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1. Episode Title: Episode 98 – Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 2, Episode 98)

2. Topics & Tags:

TOPICS: The concept of nishka:ma karma (selfless action) and its significance, Understanding the difference between desire-driven actions and selfless actions, The importance of focusing on the ultimate goal in life, The relationship between body and soul, The two types of knowledge related to the soul and their implications in spiritual practice

TAGS: HH Chinna Jeeyar Swami, Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 2, nishka:ma karma, karma yoga, Krishna, desire, selflessness, soul, body, spiritual knowledge, liberation, moksha

3. Main Content:

Jai Srimannarayana! Priya Bhagavadbandhus (Dear devotees of the Lord), Bhagavad Gita is an amazing scripture. It bestows on us numerous noteworthy concepts from Vedas, and many embedded secrets from Upanishads in an easily comprehensible manner. If we can pay a little attention and focus, the great scripture of Bhagavad Gita offers clarity of concepts in simple terms. Some of those terms are karma yoga (the path of action), nishka:ma karma (selfless action), karma yoga, and yoga. All four words are in fact synonyms. Whether it is yoga or karma yoga or nishka:ma karma, these words all mean the same. However, some say nishka:ma karma yoga.

Karma refers to the activity one does. Whenever we do something, we do it with a desire. We work thinking, ‘I would like to get something out of this activity’. When we think ‘I am doing this because I want something out of it’, the underlying ‘want’ is called ka:ma (desire), the desire. ‘I am working to fulfill my desire, to achieve something’. ‘I plant a seed as I want its fruit.’ Or ‘I grind something as I want this type of material out of it.’ Or ‘I am doing this as I want to benefit from it.’ Or ‘I am working as I want salary.’ We work because we want something. Right? There is a desire driving the work. That desire is called ka:ma. The related activity is called ka:mya (action done with desire). So, ka:mya is the activity done with ka:ma, i.e., desire. Activity done expecting a result is called ka:mya karma.

However, some activities are not ka:mya karmas. Imagine a mother bathing her son. She never does it thinking, ‘Since I am bathing him, he has to pay me this much.’ She never acts thinking, ‘Because I am bathing him, he will say thanks to me or pay me fees.’ The mother feels sad if she does not bathe him! If she does not take care of her child and serve him properly, she feels sad and inadequate, as if lacking in a difficult situation. Such acts are not done with ka:ma, desire. It is called nishka:ma karma. It is an activity done without expecting any benefit. This is also called karma yoga or simply yoga. Yoga or nishka:ma karma or karma yoga, they all mean the same. We perform such an activity as an outpour of deep love for others. They are done without expecting any benefit.

When such activity is done, not limiting it to physical relationships, not expecting any benefit or favorable outcome for the body alone, expecting uththama purusha:rdha (ultimate goal), if one does an activity without mentally expecting any profit for himself out of it, he will attain benefits of the highest order. We usually desire only visible benefits. We do not ask for intangible benefits. When we eat food, we do it to satiate hunger. It gives temporary happiness. We can see these visible benefits and experience them physically. If we use a hand fan to air dry ourselves, we feel temporary relief from heat. It is visible and can be experienced. If we bow to God, we do not directly perceive any benefit. When we chant a mantra, we do not see any immediate perceivable benefit.

So, are these beneficial or not? Some say, ‘By bowing or meditating we feel a sense of tranquility’. That is ok. If it’s only to attain the temporary benefit of tranquility, then it will limit the benefit to that alone. However, without desiring such temporary benefit, if he meditates as an expression of gratitude towards God for all the benefit He has provided for us, it will become a means to moksha (liberation). Even this is karma. If the temporary benefit can be set aside, which will be received anyway, if a specific thing is all that is desired, then the benefit will be limited to that, assuming the act is done properly; otherwise, he will not even attain that temporary benefit.

However, if one does the act without such desire, then it will transform him in such a way that the soul’s karmic bondage is broken and he gains its original identity. Not just for meditation alone, it is applicable to activities such as eating, bathing, or exercising. Any physical activity definitely gives certain temporary benefits. Exercise gives energy to the body, bathing gives revitalization. If he does these activities thinking they yield such limited benefits, then they yield only those benefits. However, thinking that waking up, exercising, bathing is part of the service to God, that this body is provided by God and that it’s His tool, and that every activity done by the body and every breath taken is part of the service to God, if these activities are carried out with such spirit, then even taking a bath will become a tool for the soul’s liberation, consuming food will become a tool for the soul’s liberation, breathing will become a tool for the soul’s liberation.

An activity performed not expecting results, and not desiring any temporary benefits, any bodily activity devoid of expectations is called nishka:ma karma, a karma with no expectations. It transforms into karma yoga. Karma, the activity, became a tool. It becomes a yoga, means, to unite with the ultimate eternal goal. It thus becomes yoga, karma yoga, and nishka:ma karma. It thus becomes a tool for moksha, liberation! This is a key concept that Bhagavad Gita aims to teach. To learn this, we must have conviction. We learned earlier that such conviction is called adhyavasa:yam. One must have determined knowledge, vyavasa:ya:thmika buddhi (resolute intellect), about soul, body, and the activities done by the body.

We learned earlier that it is of two types each. There are two aspects of knowledge related to the soul. First: Soul and body are different from each other. Simple! Soul is not the body because it is not visible. Its existence is not felt anywhere in the body. Because the soul is said to be minute, it is probably very small in size. It is not like anything that the body is composed of. Soul is a different substance and a different reality than the body. That’s it. Therefore, the first aspect is the common knowledge that the soul is different from the body. This is also a type of buddhi, knowledge. It is one facet of sankhya buddhi (knowledge of the soul).

Another facet of sankhya buddhi is knowing soul’s yadha:thmya jnana (knowledge of the reality of the soul), that is, knowing the reality of it exactly as is. It’s a state of perfection. It means, what is soul? How does it manifest? It belongs to Him. How does it belong to Him? In how many ways? Clear knowledge of this is referred to as soul’s yadha:thmya jnana. Just knowing that the body is different from the soul is considered… samanya jnana (basic knowledge of the soul). One is samanya jnana, basic knowledge and the other is visesha jnana (deeper knowledge). Therefore, sankhya buddhi is of two types. One is samanya buddhi. One needs to be firm about this as well. The other is visesha buddhi, that is to know it as it is. These are the two types.

How are these two types useful? If one only knows that the body is different from the soul, that knowledge becomes useful to seek better places than these bodies, for happiness. There exists a heaven somewhere, known as Indra loka (the realm of Indra), where one can attain certain pleasures by performing specific activities. Vedas say - swarga kamo yaje:tha (one who desires heaven should perform sacrifices). He knows that there exists a soul different from the body. It doesn’t perish like the body and is eternal. Soul doesn’t perish like a body does. na hanyathe: hanya ma:ne sari:re (the soul is not killed when the body is killed). It is enough to know that the soul does not perish when the body is disintegrating. Having known this, he will strive for a better state that is higher than the current one, i.e., being in this body. This is considered basic knowledge of the soul. It is beneficial only to this extent.

However, if he wants to reach God, completely liberated from karmic bondage and attain eternal bliss, this basic knowledge is insufficient. He will need the soul’s yadha:thmya jnana, clear knowledge. He must develop unwavering knowledge of that. This is called vyavasa:ya:thmika buddhi e:ka (resolute, single-minded intellect). These are the two types of sankhya buddhi. Moving to the next one, we alluded earlier to the two types of buddhi with respect to yoga. One is whether we should desire fruits or not while performing activities with this body. The second one is whether we should focus on temporary or permanent benefit while performing an action. These are the two types of yoga buddhi.

Let’s see what ‘performing duty focusing on temporary benefit’ means. In general, every activity yields a result, whether it is raising, stretching, or moving, or folding a hand. It yields results. Every activity yields a result. Do we do this activity desiring that temporary benefit or a permanent benefit? We should possess these two types of knowledge in yoga. One must have decisive knowledge in this as well. Imagine that a mom sends her son to procure flour from a market. On the way to the market, the son runs into several things. He stops to see a fascinating street performer. Later, a friend stops him to show something interesting. Then someone else gets his attention to discuss random topics. He gets distracted by what his friend showed him and enjoyed the acts of the street performer. These are the temporary benefits that he received on the way.

Is he going to be stuck by these? Is he doing yoga, or ‘work’, seeking temporary benefits? Is he being steadfast in his goal until he gets what his mom asked for? If the goal is in focus, then he will not be distracted by anything along the way. If the goal is wavering, then whatever he sees along the way will distract him as they also give certain results. However, he is getting diverted by these results. He is losing track of his goal. Therefore, even in yoga there should be certainty on the two types. Is it the temporary benefit or permanent benefit? Is it the basic knowledge of the soul or is it soul’s yadha:thmya jnana? This is the certainty one needs to have related to the knowledge of sankhya and yoga. What benefit does this certainty give? Speaking about this, Sri Krishna is leading us into verse 2.41. Let’s learn about it further. Jai Srimannarayana!

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