

THE BHAGAVAD GITA

(The Sacred Song)

The Fifth Enlarged, economy Edition

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Devanagari, A Lucid English Rendition,
Paragraph Headings, Guide for the Beginners
and Daily Reading, Explanation of
selected Verses, Verses from 29
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by

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CHAPTER 3

PATH OF SELFLESS SERVICE

अर्जुन उवाच

ज्यायसी चेत् कर्मणस् ते मता बुद्धिर् जनार्दन ।

तत् किं कर्मणि घोरे मां नियोजयसि केशव ॥१॥

व्यामिश्रेणेव वाक्येन बुद्धि मोहयसीव मे ।

तद् एकं वद निश्चित्य येन श्रेयोऽहम् आप्नूयाम् ॥२॥

Arjuna asked: If You consider acquiring transcendental knowledge is better than working, then why do You want me to engage in this horrible war, O Krishna? You seem to confuse my mind by apparently conflicting words. Tell me, decisively, one thing by which I may attain the Supreme. (3.01-02)

Arjuna was in the mode of delusion; he thought that Lord Krishna meant a contemplative life (BuddhiYoga) was better than doing one's normal duty in life in verse 2.49. Some people are often confused and think that salvation is possible only by leading a life devoted to scriptural study, contemplation, and acquiring Self-knowledge. Lord Krishna clarifies this by mentioning two major paths of spiritual practice — depending on the nature of the individual — in the following verse:

श्रीभगवानुवाच

लोकेऽस्मिन् द्विविधा निष्ठा पुरा प्रोक्ता मयाऽनघ ।

ज्ञानयोगेन सांख्यानां कर्मयोगेन योगिनाम् ॥३॥

Lord Krishna said: In this world I have stated a twofold path of spiritual discipline in past --- the path of Self-knowledge (for the contemplative ones) and the path of unselfish work (Sevā, KarmaYoga) for all others. (3.03)

‘Sevā’ or ‘KarmaYoga’ means sacrifice, selfless service, unselfish work, meritorious

deeds, giving away something to others. Some people often get confused like Arjuna and think that leading a life devoted to scriptural study, contemplation, and acquiring transcendental knowledge may be better for spiritual progress than doing one's worldly duty.

A God-realized person does not consider oneself the doer of any action, but only an instrument in the hands of the divine for His use. It should be further pointed out that both metaphysical knowledge and selfless service are means to attain the Supreme Being. These two paths are not separate, but complementary. In life a combination of these two modes is considered the best. Carry both selfless service and a spiritual discipline of acquiring Self-knowledge with you as stated in the following verses:

न कर्मणाम् अनारम्भान् नैष्कर्म्यं पुरुषोऽश्नुते ।

न च संन्यसनाद् एव सिद्धिं समधिगच्छति ॥४॥

न हि कश्चित् क्षणमपि जातु तिष्ठत्य् अकर्मकृत् ।

कार्यते ह्य् अवशः कर्म सर्वः प्रकृतिजैर् गुणैः ॥५॥

One does not attain freedom from the bondage of Karma by merely abstaining from work. No one attains perfection by merely giving up work because no one can remain actionless even for a moment. Everything in the universe is driven to action --- helplessly indeed --- by the forces of Nature. (3.04-05)

It is not possible for anybody to completely abandon action by thought, word, and deed. Therefore, one should always be active in serving the Lord by various means of one's choosing, and never be without work because an idle mind is the devil's workshop. Performing action till death with a desireless frame of mind is better than abandoning work and leading the life of an ascetic — even after God-realization — because even an ascetic cannot escape the impulse of action.

कर्मेन्द्रियाणि संयम्य य आस्ते मनसा स्मरन् ।

इन्द्रियार्थान् विमृदात्मा मिथ्याचारः स उच्यते ॥६॥

The ignorant one, who restrains the organs of action but mentally thinks of sense pleasures, is called a pretender. (3.06)

One's growth comes from working selflessly rather than giving up work and practicing sense-control before one is naturally ready for it. Bringing the mind under control is

difficult, and spiritual life becomes a mockery without mastery over the senses. Desires may become dormant and rise again to give trouble, just as a sleeping person wakes up in due course of time.

The four goals of human life — doing one's duty, earning wealth, material and sensual enjoyment, and attaining salvation — were designed in the Vedic tradition for gradual and systematic growth of the individual and the progress of society. Success in spiritual life does not come from prematurely wearing saffron clothes just to maintain an Ashram or livelihood without first conquering the six enemies --- lust, anger, greed, pride, attachment, and envy. It is said that such pretenders do a great disservice to God, society, and themselves and become bereft of happiness in this world and the next (BP 11.18.40-41) A pretending monk is considered sinful and a destroyer of the ascetic order of life.

WHY ONE SHOULD SERVE OTHERS

**यसु त्व इन्द्रियाणि मनसा नियम्यारभतेऽर्जुन ।
कर्मेन्द्रियैः कर्मयोगम् असक्तः स विशिष्यते ॥७॥**

One who restrains the senses --- by (a trained and purified) mind and intellect --- and engages the organs of action to KarmaYoga or selfless service without attachment, is considered superior. (3.07)

**नियतं कुरु कर्म त्वं कर्म ज्यायो ह्यु अकर्मणः ।
शरीरयात्रापि च ते न प्रसिद्धेद् अकर्मणः ॥८॥**

Perform your obligatory duty because working is indeed better than sitting idle. Even the maintenance of your body would be impossible without work. (3.08)

**यज्ञार्थात् कर्मणोऽन्यत्र लोकोऽयं कर्मबन्धनः ।
तदर्थं कर्म कौन्तेय मुक्तसङ्गः समाचर ॥९॥**

Human beings in this world are bound by work (Karma) that is not performed as a selfless service (Sevā, Yajna). Therefore, becoming free from attachment to the fruits of work, do your duty to the best of your abilities as a service to Me (for the good of humanity). (3.09)

TO HELP EACH OTHER IS THE FIRST COMMANDMENT OF THE CREATOR

**सहयज्ञाः प्रजाः सृष्ट्वा पुरोवाच प्रजापतिः ।
अनेन प्रसविष्यध्वम् एष वोऽस्त्व इष्टकामधुक् ॥१०॥**

In the ancient time, the Creator created human beings together with selfless service (Sevā, Yajna, sacrifice) and said: By serving each other you shall prosper, and the sacrificial service shall fulfill all your desires. (3.10)

**देवान् भावयतानेन ते देवा भावयन्तु वः ।
परस्परं भावयन्तः श्रेयः परम् अवाप्स्यथ ॥११॥**

Help the celestial controllers with selfless service and they will help you. Thus helping each other, you shall attain the Supreme goal. (3.11)

**इष्टान् भोगान् हि वो देवा दास्यन्ते यज्ञभाविताः ।
तैर् दत्तान् अप्रदायैभ्यो यो भुङ्क्ते स्तेन एव सः ॥१२॥**

The celestial controllers, being nourished and pleased by selfless service, will give you all desired objects. One who enjoys the gift of celestial controllers without sharing with others is, indeed, a thief. (3.12)

A celestial controller or guardian angel means a supernatural ruler, a celestial person, an angel, an agent of God, the cosmic forces that control, protect, and fulfill desires. Even the gates of heaven shall be closed to those who try to enter alone. According to the ancient scriptures, helping others is the best meritorious deed one can do. The wise seek to serve themselves in the service of others while the ignorant serve themselves at the cost of others. To serve each other is the original or first commandment of the creator that has been restated by Lord Krishna in the Gita. God has given us talents to help us serve, and in serving others we grow spiritually. We take birth to help each other, to understand, care, love, give, and forgive each other. Actually, we serve ourselves by serving others. Giving makes the world a better place for all humanity. According to Muniji “Giving is Living”.

It is believed that selfishness saps our natural health and immune system also. When we take steps to move ourselves away from self and think about the needs of others and how to serve them, a physical healing process seems to set in motion. This is especially true if we personally help a person we may never meet again in life.

One who makes no sacrifice, but grabs everything without helping others, is like a thief. It is said that celestials are pleased when people help each other. The capacity of the giver

increases by the grace of God, fulfilling all desires to give. The spirit of cooperation --- not competition or confrontation --- between human beings, between nations, and between organizations seems to be hinted here by the Lord. All the necessities of life are produced by dedicated sacrificial services of other people. We are created to depend on each other. The world has been called a cosmic wheel of cooperative action by Swami Chinmayananda. Cooperation, not competition, is more conducive to overall progress of the individual, as well as society. Nothing worthwhile can be achieved without cooperation and help from others. The world would be a much better place if all inhabitants cooperated and helped each other, rather than fight or compete with each other. It is the selfish motive that prevents cooperation even between spiritual organizations. One who can truly say all organizations, temples, mosques, and churches are our own, is a true leader and a real saint.

यज्ञशिष्टाशिनः सन्तो मुच्यन्ते सर्वकिल्बिषैः ।

भुञ्जते ते त्व् अघं पापा ये पचन्त्यात्मकारणात् ॥१३॥

The righteous who eat after sharing with others are freed from all sins, but the impious who cook food only for themselves (without first offering to God or sharing with others), in fact, eat sin. (3.13)

Food should be cooked for the Lord and offered first to Him with love before consuming. Children should be taught to pray before taking food. The house rule should be: No food before prayer and thanking the Lord. Lord further states that helping others is divine:

अन्नाद् भवन्ति भूतानि पर्जन्याद् अन्नसंभवः ।

यज्ञाद् भवति पर्जन्यो यज्ञः कर्मसमुद्भवः ॥१४॥

कर्म ब्रह्मोद्भवं विद्धि ब्रह्माक्षरसमुद्भवम् ।

तस्मात् सर्वगतं ब्रह्म नित्यं यज्ञे प्रतिष्ठितम् ॥१५॥

Living beings are sustained from food grains; grains are produced by sacrificial work (or duty performed by farmers and other field workers) and rain. Duty is prescribed in the scriptures. Scriptures come from the Supreme Being. Thus the all-pervading Supreme Being or God is ever present in selfless service. (3.14-15)

एवं प्रवर्तितं चक्रं नानुवर्तयतीह यः ।

अचायुर् इन्द्रियारामो मोघं पार्थ स जीवति ॥१६॥

One who does not help to keep the wheel of creation in motion by sacrificial duty (Sevā) and rejoices in sense pleasures, that sinful person lives in vain. (3.16)

Saints, human beings, trees, rivers, and earth are for the use of others. However, there is no prescribed duty for the enlightened ones as explained below:

यस् त्वात्मरतिर् एव स्याद् आत्मतृप्तश्च मानवः ।

आत्मन्येव च संतुष्टस् तस्य कार्यं न विद्यते ॥१७॥

नैव तस्य कृतेनार्थो नाकृतेनेह कश्चन ।

न चास्य सर्वभूतेषु कश्चिद् अर्थव्यपाश्रयः ॥१८॥

For one who rejoices only with the Supreme Being, who is satisfied with the Supreme Being, and who is content with the Supreme Being alone, for such a Self-realized person there is no duty. Such a person has no interest, whatsoever, in what is done or what is not done. A Self-realized person does not depend on anybody (except God) for anything. (3.17-18)

Lord Rama said: One who considers himself as my devotee but depends on others for anything, tell Me what kind of faith does he have in Me? Such a person's faith is weak (TR 7.45.02).

All duties, obligations, prohibitions, regulations, and injunctions are meant to lead one to perfection. Therefore, a perfect yogi who has Self-knowledge, detachment, and devotion has nothing more to gain in this world by doing worldly duty.

LEADERS SHOULD SET AN EXAMPLE

तस्माद् असक्तः सततं कार्यं कर्म समाचर ।

असक्तो ह्याचरन् कर्म परम् आप्नोति पूरुषः ॥१९॥

Therefore, always perform your duty to the best of your abilities without any attachment to the results, because by doing work without attachment, one reaches the supreme goal of life. (3.19)

In no other scripture, written before the Bhagavad-Gita, has the philosophy of KarmaYoga — unselfish devotion for the welfare of humanity — been so beautifully expounded. Lord Krishna has elevated the idea of altruism to the highest form of worship and spiritual practice. By altruism, one obtains grace, by grace one gets faith, and by faith the ultimate Truth is revealed. One immediately feels better by helping others

and comes one step closer to perfection. Swami Vivekananda said: Work done for others awakens the subtle and dormant divine power, Kundalini, within our body. An example of attaining Self-realization by persons while doing their worldly duties is given below:

**कर्मणैव हि संसिद्धिम् आस्थिता जनकादयः ।
लोकसंग्रहमेवापि संपश्यन् कर्तुम् अर्हसि ॥२०॥**

King Janaka and many others attained perfection of Self-realization by selfless service (KarmaYoga) alone. You also should perform your duty with a view to guide people and for the welfare of society. (3.20)

Those who do selfless service are not bound by Karma and attain salvation (VP 1.22.52). Nothing is beyond the reach of those who have others' interest in mind. Swami Harihar says: Selfless service to humanity is the true service to God and the highest form of worship.

**यद् यद् आचरति श्रेष्ठस् तत् तद् एवेतरो जनः ।
स यत् प्रमाणं कुरुते लोकस् तद् अनुवर्तते ॥२१॥**

Because whatever noble persons do, others follow. Whatever standard they set up, the world follows. (3.21)

People follow whatever great persons do (BP 5.04.15). A leader is obliged to set higher ethical, moral, and spiritual standards for the general population to follow. If the leader fails in this regard, the quality of the nation's life declines, and the progress of society is greatly hampered. Therefore, leaders have a great burden on their shoulders. The life of a true leader is the life of service and sacrifice. Leadership should not be an enterprise for becoming rich or famous.

A political leader or the head of a state uses negotiations (साम), bribery or gift (दान), physical force (दण्ड), and division (भेद). These are the four noble pedestals on which welfare and defense of a country stands, according to the Vedas.

**न मे पार्थास्ति कर्तव्यं त्रिषु लोकेषु किञ्चन ।
नानवाप्तम् अवाप्तव्यं वर्त एव च कर्मणि ॥२२॥**

O Arjuna, there is nothing in the three worlds — heaven, earth, and the lower regions — that should be done by Me, nor there is anything unobtained that I should obtain, yet I engage in action. (3.22)

**यदि ह्यहं न वर्तेयं जातु कर्मण्यतन्द्रितः ।
मम वर्तमानुवर्तन्ते मनुष्याः पार्थ सर्वशः ॥२३॥
उत्सीदेयुर् इमे लोका न कुर्यां कर्म चेद् अहम् ।
संकरस्य च कर्ता स्याम् उपहन्याम् इमाः प्रजाः ॥२४॥**

If I do not engage in action relentlessly, O Arjuna, people would follow the same path in every way. These worlds would perish if I did not work, and I would be the cause of confusion and destruction. (3.23-24)

WHAT SHOULD THE WISE DO TO THE IGNORANT?

**सक्ताः कर्मण्य् अविद्वांसो यथा कुर्वन्ति भारत ।
कुर्याद् विद्वांसु तथासक्तश् चिकीर्षुर् लोकसंग्रहम् ॥२५॥**

The ignorant work with attachment to the fruits of work for themselves, and the wise should work without attachment for the welfare of the society. (3.25)

**न बुद्धिभेदं जनयेद् अज्ञानां कर्मसङ्गिनाम् ।
जोषयेत् सर्वकर्माणि विद्वान् युक्तः समाचरन् ॥२६॥**

The wise should not unsettle the minds of the ignorant who are attached to the fruits of work, but should inspire others by performing all works to the best of one's abilities (without attachment to results). (See also 3.29) (3.26)

Doing one's duty without a personal, selfish motive is an exalted state given only to the enlightened ones. This may be beyond comprehension of ordinary people. The mark of genius lies in the ability to handle two opposed ideas and paradoxes, such as living in the world with detached attachment. Most people work hard only when they have some motivating force, such as enjoyment of the fruits of work. Such persons should not be discouraged or condemned. They should be introduced slowly to the beginning stages of selfless service. The excessive attachment to possessions, not the possessions themselves, becomes the source of misery.

Just as one has to pray and worship with single-minded attention, similarly, one should perform worldly duties with full attention, even while knowing full well that the world and its affairs are transitory. One should not live thinking only of God and neglecting one's duty in the world. Yogananda said: Be as earnest about meditation as about earning money. One should

not live a one-sided life. The importance of controlling the senses and ways to combat ego are given below:

ALL WORKS ARE THE WORKS OF NATURE

**प्रकृतेः क्रियमाणानि गुणैः कर्माणि सर्वशः ।
अहंकारविमूढात्मा कर्ताहम् इति मन्यते ॥२७॥**

All actions are performed by various forces (or Gunas) of Nature, but due to delusion of ego or ignorance, people assume themselves to be the sole doer. (See also 5.09, 13.29, 14.19, and 18.14) (3.27)

Indirectly, God is the doer of everything. The power and the will of God do everything. One is not free even to kill oneself. One cannot feel the presence of the omnipresent God as long as one feels: "I am the doer". If one realizes --- by the grace of God --- that one is not the doer, but just an instrument, one at once becomes free. A Karmic bondage is created if we consider ourselves the doer and enjoyer. The same work done by a Self-realized master and an ordinary person produces different results. The work done by a Self-realized master becomes spiritualized and produces no Karmic bondage because a Self-realized person does not consider oneself the doer or the enjoyer. The work done by an ordinary person produces Karmic bondage.

**तत्त्ववित् तु महाबाहो गुणकर्मविभागयोः ।
गुणा गुणेषु वर्तन्त इति मत्वा न सज्जते ॥२८॥**

One who knows the truth about the role of the forces of Nature (Gunas) in getting work done, does not become attached to work. Because such a person knows that it is Gunas that get their work done by using our organs as their instruments. (3.28)

**प्रकृतेर् गुणसंमूढाः सज्जन्ते गुणकर्मसु ।
तान् अकृत्स्नविदो मन्दान् कृत्स्नविन् न विचालयेत् ॥२९॥**

Those who are deluded by the illusive power (Maya) of Nature become attached to the work done by the forces of Nature (Gunas). The wise should not disturb the mind of the ignorant whose knowledge is imperfect. (See also 3.26) (3.29)

The enlightened one should not try to dissuade or detract ignorant ones from performing selfish actions that they do, deluded by the forces

of Nature, because doing work --- and not the renunciation of work in the initial stages --- will ultimately lead them to realize the truth that we are not the doers, but divine instruments only. Working with attachment also has a place in the development of society and in the life of common people. People can easily transcend selfish desires by working for a noble goal of their choice.

**मयि सर्वाणि कर्माणि संन्यस्याध्यात्मचेतसा ।
निराशीर् निर्ममो भूत्वा युध्यस्व विगतज्वरः ॥३०॥**

Do your prescribed duty, dedicating all work to Me in a spiritual frame of mind, free from desire, attachment, and mental grief. (3.30)

**ये मे मतम् इदं नित्यम् अनुतिष्ठन्ति मानवाः ।
श्रद्धावन्तोऽनसूयन्तो मुच्यन्ते तेऽपि कर्मभिः ॥३१॥
ये त्वेतद् अभ्यसूयन्तो नानुतिष्ठन्ति मे मतम् ।
सर्वज्ञानविमूढासु तान् विद्धि नष्टान् अचेतसः ॥३२॥**

Those who always practice this teaching of Mine --- with faith and free from criticism --- become free from the bondage of Karma. But those who find fault with this teaching and do not practice it, should be considered ignorant, senseless, and confused. (3.31-32)

**सदृशं चेष्टते स्वस्याः प्रकृतेर् ज्ञानवान् अपि ।
प्रकृतिं यान्ति भूतानि निग्रहः किं करिष्यति ॥३३॥**

All beings follow their nature. Even the wise act according to their own nature. (If we are but slaves of our nature) Then what is the value of sense restraint? (3.33)

While we cannot and should not suppress our nature, we must not become victims but rather controllers and masters of the senses by using the discriminative faculties of human life.