

Satsanga with Sri Swami Vidadatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam

Bhaja Govindam – Verse 4

The fourth verse talks about the unsteadiness or unpredictability of life.

नलिनीदलगत जलमतितरलं तद्वज्जीवितमतिशयचपलम् ।

विद्धि व्याध्यभिमानग्रस्तं लोकं शोकहतं च समस्तम् ॥

*nalinīdalagata jalamatitaralan tadvajjīvitamatisāya-capalam, viddhi
vyādhyabhimānagrastam lokam śokahatam ca samastam.*

The life of a person is as unsteady as rain drops trembling on a lotus leaf. May you understand that the whole world remains a prey to disease, pride, and grief.

Tadvajjīvitamatisāyacapalam. *Jīvitam* means life, and *capalam*, unsteady. *Atisāya capalam* is extremely unsteady. Śrī Śaṅkarācārya gives an excellent example here, to illustrate the unsteadiness of life. *Nalinīdalagata jalamatitaralam.* *Nalinī* is the lotus, *dala* means leaf, and *jalam* is a drop of water. *Nalinīdalagata jalam* is a drop of water resting on a lotus leaf. *Atitaralam*, how unsteady it is! *Tadvat*, in the same manner, our life also is extremely unsteady or extremely unpredictable.

Life is unsteady and unpredictable

A very important fact about human life and things that we generally take for granted is brought to our attention. Life is as unsteady and unpredictable as the droplet of water, which rests on the lotus leaf. Interestingly enough, this drop of water does not touch the leaf itself. It is therefore so unsteady that even the slightest breeze will cause it to slide off. Life departs in much the same way as the droplet, with the blowing of a breeze. We just do not know what the next moment is going to bring. It could be anything, a stroke, a heart condition, a cancer detected, or an accident. Śrī Śaṅkarācārya points out that we cannot take this life for granted.

People generally plan for the future. When the young are advised to read the Bhagavad Gītā, they commonly say that they will do it when they retire. However, the young man who takes up a job and gets married, goes ahead and buys an insurance policy. “Who knows what will happen to me? I am providing for my wife,” he says. The fellow understands that life is unpredictable;

otherwise, a life insurance policy would not have any place in it. While on the one hand, life is unpredictable when it concerns security, on the other hand, when it comes to reading the Bhagavad Gītā, it is predictable. He expects to live long and decides that the time to study the Bhagavad Gītā is later. The complacency of the human mind is amazing. We take it for granted that we have a long time ahead of us, but we do not know when the 'lub' of the heart will not be followed by the 'dub'. This clock is ticking away and nobody knows when it will stop ticking.

Unfortunately, in India, people never want to talk about death. It is considered inauspicious, *aśubha*. Vinobabhave, a saint, used to say that people want to close their eyes to death, like the deer does when it is chased by the tiger. The deer runs very hard, but the tiger is much more powerful and, ultimately, the deer gets tired. It knows that the end is coming near. It then buries its head in the earth because it does not want to face the reality of life. Similarly, we don't want to talk about mortality and somehow avoid facing the reality of life as being unsteady and unpredictable. When it comes to such things, we think that everybody else's life may be unpredictable, but we ourselves are fine. The mind just wants to avoid facing up to the facts of life.

Do not waste your time

In certain unsympathetic ways, Śrī Śaṅkarācārya says, life is *atiśaya capalam*. What does it mean? It means that there is no time to waste. Do not postpone what must be done, to the future. We procrastinate that which is unpleasant or difficult; when I start reading the Gītā, I get a headache and put it off for later; I start doing *japa*, my mind wanders and, again, I decide to do it later when I am free from worries and anxieties. However, it is when there are too many tensions and anxieties in life that you should do *japa*. It is meant to relieve us from the pressures that we ourselves unnecessarily create. While there may be some genuine reasons why we may have tensions, many are self created because we follow some wrong values or wrong priorities in life. Śrī Śaṅkarācārya says, be alert to this and start utilizing your time properly.

The time to start studying Vedanta as well as implement it in our lives is now. Vedanta talks about our life and tells us how to be happy. How can we postpone being happy to some time in the future? If we do, we do not understand the value of it. Therefore, Śrī Śaṅkarācārya says, start worshipping Govinda now.

Keep Govinda as your primary objective

The worship of Govinda could be in the temple by way of *archana*, or by way of prayer, or *japa*; all are necessary. At the same time, in performing all actions with the best of intentions, our lives also can be turned into a worship of Lord. Let this awareness be there in my mind.

In the Gītā [8-7], *bhagavān* says, “*tasmātsarveṣu kāleṣu māmanusmara yudhya ca,*” remember me all the time, and perform your duty. That is why *japa* or *nāma smaranam*, repetition in the mind, has great value. Repetition of a name is a constant reminder to us about our objectives. Whatever you do, always keep this as an objective. Do not have *artha* or *kāma* as an objective in your mind, may Govinda or *mokṣa* always be your objective. Life is very short even though we may think that we have 100 years to live. When Yamarāja offered long life to Naciketas, he replied, “With reference to infinite time, whatever life you offer is bound to be limited.”

श्रोभावा मर्त्यस्य यदन्तकैतत् सर्वेन्द्रियाणां जरयन्ति तेजः ।

अपि सर्वं जीवितमल्पमेव तवैव वाहास्तव नृत्यगीते ॥

śvobhāvā martyasya yadantakaitat sarvendriyāṇāṃ jarayanti tejaḥ, api sarvaṃ jīvitamalpameva tavaiva vāhāstava nṛtyagīte.

Oh Yama! All these ephemeral (things) weaken the power of all the sense organs of the mortal (human being). Moreover, every form of life is short only. Let all your vehicles, dance, and music be yours only [Kāṭhapaniṣad, 1-1-26].

We have to remember that life is momentary and, therefore, the task that is before us requires all our attention and all our effort.

All other pursuits lead to disease, pride, and sorrow

The second line of this verse says, *viddhi vyādhyabhimānagrastam lokam śokahatam ca samastam.* *Viddhi* is may you further understand. *Vyādhyabhimānagrastam lokam* means that this *loka* or the whole world is *grastam* or grasped, from the jaws of *vyādhi*, disease, and *abhimānam*, pride. Whatever life we do have is stricken by *vyādhi* and *abhimānam*, arrogance and conceit. At the level of the body, there is always some kind of disease present. The body is never completely healthy, though it may be healthy for periods of time. At the level of the mind, there is *abhimānam* or conceit. Therefore, the life that you are

spending away in the pursuit of *artha* and *kāma*, only appears to bring you *vyādhi* and *abhimānam*.

Lokaṁ śokahatam ca samastam The world is *śokahatam*, afflicted by sorrow. Śrī Śaṅkarācārya points out that besides *vyādhi* and *abhimānam*, this is another thing that dominates our life. People are always under the spell of sorrow; this world is always grief-stricken. Therefore, what is it that you are working for or waiting for? Why does the *bhajanam* of Govinda not seem to find priority in life? If you think that there are pursuits in life more worthwhile than the worship of God, know that those pursuits only serve to bring pride, arrogance and disease, resulting in sorrow or sadness. Therefore, realize the true nature of life and utilize whatever time you have, properly.

Set proper priorities

In the Bhagavad Gītā [13-9], Lord Kṛṣṇa asks us to reflect constantly upon the fact that there is pain of different kinds all the time; in *janma* or birth, in *mṛtyu* or death, in *jara*, old age, and in *vyādhi*, disease, *janma-mṛtyu-jarā-vyādhi-duḥkha-doṣānu-darśanam*. Śrī Śaṅkarācārya says, remember that there is only pain all along and, therefore, utilize whatever opportunity you have, for a worthwhile cause. Even elsewhere, in talking about life, he points out:

आयुर्नश्यति पश्यतां प्रतिदिनं याति क्षयं यौवन

प्रत्यायान्ति गताः पुनर्न दिवसाः कालो जगद्भक्षकः ।

āyurnaśyati paśyatāṁ pratidinam yāti kṣayam yauvana,
pratyā-yānti gatāḥ punar-na divasāḥ kālo jagad-bhakṣakaḥ.

Day by day, a man comes nearer to death; his youth wears away; the day that is gone never returns; time, the almighty, swallows up everything [Śivāparādhakṣamāpaṇa Stotram, 13].

Life is ebbing away with the passing of each day, *pratidinam āyurnaśyati*. Even as we watch, *yauvanam* or our youthfulness is also slowly getting exhausted. *Pratyā-yānti gatāḥ punar-na divasāḥ*, the days that have passed by, never return. *Kālo jagad-bhakṣakaḥ*. *Kāla* or time devours the entire creation. What Śrī Śaṅkarācārya means is that we should keep in mind that time is constantly devouring our days, eroding our life, and we should, therefore, do

what is necessary. In his teachings, Śrī Śaṅkarācārya always reiterates the importance of setting priorities in our life and utilizing our time properly¹.

¹ Transcribed and edited by Krishnakumar (KK) S. Davey and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.