

The Bhagavad Gita Saram

The Essence of the Gita

SWAMI SHANTANANDA PURI

During the year 2006, around the time of Maha Siva Ratri, Swami Shantananda Puri was staying in Gujarat at an ashram on the banks of the sacred Narmada River. After heartfelt requests from Swami Sadasivananda and other devotees, Swamiji gave a series of lectures on the 42 verses from the Bhagavad Gita chosen by Sri Ramana Maharshi. Swami Shantananda spoke for over 60 hours on the 42 verses. His talks were recorded and transcribed.

The following is an excerpt from that voluminous work, and is a commentary on verse twenty eight of Sri Ramana Maharshi's Bhagavad Gita Saram, or The Essence of the Gita.

Yato yato niscarati manascancalam asthiram
Tastastato niyamyaitad atmanyeva vasam nayet

Whenever the unsteady mind, moving here and there, wanders off;
He should subdue and hold it back – direct it to the Self's control;
You should be established always in the *atman*.

Bhagavad Gita 6:26

Yesterday we discussed the 25th verse of chapter six. The 26th verse points out the importance of *nirodha* – stopping the movement of the mind, which goes in various directions. So the

MOUNTAIN PATH

purpose of meditation is to make the mind firm and static at one place. Thus controlling it you will be established always in the *atman*.

This verse is in Chapter Six ('The Yoga of Meditation'), which encompasses Sri Krishna's directions on *sadhana* (practice). Bhagavan's inclusion of this verse, along with two others from this chapter, reflects how important *sadhana* is for those who seek to subject the mind to the 'Self's control'. Bhagavan Ramana repeatedly turned the enquirer to *sadhana* as an essential aspect of ridding the mind of unsteadiness (*calam*). This is best demonstrated by Bhagavan's declaration: "The obstacles that hinder realization are habits of mind (*vasanas*), and the aids to realization are the teachings of the scriptures and of realized souls."¹

So in this verse the Lord is teaching us how to catch and steady the mind. *Manaha*, the mind – what sort of a mind? *Calam* – always moving or wavering and never staying with one object – it goes on. I call it the spaghetti mind because you start with one thing and it moves to many – connected thinking. It is *asthiram* – it is not firm. That mind *yataha yataha niscarati* – wherever it moves – *tata tata* – from those places that it has moved to – *niyamyaitad* – control it and bring it back. Then *atmanyevam vasam nayet* – you should make your mind subordinate to your *atman*, and thus bring it under control. At the moment you are under the control of your mind. By *not cooperating* with your mind you can bring it under your control.

This *sloka* deals with the *atman* and is one hundred percent philosophy and has nothing to do with *bhakti*. There are many paths to the Lord but never confuse one with the other. There is nothing similar in them except at the end. So do not reconcile what you saw in one path, for you cannot compare it with the other. So you have to hear it and take it as it is. There is nothing that is 'simple' or 'complicated', it all depends on your readiness and conditioning – *yogyata, adhikara, liyakat* – your fitness to understand it. Your fitness depends not on the method but on yourself – the individual.

So here we should know about the mind – its nature – because unless you know about the mind you cannot catch it. Here the Lord has used the word *carati*, i.e., wherever the mind goes and also used

¹ Venkataramiah, M. (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§13.

the word *calam* – moving. There are two types of movement, for instance, the earth is revolving around its own axis and is also moving around the sun. Likewise the mind has got two types of *calatvam* – movement. One is that it moves out – *chara* – and the other is that although it is not moving out it is going on thinking – *cala*.

Just as when a boy was asked by a man, ‘Son, where does this road go?’ the boy replied, “Sir, the road goes nowhere, it is only the buses that the passengers take that go.” Similarly the mind does not go anywhere. It is where it is. If we understand these things we can easily understand and analyze our mind. So then how do we visualise pictures of Lord Krishna or say, my late husband? The mind has not gone anywhere nor have any objects come and occupied our mind. So the thoughts that come to your mind are events that have happened sometime back, called memory – *vasanas* or some conditionings of the past. It is their reflections that are appearing as images. You think you are seeing this when you have shut your eyes. Ideally when you shut your eyes it should be dark but instead you see these images.

So, there is some light and this light is the knowledge – the awareness. It is in this light that the pictures are coming. Just as a movie is not real but is just light being projected on the screen and we emote to the movie, thinking that the characters are real. So the light is already there and the light is necessary for the picture to exist but the picture is not necessary for the light to exist. The pictures come and go, but the light remains.

There is nothing known as mind or thoughts because thoughts are just memories which are parading there, just like movie pictures on the screen. What remains is knowledge-consciousness and on this cinema screen due to the *vasanas* the past pictures come. They can do nothing to you. So, know that there is nothing else except *jnana*, the knowledge which is in the form of light-awareness or consciousness. There is no ‘I’ apart from this knowledge. That which makes me sentient and a human being is the knowledge which makes me aware that I AM.

This is the nature of the mind and there is nothing called the mind just as there is nothing ‘real’ called a film or a picture. There is just a screen and some light, which creates shadows. The shadows which move are unreal. The light alone is real and is what truly exists. This is the mind. And when once you know that what do you do? When

MOUNTAIN PATH

you know that you are the knowledge through which all the past imaginations are passing, you do not concern yourself with them. Is the light afraid of the terrifying scenes which come on the cinema screen or is it laughing when there is humour on the screen? The light is not affected at all because these scenes never existed and they cannot stain you by giving you sorrow or happiness.

When you know this, this alone is the method and you are at peace. So *atmanyeva vasam nayet* means that you remain as Knowledge, knowing that nothing can stick to you or harm you or give you joy. This light or Knowledge you call the Self. There is nobody called a seer it is the Knowledge which sees and is the seer. So he is the 'I', he is the Self and is the one doing the entire thing.

Yato yato niscarati manascancalam asthiram – just as nobody would go to a movie that showed an image of Shantananda for three hours, the mind does not like to remain still – it is *cala*. Why is it *cancalam*? Because of *raga-dwesa*, a thought came, you got attached, then you remembered your enemy – these are your likes and dislikes – so there is movement. What is the mind *asthiram*? It arises because of the *vasanas* which are the smell of what happened a long time back! *Yato yato niscarati* – this is only an imaginary way of saying that the mind goes, but in actuality it does not 'go' anywhere. It is when you know this that half the battle is won. *Tatastato niyamyā* – It is from there that you control it. How? To be detached is the method of controlling the mind. Then *atmanyeva vasam nayet* – how to take it to *atmanyeva vasam nayet*? Remember constantly that you are the light which cannot be stained. Remain as the *atman*, unperturbed and unagitated.

This is one of the methods of approaching Truth through *jnana*, and it may not be possible for all to get established in it. It won't do to just repeat 'I am the knowledge' or 'I am the light', because you will still be afraid. Here they have not brought in the Lord. So how does one reach the same state through the other method? You go on thinking of the Lord, either Shiva, Krishna or the Mother and pray 'I am unable to give up my desires and win the battle over my senses' and plead to Them for help. In doing so your mind will automatically come away from the desires and it will begin to concentrate on the Lord the more you pray or do japa with agony and sorrow – see *Vishada*

THE BHAGAVAD GITA SARAM

Yoga, which is the first chapter in the Gita. Like Arjuna, when you bemoan to the Lord then the instructions come from the Lord. This has happened throughout history, whenever you lament or repeat the Lord's Name either because of your sorrowful experiences or your ignorance. If you weep before the Lord, that becomes a method and you get proper instructions from Him.

Q: What if you want to weep to God and cannot weep because your heart is dry?

A: If you cannot weep, just like in the cinemas or movies they use glycerine to induce tears, do that and one day the weeping will come. Just as a lie repeated a thousand times becomes a truth – that is hypnotism. So imagine, because everything is an imagination, including your becoming a *jiva*. Even when your heart is dry you can pray 'Lord my heart is so dry, please make me weep.' But this is not necessary because we should not dilute our prayers.

Q: Are you saying, then, that *sraddha* (faith) is an imagination?

A: Yes, when your body and mind are imaginations, so is *sraddha*. They are all cosmic imaginations.

Question: So are we to finally conclude that this is all some sort of dream?

Swamiji answered steadfastly: No! You are to conclude that all this is a damned nightmare. Therefore run like hell for the exit doors!

Question: What are the exit doors?

Swamiji: God, *guru*, *satsang*, *vichara* and *abhyasa* (repeated and protracted spiritual practice)!¹ ▲

¹ "In the *Bhagavad Gita* it is said that it is the nature of the mind to wander. One must bring one's thoughts to bear on God. By long practice the mind is controlled and made steady." Venkataramiah, M. (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§91.