

## ŚRĪMADBHAGAVADGĪTĀ INTERPRETATION SUMMARY

### Chapter 18: Mokṣa-Sannyāsa-Yoga

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YouTube Link: [https://youtu.be/Otkbfl\\_vHwU](https://youtu.be/Otkbfl_vHwU)

## Action Without Bondage: The Secret of True Doership

The name of Chapter 18 of the Bhagavad Gītā is **Mokṣha Sanyās Yoga - Yoga through the Perfection of Renunciation and Surrender**

The session commenced with the auspicious ritual of lighting the lamp and offering heartfelt prayers to the Divine.

We are currently discussing **Chapter 18**, which is the **summary and essence of the remaining seventeen chapters of the Bhagavad Gītā**. In our previous session, we completed the discussion up to **shloka ten**. Before beginning today's session, the speaker shares a thoughtful reflection.

### Preparing the Mind Before the Gītā

Before directly entering into the **pattern and explanation of shlokas**, it is important to prepare our inner state. Jumping straight into shlokas is not always helpful. First, the mind must be **established in spiritual thinking**. Only when the mind is aligned with higher thoughts can the wisdom of the Gītā be truly received. Therefore, from today onward, before beginning the study, we will first **set our mind in Bhagavān**, and then proceed to the teachings.

The opening question for today is simple, yet profound: **Do we truly believe that Bhagavān exists?** And if we do, **what proof do we have for this belief?** To explain this, the speaker narrates a small yet powerful anecdote.

### The Story of the Two Babies

Inside a mother's womb, **two unborn babies** were talking to each other.

One baby asked the other: "Do you believe there is life after delivery?"

The second baby replied confidently: "Of course. There must be something new and different after delivery. Perhaps we are here only to prepare ourselves for what is to come."

The first baby laughed and said: “That is nonsense. There is no life after birth. And even if there is, who knows what it would be like?”

The second baby responded thoughtfully: “I feel there will be more light than what we see here. Maybe we will walk on our own feet and eat using our own mouths. Maybe we will have senses that we cannot even imagine right now.”

The first baby rejected this completely: “Impossible. Walking on feet? Eating through the mouth? Ridiculous! The cord supplies everything we need. Life depends on it—and the cord is very short.” “Without this cord, life cannot exist. So life after delivery is impossible.”

The second baby replied firmly: “I believe there is surely something after birth, and it is different from this. Maybe we will not need this physical cord anymore.”

The first baby mocked the idea: “Nonsense! And if life after delivery exists, why has no one ever returned to tell us about it? No one has come back.” “Delivery is the end. After that, there is only darkness, silence, and nothingness.”

The second baby softly said: “I don’t know how it will be. But I am sure we will meet our **mother**, and she will take care of us.”

The first baby laughed again: “Mother? You actually believe in mother? If mother exists, where is she now?”

The second baby replied calmly: “She is all around us. We exist because of her. We are surrounded by her. We live in her.” “Without her, this world would not and could not exist.”

The first baby argued: “But we cannot see her. Therefore, logically, she does not exist. It is only a fantasy.”

The second baby answered gently: “Sometimes, when you are silent and focused, you can feel her presence. You can even hear her loving voice.” “But for that, you must be silent. And you must listen.”

This analogy perfectly reflects **our experience with Bhagavān**. Just like the two babies, there are **two kinds of people** in this world:

- One who believes **only in what is visible**
- Another who, while living in this world, believes there is **something beyond the senses**

Just as the **mother exists** even though the babies cannot see her, **Bhagavān exists**, even though we cannot see HIM with our physical eyes.

Though we cannot see or touch **HIM**, **HE is constantly providing us life, sustenance, and protection**. Like the mother caring for the unborn child, **Bhagavān takes care of us at every moment**. HE is our **Creator**. We exist **because of HIM**.

To feel HIS presence and hear HIS voice, our **spiritual senses must awaken**. Just as the baby had to remain silent to perceive the mother, we too must become silent within. Through **meditation, stillness, and an open heart**, we begin to experience Bhagavān.

Bhagavān has **hidden HIMSELF inside our hearts**. What is required from us is simple, yet profound: **Hide yourself, and expose the Bhagavān within you**.

## na hi dehabhṛtā śakyaṃ(n), tyaktuṃ(ñ) karmānyaśeṣataḥ, yastu karmaphalatyāgī, sa tyāgītyabhidhīyate. 18.11

Since all actions cannot be given up in their entirety by anyone possessing a body, he alone who renounces the fruit of actions is called a man of renunciation.

Bhagavān clearly states that **it is not possible for an embodied being to completely abandon all actions**. As long as one has a body (*deha*), **action is inevitable**. However, the one who **renounces the fruits of action** is declared to be the **true tyāgī**.

In the earlier shlokas of this chapter, Bhagavān distinguished between:

- **External renunciation** – giving up actions
- **Internal renunciation** – giving up attachment to results

This **11th shloka** plays a crucial role in clearing a common misunderstanding: that spiritual progress requires abandoning all actions and withdrawing from worldly life. Bhagavān begins with a strong assertion: For one who has a body, complete abandonment of action is impossible. Breathing, digesting food, walking, speaking, thinking— all these are **actions (karma)**. Even maintaining silence involves **physical and mental activity**. Therefore, absolute inaction is not possible for a living human being. This directly counters the belief that liberation can be attained simply by stopping work or escaping into physical solitude. Even a monk living in a forest must act to sustain the body. Hence, **renunciation of action itself** is neither practical nor spiritually meaningful.

### If Action Is Inevitable, What Should Be Renounced?

If action cannot be avoided, then what is the correct spiritual discipline?

The answer lies in the second line of the shloka: **The one who renounces the fruits of action is the true renouncer**. Here lies the **heart of the Bhagavad Gītā's philosophy**.

- Action is inevitable
- **Attachment is optional**

Human suffering does not arise from action itself. It arises from **expectations, desires, fear of failure, and craving for reward**. When a person acts with constant anxiety about success and failure, the mind becomes restless. But when one **renounces the fruits of action**, one remains **inwardly free**, even while acting outwardly. The body works. The mind remains peaceful.

### Who Is a True Tyāgī?

According to this shloka, a **tyāgī** is not someone who stops working. A true tyāgī is one who:

- Performs duties sincerely
- Works without ego
- Has no personal claim over outcomes
- Accepts success and failure with equanimity
- Offers results to **Bhagavān**, society, or the cosmic order
- Does not act for selfish gratification

Thus, **renunciation is a mental discipline**, not physical withdrawal. This teaching is not new. In **Chapter 2**, Bhagavān already taught: **Act without attachment, and you shall be free**. Shloka 18.11 **reaffirms and culminates** this central message of the Gītā.

## A Practical Illustration

Once there was a senior judge known for his integrity. After decades of service, he announced that he wished to renounce the world and live quietly, free from responsibility. People praised his desire for renunciation. A young lawyer gently asked him: “Sir, will you stop breathing? Will your mind stop thinking? Will your presence stop influencing others?”

The judge realized that even if he left the courtroom, his actions would continue—through advice, influence, and even silence. Simply withdrawing from visible duties did not mean freedom from action. So he chose another path. He continued judging cases, but with a **changed attitude**. Earlier, praise, criticism, promotions, and fear of mistakes disturbed him. Now, he focused only on delivering justice sincerely. He left the outcomes—public opinion, career consequences, reputation—to **Bhagavān**. Success no longer inflated him. Criticism no longer shook him.

Years later, when asked how he practiced renunciation while remaining active, he replied: “I did not renounce the work. I renounced ownership of the results. The hands work, but the heart remains free.”

This shloka offers a **profound and practical definition of renunciation**.

- Total inaction is impractical
- Renunciation of results is the true discipline

In Bhagavān’s vision, a liberated soul is not one who abandons life, but one who **lives fully, works wholeheartedly, and remains inwardly unattached**. Such a person alone deserves to be called a **true tyāgī**.

## Takeaway

- Action is unavoidable as long as there is a body
- Attachment to results is optional
- True renunciation lies in **letting go of ownership**, not duty
- This teaching makes the Bhagavad Gītā relevant for **every active individual**, not only monks and yogīs

## 18.12

**aniṣṭamiṣṭam(m) miśram(ñ) ca, trividham(ñ) karmaṇaḥ(ph) phalam,  
bhavatyatyāginām(m) pretya, na tu sannyāsinām(ñ) kvacit. 18.12**

Agreeable, disagreeable and mixed-threelfold, indeed, is the fruit that accrues after death from the actions of the unrenouncing. But there is none whatsoever for those who have renounced.

Bhagavān declares that the **fruits of action are of three kinds**:

1. **Desirable (iṣṭam)**
2. **Undesirable (aniṣṭam)**
3. **Mixed (miśram)**

These fruits **accrue after death** to those who **have not renounced attachment** to their actions. For the **true renunciates**, however, **no such fruits arise—at any time**.

In the previous shloka, Bhagavān clarified that **true renunciation is not abandoning action**, but **abandoning attachment to results**. Action is unavoidable as long as one lives in a body. What binds a

person is **desire for results**, not action itself.

This **12th shloka** now explains:

- **What kinds of results actions produce**
- **Who receives these results**
- **Why bondage continues even after death**
- **Why a true renunciate remains free**

### **The Threefold Fruits of Action**

Bhagavān explains that the results of karma are **threefold**.

#### **1. Desirable/Pleasant Results (*Iṣṭa Phala*)**

These include: pleasure, success, fame, wealth, comfort, praise. Though pleasant, these results still **bind the soul**. They create attachment, pride, and craving for repetition. What appears **“good”** outwardly becomes a chain inwardly.

#### **2. Undesirable/Unpleasant Results (*Aniṣṭa Phala*)**

These include: pain, failure, loss, suffering, insult, disease. Though unpleasant, these too are **fruits of past actions**. They serve as lessons, purification and exhaustion of karma. Yet, attachment to them creates **fear, resentment, and resistance**, leading again to bondage.

#### **3. Mixed Results (*Miśra Phala*)**

Most human experiences fall into this category. Success with stress, wealth with anxiety, relationships with joy and sorrow, and duty with sacrifice. Worldly life is largely a blend of **happiness and suffering**.

### **Who Receives These Fruits?**

Bhagavān makes a crucial declaration: **These fruits accrue to those who have not renounced—even after death.**

Who is a *non-renunciate*?

- One who acts with ego: **“I am the doer”**
- One who desires specific outcomes
- One who is attached to success, recognition, and reward

Such a person accumulates karma that **does not end with death**. The body may fall, but **karma continues**. Unfulfilled desires and impressions (*saṃskāras*) carry forward and shape **future births**. This is the law of **saṃsāra**—the cycle of birth and death.

Bhagavān emphasizes that:

- Physical death does not end karma
- Desires continue
- Fruits may manifest in future births
- Heaven, hell, or rebirth are determined by karma

This is why **mere withdrawal from life does not give liberation**. Bhagavān clarifies again: A *saṃnyāsī* is **not**: one who wears saffron, one who abandons society and one who escapes responsibilities. A **true renunciate** performs actions without attachment, offers all actions to *Īśvara*, accepts results with equanimity, has surrendered the sense of doership. Such a person acts, but is not bound, works, but does

not accumulate karma, lives in the world, yet remains inwardly free For such a person, **no fruits arise—at any time.** This shloka reinforces one of the **central doctrines of the Gītā: Bondage is caused by attachment to results, not by action itself.** Two people may perform the **same action.** One becomes bound and the other becomes free. The difference lies only in **inner attitude.** The renunciate offers action as worship, has no “I” or “mine” in action, has no craving for pleasure and has no fear of pain. Therefore, no karmic residue remains, no future fruit is generated, no new birth is required This is **karma yoga leading to mokṣha.**

### **Practical Applications in Daily Life**

**In Professional Life:** An ego-driven worker works for promotion, bonus, recognition. Success inflates ego. Failure creates frustration and depression. Even after retirement, the mind relives results. But, A renunciate in spirit, works sincerely and ethically, accepts outcomes calmly, sees work as duty, not identity, carries no mental residue forward.

**In Student Life:** An attached student studies to outperform others. High marks create arrogance. Low marks create fear and self-doubt. But, A renunciate student studies as self-growth, gives best effort, accepts results as feedback and remains balanced and learning continues.

**In Parenting and Family Life:** Attached parenting: Expectations of obedience and fulfillment and emotional suffering when expectations fail Detached yet loving parenting: Duty performed with care, outcomes accepted as not fully controllable, love remains, suffering reduces.

**In Social Service and Charity:** Ego-driven service: Done for name, fame, recognition, absence of praise leads to bitterness Selfless service: Offered to society or Bhagavān, no expectation of recognition, inner joy remains constant.

**In Spiritual Life:** Many believe renunciation means leaving the world. This shloka corrects that misunderstanding. You may: Live in a house, run a business, raise a family and yet remain inwardly free. True renunciation is renouncing ownership of results, not action.

This shloka teaches that **liberation is possible in daily life itself**, when action is performed with surrender and without attachment.

### **18.13**

#### **pañcāitāni mahābāho, kāraṇāni nibodha me, sāṅkhye kṛtānte proktāni, siddhaye sarVākarmaṇām. 18.13**

In the branch of learning known as Sāṅkhya, which prescribes means for neutralizing all actions, the five factors have been mentioned as contributory to the accomplishment of all actions; know them all from Me, Arjuna.

For liberation, one does **not** need to go to forests or monasteries. Bhagavān in this shloka, begins a profound explanation of action and responsibility, which forms the foundation of true karma yoga.

Arjuna has been struggling with a fundamental confusion, should one act? or should one renounce action altogether? To resolve this confusion, Śrī Kṛṣṇa begins by revealing a crucial truth: **No action happens because of a single cause.**

Bhagavān says: “O Mahābāho (mighty-armed one), learn from ME the five causes which have been declared in the Sāṅkhya philosophy for the accomplishment of all actions.” Here, Bhagavān prepares the ground for a **deep teaching on karma and doership.**

Śrī Kṛṣṇa addresses Arjuna as **Mahābāho**. This does not refer only to physical strength. It also refers to **intellectual courage**. Bhagavān is encouraging Arjuna to face a difficult truth bravely: **Human beings are not the sole doers of action**. Though the ego finds this hard to accept, Bhagavān clearly states that **multiple factors are responsible for every action**.

### Five Causes of Action

In this shloka, Bhagavān does not yet list the five causes. HE only announces their existence. The detailed explanation will come in the next shloka. The key message here is: Every karma is the result of **five interdependent causes and** action is never the product of an isolated individual effort

### Reference to Sāṅkhya Philosophy

Bhagavān mentions **Sāṅkhya**, which is known for its **deep analytical approach to reality**. By referring to Sāṅkhya, Bhagavān emphasizes that: This teaching is **not emotional or speculative**. It is rooted in **rational spiritual analysis**. The phrase “*kṛtānte proktāni*” means: **declared in the final conclusion**. This indicates that these five causes are not preliminary ideas, but established truths, arrived at after deep inquiry into how actions are accomplished. **This expression is especially significant**. It means these five causes apply to all actions: physical, mental, moral, and spiritual actions. They apply equally to noble deeds and wrongful actions There is **no exception**.

This shloka teaches that **action is a complex process**. It is not simple, not linear and not the effort of a single self. When one understands that: “I am not the only doer”, “Many factors are involved” Then **false ownership dissolves**. This insight naturally leads to humility, without weakness, responsibility, without arrogance, action, without ego.

This shloka serves as a gateway to one of the **most liberating teachings of the Gītā: You are an instrument, not the absolute doer of karma**. When this truth is understood pride reduces, guilt reduces, fear reduces, and attachment to results weakens. And **karma yoga becomes natural**.

### Takeaway:

- Liberation does not require physical withdrawal from life
- Every action has **multiple causes**, not just the individual
- Egoistic doership is an illusion
- Recognizing oneself as an **instrument** leads to freedom

### 18.14

**adhiṣṭhānaṃ(n) tathā kartā, karaṇaṃ(ñ) ca pṛthagvidham,  
vividhāśca pṛthakceṣṭā, daivaṃ(ñ) caivātra pañcamam. 18.14**

The following are the factors operating towards the accomplishment of actions, viz., the body and the doer, the organs of different kinds and the different functions of manifold kinds; and the fifth is Daiva, latencies of past actions.

Bhagavān now presents a **systematic and profound analysis of human action**. This shloka forms part of a larger teaching where Śrī Kṛṣṇa explains **why no individual should arrogantly assume complete authorship of action and its results**. By identifying five essential factors behind every karma, Bhagavān dismantles the ego’s claim: “I alone am the doer.”

### The Five Factors Responsible for Every Action

Bhagavān declares that **every karma is accomplished through five causes**.

### 1. Adhiṣṭhānam - The Basis (Body and Field)

This refers to the **body and the mental framework** through which action is performed. Without a body, health, strength and mental capacity, no action is possible. This reminds us that **our abilities are limited by physical and mental conditions**, many of which are not fully under our control.

### 2. Kartā - The Doer

The *kartā* is the individual with a sense of agency—the “I” that decides and initiates action. However, Bhagavān subtly clarifies: This “I” is **not the Ātmā**. It is the ego-bound personality, shaped by **prakṛti**. Even the doer is **conditioned**, not independent.

### 3. Karaṇam - Instruments of Action

These include sense organs, organs of action, mind, intellect, speech and abilities. These instruments vary in efficiency, may function well or poorly and are **given**, not owned. We cannot claim absolute ownership over them.

### 4. Ceṣṭā - Effort

This refers to the **various attempts and activities** made during action. Effort is important. But **effort alone does not guarantee success**. Many people put in effort. Not everyone attains the same result. Multiple internal and external variables influence outcomes.

### 5. Daivam - Destiny / Divine Factor

This is the most humbling factor. It refers to past karma, time, circumstances, unseen forces and divine will. Even when all other factors are present, without daivam, the action may not succeed. Human control is **never absolute**.

Together, these five factors teach a vital truth: **No action is produced by a single cause**. Therefore, pride, blame, excessive guilt, and obsessive attachment to results—all arise from **ignorance**. Understanding this leads to humility without weakness, responsibility without ego, and action with surrender.

## Foundation of Karma Yoga

This shloka prepares the ground for **ideal karma yoga**: act diligently, renounce egoistic ownership and offer actions to **Bhagavān**. A wise person recognizes: “I am one participant in a vast cosmic process.” Such understanding brings **inner peace** and leads toward **liberation**.

## Practical Examples from Daily Life

### Student and Examination

- **Adhiṣṭhānam**: Student’s body, health, memory, stamina
- **Kartā**: The student attempting the exam
- **Karaṇam**: Brain, pen, question paper
- **Ceṣṭā**: Study, revision, time management
- **Daivam**: Unexpected questions, illness, evaluator’s mindset

Despite sincere preparation, results may vary. Hence, focus on effort and let go of anxiety about outcomes.

## Farmer and Agriculture

- **Adhiṣṭhānam**: Farmer's body and land
- **Kartā**: Farmer making decisions
- **Karaṇam**: Tools, seeds, irrigation
- **Ceṣṭā**: Sowing, watering, protecting crops
- **Daivam**: Rainfall, climate, floods, pests

The farmer does everything possible, yet the harvest depends on forces beyond control. This teaches **humility and surrender**.

## Parenting

Parents may provide education, give love, discipline, guidance. Yet, child's nature, past tendencies, and life circumstances are not fully in their control. Parents should act sincerely, but avoid excessive control or blame.

## Takeaway

- **I am responsible, but not the sole controller**
- Perform action with full effort
- Accept results with equanimity
- Let go of ego, guilt, and anxiety

This understanding brings **freedom while acting**.

## 18.15

**śarīravāñmanobhiryat, karma prārabhate naraḥ,  
nyāyyaṃ(m) vā viparītaṃ(m) vā, pañcaite tasya hetavaḥ. 18.15**

These five are the contributory causes of whatever actions, prescribed or prohibited, man performs with the mind, speech and body.

In this shloka, Lord Krishna continues His analytical explanation of karma.

He explains that **every action**, whether performed through **body, speech, or mind**, whether **right or wrong, prescribed or prohibited**, arises from **five interconnected causes**.

Human beings act through three main instruments:

- **Body (Śarīra karma)**: Physical actions like walking, working, helping, or harming.
- **Speech (Vāk karma)**: Words spoken—advice given, encouragement offered, truths spoken, or lies told.
- **Mind (Mano karma)**: Intentions, desires, plans, emotions, judgments, and decisions.

Every human action occurs through one or more of these instruments. Importantly, the Bhagavad Gita applies the **same law of causation** to both good and bad actions. This reflects the Gita's **neutral, scientific, and realistic approach** to karma.

The key teaching here is **humility in action**. Human beings often think, *"I alone am the doer."* This egoistic belief ignores the complex web of causes behind every action. By reminding us of the five causes, Sri Krishna dissolves this false sense of absolute doership.

This shloka prepares the ground for the next one, where Krishna declares that **one who thinks himself to be the sole doer is deluded**.

Practically, this teaching brings **emotional balance**:

- When success comes, we do not become arrogant.
- When failure occurs, we do not collapse under guilt or self-blame.

Instead, we reflect: *“I performed my duty sincerely, but many factors were involved.”* This attitude is central to **Karma Yoga**—doing one’s duty without attachment to results.

Spiritually, this shloka points toward the presence of a **higher order** operating through human effort—natural laws, circumstances, and divine will. While humans act through body, speech, and mind, the **ultimate orchestration belongs to the Divine**.

### Illustrative Example

Consider a doctor performing surgery.

- **Body**: the doctor’s trained hands perform the operation.
- **Speech**: instructions to the medical team and words of reassurance to the patient.
- **Mind**: knowledge, focus, decision-making, and judgment.
- **Other causes**: medical instruments, nurses, hospital facilities, and the patient’s condition.

If the surgery succeeds, it would be wrong to say, *“I alone saved the patient.”* If it fails, excessive self-blame is also incorrect. The action is the result of **five causes working together**, not individual ego.

### Takeaway

- No action is done by ego alone
- Both good and bad actions arise from multiple causes
- Right understanding brings humility in success and peace in failure
- This understanding leads to **Karma Yoga**—action without attachment

In essence, Bhagavan Krishna invites Arjuna—and all seekers—to **act responsibly without ego**, recognizing that every action arises from a harmonious interaction of many factors.

## 18.16

**tatraivaṃ(m) sati kartāram, ātmānaṃ(ñ) kevalaṃ(n) tu yaḥ,  
paśyatyakṛtabuddhitvān, na sa paśyati durmatiḥ. 18.16**

Notwithstanding this, however, he who, having an impure mind, regards the absolute, taintless Self alone as the doer, that man of perverse understanding does not view aright.

In this next shloka, Bhagavan Krishna directly presents the **meaning and warning**.

After explaining that **every action has five causes**—the body, the doer, the instruments, various efforts, and the divine factor—Sri Krishna now cautions against a **serious spiritual error**: the belief *“I alone am the doer.”*

Krishna says that the person who, due to an **unrefined or immature intellect (durmati)**, sees the individual self or ego as the sole doer of action, **does not truly see reality**. Such a person ignores the

vast network of causes involved in every action. These causes include **prakṛti (nature)**, past impressions and **saṁskāras**, circumstances, tools and resources, the cooperation of others, and the working of the **divine order**. The word “*alone*” is crucial here. Krishna does not deny that the self participates in action. What He condemns is the belief that the self acts **independently and exclusively**. This ego-centered view leads to **pride when actions succeed** and **guilt, depression, or frustration when they fail**. Therefore, Krishna says such a person “*does not see*”—even if they appear knowledgeable. Their problem is not moral evil but **distorted perception**.

The term *durmati* indicates a wrong or perverted understanding that arises when the ego claims ownership of action while ignoring the **cosmic intelligence** operating through all beings. True wisdom lies in recognizing that the self is primarily a **witness (sākṣī)**. Actions occur **through us**, but not **by us alone**. When one understands this, the root of bondage begins to dissolve. As long as a person thinks, “*I am the doer*,” they remain bound by karma. When they realize, “*Actions happen through me, but many forces are at work*,” the burden of action falls away, giving rise to **inner freedom and equanimity**.

### Practical Illustration

Consider a successful leader who believes all achievements are solely due to personal brilliance. Such a person becomes arrogant and restless. In contrast, a leader who acknowledges the role of teachers, team members, timing, circumstances, and grace remains **humble and balanced**. Humility, Krishna teaches, is **not weakness**—it is **clarity of vision**.

Similarly, a businessman may say, “*My intelligence and hard work alone created this success*.” In reality, success depends on employees, market conditions, family support, government policies, health, and favorable timing. Ignoring these factors reflects **immature understanding**. When conditions change and profits fall, ego leads to frustration and despair.

Recognizing multiple causes keeps one **steady in failure and humble in success**.

### Takeaway

- Wrong view: “*I alone am the doer*.”
- Right view: “*I do my duty; many forces operate through me*.”

This shift corrects egoistic ownership, frees the mind from stress, and transforms action into **Karma Yoga**—acting fully, responsibly, and wisely, while remaining inwardly free.

Bhagavan Krishna guides us from **ego-based action** to **wisdom-based action**, preparing the seeker for true liberation.

### 18.17

**yasya nāhaṅkṛto bhāvo, buddhiryasya na lipyate,  
hatvāpi sa imāṁllokān, na hanti na nibadhyate. 18.17**

He whose mind is free from the sense of doership, and whose reason is not affected by worldly objects and activities, does not really kill, even having killed all these people, nor does any sin accrue to him.

At first glance, this shloka sounds shocking. Lord Krishna says: “**One who is free from ego and whose intellect is not tainted— even if he kills these people, he neither truly kills nor becomes bound by his action.**” Naturally, the question arises: How can someone kill and yet not be a killer? The answer lies not in the *external action*, but in the **inner attitude**.

## Two Key Qualifications Krishna Emphasizes

### 1. Absence of Ego (Ahaṅkāra-abhāva)

The phrase “*yasya nāhaṅkṛto bhāvaḥ*” means: *One who does not have the feeling “I am the doer.”* Such a person understands that actions happen through the body, the mind, the senses, prakṛti (nature), past karma, and the divine order. He sees himself as an **instrument**, not the independent doer. There is **no egoistic ownership** of action.

### 2. Pure, Untainted Intellect (Na lipyate buddhiḥ)

The intellect is not clouded by hatred, desire, revenge, personal gain, or emotional disturbance. It remains **clear, objective, and aligned with dharma**.

### Application to Arjuna’s Dilemma

Arjuna fears that fighting in the war will make him sinful. Krishna clarifies action done as duty, without ego, without selfish intention, without hatred, does **not bind the soul**, even if it involves killing at the physical level. Thus, such a person does not kill at the level of the Self, nor does he incur karmic bondage.

### Why Intention Matters - A Simple Example

Consider a court case. A man causes another person’s death in a road accident. The judge asks, “Did you cause his death?” He replies, “Yes, but I had no intention. My vehicle was in good condition, I was driving responsibly, and the person suddenly came in front of my car.” If proven, even a human court does not punish him, because: there was no intention to kill, no malice, no negligence. **Intention determines guilt**, not mere occurrence of action. The same principle applies to **karmic law**.

### Modern-Day Dharma Examples

- A **judge** giving a death sentence as part of duty
- A **soldier** fighting to protect justice
- A **doctor** performing a painful surgery where the patient does not survive

In all these cases:

- the action is difficult,
- but there is **no selfish motive**,
- the action is **duty-bound**.

Such actions **do not bind**, because they are free from ego and attachment.

This shloka **does NOT justify violence**. Krishna is **not giving a license to harm others**. The teaching applies only to: righteous action, performed as duty, without ego, without personal gain. Violence driven by anger, revenge, greed, or pride always binds.

### Takeaway

- **Ego creates bondage — not action**
- Right action + wrong attitude → **bondage**
- Right action + pure awareness → **liberation**

A wise person:

- acts fully in the world,
- yet remains inwardly free.

This is the essence of **Karma Yoga—action as worship**, action without ego, action without bondage.

**18.18**

**jñānaṃ(ñ) jñeyaṃ(m) pariñātā, trividhā karma-codanā,  
karaṇaṃ(ṅ) karma karteti, trividhaḥ(kh) karma-saṅgrahaḥ. 18.18**

The Knower, knowledge and the object of knowledge-these three motivate action. Even so, the doer, the organs and activity-these are the three constituents of action.

Bhagavān presents a profound philosophical anatomy of human action. He explains that every karma is not a simple, isolated event. Instead, it arises from two interconnected triads: one internal and one external. By understanding this structure, we can perform actions wisely and avoid the bonds of attachment.

### **The Internal Triad: The Impulse to Action**

The first triad is known as **karma-codanā**, or the threefold **impulse to action**. Before any physical movement occurs, action begins within the consciousness. These three components are:

- **Knowledge (jñānam):** This is the understanding or perception behind an action. It encompasses one's worldview, values and power of discrimination. This knowledge can be pure or distorted, complete or partial.
- **The Object of Knowledge (jñeyam):** This is the goal toward which the knowledge is directed. It represents what one seeks to achieve, such as wealth, service, truth, power, or liberation.
- **The Knower (pariñātā):** This is the conscious individual or the experiencer. He is the knowing subject who possesses the knowledge and directs it toward the object.

No action can occur without these three. A person must have the capacity to know, an object to pursue, and must exist as a conscious subject.

### **The External Triad: The Basis of Action**

Once the impulse is formed, it manifests through the second triad known as **karma-saṅgrahaḥ**, the threefold basis of action. This explains how the impulse transforms into reality:

- **The Instrument (karaṇam):** these are the tools used to perform the work. They include the physical body, the senses, the mind, and any external tools required.
- **The Action (karma):** This refers to the actual movement, effort, or work performed. It can be physical, verbal, or mental in nature.
- **The Doer (kartā):** This is the agent who performs the action. The doer is shaped by his intentions, his ego-sense, and the influence of the three **guṇas**.

### **Spiritual Insights and Self-Observation**

By presenting these two triads, Bhagavān teaches that action is a complex interaction between

consciousness, intention, means, and agency. This framework serves a specific spiritual purpose: the deconstruction of the ego.

When we realize that action depends on many factors - knowledge, objects, and instruments, the rigid notion of "I am the sole doer" begins to dissolve. This understanding supports the practice of **Karma Yoga**, allowing one to act responsibly without the burden of attachment.

This shloka encourages the practice of **svādhyāya** (self-study). It prompts the aspirant to ask:

- What kind of knowledge is driving my actions?
- What objects am I pursuing?
- Am I acting as an ego-driven doer or as an instrument of a higher purpose?

Ultimately, this analysis does not just categorize movement. It liberates the mind. It breaks the blind identification with action, leading us toward wisdom, inner peace, and freedom. This shloka prepares the ground for Bhagavān to later classify knowledge, action, and the doer according to the three guṇas.

## 18.19

### **jñānam(ñ) karma ca kartāca, tridhaiva guṇabhedataḥ, procyate guṇasaṅkhyāne, yathāvacchrṇu tānyapi. 18.19**

In the branch of knowledge dealing with the Guṇas or modes of Prakṛti, knowledge and action as well as the doer have been declared to be of three kinds according to the Guṇa which predominates in each; hear them too duly from Me.

#### **The Framework of the Three Guṇas**

Bhagavān transitions from the general anatomy of action to a detailed analytical classification. He declares that knowledge (**jñānam**), action (**karma**), and the doer (**kartā**) are each of three distinct kinds, determined by the dominance of the three guṇas: **Sattva** (purity and harmony), **Rajas** (activity and passion), and **Tamas** (inertia and ignorance).

With the instructional word "*śrṇu*" (hear from Me), Bhagavān invites Arjuna to listen properly and in detail. He is laying down an essential philosophical framework for understanding human life and conduct, rooted in the science of the guṇas (guṇa-saṅkhyāna). This teaching suggests that nothing exists in isolation. Everything, from our moral judgments to our everyday chores is conditioned by these three inner qualities.

#### **Redefining Knowledge, Action, and the Doer**

In this verse, Bhagavān prepares us to look deeper than the surface of human behavior.

- **Knowledge (jñānam):** This is not merely an accumulation of information. There is a vast difference between information and true knowledge. Bhagavān implies that knowledge is how one perceives reality. Does one see unity or division? Truth or delusion? While subsequent verses will detail these, the foundation is set here, only knowledge purified by Sattva leads to true wisdom and liberation.
- **Action (karma):** All actions are not equal. Even if two people perform the same external act, the spiritual consequences differ based on the intention, attitude, and awareness behind it. An act is judged not just by its result, but by the guṇa that motivates it - whether it stems from selflessness, ambition, or ignorance.

- **The Doer (kartā):** This is perhaps the most subtle teaching. The inner sense of agency, the "I" who performs the task is also shaped by the guṇas. A person may act humbly, arrogantly, calmly, or compulsively based on their inner constitution. This insight prepares us for deeper lessons on detachment and the surrender of the ego.

## The Gateway to Transformation

The philosophical importance of this shloka lies in its connection to the systematic classification of human behavior. By using the lens of the guṇas, Bhagavān invites us to practice introspection. Instead of blaming external circumstances for our state of mind, He asks us to examine our inner constitution.

Spiritual growth begins when we consciously **cultivate Sattva, reduce Rajas, and overcome Tamas**. This shloka acts as a gateway, guiding us to see life through a new perspective. It teaches that transformation does not necessarily require abandoning action altogether. Instead, it requires the refinement of our knowledge, our karma, and our very sense of doership. This refining process is what ultimately leads the soul toward liberation.

## 18.20

**sarvabhūteṣu yenaikaṃ(m), bhāvamavyayamīkṣate,  
avibhaktaṃ(m) vibhakteṣu, tajjñānaṃ(m) viddhi sāttvikam. 18.20**

That by which man perceives one imperishable divine existence as undivided and equally present in all individual beings, know that knowledge to be Sāttvika.

## The Vision of Unity

In this shloka, Bhagavān defines **Sāttvic** knowledge, which is the highest and purest form of understanding. He explains that knowledge is **Sāttvic** when it enables a person to see a single, imperishable reality within all beings - the undivided within the divided (*avibhaktaṃ vibhakteṣu*).

**Sāttvic** knowledge is not merely the accumulation of information or intellectual learning. It is a transformative vision of unity. While the world appears fragmented into humans, animals, plants, gods, and demons, the enlightened person perceives the same unchanging spiritual essence within every form. Though names, functions, castes, and species differ, the underlying consciousness remains one.

## The Undivided within the Divided

The heart of this teaching lies in the phrase **avibhaktaṃ vibhakteṣu**. This vision does not deny diversity at a worldly level. Bhagavān does not say that differences do not exist. Instead, He teaches that all diversity rests upon a foundation of unity.

To understand this, consider these examples:

- **The Electricity:** One power source flows through a home, yet it makes a fan cool, a heater warm, and a television entertain. The functions of the appliances differ, but the electricity is one.
- **The Gold:** Ornaments come in many shapes - rings, necklaces, and bangles, but the substance of gold remains identical in all of them.
- **The Mother:** A mother may have many children with different temperaments - one rebellious, one

talented, and one ordinary. Yet, her love flows equally because she sees the same life in each of them.

When we perceive this "one in many," knowledge becomes wisdom. This vision dissolves narrow distinctions like "mine versus yours" or "superior versus inferior." If harming another is understood as harming the same divine essence, then compassion, humility, and non-violence become natural traits.

### **Real-Life Application and Wisdom**

Bhagavān shows that **Sāttvic** knowledge expresses itself through equality and balance. A beautiful example is that of a doctor in a crowded hospital. Whether he treats a wealthy businessman, a criminal, or a beggar, he sees only the same human life force and suffering. He does not alter his care based on social status because he is established in the principle of *sarva-bhūteṣu ekam* (the one in all beings).

Similarly, the story of *Sant Tukaram* illustrates this truth. When Tukaram bowed to a person of a supposedly "low caste," he was questioned by others. He simply replied that he was not bowing to a body or a caste, but to the Lord dwelling in that heart. Social divisions vanish when spiritual unity is realized.

### **The Path to Freedom**

Cultivating **Sattva** through self-inquiry (*svādhyāya*), devotion, and discipline reduces the *ahankar* (ego) and the sense of being separate. When the ego dissolves, *abhimān* (pride) vanishes, leading to **Samatva** (equanimity). One remains balanced in success or failure, praise or blame, because the inner Self remains untouched by external changes.

Ultimately, this shloka teaches that true knowledge is not about seeing differences sharply, but about seeing unity clearly. This realization leads to **Moksha** where wisdom becomes freedom, and freedom becomes eternal peace.

## **18.21**

**pr̥thaktvena tu yajjñānaṃ(n), nānābhāvānpr̥thagvidhān,  
vetti sarveṣu bhūteṣu, tajjñānaṃ(m) viddhi rājasam. 18.21**

The knowledge by which man cognizes many existences of various kinds, as apart from one another, in all beings, know that knowledge to be Rājasika.

### **The Vision of Fragmentation**

Having described the highest knowledge, Bhagavān now explains *Rājasic* knowledge. He defines it as the understanding that perceives diversity and separateness in all beings. Instead of seeing the thread that connects existence, the Rājasic mind sees living beings as many distinct, unrelated, and fragmented entities.

While *Sāttvic* knowledge seeks unity in all, *Rājasic* knowledge is characterized by the perception of difference. A person influenced by this quality views the world through the lens of "mine versus yours," believing that each individual has an independent existence unrelated to the whole.

### **The Limitations of the Divided Mind**

It is important to note that Bhagavān does not call this knowledge "false," but rather "partial" and "limited." It fails to perceive the underlying oneness of existence. This knowledge focuses exclusively on:

- Names and Forms: The outward appearance.
- Roles and Classifications: Skills, talents, profession, or nationality.
- Status: Seeing others as superior or inferior.

Because it recognizes only the surface, *Rājasic* knowledge naturally leads to comparison, competition, and conflict rather than compassion. It is the hallmark of the ambitious professional - the administrator, the trader, or the leader. Such individuals may be highly intelligent and efficient, but because their understanding is colored by *ahaṅkāra* (ego) and *kāmanā* (desire), their actions are usually motivated by personal gain and recognition.

### **The Manager and the Bondage of Separation**

Consider the example of a senior manager in a large company. He is sharp and efficient, categorizing his team strictly into "high performers" and "non-performers." While this improves short-term productivity, the atmosphere becomes tense. Employees feel valued only as functional units, not as human beings. Collaboration declines because the vision is fragmented.

This manager possesses *Rājasic* knowledge. He knows the facts and distinctions, but he lacks depth. In social life, this same outlook causes people to identify so strongly with a religion, language, or ideology that they view others as fundamentally different or even as enemies.

### **Moving Beyond the Divisive Outlook**

Bhagavān teaches that this knowledge is necessary for worldly functioning and progress - organizations need to recognize different skills to operate. However, it becomes a bondage when one believes that this separateness is the ultimate truth. Believing only in division strengthens attachment and fuels restlessness, anxiety, and dissatisfaction.

Spiritual growth requires crossing over this *Rājasic* state and moving toward *Sattva*.

The shloka invites us to introspect:

Do we see others only as separate individuals?

Do we sense the deeper oneness behind appearances?

The subtle message is: See the differences, but do not forget the oneness. By refining our understanding, we ensure that while differences remain at the surface level, they no longer divide the heart. This evolution takes us from *Rajas* to *Sattva*, and finally toward becoming *guṇātīta* - transcending the *gunas* altogether.

## **18.22**

**yattu kṛtsnavadekasmin, kārye saktamahaitukam,  
atattvārthavadaipaṃ(ñ) ca, tattāmasamudāhṛtam. 18.22**

Again, that knowledge which clings to one body as if it were the whole, and which is irrational, has no real grasp of truth and is trivial, has been declared as *Tāmasika*.

### **The Mode of Ignorance**

Bhagavān concludes His analysis of knowledge by describing *Tamasic* knowledge, the lowest category of understanding. He explains that knowledge is in the mode of ignorance when it clings to a single action, form, or idea as if it were the whole truth. Such knowledge is irrational, not grounded in reality, and extremely narrow.

While ***Sāttvic*** knowledge sees the whole and ***Rājasic*** knowledge sees the parts, ***Tamasic*** knowledge

mistakes a tiny fragment for the entire universe.

## Characteristics of Tamasic Knowledge

The anatomy of this ignorant vision is broken down into three specific defects.

- **Narrow Attachment (*kṛtsna-vad ekasmin kārye saktam*):** The individual becomes obsessed with a single track of thought. This might manifest as mistaking the physical body for the eternal Self, or believing that a specific ritual or idol is the only spiritual truth, without recognizing the deeper, infinite reality.
- **Irrationality (*ahaitukam*):** This attachment lacks sound reason, logic, or examination. It is a state of blind faith, fear, or habit. The person follows ideas unreflectively, resisting any inquiry that might challenge their misconceptions.
- **Triviality (*atattvārtha-vad alpam*):** This understanding is not grounded in the *Tattva* (truth). It is shallow and limited (*alpam*). Because it fails to grasp deeper principles, it can never lead to matured awareness or liberation.

In essence, **Tamasic** knowledge is a state of dullness and confusion. It traps the seeker in a restricted outlook that often leads to suffering and conflict rather than clarity.

## Comparative Summary: The Three Types of Knowledge

By exploring shlokas 20 through 22, we gain a complete framework for **svādhyāya** (self-study). These three levels of understanding represent the evolution of the human mind from darkness toward the light of liberation.

**Sāttvic knowledge** is the pinnacle of understanding. It is complete, truthful, and deeply rooted in reality. This vision is essentially holistic, it allows the seeker to see the "bigger picture" by recognizing the interconnections between all actions and spiritual principles. Unlike knowledge driven by ego, **Sāttvic** insight is pursued for the sake of truth rather than personal prestige. A person with this vision might study the scriptures to understand the **Atman**, eventually seeing every being as a manifestation of the Divine. It is knowledge that sees unity in diversity.

In contrast, **Rājasic knowledge** is motivated by the restless energy of ambition and attachment. While it is often productive and can lead to material success, it remains partial and fragmentary. It focuses on results and achievements rather than the essence of truth. A **Rājasic** student, for example, might master a subject solely to gain status or a high-paying job rather than for the intrinsic value of the wisdom. This mindset sees parts of the truth but misses the whole, leading to a life driven by competition and the constant desire for recognition.

Finally, **Tamasic knowledge** represents the lowest level of awareness, characterized by ignorance and inertia. It is one-sided and rigid, clinging to a single idea or a physical form as if it were the absolute truth. There is no reflection or logic here; it is a vision that is small in scope and often entirely incorrect. Following rituals blindly or clinging to superstitions without understanding their purpose are classic examples. Because it is detached from reality, **Tamasic** knowledge traps the individual in confusion and harmful actions.

The ultimate teaching of these shlokas is that while **Rājasic** knowledge can build a career and **Tamasic** knowledge can provide a false sense of security, only **Sāttvic** knowledge leads to true freedom. Bhagavān encourages us to be aware of the pitfalls of ignorance and the agitation of desire, urging us to cultivate that clear, unified vision that brings lasting peace.

## The Path Forward

The key takeaway from this teaching is that knowledge is the foundation of our existence. **Sāttvic** knowledge leads to freedom and spiritual growth. **Rājasic** knowledge may bring temporary material success but fuels restlessness. **Tamasic** knowledge keeps one trapped in a cycle of ignorance.

Bhagavān encourages us to rise above the dullness of **Tamas** and the agitation of **Rajas**. By cultivating **Sāttvic** understanding - where we see the interconnectedness of all life, our wisdom becomes a bridge to freedom and eternal peace.

## 18.23

### **niyataṃ(m) saṅgarahitam, arāgadveṣataḥ(kh) kṛtam, aphalaprepsunā karma, yattatsāttvikamucyate. 18.23**

That action which is ordained by the scriptures and is not accompanied by the sense of doership, and has been done without any attachment or aversion by one who seeks no return, is called Sāttvika.

### The Path of Pure Action

Having classified the various types of knowledge, Bhagavān now focuses His attention on *Karma* (Action). He defines Sāttvic action as that which is performed according to duty, without attachment, without likes or dislikes, and without the expectation of rewards. This is action in its purest form, often referred to as the mode of goodness.

For an action to be considered Sāttvic, it must possess several key qualities:

- **Duty-Oriented (Niyatam):** The action must follow Dharma or one's prescribed duty. It is not random or self-willed, rather it is the performance of what is right and necessary in a given situation.
- **Freedom from Attachment (Saṅga-rahitam):** One acts for the sake of the duty itself, not for fame, pleasure, or personal gain. The doer is not emotionally entangled with the process.
- **Neutrality of Emotion (Arāga-dveṣhataḥ):** Sāttvic action is performed without passion (Rāga) or hatred (Dveṣha). It is characterized by impartiality, meaning the action is not dictated by whether one "likes" or "dislikes" the task or the people involved.
- **No Desire for Results (Aphala-prepsunā):** The doer does not cling to the outcome. By letting go of the fruits of labor, one avoids the traps of frustration in failure or pride in success.

### The Foundation of Karma Yoga

This shloka presents the ideal way to live. When actions are performed with these qualities, they promote inner harmony, mental clarity, and spiritual growth. This is the very essence of Karma Yoga - working with a detached ego and a balanced mind.

In practical life, we can see this through several everyday **examples**:

- **In the Workplace:** Imagine a colleague asks for help with a report. If you assist them because you see it as your responsibility to the team - without caring if the boss notices or if you get a "pat on the back" - your action is Sāttvic. You remain impartial, helping whether you like the colleague personally or not.
- **In the Home:** Cooking a meal for your family without complaining or waiting for a "thank you" is Sāttvic karma. The satisfaction comes from the act of nourishing others, not from the recognition received.

- **In Service:** Mentoring someone sincerely without seeking fame, or donating to charity quietly without showing off, are both expressions of this pure mode of action.

### **The Mindset Behind the Deed**

The vital takeaway here is that Sāttvic action is defined by the mindset, not just the task itself. Two people can perform the exact same job, but if one acts selflessly while the other acts for a reward, only the former is performing Sāttvic karma. By remaining duty-bound rather than outcome-bound, a seeker remains calm even when things do not go as planned. This discipline purifies the mind and builds a foundation of lasting inner peace.

The session closed with a note of heartfelt gratitude for the unveiling of the 18th Adhyāya, which has beautifully clarified the essence of duty, action, and selfless living. While we concluded by establishing the foundation of Sāttvic principles, the exploration will continue in the next session with an analysis of Rājasic and Tamasic karma.

### **Questions & Answers**

**Sravanthi ji:**

**Q. I am a professional, but sometimes I feel so much stress when work is given to me. If I think I cannot complete it on time, I feel very stressed. Even if I am doing my best, it might not finish on time because of circumstances or because the knowledge required to complete it hasn't been fully acquired by me yet. My manager expects the task to be done by a specific time. How can I overcome this stress?**

**Answer:** The answer to this lies in the philosophical framework of the Gītā, specifically the shloka that identifies the five factors necessary for any action to be accomplished.

***adhiṣṭhānaṁ tathā kartā karaṇaṁ ca pṛthag-vidham  
vividhāśh ca pṛithak cheṣṭā daivam chaivātra pañchamam***

Bhagavān teaches that for any karma to be performed, five factors must coincide: the body or seat of action, the doer, the various instruments, the different efforts, and finally, Daivam (the divine factor or external variables beyond our control).

When you feel stressed at work, remember that you can control the first four factors - your sincerity, your honesty, and your hard work. However, the fifth factor, Daivam, is totally out of your control. In professional life, what you need to do is show your sincerity of work. If you have done your job to the best of your capabilities and devotion, you should remain calm.

Communicating this to a manager is key. While many in the professional world focus only on output, a mature leader must look at things from a larger perspective. A short-sighted objective can hurt good people and cause them to leave. By understanding the inherent limitations of how any karma is performed, a manager shows maturity, which is better for both the individual and the company. Therefore, do your best, learn from any mistakes, but do not take the stress of the factors that are not under your control.

**Anita ji:**

**Q. We are taught to have *samatva* (equanimity) and unity with everyone. However, if I choose to avoid purchasing things from a particular community because I believe the resources are being used against our faith, and I have no personal gain but, is this action considered Tāmasic, Rājasic, or something else?**

**Answer:** This is a significant question regarding the application of Gītā philosophy in changing times. We must remember that Bhagavān gave this message to Arjuna on a battlefield. Today, when

Sanātana Dharma faces challenges, our actions must be viewed through the lens of protecting that Dharma.

As Bhagavān states:

***Yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānir bhavati bhārata***

***Abhyutthānam adharmasya tadātmānaṁ sṛjāmyaham***

When we take action to protect Dharma, we are essentially assisting Bhagavān in His mission. If an action - such as a boycott is done with the intention of rebuilding and safeguarding our Sanatana Dharma, and is performed without personal pride or selfish gain, it is considered Sāttvic karma. It is not Rājasic or Tāmasic because the motivation is not ego-driven but duty-bound. Protecting the foundation of one's faith without the feeling of personal "I-ness" is the essence of Dharma.



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**Jai Shri Krishna!**

Compiled by: Geeta Pariwar - Creative Writing Department

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