

## Chapter IV

Further discussion of grief at killing; cultivating fortitude, and its benefits; action without desiring the fruit; the yoga of intelligence.

Arjuna was still doubt-ridden. “Oh Lord,” he began. “You said that bodily changes are like the stages of wakefulness, dream, and sleep. But we do not forget our experiences when we awake from deep sleep, while experiences of previous births are destroyed in memory by the incident called death.” Krishna replied that it was not possible to recall to memory all experiences, but it was possible to recall some. For the *Atma* persisted, although the vehicle changed.

Arjuna then shifted to another point, a point that pesters many besides Arjuna. That is why, Krishna says, “the wise person is not deluded by this (*dheeras thathra na muhyathi*).” He does not say that Arjuna should not be deluded by this; he intends to teach all wavering minds. Krishna solves every doubt as soon as it arises. He said, “Arjuna! While passing through the three stages, the intellect (*buddhi*) somehow manages to keep some points in its hold. But it too is destroyed when death comes to the body. At one stroke, all is forgotten. Memory is the function of the intellect, not of the *Atma*.

“Now consider this. You cannot now tell exactly where you were on a definite day, ten years ago, can you? But you existed that day, ten years ago, without a doubt. You dare not deny your existence then. The same is the case of the life you lived before this one, although you may have no recollection of how and where. The wise person is not deluded by such doubts, nor agitated by them.

“The *Atma* does not die; the body does not stay. Do you think that your grief at their possible death will make the *Atma* of your opponents happy? That is an insane thought. The *Atma* does not derive joy or grief, whatever happens or does not happen. Let the senses keep to their places, and there is no reason to fear. Only when the senses start contacting objects are the twin distractions of joy and grief produced. When you hear someone defaming you, you feel anger and grief; but no such agitation can take place if the words do not fall on your ears. The object-ward movement of the senses is the cause of grief and its twin, joy.

“It is like heat and cold: in the cold season, you crave warmth; in the hot season, you crave coolness. Sense-object contact is exactly like this. As long as the world is there, objective contact cannot be avoided; as long as the burden of previous births is there, the joy-grief complex cannot be avoided. Still, one can master the art, the discipline, the secret of avoiding them or bearing them without bother.

“Of what use is it to wait till the waves are silenced before you wade into the sea for a bath? They will never cease. The wise person learns the trick of avoiding the blow of the on-rushing wave and the drag of the receding wave. But a sea bath is essential. Some people avoid that very thing, because they are too idle to learn the art, Arjuna! Wear the armour of fortitude, and the blows of good and bad fortune can never harm you.

“The word fortitude (*thithiksha*) means equanimity in the face of opposites, putting up boldly with duality. It is the privilege of the strong, the treasure of the brave. The weak will be as agitated as peacock feathers; they are ever restless, with no fixity even for a moment. They sway like the pendulum, this side and that, once toward joy, the next moment toward grief.”

Here, some pause has to be made on one point. Fortitude is different from patience. Fortitude is not the same

as tolerance (*sahana*). Tolerance is putting up with something, tolerating it, bearing it, because you have no other choice. Having the capacity to overcome it, but yet, disregarding it—that is the spiritual discipline. Patiently putting up with the external world of duality combined with inner equanimity and peace—that is the path to liberation. Bearing all with analytic discrimination—that type of tolerance will yield good result.

(*Viveka* is the word used for such discrimination. It means the capacity to recognize what is called the “nature of the objective world”; that is to say, the world of objects that “come and go” and are not eternal.)

“Generally, people seek only happiness and joy; under no circumstance do they desire misery and grief! They treat happiness and joy as their closest well-wishers and misery and grief as their direct enemies. This is a great mistake. When one is happy, the risk of grief is great; fear of losing the happiness will haunt one. Misery prompts inquiry, discrimination, self-examination, and fear of worse things that might happen. It awakens one from sloth and conceit. Happiness makes one forget one’s obligations to oneself as a human being. It drags one into egotism and the sins that egotism leads one to commit. Grief renders one alert and watchful.

“Happiness spends the stock of merit and arouses the baser passions, so it is a real enemy. Really, misery is an eye opener; it promotes thought and the task of self-improvement, so it is a real friend. Misery also endows one with new and valuable experiences. Happiness draws a veil over experiences that hardens people and makes them tough. So, troubles and travails are to be treated as friends; at least, not as enemies. Only, it is best to regard both happiness and misery as gifts of God. That is the easiest path for one’s own liberation.

“Not to know this is the basic ignorance. A person so ignorant is blind; really, happiness and misery are like the blind person, who must always be accompanied by one who sees. When the blind person is welcomed, inevitably you have to welcome the person with eyes, who is the constant comrade of the blind one. So too, happiness and misery are inseparable; you cannot choose only one. Moreover, misery highlights the value of happiness. You feel happy by contrast with misery.” Thus said Krishna to Arjuna, to teach him the insignificance of all duality.

Then Arjuna resumed: “Madhava! What profit is there if your advice is followed and if the necessary fortitude (*thithiksha*) is cultivated? Forbearance is perhaps the only result. There is no benefit, is there?”

Krishna replied “Oh Son of Kunthi! The hero is the steady person who is not agitated to the slightest extent by ups and downs caused by roaring waves on the sea of life; who does not lose the poise that has become part of their nature; who keeps to the schedule of spiritual discipline whatever the attraction or distraction. The wise one is unaffected by the ever-present dualism of the objective world. The wise one is the person referred to as *dheera*.

“*Dhee* means intelligence; it is the quality that makes a person a perfect person (*purusha*). It is not the dress or the moustache that marks the person. Manhood comes with the rejection of the dual. To deserve the status, one ought to earn victory over internal, rather than external, foes. The exploit is to conquer the twin foes of joy and grief.

“Well, you might have another doubt also. (Your heart is a nest of doubts!) You might still ask what the gain of victory is. The gain is immortality, let Me assure you. Things of the world cannot confer that state of bliss. They can give only relative, not absolute bliss. When you rise above joy and grief, bliss is absolute, independent, full. Arjuna! You are a man among men, so you have no need of this paltry victory over worldly enemies. You deserve the bliss of immortality.”

Thus saying, Krishna began telling him of the science of *Atma* and non-*Atma*, the discipline by which one

can discriminate between the two. “The self-knower (*Atma-jnani*) is not bound by the results of action (*karma*); only those who indulge in action without awareness of the *Atma* (their real Self) get bound. Like the person who has learned swimming, the wise person can safely wade into the sea of worldly activity. If you do not know how to swim and still enter the sea, the waters will swallow you up, and death is sure.”

This explains why Krishna taught Arjuna the key science of self-knowledge. *Atma* neither kills nor dies. Those who believe that it kills or dies are unaware of its nature. The *Atma* of Arjuna does not kill; the *Atma* of Bhishma or Drona does not die; the *Atma* of Krishna does not prompt! These are just phases of the cause-consequence duality. The *Atma* cannot be the cause or consequence of any action; it is changeless.

There are six forms of modulation or modification: originating, existing, growing, altering, declining, and getting destroyed. These are the six transformations. Origination or birth is when it “was not” and later “is”. Termination or death is when it “is” and becomes “is not”. Birth happens to organic beings, not inorganic things. But the *Atma* has no organs, it is without parts. The *Atma* is not born, so how can it die? Whom does it kill? It is unborn, eternal.

“Just as a person discards old clothes and wears new ones, the dweller-in-the-body (*dehi*) discards one body and dons another. The body is to the individual what the clothes are to the body. If you understood the real nature of the *Atma*, then you would not give way to grief. All the weapons that you wield can harm only the material body; they cannot harm the modificationless *Atma*. Know this as truth and renounce this despondency.

“The foremost duty of a warrior is to stay on the side of *dharma* and destroy *a-dharma*. Consider your good fortune! You have worthy foemen like Bhishma on this battlefield. This same Bhishma fought in the past with his own guru, the *brahmin* who taught him all the arts, the great Parasurama himself, primarily in order to carry out his warrior duty. And now you, like a coward, are afraid to take arms against such stalwarts. A warrior finds his duty fulfilled when he upholds the cause of *dharma* in spite of all odds. That is the path of progress.

“*Kshatham* means sorrow, and a warrior (*kshatriya*) is he who protects beings from sorrow. A chance like this to wage a war on behalf of *dharma* against the forces of *a-dharma* comes but rarely. The war that is waged to establish peace and plenty in the world is referred to as a *dharmic* battle, and this is just such a struggle, where justice is bound to win. You have been blessed as a warrior to take part in this *dharmic* battle. Just imagine how much merit you will acquire by the service to the world, which you are set to do now.

“The Kauravas haven’t desisted from any sin, injustice, or vice. They insulted elders, deserted the virtuous, defamed the chaste, and wounded the self-respect of the good. Countless are their misdeeds. Now, the moment for retribution has come, and they are about to answer for all their crimes. And just at this hour, if you behave like a coward, you bring dishonour to your parents, to your brothers and indeed to the entire warrior caste.

“You imagine that it is a sin to engage in war. That is a great error. The sin, on the other hand, lies in avoiding the chance to destroy the wicked, in prolonging the agony of the virtuous. Give up your *dharma* now, and you run the risk of falling into perdition. Hold fast to it, and you are untouched by sin. Be of fixed mind; do not give way to either one or the other among all the dualities of the world.”

From verse 31 of this chapter, Krishna spoke of this devotion to one’s duty in eight verses. One should engage in activity, with a mind steady in the midst of fortune, good and bad. This was what Krishna advised in verse 37. Verse 39 is a transitional verse, for after saying “I have described to you the *sankhya* (see the glossary) arguments (*esha thebhihithaa saankhya*)”, Krishna said that He will go on to teach him the *yoga* of intelligence

and asked him to listen with care.

When desire to attain the fruit of action is renounced with full awareness, then it becomes what Krishna calls the “*yoga* of intelligence”. The intellect has to be purified and trained; otherwise, it is impossible to give up attachment to the fruits of action and to continue doing things as either duty or dedication. Such a purified intellect is named *yoga-buddhi*. Cultivate it and then, through it, liberate yourself from the bondage of action (*karma*). Really speaking, you, the true you, is above and beyond action.

You might say you will desist from action (*karma*) rather than practice the difficult discipline of renouncing the fruits thereof. But that is impossible. No, it is inevitable. One has to do some action or other. “Not for a single moment can one free oneself from action.” says Krishna in the third chapter of the *Gita*.

“Arjuna! Every deed or activity has a beginning and an end. But desireless action (*karma*) has no such. That is the difference between the two. When action is done with a view to the gain therefrom, one has to suffer the loss, the pain, and even the punishment. But desireless action frees you from all these.

“Desire the fruits of action, and get born again and again, caught up in that desire. Give up that desire, and you are liberated from the flux. The practice of this type of renunciation ends the state of bondage. The main point is to stick to the goal. The goal is action, not its fruit. Let me tell you that the desire for the fruit of one’s acts is an indication of the quality of passion (*rajoguna*), which does not befit you. Perhaps you prefer to remain inactive. Well, that is an indication of the quality of dullness (*thamoguna*). It is even worse than passion.” The Lord has laid down four commands: a “do” and three “don’ts”. The first insists on the cultivation of strength; the rest require the avoidance of weakness.

Of course, it is not Arjuna alone that got such advice; all mankind needs it. Arjuna is only the representative “man”. Students of the *Gita* must learn this lesson first: the *Gita* is primarily for every seeker.

Another point to be noted is this: the *Gita* is addressed to humanity, and not to birds and beasts or to the gods. People perform acts that are prompted by the desire for the fruits thereof; if the acts do not yield fruit, they will not perform the acts at all. Profit, gain, reward, result—these are what people seek. But this rule does not apply to those who take the *Gita* in their hands to drink the nectar of the Lord’s message. Not all yearn for the nectar, and, if you do, it is evident that you aspire for eternal joy, eternal liberation. Then you must pay the price, the giving up of the desire for the fruit of action, and dedicate everything at the feet of the Lord.