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4835 Bank Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1X 1G6

ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

श्रीमद्भगवत् गीता

पञ्चदशोऽध्यायः - पुरुषोत्तम योगः

*pañca daśo'dhyāyaḥ - puruṣottama yogaḥ*

Chapter 15

Volume 1

श्री भगवान् उवाच

*śrī bhagavān uvāca*

ऊर्ध्वमूलमधः शाखं अश्वत्थं प्राहुरव्ययं

*ūrdhvamūlamadhaḥ śākhaṁ aśvattham prāhuravyayaṁ*

छन्दांसि यस्य पर्णानि यस्तं वेद स वेदवित् ॥

15-1

*chandānsi yasya parṇani yastam veda sa vedavit ॥*

अधश्चोर्ध्वम् प्रसृतास्तस्य शाखाः गुणप्रवृद्धा विषय प्रवालाः ।

*adhaścordhvam prasṛtāstasya śākhaḥ guṇa pravṛddha viṣaya pravālāḥ ।*

अधश्च मूलान्यनुसंततानि कर्मानुबन्धीनि मनुष्य लोके ॥

15-2

*adhaśca mūlānyanusantātāni karmānubandhīni manuṣya loke ॥*

न रूपमस्येह तथोपलभ्यते नान्तो न चादिर्न च संप्रतिष्ठा ।

*na rūpamasyeha tathopalabhyate nānto na cādirna ca sampratiṣṭha ।*

अश्वत्थ मेनं सुविरूढ मूलं असङ्गशस्त्रेण दृढेन छित्वा ॥

15-3

*aśvattha menam suvirūḍha mūlaṁ asaṅgaśastrena ḍṛḍhaina chitvā ॥*

ततः पदं तत्परिमार्गितव्यं यस्मिन्गता न निवर्तन्ति भूयः ।

*tataḥ padaṁ tatparimārgitavyaṁ yasmingatā na nivartanti bhūyaḥ ।*

तमेव चाद्यं पुरुषं प्रपद्ये यतः प्रवृत्तिः प्रसृता पुराणी ॥

15-4

*tameva cādyaṁ puruṣaṁ prapadye yataḥ pravṛttiḥ prasṛtā purāṇi ॥*

The 15th chapter of भगवत् गीता *bhagavat gītā* is entitled पुरुषोत्तम योग *puruṣottam yoga*, which means the subject matter for this discourse is पुरुषोत्तम *puruṣottam*.

पुरुषोत्तम *puruṣottam* is another pointer word to indicate सत् चित् आनन्द स्वरूप ब्रह्मन् *sat cit ānanda svarūp brahman* - The परमेश्वर *parameśvar*. Therefore, the subject matter for this discourse is परमेश्वर *parameśvar* itself, which means ईश्वर



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तत्त्व ज्ञान *īśvara tattva jñāna* - knowledge of the truth about परमेश्वर *parameśvar* itself.

The teaching here is on ब्रह्मज्ञानं *brahma jñanam*, ईश्वर ज्ञानं, *īśvar jñanam*, आत्मज्ञानं *ātma jñanam* - 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 *bhagavān* said:

मां च यो अव्यभिचारेण भक्तियोगेन सेवते  
*mām ca yo avyabhicāreṇa bhaktiyogena sevate*  
स गुणान् समतीत्यैतान् ब्रह्म भूयाय कल्पते 14-26  
*sa guṇān samatītyaitān brahma bhūyāya kalpate*

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

Since there can be no पूर्ण ईश्वर भक्ति *pūrṇa īśvar bhakti* without पूर्ण ईश्वर ज्ञानं *pūrṇa īśvar jñanam*, the pursuit of such undistracted भक्ति योग *bhakti yoga* way of life must necessarily be rooted in पूर्ण ईश्वर ज्ञानं *pūrṇa īśvar jñanam*, in order for that ईश्वर भक्ति *īśvara bhakti* to mature into मोक्ष *mokṣa*, जीव ब्रह्म ऐक्यं *jīva brahma aikyam* - total identity with The परमेश्वर *parameśvar* already in oneself.

Therefore, having pointed out in the last chapter that भक्ति योग *bhakti yoga* way of life is the means for one to uplift oneself from the hold of all the three गुणs *guṇas*, भगवान् *bhagavān* teaches in this chapter That पूर्ण ईश्वर ज्ञानं *pūrṇa īśvar jñanam*, which is necessary for one's pursuit of भक्ति योग *bhakti yoga* way of life, that can lead one ultimately to जीव ब्रह्म ऐक्यं *jīva brahma aikyam* - identity with The परमेश्वर *parameśvar* already in oneself.



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

1. The teaching here is about जीव *jīva*, जगत् *jagat* and ईश्वर *īśvara*, and as such, this chapter epitomizes the essential content of the entire Vedānta Sastra, which means, the entire Gita Sastra, briefly, yet completely.
2. This chapter is on ईश्वर भक्ति *īśvara bhakti* and ईश्वर ज्ञानं *īśvara jñānam*, in ONE. Being so, a devotional recitation of this chapter with understanding and appreciation is both ईश्वर उपासन *īśvara upāsana* - worship of परमेश्वर *parameśvar* and ईश्वर अनुस्मरणं *īśvara anusmaraṇam* - contemplation on परमेश्वर *parameśvar*.
3. Such a devotional recitation of this chapter, with understanding and appreciation, and श्रद्धा *śraddha* in ईश्वर ज्ञानं *īśvar jñān*, makes a person कृत कृत्यः *kṛta kṛtyaḥ*, so declares भगवान् *bhagavān* at the conclusion of this chapter.

कृत कृत्यः *kṛta kṛtyaḥ* 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 कर्म *karmas* in one's normal life style. This declaration by Sri Krishna should be a matter of tremendous spiritual comfort for all of us. The religious कर्म *karmas* commonly practiced in traditional Hindu families include Vedic rituals such as:

- ✓ नित्य कर्म *nitya karmas* - Daily rituals such as सन्ध्या वन्दनं *sandhyā vandanaṁ*, वेद अध्ययनं *veda adhyayanaṁ*, ईश्वर आराधनं *īśvara ārādhanam*, reading Ramayana, भगवत् गीता *bhagavat gīta* etc.
- ✓ श्रौत कर्म *śrauta karmas* - Vedic rituals such as specific Havans, prayers, etc. on specific occasions
- ✓ स्मार्त कर्म *smārta karmas* - ritualistic worship of various देवता *devatās* on specific occasions
- ✓ पितृ कर्म *pitṛ karmas* - such as श्राद्ध कर्म *śrāddha karmas* 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



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part of normal life style. The dutiful performance of any such religious कर्म *karma*, 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 *karmas*, 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 *karmas* in a spiritually satisfying manner, in the environments in which we live.

Having consciously given up such traditional duty bound religious कर्मs *karmas*, 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 *bhagavān'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 *kṛta kṛtyaḥ* means, whenever any duty-bound religious कर्म *karma* 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:

In lieu of any such कर्म *karma* just read the पुरुषोत्तम योग *puruṣottama yoga* of भगवत् गीता *bhagavat gīta*, with श्रद्धा *śraddha* 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 *kṛta kṛtyaḥ* - you become one who has done, properly and fully, all that needs to be done, which means, with respect to the intended कर्म *karma*, you are both fulfilled and uplifted in yourself, by yourself, immediately.

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



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श्री भगवान् उवाच *śrī bhagavān uvāca*

ऊर्ध्वमूलमधः शाखं अश्वत्थं प्राहुरव्ययं

*ūrdhvamūlamadhaḥ śākhaṁ aśvattham prāhuravyayam*

छन्दांसि यस्य पर्णानि यस्तं वेद स वेदवित् ॥ 15-1

*chandāmsi yasya parṇani yastam veda sa vedavit ॥*

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

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

Now, what is the purpose of this वृक्ष कल्पना *vrkṣa kalpanā* - tree imagery and why अश्वत्थ *aśvattha* tree in particular? The object here is to make one understand, appreciate and absorb ईश्वर तत्त्व ज्ञानं *īśvar tattva jñanam* - knowledge about the truth of परमेश्वर *parameśvar*. This object can be accomplished, this knowledge can be realized, only if one cultivates विवेक वैराग्य बुद्धि *vivek vairāgya buddhi* and सर्व कर्म फल त्याग *sarva karma phala tyāga*.

विवेक *vivek* means the ability to discriminate between सत्यं *satyam* and मिथ्या *mithyā* - 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 *vairāgya* means the ability to cultivate dispassion towards all that is मिथ्या *mithyā*, and hold on to सत्यं *satyam* at all times, under all circumstances, through undistracted भक्ति योग *bhakti yoga*.

सर्व कर्म फल त्याग *sarva karma phala tyāga* means the ability to cultivate the attitude of offering all the results of all of one's actions to परमेश्वर *parameśvar* Itself, as worship of परमेश्वर *parameśvar*, and welcoming the fruits of all of one's actions as ईश्वर प्रसाद *īśvar prasād* - as the very blessings from परमेश्वर *parameśvar*.



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Only when one has all the above three abilities in full measure, can one absorb and recognize ईश्वर ज्ञानं *īśvar jñānam* in oneself, by oneself, otherwise ईश्वर ज्ञानं *īśvar jñānam* will remain only as book-knowledge.

The purpose of वृक्ष कल्पना *vṛkṣa kalpanā* - tree imagery used in this chapter to communicate ईश्वर ज्ञानं *īśvar jñānam* is only to help one cultivate चिबेक बुद्धि *vivek buddhi*, वैराग्य *vairāgya* and सर्व कर्म फल त्याग बुद्धि *sarva karma phala tyāga buddhi*, to enable one to understand, appreciate and absorb knowledge about जीव, *jīva*, जगत् *jagat* and ईश्वर *īśvar*, unfolded in this and all the previous chapters.

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

अश्वत्थ *aśvattha* 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 *parameśvar* Itself. The twigs of these trees are used in all Vedic rituals.

The अश्वत्थ *aśvattha* 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 *buddhi*.

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 *saṁsār*, this जगत् *jagat* - this entire creation. Any knowledge of this संसार - this ever-changing creation, apart from its root cause, is therefore incomplete.





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Thus, the tree imagery expounds the interrelation between the undifferentiated ब्रह्मन् *brahman*, The परमेश्वर *paramēśvar*, and the differentiated जगत् *jagat* – this entire creation, which leads one to the enquiry on the nature of ब्रह्मन् *brahman*, which is the ultimate root cause for this संसार *saṁsār*, 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 *īśvar tattva jñānam*. That is also why our scriptures use this tree imagery to unfold the nature of ब्रह्मन् *brahman*, which is beyond the reach of one's mind. For example, in the last section of कठोपनिषत् *kāthopaniṣat*, Lord Yama opens His discourse unfolding the nature of ब्रह्मन् *brahman* as follows. These are the words of Lord Yama:

ऊर्ध्वमूलः अवाक् शाखः, एषः अश्वत्थः सनातनः तदेव शुक्रं, तत् ब्रह्म तदेव अमृतं उच्यते ।  
*ūrdhvamūlaḥ avāk śākhaḥ, eṣaḥ aśvatthaḥ sanātanaḥ tadeva śukraṁ, tat brahma tadeva amṛtaṁ ucyate ।*  
तस्मिन् लोकाः श्रिताः सर्वे तद् नात्येति कश्चन । एतत् चै तत् ॥ (कठ 6-1)  
*tasmin lokāḥ śritāḥ sarve tad nātyeti kaścana । etat vai tat ॥ (kāṭha 6-1)*

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

This संसार वृक्ष *saṁsār vṛkṣ* – this tree of existence, this entire creation along with its root, called अश्वत्थ *aśvattha*, 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 *brahman*. That ब्रह्मन् *brahman* alone is pure, in the sense it is uncontaminated with anything else, because It is ONE without a second.

That ब्रह्मन् *brahman* alone is सत्यं *satyaṁ*, Eternal and independent, and everything else is only transient appearance and ever dependent. That ब्रह्मन् *brahman* alone is Immortal. In That ब्रह्मन् *brahman* rest all लोकs *loks*, all worlds, all objects, and all experiences. Nothing in this entire creation can transcend that ब्रह्मन् *brahman*. Nothing in this entire creation exists apart from that ब्रह्मन् *brahman*. That ब्रह्मन् *brahman* is all-



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inclusive. That ब्रह्मन् *brahman* is indeed The आत्मा *ātmā*, The Self I, The परमेश्वर *parameśvar* already in oneself, and indeed in every self.

That is the message of Lord Yama in the कठोपनिषत् *kāthopanīṣat*. 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 *īśvara tattva jñānaṁ* - knowledge of the truth about परमेश्वर *parameśvar*, by calling Arjuna's attention to that familiar Upanishad message on the nature of जीव *jīva*, जगत् *jagat* and ईश्वर *īśvar* using the imagery of अश्वत्थ *aśvattha* tree, as संसार वृक्ष *saṁsār vṛkṣa* - the tree of existence. Accordingly, भगवान् *bhagavān* says

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ऊर्ध्वमूलमधः शाखं अश्वत्थं प्राहुरव्ययं

*ūrdhvamūlamadhaḥ śākhaṁ aśvatthaṁ prāhuravyayaṁ*

छन्दांसि यस्य पर्णानि यस्तं वेद स वेदवित् ॥ 15-1

*chandāṁsi yasya paṇāni yastaṁ veda sa vedavit ॥*

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

ऊर्ध्वमूलं *ūrdhvamūlam* - it has its roots above

अधः शाखं *adhaḥ śākhaṁ* - its has its branches below, and

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

छन्दांसि यस्य *chandāṁsi yasya* (=तस्य *tasya*) पर्णानि *paṇāni* - the Vedas are its leaves

यः तं वेद *yah taṁ veda* - The one who understands, appreciates and recognizes that अश्वत्थ *aśvattha* tree, that संसार वृक्ष *saṁsār vṛkṣa*, as pointed out in the scriptures

सः वेदवित् *sah vedavit* - 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.