

Reflections from Shrimad Bhagavadgita– Part 160: Chapter 18, Verses 01-05

(May 26 – June 1, 2021)

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TRANSLITERATION

अथाष्टादशोऽध्यायः

ATHA ASHTADASHODHYAYAH

अर्जुन उवाच ।

arjuna uvācha

संन्यासस्य महाबाहो तत्त्वमिच्छामि वेदितुम् ।
त्यागस्य च हृषीकेश पृथक्केशिनिषूदन ॥ १८-१ ॥

*sannyāsasya mahā-bāho tattvam ichchhāmi veditum
tyāgasya cha hṛīhīkeśha pṛithak keśhi-niṣhūdana*

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

śhrī-bhagavān uvācha

काम्यानां कर्मणां न्यासं संन्यासं कवयो विदुः ।
सर्वकर्मफलत्यागं प्राहुस्त्यागं विचक्षणाः ॥ १८-२ ॥
त्याज्यं दोषवदित्येके कर्म प्राहुर्मनीषिणः ।
यज्ञदानतपःकर्म न त्याज्यमिति चापरे ॥ १८-३ ॥

*kāmyānām karmaṇām nyāsaṁ sannyāsaṁ kavayo viduḥ
sarva-karma-phala-tyāgaṁ prāhus tyāgaṁ vichakṣhaṇāḥ
tyājyaṁ doṣha-vad ity eke karma prāhur manīṣhiṇaḥ
yajña-dāna-tapaḥ-karma na tyājyam iti chāpare*

निश्चयं शृणु मे तत्र त्यागे भरतसत्तम ।
त्यागो हि पुरुषव्याघ्र त्रिविधः सम्प्रकीर्तितः ॥ १८-४ ॥
यज्ञदानतपःकर्म न त्याज्यं कार्यमेव तत् ।
यज्ञो दानं तपश्चैव पावनानि मनीषिणाम् ॥ १८-५ ॥

*nīśhchayaṁ śhrīṇu me tatra tyāge bharata-sattama
tyāgo hi puruṣha-vyāghra tri-vidhaḥ samprakīrtitaḥ
yajña-dāna-tapaḥ-karma na tyājyaṁ kāryam eva tat
yajño dānaṁ tapaśh chaiva pāvanāni manīṣhiṇām*

TRANSLATION

- (01) Arjun said: O mighty-armed Krishna, I wish to understand the nature of *sanyās* (renunciation of actions) and *tyāg* (renunciation of the desire for the fruits of actions). O Hrishikesh, the Lord of Senses, I also wish to know the distinction between the two, O Keshinishudan, the slayer of the demon Keshi.
- (02) The Supreme Divine Personality said: Giving up of actions motivated by desire is what the wise understand as *sanyās*. Relinquishing the fruits of all actions is what the learned declare to be *tyāg*.
- (03) Some learned people declare that all kinds of actions should be given up as evil, while others maintain that acts of sacrifice, charity, and penance should never be abandoned.
- (04) Now hear my conclusion on the subject of renunciation, O tiger amongst men, for renunciation has been declared to be of three kinds.
- (05) Actions based upon sacrifice, charity, and penance should never be abandoned; they must certainly be performed. Indeed, acts of sacrifice, charity, and penance are purifying for those who are wise.

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Chapter 18

Verse 01

In this final chapter of Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna gives a concise synopsis of all the subjects presented in the previous 17 chapters. He briefly summarizes the perennial principles and eternal truths that were presented in the previous chapters. He clearly delineates how all concepts elaborated upon in earlier chapters harmoniously unite in the final conclusion. This verse specifically concerns the two concepts of *Sanyasa* or the renunciation of actions and *Tyaga* or the renunciation of desires for rewards or fruits of actions. Lord Krishna had earlier talked about *Sanyasa* in Chapter 5:13 and Chapter 9:28, and about *Tyaga* in Chapter 4:20 and Chapter 12:11, but the distinction between the two concepts were not still too clear for Arjuna. Therefore, in this verse, Arjuna asks the penetrating and poignant question to Lord Krishna to explain clearly the two concepts as well as the acute distinction between the two. The usage of the evocative term *mahabaho*, meaning mighty-armed, denotes Lord Krishna's indomitable might and of the term *keshinisudana* refers to His destroying a mighty demon Keshi. The evocative *Hrishikesh*, meaning the Lord of Senses, acknowledges that Lord Krishna is the inner monitor of the mind and that only He can remove all doubts.

Verse 02

In this verse, Lord Krishna explains that the learned people consider *Sanyasa* as the renunciation of works. Those who renounce works for material enjoyment and enter the renounced order are called *karma sanyasis*. They continue to do some of the *nitya karma* (daily works for the maintenance of the body), but they renounce *kaamya karma* (works related to acquisition of wealth, progeny, prestige, status, power, etc). Such works bind the soul further in the wheel of *karma* and lead to repeated rebirths in the *samsara* of birth and death. Lord Krishna states that some wise people lay emphasis on *Tyaga* instead, meaning “internal renunciation.” This implies not relinquishing the prescribed Vedic duties, rather renouncing the desires for enjoying their fruits. Therefore, giving up attachment to the rewards of actions is *Tyaga*, while totally giving up works for material enjoyment is *Sanyasa*. Both *Sanyasa* and *Tyaga* seem plausible and reasonable options to pursue for enlightenment. Of these two courses of action, which one does Lord Krishna recommend? He provides more clarity on this topic in the subsequent verses.

Verse 03

In this verse, Lord Krishna describes the existence of two philosophies concerning the concepts of *Sanyasa* and *Tyaga*. The proponents of *Sankhya* philosophy, which is based on analytical reason, declare that even prescribed Vedic activities have an aroma of desire for rewards attached to them and the resultant reactions keep one enslaved in *samsara*, the perpetual cycle of birth and death in material existence. Therefore, even prescribed Vedic activities are fit to be abandoned by those aspirants striving for *moksha* or liberation from material existence. But those of the *Mimamsaka* philosophy, who adhere to rationalistic thinking in interpreting the conclusions of the Vedic scriptures, maintain that beneficial activities, such as sacrifice, charity, and penance, are not to be abandoned at any cost, but only the desires for rewards from such duties are to be renounced.

Verse 04

After having explained, in the previous verse, the two opposing views concerning renunciation, which include *Sanyasa* and *Tyaga*, the Supreme Lord Krishna now offers the absolute verdict on this subject in order to alleviate the confusion and conflicting opinions. He says that renunciation is really of three types that will be explained in the following verses. In this verse, Lord Krishna addresses Arjun as *vyāghra*, meaning “tiger (amongst men)” because renunciation is for the brave-hearted.

Verse 05

In this verse, Lord Krishna emphasizes that never under any circumstances are prescribed Vedic activities such as *yajna* or ritualistic propitiation and worship, *tapah* or penance and austerities and *daanam* or charity to the worthy persons are to be abandoned. They must be

continuously performed all throughout life. To the *manishinam* or the wise and conscientious, who possess discriminative skills, the prescribed Vedic activities are products of *sattva guna*, the mode of goodness, which sanctify and lead to purification of the mind. The performance of prescribed Vedic activities dissolves all impurities and eradicates the *karmas* or reactions to actions from past activities. Such aspirants reflecting upon spiritual attainment throughout their lives are naturally in communion with the Supreme Lord at the moment of death.