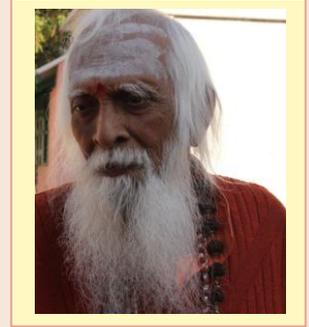


Karma-Sadhana-Renunciation-Grace-Self-realisation

By Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj, 04th March 2011

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Sri Ganesaya Namaha



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As per Mahatma Buddha, desires alone are responsible for our suffering. Desires motivate you to do actions to enable their fulfilment. Desires with bad motives, say to rob or kill a person result in bad actions and desires with good motives, say to run an orphanage result in good actions. As per the Karma concepts, bad actions earn you sins (Papa) and the good actions earn you merits (Punya). As per Newton's law every action has a reaction which is unavoidable. These Papas (sins) and Punyas are the reactions whose effects one has to enjoy or experience in the consequent births by getting punishment for the sins committed or by getting rewards/bonuses for the merits earned in previous births. This is called PRARABDHA or destiny which is mostly unavoidable. Prarabdhas are the results of Karmas of previous births encashed in subsequent births. In order to reap the fruits of good or bad deeds done in earlier births, one has to be born again and take up a body. In this birth again, apart from the Prarabdha, one commits fresh actions (good or bad) which again entail another re-birth in order to reap their fruits. Thus, actions result in forging of a continuous chain of rebirths and deaths endlessly, each life involving untold sufferings and sorrows apart from some moments of pleasures of transitory nature.

The Karmas (actions) are divided into four main categories:-

1. NITYA KARMA – OBLIGATORY

The various types of prayers, Japas, rituals and Havans (fire offerings) prescribed for each caste and each station in life (celibate, householder, etc.) to be done daily and compulsorily come under this category of Karmas. Though these are good deeds, they do not earn any Punya or merit but any failure to do it will involve a type of sin called “Pratyavaya dosha”.

2. NAIMITTIKA KARMA – OCCASSIONAL

These are the various rituals or rites prescribed for purification of the body-mind complex and to prevent some adverse happenings on various occasions such as on birth, at the time of starting feed of solid food to the child (Anna Prasanam), funeral on death, when the first child is in the womb (Seemantha, Pumsavana, etc.) as prescribed in Dharma Sastras. These are also compulsory and do not earn Punya (merits) by themselves.

3. KAMYA KARMA

These are actions done to fulfil our desires and include employment in a private or public body in private capacity or in Government, etc. for earning money and status or position. It also includes ‘Poortha’ i.e. charitable works like running a free hospital or schools (including any contributions towards it), building temple, distributing free food, clothing, etc. to the poor as also ‘Ishta” i.e. Performing fire sacrifices – i.e. yagas for getting entry into the Heaven (Swarga) and enjoying sensual pleasures(mentally) for limited periods. While doing the Kamya Karmas we do a lot of subsidiary sins which involve us in cycles of births and deaths. For instance while constructing an orphanage, we may illegally deprive the rightful owner of his land and acquire it by subterfuge or we may treat the workers harshly and pay them meagre wages much below their dues. It is these Kamaya Karmas which are mainly responsible for repeated rebirths and consequent sufferings in life. But in Bhagavad Gita it is told that whatever job or action is done for the maintenance of the body of oneself and his dependants do not cause any sin or consequent prarabdha.

4. NISHIDDHA KARMA (PROHIBITED ACTIONS)

These are actions which are specifically prohibited for e.g. adultery, drinking liquor, etc. These actions done in defiance of the scriptural injunctions result in sins and thus in repeated cycles of births and deaths.

5. PRAYASCHITTA KARMAS (EXPIRATORY ACTIONS)

These are certain rites, rituals and vows of penance undertaken with a view to expiate or remove the sins committed like adultery, drinking of liquor, etc. These do not create any fresh sins or punyas as these are meant to wipe off the sins committed earlier.

The karmas (desire oriented) which involve accruing of sins and merits to be experienced in subsequent lives are again categorized as:

1. SANCHITA

This is the reservoir where all the Karmas whose fruits are to be experienced in future births are kept accumulated.

2. PRARABDHA

The quantum of fruits of past actions allotted for a particular birth is called Prarabdha. It is the Lord who makes an allotment of the fruits of past karmas to be experienced in the current (present) birth. It will consist of rewards like being born in a rich man's house, getting unexpected lotteries or legacies, promotions in status, etc. According to the nature of the good deeds done as also punishments like diseases, involvement in accidents, defamation or scandals, etc. as per the nature of the bad deeds done. The Prarabdhas are normally unavoidable and compulsory but their effects can be substantially prevented or erased if one approaches a liberated (Jivan mukta) saint. The Jivan muktas do not perform any miracle but in their presence, events automatically happen, which confer untold benefits on the devotees. Rarely when a person commits enormous sins or performs enormous good deeds, Lord does not wait to allot their effects in the next birth but sees to it that the person reaps the punishments or rewards in the current birth itself.

3. KRIYAMANA

This is the name for the actions (good or bad) done in the current birth whose fruits will be allotted as Prarabdha in subsequent births.

VASANAS

Apart from the Prarabdha, the actions done in the part have another grave side effect also called Vasanas or prior conditioning. Any action good or bad done leaves an almost indelible impression on the Chitta (generally called mind) and this impression provokes in us a tendency to repeat the same action in this and subsequent births also. The more the same good or bad action is repeated, that particular impression grows stronger and stronger and becomes very aggressive. The impression of a good action like seeking Satsanga is called a SAD VASANA. The impression of a bad action like drinking liquor is called ASAD VASANA. By a repetition of a bad action again and again, the Asad vasana is strengthened. So also with the Sad vasana.

All the accidents, incidents and good or bad events in life which take place in one's life without ones volition are due to Prarabdha which is a reaction i.e. result of past actions. This is exhausting the results of past bad or good Karmas by suffering, unhappiness or happiness and joy. During the span of life given for experiencing the Prarabdha i.e. punishment for past bad karmas (like imprisonment without doing any crime) and rewards for past good karmas (inheriting wealth from a dead relative, lottery, etc.) a man performs fresh new actions good or bad. From an ordinary point of view, for doing these fresh actions (which form Prarabdha for next birth) a man has got full free will but is seldom exercised. While Prarabdha is unavoidable, theoretically one has a choice of free will to do fresh actions. But in the case of fresh actions, Vasanas are a man's advisors. A strong bad vasana can compel a man to suppress his free will and do a bad action. It is like a weak Governor during President's rule who is free to act as he wants but feels compelled and helpless to take the advice of his more aggressive advisors. It becomes almost a habit for a man to abide by the advice of his Vasanas. As he has a free will he should fight with his Vasanas by doing Japa, prayers, seeking the company of holy men, by deliberately cultivating good habits and replacing all asad Vasanas by Sad-vasanas. In removal of Vasanas, the grace of the Guru and the grace of the God play a very important role as it is our efforts to do japa, prayers, etc. and to obey instructions of the Guru which invoke the Grace. Our efforts alone will not be capable of removing the Vasanas without the Grace factor.

At the higher stages of sadhana, the Sad-Vasanas have also to be abandoned besides asad vasana as the good actions done under the influence of good Vasanas (like acts of charity) result in taking a new body and getting rebirth for enjoying the rewards of the actions as much as bad actions result in rebirth for experiencing the punishments. In this span of life in rebirth we again do fresh actions and thus forge a continuous chain of rebirths and consequent sufferings and unhappiness.

Various ways have been prescribed for removal of Vasanas and desires. You may ask "If all actions involve us in continuous cycles of birth and death, why should not I cease doing any action whatsoever and sit quiet?" This is the best way and if only we can do it, God-realisation is not far to seek. The Vasanas are so strong that so long as they remain, the prominent ones constitute our inborn nature which will compel us to act. Even otherwise, so long as one is

body conscious, he has to breathe, eat, take up a job to earn enough money for his daily bread, etc.

One way to remove the fruits of karmas resulting in rebirth is to do actions without motive. We can do the actions as part of our duty without any motive or expectations of the fruits of actions resulting in our joy, happiness, etc. Alternatively we can surrender (Samarpan) the results to God saying “Lord, the entire world is yours. What all actions I do are all rendered as a service to you. I do not want any wages for the service.” Or “Lord, all actions are done in Totality by your Will using my mind and body as instruments to carry out your Will. I am nothing; you are the doer of these acts - not I”. This type of doing actions render them sterile, do not give birth to either merit (Punya) or sin (Papa), and hence do not build up a Prarabdha. This is called ‘NISHKAMA KARMA’- motiveless action and this entire method is known as Karma Yoga. Karma Yoga is excellent for the purification of the mind which is clogged with a lot of impure Vasanas of anger, hatred, jealousy, attachment, lust or passion, greed, etc. Karma Yoga thus prepares the ground for sadhanas through Bhakti yoga or Jnana yoga (path of devotion or knowledge) which includes ‘Vichara marga’ like ‘Who am I’ meditation and which directly lead to Self-realisation.

Highly qualified and deserving Sadhakas can by-pass the ‘Karma-marga’ meant only for purification (and not directly related to Self-realisation) and by Vichara (contemplation) alone get all the purification needed and eradicate all Vasanas. Bhagavan Ramana, has advised that one should at all times have all his attention centred on Self (Atman) alone. If any Vasanas or desires intrude, he should put the question to himself as to who is being disturbed by the Vasana oriented thoughts. As the answer will be ‘I’, again one can put his question as to ‘Who am I’ and thus resume his quest for the Self (Atman). This may be possible for ‘Pakwees’ (those who are mature and endowed with discrimination and dispassion - Viveka and Vairagya).

Before we go to the various methods of spiritual practices including meditation, we should know clearly about our goal as to what is called Moksha or Mukti or Self-realisation or God realisation and what is its relationship with various Gods as the Hindu Theology, ATMAN and BRAHMAN in the Hindu philosophy.

MOKSHA (LIBERATION) AND SELF – REALISATION

The definitions vary from religion to religion. An absolute extinction by merging in Void is considered as Moksha by some (Buddhists). Travelling perpetually on a divine stone (Siddha Shila) forever and ever, which appears before a perfect saint at the time of leaving the body is Moksha as per Jains. According to Vaishnavas, Mukti is four fold: -

1. To remain near the Lord (Narayana) in His domain (Loka) in a divine plane like Vaikunta – Samipya
2. To have an identical form and features of the Lord (Saroopya)
3. To have almost all the glorious powers (mahima) of the Lord (Sarshti)
4. To unite with the Lord (not a complete merger) – Sayyujya.

Here the God is considered as a personal Lord with form and with various lovable qualities/ attributes (Saguna Saakara). A continuous meditation and contemplation with constant remembrance and chanting of God's name will lead to God realisation which will ultimately lead one to the same goal of Self –realisation as all advaitic sadhanas. In Advaitic concept, the ultimate Supreme Being is called as Brahman or sometimes Parabrahman who is like a Chairman of the Board of Directors in a Company and he is also the sole proprietor. With the help of an elusive but indescribable power of Maya, ISWARA or God is created. Brahma (creator), Vishnu (sustainer) and Siva (destroyer) are the main Iswaras but Ganesa, Lakshmi and various other Gods are also included in them. They are all transient and last till the great deluge. They are creations like all the Jivas (individual souls) but while Maya bosses over the Jivas, the Iswara has Maya as his assistant. It is the Maya which creates the Jivas and the world. As per Bhagavad Gita , it is by the Supreme Lord's will that one gets and attached to and develop faith to one or the other of various Gods. So long as a person worships them considering each such god as separate and different, he gets limited results. If one is to worship any of the Gods as the very Supreme Being or Paramatma, it will first take him to Savikalpa Samadhi where the duality of the worshipper and worshipped exist and the mind gets concentrated in the form of his chosen deity. Subsequently, without any effort on his part, the Sadhaka reaches the undifferentiated state of super consciousness (NIRVIKALPA SAMADHI) where all names and forms disappear and only the Supreme Being as Existence cum Awareness exists.

That is the state of final bliss. When one gets released from all bondages, there is a permanent cessation of sorrows or sufferings. This is Mukti. When one gets firmly established in the aforesaid state at all times while walking, talking, eating, etc. it is called Sahaja Samadhi- when we remain as we are in our natural (sahaja) state as the Brahman (Supreme Being). As per the Ashtanga Yoga (Patanjali's) there are many more states of Samadhis like samprajyata, asampragyata, etc. are described - which are not essential to know.

BASIS OF THE METHODS OF SADHANA

In ordinary life, God has given us three states –waking state, dream state and sleeping state. The dream state and sleeping state are meant to give rest to the mind, senses and body, to rejuvenate them by removing the tension, anxiety, etc. of the waking state. A Supreme Power has created such a body-mind complex with a complicated structure of bones, blood, hormones, glands, muscles, nerves, bones, internal organs like the heart, kidney, etc. besides the external organs from and ant to a man or an elephant. Certainly that power should be capable of creating a body-mind complex which can work continuously for years night and day without the need for any rest. But God has given us sleep and dreams as clues for solving the riddle of the waking state. In our dream, let us say that myself sitting in an African forest as a great African chieftain surrounded by warriors. If in that dream if some tigers were to pounce on us all, all of us would be running in different directions shelter to shelter. If one of the tigers were to chase me, catch one of my feet and sink its teeth into my leg, I would have to shout with pain and panic. Without doubt, so long as I am in the dream state, the entire dream forest, the tiger and the pain in my leg appear real, solid and true and none can convince me into the contrary. When I woke up from the dream the entire dream world disappeared along with the tiger. Neither the African forest nor the tiger, etc. were real. They were my imaginations and they were only in my mind. The forest and the tiger were all thoughts in my mind though they materialized in space and I saw them apart from me. The only way to escape from the terror in the dream which though imaginary looked real at that point of the time was to wake up. Based on this analogy, our sages have arrived that the so called waking state is also a dream (dream No. 2) which is only an imagination i.e. a thought and nothing else. Our ancient sages, through certain techniques like Meditation, Japa, etc. were able to wake up from the “so called waking state” also into ultimate and only real state called the Super Conscious (Samadhi) state where the entire world with all its miseries unhappiness and sorrows disappeared. The cosmic dreamer alone was left, should found Himself as the only formless Reality who was pure Consciousness otherwise called as Brahman (from cosmic totality point of view) or known as Self or Atman when viewed from the point of view of the dream state where it had manifested as a separate world with a forest and many individual beings, trees, shrubs, etc.

HOW TO WAKE UP FROM THE DREAM

We have seen that we have to wake up if we intent to put an end to the miseries, sorrows and pain of the world. The birth and rebirth are also part of the dream. There are many techniques for waking up from the dream of waking state. Let us examine some of the basic methods.

The dream and sleep come by themselves and go away by themselves. We cannot wake up in the middle of a dream whenever we want. Let us then see why at all the dream continues for half an hour or more. A dream is a creation of the imagination of your mind. It is a continuous thought. In the dream you create a world- say, a city with several houses and several human beings, etc. This creation as such in the world cannot harm you in any way. After creating the world, it was you who established relationships of ownership, love and attachment, hatred, jealousy, etc. You began to consider one person as your son, wife or father and began to love them. Some others were considered as your enemies and you began to hate them. You did good and bad actions to promote the interest of those whom you loved. You did bad actions including murder to eliminate or to disgrace your enemies. These action brought miseries, sorrows, pain, etc. Thus you created a world of relationships (called Samsara) with the objects of the world, which included ownership (saying "This is mine. I possess this.") of buildings, vehicles, etc. Naturally your mind is fully dispersed in various objects of the world in acquiring new relationships (marriage, profession, etc.) or maintaining and protecting them. Throughout your life all your thoughts are centered around these objects. If you can withdraw your mind from these objects and stop all thoughts, the dream would be broken and you will wake up.

The first method will, therefore be to withdraw the mind from all the objects related to us and remain without any thought for some time (say for two hours a day initially). This method forms the subject matter of the first aphorism of Patanjali's Yoga Sutra – "Yogaschitta-vritti-Nirodhah". This method has also been advocated by the recent philosophers like late J. Krishna Murthy and late Vimala Thakkar (who was residing in Mount Abu). This method requires continuous practice for three to four years. People get discouraged with not getting results after practicing it for a day or two and declare that it is impossible. To pre-judge a method without putting it into practice for a substantial period and to declare it as impossible is the first major impediment.

The second method can be explained by the following analogy. While you are dreaming of a tiger which is chasing you, if your mother standing by your bed side lets fall a pot of water with a thud, your dream breaks. In your own dream world, if the tiger were to roar loudly, or hundred African drums were beaten, the dream will continue unbroken. So if a sound from a different plane is to intrude, like the falling of a water pot from the mothers hand it has the capacity to wake you up. Similarly chanting of the sound 'Om' or 'Aum' or any Mantra (incantation) if practiced repeatedly for a long time will be able to wake us from the so called waking state and take us to the Super Conscious state which is our natural state on which sleep, dream, etc. had been super imposed. 'Om' and various

Mantras belong to the Divine Plane and have come to us through the divine inspiration in and experimental verification by Rishis (saints). If some aspirant was to give total attention to the feeling of "I AM" or be in the quest "Who am I" continuously for long periods, this can also lead one to "Super Consciousness". The principle behind this is to reduce the multiple thoughts to one thought like our AMNESS or mere Existence (i.e. I AM) and be concentrating on that one thought alone; A stage comes after repeated practice when this single thought disappears leaving a NO-MIND state, the 'I' disappears and the Awareness of existence alone remains. This state is called the Nirvikalpa Samadhi- the undifferentiated state of Super Consciousness.

As the names of our various Gods are made up of Sanskrit alphabets and each of the letters represents different power capsules, chanting or concentrating any of the Gods like Siva, Rama, Krishna, etc. will also lead to God-Realisation.

GRACE

Thus one has to make a lot of effort to ensure a constant remembrance of God through prayers and meditation or to resort to Self-enquiry or other methods in Jnana path or Bhakti path (path of devotion). When a person fails in his academic or professional examinations by falling short of the minimum marks required, a moderation committee of examiners may decide to give him a grace mark of one or two out of compassion and make him pass. Similarly in the spiritual path too, no amount of Sadhana alone will get us to the destination. Grace of the Guru, Grace of the Supreme Lord and Grace of the Self (Atma Kripa) alone will take us to the destination. Ultimately all the three types of Grace will be one and the same. From the time you are born the Grace begins to work. Our birth, our upbringing and education, marriage, daily food, every item in life is due to His Grace only. The more we recognize and thank him with real feeling from the heart, the more we get it. The wind of grace is always blowing. But through prayers and meditation our antenna is unable to catch that Grace. Even in those cases when some people became the recipient of Grace in this birth without doing much of a Sadhana at all, it is quite probable that such people have done quite a lot of Sadhana in their previous births. The one who prays to the Supreme Lord for Grace is verily the Self and the one to whom one prays is also the Self. Hence the one who prays for Grace must get it as he himself grants it from the other end.

RENUNCIATION

As stated earlier in this dissertation, in order to wake up from the dream of the waking state, one has to withdraw his mind from all the objects of the world. In order to realize God it is essential that we renounce all our attachments to the various objects like son, wife, money, position, the attachment, hatred, etc. Our God is a jealous God. In our shopping list God should be the only item. The renunciation can be developed by the following means:-

1. By seeking the company of holy men and hearing their instructions.
2. By analyzing the nature of the enticing objects of the world and pondering over their bad aspects like (a) being evanescent and not permanent and (b) the enjoyments of the objects resulting finally in sorrow and unhappiness, etc.
3. By praying the God to shower his Grace enabling us to renounce
4. By reading the life stories of great saints

In one way, we have no right to be proud of our renunciation. If a child playing with dolls suddenly throws away all the dolls, cries and shout for the mother who is busy in the kitchen, can we term the act as renunciation? The child's original place was his mother's lap and at any time it is entitled to go back to it. It is we who have given value for the world's objects which are truly speaking akin to doles and puppets. Secondly, no object in the world belongs to any of us. They all belong to the Lord. Again, renunciation is not throwing the objects away or running away from them. It is only loosening your mental grip over them. A boat when not in use also has to be kept in the midst of the waters of the river or ocean, but it has to be ensured that no water seeps into the boat. We have to remain in this world and some objects are also around us all the time. Let not the objects get into the mind. If I hold a pen down by gripping it in the palm of my hands, it is attachment. If I keep my hand with palm upwards and outstretched with the pen lying on the palm, the grip is no longer there and the pen is still lying in my hand. This is detachment.

For a householder, it is better that he starts doing actions just as a matter of duty dedicating to the Lord without any selfish motives, and without bothering about the results of his actions. This is renunciation of the fruits of his action so that he can transcend and go beyond good and bad actions. This has been explained earlier while dealing with "karma".

Sanyasa or taking up monkhood formally wearing ochre robes is not a 'must' for God realization. God is not running a convent school where all the students must wear uniform. One has to develop his spirituality in any environment where he is placed. Without having acquired a thorough dispassion towards worldly objects, donning ochre robes and moving in the world is very dangerous. After having once become a monk, returning back to the enjoyment of worldly life has been likened to eating out the food which has been once vomited out. Indulging freely in the company of other sex, staying alone in their houses, physically hugging them or fondling them as if to confer his blessings on them, indulging in attractive occasions like singing in public or attending musical concerts and dancing sessions – all these enticing entertainments have caused many monks to fall down. Many monks have

married after years of Sanyasa and a number of monks have gone to Jail for having perpetrated murders, assaults, etc. moved by lust or passion and being involved in clandestine sexual affairs. Monkhood is a one way path and is like walking on a razors edge, but is very essential and highly beneficial at a very mature stage. One should be already a Sanyasi at Heart and should have been behaving for years like a sanyasi even while remaining a Brahmachari or householder. Then Sanyasa would seek him and come to him. Sanyasa at the heart cannot start at the ringing of the bell or the donning of ochre robes. Renunciation does not hate the world. Renouncing duality and all desires not looking at the word as apart from yourself, but as your very Self and to remain in continuous thoughts of the Supreme Lord or the Atman is the real renunciation.

LIBERATION

Release from the ignorance of considering the body as the Self, realizing that the appearance of different persons and other objects of the world is illusory and unreal like the multiple dream objects, abandoning the sense of individuality and merging as one, with the Totality which is Pure Consciousness is the ultimate Mukti or Liberation. All the miseries and unhappiness of the world stem from our ignorance of who we are and considering ourselves as the body limited by time, space, etc., being unaware of our infinite potential. As far as devotees of gods with form like Siva, Vishnu, etc. are concerned, who consider the deity as separate from them, reach after death the imaginary world of their respective gods like Kailasa, Vaikuntha, etc. and live either in the proximity of or united with their deity without losing their identity. Scriptures like Bhagavatham declare that even those devotees who go to the worlds of imagination are finally taken to the formless Supreme Consciousness in due course. The State of Mukti declared as one of ineffable peace and perennial absolute bliss. That final state can only be experienced and it cannot be described by words. In Advaita, Mukti is not a state which one gets only after death. One can get into that state even while alive by means of Sadhana and remain fully enlightened. That state which is infact the natural state of every Jeeva is called Jivan Mukti. Some consider that even Jivan Muktas will get a higher state called Videha Mukti when they leave their body, which according to them, is the final perfect state. More about 'Jivan Mukti' in detail is given in my book titled "Jivan Mukti".

If we set a burning matchstick to a log of dry wood on the one hand and also to an iron bar, the former may burn brightly for hours while even by applying a burning torch the iron bar cannot be made to burn. This is because there is no fire element in the iron bar. The fire which is already in the log of wood has managed to come out into a conflagration and the match stick only kindled the power which was already in the wood. Similarly, all the Divinity is already in us and we are all fully Divine. It only requires a GURU to kindle that Divinity. We can never become what we are not. May we all realize our full Divinity and shine in the effulgence of this Realisation.

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