



ब्रह्मविद्या Brahma Vidya

श्रीमद्भगवत् गीता मोक्षसंन्यासयोगः Chapter 18 Volume 9

न तदस्ति पृथिव्यां वा दिवि देवेषु वा पुनः ।
सत्त्वं प्रकृतिर्जैर्मुक्तं यदेभिः स्यात् त्रिभिर्गुणैः ॥ 18 - 40

ब्राह्मणक्षत्रियविशां शूद्राणां च परंतप ।
कर्माणि प्रविभक्तानि स्वभावप्रभवेर्गुणैः ॥ 18 - 41

शमो दमःतपः शौचं क्षान्तिः आर्जवमेव च ।
ज्ञानं विज्ञानं आस्तिक्यं ब्रह्मकर्म स्वभावजम् ॥ 18 - 42

शौर्यं तेजो धृतिः दाक्ष्यं युद्धे चाप्यपलायनम् ।
दानं ईश्वरभावश्च क्षात्रं कर्म स्वभावजम् ॥ 18 - 43

कृषि गोरक्ष्यवाणिज्यं वेश्य कर्म स्वभावजम् ।
परिचर्यात्मकं कर्म शूद्रस्यापि स्वभावजम् ॥ 18 - 44

As we have seen already in Chapter 14, the very nature of **माया** - the inherent infinite power of **परमेश्वर**, is the three-fold **गुण**s, namely the **सत्त्व**, **रजस्** and **तमस्** **गुण**s. While every **कर्म** is governed by the compositions of one's **गुण**s, the **गुण** s themselves cannot be seen. Only their manifestations in one's **कर्म** can be seen.

Sri Krishna has been talking extensively about the manifestations of the three **गुण**s in various aspects of **कर्म** including



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श्रद्धा, आहार, यज्ञ, तपस्, दानं, त्याग, ज्ञानं, कर्म, कर्ता, बुद्धि and सुखं

All this is definite and clear knowledge on the manifestations of गुण in one's कर्मs. With this knowledge, one can recognize the texture, the quality of one's own गुण at any particular time, and one can understand oneself better, and do whatever needs to be done to uplift oneself to the predominance of सत्त्वगुण in one's अन्तःकरण - mind and बुद्धि. That is the purpose of all this discussion on गुण and कर्म. Bringing this discussion to a close, भगवान् says:

न तदस्ति पृथिव्यां वा दिवि देवेषु वा पुनः ।
सत्त्वं प्रकृतिजेर्मुक्तं यदेभिः स्यात् त्रिभिर्गुणैः ॥

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यत् सत्त्वं स्यात् - Whatever is existent, or simply, whatever exists

पृथिव्यां वा दिवि देवेषु वा पुनः - either on this earth or in the celestial world of देवs, the अधिष्ठान देवताs - the celestial world of presiding deities like इन्द्र, वायु, वरुण, अग्नि, etc., which means, whatever exists in this entire world of beings in this entire creation

एभिः प्रकृतिजैः त्रिभिः गुणैः मुक्तं - that which is free from the hold of these three गुणs born of प्रकृति, the माया, the inherent infinite power of परमेश्वर

तत् न अस्ति - it is not there

That means, there is nothing in this creation which is free from the hold of the three गुणs and these three गुणs always manifest themselves in every action of every being.

Therefore, by recognizing these three गुणs in one's own actions, one understands the composition of one's own गुण at any given time, and that knowledge gives an



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opportunity for every person to help oneself in uplifting oneself from तमस् and रजस्, which are obstructions to one's spiritual progress, and, in cultivating सत्त्वगुण component in oneself, which is मोक्षसाधनं - the means helpful for gaining मोक्ष - Total Fulfillment in life.

Thus concluding this discussion on how the three गुणs manifest themselves in one's कर्मs, Sri Krishna now moves on to the next and the final topic of गीतोपदेश, namely the following: If everyone is under the hold of one's गुणs, and if every कर्म is only a manifestation of one's गुणs, how can one gain freedom from कर्म, and gain मोक्ष?

One is born with गुणs, and there is nothing one can do about it. One does कर्म naturally, from the very moment of one's birth. One does not see any गुण. One can only do कर्म, and one cannot remain without doing कर्म even for a moment. Even as a जीवनहेतु - as a means of maintaining oneself while living, one has to do some कर्म in the society in which one lives. When that is the case, how can one be doing कर्म all the time, and at the same time gain freedom from कर्म itself, to gain मोक्ष?

The answer to this question is the topic of discussion in the next 26 extraordinary verses. Even though the answer to this question should be evident from all that भगवान् has said already up till now, still this question keeps coming in one's mind again and again in one form or another. Therefore, in this concluding section of गीतोपदेश, भगवान् tells again, the means for gaining freedom from कर्म, by properly utilizing the कर्म itself for gaining that freedom, and ultimately, the means for gaining मोक्ष itself. This concluding section of गीतोपदेश is all-important in भगवत् गीता. Therefore, let us try to understand the message here properly, clearly and completely.



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भगवान् opens the topic by calling attention to the कर्मs people naturally do as a matter of social duty in the society that prevailed at that time, in the times of Arjuna, which, as we all know, is over 5000 years ago. Referring to that society, भगवान् says:

ब्राह्मणक्षत्रियविशां शूद्राणां च परंतप ।

कर्माणि प्रविभक्तानि स्वभावप्रभवेर्गुणेः ॥

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Here भगवान् is talking about वर्णधर्मs - the कर्मs of the four-fold duty based occupational groups of people, constituting the entire Vedic society that existed in India at the time of Arjuna under the names ब्राह्मणs, क्षत्रियs, वैश्यs, and शूद्रs.

At this point it must be made absolutely clear that we are not talking here about the present-day erroneous and self-destructive notions about the so-called caste divisions in our society. Our object here is only to understand clearly and properly what the Gita says about वर्णधर्मs - natural occupational duties of ब्राह्मणs, क्षत्रियs, वैश्यs and शूद्रs in the entire Vedic society, and how they help both the individual and the society as a whole, to progress both materially as well as spiritually. Therefore, let us set aside, for the time being, our own individual opinions on वर्णधर्मs in Vedic society, and listen to what Sri Krishna says on the subject. भगवान् tells here:

परंतप - O! Arjuna

ब्राह्मणक्षत्रियविशां शूद्राणां च कर्माणि - the कर्मs to be done, the duties to be performed by the ब्राह्मणs, क्षत्रियs, वैश्यs and शूद्रs in the society

प्रविभक्तानि - are mutually and distinctly divided among individuals, for the welfare of both the individual as well as the society as a whole, without creating conflicts and confusion in the society.

How are they divided? Not arbitrarily, not forcefully, not based on parentage, please understand this, not based on parentage, but by



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स्वभावप्रभवेः गुणैः - by one's own स्वभाव गुणs - by the peculiar composite texture, quality of one's own natural गुण combinations - सत्त्व-रजस्-तमस् गुण combinations, स्वभाव गुणs at any given time, which means

- ✿ if you naturally have the स्वभाव fit for ब्राह्मण कर्म, you do ब्राह्मण कर्म. Likewise
- ✿ if you naturally have the स्वभाव fit for क्षत्रिय कर्म, you do क्षत्रिय कर्म
- ✿ if you naturally have the स्वभाव fit for वैश्य कर्म, you do वैश्य कर्म; and
- ✿ if you naturally have the स्वभाव fit for शूद्र कर्म, you do शूद्र कर्म.

That is वर्णधर्म. Now, who created वर्णधर्म? भगवान् says in Chapter 4
चातुर्वर्ण्यं मया शृष्टं गुणकर्म विभागशः 4 - 13

The four वर्णs - the four duty based occupational groups of people called ब्राह्मणs, क्षत्रियs, वैश्यs and शूद्रs in the society were created by Me, The परमेश्वर, based on गुण विभाग and कर्म विभाग - the natural differences in the गुणs of the individuals, and also the natural differences in the various कर्मs to be done in the society for the continued welfare and progress of both the individual and the society as a whole.

When Sri Krishna says that "the four वर्णs in human society were created by Me - The परमेश्वर", it means that the existence of the four वर्णs in human society is the Eternal ORDER natural to human society. Whether or not one recognizes, understands, and appreciates this natural order, this order does exist in every human society, because it is the very Law of Nature. Now, what is this Law of Nature with respect to गुण विभाग - differences in the गुण of the individuals, and कर्म विभाग - differences in the various कर्मs to be done in the society?



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In Chapter 14, Sri Krishna talked about गुण विभाग - the four-fold order with respect to the combinations of सत्त्व, रजस्, and तमस् गुणs, which occur naturally in the disposition of अन्तःकरण - mind and बुद्धि of human beings. As we may recall, this four-fold गुण विभाग is:

रजः तमश्च अभिभूय सत्त्वं भवति भारत ।

रजः सत्त्वं तमश्चैव तमः सत्त्वं रजस्तथा ॥ 14 - 10

The four-fold order in गुण विभाग is the following:

The first order is the सत्त्व-रजस्-तमस् sequential combination, which means the predominance of सत्त्व गुण, primarily associated with रजस् गुण, and very little associated with तमस् गुण. This order of गुणविभाग is the most appropriate for ब्राह्मण कर्म in society.

The second order is the रजस्-सत्त्व-तमस् sequential combination, which means the predominance of रजस् गुण, primarily associated with सत्त्व गुण and very little associated with तमस् गुण. This order of गुणविभाग is most appropriate for क्षत्रिय कर्म in society.

The third order is the रजस्-तमस्-सत्त्व sequential combination, which means the predominance of रजस् गुण but primarily associated with तमस् गुण and very little associated with सत्त्व गुण. This order of गुणविभाग is most appropriate for वैश्य कर्म in society; and finally



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The fourth order is the तमस्-रजस्-सत्त्व sequential combination, which means the pre-dominance of तमस् गुण, primarily associated with रजस् गुण and very little associated with सत्त्व गुण. This order of गुणविभाग is most appropriate for शूद्र कर्म in society.

This four-fold order of गुणविभाग, the four-fold order of sequential combinations of the three गुणs is both natural and universal. It has no particular name, because, by itself, it is not visible for recognition. Sri Krishna talks about कर्मविभाग - the four-fold distinctions in वर्णकर्मs in society in the next few verses, which we will see shortly. Before that, we must understand how one gets the गुण - the particular combination of the three गुणs that one has at any given time.

In our present verse, भगवान् says that one gets one's गुण from one's स्वभाव

स्वभाव प्रभवेः गुणेः (18 - 41)

स्वभाव means what? How does one get one's स्वभाव? स्वभाव is one's innate nature, born of one's संस्कारs , which are the accumulated impressions left behind by all of one's past कर्मs , including all of one's past education and cultivated training of the mind and बुद्धि, both in one's पूर्वजन्मs - past lives, and also in one's present life.

Every कर्म one does, either in thought, word or deed, even when it is all over, leaves behind some impressions, lingering impressions. These impressions are constantly getting accumulated and integrated with one's अन्तःकरण - mind and बुद्धि, of one's सूक्ष्म शरीर - the subtle body, in the form of one's composite गुण. Thus, one's गुण



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has its origin in one's स्वभाव - one's पूर्व संस्कारs - accumulated impressions left behind by one's past कर्मs.

Therefore, the पूर्व संस्कारs of the person, at the time of death, naturally determines the गुण of the person, and consequently, the time, place and circumstances of one's next birth. As a result, even at birth, the अन्तःकरण - the mind and बुद्धि of a human being is already a developed one, in terms of one's स्वभाव गुण, and this स्वभाव गुण manifests itself as one's spontaneous tendencies with respect to every कर्म the person does, subsequently throughout one's life.

Thus every कर्म of an individual person becomes the natural expression of one's स्वभाव गुण - गुण born of one's स्वभाव, or one's पूर्व संस्कारs, which means, one's स्वभाव गुण uniquely determines one's कर्म, and this natural connection between one's स्वभाव गुण and कर्म is the basis of वर्णधर्म - the mandated duties of individuals in Vedic society.

By taking full advantage of the natural connection between one's स्वभाव गुणs and कर्म, both the individual and the society as a whole can realize the highest potential of human existence. That is the power of वर्णधर्म in Vedic society.

It is important to understand here that one's parentage is NOT the cause for one's वर्ण - one's occupation in society. One's parentage is the result of one's पूर्व संस्कारs, one's स्वभाव गुणs born of one's कर्मs in one's past lives.

In the Vedic society, the वर्णधर्मs, the social duties arising from one's parentage simply provides every individual a unique opportunity to play one's rightful role in society, making full use of one's in-born nature, without competing with others for one's living needs, and without confusing oneself with respect to the ultimate destination in life, which is the same for every person.



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The वर्णधर्मs - the social duties arising from one's parentage are never an impediment to one's spiritual progress. In fact, they are an invaluable asset, and an extraordinary help in one's spiritual progress.

If for any reason, one rejects one's वर्णधर्मs - one's occupational duties arising from one's parentage that is also a manifestation of one's ever-evolving गुण, which will certainly have its own natural consequences for one's future.

Having pointed out that the natural division of social duties in the four occupational groups in the Vedic society arises from the स्वभाव generated गुणs of the individuals involved, Sri Krishna now talks about the manifestations of such गुणs in each of the four groups involved, occupational groups involved.

Talking about ब्राह्मण कर्म, भगवान् says:

शमो दमः तपः शौचं क्षान्तिः आर्जवमेव च ।

ज्ञानं विज्ञानं आस्तिक्यं ब्रह्मकर्म स्वभावजम् ॥ 18 - 42

As we have already seen these words before,

शमः - means मनो निग्रहं - control and mastery over one's mind, one's ways of thinking

दमः - means बाह्य इन्द्रिय निग्रहं - control and mastery over all of one's external organs of perception and action

तपः - means personal discipline at all levels, as भगवान् said earlier, शारीर तपस्,

वाक् तपस् and मानस तपस् - discipline at the body level, speech level and at the mind level

शौचं - purity inside and outside - cleanliness of mind and बुद्धि, and also cleanliness of one's body and surroundings

क्षान्तिः - forgiveness, accommodation and forbearance



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आर्जवं - straightforwardness in thought, word and deed at all times

वाङ् मे मनसि प्रतिष्ठिता, मनो मे वाचि प्रतिष्ठितं ॥

Let there be complete identity between what I speak and what I think. Let there be complete accord between what I do and what I think. Let there always be proper alignment, clarity and focus in all of my thoughts, words and actions - That is being

आर्जवं - straightforwardness in thought, word and deed at all times.

ज्ञानं - total commitment to the pursuit of Knowledge - both objective knowledge and Upanishad knowledge

विज्ञानं विशेष ज्ञानं - total commitment to the pursuit of knowledge and service at the highest possible level, through spiritual striving rooted in **सत्यं, धर्मम्, तपस्, ब्रह्मचर्यम्, सम्यक् आत्मविचारं** and **सम्यक् ज्ञानं** (see **मुण्ड.** 3 - 1 - 5 and 6)

आस्तिक्यं - continued cultivation of **आस्तिक्य बुद्धि**, meaning continued efforts leading to the recognition of **परमेश्वर ज्ञानं, ईशावास्यं इदं सर्वम् ज्ञानं, वासुदेवः सर्वम् इति ज्ञानं, ब्रह्म एव इदं विश्वम् ज्ञानं** - recognition of Vedas and the Upanishads as the valid means of knowledge about **जीव, जगत्** and **ईश्वर**; and **श्रद्धा** in understanding and appreciation of the Vedic commands, as the commands of **परमेश्वर** Itself, as the commands of The Pure Consciousness already in oneself.

ब्रह्मकर्म स्वभावजम् - all these are **ब्राह्मण कर्म**s - **कर्म** natural to the **स्वभाव** of **ब्राह्मण**s in the Vedic society.

We will talk about **ब्राह्मण कर्म**s and the other **वर्ण**s in detail next time.