

# Srimad Bhagavad Gita

Chapter 4  
Jnaana Karma Sanyaasa Yogah:  
Yoga of Renunciation of Action in Knowledge

Transliterated Sanskrit Text

Free Translation

&

Brief Explanation

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Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 4 (Part-1)  
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Preamble

In the previous Chapter Sri Krishna advocated the path of Karma Yoga as a method to realize the Self. For fear that Arjuna may misunderstand this advice as the only way for the self-development Lord Krishna reveals in this chapter how spiritual knowledge is received by successive disciples and the reason and nature of His descent into the material worlds. He also explains the paths of action and knowledge as well as the wisdom regarding the supreme knowledge which results at the culmination of the two paths. Thus this chapter dealing with the paths of action and knowledge is entitled: 'The Yoga of Renunciation of Action in Knowledge'. In a way this Chapter can be considered as an Appendix to the Third Chapter.

In this Chapter we can observe Sri Krishna talking to Arjuna not as his friend or charioteer but as an omnipotent and omniscient God probably to instill in his mind the necessary reverence and respect for Him and His teachings.

The Text

TRADITION OF JNAANA YOGA

**sri bhagavaan uvaacha  
imam vivaswate yogam proktavan aham avyayam  
vivaswaan manave praaha manur ikshwaakave'braveet // 4.1 //**

*Sri Bhagavan said*

*I taught this eternal Yoga to Vivasvan; he taught it to Manu and Manu proclaimed it to Ikshvaku.*

This eternal yoga means the yoga taught in the Second and Third Chapters. The fruit of this yoga is liberation, which transcends time, space and causality. Hence it is eternal. Vivasvan is the Sun-God. Manu is the ancient law-giver. Ikshvaku is the ancestor of Kshatriyas whose lineage goes back to the Sun-God.

Jnaana Yoga, discussed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapters, is based on renunciation and is attained through the performance of duty. Thus it comprehends both the life of activity (*pravritti*) and the life of retirement (*nivritti*) as taught in the Vedas. The path of knowledge has been described through the Gita as leading directly to liberation. Therefore, it is extolled here by pointing out its antiquity.

**evam paramparaa praaptam imam raajarshayo viduh  
sa kaaleneha mahataa yogo nashtah parantapa // 4.2 //**

*This knowledge, handed down thus in regular succession, the royal sages knew. This yoga by long lapse of time has been lost to the world, O Parantapa (Arjuna).*

The royal sages - men like Rama and Janaka who were kings and at the same time sages also because of their austerities and wisdom knew this Yoga. If the leaders of a country possess the knowledge of Yoga i.e. moral values of life, they will percolate down the line into the entire society.

The teachings of this yoga were lost by falling into the hands of selfish and unrighteous people. It is the intention of the Lord to revive it through the Gita.

**sa evaayam mayaa te'dya yogah proktah puraatanah  
bhakto'si me sakhaa cheti rahasyam hyetad uttamam // 4.3 //**

*That same ancient yoga has been taught to you by Me today, for you are My devotee and My friend and it is a supreme secret*

The yoga mentioned here is considered secret because it is not commonly known to everybody and that it should be revealed only to those who are worthy to receive it.

ARJUNA'S DOUBT

**arjuna uvaacha  
aparam bhavato janma param janma vivaswatah  
katham etadvijaaneeyaam twam aadau proktavaan iti // 4.4 //**

*Arjuna said  
Later was your birth and earlier was the birth of Vivasvan; how, then, am I to understand that you taught this Yoga in the beginning?*

The birth of Sri Krishna was later than that of The Sun. Arjuna wants to know how he should believe that the former taught this yoga to the latter.

THEORY OF AVATARS

**sri bhagavaan uvaacha  
bahooni me vyateetaani janmaani tava chaarjuna  
taanyaham veda sarvaani na twam vettha parantapa // 4.5 //**

*Sri Bhagavan said  
Many births of mine have passed as well as of yours, O Arjuna ; I know them all but you know them not ,O Parantapa .*

Arjuna with a limited knowledge thinks that Sri Krishna is an ordinary man and not the omnipotent and omniscient Lord. This doubt is cleared here. Sri Krishna knows the past and future because He is the Lord Himself. He is unobstructed in His power of vision.

## SECRET OF LORD'S BIRTH

**ajo'pi sannavyayaatmaa bhootaanaam eeshwaro'pi san  
prakritim swaam adhishthaaya sambhavaamyatmamaayayaa // 4.6 //**

*Though I am unborn, and eternal by nature, and though I am the Lord of all beings, yet subjugating my own nature, I come into being by my own Maya.*

The Lord is eternal by nature because Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, which forms His nature, is eternal and changeless. 'My own nature' means His inherent power of Maya. Maya inheres in Brahman, but Brahman remains unaffected by it in the same way as the poison of a cobra which is in the cobra but cannot injure it. This power of Maya which is made up of the three Gunas, deludes the embodied being from recognizing the Lord who is his true Self. 'I come into being by my own Maya' means that it is through Maya the Lord appears to be born. His embodiment is not real as are the embodiments of other beings.

The embodiments of human beings (birth in the human form) are not voluntary. Driven by nature or prakriti, through ignorance, they are born again and again. The Lord controls nature and assumes embodiment through His own free will. The ordinary birth of creatures is determined by the force of nature while The Lord takes birth through His own power. He uses His nature in such a way which is free from subjection to karma. Yogamaya refers to the free will of God, His incomprehensible power.

To put it differently, the embodiment of the Lord is only an appearance. A created being is under the control of Maya but the Lord is the controller of Maya. The birth and death of the Lord depends upon His own will. But the birth and death of an embodied being are due to the law of Karma. This is the difference between an embodied being and the incarnate Lord.

## THE LORD'S INCARNATION

**yadaa yadaa hi dharmasya glaanir bhavati bhaarata  
abhyutthaanam adharmasya tadaa'tmaanam srijaamyaham // 4.7 //**

*Whenever there is a decline of dharma (righteousness), O Bharata , and rise of adharm (unrighteousness), then I manifest myself.*

## FOR WHAT PURPOSE?

**paritraanaaya saadhoonaam vinaashaaya cha dushkritam  
dharma samsthaapanaarthaaya sambhavaami yuge yuge // 4.8 //**

*For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of righteousness, I am born in every age.*

Whenever there is a serious tension in life, when the all-pervasive materialism invades the hearts of human souls, to preserve the equilibrium, a responsive manifestation of

wisdom and righteousness is essential. The Supreme, though unborn and undying, becomes manifest in human embodiment to overthrow the forces of ignorance and selfishness.

Avatara means descent, one who has descended. The Divine comes down to the earthly plane to raise it to a higher status. The purpose of Avatar is to inaugurate a new world, a new Dharma. By His teaching and example, He shows how a human being can raise himself to a higher grade of life.

The issue between right and wrong is the most crucial one. The Lord works on the side of the right. Love and mercy are more powerful than hatred and cruelty.

Dharma will conquer Adharma, truth wins over falsehood and power behind death will be overthrown by the Reality, Sat Chit Ananda - Being, Intelligence and Bliss.

Dharma means the mode of the being. It is the essential nature of a being that determines its mode of behavior. So long as our conduct is in conformity with our essential nature, we are acting in the right way. Adharma is nonconformity to our nature. Harmony of the world is on account of conformity of all beings to their respective natures; disharmony of the world is due to their nonconformity.

When the freedom given to humans is abused causing disequilibrium The Lord does not merely stand aside and allow the things to drift. He, through His manifestation, sets the matter on the right track and lets it jog along by itself while His loving hand is steering it all the time.

Sri Krishna says that His manifestations in this world in every age are for the following purposes:

- for the protection of the good: To protect those who lead a life of truth and righteousness, who utilize their bodies in the service of the community, who are free from selfishness, anger, hatred, lust and greed and who devote their life to divine contemplation.
- for the destruction of the evil-doers: For the elimination of wrong tendencies in those who lead a life of unrighteousness, who break the laws of the society, who are vain, dishonest and greedy, who injure others, who take possession of other's property by force and who commit all sorts of crimes and
- for the establishment of dharma: When dharma is protected and wickedness destroyed, society lives according to dharma and affords opportunities to its members to lead a spiritual life. It connotes cosmic and moral order.

**janma karma cha me divyam evam yo vetti tattwatah  
tyaktvaa deham punarjanma naiti maameti so'rjuna // 4.9 //**

*He who thus knows in true light My divine birth and action, will not be born again when he leaves his body: he will attain Me, O Arjuna.*

After explaining the reasons for His incarnations in this world Sri Krishna declares that he, who knows the great truth that the Lord though apparently born is ever beyond birth and death, though apparently active in the cause of righteousness, is ever beyond all action - becomes illumined with Self-knowledge, has realized the ultimate truth. Thus he transcends birth and death in the relative world and attains Brahman.

**veetaraagabhayakrodhaa manmayaa maam upaashritaah  
bahavo jnaana tapasaa pootaa madbhaavamaagataah // 4.10 //**

*Freed from attachment, fear and anger, absorbed in Me, taking refuge in Me, purified by the fire of knowledge, many have attained my being.*

The purpose of incarnation is not merely to uphold the world order but to help the human beings to become perfected in their nature.

The steps required to be undertaken by beings in this regard are:

- renouncing attachments to sense objects
- becoming desireless
- getting free from selfishness
- realizing that he is constant, indestructible, eternal Self and that change is merely a quality of the body.

When an individual has reached this stage of self-development he becomes fearless and sees the Self everywhere and in such a state anger cannot arise in him. He is absorbed in Him and becomes fully devoted to Him. He thus takes absolute refuge in The Lord after getting purified with the fire of this knowledge.

The wisdom is referred to here as fire. Just as fire burns everything the wisdom burns down or completely removes all latent tendencies, impressions, cravings etc in an individual and thus makes him pure.

IS THE LORD PARTIAL TOWARDS SOME?

**ye yathaa maam prapadyante taamstathaiva bhajaamyaham  
mama vartmaanuvartante manushyaah paartha sarvashah // 4.11 //**

*In whatever way men worship Me, in the same way I reward them; It is my path, that men follow in all things, O Son of Pritha.*

This verse brings out the wide catholicity of the Gita religion. God meets every aspirant with favor and grants to each his heart's desire. He does not extinguish the hope of any but helps all hopes to grow according to their nature. The Lord bestows pleasure to those who seek pleasure, rewards those who aim liberation, and rescues them from distresses

who pray to Him, and so on. In whatever form man worships the Lord, the Lord appears to him in that form. The various deities and cosmic forces, the angels, the prophets, the incarnations, are only different manifestations of the Lord Himself.

As there are innumerable ideals cherished by men, so there are innumerable forms of the Lord corresponding to those ideals. It is to Him alone that man offers worship under different names and forms, through different symbols and rites. Likewise, from Him alone comes the fulfillment of all desires, whether they are secular or spiritual. As the Self within He brings to fruition all wishes when the necessary conditions are fulfilled. The Atharva Veda says “*ekam jyoti bahudha vibhati*” - the one light manifests itself in various forms. (XIII.3.17)

“The spiritually immature are unwilling to recognize other Gods than their own. Their attachment to their creed makes them blind to the larger unity of Godhead. This is the result of egotism in the religious ideas. The Gita on the other hand affirms though beliefs and practices may be many and varied, spiritual realization to which these are the means is one”. Dr.S.Radhakrishnan.

WHY DO PEOPLE NOT DESIRE LIBERATION?

**kaangkshantah karmanaam siddhim yajanta iha devataah  
kshipram hi maanushe loke siddhirbhavati karmajaa // 4.12 //**

*Those who long for success in action in this world worship the Gods, because success is quickly attained by men through action.*

Men worship God in this world because they want immediate fruits in terms of pleasures from their activities. Worldly success is much easier of attainment than Self-knowledge which demands perfect renunciation.

ALL ARE NOT BORN EQUAL

**chaaturvarnyam mayaa srishtam gunakarma vibhaagashah  
tasya kartaaram api maam viddhyakartaaram avyayam // 4.13 //**

*The fourfold caste has been created by Me according to the differentiation of Guna and Karma; though I am the author thereof know Me as non-doer and changeless.*

This verse explains the diversity of human temperaments and tendencies. All men are not of the same nature because of the preponderance of the different Gunas in them. The caste system was originally meant to make the growth of human society perfect. But this principle later on came to be abused and misused by the society which gave it a totally wrong meaning based on the accident of birth.

On the basis of the temperamental distinctions and the quality of thoughts entertained by the individuals, the entire mankind has been, for the purpose of spiritual study, classified as the four castes or Varnas just as people are divided as professionals, merchants,

agriculturists and laborers etc on the basis of activities or vocation pursued by them. For the well being of the society in general each class of people is as important and essential as the other.

Accordingly the four castes are:

- Brahmana - where Sattwa (purity, goodness etc.) predominates in thoughts and action.
- Kshatriya - where Rajas (courage, valor etc.) predominates in thoughts and deeds.
- Vaishya - where Rajas and Tamas (indolence, ignorance etc.) predominate
- Sudra - where Tamas alone predominates.

The Lord is the Creator of the four castes only from the standpoint of maya. Maya is the immediate cause of everything that happens in the relative world. But since maya has no existence independent of the Lord, He is said to be the Creator.

The Lord with reference to the mind and intellect is the creator of the temperaments although in His essential nature He is not the Doer or the Creator because He is the changeless and all-pervading irrespective of what happens in the creation.

ACTION WITHOUT ATTACHMENT DOES NOT LEAD TO BONDAGE

**na maam karmaani limpanti na me karmaphale sprihaa  
iti maam yo'bhijaanaati karmabhir na sa badhyate // 4.14 //**

*Actions do not taint Me, nor have I a desire for the fruits of actions. He who knows Me thus is not bound by actions.*

Actions do not taint the Lord because He is totally free from egoism. Since He is unselfish, He is not taking rebirths as men to reap the fruit of His actions. Anyone who knows his own inmost Self to be the Lord, unattached to action and its result, is not bound by action and will not be reborn in the world of maya.

Taint and desire can come only to an Ego which is the Self functioning through a given state of mind and intellect. The one who has renounced his identification with his limited ego and rediscovered himself as none other than the Self is no more affected by his actions in the outer world.

**evam jnaatwaa kritam karma poorvair api mumukshubhih  
kuru karmaiva tasmaat twam poorvaih poorvataram kritam // 4.15 //**

*Having known this, the ancient seekers after liberation performed action; therefore, you too perform action, as did the ancients in the olden times.*

Knowing that the Self can have no desire for the fruits of actions and cannot be tainted or soiled by them and knowing that no one can be tainted if he works without egoism, attachment and expectation of fruits, Arjuna is called upon to do his duty as the ancients

like King Janaka and others did in the days of yore. The idea is that the ignorant perform action for self purification, and the wise perform action for the maintenance of the world.

DOCTRINE OF ACTION AND INACTION

**kim karma kim akarmeti kavayo'pyatra mohitaah  
tat te karma pravakshyaami yajjnaatwaa mokshyase'shubhaat // 4.16 //**

*What is action? What is inaction? As to this even the wise are perplexed. Therefore, I shall tell you what action is by knowing which you shall be freed from the evil (of Samsara - the wheel of birth and death).*

The Lord thus instructed Arjuna to perform action in a disinterested spirit. But one cannot duly perform one's duty without knowing in reality what constitutes action and what inaction is. Therefore the Lord promises to reveal to Arjuna the truth about action showing its intricate nature and the value of its knowledge in order that Arjuna may really understand the truth about transcendent actions, which are free from the feeling of possession, the sense of doership, attachment and the desire for fruit. Thus the mystery of action is extremely difficult to unravel.

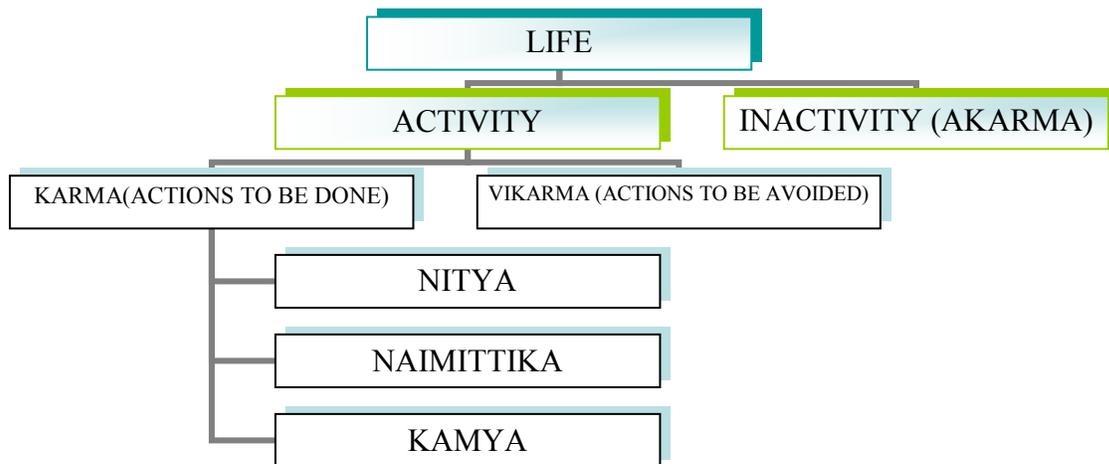
**karmano hyapi boddhavyam boddhavyam cha vikarmanah  
akarmanashcha boddhavyam gahanaa karmano gatih // 4.17 //**

*One has to understand what action really is and likewise one has to understand what is forbidden action and also what inaction is. Indeed hard to understand is the way of action.*

One must not oversimplify action and inaction by thinking that the former means the activity of the body and the latter its idleness. The definition of these three terms is as under:

- Action: That which is prescribed in the scriptures and not merely approved by men.
- Forbidden action: That which is forbidden by the scriptures.
- Inaction: Renunciation of action.

Activity is the very essence of life. The great Seers of ancient days evaluated the life on the basis of the quality of activities. This is explained in the following chart.



Life is constituted of moments of activity and inactivity. Through inactivity neither progress nor deterioration is ever possible. Periods of activity alone create man. Such creation of man depends upon what type of activity he undertakes. Activity or Karma need not imply only ritualism but it encompasses all dedicated actions. It is known to all that action means movement of the body etc., and inaction means absence of such movements or to sit quiet. But these two terms imply much more than these familiar ideas.

Activity can be broadly classified as constructive and destructive. Constructive activities are termed here as Karma (i.e. actions to be done) which contribute towards the evolution of an individual. Destructive activities are those which debase the individual and hence totally condemned by the Sastras; these are referred to here as Vikarma (actions to be avoided).

Karma (Constructive activity) can be of three types:

- Nitya Karma: constant duties
- Naimittika Karma: special duties on special occasions and
- Kamyas Karma: duties done expecting rewards.

Sri Krishna advises Arjuna to avoid prohibited actions (Vikarma) and to pursue the constructive and creative activities of self-development (Karma) and to totally reject inactivity (Akarma). It is essential that a true seeker should know the triple classification of activities constituting life. Sri Bhagavan admits that it is not easy to understand these concepts of activities implying that for evaluating actions one should go beyond the actions as such and look into the motive or desire or intention behind such actions. If motives are pure actions will be noble and if motives are impure so also actions will be mean.

**karmanyakarma yah pashyed akarmani cha karma yah  
sa buddhimaan manushyeshu sa yuktah kritsnakarmakrit // 4.18 //**

*He who recognizes inaction in action and action in inaction is wise among men; he is a Yogi and a true performer of all actions.*

This verse conveys the central theme of this Chapter. Sri Krishna describes the nature of action and inaction by introducing the concepts of seeing inaction in action and action in inaction. Bhagavan asserts that he who so recognizes is a wise person, a Yogi and is deemed to have preformed all actions.

Although these terms are common and familiar they are used in the Gita with special meaning and implications. They are examined hereunder.

*Inaction in action:*

It is only the ignorant that regard the Self as active. But the wise person regards the Self as actionless even when he himself is engaged in action. Activity belongs to the senses, the body and the mind. It is a function of the Gunas.

*Action in inaction:*

The body, the senses and the mind, regarded by the ignorant as actionless, are perceived by the wise to be active. Hence he sees action in what the ignorant think to be inaction.

*Performed all actions:*

A wise person devoid of the idea of agency is really a free soul, though he participates in action. Action does not bind him.

The terms 'action' and 'inaction' are not rightly understood; the one is mistaken for the other. The Lord tries to remove this misunderstanding. The Self of man is actionless. Action pertains to the physical body, the senses and the mind. But an ignorant person falsely attributes action to the Self and says to himself that 'I am the doer, mine is the action, and by me is the fruit of action reaped' and so on.

Similarly, he falsely imputes to the Self the cessation of activity, which really pertains to the body, the senses and the mind. So he says to himself 'I shall be quiet, I may be free from work and worry and be happy' and so on.

Through right knowledge a man sees inaction in action; he sees that action commonly associated with the Self really belongs to the body, the senses and the mind and that the Self is actionless. Likewise, a man with right knowledge sees action in inaction; he knows that inaction is also a kind of action. Inaction is a correlative of action and pertains to the body. The Self is beyond action and inaction.

Sankara explains that in *atman* there is no action; in the body, however, there is no rest, even when there seems to be rest.

He who knows the meaning of action and inaction as explained above is wise among men; he is a Yogi. He does all action without being bound; he is free from the evil result of action. He has achieved everything.

**yasya sarve samaarambhaah kaamasankalpa varjitaah  
jnaanaagni dagdhakarmanam tam aahuh panditam budhaah // 4.19 //**

*Whose undertakings are all devoid of desires and self-will and whose actions have been burnt by the Fire of Knowledge, the wise will call him the sage.*

Realization of 'inaction in action' and 'action in inaction' is praised here. Sri Krishna says that he is a perfect sage whose actions in the outside world are without desires or the thoughts which cause such desires. Such actions performed are mere movements without any attachment for the actions and for their results because of the absence of any selfish purpose.

They are undertaken for preventing people from going astray or merely for the maintenance of the body or to set an example to others. When a sage performs these actions in the community such a learned person really does no action and his action is equivalent to inaction since all his actions are consumed by the fire of wisdom in having known the truth about action and inaction through the knowledge of Self.

The Self knowledge is a spiritual fire which consumes the results of all kinds of actions, good or bad, making the enlightened sage free from the bonds of action. Even when such a saint works in the world outside he is only expressing the will of the Divine and not his own desires and therefore, it is said that his actions are burnt by the fire of knowledge.

**tyaktwaa karmaphalaasangam nityatripto niraashrayah  
karmany abhipravritto'pi naiva kinchit karoti sah // 4.20 //**

*Giving up attachment to the fruits of actions, ever content, depending upon nothing, he does not do anything though engaged in actions.*

A man of wisdom is described here. He who has abandoned all concern for actions and has also renounced all his attachments for their fruits is a perfect worker. This, however, does not mean that the Path of Action is to act without an eye upon the fruits of activities. It only means that we should avoid our mental dependence and intellectual attachment to the desired or expected results of our activities. Only when one gets pre-occupied with the expected fruits of actions, he gets worried and anxious and thereby becomes ineffective. Hence we are advised to work for the happiness and welfare of the society by forsaking (Tyaktwaa) our clinging (Sangam) to the fruits of action (Karma phalam).

If an attitude of non-attachment to fruits of actions is developed one becomes anxiety-free and his intellect can have no more desires because anxiety is the direct result of desires. He thus becomes ever content (Nitya-Tripta) in his experience of the Self acting in the world not seeking any fulfillment for himself.

An ordinary man lives entirely depending on the fruits of his actions and derives joy out of such fruits. In the case of a sage, he expects no fruits of his activities and his very actions are by themselves a reward for him. Hence he depends on nothing (Niraashraya).

The weaknesses of anxiety for the fruits of action, a sense of discontentment and a feeling of dependency on things and beings of the world, belong to the Ego. When the seeker ends his ego and realized his identity with the Self, he though seemingly engaged in activity does not do anything. He is an emancipated soul who sees inaction in action and action in inaction.

**niraasheer yatachittaatmaa tyaktasarvaparigraha  
shaareeram kevalam karma kurvannaapnoti kilbisham // 4.21 //**

*Free from desire, with the body and the mind controlled, and surrendering all possessions he incurs no sin through mere bodily activity.*

A knower of Brahman is always absorbed in his communion with the Absolute and no outside activity is possible for him. However, actions for the bare maintenance of the body are done by him without any real identification with the body. The question whether such a person commits any sin accruing from failure to perform one's prescribed duties is answered now.

When an individual

- completely renounces desire
- brings his body and mind under perfect control and
- relinquishes all possessions, his ego ends.

When the ego has ended his actions do not leave any impressions on his mind and intellect and hence they are not capable of bringing about any consequences.

Such a saint's activities do not bind him since he is not the performer of actions but the actions merely flow through him. He is not a doer of actions but only an instrument for the Lord's will to express itself. The human soul becomes the pure channel of Divine power.

**yadricchaalaabhasantushto dwandwaateeto vimatsarah  
samah siddhaavasiddhau cha kritwaapi na nibadhyate // 4.22 //**

*Content with what comes to him without any effort on his part, free from the pairs of opposites and envy, even minded in success and failure, though acting he is not bound.*

An individual who has gone beyond ego cannot perform any desire-prompted and result-motivated activity. So he will be happy with whatever gain spontaneously accrues to him out of his actions. This is called 'without any effort'.

The state of egolessness indicates perfect victory over mind and intellect and so the pairs of opposites - heat and cold, success and failure, good and bad, joy and sorrow, gain and loss etc., cannot affect him because they are only the interpretation of the world of objects by the mind. Such an individual who has conquered his egocentric misconceptions about himself, though acting is not bound by the consequences of the

actions performed (Karma-Phalam) because he realizes that the gunas act upon the gunas and is ever steady in the true knowledge of the Self. From the standpoint of the world such a man may appear to be working or engaged in action, but from his own point of view he is not the agent of any action. The egoistic motive of action has been consumed, in his case, in the fire of knowledge.

The Cosmos is a manifestation of the Supreme and what binds is not the act but the selfish attitude to action, born of ignorance which makes us imagine that we are many separate individuals with our likes and dislikes.

In the following verses Sri Krishna proceeds to point out how the actor, the act and the action are all different manifestations of the one Supreme and action offered as a sacrifice to the Supreme does not bind.

SACRIFICE AND ITS SYMBOLIC VALUE

**gatasangasya muktasya jnaanaavasthitachetasah  
yajnaayaacharatah karma samagram pravileeyate // 4.23 //**

*For the one who is devoid of attachment, who is liberated, whose mind is established in knowledge, who acts for the sake of sacrifice alone, the whole action dissolves away.*

The qualities of a man of wisdom are enumerated in this verse which explains the path to perfection.

They are:

Devoid of attachment - Divinity attained by man is not something that is newly acquired by him but it is only a rediscovery of perfection already existing in him which is veiled from him because of his attachment to the finite world of objects. The wise man is he for whom attachment with the world of objects has ceased.

Liberated - Bondages created around the personality of a man are his own creation due to his attachments with things. His ego feels fulfilled only through the material world of objects and it develops a sense of clinging to these objects. Thus his body gets itself attached to the world of sense-objects, his mind gets itself enslaved in the world of emotions and his intellect gets entangled in its own ideas and he feels bound and fettered. It is only when one goes beyond these attachments and hand-cuffs he becomes liberated.

Mind established in knowledge - Perfect detachment and complete liberation can be accomplished only when the seeker's mind gets focused on the discriminative knowledge of knowing the difference between the permanent and impermanent. Mind's attachment to the worldly objects is because of its delusion. If, however, the mind were to concentrate on the discriminative knowledge with the support of the intellect all the false attachments will drop off.

Acting for the sake of sacrifice (Yagna) - 'Yagna' does not mean only the rituals performed in an attitude of Dedication to God for achieving freedom from the cycle of

mortal existence ; it means all actions performed without ego and without the motivation of egocentric desires in a spirit of service.

When a man of perfect wisdom with the qualities as stated above performs actions in a spirit of sacrifice (Yagna), such actions dissolve away of themselves i.e. they do not leave any impressions upon his mind and cannot produce any reaction of newly formed vasanas.

Yagna ritual, the holiest act known to man, is used in the following verses as a symbol standing for the outlook of an illumined man on all his work. It is interpreted in a larger spiritual way.

**brahmaarpanam brahmahavirbrahmaagnau brahmanaa hutam  
brahmaiva tena gantavyam brahmakarmasamaadhinaa // 4.24 //**

*Brahman is the act of offering ; Brahman is the clarified butter etc. constituting the offerings ; by Brahman it is offered into the fire of Brahman ; Brahman is that which is to be reached by him who always sees Brahman in all his works.*

This is a famous verse which is generally recited before taking daily food. This verse is a capsule of the entire Vedanta.

Brahman is the Infinite Reality which is changeless substratum behind the changing phenomenal world in contrast with that aspect of Brahman which functions in and through a body termed as the Atman.

When the waves of the ocean dash against each other nothing new happens because all waves are nothing but the ocean and by their act of dashing against each other the ocean rises over the ocean itself and become one with the ocean. Similarly when a Yagna is performed by a sage for whom there is no plurality of the world, Brahman the Truth is the performer offering Brahman, the material to the sacred fire, which is nothing but Brahman, invoking Brahman only.

In the previous verse it was stated that performing actions for the sake of sacrifice, Yagna, alone melts away all his actions. It is explained here that after attaining the true knowledge the seeker's whole life becomes one act of Yagna, in which the process of offering, the objects offered , the fire, the doer of the sacrifice, the work itself and the goal are all Brahman.

After attaining the Knowledge of Brahman, a man sees Brahman in everything. He sees Brahman in every part of the action: the instrument, the doer, the result and the action itself. These have no existence apart from Brahman just as the mirage has no existence apart from the desert. What appears to be water to the ignorant is nothing but the desert. Likewise, what appears to the unenlightened as the instrument of action, the doer, and so on, is realized by one who is endowed with the knowledge of Brahman as Brahman Itself. To him everything is Brahman.

Thus the action performed by the knower of Brahman to set an example to the world is in reality no action, since all the accessories of action are consumed, as it were, in the fire of Brahman. The knowledge of Brahman removes all duality. Therefore action performed by a knower of Brahman melts away with its result and cannot bind its performer.

The significance of reciting this verse before taking food is that eating food is an unavoidable necessity for existence. When one is hungry he enjoys any type of food that comes to him. Even at this moment of enjoyment he should not forget the truth that it is Brahman eating Brahman, and that during meals he is offering to Brahman the food that is Brahman invoking nothing but the grace of Brahman.

## Concepts and Issues

After stating the details of Karma Yoga to be practiced in daily life, Sri Krishna says that He taught this immortal Yoga to the Sun which was handed down to the Solar Dynasty. The Royal sages practiced and preached this Yoga to the humanity but later due to lack of such great exponents this Yoga fell into disuse in public life. Arjuna raises a doubt as to how could Sri Krishna who is living now teach this Yoga to the Sun who was born in the beginning of creation and to others who were born long ago. The Lord replies that He and Arjuna have undergone many lives but He knows them all whereas Arjuna does not know about it. Again Arjuna asks The Lord as to why he has taken birth at all when He is not bound by bondages caused by the Vasanas and when He is proficient in the knowledge of the Self.

It is here that Sri Krishna reveals that He is God Himself, the Infinite, the Eternal and the Imperishable. He tells him that out of His free will He incarnates Himself whenever righteousness (Dharma) declines and un-righteousness (adharma) gets an upper hand, to restore the balance - to protect the Good and to destroy the wicked. Any one who understands the secret of His incarnation will attain liberation.

He responds to His devotees with impartiality as per their attitudes and prayers if they approach Him through knowledge and devotion. In the process of evolution, the desires of humanity differ according to the grades of their temperaments. Sri Krishna reveals how He has divided the society onto four varnas or groups or castes based upon the nature and vocation of the people depending on their temperaments.

One who possesses self-restraint, purity, straightforwardness, serenity, knowledge of scriptures as also teaches others is called a Brahmana in whom Sattva predominates. One who possesses prowess, splendor, firmness in action, dexterity, generosity, ruling capacity, predominated by Rajas, is called a Kshatriya. One who does agriculture and trade, has predominating Rajas but with a subordinated Tamas is called a Vaishya. He in whom Tamas predominates and Rajas is in subordination, does service to the other three categories is called a Sudra.

Sri Krishna says anyone according to his temperament can perform duty without expectation of result and reach Him i.e. God-realization. Caste is not determined by the accident of birth.

Sri Krishna says that this is not a novel theory and the secret was understood by the ancient seekers who pursued the path of selfless service utterly indifferent to rewards. He advises Arjuna to do the same and not try to renounce his duty through attachment or fear.

Sri Krishna says that it is very difficult to decide one's own duty. To perform one's duty one should know what to do, what not to do and how to do. The question of action has three aspects

- Performance of right action (Karma),
- Abstention from all actions (Akarma)
- Performance of forbidden actions (Vikarma).

Akarma or abstention from any action is not the subject here because there cannot be any life without any action. Performance of forbidden action (Vikarma) is destructive and produces sorrow and restlessness in the one who performs them.

That man is the wisest who while performing actions is not really doing them at all. Here one must know action in inaction and inaction in action.

Action means activities performed by body, mind, intellect and the senses. Inaction means renouncing all activities of the body. If action is performed according to rule and one's own order in the society without expecting result, without attachment, without the feeling of possession and egoism, then it is considered as inaction in action.

If one sits quiet without performing any bodily action but thinks about all actions in his mind he is still considered as doing actions i.e. there is action in inaction. He who knows this secret will not renounce duties pertaining to his order in society and stage in life.

One who does inner contemplation on the Supreme Self and acts for the good of the society without any selfish motive or expectation of reward is the knower of inaction in action, a sage. Through this all his sins will get burnt up and one will become free from bondage. He never expects anything from the world and is happy always. He takes things as they come. He is the performer of all sacrifices prescribed in the scriptures. He is the knower of Knowledge or Brahman. One who feels the presence of Brahman in every action will feel that Brahman is the actor, action and also the result of action. This is called knowledge sacrifice.

## Live as the Gita Teaches You to Live

The doctrine of action and inaction is the keynote of this section. The important advice to the humanity is how to understand inaction in action and how to tune our lives towards

that goal. It is emphasized that action offered as a sacrifice to the Supreme (action performed with the Yagna spirit) does not bind. Yagna spirit means all actions performed without ego and without the motivation of egocentric desires in a spirit of service.

### Points to Ponder

- 1) Who are those blessed souls who attain liberation from the cycle of births and deaths?
- 2) Explain fully the fourfold caste system?
- 3) How can we be free from reactions when we perform actions?
- 4) What is the nature of true action; how does a Karma Yogi perform action?

**Next time we will proceed from the Verse 4.25**

*HARIH OM*

Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 4 (Part-2)  
Jnaana Karma Sanyaasa Yogah:  
Yoga of Renunciation of Action in Knowledge  
T.N.Sethumadhavan

Preamble

After describing the Knowledge sacrifice and the faculty of seeing everything as Brahman the Lord proceeds to enumerate other kinds of sacrifices (Yajnas) and extols the Knowledge sacrifice as the highest. When a seeker constantly practices the different types of Yajnas suggested in this section he gains wisdom. With the dawn of wisdom he begins to develop renunciation and perceives the identity of the *atman* and *brahman*.

Yajna in the ancient past merely meant the ritual of fire worship by kindling the flames with the offerings therein by the people. Krishna gives a new interpretation to the word Yajna to mean the conversion of human day to day activities into worship. The cycle of human activity starts with the receipt of stimuli from the world at large by the organs of perception, which turn them into reaction in mind and intellect, and which are returned as a response back into the world through the organs of action. This entire cycle has been split into twelve main activities; each of them turned into a ritual, worship, a Yajna. Those who understand this and turn their daily activities into a practice of these yajnas will free themselves from the *vasanas* / desires.

This concept of viewing daily activities as a Yajna can be further explained in simpler terms. Take for instance the most common activities of eating and reading. This can be stated in the Gita language as “*People offer the sense of hunger as sacrifice in the fire of food; others offer the sense of ignorance as sacrifice in the fire of the knowledge*”. What does this mean? It simply means that food satisfies hunger or hunger is burnt in the *Yajnakund* of food or hunger is burnt by food or just hunger is satiated by consuming food. Similarly, knowledge removes ignorance or ignorance is burnt in the sacrificial fire of knowledge or ignorance is burnt (removed) by knowledge or just ignorance disappears when knowledge dawns.

By converting activities into Yajna (worship) a seeker drops his *vasanas* and gradually gains knowledge of the Self. The supermost of all yajnas is *jnana yajna*, the yajna of Wisdom. A seeker should prepare himself for the yajna through devotion, enquiry and service. With such preparation he will attract a perfect Guru to teach him the knowledge of the Self. This knowledge of the Self destroys all desires and agitations and removes forever his delusion that the world is real.

The knowledge of Self purifies the mind of all agitations and gives supreme Peace. Those devoted to Self control their senses and pursue the Self with consistency until they reach it. The ignorant, ever doubtful of the Self, lack steadiness of purpose. They will not achieve anything in this world or the next nor will they find any enduring happiness. Krishna, therefore, advises Arjuna to gain knowledge and remove all doubts and delusion and thus become established in the Supreme Self.

## The Text

**daivamevaapare yajnam yoginah paryupaasate  
brahmaagnaavapare yajnam yajnaivopajuhwati // 4.25 //**

*Some Yogis offer oblations or perform sacrifice to Devas alone (Deva-yagna); while others offer the Self as sacrifice by the Self into the fire of Brahman (Brahma Yagna).*

Sri Krishna explains the mental attitude of a saint when he comes in contact with the world and functions in it. The Lord is enumerating in these verses twelve different types of Yagnas, each one apparently meaning ritualism but in fact suggesting different patterns of life wherein by the necessary adjustments in the mind we can effectively change the entire reactions of the world upon us.

Deva Yagna - Some Yogis perform sacrifice to Devas alone: According to ritualism this means invoking the grace of a specific deity and offering oblations to it in the sacred fire for gaining its blessings. But here it means that the perfect masters (Yogis) when they move in the world do perceive objects but their understanding and experience of the perception is of such a nature that the world of objects was subservient to the five sense organs which are Devas. When this mental attitude is entertained by the seeker, he feels detached from the sense experience and is able to have a sense of inner equanimity. It is surrendering individual consciousness to Cosmic Consciousness.

Brahma Yagna - Offering the Self as a sacrifice by the Self in the fire of Brahman: The outer world by itself is incapable of giving us sorrow or joy; but it is our attitude towards the objects and situations of the outer world that brings us such feelings. The perfect masters understand that the sense organs are mere instruments of perception and tune them to sacrifice themselves in the knowledge of the Brahman. When an individual's organs of perception and action are to function not for satisfying his selfish needs but for the sake of serving the society at large, then although he lives in the world of objects he will not have any attachment to them.

The limiting accessories such as body, mind and intellect which are super imposed on the Self through ignorance are subordinated and the identity of the individual soul with the Supreme Soul is realized. The offering of the Self in the Brahman is to know that the Self which is associated with the limiting adjuncts is identical with the unconditioned Supreme Brahman. This is called Brahma Yagna wherein the Self is divested of Its Upadhis or limiting adjuncts so that it is recognized as the Supreme Self or Brahman.

Brahman is described in the scriptures as Consciousness, Knowledge and Bliss and as the innermost Self of all. It is devoid of all limitations imposed by time, space and causality. The individual self is in reality Brahman, but appears as the individual through association with the body, mind, intelligence and senses. To know the conditioned self as one with the unconditioned Brahman is to sacrifice the self in the fire of Brahman. This sacrifice is performed by those who have renounced all action and are devoted to the Knowledge of Brahman.

**shrotraadeeneendriyaanyanye samyamaagnishu juhwati  
shabdaadeen vishayaananya indriyaagnishu juhwati // 4.26 //**

*Some again offer hearing and other senses as sacrifice in the fire of restraint; others offer sound and other objects of the senses as sacrifice in the fire of the senses.*

To offer hearing and other senses in the fire of restraint: Some masters live constantly offering the senses into the fire of self-control so that the senses, of their own accord, get burnt up giving them inner joy. The more we satisfy the sense organs, the more they demand and this process goes on endlessly. Hence self-control of the sense organs is the only way to tame them for experiencing inner peace. This is the path of self control which is also an act of Yagna. Every form of self control, where we surrender the egocentric enjoyment for the higher delight, where we give up lower impulses, is said to be a sacrifice.

To offer sound and other objects of sense in the fire of the senses : Others direct their senses towards pure and unforbidden objects of the senses and in so doing regard themselves as performing acts of sacrifice. Under this method the senses are made the best use of for the adoration of the Almighty. In the fire of the senses, sense objects are offered as oblation. The sensual is transformed into spiritual.

Two diametrically opposite types of Yagnas are mentioned here. One makes the senses ineffective and the other makes the senses super-effective. The method of self control is negative (which is given to the few) while sense-sublimation is positive (which is given to the aspiring many); but both achieve the same objective i.e. purification of the mind.

**sarvaaneendriya karmaani praanakarmaani chaapare  
aatmasamyamayogaagnau juhwati jnaanadeepite // 4.27 //**

*Others again sacrifice all the functions of the senses and the functions of the breath (vital energy) in the fire of the Yoga of self-restraint kindled by knowledge.*

Control of the ego by better understanding of the Divine behind it is called *atma-samyama-yoga* i.e. the Yoga of self-restraint. All the activities of sense organs and the organs of action as well as the objects of the senses together with the functions of the *prana* are offered into the knowledge-kindled fire of right understanding i.e. meditation which is one-pointed discriminative wisdom. The idea conveyed here is that by stopping all activities, the masters concentrate the mind on the Self.

**dravyayajnaas tapoyajnaa yogayajnaastathaa'pare  
swaadhyaaya jnaanayajnaashcha yatayah samshitavrataah // 4.28 //**

*Others again offer wealth, austerity and Yoga as sacrifice, while the ascetics of self-restraint and rigid vows offer study of scriptures and knowledge as sacrifice.*

Dravya Yagna: Charity and distribution of honestly acquired wealth in a spirit of devotion in the service of the community is called Dravya yagna. Wealth includes love, kindness, sympathy and affection also.

Tapo Yagna: Offering of a life of austerity to The Lord in a spirit of dedication so that the seeker may attain a little self-control.

Yoga Yagna: Yoga is an attempt to grow from the lower in us to the higher standard of divine living; it comprises such practices as breath-control and the withdrawal of the mind from the objects of the world.

Swadhyaya Yagna: This means study and understanding of the scriptures without which no progress in spiritual practices is possible. It also implies introspection.

Jnana Yagna: It is that activity in man by which he renounces all his ignorance into the fire of knowledge kindled by him in him. This has two aspects - negation of the false and assertion of the real nature of the Self. These two activities are undertaken during the seeker's meditation.

All these five methods of self-development can be practiced only by him who is sincere and consistent in his practices.

**apaane juhwati praanam praane'paanam tathaa'pare  
praanaapaana gatee ruddhwaa praanaayaamaparaayanaah // 4.29 //**

*Others offer as sacrifice the out-going breath in the in-coming and the in-coming in the out-going, restraining the courses of the out-going and in-coming breaths, solely absorbed in the restraint of breath.*

Sri Krishna explains here Pranayama as another technique for self-control. Pranayama consists of three processes viz.

- Puraka : process of filling in the breath
- Rechaka : process of blowing out the breath
- Kumbhaka : process of holding the breath for some time.

Puraka and Rechaka are alternated by an interval of Kumbhaka. This process of Puraka-Kumbhaka-Rechaka-Kumbhaka-Puraka when practiced in the prescribed manner becomes the method of Pranayama. Pranayama is referred to here as a Yagna where the practitioner offers all the five subsidiary Pranas into the main Prana. Prana does not merely mean breath. It indicates the various manifested activities of life in a living body.

Generally five different Pranas are enumerated corresponding to different functions in every living body viz.

- function of perception - prana
- function of excretion - apana
- function of digestion and assimilation - samana

- circulatory system which distributes food to all parts of the body - vyana and
- capacity of a living creature to improve himself in his mental outlook and intellectual life - udana.

These activities of life are brought under the perfect control of the individual through the process of Pranayama so that a seeker can gain capacity to withdraw completely all his perceptions of the outer world for gaining the knowledge of the Self.

**apare niyataahaaraah praanaan praaneshu juhvati  
sarve'pyete yajnavido yajnakshapita kalmashaah // 4.30 //**

*Others, having their food regulated, offer the vital forces in the vital forces. All of them are knowers of the sacrifice, whose sins are destroyed by sacrifice.*

In the series of techniques enumerated by Sri Krishna this is the last method. There are some, who through systematic regulation of their diet, come to gain complete mastery over themselves.

Those, who know the art of living these techniques, weaken the functions of the organs of action and thereby control their passions and appetites leading to purification of the mind and destruction of sins for achieving the goal of Self-knowledge.

In the above mentioned twelve different types of Yagna techniques self-effort is a common factor. The yajnas are only the means to enable the mind-intellect equipment to adjust itself better for meditation. Meditation is the only path through which the ego withdraws from false evaluation of itself for achieving spiritual growth.

**yajnishishtaamritabhujō yaanti brahma sanaatanam  
naayam loko'styayajnyasya kuto'nyah kurusattama // 4.31 //**

*The eaters of the nectar - the remnant of the sacrifice - go to the Eternal Brahman. This world is not for the non-performer of the sacrifice; how then the other world, O Best of the Kurus ?*

'Eating the nectar - the remnant of the sacrifice' means the result of the above mentioned twelve types of Yagnas. The result of performing any one of the above Yagnas is a greater amount of self-control and the consequent inner integration of the individual personality for the purpose of intense meditation. Such an integrated person will have greater inner poise in his meditations through which he comes to experience the Infinite and the Eternal indicated by the term 'Brahman'.

Self-development and inner growth cannot be had without sincere self-effort. Therefore, Sri Krishna exclaims how one could hope to achieve the highest without sincere effort when even in this world nothing great can be obtained without selfless and dedicated activity.

**evam bahavidhaa yajnaa vitataa brahmano mukhe  
karmajaan viddhi taan sarvaan evam jnaatwaa vimokshyase // 4.32 //**

*Thus innumerable sacrifices lie spread out before Brahman - literally at the mouth or face of Brahman - Know them all as born of action and thus knowing, you shall be liberated.*

When twelve different Yagnas differing from one another have been described a doubt arises as to whether these different paths lead to the same goal or produce different effects. It is clarified here that all of them lead to the same goal - innumerable sacrifices lie spread out before Brahman.

Another doubt as to the origin of the theory of Yagnas is clarified by interpreting the same line of the verse to mean the various Yagnas lie strewn about at the door of the Vedas giving authenticity to the idea .

It is also urged that the paths prescribed are to be achieved through self effort and hence the inevitability of right action accomplished through the activities of the body, speech and mind.

These activities cannot be attributed to the Self as the Self is actionless. Thus if one realizes that these are not my (Self) actions and I (Self) am actionless and detached he will be freed from the worldly bondage.

As compared with these sacrifices which are the means to attain inner integration, knowledge (considered as a sacrifice) is being extolled in the next verse.

WISDOM AND WORK

**shreyan dravyamayaadyajnaaj jnaanayajnah parantapa  
sarvam karmaakhilam paartha jnaane parisamaapyate // 4.33 //**

*Superior is the knowledge-sacrifice to all material sacrifices, O Parantapa. All actions in their entirety, O Partha, culminate in wisdom.*

Sri Krishna explains that Gnana Yagna, the offering of our ignorance into the Fire of Knowledge - acquired and experienced- is the noblest of all the activities. Compared with the formalistic ritualism with material offerings (Dravya Yagna), Gnana Yagna - destroying the misunderstanding in the fire of right understanding - is superior because sacrifices with material objects produce only material results while the Knowledge of the Self, Brahman, ends desire, the source of all activity and therefore all actions get themselves fulfilled. Hence Sri Krishna says 'all actions in their entirety culminate in Knowledge'. The goal is the life giving wisdom, which gives us freedom of action and liberation from the bondage of work.

HOW DOES ONE GAIN THAT EXALTED KNOWLEDGE?

**tadviddhi pranipaatenā paripraśnena sevayā  
upadekshyanti te jñānam jñāninas tattvadarśinah // 4.34 //**

*Learn it by prostration, by inquiry and by service. The wise who have realized the Truth will teach you in that Knowledge.*

The method of gaining the Knowledge by which all actions get exhausted is told here. The verse explains the qualities of a teacher who alone can give guidance on the Path of Knowledge. It also prescribes the mental attitude and intellectual approach that a student should possess for having an effective and rewarding Guru-Sishya relationship.

The student acquires knowledge of the Self by:

- Prostration: It is not only the show of physical surrender by prostration before the Master by the student but an intellectual attitude of humility, reverence and obedience when he approaches the teacher for receiving instructions. The student should exhibit readiness to understand, grasp and follow the Master's instructions.
- Inquiry: The student should be ever ready to raise doubts about bondage and liberation and about knowledge and ignorance etc. and have them clarified from the Teacher within the limits of devotion and respect. Discussions between the teacher and the taught bring forth the best from the teacher which gets transferred to the student.
- Service: Service does not imply any physical service or offering of material objects but it means the attunement of the student to the principles of life advised to him by the Master.

The qualifications of a fully useful teacher are:

- perfect knowledge of the Scriptures and
- a subjective experience of the Infinite Reality.

Sri Krishna means to say that mere theoretical knowledge, however perfect, does not qualify a person to be a Guru. The Truth or Brahman must be realized before one can claim that most elevated position. That knowledge alone which is imparted by those who have full personal enlightenment can prove effective and not any other because he who has no subjective experience of what is taught cannot understand the inner meaning of the scriptures just as a spoon cannot have any idea of the soup. This verse makes out that in spiritual life faith comes first, then knowledge and then experience.

RESULT OF KNOWLEDGE

**yajñātwā na punarmoham evam yaasyasi paandava  
yena bhootaanyasheshena drakshyasyaatmanyatho mayi // 4.35 //**

*Knowing that, O Pandava, you will not again get deluded like this: and by that you will see all beings in your own Self and also in Me.*

Sri Krishna declares that after gaining the Knowledge of Brahman (referred to in the previous verse, to be learnt from the Guru) one will be able to recognize the entire creation, constituted of the world of objects, emotions and ideas, as nothing but the Self which is none other than `Me', The Lord, The Paramatman, just as having recognized the ocean, all the waves are recognized as nothing but the ocean itself. The Self and the Lord are identical. All beings too are identical with the immortal Self; through ignorance they appear as separate.

Meaning thereby, that having received the true knowledge from a teacher one will realize the identity of the individual Self and God and he will not be subject to any confusion again like Arjuna now. Here the confusion of Arjuna refers to his despondency about killing of his kith and kin assembled on the battlefield.

**api chedasi paapebhyah sarvebhyah paapakrittamah  
sarvam jnaanaplavenaiva vrijinam santarishyasi // 4.36 //**

*Even if you are the most sinful of all sinners, yet you shall verily cross all sins by the raft of Knowledge.*

Gita, being a scripture for living, says here that even if one is the most sinful among the entire sinful, one can attain salvation and cross the world of imperfections through the Knowledge of the Self.

Sin is an act of ego forgetting its own divine nature. It is an act indulged in by man in his delusion catering to his baser instincts with the hope of achieving bliss. To rediscover that our ego is nothing other than the Self in us and to live thereafter as the Self of all is called true wisdom - Jnana. Having thus realized one's own true nature, the material objects do not have any attraction to such an individual.

HOW DOES KNOWLEDGE DESTROY SIN?

**yathaidhaamsi samiddho'gnir bhasmasaat kurute'rajuna  
jnaanaagnih sarvakarmaani bhasmasaat kurute tathaa // 4.37 //**

*As the blazing fire reduces pieces of wood to ashes, O Arjuna, so does the Fire of Knowledge reduces all actions to ashes.*

As the fuel pieces, irrespective of their quality, shape, size etc., will be reduced to one homogeneous mass of ash in the Yagna fire, all Karmas, good, bad or indifferent, get burnt up in the Fire of Knowledge and will become something different from what they were in their cause and effect condition. When the Knowledge of the Self dawns, all actions and their results cannot bring man into this world again for the enjoyment of fruits of his actions. This is reducing actions to ashes. When there is full enlightenment

i.e. no idea of agency or doership and no desire for the fruits of actions, then action is no action at all as it loses all its potency.

Actions leave reactions in the form of residual impressions which mature at different periods of time depending upon the quality and intensity of the action. There are three kinds of Karmas or actions or fructification of past actions Viz.

- Prarabhdha - so much of the past actions that have given rise to the present birth (operative).
- Sanchita - the balance of past actions that will give rise to future births (not yet operative)
- Agami - the actions done in the present life (to be operative in the future).

The Fire of Knowledge cannot bring about the results of all actions except the Prarabhdha which have already started producing effects.

**na hi jnaanena sadrisham pavitram iha vidyate  
tat swayam yogasamsiddhah kaalenaatmani vindati // 4.38 //**

*Certainly, there is no purifier in this world like Knowledge. A man who has become perfect in yoga finds it within himself in course of time.*

There exists no purifier equal to knowledge of the Self. He who has attained perfection by the constant practice of Karma Yoga and Meditation will find knowledge of the Self in himself after some time. The surest means of acquiring this knowledge or wisdom is taught in the next verse.

MEANS OF ACQUIRING KNOWLEDGE

**shraddhaavaan labhate jnaanam tatparah samyatendriyah  
jnaanam labdhvaa paraam shaantim achirenaadhigacchati // 4.39 //**

*The man who is full of faith, who is devoted to it and who has subdued all the senses, obtains this Knowledge ; and having obtained Knowledge he goes at once to the Supreme Peace.*

The three qualities that are necessary for an individual to be assured of the Knowledge Divine are enumerated here. Faith, devotion and self-control are the three imperative necessities to be acquired before one hopes to evolve to a diviner stature.

Faith (Sraddha): This is not blind belief or unquestioned acceptance of any declaration said to be divine. Faith indicates that by which an individual understands readily the exact import of the scriptural text as well as the words of advice of the teacher.

Devotion (Tatparah): The seeker must give his undivided attention to the path of self-development chosen by him and must on all occasions maintain in his mind a continuous consciousness of the Divine.

Self-control (Samyatendriyah): It is the sense organs that cause mental agitations and come in the way of maintaining oneself quietly in the higher values of life. Therefore, a seeker should learn to live in steady and constant sense-control.

The seeker who follows the above agenda of life reaches the state of Knowledge having attained which he soon reaches the Supreme Peace or the Supreme Joy, the goal of life. All activities in this world are undertaken to achieve better happiness or joy. So the goal of life is absolute happiness where all strife ends, all desires fulfilled and agitations exhausted. Sri Krishna indicates here that such a state of Supreme Peace is attained by acquiring the Divine Knowledge.

**ajdashchaashraddhaadhaanashcha samshayaatmaa vinashyati  
naayam loko'sti na paro na sukham samshayaatmanah // 4.40 //**

*The ignorant, the faithless, the doubting self goes to destruction; there is neither this world nor the other nor happiness for the doubting soul.*

In the previous verse it was said that those who had faith and knowledge would soon reach the Supreme Peace. Sri Krishna repeats the same idea through a negative statement in this verse. Those who do not have these qualities will get themselves ultimately destroyed and completely ruined. He who has no Knowledge of the Self (ignorant), who has no faith in his own self, in the scriptures and in the teachings of his Guru (faithless) and who is of a doubting disposition because of which fails to enjoy this world on account of his suspicion about the people and things around him and who has innumerable doubts as regards the other world will not find any joy anywhere - neither here nor in the hereafter.

**yogasannyasta karmaanam jnaanasamchhinnasamshayam  
aatmavantam na karmaani nibadhnanti dhananjaya // 4.41 //**

*Actions do not bind the one, who has renounced actions through Yoga, whose doubts have been fully dispelled by Knowledge and who is poised in the Self, O Dhananjaya.*

This verse is the summary of all the main secrets of life explained in this Chapter. It is only egoistic activities, motivated by egocentric desires that leave gross impressions in the inner personalities of men and bind them to reap their reactions. When an individual learns to renounce his attachments to the fruits of his actions, righteous or unrighteous, through Yoga and yet works on in perfect detachment and when all his doubts about the goal of life have been removed through Self-Knowledge, the ego comes to realize that it is none other than Atman, the Self. When such a person works, his actions do not bind him. The mutual relationship of true work, wisdom and self-discipline is brought out here.

**Tasmaad ajnaanasambhootam hritstham jnaanaasinaatmanah  
chhittwainam samshayam yogamaatishthottishtha bhaarata // 4.42 //**

*Therefore, with the sword of Knowledge (of the he Self) cut asunder the doubt about the Self born of ignorance, residing in your heart and take refuge in Yoga, arise O Bharata!*

Sri Krishna advises Arjuna in this last verse of the Chapter to perform action with the help of knowledge and concentration. The knowledge referred to here is the knowledge by which one discriminates between the body and the Self and which consequently destroys grief and delusion.

The doubt in his heart whether it is better to fight or abstain is the product of ignorance. It will be destroyed by wisdom. Then he will know what is right for him to do. It is a call to every seeker to get up and act well in the spirit of Yagna and gain inner purity, so that he can experience the Supreme Peace which is the final goal of evolution.

**om tat sat iti srimad bhagavadgeetaasu upanishatsu brahma vidyaayaam  
yogashaastre sri krishnaarjuna samvaade jnaana karma sanyaasa yogo naama  
chaturtho'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 fourth discourse entitled The Yoga of Renunciation of Action in Knowledge

## Concepts and Issues

Sri Krishna details various forms of sacrifices all of which requires action of body, mind and intellect with the expectation of the fruit. But He emphasizes that knowledge-sacrifice is far superior to other sacrifices done with material objects. The Lord extols spiritual wisdom and tells Arjuna that this knowledge can be obtained through sincerity, purity of heart, service to God-realized Guru with devotion, prolonged practice of Karma Yoga and sense-control.

The Real Knowledge is the awareness of the Self or Pure Consciousness within. This Pure Consciousness is experienced by the seeker only after a protracted period of practice in deep meditation.

For this one must have immense faith in God, belief in the preceptor, patience and devotion accompanied with a withdrawal of the senses from the objects of the world. Then alone one can have supreme peace.

The ignorant one, due to lack of these qualifications, entertains doubts in himself as well as in others and suffers here as well as hereafter. But nothing in the world can bind him who works with this understanding of Knowledge.

## Live as the Gita Teaches You to Live

It is only egoistic activities, motivated by egocentric desires that leave gross impressions in the inner personalities of men and bind them to reap their reactions. When an individual learns to renounce his attachments to the fruits of his actions through Yoga and works in perfect detachment and when all his doubts about the goal of life have been removed through Self-Knowledge, the ego comes to realize that it is none other than Atman, the Self. When such a person works, his actions do not bind him. Every form of self-control, where we surrender the egoistic enjoyment for the higher delight, where we give up lower impulses, is said to be a sacrifice. The mutual relationship of true work, wisdom and self-discipline is the key note of this Chapter. The goal is the life-giving wisdom, which gives us freedom of action and liberation from the bondage of work. It is the goal which everybody should attempt to reach.

### Points to Ponder

1. Explain the different kinds of sacrifices and their ultimate aim.
2. How is the 'knowledge sacrifice' superior to the sacrifices for expected results?
3. Who is the best person fit to receive this 'Knowledge' and how does he receive it?
4. Write short notes on
  - 1) Action, Inaction and Forbidden Action
  - 2) Action in Inaction, Inaction in Action
  - 3) A person of doubting disposition
  - 4) Performing actions with knowledge
  - 5) Result of Knowledge
  - 6) Obstacles to attain knowledge

**Next time we shall take up Chapter 5**

*HARIH OM*