

Bagahwat Geeta, Class 55

In Chapter 2, Krishna gave a gist of Karma Yoga and Jnana Yoga.

In Chapter 3, Karma Yoga was elaborated.

In Chapters 4 and 5, Jnana Yoga is elaborated.

The 4th Chapter is the “jnana yoga pradhana”. There is a small diversion in the first 8 verses before diving into jnaana yoga. In the first three verses, Lord Krishna glorifies this knowledge consisting of Karma Yoga and Jnana Yoga. The very essence of karma and jnana has already been taught in Veda at the beginning of the creation and this was received by Surya Bhagavan. This same wisdom is revived again in the name Gita. Veda was received by Surya Bhagavan and Gita is received by Arjuna. Therefore, it is an ancient and time-tested wisdom making it a reliable and a valid one.

Arjuna has a doubt about the timeline between creation and his current time. The times are different by few millennia, students are different yet the teacher is the same!

Krishna says in Chapter 4, Sloka 1:

मया तदात्मना ज्ञानं तदात्मना तदात्मना । (मया ज्ञानं तदात्मना I taught)

And now also, Chapter 4, Sloka 3:

मया तदात्मना ज्ञानं तदात्मना तदात्मना । (मया तदात्मना taught by Me).

Arjuna asks “Your birth is recent but your initial student’s birth was too long ago. How can a recent person teach an ancient student?”

Krishna answers Arjuna from Verse 5 though Verse 8.

Chapter 4 Sloka 5

ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय

ॐ कुरुते तव जन्ममृत्योरनुभवं ननु कुरुते तव

जन्ममृत्योरनुभवं ननु कुरुते तव जन्ममृत्योरनुभवं ॥4.5॥

ॐ कुरुते तव जन्ममृत्योरनुभवं ननु कुरुते तव जन्ममृत्योरनुभवं ॥4.5॥
may My births as well as of thine, O Arjuna, I know all but thou knowest not

thou knowest not, O Parantapa.

The Blessed Lord said Many births of Mine have passed as well as of thine, O Arjuna; I know them all but thou knowest not, O Parantapa (scorcher of foes).

Lord Krishna introduces the topic of avatara in his answer to Arjuna. The Lord's incarnation is different from a human birth. Human birth is called janma but when the Lord appears in creation, it is called avatara. Krishna wants to point the differences between janma and avatara.

Swamiji elaborates on the topic of birth and incarnation before explaining Verse 5.

The differences between manushya janma and Ishvara avatara are:

Cause, Nature and Purpose

FIRST: the cause; at the cause level there is “kaaraNa bheda”.

In the case of the birth of a jeeva, it is caused by ignorance of the jeeva.

Because of ignorance, the jeeva has the problem of ahankaara (ego).

Because of ego, there is the problem of karma.

Because of karma, there is the problem of punyam and paapam.

Because of punyam and paapam, there is the janma.

The birth of a jeeva is due to ignorance, so we can call this as a "fall of a jeeva".

In the case of Ishvara, His birth takes place never because of. It is because of His omniscience. Because of the knowledge alone, Bhagavan chooses to appear on Earth. This is knowledge and compassion based. Avatara means coming down out of compassion. There is a difference between falling into a well (helpless phenomenon) and going down the well. kaaraNa bheda is the first difference.

SECOND: the nature; svaroopam is different; "svaroopam bheda".

Since jeeva-janma is because of ignorance, jeeva continues to be a samsaari. He is a bound person, born with sorrow. He is helpless, not a master of himself. Janma is samsaaraH.

Since Ishvara avatara is backed by knowledge, it is nitya mukta svaroopam or asamsaari.

Jeeva is samsaari while Avatara is asamsaari.

Another technical difference that Krishna points out is that all the bodies are made up of matter whether it is manushya shariram or avatara shariram. But the scriptures say that there is a difference between the two sharirams. The jeeva shariram is not directly born out of prakrti or maya. Jeeva shariram is indirectly born out of maya. Maya or prakriti gets converted into five elements called pancha bhutani and these five elements get converted into paancha bhoutika shariram. Thus maya does not directly produce the body (jeeva shariram) but it produces through the five elements alone. Jeeva shariram is called paancha bhoutika shariram. From maya to bhutaas to the physical body.

In the case of Ishvara avatara, the maya does not go through

the intermediary stage of five elements. Maya directly gets converted into Ishvara avatara shariram. Avatara shariram is called mayika shariram. From maya to the physical body.

So the second difference is in the nature of jeeva shariram and avatara shariram.

Jeeva shariram is bound or samsaari shariram; paancha bhoutika shariram.

Avatara shariram is free or asamsaari shariram; mayika shariram.

This is the svaroopā bheda.

THIRD: the purpose; “karya” or “udheshya bheda”.

When a jeeva is born, it is purely to exhaust the punyam and paapam, which have been acquired in the past, called prarabdha. The prarabdha has to be exhausted. Prarabdha punyam is exhausted through sukham and prarabdha paapam is exhausted through dukham. To experience pleasure and pain, we require the body medium. It is the prarabdha that determines the type of the body for exhausting punya-paapa. The very design of the body is for the purpose of punya-paapa exhaustion. The purpose of jeeva-janma is for the depletion of punyam and paapam.

What is the purpose of an avatara? Avatara is not ignorant, not a samsaari, and does not suffer from the problem of ego. Since there is no ego, there is no question of punyam or paapam. Therefore, Ishvara does not need to take an avatara to exhaust punya-paapa.

Krishna tells an avatara’s purpose in Chapter 4, Verse 8:

शरीरं कर्तुं यत्प्रयत्नं तद्विनाशकं तदात्मनः ।

शरीरं कर्तुं यत्प्रयत्नं तद्विनाशकं तदात्मनः ॥ ८ ॥

To protect the righteous, to annihilate the wicked, and to reestablish the principles of dharma I appear on this earth, age after age.

Ishvara Avatara's purpose is for the protection of dharma and destruction of adharma by protecting the dharmic people and destroying the adharmic people. This is why the very nature of avatara shariram is designed for protecting the people and establishing dharma. The design is determined by the type of protection that is required. Before every avatara comes, there is a portion in the Puranas, where all the noble people pray to the Lord to save them from some rakshasa (Hiranyakashipu, Ravana, etc). Rama Avatara's purpose was destruction of Ravana. The design of the body depends upon the situation.

Ravana's peculiar boon is that he cannot be killed by anyone or anything, except he didn't include humans, out of over-confidence. So, if Ravana had to be destroyed, Bhagavan's avatara had to be human. Hence the design of the body is determined by the purpose of the avatara. When the atrocities were done by Hiranyakashipu, the design for the avatara had to fit the loop holes of his boon. He could not be killed by humans nor animals nor any weapons; and not during the day nor night. The avatara was Narasimha with sharp nails.

In summary: the difference between janma and avatara:

Cause: kaaraNa bheda – ajnaanam vs jnaanam

Nature: svaroopA bheda – samsaari vs asamsaari

Purpose: udheshya bheda – depletion of punya-paapa vs protection of dharma

Krishna tells in this sloka that since avatara is not restricted by ignorance, the avataras know the past, present and future. Krishna says that He knows all his previous incarnations. However, in the case of jeeva-janma, since ignorance limits the jeeva, the jeeva cannot know the past

janmas.

How do you know if one is avatara or janma? We really don't have a method of knowing. We accept one as avatara wherever there is scriptural support ie. Rama is an avatara as written in the scriptures. If it is not mentioned in the scriptures, we cannot prove is one is an avatara or janma. It then becomes our personal belief.

If you consider people with extraordinary powers to be an avatara; then rakshasas will also fall under this. Having extraordinary powers is not proof that this person is an avatara.

Limitations does not disprove avatara. Certain avataras showed limitations. For example, Rama, who is accepted as an avatara, had several natural limitations. It is one's personal belief to accept someone as an avatara even with limitations and not accept someone with extraordinary powers as an avatara.

One consolation is that we do not need to know if one is an avatara or not for our spiritual growth. We need purity of mind! To attain purity of mind, worshipping any form of God is good enough.

The next thing required for spiritual growth is knowledge. This requires a Guru; who need not be an avatara. Even if an avatara has to bless, the blessing can be only by becoming a Guru. Krishna can never give moksha to Arjuna by any method other than by being his Guru.

Swamiji recites from Dhyana Slokas:

ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ।

ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ॥

And

ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ।

Therefore, for knowledge we don't require an avatara. Nor for knowledge. There may or may not be an avatara right now. I may be willing to accept someone as an avatara. The important aspect is to purify, know and be free.

We all uniformly accept Krishna as an avatara. Krishna says, "Arjuna, I am an avatara, different from you. My cause of birth is knowledge, my nature is moksha, my purpose is moksha (Chapter 4, Verse 8). This is the topic of avatara given in this portion.

With this background, let's look at Verse 5.

Krishna says, Hey Arjuna, Many janmas have gone by for you. I have also taken many sharirams. The number of sharirams does not prove superiority. So what is the difference between you and me? I continue to be a free person; a therefore I know all the past sharirams. What about you? You do not know your past sharirams. O Parantapa (Arjuna).

Chapter 4 Sloka 6

Though I am unborn, of imperishable nature, and though I am the Lord of all beings, yet, governing My own Nature, I am born by My own Maya.

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Though I am unborn, of imperishable nature, and though I am the Lord of all beings, yet, governing My own Nature, I am born by My own Maya.

Though I am unborn, of imperishable nature, and though I am the Lord of all beings, yet, governing My own Nature, I am born by My own Maya.

Krishna talks about the nature of the avatara.

Though I am unborn, of imperishable nature, and though I am the Lord of all beings, yet, governing My own Nature, I am born by My own Maya.

I know that I am birth less Brahman; I know my nature. I know I am birthless reality and this shariram is a simple `शरीर` (assumed appearance) I have put on for a certain purpose. I know I am `जन्म` meaning `न` `जन्म` `शरीर` `शरीर` (no birth). `अमर` `अमर` I am of changeless nature, not subject to decay and death; `शरीर` `शरीर` (devoid of old age and death).

`जन्म` means `जन्म` `मरण` and `अमर` means `अमर` `अमर` | Not only am I free from birth and death, `अमर` `अमर` | I am the master of all living beings. I am not a limited entity but I am `अमर` – I am the master. I have not helplessly come down to this world, I have chosen to come.

How do I manage to come down? `अमर` `अमर` `अमर` – by keeping the prakriti, the matter, the material body under my control I am born. I am surrounded by matter; just as the jeeva also is surrounded by matter. The difference, however, is that I am the master of the matter whereas the jeeva is the slave of the matter (or shariram). Both the avatara (Bhagavan) and the jeeva are surrounded by the body-mind complex (`शरीर`) but Bhagavan is in control of the body-mind complex whereas the jeeva is controlled by the body-mind complex.

`जन्म` `जन्म` I take a body. How? `अमर` with the help of maya tattvam; by producing `शरीर` `शरीर` | This means that I don't require the five elements. Instead from maya I can directly convert into the shariram. This is why Bhagavan does not require the regular process of creation. Even `अमर` in case of Rama avatara is not the regular process. This is why it is said that the Lord entered into the garbha. In the case of Narasimha avatara, etc., there is no question of a father or mother. From where did the body come? They appear in full-fledged form. How is this possible? It is because of direct conversion of maya, otherwise called `अमर` | Therefore, Krishna says `अमर` `अमर` | And when do I take an avatara? See Sloka 7.

`अमर` Chapter 4 Sloka 7

