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The Battlefield of Life

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA



THE BATTLEFIELD OF LIFE

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

The 25th of April 2022 marks the auspicious occasion of the Birth Centenary of Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj. To commemorate this sacred occasion, the Headquarters Ashram has decided to bring out booklets comprising the illuminating discourses of Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj for free distribution.

Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj arrived at the holy abode of Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj in 1944, and remained here until his Mahasamadhi in November 2001. Swamiji Maharaj was a master of practically every system of Indian thought and Western philosophy. "Many Sankaras are rolled into one Krishnananda," said Sri Gurudev.

Over the years, Swami Maharaj gave many profound and insightful discourses during Sunday night Satsanga, and on holy occasions such as Sri Gurudev's birthday, Sri Krishna Janmasthanami, Mahasivaratri, etc., and also during Sadhana Week and Yoga Vedanta Courses conducted by the Yoga

Vedanta Forest Academy of the Ashram. Sri Swami Maharaj always spoke extempore, spontaneously, without any preparation, and every discourse was fresh, unique, and divinely inspired. The audience was bathed in that stupendous unfathomable energy that radiated from Swamiji Maharaj during these discourses.

We are immensely happy to bring out some of Sri Swamiji Maharaj's discourses in booklet form as our worshipful offering at his holy feet on the blessed occasion of his Birth Centenary.

The present booklet, '**The Battlefield of Life**', comprises a discourse given by Sri Swamiji Maharaj during the Basic Yoga-Vedanta course to introduce the students to the glorious scripture i.e. Srimad Bhagavadgita.

May the abundant blessings of the Almighty Lord, Sadgurudev Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj and Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj be upon all.

—The Divine Life Society

THE BATTLEFIELD OF LIFE

We have seen that the occasion for the delivery of the Bhagavadgita was a field of war, which is conspicuous in its occurrence in the context of the Mahabharata. As we have observed earlier, the Bhagavadgita does not intend to tell us a story for entertaining in our leisure hours, but to give a permanent message for the salvation of the soul of the human being. That is why it is called a Yoga Shastra, or a scripture of Yoga. Whatever is said in this scripture is a sermon on the practice of Yoga, and the necessity for the teaching arises on account of a conflict in which one finds oneself at any given moment of time in one's life. The whole of the Mahabharata is a story of conflict. We would gradually realise that the practice of Yoga resolves itself into a simple system of the overcoming and the balancing of forces for the purpose of resolving all conflicts.

The universe moves in two directions, one may say—the centripetal and the centrifugal. There is an outward centrifugal urge of the universe

which propels it in the direction of space, time and externality. There is also a centripetal impulse to maintain its integrality of status inwardly, and these two tendencies in the universe represent the character of the whole of nature. And this character that we see in creation is sympathetically reflected in every one of us, so that we are also at every moment of time centrifugal and also centripetal; we have an externalising impulse towards activity, social relationship and contacts of various kinds, and at the same time we have a powerful impulse to maintain our integrality and status, as such. We do not wish to lose our independence in the name of outward relationship or even social welfare. All this is conditioned by a need we feel to maintain our freedom, which we may call our own status. Who would like to lose his status in the name of something else?

But, side by side with this impulse to retain our individuality or integrality of status, there is also a propulsion towards externalisation, which also we cannot resist. We run about day in and day out, demonstrating thereby that a complete inwardisation and maintenance of personal status is not the completion of life. This has to be set in tune or harmonised with the external world, or the

universe. While we are bent upon maintaining our independence and status, we are also compelled, at the same time, to recognise the existence of other people in the world, things around us, the vast world in front of our eyes, with which we have to maintain a balanced relationship. While we are, in a sense, in a non-spatial and non-temporal indivisibility which we call the status we maintain, we are also in a world of space and time. We are like a double-edged sword which cuts both ways; or like a person who is pulled equally in two different directions, now one urge preponderating and now the other.

The cosmical impulse corresponding to this psychological impasse through which we are passing is designated in the language of Indian philosophy, especially the Vedanta, the Samkhya and the Yoga, as the process of the matrix of all things known as *prakriti*, a Sanskrit word which means the original substance of all creation. The material of the universe is called *prakriti*. It is constituted of certain forces, parts, energies or properties. These are known as *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. The property of *tamas* indicates inertia, fixity, immobility. *Rajas* is the name that we give to the impulsion dragging everything outwardly into the space-time-complex and compelling everything to relate itself to things

outside. *Sattva* is the counter-balancing urge which obliges everything to maintain an individuality of internal status, which requires all to maintain a balance and not lose the alignment in the inner layers of personality or the external relationships in society.

If there is no alignment in the inward structure of our psyche, we can go crazy, become neurotic and a patient psychopathologically. Health is the harmony of the layers of our personalities. If they are disbalanced we are sick physically or psychologically. There is a necessity to maintain inward balance. But that will not do entirely; we have also to maintain a similar balance in our relationship outside. There should be a balanced relationship between 'you' and 'me', for instance, a balanced relationship with the five elements—earth, water, fire, air and ether—the climatic conditions and the many other conditions that constitute what we call the outward life of individuals, and ourselves.

There is, thus, a conflict everywhere, cosmically and individually. Life is a battle, a situation which does not require a commentary. It is a struggle from birth to death. It is a process of confronting something or the other every day, a necessity that we feel every moment of time to resolve a

situation that has arisen in front of us. When we wake up in the morning, we are face to face with the reality that confronts us as a conflict. We have conflicts inside and conflicts outside. We are not always happy, because happiness is the outcome of a rare preponderance of *sattva guna*, the balancing part within us, and to the extent we are balanced inwardly and outwardly, to that extent we are also happy, delighted and joyous. To the extent *rajas* preponderates in us, there is a tendency to upset everything; it may be an upsetting of the layers of our own individual personality or the upsetting of our relationships with the outside world. Any kind of upsetting of an existing balance is the tendency to the absence of joy, which is tantamount to an entering into grief and sorrow.

The whole of life is an arena of such a conflict. If we read Homer's Iliad or Odyssey, if we read Milton's Paradise Lost, if we read the Ramayana of Valmiki, if we read the Mahabharata, we shall find everywhere the same thing presented in different languages and styles, the whole picture presented being the scene of a tremendous conflict, a rubbing of shoulders, a circumstance into which we are thrown unwittingly, the circumstance becoming worse when we have not got the adequate understanding of the causes of

the occurrences. Our condition seems to be growing worse because we do not know why a situation has arisen at all, why there should be conflict of any kind. Why should we not be happy always? Why should there not be a balance, a harmony, an equilibrated relationship inwardly and outwardly? We do not know, and nobody can know, easily. But this state of affairs cannot continue for a long time, and we do not wish that it should continue indefinitely.

We are not merely entangled individuals, but also individuals in whom is planted a light of reason and a flash of insight which occurs sometimes in our personal lives, telling us that, in spite of the unfortunate circumstances in which we find ourselves in the world, there is some hope for the better. We do not always entertain a despairing mood of dejection and utter hopelessness, though, occasionally, when the power of *rajas*, of external relationship and a loss of inward stability, becomes very strong and overwhelms, we may lose our balance completely. We may not then be even able to think in a right manner.

But such occasions are rare; usually we are able to realise that there is justice in this universe, though in moments of intense suffering we are likely to complain against the system of things and find fault

with the structure of the universe. But this we do not do always. There are moments of sobriety when we are able to think in a better manner and feel that there is a need for the resolution of conflict. That there should be an urge felt within us to resolve a conflict should be an indication of the possibility of the resolution of the conflict, as one cannot entertain merely a hopeless hope. A hope is hopeful, it is not negativity. When we assure ourselves that things will be better one day, in some way or the other, some insight is welling up from inside, and that is the inward status of integrality that speaks to us in the words of a superphysical language.

The epics of the great masters, whether of the East or of the West, are a depiction of the drama of life. It is a play of various circumstances, situations, colours, each looking independent of the others, but somehow collaborating to present the picture of completeness, as in a play. The *dramatis personae*, the people who enact the play, are independent and isolated in their performances. It does not mean that everyone taking part in the play will present the same picture and place before us an identical situation. Every individual enacting the play is different from the others, has a performance which is distinct from that of the others. But the whole drama is a

completeness by itself. It is not a distracted chaos, it is a harmony, and we enjoy the play. When the whole enactment is over, we are delighted. "This is a wonderful performance." Thus we go away with happiness. We do not say, "This man did this and that man did that; there is no connection between one and the other." We realise the connection in spite of the variegated scenes presented in the drama which may run for hours together into the night. The pictures may be completely different if individually perceived, but the wholeness behind the acts is the delighting feature. So is life, and such is the intention of the writing of epics.

We are not always in a position to see the wholeness that is behind the pictures in the form of the drama of creation. We are the actors in this great field of activity called the cosmos. "The whole world is a stage," said Shakespeare, and we are all the people who are acting on this stage, but we are not always conscious that we are playing the drama. This consciousness is wrested out of us by some unfortunate occurrence in us. Look at the fate of a person who is performing one role in a dramatic enactment. Suppose he forgets his relationship with the other performer. He behaves as if he is absolutely independent, and has no connection

with the entirety of the play. He does not know that there is a direction of the play. He does not know the intention behind the performance. He is acting absolutely independent, presenting an isolated picture. He would cut a sorry figure and spoil the whole game. This we are doing every day. We are disturbing the game of life, not knowing that we are items in the totality of the dramatic presentation in this grand enactment of the aims of life, of which the Supreme Being Himself is the Director. His vision is the totality of the picture of the drama. The Bhagavadgita takes up this point of view of the completeness that is behind this wonderful picture of creation, and the necessity that is to be there for recognising a harmony in the midst of forces which look like conflicting powers on account of their isolated individualities not related harmoniously one with the other. The difficulty is the excessive preponderance of one of the powers of prakriti, at some time, on which we lean due to the force exerted upon us by one or the other of them.

Apart from *rajas* and *sattva*, the externalising and stabilising powers, there is a third condition called *tamas*, inertia. In the language of physics you would have heard it said that there are two forces: stasis and kinetics, or dynamics. There is no such thing as

sattva in science, which is not concerned with it, and perhaps it is not willing even to think of it. There are only two conditions of things: either they are in a state of inertia or they are dynamic and expressed in some form of activity. So we are, and everything is, in one of these conditions, and sometimes in both these conditions, working together in some sort of proportion.

We are in a field of the opposition of the forces, which work simultaneously in the universe outside and in the personality of ours inwardly. The universe is a battlefield in the sense of this metaphysical description of the constitution of the universe. We will understand why the Bhagavadgita is given in the context of a war and not in a chapel, a convent, a temple of worship. The universe is a temple, no doubt. In one sense, it is the shrine of the Supreme Being, the Absolute. We can adore anything and everything as God. But it is not to be done in a spirit of exclusiveness or isolation of any kind. Temporal perception works in a threefold manner, presenting this picture of creation as a permutation and combination of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*.

The very first verse of the Bhagavadgita brings to highlight two important words, 'Dharmakshetra' and 'Kurukshestra', significant terms indeed. The

universe is a field of tremendous activity, of conflict and warfare. It is also a field of justice and law. 'Kurukshetra' is 'Dharmakshetra'. There is a law that integrates these apparently conflicting powers in the same way as there is a law inside us which integrates the cells of our physical body into a wholeness of personality. Every cell of our body is different from the other. It can disintegrate, and when the life force is withdrawn from it, it dissolves itself into the five elements, it decays, decomposes itself and loses its oneness. Every thought is different from every other thought. We can think one thousand things every day, and yet we know we are the person thinking these one thousand things. "I thought something yesterday, and I am thinking something today. Though there is no apparent connection between yesterday's thought and today's thought, yet I know that there is connection, because I am the person thinking these thoughts."

There is an integration of the psychic structure as well as the physical body. This is the dharma, the law which organises things. Law is a name that we give to the system which organises bodies into a completeness or a meaningful wholeness, instead of their being thrown as scattered particulars or a meaningless chaos. Dharma is law; we may also

call it justice. That which is in consonance with the system of the universe is the justice of the universe, and the way in which this justice operates in terms of the various particularities is the law. There is activity, there is movement, there is change, there is transformation—all pointing to an apparent diversity of things. But this is not the whole truth of the matter. There is an organisation everywhere, right from the atom to the solar system. Even an atom is not a chaos; there is a balance maintained by the constituents of the atom, the electrons getting conditioned and ruled by a central nucleus, and the solar system working beautifully by the power of the Sun who organises the system. A similar power is working within ourselves, on account of which we are individuals, a completely organised body. Our personality is not a disorderly heap. We have a capacity to think consistently, logically, and in an organised manner. There is a dharma operating everywhere, in the whole cosmos, the entire creation, in our own self, in the atom, in everything, notwithstanding the fact that there is distraction, difference, individualisation, egoism, and externalisation. The bringing together of these two tendencies in all things is the purpose of Yoga. Neither are we to lean externally too much on visible

phenomena and be busybodies who have lost their soul, nor are we expected to be hibernating frogs in the crevice of our individuality, unrelated to the outer world.

The whole teaching of the Gita is centred on balance, equanimity, a putting in order of everything that is not in order—*samatva*. Things do not appear to be in order or in a state of harmony because of a preponderance of this externalising power, known as *rajas*. There is struggle everywhere, in everything, at all times, a struggle to maintain a balance. All struggle is an effort towards the maintenance of equilibrium in any field of life, in any plane of existence. The laws of various types—the governmental law, the social law, the communal law, the family law and various other systems of management—signify one and the same thing, namely, the necessity to maintain harmony, and it has to be maintained everywhere, in every walk of life, in any given moment of time. If there is a lack of balance anywhere, in any part of our body, for instance, or in any part of human society, there is then an anxiety creeping into our experience, at once. We are unhappy if there is a little thorn pricking the sole of our foot, and our joy goes away in a second. If there is some intractable element in society, which is disturbing

the peace of the minds of people, we are obliged to be conscious of its existence and are also compelled to see what means can be adopted in setting right the situation. Even a single incoherent element is sufficient to disturb the entire balance, just as an earache is enough to make us grieve the whole day. The point is that there should not be any occasion for misbalance even in the slightest manner, and the whole of Yoga is a comprehensive approach to the situation of cosmic conflict which sympathetically reflects itself in every individual, also.

That conflict there is, is obvious enough. We all know that the world is wretched. We complain about the world every day that it is stupid and it is going to the dogs. We are very much concerned about the future, but we are not fully awakened to the needs of the hour, the means that are to be employed, and the way we have to conduct ourselves under such circumstances. We are not in a state of Yoga. We only perceive things as they happen outwardly in the world of space and time. We are sense-ridden, entangled completely in the perceptions of the senses. We are living in a sense-world and we are wholly relying upon the reports of the senses. We do not exercise our reason and understanding to the extent necessary to counterbalance the distracting

reports that we receive from the senses. Our reason is not equally strong, our understanding is feeble, but the senses are vigorous, they are impetuous. So low we are in the cadre of creation; we have fallen very low indeed, while the senses are active and rebellious, the organising power in us, the understanding, is not equally powerful. One can imagine the state of affairs if individuals who rebel are stronger than the organising power of a government. This is what has happened to us. The organising power in us, called reason and understanding, is not able to cope up with the situation of conflict that is presented before us in experience by the senses that work in terms of the objects outside. We are slaves of the senses, and not their masters. We stoop down every moment to the level of the demand of a particular sense organ; and this cannot be regarded as freedom of any kind. Whatever the senses say is acquiesced to by our reason and understanding, by our knowledge and education, by our culture; and everything that we have is a subsidiary stooge, as it were, to these revolting dacoits called the senses. The Bhagavadgita does not want this circumstance to continue.

There should be a strong organising force, a Central Government, to establish a central administration in the cosmos, and, as a consequence

thereof, in our own selves and in society. This is to enter into the field of Yoga. We generally argue in terms of human society or human relationship, and not in the light of reason and the higher understanding. We have a poor reason and a sentimental argument to justify our social conditions, and we have not got the understanding or the reason enough to awaken ourselves to the existence of the higher power of dharma, the power of God, the law of the universe. The Bhagavadgita takes its stand as a good teacher in a school or a college, and leads us by our hand, by degrees to the various levels to which we have to rise for the purpose of the real freedom that we have to achieve. The greater the operation of law and justice, the greater is its intensity of action, the greater is the freedom that we are assured. Salvation and freedom mean the same thing, and a recognition of the law and obedience to this law is necessary in order to achieve true freedom. If we do not know how the law of the universe operates in relation to ourselves and to other things, if we are oblivious of the law of our own country, how can we abide by that law? We are ignorant of the law, and so we are likely to blunder, and we are blundering every day, and every error in respect of the law is to court punishment from the law. The punishment comes upon us as

a grief, a sorrow, an unhappiness, an insecurity, a feeling that something is wrong.

The Bhagavadgita places us in the context of human society at the very outset, the situation in which we are today. We are nationals of a country, and we are human beings with a relationship obtaining in mankind as a whole. We always think in terms of human relationship. It is well known that we argue in this manner. This is the subject of the First Chapter of the Bhagavadgita, where the whole social structure is taken as the stand for the argument in connection with any action to be taken under a particular situation. Taking Arjuna as the symbol of mankind, the epic of the Mahabharata in its gospel of the Bhagavadgita tells us how we think as individuals.

We are faced with a warring situation and our activities in daily life are our efforts to face the battle. The work that we do in our office, the labour that we put forth in a factory, or any other work that we do in any walk of life, is the effort we put forth to resolve a conflict and solve a situation. But we do not always do it properly, and so a factory worker need not be happy, and an office-goer need not be satisfied. Our activities need not bring us happiness. We stoop down to the state of utter hopelessness

and wretchedness, because we have not found time to walk with the light of reason and the justice of the universe. We cannot see this law with our eyes, just as we cannot see a government, for instance. Anything that is impersonal cannot be seen with the eyes. We cannot see even money. We see a piece of paper called a note or a metal piece called coin, but money is something different. It is a value that is imbedded in the symbol called note or coin, and that value cannot be seen with the eyes.

The higher law is an impersonal operation and, therefore, it is not an object of the senses. Inasmuch as we are depending on the senses for our achievement and judgement of things, we are unable to take advantage of the existence of impersonal powers, reason and insight. Arjuna was in this condition. He was thinking in terms of his relationships with people, as a son of so-and-so, a nephew, etc., with ulterior motives. Just as we gird up our loins to do something very vigorously every day, Arjuna got ready to embark upon a war. "We shall do this," is our determination in the early morning, and so was the contemplation in the mind of Arjuna and all people on his side. They decided that certain steps were to be taken, and there was a necessity to implement the decision. This implementation of the

decision is the entering into the field of battle. This is also the entering of ourselves into the field of the practice of Yoga, towards which the Bhagavadgita will take us.

We are in a field of the opposition of the forces, which work simultaneously in the universe outside and in the personality of ours inwardly. The universe is a battlefield in the sense of metaphysical description of the constitution of the universe. We will understand why the Bhagavadgita is given in the context of a war and not in a chapel, a convent, a temple of worship. The universe is a temple, no doubt, in one sense, it is the shrine of the Supreme Being, the Absolute. We can adore anything and everything as God. But it is not to be done in a spirit of exclusiveness or isolation of any kind. Temporal perception works in a threefold manner presenting this picture of creation as a permutation and combination of *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*.

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