

Tridandisvami Sri Srimad Bhaktivedanta Narayana Maharaja

Benefits of Feeling Utterly Insignificant

From the lecture series called Ramananda Samvad

(the Conversation Between Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and Sri Raya Ramananda)

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Yesterday we heard how Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and Raya Ramananda met together for the first time, and how they conversed with each other in a very humble mood. When they first met, and Sri Raya Ramananda was embraced by the Lord, Raya Ramananda uttered the Srimad-Bhagavatam verse that had been spoken previously by Nanda Maharaja to Gargacarya:

mahad-vicalanam nrnam
grhinam dina-cetasam
nihsreyasaya bhagavan
nanyatha kalpate kvacit

["My dear Lord, sometimes great saintly persons go to the homes of householders, although these householders are generally low-minded. When a saintly person visits their homes, one can understand that it is for no other purpose than to benefit the householders." (Caitanya-caritamrta Madhya-lila 8.40)

Great souls (mahat) travel here and there, and they meet with those in household (grhastha) life and who are entangled in the noose of their fruitive activities. Fixed in one place, householders have no opportunity to go here and there to meet with sadhus, and sadhus therefore, travel and meet with them. Nanda Maharaja said in a very humble mood, "The consciousness of us householders is very low."

Brahmacaris, vanaprasthas and sannyasis go door to door and beg alms from householders. Householders give donations that support and nourish those in the renounced orders of life, and therefore, some Puranas conclude that the grhastha ashram is the best. If there were no grhasthas, where would the sadhus go? Where would the brahmacaris beg alms? Where would Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu stay when He travels?

It must be noted, however, that Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu stayed with

grhasthas who are like Nanda baba. He would accept alms only from very exemplary and saintly householders. As previously mentioned, Nanda Maharaja told Gargacarya, “I know you do not come to the house of any householder for food or donations. The real reason you come is that we are fallen. You have come in order to bestow upon us the eternal benefit of spiritual well being.” As Nanda Maharaja spoke in this very humble mood, Sri Raya Ramananda is speaking to Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu.

The teaching here is that unless one feels oneself to be utterly insignificant, it is not possible to receive the mercy of the visiting Vaisnava.

Great souls have one-pointed faith, determination, enthusiasm and complete conviction in the service of Lord Krsna; and they want to distribute this to others. But who can receive such mercy? Only those who feel themselves to be utterly insignificant. Those who receive the mercy of Vaisnavas can become successful in their life and realize the service of the Lord. Without the mercy of Vaisnavas this is not possible, and therefore, their mercy is absolutely essential.

Why have I called you all here from all corners of the world? I have called you only for your benefit.

There is a parallel verse to this, which is also in Srimad-Bhagavatam. It was spoken by Yudisthira Maharaja to Mahatma Vidhura, who, after traveling on pilgrimage, came to Yudisthira Maharaja’s palace and gave him his association.

bhavad-vidha bhagavatas
tirtha-bhutaḥ svayam vibho
tirthi-kurvanti tirthani
svantah-sthena gadabhṛta

[“My Lord, devotees like your good self are verily holy places personified. Because you carry the Personality of Godhead within your heart, you turn all places into places of pilgrimage. (Srimad-Bhagavatam 1.13.10)

Yudisthira Maharaja said, “Great Maha-bhagavata Vaisnavas like you are personally holy tirthas (sacred places of pilgrimage), but you are a moving tirtha. You travel and visit the holy places, to purify those places by your presence. On the excuse of taking bath in the many holy places, you purify them and bestow mercy upon the residents and villagers who live there.

“You are ‘svantah-sthena gadabhṛta.’ The general meaning of the word

“gadabhrta” is that personality who carries the club. Narayana, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, holds that club. In this connection, however, the confidential meaning of gada is not club, but flute. The person who always carries within his heart that very Syamasundara Sri Krsna who plays sweetly upon His flute is called a mahat or great soul.

In this verse it is stated, “Not for any other reason but to give benefit to others.” Is Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu mahat or Mahabhagavata? He is God Himself. If those who are sadhus travel here and there to bestow benefit upon others, and they are so powerful that they can inspire others in their Krsna consciousness, then what to speak of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, who is the original Supreme Personality of Godhead.

If you do not understand what I am saying, you can ask questions. This is an isthagosthi (meeting for the purpose of understanding).

Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and Raya Ramananda very sweetly spoke to each other, and sometime later a brahmana approached Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and extended an invitation for Him to take lunch in his house. Mahaprabhu accepted the invitation, took bath, and then went to the house of that brahmana. Then, in the evening, as he had arranged with Raya Ramananda, He went back to that solitary place and sat there waiting for him to come. He is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, yet He was waiting very eagerly for Raya Ramananda to come there.

This time Ramananda Raya did not come as before. He had previously come like a king surrounded by his entourage, but this time he wore only a simple dhoti and brought only one servant. Then, as soon as he arrived, he told the servant to sit at a distance. Alone, he sat down in the solitary place with Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, so that they could converse about very confidential subjects.

prabhu kahe,--"pada sloka sadhyera nirnaya"
raya kahe,--"sva-dharmacarane visnu-bhakti haya"

[Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu ordered Ramananda Raya, "Recite a verse from the revealed scriptures concerning the ultimate goal of life." Ramananda replied, "If one executes the prescribed duties of his social position, he awakens his original Krsna consciousness." (Caitanya-caritamrta Madhya-lila 8.57)]

Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu at once asked Sri Raya Ramananda, “O Ramananda Raya, please quote a verse from sastra which defines sadhya, the goal of life.” Here, Srīman Mahaprabhu and Ramananda Raya are setting an example: when sadhus meet together they don’t speak about mundane subjects. If we go and meet with a sadhu at any time, we should not bring up any mundane

topics. If sadhus meet you they will ask, “How is your bhajana?” not, “How is your material life?” Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu thus posed this question: “Please quote a verse from sastra which defines sadhya, the goal of life.”

The word sadhya means objective in life, and the practice by which we can obtain the objective we have selected is called sadhana. So sadhya is that which can be attained by sadhana, and sadhana is that by which one can attain the sadhya, or particular objective.

There are many types of objectives, and corresponding to the many types of objectives there are many types of processes to achieve them. All types of sadhana or practices do not lead to the same objective, and all types of objectives do not have the same process for attaining them. The goal of life for all living entities is a transcendental subject matter.

Therefore, the conditioned soul cannot ascertain either the goal or the method to attain it. It is quite impossible.

As stated in Mahabharata: “Acintya kalaye bhava na tansta te nato jayet – that which is transcendental and inconceivable cannot be ascertained by argument.”

Every transcendental subject has a common symptom, and the common symptom is that it is acintya, completely inconceivable. The material mind cannot think about it. It is therefore inappropriate to apply one’s intelligence and power of material discrimination to ascertain anything transcendental.

In the scripture known as the Rg Veda, four types of purusartha (objectives) have been mentioned, namely dharma, artha, kama, and moksa. Dharma is the performance of prescribed duties recommended by the Vedic scriptures. Specifically, this comes in the form of observing the rules and regulations of varna and asrama (the social and spiritual orders). If one follows dharma carefully, the result is that he will get artha. Artha means economic development, security in this world, many servants and followers, etc. When one acquires economic prosperity, he can go to the next objective, kama. One who is materially successful can try to fulfill his material desires (kama). The fourth objective is called moksa, or liberation. Dharma, artha and kama are not actually goals of life, because those who attain these goals do not find happiness. Rather, they simply suffer.

”Purnam api janana, purnam api marana.” Again and again they take birth in this material world and rotate in the endless cycle of birth and death. Without exception, all living entities in this world are unhappy. Human beings, animals and other species are all unhappy. They don’t know how to find happiness. They don’t know the path to become free from suffering. All their activities simply result in pain, and if they get any happiness,

it is mixed with suffering. The result of that happiness is more suffering. This is the condition of the living entities in this world. Liberation or mukti has been defined as, “adyanta dukha nivrtti,” the complete and absolute cessation of all types of suffering.

One type of mukti is called sayujya-mukti. This means that the atma will merge or enter into the impersonal effulgence (nirvesesa brahma) of the Lord, which has no qualities, no attributes, no shape, no form and no personality. In this condition there is complete cessation of all suffering, and also all happiness that is beyond material nature. So this mukti is one type of goal of life, but it cannot be called parama-purusartha, the supreme goal of life. Dharma, artha, and kama are not goals of life. Moksa may be called so, but it cannot be called the supreme goal.

Devotional service is rasa-svarupa, the embodiment of all ecstatic transcendental mellows. By constitution the living entity is a servant of Sri Krsna, and therefore the happiness he experiences in this service is directly related to his constitutional position. The happiness which is directly related and natural to the constitution of the living entity is called “bhagavata-seva,” service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

In this there are two principles. First of all, there is a particular type of relationship between the object of service, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and His servant. Secondly there is a very intense desire to give happiness to the Supreme Lord by rendering Him service. This has been defined by Srila Rupa Gosvami:

anyavilasa sita sunyam jnana karmady anavrtam
anukulyena krsnanu silanam bhaktir uttama

“The continuous, unbroken cultivation of all endeavors of the body, mind, words and loving feelings of the heart, under the guidance of the self-realized guru, which is meant exclusively for both the happiness and benefit of Sri Krsna, which is completely untouched by even the slightest smell of any type of other external desire, and which is not covered by karma, jnana or yoga. This is called uttama-bhakti.”

This uttama bhakti is rasa-mayi; it is full of ecstatic mellows. This is the real transcendental happiness, and this is the supreme goal of objectives of life (parama-purusartha).

atmaramas ca munayo
nirgrantha apiy urukrame
kurvanty ahaitukim bhaktim
ittham-bhuta-guno harih

["I am different varieties of atmaramas [those who take pleasure in atma, or spirit self], especially those established on the path of self-realization, though freed from all kinds of material bondage, desire to render unalloyed devotional service unto the Personality of Godhead. This means that the Lord possesses transcendental qualities and therefore can attract everyone, including liberated souls." (Srimad Bhagavatam 1.7.10)]

Those who are self-satisfied (atmarama) don't need anything in this world. They are self-satisfied. They are liberated from the clutches of the material energy and are situated on the platform of eternity. They become astonished when they hear about the wonderful, transcendental qualities of Sri Krsna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. When they hear about His astonishing characteristics, an intense greed awakens in their hearts to serve Him. When self-satisfied personalities like Srila Sukadeva Gosvami and the four Kumaras Sanaka, Sananda, Sanatana and Sanat Kumara hear about Sri Krsna, intense greed to serve Him awakens in their hearts.

Liberated personalities want bhakti, and therefore, bhakti is the supreme goal for them. Those who are already liberated can become attracted to devotional service and understand that it is far higher than liberation, whereas those who are conditioned in this world cannot. Therefore, ascertainment of the goal of life is impossible for conditioned souls. It is for this understanding that Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu said to Ramananda Raya, "Please quote a verse from the sastra which defines the goal of life." Sastra is authority, sastra gives perfect knowledge.

Lord Krsna stated in Bhagavad-gita (16.23):

yah sastra vidhim utsrjya

vartate kama-karatah

na sa siddhim avapnoti

na sukham na param gatim

["He who discards scriptural injunctions and acts according to his own whims attains neither perfection, nor happiness, nor the supreme destination."]

Those who don't accept the conclusions of sastra, and therefore don't follow it in their lives, cannot have happiness or success in their life. Therefore, one should accept the conclusions of sastra with regard to understanding the goal of life and the method to attain it. If one does not follow sastra, one is bound to follow his mundane, contaminated, material intelligence. Material intelligence will mislead him and his life will be ruined. He will not be able to discover any happiness. Therefore, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu said to Ramananda Raya, "Please quote the scriptures to support your presentation of the goal of life."

There are many different types of scriptures: Veda, Vedanta, Upanisad, Purana, Srimad Bhagavatam and others. Among all of the different types of scriptures, Srimad Bhagavatam is best. “Srimad Bhagavatam pramanam amalam.” It is immaculate evidence regarding the ultimate goal of life.

In the beginning of their conversation, when Caitanya Mahaprabhu was posing these questions, Raya Ramananda quoted from various scriptures such as Visnu Purana and Bhagavad Gita. Each time, however, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu replied, “This is external; tell Me something more”. It wasn’t until Sri Ramananda Raya began to quote from Srimad Bhagavatam that Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu began to be satisfied with his answers. This acceptance by Mahaprabhu is also evidence that the Srimad Bhagavatam is the crest jewel of all scriptural evidence.

We see that in the impersonal light of brahman there is complete and absolute cessation of all suffering. There is some happiness; this is true. But in this type of liberation there is some obstacle, some impediment, to progress. If one wants to attain this as a goal of life, one will have to adopt the conception that “everything is one.” By adopting the conception that everything is one, the mood of service is completely destroyed. This is a very critical obstacle. Only service to Sri Krsna can give the highest happiness. In *uttama-bhakti*, which is the embodiment of all happiness (*rasa-svarupa*), two principles are presented: the relationship between the object of service and the servant is the first, and the second is the desire to render service. These are the two prominent ingredients of *rasa-mayi bhakti*.

Leaving *sayujya-mukti* or impersonal liberation aside, there are other types of *mukti*: *salokya*, *sarsti*, *samipya* and *svarupya*, to reside on the same planet as the Supreme Lord, to have opulences like the Supreme Lord, to reside close to the Supreme Lord, and to have a form that is similar to the associates of the Supreme Lord. These are related to service to Sri Narayana in Vaikuntha. In these four types of liberation there is a relationship between the object of service and the servant. Here, Lord Sri Narayana is the object of service and Laksmi devi, Narada Rsi of Vaikuntha, Garuda and others are all His servants. The conception of service is present, but there is also some obstacle. Those who desire this type of liberation have some desire for their own happiness, (*svasukha*). Here we see that all suffering is gone and there is happiness, but something is missing. The desire to render service is contracted, restricted, and confined. It cannot totally flourish and mature.

Pure devotional service is exclusively for the happiness and welfare of Sri Krsna. For those who have one-pointed desire to give happiness to Sri

Krsna, their own happiness is automatic. Their happiness lies in the happiness of Krsna, and therefore their desire to serve is intense and exclusive. It is not contracted or restricted by any desire for personal happiness or separate desires.

Therefore the goal of life of the four types of liberation is also not the supreme goal of life. Srimad Bhagavatam says in its second verse mangalacaranam (invocation):

dharma projjhita-kaitavo 'tra paramo nirmatsaranam satam
Vedyam vastavam atra vastu sivadam tapa-trayonmulanam
Srimad-bhagavate maha-muni-krt kim va parair isvarah
Sadyo hrady avarudhyate 'tra krtibhih susrusubhis tat-ksanat

[“Completely rejecting all religious activities which are materially motivated, this Bhagavata Purana propounds the highest truth, which is understandable by those devotees who are fully pure in heart. The highest truth is reality distinguished from illusion for the welfare of all. Such truth uproots the threefold miseries. This beautiful Bhagavatam, compiled by the great sage Vyasadeva (in his maturity), is sufficient in itself for God realization. What is the need of any other scripture? As soon as one attentively and submissively hears the message of Bhagavatam, by this culture of knowledge the Supreme Lord is established within his heart.”]

This Srimad Bhagavatam unequivocally kicks out all types of cheating religion; that is, any religious or so-called spiritual practices which are contaminated by material or self-centered motivation. Any activity or mentality with any selfish motivation has been rejected by Srimad Bhagavatam.

The conclusion is that above the four types of liberation in Vaikuntha there lies Goloka Vrndavana. In Goloka Vrndavana, all the residents' service is exclusively for the happiness of Krsna. This is their highest happiness, and this is pure and transcendental to the utmost degree. For this reason, prema, love for Lord Sri Krsna in Goloka Vrndavana, is the supreme objective of all living entities. *[see endnote]

Srila Baladeva Vidyabusana explains in his commentary of Vedanta Sutra: “Muktanam api lilaya vigraham krtva bhagavtam bhajante.” Those who are liberated from this world meditate internally upon their own constitutional form (siddha-deha) their spiritual body. Externally living in this world, they meditate internally on their spiritual form, and by their spiritual form they render service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead.
Gaura Premanande!

* endnote - The supreme objective of all living entities is pure and transcendental to the utmost degree. Thus whatever objective one desires to attain in Vaikuntha,

really it is completely present and included already in Goloka Vrndavana.

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