



श्रीमद्भगवत् गीता
पुरुषोत्तम योगः
Chapter 15
Volume 2

श्री भगवान् उवाच

ऊर्ध्वमूलमधः शाखं अश्वत्थं प्राहुरव्ययं

छन्दांसि यस्य पर्णानि यस्तं वेद स वेदवित् ॥ 15-1

अधश्चो ध्वम् प्रसृतास्तस्य शाखाः गुणप्रवृद्धा विषय प्रवालाः ।

अधश्च मूलान्यनुसंततानि कर्मानुबन्धीनि मनुष्य लोके ॥ 15-2

न रूपमस्येह तयोपलभ्यते नान्तो न चादिर्न च संप्रतिष्ठा ।

अश्वत्थ मेनं सुविरूढ मूलं असङ्गशस्त्रेण दृढैर्न छित्वा ॥ 15-3

ततः पदं तत्परिमार्गितव्यं यस्मिन्नाता न निवर्तन्ति भूयः ।

तमेव चाद्यं पुरुषं प्रपद्ये यतः प्रवृत्तिः प्रसृता पुराणी ॥ 15-4

As we saw last time, Sri Krishna opens this discourse on ईश्वर तत्त्व ज्ञानं with a description of the nature of existence of this phenomenal world, using a वृक्ष कल्पना – the imagery of an अश्वत्थ tree, symbolizing the entire संसार – the ever-changing world of living beings in general, and the world of human beings in particular.

Literally, the word अश्वत्थ means "that which does not stay the same tomorrow", which is an apt description for this ever-changing world. The comparison of संसार to a tree like अश्वत्थ, is only for the purpose of unfolding the nature of existence manifested as this creation. Sri Krishna describes the nature of existence in terms of संसार वृक्ष, called अश्वत्थ as follows:

ऊर्ध्वमूलमधः शाखं अश्वत्थं प्राहुरव्ययं ।

छन्दांसि यस्य पर्णानि यस्तं वेद स वेदवित् ॥ 15-1

अश्वत्थं प्राहुः – About that संसार वृक्ष called अश्वत्थ, this is what the Upanishads say
अव्ययं ऊर्ध्वमूलम् अधःशाखं



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अव्ययं means माया शक्तिमत्, that which is a manifestation of the power of माया – the infinite inherent power of ब्रह्मन्. The immediate cause for this संसार – this created existence, is माया – the inherent power of ब्रह्मन्. Since माया is ब्रह्माश्रया माया, माया is totally dependent on ब्रह्मन्, the ultimate cause. The root cause for this संसार is ब्रह्मन्. ब्रह्मन् is the only independent entity in all existence.

Therefore, भगवान् says, that this संसार वृक्ष has ऊर्ध्वमूलम् and अधःशाखं. It has its roots above and branches below. The root is ब्रह्मन्, and the branches are all the ever-changing manifestations of माया. ऊर्ध्वम् means "above", and अधः means "below". In the language of the Upanishads, ऊर्ध्वम् and अधः have the same meanings as पर प्रकृति and अपर प्रकृति, which Sri Krishna talked about in Chapter 7.

Therefore, the ultimate cause for this संसार being ब्रह्मन्, That ब्रह्मन् is ऊर्ध्वम् – above, meaning अप्रमेयं – beyond one's comprehension. That अप्रमेयं ब्रह्मन् is ऊर्ध्वम् – above because of several reasons. For example,

कारणत्वात् ऊर्ध्वम् – ब्रह्मन् is the ultimate cause for everything in this creation. In terms of cause-effect relationships, the cause always precedes the effects, and hence It is above the effects.

सूक्ष्मत्वात् ऊर्ध्वम् – ब्रह्मन् is अति सूक्ष्मं – most subtle, more subtle than anything in this creation. It is even more subtle than time. Time is not an object and it is appreciated purely by the mind, but ब्रह्मन् is above the reach of mind also, and hence ब्रह्मन् is ऊर्ध्वम्.

नित्यत्वात् ऊर्ध्वम् – ब्रह्मन् is नित्यं सत्यं – Eternal, never subject to change. Everything else in this creation is मिथ्या – transient and ever subject to change. Therefore ब्रह्मन् is ऊर्ध्वम् – above and beyond everything that is transient and subject to change.

उत्कृष्टत्वात् ऊर्ध्वम् – ब्रह्मन् is the most exalted in all existence. There is nothing in this creation, which is beyond ब्रह्मन्. As भगवान् said earlier (7-7)

मत्तः परतरम् न अन्यत् किञ्चित् अस्ति धनंजय – Other than myself, The परमेश्वर, another cause whatsoever is not there. ब्रह्मन् is both the efficient cause as well as the material cause for all existence. Being so, ब्रह्मन् is the most exalted in all existence, and hence ऊर्ध्वम्. On the other hand,



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अधःशाखं - the संसार वृक्ष has its branches below, because they are the effects of माया, they are the products of the inherent power of ब्रह्मन्, and they are, what Sri Krishna described earlier as अपर प्रकृति (7-4)

भूमिरापोऽनलो वायुः खं मनो बुद्धिरेव च ।
अहंकार इतीयं मे, भिन्ना प्रकृतिरष्टधा ॥

The पञ्च महाबभूतs, mind, बुद्धि and अहंकार - ego, all in their subtle and grossified states of existence, giving rise to, in the words of Taittiriya Upanishad,

सच्च त्यच्चाभवत् । निरुक्तं चानिरुक्तं च ।
निलयनं चानिलयं च । विज्ञानं चा विज्ञानं च ।
सत्यं चानृतं च सत्यं अभवत् यदिदं किंच । (तै . 2 - 6)

- ◇ all which are visible and invisible
- ◇ gross and subtle, definable and indefinable
- ◇ manifest and unmanifest, tangible and intangible
- ◇ sentient and insentient , knowledge and ignorance
- ◇ truth and falsehood
- ◇ whatever else there are in this universe, without exception

All of them constitute the branches for this संसार वृक्ष, bound by time and space, and they are the products of माया. Being so, they are अधः - "below" relative to ब्रह्मन्, which is ऊर्ध्वम् - "above", the ultimate cause for all of them.

अश्वत्थ tree belongs to the class of Banyan trees and Peepul trees which are generally very huge trees, with plenty of foliage, innumerable branches and sub-branches extending far and wide, in all directions. Referring to such an अश्वत्थ tree, भगवान् says:

छन्दांसि यस्य पर्णानि - whose leaves are the Vedas. The leaves of the संसार वृक्ष, are compared to the Vedas. Just as the leaves serve to protect and sustain the अश्वत्थ tree, so also the Vedas serve to protect and sustain this संसार, keeping the संसार going eternally. How?

The life of every person in this संसार is only one of कर्म s of various kinds. The Vedas - the कर्मकाण्ड of the Vedas, provide the knowledge of the various means and ends with respect to all कर्मs, whether they are materialistic or spiritual.



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Through such knowledge, or lack of such knowledge, or indifference to such knowledge, one does पुण्य कर्मs and पापकर्मs of various kinds, which form the basis for one's repeated births in this संसार, thus keeping the संसार going as a perennial flow of existence.

यः तं वेद - The person who knows, who understands and recognizes the nature of अश्वत्थ tree - the संसार वृक्ष, the tree of existence, along with its root, because knowledge of अश्वत्थ tree without the knowledge of its root is incomplete and inadequate knowledge. Therefore, the one who recognizes the nature of this मायामय संसार, this creation born of माया, along with its root cause, namely ब्रह्मन्.

सः वेदवित् - that person is a वेदवित् one who has understood and recognized समूल संसार वृक्ष ज्ञानं - the knowledge of this entire creation along with its root cause, which means that person has gained पूर्ण ईश्वर ज्ञानं - ब्रह्म ज्ञानं which again means if one wants to gain पूर्ण ईश्वर ज्ञानं, it is absolutely important for that person to understand, appreciate, realize and recognize the full import of this संसार वृक्ष कल्पना - this tree imagery for this संसार, this ever-changing creation of forms, names and experiences.

Continuing the description of the अश्वत्थ tree in this संसार वृक्ष कल्पना, the tree imagery for this creation, भगवान् says:

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

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तस्य (वृक्षस्य) शाखाः अधः च ऊर्ध्वम् च प्रसृताः - The branches of the अश्वत्थ tree प्रसृताः meaning प्रगताः - they grow all over in all parts of the tree, extending in all directions, some of them growing downward (अधः च) and some of them growing upwards (ऊर्ध्वम् च). In terms of this संसार - this physical world, these branches represent the various उपाधिs - the different kinds of शरीर s - the body vehicles, of all the living beings in this creation.

Every शरीर - every physical body, is a unique expression of one's कर्मफलs - the result of one's past actions and experiences. The कर्मफलs are varied and infinite, and so are the शरीरs - the body-vehicles of all living beings in this creation. The branches of the



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अश्चत्य tree growing downwards, in different parts of the tree, in different forms and in different directions, represent the different शरीरs of the living beings in the human kingdom, including animals, plants, etc.

Likewise, the branches of the अश्चत्य tree growing upwards, in different parts of the tree, in different forms and in different directions represent the different body vehicles of the multitude of different celestial beings, such as गन्धर्वs, देवs, इन्द्र, बृहस्पति, etc. all the way up to ब्रह्माजी - the creator, who are still within this संसार - this world of created existence.

In the Taittiriya Upanishad, we saw a description of the different gradations among the various celestial beings in terms of their ability to appreciate, experience and enjoy higher and higher levels of आनन्द - happiness, depending on their spiritual maturity, and hence, superiority with respect to श्रोत्रियत्वं and अकामहत्वं. श्रोत्रियत्वं means realized and recognized ब्रह्मज्ञानं - Self-knowledge gained from the Upanishads, together with one's every day lifestyle in keeping with such knowledge; and अकामहत्वं means one's ability to overcome the destructive powers of one's own राग द्वेष forces, forces of likes and dislikes.

Just as the different upward growing branches of the अश्चत्य tree represent the शरीरs of different gradations of celestial beings, so also, the different downward growing branches of the अश्चत्य tree represent the शरीरs of different gradations of human beings in the human kingdom in this creation. Further,

गुणप्रवृद्धा विषय प्रचालाः means गुणप्रवृद्धाः शाखाः विषय प्रचालाः शाखाः. Now, how do the branches of the अश्चत्य tree get their strength to grow all over the tree, extending in all directions?

गुणप्रवृद्धाः शाखाः - गुणप्रवृद्धाः, प्रकृति गुणैः प्रवृद्धाः, स्थूलीकृता - The branches of the tree are nourished, made stout, big and strong, each by its own natural sap, the vital juice which constitutes the प्रकृति गुणs for the tree. Thus the branches of the अश्चत्य tree, both those growing upwards and those growing downwards, are nourished by their own saps. So is the case with respect to all living beings also in this creation.

Whether the living beings in this creation are celestial or those in the human kingdom, all of them are nourished by their own प्रकृति गुणs - सत्व, रजस्, तमस् गुणs. Because there are varieties of gradations in their गुणs, there are varieties in their कर्मs, and consequently, there are varieties in their शरीरs - body vehicles. Such varieties of शरीरs



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keep coming into this संसार - this ever-changing world, all the time, just as new branches keep sprouting forth from the अश्चत्य tree all the time.

How do the new branches keep sprouting from the अश्चत्य tree all the time?

विषय प्रवालाः शाखाः - प्रवालाः means the new shoots and baby leaves which spring up, and grow in any plant.

Therefore विषय प्रवालाः शाखाः means in the case of अश्चत्य tree, the sources for the new branches are the shoots and new leaves which spring up from the nodular buds in the tree, and in the case of human beings, their nodular buds are विषयाः - the शब्द, स्पर्श रूप, रस, गन्ध विषयाः - all the sense objects and sense experiences. These sense objects and the sense experiences give rise to desires and कर्म's of various kinds, which in turn give rise to birth of a variety of new beings in this संसार. That is how this संसार keeps going endlessly.

Thus the root cause for this संसार has already been pointed out as ऊर्ध्वमूलं - the सत् चित् आनन्द स्वरूप ब्रह्मन् with its inherent infinite power, the माया.

Aside from That root cause, and underneath that root cause, this संसार itself gives rise to later-born secondary roots, secondary causes, which contribute to its continued existence. Especially, in the world of human beings, every effect has a cause, and this cause itself is the effect of some other cause. Such causes are the later-born secondary causes, and they are never-ending. These secondary causes contribute to the continued existence of this मनुष्य लोक - the world of human beings.

For the संसार वृक्ष, the अश्चत्य tree, these secondary causes are:

अधः च मूलानि अनुसंततानि - अधः च मूलानि - the roots coming down from branches, and growing downward

अनुसंततानि - they entrench themselves into the earth naturally, and further strengthen the tree. This kind of later-born secondary roots coming down from the branches is commonly seen in Banyan trees. Thus, the tree gives rise to branches, and the branches themselves later give rise to secondary roots, which entrench themselves into the earth and strengthen the tree further, enabling it to develop new branches, which in turn give rise to new secondary roots, etc. thus keeping the tree perennially going for ever. So is the case in this संसार also.



कर्मानुबन्धीनि मनुष्य लोके

मनुष्य लोके - particularly in the world of human beings,

कर्म अनुबन्धीनि - the secondary roots are in the form of कर्म फल जनित वासनाः - they are in the form of वासनाs, lingering smells, lingering impressions, manifested as likes and dislikes born of one's own कर्म फलs - experiences of past actions. These वासनाs are of several kinds, such as

विषय वासनाs - likes and dislikes for certain kinds of sense objects and sense experiences

देह वासनाs - likes and dislikes for certain kinds of physical bodies

शास्त्र वासनाs - likes and dislikes for certain kinds of knowledge, etc.

Such वासनाs are अनुसंततानि - they extend to all aspects of human life. Like the hanging roots, born later from the branches of the अश्वत्थ tree, these वासनाs in the world of human beings become the later-born secondary causes for the pursuit of धर्म and अधर्म, पुण्य कर्मs and पाप कर्मs of various kinds, which are binding in nature, which means that these वासनाs bind the people to their own कर्मs and कर्मफलs. Thus these वासनाs continuously create new bondages, which in turn create new कर्मs and कर्मफलs, and this cycle of वासना बन्ध कर्म - new वासना - new bondage and new कर्म, goes on and on forever, which keeps this मनुष्य लोक in this संसार going for ever.

This is the tree imagery of the nature of existence of this phenomenal world of human beings, this संसार in this creation. From the foregoing description of this संसार वृक्ष, it seems as though this संसार is so firmly rooted in existence, and that those who are already within this संसार are locked into it forever. If so, how can anyone uplift oneself from the bondages of this संसार, and gain मोक्ष, gain freedom from the hold of this माया-created transient world of existence?

Sri Krishna talks about it in the next two verses, which we will see next time.