

॥ Shri Hari ॥

## **Fifteenth Chapter**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In response to Arjuna's question, "Those devotees who worship Thee with attributes and those who worship the Absolute (the Imperishable and the Unmanifested)—which of them are better versed in Yoga?" The Lord declared the former to be superior to the latter. In the fifth verse, the Lord while comparing the two declared, "The difficulty of those whose thoughts are set, on the Unmanifested is greater, for the goal of the Unmanifested, is hard to reach by the embodied beings." How to overcome this difficulty of body consciousness—this topic, as well as, the description of the Absolute has been given, in the thirteenth and the fourteenth chapters.

In the twenty-first verse of the fourteenth chapter Arjuna asked, "What are the marks and conduct of him, who has transcended the three modes (guṇas) and how does he transcend them?" In response to this, the Lord after discussing the marks and conduct of the person who has transcended the three modes, in verses twenty-second to the twenty-fifth, in the twenty-sixth verse He explained unadulterated devotion, as the means to transcend, the three modes, for the devotees who worship God with attributes. It means, that devotee who has exclusive devotion to God (who totally depends upon Him) transcends the three modes easily. The expression 'Avyabhicāreṇa bhaktiyogena', stands for devotion free from dependence on the world, the term 'Yah' stands for the embodied soul, while the term 'Mām' stands for God. In the fifteenth chapter these very three subjects have been described in detail which are referred in brief just above.

Man (soul) being a fragment of God, is transcendental but he is bound because of his identification with, and attachment to

the body (world)—the evolute of the modes. He is not liberated from these modes, so long as he does not know the glory of the Lord, the transcendental one. Therefore, the Lord, introduces the fifteenth chapter in order, to explain His glory and secret, to enable a striver to cultivate unswerving devotion.

A man (soul), is a fragment of God (Gītā 15/7) and so he has his affinity, only for God. But by error, he assumes his affinity for the body, senses, mind and intellect, etc., which are evolutes of Nature, by regarding them as 'I', or 'mine', or for me. This is the main stumbling block, to exclusive devotion. In order to remove this stumbling block, the Lord in the first five verses of the fifteenth chapter, having described the universe as a Pīpala tree, exhorts Arjuna, to cut it down with an axe of dispassion.

श्रीभगवानुवाच

ऊर्ध्वमूलमधःशाखमश्वत्थं प्राहुरव्ययम् ।  
छन्दांसि यस्य पर्णानि यस्तं वेद स वेदवित् ॥ १ ॥

śrībhagavān uvāca

ūrdhvamūlamadhaḥśākhamāśvattham prāhuravyayam  
chandāṁsi yasya parṇāni yastam veda sa vedavit

The Blessed Lord said

He who knows the Pīpala tree which is said to be imperishable, as having its root above and branches below, and whose leaves are the Vedas, is the knower of the Vedas. 1

Comment:—

'Ūrdhvamūlamadhaḥśākham'— [Like the first two verses of the thirteenth chapter, here in the first verse of the fifteenth chapter also the Lord presents a view of all the topics of the entire chapter. The expression 'Ūrdhvamūlam' denotes God; the expression 'Adhaḥśākham' denotes Brahmā, the representative of all beings while the term 'Aśvattham' denotes the world. He who knows the omnipotent Lord (the root of the Pīpala tree in

form of the universe) in reality has been called 'Vedavit' (knower of the Vedas).

Generally trees have their roots below and branches above. But this tree in the form of the universe is strange as it has its root above and branches below. The supreme abode of God from where there is no return is above all the other worlds. Brahmā is the main branch (stem) of the tree in the form of the world as he emanates first of all. The abode of Brahmā is lower than that of God. Brahmā is lower than God in position, virtues, rank and age etc., so he is called 'Adhaḥ'.\* As the root is the foundation (support) of the entire tree, so is God the origin of the entire universe. Brahmā, the creator is born of Him and he has been described by the expression 'Adhaḥśākham' (branches below).

God is the illuminator and base of the entire creation and He is superior to everyone in every way. "There is none equal to Thee, how could then there be one superior to Thee in the three worlds" (Gītā 11/43)†? Being the base and the support of the entire universe He is called 'Ūrdhvamūlam' (root above).

The term 'Mūla' stands for the root or the base. The universe is born of Him and is preserved by Him. He is eternal, infinite and the base of the entire creation. He resides in His eternal abode, which is situated above all the worlds in His manifested form with attributes. So He is known as 'Ūrdhva'. This world is born of Him and therefore it is called 'Ūrdhvamūla' having its root above.

As trunks, branches and tendrils sprout from the root of the tree, so does the entire universe emanate from God. It is expanded by Him, it remains established in Him and it is by His power that beings act‡. Having taken refuge in such Lord,

\* The expression 'Adhaḥśākham' includes all creatures from Brahmā to insects.

† No one appears either to be superior or equal to Him (God).

‡ This fact has been mentioned in the Gītā when Lord Kṛṣṇa declares, "I am the source and dissolution of the entire universe" (7/6), "I am the origin,

a person is satisfied forever (the Lord talks of taking refuge in Him in the fourth verse).

At the time of creation Brahmā, the creator accepts Prakṛti but he remains liberated from it as he has no attachment to it. Except Brahmā all the other beings having affinity of 'Tness and 'mineness' for Prakṛti (nature) and its evolute body etc., are bound and take birth and then die again and again i.e., their branches spread downward. The three kinds of birth because of the three modes of goodness, of passion and of ignorance are included in the expression 'Adhaḥśākham (Gītā 14/18).

'Aśvattham'—The term 'Aśvattham' has two meanings—(1) That which may not last even by tomorrow i.e., kaleidoscopic\* and (2) Pīpala tree.

According to the first interpretation the universe does not remain fixed even for a 'Kṣaṇa'† (moment), it is kaleidoscopic, the seen is changing into the unseen. It seems to exist like a mirage. The mere change appears as creation, existence or dissolution. It is because of its kaleidoscopic nature, that it is called 'Aśvattham'.

According to the second interpretation the universe has been called a Pīpala tree. In the scriptures, this tree has been glorified very much. The Lord, declares while describing His divine manifestations, 'Among all the trees I am the 'Aśvattha' (Pīpala)' (Gītā 10/26). If the plants of Pīpala, myrobalan and

the dissolution, the formation, the treasure house and the imperishable seed of the universe" (9/18), "I am the source of all; from Me everything evolves" (9/10), "The ancient activity or energy streamed forth from Him" (15/4), "From Him all beings have evolved" (18/46).

\* The term 'Śvaḥ' stands for tomorrow. That which continues by tomorrow is 'Śvattha' and that which does not last even by tomorrow is 'Aśvattha'.

† The philosophers have explained the term 'Kṣaṇa' (moment) in the following way—a needle pricks the lotus leaf in three moments—touch in the first moment, making the hole in the second moment, and pulling the other side of the leaf in the third moment.

basil, are worshipped by regarding them as divine, their worship becomes, worship of God.

God is the root of the universe, and therefore this Pīpala tree, in the form of the universe, being a manifestation of God, deserves to be worshipped. The worship of Pīpala tree, in the form of universe is to render service to it, without having any desire to derive pleasure, out of it. This world is a manifestation of God, for those who do not desire to derive pleasure out of it—All is God (Gītā 7/19). But this world, is the abode of sorrow, for those who desire to derive pleasure out of it, because they (the self), are imperishable, while the world is perishable, transitory or kaleidoscopic. Therefore, the objects of the world cannot satisfy the self, and the people have to follow a cycle of birth and death. So everyone, should render service to the world, without expecting any reward from it.

**'Prāhuravyayam'**—This tree, in the form of the world, is called imperishable, because in spite of being perishable, its beginning and end, are not known, its flow is continuous (eternal), and its root is imperishable God. As the water of sea evaporates, with the heat of sun, changes into a cloud, falls on the ground in the form of rain, and flows into the sea again, in the form of a stream or a river and the process continues endlessly, so does the cycle of the world go on, without any end. This cycle moves so rapidly, that just like a movie in spite of, being kaleidoscopic, it seems fixed.

This tree in the form of this world, is called imperishable, but in fact, it is not so. Had it been imperishable, the Lord, in the third verse of this chapter, would not have declared, "Its form is not perceived here, as it is said" nor would He have inspired Arjuna to cut off this firm rooted Pīpala tree, with a strong axe of non-attachment.

**'Chandāṁsi yasya parṇāni'**—The Vedas, are the leaves of this tree, in the form of the universe. Here, the Vedas, mean the portion

of the Vedas which deal with rituals and their performance, for the fruits.\* As trees, with flowers and leaves without bearing any fruits cannot satisfy people, so can mundane pleasure and prosperity, looking beautiful outwardly, like flowers and leaves, not provide imperishable bliss.

Virtuous actions performed, in order to attain, heaven are better than forbidden actions, but they cannot lead to salvation as those people having enjoyed the vast heaven, enter the world of mortals, when their merit is exhausted (Gītā 9/21). Thus, such actions and their fruits—both are perishable. Therefore, a striver, should realize God, by becoming detached from both of them.

Leaves are born of the branches of a tree, and they protect and nourish it. They beautify it and strengthen it (the movement of leaves strengthen its root, stem and branches). The Vedas, are also born of Brahṁā, the main branch of this tree, in the form of the world and actions sanctioned by the Vedas, nourish and protect the world. So, the Vedas, have been called leaves. When actions, are performed with a desire for fruit, these lead him to heaven. This is nourishment of the tree. In heaven, there are celestial damsels and gardens etc. This is the beauty of that tree.

The performance of actions for their fruit leads to the cycle of birth and death—this is strengthening of this tree.

Here the Lord means to say, that a striver, instead of getting entangled in the leaves, in the form of performance of actions for their fruit, should depend only on God, the root of the tree. Having depended on God, he realizes the reality about the Vedas, which deal with the Supreme Being, rather than the world or heaven (Gītā 15/15).†

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\*In the Vedas the number of the hymns which deal with the fruit of actions, is eighty thousand while the number of the hymns which lead to salvation, is twenty thousand. Out of these twenty thousand hymns, there are four thousand on the path of knowledge, and sixteen thousand, on the path of devotion.

†The Vedas ascertain the Supreme Person Who is the supreme goal.

'Yastam veda sa vedavit'—He who knows this tree, in the form of the universe, knows the reality, about the Vedas. The real knowledge of the world, consists in knowing the world, as kaleidoscopic and also having no desire of deriving any pleasure out of it. When a man realizes, that the world is transitory (unreal), he cannot derive any pleasure out of it. While enjoying the sense-objects, he does not realize the world, to be transitory. A man depends on the world and has a desire to derive pleasure, out of it only by regarding the worldly beings and objects, as real. When he realizes, its true character he has a disinclination for the world, and an inclination to God, and he realizes his identity, with God. Such a person, is a knower of the Vedas. The person who has only studied the Vedas, may be a scholar, but he has not really known, the Vedas. The real knower of the Vedas, is he who having renounced his affinity, for the world, has realized God.

The Lord in the fifteenth verse of this chapter, has declared that He Himself is the knower of the Vedas. Thus the Lord identifies, such a man, who knows the reality about the world, with Him by calling him a knower of the Vedas. It means, that discrimination bestowed upon human beings, is so glorious that a person having known the reality about the world can become the knower of the Vedas, like God.\*

The man (soul), being a fragment of God, has only affinity, for God. He has assumed his affinity for the world by an error. He, who through discrimination having rectified this error i.e., having renounced his assumed affinity, for the world, has realized his self-evident identity, with God, knows the reality about the tree in the form of the world, and he has been called 'Vedavit' (the knower of the Vedas), by the Lord.

**Appendix**—The world, the Soul and the Supreme Soul—all the three are only God—'Vāsudevaḥ sarvam'. It has been described

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\*The same fact has been pointed out by the Lord when He declares, "They have attained unity with Me" (Gītā 14/2).

here in the form of a tree.

In spite of being kaleidoscopic, the purpose of calling the world ‘avyaya’ (imperishable) is that though the world undergoes changes constantly, yet nothing is spent out of it viz., it does not know any diminution. As in the sea, several waves appear to rise and there are tides also, but water of the sea remains the same, it neither decreases nor increases. Similarly though it appears that the world constantly undergoes changes, yet it remain. ‘avyaya’ (unspent). The reason is that the kaleidoscopic world also being the evolute of God’s power ‘aparā prakṛti’ is the manifestation of God—‘sadasaccāhamarjuna’ (Gītā 9/19). Both—the kaleidoscopic ‘aparā prakṛti’ (lower nature) as well as the unchangeable ‘parā prakṛti’ (higher nature) is God’s manifestation. This world is in the form of waves in God-ocean. As in the ocean, the waves appear rising outwardly only; inside the ocean, there are no waves, the ocean remains calm and uniform, similarly outwardly the world appears to be kaleidoscopic, yet within it, there is God Who is ever calm and uniform (Gītā 13/27). It means that the world as the world is not imperishable but it is imperishable as the manifestation of God. A glimpse of God appears in the form of the world. A striver instead of catching that glimpse (world), should be inclined to God. To cognise the reality of that glimpse, to value it and to be attached to it lead to bondage.

Another purpose of using the term ‘avyaya’ is that the person who gets attached to the world, his cycle of birth and death will also be imperishable viz., will never come to an end. The long path can come to an end but how can be round path end? As a bullock used in a crusher goes on moving round and round without an end, similarly the person attached to the world will go on following the cycle of birth and death endlessly.

The world is ‘avyaya’ because the seed of the world is ‘avyaya’—‘bījamavyayam’ (Gītā 9/18).

