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ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

श्रीमद्भगवत् गीता मोक्षसंन्यासयोगः **Chapter 18** Volume 1

अर्जुन उवाच

संन्यासस्य महाबाहो तत्त्वमिच्छामि वेदितुम् ।
त्यागस्य च हृषीकेश पृथक् केशिनिषूदन ॥ 1

श्री भगवान् उवाच

काम्यानां कर्मणां न्यासं संन्यासं कवयो विदुः ।
सर्वकर्मफलत्यागं प्राहुस्त्यागं विचक्षणाः ॥ 2

This last chapter of भगवत् गीता is entitled मोक्षसंन्यासयोग; मोक्ष- Total Fulfillment in life through संन्यास- the attitude of renunciation. This chapter integrates all that has been said in the entire Gita Sastra - indeed the entire Veda-Vedanta Sastra. Consequently, Sri Krishna's discourse in this chapter is highly focused. The focus here is naturally on कर्म, helpful for gaining मोक्ष.

Even though everybody has an apparent sense of familiarity with कर्म, there is seldom any firmness in that familiarity, even with respect to commonly accepted codes of conduct. This lack of firmness arises from the fact that the attitudes with respect to any कर्म are different for different people, and even for the same person, they change from time to time; and that is because the value-structure and the objective of life governing one's actions are different for different people; and even for the same person, they too can change from time to time.

From the teachings of the भगवत् गीता and the Upanishads, it is clear that for every human being:



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- ✚ there is only one ultimate objective in life, and that is to gain मोक्ष
- ✚ there is only one, never-changing attitude towards all कर्मs, and that is पूर्ण श्रद्धा, together with ईश्वर अर्पण बुद्धि - total dedication to परमेश्वर, and
- ✚ there is only one set of values governing all कर्म, and those are values governed totally by सत्त्व गुणs

All legitimate worldly objectives are only intermediate stations in one's सन् मार्ग - in one's endeavour to reach, to gain मोक्ष - Total Liberation, Total Fulfillment, Absolute Happiness and Peace in this very life itself. With परमेश्वर-consciousness at all times, together with पूर्ण श्रद्धा and ईश्वर अर्पण बुद्धि with respect to every कर्म that one does, governed by a value structure rooted in सत्त्व गुण, one can certainly gain not only every legitimate worldly objective, but also, ultimately, मोक्ष Itself. The knowledge about how that can be accomplished through ईश्वरज्ञानं and कर्मयोग बुद्धि, has already been pointed out extensively throughout all previous chapters. In this chapter, भगवान् calls attention to that knowledge again in an extraordinary manner, for the purpose of imparting further clarity and firmness to that knowledge.

Let us understand clearly the human situation as it is right now. All that everyone has is one's own body-mind-intellect complex, blessed with the ability to do कर्मs of various kinds. All life is only one of कर्म. The कर्म that one does depends on one's गुण, and the गुण that one has depends on the कर्म that one has been doing all along. Therefore, neither the कर्म, nor the गुण is truly independent. Then what is independent?

I am independent. You are independent. Every person is really independent. Every person is really independent of one's own कर्म and one's own गुण, naturally. Still,



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every one feels bound by one's own कर्म and one's own गुण. Why? Because of one's own ignorance about the true nature of oneself, and consequently, because of one's own, often misdirected कर्मs, arising from, often ill-cultivated गुणs.

Then, how can one liberate oneself from the bondages with one's own कर्म and गुण? Liberation is possible only through Self-knowledge - आत्मज्ञानं, realized and recognized through one's own properly directed कर्म, and diligently cultivated गुण, which means कर्मयोग. How to do that has been the subject matter of Sri Krishna's teachings in all previous chapters, and that knowledge is re-stated and reinforced again in this final chapter. Every verse in this chapter is hence very important, in spite of its apparent appearance as a repetition of what has already been told. If something is repeated, it is because it needs repetition, again and again, until the message takes roots in one's बुद्धि.

Therefore, one must make a special effort to understand what भगवन् tells in each verse. It is a matter of knowledge, knowledge which is never subject to change, knowledge which should guide every person every day of one's life.

At the end of the last chapter, it becomes clear to Arjuna that Sri Krishna is now approaching the concluding part of His उपदेश, and this is perhaps his last chance to bring up again the subject of संन्यास, which has been lingering in his mind, hoping perhaps that he might still be able to get away from this war-situation that he is facing now, by choosing to take up the popular life style of संन्यास with the blessings of Sri Krishna. Therefore, Arjuna now brings up the topic of संन्यास in a simple-looking manner and seeks a response from Sri Krishna. This is how this chapter opens:

अर्जुन उवाच

संन्यासस्य महाबाहो तत्त्वमिच्छामि वेदितुम् ।

त्यागस्य च हृषीकेश पृथक्केशिनिषूदन ॥

1



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Addressing Sri Krishna as महाबाहो, हृषीकेश and केशिनिषूदन, Arjuna says:

O! Krishna

वेदितुम् इच्छामि - I want to know. What?

संन्यासस्य तत्त्वं - the essential meaning of the word संन्यास, and also

त्यागस्य च तत्त्वं - the essential meaning of the word त्याग

पृथक् - separately, one distinct from the other

What exactly are the meanings of the words संन्यास and त्याग? Do they really have distinctly different meanings? If so, what is the difference? That is Arjuna's question. This simple looking question from Arjuna at this point is of profound significance. Both the words संन्यास and त्याग are concerned with कर्म and मोक्ष, which is precisely the subject matter of Sri Krishna's discourse in this chapter.

Arjuna's question in itself is an enquiry on the very essence of the entire Gita Sastra. It is an enquiry on the surest means for achieving the highest पुरुषार्थ - the highest goal of life, namely मोक्ष. That enquiry, as we know now, has led to the following unequivocal teaching of extraordinary significance to all humanity from Sri Krishna, The परमेश्वर Itself.

मन्मना भव मद्भक्तो मद्याजी मां नमस्कुरु
मां एव एष्यसि सत्यं ते प्रतिजाने प्रियोऽसि मे ॥
सर्वधर्मान् परित्यज्य मां एकं शरणं ब्रज ।
अहं त्वा सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः ॥

That is the substance of the entire teachings of the भगवत् गीता. We will see these verses in detail a little later when we get to them. Aside from the above significance, Arjuna has an obvious reason for his question about the precise meaning of the words संन्यास and त्याग.



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Literally speaking, **संन्यास** and **त्याग** have the same meaning, namely "giving up" or renunciation. Therefore **संन्यास** is **त्याग** - "giving up". With respect to "giving up" itself, there is no difference. But there is a difference with respect to who gives up, what is given up, and the significance of such giving up with respect to **मोक्ष**.

We will talk about this difference, in details next time. For now, **संन्यास** usually refers to what is given up by one who lives a life-style of ordinary **संन्यासी**s in society, whereas **त्याग** refers to what is given up by a **कर्मयोगी**.

संन्यासीs and **कर्मयोगी**s are two mutually distinct classes of people in society. For example, an ordinary **संन्यासी** has no specific worldly duties whatsoever, whereas a **कर्मयोगी** has only worldly duties and nothing else.

Consequently, the life-style of an ordinary **संन्यासी** is distinctly different from that of a **कर्मयोगी**. But Arjuna feels that Sri Krishna does not distinctly differentiate between a **संन्यासी** and a **कर्मयोगी**, because **भगवान्** not only uses the words **संन्यास** and **त्याग** often in the same sense, but also praises **संन्यासी** and **कर्मयोगी** equally with reference to **मोक्ष**.

Let us briefly recall the words of Sri Krishna in Chapter 5, addressed to Arjuna:

**संन्यासः कर्मयोगश्च निश्चेयसकरो उभो
तयोस्तु कर्मसंन्यासात् कर्मयोगो विशिष्यते ॥ 5 - 2**

Both **संन्यास** and **कर्मयोग** can lead to **मोक्ष**, but of these two ways of life, for you Arjuna, **कर्मयोग** is far superior to **कर्मसंन्यास** as a means for gaining **मोक्ष**. As a matter of fact



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सांख्ययोगो पृथक् बालाः प्रवदन्ति न पण्डिताः

एकं अपि आस्थितः सम्यक् उभयोः विन्दते फलम् ॥ 5-4

It is childish to talk about कर्मसंन्यास and कर्मयोग as being different from each other. The person who is very well established in either one of them, enjoys the fruit of both, realizes the joy of both, because

यत् सांख्येः प्राप्यते स्थानं तत् योगेरपि गम्यते

एकं सांख्यं च योगं च यः पश्यति सः पश्यति ॥ 5-5

The destination ultimately reached by कर्मसंन्यासीs is also reached ultimately by कर्मयोगीs. Therefore, the one who sees कर्मसंन्यास and कर्मयोग as ONE, that person alone understands the true meaning of कर्मसंन्यास and कर्मयोग. (In conversational style, संन्यास always refers to only कर्मसंन्यास).

From these words of Sri Krishna, Arjuna feels this way: If both संन्यास and कर्मयोग are equally effective means for gaining मोक्ष, then why should I not follow संन्यास instead of कर्मयोग? Why does भगवान् insist that only कर्मयोग is appropriate for me? If कर्मयोग is really superior to संन्यास, then why talk about संन्यास at all?

These are the questions which have been lingering in the mind of Arjuna, in spite of the last 16 chapters of Gita teachings. By asking Sri Krishna the precise meanings for the words संन्यास and त्याग, Arjuna is probably hoping that Sri Krishna might say that both संन्यास and त्याग essentially mean the same thing, and that one can choose either संन्यास or कर्मयोग way of life as the means for gaining मोक्ष, which would give him an opportunity to choose the life style of संन्यास with Sri Krishna's blessings, and thus release him from the war situation that he is in, just for now.



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No, that is not what is going to happen. भगवान् does not recommend the ordinary traditional संन्यास way of life for Arjuna, simply because Arjuna's अन्तःकरण - mind and बुद्धि, is not yet ready for such a way of life.

The ordinary traditional संन्यास way of life is only an expression of विवेक वैराग्य बुद्धि of a मुमुक्षु - one who wants to gain ईश्वरज्ञानं through a life of self-discipline and total commitment to the pursuit of ब्रह्मविद्या. The purpose of such संन्यास way of life is only to gain the ultimate disposition of Absolute संन्यास.

Absolute संन्यास is not कर्म संन्यास or ordinary Sanyasa. Absolute संन्यास is not a matter of one's choice, nor is it a matter of one's sheer will. Absolute संन्यास is not a matter of simply putting on some form of external appearance, or simply withdrawing oneself from worldly duties, or simply a matter of following certain personal disciplines in some monastic order. Absolute संन्यास is a matter of growing up. It is a matter of self-evolution. It is a matter of Self-knowledge - आत्मज्ञानं. It is ultimately a matter of realization and recognition of ब्रह्मज्ञानं, ईश्वरज्ञानं, आत्मज्ञानं - Self-knowledge.

One has to grow up to gain the natural disposition of Absolute संन्यास. That disposition is the total absence of कर्तृत्व भाव - the sense of doership. When the sense of doership completely disappears from one's अन्तःकरण - mind and बुद्धि, one is fully established in oneself, The Universal Self in oneself, the प्रत्यग आत्मा - one's own Innermost Consciousness. In that state of identity with the Universal Self in oneself, whatever that one does, does not and cannot bind the person. One is then totally liberated from the bondages of one's own कर्म and गुण. One is then free.

Arjuna is still far from reaching that state of mental disposition. Arjuna is still, very much, a man of worldly actions. Arjuna's अन्तःकरण - mind and बुद्धि, has not yet evolved far



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enough to easily reach the disposition of Absolute **संन्यास** through the ordinary traditional **संन्यास** way of life, the **कर्म संन्यास** way of life. In fact, one cannot gain that disposition without first being a **कर्मयोगी**. **भगवान्** has already said that in Chapter 5 itself.

संन्यासस्तु महाबाहो दुःखं आसुं अयोगतः ।
योगयुक्तो मुनिर्ब्रह्म न चिरेण अधिगच्छति ॥

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Without prior **कर्मयोग**, it is extremely difficult for anyone to gain the disposition of ordinary **संन्यास**. On the other hand, the one who is well established in **कर्मयोग** gains ultimately the disposition of Absolute **संन्यास**, and hence **मोक्ष**, naturally and far more quickly. That is why Sri Krishna recommends only **कर्मयोग** for Arjuna.

Arjuna's question on **संन्यास** and **त्याग** only reveals that he has not yet understood the full meanings of both **संन्यास** and **कर्मयोग**. Naturally therefore, Sri Krishna gives a complete and fulfilling answer to Arjuna's question, which dispels Arjuna's doubts and misunderstandings on the subject, and resets Arjuna's **अन्तःकरण** - mind and **बुद्धि** firmly in **सन् मार्ग** - in the direction of **मोक्ष**, which is the purpose of the entire **गीतोपदेश** - Gita Teachings.

With this background, let us now proceed to Sri Krishna's discourse in this chapter.

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काम्यानां कर्मणां न्यासं संन्यासं कवयो विदुः ।
सर्वकर्मफलत्यागं प्राहुस्त्यागं विचक्षणाः ॥

2



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Responding to Arjuna's question - what exactly are the meanings of the words **संन्यास** and **त्याग**, **भगवान्** says:

कवयः विदुः - the wise people know, and

विचक्षणाः प्राहुः - those who are able to see clearly everything as it is, they say, which means, it is well-understood among wise people that

काम्यानां कर्मणां न्यासं संन्यासं

न्यासं - means renunciation, **त्याग**. Renunciation of all **काम्य कर्म**s, **कर्म**s prompted by worldly desires of various kinds, such as health, wealth, name, fame, power, **पुण्य**, **पाप**, heaven, etc. - renunciation of all such **काम्य कर्म**s is called **संन्यास**.

On the other hand, **सर्वकर्मफलत्यागं** is **त्यागं** - Renunciation of all fruits of actions, renunciation of fruits of all actions is called **त्याग**. Thus **त्याग** involves giving up **कर्मफल**, and **संन्यास** involves giving up **कर्म** itself. But giving up **कर्म**, in effect involves also giving up **कर्मफल**. When that is the case, what is the difference between **त्याग** and **संन्यास**? Is there a difference?

That we will see next time.