

## Reflections from Shrimad Bhagavadgita– Part 169: Chapter 18, Verses 38-41

(July 28 – August 3, 2021)

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### ORIGINAL SANSKRIT DOCUMENT

### TRANSLITERATION

विषयेन्द्रियसंयोगाद्यत्तदग्रेऽमृतोपमम् ।

*viṣhayendriya-sanyogād yat tad agre 'mṛitopamam*

परिणामे विषमिव तत्सुखं राजसं स्मृतम् ॥ १८-३८ ॥

*pariṇāme viṣham iva tat sukham rājasam smṛitam*

यदग्रे चानुबन्धे च सुखं मोहनमात्मनः ।

*yad agre chānubandhe cha sukham mohanam  
ātmanah*

निद्रालस्यप्रमादोत्थं तत्तामसमुदाहृतम् ॥ १८-३९ ॥

*nidrālasya-pramādottham tat tāmasam udāhṛitam*

न तदस्ति पृथिव्यां वा दिवि देवेषु वा पुनः ।

*na tad asti pṛithivyām vā divi deveṣhu vā punaḥ*

सत्त्वं प्रकृतिजैर्मुक्तं यदेभिः स्यात्त्रिभिर्गुणैः ॥ १८-४० ॥

*sattvaṁ prakṛiti-jair muktam yad ebhiḥ syāt tribhir  
guṇaiḥ*

ब्राह्मणक्षत्रियविशां शूद्राणां च परन्तप ।

*brāhmaṇa-kṣhatriya-viśhām śhūdrāṇām cha  
parantapa*

कर्माणि प्रविभक्तानि स्वभावप्रभवैर्गुणैः ॥ १८-४१ ॥

*karmāṇi pravibhaktāni svabhāva-prabhavair  
guṇaiḥ*

## TRANSLATION

- (38) Happiness is said to be in the mode of passion when it is derived from the contact of the senses with their objects. Such happiness is like nectar at first but poison at the end.
- (39) That happiness which covers the nature of the self from beginning to end, and which is derived from delusion, sleep, indolence, and negligence, is said to be in the mode of ignorance.
- (40) No living being on earth or the higher celestial abodes in this material realm is free from the influence of these three modes of nature.
- (41) The duties of the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras are distributed according to their qualities, in accordance with their *guṇas* (and not by birth).

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## CHAPTER 18

### Commentary

#### Verse 38

The *sukham* or happiness that is derived from sense gratification by the contact of the five senses, including eyes, ears, noses, tongue and body, with their sense objects, such as sexual and sensual bodily enjoyments, although seem like nectar in the beginning when it is fresh and newly experienced, but later after habitual repetition, again and again continuously throughout one's life, it becomes just like poison yielding grief in this world and the next. Such *sukham*, Lord Krishna confirms, as situated in *raja guna*, the mode of passion.

#### Verse 39

That *sukham* or happiness which stupefies the *jiva* or embodied being by making perception of reality obscure, both at the beginning as well at the end, even after the habitual, repetitive experience exhibits its true nature of enslavement and bondage to *samsara*, the perpetual cycle of birth and death, is affirmed by Lord Krishna as *tama guna*, the mode of ignorance. The word *mohanam* means delusion and is the obscuration of the true nature of reality. *Nidra* or slumber denotes lack of consciousness which can transpire even while engaging in an act of enjoyment. *Alasya* is slothfulness, the lassitude which

comes from habitually dulled senses and which certainly contributes to dullness of mind. *Pramada* is negligence or inattention to what is required and is connected to dullness of mind. So, the delusive nature of *nidra*, *alasya* and *pramada* are all situated firmly in *tama guna* and, along with the characteristics of *raja guna*, are very detrimental to the aspiring *jiva*.

#### Verse 40:

Thus, Summing up what has not been specifically mentioned in the previous chapters, the Supreme Lord Krishna asserts that there is no *jiva* or embodied being in a subtle body, physical body or etheric body anywhere in material existence throughout all creation, from the highest material being known as Brahma down to a simple plant, that is free from the influence of the three *gunas* or modes of material nature, which arise from the material substratum pervading physical existence. Nowhere in existence is any living entity in all of creation exempt from this reality.

#### Verse 41:

Thus far in Chapter 18, Lord Krishna has made an elaborate exposition on the three *gunas* or modes of material nature and how they influence the *jivas* or embodied beings. Beginning with this verse, He commences a new scheme, explaining the duties of the different classes of Vedic society such as *brahmana* or priestly class, *kshatriya* or royal and warrior class, *vaishya* or farmer and mercantile class, and *shudra* or menial worker class, which is the only one not qualified to take part in any Vedic activity as they serve the other three classes. In this and the following few verses, Lord Krishna clearly explains the design of the system of *Varnashram* of the Vedic Society. He says that that people have different natures, according to the *gunas* that shape their personalities, and so, different professional duties are suitable for them. The *varṇas* were not considered higher or lower amongst themselves. Since the center of society was God, everyone worked according to their intrinsic qualities to sustain themselves and the society in order to make their life a success by progressing toward God-realization. Thus, in the *varnashram* system, there was unity in diversity. Diversity is inherent in nature itself, take for example, we have various limbs in our body and they all perform different functions. Seeing them all as different is not a sign of ignorance, but factual knowledge of their utilities. Similarly, the variety amidst human beings cannot be ignored. The *varnashram* system recognized the diversity in human natures and scientifically prescribed duties and occupations matching people's natures. However, with the passage of time the *varnashram* system deteriorated, and the basis of the *varnas* changed from one's nature to one's birth. The children of Brahmins started calling themselves as Brahmins, irrespective of whether they possessed the corresponding qualities or not. Also, the concept of upper and lower castes got corrupted, and the upper

castes began looking down upon the lower castes. When the system grew rigid and birth-based, it became totally dysfunctional.