

XIV. The Yoga of the Division of the Three Gunas

Summary of Fourteenth Discourse

Knowledge of the three cosmic qualities or Gunas, namely, Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas is now given through this discourse. The knowledge of these three Gunas, which hold the entire universe and all creatures under their sway, is of vital importance to each and everyone for their progress and happiness in life. Without this knowledge one will be forever bound by sorrow. In this knowledge we have the secret of success in worldly life as well as in spiritual life. Therefore, one should acquire this precious knowledge.

Lord Krishna reveals that these three qualities compose the Cosmic Nature. This Cosmic Nature is the primal source and origin of the entire creation and all things in it. Hence all things created are subject to their influence and irresistible power. The individual soul also is bound to the body by these three qualities present in Cosmic Nature. The Supreme Being brings about creation through the help of His Prakriti (Nature) endowed with these threefold qualities.

The highest of the three qualities is Sattwa. It is pure. It brings about happiness, wisdom and also illumination. The second quality of Rajas gives rise to passion manifested by intense attachment and greed. It causes sorrow and suffering. The third, termed Tamas, is the worst of all. It arises due to ignorance and results in darkness, lethargy and delusion.

Krishna asks us to diligently endeavour to cast out Tamas from our nature. We should control and master Rajas, and by holding it in check, wisely divert its power towards good kinds of activities. Sattwa should be carefully cultivated, developed and conserved in order to enable us to attain immortality. The realised sage, of course, goes beyond all these qualities, for, although it is Sattwa that enables him to reach God, even this quality will bind him if he is attached to it.

The aspirant should know the symptoms and signs of their presence in his personality and acquire a knowledge of their subtle workings. Then only can he maintain an unhampered and smooth progress in all activities of his life, both secular as well as spiritual. Lord Krishna teaches us this important subject in this discourse from the ninth to the eighteenth verse. He declares that one who rises beyond all the three Gunas through spiritual practices, becomes free from birth, death, old age and sorrow, and enjoys immortality.

In reply to a question from Arjuna, the blessed Lord describes the marks of one who has risen above the three Gunas. He states that if one constantly worships Him with exclusive devotion one will attain the highest divine experience and supreme peace and blessedness.

Sri Bhagavaan Uvaacha:

*Param bhooyah pravakshyaami jnaanaanaam jnaanamuttamam;
Yajjnaatwaa munayah sarve paraam siddhimito gataah.*

The Blessed Lord said:

1. I will again declare (to thee) that supreme knowledge, the best of all knowledge, having known which all the sages have gone to the supreme perfection after this life.

*Idam jnaanam upaashritya mama saadharmaayam aagataah;
Sarge'pi nopajaayante pralaye na vyathanti cha.*

2. They who, having taken refuge in this knowledge, attain to unity with Me, are neither born at the time of creation nor are they disturbed at the time of dissolution.

COMMENTARY: In this verse it is knowledge of the Supreme Self that is eulogised by the Lord.

*Mama yonirmahadbrahma tasmin garbham dadhaamyaham;
Sambhavah sarvabhoottanaam tato bhavati bhaarata.*

3. My womb is the great Brahma; in that I place the germ; thence, O Arjuna, is the birth of all beings!

*Sarvayonishu kaunteya moortayah sambhavanti yaah;
Taasaam brahma mahadyonir aham beejaapradah pitaa.*

4. Whatever forms are produced, O Arjuna, in any womb whatsoever, the great Brahma is their womb and I am the seed-giving father.

*Sattwam rajastama iti gunaah prakriti sambhavaah;
Nibadhanti mahaabaaho dehe dehinam avyayam.*

5. Purity, passion and inertia—these qualities, O mighty-armed Arjuna, born of Nature, bind fast in the body, the embodied, the indestructible!

COMMENTARY: The three Gunas are present in all human beings. None is free from the operation of any one of the three qualities. They are not constant. Sometimes Sattwa predominates and at other times Rajas or Tamas predominates. One should analyse and stand as a witness of these three qualities.

*Tatra sattwam nirmalatwaat prakaashakam anaamayam;
Sukhasangena badhnaati jnaanasangena chaanaghā.*

6. Of these, Sattwa, which from its stainlessness is luminous and healthy, binds by attachment to knowledge and to happiness, O sinless one!

*Rajo raagaatmakam viddhi trishnaasangasamudbhavam;
Tannibadhnaati kaunteya karmasangena dehinam.*

7. Know thou Rajas to be of the nature of passion, the source of thirst (for sensual enjoyment) and attachment; it binds fast, O Arjuna, the embodied one by attachment to action!

*Tamastwajnaanajam viddhi mohanam sarvadehinaam;
Pramaadaalasyanidraabhis tannibadhnaati bhaarata.*

8. But know thou Tamas to be born of ignorance, deluding all embodied beings; it binds fast, O Arjuna, by heedlessness, sleep and indolence!

*Sattwam sukhe sanjayati rajah karmani bhaarata;
Jnaanamaavritya tu tamah pramaade sanjayatyuta.*

9. Sattwa attaches to happiness, Rajas to action, O Arjuna, while Tamas, shrouding knowledge, attaches to heedlessness only!

*Rajastamashchaabhibhooya sattwam bhavati bhaarata;
Rajah sattwam tamashchaiva tamah sattwam rajastathaa.*

10. Now Sattwa prevails, O Arjuna, having overpowered Rajas and Tamas; now Rajas, having overpowered Sattwa and Tamas; and now Tamas, having overpowered Sattwa and Rajas!

*Sarvadwaareshu dehe'smin prakaasha upajaayate;
Jnaanam yadaa tadaa vidyaa dvividdham sattwamityuta.*

11. When, through every gate (sense) in this body, the wisdom-light shines, then it may be known that Sattwa is predominant.

*Lobhah pravrittir aarambhah karmanaam ashamaah sprihaa;
Rajasyetaani jaayante vividdhe bharatarshabha.*

12. Greed, activity, the undertaking of actions, restlessness, longing—these arise when Rajas is predominant, O Arjuna!

*Aprakaasho'pravrittishcha pramaado moha eva cha;
Tamasyetaani jaayante vividdhe kurunandana.*

13. Darkness, inertness, heedlessness and delusion—these arise when Tamas is predominant, O Arjuna!

*Yadaa sattwe praviddhe tu pralayam yaati dehabhrit;
Tadottamavidaam lokaan amalaan pratipadyate.*

14. If the embodied one meets with death when Sattwa has become predominant, then he attains to the spotless worlds of the knowers of the Highest.

*Rajasi pralayam gatwaa karmasangishu jaayate;
Tathaam praleenastamasi moodhayonishu jaayate.*

15. Meeting death in Rajas, he is born among those who are attached to action; and dying in Tamas, he is born in the womb of the senseless.

*Karmanah sukritisyaahuh saattwikam nirmalam phalam;
Rajasstu phalam duhkham ajnaanam tamash phalam.*

16. The fruit of good action, they say, is Sattvic and pure; the fruit of Rajas is pain, and ignorance is the fruit of Tamas.

*Sattwaat sanjaayate jnaanam rajaso lobha eva cha;
Pramaadamohau tamaso bhavato'jnaanameva cha.*

17. From Sattwa arises knowledge, and greed from Rajas; heedlessness and delusion arise from Tamas, and ignorance also.

*Oordhwam gacchanti sattwasthaa madhye tishthanti raajasaah;
Jaghanyagunavrittisthaa adho gacchanti taamasaah.*

18. Those who are seated in Sattwa proceed upwards; the Rajasic dwell in the middle; and the Tamasic, abiding in the function of the lowest Guna, go downwards.

*Naanyam gunebhyah kartaaram yadaa drashtaanupashyati;
Gunebhyaashcha param vetti madbhaavam so'dhigacchati.*

19. When the seer beholds no agent other than the Gunas, knowing that which is higher than them, he attains to My Being.

COMMENTARY: The seer knows that the Gunas alone are responsible for all actions and He is distinct from them.

*Gunaanetaanateetya treen dehee dehasamudbhavaan;
Janmamrityujaraaduhkhair vimukto'mritamashnute.*

20. The embodied one, having crossed beyond these three Gunas out of which the body is evolved, is freed from birth, death, decay and pain, and attains to immortality.

Arjuna Uvaacha:

*Kairlingais treen gunaanetaan ateeto bhavati prabho;
Kimaachaarah katham chaitaam streen gunaan ativartate.*

Arjuna said:

21. What are the marks of him who has crossed over the three qualities, O Lord? What is his conduct and how does he go beyond these three qualities?

Sri Bhagavaan Uvaacha:

*Prakaasham cha pravrittim cha mohameva cha paandava;
Na dweshti sampravittaani na nivittaani kaangkshati.*

The Blessed Lord said:

22. Light, activity and delusion,—when they are present, O Arjuna, he hates not, nor does he long for them when they are absent!

*Udaaseenavadaaseeno gunairyo na vichaalyate;
Gunaa vartanta ityeva yo'vatishtathi nengate.*

23. He who, seated like one unconcerned, is not moved by the qualities, and who, knowing that the qualities are active, is self-centred and moves not,

*Samaduhkhasukhah swasthah samaloshtaashmakaanchanah;
Tulyapriyaapriyo dheeras tulyanindaatma samstutih.*

24. Alike in pleasure and pain, who dwells in the Self, to whom a clod of earth, stone and gold are alike, to whom the dear and the unfriendly are alike, firm, the same in censure and praise,

*Maanaapamaanayostulyas tulyo mitraaripakshayoh;
Sarvaarambhaparityaagee gunaateetah sa uchyate.*

25. The same in honour and dishonour, the same to friend and foe, abandoning all undertakings—he is said to have crossed the qualities.

*Maam cha yo'vyabhichaarena bhaktiyogena sevate;
Sa gunaan samateetyaitaan brahmabhooyaaya kalpate.*

26. And he who serves Me with unswerving devotion, he, crossing beyond the qualities, is fit for becoming Brahman.

*Brahmano hi pratishtaa'ham amritasyaavyayasya cha;
Shaashwatasya cha dharmasya sukhasyaikaantikasya cha.*

27. For I am the abode of Brahman, the immortal and the immutable, of everlasting Dharma and of absolute bliss.

*Hari Om Tat Sat
Iti Srimad Bhagavadgeetaasoopanishatsu Brahmavidyaayaam
Yogashaastre Sri Krishnaarjunasamvaade
Gunatrayavibhaagayogo Naama Chaturdasho'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 fourteenth discourse entitled:

“The Yoga of the Division Of the Three Gunas”
