

Baghawad Gita Class 189: Chapgter 15, Verse 1

Greetings,

Continuing his teachings Swamiji said, having completed the 14th chapter, now we will enter into the 15th chapter, one of the smallest chapters in the Gita, with only 20 verses; but one of the most important and popular chapters of the Gita, and it is often used as a prayer verse before taking food; therefore generally, when this chapter is chanted, people remember the food, rather than the Lord, but it is a very important Vedantic chapter.

And

since it occurs in the last shatkam of the Gita, all the three important topics of the last shatkam are dealt with in this chapter. The three important themes of the last shatkam, if you remember, are:

Gyana

yoga as the sadhana,

Jivatma paramatma aikyam as the subject matter; the importance of values or sadgunaha as a preparatory step, for the aikya Gyanam.

All these three topics have been well dealt with in this chapter. And this chapter is titled Purushottama yoga and the word Purushottama here means Nirguna chaitanyam. It does not refer to saguna Ishvara, nor to Vishnu or Sri Krishna or Shiva. It refers to Nirgunam Brahma or Nirguna chaitanyam and this meaning Lord himself gives at the end of the chapter, so there can be no controversy, because Sri Krishna himself says Purushottama means attributeless consciousness and yoga here

it means the subject matter. So Purushottama yoga means the topic of Nirgunam brahma, which is the main teaching of this chapter.

With

this background we will enter into the Chapter proper.

Shloka 15.1:

The Blessed Lord said They say that the peepul Tree, which has its roots upward and the branches downward, and of which the Vedas are the leaves, is imperishable. He who realizes it is knower of the Vedas.

As

the very title of this chapter shows, the topic is Nirguna Brahma and by

the study of this chapter, one will get Nirguna Brahma Gyanam. And naturally a person

will have a question, why should I get nirguna Brahma Gyanam at all, because a person would not go after any knowledge, unless he expects some benefit out of it.

The

subject we study in the college is from the standpoint of employment, so the question

will come, why should I get Brahma Gyanam? We should remember Sri Krishna is

giving here Brahma Gyanam as a means of moksha or freedom.

Then

the next question will come, what do you mean by moksha? We say Moksha is samsara nivrtti,

freedom from samsara.

And naturally, the next question will be what is samsara? Samsara is the

varieties of problems that a human being continuously faces,
and to get out of
the problem he continuously runs about.

So samsara means continuously facing problems and running
about to get rid of the problem. And this struggle is called
samsara. And freedom from that samsara is called Moksha and;
Brahma Gyanam is the remedy for moksha. And according to the
Vedanta, Brahma Gyanam is not one of the remedies, it is the
only remedy available. And therefore, Brahma Gyanam is for
moksha; moksha is freedom from samsara.

Now

the thing is: I would like to get rid of samsara, if only I
think samsara is a problem.

If a person says I am very comfortable as a samsari he would
not like moksha and for him Brahma Gyanam is irrelevant.

So

seeing the problem of samsara is the pre-requisite for the
desire of moksha, and moksha iccha is a
prerequisite to develop interest in Brahma Gyanam. And
interest in Brahma Gyanam
is a pre-requisite for continuously attending the class. So
therefore Sri Krishna
wants the students to continue and that is possible only if
they have diagnosed
the problem.

Without

diagnosing the disease, I will never attempt an appropriate
treatment. And everybody
has got this basic disease called bhava roga.

We

have to scan our life to discover the disease called bhava
roga only then we
can go through the treatment of Gyana Yoga. Therefore, Sri

Krishna begins the 15th chapter with a description of samsara. Samsara means the whole life of change; the whole life of birth and death; the old age, disease and death; association and disassociation.

He talks about this in the first 2-1/2 verses.

And in the 15th chapter, we do not find Arjuna asking any question. Therefore Sri Krishna himself volunteers to continue the teaching.

Arjuna, (whether you like it or not), I love teaching, and Therefore, I would like to clarify further. And to give a description of this samsara, the ever-changing universe, Sri Krishna compares samsara to a huge Peepal tree (Arasha maram in tamil).

And this comparative study is not Sri Krishna's own original version but this has been already done in Kathopanishad.

In Kathopanishad in mantra 2,3.1, the universe; the changing universe and life; is compared to a huge ashvatha tree. And Shankaracharya gives a very elaborate commentary on this, both in his Kathopanishad Bhashyam as well as the Gita Bhashyam. In his commentary, he studies the common features between the samsara and the ashvatha tree. Common features are called Sadhramyam.

The common features are:

1. Mahatvam: both are very huge.
2. Adhyanta rahithatvam. You cannot trace the beginning of both.

People ask when did the universe start? Why am I born? I came because of karma. Where did karma come from; from previous janma. Where did previous janma come from? Why did God create me? The answer is there is no beginning for creation; Universe ever was, is and will be.

Same questions come for the tree as well. How did tree come? It came due to the seed. How did seed come? So one soon gets caught in this never ending paradox of which came first, the seed or the tree? Thus, Samsara is a cyclical phenomenon

3.
Anivarchaniyatvam: Inexplicability; Logically cannot be categorized; In what sense? You can never say a thing is a cause or an effect. You can never pinpoint a thing is a cause or an effect, because from one standpoint a thing is a cause, the very same is an effect, from another standpoint. So today is cause or an effect? From yesterday's standpoint today is an effect. From tomorrow's standpoint it is a cause.

Fate and free will also fall into this argument.

If you look at a particular point and see as an effect of the cause, you will call it fate. And if the very same point is seen as the cause of the future, you will call it Freewill. You can never pinpoint whether a thing

is absolutely
freewill or absolutely fate; absolutely cause or absolutely
effect; or
absolutely parent or absolutely children; nobody is an
absolute parent. Nothing
is logically classifiable. The more you probe the more
mysterious it becomes.

4.

Moolavatvam: A tree has a root and it is not visible. But you
are aware that
there is a root. Similarly, the universe also has a root
called Ishwara. He is
also not visible like the root. I know that without a root a
tree cannot stand;
similarly, the universe cannot stand without a god.

5.

Shakavatvam:

A huge tree has many branches, some at top, some in middle and
some at bottom. Similarly, Universe also has higher, middle
and lower Lokas. So the higher lokas and the higher bodies;
deva shariram, represents urdhva shakas, the upper branches;
manushya lokas comes under the middle branch and the athala,
vithala, suthala, rasatala mahatala, talatala, patala, all the
lower lokas will come under the lower branches. Thus, the
universe is a vast tree with the fourteen lokas as its
branches. So shakavatvam is the next common feature.

6.

Parnavatvam: Tree is so full of leaves that one cant even see
the trunk. Similarly, the
universal tree has got the leaves
in the form of karmani; or karma kanda of the vedas are
compared to the leaves of the
samsara tree. So
here you will require a slight explanation. Why do we

compare

karma kanda to the leaves

of the tree? The leaves are very important for the perpetuation and the growth

of the tree. In fact, leaves protect the tree and help the tree survive. And

you know the leaf alone has got chlorophyll; that is why it is green, and it

does photosynthesis and it cooks food and because of that alone, the tree

survives. And through osmotic pressure, it absorbs the water.

The

karma kanda of the vedas is called

chandasa because it protects the samsara tree like the leaves of the original

tree.

How

does the karma kanda protect,

perpetuate and help the growth of the tree? You must have inferred by now.

Karma kanda talks about varieties

of karmas and also tempts all the people to do those karmas by promising

many varieties of results. If you perform this karma, you will get children. If you perform that karma, you will get money. You do that karma and you will go to heaven. Full of advertisements.

And

naturally a person is attracted to karma kanda; in fact Gyana kanda is never appealing.

If I ask, how is mandukya upanishad? You will probably say it is very dry.

So

Gyana kanda is generally
not appealing,

Whereas, karma kanda is the most appealing thing, because he asks you to do varieties of karma to get varieties of results. And therefore this person will take to varieties of karmas and karmas will produce Karma phalam. And from karma phalam you get punya or papam. Punya papas, as they increase, will lead to punarapi jananam, punarapi maranam. Thus the samsara cycle of birth and death is perpetuated by karma kanda by tempting the people to do varieties of karma.

Punya karmas will
take you to higher lokas. Rajas karmas will take you to the middle loka or manushya
loka; Tamo karmas will take you to lower lokas.

While
Gyana kanda puts an end to
the samsara tree, karma kanda nourishes the
samsara tree. And
therefore they are like the leaves of a tree. Therefore
parnavatvam.

7.
Phalavatvam: Now trees bear fruits; some are sweet, some sour and some a
mixture of both. Samara tree also gives three types of phalam. It gives Sukham,
Dukham and Mishra phalam, mixture of both sukha and dukha

8. Ashrayavathavam: The tree helps the birds by providing them with a nest. So the trees serves as the nesting site for the birds, which alone would eat the fruit. The tree is not going to eat; only the birds which occupy the tree, they alone enjoy this sukha dukha phalam; Similarly in the vast universe, all the jivas are like the birds. Some jivas are on the higher branches, or like svarga loka with Deva shariram, some of them

are in the middle branch, meaning like in manushya loka with manushya shariram, some of them are in the lower branches, meaning adho loka with adho shariram and therefore the tree supports the birds. Similarly the samsara tree supports the jiva world. This same concept is referenced in Mundaka upanishadic mantra (III.1.1) as well.

9. Chalanavatvam: The huge tree moves because of the wind; especially when there is powerful cyclonic wind. Even though it is a huge tree, it moves up and down, here and there. In the same way, the whole samsara tree along with all the jivas are taken here and there by the wind of prarabdha karma. So we are all taken to various conditions, various places, various situation, lashed by Prarabhda's winds. A person wanted to be transferred to Madras but got transferred elsewhere. Such situations can affect life and is governed by the prarabdha karma wind and hence chalanatvam.

10.

Chedyathvam: Even

though the tree is very huge, by appropriate effort, this tree can be uprooted.

It is possible to put an end to this tree by using the appropriate axe.

Similarly, the special axe called Gyanam also can uproot the huge samsara

chakram. In fact the very word vrikshaha means

that which can be uprooted. It is derived from the root vrasch; Shankaracharya says the uprooting is not easy.

If

it is a small plant, we can effortlessly remove, but if

it

is ashvatha tree it is not that easy.

So,

all the above were common features between the tree and Samsara.

In

Shloka ashvattham

prahuhu means this entire samsara; the life of change is considered to be similar to ashvattha tree. Urdhvam also means superior or sacred as well as incomprehensible.

Urdhvamulam

means one, which has got a root. Urdhwam also means spatial aboveness. Thus Brahman is superior and incomprehensible. This Brahman is the moolam or root of the samsara tree.

Avyaya:

means eternal. The beginning and end cannot be traced. Thus we have the seed and tree paradox; similarly human life is a paradox; we can't say when first jiva was born.

Chandamsi yasya parnani in shloka

means:

So

the protecting sustaining leaves of the samsara tree are none other than the veda prescribed karmas.

And

karma kanda always makes

the people to remain in the field of rituals. There are many who love the

rituals but they never like Gita and Upanishads.

They are highly religious people; they love the ritualistic

portion, but never
come to Vedanta. Thus, they
successfully perpetuate the samsara.

It does not mean that karma kanda is our enemy to be thrown away. We say is, karma kanda must be used, up to a particular limit, and sooner or later, one should transcend the ritualistic portion and spend more time in philosophical portion.

Generally,
people tend to go to two extremes. One extreme is people never like religious
poojas or rituals. For them, they have no way of purifying the mind. **Pooja is the only method of purification.**

And the other extreme are people who stay with puja alone; that is also not correct. One should enter karma kanda, purify the mind and then come to Gyana kanda.

Yah tam veda in
shloka means, the one who understands this universal tree with its many
branches, leaves, fruits etc. the one who knows this universal tree and Shankaracharya adds; along
that knows that the root is Brahman. He says, He alone is a wise person, who
has understood the scriptures properly. Vedavit in shloka means the one who is a Gyani.

Take Away:

Swamiji
says that Puja (a part of Karma kanda) alone **is** the method of purification of the mind.

**With Best
Wishes,**

Ram Ramaswamy