

“Yo madbhaktah sa me priyah”

Lord Krishna says Yo madbhaktah, this bhakta, my devotee who is like this, sa me priyah, is dear to me. We will talk about the bhakta, the devotee of the Lord. The discussion, which occurs in as many as six chapters of Bhagavad Gita from Ch 7 to Ch 12, will also involve the Lord (Bhagavan) to whom the bhakta is devoted, and the bhakti, devotion. They are all connected.

Basically what Lord Krishna reveals is that “I am your own self”. He is not away from us, not other than us. He is our own self. Not the self that we think we are, that is not Bhagavan, not Isvara the Lord, but the way we truly are. Vedanta gives us the example of the rope-snake. What is in front of me is a piece of rope and I think it’s a snake. The object is not what I take it to be. That example applies also to our own self. We are different from what we take ourselves to be.

If Lord Krishna says “I am closer than the closest” as our own self, then why do we not know Him? Naham prakasa yas ya yoga maya samavrttah - very well veiled, hidden, by my yoga maya, I am not evident to anybody. I am not recognized as I am by anybody, with some exceptions, very well veiled by my yoga maya. I am so close and yet people do not recognize me because their sights are always elsewhere. In this universe there is nothing other than myself; nothing is superior or inferior to myself. Whatever is, is myself. Not only ourselves, but everything that we encounter is the Lord. Subject, object, whatever is, is Isvara. Then why do we not recognize him?

Lord Krishna says that because I am veiled, covered by my Maya, I manifest myself in certain costumes. In this universe, sattva, rajas and tamas qualities make for three types of entities or names and forms. Sattva is something very dear that we like, something pleasant, tranquil, peaceful which makes us feel happy and satisfied. Rajas is dominant when we find that our mind is agitated, restless, active, desiring, wanting, lacking, or ambitious. Storms, floods and all kinds of disturbances can occur. Tamas is dominant when there is inertia. I find myself dull, inactive, not motivated, not inspired, not wanting to do anything, not interested in anything so that nothing motivates me.

So sometimes we find ourselves with sattvic qualities, sometimes rajasic qualities, sometimes tamasic qualities. Thus, Vedanta says that this universe is made up of these three gunas: sattva rajas and tamas. This applies to our personalities also. We have this gross body primarily made of tamas quality. We are also active people and powering these actions we have prana, the vital air, in our personality. Then we have the organs of perception backed by the mind made up of sattva with which we gain knowledge of the world. Lord Krishna says, “Understand that all of them are from Me. It is I alone who is manifest in the universe with these three-fold costumes of sattva, rajas, and tamas. My personalities are made up of sattva, rajas and tamas. You also. Nature also.”

So who am I? Lord Krishna says that what you experience is superficial, like costumes to an actor. We see only the costumes. Sometimes we feel frustrated, that there should be an answer as to why all this? Whenever we think we have found the answer like the God particle etc., then some more questions will arise. It's a very beautiful thing. Either you can feel frustrated because you don't have the answer or you can enjoy that there need not be an answer. Lord Krishna says "I have this costume of Maya, because of which I appear to be different from what I truly am". In all the costumes you are there. There are many names, but you are one.

The *bhakti* is one whose whole life centers on Bhagavan. Why is devotion important? Why is God important? Because truly recognizing Him is the agenda with which we have been born. We have been sent here with a certain task, a certain problem to solve. Therefore recognizing what is becomes very important. "The wise person recognizes me", says Lord Krishna. What is the Lord. So this is our goal. This is our task. It is like a test that is given to us. You have to clear this test. "Swami, I am not interested." But unfortunately there is no choice. We have to clear this test because we are born with certain desires. We have lots of ambitions, desires, within ourselves. We want to be happy in our lives. We want to be successful in our lives. Nobody can say, Swamiji I don't mind not being happy. I need not be happy. I need not be successful. I don't mind being sad. I don't mind being sorrowful. If somebody can say that, it would be nice, then he is free. But nobody can accept it.

So we are born with an attachment to our desire for happiness. We cannot accept ourselves to be unhappy. Then we have to learn how to be happy. "I know how to be happy, Swamiji. I have surrounded myself with all kinds of things. I go to my Facebook. I get bored with that then I go to WhatsApp. Then I go to Twitter. Then I go to a movie. Then I go to a restaurant. Then I go for a game. So many distractions are there, Swamiji. I know how to make myself happy. I don't need anything else to become happy." All of these can make us happy, no doubt about it, for some time. Our mind being what it is, we ask what next? We want something else. iPhone 1 is exciting. Phone 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, each one comes with new features and people are eagerly waiting. "I just bought iPhone 7 a year ago and now I want a new one." Manufacturers know this. They know how to make people spend money and they earn it at our cost. Our attempts to become happy seem to create hunger for more happiness, hunger for variety, and does not seem to lead us anywhere. Otherwise why should you come here? If the answer for our search for happiness were elsewhere, which most people believe, you would not be here.

Lord Krishna says one among thousands gets an idea that probably what we are doing is not the way to do. Most people spend their life and finish it off. They go from one desire to the other, thinking that if that did not work out something else will work. Life after life can go like that because that is how we are born. Lord Krishna says that all the beings and particularly human beings are born with *iccha* and *dvesha*, *iccha* meaning "this is what I want", *dvesha* meaning "this is what I don't want". In this way they exhaust their lives.

To help us get the insight that maybe what we are doing is not the way to permanent happiness, the scriptures show us the path. We are born with this impulse of *iccha* and *dvesha*, I like this and I do not like this, I want this and I do not want that. Usually those impulses dictate what I do and don't do. I think that by satisfying those impulses, I will be happy. When there is a desire and I satisfy the desire, I feel happy. When I don't like someone and I see that person unhappy, I feel happy.

There are two ways of becoming happy, one is *iccha* and the other is *dvesha*. When we are rooting for a team and we see that the other team is losing, we feel happy. That is called *dvesha*. When we feel happy because others are doing well, that is called *iccha*. Both give us happiness. Right from birth people have *iccha* and *dvesha*. Most people live their lives merely satisfying these impulses of desire and aversion, fulfilling their desires for what they want and avoiding and hating and hurting and retaliating to that which they hate. As more desires are fulfilled, more desires arise. The more I hate others, more hatred arises. It doesn't go. The hatred also keeps on increasing. Most of the people simply spend away their lives as dictated by their *iccha* and *dvesha*.

So, Lord Krishna says that nobody even bothers about Him, nobody wants to know Him. When he has displayed himself and nobody looks at him, can he not feel bad? People look at his costume and don't look at Him. But *jnananam*, *punya karma nam*, if because of our *samskara*, our upbringing, or for whatever reason, we have a value for *punya karma* or virtuous deeds, like a value for being hardworking or honest or truthful or sincere and dedicated, that is called *punya karma*. If we perform an act of virtue, an act of dharma, then dharma comes in our life, *punya karma* comes in our life. A virtue comes in our life that has the effect of neutralizing the influence of *iccha* and *dvesha*. We are born with these impulses, but if because of our *samskaras*, because of upbringing, the family and environment in which we were born, the way we were raised, the kind of values we were given, which were demonstrated by the way our parents lived, then we also adopted these values in our lives, even though living some of those values caused some hardships. Lord Krishna says that when there is *punya karma*, when there is dharma in the life and when there is virtue in the life, slowly there will be a neutralizing of the impulses of *iccha* and *dvesha*. So there is a way out. Even if we are born with *iccha* and *dvesha*, the path of dharma, righteousness, *punya*, also is there.

Bhakti begins with living a life of virtue. Virtue is following the order of the law which obtains in the universe, which is called the moral law. There is the law of the land, which should be followed, but there is also the moral law. Sometimes the law of the land is not sufficient because of many loopholes. Then it is possible for us to violate the law of the land and get away with it. Not everyone stops at a stop sign. You look and go, but don't stop usually. This is the human law and it is possible not to be caught sometimes. But you cannot get away from the moral law. Someone is watching, not only from outside, there is also someone inside who is watching every thought of mine, every intension of mine. The world outside only watches what I do and accordingly I may be treated, but there is someone who watches the intension with which I do it. Even though I can be smiling and appear different from what I really am, that is called *Maya*, and it can delude you.

What I am saying is that after all there is a limitation to what the human law can do to us. We are often smarter than the law and we can find loopholes and get away without being punished. But where the moral law is concerned, we cannot get away because there is someone inside who is watching. Not only my actions are watched, but intensions also are watched. That is where the change has to happen. There is *punya karma* where there is a God fearing person, someone who is not afraid of God but who takes God into account. We behave differently in the presence of different people. With our friends we behave in one way.

With children we behave in a different way, with our parents also in a different way and so on. When there is an important person, a respectable person, a reverential person, then automatically we take that into account and behave in a certain way. Similarly when we recognize that there is God everywhere and watching, we should take Him into account. That is called God-fearing, not afraid of God, but someone who takes God into account, knowing that he is there, and behaves accordingly, reverently. That is how the punya karma comes in our life.

The iccha and dvesha are attenuated. Then the bhakti arises in the heart of the person. That is how Lord Krishna in the seventh chapter of the Bhagavad Gita describes his own self and how the bhakti can arise when there is purification in the mind. He describes how impurity can deny us the very bhakti or devotion and how the purity of mind is required to discover the devotion.

This concludes the summary report of the first of eight classes on Verse 16 of Bhagavad Gita Chapter 12. An MP3 digital recording of all eight classes is available for purchase from Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Saylorsburg, PA, www.arshavidya.org. The Title is Yo Madbhaktah sa me Priyah, Swami Veditatmananda, Independence Day Weekend, 1-4 July, 2017



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