

ŚRĪMADBHAGAVADGĪTĀ INTERPRETATION SUMMARY

Chapter 12: Bhakti-Yoga

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From Devotion to Equanimity: The Heart of a Bhakta, Qualities That Please Bhagavān

The 12th Chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā: *Bhakti Yoga - The Yoga of Devotion*

The discourse commenced with the ceremonial lighting of the Dīpam (lamp) at the lotus feet of Śrī Bhagavān, invoking divine grace and filling the gathering with a profound sense of Bhakti and reverence.

सदाशिव समारम्भाम् शंकराचार्य मध्यमाम्।

अस्मद् आचार्य पर्यन्ताम् वंदे गुरु परम्पराम्॥

Beginning with Sadashiva, through Ādi Śankarācārya in between and up to my own preceptor, I bow with reverence to the entire tradition of preceptors.

In the last session, we had completed the first ten ślōkas of the twelfth adhyāya of the Bhagavad Gītā. In those verses, Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa explained the different ways by which one can gradually rise towards Him.

Actually, this chapter itself begins with a question. Arjuna asks, and in response, Bhagavān reveals the path. It is important to remember that the Gītā was spoken by Bhagavān to Arjuna, not without reason. Arjuna was endowed with all twenty-six divine qualities. He was well-prepared, he had performed his duties righteously, and he was fit to receive this knowledge. Therefore, Bhagavān chose Arjuna as the medium to deliver this Gītā.

In the same way, all who are studying and learning the Gītā today can also consider themselves especially fortunate and blessed. Just as Bhagavān chose Arjuna, He has also chosen us to listen to His divine words, to walk upon the path of the Gītā, and to mould our lives according to it.

Over the last two weeks, we have gone through all twenty ślōkas of this twelfth chapter. Having studied and recited them, we now feel confident that we too can learn, memorise, and chant the ślōkas correctly and beautifully. This confidence itself is the grace of Bhagavān, who has chosen us

for this path.

Towards the end of the Gītā, in the eighteenth adhyāya, Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa emphasises this point very clearly. In verses 68 and 69 He declares:

***ya imam paramam guhyam mad-bhaktesv abhidhāsyati |
bhaktim mayi parām kṛtvā mām evaiśyaty asaṁśayaḥ || 18.68 ||***

“He who teaches this supreme secret to My devotees, endowed with the highest devotion to Me, shall undoubtedly come to Me, free of all doubts.”

***na ca tasmān manuṣyeṣu kaścin me priya-kṛttamaḥ |
bhavitā na ca me tasmād anyah priyataro bhuvī || 18.69 ||***

“Among men there will never be anyone who does more pleasing service to Me than he; nor shall there be anyone dearer to Me on this earth than such a person.”

Thus Bhagavān assures that whoever studies, teaches, and spreads the Gītā becomes most dear to Him. Such a person is included among His most beloved devotees. We can therefore rejoice that by walking on this path, by learning and teaching the Gītā, we too have been included in that “most favourite” list of Bhagavān. Yet, it is also our responsibility to live up to this honour and continue walking steadily on the Gītā mārga.

We have now seen the meanings of the first ten ślokas in detail. Today, we begin with the eleventh śloka.

At the very outset of this chapter, Arjuna had asked which path is superior, worship of the manifest form (***sākāra upāsanā***) of Bhagavān or worship of the unmanifest (***nirākāra upāsanā***). In the second verse, Bhagavān replied briefly that devotion to the manifest form, the sākāra rūpa, is easier and better suited for Arjuna.

Now, it is not that worship of the unmanifest does not yield fruit. Certainly it does. But Bhagavān answers in a way suited to the one asking. Arjuna represents not only himself but also all of us. For most seekers, worship of the unmanifest is exceedingly difficult. Therefore, out of His compassion, Bhagavān recommends the worship of the manifest form. This is the most accessible and the most practical path.

In the fifth verse, Bhagavān explains that those who strive to worship the unmanifest face greater trouble. The path of nirākāra upāsanā is steep and demanding. It is possible, but not easy. Hence, in His mercy, Bhagavān directs Arjuna and us towards sākāra upāsanā, which is filled with sweetness, intimacy, and ease.

From the sixth to the tenth ślokas, Bhagavān elaborates on different ways by which one can approach Him. He explains that one may perform all actions while renouncing their fruits, offering them as worship to Him. Whoever lives in this way, considering all work as His service, is uplifted by Bhagavān Himself, who carries them across the ocean of birth and death.

Thus, in these verses, Bhagavān again and again presents options suited to different seekers, according to their eligibility, practice, and devotion. In the tenth śloka, He even grants an alternative for those who cannot practise intense meditation or renunciation: simply dedicate whatever you do to Him, with the thought, “*This too is for You.*”

This inclusiveness is the hallmark of Bhagavān’s teaching. At every step, He offers a way forward,

never rejecting, always encouraging.

Now, beginning with the eleventh śloka, Bhagavān will present further alternatives, gradually showing different levels of practice that lead one to union with Him.

12.11

athaitadapyaśakto'si, kartum(m) madyogamāśritaḥ, sarVākarmaphalatyaḡam(n), tataḥ(kh) kuru yatātmavān. 12.11

If, taking recourse to the Yoga of My realization, you are unable even to do this, then, subduing your mind and intellect etc., relinquish the fruit of all actions.

Bhagavān teaches: if one is not able to withdraw and control the senses, then at least one should renounce the fruits of all actions.

He recognises that perfect restraint of the **indriyāḥ**, the **five karmendriyāḥ** (instruments of action) and the five **jñānendriyāḥ** (instruments of knowledge), is a high attainment. For many, mastery of these indriyāḥ is difficult. Therefore, when a seeker cannot yet accomplish strict sense-control, Bhagavān prescribes the accessible alternative: perform one's duty, yet renounce attachment to the **karmaphala**, relinquish desire for the fruit of action. In short, even if the body and senses continue to act, the mind should be free from expectation of results.

A modern teacher, Param Puja Swami Ji Maharaj, founder of Gītā Pariwar, offers a helpful practical caveat for young people. He argues that youth should not prematurely abandon fruitive action. If a young person never aspires to attain anything, if there is no goal before them, life can become listless. Therefore, Swami Maharaj counsels a two-stage approach for the young: first, dream, cultivate an aim; then believe in one's capacity and strive wholeheartedly to attain that goal; once it has been realised, one may then practise detachment and renounce the fruit. In short: set aims, exert effort, achieve, and thereafter cultivate renunciation. Renunciation as an immediate prescription for those still forming their capacities may, he warns, undermine the very energy required for progress.

Bhagavān's teaching in this adhyāya is full of such graded options. He offers methods suited to different temperaments and levels of practice. Arjuna's response to these multiple options is instructive: when several alternatives are presented, a beginner often assumes the first is superior and the last must be the weakest. Thus Arjuna thought, *"If Bhagavān has spoken of aṣṭa or many methods and places the karma-based way last, it must be the least effective."* Yet Bhagavān answers to dispel this misunderstanding: the seemingly 'last' option, to act, offering all action to Bhagavān and renouncing the fruits, is not inferior. On the contrary, Bhagavān presents and compares all the choices (in the ślokas of the twelfth adhyāya) and explains their relative suitability. Renunciation of karmaphala, rightly understood and practised, is a most powerful and practical path, and Bhagavān affirms its spiritual efficacy even for those who cannot at once master meditative withdrawal or complete sense-control.

Thus, the teaching remains compassionate and pragmatic: if one cannot yet still the senses, one can still transform action into upāsanā by surrendering results. Yet great teachers such as Param Puja Swami Ji Maharaj remind young aspirants to first cultivate purpose and exertion, only later letting go of attachment when one has the strength to do so without losing aspiration. Bhagavān's arrangement of options is therefore both wise and merciful, adapted to the readiness of each seeker.

12.12

śreyo hi jñānamabhyāsāj, jñānāddhyānam(ṽ) viśiṣyate, dhyānātkarmaphalatyāgaḥ(s), tyāgācchāntiranantaram.12.12.

Knowledge is better than practice without discernment, meditation on God is superior to knowledge, and renunciation of the fruit of actions is even superior to meditation; for, peace immediately follows from renunciation.

Bhagavān explains that the practices already prescribed in the earlier śloka mature one's inner understanding step by step. A sādḥaka may begin with a simple, mechanical repetition of the holy name, **nāma-japa**, without any clear understanding of what the name signifies. For example, a young person might be told, "Chant Rāma," and begin repeating "Rāma, Rāma" as a sound. Later, a teacher, a guru or someone explains that "Rāma" is Prabhu, Rāma is Bhagavān with form, and with that explanation, the chant acquires meaning. That moment of clarification is the turning point: from mere repetition, knowledge (jñāna) arises.

From that initial, **superficial reflection or semblance (ābhāsa)** the practice deepens. The mechanical chant becomes japa suffused with awareness; japa ripens into **contemplative meditation (dhyāna)**. When the sādḥaka knows whom he is calling and why, the repetition ceases to be empty sound and becomes an inward current of devotion. As the practice progresses, the object of the name is imagined, contemplated, Rāma is seen in the mind's eye with bow and arrow, walking or standing in splendour, and that dhyāna is a deeper, more intimate form of upāsana than mere pronunciation.

Bhagavān then points to the practical fruit of such practice: some forms of devotion bring immediate inner tranquillity. This is not a promise of some distant or postponed reward; it is an immediate transformation of the heart. The speaker gives an example to make this plain: if her sister desires one cup of tea and one gives it to her, her joy and one's own peace are immediate. If one clings to the tea and drinks it oneself while withholding it from her sister, the mind will brood and feel unsettled. Giving, when done from love and without attachment, brings instant śānti. In the same way, selfless action (dāna) and loving service convert outer acts into inner peace at once.

Therefore, the option Bhagavān places at the end of the list of practices, the practice of performing action while renouncing the fruit, is not a "last-rate" fallback. It is practical, potent, and often the most attainable method for busy people. Arjuna himself is an exceptional bhakta and would not need many options; if Bhagavān had ordered him simply to fight, Arjuna would obey. But Bhagavān speaks to a wider audience. He knows how busy ordinary people are; He knows that many cannot set aside long hours for worship, long sessions of meditation, or sustained withdrawal of the senses. Out of compassion, He therefore offers graded methods that fit different lives and capacities: if one has two minutes, offer those two minutes as prayer; if one has ten minutes, use those; if one can spend half an hour or an hour, that too is honoured. The Gītā presents practices that can be taken up according to one's time, temperament, and ability.

From the thirteenth śloka onwards, the chapter is formally known as **Bhakti-yoga—the Yoga of Devotion**. In ślokas 13–19, Bhagavān enumerates the lakṣaṇas, the characteristic qualities of a true bhakta. These verses form a kind of checklist: the Gītā does not simply command "do this, do not do that." Rather, it supplies a clear inventory so that anyone who wishes to call themselves a bhakta may examine themselves against these traits. If one says, "I am a bhakta," one should check honestly: do these qualities exist in me? In a similar way, when the Gītā discusses the nature of a good or bad person (for example, in chapter 16), it supplies traits to help self-examination.

Commentators sometimes divide the list differently; some count thirty-six lakṣaṇas, others thirty-nine

by splitting certain compound terms, but the essential point remains unchanged: Bhagavān gives concrete, practical characteristics so aspirants can measure their progress. From the thirteenth śloka through the nineteenth, Bhagavān will describe these bhakta-lakṣaṇas in language both precise and accessible. It will be an interesting and useful study for everyone to compare their own life with this checklist and see which qualities have taken root and which still require cultivation.

12.13

adveṣṭā sarvabhūtānām(m), maitraḥ(kh) karuṇa eva ca, nirmamo nirahaṅkāraḥ(s), śamaduḥkhasukhaḥ kṣamī. 12.13

He who is free from malice towards all beings, friendly and compassionate, and Free from the feelings of 'I' and 'mine', balanced in joy and sorrow & forgiving by nature.

The first quality Bhagavān mentions is **adveṣṭā**, non-hatred, a heart free from malice. One who wishes to call oneself a bhakta must not hate anyone. In everyday life, people are often told, “*Hate this, hate that.*” But the Gītā teaches differently: “**Hate the sin, not the sinner.**” In fact, even this instruction can be refined; Bhagavān says that hatred should not arise from the heart at all.

Why? Because, as He declares in the fifteenth chapter:

**sarvasya cāhaṃ hr̥di sanniviṣṭo
mattaḥ smṛtir jñānam apohanaṃ ca
vedaiś ca sarvair aham eva vedyo
vedānta-kṛd veda-vid eva cāham (15.15)**

“I am seated in the heart of all beings. From Me come memory, knowledge, and forgetfulness. By all the Vedas I alone am to be known; indeed, I am the compiler of Vedānta and the knower of the Veda.”

If Bhagavān resides in the heart of every being, then hating any creature is indirectly hating Him. Thus, a bhakta is instructed to let go of hatred completely. No matter how much wrong another person has done, one must not cultivate malice. The law of karma is already operating—Bhagavān alone is the judge. It is not the devotee’s role to wish ill for others or to demand that they “get what they deserve.”

This non-hatred extends to all beings, not just humans, but animals, birds, and even the insentient world. Neutrality may be possible when love is absent, but active hatred is never acceptable if one truly wishes to be a devotee.

The next quality is **maitraḥ**, friendliness toward all. It is easy to be friendly toward one’s close circle, but the bhakta’s friendliness must extend even to one’s adversaries. Even if someone has done wrong, if they approach, the devotee does not respond with bitterness. If the devotee retaliates, then what distinguishes them from the wrongdoer? If the devotee is right, it is their responsibility to remain right till the very end, regardless of what others do.

Next comes **karuṇaḥ**, compassion. Compassion must replace judgment. For example, during the coronavirus pandemic, some people said: “These people are suffering because of their bad karma.” But it is not the role of a devotee to pronounce judgment on others’ karmas. The devotee’s dharma is to feel compassion, to help where possible, and to serve with kindness. Judgment belongs to Bhagavān, not to the bhakta.

Then comes *nirmama*, freedom from the sense of possessiveness, the feeling of “mine.” For embodied beings like us, this is perhaps the hardest. Normally, our speech is full of “my sister, my daughter, my father, my laptop, my bag.” This sense of *mamatva* (“mine-ness”) clings to everything. Bhagavān teaches that a true devotee loosens this grip.

A perfect example of *nirmama* is seen in Meerā Bāi’s devotion to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. She proclaims:

“मेरे तो गिरधर गोपाल, दूसरो ना कोई”

“For me, there is none other than Giridhar Gopāl, the one who lifted the Govardhan mountain, the cowherd boy Śrī Krishna.”

Meerā Bāi’s love was so complete, so singular, that all worldly attachments faded; nothing else belonged to her heart except Bhagavān. She exemplifies the essence of *nirmama*, a life entirely surrendered to the divine, free from possessiveness or attachment to worldly objects or relationships.

Connected to this is *nirahaṅkāra*, freedom from ego. Often in relationships, quarrels drag on because both sides wait for the other to apologise. The ego says, “Why should I go first?” But love demands humility. A bhakta must be willing to make themselves smaller for the sake of preserving love. This is why the flute is so dear to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The flute has nothing of its own; it is hollow and empty inside. Precisely because it is egoless and without self-assertion, Bhagavān fills it with His breath and melody. If we too can empty ourselves of ego and pride, then Bhagavān’s grace can flow through us.

Then Bhagavān mentions *sama-duḥkha-sukha*, equanimity in pleasure and pain. In life, people are often thrown into extremes. If they achieve 90% in an exam, they leap with unrestrained joy; if they fall short, they sink into despair. Such an imbalance leads to stress and depression. A bhakta, however, maintains balance: enjoying joy without intoxication, enduring sorrow without collapse. Neither over-excitement nor over-despair sways them.

Finally, in this śloka, Bhagavān calls the bhakta *kṣamī*, forgiving. Many people carry old grievances for years, even after the wrongdoer has moved on. They clutch at the memory, waiting for revenge or apology. But this is a needless burden. Forgiveness is liberation, for oneself more than for the other. As the Hindi verse says:

मनुज गलती का पुतला है, तो अक्सर हो ही जाती है ॥

जो कर ले ठीक गलती को, उसे इन्सान कहते हैं ॥

“Manuj galatī kā putlā hai, to aksar ho hī jātī hai.

Jo kar le ṭhīk galatī ko, use insān kahte haiṃ.”

“Man is the image of mistakes, so errors often occur. But the one who corrects his mistake, that one is truly human.”

Thus, the devotee forgives others as readily as they correct their own mistakes. All are human; mistakes happen. Carrying resentment is of no use. Forgiveness is the path of the bhakta.

Now, having described these first seven qualities in 12.13, Bhagavān continues in the fourteenth śloka to expand on the inner life of the devotee.

santuṣṭaḥ(s) satataṁ(ṽ) yogī, yatātmā dṛḍhaniścayaḥ, mayyarpitamanobuddhiḥ(r), yo madbhaktaḥ(s) sa me priyaḥ.12.14.

The Yogī who is Ever-concentrated and mentally united with Me, nay, who has subdued his mind, senses and body, has a firm resolve, and has surrendered his mind and reason to Me—that devotee of Mine is dear to Me.

“He who is ever content (*santuṣṭaḥ*), who is steady in yoga (*satataṁ yogī*), who has mastered himself (*yatātmā*), who is of firm determination (*dṛḍha-niścayaḥ*), whose mind and intellect are dedicated to Me (mayy arpita-mano-buddhiḥ), such a devotee is dear to Me.”

1. Santuṣṭaḥ - Ever-content, fully satisfied

Bhagavān begins by praising contentment. A true bhakta is satisfied with whatever life provides. This does not mean passivity or laziness, but a conscious attitude of acceptance: *“How much I have, I will be content with that.”*

This echoes the **Navadha Bhakti** described in the Rāmāyaṇa, where Bhagavan Rāma mentions nine ways a devotee can express love for the divine, one of which is being content and satisfied with what one possesses. Contentment brings immediate peace, removes anxiety, and allows the mind to focus entirely on devotion rather than being distracted by desires.

2. Satataṁ yogī - Steady in yoga, balanced in all situations

The word yogī here refers to balance, not just postures or meditation. A bhakta maintains equilibrium in every situation of life, neither overly elated in happiness nor despairing in sorrow. Just as a yogi harmonises body, mind, and breath, the devotee harmonises emotions, thoughts, and actions.

For example, one who maintains steadiness in exams, meetings, or daily challenges, without being swayed by stress or over-attachment, demonstrates this quality. It is about integrating yoga into daily life: balance in success and failure, in praise and criticism, in gain and loss.

3. Yatātmā - Self-controlled

Yatātmā describes someone who has mastery over their mind, senses, and impulses. This includes the five karmendriyas (senses of action), the five jñānendriyas (senses of knowledge), and the mind (manas).

Self-control does not mean forcing or suppressing the mind unnaturally. Bhagavān emphasises guiding the mind: *“You can go where your mind wishes, but let it be aligned with devotion to Me.”* It is a self-directed freedom, a conviction of discipline combined with love.

This is a quality exemplified by anyone who remains devoted and focused even amidst life’s distractions. For instance, while learning Gītā, one may feel busy with exams, work, or meetings. A true bhakta arranges time for devotion, never postponing it indefinitely, but dedicating whatever is possible with firm conviction.

4. Dṛḍha-niścayaḥ - Firm determination

Firm determination is the resolve to continue one’s devotional practice despite obstacles. A devotee’s determination allows them to prioritise spiritual growth alongside worldly responsibilities.

For instance, even if a devotee feels they cannot attend a live class or devote an hour daily, the firm determination to engage with the teachings, even through recordings, notes, or brief periods, ensures consistent progress. It is this unwavering will that sustains devotion through life’s ups and downs.

5. Mayy arpita-mano-buddhiḥ - Mind and intellect dedicated to Bhagavān

Bhagavān emphasises that a devotee's thoughts (manas) and discernment (buddhi) should be oriented toward Him. Whatever one thinks, one should think of Bhagavān; whatever one loves, one should love with Him in mind.

In practical terms, this means that while performing duties, studying, or interacting with the world, the bhakta remains internally connected to Bhagavān, thinking of His leelas, meditating on His form, chanting His name. This internal dedication is the essence of devotion.

In this verse, Bhagavān highlights the inner qualities of a bhakta: contentment, balance, self-control, firm determination, and mental/intellectual surrender. These qualities ensure that the devotee remains steady in devotion, even amidst worldly duties, distractions, or challenges.

12.15

yasmān nodvijate loko, lokān nodvijate ca yaḥ, harṣāmarṣabhayodvegaiḥ(r), mukto yaḥ(s) sa ca me priyaḥ 12.15

He who is not a source of annoyance to his fellow-creatures, and who in his turn does not feel vexed with his fellow creatures, and who is free from delight and envy, perturbation and fear, is dear to Me.

All the qualities described by Bhagavān here are not some extraordinary traits reserved for saints, but qualities one can easily recognise in day-to-day life. In fact, they are the very same virtues we expect from our own children, siblings, colleagues, or friends. We often insist that others behave with patience, kindness, and balance, though we may not always hold ourselves to the same standards. In the same way, Bhagavān too lovingly expects these qualities from His devotee.

It is not that one must perfect all thirty-six qualities at once. Even cultivating one or two with sincerity makes one dear to Bhagavān. What matters is the effort, if one already has certain guṇas, preserve them; if one does not, strive to develop them.

Among these, an especially important quality is described in the phrase yasmān nodvijate lokaḥ: the devotee is one who neither agitates others, nor becomes agitated by others. To avoid disturbing others through words or actions is within reach. But not getting disturbed by what others do or say is far more challenging. Life inevitably brings criticism, insults, or provocations, yet the devotee remains unmoved, remembering always, *"I am special to Bhagavān, chosen for a divine purpose. I carry His grace, and therefore I have no reason to be disturbed."* With this conviction, minor irritations lose their power.

A practical mantra for this state is "This too shall pass." Every joy and sorrow, insult and praise, gain and loss, is temporary. Nothing in this world lasts forever. Keeping this perspective makes it easier not to take anything personally. For the true bhakta, even the insulter, the insult, and the one insulted are all seen as manifestations of Parameśvara Himself. In such a vision, agitation dissolves naturally.

Bhagavān further emphasises that His devotee is free from harṣa (excessive elation), amarṣa (envy), anger, fear, and anxiety. Fear arises only when one acts wrongly or hides in guilt, but a devotee who has surrendered everything to Paramātmā has nothing to fear. Balanced in happiness and sorrow, beyond fear and agitation, such a devotee is Bhagavān's priya, His most beloved.

With this, Bhagavān prepares Arjuna to receive the next instruction, expressed in the sixteenth śloka.

12.16

napekṣaḥ(ś) śucirdakṣa, udāsīno gatavyathaḥ, sarvārambhaparityāgī, yo madbhaktaḥ(s) sa me priyaḥ. 12.16

He who wants nothing, who is both internally and externally pure, is wise and impartial and has risen above all the distractions, and who renounces the sense of doership in all undertakings—such a devotee of Mine is dear to Me.

In the previous śloka, Bhagavān described the devotee's attitude when dealing with other people. In this verse, He highlights the devotee's attitude towards action and life itself.

- **Anapekṣaḥ** - the true devotee is free from expectations. Expectations are the hidden root of sorrow. Whenever we expect others to act in a certain way, "he should say this," "she should do that", and it does not happen, disappointment follows. The pain is not caused by others, but by our own expectations.

A beautiful couplet captures this truth:

“क्यों कल्पना खुशी की, खुशी से ज़्यादा खुशी देती है?

क्यों सामने की खुशी भी, मुट्ठी से रेत की तरह फिसल जाती है?”

“Kyun kalpanā khushi kī, khushi se jyādā khushi detī hai?

Kyun sāmne kī khushi bhī, muṭṭhī se ret kī tarah fīsal jātī hai?”

When one keeps imagining happiness in some future fulfilment, the joy that already exists in the present slips away like sand from one's hand. Thus, contentment comes not from clinging to what is missing, but from gratitude for what one already has: food, clothing, family, health, and so many blessings denied to countless others.

- **Śuciḥ** - purity both external and internal. External purity means keeping one's environment, body, and habits clean. Internal purity means guarding the mind against envy, pride, and selfishness.
- **Dakṣaḥ** - a devotee acts with alertness and dedication, putting full effort into whatever is undertaken. It is not about doing many things, but about doing the right things with sincerity.
- **Udāsīnaḥ** - unconcerned, not in the sense of apathy, but of non-interference. The devotee does not meddle in every situation unnecessarily, nor is he overly curious about matters that do not concern him. Corrections, when needed, are done with love, not with intrusion.
- **Gatavyathaḥ** - free from mental anguish. Pain and problems arise in everyone's life, but the bhakta remains inwardly undisturbed, having surrendered all to Paramātmā.
- **Sarvārambhaparityāgī** - one who does not initiate unnecessary undertakings. The devotee does not chase endless new desires or schemes for sense gratification. Actions are guided only by svadharma and are offered to Bhagavān, not started from restless impulses.

Such a devotee works without selfish expectation, remains unattached to the results, and is inwardly free. Outwardly engaged, inwardly renounced, such a person becomes truly dear to Bhagavān.

12.17

yo na hr̥ṣyati na dveṣṭi, na śocati na kāṅkṣati, śubhāśubhaparityāgī, bhaktimānyaḥ(s) sa me priyaḥ. 12.17

He who neither rejoice nor hates, nor grieves, nor desires, and who renounces both good and evil actions and is full of devotion, is dear to Me.

This śloka beautifully reveals the inner disposition of a devotee, the way he relates to situations, objects, and emotions that come and go in life.

Ordinarily, human life runs in cycles of gain and loss, pleasure and pain. When we receive a favourable object, when situations go our way, we naturally rejoice. But that same object or circumstance, once lost, gives rise to sorrow and despair. Thus, the very things that once delighted us become the source of grief later. In this way, the mind keeps oscillating between extremes, now rejoicing, now lamenting, now desiring, now resenting.

A devotee, however, rises above this cycle. He learns the art of equanimity. For him, nothing is purely “good” or “bad.” He knows that such labels are the seeds of attachment and aversion, and with them come inevitable joy and sorrow. Instead, he looks upon everything as Bhagavān’s prasāda, His will, His gift, His play. He accepts each situation as a blessing, performs his rightful duties without resistance, and moves forward without clinging or complaint.

Such a devotee does not get carried away in joy, nor does he sink in grief. He does not harbour hatred, nor does he remain entangled in endless desires. His mind is free, his heart steady, his soul anchored in surrender. This attitude is called **śubhāśubha-parityāga**, renunciation of both the favourable and the unfavourable.

And when this equanimity is joined with deep devotion, when the heart beats only for Bhagavān and nothing else, then such a bhakta becomes supremely dear to Him. Śrī Krishna says, “*That devotee who remains balanced, free from agitation, and filled with devotion, such a person is My very own, exceedingly beloved.*”

This verse, therefore, is not a dry instruction to suppress emotions, but a divine invitation to live in freedom, free from the endless rollercoaster of worldly ups and downs, and firmly established in the peace and joy of devotion.

12.18

**ṣamaḥ(ś) śatrau ca mitre ca, tathā mānāpamānayoḥ,
śītoṣṇasukhaduḥkheṣu, ṣamaḥ(s) saṅgavivarjitaḥ. 12.18**

He who deals equally with friend and foe, and is the same in honour and ignominy, who is alike in heat and cold, pleasure and pain and other contrary experiences, and is free from attachment.

A devotee who is samah remains the same in their attitude toward everyone, whether it is an enemy (śatru) or a friend (mitra). This equanimity is not mere politeness, but a profound inner balance. The devotee shows love and respect to friends without secretly harbouring anger, jealousy, or expectation. Similarly, when faced with insult or disrespect, the mind does not react with agitation or resentment. One remains composed, balanced, and unaffected internally.

Even in situations of physical discomfort, extreme cold or heat, lack of conveniences, or loss of comforts like electricity or air-conditioning, the devotee does not get restless or cling to desires. They do not overreact to external circumstances or demand what is absent. Happiness arises from inner freedom, not dependence on external objects or conditions.

Attachment to objects, comforts, or outcomes is minimal; the devotee is not driven by cravings or compulsions. Joy and sorrow, respect and insult, pleasure and pain, all are met with the steadiness of mind. This freedom from attachment and equanimity in all situations is the hallmark of a true devotee, one who is deeply dear to Bhagavān.

12.19

**tulyanindāstutirmaunī, santuṣṭo yena kenacit,
aniketaḥ(s) sthīRāmatih(r), bhaktimānme priyo naraḥ. 12.19**

He who takes praise & criticism alike, and is given to contemplation and is contented with any means of subsistence available, entertaining no sense of ownership and attachment in respect of his dwelling-place and is full of devotion to Me, that person is dear to Me.

Even when someone praises the devotee or speaks falsely about them, backbiting or highlighting faults, the devotee remains *samaḥ*, perfectly equal in mind and heart. They are neither elated by praise nor disturbed by reproach. If insulted, they do not react with anger or retaliation; they simply observe, remain silent, and continue their contemplation of Bhagavān. The silent devotee (**maunī**) watches with awareness, speaks little, and dedicates themselves fully to inner reflection and meditation.

Such a devotee remains content (**santuṣṭaḥ**) with whatever they possess, whether little or much. They are free from attachment to possessions or home (aniketaḥ), unmoved by external circumstances, and maintain a steady, unwavering intellect (**sthīrāmātiḥ**) firmly fixed on Bhagavān. Even if they are prevented from pursuing certain desires or duties, their mind remains balanced, and their actions are guided by devotion rather than attachment.

By cultivating these qualities, equanimity in praise and blame (**tulyanindāstuti**), silent contemplation, contentment in all circumstances, detachment from worldly ties, and steady, firm-minded devotion, the devotee becomes deeply beloved to Bhagavān. These virtues define the ideal of a bhakta, making them most cherished in the eyes of the Divine.

12.20

**ye tu dharmyāmṛtamidaṁ(ṽ), yathoktaṁ(m) paryupāsate,
śraddadhānā matparamā, bhaktāste'tiva me priyāḥa.12.20.**

Those devotees, however, who partake in a disinterested way of this nectar of pious wisdom set forth above, endowed with faith and solely devoted to Me, they are extremely dear to me.

“Who has heard this? Who has truly listened to this nectar of wisdom as I have explained?” asks Bhagavān. He speaks of the *amṛta-dharma*, the immortal dharma, the eternal truth of devotion and righteous conduct. Those who have heard this, who sincerely follow it, and who are steadfast in faith (śraddhā), recognising Bhagavān as the Supreme, the sole object of love and surrender, are exceedingly dear to Him. Such devotees are His most cherished, His priyāḥ, for they live in alignment with His guidance and acknowledge Him as the ultimate.

Having outlined the qualities of a true devotee and described the immortal dharma, Bhagavān emphasises that those who steadfastly adhere to these teachings, fix their minds on Him, and regard nothing else as supreme, are most beloved to Him.

Thus concludes the 12th chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā, the Bhakti Yoga, the Yoga of Devotion. A bouquet of spiritual teachings, a “pushpika” of wisdom, presenting the essence of devotion with clarity and completeness, is offered at the lotus feet of Sri Hari

At the chapter’s conclusion, the sacred syllable Om is invoked, symbolising the Supreme Self and serving as a benediction. It is also a means of seeking forgiveness for any errors made during recitation or explanation, offering the devotee reassurance and grace.

Ved Vyāsa further explains that **Om Tat Sat** represents the Supreme itself, a reminder of the eternal reality, and a call to pure, devoted remembrance.

In essence, those who hear, embrace, and practice this eternal dharma with devotion, unwavering faith, and love for Bhagavān are the most beloved to Him, exemplifying the true path of Bhakti.

The session concluded with **Harinām Sankīrtan**, followed by an interactive **Question and Answer** segment, where insightful, thought-provoking queries were addressed, blending practical guidance with deep spiritual wisdom.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

Sonam ji

Q: In the 16th śloka, it is said that sarvārambhaparityāgī, renouncing the initiation of material undertakings. Does this imply that one should completely stop initiating?

Ans: No, not at your age, **sarvārambhaparityāgī**, renouncing the initiation of actions, does not mean stopping all activity. Rather, it refers to gradually giving up actions driven by rājas (desire, restlessness) and tāmas (laziness, ignorance). For example, simple worldly cravings, like wanting samosas, jalebi, tea, or going to the movies, are rājasik or tāmasik initiations, and one should begin renouncing these.

However, actions born of sattva, guided by duty, discipline, or spiritual aspiration, such as deciding to complete all 18 chapters of the Gītā daily, should still be initiated. The ultimate goal is to first shift from rājas and tāmas to sattva, and then, when fully established in sattvic discipline, even those sattvic initiations can be gradually transcended. The emphasis is on discernment and gradual purification, not abrupt renunciation of all activity.

Amit ji

Q: Could you please elaborate on what exactly is meant by sukshma sharira and stoola sharira?

Ans: The physical body that we can see and touch, composed of bones, flesh, and organs, is called the **stoola śarīra, or the gross body**.

Beyond this gross body exists the sukshma śarīra, the subtle body, which consists of:

- The ten indriyas (five jñānendriyas for perception, and five karmendriyas for action)
- The five pranas (vital energies)
- The mind (manas) and intellect (buddhi)

Altogether, these 17 elements form the sukshma śarīra. This subtle body is active during waking and dreaming states. Even in deep sleep (sushupti), while the sukshma śarīra is inactive, the karana śarīra, or causal body, remains awake as the eternal witness (sakshi bhava).

The Upanishadic statement “**sukham aham asvāpsam, na kiñcid avedīṣam**” beautifully illustrates this: even in deep sleep, when we perceive nothing externally and experience no dreams, we awaken with a sense of comfort and bliss. This happiness is not due to external objects, but arises from the karana śarīra, the conscious witness that remains aware in all states.

Thus, we have:

- **Stoola śarīra** - the gross physical body.

- **Sukshma śarīra** – the subtle body of mind, intellect, senses, and pranas.
- **Karana śarīra** – the causal body, the ever-awake witness, present even in deep sleep.

Together, these three śarīras explain the layers of our existence, showing how consciousness persists across waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, and how bliss can arise even in apparent inactivity.

Q: Which can be called consciousness, the stoola śarīra or the sukshma śarīra?

Ans: Stoola śarīra – the gross physical body, composed of flesh, bones, and organs, rests completely during sleep. It has no awareness on its own.

Sukshma śarīra – the subtle body, made up of the mind (manas), intellect (buddhi), senses (indriyas), and vital energies (prāṇas), also becomes inactive during deep sleep (sushupti). Even in dreaming, its activity is limited to the subtle experiences.

Karana śarīra – the causal body, the ever-awake witness (sakshi), remains present at all times, even in deep sleep. It observes the functioning of the gross and subtle bodies without being affected.

After a period of sleep, when we wake up feeling refreshed, this sense of awareness reflects consciousness, the integrated presence of the gross, subtle, and causal bodies. The Ātman, however, transcends all three bodies. It is formless, eternal, and ever-conscious, independent of the gross, subtle, or causal layers.

Lokhnath ji

Q: In the Rāmāyaṇa, Bhagavan Rāma explains certain qualities of a devotee, while here in the Bhagavad Gītā, we are discussing the 36 (or 39) characteristics of a devotee. Is there any difference between the two lists, or is it more of a coincidence that they align in some way?

Ans: Actually, in the Rāmāyaṇa, Bhagavān Rāma is describing bhakti, the devotional attitudes, whereas here in the Bhagavad Gītā, we are discussing the 36 (or 39) lakṣaṇas of a bhakta, a devotee. The emphasis in the Gītā is practical; these are the qualities one must cultivate to truly be called a bhakta, and how one should live and act in the world. The Bhagavad Gītā serves as a manual for life, providing guidance on how to perform one's duties and maintain devotion in every situation.

Thus, while the Gītā lists the characteristics of a bhakta, in the Rāmāyaṇa, the focus is on bhakti itself, the nine primary forms of devotion:

श्रवणं कीर्तनं विष्णोः स्मरणं पादसेवनम्
अर्चनं वन्दनं दास्यं सख्यम आत्मनिवेदनम्

So bhakti (the attitude and practices of devotion) is distinct from the lakṣaṇas of a bhakta (the qualities that make one a true devotee). Performing bhakti in these ways cultivates these qualities, and one becomes a genuine bhakta. Both perspectives are complementary, highlighting devotion from different angles.

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

**om tatsaditi śrīmadbhagavadgītāsu upaniṣatsu
brahmavidyāyām(ṽ) yogaśāstre śrīkṛṣṇārjunasaṃvāde**

bhaktiyogo nāma dvādaśo'dhyāyaḥ.



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Jai Shri Krishna!

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