

Reflections from Shrimad Bhagavadgita– Part 171: Chapter 18, Verses 46-49

(August 11 – August 17, 2021)

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ORIGINAL SANSKRIT DOCUMENT

TRANSLITERATION

यतः प्रवृत्तिर्भूतानां येन सर्वमिदं ततम् ।

yataḥ pravṛittir bhūtānām yena sarvam idaṁ tatam

स्वकर्मणा तमभ्यर्च्य सिद्धिं विन्दति मानवः ॥ १८-४६ ॥

sva-karmaṇā tam abhyarchya siddhiṁ vindati mānavaḥ

श्रेयान्स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात् ।

śhreyān swa-dharmo viguṇaḥ para-dharmāt sv-anuṣṭhitāt

स्वभावनियतं कर्म कुर्वन्नाप्नोति किल्बिषम् ॥ १८-४७ ॥

svabhāva-niyataṁ karma kurvan nāpnoti kilbiṣham

सहजं कर्म कौन्तेय सदोषमपि न त्यजेत् ।

saha-jam karma kaunteya sa-doṣham api na tyajet

सर्वारम्भा हि दोषेण धूमेनाग्निरिवावृताः ॥ १८-४८ ॥

sarvārambhā hi doṣheṇa dhūmenāgnir ivāvṛitāḥ

असक्तबुद्धिः सर्वत्र जितात्मा विगतस्पृहः ।

asakta-buddhiḥ sarvatra jītātmā vigata-sprīhaḥ

नैष्कर्म्यसिद्धिं परमां संन्यासेनाधिगच्छति ॥ १८-४९ ॥

naiṣhkarmya-siddhiṁ paramāṁ sannyāsenādhigachchhati

TRANSLATION

- (46) By performing one's own natural activities, one should worship the Creator from whom all living entities have come into being, and by whom the whole universe is pervaded. By such performance of work, a person can easily attain perfection.
- (47) It is better to do one's own *dharma*, even though imperfectly, than to do another's *dharma*, even though perfectly. By doing one's innate duties, a person does not incur sin.
- (48) One should not abandon duties born of one's nature, even if one sees defects in them, O son of Kunti. Indeed, all endeavors are veiled by some evil, as fire is by smoke.
- (49) Those whose intellect is unattached everywhere, who have mastered the mind, and are free from desires by the practice of renunciation, attain the highest perfection of freedom from action.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/11_nkbxMbfCHbzszOVso_dYsoFs1GWsl/view?usp=sharing

CHAPTER 18

Commentary

Verse 46

It is only natural that the spiritually cognizant human beings worship the source of their very existence, the Supreme Lord, who is the root and the foundation from whence all creation originated and by whom all existence is pervaded. The perfection of self-realization is only obtained in perfection from worshipping the Supreme Lord and offering everything one possesses to Him. This can be also done by following one's own natural duties without deviation as ordained in Vedic scriptures. All *jivas* or embodied beings manifested from the Supreme Lord who is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent and who created, maintains and sustains everything in all creation which is all permeated solely by Him. This has already been established in Chapter 7, Verses 6 and 7, where Lord Krishna confirms: He alone is the origin of all as well as the demise of all. There is nothing superior to Lord Krishna for all creation depends upon Him. In Chapter 9, Verse 4, He states: In an unperceivable manner, He pervades all existence yet everything is in Him but He is not in it. In Chapter 9, Verse 10, He states: That His external energy manifests all moving and stationary *jivas* or embodied beings according to His direction, and in Chapter 10, Verse 8, He reveals: Every aspect of creation, maintenance and existence as well as the Vedic scriptures has Him alone as the sole source.

Verse 47

In this verse, Lord Krishna emphasizes adhering to one's own natural path of *dharma* or righteousness even if it is devoid of adequate merit or is deficient in some way. Performing activities that conform to one's inherent nature is still superior to following the ways of another *Dharma*, even if done exemplarily. The performance of duties not sanctioned for one in the Vedic scriptures is risky, fraught with danger, and is susceptible to sin; but in the performance of one's own naturally prescribed duty, no such sin is incurred. Take for example, one is inherently suited to perform the *Karma Yoga* to attain the Supreme Lord. But there are two other pathways to attain the Supreme Lord as prescribed in the *Vedas*, including the *Jnana Yoga* and the *Bhakti Yoga*. Lord Krishna says here that if the person suited for the *Karma Yoga* decides to follow the *Jnana Yoga* or the *Bhakti Yoga* instead, the chances of one's failing as well as incurring sin in achieving the end result are greater than if the person simply followed one's own inherent pathway which one is suited for. This is because the perfection in *jnana yoga* demands the consistent ability to completely control the mind and conquer the senses, which is a lifetime endeavor and fraught with danger of lapses in constancy. Besides, once control of the mind and mastery of the senses has been achieved in *jnana yoga*, they must be kept controlled and mastered, otherwise one will fall down from their position and subjected again to mundane desires and the influence of objects the senses, which propels one to sin and locks one in *samsara*, the perpetual cycle of birth and death.

Verse 48:

In this verse, Lord Krishna gives His final verdict on the subject of whether or not to follow one's own *Dharma* in achieving the ultimate goal: *moksha* or liberation from the cycles of birth and death. He says that the actions that are initiated naturally are easily executed and should be done even if there may be some fault or defect. Furthermore, all endeavors in the material world are accompanied by some sort of fault or defect and all living beings must perform actions to exist, but the following of one's own natural path is the least difficult and not beset with unpredictable dangers. For example, although dispelling darkness and cold by providing heat and light, fire is still accompanied by smoke which burns the eyes and irritates the nose. Similarly, in the quest for *moksha*, there will be some difficulties and irritations, but without clarity of intention and purity of heart, it will not be possible for one to achieve *moksha*. When the heart becomes pure, all imperfections are dissolved and disappear. So, by worshipping the Supreme Lord following one's own natural prescribed duty, one attains self-realization and achieves *moksha*.

Verse 49:

Here, Lord Krishna explains that when *buddhi* or intelligence is unfettered, meaning unattached to desires and rewards, and the mind is controlled and the senses are conquered, with no conceptions of doership, one is established in renunciation even while performing prescribed Vedic activities. Also, one attains the supreme serene state of *bhakti* or exclusive loving devotion unto the Supreme Lord by *dhyana* or meditation in communion with Him internally as well as propitiation to Him with one's physical body externally such as *japa* or chanting His divine, holy names in ecstasy. By the wonderfulness of *bhakti*, the mind and senses are controlled and conquered quite easily and have surpassed the limits of *jnana yoga* or facilitating communion with the Supreme Lord by knowledge.