

8. Lessons from the Bhagavad Gita

Bhakti or devotion is the only path for reaching the Divine destination. *Bhakti* is the only panacea for all the ills of this world. *Bhakti* is the only method for making you realise the truth. I believe that there will be scarcely any Indian who has not read through the text of the *Bhagavad Gita*; that there would be none who has not heard and is not aware of the *Bhagavad Gita*. The *Bhagavad Gita* means “The Song of God,” words that have come to us as His flowers, as His *prasad*. Vyasa has woven these flowers, the words of God, into a beautiful garland and has gifted it to us.

The *Bhagavad Gita* consists essentially of three parts, namely, *Karma Khanda*, *Upasana Khanda* and *Jnana Khanda*. These are also being referred to as the six-chapter contents in each case. Through these three parts, the *Bhagavad Gita* has been teaching us various spiritual aspects, such as *bhakti* or devotion, *jnana* or knowledge and *yoga* or meditation, and so on and so forth. But the *Bhagavad Gita*, in addition to these, has really also given us the great saying, “*THATH THWAM ASI*” meaning “That Thou Art”. This is the essence or the keynote of the *Bhagavad Gita*. The first six chapters teach us about the *jiva* or soul that resides in this body and, through that, the nature of *jiva*. The next six chapters, while teaching us the path of *bhakti*, also show us the nature and content of what we call *Thath* or “THAT”. The last six chapters, while giving us the content and the meaning of the third word *Asi* also tell us about how to realise the identity of the self, the *Jivatma*, with “THAT” the *Paramatma* and also teach us to give up things, how to sacrifice and reach *Moksha* or liberation. If we study the *Bhagavad Gita* in the proper way and enquire into its contents, we will understand the true nature of the saying “*THATH THWAM ASI*.”

This morning how the concept of surrender or *saranagathi* has been described in the *Bhagavad Gita* has been conveyed to you. It appears to me that the real meaning of the word *saranagathi* or surrender has not been properly understood. Our elders, by the study of many scriptures and texts, have conveyed to us the meaning. Despite this, we get the impression that the word *surrender* means putting at the disposal of God our body, our mind, all our powers and all that we have. We take it that “placing these before God” is the true meaning of the word surrender. This is not the correct and proper meaning of the word. Our body is not in our control at all. Our body, under some circumstances, is posing to us several problems. Under such circumstances, when the body is not under our control, it is not understandable how we can say that we will take such a body and surrender it to God.

When we look at the mind, it is even worse. It leads us to many distorted meanings. While we are not only not in control of our mind even for one moment, we are even slaves to our mind and we foolishly enjoy the mind’s wanderings. Under such circumstances, to say that you are surrendering your mind to God is something quite un-understandable. When you have to struggle so much to control your own mind, even for a short while; and when your attempts in this direction are often futile, to take such a mind and put it at the feet of God and say that, “I am surrendering my mind to you,” seems to me to be ridiculous. Let us take the case of your various organs. When the situation is that the mind, which is the ruler, which is the controller of all your organs, is in such a condition, what is the point in talking about the organs and surrendering all your organs to God.

So, when you say that you are surrendering to God your thought, your word, your deed, it is simply a kind of trivial satisfaction to yourself. This cannot represent the truth and the meaning of the word surrender. God also never wants you to surrender, and hand over to him, everything that you own. In fact, God has never asked for such a thing. If you make a proper attempt to understand

the true meaning of the word *saranagathi* or surrender, you will understand that *saranagathi* really relates to another aspect and it should be interpreted in the background and context of Divinity only. Only when you accept and when you believe that the Divine is present in every human being and in every living thing, that Divinity is omnipresent can you understand the meaning of surrendering in thought, word, and deed and you will also become one with God. There is some justification for your talking of *saranagathi* or surrender when you are in full control of your mind, your words and your body. As soon as you are able to recognise the aspects of the omnipresence and the omnipotence of God, the feeling of ego, the feeling that there is an “I”, which is a distinct thing, will disappear.

In other words, when we try to understand the meaning of the word *saranagathi* or surrender, you will note that, in the beginning, Arjuna started asking questions of Lord Krishna, thinking that he is using his own intelligence, his own capacity of enquiry and his own ability of distinguishing right from wrong. He is thinking that he is using his own strength. Because he relied heavily upon his own powers and thought that his own powers were capable of excelling and exceeding God’s powers, he landed himself into a difficulty and was not in a position to decide what he should do and what he should not do. As soon as Arjuna found it not possible to go ahead or even to go back; in fact, when all his actions came to a stop, then he turned to Lord Krishna and said: “I will take your orders, I am not in a position to decide what I should do. I am ready to obey you and carry out whatever you want me to do and I will do so with my full heart.” Thus he surrendered his thought, word, action, and all, entirely to God. Such surrender is the lesson of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

It is not correct to say that even this is complete surrender. A situation has arisen when he is ready to take whatever order God gives and obey it implicitly. In this situation, the position is that God gives orders and another individual is willing to execute them. In other words, there is a duality here, in that the one who gives the order is God and the one who wishes to execute them is man. As long

as there is this distinction in the mind of the individual, between God on the one hand and “I” of the individual on the other hand, this cannot be accepted as complete surrender. There is bliss and happiness in unity. There is no bliss and happiness in duality. So when you are looking at the word surrender or *saranagathi*, in common parlance, in the ordinary way of doing routine things and interpret it by telling yourself that God has given you the order, God has told you what to do and you will accept that and will follow that, this meaning of surrender is right only in a limited sense.

There is one other thing which we have to recognise and take note of. We know that Krishna and Arjuna were living together for well over eighty years, were meeting each other very often and talking to each other like friends. But at no time in those eighty odd years did Lord Krishna ever try to teach anything of the *Bhagavad Gita* to Arjuna. It was only after eighty years of their living together and that, too, in the battlefield, and that again under some special circumstances, that the Lord wanted to give him the contents of the *Bhagavad Gita* and give Arjuna a position of authority and competence from where he could do something. We have to enquire into the meaning of all these things. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, He has also taught that we have to recognise what is called *adhikara*, or worthy of being entrusted with a task. He has also taught us that unless one acquires the qualification, merit and worth, there is no point in teaching the *Bhagavad Gita* to him. Conveying the contents of the *Gita* to someone who does not deserve it and who has not yet acquired that merit has no meaning. We know that it is only the hungry man who has the right to ask for food. It is only the man who has the money that has the right to spend that money. It is only the man that is poor and needy and deserving of charity, that is to be given such help. In this way, each individual gets the right to do something. The recognition of this right or qualification, before action is initiated, is an aspect which is contained in the *Bhagavad Gita*. The Lord has shown in the *Gita* that you could preach only after recognising the merit or qualification and worthiness of the re-

recipient. It is explicit that there is no point in teaching such a good thing to one who has no belief. You must see whether he has faith and belief or not. You must also see that the recipient has fear of sin and reverence for God. Unless he has these qualities, the recipient has no right to receive the good and great teaching that is contained in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Not only that, your teaching may become irrelevant if you go and teach one who has not got these qualities.

It is God's word that if you have devotion to God, He will look after all your future. He will look after all the welfare that is due to you. So declared the Lord in the *Gita*. But when would this be? He said that this would be done provided the devotee spends all his time in the thought of God, provided he accepts God to be all pervading and as present in every being. The Lord never said that He will look after the welfare of a devotee all the time, in spite of the devotee spending only a little while, now and then, in thought of God and even if he goes on doing all kinds of evil and harmful things in the name of God. There are three things which one should keep in mind, namely, "I will not think of anything else except God; I will not do anything else without the permission of God and I will have my attention completely fixed in God." It is only when you accept and put into practice these three things, that the Lord will look after your welfare. Today, we are not bothering about the injunctions which God has given us; but instead, we are arguing with God and asking Him why He is not looking after our welfare and our safety. By simply reading and repeating the text of the *Bhagavad Gita*, by merely thinking about the contents of the text, we are not going to get any benefit out of it. It is only by understanding the meaning of the text, by ruminating over the meaning in your mind and digesting it completely and making it part and parcel of your life, can you get the benefit out of it.

You have been told about the path of monkey and the path of cat. The relationship between the baby monkey and its mother monkey is such that no matter where the mother goes, no matter even if the mother is jumping hither and thither, the baby holds fast and

clings safely to the mother, going wherever the mother goes. The child has implicit faith in the mother. In this way, just like the young monkey clinging to the mother under all conditions and under all circumstances, we should attach ourselves to God under all conditions and under all circumstances. That is the kind of behaviour we should accept. In this, there is no responsibility of any kind on the part of the mother monkey. The entire responsibility for its conduct rests on the young one. On the other hand, when we come to see the life of a cat and the kitten, the mother cat takes the entire responsibility for taking the kitten from place to place and looking after it. This was explained to you with a view to convey to you the meaning of *saranagathi*. There is a significance here, which we can see; that if you stay where you are, then God Himself will take the responsibility of looking after you.

While the two paths, the path that has been described in the context of a monkey and the path that has been described in the context of a cat, seem to be all right in common parlance and so far as ordinary persons are concerned in their daily life, they are not so in the case of a person who is devoted and who wants to know the real inner meaning of *Atma* or the Soul. Such a person will have to find a path which is different from these two and superior to these two.

To give you the meaning and the character of this devotion, Vivekananda had a good example. Every person wants and desires that he should get *moksha* or liberation, that he should attain that place of *moksha*. We may say that liberation is synonymous with freedom. When we desire freedom, it implies that at the moment we are in some kind of bondage. What is that bondage? The bondage is in our own family, in our own home, in which we are tied up and entangled. Your own affection for your people is the bondage. That is the chain which has bound you. This is what you may call affection with some kind of an attachment. When you are tied up with the chain, the chain of affection and attachment to the family, there are two ways by which you can free yourself from this chain. One way

is to get the strength by which to break the chain. There is a second way and that is to make yourself tiny, smaller and smaller so that you can just slip and get out of the chain which is binding you.

With the exception of these two alternatives, if you want to reach freedom and if you want to get out of the chain, there is no way of doing it. These two can be described as *bhakthi*, or the devotional path, and *jnana*, or the path of knowledge. *Bhakthi* or devotion means you recognise that there is a master, that you have to put yourself in a humble position and be subservient to the master. You also recognise that your conduct should be such that you please Him and get His grace. This is the procedure for *bhakthi*. This is referred to as an attitude of *daasoham*, or behaviour that, by implication, proclaims, “I am your servant.” When you are bound by a chain, within that chain if you can tell yourself *daasoham*, *daasoham*, that means you are humble, you are developing humility, your ego is becoming less and less. It shrinks you so much as your humility grows that you can slip and get out of the chain. The other path, which is the path of *jnana*, is the way of getting out of the chain by telling yourself *Shivoham*, *Shivoham*; I am Siva, I am Siva —that means you are expanding, becoming bigger, finally you become so big that you can break the chain and get out. So, to break the chain and free yourself, one is the path of *jnana* and the other is the path of *bhakthi*.

* * * * *