

Reflections from Shrimad Bhagavadgita– Part 27: Chapter 3, Verses 18-23

(October 31 –November 6, 2018)

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ORIGINAL SANSKRIT DOCUMENT

नैव तस्य कृतेनार्थो नाकृतेनेह कश्चन ।
न चास्य सर्वभूतेषु कश्चिदर्थव्यपाश्रयः ॥ ३-१८ ॥
तस्मादसक्तः सततं कार्यं कर्म समाचर ।
असक्तो ह्याचरन्कर्म परमाप्नोति पूरुषः ॥ ३-१९ ॥
कर्मणैव हि संसिद्धिमास्थिता जनकादयः ।
लोकसंग्रहमेवापि सम्पश्यन्कर्तुमर्हसि ॥ ३-२० ॥
यद्यदाचरति श्रेष्ठस्तत्तदेवेतरो जनः ।
स यत्प्रमाणं कुरुते लोकस्तदनुवर्तते ॥ ३-२१ ॥
न मे पार्थास्ति कर्तव्यं त्रिषु लोकेषु किञ्चन ।
नानवाप्तमवाप्तव्यं वर्त एव च कर्मणि ॥ ३-२२ ॥
यदि ह्यहं न वर्तेयं जातु कर्मण्यतन्द्रितः ।
मम वर्तमानुवर्तन्ते मनुष्याः पार्थ सर्वशः ॥ ३-२३ ॥

TRANSLITERATION

*naiva tasya kṛtenārtho nākṛteneha kaścana
na cāsya sarva-bhūteṣu kaścīd artha-vyapāśrayaḥ
tasmād asaktaḥ satataṁ kāryaṁ karma samācara
asakto hy ācaran karma param āpnoti pūruṣaḥ
karmaṇaiva hi saṁsiddhim āsthitā janakādayaḥ
loka-saṅgraham evāpi sampāśyan kartum arhasi
yad yad ācarati śreṣṭhas tat tad evetaro janaḥ
sa yat pramāṇaṁ kurute lokas tad anuvartate
na me pārthāsti kartavyaṁ triṣu lokeṣu kiñcana
nānavāptam avāptavyaṁ varta eva ca karmaṇi
yadi hy ahaṁ na varteyaṁ jātu karmaṇy atandritaḥ
mama vartmānuvartante manuṣyāḥ pārtha sarvaśaḥ*

TRANSLATION

- (18)** Such self-realized souls have nothing to gain or lose either in discharging or renouncing their duties. Nor do they need to depend on other living beings to fulfill their self-interest.
- (19)** Therefore, giving up attachment, perform actions as a matter of duty, for by working without being attached to the fruits, one attains the Supreme.
- (20)** By performing their prescribed duties, King Janak and others attained perfection. You should
&
(21) also perform your work to set an example for the good of the world. Whatever actions great persons perform, common people follow. Whatever standards they set, all the world pursues.
- (22)** There is no duty for me to do in all the three worlds, O Parth, nor do I have anything to gain or attain. Yet, I am engaged in prescribed duties.
- (23)** For if I did not carefully perform the prescribed duties, O Parth, all men would follow my path in all respects.

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1clOrmo6TAuq7aJrD7dv5Lg21X6Urvb3y>

Commentary:

Verse 18:

Until now, Lord Krishna was talking about prescribed worldly duties (*Karma*) and saying that they must be done as an offering to God. This was necessary to purify the mind, helping it rise above worldly contamination. But self-realized souls have already reached absorption in God and developed purity of mind. These transcendental souls are directly engaged in pure spiritual activities, such as meditation, worship, Kirtan, Guru Seva, etc. (either *Jñana* or *Bhakti path*). If such souls reject their worldly duties, it is not considered a sin. They may continue to perform worldly duties if they wish, but they are not obliged to do so. Historically, Saints have been of two kinds: (a) Those like Prahlad, Dhruv, and Vibheeshan, who continued to discharge their worldly duties even after attaining the transcendental platform. These were the *Karma Yogis*—externally they were doing their duties with their body while internally their minds were attached to God, and (2) Those like Shankaracharya, Madhvacharya, Ramanujacharya, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, or Meerabai who rejected their worldly duties and accepted the renounced order of life. These were either the *Jñana Yogis* or *Bhakti Yogis*, who were both internally and externally, with body as well as mind, engaged only in devotion to God. In this verse, Lord Krishna tells Arjuna that both options (*Karma* or *Jñana/Bhakti* pathways) exist for the self-realized sage.

Verse 19:

In this verse, Lord Krishna explained to Arjuna that while three different paths to *Moksha* (liberation)—*Karma Yoga*, *Jnana Yoga*, and *Bhakti Yoga*—are available, why he would specifically recommend *Karma Yoga* to him. From verses 3.8 to 3.16, Lord Krishna strongly urged those who

have not yet reached the transcendental platform of *Atma-Tattva* (self-realization) to perform their prescribed duties with no attachment (*Karma Yoga*). In verses 3.17 and 3.18, he stated that the transcendentalist is not obliged to perform prescribed duties. So, why *Karma Yoga* path is more suitable for Arjuna? Arjuna had not yet attained *Atma-Tattva* or *Moksa* at that time; but he was certainly knowledgeable of the path to *Atma-Tattva* and was dedicated to pleasing the Supreme Lord. The difference in consciousness between the righteous Arjuna and the liberated Arjuna was not that big; but he still needed to perform actions without attachment while the liberated ones had no need to perform the prescribed actions.

Verses 20 & 21:

Leaders of society have a moral responsibility to set lofty examples for inspiring the rest of the population by their words, deeds, and character. Humanity is inspired by the ideals that they see in the lives of great people. Such leaders inspire society by their example and become shining beacons for the masses to follow. When noble leaders are in the forefront, the rest of society naturally gets uplifted in morality, selflessness, and spiritual strength. But in times when there is a vacuum of principled leadership, the rest of society has no standards to pursue and slumps into self-centeredness, moral bankruptcy, and spiritual lassitude. Hence, great personalities should always act in an exemplary manner to set the standard for the world. Even though they themselves may have risen to the transcendental platform, and may not need to perform prescribed Vedic duties, by doing so, they inspire others to perform prescribed Vedic actions. In this verse, Lord Krishna cites an example of King Janak, who attained perfection through *Karma Yoga*, while discharging his kingly duties. Even after reaching the transcendental platform, he continued to do his worldly duties, purely for the reason that it would set a good example for the world to follow. Many other Saints did the same. Therefore, He advises Arjuna that he should also perform his duties without attachment or desire for rewards simply to set an example for the good of the world and for others to follow his lead. The leader may be at the transcendental platform and therefore eligible to renounce work and engage completely in spirituality. However, others in society use their example as an excuse for escapism, to run away from their responsibilities. Nowadays, we find thousands of such fake Sadhus. They copy the examples of the great *Sanyāsīs* and don the ochre robes, without the concurrent internal enlightenment and bliss. Though externally renounced, their nature forces them to seek happiness, and devoid of the divine bliss of God, they begin indulging in the lowly pleasure of worldly life. Thus, they slip even below the level of common people in household life.

Verse 22:

In this verse, Lord Krishna uses Himself as an example citing the fact that as the creator of all the worlds He has nothing to gain as He controls everything, is perfect and complete in Himself, has an eternal and infinite bliss and has no need of anything outside of Himself. Yet, He still performs His transcendental pastimes completely in line with the Vedic scriptures to benefit the welfare of all beings and the world. The reason why most people work is because they need something. We all know that God is an ocean of bliss, and hence we all seek bliss from Him. Since, we have not attained perfect bliss as yet, we feel dissatisfied and incomplete. So if God, who is self-sufficient and fully satisfied in Himself, still does work, there can be only one reason for it—it will not be for

Himself, but rather for the welfare of others. Thus, Lord Krishna tells Arjuna that although in His human form as Shri Krishna, he has no duty to perform in the universe, yet he works for the welfare of the world.

Verse 23:

God descended to the material world in the form of Krishna, playing the role of a king (of Dwaraka) and a great leader. Were He not to follow the prescribed Vedic activities in His earthly role as a king, then many of his otherwise great subjects would follow in His footsteps with a false notion that it is ok to violate the prescribed activities as it is the standard set by their leader. Lord Krishna tells Arjuna that by doing so, He would be at a great fault for leading them astray, which in turn would bring ruin to the world.