

ŚRĪMADBHAGAVADGĪTĀ INTERPRETATION SUMMARY

Chapter 18: Mokṣa-Sannyāsa-Yoga

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YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/XILpDzB3yTc>

Svadharmā, Tyāga, & the absorption into the Supreme Bliss: The Progression towards absolute Excellence

The 18th Chapter of Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā - Mokṣa Sannyāsa Yoga: The Yoga of Renunciation and Surrender

The discourse commenced with the sacred ritual of lighting the Dīpam at the lotus feet of Śrī Bhagavān. The gentle glow of the flame, accompanied by heartfelt prayers, infused the atmosphere with profound reverence and Bhakti, marking the beginning of a divine journey into the wisdom of the Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā.

**Vāsudevasutaṁ Devaṁ, Kaṁsacāṇūramardanam
Devakīparamānandaṁ, Kṛṣṇaṁ Vande Jagadgurum**

Bowing in reverence at the lotus feet of Śrī Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa and Swamiji, we begin our contemplation.

Chapter 18 serves as a grand summary of all the teachings from the preceding seventeen chapters of the Bhagavad Gītā. In our previous session, we discussed up to verse 40. Today, as we continue from verse 41, we enter a crucial section of this chapter.

The teachings here are profound yet easily comprehensible. You may find that many of the concepts are presented with great clarity, allowing for direct understanding and appreciation. However, if any questions arise, you are most welcome to raise them at the end of the session. Now, let us dive into Ślōka 41.

18.41

**brāhmaṇakṣatriyaviśāṁ(m), śūdrāṇāṁ(ñ) ca parantapa,
karmāṇi pravibhaktāni, svabhāvaprabhavaiguṇaiḥ. 18.41**

The duties of the Brāhmaṇas, the Kṣatriyas and the Vaiśyas, as well as of the Śūdras have been assigned according to their innate modes of Prakṛti (Guṇas), Arjuna.

The Duties of Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, and Śūdras: Based on Guṇas, Not Birth

The duties of Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, and Śūdras are assigned according to their inherent qualities and karma, not based on birth. Śrī Bhagavān clearly states in the Bhagavad Gītā that the division of society is based on svabhāva-prabhavair guṇaiḥ—the nature and qualities a person is born with—not on their lineage.

- **brāhmaṇa**—of the priestly class
- **kṣatriya**—the warrior and administrative class
- **viśhām**—the mercantile and farming class
- **śhūdrāṇām**—of the worker class
- **karmāṇi**—duties
- **pravibhaktāni**—distributed
- **svabhāva-prabhavair guṇaiḥ**—work based on one’s nature and guṇas

Thus, Brāhmaṇya has nothing to do with birth. Nowhere in the Bhagavad Gītā is it said that duties are assigned by birth (janmāni pravibhaktāni). Rather, it is one’s karma and innate nature that determine whether one is a Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya, or Śūdra.

Discovering One’s True Profession

Someone has aptly said that finding the right profession is like finding the perfect life partner—it requires self-awareness and understanding. Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa explains that each person has a unique nature due to their guṇas, which shape their personality and determine their most suitable professional duties. The Varnāśrama system was a scientific organization of society, structured around an individual’s svabhāva-prabhavair guṇaiḥ—their inherent nature and qualities.

The Four Āśramas: The Stages of Life

The system of Varnāśrama Dharma consists of four āśramas (stages of life) and four varṇas (occupational categories). The four āśramas are:

- **Brahmācarya Āśrama** (Student Life) – From birth to 25 years, one focuses on learning, self-discipline, and scriptural study under a Guru.
- **Gṛhastha Āśrama** (Householder Life) – From 25 to 50 years, one engages in family life, profession, and societal responsibilities.
- **Vānaprastha Āśrama** (Semi-Renounced Life) – From 50 to 75 years, one gradually detaches from worldly affairs, while still guiding family and society.
- **Sannyāsa Āśrama** (Renounced Life) – From 75 years onwards, one fully renounces material life and dedicates themselves to spiritual pursuits.

The Four Varṇas: The Occupational Categories

Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa explains the four varṇas in this śloka:

1. **Brāhmaṇas** – The priestly, scholarly, and teaching class.
2. **Kṣatriyas** – The warriors, rulers, and administrators.
3. **Vaiśyas** – The merchants, traders, and agriculturalists.
4. **Śūdras** – The service-oriented and working-class people.

Varṇas Were Never Meant to Be Hierarchical

Originally, the varṇas were not considered higher or lower. All were equal in their importance to society. The foundation of the Bhagavad Gītā is equanimity (samatvam), which is emphasized in multiple ślokas. The center of society was Prabhu (Bhagavān), and everyone worked according to their intrinsic qualities (svabhāva-prabhavair guṇaiḥ) to sustain themselves and society, and to progress toward Paramātmā.

Thus, the Varnāśrama system ensured unity in diversity. Diversity is an inherent aspect of nature—just as five fingers are not alike, humans too have different abilities and responsibilities. Expecting everyone to perform the same function is futile and illogical. Recognizing these natural differences is not ignorance but wisdom.

Even in communist societies, where equality is emphasized, there are still party leaders, military personnel, farmers, and workers. The four functional classes exist in all civilizations—whether Christian, Islamic, or secular. Every country has its military (Kṣatriyas), business class (Vaiśyas), service sector (Śūdras), and scholars or religious heads (Brāhmaṇas). However, it is unfortunate that only Sanātana Dharma has been targeted unfairly under the pretext of caste-based discrimination.

The Deterioration of the Varnāśrama System

Over time, the true basis of varṇa changed from qualities to birth, which was a social distortion, not the original intention of Bhagavān. The children of Brāhmaṇas began calling themselves Brāhmaṇas, irrespective of their qualities. Similarly, the concept of ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ classes emerged when those in power began looking down upon others, making the system rigid and dysfunctional. This was a human-created social defect—not sanctioned by the Gītā.

The most unfortunate aspect is that people, without properly studying the Bhagavad Gītā, have blamed it for dividing society—an accusation that is entirely baseless. The Gītā consistently upholds the principle of equanimity, as stated in the śloka:

Samatvam Yoga Uchyate

Equanimity is said to be Yoga.

Furthermore, in another śloka, Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa emphasizes:

vidyā-vinaya-sampanne brāhmaṇe gavi hastini śhuni chaiva śhva-pāke cha paṇḍitāḥ sama-darśinaḥ

The truly wise, endowed with knowledge and humility, see with equal vision a learned Brāhmaṇa, a cow, an elephant, a dog, and even a dog-eater.

When such profound equanimity is advocated in the Bhagavad Gītā, how can it possibly create divisions among human beings? The very thought that the Gītā has caused social disparity is baseless.

In the following ślokas, Śrī Kṛṣṇa will map the guṇas of individuals to their natural inclinations and work. He will define the characteristics of a Brāhmaṇa, a Kṣatriya, a Vaiśya, and a Śūdra. As we proceed to Śloka 42, we will explore the traits of a Brāhmaṇa.

18.42

śamo damastapaḥ(ś) śaucaṃ(ñ), kṣāntirārjavameva ca, jñānaṃ(m) vijñānamāstikyaṃ(m), brahmakarma svabhāvajam. 18.42

Subjugation of the mind and senses, enduring hardships for the discharge of one's sacred obligations, external and internal purity, forgiving the faults of others, straightness of mind, senses and behaviour, belief in the Vedas and other scriptures, God and life after death etc., study and teaching of the Vedas and other scriptures and realization of the truth relating to God—all these constitute the natural duties of a Brāhmaṇa.

- **Śhamaḥ**—Tranquility, peace of mind, inner calm.
- **Damaḥ**—Restraint, control over the senses.
- **Tapah**—Austerity, self-discipline.
- **Śhaucham**—Purity, both internal and external.
- **Kṣhāntiḥ**—Patience, forbearance.
- **Ārjavam**—Integrity, straightforwardness.
- **Jñānam**—Knowledge, deep understanding.
- **Vijñānam**—Wisdom, realized knowledge.
- **Āstikyam**—Faith in the divine and the hereafter.

Tranquility, restraint, austerity, purity, patience, integrity, knowledge, wisdom, and faith—these are the intrinsic qualities of a Brāhmaṇa, as described by Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

A person possessing these qualities is truly worthy of being called a Brāhmaṇa. Notably, Śrī Kṛṣṇa never once mentions any external attributes—such as a shaved head, a tilak on the forehead, wearing a silk dhoti, or a sacred thread. These do not define a Brāhmaṇa. **Rather, it is one's karma (actions) and svabhāva (inherent nature) that determine one's true identity.**

The four defining traits of a Brāhmaṇa are **honesty, rare spiritual knowledge, purity, and forbearance in the face of difficulties while performing austerities (tapah).**

For instance, if a person decides to chant the **Mahamṛtyuñjaya Mantra** 1.25 lakh times over 21 days, this requires intense discipline, patience, and perseverance. It is not an easy feat. Similarly, some devotees perform **Gāyatrī Pūñścharaṇa**, chanting the Gāyatrī Mantra 24 lakh times within a prescribed period. Sitting for long hours in deep concentration, maintaining focus, and enduring physical discomfort—including body aches and even blisters from the internal heat generated by mantra chanting—demands exceptional forbearance.

A true Brāhmaṇa gladly embraces such hardships. He enjoys waking up in the early hours of Brahmā Muhūrta (around 3-4 AM) to engage in spiritual practices and devotion. Through consistent sādhana, he eventually attains direct experience of the Divine. Only one who has realized Brahmān is a true Brāhmaṇa. Thus, merely being born in a Brāhmaṇa family is meaningless unless one embodies the qualities described in this śloka.

Those with a predominantly sāttvika nature were categorized as Brāhmaṇas. Their primary duties included practicing austerities, maintaining purity of mind, engaging in devotion, and inspiring others through their example. They were expected to be tolerant, humble, and spiritually inclined. They performed Vedic rituals for themselves and for the other varṇas. Their love for knowledge made them natural teachers, entrusted with cultivating and sharing wisdom. While they did not engage in political administration, their scriptural knowledge made their counsel highly valuable to rulers and policymakers.

Next, we will explore the traits, karma, and svabhāva of a Kṣatriya as described in the following śloka.

18.43

**śauryaṃ(n) tejo dhṛtirdākṣyaṃ(m), yuddhe cāpyapalāyanam,
dānamīśvarabhāvaśca, kṣātraṃ(ñ) karma svabhāvajam. 18.43**

Heroism, majesty, firmness, diligence and dauntlessness in battle, bestowing gifts, and lordliness—all these constitute the natural duty of a Kṣatriya.

- **Śhauryam**—Valor, courage.
- **Tejah**—Strength, radiance.
- **Dhṛitiḥ**—Fortitude, determination.
- **Dākṣhyam**—Skill in weaponry.
- **Apalāyanam**—Not fleeing from battle.
- **Dānam**—Large-heartedness, generosity.
- **Īshvara-bhāva**—Leadership abilities.

These are the natural qualities of Kṣatriyas—valor, strength, fortitude, expertise in battle, resolve never to retreat, generosity, and leadership.

Kṣatriyas are strong and heroic, but their strength must be accompanied by fortitude, patience, generosity, and resourcefulness. It is commonly believed that those who enroll in the armed services are automatically Kṣatriyas. Additionally, if their names are Singh, Rajput, etc., people assume they are Kṣatriyas. But merely being willing to fight or wage war does not make one a Kṣatriya. These qualities must be supplemented with forbearance, patience, and generosity.

We see this in the army, where soldiers not only fight battles but also help society during natural calamities. Whether it is a flood, typhoon, or tsunami, they are the first to respond, providing relief and assistance to those in need.

Kṣatriyas predominantly possess rājasic guṇa, with a mix of sāttvika guṇa. This makes them royal, heroic, daring, commanding, and charitable. Their qualities made them suitable for military and administrative duties, governing the land and protecting its people. However, they also acknowledged that they were not as spiritually learned as Brāhmaṇas. Hence, they respected Brāhmaṇas and sought their counsel on spiritual, ideological, and policy matters.

Now, in the next śloka (44), we will explore the qualities and duties of Vaiśyas and Śūdras.

18.44

kṛṣigaurakṣyavāṇijyaṃ(m), vaiśyakarma svabhāvajam, paricaryātmakam(ñ) karma, śūdrasyāpi svabhāvajam. 18.44

Agriculture, rearing of cows and honest exchange of merchandise—these constitute the natural duty of a Vaiśya (a member of the trading class); and service of the other classes is the natural duty even of a Śūdra (a member of the labouring class).

- **Kṛiṣhi**—Agriculture
- **Gau-rakṣhya**—Dairy farming
- **Vāṇijyam**—Commerce
- **Vaiśhya-karma**—Duties of the mercantile and farming class
- **Svabhāva-jam**—Born of one's intrinsic qualities
- **Paricharyā-ātmakam**—Serving through work
- **Śhūdrasya-karma**—Duties of the worker class

Agriculture, dairy farming, and commerce are the natural occupations for those with the qualities of Vaiśyas. Serving through work is the natural duty for those with the qualities of Śūdras.

Vaiśyas engage in honest trade, business, and economic activities. Their nature is predominantly rājasic, with a mix of tāmasic guṇa, inclining them toward wealth generation through business and agriculture. They sustain the economy, create employment, and are expected to support society

through charitable activities.

While business is inherently profit-driven, it must also be just and reasonable. A Vaiśya's duty is not just to accumulate wealth but to share it for the welfare of society.

The fourth division refers to Śūdras, who find joy in serving society—whether it be Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, or Vaiśyas. Their nature is predominantly tāmasic, making them less inclined toward scholarship, governance, or commerce. Their best path to progress lies in serving society according to their natural disposition. Artisans, technicians, job-workers, tailors, craftsmen, and barbers traditionally fell under this category.

However, these divisions are fluid and dynamic, not rigid or permanent. For example:

- **A housewife taking care of her family is performing the role of a Śūdra.**
- **When she teaches her children, she is a Brāhmaṇa.**
- **When she bargains in the market, she becomes a Vaiśya.**
- **When she fights for her honor or the rights of her children, she is a Kṣatriya.**

Thus, one's role is determined by karma (action), not birth. Unfortunately, society today misinterprets these classifications as fixed and unfairly blames the Bhagavad Gītā for societal divisions. But Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself demonstrated all four roles:

- As a **Vaiśya**, He tended cattle and engaged in farming.
- As a **Kṣatriya**, He fought and vanquished demons and asuras.
- As a **Brāhmaṇa**, He was the supreme teacher, Yogeshvara, and the knower of the Absolute Truth.
- As a **Śūdra**, He humbly served the Brāhmaṇas by cleaning utensils at yajñas.

The Gītā clearly states:

karmāṇi pravibhaktāni, svabhāva-prabhavair guṇaiḥ—

Duties are assigned based on one's qualities and actions, not by birth.

At the level of spiritual knowledge (jñāna):

- One who identifies solely with the body is a Śūdra.
- One who transcends bodily identification and realizes the Self is a Brāhmaṇa.

Despite this, society today labels people based on birth and wrongly accuses the Gītā of promoting division. This misconception is deeply painful, for the Gītā has never advocated caste-based discrimination—it only speaks of karma and guṇas.

Now, let us explore Śloka 45, where Śrī Kṛṣṇa further explains the importance of performing one's duty in accordance with one's svabhāva.

18.45

**sve sve karmaṇyabhirataḥ(s), saṃsiddhiṃ(m) labhate naraḥ,
svākarmanirataḥ(s) siddhiṃ(m), yathā vindati tacchṛṇu. 18.45**

Keenly devoted to his own natural duty, man attains the highest perfection in the form of Godrealization. Hear the mode of performance whereby the man engaged in his inborn duty reaches that highest consummation.

The Path to Perfection Through One's Duties

- **sve sve**— respectively
- **karmaṇi**— work
- **abhirataḥ**— fulfilling
- **sansiddhim**— perfection
- **labhate**— achieves
- **naraha**— a person
- **sva-karma**— one's own prescribed duty
- **nirataḥ**— engaged
- **siddhim**— perfection
- **vindati**— attains
- **śhrīṇu**— hear

By fulfilling their duties, born of their innate qualities, human beings can attain perfection. Now hear from Me how one can become perfect by discharging one's prescribed duties.

Swa-dharma: The Key to Stability and Growth

Swa-dharma refers to the prescribed duties based on one's innate qualities (guṇas) and station in life. When we perform our swa-dharma, we utilize the potential abilities of our body and mind in a constructive and beneficial manner. This leads to purification, growth, and harmony—both for ourselves and for society.

Since these duties align with our innate nature, they bring stability, comfort, and fulfillment. As we progress in our competence, our swa-dharma also evolves, allowing us to step into a higher class of responsibility. In this way, we advance by dutifully executing our responsibilities.

The Misuse of Caste in Society

It is outrageous and tragic that even in modern times, we witness discrimination based on birth. There are instances where Dalit women are abused, even killed, simply for entering temples or accessing water sources reserved for so-called upper castes. ***Such injustices highlight the desperate need for education, so people understand that superiority or inferiority is not based on birth, but on one's deeds (karma) and nature (svabhāva).***

Ironically, many so-called upper-caste individuals engage in unethical, immoral activities, yet they are still seen as superior. Instead of judging by birth, people should be classified based on their actions and qualities.

Historical Examples: Karma Over Birth

Indian history and spiritual tradition are filled with examples that prove one's caste is determined by karma, not birth:

- Sant Raidas was born in a Śūdra family and faced immense discrimination. However, he attained spiritual greatness, and even the King of Benares bowed before him, recognizing his wisdom.
- Sant Kabir, Sant Ramdas, and Namdev were also born in poor families but rose to spiritual prominence despite public humiliation.
- Paraśurāma, though born in a Brāhmaṇa family, was a Kṣatriya by temperament. He wielded an axe as his symbol, fought many battles, and defeated numerous kings.
- King Vishwajeet, born into a Kṣatriya family, longed to be recognized as a Brāhmaṇa. After immense spiritual austerities, Rishi Vasiṣṭha finally acknowledged him as a Brahmarṣi.
- Vishwāmitra, a Kṣatriya by birth, through years of tapas (austerities), awakened the Brāhmaṇa

within him and attained the supreme Brahmā-jñāna.

Thus, one may be born a Kṣatriya but attain the status of a Brāhmaṇa through actions. Likewise, a person born into a Brāhmaṇa family may become a Kṣatriya upon joining the army, for he can no longer refuse to fight, claiming non-violence.

Fluidity of Caste in the Bhagavad Gītā

These divisions are not rigid or permanent. From the perspective of jñāna and the Bhagavad Gītā, a Brāhmaṇa is not defined by external symbols like tilak, shaved head, or robes. Instead, Śrī Kṛṣṇa describes a Brāhmaṇa as one who follows dharma, practices non-violence, is forgiving, compassionate, and devoted to spiritual wisdom.

Similarly, Vaiśyas, the economic backbone of society, play a crucial role by supporting Brāhmaṇas and Kṣatriyas with their wealth. Kṣatriyas require resources for defense, and Brāhmaṇas require sustenance for spiritual pursuits—both depend on Vaiśyas.

Bhagavān's Teaching: Dedicate Your Work to the Divine

Śrī Kṛṣṇa says: "Whatever work you do, consider it Bhagavān's work and dedicate it to Him." Regardless of your role, if you perform your duties without attachment, aversion, or expectation of results, you elevate your actions into an act of yajña (sacrifice).

- A son caring for his parents performs yajña.
- Helping neighbors in distress is also yajña.
- Performing one's duties proficiently is a yajña.

Thus, when we act selflessly and skillfully, our work becomes an offering to Bhagavān.

The Dangers of Choosing the Wrong Profession

What happens when a person chooses a profession that does not align with their temperament?

- A volatile, aggressive person with a Kṣatriya temperament who becomes a teacher may terrorize students, causing harm and distress. We have seen cases where teachers physically assault students, leading to severe injuries. Such individuals are not suited for teaching but for defense or law enforcement.
- A doctor with a Kṣatriya temperament may administer injections like stabbing with a knife—they lack the gentle compassion needed for patient care.
- A Vaiśya-minded doctor may prioritize profit over ethics, engaging in illegal organ trade or unnecessary surgeries. Medical professions require service-oriented individuals, yet many are driven solely by profit.
- Even judges and legal officials who should uphold justice are often seen engaging in corruption, turning their positions into a business for personal gain.

Finding the Right Profession: A Sweet Song vs. A Stressful Life

When people align their work with their innate temperament, life becomes a sweet, melodious song. Otherwise, life becomes a stressful challenge.

Thus, we must examine ourselves (svādhyāya) and reflect:

- Are we in the right profession?
- Is our life a harmonious flow or a burdened struggle?
- Are we performing our duties with gratitude, patience, and detachment?

With Bhagavān's and Guru's grace, we are able to perform our duties. We must recognize this, let go of ego (ahaṅkāra), and dedicate our work to Divine service.

The Story of the Learned Priest and the Guru

Once, there was a highly esteemed priest, renowned for his vast knowledge of the scriptures. He had memorized countless sacred texts and was even more famous than the guru he eventually sought out. Despite his intellectual mastery, he felt a deep sense of incompleteness.

"I have read and memorized the scriptures," he admitted, "but I have not understood the Absolute Truth (Paramatattva). I can recall words, but I do not know the path to reach the silence beyond them."

As he neared the final moments of his life, he sought a guru who could guide him toward true realization. The guru looked at the priest and said:

"I see that there are many obstacles within you. Your knowledge is overwhelming you. Write down everything you know and bring it to me. There is no need for me to tell you what you already know. Once you have set that aside, I will reveal to you what you do not know."

The priest agreed and set out on his task. Since he had studied an immense number of scriptures, it took him nearly a year to write everything down. Finally, he returned to the guru with a thousand-page manuscript and presented it humbly.

The guru smiled and said, *"Ah, you have returned! I doubted whether you would even be able to finish this task in your lifetime. Your mind is so filled with knowledge that I feared it might take you forever to write it all down. But now that you are back, I must tell you—this is too much! I am old, and my time is near. I cannot read such a bulky text. Summarize it and bring me the essence of all that you know."*

The priest went back and worked tirelessly for three more months. He condensed his vast knowledge into 100 pages and returned to the guru.

But the guru shook his head again, saying, *"This is still too much. I do not have the time or strength to read 100 pages. Condense it further and bring me just the core essence."*

The priest, now deeply engaged in the process, went back once more. After much contemplation, he reduced his knowledge to a single page and brought it to the guru.

Yet again, the guru sighed and said, *"Even this is too much. My time is nearly up. Go to the next room and summarize it in just one sentence."*

Determined, the priest went away and returned with a single shloka containing the essence of his lifelong studies.

But as the guru lay on his deathbed, he whispered, *"Even this is too much. I am holding on for you. When will you truly understand? Why are you being so reluctant to let go?"*

Suddenly, realization dawned upon the priest. He rushed to the next room and returned with a blank sheet of paper. He placed it in the guru's hands.

At this, the guru's eyes lit up with joy. He said, *"Now you have become my disciple. Though I am leaving this world, our connection will remain unbroken. Even death cannot sever this bond, for now, you are truly empty. Previously, your knowledge stood as a barrier between us—your pride in what you knew kept you from seeing the Truth. But now, you are free. Now, you are ready."*

At that moment, in the depth of emptiness, the disciple attained Divinity. He understood that true knowledge is not in accumulation, but in surrendering to the vast silence beyond words.

The Deeper Meaning

What happened when the priest brought the blank paper? He became empty from within.

To walk the path of true spirituality, one must first become empty, letting go of the burden of knowledge, ego, and preconceived notions. Only when the mind is silent and the heart is open can one truly experience the Divine.

Now, let's delve into Śloka 46.

18.46

**yataḥ(ph) pravṛttirbhūtānām(m), yena sarvamidam(n) tatam,
sVākarmaṇā tamabhyarcya, siddhiṃ(m) vindati mānavaḥ. 18.46**

From whom all beings come into being and by whom the whole universe is pervaded, by worshipping Him through the performance of his own natural duties, man attains the highest perfection.

The Importance of Svadharma

"By performing one's natural occupation, one worships the Creator, from whom all living entities have come into being and by whom the whole universe is pervaded. Through such performance of karma, a person easily attains perfection."

This verse emphasizes the significance of Svadharma (one's prescribed duty). Bhagavān has designed the universe in such a way that every soul plays a unique and essential role. No soul is superfluous in His divine plan. Each being is like a tiny cog in the giant wheel of creation, contributing to the greater whole.

Bhagavān does not expect more from us than the competence He has given us. Rather than comparing ourselves to others or aspiring for duties that are not aligned with our nature, we should embrace our own Svadharma.

Svadharma as a Path to Perfection

When we perform our prescribed duties in devotional consciousness, our work itself becomes worship. The goal is not to escape our responsibilities but to purify ourselves through them. By engaging in Svadharma with the right intention and consciousness, we gradually elevate ourselves toward Paramātmā (the Supreme Reality).

"Karma He Pūjā Hai" - Work is Worship.

The Story of the Young Sanyāsī and the Butcher

A powerful illustration of how no duty is impure, but rather, the consciousness behind it determines its worth comes from the Vana Parva of the Mahābhārata, as narrated by Sage Mārkaṇḍeya to Yudhiṣṭhira.

A young sanyāsī (renunciant) once went into the forest to perform austerities and meditation. Over the years, he developed mystical powers due to his intense tapasya. One day, as he sat under a tree, a crow's droppings fell on him. In anger, he glared at the bird, and it instantly fell dead. He realized that he had attained supernatural powers and became proud of his achievements.

Shortly afterward, he went to a house to beg for alms. The housewife answered the door and asked him to wait, as she was tending to her sick husband.

The sanyāsī became furious and thought, "*How dare this woman make me wait? She does not know my powers!*"

Reading his mind, the housewife calmly said, "*Do not look at me with such anger. I am not a crow to be burnt by your glance.*"

The sanyāsī was shocked. How did she know about the incident with the crow?

The housewife explained that she had not performed any austerities, but simply fulfilled her household duties with sincerity and devotion. Through this, she had attained spiritual illumination.

She then directed him to a butcher in Mithilā, saying, "*Go to him, and he will teach you about Dharma.*"

The sanyāsī hesitated—How could a lowly butcher teach him about Dharma? But curiosity led him to seek out the butcher.

To his surprise, the butcher, despite his humble profession, spoke with great wisdom and clarity. He explained:

"Every soul has a unique Svadharma, determined by past karma and natural competence. True spiritual progress does not come from abandoning one's duty, but from performing it with selflessness and devotion. If one carries out their prescribed duty while renouncing personal desires, one gradually purifies the soul and elevates it toward Divine Consciousness."

This conversation became known as the Vyādha Gītā of the Mahābhārata—a profound discourse on Dharma.

Relevance to Arjuna

This teaching was particularly applicable to Arjuna, who wanted to abandon his Kṣatriya Dharma out of fear and sorrow. He perceived his duty as painful and miserable, yet Śrī Kṛṣṇa instructed him that by performing it with the right consciousness, he would actually be worshipping the Supreme and attaining perfection.

Thus, Svadharma is not just about action—it is a spiritual path that aligns us with Bhagavān's divine plan.

Now, let's delve into Śloka 47.

18.47

**śreyānsvadharṃo viguṇaḥ(ph), paradharmātsvanuṣṭhitāt,
svabhāvaniyataṃ(ñ) karma, kurvannāpnoti kilbiṣam. 18.47**

Better is one's own duty, though devoid of merit, than the duty of another well-performed; for, performing the duty ordained by his own nature, man does not incur sin.

The Superiority of Svadharma

A similar verse is found in Chapter 3, which emphasizes on Sva-dharma

***śhreyān swa-dharmo viguṇaḥ para-dharmāt sv-anuṣṭhitāt
swa-dharme nidhanam śhreyaḥ para-dharmo bhayāvahaḥ (3.35)***

"It is better to follow one's own dharma, even imperfectly, than to follow another's dharma, even if performed perfectly. By performing one's natural duty, one does not incur sin."

The Two-Fold Advantage of Svadharma

Performing one's Svadharma (prescribed duty) has two key benefits:

- It aligns with our inherent nature – Just as flying is natural for a bird and swimming is natural for a fish, our Svadharma is suited to our temperament and abilities. It flows effortlessly when we act in accordance with it.
- It allows the mind to be free for devotion – When we act in alignment with our innate nature, we do not struggle against ourselves. Instead, we can engage in our duty with devotion, making it a form of worship.

If we abandon our Svadharma thinking it is defective and take up another's duty, we struggle against our natural inclinations. This was precisely the dilemma of Arjuna.

Arjuna's Dilemma and Svadharma

As a Kṣatriya, Arjuna was naturally inclined toward military and administrative duties. The circumstances of his life had placed him in a war where it was his duty to uphold righteousness. Yet, he wanted to abandon his Svadharma and take up another path, such as renunciation and austerities.

However, even if he withdrew to the forest, his Kṣatriya nature would remain. In all likelihood, he would gather the tribal people and become their king. Running away from duty would not help him spiritually because true renunciation is not the renunciation of action, but the renunciation of attachment. Instead, Śrī Kṛṣṇa instructed him to perform his Svadharma while offering the fruits of his actions to Bhagavān.

Svadharma Evolves with Spiritual Growth

As one progresses spiritually, one's Svadharma evolves. Initially, it is dictated by bodily duties, but as one advances, it transforms into the dharma of the soul—pure devotion to Bhagavān.

At this stage, Bhagavān gives the ultimate conclusion of the Bhagavad Gītā in 18.66:

***sarva-dharmān parityajya mām ekaṁ śharaṇam vraja
ahaṁ tvām sarva-pāpebhyo mokṣhayiṣhyāmi mā śhuchaḥ***

"Abandon all varieties of dharma and surrender unto Me alone. I shall liberate you from all sinful reactions; do not fear." (18.66)

This final teaching is applicable only when one reaches the stage of complete surrender and devotion. Until then, Bhagavān instructs us to continue performing our Svadharma.

The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (11.20.9) reinforces this:

***tāvat karmāṇi kurvīta na nirvidyeta yāvatā
mat-kathā-śhravaṇādau vā śhraddhā yāvan na jāyate***

"One must continue performing prescribed duties until the taste for devotion—through hearing, chanting, and meditating on Bhagavān's leelas—fully develops."

Thus, until we reach the highest stage of surrender, we must perform our Svadharma with devotion and dedication, offering the results to Bhagavān. Only then, when Bhagavān sees that we are ready,

will He say, "Now, I will take care of you. I will wash away all your past karma and grant you Mokṣa."

Now, Let's Continue with Śloka 48.

18.48

**sahajaṃ(ñ) karma kaunteya, sadoṣamapi na tyajet,
sarvārambhā hi doṣeṇa, dhūmenāgnirivāvṛtāḥ. 18.48**

Therefore, Arjuna, one should not relinquish one's innate duty, even though it has a measure of evil; for all undertakings are beset by some evil, as is the fire covered by smoke.

The Inevitability of Defects in Duty

"One should not abandon duties born of one's nature, even if one sees defects in them, O son of Kunti. Indeed, all endeavors are veiled by some evil, just as fire is covered by smoke."

No Work is Free from Imperfections

Every karma (action) comes with some form of inefficiency or fault. However, that does not mean one should abandon it. Many people recoil from their prescribed duties because they find defects in them. Here, Śrī Kṛṣṇa reminds us that no work is entirely free from flaws, just as fire naturally has smoke.

Examples of inevitable imperfections in actions:

- Breathing kills countless microbes. Some Jain monks cover their mouths to minimize this harm, yet they cannot completely avoid it.
- Farming destroys innumerable microorganisms in the soil.
- Competition in business leads to success for some and financial loss for others.
- Eating food means depriving someone else of that nourishment.

Even the most noble and righteous duty will have some defects. But the benefits of performing Svadharma far outweigh its imperfections.

Svadharma: A Path to Fulfillment and Success

Performing Svadharma (one's natural duty) provides a comfortable and natural path for inner purification and spiritual elevation.

A real-world study illustrates this beautifully:

Mark Albion, a professor at Harvard Business School, in his book "Making a Life, Making a Living," cited a study tracking the careers of 1,500 business graduates from 1960 to 1980.

- The students were divided into two categories:
 - o Category A (83%) - Those who focused on making money first, planning to pursue their real interests later.
 - o Category B (17%) - Those who pursued their passions first, believing financial success would follow.
- **After 20 years:**
 - o Out of 101 millionaires, 100 were from Category B (who pursued their passion first).
 - o Only one millionaire came from Category A (who prioritized money first).

The study revealed that those who pursued what they loved naturally excelled, and wealth followed as a byproduct. Mark Albion concludes that for most people, there is a difference between work and play. But those who love what they do find that work becomes play, and they never feel like they are

working a single day in their lives.

This aligns with Śrī Kṛṣṇa's teaching to Arjuna—not to abandon the work best suited to his nature, even if it has defects, but rather to perform it with the right consciousness.

The Importance of Consciousness in Action

For work to be elevating, it must be performed in the proper consciousness—offering its results to Bhagavān. Śrī Kṛṣṇa expands on this further in the next verse.

Now, Let's Continue with Śloka 49.

18.49

asaktabuddhiḥ(s) sarvatra, jitātmā vigataspr̥haḥ, naiṣkarmyasiddhiṃ(m) paramāṃ(m), sannyāsenādhigacchati. 18.49

He whose intellect is unattached everywhere, whose thirst for enjoyment has altogether disappeared and who has subdued his mind, reaches through Sāṅkhyayoga (the path of Knowledge) the consummation of actionlessness.

The State of Naiṣkarmya Siddhi

"Those whose intellect is unattached everywhere, who have mastered the mind, and who are free from desires through the practice of renunciation, attain the highest perfection of freedom from action."

Detachment Amidst Action

Śrī Kṛṣṇa, in this final chapter, reiterates many principles he has already explained. In the beginning of the chapter, he clarified that true renunciation (sanyās) is not about abandoning responsibilities but about performing them without attachment. Here, he describes the state of actionlessness (naiṣkarmya-siddhi)—a state that can be achieved even while actively engaging in the world.

A karma yogī achieves this state by:

- **Detaching from outcomes** – Doing one's duty without clinging to success or failure.
- **Mastering the mind** – Not letting desires dictate actions.
- **Practicing renunciation** – Not by giving up work, but by working in devotion, surrendering results to Bhagavān.

This can be understood through the analogy of walking in the mud without letting the mud cling to the body—engaging with the world while remaining unaffected.

A flowing river under a bridge is another example:

- The river enters from one side and exits from the other.
- The bridge remains unaffected—it neither holds the water nor blocks its flow.
- Similarly, karma yogīs perform their duties without getting entangled in the results.

They offer their work as worship to Bhagavān and remain content regardless of success (siddhi) or failure (asiddhi).

A Story of Acceptance

A man had two daughters:

- The first daughter was married to a farmer. She prayed for abundant rain to nourish the crops.
- The second daughter was married to a brick kiln owner. She prayed for dry weather so that the bricks could be baked properly.

One day, their father received their opposing requests and thought:

"Bhagavān alone knows what is best. Let him decide."

This is the mindset of a true karma yogī—detached from desires, surrendering to Bhagavān's divine plan.

Another Perspective - The Doctor's Dilemma

Consider a doctor who owns a hospital. He performs pūjā, praying for a successful business—perhaps to fulfill his wife's wish for a diamond necklace. At the same time, the people living around the hospital pray day and night to Bhagavān for good health, hoping they never have to visit the hospital.

Now, what should Bhagavān do?

The answer is simple: He will do what is right.

A karma yogī accepts Bhagavān's will without complaints, remaining unshaken by outcomes.

This verse emphasizes that spiritual liberation does not require external renunciation, but rather internal detachment from desires and outcomes. By practicing renunciation in action, **one attains the highest state of freedom—*niṣhkarmya siddhi***.

Now, Let's Continue with Śloka 50.

18.50

**siddhiṃ(m) prāpto yathā brahma, tathāpnoti nibodha me,
samāsenaiḥ kaunteya, niṣṭhā jñānasya yā parā. 18.50**

Arjuna, know from Me only briefly the process through which man having attained actionlessness, which is the highest consummation of Jñānayoga (the path of Knowledge), reaches Brahma.

Bhagavān says, "Hear from Me briefly, O Arjun, and I shall explain how one who has attained perfection (cessation of actions) can also attain Brahman by being firmly fixed in transcendental knowledge."

Theoretical knowledge is one thing, but realizing it practically is another. As the saying goes, "Good ideas are a dime a dozen, but they are not worth a plug nickel if not acted upon." The Bhagavad Gītā is filled with profound teachings, but they must be brought to life. It is not merely a book to be read—it is a manual for living. If its wisdom is not applied, what is the use?

A theoretical Paṇḍita may have the scriptures memorized, yet remain devoid of realization. In contrast, a Karma Yogi finds countless opportunities to put spiritual truths into practice. By consistently performing karma yog, one naturally realizes spiritual knowledge. As Swamiji says, "**Gītā padhe, padhāe, aur jīvan me lāye**"—**one must read, teach, and live the Gītā**. Unless its teachings are integrated into life, they serve no purpose.

When one attains naiṣhkarmya-siddhi—the state of actionlessness while performing work—transcendental knowledge manifests through experience. Established in that wisdom, the Karma Yogi attains the highest perfection of Bhagavān-realization. Śrī Kṛṣṇa elaborates on this process in the next few verses.

Karma has two poisonous fangs—kartṛtvābhimān (the sense of doership) and the desire for enjoyment. Only by removing these can one perform karma in a way that leads to naiṣhkarmya-siddhi.

The next three shlokas are interconnected, where Paramātmā reveals the path to this state. Let us study them together and reflect upon their deeper meaning.

18.51

**buddhyā viśuddhayā yukto, dhṛtyātmānaṃ(n) niyamyā ca,
śabdādīnviṣayāṃstyaktvā, rāgadveṣau vyudasya ca. 18.51**

Endowed with a pure intellect and partaking of a light, Sāttvika and regulated diet, living in a lonely and undefiled place, having rejected sound and other objects of sense,

- **buddhyā viśuddhayā yuktaḥ** – The seeker aspiring for Bhagavān-realization must be endowed with a pure and sāttvik intellect. In this very chapter, Śrī Kṛṣṇa explains what constitutes sāttvik buddhi. This intellect must be free from doubt, as clarity and discrimination (viveka-buddhi) are essential for spiritual progress. Discrimination enables one to detach from the material world and establish a connection with Paramātmā.
- **vairāgyaṃ samupāśhritaḥ** – Unlike worldly individuals who depend on external objects and relationships due to passion and attachment, a sincere sāṅkhya-yogī remains detached from all such entanglements. He finds no charm even in celestial pleasures.
- **vivikta-sevī** – The seeker naturally prefers solitude. However, if solitude is not available—if one must live amidst family in a two-bedroom apartment—it should not cause distress. Otherwise, the mind’s attachment to material comforts will only grow stronger, becoming an obstacle to meditation. True solitude is an internal state. One must cultivate the ability to meditate and perform duties whether in isolation or amidst a crowd. While solitude is conducive to concentration, it can also lead to lethargy. Additionally, external praise and honor for residing in solitude can become stumbling blocks in spiritual progress. A striver must guard against such distractions.
- **laghu-āśhī** – The aspirant should eat lightly and consume sāttvik food, as described in Chapter 17. The diet should sustain the body rather than indulge the tongue.
- **yata-vāk-kāya-mānasaḥ** – One must exercise control over speech, body, and mind. The intellect should not be swayed by worldly temptations. One should also ensure that speech is truthful, beneficial, and free from malice. The body should not be engaged in meaningless wandering or excessive indulgence. The mind should remain absorbed in Bhagavān rather than worldly matters.

As Śrī Kṛṣṇa stated in Chapter 17:

***deva-dwija-guru-prājña- pūjanaṃ śhaucham ārjavam
brahmācharyam ahinsā cha śhārīraṃ tapa uchyate***

***anudvega-karaṃ vākyaṃ satyaṃ priya-hitam cha yat
svādhyāyābhyasanaṃ chaiva vān-mayaṃ tapa uchyate***

18.52

**viviktasevī laghvāśī, yatavākkāyamānasah,
dhyānayogaparo nityam(m), vairāgyam(m) samupāśritaḥ. 18.52**

having controlled the mind, speech and body by restraining the mind and senses through firmness of a Sāttvika type, taking a resolute stand on dispassion, after having completely got rid of attraction and aversion and remaining ever devoted to the Yoga of meditation,

- **śhabda-ādīn viṣhayān tyaktvā** – The seeker must learn to withdraw the senses from their respective objects. Sight is drawn to forms, ears to sound, skin to touch, tongue to taste, and nose to smell. When the senses engage with their objects, they generate dualities—pleasure and pain, gain and loss, attraction and aversion—all of which hinder meditation. Thus, restraint over the senses is essential.
- **rāga-dveṣhau** – Attachment and aversion bind a person. One is attached to what seems beneficial and repelled by what appears unfavorable. If an obstacle arises in obtaining a desired object or meeting a dear person, anger and resentment arise. The mind oscillates between desires and dislikes, creating inner turmoil that disrupts meditation. A true seeker must rise above these dualities.
- **dhyāna-yoga-paro nityam** – The aspirant should be ever engaged in meditation. During fixed hours, one should practice meditation intensely, but even while performing professional and daily duties, the thought of Bhagavān should remain. The realization of Vāsudevaḥ Sarvam—"Bhagavān is everything"—must be deeply ingrained.

18.53

**ahaṅkāram(m) balaṁ(n) darpaṁ(ñ), kāmam(ñ) krodham(m) parigraham,
vimucya nirmamaḥ(ś) śānto, brahmabhūyāya kalpate. 18.53**

having given up egotism, violence, arrogance, lust, anger and luxuries, devoid of the feeling of meum and tranquil of heart—such a man becomes qualified for oneness with Brahma, who is Truth, Consciousness and Bliss.

ahankāram balaṁ darpaṁ kāmam krodham parigraham vimuchya – A seeker must abandon:

- **Ahankāra (Egotism):** The false notion of superiority.
- **Bala (Force/Violence):** The tendency to control others.
- **Darpaṁ (Arrogance):** Pride in one's possessions or achievements.
- **Kāmam (Desire):** The craving for worldly pleasures.
- **Krodham (Anger):** A fiery impulse to harm those who obstruct one's desires.
- **Parigraham (Possessiveness):** The tendency to hoard material objects.

nirmamaḥ śhāntaḥ – Detachment is the key.

The greatest attachment is to our own body, senses, mind, and intellect. A hundred years ago, none of these belonged to us, and a hundred years from now, they will no longer be ours. Even in personal relationships, one should cultivate detachment while performing duties with sincerity.

brahma-bhūyāya kalpate – A person free from attachment and mental turmoil becomes eligible for Brahman-realization. However, this is not yet the final state—it is like reaching Masjid Bunder station but still needing to reach VT. The ultimate realization is yet to come, which Śrī Kṛṣṇa will elaborate on

next.

Questions and Answers-

Aparna Ji

Q: Should I do my job or give seva quitting my job as I can not do both

A: Ultimately the decision should be yours but as you are young I suggest, you try and give seva in your free time without quitting your job. These thoughts have come to you, this in itself is God's blessing. This is a step in your spiritual development. People normally ignore spirituality under the pressure of job life but in your case it is different. You are even thinking of quitting the job for giving seva. You continue spirituality along with your job as you may have commitments for your family requirements.

Read 1 or 2 Adhyay of Gita everyday.

Sunita Ji

Q: What is the difference between Swa-Dharma and Kartavya-Dharma?

A: Dharma is the inherent quality. For example, the Dharma of sun is to give light and heat. Dharma is inherent which defines what you are. Swa is a fragment of Paramatma. Connecting these two- Paramatma and one's own Dharma is Swa- Dharma. Kartavya karma is different. Kartavya- karma is for the body whereas Swa-dharma is for the soul.

The next verses will be discussed in the upcoming Vivechan next week.

The discourse concluded with a **prārthanā (prayer) at the padakamala (lotus feet) of Śrī Hari**, followed by the recitation of the **Hanumān Chalisa**.



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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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