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Preface

Krishna presents twenty-four Gurus

In the eleventh skandha of Śreemad Bhāgavatam, which is known as Mukti-skandha we find two situations. One is the relatively restful life of Krishna in Dvāraka after he had fulfilled his mission of eliminating the wicked people who were a burden on earth. The other is his long and instructive discourse to Uddhava.

Brahmā and the others had arrived in Dvāraka with a request that Krishna return to his abode, now that the purpose of his incarnation had been served. Krishna agreed to go back, but not before destroying his own clan, as they had become conceited, unruly and a threat to humanity. With this assurance, Brahmā and the retinue returned to the heavens.

Now Uddhava, the great devotee and servant of Krishna, having heard or overheard that conversation, begged of Krishna to take him also along, to wherever his Lord was going. Uddhava submitted that he could not bear to be away from Krishna even for half a moment!

Was Krishna in a dilemma? Is it ever possible to take someone along, when one leaves behind his own body? All kinds of physical associations and getting along, moving about together, and so on are possible only when one is alive. All relationships end with the fall of the body. Krishna understood Uddhava's difficulty. What he told and further advised Uddhava, forms the major part of Mukti-skandha.

This was Krishna's final spiritual message and discourse to mankind. It was delivered through Uddhava and is known as

Uddhava-gītā. The teaching extends from the sixth to the twenty-ninth chapter in the eleventh skandha of Śreemad Bhāgavatam.

There were two significant occasions in Krishna's life when he gave spiritual discourses. One was in Kurukshetra when at the spur of the moment, Krishna had to revitalize a crestfallen Arjuna just before the war began; and the other was to Uddhava in the peaceful surroundings of Dvāraka. These two conversations, full of values and enlightenment for the entire humanity, form the core of Krishna's teachings.

As is well known, Arjuna the magnificent warrior, had suddenly become despondent and diffident on the warfront when he found that he would be fighting his own respected grand-father and beloved teacher, as well as his own relatives and friends! And this was after that great fighter had prepared himself through thirteen years of austerities for the long awaited war! There Krishna had to convince Arjuna that the need of the hour was not to abandon the war and take to the life of a recluse living on alms, as Arjuna had wanted to. The call was to stand up and fight the righteous war.

Here in Dvāraka it was just the opposite! Krishna was advising Uddhava to **abandon everything and take to the life of a recluse** giving himself up completely to a life of chance. But Uddhava submitted that he could not do so because of his strong sentimental ties towards his family and friends, and towards Krishna himself.

Thereupon, Krishna instructs Uddhava the very same principles of Advaita philosophy which he had so successfully employed in Kurukshetra to inspire the dejected warrior Arjuna to fight. The human mind is equally capable of both – to hold as well as to abandon, for it is that immortal, unflinching inner Soul, *antarātmā*, that gives the strength and capability for both.

Vyāsadeva's presentation of the Navayogi-Nimi conversation as

part of Nārada Maharshi's instructions to Vasudeva, is a full-fold discussion on Bhāgavata dharma. How does a devotee get the experience of God? When will it happen? What should he do by which he becomes fit for this vision? These experiential aspects are examined from various angles.

Krishna first spoke about his ancestor Yadu Chakravarti and his meeting with Avadhūta, a mendicant. Evidently that episode has great relevance to a devotee's mind. The Avadhūta declared that he had twenty-four Gurus. They included five elements, the pañca-bhūtas. It was his close observation of these and contemplation on the truths and principles they revealed that shaped his life.

Experience, awareness, knowledge, memory, interaction, its consequences – none of these are external or in the level of body-senses complex. It is evident that the body and the senses in the body which are an aggregate of matter and energy, have no sentience or awareness. The awareness level is beyond the matter-energy planes. This body, which was formed by the awareness, reveals that Consciousness. And it is the mind that enlivens and employs the body and senses; that is the awareness itself! And Knowledge (jñāna) can be churned out from this Consciousness alone, like butter from curd. That is what the Avadhūta did.

He observed his surroundings very keenly and gleaned from them after deep thought, whatever values, qualities and principles that were appropriate for his way of life. And the resultant unique noble personality, full of enlightened values and qualities, caught the eye of emperor Yadu.

The subsequent conversations during which Yadu asked many questions and the Avadhūta replied, are very revealing. They provide a full answer to the doubts raised by people – viz. **is it possible for the human personality to enquire into and discover the Truth** which can wipe away the three-fold miseries of life? Can

one wander freely as he pleases with an equanimous mind and vision? Anyone can enter this ocean of knowledge, which is a part of our ancient culture, stretching back to the Vedas. The nectarine contents can be partaken by one and all. These are not made from external materials or objects, but are entirely created by the intelligence and mind.

All our śāstras have been evolved like that: Dṛk-Dṛśya Viveka, Viveka-cūḍāmaṇi, Aṣṭāvakra-saṃhitā, Aparokṣānubhūti, Kaivalya Navanītam – the list is vast. Yet there is scope for many more. Those who read and seriously contemplate on the contents and messages of this book, will have no difficulty in knowing and experiencing Bhagavān, Īśvara, the Lord.

Though there are many subjects discussed in Śreemad Bhāgavatam, one of the main objectives of Vyāsadeva seems to be to describe the specialities of Lord Krishna's birth and life, and also to make known to people Krishna's gospel to Uddhava, his best devotee.

The occasion was Uddhava's appeal to Krishna to take him also along to wherever Krishna planned to go after shedding his body! Uddhava declared unhesitatingly that he could not ever stay away from Krishna even for a fraction of a moment! The manner of Uddhava's appeal shows the essence of Vedantic thought and enquiry.

Uddhava had chosen the words: सोऽहं ममामिति मूढमतिर्विगाढः (*so'ham mama-aham-iti mūḍha-matir-vigāḍhaḥ*) (11.7.16) to state his difficulty. The idea of 'me' is with respect to the body; and linked to the body is the feeling 'mine'. Uddhava's appeal to Krishna was to free him from these two and bring clarity to his mind. This is what everyone needs. If the ideas 'I' and 'mine' can be wiped away, human life becomes fulfilled. In Arjuna's words these were '*kārpaṇya-doṣaḥ*' and '*dharma-sammūḍhatā*'.

Chapter 3

The art of uplifting oneself

Krishna said:

प्रायेण मनुजा लोके लोकतत्त्वविचक्षणाः ।
समुद्धरन्ति ह्यात्मानमात्मनैवाशुभाशयात् ॥

11.7.19

लोके लोकतत्त्वविचक्षणाः मनुजाः प्रायेण आत्मना एव आत्मानं अशुभाशयात्
समुद्धरन्ति हि ।

Generally, people adept in understanding the truth about the world, raise themselves from their unholy influences by their own efforts.

Krishna begins in a decisive way. Uddhava's difficulty lies in his mind. In fact, his problem is the creation of his mind itself. He is unable to do what is required to be done. The worldly ties prevent him from doing the right thing. Should this happen?

We should always be strengthened and enriched by life, its interactions and our behaviour. Can it be otherwise? Is not the human being gifted with intelligence, discrimination and will power? That is why Krishna says right in the beginning that people who understand well the essence of the world, usually uplift their minds by themselves. Mistakes and omissions may take place. But effort should be made to discover them in time, make efforts to correct them and learn not to repeat them. Each one has the ability, the possibility and the potential, for this. This cannot be doubted. There can be no argument against it.

This implies that Uddhava should not raise any excuse of weakness in this matter. He now knows that he is trapped in m̄yā and is deluded. That awareness alone is enough. He should now endeavour to escape from it. Awareness first, followed by effort next! This chain of events should continue. Pārtha, who had collapsed, weeping, in Kurukshetra, too was advised in the same way.

उद्धरेदात्मनात्मानं नात्मानमवसादयेत् ।

Bhagavadgītā 6.5

Uplift yourself by yourself. Do not bring your downfall.

Do not doubt if you have the strength to raise yourself like this. Just as children, from their childhood, learn and practise to sit, stand, walk, bathe, dry themselves with a towel and so on, and progressively move on to higher levels of studies, etc. and succeed in them, one can gain success in this inner upliftment too with effort. Do not bring in any contradictory ideas against this or permit them. This principle is applicable to everyone, anytime, anywhere, in any situation. This is the advise that Vasiṣṭha gave to the sixteen year old Rama in Ayodhya, Krishna to the middle-aged Arjuna in Kurukshetra and now here in Dvāraka, it is again Krishna advising the aged Uddhava. He (Krishna) once again explains how to uplift one's soul.

Importance of truthful introspection

आत्मनो गुरुरात्मैव पुरुषस्य विशेषतः ।

यत् प्रत्यक्षानुमानाभ्यां श्रेयोऽसावनुविन्दते ॥

11.7.20

आत्मनः गुरुः आत्मा एव पुरुषस्य विशेषतः, यत् असौ प्रत्यक्ष-अनुमानाभ्यां श्रेयः अनुविन्दते ।

One's Guru is one's own Self, Ātmā – particularly so for man. By employing the two principles of direct perception and inference, man achieves śreyas, lasting goodness.

For human beings particularly, the means for uplifting oneself is within himself alone. The external objects are perceived and grasped through the senses. For this the senses are employed by the mind inside the body. The mind itself gets directions from the intelligence, which is also an inner faculty. And then the received impressions are compiled and stored as memory, again within oneself.

The buddhi, intelligence, has the ability to put two and two together from the sensory impressions and arrive at new findings. That is how, seeing the apple fall, Newton was able to interpret the force of attraction, and the law of gravity was discovered. The scientific achievements have been the result of interpretations and hypotheses. Music, dance, literature, medicine, astrology or astronomy – human excellence in all these fields are examples of such reasoning by intelligence.

It is the intelligence which also finds out that the world and the senses in the body, which perceive it are perishables. Now, an imperishable basis is essential for supporting perishables. That is what the awareness called 'I' indicates. In this manner the intelligence and its findings reach the level of the imperishable Ātmā. Krishna emphatically says that the path for gaining śreyas, is also on similar lines.

The hypotheses (anumāna) have the same significance and use as the perception (pratyakṣa) of the visibles. Human life is related to both equally, it should be remembered.

पुरुषत्वे च मां धीराः सांख्ययोगविशारदाः ।

आविस्तरां प्रपश्यन्ति सर्वशक्त्युपबृंहितम् ॥

11.7.21

धीराः च सांख्य-योग-विशारदाः पुरुषत्वे सर्वशक्त्युपबृंहितं मां आविस्तरां प्रपश्यन्ति ।

While being in this living sentient entity (puruṣatve – in the human

body), the intelligent ones (dhīrāḥ), gaining expertise in sāṅkhya and yoga, realize Me, endowed with all powers, fully and expansively.

Krishna is describing here, how through direct perceptions and inferences, śreyas can be gained. Sāṅkhya is the committed process of deep spiritual contemplation based on the declarations of the Upanishads. Sāṅkhya goes from the gross to the subtle and then finally from the subtle to the ultra subtle to reach the singular Truth. Intelligent analysis and enquiry are the main processes in sāṅkhya. To facilitate this process, truthful value-postulates are presented.

This is what Krishna conveyed to Arjuna. He began by saying: "You are grieving for those who should not be grieved for." This stunning statement jolted Arjuna's mind and intelligence. He was shocked to realize his folly! "Is my thinking so deluded?" he wondered! "The intelligent ones do not grieve for the living or the dead. They are both to be viewed with an equal vision", Krishna said emphatically.

What is this equal-mindedness? What is the means for gaining it? Appreciating the inquisitiveness sprouting in Arjuna's mind, Krishna began presenting the spiritual Truths:

नासतो विद्यते भावो नाभावो विद्यते सतः ।

उभयोरपि दृष्टोऽन्तस्त्वनयोस्तत्त्वदर्शिभिः ॥

Bhagavadgītā 2.16

असतः भावः न विद्यते, सतः अभावः न विद्यते, तत्त्वदर्शिभिः अनयोः

उभयोः अपि अन्तः दृष्टः ।

Asat (unreal) has no existence. The sat (real) does not cease to be.

By the Knowers of Truth, is seen (realized) the essence of these two.

This statement promotes truthful introspection. Real and unreal are two notions, ideas. Whatever is 'sat' (real) that is truth. The 'real' always exists; it never undergoes any change or reduction.

'Asat' is the opposite of 'sat'. It can never exist, appear or shine. If these two conclusions are considered together, 'sat' alone will be found to exist. If anything is said to exist, it must be 'sat'. And if it is 'sat', it should continue to be as it is, always.

Under such conditions, can we claim that the world we see, and the body which is a part of it, are true? No! Because they keep on changing! Any change is non-existence. Change is when what existed disappears and in its place there is a new appearance. So it is clear that the world is not 'real'.

But can we discard it saying it is unreal, 'asat'? That too is not feasible. Because we perceive it. We can feel it and we do experience it. And that is why we enquire about it! So, what is the world, the body and the rest? That they are not 'real' is certain, but we cannot say that they are 'unreal' either. Evidently, the investigation cannot stop there.

All perceptions have one thing in common – the perceiver is the same. 'I' am 'seeing'. That same 'I' hears the sound and senses smell. It is 'I' myself who sleeps. That same 'I' sees, dreams, wakes up. While awake, while dreaming, while sleeping, it is the same 'I' who is the experiencer, the perceiver.

Wakefulness is extinct in sleep. Sleep is extinct in dream. There is no dream in the wakeful condition. Though all these three disappear on their own, 'I' continues to be in each and in all of them. So, this 'I' is the pervasive one. All the three states are pervaded by this 'I'. No change is seen in this 'I'. Therefore, that is the 'real'.

The states of sleep, dream and wakefulness are unreal, 'asat'. They do not, in truth, have an independent existence. They exist in 'I'. Opening the eyes 'I' see. My 'seeing' reaches the sun, moon and stars. The objects do not pervade. 'I', my sight, my wakefulness displays the infinite dimensions. That alone is the real. All the rest are for revealing that as the real. There is no object other than what I see. The extent of the vision is bestowed by me!

अविनाशि तु तद्विद्धि येन सर्वमिदं ततम् ।
विनाशमव्ययस्यास्य न कश्चित्कर्तुमर्हति ॥

Bhagavadgītā 2.17

येन सर्वं इदं ततं तत् तु अविनाशि इति विद्धि, अस्य अव्ययस्य विनाशं कश्चित् कर्तुं न अर्हति ।

Understand that to be imperishable by which all this (world) is pervaded. None is capable of destroying this, which has no decay.

Whatever is pervading in all these visibles, is already imperishable. No one can destroy that – even God cannot! This imperishable one is Ātmā, the ‘real’ indicated by ‘I’.

When I perceive the objects of the world, they remain where they are. They do not come to me - neither do they expand or spread. It is the awareness as ‘I’ that ‘issues forth’, spreads and engulfs them. The world becomes endless before me, by me and in me. This awareness coupled with experience is possible in human personality only. That is why Krishna says that this expansion is witnessed in puruṣatva.

Krishna adds: सर्व-शक्त्युपबृंहितम् – *sarva-śakti-upa-bṛṃhitam*. What does this mean? I am seen to be ‘replete with all powers’. The world exists only in front of the senses. It is this ‘I’ that determines nearness, distance, variety, infinitude and so on. Vision originates from the imaginations of the mind. It ends also in the mind. The imprint is also copied by the mind. If the world objects are within the seer and his sight, then their power is also in the same sight and seer. Everything is reposed in the sight level. So it is very true to say that ‘Īśvara is seen endowed with all powers in puruṣatva’.

The senses are superior to the objects. The power of the senses must also be greater than those of the objects. And, the senses have been created not by the external world, but by the inner realm.

इन्द्रियाणि पराण्याहः इन्द्रियेभ्यः परं मनः ।

मनसस्तु परा बुद्धिः यो बुद्धेः परतस्तु सः ॥

Bhagavadgītā 3.42

Senses are superior to the objects around. Mind reigns above the senses. And intelligence is still superior. But the Soul is still loftier. (It is the real identity and personality of man.)

Therefore should not such a 'seer', such an 'I' which displays the entire world, be considered the source of all powers in the world? That is why Krishna describes the supreme Soul, Paramātmā as the repository of all powers. All these experiences are enabled in the puruṣatva i.e., in the human body. That is what makes human birth a speciality.

Uniqueness and potential of human birth

Krishna now makes an evaluation of the status and potential of human life. This is very significant:

एकद्वित्रिचतुष्पादो बहुपादस्तथापदः ।

बह्व्यः सन्ति पुरः सृष्टास्तासां मे पौरुषी प्रिया ॥

11.7.22

एक-द्वि-त्रि-चतुष्पादः बहुपादः तथा अपदः बह्व्यः पुरः सृष्टाः सन्ति, तासां मे पौरुषी प्रिया ।

Many bodies were created, some with one leg, some with two, three, four and numerous feet; some without any feet. Among all of them it is the puruṣa (human body) that is most dear to me.

अत्र मां मार्गयन्त्यद्धा युक्ता हेतुभिरीश्वरम् ।

गृह्यमाणैर्गुणैर्लिङ्गैर्ग्राह्यमनुमानतः ॥

11.7.23

अत्र युक्ताः अग्राह्यं ईश्वरं मां गृह्यमाणैः गुणैः हेतुभिः लिङ्गैः अनुमानतः अद्धा मार्गयन्ति ।

Here (in this body), those who have integrated their mind and senses, grasp Me directly through means of graspable components which are endowed with Guṇas, though I, the Īśvara, am ungraspable by the senses.

Krishna is now speaking from his stature as Lord of the universe, Īśvara. He declares that none of the creatures – from those having no feet to those having numerous feet - have the ability or potential, that the human body is endowed with. All the other bodies can only perceive and experience the external world.

The human body is different. Perceiving external sights, imprinting each of them inside, experiencing them and gleaning information, creating memories of them – all these take place in the inner realm. The small limited body is able to conceive and behold inside it this vast expanse, including the sky. Is not the inner realm then, much more expansive than the body? In fact, the revealing inner realm creates the external world. Only in this body (puruṣatve) one can become aware of the primary cause for all these. It is the inner soul, Ātmā who is in fact the Lord, Īśvara. “That is why the human (puruṣa) is most dear to Me”, says Krishna.

What is it that enables us to think about the inner sphere? The instruments for perception are the senses. They are located in the body. Mind is essential to employ any limb of the body. Mind and intelligence are needed for understanding. They are faculties located within the body. Actions too are propelled from within. The mind, first of all, conceives the work to be done and then the senses act accordingly.

The sense organs are inert. Even the mind and intellect are mere instruments. Consciousness, sentience is required for functioning of the senses, mind and intellect. Consciousness claims that they are all ‘mine’. That is ‘I’. All the rest are instruments in its possession.