



श्रीमद्भगवत् गीता
पुरुषोत्तम योगः
Chapter 15
Volume 1

श्री भगवान् उवाच

ऊर्ध्वमूलमधः शाखं अश्वत्थं प्राहुरव्ययं
छन्दांसि यस्य पर्णानि यस्तं वेद स वेदवित् ॥ 15-1

अधश्चोर्ध्वम् प्रसृतास्तस्य शाखाः गुणप्रवृद्धा विषय प्रवालाः ।
अधश्च मूलान्यनुसंततानि कर्मानुबन्धीनि मनुष्य लोके ॥ 15-2

न रूपमस्येह तथोपलभ्यते नान्तो न चादिर्न च संप्रतिष्ठा ।
अश्वत्थ मेनं सुविरूढ मूलं असङ्गशस्त्रेण दृढेन छित्वा ॥ 15-3

ततः पदं तत्परिमार्गितव्यं यस्मिन्नाता न निवर्तन्ति भूयः ।
तमेव चाद्यं पुरुषं प्रपद्ये यतः प्रवृत्तिः प्रसृता पुराणी ॥ 15-4

The 15th chapter of भगवत् गीता is entitled पुरुषोत्तम योग, which means the subject matter for this discourse is पुरुषोत्तम. पुरुषोत्तम is another pointer word to indicate सत् चित् आनन्द स्वरूप ब्रह्मन् - The परमेश्वर. Therefore, the subject matter for this discourse is परमेश्वर Itself, which means ईश्वर तत्त्व ज्ञान - knowledge of the truth about परमेश्वर Itself.

The teaching here is on ब्रह्मज्ञानं, ईश्वर ज्ञानं, आत्मज्ञानं - Self-knowledge in brief and in full.

Sri Krishna has been teaching this knowledge in various details, from chapter 2 onwards, in every chapter. The occasion for this discourse at this point arises from the context. At the end of last chapter, भगवान् said:

मां च यो अद्यभिचारेण भक्तियोगेन सेवते
स गुणान् समतीत्यैतान् ब्रह्म भूयाय कल्पते 14-26



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The one who serves Me, who worships Me, The परमेश्वर, through undistracted भक्ति योग, which means, the one who is committed to a life of पूर्ण ईश्वर भक्ति at all times, under all circumstances, that person naturally uplifts oneself from the hold of all the three गुणs, and becomes fit for gaining मोक्ष – gaining identity with परमेश्वर, already in oneself.

Since there can be no पूर्ण ईश्वर भक्ति without पूर्ण ईश्वर ज्ञानं, the pursuit of such undistracted भक्ति योग way of life must necessarily be rooted in पूर्ण ईश्वर ज्ञानं, in order for that ईश्वर भक्ति to mature into मोक्ष, जीव ब्रह्म ऐक्यं – total identity with The परमेश्वर already in oneself.

Therefore, having pointed out in the last chapter that भक्ति योग way of life is the means for one to uplift oneself from the hold of all the three गुणs, भगवान् teaches in this chapter That पूर्ण ईश्वर ज्ञानं, which is necessary for one's pursuit of भक्ति योग way of life, that can lead one ultimately to जीव ब्रह्म ऐक्यं – identity with The परमेश्वर already in oneself.

While the entire भगवत् गीता is of profound spiritual significance, this chapter 15 of the भगवत् गीता is an extraordinarily glorious chapter, for at least three reasons:

1. The teaching here is about जीव, जगत् and ईश्वर, and as such, this chapter epitomizes the essential content of the entire Vedanta Sastra , which means , the entire Gita Sastra, briefly, yet completely.
2. This chapter is on ईश्वर भक्ति and ईश्वर ज्ञानं, in ONE. Being so, a devotional recitation of this chapter with understanding and appreciation is both ईश्वर उपासन – worship of परमेश्वर and ईश्वर अनुस्मरणं – contemplation on परमेश्वर.
3. Such a devotional recitation of this chapter, with understanding and appreciation, and श्रद्धा in ईश्वर ज्ञानं, makes a person कृत कृत्यः, so declares भगवान् at the conclusion of this chapter.

कृत कृत्यः means you become one who has done, properly and fully, all that needs to be done, with respect to any prescribed or traditional, or duty-bound religious कर्मs in one's normal life style. This declaration by Sri Krishna should be a matter of tremendous



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spiritual comfort for all of us. The religious कर्मs commonly practiced in traditional Hindu families include Vedic rituals such as:

- ✓ नित्य कर्मs - Daily rituals such as सन्ध्या वन्दनं, वेद अध्ययनं, ईश्वर आराधनं, reading Ramayana, भगवत् गीता etc.
- ✓ श्रौत कर्मs - Vedic rituals such as specific Havans, prayers, etc. on specific occasions
- ✓ स्मार्त कर्मs - ritualistic worship of various देवताs on specific occasions
- ✓ पितृ कर्मs - such as श्राद्ध कर्मs for the departed ones, etc.

Every Hindu family without exception is traditionally duty-bound to perform at least one or more of the above household Vedic rituals, in some form and name, as an essential part of normal life style. The dutiful performance of any such religious कर्म, serves an extraordinarily important social purpose, namely:

- ✓ it gives meaning to life
- ✓ it gives a sense of identity, continuity, stability and solidarity, not only to the entire family, but also to the fabric of the entire community and the society as a whole
- ✓ at the individual level, it gives a sense of balance, mental peace and happiness, and a level of spiritual strength and fulfillment, to move on in life, with faith, hope and confidence.

That social purpose ever remains true. However, our personal circumstances of life have apparently changed drastically with time. As a result, in the world of today, we find that most of us have given up, most, or all of such duty-bound traditional household religious कर्मs, not only because of ignorance and indifference, but also because of the fact that in the changed circumstances of our lives it is practically impossible to do those religious कर्मs in a spiritually satisfying manner, in the environments in which we live.

Having consciously given up such traditional duty bound religious कर्मs, one may tend to live with feelings of guilt, indifference and/or a sense of spiritual degradation and its long-term consequences, such as total spiritual vacuum. In the light of भगवान्'s declaration in this chapter, it is clear that wherever we may happen to live, and whatever be our immediate external environment, there is absolutely no need for anyone to let oneself to entertain any such feelings of spiritual degradation.

Because, कृत कृत्यः means, whenever any duty-bound religious कर्म cannot be performed in the prescribed manner, or traditional manner, or satisfying manner, for any reason whatsoever, there is no need to despair or give up. All that one needs to do is the following:



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In lieu of any such कर्म, just read the पुरुषोत्तम योग of भगवत् गीता, with श्रद्धा and devotion, and some level of understanding and appreciation of its contents. That is enough. Because, when you do that, you have become कृत कृत्यः - you become one who has done, properly and fully, all that needs to be done, which means, with respect to the intended कर्म, you are both fulfilled and uplifted in yourself, by yourself, immediately.

Such is the glory and power of this chapter of the भगवत् गीता. With the above understanding, let us now proceed with the text.

श्री भगवान् उवाच

ऊर्ध्वमूलमधः शाखं अश्वत्थं प्राहुरव्ययं

छन्दांसि यस्य पर्णानि यस्तं वेद स वेदवित् ॥ 15-1

Sri Krishna opens this discourse with a description of the nature of existence, nature of this entire creation, using वृक्ष कल्पना - the imagery of a tree.

Just as the Taittiriya Upanishad describes the nature of an individual person using पक्षि कल्पना - the imagery of a bird, here भगवान् describes संसार - the vision of an individual person in this ever-changing worlds of thoughts, actions and experiences, through वृक्ष कल्पना - the imagery of a tree, more particularly the अश्वत्थ tree.

Now, what is the purpose of this वृक्ष कल्पना - tree imagery and why अश्वत्थ tree in particular? The object here is to make one understand, appreciate and absorb ईश्वर तत्त्व ज्ञानं - knowledge about the truth of परमेश्वर. This object can be accomplished, this knowledge can be realized, only if one cultivates चित्तेक वैराग्य बुद्धि and सर्व कर्म फल त्याग

चित्तेक means the ability to discriminate between सत्यं and मिथ्या - eternal existence and transient appearance, that which is never subject to change, and that which is ever subject to change, that which is ever independent and that which is ever dependent.

वैराग्य means the ability to cultivate dispassion towards all that is मिथ्या, and hold on to सत्यं at all times, under all circumstances, through undistracted भक्ति योग.



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सर्व कर्म फल त्याग means the ability to cultivate the attitude of offering all the results of all of one's actions to परमेश्वर Itself, as worship of परमेश्वर, and welcoming the fruits of all of one's actions as ईश्वर प्रसाद - as the very blessings from परमेश्वर. Only when one has all the above three abilities in full measure, can one absorb and recognize ईश्वर ज्ञानं in oneself, by oneself, otherwise ईश्वर ज्ञानं will remain only as book-knowledge.

The purpose of वृक्ष कल्पना - tree imagery used in this chapter to communicate ईश्वर ज्ञानं is only to help one cultivate विवेक बुद्धि, वैराग्य and सर्व कर्म फल त्याग बुद्धि, to enable one to understand, appreciate and absorb knowledge about जीव, जगत् and ईश्वर, unfolded in this and all the previous chapters.

Now about the अश्वत्थ tree. That the अश्वत्थ tree symbolizes संसार - the truth about nature of this phenomenal world of existence, and as such, the अश्वत्थ tree itself is a glorious manifestation of परमेश्वर, are concepts deep rooted in the Vedic culture. In Chapter 10, विभूति योग, Sri Krishna, as परमेश्वर identifies Himself with the tree: "अश्वत्थः सर्व वृक्षाणां - I am अश्वत्थ among all trees" says Sri Krishna (10-26).

अश्वत्थ tree belongs to the class of Banyan and Peepul trees which are looked upon with great reverence by people even today. Those who pray for progeny, worship these trees as परमेश्वर Itself. The twigs of these trees are used in all Vedic rituals.

The अश्वत्थ tree illustrates, peculiarly well, the nature of this phenomenal world of existence. These trees are long lasting and self-sustaining. They are very large, with plenty of branches and leaves with very small fruits, each fruit containing literally hundreds of very tiny seeds. That such a large tree can come out of such a tiny seed is itself awe-inspiring for a spiritually inclined mind and बुद्धि.

Though the root of the tree is not visible to the eyes, it is obvious that the root is there, and it is the root through which the tree is nourished and sustained, even while the tree, with all its leaves, flowers and fruits continuously appears, disappears and reappears in time.

Any knowledge of the tree, apart from its root, is therefore incomplete. So is the case with this संसार, this जगत् - this entire creation. Any knowledge of this संसार - this ever-changing creation, apart from its root cause, is therefore incomplete.



Thus, the tree imagery expounds the interrelation between the undifferentiated ब्रह्मन्, The परमेश्वर, and the differentiated जगत् – this entire creation, which leads one to the enquiry on the nature of ब्रह्मन्, which is the ultimate root cause for this संसार, all that we see, all that there is, in this entire creation.

That is how the tree imagery becomes an appropriate means for communication of ईश्वर तत्त्व ज्ञानं. That is also why our scriptures use this tree imagery to unfold the nature of ब्रह्मन्, which is beyond the reach of one's mind. For example, in the last section of कठोपनिषत्, Lord Yama opens His discourse unfolding the nature of ब्रह्मन् as follows. These are the words of Lord Yama:

ऊर्ध्वमूलः, अवाक् शाखः, एषः अश्चत्यः सनातनः तदेव शुक्रं, तत् ब्रह्म तदेव अमृतं उच्यते ।
तस्मिन् लोकाः श्रिताः सर्वे तदु नात्येति कश्चन । एतत् वै तत् ॥ (कठ 6-1)

We have already seen this verse in detail. Briefly, it says:

This संसार वृक्ष – this tree of existence, this entire creation along with its root, called अश्चत्य, is a perennial flow of existence as cause and effect without a beginning. It has its root above and branches below, meaning, the root cause, the ultimate cause of this entire creation is above one's comprehension, and its manifestations are below. That means, these manifestations are effects, and they are available for comprehension in the world of time and space. That ultimate root-cause for this entire creation is ब्रह्मन्. That ब्रह्मन् alone is pure, in the sense it is uncontaminated with anything else, because It is ONE without a second.

That ब्रह्मन् alone is सत्यं, Eternal and independent, and everything else is only transient appearance and ever dependent. That ब्रह्मन् alone is Immortal. In That ब्रह्मन् rest all लोकs, all worlds, all objects, and all experiences. Nothing in this entire creation can transcend that ब्रह्मन्. Nothing in this entire creation exists apart from that ब्रह्मन्. That ब्रह्मन् is all-inclusive. That ब्रह्मन् is indeed The आत्मा, The Self I, The परमेश्वर already in oneself, and indeed in every self.

That is the message of Lord Yama in the कठोपनिषत्. This message is already a matter of general familiarity to Arjuna by virtue of his own upbringing, education and culture. Therefore, Sri Krishna opens this discourse on ईश्वर तत्त्व ज्ञानं – knowledge of the truth



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about परमेश्वर, by calling Arjuna's attention to that familiar Upanishad message on the nature of जीव, जगत् and ईश्वर using the imagery of अश्वत्थ tree, as संसार वृक्ष – the tree of existence. Accordingly, भगवान् says

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ऊर्ध्वमूलमधः शाखं अश्वत्थं प्राहुरव्ययं

छन्दांसि यस्य पर्णानि यस्तं वेद स वेदवित् ॥ 15-1

अश्वत्थं प्राहुः - About the अश्वत्थ tree, about the संसार वृक्ष, about the tree of existence, about this entire creation along with its root, called the अश्वत्थ tree, as you know, our scriptures say that:

ऊर्ध्वमूलं - it has its roots above

अधः शाखं - its has its branches below, and

अव्ययं - it has the appearance of perennial existence. Further,

छन्दांसि यस्य (=तस्य) पर्णानि - the Vedas are its leaves

यः तं वेद - The one who understands, appreciates and recognizes that अश्वत्थ tree, that संसार वृक्ष, as pointed out in the scriptures

सः वेदवित् - that person is the knower of the content of all the Vedas in its entirety

This is simple word meaning of the first verse. We have a lot more to talk about this verse, which we will see next time.