

OM SAI RAM!

Welcome to this Question and Answer Session,

Q. 315, “ON VASANAS AND TRANSFORMING GUNAS”

April 13, 2024

*This text excerpt is taken from Prof. Anil Kumar’s book
“Sathyopanishad, Vol. 1,” pages 145-150.*

Swami! It is said that we carry with us certain traits, vasanas of the past life. Is that true and how does it happen?

Bhagawan: Certainly so! Just as in accounts the balance is brought forward from the previous page to the next page, the traits of the previous life are brought forward to the present.

When you light an incense stick or an *agarbatti* or camphor, don’t you get the fragrance all over this room? When you have a fragrant flower, does it not spread its fragrance? Similarly, bad odour or foul smell also spreads. So also, the characteristics of the past lives are brought forward to subsequent lives.

Bhagawan! How is it that we have vasanas, traits of the past life? We are born, we grow and die. The body is bound to weaken, wither, die and decay. How then are our features brought forward to the next life?

Bhagawan: It is certain that the features of the past life are carried to the next life. You can call them *vasanas* or *samskaras* or the qualities of the past life. People with good *samskaras* will spend their time in a sacred way by participating in *satsang*, good company, *bhajan*, singing His glory, entertaining *sadalocana*, good thoughts and *satkarma*, good deeds and good discussion.

On the other hand, people with bad *samskaras* make their lifetime unholy by indulging in *duskarma*, misdeeds, entertaining *durbhavana*, bad thoughts and *asatya*, speaking falsehood. As you have said, it is true that the body weakens, withers, dies and decays but the *samskaras* don’t die. They follow you to the next life.

A simple illustration will make this subject clearer to you. Suppose your hand was injured. You got it treated and for some time you put a bandage also over and around the injured part. The hand was healed completely after some time. But in that part of your hand where the injury took place, a scar or mark is left and it remains till now as well. Similarly, the body may die. But the *vasanas* remain as a spot in the next life.

Swami! Three gunas or attributes such as rajas, tamas and sattva are said to bind man. Does a sattvika quality also bind man? Is that also a bondage?

Bhagawan: These three attributes only, bind man. Your life is conditioned by them. All your deeds and expressions are governed by them. They monitor your conduct and behaviour. Even *sattvika* qualities also chain you.

For example, you are confined with an iron chain. Is that not bondage? You may be confined with a silver chain. It is also bondage. It may be now a gold chain this time that binds you. Is it not bondage? After all, the three chains differ only in the composition of the metal. After all, each is a chain and nothing more, though its value may differ from that of the other. Thus the attributes bind or limit you.

Here, the iron chain is compared to that of '*tamas*', dullness or inertia. The silver chain is like the '*rajasika*' quality, active, energetic, passionate and the gold chain is like the '*sattvika*' nature, pure, steady, good. But Divinity is beyond these three '*gunas*'. It is, in fact, attributeless.

Swami! We have many qualities – *tamasika*, *rajasika* and *sattvika*. Do they change at any time? How are we to ennoble ourselves? Sometimes these attributes may be responsible for conflicts with our colleagues in the office. What is to be done under these circumstances? Kindly give us a solution to this problem that we encounter every day.

Bhagawan: The whole world revolves around these three attributes – *tamasika*, *rajasika* and *sattvika*. Every individual has these three attributes working like the three blades of a fan. But in a person, the quality which dominates the other two decides his nature, his total personality, nay, his very destiny as a whole.

He is a pious man, whose *sattvika* quality dominates his *rajasika* and *tamasika* qualities. He is an emotional, passionate, active man if his *rajasika* quality dominates his *sattvika* and *tamasika* qualities. He is a dull, inactive and passive man if he is dominated by the *tamasika* nature. Thus, everyone has these three attributes.

For instance, in an eyeball don't you see all the three colours, white, red and black? They symbolise these *trigunas* or traits. Watch the sunrise. You will notice three colours, red, white and black, indicating *trigunas* or the three attributes. However, you should note one important point. *Gunas* have no independent existence. Divinity makes them functional. But the *gunas* are not to be found in the divine, as God is *gunatita*, beyond attributes.

Gunas are transformable. For instance, you can get over *tamasika* quality by *karma*, action. *Karma* transforms *tamasika* quality into *rajasika*, activity. *Rajasika* nature is dual. It may give you success or failure, profit or loss, praise or blame, etc.

Man has to perform *karma*. In fact, there is no one who does not take any action. You may lie on a bed sleeping, yet your heart beats, blood circulates and the nervous system and pulmonary system work. Don't they? Does it not amount to action?

By doing selfless actions, offering all the fruits of action to God, serving God in everyone and by realising the indwelling Divinity, one can develop *anubhavajñana*, practical wisdom or experience-based wisdom. At that stage, a *rajasika* person becomes a *sattvika* person.

Therefore, karma is important. *Karmanuhandh i ni manusya loke*, meaning 'human society is bound by action'. Your very life is gifted to *karma*. Thus, *janma*, birth and *karma*, actions are inter-related. In fact, one should salute respectfully the action he does. *Tasmai namah karman e*, means 'my salutations to the action given or assigned to me'.

Therefore, a *tamasika* nature can be converted into *rajasika* by volitional action, which can be further transformed into *sattvika* by *bhakti*, and *jñana*, devotion and awareness. This is *sadhana* or spiritual practice.

By *atmavicara*, self-enquiry, one can improve and change your nature. When any lower or animal qualities like wavering of the mind, excessive sleep or gluttony crop up, immediately say to yourself at least ten times, "I am a man; I am not an animal." Then, you will be able to get over them.

Do your duty sincerely. Don't be pompous. Don't show off nor do any stunt. Always be sure that God notices everything that you do, though others may not. Do your duty with love.

***"Duty with love is Desirable,
Duty without love is Deplorable,
Love without duty is Divine"***

If you offer all your work and fruits thereof to God, your work will be transformed into worship.

You may not agree with your colleagues in your office. Your temperament may be incompatible with theirs, sometimes leading to controversies and in-fights and you may, as a result, lose your peace of mind. So, don't have too close a relationship with too many people. Say "hello, hello" to everyone, 'how are you' to all those you meet and end with 'goodbye'. That's all and nothing more.

Today there is no real social service. Everything is either slow service or show-service. You should have a feeling that what you do is not for anybody but for your own satisfaction and happiness. Whatever you do, do it for the satisfaction of your conscience. You shouldn't do anything for praise or appreciation by others. Your conscience is God. Know that character is the most important and you should never compromise on this score.

What is always necessary for success in life is co-operation. But nowadays, we find only operation.

There'll be more of Swami's precious advice in the next session. Thank you for listening.

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