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Responding to terror with wisdom: The Bhagavad Gita's timeless message

Responding to terror with wisdom: The Bhagavad Gita's timeless message



By Acharya Prashant

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In a tragic event at Pahalgam, more than twenty innocent tourists were brutally murdered in a terror attack. Reports state that the terrorists specifically chose their victims along religious lines before

killing them. This was not an act of random violence; it was a calculated attempt to destroy communities, spread fear, destabilize the region, divide people, and weaken the local economy.

This is no moment to let oneself be overwhelmed by mindless fury or reactive anger, as that is exactly what the forces operating behind such conduct desire. At such a moment, when sorrow and bewilderment grip the mind, what we need is firmness and fearlessness born of wisdom.

Why is the Gita relevant in such moments?

Terrorism is not just a confrontation with violence; it is a confrontation with a breakdown of understanding, leaving us bewildered, enraged, and afraid. The Bhagavad Gita, too, starts at the same place – the battlefield of Kurukshetra where base emotions rule, and clear action is obfuscated by feeling. Terrorists seek not just to take lives, but to unsettle us from inside. Terrorism inflicts us with war, Gita tells us how to respond when challenged with wars. The Gita was revealed not in a secluded and peaceful environment, but on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, when Arjun, the greatest archer of his era, was paralyzed by grief and uncertainty. Much like Arjun, we too frequently experience moral ambiguity and face inner conflict.

To let Gita help us, it is not to be worshipped as a symbol, nor recited out of habit, but to be understood and used as a mirror to examine the workings of our provoked and distressed mind. In times of severe crisis, like a terror attack, when inner balance is lost and fear overcomes reason, it will act as a living guide.

Understanding the Roots of Terror

Terrorism does not begin with weapons. Violence is merely the end result. Its roots lie deeper in the human mind: ignorance, fear and inner void. Even though people who turn to terrorism may outwardly appear ordinary, their thinking has often been influenced by years of ignorance and indoctrination.

To combat terrorism effectively, we need to look at the social and psychological factors that contribute to its growth. Much like a doctor who looks into the cause of a disease before suggesting a treatment, we need to

understand the environment that encourages extremism. Research studies indicate that areas characterized by poverty, illiteracy, marginalization, and rigid belief systems, especially those where inquiry is discouraged and dialogue is suppressed, are the sites where terrorism grows. The situation becomes even more precarious when combined with political instability, fragile institutions, and rapid population growth.

But there is a more profound truth that lies beneath all external circumstances. The Gita asserts that fear, desire, aggression, and the need to dominate are all innate animalistic instincts. Even a competent mind may be susceptible to manipulation if these instincts are not sublimated through awareness and education. In such a state, a person becomes a source of suffering—not just to the world, but to oneself first.

The Real Aim of Terror: What the Gita Teaches Us

Terrorism is not merely about killing people. Its fundamental objective is to create a generalized fear. Even though there may not be many direct victims, the psychological effects are meant to shake entire communities, sow suspicion, and undermine trust. A society governed by fear becomes easier to divide, provoke, and manipulate. The deepest damage caused by terrorism occurs through this emotional destabilization. This is precisely where the Bhagavad Gita's timeless clarity comes to the rescue. It teaches us that the real struggle is not merely external, but internal. Fear, uncertainty, and blind reactivity undermine peace more than any weapon. Arjun was not merely instructed by Shri Krishna to fight, but to fight with clarity—free from fear, resentment, or attachment. He emphasized that the real battle is not against external foes, but against the inner chaos that clouds judgment and binds one to illusion.

While violence can destroy individuals, it cannot eradicate terrorism as a mindset. The very cycle that retaliation aims to end can often be reinforced by it. This is similar to the myth of *Raktabeej*, a character in the *Durga Saptashati*, whose every drop of spilled blood spawns another demon. The more he was attacked, the more the demons multiplied. In the same way, an unchecked reaction can reinforce the very evil we wish to eliminate. The true remedy to this problem lies in understanding the ignorance and fear that sustain such violence at its roots.

Stillness Amid The Storm: The Gita's Clarity Manual on Courage

When Arjun stood at the brink of battle, he quivered. He faltered, his heart sank and his bow slipped from his hands. It was not the fear of being killed that caused him to shake, but the pangs of attached feelings and moral uncertainty. Shri Krishna didn't motivate him but provided wisdom. Shri Krishna told Arjun that strength was not defined fundamentally by muscles, weapons and cleverness, but as the result of personal stability and integrity, where a person is free to act without personal interest or attachment.

Terrorism seeks to provoke us into fear, anger, hatred and revenge. We allow fear to dictate our actions when we react blindly. That is precisely when terrorism succeeds not just in violence, but in shaking our inner state. Shri Krishna warns us against this. While He acknowledges our suffering, He exhorts us to try to understand the situation with clarity rather than respond impulsively. The Gita's core teaching is: the right action must be based in wisdom. Our own fear or hatred based actions only fulfill the purpose of those who would like to create divisions between us.

A Call to Reflect and Respond

Terrorism aims to divide, provoke, and elicit a negative response in the form of outrage from us. True victory lies in refusing to let it unsettle your inner equilibrium.

We must rise not with fists clenched in rage, but with minds rooted in clarity. Let Shri Krishna's wisdom become the living compass of our conscience. Such wisdom will make a society harder to divide and control. It will confront provocation with clarity, not fear. And it will not lose its bearings when violence shows its head. It will react not with confusion but with courage fueled by understanding.

This is the India envisioned by the Gita—steadfast in adversity, wise in action and limitless in courage. Let us rise to act with courage rooted in clarity.

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