



ŚRĪMADBHAGAVADGĪTĀ INTERPRETATION SUMMARY

Chapter 18: Mokṣa-Sannyāsa-Yoga

2/6 (Ślōka 13-25), Sunday, 08 October 2023

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YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/VdjxZYHXdc8>

The subtlety of our Actions

The 18th chapter of the Bhagavadgita is **Moksa-Sannyasa-Yoga, the Yoga of Liberation by Renunciation.**

The session started with *Deepa prajwalan*, the traditional lighting of the lamp invoking Goddess Sharada, and prayers to Paramatma, Param puja Swamiji, and Gita Ma.

We are at the onset of the beautiful 18th chapter, which is also called as **Ashtadashadhyayini**, or **Ekadhyayi gītā.**

So far, the earlier part covered some very important points, including the initiation of the dialogue with a simple yet intelligent query by Arjuna, that made Śrī Krishna go through all the concepts of Bhagavadgītā all over again. Arjuna's query was **'What is the difference between tyaga and Saṁnyāsa?'**

He wished to know by principle, the difference between the two. Shri Krishna responded with a beautiful answer. First, he shared the opinions of other intelligent people and gradually gave his firm opinion on that. HE said that a **Sadhak aspiring for the Ultimate Truth should never ever give up on three important things, yajna, tapas and dana.** These three activities are **Pāvanāni manīṣiṇām, responsible for purification of body and Soul. Hence these three should not be discarded.**

As a member of Geeta Pariwar, we are all doing a maha yajna. 'Geeta sewi' is a beautiful opportunity for each one of us to do our part and offer our aahuti in this Gītā Mahayajna. As indicated by Sri Krishna, one should try to use this opportunity and carry out this great service in life. Everyone should try to make the best use of the Geeta Sewi program's call for volunteers. We are all here with a desire to assimilate Gītā into our lives, following Swamiji's motto - '*Gītā padhe, padhayiye, jivan me laayen*'. In order to be able to get it into our lives, we should offer services to spread awareness of Gītā ma and receive her blessings. Without her blessings, it will be difficult to understand the principles of Gītā. That is the importance of becoming a Gītā sevi. By becoming a Gītā sevi, a person can do all the

three things – *yajna*, *tapa* and *dana*, together.

On this note, let us try to understand these principles of Gītā in more detail.

This chapter deals with the types of actions one needs to do. The subtlety of the actions is the topic of today's session. After highlighting the importance of *yajna*, *dana* and *tapa*, Sri Krishna mentioned three different types of tyaga. HE spoke about situations where people abandon their duties, and whether it is justified. In last session, we had reached a point where we saw that any action done is of different types, bearing different results, some favourable, some unfavourable, and some a mix of favourable and unfavourable. The karma phala or fruit of action will depend on the type of action.

In order to understand what types of actions need to be done, one should first understand about karma. We know that karma is a means of purifying ourselves.

18.13

pañcaitāni mahābāho, kāraṇāni nibodha me, sāṅkhye kṛtānte proktāni, siddhaye sarVākarmaṇām. 18.13

In the branch of learning known as Sāṅkhya, which prescribes means for neutralizing all actions, the five factors have been mentioned as contributory to the accomplishment of all actions; know them all from Me, Arjuna.

Sri Krishna is addressing Arjuna as *Mahabaho*, in recognition of his capacity to perform great tasks. HE also uses the term *nibodhame*, asking Arjuna to learn from him, about the five basic causes which are responsible for the accomplishment of any actions.

Our ancient scriptures are abundant with indepth knowledge on karma. But we do not have time to study the vast scriptures. Bhagavad Gītā is a small text that anyone can read to understand the cause behind any task. This is the benefit of studying Gītā.

18.14

adhiṣṭhānaṃ(n) tathā kartā, karaṇaṃ(ñ) ca pṛthagvidham, vividhāśca pṛthakceṣṭā, daivaṃ(ñ) caivātra pañcamam. 18.14

The following are the factors operating towards the accomplishment of actions, viz., the body and the doer, the organs of different kinds and the different functions of manifold kinds; and the fifth is Daiva, latencies of past actions.

Sri Krishna explains the five causes as **Adhistana, Karta, Karana, Chesta, and Daiva**. These five should be comprehended together in totality.

Let us assume the task of farming. First, a place or farm (**adhistana**) is needed, then a person to do the farming (**karta**). Next, equipments (**karana**) need to be arranged, followed by a plan of action (**Chesta**). Finally, with all actions set, on the day of farming, HIS will (**Daiva**) has to be surrendered to.

Like the farm, our body, the place where any action is going to be accomplished is *adhistana*. Without a body, it's not possible to do any action.

Jīvātmā is the **Karta** - the doer. The *Jīvātmā* is a part of the pure *Atma*, but it is closely associated with the body, and hence becomes the *karta*. No jewellery can be made from pure gold; a little bit of impurity has to be added to the pure gold to make jewellery. To get any action done, the pure *Atma* has to be transformed into *Jīvātmā* in a body, and get some proximity with the body, to accomplish something. However, it should be remembered that the *Jīvātmā* is a reflection of the Almighty.

The third factor, **Karana** or instrument (the means by which the action is done) is the sense organs, *upakaran*. The body uses its instruments, the *karmendriyas* and *gyanendriyas*, to derive at different types of efforts or plans (**Chesta**) in order to conceive the intended action.

When everything is in place, there is something called destiny (**daiva**) that comes to play. *Daiva* is one fifth of the causes that determines the success of any task. It does not mean luck or fortune. *Gītā* is not telling us to believe in luck. *Daiva* has two meanings.

- **It means the result of our past actions.** For eg, if the farmer has had some past action for which he has to suffer, it may incur as a loss in his farm.
- **It is also the blessings.** Karma kanda elaborates about various remedies like poojas and anushtanas for this *daiva*. The simplest thing that we can do to improve our destiny, is making a daily effort to connect with our *daiva*, through daily *Sādhanā*, and poojas following the practices taught by our learned ancestors.

These 5 factors will decide whether the effort is going to be successful. These factors function not only at the individual level, but even at the organizational level. This is relevant even in the office, when teams work together towards a common goal.

Sri Krishna further elaborates the entire concept of karma/ action.

18.15

śarīravāñmanobhiryat, karma prārabhate naraḥ, nyāyama(m) vā viparīta(m) vā, pañcaite tasya hetavaḥ. 18.15

These five are the contributory causes of whatever actions, prescribed or prohibited, man performs with the mind, speech and body.

Every task employs three instruments:

- Body (*Shareera*)
- Speech (*Vang*) and
- Mind (*manah*).

Any task can be started either from the body, or speech or the mind.

This has already been elaborated in the 17th chapter, *Shraddatrayavibhagayoga*.

When aiming for sattvic action, it is desirable to keep these three in the best mode. We have to perform *shareeric tapa*, *vangmay tapa*, and *manasa tapa* (as explained in chapter 17). Sri Krishna has explained the *sattvic tapa*, *rajasic tapa*, and *tamasic tapa*, in detail and also sub-classified them into *shareera*, *vangmayi* and *mana*. HE has given Indepth insight about how to keep the initial points clean and sattvic. Whatever austerities explained in chapter 17 should be followed in sattvic form. Then the karmas will automatically become sattvic.

What is the outcome if one follows the different routes - sattvic, rajasic and tamasic?

The result is either:

- **Nyayam:** actions recommended by the scriptures.
- **Viparitam:** is against the scriptures.

In either case, whatever action results, also depends on the five causes explained earlier.

18.16

**tatraivaṃ(m) sati kartāram, ātmānaṃ(ñ) kevalaṃ(n) tu yaḥ,
paśyatyakṛtabuddhitvān, na sa paśyati durmatiḥ. 18.16**

Notwithstanding this, however, he who, having an impure mind, regards the absolute, taintless Self alone as the doer, that man of perverse understanding does not view aright.

Atma is not one of the essential components of doing the task. Karta is a part of the nature or matter, prakriti, but atma is not matter, it is part of Purush.

Some people think that the Soul itself is the doer. However, this is ignorance (*durmati*).

For e.g., we light a lamp in the evening, for our daily activities. Different activities are performed under the light; can it be said that these activities are happening because of the light?

Similarly, all the tasks accomplished by the body are done under the light of the *Atma*, it is the *Prakash* that is with us. But the *atma* itself is not the doer.

Another example is the Sun. several activities happen under the presence of the Sun, but the Sun by itself is not doing anything. **The entire credit of the actions goes to the *Prakṛti*, not the *Atma*.**

This is explained in the 3rd chapter also:

***Prakṛti kriyamaanaani, gunah karmani sarvashah
Ahankara vimoodatma kartaha miti manyate.***

Sri Krishna explains that because of misidentification, people start believing that *Atma* is the doer. That is total ignorance.

HE further explains the kind perception possessed by the wise and learned people.

18.17

**yasya nāhaṅkṛto bhāvo, buddhiryasya na lipyate,
hatvāpi sa imāṃllokān, na hanti na nibadhyate. 18.17**

He whose mind is free from the sense of doership, and whose reason is not affected by worldly objects and activities, does not really kill, even having killed all these people, nor does any sin accrue to him.

The wise one doesn't have the ego of being the doer. When a task is being done, he understands that the action is being done by the body, the *atma* is just giving its light. The person whose intellect is not tainted by ego, is not tied to the action, even if he ends up slaying somebody. It should be remembered that this discussion was happening in the battlefield, and hence the example of extreme

act, slaying arises here. Nobody has any rights to kill anyone. But if it is done with an egoless feeling, as a duty, he will be free from its karma.

Today, a war has erupted between Israel and Palestine. The soldiers fighting on the forefront, are carrying out their duty towards their country. If they think that they are doing a sin by killing the enemy, they will be deviating from their karma. The whole purpose of them being there is lost. If their intellect is not tainted, then they don't get bound by the action.

In Ramayana, when Śrī Rama killed Raja Bali, in support of Sugriva, he was right and justified, because he was following his dharma. In Mahabharata, Arjuna is fearing the killing of his own people. Śrī Krishna is assuring him that he is righteous in following his Kṣatriya dharma.

Today is Indian Airforce day. Our airforce is protecting our country, not out of any hatred or malaise towards the enemy, but as part of their duty, dharma. If they end up killing the enemy, they will not be bound by the act of slaying them.

Similarly, in previous session, we saw the example of an executioner whose job is to hang criminals. He is just doing his job following the orders of the court, so he doesn't accumulate any sin.

Śrī Rama killed the asuras to protect the rishi munis. All of these people are not killing anyone because of personal hatred or ego; hence they will not get tainted by these killings. It is to be understood that **this happens when the discretion, the intellect of a person is awake**. Their action is being done as part of the dharma.

How can one understand what is dharma and what is not?

We should study Bhagavad gītā for sure. Swamiji also advises to study Mahabharata and Ramayana in order to understand dharma. A person will take correct action if he studies the two epics, especially the Mahabharata. The intellect of a person is awakened by the incidents narrated in Mahabharata, which has been rightly described as **Viveka taru udhyan** - a garden of trees of intellect, by Gnaneshwar maharajji.

Śrī Krishna is giving us step by step guidance about how to free ourselves from the karma of our deeds. Thus far, HE has spoken about the factors responsible for one's actions. HE proceeds to speak about the three sources of inspirations to do any task.

18.18

jñānaṃ(ñ) jñeyaṃ(m) pariñātā, trividhā karmacodanā, karaṇaṃ(ṅ) karma karteti, trividhaḥ(kh) karmasaṅgrahaḥ. 18.18

The Knower, knowledge and the object of knowledge-these three motivate action. Even so, the doer, the organs and activity-these are the three constituents of action.

Every action is inspired by three things -

- knowledge (**jnanam**),
- the knowable (**jneya**), and
- the knower (**parijnata**).

For instance, a person wants to have a cup of tea. Wanting to have tea is the inspiration or drive behind the next steps of actions. The person should have the knowledge about the ingredients

required. He should also know how to use the ingredients. Then there is the person himself, the knower, behind all the actions necessary for the process.

These inspirations become the instruments for performance of the three forms of actions:

- the **karana** (senses),
- the **karma** (work), and
- the **karta** (doer), respectively.

The three inspirations can be equated to the software that is necessary to create the hardware, that is the three forms of actions.

- First comes the knowledge (*janati*) about being thirsty, tired, and wanting to have tea.
- It is followed by the desire *icchate*, to make tea.
- This leads to *yatate*, the actual action of making tea.

When the inspiration (*trividha karmachodana*) follows these stages, it becomes the basis of actual action (*trividha karmasangraha*).

- The knower (**parijnata**) becomes the doer (**karta**).
- Then knowledge (**jnanam**) turns into, the means of the action (**karana**).
- **Jneya**, the whole act of making tea becomes the action (**karma**) itself.

This entire discussion is reinforcing one fact –*Prakṛti* is made of 3 properties by nature. It should be remembered that 3 gunas are there in all the matter.

- Initially, everything was in the subtle form of inspirations, as *jnana*, *jneya* and *parijnata*.
- Now that it has transpired into actions (*karmasangraha*), the *Puruṣa* has come to the periphery of *prakṛti*.
- *Prakṛti* is of 3 types –*satva*, *rajo* and *tamo guni*.
- The moment it becomes action (*karana*, or *karma* or *karta*), the *karmachodana* inherits the 3 properties. i.e. *parijnata* becomes *karta* that is *sattvic*, *rajasic* or *tamasic*.
- Similarly, the *Jnana* and *Jneya* also get converted into *sattvic*, *rajasic* or *tamasic*.
- Śrī Krishna explains that the causes (*parijnata*, *jnana* and *jneya*) and the basis of these causes (*karana*, *karma* and *karta*) obtain the properties of the *Prakṛti*.

18.19

jñānaṃ(ñ) karma ca kartāca, tridhaiva guṇabhedataḥ, procyate guṇasaṅkhyāne, yathāvacchṛṇu tānyapi. 18.19

In the branch of knowledge dealing with the Guṇas or modes of *Prakṛti*, knowledge and action as well as the doer have been declared to be of three kinds according to the Guṇa which predominates in each; hear them too duly from Me.

Śrī Krishna asks Arjuna to listen to him as HE explains the three types of knowledge (*jnana*), action (*karma*) and the doer (*karta*).

The basic structure of *sattvic* guna is light (*prakasha*).

Rajo guna is action oriented, its basic form is *kriya* (action).

Tamo guna's basic nature is inertia.

Based on them, the knowledge, action and doer are described by Śrī Krishna.

18.20

sarvabhūteṣu yenaikaṃ(m), bhāvamavyayamīkṣate, avibhaktaṃ(m) vibhakteṣu, tajjñānaṃ(m) viddhi sāttvikam. 18.20

That by which man perceives one imperishable divine existence as undivided and equally present in all individual beings, know that knowledge to be Sāttvika.

In the 13th chapter, it was learnt that knowledge cannot be known *per se*. It can be known only through the characteristics of the person.

Here, Śrī Krishna is explaining the perception of a person with sattvic knowledge. Such a person sees One Brahmā tattva in everybody. We can get a practical glimpse of these subtle characteristics by studying the lives of our sages, like Namdevji and Eknath Maharajji. When a dog ran away with Namdevji's rotis, he ran behind the dog, shouting 'Vitthala, take the ghee along with the roti'. His thought process was so pure, that he saw Vitthala in the dog also, and wanted to give it the best food, as good as what he himself was having.

Once, Eknath maharaj was carrying the holy water Ganga from Kasi to Rameshwaram for abhishek of Siva linga in Rameshwaram. On the way, he came across a donkey that was dying of thirst. He immediately gave the holy water to the donkey to drink. When questioned, he responded that he didn't see a donkey, but rather a thirsty Rameshwar and he couldn't let him die of thirst.

Our sages had such pure perceptions and are live examples of sattvic jnana. We should be proud of our history and culture that is propagating *Vasudaiva Kutumbakam*. **Bharat is gifting this beautiful knowledge of 'Ekta' to the entire world.**

Next, Sri Krishna explains the second type of knowledge.

18.21

prthaktvena tu yajjñānaṃ(n), nānābhāvānprthagvidhān, vetti sarveṣu bhūteṣu, tajjñānaṃ(m) viddhi rājasam. 18.21

The knowledge by which man cognizes many existences of various kinds, as apart from one another, in all beings, know that knowledge to be Rājasika.

This knowledge will teach about distinction like, mine, yours, etc. The previous knowledge was of the highest level. This knowledge belongs to the middle level, where the treatment varies depending on the person dealing with. The perception with which persons or things are being seen will be rajasic. This is not the personality that we should be seeking.

There is a beautiful prayer, that requests for a perception to see equality in everything.

Pavana bheeksha dedo Ram

Abedha bhakti dedo Ram

Atma nivedhan dedo Ram

One needs to develop that kind of vision, seeing equality in everything and everyone.

A beautiful shubashit (sayings in Sanskrit impart great knowledge) says that a person with narrow thinking sees distinction of mine and yours, but a magnanimous mind will see that all people belong

to one family.

अयं निजः परो वेति गणना लघुचेतसाम्

उदार चरितानां तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्

Only narrow-minded persons have two different outlooks towards common matters relating to themselves and others, whereas for noble- and broad-minded persons the entire world is like their own family. (And their approach towards all matters is uniform, be it their own matter or that of others i.e., they are never partisan.)

The phrase '*Vasudaiva Kutumbakam*' originates from this particular shubashit. Our country is a good example of this magnanimous mind. Irrespective of whether countries were good to us or not, our honourable prime minister is helping them by providing reliefs for earthquakes, floods and vaccines, without any bias.

18.22

**yattu kṛtsnavadekasmin, kārye saktamahaitukam,
atattvārthavadalpaṃ(ñ) ca, tattāmasamudāhṛtam. 18.22**

Again, that knowledge which clings to one body as if it were the whole, and which is irrational, has no real grasp of truth and is trivial, has been declared as Tāmasika.

This shloka explains the tamasic perception. Śrī Krishna is not referring to it as knowledge. There is sattvik knowledge and rajasic knowledge. But there cannot be tamasic knowledge because the very nature of tamasic nature is ignorance. There cannot be ignorant knowledge!

There is nothing more important than the person himself. My thought is the only thought; My existence is the only important one. **When this self-centred perception spreads in the world, restlessness prevails.** There is no slightest consideration for the others.

There was a community of frogs living in a lake, they considered that their lake was the largest in the world. They thought highest of their leader who could leap the farthest than others. A swan arrived at their lake and was bemused to see their narrow knowledge. It tried to explain about the outside larger world, but failed to convince the frogs whose minds were clouded with ignorance. Being happy with their own ignorance and existence is the quality of tamasic nature. Without any foundation in truth, they will be attached to their beliefs. This path is a path of certain decline. In Rajo guni, there is a scope of improvement. But with tamo guni, there will only be degraded actions.

Sadhaks should introspect and improvise themselves. In order to rise from tamo guna to rajo guna, they should seek the company of activists or knowledgeable people who are active. To rise from rajo guna to sattvic guna, our Swamiji says they should engage in satsang.

Knowing these three types of knowledge, HE proceeds to the 3 types of karmas.

18.23

**niyataṃ(m) saṅgarahitam, arāgadveṣataḥ(kh) kṛtam,
aphalaprepsunā karma, yattatsāttvikamucyate. 18.23**

That action which is ordained by the scriptures and is not accompanied by the sense of doership, and has been done without any attachment or aversion by one who seeks no return, is called Sāttvika.

The best type of karma is one that is expected from a person (*niyata*) as prescribed by dharma and should be performed without worrying about the attachment (*sangarahita*).

The *niyata* karma of the soldiers is to fight for the country. Although it is a noble cause, yet any ordinary person cannot indulge in fighting for the country, as it is not his *niyata* karma.

Secondly, there should not be any hatred or malice towards any task. In Mahabharata, during a big *yajna*, Śrī Krishna took up the task of washing the feet of brahmins. HE didn't have any ego that he is the Paramātmā. HE was ready to do any task offered to HIM.

There should be no expectations of fruits of the task. During our Independence, our freedom fighters were not deterred from the fear of getting killed during the fight.

Svatantrya Veer Sawarkar ji, although a great barrister, didn't get incited by the wealth his occupation could have brought in. He sacrificed his life for his dharma of fighting for his beloved country.

Such actions performed as per dharma and without selfish desires will take us to our true destination. But most of the people perform actions with self-centred motives in their minds, as explained in the next shloka.

18.24

yattu kāmepsunā karma, sāhaṅkāreṇa vā punaḥ, kriyate bahulāyāsaṃ(n), tadrājasamudāhṛtam. 18.24

That action, however, which involves much strain and is performed by one who seeks enjoyments or by a man full of egotism, has been spoken of as Rājasika.

We are living in an era where nothing works without an incentive. Incentive is the Word of the Millennium. All the tasks driven by pleasures and desires and done with an ego of the doership, amount to rajasic karma. There may be enormous amounts of efforts involved in the completion of the task. Yet, because it is done with ego in the fore front, it becomes rajasic in nature.

Albeit this type of action is not to be underestimated. It can form the seed for future sattvic qualities. For instance, during Ganesha puja, the children attend the aarti in anticipation of the prasada that is distributed after the aarti. Their action of attending the pious ceremony is driven by their desire for the prasada. Yet, their participation should be welcome, because gradually, the taste of prasada will be forgotten, but the memory of aarti will stay in their mind, and the love for participation in the religious activities will develop.

It is not wrong to have desires. We should not underestimate the importance of desires. We should have mighty desires, driven by sattvikta, like Swami Vivekanandaji who desired to spread his guruji's teachings all over the world. This desire was so hard to fulfil in those days, but he made all efforts possible to take our scriptures and ancient knowledge to the western world.

Similarly, the desire of our honorable PM Narendra Modiji to bring our country to the forefront as a world leader and promote the concept of Vasudaiva Kutumbam is also driven by sattvikta. Our mind should be sattvic, so our icchas or desires will be sattvic and our karmas too will be sattvic.

18.25

anubandham(ñ) kṣayaṃ(m) hiṃsām, anavekṣya ca pauruṣam, mohādārabhyate karma, yattattāmasamucyate. 18.25

That action which is undertaken through sheer ignorance, without regard to consequences or loss to oneself, injury to others and one's own resourcefulness, is declared as Tāmasika.

Śrī Krishna mentions about tamasic karma as something that leads to violence and performed with unnecessary boldness without thought about one's capabilities. Its foundation is lack of knowledge or ignorance. A person may have a strong physique and strength, but he would be foolish if he jumped into the ocean to swim. If a handful of brave soldiers attempt to bring down a huge army, their action will also amount to tamasic karma, as it is based on unnecessary boldness.

The session concluded with a strong suggestion that **one should stay away from tamasic karma, continue doing rajasic karmas and aim for the sattvic karmas**, and offering the discussion at the feet of Gurudev and Paramātmā.

Questions & Answers

Suman ji

Question: Can you please recommend books to study Mahabharatha?

Answer: Please refer to the original text, and also listen to Swamiji's pravachan about Mahabharata. **Sankshipta Mahabharata**, a set of 2 volumes, by Geeta Press is recommended, to start the journey. Later, you can study the 6 volume set, which contains the sanskrit shlokas also.



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Thank you-For reading the summary

You have enjoyed this vivechan writeup! In spite of intense editing and proofreading, errors of grammar, as also of omission and commission may have crept in. We appreciate your forbearance.

Jai Shri Krishna!

Compiled by: Geeta Pariwar - Creative Writing Department

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