

Reflections from Shrimad Bhagavadgita– Part 28: Chapter 3, Verses 24-29

(November 7 –November 13, 2018)

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ORIGINAL SANSKRIT DOCUMENT

TRANSLITERATION

उत्सीदेयुरिमे लोका न कुर्या कर्म चेदहम् ।
सङ्करस्य च कर्ता स्यामुपहन्यामिमाः प्रजाः ॥ ३-२४ ॥
सक्ताः कर्मण्यविद्वांसो यथा कुर्वन्ति भारत ।
कुर्याद्विद्वांस्तथासक्तश्चिकीर्षुर्लोकसंग्रहम् ॥ ३-२५ ॥
न बुद्धिभेदं जनयेदज्ञानां कर्मसङ्गिनाम् ।
जोषयेत्सर्वकर्माणि विद्वान्युक्तः समाचरन् ॥ ३-२६ ॥
प्रकृतेः क्रियमाणानि गुणैः कर्माणि सर्वशः ।
अहङ्कारविमूढात्मा कर्ताहमिति मन्यते ॥ ३-२७ ॥
तत्त्ववित्तु महाबाहो गुणकर्मविभागयोः ।
गुणा गुणेषु वर्तन्त इति मत्वा न सज्जते ॥ ३-२८ ॥
प्रकृतेर्गुणसम्मूढाः सज्जन्ते गुणकर्मसु ।
तानकृत्स्नविदो मन्दान्कृत्स्नविन्न विचालयेत् ॥ ३-२९ ॥

*utsīdeyur ime lokā na kuryām karma ced aham
saṅkarasya ca kartā syām upahanyām imāḥ prajāḥ
saktāḥ karmaṇy avidvāṁso yathā kurvanti bhārata
kuryād vidvāṁs tathāsaktaś cikīrṣur loka-saṅgraham
na buddhi-bhedaṁ janayed ajñānāṁ karma-saṅginām
joṣayet sarva-karmāṇi vidvān yuktaḥ samācaran
prakṛteḥ kriyamāṇāni guṇaiḥ karmāṇi sarvaśaḥ
ahaṅkāra- vimūḍhātmā kartāham iti manyate
tattva-vit tu maha-baho guṇa-karma- vibhagayoh
guṇa guṇesu vartanta iti matva na sajjate
prakṛter guṇa-saṁmūḍhāḥ sajjante guṇa-karmasu
tān akṛtsna-vido mandān kṛtsna-vaṁ na vicālayet*

TRANSLATION

- (24)** If I ceased to perform prescribed actions, all these worlds would perish. I would be responsible for the unvirtuous population that would prevail, and would thereby destroy the peace of the human race.
- (25)** As ignorant people perform their duties with attachment to the results, O scion of Bharat, so should the wise act without attachment, for the sake of leading people on the right path.
- (26)** The wise should not create discord in the intellects of ignorant people, who are attached to fruitive actions, by inducing them to stop work. Rather, by performing their duties in an enlightened manner, they should inspire the ignorant also to do their prescribed duties.
- (27)** All activities are carried out by the three modes of material nature. But in ignorance, the soul, deluded by false identification with the body, thinks itself to be the doer.
- (28)** O mighty-armed Arjun, illumined persons distinguish the soul as distinct from senses and karmas. They perceive that it is only the senses that move amongst the sense objects, and thus they do not get entangled in them.
- (29)** Those who are deluded by the operation of the *guṇas* become attached to the results of their actions. But the wise who understand these truths should not unsettle such ignorant people who know very little.

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Commentary:

Verse 24:

When Lord Krishna appeared as a human being on Earth, he conducted himself in all ways and manners, appropriate for his position in society, as a member of the royal warrior class. Had he acted otherwise, other human beings would begin to imitate him, thinking that they must copy the conduct of the worthy son of the righteous King Vasudev. If he had failed to perform the prescribed Vedic duties, human beings following his example would be led away from the discipline of *karma*, into a state of chaos. This would have been a very serious offence and Lord Krishna would be considered at fault. Thus, he explains to Arjuna that if he did not fulfill his occupational duties, it would cause an uproar in society. Similarly, Arjuna was famous for being undefeated in battle, and was the brother of the virtuous Yudhisthir. If Arjuna refused to fulfill his duty to protect dharma, then many other worthy and noble warriors could follow his example and also renounce their prescribed duty of protecting righteousness. This would bring destruction to the world balance and the rout of innocent and virtuous people. Thus, for the benefit of the entire human race and the welfare of the world, Lord Krishna coaxed Arjuna not to neglect performing his prescribed Vedic duties.

Verse 25:

In this verse the expression *saktāḥ avidvānsaḥ* has been used by Lord Krishna for people who are as yet attached to worldly pleasures, but who have full faith in the Vedic rituals sanctioned by the scriptures. They are called ignorant because though they have bookish knowledge of the scriptures, they do not comprehend the final goal of self-realization. Such ignorant people perform their duty scrupulously according to the ordinance of the scriptures, without any doubt. They have firm faith

that the performance of Vedic duties and rituals will bring the material rewards they desire. If the faith of such people in rituals is broken, without their having developed faith in the higher principle of devotion, they will have nowhere to go. One should continue to perform *karma* as long as one has not developed renunciation from the sense objects and attachment to God. Lord Krishna urges Arjuna that just as ignorant people faithfully perform ritualistic duties, so also the wise should perform their works dutifully, not for material rewards, but for setting an ideal for the rest of society. Besides, the particular situation in which Arjuna finds himself is a *dharmā yuddha* (war of righteousness). Thus, for the welfare of society, Arjun should perform his duty as a warrior. Finally, the expression *loka-saṅgraham chikīrṣhuḥ* means “wishing the welfare of the world.” Thus, Lord Krishna again emphasizes that the wise should always act for the benefit of humankind.

Verses 26:

In this verse, Lord Krishna urges that wise people should not perform any actions or make any utterances that lead the ignorant toward downfall. Leaders have greater responsibility because common people follow them. Lord Krishna states *na buddhi-bhedam janayet*, meaning the ignorant should not be asked to abandon duties by giving superior instructions they are not qualified to understand, such as forcing them to practice self-realization. Normally, people in material consciousness consider only two options. Either they are willing to work hard for fruitive results or they wish to give up all exertions on the plea that all works are laborious, painful, and wrought with evil. Between these, working for results is far superior to the escapist approach. Hence, the spiritually wise in Vedic knowledge should inspire the ignorant to perform their duties with attentiveness and care. If the minds of the ignorant become disturbed and unsettled, then they may lose faith in working altogether, and with actions stopped and knowledge not arising, the ignorant will lose out either way.

Verse 27:

All our actions are performed by the mind-body-senses mechanism of *prakṛiti*, or the material energy, which consists of three modes or *guṇas*, including (a) goodness (*sattva*), passion (*rajas*), and ignorance (*tamas*). Just as waves are not separate from the ocean, but a part of it, similarly the body is a part of Mother Nature from which it is created. Therefore, material energy is the doer of everything. Why then does the soul perceive itself to be doing activities? The reason is that, in the grip of the unforgiving ego, the soul falsely identifies itself with the body. Hence, it remains under the illusion of doership. Let us say there are two trains standing side-by-side on the railway platform, and a passenger on one train fixes his gaze on the other. When the second train moves, the passenger on the first train falsely senses that his own train, rather than the second train, is moving. Likewise the immobile soul identifies with the mobility of *prakṛiti*. Thus, it perceives itself as the doer of actions. The moment the soul eliminates the ego and surrenders to the will of God, it realizes itself as the non-doer. The soul does not itself perform actions, but it does direct the actions of the senses-mind-intellect. For example, a chariot driver does not pull the chariot himself, but he does direct the horses. But, if there is an accident, it is not the horses that are blamed, but the driver who was directing them. Similarly, the soul is held responsible for the actions of the mind-body mechanism because the senses-mind-intellect work on receiving inspiration from the soul.

Verse 28:

This verse discusses the *tattva-vit* or the Knowers of the Truth. The previous verse mentioned that the *ahankāra vimūḍhātmā* (those who are bewildered by the ego and misidentify themselves with the body) think themselves to be the doers. Once they abolish that ego, they are free from bodily identifications, and are able to discern their spiritual identity distinct from the corporeal body. Thus, they are not beguiled into thinking of themselves as the doers of their material actions, and instead they attribute every activity to the movements of the three *guṇas*. Such God-realized Saints believe that God is doing everything, but people falsely think that they are doing.

Verse 29:

Lord Krishna explains in this verse that the ignorant become bewildered by the *guṇas* of the material energy, and think themselves to be the doers. Infatuated by the three modes of material nature, including goodness (*sattva*), passion (*rajas*), and ignorance (*tamas*), they work for the express purpose of being able to enjoy sensual and mental delights. They are unable to perform actions as a matter of duty, without desiring rewards. However, the *ḥṛitsna-vit* (persons with knowledge) should not disturb the minds of the *akṛitsna-vitm* (persons without knowledge). This means that the wise should not force their thoughts onto ignorant persons by saying, “You are the soul, not the body, and therefore, *karma* is meaningless; give it up.” Rather, they should instruct the ignorant to perform their respective *karma*, and slowly help them rise above attachment. In this way, after presenting the distinctions between those who are spiritually wise and those who are ignorant, Lord Krishna gives the sober caution not to unsettle the minds of the ignorant.