

THE SPIRITUAL SCIENTIST

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The Song of God

"We have guided missiles and misguided men." This poignant remark of Martin Luther King, Jr, about the state of the modern world rings strikingly true. In the recent times, there has been an amazing increase in human ability to control the outer world by science and technology. But simultaneously there has been an alarming decline in human ability to control the inner world resulting in a variety of irrational passions - immorality and corruption at best and terrorism and brutality at worst.

The occasion of Gita Jayanti (Dec 15) provides modern society a good opportunity to examine the relevance of the timeless wisdom of this "song of God".

AN INTRODUCTION TO REALITY

The quest for happiness lies at the heart of all human endeavors. The Bhagavad-gita asserts that happiness is our inalienable right and provides a clear pathway for its achievement. The fundamental teaching of the Gita is that our current existence has two dimensions - material and spiritual: we are spiritual beings residing in material bodies. (2.13) Modern scientific studies in fields like past life memories, near-death experiences (NDEs) and consciousness also strongly suggest that there is a spiritual part of our being which continues to exist even after bodily death. These studies therefore confirm this postulate of the Gita. Just as the soul animates the body, the Gita continues, the Supersoul, the Supreme Being, animates the entire cosmos.

The Gita further explains that material existence is temporary and troublesome due to an existential disharmony; human beings tend to neglect the spiritual dimension of their lives and focus only on material ambitions and achievements. This imbalance stunts their ability to experience the fullness of life and the resulting dissatisfaction manifests individually as depression, irritability, anxiety, stress etc and socially as disunity, violence, wars etc. This disharmony also results in the universal and inescapable evils of birth, old age, disease and death (13.9).

Our innate longing for immortality in a world that is intrinsically subject to death, indicates that we belong to an immortal realm. The Gita thus posits the existence of a higher-dimensional world which is beyond the pernicious effects of time (8.20). That realm is characterized by a sweet harmony of divine love between the innumerable subordinate souls and the Supreme. In that realm, the Supreme Person being all-attractive is the pivot of all relationships and is therefore best known as Krishna, which means 'all-attractive' in Sanskrit. Every soul enjoys an eternal life of cognizance and bliss in that realm, provided he is harmonious with the will of the Supreme. When he

refuses to be in harmony, he falls to the realm of matter, where he can experience the results of disharmony and thus reform himself.

SUFFERING AND ITS SOLUTION

During his sojourn in the material realm, the soul occupies different bodies according to his desires and activities. Each body, whether human or subhuman, imposes on the soul the demands of eating, sleeping, mating and defending. In material life the soul struggles hard to try to fulfill these bodily demands. But the repetitive nature of these demands makes life a continuous suffering with only momentary relief whenever these demands are satisfied.

Suffering however is good as it provides the necessary impetus to return to harmony just as fever provides the impetus to take to a remedial therapeutic process. Among the 8.4×10^6 species that inhabit the cosmos, the human form is specially-gifted; only in a human body does the soul have the requisite intelligence to question his suffering situation and attempt to rectify it. The Gita is addressed to such an intelligent human being.

Asserting that material nature is endlessly mutable (8.4), the Gita advises the seeker of true happiness to not be disturbed by the dualities of heat-cold, pain-pleasure etc that result from the inevitable changes in the material realm (2.14). The Gita however does not recommend a life of inane fatalism; it exhorts the individual to direct his life's energies in a direction that will be truly fruitful. Because our present anomalous situation is a result of a disharmony with our spiritual nature, the Gita recommends that attempts for improvement be directed in the spiritual realm, not the material realm.

THE RELEVANCE OF THE GITA

It is here that the relevance of the Gita to the modern scenario can be seen. Over the past few centuries modern man has performed immense intellectual labor in an attempt to decrease the miseries of material existence. But all of these efforts have been directed in the realm of matter. This has resulted in an increased ability to manipulate the material energy through science and technology. But modern man has, with almost a religious dogma, avoided applying his intellectual faculties to understanding the spiritual dimension of life. But all the cherished human qualities like love, compassion, honesty and selflessness spring from the soul - the spiritual aspect of our being. Therefore negligence of spiritual life has had disastrous consequences; there has been a marked decline in all these virtuous human attributes in modern society. That is the cause of the guided-missiles-misguided-men syndrome.

The Gita thus provides the answer to the well-known prayer: "O God, please give me the strength to change the things I can, the endurance to accept the things that I cannot change and the wisdom to know the difference between the two." The Gita explains that, if our endeavors for happiness are to bear lasting fruit, the spiritual aspect of our lives needs to be improved, not the material. The Gita also systematically explains the difference between matter and spirit and provides a practical methodology for spiritual elevation. The Gita thus helps us to understand how ignorance and / or negligence of the spiritual dimension of life has been the bane of modern civilization.

RETURNING TO HARMONY

The Gita recommends yoga as the means to spiritual emancipation. Contrary to the general notion, the Gita states that mere physical postures and breathing exercises do not constitute yoga; they are just the beginning of one type of yoga. Actual yoga involves harmonizing all energy - material and spiritual - with the original source of energy, the energetic Supreme. The Gita states that meditation (dhyana-yoga), speculation (jnana-yoga), detached action (karma-yoga) and devotional service (bhakti-yoga) are means by which a soul can advance on the path back to harmony. Ultimate success however comes only by devotional service (11.53-54); other paths are only stepping stones to the attainment of that devotion (6.47, 7.19, 3.9). The best method of devotional meditation for the current period in the cosmic cycle (Kali Yuga) is mantra meditation (10.25), especially the chanting of the maha mantra Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna

Krishna Hare Hare Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Hare Hare. As one advances on the path of harmony, one progressively experiences decrease in mental agitation due to irrational passions, an unshakable inner tranquility and finally an eternal ecstasy of love coming from the spiritual stratum. (6.20-23) The Gita therefore concludes with an unequivocal call for loving harmony with the Supreme (18.66).

The Gita declares the higher realities of life to be pratyakshavagamam, directly perceivable by experience from within (9.2) Thus the Gita approach to the study of the cosmos is not at all dogmatic; rather it is bold and scientific. The Gita presents the postulates logically and systematically and also provides the enterprising spiritual scientist a practical method to verify those postulates.

INDIA'S GIFT TO THE WORLD

The Gita explanation of the truths of life is so profound, coherent and cogent that, for most modern Western scholars who studied the Gita for the first time in the 17th and 18th centuries, it was love on first reading. The remark of the famed American thinker Ralph Waldo Emerson is a sample, "I owed a magnificent day to the Bhagavad-gita. It was the first of books; it was as if an empire spoke to us, nothing small or unworthy, but large, serene and consistent, the voice of an old intelligence which in another age and climate had pondered and thus disposed of the same questions which exercise us."

Unfortunately with the passage of time, imperial biases among Western scholars obscured the wisdom of the Gita from enlightening the whole of humanity. Indian intellectuals being afflicted by feelings of cultural inferiority due to prolonged foreign subjugation, did not give the Gita the importance it deserved.

It was only when His Divine Grace A C Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada, the founder-acharya of the International Society for Krishna consciousness (ISKCON), took the wisdom of the Gita to the West in the 1960s that the world started recognizing the glory of this philosophical masterpiece once again. Srila Prabhupada's commentary on the Gita, Bhagavad Gita As It Is, soon became the most widely read edition of the Gita in the English language. Till date over five million hardbound copies have been printed in over a dozen languages. Bhagavad Gita As It Is has transformed the lives of millions the world over from confused despair to enlightened happiness. "If truth is what works, as Pierce and the other pragmatists insist, there must be a kind of truth in the Bhagavad Gita As It Is, since those who follow its teaching display a joyful serenity usually missing in the bleak and strident lives of contemporary people." This remark of Dr Elwin H Powell, Professor of Sociology, State University of New York is typical of the critical acclaim that Bhagavad Gita As It Is has won among the world's leading scholars.

EAST-WEST SYNTHESIS

Srila Prabhupada has been acknowledged as the greatest cultural ambassador of India to the modern world. His vision was a global East-West synthesis. Just as a lame man, if carried by a blind man, could guide the latter, Srila Prabhupada understood that if the materially prosperous but spiritually blind West and the spiritually gifted but materially impoverished India joined forces, the combination would usher in an era of peace and prosperity all over the world. ISKCON is working tirelessly at the grassroots level to make this vision a reality.

Unfortunately the West has embraced a hedonistic way of life devoid of any spiritual paradigm. And the East, especially India, being enamored by the glitter of Western culture, is casting away the treasure of Vedic wisdom that is its priceless heritage. But the morning of September 11 was fateful; it burst the bubble of comfort and security in a godless civilization. Now in a world that is in dire need of spiritual shelter after the WTC disaster, it behooves all intelligent and responsible Indians to understand, assimilate and distribute the gift of the wisdom of the Gita to their fellow humans.

Join us next month for another session of thought-provoking discussion.

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Dedicated to

**His Divine Grace A C Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada,
The Greatest Spiritual Scientist of the Modern Times**

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