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On a spiritual mission

Sunday, 21 March 2021 | MUSBA HASHMI



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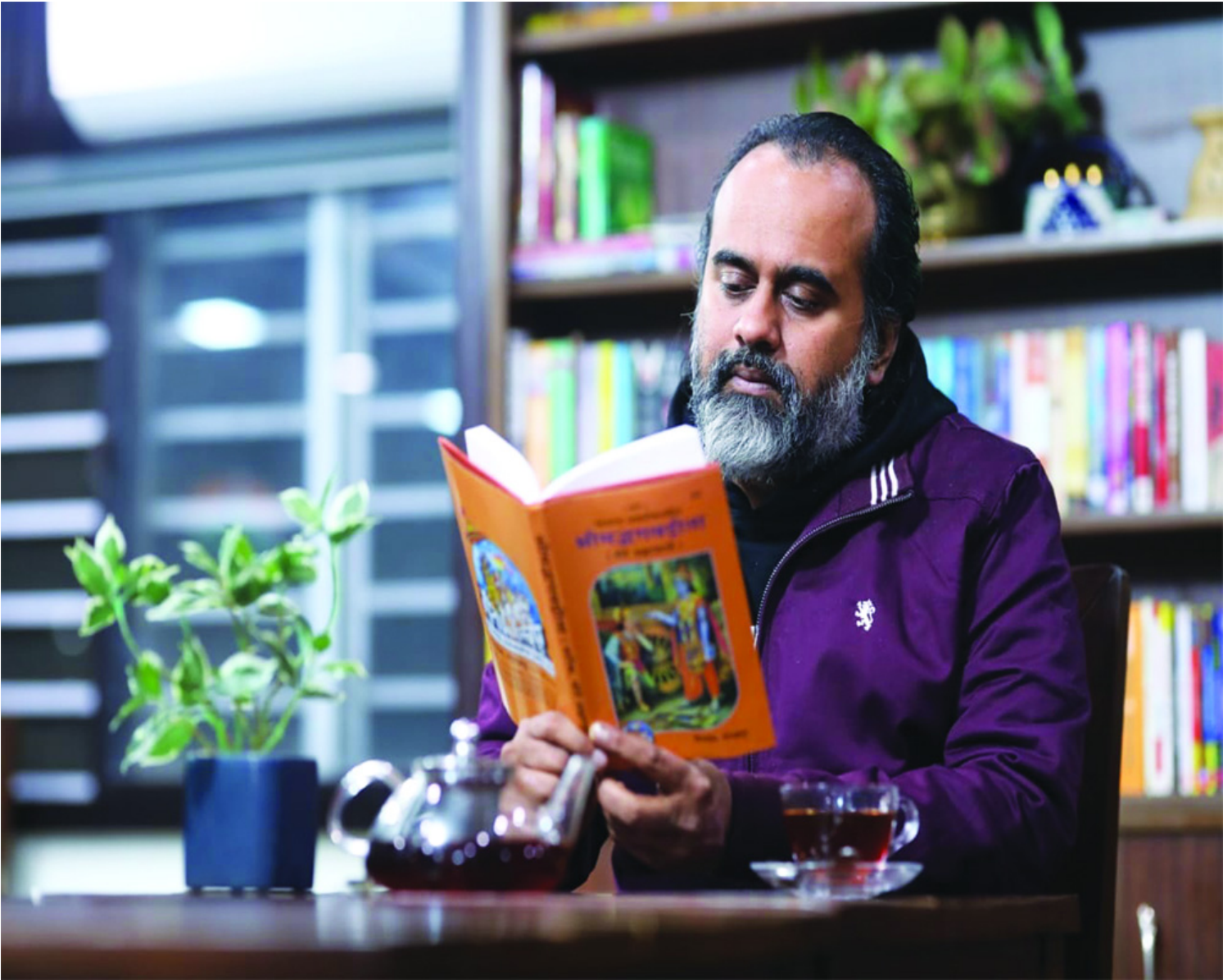


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On a spiritual mission

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MUSBA HASHMI chats up ACHARYA PRASHANT, an IIT-IIM alumnus and an ex-Civil Servant, who is on a mission to revive the Vedas by introducing to the world 17 different forms of The Gita

The usual perceived notion of an acharya — draped in saffron dhoti, flaunting a long unkempt beard and a teeka on the forehead — has now been changing because of the likes of those of Guru Gaur Gopal Das, Sadhguru and many others. One of them is Acharya Prashant aka Prashant Tripathi. However, the fact that sets him apart from all his compatriots is that he teaches 17 forms of Gita.

Surprising enough? What is even more interesting is the fact that the Acharya is an IIT-IIM alumnus and also an ex-civil services officer who decided to leave his job behind in order to attend to the spiritual call.

“There was no magical instance as such. It was a natural process and spirituality was always in the back of mind. I was always looking for the right things that I wanted to do in life. Initially, I thought that it can be done through bureaucracy. Later on, I discovered that it was to the way out. In 2000, I cleared IIM-Ahmedabad and UPSC at the same time, then took a sabbatical for three years, completed MBA and after that I left the IRPS Services. In 2006, I founded Adwait Life-Education Foundation where we were teaching spirituality to engineering students. Moving on, in 2015, I founded PrashantAdwait Foundation. This is how it happened,” he tells you.

Not that his decision of leaving the Civil Services didn’t meet resistance. It was his personality and his choice of people that helped him in the long run. “I have always been an off-beat person, which gives me the advantage that I didn’t have people around me who would counter my decisions. I had people around me who resonated with the kind of person I am and the things that I have wanted in life. I faced some resistance when I became a missionary,” he says.

While many say, criticism is the best motivation, one may wonder what made Acharya surround himself with people who only resonated with his thoughts.

unnecessarily threw resistance and not the ones who doesn't have a similar vision like me and thought I didn't have much potential," he says.

However, teaching spirituality didn't come without its share of challenges. It was a task to attract students towards the subject. "In order to tackle this challenge, we developed a curriculum where we promised jobs to students. On this pretext, we taught them spirituality and it became a major success. Apart from that, we also made sure that we are talking to students in a language and way that they are comfortable in," he says. He has recently launched Upanishad and Wisdom, an online course on Upanishads and Gitas in order to expand the learning experience.

What helped Acharya to explore different forms of Gita is that he decided to dig deep into the subject. It wasn't a difficult thing to do, he says. "The word Gita means songs. A song that is coming from deep meditation and devotion. All the ancient teachings were transformed into songs. And that there are 17 different forms of Gita, it is not a very obscure fact. Anybody who has some understanding of the Indian spiritual tradition would come to know that there are actually hundreds of Gitas.

"In fact, after Sri Krishan told Srimad Bhagwad Gita to Arjun, there is another Gita called Uttar Gita after the war got over. Here Arjun told Sri Krishan that he has forgotten whatever that was told to him and asks if Sri Krishan can tell him the Gita all over again. Sri Krishan scolds and retells Arjun the entire Gita again, hence it is called Uttar Gita. Even the Mahabharat has 18 Gitas, out of which Srimad Bhagwad Gita is just one," he explains. The retreats, he says, were started in 2012 when he would sit besides the ranges in Rishikesh and Puri and would read the scriptures for entire nights. It went on for about five years. However, it was not as if, during these years, he got some enlightenment. The only thing which changed was his perspective towards life. It became clear.

"When one reads these scriptures, the usual perception is that his perception towards things will change. However, it is not true. You will continue to see the same things, but with more clarity. I won't say I started looking at different things, instead I looked at the same things but with more clarity. So, this is what I learnt during this spiritual journey," he explains.

One of the things that his organisations stands against is superstition. Before reaching the stage of clarity, what one faces is confusion. It is not as if one sits and within five minutes he knows it all. It is a process which can be certainly frustration at times. "You read something that is intended to give you clarity, but you end up more confused. You implement it, live with this confusion for months or even years and then something opens up and you realise that this is what it was. There have been a lot of struggle with confusion, but during this I ensured one thing that I kept moving forward," he says.

Ask Acharya what kept him going in the period of struggle and he is quick to answer — my love to gaining clarity.

"I know if I am confused, this confusion will not go away by lying down and watching Netflix for 10 hours. I have to do something about it. It was clarity itself that kept me going," he adds.

Not only teaching spirituality, Acharya also helps people across the world by motivating them to lead a better life. On a daily basis, he gets about 400 queries on depression and other things. However, the number was doubled during the lockdown. "We were shocked to see so many queries pouring in. It was then when people realised death is inevitable. It depressed them. The only solution we gave them is to do good and productive things. It will give you positivity because you will realise the value of life and time," he tells you

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