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Managing Life – Perception to Perfection

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Upanishads define a human being as the immortal pure essence of each being. They say that all human beings are linked with the cosmic dimensions of the universe. If this is being 'human', how far are we being 'human', in today's world, racing with the gizmos, craving for material pleasures, and detaching ourselves from the ultimate truth. This article is an attempt to reiterate a few realities that could make our lives better.

Sthitaprajna is the supreme state of being wherein one is said to have attained the supreme reality or Brahman. The Bhagawadgita (Holy book of Hindu religion) defines Sthitaprajna as “*He whose mind is not distressed in calamities, in whom all longings for pleasures are lost, from whom attachment, fear and wrath have passed away*”. The concept, in haste, should not be misunderstood as a march towards the woods and detaching physically from the mundane world. It is only a promotion of the mental faculty to the higher levels of consciousness setting aside the lust and longings of the flesh.

Sthitaprajna (ideal human being) has no attachment or aversion and has the purity of spirit. Sthitaprajna is the way of attaining the supreme wisdom, free

from the illusory sorrows and the momentary pleasures of the mundane world. Sthitaprajna is the approach of getting things done in a perfect way and successfully. Sthitaprajna is the path of 'Shoulds' (refer to Box 1, GAPS Strategy). "Shoulds" are nothing but the standard way of doing things.

Box 1: Filling the Gaps – The GAPS Strategy

Kenneth Blanchard in his book "Zap the Gaps", narrates a simple and effective strategy of detecting the weak signals and creating a healthy and congenial atmosphere at the workplace. The strategy can actually be implemented in work as well as personal lives. The strategy may be discussed in brief as follows:

Every organization requires remembering three basic needs that govern the functioning of the firm viz., business needs, performance needs, and work environment and capability needs.

It is the foremost responsibility of the top management to ensure that all these three needs are aligned to each other. To get the best results, one needs to understand the business needs, and then one has to determine the performance requirements of the people to meet those needs. To ensure performance, one has to make certain that people are truly capable and that their work environment needs are being met. If any piece is missing in this alignment, the firm is going to have problems.

Zapping the Gaps

As said earlier, if any piece is missing in this alignment, the firm is going to have problems. Conversely, when a firm's state of affairs is not healthy, there is every possibility that any of the three basic needs is not in its place. There can be various factors responsible for such state of entropy. Gap in communication, gap in expertise, gap in training methods, gap in execution etc. Ken Blanchard in his book "Zap the Gaps", has suggested an apparently effective and efficient antidote to eradicate the gaps in an organization. He suggests a four-step strategy that is abbreviated as GAPS strategy.

- 'Go' for the Shoulds: The first step of the strategy says that an organization should know and understand, as to what should be the state of affairs of the job that is currently being observed. 'Should' indicates the zero trouble zone, the flawless state of affairs. It suggests how the situation would have been, had it not been affected by any problem or gap.
- 'Analyze' the Is: 'Is' denotes the state of affairs that exist in the organization presently. To put it clearly, 'Should' denotes the standard performance level that is expected out of an employee whereas 'is' the real performance that the employees are showing as output. The difference between the 'should' and 'is' is the gap in the organization.
- Pin Down the Causes: By this phase of the strategy, we would have known the gaps existing in the organization that are preventing the actual performance from meeting the standard performance. People often commit the mistake of jumping onto the

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Bhagawadgita starts with a narration on the concept of Dharma. Dharma is the pursuit of an ideal behavior. Dharma is duty, an obligation and a responsibility. Dharma, literally, means, “that which sustains”. Everything that goes with the natural order or state of things is dharma and only this sustains. Deviation from Dharma is tantamount to going away from Sthitaprajna. Conversely, adherence to Dharma results in adoption of Sthitaprajna.

Now, coming to the practicalities, what is preventing us in delivering an excellent performance? Why do projects fail, why do companies merge only to demerge, why do negotiations fail, why do we have scandals like WorldCom, Enron etc., what prevents an executive from delivering his best, what results in employee grievances, what results in job-burnout? What is preventing us from sticking to our Dharma, what is taking us away from the state of Sthitaprajna? These are a few million-dollar questions, the answers to which affect the well-being of millions of executives, thousands of companies, their CEOs and the employees. The answer is simple. It is all in the perception of a man how he drives himself and his surroundings. The attitude-driven, perception is the inherent factor responsible for the behavioral tendencies of the human beings. Perception has the potential of translating the thought into behavior. Whether the resulting behavior is right or wrong, depends on the quality of perception and extent of control over attitude and the states of ego.

What governs the quality of perception and control over attitude? Ego is oriented towards perceptions in the real world, and hence, drives the perceptions resulting in certain behavior. And it is the state of ego that prompts towards or leads away from the path of righteousness. There can be various states of ego that govern our behavior (Box 2).

Box 2: States of Ego

Eight egoistic actions that are obstacles to peaceful worldly life are classified.

EGO 1: Emotion – Grief – Overreaction (Perceive emotions from sensory perceptions that cause grief and reckless actions).

EGO 2: Exploitation – Greed – Oppression (Direct greedy actions that oppress and exploit others).

EGO 3: Exaggeration – Gimmick – Opportunism (Gain personal profits through gimmicks and exaggeration of facts).

EGO 4: Expectation – Glory – Ornamental (Conduct useless actions that are Glamorous for personal glory).

EGO 5: Externalization – Grumble – Opinionated (Accuse others of one's mistakes, complain and unduly adhering to one's own preconceived notions).

EGO 6: Embarrassment – Guilt – Oscillation (Develop unsteady mind filled with guilt, generated from disputed beliefs).

EGO 7: Extremism – Grudge – Opposition (Express extreme views and animosity and organize hostile actions).

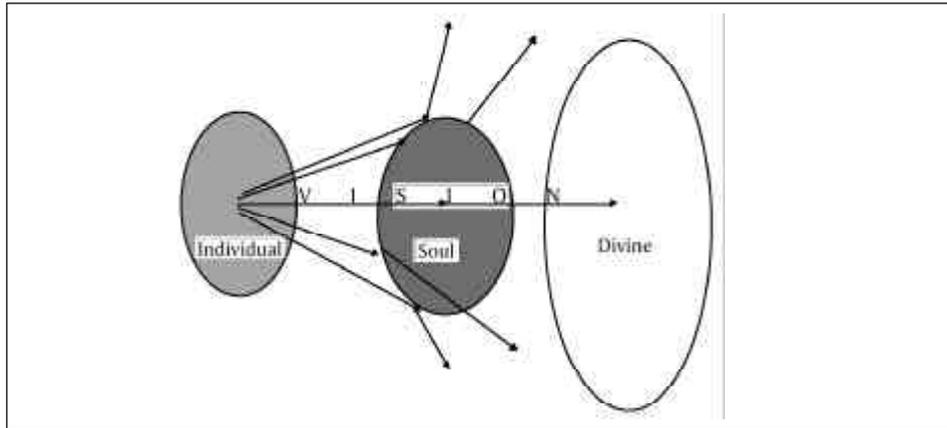
EGO 8: Empty-headed – Guesswork – Obnoxious (Exhibit irritating behavior attributed to ignorance and preconceived notions).

Source: Bhagawadgita: (Verses 64 to 68).

The Jigsaw Puzzle called Life

A human being, whatever role he plays on this earth, should have a clear understanding of the three-tier mechanism of the whole universe: Individual-Soul-Divine (Figure 1). All three entities have their own respective visions. Divine has a vision, which is in accordance with the destiny. Soul has a vision, which is already in alignment with the Divine. And lastly, the Individual has a vision. For a better understanding, the art of living can be correlated with solving a jigsaw puzzle, which has various colors in a haphazard pattern, and needs to be solved by way of arranging all the colors in alignment. A successful living is in the ability of aligning the visions of the Divine, Soul and the Individual in one line. Since the Soul is already in alignment with the divine, it is the individual's vision that needs to be brought in line with the soul's. Like solving a jigsaw puzzle, we need to solve the puzzle of life and attempt to bring about synchronization between the visions of the Individual, Soul and Divine. When things move in our favor, it ensures the well-being of the individual. Hence, we should understand that our perception of "dreams and aspirations coming true" is a mere illusion.

Actually, it is a coincidence that your dream is in accordance with what the divine destiny has decided for you. And conversely, regretting over failure to achieve something is a waste of time, as that was not the reward meant for you. The jigsaw puzzle isn't yet solved. The visions are not in unison.



How do we attempt for the unison of visions? Let us try to understand as to what deviates the individual's vision from the soul's vision. Our continuous and consistent exposure to the outside world results in development of states of ego, leading to a set of perceptions that prevent us from thinking beyond the physical world. The mundane ephemeral happenings around us camouflage our farsightedness and the ability to think beyond the material world around us. They create a perception that the material things around us are the ultimate realities, and hence pave the way for unwanted elements like greed, corruption, frustration, unhappiness, thus taking us away from Sthitaprajna. The Supreme Self, being beyond the reach of the naked eye and other organs, cannot be perceived without a sincere effort and devotion towards the supreme state. One needs to superimpose the image of the Divine over the individual's perceptions, thus allowing the Soul to act as a bridge between the Individual and the Divine.

Life as a Statement of Accounts

Having understood and convinced about the three-tier mechanism of life— *Individual (Brahman), Soul (Atman) and Divine (Paramatman)*, let us understand how to liberate ourselves from the mere material thinking and promote our thought process beyond the physical world around us that takes us close to the

supreme state of living. The close-knit bond of *individual-soul-divine* says very clearly that life is not all about taking birth one fine day and dying on a fateful day. It has a purpose. It assumes a better meaning if we look at life as a project which the Divine has assigned to the Individual with a lot of terms and conditions. The Individual is sent to the earth with three tools to be used to lead a successful living, viz., goodness, passion and ignorance (*Bhagawadgita*). Lord Krishna in his *Gita* sermon to Arjuna says:

*sattvam rajas tama iti gunah prakriti-sambhava
nibadhnanti maha-baho dehe dehinam avyayam*

which means,

O Mighty Armed! Sattva (Goodness), rajas (Passion) and tamas (ignorance) are three modes born of nature (Prakriti). These hold the imperishable spirit to the body. It is all in the hands of the individual how he shapes his values, attitudes, ego, and perceptions with the help of these tools and keep his statement of accounts, maintained by the Divine free from red flags. Statement of accounts as we understand in the accounting parlance is a statutory document of an organization published each year, which shows the financial performance of the organization. And the accounts are prepared in accordance with the Code of Practice of the Accounting authorities and are subject to auditing each year by the Audit Commission. It goes without saying that the accounts with transparency and ethics are rewarded, and the ones with window dressing and red flags are penalized.

There is a close resemblance between the statement of accounts of an organization and a person's life. Good deeds as well as bad conduct are maintained in the statement of the life's account and the successes and failures in life are mere reflections of the good deeds and bad deeds in life, which align or disturb the vision of the Individual and Divine and hence, bring closer or take away from Sthitaprajna respectively. The assertion might raise a question, what about auditing? The answer is yes! A life is also subject to auditing. The sufferings in the life that trouble people and the rewards in life that surprise people are the results of the Destiny's raid over the Individual's statement of accounts. Nothing happens incidentally. And nothing happens without reason and rationale, because the statement of account of the individuals must adhere to the rule "the balance

sheet must be tallied”. And hence every transaction must have a debit entry and a credit entry. Similarly, every action committed by an Individual will have a reward or a reprimand judged by the destiny (Divine). As long as the vision of the Individual is in line with the visions of the Soul and the Divine, he is on a secured path. Any deviation of the Individual’s vision from that of the soul’s and divine’s is inviting trouble.

This can be further understood in the light of the scams and scandals which do not go unnoticed, as the balance sheet has to get tallied. What had resulted, do you think, in the downturn of Enron, WorldCom, Yukos or Tyco? Were the leaders/CEOs of these companies not qualified or cognitively less intelligent? Certainly not. These were the leaders, who, though adept with the technical skill, were poor at the Sthitaprajna or the rational and moral thinking which deviated their practices from the soul’s control and the destiny’s monitoring, Resulting in lack of integrity, credibility, and reliability and lack of emotional intelligence. According to Goleman’s research on EI *vis-a-vis* leadership style of executives, close to 90% of their leadership success was attributable to emotional intelligence. In contrast, unsuccessful executives mainly demonstrated two characteristics viz. rigidity and poor relationships, which held them back from adapting their style to changes in organizational culture, or listening and responding to feedback on how they needed to change or improve.

With this backdrop, we should realize the fact that happenings in the past are interpretable and the happenings of future course are not-so-unpredictable. The universe is governed by the Divine. And the only way of having a control over our lives and keeping ourselves away from the evils is to keep your vision, and action in *tandem* with the destiny’s vision through the soul’s vision. To quote from the Bhagawadgita, Lord Krishna says:

*anasritah karma-phalam karyam karma karoti
yah sa sannyasi ca yogi ca na niragnir na cakriyah*

which means:

One who performs action without being attached to its fruits is an ascetic, and a religious performer of purification of mind (Karma Yogi). One who has

stopped performing any actions, who doesn't light up the sacred fire and doesn't perform his duty, is neither an ascetic nor a Karma Yogi.

Principle-Centered Approach – A Preferred Approach

We can infer from the above discussion that an individual's behavior should be supported by a rationale that brings about an alignment with the Soul's and Destiny's vision by molding his perception, which takes the individual closer to perfection. Hence, an individual's approach towards life should be principle centered rather than practice-centered.

The general behavioral tendencies of a human being can be broadly divided into two types—practice-centered and principle-centered approaches. Many of us understand these as two exclusive concepts and adopt any one. However, we should realize that the practice-centered approach of doing things is a mere peripheral activity that addresses to the short-term and momentary needs. Whereas principle-centered approach is based on a reason for every activity, and executes the practice with a convincing rationale. The difference between the practice-centered approach and principle-centered approach towards life is as good as the difference between simply following the 'Whats' of an activity and being bothered about the 'Whys' behind the 'Whats' of the activity respectively. To put it simply, principle-centered approach operates in obedience to natural laws, regardless of conditions, whereas practice-centered approach is based on certain created values, beliefs etc., for one's convenience. Principle-centered approach is a long-term, inside-out approach to developing people and organizations.

To sum up, the purpose of the article is to communicate an appeal to the mankind to view life with a meaning, and extrapolate the reason of the physical beyond birth and death, which will align the individual's proposals with the Divine's disposals. Hence, lead a life based on principle-centered approach than practice-centered and build certain positive values and disciplines in life, which would result in the alignment of the Individual's vision with that of the Divine's through the Soul's and hence, culminates in a happy and successful living.

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