

III. The Yoga of Action

Summary of Third Discourse

In order to remove Moha or attachment, which was the sole cause of Arjuna's delusion, Sri Krishna taught him the imperishable nature of the Atman, the realisation of which would grant him the freedom of the Eternal. A doubt therefore arises in Arjuna's mind as to the necessity of engaging in action even after one has attained this state.

Sri Krishna clears this doubt by telling him that although one has realised oneness with the Eternal, one has to perform action through the force of Prakriti or Nature. He emphasises that perfection is attained not by ceasing to engage in action but by doing all actions as a divine offering, imbued with a spirit of non-attachment and sacrifice.

The man of God-vision, Sri Krishna explains to Arjuna, need not engage in action, as he has attained everything that has to be attained. He can be ever absorbed in the calm and immutable Self. But to perform action for the good of the world and for the education of the masses is no doubt superior. Therefore, action is necessary not only for one who has attained perfection but also for one who is striving for perfection. Sri Krishna quotes the example of Janaka, the great sage-king of India, who continued to rule his kingdom even after attaining God-realisation.

Prakriti or Nature is made up of the three qualities—Rajas, Tamas and Sattwa. The Atman is beyond these three qualities and their functions. Only when knowledge of this fact dawns in man does he attain perfection.

The Lord tells Arjuna that each one should do his duty according to his nature, and that doing duty that is suited to one's nature in the right spirit of detachment will lead to perfection.

Arjuna raises the question as to why man commits such actions that cloud his mind and drag him downwards, by force, as it were. Sri Krishna answers that it is desire that impels man to lose his discrimination and understanding, and thus commit wrong actions. Desire is the root cause of all evil actions. If desire is removed, then the divine power manifests in its full glory and one enjoys peace, bliss, light and freedom.

Arjuna Uvaacha

*Jyaayasee chet karmanaste mataa buddhir janaardana;
Tat kim karmani ghore maam niyojayasi keshava.*

Arjuna said:

1. If it be thought by Thee that knowledge is superior to action, O Krishna, why then, O Kesava, dost Thou ask me to engage in this terrible action?

*Vyaamishreneva vaakyena buddhim mohayaseeva me;
Tadekam vada nishchitya yena shreyo'ham aapnuyaam.*

2. With these apparently perplexing words Thou confusest, as it were, my understanding; therefore, tell me that one way for certain by which I may attain bliss.

Sri Bhagavaan Uvaacha:

*Loke'smin dwividhaa nishtha puraa proktaa mayaanagha;
Jnaanayogena saankhyaanaam karmayogena yoginaam.*

The Blessed Lord said:

3. In this world there is a twofold path, as I said before, O sinless one,—the path of knowledge of the Sankhyas and the path of action of the Yogis!

*Na karmanaam anaarambhaan naishkarmyam purusho'shnute;
Na cha sannyasanaad eva siddhim samadhigacchati.*

4. Not by the non-performance of actions does man reach actionlessness, nor by mere renunciation does he attain to perfection.

COMMENTARY: Even if a man abandons action, his mind may be active. One cannot reach perfection or freedom from action or knowledge of the Self, merely by renouncing action. He must possess knowledge of the Self.

*Na hi kashchit kshanamapi jaatu tishthatyakarmakrit;
Kaaryate hyavashah karma sarvah prakritijair gunaih.*

5. Verily none can ever remain for even a moment without performing action; for, everyone is made to act helplessly indeed by the qualities born of Nature.

COMMENTARY: The ignorant man is driven to action helplessly by the actions of the Gunas—Rajas, Tamas and Sattwa.

*Karmendriyaani samyamya ya aaste manasaa smaran;
Indriyaarthaan vimoodhaatmaa mithyaachaarah sa uchyate.*

6. He who, restraining the organs of action, sits thinking of the sense-objects in mind, he, of deluded understanding, is called a hypocrite.

*Yastwindriyaani manasaa niyamyaarabhate'rjuna;
Karmendriyah karmayogam asaktah sa vishishyate.*

7. But whosoever, controlling the senses by the mind, O Arjuna, engages himself in Karma Yoga with the organs of action, without attachment, he excels!

*Niyatam kuru karma twam karma jyaayo hyakarmanah;
Shareerayaatraapi cha te na prasiddhyed akarmanah.*

8. Do thou perform thy bounden duty, for action is superior to inaction and even the maintenance of the body would not be possible for thee by inaction.

*Yajnaarthaat karmano'nyatra loko'yam karmabandhanah;
Tadartham karma kaunteya muktasangah samaachara.*

9. The world is bound by actions other than those performed for the sake of sacrifice; do thou, therefore, O son of Kunti, perform action for that sake (for sacrifice) alone, free from attachment!

COMMENTARY: If anyone does actions for the sake of the Lord, he is not bound. His heart is purified by performing actions for the sake of the Lord. Where this spirit of unselfishness does not govern the action, such actions bind one to worldliness, however good or glorious they may be.

*Sahayajnaah prajaah srishtwaa purovaacha prajaapatih;
Anena prasavishyadhwam esha vo'stvishtakaamadhuk.*

10. The Creator, having in the beginning of creation created mankind together with sacrifice, said: "By this shall ye propagate; let this be the milch cow of your desires (the cow which yields the desired objects)".

*Devaan bhaavayataanena te devaa bhaavayantu vah;
Parasparam bhaavayantah shreyah param avaapsyatha.*

11. With this do ye nourish the gods, and may the gods nourish you; thus nourishing one another, ye shall attain to the highest good.

*Ishtaan bhogaan hi vo devaa daasyante yajnabhaavitaah;
Tair dattaan apradaayaibhyo yo bhungkte stena eva sah.*

12. The gods, nourished by the sacrifice, will give you the desired objects. So, he who enjoys the objects given by the gods without offering (in return) to them, is verily a thief.

*Yajnashishtaashinah santo muchyante sarva kilbishaih;
Bhunjate te twagham paapaa ye pachantyaatma kaaranaat.*

13. The righteous, who eat of 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.

*Annaad bhavanti bhootaani parjanyaad anna sambhavah;
Yajnaad bhavati parjanyo yajnah karma samudbhavah.*

14. From food come forth beings, and from rain food is produced; from sacrifice arises rain, and sacrifice is born of action.

*Karma brahmodbhavam viddhi brahmaakshara samudbhavam;
Tasmaat sarvagatam brahma nityam yajne pratishthitam.*

15. Know thou that action comes from Brahma, and Brahma proceeds from the Imperishable. Therefore, the all-pervading (Brahma) ever rests in sacrifice.

*Evam pravartitam chakram naanuvartayateeha yah;
Aghaayur indriyaaraamo mogham paarththa sa jeevati.*

16. He who does not follow the wheel thus set revolving, who is of sinful life, rejoicing in the senses, he lives in vain, O Arjuna!

COMMENTARY: He who does not follow the wheel by studying the *Vedas* and performing the sacrifices prescribed therein, but who indulges only in sensual pleasures, lives in vain. He wastes his life.

*Yastwaatmaratir eva syaad aatmatriptashcha maanavah;
Aatmanyeva cha santushtas tasya kaaryam na vidyate.*

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.

*Naiva tasya kritenaartho naakriteneha kashchana;
Na chaasya sarvabhooteshu kashchidarthta vyapaashrayah.*

18. For him there is no interest whatsoever in what is done or what is not done; nor does he depend on any being for any object.

COMMENTARY: The sage who rejoices in his own Self does not gain anything by doing any action. To him no real purpose is served by engaging in any action. No evil can touch him as a result of inaction. He does not lose anything by being inactive.

*Tasmaad asaktah satatam kaaryam karma samaachara;
Asakto hyaacharan karma param aapnoti poorushah.*

19. Therefore, without attachment, do thou always perform action which should be done; for, by performing action without attachment man reaches the Supreme.

*Karmanaiva hi samsiddhim aasthitaa janakaadayah;
Lokasangraham evaapi sampashyan kartum arhasi.*

20. Janaka and others attained perfection verily by action only; even with a view to the protection of the masses thou shouldst perform action.

*Yadyad aacharati shreshthas tattadevetaro janah;
Sa yat pramaanam kurute lokas tad anuvartate.*

21. Whosoever a great man does, that other men also do; whatever he sets up as the standard, that the world follows.

*Na me paarthaasti kartavyam trishu lokeshu kinchana;
Naanavaaptam avaaptavyam varta eva cha karmani.*

22. There is nothing in the three worlds, O Arjuna, that should be done by Me, nor is there anything unattained that should be attained; yet I engage Myself in action!

*Yadi hyaham na varteyam jaatu karmanyatandritah;
Mama vartmaanuvartante manushyaah paartha sarvashah.*

23. For, should I not ever engage Myself in action, unwearied, men would in every way follow My path, O Arjuna!

*Utseedeyur ime lokaa na kuryaam karma ched aham;
Sankarasya cha kartaa syaam upahanyaam imaah prajaah.*

24. These worlds would perish if I did not perform action; I should be the author of confusion of castes and destruction of these beings.

*Saktaah karmanyavidwaamso yathaa kurvanti bhaarata;
Kuryaad vidwaam stathaa saktash chikeershur lokasangraham.*

25. As the ignorant men act from attachment to action, O Bharata (Arjuna), so should the wise act without attachment, wishing the welfare of the world!

*Na buddhibhedam janayed ajnaanaam karmasanginaam;
Joshayet sarva karmaani vidwaan yuktah samaacharan.*

26. Let no wise man unsettle the minds of ignorant people who are attached to action; he should engage them in all actions, himself fulfilling them with devotion.

*Prakriteh kriyamaanaani gunaih karmaani sarvashah;
Ahamkaaravimoodhaatmaa kartaaham iti manyate.*

27. All actions are wrought in all cases by the qualities of Nature only. He whose mind is deluded by egoism thinks: "I am the doer".

COMMENTARY: Prakriti or Nature is that state in which the three Gunas exist in a state of equilibrium. When this equilibrium is disturbed, creation begins and the body, senses and mind are formed. The man who is deluded by egoism identifies the Self with the body, mind, the life-force and the senses, and ascribes to the Self all the attributes of the body and the senses. In reality the Gunas of nature perform all actions.

*Tattwavit tu mahaabaaho gunakarma vibhaagayoh;
Gunaa guneshu vartanta iti matwaa na sajjate.*

28. But he who knows the truth, O mighty-armed Arjuna, about the divisions of the qualities and their functions, knowing that the Gunas as senses move amidst the Gunas as the sense-objects, is not attached.

*Prakriter gunasammoordhaah sajjante gunakarmasu;
Taan akritsnavid o mandaan kritsnavin na vichaalayet.*

29. Those deluded by the qualities of Nature are attached to the functions of the qualities. A man of perfect knowledge should not unsettle the foolish one of imperfect knowledge.

*Mayi sarvaani karmaani sannyasyaadhyaatma chetasaa;
Niraasheer nirmamo bhootwaa yudhyaswa vigatajwarah.*

30. Renouncing all actions in Me, with the mind centred in the Self, free from hope and egoism, and from (mental) fever, do thou fight.

COMMENTARY: Surrender all actions to Me with the thought: "I perform all actions for the sake of the Lord only."

*Ye me matam idam nityam anutishthanti maanavaah;
Shraddhaavanto'naasoo yanto muchyante te'pi karmabhih.*

31. Those men who constantly practise this teaching of Mine with faith and without cavilling, they too are freed from actions.

*Ye twetad abhyasooyanto naanutishthanti me matam;
Sarvajnaanavimoodhaam staan viddhi nashtaan achetasah.*

32. But those who carp at My teaching and do not practise it, deluded in all knowledge and devoid of discrimination, know them to be doomed to destruction.

*Sadrisham cheshtate swasyaah prakriter jnaanavaan api;
Prakritim yaanti bhootaani nigrahah kim karishyati.*

33. Even a wise man acts in accordance with his own nature; beings will follow nature; what can restraint do?

COMMENTARY: Only the ignorant man comes under the sway of his natural propensities. The seeker after Truth who is endowed with the ‘Four Means’ and who constantly practises meditation, can easily control Nature if he rises above the sway of the pairs of opposites, like love and hate, etc.

*Indriyasyendriyasyaarthe raagadweshau vyavasthitau;
Tayor na vasham aagacchet tau hyasya paripanthinau.*

34. Attachment and aversion for the objects of the senses abide in the senses; let none come under their sway, for they are his foes.

*Shreyaan swadharmao vigunah paradharmaat swanushthitaat;
Swadharame nidhanam shreyah paradharmo bhayaavahah.*

35. Better is one’s own duty, though devoid of merit, than the duty of another well discharged. Better is death in one’s own duty; the duty of another is fraught with fear.

Arjuna Uvaacha:

*Atha kena prayukto'yam paapam charati poorushah;
Anicchann api vaarshneya balaad iva niyojitah.*

Arjuna said:

36. But impelled by what does man commit sin, though against his wishes, O Varshneya (Krishna), constrained, as it were, by force?

Sri Bhagavaan Uvaacha:

*Kaama esha krodha esha rajoguna samudbhavah;
Mahaashano mahaapaapmaa viddhyenam iha vairinam.*

The Blessed Lord said:

37. It is desire, it is anger born of the quality of Rajas, all-sinful and all-devouring; know this as the foe here (in this world).

*Dhoomenaaavriyate vahnir yathaadarsho malena cha;
Yatholbenaavruto garbhas tathaa tenedam aavritam.*

38. As fire is enveloped by smoke, as a mirror by dust, and as an embryo by the amnion, so is this enveloped by that.

*Aavritam jnaanam etena jnaanino nityavairinā;
Kaamaroopena kaunteya dushpoorenaanalena cha.*

39. O Arjuna, wisdom is enveloped by this constant enemy of the wise in the form of desire, which is unappeasable as fire!

*Indriyaani mano buddhir asyaadhishtaanam uchyate;
Etair vimohayatyeshā jnaanam aavritya dehimam.*

40. The senses, mind and intellect are said to be its seat; through these it deludes the embodied by veiling his wisdom.

*Tasmaat twam indriyaanyaadau niyamya bharatarshabha;
Paapmaanam prajahi hyenam jnaana vijnana naashanam.*

41. Therefore, O best of the Bharatas (Arjuna), controlling the senses first, do thou kill this sinful thing (desire), the destroyer of knowledge and realisation!

*Indriyaani paraanyaahur indriyebhyah param manah;
Manasastu paraa buddhir yo buddheh parastu sah.*

42. They say that the senses are superior (to the body); superior to the senses is the mind; superior to the mind is the 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.*

43. Thus, knowing Him who is superior to the intellect and restraining the self by the Self, slay thou, O mighty-armed Arjuna, the enemy in the form of desire, hard to conquer!

COMMENTARY: Restrain the lower self by the higher Self. Subdue the lower mind by the higher mind. It is difficult to conquer desire because it is of a highly complex and incomprehensible nature. But a man of discrimination and dispassion, who does constant and intense Sadhana, can conquer it quite easily.

*Hari Om Tat Sat
Iti Srimad Bhagavadgeetaasoopanishatsu Brahnavidyaayaam
Yogashaastre Sri Krishnaarjunasamvaade
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”
