

Brief summary for Tuesday 12th October (3.25 - 3.26 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 33, [check out the notes here](#).

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

This week we saw Krishna continue to encourage Arjuna to act, pointing out that just as ignorant or attached people should work, so must wise persons like Arjuna, but without attachment for the results of their action. Krishna addresses Arjuna as scion of Bharata, which has a special meaning in that rata means devoted and Bha means knowledge and so Arjuna, who is devoted and in knowledge, should not act with attachment, but act to set an example and uplift others.

Krishna points out that action is the same for both the wise and the ignorant (or the attached and the detached), but the difference lies in their attitudes or the desire behind the action. Those in ignorance perform activities with attachment to the work and the fruits of that work, whereas one who understands the truth of the atma (conscious entity) also acts but without attachment. On the higher level, they act for the satisfaction of Krishna rather than the satisfaction of the senses, even though the actions may look the same externally.

We should understand that "ignorant" refers to those who don't know the truth about the self. They don't have jnana (knowledge which is generally found in the Upanisads) and so they are absorbed just in the actions with no higher purpose. Being attached, as we have previously discussed, this binds one to that work through karma. Being in such a state of

consciousness, they aren't qualified to practice Jnana yoga and so should be encouraged to practice Karma Yoga to develop the vision of the self.

This encouragement comes from seeing great souls also performing action, even though they have realised the atma (soul). Krishna wants Arjuna also to set an example in such a way, performing his prescribed Vedic actions out of compassion for others, protecting them and society from chaos that would ensue if everyone gave up their duties artificially. Here Krishna is emphasising to act for the benefit of others, even if one is in knowledge. After all, people in knowledge also have to act anyway (as we have previously discussed) so they should do so without attachment for the good of society is what Krishna is saying.

Verse 2.26 brings out many interesting points, from both the perspective of the entire path of Buddhi yoga, and Bhakti yoga in particular. Krishna says a learned person, or a wise person in spiritual matters, should not disturb the minds of those attached to frutiv work by encouraging them to give up their prescribed duties and just engage in the cultivation of jnana. Better is to engage people in their activities while acting with discipline.

As has been mentioned, one can't jump beyond their eligibility. Truth is given in instalments according to one's eligibility. We see this as a principle in all areas of knowledge; it is a universal principle. We don't go to a masters class or PHD level class in university if we haven't got the required background knowledge and tools of thinking gained from the undergraduate class. We should keep this in mind as in spiritual life we will hear all sorts of instructions from the scriptures and saints and we don't want to hold on to lower things as being the all in all.

We will discuss Bhakti shortly, but in this context of jnana, the restriction to study the Upanishads is not a social bias but an expression of this principle of learning according to one's eligibility. Spiritual life and loving God is the right of everyone, but we see practically that one is eligible to do so depending on the extent of their material conditioning. In this context of what Krishna has spoken so far, we know the fruits of work are temporary

and also that a person in knowledge should set an example. We may wonder why they don't set the example of renunciation and so Krishna has been explaining, most people aren't qualified to follow the path of renunciation. If an attached person tries to do so, giving up their responsibilities in the world, eventually they will become hypocritical and try to fulfil their desires in a way that is contrary even to the principles of dharma or religion. Therefore better they act according to that in a way that they can gradually realise spiritual truths.

For this reason Krishna is saying the wise shouldn't encourage the ignorant to give up their prescribed duties, it will only create a disturbance in their minds. Better they be encouraged to engage in scripturally sanctioned work. It may seem that it would be more compassionate to give them knowledge of the soul but Krishna argues that the wise should not impart knowledge but encourage them to walk in that direction by setting an example themselves. Don't bewilder their minds by saying there is another path where one gives up action through the practice of jnana. They will be unable to practice due to incomplete knowledge of the self (realised through niskama-karma yoga) and their attachment to action.

As we have heard, if the mind of the attached becomes disturbed, they may lose faith in working and if they don't act, knowledge will not come and so they would lose out from all angles. People can't stop acting anyway and so it is better to teach them to act with detachment from the fruits. It is a gentle way to bring them to a higher platform. Use their predisposition to act in a beneficial way, not tell them to give it up and just sit.

As we have discussed before, there are different types of work, depending on one's consciousness.

1) Karma kanda is where one works only for the fruits.

2) Sakama-karma-yoga is where one has spiritual upliftment as their goal (even better with attaining Krishna as one's goal), but still desires the fruits of their action due to attachment. They are encouraged to renounce a

portion of the results of their work and by doing so they will gradually become detached and attain transcendental knowledge.

3) Niskama-karma-yoga is where one works with complete detachment from the fruits of work (which is what we have seen Krishna mainly encouraging Arjuna to do in the 2nd and 3rd chapter so far).

In all three of these stages, the action or external activity may be exactly the same, but the consciousness behind the work is different. It is only superficially the same but there is a gradual development of detachment from the fruits of one's actions. The quality of work is measured by the consciousness behind it and the attachments one has.

We should note though that this is all in the context of karma yoga and jnana yoga, and this verse applies mainly to the jnani. Krishna is saying that one with jnana shouldn't encourage the ignorant to give up work. Indirectly this verse also shows the inferiority of jnana in comparison to bhakti. Devotees also observe this verse in essence (as we will discuss) but Krishna is not forbidding devotees to encourage even the ignorant to engage in His service. They will not be disturbed as even their karmic propensity can be dovetailed. Unlike jnana, bhakti doesn't require a person purify their heart first by another means before practicing, but rather the practice itself also purifies the heart. It is true though that a devotee teaches and engages the ignorant or attached person in consideration of their eligibility.

In the bigger picture of the yoga ladder, the purpose of performing karma is to attain knowledge or jnana which leads to bhakti. If a person is encouraged to give up their duty, jnana will not be able to manifest in their hearts and so they will deviate from both their duty as well as be unable to gain knowledge. This isn't true for bhakti though, because instructions on bhakti are always beneficial for everyone in all circumstances. We read a nice verse from Srimad Bhagavatam 5.5.15:

“Only My abode and My mercy are worth praying for. Instructions on devotion to Me should be given by fathers to their sons, teachers to their disciples and kings to their subjects. One should not become angry with a person who receives instructions but does not follow them. Even those who are ignorant of knowledge of fundamental spiritual truths (tattva-jnana) and bewildered about their proper duty should not be engaged in karma. What goal will be achieved by engaging a person blinded by delusion in fruitive activities, thus throwing him further into the dark well of this material world? Nothing will be achieved.”

Naturally, with understanding what Krishna has said from the start of His discourse in Chapter Two, that all things are temporary in this world, we may think it is better to encourage others to give up activity. You can't take anything with you when you die so what is your eternal gain in working. Krishna of course recommends a different strategy and that is to encourage those who are attached to use their work and its fruits for devotional service.

This verse doesn't suggest we don't encourage people to engage in service to Krishna. We should and the service will be very beneficial, especially when we are able to engage their natural karmic propensity. Bhakti itself doesn't require purification of heart before engaging in it as we mentioned. But beginners are encouraged to especially engage in kirtan and sravanam (congregational hearing and chanting about Krishna), whereas advanced devotees are able to sit in solitude and meditate on Krsna's lila's (pastimes) with an undisturbed mind. We see the example of great devotees like Gaura Kisora Dasa Babaji for example, but those acting as acharya (teaching by example) also engage in a way that beginners can emulate too. It's not that everyone is taught the same thing at all stages though.

Of course the primary occupation for all is hearing and chanting, whether one is a householder or renunciate, but someone in bhakti may also do karmic activities. In a traditional setting that is understood, for example even Caitanya Mahaprabhu did the Sraddha ceremony for his father. But

the idea or conscious motivation is not thinking that there will be some loss or problem if we don't do it. By bhakti all things will be achieved, but sometimes we engage in activities for social convention, etc. We interact with the world, observe different traditions even, but not in a way that covers our bhakti, that is, not thinking we need to do them for advancement. Bhakti alone has power not only to benefit us, but as the Bhagavatam points out, even one's family for 21 generations. The efficacy in bhakti is much greater than karma, yet still, incidentally if the occasion arises we may perform such activities.

The main point is that there is a place for a person in knowledge to act nonetheless, even if knowledge and action don't seem to go together (as action is in relation to things that don't endure). Krishna is emphasising action and will continue to do so for various reasons, especially the sake of others as is emphasised here. Krishna wants Arjuna to set that example. That said, Krishna does at other times say things that seem contradictory to this. For example, in Srimad Bhagavatam 6.9.50:

"A pure devotee who is fully accomplished in the science of devotional service will never instruct a foolish person to engage in fruitive activities for material enjoyment, not to speak of helping him in such activities. Such a devotee is like an experienced physician, who never encourages a patient to eat food injurious to his health, even if the patient desires it."

It's important to note the context as we said in our early sessions on the Gita. The instructions given in the Bhagavatam verse are in relation to bhakti directly, whereas at this point in the Gita, Krishna has not yet brought us fully to bhakti. Rather, He is speaking about jnana. Jnana is dependent on purity of heart and purity of heart comes from action without desire (niskama-karma yoga). But bhakti is by nature very potent and is not dependent on purity of heart. Srila Prabhupada points out in his purport that those who have faith in bhakti have no obligation for performing karma:

"Although the ignorant man is not to be disturbed in his activities, a slightly developed Krishna conscious person may directly be engaged in the service of the Lord without waiting for other Vedic formulas. For this fortunate man there is no need to follow the Vedic rituals, because by direct Krishna consciousness one can have all the results one would otherwise derive from following one's prescribed duties."

We see this point in many places in sastra (scripture) too. For example:

One should continue to perform the Vedic ritualistic activities until one actually becomes detached from material sense gratification and develops faith for hearing and chanting about Me. [Srimad Bhagavatam 11.20.9]

Having taken complete shelter at My lotus feet, however, a saintly person ultimately renounces such ordinary religious duties and worships Me alone. He is thus considered to be the best among all living entities. [Srimad Bhagavatam 11.11.32]

Give up all dharmas and surrender to me alone. [Bhagavad-Gita 18.66]

If someone gives up his occupational duties and works in Krishna consciousness and then falls down on account of not completing his work, what loss is there on his part? And what can one gain if one performs his material activities perfectly? [Srimad Bhagavatam 1.5.17]

So in one sense, properly understood, this verse (3.26) also speaks about the superiority of bhakti. A devotee doesn't say one should remain attached to material things but says become attached to Krishna. Rather than give up sense objects, so many sense objects are there to be attached to in relation to Krishna.

Sanga is used in the verse which means attachment (karma-sanginam). This same attachment that has been described as the cause of our

bondage, when reposed in saintly people, will be the cause of our freedom. Association with devotees is a very powerful way to advance in spiritual life. In Jnana we advance by detachment or giving things up. In Bhakti we advance by attachment or sanga.

We don't give up those things that have value in Krishna's service. As generally people are attached to things, this path is very user friendly, especially compared to the path of Jnana. To work dutifully and be detached from the fruits, do it for Krishna instead. Rather than give the results we give ourselves to Krishna. Engage our energy, our attention, especially in chanting His name for example. Our whole life will gradually become an offering.

This verse in the Gita doesn't apply to devotees in the sense that we don't encourage people to remain attached, but rather encourage them to become attached to Krishna. We have some understanding that Mahaprabhu's gift is so great and we want others to have the best thing. This mercy or grace can take one to the highest reaches of bhakti or spiritual life, but also can give any other form of spiritual realisation one may desire. The process is so much easier and user friendly through Mahaprabhu's grace.

Therefore, this verse serves to underscore the power of bhakti and the weakness of jnana. Knowledge and detachment come automatically as side effects of bhakti (they are considered small things, as naturally, love is so much greater). Knowledge and detachment become beautiful in relation to bhakti. So in comparison to jnana and even niskama-karma yoga, bhakti is so much more user friendly and we are fortunate to be touched by her.

Next time we will discuss verses 3.27 - 3.29 where Krishna will describe the differences in thinking between the attached and detached worker (the ignorant and the wise) when performing action.