

# Unshaking ourselves from the fear of outcomes<sup>1</sup>

B Mahadevan<sup>2</sup>

We are all in the thick of activities doing some work or the other. Although we continuously engage in activities, it often induces a lot of stress in us. For this reason some of us feel that work is not at all an enjoyable part of our life. For many students studying is a stressful activity. When the results of the examinations are going to be announced, it is even more stressful. For people working in organizations working is a stress inducing activity on a day-to-day basis. This is because there are expectations and targets set by the boss and other colleagues and the question is will we meet the targets and expectations? Parents have a lot of stress because they do not know if their children will do well in the examinations. They are not sure how they will be perceived among their peers and friends circles. Older parents have different kinds of problems. They are worried if their son or daughter will be well settled in life, whether they will get good jobs etc. The list of reasons for us to get stressed is endless and nearly every one of us qualifies to get stressed for some reason or the other.

We are already seeing the downside of this phenomenon on each of us and on the society. Diabetes and hyper-tension, the two widely prevalent chronic diseases in the society are nothing but stress induced. There are reports suggesting that the number of younger people (in the age group of 25 – 35) getting one of these two diseases is on the rise. Despite advances in modern medicine, the stress induced diseases are posing a big challenge to human welfare. The moot question is why are we getting stressed and how should we address this issue.

## Fear of Outcomes – The stress enabler

The stress that we all go through is mainly arising out of the fear of the outcome. If only we knew what exactly the outcome is going to be, all our stress will vanish. If this is not possible, then we must be able to adjust or control every unfolding event in the future pertaining to our work with such a clock work precision that the outcomes are exactly as planned. Both these are unfortunately not possible although some people foolishly think that they can control the outcomes. Theoretically speaking, if we step out of our homes there is no guarantee that we may return back after we finish the day's work. There could be a Tsunami or an earthquake or other such events (caused by large natural forces at play known as आदिदैविकं - *ādidāivikam*) or even a major terrorist strike or an accident (caused by manmade interventions known as आदिभौक्तिकं - *ādibahuktikam*) or a heart attack or some such major personal health setback (caused by bodily malfunctions known as आद्यात्मिकं - *ādyātmikam*). The idea is not to paint a pessimistic view of the reality but to highlight the fact that there could be many a slip between the cup and the lip. Since work is in the domain of present and the outcome in the domain of future, the uncertainty of outcome is

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<sup>2</sup> B Mahadevan is a Professor at the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore.

inevitable. The question that remains still unanswered is how do we address the induced stress?

If we consult a medical practitioner he will advise that we have a change of *life style*. The new life style prescribed will have two components. One is about our food habits. The doctor may advise us to avoid eating high fat content food and instead have more fibrous and unsaturated fatty substances. The other is about the need for regular physical exercises, which may include morning walking exercises, playing or cycling. While this can address the problem on the surface to an extent, it may not solve our problem in any meaningful manner as the solution is not at all “physical”. How can one hope to solve a mind induced problem by addressing the physical aspects of the problem alone? On the other hand, if we understand some of the prescriptions in our ancient texts, they provide a better diagnosis of the problem as well as a better solution. Let us look at *Gītā* for an example.

### **Equanimity – The stress relieving agent**

Lord Krishna’s major recommendation to us to enjoy our work revolves around shielding us from the ill-effects of the outcomes of the work we engage in. His advice is simple and straightforward. The only way for us to be free from stress is to distance ourselves from the outcomes when we engage in work (*saṅgam tyaktvā karmāṇi kuru*) so that the fear of outcomes is no longer an issue.

योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा धनञ्जय ।  
सिद्ध्यसिद्ध्योः समो भूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते ॥ 2.48

*yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi saṅgam tyaktvā dhanañjaya*  
*siddhyasiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā samatvam yoga ucyate*

Unlike the modern medical fraternity’s advice, this is purely a mental issue. Keeping away from outcomes is not about avoiding work or shunning our responsibilities or stopping setting goals and targets for our daily activities. In fact, we must continue to do these useful things in our life. With such set goals and targets we must actively engage in activities and put our best foot forward. However as we *physically engage* in work, we must constantly train our mind to *emotionally disengage* from developing expectations about the outcomes and analyzing the potential effects that it can create one way or the other. It is this hyper-analytical activity that induces stress. The analytical brain is too strong to unnerve people, push them to the edge and present situations that may indeed never unfold. Even after all these analytical thinking and changing work strategies, when such situations unfold the stress component does not go away. Therefore, a useful tool in our life’s kit bag in any case is to be mentally ready to face any outcome as it unfolds. The only way to do is to learn to ignore outcomes when they actually unfold.

The changed life style we need is to develop intuitions so that we have good awareness of this potential mouse trap and not get stuck with this. When we are able to achieve this frame of mind, we will be able to develop equanimity with respect to success and failure.

Indeed engaging in work with such a level of equanimity, Lord Krishna says is the *yoga of work*. This is the art of unshaking ourselves from the fear of outcomes.

In *Gītā*, as well as in many of our ancient texts, this idea is reinforced multiple times. Unfortunately, this is misunderstood in modern times. Trying to use stress relieving medicines, contrived diet and physical exercises to address the enormous stress that we go through in our daily life is futile. It is like setting up elaborate security arrangements at the main gates of the office to check theft of information out, when information could be stolen through the Internet sitting inside the office itself. The sooner we see the futility of this approach and nab the culprit the better it is for us.