

Our perspective towards the “world outside”¹

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Dealing with people, emerging situations and temptations that arise in our mind is a life time challenge for many of us. While we have every intention not to pick up an argument or fight with people on some issues we often get trapped into this and displease others. At other times we get involved in certain situations that put us in a spot. There was no reason to take sides in an ongoing tussle between two people yet we get involved. We even take decisions and make commitments in the process on an issue in which we must have simply kept quiet. There are occasions in which we get tempted on something which brings us trouble later. It may be as simple an item as an attractive eatable on the road side hotel which leads us to indigestion and fever. A new gadget could have lured us and we would end up paying a hefty amount to buy it. A little later we find the gadget not as attractive and useful as we thought it to be.

In all the above situations our mind also gets spoiled in the process and we regret about such happenings later. For many of us these events do teach us some lessons in life but only momentarily. After a few days, the resolution we took not to get caught in such events in the future goes for a toss. We end up in a similar situation again and this process goes on and on. Is life such an uncontrollable sequence of events unfolding day by day and repeating in regular intervals? In order to know what the way forward is we need to first develop an understanding of the “world outside” and the nature of our interactions with the world outside.

The “World Outside”

The term “world outside” requires some explanation. Two conditions need to be satisfied to define the world outside:

- (a) Anything that is available for consumption by any of the five *jñanendriyas* (the organs of knowledge)
- (b) Anything that is passed on by the *jñanendriyas* that is cognizable by the mind

Both these can provide us the collective meaning of world outside. The first aspect is easily understood by all of us. For example all that we can see through our eyes can constitute the world outside. The Sanskrit word for world is लोकः (*lokaḥ*) which means that which can be seen. This is derived from the verbal root लोक् - दर्शने (to see). Similarly what we can hear, taste, sense through touch and feel and smell will all qualify to be world outside.

The second aspect of world outside is a derived understanding from the first aspect. Mind can play a very significant role in defining our world. In common parlance this is referred as one’s world view. For example, an assessment of the conversation between two people in

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an unknown place which we visit for the first time can determine our definition of the outside world. Similarly, the events that we witness and our judgment of these events will shape our understanding of the outside world that we are currently experiencing. Even the smell of the place and the taste of the food that we have can trigger our mind into “some processing mode” and the end result is we make a judgment of the world around us.

Viewed at one level our helplessness in dealing with situations that unfold around us, the weaknesses we have in getting trapped into some inappropriate responses to situations are some help in addressing this aspect. We shall see one *śloka* from chapter 3 of *Gitā* to understand this.

Attachment and Aversion

The problems that we all face in life (mentioned above) are nothing but the outcome of our response to external sensory experiences. They arise mainly from attachment (रागः) and aversion (*dveṣaḥ*). If these forces do not act on us where is the scope to get into such problems? Therefore, Lord Krishna first points to the source of attachment and aversion. According to him every sensory object (*indriyasya indriyasyārthe*) has the potential to create attachment and aversion (*rāga-dveṣau vyavasthitau*). This indeed means that whatever we can define as the world outside has the potential to generate attachment or aversion.

Since the world outside has the innate ability to generate attachment and aversion, Lord Krishna further offers a practical advice. He says a sensible approach to deal with the world outside is not to come under the spell of these two forces (*tayorna vaśam āgacchet*). According to Him, these two are like highway robbers (*paripanthinau*).

इन्द्रियस्येन्द्रियस्यार्थे रागद्वेषौ व्यवस्थितौ ।

तयोर्न वशमागच्छेत् तौ ह्यस्य परिपन्थिनौ ॥ 3.34

indriyasya indriyasyārthe rāga-dveṣau vyavasthitau
tayorna vaśam āgacchet tau hyasya paripanthinau

The reference to highway robbers has deep connotations. In a journey we undertake on a highway we first need a vehicle. We also carry things we need to successfully complete the journey. This may include cash, know-how to reach and other things to sustain the journey. Robbing all these will bring the journey to a grinding halt. Our life is after all a journey, every *janma* being one leg in the journey. The body is the vehicle in which we carry this leg of our life journey. We carry wisdom, accumulated experiences, aspirations, will power, temperament and energy to carry on the journey. Imagine the situation in which we will be robbed of these things. According to Krishna this is what *rāga* and *dveṣa* will do to us if we become slave of these.

Dealing with the world outside

While the world outside will continuously generate attachment and aversion at every turn of events in our life, what to do about it is a choice that belongs to us. Pleading helplessness, lacking a sense purpose for the life journey and making half-hearted attempts to redeem ourselves from the clutches of *rāga* and *dveṣa* will only make us the slave of these two forces. It is not difficult to imagine how a person of this nature will lead his life.

Some adverse remarks made by somebody about us will generate *dveṣa* in us towards that person. We will lose our peace of mind and will spend sleepless nights on this issue. The mind will have to invest on methods and a plan to revenge for this act. Of what avail is this enormous energy spent? It will never contribute to development of a healthy personality and strong character. On the other hand, perceiving a positive impact will lead to more attachment. Developing too much attachment towards people and things around us will make us less questionable about the reality. The power of discrimination will be lost and we will eventually pay a price for this. Such a person will be tossed up and down and even after enormous efforts he would not have progressed even an inch in his life journey. Perhaps he would have retrograded by a few steps.

God has endowed the human beings with free will. A person of high thinking will choose not to get involved with the attachment and aversion aspects that the world outside continuously throws on him. He will be quite convinced that the source of *rāga* and *dveṣa* is the world outside and he needs to keep them at that level and will choose not to get involved with them at any cost. He will behave like a person deeply involved in the act but disinterested in taking sides one way or the other.

Invoking the free will is easier said than done. One needs deep contemplation on the idea presented in this *śloka*. Moreover, one must repeatedly enquire about the futility of getting stuck with the pairs of opposite forces of attachment and aversion by relating to the life experiences that we have already had. Armed with this understanding, one must venture to break away from the clutches of attachment and aversion by making a few attempts at situations that unfold. Above all one must have a deep faith on the value of the advice that Lord Krishna has provided through this *śloka*.

Only with such a combination of events we can progress meaningfully in our life journey of developing a strong inner self. The other choice is to meekly surrender and put the blame on fate.