



# THE UNDERSTANDING OF DEATH AND REMOVAL OF FEAR FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE BHAGAVAD-GITA

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## Abstract:

This paper intends to explore the perspective of death and removal of that fear from the *Bhagavad-gita's* point of view. The fear of death of oneself and the occurrence of death of others leave a grand impact on peoples' psyche and consequently on their actions. Everyone faces the fear of death irrespective of any other factor. Many psychologists have researched on death and concluded that death has major psychological implications on one's personality. Krishna, like a psychological counselor to Arjuna, recites the *Bhagavad-gita* in the mid of the battlefield to a fearful Arjuna who denies to fight after seeing his relatives as his opponents. He develops a fear of death in his heart for his relatives and for his own self. The 700 verses of *Bhagavad-gita* which Krishna delivers are about removing the fear of death, anxiety, attachment and anger. Krishna compares death with a process of shedding of the worn out garment and wearing a new one. The body changes many forms from infancy to old age and finally culminates into the death. But Krishna elaborates that this is the death of the body only, not of the life. Life is eternal and moves from one birth to another without losing its essence. The fear can be removed if one diligently follows the path suggested by Krishna and can attain self-realization which leads to a joyous and peaceful life.

Key words: death, fear, Bhagavad-Gita, eternity, self-realization.

## Introduction

The meaning of the Death according to the Merriam Webster dictionary is "permanent cessation of all vital functions: the end of life". A body is dead when it stops all the activities of breathing, walking, eating, talking etc. Medically speaking the brain dies first and gradually other organs of the body cease to be active. Death is an irreversible loss of all bodily functions.

Death, whatever the medical and other opinion, theory or research explains is not the purpose of this paper. Here, the idea of death in this paper is to understand the death and removal of the fear emanates from it, from the Gita's perspective and

Krishna, stands in the mid of the battlefield, counsels the fearful Arjuna who has lost his composure and denies fighting with the Kauravas, on the pretext of his being their relative. This was very unusual to Arjuna that he avoids his duty of a warrior. Arjuna's was not a coward but he was enveloped in the fear of death. The anxiety of death of his relatives and his own self in the battlefield shakes his heart and

becomes the primary reason behind his negation for his duty. Castano, et. al. say “Surely, pondering one’s demise is likely to have a variety of consequences on the individual’s cognition, emotion, and behavior. And thus it could simply be true that death primes enhance conservative tendencies” (601).

From the time immemorial death has been a point of concern for everyone. In the epic the Mahabharata, Lord Yama (the lord of death), in the disguise of *Yaksha* (a bird) posed few questions to Yudhishtira. One of the questions among all was to tell the biggest wonder on the earth. In answer to the question Yudhishtira said that it is wonderful that death is inevitable still people do not believe the truth and live as if they will live forever. (Ganguli 604). Knowledge of our death is the critical existential danger and people have established all types of approaches to avoid pondering over the inescapability of their deaths. (Solomon et.al 20).

In the Katha Upanishad, an episode of Nachiketa had a conversation with Lord Yama. He enquired about the truth of death and immortality. He asked Yama to reveal the mystery of death to him. Initially Yama was reluctant but after lot of insistence he unravels the truth of death to Nachiketa which is similar to the answer of Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita. (Krishnananda 7)

Death is unquestionably inevitable still the fear of death rests in almost everyone’s heart on the earth. “We live much of our lives avoiding the knowledge of our ultimate demise, or at least avoiding thinking about it” (Wilson, 2013). This fear sometimes is so grave in some people that it takes toll on their mental health and they suffer with numerous mental diseases and could not live a normal life. The fear of death is termed as ‘thanatophobia’ which was first taken into account by Freud. He said that the fear people face is not the fear of death but it is a repressed and unattended trauma of childhood stored in the unconscious. He said that people are not convinced of their own deaths because, ‘in the unconscious every one of us is convinced of his own immortality’ (as cited at Bartleby.com). Mcleod says there is no sense of the passage of time; time does not work chronologically in our unconscious.

### Bhagavad Gita’s perspective on death

Arjuna’s dilemma in the battlefield is because of the fear of death of his relatives and his own death. The fear was so thorough that he denied his foremost duty of a fighter in the battle. This fear does not fit for a warrior and Krishna reprimanded this act of Arjuna calling his acts Anarya (which does not fit to an Aryan, a fighter). Arjuna tried to convince Krishna by numbers of arguments but failed. In fact when Krishna understood that fear of losing his people is deep enough in Arjuna, Krishna utters a full session of telling him the truth of life to remove his fear.

Krishna explains the everlasting nature of soul to Arjuna and tells him that death occurs only to the body and the soul element, without any alteration, only passes from one body to another. Krishna says that you, me and all the kings were always present and will exist forever (Prabhupad 78).

Bhagavad Gita(BG) chapter 2 verse 12

*na tv evaham jatu nasamna tvam neme janadhipah*

*na caiva na bhavisyamah sarve vayam atah param* (BG, 2.12)

Arjuna’s despair and lamentation has universal existence. The Gita says that death is only an event and not the complete cessation of life. It metaphorically relates death with the gradual withering condition of clothes and as one changes the clothes similarly soul changes the body once the body is worn out. the nature of the soul is imperishable, unborn, ceaseless and absolute.

*vasamsi jirani yatha vihaya navani grhnati naro 'parani*

*tatha sarirani vihaya jirnany anyani samyati navani dehi* (BG 2.22)

Gita focuses on the eternal nature of life and tries to make people fearless of death, because fear affects all decisions and actions of a person. A soul repetitively changes body only without losing its essence of eternity. In a body itself it changes many states viz. from infancy to childhood, from childhood to youth and gradually to old age and then to death. The soul remains intact in this process and only those who don’t know this fact suffers.

*dehino 'smin yatha dehe kaumaram yauvanam jara*

*tatha dehantara-praptir dhiras tatra na muhyati* (7.4-5)

In Hindu philosophy surrendering the actions and the self to God from whom the life originates serves a great psychological purpose. In fact every religion, more or less, follow the same philosophy and research has also shown that surrendering to God helps people to get relief from the physical and mental agony. The “six virtue clusters - wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence” (van der n.d.) come from surrendering to God and ultimately in removal of the fear. Krishna in Gita asks people to surrender to him and promises to relieve them from all types of sins and fear.

*sarva-dharman parityajya mam ekam saranam vraja*

*aham tvam sarva-papebhyo moksaisyami ma sucah* (BG 18.66)

Krishna says that he is death personified and he is the eternity and immortality. He is the lord of death; *yamah samyamatam aham* (BG 10.29). He further declares that he is all- consuming death and the creator of all beings living and non-living; *mṛtyuh sarva-haras caham udbhavas ca bhavisyatam* (BG 10.34)

Gita philosophizes that only the body dies and the soul remains intact bearing the eternal, imperishable nature. In the process of birth death and rebirth cycle the subtle soul carries all the fears, emotions and impact of past karmas to another life. So Krishna advises that one should be very careful while performing actions and should not desire fruit of his actions as it leads to attachment which brings suffering and fear. He says that at the time of death if one remembers Me (the God) that person becomes fearless. (Prabhupad 366)

*anta-kale ca mam eva smaran muktva kalevaram*

*yah prayati sa mad-bhavam yati nasty atra samsayah* (BG 8.5)

### Who does not grieve death?

Krishna says that one should not be fearful and should not grieve death as the person never dies only the body dies and after death it is certain that the soul will again acquire a new body. So the wise never laments the death and live the life fearlessly. Swami Nikhilananda in his book *Man in Search of Immortality: Testimonials from the Hindu Scriptures* writes that this belief that soul survives after death is a big solace to the living being as man wants to be immortal and that's why he creates and generates (6). Krishna declares to Arjuna that those who are full of wisdom do not grieve over the death because nothing dies in the world.

*asocyan anvasocas tvam prajna-vadams ca bhasase*

*gatasun agatasums ca nanushochanti panditah* (BG 2.11)

The same person has died many times before this and will die again in the coming lives. What's truly essential is the consciousness. You have come in connection with the consciousness it is immortal

Krishna explains that life is undeniably mortal and he is wise who understands this truth and does not grieve over the predictable.

*jātasya hi dhruvo mṛityur dhruvaṁ janma mṛitasya cha*

*tasmād aparihārye 'rthe na tvam śhochitum arhasi* (BG 2.27)

Krishna showers the knowledge of eternal existence of life and to confirm the truth he said; *na tvevāhaṁ jātu nāsaṁ na tvam neme janādhīpāḥ* (BG 2.11), that means that there was never a time when we didn't exist on the earth. Thus a person who knows the truth never grieves on the passing things.

### Conclusion

The Bhagavad Gita and the entire Indian philosophical system are based on the thought of the immortality and eternal existence of soul. Krishna removed Arjuna's fear by enlightening him through the same wisdom. He suggested number of methods primarily the three yogas; *karma yoga*, *gyan yoga* and *bhakti yoga* to realize the truth of the soul and to reach to the super conscious level of the mind. Once a person attains this truth all his illusions disappears and all the fears related to death and life vanish.

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