

Reflections

Rejuvenation

Children live in a world of imagination which to them is reality. Little Tara entered her school playground and imagined the flowering trees and bushes to be a little forest she was exploring. What fun! She carefully stepped over the dry leaves so as to avoid making a noise, lest the wild animals detect her presence! She carefully looked around. The sun was playing light and shade. The air that touched her skin was cool and pure. The different riotous shades of green, in the leaves around her, seemed to be gleaming with delight in the sunshine. The flowers radiated all their smiles on little Tara. The canopy of the clear blue sky overhead made her jump with joy. The butterflies flapping about her, as if playing with her, also appeared luminous! The exuberance in her heart overflowed and she felt she would burst with joy.

Children day-dream into their teenage years and can live in a totally different, angelic world, without any conflict. They can bounce back from a momentary agony as if nothing ever happened. In fact sorrow is unreal to them. They renew their energies constantly and remain full of life. They unknowingly teach us the art of rejuvenating ourselves. Periodic revitalization of our mental content and life energies is a very essential aspect of living. It is the refreshment that our being yearns for. When we enter large and wide natural spaces, like walking along an oceanfront or night sky-gazing, we feel a sense of vastness envelop our being. We feel the silence and expanse entering into us. This is so, because of the similarity of elements. Our bodies are verily made up of the five

elements which constitute nature. According to the science of Ayurveda, the body is composed of *panchabhutas* or the elements of air, fire, water, earth and space. Each body whether human, animal or non-living is made up of these very same elements. It is this fact that gives our bodies and minds a sense of release and freshness when they come in touch with these elements in their natural form. Vast natural spaces have this telling effect instantly. The first thing that they usher us into is a vivified stillness. The mind slows down by itself and *pranaic* energy becomes harmonious. We feel a sense of ease and inner well-being without effort. The instrument of body-mind has tuned in to its cosmic counterpart. And hence the happiness.

Now we are in a position to realize the misery of artificial states of joy. Object-based joys may excite us momentarily but carry no lasting value. More objects is not equal to more joy, is everybody's experience. It is for this reason that these joys never get etched in our memory as something substantially valuable. But one episode of real happiness puts a permanent mark on our memory. The least suggestion rekindles it. The bottom-line is, when life energy is bubbling, awareness is spectacular. Nothing else is required to keep one happy in this state. In fact one starts overflowing with happiness. This is a perpetual, continuous, self-sustaining mechanism that we must first observe, acknowledge and then master.

The spiritual traditions of India have developed innumerable methods to awaken higher awareness. To be trapped, as it were, within one's untrained mind, to

remain in a conditioned, compulsive state, and consequently get addicted to objects to remove one's sorrow, is the dreadful fact of careless living. So transcending the thought plane and awakening to full awareness, is the natural deep unconscious human yearning that manifests in so many ways. Man's escape into the world of art may actually be called the soul's escapade into the world of boundless beauty. The urge towards relationships is actually the push towards expansion. The thirst for science or knowing is a relic of the urge to merge in the universal. All striving is by its very nature spiritual. And hence the science of Yoga gives us ways to convert about everything into Yoga. Yoga means union with the universal.

To transcend the mind with just our will power is difficult. It falls to the lot of very few, to use thought, powered by a tremendous will, to reach the goal of spiritual striving. And that is why the Yogic sciences offer other helps like regulation of vital energy. Vivekananda says in this regard, "What would be more rational than to have the mind itself accomplish the thing. But it cannot. The physical help is necessary for most of us. The system of Raja Yoga is to utilize these physical helps, to make use of the powers and forces in the body to produce certain mental states, to make the mind stronger and stronger until it regains its lost empire. By sheer force of will if anyone can attain to that, so much the better. But most of us cannot, so we will use physical means, and help the will on its way." For genuine spiritual aspirants, this is an important point to note. Yogis have since ancient times used vital energy as a means or a ladder for spiritual evolution. In fact traditional Yoga even considers the thought process to be a mere fallout of the

vital energy flow. However, the thought born of Yogic states, is not the powerless discursive mechanism of ordinary cogitation. It is a device for transcendence in itself. Needless to say, the practices of Yoga rejuvenate us all along the way towards our spiritual goal.

To rejuvenate our spirit means to bring all dimensions of our lives in sync with each other. When the intellect, emotion and will harmonize, we feel endless energy. Most of all, this is the basic state required for any form of spiritual research. To touch the spirit is possible only when one forgets the body-mind mechanism. And this is possible only if the mechanism is in full harmony within itself.

The greatest obstacles to these beautiful and natural states of mind are the jarring negativity modes of our mind. When we are unable to channelize life energy or regulate thought flow and manifest higher awareness, we take to brooding, condemning and judging others instead. We find ourselves in one of the following states: Chasing objects for a shot of dopamine or worrying ourselves endlessly over something silly or defending a non-existing ego. To satisfy these we readily take to anger and jealousy. We play the blame-game. Criticism and suspicion become our nature.

In contrast to this, a genuine seeker or devotee's life is one bubbling mart of joy. He is never prone to negative emotions or egoistic judgement. The genuine seeker is generous to the extreme, grateful in all his ways, appreciative of the least good in others and reluctant to judge. The egoistic and proud, on the other hand, have their judgements and evaluations always ready. The *bhakta* connects to God and hence disconnects from the world. The

worldly mind connects to nothing and hence has only its dissatisfactions to share.

Thus the level of joy in one's life is a sure pointer to the kind of person one is. To change one's mental modes for the better, constantly, is one of the greatest blessings the great religions of the world have to offer. The life of devotion with its cascades of love, the feeling of oneness and the consequent radiantly blissful state of mind offers constant positivity, rejuvenation and fulfilment. Loving God, who is the highest ideal, is natural to the human experience. Without this elevating touch, and left to itself, the mind can swing endlessly.

Consecration, clarity, purity, appreciation, etc. are emotions meant to be felt on a regular basis and so conditioned into our system that they become our very nature. They form the crux of the matrix of devotion. It is the absence of these from our daily life that is the lingering cause of our frustrations. Indeed a life without these softening emotions is a dreary desert where one can die of thirst. Devotion is the greatest rejuvenating tonic. A daily dip in the river of devotion refreshes the body-mind mechanism as nothing else would.

Modern life offers us a range of securities that could not be imagined in the past. Food security, shelter, health security, the safety net of insurance and pension, are a reality to the average common man. Insecurity has now stepped to the next level. We suffer from emotional insecurities, relationship insecurities and depression. The gnawing insecurity manifests as stress and related symptoms. It is important to realize that devotion is an important and essential component of human emotion. To be devoted is not to be biased but to be hardwired for

positivity. The devoted mind is ever cheerful and can take anything into its stride. There is the characteristic example of children before us. They can trust and remain devoted to their relationships with ardour. By doing this they create a heavenly peace and joy around themselves.

By compromising on devotional practices we have given up the basic need of our minds. In fact the urge to worship and adore is so basic to the human psyche, that by removing the all-inspiring Chosen Ideal (*Ishtam*) from our lives, we do not know whom to throw our emotions upon. This is actually debilitating to the evolution of our soul. We must understand the vital need to bring divinity and its positive emotional inundation into our lives on a daily basis.

In the life of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi one finds this untouched inner harmony. She appears so calm even in very trying circumstances. She is unruffled in provocative situations. She responds benignly in the face of criticism. Indeed such an attitude is only possible if there is an absolute sense of concord within oneself. Nivedita described her as calmness personified, yet overflowing with wit, fun and sublime joy. Mother enjoyed open air musical dramas and theatrical performances. She occasionally sang herself. Her life depicts how much she enjoyed the beauty of nature. She watched with childlike wonder Nilakantha birds in flight. She was amused to see wild deer move in triangles and quickly move away at the slightest sense of fear. She was ever-cheerful even in crazy company.

Love and service are actually an overflow of one's inner state of being into another being. They are not impelled by the behaviour or qualities of the 'other'.

Thus one's nature can be a constant in spite of the bewildering variables of life. It is a state that is born of one's being. It can be transmitted to another. There is a beautiful incident in Mother's life which demonstrates how to love greatly and impartially,

Mother used to be visited regularly by a troublesome and naughty child who demanded constant attention. Whenever the little girl came into the room, she would run to Mother and hold her fast. The Mother always gave her lots of sweets to eat. One day, Mother said to the little girl, "You have been visiting me a long time now. Do you love me?" "Oh yes, I love you very much!" the child said. "How much do you love me?" The little girl widened her arms to show her love. "I shall be sure of your love for me, if you can love everyone at home", the Mother said. "All right, I will love all of them. I will not be naughty anymore" replied the child. "That's very good," Mother continued, "But how shall I know that you will love all equally?" The child then asked, "What should I do to love all equally?" "Do not demand anything of those you love. If you make demands, some will give you more and some less. In that case you will love more those who give you more, and less, those who give you less. Your love will not be the same for all. You will not be able to love impartially." Mother is hinting at one of the greatest psychological realities of the human mind. Love and happiness are self-starting and self-sustaining mechanisms. They have little to do with outer objects and people. Not knowing this fact and having very little training in mind management, we assume love is proportional to the object of love. When one realizes the immensity of one's potential one is no more a beggar to

anything. One can just pour out the same extent of love to all beings. In the sight of others, one is loving everyone 'equally'. It is actually an overflow of one's inner consummation.

The little girl promised to love everyone without asking for anything in return. From that day onward, the child lived harmoniously with her family, and brought them great joy. Likewise, the Holy Mother, in her own loving ways, transformed the lives of many young and old, men and women. It was said of her, "By Mother's grace, even desperadoes became devotees of the Lord!"

Once our mind is well aerated, happy by itself, and mature in its understanding, it will on its own learn to transcend itself. Transcendence is not an achievement, it is an ever present reality. Existentially, our sense of 'I' is completely unrelated to the body and mind. We always speak of the latter as belonging to us but never as ourselves. Besides the sense of 'I' in us never changes, no matter how much the body and mind change. All these facts point to the possibility of experiencing ourselves as we truly are.

Indeed, pure unqualified consciousness is the common factor that abounds and rejuvenates life every moment. In our joys and miseries, in our ecstasies and agonies, when we appear conscious or unconscious, at all moments, it forms the common basis of our experience. Just now we may feel that it would do us good to take an occasional dip into this. The fact is, consciousness is all that there is. The mind and its moods are the surface bubbles of the ocean of consciousness that each one of us really is. To know this is to rejuvenate and refresh oneself continuously and perpetually. ❀

The Relevance of the Bhagavad Gita in Our Lives

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We all know that the *Bhagavad Gita* is a very ancient scripture, yet it is relevant to anyone, anywhere, anytime, and in any Age. It is the most practical text if we wish to take its help in order to live our daily lives. There is a grave misunderstanding that we need to read these books only when we are old; when we have finished with the dealings of the world, then only do we need to come to these books, ideas, and philosophies. But by that time, where is the motivation and energy left in our system to change our worldview?

The Background

The *Bhagavad Gita* is the essence of all ancient thought — from the Vedic Age, to the Pauranic Age. We don't know exactly how ancient the Vedic Period really is. Indian scholars would place it at 10,000 years ago; western scholars limit it to perhaps 5,000 years ago. These concepts are, first and foremost, practical. There was a time when these concepts, given as *shlokas* or verses, were learnt by heart; they were not written down; it was only in relatively recent times that these texts were written and printed.

This scripture is in Sanskrit, but simple enough to understand if we take the trouble of finding the corresponding words in the other Indian languages. Ideally, we need to go straight to the Sanskrit language, if we want to study the texts seriously. Translations cannot give the real feel of these concepts; but we can always discuss,

question, and take them in with serious reflection and concentration. The *Bhagavad Gita* is a conversation between a warrior, Arjuna, who is poised and ready to lead his massive army to fight a great battle, against his kith and kin, and Sri Krishna, who is his charioteer to steer his chariot through this war. Whether this is a historical narrative or a metaphysical text is not important. What is important is the teaching, which appeals to human nature, in any Age.

This ancient Age was evidently a very peculiar one when the focus of the human mind was to discover the basic secret of human life. It wasn't as if the ancient thinkers were not interested in the world outside; they were, but they wanted to discover the secret of how to live in this world in such a way that whatever be their experiences, human beings did not get desperate, depressed, or overwhelmed thinking that they could not deal with situations or with life itself. Just as Arjuna, the great warrior was all set to lay down his arms out of sheer despondency, overcome as he was with fear and uncertainty. Just as Sri Krishna emphasized to Arjuna, the ancient *rishis* wanted human beings to face both life and death with strength and fearlessness, and they wanted whatever would make them capable of living confidently at the human level.

Later, perhaps because it became difficult to deal with the hard truths, the same concepts were given in stories, allegories and parables, as in the Puranas. Later still, the stories became predominant

and the truths vanished. People thought it was enough to know the stories and that there was no need to go back to the basic laws of human life that had been discovered about the mind and the depth of the human unconscious. Thus, our civilization degraded. The *Bhagavad Gita* gives an analytical understanding of the depths of the human mind, and Sri Krishna's teachings help us to probe these and apply the principles and truths to our daily lives. Keeping alive these concepts, from time to time, through the centuries, we have had a regular flow of people born in India, who have tried to remind us of these original truths, but they did not take centre-stage in human life in Hindu society.

In the modern age, or as it is called the Common Era, philosophers were born in India and they gave us systematically and logically thought out systems, called *darshanas*, based on the ancient truths. Some of them were very well known, the many teachers, the *acharyas*, who hailed mostly from South India, and who wrote detailed commentaries on the ancient scriptures. Sri Shankaracharya, Sri Ramanujacharya, and others, all hailed from South India. North India at that time was reeling under the invasions of foreigners.

These commentaries were in Sanskrit, and that language itself almost vanished, especially as a language of common communication. Consequently, these writings became the property of the Brahmins, who took the knowledge as an exclusive privilege and did not want to part with it because its exclusivity gave them tremendous prestige. This became a huge obstacle between the common people and the Brahmin priests and scholars. The common people had forgotten and were ignorant about what these truths stood for.

It became so that it was considered improper or a 'sin' for the common people to read the ancient scriptures on their own. This taboo was especially applied to the women. The priests made it a great secret and conveyed that the women, in particular, were not intelligent enough to understand.

Then a class of people, who chose to renounce the world, arose — they were the wandering mendicants, the *sadhus*. Many of them were intellectuals and scholars. They tried to study these ancient truths and apply them to their lives. But they remained outside society. That further convinced the common householders that these concepts were not meant for them in any way, although the *sadhus* would try to share their thoughts within society. However, women in particular, were almost deprived from knowing anything about these scriptures, and the women accepted that.

Because of this exclusivity the ancient scriptures and their knowledge vanished altogether from Indian society. It is the mothers who impart the initial learning to the children, in the homes, and they themselves were bereft of this knowledge. This practice, over many centuries, pulled down the Indian civilization even more. India was the hub of several invasions. The initial invaders came and mixed with the local people and so the culture was a mixture of thoughts and beliefs, but they accepted the common Hinduism. But the incoming of the Muslim era and Islam changed that also. They did not mix, but instead tried to convert the Hindus to Islam. There was a great clash. At this time, in around the 15th century, some voices arose with the Bhakti movement, and they tried to assert that

the truths were applicable to the common man. Some of these people are well known — Meera Bai, Surdas, Tulsidas, Kabir Das, Dadu, among many others. They made the concepts popular through devotional music to be sung on the streets of India.

Then came the British, and they tried to make us believe that we have absolutely nothing — no civilization, no religion, no education, and no culture. Because of that we lost confidence in everything that was intrinsic to the country and the people. We completely lost touch with our background, and in fact, began to feel ashamed of what was now considered ‘superstition’ and ‘idol worship’. All this that we are re-tracing, is just for us to recognize the distance and wide divide between the ancient truths and what the modern Indian thinks or feels.

The 19th Century Phenomenon

On the surface, in modern-day India, the English language, western culture, education, and commercial life are predominant. This is visible in the big cities, and that is a great attraction to the people of the remote villages. Our traditional education has completely vanished; except for a few rituals, festivals, and ceremonies, very little seems to be visible.

Sri Ramakrishna came in the 19th century. He lived the life of the Vedas. From common Hinduism, to the ultimate truth that had been discovered in ancient India, he demonstrated the entire span in his life. He lived that life, which went on to become a practical demonstration of the truths. He did not preach or try to influence or ‘convert’ anyone. To those who went to him, he talked about what he understood and had discovered, through

his own experiences. His conviction was based on realization and not on mere intellectual understanding. He was therefore as sure as could be that the ancient truths as discovered and spoken of by the *rishis* are not dead; they are as applicable today, as they were then. His life shows what India is, in-depth, even though it is not visible to most who look at only the surface.

From among his direct disciples, it was Swami Vivekananda who felt at that time, that India was not prepared to even listen to the ancient ideas, leave aside bringing them back into their lives. He went to the West, talked about them, in the English language, so that the western people would at least know what India stood for. He broadcast the concepts. After that there have been many movements in India to revive the ancient concepts as contained in the Upanishads and the *Bhagavad Gita*, but they are not necessarily couched in a very clear language. Swami Vivekananda’s language is perhaps the clearest for modern India, for the people who want to think and reflect.

The Age of Doubt

There was a time when faith worked, and the one apparently simple way to live life was to live by faith. The books say so; the guru gives a method; so have faith and practice. Do not ask for any explanation. Unfortunately, as Swamiji himself has said, this is the age of doubt. We have lost faith, as we are full of doubts and questions; we want answers not realizing that we are not prepared to accept or understand the answers. They may be given in the books, explained to us

in simple language, but our minds don't accept the simplicity of the explanation. We are so caught in our likes and dislikes. And with that standard there can be no faith, which implies unquestioning attitude towards the scriptures, the teachers, and their words. Faith is based on practice, not on questioning. But questioning has become the norm in this modern age, and that is actually a great responsibility, because then we have to be prepared to understand. If we doubt, then we must question and find answers, and regain faith, and then practice. The doubts, the fears, the anxieties, and the confusions that Arjuna expresses, are what swirl in our minds all the time. And the answers lie in Sri Krishna's teachings.

Driven by Instincts

We carry a terrible baggage coming through evolution, becoming human beings, having passed through all animal states, the tendencies of which are very much within us, although we do not recognize or acknowledge this. The ancient Indian thinkers, the *rishis*, realized that we human beings carry a deep past, which is buried to some extent within the subconscious and mostly in the unconscious, of which we are unaware. They tried to make us aware of this by giving, to begin with, very hard truths as given in the Vedic literature, the Upanishads and by Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*. These truths were like *sutras*, or 'threads', the concepts to be understood and memorized as they were given by word of mouth only.

If we look within ourselves we will realize that we live by instincts. We do not use reasoning. We have the capacity to reason, but we use it for our likes and

dislikes. We reason out and rationalize anything driven by them. The most common 'dis-ease' in this Age, is 'depression'. To overcome that people take drugs, alcohol, get into frenzied activity, almost as if to *forget* life itself and how to live! What does that imply? That we do not like ourselves as we are, we don't like the world around us, and we manage to suppress our ability to think and reason altogether and simply use any means to 'forget'. Arjuna also decides to turn away from reality, and get into despondency.

The instinct for survival comes either from the previous birth as per ancient Indian thought, or through the evolutionary process; both aspects point to the past. We have been born many times, says the Hindu, so we carry forward all the instincts, tendencies, and desires. Through the process of evolution we have crossed many levels from the single-celled amoeba to the human being. All this can be traced back to ourselves even in this life as we start as a single cell. At least this kind of reflection will take away the sense of being the helpless victim. We cannot be victims if we ourselves desired to be born.

A newborn knows it. At a very early age the young child displays a strong will, likes, and dislikes, and can express himself or herself very vocally. Where does this come from? Western science claims that all these tendencies are behavioural patterns inherited from the parents. If that were so, then why aren't all siblings carbon copies of each other? Why is each human being so proud about his or her uniqueness? As a duplicate where would be the uniqueness? No doubt everyone inherits some physical attributes but what about the personality and tendencies? According to our ancient Indian psychology we have

a term "*prarabdha karma*". Which implies very ancient impressions, which we carry with us through each birth. These are also our impressions. We carry tendencies and impressions, unique to us as individuals. This emphasis on our individual separation and uniqueness is the essence of our personality and ego.

To work out all the doubts, ask the relevant questions, and find the correct answers, which are actually given to us as the ancient truths in the *Bhagavad Gita*, demands from us a very steady level of thinking, reasoning, and logic. As Arjuna finally understands and realises that he is responsible for the situation he is in and that he needs to work through it. In our day-to-day life, we feel totally disinclined to take this trouble, as we are quite content living life at our terms, with likes and dislikes, until something hits us! A shock or a blow shakes us out of our complacency, but then we do not know how to find any answers. And by that time, perhaps most of us have lost the energy to think clearly anyway.

The blows of life can paralyse the mind. This is the truth and this was discovered in the ancient Vedic times, and this knowledge was given at a very young age. It is up to us to at least become conscious of the truth. The responsibility lies with us, to understand these concepts and then possibly we will find answers to all our questions: Why is life difficult? Why do we get blows? And what is our goal in life? We have to put our doubts into words and pose the questions. We find all the answers in the *Bhagavad Gita* and the other ancient scriptures. There have been people who have experienced, and understood, and who can give us the answers, but the questions have to come from us. I believe

that Sri Ramakrishna came to re-demonstrate these concepts by living through them. We need the mental clarity; that is the demand of this age. Till we have that clarity we can't even practice properly. Therefore either we regain the absolute unquestioning faith and practice; but if we have doubts or questions we need to clarify our doubts and find answers to our questions first, if we want to make any progress in this journey.

Asking questions means paying attention to what the mind is doing. This Age is nothing but distraction. Instead of paying attention to our mind or just to the world outside, we have to first discover what the mind is raising. We don't need to depend on habits and distractions to live our lives. Our habits become addictions and changing habits needs will power. We do use our will power but for the mundane day-to-day life. But we do not use our will power to change habits that become obstacles to our progress as human beings. Our habits become addictions, because they do not seem to need effort. And we have forgotten that living our lives means making constant effort. An animal doesn't make efforts beyond its search of food and a mate, but we have to go beyond that. As human beings, believing that we are unique we do need to use will power, first of all to discover what needs to be done in this journey of life. Using will power is not easy because we need it mostly in dealing with something difficult or challenging or even unpleasant.

Living in the Present

Is there only one life, as people like to proclaim today? If it were so, and if everyone really believed it, this world

would be a very cheerful place, as everyone would be busy trying to make the best of it. But this is not so. People have proclaimed that life is a celebration, it is a carnival, and so on... does it really function, day after day? It is like the very popular belief today of, "living in the present"; sure, if we can stop our minds it is possible to live in the present. But can we? Is not our mental processing of the past, present, and future happening continuously? Living in the present is only possible for a man like Sri Ramakrishna because He lives in eternity. He doesn't bother about the passing of time because He is beyond Time, Space, and Causation... He is free. But we live in Time; and that time is continuously passing. We are creatures of Time and Space. The past, present, and future need to be understood together and we need to be aware of firstly, our own past, as that is the background, and secondly, of the world around as it gives us the wide-angle perspective. We are not isolated entities living in this world; we are part of society, race, country, and all these have a past. We have to think of what this past contains and how much of that we have

carried through subconsciously. How can we understand the present, and live in it, if we do not understand the past? How will we move into the future if we do not understand both the past and the present? All the sciences are giving us the past and the link with the present, but we don't care and we don't think it is relevant to us, personally. Therefore, it's no wonder we feel we are floundering, or are confused and anxious. With this unawareness we are jumping into the ocean without being aware of what the ocean is and what it entails being in it! We will remain oblivious of the 'typhoons' and 'tsunamis' of life. And that is why we feel shocked and are taken unawares. We are then overcome by fears and mental paralysis.

Finally, let us recognize that the human mind is capable of so much awareness. Without the real understanding, acceptance, and determination we cannot move forward. The central idea of the *Bhagavad Gita* is to remain ever active, never to give in to inactivity or inertia, and to live life intelligently. Krishna repeatedly asks us to take refuge in *buddhi* (intellect) – "*Buddhau sharanam unvichha*". ❀

