

Bhagavad Gita -Chapter 13, Vol. 1

“The Distinction between - The Body of Oneself and The Self in oneself.”

The main purpose of this chapter is to re-establish, firmly and beyond doubt, in one's mind the knowledge about the true nature of Parameswara which also involves knowledge about the means by which purity of mind and clarity can be established, so that one becomes fit for gaining knowledge about the overriding purpose of the body-mind-intellect complex which every human being is blessed with.

- Sri Krishna is calling attention to one's own physical body for a particular reason, which is the following. Even though every person naturally recognizes one's own physical body, one also entertains a continuing confusion about one's own physical body and the SELF in one self. Everyone treats one's own physical body sometimes as an object of one's knowledge, and sometimes as identical with oneself, as the subject, oneself it-self, as “I” Itself.

In order to dispel this subject-object confusion with reference to one's own physical body, Sri Krishna opens the discourse with the statement:

- “This physical body, one's own physical body must be understood as an object of one's knowledge, not as oneself itself, not as SELF “I” itself.”

- One's own physical body is a holy place, just like a temple is a holy place. For any person, the holiest of all places is one's own physical body, because it is the only one capable of doing holy actions.

Holy action means proper action for gaining the ultimate goal of life, namely Total Fulfillment in life. For example, like in an agricultural society, a fertile plot of land fit for cultivation, where one can sow the seeds and reap the fruits.

I do not need anyone to tell me whether or not this body is my body. I know it naturally. Anything touching my physical body, I immediately recognize that my body is being touched.

On the other hand, if I have discriminating knowledge about what is SELF and what is not SELF, then I know clearly, even more clearly than before, that this physical body is an object of my knowledge and the knower of that knowledge is the Pure Consciousness in myself, the innermost Consciousness in myself, and that is the “SELF I” Itself.

Bhagavad Gita - Chap. 13 Vol. 2

Sri Krishna unfolds the extraordinary relationship that exists between one's physical body and The SELF I in oneself; between the known and the knowable world of objects and The All-Knower; between a limited individual person, and the ever-existent, all-conscious, ever-conscious, all-inclusive, limitless Brahman.

Looking at Arjuna face to face, Sri Krishna says: "You are not your physical body. While your body and your-self are always naturally together, they are mutually distinct from each other. Your body is only an object for which you are the subject "I". The one who knows, the one who recognizes this fact, namely that one's own one's own body is an object of one's knowledge, that knower, recognizes "That SELF in oneself."

If you choose to identify yourself in terms of the form, name and attributes of your body vehicle, then you must also learn to understand and recognize the true nature of yourself as the nature of "I" in yourself. While your body exists naturally and inseparably together with yourself, you yourself - the "I" in yourself, is distinct from your body, is independent of your body. It is not an isolated "I" in your body. It is the universal "I" existing in every body, "That I", "That SELF" in yourself is "MY-SELF", - The ever-existent, ever conscious, all-inclusive, limitless Brahman."

So says Sri Krishna; not only addressed to Arjuna, but addressed to every person for whom enlightenment through knowledge is Joy.

When we understand that "THAT" includes everything that can be objectified, either by thought, word or deed, manifest or unmanifest, animate or inanimate, then the SELF of all that exists in this creation is indeed Brahman.

This is a matter of knowledge to be understood and recognized. It is not a matter of blind belief or indoctrination of any kind. It is knowledge for enlightenment to be reflected upon, and understood by every person, blessed with the ability to understand, appreciate and enjoy Enlightenment through knowledge.

This knowledge can be gained only by those who sincerely seek this knowledge approaching knowledgeable teachers with sincere interest, humility and dedication in reflecting on the content of the teachings, through repeated questioning of one's own understanding of such teachings, and ultimately resolving all doubts in one's mind and by oneself, and doing service. Service here is done to anyone, anywhere, at any time, with the attitude of service dedicated to Brahman, is indeed the best and the highest service one can do to oneself.

The Gita and the Upanishad mantras are our real teachers. We study these mantras with sincere interest, humility and dedication, making use of whatever help becomes available to us from time to time.

We reflect on the content of these mantras by repeated questioning; we do not question the mantras, but we do question our understanding of these mantras, until all our doubts are resolved by ourselves.

This entire world of transient existence represent a worldly life of transient pleasures and pain, success and failure, hopes and fears, sorrow and distress, ailments and sufferings, bondage and mortality, etc., generally a life of never-ending wants, cravings and limitations, dissatisfaction and unfulfilled desires of various kinds, from all of which one would certainly wish to get a total release if possible; free from all ups and downs of worldly life. And, at the same time, it is equally clear to me that I am indeed never absolutely free from the ups and downs of worldly life.

Bhagavad Gita – Chapter 13 Vol. 3

Briefly recalling what we saw last time in the first two verses of this chapter; we just heard Sri Krishna unfolds the extraordinary relationship that exists between one's own physical body and the SELF "I" in oneself.

Calling Arjuna's attention, Sri Krishna says:

“O! Arjuna, please listen:

This physical body, one's own physical body, must be understood as an object of one's knowledge and not as ONESELF itself, not as Subject "I" Itself. That Self I in one's own physical body is My-SELF – Itself, who is ever absolutely free from the ups and downs of worldly life.”

How is that possible? How can I understand Sri Krishna's statement that I am in fact absolutely free from all the transient experience of worldly life? That is the question with which we left ourselves last time to think about.

When one thinks about this question, repeatedly, it turns out that this question is not, after all, a profound one. In fact, the answer to this question is evident from common experiences from daily life. For example, I may mistake a rope to be a snake. Immediately my mind superimposes on the rope all the attributes of the snake, and that gives rise to all kinds of fears and mental agitations. Such fears and mental agitations are real, in the sense that they last as long as my ignorance of rope-knowledge lasts. Once I realize that rope is only a rope, and not a snake, my ignorance of rope-knowledge disappears, and along with that, all the fears and mental agitations created by that ignorance also disappear. That is common experience. Similarly, in the darkness of the night, I may mistake a pillar to be a ghost, and experience all the associated fears and mental agitations, as long as my ignorance of pillar knowledge lasts. Once the place is lighted, I see the pillar as it is, and my ignorance of pillar knowledge goes away. Along with that, all the fears and mental agitations created by that ignorance also disappear. This is also common experience.

One can cite any number of such examples to show that mistaken identity, born of ignorance can make one superimpose the attributes of a mistaken one on the real one, resulting in an infinite variety of transient experiences of worldly life.

Therefore, if by ignorance, one superimposes the attributes of one object on another object, such superimposition has the capacity both to conceal and to create – conceal the true identity of the other object, and also create varied pleasant and unpleasant experiences in oneself. That is common knowledge.

Ignorance is not a new phenomenon. We deal with it every day. Everybody is ignorant of many things - that is also common knowledge. There seems nothing extraordinary about such ignorance. Being so, all such ignorance of worldly matters can be designated as ordinary ignorance. But there is something extraordinary about the fact that most people do not know that one can be ignorant of one's own self. Such ignorance is called "Self-ignorance".

"Self-ignorance" is ignorance about the true nature of one's own SELF, and all forms of ordinary ignorance are only partial derivatives of Self-ignorance. The manifestations of Self-ignorance are infinite in scope and ever subject to change, and hence, the consequences of Self-ignorance are extraordinarily great. Vedanta calls such Self-ignorance the "original ignorance" to distinguish it from ordinary ignorance, which is concerned only with ignorance of some form of object knowledge.

In Self-ignorance, one habitually superimposes the attributes of one's physical body on the SELF "I" in oneself.

Such superimposition has the power to conceal the true identity of one-self, and also creates worldly experiences of various kind with which one readily identifies oneself without any enquiry. Therefore, it is important for us to understand clearly the nature of one's physical body, and the relationship between Self-ignorance, and the physical body.

Every individual person, like every one of us here, is a unique combination of the body and The SELF. That SELF is ever-existent, all-conscious, ever-conscious, pure awareness, all-inclusive and all-pervading, the ultimate cause and ultimate abode of all that exist in this creation, and The SELF, already exists in the hearts of all beings as ATMAN Itself.

What we call the physical body, is itself three-fold in nature, which means it is the integrated manifestation of three bodies in one. These three bodies are:

- the gross physical body, which is perceptible both externally and internally
- the subtle body, which is imperceptible,
- the causal body, which is the cause for both and is also imperceptible.

This perceptible gross physical body, is constituted of the five great elements that have undergone the process of "grossification" (lowering the vibrations > becoming more dense) through mutual interactions. By itself, the gross physical body is inert, and it is just a shell and housing for the occupation of the imperceptible subtle body, which fills up the entire housing.

The subtle body is also constituted of the five great elements, but before the process of “grossification” (becoming more solid, having lower vibrations), and hence it is imperceptible (has very subtle vibrations). Thus the subtle body exists everywhere in one's gross physical body as an assemblage of differentiated organs, including

- ? the 5 - organs of perception
- ? the 5 - organs of action
- ? the 5 - powers of physiological functions of the 5 digestive powers and
- ? the mind and the faculty of decision.

The organs of perception and action in the subtle body are not the gross ones seen externally in the perceptible physical body, but they are their imperceptible counterparts in the subtle body.

Thus, this entire gross physical body is totally in keeping with the subtle body inside, in all details. It is this subtle body reflecting the power of ATMAN already in itself that gives life to the gross physical body, activates it and operates it for doing functions of various kinds to exhaust all of one's Karma – all of one's already fructified fruits of past Karma, through worldly experiences of various kinds such as pleasure, pain, success, failure, etc.

On exhausting all of one's Karma, the function of the present subtle body is over, and hence it naturally leaves the gross physical body. Then, we say that the body is dead. Please note that only the gross physical body is dead. The subtle body is not dead. On leaving the gross physical body, the subtle body assumes different gross physical bodies, one after the other, from time to time, each time in a form and name totally in accordance with one's own past cultivated knowledge and mental disposition, resulting in successive births and deaths for the gross physical body, again and again.

The causal body, existing in an undifferentiated imperceptible form, is the cause for both the subtle imperceptible body and the gross perceptible body.

This causal body is indeed Self-ignorance.

Since only the one who is capable of gaining knowledge can be ignorant, the gross perceptible body cannot be ignorant. Only the subtle imperceptible body can be ignorant.

Self-ignorance is not precisely definable. It is a condition of the subtle body, in which the ignorance aspect prevails in its original state; we may recall this as the original one, just to distinguish it from all the other forms of ignorance derived from it, which means that Self-ignorance is not mere object ignorance. It is ignorance of the SELF "I".

As pointed out earlier, ignorance has the power both to conceal and to create.

This original one has the power to conceal The SELF "I", from the organs of perception in the subtle body. It also has the power to create a formidable obstruction to recognize The SELF "I".

Thus, we understand that Self-ignorance is the very nature of the causal body. It exists in an undifferentiated form in the differentiated components of the inner organs of perception of the subtle body, and consequently, has the power to enforce the notion of

“ego”, the notion that “I am the doer, the enjoyer,” etc. in the mind of the subtle body, which in turn gives rise to the associated experiences of pleasure, pain, sorrow, distress, etc., leading to repeated births involving different subtle bodies and gross bodies. That is how Self-ignorance is related to one's physical body.

Having identified the causal body as Self-ignorance, we can now say that every individual person, indeed every individual living being, is made up of a particular combination of “bodies” in the increasing order of subtlety in manifestation, where ATMAN alone is Absolute reality, never subject to change; that is the distinguishing mark of every individual and the other three are only transient realities ever subject to change.

That is the distinguishing mark of every individual.

With reference to any particular person as subtle body, let us be clear that since the subtle body includes ATMAN (or SELF”I”), which is ever existent, the subtle body is also ever existent, which means there is no death for the subtle body. When the gross physical body dies, the subtle body does not die. It continues to exist as an unmanifest individual subtle body made up ofand ATMAN, until such time it is ready to manifest itself again in another physical body appropriate to its pre-cultivated knowledge and mental disposition.

Further, since there is only one ATMAN, The ATMAN in any one individual subtle body is also The Atman in all other individual Jivas (Individuals), manifest or unmanifest, and That ATMAN is also The SELF”I” of Parameswara ITSELF.

Therefore, with respect to all individual subtle bodies, we must understand that the SELF (or ATMAN) in the subtle body is The Parameswara ITSELF.

Liberation is only for the subtle body: “Liberation” for the subtle body means being able to recognize itself as ATMAN, as Parameswara ITSELF.

How is such recognition possible? It is possible because, that which stands in between this recognition is only Self-ignorance. When this is removed there occur a direct and immediate knowledge in the inner instruments of perception of the subtle body, and the subtle body now naturally recognizes Itself as ATMAN, as SELF”I”, as Parameswara ITSELF.

Thus, when self-ignorance disappears, the ONENESS of subtle body and ATMAN and Parameswara becomes evident, spontaneously even while the body is alive and active, and such a subtle body now becomes an enlightened person existing as the very embodiment of Parameswara.

For such an enlightened person, in time, when all the “prarabda” karma is exhausted, the gross physical body naturally falls, and since there are no more actions to be done, or events to be experienced, the subtle body also disappears, and since Self-ignorance has already disappeared, the enlightened person, as a subtle body, now spontaneously becomes one with ATMAN, the all-pervading SELF Itself, the Parameswara Itself; the immortal Brahman Itself.

That is how it is possible for any person to uplift oneself, and recognize one's inherent Immortality and gain total liberation from all transient realities of worldly life through gaining Self-knowledge, by transcending Self-ignorance.

How one can transcend Self-ignorance is indeed the subject matter of the entire Bhagavad Gita and all the Upanishads.

Bhagavad Gita-CHAP. 13-VOL.4

Briefly recalling what we saw last time, every individual person, as a living being, is a unique combination of one's body and The Self "I" in one's body. What we call the body, is itself a unique combination of three distinct bodies in one,

- The visible gross physical body, which by itself is only an inert housing for the other two bodies.
- The alive and invisible subtle body, filling up the entire gross physical body. The subtle body, by itself, is the manifestation of one's residual accumulated past-results of one's past personal qualities and actions, still to be experienced and exhausted, and
- The alive and invisible causal body, which is the cause for both the live subtle body and the inert gross physical body. The very nature of this causal body is ignorance in the mind and intellect of the subtle body about the true nature of The Self "I", already in oneself.

Thus, when one looks at oneself as an individual person, in order to be able to uplift oneself both materially and spiritually, one must first recognize the existence of all the above four distinct constituents of oneself, namely:

- The inert gross physical body
- The live subtle body occupying the entire gross physical body
- Self-ignorance and
- The SELF "I" whose very nature is PARAMESWARA Itself, all existing together, with increasing subtlety in the above order.

Of the above four constituents, The Self "I" alone is Absolute Reality, all pervasive, ever-existent, ever conscious, and all conscious, never subject to change or disappearance at any time, whereas the other three constituents, are only transient realities (meaning dependent realities) ever subject to change and ultimate disappearance.

Now, let us consider any individual person as a living being. When that person's Karma has been fully experienced and exhausted, that person's gross physical body has served its purpose, and it no longer befits the evolved needs of the subtle body inside, in its current state of Self ignorance. Therefore, the subtle body, along with its state of Self-ignorance, naturally leaves the gross physical body in search of a new housing - a

new gross physical body, to occupy and re-manifest itself, to experience and exhaust the already maturing outcome of the accumulated results of past desires and actions. The moment the subtle body, along with its causal body, leaves the gross physical body, the inert gross physical body, falls dead, but the person, the Jiva is not dead. The person, as a live and conscious being, continues to exist as an individual unmanifest Jiva, now constituted of only of the subtle body, Causal body (or Self-ignorance) and The Self "I", until such time as the subtle body, along with its Causal body (state of Self ignorance) re-enters into another gross physical body, appropriate to its present needs.

How such re-entrance takes place, Sri Krishna tells in Chapter 15 (15-7,8 and 9), which we will see a little later.

On the other hand, if the same person we are talking about orders and reorders his every day life style in such a manner that he gains Self-knowledge, at some time in his life, (at the moment he gains self-knowledge), then, Self-ignorance naturally disappears, and the person now becomes an enlightened person, with his gross physical body - subtle body with absolute purity of mind together with The Self "I", The Parameswara Itself, already in oneself.

In time, when all Karma has been fully experienced and exhausted, his gross physical body naturally falls, and his subtle body also naturally disappears, because there are no more accumulated actions to be done, and emotions to be experienced for a Jiva and hence The SELF "I", naturally becomes ONE with the all-pervading, ever-existent, ever conscious, all inclusive Brahman, just as a limited room-space becomes one with the infinite total space when all the enclosing walls are destroyed and removed. That is how any ordinary person can discover oneself as Parameswara Itself, by destroying all bondages born of Self-ignorance. When that happens, one naturally discovers oneself as Parameswara Itself, and the truth becomes self-evident.

Therefore, the only way one can understand Sri Krishna's statement, that every person, indeed every Jiva, is in fact Brahman Itself, is by understanding clearly what exactly Self-ignorance is, and what exactly Self-knowledge means to a person and by taking immediate steps to gain Self-knowledge.

Therefore, at this time, it is both appropriate and necessary to recall a few of the Upanishad verses which we have heard already, and on whose contents we must reflect again and again.

The word Knowledge and also the word Ignorance have distinct meanings in Upanishad readings, according to the context. When talking about them separately, the Word "Knowledge" means any particular knowledge, with reference to the context. And the word Ignorance simply means "ignorance" – ignorance about any particular knowledge, again with reference to context.

On the other hand, when talking about either in juxtaposition (one by the side of the other), knowledge about the true nature of The Self "I" in one-self and in every self there is, and "That" is Self-knowledge. This knowledge by its very nature is truly independent, never subject to change, and all-inclusive. And Ignorance includes all forms of

knowledge other than Self-knowledge, which means Self-ignorance. All forms of purely objective knowledge, which are essentially dependent in nature, such as those included in our education in arts, sciences, engineering, technology, etc. All forms of such knowledge come under Self-ignorance.

With this understanding of both in juxtaposition, let us recall the content of a few of the Upanishad verses, which we have heard already. The Upanishad says

- Self-ignorance and - Self-knowledge offer two distinct life styles, two distinct paths of life, mutually opposed to each other, because these two paths of life are ever far apart, leading to opposite destinations. The life style rooted in Self-ignorance is the path of life exclusively governed by the transient realities and experiences of worldly life, involving Action, desires, etc., all of which lead to repeated births and deaths, whereas the life style rooted in Self-knowledge is the path of life leading to total liberation, in which Ignorance naturally vanishes, and the individual Jiva gains total freedom from repeated births and deaths, and enjoys its inherent fullness and immortality, which means, through the Knowledge, the individual person, even while still living, reaches one's natural destination, namely one's innermost SELF – the abode of the all-pervading Brahman and thus become ONE with That Parameswara Itself, already in oneself, and indeed in every self there is.

Further:

- The path of life rooted in Self-knowledge, which is the path of life leading to Oneness with Brahman Itself, already in One-self.
- The path of life rooted in self-ignorance and its consequences, which is precisely the path of life rooted in objective knowledge, totally devoid of self-knowledge. That path of life is a life of never ending cycle of transient experiences of pleasure and pain, sorrow and distress, etc.

Thus what can be achieved by Knowledge and Ignorance are distinctly and vastly different. Both paths of life are always open to every individual human being.

Analyzing both the possible lifestyles, a wise person who has Discrimination evaluates them in terms of their respective utility for achieving one's ultimate objective in life. After such analysis, the wise person naturally chooses - the path of life rooted in Self-knowledge, whereas the one not yet mature enough to recognize the very purpose of life, chooses the path of life exclusively rooted in objective knowledge.

Why?

- Is being attracted by the transient pleasures obtainable by the worldly pursuits of objective knowledge.

That does not mean that Knowledge - as objective knowledge, is any less important for one's spiritual progress.

As the Upanishad says:

“The person who knows, who clearly understands and appreciates both Self-knowledge and objective knowledge together, that person through the discipline cultivated in the pursuit of objective knowledge, in depth, crosses and overcomes the world of death,

which means that person gains clarity of understanding of the complexities of the world of changes.”

That person realizes the cause-effect relationships of the world of changes, both in its unmanifest and manifest states, and so realizing, by the help of Upanishad knowledge, Self-knowledge, that person gains immortality, gains the knowledge of the changeless reality behind and beyond the world of changes.

That person gains totality of knowledge, gains Knowledge that is God realization - Self-realization arising from the holy confluence of the ever-flowing objective knowledge with the limitless ocean of spiritual knowledge. Such God-realization is possible only through - objective knowledge and Self-knowledge together, in that order.

Thus Upanishad makes it absolutely clear that proficiency in objective knowledge in depth, is a necessary pre-requisite for gaining Self-knowledge. The greater and deeper such proficiency is in objective knowledge, the easier it is to gain Self-knowledge,

What can be achieved by objective knowledge alone is always limited. And what can be achieved by - Self-Knowledge is indeed unlimited. It is Limitlessness Itself. Such limitlessness is beyond the comprehension of one who is still immature.

That is why such a person goes after only objective knowledge, which is no more than - happiness governed by human limitations.

On the other hand, pursuit of Self-knowledge leads to Limitless Happiness.

The means, for gaining such Happiness is the clear realization of Self-knowledge.

Namely:

The SELF in oneself is Parameswara It-Self.

The SELF in every self is Brahman It-Self. That is Self-knowledge.

In a clarion call to all humanity, the Keno-Upanishad emphasizes the need for every person to take immediate steps to gain the realization of such Self-knowledge, in the following words:

For the one who seeks to realize Self-knowledge, here, in this world, while one is still living, for that person, there is TRUTH in life, there is meaning in life. And for the person who does not seek to realize Self-knowledge, here, in this life itself, very great is the loss. Discovering The Self I, discovering Parameswara in oneself, and indeed in everything in this creation, the wise ones uplift themselves from the world of transient experiences, and become immortal, reach their natural ultimate destination in life, namely Brahman Itself, already in oneself.

This is The TRUTH, The SELF of every being in this creation.

That is The TRUTH. Life becomes meaningful only when one makes use of one's natural faculties and blessings to realize that truth, here, in this very life. Otherwise, life is simply a waste. Therefore, the Upanishad summons every person to take immediate steps to gain such realization, so that one may experience True life, before one's gross

physical body falls dead. But, if one chooses to neglect one's opportunity to seek such realization, great shall be one's loss - so declares the Upanishad.

From all that has been said today we understand that Self-ignorance, which is obstruction to Self-knowledge, already exists in one's in one's body-mind-intellect complex. It is such Ignorance that conceals the true identity of oneself from The SELF in oneself, and creates a mistaken view of one-self. Therefore, such Self-ignorance, such obstruction of Self-knowledge has to be removed for one to be able to realize the true identity of one's own self. Self-ignorance can be removed only by Self-knowledge. To impart Self-knowledge is the mission of all our Upanishads, and that is precisely what the Bhagavad Gita does.

Being convinced of this understanding, we will continue our Gita verses next time.