

Reflections from Shrimad Bhagavadgita– Part 14: Chapter 2, Verses 18-23

(August 1 –August 7, 2018)

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ORIGINAL SANSKRIT DOCUMENT

अन्तवन्त इमे देहा नित्यस्योक्ताः शरीरिणः ।
अनाशिनोऽप्रमेयस्य तस्माद् युध्यस्व भारत ॥ १८ ॥

य एनं वेत्ति हन्तारं यश्चैनं मन्यते हतम् ।
उभौ तौ न विजानीतो नायं हन्ति न हन्यते ॥ १९ ॥

न जायते म्रियते वा कदाचिन्
नायं भूत्वा भविता वा न भूयः ।
अजो नित्यः शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो
न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे ॥ २० ॥

वेदाविनाशिनं नित्यं य एनमजमव्ययम् ।
कथं स पुरुषः पार्थ कं घातयति हन्ति कम् ॥ २१ ॥

वासांसि जीर्णानि यथा विहाय नवानि गृह्णाति नरोऽपराणि ।
तथा शरीराणि विहाय जिर्णान्य न्यानि संयाति नवानि देही ॥ २२ ॥

नैनं छिन्दन्ति शस्त्राणि नैनं दहति पावकः ।
न चैनं क्लेदयन्त्यापो न शोषयति मारुतः ॥ २३ ॥

TRANSLITERATION

*antavanta ime dehā nityasyoktāḥ śarīriṇaḥ
anāśino prameyasya tasmād yudhyasva bhārata*

*ya enam veti hantāraṁ yaś cainaṁ manyate hatam
ubhau tau na vijānīto nāyaṁ hanti na hanyate*

*na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin
nāyaṁ bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ
ajo nityaḥ śāśvato 'yaṁ purāṇo
na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre*

*vedāvināśinaṁ nityaṁ ya enam ajam avyayam
katham sa puruṣaḥ pārtha kaṁ ghātayati hanti kam*

*vāsāṁsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya navāni grhṇāti naro 'parāṇi
tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇāny anyāni saṁyāti navāni dehī*

*nainaṁ chindanti śastrāṇi nainaṁ dahati pāvakaḥ
na cainaṁ kledayanty āpo na śoṣayati mārutaḥ*

TRANSLATION

- (18)** The embodied soul is eternal in existence, indestructible and infinite, only the material body is factually perishable; therefore fight O Arjuna.
- (19)** Anyone who thinks the soul is the slayer and anyone who thinks the soul is slain both of them are in ignorance; the soul never slays nor is slain.
- (20)** The soul never takes birth and never dies at any time nor does it come into being again when the body is created. The soul is birthless, eternal, imperishable and timeless and is never destroyed when the body is destroyed.
- (21)** O Arjuna, one who knows the soul as eternal, unborn, undeteriorating and indestructible; how does that person cause death to anyone and whom does he slay?
- (22)** Just as a man giving up old worn out garments accepts other new apparel, in the same way the embodied soul giving up old and worn out bodies verily accepts new bodies.
- (23)** Weapons cannot harm the soul, fire cannot burn the soul, water cannot wet and air cannot dry up the soul.

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1ausytyG6exRQWGn0NHUsOD-EWKZEnKVG>

Commentary:

Verse 18:

That which is characterized by a beginning and an end is considered as not being real. The physical body is subject to pleasure and pain, old age and disease. Although the eternal soul is embodied within the physical body; its position is not compromised or affected by the modifications of the physical body. It is therefore *aprameyasya* or immeasurable, existing always in the same condition, complete within itself. This instruction of the Supreme Lord verifies that the immortal soul being distinct from the body has no factual connection with pleasure, pain, old age or disease so He directs Arjuna not to yield to lamentation born from delusion but to accept his duty as a ksatriya and duly engage in battle.

Verse 19:

After establishing the immortality of the soul, Lord Krishna informs Arjuna that for anyone to believe that it is possible for the soul to be slain or anyone believing that they can be responsible for the slaying of the soul, are both in complete ignorance. Not being able to fathom the intrinsic nature of the soul they cannot realize that the soul is never the instigator of any action nor is the soul ever the recipient of any action.

Verse 20:

This verse establishes the eternal nature of the soul, which is ever-existing and beyond birth and death. Consequently, it is devoid of the six types of transformations: *asti, jāyate, vardhate, vipariṇamate, apakṣhīyate,* and *vinaśhyati*--existence in the womb, birth, growth, procreation, decay, and death." These are transformations of the body, not of the soul. What we call as death is merely the destruction of the body, but the immortal self remains unaffected by all bodily changes. With the two words 'ajah' meaning unborn and 'nityah' meaning eternal, it is made clear that the two modifications of birth and death are not applicable with regard to the soul. This concept has been repeatedly emphasized in the Upanishads. The *Kaṭhopanishad* contains a verse almost identical to the above verse of the *Bhagavad Gita*:

na jāyate mriyate vā vipaśhchin nāyam kutaśhchin na babhūva kaśhchit
ajo nityaḥ śhāśhvato 'yam purāṇo na hanyate hanyamāne śharīre (1.2.18) [v25]

"The soul is not born, nor does it die; it did not spring from something, and nothing sprang from it. It is unborn, eternal, immortal, and ageless. It is not destroyed when the body is destroyed."

This is also consistent with the following verse of the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣhad*:

sa vā eṣha mahān aja ātmājaro 'maro 'mṛito 'bhayaḥ (4.4.25) [v26]

"The soul is glorious, unborn, deathless, free from old age, immortal, and fearless."

Verse 21:

If one understands that the eternal soul is incapable of being destroyed, why then would he have any doubts that he cannot slay anyone? The word *avinashinam* means indestructible, *nityam* means eternal and therefore by its own inherent nature the immortal soul is imperishable because what is eternal is never in a state of modification. The word defect is commonly used for that which is not of perfection. The physical body of the living entities is not perfect, it is defective, thus the word destruction is applicable to the physical body but never to the eternal soul.

A spiritually elevated soul quells the ego that makes us feel that we are the doers of our actions. In that state, one can see that the soul seated within actually does nothing. Such an elevated soul, though doing all kinds of actions, is never tainted by them. Shree Krishna is advising Arjuna that he must elevate himself to that enlightened level, seeing himself as the non-doer, free from egotism, and perform his duty rather than shirk from it.

Verse 22:

In this verse, Lord Krishna explains that just as there is no grief when one discards the old worn out garment and accepts a new garment, in the same way there should be no grief when the embodied soul discards the old worn out body and accepts the new body. What new body will it be is going to be dependent on one's own *karma* or actions in the present life. So if a virtuous preceptor like Bhishma were to lose his body in this war of righteousness, then he would only receive a better new physical body in his next life. Therefore, there is no need for grief at the destruction of the present old, worn out body.

Verse 23:

The Supreme Lord Krishna explains to Arjuna that the soul is totally divine, and hence is beyond the interactions with any material objects. It can never be cut by any weapons, nor can it be burned by fire, nor moistened by water, nor withered by air. Although the use of the word *na* meaning never only once would have been sufficient to establish the premise of utter futility in trying to destroy the soul, it has been used four times to emphasize the indestructibility of the soul.