

Similarly if we disrespect and humiliate any being, it will be disrespect and humiliation to God only—‘karṣayantaḥ sārīrasthaṁ bhūtagrāmama cetaśaḥ’ (17/6).

As in the path of knowledge, the modes are acting on the modes (‘guṇā guṇeṣu vartante’), similarly in the path of devotion, God is being worshipped by God’s things. But there is a vast difference between the two. In ‘guṇā guṇeṣu vartante’ there is predominance of matter (non-Self) which a striver, following the path of knowledge, disowns but in ‘svakarmaṇā tamabhyarcya’, there is predominance of the sentient (the divinity) which the striver, following the path of devotion, owns. Therefore in the path of devotion, inertness is wiped out, the universe in the form of the universe is concealed, and it is revealed as God because in fact it is only God. If the universe appears as the universe to a striver, he should serve it, and if it appears as the manifestation of God, he should worship Him. He should do nothing for himself. Performance of action for one’s own sake, is ‘bondage’; for the sake of the world, is ‘service’ and for God’s sake, is ‘worship’.



Link:—The Lord, in the next two verses, explains that a striver, need not lose heart, while worshipping the Lord through the performance of his duty, even if there remains any defect, in his performance.

श्रेयान्स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात् ।

स्वभावनियतं कर्म कुर्वन्नाप्नोति किल्बिषम् ॥ ४७ ॥

**śreyānsvadharṁo viguṇaḥ paradharmātsvanuṣṭhitāt
svabhāvaniyataṁ karma kurvannāpnoti kilbiṣam**

Better is one's own duty (dharma), though devoid of merit than the duty (dharma) of another even if well-performed. He who carries out the duty ordained, by his own nature, incurs no sin. 47

Comment:—

'Śreyānsvadharmo viguṇaḥ paradharmātsvanuṣṭhitāt'— Here, the term 'Svadharmā', denotes one's duty according to one's Varṇa (Caste):

A man, having an aim of God-realization, has to perform his duty, according to what he thinks, himself to be. If he thinks that he is a man, he has to perform his duty as a man. If he thinks that he is a teacher, or a student, he has to teach or study. Similarly if he holds, that he is a striver, a devotee, or a seeker of knowledge, he has to practise spiritual discipline, devotion or seek knowledge, whole-heartedly.

Similarly, a man has to perform his duty, according to his varṇa (caste) and āśrama (stage of life). A Brāhmaṇa's duties, are—performance of religious sacrifice accepting charity, and teaching etc., in order to earn his living. For a Kṣatriya, fighting and authority, for a Vaiśya agriculture, cow-rearing and trade, and for a Śūdra service, are the duties to earn their living. One's own duty, even though devoid of merit, is better than the duty of others. The duties prescribed by the scriptures, for persons of a particular Varṇa, is 'Svadharmā' (one's own duty), while the same duty for people of other Varṇas, castes is, Paradharma (Duties of others). Performing religious sacrifice, for others as a priest, and taking charity etc., are a Brāhmaṇa's own duties, as these are sanctioned by scriptures for him, but the same duties are Paradharma, for the Kṣatriyas, the Vaiśyas and the Śūdras, as these are forbidden by scriptures, for them. But, at the time of extreme distress, duties which are forbidden, by scriptures, become duties, for people, of all varṇas (castes). For example, a Brāhmaṇa can earn his living by agriculture, and trade etc., which are duties of a Vaiśya, at the time of extreme distress.*

*At the time of distress a Brāhmaṇa can earn his living through the profession of a Kṣatriya and at the time of extreme distress through the profession of a Vaiśya. But a Brāhmaṇa should plough the land with two bullocks instead of one and work in the field in the morning and evening when it is cool. Moreover, he should not deal in sugar, butter, oil and salt etc.

As far as the natural duties, such as serenity and self-control etc., of a Brāhmaṇa, are concerned, these are duties, for all members belonging to the four Vārṇas, because they are prescribed by scriptures, for all of them.

God-realization, is the only aim of human life. So every human being is a striver, therefore he has to cultivate all the divine traits, in him by renouncing demoniac ones. Everyone is free and strong, enough to abandon demoniac traits, and to develop divine ones. No one is dependent, weak and ineligible, in it. According to their temperaments, different persons may possess different divine traits. A person may have predominance of forgiveness, in his nature, in another, person there may be forgiveness only, on asking for it. In some other person, there may be predominance of compassion, while in another there may be compassion, on thought. Such differences may exist.

'Svabhāvānīyataṁ karma kurvannāpnoti kilbiṣam'—In scriptures, two kinds of actions, are mentioned—prescribed and prohibited. Out of the prescribed actions, those actions which are performed according to one's caste (Vārṇa), or stage of life (Āśrama) time, and circumstances etc., are called 'Niyata Karma'.

One's nature, is formed according to three modes of nature—of goodness (sattva), of passion (rajas) and of ignorance (tamasa). Actions which are performed according to that nature, are called 'Svabhāvānīyata Karma'. These are also known as natural duties—duties born of nature, one's own duties and innate duties etc.

A being is born, in a particular vārṇa (caste) according to qualities and actions, of his previous birth. Though actions perish, but their impression (saṁskāra) continues. So in life one is born with that nature, which he inherits. The Lord (in Gītā 18/48) declares, that though all undertakings are tainted with blemish, yet a person should perform his duty, according to his Vārṇa

Similarly a Kṣatriya can earn his living through the profession of a Vaiśya and a Vaiśya through the profession of a Śūdra.

(caste) as sanctioned in the scriptures, for the welfare of others, by giving up his selfishness and pride. By doing so, he incurs no sin. Similarly he, who performs actions, for the maintenance of the body alone, incurs no sin (Gītā 4/21).

An Important Fact

Now a doubt arises, whether a person born in the family of a butcher, should not abandon his duty of slaughtering animals? Does a butcher not incur, sin? Can he attain salvation, by performing such a forbidden action?

The explanation is, that natural duty is that which is not forbidden, and which is not harmful to anyone. The actions which are harmful or injurious to others, cannot be called, one's natural duties. These are performed out of attachment and desire. A forbidden action, is always evil and so it must be abandoned, because it is a demoniac trait, while virtuous actions, are divine traits. A man, may have a mere thought of committing evil, because of past impressions, but that thought cannot compel him, to perform evil actions. That inclination, can be rooted out, through discrimination, virtuous thoughts, good company and study of scriptures etc. Reasoning also reveals, that no one wants to be injured and slaughtered. So none has a right to injure and slaughter, others. If a person wants other persons to do good to him, he should also do good, to others. The scriptures also reveal, that any sin or unjust action, is not natural, it is born of an evil. In the third chapter, Arjuna asked Lord Kṛṣṇa, "Impelled by what does a man, commit sin, even involuntarily as though driven by force?" The Lord replied, "It is desire, it is anger, born of the mode of passion, which impels a man to commit sins" (3/36-37). Actions which are performed, out of desire, wrath, selfishness, and pride, are not pure, but are impure.

Actions, which are performed, in order to attain God, are not defective, even though they may be different, for people of different castes. Having realized God, a Brāhmaṇa will

observe purity and sanctity in the preparation of food, and in having it. But a person of a low caste, having realized God, will not observe purity and sanctity, like a Brāhmaṇa. He will eat food which is left on the plate, after a meal while a Brāhmaṇa, will not eat it. So actions of the liberated souls, are faultless. Their nature is pure, because they are free, from either attachment or aversion.

A man, is born in the family of a butcher, in order to reap the fruit of his sinful actions. He is not born there, to commit sins. In the Yogadarśana (one of the six schools of Hindu philosophy), sinful action bears fruit, in the form of caste, age and suffering, but it does not force that man to perform new sinful actions, (2/13). He is free in performing actions. If his heart becomes pure, he cannot slaughter animals. A person, asked a saint, "What should a butcher, who considers slaughtering animals his profession, do?" The saint replied, "If he goes on chanting the name of the Lord, with sanctity, for three years, he will find himself unable to perform, his duty as a butcher. He will scorn his action and then, he will give it up." He will not be able to slaughter animals, if he wants to realize God, from his heart, because his heart will change and virtues, will be revealed in him.

In the Rāmācaritamānasa Lord Rāma says, to Śabarī, "Listen to the nine kinds of devotion which I am going to describe" (3/35/4). Afterwards He declared, "You very well possess, all kinds of devotion" (3/36/4). It means that Śabarī did not know the nine kinds, of devotion, though she possessed all of them. Through adoration, meditation and good company, we develop virtues, which we are not aware of. So a man, should make his nature pure, and he is capable, of making it pure. He finds himself incapable, because of his attachment to mundane pleasure and prosperity. Those who hold discourses to preach others, can't be virtuous, unless they themselves translate those preachings, into practice, by making their nature pure, having the aim of God-realization.

The Lord, has bestowed this human body, so that human beings may attain salvation, by purifying their nature. They can purify their nature, it is neither impossible nor difficult. This human body, has been called the gateway to salvation (Mānasa 7/43/4). Had it been impossible, to purify nature, how could this human body have been called, the gateway to salvation? There is no use of this human life, if a man cannot purify his nature.

Appendix—By performing one's own duty there can be sin but the striver cannot incur this sin—'kurvannāpnoti kilbiṣam'. In incurring sin the main cause is the 'feeling' rather than an 'action'. Therefore sin is incurred, not by actions but by selfishness and pride.



सहजं कर्म कौन्तेय सदोषमपि न त्यजेत् ।

सर्वारम्भा हि दोषेण धूमेनाग्निरिवावृताः ॥ ४८ ॥

sahajaṁ karma kaunteya sadoṣamapi na tyajet
sarvārambhā hi doṣeṇa dhūmenāgnirivāvṛtāḥ

One should not abandon, O Arjuna, one's innate duty, even though it may have flaws, for all undertakings are clouded by defects, as fire is by smoke. 48

Comment:—

[In the preceding verse, the Lord declared, "He who performs his duty ordained by his own nature, incurs no sin." It means that duty ordained by one's own nature, also involves sin. Therefore, the Lord declares, "The natural duties, even though defective, should not be abandoned, because all of these are clouded by defects, as fire by smoke."]

'Sahajaṁ karma kaunteya sadoṣamapi na tyajet'—The duties ordained by one's own nature, are called innate duties. A Brāhmaṇa's innate duties, are serenity and self-control etc., a Kṣatriya's heroism and vigour etc., a Vaiśya's agriculture and cattle-rearing etc., and a Śūdra's, service.