

# Managing the two dials in our “Dashboard of Life”

*B Mahadevan<sup>1</sup>*

We are constantly reminded that in order to be successful in life, we need to set goals and work towards achieving them. This is easier said than done. First is the question of the nature of goals that we need to set. Broadly we can divide the goals that we can set into two categories: materialistic goals and spiritualistic goals. By materialistic goals we mean all aspects related to physical well being, living comfort, security and creation of wealth. It will typically revolve around our goals related to education, employment, career growth, success, asset building, savings, family and their welfare etc. On the other hand, spiritualistic goals would be mainly concerned with the mental well-being, self-actualization and evolution. This would mean a sense of fulfillment that we may experience, inner peace and tranquility, a feeling of bliss or joy etc.

Notwithstanding these, the average human pursuit is all about material well-being. A vast majority of us, irrespective of our educational background, religious inclination, spiritual training etc. still value material well-being implicitly. It is all about being healthy, comfortable, having a good job and salary, a feeling of a secured future, happy family and surroundings and power, position and fame in the society. On the other hand, a very minuscule of us are able to go after spiritual well-being and consciously and actively detest materialistic aspects of life. Spiritual well-being pertains to having a freedom of life choices, sense of fulfilment and completeness and unwavering goal of self-realization and constant effort of self-inquiry to achieve this. This would be possible only after having long periods of intense effort (*abhyāsa*) and deep unwavering detachment to worldly things (*vairagya*).

For many of us it is not clear what to do with these two goals. Some believe spiritual goals are mutually exclusive with materialistic goals. They feel that depending on one’s nature we need to pursue one or the other. A vast majority of us, however, feel that while both the goals are required they are to be pursued in a sequential order (materialistic goals when we are young and spiritualistic goals when we are old).

## Two dials in our dashboard called “Life”

Many of us many not even know that these two goals are like the two dials in our dashboard called life. There is only one dial visible to us on the dashboard. For a vast majority of us materialistic goals appear real, immediate and important, particularly when we are young. The spiritual goals, on the other hand, are implicit and is neither consciously thought about nor efforts made towards them. There is an unstated assumption that these goals are expected to unfold by itself, perhaps as we grow old.

The idea that we shall put our best foot forward and pursue materialistic goals in life as long as we are active and employable in life is not logical. The thought that post-retirement we shall become “spiritual” is also a flawed argument and naïve understanding of life. It will be truly a “wonder” that on the day of our retirement we come home, eat and sleep and wake up the next day morning bubbling with spiritual

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<sup>1</sup> *B Mahadevan, a Professor at the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore is currently the Vice Chancellor of Chinmaya Vishwa Vidyapeeth, a University for Sanskrit and Indic Traditions.*

energy and thoughts. In fact the post-retirement mental crisis and low morale that a number of us go through in life is attributed to this lack of understanding of the need for pursuing both the goals in life from early stages of life.

The most critical aspect is our ability to cross-over from mundane worldly matters to the spiritual plane. In order for that to happen, we need to have a life in which both these measures of well-being are balanced. This middle path indeed provides the bridge for the crossover by slowly de-emphasising the materialistic dimension and slowly increasing the spiritual component in us. While this idea is fine from a theoretical perspective, how are we going to bring this into practice?

For a true bhakta, devotion may well provide the required support system to weather through these challenges of life. To understand these issues, let us look at a *śloka* from chapter 9 of the *Gītā*.

### **The Lord takes care of a Bhakta**

For such of those people (*ye janāḥ*) who do constant meditation and contemplation with devotion (*parupāsate*) on me (*mām*), without thinking of anything else (*ananyaḥ cintayantaḥ*), deeply absorbed in me and desirous of my constant association (*nitya abhiyuktānām*) I take complete responsibility (*vahāmy-aham*) for and endow them with both material well-being (*yogam*) as well as spiritual well-being (*kṣemaṃ*).

अनन्याश्चिन्तयन्तो मां ये जनाः पर्युपासते ।  
तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम् ॥ 9.22

*ananyaścintayanto mām ye janāḥ parupāsate*  
*teṣāṃ nityābhiyuktānāṃ yoga-kṣemaṃ vahāmy-aham*

Constant meditation and contemplation that Lord Krishna is suggesting in this *śloka* needs to be properly understood. It does not point to a literal meaning that “drop all activities and sit in a meditative mood 24x7”. It means that instead of wasting our time thinking about how we are going to manage these two competing goals of life we merely engage in the world of action and respond to the demands in life and unfolding situations with a firm understanding and a constant thought (running implicitly in the background of our mind) that the Lord will take care of these complications.

A simple analogy to this type of behaviour is what you see in the case of a two-year old child. The parents take the child to a public place or event and the child fully engages in the action without worrying about the risks that it may go through by running helter-skelter across the road etc. The child implicitly has developed a deep faith that the parents will take care of it. True to this belief the parents will constantly monitoring the child and de-risk the child whenever required. The only act that the child does is to ensure from time to time that the parents are around. We need to develop such an attitude towards the Lord and engage in our life pursuits.

## The Value of Prasāda Buddhi

It is still not clear to us as to how we will develop this attitude to life and truly believe that the Lord will take care of all our goals and achievements in life. One practical method to get into this mode of living is to develop what is called "*prasāda buddhi*". The word "*prasāda*" has a special meaning and significance in *sanātana dharma*. A small booklet that we may receive in a temple is called *prasāda*, the child born to parents is a *prasāda*, the sandalwood paste and flowers given to us in a temple is also a form of *prasāda*. The list is indeed long.

At every moment of our life events unfold and we receive some outcomes. *Prasāda buddhi* is our ability to accept these with folded hands as though it is a *prasāda*. If we are able to mentally condition ourselves that these are nothing but *bhagavat prasāda*, then the value judgment on these outcomes and their impact on us will go out of our thinking completely. The notion of good and bad will go out of our world view and instead will be replaced by the thought that the Lord has bestowed on us something for a good reason.

This thought will come only when we are able to constantly contemplate on the Lord as Krishna has suggested in this *śloka*. In the true sense, a person with *prasāda buddhi* will truly experience over time that the materialistic goals and the spiritualistic goals of life are indeed taken care by the Lord. He/She can therefore truly focus on the immediate action required for leading this life in a meaningful way.