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1. Episode Title: Arjuna’s confusion on Karma and Jnana Yoga – Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 3, Episode 10)

2. Topics & Tags:

TOPICS: Arjuna's confusion regarding the superiority of intellect (buddhi) over action (karma) and his questioning of Krishna's guidance. Krishna's previous teachings on the relationship between performing action without attachment (asanga karma) and attaining steady knowledge (jnana nishtta) for self-realization. The deeper meanings and significance of Krishna's names, Janardana and Kesava, including Lord Shiva's explanation of Kesava. The compassionate nature of God as the creator, sustainer, and dissolver, who repeatedly offers chances for souls to overcome karmic bondage. Arjuna's misinterpretation of Krishna's comprehensive explanation, leading to his request for a clear, decisive path to benefit.

TAGS: HH Chinna Jeeyar Swami, Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 3, Episode 10, Arjuna, Krishna, Karma Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Karma, Jnana, Buddhi, Intellect, Action, Self-realization, Atma sakshatkara, Janardana, Kesava, Lord Shiva, Brahma, Asanga karma, Karma nishtta, Jnana nishtta, Misunderstanding, Compassion, God's nature, Creation, Sustenance, Dissolution, Spiritual guidance, Dharma, Bhagavad Gita Sloka 3.1, Bhagavad Gita Sloka 3.2.

3. Main Content:

Jai Srimannarayana! Priya Bhagavadbandhus (Dear devotees of the Lord),

We have now entered Chapter 3 of Bhagavad Gita. The chapter starts with Arjuna’s question.

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SLOKA WORD -

a:pada:m apahartha:ram da:tha:ram sarva sampada:m

lo:ka:bhi ra:mam sri:ra:mam bhu:yo: bhu:yo: nama:myaham

SLOKA MEANING -

(I repeatedly bow to Sri Rama, who removes all calamities, grants all wealth, and delights the world.)

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His question in verse one is as follows.

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SLOKA WORD -

jya:yasi: che:th karmanas the:

matha: buddhir jana:rdana! |

thath kim karmani gho:re: ma:m

niyo:jayasi ke:sava! || BG 3.1

SLOKA MEANING -

(If, O Janardana, according to You, intellect is superior to action, then why do You engage me in this dreadful action, O Kesava?)

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Arjuna is asking Sri Krishna a question in this verse. Krishna!

`the: matha:` (According to You)

`karmanaha buddhihi jya:yasi che:th` (if intellect is superior to action in the attainment of self-realization),

`thath kim karmani gho:re: ma:m` (then why would one perform an action that is heinous and results in grief and fear?)

What is the fear about? The goal is to realize the Self. Whatever obstructs one from realizing the soul causes fear. Therefore, engaging in work is dreadful.

`ma:m kim niyo:jayasi,` (Why are You encouraging me to take up such dreadful action?)

`Kes:ava:` (tell me, Krishna)

Krishna had actually articulated this clearly in Chapter 2. What did He say?

`buddhi` (steady right knowledge), also called `jna:na nishtta` (steady knowledge).

Krishna never said that action is inferior to wisdom or that wisdom is superior to action. However, `jna:na nishtta` (steady knowledge) is essential. This results in `a:thma sa:ksha:thka:ra` (self-realization). And `jna:na nishtta` (steady knowledge) is attained by performing action. That is, when actions are performed devoid of any attachment with them and desire on outcomes, they generate `jna:na nishtta` (steady knowledge). And with such `jna:na nishtta` (steady knowledge), self-realization results. This is what He said.

One is neither inferior nor superior to the other. First comes performing `asanga karma` (action without attachment), action performed without the feeling of ‘mine’. With that `asanga karma` (action without attachment), proper intellect shapes up resulting in `sthittha prajnatha` (state of steady knowledge). `Sthitha prajnatha` (state of steady knowledge) is called `jna:na nishtta` (steady knowledge). With action one must attain `jna:na` (wisdom). With `jna:na` (wisdom), one must attain self-realization. However, `jna:na nishtta` (steady knowledge) is closer to self-realization, while performing action is relatively far away. This is what He said, not that one is superior or inferior to the other. Without action, the intermediate stage of `jna:na nishtta` (steady knowledge) will not occur whatsoever. So, for `jna:na nishtta` (steady knowledge), action is the foundation. And for self-realization, `jna:na nishtta` (steady knowledge) is the foundation.

The Wise mention `avyavahitha pu:rvam` (immediately next to or prior to). For self-realization, `avyavahitha pu:rvam` (immediately prior to) is the `jna:na nishtta` (steady knowledge). And the one prior to it is `karma nishtta` (steady action). This is what Krishna said. But that is not how Arjuna understood. He (mis)interpreted the one [action] that is distant as being horrible. And the one that is close by as the only essential one. Therefore Arjuna put forth his query thus. ‘You say intellect is superior and action is horrible…’ Arjuna spoke incorrectly about Krishna’s statement. In fact, Krishna didn’t say that.

‘…why are You encouraging me to take it up?’, Arjuna asked.

Here, Arjuna addressed Krishna with two different names. One is Kesava and second is Janardana, are the two names he used for Krishna. Arjuna’s words indicate that he feels Krishna to be favorable and a `hithaishi` (well-wisher). Why? Janardana means the One who removes the pain of people. It also means the One who resolves the shortcomings of people. ‘You are supposed to address any limitations I have. You are supposed to remove any ignorance I possess. Being such a person, why are You doing this to me?

Also, You are known as Kesava. What does Kesava mean? It is made up of the words `ka:` (ka), `esha` (esha), `va` (va). There are many meanings to the word Kesava. `Ka` (ka) means, in the water; `se:the:` (slept), the one who slept. That is one meaning for Kesava. Kesava also means One with beautiful, curly hair. While praying to Krishna, we chant `kutila:laka samyukhtam` (adorned with beautiful curly hair). His beautiful `kuntalam` (hair curls), tends to fall on his forehead in curvy waves…, due to which He has an exquisite face… is another meaning of Kesava. It also means One who has distinctive hair locks.

There is one more meaning to it. There was a demon named `Ke:si` (Kesi). He once came in the disguise of a horse. He is also known as `Aswa:sura` (Ashwasura). Disguised as a horse, he approached with an intent to hurt Krishna. According to `Bha:gavatham` (Bhagavatam), Krishna thrust his hand into the demon’s mouth and tore him apart. Since he killed `Ke:si` (Kesi), He came to be known as Kesava. `Kesi: hantha:` (killer of Kesi), one who killed Kesi.

In addition to these, according to `Bha:gavatham` (Bhagavatam) in `Hari vamsham` (Hari Vamsham), there is another definition of Kesava given by Lord Parama Shiva. Sri Krishna once made a journey to Kailasa. There Lord Shiva introduced Krishna to everyone. How? Lord Shiva says –

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SLOKA WORD -

Ka iti brahmano: na:ma:

I:so:ham sarva dehina:m

A:va:m tavange: sambhu:tou

Thasma:th kesava na:mava:n ||

SLOKA MEANING -

(Ka is the name of Brahma. I am Isa, the controller of all embodied beings. Both of us have emerged from Your body. Therefore, You are known as Kesava.)

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Speaking to `Bhagava:n` (God), Lord Shiva says, `Ka iti brahmano: na:ma` (four-headed Lord Brahma is known by the name ka).

`I:so:ham sarva dehina:m` (I am the One who governs all). I am the One who takes the `ji:va` (soul) away from here. No one willingly leaves their home [earth]. Even if they are weak, sick, have infections and unable to carry on with their lives, they still do not like to leave [this body]. They wish they could survive another 2 or 3 days. They would keep saying, ‘Hey Doctor! I will give anything. Cure my disease and make me capable of eating a bit’ … but, they are not inclined to leave this place. [Lord Shiva says] “When `ji:va’s` (soul's) time is up however, I am the One who takes control and takes him out of this place. My name is therefore, `I:sa` (Isa) and `Ni:yantha` (Controller). `Ka:` (Ka) is Brahma and `I:sa` (Isa), Me have both emerged from your body. We belong to You. Therefore Your name became `Ka: I:sa: Va:n` (Ka Isa Van), Kesava. This was mentioned by Lord Parama Shiva himself.

You are therefore the source of creation, sustenance and dissolution. You are Kesava. Why are You undertaking the creation, sustenance, and dissolution? Only so that these `ji:vas` (souls) can be rid of their `ka:rmic bondage` (karmic bondage). There is no benefit otherwise for You to create this universe. There is nothing You would gain from them. There is nothing in this universe that You do not have and that they can earn by themselves and give it to please You. Because everything we cherish in this universe is given by You. You do not do anything with bias or lack of compassion. Therefore, in my case too, You will not have any bias or lack of compassion.

Not just once, but You created this universe countless times. Why do You do the creation so many times, even when no one recognizes You for it or expresses gratitude? Does anyone say ‘Thank you’ to God, for such a beautiful creation and making a space for one here? No one acknowledges it, even by mistake! Instead one says, ‘I created all this. I bought all of this [land]. I planted this orchard all by myself. I worked hard to grow these fruits!’ Did he really grow those fruits? He can at best grow filth [in society], but nothing else! Those fruits were borne by the trees, definitely not by him! No one can do anything by themselves in this universe. Only God can make things happen. Even though everyone is shrouded in arrogance, do not thank You and are at the verge of destroying it… You ignore all that and keep trying to create this universe several times. Why? Because You are a `kri:shi: vala` (farmer). You are like a nice farmer. What is Your nature? Wishing for the welfare of all. It does not matter what they can do or will do. But You keep giving them numerous chances, by creating this universe several times, without getting annoyed or taking a break.

You, being so compassionate, should guide me in a way that uplifts and does not push me into `ka:rmic bondage` (karmic bondage). However, what are You doing now? You are driving me into `ka:rmic bondage` (karmic bondage). You said I’ll need to attain self-realization. You spoke highly about the soul and that it is eternal, cannot be destroyed and one that should be attained. To attain such a great soul, You said we need `jna:na nishtta` (steady knowledge). To realize `jna:na nishtta` (steady knowledge), one must first possess `karma nishtta` (steady action). When will one get `jna:na nishtta` (steady knowledge)? After reaching the state of `karma nishtta` (steady action). When will one reach `karma nishtta` (steady action) state? By performing an activity with no attachment or desire to its outcomes.

Poor Arjuna here took a misstep. He thought to get `jna:na nishtta` (steady knowledge), one must have `sarve:ndriya uparathi` (withdrawal from all senses)… that is, when one withdraws from all the senses. Therefore, he thought, that the soul realization happens once the activities are withdrawn by all the senses. However, doing action is an activity done by all the senses. These two are entirely opposite. If one withdraws senses, he can attain `jna:na nishtta` (steady knowledge), but if one makes them work then that results in `karma nishtta` (steady action). [Arjuna said], “How can I decipher that `karma nishtta` (steady action) is the tool to attain soul realization? Why are You making me do this action?” This is a case of misunderstanding. While Krishna was comprehensive in His explanation, Arjuna took only a part of it. He should have understood holistically. He only grasped the part he liked, the rest he ignored.

Sometimes people converse with others via their earphones. They only listen to the speaker occasionally when they feel like it, at other times they remove the earphones. If the person on the other end screams at him, he would just remove the earphones. He doesn’t listen to what the other person is saying anymore as he removed those earphones. Arjuna is in a similar state now. He is not focusing on what he thinks he does not need. In reality Krishna conveyed what type of action leads to `jna:na nishtta` (steady knowledge). Arjuna did not ponder in his mind on what ‘type’ of action it should be. He said that [action] results in `a:thma sa:ksha:thka:ra` (realization of soul). What He explained was all great.

Arjuna says…

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SLOKA WORD -

vya:misre:na iva va:kye:na

buddhim mo:hayasi:va me: |

thad e:kam vada nischithya

ye:na aham sre:yaha a:pnuya:m || BG 3.2

SLOKA MEANING -

(With seemingly conflicting words, You appear to confuse my intellect. Therefore, tell me decisively that one path by which I may attain the highest good.)

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`vya:misre:na iva va:kye:na` (words used were interspersed with one another)

`buddhim mo:hayasi:va` (appear to confuse my mind)

If Arjuna had said ‘confuse’ [instead of ‘appear to confuse’], Krishna would have done something so he wouldn’t ever speak again that way. Arjuna said, ‘It appears to me that You are deluding me’. Therefore…

`e:kam vada` (tell me one thing that is not conflicting and confusing)

`nischithya` (firmly)

`ye:na sre:yo::ham` (by which I may attain benefit)

`nischithya` (firmly) must be included with line that follows, not with the verse’s previous line, it is not `thad e:kam vada nischithya` (You decide something and tell me that). God doesn’t need to finalize anything new today. Everything that is right is already established. Who needs to make a decision is this ‘great’ person [Arjuna].

`nischithya aham sre:yaha a:pnuya:m` (tell me that which I can firmly accept and that which benefits me).

Arjuna is partly praising and partly criticizing God. For his sake, it is criticism. However, to ensure it doesn’t anger Him, Arjuna questions Him as if praising Him. Let us see how Krishna answers that.

Vande Guru Paramparam!

Jai Srimannarayana!

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