

How to be cool

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Sankhya yoga/Topic of Karma(Chapter 2...continued)

Last time we saw one aspect of karma-yoga i.e. to focus on what I can do. This can make me a highly responsible and proactive person, but there is also a flip side—I could be worried, anxious, tense about the results because the result is my baby and I have no choice but to accept it. How do I do this? Some of my desires may not be fulfilled, even a priority of mine may not work out and one has to face that. To bring in this aspect, one has to understand the idea of *Ishwara*, *Bhagwan*, or what's popularly known as God. Where does God come into the picture? Strictly speaking, we cannot have a hundred per cent secular karma yoga. We need to understand God, but that doesn't mean it's restricted to a particular religion.

All religions, irrespective of where they come from, commonly use three words to describe God—one is 'omnipotent' or 'all-powerful'. This is easy to understand; God has created everything and, therefore, he must be all-powerful. The second word is 'omniscient' or 'all-knowing'; that is also easy to understand...the one who has created everything would understand and know everything. The problem is with the third word i.e. 'omnipresent', meaning 'he is everywhere'. How do we understand that? Because we always locate God in some place or the other; he's not here, he's somewhere, and this comes from a personification of God. And if your understanding of God is primitive like this, then you're in a dilemma. I'm deliberately using the word 'primitive' because it does not require any great philosopher to dismiss this idea, it only requires a child...A child may have a simple question, 'Is God really all powerful?'

His father says, 'Yes, son, he is all-powerful'.

The child responds, 'Daddy, can he make a big stone that he himself cannot lift?'

Now you're in a Catch-22 situation. If you say, 'Yes, he is all powerful, he can create it', what you're really saying is that he is not all-powerful because he cannot lift it. The moment he has created it he stops being all-powerful. If father says, 'No, he can't make that kind of stone', then he is not all-powerful at the first step itself.

The second question could be, 'Where is God?', to which you reply 'In XYZ place'. 'But who made that place?'. You reply 'God made that place'. Where was he before he made that place? You will reply, 'Some other place'. This can go on forever.....At the same time, all religions say that he is omnipresent, that means he must be present everywhere.

There is only one way of getting out of this dilemma. In the vision of Vedanta, it's very simple. This problem comes up because we have not taken into account the second thing necessary for creation. Any creation implies a 'material' because out of nothing you can only create nothing. If you are creating something and the world that we see is 'something', then you need 'something' to create it. But, Swami-ji, you might say, in an earlier post you said the world is 'mithya', not real. That is true. But you need a *mithya* material to create a *mithya* world; the world is tangible, the body is tangible, your mind has its own power and function, and, therefore, you need a material. *Therefore, in the Vedantic vision, in the vision of the Gita, we look upon God as not only the creator, as an intelligent being, the all-powerful, the all-knowing, but we also look upon God as the material for the whole creation. That means that the intelligent/efficient cause and the material cause are one and the same. Just as a spider creates its web...It's easy to make a statement but one should be able to give an example to demonstrate it and the example of the spider is a demonstration of the possibility of intelligent cause and material cause being one and the same. The spider is an intelligent being which creates the web and he is also the material for the web, the material is not got from outside, it's obtained from its own body.*

Similarly, when you dream, you are an intelligent being who is responsible for the dream and your mind-stuff is material for the dream. But, you could say, the dream is not real. But I have already mentioned in an earlier post that the world is not real *sathya-mithya*....It is an apparent reality, it's a dependent reality, because it depends on the material and the material is God. So now we have a situation where God is both the intelligence and the material for creation. This changes my whole perspective of life; it means that creation is not really a creation, it is more of a manifestation. God himself has manifested into this whole universe.

That means you may describe this process of manifestation through a scientific method like the Big Bang theory or a dialectical method like the 5-element theory—*akasha, vayu, agni, aapah, prithvi*...space, air, fire, water, earth. These are only models...You can have a scientific model like the Big Bang theory which most scientists seem to be accepting right now, or you could have a dialectical theory. Both are only dealing with a process. It's *Ishwara* that has manifested as the whole universe— as space, as time, as everything in space and time, and the sun and moon and the stars, as your body, my body, your mind, my mind....That is why creation is nothing but solidified knowledge.

Look at a banyan tree...the seed is so tiny. That seed has the genetic coding of the whole tree and its three hundred years of life, how the branches will grow, how the roots will come down...it's solidified knowledge in the form of a seed. Take a human baby—the ova and the sperm have the genetic coding of the whole individual—its height, weight, colour of eyes...all this is codified including the possibility of diabetes at 50, heart attack at 60, etc etc as well as the possibility that you can change all this by doing the right things like healthy eating, exercise etc....Therefore, there is nothing but *Ishwara* manifested as the whole universe. That makes the whole universe sacred; everything is sacred....That's why in Hinduism everything is considered sacred. The Lord can be worshiped in any form, which I will highlight later....

What does this understanding of God give ? (Because God has to be understood, not merely believed in). *This understanding of God brings in another fact. All these principles that are manifested in the universe, all that we study as scientific laws are nothing but a manifestation of Ishwara..Gravity, electromagnetic forces, nuclear forces, all these are nothing but a manifestation of Ishwara.* Now here I am as a karma-yogi, I have a desire to be fulfilled, a priority to be dealt with, I have done an action expecting some result. Remember, as I said before, there is no work without expecting results...I'd like to emphasize that. Therefore, I am expecting a result, and, naturally, I will be worried and anxious about the result. I know one thing for sure that the result of these actions is in my hands only to a certain extent. In fact, that's what Krishna says in the second half of the verse that I am the *karma phala hetu*, I am the one who gives the result of the actions, not you. You do the action, you are responsible for the action, but the results are framed by my laws, by the universal principles which we study as scientific laws.

We don't know all the laws; some we understand, many we don't, but one thing is sure—every result for every action of life is shaped by the universal laws including the laws of karma which don't come under the scientific fold. But these laws shape the result. Therefore, every result is shaped by the laws of *Ishwara*. Therefore, the result comes from *Ishwara*. Culturally, in India, we have an attitude of accepting something that comes from *Ishwara*. I give you a flower, you will naturally smell it and say, 'Thank you, Swamiji, it's a nice flower'. But if I offer it to the Lord and then give it to you, you will take it first to your eyes and then smell it. Why? Because now it is a flower plus something, it is *prasada*. This is a religious-cultural attitude that we have, a cultural attitude that can bless. Why? Because anything that can come as *prasada* is gladly accepted. The result of all my actions are *prasada* because they come from the Lord. When I go to a temple, there is a priest standing there between me and God, and the sight of the priest may not be inspiring to accept *prasada*. But when I act, there is nothing between me and God, between me and *Ishwara*. My actions are my worship of *Ishwara* because I am functioning because of his laws, every action of mine is possible because the laws make it possible for me to act. This recognition makes every action of mine an offering to the Lord.

I can also, before I initiate an action, consciously look at the action as an offering, as an *arpana* to the Lord. That makes it a worship; the same work becomes a worship even though the work may be for my own personal desire-fulfilment. The *karma-phala* or the result becomes the *prasada*. Therefore, really speaking, one learns to accept it gladly. The more I understand *Ishwara*, the more I have the *prasada buddhi*, the better *karma yogi* I will be because I will accept the result. In fact, even before initiating an action, I decide

to accept the result as *prasada*.

This means I can take both success or failure in my stride. I have become bigger than my desire even though I have the desire. This is phenomenal for my growth because as I am working to fulfil my desires, I am growing and becoming bigger than my desire. In time I will become bigger than all my desires. This is a huge thing—if I can take both success and failure in my stride, I'm a force to reckon with because success does not elate me to the heavens so I come crashing down the next day nor does failure make me despair. I'm not an emotional yo-yo that jumps up and down, I am bigger than what I am doing. What I am doing has helped me become much more than what I was when I started out. This is a phenomenal *sadhana* that the *Gita* presents; *karma yoga* is not a yoga of action, it is a yoga of an attitude towards action. Krishna calls it a *buddhi yoga*; 'buddhi' meaning your attitude, an attitude with which you perform action.

Nobody can say, 'I don't have time for this *karma yoga*.' If I say, 'Sit down and do some special *puja* or exercises,' you could try to excuse yourself by saying, 'Swamiji, I don't have the time, busy life....' Here that problem doesn't arise—the busier you are, the more time you have for *karma yoga*, because every action now is *karma yoga*. I think this is the best *sadhana* for the modern person. You don't need to do anything else, you just need to understand what *Ishwara* is and cultivate this attitude of *prasada*, of acceptance. So when one initiates an action, it is done as *ishwara arpana*, as an offering it to the Lord; when one gets the results, one accepts it as *prasada*. The mind is now more calm, more centred, more capable, more understanding of what the truth is. These two attitudes change one's entire perspective on life and ensure growth. Along with this outlook if one studies and exposes oneself to this knowledge, I will be surprised if, over a period of time, a person does not gain some rootedness in this knowledge.

Suppose there are two people who put in the same amount of effort, but both of them get different results. How would you explain that?

That's where the law of karma comes in...My own past karma may be against it, my own past action may be against it; this is what we call luck, fate etc...That's why in Hinduism, we add one more element to effort, we say a prayer so that the prayer will contribute to your present karma and enhance its result. It still may not be enough to overcome the past or to overcome the present challenges, and that is when growth takes place because one is willing to accept it as *prasada*. So whether you succeed or fail, you still grow....*If I succeed or fail, I accept it as prasada, I'm grateful to the lord, I try to see why I failed, my mind is still calm and peaceful, I grow, I have become bigger than the desire. It doesn't mean that if I have failed once, I can't try again; I can try as many times as I wish...Or you may decide it's not worth the trouble, it's not meant to be fulfilled, and you may let it go.* The point is that your attitude of responsibility, proactive-ness, and acceptance has made your actions much more effective and your *prasada buddhi* has helped you grow bigger than the desire...You have grown and that is the most important thing.

In the next post we will see two definitions of this yoga which will complete this picture of karma yoga.

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