

# Mindful Odyssey: Exploring Ancient Indian Spiritual Insights (Editorial article)

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**Abstract:** With a rat race in the modern world, we humans have lost the very purpose of our existence on this planet. We have been made to believe that acquisition of material wealth and comforts are the only aims of life. In case we dwell deeper into this, we realize that there is no provision for carrying the hard-earned material wealth while we leave this world. Then what are we working so hard for? Are we doing that to leave wealth for our children? If yes, then are we assuming that our children are not capable of earning their own living? An objective thinking does leave us thinking. The objective of this article is deep dive into this subject and gradually focus on the real objective of this precious human life that we have been gifted with.

**Keywords** Atman; Ahamkar; Bhagwad Gita; Brahman; Buddhi; Chitta; Gunas; Gunateet; Jivatman; Karma; Karmaphala; Manas; Moksha; Nishkaam; Paramatman; Panch Bhootas; Preyas; Punyas; Rajasik; Sattavik; Shreyas; Tamasika;

**THE SPIRITUAL QUEST** that most of us are faced with at some stage in our lives- How are we here on this planet? What are we? Why are we here? How do we reach there? How best can we live our lives on this planet? What is our final destination? We are often left wondering about our journey to this planet. We are born, are brought up, we study, we get a job, we get married, we beget children, we earn material wealth, we age and we die. We accept this fate for ourselves and our near and dear ones. But then, is this what life is all about?

Before we come back to these issues, we need to analyze what the current environment around us today is, and what the common thought process is.

**THOUGHT PROCESS IN THE MODERN WORLD-** Darwin's theory still rules the roost. Survival of the fittest! We must give a thought to the implications of this concept from the perspective of the human race and this planet. Starting with the level of Nation States first. Every powerful Nation feels

that it needs to dominate the rest of the world. In recent times it has led to world war I, world war II, cold war and a nuclear race. This continued till 1991, when the Soviet Union got dismantled. This was followed by a single nation domination, that of USA. This led to destructions of many nations including Iraq, Syria, Libya etc. Russia-Ukraine conflict is the latest in this direction.

Now coming to the level of the religions. The thought process is that God has created the whole nature, rest of the beings and the things for the man to enjoy life, here on earth. Some religions feel that the people from other denominations do not have a right to live, and need to be converted or eliminated, as a responsibility towards God. Yet others feel that all the heathens have got to be converted before salvation of the faithful happens. So, this is where we stand today and there is no sign of any redemption at present.

At the level of science and technology, material comforts are deemed to be the signs of progress. It is felt that ultimate aim in life is to acquire more and more material comfort and wealth. Every country which makes advances in science and technology has an innate right to extract its pound of flesh from the rest, whether it is from the patients on medicines, or vaccines for pandemics, use of sophisticated weapons in unending wars, exploitation of natural resources of third world countries, manipulation of exchange rate of currencies to keep poor nations eternally poor. It is really a paradox that people living in Africa, the richest continent of the world in terms of resources, are the poorest in the world. Some nations are becoming richer at their cost. There is an attempt to give an impression that everything is just and fair.

We may or may not admit, the fact remains that the current thought process in the world is responsible for most of our miseries today. A powerful person, society or a country in a position to dictate terms to

the vulnerable, is supposed to be smart! Material progress in terms of GDP is a benchmark for prosperity of people. We keep talking about raising the material standards of people, yet a majority of the people are not happy in the real sense. Religious dogmas are dividing the societies, and the world. Spiritual science, which should be the essence of human existence, has been relegated to the background.

**INDIC THOUGHT AND SPIRITUALITY-*Vasudaiva Kutumbakam*....** We often hear this quote from our *Shastras* (scriptures). It literally means that *all the beings in this universe are one family*. Does it imply only men? No, it implies women as well. Does it imply only humans? Well no, it means other Jivas (beings) as well. Does it imply only animate beings? Well no, it also means inanimate beings as well. Does it mean only visible beings? No, it also means invisible ones to the naked eye like viruses and bacteria. Does it mean only on Planet earth? Well no, it also includes all other planets Does it mean only our universe? Well no, it means other universes as well.

**THE FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPT** of Indic or Sanatan Philosophy is that Paramatman (the Super Soul or God) is the father and *Prakriti* (Nature) is the Mother of all beings. Every being in this universe is a subset of the same Parmatman, and is called Jivatman and hence related. Every being's gross body is made of the same Panch Bhootas- five elements of *Prithvi* (earth), *Jal* (water), *Agni* (fire), *Vayu* (air) and *Aakash* (ether). So, our shapes and forms as *Jivatmans* (creatures) might be different, but we all are basically from the same stock-*Parmatman*.

We can draw an analogy with gold ornaments. Prior to being shaped into a specific shape or size, every ornament is gold, and after it is no more wearable, it is melted back into gold. So, the transitory name for gold could be a bangle, ring, ear tops or necklace, but

it was gold and it would continue to be gold. On the same lines, a human being, an animal or an insect, was, is and will remain a subset of *Paramatman*.

Every being has a purpose in this universe, and therefore we are expected to respect every being- *Ahimsa* (nonviolence) should be a natural rule for us, humans, the most evolved of all the species. Every material in this universe is made of *Panch Bhootas*(five basic elements) and is enveloped by *Paramatman*. Hence, we need to respect everything material, in this universe.

But, here following *Ahimsa* doesn't imply that if someone tries to harm us, we should take it lying down. Krishna clearly tells Arjuna in Bhagwad Gita that as a Kshatriya, it is his responsibility to fight when challenged. It could also be a fight to finish, if the need be. The dictum of *Ahimsa* has got to be followed from a position of strength rather than a weak or vulnerable position. So, following the principle *Ahimsa* is not to be misconstrued as being timid.

## INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

*Why do we go abroad?*

-Well, the answer is that it could be a mission to be accomplished, visit near and dear ones or friends, or else for the purpose of tourism.

*What all do we need to get there?*

-A Visa for the visit, international currency, booking of airline, booking of accommodation etc.

*How can we have a interesting and memorable trip?*

-Following the rules and regulations of the host country, and being good to one and all over there. After completion of our trip, what is our final destination?

-Well, it has to be either some other country from there, or the home country.

Now let us compare this concept with our trip to this planet.

## TRAVEL TO THIS PLANET

*Why are we here on this planet?*

As per our Indic philosophy, it our *Karmphala*(fruits of our action), good or bad, which brings us here. We pay for our past *Karmas* (actions) here in this *Karmbhoomi*(field of action). It could be due to a desire yet to be fulfilled or a mission yet to be accomplished.

*What's needed to reach here?*

Mother's womb is need for transportation. A supportive environment is subsequently needed for growth. '*Punyas*' (or the reward points for good deeds) as currency are required for a good trip to this planet.

*What's our final destination?*

Sea water temporarily gets transformed into clouds due to the action of Sun; falls as rain on the surface of the earth; becomes a part of some river, flows back into the sea, its original source. Same analogy applied to us. We are a part of the *Paramatman*; it is our attachment to *Gunas* which forces us into the lap of Mother *Prakriti*, where we get an opportunity to reform ourselves, by getting detached from *Gunas*, and get fully attached to *Paramatman*, till we are able to merge back into our original source- *Paramatman* or *Brahman*. That is *Atyantik Pralay* (the final dissolution or redemption ) for us.

*How best can we live our lives on the planet ? Simply by orienting our path towards Paramatman, our source.*

## WHAT ARE WE?

We are *Jivatmans* (beings), just a fragment of the *Paramatman*(GOD). We have two layers around us- a **subtle body** which includes *Manas*(Mind), *Buddhi*(intellect), *Chitta* (consciousness) and *Ahamkaar* (ego) and the gross body, which of course is composed of the five great elements- earth, water, fire , air and ether. While the senses control the **gross**

body, it is *Manas* (mind) which controls the senses, and the *Buddhi* (intellect) decides, it is the *Atman* which supplies light to the *Buddhi* for a proper decision making. This flow has been explained in Fig 1, below.

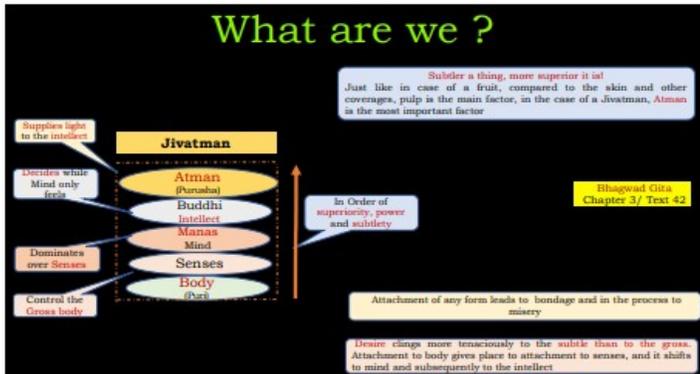


Fig.1 What are we?

**Why are we unhappy here, and what is the way out?**

Our education system, and the environment around us makes us feel that the sole objective of life is to earn wealth and the related things. In the Indic parlance we call it *Preyas*, that is what seems pleasant. But unfortunately, those are the very cause of human misery as well. Any amount of increase in *Preyas* can not remove unhappiness. So, what is the solution? Following what is good for the society at large, and good for the spiritual progress of self. That is called *Shreyas*.

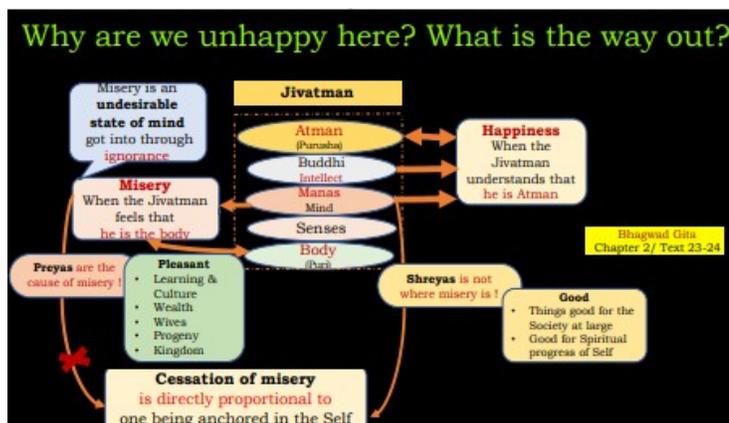


Fig 2 why are we unhappy here?

**How should we perform our Karmas on this planet?**

Any *Karma*(action), good or bad has an outcome for the performer, if one decides to take credit for it. It is the ego that I have done it, which is the challenge. So, there has to be return to this planet to bear fruits of our action, good or bad. The fact remains that repeatedly coming over here, and going through the grind over and over again, is not a desirable experience.

So, does it mean that we should not perform *Karmas*, to get rid of this cycle? Well, no! That is not the solution. Inertia cannot lead us to liberation. In the first place we cannot remain without performing *Karma* for even a single moment, as for the sustenance of our bodies, we have to perform some *Karma*.

In that case how can we get rid of this perennial cycle of births and death? Well, by simply not expecting fruits of action. This type of *Karma* is call *Nishkaama Karma*. Not doing *Karma* for the sake of oneself, but with the thought process of doing *Karma* for the sake of *Karma* itself or *Paramatman* Himself. This process leads to burning of *Karmas*, and thus a halt to the undesirable cycle of birth and death.



Fig 3 How should we perform our Karmas?

### What is our major challenge over here?

If things are so rosy, that just by performing Shreyas and *Nishkaam Karma*, we can get rid of our problems like unhappiness and repeated cycles of birth and death, why can't every human do that? Well, a major challenge that we are faced with is our nature or Guna. We might have any of the three innate Gunas - *Tamasika*, *Rajasika* or *Sattavika*. Now a *Tamasika* or *Rajasika Guna* person cannot be expected to perform *Nishkaama Karma*. You cannot expect a carnivorous animal suddenly eat grass for its survival. Hunting for food is built into its DNA. It is a big challenge to overcome one's nature.

A *Tamasika* person has got inertia, heedlessness, ignorance. So, s/he has to be motivated or incentivized for performing *Karma*. Till s/he gets established there, and over a reasonable period of time becomes a *Rajasika* person.

A *Rajasika* person too cannot be expected to perform *Nishkaama Karma*. S/he has to be made to understand, the unhappiness that greed brings in our lives. With repeated experience s/he becomes wiser, and gradually comes into the fold of the Sattva Guna with *Dharma*(virtues) emanating from him. At this stage s/he can think about Shreyas and *Nishkaama Karma*.

A *Sattavika* person cannot rely on his laurels. He has a further journey ahead, wherein he has to even transcend his current Guna.



Fig 4 Our major challenge- our nature

### What is the recommended Art of Living?

Art of living is basically nurturing our nature. We need to evaluate our nature. If we of *Tamasika* nature, we need to work on becoming a *Rajasika* person, by indulging in a lot of positive activities, but not stop after we reach that level. We have to realize the shortcomings of greed and work towards becoming *Sattavika*, working towards a virtuous life for the general good. But then, again we do not have to stop there.

We have to try to get out of *Sattvika Guna* too and become *Gunateet*. It is at this stage that a *Jivatman* can truly understand this universal order, and get fully associated with *Paramatman*. That is transcending the three Gunas. At this stage a human being is fit for becoming a part of *Brahman* or *Paramatman*, which implies reaching back from where the journey had begun.

Here we can look back at the analogy of the rain water and its return to the sea.

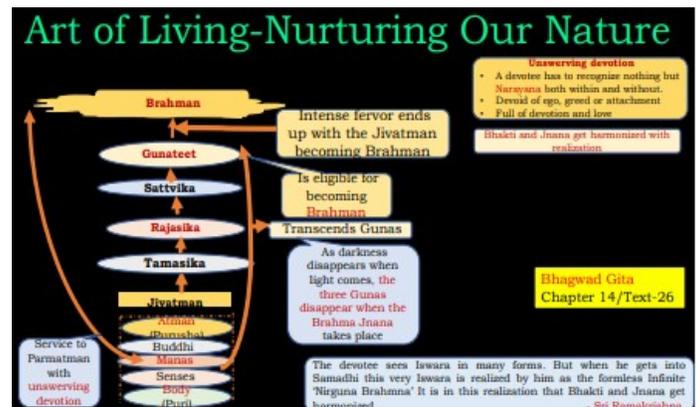


Fig 5 Art of living-evolving thought process

### Our final Destination

Is it *Swarga* or heaven? Well, every journey to *Swarga* is temporary. We are forced to return once our '*Punyas*'(currency for payments) have exhausted over there. We are back to earth for earning more '*Punyas*'. Hence it is not desirable to be in this cycle

of birth and death. Here the Indic concept for true destination is *Moksha*-back to the source *Paramatman/Brahman*, like a river water going back to the ocean after its rough journey. Now the next question is - how do we reach there?

- One needs to be Gunateet in one's approach. Not influenced by the Gunas of *Prakriti* or Nature.
- Perform a Nishkaam Karma every time – perform action without expectations of rewards for that.
- One needs to make *Paramatman* one's best friend and hold on to Him under all the circumstances. He will do the rest!

## CONCLUSION

We may or may not admit, the fact remains that the current prevalent thought process in the world is responsible for most of our miseries today. A powerful person, society or a country is in a position to dictate terms to the vulnerable Material progress is a benchmark for prosperity of people. We keep talking about raising the material standards of people, yet a majority of the people are basically unhappy. Religious dogmas are dividing societies, and the world. Spiritual science, which should be the essence of human existence, has been relegated to the background.

Here the Ancient Indic spiritual thoughts provide the roadmap. We, as Jivatman are an integral part of *Paramatman* (GOD), Every being in this universe has the same Atman at the core. Every being's gross body is made of the same *Panch Bhootas*. Every being in this universe is with a purpose. No being is useless. Hence, we need to respect every being. Ahimsa needs to be our guiding principle. Noninterference with the natural ecosystem is fundamental to the survival of the planet and of the human race itself. However, this in no case means that we should shy away from

challenges posed by evil forces. They need to be faced head on to the best of our capability, otherwise it is cowardice, and therefore detrimental to our basic survival.

All the non-living entities too are intrinsic to our survival. We need to respect everything on this planet and beyond, and not look at exploiting everything to satisfy our greed. That is how we would be able to prevent the slide towards climate change, and also save the planet.

We are bound by our *Prakriti* (Nature). But Nature can be nurtured, through a proper Art of Living.

The final objective of human birth is *Moksha*- going back to our source- *Brahman or Paramatman*. Our best friend *Paramatman* shall take us there, provided we repose our faith in Him! That is how the true objective of this human birth can be met.

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