

The Vision of Oneness
Samatva-dr̥ṣṭi
Swami Viditatmananda Saraswati¹

The vision of oneness, presented by Lord Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, is both the goal of life and the means for attaining that goal. The significance of this vision is understood only when we understand the conflicts and stresses that accompany a belief in the reality of duality.

Duality

We see duality or differences everywhere in creation. We do not see equality of any two things in this world. In fact, we find variety in terms of looks, nature, strength, function and other special features amongst all – sentient and insentient.

The variety in the nature of all beings, sentient and insentient, is sought to be explained by the different proportion of *guṇas* of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, which are the qualities of *prakṛti*, or primordial nature, of which they are made up. Consequently, there is variety in the *karma* (actions) of all beings, and as a result, we perceive differences every where.

Duality is thus experienced by us as the duality between the individual and the universe, between one individual and another, as well as between the individual and the Lord. The perceived diversity that is at the level of *upādhi*, or name and form, is taken to be real. The sense of duality that arises from the perception of differences is also taken to be legitimate.

The psychology of taking duality to be real is the psychology of likes and dislikes, which arises from taking oneself to be the body alone, which in turn results in a basic sense of inadequacy, isolation and helplessness. Once

¹ Published in the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam 15th Anniversary Souvenir, 2001.

I have this basic sense of inadequacy and insecurity, every experience is going to be interpreted in terms of being helpful, harmful or neutral.

The Psychology of Likes and Dislikes

We experience happiness and feel a sense of comfort whenever we find a person or situation favorable to us. Loving to repeat the same experience of happiness, we constantly maneuver to recreate the favorable situation. And whenever we face an unfavorable situation, we feel discomfort and stress. Then there is constant attempt to avoid or get rid of the situation. In this way, *rāga* and *dveṣa*, likes and dislikes, are formed. When one's activities are prompted by likes and dislikes, one's actions are often impulsive and this leads to conflict both within and without. Anxiety and grief follow in the wake of conflict. In this way, a life based on giving reality to the sense of duality perpetuates *samsāra*, which is nothing but a chain of disquiet and unhappiness.

***Samatā* – Sameness**

Is this sense of duality, born of the perceived differences, the truth or reality about life? No. The truth is that there is unity in diversity. Then why is it that we do not see the unity?

The unity is not seen only because we have taken perceived differences to be very real. When we inquire, we find that there is no rule that what is perceived is necessarily real. Look at the assortment of pots, saucers, jars made of clay. At first glance, each appears to be different from the other. But are they really different? No. One clay alone manifests as the assortment of pots, saucers and jars. When we fail to recognize this fact

we are deluded and confused into thinking there are many objects when actually there is only one clay.

Although we pick out differences with our sense organs, duality or differentiation is not real. And it is important to have the vision of oneness because that is the truth. The Lord in the *Bhagavad Gītā* says:

*samam sarveṣu bhūteṣu tiṣṭhantam parameśvaram
vinaśyatsu avinaśyantam yaḥ paśyati sa paśyati*

The one who see the Lord as existing equally in all beings, and as the one who is the imperishable among the perishable, he sees (B.G 13.27).

This verse points out that the indestructible, timeless Lord exists equally in the entire universe, in all different objects. Every object in the universe is constantly changing, and subject to time. Yet the Lord exists in all objects as the one who is Imperishable, Changeless. The Changeless, Imperishable Lord is the connecting link who lends harmony and order to the whole universe, just as the thread that connects the different flowers in a garland is the support of all the flowers in the garland, because of which the flowers enjoy an order and a harmony.

What looks different externally, at the level of name and form, has its basis in unity alone and that alone is the truth.

Look at our body, which is made of many parts, each different from the other. Each limb has a different name, place and function. There is no competition among them. Moreover, there is cooperation among all of them, so that they all work together in unison. Every part, every cell, functions for the benefit of the whole body. Whenever there is a need for help in any one part, the whole unit responds to assist it. Why? Because

one conscious self (*ātmā*) is the support of all of them, without whom they could neither exist nor enjoy sentiency.

Similarly, the Lord, who is non-dual, whole, exists as the self of all, pervading all, lending existence and vitality to all. The Lord is the same in all different parts that make up this universe. The person who sees the Lord as equally present in all, is the one who really sees.

What is the meaning of ‘even though seeing, they do not see’? It means that although the person sees the object, he or she does not see it as it is. For example, because of dim light, a person sees a snake where in fact there is only a rope. Certainly something was perceived, but it was an incorrect perception. All kinds of problems arise because of this erroneous notion. The harmless rope becomes the cause of the fear born of seeing a snake! Once there is fear, the poor rope is forsaken and not accepted.

Just as because of the notion of the rope, the snake is not seen, so too, because of the notion that the differences and variety in external objects are real, the Lord who is one and equal in all, is never perceived. Taking the snake to be real, fear arises. In the same way, taking the world to be real, there is fear.

The Lord – who is non-dual, undivided – is real, and the world, which appears dual, is not. It is the rope alone that appears as a snake. So also, the Lord alone shines in the form of the whole universe.

However, owing to ignorance, there is no awareness of the reality of oneness. Then taking duality to be real, there is fear and grief in life. All our sorrow, grief, likes and dislikes are born of ignorance alone. That is why

the Lord says that the ignorant person, even though seeing, does not see. Only the wise person really sees.

Lord Kṛṣṇa points out the benefit of seeing the Lord, who is the one in the many, equal amongst all differences and permanent in the impermanent.

*samam paśyan hi sarvatra samavasthitam īśvaram
na hinasty ātmanātmānam tatao yāti parām gatim*

Because of seeing the Lord as the one who is present alike everywhere, he does not destroy himself by himself. Therefore, he attains the ultimate goal (B.G. 13.28).

Here the Lord says that the wise person who perceives the Lord as the very essence of oneness everywhere, does not destroy himself by himself. In effect, this means that the one who is ignorant of this truth, who has no discrimination, destroys the self by the self.

The Destruction of the Self

In the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Lord Kṛṣṇa points out that the Self is ageless, immortal, indestructible. Weapons cannot cut it, fire cannot burn it, water cannot wet it or drown it and air cannot dry it. How can it even be hurt, much less destroyed? And would anyone hurt his or her own self?

Because the self cannot be destroyed or hurt in the primary sense, we have to take the secondary meaning or the word ‘destroy’ or ‘hurt’. Destruction can be of many types. Here it would mean ‘lack of respect’ or ‘misuse’ or ‘abuse’. When you show disrespect, or falsely accuse an extremely respectable and respected person, it is as good as killing the person.

The self is *sat-cit-ānanda* – changeless, immortal, awareness, limitless, whole. Yet because of ignorance, one superimposes mortality,

ignorance and limitation on the self. This non-recognition of the truth of the self is disregard and denial of the true self. This is the destruction of the self.

This non-recognition of the true nature of the self leads to discontentment with one's own self, which causes one to beg for happiness, peace and security from the world. This seeking of security and adequacy in the world is a big denial of one's self alone, which is the destruction of the self.

Destruction of the self comes in many forms. The Lord resides as the self in every being. So whenever we snub or harm anyone through thought, word or deed, we are only showing lack of respect for the Lord who dwells in that heart.

Again, because of ignorance alone, we misuse the body, by using it for sense gratification and aggrandizing material wealth, mistaking these as the goals of life. To use it for sense pleasures alone is definitely misusing it and is comparable to destroying oneself.

There is destruction of the self again when our actions are contrary to universal values of righteousness, peace and truth, which are in keeping with the nature of the self. In this way, there is a denial of the Lord, the self who is in the form of *dharma*.

Thus, there is a sequence in how we destroy the self:

- Owing to ignorance there is *aviveka* (lack of discrimination)
- As a result of *aviveka* there is desire (for security and pleasures)
- From the desire for security and enjoyment, arise likes and dislikes.
- From these likes and dislikes arise the impulses of anger, greed, lust, etc.

- These impulses lead one to do wrong actions.

If action is performed for the sake of material achievements and satisfying one's senses alone, yet is in keeping with ethics, one still misses the goal of life and misuses the self in the form of the body.

The Vision of Oneness – the End

The wise person, who recognizes that oneness is the Truth, is free of the kinds of destruction mentioned above. Lord Kṛṣṇa describes how the wise person perceives the world:

*vidyā-vinaya-sampanne brāhmaṇe gavi hastini
śunicaiva śvapake ca paṇḍitāḥ samadarśinaḥ*

Wise people see the same self in a Brahmin endowed with knowledge and humility, in a cow, in an elephant, in a dog and (even) in a dog-eater (B.G. 5.18).

Here Lord Kṛṣṇa gives examples that show the different proportions of the *guṇas* of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. The *Brāhmin* endowed with knowledge and humility, is an example of *sattva*. Here the use of the word *Brāhmin* only indicates a *sāttvic* person and not a particular case or person. Where there is a predominance of *sattva*, there will be *śama* (mastery over one's mind), *dama* (mastery over one's sense organs) and *tapas* (austerity), as well as purity, faith, knowledge, etc.

The 'cow' is an example of the predominance of *rajas*. The other examples all indicate a predominance of *tamas*, which shows slowness, dullness, ignorance, insensitivity, cruelty.

These differences manifest clearly in terms of appearance, deeds, character and instincts. The wise person notes not only the differences

obtaining at the level of the *upādhi* but also the Truth, the Lord and the inherent unity in all of them.

About this Truth or reality, the Lord says:

nirdoṣam hi samam brahma

Since Brahman is without any blemish and is equal in all (B.G. 5.19).

Brahman or the Lord has no defect, no blemish, and is equally present in the whole universe. This is again said in a different place in the Bhagavad Gītā:

samaḥ aham sarvabhūteṣu na me dveṣaḥ asti na priyaḥ

I exist equally in all beings. There is no one for whom I have a dislike, nor do I have a favorite (B.G.9.29).

The Lord says that I am the self of every object, be it *sāttvic*, *rājasic*, or *tāmasic*. I reside equally in a virtuous person, an immoral person, a believer, a rich person, a poor person, and so on.

Now, a question naturally arises. If the Lord is equally present in both the pure-hearted and the impure-hearted, does the Lord get tainted by impurity? The Lord says, ‘No’. The Lord sustains and lends support to the *upādhis* and their qualities by mere presence alone, and is totally free of the merits and demerits of the *upādhis*. Just as the sun does not get more pure because it is reflected in the waters of the *Gaṅgā*, nor does it become impure when it is reflected in dirty water, so too the Lord, who is the self of a *sāttvic* person, does not become more pure when reflected in this person, nor does the Lord become tainted with impurity, even though He is the self of a person given to wrong thinking.

Again, another question arises: do the merits and demerits of the *upādhis* conceal the Lord? If they do, then how can the wise man see the Lord in and through the disparities caused by the *upādhi*? In this case, the Lord says that ‘the *upādhis* cannot hide me. I am the consciousness that is self-revealing and so, I am ever evident (as the self)’.

The self itself is free of all merit and demerit, virtue and vice. The *upādhi* with all its qualities is a medium of expression for the self, which is free of all qualifications. In fact, this *upādhi* does not cover the self; it manifests the self.

An ignorant person does not take the self-shining, self-revealing self into account. Instead, his mind is always engaged in giving reality to merit, demerit, virtue, and vice because he takes the *upādhi* itself to be the self.

However, the wise man, who has the capacity to discriminate between *ātmā* and *anātmā*, recognizes the self is free, is *satya* – the truth which is ever uninvolved, whereas the *upādhi* is only a costume that does not have the capacity to touch the self. In the wake of this recognition, he is not swayed by the good or bad attributes of the *upādhi*. He sees that which is free of all attributes, in all the attributes. He perceives the formless in all that has form. The person who sees the one in the many, the unity in the diversity, the permanent in the impermanent – he alone sees.

The wise man is non-violent. The wise person knows himself and everything else to be of the nature of *sat-cit-ānanda*. He is content in himself and does not depend upon anything else for happiness and joy. He alone really respects the self. As a result, he does not harm himself because of denial of the self. Again, he does not judge a person merely by the

upādhi and therefore he respects others, too. He sees everybody as equal to himself. In the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the Lord says:

*ātmaupamyena sarvatra samam paśyati yaḥ Arjuna
sukham vā yadi vā duḥkham sa yogī paramaḥ matah*

The one who judges happiness and sorrow in all beings by the same standard as he would apply to himself, that *yogi*, O Arjuna, is regarded as the most exalted (B.G. 6.32).

A wise person recognizes his own self as the self of all. As a result, he applies to everyone else the same standards that he applies to himself. He appreciates that just as he likes happiness and dislikes unhappiness, so too, others also like happiness and try to avoid unhappiness. Knowing this, he does not harm anybody physically or psychologically. Moreover, he makes every effort to secure beneficial situations for others.

While he definitely perceives the differences obtaining at the level of the *upādhi*, and he respects these differences while dealing with situations, he nevertheless does not have any sense of reality in duality. His recognition that the Lord is there equally in all, always remains.

The love of wise people who live by *ahimsā* is not confined to any one race or people of one nation. Caste, race, religion or nation does not shackle their love and compassion. The intention behind all their transactions is love, compassion and the blessing of well being to all.

..tataḥ yāti parām gatim

..because of this he attains the ultimate goal (of *mokṣa*) (B.G. 13.28).

He is liberated while living. The bondage that one feels is only a notion that arises from ignorance. Taking differences and duality to be real

leads to many complexes which manifest as the defense mechanisms of desire, greed, anger.

A person seeking to reach the highest pinnacles of love, compassion and happiness finds the commitment to race, caste and region as binding chains that block spiritual growth. With great determination, he breaks these fetters, one by one, and discovers the inner freedom in which the external world is unable to create any bondage or dependence. The wise person becomes free while in this body itself. This inner freedom born of recognizing the truth of oneness is the goal of life.

The Means for the Vision of oneness

The means for gaining this *samatva-dr̥ṣṭi* is called *yoga*. While talking about this *yoga*, the Lord says:

*yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi saṅgam tyaktvā dhanañjaya
siddhi-asiddhyoḥ samo bhutvā samatvam yoga ucyate*

Remaining steadfast in yoga, O Arjuna, perform actions, abandoning attachment, remaining the same to success and failure alike. This evenness of mind is called *yoga* (B.G. 2.48).

The Lord calls equanimity of mind, *samatva buddhi*, while performing actions, as well as while receiving the results of action, as *yoga*.

Samatva while performing actions is the performance of actions with the attitude of ‘offering’ unto the Lord. The actions that we perform are all different, and so there cannot be any sameness in the actions themselves. But the attitude with which an action is done can be the same. This is the attitude of offering one’s actions to the Lord, the attitude of pleasing the Lord, the attitude of worshipping the Lord. The Lord says:

yataḥ pravṛtṭiḥ bhūtānām yena sarvam idam tatam

svakarmanā tam abhyarcya siddhim vindati mānavaḥ

Through one's duty, worshipping Him from whom is the creation of beings, by whom all this is pervaded, a human being gains success (B.G. 18.46).

In this verse, Lord Kṛṣṇa points out that all objects (both sentient and insentient) are born from the Lord, meaning that the Lord is the creator of this whole universe, is the ruler of this universe. The Lord pervades this entire universe, meaning the Lord is the inner self of all. In fact, the Lord is in the very form of the universe that is ruled by Him. There is *yoga* in our life when we live our life with this understanding.

The understanding of the Lord as both the Ruler and the universe that is ruled, brings an understanding of the order and harmony in the universe. Every object in the universe acts in accordance to the role assigned to it. I am also a part of this creation, and have a place in this creation. I have been given various skills, abilities and knowledge, and it is proper that they should be used in fulfilling the Lord's plan. I am whatever I am because of the Lord and everything that I have is a gift from the Lord. The idea is that I offer unto the Lord these gifts. The Lord's wish becomes my wish and I do not have any other agenda of my own. This alone is offering to the Lord.

This creation of the Lord is for the well being of all beings. It has been manifested, keeping in mind the needs of all beings. The appropriate attitude is, 'may my action be for the welfare of all beings'. However, selfishness often interferes with my capacity to implement this attitude. Internally, I feel insecure, and from this sense arises desire, greed, anger. Whenever I react impulsively, directed by these, the result is hurt or pain to myself and others. To the extent that fulfilling one's likes and dislikes is not given priority over what one is called upon to do or respond to in a particular

situation, to that extent one's actions automatically become the means for the welfare of the world and thus become a worship of the all pervading Lord.

The Lord is the creator, the ruler, the well-wisher, and is ever compassionate. To the extent that we are alive to this fact, to that extent we are able to perceive His Grace and to that extent we are able to maintain the attitude of *yoga*, the attitude of worship.

The other aspect of *samatva-dṛṣṭi* is *prasāda-buddhi* – the attitude of graceful acceptance of the results of action. Not only is the Lord the ruler of all our actions (*karma-adhyakṣa*); the Lord is also the giver of all the results of all our actions (*karma-phala-dātā*). The results of our actions manifest as the different situations that we face. Every situation is created by the Lord as a result of our *karma*. This understanding results in sameness of mind toward the various situations and events that we confront. It gives rise to the appreciation that whatever is happening has been given by the Lord, so it is *prasāda* of the Lord, the blessing of the Lord.

Samatvam in success and failure is nothing but this very equanimity of the mind. Success is *prasāda* given by the Lord, and lack of success is also *prasāda* from the altar of the Lord alone. There must be some reason for this kind of result and it must be for my own spiritual growth. Here, the graceful acceptance of all situations with *śraddhā*, and the freedom from likes and dislikes toward them, is called *yoga*. In this way, *yoga* is constant meditation on the Lord while performing action as well as when receiving the result.

Maintaining this attitude while living one's life, one's *rāga-dveṣas* are relatively neutralized. As a result, the hurt one inflicts on others is also reduced. One's mind becomes purer and one gains the eligibility to

recognize the Lord, who is the very nature of Oneness. Endowed with the vision of the Lord, a *yogi* no longer harms others. In fact, his actions become the means for the welfare of all beings. He is, himself, totally fulfilled. He becomes a blessing to the universe. This is the greatest result of the Vision of Oneness.

Om Tat Sat.