

Baghawad Gita, Class 174:

Chapter 13, Verses 17 to 20

Note: In this chapter the numbering of shlokas can be different depending upon Gita book you are reading. I am using Swamiji's numbering.

Shloka # 17:

And the Knowable, though undivided, appears to be existing as divided in all beings, and It is the sustainer of all beings as also the devourer and originator.

In this 13th chapter, from shloka No.13 onwards, Sri Krishna has come to the topic of Gneyam, which is the fourth topic of the six topics that Arjuna wanted to know and Sri Krishna made it clear that this word Gneyam is nothing but Param Brahma of the Upanishad. He then started description of the Param Brahma as given in the Upanishads and as I said, this is the subtlest topic of the Upanishads, and the subtlest topic of the Bhagavat Gita as well. In fact, this is the main topic and the description of one who is inconceivable is: Param Brahma is nirgunam, it is free from all attributes and therefore available for any kind of sensory perception and **while it is Nirgunam, it is all pervading; it exists everywhere; in fact, in the form of the very existence itself. Nirgunam Brahma is the very existence principle, which is everywhere, and not only that, it is only one;** it is not plural; the objects in the creation are many; but the all-pervading, attribute-less existence is Ekam.

Even though this Existence seems like it is divided, it is really not so. As I gave the example, the light pervading the hall or pervading the fingers, cannot be divided; it is all

over; but you see the light only on the fingers; in between the fingers, you do not see the light and therefore it creates a misconception that one light is on this finger, second light is on this finger, the third is on this; thus there are five fingers and it appears, as though there are five lights; and in between it appears as though there is no light. But the fact is that it is only a seemingly divided light, reality is that the light is continuously there, even in between the fingers. In a similar manner, existence is seemingly divided but it is really one indivisible Brahma. Thus Nirgunam, Sarvagatham, Ekam, Akhandam, Sadrupam, all these descriptions Sri Krishna gives.

It is almost impossible to conceive of such an Existence, which is why later Sri Krishna will point out that you have to train your mind to understand Brahman and one of the training suggested in the Shashtra's is meditating upon space. Here you are trying to understand or conceive the akasha tatvam. We use the word akasha loosely. When I say aksasha here, it is something I do not see, I do not touch, I do not smell, I do not taste, and even though it is not a perceptible yet I am able to talk about akasha.

When

I use the word empty space; what does it mean?

We

probably have never thought of the meaning of the word space. And if you think of space, you will know, it is something, which is not perceptible or tangible and which is all pervading, which is only one:

How

many spaces are there? There is only one indivisible space and it looks as though space means emptiness. But remember, science has proved space is not emptiness

or void, but it is a positive substance. So by meditating upon akasha, as described in Taittiriya Upanishad, one sees Brahman. This meditation is known as akasha dhyanam.

Akasha dhyanam is

prescribed to make the intellect extremely subtle to understand Brahman, which

is subtler than even akasha. Similarly, the Brahman description creates

an impression, that it is a void or nothing. Sri Krishna says it is a positive entity.

(Can you see; No. Can you hear; No. Can you touch; No. Can you taste; No. Where is it? It is everywhere). So, then it appears that it is void. It is positive bhava padarthaha and therefore we have to make the mind subtler and subtler; ultimately grasping this is our aim. Let it take months, let it take years; let it take janmas; ultimately, knowing this Brahman, Gneyam or unconceivable Brahman is our ultimate goal. And, therefore, Sri Krishna struggles to describe and you should also struggle to understand. I will also struggle to explain.

Shloka # 13.18:

That is the Light even of the lights; It is

spoken of as beyond darkness. It is Knowledge, the Knowable, and the Known. It

exists specially [A variant reading is dhisthitam.-Tr.] in the hearts of all.

So here Sri Krishna says that Satrupam Brahma; that Brahman which is in the form of pure Existence; formless Existence; is the same as the Atma, which is the formless Consciousness principle. Sadrupam Brahma is the same as chidrupah Atma. And when I use the word consciousness you have to remember all

those points: **Consciousness is not a product, part or property of the body; Consciousness is an independent entity which pervades and enlivens the body; Consciousness is not limited by the boundaries of the body; Consciousness survives even after the fall of the body; the surviving Consciousness is not accessible to us, not because it is absent, but because there is no medium for its manifestation. And that consciousness is Existence- Brahma and Sri Krishna describe the Consciousness by a special word used in the Upanishad, jyotisham mapi jyoti.** Sri Krishna borrows Upanishadic expressions throughout, because whenever the topic of Brahman comes, one has to turn to the Upanishads. Everybody has to come to that.

What is the meaning of this word? Jyotisham
jyoti means the light of all lights, just like in
Kenopanishad,
the eye of the eye, the ear of the ear, the mind of the mind,
similarly, light
of all lights.

In Vedanta, the word light is used in a technical sense, I have told you before, I would like to remind you in Vedanta light means that in whose presence things are known or recognized. Light is defined as that in whose presence things are known and from that standpoint, all the luminaries in the sky such as Surya, Chandra, Nakshatrani and vidhyut are called light. It means the sun, moon, the stars, as well as the lightning; all of them are called lights because in their presence we are able to know things. During the daytime, because of the sunlight alone, I am able to know what is in front of me. In the night, I recognize things with moonlight. And if it is amavasya night, then I have to use a fire to know things. All of them are called lights because in their presence things are known. If the electric current goes off now, you are all there, but I cannot know you.

Now

extending this principle, the Upanishad says that every sense

organ can also
be called light. **Every sense organ also
can be called light; because in the presence of sense organs,
things are known;
in their absence, things are not known. A blind man cannot see
anything even if
the sun, moon, and electricity are present.**

Similarly,
the ears are called light, because in the presence of the
ears, the sound is known,
in its absence, sound is not known. Similarly, nose is a
light; in the presence
of the nose, smells are known; in their absence they are not
known. Thus every pramanam,
every instrument of knowledge is a light. **Even
logic is a form of light, because through reasoning, I come to
know things.**

And
then the Upanishad says there
is a special chapter, section in Brihadaranya dealing with
this subject matter. It
is called svayam jyoti
brahmanam. The Upanishad says even
words can be called light.

And suppose, there is a visitor in your house, and when he
enters the power goes off; And he does not know where is what,
in your house, and you are worried and then you give a verbal
light; turn to the right, turn to the left, etc. and now he
comes to know of the things in front of him; he is not using
the flash light, nor electric light, not any other light, he
cannot even use his eyes because of the pitch darkness, and he
can be guided by vacha agnina. **Brihadaranya says: words are
lights.**

And

coming from this direction, the Upanishad says the **ultimate light is nothing but the consciousness principle, because in the presence of consciousness alone, you can know everything and if consciousness is not there, an inert thing cannot know anything. And therefore the ultimate light in whose presence you can know everything, in whose absence you do not know anything, that light is consciousness.**

And if that light of consciousness is not there, then even the sun, the moon, etc. become useless, even if the sense organs are there, they are useless, even a wonderful brain cannot answer. So therefore the greatest brain, the sense organs, the sun, moon, all the lights become meaningful, only when the consciousness principle is there, and therefore consciousness is called the light of all lights, the light in whose presence alone, the other lights become meaningful. And therefore Sri Krishna says jyotishamapi tajjyoti. It is the light of all lights.

Furthermore Sri Krishna says, param tamasah uchyate. And this light is a unique light, the light of consciousness, with which you can illumine or know even darkness. This is a very interesting thing you have to know. If you take local light, that light can illumine everything. So the light can illumine the wall, all your bodies, your head, this mike, the book, the letter; the light can illumine everything, but that light cannot illumine one thing; it cannot illumine darkness. If you take a flashlight to see

darkness, what happens?

Citing a story, Swami Chinmayananda says: some people went and told Surya Bhagavan it seems that there is a very beautiful girl,

if you want to marry; and that girl's name is Miss Darkness or Miss Night,

because in Sanskrit night is feminine gender and known as nisha;

ratri, etc. We even have a prayer in Veda,

called ratri suktham. A suktham is a prayer dedicated to ratri.

So, if you want, you can marry her. Surya Bhagavan

wanted to go and see Miss Night. And somebody said, she is on the other part of

the earth. And therefore Sun started travelling to reach the other side; Surya

Bhagavan, started going round; and he is still continuing this journey. He

wants to meet Miss Night. That is how Sunrise and sunset started. So sunlight

however powerful it might be, it cannot illumine darkness; whereas the

consciousness is the only unique light, which is capable of illumining, making

you know, what is darkness.

In the night, in darkness, how do you see? You are not seeing the

darkness through your eyes. Eyes can never see darkness because eyes stop

functioning when there is no light; if so, how can that I ever illumine

darkness, but still we are able to know and experience darkness. So how do we

gain the knowledge of darkness? We gain this knowledge by a unique method. The

consciousness alone illumines darkness when all other lights are opposed to darkness, because when light is there, darkness will go away,

Consciousness is the unique light, which can co-exist with darkness.

And therefore it is said to be tamasa paramuchyate. The meaning of word Param is unopposed to. Unopposed to and therefore only absolute, is the light of consciousness.

This sad chit Brahman alone is in the form of everything. Sarvam Brahma mayam jagat. This formless existence, consciousness alone appears as this formed universe. **A formless existence consciousness alone appears as the formed universe.** You may ask, how is it possible? Again you have to go back to science alone. Just as formless energy gets converted into formed and tangible

matter. Energy is intangible and when energy is converted into matter, it becomes

tangible. And when matter is converted to energy, again it becomes intangible. **So if intangible energy can appear as tangible matter, Vedanta says, the non-tangible Brahman is the ultimate cause of**

this universe and that alone appears as the tangible universe.

It is jagat

karanam. It is in the form of everything. And therefore Gyanam, Gneyam, that

Brahman alone is Gyanam, Gyanam means the means of knowledge. So that through

which we come to know that means of knowledge is also Brahman and Gneyam, the

object that you know is also Brahman. **Thus,**

the subject is Brahman, the object is Brahman; the instrument is Brahman, sarvam Brahma mayam jagat.

So Gyannam, Gneyam, and Gyana gamyam. And through this

knowledge, BrahmaGyanam, the destination that you want to reach that destination is also Brahman. **The knower is Brahman, the knowing instrument is Brahman, the known object is Brahman, and the destination you want to reach ultimately is also Brahman.** In short, sarvam Brahma mayam jagat.

And

where should you discover that Brahman. Even though Brahman is everywhere, you

have to discover that Brahman only in a particular place. Like the electricity

is there all over the cable. It runs, it passes through, but if you want to

find out whether there is power or not, you only need to look at the fan,

electricity is not in the fan alone; is all over the cable, but to recognize it,

you look at the fan; or you look at the light; and suppose there is neither the

fan nor the light, where there is a plug point, with a tester it can be tested.

And once I test electricity in the plug point, I know that electricity is not

only there, but it is also throughout.

In

the same way, sat chit atma

Brahman is everywhere but if you want to recognize it, you require a plug

point; that plug point (power outlet) is

each one of us. **Even though**

consciousness is everywhere, you recognize it only in your mind. I recognize consciousness in my mind, you

recognize consciousness in your mind; but, I cannot recognize consciousness in

you, That you are conscious people, I

cannot see, because when I see a body and a dead body, I do

not see the consciousness
in you. I see only the material body I do not see
Consciousness. When you nod
your head, I assume that you are conscious and that you
are aware of the words, and somehow you are managing to
understand and
you are nodding the head out of understanding and not of
dozing, because in
dozing also, the head shakes. Anyhow, I have to be optimistic;
that you are not
sleeping.

Remember

I have no way of recognizing the consciousness in your body;
That is why,
scientists are struggling to recognize the consciousness in
the brains of
people; how consciousness is happening, any amount of brain
research, they are
not able to understand, because it is not visible. Therefore,
**how do I understand consciousness? Only in
one way; I am a conscious being; for that I hope you won't ask
for proof.**

That I am conscious being is self-evident fact. And I am
consciousness in my own mind, in what way? Being conscious of
all the thoughts that arise in my mind, I am Consciousness; of
the words that are coming from outside, which form thoughts in
my mind, I am conscious; whether the words I understand or
not, I am conscious.

Because

you say that you understand; you also say that I do not
understand. And when
all these thoughts are resolved, and the mind goes blank, that
blankness of
mind also I am conscious of. What is the proof; I am using the
word blank.

What I have not experienced, I cannot talk about. The very fact that I am talking about mental blankness or mental blackout, I am able to talk, because I am Conscious of it.

And that consciousness is the vritti bhava abhava sakshi; the witness of the presence or the absence of thought in the mind is the consciousness and it is this Consciousness, which is in everyone's mind and it, is this consciousness, which is in between the living beings also. Thus we have to go a long way to appreciate it.

Therefore

Sri Krishna says sarvasya hrđi

visthitam. visthitam means

available, literally it means present, present being accessible, available, and

recognizable. And Arjuna this is Gneyam Brahma. So with this, the fourth topic

is also over.

And incidentally one point you should remember is: the topic of kshetraGneyaha which we discussed in the beginning and the topic of Gneyam which we have just completed, both of them, are ultimately one and the same principle alone. KshetraGneyaha is Gneyam Brahma, jivatma the kshetraGneyaha, is the paramatma the Gneyam Brahma. Then the question is if both of them are one and the same; why do you use two words and confuse us. Normally itself it is difficult to understand; when why you confuse by using different expressions also. We say that this is not new to Vedanta and even in our daily transactions we have got different words to indicate one and the same substance. In fact, in Vishnu sahasranama, thousand names are used to reveal one Vishnu. And if you look at a home, in it, the same member of family is addressed by different names by different people, one calls her mother, another calls sister, another calls wife, another calls granny; so one and same substance can have different names, when the point of reference is different.

From the reference point, from the standpoint of the child, the man is father. From the standpoint of the wife, the very same man is the husband. Not that the stomach is father, the head is the husband. The whole person is the father and the whole person is the husband, the whole person is the brother; so when the angle differs, the nama differs; suppose one person says this is Adyar. Another person says that this is Tamil Nadu. Another person says that this is India. Another person says this is Asia. Who is correct? All are correct. When you are talking from the standpoint of local area of Tamilnadu, you call it Adayar. In the context of various States of India, you call it Tamil Nadu. When you are talking from the standpoint of different countries, you call it India. When the topic is in the context of continents, you call it Asia. When the topic is planet, you call it Earth. When the topic is solar system, this is the solar system. When it is galaxy, our galaxy is what, milky way. Same way, even though consciousness is all pervading, when you look at consciousness from the standpoint of **the individual, consciousness obtaining in the body, the individual, we call it kshetragnya**, the jivatma, from microcosmic standpoint, **whereas the very same consciousness as the all pervading principle, macrocosm, we call it paramatma or Gneyam Brahma**. Thus, kshetragnyam is Gneyam Brahma alone.

Shloka # 13.19:

Thus has been spoken of in brief the field as also Knowledge and the Knowable. By understanding this My devotee becomes alified for My state.

In

this shloka Sri Krishna is consolidating all his teachings of the six topics.

He says, I have discussed four topics and two more are remaining. This kind of

summary is a method of teaching known as Simhavalokanam Nyaya.

The Lion does like that, it seems. Just goes forward and makes sure that there is no challenger at all; I am the king of the forest; and everybody has to accept me; and having gone forward it looks around as having made sure that the portion covered, I have proved myself; then it goes forward. Similarly, the teacher has to give an opportunity to the student to think what has been covered and then go forward. And therefore Sri Krishna here says; O Arjuna, I have discussed four topics; They are:

(1)

Kshetram and (2) you have to supply Kshetragnya, which is not stated in shloka, but which goes together; and (3) Gyanam, is the third topic and (4) Gneyam, the fourth topic. Choktam means, I have taught you briefly.

If

you want to know more details go to the Upanishads that deal with this subject matter alone. And therefore, this is just a preview of the topic.

Thus,

Sri Krishna says, every seeker who is my devotee will certainly know this and one of the conditions is he should be my bhaktha from which Sri Krishna indicates Bhakthi is an important qualification for gaining self -knowledge. So a Vedantic student should be necessarily a devotee. Vedanta teacher should also be a religious person and that is why in all our scriptures, philosophy, religion and theology are mixed together. Whereas in other systems; especially western, philosophy and theology are separated. But

in Vedanta, we insist, if you want the philosophical knowledge, you should start with devotion. The discussion may be of pure formless truth; even though the discussion is the ultimate truth, we keep the photo of the Lord and start with the Sahanabhavathu prayer and also end with prayer, because without devotion, Gyanam does not take place. There is no secular Vedanta. Even if somehow knowledge takes place for a non-devotee, it remains an academic knowledge; he will just be an expert in the Upanishads, but there will be no transformation in his personality.

And, therefore, Sri Krishna insists that you should be necessarily a devotee. In fact, at the end of the 18th chapter, Sri **Krishna even gives a warning to every Gita teacher not to teach Gita to a person who is a non-religious person.**

Therefore Sri Krishna here says: mat bhaktha, means he must be My devotee, which further means Ishwara bhaktha. Such a devotee will necessarily gain the knowledge even if he feels that it is too subtle for understanding, as his devotion will refine his intellect. The second time he listens; he will understand better.

That is why Vedanta has to be listened to, again and again. First time listening certain aspects you will understand; next time some other will be cleared, and so on.

A special Brahma sutra is dedicated for this subject. So, keep on listening.

What is the benefit he will get? Sri Krishna says, he will

also attain the same nature as mine. Just as I am ever free, he will also discover the eternal freedom, which is his very nature. So mat bhava means Brahma bhava, Ishvara bhava, which means poornatvam. Previously he considered himself to be a finite individual, now he does not have that problem. He knows I am the all-pervading Brahman. There is no sense of isolation. There is no sense of rejection. These emotions increase as we grow older and older because when we are younger, we can forget this samsara by diversion. Go to beach, or go to a movie, or move with friends you can be busy and forget samsara, but as we grow old, we have no escapist route, lying on the bed without able to get up; therefore no fear of that. How wonderful it is. I never feel lonely. I never feel rejected, because all are existing in Me. This purnatvam is the benefit of this knowledge. Therefore, Sri Krishna says, he will become qualified.

Shloka 13.20:

Know both Nature and also the individual soul

[Prakrti is sometimes translated as matter, and purusa as spirit.-Tr.] to be

verily without beginning; know the modifications as also the alities(reality)

as born of Nature.

In 19th verse, Sri Krishna has consolidated and concluded four topics. He now wants to discuss the last two topics of purusha and prakrti. And these two, he wants to discuss them together, because they are closely interconnected principles, just as Kshetram and Kshetragnya are closely interconnected. Shlokas 20-24 deal with purusha and prakrti. And this purusha and prakrti are very much similar to Kshetram and Kshetragnya. We saw Kshetram represents the matter principle and kshetragnya represents the consciousness principle. Vedanta takes consciousness as an independent principle, because as we have seen, Vedanta does not look upon consciousness as part or product of matter; therefore it is enumerated as a separate

entity. Remember the example, even though I see one fan functioning, in my understanding there are two principles, one is the visible fan and the invisible electricity, which is a separate principle, which continues even when the fan stops. Similarly, when I look at you, it is not one principle but a mixture of two; the visible-matter-principle and the invisible consciousness principle; And in the seventh chapter, Sri Krishna used the word para prakrti and apara prakrti, para prakrti being consciousness and apara prakrti being matter. Now the same ideas are discussed again in the name of purusha and prakrti; purusha means chaitanya tatvam, the independent-consciousness-principle and prakrti means the matter-principle.

The
fundamental basic invisible matter can even be compared to energy. Energy is the
invisible version of matter. And about these two topics Sri Krishna is going to
talk details of which we will see in the next class.

Take away:

Brahman:

(Can you see; No. Can you hear; No. Can you touch; No. Can you taste; No. Where is it? It is everywhere).

So,
then it appears that it is void. It is positive bhava padarthaha and therefore
we have to make the mind subtler and subtler; ultimately grasping this is our
aim. Let it take months, let it take years; let it take janmas; ultimately, knowing
this Brahman, Gneyam or
unconceivable Brahman is our ultimate goal.

Nirgunam Brahma is the

very existence principle, which is everywhere, and not only that, it is the only one.

Akasha

dhyanam is prescribed to make the intellect extremely subtle to understand

Brahman, which is subtler than even akasha.

Ultimate

light is nothing but the consciousness principle, because in the presence of

consciousness alone, you can know everything and if consciousness is not there,

an inert thing cannot know anything. And therefore the ultimate light in whose

presence you can know everything, in whose absence you do not know anything,

that light is consciousness.

And,

that consciousness is the vritti bhava abhava sakshi; the witness of the presence or the absence

of thought in the mind.

So

if intangible energy can appear as tangible matter, Vedanta says, the

non-tangible Brahman is the ultimate cause of this universe and that alone

appears as the tangible universe.

Even

though consciousness is everywhere, you recognize it only in your mind.

Sri

Krishna even gives a warning to every Gita teacher not to teach Gita to a person who

is a non-religious person or one without bhakti.

With Best Wishes,

Ram Ramaswamy