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1. Episode Title: Episode 38 – Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 3, Episode 38) - The Wheel of Life - Part 4

2. Topics & Tags:

TOPICS: The importance of performing actions (karma) in accordance with the "wheel of life" (chakra) as described in the Bhagavad Gita. The discussion emphasizes the significance of context when interpreting words and scriptural teachings, particularly the term `akshara` (imperishable). It explains how the cycle of food, beings, clouds, sacrifice, and action forms this wheel, and clarifies who is exempt from this cycle of action – only those who are completely self-satisfied and detached from worldly duties.

TAGS: HH Chinna Jeeyar Swami, Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 3, Chapter 8, Chapter 12, Karma Yoga, Chakra, Wheel of Life, Yajna, Sacrifice, Akshara, Soul, Atma, Brahman, God, Krishna, Arjuna, Ramanujacharya, Context, Language, Duty, Self-realization, Liberation, Nithya Suris, Mukta Ganas, Gita 3.16, Gita 3.15, Gita 3.17, Gita 8.3, Gita 12.1, Pankajam, Meaning of words, Scriptural interpretation

3. Main Content:

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

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

One should always perform any work in accordance with the situation. It is a general principle. Not only working, one must also speak in accordance with the situation. Not only in worldly aspects, one must work realizing the situation even when working with the scriptural aspects. This is the recommended rule. Behaving against the situation will lead to unwanted situations.

Assume a lady is named ‘Pankajam’. Quite a few are named Pankajam. What is the meaning of the name? Panka (thick mud), ja (born in). Pankajam (lotus) means that which is born from thick mud. What all are born from thick mud? “Oho! She is Pankajam.” It can be very upsetting if we say that to her, implying she was born in such an environment. It could mean water-weeds, snails, mud, grass or something else. It is true that the word has that meaning. Anything born from it can be named as Pankajam. However, if the situation is such that one wants to refer to a person or something about her, then, one could say “Ah! your face is glowing like a pankajam (lotus)!” Here, the word pankajam (lotus) cannot be compared to be water-weeds, or snails or mud etc. When the context is about a glowing face, one should use the pankajam (lotus) which conveys the meaning of glow. There are many things that emerge from [the muddy waters]. However, the one that indicates glow or gives a pleasant feel is a water lily or lotus or \_\_. We should be using only that [lotus] and simply place the others [like weeds, snails] aside. Words have different meanings. This is true in all languages. It is the responsibility of wise people to use whatever is right for the context. Only those who have undergone right teachings will have that ability. For others, it will be a little difficult.

Bhagavad Ramanujacharya Swami gained proper edification. Therefore, he was able to provide the right meanings to God’s teaching, Bhagavad Gita, properly correlating the beginning to the end and throughout without causing any conflicts. If you go through Gita Bhashya (his commentary) for Bhagavad Gita, we can understand. As an example, we are learning about the word chakra (wheel), in chapter 3. God says…

ev:am pravarthitham chakram (Whoever leads life following the chakra (wheel), only he will be recognised as someone who has lived.) Otherwise, he would be regarded as dead. That’s what He said.

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SLOKA WORD -

evam pravartitam cakram

nānuvartayatīha yaḥ |

aghāyur indriyārāmo

moghaṁ pārtha sa jīvati ||

SLOKA MEANING -

O Partha (Arjuna), he who does not follow this wheel thus set in motion, living a life of sin, indulging in the senses, lives in vain.

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Only in Ramanujacharya’s Bhashya (commentary) do we see the chakra (wheel) realized properly. Where is the chakra (wheel)? Explaining the way we live…

anna:th bha:vanthi bhu:tha:ni (The bhu:thas (beings/bodies), bodies made of pancha bhu:thas (five elements of Nature) are living because of annam (food).) When we say bhu:thas (beings/bodies), we must remember the soul and the body. Only when they are together, they are called bhu:tha (being/body). That is when they are living because of annam (food). Annam (food) is grown because of clouds, i.e water from the clouds. Clouds are formed because of yajna (sacrifice). When yajna (sacrifice) is performed properly, i.e. when you live life properly, the effect of bha:va tharanga (vibrations of the feel) with which you live rise within you, and the ho:ma dhu:ma (smoke from the oblations) into the havan. The clouds are then formed such that they yield good water because of the [energized] sun rays. Those clouds are formed because of yajna (sacrifice). Yajna (sacrifice) is based on one’s karma (action). Karma (action) can only be done by sari:ras (bodies). Sari:ra (body) is called bramha (Brahman/body).

karma brahmo:dbhavam viddhi (karma is born from Brahman)

Bramha (Brahman/body), i.e. body is…

aksharam samudbhavam (born from the imperishable)

Only when there is a soul, the body takes form, grows, and undergoes change. Otherwise, the body remains for some time and gradually disintegrates to its elements. It is the aksharam (imperishable) that keeps the body intact from disintegrating. Aksharam (imperishable) is that which is not kshara (disintegrable). Atma (soul) has a name called akshara (imperishable). Both soul and paramatma (God) are given the name akshara (imperishable). The nithya su:ris (eternally liberated souls) are also named akshara (imperishable). What is the context here? The context with respect to chakra (wheel) is to refer to that which is with the body. Therefore, this ‘wheel’ runs with the body, and the body is living because of the soul.

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SLOKA WORD -

tasmāt sarva-gataṁ brahma

nityaṁ yajñe pratiṣṭhitam ||

SLOKA MEANING -

Therefore, the all-pervading Brahman is eternally established in sacrifice.

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sarvagatham bramha (We must observe this word [sarvagatham (all-pervading)] properly.)

sarvagatham bramha (sarva (with all beings); gatham (that exist); bramha (all the bodies)) Or the body which is made for or is the means for performing all varieties of activities…

nithyam yajne: prathishttitham (It [body] must always work as yajna (sacrifice).)

Bodies must always be used as yajna (sacrifice). If you think that you will simply live, not be useful to anyone, not meditate on anyone, die… Sri Krishna clearly states in verse 3.15 that such a life is not worth nothing.

thasma:th sarvagatham bramha nithyam yajne: prathishttitham || (Bodies given for the purpose of exercising karma (action) must live as yajna (sacrifice).)

They must live as yajna (sacrifice). Or else they are dead bodies. Now, this qualifies for chakra (wheel), the ‘wheel’. When the body is used for yajna (sacrifice), it is because of the soul. When both body and soul are together, it becomes bhu:tha (being/body). Bhu:tha (being/body) lives because of annam (food). Annam (food) is because of the [clouds]. Does atma (soul) have a name called akshara (imperishable)? Yes. If you use akshara (imperishable) in reference to paramatma (God), it does not fit in [to chakra (wheel)]. If you use it to refer to the atma (soul), it fits in as body and soul become a bhu:tha (being/body). Once you can get to bhu:tha (being/body), that completes the chakra (wheel). You can see [referring atma (soul) as Akshara (imperishable)] in Bhagavad Gita and many instances in Upanishads.

Let’s look at where it is in Bhagavad Gita. In chapter 8…

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SLOKA WORD -

akṣaraṁ brahma paramaṁ

svabhāvo ’dhyātmam ucyate |

SLOKA MEANING -

The imperishable is the supreme Brahman; its essential nature is called the individual soul.

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In the beginning of Ch. 8 itself, which is named akshara para brahma yo:ga (Yoga of the Imperishable Supreme Brahman), He says atma (soul) is called akshara (imperishable). Proceeding a little further to beginning of Chapter 12, Arjuna asks two questions. The first one is…

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SLOKA WORD -

evaṁ satata-yuktā ye

bhaktās tvāṁ paryupāsate |

ye cāpy akṣaram avyaktaṁ

teṣāṁ ke yoga-vittamāḥ ||

SLOKA MEANING -

Those devotees who are always steadfast and worship You, and those who worship the imperishable, unmanifested – which of these are better versed in yoga?

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There are some who meditate upon You…

e: cha:pyaksharam avyaktham (There are those meditating upon Akshara thaththva (the undestroyable reality/truth of the imperishable).)

It is true that bhagava:n (God) is named Akshara (imperishable). However, Arjuna asked, “Of both, those meditating on You and those meditating Akshara thaththva (the undestroyable reality/truth of the imperishable), who is intelligent?” He asked this question.

the:sha:m ke: yo:ga viththama:ha (What akshara (imperishable) refers to here is atma (soul) in the context of those meditating upon the soul.)

Further in chapter 12, Sri Krishna refers to it while explaining, “Whoever meditates upon the soul is going to have a very hard time. Whoever meditates upon Me will find it very easy.” How easy it is and what are the steps to attain this easy One... He showed gradually one after another all the steps in meditating upon Him. In Ch 12, He also stated how difficult it is to meditate upon akshara (imperishable), i.e atma thatthva (reality of soul). We will learn about it in detail when we get there. Sri Krishna used akshara (imperishable) in both these contexts to refer to atma (soul). It is clear in these verses. Therefore, when the wheel is being talked about…

bramha akshara samudbhavam (Brahman is born from the imperishable)

If we take akshara (imperishable) to mean atma (soul), the wheel is clearly established. We will also properly understand what Sri Krishna is conveying [the chakra (wheel)]. After explaining about the chakra (wheel), Sri Krishna says, “It is essential for all human beings to act according to this wheel.” He elucidated this way of life. Questions like why should one work this way, what is the necessity to work, what will happen if we don’t… First of all, it’s impossible to not do anything. You have to breathe. You can’t abstain from drinking water, or eating food. Even if you claim you can go without food or water, you still need to breathe air. If you say you will do kumbhaka (retaining air) for a year, 2, 3 or more. Fine. You are still living depending on the five elements of nature. That is you are still living in the body. After you leave the body, that’s different. That is when others perform final rites. However, while in the body, it is impossible to not do anything by yourself. In that case, instead of wasting life, live properly. Live life as yajna (sacrifice).

Who is this needed for? For anyone taking birth and living a life. Do you know who it is not needed for? Bhagava:n (God) says for in the next verse, 3.17.

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SLOKA WORD -

yas tv ātma-ratir eva syād

ātma-tṛptaś ca mānavaḥ |

ātmany eva ca santuṣṭas

tasya kāryaṁ na vidyate ||

SLOKA MEANING -

But for the person who rejoices in the Self, who is satisfied with the Self, and who is content in the Self alone, there is no duty to perform.

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It is only that one who does not need to do yajna (sacrifice). Who is that? One who does not need anything other than ji:va (soul), and the jna:na (knowledge). One may say, “There are some who are like that in some places.” If so, such people should have nothing to do with the world. They shouldn’t be preaching either in this world. There need not be any enlightenment, or worshiping, or anything. There shouldn’t be any donations either. If one seeks all these, how can such a person be called a:thma rathi (inclined towards atma/rejoices in the Self)? Therefore, such a person cannot be called a:thma rathi (inclined towards atma/rejoices in the Self).

a:thmarathir (whoever is inclined only towards atma (soul))

a:thma thrupthas cha ma:navaha (whoever is happy with only atma (soul)/satisfied with the Self)

a:thmanye:va cha santhushtaha (whoever is satisfied only with the activities related to atma (soul)/content in the Self alone)

Such a person has no connection with anything.

thasya ka:ryam na vidyathe: (there is no work that he needs to do)

It is not necessary to specially focus now on learning to lead life as yajna (sacrifice) for him. He attained siddhi (accomplishment/perfection). This state is only for nithya su:ris (eternally liberated souls), and muktha ganas (liberated souls). It is impossible to be that way for one living on this earth. Therefore, it is the divine injunction to live life as yajna (sacrifice) for all those born [on the earth]. Thus, Ch. 3 establishes the need to qualify any work we do as yo:gam (yoga/union), i.e. doing so as yajna (sacrifice). Bestowing us with this knowledge, He is leading us further. Let us try to learn further.

Jai Srimannarayana!

Vande: Guru Parampara:m!

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