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1. Episode Title: Episode 12 – Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 2, Episode 12)

2. Topics & Tags:

TOPICS: The nature of human ignorance and its impact on knowledge, Arjuna's internal conflict and sorrow, The role of elders and gurus in guiding individuals, The importance of listening to guidance, The consequences of ignorance in decision-making

TAGS: HH Chinna Jeeyar Swami, Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 2, Arjuna, Krishna, ignorance, sorrow, duty, gurus, guidance, decision-making

3. Main Content:

Jai Srimannarayana! Priya Bhagavadbandhus (Dear devotees of the Lord), Humans are a species with knowledge as their main unique trait. However, the food consumed, the surrounding environment, and the habits imbibed from the past together have resulted in ignorance engulfing humans, suppressing and even taking control of them. No one is an exception. Even great people had to endure such a state at times. If there is effort and determination, some get the opportunity to gradually eliminate the effect of that ignorance and reawaken knowledge to set them back on the right path.

Even Arjuna was enveloped by such ignorance. It immersed him into deep sorrow, making him forget his duty. We observe this situation at the beginning of Bhagavad Gita’s 2nd chapter. Anyone who makes mistakes deserves to be punished. It’s one’s responsibility to fight one’s enemies in war. Thus, Arjuna arrived prepared to fight on behalf of the Pa:ndavas. The Kauravas and everyone else came prepared as well. But after arrival, he sees only the relationship with them, declares that he will not fight, and tries to turn back. Sri Krishna then reminds him of his duty and teaches him why it is wrong to give up now. Those teachings are essentially this Bhagavad Gita.

In chapter 2 verse 5, Arjuna explains to Sri Krishna about the sorrow caused by his ignorance. Arjuna experiences sorrow seeing Bhi:shma and Dro:na across from him. There are other revered ones as well. They are Elders to him. Because they are a guiding force and can help eradicate ignorance, they are called gurus. It is deemed appropriate to refer to all such Elders respectfully as gurus. Arjuna asks Sri Krishna. This is an example of how sorrow can make one advise others instead of listening to the others’ advice. Arjuna, while engulfed in sorrow, stopped listening to Sri Krishna and started advising Him using his knowledge. How interesting! This is a surprise!

While Sri Krishna is trying to guide him [Arjuna] on what his duty is, Arjuna begins to counter Sri Krishna’s guidance. In such situations, regardless of the manner or how many times advisors try to guide, people tend to promote their own argument based on what they believe in. Even if the advice is from an established source and logical, they won’t be able to absorb it. It is the negative influence of one’s ignorance and sorrow.

Arjuna says...

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SLOKA WORD -

guru:na hathva:hi maha:nu bha:van

sreyo: bho:ktum bhai:ksha mapi:ha loke:

SLOKA MEANING -

Hey Sri Krishna! Gurus! Dro:na and Bhi:shma are my gurus, right? I must not kill them. They are worthy of worship with flowers as this ‘great’ one [Arjuna] thought of earlier. Therefore, they all [gurus] must not be killed. Why? They are all great people.

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So what? Shouldn’t they be punished if they commit a mistake, irrespective of their greatness? No no! Instead of killing such people, I feel it wise to beg for alms to eat until the end of life. Why? If they desire riches, then how do I advise them that it’s not the right thing to do? Is it correct for someone like me to take what they are desiring? Why do I want those pleasures? How can I enjoy those?

Also, assume I kill them with my arrows and see their blood-ridden bodies in various miserable states… I’ll be haunted by the same memories as I eat. Even while eating, I would only see the blood-ridden bodies and the gory war field, not the food. That will worsen my sorrow further as I would feel that I am eating the result of all that. How will I be able to cremate their bodies? He asks...

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SLOKA WORD -

khatham

SLOKA MEANING -

how do I do it

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This shows that Arjuna is not in a state of listening. He is only in a state of teaching, giving advice, not taking it. What do Elders do in such situations? They try to give advice once or twice. However, he tries to convey his feelings by saying, ‘You are right, but…’ To another explanation, he would respond ‘what you said is fine, but I feel this is better.’ Even though they appear to listen and understand the advice given, they try to tactfully promote their own beliefs, like a fool. He does not make a concerted effort to truly understand the advice given by others.

Elders usually try to guide them a few times, but when they see the pattern of ignorance, they say, ‘go ahead’ and let him carry out their ideas. They then ignore these people and consider it futile attempting to uplift them. They don’t encourage them further, why? Because the strength of what he believes lies in his words. When Arjuna spoke to Sri Krishna, he said...

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SLOKA WORD -

guru:na hathva:hi

SLOKA MEANING -

He appended ‘hi’ meaning ‘isn’t that so?’. He said “It is better to worship them than to kill them, right?” ‘Right? Isn’t that so?’

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What does this expression mean? It implies that ‘what I said is correct and what you said is not. Therefore, you should believe, acknowledge and approve the path that I indicated. Not only is he spoiled, he spoils the other person. Also, he wants approval from others that whatever terrible task he plans to do is justified! That’s how far he brings down others. That’s how he does his dreadful work! This is a wonderful example of how ignorant people work.

My a:cha:rya (teacher) used to share a fascinating anecdote. Once an elderly man arrived to perform his mother’s annual ceremony. Generally, Vedic families have yajna su:thra (sacred thread), a sacred thread around the neck after the Upanayana ceremony as a child. They are expected to chant Ga:yathri manthra (Gayatri mantra), learn Vedas, and follow Vedic rituals daily. The thread is meant for these activities, but that elder man didn’t know. So, he simply removed it, and set it aside - feeling it was inconvenient, sliding down the shoulders every now and then. He loved his mother, however. He lived in a city and had the Upanayanam done early in his childhood. He was well educated, went abroad, forgot all the duties and discarded his sacred thread as well.

When he learned of his mother’s demise, he returned to perform the last rites. Initially, he was fully clothed, so it was not apparent to the priest if he was wearing the sacred thread or not. To perform these rites, a man must be bare chested. The priest urged him to do that, so that the thread could be alternated on the shoulders as per the procedure. It’s known as “Pra:chi:na vi:thi” and “Upavi:thi” when shifting the thread across sides. Even if someone doesn’t have the thread, custom is to use a cloth temporarily in lieu of this. The priest intended to perform the ritual, so he asked the man to tie his upper clothes around the waist. Then, the priest noticed there was no sacred thread on him! He asked – “Where is your Jandhyam (sacred thread)?”

The man was well aware that he is supposed to have it as per the custom. He is accustomed to wearing a neatly ironed thread temporarily for such traditional instances, but he arrived in a hurry and forgot to wear it this time. His false pride obstructed him from admitting that he had forgotten and accepting his ignorance for not always wearing it. A man’s stature, power, and money prohibit him from admitting ignorance, preventing him from bowing down. They make him headstrong, argumentative and build false pride in him. He even misguides others.

When the priest inquired about his jandhyam, this man was unwilling to admit that he doesn’t wear it. It is not appropriate to say he removed it. He definitely did not want to say that he removed it out of ignorance. What to do now? He asked, “who are we doing this for?” The priest replied, “for your mother.” He responded, “Mothers are women, right? Women do not wear yajno:pavi:tha (sacred thread). How can I wear one if the ceremony is for a woman who does not wear yajno:pavi:tha? Therefore, I removed it.”

Unfortunately, the priest was not highly competent, having learned bits here and there. People, like this man, prefer such priests as they can be easily convinced to perform anything wanted instead of what’s appropriate. Such a priest should not be called a puro:hitha (one wishing well for the community). He should be known as puro:ahitha (wishing ill for the community). This priest was not a well-learned one, and could be easily manipulated. Thus, he was convinced by the man’s argument and accepted the man not having his yajno:pavi:tha. Then, this man was even more encouraged and further said...

“When anyone is doing such a ritual where the ceremony is for one who does not have yajno:pavi:tha… neither the one who is performing it, i.e. me, nor the one guiding it, i.e. you, should have it. So, remove yours too.” He, thus, had everyone remove their yajno:pavi:tha and completed the ceremony. This is a terrific example to see that an ignorant person will not only tread on an incorrect path but will also goad others astray.

Arjuna hence said...

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SLOKA WORD -

guru:na hathva:hi sre:yo: bho:kthum bhaiksham

SLOKA MEANING -

It is better not to kill them, right? He also wants Sri Krishna to accede to this.

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Arjuna is only promoting his argument but is not listening to the advice given. On top of that, he says that “they are great people.”

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SLOKA WORD -

maha:nubha:va:n

SLOKA MEANING -

they are all great

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Why? His guru spent all his energy to make him the best of the best archers in the world. When Dro:nacharya ran into [great archer] E:kalavya, intending to avoid any challenges in attaining his goal of making Arjuna the best, he purposely asked for his [E:kalavya’s] thumb. Such is his ‘greatness’. That is, Arjuna is only seeing his guru’s efforts to benefit him, but is unable to see his mistake of taking away another’s thumb. “Maha:nubha:va:n”, Dro:nacharya, is a guru in whom he [Arjuna] even ignored the blame of having erred, just to make him [Arjuna] victorious.

“How can I kill such a guru? Even you know this Sri Krishna, don’t you? Your own guru, Sa:ndeepan, has only been a namesake teacher for you for a mere 64 days. For his sake, You ventured on an impossible task and accomplished it. But You ask me to fight against my own. Don’t You know this much? I may be endowed with riches, kingdom, after I kill the guru. It may be that the world will appreciate the victory. However, if I won’t fight and kill them, due to which I might not get kingdom and other riches... I can survive by begging for alms. The world will then appreciate me more for my generosity. Therefore you must guide me towards a better path, not just a good path. You must give me advice that is superior or supreme, not just a good one.”

It appears that Arjuna is thus questioning even Krishna’s guidance or why He would ask him to do it! Arjuna asked, “How can I wage a war against these people, even though you ask me to?” Let us carefully observe how his ignorance grows in varied ways. We do have such stages as well. We need to use Sri Krishna’s response as a lever for progress, if we desire to elevate ourselves. Let’s try to learn it. Jai Srimannarayana!

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