

Bhagavad Gita online Class 75 on 07 Mar 2020 by Swami Dayatmanada (Lecture delivered online from Bangalore, India)

Shanti Patha:

ॐ वसुदेवसुतं देवं कंसचाणूरमर्दनम्
देवकीपरमानन्दं कृष्णं वन्दे जगद्गुरुम् ॥ १ ॥

Vasudeva sutham devam, Kamsa Chanura mardanam,
Devaki paramanandam, Krishnam vande jagat gurum

I worship Lord Krishna, Who is the spiritual master of the universe, who is the son of Vasudeva, who is the Lord, who killed Kamsa and Chanura, and who is the bliss of Devaki.

सर्वोपनिषदो गावो, दोग्धा गोपाल नन्दनः।
पार्थो वत्सः सुधीर्भोक्ता, दुग्धं गीतामृतं महत् ॥

Sarvopanishado gaavo, dogdha gopala nandanaha|
parthovatsa: sudheerbhoktaa, dugdham gitamrutam mahat |

All the Upanishads are likened to the cows. The milker is Krishna, the son of Gopala. Partha is likened to the calf, while the drinkers are the wise ones. The nectar of Gita is the milk.

मूकं करोति वाचालं पङ्गुं लङ्घयते गिरिं ।
यत्कृपा तमहं वन्दे परमानन्द माधवम् ॥
Mookam karoti vachalam pangum langhayate girim |
Yat-krupa tamaham vande paramananda madhavam ॥

I remember with devotion the divine grace of Krishna who can make the dumb speak and the lame cross high mountains. I extol that grace which flows from the Supreme Bliss manifestation of Madhava.

A Brief Recap of the Fourth Chapter

We have been very fortunate in completing the fourth chapter of the Bhagawad Gita, called Gnana Yoga. Before entering the next chapter, called Karma Sannyasa Yoga, let us briefly recollect the important points of the fourth chapter. There are several beautiful points here. In fact, what we understand to the Hinduism today is mostly the points taken from this fourth chapter.

Though the truths are equally evident in several other chapters, in the fourth chapter, these points have been particularly emphasized, beautifully expressed, and have been declared as the very foundations of the eternal religion – not just Hinduism, but every other religion, too.

The first point that the Lord wants to convey to us is that the Truth is Eternal. The very definition of Truth is that which never changes, i.e., *trikala abaadhitam satyam* (that which cannot be negated in three periods). That which changes is untruth, or unreal, and that which never changes, the Truth.

The second point is that God incarnates, whenever necessary, to remind us of our true nature, the goal of human life, and all the ways to reach this goal. Swami Vivekananda says that an incarnation of God (*avatara*) is the highest reading of God by the limited human mind. Whatever concepts, imaginations and ideas that we have about God is derived from our concept of an incarnation. Only an incarnation, infinitely magnified, is what we call, vaguely, as God.

The Concept of an Avatara, or Godhead

In this chapter, Lord Krishna (here Krishna refers to an avatara, which in turn means Godhead, not just the person or individual called Krishna), emphasizes the special *siddhanta* (doctrine) of past birth, rebirth, and reincarnation. In the very beginning of the fourth chapter, he says clearly: *I had many births, you too had many births, only I remember them all, while you don't remember any.* Then the Lord goes on to confirm that anyone, or everyone, endowed with faith (called *shraddha*) and absolute sincerity, reaches me alone. *All men, whatever path they may be traversing, ultimately reach Me alone.* Here, *Me* means the Truth, which can't be many.

Sri Krishna is emphasizing, एकं सद्विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति (Upanishads/Rigveda: the Truth is one, the wise/sages/realized souls perceive it differently or call it by different names [because of differences in climates, nations, languages, concepts, all meaning the same, of course]).

Sri Ramakrishna illustrates this point thus: Imagine a water tank, with four paths leading to it (e.g., four routes, or *ghats*, through which one can reach the tank to fetch water). Some people may call it *paani*, some water, while others call it *jal*, and yet others, *acqa*. These are all different names, all referring to the same truth (water).

This is the very foundation of Hinduism: *All religions are equally valid paths, or means, of reaching God.* Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) goes further in saying that not only the so-called paths/religions, but even if someone professes a lack of belief in any particular religion, but is a principled, sincere man, he, too, is going to reach the same goal.

A Simple Example to Illustrate:

Gautama Buddha never emphasized the idea of God, nor even talked about God, but neither did he deny the existence of God. Today, his followers (Buddhists) are numerous, and most people like Buddhism, because without being fanatical, it emphasizes rationality, meditation, and compassion.

The Lord says: In order to reach me, one has to convert every action in life into a divine sacrifice (in Sanskrit, *yajna*). Here *yajna* doesn't mean a particular ritual (like for example, *pooja*, which denotes an activity performed in sacred places like temples). But here, the word

yajna means worshipping the Divine Lord, through ordinary activities like breathing, sleeping, eating, even killing.

Arjuna was advised by Krishna: *Be endowed with shraddha, and do your duty. The point here is not the killing, rather the proper, spiritual attitude, with which one should discharge his duty, whatever it may be. In order to reach Me, you need to convert every action of your life into a divine sacrifice.*

Indeed, anything we do can be a divine worship, or technically a yajna. In the fourth chapter, the Lord gives us a sample of twelve sacrifices, beginning with *brahmarpanam*. The purpose is to teach us how to convert every action into a divine worship or a spiritual practice. Lord Krishna also explains what is action, what is inaction, and what is wrong, evil, or unrighteous action. He goes on to declare: *Even wise people are confused about the distinction between action, inaction, and wrong action.*

Swami Vivekananda simplified this concept for us, and defined what is called in Sanskrit as *dharma* (righteous action or conduct) and *adharma* (wrong action). Any action that takes us nearer to God is *dharma*, and any action that leads us away from God is called *adharma*.

By definition, every spiritual action, must be done with *shraddha* (absolute sincerity). Sincerity is the only testing stone for converting our actions into worship. This means that a person endowed with *shraddha* ultimately reaches God. Therefore, it is also said, *shraddha is another form of God.*

What is Shraddha (Sincere Faith)?

We possess *shraddha*, but we are not possessed by *shraddha* (therefore, we may change our views any time). But he who is possessed by *shraddha* (in the *Katopanishad*, it is mentioned that *shraddha* possessed Nachiketa, not the other way around), is utterly helpless, like a man who has a gun pointed at him by another (meaning he is forced to carry out whatever the wielder of the gun orders him to do). That is the power of *shraddha*.

Sri Ramakrishna was possessed of an enormous amount of *shraddha*. And *shraddha* comes to a person only by the grace of God. And the grace of God only descends on one only when one sincerely tries to convert all of one's actions to a divine worship. The practice of karma yoga aids us in the process, by purifying us, and bestowing upon us a thorough knowledge of one's real nature.

Karma yoga is converting every one of our actions to, or connecting with, God. Such an attempt purifies our heart. When the heart is purified, the grace of the Lord descends in it, in the form of *shraddha*. When absolute faith comes in this form, it will invariably, inevitably, and overwhelmingly possess us, and take us to God, or Knowledge.

God is defined as Absolute Truth, Absolute Knowledge and Absolute Bliss (*sat, chit, ananda*). The Upanishads (especially *Taitriyopanishad*) defines God thus:

satyam gnanam anantam brahma (Taitriyopanishad 2.1.1)

Truth, Pure Knowledge and Infinity, that is the definition of God. Whether we are devotees, treading the path of devotion (or any other path), ultimately it is the Knowledge – that alone can lead us to God. In the case of the devotee of the Lord, this Knowledge takes the form of, *I am a child of God, I belong to God, I don't belong to anyone else, I am a part of God, and therefore I am God.*

A *bhakta* (devotee) progresses towards this realization gradually, and upon attaining it (having progressed through three stages), is called a *brahmavit* (one who knows the nature of the Supreme Spirit). This is beautifully illustrated in the life of Shri Hanuman, as in this story.

Lord Rama once asked Hanuman: *What is your opinion about me?* In other words, Rama was asking about their relationship, or how Hanuman thought of him. Hanuman replied:

देहबुद्ध्या तु दासोऽस्मि जीवबुद्ध्या त्वदंशकः ।
आत्मबुद्ध्या त्वमेवाहमिति मे निश्चिता मतिः ॥

Oh Lord, while I identify myself with my body and mind, you are my master and I am Thy servant. When I consider myself an individual soul, I am Thy part. But when I look upon myself as the spirit, I am you and you are me. This is my firm conviction (i.e., derived from realization, not just intellect belief).

Our Three Kinds of Relationships With God:

In this world, we have a body and mind, and other possessions, but we are not the body or the mind or the other possessions. We are all *jivas or jivatmas* (individual souls) possessing a body and mind, so are responsible for taking good care of them, and use them properly. Then our relationship with God is defined thus: *You are the Whole, and I am the part.*

- The first relationship (I am the body) represents the *dvaita* Vedanta philosophy (द्वैत वेदान्त, or dualism).
- The second relationship is *vishishtadvaita* Vedanta philosophy (विशिष्टद्वैत वेदान्त, or qualified non-dualism, which was Sri Ramanuja's philosophy).
- The third relationship is when I know that I am Pure Consciousness, and God is also Pure Consciousness, there is no distinction whatsoever, because there can only be one Pure Consciousness. This is known as *advaita* (अद्वैत वेदान्त, non-dualism).

However, these three stages can be transcended, through either the paths of action, devotion, knowledge or meditation. But the end result will be according to our concept of who we are. In other words, our relationship with the Divine goes on changing, until we find that there is not relationship (because a relationship is possible only when there are two separate objects, but in the end, we find we are one and the same – so there is no I, there is no You).

What is important is that we must acquire that tremendous shraddha. Shankaracharya defines it succinctly and accurately in his magnum opus, *Vivekachudamani* (verse 25):

शास्त्रस्य गुरुवाक्यस्य सत्यबुद्ध्यवधारणम् ।
सा श्रद्धा कथिता सद्भिर्यया वस्तूपलभ्यते ॥ २५ ॥

*śāstrasya guruvākyaṣya satyabuddhyavadhāraṇam |
sā śraddhā kathitā sadbhīryayā vastūpalabhyate || 25 ||*

Acceptance by firm judgment as true of what the Scriptures and the Guru instruct, is called by sages Śraddhā or faith, by means of which the Reality is perceived.

What our guru, and scriptures, tell us is the highest truth. When a person possesses that kind of faith, he is sure to realize his true nature very soon.

What is Insincerity?

Insincerity (*ashraddha*) is the opposite of sincerity. When *shraddha* is absent, *ashraddha* results. It is a way of saying: *I don't believe it. Because I don't believe it wholeheartedly, I don't have a desire to develop a desire for it. Therefore, I won't even look at it.*

To counter this, we have to think: *I want to be happy, I believe in happiness, I believe in immortality, I believe in Absolute Knowledge, I believe that I am the Atman, not because I have realized (these truths), but because I have faith in the words of the scriptures and the guru.*

The entire purport of the fourth chapter of the Bhagawad Gita (aptly named as Gnana Yoga) is that the key to True Knowledge (i.e., who we are, what God is, what our relationship with God is) is possessing shraddha.

A person who doesn't possess shraddha is called a hypocrite. He is full of doubts. Such a person has no happiness in this world, much less in the other world. He can't have any happiness because he doesn't believe in any other world. In fact, it may be said that he doesn't believe in *anything*.

Since he believes in nothing, ultimately he will become nothing. In effect, after a long time (of being in this condition of believing in nothing), Nature slaps him, gives him a strong dose of misery, and forces him to accept that even if he doesn't believe in happiness, he must believe in unhappiness or misery!

The goal of all spiritual practices is to acquire absolute sincerity or shraddha. An insincere person gets confused, is beset with doubts, and ultimately courts ruin. On the other hand, shraddha destroys all doubts, and leads the spiritual aspirant – slowly but surely – to God realization/self-knowledge/samadhi.

The above are the most important points of the fourth chapter of the Bhagawad Gita.

Now, it is our pleasure and privilege to start on the fifth chapter of the Bhagawad Gita, very aptly called *Karma-Sannyasa Yoga*, or the yoga of converting every action into a sannyasin's life.

Who is a Sannyasi?

By definition, a *sannyasi* is one, who gives up every action – excepting the bare minimum – in his life. He takes bare minimum care of his body and the mind, as all his attention and energy is diverted or directed towards inner development through a three-pronged process:

- Shravana (श्रवण, listening)
- Manana (मनन, deep thinking)
- Nididhyasana (निदिध्यासन, profound and repeated meditation)

Summary of the Important Points of the Fifth Chapter of the Bhagawad Gita:

Let us now summarize the important points of the fifth chapter of the Bhagawad Gita. Our scriptures follow a strict rule in organizing the chapters contained in them, in that there should be a logical relationship between. This is known as *sangati* (संगति, relationship) in Sanskrit, denoting the connection or continuity or relationship of the present chapter or paragraph, with the preceding one, and similarly with the succeeding one. This relationship is expected to be discovered by deep-thinking people, i.e., those possessed of deeper understanding or shraddha. Fortunately, our *acharyas* (spiritual teachers) help us in this respect, by explaining to us what this relationship is.

The fifth chapter begins thus. Arjuna is now again beset with the same doubts as he had in the beginning of the third chapter. In the second chapter, the Lord extols two types of yogas – gnana yoga, and karma yoga, alternately. More confused than ever, Arjuna beseechs Lord Krishna to explain clearly which path (among the two) he should take.

Sri Krishna replies that there should be no confusion born of his teachings; rather, it is Arjuna's lack of understanding that is causing confusion. There was no contradiction in whatever he said, and no alternative explanation – because it was the Absolute Truth. It is a step-up process, in that one step leads to the next, higher step, which in turn leads to still higher steps, and so on.

Karma yoga will lead us to a higher form of Karma Yoga, according to Sri Ramakrishna's teachings. If we take the interpretation of Shankaracharya, karma yoga is like a by-lane, or a B-road, that leads us to a major road. He who doesn't go by the main road fails to reach the destination (of course, there were no motorways in Shankaracharya's time, so he had no opportunity to observe that all too often motorways and A-roads are clogged up, and it is the B-roads that lead us to our destinations more quickly!)

Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna weren't fanatical persons, and explained that every path, followed sincerely, equally leads to the same destination. There is an old saying: *All roads lead to Rome.*

All ashramas [i.e., Brahmacharya (student), Grihastha (householder), Vanaprastha (retired) and Sannyasa (renunciate)], and all varnas [Brahmins (philosophers), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishya (traders) and Shudras (workers)], every type of yoga, every religion – all of them are valid, and lead to God, provided three conditions are fulfilled:

- We must believe there is a higher goal to be reached, and that is our only goal

- We must be totally devoted to it throughout our lives, and similarly in successive lives, until the goal is attained
- We must surrender totally to God, as according to Sri Ramakrishna, the grace of God *alone* takes us to him (and not any yoga, religion or path). Then what is the role of paths, religions and spiritual practices in our life? It is to enable us – by making us fit recipients – to receive the grace of God

That power to receive the grace of God, and to retain it, is the end result of every yoga. But it is God's grace alone that leads us to His realization. Gnana can come only from gnana, not agnana (ignorance). There is simply no other way.

So, answering Arjuna's questions, the Lord says that though *sankhya* and *karma* yogas lead to the same goal – Me (the Supreme Godhead). However, Arjuna responds by saying that Krishna is sometimes praising yagnas (in the fourth chapter), and at the end of the same chapter, heaping high praise on gnana ["All actions are burnt up by the yoga of gnana", "Like fire destroys all firewood, so does gnana ultimately destroy all karmas"].

The Lord responds by telling Arjuna that when true knowledge dawns upon him, he would realize that he is not the body-mind, and then his relationship to that body-mind would be lost, and then he would know who he really is. When we realize that we are not the body-mind, then we realize what we truly are.

To describe it from the opposite perspective, *atman* is not the body, it is not the mind. That is the process described in the scriptures as *neti, neti* (not this, not this).

Perhaps there is an unconscious desire in Arjuna's mind, in that he doesn't want to bother with all this fighting. If he were to adopt the life of a *sannyasi*, [in a humorous sense, it may be said that many people in India seem to want to follow Arjuna's example. They don't want to work, don't want responsibilities, and want to remain carefree, with all their needs provided for by others without exertion. In their minds, *sannyasa* in India equates to a life free from worldly responsibilities, where all the necessities of life come automatically, without the burden of duties].

Who is a Real Sannyasi?

But here, the Lord is clarifying who is a *sannyasi*, in the real sense, and how difficult it is to be a *sannyasi*. In truth, it is not an easy lifestyle, and should be adopted only by a person who is truly fit to take up that kind of life. The life of a householder is far, far easier, compared to the life of a *sannyasi*.

So the Lord points of two paths: (a) the path of knowledge, and (b) the path of *karma* yoga, both lifestyles leading to the same goal, which is God-realization. But this shouldn't lead us to misunderstand that we are free to choose either of the two at will. We are free only to choose that style which really suits us, in the sense that we are fit for that lifestyle.

The life of a monk is not easy. So one should acquire the necessary fitness for living as a *sannyasi*, which is why, in the Hindu system of *ashramas*, the *sannyasa ashrama* comes last [the other three *ashramas* are really only preparation for adopting the *sannyasa ashrama*].

Whether a person is Indian or not, a Hindu or not, everyone is standing on the moving escalator of evolution, and everybody, ultimately (in this, or subsequent lives) has to go through a life of sannyasa to get freedom from the escalator. Of course, we are all always progressing towards God, through happiness or unhappiness.

It is not easy to take up the life of a monk. The Lord gives a beautiful explanation of who a real sannyasi is. By definition, a person who takes to sannyasa (संन्यास, the life of renunciation) is called a sannyasi. What is a life of renunciation? It is not an external state, but a state of the mind, a state of consciousness, where the person is not following formal rules and regulations.

Who is a householder? He who cannot do without the world, or who depends upon the world, who is a slave to the world, who is stunned if he does not find the world around him even momentarily (including his body-mind, family, society etc.).

A sannyasi, on the other hand, is one who can be in the world without needing the world, and is totally independent of the world. He does not depend upon anybody except God, or atman. He considers the whole world dependent upon him, but himself not dependent upon the world at all.

The Definition of True Karma Yoga

Both lifestyles (of the karma yogi and the sannyasi) lead exactly to the same goal – called moksha (मोक्ष, liberation), but the lifestyle of a monk is extremely difficult to lead. A sincere karma yogi progresses towards his goal quickly by the grace of the Lord. According to certain interpretations, the preparatory stage is called karma yoga, but according to Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, karma yoga is the beginning, middle and final goal, also leads to liberation. But we have to do certain types of preparatory practices. A karma yogi must cultivate the attitude that whatever actions he does are all actually done by God through the instrument of *prakruti* (प्रकृति, nature) and not by himself. He has nothing to do with any activities.

Here *prakruti* means the body-mind. The body and mind are the products or manifestations of tri-gunas, i.e., they are both made of sattva (सत्त्व), rajas (रजस्) and tamas (तमस्), and everything that we call our activities (our actions, reactions, thoughts, happiness, unhappiness, everything is the doing of prakruti, nature), and therefore has nothing to do with us, who are embodiments of pure consciousness.

So karma yoga is understanding that I don't do anything, I don't even think I am not doing anything. My role is only to be myself, as pure consciousness. That is what a true karma yogi must think. He must cultivate the attitude that whatever actions he does are all done by God, in the presence of God, by His instrument called prakruti, which is manifesting as body and mind. I am not the body or the mind, so have no right to claim my body or mind as my own.

A person who reminds himself every second that he is not the body-mind is called a karma yogi. Further, a karma yogi must think that any action done by the body and mind are done by nature and he has nothing to do with any of the activities. This is called non-attachment, which is the attitude that one is not doing anything.

A person who is doing some activities would get good or bad results. But if we are not performing any actions, we shouldn't expect, and wouldn't get, any result. If any result does come, it belongs to the body and mind. If good actions are done by the body, the body would be happy as a result. Similarly, good thoughts arising in the mind would lead to happiness of mind. Since the body-mind do not belong to me, and I have nothing to do with them, the result of their actions, too, don't belong to me.

The cause doesn't belong to me, nor does the effect – this is the attitude with which karma yoga needs to be performed. But since we are unable to think in this "harsh" manner, we are given an easy link – thinking that everything is done by God, and we are only instruments in His hands. The bhajan *sakali tomari iccha*, expounds this idea: *Everything is Your will, O Mother; You sometimes uplift and at other times demote a person; You give a person happiness and unhappiness at different times; but let Your will be done, I have nothing to do with it. But since I am still attached to the body-mind, let me surrender myself to You, and develop the attitude that everything is happening by Your will, and therefore must be good only.*

Whatever Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother do to us would only be good for us. If we are suffering at the moment, we may not understand it, but later on, when we look back and analyse, we feel that was perhaps the best thing that could have happened to us. This is the non-attached attitude of a karma yogi.

Such a spiritual aspirant should offer every one of his actions unto the Lord, and live an unattached life. In the fifth chapter (verse 10) of the Bhagawad Gita, the Lord gives a beautiful analogy of a lotus leaf floating on water:

**ब्रह्मण्याधाय कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा करोति यः ।
लिप्यते न स पापेन पद्मपत्रमिवाम्भसा ॥ 10॥**

*brahmaṇyādhāya karmāṇi saṅgaṁ tyaktvā karoti yaḥ
lipyate na sa pāpena padma-patram ivāmbhasā*

Those who dedicate their actions to God, abandoning all attachment, remain untouched by sin, just as a lotus leaf is untouched by water.

The lotus flower is above the water, but the leaf, though constantly on the water, does not get wet, because of a film (non-attachment) on its surface. No water can permeate it. A karma yogi must lead that kind of a life.

Sri Ramakrishna provides the same answer in response to a query by M: *How, Sir, should one live in the world?* He says: *Live like a maidservant in a rich man's house. She does all the household work like a member of the family, and treats the children as if they were her own. But in her heart of hearts, she knows perfectly well that her real home and children are far away; that if she is dismissed from service by the owner of the house, she would have leave behind everything, even the most worthless item in the house.*

In the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, we find this point reiterated multiple times, in slightly different ways.

A karma yogi renounces all attachment to whatever the body-mind does, and lives happily, with the thought that in this human body, consisting of nine-doors (apertures), he neither does nor causes anything to happen.

**सर्वकर्माणि मनसा संन्यस्यास्ते सुखं वशी ।
नवद्वारे पुरे देही नैव कुर्वन्न कारयन् ॥ 13॥**

*sarva-karmāṇi manasā sannasyāste sukham vaśhī
nava-dvāre pure dehī naiva kurvan na kārayan*

The embodied beings who are self-controlled and detached reside happily in the city of nine gates, free from thinking they are the doers or the cause of anything.

That, of course, is our goal. The Lord says: Though He, the Lord, is the creator of the whole universe, He is not responsible for any of the doings of the creatures. In verse 15, He says:

**नादत्ते कस्यचित्पापं न चैव सुकृतं विभुः ।
अज्ञानेनावृतं ज्ञानं तेन मुह्यन्ति जन्तवः ॥ 15॥**

*nādatte kasyachit pāpam na chaiva sukṛitam vibhuḥ
ajñānenāvṛitam jñānam tena muhyanti jantavaḥ*

The omnipresent God does not involve Himself in the sinful or virtuous deeds of anyone. The living entities are deluded because their inner knowledge is covered by ignorance.

When a woman begets a child, how much attachment, and affection, does she develop for her child! Perhaps far more attached to the child than its father, she thinks: *This child is my own flesh and blood, and has sprung from my own body.* We might imagine that God, being the father and mother of this whole universe, would be far more attached to it (than the mother to her child).

But in truth, that is not the case. The Lord makes it clear that he has nothing to with anyone's activities. He is only a witness, and does not get either the merits or demerits of the actions of any person. Every person is responsible for his own actions.

Sometimes, when we are miserable, we conveniently blame God (though we rarely thank God when we are happy!). The Lord, though, makes it clear in the above verse that He accepts neither our praise nor our blame. He has given us the equipment, the opportunity, and the energy, to perform actions. What we do with them decides our fate.

Therefore, in Hinduism, God is called *vidhaata* (विधाता, he who gives us the fruits of our actions). His role is that of a supervisor, who rewards or punishes us according to our actions. But if we sincerely pray, He will give us right understanding (धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात्, may He enlighten our minds). That is the grace of God. It is also the foundation of Hinduism's third law, or the law of karma, which assumes that every living being has undergone, or will undergo, innumerable births – i.e., in the past, present and future.

Since God has given us our intelligence, our opportunity (the world is the greatest opportunity for us to mould our own life), we ourselves are responsible for our own happiness or unhappiness. If we are happy, we should attempt to increase it by leading a *dharmic*, or spiritual life, and if we are unhappy, we should correct ourselves. That is how we should purify ourselves, and ultimately reach Him, the source of all happiness, and become one with Happiness. So, though the Lord receives neither the meritorious actions nor the sins of anyone, people suffer because of their own ignorance.

The question arises, why do we do good and bad things at different times in our life? If we really had the complete, right knowledge, we would not intentionally do anything bad. So if we are indeed doing something bad, it is due to our misunderstanding that the bad is actually good. So it is our understanding (correct or incorrect) that leads us to perform good or bad actions. The purpose of any action is not to become happy or unhappy, but to progress slowly towards God, leaving behind the source of all actions (i.e., the body and mind).

In effect, these are like ladders, with the help of which we get the pinnacle. A good analogy would be a pole-vaulter, who comes sprinting towards the box with a long, flexible pole, plants the far edge of the pole at one end of the box, and launches into the air towards the bar. At the right moment, he lets go of the pole, and swings his body across and over the bar without disturbing it, and finally lands safely on the mattress.

The bar here may be compared to *maya*, or *samsara*, upon successfully crossing which we become victors. Those are devoted *exclusively* only to the divine Lord, when they realize Him, all their impurities are destroyed by the knowledge of the Self. They attain liberation, and are not reborn ever again.

What is Our Duty?

So what should be our duty? Since the Lord is not responsible for our actions (only we are), so we have to learn how to give up evil actions, and then the clinging even to good actions (because good actions produce happiness, which makes us cling to the world).

So it may be said that an unhappy person has a better chance of progressing towards God than a happy person. A rich person can fulfil his desires in this world, whereas a poor person, unable to do so in this world, may feel he has a better chance in the other world!

After experiencing a great deal of good and evil, we finally realize that the only goal is God-realization, where we can get permanent and infinite happiness. Sooner or later, we come to that true realization, and transform into spiritual aspirants.

Who is a Jivan-Mukta?

How do we know that attaining such a goal is possible? Because we see examples of people who have reached that state, called jivan-muktas (people who have attained self-realization or *moksha* and thus become liberated, while yet living). This attainment of self-realization is also known as *samadhi*.

When a person attains this self-knowledge, he knows he is *brahman* (aham brahmasmi, अहम् ब्रह्मास्मि, *I am the Supreme Spirit*). At this point, two things can result. Some people don't wish to come out of that state, and Sri Ramakrishna says that after twenty-one days, their bodies withers and drops-away like a dry leaf. But in other cases, God wants to use their bodies for guiding people who are ignorant (but praying sincerely for getting out of this unhappy situation). The divine Lord uses these jivan-muktas as instruments for conveying the message of the scriptures to them.

Even after realization, the bodies and minds of such jivan-muktas continue to function, until their *prarabdha karma* is exhausted, like a potter's wheel continuing to spin when the potter is interrupted in his work and moves away without stopping the wheel (the wheel continues to spin for a considerable time, until its momentum is exhausted, leading onlookers to imagine that it is spinning by itself or is being spun by a ghost!). In effect, God works through such people for everyone's enlightenment.

But is it possible for us to approach such people? Yes, it is. However, how do we identify such a person (i.e., one who has attained enlightenment)? In other words, what are the *lakshanas* (लक्षण, identifying characteristics) of such a person? The Lord says that such a person looks upon a learned Brahmana, and elephant, a dog, and an eater of a dog, in exactly the same way:

**विद्याविनयसम्पन्ने ब्राह्मणे गवि हस्तिनि ।
शुनि चैव श्वपाके च पण्डिताः समदर्शिनः ॥ 18॥**

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

The truly learned, with the eyes of divine knowledge, see with equal vision a Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog, and a dog-eater.

A person whose mind is serene under all circumstances (pleasant or unpleasant) is as good as a God-realized soul. Sri Ramakrishna illustrates this through the following parable.

How Does A God-Realized Soul Behave?

There was once a great devotee of Rama, a soldier by profession. One day, he was found, stabbed and dying, on the bank of a river, by a few people. Somebody then asked him who had stabbed him, so that the culprit could be punished suitably. The soldier laughed and replied that Rama had guided him until now, and the same Rama had now stabbed him. Obviously, the soldier wasn't looking upon only good people as Rama, and considering the

bad people as Devil incarnate. For him, happiness or unhappiness, good or bad conditions, pleasant or unpleasant experiences – everything was Rama.

Revered Swami Brahmanandaji, in his last days, was suffering from severe diabetes, and was in unbearable pain. One day, somebody asked him if the suffering was too much, beyond his power of endurance. The Swami replied that in his state, he had to accept pleasure and pain in exactly the same way (he was indirectly indicating that he was a man of realization; there was pain and pleasure only when he identified himself with his body, as was sometimes necessary. But knowing fully well that he was not the body-mind, he had to accept both pleasure and pain in the same way).

We are all saints when we are serene and happy! When we are unhappy, we are upset! A man of realization would be the same happy person, not in an inert sense, but bubbling with joy, as is illustrated in the following incident from Sri Ramakrishna's life.

During Sri Ramakrishna's last days, Hari Maharaj (later, Swami Turiyananda) came to visit him one day. Sri Ramakrishna complained to him that he was in a state of extreme suffering. But Hari Maharaj refused to accept that, and said he could see him (Sri Ramakrishna) swimming in a state of bliss (*sachidananda sagare*, in an ocean of bliss). Sri Ramakrishna laughed out in response and said: *This rascal has found me out!*

Though bliss is their real state, when they identify with their bodies for our sake, the jivan-muktas have to go through the bodily suffering. However, they don't react as we do, because they know that this is the condition of the body-mind. Misery in life does give us a wonderful opportunity to develop the quality that we call as serenity of the mind.

The Lord also indicates certain qualities, or characteristics that every spiritual aspirant must acquire in order to combat the unhappy experiences of life, and swiftly progress towards the Lord. If we are simply stuck – with happiness or unhappiness – we are not going to progress. Therefore, we must treat both alike, accepting them as temporary conditions in life. As one of the Swamis in the Ramakrishna Order used to put it jocularly, one should treat great pleasure and extreme misery the same, knowing that all conditions – including death – only applied to the body-mind. Since we are not the body-mind, we should remain unaffected.

This may be understood better through a small hint. We are all here, with our individual body-minds. But none of us identifies with *another's* body-mind, i.e., our happiness or unhappiness does not affect another's happiness or unhappiness. Thus we are (largely) unaffected by the state of mind of even those close-related to, or are in close-proximity with, us.

So a God-realized soul does not depend on an external object for his happiness because he looks at the internal light (*antar-jyothi*), which is the light of God. He becomes supremely blissful, within himself. Sri Ramakrishna called it as *Atma Rama*, meaning one who gets the highest bliss from within himself. Then the Lord indicates that for the successful practice of karma yoga, a person must practice deep meditation daily, even though karma yoga is an independent path. Without the aid of deep meditation, we will not know what karma yoga is, whether we are practicing it correctly or not, the way to judge whether we are practicing it

correctly, and if we aren't doing it right, what is the way to correct the situation. For that, introspection is needed, which can only be achieved through a daily practice of meditation.

Once, Sri Ramakrishna was in a conversation with his guru, Tota Puri, who had a brass pot (*kamandalu*), which he used to diligently wash, scrub, and polish to a high gloss. One day, Sri Ramakrishna asked him why he needed to do it daily. Tota Puri replied that if he failed to clean it even for a day, it developed spots. Sri Ramakrishna responded that if it was a golden pot, there would be no need to scrub and polish it daily. Tota Puri had to accept this. Sri Ramakrishna clarified the point by stating that a spiritual aspirant indeed had to practice diligently every day until he reached God. However, after attaining Him, there would be no need for further practice – just bliss, bliss, and more bliss. And every aspirant – whatever path he practices – must in the end surrender to God, who is the Lord of the whole universe, and only by the grace – and grace *alone* – of God, does a person attain the ultimate peace, and as a result God realization.

The above points summarize the salient points of the fifth chapter of the Bhagawad Gita. With this overview, we are ready to enter a detailed discussion of the fifth chapter, titled Karma Sannyasa Yoga.

Shanti Patha:

जननीं सारदां देवीं रामकृष्णं जगद्गुरुम् ।
पादपद्मे तयोः श्रित्वा प्रणमामि मुहुर्मुहुः :

jananīm sāradaṁ devīm rāmakṛṣṇaṁ jagadgurum |
pādapadme tayoḥ śritvā praṇamāmi muhurmuḥuḥ |

Taking shelter at the lotus feet of the Mother, Sarada Devi, and Ramakrishna, the teacher of the world, I salute them again and again.

May Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda bless us all with devotion and knowledge.