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Sublimation of Kāma-Krodha – Quintessence of Spiritual Sādhanā

Significance of sensory restraints

No spiritual seeking or pursuit will have its desired benefit unless it brings about a sufficient measure of sensory discipline, moderation and refinement. In fact, sensory discipline is something that Bhagavadgītā repeatedly emphasizes. It is the unique call of this great war-dialogue. Disciplining the senses is, judged from any angle, a comprehensive sādhanā.

It is the senses that draw the mind away towards the objects around to remain enmeshed with them. Unless this servitude towards the world objects is checked and sublimated, spiritual seeking as a pursuit will not have any meaningful progress.

Krishna first spoke about *titikṣā* (forbearance) in the 2nd chapter (verse 14). Describing our life as **interactions between senses and objects** (*mātrā-sparśāḥ*), he told Arjuna to forbear the resultant effects of all interactions, namely sukha-duḥkhas. Such forbearance, he then pointed out, is the indispensable quality of a seeker – one who yearns for liberation.

In the 3rd chapter, Krishna stressed that every sensory perception carries with it attraction and repulsion (*rāga* and *dveṣa*). And therefore, he warned the seeker not to come under their sway (*tayoḥ na vaśam-āgacchet*). Is not the idea in both cases the same?

In the following verse Krishna re-emphasizes the same truth, but in a different manner. It is both a warning and a confirmation:

ये हि संस्पर्शजा भोगा दुःखयोनय एव ते ।
आद्यन्तवन्तः कौन्तेय न तेषु रमते बुधः ॥

*ye hi saṁsparśajā bhogā du:kha-yonaya eva te ।
ādy-antavanta: kaunteya na teṣu ramate budha: ॥*

(5.22)

The delights born of contacts with sense-objects are indeed the womb of misery. They are transitory, fleeting. O son of Kunti, the wise one does not rejoice in these.

Krishna makes a clear analysis about sensory indulgences. Right from birth a child is exposed to sensory experiences. Suckling gives him taste, and gradually he imbibes touch, sound, sight and the rest. Every sense-contact brings either pleasure or displeasure. That is why the child does not like all tastes or sounds or touches. All these sensory experiences get imprinted in the buddhi, which in turn motivates sensory activities and pursuits. The foundation of life is thus quite obvious.

But is human life meant only to seek these delights and thrills? Or, should the sensory experiences be an opportunity and compulsion for us to learn discreetly, evolve inwardly, to think of something subtler and lasting?

Krishna is clear that to become Wise, one has to recognize that all sensory pleasures **are verily the womb of misery**. Sensory indulgences, however thrilling or exciting, bring corrosion to the senses themselves. This is the law of nature. Knowing this, the wise should not get enslaved by sensory enjoyments. The discrimination that the external delights are fleeting and are verily the source of misery, should act as a compulsion. No sensory delight can lead man to any lasting gain.

Spiritual wisdom is always allied with dispassion. **Dispassion has the power to generate unlimited strength and wellbeing.** Without the merits of dispassion (*vairāgya*), none can lead an effective spiritual life. Bhagavadgītā does not deflect from this cardinal message. However secular or all-inclusive Krishna's analysis and statements are, he does

not allow the seeker to be indifferent to the call of dispassion. To be a Self-seeker is to be dispassionate.

This too is a secular message. There is no particular religious element here. Krishna makes a pragmatic evaluation of what the senses represent and can bring for man. The next verse goes a step further. It pronounces in brief but unambiguous terms what is true spiritual or yogic attainment:

शक्नोतीहैव यः सोढुं प्राक्शरीरविमोक्षणात् ।
कामक्रोधोद्भवं वेगं स युक्तः स सुखी नरः ॥

śaknotīhaiva ya: soḍhuṃ prāk-śarīra-vimokṣaṇāt ।
kāma-krodhodbhavaṃ vegam sa yukta: sa sukhi nara: ॥

(5.23)

Whoever, before his body falls, is able to withstand the urges of passion and anger, is indeed the **spiritually integrated and happy individual**.

True seeking consists in freeing the mind and intelligence from the clutches of *kāma* and *krodha*, passion and anger. Servitude to sensory objects will bring in the onslaught of passion and hatred. The whole of spiritual tuition is aimed at gaining inner control and stability.

As exposure to sensory objects disturbs the mind with attractions and repulsions, spiritual wisdom and absorption in the Self fills the same mind with inspiration, strength and poise. When spiritual insight deepens, the influence of sensory objects in generating *kāma* and *krodha* will become weak. The process works **not by shunning** sensory objects or interactions altogether, but by taking to them abstemiously and building simultaneously the subjective strength through introspection and dispassion. Herein lies the secret of spiritual *sādhanā*.

The cultivation of spiritual insight and deriving its sublime benefits are not to be in the absence of sensory interactions, but in their very currency. Interactions take place at the sensory level. Spiritual wisdom and its effects work inwardly – in the level of *buddhi* or intelligence. There

should not be any conflict between them. On the other hand, the two should work as powerful complements. In the light of world exposure alone, spiritual quest becomes relevant and meaningful. One is led to seek the Supreme Reality only on repeatedly encountering the ephemeral world and getting exposed to the trifling nature of sensory pleasures. To make one seek, the fleeting thrills the objects give will have to be seriously reflected upon. Thus, there cannot be any conflict between interactional life and spiritual seeking leading to enhancement of dispassion.

To summarize Krishna's tuition: The whole of yoga, spiritual Knowledge, consists in setting right the mind while it is in the midst of sensory interactions. And this implies **making the mind even towards *kāma* and *krodha***, a constant outcome of these interactions. When the mind becomes even and poised, the very same objects that acted earlier as a source of allurements and hatred, would become like beautiful clear water in which the mind can swim freely and joyfully.

At this stage, Krishna does not even speak of the Self, which was his stress earlier, when he began the dialogue. To be Self-realized is, in truth, to be **even-minded or stable-minded**, in the manner in which it is explained here. This is again another secular presentation of the whole spiritual truth and attainment!

The true freedom - Brahma-nirvāṇa

In the next verse, Krishna blends beautifully the **subjective mental evenness** with the highest **religio-spiritual attainment**:

योऽन्तःसुखोऽन्तरारामस्तथान्तर्ज्योतिरेव यः ।
स योगी ब्रह्मनिर्वाणं ब्रह्मभूतोऽधिगच्छति ॥

yo'nta:sukho'ntar-ārāmas-tathāntar-jyotir-eva ya: ।
sa yogī brahma-nirvāṇaṃ brahma-bhūto'dhigacchati ॥

(5.24)

When one thus gets inner poise, inner delight and inner brilliance, he becomes a Yogī. Becoming Brahman, he attains *Brāhmic* freedom.

To evenize and harmonize the mind – to be even-minded towards all dvandvas – is the summum bonum of all spirituality and seeking. Following such evenization, a new life unfolds. **Instead of seeking delight from interaction with the objects, the mind itself generates the poise and delight.**

The seeker will prefer the delight born from his inwardness to the interactional thrills and pleasures. He becomes an *antaḥ-sukhī* and *antar-ārāmaḥ* (one revelling in the delight and comfort born of within). And such inner beatitude is accompanied by a constant inner brilliance – *antar-jyotiḥ*, making him a true yogī. He attains *Brahma-nirvāṇa* – the supreme release or redemption such a state brings about. That relates to Brahman, its realization. The *nirvāṇa* arising from *Brāhmic* knowledge and state is the supreme – **ultimate in human life**. Experiencing such *Brahma-nirvāṇa*, he verily **becomes** Brahman (*Brahma-bhūtaḥ*).

The point to be understood is that the inner delight and poise, resulting from the purity of the mind which is freed from the clutches of *kāma* and *krodha*, is the keynote of spiritual and yogic life. Such inner fullness alone counts in the life of a seeker. All the rest is subsidiary.

In the beginning of the gospel (chapter 2), Krishna may seem to suggest that spiritual enlightenment calls for complete withdrawal from external activities and involvement. But is this really so? Here in verse 5.25, he gives a full answer to this. **Self-knowledge verily means gaining freedom from the mind's own shackles.** That will instantly mean inner composure and inner brilliance. What inevitably follows is a great expansion of the heart and mind. Dependence and desire for the objects keep the mind subdued and selfish. With the inward delight filling the mind and heart, all forms of narrowness dissolve. The enlightened hearts thus become *sarva-bhūta-hite ratāḥ* – engaged in the welfare of all beings. Free of all selfish constrictions, the Knower becomes universal in his outlook and motivations.

Instead of being constricted by the thoughts and activities revolving around himself and his family, he remains engaged in the lasting welfare of the entire world, particularly the wellbeing of all creatures. Spirituality

means such expansion, besides the freedom and joy it delivers from within – Krishna emphasizes.

Krishna develops the idea and presents something quite singular in the next verse:

कामक्रोधवियुक्तानां यतीनां यतचेतसाम् ।
अभितो ब्रह्मनिर्वाणं वर्तते विदितात्मनाम् ॥

*kāma-krodhaviyuktānām yatīnām yata-cetasām ।
abhito brahma-nirvāṇam vartate veditātmanām ॥*

(5.26)

Those of self-control, whose minds are rid of lust and anger, and who by dint of the purity of their mind have realized the Self, for them *Brahma-nirvāṇa* – the freedom and joy arising from the knowledge of Supreme Reality – reigns all around.

To strive spiritually or to be a seeker is to orient the mind spiritually. That is why he uses the expression *yata-cetas*. The mind (*cetas*) should become *yataḥ* (restrained). *Yata-cetas* thus denotes one whose mind is well restrained and oriented spiritually. What does it mean in practical terms? Krishna answers the question: It is to be rid of *kāma* and *krodha*, to be a *kāma-krodha-viyuktaḥ*.

The whole objective of spiritual sādhanā is to sublimate desire and hatred that generally dominate the mind. Instead of passion and prejudice instigating the seeker's activity, he should find the higher sense of righteous natural harmony as the constant motivation for his interactions. This will be possible only when deeper and more comprehensive level of thinking and evaluation become predominant.

Everyone knows that lust or greed is neither good nor noble. Equally so, anger or hatred is also detestable. To be a good human, one must rise above these and have a purity of attitude and aim to govern his life and activities. Is this not a fully secular proposition? To confirm this, Krishna adds: "For the one freed from *kāma* and *krodha*, ***Brahma-nirvāṇa*** reigns

all around.” Although the sāadhanā is **secular**, the gain it brings about is the **spiritual ultimate!**

Krishna wants the seeker to know that ultimate spiritual gain and glory do not result from **mere meditative absorption, or withdrawal from activities**. The interactional sāadhanā purifies the mind. To be freed of *kāma* and *krodha* is, Krishna points out, to experience the joy of spiritual freedom in all dimensions – free of all constrictions. The search or seeking will thus cease for the seeker. He will become a Knower, who, by virtue of such knowledge and the sublimation it brings to the mind, will become an heir to ceaseless joy, wherever he is and whatever he may be engaged in.

Ātma-jñāna does not mean merely knowing the Self. It is, on the other hand, a process of purifying and transforming the mind. And it has to be at work in and through interactions, activities. Those involvements, which would normally vitiate the mind by arousing passions and prejudices, can be made to purify and sublimate the mind, provided such a purifying attitude is preserved while pursuing all activities.

Activities may link one to various external factors, like persons, places and events; but in all cases, the mind alone is the interacting subject, which is free to foster its purifying attitude throughout. The variety in interactions does not thus pose the least hindrance. The evenness of the mind and the attitude it fosters will sublimate and purify all interactions. The seeker has to ensure that this takes place, irrespective of all other considerations. Activities and interactions will then only help and facilitate the sublimational sāadhanā. The question is whether the seeker will understand this secret and will apply it diligently.

