

Link:—In the next verse, Lord Kṛṣṇa explains that the soul is free from change by giving an illustration.

वासांसि जीर्णानि यथा विहाय
नवानि गृह्णाति नरोऽपराणि ।
तथा शरीराणि विहाय जीर्णा-
न्यन्यानि संयाति नवानि देही ॥ २२ ॥

vāsāṁsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya
navāni grhṇāti naro'parāṇi
tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇā-
nyanyāni saṁyāti navāni dehī

As a person discarding worn-out clothes, puts on new ones, so an embodied soul, casting off old bodies, enters into others, which are new. 22

Comment:—

'Vāsāṁsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya navāni grhṇāti naro'parāṇi tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇānyanyāni saṁyāti navāni dehī'—In the thirteenth verse of this chapter, it has been mentioned in brief that a wiseman does not get deluded, when the soul, transmigrates from one body to another. Now, Lord Kṛṣṇa by giving an illustration explains, that as a man by casting off old clothes is not grieved, so a man casting off worn-out bodies, should not grieve.

Here the word nara' (man), has been used for a human being, including men-women, boys-girls, young-old etc., all.

As a man discarding old clothes, puts on new ones, so does an embodied soul, casting off worn-out bodies, enter into new bodies. The casting off, of worn-out bodies is called death, while its acquiring new bodies, is called birth. So long as, this embodied soul has connection with prakṛti, it goes on acquiring new bodies, according to actions of the past, or according to thoughts at the moment of death.

Here the term 'śarīrāṇi' (bodies), has been used in plural

form. It means, that so long as an embodied soul, does not get emancipated, it goes on acquiring new bodies, upto eternity. The bodies, it has acquired are countless. The term 'dehī' has been used, to indicate, all embodied souls.

In the first half of this verse, there is mention of discarding of worn-out clothes, while in the second half, there is reference to casting off worn-out bodies.* So, how can the illustration of old clothes befit bodies, when bodies of even children and young men, die? The answer is, that end of age, means the worn-out bodies, whether they are of children, youngmen or old men.

In this verse, the Lord by using the terms, 'yathā' (as) and 'tathā' (so), has explained that as a man, discarding worn-out clothes, puts on new ones, so does an embodied soul, casting off worn-out bodies, acquire other bodies, which are new.

Here, a doubt arises, that a man is free in casting off old clothes and putting on new ones, but he is not free to cast off an old body and enter into a new one. The answer is, that Lord Kṛṣṇa does not mean to talk about freedom and dependence. His aim is to dispel the grief, arising from the separation of a body. One should not grieve, over the death of a body, because the soul remains unattached and unchanged. From this angle, this example is appropriate.

Another question that arises is, that a man is happy by discarding old clothes and putting on new ones, whereas he feels grieved, while casting off an old body and getting into a new one. The reason is, that a man by identifying himself with a body, wants to live long and thinks of the death of the body, as his own death. Thus, he gets sad. The grief (sadness), is the result of the desire to live, not because of death. 'I may

* If we perceive by applying our discrimination we come to know that the body is wearing out every moment and it reaches a stage when it completely dies. But we don't realize this fact because we don't pay attention to it. This is darkness or ignorance (lack of discrimination).

live'—this desire is latent, and he has to die, and that causes grief. But if he were to discriminate between the real and the unreal, he need not be sad, he rather rejoices. Thus, it is because of his ignorance, that he weeps. In his ignorance, he is like a child, who weeps, while his old clothes are taken away and he is made to put on new ones. To remove this ignorance, the Lord has used 'yathā' (as) and 'tathā' (so) words, by giving an illustration of clothes.

Lord Kṛṣṇa, has used the verb 'gṛhṇāti' for putting on clothes and 'saṁyāti' (enter), for embodied soul, because people generally think out of ignorance, that man changes clothes, living at his own place while an embodied soul has to go and enter new bodies. So Lord Kṛṣṇa, has used these two verbs, keeping the worldly point of view in mind.

Something Noteworthy

In the Gītā in 'Yena sarvamidam tatam' (2/17), in 'Nityaḥ sarvagataḥ sthānuḥ' (2/24) phrases, the soul has been described as all-pervading, eternal, omnipresent and constant, while in phrases such as 'Saṁyāti navāni dehī' (2/22) and 'Śarīram yadavāpnoti' (15/8), it is said that the soul migrates (enters) into another body. So, there seems to be a contrast, but in fact, there is none. For example, when a person grows from his babyhood to youth, he says that he has grown young. But the fact is, that he is the same, it is the body which has grown young. By identifying himself with the body, he grafts the change of his body upon himself. Therefore, in fact the soul does not migrate. But, because of its identification with bodies, It seems to migrate.

Now, a question arises, why this cycle of birth and death, has been going on from times, immemorial. From the view-point of the Discipline of Action, to reap the fruit of virtuous and evil actions, and from the view-point of the Discipline of Knowledge due to ignorance, and from the view-point of the Discipline of Devotion, due to disinclination for God, this cycle of birth and

death goes on. The basic factor behind these three is, that God has granted liberty to living beings, to make proper use of their lives, but they misuse it and so they have to go through a cycle of birth and death. They can be free from this cycle, by making proper use of this liberty. It means, that if they start working for the welfare of others, by renouncing their selfishness, they will be free from this cycle. Moreover negligence in discrimination* is the root cause of birth and death. If we attach importance to discrimination, we can be free from the shackles of birth and death. Similarly, disinclination for God, is the cause of birth and death, which can be eliminated by having an inclination for Him.

Appendix—A man wants new articles, so the Lord also gives him new articles (body etc., material). When the body grows old, God bestows upon him the new body. Therefore 'having new desires' is the cause of his birth and death. Those who have new desires, will get new things times without number. In a man there is one power of the will and another of the life-breath. If he has power of the will and his life-breath ends, he has to be re-born. If he has no will (desire), he has not to take re-birth when his life-breath ends.

An illustration is applicable only to a certain extent, not to the full extent. Here the illustration of casting off old clothes and putting on new ones is applicable to the extent that as a man, by changing several clothes, remains the same, similarly the self, by casting off worn-out bodies and by acquiring several new bodies, remains the same. As by casting off old clothes we don't die and by putting on new clothes we are not born,

* Negligence in discrimination means that we don't act according to what we know. We know that it is wrong to tell a lie. But still we do so in order to achieve selfish ends. We know that it is wrong to give pain to others. But we derive sadistic pleasure in torturing others. Similarly we know that bodies are perishable but we have attachment and infatuation for them. This is known as an affront to our knowledge.

similarly by casting off worn-out bodies, we don't die and by acquiring new bodies, we are not born. It means that the body dies, we (the self) don't die. If we die, who will reap the fruit of virtuous and sinful actions? Who will acquire new bodies? Who will be in bondage? Who will attain salvation?



Link:—In the next three verses, there is the description that the soul is super-mundane.

नैनं छिन्दन्ति शस्त्राणि नैनं दहति पावकः ।

न चैनं क्लेदयन्त्यापो न शोषयति मारुतः ॥ २३ ॥

nainam chindanti śastrāṇi nainam dahati pāvakaḥ
na cainam kledayantyāpo na śoṣayati mārutaḥ

Weapons cannot cut the soul, nor can fire burn it, water cannot drench it, nor can wind make it dry. 23

Comment:—

'Nainam chindanti śastrāṇi'—Weapons cannot cut the soul because they are made of the earth-element which cannot even reach the soul. So how can they hurt the soul?

'Nainam dahati pāvakaḥ'—Fire cannot burn the soul, because the soul is beyond the reach of fire. It means that fire can never bring any change ever in it.

'Na cainam kledayantyāpaḥ'—Water cannot drench the soul because water cannot wet it. Water can never bring any change in it.

'Na śoṣayati mārutaḥ'—Wind cannot dry the soul because it is beyond the reach of wind. It can never bring any change in the least in it.

Thus out of the five gross elements four cannot hurt the soul. Now, the question arises—why has Lord Kṛṣṇa not mentioned the fifth element—ether? The answer is, that Ākāśa (ether) is actionless. Earth, water, fire, wind are born of ether and these are incapable of acting on ether. Therefore, when they cannot