

Bhikshu Geetam : The Song of A Sannyasin

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There is a spiritual discussion between Lord Krishna and Uddhava in the eleventh *skanda* (part) of the *Srimad Bhāgavatam* and it is called the 'Uddhava Geetam'. In this *geetam*, at a particular place, the Lord says that a seeker of blessedness should try to redeem himself or herself having recourse to reason, even when he or she is subjected to various ill-treatment by the wicked—whether reproached or insulted, ridiculed or belittled, beaten or tightly bound, or deprived of one's means of livelihood, literally spat or urinated upon, and thus shaken in many ways and reduced to straits, dislodging, as it were, from one's steadiness in the Self.

Uddhava wonders and asks how is it possible for ordinary people to put up with all such outrages and atrocities of the wicked without reacting in the least. Those who have taken refuge in the lotus feet of the Lord, who have gone beyond all dualities such as attraction and aversion, happiness and misery, it may be possible for them; but ordinary people cannot stomach humiliation and outrageous behaviour of others. Their natural tendency is to revolt against ill-treatment and they cannot rest until the injustice meted out to them is redressed.

The Lord then tells Uddhava: Indeed, in this world, there is scarcely a pious soul who is really able to compose his mind agitated by the abusive words of a wicked fellow. A man is not so severely pained when pierced by shafts that have deeply entered his vital parts as indeed by the wicked's shaft-like pungent words that rankle with him and torment his heart.

In this connection, Sri Krishna narrates

to Uddhava a most sacred song sung by a mendicant, who in spite of being subjected to all kinds of indignities by beastly people remained full of composure, recognizing their atrocious behaviour to be the consequences of his own past deeds. The Lord asks Uddhava to listen to this story attentively.

He says, there lived in the principality of Avanti a wealthy, but parsimonious, lascivious, ill-behaved, greedy, most irascible, unworthy brahmin who pursued the vocation of agriculture and trade. Neither relatives nor guests were ever honoured by him even verbally. Not only that, living in a house devoid of piety and ritual acts, he never gratified himself with pleasures when there was time for it. His close relations, even his wife, sons and daughters and servants felt disgusted with him. Not only they did not do what was liked by the brahmin, but also bore him ill will. Destitute of piety and enjoyment, having fallen from this world as well as the next, guarding the wealth like a Yaksha, he met ultimately with destruction as his residual stock of merit had run out through his neglect of sacrifices. All the wealth he earned through untold hardships was lost in various ways. Relatives seized a portion, robbers laid their hands on another; the king, other human beings, agency of Providence, in the shape of fire, all took one after another their pie. Now, having become absolutely destitute and discarded by his relatives and friends, he became utterly despondent. Reduced to such a pitiable condition he kept brooding over his lot and sorrowing with his throat choked. He was filled with great dispassion.

He said to himself: What a pity! The wealth I earned by undergoing tremendous hardships could neither be used for my own enjoyments nor for the performance of religious acts. In the present life, neither I could have any happiness, nor could I accumulate religious merits. I am therefore bound to go to hell after death. Bodily exertion, apprehension, anxiety and delusion fall to the lot of persons who are as busy as acquiring wealth, augmenting and preserving it once it has been acquired, and are always worried about its expenditure and loss. So a seeker of beatitude should abandon from a distance the evil going by the name of wealth. Fifteen evils found in men are believed to have their origin in wealth. These evils include the tendency to misappropriate others' property, commit violence, arouse mendacity, hypocrisy, covetousness, anger, pride, arrogance, discord, animosity, distrust, rivalry, fondness for women in general, gambling and wining. Having obtained the precious human body, the gateway to final beatitude, who would get attached to wealth, the abode of all these evils? One's own brothers, wife, parents and uncles as well as one's near and dear ones, who were once full of love, had identity of interest, are all estranged in no time by a single shell and converted into enemies. Agitated and incensed by the lure of least wealth, these people cast at once all affection to the winds and being jealous even take the life of their rival. The brahmin thought, having obtained this rare human body, the gateway to heaven as well as to final beatitude, what mortal would get attached to wealth, the abode of all evil? My fortune, lifetime and strength, through which men of understanding achieve perfection, have all been carelessly wasted, occupied as I have been with fruitless endeavour of amassing wealth.

Moreover, when death is certain, none can attain real happiness from any human being or by fulfilling desires. To be sure, this world stands fully enchanted by the

deluding potency of some unknown and unseen agency. He thought, God seems to have become pleased with me. That is why I have come to this state today and have attained dispassion for the world. Henceforth I shall stick to this dispassion and remain content within myself. I shall perform religious acts, and by giving up identification with my body, shall spend the rest of my life.

Brahmin's resolve

Having thus resolved, the brahmin undid the knots (in the shape of the ego-sense and the feeling of 'my'ness) existing in his heart and turned out to be a peaceful ascetic subsisting on alms. Seeing that aged mendicant untidy, wicked people ill-treated him in numerous insulting ways—snatching his bamboo staff, bowl, *kamandalu*, and even the food he got by way of alms, spitting and urinating on his head, thrashing him, tying him with a rope, ridiculing him and threatening him with words. Nevertheless, the mendicant reconciled himself with all these heaps of ill-treatment and took each as his own lot to be worked out by him, resorting to firmness of a *sāttvika* type, sang the following song called 'Bhikshu Geetam'.

In the first *shloka*, given below, he is giving the essence of Vedanta and in subsequent verses, he elaborates what he said in the first one. First he says,

*Nāyam jano me sukhaduhkhaheturna
devatātmā grahakarmakālāh;
Manah param kāranamāmananti
samsāracakram parivartayehetu.*

—'Neither these people nor any deity nor the self nor the stars nor *karma* nor the time-spirit is responsible for my joys and sorrows. The *Shruti* texts declare the mind alone to be the cause (of our joys and sorrows)—the mind which sets going the course of worldly existence.'

Then he talks about the link between the mind and actions that follow. He says: The

powerful mind indeed sets into operation the three *gunas* (by giving rise to attachment and aversion etc.) and from the latter proceed actions of various kinds—immaculate (*sāttvika* or virtuous), black (*tāmasika* or sinful) and bright (*rājasika* or of a mixed type—virtuous as well as sinful); thence crop up the various states of existence conforming to the colour (character) of these actions.

Then he says how the *jiva* gets bound, while God looks as a witness. Co-existing with the thinking mind (as the inner-Controller), yet unattached to its operations, and full of wisdom, God, who is a friend (director) of mine (the *jiva*), merely looks on with His unclouded vision. Accepting as its own self the mind which unfolds the universe within itself and enjoying the objects of the senses through attachment with the three *gunas*, the *jiva* (the individual soul) gets bound.

Now he highlights the highest yoga. The five *niyamas* (purity, contentment, austerity, study of scriptures and chanting of the name of God and self-surrender) and the five *yamas* (non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence and non-acquisition of property), learning, meritorious acts and noble vows—all find their culmination in control of the mind, for subjugation of the mind alone constitutes the highest yoga (wisdom), as said in '*Paro hi yogo manasah samādhih*'. The mind is more powerful than all other things. So, he who is able to bring it under control, is adored even by the gods. Taking this body—a creation of the mind—as his very self and the son, wife, etc as his, a man of clouded judgement, labouring under the misapprehension that this is my own self and he is another, revolves in the world of matter, the end of which is difficult to reach.

The bhikshu then scans the nature of his body and Soul (Ātman) in the context of experiencing joy and sorrow. If, an individual, he reasoned, is responsible for our joy and sorrow, even in this case what

does it matter to the Ātman? The capacity to give and experience joy and sorrow indeed belongs to two earthly bodies (and not to the Ātman).

The mendicant then gives a wonderful example of tongue and teeth to illustrate the point. He argues: If a man bites his own tongue with his own teeth, with which of them should he get angry on his experiencing pain through such biting? If any god presiding over a particular sense organ) is held to be responsible for our sorrow, let it be so. Even then, what does it matter to the Ātman which neither inflicts nor suffers pain? The capacity to inflict and suffer pain belongs to the two gods inflicting and suffering pain through the organs presided over by them and not to the Ātman, which is formless and changeless. When a particular limb (presided over by one deity) in one's one body is smitten by another (presided over by another god) with which of the two limbs (or gods) should the man get angry? If, however, it is argued that others become instrumental in modification of the Ātman (assuming Ātman is responsible for our joys and sorrows), the reply is that there is no entity in this universe other than the Ātman, which is all-pervasive. If it is argued that there is (or appears to be), it is illusory. Hence there is neither joy nor sorrow, why then should one feel angry at all?

Even the stars are not responsible

Then he explains in his song why the stars are not responsible for one's joy and sorrow. If the stars are responsible for joys and sorrows, what does it matter to the Ātman, which is birthless? They exert their influence only on a body which is subject to birth and death. The astrologers declare the evil or good influence exerted by the stars as falling directly on a fellow star (the star which happened to be at the ascendant at the birth of a man and only indirectly on the personality born at that particular time because of the deity presiding over the star

identifying itself with the said personality). With whom then should the Ātman, which is other than the star as well as the body born under its influence, get angry?

Next he takes up *karma* (action). If *karma* is responsible for joys and sorrows let it be so. Even in that case what responsibility attaches to the Ātman? For action is possible only in the event of the being a substance, both material and conscious. That alone which is material is subject to change and no one who is not conscious can engage in a pursuit conducive to one's own interests. The body, however, is material and is not alive to its own interests while the Ātman is of the nature of pure wisdom or consciousness. Therefore action that is the root of pleasure and pain, happiness and misery, does not belong to the Purusha or Ātman. Hence, who should It feel angry with?

Then he negates *kāla* or the time-spirit also. If *kāla* is responsible for one's joy and sorrow, even in that case what responsibility attaches to the Ātman? For, time or *kāla* is a fragment of the Ātman. Ātman, being the whole, does not feel pleasure or pain arising from time, just as fire does not feel the heat of its spark or a piece of ice, that is caused by coldness, cannot benumb or affect the latter. Therefore, who the Ātman can be angry with? The Ātman is the Supreme and there can be no pair of contraries in the Supreme. Such being the case, how can I be angry with anyone?

The mendicant concludes after all these deliberations and reasoning that through the agency or instrumentality of none and at no place or time and on no account can there be

any connection of the Self—which lies beyond *Prakriti*—with the pairs of opposites. From *ahamkāra* or the ego-sense, which is the root cause of *samsāra*, comes fear. Hence, one who has awakened to this supreme truth (*tattva*) has no fear from other created beings. Embracing the aforesaid conclusion regarding the *Paramātman* or Supreme Spirit, adopted by the most ancient and eminent seers, I, such as I am, shall cross the turbulent ocean of *samsāra* (mundane existence) by worshipping the feet of Sri Krishna (the bestower of liberation) alone.

The Lord thus gave an account of the reasoning followed by the mendicant and then said to Uddhava: Getting disgusted with the pleasures of the senses and leaving his home and wandering over the earth, the ascetic had overcome his depression even though he had lost his fortune. He did not budge from his righteous course of conduct though ill-treated by the wicked and chanted the foregoing song: None other brings joy or sorrow to the *jiva* (embodied soul). Friends, neutrals and foes, nay, the whole world is an illusion of the mind steeped in ignorance about the Self.

Endowed with an intellect focussed on Me, the *Paramātman*, therefore O dear Uddhava, control the mind by all means. That is the consummation of yoga (wisdom).

He who hears or repeats to others or remembers with a concentrated mind this song chanted by the aforesaid mendicant, can never be overpowered by pleasure or pain caused by hunger and thirst, grief and delusion. ■

REFERENCES

- 1 *Srimad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāna*, Gita Press, Gorakhpur, Part 2, Code No. 565 pp. 623-30. 2 *Ibid.*, 11.23.43.
3 *Ibid.*, 11.23.46.

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