

*Link:—When we rise above attachment and aversion, what should we do and what should we refrain from doing? The Lord, answers this question, in the verse that follows:—*

**श्रेयान्स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात् ।  
स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मो भयावहः ॥ ३५ ॥**

**śreyānsvadharma viguṇaḥ paradharmātsvanuṣṭhitāt  
svadharṁe nidhanam śreyaḥ paradharmo bhayāvahaḥ**

Better is one's own duty ( dharma) though devoid of merit, than the duty of another well performed. Better is death in one's own duty, than of another, which is fraught with danger. 35

*Comment:—*

'Śreyān\*svadharma viguṇaḥ paradharmātsvanuṣṭhitāt'—The duty of another person according to his caste, order of life, etc., may outwardly seem full of merit, be easy to perform, be attractive, provide riches, comforts, honour and praise etc., and enable one to live with comfort throughout his life, yet as forbidden to him. These are fraught with fear (pain). On the other hand, one's own duty, according to one's caste and order of life, may be devoid of merit, be difficult to perform, not appealing and not providing riches, comforts, honour or praise etc., and may be painful, throughout life, yet these should be performed without expecting any reward, as these leads to salvation. Therefore, a person should always perform his duty, without expecting any reward, without a sense of 'mine' and without attachment.

Performance of duty, for a man is but natural and innate. A man is born, according to his actions, and actions are decided, by his birth (Gītā 18/41). Through the performance of his own duty, he attains perfection (Gītā 18/45). Therefore, one should not give up one's duty ordained by one's nature, even if it seems

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\* The term 'Jyāyasī' (Superior) (3/1) used in the question put by Arjuna and the term 'Śreyān' are synonymous. It means that the Lord has answered Arjuna's question in this verse with particular attention.

to be tainted with blemish (Gītā 18/48).

Arjuna thinks, it is better to live in this world by begging, than to fight (Gītā 2/5). So the Lord makes it clear to Arjuna, that begging being the duty of a beggar, is not his duty, because he is a Kṣatriya (a member of the warrior class), and not a beggar. In the first chapter, when Arjuna said that only sin would accrue to them by fighting (1/36), the Lord said, that having abandoned his own duty and forfeited his fame, he would incur sin (2/33). Further, the Lord declared, "Treating alike pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, engage thou in battle; thus, thou shall not incur sin" (2/38). In the eighteenth chapter also He declares, "Better is one's own duty though devoid of merit, than the duty of another well performed and he who performs his duty ordained by one's own nature, incurs no sin" (18/47). It means, that a man incurs sin only when duty is performed with attachment and aversion. When a striver performs his duty scrupulously, being free from attachment and aversion, he realizes equanimity, which leads him to freedom from sorrow and pain (Gītā 6/23). So the Lord urges Arjuna, time and again, to perform his duty of fighting without attachment and aversion. By performing his duty he would be detached from actions, develop dispassion, and attain the goal of life. Through the selfless performance of duty, actions flow towards nature (prakṛti) and so a striver has no affinity for these. Therefore, a striver should perform his duty, with the view to root out attachment, for actions.

Lord Kṛṣṇa is convincing Arjuna that having taken birth in the warrior class and fighting is his duty he had to treat alike victory and defeat, gain and loss, and pleasure and pain believing that he had no concern as such with war but he had to act in order only, to remove attachment with actions. The body, senses, mind, intellect and matter etc., are meant for performing duty alone.

One's duty done according to one's caste and order of life,

even though it may appear devoid of merit, leads to salvation. A Kṣatriya's duty of fighting, which involves violence may seem devoid of merits as compared with that of a Brāhmaṇa such as serenity, self-restraint, austerity, purity and forgiveness etc., yet a Kṣatriya (member of the warrior class) should fight, as it will lead him to salvation.

According to one's caste and order of life etc., outwardly actions (duties) may seem terrible or mild, but these are performed with the only aim of God-realization. When a person forgets the real aim of life i.e., God-realization and attaches importance to worldly objects, actions seem terrible or mild to him. Under no circumstances should one, discard his duty.

**'Svadharme nidhanaṁ śreyaḥ'**— If people ever gained, comfort, pleasure, property, riches, honour and praise etc., by performing their duty, there could be seen crowds of righteous people. But, duty is not performed, keeping in view pleasure or pain, but it is performed according to the teachings of the Lord or the scriptures, without expecting any reward. So, while performing his duty, if a striver suffers pain, that pain leads him to his spiritual progress. In fact, that pain is not pain, but is penance or austerity, which is conducive to progress, as penance is performed for ones own self, while duty is performed for others. Penance which is performed intentionally, does not prove so beneficial, as penance, in the form of pain, which comes uninvited. Those who die while performing their duty, become immortal. From the worldly point of view also, it is observed, that those who do not deviate from their duty in spite of suffering pain, are admired and honoured. Patriots who suffered tortures, went to jail and were hanged, in order to make the country independent, are praised and honoured even today. On the other hand, those who are sent to jail, because of their crimes are condemned and dishonoured. It means, that the person who performs his duty without expecting any reward, may suffer pain and even may meet

with death, but that pain wins honour and praise here, and leads him to salvation hereafter, because he has an eye on righteousness.

**Question:**—How to know for certain, that death while performing one's own duty, leads only to salvation?

**Answer:**—The Gītā is a gospel of Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself. So, there should not arise any doubt, about His teaching. Secondly it is a matter of faith and belief, rather than reasoning, yet some aspects clarify the doubts:

(1)—Whatever, is not known to us should be decided by the scriptures.\* It is mentioned in the scriptures, that he who protects righteousness, is protected by the righteous (Manusmṛti 8/15) i.e., righteousness leads him to salvation. Therefore, the responsibility of salvation of a person, who follows righteousness falls on the righteous and the preachers of righteousness, such as God, the Vedas, the scriptures and the sages and ascetics. It is their power which leads one to salvation. In the scriptures, it is mentioned that a chaste woman, attains salvation. She does not attain salvation, because of the virtues of her husband and his power, but because of the power of the Lord, the Vedas and the scriptures etc., who have made this law (ordinance). There is no doubt about it.

(2) History also reveals the fact, that he who performs his duty with righteousness attains salvation. King Hariścandra did not deviate from truth, in the face of adversity, insult and dishonour. Consequently, he along with his subjects attained the Supreme Abode (Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, Devībhāgavata etc.).

(3)—Nowadays we come across many incidents of rebirth, which reveal that creatures take to higher or lower births according to their good or bad deeds†.

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\* The scripture which removes doubts and reveals secrets, gives us all the light of knowledge. Therefore, he who has no knowledge of the scriptures, is blind.

† Kalyāṇa monthly magazine—43rd year (1968) Paraloka Aura Punarjanmāṅka (Special Issue—pertaining to the Next-World and the Next-Birth).

(4) Not to speak of a believer, even a non-believer, by performing his duty scrupulously, without any selfish motive, gains peace or joy, which is a characteristic of the mode of goodness. This peace, is a signal for salvation or the supreme peace. Therefore, our own experience proves, that performance of one's duty while discarding forbidden actions, leads to salvation.

### A Vital Fact

It is the real duty of a man (the self), being a fragment of the Lord, to attain salvation and to believe, that he is, only the Lord's and only the Lord is his. Even duty, according to one's caste, stage of life and body etc., are not real duties because these are assumed, and are not of the self. In all of these, a man has to depend on others, while in one's own real duty, he is totally independent and without the least dependence, on anyone. Therefore, a striver himself may be a lover, a seeker of knowledge or a devotee, as he has not to depend on anyone else. A lover, transmuted by love, becomes one with the Beloved; a seeker of knowledge, transmuted by knowledge, becomes one with Him Who is all Knowledge, and a servant changed by service, becomes one with the Master. Similarly a striver transformed by Sādhana, (Spiritual discipline) becomes one with God.

A striver having the aim of God-realization, does not hanker after riches, honour, praise, comforts and luxuries. He is not at all worried about these, nor is he pleased having acquired them, because his aim is only God-realization, rather than acquisition of riches, honour and praise etc. So all the worldly actions, are performed scrupulously and solemnly, for the Lord's sake by him. As a businessman, takes a lot of trouble, to earn more and more money, and as a patient, undergoes an operation happily, in order to recover from a disease; a striver remains pleased and satisfied, even in defeat, loss and pain, in order to attain his aim of God-realization. For him, the desirable and the undesirable circumstances, are the means to practise spiritual discipline.

When a striver, having resolved to realize God, starts performing his duty scrupulously, he does not deviate from the performance of his duty, even in the face of adversity. He faces that adversity happily, taking it to be a penance.

When a striver, assumes the body as 'I' and 'mine', it submits to attachment and aversion. While coming under the sway of attachment and aversion, a man strays away from his duty. Had the body been 'I' (the self), it would have remained with the self, or the self would have been destroyed with the destruction of a body. But it is not so. Similarly, if the body had been mine, nothing would have remained to be acquired, after acquiring it. But, the desire to acquire more, continues. It means that the real thing has not yet been acquired, and the acquired things, such as the body etc., are not mine. How can the body be mine, when I have neither brought it with me, nor can carry it with me, nor can change it as I desire? Thus, every striver knows that a body is neither 'he' nor 'his'. But the strivers do not attach importance to this knowledge, so they cannot get rid of attachment and aversion. If a striver sometimes, happens to feel a body as 'I' and 'mine', he should instead of attaching importance to this feeling, give importance to his knowledge. By this, he realizes the self, and then he gets rid of attachment and aversion. Being free from attachment, the knowledge, of what ought to be done and what ought not to be done, is naturally revealed in his mind and accordingly actions are performed.

**'Paradharmo bhayāvahaḥ'**—Though the performance of duty of another, appears easy, yet it is fraught with fear i.e., its consequence is disastrous. Having discarded, selfish motive, if a man performs his duty for the good of others, there is no fear for him, from any quarters.

**Question:**—Having described the duties, of Brāhmaṇas (priest class), Kṣatriyas (warrior class), Vaiśyas (trader class) and Śūdras (labour class) in the forty-second, forty-third and

forty-fourth verses respectively, the Lord, in the first half of the forty-seventh verse declared, "Better, is one's own duty destitute of merit, than the duty of another well performed." According to the present verse, the duty of another is said to be fraught with fear. Therefore, the duty of a Brāhmaṇa should be disastrous for others, such as the Kṣatriya etc. But scriptures advise all people to inculcate the inborn qualities of a Brāhmaṇa in their lives. Why?

**Answer:—**Controlling of the mind and senses etc., (Gītā 13/7—11; 16/1—3) are common duties, which should be performed by everyone. These are natural duties for a Brāhmaṇa, so he can perform these easily, while members of other castes, may not perform these so easily. Common duties are also a part and parcel of natural duties. Besides the common duties, when a man performs duties born of his nature, he does not incur sin, though it may appear that he incurs sin. For example, if a Kṣatriya fights valiantly without selfishness and malice, by regarding it as his duty he incurs no sin. The Lord declares, "He who performs his duty ordained according to his nature, incurs no sin" (18/47). Besides common duty and one's own duty, the duty of another is fraught with fear, because it is prohibited by scripture. It will deprive other persons of their rightful means of livelihood, and it will lead him to hell. Therefore, the Lord asks Arjuna to perform his duty of fighting, which is better than begging. Begging, is prohibited for Arjuna, being a Kṣatriya it is not beneficial for him.

#### **A Vital Fact Pertaining to One's Duty & the Duty of others**

Nature (prakṛti) and its evolute (body and world), are different from God and the self (soul). Duty of the self is one's duty, while the duty of nature, the body and the world, is the duty of another. Absence of modification, flawlessness, imperishability, eternity, desirelessness and non-attachment, are duties of the self, while modifications, flaws, transitoriness, mortality and

desires for pleasures, prosperity, honour and praise etc., are the duties, of the body and the world and therefore, are the duties of another. The duty of the self is imperishable, because the self is imperishable, while the duty of the body is perishable, as the body ever undergoes change.

Renunciation, (the Discipline of Action), knowledge (the Discipline of Knowledge) and love (the Discipline of Devotion), being axiomatic, are one's own duty. These need no practice, as practice is done by the body and whatever has affinity for the body, is the duty of another.

To be united with God, is one's own duty, while to be a pleasure seeker, is the duty of another; to remain detached is one's duty, while to be attached is the duty of another; to render service is one's own duty while to have desire is the duty of another; to be a lover is one's own duty while to be passionate is the duty of another. It means, that whatever is connected with the self is, one's own duty, while whatever is connected with nature (prakṛti), is the duty of another. One's own duty is sentient, while the duty of another is insentient.

The self is a fragment of God while the body is a fragment of nature (prakṛti). The desire for Self-realization and God-realization, is the duty of the self, because the self is a fragment of God, while the desire for pleasure and prosperity is the duty of another (paradharma). This desire for pleasure and prosperity, is aroused by accepting affinity for an unreal body. A desire for one's ultimate good, is one's duty because being a fragment of God, one's own desire is the desire of God Himself, and not that of the world.

A man is independent in performing his own duty of God-realization or Self-realization or salvation, because in this there is no need of body, senses, mind and intellect etc., but only the need to sever connection with them. In performing duty for another, a man is dependent because that needs the body, senses,



mind, intellect, things and persons etc.

When a man practises spiritual discipline in order to realize God, without accepting his affinity for the body, his practice is his own duty. All the means followed, in order to attain Self-realization or God-realization, are included in one's own duty (svadharma) while all the actions done for the world, are included in the duty for another (paradharma). Thus, practising the three Disciplines (Action, Knowledge and Devotion) is a man's own duty, while hankering after worldly pleasures and prosperity, having accepted affinity for the body, is the duty of another.

All the virtuous actions such as a pilgrimage, fast, penance, meditation and trance etc., performed with physical, subtle and causal bodies, with the expectation of reward i.e., with a selfish motive, turn to be 'paradharma' (the duty of another). But if these are performed for the welfare of others, without expecting any reward, these become, 'svadharma' (one's own duty). The reason is, that the self is desireless, while desire is born by having affinity for nature (prakṛti). So, when a man having desire, performs his duty, it becomes the duty of another. One's own duty, leads to salvation, while the duty of another leads to bondage.

Every man having a disinclination for the duty of others, should perform his own duty of God-realization or Self-realization, for which this human body has been bestowed upon him. As far as, the performance of duty of another is concerned it can be performed in lower births as also heaven etc., where the only aim is the enjoyment of pleasures. A man is independent and capable of performing his own duty, while he is dependent and incapable of performing the duty of another. He is sad when he has a desire to acquire worldly objects, and depends on them having acquired them. This dependence is 'paradharma' (the duty of another). But, when there is no desire, there is no question of any want or dependence. That is 'svadharma' (one's own duty). While performing one's own duty, a man may have to undergo

a lot of suffering adversity, and even may lose his life, but it will lead him to salvation (God-realization), while the duty of another, even though full of merit and easy to perform, is fraught with danger i.e., leads him to the cycle of birth and death.

All the pains, sorrows and worries etc., of the world, are born by the performance of the duty of another, while the performance of one's own duty leads him to the eternal bliss.

**Appendix**—According to his birth and actions whatever a striver assumes himself, his 'dharma' (duty) is 'svadharma' for him and whatever is forbidden for him, that is 'paradharma' (duty of another) for him; as a striver assumes himself to be of a particular 'Varṇa' (order of life) and 'Āśrama' (stage of life), for him the duty of the man of that 'Varṇa' and 'Āśrama' is 'svadharma'. If he thinks himself to be a pupil or a teacher, study or teaching is 'svadharma' for him. If he assumes himself to be a servant or inquisitive (Jijñāsu) or devotee, then service or inquisitiveness or devotion is 'svadharma' for him. Evils such as theft and violence etc., which involve ill and harm of others cannot be 'svadharma' for anyone but that is 'kudharma' or 'Adharma'.\*

Performance of action in a disinterested way for the welfare of others (viz., Karmayoga) is 'svadharma'. In the Gītā 'svadharma' (one's own duty) has been mentioned 'sahajakarma', 'svakarma' and 'svabhāvajakarma'.

Performance of action against one's duty is 'akartavya' and 'not to discharge one's duty' is also 'akartavya' (neglecting of duty) (Gītā 2/33).



\* In every dharma these three are there—'kudharma', 'adharma' and 'paradharma'. The feeling to harm others and diplomacy etc., are 'kudharma in dharma'. To kill an animal in a sacrifice is 'adharma in dharma'. The 'dharma' of the people of other 'Varṇa' and 'Āśrama' is 'paradharma in dharma'. Kudharma, adharma and paradharma—these three don't lead a person to salvation. The dharma (duty) which involves renunciation of selfishness & pride and welfare of others at present and in future leads to salvation.