

Of Life and Spirituality

-by Melkote Ramaswamy

Come to think of it, we have lots of blessings to count. It doesn't take much to realize and recognize that the world around us in all its ramifications is simply given to us—the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the rivers, the oceans, the vegetation, the forests, animals, birds, -- the list goes on and on. We had absolutely no hand in creating any of these.

In a sense, these are all God-given gifts to us. If we accept this premise, we can see the hand of the Lord in myriad other ways. This should remind us to recognize and acknowledge in all humility and reverence the invisible hand of the Creator and marvel at His intelligence.

We start with this big God-given plus. And then there are a host of other plusses that are concurrently paired with minuses that we have to deal with—sort of opposites. These create a challenge in life. Plus signifies positive and minus negative. Plus implies adding and minus subtracting. For instance, we talk of Power of Positive Thinking/sign of optimism versus Negative thinking /sign of a pessimist. We all want to build assets and get rid of liabilities.

Then there are other sets of opposites. We associate virtue as Plus and vice as Minus. We live in a world of particles and anti-particles--which unlike other things in life have exactly equal and opposite characteristics. The world presents us with all sorts of duality which can be understood in terms of plus and minus. While having all plusses is the desired and eventual goal, we realize this is impossible. Plus and minus have variable connotations. For instance, for a ski-resort, minus temperatures are a plus. For someone trying to become healthy, putting on (plussing) weight can be an undesirable, negative thing (minus). When it comes to charity, isn't better to be a giver than a receiver.

We talk of having good Days and bad days; of battle of good versus evil, of beautiful and the ugly. And then there is happiness and sorrow, success and failure/ups and downs.

Traditionally, the universe has been analyzed in terms of matter and energy. An alternative approach is described in Bhagvad Gita (Chapter 14) where human behavior is discussed and to be understood in terms of three attributes (mental states), namely--1.State of purity (Satvic) 2.State of ambition, drive and passion (Rajasic) 3.State of lethargy, inertia and indolence (Tamasic)

All of us are made up of a mixture of these three attributes. The goal of spiritual advancement is attain state of purity (satvic). Mind can be our best friend or worst enemy (Gita, Chapter 6). The secret is to make mind our best friend and steer our thoughts and energy and thereby our attitude towards self-upliftment. It is ironic, by giving up (sacrifice); one expands one's spiritual horizon.

Another classification Bhagvad Gita mentions in Chapter 16 is in terms of divine and demoniac qualities we all possess and the goal to rise above the demoniac. We sense the divine component in daily dialog where people refer to God under many circumstances (Oh My God, Thank God, God forbid, God-forsaken place, etc.). Further, whenever ethics (dharma) and morality are in danger of decline and the opposite (adharma) is on the ascendancy, the Lord intervenes in human form to restore moral law and order. This is referred to as Avataar (Gita-Chapter 4) and can be understood best as a sort of divine feedback mechanism.

Let us not forget that we are gifted with free will, the ability to make right decisions, to distinguish what is right versus what we would like to do. We can exercise this to stay where we are; to go higher or; to go lower.

*Melkote Ramaswamy is a physicist, speaker, writer, author of An Immigrant celebrates America (University of Indianapolis Press, 2007) and Vedanta through Drushtaanta (Adhyatma Press, Ahmedabad, India, 2013) and an active member of Hindu Temple of Central Indiana. He has attended several Vedanta camps at Arshavidya Gurukulam, Saylorsburg, PA. (melramaswamy@gmail.com)