

## The mystery of desire, Times of India, Speaking Tree, 13 June 2015, Mumbai



*The Bhagwad Gita helps us understand the dynamics of desires, actions and results, writes NEEMA MAJUMDAR*

There are several spiritual clichés about desires, action and results. The traditional teachings of the Bhagwad Gita and vedanta add nuance to general messages regarding them.

### Your Desires

In the Bhagwad Gita (7:11), Krishna tells Arjuna, *Dharma aviruddha kama aham asmi*. It means, “I (the Lord) am in the form of desire which is unopposed to dharma, universal ethical values.” The Gita in keeping with the philosophical tradition of India, looks upon desire as a privilege given to us, and not something that one has to eliminate. We are endowed with the capacity to desire, to know and to do. In fact, the final human end as envisaged in the Gita and vedas is moksha — freedom. The person who desires moksha is called *mumuksu*. The one who desires to know the reality of Atman, Self, is called *jignasu*.

If that is so, why is desire presented as a problem in some spiritual teachings? The problem lies in the fact that often desires have a great force. They impel a person to go against universal values, such as not lying, cheating or hurting others, which come under dharma. That means, even though we cannot label desire as an unwelcome thing, the challenge is in managing these desires; this is where one's discretion comes in to play. One has to learn to use the privilege of desire wisely. Growth lies in ensuring that we don't act on those desires which go against dharma.

Therefore, desires can be pursued and one can be free to have one more desire, provided desires don't create pressure in us. Spirituality is all about gaining mastery over one's desires so that they don't take us on a tangent and make us do inappropriate things. With mastery, we can utilise the privilege to desire to do useful things for society and also evolve spiritually.

### Unconditional Compassion

Often, spiritual teachings talk about unconditional compassion and love. Of course, being compassionate, loving and caring has a lot of value. As we become more objective and mature, we naturally become a contributor to society. We define our role in this world more broadly and reach out to others. In fact, Krishna says that those who are self-centered are creating *paap*. This is because in this interconnected world, we depend upon many people for our life. If we just take and don't give back enough, we are like thieves.

But these spontaneous acts of care and compassion out of understanding of our connection with the whole world cannot be idealised to the point that one loses discretion in choosing actions that are called for in a given situation. For example, Mahabharata and Bhagwad Gita show that different situations call for unique responses, depending upon what is the need of the hour. For example, Krishna tried to negotiate with Duryodhana to the maximum extent possible to avoid battle. But when these efforts failed, he asked Arjuna to fight to uphold the dharma for the larger goodness of humanity. The logic was that if you let someone like Duryodhana, who is greedy and unethical, to rule the kingdom without any resistance, many people will suffer due to his abuse of power. Since Arjuna was born a kshtriya, warrior, and placed in a position where he could do something, he had to respond to the situation by engaging in the fight, not against his cousin brothers, but against adharma, unethical ways. The love for ones cousin cannot come in the way of what needs to be done.

The advice that one should be detached and not expect results also requires careful examination. In the famous verse of the Gita (2:47): *Karmani eva adhikara te, ma phaleshu kadachana*, Krishna says you have a choice over your actions, but never over the results of those actions. If we could choose our results, there wouldn't be any failures. The question is, if the result is not in our hand, then who determines it ? Is it random? If things were random, there would not be any predictability. There would be no relationship between our actions and results.

### **Cause And Effect**

Here Krishna says, results are determined by the laws of cause-effect, which connect our present action, cause, with past causes to produce an effect, result. Because of the presence of this order that connects various past and present causes to produce an effect, things are predictable. Predictability implies that we can influence outcomes through our actions, but don't totally control the results.

A wise person lives one day at a time. Of course, we can plan, but focus on a day, make the most of it. Nothing is too big for one to manage for one day. A lot of our anxieties, worries and fears about what results are going to come to us through future events of life can be handled if we live one day at a time, with awareness that results are taken care of by the infallible order of Isvara.