

Reflections from Shrimad Bhagavadgita– Part 39: Chapter 4, Verses 30-34

(January 30 –February 5, 2019)

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ORIGINAL SANSKRIT DOCUMENT

TRANSLITERATION

अपरे नियताहाराः प्राणान्प्राणेषु जुह्वति ।
सर्वेऽप्येते यज्ञविदो यज्ञक्षपितकल्मषाः ॥ ४-३० ॥
यज्ञशिष्टामृतभुजो यान्ति ब्रह्म सनातनम् ।
नायं लोकोऽस्त्ययज्ञस्य कुतोऽन्यः कुरुसत्तम ॥ ४-३१ ॥
एवं बहुविधा यज्ञा वितता ब्रह्मणो मुखे ।
कर्मजान्विद्धि तान्सवनिवं ज्ञात्वा विमोक्ष्यसे ॥ ४-३२ ॥
श्रेयान्द्रव्यमयाद्यज्ञाज्ज्ञानयज्ञः परन्तप ।
सर्वं कर्माखिलं पार्थ ज्ञाने परिसमाप्यते ॥ ४-३३ ॥
तद्विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया ।
उपदेक्ष्यन्ति ते ज्ञानं ज्ञानिनस्तत्त्वदर्शिनः ॥ ४-३४ ॥

apare niyatāhārāḥ prāṇān prāṇeṣhu juhvati
sarve 'pyete yajña-vido yajña-kṣhapita-kalmaṣhāḥ
yajña-śhiṣṭāmṛita-bhujo yānti brahma sanātanam
nāyam loko 'styayajñasya kuto 'nyaḥ kuru-sattama
evam bahu-vidhā yajñā vitatā brahmaṇo mukhe
karma-jān viddhi tān sarvān evam jñātvā
vimokṣhyase
śhreyān dravya-mayād yajñāḥ jñāna-yajñāḥ
parantapa
sarvam karmākhilam pārtha jñāne parisamāpyate
tad viddhi praṇipātena paripraśhnena sevayā
upadekṣhyanti te jñānam jñāninas tattva-darśinaḥ

TRANSLATION

- (30)** Yet others curtail their food intake and offer the breath into the life-energy as sacrifice. All these knowers of sacrifice are cleansed of their impurities as a result of such performances.
- (31)** Those who know the secret of sacrifice, and engaging in it, partake of its remnants that are like nectar, advance toward the Absolute Truth. O best of the Kurus, those who perform no sacrifice find no happiness either in this world or the next.
- (32)** All these different kinds of sacrifice have been described in the Vedas. Know them as originating from different types of work; this understanding cuts the knots of material bondage.
- (33)** O subduer of enemies, sacrifice performed in knowledge is superior to any mechanical material sacrifice. After all, O Parth, all sacrifices of work culminate in knowledge.
- (34)** Learn the Truth by approaching a spiritual master. Inquire from him with reverence and render service unto him. Such an enlightened Saint can impart knowledge unto you because he has seen the Truth.

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Commentary:

Verse 30:

The Vedic scriptures describe five kinds of *prāṇas* in the body—*prāṇa*, *apāna*, *vyāna*, *samāna*, and *udāna*—that help regulate various physiological bodily functions. Amongst these, *samāna* is responsible for the bodily function of digestion. Some people may be inclined toward fasting. They curtail their eating with the knowledge that diet impacts character and behavior. Such fasting has been employed as a spiritual technique in India since ancient times and also considered here as a form of *yajña*. When the diet is curtailed, the senses become weak and the *samāna*, which is responsible for digestion, is made to neutralize itself. This is the nature of the sacrifice that some people perform. People perform these various kinds of austerities for the purpose of purification. It is the *desire* for gratification of the senses and the mind, which leads to the heart becoming impure. The aim of all these austerities is to curtail the natural inclination of the senses and mind to seek pleasure in material objects. When these austerities are performed as a sacrifice (*yajna*) to the Supreme, they result in the purification of the heart (The word “heart” is used here to refer to the internal machinery of the mind and intellect).

Verse 31:

The secret of sacrifice is the understanding that it should be performed for the pleasure of God, and then the remnants can be taken as his *prasad* (grace). For example, devotees of

the Lord partake of food after offering it to Him. After cooking the food, they place it on the altar and pray to God to accept their offering. In their mind, they meditate on the sentiment that God is actually eating from the plate. At the end of the offering, the remnants on the plate are accepted as *prasād*, or the grace of God. Partaking of such nectar-like *prasād* leads to illumination, purification, and spiritual advancement. When objects or activities are offered as sacrifice to God, then the remnants, or *prasād*, are a nectar-like blessing for the soul. Those who do not perform sacrifice to God remain entangled in the fruitive reactions of work and continue to experience the torments of Maya.

Verse 32:

Lord Krishna presents here the appraisal and authenticity of His previously described *yajñas* or offerings of worship. He says that it is “different strokes for different folks”. This means that the type of *yajña* to be performed depends upon the qualification and inclination of the performer. Some may do it mentally, some may do it orally, and some others may do it physically. One of the fascinating features of the Vedas is that they recognize and cater to the wide variety of human behavior. Different kinds of sacrifice have thus been described for different kinds of performers. The common thread running through them is that they are to be done with devotion, as an offering to God. With this understanding, one is not bewildered by the multifarious instructions in the Vedas, and by pursuing the particular *yajna* suitable to one’s nature, one can be released from material bondage and attain *Moksha*.

Verse 33:

In this verse, Lord Krishna puts the previously described sacrifices in proper perspective. He tells Arjuna that doing physical acts of devotion alone are not good enough for one’s relief from material bondage. Ritualistic ceremonies, fasts, mantra chants, holy pilgrimages, are all fine, but if they are not performed with knowledge, they remain mere physical activities. Although such mechanical activities are still better than not doing anything at all, but they are not sufficient in themselves to purify the mind. Many people chant God’s name on rosary beads, sit in recitations of the scriptures, visit holy places, and perform worship ceremonies, with the belief that the physical act itself is sufficient for liberating them from material bondage. The cause of bondage and liberation is the *mind*. Whatever form of devotion one does, the mind has to be totally engaged in meditating upon God. Mahatma Kabir Das put this idea very eloquently in one of his famous Dohas:

माला फेरत जुग भया, फिरा न मन का फेर,
कर का मनका डार दे, मन का मनका फेर।

“O Sanyasi, you have been rotating the chanting beads for many ages, but the mischief of your mind has never ceased. Now put those beads down, and instead, rotate the beads of your mind.”

Devotional sentiments are nourished by the cultivation of knowledge. Cultivating knowledge of God and our relationship with Him nurtures devotional sentiments. Therefore, Lord Krishna explains to Arjuna that sacrifices performed in knowledge are superior to the sacrifice of material things.

Verse 34:

In the previous verse, Lord Krishna talked about how all sacrifices should be made with spiritual knowledge of God. In here, He explains how one can go about earning such a knowledge, which is altogether different from actions that bestow material rewards. He

instructs everyone to (a) seek a self-realized soul as one's spiritual master, (b) render service unto him with faith and devotion, and (c) inquire from him with a pure heart about the purpose of life, the true nature of a living being and how to revive one's relationship with the Supreme Being. By these questions and by being pleased by one's sincere service, such a self-realized being will guide and instruct one on matters related to the ultimate truth because he has direct experience and wisdom of this and thus will remove all doubts about: Who am I? Why am I here? What is the purpose my life?, etc. The self-realized being will dispel all these questions by proper reasoning and evidences from the Vedic scriptures as well as practical experience. The master will reveal the nature of the individual consciousness and its relationship with the ultimate consciousness, which is the goal of all existence. All actions culminate in knowledge when instructed by a self-realized being but never when instructed by those who are not self-realized. The Absolute Truth cannot be understood merely by our own contemplation. The intellect of the soul is clouded by ignorance from endless lifetimes. Covered with nescience, the intellect cannot overcome its ignorance simply by its own effort. One needs to receive knowledge from a God-realized Saint who knows the Absolute Truth. One of the most magnanimous graces of God is when He brings the soul in contact with a true Guru. The plural sense of the words *jnaninah*, meaning those experts in the Vedic scriptures, and *darshinah* meaning those who realized the ultimate truth, denotes that all self-realized beings will possess this spiritual knowledge.