

# Know the Chariot of your Life Journey<sup>1</sup>

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Assume that you have a water pump fitted to your bore well. The pump suddenly goes out of order and it is a big task restoring it back to action. Every time it goes out of order you go looking for a mechanic. The mechanic comes and attends to the pump and in a few minutes it is restored to action. As the frequency of this intervention increases it becomes cumbersome for you to restore the pump as the mechanic does not come in time to attend to it. At this stage there is a feeling that if only you have the know-how you would have attended to the repair. More importantly, you would have found out ways of minimizing such situations in the future.

We have a very similar situation in our life also. There are numerous occasions in our life when we lose our “cool”. We shout at people, treat people who we normally respect with little or no respect, hurt feelings of people unwittingly in an angry encounter and destroy moods and relationships albeit temporarily. In most of these occasions we go through a post-event phase of repentance. This is a normal behavior for many of us. However, what is abnormal is our inability to take charge of the situation and work towards reaching a state where we will not fall into this trap once again. Some of us even have a genuine desire to achieve this but we do not have the “know-how” for this.

## Gaining control on our responses to situations

How do we get an upper hand on the avoidable behavior arising out of losing self-control? Is there a way to understand what exactly causes this chain of actions in us? These were the questions that were running in the mind of Arjuna and Lord Krishna provides some insights into these issues in the closing section of chapter 3 of the *Gītā*. We shall look at one *śloka*.

Our response to unfolding situations in life is on account of the physical and psychological things that we are all made up of. This includes the body which accounts for our physical make up, the *indriyās* (sense organs), the *manas* (mind) and the *buddhi* (intellect) which together make up our psychological personality. There is also the soul which is part of our self. Krishna points to the relative superiority of these and urges us to reflect on them as the first step to gain control on our responses.

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<sup>1</sup> Mahadevan, B. (2014). "Know the chariot of your life journey", *Sadguru's Blessings*, Vol. 11 (10), June, 2014, pp 15 - 17.

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## The Body – Mind – Intellect Complex

According to Lord Krishna, the *indriyās* are superior to the body (*indriyāṇi parāṅyāhuḥ*), the *manas* is superior to the *indriyās* (*indriyebhyaḥ param manaḥ*), the *buddhi* is superior to the *manas* (*manasastu parā buddhiḥ*) and the soul is superior to the *buddhi* (*buddheḥ paratastu saḥ*).

इन्द्रियाणि पराण्याहुरिन्द्रियेभ्यः परं मनः ।

मनसस्तु परा बुद्धिर्यो बुद्धेः परतस्तु सः ॥ 3.42

*indriyāṇi parāṅyāhuḥ indriyebhyaḥ param manaḥ  
manasastu parā buddhiḥ yo buddheḥ paratastu saḥ*

The most inert part of us is the body. There is no motive force to the body by itself. Only because of the *prāṇa* the body gets activated. This is the reason for a person who is so fond of halwa unable to open his/her eyes wide after he/she is dead when a cup of steaming oven fresh halwa is brought in front of him/her. The *indriyās* are better than the body. This is because our *indriyās* can travel far and wide and reach places. For example, in a split moment the *indriyās* can take us to a beautiful tourist spot in the US.

The *manas* is truly a super-*indriyā*, as it can do all the functions of the *indriyās* when none of them are at work. Otherwise how do you explain watching vividly your favourite movie in dream or taking your son to a cricket match in a dream. This is why *manas* is considered superior to the *indriyās*. The *buddhi* is considered superior to the *manas* as it has the capability to analyse and decide what is right and what is wrong. The *manas* has the ability to deploy instructions to the *indriyās* and the body but may not be able to judge what is the right course of action. The soul is superior to everything as it is the very storehouse of energy (*prāṇa*) without which none of the above can perform. It is like having a number of electrical gadgets but they will work only as long as there is electricity. Once you pull the plug everything comes to a grinding halt.

Why is Lord Krishna asking us to contemplate on this? What is the relationship between this and the issue on hand? In order to understand this we shall turn our attention to the very imagery of the *pārthasārathy*, which we are very familiar with.

## Pārthasārathy – An inspiration for Life

We are all told that life is a journey. In a typical journey we need a vehicle, otherwise how do we perform the journey? If this is true what is the vehicle that we use in our life journey? How does one operate this vehicle? The above *śloka* provides a beautiful description of this.

In our life journey we use a chariot called the body. The chariot is driven by five horses. In order that the chariot runs along the chosen path and reach the destination, we need the charioteer to hold the reins in his hands. Only then the occupant of the chariot will reach his/her destination. Through the above *śloka* Lord Krishna reminds us of this aspect. This is best understood when we contemplate on the magnificent *Gitopadeśa* photo depicting Lord Krishna as the charioteer and Arjuna as the warrior sitting inside the chariot. The equivalence between this image and our life journey is illustrated in the table below.

<b>Pārthasārathy (Gitopadeśa)</b>	<b>An individual</b>
The chariot (cannot run by itself)	The Human Body (no motive force)
The five horses (which can take the chariot to places)	The Indriyās
The reins (which are the locus of control for the horses)	The Manas
Lord Krishna as Charioteer (holds the control of the reins and directs them appropriately)	The Buddhi
Arjuna (the occupant of the chariot who needs to be safely negotiated to the final destination)	The Soul

It is very easy to imagine what will happen if the five horses are simply let loose with no reins. They will wildly run in their own direction which may result in throwing the charioteer and the warrior out of the chariot. Further the chariot will be completely destroyed soon. In the same way our *indriyās* cannot be left uncontrolled, lest it has the danger of destroying the individual. The horses are to be tied with reins, but the reins must be in the hands of an able charioteer. Otherwise the outcome could be no different from the earlier one. In our life, in the same way, the *manas* needs to be moderated and regulated by the *buddhi*. Otherwise, we may become too moody, emotional, and temperamental and could often be in an inebriated state. In the extreme case where the *buddhi* can exercise no control over the *manas*, the person may even become a lunatic.

Through this *śloka* Krishna has reminded to us that in order for a journey to be successful, we need a good vehicle, we should know the ultimate destination and we should be capable of steering the vehicle in the right direction. Developing the capability to steer the vehicle in the right direction in our journey called life is all about understanding and enforcing a strict master – slave relationship between the body, *indriyās*, *manas* and *buddhi*.