

GEET`AA`S TEACHING OF FEARLESSNESS VERSUS FEAR-BASED DOCTRINES*

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*[mookam karot`i vaachaalam pangu langhaet`ay girim
yat` kripaa t`am aham vand`ay parmanand`a maad`havam]*

{The One by Whose Grace, a dumb person turns fluent in speech and a lame person is able to cross rugged mountains, to that Sweetest of the sweet, The All-Blissful, I offer salutations.}

Distinguished Speakers and Organizers, Ladies, and Gentlemen:

We have gathered here today at a very important juncture in human history, when all over the globe, mankind is terror struck. How man deals with himself and with others depends upon the intrinsic nature of man. A fundamental change is needed in man`s thinking. Spirituality, and in particular the Bhagvad`Geet`aa, was never needed as much as it is needed now. This conference has therefore been organized at the right time, and with a perfect theme.

Surely, Geet`aa is a dispeller of fear. But, we need to understand how this is so. To do this, we need to ascertain what our call for duty is, today, in our present world, which is *our* “Karma Bhoomi” or the “Ground of Action”. When we are able to hear the clarion call that beckons us towards action, towards becoming a karma-yogee, then we shall begin to understand at the deeper level the nature of fear and of fearlessness.

Briefly speaking, ‘fear’ kidnaps the ability to think clearly, increasing the possibility of being lead into error, and decreasing the chance of opening the positive exit doors that may be available. Depending upon the context, ‘fear’ can lead to complications, losses, and tragedies, both big and small.

But, then, one may ask: Isn`t ‘fear’ natural and wise? Suppose there is a road with a 50% chance of being hit if one attempts to cross. Should one just be fearless, and try to cross anyway because ‘Krishna protects His devotees’? If a hurricane is coming, should one be fearless and ignore orders to vacate his home on the beach, because ‘The Divine will surely help’?

To answer this, one should first realize that the logic in the above two examples, although not uncommon, is still inappropriate, and a yes/no type of answer (applicable to

all situations) is non-existent. A fearless person would not necessarily run across the highway without thinking, or choose to ignore orders to vacate his house. A person who is panic-stricken because of fear is, indeed, more likely to end up doing something undesirable. Fear tends to preclude calmness and presence of mind, making rationality difficult to achieve. A less fearful person can act in a calm and rational manner, and thus has a higher chance of making an optimal decision under the circumstances he is in.

Thus, at the outset, it is to be vehemently emphasized that the Geeta does not teach foolhardiness, rashness, ignoring or not apprehending dangers and risks, or acting in a silly manner in negative situations. Krishna (or The Divine) is also the vehicle speeding on the road and the hurricane striking the shore. According to the Geet`a, both of these are aspects of 'Nature', and 'Nature' evolves from The Divine only. As Krishna repeatedly points out (in agreement with Science): 'Nature' runs the universe. The vehicles and the hurricane follow the laws of probability, and wisdom requires that we heed such laws. Geet`a is a text of profound wisdom.

But, then, one may argue that 'Fear' is a topic in Behavioral Science, and should be dealt with as such. What could it have to do with 'Spirituality' and the Geeta? The answer is that, as I have elaborated elsewhere [3] in my work on Spirituality and the Foundations of Reality and Quantum Physics, Science itself is a part of Spirituality. The latter is the vision of the Whole Reality, while the former is only the part dealing with the mundane. Our knowledge of both is very incomplete, but ignoring Spirituality, we become even more depraved, and drastically so. The reason is that Man does have at least some experience and knowledge of Reality beyond the mundane, which (though relatively small) is still extremely significant.

Still, however, one may ask as to how spirituality helps in any concrete manner. Basically, the answer is that it provides a perspective of the 'Bigger Picture', the vision of higher realities relevant to us. The knowledge of this tends to lead us to the positive exit doors in negative situations. Since Spirituality is the Whole Science, it provides us with a consistent frame of mind, consonant with our existence as a part of the total Reality. This creates an outlook that is rational in an overall sense. This is discussed in some of my articles where I look at rationality in relation to spirituality. We now elaborate this.

Spirituality is the ascent to The Divine, and thus may be said to be entirely vertical. Though it often comes clothed in religion, it is not religion. Religion has a horizontal (mundane) part as well, which has to do with ego, both individual and collective. This includes belief systems, rituals, sect, styles and rules of worship, language, race, skin color, holy book(s), etc., etc., associated with 'me' as an individual, or with 'us' in a collective sense. It creates the dichotomy: We, the Believers versus They, the Non-Believers.

Now, I am strongly in favor of genuinely respecting the different religions. Yet, I must say the truth, namely, that all religions are not the same with respect to the amount and nature of their horizontal and vertical content. The vertical content of different religions may occasionally be even somewhat different, depending upon what aspect of the ascent is emphasized more, and in what way the emphasis is given. However, the vertical content of different religions is in consonance with each other. *Indeed, it has to be so.* This is the fact that often gets indirectly referred to in casual conversation, when people say that 'all religions teach the same things'. In other words, when we say that 'all

religions teach the same thing', we are asserting that the religions have a large common vertical part, all of which corresponds to spirituality.

Looking at this from another point of view, we must realize that religion is, indeed, essential and necessary. It may be considered as the mundane expression of spirituality. Each of us can have our own unique way of relating to and expressing ourselves to the Divine. The problem comes when one thinks that only his or her expression is the right one, the others being wrong to varying degrees.

The horizontal parts of different religions can be, and very often are, very divergent. Often, the horizontal part is a hurdle in the ascent of man to The Divine. It is natural for any person to have a horizontal part associated with him initially. However, as the ascent continues, it is too big a burden to carry. Great spiritual teachers agree with this assertion. Indeed, Buddha, Jesus, and Krishna did not dwell much on rituals and taught mainly the spiritual principles in the context prevailing at their time. Thus, the great Soofee master Roomee says in the Masnavi:

*The religion of the lovers of God is apart from all religions
The lovers of God have no religion but God alone.*

In the Raamaayana of the great spiritual poet Tulseed`aasa, the sage Vaalmeeki says:

*{ jaat`i paat`i d`hana d`harama bar`aabee
priya parivaara sad`an sukhd`abee
sab t`aji t`umhahi rahay liva laabee
t`in kay hrid`ay basahu raghuraaee }*

*[They who
Leaving aside all considerations
Of wealth and of social prominence,
Of a pleasurable home and of an affectionate family
Of community, of sect,
Aye, even of religion,
Burn only The Divine flame within themselves,
In the hearts of such as these
God dwells.]*

Of course, Krishna ends the Geeta with His immortal words:

*{Sarva d`harmaan parit`yajya maam aykam sharnam vraj
Aham tvaam sarva paapaybhyo mokshashyaamee maa shuchah}*

*[Leaving aside
All varieties of religion,
Take shelter
In Me alone.
I will deliver you
From all sins
Do not worry.]*

The 'layman' (busy as he is with his own day to day problems) may not be aware of the above distinction between religion and spirituality, and may not distinguish between the horizontal and vertical parts, considering his religion (as a whole) to be coming from his religion's 'god', who is assumed to have the attributes spoken of in his religion. The horizontal, mundane, part accentuates the differences between 'We' (the

Believers) and 'They' (the Nonbelievers), creating conflict. Often, in course of time, writers emerge who philosophize one or more aspects of the horizontal part, confounding the matter further.

As an example of such philosophizing, the 'cat-pole' story is famous. Once there was a very learned and spiritual saint. The saint had a cat, which used to bother him in his meditation. So, the saint bought a pole, fixed it on the ground some distance away, and before his meditation, he tied the cat to the pole. In course of time, the saint got many disciples some of which also lived with him. After some time, the saint died. The disciples, most sincerely, tried to carry on the message of the master. However, over time, differences appeared in the interpretation of the words of the master. The disciples moved apart and established separate centers.

But, in a sincere spirit, the disciples wished to have something common so that people see their oneness in the saint. Since the disciples were spiritually immature, the only thing they clearly remembered on which they could agree, was that the saint had a cat, and used to tie it to a pole. So, now, at each center, a cat was brought and a pole was fixed. After some time, a philosopher happened to come to the community. Looking at the sincerity of the worshippers, he was impressed. He saw deep meanings in the cat being tied to the pole, and wrote a very philosophical book on it. Slowly, all teachings of the master were forgotten, this book became 'The Book', and the cat-pole and the 'Book' became the main pillars of their religion.

So, the main point is that when the horizontal or mundane part of a religion is philosophized, the layman begins to see 'spirituality' even in this mundane part of his religion. This causes even more bigotry to develop. Depending upon the content and the phrasing in his religious primer, this 'layman' may see negativities in the Nonbelievers, developing dislike and even hatred for them. Over time, this would also sow the seeds of fear that the Nonbelievers may hurt the Believers and their religion.

If, in his religious primer, the condemnation of the Nonbelievers is very strong and is presented in a strong and intolerant language, this so-called layman may consider the elimination of the Nonbelievers as his prime duty. This is true particularly if a big reward is offered to him by his 'Book', during his life here on this earth or in his life in the next world. Like Mahatma Gandhi, a student of the Geet`a should try to understand how this layman got motivated. Note that this person, this layman under discussion, may be terrible to the Nonbelievers and may do terrible deeds, because he is a victim of the interpretation of his book.

Note also that his 'extremism' comes from his 'Book' and its interpretation. The rationality of this man is wiped out by his belief that his book is coming from his god. If this man has damaged life or property, or is otherwise dangerous, I would recommend constraints on him that could be severe. But, I would not admit that he is not misguided. He is a victim of his own simple-mindedness, as well as of the indoctrination based on fear and temptation.

Unfortunately, fear and temptation (among other things) have been used in varying degrees by almost all religions to goad people towards 'righteousness' (as defined therein). Quite often, we hear statements like 'If you wish to please God and be rewarded, do this particular worship and do it in this particular way', 'Fear God! He will punish you if you don't obey', 'Go not to the yonder camp. We don't know those people. You never know what may befall'. Note that each of these is based on fear: fear of losing

a reward, fear of punishment, and fear of the unknown. The logic behind these, if accepted, can hurt deeply. If you worship God for reward, then you really want the reward, not God. In this way, religions (often unwittingly) promote a materialism of two worlds (this world, and the one beyond). One wonders how this is better than the outlook of the materialist atheist, who restricts himself to this world only!

Next, we have the ‘fear of God’! This is the strangest concept! The Divine is our friend, our benefactor. He is a greater friend of ours than we ourselves are. He is kind and compassionate, beneficent and merciful. We are safer in His hands than in our own. It is wrong to inculcate fear of God in the mind of your own self or that of any one else. Why will you fear God? Is it because you wish to keep doing evil, and He is a hurdle? Is it because you want wealth, and He may not give you ‘enough’ (considering how you are)? No! Instead of loving evil and wealth and fearing God, we must love, worship, and seek God alone, and as Jesus said, do so ‘with all our heart, and all our mind, and all our soul’. God will not hurt us. God cannot hurt us. That is the Reality. It is we, who hurt our own selves. The less we are interested in God and Reality, the more the hurt can be.

It is not beneficial to accept a religion blindly (particularly, if you are born in it); a critical examination is necessary. One may enquire if its teaching emphasizes Divine Love or it is fear-based, whether one prays therein for The Divine or for some other reward, whether one prays for the good of both the Believers and the Nonbelievers or of the Believers only, whether one really prays to the Divine or one fears that the Divine cannot be reached except through a particular deity or individual.

Next, we have the ‘fear of the unknown’. Being fearful, ignoring or keeping distance, tends to create even more fear, confusion, and false rumors on both sides, which is not good for either. A cautious but friendly enquiry is called for. If the yonder camp corresponds to another religion, the same still holds true. It is important to realize that Reality itself is largely Unknown; unless we have a healthy and keen spirit of enquiry, we cannot progress. Perhaps, this is why the great Soofee poet G`aalib wrote:

*{ eemaan` mujhay rokay hae jo kheen`chay hae mujhay kufr
kaabaa meray peechhay hae galeesaa meray aagay }*

[Though faith tries to hold me back,

Disbelief pulls me forward;

Kaabaa is behind me,

The Temple of The Unknown is in the front.]

The Geet`aa asks man to relinquish fear, and thus become clear-headed and rational. This also helps develop detachment, because fear is concerned generally with worldly losses. The Geet`aa is essentially a purely spiritual text (presenting (in the words of Aldous Huxley) the ‘perennial philosophy’). It is a brief narrative, describing some of the major aspects of Reality that are very important for mankind. Spirituality in general, and the Geet`aa in particular, are finding more and more support in the context of physics and mathematics. Thus, it is not merely another belief-system. We can ignore the message of the Geet`aa at our own risk.

The Geet`aa is for all mankind. Although it has some context of the Vedic religion that preceded it, it points also to the limitations of the same, and tells us how to rise above them. Indeed, the Geet`a is above religion. This means that any one, irrespective of his religion, can follow the Geet`aa. As Juan Mascaro said: “*The*

greatness of the Geet`aa is the greatness of the universe.The Geet`aa is the vision of God in all things, and of all things in God”.

The universal nature of the Geet`aa imparts in us a sense of dignity for ourselves and for others, drawing our attention to the unity among things rather than the differences. To be able to see the differences is rather easy; almost any one can do that. But, to see the unity requires the cultivation of insight, which only a mature spiritual system can provide.

The Geet`aa does provide such a system. Thus, unlike certain religions, it asks you to pray both for the Believers and the Nonbelievers. It asks you not to entertain fear, but replace it by the attempt to understand. As you develop an inclination to understand situations rather than to react to them with fear, your tendency to be fearful decreases, and your fear tends to be dispelled. Thus, the Geet`aa tends to dispel fear.

In a world beset with fear due to religious intolerance, terrorism, war, greed, corruption, economic upheavals, and even grade school violence, the Geeta stands as a beacon light of wisdom.

So, coming back to our karma-bhoomi, our present world which is our ground of action, what does the Geet`aa asks us to do? The answer is obvious. We must spread spirituality everywhere, to every man and woman in this world. How is this to be achieved? There are two parts to this activity. Firstly, we must spread the message among those who are positively oriented. In (verses) 18.68 and 18.69, Krishna asks us to do this, emphasizing that, to Him, such activity is the most dear. Secondly. We must live an exemplary life ourselves. We must ourselves follow the teachings. Recall 3.21: {yat yat aacharat`i sreshthah tat tat evat`aro janah, sa yat` pramaan`am kurut`ay lokah t`ad` anuvart`atay}.

We must pay heed to 3:30: {mayee sarvaan`i karmaan`i sanyasya ad`hyat`ma chayt`sah, niraasheera nirmamo bhoot`va yud`hyasva vigat` jwarah}. We must leave the feeling of ‘mine-ness’, my race, my ethnic group, my sect, my religion. Although success is certain (as Sanjay said in the last verse 18.78, where there is Krishna, there is victory), we must not waste time in hoping and dreaming for the success of our mission. We must renounce all actions unto Krishna, rest our mind in spirituality, shake off the worldly fever, and fight the battle against ignorance.

In this battle, we must be fearless. Recall the first word of chapter 16: {abhayam sat`va sanshud`d`hih ...bhavanti sampad`am daeveem}.

This battle is not to kill someone or to kill oneself or to kill both, while hankering for rewards in heaven, and thinking that one is practicing austerity and obeying his book and his god. The Geet`aa holds such activity to be in the mode of ‘darkness’. Recall 17.19: {moodha graahayn` aat`mano yat`a peedayaa kriyat`ay t`apah, parasya ut`saad`ana art`ham vaa t`at` t`aamasam ud`aahrat`am }.

Our clarion call is for action on our part, without worrying about fruits; {karman`i eva ad`hikarast`ay maa phaleshu kad`aachana}.

In this battle, no human is our opponent. Recall 12.13 and 12.18, {advayshtah sarva bhoot`aanaam, and samah shatrtao cha mit`ray cha). We shall not hate any one. There is no human enemy. Our attitude is as in 13.27: {samam sarvayshu bhoot`ayshu t`ishthant`am parmayshwaram}. God sits equally in all.

Our fight is against ignorance. We must spread *jnaana*, i.e., spiritual knowledge. Recall 4.38: {na hi jnaanayna sad`arsham pavit`ram eeha vid`yat`ay}.: there is

nothing as purifying as spiritual knowledge. Also, recall 4.33: {*sarvam karma akhilam Paartha jnaanay parisamaapyat`ay*}: All action, in its entirety, consummates in knowledge (alone).

We must be ready to serve all mankind, irrespective of race and ethnicity, color and creed. There is no one who needs to burn in the fire of hell. There is no Nonbeliever who should be tortured. We are all various shades of gray. We must see the Divine immanent in all. Our vision is as in 6.29: {*sarva bhoot`ast`ham aat`maanam sarva bhhot`aani cha aat`mani*}: [all beings in God and God in all beings].

There is no one who is beyond help. Recall 4.36: {*api chayd`asi paapaybhyah sarvaybhyah paapa krat`t`amaa, sarvam jnaana plavaynaeva vrajinam sant`rishyasi*}: [even if thou art //among all evil-doers//the most sinful//thou wouldst cross //the sea of all wickedness//by the bark of knowledge].

This is the kind of vision that Swami Dayananda had more than a century ago. Today, we need this vision even more. Action in the service of the Divine is joy. It is time to come forward and to begin the service. Recall 14.26 and 14.27: {*maama cha yo avyabhicharaayn`a bhakt`iyogayna sayvat`ay, sa gun`aan samt`eet`ya ayt`aan Brahma bhooyaaya kalpat`ay.// Brahman`o hi prat`ishtha aham amrat`asya avyayasya cha, shaashwat`asya cha d`harmasya sukham aykaant`ikasya cha*}:
And he who serves Me
With unfaltering devotion,
That one,
Rising above the attributes,
Becomes appropriate for
The Being of
The All Pervading One.
For, I am The Foundation
Of The All Pervading One.
(I am The Foundation)
Of The Immortal and The Imperishable.
(I am the Foundation)
Of everlasting Righteousness,
And of The Bliss
Of The One and The Only One.

Thank you very much. [*Jai Sri Krishna*] {Hail to The Divine.}

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[5] For references to these and other works of the author on the Geeta, the reader is welcome to write to him at the address: jsrivas@lamar.colostate.edu

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