

Chapter XXV

The world as a permutation and combination of the 5 elements; qualities of demonic and divine natures; the highest dharma.

“Krishna! You say that those who recognize the world as mere world cannot claim to know the *Vedas*; they must recognize it as God (*Paramatma*). The world is an effect, so it cannot be different from the Cause. How is this possible? The world that is seen by us is subject to growth and decay. God, on the other hand, is eternal, true, unaffected by change. There can be no affinity between water and fire, right? How can these two be one? Please tell me; I shall be most happy to hear you,” said Arjuna.

“Well, Arjuna! In the cognizable world, every single thing displays its characteristic (*guna*). The characteristic depends upon the owner, the possessor. There is a basis (*adhara*) for the characteristics possessed by every object and being in the world. That basis is the *Atma*. Fix your attention on the unchanging basis —not on the fluctuating manifestations. Otherwise, you flounder in the flux. Just as the seed is the basis for the trunk, boughs, branches, twigs, leaves, and flowers of a tree, the world (*prakriti, prapancha*) is the tree that emanates from the seed, *Atma*. The world is the permutation and combination of the five elements, which are latent in the basis, the *Atma*. Consider the *Atma*, the base, as essential, for it is as its manifestation that the world is expressed. He who has grasped this truth through steady discipline deserves the title ‘he who has mastered the *Vedas* (*veda-vid*)’.

“But without deep inquiry, without discriminating between the real and the unreal, if one just mistakes the seen to be the lasting and argues so, one is losing the way. How can such a one reach the goal? How can such a one attain the reality? The yearning to know this Reality comes of God-ward attributes. The demonic nature has the opposite tendency; it makes people argue that they have known when they have not, it keeps them away from all attempts to know, it induces them to establish untruth as truth.”

As soon as the Lord finished saying this, Arjuna raised his head in astonishment and said, “Gopala! You were declaring so far that the *Atma* is the basis for all characteristics and all beings. That is to say, You were declaring that You were that Basis. Meanwhile, you have started talking about two distinct natures, the Divine being and the demonic being! I am getting confused. I am at a loss to decide which to accept and which to reject.”

“Arjuna! Your question is even stranger. You say, I never speak a word that has no meaning or do a deed that has no significance. Yet you worry over the issue of which among my statements to accept and which to reject! This is senseless anxiety and hesitation. My dear brother-in-law, the gods (*devas*) and the demons (*asuras*) are not two separate distinct groups; they are so divided on the basis of the distinction in characteristics. Well, the characteristics (*gunas*) are artificial; they are not of the essence of consciousness of which I have already told you.

The potter makes pots, pans, and plates. These are not essentially ‘parts’ of the clay out of which they were shaped. The pot, pan, and plate are artificial forms of the clay. The names are also artificial; the names and forms are the characteristics. The substance or basis (*adhara*) is clay; the shapes-names-forms, the manifestation, the expressions are pots, pans, and plates. Clay is natural; pots, pans and plates are artificial. Take it that the clay, the basis, the innate, inborn (*sahaja*) is My real form (*swa-rupa*), reality. In the names-forms, the expressions and pots, etc. are not in Me; but I am in them. I have no characteristics (*gunas*), but I am in the characteristics, note this. Therefore, don’t try to keep clay and pots apart, as two distinct entities. That cannot be correct. It is also not possible.”

“Krishna! What is the relationship between your reality or truth (*swa-bhava*) and its embodiment (*swarupa*), the objective world (*prakriti*)?”

“I have told you already that the five elements, earth, water, fire, air and sky, are My embodiment (*swa-bhava*), My attributes. What is this objective world except the combination of the five elements? What else can you call it?”

“Krishna! Without the five elements, nothing can exist in this world, right? Then how can I deny them? Existence is bound with them.”

“When you accept the five elements, you have to agree to the five-fold proliferation of each element, making in all 25 principles (*thathwas*). Only four elements —earth, water, fire, and air— are evident and perceptible, but ether or sky is the basis for all. So too, the mind (*manas*), intellect (*buddhi*), memory consciousness (*chittha*), and ego (*ahamkara*) are all cognized by experience, but the soul (*anthah-karana*), which is their base, can only be inferred. All things of which we are aware are only manifestations of a Thing, of which we are unaware. They derive their strength and support from the Unseen. That Unseen Basis of which you are unaware is I Myself, the *Atma*. All are based on Me.

“That which is based is subject to change: growth, decline, and modification. But the base should not therefore be taken as subject to change. For example, consider the moon and its reflection in water. The image of the moon in the water is not steady; it shakes and quivers. It is the water that shakes and quivers, not the moon above. Ignorant people, who are like children, infer that the moon is itself shaking. The transference of the characteristics of the based (*adheya*) to the base (*adhara*) is the fundamental demonic (*asuric*) quality. The recognition of the eternity and truth of the base even in the based —that is the real, divine nature.”

Arjuna listened intently and with steady attention to all this. Then he queried, “Madhava! You said that it is the inherent quality of nature that distinguishes these two. Which qualities make for demonic and which for divine natures? Please clarify.”

Krishna replied: “Arjuna! I am ever willing to clarify; I need only listeners who are steady and intent. Hear this with unwavering attention:

- (1) fearlessness,
- (2) purity of emotions,
- (3) awareness of the unity of all creation,
- (4) charity,
- (5) control of the senses,
- (6) sacrifice,
- (7) study,
- (8) asceticism,
- (9) straightforwardness,
- (10) nonviolence,
- (11) integrity,
- (12) equanimity, absence of anger or resentment,
- (13) detachment,
- (14) inner peace,

- (15) refraining from scandal-mongering and talking ill of others,
- (16) sympathy,
- (17) absence of greed,
- (18) sweetness and softness of speech,
- (19) fear of non-*dharmic* acts,
- (20) absence of fluctuation in the mind,
- (21) courage during disaster; patience and fortitude,
- (22) steadiness,
- (23) cleanliness,
- (24) harmlessness, and
- (25) humility.

These twenty-five holy qualities are the traits of divine endowment.

“Pride, pomp, vanity, anger, harshness, and absence of discrimination are the components of the demonic endowment of mankind. People having these qualities are infused with the demonic character. Although for all outward appearance they may be humans, they do not deserve that name. Those who have the aforesaid divine qualities are known as having divine parts; those who have the demonic attributes are known as demonic humans.

“Some people esteem themselves as part divine, but do they have all the attributes that should characterize them, or do they have at least sympathy (*daya*), morality (*dharma*), service to others, and equanimity (*santham*)? If they have these at least in a small measure, they can be regarded as divine. Instead, if the full battery of demonic equipment is evident in them, how can their declaration be taken at its face value? It is sheer vanity to pretend so or to claim as such. Vanity and pomp can never be classed as divine; they are unquestionably demonic.

“Each one can easily analyze himself and decide to which class he belongs. The class is not decided by physical appearance, possessions, status, or authority. For example, consider Ravana. He had the human form, he was an emperor, he was greater than Kubera, the Lord of wealth; but can he be considered part divine for these reasons? No. He is declared a demon, on the basis of the qualities he had.

“Three qualities form the fundamental basis of all demonic (*asuric*) natures: lust, anger, and greed (*kama, krodha, lobha*). They destroy the self and foster the demon in humanity. They have to be overwhelmed and overcome by the divine qualities of detachment, equanimity, and renunciation (*vairagyam, santham, thyagam*). Rely on these warriors in this fight. Foster these warriors and they will, in a trice, wipe out the forces of demonic influence. Any trace of the foes (lust, anger, and greed) left unsuppressed anywhere is a potential danger, so they must be reduced to ashes. That leads to real success in the struggle for the goal.

“Desires and attachments are as roots to the tree of life. When the roots are cut asunder, the tree dies; the rate of decline depends upon the speed and effectiveness of the cutting asunder. It will keep sprouting even if a single root is intact. It will not go dry or die. Remove every single root; then the tree perishes and becomes deadwood. The boast of people that they have destroyed all roots is vain if the tree is green and growing! So too, the delusion (*maya*) that has possessed the individual (*jivi*) will perish in proportion to the uprooting of the desire that binds.

“Some engage themselves in meditation after reducing, to some extent only, a few urges and desires. They do not achieve full concentration. Nor are they tossed by uncontrolled agitations. They are caught in the intermediate level. What is the reason for this state of things? Full concentration can come only from full control of desire.

Hence, it is declared that lust, anger, and greed are demons that harass people, demons that assume fearful and ugly forms.

“But it is not a calamity to have ugly faces or frightful forms. At the worst, one may be called ‘repulsive’, that is all. It is the repulsive character, the ugly nature that marks the calamity. A person may be beautiful in appearance and have a parrot-like chatter that is sweet to the ear, but the person cannot be regarded as divinely endowed, born with divine parts for these reasons. If demonic nature simmers in them, physical beauty and sweetness of voice cannot entitle them to divinity. The words that emanate from them are vulgarized into hammer strokes and dagger thrusts! Thus, demonic attributes and the divine attributes are related to the qualities that compose the nature and behaviour of the individual, and not to the physical form and appearance.”