

Brief summary for Tuesday 18th January (4.3 - 4.4 session)

We must thank all our teachers for their contribution to what has been written below. These are things we have learned and heard from other gracious souls whose teachings are expressed in our own words/understanding.

If you missed part 42, [check out the notes here.](#)

You can find [all the previous notes here.](#)

We continued to study verse 4.3 this week, where Krishna explains that He is teaching this wisdom to Arjuna because he is qualified to understand such secret teachings. The reason for this is because of their friendship and Arjuna's devotion to Krishna.

Arjuna is naturally humble and did not consider himself on the same level of the great kings and gods Krishna has mentioned so far and did not think of himself as a spiritual visionary. Krishna makes clear here that although Arjuna may think himself ordinary by comparison, the real qualification for receiving the knowledge is that Arjuna is a friend and devotee. True devotees of Krishna, what to speak of his friends, are greater than either kings or gods as they set the standard for saintliness. This verse we find the word bhakti (bhakto) appear for the first time. Devotion is Arjuna's principal qualification in understanding the secrets of the Gita.

We have seen this concept of eligibility (adhikar) come up previously in the Gita. Again we find Krishna referring to it. He actually began to introduce Arjuna's qualifications in 4.2 when Krishna called Arjuna Parantapa, meaning, one who destroys enemies. That person who controls the senses and the mind from hearing from the guru can hear even more confidential things from the guru.

We discussed in the previous verse how the members of the parampara don't conform with the kings of this world (the mind and senses). Such a person who controls the senses rules the world as the world is run by the senses. Krishna hinted at Arjuna's qualification calling him Parantapa as Arjuna has shown capacity to restrain himself from the enemies of the thoughts and unrestrained senses.

Krishna is also talking about the qualification of students and appropriate recipients of the teaching He is discussing. A secret to finding a qualified guru is qualifying ourselves. There is no shortage on the side of Krishna to bring the guru, but there may be some shortage on our part to be able to recognise when He or she comes and how they come to us (sometimes in different ways). Some kind of restraint is needed so we are not slaves to the mind and senses.

Krishna says to Arjuna, you are my devotee. Service is something that should be done affectionately, for example in serving the guru or other devotees. The more we can control the senses, the more affectionate and friendly we can really be.

The affection is an important point. Sometimes being a servant may be misunderstood. A devotee may mean a master and student. The master speaks and the student listens. Classically a student may just do what the master asks of them. When friendship is included, then there can be some intimacy as well. This means there can be questions. Not that we surrender and just do whatever is asked of us. We also ask questions with a view that we may progress. Arjuna, being fully devoted, is inquiring submissively.

Srila Rupa Goswami, when talking about guru as a practice or limb of bhakti says that one should take shelter of the guru with confidence and intimacy. Come sit and hear, and clear doubts and question so you can move forward in spiritual life. The transmission of spiritual knowledge from the guru to the disciple requires the disciple to understand the heart of the guru, as in talks between friends in the language of love.

This point is another reason Krishna gives why He is sharing with Arjuna, someone who is favorable to Him: this teaching is private or a secret. Krishna uses the term Rahasya which means secret. Confidential things about yourself you share only with your friends. The knowledge is rare, not everyone will be able to understand it, and within this secret knowledge, bhakti is even more secret within that.

Only a devotee can understand Krishna because one's relationship with Krishna is rahasya: secret, confidential and mysterious. Devotion is the quality that makes a person receptive to spiritual wisdom. Scrutiny and inquiry, which are necessary in the search for truth, come best from a mind and heart that is open. The way to understand Krishna is the same as the way to understand any person: with love.

The guru disciple relationship is one of servitorship but it borders on friendship. We should feel the guru is the best friend and cares about me. Arjuna has this and Krishna wants to awaken faith in Arjuna to just take shelter of Him. He wants to emphasize the efficacy of bhakti beyond other stages of yoga.

So Krishna is setting up to talk about Himself and in talking about Himself, bhakti has to come up. Arjuna is wondering why Krishna is speaking to him when generally He has spoken this teaching to all these great personalities. Krishna starts to give the reasons with restraint or self-control, but then goes further and says that because it is a great secret.

Already some secret knowledge was given. You are beyond forms and there is a unity that lies underneath all this perceived difference. Then more secret or mysterious than that is the point that inside of that unity, there is variety, there are forms, there are names. Arjuna has bhakti and only if Krishna wants us to know Him can we really know Him.

Devotion is causeless, it controls Krishna. It is free and independent. Whole other topic that is found in Nectar of Devotion, but if Krishna is attracted to a devotee, this is how they become part of the parampara. They then show

compassion to others who don't have these things, that they too can attract Krishna. What we really know or realise will be determined by how we act, how much we give of ourselves to the practice and participate.

There have to be devotees in the world for Krishna to come here. Arjuna is such a person. Devotees attract Him. Krishna never leaves the company of Bhakti devi, the goddess of devotion, and comes to the worlds because there is some bhakti.

This is a topic that will be discussed more in coming weeks, but Krishna is saying to Arjuna here that although he thinks of Krishna as extraordinary, actually Krishna thinks of Arjuna as extraordinary. How many people think of me in the way you do, with real love and affection. Therefore I am sharing my secrets with you.

Although Krishna has been deepening Arjuna's faith in the teaching by describing the impressive history and tradition by which the teaching of yoga descends, the first verse also creates some confusion in Arjuna. These 3 introductory verses lead to this question in text 4:

“Your birth is recent (aparam) and Vivasvan's birth is ancient (param). How can I understand that you instructed him in this yoga in ancient times?”

This is to create a segue into an important topic in the realm of knowledge: Krishna's own transcendental nature and position. How could Krishna have instructed Vivasvan 120 million years before? It implies His divinity as humans are not supposed to instruct gods, and it is unusual for them to remember their previous lives (although there are exceptions to the rule).

Arjuna may be able to understand Krishna could have been in a different form, but Krishna wouldn't remember as the norm is we don't remember our past lives. If it was another body, how does Krishna remember, and it can't have been this same body as it appeared here recently (remember Arjuna is Krishna's friend and family member). Arjuna wants Krishna to

explain this conundrum as it is a lot for him to digest. So Arjuna sets the stage Krishna to explain the nature of His descent into the world.

In speaking about an avatar who comes to renew the teaching, Krishna has implied he is Arjuna's friend but that He is different too. Krishna has said that He explained this yoga thoroughly. He spoke comprehensively on it, coherently in a well thought out way. A good teacher will clear one's doubts but also create new doubts so that their student can enter into a new territory of knowledge. The way they explain leads to new questions as we see is the case with Arjuna here.

As discussed, there is always more to say about the teaching. Guru's challenge is to challenge our understanding so we have the opportunity to grow. So creating faith also creates doubt, which the guru will also satisfy of course. When we think we have understood it, new doubts come. Such is the nature of being in touch with the Absolute in this world, it is never boring; it is a very exciting affair.

Something our school often emphasizes about this question from Arjuna is that actually Arjuna did know Krishna was the supreme. Remember in chapter one he was put in a mystic covering. Actually Arjuna had experienced many wonderful and divine lila's (pastimes) with Krishna. He is a great devotee and eternal friend. Also he had heard many things such as from Bhishma during the Rajasuya sacrifice of Yudhisthira. But Arjuna could understand it would be difficult for others to understand that Krishna had spoken this teaching 120 million years prior.

Arjuna is kindly asking for our benefit. The Agni Purana says that the purpose of inquiry from persons of wisdom is to reconfirm the knowledge of eternal principles they already possess and also to offer additional clarification. Arjuna wasn't a novice in Vedic knowledge and was somewhat cognisant of Krishna's actual supreme position. We will see later in chapter 10 Arjuna proclaim these things. Arjuna knows Krishna as the son of Vasudeva, as Bhagavan, but he questions as if he didn't know him in this way.

This question, apart from being for the benefit of others, gives Krishna the opportunity to speak directly about Himself. Those in ignorance aren't able to appreciate the omniscience and eternality of Krishna, thinking He takes birth and dies as ordinary people do. They don't understand that He possesses a spiritual form and is the highest purity. They do not believe that He is an eternal person and the original Godhead, who is unborn and all-pervading, and who is endowed with unlimited transcendental opulence. So Arjuna wants Krishna to speak authoritatively about the fact that Krishna is superhuman, transcendental and above the modes of time and space.

Arjuna has brought these doubts for these reasons. Men don't teach gods. Also Krishna, you weren't born that long ago, we are practically the same age, Arjuna is thinking. This will allow Krishna to speak about His omniscience and eternality. Arjuna is asking for clarification. Are you omniscient? Are you eternal?

Krishna is not a proud person; He is very humble. He doesn't want to just come out and speak these things about Himself, but is necessary for the rest of the teaching, especially in regards to bhakti. So He started this chapter in a way to create a doubt in Arjuna to draw these things out so there is a chance for Krishna to explain some things about Himself.

There is lots Krishna could say about Himself for our benefit. So much to be said about Him, but so far He hasn't said much. As we know, all our possessions and qualities can be finished in a moment by the nature of time. Yet we can be so proud of them (speaking personally). It is easy to talk about ourselves even if it is not useful for anyone else.

Krishna has so much to offer, so much to be said about Him. If He says all these wonderful things, it wouldn't be pride, it is just a fact because He is so wonderful. But Krishna's nature is that He doesn't put Himself forward, so Arjuna draws it out of Him by His question. He hasn't put these topics forward in the Bhagavad-gita so far and has waited for Arjuna to politely ask Him.

Krishna is a cultured person and has nothing to gain by pushing forward His qualities. If He does, it is only for the pleasure of His devotees. We should be very thankful for Arjuna as if He didn't ask, Krishna would not have spoken what is to come otherwise. When Krishna speaks, His speech is auspicious for the world and devotees welcome such discourse. They are always eager to hear more about Krishna. So this question in 4.4. asked for the benefit of others gives Krishna the opportunity to speak directly about Himself in the coming verses. This starts to move the discussion centered on self-realisation in the direction of God-realisation.

Krishna will start to go on a tangent away from the main topics of the first 6 chapters while He speaks on the nature of Avatar. This is foundational for devotion though which as we know is the central theme of the whole text.

The first 6 chapters are mainly about us, not about Krishna. They are largely about us and what we think ourselves to be. They also give the means to extract ourselves from that identification according to our standing or purity of heart. Different practices are more efficacious for different people.

To distinguish ourselves from matter is part of knowing what we are (and what we are not). What we are in relation to God and ultimate reality will come later. But Krishna will segue into a few verses which brings more of the theology of the Gita in. Remember, the chapter is about knowledge.

Knowledge is not just knowing ourselves, but the full extent is knowing ourselves in relation to the absolute. Yoga as we know is one, but with different stages. In talking about Jnana yoga (the main topic of this section), indirectly Krishna has to be speaking about bhakti. We will see more qualities of Krishna come out in the middle 6 chapters, as for devotion to be discussed, the object of devotion needs to be discussed. That object of devotion is of course Krishna, so it is required to know something about Him.

This section onwards (until 4.15) is very important in regards to the whole Gita and the topic at hand (knowledge). They are seed verses for what will come in the middle section of the Gita (chapters 7 - 12). Krishna is speaking in this chapter about knowledge and so if we really want to speak about knowledge, Krishna should really speak about Himself. He is the be all and end all of knowledge.

Krishna will get a bit ahead of Himself and after verse 15 will return to the primary subject of the chapter: self-knowledge (jnana). But in these seed verses we will learn much about the nature of Bhagavan, Krishna, the personality of Godhead. It is a nice break or breather for devotees who are more interested in Krishna.

Next time we will begin this journey by reading verses 5 and 6 where Krishna will explain His omniscience and eternality.