

## ŚRĪMADBHAGAVADGĪTĀ INTERPRETATION SUMMARY

### Chapter 4: Jñāna-Karma-Sannyāsa-Yoga

2/4 (Ślōka 11-20), Saturday, 19 April 2025

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YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/dE2V0R2w7o4>

## Action Without Bondage: Walking the Path of Karma and Jñāna

The **fourth chapter** of the *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā*, titled **Jñāna-Karma-Sannyāsa-Yoga** -

**The yoga of the path to liberation through knowledge, action, and renunciation.**

It weaves together the profound themes of **spiritual knowledge (jñāna)**, **selfless action (karma)**, and **inner renunciation (sannyāsa)**. It marks a turning point in the dialogue between Śrī Bhagavān and Arjuna—where Karma-Yoga, previously explained, now finds its deeper foundation in timeless wisdom.

The session commenced with the **lighting of the traditional lamp**, symbolizing the light of knowledge that dispels the darkness of ignorance. This sacred act signifies the illumination of the *Antaḥkaraṇa*—the inner faculty of mind, intellect, ego, and consciousness—preparing the seeker to receive divine truth. The radiant flame reflects the eternal light of **Dharma**, which remains unwavering through the turbulence of time.

This moment of sanctity was deepened through the recitation of soul-elevating **prayers**:

गुरुर्ब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णुः गुरुर्देवो महेश्वरः ।  
गुरुः साक्षात्परब्रह्म तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः ॥

*The Guru is Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Maheśvara—verily the Supreme Brahman. I bow to that revered Guru.*

कृष्णाय वासुदेवाय हरये परमात्मने ।  
प्रणतः क्लेशनाशाय गोविन्दाय नमो नमः ॥

*Salutations to Kṛṣṇa—Vāsudeva, Hari, the indwelling Supreme Self—who dispels all afflictions.*

नमामि सद्गुरु शान्तं सच्चिदानन्द विग्रहम् ।  
पूर्णब्रह्मपरानन्दमीशं आलन्दिवल्लभम् ॥

*I bow to the tranquil Sadguru, the very form of truth, consciousness, and bliss—manifestation of the infinite.*

रत्नाकराधौतपदां हिमालयकिरीटिनीम् ।  
ब्रह्मराजर्षिरत्नाढ्यां वन्दे भारतमातरम् ॥

*Salutations to Bhārat Māta, her feet bathed by oceans, crowned by the Himalayas, and adorned with the jewels of sages and kings.*

ॐ पार्थाय प्रतिबोधितां भगवता नारायणेन स्वयं ।  
व्यासेन ग्रथितां पुराणमुनिना मध्ये महाभारते ॥  
अद्वैतामृतवर्षिणीं भगवतीमष्टादशाध्यायिनीम् ।  
अम्ब त्वामनुसन्दधामि भगवद्गीते भवद्वेषिणीम् ॥

*I meditate upon the Bhagavadgītā—the divine mother—taught to Arjuna by Nārāyaṇa Himself and compiled by sage Vyāsa within the Mahābhārata. She rains the nectar of non-duality and destroys the bondage of worldly existence.*

नमोऽस्तु ते व्यास विशालबुद्धे ।  
फुल्लारविन्दायतपत्रनेत्रे ।  
येन त्वया भारततैलपूर्णः ।  
प्रज्वलितो ज्ञानमयः प्रदीपः ॥

*Salutations to Vyāsa, of expansive intellect and lotus-like eyes, who lit the lamp of knowledge with the oil of Bhārata's essence.*

Following these invocations, heartfelt salutations were offered to **Swami Govind Dev Giri Maharaj Ji** and to all the **Gītā Sādhakas**, the sincere seekers gathered to walk this path of truth.

In the **third chapter**, Śrī Bhagavān had laid the foundation of **Karma-Yoga**—urging Arjuna to act without attachment, for the welfare of the world. Now, as the **fourth chapter** begins, Bhagavān **pulls back the curtain of time** and reveals a deeper mystery: **this sacred yoga is not new**. It is an eternal wisdom that has been **transmitted through generations**.

*"I imparted this imperishable Yoga to Vivasvān (the Sun God); he taught it to Manu; Manu passed it to Ikṣvāku. Thus, the royal sages knew it in succession. But in the course of time, this knowledge was lost."*

This **Paramparā (lineage)** was the channel through which Dharma sustained the world. And now, in Arjuna's moment of crisis, **Bhagavān revives this lost wisdom**, for He has taken form **again**—just as He vows to do whenever Dharma is threatened:

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ।  
अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥ 4.7 ॥

*"Whenever righteousness declines and unrighteousness rises, O Bhārata, I manifest Myself."*

Arjuna, puzzled, questions how Bhagavān—born just a few years before him—could have taught this to Vivasvān, the Sun God. This prompts one of the most significant revelations of the Gītā. Śrī Bhagavān declares:

*"Both you and I have had many births, O Arjuna. You do not remember them, but I remember them all."*

With this, Bhagavān affirms His **divine nature**—*Ajah* (unborn) and *Avyayah* (imperishable)—who takes form **not out of karma, but out of compassion**, for the protection of the righteous and the destruction

of evil.

As the chapter unfolds, Śrī Bhagavān explains **who can truly attain Him**—those whose minds are freed from worldly agitation:

**वीतरागभयक्रोधा मन्मया मामुपाश्रिताः।**

**बहवो ज्ञानतपसा पूता मद्भावमागताः ॥ 4.10 ॥**

*“Freed from passion, fear, and anger; absorbed in Me; relying on Me; purified by the fire of wisdom—many have attained My being.”*

These verses make it clear that **mere ritual or action is not enough**—what elevates an action into Yoga is **the presence of knowledge and devotion** behind it. Thus, renunciation is not abandonment of action, but the **abandonment of ego and desire** behind action.

This chapter also introduces the concept of **Jñānāgni**—the fire of knowledge that **burns all past karma to ashes**—and reveals the glory of **offering even knowledge as a sacred act**, which is the highest form of Yajña (sacrifice).

In essence, Chapter 4 is a **bridge between Karma and Jñāna**, action and renunciation, human effort and divine grace. It guides the seeker to move from **external discipline to inner surrender**, from **doing to being**, and ultimately to **knowing**.

Let this chapter awaken in us not only understanding, but also **reverence** for the timeless knowledge that has been compassionately handed down from the **Eternal Teacher—Śrī Bhagavān Himself**.

#### 4.11

**ye yathā māṃ prapadyante, tāṃstathaiva bhajāmyaham,  
mama vartmānuvartante, manuṣyāḥ(ph) pārtha sarvaśaḥ. 4.11**

Completely rid of attachment, fear and anger, wholly absorbed in Me, depending on Me, and purified by the penance of wisdom, many have become one with Me even in the past.

In this profound verse, **Śrī Bhagavān** reveals the **universality and inclusivity** of His nature. No matter how a seeker approaches Him—be it through devotion, desire, knowledge, or surrender—He responds with perfect reciprocity. There is no single rigid path; rather, every sincere effort to connect with the Divine is embraced and uplifted.

- **ye yathā māṃ prapadyante** - "As they approach Me":

Human beings approach Bhagavān in myriad ways—some seek material gains, some long for liberation, while others simply yearn for pure devotion. Each path mirrors the inner aspiration and level of understanding of the seeker.

- **tāṃs tathaiva bhajāmi aham** - "So I reward them accordingly":

Bhagavān’s response is not bound by rules—it is graceful, personal, and just. He fulfills the seeker’s desires in accordance with their intent, and through that fulfillment, often gently elevates them toward higher spiritual realization.

- **mama vartma anuvartante** - "All follow My path":

Whether knowingly or unknowingly, all beings are journeying along the Divine path. Even those unaware of Bhagavān's presence are ultimately moving toward Him, for He is the **goal of all action, devotion, and wisdom**.

- **manuṣyāḥ pārtha sarvaśaḥ** - "In all ways, O Arjuna":

This line reassures that **no path is outside the Divine embrace**. Every soul, regardless of background, belief, or starting point, is accepted. All efforts rooted in sincerity find a place within Bhagavān's cosmic design.

This verse reflects **Bhagavān's impartiality** and the beauty of **Divine grace**—He does not demand conformity but honors authenticity. He becomes whatever form the devotee desires, guiding each along the path best suited for their evolution.

### Forms of Devotion

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* outlines **nine classical modes of devotion (Navadhā Bhakti)**, illustrating how diverse and personal the approach to Bhagavān can be:

1. **Śravaṇa (Listening)** - *King Parīkṣit* attained liberation by attentively hearing the glories of Śrī Bhagavān.
2. **Kīrtana (Singing)** - *Śukadeva Gosvāmī* immersed himself in narrating the Bhāgavatam.
3. **Smarana (Remembering)** - *Prahlāda* constantly meditated upon Bhagavān amidst adversity.
4. **Pāda-sevana (Serving the Lord's Feet)** - *Lakṣmī Devī* lovingly serves at the feet of Bhagavān.
5. **Archana (Worship)** - *King Pṛthu* offered worship through rituals and sacred rites.
6. **Vandana (Prostration)** - *Akrūra* bowed with devotion and reverence.
7. **Dāsyā (Servitude)** - *Hanumān* served Śrī Rāma with unshakable loyalty and humility.
8. **Sakhya (Friendship)** - *Arjuna* related to Śrī Bhagavān as an intimate and trusted friend.
9. **Ātma-nivedana (Self-Surrender)** - *King Bali* offered his entire being in complete surrender.

Each form is a unique doorway to the same truth: **Bhagavān responds to love in the form it is offered**.

### Key Insight

This verse is a celebration of the **all-embracing nature of the Divine**. It instills confidence in the seeker that **no sincere prayer goes unanswered**, and **no path is inferior if taken with honesty and devotion**. Whether the journey begins in desire or culminates in renunciation, **Bhagavān meets each**

**soul where they are**, and patiently guides them home. His love is not conditioned by formality or tradition—it is open, responsive, and deeply personal.

In a world full of distinctions and divisions, this teaching of **radical inclusivity** reminds us that the Supreme is not distant. Rather, **He walks with us in every step, mirroring our sincerity with His grace.**

## 4.12

### **kāṅkṣantaḥ(kh) karmaṇām(m) siddhiṃ(m), yajanta iha devatāḥ, kṣipraṃ(m) hi mānuṣe loke, siddhirbhavati karmajā. 4.12**

In this world of human beings, men seeking the fruition of their activities, worship the gods; for success born of actions follows quickly.

In this verse, **Śrī Bhagavān** reflects on the **motivations behind human worship** and the nature of the results it yields. Many people, driven by desires for **worldly success**, naturally seek **quick and visible rewards**. To fulfill these aspirations, they turn to various deities, each representing different powers and realms of life.

- **kāṅkṣantaḥ karmaṇām siddhiṃ** – “Desiring the success of their actions”: Such individuals are **goal-oriented** and seek specific, tangible outcomes—be it wealth, status, power, knowledge, or protection. Their devotion is often fueled not by surrender or self-realization, but by the expectation of success.
- **yajante iha devatāḥ** – “They worship various deities in this world”: To fulfill these desires, they perform rituals and offerings to particular devatās who govern different aspects of existence, as ordained in the Vedas:
  - *Goddess Lakṣmī* is worshipped for **wealth and prosperity**.
  - *Hanumān ji* is invoked for **strength and fearlessness**.
  - *Gaṇeśa ji* is sought for **wisdom and removal of obstacles**.
  - *Goddess Sarasvatī* is revered for **knowledge, speech, and creativity**.
- **kṣipraṃ hi mānuṣe loke siddhir bhavati karmajā** – “Success born of actions is quickly achieved in the human world”: Because these efforts are often in line with specific karmic mechanisms and devotional energies, **results come quickly**. The deities, being empowered administrators of cosmic functions, **grant material boons** within their domains.

However, **Śrī Bhagavān** subtly points to the **limitation** of this approach. While effective in achieving short-term goals, such worship remains **confined to the material realm**, and the results—no matter how grand—are **impermanent**. The devatās are benevolent, but their **power is derived** from the Supreme Himself. Thus, while they fulfill desires, **they do not grant liberation**.

## Illustration through Analogy

This dynamic can be compared to approaching **different department heads in a government** for specific issues versus **meeting the Chief Minister** for overarching support and guidance. Worshipping devatās is like seeking help from individual departments—efficient and targeted. But surrendering to **Śrī Bhagavān**, the Supreme, is like aligning with the highest authority—a **source of complete and enduring fulfillment**, encompassing all other benefits.

### Key Insight

This verse beautifully **balances realism with spiritual aspiration**. It acknowledges that material desires are natural and that **worship of devatās** is a legitimate path for fulfilling them. Yet, it urges the seeker not to stop there. Śrī Bhagavān gently redirects attention to a **higher pursuit**—not the fleeting fruits of action, but the **eternal fruit of liberation (mokṣa)**. When one transcends limited desires and **surrenders wholly to the Supreme**, every action becomes sacred, and every success gains deeper meaning.

Ultimately, **what the seeker seeks** determines **what they receive**. And in the same spirit as Verse 4.11, **Bhagavān responds to each soul according to their intent (bhāva)**—whether it be for the temporary or the timeless.

## 4.13

**cāturvarṇyaṃ(m) mayā sṛṣṭaṃ(ñ), guṇakarmavibhāgaśaḥ,  
tasya kartāRāmapi māṃ(m), viddhyakartāRāmavyayam. 4.13**

The four orders of society (viz., the Brāhmaṇa, the Kṣatriya, the Vaiśya and the śūdra) were created by Me, classifying them according to the Guṇas predominant in each and apportioning corresponding duties to them; though the originator of this creation, know Me, the Immortal Lord, to be a non-doer.

In this verse, **Śrī Bhagavān** reveals the divine foundation of the social structure known as **Varṇa**, not as a system of inequality, but as a framework designed for **balance and harmony** in society. He makes two key declarations: that He is the **creator** of this system, and yet He remains a **non-doer**, untouched by its operation.

- **cāturvarṇyaṃ mayā sṛṣṭam** - “The four-fold order was created by Me”:

Śrī Bhagavān declares that the Varṇa system—Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya, and Śūdra—was divinely instituted for the smooth functioning of society.

- *Brāhmaṇas*: Custodians of wisdom, knowledge, and spiritual guidance.
- *Kṣatriyas*: Warriors and rulers, upholding justice and protection.
- *Vaiśyas*: Engaged in trade, agriculture, and economic activity.
- *Śūdras*: Serve society through labor, support, and skilled service.  
Each Varṇa has a vital role, contributing to the **social and spiritual fabric** of the world.

- **guṇa-karma-vibhāsaḥ** – “Based on qualities and actions”:  
The classification is not based on birth, but on the dominance of **three Guṇas** and the nature of one’s work:

- *Sattva* (purity, wisdom): inclined toward teaching, contemplation.
- *Rajas* (passion, ambition): active in protection, leadership.
- *Tamas* (stability, endurance): suited for support and service.  
A person’s **past Karmas** and current nature shape their Varṇa—making it **dynamic**, not hereditary.

- **tasya kartāram api māṃ viddhi akartāram avyayam** – “Know Me as its creator, yet a non-doer and eternal”:

Although Śrī Bhagavān initiates the Varṇa system, He is **detached** from its functioning. He remains **unaffected**, because His nature is **immutable and beyond material involvement**. His creation operates through **Guṇas and Karma**, not through personal desire or intervention.

### Clarification

This verse corrects common **misinterpretations** of the Varṇa system as a rigid caste hierarchy. Śrī Bhagavān never ties Varṇa to **birth**; instead, He emphasizes **function and nature**. The degeneration of this system into hereditary caste divisions is a result of **human distortion**, not divine design. Its true purpose was to **align personal qualities with societal duties**, thus ensuring Dharma.

### Key Insight

Śrī Bhagavān teaches us to value individuals based on their **qualities and actions**, not ancestry. By doing so, He uplifts the dignity of labor and reminds us that **every role has spiritual significance**. At the same time, His own position as a **detached creator** models **how to act without attachment**—creating, sustaining, and guiding, yet remaining untouched. This verse inspires both **social harmony and spiritual detachment**.

## 4.14

**na māṃ(ñ) karmāṇi limpanti, na me karmaphale sprhā,  
iti māṃ(m) yo'bhijānāti, karmabhirna sa badhyate. 4.14**

Since I have no craving for the fruit of actions, actions do not taint Me. Even he who thus knows Me in reality is not bound by actions.

In this verse, **Śrī Bhagavān** expounds on His **transcendental relationship with karma**. Though He is actively engaged in the cosmic play—creating, sustaining, and guiding the universe—He remains completely **untainted and untouched by results**. This truth becomes a **spiritual model** for seekers who aspire to live in the world without becoming entangled in it.

- **na māṃ karmāṇi limpanti** – “Actions do not taint Me”:  
Bhagavān’s actions arise from **pure will, compassion, and cosmic duty**, not from ego or desire. Hence, they leave no karmic residue.

- **na me karmaphale spr̥hā** – “I have no craving for the fruit of actions”:

Unlike ordinary beings who act with hope or anxiety about results, **Bhagavān is utterly detached**. This detachment renders His actions **karmically neutral**, even while fully engaged.

- **iti mām yo’bhijānāti** – “One who knows Me thus”:

A person who realizes Bhagavān’s **non-attached nature** gains insight into the **true meaning of karma-yoga**—acting without clinging.

- **karmabhir na sa badhyate** – “Is not bound by actions”:

Such a seeker, inspired by Bhagavān’s example, performs all duties **without bondage**. They attain **freedom through action**, not by renouncing work, but by acting **without attachment**.

### Deeper Reflection

This verse deepens the teaching from **Verse 4.13**:

*“Though I am the originator of the Varṇa system, I remain a non-doer.”*

Here, Bhagavān clarifies **how** He can be the creator yet remain **unaffected**—because **ego and craving are absent** from His actions.

### Analogy:

A **lamp** lights up a room, allowing many actions to take place, but it remains **untouched** by any of them.

Similarly, the **Ātman (Self)** within us **enables all activity**, yet it does not act.

Due to **ignorance and ego**, however, humans identify with body and mind as the doer—and thus become **trapped in the cycle of karma**.

### Jñāneśwar Mahārāj says -

"हे माझ्यामुळेच झाले, परी मी हे नाही केले।

अैसे ज्याने जाणले, तो कर्ममुक्त"

*“It happens because of Me, but I am not the doer—one who realizes this truth becomes free from karma.”*

### Human Struggle with Karma

While Bhagavān remains **untouched** by karma, humans—under the influence of **Māyā**—cling to results and assume doership. This false identification leads to **bondage**, trapping one in **joy and sorrow, success and failure**.

Śrī Bhagavān offers a way out: act with **sincerity and surrender**, offer each deed to the Divine, and remember that the **Self is a witness**, not the doer.

### Practical Insights

- **Act Without Attachment** – Perform your duties sincerely, but without clinging to outcomes.
- **Embrace Detachment** – Maintain equanimity through success and failure; they are fleeting.
- **Offer Actions to the Divine** – Treat every act as an offering (*Yajña*), purifying the ego and

spiritualizing everyday life.

### Key Insight

This verse reveals the heart of **karma-yoga—freedom through action**, not escape from it.

By understanding and embodying Bhagavān’s **non-attached engagement**, we can live dynamically yet peacefully. Śrī Bhagavān does not ask us to **renounce the world**, but to **change how we relate to it**. When action is performed with **awareness and surrender—not desire—it becomes the path to liberation**.

### 4.15

**evaṃ(ñ) jñātvā kṛtaṃ(ñ) karma, pūrvairapi mumukṣubhiḥ,  
kuru karmaiva tasmāttvaṃ(m), pūrvaiḥ(ph) pūrvataraṃ(ñ) kṛtam. 4.15**

Having known thus, action was performed even by the ancient seekers for liberation; therefore, do you also perform actions as have been performed by the ancients from antiquity.

Śrī Bhagavān now places the teachings of **karma-yoga** in the context of **eternal tradition**. He reminds Arjuna that the path of **selfless action**, once understood, was not avoided by the wise—but embraced. Those who earnestly sought liberation did not reject action; they perfected it through **detachment and dedication**.

- **evaṃ jñātvā kṛtaṃ karma** – “Having known this truth, they acted”:

The ancient sages clearly understood that acting without attachment does not bind the soul. Recognizing the **transcendental principle** of detached action, they engaged in karma **as a means of inner purification**.

- **pūrvair api mumukṣubhiḥ** – “Even by the ancient seekers of liberation”:

These were not ordinary individuals, but **mumukṣus**—those with a burning desire for **mokṣa (liberation)**. For them, karma-yoga was not a burden but a **spiritual discipline** leading to inner freedom.

- **kuru karmaiva tasmāt tvam** – “Therefore, you too should act”:

Śrī Bhagavān exhorts Arjuna to **follow this timeless example**. Action performed in the spirit of **yajña (sacrifice)** and **surrender** leads not to bondage but to **liberation**, when done without desire for personal gain.

- **pūrvaiḥ pūrvataraṃ kṛtam** – “As practiced by the ancient ones before you”:

The **continuity** of this practice from antiquity proves its universality and spiritual soundness. Arjuna is urged to become a **link in this sacred chain**, joining the lineage of those who walked the path of **righteous action**.

### Message of Continuity

This verse beautifully establishes **karma-yoga** as a **sanātana dharma**—an eternal spiritual law practiced

by enlightened beings across the ages. Śrī Bhagavān reassures Arjuna that he is not being asked to do something new or untested. Rather, he is being asked to **honor a legacy**, to walk the path trodden by the **greatest of seekers**.

### Key Insight

This verse emphasizes that **selfless action is a proven path to liberation**. Śrī Bhagavān calls us to rise above confusion and hesitation by grounding ourselves in the **wisdom of tradition**. When we perform our duties in the spirit of **offering and detachment**, every act becomes a **step toward transcendence**.

Just as the ancient sages attained liberation by remaining engaged in the world yet untouched by it, so too can we—by surrendering our actions to the Divine and acting in accordance with **Dharma**.

## 4.16

### **kiṃ(ñ) karma kimakarmeti, kavayo'pyatra mohitāḥ, tatte karma praVākṣyāmi, yajñātvā mokṣyase'śubhāt. 4.16**

What is action and what is inaction? Even men of intelligence are puzzled over this question. Therefore, I shall expound to you the truth about action, knowing which you will be freed from its evil effects i.e., the shackles of karma.

In this pivotal verse, **Śrī Bhagavān** introduces the **subtle and intricate nature of karma**. The question “What is action and what is inaction?” lies at the very heart of spiritual discernment, and even **kavayaḥ**—the most learned thinkers and sages—have grappled with its complexity. By raising this question, Bhagavān prepares Arjuna for a **deeper revelation**, one that transcends conventional understanding.

- **kiṃ karma kim akarma iti kavayaḥ api atra mohitāḥ** – “Even the wise are deluded about what is action and inaction”:

The path of karma is not merely a matter of external activity. It involves **subtle distinctions** between doing, non-doing, and the inner motives that drive them.

A person may appear active yet be inwardly detached, and another may seem inactive while mentally steeped in desire. This complexity often **confuses even the wise**.

- **tat te karma pravākṣyāmi** – “Therefore, I will explain karma to you”:

Śrī Bhagavān now takes the role of the **Supreme Teacher**, promising to explain the **true essence of action**—beyond appearances and assumptions.

His words are not philosophical speculation but **divine revelation**, born of direct knowledge and authority.

- **yajñātvā mokṣyase aśubhāt** – “Knowing this, you will be freed from the inauspicious”:

The term *aśubha* refers to the **unwholesome effects of ignorant action**—actions performed with attachment, ego, or selfish intent that lead to bondage.

By understanding the true nature of karma, Arjuna—and all seekers—can **free themselves from its binding consequences**, thus attaining **mokṣa** (liberation).

## Complexity of Karma

This verse acknowledges that karma is not simply “doing” or “not doing.” It includes:

- **Intentions** behind the action
- **Consciousness** while performing it
- **Ego-identification** or surrender
- **Mental and emotional reactions**  
Even **inaction** can become karma if it stems from fear, indifference, or delusion. Thus, understanding karma requires **inner clarity and viveka (discernment)**.

### Key Insight

This verse serves as the **gateway** to Bhagavān’s deeper teachings on karma, setting the stage for the profound verses that follow. It calls the seeker to move beyond superficial judgments and develop a **subtle intelligence** that can discern between **mere activity and true yoga**.

Śrī Bhagavān’s assurance reminds us that although life is filled with complex choices, **freedom is possible**. By seeking divine wisdom, one can act in the world without becoming bound by it.

**This teaching invites both humility and eagerness**—humility in acknowledging our confusion, and eagerness to be guided by the eternal truth that alone leads to liberation.

## 4.17

### **karmaṇo hyapi boddhavyam(m), boddhavyam(ñ) ca vikarmaṇaḥ, akarmaṇaśca boddhavyam(ñ), gahanā karmaṇo gatiḥ. 4.17**

The truth about action must be known and the truth of inaction also must be known; even so, the truth about prohibited action (Vikarma) must be known. For, mysterious are the ways of action.

Building upon the previous verse, **Śrī Bhagavān** now urges Arjuna to develop a deeper discernment—not only between action and inaction, but also toward **prohibited or unrighteous action**. This verse highlights the **multi-dimensional nature of karma** and the subtle consequences that actions carry. Without this understanding, one may unknowingly slip into bondage, despite good intentions.

- **karmaṇaḥ hi api boddhavyam** - “Even action must be understood”:

Not all actions are equal. **Karma** refers to action performed in accordance with **Dharma**—aligned with truth, duty, and the welfare of all. Such action purifies the mind and supports one’s spiritual evolution.

- **vikarmaṇaḥ ca boddhavyam** - “Wrongful action must also be understood”:

**Vikarma** refers to actions that go against Dharma—motivated by greed, anger, or delusion. These actions lead to suffering and accumulate negative karmic results. Recognizing and **avoiding vikarma** is essential for spiritual safety.

- **akarmaṇaḥ ca boddhavyam** – “Inaction must also be understood”:

**Akarma** is not laziness or neglect of duty. It refers to action performed **without attachment**, without ego, and without craving for results. Such action appears outwardly active, yet is inwardly still—**karma that does not bind**.

- **gahanā karmaṇaḥ gatiḥ** – “The course of action is indeed profound”:

The effects of karma are often **complex and hidden**. One may act with good intentions and still face unexpected consequences, while at other times, apparent inaction may cause great harm. Hence, **the true path of karma is deep and difficult to grasp**.

### Complexity of Karma

Karma is not limited to physical deeds. It includes:

- **Mental intentions and emotional motives**
- **Timeliness and context** of the action
- **Spiritual maturity** of the doer
- **Impact** on others and the self

Even a righteous act, if done with arrogance or selfishness, can bind. Likewise, inaction during a moral crisis can become a form of **neglectful vikarma**. Hence, spiritual discernment (*viveka*) is necessary.

### Key Insight

This verse awakens seekers to the **sacred responsibility of self-awareness in action**. Śrī Bhagavān reminds us that true freedom lies in understanding the **fine distinctions** between what is right, what is harmful, and what transcends all dualities through selflessness.

To live with **clarity and freedom**, one must:

- **Reflect before acting**
- **Avoid adharma** in all forms
- **Perform duties with detachment and devotion**

By doing so, the seeker walks the **path of karma with wisdom**, transforming action into a means of **liberation rather than bondage**. This verse thus calls for **mindfulness, inner clarity, and alignment with Dharma**, fostering both personal growth and collective harmony.

## **karmaṇyakarma yaḥ(ph) paśyed, akarmaṇi ca karma yaḥ, sa buddhimānmanuṣyeṣu, sa yuktaḥ(kh) kṛtsnakarmakṛt. 4.18**

He who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction, is wise among men; he is a Yogī, who has performed all actions.

In this profound verse, **Śrī Bhagavān** introduces one of the most subtle and transformative insights of the **Bhagavad Gītā**. He challenges the superficial understanding of karma and calls for a deeper **vision rooted in spiritual awareness**. The key lies not in **what is seen externally**, but in the **inner state of the doer**.

- **karmaṇi akarma yaḥ paśyet** – “One who sees inaction in action”:

This refers to a person who, even while acting in the world, remains **inwardly detached and unaffected**. Such selfless action (*niṣkāma karma*), done without ego or craving, is spiritually equivalent to inaction. Though the body acts, the soul remains untouched.

- **akarmaṇi ca karma yaḥ** – “And who sees action in inaction”:

This is the opposite condition—when someone outwardly appears inactive but **inwardly entertains desires, fears, or responsibilities**. In such cases, even so-called inaction becomes karma, because the **mind is still entangled**. Avoiding duty due to laziness or escapism is also action, and it binds.

- **sa buddhimān manuṣyeṣu** – “Such a person is wise among humans”:

One who understands this inner paradox is truly wise. This wisdom transcends intellectual knowledge—it is **realized insight** into the **true nature of being and doing**.

- **sa yuktaḥ kṛtsna-karma-kṛt** – “Such a Yogī has performed all actions”:

This person is **yukta**—spiritually united, balanced, and integrated. Though seemingly active, they remain **free from karma**, having performed all duties in a spirit of **surrender and detachment**, thus transcending them.

### **Illustration**

**Kabir Das Ji** beautifully echoes this truth:

"जो कुछ किया तुम किया, मैं कुछ किया नहीं।  
कहो कही यह मैं किया, तो तुम ही हो मुझ माही ॥"

*"Whatever has been done, it is You who have done it. I have done nothing. And if I say 'I did it,' then it is still You within me who did it."*

This reflects the **state of the true Yogī**, who acts as an **instrument of the Divine**, never claiming ownership over action.

### **Key Insight**

This verse conveys the **core principle of karma-yoga**—freedom lies not in stopping action, but in **purifying the intent** behind action.

It teaches us that:

1. **Action performed with detachment and inner stillness** is equal to inaction—it does not bind.
2. **Inaction born out of ignorance or selfish avoidance** is itself a binding action.
3. **True wisdom** lies in seeing **beyond appearances**, and acting with **inner equanimity** and **surrender to the Divine**.

**Śrī Bhagavān** calls us to become such wise **Yogīs**—who engage fully in their duties, yet remain inwardly silent, detached, and illumined. Every action then becomes a **step toward liberation**, and the whole of life is transformed into a **sacred offering**.

#### 4.19

**yasya sarve samārambhāḥ(kh), kāmasaṅkalpavarjitāḥ,  
jñānāgnidagdhakarmāṇam(n), tamāhuḥ(ph) paṇḍitaṁ(m) budhāḥ. 4.19**

Even the wise call him a sage, whose undertakings are all free from desire and Sankalpa (thoughts of the world) and whose actions are burnt up by the fire of wisdom.

In this verse, **Śrī Bhagavān** presents a powerful portrait of the **true sage**—not one who escapes from the world, but one who lives in it with **purity, wisdom, and detachment**. Such a person is not bound by karma, because their actions are free from craving and illuminated by knowledge.

- **yasya sarve samārambhāḥ kāma-saṅkalpa-varjitāḥ** - “All undertakings are free from desire and personal intent”:

A true sage acts not to fulfill **kāma (desire)** or **saṅkalpa (ego-driven plans)**. Their every initiative is rooted in **Dharma**, not in personal ambition or expectation. Actions flow from a place of **clarity and compassion**, not compulsion.

- **jñānāgni-dagdhakarmāṇam** - “Whose actions are burned in the fire of wisdom”:

Just as fire turns wood to ash, **spiritual knowledge (jñāna)** burns the binding tendencies of karma. Such a person performs actions **with awareness of the Self**, and therefore the actions leave **no karmic residue**. They are purified by insight.

- **tam āhuḥ paṇḍitaṁ budhāḥ** - “Such a one is called wise by the enlightened”:

True **paṇḍitya (wisdom)** is not measured by scholarship but by **inner transformation**. The **budhāḥ**—those who are awakened—recognize in such a person the signs of **realized wisdom**: equanimity, detachment, and inner freedom.

#### Connection to the Chapter Theme

This verse ties directly into the theme of **Jñāna-Karma-Sannyāsa-Yoga**—the yoga of **knowledge, action, and renunciation**. It shows how **wisdom (jñāna)** enables one to renounce attachment (**sannyāsa**) even while engaging in action (**karma**), thus rising above the dualities of gain and loss, success and failure.

## Key Insight

This verse reveals the **hallmark of true spiritual maturity**:

- Action without selfish desire.
- Effort without attachment to result.
- Wisdom that **burns the roots of bondage**.

Śrī Bhagavān teaches that **freedom is not in avoiding action**, but in **purifying our intent** through inner knowledge. When the fire of wisdom consumes selfishness, **every action becomes sacred and liberating**. The truly wise person is not necessarily one who renounces the world, but one who **renounces ego and desire within action** itself.

## 4.20

**tyaktvā karmaphalāsaṅgaṃ(n), nityatṛpto nirāśrayaḥ,  
karmaṇyabhipravṛtto'pi, naiva kiñcitkaroti saḥ. 4.20**

He, who, having totally given up attachment to actions and their fruit, no longer depends on anything in the world, and is ever content, does nothing at all, though fully engaged in action.

In this profound verse, **Śrī Bhagavān** describes the liberated soul—not as one who escapes life’s responsibilities, but as one who lives amidst them with **detachment, inner fulfillment, and surrender**. Such a person acts, yet remains untouched by karma.

- **tyaktvā karmaphalāsaṅgaṃ** - “Having renounced attachment to the fruits of action”:  
The realized person performs actions **without longing for personal gain**. Their choices are not driven by outcomes but rooted in **Dharma and surrender**.
- **nityatṛptaḥ nirāśrayaḥ** - “Ever content and independent”:  
Their joy does not depend on external achievements. They are **nityatṛpta** (constantly content), and **nirāśraya** (free from dependence). True satisfaction arises not from what one gets, but from **who one becomes**.
- **karmaṇy abhipravṛttaḥ api** - “Though fully engaged in action”:  
Such a person remains active in the world—working, serving, fulfilling duties—but from a space of **equanimity**, not ego. There is **action without doership**.
- **naiva kiñcit karoti saḥ** - “He truly does nothing at all”:  
Though actions continue externally, **inwardly he remains untouched**, like the lotus on water. The **sense of ‘I am doing’ is absent**, and thus the action leaves no karmic trace.

## Spiritual Insight

This is the heart of **karma-yoga**—to act without bondage. When ego is dropped and actions are **offered to Bhagavān**, even worldly duties become sacred. Such action, born of detachment and guided by wisdom, becomes **akarma**—non-binding and purifying.

### Illustration through Poetry

This ideal is beautifully echoed in a devotional Marathi poem—a metaphor for the spiritual journey that mirrors the Gītā's teachings:

चल चल पुरतो निधेहि चरणम्  
सदैव पुरतो निधेहि चरणम् ॥

*March ahead—place your steps forward, always forward.  
Your true home lies atop the mountain—reach it not by vehicle, but by inner strength.*

पथिपाषाणा विषमा प्रखरा  
तिर्यञ्चोपि च परितो घोरः  
सुदुष्करं खलु यद्यपि गमनम् ॥

*The path is filled with jagged stones and dangers, yet continue walking without fear.*

जहीहि भीतिं हिदि भज शक्तिम्  
देहि देहि रे भगवती भक्तिम्  
कुरु कुरु सततं धेयस्मरणम् ॥

*Banish fear, awaken strength within.  
Seek Divine devotion, and constantly remember your ultimate goal.*

These verses reinforce the same spirit that **Bhagavān teaches Arjuna**—to walk the path of action boldly, surrendering fear, ego, and attachment at every step. Let **inner strength** be your chariot, and **Bhakti** your compass.

As **Poet Yashavan** affirms:

ग्रहांचे सहाय्य त्या शूरा, यशश्री पायाची दासी।

*To the truly brave, even the stars lend support—Success becomes a servant at their feet.*

### Key Insight

This verse calls us to a higher way of living—not by running away from life, but by engaging in it with **purity of heart and steadiness of soul**. Śrī Bhagavān shows that the key to liberation is not external renunciation, but **inner freedom**—achieved by **acting without attachment, depending on nothing, and offering everything to the Divine**.

The session concluded with a meaningful **Question & Answer interaction**, offering participants a chance to reflect, inquire, and deepen their understanding of the profound teachings on *karma*, *akarma*, and the essence of detachment.

## Question And Answer Session

### Kalpana Taval Ji

**Q:** “If we renounce attachment to the fruits of actions, karma turns into akarma. But what about the inner processes of the mind—like sankalpa and vikalpa (resolving and doubting)? Outwardly we may appear inactive, but inwardly there’s mental activity. Wouldn’t that still be considered karma?”

**A:** An excellent and subtle question.

Yes, **if the inner feeling (bhāva) is 'I am doing this', then it is still karma**, whether it is external or only mental.

But **if the sense of doership is surrendered** and we genuinely feel, *"This is being done by Paramātmā, not by me,"* then that action becomes **akarma**—free from bondage.

It is not the **presence or absence of physical activity**, but the **presence or absence of ego and desire** that makes all the difference.

The secret lies in **how we identify** with the action.

### **Sunita Mishra Ji**

**Q:** *"What you just said reflects my daily experience. I often feel that every task I perform is actually being done by Paramātmā. What should I do next?"*

**A:** You are truly blessed, Sunita Ji. Such a realization is a sign of **Bhagavad-kṛpā—Divine Grace**.

But remember, this experience should **not give rise to ego**.

This inner awareness is rare and is often the **fruit of deep impressions (saṁskāras) carried over multiple births**.

Now, what should be done next?

**Continue to perform your duties, with humility, as an offering to Bhagavān.**

Let your inner attitude be:

*"O Bhagavān, I offer back to You what is already Yours."*

Such a devotee can truly say,

*"I have become free (mukta), yet I remain devoted in service."*

Even when **the devotee merges with Paramātmā**, and no sense of separation remains, **devotion does not cease**—it becomes purer and more natural.

It is not said that *Tukārām saw Panduranga*,

### **तुका झाला पांडुरंग**

*Tukā became Panduranga Himself.*

Yet even in that state of oneness, Tukārām remained immersed in **bhajan and seva**, as expressed in his own words:

**हाचे भजन राहिना, मूळ स्वभाव जाईना।**

*His devotion did not stop; his essential nature remained unchanged.*

This is the hallmark of a **true Bhakta**—even after union with the Divine, they continue to serve, sing, and love, not out of obligation, but from the bliss of that union.

### **Devendra Dikshit Ji**

**Q:** *"If someone does something wrong—say, commits theft—and then says, 'It was Bhagavān who did it through me,' can that act be justified as surrendered action?"*

**A:** A necessary and discerning question.

Let's answer it clearly—and with a smile:

If a **Gītā-versed policeman** hears that justification, he'll reply:

*"Indeed, I too am an instrument of Bhagavān—and my duty is to uphold Dharma. Punishing the wrongdoer is also His work!"*

We must understand—**true surrender to Bhagavān never supports adharmā.**

Saying "Bhagavān did it through me" cannot be an excuse for actions rooted in greed, deception, or harm.

**Bhagavān accepts only those offerings that are aligned with Dharma, humility, and sincerity.**

To act wrongly and then label it as surrender is not bhakti, but delusion.

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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.

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**Jai Shri Krishna!**

Compiled by: Geeta Pariwar - Creative Writing Department

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