

## ŚRĪMADBHAGAVADGĪTĀ INTERPRETATION SUMMARY

### Chapter 3: Karma-Yoga

4/5 (Ślōka 21-30), Sunday, 15 October 2023

Interpreter: GĪTĀ PRAVĪṆA RUPAL SHUKLA

YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/qs8eM66K3L4>

## True Definition of Action

CHAPTER 3 of Srimad Bhagavadgītā is Karma Yoga -- The Yoga of Action

The Vivechan Session started with the auspicious Deep Prajwalan (lighting of the lamp), and prayers offered to Paramātmā. Obeisance was also offered to Sri Guruji. By the grace of the Supreme, blessings of our Pujya Guruji, and so many punya karmas done in our previous births, we got this opportunity to learn Gītā, and spread the knowledge of Gītā.

When we started our Gītā journey, level one appeared difficult, and we all proceeded with a doubt in our mind whether we would be able to correctly pronounce these difficult Sanskrit words. We could successfully complete Level one, then Level two, and now we are in Level three. Now we all are confident that we will be able to complete all the eighteen chapters with perfect pronunciations.

The 3rd chapter starts with Arjuna asking Sri Krishna:

**jyayasi cet karmanas te mata buddhir janardana  
tat kim karmani ghore mam niyojayasi kesava**

If HE considered knowledge is superior to action, then why did HE ask him to wage this terrible war? He further said that he was totally confused by HIS ambiguous advice. He insisted that SriKrishna should tell him decisively, the one path which he would follow in order to achieve the highest good.

The Gita teachings starts with the 7th Sloka of Chapter 2, wherein Arjuna completely surrendered to Sri Bhagavān and spoke the following words-

**sisyas te 'ham sadhi mam tvam prapannam**

"I am Your disciple, and I surrender to You. Please instruct me for certain what is best for me, Which path should I follow?".

The totally bewildered Arjuna completely surrendered to Sri Krishna. Like a small child he pleaded with Bhagavān, to precisely show him the right path. Bhagavān deliberates on the various ways, which a person should lead in order to have a pious yet purposeful life so as to get ultimate bliss. HE

explained Jyana Yoga, Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga. These are only some of the different types of ways one can proceed through, so as to reach HIM.

In fact, there are innumerable ways to reach HIM. The number of methods or practices that could be adopted are uncountable like the number of soil particles one can hold in one's fist. All the paths lead to the same destination and the destination is Soul realization. The underlying theme is that whatever path one chooses, one should proceed with perseverance, dedication and devotion and not giving up. In whatever manner one wants to understand and realize the essence, one is free to do but the essence remains the same. The essence is, 'ParamTatwa is our own Swarupa'. Put in simple language, we are all the manifested forms of the unmanifested Brahman. The same is explained in different Upanishads through Mahavakyas. There are four Mahavakyas.

- 1. **Aham Brahmāsmi** - I am Brahman
- 2. **Tat Tvam Asi** - That Thou Art
- 3. **Prajyanam Brahmā** - The Consciousness is Brahman
- 4. **Ayam Atma Brahma** - The Self is Brahman.

They all mean we all are the reflected consciousness of the infinite Supreme Consciousness. The body form which we all take is a play of Prakriti. Purusha is our Atma or soul. Being embodied we need to do our Karmas as well. Gunas are the characteristics of Prakriti.

It is true that any of the methods adopted and practiced sincerely will give us the desired result. But one cannot simply say that I would only contemplate on Brahman as that is the ultimate goal and I need not do any work. This is not possible as Prakṛti comprises of Gunas which make us do work. These Gunas are of three types SATVA, RAJA, and TAMA. These Gunas influence our actions. Even one second of our life does not pass without doing Karma or actions. One may not realize that even while sitting idle also, one is doing some form of Karma, like breathing. Inhaling and exhaling is a Karma which we do involuntarily.

Karmas again can be classified as good Karmas or bad Karmas. Good Karmas are acts of merits which yield in Punyas or virtues where as bad Karmas are acts of demerits which earn us vices or Papas. All our actions are Guna dependent. In order to get rid of bad Karmas, one needs to perform Yajnas as prescribed by Vedas. Vedas have prescribed more than thousand different types of Yajnas; five out of them are most important - Deva Yajna, Pitru Yajna, Bhoota Yajna, Rishi Yajna, and Brahma Yajna. One may argue that bad karmas do not accrue to him as he is sitting tight and not doing any action. So, he need not perform any Yajna. But this argument does not hold to logic as breathing is also an activity. While breathing in, we may be killing many viruses and bacteria although unknowingly. Hence some sort of Papa may accrue. Again, thinking in the mind is an action. Even if one sits idle but keeps thinking about some evil acts, he would be accumulating sins. It is better to do some actions without getting attached to it instead of not doing any physical action but thinking about it. Hence Nishkama Karma or Karma without any attachment is always better to be performed than doing good work with selfish motive. To give an example, keeping fast or upavasam on Ekadashis and other auspicious days is definitely a Sat Karma, but thinking about food while observing fast is not a desirable Karma. What is more desirable is the feelings or thoughts which goes into the performance of a Karma and not the stand-alone Karma.

Sri Krishna performed many actions during HIS lifetime, but he did not get entangled in heart and mind at any time. HE did all HIS actions as a non-doer. Once, his Gopi friends asked him if his actions won't result in any karmas which he had to bear. Krishna replied 'I only do all my actions/ Karmas without any attachment. I therefore would not bear any karmas.' Gopis did not believe this.

Then Sri Krishna gave them a small job to ascertain the veracity of his statement by asking them to

request Yamuna River to provide them with a path to cross the river. Gopis went to river Yamuna and requested it to make a way for them to cross it. Yamuna river did not oblige. Sri Krishna asked them to go back and request Yamuna River that if it is true that Sri Krishna had never fooled with the Gopis, then Yamuna should provide them with a path to cross. To their greatest astonishment, Yamuna River separated, carving out a pathway in the middle enabling them to cross the river. Thus, Sri Krishna proved to HIS Gopi friends that whatever HE did is without involving his heart and mind. HE was not attached to any of HIS actions. It was only Leela performed by HIM. We thus call it Krishna Leela. Hence, the bhava or feelings is more important than any Karma.

Similarly, chanting Bhagavat Gita with perfect pronunciation but without any feeling or while entertaining other thoughts is not of much significance whereas chanting the slokas imperfectly while thinking and understanding the right meaning of those slokas is a more desirable action. While doing an action, one has to give the best without thinking of results. We have rights to perform but do not possess the right to results. When one does his actions with such a feeling of non-doership, Paramātmā HIMSELF take care of his actions and all his actions are turned fruitful or Punya karmas. Working without desire is always better than doing all good works with desires.

This has been told by Prabhu in Sloka 47 of Chapter 2:

***karmanyevadhikaras te ma phalesu kadacana  
ma karma-phala-hetur bhur ma te sango 'stv akarmani***

Hence one has a right to perform his prescribed duties, but he is not entitled to the fruits of his actions. One should never consider oneself to be the cause of the results of his activities. At the same time, one should also be not attached to inaction. There is no scope for inaction. Many times, deliberate action with desire is more harmful than deliberate inaction. In such a case nature takes its course and makes us do whatever we are supposed to do.

### 3.21

**yadyadācarati śreṣṭhaḥ(s), tattadevetaro janaḥ,  
sa yatpramāṇam(ñ) kurute, lokastadanuvartate. 3.21**

For, whatever a great man does, that very thing other men also do; whatever standard he sets up, the generality of men follow the same.

In the 20th sloka, it was seen that Mahatmas like King Janaka attained perfection by performing their prescribed duties. Janaka, here does not refer to the person, the father of Sita. But it represents the post he occupied. The word Janaka is used symbolically for great people who performed their difficult duties with ease, and yet remained totally unattached. They attained holiness through action and not through inaction. Hence Sri Krishna advised Arjuna, that he should also perform his duties to set an example for the good of the world, and not to resort to inaction.

In this Sloka, it is elaborated that others will follow whatever path the great people take. The great leaders exemplify. Leaders have a moral responsibility towards common people. They set up a standard (pramāṇam) and others follow (anuvartate). Our revered Guruji and Ashu Bhaiya are inspiring all of us. They are setting examples by doing such dedicated and selfless works.

In Ramayana, Prabhu Ramachandra had set an example of giving utmost priority to the opinions of citizens (Prajās). Prabhu knew Sita Mata did not commit any wrong but despite that he asked Laxman to leave her at Valmiki Maharishi's Ashram, only to fulfill his Praja Dharma of honoring people's views.

In Mahabharata, Sri Krishna was dissuaded by one and all not to go to Kauravas with a proposal of mediation / Sandhi. Despite that Sri Krishna went only to set an example that a peace proposal should be initiated before any war decision. As Paramatma, HE knew what he was doing was futile, still HE did it only to ensure that mankind should learn that efforts were made to negotiate before fighting a battle. Actions of great people are always emulated. Common people learn from history. People learn from action, not from mere words. Hence great people have to be very careful about their actions.

Each one of us have also a noble duty towards our juniors and people who try to learn from us. The juniors look towards us so as to what sort of company we keep, what are the types of books we read, what work we do etc. Each one of us have a moral duty of setting an example in the society.

### 3.22

**na me pārthāsti kartavyaṃ(n), triṣu lokeṣu kiñcana,  
nānavāptamavāptavyaṃ(ṽ), varta eva ca karmaṇi. 3.22**

Arjuna, there is no duty in all the three worlds for Me to perform, nor is there anything worth attaining, unattained by Me; yet I continue to work.

Key words

triṣu lokeṣu - in the three worlds

avāptavyam - to be gained

karmaṇi - prescribed duties

Bhagavan here said 'Oh! Partha there is no duty for me in all the three worlds. Nor does any benefit accrue to me. There is nothing worth for me to attain, still I keep doing works.' There is a great lesson for all of us here to learn from this. Bhagavan being all powerful, all pervading, all knowing past, future and present, has no necessity to work. Yet, HE works just because HE had taken a gross form. We humans, being the tiniest fragments of HIM, should necessarily work.

### 3.23

**yadi hyahaṃ(n) na varteyaṃ(ñ), jātu karmaṇyatandritaḥ,  
mama vartmānuvartante, manuṣyāḥ(ph) pārtha sarvaśaḥ. 3.23**

Should I not engage in action scrupulously at any time, great harm will come to the world; for, Arjuna, men follow My way in all matters.

Key words

Varteyam - engage in action

atandritaḥ - carefully

vartma - path

anuvartante - follow

sarvaśaḥ - in all respects

Bhagavan told Partha if HE did not carefully perform the prescribed duties then all men who would follow HIS path. Hence it is imperative on HIS part to perform all Karmas dutifully so that the world would follow HIM and work with sincerity and righteousness. Otherwise, great harm would be done to the man kind.

### 3.24

**utsīdeyurime lokā, na kuryām(ñ) karma cedaham,  
sañkarasya ca kartā syām, upahanyāmimāḥ(ph) prajāḥ. 3.24**

If I ever cease to act, these worlds would perish; nay, I should prove to be the cause of confusion, and of the destruction of these people.

Key words

utsīdeyuh - destroy

kuryām - perform

upahanyām - would destroy

Bhagavan continued that if HE ceased to perform the prescribed actions, these worlds would perish. HE would be responsible for the pandemonium that would prevail, and would thereby destroy the peace of the human race. HE cannot resort to not performing even for a moment. We all know HE is the Consciousness and without HIM all worlds will perish in no time. Thus, he explains to Arjun that if he did not fulfil his occupational duties, it would cause pandemonium in society.

For that matter anybody in vital positions or assuming key posts cannot stop working. That is why in the event of the death of the Prime Minister of a country, a temporary Prime Minister is immediately asked to take charge. Otherwise, there will be chaos and enemies might take advantage and attack.

### 3.25

**saktāḥ(kh) karmaṇyavidvāṃso, yathā kurvanti bhārata,  
kuryādvidvāṃstathāsaktāḥ(ś), cikīrṣurlokasaṅgraham. 3.25**

Arjuna, as the unwise act with attachment, so should the wise man, with a view to maintain the world order, act without attachment.

Key words

Saktah - attachment

avidvāṃsaḥ - the ignorant people

loka-saṅgraham - for the welfare of the masses

Bhagavān said that ignorant people perform their duties with attachment and the wise people act without attachment. This is necessary to maintain the world order. The Jeevan Muktas, the self-realized, have no attachment to work. These persons work only for the sake of leading people on the right path. They are not required to work as they neither have a desire to work nor do they have aversion to work. They all are predominantly Sattvik people. Rajas and Tamas Gunas have very little effect on them.

They work only to set an example to the mankind. They do the rituals and observe Ekadashi Vrata. They perform all rituals that are required to be performed on Chaturmas and other Holy days. They do not renounce their Karma of doing worship, meditation and Yajna. They also lead a normal social life. This is because they understand they have a duty to guide the mankind. They have a moral responsibility towards others who look up to them for guidance. They do their Karma keeping in mind the welfare of the society.

### 3.26

**na buddhibhedam(ñ) janayed, ajñānām(ñ) karmasaṅginām,  
joṣayetsarVākarmāṇi, vidvānyuktaḥ(s) samācaran. 3.26**

A wise man established in the Self should not unsettle the mind of the ignorant attached to action, but should get them to perform all their duties, duly performing his own duties.

Key words

buddhi-bhedam - discord in the intellects

karma-saṅginām - who are attached to fruitive actions

joṣhayet - should inspire (them) to perform

The wise should not create discord in the intellects of ignorant people who are attached to their actions. They should not be advised to stop work just because of their attachment.

Doing Karma with attachment is better than not doing Karma at all. Rather, by performing their duties in an enlightened manner, they should inspire the ignorant also to do their prescribed duties. Seniors should set examples for juniors to emulate. Many enlightened persons tell Kathas for guiding the society.

**3.27**

**prakṛteḥ(kh) kriyamāṇāni, guṇaiḥ(kh) karmāṇi sarvaśaḥ,  
ahaṅkāravimūḍhātmā, kartāhamiti manyate. 3.27**

In fact all actions are being performed by the modes of Prakṛti (Primordial Nature). The fool, whose mind is deluded by egoism, thinks: "I am the doer."

Key words

prakṛiteḥ - of material nature

kriyamāṇāni - carried out

ahankāra-vimūḍha-ātmā - those who are bewildered by the ego and misidentify themselves with the body

Our actions are guided by our Gunas. There are three types of Gunas -

- Sattva
- Rajas
- Tamas

These Gunas have been explained elaborately in the 14th chapter. They are our material nature. But in ignorance, the Soul, deluded by false identification with the body, thinks of itself as the doer. In reality all actions are nourished by the Gunas. Hence to think that some a person is doing bad Karmas is also not correct. It is not a person who is doing the work, but it is the Gunas who are playing on him.

Many a times these Gunas are carried over to the next birth. If the Karmik Account contains more of Satwa Guna, a person continues doing more good Karmas; if a person's Karmik Account has more of Raja or Tama Guna, he tends to do more of bad Karmas. Thus, the cycle of Gunas and Karmas continue. To reduce this balance of carried over bad Karmas, one needs to observe more spiritual practices and surrender himself / herself to Paramātmā. Bhagavān says in the 15th Sloka of 15th chapter 'sarvasya caham hr̥di sannivisto' I am seated in the hearts of all living beings. 'Whatever work

one is doing in this life, he must do with a non-doer attitude without keeping any desires for results. He must do every work, thinking that he is an agent of Paramātmā. In this way one can reduce one's previous bad Karma balances and also increase the present life's good Karma balances. In addition to this, he can also observe the prescribed Vedic Practices of keeping fast, doing poojas, yajnas, etc. Many people keep Ekadashi Vrata in order to quickly reduce their bad Karmas.

### 3.28

#### **tattvavittu mahābāho, guṇakarmavibhāgayoḥ, guṇā guṇeṣu vartanta, iti matvā na sajjate. 3.28**

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

Key words

Tattavit - knower of truth

Mahabaho - mighty armed, name of Arjuna

guṇa-karma - from guṇas and karma

vibhāgayoḥ - distinguish

Jnyanis or the realized persons distinguish the soul as distinct from Gunas and Karmas. They perceive that it is only the Gunas (in the shape of the senses, mind, and others) that move among the Gunas (in the shape of the objects of perception), and thus they do not get entangled. They clearly see the body as a play of Matter/ Prakṛti/ Guna, and it is distinct from ATMA. This fact is clearly understood by the tattva-vit (knower of truth).

Having thus abolished the ego, they are free from bodily identifications, and are able to discern their spiritual identity distinct from the material body. Hence, they do not perceive themselves as the doers of their material actions, and instead they attribute every activity to the play of the three Gunas. Such are the spiritual Saints who dwell always in eternal peace and bliss and hence are '**guṇā guṇeṣu vartanta iti mattva na sajjate**', engaging in activities without any attachments.

### 3.29

#### **prakṛterguṇasammūḍhāḥ(s), sajjante guṇakarmasu, tānakṛtsnavido mandān, kṛtsnavinna vicālayet. 3.29**

Those who are completely deluded by the Guṇas (modes) of Prakṛti remain attached to those Guṇas and actions; the man of perfect Knowledge should not unsettle the mind of those ignorants of imperfect knowledge.

Keyword

sammūḍhāḥ - deluded

Those who are deluded by the operation of the Gunas become attached to the results of their actions. But the wise who understand these truths should not disturb such ignorant people who do not understand or realize these differences. The ignorant people become bewildered by this play of the material energy and think themselves as the doers. Being attracted by the three modes of material nature, they work for their mental delights and material pleasure. They do not perceive like the wise



do.

### 3.30

**mayi sarvāṇi karmāṇi, sannyasyādhyātmacetasā,  
nirāśīrnirmamo bhūtvā, yudhyasva vigatajvaraḥ. 3.30**

Therefore, dedicating all actions to Me with your mind fixed on Me, the Self of all, freed from desire and the feeling of meum and cured of mental agitation, fight.

Adhi means inside; Atma here implies Sarira. These two words joined together is Adhytma. Adhyātma refers to that which is inside a manifested form. It does not mean the Sarira or Body alone, but includes everything - the Pancha Karmendriyas, Pancha Jyanendriyas, Pancha Prana, Mana(mind), Buddhi(intellect), and Ahankara or ego. It also includes the Stula Sarira, Sukshma Sarira and also Karana Sarira.

*Adhyātma*-chetasā means all of the above with the thoughts resting on Paramatma.  
Sanyasya means “renouncing all fruits of actions as well performing as a non-doer.  
Nirāśīṇ means “without hankering for the results of the actions.”

With the mind centered in HIM, and performing all works as an offering to HIM, one can become free from all desire and selfishness, and from mental grief as well.

After explaining all these, Bhagavan asks Arjuna to develop such a feeling and then to get up and fight.

Question & Answer session:

#### Chandana Ji

**Question.** Is Karma explained in Vedas also?

**Answer.** Karmas are explained in Karma Khand of the Upanishads. But it is described in detailed only in Bhagavad gita. Sri Krishna had laid lot of emphasis on Karma as well as Karma without expectations.

Dr. JayaPai Ji

Question: What is the meaning of **Guna Guneshu vartanta**? If all actions are done by the gunas and not the person, then why should the karma phalas become attached to the person, and get carried over to the next birth?

A. Nature is made up of three Gunas - Satwa, Raja, Tama. A person is a mixture of all three. Any one guna will be active at one time, and that will add to the karma phala of the person. Sleeping is on account of tama guna. Working is on account of raja guna. Prayer or meditation is on account of satwa guna.





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**Jai Shri Krishna!**

Compiled by: Geeta Pariwar – Creative Writing Department

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