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Karma – Essence of the Third Chapter of the Srimad Bhagavadgeeta

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Abstract

The chapter 3 of the ‘Bhagavadgeeta’ offers invaluable wisdom on the importance of selfless action, duty, and balance in our daily lives. Lord Kṛṣṇa emphasizes the importance of karma in life. He reveals that it is important for every human being to engage in some sort of activity in this material world. By embracing the teachings of *Karma Yoga*, or the ‘Path of Selfless Service’, we can learn to focus on our responsibilities and perform tasks with detachment from their outcomes. Lord Kṛṣṇa explains that no one can remain inactive even for a moment, as everyone is driven to act by the natural qualities (*guṇa*) inherent in them. Therefore, it is crucial to choose the right actions and perform them with the right attitude. This approach reduces stress, fosters inner peace, and promotes personal growth. The practice of selfless service, or *Yajña*, encourages us to engage in acts of kindness and charity without expecting anything in return, cultivating humility and a sense of connectedness with the divine.

Discussion

In the Bhagavadgeeta, every chapter is designated with a specific title. The lexical meaning of the word ‘*Yoga*’ in the title of the every chapter means, *yuj + ghañ - yujyatē manaḥ ātmanā yōgaḥ cittavṛttinirōdhaḥ* - this means, ‘to have a mind in the soul; meditation or inhibition of thoughts. The third chapter, *Karma-Yoga*, means performance of necessary worldly duties; merely by reason of a sense of duty; with no thought of liking or dislike, and of reaping the fruits of action.

In the chapter three, Arjuna raises two questions in the first two verses—

1. Why should he perform an action of waging war which is very cruel since thousands of warriors are going to die?
2. What is *shrey*, ultimate good for him? Action or knowledge which results in moksha, liberation for him (3.1 and 3.2)

Instead of answering the question directly, the Lord begins by stating that there are two ways of leading life, *Karma-yoga* and *Jñāna-yoga*. What is karma and for whom the actions are and what is knowledge and it is for whom. At the beginning of the creation, He taught two life-styles for human beings. One who sees the purpose of action in life, it is better for him to perform actions as a duty. But one who realises the futility of actions, for him it is better to renounce actions and accept the life of renunciation for acquiring knowledge of truth (3.3).

With this basic understanding of karma and knowledge, the Lord takes off and starts to present the reasons for performing the actions and explains why it is not necessary for anyone to give up actions physically. The Lord presents four different standpoints – seekers of the truth, *prAkRtas* – who are busy in their day

to day affairs, wise persons and the Lord Himself.

1. Lord Kṛṣṇa gave four (4) reasons for the seekers of the truth for performing actions and not to give up actions at all.

1.1. Lord Kṛṣṇa says that just by not performing actions, one cannot get the Naishkarmya-siddhi. One cannot attain moksha, liberation by mere renunciation of actions (3.4).

1.2. It is impossible for anyone to sit for a moment without performing any action because one is always impelled by one's own *prakṛti*, *svabhāva*, born of the three *guṇas* namely sattva, rajas and tamas to perform actions (3.5).

1.3. Even if one gives up actions physically but keeps building castles in the clouds due to being deluded by the sense-objects, it would be mithyāchāra, hypocrisy on his part (3.6).

1.4. One needs to perform his obligatory actions because without it, it would be impossible to maintain/sustain the body or to live one's life (3.8).

It is better for one to continue to perform one's duties with the right attitude and by having a say over one's senses which is called 'karma-yoga' (3.7). This can give one the purification of the mind to attain self-knowledge.

2. Now Lord Kṛṣṇa talks about the reasons for performing actions for all human beings, whether one is a seeker or not. Even the people who are engaged in their day to day life activities, should

perform actions for the following reasons:

2.1. The Lord says that, except those actions that are carried out with an attitude of offering to the Lord (Yajña-karma), all other actions are binding in nature. It means those actions become the cause for new birth. Therefore, being free from all kinds of attachments, may you perform all actions as an offering to the Lord (3.9). At the beginning of the creation, along with the human beings, Prajāpati Brahmāji created this yajña. Then, He said that, let this yajña be a *iṣṭa-kāmadhuk*, wish-fulfilling cow for all of you and may you all prosper by this yajña (3.10). You propitiate devatas, deities with this yajña and they will bring peace, pleasure and prosperity in your life. By this you can gain shreya, the ultimate good in your life (3.11). And also the enjoyment of the result of the actions after offering would release one from all kinds of sins. But in case, one does not offer after gaining the results of one's action and enjoys oneself, then he is not eating food but eating only sins and hence, he is a thief. (3.12 and 3.13).

In simple words, whatever we do or enjoy, first we should offer it to the Lord. That means all our actions are yajña, the offering to the Lord. We should appreciate the Lord in all our actions and also while enjoying the result of such actions.

2.2. Now Lord talks about a very broad vision, which includes the entire

Universe. It is called Universal-Yajña or Jagat-chakra. We are not only the beneficiaries of the universe but we are the also part of the universe.

So Lord Kṛṣṇa says that all beings are born of the food, the food is due to the rains, the rains are because of the *Yajña*, Yajña is born from karma, (3.14) karma is from Vedas and Vedas are from Akshara Brahman, the Lord. Therefore, this all-pervasive Brahman is always in the yajña (3.15). Further, Bhagavan says that one who does not follow this jagat-chakra; one who does not participate in this universal-yajña, his life itself is *pāpa*, sin and he is indulging only in sensory satisfaction and hence his human life is in vain (3.16).

The message here is that one should perform yajña in his life all the time. Here yajña means one's life should be such that it does not create any kind of disturbance in the environment which includes nature, elements, and all other forms of lives. Even the pollution is also *pāpa* from this standpoint. One needs to perform actions to participate in the sustenance and maintenance of the world. [That means we are not only the consumers of the world but also contributors in the world. As a contributor, one needs to perform actions, fulfil his/her duties. There is no need to renounce karma physically. The More one contributes, the more mature he/she is].

3. **Now Lord takes the standpoint of the enlightened person. Suppose Arjuna thinks he has understood the true nature of the self, still he should not need to give up action.** Though the Lord says that one who is happy with oneself, one who revels in the self and one who is satisfied with oneself does not need to perform any action. He is free from all kinds of duties (3.17). He does not have anything to gain from anyone in the entire universe therefore he does not have any purpose of the actions in his life nor does he have any purpose of not performing action (3.18). **Still the Lord says that, he should perform actions for which Lord Kṛṣṇa gives four reasons. Let us see one by one all the four reasons for performing actions in the life and to be active in the life.**

3.1. In this reason, there are two standpoints for performing actions. If Arjuna thinks he has understood the truth, then for the welfare of the world he needs to keep performing actions. And if he is not enlightened, then to gain the purification of the mind, he has to perform actions. To have the right kind of mind to understand the true nature of the self, he needs to continue fulfilling his duties (3.20).

3.2. In life, once a person grows up, he/she is a role model for someone in the family, school or society. In the same way, as an enlightened person, Arjuna is a role model for other seekers and as a warrior also being in the battle field he is a role model, archetype for other soldiers on either side of the

battle field. Because, generally people have a tendency to follow blindly what their role model is does and they take their role model's actions as a pramANa, authority or standard for what to do and what not to do (3.21).

(Grand-Parents, Parents, elder siblings, sister/brother and other family members are the role models for others in their family. Teachers and co-students are leaders in the school/college. Every citizen is the leader for the welfare of the society in a democracy. Generals are the leaders in the battle field for the warriors and in the spiritual world for the followers, the seekers.

- 3.3. Wise person should continue to perform actions, without any attachment to the actions or the results of the actions, with a desire to do good to the society, in the same way, the ignorant persons are doing with attachment (3.25).
- 3.4. **The fourth and the last reason to perform action for the wise person is because, it is extremely important, especially in the life of every human being to perform actions.** The Lord says that being a role model or an enlightened person, it becomes a very responsible life and their actions should be such that they do not create any kind of disbelief, confusion or conflict in the life and the mind of the children, the students, the followers, the seekers and other ignorant people in the society. It should not hurt other's *śraddha*, faith, belief because

all human beings are living their life as per their *śraddha*, faith, belief only (3.26).

4. **Finally Lord Kṛṣṇa is presenting Himself as an example for performing actions; not giving up actions at all, though he is actionlessness** (non-doer and non-enjoyer, *akartā-abhoktā*). He takes both standpoints – from the standpoint of Himself and from the standpoint of the others who can make Him role model or follow him blindly.

- 4.1. Lord says, “Look, Arjuna! I do not have any duties whatsoever in these three worlds, which can impel me to perform actions. Nor is there anything in the three worlds which is not yet gained for my enjoyment for which I need to perform actions. Still I perform action, I am driving your chariot. See! I am your charioteer on your request.” (3.22).
- 4.2. Suppose I give up the actions and do not perform my duties due to my indifference (*Atinidriya*) towards the actions, the others would follow me and would fall from their responsibilities towards the family, society and the world. (3.23) As a consequence I would be the cause or responsible for creating confusion in the society (*varṇa-sankara*) regarding one's duties. In this way I would be responsible for the destruction of the people because they are being moved away from their duties. When one is not performing his/her duties, he/she would indulge in the sense-objects. And sometimes for desired objects

they would cross the Dharma. If there is no dharma in the society it would lead to the destruction of the humanity. Then, I would be responsible for the destruction of the people (3.24).

Conclusion

Bhagavan Kṛṣṇa said, O sinless Arjuna, I have already explained that there are two classes of men who realize the Self. Some are inclined to understand Him by empirical, philosophical speculation, and others are inclined to know Him through devotional work. Such self-realized souls have nothing to gain or lose either in discharging or renouncing their duties. They do not need to depend on other beings to fulfill their self-interests. Shree Krishna expounds on karma yoga (the yoga of action) in this chapter. He

also explains to Arjuna that nobody can remain without action, even for a moment.

Furthermore, the importance of maintaining a healthy balance between work and rest, discipline, and self-control allows us to lead a more harmonious and fulfilling life. As we incorporate these timeless principles into our daily routine, we not only enhance our own well-being but also contribute positively to the world around us. Hence, essence of the Bhagavadgeeta's third chapter serve as a powerful guide for individuals seeking spiritual growth for a purposeful and meaningful life grounded in selfless action.

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About the Author



Swamini Sadvidyananda Sarswati is a disciple of Pujya Swami Dayananda Sarswati. She is a great exponent of Vedanta and Hindu scriptures. She teaches the great truth content in the Bhagavadgeeta and in the Upanishads in simple language that can be understood by a lay person, who has desire to know the truth of life. She is also scholar in Sanskrit and hence has direct access to original scriptures. She has studied Vedanta and Sanskrit for more than a decade with His Holiness Swami Dayananda Sarswati in the ancient Gurukulam system of learning. She is fluent in English, Gujarati and Hindi and wrote commentaries on Srimad Bhagavadgeeta 'Gita Home Study' in Gujarati.



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Veda Samskruti is an inherent intellectual property of Bhaarata dEsham. It is the basic duty and right of every citizen in Bhaarata dEsham to protect this Intellectual property. Indian Constitution and Law provides provision for protection and preservation of its culture, its monuments, architecture etc.

The Chaturvedas said to have 1131 shaakhaas right up to the time of Aadi Shankaraachaarya and thereafter during last more than ten centuries, many shaakhaas are out of practice due to various reasons and presently only seven shaakaas are in the practice of Guru shiShya parampara.

There is a need to continuously preserve these available shaakhaas which may likely to disappear in future due to various external forces acting in the country vigorously with the power of money and global politics. It is time for the intellectuals of Bharata dEsham to wake-up and work collectively to protect and preserve Veda Samskruti of Bharata dEsham, by empowering the Youth of Bharat dEsham, the future care takers of this great Indian Heritage , with suitable education of our correct history and culture.

The above background lead to formation of this Veda Samskruti Samiti which is registered under Societies acts of Government of Telangana, with Regd. No. 961/2016 by Sri A.H. Prabhakara Rao, who is the Founder and President of the Samiti.

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