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## **The Message of Active Spiritual Life and Steady Mind in Bhagvad Gita**

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### **Abstract**

The growing unrest and conflicts in the world have prompted us to an ever-increasing search for mental peace and stability. Indian knowledge system enlightens the world with in-depth knowledge about how to live a peaceful and spiritual life. The philosophical foundation of the Indian knowledge system rests on various religious texts, most prominently Bhagwad Gita. Based on the textual analysis, this paper addresses the question of mental stability expressed in the ideas of Sthitaprajna and Sthitha-dhiih in Bhagwad Gita. The article discusses how Bhagwad Gita not only identifies the prime causes of despair and restlessness in the world but also illuminates the path to self-actualization. Such self-actualization is only possible through the path of right knowledge, action and devotion. It also teaches us how one can lead an active spiritual life without renunciation from the world. Such transcendental knowledge is very helpful in the integrated development of individuals and the progress of human society.

### **Introduction**

Despite immense material and technological progress in the contemporary world, there is unrest and disharmony in our personal and social lives. One of the important sources of the Indian knowledge system, Bhagvad Gita teaches us how to cope with such mental and social conflicts. Integration of spirituality in life without renunciation from the world is one of the important teachings of the Bhagvad Gita.

Bhagvad Gita eloquently expresses the underlying unity of all existence which is one of the central themes of other Hindu religious texts. There is a

single entity- Brahman-who is the creator of existence and existence itself. Each human being carry a spark of Brahman within oneself which is known as the Atman. The purpose of life is to reach the self-actualization of the Atman which will lead to union with Brahman.

All aspects of existence are unified extensions of the Divine- this idea not only indicates the impermanence of the material world but also the underlying equality of human beings and other creatures of the world.

Standing in the way of one's self-actualization are worldly distractions in the form of the three *gunas* – qualities, characteristics, and states of mind – inherent in each individual. These *gunas* are:

Sattva – wisdom, goodness, enlightenment

Rajas – passion, activity, aggression

Tamas – darkness, confusion, helplessness

Bhagvad Gita elaborates on the concept of transcendental knowledge which liberates one's soul from the entanglement of the material world. Particularly the concept of *Sthitaprajna* is a very important teaching of Bhagvad Gita against the drive for self-gratification accompanied by insatiable desires of the materialistic world. Bhagvad Gita not only identifies the prime causes of unsteady mind and despair in the world, but it also illuminates the path of peace to mankind.

### **Importance of Steady Mind and the State of "Sthithaprajna"**

The Bhagavad Gita highlights the importance of controlling the mind, which is described as fickle and unstable by nature.

While comparing the mind to wind Arjuna says:

चञ्चलं हि मनः कृष्ण प्रमाथि बलवद्दृढम् ।  
तस्याहं निग्रहं मन्ये वायोरिव सुदुष्करम् ॥ 34 ॥

*"The mind is very fickle indeed O Krishna, turbulent, strong and obstinate. I think it is as impossible to control the mind as the wind." (Verse 34, Chapter VI)*

And in the next verse, Lord Krishna concurs:

असंशयं महाबाहो मनो दुर्निग्रहं चलम् ।  
अभ्यासेन तु कौन्तेय वैराग्येण च गृह्यते ॥ 35 ॥

*"Undoubtedly, O Mighty Armed, it is very difficult to control the ever-moving mind. However, through sincere practice and dispassionate detachment (vairagya), it can be achieved." (Verse 35, Chapter VI)*

Admitting the restlessness of the mind, Lord Krishna stresses that even such a mind can be controlled through sincere practice and detachment.

According to the Bhagavad Gita, self-realization is not possible without achieving stability of the mind or the state of "sthithaprajna". Stability of mind means remaining calm in all circumstances and under all conditions.

This state of 'sthithaprajna' or transcendental consciousness is explained by Lord Krishna particularly from Verses 54 to 59 of Chapter II of the Bhagvad Gita.

Explaining the state of 'sthithaprajna' Lord Krishna says to Arjuna:

श्रीभगवानुवाच  
प्रजहाति यदा कामान्सर्वान्पार्थ मनोगतान्  
आत्मन्येवात्मना तुष्टः स्थितप्रज्ञस्तदोच्यते || 55 ||

*"When a person gives up all the desires and cravings of the senses that torment the mind and when his inner self is satisfied within itself, at that time he is said to be a 'sthithaprajna' or in pure transcendental consciousness." (Verse 55, Chapter 2)*

Again, Lord Krishna says,

दुःखेष्वनुद्विग्नमनाः सुखेषु विगतस्पृहः  
वीतरागभयक्रोधः स्थितधीर्मुनिरुच्यते || 56 ||

*"One who is not disturbed in mind even amidst the miseries or elated when there is happiness, and who is free from attachment, fear, and anger, is called a sage of steady mind." (Verse 56, chapter 2)*

The Bhagvad Gita teaches us that one person who has control over his/ her five senses can be considered a person of steady intelligence. Though it requires detachment from the objects of the senses, Lord Krishna also suggests that complete detachment is not possible for human beings. Like the tortoise, one person needs to cultivate the power to utilize the senses when necessary and withdraw when sufficient. It is explained that such cultivation of control of the senses is possible only through the superior attachment to Lord Krishna. Devotion or consciousness of the Supreme can only enable human beings to get detached from the materialistic world.

Such self-realized persons are free from hankering, lamentation, and fear. They remained undisturbed in misery and happiness. Thus detachment, which can liberate human beings from self-gratification and associated pain can be achieved not by self-abnegation, but by superior attachment to the Supreme.

### **Instability of Mind and Obstacles in the Way of Self Actualization**

Bhagvad Gita illuminates us that due to association with the three modes of material nature, the living entity is entangled in the material world. Transcendental knowledge is that knowledge which is not contaminated by these three modes of nature.

Material nature consists of three modes- goodness, passion, and ignorance.

**The mode of goodness**, being purer than the others, is illuminating, and it frees one from all sinful reactions. Those situated in that mode become conditioned by a sense of happiness and knowledge.

When a living entity is situated in the mode of goodness, he becomes conditioned to feel that he is advanced in knowledge and better than others. The best examples are the scientists and philosophers, each one is very proud of his/ her knowledge, and because they generally improve their living conditions, they feel a sort of material happiness. Due to the illusion of material energy, there is no likelihood of liberation, or being transferred to the spiritual world.

**The mode of passion** is born of unlimited desires and longings and because of this, the embodied living entity is bound to materially fruitful actions.

In this mode, one is hankering after a sense-gratification and material enjoyment. One has to work very hard to have honor in society and to have a happy family, as such one becomes associated with the fruits of his activities and thus becomes bound by such activities.

**The mode of darkness**, born of ignorance, is the delusion of all embodied living entities.

The mode of ignorance is just the opposite of the mode of goodness which develops knowledge. Under the spell of ignorance, one cannot understand a thing as it is. Such a man appears to be always dejected and is addicted to intoxicants and sleeping.

Thus, the mode of goodness conditions one to happiness, passions condition one to fruition action, and ignorance covering one knowledge, binds one to madness.

Sometimes the mode of goodness becomes prominent, defeating the mode of passion and ignorance, sometimes the mode of passion defeats goodness and ignorance and at other times ignorance defeats goodness and passion.

From the mode of goodness, real knowledge develops, from the mode of passion, greed develops and from the mode of ignorance develop foolishness, madness, and illusion.

Bhagvad Gita elaborates on how one can transcend all the activities of the modes of material nature and can enjoy the happiness of spiritual life even in the material body which is discussed in the following sections.

### **Ways of Liberation from the Modes of Material Nature and Self-actualization**

Bhagvad Gita teaches human beings the path of right action (Karma Yoga), right knowledge (Jnana Yoga), and right devotion (Bhakti Yoga) for self-actualization and liberation from material entanglement.

## Karma Yoga

The teachings of Karma Yoga enlighten ordinary duty-bound persons on the importance of righteous actions. It teaches that action is superior to inaction, and even for the maintenance of our vital organs, it is necessary to be active. What is important is acting without attachment or without being concerned about the result of our actions. Wise persons are not motivated only by the outcome of their actions and they can lead people on the right path of actions.

It is clearly expressed in the Verse 48 of Chapter 2 where Lord Krishna reminds Arjuna:

**कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन।**

**मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥48॥**

*“You have the right to work only but never to its fruits. Let not the fruits of action be your motive, nor let your attachment be to inaction.”* (Verse 48, Chapter 2)

When the great archer Arjuna was overwhelmed by seeing his friends, relatives, and teachers on the opposite side of the Kurukshetra battlefield, Lord Krishna persuaded him to fight and not quit the battlefield. Reminding him, of his duty as a warrior, Lord Krishna asked him to surrender all his actions upon Him without any claim of proprietorship. In this way, Bhagvad Gita illuminates the way to escape attachment and bad Karma by emphasizing working with Krishna consciousness.

**ये मे मतमिदं नित्यमनुतिष्ठन्ति मानवाः ।**

**श्रद्धावन्तोऽनसूयन्तो मुच्यन्ते तेऽपि कर्मभिः ॥31॥**

*“Those persons who execute their duties according to my injunctions and who follow the teaching faithfully, without envy, become free from the bondage of fruitive actions.”* (Verse 31, chapter 3)

Bhagvad Gita gives us the knowledge that sensory perceptions are nothing but the movement of material senses amongst the objects only. Such perception of Karma Yogi leads him/ her to think that “S/he is not the doer”. The Karma Yoga in the transcendental knowledge empowers human beings to remain calm in both situations of achieving something pleasant or obtaining something unpleasant. Thus the Karma Yogi achieves inner happiness and peace in the state of self-realization which is aptly expressed in the following Verse:

**बाह्यस्पर्शेष्वसक्तात्मा विन्दत्यात्मनि यत्सुखम् ।**

**स ब्रह्मयोगयुक्तात्मा सुखमक्षयमश्नुते ॥21॥**

*“Such a liberated person is not attracted to the material sense of pleasure but always in trance, enjoying the pleasure within. In this way, the self-realized person enjoys unlimited happiness, for he concentrates on the Supreme.”* (Verse 21, Chapter 5)

### **Jnana Yoga (Right Knowledge)**

Bhagvad Gita explains the fundamental distinction between the temporary material body and the eternal spiritual soul. It illuminates mankind about the impermanence of material things which is the prime cause of pain and suffering. What is eternal is the human soul which carries the part of Brahman. Internalization of such knowledge gives strength to human beings at times of loss and pain.

Explaining the nature of soul, Lord Krishna says:

न जायते म्रियते वा कदाचि

नायं भूत्वा भविता वा न भूयः ।

अजो नित्यः शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो

न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे ॥ 20 ॥

*“The soul is neither born, nor does it ever die; nor having once existed, does it ever cease to be. The soul is without birth, eternal, immortal, and ageless. It is not destroyed when the body is destroyed.”* (Verse 20, Chapter 2)

Bhagvad Gita teaches us that the contact between the senses and the sense objects gives rise to fleeting perceptions of happiness and distress. These are non-permanent and come and go like the winter and summer seasons. One must learn to tolerate them without being disturbed. The person who grasps this supreme knowledge and who is not disturbed by happiness and distress and is steady in both is certainly eligible for liberation.

Lord Krishna is the Supreme Truth, the supreme cause and sustaining force of everything, both material and spiritual. Thus the transcendental knowledge- the spiritual knowledge of the soul, of God and their relationship- is both purifying and liberating.

### **Bhakti Yoga (The Way of Devotion)**

Bhakti Yoga, mainly expressed in chapter 12 of the Bhagvad Gita, emphasizes that the path of devotion is the highest among all types of spiritual practices. Devotion is not some mysterious gift that one can get; it requires consistent efforts to cultivate it. Lord Krishna tells Arjun that if he is unable to absorb his mind in God completely, then he should strive to do all his work with devotion to God. And with constant practice, he will reach perfection. It is said that the cultivation of knowledge is higher than mechanical practice, and meditation is higher than knowledge. However, better than meditation is the renunciation of the fruits of actions because it immediately leads to great peace.

In this section of Gita, Lord Krishna expresses the qualities of a person who are engaged in pure devotional services:

अद्वेषा सर्वभूतानां मैत्रः करुण एव च ।

निर्ममो निरहङ्कारः समदुःखसुखः क्षमी || 13 ||

सन्तुष्टः सततं योगी यतात्मा दृढनिश्चयः |

मय्यर्पितमनोबुद्धिर्यो मद्भक्तः स मे प्रियः || 14 ||

*“Those devotees are very dear to me who are free from malice toward all living beings, who are friendly, and compassionate. They are free from attachment to possessions and egotism, equipoised in happiness and distress, and ever-forgiving. They are ever-content, steadily united with me in devotion, self-controlled, of firm resolve, and dedicated to me in mind and intellect.”* (Verses 13 and 14, Chapter 12)

The devotees of Lord Krishna are free from hatred for any being at any time and benevolent towards everyone. They are compassionate and ever forgiving and sympathetic towards the sufferings of their friends and enemies alike. They are free from conceptions of possessiveness and ideas of ego consciousness. They are also liberated from the false identification of themselves with their physical bodies and consequently unaffected by the dualities of material existence such as pleasure and pain. They are satisfied with whatever comes of their own accord for bodily sustenance. They are firmly resolved in the teachings of the spiritual master about the Supreme Lord. They are contemplative and fully dedicate their mind, intellect, and heart to the Supreme Lord Krishna. Such devotees are very dear to Lord Krishna and can attain communion with the Lord by realizing their souls. Such pure souls are indifferent to worldly gains and are always selflessly engaged in devotional services to mankind.

### **Conclusion**

It can be concluded from the previous sections that by enlightening the path of right knowledge, action, and devotion, the Bhagavad Gita blesses humanity with the message of mental calmness and social harmony. Proper inculcation of such knowledge may be very helpful to lead a spiritually active life and deal with the ups and downs of the surrounding world. The teachings of the Bhagavad Gita are very important for the integrated development of human beings, particularly for the development of younger generations.

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