

LESSONS FROM THE BHAGAVAD GEETA

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In the last lesson, we touched on Sri Krishna's call to follow the teachings of the Vedas. As I explained the Vedas contain some 100,000 verses which is not easy for the common person to grasp this knowledge. More so in *Kalyug* (a period we are going through now, which will last some 400,000 years). It has been foretold that in *Kalyug*, people will be less inclined to take to spiritual life, as they will be easily swayed by the attractions of the material world. So Sri Krishna gave us the Bhagavad Geeta, which condenses the teachings of the Vedas and simplifies our understanding and practices to keep us on the spiritual path. For this reason, those who want to, or those who are inclined towards leading a more spiritual life, must take to the study of the Geeta and also practice what they have learnt.

Now, vs. 45 of Chapter 2, speaks of the *Gunas*. There is no direct translation for this word, so the closest is "Attributes". The presence of *Gunas* in us are due to our cumulative past actions and will cause us to behave in a particular manner. The three *Gunas* are inevitably present in all of us. They are naturally *Sattvic* (purity), *Rajasic* (passionate) and *Tamasic* (inert). These *Gunas* are dealt with in greater detail in Chapter 14. However, at this stage it is important for us to know that these three *Gunas* exist in all of us but in different proportions. The composition of the *Gunas* in us determines our attitudes to life. That's why someone may take more to reading and research and indoor activities like poetry, painting, studying of religious scriptures, etc when he or she is endowed with more *Sattvic* qualities. Another may take to more vigorous outdoor activities like mountain climbing, hiking, etc when

endowed with *Rajasic* qualities and those who are constantly lethargic and postponing activities are of *Tamasic* nature.

It is important to understand that ALL the three *Gunas* exist in all beings but in different portions. Our current actions can naturally alter the dominance of the respective *Gunas*. Chapter 17 deals with the **seven** factors in our lives that are influenced by our *Gunas*, namely **food, faith, worship, penance, sacrifice, austerity** and **gift**. It is for this reason, that some of us prefer to do community service like giving charity, visiting old folks' homes, serving meals to poor and needy. All these actions form the path of Karma Yoga (Path of Action). While others choose to read and analyze the scriptures, give religious talks, practice meditation, observe silence, etc in the path of *Jnana* Yoga (Path of Knowledge).

In this verse, the Lord is advising Arjuna to transcend the three *Gunas* and be free of them. Now we can understand if we are to free ourselves from the *tamasic* (lethargic) and *rajasic* (passionate attributes that cause us to run here and there in pursuit of satisfying our mundane pleasures), but one may wonder why we are being asked to overcome even our *sattvic* (pure) attributes. The reason is that even this attribute binds us (falsely) to happiness and this causes us to take rebirth again, because we do not wish to give up this exalted state. By overcoming the three *Gunas*, we finally free ourselves from its hold. This simple analogy can be explained like this: Imagine a gas filled balloon whose natural tendency is to float upwards, Just like the pure nature of the soul when released from the body wants to be one with the Lord (the source).

However, just like the balloon is tied down to the ground with strings, the soul is tied to the body by the three *Gun*as. The minute the strings are cut from the balloon (like we are freed from the *Gun*as that bind us), then the balloon will have the natural tendency to float upwards. Like the soul will have the natural tendency to merge with the Lord. The reason for us to take to the study of the scriptures and leading a spiritually uplifting life is to know how to cut these shackles that bind us to the world birth after birth. In this verse also, the Lord advises four objectives for one whose intellect is one pointed (as described in chapter 2, verse 41) – i.e,

- (1) free yourself from dualities;
- (2) be established in purity;
- (3) unconcerned for acquisition and preservation;
- (4) your mind fully under control

1st quality: “free yourself of dualities”. What are dualities? The moment we are born, our lives are subject to them - happiness and sorrow, good health and sickness, pleasure and pain, honour and dishonour. It is an accepted fact that our life from birth to death will be a series of ups and downs. What are the causes of such happenings? It is the past karmas that we bring forth. We are paying or reaping the causes of our actions. We must understand that there is nothing we can do to prevent them. So should we just resign ourselves to them and leave the future to the karmas. Yes and No! It is two parts:

- i) Mind must accept that what we are going through now, example the bad times is due to our very own past actions. (Note: If we are going through good times we must also appreciate that it is due to our past actions). Instead of lamenting and wasting time which is not going to change anything, we must keep our mind positive and focused on....
- ii) Our current actions - Ensure that your current performed are good and leads

you on the spiritual path, because ultimately it is these current actions which will cause future enjoyments (or suffering). This is something you can take control of.

Thus, we free our selves of dualities, remain indifferent to the ups and downs, determined to stay on a spiritual path. The rewards will follow.

2nd quality: “Be established in purity”. This actually follows the first requirement that when you are free from dualities your mind is calm and concentrated and you will be established in purity.

3rd quality: “Unconcerned for acquisition and preservation”. From the caveman days this is what man has been doing. We go through life always wanting to acquire things....bigger house, bigger car, bigger bank balance, etc. Two things happen here. Whatever we acquire, we are still not happy. We wonder and worry how we can acquire more. Secondly we also worry whether we can hold on to what we have acquired. We therefore want to **preserve** what we acquire. Therefore our life becomes a series of worries about “**acquisition and preservation**”. While it is not wrong to work hard and acquire the comforts of life (Bhagavad Geeta doesn’t tell you to retire in a forest but live your life), it is the norm that when we are on the acquisition trail we become obsessive. That is the pitfall to avoid. Do your work to the best of ability but remember “**you get what you deserve not what you desire**”.

And finally: “Mind fully under control”. Through practice as when you are in control of your mind and vice versa, then you are not affected by the dualities of life and will experience smooth progress on the spiritual path.

Hari Om Tat Sat!

