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How to Live and Leave

Universality of the Gospel

Krishna further enhances the significant shift he took in the 7th chapter, making Bhagavadgītā more universal and profound. In the process he incorporates a number of views bearing upon religious and philosophical thinking.

The universality of the gospel naturally implies that the conversation cannot be restricted to one person, event or time. It must deal with the complex human mind and its eternal compulsions. Thus, enriching additions and inclusions are indispensable. The necessity is also evidenced from Arjuna's questions at the outset, picking up the thread from Krishna's concluding verses of the earlier (7th) chapter.

How steeped Arjuna was in utter grief and dejection, resulting in the total collapse of his personality! The immediate relief he sought was to this burning affliction. But how strangely did the picture change soon! Arjuna quickly became poised with a sustaining mood of deep quest, investigation and zeal to know more about human nature, the complex universe and the eternal principles governing them!

If such a startling transformation graced the Kurukshetra warrior all too soon, what could be the range of inspiration or enquiry that seekers in general will be infused with, considering that they are better placed in the calmer and more stable environment of day-to-day life?

Thus, **the gospel had to rise from its restricted relevance of the warfront to a higher, eternal note.** Only then will it have the potential to deal with human mind in all its complexity and treat the sustained interrogations of the sharp intelligence. The full-fold relevance and message of the dialogue lies in this expanded scope.

Arjuna wants to know about *brahman*, *adhyātma*, *adhibhūta*, *adhidaiva* and *karma*. He also seeks to be told how one, with a steadfast mind, can get to the supreme Reality at the time of the body's fall. Krishna himself briefly expressed these thoughts while concluding the previous chapter. That provoked Arjuna's curiosity, and he seeks clarification on the points with deep earnestness, denoting how much he yearns to gain spiritual wisdom.

Spiritual enquiry is basically three-fold: the living individual, the world environment of matter and energy, and thirdly, the cause and source of these. In addition, Arjuna also wants to find out how the rare fortune of leaving the world in the end, with the contemplation on the Supreme can be gained. It is a fate which people, in general, covet so much.

The dialogue thus is no more personal, specific or event-based. **It extends into a full treatise on human life and all its intricacies.** Naturally it analyzes the world, its causal factors, and finally the outcome the world is destined to bring about at the end of man's earthly sojourn.

Arjuna wanted to be instructed on the path of everlasting good, *śreyas* (2.7). In the same breath he also specified that neither a prosperous Kingly life on the powerful throne (this is the best a warrior could think of) nor the promise of the higher worlds after death (this is the best that Vedic rituals can invoke), would suffice for him. For, neither of these, he made it clear, had the power to redress the scorching grief he was suffering from (2.8).

So he desperately wanted to be gifted with the efficient means to remove all his grief, filling him with supreme happiness. This is what the Upanishads speak about – the *śreyas*, as different from the *preyas*.

As the Upanishads discuss the subject in a detailed manner, especially in the background and relevance of the ritualistic section of the Vedas, **Krishna too makes his dialogue thorough and comprehensive.** Only then can it serve the role of serving many an Arjuna and yet others.

As our life is an interaction between the human psyche and the world of matter, an understanding of both oneself and the surrounding existence is necessary, if the effort to eliminate grief, and gain happiness is to be well-founded and fulfilled. That will naturally lead one to wonder and enquire about the Power or Potential that governs the endless world with its multiple courses and cycles.

We continually find ourselves amidst and confronted with stupendous factors. To contend them will not be the prudent course – it is neither feasible nor fruitful. What then is the way to realize, at least to a degree, what each needs or wishes for?

It is then that such questions emerge and begin to assail the human mind – questions like what in reality is oneself, what does the world verily consist of, what, if any, rules the world phenomena. Quests and reflections of this kind verily shape religion, philosophy and spirituality.

This is how **Krishna's words go beyond the boundaries of a mere short-term redress of a warrior's afflicted mind and encompass the much larger orbit of human life**, the world around and the creative source of both.

The right mode of departing from the world

Answering Arjuna's questions briefly, Krishna discusses the broad-based concepts and evaluations relevant to the subject:

अक्षरं ब्रह्म परमं स्वभावोऽध्यात्ममुच्यते ।
भूतभावोद्भवकरो विसर्गः कर्मसञ्जितः ॥
अधिभूतं क्षरो भावः पुरुषश्चाधिदैवतम् ।
अधियज्ञोऽहमेवात्र देहे देहभृतां वर ॥

*akṣaram brahma paramaṁ svabhāvo'dhyātmam-ucyate ।
bhūta-bhāvodbhavakaro visargaḥ karma-sañjītaḥ ॥
adhibhūtaṁ kṣaro bhāvaḥ puruṣaścādhidivatatam ।
adhiyajño'ham-evātra dehe deha-bhṛtāṁ vara ॥*

(8.3,4)

Brahman is the Imperishable. Its own expression as life is *adhyātma* – the Self. Release and display of the elements, bringing the necessary ground for the purpose is called *karma*, action.

The ceaseless transformation of object existence is meant by *adhibhūta*. *Adhi-daiva* is the *puruṣa*. And *adhiyajña* is the resident Self in the body.

Krishna answers the fourth question in a more elaborate manner:

अन्तकाले च मामेव स्मरन्मुक्त्वा कलेवरम् ।

यः प्रयाति स मद्भावं याति नास्त्यत्र संशयः ॥

anta-kāle ca mām-eva smaran-muktvā kalevaram ।

ya: prayāti sa mad-bhāvaṃ yāti nāsty-atra saṃśaya: ॥

(8.5)

Remembering Me alone in the end, whoever departs from this world shedding his body, no doubt, attains my state.

What is the best way of departing from the world? What should one do to achieve this? Does the outcome follow any personal or particular process, or is there some general law that governs the finale of human life on earth?

Krishna says that the last-minute memory and contemplation are important in this matter. The best and simplest course is to remember the Teacher and his words exclusively, as part of the seeker's life, placing full reliance on them. That will then lead the seeker to the state similar to that of the Teacher. It is doubtless, it is definite, assures Krishna.

Is the message contained in this statement, something solely personal and specific for Arjuna alone? Krishna himself would depart from the world as he did some years later. Departure, being thus common to Arjuna and Krishna, and to all humans, how and where is the question of Arjuna attaining to Krishna's state? What is the state, if at all, referred to here? For the rational mind, it calls for thorough examination.

Does Krishna mean some rare extra merit, by which he can draw Arjuna to himself? That would be disproving Krishna's humanhood, and awarding him a status above and beyond human life. Where is then the universal and ever-relevant character of the instruction?

Herein lies the art of blending personal references with general propositions, as for instance what the next verse conveys:

यं यं वापि स्मरन्भावं त्यजत्यन्ते कलेवरम् ।

तं तमेवैति कौन्तेय सदा तद्भावभावितः ॥

yaṃ yaṃ vāpi smaran-bhāvaṃ tyajaty-ante kalevaram ।

taṃ tam-evaiti kaunteya sadā tad-bhāva-bhāvita: ॥

(8.6)

Whatever one thinks of or contemplates upon with fondness, while shedding the body, that itself he attains, governed by the law of wholesome identity.

Attainment of anything whatever is truly an outcome generated by the mind. The whole fruition is a mental process. The status and role of the body is but of an instrument, as is a tool in the hands of a worker. As the body has its impetus in the mind, its effects too are registered in the same mind. Body by itself carries no causality at any time.

At the time of shedding the body, whatever the mind clings to, haunted by various hopes, will determine one's plight. Krishna reveals the law and process governing this ultimate outcome. But **this does not mean that anyone is free to do what he wishes, leaving the final thought to be picked up near the hour of departure** from the world.

Devotional practice – a life-long pursuit

Mind's thinking process is self-governed and self-resting. Accordingly, **the last thought** cannot suddenly be new or different. It will always be the **cumulative effect or outcome of what has been dominant all along**. The effort to shape the last thought and contemplation should, thus, begin and persist far earlier. Krishna, therefore, emphasizes that the right option should be discreetly exercised

and pursued all along:

तस्मात्सर्वेषु कालेषु मामनुस्मर युध्य च ।

मय्यर्पितमनोबुद्धिर्मांमेवैष्यस्यसंशयम् ॥

tasmāt-sarveṣu kāleṣu mām-anusmara yudhya ca ।

mayy-arpita-mano-buddhir-mām-evaiṣyasy-asamśayam ॥

(8.7)

Therefore, **remember Me all the time** and fight. If the mind and intelligence are devotedly resting in Me, then one attains Me. This is beyond doubt.

The mind is closely associated with the body. But the body does not determine mind's plight or fate. Normally, the independent nature of the mind is not understood by people. It is sheer ignorance. That is why enlightenment becomes necessary, as in the case of Arjuna.

Engage in war, as you have to, says Krishna. But it should be the secondary process. The first should be the mind's option. So at all times, in all situations, whatever be the circumstances one finds himself in, let his mind be given to the thought and contemplation of the Supreme. This would determine the fate of the individual. **Truly the mind is the architect of one's fate. The memory and identification it fosters and preserves are the only factors that govern its course.** Be assured of this, says Krishna.

To make it clear that this is more an exposition of the mind's potential and process, and not something that subsists solely on Krishna's personality, he immediately sets forth the general, universal proposition:

अभ्यासयोगयुक्तेन चेतसा नान्यगामिना ।

परमं पुरुषं दिव्यं याति पार्थानुचिन्तयन् ॥

abhyāsa-yoga-yuktena cetasā nānyagāminā ।

paramaṃ puruṣaṃ divyaṃ yāti pārthānucintayan ॥

(8.8)

By the force of constant thinking and reflection, one attains to the supreme divine State, provided such thinking remains exclusive and the mind takes to it with application.

The outcome in human life always follows its fond selection, will and effort. **Abhyāsa - consistent, assiduous practice - alone counts. This is where most seekers are likely to relent, and consequently meet failure.**

It is all an inward process, wherein the mind alone is the supreme agent and functionary. Mind thrives on thoughts. And these thoughts are what should be looked into, purified and made exclusive. The emphasis is unambiguous and unmistakable.

In the next few verses Krishna blends religiosity with philosophy and describes how the contemplation on the Supreme should be done. Devotion is the primary help in all these contemplations. He makes the following assertion, bringing in the yogic contemplation which is the gist of all religion, philosophy and spirituality. The statement thus becomes conclusive and supreme:

यदक्षरं वेदविदो वदन्ति
विशन्ति यद्यतयो वीतरागाः ।
यदिच्छन्तो ब्रह्मचर्यं चरन्ति
तत्ते पदं सङ्ग्रहेण प्रवक्ष्ये ॥

*yad-akṣaram veda-vido vadanti
viśanti yad-yatayo vīta-rāgāḥ ।
yad-icchanto brahma-caryam caranti
tatte padaṃ saṅgrahaṇa pravakṣye ॥*

(8.11)

What the Vedic Knowers hold as Indestructible, which those free of desires succeed in entering, and seeking which people take to life-long austerity of celibacy, I shall briefly explain to you.

This verse reflects the words of Kaṭhōpaniṣad, as some of the verses in the second chapter also do, making it clear that Krishna is not presenting any new thought or philosophy of his own, but is restating and expounding the age-old vision that our Knowers have disclosed and propagated.

What is that supreme abode? Krishna's words are very significant and wholesome. Keeping all the senses (that perceive the external objects) under check and restraining the mind within, strive to remember the Lord all the time, and then leave the world, with no other thought or fascination (8.13). No possession, acquisition or attachment is ultimately rewarding. Nothing from the world can redeem the human soul. Instead, **it is the readiness and strength to dispossess everything and all, that verily helps fulfillment of human life.**

