

Chapter XIX

Misinterpretations of the *Gita*; the verse “I shall bear the burden of your welfare”.

Speakers who are out to spread the *Gita* have multiplied nowadays and, as a consequence, a variety of interpretations, most of them far removed from the genuine one, have emanated, clouding the true significance of the genuine one. Interpretations follow the nature and character of the exponent. Once one forms an opinion, one tries to buttress it with appropriate arguments and prove others wrong. The opinion is then repeated parrot-like on every occasion; no attempt is made to practise the *Gita* and make it part of one’s actual life. Such people pretend to be great *Gita* preachers and go about heavy with the burden of credentials and titles. They ruin themselves by this deception and undermine the trust placed on the *Gita*.

Each word of God is for translation into actual life, not for scattering into the ears of people to reap fame. But the times have gone so awry that today the words are misused for acquiring publicity and praise! Those who listen to the expositions of these preachers are also neglecting to question the bona fides; they do not care to examine whether the people who extol the *Gita* to the skies have tasted the sweetness of its teachings. Words and deeds are far apart; the teachers exhort others, but those who are exhorted find that the teachers themselves don’t follow the lesson! No, not even one in a million.

Some boast that they have the entire *Gita* on the tip of their tongue, that they can roll out, on the spot, any verse from the *Gita* that you want to hear, given only the chapter and number. Or, they can quote chapter and number for any phrase or word you give. I am inclined to laugh when such scholarship is exhibited. Poor tongue, that it should carry so much on its tip, without any of it being absorbed in actual life! A gramophone record can repeat as well as they can, and with equal benefit to itself. Practicing one verse certainly yields more benefit than learning all the verses by rote and retaining them in memory. Arjuna proved every word of Krishna true, by practising it. His sincerity won him the grace of Krishna.

It is a pity that even extremely learned pundits at the present time are unaware of the thrill of putting into practice a single word of the *Gita*. What, then, are we to say of the unlearned, the ignorant? In short, even some very reputed exponents of the *Gita* are playing false to its teaching, acting contrary to the message. To the song of the Lord, each one adds a fancy note of their own to demonstrate their special twist in scholarship, or their favourite predilection. Let us consider one example of this type.

The tenth verse of Chapter 6 of the *Gita* declares that accepting help from others (*parigraha*) is a great sin. Now, those who accept the *Gita* as authority should act accordingly, avoiding help, right? *Parigraha* means “accepting” even for the upkeep of the body and the maintenance of *dharma*! These preachers, however, do accept 99 percent of them! The condemnation of accepting help applies to all forms; there are no modifying circumstances or exceptions. Yet, collections and contributions are asked for *parigraha* sacrifices, as an “offering” during waving of lights in a ritual worship, as expenses for the community of *parigraha* preachers, as gifts for the guru. Tickets are “sold” for lectures, just as for entertainment (like the drama and cinema). People who do this have no faith in the words of Krishna, for had they faith, they would not have behaved in such contrary ways. If they were convinced that it is wrong, they would not be tempted to act so. They explain the verse and feel that their duty is done; they do not feel the need to follow the advice. That is the spirit of the times, for this is the age of hypocrisy. People who watch this type of *Gita* preaching lose faith first in the preacher and, later, in the *Gita* itself. The pub-

licity dissolves into mere pomp and vanity.

The teachings of the *Gita* don't get the respect that the book gets. Thousands of people, when they see the sacred books —the *Gita*, *Ramayana*, *Bhagavatha*, *Bharatha*, etc.— bow their heads, press them to their eyes, place them on their heads, keep them on a special seat in the shrine, and reverentially place a few flowers on them. They sit with closed eyes and, with tear drops rolling down their cheeks, fall prostrate before the books and rise very much satisfied with themselves! All that reverence is for the stack of paper, not for the contents of the books, the subjects they deal with.

The head must carry not the weight of the paper but the message explained thereon. Attach value not to the book but to the subject; revere not the volume but the matter expounded therein. Install it not on the altar but in the heart. For it is only then that the authority of the *Gita* will be honoured steadily, at all times. The mind won't be cleansed of egotism or like evils by all this outward reverence, learning by rote, offering worship in shrine rooms, holding the head, pressing on the eyes, etc. Let the message enter the heart; put it into practice and taste the joy that comes from it. That's the way to honour the *Gita*.

The tastiest dish can never quell your hunger if you place it on your head or press it to your eye or fall prostrate before it. The *Gita* is on a par with this. The *Gita* is a tasty dish, full of the sweet ingredients of devotion, wisdom, action (*karma*), and detachment. Eat it; drink it. One mouthful is enough. The hungry one does not need all the grain that is harvested; a handful of rice suffices. The thirsty one need not drink the Godavari dry; a glass of water is enough.

He who has hunger for God need not consume the entire *Gita*; it can be quenched by practising even one verse. A box of matches has many sticks; if you want to light a fire, you need to strike only one; you can nurture the little flame into a huge fire, with care and diligence. The entire stock of sticks need not be struck. There are 700 sticks in the *Gita*; each one is a stick from which you can light the flame of wisdom (*jnana*). Strike one on the stone of experience; that is enough.

The *Gita* has to be used thus for self-realization; that is the holy task for which it is designed. It is a great wrong to misuse it. All attempts to use it for fame and fortune, for titles and display, are but symptoms of egotism; they are acts of sacrilege. The fragrance (*gandha*) must be extracted from this book (*grantha*); that is the test of scholarship. The fragrance is the essence of the book. Do not, on the other hand, transform the brain (*masthaka*) into a book (*pusthaka*).

See God in the stone; do not change God into a stone. That is the desirable vision. The stone must be visualized as divine, suffused with God, which it really is. This vision is the precious gift that God has given the people of this land. Pearls do not float on the waves of the ocean, so dive deep into the silent caverns at the bottom if you yearn for them. The people of this land have sought for God in this manner for ages.

The practice of *dharma* is the body; the realization of God is its heart. This is the truth that has urged the people here to march forward and save themselves. They are not slaves to outward polish, external embroidery, or material comfort. They search for the basic *Atma* with the inner eye and cultivate detachment. However, the people of India (Bharath), who have this grand nature, are attracted today by material progress and outward pomp! This tragedy is much to be regretted.

Those who go about expounding the *Gita* with the object of earning money are thereby keeping God afar. They may give various justifications for their behaviour, no doubt; but no one who has real faith in the *Gita* or

who is a real adherent of its teaching can accept their explanations.

The *Gita* is spoken in order to foster *dharma*, not valued possessions (*danam*); it serves to promote goodness, not “goodsness”. Collecting money in the name of a temple for Krishna or Rama, or for a temple for the *Gita*, is another means of reducing faith in God; building a house for the Lord who is immanent and all-pervading is absurd. The heart is the proper temple where Krishna or the *Gita* is to be installed. To put up an artificial structure, which is certain to be ravaged by time, for the eternal Absolute, the indestructible Godhead, is very improper. Of course, until a stage is reached, these may be necessary, but in that case it is wiser to make the best use of the ancient temples that already exist. Building new ones and ruining the old ones is as foolish as killing the cow and donating footwear made out of its hide! The welfare of the world can be promoted by renovating old temples, not by creating new ones. The installation of God in ancient days was done according to strict scriptural ritual, so the old temples are holier. The power radiated from them confers upon this land what little welfare it now enjoys.

The sages of the past suffered hardships, detached themselves from the world, and even disintegrated their physiques in the search for the secrets of individual salvation and social uplift. They have handed down certain codes of conduct and rules of living that are practicable and simple. Even these are now neglected or misunderstood; new codes and rules are imposed, so these precious ones have gone under.

When elders, gurus, and pundits accept and honour these new-fangled modes of behaviour, how can India continue to be the abode of righteousness (*dharma-kshetra*), the abode of *yoga* (*yoga-kshetra*), and the abode of surrender (*thyaga-kshetra*)? This downfall in ideals explains why the land that verily was a bestower of food (*anna-purna*), feeding all her children, has to wail today for food. The holy experience “I am Siva (*Sivoham*)” was resounding from every mountain valley, every cave, every temple, and every sacred river bank; but now the cry is “I am dead (*Savoham*)”!

The land has lost its ancient joy; it is infested with anxiety; it is the home of self-aggrandizement; it is pursuing empty pomp. To counteract these tendencies, the spread of spiritual knowledge by people who have actually experienced the joy of spiritual discipline and success in and through it has become very necessary. Everyone from the simple unlettered person to the realized sage (*paramahansa*) must recognize this need. All must cultivate faith in the *Gita* and take it as the authentic word of the Lord.

The Lord has given the assurance, “I shall bear the burden of your welfare, here and hereafter (*Yoga-kshemam vahaamyaham*)”. He has undertaken this task voluntarily. But for mortals and aspirants to benefit from this, they have to live as ordained; they have to adhere to the lines laid down. When they feel that they are not so helped, they have only to examine their own lives and discover how far they have kept up the commands of God regarding the regulation of life. They fail to examine this. They do not consider the past and future; they complain about the grief of the moment, not knowing that it is caused by neglect in the past and ignorance of the future. This is the root of their suffering.

While considering this assurance, the condition contained in the same verse, “For those devotees who worship Me alone (*Ananyaah chinthayanthah maam, ye janaah paryupaasathe*)”, has to be remembered. “I shall bear the burden of your welfare, here and hereafter” is the crown of this condition, the final fruit. The assurance is the head; but no head can function independently of limbs. Holding fast only to the head, apart from neck and shoulders and the rest of the body, is like putting faith in the key in one’s hand after the iron safe has been stolen! Of what use is the key after the treasure is burgled?

The conditions for the fulfilment of that assurance are: meditation on the Lord unhampered by any other thought (*an-anya-chintha*) and steady worship (*upasana*). If unbroken meditation is absent, when worship is not offered with unconditional surrender, what justification is there to complain that He is not bearing the burden?

You surrender to others; you praise and extol others; you are immersed in other thoughts. How then can He assume the burden? You serve others and press the Lord for reward! How can this be undivided loyalty (*an-anya-chintha*)? The servant of the king must serve the king wholeheartedly; if the servant serves the king and loves his family, it cannot be termed unswerving loyalty. Serve whom you love, love whom you serve. That is the secret of surrender (*saranagathi*).

Vyasa made a lovely garland, using the words of Krishna as flowers; of that garland, this verse is the crest. It is the central jewel of that garland of gems.

The words “*yoga*” and “*kshema*” used by the Lord here mean: acquisition of something desirable and preservation of what is thus acquired. The discipline by which you can preserve it is: exclusive meditation on the Lord (*an-anya-chintha*). That will cleanse the mind; it will make you a devotee. Devotees are recognized by these things: they talk of the Lord; they sing of the Lord; they see only the Lord; they work and spend their leisure with the Lord.

Such people have no need to perform rituals or other sacrifices; they need not busy themselves with meritorious acts of charity, or go from one holy place to another. Why should they be sad if they miss these things or complain that the Lord did not give them the chance or the wherewithal for these? He does not insist on these or crave these. Offer whatever arises in the mind, made pure by spiritual discipline; He gladly accepts all. You may engage yourselves in what are termed “good deeds”, but if the mind is unclean, if the vessel is not “tinned” with the thought of God, they are all polluted into poison. He is particular that the vessel be clean.

Note how the handful of parched rice that Kuchela offered the Lord with a pure mind pleased Him. Read the experiences of Vidura and Droupadi in the epics (*Puranas*). What did they offer the Lord? Vidura gave a cup of gruel; Droupadi had only a wee bit of leaf to offer. On the face of it, they are valueless, unable to fetch even half a penny as price. But consider how much the Lord gave in return! He does not calculate the value of things. He calculates the feeling that prompted the act. So purify the feeling in order to win His Grace.