Preamble

This Chapter analyses from various points of view and establishes the fact that the

performance of prescribed duties is obligatory for everyone. Here Lord Krishna

categorically and comprehensively explains how it is the duty of each and every member

of society to carry out their functions and responsibilities in their respective stage of life

according to the rules and regulations of the society in which one lives. Further the

Lord explains why such duties must be performed, what benefit is gained by performing

them, what harm is caused by not performing them, what actions lead to bondage and

what actions lead to salvation. All these points relating to duty have been described in

great detail. Hence this chapter is entitled “Karma Yogah : Yoga Of Action”.

In the previous Chapter Bhagavan advised that Arjuna's duty was to work without preoccupying himself with its result and at the same time suggested that he should not be

attached to inaction. He concluded His advice with the advocacy of the path of attaining

the state of steady wisdom and Brahmi state by knowledge and renunciation.

Arjuna feels confused by the Lord’s praise of righteous war (2.31-38) and the Buddhi

Yoga i.e. equanimity of mind (2.49 & 50) as also about the man of steady wisdom in

conclusion. These apparently conflicting views seem to have perplexed Arjuna as to

which path he has to adopt for his self-development i.e. whether it is knowledge or action

or either together or total renunciation of both. The advice of The Lord here is that

selfless action performed in a spirit of dedication and surrender and with pure motive is

the right path.

The Text

WHY THEN WORK AT ALL?

arjuna uvaacha

jyaayasee chet karmanaste mataa buddhir janaardana

tat kim karmani ghore maam niyojayasi keshava // 3.1 //

Arjuna said

If you think that knowledge is superior to action, O Janardana, why then do you ask me

to engage in this terrible action, O Kesava?

vyaamishreneva vaakyena buddhim mohayaseeva me

tadekam vada nishchitya yena shreyo'ham aapnuyaam // 3.2 //

With these apparently perplexing words you confuse my understanding, as it were;

therefore, tell me definitely that one thing by which I may attain the Highest Goal.

Arjuna misunderstands the teaching that work for reward is less excellent than work

without attachment and desire and believes that Sri Krishna is of the view that knowledge

without action is better than work. If Sankhya method of gaining wisdom is superior, then

action is an irrelevance. In this confusion he asks Sri Krishna as to which of the paths he

has to follow for his self-development since he still believed that to fight against his

people was a terrible action. Hence, Arjuna requests Sri Krishna to teach him for certain

either of the two – knowledge or action - in accordance with the state and power of his

understanding by which he could attain the highest good i.e. complete eradication of grief

and infatuation and attainment of that imperishable.

The confusion is only seeming. It is not the intention of the Lord to confuse Arjuna but

yet Arjuna is confused.

LIFE IS WORK BUT THE NEED IS UNCONCERN FOR RESULTS

sri bhagavaan uvaacha

loke'smin dwividha nishthaa puraa proktaa mayaanagha

jnaanayogena saankhyaanaam karmayogena yoginaam // 3.3 //

Sri Bhagavan said

In this world there is a two-fold path, as I said before, O blameless One (Arjuna), the

path of knowledge for men of contemplation and the path of work for men of action.

The words ’As I said before’ indicate the beginning of the created world. Even at the very

beginning of the cycle of time, two classes of people, those with contemplative and those

with active temperaments, were in existence.

Those of contemplative mind are born with a clear knowledge of the Self and the nonSelf. They easily renounce the world even at the early age of their lives and concentrate

their thoughts on Brahman always. For them the path of knowledge is prescribed so that

their ideas can mature and blend with Brahman.

The understanding of those who believe in external action as a means of self-unfoldment

is still colored by the stain of duality. The performance of unselfish action purifies their

souls and enables them to practice knowledge and contemplation.

The path of knowledge (Gnana Yoga) was described by The Lord in verses 11-38 and the

path of action (Karma Yoga) in verses 40-53 of the Second Chapter which created

confusion in the mind of Arjuna although never intended by The Lord.

To consider the path of action and the path of knowledge as competitive is to understand

neither of them, they being complementary. Selfless activity enables the mind to exhaust

many of its existing mental impressions and the mind thus purified prepares the one for

the reception of knowledge of the Absolute through meditation or contemplation. There

cannot be any knowledge of Brahman unless the mind is pure.

The Lord distinguishes two main types of seekers viz., the active and the contemplative.

Because temperamentally these two categories are so wide apart that a common

technique for spiritual development cannot yield results. So Sri Krishna explains the twofold path of Self-development. Viz. Path of knowledge for the introverts whose natural

tendency is to explore the inner life of the Spirit and the Path of action for the extroverts

who have a natural bias for work in the outer world.

Those who are endowed with discrimination, dispassion, six-fold virtues, and longing for

liberation and who have a sharp, subtle intellect and bold understanding are fit for Gnana

Yoga or the Path of Knowledge. The six-fold virtues are control of the mind, control of

the senses, fortitude, turning away from the objects of the world; faith and tranquility.

Those who have tendency for work are fit for Karma Yoga or the Path of Action.

But this distinction cannot be the ultimate because all men are in different degrees both

introverts and extroverts. For the Gita, the path of action is a means of liberation as

efficient as that of knowledge and these are intended for two types of people. The

practice of a particular spiritual discipline is determined by the competence of the

aspirant. Both the active and the contemplative have one goal viz. the realization of

Brahman. The path of action, however, does not directly lead to the realization.

WHAT IS ACTIONLESSNESS?

na karmanaam anaarambhaan naishkarmyam purusho’shnute

na cha sannyaasanaad eva siddhim samadhigacchati // 3.4 //

Not by abstention from work does a man reach actionlessness, nor by mere renunciation

does he attain to perfection.

Action as it is generally understood is the outcome of want and desire. Actionlessness

does not mean mere idling or abandoning of all actions. Although one can while away his

time doing nothing, his mind will be full of thoughts scheming, speculating and planning

over several matters. Desires generate thoughts at the mental level which when expressed

in the outer world become actions. Thus thought is the real action. If one is free from

thoughts, wishes, likes and dislikes and has knowledge of the Self he can be said to have

reached the state of actionlessness.

The one who has reached such a state of actionlessness has neither the necessity nor the

desire for action as a means to the end. He has a perfect satisfaction in the Self. Thus

actionlessness and perfection are synonymous terms meaning, becoming one with the

Infinite and free from all ideas of want and desire.

Mere renunciation or abandonment of action or running away from life does not lead to

perfection. Through selfless dedicated action, purification of mind is achieved and the

purified mind helps in attaining the Knowledge of the Self which is the ultimate Bliss.

The natural law is that every action has its reaction and hence the result of the action is a

source of bondage preventing the man from his union with the Supreme. What is needed

is not renunciation of works but renunciation of selfish desires. This is naishkarmya, a

state where one is unaffected by work.

WHY RENUNCIATION OF ACTION UNACCOMPANIED BY KNOWLEDGE DOES NOT LEAD TO

PERFECTION?

na hi kashchit kshanamapi jaatu tishthatyakarmakrit

kaaryate hyavashah karma sarvah prakritjair gunaih // 3.5 //

Verily none can ever remain even for a moment without performing action; for everyone

is made to act by the Gunas or qualities born of prakriti (nature), in spite of himself.

Man is always under the influence of triple tendencies of unactivity- based on his Sattwic

quality, activity- based on Rajasic quality, inactivity- based on Tamasic quality. Even for

a single moment nobody can ever remain without any activity; even if one remains

inactive physically his mind and intellect will always be active. Sattwic actions help a

man to attain liberation. Rajasic and Tamasic actions bind a man to worldliness.

So long as we lead embodied lives we remain under the influence of these three Gunas or

mental tendencies and we cannot escape from action. Without work life cannot be

sustained. . But these Gunas cannot affect a man who has the knowledge of the Self, for

he has gone beyond them. He has become a Gunatita - one who has transcended the

qualities of nature and for him the work ceases. The man who has no knowledge of the

Self who is called un-illumined, will be swayed by ignorance and will be driven to action

by the Gunas.

While life remains, action is inevitable. Thinking is an act. Living is an act. These acts

cause many effects. To be free from desire, from the illusion of personal interest, is the

true renunciation and not the physical abstention from activity.

When it is said that work ceases for a man who is liberated, all that it means is that he has

no further personal necessity for work which however does not mean that he goes into

masterly inactivity. He woks, but without egoism or any binding necessity. Even in

performing work he is not involved. When his egoism is removed, his actions are

governed by the Supreme Self seated in his heart. Free from desire and attachment, one

with all beings, he is released from the bondage of actions. Such actions do not bear fruit

in the same way as a roasted or boiled seed loses its potency to sprout.

karmendriyaani samyamya ya aaste manasaa smaran

indriyaarthaan vimoodhaatma mithyaachaarah sa uchyate // 3.6 //

He who restrains his organs of action, but continues to dwell in his mind on the objects of

the senses, deludes himself and is called a hypocrite.

The five organs of action - the Karma Indriyas - are the organs of speech, hands, feet,

genitals and anus. They are born of the Rajasic portion of the subtle elements viz. organ

of speech is born of ether element, hands of air, feet of fire, genitals of water and anus of

earth. Despite restraining these organs if one sits revolving in his mind the thoughts

regarding the objects of these sense organs in order to give an impression that he is

meditating on God, he is called a self-deluded hypocrite and a man of sinful conduct.

True renunciation is not just the control of the organs of action or abstention from

physical movement. It is the control of the mind and the organs of perception. It is the

absence of longing for the activity. An active mind and an actionless body do not indicate

the life of sanyasa. We may control outwardly our activities but if we do not restrain the

desires which impel them, we have failed to grasp the true meaning of restraint.

yastwindriyaani manasaa niyamyaarabhate'rjuna

karmendriyaih karmayogam asaktah sa vishishyate // 3.7 //

But he who restrains his senses with his mind and directs his organs of action to work,

with no feeling of attachment - he, O Arjuna, is indeed superior.

The science of right action and the art of right living are explained in this verse. Mind

gets its inputs through five organs of perception which are also called sense-organs or

organs of knowledge (Gnana Indriyas) from the outer world of sense objects. These five

sense organs are the eye (sense of sight), ear (sense of hearing), nose (sense of smell),

skin (sense of touch), and tongue (sense of taste). Mind perceives the sense objects by

interacting with the sense organs and if that interaction is absent perception of objects by

the mind is not possible even though the objects might be within the range of the sense

organs. This verse asks the seeker to control the sense organs by the mind. This implies

substitution of sense objects by nobler and diviner alternatives for the mind to dwell

upon.

When the sense organs are thus controlled, a huge quantity of energy gets stored up

which unless properly directed will disturb the inner equilibrium of an individual. This

verse says that the pent up energies must be spent by directing the seeker's organs of

action (explained in the previous verse) to the appropriate fields of activities. Even when

so acting it is advised not to have attachment arising out of doership and enjoyership so

that instead of gathering new mental impressions one may use such activities for

exhausting the existing vasanas. Thus the very field of activity becomes a ground for

liberation. In the previous verse mere outer renunciation is condemned and in this verse

true spirit of inward detachment is commended.

IMPORTANCE OF PERFORMING ALLOTTED DUTY

niyatam kuru karma twam karma jyaayo hyakarmanah

shareerayaatraa pi cha te na prasiddhyed akarmanah // 3.8 //

Do your allotted work; for action is superior to inaction. Even the bare maintenance of

the body would not be possible if you remain inactive.

Allotted action is one’s own duty as laid down in the scriptures to different persons in

accordance with their inherited tendencies, the stage in life and the order in society. Nonperformance of such bounden duties would mean inaction. The very fact of living

involves several natural and unavoidable actions which have to be performed by all. Even

bodily existence in health is just not possible if one has to live in complete inertia and

inaction.

UNSELFISH ACTION DOES NOT CREATE BONDAGE

yajnaarthaat karmano'nyatra loko’yam karmabandhanah

tadartham karma kaunteya muktasangah samaachara // 3.9 //

The world is in bondage to work unless they are performed for the sake of Yajna

(sacrifice). Therefore, O Son of Kunti, give up attachment and do your work as a

sacrifice.

All work is to be done in a spirit of sacrifice, for the sake of the Divine. Yajna here

means any unselfish action done with a pure motive. It is a self-sacrificing work

undertaken in a spirit of self-dedication for the good of all. Such actions cannot be selfserving but self-liberating and do not bind the performer. An action which is not

governed by the spirit of unselfishness binds one to worldliness, however glorious it may

be.

WHAT IS SACRIFICE?

sahayajnaah prajaah srishtwaa purovaacha prajaapatih

anena prasavishyadhwam esha vo'stvishtakaamadhuk // 3.10 //

The creator (Prajapati ), having in the beginning created mankind together with Yajna,

said ‘by this you multiply’; this shall be the milch cow of your desires'.

When the Universe was created by the Creator - Prajapati - he simultaneously created

Yajna also, the spirit of self-dedicated activities which is seen everywhere, e.g. shining of

the sun and the moon, flowing of rivers, tolerance of the Earth etc., All these activities

show the spirit of sacrifice without any selfish motives. The second part of the verse

means that no achievement is impossible for man if he knows how to act in the spirit of

self-effacement and self-sacrifice with the required amount of non-attachment.

HOW CAN WELFARE BE ACHIEVED BY SACRIFICE?

devaan bhaavayataanena te devaa bhaavayantu vah

parasparam bhaavayantah shreyah param avaapsyatha // 3.11 //

Cherish the Devas with this and may those Devas cherish you, thus cherishing one

another you shall gain the highest good.

ishtaan bhogaan hi vo devaa daasyante yajnabhaavitaah

tair dattaan apradaayaibhyo yo bhungkte stena eva sah // 3.12 //

Devas, cherished by the sacrifice, will give you the desired objects. Indeed, he who

enjoys objects given by the Devas without offering in return to them is verily a thief.

By performing actions as Yajna, as dedication to the Self, recognize and express your

sense of appreciation and gratitude to all the Devas, the presiding functionaries of natural

laws such as wind, fire etc.

By worshipping the various Devas in a spirit of sacrifice, by being grateful to all the

presiding deities of the unchanging laws of nature, you recognize the Self behind all the

Devas, behind all the laws of nature and natural phenomenon in this creation. Thus,

through the Yajnam- by propitiating the Devas, you propitiate the Self itself.

In any sacrifice or ceremonial ritual we propitiate the Devas by offering oblations to

them. It is simply a way of expressing our deep sense of appreciation and gratitude to

them for the parts that they play in this creation. Whether one is grateful or not, the sun

rises, the rain rains and the wind blow. But by recognizing their functions in this creation,

and by expressing one's deep appreciation and gratitude to them, one recognizes the true

nature of one's own function in this creation, one becomes an active participant in this

creation, and one progressively identifies oneself with the creation and the creator - The

Self, Brahman.

When you express your appreciation and gratitude to the Devas, what do they do to you?

Having been properly propitiated, the Devas will protect you; nourish you by their

functions. Thus, may all the laws of nature - by their own natural functions, uplift you by

being an asset to you in your endeavors for gaining your overriding goal of life, namely

liberation.

By doing every work as a work of sacrifice totally dedicated to the Self, everything in

this creation becomes an asset to you for your own upliftment in life, for your own true

progress in life, for a life of non-binding, everlasting prosperity, success and happiness,

leading ultimately to Shreyas, total Fulfillment in life. Therefore, mutually interacting

with each other, may you reap the supreme good, may you gain moksha.

What about the person who never says a prayer, who has no sense of gratitude, but only

wants to enjoy whatever he, can get out of this world? The one who enjoys all the

blessings of daily life without even a sincere expression of gratitude to the Self (Devas)

who made all such enjoyments possible, is indeed a thief.

Thus in the Vedic view, every human being is meant for action as a participant in this

creation. Every one's destination is the same, namely shreyas, moksha. One reaches this

destination by doing one's Karma with the attitude of Karma Yoga - as an act of sacrifice

dedicated to the Self.

In this relative world man and Devas are interdependent. They are nourished by one

another. Men offer oblations to the gods; gods in return ensure men’s welfare by sending

rain and other gifts. Thus a chain of mutual obligation binds together all created beings.

THOSE WHO ACT IN A SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE ARE SUPERIOR PERSONS

yajnashishtaashinah santo muchyante sarva kilbishaih

bhunjate te twagham paapaa ye pachantyaatma kaaranaat // 3.13 //

The righteous who eat the remnants of the sacrifice are freed from all sins; but those

sinful ones who cook food only for their own sake, verily eat sin.

Sins of the past are the cause for the present pains and the present sins are the cause for

future sorrows. All the causes for the sorrows in social life can be removed if the

members of the community find happiness in enjoying the results of their efforts

performed in true Yajna spirit. As a contrast to this it is pointed out that those who cook

for themselves only meaning those who perform actions only with selfish motives are

eating nothing but sin. By doing the work in yajna spirit, the selfish life is transformed

into an unselfish one and the individual becomes aware of the interdependence of all

beings.

ACTION SETS THE WHEELS OF THE COSMOS GOING

annaad bhavanti bhootani parjanyaad anna sambhavah

yajnaad bhavati parjanyo yajnah karma samudbhavah // 3.14 //

From food all creatures are born; from rain food is produced; from sacrifice comes

rain; sacrifice is born of action.

karma brahmodbhavam viddhi brahmaakshara samudbhavam

tasmaat sarvagatam brahma nityam yajne pratishthitam // 3.15 //

Know that action arises from the Vedas, and the Vedas from the Imperishable. Therefore,

the all pervading Vedas ever rest in sacrifice.

The cosmic wheel of co-operative action is painted here. The living creatures are born out

of food and nourished by food. The mineral wealth of the world becomes assimilable

food because of the action of the rain upon it. Rain is the cause for the conversion of

mineral raw material into nutritive food in life. Similarly, in all fields of activity profit

can be gathered only when the field comes under conditions favorable for it to produce

those profits. Self-dedicated activity - Yajna - when performed in any field of endeavor

will create conditions-rains- for the field to yield profit - Annam- enjoyable by the

society.

This wheel of action is connected with and includes the Supreme. The principle of right

action has come out of the Creator himself who is none other than the Imperishable

Supreme Reality expressed through the Vedas. Therefore, the all pervading Supreme is

ever centered in all efforts undertaken with an honest spirit of self-dedication for the

common good. He who lives in unison with this wheel of action is contributing to the

harmony of life.

evam pravartitam chakram naanuvartayateeha yah

aghaayur indriyaaraamo mogham paartha sa jeevati // 3.16 //

He who does not follow the wheel thus set-in motion, but takes delight in the senses, he

lives in vain, O Arjuna.

Every member of the Universe follows the principle of Yajna and contributes to the

smooth running of the Universal Wheel of Action. But among all the living creatures

only man has been endowed with the option of freedom of action - to contribute to the

harmonious working of the cosmic mechanism or strike a discordant note.

While a majority of the people live abiding in the Law of Harmony, there are some who

do not believe in this Eternal Law and revolt against it. During such dark periods nobody

works with the spirit of Yajna without which no favorable circumstances can be created

(rain) for the productive potential to manifest. Such seekers of selfish pleasures bring

about discordance in the Wheel of Action. They are considered to be living in sin and

that too in vain by the Gita.

In these verses (10 to 16) the Vedic conception of sacrifice as an inter-link between God

and man is set in the larger context of the interdependence of beings in the cosmos. He

who works for himself alone lives in vain.

TO THE ONE WHO REMAINS SATISFIED IN THE SELF, THERE IS NOTHING TO WORK FOR

yastwaatmaratir eva syaad aatmatriptashcha maanavah

aatmanyeva cha santushtas tasya kaaryam na vidyate // 3.17 //

But for that man who rejoices only in the Self, who is satisfied in the Self, who is content

in the Self alone, verily there is nothing to do.

The motivation for any human action in the outer world is to achieve better satisfaction

and contentment. The man of perfection does not depend on external objects for his

happiness. He finds his joy, bliss and contentment in his own Divine experience. When

he has already achieved satisfaction and contentment, no more desires arise in him.

Where there are no desires there is no action. Such a realized man is a person endowed

with Self-Knowledge. He has no worldly duties to perform. He is the knower of

Brahman.

naiva tasya kritenaartho naakriteneha kashchana

na chaasya sarvabhooteshu kashchidartha vyapaashrayah // 3.18 //

He has nothing to gain by what he does in this world, nor anything to lose by what he

leaves undone; nor is there anyone, among all beings, on whom he need to depend for

any thing.

An ordinary man is required to act for earning profit or avoiding loss. But for a man who

discovered eternal satisfaction in his own Self and reached perfect contentment therein no

purpose is served by engaging himself in any action because there is neither anticipation

of gain nor fear of loss for him. Such a person depends upon nothing for his joy, neither

on any being from the Creator, Brahma to a blade of grass nor on any object.

PERFORM ACTION WITHOUT ATTACHMENT

tasmaad asaktah satatam kaaryam karma samaachara

asakto hyaacharan karma param aapnoti poorushah // 3.19 //

Therefore, always do without attachment the work you have to do; for by performing

action without attachment a man reaches the Supreme.

After explaining the wheel of action Sri Krishna concludes His dissertation by asking

Arjuna to perform actions which are obligatory on his part in his present status in life.

Even here The Lord warns him to keep his mind away from the pitfalls of attachments.

Though the liberated man has nothing to gain by action or non-action and is perfectly

happy in the enjoyment of the Self, there is such a thing called desireless action which he

undertakes for the welfare of the world. The work done without attachment is superior to

the work done in a spirit of sacrifice which is itself higher than work done with selfish

aims. While this verse says that the man reaches the Supreme performing actions without

attachment, Sankara holds that karma yoga helps us to attain purity of mind which leads

to salvation. It takes us to perfection indirectly through the attainment of purity of mind.

EXAMPLES SET BY THE WISE

karmanaiva hi samsiddhim aasthitaa janakaadayah

lokasangraham evaapi sampashyan kartum arhasi // 3.20 //

Janaka and others attained perfection verily by action only; even with a view to the

protection of the masses you should perform action.

Ancient kings like Janaka and others attained perfection or liberation - samsiddhi - by the

path of action, performing right actions in a spirit of detachment and self-dedication.

They set an example to the world by their lives of service and achievement. They attained

purity of mind through the performance of duty and then realized Brahman.

Sri Krishna means Arjuna too, belonging to a princely class, who has the responsibility to

protect his people, should act diligently and perform his kshatriya duties without running

away from the battle as he intended earlier.

We can notice the modern leadership principle here. Born as a king Arjuna has got a

greater commitment towards his subjects. He is a leader of men and a lot depends on him

and his activities. Therefore, it is his bounden obligation to keep his post and discharge

his duties diligently, risking all dangers and fighting enemies for achieving

Lokasangraha.

Lokasangraha stands for the unity of the world, the inter connectedness of society,

protection and maintenance by each other. If the world is not to sink into physical misery

and moral degradation, if the common life is to be decent and dignified, religious ethics

must control social action. The aim of religion is to spiritualize everyday life for

establishing universal brotherhood on earth and maintenance of the world order.

HOW WORLD ORDER CAN BE MAINTAINED BY PERFORMING ONE’S OWN DUTIES?

yad yad aacharati shreshthas tattadevetaro janah

sa yat pramaanam kurute lokas tad anuvartate // 3. 21 //

Whatever a great man does, that, others follow; whatever he sets up as the standard, that,

the world follows.

Common people are more influenced by the living examples of great men than by the

abstract teaching of the scriptures. Man is a social animal. He is also an imitating animal.

He takes his ideas of right and wrong from those whom he considers his superiors. The

examples set by the leaders are implemented by the followers. As is the quality of

leaders, so will be the quality of the followers. Whatever the persons in authority do, the

subordinates imitate.

Sri Krishna implies that if Arjuna were to abandon his duty to act, then the entire

community will follow the low standard of retreating from action set up by him which

will lead to general social decadence. The Lord cites Himself as an example for Arjuna to

act.

na me paarthaasti kartavyam trishu lokeshu kinchana

naanavaaptam avaaptavyam varta eva cha karmani // 3.22 //

There is nothing in the three worlds, O Partha, that has to be done by me, or is there

anything unattained that should be attained by me, yet, I continue to engage myself in

work.

Being a Perfect man and a Yogi, Sri Krishna had nothing to gain in this world. His entire

life is an example of a perfect life of complete detachment. Even though He had nothing

that He did not gain nor had anything further to gain, He was engaging Himself

constantly in activity.

Here Krishna speaks of Himself as the Godhead. Though He transcends all claims of

duty, yet He acts according to the scriptural injunctions to set an example to others.

yadi hyaham na varteyam jaatu karmanyatandritah

mama vartmaanuvartante manushyaah paartha sarvashah // 3.23 //

For, should I not ever engage in action, without relaxation, men would in every way

follow my path, O Son of Pritha.

If The Lord remains inactive the people also will imitate Him and sink themselves in

inertia and unproductive existence and great harm will come in the world. The entire

Universe survives and sustains itself by activity alone. In these verses the word `I'

implies Atman or the Self-realized man of perfection. The God principle serves the

pluralistic phenomenal world as a substratum for its existence.

utseedeyur ime lokaa na kuryaam karma ched aham

sankarasya cha kartaa syaamupahanyaam imaah prajaah // 3.24 //

If I should cease to work, these worlds would perish. I should then be the cause of

confusion and destruction of these people.

If The Lord does not work it will not be conducive to the progress of the Universe. The

Universe is not chaos but a cosmos. Nowhere chaotic conditions are observed in the

working of the cosmic forces. Movement of planets, occurring of seasons, laws of the

oceans, various social orders and disiplines etc., always obey the law of nature or God.

The Lord represents not only the law governing the outer world of things but also the law

that governs the inner world of thoughts and emotions. Human society is divided into

four castes on the basis of individual mental temperaments. In case the law governing the

inner temperaments does not function there will be confusion in behavior and instability

in the character of people bringing about their own destruction.

Concepts and Issues

Arjuna is confused about the relative importance of knowledge and work. If the man of

knowledge is superior to the man of action, then why is he being asked to pursue the path

of action and undertake such a terrible act like a fratricidal war?

Sri Krishna replies that there are two types of people viz. the purely intellectual and the

physically active. The path of knowledge is prescribed for the intellectual, whereas the

path of action is the best for the physically dynamic. But it should be born in mind that

dedicated action by itself cannot be the end. It is only the means to achieve the final goal

of Realization of the Self. On the other hand, the path of wisdom takes one directly to the

final goal.

The path of knowledge is not the proper one for Arjuna as he, being a Kshatriya, does not

belong to the meditative and intellectual type. His natural aptitude is for action and he can

purify himself only through action. So he has to discharge his duties in a selfless spirit of

pure devotion without expecting any fruits of such action.. If one understands the art of

performance of actions without selfishness, one is already in the path of knowledge as

these two paths are not contradictory but complementary.

An action performed without any concern for the fruits thereof is not inaction because

such action never produces any psychological reaction and gains wonderful results while

inaction i.e. running away from action, produces nothing but idleness.

All beings always remain active. Inaction is against the law of nature. Inaction by

external withdrawal of sense organs from the sense objects while the mind remaining

preoccupied with the thinking about those objects is hypocrisy or escapism and self

deception. A real seeker of wisdom is the one, who conquers his organs of perception by

his mind but employs his organs of action in the selfless discharge of his duty.

Performance of one's duty is, in all respects, preferable to utter inaction. One cannot live

even the everyday ordinary life without doing anything.

Only those actions which are prompted by desires entail bondages of vasanas but not

those performed in the discharge of one's duty with no expectation of the result and

meant only as an offering at the feet of The Lord. It is called performing of actions in the

spirit of Yagna i.e. sacrificing our selfish interests for the welfare of the humanity at

large. Here the word Yagna which means Vedic ritualism includes all self-less cooperative activities.

In the beginning the Creator created all living beings with a capacity of yagna in

everybody i.e. to work with a selfless attitude, in a spirit of dedication for the common

welfare. The spirit of co-operation between the high and the low, the rich and the poor,

the wise and the dull, the spirit of give and take and many more such noble and divine

values of harmonious living in society are meant by the word Yagna. He only commits

stealing who is only ready to take but not to give. People used to propitiate God by

sacrifice who in turn bestowed them with plenty and prosperity through rains, fertility of

the soil to yield nourishing food.

Mother Nature provides many examples of the spirit of constant sacrifice like the Sun

giving light, the Earth satisfying all human requirements and the Fire giving heat etc.

Thus sacrifice is an unselfish action. Prosperity and plenty are the direct results of such

dedicated actions.

The capacity to do well in us has been given by the Creator, the Supreme, manifested

through its own creative urge. What we are bound to do in our station in life we must do

well for our own good and for the good of the entire community. Wherever such a noble

work is undertaken in a spirit of co-operation (Yagna) there is God, the Highest. Those

who have reached the highest state of eternal contentment need not pursue this path

because they have nothing to gain by actions as the individuality in them created by ego

has already ended and they do not depend upon anyone for anything.

Sri Krishna advises Arjuna that he still being a seeker of Knowledge should discharge his

duty in a spirit of dedication as an offering to The Lord citing examples of King Janaka

and others of Perfect Wisdom who attained Perfection through selfless discharge of their

duties. The Lord gives His own example of engaging Himself in activities continuously

although it is immaterial for Him whether He acts or not.

The reason for this is that the common people with limited intelligence imitate the great

and so if The Lord has to remain inactive, they will also remain idle leading to

indiscipline

Live as the Gita Teaches You to Live

Ø Action one must perform; but it should be performed in the spirit of Yajna. The

aim is Lokasangraha, the benefit at large.

Ø Interdependence of beings in the cosmos should not be forgotten. He who works

for himself alone lives in vain.

Ø Leadership qualities are stressed. Set an example to others in right living.

Points to Ponder

1. What was Arjuna's doubt in the beginning of the Chapter and what was Sri

Krishna's clarification to it?

2. How does a man bound by action?

3. Who is a hypocrite?

4. What is the philosophy of action?

5. How can one be free from action?

6. What is the cosmic wheel of co-operation?

7. What is meant by Lokasangraha?

8. What is the difference between the activities of the wise and the ignorant?

9. Why it is important for the wise man to set an example to others in rightful living?

Next time we will proceed from the Verse 3.25

HARIH OM

Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 3 (Part-2)

Karma Yogah : Yoga Of Action

T.N.Sethumadhavan

Preamble

We had seen in the previous verses that by citing His own example The Lord described

the consequences of not doing any action and proved that for the sake of the world order

it is necessary for all of us to perform our allotted duties. Bhagavan continues his sermon

and advises that it is incumbent upon even the man of knowledge to perform action for

the sake of world amity.

The Text

saktaah karmanyavidwaamso yathaa kurvanti bhaarata

kuryad vidwaam stathaa saktash chikeershur lokasangraham // 3.25 //

As the ignorant men act from attachment to work, O Bharata (Arjuna), so should the wise

act without attachment, wishing the welfare of the world.

It is well known that every member of the society by and large always keeps himself busy

through out his life time performing actions in his chosen field. A man of Self-realization

also works in the world with the same enthusiasm and sincerity as an average man of the

society with the difference that the actions of the ignorant are motivated by attachments

and anxieties for the fruits of actions while the man of perfection will work without

attachment and for the purpose of the welfare of the world at large.

Attachment becomes an obstruction only when it is ego-centric. But to the extent the

attachment envelopes the welfare of a larger section of the community it gathers ethical

value. Hence the advice to Arjuna is that he must fight as a warrior who is called upon to

protect the higher values of living unattached to his ego-centric conception of himself and

his people.

The idea is that an ignorant person acts zealously for his personal happiness; but a wise

man should act, with the same zeal, for the welfare of others.

na buddhibedam janayed ajnaanaam karmasanginaam

joshayet sarva karmaani vidwaan yuktah samaacharan // 3.26 //

Let no enlightened man unsettle the understanding of the ignorant people who are

attached to action; he should engage them in action, himself performing it with devotion.

This verse is a sort of precaution to the over-zealous explaining the art of giving guidance

to others. A society functioning in a particular way should not be suddenly asked to stop

and change its direction by a leader. On the contrary the leader should fall in line with the

generation and slowly and steadily guide and help them to act in the right direction

setting his own example. When a man of equipoise works in the society at large, the

chances are that he will start advising on abstract ideologies and ethics which may make

the ordinary people to conclude that renunciation of all activities is the direct path to Selfdevelopment and thus give up prematurely all work. The men of wisdom are warned not

to go against the spirit of the times.

No wise man should unsettle his generation's firm faith in their actions. He should

perform even the ordinary actions in a diviner and better way and set an example to the

world in performing actions without any selfish motive or attachment so that the lesser

folk may follow his example.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE MAN OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE MAN ATTACHED TO ACTION

prakriteh kriyamaanaani gunaih karmaani sarvashah

ahamkaara vimoodhaatmaa kartaa'hamiti manyate // 3.27 //

All actions are being performed by the Gunas of Prakriti. But he, whose mind is deluded

by egoism, thinks ‘I am the doer’.

Earlier it was explained how ignorance leads to desires, desires to thoughts and how

thoughts in conjunction with mental tendencies i.e.Gunas viz. Sattwa, Rajas and Tamasmanifest themselves in the outer world as actions of different qualities. Nobler the

thought, nobler the action and meaner the thought, meaner the action and so on.

Thus the Gunas modify themselves into the outside world, the body and the senses which

are called the modes of Prakriti. They are classified into twenty three categories viz.

intellect, ego, mind, the five subtle elements of ether etc., the ten organs of perception

and action, and the five objects of senses viz. sound, touch, sight, taste and smell. These

are the performers of all action. The word ‘action’ includes all the functions of the organs

of perception and action (jnana indriyas and karma indriyas). The self looks on without

participating in any way in the action done by the body and the senses. Whatever actions

take place in this world are nothing but the operations of the aforesaid modes of Prakriti

and the absolute and formless Atma or the Self has really nothing to do with them.

An ignorant man, however, identifies the Self with the aggregate of the body and the

senses and calls it as ‘I ‘and thinks that the Self is the doer.

Even though the Self or the soul has no relation with actions, the unwise man identifying

himself with the body and the senses associates himself with the different actions of the

body and thus assumes himself to be the doer of those actions. In other words he thinks it

is he who resolves, he who reflects, he who hears, he who sees, he who eats, he who

drinks, sleeps, walks and so on and thus traces every action to himself. Thus he ascribes

to the Self all the characteristics that really belong to the Gunas. That is why action

becomes the cause of bondage to him. It is the reason for him to go through the process

of repeated births and deaths to reap the fruits of those actions

BUT THE ENLIGHTENED MAN FEELS DIFFERENTLY

tattwavittu mahaabaaho gunakarma vibhaagayoh

gunaa guneshu vartanta iti matwaa na sajjate // 3.28 //

But he who has true insight into the respective spheres of Gunas and their actions,

holding that it is the Gunas ( in the form of senses, mind etc.) that move among the Gunas

(objects of perception) does not get attached to them, O Mighty Arjuna.

As a contrast to the attitude of the ignorant man explained in the previous verse, Sri

Krishna here explains the attitude of the wise man who knows that the Self is entirely

distinct from the Gunas, their classification and functions.

The enlightened man who has obtained insight into the categories of the gunas and

actions, attributes every action of the mind, intellect, senses and the body to the fact that

it is the product of these gunas in the shape of all instruments of perception such as the

mind, intellect and senses that are moving within the sphere of their respective objects,

which are also products of the gunas and that he has no relation with either. Therefore,

he does not get attached to either any action or to their fruits in the shape of agreeable or

disagreeable experiences.

The difference between the active enlightened man and the active ignorant man is that the

former is beyond the influence of the gunas and considers himself as a non-doer while the

latter is controlled by the gunas and feels that everything is being done by him.

prakriter gunasammoodhaah sajjante gunakarmasu

taan akritsnavido mandaan kritsnavin na vichaalayet // 3.29 //

The man of perfect knowledge should not unsettle (the understanding of) the foolish who

is of imperfect knowledge, who deluded by the Gunas of nature, attach themselves to the

functions of the Gunas.

Ignorant people perform actions with the expectation of results. The wise, who have

knowledge of the Self, should not disturb the conviction of such ignorant persons (people

of insufficient knowledge, or men of meager intelligence) because if their minds are

unsettled they will give up actions themselves and plunge themselves into inertia.

Therefore, in the beginning they should be encouraged to perform actions irrespective of

their attachment to its fruits and gradually they should be taught the goal of selfless

activities for the attainment of Self-realization.

HOW SUCH PERSONS OF IMPERFECT UNDERSTANDING SHOULD PERFORM ACTIONS?

mayi sarvaani karmaani sannyasyaadhyaatma chetasaa

niraasheer nirmamo bhootwaa yudhyaswa vigatajwarah // 3.30 //

Surrendering all actions to Me, with the mind intent on the Self, freeing yourself from the

longing and selfishness, fight unperturbed by grief.

THIS VERSE IS THE HEART OF THIS CHAPTER CONVEYING ITS CENTRAL THEME. THE

LORD REVEALS TO ARJUNA THE DEFINITE DISCIPLINE THAT WOULD LEAD HIM TO HIS

HIGHEST GOAL.

Here the word `me' means not Sri Krishna, the person but the Supreme Self, the Divine

Being, the Supreme Lord, the Eternal and the Omniscient, the Self of all. The Lord asks

Arjuna to fight on surrendering all activities unto Him, with the mind always

concentrated on the Self. Surrendering all actions does not mean inactivity but acting

without attachment and the sense of possession with regard to them. Actions performed

with egocentric and selfish motives become a bondage. Actions performed without

attachment and desires are not actions at all in as much as they are not capable of

producing any painful reactions.

It also means giving up of wrong motives behind actions. Purification of motives is

possible only when the mind is made to concentrate on the Self and the Divine glory.

Actions performed with such mind cannot be ordinary actions but they will be activities

performed for the sake of The Lord and are the expressions of the Supreme Will through

an individual.

The Lord further advises action without longing, ego and mental perturbance. Longing is

an expectation of a happening at a future point of time. Ego is one's own self-estimation

based on his past. To act without ego and longing thus means acting without the

memories of the past or the anxieties about the future but to live in the present. Even in

the present there is a chance for the man of action to waste his time and energy in

unnecessarily worrying about his activities through his inborn nature. This anxiety and

worry is what is called here as mental fever or perturbance.

The idea is that we must engage in work by self-surrender to the Lord who presides over

cosmic existence and activity. “Thy will be done” should be our attitude in all work. We

must do the work with the sense that we are the servants of The Lord. The word `fight'

indicates individual's confrontation with circumstances and situations in daily life.

RESULT OF SUCH ACTION BASED ON SURRENDERING IT TO THE SUPREME

ye me matam idam nityam anutishthanti maanavaah

shraddhaavanto'nasooyanto muchyante te'pi karmabhih // 3.31 //

Those men who constantly practice this teaching of mine with faith and without finding

fault are also freed from the bondage of all actions.

Shraddha -faith- is a mental attitude. It is faith in one's own Self, in the Scriptures and in

the teachings of the spiritual preceptor. It is a combination of the higher emotions of

reverence and humility. It is the sincerity of purpose.

Sri Krishna advocates Karma Yoga as a path that takes one ultimately to the Supreme

because through desireless activity alone when performed with full faith and without

criticism and questioning we will be able to bring about Vasana-exhaustion and thus

make the mind purer for its meditative purposes.

The words ‘they too are freed from the bondage of all actions’ are intended to show that

when by pursuing this discipline it is possible even for an ordinary person to get over the

binding effects of action by surrendering the results of action to the Supreme, it should be

much easier for Arjuna to attain that state.

WHAT IS THE HARM IF THIS ADVICE OF THE LORD IS NOT FOLLOWED?

ye twetad abhyasooyanto naanutishthanti me matam

sarvajnaanavimoodham staan viddhi nashtaan achetasah // 3.32 //

But those who find fault with my teaching and do not practice it, deluded in all

knowledge and devoid of discrimination, know them to be doomed to destruction.

Sri Krishna warns here that those who are obstinate in finding fault with His teachings

without practicing them are doomed for destruction. Such people will be more and more

deluded and will lose their discrimination.

Karma Yoga is a way of life and one has to live it if one wants to receive His grace. The

path of work is a process of elimination of desires in us. When egoism and egocentric

desires are eliminated the work done through such pure mind is a divine action which

will have enduring achievements. To the extent an individual does not practice this

efficient way of work he loses his discriminative capacity and ultimately will meet his

destruction.

ACTION IS DRIVEN BY ONE’S OWN NATURE

sadrisham cheshtate swasyaah prakriter jnaanavaan api

prakritim yaanti bhootani nigrahah kim karishyati // 3.33 //

Even a wise man acts in accordance with his own nature; beings will follow nature; what

can restraint do?

The question as to why some people do not follow the teachings of The Lord and instead

act on their own is answered in this verse; the reason is that their lower nature proves too

strong for them. Every one is conditioned by his thoughts which in turn are influenced by

his nature (tendency) or prakriti. Even an honest person finds it difficult to practice the

technique in life shown by The Lord because of his own mental conditioning

overwhelmed by his incapacity to pursue the path of action.

Prakriti is the mental equipment with which one is born as the result of the past acts

performed in a previous life. This nature is the mainspring of the man’s action. This must

run its course; there is no escape from this and even God cannot prevent its operation

(Shankara). Even He ordains that past deeds produce their natural effects.

Restraint or forcible repression of senses for renouncing activities cannot be of much

avail since actions flow inevitably from the workings of Prakriti and the Self is only an

important witness. This indicates the omnipotence of the nature over the Self which

makes us to act according to our nature, the law of our being. However, this is not a

statement of despair to the effect that there is no scope for personal exertion to reach the

highest goal and that the teachings of Sri Krishna are all purposeless. On the other hand it

is a call to find out our true being and give expression to it as explained in the next verse.

ROLE FOR PERSONAL EXERTION

indriyasye'ndriyasyaarthe raagadweshau vyavasthitau

tayor na vasham aagacchet tau hyasya paripanthinau // 3.34 //

The love and hatred that the senses feel for their objects are inevitable. But let none come

under their sway; for, they are his enemies.

Attachment and aversion of the sense organs to sense objects are natural to every one.

Although the sense objects as such are not capable of attraction or repulsion it is the mind

which produces such agitations because of its being conditioned by vasanas. Thus mind

develops attachment for the agreeable objects and aversion for disagreeable ones. Sri

Krishna does not advise running away from the sense objects but emphatically says `Let

none come under its sway' meaning that one should be a master of the senses and not

their victim.

If we do not interfere attachments and aversions will determine our acts. So long as we

act in certain ways because we like them and abstain from some others because we

dislike them we will be bound by our actions.

But if we overcome these impulses from our egocentric ideas and act from a sense of

duty, we cannot be the victims of the play of Prakriti. Thus in the process of controlling

the mind - stopping it from running after the objects of attachment and aversion - lies

the personal exertion for the seeker. That is his Purushartha.

Linking this advice to the previous verse it can be understood that it is not possible for

anybody to renounce all his activities forcibly. But man can by changing the aim of his

life, turn the course of life from one direction to the other. In other words, avoiding likes

and dislikes he can convert his actions as aids to God-realization.

DANGER IN PERCEIVING OTHER’S DUTIES AS BETTER THAN ONE’S OWN

shreyaan swadharmo vigunah paradharmaat swanushthitaat

swadharme nidhanam shreyah paradharmo bhayaavahah // 3.35 //

Better is one's own duty, though imperfectly performed, than the duty of another well

performed. Better is death in the doing of one's own duty; the duty of another is fraught

with peril.

Although the word Dharma is meant here as duty, in a special sense it is one's own basic

nature or vasana. Swadharma is the type of vasanas one finds in his mind. To act

according to one's taste, inborn and natural, is the only method to live in peace and joy.

To act against one's vasanas is to act in terms of Paradharma which is fraught with

danger.

Here the Swadharma of Arjuna is that of a prince and not that of Brahmana . He wanted

to take up the latter abandoning the former. In this verse Sri Krishna reminds him that to

act according to his own vasanas or Dharma, even though imperfect, is the right path for

his development. It is dangerous to suppress one's own personality expression and imitate

the activities of others, however divinely they may be. There is more happiness in doing

one's own work even without excellence than in doing another's duty well. We must play

our part, manfully, be it great or small.

The implication is that Arjuna's thought of desisting from fight and going in for the calm

and peaceful life of a Brahmana is prompted by man's natural desire to shun what is

disagreeable and adopt what is momentarily agreeable to the senses. He should on no

account yield to such weakness. It is indeed much better for a person to die while

discharging his own duty, though it may not have any merit, than doing the duty of

another, though it may be performed in a perfect manner, because the duty of another has

many pitfalls.

THE ENEMY IS DESIRE AND ANGER

arjuna uvaacha

atha kena prayukto'yam paapam charati poorushah

anicchannapi vaarshneya balaad iva niyojitah // 3.36 //

Arjuna said

But under what compulsion does a man commit sin, in spite of himself, O Varshneya, and

driven, as it were, by force?

This question raised by Arjuna is illustrative of our daily situations. Everybody knows

what is right and what is not right, what is good and what is bad. Yet when it comes to

action people are invariably tempted to commit the wrong.

Arjuna's query is why this paradoxical confusion between one's ideology and one's own

actions. The Divine in us wants us to achieve great things but the animal in us wants us to

do most abominable things many times much against our will. We seem to be constrained

by an outside force. Arjuna wants to know the cause for this peculiar phenomenon.

sri bhagavaan uvaacha

kaama esha krodha esha rajoguna samudbhavah

mahaashano mahaapaapmaa viddhyenam iha vairinam // 3.37 //

Sri Bhagavan said

It is desire, it is anger born out of the quality of Rajas, all sinful and all devouring ; know

this as the foe here (in this world).

The cause of all sins and wrong actions in this world is desire. Anger is also a desire

expressed in another form. When a man's desire is not gratified he becomes angry with

those who stand as obstacles in the way of their fulfillment. When a desire arises the

quality of Rajas in a man urges him to work for its satisfaction.

The desire-anger-emotion combination of three-in-one is the root cause which makes an

individual to compromise with higher values of existence. Once the virus of desire enters

the intellectual computer the results are bound to be chaotic, blocking out the entire

wisdom because desire is never satiated by its gratification. One gets rid of desire only

through the constant practice of detachment. Therefore Sri Krishna says desire is the

man's greatest enemy on the earth because man commits sin only at the command of

desire against his will and better judgment which lands him in terrible suffering in the

form of repeated birth and death.

HOW DOES DESIRE AFFECT MAN?

dhoomenaavriyate vahnir yathaadarsho malena cha

yatho'lbenaavrito garbhas tathaa tenedam aavritam // 3.38 //

As fire is enveloped by smoke, as a mirror by dust and as an embryo by the womb, so is

this (knowledge) enveloped by that (desire).

`This' means true knowledge or wisdom and `that' means desire which is clearly stated in

the next verse. The three different examples refer to the different degrees to which desire

in the form of ignorance envelopes and conceals the inner Light in man and delude our

capacity to think rationally.

Discrimination is blocked by the sense of attachment in the mind for the worldly objects.

Desires fall under three categories depending upon the quality of attachments - Tamasic inert, Rajasic - active, and Sattwic -divine.

Even Sattwic desires veil the discrimination just as smoke envelopes fire where rise of

the slightest wind of discrimination can dispel the smoke of desire. The veiling is thin and

hence it requires only a little effort to remove it.

For the Rajasic where intellect is covered by desire prompted agitations, the example is

of wiping out of dust on a mirror. Here the covering by the impurities is complete as

compared to the Sattwic. In the case of smoke fire can be at least perceived while dust

completely blocks the reflection in a mirror. Hence, in this case the efforts for the

removal of the dirt of desires require more time and effort.

In the case of a Tamasic, diviner aspects are completely shut out from the view by base

animal instincts. The case of a foetus covered with amnion fluid in the womb is given as

an illustration. Here there is no method of removing the covering until a definite period of

time is elapsed. Similarly the low desires can be removed only after a longer period of

spiritual evolution a Tamasic has to undergo.

aavritam jnaanam etena jnaanino nityavairinaa

kaamaroopena kaunteya dushpoorenaanalena cha // 3.39 //

O Son of Kunti, wisdom is enveloped by this constant enemy of the wise in the form of

desire, which is unappeasable as the fire.

Desires are insatiable. They are never satisfied by the enjoyments of the objects of the

desires. They grow more and more as does the fire to which fuel is added. Desire screens

off our capacity to discriminate right from the wrong, real from the unreal. The ignorant

man considers desire as his friend because his senses are gratified. The wise man knows

by experience that desire will bring nothing but suffering to him. He knows that the

enemy in the form of desire does not allow the ideas of discrimination, dispassion and

disinterestedness to get a hold in the mind of a seeker and presents obstacles in the path

of his spiritual progress. Hence it is said to be the constant enemy of the wise but not the

ignorant.

SEAT OF DESIRE

indriyaani mano buddhir asyaadhishthaanam uchyate

etair vimohayatyesha jnaanamaavritya dehinam // 3.40 //

The senses, the mind and the intellect are said to be its seat; through these it deludes the

embodied by veiling his wisdom.

If the enemy's hide-outs are known it is easy to capture him. Similarly Sri Krishna gives

the clues to Arjuna as to where the enemies of wisdom lurk so that he can locate and

eliminate them. The Lord says the senses, the mind and the intellect are seats of action for

the desire to play havoc with the inner serenity and equipoise of a man. The sense organs

transmit the stimuli received from the objects of enjoyment to the mind which working in

close collaboration with the intellect starts living in the experience of sense enjoyments.

To eliminate the inner enemy of desire at its source - sense-organs, mind and intellect- is

the crux of the problem. How it is to be achieved is explained in the following verses.

CONTROL THE SENSES AND DESTROY THE DESIRE

tasmaat twam indriyaanyaadau niyamya bharatarshabha

paapmaanam prajahi hyenam jnaana vijnaana naashanam // 3.41 //

Therefore, O the Best of the Bharatas, controlling the senses first, you kill this sinful

thing, the destroyer of knowledge and wisdom.

Sri Krishna states that the first step to kill desire is to control the senses. Desire is referred

to here as a sinful thing posing a threat to both knowledge and wisdom. Desire is a sinful

thing because it leads us to live a life of lowly nature.

Adi Sankara defines Knowledge - Jnana - as the knowledge of the Self acquired through

a study of the scriptures and from a teacher. This is an indirect knowledge or Paroksha

Jnana. Vijnana or wisdom is the direct knowledge or the personal experience, anubhava,

of the things so taught or Self-realization - Aparoksha Jnana. Thus desire oriented

agitations are not only an impediment to our direct personal spiritual experiences but also

to our indirect way of acquiring knowledge through the study of scriptures.

indriyaani paraanyaahur indriyebhyah param manah

manasastu paraa buddhir yo buddheh paratastu sah // 3.42 //

They say that the senses are superior to the body; superior to the senses is the mind;

superior to the mind is intellect; and one who is superior even to the intellect is He - The

Self.

evam buddheh param buddhwaa samstabhyaatmaanam aatmanaa

jahi shatrum mahaabaaho kaamaroopam duraasadam // 3.43 //

Thus knowing Him who is superior to the intellect and restraining the self by the Self, O

Mighty armed, destroy the enemy in the form of desire, no doubt hard indeed to conquer.

These two verses conclude the third chapter of The Gita giving the seeker a technique to

conquer desire, the inner enemy. The Upanishadic method of meditation for the

withdrawal of ego from the outer world of sense objects to the inner world of the Self for

the purposes of curbing desire oriented tendencies and thereby achieving Self-discovery

is commended here. These verses give us the hierarchy of levels of consciousness.

The physical body is gross, external and limited. As compared to this the senses are

superior because they are subtler and more internal and have a wider range of activity.

Superior to the senses is the mind as it can direct the function of the senses (as it can

undertake the work of the senses also). Superior to the mind is the intellect because it is

endowed with the faculty of discrimination and finality; when the mind doubts, the

intellect decides. But The Self is superior to even the intellect because the intellect draws

its power to illuminate from the Self alone. The Self is the indweller in the body, the

Witness of the activities of the body, senses, mind and intellect.

Sri Krishna advises Arjuna to conquer desire with this understanding of the superior

power of the Self, though it is difficult to achieve. The Lord points out that a man of

discrimination and dispassion will be able to achieve this by increasing his Sattwic

quality and by appealing to the indwelling Presence, The Self, through meditation. This

controlling of the lower self i.e. the mind with the knowledge of the Higher Self is termed

here as ‘restraining the self by the Self’.

The technique of meditation is a conscious withdrawal of all our identifications with our

body, mind and intellect and thereby turning our awareness or desire-faculty towards our

diviner existence where the ego is under the perfect control of the Self with no desires to

agitate the mind any more.

Thus a constructive re-organization of life is taught here by the Gita without the

suppression or rejection of the life's situations.

“This Chapter expounds the necessity for the performance of work without any selfish

attachment to results, with a view to securing the welfare of the world, with the

realization that agency belongs to the modes of prakriti or to God himself.” Dr.S.Radhakrishnan.

om tat sat iti srimad bhagavadgeetaasu upanishatsu brahma vidyaayaam

yogashaastre sri krishnaarjuna samvaade karmayogo naama tritiyo'dhyaayah ||

Thus in the Upanishads of the glorious Bhagavad Gita, the science of the Eternal, the

scripture of Yoga, the dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, ends the third discourse

entitled The Yoga of Action.

Concepts and Issues

In view of what was told earlier the wise and the ordinary man should always be engaged

in activities, the only difference being the former performs action with selfless motive

while the latter does it with selfish motives. Here The Lord warns Arjuna that the man of

knowledge should desist from advising the ignorant to improve as it is likely to be

misunderstood by the latter resulting in the cessation of action by them. To avoid such

consequences, the wise should set an example by sticking to the path of action.

Ignorance of the nature of the Self creates desires, desires generate thoughts, and

thoughts produce actions. Due to ignorance and ego we think that we perform, we

succeed etc. while actually the actions are performed by the organs of action in us.

Because of the imperfect understanding we consider we are the doers and hence we get

attached to the anxiety for enjoying the fruits of our actions. But in the case of a wise

man, who identifies himself with the Self and has gone beyond his ego sense, there is no

attachment for the fruits of actions because he knows that he, the Self, is not the

performer of actions and that it is only the sense organs which do the work.

The ignorant can understand the higher values of action by dedicating himself to the

service of the society at large with pure selfless actions. All actions have to be offered

free from selfish motives at the feet of The Lord. Such actions without selfish motives

are not done by the individual; he is only a medium through which the Divine Power

manifests itself, through all its actions. Those who perform actions in this unselfish spirit,

with full faith in The Lord and His teachings are released for ever from the bondages

caused by action. The ignorant who criticize His teachings and work to promote their

selfish interests meet their own downfall.

The vasanas (impressions, tastes and inclinations brought over from the previous births)

order our intellect and we cannot pursue any path other than that ordered by the direction

of our own present vasanas. Man's present behavior and attitude to life are mostly

governed by his past actions -vasanas. However, he can raise himself if he masters his

senses that produce attachment and hatred. He should try not to become a slave of his

own senses.

The mind is the storehouse of vasanas. By giving up selfish actions and attachment to

their rewards, the vasanas do not get multiplied and the ego, the sense of `I', ceases to

exist.

One's own duty is the best for oneself for one's own spiritual advancement. Sometimes,

man is forced to commit evil deeds in spite of all his efforts against them. This is because

of dual personality in everybody - good and evil are found in varying proportions. Good

thoughts prompt good actions and evil thoughts encourage evil deeds. This lower nature

is called ignorance which breeds desires. Desire is the root cause of all evil.

Just as smoke veils the bright fire, dust the reflecting surface of a mirror and the unborn

child by the mother's womb, so also the desire veils the Ever Pure Self, the allilluminating self-knowledge. Desire acts through the organs of perception and organs of

action at the mental and intellectual levels. So the first task to destroy desire is to check

and control senses. If that is accomplished the All-illuminating Perfect knowledge reveals

itself to be experienced as the Self.

Man is made up of the physical body, the senses, the mind and the intellect. Beyond all

these the pure Atman or the Self shines. The strategy to conquer desire is to govern the

mind by the intellect.

With meditation upon the Self purify the intellect. In him who has thus become one with

the Self, the Lord of the Lords, all desires are completely at rest for ever.

Live as the Gita Teaches You to Live

All human problems arise when the mind is extroverted through its immediate agents viz.

the senses. The mind seeks happiness which is its real nature. Due to lack of

understanding it tries to derive happiness through the senses and goes out to the world of

objects. Instead, if the mind is drawn back to its source, which is the Supreme

Consciousness, it begins to experience inexpressible happiness.

Man without thoughts (individual consciousness) is God and God with individual

consciousness becomes man.

The Lord asks us to go beyond the three Gunas -Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas and be aware

of the functions of intellect, mind and senses. The seat of desire is up to the level of the

intellect. When the intellect and mind merge with consciousness within, the desires lose

spontaneously their potency like a wave merging in the ocean.

In this Chapter the Lord showed from various points of view the necessity of performing

one’s prescribed duties and how to perform such duties by dedicating them to God and

renouncing all desire, attachment and the sense of possession keeping in mind that the

agency for performing the work belongs to the modes of prakriti or to God himself..

He also stressed that one should not come under the sway of likes and dislikes while

performing one’s duty. He brought out clearly that desire is the root for all the evils and

appealed that the desire should be conquered by the control of the mind by the intellect.

Points to Ponder

1.What are the urges against which we must guard ourselves?

2.What is the notion of the ignorant man while acting?

3.How the wise man is not bound by actions and their results?

4.What is that which propels a man to act in a particular way even if he does not

wish to act that way?

5. How does desire bring disaster to an individual’s personality?

6. How to destroy desire, the inner enemy of man?

7. Write short notes on

1) Spirit of Sacrifice - `Yagna'

2) Organs of Perception

3) Organs of action

4) Inaction

5) Vasanas

6) Seats of desire

7) Swadharma and Paradharma.