

अविनाशि-पञ्चकम् ।

By Avinash Sathaye

These verses were composed to summarize the philosophy and the message of the भगवद्गीता,

The Path to liberation outlined in Gita.

सरससुबोधां तत्त्वप्रोतां श्रुणु रे गीतां भगवत्प्रोक्ताम्।

त्यक्त्वाऽऽसक्तिं कुरु कर्तव्यं ज्ञानी जीवन्मुक्तो भूयाः ॥ १ ॥

sarasasubodhām tattvaprotām śruṇu re gītām bhagavatproktām ।
tyaktvā"śaktim kuru kartavyam jñānī jīvanmukto bhūyāḥ ॥ 1 ॥

Listen to the Gītā, pronounced by the Lord, full of vital meaning, attractive and easy to understand! (By following it,) do your duty without attachment, be enlightened and attain Salvation even as you live!

Commentary: We begin by an advice to oneself about how to use the Gītā. It is easy to understand (subodha) and full of spiritual meaning (rasa). The word rasa is used to characterize the Brahma (raso vai saḥ - He is verily rasa). The common usage of this word is juicy or tasty and Gītā is indeed a pleasure to read.

It is tattvaprotā – strewn with tattva. The word tattva is part of the great saying (mahāvākya) tattvamasi = You are it (the Brahma)! The common usage of the word tattva is the underlying principle and the underlying principle of life is strewn into the words of Gītā.

It is also proclaimed by the God (bhagavat-proktā), so please listen to it and follow the prescribed steps.

Step 1 is to do what is to be done (kartavya), without attachment to the action or to the outcome. This is not supposed to make you idle or careless or uncaring. You still do things as usual, enjoy them when appropriate, but don't let them bind you into a subsequent course of life which will take you away from the path of liberation.

Step 2 is become enlightened (jñānī) about the true nature of yourself. You are to realize that you are the supreme Brahma and the world is an illusion with a

limited life. There is nothing in this world to bind you to it, including the cycle of births.

This step, while easy to state, is the most mysterious and hard to reach. All advice suggests helpful actions which may cause enlightenment, but ultimately it comes from the evaporation of your own false notions. There is no mechanism, no actions, no rituals, no Divine Grace that can grant knowledge. Many things will help you turn towards it, put you in a clean peaceful state of mind, take all pains and distortions away; but won't make you experience the truth. like the proverbial horse, you can be dragged to the river of knowledge, but cannot be made to drink!

On the other hand, nothing really keeps you from this ultimate realization. As the common saying goes, you simply look last in the place where you find a missing thing.

Final stage. Unlike some other philosophies, the Gītā suggests that you don't have to die to get the final liberation; it is very much possible to reach the ripe knower state without losing your body. As Krishna himself illustrates, there is nothing that I must do in any of the three worlds, nothing that I have not acquired or that I have to acquire; yet I keep of doing my actions.(3.22). This is the stage described as "living liberation" (jīvanmukti).

Different Paths to liberations discussed in Gita.

कश्चिद् यत्नं योगे कुरुते भक्त्या कश्चिद् भगवद्रक्तः ।

तत्त्वविचारैणान्यो यतते निःश्रेयसमार्गे यो युक्तः ॥ २ ॥

kaścid yatnaṁ yoge kurute bhaktyā kaścid bhagavadraktaḥ ।
tattvavicāreṇānyo yatate niḥśreyasamārgē yo yuktaḥ ॥ 2 ॥

Some attempt Yoga, others are attracted to the Lord with devotion, yet others on their way to Salvation try to think and understand the Truth.

Commentary: There are three main methods recommended in Gītā for the preparation of the mind to acquire the knowledge – or really to erase the misconceptions.

One is the path of Yoga, which involves mental and bodily discipline coupled with concentration and meditation.

The second is the most popular path of devotion. Here you take pleasure in a God, in the prayers, worship and association with a deity. In this path, you transform your normal material lust into a desire for divine and pure things, dedicating yourself to God's work. Thus, you at least get rid of personal selfish attachments and with a purified mind, strive to reach the next stage. This is often the recommended path for a common man, easier to follow yet full of promise.

The third is to directly seek after the knowledge. You engage your intellect and rational qualities to analyze the nature of the world and life and come to a logical understanding of the true knowledge. You engage yourself in studies, association with knowledgeable persons and deep thought. This is described as being difficult due to its abstractness and required analytical mind. It is more painful for those who are going after the abstract; indeed, the ones in a body can reach the abstract path only with great difficulty (12.5).

Thus, Gītā gives what it considers as the best method, the Karmayoga! We discuss it next.

The Important trick is कर्मयोग.

बालस्तरुणो वृद्धो वाऽयं मूढो वा चतुरो वा मनुजः ।

जीवन्नैर्कर्म्यं न हि लभते कर्मयोगतत्त्वे चेदज्ञः ॥ ३ ॥

bālastaruṇo vṛddho vā'yaṁ mūḍho va caturō vā mnujaḥ ।
jivannairṣkarmyaṁ na hi labhate karmayogatattve cedajñāḥ ।। 3 ।।

Neither a child, nor a youth, nor an elder; neither the dumb nor the clever; no one living escapes the Karma, without learning the secret of Karmayoga!

Commentary: Here the concept of naiṣkarmya is introduced. It means the state of no Karma – the way of staying without action. Of course, this is impossible for a living being and may be so for anyone with a mind, even though dead! But liberation demands that the production of Karma stop, before one reaches the final goal. Where there is Karma, there is rebirth!

This verse only states that you cannot reach this state of no Karma, without learning its secret. To emphasize, it states that you may be a child or a youth or old, or ignorant or clever; as long as you live, you won't achieve this naiṣkarmya, without learning its secret. We describe it next.

How is the कर्मयोग is executed by the experts.

कर्तव्यं यद् विहितं शास्त्रे त्यक्तव्यं यच्छास्त्रनिषिद्धम्।

ईशायेति हि नैव ममैवं कृत्वा चरमाणः किल कुशलः ॥ ४ ॥

kartavyam yad vihitam śāstre tyaktavyam yacchāstraniṣiddham |
īśāyeti hi naiva mamaivam kṛtvā caramāṇaḥ kila kuśalaḥ || 4 ||

One ought to do what is prescribed by the Shāstra and eschew what is proscribed, one ought to do everything by saying “To God, and never for me”; truly he is the expert who thus lives!

Commentary: Here the secret of Karmayoga is explained. The main point is to continue doing actions, but with a different frame of mind and different rules. This is like a weight reduction program. Of course, if you stop eating, your weight will reduce, but you may also just die unhappy. However, if you follow a proper diet and keep at it, you will have great health benefits.

The steps are:

- Do what is prescribed by the scriptures. This may consist of duties imposed on you because of your status in the society or by your surroundings. Not doing these may cause harm to you or to others around you or may cause you harm in future life because of excess accumulation of binding karma.
- Avoid what is proscribed! Follow the laws, both common and moral laws to the best of your ability. Again, not following these might lead to excess bad Karma.

Of course, in practice, both this and the above item lead to doubts and confusion. The scriptures can have many contradictory rules, the laws are subject to change based on the times and society and circumstances. If you ask wise persons for advice, you may get contradictory advice, because, in some cases, there is really no single answer.

For example, if you see one man running away and then meet another who is chasing him, should you reveal where the first man went? If you accept the absolute law that you should always tell the truth, then you should! However, you may be causing harm to a person who deserves to be saved and protected from a vicious attacker. You may not have the knowledge or the tools to come to a proper resolution of the dilemma. Yudhiṣṭhira expressed this wisely in a verse in Mahābhārata:

तर्कोऽप्रतिष्ठो श्रुतयो विभिन्नाः । *Logic does not have authority, scriptures are varied,*

नैको मुनिर्यस्य मतं प्रमाणम् । *There is no one sage whose speech is the absolute norm,*

धर्मस्य तत्त्वं निहितं गुहायाम् । *The secret of Dharma is hidden in a cave,*

महाजनो येन गतः स पन्थाः ॥ *(So) the (right) path is the one followed by Great people!*

- One should do all actions in dedication to God, saying that “This action is dedicated to God and neither the action, nor its fruit is mine!”
One should do all actions in dedication to God, saying as believing “this is not mine – neither the action, nor the fruit!”. In some sense, this is an antidote to the undecision discussed above. Any action done this way, does not lead to a Karmic binding, and that is the secret of Karmayoga.

The verse concludes by commenting that one who behaves thus, is the real expert of action.

Typically, this last part causes moral paradoxes of its own. How would you judge the actions of a terrorist who is doing it in the name of his God, with total dedication and a firm faith? In principle, if his faith stays always firm and unwavering, his actions will not lead to binding. It would be a Karmayoga. However, the nature of the actions is likely to leave a bad Karmic trace on his mind which will catch up with him, sooner or later. This is why the scriptures suggest rules of good behavior and this is why it is recommended to follow them.

What actions benefit in the Path to Liberation.

पुण्यं परहितकरणं नित्यं पापं परपीडाजनकं यत् ।

ईशसमर्पितबुद्ध्या क्रियते यत्तन्मोक्षपथे पाथेयम् ॥ ५ ॥

punyaṁ parahitakaraṇaṁ nityaṁ pāpaṁ parapīḍājanakaṁ yat ।
īśasamarpitabuddhyā kriyate yattanmokṣapathe pātheyam ।। 5 ।।

Virtue is to do good unto others and Sin is to do them harm. Whatever be done with dedication to the Lord, it is sustenance on the way to Salvation.

Commentary: Strictly speaking, this last verse is not directly from Gītā. It is often ascribed to Vyāsa, the composer of Mahābhārata as the essence of all the purāṇās, and it partly resolves the above paradox of Karma in a different and

more practical way. A good deed is one that helps others and a bad deed is one that hurts others. While this may not resolve the dilemma of figuring out if we are helping or hurting particular persons, it is a good general principle. Hence it is described as good sustenance on the Path to Salvation. While it may not help you walk, it may keep you from faltering!

हरिः ॐ। श्रीकृष्णार्पणमस्तु॥