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ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

श्रीमद्भगवत् गीता

पञ्चदशोऽध्यायः - पुरुषोत्तम योगः

*pañca daśo'dhyāyaḥ - puruṣottama yogaḥ*

Chapter 15

Volume 2

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 parṇāni yastam veda sa vedavit ॥*

अधश्चोर्ध्वम् प्रसृतास्तस्य शाखाः गुणप्रवृद्धा विषय प्रवालाः ।

*adhaścordhvam prasṛtāstasya śākhāḥ guṇapravṛddhā viṣaya pravālāḥ ।*

अधश्च मूलान्यनुसंततानि कर्मानुबन्धीनि मनुष्य लोके ॥ 15-2

*adhaśca mūlānyanusantatāni karmānubandhīni manuṣya loke ॥*

न रूपमस्येह तथोपलभ्यते नान्तो न चादिर्न च संप्रतिष्ठा ।

*na rūpamasyeha tathopalabhyate nānto na cādirna ca sampratiṣṭhā ।*

अश्वत्थ मेनं सुविरूढ मूलं असङ्गशस्त्रेण दृढेन छित्वा ॥ 15-3

*aśvattha menam suvirūḍha mūlam asaṅga śastrena dṛḍhaina chitvā ॥*

ततः पदं तत्परिमार्गितव्यं यस्मिन्गता न निवर्तन्ति भूयः ।

*tataḥ padaṁ tatparimārgitavyam yasmingatā na nivartanti bhūyaḥ ।*

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

*tameva cādyam puruṣam prapadye yataḥ pravṛttiḥ prasṛtā purāṇī ॥*

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

Literally, the word अश्वत्थ *aśvattha* means "that which does not stay the same tomorrow", which is an apt description for this ever-changing world. The comparison of



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संसार *saṁsāra* to a tree like अश्वत्थ *aśvattha*, 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 *saṁsāra vṛkṣa*, called अश्वत्थ *aśvattha* as follows:

ऊर्ध्वमूलमधः शाखं अश्वत्थं प्राहुरव्ययम् ।

*ūrdhvamūlamadhaḥ śākhaṁ aśvattham prāhuravyayam ।*

छन्दांसि यस्य पर्णानि यस्तं वेद स वेदवित् ॥ 15-1

*chandānsi yasya parṇāni yastam veda sa vedavit ॥*

अश्वत्थं प्राहुः *aśvattham prāhuh* - About that संसार वृक्ष *saṁsāra vṛkṣa* called अश्वत्थ *aśvattha*, this is what the Upanishads say

अव्ययं ऊर्ध्वमूलम् अधःशाखं *avyayam ūrdhvamūlam adhaḥ śākhaṁ*

अव्ययं *avyayam* means माया शक्तिमत् *māyā śaktimat*, that which is a manifestation of the power of माया *māyā* - the infinite inherent power of ब्रह्मन् *brahman*. The immediate cause for this संसार *saṁsāra* - this created existence, is माया *māyā* - the inherent power of ब्रह्मन् *brahman*. Since माया *māyā* is ब्रह्माश्रया माया *brahmāśrayā māyā*, माया *māyā* is totally dependent on ब्रह्मन् *brahman* the ultimate cause. The root cause for this संसार *saṁsār* is ब्रह्मन् *brahman* ब्रह्मन् *brahman* is the only independent entity in all existence.

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

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



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कारणत्वात् ऊर्ध्वम् *kāraṇatvāt ūrdhvam* - ब्रह्मन् *brahman* 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.

सूक्ष्म त्वात् ऊर्ध्वम् *sūkṣma tvāt ūrdhvam* - ब्रह्मन् *brahman* is अति सूक्ष्मं *ati sūkṣmam* - 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 *brahman* is above the reach of mind also, and hence ब्रह्मन् *brahman* is ऊर्ध्वम् *ūrdhvam*.

नित्य त्वात् ऊर्ध्वम् *nitya tvāt ūrdhvam* - ब्रह्मन् *brahman* is नित्यं सत्यं *nityam satyam* - Eternal, never subject to change. Everything else in this creation is मिथ्या *mithyā* - transient and ever subject to change. Therefore ब्रह्मन् *brahman* is ऊर्ध्वम् *ūrdhvam* - above and beyond everything that is transient and subject to change.

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

मत्तः परतरम् न अन्यत् किञ्चित् अस्ति धनंजय *mattaḥ parataram na anyat kiñcit asti dhananjaya* - Other than myself, The परमेश्वर *parameśvar*, another cause whatsoever is not there. ब्रह्मन् *brahman* is both the efficient cause as well as the material cause for all existence. Being so, ब्रह्मन् *brahman* is the most exalted in all existence, and hence ऊर्ध्वम् *ūrdhvam*. On the other hand,

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

भूमिरापोऽनलो वायुः खं मनो बुद्धिरेव च ।

*bhūmirāpo'nalo vāyuh khaṁ mano buddhireva ca ।*

अहंकार इतीयं मे, भिन्ना प्रकृतिरष्टधा ॥

*ahaṁkāra itīyaṁ me, bhinnā prakṛtiraṣṭadhā ॥*



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The पञ्च महाबभूतः *pañca mahābabbhūtas*, mind, बुद्धि *buddhi* and अहंकार *ahaṅkāra* - ego, all in their subtle and grossified states of existence, giving rise to, in the words of Taittiriya Upanishad,

सच्च त्यच्चाभवत् । निरुक्तं चानिरुक्तं च ।

*sacca tyaccābhavat / niruktaṁ cāniruktaṁ ca /*

निलयनं चानिलयं च । विज्ञानं चा विज्ञानं च ।

*nilayanaṁ cānilayaṁ ca / vijñānaṁ cā vijñānaṁ ca /*

सत्यं चानृतं च सत्यं अभवत् यदिदं किञ्च । (तै . 2 - 6)

*satyaṁ cānṛtaṁ ca satyaṁ abhavat yaditaṁ kiñca /*

- ◇ 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 *saṁsār vṛkṣa*, bound by time and space, and they are the products of माया *māyā*. Being so, they are अधः *adhah* - "below" relative to ब्रह्मन् *brahman*, which is ऊर्ध्वम् *ūrdhvam* - "above", the ultimate cause for all of them.

अश्वत्थ *aśvattha* 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 *aśvattha* tree, भगवान् *bhagavān* says:

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

The life of every person in this संसार *saṁsāra* is only one of कर्म *karmas* of various kinds. The Vedas - the कर्मकाण्ड *karmakāṇḍa* of the Vedas, provide the knowledge of



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the various means and ends with respect to all कर्मs *karmas*, whether they are materialistic or spiritual.

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

यः तं वेद *yaḥ taṁ veda* - The person who knows, who understands and recognizes the nature of अश्वत्थ *aśvattha* tree - the संसार वृक्ष *saṁsāra vṛkṣa*, 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 *māyāmaya saṁsāra*, this creation born of माया *māyā*, along with its root cause, namely ब्रह्मन् *brahman*.

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

Continuing the description of the अश्वत्थ *aśvattha* tree in this संसार वृक्ष कल्पना *saṁsār vṛkṣa kalpanā*, the tree imagery for this creation, भगवान् *bhagavān* says:

अधश्चोर्ध्वम् प्रसृतास्तस्य शाखाः गुणप्रवृद्धा विषय प्रवालाः ।

*adhaścordhvam prasṛtāstasya śākhāḥ guṇapraṇṛddha viṣaya pravālāḥ ।*

अधश्च मूलान्यनुसंततानि कर्मानुबन्धीनि मनुष्य लोके ॥

15-2

*adhaśca mūlānyanusantātāni karmānubandhīni manuṣya loke ॥*

तस्य (वृक्षस्य) शाखाः अधः च ऊर्ध्वम् च प्रसृताः *tasya (vṛkṣasya) śākhāḥ adhaḥ ca ūrdhvam ca prasṛtāḥ* - The branches of the अश्वत्थ *aśvattha* tree

प्रसृताः *prasṛtāḥ* meaning प्रगताः *pragatāḥ* - they grow all over in all parts of the tree, extending in all directions, some of them growing downward (अधः च *adhaḥ ca*) and



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some of them growing upwards (ऊर्ध्वम् च (ūrdhvam ca). In terms of this संसार *samsāra* - this physical world, these branches represent the various उपाधिस *upādhis* - the different kinds of शरीरस *śarīras* - the body vehicles, of all the living beings in this creation.

Every शरीर *śarīra* - every physical body, is a unique expression of one's कर्मफल *karma phalas* - the result of one's past actions and experiences. The कर्मफल *karma phalas* are varied and infinite, and so are the शरीरस *śarīras* - the body-vehicles of all living beings in this creation. The branches of the अश्वत्थ *aśvattha* tree growing downwards, in different parts of the tree, in different forms and in different directions, represent the different शरीरस *śarīras* of the living beings in the human kingdom, including animals, plants, etc.

Likewise, the branches of the अश्वत्थ *aśvattha* 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 गन्धर्वस *gandharvas*, देवस *devas*, इन्द्र *indra*, बृहस्पति *bṛhaspati*, etc. all the way up to ब्रह्माजी *brahmājī* - the creator, who are still within this संसार *samsār* - 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 *ānand* - happiness, depending on their spiritual maturity, and hence, superiority with respect to श्रोत्रियत्वं *śrotriyatvaṁ* and अकामहत्वं *akāmahatvaṁ*. श्रोत्रियत्वं *śrotriyatvaṁ* means realized and recognized ब्रह्मज्ञानं *brahma jñānaṁ* - Self-knowledge gained from the Upanishads, together with one's every day lifestyle in keeping with such knowledge; and अकामहत्वं *akāmahatvaṁ* means one's ability to overcome the destructive powers of one's own राग द्वेष *rāga dveṣa* forces, forces of likes and dislikes.

Just as the different upward growing branches of the अश्वत्थ *aśvattha* tree represent the शरीरस *śarīras* of different gradations of celestial beings, so also, the different downward growing branches of the अश्वत्थ *aśvattha* tree represent the शरीरस *śarīras* of different gradations of human beings in the human kingdom in this creation. Further,

गुणप्रवृद्धा विषय प्रवालाः *guṇapraṇṛddhā viṣaya pravālāḥ* means गुणप्रवृद्धाः शाखाः विषय प्रवालाः शाखाः *guṇa praṇṛddhāḥ śākhaḥ viṣaya pravālāḥ śākhaḥ*. Now,



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how do the branches of the अश्चत्य *aśvattha* tree get their strength to grow all over the tree, extending in all directions?

गुणप्रवृद्धाः शाखाः *guṇa pravṛddhāḥ śākhāḥ* - गुणप्रवृद्धाः *guṇa pravṛddhāḥ*, प्रकृति गुणैः प्रवृद्धाः *prakṛti guṇaiḥ pravṛddhāḥ*, स्थूलीकृता *sthūlikṛtā* - 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 गुणसु *prakṛti guṇas* for the tree. Thus the branches of the अश्चत्य *aśvattha* 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 गुणसु *prakṛti guṇas* - सत्त्व *satva*, रजस् *rajas*, तमस् *tamas* गुणसु *guṇas*. Because there are varieties of gradations in their गुणसु *guṇas*, there are varieties in their कर्मसु *karmas*, and consequently, there are varieties in their शरीरसु *śarīras* - body vehicles. Such varieties of शरीरसु *śarīras* keep coming into this संसार *saṁsāra* - this ever-changing world, all the time, just as new branches keep sprouting forth from the अश्चत्य *aśvattha* tree all the time.

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

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

Therefore विषय प्रवालाः शाखाः *viṣaya pravālāḥ śākhāḥ* means in the case of अश्चत्य *aśvattha* 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 *viṣayāḥ* - the शब्द *śabda*, स्पर्श रूप *sparśa rūpa*, रस *rasa*, गन्ध विषयाः *gandha viṣayāḥ* - all the sense objects and sense experiences. These sense objects and the sense experiences give rise to desires and कर्मसु *karmas* of various kinds, which in turn give rise to birth of a variety of new beings in this संसार *saṁsāra*. That is how this संसार *saṁsār* keeps going endlessly.

Thus the root cause for this संसार *saṁsāra* has already been pointed out as ऊर्ध्वमूलं *ūrdhva mūlaṁ* - the सत् चित् आनन्द स्वरूप ब्रह्मन् *sat cit ānand svarūpa brahman* with its inherent infinite power, the माया *māyā*.



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Aside from That root cause, and underneath that root cause, this संसार *saṁsāra* 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 *manuṣya loka* - the world of human beings.

For the संसार वृक्ष *saṁsār vṛkṣa*, the अश्वत्थ *aśvattha* tree, these secondary causes are:

अधः च मूलानि अनुसंततानि *adhaḥ ca mūlāni anusantatāni* - अधः च मूलानि *adhaḥ ca mūlāni* - the roots coming down from branches, and growing downward अनुसंततानि *anusantatāni* - 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 *saṁsāra* also.

कर्मानुबन्धीनि मनुष्य लोके *karmānu bandhīni manuṣya loke*

मनुष्य लोके *manuṣya loke* - particularly in the world of human beings,

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

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

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

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

Such वासनाs *vāsanās* are अनुसंततानि *anusantatāni* - they extend to all aspects of human life. Like the hanging roots, born later from the branches of the अश्वत्थ *aśvattha* tree, these वासनाs *vāsanās* in the world of human beings become the later-born secondary causes for the pursuit of धर्म *dharma* and अधर्म *adharma*, पुण्य कर्मs





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## ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

*punya karmas* and पाप कर्म *pāpa karmas* of various kinds, which are binding in nature, which means that these वासना *vāsanās* bind the people to their own कर्म *karmas* and कर्मफल *karma phalas*. Thus these वासना *vāsanās* continuously create new bondages, which in turn create new कर्म *karmas* and कर्मफल *karma phalas*, and this cycle of वासना बन्ध कर्म *vāsanā bandha karma* - new वासना *vāsanā* - new bondage and new कर्म *karma*, goes on and on forever, which keeps this मनुष्य लोक *manuṣya loka* in this संसार *saṁsāra* going for ever.

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

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