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ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

श्रीमद्भगवत् गीता

त्रयोदशोऽध्यायः - क्षेत्र-क्षेत्रज्ञ विभाग योगः

trayodaśo'dhyāyaḥ - kṣetra-kṣetrajñā vibhāga yogaḥ

Chapter 13

Volume 4

श्री भगवानुवाच *śrī bhagavān uvāca*

इदं शरीरं कौन्तेय क्षेत्रमित्यभिधीयते ।

idaṁ śarīraṁ kaunteya kṣetramityabhidhīyate ।

एतद्यो वेत्ति तं प्राहुः क्षेत्रज्ञ इति तद्विदः ॥ 13-1

etadhyo vetti taṁ prāhuḥ kṣetrajñā iti tadvidaḥ ॥

क्षेत्रज्ञं चापि मां विद्धि सर्व क्षेत्रेषु भारत ।

kṣetrajñāṁ cāpi māṁ viddhi sarva kṣetreṣu bhārata ।

क्षेत्र क्षेत्रज्ञं योर्ज्ञानं यत तत् ज्ञानं मतं मम ॥ 13-2

kṣetra kṣetrajñāṁ yorjñānaṁ yat tat jñānaṁ mataṁ mama ॥

Briefly recalling what we saw last time, every individual person, as a जीव *jīva*, as a living being, is a unique combination of शरीर *śarīra* and आत्मा *ātmā*, one's body and The Self "I" in one's body. What we call शरीर *śarīra* – the body, is itself a unique combination of three distinct bodies in one, namely स्थूल शरीर *sthūla śarīra*, सूक्ष्म शरीर *sūkṣma śarīra* and कारण शरीर *kāraṇa śarīra*.

स्थूल शरीर *sthūla śarīra* is the visible gross physical body, which by itself is only an inert housing for the other two bodies.

सूक्ष्म शरीर *sūkṣma śarīra* is the alive and invisible subtle body, filling up the entire gross physical body. The subtle body, by itself, is the manifestation of one's residual accumulated past गुण-कर्मफल *guṇa-karma phalas* - results of one's past personal qualities and actions, still to be experienced and exhausted, and

कारण शरीर *kāraṇa śarīra* is the alive and invisible causal body, which is the cause for both the live subtle body and the inert gross physical body. The very nature of this कारण शरीर *kāraṇa śarīra* – the causal body, is अविद्या *avidyā* – ignorance in the mind and बुद्धि *buddhi* of the subtle body about the true nature of आत्मा *ātmā* – The Self "I", The परमेश्वर *parameśvar*, already in oneself.



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Thus, when one looks at oneself as a जीव *jīva* – as an individual person, in order to be able to uplift oneself both materially and spiritually, one must first recognize the existence of all the above four distinct constituents of oneself, namely

स्थूल शरीर *sthūla śarīra* – the inert gross physical body

सूक्ष्म शरीर *sūkṣma śarīra* – the live subtle body occupying the entire gross physical body

अविद्या *avidyā* – Self-ignorance and

आत्मा *ātmā* – The Self "I" whose very nature is सत् चित् आनन्द स्वरूप परमेश्वर *sat cit ānand svarūp paramēśvar*, The ब्रह्मन् *brahman* Itself, all existing together, with increasing subtlety in the above order.

Of the above four constituents, आत्मा *ātmā* – The Self "I" alone is सत्यं *satyaṁ* – Absolute Reality, all pervasive, ever-existent, ever conscious, and all conscious, never subject to change or disappearance at any time, whereas the other three constituents, namely the स्थूल शरीर *sthūla śarīra*, सूक्ष्म शरीर *sūkṣma śarīra* and कारण शरीर *kāraṇa śarīra* are only मिथ्या *mithyā* – transient realities (meaning dependent realities) ever subject to change and ultimate disappearance.

Now, let us consider any individual person as a जीव *jīva* – as a living being. When that person's प्रारब्ध कर्म *prārabdha karmas* - already begun results of past कर्म *karmas*, have been fully experienced and exhausted, that person's gross physical body (स्थूल शरीर *sthūla śarīra*) has served its purpose, and it no longer befits the evolved needs of the subtle body (सूक्ष्म शरीर *sūkṣma śarīra*) inside, in its current state of अविद्या *avidyā* – Self ignorance. Therefore, the subtle body, along with its state of Self-ignorance, naturally leaves the gross physical body in search of a new housing - a new gross physical body, to occupy and remanifest itself, to experience and exhaust the already maturing results of the accumulated results of past गुण *guṇas* and कर्म *karmas*. The moment the subtle body, along with its अविद्या *avidyā*, leaves the gross physical body, the inert स्थूल शरीर *sthūla śarīra* – the gross physical body, falls dead, but the person, the जीव *jīva* is not dead. The person, as a जीव *jīva*, as a live and conscious being, continues to exist as an individual unmanifest जीव *jīva*, now constituted of only सूक्ष्म शरीर *sūkṣma śarīra* (the subtle body), अविद्या *avidyā* (Self-ignorance) and आत्मा *ātmā* – The Self "I", until such time as the subtle body, along



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with its अविद्या *avidyā* (state of Self ignorance) re-enters into another स्थूल शरीर *sthūla śarīra* – gross physical body, appropriate to its present needs. How such re-entrance takes place, Sri Krishna tells in Chapter 15 (15 -7,8 and 9), which we will see a little later.

On the other hand, if the same person we are talking about orders and reorders his every day life style in such a manner that he gains आत्मा ज्ञानं *ātmā jñānam* – Self-knowledge, at some time in his life, (at the moment he gains self-knowledge), अविद्या *avidyā* – Self-ignorance naturally disappears, and the person now becomes a ज्ञानी *jñānī* – an enlightened person, with his स्थूल शरीर *sthūla śarīra* (the gross physical body), सूक्ष्म शरीर *sūkṣma śarīra* – subtle body with शुद्ध अन्तःकरण *śuddha antaḥ karaṇa* – absolute purity of mind and बुद्धि *buddhi*, together with आत्मा *ātmā* – The Self "I", The परमेश्वर *parameśvar* Itself, already in oneself.

In time, when all his प्रारब्ध कर्म *prārabdha karmas* have been fully experienced and exhausted, his gross physical body naturally falls, and his subtle body also naturally disappears, because there are no more accumulated कर्म *karmas* to be done, and कर्मफल *karma phalas* to be experienced for a ज्ञानी *jñānī*, and hence The आत्मा *ātmā* "I" in the ज्ञानी *jñānī*, the जीवात्मा *jīvātmā*, naturally becomes ONE with the all-pervading, ever-existent, ever conscious, all inclusive परमात्मा *paramātmā* – The परमेश्वर *parameśvar* Itself, just as a limited room-space becomes one with the infinite total space when all the enclosing walls are destroyed and removed.

That is how any ordinary person can discover oneself as परमेश्वर *parameśvar* Itself, by destroying all of one's अविद्या काम-कर्म बन्धन *avidyā kama-karma bandhanas* - all bondages born of Self-ignorance. When that happens, one naturally discovers oneself as परमेश्वर *parameśvar* Itself, and the truth of the महावाक्य *mahāvākya* of गीतोपनिषत् *gītōpaniṣat* "क्षेत्रज्ञं चापि मां विद्धि, सर्वक्षेत्रेषु भारत *kṣetrajñam cāpi māṁ viddhi, sarva kṣetreṣu bhārata*" becomes self-evident.

Therefore, the only way one can understand Sri Krishna's statement, that every person, indeed every जीव *jīva*, is in fact परमेश्वर *parameśvar* Itself, is by understanding clearly what exactly अविद्या *avidyā* – Self-ignorance is, and what exactly विद्या *vidyā*



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– Self-knowledge means to a person, and by taking immediate steps to gain आत्मा ज्ञानं *ātmā jñānam* – Self-knowledge.

Therefore, at this time, it is both appropriate and necessary to recall a few of the Upanishad verses on अविद्या *avidyā* and विद्या *vidyā*, which we have heard already, and on whose contents we must reflect again and again.

The words विद्या *vidyā* or ज्ञानं *jñānam*, and also the words अविद्या *avidyā* or अज्ञानं *ajñānam* have distinct meanings in Upanishad readings, according to context. When talking about them separately, the word विद्या *avidyā* or ज्ञानं *jñānam* simply means "Knowledge", any particular knowledge, with reference to the context. And the word अविद्या *avidyā* or अज्ञानं *ajñānam* simply means "ignorance" - ignorance about any particular knowledge, again with reference to context.

On the other hand, when talking about either विद्या *vidyā* and अविद्या *avidyā*, or about ज्ञानं *jñānam* and अज्ञानं *ajñānam* in juxtaposition (one by the side of the other), विद्या *vidyā* or ज्ञानं *jñānam* means पर विद्या *para vidyā* or आत्मा ज्ञानं *ātmā jñānam*, knowledge about ब्रह्मन् *brahman* – knowledge about the true nature of The Self "I" in oneself, and in every self there is, and That is Self-knowledge. This knowledge by its very nature is truly independent, never subject to change, and all-inclusive. And अविद्या *avidyā* or अज्ञानं *ajñānam* means अपर विद्या *apara vidyā*, which includes all forms of knowledge other than Self-knowledge, which means Self-ignorance. All forms of purely objective knowledge, which are essentially dependent in nature, such as those included in our education in arts, sciences, engineering, technology, etc. All forms of such knowledge come under अविद्या *avidyā* – Self-ignorance.

With this understanding of विद्या *vidyā* and अविद्या *avidyā*, or ज्ञानं *jñānam* and अज्ञानं *ajñānam* in juxtaposition, let us recall the content of a few of the Upanishad verses, which we have heard already. The Upanishad says

दूरं एते विपरीते विषूची अविद्या या च विद्या इति ज्ञाता ॥ कठ 2 - 4
dūram ete viparīte viṣūcī avidyā yā ca vidyā iti jñātā ॥

अविद्या *avidyā* – Self-ignorance and विद्या *vidyā* – Self-knowledge offer two distinct life styles, two distinct paths of life, mutually opposed to each other, because these two paths of life are दूरं एते विषूची *dūram ete viṣūcī* – they are ever far apart, leading to



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opposite destinations. The अविद्या मार्ग *avidyā mārṅa* – the life style rooted in Self-ignorance is the संसार मार्ग *saṁsār mārṅa*, it is the path of life exclusively governed by the transient realities and experiences of worldly life, involving धर्म *dharma*, अधर्म *adharmā*, पुण्य *puṅya*, पाप *pāpa*, कर्ता *kartā*, भोक्ता *bhoktā*, सुख *sukha*, etc., all of which lead to repeated births and deaths, whereas the विद्या मार्ग *vidyā mārṅa* – the life style rooted in Self-knowledge is मोक्ष मार्ग *mokṣa mārṅa* – it is the path of life leading to मोक्ष *mokṣa*, total liberation, in which अविद्या *avidyā* naturally vanishes, and the individual जीव *jīva* gains total freedom from repeated births and deaths, and enjoys its inherent fullness and immortality, which means, through the विद्या मार्ग *vidyā mārṅa*, the individual person, even while still living, reaches one's natural destination, namely one's innermost self – the प्रत्यग आत्मा *pratyaga ātmā*, which is वैष्णवं परमं पदं *vaiṣṇavaṁ paramaṁ padaṁ* – the abode of the all-pervading परमेश्वर *parameśvar*, and thus become ONE with That परमेश्वर *parameśvar* Itself, already in oneself, and indeed in every self there is. Further a

श्रेयश्च प्रेयश्च मनुष्यं एतः, तौ संपरीत्य विविनक्ति धीरः ।

śreyaśca preyaśca manuṣyaṁ etaḥ, tau saṁparītya vivinakti dhīraḥ ।

श्रेयो हि धीरः अभिप्रेयसो वृणीते, प्रेयो मन्दः योगक्षेमात् वृणीते ॥ कठ 2-2

śreyo hi dhīraḥ abhipreyaso vṛṇīte, preyo mandaḥ yogakṣemāt vṛṇīte ॥

श्रेयस् *śreyas* is विद्या मार्ग *vidyā mārṅa* – the path of life rooted in पर विद्या *para vidyā*, which is आत्मा ज्ञानं *ātmā jñānaṁ* - Self-knowledge, which is the path of life leading to Oneness with परमेश्वर *parameśvar* Itself, already in Oneself. And प्रेयस् *preyas* is अविद्या मार्ग *avidyā* – the path of life rooted in अविद्या *avidyā* – self-ignorance and its consequences, which is precisely the path of life rooted in अपर विद्या *apar vidyā* – objective knowledge, totally devoid of self-knowledge. That path of life is संसारित्वं *saṁsāritvaṁ* – a life of never ending cycle of transient experiences of pleasure and pain, sorrow and distress, etc.

Thus what can be achieved by श्रेयस् *śreyas* and प्रेयस् *preyas* are distinctly and vastly different. Both paths of life are always open to every individual human being. Analyzing both the possible lifestyles, a wise person who has चिवेक बुद्धि *vivek*



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buddhi evaluates them in terms of their respective utility for achieving one's ultimate objective in life. After such analysis, the wise person naturally chooses श्रेयस् *śreyas*, the विद्या मार्ग *vidyā mārḡa* – the path of life rooted in Self-knowledge, whereas the one whose बुद्धि *buddhi* is not yet mature enough to recognize the very purpose of life, chooses प्रेयस् *preyas*, the अविद्या मार्ग *avidyā mārḡa* – the path of life exclusively rooted in अपर विद्या *apara vidyā* – objective knowledge. Why? योग क्षेमात् *yoga kṣemāt* – being attracted by the transient pleasures obtainable by the worldly pursuits of objective knowledge.

That does not mean that अविद्या *avidyā*, as अपर विद्या *apara vidyā* - as objective knowledge, is any less important for one's spiritual progress. As the Upanishad says:

विद्यां च अविद्यां च, यः तत् वेद उभयं सह ।

vidyāṁ ca avidyāṁ ca, yaḥ tat veda ubhayam saha ।

अविद्यया मृत्युं तीर्त्वा, विद्यया अमृतं अश्नुते ॥ ईश 11

avidyayā mṛtyuṁ tīrtvā, vidyayā amṛtaṁ aśnute ॥ īśa 11

The person who knows, who clearly understands and appreciates both विद्या *vidyā* and अविद्या *avidyā* – both Self-knowledge and objective knowledge together, that person

अविद्यया मृत्युं तीर्त्वा *avidyayā mṛtyuṁ tīrtvā* – through the discipline cultivated in the pursuit of objective knowledge, in depth, crosses and overcomes मृत्यु *mṛtyu* – the world of death, which means that person gains clarity of understanding of the complexities of the world of changes. That person realizes the cause-effect relationships of the world of changes, both in its unmanifest and manifest states, the world of माया *māyā*, and so realizing,

विद्यया अमृतं अश्नुते *vidyayā amṛtaṁ aśnute* – by ब्रह्मविद्या *brahmavidyā*, आत्म विद्या *ātma vidyā* – by the help of Upanishad knowledge, Self-knowledge, that person gains immortality, gains the knowledge of the changeless reality behind and beyond the world of changes. That person gains पूर्ण ज्ञानं *pūrṇa jñānaṁ* – totality of knowledge, gains ईशावास्यं इदं सर्वम् *īśāvāsyam idaṁ sarvam* knowledge.

उभयं *ubhayam* is God realization - Self-realization arising from the holy confluence of the ever-flowing objective knowledge with the limitless ocean of spiritual knowledge.



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Such God-realization is possible only through अविद्या *avidyā* and विद्या *vidyā* together - objective knowledge and Self-knowledge together, in that order.

Thus, ईशावास्य *īśāvāsya* Upanishad makes it absolutely clear that अविद्या *avidyā* as अपर विद्या *apara vidyā* is a necessary pre-requisite for ब्रह्मविद्या *brahma vidyā*, which is पर विद्या *para vidyā* – proficiency in objective knowledge in depth, is a necessary pre-requisite for gaining Self-knowledge. The greater and deeper such proficiency is in objective knowledge, the easier it is to gain Self-knowledge, if only one has the necessary श्रद्धा *śraddhā* in gaining Self-knowledge.

What can be achieved by अपर विद्या *apara vidyā* alone - objective knowledge alone is always limited. And what can be achieved by पर विद्या *para vidyā*, ब्रह्मविद्या *brahmavidyā* - Self-knowledge, is indeed unlimited. It is Limitlessness Itself. Such limitlessness is beyond the comprehension of one who has only मन्द बुद्धि *manda buddhi* – बुद्धि *buddhi* which is still immature. That is why such a person goes after only प्रेयस् *preyas*, which is no more than मनुष्य आनन्द *manuṣya ānand* – happiness governed by human limitations. On the other hand, pursuit of श्रेयस् *śreyas*, आत्म ज्ञानं *ātma jñānam* – Self-knowledge, leads to ब्रह्मानन्द *brahmānanda* – Limitless Happiness.

The means, for gaining such ब्रह्मानन्द *brahmānanda* is the clear realization of Self-knowledge, namely:

क्षेत्रज्ञं चापि मां विद्धि, सर्वक्षेत्रेषु भारत *kṣetrajñānam cāpi mām viddhi, sarva kṣetreṣu bhārata* – The Self in oneself is परमेश्वर *parameśvar* Itself. The Self in every self is परमेश्वर *parameśvar* Itself. That is Self-knowledge.

In a clarion call to all humanity, the Kenopanishad emphasizes the need for every person to take immediate steps to gain the realization of such Self-knowledge, in the following words:

इह चेत् अवेदीत्, अथ सत्यं अस्ति, न चेत् इह अवेदीत्, महती विनष्टिः ।

iha cet avedīt, atha satyaṁ asti, na cet iha avedīt, mahatī vinaṣṭiḥ ।

भूतेषु भूतेषु विचित्य धीराः प्रेत्य अस्मात् लोकात् अमृता भवन्ति ॥ केन 2-5

bhūteṣu bhūteṣu vicitya dhiraḥ pretya asmāt lokat amṛtā bhavanti ॥ kena



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For the one who seeks to realize Self-knowledge, here, in this world, while one is still living, for that person, there is TRUTH in life, there is meaning in life. And for the person who does not seek to realize Self-knowledge, here, in this life itself, very great is the loss. Discovering The Self I, discovering परमेश्वर *parameśvar* in oneself, and indeed in everything in this creation, the wise ones uplift themselves from संसारित्वं *saṁsāritvaṁ* – from the world of transient experiences, and become Immortal, gain मोक्ष *mokṣa*, gain ब्रह्मानन्द *brahmānand*, reach their natural ultimate destination in life, namely वैष्णवं परमं पदं *vaiṣṇavaṁ paramaṁ padam* - परमेश्वर *parameśvar* Itself, already in oneself.

परमेश्वर *parameśvar* is The TRUTH, The Self of every being in this creation. ईशावास्यं इदं सर्वम् *īśāvāsyam idaṁ sarvam*. That is The TRUTH. Life becomes meaningful only when one makes use of one's natural faculties and blessings to realize that truth, here, in this very life. Otherwise, life is simply a waste. Therefore, the Upanishad summons every person to take immediate steps to gain such realization, so that one may experience True life, before one's gross physical body falls dead. But, if one chooses to neglect one's opportunity to seek such realization, great shall be one's loss - so declares the Upanishad.

From all that has been said today we understand that अविद्या *avidyā* – Self-ignorance, which is obstruction to Self-knowledge, already exists in one's शरीर *śarīra* – in one's body-mind-intellect complex. It is such अविद्या *avidyā* that conceals the true identity of oneself from The Self in oneself, and creates a mistaken view of oneself. Therefore, such Self-ignorance, such obstruction of Self-knowledge has to be removed for one to be able to realize the true identity of one's own self. Self-ignorance can be removed only by Self-knowledge.

To impart Self-knowledge is the mission of all our Upanishads, and that is precisely what the Bhagvat Gita does.

Being convinced of this understanding, we will continue our Gita verses next time.