

Chapter XV

Discussion of action, the material creation, demi-gods, and the Lord of the sacrifice; the essence of the Gita: practice to secure the thought of Om at the last moment of life.

Then, Arjuna prayed that the third subject, *karma*, could be fully explained to him. Krishna was quite ready to oblige him. He began, “Arjuna! The limitation that is necessary for the creation, fostering, and destruction of beings is what is called *karma*. The movable and immovable are all beings; why, the very act of the very resolution for creation is *karma*; the very first, which still activates all everywhere —this entire universe and all the movements and agitations and activities in it are the direct consequence of primal action (*karma*), My divine will (*sankalpa*). And, as long as My resolution lasts, the stream of action will flow along. It can never go dry as long as I do not will it. All that you do is to get drawn into this flood; why, you are but currents in this rush, or ripples or waves. My will has prompted all action (*karma*), so action done in consonance with My will becomes part of Me.

“Action (*karma*) is of My nature; I manifest Myself as action,” said Krishna, to the great consternation of Arjuna. He made it clear that all action is divine, of His essence! “It is enough if you know that *Brahman* (the Universal), *Atma* (the individual), and *karma* are all three Me; knowledge of this will confer release. You need not worry about the rest,” said Krishna, as if He wanted to avoid further discussion. Evidently, Krishna wanted to take the chariot into the ranks of the foes and start the conflict, for time was flying fast.

But Arjuna was adamant; he was different. Ordinary people would not have argued even so long with Krishna. When Krishna says, “Don’t worry about the rest,” one should stop worrying. But Arjuna was the right interrogator for Krishna and Krishna was the right teacher for Arjuna; in fact, they are man-God (*nara-Narayana*), aren’t they? Hence, the appropriateness, interest, and value of this dialogue.

Arjuna was not content to leave the matter at that; he did not accept Krishna’s assurance. “Tell me about the remaining three also, oh Lord,” he pleaded. “Save me from the coils of doubt,” he prayed. “Destroy the darkness and reveal Your Reality to me,” he insisted. At this, Krishna melted a little. He fondly stroked Arjuna’s back and replied, “Do not grieve; I shall tell you all. This perishable creation (*adi-butha*), about which I mentioned, is not such a formidable tangle. It is quite within the reach of all. Everything that declines and dies, everything that has form and name, is included in this perishable creation.

“In other words, the whole perishable creation is lower nature. All these embodied things, on this side and on the other and everywhere, are this whole perishable creation. In spite of this, they aren’t different from Me,” said Krishna, pausing meaningfully. He did not continue the exposition!

The ways of the Lord are known only to Him. No one else can make out their meaning and purpose. Trying to unravel them is a fruitless task.

“They are not different from Me!” At these words, Arjuna was petrified with surprise. His head became heavy with doubt. His intelligence was befogged. His conviction was shaken. Doubts multiplied in his brain in frightening sequence. Why did he suffer like this? What was the reason for all this upset?

After declaring “I am existence-knowledge-bliss, the truth-eternity entity; I am unaffected by death, decline, or destruction,” Krishna made the devastating admission that He was also the temporary, transitional, destructible body! This was the cause of all the confusion in Arjuna’s brain! Anyone would be confounded by doubt at these

conflicting statements. Krishna laughed as He saw Arjuna's plight.

Still, since He had no intention of causing delay, and since he knew the source of Arjuna's dilemma, Krishna immediately set about resolving the doubt. "Arjuna! Why do you feel lost? You are confounded because I said I am the short-lived body too, aren't you? Common folk will be shocked on hearing this. Their reaction will be to reject the idea, for it is difficult to reconcile the two. This body, which is temporary, transitional, and transient, has affinity with Me, for I am the base from which it springs. Without Me, the body can never be. This will become clear to you with a summary of its origin. Listen to the story of the origins of the body, which clarifies the mystery.

The body is primarily indebted for its emergence to the food that the parents consume, isn't it? Where did that food come from? From the earth element: the grains and other materials that grew on the earth. And the earth, the earth element? It evolved from the water element. Tracing back, we find that the water element emerged from the fire element, the fire element from air, the air from ether (*akasa*) and ether from the shadow (delusion, *maya*) of Godhead! That shadow is merely My apparel.

"My Apparel, which I willed and folded around Me, became ether, the ether got transformed into air, the air changed into the fire element, the fire element into water, the water became earth, the earth grew grains of food, the food developed into the body! So, it is clear, isn't it, that the body is also Myself? Why doubt this?

"Therefore, I am also this perishable creation (*adi-butha*), as much as I am, as I said before, *Brahman*, the individual soul, and *karma*. The cause is the same as the effect; I am the primal cause, so I am all these effects also. I am the highest *Atma*; the rest all proceed from the divine (*adi-daiva*). In every physical citadel or body, the divine personality named *Hiranyagarbha* is immanent.

"Just as a people are served by their senses, the *Hiranyagarbha* is served by demi-gods (*adi-daivas*) proceeding from the divine. What role do these demi-gods play? These deities serve the divine purpose. That is to say, Surya illumines the eye, the divinities of the quarters enhance the ear, and Indra motivates the hand. These and other presiding deities are the senses of *Hiranyagarbha*. However great a spiritual aspirant might be, whatever eminence they might have reached, they can attain the Highest only through *Hiranyagarbha*. *Hiranyagarbha* is indeed the Godhead; there is no distinction between the two.

"Is this clear, Arjuna? I am as much demigod as I am the material creation. I am as much these two as I am *Brahman*, soul, and *karma*. They are all fully divine.

"Now for the next entity: the Lord of the selfless-ritual sacrifice (*adi-yajna*). That is also Me! This entity consumes joy and grief, the results of the multifarious actions in which beings are engaged. I, the Lord of the sacrifice, am the recipient of sound, touch, sight, taste, and smell through the five senses in all beings! I am not only the entity responsible for action; I am also the entity for which that action is gone through, the recipient of the fruits; I am the benefactor as well as the beneficiary."

Of course, Krishna was able to open Arjuna's eyes and clarify this truth, this fact of His being the Lord of the sacrifice (*adi-yajna*). But ordinary intellects may not be able to grasp its implications. It will be easy if we take some illustrations from life. When you want a breeze, you switch on the fan; when you want light, you switch on the lamp; when you want to cook, you light the stove; when you want to address a vast audience, you fix up a mike and loudspeakers and switch them on. Or, if you require printing, you operate the press with a switch. Consider these as separate operations and you will notice that they are unrelated to one another. Light and air, heat and

sound are unrelated; they are distinct in every way, it would seem. But for all these, the motivator (*kartha*) is the same: the electric current. The expressions, the manifestations, may be different; but the basis, the inspiration, the latent potency, the base is the same.

Like the current, Godhead operates through all instruments and awards the consequences of all the activities of the instruments. He is the bestower of the fruits of all action. Like the current, He is the inner motivator of all beings. Since He is the activator of all actions, He is called the Lord of the sacrifice (*adi-yajna*).

“The seventh entity is *Om* (*pranava*), which, when pronounced at the moment of death, awards merger with the imperishable highest *Atma* Itself!” When Krishna said this, Arjuna immediately prayed to Him to elaborate the point a little more so that he might grasp it clearly. Krishna was only too glad to do so.

“The moment of death does not mean some future point of time. It means, this very moment! Any moment might turn out to be the moment of death. So every moment is the ‘last’. Every moment must be filled with *Om*. The fate of a person after death is molded by the thought that predominates at the moment of death. That thought is the foundation on which the next birth is built. Whoever at that time remembers Me attains My glory, reaches Me in fact. So every action, every striving of his, every spiritual exercise, should be aimed at sanctifying that fateful moment. The years of life must be devoted to the discipline that will bring up at that moment the thought of the highest *Atma* or *Om*.

“What has to be discarded is the body, this physical case. What has to be earned is the Universal Absolute (*Parabrahman*). The body has your reality (*swa-rupa*), the undiscardable, indestructible, undying truth (*sathya*) and eternity (*nithyam*). That reality is the entity called *Atma*, or, what is the same thing, the highest *Atma*. Since you are that, you cannot cast it off. Casting off the body is akin to shifting from a house occupied for some years, and birth is your entry into a new one. These are both physical acts, which don’t affect the *Atma*.

“Arjuna! The *Atma* doesn’t come in or go out. Those who toil in the falsehood of body consciousness (*deha-thathwa*) cannot have the *Atma* revealed to them. Body consciousness is liable to decay and death. Therefore, more than the six items mentioned by Me already, *Om*, which is such a potent instrument of liberation, has to be understood clearly. All the long years of life are to be utilized for this consummation—the mind being fixed on *Om* when the body is being cast off. You belch the flavour of the food you ate; your last thought indicates the food you have fed on.

“Your progress is in accordance with your spiritual practices. Be always aware of the need to fix the mind on holy thoughts when the body is got rid of. That is to say, immerse yourself in holy thoughts every moment of your life.”

Arjuna inquired, “Oh Lord! Has one to strive for it from now on, if one wishes to get holy thoughts at the last moment of life? Can we not get them at that time itself?”

The Lord realized his doubt and replied, “Your intelligence seems to have been blunted a great deal! You hesitate to accept the need to develop holy thoughts from now on. Arjuna! The mind has to be educated into the habit through what is called the discipline of constant practice. The mind has to be trained to avoid other thoughts and concentrate only on the Lord. Only then can you reach the Oversoul, the supreme Spirit. Unless you systematically teach it and train it, it will not and cannot remember the supreme Spirit at the moment of death.

“You might ask Me why. Well, think of your own case. You are able to use these weapons of offence and

defence in the battle that is imminent because you taught yourself the art of handling them many years ago, right? Could you have used them with confidence, without preparation, on the spur of the moment? Is it ever possible? The warrior will be called upon to wield weapons some day, so he is taught the art from childhood so that he may be ready for any emergency.

“Similarly, whatever else a person may not meet during life, he is certain to meet with death. So, each one must be trained to have at that time the attitude and thought that are most beneficial to them. Otherwise, life is a failure, a waste. A person unready for this consummation has to suffer the fate that will befall him. No one enters a battlefield in order to suffer defeat. So too, no one voluntarily accepts a fall; people seek only progress. Would it not be wise, therefore, to strive for the end that is in your own best interest? Hence, everyone must take earnest steps to secure the thought of the seventh item, *Om (pranava)*, at the last moment of life. Whoever dies in that thought attains Me.” said Krishna.

This is the entire essence of the *Gita*. For the goal of all actions is to attain the acme of progress, isn't it? That is the urge that makes people engage in prayers, in repetition of the name and meditation, in ritual worship and spiritual exercises. All those who have placed faith in these have to remember the goal throughout.

Krishna said that *Om* has to be remembered at the moment of death. Certain points require elucidation in connection with this, for there are many who argue that *Om* can be repeated only by a few and that others are not entitled to it. This is wrong. This false conclusion has been arrived at because they do not know the truth. It springs from a mistaken belief.

The *Gita* does not mention this group or that group. Krishna declares “whoever”, without any qualifying words or limiting it to one class or sex. He does not even say, “who deserves or who does not deserve”, “who is authorized or who is unauthorized”. He says only that for meditation on *Om* (mere ‘calling it to memory’ is of no use), some preliminary disciplines have to be gone through, like control of the senses and concentration of the mind.

For, when the mind is flitting from one fancy to another, how can the production of *Om* by the vocal organs be of any benefit? The sound will not help the attainment of liberation. Senses have to be curbed, thoughts have to be one-pointed, the glory has to be apprehended. That is why the Lord advised that from birth to death, you must be engaged in the search for truth. Instead, if you postpone spiritual discipline until the last moment, you will be like the student who turns over the pages of the textbook for the first time just before entering the examination hall! If the student feels that he has before him one full year and neglects to learn from the teacher, lecture notes, and books, how can anything enter the brain that very morning? It will only add to the student's despair. The student can be pronounced proficient only in indolence.

No tree will yield fruit the moment you plant the seedling in your backyard. For the tree to reach that stage, you have to foster it with care over a long period of time, don't you? Similarly, whatever result you seek, you have to follow carefully the preparatory disciplines, without break. No one can acquire the fruit without vigilance and steadfastness.

Spiritual aspirants must be always aware of this. The yearning must be directed away from “how to be born” toward “how to die”! For birth depends on how death takes place. Death comes first, birth happens later. Folk believe that people are born to die and they die so that they may be born. This is wrong. You are born so that you may not be born again; you die, so that you may not die again. That is to say, the one who dies must so die that rebirth

does not happen. When once you die, you should not be born again to meet another death. Death is inevitable, if you are born; so avoid birth, and thus avoid death.

So, the spiritual aspirant should aspire not for a good birth but for a good death. You may be born well, in a good family or with many favourable circumstances, but subsequent action may not ensure a good death. If a good death is aimed at, the trouble of being born and becoming once again subject to death can be avoided.

Everyone born must have the end always in view. Cultivate good habits of thought and action in order to make the end genuinely auspicious. Attaining such an end is the unmistakable sign of winning God's grace.