

Sri Bhagavad-Gita
The Honey-Elixir for Humanity



03: Karma Yōga

Discipline of Action

(Learning Through Conversation)

Prior reading of earlier chapter is recommended

Mee Rajagopalan

www.meenalaya.org

03 May 2020

Version 1.0

03: Karma Yōga Discipline of Action



§ Chapter 03

I have arrived before the Sunset to the banks of river Ganges. The third evening of my journey with Aiya to Kurukshetra and witness the divine conversation between Arjuna and Krishna was unfolding. The last two nights have been luminous with the knowledge of Sri Bhagavad-Gita as we witnessed Arjuna's despondency and how it had turned out to be the glorious opportunity for the pursuit of supreme Knowledge.

The moment Arjuna turned into the most fitting disciple to Krishna, his friend and the willing Chariot-driver, Bhagavān's role has changed to that of Guru, . The transformation of their relationship into Guru-Sishya at once changed Ku-

rukshetra from a place of blood-shed and destruction to a great stage for imparting supreme knowledge.

“Welcome, are you ready”, said Aiya.

“Surely Aiya, My mind is full of what I saw and heard, yet it is longing for more. I cannot wait to continue!”

“Please can you confirm your understanding so far?”, asked Aiya

I was hesitant but said. “Aiya, deluded due to inconsolable grief, caused by attachment, Arjuna was advocating for giving up on his role. To Bhagavān, who was patiently listening, Arjuna exhausted all sorts of arguments to substantiate his position; upon realizing that he has no more to say or offer and in such incapacitated state, *‘kārpanya-dosha’*, Arjuna surrendered to Bhagavān, giving up his ego and pleading ‘I am your disciple, please clearly tell me what I should do’. Bhagavān, who until then remained as a silent witness in His role of chariot-driver, ascends to be the spiritual preceptor and Guru to Arjuna.”

“Yes! Total Surrender to God and the Learned is the foremost and the biggest strength that one should acquire. Then?”, Aiya said, while seating himself on the usual rock under the Banyan tree. The Sun was setting.

“Aiya, Bhagavān then imparted the supreme knowledge of Ātma. The Self is different from the non-self and this lack of discrimination is the cause of *‘Samsārā’*. Bhagavān enumerated the glory of Ātma as *‘Nitya’* (eternal), *‘Satyam’* (Independent-existence), *‘Akartha’* (detached from action), *‘Aboktha’* (unaffected by results), *‘Sarvagataḥ’* (unlimited by space), *‘Deha-ateeta’* (beyond all embodiments), *‘Nirvikāra’* (transcending time) etc.”

“Yes, for the eternal freedom from Samsārā, one has to realize one’s identity with the Ātma and completely surrender to the Paramātma. This is easier said than done; the preparation to qualify for the knowledge of Ātma requires one to perform one’s duties diligently, and in this process, gain the necessary maturity and qualification. What did Bhagavān say in this regard?”

I felt like a student reporting the home-work to the teacher and it enthralled me as I get the chance to re calibrate my thoughts and understanding on what I have grasped so far and to learn more.

“Aiya, Bhagavān stated Karma-Yōga which is all about doing ones duties, the proper actions with proper attitude, all without any attachment to the results.”

“Proper actions refer to ?”

“Those are obligations that one inherits based on one’s role in the society and also the life-stages. ‘*Svadharmā*’ dictates actions that are mandated. We have to understand what these are and duly perform. For example, house-holder should perform daily ‘*panca-māha-yajña*’, sacrifices with no selfish motives.”

“What happens to those who diligently performs Karma-Yōga?”

“They become Karma-Yōgi capable of attaining the knowledge of the Self and eventually Self-realization. They thus become Liberated and remain free with their resolute-intellect steadfast on the Self.”

“What is the name that Bhagavān gives to them?”

“Bhagavān refers to them as ‘*sthitaprajña*’. Thanks to Arjuna as he wanted to know how such a person will conduct in the world, Bhagavān narrated the attitude and conduct of such Liberated person in the world.”

“Which is...”, Aiya asked.

“Such wise people perform ‘*sādhana*’ to master the control of their senses and mind. Even upon Self-realization, they continue the *sādhana*, ‘*nididhyāsanam*’ to keep the focus on the Self. Their attitude towards the world is driven by unconditional love. Discharging their duties calmly, they remain ‘*brāhmī-sthitih*’ in the state of Brahman. I am so assured when Bhagavān declared one that can take up the pursuit of Self-realization at any age as attaining such a state even at the old age before giving up the embodiment is liberation. Therefore I am hopeful.”

“Very well, Let us now continue our journey. May we pray for the benign grace of the Lord and the great Seers for endowing us with the tranquillity of mind and sharpness of intellect for the absorption of knowledge; May we have the strength to assimilate! May we recite the enchanting prayers on Sri Bhagavad-Gita, rendered by the great soul, Sri Madhusudhana Saraswathi”. Saying thus, Aiya closed his eyes and started reciting the shlokā. I too joined him.

§ Prayer 3

Oṃ

*prapanna-parijātāya totra-vetraika-pāṇaye
jñāna-mudrāya kṛṣṇāya gītāmṛta-duhe namaḥ ||3||*

*Salutations to Krishna who is the wish-giving tree, Who holds a cane on one
and the seal of Jñāna on one had, giving all the nectar of Gita.*

Aiya sat down with his eyes closed and said.

“May we pray to Bhagavān Lord Krishna, Who, like the all-granting
‘*Pārijātha*’ tree in the heaven, bestows grace to His devotees for their goals,
the four *purushāthā*, ‘Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Mōksha.

May we pray to Bhagavān Lord Krishna, who holds the whip in one-hand,
controlling the horses of senses and directing the chariot of mind. Bhagavān
although has nothing to desire or achieve, yet for the sake of Dharma, per-
forms action, taking up the whip and the job of a chariot-driver.

May we pray to Bhagavān Lord Krishna, who exhibits ‘*chin-mudrā*’, the
supreme teaching of Veda, the unification of Jivātma, with Paramātma, upon
transcending the tri-fold impediments of duality, symbolized by the ‘chin-
mudra’.

May we pray to Bhagavān Lord Krishna, Who is attracting all with His
enchanting charm, and giving us the elixir of immortality as Sri Bhagavad-
Gita!”

Reciting the prayer and contemplating on its essence, I remained with my eyes
closed. On the canvas of my mind, emerged the scene of Kurukshetra, coming
alive by Sanjaya’s narrations and the insightful interludes of Aiya.



§ Arjuna's Perplexity

Aiya said.

“After listening to Bhagavān on the importance of Knowledge and at the same time the instruction to perform action, Arjuna is perplexed. His confusion is understandable. After all, he has surrendered as a deluded person and sought a way out of the war, that is to give up action. He was listening to Bhagavān only for gathering reasons to give up action. Perhaps owing to this bias, Arjuna did not grasp correctly and that is why he is confused.”

“What is the confusion Aiya?”

“Well, Arjuna is holding on to the assertion by Bhagavān that knowledge is superior to action. He is also mindful how Bhagavān has criticised those performing Karma merely for attaining worldly pleasures here and hereinafter. Since knowledge is what is required for freedom, and Karma is binding, then why Bhagavān keeps on insisting to perform action! This puzzles him. ‘Why should I take up action if the path of knowledge gives liberation!’ - thus thinks Arjuna.”

“Aiya, I don't think Bhagavān said that.”

“Correct! Bhagavān criticized action that are merely done as Karma; at the same time, Bhagavān spoke about the glory of action when done as Karma-Yōga; Arjuna seems to have missed this point.”

Arjuna uvāca

jyāyasī cetkarmaṇaste matā buddhirjanārdana
tatkiṃ karmaṇi ghore māṃ niyojayasi keśava (3.1)

“Arjuna asked :

O Janārdana, According to You, if (the path of) knowledge is superior to (the path of) action, then why, O Keshava, You are directing me to this terrible action ? (3.1)”

“Arjuna calls Bhagavān as ‘Janārdana’ as the One who fulfils desires and the remover of Samsārā; perhaps he does so to stress upon the point that liberation is

what he is seeking and not doing action. Why then Bhagavān induces to engage in a terrible war. This doubt comes to Arjuna as he has faulty understanding.”

“Why was this a faulty understanding?”

“Bhagavān used the term ‘Buddhi’ as in ‘Buddhi Yōga’, to mean ‘equanimity’. But Arjuna uses the term to mean ‘intellect’ and therefore mistakes that the path of ‘action’ and ‘knowledge’ are somehow mutually exclusive.”

vyāmiśreṇeva vākyena buddhiṃ mohayasīva me
tadekaṃ vada niścitya yena śreyo’hamāpnuyām (3.2)

“It appears (to me) as though with Your apparently contradictory speech, You are confusing my intellect (or understanding). Tell me with certainty that one (way) by which I may attain bliss. (3.2)”

“Arjuna, who started with an accusation, now moderates his statement. He says that the speech of Bhagavān somehow appears to him as contradictory. As a sincere disciple, Arjuna is full of ‘*shradda*’; that is why he admits his confusion as due to his improper understanding; he concedes that his intellect is unable to comprehend the truth. A clear instruction from Bhagavān is therefore sought. Also notice, he is NOT asking which path to take: ‘action’ or ‘knowledge’ but reminds Bhagavān of his goal - the supreme bliss. At least, he is clear on this.”

“Yes Aiya.”

“Great teachers don’t just instruct what needs to be done; they also teach why something to be done, and how, when and where. That is the reward of total surrender to the great teacher. Bhagavān now starts a detailed tutorial on Karma-Yōga.”

Śrī Bhagavān uvāca

loke’smin dvidihā niṣṭhā purā proktā mayānagha
jñānaYōgena sāṅkhyānām karmaYōgena Yōginām (3.3)

“Bhagavān said:

O Sinless! Already I have shown that there is two-fold path in this world; that

of Sankhyās by the Discipline of Knowledge, and that of Yōgins by the Discipline of Action. (3.3)

“Aiya, what is Bhagavān saying?”

“Bhagavān recalls that He has already indicated about two distinct life-styles and two necessary disciplines. The life-style is a choice and it is not important but the disciplines or ‘sādhana’ are critical.”

“I don’t follow Aiya.”

“Bhagavān uses the term ‘*nisthā*’ to refer to particular ways of conducting one’s life. One is ‘*pravriti-nisthā*’ in which one leads a life transacting in the world by acquiring worldly objects for the well-being of oneself and others. The other is opposite, known as ‘*nivriti-nisthā*’, in which renunciation of worldly objects is the dominant way of life.”

“Aiya, Is Bhagavān referring to the life-style of ordinary people and that of ‘*sanyāsi*’?”

“Bhagavān is referring to the life-style of house-holder as *pravriti-nisthā*. Families are the essential part of building and nurturing the society. Therefore, for the needs for survival, enjoyment and to support others in the society, the house-holders need to perform actions for the acquisition of resources and their distribution. By action alone, they are able to sustain the wellbeing of themselves and others. On the contrary, there are those who take-up a life-style of renunciation with the focus on spiritual progress only; so they minimize and avoid dependance on worldly objects; their life-style is *nivriti-nisthā*, with predominant focus on the knowledge for liberation. So, yes, Bhagavān talks about ‘*grahasta-āshrama*’ and ‘*sanyāsa-āshrama*’ as the two distinct life-styles for the human-beings.”

Aiya immediately added.

“Do not wrongly infer that house-holder does not seek knowledge and also as those who take up renunciation perform no action! Here only the predominant focus of each life-style is emphasised.”

“Aiya, Is the choice of life-style fixed? When and how one chooses the life-style?”

“Bhagavān will explain this to us. Taking the life of renunciation the ‘sanyāsa-āshrama’ is advocated only for those who have attained the necessary mental and intellectual maturity. Therefore ‘sanyāsa-āshrama’ is deemed as the fourth and the last-stage of human-life.”

“Fourth stage? I thought we are only talking about two life styles!”

“Yes, There are only two ‘life-styles’ as said earlier. But there are four ‘life-stages’. The ‘family-life’ or ‘grahasta-āshrama’, is the life-stage where one should follow the life-style ‘*pravriti-nisthā*’ and therefore predominant focus is performing actions. In the life-stage of ‘sanyāsa-āshrama’, one should take up the life-style of ‘*nivriti-nisthā*’ with the predominant focus on knowledge.”

“What are the other two life-stages, Aiya?”

“Of the other two, one is before ‘grahasta-āshrama’, and the other after ‘grahasta-āshrama’. Thus there are 4 life-stages or āshrama.”

I was listening.

“The other two are to be taken as ‘preparatory stages’. The ‘*Brahmacharya-āshrama*’ is the first life-stage. It refers to the formative years of acquiring skills and knowledge to equip one to lead righteous life. A formal initiation is advocated to mark that a child is entering to this first stage of progress in life. This initiation is so important in ‘Sanātana-Dharma’ and it considers as if giving a rebirth to the child. The teachers, as the new ‘parents’ take the ownership for nurturing the child and imparting all necessary life-skills and knowledge, preparing the child to ably understand and decide on the how to handle subsequent stages of life.”

“What is the third one Aiya?”

“Third one is ‘*vānaprastha-āshrama*’ which follows the family-life; you can consider as the early part of your retirement from world-affairs and this stage is the transition stage of the house-holder to prepare and enter the fourth stage of ‘sanyāsa-āshrama’. All these we will learn soon. Since ‘grahasta-āshrama’, is prescribed as an earlier life-stage than the ‘sanyāsa-āshrama’, clearly, change of life-style from *pravriti nisthā*’ to ‘*nivriti nisthā*’ is possible; but ‘*nivriti nisthā*’ to ‘*pravriti nisthā*’ is not expected.”

“In other words Aiya, only after being a house-holder, one can become the renounced?”

“In general yes, there may be exceptions as we have seen some going directly from ‘Brahmacharya-āshrama’ to ‘sanyāsa-āshrama’, like Bhagavān Ramana. Those conditions are different and we will learn those in due course. Here the important point is there are two distinct life-style and respectively different paths.”

“Sure Aiya, when Bhagavān says the Discipline of Action, He means Karma-Yōga right?”

“Yes, you have asked me earlier - ‘what Yōga should I do?’. Bhagavān has clearly instructed that as a house-holder, your paramount pursuit is Karma-Yōga. Let us use the phrase Discipline of Action hereinafter, as there are discipline in how one performs action to be deemed as done in Karma-Yōga. The Discipline of Action leads to the Jñāna-Yōga, the Discipline of Knowledge.”

“Aiya, does it mean, without taking up the ‘sanyāsa-āshrama’, one cannot pursue the Discipline of Knowledge for the *‘Ātma-jnām*’! That means, there is no liberation for a house-holder! That sounds unfair!”

Aiya laughed.

“It is a good question. The demarcation of ‘life-style’ is only a ‘guideline’. The Discipline of Knowledge, *‘Jñāna-Yōga*’, can be pursued even while remaining as the house-holder. The Discipline of Action, ‘Karma-Yōga’ is mandated for the house-holders. By performing Karma-Yōga, one attains the required maturity and mental purity to increase their focus on the pursuit of ‘Ātma-jnām’. So, no, there is no need to change the life-style as the very essence of Karma-Yōga will make you as a person of true renunciation. Life-style does not matter, only the adherence to the disciplines matter.”

“Aiya, is there not a contradiction?”

“No. It will become clear to us once Bhagavān explains the true value of Karma-Yōga. In performing Karma-Yōga, the Karma-Yōgi has already given-up all benefits of action, and therefore renunciation has become his nature. So even as a house-holder, he is a ‘sanyāsi’. This will come clear soon. The important lesson is that without performing actions as Karma-Yōga, one cannot attain the

maturity needed for the spiritual progress.”

*na karmaṇāmanārambhānnaiṣkarmyaṃ puruṣo’śnute
na ca saṃnyasanādeva siddhiṃ samadhigacchati (3.4)*

“Not by abstaining from action does a person attain freedom from the bondage, nor by mere renunciation does he attain perfection. (3.4)”

“Bhagavān now tells the importance of doing action. If Arjuna takes the term ‘liberation’ to mean ‘not doing any action’, then he has misunderstood. ‘Free from action’ only refers to the ‘freedom from the impact’ of action. This is emphasised by Bhagavān with two assertions. First, by abstaining from action that ought to be done, one does not get freedom. If one thinks not doing action is the life of renunciation, that is also a wrong notion; one does not attain perfection by such failures to perform.”

“Aiya, so action is necessary for both life-styles, is that the meaning?”

“Yes giving up action does not lead to liberation. Inaction is not admitted in both life-styles. It is also impossible for anyone to totally give up action.”

*na hi kaścitkṣaṇamapi jātu tiṣṭhatyakarmakṛt
kāryate hyavaśaḥ karma sarvaḥ prakṛtijairguṇaiḥ (3.5)*

“None, verily, even for an instant, ever remains doing no action ; for everyone is driven helpless to action by the energies born of Nature. (3.5)”

“Bhagavān gives a great insight here. Everything in the world is forever performing some action. This is because of the inherent nature of things.”

“Even while sleeping, Aiya?” , I asked.

“Yes, action is always going on within you even when you sleep. This is because how all beings are made. Individual nature is moulded by tendencies; the tendencies are born of modes; Remember the ‘*traiguna*’- the three modalities of nature - the cause of which is ‘*prakṛti*’.”

“What is ‘prakṛti’?”

“For now, consider the term to refer the ‘eternal nature’; it is the root cause of

all that appears in names and forms as the ever changing worlds of objects. The individual nature is therefore made up of the same fundamental modalities of nature. After all, every effect is only the modification of its cause, is it not?”

Aiya continued.

“That is why perpetual action is in our nature. No one can be action-less even for a moment.”

“Aiya, what about when I don’t do any physical activity?”

“Your physical body continues to be active. Every cell of your body is active, at all time. But if you only consider your external activities, even when those are stopped, your mind is active. Action is the very nature of existence. No one can eliminate actions; therefore our choice is how we should regulate actions. That is what we should learn.”

“So what is renunciation of action mean?”

“Great question! Renunciation of action is not giving up the action, but giving up the fruits of action. Every selfless action is to be deemed as action done in renunciation. Such actions do not bind.”

“Aiya, when I perform meditation, where I control my senses, am I considered action-less?”

**karmendriyāṇi saṁyamya ya āste manasā smaran
indriyārthānvimūḍhātmā mithyācāraḥ sa ucyate (3.6)**

“He who, restraining the organs of action, sits thinking in his mind of the objects of the senses, self-deluded, he is said to be one of false conduct. (3.6)”

“Bhagavān now talks about the danger of vehemently suppressing the sense organs with the view that such a state of ‘inaction’ is meditative. If your approach is alike, then you are deluded too. Bhagavān strongly condemns such acts as bogus renunciation and those who pretend such acts as renunciation as ‘*mithyācāra*’. Please understand, without a purpose, if you simply try to remain action-less, your mind is not directed; it then becomes a fertile ground for weeds of thought that distract; that would be wasted life, making a deep fall from progress. That is dangerous. “

“Aiya, so inaction does not give liberation, inaction is impossible; forcefully trying to remain as action-less is also dangerous. All these are said by Bhagavān only to highlight the importance of doing action, right?”

“Yes! Inaction is impossible. But imposing discipline in action is possible and essential. Everyone should unfailingly perform due actions with certain discipline. Therefore one should not struggle to remain action less; For the householder, this is a bonus: the path of action is natural as it is insuppressible and our inherent tendency is to act. The only requirement is to bring in the discipline so that the householder can easily progress to Karma-Yōga, the Discipline of Action. The householder thus performs action to serve the family and the society and at the same time attains the clarity of mind and resolute intellect, the essential qualities to pursue Ātma-jñānam. Such person is the most honourable.”

yastvindriyāṇi manasā niyamyārabhate'rjuna
karmendriyaiḥ karmaYōgamasaktaḥ sa viśiṣyate (3.7)

“But whoso, restraining the senses by mind o Arjuna, engages in Karma-Yōga, unattached with organs of action, he is esteemed. (3.7)”

“Aiya, Who is esteemed?”

“Bhagavān says those who perform the actions diligently as Karma-Yōga are the esteemed. A Karma-Yōgi may not look outwardly different to a ‘*Karmi*’ (one does action not as a Karma-Yōga). It is because while the organs of actions are focused on what needs to be accomplished, inwardly, the Karma-Yōgi is distinguished as his senses are regulated and his mind refrained from the impulses. They are indeed the esteemed.”

“Aiya, for the householder, what is Karma-Yōga? How do the activities performed as Karma-Yōga differ from others?”

“The word ‘Karma’ refers to ‘actions’ and the second word ‘Yōga’ refers to ‘certain attitude’ so that together the term refers to ‘proper action’ executed in ‘proper’ way. One who performs accordingly is called ‘Karma-Yōgi’, in contrast others are ‘Karmi’. Scriptures describe various types of Karma and their applicabilities to one’s life, based on one’s life-style and life-stage.”

“Aiya, please explain what you mean by types of Karma?”

“Scriptures classifies Karma in yet another way for our comprehension by the nature of underlying ‘*guna*’, the modalities of nature.”

“Aiya, the three *guna* are what we saw before?”

“Yes, based on those ‘*traiguna*’, the Karma are grouped into three. ‘*Sātvic-Karma*’ are divine actions that are performed for the benefit of others; those are done for the benefit of more people. Karma-Yōgi should always endeavour to perform only ‘*Sātvic-Karma*’.”

Aiya continued.

“Then there are actions that one may do, only with the sole intention of meeting one’s own needs. Actions done entirely for ‘selfish-reasons’ are termed as ‘*Rājasic-Karma*’. Do you understand?”

“Aiya, many of our actions are to meet our personal or family needs. How can we deny those actions?”

“Denial is not suggested; only a control is advocated! Actions done only for self benefits or only for the needs of one’s own family are ‘*Rājasic-Karma*’. I agree, ordinarily, the ‘*Rājasic-Karma*’ form the largest part of our actions. But that does not make ‘those’ as the norm. We should always aim to change our actions to become ‘*Sātvic*’ in nature. To do this, we need to regulate and minimize the share of ‘*Rājasic-Karma*’ in our lives.”

“I guess the third type of Karma is ‘*Tāmasic-Karma*’, right?”

“Yes, actions that are done solely to cause adverse impact on others, sometime not even for any supplementary personal gains, are ‘*Tāmasic-Karma*’; Such evil actions should be totally discarded. So it is important to think carefully before taking up an action and consider what type it is. We all have complete freewill to action - either to do or not do, either to do this way or that way. We should make use of that privilege before embarking. We must deliberate and discard ‘*Tāmasic-Karma*’; also regulate or minimize ‘*Rājasic-Karma*’ giving preference only to the ‘*Sātvic-Karma*’. This is the foremost requirement for Karma-Yōga and so Bhagavān asks us to happily engage in action.”

niyataṃ kuru karma tvam karma jyāyo hyakarmaṇaḥ
śarīrayātrāpi ca te na prasiddhyedakarmaṇaḥ (3.8)

“(Therefore), Do perform your mandated duties because action is superior to inaction, and by inaction, even sustenance of the body would not be possible for you. (3.8)”

“Bhagavān now talks about Karma-Yōga starting with the ‘commandment’: we must do our duties, the mandated actions. Bhagavān says ‘*tvam niyatam karma kuru*’ - telling Arjuna, ‘you do the mandated duties’. He thus gives another definition for Karma-Yōga as the performance of mandated duties.”

“Aiya, what are these mandated actions?”

“Let us first understand what triggers the action in us. Firstly, there are sensory impulses and emotions that drive us to action. Such actions are born out of ‘likes and dislikes’ - ‘*raga-dvesha janyam*’. Then there are actions taken upon the considered endorsement by our resolute intellect; those are something we commit to do: ‘*kartavya buddhi janyam*’ - ‘born out of intellect’, do you follow?”

“May I ask for some examples?”

“You like to see a movie and therefore you go to a movie. That is an example of action born out of your desire for sensual pleasures. Your likes and dislikes drive such actions. Say, you have to get up at certain time in the morning to go to work and this is something that you have committed to reasons, even though you like to sleep for more time. That is not impulse driven, but a reasoned mandate driven. Do you see the difference?”

“Understood Aiya”

“We need to do what is mandated duties. Others, we need to be careful before taking up for execution because those actions could fall into list of ‘prohibited action’ or ‘*Nishidda-Karma*’ by the scriptures. Scriptures prescribe what Karma to be done and what not to be done.”

“Aiya, please explain. On what basis scriptures assign Karma to all? How some actions are declared as prohibited? Also how could scriptures enumerate as there are so many actions that we all need to do in the world?”

“Scriptures are our guidance in life. Language provides the letters and the rules of making words. We then make words, sentences and even write great epics - all based on the building blocks of the language and its rules. Simil-

larly the scriptures address the varied needs of human-beings by providing certain rules, all based on dharma. We may do many tasks in our lives, but all our actions can be grouped into certain types and this is what the scriptures do. These are broadly split into two: '*Vihita-Karma*' which are to be necessarily done and '*Nishidda-Karma*' which are to be necessarily avoided. These are based on Dharma - the righteousness. We have already learnt about '*Sāmānya-Dharma*', the 'common human values' such as not stealing, not hurting, not speaking untruth etc. We also saw about '*Visesha-Dharma*' which are applicable only to certain people and also at certain life-stages. Thus, each of us inherit certain values, disciplines, role and corresponding responsibilities appropriate to our life stages. This is denoted by '*svadharmā*'. Scriptures indicate the duties implied by one's 'svadharmā' as the 'mandated duties'. Not doing those amounts to sin."

"Nishidda-Karma is?"

"Dictated by the Dharma, and also by one's 'svadharmā', certain actions are deemed inappropriate and so deemed as 'prohibited'; those should never be done."

"Aiya, like 'stealing others property' etc. Right?"

"Well, such acts are surely to be avoided. Frankly, we don't need the scriptures to instruct on those evil acts. Our common sense itself will guide us. But the importance here is that there are certain actions which may not be evil but could be regressive and harming one's progress in life. We are always tempted to try and do such enticing acts, such as gambling, drinking intoxicated drinks etc. Scriptures, and those knowledgeable in interpreting the scriptural texts, help us in avoiding those prohibited actions."

Aiya continued.

"Sometimes we may have to do certain actions even though it is not a mandated action by the scriptures, but endorsed by our resolute intellect that those should be done, even though those actions are not coming out of desires."

"Like the instruction from my Doctor that I must do physical exercise everyday... which I don't enjoy", I said with a tone of guilt.

Laughingly Aiya said, "Yes, such necessary actions even though not triggered by personal desires are called '*Nishkāma-Karma*'. Those are to be done similar to

the mandated duties.”

“Ok Aiya! What about other actions driven by our personal desires? For example, going to movies, enjoying travel, buying goods for pleasures - are these actions allowed? If not, how does one enjoy life?”

“Of course you can perform actions to achieve those objects of desire and pleasure; part of embodied life is to enjoy. Only condition is that those actions should not fall into prohibited list of acts. Scriptures call actions that are driven by desires as ‘*Kāmya-Karma*’ or ‘*Sakāma-Karma*’. Remember, our actions that are seeking things and experiences which are not for the basic survival and safety needs, then those actions fall under ‘*Sakāma-Karma*’.”

“So we can do those?”

“Only if those are not falling into the list of prohibited acts or ‘*Nishidda-Karma*’. The good news is that when you perform all actions as *Karma-Yōga*, then the *Kāmya-Karma* will eventually leave.”

“Is there any other type of *Karma*?”

“One more - which the scriptures call as ‘*Prāyaschita-Karma*’. These refer to ‘remedial actions’, as a compromise or an adjustment to compensate our failures in adherence. ”

“That is, if we have done something wrong and we like to make corrections to escape from the impact, right?”

“Yes, for the past-mistakes of doing something wrong, or not doing what needed to be done, one may look for remedial actions so that the implications could be moderated or avoided. Such ‘remedial actions’ are given in the scriptures in the form of certain rituals or sacrifices.”

“Are those mandated by the scriptures?”

“No! Those are not mandated; but one may desire to do in order to avoid any negative impact of past actions. Doing ‘*Prāyaschita-Karma*’ only for escaping from adversities must be generally avoided, as it would mean, losing the opportunities to develop the strength to face up life; taking remedial actions weaken our resolve. So such *Karma* should be done only, selectively and rarely. Ideally

those should be done only if such remedial actions will help others. If it is done for personal interest, their applications should be minimized.”

Aiya continued.

“Bhagavān used the term ‘*niyatum*’ to indicate both the day-to-day mandated duties, ‘*nitya-karma*’ and the specially mandated duties, such as for the birth of a child, death of a relative, marriage rituals etc., ‘*naimittika-karma*’. We know these from the tradition and also by the learned teachers of scriptures. One should always do such mandated actions, as Karma-Yōga.”

“Why Aiya?”

yajñārthātkarmaṇōnyatra lōkōyaṃ karmabandhanaḥ
tadarthaṃ karma kauntēya muktasaṅgaḥ samācara (3.9)

“The human-beings are bound by actions except in the case of action for the sake of sacrifices (yajñā); So, O son of Kunti, perform for that (yajñā) sake, free from attachment. (3.9)”

“Aiya, is Bhagavān talking about ‘*Yajñā*’, fire-rituals?”

“Having started the description of Karma-Yōga with the commandment, now Bhagavān describes it in terms of *Yajñā* which refers to virtuous actions that are done as sacrifice. The ‘Fire-ritual’ that you have mentioned is a type of ‘*Yajñā*’ by which oblation to ‘gods’, the powers of nature are made in gratitude and also for obtaining benefits for one and all. There are many types of ‘*Yajñā*’ in the Scriptures. But here Bhagavān is bringing the important aspect of Karma-Yōga for which we should take the intended meaning of the term ‘*Yajñā*’. It is about treating the life itself as a performance of sacrifices for the common good. When we consciously conduct our life as a series of endeavours, each done as a sacrifice, our life is enriched in Karma-Yōga. As house-holders, we have the most important role and opportunity in this.”

“What are the duties for the house-holder Aiya?”

“Bhagavān here quotes the two most important duties of house-holders: ‘*Yajñam*’, and ‘*dhānam*’. Bhagavān will also add later, ‘*tapas*’ as the important duty for the house-holder at particular stage of life for progress. Performance of ‘*Yajñam*’ requires setting up and beseeching a higher ideal and in this process or-

ganize and distribute resources, offer oblations and distribute rewards to others - all in all, to serve, share and sacrifice. The word '*dhānam*' refers to the supreme act of willingly and unconditionally giving away even things that are dear to one for the sake of others. The very definition of these duties require those to be done as Karma-Yōga, those actions are not binding but leading to liberation. Thus, having talked about the nature and types of Karma, now Bhagavān talks about the attitude required to perform the action as Karma-Yōga. The attitude marks the shift for an action to be come non-binding in stead of binding. The attitude is about being unattached to the outcome of the action. It is giving up the expectation or right on the outcome.”

“How Aiya?”

“Karma-Yōga is all about doing the right actions in right attitude. We have seen what the right actions are. Those are the 'Vihita-Karma' and 'Nishkāma-Karma' only; moderated and regulated 'Sakāma-Karma' and occasional 'prāyascita-Karma' are accepted, knowing that these will fall away as progress in Karma-Yōga. Now we must understand what is the right attitude to perform actions, in order to be valid as Karma-Yōga.”

“Aiya, without expectation of any outcome, one should do the duty. Is that correct? I understand the importance of such attitude, but how do we instil such an approach? Is it possible at all?”

“Well, It is all in the attitude of our minds. Consider an example: When the action required is to pay-off the final repayment due on a loan, one gets a sort of fulfilment when completing that act itself, as there is nothing more expected upon the settlement, do you see the point! That settlement action itself completes and there is no expectation beyond. Try to perform every action in the same approach: as a debt to be cleared or an onus to be fulfilled and the successful completion of action itself serves as the final outcome. Then your attitude moves towards Karma-Yōga.”

“So we give up the right, just take up the duty! Is that simple?”

“Rights will come on their own. Just do what needs to be done to the best of your abilities and with interest in doing it well - as if completing the debt for good.”

“Aiya, if I just do my duty, what is the guarantee that my rights will come? What if those due to me do not come?”

“Well, if you drop the expectation, you will not have the query. But your question is understandable. That is why Bhagavān is giving the assurance. That is why Bhagavān is asking us to perform actions are done in the name of God. The term *Yajñā* is used by Bhagavān. The literal meaning is the rituals of sacrifice. But the intended meaning here is ‘*Ishvara*’, because Vedas declare ‘*yajñyovai vishnuh:*’. Therefore the teaching is: ‘Treat the work as the worship’, as an offering to God, ‘*Īshvara-arpanam*’. Here Bhagavān is giving the first part: What should be our attitude in performing an action.”

“Aiya, this means Karma-Yōgi should be a devotee, right?”

“Yes!”

Aiya quickly added.

“Well, you can consider two different attitude towards God. In one, ‘God is the master and I am His eternal servant’. That means: ‘ I must completely follow the words of my Master, which is the Veda. So I do my mandated duties as per the scriptures’. This is one approach, straightforward, driven by the devotion to God.”

I was listening.

“There are others who may like to look God, not as the controlling Master but the enabler. This is also fine. It is because one could at least reason out based on the common human value: gratitude. Just think about life. Everything is given to us by God, everything is enabled by God. Starting from the prize of human-birth, this body, the parents, friends and all other things in life are coming to us without our efforts. All our efforts and actions are only in the manipulation of what we are endowed with. Thus we must be totally indebted to the supreme power for being our enabler. So we must be grateful and only in that attitude we must perform our actions as oblation to God. Bhagavān asks us to perform without attachment ‘*muktasaṅgaḥ*’. When you have dispassion and detachment in action it does not mean that you are resentful or reluctant in doing the action; on the contrary your interest is immense and the focus deep as said by Bhagavān with the word, ‘*samācara*’. This is very important. This vital point must be grasped.”

“Understood Aiya. When we do for God, then we offer the best possible. That is bonus.”

“Very true. That is why Bhagavān introduces the importance of devotion. The Discipline of Devotion or ‘*Bhakti-Yōga*’ will be discussed in due course. Here Bhagavān has indicated how devotion to God forms the rock solid foundation for the pursuit of Karma-Yōga, the Discipline of Action. The same is true for the Jñāna-Yōga, the Discipline of Knowledge. Devotion to God needs to be the underlying foundation.”

“Aiya, how are these paths differ?”

“Do not consider these as separate and distinct paths somehow leading to the same destination. Many take up such an approach and consider Action, Devotion, Knowledge are all independent means to liberation. No! The pursuit and attainment are only at the mercy of God and therefore devotion to the supreme power is necessary. When there is devotion to God, then there is accommodation for the need to surrender and sacrifice. This enables to the pursue Karma-Yōga. The benefit of Karma-Yōga is the purity of mind and resolute intellect, built on dispassion to all that are ‘perishable’ or ‘*kshara*’. Such a mind is capable of applying the discrimination to seek out that which is ‘imperishable’ or ‘*akshara*’ as the supreme ‘Self’. This is the path of knowledge, the Jñāna-Yōga. The underlying devotion to God, the One beyond all perishable and imperishable then grants the absolute realization of the non-dual eternal ever blissful existence in none other than the Self. Therefore consider all these are not distinct paths but mutually inclusive and dependant, with one leading to the other.”

sahayajñāḥ prajāḥ sṛṣṭvā purovāca prajāpatiḥ
anena prasaviṣyadhvameṣa vo’stviṣṭakāmadhuk (3.10)

“In the beginning of creation, through sacrifice, Prajapati created humankind along with duties, and said, “Prosper in the performance of these yajñas (sacrifices), for they shall bestow upon you all you wish to achieve.” (3.10)”

“Bhagavān now reinforces the earlier command for performing Karma-Yōga, by stating how the Creator has ordained in creations. By performing the sacrifice, the Lord Brahma created the world and the mankind, endowing with the duty of sacrifice for their well being. Action in the spirit of sacrifice is therefore the inherent onus to mankind. Embodied beings are ‘*Bhōgātma*’ - born to enjoy or experience the embodiment. The world of objects exist for this purpose only and therefore there exists the mandate to nourish and mutually support the giver, the nature, and the consumer, the beings. The human-beings as the most advanced form of embodiment in this world therefore carry the most advanced

form of indebtedness to nature. This is what is told to Arjuna. Here the term '*yajñāḥ*' is used to refer the 'life-style of sacrifice' for the Karma-Yōgi. You must understand that sacrifice is possible only for human-beings. Sacrifice is the most important value, especially for the house-holder and many mandatory Karma are based on sacrifice. Here the supreme value of 'sacrifice' is indicated as the inherent nature for human-beings."

"Aiya - if sacrifice is an inherent nature for human-beings, why is it not evident?"

"That is the great question. Loyalty is an inherent nature for dogs; that is why they wag their tail instinctively. Such instinctively recognizable quality, variably exist in each type of being. Our nature is to love, being grateful, compassionate etc. However, our infinite capacity of 'mind' is marred with the stock of impurities, causing us to be unaware of our true nature. But it is not always the case! Be in the look out, the virtue of sacrifice always shines through in every human being, sometime or the other."

"Aiya, can you please tell me what are the sacrifices that we should consciously do as our mandated duties?"

"For the house-holders, only to remind the importance of selfless action, and the inherent spirit of sacrifice, the scriptures give '*panca-mahā-yajñāḥ*' or the 'five-great-sacrifices' as the mandated duties. You must have known those and you may be already doing those in one form or the other."

I was listening.

"The first one is '*Deva-yajñāḥ*', performed everyday in the form of prayers to God. Our prayer may be for some desire that we seek, or offering gratitude for some desires fulfilled or simply surrendering and hailing the supreme glory of God. In whatever form, prayer at the starting and ending the day is mandated and of course, the scale of such prayers may vary across different stages of our life. The important point is one should be sincere both in terms of daily adherence and intense commitment in offering the prayers. In fact, such sincerity and commitment should be applied to all out actions."

"What is the second one Aiya?"

"Second one is to the reverential recollection and offering to one's ancestors, known as '*Pitru-yajñāḥ*'. The embodiment is progressive gift of the lineage; so

showing gratitude to ancestors by rejoicing their memories and oblations and prayers on their behalf are mandated.”

“Third one is ‘*Rishi-yajñāḥ*’. Great many Sages as the Seers of the Truth have given us knowledge, steering us towards perfection. We all owe to their sacrifices. This unpayable debt is known as ‘*Rishirinam*’. The way to show gratitude is to study scriptures and related spiritual texts and also propagate their glory. That is why as part of the mandated duty, we have to read, hear and impart the scriptural texts everyday. We all may not be qualified to impart knowledge to others, but we all must study without fail, everyday at least some part to progressively learn the import of the scriptures.”

Aiya continued.

“The fourth sacrifice is ‘*Manushya-yajñāḥ*’, which is about offering service to other human-beings without discrimination. Actively one must seek to welcome and support others, with kind and comforting words and offer all possible support as needed. The last one is ‘*Bhuta-yajñāḥ*’ which refers to feeding other beings, animals, birds, insects and plants. These sacrifices are mandated to the house-holders, to be done daily, without fail and without expectations. That would orient one’s life towards Karma-Yoga.”

devānbhāvayatānena te devā bhāvayantu vaḥ
parasparam bhāvayantaḥ śreyaḥ paramavāpsyatha (3.11)

“With this may you gratify the Gods, and the Gods shall nourish you; thus nourishing one another, ye shall attain the supreme good. (3.11)”

iṣṭānbhogānhi vo devā dāsyante yajñabhāvitāḥ
tairdattānapradāyaibhyo yo bhukte stena eva saḥ (3.12)

“Nourished by the sacrifice, the Gods shall indeed bestow on you the enjoyments you desire. Whoso enjoys Their gifts, without offering to Them, he is verily a thief. (3.12)”

“Bhagavān is giving another definition of ‘Dharma’ here. ‘*dharmō rakshati rakshitaḥ*’ which implies dharma is ‘that which protects the protector’. Being grateful to all that the gods give in the nature, we must worship the gods, the powers of nature with offerings to the best of our abilities and with at most sincerity. In return, the gods nourish us by giving all that is needed in the nature to sustain

and enjoy life in this world. Such harmony with nature should be ensured by our conduct.”

“Aiya, how is that our offerings to God help us in progressing with Karma-Yōga?”

“Bhagavān is imparting the second important attitude needed for Karma-Yōga. That is the ‘*prashāda-bhuddi*’ the attitude to receive all as the ‘gift of God’. This would mean, everything we face in life, grief or joy, is the gift of God and therefore to be treated with reverence. This attitude helps us to accept any situation. Acceptance helps us to avoid grief and fill with endurance. Resistance fuels sorrow and weakens us.”

“As everything is given in the nature, all our accomplishments must be offered to God. Bhagavān now talks about ‘dhānam’, the sharing of our earnings with others. Offering to God is both in gratitude and in our duty to share. If one does not share one’s earnings through sacrifice, then one is said to be a thief. Since all our efforts and so called ‘earnings’ are only taking what is already in the nature through our manipulations in the form of actions, we always owe our earnings to others. Therefore sharing with others and sacrifices are mandated, failing which we become thieves of nature. The positive benefit of sharing and sacrifices mean, the actions that we do become nonbinding in nature, which is the aim and necessary goal for liberation.”

*yajñāśiṣṭāśīnaḥ santo mucyante sarvakilbiṣaiḥ
bhuñjate te tvaghaṃ pāpā ye pacantyaṭmakāraṇāt (3.13)*

“The righteous, who eat the remnant of the sacrifice, are freed from all sins; but those who cook for their own sakes verily devour sin. (3.13)”

“By offering to others first, such as the five-fold Yajña for the house-holders, one attains virtue and eventually freed from all sins. On the contrary, those who only acts for their own sake, without offering to others, verily commit sin. It means, those sinners are deprived of understanding and the path to liberation and thus its pursuits.”

“Aiya, what does Bhagavān mean by saying ‘freedom from sin’? What sins that the house-holder of righteous life could possibly commit!”

“Well, even without knowing, we may cause hindrances to others in our day to day life. We may step on many insects without knowing! A house-holder may in-

advertently cause violence to insects by the acts of smashing, grinding, burning, cleaning etc. in the normal house hold activities, according to the enumerations in the Manu-Smriti. Even from such inadvertent sins, one gets relief when the acts are done in Karma-Yōga. Such righteous conduct in life at individual level translates in to the great service to the whole world, helping in its perpetual motion in the path of Dharma. That is because there is mutual dependency for the wheel of world to move properly for the well being of all.”

annādbhavanti bhūtāni parjanyaḍannasambhavaḥ
yajñādbhavati parjanyo yajñāḥ karmasamudbhavaḥ (3.14)

karma brahmodbhavaṃ viddhi brahmākṣarasamudbhavam
tasmātsarvagataṃ brahma nityaṃ yajñe pratiṣṭhitam (3.15)

“From food creatures come forth; the production of food is from rain; rain comes forth from sacrifice and the sacrifice is born of action; know that the action has the origin in the Veda and the Veda comes from the Imperishable. Therefore, the all-pervading Brahman ever rests in sacrifice. (3.14, 3.15)”

“Aiya, I am not clear. Is Bhagavān talking about mutual dependency in the world?”

“Bhagavān is emphasising the importance of Karma-Yōga which is based on performing action with the attitude of sacrifice. That is how the whole creation is set in motion. ‘*Anna*’ means food, the cause of all bodies. Every being comes out of food, by eating food all creatures survive and eaten by food, all creatures eventually turn to food. Food requires water; we need rain to give water and to get rains, we need to perform sacrifices.”

“Aiya, Is not rain a natural phenomena? How do we relate the arrival of rain to the act of sacrifices by human beings?”

“Rain should come at appropriate time, at appropriate measures for generating and sustaining the food-chain for our lives. Nature has to be merciful in orchestrating so many factors for the rain. Scriptures say that the gods will protect the land where there is selfless act of kindness. This is indicated by an interesting anecdote in the ‘*Brahadāranyaka-Upanishad*’. The Creator while creating the beings gave them the sound of ‘d’ to remind them of their duties to sustain ‘Dharma’. The human-beings who inherently like hoarding, took the sound ‘d’ to mean ‘*Dāna*’, giving charitably. The gods, the divine-beings, because of their

luxuriant pleasures took it as '*Damana*' or 'self-control' and the Demons who are violent in nature took it as '*Daya*' or mercy. Therefore the thundering rain-cloud roars with the sound of 'D D D' and this anecdote brings to our attention that our acts should be with charity, self-control and kindness."

"Interesting Aiya! But how does our performance of action bring timely rain?"

"We have to take the words of Bhagavān for that. He has already told that when we offer to gods, in turn, the gods need to perform their duty to nourish the world. The farmer may see no rain yet, when driven by the attitude of sacrifice, as he ploughs the land, the peacocks see his plights and they make their calls. Hearing their calls, Indra, the Lord of Deva, summon the Rain-god to shower. Such is an anecdote reinforcing the same assertion. Only for this, scriptures prescribe Karma that bring out our act of charity, self-control and kindness. Those are Yajña."

Aiya continued.

"So our action according to the Vedas performed brings the mercy of gods for our welfare. Bhagavān uses the term '*Brahma*' for the Vedas and states that the Vedas come from the Imperishable Brahman. Therefore the chain of sacrifices is what makes the working of the world."

"Aiya, Are not the Vedas given by the Seers?"

"Seers are those blessed-Sages who are able to discover what is already present as knowledge in the nature. Seers only discover, understand and propagate their findings. Newtons' Laws are not the creations of Newton! Those were his discoveries of what are already existing in the Nature. Vedas are revealed knowledge and that is why called as '*apauruṣeya*' revered as the words of the Lord and therefore not subjected to the blemishes of human mind. Therefore Vedas should be the primary and the overriding source of knowledge for all."

"Aiya, what happens if one does not follow such discipline?"

evaṃ pravartitaṃ cakraṃ nānuvartayatīha yaḥ
aghāyurindriyārāmo moghaṃ pārtha sa jīvati (3.16)

"One who does not follow the wheel thus set in motion (in Dharma), makes one's life sinful, indulging in senses and wasted in vain, O Partha. (3.16)"

“Bhagavān uses the phrase ‘*cakram*’ or ‘wheel’ to indicate the cycle of mutual dependence. It is the ‘wheel of the world’ that is set in motion in the path of ‘Dharma’ and we all have the responsibilities to ensure its perpetual sojourn. Performing our duties as Karma-Yōga is therefore mandated to all human-beings. If one does not contribute to this universal requirement, then one is condemned with one’s life deemed as sinful! It is because in the absence of Karma-Yōga, actions will be only for sensual pleasures and thus one’s life will be wasted away without securing the virtues needed to progress towards eternal freedom. Bhagavān uses the word ‘*mogham*’ to indicate useless’ or ‘wasteful’ nature of life. You must know the word ‘*moham*’ on the other hand refers to ‘delusion’. Deluded mind leads to useless action and wasteful life.”

“Understood Aiya.”

“Thus Bhagavān completes the instruction on Karma-Yōga. You should by now have the good understanding of Karma-Yōga.”

“I think so Aiya. Karma-Yōga is about doing only what is right, and doing those with the right attitude. Correct?”

“Yes, How do you know what is ‘right’?”

“Right actions are those that are mandated according to my ‘*svadharmā*’. Right actions are those that are not ‘prohibited’ in the scriptures.”

“What is ‘right attitude’ for doing the action?”

“Before doing the action, I should fully analyse the action and the way that I plan to do are both righteous, and”, I hesitated.

“Then?”

“I must perform the action with utmost care and interest as if I am offering as worship to God. Action should be done for ‘God-sake’ or as ‘*Ishvara-arpanam*’. Work should be revered as worship. I must do so with keen interest only for its timely completion to the best of my abilities.”

“Then?”

“That is it. I must discharge alike every task, and as if I am paying of my final

instalment of a debt. Therefore there is no expectation on the outcome. Satisfaction must be in the completion of task itself.”

“Then what attitude should you have for the outcome of the action?”

“Accepting as ‘*Ishvara-Prashād*’ - no matter what comes, gracefully taking it.”

“Do you understand why you have to accept as ‘Ishvara-Prashād’?”

“Yes Aiya. When Arjuna fires the arrow, there ends his power of action. He has the choice to fight, set the target, lock the bow and fire. But once the arrow has left, then its trajectory may change due to so many things in the nature. So the end-result cannot be owned by Arjuna. Everything we do is also like that. We merely perform our part and then leave it for the God to take it over. That is why the outcome of any action should be taken as the ‘gift of God’. Am I right Aiya?”

“Indeed ! Are you therefore committing to the required ‘dispassion’ to the ‘fruit of labour’ while doing actions?”

“I will work hard on this. I am still far away to shun all actions driven by personal desires. But now I know, even though I perform such ‘*sakāma-karma*’, I can regulate those and eventually shed those at some stage.”

“Hold on to those resolute intellect. That is necessary. Now Bhagavān starts new topic - *Mōksha*.”

“Aiya, while talking about duty, why Bhagavān suddenly talks about Mōksha?”

“The reason is, Bhagavān wants to tell us that performing Karma-Yōga must continue until one attains liberation. The Karma-Yōgi will eventually attain a supreme mental state and only then he has the freedom to give up all actions. Remember Karma-Yōga is not the end but the most essential means to the end, the Liberation. The state of mind required for pursuing the knowledge for liberation results only by performing Karma-Yōga. With the description, and the conduct, of the Liberated, Bhagavān summarizes the Karma-Yōga.”

§ Conduct of the Liberated

yastvātmaratireva syādātmatṛptaśca mānavaḥ
ātmanyeva ca santuṣṭastasya kāryaṃ na vidyate (3.17)

“That person, who rejoices in the Self alone, who is fulfilled with the Self and who is well contented in the Self alone, for that person, there is nothing to be done. (3.17)”

“Aiya, Bhagavān quotes the terms ‘rejoice’, ‘fulfilled’ and ‘contented’. Are all these conveying the same?”

“Good question. Bhagavān narrates the state of mind of such liberated soul. The term ‘*rathihi*’ refers to ‘pleasure in objects’. This is called ‘*bhōga-sukham*’ or ‘*vishaya-ānanda*’. For the Karma-Yōgi, the ‘*vishaya*’ or desired ‘object’ is the ‘Self’ only and therefore he is rejoicing within self. Thus he is also ‘internally’ happy, requiring no external objects for joy. Only when you are happy within you, and only when you are able to love yourself, you are able to give happiness and love to others. This is the first point of the state of mind of Karma-Yōgi.”

Aiya continued.

“Also Karma-Yōgi is not impacted by external events. In other words, Karma-Yōgi does not find fault in others and is full of ‘*sandhusti*’ or contentment. These three: contentment, fulfilment and internal joy are all indicating ‘blissful existence’, the ‘*Ātma-ānanda*’.”

naiva tasya kṛtenārtho nākṛteneha kaścana
na cāsya sarvabhūteṣu kaścīdarthavyapāśrayaḥ (3.18)

“For him, in this world, there is nothing whatsoever to gain (or interest) in ‘what is done’ or ‘what is not done’. For him, nor there is any expectation (or dependency) for anything in any other being. (3.18)”

“There is a great insight. Liberated person is forever free and seeks no benefit in whatever is done or not done. Neither is any expectation to gain anything from anyone. As a result, there is no resistance to anything. Whatever comes is welcome. When there is no resistance, where then is the grief!”

“Why there is no more duty for such liberated person? What about his living needs?”

“The Seer knows that the ‘*Prārāpta-Karma*’ decides the time of death and so it should also maintain the embodiment till death. Therefore, whatever needed to nourish the body will naturally come - this, the Liberated knows. For the same reason, there is also no need for the Liberated to safe-keep possessions for future needs. So the personal ‘*Yōga-Kshema*’ or the ‘*Artha-Purushārta*’ are no more valid for the Liberated. As the Liberated remains happy internally, there is also no need for seeking external joy. Thus the ‘*Kāma-Purushārtam*’ is also nullified.”

“Aiyā, Does it mean, the Liberated does not do any action anymore?”

tasmādasaktaḥ satataṃ kāryaṃ karma samācara
asakto hyācarankarma paramāpnoti pūruṣaḥ (3.19)

“Therefore, without attachment, constantly perform the action which should be done; for, performing action without attachment, man reaches the Supreme. (3.19)”

“Bhagavān instructs Arjuna that he should continue to perform the duties as Karma-Yoga and by doing so attain the supreme state. In other words, until one attains the supreme knowledge, one must continue to perform Karma-Yoga. You asked if there is any action due by the Liberated. What is left for the Liberated to do, who has already given-up the ‘arta-kāma-purushārta’, except to endure the current life until the end of Prārabtha-Karma. So the Liberated is free to choose whatever is appropriate to sustain ‘Dharma’ in support of the ‘ *Jagad-chakrā*’. Thus the Liberated remains free and is called ‘*Jivan-Mukta*’.”

“So the Liberated may still continue to do actions?”

“Yes, The ‘Jivan-Mukta’ is free to remain active in this world, making all actions for the benefit of the world. Many such examples exist in our history. Even today, there are many amongst us who are liberated, yet remain with their simple living of selfless actions.”

karmaṇaiva hi saṃsiddhimāsthītā janakādayaḥ
lokasaṅgrahamevāpi sampāśyankartumarhasi (3.20)

“By performing their prescribed duties, King Janaka and others attained perfec-

tion. You should lead by example to others by performing your work. (3.20)

‘Bhagavān is giving the example of King Janaka, who having attained the knowledge, continued to discharge his duties as a King for the welfare of others. Liberated people thus demonstrate to others the art of living by Karma-Yōga. This way, they also keep their resolute intellect and pure mind unwavering, immune from temptations.’

Aiya continued.

‘Also Bhagavān now starts to speak about the role of such wise persons. By performing actions, such Liberated persons lead others by example.’

*yadyadācarati śreṣṭhastattadevetaro janah
sa yatpramāṇam kurute lokastadanuvartate (3.21)*

“Whatsoever a great man does, that alone the other men do ; whatever he sets up as the standard, that the world follows. (3.21)”

‘Learned people should set examples to others. The most effective are those who show the right path by their very own conduct in life. They are the heros. The glory of Ramayana - is about the glory of the path that Rama followed. You may not have any doubt in understanding this.’

‘Yes Aiya, these days we attach hero-worship to people who are famous. That is deplorable. Only those who by their words, thoughts and deeds show righteousness should be our heros.’

‘Yes, having said thus, Bhagavān is thinking that Arjuna may decide to give up action with the notion that he is already a Liberated. He is not yet; even if he is, he still has to perform actions to lead others. For this reason, Bhagavān sets Himself as the example.’

*na me pārthāsti kartavyam triṣu lokeṣu kiñcana
nānavāptamavāptavyam varta eva ca karmaṇi (3.22)*

“I have nothing whatsoever to achieve in the three worlds, o son of Pritha, nor is there anything unattained that should be attained; yet I engage in action. (3.22)”

“Think about this. Bhagavān is now a chariot driver for Arjuna. Why does He need to do such a role! It is His own choice and He does it only for sustaining Dharma. As a house-holder and a King, Bhagavān demonstrates that He is doing actions according to His svadharmā. He is Liberated yet follows Karma-Yōga.”

yadi hyahaṃ na varteyaṃ jātu karmaṇyatandritaḥ
mama vartmānuvartante manuṣyāḥ pārtha sarvaśaḥ (3.23)

“For, should I not ever engage in action, tirelessly, then others would, in all matters, follow My path, o son of Pritha. (3.23)”

“When someone who is prominent in the society does not set a proper example to others, then the society will also fail to follow what is right. Those who lead must set example by their action, doing things with utmost interest and commitment. Greater responsibility therefore weighs on them.”

“Aiyā, if those who should set examples to others, fail to do so, what happens?”

utsīdeyurime lokā na kuryāṃ karma cedaham
saṅkarasya ca kartā syāmupahanyāmimāḥ prajāḥ (3.24)

“These worlds would be ruined if I should not perform action; I should then be the cause of confusion of castes, and the destruction of these people. (3.24)”

“Bhagavān clearly states that if He fails to comply, he will be solely responsible for the chaos that may follow, as others who follow Him, also fail in their Dharma. In every walks of life, therefore those in power and influence on others must demonstrably conduct their life in the righteous way. Ignorant people act in a way that further destroys their opportunity to rise.”

saktāḥ karmaṇyavidvāṃso yathā kurvanti bhārata
kuryādvidvāṃstathāsaktaścikīrṣurlokasaṅgraham (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. (3.25)”

“The interest and commitment for the work to be well done may be the same for both the ignorant and the wise. But the difference is, the wise person has

no attachment as he does action in Karma-Yōga, whereas the ignorant does for selfish reasons. Therefore the wise is free from the action whereas the ignorant is bound.”

Aiya continued.

“The main point is that an ignorant person acts zealously for his personal happiness; the wise acts with the same zeal but for the welfare of others. Here the reminder is given to the wise on how they should act.”

“Aiya, Should the wise person therefore advise the ignorant to change?”

*na buddhibhedam janayedajñānām karmasaṅginām
joṣayetsarvakarmāṇi vidvānyuktaḥ samācaran (3.26)*

“Let no wise man cause unsettlement in the minds of the ignorant who are attached to action; he should make them do all actions, himself fulfilling them with devotion. (3.26)”

“Bhagavān gave the answer to your question. There is a great insight here. The wise person out of over-zealous attitude should not start preaching and confuse the ignorant person. Without the required maturity, the ignorant may mistake the needed renunciation of outcome as the renunciation of action itself and thus falter. Instead, the wise should continue to set example to others by their conduct: performing actions in the spirit of outright renunciation on the outcome. In other words, do not meddle in the affairs of others unless asked. Bhagavān has demonstrated by His act that advice should not be given unless it is asked.”

“Aiya, I understand the impact of attachment in the ignorant. What differentiates the wise person from ignorant.”

*prakṛteḥ kriyamāṇāni guṇaiḥ karmāṇi sarvaśaḥ
ahaṅkāravimūḍhātmā kartāhamiti manyate (3.27)*

“Actions are brought in all cases by Guna, the modalities of Nature. He whose mind is deluded by egoism thinks ‘I am the doer.’ (3.27)”

“Aiya, Bhagavān talks about gunas. Please tell me how the gunas influence actions.”

“We discussed earlier. Gunas impact the thoughts. Thoughts impact actions. When thoughts are nobler, actions tend to be nobler. When thoughts are evil, actions will also be evil. Thus our actions impact the world. Collectively, therefore, the world changes by the actions of everyone.”

“Understood Aiya, How do the gunas bring about actions in us?”

“The modalities of nature - the essential fabric of *‘prakriti’* is the guna. These are seen as three types. All embodiments are built on the same fabric - the five subtle organs of perceptions, the five subtle organs of actions and the mind are made-up of these guna. So all our actions - words, deeds and thoughts - are influenced by the guna. The inherent guna is due to the ‘vāsana’, the effect of past Karma. However, one can and should nurture and improve the composition of one’s guna in order attain perfection. When the ‘satva-guna’ dominates, one’s mind becomes purer and the actions nobler. The ignorant, due to the false identity of the Self with the embodiments brags ‘I am the doer’ and thus entrapped in Samsārā.”

tattvavittu mahābāho guṇakarmavibhāgayoḥ
guṇā guṇeṣu vartanta iti matvā na sajjate (3.28)

“But he who knows the truth, o mighty armed, about the divisions of the energies and (their) functions, is not attached. thinking that the energies act upon the energies. (3.28)”

“On the contrary, the Learned knows that the gunas make all objects and also trigger all actions. So all actions and the objects acted upon are the matter of gunas only. Knowing thus, the Learned has no attachment and rather he focuses on nurturing the gunas.

Aiya continued.

“Bhagavān says that the wise knows the truth. He has discriminated his identify away from the Anātma and to the Ātma, the unattached ‘Self’. He thus knows only the ‘guna’ drive all actions and all objects of actions are made up of gunas and all these are merely like drama-scenes to witness and unattached. The Liberated is with the resolute intellect and remains unattached. Ignorant is lost in the inherent gunas and hold a false identity. The wise remains free and that is the difference.”

prakṛterguṇasammūḍhāḥ sajjante guṇakarmasu
tānakṛtsnavido mandānkṛtsnavinna vicālayet (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 (3.29).”

“Aiya, it is again a warning to the wise, not to meddle in other’s affairs, right?”

“Yes, a person may be ignorant and not knowing the truth. Yet, if the he person is doing hard work towards the desired object with attachment, so be it! Performing action is better than inaction. It is also better than doing action without interest or commitment. The wise, who have knowledge of the Self, should not disturb the conviction of such ignorant persons because if their minds are unsettled by the intervention, then they would give up their actions and add further misery to their affairs. Instead, those doing actions driven by attachment should be left undisturbed until for the opportune time to steer their goal towards selfless activities. Again, such intervention should be timely and only at the request or the dire need of the ignorant.”

“Aiya, how then the action should be performed by ignorant man like me, who does not have the qualification to attain the true knowledge, yet seeks liberation?”

mayi sarvāṇi karmāṇi samnyasyādhyātmacetasā
nirāsīrnirmamo bhūtvā yudhyasva vigatajvaraḥ (3.30)

“Surrendering all actions to Me, with the mind intent on the Self, freeing yourself from the longing and selfishness, unperturbed by grief, do fight! (3.30).”

“The most relevant, reverent and important message is given here by Bhagavān. Total surrender to God is paramount. It is the essence of Karma-Yōga. By doing all actions for the goodness of others as ‘Ishvara-arpanam’ and accepting all outcome as ‘Ishvara-Prashād’ one does not grieve. Therefore with such spirit of selfless action, Arjuna should perform his duty. This is the advice is to all mankind on how to perform ones duty.”

“Aiya, Bhagavān is asking Arjuna to surrender to Him. Is He not?”

“Yes, We should also understand that by the term ‘me’, Bhagavān is asking us

to abide in the Supreme Self, the Divine Being, the Eternal and the Omniscient, the Self of all. Surrendering all actions does not mean inactivity but acting without attachment and the sense of possession with regard to them. Actions driven by desires and the sense of ownership are binding. But Actions performed without attachment and desires are not binding the performer, no matter what the outcome of the action be. So perfection of attitude in doing actions and handling the outcome of actions is all about the purity of the mind. That requires the mind to be free from all blemishes, and totally abiding in one's Self. With such mind, actions performed cannot be ordinary but extraordinary, done for the sake of God."

ye me matamidaṃ nityamanutiṣṭhanti mānavāḥ
śraddhāvanto'nasūyanto mucyante te'pi karmabhiḥ (3.31)

"Those men who constantly practise this teaching of Mine with faith and without cavilling (not finding fault), they too are liberated from the bondage of all actions. (3.31)"

"Bhagavān reinforces the important attribute of total surrender. It is about the transfer of responsibilities to God and to the Guru. Like a child, who upon getting the hold of Mother's hand, becomes totally fearless in crossing the road as this otherwise arduous task is frolicsome now. Same way, once we surrender to our Guru and God, our hands are held safely and the we are steered into the path of perfection. Total surrender requires immense strength of character and 'shradda', the total commitment to Scriptures and in the teachings of the spiritual preceptor. The sincerity and intensity of purpose become unassailable for those who surrender."

"What happens to them?"

"Their mind becomes pure. Blemishes are gone; The stored intense-desires or the '*vāsana*' are completely burnt. They are not bound by their actions anymore. They are perfectly fit to receive the supreme knowledge and cross the ocean of Samsārā."

"Aiya, What happens to those who do not listen to the divine instruction of Bhagavān?"

ye tvetadabhyasūyanto nānutiṣṭhanti me matam
sarvajñānavimūḍhāmstānviddhi naṣṭānacetasaḥ (3.32)

“But those who find fault with My teaching and do not practise it, deluded in all knowledge and devoid of discrimination, know them to be doomed to destruction (3.32)”

“Well, those who are obstinate in finding fault with the teachings and or not following those in their actions, are at peril. They become more and more deluded, losing their ability to discriminate right from the wrong. They regress and go deeper into the entrapment of Samsārā.”

*sadṛśam ceṣṭate svasyāḥ prakṛterjñānavānapi
prakṛtiṃ yānti bhūtāni nigrahaḥ kiṃ kariṣyati (3.33)*

“Even a wise man acts in accordance with his own nature; beings will follow nature; what can restraint do? (3.33)”

“Bhagavān also says why some people are like that, not abiding to what is being taught. It is because of their lower nature. The resultant of their guna are too low; predominance of Tāmasic or Rājasic, making their actions skewed towards selfish and passionate desires rather than for the wellbeing of others. It is because of those inherent nature, even a sincere aspirant may find it hard to follow the discipline of Karma-Yōga as prescribed by Bhagavān.”

“Why do such lower qualities dominate in us?”

“It is determined by the results of one’s past actions. There is no escape from the ‘vāsana’, as one has to endure embodiments reflective of those. That is why there are those who remain in such lower state of condition.”

“By surrendering to God, can such a person evolve?”

“Of course, evolution is inevitable to all. Surrendering to God is the important requirement. Remember, the rule that one has to experience the results of one’s actions that are driven by desires can never be compromised. Yet, to those who surrender, the grace of God provides the strength of character to face all challenges. Take it another positive way. When one finds that their seeking for liberation is hurdled by their lower nature of character that seems undeniable, one has just opened the door for turning into spiritual contemplation. Turning points exist therein. The grace of God enables them to latch on to those turning points to alter their course of life towards progress.”

indriyasyendriyasyārthe rāgadveṣau vyavasthitau
tayorna vaśamāgacchetau 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. (3.34)”

“Bhagavān points out that one does not need to feel guilty if desires of selfish nature recur in their minds and sensory temptations draw the attention at all times. That is natural effect of the composition of the guna. Yet, with the resolute intellect, the mind can be kept free and not swayed by those impulses. For that one needs to labour in control of senses and mind. This requires persistent effort and motivation on the part of the seeker. By revising the goals in life and altering the means of life by the guidance of scripture and spiritual preceptor, one can progress.”

“Aiya, that means, temptations can come even to the minds of the Learned?”

“Yes, it is due to vāsana, the inherent nature, the senses of anyone can cause temptations. The difference is, the ignorant person yields to temptations and therefore gives room to desires that eventually drive all actions; but the wise person is able to discriminate and curb the impact of such temptations to take form as desired.”

śreyānsvadharma viguṇaḥ paradharmātsvanuṣṭhitāt
svadharme nidhanaṃ śreyaḥ paradharmo bhayāvahaḥ (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. (3.35)”

Aiya continued.

“This is another caution from Bhagavān. Sometimes we are more interested to follow some other life-style and do things that are in violation of our ‘svadharma’. Bhagavān says such approach is not only wrong but also leads to greater peril. It is better to do what you need to do, even poorly, rather than doing someone’s task perfectly.”

“Why does Bhagavān bring this point to Arjuna?”

“Bhagavān is mindful that Arjuna is contemplating on giving up on his ‘svadharmā’ and follow the life-style of ‘sanyāsi’, the life of renunciation. Arjuna already indicated to give up all in this world. By doing so, Arjuna commits a sin of not doing what he ought to do according to his ‘svadharmā’ and secondly, as he has not acquired the mental condition to become a sanyāsi, he would not adhere well to sanyāsa-āshrama. That is double risk. Bhagavān says therefore, it is better for him to fight and die rather than running away to a life of renunciation.”

§ Conquering Desires

Arjuna uvāca

atha kena prayukto'yaṃ pāpaṃ carati pūruṣaḥ
anicchannapi vārṣṇeya balādiva niyojitaḥ (3.36)

“Arjuna said

O Varshneya! But under what compulsion, does a man, though reluctant, commit sin, as if constrained by force. (3.36)”

“Aiyā, I have this same doubt. I do understand the importance of being righteous and doing virtuous acts. But sometimes, the other side of the mind wants to do something different, making me do things which may be sinful. It is like something else is forcing me to do such erroneous acts.”

“Let us listen to Bhagavān.”

Śrī Bhagavān uvāca

kāma eṣa krodha eṣa rajoguṇasamudbhavaḥ
mahāśano mahāpāpmā viddhyenamiha vairiṇam (3.37)

“Sri Bhagavān said:

It is desire, it is wrath, born of the energy of Rajas all-devouring, all sinful; that, know thou, is the foe here (in this world). (3.37)”

“It is the force of desire that makes us do wrong things and thus committing sin. Desires driven by the lower nature, predominant of rājasic and tāmasic guna can sway the mind towards actions that are binding and sinful. Passion arising out of predominant rājasic nature translate to emotional actions. Anxiety, anger and associated weaknesses then fill one’s mind and delude the intellect. Therefore such desires must be deemed as the worst enemy in this world. There is no external force making one to do sinful acts, it is the allowance inside one’s mind, for passionate desires.”

dhūmenāvriyate vahniryathādarśo malena ca
yatholbenāvṛto garbhastathā tenedamāvṛtam (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). (3.38)”

“Aiya, What does Bhagavān mean by saying desire envelops the knowledge?”

“Bhagavān elucidates with three examples, each implying a different level of impact. Here by the term ‘this’, the knowledge of the Self is indicated and by the term ‘that’ the ignorance of desire is indicated. When one forgets the true identify with the Self, then there is ‘ahamkāra’ and ‘mamakāra’, the sense of ‘I’ and ‘my’ gets the hold. The clouding ignorance therefore block the ability to discriminate good from bad, right from wrong and truth from false.”

“Aiya, please explain the examples given by Bhagavān.”

“We learnt already that the type of desire depends upon the quality of attachments. When desires are driven by ‘tāmasic guna’, only inert and animal instincts dominate. The divine nature is completely hidden. Bhagavān gives the example of a foetus covered with amnion fluid in the womb; there is no way the covering could be removed until a definite period of time is elapsed. In the same way, when the tāmasic desires dominate, one has to patiently wait and spend a longer period of time in spiritual contemplation for uncovering the goodness in oneself.”

“When desires are propelled by the passionate rājasic nature?”, I asked.

“In this case, the knowledge is like a mirror but completely covered by the dust of desires; so compared to ‘tāmasic’ desires, we can relatively easily wipe the mirror of mind clean from the dust of ‘rājasic’ desires. But be warned, the dust of desires are persistent and so persistent effort of cleaning the mirror is required. In other words, when rājasic nature dominates, vigilant actions are required to scrutinize those and impose regulations. Sense and mind control are important abilities that one should practice and attain.”

“Aiya, is there a drawback of Satvic desires too?”

“Yes, Bhagavān says even ‘divine desires’ driven by the predominance of ‘satvic’ nature also envelop our knowledge and discrimination just as smoke envelopes

fire. But unlike the long and persistent efforts needed for other type of desires, even 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. So if we need to have desires, it is far better to have only 'satvic' desires."

"Aiya, desires to learn the scriptures, desires to do virtuous things - all these are 'satvic' right! Am I to understand that even such divine desires elude our true knowledge?"

"Desires for virtuous deeds are necessary. Only then our life goals - purushārtam - can be steered towards liberation. But there comes the time that there is nothing to desire for, as there is nothing other than the Self. In that state of non-dual existence, one with the Universal-Self, desire has no existence. Afterwards, as the truly Liberated, there is nothing to desire for."

āvṛtaṃ jñānametena jñānino nityavairiṇā
kāmarūpeṇa kaunteya duṣpūreṇānalena ca (3.39)

"O Son of Kunti, wisdom is enveloped by this constant enemy of the wise in the form of desire, which is insatiable as the fire. (3.39)"

"Bhagavān now warns about the insatiable nature of desire. Like fire that grows as we feed with fuel, desires too grow as we keep attending to those. For the ignorant person, desires are constant companions. But for the wise, desires are like enemies constantly encroaching to take away the freedom and peace. The wise knows that 'rāga' leads to 'shoka' and to 'moha'. So the wise fights against the desires with the view to cull those but the ignorant indulges on those to his peril."

"Aiya, from where desires come?"

indriyāṇi mano buddhirasyādhiṣṭhānamucyate
etaivimohayatyeṣa jñānamāvṛtya dehinam (3.40)

"The senses, mind, and the reasoning intellect are said to be its seat; these deludes the embodied by veiling the wisdom. (3.40)"

"Bhagavān shows the seat of desires, or should I say, the hide-out of the enemy! If one knows where the enemy is hiding, one could be vigilant and cleanse those hide-outs, removing the potential threats at their root, is it not? The sense,

mind and the intellect are the hide-out places for the desires.”

“Aiya, knowing now the hide-out, how do we challenge the enemy, the desire?”

tasmaat twam indriyaanyaadau niyamyā bharatarshabha
paapmaanāṃ prajāhi hyenam jnāna vijñāna 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. (3.41)”

“Bhagavān gives clear steps. First handle the sense organs as those are the ones bringing temptations to the mind. It is not by employing forced suppression of senses which causes pain and always in vain. But apply regulations. Suppression of senses is not desirable but their gradual reorientation is essential. Through practice, one can attain the mastery to bring senses into voluntary regulation. Mind should be able to discriminate and ignore sensual triggers and temptations. Mind should be the master of senses. The ‘dama’ and ‘sama’, the control of senses and mind respectively are aided by specific sādhana or practices. By those practices, apply persistent efforts to attain the senses-regulation and mind-control. Then with discrimination, the desire, the greatest of all enemies and the peril leading to sin, can be killed.”

“Aiya, What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom? Bhagavān says, ‘Jñāna’ and ‘Vijñāna’. Please explain.”

“Bhagavān Sankara says ‘*Jñāna*’ is the knowledge of the Self acquired through a study of the scriptures and from spiritual preceptor. This is an indirect knowledge or ‘*Paroksha-Jñāna*’. This is the knowledge : ‘there exists Ātma, free and unattached to Anātma, the insentient embodiments’. But this knowledge has to be realized. The term ‘*Vijñāna*’ or wisdom refers to the direct knowledge ‘*Aparoksha-Jñāna*’. It is the realization, ‘*anubhuti*’, of the Self. This is the realization : ‘I am Ātma’. Bhagavān is pointing out that the desires and the mental agitations owing to desires are blockers of both direct and indirect knowledge of the Self.”

indriyāṇi parāṅyāhur indriyebhyaḥ param manaḥ
manasas tu parā buddhir yo buddheḥ paratas tu saḥ || 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. (3.42)”

“Bhagavān now concludes by enumerating the order of superiority in the pursuit of Self-Realization so that we can apply due perspectives in handling those. The Self, Ātma is the most superior, the realization and identification with which one attains liberation and completeness. By discrimination, the embodiment is to be known as Anātmā. Yet the embodiment is to be used as the instrument in pursuit of our goal. At the bottom of the list is our physical embodiment - the gross and tangible part with which we initially attach the notion of self identity. By appraising the gross-body, we conclude ‘I am not the gross body’. The inert gross-body is animated with the senses, the organs of perception and actions and therefore the senses are superior to the gross-body. Yet on appraisal, senses too are incomplete, never can be perfect and inherently inert. We can therefore discard those as not the Self. Mind is superior to senses as it is mind that translates sensory impulses to coherent thoughts. But the mind is never fulfilled. It changes and remain insentient when its not powered by the consciousness. Hence mind is not the Self and we discard. The discriminating intellect is superior than the mind of thoughts, as intellect directs actions. Yet intellect is never complete and often faulty, influenced by the state of mind. Therefore the effulgence of consciousness, the only sentience principle can be the Self and in that supreme knowledge, we dwell and attain wisdom.”

“Aiya, what is the essence of this ranking?”

“It is indicate both the reverence and the relative importance of these faculties of embodiment in making use of those in the spiritual pursuit. Use these to destroy the enemy - the desires that lead to peril.”

*evaṁ buddheḥ paraṁ buddhvā sanstabhyātmanam ātmanā
jahi śhatruṁ mahā-bāho kāma-rūpaṁ durāsadam || 3.43 ||*

“O Mighty armed (Arjuna)! Thus knowing Him (Ātma) as superior to the intellect, subdue the (false-identity of) self by the (true knowledge of) Self and destroy the formidable enemy, called desire. (3.43)”

Aiya said.

“Bhagavān now concludes with the instruction to all, which also brings out the essence of Vedanta. Having attained the knowledge that Ātma is superior, one should focus only on Ātma, the true Self. With that power of knowledge

the false notion of self with the physical and mental embodiments should be removed. As the embodiments are essential instruments for our progress, Bhagavān says, restrains those instruments - meaning that their utility should be only to aid in the pursuit of Self-Realization. When such goal is set in steadfast focus, we are totally empowered to seek the hide-out of desires, the most difficult enemy to destroy, and actually destroy. That is the biggest of all battles. That is the war that we all should keenly engage, fight and win. Only to equip in the mammoth war, Karma-Yōga is prescribed. Our strength of character in terms of pure-mind and resolute-intellect is achieved only by performing Karma-Yōga. By doing Karma-Yōga, one is totally devoted to God as all actions are done as 'Ishava-arpanam' and all effects are revered as 'Ishvara-Prashād'. Then there is no fear of defeat against the desire and all its dire consequences in the form of Samsārā."

om tat sat

om tat sat
iti srimad bhagavadgeetaasu upanishatsu
brahma vidyaayaam Yōgashaastre
sri krishnaarjuna samvaade
karmayogo naama tritiyo'dhyaayah ||

Thus in the Upanishads of the glorious Bhagavad Gita,
the science of the Eternal, the scripture of Yōga,
the dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna,
ends the third discourse entitled
The Yōga of Action.





Previous
Part-02

Next
Part - 04



www.meenalaya.org

Mee. Rajagopalan

Comments to rajag@gmail.com