

ŚRĪMADBHAGAVADGĪTĀ INTERPRETATION SUMMARY

Chapter 15: Puruṣottama-Yoga

1/2 (Ślōka 1-8), Sunday, 12 May 2024

Interpreter: GĪTĀ PRAVĪṆA RUPAL SHUKLA

YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/Tf86hnlB8m0>

Strive to reach the root of the Saṁsāravṛkṣa

The 15th chapter of the Bhagavad-Gītā is known as the **Puruṣottama-Yoga - The Yoga of the Supreme Being**.

The first of the two-part interpretation session of the 15th chapter of Śrīmadbhagavadgītā started with prayers to Bhagavān Shri Krishna, followed by the lighting of the auspicious lamp. Prayers were offered to śiva ji, Maharshi Veda Vyas ji and one's Guru.

**Sadaśiva Samarambham Vyasa Shankaracharya Madhyamam
Asmad Acharya Paryantam Vande Guru Paramparam**

Originating with the all-pervasive śiva, to Veda Vyasji, to my own Guru, I bow with reverence to the entire Guru Parampara (tradition of teachers).

The 12th Chapter, **Bhakti Yoga**, dealt with 36 Bhakta-lakshas, the signs of a true and devoted Bhakta (Devotee of Bhagavān).

At the end of the 15th Chapter, Bhagavān will explain HIS **Purushottama Swarupa** where he will disclose about HIS Supreme form.

With Bhagavān's grace and blessings from Saints and our Gurus, coupled with the Punya Karma (good deeds) of our past life, we have been fortunate to get this opportunity to Learn Gītā, Teach Gītā and spread the Knowledge of Gītā amongst the people. There are so many who may be yearning to Learn Gītā but are not getting a chance and there are those who have got a chance but are not utilizing the God given opportunity.

In Shankara Bhashyam, Shankaracharyaji said:

yamevaiṣa vṛṇute tena labhyastasyaiṣa

which means we are not in charge of our choices; it is Bhagavān who chooses the path for us. Since

we have been fortunate to have been chosen for this path by Bhagavān, it is our responsibility to not Leave but diligently Live the wonderful Gītā journey.

Arjuna, who was Invincible and was never defeated, describes his mental condition to his friend Sri Krishna, in Shlokas 28-30 of the first chapter of Bhagavad Gītā. He says his limbs were weak and unstable and he is no longer able to hold himself steady. He doesn't have the will to fight his own family members.

***sīdanti mama gātrāṇi mukhaṁ cha pariśuṣhyati
vepathuś cha śharīre me roma-harṣhaś cha jāyate
gāṇḍīvaṁ sraṁsate hastāt tvak chaiva paridahyate
na cha śhaknomy avasthātum bhramatīva cha me manaḥ***

In the 7th Shloka of Chapter 2, he desperately seeks Bhagavān's advice on what should be his course of action under the circumstance.

***karpanya-dosopahata-svabhavaḥ
prcchamī tvam dharma-sammudha-cetaḥ
yac chreyah syan niscitam bruhi tan me
sisyas te 'ham sadhi mam tvam prapannam***

Bhagavān Krishna, in response to Arjuna's fervent request, starts disseminating the Knowledge captured in the Bhagavad Gītā from the 11th Shloka of Chapter 2.

Param Pujya Swamiji Maharaj says that Vedas are the main source of Knowledge; they teach and guide us in almost all sphere of life activities, both physically and spiritually. The Vedas are the condensation of what is said to had been told by Bhagavān and His messengers. On the other hand, Gītā is HIS direct voice. So, when we, the fortunate chosen by Bhagavān, chant the Shlokas of the Gītā, we are actually repeating what the Paramātmā had said to Arjuna on the Battlefield.

The 12th and 15th chapters are the smallest Chapters of Gītā. Therefore, our Gītā journey in Geeta Pariwar starts from these chapters. Initially, when we start our Gītā journey, we may think it to be a difficult one. But after completing these two small chapters, our confidence increases and provides us with the impetus to walk the path and complete all 18 Chapters to attain the pinnacle of our spiritual wellbeing.

In Chapter 15, Bhagavān tells us a different philosophy of life. In several Gītā discourses we would have heard of a hypothetical tree that is upside down that vividly describes the idea of Creation. One may wonder what is the genesis of this mystical tree; where and why has it been described?

Starting from the 1st Shloka of this Chapter, Bhagavān explains the Samsara Swarupa or the form of the Samsara symbolized by this Tree.

15.1

**śrībhagavānuvāca
ūrdhvamūlamadhaḥ(ś) śākham, aśvattham(m) prāhuravyayam,
chandāṁsi yasya parṇāni, yastam(ṽ) veda sa vedavit.15.1**

Srī Bhagavān said :He who knows the Pīpala tree (in the form of creation); which is said to be imperishable,with its roots in the Primeval being (God), whose branch is represented by Brahmā (the

Creator), and whose leaves are the Vedas, is the knower of the purport of Vedas.

In the first 2 Shlokas of the chapter, Bhagavān explains the Samsara Swarupa. HE describes the **Aśhvatttha** tree with its **Mool** or the root which is the main part of the tree facing upwards, and the branches down below. **Urdhva** or upward, implies the Brahma, the Supreme or Principal Being. HE is Supreme and Omnipresent.

By using the word **Aśhvatttha**, Bhagavān tells us that **Samsāra** is temporal, and ever changing. The materialistic world of today is very unlikely to remain the same the next day.

- **shva** signifies tomorrow or the next moment in time
- **aśhva** means that which will not be there tomorrow.

Aśhvatttha indicates that which is ever evolving, ever changing.

Bhagavān is comparing this material world with not just any random tree, but with the Pīpala tree, also called as

Aśhvatttha tree. The reason for this being Pīpala tree is very unpredictable. Its leaves shake even if there is no wind. HE also describes this world as '**Avyayam**', meaning that which though ever changing remains indestructible or eternal.

The word '**Chandas**' used in this verse has multiple meanings, the first of which is **Poetry**, the literary work written in Sanskrit in particular. The second meaning is **Jñāna**, the knowledge of the Divine. The third meaning is the **Vedas**. The meaning imbibed here is that of Knowledge. In this mystical **Aśhvatttha** tree with the roots upwards and branches and leaves downward, the leaves imply Knowledge. Bhagavān concludes this Shloka by saying that **whoever has the knowledge of the endless cycle of Creation and Destruction, is the one who has deeply knowledge of the Vedas.**

15.2

**adhaścordhvaṃ(m) prasṛtāstasya śākhā,
guṇappravṛddhā viṣayappravālāḥ,
adhaśca mūlānyanusantatāni,
karmānubandhīni manuṣyaloke. 15.2**

Fed by the three Guṇas and having sense-objects for their tender leaves, the branches of the aforesaid tree (in the shape of different orders of creation) extend both upwards and downwards; and it's roots which bind the soul according to its actions in the human body, are spread in all regions, higher as well as lower.

Bhagavān continues to explain that the branches of the mystical tree are spread everywhere, in all directions. HE brings in the theory of Karma here and explains that what **Phala** (fruits) we receive in our lives is governed by our Karma or Action in our past lives.

The 47th Shloka of Chapter 2 of Bhagavad Gītā is very well known

**karmaṇyevādhikāras te mā phaleṣhu kadāchana
mā karmaphala hetur bhūr mā te saṅgo 'stvakarmaṇi**

It is often misinterpreted as doing one's action but not pondering about the result thereof.

This Shloka actually explains that we mortal human beings have the right to performing our Karma, the duties or actions prescribed to us but have no entitlement to the Phala (fruit) or the result of such actions.

The branches of the tree denoting our Karma are nurtured and nourished by the Trigunas - Sattva, Rajo and Tamo Gunas.

All mortal beings possess all the three Gunas in various degrees. The difference depends on which of the three Gunas is dominant or superior in an individual.

A person who loves to laze around and sleep all the time is Tamo Guna Pradhana; his dominant Guna is Tamo Guna. Someone who is hyperactive and always so busy in accomplishing materialistic work, that he doesn't even find time to pray or meditate is controlled by Rajo Guna. Those governed by Sattva Guna spend their time in meditation, prayer, chanting and in service to Bhagavān.

The leaves on a branch before foliating can be likened to the five sources of worldly temptations - sound, sight, touch, smell and taste.

Just like the way, the tender leaves foliate and continue to grow on the branches, so does these materialistic temptations. Our dominant Guna drives our five sense objects to awaken and give rise to various temptations or desires in our minds which eventually controls how we perform our Karma or Actions. The Karma we perform ultimately binds us to the Samsara.

As explained in Chapter 17, **Śhraddhā Traya Vibhāga Yoga**, these Trigunas not only affect our actions, but also the kind of food we prefer and consume.

All the material experiences we encounter in our daily lives and the consequent action we perform are due to what is perceived by our **Indriyas** (sense organs) under the directions given by our Gunas.

Hence, we can say, it is "I", "Me" who actually and eventually is responsible for our Karmas and the control mechanism for our actions lie within ourselves only.

15.3

**na rūpamasyeha tathopalabhyate,
nānto na cādirna ca sampratiṣṭhā,
aśvatthamenam(m) suvirūḍhamūlam,
asaṅgaśastreṇa dṛḍhena chittvā. 15.3**

The nature of this tree of creation, does not on mature thought, turn out what it is represented to be; for it has neither beginning nor end, nor even stability. Therefore cutting down this Pīpala tree, which is m

Ishwar clarifies that the **Saṃsāra** in actuality is not like the inverse Peepal tree which HE had so far used as a metaphor to explain the concept to us.

One must understand that while the example of the inverse tree was given by Bhagavān to make us understand the broad contour of **Saṃsāra**, in reality, it is totally different. It neither has any foundation, nor any resting surface. It has no top or bottom. There is no starting point or end point for this **Saṃsāravṛkṣa**. It is eternal.

Yogeshwar explains how in the next life, **good Karma leads to birth in a good Yoni or species with a good life, and how bad Karma leads to an inferior Yoni and poor quality of life.**

In this context, one needs to understand the concept of **Chaturdasha Bhuvanani**, the 14 worlds, of which the first 8 bhuvans are considered superior to **Manushya bhuvan**, which is the 9th celestial bhuvan and where we human beings or precisely the two-legged beings exist.

The bhuvans after Manushya are:

- 10th: for animals with four legs.
- 11th: for birds having two legs and two wings
- 12th: of reptiles with no wings.
- 13th: of insects such as spiders, mosquitoes, octopuses etc having 6 legs.
- 14th: of trees and plants, that can lead only sedentary life completely attached to a place.

We also have the concept of the **Chaturdasha Lokas** or realms of existence.

There are six lokas which are superior the **Manushya Loka**, the realm where we human beings exist. In order, the key lokas are

- **Satya** loka
- **Tapa** loka
- **Jala** loka
- **Mahar** loka
- **Swarga** loka
- **Prithvi** loka

Sattvik Karma under the influence of Sattva Guna in our current life, will lead to rebirth in one of the superior lokas. Rajasik Karma governed by Rajo Guna will bring us back to the Prithvi loka; and Tamasik Karma done under the influence of Tamo Guna will push us into one of the following inferior lokas as animals, birds, reptiles or plants depending on the intensity of the bad deed.

The Inferior lokas are:

- **Atal** loka
- **Sutal**-loka
- **Talatal** loka
- **Mahatal** loka
- **Patala** loka

All of us, by and large, know which action is noble and which one is dishonourable. Even a 5-year-old child will be able to decipher between a good deed and a bad deed. However, the problem lies with the practical implementation of this knowledge in our daily lives.

In the earlier Shloka, while Bhagavān described the **Aśhvattha** as ever evolving, ever changing, in this Shloka he explains that the downward facing branches attach and deeply entrench one to the **Samsāra**. One must cut down this attachment with a strong axe of detachment in one's search of the **Mool**, the root of the tree, which is the Supreme Lord. It is from HIM from whom streamed forth the activity of the universe. Upon taking refuge in Him, one will not return to this world again.

This concept can be best illustrated with a Pauranic tale:

Once Maharshi Shukdev visited Janaka, the King of Mithila, seeking knowledge. That day happened to

be very auspicious, and King Janaka was performing a holy ritual. King Janaka handed Shukdevji a pot filled to the brim with oil and asked him to do a Parikrama (circumambulation) of the city of Mithila with the pot of oil ensuring not a drop of oil spilled from the pot. Shukdevji was totally focused on ensuring that not a drop of oil was spilled and successfully completed the seemingly difficult job. On his return, King Janaka asked him for his opinion about Mithila city. Shukdevji replied that he was so focused and engrossed in performing the task at hand of carrying the pot of oil, that he did not see any of the sights the King was alluding to. King Janaka told Shukdevji that with this activity, the learned Maharishi should have already got the answer to the question which brought him to Mithila.

The key here is '**Detachment**'. While Maharshi Shukdev was going around the town of Mithila during his Parikrama, he was totally unmindful of his surroundings and completely focused on accomplishing the task assigned to him. Likewise, **in our life we should perform our duties with diligence but shouldn't get attached to any emotions or worldly objects**. All of us are just like the actors playing their respective roles with commitment on stage but without getting attached to the roles assigned. This alone will then lead us to Absolute Detachment.

Having cut all the roots of attachments, Bhagavān proceeds to tell the course of action in the next Shloka.

15.4

**tataḥ(ph) padaṃ(n) tatparimārgitavyaṃ(ṡ),
yasmingatā na nivartanti bhūyaḥ,
tameva cādyam(m) puruṣam(m) prapadye,
yataḥ(ph) pravṛttiḥ(ph) prasṛtā purāṇī.15.4**

Thereafter a man should diligently seek for that supreme state, viz., God, having attained which they return no more to this world; and having fully resolved that he stands dedicated to the Primeval Being (God Nārāyaṇa) Himself, for whom the flow of this beginningless creation has progressed, he should dwell and meditate on Him.

Bhagavān says, after managing to cut the roots of attachment with the axe of detachment, one should seek to achieve the ultimate goal to unite with the Paramātmā, the **Puruṣottama**. When one achieves this union with the Paramātmā, one is liberated from this Saṃsāra, and freed from the endless cycle of birth and death.

After attaining Detachment, Bhagavān advises us to seek Paramadhama, the realm from which no one returns to this material world.

Paramātmā also gives a description of HIMSELF in this Shloka. HE is the Being from whom this eternal **Saṃsāra** came into existence. There is no timestamp to the creation of the **Saṃsāra**. It is just mentioned since '**Anadi**', that which has no beginning and is eternal.

However, to achieve this union with the Paramātmā, immense efforts and some specialised Sadhana are needed, which is elaborated by HIM in the subsequent Shlokas.

15.5

**nirmānamohā jitasāṅgadoṣā,
adhyātmanityā vinivṛttakāmāḥ,
dvandvairvimuktāḥ(s) sukhaduḥkhasañjñaiḥ(r),
gacchantyamūḍhāḥ(ph) padamavyayaṃ(n) tat. 15.5**

They who are free from pride and delusion, who have conquered the evil of attachment, and are constantly abiding in God, whose cravings have altogether ceased and who are completely immune to all pairs of opposites going by the names of pleasure and pain, and are undeluded, attain that supreme immortal state.

Bhagavān describes the qualities which will help us to attain our ultimate goal of being One with the Paramātmā.

Nirmānamohā: Free from pride and delusion. The first step is to give up all pride, which is due to ignorance.

Jitasāṅgadoṣā: Free from all attachments. Once the "I" and "mine" notion has been vanquished from our mind, we gain victory over attachments.

Adhyātmanityā: Dwelling on the Self. Where the self is free from individual identity; This is not confined to just reading holy scriptures or visiting holy places, but a true sense of unity with the Almighty. Cultivating the feeling of oneness with the Paramātmā and 'I am of HIM and HE is of me' gives one eternal happiness which can be inferred from certain Vedic utterances such as Akhanda Sachidananda, Chidananda etc.

Vinivṛttakāmāḥ: where all the worldly desires are turned away. One who has won over all his desires. One has full control over desire, anger, greed, jealousy and pride by thinking himself as a part of HIM.

Dvandvairvimuktāḥ: Free of all dual conflicts. Equally poised when facing pairs of opposites such as good and evil; loss and gain; sadness and joy; pleasure and pain; dharma and adharma, etc.

Gacchantyamūḍhāḥ: reaching the state of an undeluded person. Only after attaining the qualities described above, can one reach the eternal goal of Paramapada, which is avyayaṃ (which has no extinction) for which we have been continually striving and which is the ultimate destination for all.

15.6

**na tadbhāsayate sūryo, na śasāṅko na pāvākaḥ,
yadgatvā na nivartante, taddhāma paRāmaṃ(m) mama. 15.6**

Neither the sun nor the moon nor fire can illumine that supreme self-effulgent state, attaining which they never return to this world; that is My supreme abode.

Paramapada is such a realm or place that it cannot be lit by any of the three principal sources of light- the Sun, the Moon, or the Fire. The Paramapada is **Swaprakasha** or self-illuminating. In fact, the Sun, Moon and Fire also receive light and energy from this Supreme Entity.

HE describes Paramadhama to be such a place after reaching which, one will not return to the mortal world. It is not a place but a metaphor to explain the union with the Parama Brahma, the Supreme Being.

15.7

**mamaivāṃśo jīvaloke, jīvabhūtaḥ(s) sanātanaḥ,
manaḥ(ś) śaṣṭhānīndriyāṇi, prakṛtisthāni karṣati. 15.7**

The eternal Jīvātmā in this body is a fragment of My own Self; and it is that alone which draws around itself the mind and the five senses, which abide in Prakṛti.

This is one of the most important and popular Shlokas of Gītā, through which the Yogeśvara establishes HIS eternal connection with the Six Indriyas, the five sense organs and the mind.

HE is referring HIMSELF as **Sanātana** as against Puratana. HE deliberately abstained from referring as Puratana since Puratana means ancient and hence alludes to a starting point in time, where **Sanātana means where the point of origin is unknown, and is eternal.** This adjective is best suited to Paramātmā, since HE is eternal.

Bhagavān proclaimed that the **Jīvātmā** or the Soul is part of HIM. Due to ignorance, the **Jīvā**, the earthly beings think they are bound in **Prakṛti** or Nature. It is this identification with **Prakṛti** that invokes the five senses and the mind to various deeds. It is a known fact that most of the evil deeds committed by living beings are the result of **Vāsanās** (temptations/desires), generated by the Sense organs.

The fault lies not with **Indriyas**, but solely with us. **We develop a false sense of deep belongingness to worldly objects / pursuits under the influence of TriGuṇas which are nurtured by temptations and the attachments.**

15.8

**śarīraṃ(ṽ) yadavāpnoti, yaccāpyutkrāmatīśvaraḥ,
gṛhītvaitāni saṃyāti, vāyurgandhānīvāśayāt.15.8**

Even as the wind wafts scents from their seat, so, too, the Jīvātmā, which is the controller of the body etc., taking the mind and the senses from the body which it leaves behind, forthwith migrates to the body which it acquires.

There is contextual relevance between this Shoka and the 12th and 22nd Shlokas of Chapter 2.

In the 12th Shloka of Chapter 2, Bhagavān says, that never was there a time when HE nor us did not exist, and in the future too shall any of us cease to be.

**na tvevāhaṃ jātu nāsaṃ na tvaṃ neme janādhīpāḥ
na chaiva na bhaviṣhyāmaḥ sarve vayamataḥ param**

This is the Eternal being of the Paramātmā.

In the 22nd Shloka HE says, just as a person sheds worn-out garments and wears new ones, likewise, at the time of death, the soul casts off its worn-out body and enters into a new one. So, there is no death or birth but the passage of the eternal soul from one being to the other.

**vāsānsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya navāni gṛhṇāti naro 'parāṇi
tathā śharīrāni vihāya jīrṇānyā nyāni sanyāti navāni dehī**

In this Shoka, Bhagavān says that like the wind carries fragrance from a flower garden or bad odour from a garbage bin with it to a royal mansion or a poor man's house without making any distinction, likewise the soul is not attached to any Karma-Phala (result of our action) or our Indriyas (sense organs). The wind's duty is to carry the odour, whether good or bad from one place to another. Similarly, the **Jīvātman** or the soul, while moving from one mortal body to another mortal body, carries with it the impressions and experience that it gathered in that life with its senses. Just like the wind loses the odour after some time, the **Jīvātman** too doesn't carry the impressions forever. It does not remain attached to Indriyas. As such, the **Ātma** is always free from any kind of attachments.

Taking the help of this concept, HE explains HIS presence from a macro to micro perceptive, which will be discussed in detail in the next session.

The session concluded with **Hari Nama Sankirtana**, followed by a Questions and Answers session.

Questions and Answers:

Murali ji

Q: We have been told to seek Swargalok but it is much below the Satyalok. Does Swargalok have Maya? How is one able to free ourselves from the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

A: Certainly, Swargalok has Maya. We go to Swargalok to enjoy the fruits of our Punya Karma or good deeds. But it is also under the influence of Maya. One needs to detach oneself completely from the fruit of all the Karmas. One needs to perform one's duty as assigned by the role without any expectation or attachment. This alone can lead to the liberation. We can measure our progress on the path to Liberation through our degree of detachment (or attachment). If we are not saddened or angered by some actions, that is, not affected by the result of the action, we can say we are moving in the right direction. In the liberated stage, we don't get attached but accept the outcome of the action.

Dr Poonam Sachdeva ji

Q: Suppose a person steals and feeds children or the needy with the food he stole, will his action of theft be considered as right or wrong?

A: It will be considered as a wrong action. While he will accrue the Punya (virtue) of the good deed of selflessly feeding the needy, he will also accrue the Paap (sin) for the theft.

Manoj Kumar Mongia ji

Q: Is every event like Birth, death, and education predestined and fixed?

A: Yes, it is somewhat pre-decided but it keeps changing based on our current Karma.

There are three types of Karma

- **Sanchit** – which we have acquired in our past life
- **Prarabdha** – what we have done till this moment
- **Kriyamana** – what we are continuously doing.

According to these three Karmas, Punya and Paap is decided in our lives.

We humans have **Karma Swatantra** that is freedom of doing our Karma, but that too is through the power of the Paramātmā.



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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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