

Srimad Bhagavad Gita

Chapter 3
Karma Yogah: Yoga of Action

Transliterated Sanskrit Text

Free Translation

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Brief Explanation

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Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 3 (Part-1)
Karma Yogah : Yoga Of Action
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Preamble

This Chapter analyses from various points of view and establishes the fact that the performance of prescribed duties is obligatory for everyone. Here Lord Krishna categorically and comprehensively explains how it is the duty of each and every member of society to carry out their functions and responsibilities in their respective stage of life according to the rules and regulations of the society in which one lives. Further the Lord explains why such duties must be performed, what benefit is gained by performing them, what harm is caused by not performing them, what actions lead to bondage and what actions lead to salvation. All these points relating to duty have been described in great detail. Hence this chapter is entitled “Karma Yogah : Yoga Of Action”.

In the previous Chapter Bhagavan advised that Arjuna's duty was to work without pre-occupying himself with its result and at the same time suggested that he should not be attached to inaction. He concluded His advice with the advocacy of the path of attaining the state of steady wisdom and Brahmi state by knowledge and renunciation.

Arjuna feels confused by the Lord's praise of righteous war (2.31-38) and the Buddhi Yoga i.e. equanimity of mind (2.49 & 50) as also about the man of steady wisdom in conclusion. These apparently conflicting views seem to have perplexed Arjuna as to which path he has to adopt for his self-development i.e. whether it is knowledge or action or either together or total renunciation of both. The advice of The Lord here is that selfless action performed in a spirit of dedication and surrender and with pure motive is the right path.

The Text

WHY THEN WORK AT ALL?

arjuna uvaacha
jyaayasee chet karmanaste mataa buddhir janaardana
tat kim karmani ghore maam niyojayasi keshava // 3.1 //

Arjuna said

If you think that knowledge is superior to action, O Janardana, why then do you ask me to engage in this terrible action, O Kesava?

vyaamishreneva vaakyena buddhim mohayaseeva me
tadekam vada nishchitya yena shreyo'ham aapnuyaam // 3.2 //

With these apparently perplexing words you confuse my understanding, as it were; therefore, tell me definitely that one thing by which I may attain the Highest Goal.

Arjuna misunderstands the teaching that work for reward is less excellent than work without attachment and desire and believes that Sri Krishna is of the view that knowledge without action is better than work. If Sankhya method of gaining wisdom is superior, then action is an irrelevance. In this confusion he asks Sri Krishna as to which of the paths he has to follow for his self-development since he still believed that to fight against his people was a terrible action. Hence, Arjuna requests Sri Krishna to teach him for certain either of the two – knowledge or action - in accordance with the state and power of his understanding by which he could attain the highest good i.e. complete eradication of grief and infatuation and attainment of that imperishable.

The confusion is only seeming. It is not the intention of the Lord to confuse Arjuna but yet Arjuna is confused.

LIFE IS WORK BUT THE NEED IS UNCONCERN FOR RESULTS

**sri bhagavaan uvaacha
loke'smin dwividha nishthaa puraa proktaa mayaanagha
jnaanayogena saankhyaanaam karmayogena yoginaam // 3.3 //**

Sri Bhagavan said

In this world there is a two-fold path, as I said before, O blameless One (Arjuna), the path of knowledge for men of contemplation and the path of work for men of action.

The words 'As I said before' indicate the beginning of the created world. Even at the very beginning of the cycle of time, two classes of people, those with contemplative and those with active temperaments, were in existence.

Those of contemplative mind are born with a clear knowledge of the Self and the non-Self. They easily renounce the world even at the early age of their lives and concentrate their thoughts on Brahman always. For them the path of knowledge is prescribed so that their ideas can mature and blend with Brahman.

The understanding of those who believe in external action as a means of self-unfoldment is still colored by the stain of duality. The performance of unselfish action purifies their souls and enables them to practice knowledge and contemplation.

The path of knowledge (Gnana Yoga) was described by The Lord in verses 11-38 and the path of action (Karma Yoga) in verses 40-53 of the Second Chapter which created confusion in the mind of Arjuna although never intended by The Lord.

To consider the path of action and the path of knowledge as competitive is to understand neither of them, they being complementary. Selfless activity enables the mind to exhaust many of its existing mental impressions and the mind thus purified prepares the one for the reception of knowledge of the Absolute through meditation or contemplation. There cannot be any knowledge of Brahman unless the mind is pure.

The Lord distinguishes two main types of seekers viz., the active and the contemplative.

Because temperamentally these two categories are so wide apart that a common technique for spiritual development cannot yield results. So Sri Krishna explains the two-fold path of Self-development. Viz. Path of knowledge for the introverts whose natural tendency is to explore the inner life of the Spirit and the Path of action for the extroverts who have a natural bias for work in the outer world.

Those who are endowed with discrimination, dispassion, six-fold virtues, and longing for liberation and who have a sharp, subtle intellect and bold understanding are fit for Gnana Yoga or the Path of Knowledge. The six-fold virtues are control of the mind, control of the senses, fortitude, turning away from the objects of the world; faith and tranquility. Those who have tendency for work are fit for Karma Yoga or the Path of Action.

But this distinction cannot be the ultimate because all men are in different degrees both introverts and extroverts. For the Gita, the path of action is a means of liberation as efficient as that of knowledge and these are intended for two types of people. The practice of a particular spiritual discipline is determined by the competence of the aspirant. Both the active and the contemplative have one goal viz. the realization of Brahman. The path of action, however, does not directly lead to the realization.

WHAT IS ACTIONLESSNESS?

**na karmanaam anaarambhaan naishkarmyam purusho'shnute
na cha sannyaasanaad eva siddhim samadhiyacchati // 3.4 //**

Not by abstention from work does a man reach actionlessness, nor by mere renunciation does he attain to perfection.

Action as it is generally understood is the outcome of want and desire. Actionlessness does not mean mere idling or abandoning of all actions. Although one can while away his time doing nothing, his mind will be full of thoughts scheming, speculating and planning over several matters. Desires generate thoughts at the mental level which when expressed in the outer world become actions. Thus thought is the real action. If one is free from thoughts, wishes, likes and dislikes and has knowledge of the Self he can be said to have reached the state of actionlessness.

The one who has reached such a state of actionlessness has neither the necessity nor the desire for action as a means to the end. He has a perfect satisfaction in the Self. Thus actionlessness and perfection are synonymous terms meaning, becoming one with the Infinite and free from all ideas of want and desire.

Mere renunciation or abandonment of action or running away from life does not lead to perfection. Through selfless dedicated action, purification of mind is achieved and the purified mind helps in attaining the Knowledge of the Self which is the ultimate Bliss. The natural law is that every action has its reaction and hence the result of the action is a source of bondage preventing the man from his union with the Supreme. What is needed is not renunciation of works but renunciation of selfish desires. This is *naishkarmya*, a state where one is unaffected by work.

WHY RENUNCIATION OF ACTION UNACCOMPANIED BY KNOWLEDGE DOES NOT LEAD TO PERFECTION?

**na hi kashchit kshanamapi jaatu tishthatyakarmakrit
kaaryate hyavashah karma sarvah prakritjair gunaih // 3.5 //**

Verily none can ever remain even for a moment without performing action; for everyone is made to act by the Gunas or qualities born of prakriti (nature), in spite of himself.

Man is always under the influence of triple tendencies of unactivity- based on his Sattwic quality, activity- based on Rajasic quality, inactivity- based on Tamasic quality. Even for a single moment nobody can ever remain without any activity; even if one remains inactive physically his mind and intellect will always be active. Sattwic actions help a man to attain liberation. Rajasic and Tamasic actions bind a man to worldliness.

So long as we lead embodied lives we remain under the influence of these three Gunas or mental tendencies and we cannot escape from action. Without work life cannot be sustained. . But these Gunas cannot affect a man who has the knowledge of the Self, for he has gone beyond them. He has become a *Gunatita* - one who has transcended the qualities of nature and for him the work ceases. The man who has no knowledge of the Self who is called un-illuminated, will be swayed by ignorance and will be driven to action by the Gunas.

While life remains, action is inevitable. Thinking is an act. Living is an act. These acts cause many effects. To be free from desire, from the illusion of personal interest, is the true renunciation and not the physical abstention from activity.

When it is said that work ceases for a man who is liberated, all that it means is that he has no further personal necessity for work which however does not mean that he goes into masterly inactivity. He works, but without egoism or any binding necessity. Even in performing work he is not involved. When his egoism is removed, his actions are governed by the Supreme Self seated in his heart. Free from desire and attachment, one with all beings, he is released from the bondage of actions. Such actions do not bear fruit in the same way as a roasted or boiled seed loses its potency to sprout.

**karmendriyaani samyamya ya aaste manasaa smaran
indriyaarthaan vimoodhaatma mithyaacharah sa uchyate // 3.6 //**

He who restrains his organs of action, but continues to dwell in his mind on the objects of the senses, deludes himself and is called a hypocrite.

The five organs of action - the Karma Indriyas - are the organs of speech, hands, feet, genitals and anus. They are born of the Rajasic portion of the subtle elements viz. organ of speech is born of ether element, hands of air, feet of fire, genitals of water and anus of earth. Despite restraining these organs if one sits revolving in his mind the thoughts regarding the objects of these sense organs in order to give an impression that he is

meditating on God, he is called a self-deluded hypocrite and a man of sinful conduct.

True renunciation is not just the control of the organs of action or abstention from physical movement. It is the control of the mind and the organs of perception. It is the absence of longing for the activity. An active mind and an actionless body do not indicate the life of *sanyasa*. We may control outwardly our activities but if we do not restrain the desires which impel them, we have failed to grasp the true meaning of restraint.

**yastwindriyaani manasaa niyamyarabhate' rjuna
karmendriyaih karmayogam asaktah sa vishishyate // 3.7 //**

But he who restrains his senses with his mind and directs his organs of action to work, with no feeling of attachment - he, O Arjuna, is indeed superior.

The science of right action and the art of right living are explained in this verse. Mind gets its inputs through five organs of perception which are also called sense-organs or organs of knowledge (Gnana Indriyas) from the outer world of sense objects. These five sense organs are the eye (sense of sight), ear (sense of hearing), nose (sense of smell), skin (sense of touch), and tongue (sense of taste). Mind perceives the sense objects by interacting with the sense organs and if that interaction is absent perception of objects by the mind is not possible even though the objects might be within the range of the sense organs. This verse asks the seeker to control the sense organs by the mind. This implies substitution of sense objects by nobler and diviner alternatives for the mind to dwell upon.

When the sense organs are thus controlled, a huge quantity of energy gets stored up which unless properly directed will disturb the inner equilibrium of an individual. This verse says that the pent up energies must be spent by directing the seeker's organs of action (explained in the previous verse) to the appropriate fields of activities. Even when so acting it is advised not to have attachment arising out of doership and enjoyership so that instead of gathering new mental impressions one may use such activities for exhausting the existing vasanas. Thus the very field of activity becomes a ground for liberation. In the previous verse mere outer renunciation is condemned and in this verse true spirit of inward detachment is commended.

IMPORTANCE OF PERFORMING ALLOTTED DUTY

**niyatam kuru karma twam karma jyaayo hyakarmanah
shareerayaatraa pi cha te na prasiddhyed akarmanah // 3.8 //**

Do your allotted work; for action is superior to inaction. Even the bare maintenance of the body would not be possible if you remain inactive.

Allotted action is one's own duty as laid down in the scriptures to different persons in accordance with their inherited tendencies, the stage in life and the order in society. Non-performance of such bounden duties would mean inaction. The very fact of living involves several natural and unavoidable actions which have to be performed by all. Even

bodily existence in health is just not possible if one has to live in complete inertia and inaction.

UNSELFISH ACTION DOES NOT CREATE BONDAGE

**yajnaarthaat karmano'nyatra loko'yam karmabandhanah
tadartham karma kaunteya muktasangah samaachara // 3.9 //**

The world is in bondage to work unless they are performed for the sake of Yajna (sacrifice). Therefore, O Son of Kunti, give up attachment and do your work as a sacrifice.

All work is to be done in a spirit of sacrifice, for the sake of the Divine. Yajna here means any unselfish action done with a pure motive. It is a self-sacrificing work undertaken in a spirit of self-dedication for the good of all. Such actions cannot be self-serving but self-liberating and do not bind the performer. An action which is not governed by the spirit of unselfishness binds one to worldliness, however glorious it may be.

WHAT IS SACRIFICE?

**sahayajnaah prajaah srishtwaa purovaacha prajaapatih
anena prasavishyadhvam esha vo'stvishtakaamadhuk // 3.10 //**

The creator (Prajapati), having in the beginning created mankind together with Yajna, said 'by this you multiply'; this shall be the milch cow of your desires'.

When the Universe was created by the Creator - Prajapati - he simultaneously created Yajna also, the spirit of self-dedicated activities which is seen everywhere, e.g. shining of the sun and the moon, flowing of rivers, tolerance of the Earth etc., All these activities show the spirit of sacrifice without any selfish motives. The second part of the verse means that no achievement is impossible for man if he knows how to act in the spirit of self-effacement and self-sacrifice with the required amount of non-attachment.

HOW CAN WELFARE BE ACHIEVED BY SACRIFICE?

**devaan bhaavayataanena te devaa bhaavayantu vah
parasparam bhaavayantah shreyah param avaapsyatha // 3.11 //**

Cherish the Devas with this and may those Devas cherish you, thus cherishing one another you shall gain the highest good.

**ishtaan bhogaan hi vo devaa daasyante yajnabhaavitaah
tair dattaan apradaayaibhyo yo bhunkte stena eva sah // 3.12 //**

Devas, cherished by the sacrifice, will give you the desired objects. Indeed, he who enjoys objects given by the Devas without offering in return to them is verily a thief.

By performing actions as Yajna, as dedication to the Self, recognize and express your sense of appreciation and gratitude to all the Devas, the presiding functionaries of natural laws such as wind, fire etc.

By worshipping the various Devas in a spirit of sacrifice, by being grateful to all the presiding deities of the unchanging laws of nature, you recognize the Self behind all the Devas, behind all the laws of nature and natural phenomenon in this creation. Thus, through the Yajnam- by propitiating the Devas, you propitiate the Self itself.

In any sacrifice or ceremonial ritual we propitiate the Devas by offering oblations to them. It is simply a way of expressing our deep sense of appreciation and gratitude to them for the parts that they play in this creation. Whether one is grateful or not, the sun rises, the rain rains and the wind blow. But by recognizing their functions in this creation, and by expressing one's deep appreciation and gratitude to them, one recognizes the true nature of one's own function in this creation, one becomes an active participant in this creation, and one progressively identifies oneself with the creation and the creator - The Self, Brahman.

When you express your appreciation and gratitude to the Devas, what do they do to you? Having been properly propitiated, the Devas will protect you; nourish you by their functions. Thus, may all the laws of nature - by their own natural functions, uplift you by being an asset to you in your endeavors for gaining your overriding goal of life, namely liberation.

By doing every work as a work of sacrifice totally dedicated to the Self, everything in this creation becomes an asset to you for your own upliftment in life, for your own true progress in life, for a life of non-binding, everlasting prosperity, success and happiness, leading ultimately to *Shreyas*, total Fulfillment in life. Therefore, mutually interacting with each other, may you reap the supreme good, may you gain *moksha*.

What about the person who never says a prayer, who has no sense of gratitude, but only wants to enjoy whatever he, can get out of this world? The one who enjoys all the blessings of daily life without even a sincere expression of gratitude to the Self (Devas) who made all such enjoyments possible, is indeed a thief.

Thus in the Vedic view, every human being is meant for action as a participant in this creation. Every one's destination is the same, namely *shreyas*, *moksha*. One reaches this destination by doing one's Karma with the attitude of Karma Yoga - as an act of sacrifice dedicated to the Self.

In this relative world man and Devas are interdependent. They are nourished by one another. Men offer oblations to the gods; gods in return ensure men's welfare by sending rain and other gifts. Thus a chain of mutual obligation binds together all created beings.

THOSE WHO ACT IN A SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE ARE SUPERIOR PERSONS

**yajnashishtaashinah santo muchyante sarva kilbishaih
bhunjate te twagham paapaa ye pachantyaatma kaaranaat // 3.13 //**

The righteous who eat the remnants of the sacrifice are freed from all sins; but those sinful ones who cook food only for their own sake, verily eat sin.

Sins of the past are the cause for the present pains and the present sins are the cause for future sorrows. All the causes for the sorrows in social life can be removed if the members of the community find happiness in enjoying the results of their efforts performed in true Yajna spirit. As a contrast to this it is pointed out that those who cook for themselves only meaning those who perform actions only with selfish motives are eating nothing but sin. By doing the work in yajna spirit, the selfish life is transformed into an unselfish one and the individual becomes aware of the interdependence of all beings.

ACTION SETS THE WHEELS OF THE COSMOS GOING

**annaad bhavanti bhootani parjanyaad anna sambhavah
yajnaad bhavati parjanyo yajnah karma samudbhavah // 3.14 //**

From food all creatures are born; from rain food is produced; from sacrifice comes rain; sacrifice is born of action.

**karma brahmodbhavam viddhi brahmaakshara samudbhavam
tasmaat sarvagatam brahma nityam yajne pratishthitam // 3.15 //**

Know that action arises from the Vedas, and the Vedas from the Imperishable. Therefore, the all pervading Vedas ever rest in sacrifice.

The cosmic wheel of co-operative action is painted here. The living creatures are born out of food and nourished by food. The mineral wealth of the world becomes assimilable food because of the action of the rain upon it. Rain is the cause for the conversion of mineral raw material into nutritive food in life. Similarly, in all fields of activity profit can be gathered only when the field comes under conditions favorable for it to produce those profits. Self-dedicated activity - Yajna - when performed in any field of endeavor will create conditions-rains- for the field to yield profit - Annam- enjoyable by the society.

This wheel of action is connected with and includes the Supreme. The principle of right action has come out of the Creator himself who is none other than the Imperishable Supreme Reality expressed through the Vedas. Therefore, the all pervading Supreme is ever centered in all efforts undertaken with an honest spirit of self-dedication for the common good. He who lives in unison with this wheel of action is contributing to the harmony of life.

**evam pravartitam chakram naanuvartayateha yah
aghaayur indriyaaraamo mogham paartha sa jeevati // 3.16 //**

He who does not follow the wheel thus set-in motion, but takes delight in the senses, he lives in vain, O Arjuna.

Every member of the Universe follows the principle of Yajna and contributes to the smooth running of the Universal Wheel of Action. But among all the living creatures only man has been endowed with the option of freedom of action - to contribute to the harmonious working of the cosmic mechanism or strike a discordant note.

While a majority of the people live abiding in the Law of Harmony, there are some who do not believe in this Eternal Law and revolt against it. During such dark periods nobody works with the spirit of Yajna without which no favorable circumstances can be created (rain) for the productive potential to manifest. Such seekers of selfish pleasures bring about discordance in the Wheel of Action. They are considered to be living in sin and that too in vain by the Gita.

In these verses (10 to 16) the Vedic conception of sacrifice as an inter-link between God and man is set in the larger context of the interdependence of beings in the cosmos. He who works for himself alone lives in vain.

TO THE ONE WHO REMAINS SATISFIED IN THE SELF, THERE IS NOTHING TO WORK FOR

**yastwaatmaratir eva syaad aatmatriptashcha maanavah
aatmanyeva cha santushtas tasya kaaryam na vidyate // 3.17 //**

But for that man who rejoices only in the Self, who is satisfied in the Self, who is content in the Self alone, verily there is nothing to do.

The motivation for any human action in the outer world is to achieve better satisfaction and contentment. The man of perfection does not depend on external objects for his happiness. He finds his joy, bliss and contentment in his own Divine experience. When he has already achieved satisfaction and contentment, no more desires arise in him. Where there are no desires there is no action. Such a realized man is a person endowed with Self-Knowledge. He has no worldly duties to perform. He is the knower of Brahman.

**naiva tasya kritenaartha naakriteneha kashchana
na chaasya sarvabhooteshu kashchidantha vyapaashrayah // 3.18 //**

He has nothing to gain by what he does in this world, nor anything to lose by what he leaves undone; nor is there anyone, among all beings, on whom he need to depend for any thing.

An ordinary man is required to act for earning profit or avoiding loss. But for a man who discovered eternal satisfaction in his own Self and reached perfect contentment therein no

purpose is served by engaging himself in any action because there is neither anticipation of gain nor fear of loss for him. Such a person depends upon nothing for his joy, neither on any being from the Creator, Brahma to a blade of grass nor on any object.

PERFORM ACTION WITHOUT ATTACHMENT

**tasmaad asaktah satatam kaaryam karma samaachara
asakto hyaacharan karma param aapnoti poorushah // 3.19 //**

Therefore, always do without attachment the work you have to do; for by performing action without attachment a man reaches the Supreme.

After explaining the wheel of action Sri Krishna concludes His dissertation by asking Arjuna to perform actions which are obligatory on his part in his present status in life. Even here The Lord warns him to keep his mind away from the pitfalls of attachments.

Though the liberated man has nothing to gain by action or non-action and is perfectly happy in the enjoyment of the Self, there is such a thing called desireless action which he undertakes for the welfare of the world. The work done without attachment is superior to the work done in a spirit of sacrifice which is itself higher than work done with selfish aims. While this verse says that the man reaches the Supreme performing actions without attachment, Sankara holds that karma yoga helps us to attain purity of mind which leads to salvation. It takes us to perfection indirectly through the attainment of purity of mind.

EXAMPLES SET BY THE WISE

**karmanaiva hi samsiddhim aasthitaa janakaadayah
lokasangraham evaapi sampashyan kartum arhasi // 3.20 //**

Janaka and others attained perfection verily by action only; even with a view to the protection of the masses you should perform action.

Ancient kings like Janaka and others attained perfection or liberation - *samsiddhi* - by the path of action, performing right actions in a spirit of detachment and self-dedication. They set an example to the world by their lives of service and achievement. They attained purity of mind through the performance of duty and then realized Brahman.

Sri Krishna means Arjuna too, belonging to a princely class, who has the responsibility to protect his people, should act diligently and perform his kshatriya duties without running away from the battle as he intended earlier.

We can notice the modern leadership principle here. Born as a king Arjuna has got a greater commitment towards his subjects. He is a leader of men and a lot depends on him and his activities. Therefore, it is his bounden obligation to keep his post and discharge his duties diligently, risking all dangers and fighting enemies for achieving *Lokasangraha*.

Lokasangraha stands for the unity of the world, the inter connectedness of society, protection and maintenance by each other. If the world is not to sink into physical misery and moral degradation, if the common life is to be decent and dignified, religious ethics must control social action. The aim of religion is to spiritualize everyday life for establishing universal brotherhood on earth and maintenance of the world order.

HOW WORLD ORDER CAN BE MAINTAINED BY PERFORMING ONE'S OWN DUTIES?

**yad yad aacharati shreshthas tattadevetaro janah
sa yat pramaanam kurute lokas tad anuvartate // 3. 21 //**

Whatever a great man does, that, others follow; whatever he sets up as the standard, that, the world follows.

Common people are more influenced by the living examples of great men than by the abstract teaching of the scriptures. Man is a social animal. He is also an imitating animal. He takes his ideas of right and wrong from those whom he considers his superiors. The examples set by the leaders are implemented by the followers. As is the quality of leaders, so will be the quality of the followers. Whatever the persons in authority do, the subordinates imitate.

Sri Krishna implies that if Arjuna were to abandon his duty to act, then the entire community will follow the low standard of retreating from action set up by him which will lead to general social decadence. The Lord cites Himself as an example for Arjuna to act.

**na me paarthaasti kartavyam trishu lokeshu kinchana
naanavaaptam avaaptavyam varta eva cha karmani // 3.22 //**

There is nothing in the three worlds, O Partha, that has to be done by me, or is there anything unattained that should be attained by me, yet, I continue to engage myself in work.

Being a Perfect man and a Yogi, Sri Krishna had nothing to gain in this world. His entire life is an example of a perfect life of complete detachment. Even though He had nothing that He did not gain nor had anything further to gain, He was engaging Himself constantly in activity.

Here Krishna speaks of Himself as the Godhead. Though He transcends all claims of duty, yet He acts according to the scriptural injunctions to set an example to others.

**yadi hyaham na varteyam jaatu karmanyatandritah
mama vartmaanuvartante manushyaah paartha sarvashah // 3.23 //**

For, should I not ever engage in action, without relaxation, men would in every way follow my path, O Son of Pritha.

If The Lord remains inactive the people also will imitate Him and sink themselves in inertia and unproductive existence and great harm will come in the world. The entire Universe survives and sustains itself by activity alone. In these verses the word 'I' implies Atman or the Self-realized man of perfection. The God principle serves the pluralistic phenomenal world as a substratum for its existence.

**utseedeyur ime lokaa na kuryaam karma ched aham
sankarasya cha kartaa syaamupahanyaam imaah prajaah // 3.24 //**

If I should cease to work, these worlds would perish. I should then be the cause of confusion and destruction of these people.

If The Lord does not work it will not be conducive to the progress of the Universe. The Universe is not chaos but a cosmos. Nowhere chaotic conditions are observed in the working of the cosmic forces. Movement of planets, occurring of seasons, laws of the oceans, various social orders and disciplines etc., always obey the law of nature or God.

The Lord represents not only the law governing the outer world of things but also the law that governs the inner world of thoughts and emotions. Human society is divided into four castes on the basis of individual mental temperaments. In case the law governing the inner temperaments does not function there will be confusion in behavior and instability in the character of people bringing about their own destruction.

Concepts and Issues

Arjuna is confused about the relative importance of knowledge and work. If the man of knowledge is superior to the man of action, then why is he being asked to pursue the path of action and undertake such a terrible act like a fratricidal war?

Sri Krishna replies that there are two types of people viz. the purely intellectual and the physically active. The path of knowledge is prescribed for the intellectual, whereas the path of action is the best for the physically dynamic. But it should be born in mind that dedicated action by itself cannot be the end. It is only the means to achieve the final goal of Realization of the Self. On the other hand, the path of wisdom takes one directly to the final goal.

The path of knowledge is not the proper one for Arjuna as he, being a Kshatriya, does not belong to the meditative and intellectual type. His natural aptitude is for action and he can purify himself only through action. So he has to discharge his duties in a selfless spirit of pure devotion without expecting any fruits of such action.. If one understands the art of performance of actions without selfishness, one is already in the path of knowledge as these two paths are not contradictory but complementary.

An action performed without any concern for the fruits thereof is not inaction because such action never produces any psychological reaction and gains wonderful results while inaction i.e. running away from action, produces nothing but idleness.

All beings always remain active. Inaction is against the law of nature. Inaction by external withdrawal of sense organs from the sense objects while the mind remaining preoccupied with the thinking about those objects is hypocrisy or escapism and self deception. A real seeker of wisdom is the one, who conquers his organs of perception by his mind but employs his organs of action in the selfless discharge of his duty. Performance of one's duty is, in all respects, preferable to utter inaction. One cannot live even the everyday ordinary life without doing anything.

Only those actions which are prompted by desires entail bondages of vasanas but not those performed in the discharge of one's duty with no expectation of the result and meant only as an offering at the feet of The Lord. It is called performing of actions in the spirit of Yagna i.e. sacrificing our selfish interests for the welfare of the humanity at large. Here the word Yagna which means Vedic ritualism includes all self-less co-operative activities.

In the beginning the Creator created all living beings with a capacity of yagna in everybody i.e. to work with a selfless attitude, in a spirit of dedication for the common welfare. The spirit of co-operation between the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the wise and the dull, the spirit of give and take and many more such noble and divine values of harmonious living in society are meant by the word Yagna. He only commits stealing who is only ready to take but not to give. People used to propitiate God by sacrifice who in turn bestowed them with plenty and prosperity through rains, fertility of the soil to yield nourishing food.

Mother Nature provides many examples of the spirit of constant sacrifice like the Sun giving light, the Earth satisfying all human requirements and the Fire giving heat etc. Thus sacrifice is an unselfish action. Prosperity and plenty are the direct results of such dedicated actions.

The capacity to do well in us has been given by the Creator, the Supreme, manifested through its own creative urge. What we are bound to do in our station in life we must do well for our own good and for the good of the entire community. Wherever such a noble work is undertaken in a spirit of co-operation (Yagna) there is God, the Highest. Those who have reached the highest state of eternal contentment need not pursue this path because they have nothing to gain by actions as the individuality in them created by ego has already ended and they do not depend upon anyone for anything.

Sri Krishna advises Arjuna that he still being a seeker of Knowledge should discharge his duty in a spirit of dedication as an offering to The Lord citing examples of King Janaka and others of Perfect Wisdom who attained Perfection through selfless discharge of their duties. The Lord gives His own example of engaging Himself in activities continuously although it is immaterial for Him whether He acts or not.

The reason for this is that the common people with limited intelligence imitate the great and so if The Lord has to remain inactive, they will also remain idle leading to indiscipline

Live as the Gita Teaches You to Live

- Action one must perform; but it should be performed in the spirit of Yajna. The aim is Lokasangraha, the benefit at large.
- Interdependence of beings in the cosmos should not be forgotten. He who works for himself alone lives in vain.
- Leadership qualities are stressed. Set an example to others in right living.

Points to Ponder

1. What was Arjuna's doubt in the beginning of the Chapter and what was Sri Krishna's clarification to it?
2. How does a man bound by action?
3. Who is a hypocrite?
4. What is the philosophy of action?
5. How can one be free from action?
6. What is the cosmic wheel of co-operation?
7. What is meant by Lokasangraha?
8. What is the difference between the activities of the wise and the ignorant?
9. Why it is important for the wise man to set an example to others in rightful living?

Next time we will proceed from the Verse 3.25

HARIH OM

Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 3 (Part-2)
Karma Yogah : Yoga Of Action
T.N.Sethumadhavan

Preamble

We had seen in the previous verses that by citing His own example The Lord described the consequences of not doing any action and proved that for the sake of the world order it is necessary for all of us to perform our allotted duties. Bhagavan continues his sermon and advises that it is incumbent upon even the man of knowledge to perform action for the sake of world amity.

The Text

**saktaah karmanyavidwaamso yathaa kurvanti bhaarata
kuryad vidwaam stathaa saktash chikeershur lokasangraham // 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.

It is well known that every member of the society by and large always keeps himself busy through out his life time performing actions in his chosen field. A man of Self-realization also works in the world with the same enthusiasm and sincerity as an average man of the society with the difference that the actions of the ignorant are motivated by attachments and anxieties for the fruits of actions while the man of perfection will work without attachment and for the purpose of the welfare of the world at large.

Attachment becomes an obstruction only when it is ego-centric. But to the extent the attachment envelopes the welfare of a larger section of the community it gathers ethical value. Hence the advice to Arjuna is that he must fight as a warrior who is called upon to protect the higher values of living unattached to his ego-centric conception of himself and his people.

The idea is that an ignorant person acts zealously for his personal happiness; but a wise man should act, with the same zeal, for the welfare of others.

**na buddhibedam janayed ajnaanaam karmasanginaam
joshayet sarva karmaani vidwaan yuktah samaacharan // 3.26 //**

Let no enlightened man unsettle the understanding of the ignorant people who are attached to action; he should engage them in action, himself performing it with devotion.

This verse is a sort of precaution to the over-zealous explaining the art of giving guidance to others. A society functioning in a particular way should not be suddenly asked to stop and change its direction by a leader. On the contrary the leader should fall in line with the generation and slowly and steadily guide and help them to act in the right direction

setting his own example. When a man of equipoise works in the society at large, the chances are that he will start advising on abstract ideologies and ethics which may make the ordinary people to conclude that renunciation of all activities is the direct path to Self-development and thus give up prematurely all work. The men of wisdom are warned not to go against the spirit of the times.

No wise man should unsettle his generation's firm faith in their actions. He should perform even the ordinary actions in a diviner and better way and set an example to the world in performing actions without any selfish motive or attachment so that the lesser folk may follow his example.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE MAN OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE MAN ATTACHED TO ACTION

**prakriteh kriyamaanaani gunaih karmaani sarvashah
ahamkaara vimoodhaatmaa kartaa'hamiti manyate // 3.27 //**

All actions are being performed by the Gunas of Prakriti. But he, whose mind is deluded by egoism, thinks 'I am the doer'.

Earlier it was explained how ignorance leads to desires, desires to thoughts and how thoughts in conjunction with mental tendencies i.e. Gunas viz. Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas-manifest themselves in the outer world as actions of different qualities. Nobler the thought, nobler the action and meaner the thought, meaner the action and so on.

Thus the Gunas modify themselves into the outside world, the body and the senses which are called the modes of Prakriti. They are classified into twenty three categories viz. intellect, ego, mind, the five subtle elements of ether etc., the ten organs of perception and action, and the five objects of senses viz. sound, touch, sight, taste and smell. These are the performers of all action. The word 'action' includes all the functions of the organs of perception and action (*jnana indriyas and karma indriyas*). The self looks on without participating in any way in the action done by the body and the senses. Whatever actions take place in this world are nothing but the operations of the aforesaid modes of Prakriti and the absolute and formless Atma or the Self has really nothing to do with them.

An ignorant man, however, identifies the Self with the aggregate of the body and the senses and calls it as 'I' and thinks that the Self is the doer.

Even though the Self or the soul has no relation with actions, the unwise man identifying himself with the body and the senses associates himself with the different actions of the body and thus assumes himself to be the doer of those actions. In other words he thinks it is he who resolves, he who reflects, he who hears, he who sees, he who eats, he who drinks, sleeps, walks and so on and thus traces every action to himself. Thus he ascribes to the Self all the characteristics that really belong to the Gunas. That is why action becomes the cause of bondage to him. It is the reason for him to go through the process of repeated births and deaths to reap the fruits of those actions

BUT THE ENLIGHTENED MAN FEELS DIFFERENTLY

**tattwavittu mahaabaaho gunakarma vibhaagayoh
gunaa guneshu vartanta iti matwaa na sajjate // 3.28 //**

But he who has true insight into the respective spheres of Gunas and their actions, holding that it is the Gunas (in the form of senses, mind etc.) that move among the Gunas (objects of perception) does not get attached to them, O Mighty Arjuna.

As a contrast to the attitude of the ignorant man explained in the previous verse, Sri Krishna here explains the attitude of the wise man who knows that the Self is entirely distinct from the Gunas, their classification and functions.

The enlightened man who has obtained insight into the categories of the gunas and actions, attributes every action of the mind, intellect, senses and the body to the fact that it is the product of these gunas in the shape of all instruments of perception such as the mind, intellect and senses that are moving within the sphere of their respective objects, which are also products of the gunas and that he has no relation with either. Therefore, he does not get attached to either any action or to their fruits in the shape of agreeable or disagreeable experiences.

The difference between the active enlightened man and the active ignorant man is that the former is beyond the influence of the gunas and considers himself as a non-doer while the latter is controlled by the gunas and feels that everything is being done by him.

**prakriter gunasammoodhaah sajjante gunakarmasu
taan akritsnavidandaan kritsnavin na vichaalayet // 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.

Ignorant people perform actions with the expectation of results. The wise, who have knowledge of the Self, should not disturb the conviction of such ignorant persons (people of insufficient knowledge, or men of meager intelligence) because if their minds are unsettled they will give up actions themselves and plunge themselves into inertia.

Therefore, in the beginning they should be encouraged to perform actions irrespective of their attachment to its fruits and gradually they should be taught the goal of selfless activities for the attainment of Self-realization.

HOW SUCH PERSONS OF IMPERFECT UNDERSTANDING SHOULD PERFORM ACTIONS?

**mayi sarvaani karmaani sannyasyaadhyaatma chetasaa
niraasheer nirmamo bhootwaa yudhyaswa vigatajwarah // 3.30 //**

Surrendering all actions to Me, with the mind intent on the Self, freeing yourself from the longing and selfishness, fight unperturbed by grief.

THIS VERSE IS THE HEART OF THIS CHAPTER CONVEYING ITS CENTRAL THEME. THE LORD REVEALS TO ARJUNA THE DEFINITE DISCIPLINE THAT WOULD LEAD HIM TO HIS HIGHEST GOAL.

Here the word 'me' means not Sri Krishna, the person but the Supreme Self, the Divine Being, the Supreme Lord, the Eternal and the Omniscient, the Self of all. The Lord asks Arjuna to fight on surrendering all activities unto Him, with the mind always concentrated on the Self. Surrendering all actions does not mean inactivity but acting without attachment and the sense of possession with regard to them. Actions performed with egocentric and selfish motives become a bondage. Actions performed without attachment and desires are not actions at all in as much as they are not capable of producing any painful reactions.

It also means giving up of wrong motives behind actions. Purification of motives is possible only when the mind is made to concentrate on the Self and the Divine glory. Actions performed with such mind cannot be ordinary actions but they will be activities performed for the sake of The Lord and are the expressions of the Supreme Will through an individual.

The Lord further advises action without longing, ego and mental perturbation. Longing is an expectation of a happening at a future point of time. Ego is one's own self-estimation based on his past. To act without ego and longing thus means acting without the memories of the past or the anxieties about the future but to live in the present. Even in the present there is a chance for the man of action to waste his time and energy in unnecessarily worrying about his activities through his inborn nature. This anxiety and worry is what is called here as mental fever or perturbation.

The idea is that we must engage in work by self-surrender to the Lord who presides over cosmic existence and activity. "Thy will be done" should be our attitude in all work. We must do the work with the sense that we are the servants of The Lord. The word 'fight' indicates individual's confrontation with circumstances and situations in daily life.

RESULT OF SUCH ACTION BASED ON SURRENDERING IT TO THE SUPREME

**ye me matam idam nityam anutishthanti maanavaah
shraddhaavanto'nasooyanto muchyante te'pi karmabhih // 3.31 //**

Those men who constantly practice this teaching of mine with faith and without finding fault are also freed from the bondage of all actions.

Shraddha -faith- is a mental attitude. It is faith in one's own Self, in the Scriptures and in the teachings of the spiritual preceptor. It is a combination of the higher emotions of reverence and humility. It is the sincerity of purpose.

Sri Krishna advocates Karma Yoga as a path that takes one ultimately to the Supreme because through desireless activity alone when performed with full faith and without criticism and questioning we will be able to bring about Vasana-exhaustion and thus make the mind purer for its meditative purposes.

The words ‘they too are freed from the bondage of all actions’ are intended to show that when by pursuing this discipline it is possible even for an ordinary person to get over the binding effects of action by surrendering the results of action to the Supreme, it should be much easier for Arjuna to attain that state.

WHAT IS THE HARM IF THIS ADVICE OF THE LORD IS NOT FOLLOWED?

**ye twetad abhyasooyanto naanutishthanti me matam
sarvajnaanavimoodham staaan viddhi nashtaan achetasah // 3.32 //**

But those who find fault with my teaching and do not practice it, deluded in all knowledge and devoid of discrimination, know them to be doomed to destruction.

Sri Krishna warns here that those who are obstinate in finding fault with His teachings without practicing them are doomed for destruction. Such people will be more and more deluded and will lose their discrimination.

Karma Yoga is a way of life and one has to live it if one wants to receive His grace. The path of work is a process of elimination of desires in us. When egoism and egocentric desires are eliminated the work done through such pure mind is a divine action which will have enduring achievements. To the extent an individual does not practice this efficient way of work he loses his discriminative capacity and ultimately will meet his destruction.

ACTION IS DRIVEN BY ONE’S OWN NATURE

**sadrisham cheshtate swasyaah prakriter jnaanavaan api
prakritim yaanti bhootani nigrahaah kim karishyati // 3.33 //**

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

The question as to why some people do not follow the teachings of The Lord and instead act on their own is answered in this verse; the reason is that their lower nature proves too strong for them. Every one is conditioned by his thoughts which in turn are influenced by his nature (tendency) or *prakriti*. Even an honest person finds it difficult to practice the technique in life shown by The Lord because of his own mental conditioning overwhelmed by his incapacity to pursue the path of action.

Prakriti is the mental equipment with which one is born as the result of the past acts performed in a previous life. This nature is the mainspring of the man’s action. This must

run its course; there is no escape from this and even God cannot prevent its operation (Shankara). Even He ordains that past deeds produce their natural effects.

Restraint or forcible repression of senses for renouncing activities cannot be of much avail since actions flow inevitably from the workings of Prakriti and the Self is only an important witness. This indicates the omnipotence of the nature over the Self which makes us to act according to our nature, the law of our being. However, this is not a statement of despair to the effect that there is no scope for personal exertion to reach the highest goal and that the teachings of Sri Krishna are all purposeless. On the other hand it is a call to find out our true being and give expression to it as explained in the next verse.

ROLE FOR PERSONAL EXERTION

**indriyasye'ndriyasyaarthe raagadweshau vyavasthitau
tayor na vasham aagacchet tau 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.

Attachment and aversion of the sense organs to sense objects are natural to every one. Although the sense objects as such are not capable of attraction or repulsion it is the mind which produces such agitations because of its being conditioned by vasanas. Thus mind develops attachment for the agreeable objects and aversion for disagreeable ones. Sri Krishna does not advise running away from the sense objects but emphatically says 'Let none come under its sway' meaning that one should be a master of the senses and not their victim.

If we do not interfere attachments and aversions will determine our acts. So long as we act in certain ways because we like them and abstain from some others because we dislike them we will be bound by our actions.

But if we overcome these impulses from our egocentric ideas and act from a sense of duty, we cannot be the victims of the play of Prakriti. Thus in the process of controlling the mind - stopping it from running after the objects of attachment and aversion - lies the personal exertion for the seeker. That is his Purushartha.

Linking this advice to the previous verse it can be understood that it is not possible for anybody to renounce all his activities forcibly. But man can by changing the aim of his life, turn the course of life from one direction to the other. In other words, avoiding likes and dislikes he can convert his actions as aids to God-realization.

DANGER IN PERCEIVING OTHER'S DUTIES AS BETTER THAN ONE'S OWN

**shreyaan swadharmo vigunah paradharmaat swanushthitaat
swadharme nidhanam shreyah paradharmo bhayaavahah // 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.

Although the word Dharma is meant here as duty, in a special sense it is one's own basic nature or vasana. Swadharma is the type of vasanas one finds in his mind. To act according to one's taste, inborn and natural, is the only method to live in peace and joy. To act against one's vasanas is to act in terms of Paradharma which is fraught with danger.

Here the Swadharma of Arjuna is that of a prince and not that of Brahmana . He wanted to take up the latter abandoning the former. In this verse Sri Krishna reminds him that to act according to his own vasanas or Dharma, even though imperfect, is the right path for his development. It is dangerous to suppress one's own personality expression and imitate the activities of others, however divinely they may be. There is more happiness in doing one's own work even without excellence than in doing another's duty well. We must play our part, manfully, be it great or small.

The implication is that Arjuna's thought of desisting from fight and going in for the calm and peaceful life of a Brahmana is prompted by man's natural desire to shun what is disagreeable and adopt what is momentarily agreeable to the senses. He should on no account yield to such weakness. It is indeed much better for a person to die while discharging his own duty, though it may not have any merit, than doing the duty of another, though it may be performed in a perfect manner, because the duty of another has many pitfalls.

THE ENEMY IS DESIRE AND ANGER

arjuna uvaacha

**atha kena prayukto'yam paapam charati poorushah
anicchannapi vaarshneya balaad iva niyojitah // 3.36 //**

Arjuna said

But under what compulsion does a man commit sin, in spite of himself, O Varshneya, and driven, as it were, by force?

This question raised by Arjuna is illustrative of our daily situations. Everybody knows what is right and what is not right, what is good and what is bad. Yet when it comes to action people are invariably tempted to commit the wrong.

Arjuna's query is why this paradoxical confusion between one's ideology and one's own actions. The Divine in us wants us to achieve great things but the animal in us wants us to do most abominable things many times much against our will. We seem to be constrained by an outside force. Arjuna wants to know the cause for this peculiar phenomenon.

**sri bhagavaan uvaacha
kaama esha krodha esha rajoguna samudbhavah
mahaashano mahaapaapmaa viddhyenam iha vairinam // 3.37 //**

Sri Bhagavan said

It is desire, it is anger born out of the quality of Rajas, all sinful and all devouring ; know this as the foe here (in this world).

The cause of all sins and wrong actions in this world is desire. Anger is also a desire expressed in another form. When a man's desire is not gratified he becomes angry with those who stand as obstacles in the way of their fulfillment. When a desire arises the quality of Rajas in a man urges him to work for its satisfaction.

The desire-anger-emotion combination of three-in-one is the root cause which makes an individual to compromise with higher values of existence. Once the virus of desire enters the intellectual computer the results are bound to be chaotic, blocking out the entire wisdom because desire is never satiated by its gratification. One gets rid of desire only through the constant practice of detachment. Therefore Sri Krishna says desire is the man's greatest enemy on the earth because man commits sin only at the command of desire against his will and better judgment which lands him in terrible suffering in the form of repeated birth and death.

HOW DOES DESIRE AFFECT MAN?

**dhoomenaavriyate vahnir yathaadarsho malena cha
yatho'lbenaavrito garbhas tathaa tenedam aavritam // 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).

`This' means true knowledge or wisdom and `that' means desire which is clearly stated in the next verse. The three different examples refer to the different degrees to which desire in the form of ignorance envelopes and conceals the inner Light in man and delude our capacity to think rationally.

Discrimination is blocked by the sense of attachment in the mind for the worldly objects. Desires fall under three categories depending upon the quality of attachments - Tamasic - inert, Rajasic - active, and Sattwic -divine.

Even Sattwic desires veil the discrimination just as smoke envelopes fire where rise of 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.

For the Rajasic where intellect is covered by desire prompted agitations, the example is of wiping out of dust on a mirror. Here the covering by the impurities is complete as compared to the Sattwic. In the case of smoke fire can be at least perceived while dust

completely blocks the reflection in a mirror. Hence, in this case the efforts for the removal of the dirt of desires require more time and effort.

In the case of a Tamasic, diviner aspects are completely shut out from the view by base animal instincts. The case of a foetus covered with amnion fluid in the womb is given as an illustration. Here there is no method of removing the covering until a definite period of time is elapsed. Similarly the low desires can be removed only after a longer period of spiritual evolution a Tamasic has to undergo.

**aavritam jnaanam etena jnaanino nityavairinaa
kaamaropena kaunteya dushpoorenaanaleha cha // 3.39 //**

O Son of Kunti, wisdom is enveloped by this constant enemy of the wise in the form of desire, which is unappeasable as the fire.

Desires are insatiable. They are never satisfied by the enjoyments of the objects of the desires. They grow more and more as does the fire to which fuel is added. Desire screens off our capacity to discriminate right from the wrong, real from the unreal. The ignorant man considers desire as his friend because his senses are gratified. The wise man knows by experience that desire will bring nothing but suffering to him. He knows that the enemy in the form of desire does not allow the ideas of discrimination, dispassion and disinterestedness to get a hold in the mind of a seeker and presents obstacles in the path of his spiritual progress. Hence it is said to be the constant enemy of the wise but not the ignorant.

SEAT OF DESIRE

**indriyaani mano buddhir asyaadhishtaanam uchyate
etair vimohayatesha jnaanamaavritya dehinam // 3.40 //**

The senses, the mind and the intellect are said to be its seat; through these it deludes the embodied by veiling his wisdom.

If the enemy's hide-outs are known it is easy to capture him. Similarly Sri Krishna gives the clues to Arjuna as to where the enemies of wisdom lurk so that he can locate and eliminate them. The Lord says the senses, the mind and the intellect are seats of action for the desire to play havoc with the inner serenity and equipoise of a man. The sense organs transmit the stimuli received from the objects of enjoyment to the mind which working in close collaboration with the intellect starts living in the experience of sense enjoyments. To eliminate the inner enemy of desire at its source - sense-organs, mind and intellect- is the crux of the problem. How it is to be achieved is explained in the following verses.

CONTROL THE SENSES AND DESTROY THE DESIRE

**tasmaat twam indriyaanyaadau niyamyaharashabha
paapmaanam prajahi hyenam jnaana vijnaana 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.

Sri Krishna states that the first step to kill desire is to control the senses. Desire is referred to here as a sinful thing posing a threat to both knowledge and wisdom. Desire is a sinful thing because it leads us to live a life of lowly nature.

Adi Sankara defines Knowledge - *Jnana* - as the knowledge of the Self acquired through a study of the scriptures and from a teacher. This is an indirect knowledge or *Paroksha Jnana*. *Vijnana* or wisdom is the direct knowledge or the personal experience, *anubhava*, of the things so taught or Self-realization - *Aparoksha Jnana*. Thus desire oriented agitations are not only an impediment to our direct personal spiritual experiences but also to our indirect way of acquiring knowledge through the study of scriptures.

**indriyaani paraanyaahur indriyebhyah param manah
manasastu paraa buddhir yo buddheh paratastu sah // 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.

**evam buddheh param buddhwa samstabhyaatmaanam aatmanaa
jahi shatrum mahaabaaho kaamaroopam duraasadam // 3.43 //**

Thus knowing Him who is superior to the intellect and restraining the self by the Self, O Mighty armed, destroy the enemy in the form of desire, no doubt hard indeed to conquer.

These two verses conclude the third chapter of The Gita giving the seeker a technique to conquer desire, the inner enemy. The Upanishadic method of meditation for the withdrawal of ego from the outer world of sense objects to the inner world of the Self for the purposes of curbing desire oriented tendencies and thereby achieving Self-discovery is commended here. These verses give us the hierarchy of levels of consciousness.

The physical body is gross, external and limited. As compared to this the senses are superior because they are subtler and more internal and have a wider range of activity. Superior to the senses is the mind as it can direct the function of the senses (as it can undertake the work of the senses also). Superior to the mind is the intellect because it is endowed with the faculty of discrimination and finality; when the mind doubts, the intellect decides. But The Self is superior to even the intellect because the intellect draws its power to illuminate from the Self alone. The Self is the indweller in the body, the Witness of the activities of the body, senses, mind and intellect.

Sri Krishna advises Arjuna to conquer desire with this understanding of the superior power of the Self, though it is difficult to achieve. The Lord points out that a man of discrimination and dispassion will be able to achieve this by increasing his Sattwic quality and by appealing to the indwelling Presence, The Self, through meditation. This

controlling of the lower self i.e. the mind with the knowledge of the Higher Self is termed here as 'restraining the self by the Self'.

The technique of meditation is a conscious withdrawal of all our identifications with our body, mind and intellect and thereby turning our awareness or desire-faculty towards our diviner existence where the ego is under the perfect control of the Self with no desires to agitate the mind any more.

Thus a constructive re-organization of life is taught here by the Gita without the suppression or rejection of the life's situations.

“This Chapter expounds the necessity for the performance of work without any selfish attachment to results, with a view to securing the welfare of the world, with the realization that agency belongs to the modes of *prakriti* or to God himself.” - Dr.S.Radhakrishnan.

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

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

Concepts and Issues

In view of what was told earlier the wise and the ordinary man should always be engaged in activities, the only difference being the former performs action with selfless motive while the latter does it with selfish motives. Here The Lord warns Arjuna that the man of knowledge should desist from advising the ignorant to improve as it is likely to be misunderstood by the latter resulting in the cessation of action by them. To avoid such consequences, the wise should set an example by sticking to the path of action.

Ignorance of the nature of the Self creates desires, desires generate thoughts, and thoughts produce actions. Due to ignorance and ego we think that we perform, we succeed etc. while actually the actions are performed by the organs of action in us. Because of the imperfect understanding we consider we are the doers and hence we get attached to the anxiety for enjoying the fruits of our actions. But in the case of a wise man, who identifies himself with the Self and has gone beyond his ego sense, there is no attachment for the fruits of actions because he knows that he, the Self, is not the performer of actions and that it is only the sense organs which do the work.

The ignorant can understand the higher values of action by dedicating himself to the service of the society at large with pure selfless actions. All actions have to be offered free from selfish motives at the feet of The Lord. Such actions without selfish motives are not done by the individual; he is only a medium through which the Divine Power manifests itself, through all its actions. Those who perform actions in this unselfish spirit,

with full faith in The Lord and His teachings are released for ever from the bondages caused by action. The ignorant who criticize His teachings and work to promote their selfish interests meet their own downfall.

The vasanas (impressions, tastes and inclinations brought over from the previous births) order our intellect and we cannot pursue any path other than that ordered by the direction of our own present vasanas. Man's present behavior and attitude to life are mostly governed by his past actions -vasanas. However, he can raise himself if he masters his senses that produce attachment and hatred. He should try not to become a slave of his own senses.

The mind is the storehouse of vasanas. By giving up selfish actions and attachment to their rewards, the vasanas do not get multiplied and the ego, the sense of 'I', ceases to exist.

One's own duty is the best for oneself for one's own spiritual advancement. Sometimes, man is forced to commit evil deeds in spite of all his efforts against them. This is because of dual personality in everybody - good and evil are found in varying proportions. Good thoughts prompt good actions and evil thoughts encourage evil deeds. This lower nature is called ignorance which breeds desires. Desire is the root cause of all evil.

Just as smoke veils the bright fire, dust the reflecting surface of a mirror and the unborn child by the mother's womb, so also the desire veils the Ever Pure Self, the all-illuminating self-knowledge. Desire acts through the organs of perception and organs of action at the mental and intellectual levels. So the first task to destroy desire is to check and control senses. If that is accomplished the All-illuminating Perfect knowledge reveals itself to be experienced as the Self.

Man is made up of the physical body, the senses, the mind and the intellect. Beyond all these the pure Atman or the Self shines. The strategy to conquer desire is to govern the mind by the intellect.

With meditation upon the Self purify the intellect. In him who has thus become one with the Self, the Lord of the Lords, all desires are completely at rest for ever.

Live as the Gita Teaches You to Live

All human problems arise when the mind is extroverted through its immediate agents viz. the senses. The mind seeks happiness which is its real nature. Due to lack of understanding it tries to derive happiness through the senses and goes out to the world of objects. Instead, if the mind is drawn back to its source, which is the Supreme Consciousness, it begins to experience inexpressible happiness.

Man without thoughts (individual consciousness) is God and God with individual consciousness becomes man.

The Lord asks us to go beyond the three Gunas -Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas and be aware of the functions of intellect, mind and senses. The seat of desire is up to the level of the intellect. When the intellect and mind merge with consciousness within, the desires lose spontaneously their potency like a wave merging in the ocean.

In this Chapter the Lord showed from various points of view the necessity of performing one's prescribed duties and how to perform such duties by dedicating them to God and renouncing all desire, attachment and the sense of possession keeping in mind that the agency for performing the work belongs to the modes of *prakriti* or to God himself..

He also stressed that one should not come under the sway of likes and dislikes while performing one's duty. He brought out clearly that desire is the root for all the evils and appealed that the desire should be conquered by the control of the mind by the intellect.

Points to Ponder

1. What are the urges against which we must guard ourselves?
2. What is the notion of the ignorant man while acting?
3. How the wise man is not bound by actions and their results?
4. What is that which propels a man to act in a particular way even if he does not wish to act that way?
5. How does desire bring disaster to an individual's personality?
6. How to destroy desire, the inner enemy of man?
7. Write short notes on
 - 1) Spirit of Sacrifice - 'Yagna'
 - 2) Organs of Perception
 - 3) Organs of action
 - 4) Inaction
 - 5) Vasanas
 - 6) Seats of desire
 - 7) Swadharma and Paradharma.

Next time we will take up Chapter 4

HARIH OM