Gita is like a Ripe Mango!

Discourse by Savysaachi SwamigaL

Sree KrishNaparamaatmanE namaH

Bhagavadgita can be compared to a fully grown mango tree filled with green leaves, springing flowers and little raw mangoes that eventually grow in size and fill themselves with nectar and ripen into juicy mangos! This great text containing eighteen chapters and seven hundred verses starts with Arjuna’s perplexed mind which is like the little raw mango to start with. His mind eventually matures like a fruit at the end. This Gita is like the fruit, the eighteenth chapter is its juice. Arjuna’s total surrender at the Lord’s feet is its culmination. Devotion is the foundation of “Saranaagati” (surrender).

Throughout the Bhagavadgita, there are numerous examples of unquestioned devotion and surrender to the Lord:

“ananyaan chintayanto maam ye janaah paryupaasate tshaam nityaahbhiyuktaaanaam yogakshemam vahaamyaham” (9 - 22)

[“I take care of those who think of me constantly”]

“bhaktyaatvananyaya Sakyay ahamevam vidhorjuna Jnaatum drashTum ca tatvena praveshTum ca parantapa (11 – 54)

[“You can know Me, envision Me and be a part of Me only through unquestioned devotion”]

Twenty stanzas of chapter 12 are devoted to bhakti—devotion and hence the title of the chapter is bhaktiyoga. There are many more examples which focus on devotion. bhaktireva gareeyasi (devotion is the better approach), bhaktimaan me priyo narah (he who is devoted to me is dear to me); bhaktaah te ateeva me priyah (devotees are dearest to me); madbhakhtah sa me priyah (he who is my devotee is dear to me); and so on.

Lord Krishna tells Arjuna, “sarva dharmaan parityajya maamekam Saranam vraja,” (give up everything and take refuge in me and surrender yourself). Lord Krishna lights the light of knowledge in Arjuna, immerses him in the ocean of meditation, directs him in the path of dedication, and focuses him towards devotion. With the firm foundation of devotion, He demonstrates to Arjuna the importance of surrender. This stanza (charama Sloka) is the ultimate message from Lord Krishna to Arjuna and is considered the most important stanza of all.

Acharya Ramanuja in his commentary of Gita has given two interpretations. Other scholars have followed the Acharya’s lead and further elaborated this concept of surrender. Let us take some instances from Ramayana:

(1) gods having been hurt by the arrogance of the evil demon Ravana, surrender to Lord Vishnu who takes His incarnation as Rama (baalakaanda);

(2) when the evil demons create havoc and pose obstructions to their sacrificial rituals, the sages, surrender to the Lord when Rama comes to their rescue (ayodhyaakaanda);

(3) after suffering the pangs of separation, Bharata follows Rama to the forest and surrenders to him and receives his blessings in the form of his paduka (aranyakaanda);

(4) monkey king Sugreeva surrenders to Rama and Rama protects him from his brother Vaali and gets back Sugreeva his kingdom and wife (kishkindhaakaanda);

(5) Seeta narrates to Hanumaan the story of Kaakaasura who surrenders to Rama and receives his forgiveness even though he deserved to be punished (sunadarakaanda);

(6) Vibheeshana surrenders to Rama and Rama receives him as a friend even though he belonged to the enemy camp (yuddhakaanda).

Now, let us look at the question, whether this concept of Saranaagati (surrender) applies only to human beings. No, it applies to animal kingdom equally. One can look at the example of gajendra moksha in Bhaagavata. Gajendra (elephant king) went into the river to satisfy his thirst. While returning to the shore, a huge crocodile caught hold of the elephant’s foot. No amount of his struggle could give him freedom from the crocodile’s firm grip. Having exhausted all other alternatives, the elephant surrendered to the Lord who came to his rescue. There are many other examples: Droupadi, Prahlada, Dhruva, Kuchela, and Ambareesha, all of them expressed their complete faith in the Lord at the time of distress and cried out for help and protection under a cloud of utter helplessness. Lord never fails to appear to protect His devotees and that is what Acharya Ramanuja explains in his vivid prose describing this concept of Saranaagati and its superiority.

In conclusion, Gitaachaarya – Krishna, thus tells Arjuna to give up all other paths and take refuge in Him and assures that those who follow that advice shall always receive His grace and welfare. This is the essence of chapter eighteen of the Bhagavadgita which is like the sweet nectar from a ripe mango fruit.