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1. Episode Title: Episode 21 – Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 3, Episode 21): What should anyone wish for?

2. Topics & Tags:

TOPICS: Understanding Karma Yoga as a means to ultimate liberation. The importance of setting the highest spiritual goal (moksham) in life. Krishna's teachings on transforming all actions into a path for liberation. Distinguishing between temporary worldly desires and the ultimate spiritual aspiration. The concept of karmic bondage (vasanas and samskaras) and the path to freedom. The universality of Karma Yoga, applicable to all individuals regardless of their social status or profession. The distinction between obligatory actions (niyatha karma) and optional actions (aniyatha karma). The necessity of continuing the "journey of the body" (sharira yatra) through action until liberation is attained. Arjuna's dilemma and Krishna's guidance on performing one's duty as Karma Yoga.

TAGS: HH Chinna Jeeyar Swami, Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 3, Episode 21, Karma Yoga, Moksham, liberation, ultimate goal, spiritual aspiration, Krishna, Arjuna, dharma, duty, vasanas, samskaras, niyatha karma, aniyatha karma, sharira yatra, path of action, spiritual guidance, self-realization, divine grace.

3. Main Content:

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

The third chapter of Bhagavad Gita is known as Karma Yoga (path of action). Karma (action) implies the activities we do. Yoga (means) indicates a means. So, karma yoga implies transforming whatever activity we do as a means and then performing it. Naturally, a question arises…a means to what? We typically have a goal to rise above our current situation. How high should we aim for?

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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 dangers, bestows all wealth, and delights the entire world.

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A small-time employee would like to rise up to his immediate manager’s level. That manager aspires to elevate to his manager’s level. That higher manager would aim for his higher secretary. That secretary would aim to reach the chief secretary level and further to minister, chief minister, prime minister or president. These are the positions that we are aware of. However, are there even higher positions than these? Yes, there are. In the world that can be experienced through the body, we have seen one highest position. An elevated position beyond it manifests when the soul relinquishes its bondage to karma (action) and sets free. Our elders have called that as moksham (liberation).

Moksham (liberation) has been the ultimate goal from the outset. When a regular employee moves into an officer position, it means he is relieved from the previous role and reached a higher position. If he later moves into a further higher position due to a promotion and moves into a bigger position, then he is known to have attained moksham (liberation) from the previous role. Moksham (liberation) means liberation. When we need to, we should not ask for liberation from simpler things. An intelligent person seeks liberation from the biggest of the challenges. If we have to ask or beg for something, we might as well ask for something bigger instead of trivial things.

Our guru used to share this story. Once a person decided to ask God for something. We alluded to this earlier. If God appears and says, ‘Hey devotee! I am pleased with your devotion, seek what you need and I‘ll grant it!’ It’s very unlikely, but in case the God says this. What would we ask for? Why should you ask for money or job or kids or authority or position? Why not ask for the best ask of all? What is such an ask? Our guru shared what the guy asked. What did he ask? Note, that he is not married yet! So, he asked, ‘O God! While eating savory crunchy snacks, I should cradle and feed my great grandson, in a golden crib, on the seventh floor, of my golden palace’.

How many wishes did he ask? Only one wish! God offered to fulfill only one so he asked only one. However, he being an intelligent one asked for a smart wish. What did he ask? That he wished to hold his great grandson. Note that he is not married yet. To have a great grandson, it takes some time. First, he must get married. Many married couples have issues bearing a child. So, he must have a child as well. Sometimes infants face several health issues at birth. The baby must grow up well and get married. Then that son of his should bear children. That child becomes his grandson. Our wish seeker gets his great grandson after his grandson grows up, gets married, and has children of his own. Then he must hold his great grandson. It means that he must survive until then. Just surviving isn’t enough. One needs money too! If he is alive until he holds his great grandson, it means he has sons, daughters, grandsons, granddaughters... They all should respect him until the time he holds his great grandson. To command that respect, he must be able to share wealth with them. He therefore sought that he should live on the seventh floor of a golden palace! Golden palace! And he should live there! It means, he should have given some wealth to his sons. If they don’t inherit at least some of his wealth, then they will not be happy. He should also give some to his daughters too, as they have equal rights. The stakes exist for grandsons and granddaughters too. Even they need to be given. He should have enough wealth to share with all of these relations. Apparently, he should survive to that point on the seventh floor, cradling the great grandson in his crib, while feeding him and eating savory crunchy snacks. That means he should have strong teeth until then. He should have good muscle strength too as he must be able to climb to the seventh floor. He won’t just be able to go up there! There were no elevators back then. No one can simply jump up there. So, he must be able to climb one flight of stairs at a time. To be able to climb, he should have good muscle strength along with dental strength and long life. How many wishes did he ask in one? His lineage must go on too …. All in one wish!

Summary is that, when asking for a wish, note that the mind is not poor and neither is speech. Therefore, whatever you wish to ask, do it so that it yields the highest utility. Any work we do is a means. When any activity, i.e, karma (action), is performed, by transforming it into Yoga (means), what does one wish out of it? We neither want to or wish for any temporary benefits. Why? Any temporary benefit, however many ever they maybe, will dissipate eventually. It is not important to know how they are lost. The beneficiary may squander them or they may diminish themselves or they could be lost due to taxes or maybe other relatives take them by fighting him. They don’t stick with him till the end. They end up getting destroyed. Should we ask for those that get destroyed or that thrives? We must contemplate this. To seek for something that thrives, we must elevate ourselves into that position. This body is a blocker to get there. The body exists due to prior karmic bondage. It is the hold on us by vasanas (dormant memory records), and samskaras (impressions on the mind), made during previous lives’ activities! That is what one should be free from.

Upanishads outline the benefits of getting out of such bondage. They say, one should attain a state similar to that of God. Attain a state similar to, sosnuthe saha bramhana vipaschitha (one should be able to reach a state equivalent to that of God - an amalgamation of abilities, characteristics, joy and experience). Therefore, wish only for that! Why wish for little things? Karma (action) can even become a means to yield such an epitome of benefit. The 3rd chapter of Bhagavad Gita, known as karma yoga (path of action), reveals this to us. Whatever karma (action) you do, any activities undertaken, can be transformed into a Yoga (means).

When Sri Krishna was advising him that day, Arjuna’s duty was to decimate the evil doers. He could do it for that benefit alone. Yet, he was not seeing that benefit. He was assuming that he was waging war to destroy the enemy and enjoy the riches of the kingdom. Therefore, in earlier chapters he said:

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SLOKA WORD -

yad rajya sukha lo:bhe:na

hanthum svajanam udyatha:ha!

SLOKA MEANING -

(He says) "due to the desire for the pleasures of the kingdom, I am ready to kill my own relatives!"

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He says, rajya sukha lobhena (desire for the pleasures of the kingdom). It means, he thinks that he would have to fight for the kingdom, for its benefits, and to nurture the deep desire to get more and more out of them. However, any activity done by any human, that is suitable for his phase in life, age, situation, ability of body, as a Yoga (means), will yield a result which breaks the karmic bondage and drives him towards the ultimate goal of mukti (liberation). This is the message that Sri Krishna intended to share. That, Arjuna would attain moksham (liberation) even by waging the war. That, a farmer will attain moksham (liberation) by tilling the land. That, a housewife will attain moksham (liberation) by cooking for her family. That, a student will attain moksham (liberation) by engaging in learning. The student’s journey would entail tests, certificates, passing through grades - however, these are temporary achievements. If the goal is to achieve just those then the results will be limited only to them. In any activity, if you do not focus on such temporary achievements, it will lead you all the way to Bhagavan (Lord). This is true for anyone and for any activity. Imagine a tanner. A part of his profession assumes that he mends sandals and shoes. He will attain moksham (liberation) even by engaging in this activity!

A different opinion has been offered here. A soul from an animal will incrementally take rebirth as a human, first as a down-trodden, then as a shudra (laborer class), followed by a vaishya (merchant class), then a kshatriya (warrior class) and eventually a brahmin (priestly class), and only when the brahmin (priestly class) becomes a sanyasi (ascetic), that he gets moksham (liberation)! It isn’t so! Our elders did not subscribe to this incremental soul journey! Anyone, in any state they are in, if they learn their prescribed duties and consistently execute them well, then they will attain moksham (liberation) from that state they are in! This is called karma yoga (path of action).

Arjuna wondered why he has to do karma yoga (path of action). Earlier, we alluded that there are 2 types of karmas (actions). One is niyatha karma (obligatory actions) and the other is aniyatha karma (optional actions). Aniyatha karmas (optional actions) are activities done for temporary needs and the resulting outcomes and benefits. Niyatha karmas (obligatory actions) cannot be avoided however. For example, one needs to eat, otherwise he cannot survive. One needs to drink water for survival. In addition, we also have to breathe to live. These are called niyatha karmas (obligatory actions). There is no choice here and they must be carried out. Imagine one gets a boon or a curse. He must endure the results of that boon or curse. This we knew already. These are niyatha karmas (obligatory actions). Some are aniyatha karmas (optional actions). Depending on the need, one needs to do these occasionally and experience their results.

In sloka 8, Arjuna asks:

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SLOKA WORD -

…niyatham kuru karmathvam…

SLOKA MEANING -

"You should perform your prescribed duty."

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Why should I do all these? I’ll not do any karma (action) at all! He said, he will stop doing any activity. ‘Well, you cannot stop the activity.’ If it cannot be stopped, then I’ll resort to jnana yoga (path of knowledge), which is different from karma yoga (path of action). I’ll be engrossed in jnana (knowledge). I’ll focus my intellect on it.

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SLOKA WORD -

…karma jya:yo:hi akarmanaha…

SLOKA MEANING -

"Action is superior to inaction."

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Instead of ignoring karma (action) and focusing on jnana (knowledge), karma jya:yam (action is superior). Doing karma (action) is superior! This is what Sri Krishna explained. For the question, ‘why this needs to be done’, He said:

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SLOKA WORD -

…sari:ra yathra:pi chathe:

na prasidhye:th akarmanaha

SLOKA MEANING -

"Even the journey of your body would not be accomplished without action."

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The journey of the body must continue. That is, one has to survive in this life. Isn’t it? Today if you say, ‘I have been doing karma yoga (path of action), by transforming karma (action) into Yoga (means)’, then you would not get moksham (liberation) instantly. You are not leaving from here immediately, and there is no need to be afraid of that. When you approach God with devotion and pay obeisances, you are not getting moksham (liberation) instantly. We can therefore continue to do what we need to do. Since we need to survive in a body until the end result is attained, we must let the journey of the body continue. Time spent in such a fashion is called sharira yatra (journey of the body). Until then, we need to survive by earning and feeding ourselves. To earn, we must work. To get a job, we must learn. To learn we must study. These are all intermediary steps. These are part of sharira yatra (journey of the body) and these have to be done as well. Even if you cease all activity and sit idle, you are still performing karma (action). That does not mean that you ignored karma (action) or relinquished it fully! In chapter 3, Sri Krishna thus explained to Arjuna how to do karma yoga (path of action) and encouraged him towards waging war. Let us move ahead by learning more to have better clarity.

Vande guru paramparam (I bow to the lineage of gurus).

Jai Srimannarayana!

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