Satsanga with Sri Swami Viditatmananda Saraswati  
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam  

NITYA-KARMA, OBLIGATORY DUTIES

नित्यानि - अकरणे व्यवस्थानानि सम्यावन्दनांदीनि॥
nityānि - akaraṇe pratyavāyasādhanāni sandhyāvandanādini.
D...
and sunlight are provided to us and the earth supports, nourishes, and nurtures us. Thus, nature is constantly taking care of us. We say that God, through nature, is constantly taking care of us. We enjoy all these privileges and are indebted to God or the various expressions of God.

**Nitya-karma is meant to fulfill the three kinds of obligations**

The expression of our reciprocity for this indebtedness or obligation is called *nitya-karma*, our obligatory duties. When we perform our daily and incidental duties, we fulfill our obligations. In doing so, we are not obliging anybody; we are simply repaying the debt already incurred, for the obligations we so freely accept. This is the spirit in which *nitya-karma* and *naimittika-karma* are performed. They are of the nature of worship and prayers.

We fulfill our debt to our ancestors through prayers and offerings to the departed souls, as well as through the care and service of our parents. Our debt to the sages is fulfilled in our pursuing knowledge and being instrumental in the acquisition and spread of knowledge. Thirdly, we fulfill our obligation to God through worship and prayers and by making offerings to the *devatās*.

In the Vedic times, the fire ritual was widely prevalent; different deities were invoked in the fire and offerings were made to them. When a person got married, the daily obligatory duties also involved the performance of the *agnihotra-karma* every morning and evening. It is said the fire is the carrier or vehicle for transporting the oblations to different deities and that is how those deities are nourished. The Bhagavad Gita says that when we nourish the *devatās*, they will nourish us in turn [3-11]:

\[
\text{देवान्भवतानने ते देवा भववन्तु वः। परस्परे भावत: अभ: परमवाप्स्यथ॥े े े ेु ं}
\]

*devānbhāvatānena te devā bhāvayantu vah,
parasparaṁ bhāvayantah śreyah paramavāsyatha.*

Propitiate the deities with this (*yajña*). May those deities propitiate you. Propitiating one another, you shall gain the highest good (*mokṣa*).

This scheme is given to us to attain prosperity in our lives. In nourishing the *devatās* with our offerings, we receive their grace and are nourished in our own lives. All of these actions of worship, study, teaching, serving and caring for parents, and offerings to departed souls fall under the category of *nitya-karma*.

**Nitya-karma helps us overcome self-centeredness**

When we recognize that we have been receiving help from all these sources, we become humble. Slowly, the concern for one’s own individual self diminishes and we begin to have a larger view of life. We appreciate the fact that we are not isolated beings, but a part of the whole scheme of life. We are what we are because of the contribution that we have received from the

[www.AVGsatsang.org](http://www.AVGsatsang.org)
rest of the world. Therefore, we should function as a link in a whole chain, interconnected with everything else. There is a statement in Sanskrit ‘vāsudaiva kutumbhakam’, which means that the whole universe is one family. When we live in an unselfish manner, we function as members of the universal family; this is the spirit engendered by the performance of duties. The larger the scope of that with which we identify, the easier it becomes to come out of our self-centeredness. This is the spirit behind karma-yoga, which is taught in the Bhagavad Gita and technically expressed in this text as nitya and naimittika-karma, the daily and incidental duties that are performed in the spirit of worship.

In worshipping the sun, we worship light, which stands for knowledge

The sandhyāvandana or worship of the sun is given as an example of nitya karma or daily duty. The worship of the sun and of fire was prevalent during the Vedic times because they are what we call pratyakṣa-devatā, evident gods. Of the five elements, ākāśa or space is not perceptible to the eyes, and neither is vāyu or air. Fire is the first perceptible element and is, therefore, said to be closest to God. The sun, the moon, and fire are all shining and perceptible forms of God and, therefore, people used to worship them the most. In worshipping them, we worship light, which symbolizes knowledge; thus, light, knowledge, and enlightenment also come into our lives. This is the spirit behind these forms of worship.

Nitya-karma helps us ward off the unpleasant effects of our past actions

Akaraṇe pratyavāyasādhanāni. It is an interesting aspect of our daily obligatory duties that their non-performance may cause harm to us. The threat that the failure to perform the obligatory duties, akaraṇe, can result in pratyavāya or harm invokes fear. Vedāntins, however, interpret the performance of these daily rituals as acts of self-purification and, therefore, if these actions are not performed, it means that the self-purification does not happen.

Nobody is free from the effects of their past actions. Even the fact of human birth is the result of a combination of evil and virtuous actions. We have performed many good and evil actions in our prior births and these past actions now manifest in the form of various situations, both pleasant and unpleasant. Our past good actions bring about pleasant situations and our past evil actions bring about unpleasant situations. Nitya-karma and naimittika-karma ward off the unpleasant effects of what we call evil actions that are in store for us. If we don’t perform these duties, we are unable to ward off evil effects and will, therefore, suffer the consequences of the evil actions.

---

1 Based on Vedāntasāra lectures. Transcribed and edited by Malini, KK Davey and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.