

Reflections from Shrimad Bhagavadgita– Part 40: Chapter 4, Verses 35-39

(February 6 –February 12, 2019)

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ORIGINAL SANSKRIT DOCUMENT

TRANSLITERATION

यज्ज्ञात्वा न पुनर्मोहमेवं यास्यसि पाण्डव ।
येन भूतान्यशेषाणि द्रक्ष्यस्यात्मन्यथो मयि ॥ ४-३५ ॥

yaj jñātvā na punar moham evaṁ yāsyasi pāṇḍava
yena bhūtānyaśheṣheṇa drakṣhyasyātmanyatho mayi

अपि चेदसि पापेभ्यः सर्वेभ्यः पापकृत्तमः ।
सर्वं ज्ञानप्लवेनैव वृजिनं सन्तरिष्यसि ॥ ४-३६ ॥

api ched asi pāpebhyaḥ sarvebhyaḥ pāpa-kṛit-tamaḥ
sarvaṁ jñāna-plavenaiva vṛjinaṁ santariṣhyasi

यथैधांसि समिद्धोऽग्निर्भस्मसात्कुरुतेऽर्जुन ।
ज्ञानाग्निः सर्वकर्माणि भस्मसात्कुरुते तथा ॥ ४-३७ ॥

yathaidhānsi samiddho 'gnir bhasma-sāt kurute
'rjuna
jñānāgniḥ sarva-karmāṇi bhasma-sāt kurute tathā

न हि ज्ञानेन सदृशं पवित्रमिह विद्यते ।
तत्स्वयं योगसंसिद्धः कालेनात्मनि विन्दति ॥ ४-३८ ॥

na hi jñānena sadṛśhaṁ pavitramiha vidyate
tatsvayaṁ yogasansiddhaḥ kālenātmani vindati

श्रद्धावाँल्लभते ज्ञानं तत्परः संयतेन्द्रियः ।
ज्ञानं लब्ध्वा परां शान्तिमचिरेणाधिगच्छति ॥ ४-३९ ॥

śhraddhāvān labhate jñānaṁ tat-parah
sanyatendriyah
jñānaṁ labdhvā parāṁ śhāntim
achireṇādhigachchhati

TRANSLATION

- (35)** Following this path and having achieved enlightenment from a Guru, O Arjun, you will no longer fall into delusion. In the light of that knowledge, you will see that all living beings are but parts of the Supreme, and are within me.
- (36)** Even those who are considered the most immoral of all sinners can cross over this ocean of material existence by seating themselves in the boat of divine knowledge.
- (37)** As a kindled fire reduces wood to ashes, O Arjun, so does the fire of knowledge burn to ashes all reactions from material activities.
- (38)** In this world, there is nothing as purifying as divine knowledge. One who has attained purity of mind through prolonged practice of Yog, receives such knowledge within the heart, in due course of time.
- (39)** Those whose faith is deep and who have practiced controlling their mind and senses attain divine knowledge. Through such transcendental knowledge, they quickly attain everlasting supreme peace.

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Commentary:

Verse 35:

By gaining the spiritual knowledge from an enlightened master, one will no longer be deluded by Maya or illusion and will realize that the *atma* or soul in all beings is identical with his own and that all souls are the actual body of the Supreme Being and never independent from Him. Under the illusion of Maya, we see the world as separate from God, and establish friendship or enmity with other human beings depending upon whether they satisfy or harm our own self-interest. Divine knowledge that comes with enlightenment changes our perspective and vision of the world. We then recognize all human beings as parts of God and harbor no enmity but instead develop a divine and friendly attitude toward everyone. In this context, it is worth noting what Lord Hanuman said in Ramayan: “*sīyā rāmamaya saba jaga jānī, karauñ pranāma jori jugapāni* (Ramacharitmaanas”: *I see the forms of Lord Ram and Mother Sita in everyone, and so I fold my hands and offer my respects to all.*

Verse 36:

This verse is consistent with what Kāthopanishad states on this subject:

vijñānasārthiryastu manaḥ pragrahavān naraḥso ’dhvanaḥ pāramāpnoti tadviṣṇoḥ paramaṁ padam (1.3.9)[v35]. “Illuminate your intellect with divine knowledge; then with the illumined intellect, control the unruly mind, to cross over the material ocean and reach the divine realm.” Material existence is like a vast ocean, where one is tossed around by the

waves of birth, disease, old age, and death. In this state of material bondage, there is no respite for the soul, and endless lifetimes have gone by being subjected to these conditions. Like a football being kicked around the field, the soul is elevated to the celestial abodes, dropped to the hellish planes of existence, and brought back to the earthly realm, etc. according to its karmas of righteous or sinful deeds. Divine knowledge provides the boat to cross over the material ocean. The ignorant get bound by Karmas. Performing the same karmas as a yajna to God liberates the one with knowledge. Thus, knowledge becomes the means of cutting material bondage.

Verse 37:

In this verse, Lord Krishna assures Arjuna that like a spark of fire which has the potential to burn down a huge heap of combustible material, so does the spiritual knowledge which can burn down a heap of our bad karmas from this as well as infinite previous lifetimes. If we endeavor to exhaust these karmas by reaping their results, it will take many more lifetimes, and in the meantime further karmas will accumulate in an endless process. Knowledge of the soul and its relationship with God leads us to surrender to Him. When we surrender to God, He burns our stockpile of karmas from endless lifetimes and releases us from material bondage.

Verse 38:

In this verse, Lord Krishna tells Arjuna that in this world there is nothing more purifying and sanctifying than the spiritual knowledge. Knowledge has the power not only to purify, but also to elevate, liberate, and unite a person with God. It is thus supremely sublime and pure. But a distinction needs to be made between theoretical information and practical realization. Theoretical information acquired by reading the scriptures and hearing from the Guru is insufficient by itself. It is just as if someone has memorized a cookbook but has never really entered the kitchen. Such theoretical knowledge of cooking does not help in satiating one's hunger. Similarly, one may acquire theoretical knowledge on the topics of the soul, God, Maya, karma, jñāna, and bhakti from the Guru, but that by itself does not make a person God-realized. When one practices sadhana in accordance with the theory, it results in purification of the mind. Perfecting oneself by the practice of Yoga under the tutelage of the self-realized spiritual master one will naturally attain *atma tattva* or self-realization in due course of time.

Verse 39:

In this verse, Lord Krishna introduces the concept of faith in the context of knowledge. It is consistent with what Shvetashvatar Upanishad states on the same subject:

yasya deve parā bhaktiḥ yathā deve tathā gurau tasyaite kathitā hyarthāḥ prakāśhante mahātmanaḥ (6.23)[v38]

The imports of all the Vedic knowledge is revealed within the hearts of those who engage with unflinching faith in devotion toward Guru and God. Jagadguru Shankaracharya has defined faith as follows:

guru vedānta vākyeṣhu dṛiḍho viśhvāsaḥ śhraddhā

“Faith means firm confidence in the words of the Guru and the scriptures.”

Not all spiritual truths are immediately perceptible; some of them can only be experienced after having attained sufficient elevation on the path. If we only accept what we can presently verify or comprehend, we will be bereft of the higher spiritual secrets. Faith helps us accept what we cannot understand at present. However, blind faith is not a desirable thing. Before placing it on any Guru, we must use our intellect to confirm that the Guru has realized the Absolute Truth, and he is teaching it in accordance with the eternal Vedic scriptures. Once this is confirmed, then we should strive to deepen our faith in such a Guru, and surrender to God under his guidance.