

Bhagavad Gita online Class 74 on 22 Feb 2020 by Swami **Dayatmanada (Lecture delivered online from Bangalore, India)**

Shanti Patha:

ॐ वसुदेवसुतं देवं कंसचाणूरमर्दनम्
देवकीपरमानन्दं कृष्णं वन्दे जगद्गुरुम् ॥ १ ॥

Vasudeva sutham devam, Kamsa Chanura mardanam,
Devaki paramanandam, Krishnam vande jagat gurum

I worship Lord Krishna, Who is the spiritual master of the universe, who is the son of Vasudeva, who is the Lord, who killed Kamsa and Chanura, and who is the bliss of Devaki.

सर्वोपनिषदो गावो, दोग्धा गोपाल नन्दनः।
पार्थो वत्सः सुधीर्भोक्ता, दुग्धं गीतामृतं महत् ॥
Sarvopanishado gaavo, dogdha gopala nandanaha|
parthovatsa: sudheerbhoktaa, dugdham gitamrutam mahat |

All the Upanishads are likened to the cows. The milker is Krishna, the son of Gopala. Partha is likened to the calf, while the drinkers are the wise ones. The nectar of Gita is the milk.

मूकं करोति वाचालं पङ्गुं लङ्घयते गिरिं ।
यत्कृपा तमहं वन्दे परमानन्द माधवम् ॥
Mookam karoti vachalam pangum langhayate girim |
Yat-krupa tamaham vande paramananda madhavam ॥

I remember with devotion the divine grace of Krishna who can make the dumb speak and the lame cross high mountains. I extol that grace which flows from the Supreme Bliss manifestation of Madhava.

The Consequences of Converting All Our Actions Into Worship

So far, we have been discussing how to convert all our actions into sacred worship. Not only that, if we can succeed in converting whatever we do – through the body and mind, what would be the result?

The Lord says this will purify our body and mind; above all, it will produce *gnanam* (knowledge). The end result of every action is to know the fact, to obtain the knowledge that we are all divine, that each soul is potentially divine. That knowledge must come as a result of any type of activity.

When we analyse all the activities that we perform from birth to death, life after life, what we observe is that every action is done with the sole purpose of manifesting our divinity, even though outwardly, consciously, we may not understand it. We want to be immortal, we want to be Consciousness, and above all we want to be very happy.

What Do We Really Desire?

We all desire unbroken, eternal, and infinite bliss. We know that as a result of converting all our actions into a continuous worship of God, we don't really need to obtain any of these. Rather, we already have the nature of Sat-Chit-Ananda (Existence-Knowledge-Bliss). It is to remove the cloud of ignorance that we perform all these actions.

Knowledge is not something we have to obtain. We are ourselves already that knowledge. In our usual, secular world, there is a clear distinction between our individual selves, as well as other objects. In the spiritual realm – as far as the knowledge of the atman or the True Self is concerned – there is no such distinction. This is known as *abheda-gnana* (knowledge of the non-difference, or identity, of the individual and the absolute), and removes the distinction between the knower, the process of acquiring knowledge, the object (about which knowledge is being sought), and finally the knowledge itself.

Who are We, or What is the Essential Us?

Our essential nature is knowledge itself. We are that *gnanam* (knowledge), but we have forgotten that. Every activity of ours is a means of regaining that knowledge, and thus remove the cloud of ignorance.

When we succeed in removing even a bit of that cloud of ignorance, that knowledge peeps from behind – as it were – and we realize that we are happiness itself, and so don't need to obtain happiness.

Life-after-life, we strive to remove this cloud of ignorance permanently. The Lord has indicated the path – that we have to convert every activity from something finite to something infinite.

Every action dedicated to God manifests God, or Divinity, more and more. Of course, we have not yet obtained that knowledge, but we have been given a hint that we have to convert our life into a continuous worship.

How to do it?

We all have these questions in our minds:

- What do we gain from this knowledge?
- What is the profit or result coming out of this knowledge?

The Lord says in the 36th verse:

अपि चेदसि पापेभ्यः सर्वेभ्यः पापकृत्तमः ।
सर्वं ज्ञानप्लवेनैव वृजिनं सन्तरिष्यसि ॥ 36॥

*api ched asi pāpebhyaḥ sarvebhyaḥ pāpa-kṛit-tamaḥ
sarvaṁ jñāna-plavenaiva vṛjinaṁ santariṣyasi*

Even those who are considered the most sinful of all sinners can cross over this ocean of material existence by seating themselves in the boat of divine knowledge.

Reflecting on the glory of knowledge, we understand that even if we appear to be the worst of sinners, there is really no such thing as sin. We are but pure divine beings. All thoughts about sin are merely in our minds.

What is Sin, in Reality?

Various examples have already been given to explain this. Here is another. Suppose we go to bed, and have a scary dream, about killing someone, or being killed by someone. Upon waking up, we realize that this was no more than a negative thought in the mind, and in reality, no such thing had taken place.

The problem, however, is that *while dreaming*, we don't realize it is a dream. We think we are wide awake. Only upon waking up do we understand it was all a dream. Conversely, when we are dreaming, what we consider as 'reality' in the waking state may also be regarded as a dream.

If we manage to go beyond both waking and dream states, we understand that everything is only a negative thought in the mind. Our whole thinking is rooted in one negative thought – I am not divine.

That, our scriptures say, is the greatest sin. To not consider ourselves as the *Atman*, or Self, is regarded as the greatest sin. All the other actions that we regard as sins, are the children of this fundamental ignorance.

Maharishi Patanjali expresses this idea beautifully. He says:

- First, there is *avidya* (ignorance), which gives birth to *asmitha* (egotism)
- *Asmitha*, which is identification with the body and mind, produces *raga* (attachment) and *dwesha* (aversion), i.e., likes and dislikes. We go through these cycles of likes and dislikes innumerable times in our lives, attempting to reach what we like, and move away from what we don't, instinctively. The net result of this is an endless cycle of births and deaths, in various bodies, due to *abhinivesha* (will or desire to live), which is really an intense clinging to the instrument (body-mind) through which we experience happiness and unhappiness. Thus, we identify ourselves with the body-mind, which produces an intense clinging to them, resulting in a wish to retain them (i.e., not die). The only way out of this maze is to reduce this deep identification with the body and mind. This is what we call as spiritual practice.
- Whatever form these practices might take, and whatever qualities we may develop as a result, the goal is always the same – to reduce our identification with the body and mind. To achieve that, we need to start with the grossest one, i.e., control of sense-objects. Next, we need to control the senses themselves. After that comes controlling the thoughts, also called controlling the mind. When we achieve this, we remove the negative or ignorant thoughts, and fill the mind with positive, divine thoughts. The essence of all spiritual thoughts is that:
 - I belong to God
 - God belongs to me
 - Finally the highest state (called Advaita) wherein there is no 'me', no 'God', whatever exists is the one reality, called 'Brahman'.

How Can One Overcome Ignorance?

In the 36th verse, the Lord says that even if one regards oneself as the greatest sinner in the world, one can cross over all that worldliness using the raft of knowledge. Suppose one is involved in murdering someone in a horrendous manner (especially those whom we consider our greatest well-wishers – as opposed to killing a criminal such as a murderer or thief, which gives us a lesser feeling of guilt. This is what happened to Arjuna, who considered Duryodhana and his ilk to be criminals and worthy of being killed, but not Bheeshma or Drona as they were worthy of reverence).

The Lord tries to convince him in three ways:

- (a) Even if you consider yourself and the others as the body, then like yourself, Bheeshma and Drona's bodies are also certain to undergo the natural bodily changes, i.e., grow old and die one day, which means regardless of whether you kill them or not here, they are anyway going to die one day.
- (b) On the other hand, if you consider them as virtuous (i.e., *dharmaic* or highly moral) people, by killing them, you are only fast-tracking them to heaven, which can be considered a virtuous act in a manner of speaking!

(c) However, if you regard yourself, and Bheeshma and Drona, all as *atman* (i.e., the Self, and therefore not the body), there is no birth, no growth, no changes, nor death for the *atman*.

The same idea is being presented in a slightly different way here. Suppose there is a person who has somehow committed a huge variety of sins. He may regard himself as a terrible sinner (i.e., one who needs to be reborn millions of times to work out all that karma). But the Lord says here that even if we think we are comparable to that sinner (and most of what we think doesn't come true anyway, e.g., we think we have taken birth, grown, become old, going to die etc., none of which is the truth), our experiences in each life are only our perceptions. It is the body that is born, grows, and inevitably, dies. But if we reflect on the origins, or the root cause, of all this, we find that the body came from the earth, earth came from water, water came from fire, fire came from air, air came from space, and space came from the *atman*. So even if we consider the world as all real, its reality only derives from the reality of the Brahman.

However, due to ignorance, we do not understand this. Therefore, the Lord explains that when true knowledge dawns upon us, we understand this clearly: *I am the atman; therefore the whole world is the atman; thus, there is no such thing as birth, death, killing, killer, victim, sin or sinner*. There is only ignorance, only a misunderstanding.

When Swami Vivekananda attended the Parliament of Religions, during one of his talks, he made the idea clear through this verse (*Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, Chapter II, verse 5):

शृण्वन्तुबिष्वेअमृतस्यपुत्रा
आयेधामानिदिब्यानितस्थुः

You are all the children of immortality.

If that is our true nature (and one's real nature can't be changed; for instance, fire's nature is to burn, and therefore, fire and its power to burn are not separate things; similarly, ice will never be anything other than cold.), then no matter what we think, we can never become unreal, or the body-mind. It is only our mental ignorance, a limited thought.

When we get rid of this ignorance, we understand that there was never a body or mind.

What are the Steps to Get Rid of This Ignorance?

From the Vedantic point of view, this is the reasoning:

- the mind is like a mirror
- we are looking at ourselves through the reflection in the mirror
- the mind is limited, and therefore, the reflection is also limited
- the body and mind are, of course, limited, and therefore, so are our thoughts
- therefore, we are never the body-mind; it is only our thoughts
- we need to get rid of this thinking by better thinking, i.e., replace negative thoughts with positive thoughts, or get rid of worldly thoughts through spiritual thoughts
- that is the whole sum and substance of what needs to be done

The practical method to achieve this has already been discussed:

- Become a spiritually fit disciple, i.e., one capable of receiving true knowledge
- Approach a qualified teacher
- When this beautiful harmony, or combination, is achieved (i.e., a person who can give, and one who can receive, come together), spiritual knowledge flows from the teacher to the disciple automatically (even if there was no explicit intention, such as electricity flowing automatically when there is a potential difference between two points in the circuit)

Thus, even the worst sinner in the world for all time to come is guaranteed to cross over an ocean of worldliness using the raft of knowledge (of the *atman*). The understanding that one has nothing to do with the body, indeed nothing exists but the *atman*, so one is neither a sinner nor a meritorious person, neither ignorant nor knowledgeable, and there exists but one knowledge – that of the *atman* – which will ultimately liberate one, even from the thought that one is a devotee/child/servant of God.

Curiously, we are anyway achieving this without *Brahma-gnana* (during deep sleep, for instance, when everything but one's self-awareness disappears).

How Does True Knowledge Destroy Ignorance?

The knowledge being referred to here is *self-knowledge*. But even if we take other knowledge, such as the knowledge of a bodily illness, we can seek a remedy for it. The ignorance about an object is destroyed when we get knowledge about that particular object. If this is true of worldly matters, how much more applicable would it be to spiritual matters!

Thus, the ignorance 'I am divine' destroys the ignorance 'I am not divine'.

But how does this happen – in a slow, gradual process taking millions of years? Sri Ramakrishna clears this doubt with a beautiful example: *Imagine a room that has been kept pitch-dark for thousands of years. Then, someone lights a match in it. Will it take thousands of years for the darkness to vanish? No! The darkness vanishes instantaneously!*

The moment the knowledge of the Self comes, only the Self remains; everything else totally disappears, and forever.

Worldly knowledge, however, is short-lived, as it is obtained through the mind. When the mind goes to sleep, all worldly greatness disappears temporarily. Thus, even those individuals whom are considered the greatest and most distinguished in the worldly sense, are in reality no different from ordinary people when asleep.

This is not true of spiritual knowledge, however. Whether a spiritually illumined person is in a waking state, dream state or dreamless state, the knowledge *I am the atman* is never lost, never covered up. He remains as a constant witness in all the three states.

The Lord gives a beautiful point in verse 37:

यथैधांसि समिद्धोऽग्निर्भस्मसात्कुरुतेऽर्जुन ।
ज्ञानाग्निः सर्वकर्माणि भस्मसात्कुरुते तथा ॥ 37॥

*yathaidhānsi samiddho 'gnir bhasma-sāt kurute 'rjuna
jñānāgniḥ sarva-karmāṇi bhasma-sāt kurute tathā*

As a blazing fire reduces wood to ashes, O Arjuna, so does the fire of self-knowledge burn to ashes all bonds of karma.

Even when fire burns wood, the wood is not really destroyed. It remains in the form of ashes (and thus only changes form). But when a light is brought into a dark room, the darkness vanishes completely and instantaneously. Similarly, the knowledge of the Self makes ignorance vanish completely, immediately, and forever.

[In general, examples such as these are not meant to be interpreted literally, or word-for-word. They are only meant to help us understand or appreciate intricate points, and must be taken in that spirit.]

Three Types of Karma:

The blazing fire of knowledge reduces all bonds of karma to ashes. All our experiences in this world are the result of karma. Every one of our actions, from the smallest to the largest, inevitably produces karma. Our karmas are classified into three categories:

- The stored-up karmas called *sanchita*
- The karma destined to bear fruit in this life, called *prarabdha*. All our states and experiences in our present life (i.e., our social status, where we are born, where we are living etc.) are all the result of *prarabdha karma*. It is action has already begun to bear fruit, and will continue to do so till the end of our present life
- The karmas being performed right now, and destined to bear fruit in the future (i.e., some future lives), is called *aagami*

Regardless of which type of karma it is, any result of any karma must be experienced through the body-mind only. But when knowledge – not any knowledge but self-knowledge comes (i.e., I am not the body, I am not the mind) – all the three types of karmas no longer belong to us (because karmas and their actions can belong only to the body-mind, not the Self). When a person ceases to identify himself with his body and mind, he becomes totally free from the bondage of the three types of karmas, as the *atman* has nothing to do with them.

How is the Atman Not Bound to Any Type of Karma?

For any action, there must be two objects. Without them, action – positive, negative, or neutral – is impossible. When there is no action, fruits of action are impossible. When one understands that the whole world is nothing but him (*Aham Brahmasmi, Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma*, meaning *I am the Supreme Self, and the whole world is only my reflection*), then, endowed with such a purified mind, he only sees Brahman everywhere, as expressed in the saying: *A man of Knowledge sees in a learned, spiritual Brahmana, an elephant, a cow, a dog, and an eater of the dog, only Brahman.*

Therefore, he becomes completely free. Even to say that he becomes free is really a misnomer, because when we say that we were previously bound (which was one reality), and now we are free (which is another reality), both these statements are false.

We are not travelling from the Untruth to the Truth, but from a lower Truth to a higher Truth. The lower Truth is: *I thought I was bound*. The higher Truth is: *I think I am free*.

In reality, these are all activities of the mind. When there is no mind, I am myself one *nitya, shuddha, buddha, mukta, swaroopaha*. That is how the fire of knowledge burns all our ignorance, and reveals who we are. In a dark room, a rope may be mistaken for a snake, but as soon as the light comes, the need to kill the snake disappears (through its correct identification as a rope).

Example Given by Sri Ramakrishna:

Sri Ramakrishna illustrates this point through a brilliant example: *There was once a farmer, a true gnani, who had a son. One day, the son passed away. The news was conveyed to the farmer, who returned from the fields where he had been working, but showed no reaction – neither sorrow, nor happiness. His wife saw this, and naturally reproached him for not grieving the slightest bit.*

[Indeed, we are always looking for signs of emotion in everyone, and constantly judging people and relationships by the type and intensity of emotions they show in their responses. When a person doesn't react, or doesn't show friendly emotions, we conclude that he is not friendly, nor even worthy of being a friend].

After a long time, the farmer replied that the previous night, he had dreamt of becoming a king, and then the father of seven princes, who were exemplary in every sense: handsome, virtuous, learned, capable, etc. Then he woke up, and everything vanished at once. Now he was wondering if he should grieve for those seven sons, or this one boy.

Thus, a true *gnani* regards the waking state as no more real than the dreaming state. He truly understands that everything happens by the will of God alone.

In verse 38, the Lord is again praising Knowledge:

न हि ज्ञानेन सदृशं पवित्रमिह विद्यते ।
तत्स्वयं योगसंसिद्धः कालेनात्मनि विन्दति ॥ ३८॥

*na hi jñānena sadṛśhaṁ pavitramiha vidyate
tatsvayaṁ yogasansiddhaḥ kālenātmani vindati*

Verily, in this world, there no greater purifier than divine knowledge. One who has attained purity of mind over a long period of time through practice of Yoga, and cleansed it of all selfishness, receives such knowledge within the heart, in due course though the practice of karma yoga.

What is Karma Yoga?

There are many verses in the Bhagawad Gita pointing to the fact that for a person who is practicing karma yoga (which is the process of creating, for every action, a relationship with God), every karma (action) automatically becomes yoga (i.e., joins us with God)).

Thus, every action that we do – consciously or otherwise – needs to become as an act of divine worship. Every moment, whether we are breathing, eating, moving, or doing anything else, we need to think that we are doing it for the worship of God. Thus, we need to eat for God, breathe for God, sleep for God. There is a sutra from Rudrashtakam: *nidra samadhi sthithi* (the state of sleep is the same as the state of *samadhi*).

There is a beautiful song that says: *If my legs are moving, I am going around God. If my hands are moving, I am performing the evening aratrikam (vesper service) to God. If I am speaking, I am praising God. If I am thinking, I am meditating upon God. If I am sleeping, I become one with God – which is called yoga-nidra (yogic sleep).*

In this manner, the karma yogi starts with small acts of beautiful, spiritual, positive thinking, but in the end, he ends up with the ultimate knowledge: *I am God*.

Curiously, even to say *I am God*, is an act of the mind, because when we go beyond mind, there is nobody to say: *I am God*. There is no *me*, there is no *God*.

We are all striving for this knowledge, because each soul is potentially divine. Whether a person does – consciously or not – his goal of life, in this or future births, is to attain that self-knowledge, that I am the Supreme Self (Paramatman).

Therefore, let us turn, every action into worship. The technique of converting every action (to not an ordinary, worldly or secular action, but a spiritual one), can be considered only when we connect every act, thought and word with God. That knowledge manifests slowly, and we are, as it were, removing a dark curtain. To the extent the dark curtain is moved away, the light of knowledge streams in automatically, because that is its true nature.

There is no greater purifier than knowledge. Are we going to get that knowledge? YES.

Every living being will that knowledge, because, according to Vedanta, there is reality, no other being in existence other than *Brahman*. Everything is *Brahman*, including plants, animals, birds, human beings, and even non-living things like stones and dust; all is potentially divine.

When does One Attains Perfection in Yoga?

If such spiritual activities are taken up with the right awareness, and a Godward-orientation, it becomes karma yoga. In due course (*kaalena*, in time), depending upon how much and how intensely a person practices, he becomes a yogi. A person who has reached this level of perfection is said to have attained *yogasamsiddhi* (योगसंसिद्धि, perfection in Yoga). A perfect yogi is a person who knows nothing but the Truth (that 'I am divine'). However, from the worldly point of view, it may take a long time, which the Lord refers to as कालेनात्मनि विन्दति (meaning *finds in due course*) in the above verse.

Elsewhere (BG, 7:19), He says:

बहूनां जन्मनामन्ते ज्ञानवान्मां प्रपद्यते ।
वासुदेवः सर्वमिति स महात्मा सुदुर्लभः ॥ 19॥

*bahūnām janmanām ante jñānavān māṁ prapadyate
vāsudevaḥ sarvam iti sa mahātmā su-durlabhaḥ*

After many births of spiritual practice, one who is endowed with knowledge surrenders unto me, knowing me to be all that is. Such a great soul is indeed very rare.

We can't act without knowledge, and a clear discrimination between good and bad things. First comes knowledge, then desire, followed by action. A yogi thinks, *I have the indirect knowledge, obtained through the scriptures, that I am the atman. If so, I must regain my lost kingdom.* After that desire arises, an appropriate instrument is needed. After obtaining the instrument, the yogi strives to put it into practice, and that, ultimately, leads him to God.

The great Shankaracharya says, in the Vivekachudamani (verse 3), *Only by the grace of the atman, by the grace of the Divine Lord, a human birth, a desire for spiritual progress, and favourable circumstances (i.e., favourable body/mind/persons/jobs etc.) are obtained, and the person progresses in spiritual life:*

दुर्लभं त्रयमेवैतदैवानुग्रहेतुकम् ।

मनुष्यत्वं मुमुक्षुत्वं महापुरुषसंश्रयः ॥

durlabhaM trayam eva etat daivAnugraha hetukam ।

manuShyatvam mumukShutvam mahApuruSha samshrayaH ॥

Getting these three together is matter of great luck and god's grace - human life, longing for salvation and kinship of virtuous people.

So the Lord reiterates: *There is no other purifier in this world, like the true knowledge of the Supreme Being. Nothing other than this knowledge works.*

One discovers this knowledge, not from outside, but in due course of time, within himself. Then, one's mind is completely cleansed of all selfishness. Through the practice of karma yoga, this knowledge spontaneously manifests, and purifies the mind – which means that there is only one thought in the mind, that everything is only the Supreme Divine Being; nothing else exists.

But even before spiritual disciplines are practices, something else must be obtained. As the Lord puts it in the 39th verse:

श्रद्धावान् लभते ज्ञानं तत्परः संयतेन्द्रियः ।
ज्ञानं लब्ध्वा परां शान्तिमचिरेणाधिगच्छति ॥ 39॥

*śhraddhāvān labhate jñānam tat-parāḥ sanyatendriyaḥ
jñānam labdhvā parāṁ śhāntim achireṇādhigachchati*

Those whose faith is deep, who have sincerely done yogic practices, and whose senses are controlled, attain divine knowledge. Having obtained such transcendental knowledge, they quickly attain everlasting, supreme peace (liberation).

How Does One Acquire Faith?

So, the Lord makes it clear that every action of ours – big or small – must start with *shraddha* (sincere, one pointed faith in the truth of the words of the guru and the scriptures). Indeed, life can't progress without *shraddha*. Even in worldly matters, this quality is essential for progress. For example, a budding musician can't become a great musician if he or she doesn't have a deep and sincere self-belief (that he or she is destined to become a great musician one day), as without that, there is no incentive to practice hard.

The proportion of an aspirant's *sadhana* (spiritual practices) depends on the *shraddha* he possesses. This faith is actually a characteristic of our mind, not God, so must begin with the mind. It is said that faith is a gift of God. But how does one acquire faith? By obeying God (in the form of scriptural injunctions).

In general, scriptures instruct us to do certain things, and not do certain other things. When we follow them sincerely, God's grace automatically flows towards us, just as light flows into a dark room as soon as the obstructions in its path are removed.

Why is Self-Control Vital?

Shraddha also produces the right knowledge: *I am a child of God, I am potentially divine, the only goal of my life is to progress towards God*. With that knowledge, the aspirant single-mindedly directs all his attention, thoughts, words, and actions towards that highest goal. He has but one goal (*tatparaha*, solely devoted to), which is self-realization. But to achieve that one-pointed mind, one has to be self-disciplined (*संयतेन्द्रियः*, *having controlled his senses*).

Indeed, no person can attain this goal if he has a scattered brain, scattered thoughts, and lacks control over his sense-organs. Simultaneously he must be endowed with a deep and abiding faith, together with one-pointedness of mind, and self-discipline. Self-discipline here refers to doing everything at the right time, in the right manner, which also includes avoiding temptations or distractions.

Tragically, most of us believe we are sincere, but in truth, we are unable to control, or even resist, temptations. The effort to control temptations is called one-pointedness of mind, and also means self-discipline.

A person endowed with the above qualities will soon obtain, not ordinary peace, but something much greater. When our worldly desires are appeased, we get a little, temporary, peace. For instance, a tired or hungry person, upon resting or eating, is temporarily satisfied. But the peace referred to here is called Supreme Peace, upon obtaining which there would be no more desires or struggles. Also, it is infinite, and eternal.

Classification of Faith:

Our scriptures divide faith into two types:

- Faith that is controlled by us: This is ephemeral, changing, temporary, goes up-and-down all the time.
- Faith that controls us: This possesses us and controls us, and does not allow us to do anything wrong. The important thing to remember is that we need to start with a small faith. Progress in spiritual faith really means only one thing – increase in the intensity of faith. When that faith becomes intense, we become mad for God, and it will control us. At that point, our mind will – indeed, can – think only one thing: about God. Automatically, the control of the body and mind comes, and then, by the grace of God, we attain the blessed state of self-knowledge.

Sri Ramakrishna On Shraddha:

Sri Ramakrishna illustrates the significance of faith through the following instances/parables:

- Girish Chandra Ghosh was an actor who was a drunkard, short-tempered, and behaved in a nasty way (including towards his own guru). But Sri Ramakrishna said: *Girish possesses 125% faith.* Anyone possessing 100% faith has nothing to fear, as he is going to attain the supreme state.
- There was a little boy called Jatila who needed to cross a dangerous forest to go to school. The journey frightened him, and one day he confessed his fear to his mother. Helpless because she could not escort him herself, she thought of an idea. She told the boy that his elder brother Madhusudana lived in the forest, so whenever he was crossing the forest, all he had to do was to call Madhusudana, who would come and protect him without fail.

The boy had absolute faith in the words of his mother, and thereafter, whenever he felt fearful, he followed his mother's advice. In response to his intense prayers, God could not keep away, and began to escort him regularly, transforming his journey through the forest into a joyful experience. The company of God transformed him, and in time he far exceeded his own guru in spirituality.

If a disciple has such faith (i.e., the kind of a faith the child has in his mother's words) in the words of his guru, he is nothing more to fear (as he is assured of attaining self-knowledge in a short time).

- There was a Brahmana who used to daily worship his family deity in a shrine, with food offerings being made at the end of the worship. One day, he had to go away from his house on business, and to ensure that the ritual food offering to the deity wasn't interrupted, asked his little boy to carry out the task. The innocent boy had no idea that his father had never seen the deity, nor that the whole thing was being performed only as a ritual. He completely believed that the deity actually came down and ate the food offerings everyday like a human being, so at the end of the worship, he waited for a long time for the deity to emerge and consume them. But nothing happened. Though he prayed again and again, the deity did not respond. At one point, the boy burst into tears,

and with a longing heart entreated the deity to come down and partake of the food offerings. After he had thus cried for some time with great earnestness, the deity, smiling, came down from the altar, sat before the meal, and ate it all. When the boy emerged from the shrine, his relatives asked him to bring away the offerings, since the worship was now done. The boy innocently replied that while the worship was indeed complete, there was nothing left to bring away, since God had consumed it all! Thereupon, the astonished relatives (who initially thought he was lying), entered the shrine, and were speechless when they realized that the deity had indeed consumed every bit of the offerings! That is the power of faith!

- When Sri Ramakrishna was in his last days, one day he expressed, in the presence of his disciple, the great saint Nag Mahashaya, a desire to eat an *amalaki* fruit. It was not the season for those fruits, but since Nag Mahashaya had total faith that since his guru had expressed a desire to eat the fruit, it *had to be* available somewhere. Forsaking food and drink for three days, he searched hither and thither, and at last managed to find a few *amalaki* fruits, which he brought to Sri Ramakrishna.

There are many people possessed of faith. We, too, are possessed of faith, but we need to constantly strengthen it through regular spiritual practices, so that ultimately, we, too, can attain the same state.

What About People Who Lack Faith?

The Lord also mentions people who are opposed to the people having deep faith. They are called *ashradha-dhanas* (people devoid of faith). What becomes of them? The Lord explains that not only will they not progress in life towards the higher happiness, but will go down even in this life. The little worldly happiness they may currently possess will not last. For the person of little faith, for one filled with doubts and ignorance, there is no happiness in this world or the next, as the Lord explains in verse 40:

**अज्ञश्चाश्रद्धधानश्च संशयात्मा विनश्यति ।
नायं लोकोऽस्ति न परो न सुखं संशयात्मनः ॥ ४०॥**

*ajñāśh chāśhraddadhānaśh cha sanśhayātmā vinaśhyati
nāyam loko 'sti na paro na sukham sanśhayātmanah*

But persons who possess neither faith nor knowledge, and who are of a doubting nature, perish. For the unbeliever, there is no happiness either in this world or the next.

How to Get Rid of Doubts?

What is being emphasized here is that such a person will obtain no happiness in this world or the next. In spiritual literature, it is common to praise something (by implication), by condemning the opposite quality [the real motive is not to condemn a person or quality or attribute, but rather to praise the opposite quality in an indirect sort of way].

Incidentally, we all have doubts. If someone asks us, *Do you believe in God?*, we naturally answer 'yes'. Again, to the question, *Are you a devotee of God?*, our answer is 'yes'. Therefore, we do some daily prayer, japam, meditation etc., or special worship (on holy days).

However, Sri Ramakrishna categorically states that that is not enough, illustrating the point thus: *Suppose there is a thief staying in a room. Somehow, he learns that in the adjoining room (with only a small curtain separating the two rooms), there is invaluable treasure, and there is no one in the other room to catch him if he attempts to steal something from there. Under these circumstances, can the thief sleep happily? Until he manages to get the treasure, and secrets it away somewhere safe, he won't get a wink of sleep, even if he has had three sleepless nights just before!*

Sri Ramakrishna presents another parable to illustrate this point even better.

Once, in a land that was facing a drought, there lived two farmers, both of whom needed to irrigate their fields to save their crops. One of them was weak-willed, while the other was strong-willed. As both of them toiled to bring water to their fields, their wives approached them and asked both them to rest. The first farmer put up a token resistance, but soon yielded to his wife's importunities and went away, leaving the work unfinished. The other farmer, enraged at his wife's interruption, chased her away with harsh words, continued his work, stopping only when he heard the sweet murmur of water flowing into his fields.

The point Sri Ramakrishna is making here is that if a person *really* believes that God exists, he will not rest until he obtains Him. For him, the greatest wealth is *brahmananda-nidhi* (the wealth of divine joy). Until we obtain God, we will not give up that quest. If we are not madly running after God, it only shows that at the moment, we do not have much *shraddha*, or faith, in Him.

So we must attempt to get rid of our doubts, and obtain a strong, and deep-rooted, faith in Him. In the next verse (41), the Lord says:

योगसंन्यस्तकर्माणं ज्ञानसञ्छिन्नसंशयम् ।
आत्मवन्तं न कर्माणि निबध्नन्ति धनञ्जय ॥ 41॥

yoga-sannyasta-karmāṇaṁ jñāna-sañchhinna-sanśhayam
ātmavantaṁ na karmāṇi nibadhnanti dhanañjaya

O Arjuna, activities do not bind those who have renounced karma in the fire of Yoga, whose doubts have been cut down by the sword of knowledge, and who are merged in knowledge of the self.

In other words, spiritual activities gradually take us to God, and don't bind us any longer, because the knowledge will destroy the result of every action. Therefore, the final message of Bhagawan Krishna to Arjuna in this fourth chapter is:

तस्मादज्ञानसम्भूतं हृत्स्थं ज्ञानासिनात्मनः ।
चित्त्वेन संशयं योगमातिष्ठोत्तिष्ठ भारत ॥ 42॥

tasmād ajñāna-sambhūtaṁ hṛit-sthaṁ jñānāsinaātmanah
chittvainaṁ sanśhayam yogam ātiṣṭhotttiṣṭha bhārata

Therefore, with the sword of knowledge, cut asunder the doubts that have arisen in your heart. O scion of Bharata, establish yourself in karma yoga. Arise, stand up, and take action!

Three important points are mentioned here:

- Everyone's goal is to cut this knot of doubt; since doubt arises from ignorance, we have to ultimately destroy that ignorance; until ignorance remains, doubts will not disappear
- For this ignorance to go, we need to have temporary faith in the scriptures, in the guru, and go on practicing as if God is the only reality, as if the guru's words are absolutely true, and as if God is watching us. Of course, all the above are true, but our doubtful nature means until we realize those facts for ourselves, we simply have to assume, momentarily, that they are true and act accordingly
- We have to accept that everything is ephemeral, temporary, and God, or *atman*, alone is real. Ultimately, our goal is to get rid of this doubt. When doubts are removed completely, faith is completely reinstalled. Complete faith here refers to the belief: *I am none other than divine*. That is the only faith there is. Once we are completely convinced, we will not rest until we realize that we are, indeed, God.

The Lord exhorts Arjuna: *Suppose life goes on beyond that stage. Even possessed of self-knowledge, life's activities (such as breathing and doing various other actions) must carry on as before. At this moment, O Arjuna, your duty is to take part in battle, treating it as a yoga.*

Here the Lord wants Arjuna to regard himself as an instrument in His hands, and treat the war as his karma yoga. As the Lord explains in this verse (BG, 2:19):

य एनं वेत्ति हन्तारं यश्चैनं मन्यते हतम् ।
उभौ तौ न विजानीतो नायं हन्ति न हन्यते ॥ १९॥

*ya enaṁ veti hantāraṁ yaśh chainaṁ manyate hatam
ubhau tau na vijānīto nāyaṁ hanti na hanyate*

Both are ignorant—the one who thinks the soul can slay and the one who thinks the soul can be slain. The knowers of the Truth know that the soul neither kills nor can it be killed.

In other words, the whole thing is like a play, with the same actor enacting all the roles. God is playing with Himself, and this state of living is called His *leela* (divine drama). When a person is in deep *samadhi*, there is no duality (therefore it is called *nitya*). When he is in this world, with the body-mind, it is called *leela*. When one participates in either state, there is only one result – one is constantly happy.

Shanti Patha:

ॐ वसुदेवसुतं देवं कंसचाणूरमर्दनम्
देवकीपरमानन्दं कृष्णं वन्दे जगद्गुरुम् ॥ १ ॥

Vasudeva sutham devam, Kamsa Chanura mardanam,
Devaki paramanandam, Krishnam vande jagat gurum

I worship Lord Krishna, Who is the spiritual master of the universe, who is the son of Vasudeva, who is the Lord, who killed Kamsa and Chanura, and who is the bliss of Devaki.

May Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda bless us all with devotion and knowledge.