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ब्रह्मविद्या **Brahma Vidya**

श्रीमद्भगवत् गीता

अष्टादशोऽध्यायः - मोक्षसंन्यासयोगः

*aṣṭadaśo 'dhyāyaḥ - mokṣa saṁnyāsa yogaḥ*

Chapter 18

Volume 1

अर्जुन उवाच *arjuna uvāca*

संन्यासस्य महाबाहो तत्त्वामिच्छामि वेदितुम् ।

*saṁnyāsasya mahābāho tattvāmicchāmi veditum ।*

त्यागस्य च हृषिकेश पृथक् केशिनिषूदन ॥

18-1

*tyāgasya ca hṛṣikeśa pṛthak keśiniṣūdana ॥*

श्री भगवानुवाच *śrī bhagavān uvāca*

काम्यानां कर्मणां न्यासं संन्यासं कवयो विदुः ।

*kāmyānāṁ kamaṇāṁ nyāsaṁ saṁnyāsaṁ kavayo viduḥ ।*

सर्वं कर्म फलत्यागं प्राहुस्त्यागं विचक्षणाः ॥

18-2

*sarva karma phala tyāgaṁ prāhustyāgaṁ vicakṣaṇāḥ ॥*

This last chapter of भगवत् गीता *bhagavat gītā* is entitled मोक्षसंन्यासयोग *mokṣa saṁnyāsa yoga*; मोक्ष *mokṣa* - Total Fulfillment in life through संन्यास *saṁnyāsa* - 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 *karma*, helpful for gaining मोक्ष *mokṣa*.

Even though everybody has an apparent sense of familiarity with कर्म *karma*, 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 *karma* 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 *bhagavat gītā* 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 *mokṣa*
- there is only one, never-changing attitude towards all कर्म *karmas*, and that is पूर्ण श्रद्धा *pūrṇa śraddhā*, together with ईश्वर अर्पण बुद्धि *īśvara arpaṇa buddhi* - total dedication to परमेश्वर *parameśvar*, and
- there is only one set of values governing all कर्म *karma*, and those are values governed totally by सत्त्व गुण *sāttva guṇas*

All legitimate worldly objectives are only intermediate stations in one's सन् मार्ग *san mārga* - in one's endeavour to reach, to gain मोक्ष *mokṣa* - Total Liberation, Total Fulfillment, Absolute Happiness and Peace in this very life itself. With परमेश्वर *parameśvar* -consciousness at all times, together with पूर्ण श्रद्धा *pūrṇa śraddhā* and ईश्वर अर्पण बुद्धि *īśvara arpaṇa buddhi* with respect to every कर्म *karma* that one does, governed by a value structure rooted in सत्त्व गुण *sāttva guṇa*, one can certainly gain not only every legitimate worldly objective, but also, ultimately, मोक्ष *mokṣa* Itself. The knowledge about how that can be accomplished through ईश्वर ज्ञानं *īśvara jñānaṁ* and कर्म योग बुद्धि *karma yoga buddhi*, has already been pointed out extensively throughout all previous chapters. In this chapter, भगवान् *bhagavān* 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 कर्म *karmas* of various kinds. All life is only one of कर्म *karma*. The कर्म *karma* that one does depends on one's गुण *guṇa*, and the गुण *guṇa* that one has depends on the कर्म *karma* that one has been doing all along. Therefore, neither the कर्म *karma*, nor the गुण *guṇa* 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 *karma* and one's own गुण *guṇa*, naturally. Still, every one feels bound by one's own कर्म *karma* and one's own गुण *guṇa*. Why? Because of one's own ignorance about the true nature of oneself, and consequently, because of one's own, often misdirected कर्म *karmas*, arising from, often ill-cultivated गुण *guṇas*.



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Then, how can one liberate oneself from the bondages with one's own कर्म *karma* and गुण *guṇa*? Liberation is possible only through Self-knowledge - आत्म ज्ञानं *ātma jñānaṁ*, realized and recognized through one's own properly directed कर्म *karma*, and diligently cultivated गुण *guṇa*, which means कर्म योग *karma yoga*. 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 *buddhi*.

Therefore, one must make a special effort to understand what भगवान् *bhagavān* 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 *upadeśa*, and this is perhaps his last chance to bring up again the subject of संन्यास *saṁnyāsa*, 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 *saṁnyāsa* with the blessings of Sri Krishna. Therefore, Arjuna now brings up the topic of संन्यास *saṁnyāsa* in a simple-looking manner and seeks a response from Sri Krishna. This is how this chapter opens:

अर्जुन उवाच *arjuna uvāca*

संन्यासस्य महाबाहो तत्त्वामिच्छामि वेदितुम् ।

*saṁnyāsasya mahābāho tattvāmicchāmi veditum ।*

त्यागस्य च हृषिकेश पृथक् केशिनिषूदन ॥

18-1

*tyāgasya ca hṛṣikeśa pṛthak keśiniṣūdana ॥*

Addressing Sri Krishna as महाबाहो *mahābāho*, हृषिकेश *hṛṣikeśa*, केशिनिषूदन *keśiniṣūdana*, Arjuna says:

O! Krishna

वेदितुम् इच्छामि *veditum icchāmi* - I want to know. What?

संन्यासस्य तत्त्व *saṁnyāsasya tattva* - the essential meaning of the word संन्यास *saṁnyāsa*, and also



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त्यागस्य च तत्त्वम् *tyāgasya ca tattvam* - the essential meaning of the word त्याग *tyāga*

पृथक् *prthak* - separately, one distinct from the other

What exactly are the meanings of the words संन्यास *saṁnyāsa* and त्याग *tyāga*? 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 *saṁnyāsa* and त्याग *tyāga* are concerned with कर्म *karma* and मोक्ष *mokṣa*, 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 *puruṣārtha* - the highest goal of life, namely मोक्ष *mokṣa*. That enquiry, as we know now, has led to the following unequivocal teaching of extraordinary significance to all humanity from Sri Krishna, The परमेश्वर *parameśvar* Himself.

मन्मना भव मद्भक्तो मद्याजी मां नमस्कुरु ।  
*manmanā bhava madbhakto madyājī māṁ namaskuru ।*  
मां एव एष्यसि सत्यं ते प्रतिजाने प्रियोऽसि मे ॥  
*māṁ eva eṣyasi satyaṁ te pratijāne priyo'si me ॥*

सर्वधर्मान् परित्यज्य मां एकं शरणं व्रज ।  
*sarva dharamān parityajya māṁ ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja ।*  
अहं त्वा सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः ॥  
*ahaṁ tvā sarva pāpebhyo mokṣa yiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ ॥*

That is the substance of the entire teachings of the भगवत् गीता *bhagavat gītā*. 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 *saṁnyāsa* and त्याग *tyāga*.

Literally speaking, संन्यास *saṁnyāsa* and त्याग *tyāga* have the same meaning, namely "giving up" or renunciation. Therefore संन्यास *saṁnyāsa* is त्याग *tyāga* -



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"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 *mokṣa*.

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

संन्यासी *saṁnyāsī* and कर्म योगी *karma yogī* are two mutually distinct classes of people in society. For example, an ordinary संन्यासी *saṁnyāsī* has no specific worldly duties whatsoever, whereas a कर्म योगी *karma yogī* has only worldly duties and nothing else.

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

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

संन्यासः कर्मयोगश्च निश्चेयसकरौ उभौ ।

*saṁnyāsaḥ karmayogaśca niśreyasakarau ubhau ।*

तयोस्तु कर्मसंन्यासात् कर्मयोगो विशिष्यते ॥

*tayostu karmasaṁnyāsāt karmayogo viśiṣyate ॥*

5 - 2

Both संन्यास *saṁnyāsa* and कर्म योग *karma yoga* can lead to मोक्ष *mokṣa*, but of these two ways of life, for you Arjuna, कर्म योग *karma yoga* is far superior to कर्म संन्यास *karma saṁnyāsa* as a means for gaining मोक्ष *mokṣa*. As a matter of fact

सांख्ययोगौ पृथक्बालाः प्रवदन्ति न पण्डिताः ।

*saṁkhya yogau pṛthak bālāḥ pravadanti na paṇḍitāḥ ।*



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एकं अपि आस्थितः सम्यक् उभयोः विन्दते फलम् ॥ 5-4  
*ekam api āsthitaḥ samyak ubhayoḥ vindate phalam ॥*

It is childish to talk about कर्म संन्यास *karma saṁnyāsa* and कर्म योग *karma yoga* 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

यत्सांख्यैः प्राप्यते स्थानं तत् योगैरपि गम्यते ।  
*yatsāṁkhayaiḥ prāpyate sthānaṁ tat yogairapi gamyate ।*  
एकं सांख्यं च योगं च यः पश्यति स पश्यति ॥ 5-5  
*ekam sāṁkhyaṁ ca yogaṁ ca yaḥ paśyati sa paśyati ॥*

The destination ultimately reached by कर्म संन्यासी *s karma saṁnyāsī* is also reached ultimately by कर्म योग *karma yogas*. Therefore, the one who sees कर्म संन्यास *karma saṁnyāsa* and कर्म योग *karma yoga* as ONE, that person alone understands the true meaning of कर्म संन्यास *karma saṁnyāsa* and कर्म योग *karma yoga*. (In conversational style, संन्यास *saṁnyāsa* always refers to only कर्म संन्यास *karma saṁnyāsa*).

From these words of Sri Krishna, Arjuna feels this way: If both संन्यास *saṁnyāsa* and कर्म योग *karma yoga* are equally effective means for gaining मोक्ष *mokṣa*, then why should I not follow संन्यास *saṁnyāsa* instead of कर्म योग *karma yoga*? Why does भगवान् *bhagavān* insist that only कर्म योग *karma yogas* are appropriate for me? If कर्म योग *karma yoga* is really superior to संन्यास *saṁnyāsa*, then why talk about संन्यास *saṁnyāsa* 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 *saṁnyāsa* and त्याग *tyāga*, Arjuna is probably hoping that Sri Krishna might say that both संन्यास *saṁnyāsa* and त्याग *tyāga* essentially mean the same thing, and that one can choose either संन्यास *saṁnyāsa* or कर्म योग *karma yoga* way of life as the means for gaining मोक्ष *mokṣa*, which would give him an opportunity to choose the life style of संन्यास *saṁnyāsa* 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 *bhagavān* does not recommend the ordinary traditional संन्यास *saṁnyāsa* way of life for Arjuna, simply because Arjuna's अन्तःकरण *antaḥ karaṇa* - mind and बुद्धि *buddhi*, is not yet ready for such a way of life.

The ordinary traditional संन्यास *saṁnyāsa* way of life is only an expression of चिवेक वैराग्य बुद्धि *viveka vairagya buddhi* of a मुमुक्षु *mumukṣu* - one who wants to gain ईश्वर ज्ञानं *īśvara jñānaṁ* through a life of self-discipline and total commitment to the pursuit of ब्रह्मविद्या *brahma vidyā*. The purpose of such संन्यास *saṁnyāsa* way of life is only to gain the ultimate disposition of Absolute संन्यास *saṁnyāsa*.

Absolute संन्यास *saṁnyāsa* is not कर्म संन्यास *karma saṁnyāsa* or ordinary Sanyasa. Absolute संन्यास *saṁnyāsa* is not a matter of one's choice, nor is it a matter of one's sheer will. Absolute संन्यास *saṁnyāsa* 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 *saṁnyāsa* is a matter of growing up. It is a matter of self-evolution. It is a matter of Self-knowledge - आत्म ज्ञानं *ātma jñānaṁ*. It is ultimately a matter of realization and recognition of ब्रह्म ज्ञानं *brahma jñānaṁ*, ईश्वर ज्ञानं *īśvara jñānaṁ*, आत्म ज्ञानं *ātma jñānaṁ* - Self-knowledge.

One has to grow up to gain the natural disposition of Absolute संन्यास *saṁnyāsa*. That disposition is the total absence of कर्तृत्व भाव *kartṛtva bhāva* - the sense of doership. When the sense of doership completely disappears from one's अन्तःकरण *antaḥ karaṇa* - mind and बुद्धि *buddhi*, one is fully established in oneself, The Universal Self in oneself, the प्रत्यग आत्मा *pratyaga ātmā* - 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 *karma* and गुण *guṇa*. 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 *antaḥ karaṇa* - mind and बुद्धि *buddhi*, has not yet evolved far enough to easily reach the disposition of Absolute संन्यास *saṁnyāsa* through the ordinary traditional संन्यास *saṁnyāsa* way of life, the कर्म



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संन्यास *karma saṁnyāsa* way of life. In fact, one cannot gain that disposition without first being a कर्म योगी *karma yogī*. भगवान् *bhagavān* has already said that in Chapter 5 itself.

संन्यासस्तु महाबाहो दुःखमाप्तुं अयोगतः ।  
*saṁnyāsastu mahābāho duḥkhamāptuṁ ayogataḥ* ।  
योगयुक्तः मुनिर्ब्रह्म नचिरेण अधिगच्छति ॥  
*yogayuktaḥ munirbrahma nacireṇa adhigacchati* ॥

5 - 6

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

Arjuna's question on संन्यास *saṁnyāsa* and त्याग *tyāga* only reveals that he has not yet understood the full meanings of both संन्यास *saṁnyāsa* and कर्म योग *karma yoga*. 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 *antaḥ karaṇa* - mind and बुद्धि *buddhi* firmly in सन् मार्ग *san mārگا* - in the direction of मोक्ष *mokṣa*, which is the purpose of the entire गीतोपदेश *gītopadeśa* - Gita Teachings.

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

श्री भगवानुवाच *śrī bhagavān uvāca*  
काम्यानां कर्मणां न्यासं संन्यासं कवयो विदुः ।  
*kāmyānāṁ karmaṇāṁ nyāsaṁ saṁnyāsaṁ kavayo viduḥ* ।  
सर्वं कर्म फलत्यागं प्राहुस्त्यागं विचक्षणाः ॥  
*sarva karma phala tyāgaṁ prāhustyāgaṁ vicakṣaṇāḥ* ॥

18-2

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



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कवयः विदुः *kavayah viduḥ* - the wise people know, and

विचक्षणाः प्राहुः *vicakṣaṇāḥ prāhuh* - 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 *kāmyānāṁ karamaṇāṁ nyāsaṁ saṁnyāsaṁ*  
न्यासं *nyāsaṁ* - means renunciation, त्याग *tyāga*. Renunciation of all काम्य कर्मसु *kāmya karmas*, कर्म *s karmas* prompted by worldly desires of various kinds, such as health, wealth, name, fame, power, पुण्य *puṇya*, पाप *pāpa*, heaven, etc. - renunciation of all such काम्य कर्मसु *kāmya karmas* is called संन्यास *saṁnyāsa*.

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

That we will see next time.