

QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION: Q.278, HOPE, DREAMS, EGO

Om Sri Sai Ram

Prasanthi Sandesh welcomes you.

Q. 278:

We often think that the practice of religion consists of austerities or actions which are extremely difficult for the body. We are under the impression that one should practice rigorous exercises in order to become spiritually advanced. But it is not so.

In the present talk and in the coming talks, we will come to know that spirituality is a very easy and simple thing, which does not require intensive, rigorous physical *sadhana* (spiritual practice).

For example, let us consider some of the issues which are common to everybody, such as dreams, ego, hope, and such. Let's analyse and understand these basic problems so that we can come closer to our true reality.

First, let's take a look at our hopes. Let's see that all hopes are false. In other words, when we hope, it means that we are being false or untrue. It is not a question of creating false hopes. Since hope itself is false, whatever you hope for will also be false. Hope is created due to the falsity or inaccuracy of our identity.

When we are identified as '*being*', which is our real self, then there's no need for hope. When you are *being* or real, you never think about the future or about what is going to happen. When you are so present and authentic, the future is no longer your priority. So it just disappears.

When you are unreal, artificial, or dreamlike, then the future becomes very significant because (mentally) you are living in the future. This means that your (present) reality or truth is not here and now, but somewhere else. It is in your dreams. You make those dreams seem real because you believe that you will become real through these dreams. However, you - meaning your true self - are already real. Only your hopes are false. So the effort of the *guru* is to make you aware of your true self.

Next, let's take a look at the ego. Your ego is made up of all your false hopes combined together. Ego is not a reality. It is the collection of all your dreams, of all that is unreal, of all that is false.

Let us look at this phenomenon of ego. Ego is not the reality because the ego cannot exist in the present. Ego always only exists in the past or in the future, but never in the here and now. Never! Never! That is impossible!

Whenever you think of the past, the ego comes. The (body identification) 'I' comes. Whenever you think of the future, again that same 'I' comes. But when you are just being here, not thinking of the past or future, where is this 'I' then?

Therefore, although it is quite normal for all of us to have dreams, hopes and ego, we must get to know these better through self-enquiry. To repeat again, your ego is not to be found in the present. This ego exists only in the past and in the future. It cannot exist in the present.

If you have given up hope, then with the disappearance of your hope, your goal has also disappeared. So you may think, "Why keep going if there's nowhere to reach?" As you cannot live without hope, that is why it is so difficult to drop it. Hope has become synonymous with life, so let us look at the effects of hope and ego in our lives.

When a man has hope, he appears to be more vital, more alive and he appears to be very strong. However, when a man has no hope, he appears to be weak, depressed, thrown back, not knowing what to do and where to go! Whenever there is no hope, we feel life is meaningless. So immediately we create another hope.

So what happens when you hope again? A substitute hope is created. As soon as one hope is lost, another one is immediately created because you cannot live in the gap of hopelessness. You cannot live with hopelessness. However, without any hope, life is real. For the first time, when hope is gone, life becomes authentic. Please remember this point.

As for dropping the ego, I think it is easy to do, because the very phenomenon of the ego is unreal. So both hope and ego are false and unreal. If the ego is false, how can it be difficult to drop it? If the dream is just a dream, how can it be difficult to wake up from it? If the dream was real, then it would be difficult. But if a dream is just a dream, what's the problem in coming out of it?

So you can come out of your dream because the dream cannot catch hold of you. The dream cannot prevent you from waking up. It cannot become a barrier because it has no power (in the waking state). That's why we call it a dream. It is easy to come out of a dream.

That is exactly what I mean when I say it is easy to drop the ego, because the ego is like a dream -- it is not real. In other words, dreams, hopes and ego are all totally false. We have made our lives so complicated because of these feelings.

We are surrounded by ego. We are seeking more and more egotistic journeys -- some through wealth, some through status, power, or prestige, some through politics, and others through religion. There are a million ways. But in all those ways, the end result or goal is the same. That goal is seeking the ego 'I' more and more. Let us understand this point very clearly.

Thus, ego has become the only reality for all of us. We take it at face value and we believe it is real. So the false has become the real, or the shadow has become the substance. That's why it is so difficult to drop it. That's why people find it very tough to get rid of their hopes, dreams and ego. Don't give your ego the quality of a solid structure because it is not. It is false and no effort is needed to drop it.

Here is an example to further clarify our relationship with the ego: A man is running, scared, afraid to death, because of his own shadow. You stop him and tell him, "You are being foolish. This is your own shadow! Nobody is following you and nobody is going to murder you. There's nobody except you. You have become scared of your own shadow!"

Once you start running, the shadow also runs. The faster you run, the faster your shadow follows. Then the logical mind says that you are in danger. The logical mind says, "If you want to escape, run faster. Do you want to escape? Come on! Run faster and faster!"

But whatever you do, the shadow will be following you. You cannot get rid of it. Instead, you will continue becoming more and more scared. But the truth is you are creating the whole thing by yourself! Who will ask the question, 'How can we drop this shadow?' Will someone ask about a technique or a method? Is it even possible?

The answer is that when we can clearly see the ego, when we become aware of the ego, it starts disappearing. The very seeing or the very awareness of the ego is enough to make it vanish. Therefore, there's no more question of how it will happen.

All your suffering has come through the ego. But all your pleasures have also come through the ego. For example, when a crowd applauds and appreciates you, you feel good. That's the only kind of bliss you have known. Your ego rises high, reaches a peak and becomes like Mount Everest. You enjoy it. But when the crowd condemns you, then you feel hurt. If the crowd becomes indifferent, you are crushed and fall into a valley of depression.

So you have been gaining pleasure through the ego, but you have also been suffering through it. Because you are also suffering with it, you want to drop it. But because you also derive pleasure from it, you cannot drop it. Therefore what happens is that it becomes a new type of greed - a new search for gratification.

The *guru* will help you to drop your ego and he'll also let you know the misery that ego creates. But are you ready to drop all the pleasures that the ego creates? Are you ready? If you are ready, it becomes such an easy thing to do. It's just like dropping your shadow. But the problem is that you cannot drop just half of it. You cannot drop just the suffering. It is not possible.

So, all your pleasures and all your sufferings are related to only one phenomenon, the ego. You want to preserve the pleasures, but you want to drop the suffering. Thus it becomes difficult because you are asking the impossible. The more we become conscious of these facts, the more we will certainly evolve spiritually.

Also, every hope of reaching paradise or heaven is more food for the ego again. Even hoping to become enlightened is food for the ego, as every hope is food for the ego. As we become conscious of these facts, we will certainly evolve spiritually.

In fact, the one thing which we must identify is: *who* is trying to become enlightened? The one who is trying to become enlightened is the problem. The truth is that nobody ever becomes enlightened. Enlightenment happens, but nobody ever becomes

enlightened. When the room (the mind) is empty, enlightenment happens. When there's nobody there to reach enlightenment, enlightenment is there.

Gautama Buddha did not become enlightened. Gautama Buddha was unenlightened. When 'he' was not there, when 'he' became absent, enlightenment happened. Suddenly one day he realised that he was following an absurd pattern. When he realised, 'I (the ego) am the problem,' enlightenment happened.

So whatever 'you' do will create more problems. It is not a question of doing right or wrong, or doing this or that. Whatever 'you do' will strengthen the ego.

Therefore, instead of getting into meta-physical principles and theories which seem to be beyond our mind, let us think about these basic things such as dreams, ego and hope, which are the barriers to our enlightenment or spiritual progress.

Thank you, we'll meet again.