

Reflections from Shrimad Bhagavadgita– Part 42: Chapter 4, Chapter-4 Summary

(February 20 –February 26, 2019)

Jñāna-Karma-Sannyāsa Yoga



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THE
ENTIRE
CHAPTER-4**

**(VERSES 1-42)
OF
SHRIMAD
BHAGAVAD
GITA**

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The Summary of

Chapter 4

Jñāna-Karma-Sannyāsa Yoga

[The Bhagavadgita names this chapter as Jñāna-Karma-Sannyāsa Yoga since it deals with the renunciation of all activities through the knowledge of the actionless 'I' amidst the activities of the body]

Based on the contents of the 42 verses, this chapter can be divided into the following six sections:

The Topic

Verses

1. Gītā-stuti and avatāra	01-08
2. Knowledge of avatāra and its result	09-15
3. The wisdom of seeing inaction in action and <i>vice versa</i>	16-24
4. The glory and the means of knowledge.....	25-34
5. Benefit of knowledge.....	35-37
6. Qualifications and disqualifications.....	38-42

Lord Kṛiṣṇa discussed with Arjuna the **Sāṅkhyayoga and Karmayoga** in the 2nd and 3rd chapters of the Bhagavadgita, respectively. **He says that these two Yogas are nothing new as He had already introduced them thousands of years ago through the Karma Kāṇḍa and Jñāna Kāṇḍa of the Vedas.** Thus, this is an ancient wisdom which has stood the test of time. Lord begins the 4th chapter by referring to the above aspect so that Arjuna will have reverence for Gītā. The Lord points out that He initiated the lineage of Vivasvān, Manu, Ikṣvāku, and 9 others in the beginning of the creation. It is the same ancient Vedic wisdom which is being revived by Lord Kṛiṣṇa through Arjuna in the form of the Gītā because it had declined by that time (v 2, 3). **But Arjuna wonders how Lord Kṛiṣṇa, who is his contemporary, can be the initiator of the ancient Vedic wisdom (v 4).** As an answer to this question, Kṛiṣṇa introduces the topic of avatāra (v 5-8).

Lord Krishna explains to Arjuna that we are born because of our own Karma (*Vyaṣṭi-Karma*) as well as the total Karma of the World (*Samaṣṭi-Karma*). In the case of the Lord, His own Karma is not there. Thus, the Karma of the World becomes the cause for the birth of the Lord. **The evil actions of the wicked and the noble worship of the saints necessitates the manifestation (*avatāra*) of the Lord to punish the former and bless the latter. Thus, the Lord establishes *Dharma* in the universe (v 7-8).** But, since this birth is only through *Māyā*, it is apparent. Hence it does not affect the true birth-less nature of the Lord (v 6). Moreover, since *Māyā* is under control of the Lord, His omniscience, omnipotence, etc. are not veiled. He remembers all the past (v 5) as well as His true nature. It is from this standpoint that Lord Kṛiṣṇa says “I initiated the Vedic tradition.”

In 9th - 15th verses, the Lord talks about His true nature and its knowledge. **Though the Lord seems to be active, He is free from all activities and their results (v 13-14). He is *Akartā* and *Abhoktā*.** One who recognizes this nature of the Lord also becomes liberated i.e., becomes free from actions and their results (v 9). **This shows that the true nature of the Lord and *Jivatma* are one and the same.** But, being interested in the pursuit of various types of means and ends, one does not turn to this liberating knowledge (v 12). **Still, some people manage to become one with the Lord by freeing the mind from attachment, hatred and fear, by surrendering to the Lord, and by finally gaining Self-knowledge (v 10).** Lord gives whatever the devotee seeks (v 11).

From the 16th to the 24th verse, Lord Kṛiṣṇa gives the knowledge of the nature of action and inaction and the characteristics of the person of such a knowledge. Having talked about the rareness of such a knowledge (v 16-17), the Lord defines a wiseman as one who sees actionlessness (of the Self) amidst the activities (of the body) as well as action in the seemingly inactive body (v 18). The idea is that the wise man accepts activities at the level of body because no one can expect relaxation at the body level. The very process of life is the continuous function of the body. One should only discover inner relaxation even amidst the activities by recognizing the true 'I' as the actionless Self. Therefore, true and complete renunciation is possible only through knowledge. In fact, the wise man never sees anything other than Brahman, that being the truth of all (v 25). Whether his body is active (v 20) or not (v 21), he is not affected. He is self-sufficient, content, independent, equanimous, and free from fancies, desires, expectations, attachments, and jealousy. His actions are meant for the worship of the Lord which uplifts the humanity (v 22-23).

From the 25th to the 34th verse, the Lord talks about the superiority of knowledge over all the other sādhanas and the way of getting that knowledge. Various Sādhanas are compared to Yajñas. They are: Brahmajñāna-Yajña, Deva-Yajña, Viṣayabhoga-Yajña, Dama-Yajña, Sama-Yajña, Prāṇāyāma-Yajña and Aahāranīyama-Yajña. All Sādhanas lead one to liberation by preparing the mind. But, being the direct means to liberation, Brahmajñāna-Yajña is superior to all (v 33). To get this knowledge one should approach a Guru who is established in the Truth (Tattva-Darśī) and who has the necessary language to communicate it (Jñānī). Such a teacher must be approached with humility, faith, and reverence and asked for this knowledge. Instructed by them through the scriptures, one gains knowledge; not otherwise (v 34).

From the 35th to the 37th verse, Lord Kṛiṣṇa talks about the benefit of this knowledge. Gaining the knowledge, one will not get into delusion once again. For, he sees everything in the Lord as well as in him (i.e., he recognizes his identity with the Lord) (v 35). By this knowledge, one crosses over the ocean of sin however vast it may be (v 36). Like a blazing fire, this knowledge reduces to ashes (renders inoperative) all the Karmas (v 37). Hence, knowledge is the greatest purifier. (All other Sādhanas can produce Puṇya which itself is a bondage. Moreover, no other Sādhana can destroy ignorance which is the root cause of all sins.

From the 38th to the 42nd verse, Lord Krishna discusses the importance of finding the right Guru for guidance, knowledge, and advice. That seeker who has purified the mind will soon attain knowledge by the teaching of a Guru (v 38). In the concluding verses, v 38-42, Bhagavān talks about the qualifications and disqualifications with regard to Self-Knowledge. One who has faith in the Guru and the Shāstra, sense-control and a sincere desire for knowledge will gain the knowledge (v 39). On the other hand, one who is ignorant, faithless, and doubting is doomed. He cannot enjoy anything in here or in the hereafter (v 40). Therefore, "Arjuna! Eliminate all doubts regarding the validity of these

spiritual pursuits, and resort to *Karmayoga*”, advises Lord Kṛiṣṇa (v 42). *Karmas* do not bind one who is ultimately established in the doubtless knowledge of the Self (v 41). This is freedom through knowledge despite action.