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ALL WE CAN
CONTROL IS
EFFORT, NOT THE
OUTCOME
by Suma Varughese

The path of action

You have right over action but never over the fruit thereof

- *The Bhagavad Gita*

How often have we heard or read this quote which many would say is the very heart of the Bhagavad Gita? The quote embodies the concept of nishkama karma – detached or desireless action.

While earlier I would have thought that it applied to the larger and more serious issues of life – passing the exam, getting the coveted job or promotion, I am now recognising that it applies to even the tiniest detail of our lives. In everything, we have no control over outcome. All we can control is effort. Health is not in our hands but working towards it is. Sleep is not in our hands but efforts to ensuring a good night's sleep is.

When we recognise this at a universal level, it enables us to shift our focus from pining, wishing, longing, or from pushing away what presently is, to focusing on doing something about it. Most of us are caught up in resisting what is, by brooding over it, resigning ourselves to it, flying into a fantasy world where all is miraculously well or wishing in vain for someone to rescue us. This is a waste of effort because it causes us to stray into territory that is really not our concern.

Most of the time we exist in both the domains simultaneously, and therefore have limited energy for effort. With this one movement, we leap fully into the zone of karma or effort, and therefore up our effectiveness quotient considerably. Effective people rarely waste time or energy on what they cannot control. Instead they direct their attention with utmost focus on what they can control, which is their effort. Effort also includes mental and spiritual effort, the effort to control one's own attitudes and responses to situation, to take responsibility for our thoughts, feelings, words and actions, and the effort of visualisation, affirmation and even surrender. Paradoxically, surrender, or not acting, is often the best means of action. But this too is a conscious choice and therefore part of the overall effort.

One now recognises the correlation between nishkama karma and the Law of Attraction. The Law of Attraction holds that we can control our destiny through our thoughts, feeling and action. This means that instead of focusing on what we don't want as we usually do, we focus instead on what we want (effort). And once we have articulated it, we let go of the outcome completely (detachment). This is often spoken of in terms of posting a letter or ordering from a catalogue. Once done, no review is necessary. Voila, nishkama karma. When we act thus, the sages tell us that we will not attract negative karma, because the action is pure, uncorrupted by unwholesome motivations. And because we are focused on effort and not outcome, there is no disappointment when our efforts are unsuccessful. The Lord's decree rules in all things big and small and so we flow serenely with the design of life.