

Management Insights from Indian Spirituality: Unlearning Knowledge to Uncover Wisdom

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to contemporize Indian spiritual traditions for a modern sensibility, management principles and practices. Insights have been taken from Indian spiritual literature and enlightened spiritual Gurus. Management practices need to be driven by wisdom and Indian spiritual tradition merits serious attention for the same. This paper deconstructs the Indian epics for modern times and managerial insights and also highlights the distinction between religion and spirituality.

Keywords: Indian Spirituality, Wisdom, Management, Sanatana Dharma

Introduction

In this paper, an attempt is made to explore the relationship between two worlds, the world of spirituality and the world of management. By spirituality, I mean Indian spirituality or more precisely the traditions of Sanatana Dharma. The paper attempts to advance the view that there is an urgent need to contemporize the insights contained in our spiritual traditions so that they reflect a modern sensibility. The failure to do so will consign our traditions to decay and irrelevance when in fact they are powerfully pertinent, germane and connected. More than any discipline, it is spirituality that helps us make these connections and if for that reason alone, merits serious attention.

Mahatmas attract us because their universe knows no sectarian boundaries. They are self-realized individuals who are intimately connected to their divinity. Caste, sex, color, nationality, region, community, race or ethnicity eludes them. In their exalted state, they are unable to see others apart from themselves because they dwell in the Supreme Consciousness. Their lives are living

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examples of selflessness, love, devotion and sacrifice. Our scriptures speak of four paths to self-realization including those of jnana, bhakti, karma and yoga. Yet, the life of a Realized Master illustrates the profound truth that these paths are actually one and the same!

The tradition of Sanatana Dharma distinguishes four kinds of seekers. The first kind hears the Guru's words and instantly achieves self-revelation. Such a seeker can be likened to the relationship between petrol and fire: combustion is immediate! The second seeker needs time to internalize the teachings of the Guru but takes a longer time to realize the truth. Such a seeker can be likened to paraffin: it takes longer than petrol.

The third kind of seeker needs the physical proximity of the Guru to guide and instruct him or

her on the spiritual path. Such a seeker can be likened to the relationship between charcoal and fire: it takes time to light charcoal. The fourth kind of seeker is attracted by the teachings of the Guru but much time, effort and grace is needed before he accepts the Supreme Truth as espoused by the Guru. Such a seeker can be likened to the relationship between fire and wood: burning wood is a long and cumbersome process requiring constant attention.

The same principle applies when we attempt to isolate insights from the world of spirituality to the world of management. It is the degree of spiritual maturity that determines the capacity of an individual to glean insights from one world that can be applied to another.

There are many reasons why the wisdom of the Mahabharata for example, has not been sufficiently understood or put into the practice today. This is the nature of Kali Yuga where man's propensity for evil far exceeds his propensity to do good. The nature of the times we live in are such that even if you want to do an act of selfless service in the world today, there will be several people who will stand in the way of accomplishing your objectives. They will oppose you and give you negative energy. Metaphorically, this is why there are only five Pandavas and a hundred Kauravas. Secondly, we have not invested (enough at any rate) the effort to contemporize the wisdom contained in our epics in a modern setting. Thirdly, we still suffer from a colonial hangover and have not developed a genuinely independent mindset. All these three factors need to be engaged and positively reversed. (Footnote on Kali Yuga)

The Mahabharata in the Contemporary World

The question is often asked: what is the relevance of the Mahabharata in the modern world? (<http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?288451>) And the answer is as compelling as it is straightforward: the main challenge in the modern

world lies in upholding dharma or righteousness and satyam or truth. What the world today badly needs is dharma, the capacity to articulate it, the capacity to build it and the capacity to sustain it. It is difficult to conceive of a more powerful vehicle than the two epics including the Ramayana and Mahabharata (including the sacred Bhagavad Gita) that communicates this message to both head and heart. (Rajagopalachari, 2013, a & b)

Consider the Mahabharata: it is an extraordinary tale and the wisdom it contains needs to be consciously and deliberately gleaned. It is rich in symbolism and metaphor. Above all it is faithful to the truth. It makes no attempt to mask it and does not rationalize the actions of its characters. As the late Irawati Karve observed in her celebrated work on the Mahabharata, both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are called epics. However, the Ramayana is called a poem, and the Mahabharata is called a history: "Unlike the Ramayana, the main purpose of the Mahabharata is to record events. In doing so, it describes incidentally many things like capital cities, forests and rivers, but these are of secondary importance and are always in the context of the main story. The scope of the Ramayana is narrower. That of the Mahabharata is wide ranging in time, in space and in its cast of characters. Heroes and cowards, villains and good men, impulsive fools and wise men, ugly men and fair ones are all depicted in the course of its narrative. Almost no person is portrayed as all good or all bad." (Karve, 1991, pp. 79, 80)

Karve also comments elsewhere in her work that one of the many virtues of the Mahabharata lies in the fact that it makes no effort to paint its characters in virtuous terms. It does not idealize. It admits no compromise. It does not embellish. In this respect, it echoes the thought captured by the Romanian writer Mircea Eliade in his observation: "We become really human when we have followed the learning of the myths, when we have imitated the gods." (Eliade, 1961)

How can the universal import of the Mahabharata be understood? In a beautiful passage in the context of the Mahabharata, the late Sathya Sai Baba said that the Lord had Maya (Illusion) as His Consort, so to say, and He had a son, called Manas (mind). This Manas, to continue the parable, had two wives: Pravritti and Nivritti (Attachment and Detachment). Of course, Attachment was his favorite wife and she had a hundred children. Detachment was ill-treated and neglected, and she had just five children. That is the symbolism underlying the Kauravas (hundred sons) and the Pandavas (five sons) of the Mahabharata.

Though the children all lived in the same kingdom, ate the same food and learnt from the same teacher, their natures differed widely from one another; the Kauravas, children of Attachment, were greedy, cruel, vain and self-centered; the Pandavas, the five of them, each one represented one supreme virtue, so that they could be said to symbolize sathya, dharma, santhi, prema and ahimsa (truth, righteousness, peace, love and non-injury).

Since they were so pure and born from Detachment, the Lord became their Guide. In fact, the Lord will be the Guide of whoever installs Him as his sarathi (charioteer). He will not consider the position inferior. He is the Sanathana Sarathi (Eternal Charioteer) come to be the Charioteer of all. He is the Lord for all who seek a Master, a support. The soul is the Master in everyone and Krishna is the Universal Soul personified. (Sathya Sai Speaks, 2005)

The same applies to the Ramayana. One of the most beautiful explanations that underline the inner significance of the Ramayana was provided again by Baba. The name of Rama has exceptional power. The three syllables (rama) stand for fire, light and tranquility or Agni, Sun and the Moon. By chanting the name of Rama, sins are extinguished, darkness is lifted, and emotional turbulence is replaced by peace and calm.

It is also said that when we chant the name of Rama, we are worshipping both Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva. The Ra is taken from Om Namō Narayanaya! (dedicated to Mahavishnu), while Ma is taken from Om Namah Shivaya! (dedicated to Lord Shiva). The name Rama therefore suggests non-dualism as the supreme truth: there is no Vishnu without Shiva and no Shiva without Vishnu.

According to Sri Sathya Sai, the King Dasaratha symbolizes us. All of us are given ten senses including five of action and five of perception. The capital city of Ayodhya signifies a place where no enemy can enter. This means the human body. Permission from the mind is needed to enter the body.

The three wives of Dasaratha (Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi) represent the three gunas of purity, activity and indolence. The four sons Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrugna represent the four Vedas. Rama represented the Yajur Veda, Lakshmana represented the Rig Veda. Bharata represented the Sama Veda and Shatrughna represented the Atharva Veda. They also represent the four objectives that every individual must strive to fulfill including dharma or righteousness, artha or wealth, kama or desire and moksha or salvation.

Sita represents Brahma-jnana or absolute wisdom. She was fascinated by a golden deer and fell victim to wanting to possess it. This means jnana or wisdom is thwarted by desire. The result was separation. When Rama went in search for Sita, he came to a mountain called Rishhyamukha which symbolizes detachment.

Rama seeks the friendship of Sugriva or discrimination and he needed the help of Hanuman or courage. Both qualities are essential to spiritual seekers. Rama destroys Vali who represents wickedness and cruelty. Ahalya, wife of Gautama disobeyed her husband and was cursed to become a stone, she regained human form when touched by

Lord Rama. Such is the power of His name that it can transform a hard stone into something soft, gentle and tender.

Baba would often say that pain is but an interval between two pleasures and pleasure is but an interval between two pains. Hanuman crossed the ocean of delusion (alternating between pain and pleasure; this can also be interpreted to mean transcending the world of duality) by chanting Lord Rama's Name. He was the ideal son, the ideal brother, the ideal husband, the ideal friend, and even the ideal enemy. His name is therefore the sure road to salvation. (Sathya Sai Speaks, 2005, pp. 38-48)

These are extraordinary insights. The moral of the story: if you adhere to dharma, dharma will adhere to you. If you follow dharma, dharma will follow you. If you respect dharma, dharma will respect you. Anything that contributes to promote harmony by anchoring itself upon truth in the universe can be qualified as dharma.

Contemporizing the Epics

When it comes to the larger question of contemporizing the wisdom contained in our epics and communicating them to a wider audience, the answer largely depends on the nature of what we want to communicate and the context of the communication. Some of the truths contained in the tale are apocryphal. Some are esoteric. Some are practical. Some are subtle. Some are hidden. In general, it may be said as Sadguru Sri Sharavana Baba says - that the Lord has invested each human being with three powers or shaktis. The first is iccha shakti or the power of will or desire. The second is jnana shakti or the power of speech and wisdom. The third is kriya shakti or the power of action. (Narayanswamy, 2010)

These powers need to be used cautiously and wisely with the three weapons of shraddha or faith,

vairagya or dispassion and viveka or discrimination. Translated in practical terms it means, develop the desire for godliness, purity and innocence and shun desires that do not promote them. Develop the capacity for soft and mellifluous speech; it should be capable of elevating people by giving them positive energy and self-belief. It is said that the Goddess Saraswati resides under our tongues and when we use harsh language, she runs away. Finally, develop the ability to distinguish between dharma and adharma, good and evil and right and wrong conduct. Before you act, think, contemplate, reflect and only then act.

As Sadguru Sri Sharavana Baba says: develop bhakti or devotion to stimulate shakti or power so that it results in mukti or liberation. (Narayanswamy, 2013) The key is devotion.

The Mahabharata is therefore hugely relevant to modern times. It should be understood that Kurukshetra is not just a physical battlefield in what is today the state of Haryana in North India. As the sacred Gita emphasizes, life is a kshetra or a field, a karma kshetra or a field of action, if you will, where actions have to be performed. Kali Yuga is a Karma Yuga. So, the Kurukshetra is the life process itself and the essence of ephemeral life is that it is uncertain, unpredictable and uncontrollable. The Mahabharata teaches us through the Gita that we need to employ the three armors of shraddha, viveka and vairagya (faith, discrimination and dispassion) to engage this battle. It teaches us to dedicate all thought, word and deed at the sacred feet of the Supreme Intelligence irrespective of how He is called. It teaches us the priceless values of faith, devotion and surrender.

Distinguish between Religion and Spirituality

It is important to distinguish between religion and spirituality. Religion concentrates its attention on paths based on beliefs. Spirituality concentrates its attention on methods of self-awakening.

(Kriyananda, 1998) The focus of religion is on the outer space, while spirituality occupies itself with the inner space.

Religion concentrates its attention on paths based on beliefs. Spirituality concentrates its attention on methods of self-awakening. Religion can be potentially divisive ('mine is better than yours'), while the reach of spirituality is universal. There is a beautiful account provided by Mercedes de Acosta of her first meeting with Sri Ramana Maharshi. Among the many questions posed by the devotee to the Maharshi, is a pointed question about the usefulness of religions, teachers and gurus in search for self-realization: "What about religions, teachers and gurus?"

The Maharshi's response was characteristically precise and to the point. He said: "Can religion which teaches you to look outside yourself, which promises a heaven and a reward outside yourself, can this help you? It is only by diving deep into the spiritual heart that one can find the Self."

The Maharshi then placed his right hand on his right side of the chest and continued: "Here lies the Heart, the dynamic spiritual Heart. It is called Hridaya and is clearly visible to the inner eye of the adept on the spiritual path. Through meditation you can learn to find the Self in the cave of this heart." (<http://www.beezone.com/Mercedes/>)

The Supreme Self evoked by Lord Krishna in the sacred Bhagavad Gita is beyond time and space, beyond name and form and beyond "I" (ahamkara) and "mine" (mamkara). However, this truth is not easily apprehended by human beings. "But," continued the Maharshi, "In spite of ignorance, no man takes seriously the fact of death. He may see death around him but he still does not believe that he will die. He believes, or rather, feels in some strange way that death is not for him. Only when the body is threatened does he fall victim to the fear of death."

The purpose of all religion and spirituality is self-wakening. All spiritual traditions encourage seekers to experience the truth that the search is within and not without. Reading of scriptures, pilgrimage to sacred places and exposure and adherence to religious instruction cannot by themselves lead to self-realization. This is why the ancients declare it is the Grace of the Guru and self-effort that help the seeker accomplish that objective.

As Vimalananda, the Aghora Master said: "The purpose of all spiritual practices in every religion is to disengage the ego from Her identification with the limited personality so that She may unite with Her perennial personality." (Svoboda, 1993).

This perhaps explains why Swami Vivekananda said that it is a great blessing to be born into a religion but it is not a great idea to die in one. This means that if religion has not taught the seeker the inestimable value of self-revelation, then that religion has been a waste of time upon that individual. This is also the reason why he said that education is merely the manifestation of the perfection already inherent in man.

The late Satya Sai Baba always emphasized the highest truths. He once said: "It is good to be born in a church but it is not good to die in it. Grow and rescue yourselves from limits and regulations, the doctrines that fence your freedom of thought, the ceremonies and rites that restrict and direct. Reach the point where churches do not matter, where all roads end, from where all roads run. Pardon the other man's faults but deal harshly with your own." (Murphet, 1994, p.) As Mata Amritanandamayi expressed it, "religion is the outer shell of the coconut, spirituality is the sweet nectar contained inside." (Mata Amritanandamayi, 1999, p. 61)

Deconstructing the Epics for Modern Times

Does the Mahabharata challenge some modern values? It could but it need not. For example,

obedience to elders used to be a time honored tradition in our part of the world, more generally in the East. The influence of Western modernity is changing some of these values in our own country. It is ironic that while modern India is embracing Western forms of modernity, Westerners are embracing our spiritual traditions with fervor and enthusiasm. It is now more than ever when we need to connect with our epics, our heritage and folklore and the priceless wisdom contained in them.

This task is more easily accomplished when we look at the characters in the tale and what they represent. Draupadi represented Shakti or power. Duryodhana represented lack of Grace symbolized by the ego. Karna represents the search for legitimacy of one born out of wedlock. The most powerful character in the tale is of course the Lord Himself. He is surely the chief protagonist. He is without blemish, the personification of all that is sacred and holy and represents supreme sacrifice. He is sat-chit-ananda or absolute being-consciousness-bliss. He is one without the second. Towards the end of the sacred Gita, this was the essence of the Lord's teaching to Arjuna: "Let your mind be in Me; you will come only to Me truly; I avow you are my beloved. Abandoning all virtue (i.e., of the body, mind and intellect), come and take refuge in Me alone; I shall liberate you from all evil; grieve not." (Swami Rama, 1996, p. 457).

Our scriptures need to be understood metaphorically; to understand them literally is to lose the message contained in them. They are replete with rich metaphors that contain valuable insights on how we can successfully negotiate worldly existence. The blindness of King Dhrithrashtra is not merely physical: he was blinded by his love for his sons, especially, Duryodhana (attachment), which he placed above all else, including dharma. That was the cause of his undoing.

Consider the case of Hanuman, son of Vayu, the

wind god. As a child, he tried to swallow the sun! Full of mischief, he used to play pranks on sages involved in their austerities until the day came when they could bear it no longer. They cursed him by declaring that he would no longer remember his celestial powers.

When his father Vayu heard of the curse, he restrained all movement in the universe! The world began to suffocate as it is impossible to survive without wind. The gods rushed to him and beseeched him to revoke his stand. But Vayu refused and declared that until the curse on his son is revoked, he would not budge.

The gods approached the sages and they relented by declaring that if anybody recalled his powers, they would be restored to him. Only then did Vayu relent and the universe was consigned to its original state. Years later, when Sri Rama was seeking the whereabouts of his beloved Sita, he asked Hanuman if he could cross the ocean and visit Lanka to find out if Sita was alive and well.

Hanuman was in a dilemma; how could he cross the ocean? Just then Jambavan, the king of the bears, began reciting Hanuman's exploits as a child and it is said that as he was singing his praises, Hanuman rose in height, beauty and splendor! His confidence thus restored, he crossed the ocean without difficulty and returned after having performed some extraordinary exploits in Lanka.

The truth of the tale is apocryphal. Its insight is this: the intensity of your problem is determined by the smallness of your mind! If you allow your problem to grow in stature, you become small and thereby allow the problem to become big! Successfully negotiating life's challenges requires becoming a Hanuman.

The portrait of Lord Krishna and Arjuna on a chariot steered by five horses is a common apparition in many Indian homes. But they hide and inhere a

profound truth. The chariot is the body. The five horses represent the five senses (tongue, eyes, ears, nose and skin). The reins, the driving instrument, symbolize the mind, the driver is the intelligence and the passenger is the individual atma or soul. The Lord is the Paramatman. It is a powerful message to Arjuna: “Remember you are not the charioteer but I am. You are the chariot. You are not the do-er. I am. The Truth of the matter is Only I Am”. The Mahabharata is a staggering validation of the eternal truth of Advaita Vedanta: Reality is non-dual.

The supreme lesson of the Mahabharata lies in conveying the powerful message that the battle that rages within is far more important than the battle that rages without. It is the inner battle that needs to be won.

In his immortal spiritual classic, *An Autobiography of a Yogi*, Swami Yogananda Paramahansa shares with us a revelatory discourse on the profound symbolism of the Genesis, by his Guru, Sri Yukteshwar. The story of Adam and Eve should be grasped symbolically, not literally.

According to Sri Yukteshwar, the tree of life represents the human body. The spinal cord is akin to an upturned tree with man's hair at its roots and the nerves as its branches. The branches of the nervous system bear many fruits or sensory experiences including those of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch.

Man could rightfully indulge in them but he was forbidden the experience of sex symbolised by the apple at the centre of the bodily garden. “The human body,” Sri Yukteshwar said, “was therefore not solely a result of evolution from beasts, but was produced by an act of special creation by God. The animal forms were too crude to express full divinity; the human being was uniquely given a tremendous mental capacity-the 'thousand-petalled lotus' of the brain-as well as acutely

awakened occult centres in the spine.”

The serpent represents the coiled up energy of the spinal column that stimulates the sex nerves. Adam symbolizes reason, while Eve symbolizes feeling. “Reason and feeling,” said Sri Yukteshwar, “remain in a heaven of cooperative joy so long as the human mind is not tricked by the serpentine energy of animal propensities.”

The failure to heed this warning led to Adam and Eve falling from the natural state of eternal bliss originally known to man. Brute procreation was the result. Good and evil, the Master concludes, refer to the compulsions of cosmic duality.

Falling under the sway of maya (delusion), by misusing feeling and reason, human beings “relinquish the right to enter the heavenly garden of divine self-sufficiency. The personal responsibility of every human being is to restore his 'parents', or dual nature, to a unified harmony or Eden.”

Such is the profound nature of the symbolism of the Genesis. It is hard to come across a discourse where the spiritual challenge is so strikingly distilled to perfection. (Sri Yukteshwar, 2007, 131)

The Unusual Experiences of Sri Mukundru Swami

There is perhaps no better introduction to the concept of yoga than the celebrated book by Belagere Krishna Shastri, entitled *Yega has it All*, (Yegdaagella Aithe in Kannada). It is an astonishing, beautiful and extraordinary text. (Krishna Shastri, (1995)

The book records the author's unusual experiences with Sri Mukunduru Swami, a Mahatma who left his mortal coil in 1966. He was a wandering mystic who lived in southern Karnataka. Almost nothing is known of his early life.

The literal meaning of yoga is union. Its real meaning lies in experiencing and practicing unity of vision. Its underlying truth is: I alone Am. Sri Mukunduru Swami illustrated this truth in exceptionally unusual and startling ways. He was once asked the meaning of the Ramayana.

He responded by saying that our epics contain a sakeelu (mystery). It was important to grasp the mystery to unlock the truth. The five kamendriyas (organs of activity) and the five jnanendriyas (sensory organs) were King Dasaratha's chariot. This means that anybody who has conquered his senses is a Dasaratha!

Such a one cannot but obtain bliss. Sri Rama was that bliss. His brothers, Lakshmana represents manaananda (bliss of the mind), Bharata represents atmaananda (bliss of the soul) and Shatrugna represents brahmaananda (bliss of Brahman). King Janaka, (himself a seer), got Sita after performing sadhana or spiritual practice. She is therefore jnanaambika (Mother of Knowledge).

The illusory golden deer symbolizes maya (or illusion) produced by the restless mind. Sita asks Sri Rama to capture it and Lord Rama kills it (the desire for worldly wealth).

When jnana (knowledge) and ananda (bliss) conjoin together, how can there be a place for illusion? The five organs of activity and the five senses were Ravana's chariots. He put them into his head (ego). Instead of aiming for Sita, the mother of knowledge, he desired her body. Can a slave of the senses ever obtain knowledge? Sita was in ashokavana (park without sorrow) but then again, can knowledge ever go with sorrow? All goodness (Sugriva, Jambavan, Hanuman) went with Sri Rama because they had annihilated their sense of "I" (ego).

Any seeker who can do that attains brahmavidya (self-realization). All egos went to Ravana. The

Sage Valmiki (the name means body) is a molehill. Whoever successfully transcends body consciousness is a Valmiki!

People read the epics, but do they understand them? Their understanding, declared Swami Mukunduru, is limited to the outer layer over which they weave their stories. Such is the profound sakeelu of the Ramayana.

This writer had the unexpected pleasure and privilege of meeting Belagere Krishna Shastri in Bangalore. Krishna Shastri is a staunch devotee of Sri Ramana Maharshi. In what follows, I recount some of his experiences. They are being published for the first time.

The 1940s found Krishna Shastri a deeply troubled man. During this period, he met a mystic called Seshagiri Phadke from Belgaum. Sensing his discomfiture, the latter asked to accompany him to Ramanasramam. He made his first visit to the ashram in 1947.

He found the Maharshi in his characteristic posture seemingly oblivious of his surroundings. A number of devotees were in various states of meditation. He thought to himself: "What an utter waste of time! Instead of working hard to save humanity, these people are immobile. This is nonsense. I have made a mistake in undertaking this journey."

No sooner did these thoughts cross his mind, the Maharshi lifted his head and turned to gaze at Krishna Shastri. He was unable to bear the luminosity that powerfully emanated from those divine eyes. Deeply overcome, he closed his eyes and reverentially folded his hands.

The sage then returned to his usual posture. He visited the ashram again in 1948, the day the renovation of the Patalalingam was to be inaugurated by C. Rajagopalachari, (Rajaji), then Governor General of India.

To his surprise, there was no sign of festivity in the ashram. The Maharshi was in his usual posture with devotees around him. He saw Rajaji enter the ashram and prostrate before the Maharshi. For about ten minutes nothing happened. Supplicating himself before the sage, Rajaji asked the Maharshi if he would grace the inauguration with his presence. The Maharshi replied: “Why did you think what is here, is not there too?” The inauguration took place without the Maharshi.

His last encounter took place on April 14, 1950, when the sage left his mortal coil at 8.40 pm. It was 6.30 pm. He could see the Maharshi only through a window. The crowd was huge. He prayed to Bhagavan saying how unfortunate it was that the window-bars prevented his access to him.

At that precise moment, the sage turned toward him and graced him with the same luminosity that he experienced in his first visit to the ashram. Krishna Shastri is close to a 100 today. He recalls these incidents as if they occurred yesterday. We have dwelt on these experiences at some length because they go to illustrate the nature of the spiritual quest and the nature of spiritual life.

Sri Mukunduru Swami was once asked to explain the essence of the Mahabharata. In what follows, we attempt to summarize his response. Its clarity and simplicity is not only deeply moving but divinely inspired. Self-knowledge is effulgence. The five Pandavas were enveloped in its light. They possessed viveka (discrimination) between dharma (what is good for the universe) and adharma (what is not). Dharma (righteousness) cannot exist without karma (activity). Disinterested activity (nishkama karma) consists of ego-less activity. Such activity alone does not bind the doer.

Opposed to them were a group of hundred cousins who refused to partake of the light and were enveloped in darkness. They were the Kauravas. This means that those who pursue the path of

righteousness are limited in contrast to those who pursue evil who are invariably more in number. Such is the nature of Kali Yuga. Lord Krishna symbolizes the confluence of karma and dharma. Nishkama karma does not mean idleness or indifference. It does not mean renunciation of action but practicing renunciation in action. This is engaging in action without the notion of doer-ship.

“The wise,” declares the Gita, “see that there is action in the midst of inaction and inaction in the midst of action. Their consciousness is unified and every act is done with complete awareness.” The Lord showed the Pandavas the way. He advised the Pandavas that even if they did not want the kingdom, it was necessary to protect dharma and destroy adharma. Nishkama (inaction) is tantamount to irresponsibility and can lead to dushkama (evil action). His counterpart Sakuni was actually a kunni (cur). It is in the nature of a dog to bark and bite. So he taught the Kauravas to bark and bite. Draupadi represents honor, respect and privacy. What is private and hidden should not be exposed. But the Kauravas exceeded all limits of decency by attempting to expose what was hidden. But can ignorance ever be used as a weapon to destroy honor? Their failure to disrobe Draupadi should have taught them the inestimable value of Grace, but they relentlessly pursued their wicked ways. Soon it became a veritable dance of the profane. The cosmic balance was threatened. Sri Krishna told the Pandavas, it was not enough to practice dharma for them; it was also necessary to destroy adharma. The Lord chose them as his vehicle. Yudhishtira's triumph is the victory of dharma.

Such is the extraordinary sakeelu (mystery) of this magnificent epic.

Swamiji was once asked about the existence of God. His response was characteristically sparkling, precise and not lacking in humor!

God, he said, has no shape or form or attribute. He has no legs, hands, eyes and feet. Actually, the entire universe around us is God! We can see, touch and taste a mango. If we have a good nose, we can even smell its fragrance! If the seed is planted, it will grow with color, shape and fragrance. But its quality is beyond these attributes.

That quality is God! Mata Amritanandamayi, the Divine Mother, evokes a similar metaphor. The music we appreciate from a flutist comes from neither the bamboo of the flute nor the vocal chords of the flutist. It comes from something beyond both! That something is God!

According to Sri Mukunduru, man gives names to all that he perceives through his senses in this universe. If you show him something, he will give that something a name. By giving everything a name, he assumes that this is not God, but a name! Even if you give a human being something he has not seen, he will still respond by giving that something a name! After giving him a name, he will say that something with a name is not God!

Finally, if you tell him that he himself is in God, that too will be vigorously denied! He will say: "I am a man, not God". Under the circumstances, it is perhaps appropriate to keep quiet because this is what a person's ego can accommodate. It cannot take more! God cannot be understood through debates and discussions. His presence must be experienced. He simply is! Such was the profound instruction of Sri Mukunduru Swamiji! Its sakeelu (mystery) should be contemplated, grasped and internalized.

Insights for Managers

There are several managerial insights that can be culled from the wisdom contained in our epics including our folklore, the stories contained in our puranas and from studying the lives of self-realized masters. If these insights are grasped and

internalized, they are capable of changing the lens of managers by helping them view their roles from executors to trustees. We restrict ourselves here to ten of them.

Fact No 1: You will receive a body. This means birth is inevitable if the storehouse of individual prarabdha (effects of the actions committed in previous lives) is not exhausted. Alternately, we are responsible for the birth of our respective egos since the notion of birth and death actually refers to the ego.

Human birth is a result of a debt. Unfulfilled desires lead to birth. The purpose of birth – as the late Satya Sai Baba reminded us - is to avoid rebirth. Rebirth can be avoided if the karmas we are meant to perform are performed correctly, wisely and mindfully. Correct means in consonance with truth and righteousness under the guidance of a self-realized master. So when in the body, do not take ownership (because that is best left to the Supreme Intelligence) but do take responsibility.

Fact No 2: You will learn lessons. Both positive and negative experiences occur in order to instruct and correct. They are meant to elevate us and not punish us. Good people teach us to emulate them, while people with negative qualities teach us to avoid them. This is the principal reason why 'good' and 'bad' exist.

The fact of the matter is that there is always a reason behind everything that happens in our lives irrespective of whether these are positive or negative experiences. Everybody we meet in our lives comes into our lives to fulfill debts that were incurred in previous lives. We must pay these debts cheerfully. The late Shirdi Sai Baba used to say if a beggar approaches you and you do not want to give him money, you are free not to do so but do not bark at him like a dog. He also said that people will come to you in all kinds of forms. If a cat comes to your house for example, give it milk and let it depart.

Fact No 3: There are no mistakes; only lessons. Just as managers need to replace the word “problem” by the word “challenge”, spiritual seekers need to understand that the purpose of mistakes lies in providing lessons.

There are no mistakes and accidents in life. They exist only in our imagination. Our karmas make us move in multiple ways and act in different ways. Good karmas therefore ought to be distinguished from bad karmas. We go to a Guru to extinguish our karmas.

What we regard as mistakes and accidents are Nature's way of instructing us by teaching us lessons contained in those experiences. This is why it is said that a wise man goes against his stars.

Fact No 4: Lessons are repeated until they are learnt. When we do not learn the lesson the first time, Nature gives us a second chance. Sometimes a second or at other times, even a third. Being the all-merciful mother, she instructs until we learn. If we examine the matter closely then, we will discover that the purpose of failure then is success.

This means that we must be grateful to God for having given us something called 'failure.' It is Nature's way of self-correction and guiding us to the truth. We grow when we heed the message. When we do not heed the message, we invite that result. We are responsible for the outcome. Growth means expanding our hearts. For example, we grow when we learn to forgive.

Fact No 5: Learning lessons does not end as long as you are alive. Learning is actually about unlearning! It means having the courage to give up what you have regarded as sacred and sacrosanct and replace that with knowledge that is vibrant and relevant. This is a lifelong process.

This highlights the all-pervasive importance of context. A change in context usually changes

everything. It also illustrates the fact that to be a good teacher you must learn to be a better pupil. This is what Mata Amritanandamayi meant when She said all of creation was/is Her Guru.

Fact No 6: There is no place "there" better than "here". Receive life with gratitude. Understand that you are meant to be where you are and it is important to view that location as an opportunity rather than a threat. People are so busy thinking of the past or the future that they forget to experience the divinity of the present. This is why spiritual masters over the ages exhort their followers to live in the present.

The emphasis lies in living in the present and not for the present. The past is of no value because it is dead and gone. It is also passed. On deeper reflection, there is no future because it is within the present that the future is contained. Viewed in these terms, the present is the future.

Fact No 7: Other people are merely mirrors of you. It is not the world that is deficient but our limited perception. When we criticize others, we are criticizing ourselves. Spiritual development is about correcting our visions of perfection and imperfection and learning to see imperfection perfectly.

The existence of a higher truth in every living creature is a universal truth. Spirituality helps us recognize that higher truth in those around us. This explains the importance of developing even vision by recognizing that higher truth in all.

Fact No 8: What you make of life is up to you. The past is destiny; the future is opportunity. Every human being has a choice to either elevate discourse or trivialize it. Human life is precious. It is wise to use it to learn our real identity and not fritter it away.

Life is accorded to us to accomplish the purpose of self-revelation. This is both real and possible. If the

opportunity is wasted, it will take another life to achieve it or until the desire for self-revelation is triggered.

The two main enemies that we have to overcome are transcending the notion of 'I' and 'Mine.' Such transcendence enables faith, devotion and surrender.

Fact No 9: The answers to life's questions lie within you. The ordinary man experiences himself in the world. The spiritual seeker must aim to experience the world in him. Divinity lies within, not without. Further: we must learn to engage the imperfection of the outside from the perfection of the inside. This was the sum and substance of Lord Krishna's instruction to Arjuna on the battlefield, namely, that the war within was more important than the war without.

Fact No 10: You will forget all this! Maya or cosmic illusion will try to make you forget these lessons. The wise man goes against his destiny by making the better part of him overcome the lesser part of him. King Dhrithrashtra does not change his mind even after the Lord discloses His cosmic form to him. The Lord offers to restore his eyesight but he declines the offer. Duroyodhana chooses the Lord's army rather than the Lord Himself! Karna chooses personal loyalty over truth and righteousness. All of them consequently invite destiny.

In Chapter 11 of the sacred Gita, Arjuna asks the Lord for a glimpse of His vishwaoopa or cosmic form. It is said that the Lord gave him divya drishti or special vision to enable to appropriate that vision. The traditional interpretation given to this episode is that the light emanating from that vision was so blinding that Arjuna had to cover both his eyes to protect himself from that divine effulgence. But the meaning is deeper and profound.

Arjuna sees that the Lord's cosmic form has many faces, innumerable eyes, glistening ornaments and

innumerable weapons and radiates divine fragrance. The whole universe is contained in that form and his hairs stand on end. He is soon beset by terror and horror. This mighty warrior whom nobody could equal in skill is frightened. He pleads with the Lord to come back to his form as Lord Krishna and seeks forgiveness. He sees the entire war that is about to be fought unfold before his very eyes. He sees the past, present and future collapse. He sees that the Lord is not only the ultimate personification of mercy and compassion but also what Swami Rama calls the "cruel fire of annihilation." (Swami Rama, op. cit. p. 338)

Arjuna therefore represents the sadhaka or the spiritual seeker. He is us. He is a hero who has yet to discover his heroism. His fight comes from the fact that he is not able to reconcile how the Supreme Intelligence can exist in both good and bad, heaven and hell, the sacred and the profane. He could not understand that the vishwaoopa is nothing but the daivic or godly and the asuric or demonic taken together. Good must co-exist with evil, right with wrong, good with bad. This is why duality must be transcended. When he asks the Lord for a second experience and it is given to him, he experiences no discomfort. From this fact alone, we may conclude that the message of the Gita had gone home.

Conclusion

On August 14, 2006, Mata Amritanandamayi, (or Amma as She is fondly known by her devotees), said: "There are no schools of thought or philosophies that have not been explored in India. However, our greatest misfortune is that we have failed to make practical use of this knowledge. And therefore even though we attained independence on the 15th of August 1947, our minds and intellects are still enslaved and in chains."

"India," the Divine Mother concluded, "has given three great teachings to the world: if we protect dharma, dharma will protect us. It will protect the

whole world. This is the first teaching.”

“Whatever action we undertake; it should be done for the benefit of the whole world. It should be done as an offering to God. That is the second teaching. This mental attitude of selfless offering should be underlying all our actions.”

“Everything is an expression of the one Atman. No one is separate from us. God pervades all of creation. This is the third teaching.”

If we are able to imbibe these teachings in our lives, it will bring about an end to all wars. Peace and contentment will spread throughout the world. We will be able to experience supreme peace and bliss in our lives. We will become a source of light to all others.

" (<http://www.amritapuri.org/9618/india60.aum>)

This constitutes the very essence of Indian spirituality. The purpose of life is self-realization. Human life is a blessing. It has been given to us for purposes of self-revelation. This cannot be accomplished without the active guidance of a Guru or a Self-Realized Master or a Mahatma: “Brahman is none other than the Master.” (Rigopoulos, 2007, p. 175) There is no difference between Guru, God and the Self. They are one and the same. There are as many paths to God as there are human beings. The Supreme Intelligence suffers from no limitation.

Spirituality lies at the core of effective management. For managers, it is important to move away from notions of “I” (ahamkara) and “Mine” (mamkara). These two variables are the original enemies of all leadership and learning. Actions that stem from the ego are doomed to result in outcomes far removed from those that were originally contemplated. The ego must be replaced by devotion, faith and surrender. Faith is more important than reasoning. Perform with zeal but leave the outcome to a Higher Power.

"The human race," observed Mata Amritanandamayi, "is headed towards destruction. People do not have the patience to let God's sankalpa or resolve work in their lives or in society as a whole. People are blinded by their impatience and their demands for instant gratification. The ego always wants to wake up challenges and fulfill its desires within the shortest possible time. In their hurry, people lose their patience and discrimination, which, in turn destroys their clarity of vision. If this is allowed to continue, it will end in disaster. When everyone in society has become blinded in this way, they will clash with each other. Individuals will clash with individuals, communities with communities and nations with nations. Impatience causes disharmony and imperfection. The evils of today's world, which have been caused by people's impatience, are paving the way for terrible destruction. Unless we wake up, it cannot be averted. This is the moral of the story." (Mata Amritanandamayi, 1999, pp. 30, 31)

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