

Discourses/Articles
by
Swami Krishnananda
The Divine Life Society
Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India

THE PRINCIPLES OF THE BHAGAVADGITA
(An interview with a group of Christians and Pune-Ashram Nuns)

Consciousness cannot be externalised because consciousness is indivisible. If you imagine that consciousness is divisible, you have also to imagine that there is a gap between the two parts thereof. Who is conscious of this gap? Consciousness alone is conscious of this gap between the two parts. That means, consciousness is present even in the gap in between. This is another way of saying that consciousness is universal.

Everyone in this world refers to 'himself' or 'herself'. This 'self hood' is applicable not only to organic, but inorganic bodies and objects also. If 'selfhood' is applicable to the whole world, it means the whole world is filled with selfhood alone, and since selfhood is inseparable from consciousness, it means that the whole world is filled with consciousness. But on account of ignorance, we imagine that objects are outside the self. This idea of object outside is itself a misconception. There is no object external to the self. What you call the object is self itself. Let us take the example of a dream in which a tiger chases a man. He runs in fear and finally climbs up a tree. The tree, the tiger, the chase, etc. are all a projection of his own mind and his dream-personality also is a process of his mind. So the one mind becomes every one of these in the dream. It is subjective as well as objective. This is what is happening in the waking condition also; and, even as the one single mind became all objects in the dream, the universal mind has become all these external objects around here even in waking life. They are nothing but the universal mind ultimately. You would not know that the tiger in the dream is unreal till you wake up. Even so, there is another waking up from the present waking consciousness. That higher awakening is called God-consciousness. In that condition, you will see that all the objects of the world are your own universal self. The efforts of man for material prosperity, and the like, are an indication of his deeper urge to reach up to the universal consciousness. From social consciousness, you go to individual consciousness and from the individual consciousness to the universal consciousness, and from there, again, to the Absolute. From social aspect you go to the mind and from the mind to the intellect and from there to the universal consciousness. This is the process of universal history as well as natural evolution. Thus the whole universe is struggling to attain the self-realisation of itself. Socially, it goes through the historical process, personally through the psychological process, and naturally through evolution. The society, the individual and nature are simultaneously moving towards the Absolute. As a matter of fact, the society, the individual and the world are not three different things; they are three aspects of a single universal whole; there is only one world having only one single purpose in life. When your activities are directed to this ultimate purpose, your activities become what is called Karma-Yoga.

The main gospel of the Bhagavadgita is Karma-Yoga, because it converts every activity into a meditation on the Absolute. The Bhagavadgita teaches that worldly

activity is itself a spiritual activity in the end, because any activity is finally inseparable from the movement of the Absolute, and, therefore, it is, in truth, spiritual activity. For the Yogi, there is no difference between worldly and spiritual activity. Everything is spiritual for him. The highest insight does not make any difference between the temporal and the spiritual, ultimately. Established religion does. So there is an apparent conflict between the sacred and the secular, the holy and the profane, the Church and the Government, each wanting to control the other. Even today, due to these misconceptions, religions are failing us. The religious teachers insist that God is above the world and blessedness is a promise of the hereafter. But God is not merely transcendent to the world; He is in the world. So everything in the world has to be considered spiritual in its ultimate essence. God is not only in the world, but is the world. He is both immanent and transcendent.

Arjuna was not yet fit for Yoga. So, Lord Krishna takes him step by step until he is qualified for Karma-Yoga. Notions have to be analysed. The senses have their own notions about things; one is, that things are outside and the other that the things are localised in time and space. That a thing can be at one place only and not at two is an inveterate notion that the senses have. They do not know that things are interconnected among themselves. If they did, they would not go for certain things only. They, thus, have a notion that things are physical, external as well as localised. But this is a misconception of the senses. In the ultimate analysis, we find that things are not diversified, but have a deeper underlying connection between them. Reality will always assert itself. It is difficult to define reality. Reality is not diversity, but coordination and unity. In the beginning, it appears that things are different, later that they are interconnected and later still, finally, that they are compounded of one and the same substance.

The Bhagavadgita has 18 chapters and they are grouped into 6 each. The first part of the first six chapters solves the problem of the conflict of the division within the individual. The second deals with the coordination of the individual with the universal, and the third the unity of the universe with the Absolute. The solutions of the conflict of the individual, the universal and the absolute are given in these various chapters, stage by stage. The subject is very vast and a bare outline alone is given. The entire gospel will take a long time to learn.

As long as the conflict between God and man is not solved, no other conflict can be solved. The root of the trouble is the separation of the individual from the Supreme Being. The aspiration for the coordination of the individual, the social and the universal is only an indication of the individual's need to reach the Absolute. We are trying to achieve external unity through institutions like the United Nations Organization, for instance. But broken pieces of glass cannot be put together by the use of even the best gum. You have to melt the pieces and recast them to make the glass whole once again, and this is what has to be done by these organizations. We do not, however, know the secret and hope to succeed merely by conferences, etc. The individuals have to be melted into the Absolute, and only then can there be real unity. The Bhagavadgita tells you how this can be achieved. In the beginning, you have a hasty aspiration for the Supreme, the Absolute. But this cannot materialise so easily as it requires a long period of training and discipline to mature into experience. It seems almost impossible. This is what is described in the first chapter of the Gita. You feel like doing something, but you cannot

really do it. The majority of the people in the world are in this condition only. They want truth, but cannot get it because the subconscious mind revolts against the higher aspirations.

In the second chapter, the Gita tells us that this fear can be conquered through a guide or a spiritual teacher. The spiritual path is very difficult to tread without a proper guide, and this proper guide cannot be had by study of books either, because you need the guidance of a person who has already walked the path. This chapter introduces us to the great Yoga which the Master of Yoga, Sri Krishna, imparts. Here the Master tells us that all our efforts should be based on knowledge. Action without knowledge will not succeed, for what succeeds is not the activity, but the knowledge that directs the activity. As a matter of fact, the whole gospel of the Gita is nothing but the blending of knowledge and activity. We have wrong notions about both these; we assume that knowledge means no activity, while activity is divorced from knowledge. Sri Krishna tells us that neither notion is correct. It is very difficult to understand what knowledge and activity are. Action is the outward expression of knowledge and knowledge is the inner reality of action. This may be said to be the central theme of the Gita. Action is rooted in knowledge. Then you gain the requisite inner trend to conduct yourself rightly in the outer world.

In Chapters II to VI, we are told how the individual personality can be disciplined in the process of blending knowledge and action. In the blend of knowledge and action, one can enter into the state of meditation. Chapter V explains at the end what meditation is in a short aphorism. It does not mean that in your ardour for meditation, in life, you can ignore the activities of the world. Many think that meditation is an individual and private activity which has nothing to do with the world outside. But it is not so. The two go and work together, like the wings of a bird.

Chapter VII tells us that meditation is a coordination of the individual with the universe. So meditation is not a private act, but a universal process. Chapters VII to XI give the technique of gradual unification of the individual with the universal. As a matter of fact, when the individual unites itself with the universal, the spiritual manifests itself, automatically. So, in this sense, the individual, the universal and the spiritual mean one and the same thing.

Chapter XII provides the technique of the various spiritual practices to bring about this unification, the four Yogas proper. Chapters XIII to XVIII give a beautiful exposition of how you can live in the world after acquiring this universal knowledge. It is only with this knowledge that one can redeem the world and do social work for the welfare of people: *Sarvabhutahita*. All this means that one cannot do real good to the world unless one is a truly spiritual person. You need the necessary qualifications even to get a job; and to do social work worth the while you need training in the field of the spiritual, in order to succeed in the sphere of human solidarity and material prosperity. The Gita gospel, therefore, prepares you for leading a universal life in this world. The Yoga of the Gita is inclusive of social work, humanitarian service, individual peace, as well as God-realization. This is the most complete exposition of Yoga available anywhere in the world. It is a veritable ocean placed before you. Drown yourself in it; save yourself with this vitamin tablet of the Gita. The difficulty in practice arises because of old habits persisting which can be cured by everyday meditation without a break. Satya, Ahimsa,

Brahmacarya, in their larger sense of freedom from tension and conservation of energy, are the pre-requisites for meditation. Whatever you do in this world is equal to an adoration of God. God is to be seen in everything visible in the world. Truth is everything, and the knowledge of the nature of Truth is at once harmony with all creations. It is an instantaneous communion of meditation and action, grace and effort, the divine and the earthly, the relative and the absolute—Krisha and Arjuna driving forward, seated in a single chariot which is this body, and this universe evolving towards perfection.