

## Vedanta and Devotion

### Lecture by Swami Yuktatmananda

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Dear friends, I am very happy to be here with you all this evening, participating in the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of Vivekananda Vidyapith which has been rendering selfless service over all these years.

I am happy to speak on "Vedanta and Devotion." Before we discuss 'devotion' proper, I would like to say a couple of words on Vedanta. Almost all of you are familiar with Swami Vivekananda's teachings and know what Vedanta means. Vedanta means the essence of all knowledge, the end of all knowledge. It is the knowledge with a capital "K," the knowledge by knowing which everything will be known. In the Mundakopanishad a disciple asks the guru, "What is it by knowing which everything will be known?" The guru says that there are two kinds of knowledge – *aparaa vidya*, which is 'empirical knowledge' and '*paraa vidya*', which is 'supreme knowledge.' *Aparaa vidya* is inferior knowledge and includes knowledge of arts and sciences. The rishi of the Upanishad, as a guru, is bold enough to say that even the study of the Upanishads also comes under *aparaa vidya*, emphasizing that mere scriptural knowledge, not prompted by devotion, discrimination, and direct experience, is of no avail and that it is only secular knowledge. The secular knowledge is characterized by the three-fold distinction - *the knower, the known and the process of knowing*. It can apply to any perception. When I see an object I am the seer, there is the scene, and there is the process of seeing. In Sanskrit this is called 'Triputi Bheda'- the three-fold distinction which applies to all kinds of knowledge. In empirical knowledge, 'I' acquire something which is different from me. Ultimately everything is a manifestation of the '*atman*', but for our purpose, in the relative knowledge we consider it as the subject, the object and the process of knowing.

On the other hand, *paraa vidya* is the knowledge by knowing which everything becomes known. *Paraa vidya* is the knowledge with a capital "K"—the knowledge of the Imperishable Reality, the one spiritual essence behind this human body and mind and behind this physical universe. So, knowing this spiritual reality is the true knowledge, and it is *paraa vidya*. This reality is one essence. There is no such thing as one spiritual reality behind this universe and another behind this human body and mind. The Reality is one and this "oneness of existence" is one of the important teachings of Vedanta. We will be able to appreciate the Reality behind the universe only when we know the Reality in ourselves. We won't know this Reality as an object because it is not empirical knowledge. This three-fold distinction of knower, known and the process of knowing do not apply to *paraa vidya*. The Upanishad says "Brahmavid Brahmaiva Bhavati" – the knower of Brahman becomes one with Brahman. He does not *know* Brahman as an object but when he knows Brahman, he becomes one with Brahman. In that Knowledge, the knower, the

known and the process of knowing become one. That is the ultimate goal of life that Vedanta places before us.

There are four pathways to know this, to suit four different temperaments. It is Swami Vivekananda's genius to divide humanity into four kinds: (1) The active kind, (2) The emotional kind, (3) The meditative kind and (4) The philosophical kind.

For the active kind, it is the way of work, of selfless work, called Karma Yoga. For the emotional kind is the way of devotion called Bhakti Yoga. For the meditative kind is the way of meditation called Raja Yoga. And for the philosophical kind is the way of knowledge called Jnana Yoga. We find in Sri Ramakrishna's teachings that the way of devotion is especially suited for the present age. These four temperaments are not water-tight compartments. All these four can exist in the same human being in various proportions, one dominating the other three. The yoga related to an individual's dominant temperament will be beneficial to that individual. According to Swami Vivekananda the most integrated person is one in whom all these four temperaments find equal manifestation and who is able to practice and attain perfection in all four pathways. That is the ideal man.

The way of devotion is the topic of today's lecture. Sri Ramakrishna says that the way of devotion is especially suited to the present age in which people are more body-bound. Sri Ramakrishna uses the phrase "anna-gata-prana," which means that we are oriented toward 'anna', meaning food. It refers to that layer of a being which subsists on food—*annamaya atman*. In other words it is also called 'annamaya kosha'. We are more oriented to this layer of being, our body, which is the most superficial and gross part of the being. So, Sri Ramakrishna says that the way of devotion proves especially beneficial to seekers in the present age. In the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Bhagavad Gita Shri Krishna says that the way of pursuit of exclusive knowledge of the Unmanifested without seeking the help of devotion is fraught with great fear. For the people who are body bound, the exclusive way of seeking knowledge does not yield any benefit because for them the body is real, the mind is real, and the desires of the mind are real. Vedanta says that our true nature is spirit and the body and mind are like the clothing we put on ourselves. Vedanta's goal is to realize that we are the Spirit and not the body and the mind. So the way of devotion is especially suited for the present age. In spiritual life it is important to know where we stand and begin from there. Reading books on *advaita* does not make us "knowers." That is *aparaa vidya*, book-oriented knowledge. Learning about *advaita* philosophy and lecturing about it from 9 to 5 does not mean anything if that is not integrated with my life from 5 to 9. With Advaita Philosophy our character has to be transformed. Swami Yateeshwarananda (Swami Brahmananda's disciple) was looked up by peers as one of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. He says in his book, "Meditation and Spiritual Life" that a dualist with experience is far superior to a monist without experience. A monist without experience has only book knowledge.

Devotion helps us to have a smooth transition from what we are to what we want to be. The important aspect of devotion is that we learn to love a personal God, a God with form. Worshiping God with form may appear to some to be a kindergarten phase of religion. But we should all remember that despite all our scholarship, we are all in the kindergarten of religion

unless we gain some experience and unless we grow in purity of mind. As long as we are attached to our own form (body and mind), worshipping God with a human form is very fruitful. Swami Vivekananda gives a beautiful example. Imagine that there is an assembly of cats with a philosopher cat among them. If there is a question in the assembly, "What is God?" the philosopher cat says, "God is a super cat, endowed with all auspicious attributes, ready to confer boons on us when we live a moral life and ready to punish us with a rod in hand if we go astray." Similarly if there were an assembly of cows with a philosopher cow among them, the answer to the same question would be, "God is a super cow, endowed with all auspicious attributes, ready to confer boons on us when we live a moral life and ready to punish us with a rod in hand if we go astray." Extrapolate this to the human kingdom. "God is a super human being, endowed with all auspicious attributes, ready to confer boons on us when we live a moral life and ready to punish us with a rod in hand if we go astray." This is the idea of God in the minds of most people. Cats are obliged to think of God as a super cat because of their attachment to their cat form. Similarly the cows are obliged to think of God as a super cow and humans are obliged to think of God as a super human being. As long as we are attached to our human form, worshipping a personal God is a logical necessity. Devotion helps us cultivate love for God rather than love for fleeting things. In the way of devotion we learn to make God the object of our emotions. Usually other people and our possessions are the objects of our emotion. We are happy with people, and then we are troubled by people if things don't work out our way. We are happy with our possessions, but we are unhappy when we lose them. Therefore the people and things that are outside or external are objects of our emotion. In Bhakti Yoga, we learn to make God the object of our emotions. When we do that, we grow in purity of mind. When we have a personal God to relate to, we are able to relay our problems to him, we are able to talk to him, we are able to feel close to him and grow in purity of mind.

Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita that there are four different kinds of people who worship personal God. The first kind is '*arta*', people who want relief from physical and mental afflictions, like disease and other sufferings. They want to cure their diseases and remove their sufferings by praying to God. The second kind is '*artharthi*', people who are after prosperity, name, fame, and other desires. They pray to God for enrichment of these desires. The majority of human beings belong to these two groups; '*arta*' and '*artharthi*'. The third kind is '*jignasu*', one who desires to know the answers to fundamental existential questions of life like 'What is the goal of human life?' and others. These are all theoretical questions, but they strike our minds deeply at some time or the other. These questions come to everyone. We have been gathering experiences in life. We have been gathering pleasurable and painful experiences, but life does not seem to be leading us to fulfillment. We feel frustrated at every step of the way and we feel that there is no end to problems in our life. So, the question comes: "What is the purpose of human life?" Such questions arise in the minds of people with more problems than pleasures in their lives. There are other questions which come to people's mind: "Why am I going through all this suffering? Why am I born? Wouldn't it be better if I were not born? Is there someone called God or is it only some fancy notion? Am I just this body and mind or is there a divine component?" These are the questions that strike us deeply at some time or the other. When they arise, instead of silencing them with our feeble minds, if we take these existential questions to God, then we become the third kind of devotee, called "*jignasu*".

The fourth kind is 'Jnani', the knower of God. If he knows God, then why does he worship God? What does he gain by worship? Sri Sankaracharya puts it beautifully. He says that a knower also worships God because he does not see anything else. He sees everything as God. We have seen that the knowledge of God falls under *para vidya*, in which the three distinctions, the knower, the known, and the process of knowing, all have become one. The person knows God as his own nature. So, whatever a jnani does with his body or with his mind is worship of God. He sees nothing but God manifesting before him. So, he also worships God. Sri Krishna does not belittle the first two kinds, those who pray to him for personal benefit or profit. He says, "*Udarah sarva evai te,*" which means that they are all noble-hearted. But, he adds, "*Jnani tu atmaiva me matam,*" which means "I consider the jnani as myself." Why does Sri Krishna consider the first two kinds to be noble? These people, instead of depending on their puny egos, depend on God. They pray to God for what they want instead of depending upon frail support. Praying to God for personal wealth and the ability to overcome physical and mental afflictions leaves an impression in their minds. When they pray to God repeatedly, it becomes a habit. With this habit, when fundamental existential questions come, they turn to God.

When we discuss from the point of view of devotion, we mean the third kind, jigyasu, the seekers of God. We are all spiritual seekers, especially the students of Vidyapith, current and alumni. You are all blessed people in that you are having some exposure to the teachings of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna. What Vidyapith is trying to do is to sow these teachings in your minds so that the thoughts sown today will germinate into saplings and grow into big trees when the time comes. So, it is up to you to nurture what has been sown in your minds.

But, it is true that the right time should come. Until the right time comes, nothing happens in spiritual life. Sri Ramakrishna gives a beautiful example. A child before going to bed asks the mom to wake him up when he gets the call of nature. Mother says, "I don't need to wake you up my child. That call itself will wake you up." So, when the call comes from within, when we become seekers of God, not for the fleeting things of the world, but for devotion, then things begin to happen and life begins to change. But, students and adults, when they are busy with their studies or day-to-day work and are in the midst of people for whom there is no use of the words "God" and "devotion" in their true sense, need to struggle to cultivate love for God and devotion.

Self-effort is needed for all of to develop love for God. That happens when the right time comes. Does that mean that we wait for the right time to come? If we don't do anything and just wait for the right time to come, then we will be losers. A sincere spiritual seeker always thinks that the right time has come and tries to be industrious. He/she will be up and start making effort. There is a beautiful hymn by Sri Sankaracharya called *Sri Shiva-Aparadha-Kshamapana Stotra*. In this hymn, Sri Sankaracharya says, "*Ayur nashyati pashyatam pratidinam...*" Sri Sankaracharya prays to Lord Shiva on behalf of all of us. He was a Jnani, but he was an embodiment of devotion too. He prays this way to teach us how to pray. It is similar to Sri Ramakrishna praying to the Divine Mother in the Gospel. Sri Ramakrishna also was teaching us how to pray to God. Sri Sankaracharya says, "Life keeps on ebbing away every day. Our youth also keeps on decaying." We cannot remain young all the time. Sri Sankaracharya, in another hymn, says, do not take pride

in three things, namely wealth, social contacts, and youth, because time can erase all of these in a moment. Sri Sankaracharya continues, "The days which are gone will never come back. Fortune is as fleeting as the waves in the ocean. Life itself is fleeting like lightning. Therefore, O Lord, grant me refuge and protect me even now." People think that taking the name of God, going to ashrams, and developing devotion and such things can wait till the last phase of our lives. We should take care of our responsibilities in life. Many people think that youth and middle age are for taking care of worldly responsibilities and that thinking of God can wait until the "evening" of our lives. There are parents who feel scandalized if their children show any love for God at a young age. There is a verse in Sanskrit which means, "A person who thinks that he/she will think of God when all worldly responsibilities are fulfilled, is like a fool who, standing on the seashore, thinks that he/she will take a dip in the ocean when all the waves have subsided." Waves never subside, nor do our responsibilities. Only that which we have held on to in our minds all throughout our lives will our minds be inclined to continue to hold on to. Our minds do not spontaneously turn to God on the day of our retirement. So, we need to practice devotion every day of our lives for all of our lives. Sri Krishna says in the Gita, "*Tasmat sarveshu kaleshu mam anusmara yudhya ca,*" which means "constantly remember Me at all times and fight the battle of life." Fighting was the duty of Arjuna. In our context, fight means to do our duties and fight the battle of life. We all have problems and we need to struggle. We have to face various situations in life. So, we should not keep taking the name of God for the "evening" of our lives, but remember God all the time and fight the battle of life.

Sri Ramakrishna teaches that by the way of devotion, we should cultivate certain attitudes toward God. We look upon God as the Master, as our father, and as our mother. He said that looking upon God as the mother is the most purifying attitude. It is a very safe attitude for a spiritual seeker. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi says, "Look upon God as someone very close to you, as your father or as your mother. That is all you need."

As spiritual seekers, we understand that God is not someone to be feared. God is to be loved. God is not somewhere beyond the clouds, sitting with a rod in His hand to punish us. He does not keep count of our transgressions, our mistakes, or our so-called "sins". He is not waiting to take it out on us at the end of this life, but He is patiently waiting with great love for us to turn our faith in His direction. We perform actions according to our *Sanskaras*. We reap the results of what we sow. All this happens in *Prakriti*. But, God as consciousness presides over *Prakriti*. God is patiently waiting for us to turn ourselves in His direction. Sri Ramakrishna says that God listens to our prayers, provided they are sincere. As long as we are happy with what the world gives us, as long as we pray to God for worldly prosperity or to cure our diseases, we do not really feel the need for God. That is why a right time should come. Sri Ramakrishna gives a beautiful example. His specialty is to give meaning to profound abstract truths with everyday examples. Sri Ramakrishna says, "A child is busy playing with his toys and his mother is busy cooking in the kitchen. As long as the child is busy playing with the toys, the mother is busy cooking in the kitchen as she has work to do. When the child throws away the toys, does not derive any more happiness from the toys, and cries for his mother, then the mother comes running from the kitchen, takes the child in her arms, and begins to nurse the child." Sri Ramakrishna says the Divine Mother lets us play with the toys of the world, animate and inanimate, living and non-

living. She lets us play. She gives us a long rope. She is in no hurry to wean us from the toys and direct us toward her. That is the law of nature and that is the law of *maya*.

If God alone is true and devotion to God alone is beneficial, then why don't many people turn to God? In the spiritual realm, only very few people search for a higher purpose and, of those, only very few know God in reality as per the Bhagavad Gita. A sincere spiritual teacher considers himself to belong to that minority which seeks God and also to that minority among the minority who will know God in reality. Just as a mother comes to her child who only needs the mother and is no longer interested in any toy, God is ready to bestow His blessings on us only if we turn ourselves to Him. That is why we do spiritual practice and make remembrance of God part of our lives. As sincere spiritual seekers, we do not wait for the right time to come. We must think that the right time has come and we must try to be regular with our spiritual practices.

Generally, people think that God bestows blessings on them if they do good and God punishes them if they do bad. This may be good to maintain morality in the society. For a sincere seeker of God, the idea of God has to undergo transformation. The Gita teaches us that God does not prefer to bless or to punish. Usually, when something bad happens to people, they lay blame on God by questioning why God is doing that to them. But, never will they ask a similar question when good happens to them. We take it for granted that we deserve good things to happen to us. The human mind takes credit for all good things and lays blame on others, including God, for any bad things that happen. A spiritual seeker, on the other hand, understands that these things, good or bad, happen to him because of his own *samskaras* or karma. Sri Krishna says in the Gita, "I am equally disposed towards everyone. I have no objects of hatred. I have no objects of love. I have no favorites. But, those who worship me with devotion, I abide in them and they abide in me." These are profound words. Our understanding of this verse grows as the purity of our minds grows.

Sri Sankaracharya explains this with an example. Fire gives us warmth. We experience that warmth only when we approach fire. Similarly, God is all-gracious, God is all-merciful, and God is all-loving. But, I am able to experience it only in proportion to how closely I approach God. God always bestows His blessings on us, but we realize it in proportion to our self-efforts to go towards God. There is no other way of knowing this than to move towards God. Book knowledge cannot make us experience this. When we do spiritual practice, through God's grace, our minds' resistance to go towards God starts to diminish. Sri Ramakrishna says, "If you take one step toward God, God takes one hundred steps toward you." But, we have to take that one step first. God is not inclined to show His presence for you to take that first step. We saw in the parable that a child's mother is in no hurry to attend to the child so long as the child is happy with his toys. If we are happy with the world, then we do not feel the love and grace of God. But, eventually we will understand that the world cannot give us longer-lasting happiness. This understanding may come at any moment or even after several lives.

Swami Vivekananda says in his discussion of Karma that the law of Karma should not make us fatalistic. Instead he wants us to understand that what I am now is due to what I have done in the past and hence, what I will become in the future depends on what I am doing now.'

His lecture, 'Man, the Maker of his Destiny' discusses these topics. This law of Karma gives us great incentive for self-development. We stop blaming others and God and we grow in sanity and sobriety and do what needs to be done. Thus, we conserve the energy we waste in blaming others and God, and save that energy to realize the God dwelling within.

The second point is that God is not to be feared but loved. In common parlance, a God fearing person, is a way of referring to a person who is religious. But that is not a very happy phrase to use. That implies that God is waiting to take it out on us. We should be God loving instead. Love is a common emotion in all of us. This love, when directed towards God, becomes Bhakti or devotion. Only that devotion can make our lives meaningful. As we know, Prahlada, a great devotee who knew nothing but Lord Hari, was born to a demon, Hiranyakashyapu. The following prayer is attributed to Prahlada, and Swami Vivekananda quotes: "That intense love the ignorant cherish for the fleeting objects of the senses, may that love, as I meditate on you in my heart, not leave my heart." That means the worldly people's love for the worldly objects should be directed to God and it should not leave our heart.

Love for God is the basis of devotion. It transforms our attachment to worldly things and people to that for God. Worship of God with form is a logical necessity. Worship of God in images is also an important aspect of devotion. Swami Vivekananda says, if worship of God in a clay image can produce Sri Ramakrishna, then let us have image worship by all means. Sri Ramakrishna worshipped divine mother as Bhavatarini in the stone image at Dakshineswar temple. That stone image became living for him. When M., the author of the Gospel, met Sri Ramakrishna for the second time, his tendency to argue was crushed by Sri Ramakrishna. That was M.'s first argument with Sri Ramakrishna and, fortunately, his last. There was a discussion on image worship. M. had a tendency to believe in God without form. Sri Ramakrishna used to ask this question to all, 'do you believe in God with form or without form?' M. said that he liked to believe in God without form. Sri Ramakrishna said he could hold on to that belief but he should never believe that his belief alone is correct and others who believe God with form are incorrect. God does respond to us through an image, God with a human form or God with non-human form like a Shivalinga or a Shaligram. What is important is seeking God, to have love for God; seeing God as our own. A very advanced stage of devotion is to think of God's comforts, and in that, one cannot tolerate anything that stands in its way.

Sri Ramakrishna told a parable, which you can find in the book, "Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna", compiled by an American nun, Sister Devamata. She was a disciple of Swami Paramananda. Sister Devamata had the blessed privilege of sitting at the feet of Swami Ramakrishnanandaji. She heard many sayings of Sri Ramakrishna from Swami Ramakrishnananda himself. During the time Sister Devamata was compiling this book, she had the vision of Sri Ramakrishna three times .

The parable goes like this: 'Arjuna was proud of his proximity and devotion to Sri Krishna. When Krishna sensed Arjuna's pride about his devotion, he took him for a walk. They came across a Brahmin with a sacred thread and unsheathed sword in his hand. This is an anomaly. A Brahmin is supposed to be practicing ahimsa. Krishna asked Arjuna to inquire from the Brahmin why he is carrying that unsheathed sword in his hand. When Arjuna asked the

Brahmin the reason for holding the sword, the Brahmin replied that he intended to kill four people: (1) Prahlada, for giving endless troubles to Shri Krishna. Prahlada's father was a demon and he tried to kill Prahlada because he was chanting the name of Lord Hari. Shri Krishna had to save Prahlada from all his father's attempts to kill him. (2) Draupadi, for not allowing his Lord to eat his meal. When Dushasana was disrobing Draupadi, she prayed to Lord Krishna, and he had to leave his meal and run to help her. (3) Narada: for repeating the name of Hari and not allowing his Lord to sleep in peace. (4) Arjuna: for making his lord do the menial job of a charioteer in Kurukshetra battlefield. Arjuna was humbled by this explanation of the Brahmin. The Brahmin had love for God and was thinking only about God's comfort.

When we study Sri Ramakrishna's life, we understand that he has made God real to every one of us. He inspires every one of us by assuring us of the possibility of God realization here in this lifetime. He made us feel that 'God is present here,' and 'God listens to our prayer.' One of our senior swamis used to say, "Before the incarnation of Sri Ramakrishna, the door to God realization was bolted from the other side. After the advent of Sri Ramakrishna, the door is unbolted from the other side. All we need to do is to push it open from this side." By following Sri Ramakrishna's life and reading his teachings, we feel that there is a possibility that we can become pure, we can do spiritual practices, and we can realize God.

Now a question arises. If God is unknown to us now, then how can we pray to an unknown God? Latu Maharaj, later Swami Adbhutananda, gave the answer to this question. He says, "When you are looking for a job, you prepare an application for a company, present your candidacy in a resume and send it without really knowing the hiring manager of the company. But, the manager responds to your resume. Similarly, you have not seen God, but that should not prevent you from sending an application to God. Pray sincerely to God to grant you devotion, purity, love for God and detachment, and God will respond to your prayer." Sri Ramakrishna says that God can listen to the tiniest sound emanating from the anklet tied to an ant's feet. How tiny the anklet could be and how soft its sound would be! But God listens to that sound. So we pray to God. God need not be known to us in order for us to pray to Him. See how prayer is helpful. When we pray sincerely we let not any thought enter into our mind except the prayer. Thus, prayer becomes very helpful in focusing a dispersed mind. God listens to this prayer coming from within. It is okay to talk to God about our personal problems and ask for his help, thinking that God is our own. But, let us not look to God just as a facilitator to provide us worldly things or like a doctor to cure our physical and mental diseases. It is true that God is called *Vaidyanatha*, the doctor of all doctors. Why? He is the doctor of the doctors because he cures the disease of the *Samsara*, the worldly disease. He is called *bhava-roga-vaidya*. We suffer from the disease of embodiment, thinking that we are the body and not the Atman.

Once, someone asked Ramana Maharshi about the disease of the body. Ramana Maharshi replied that the body itself is the disease. We have to pray to God to remove the disease of worldliness in us. Sri Ramakrishna says that a boat can be in the water but water cannot be in the boat. Similarly, we can live in the world, but worldliness should not be in our minds. Worldliness means being immoral and selfish. Sri Ramakrishna tells us repeatedly how

to pray. He says that with prayer we should cultivate 'discrimination,' meaning realize that 'God alone is Real and that the world is unreal or illusory or impermanent. He says that the world is a 'zero' and it has value only when we put a 'one' in front of it. God is that 'one' that lends value to this world.

Sri Ramakrishna gave this teaching to his householder disciples, not just his monastic disciples. God alone is real and the world is illusory. Householders are also sanyasins. Every spiritual seeker has to practice inner renunciation, detachment, and purification of mind. We have these precious teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and in the Gita. All we need to do is to take our spiritual life seriously, and as students, try to nurture what you have learned here in Vidyapith and try to practice spiritual teachings in your own humble way. A few minutes in the morning and the evening will help you stay in course. That will ensure that you do not become victims of problems.

Another important teaching of Sri Ramakrishna is to never belittle ourselves. You will find this in the Gita also in the sixth chapter, "One should uplift oneself by oneself. One should not belittle by oneself." One should not think that 'I am a bad person,' 'I am a sinner,' 'I am not fit for spiritual practices.' No sincere student of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother or Swami Vivekananda should ever think negatively about themselves. Always believe that you are a child of God and you can do this. Think that 'I can lead a moral life, and I can follow a spiritual life steadfastly.' Sri Ramakrishna says that if you really have done something bad, then pray to God, enter into a pact with God. Pray to God, 'I have done something bad, I will not repeat it.' Sri Ramakrishna says, 'Have faith in the Divine Name.' The divine name itself will help us undergo transformation. As children of God, we have to always think positively. Mind wants to think negative things, but as spiritual seekers we must distance ourselves from negative thoughts and do only those things that help us grow in devotion to God and grow in strength of mind. Thank you.