

**Reflections from Shrimad Bhagavadgita– Part 138: Chapter 15, Verses 01-03**

(December 23 – December 29, 2020)

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**ORIGINAL SANSKRIT DOCUMENT**

**TRANSLITERATION**

**अथ पञ्चदशोऽध्यायः**

**ATHA PANCHADASHODHYAYAH**

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

*śhrī-bhagavān uvācha*

ऊर्ध्वमूलमधःशाखमश्वत्थं प्राहुरव्ययम् ।

*ūrdhva-mūlam adhaḥ-śhākham aśhvattham prāhur  
avyayam*

छन्दांसि यस्य पर्णानि यस्तं वेद स वेदवित् ॥ १५-१ ॥

*chhandānsi yasya parṇāni yas taṁ veda sa veda-vit*

अधश्चोर्ध्वं प्रसृतास्तस्य शाखा

*adhaśh chordhvaṁ prasṛitās tasya śhākhā*

गुणप्रवृद्धा विषयप्रवालाः ।

*guṇa-pravṛiddhā viṣhaya-pravālāḥ*

अधश्च मूलान्यनुसन्ततानि

*adhaśh cha mūlāny anusantatāni*

कर्मानुबन्धीनि मनुष्यलोके ॥ १५-२ ॥

*karmānubandhīni manuṣhya-loke*

न रूपमस्येह तथोपलभ्यते

*na rūpam asyeha tathopalabhyate*

नान्तो न चादिर्न च सम्प्रतिष्ठा ।

*nānto na chādir na cha sampratiṣṭhā*

अश्वत्थमेनं सुविरूढमूलं

*aśhvattham enaṁ su-virūḍha-mūlam*

असङ्गशस्त्रेण दृढेन छित्त्वा ॥ १५-३ ॥

*asaṅga-śhastreṇa dṛiḍhena chhittvā*

## TRANSLATION

- (01)** The Supreme Divine Personality said: They speak of an eternal *aśhvath* tree with its roots above and branches below. Its leaves are the Vedic hymns, and one who knows the secret of this tree is the knower of the Vedas.
- (02)** The branches of the tree extend upward and downward, nourished by the three *guṇas*, with the objects of the senses as tender buds. The roots of the tree hang downward, causing the flow of karma in the human form. Below, its roots branch out causing (karmic) actions in the world of humans.
- (03)** The inverted form of this tree cannot be perceived in this world, neither its beginning nor its end, nor its continued existence. But this deep-rooted *aśhvath* tree must be cut down with a strong axe of detachment.

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PTmnwfdzOD\\_91NF64jHHVxQdvRoMxSFX/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PTmnwfdzOD_91NF64jHHVxQdvRoMxSFX/view?usp=sharing)

## Chapter 15

### Verse 01:

Here Lord Krishna states that only by exclusive devotion to the Supreme Lord is one able to remove the bondage of *samsara* the perpetual cycle of birth and death which is indicative of detachment from all other desires and pursuits. In order to properly emphasize detachment, the Supreme Lord uses the metaphor of the *ashvattha* or banyan tree which represents material existence. He speaks of detachment as the weapon, cutting the knots of bondage asunder. Lord Krishna reveals His absolute dominion and sovereign glory over all creation and everything that is in it. The state of *samsara* is symbolized by the *ashvattha* or banyan tree which in real life has its roots growing upwards and its branches growing downwards. The indestructible nature of *samsara* is symbolized in the second division of the Katha Upanisad III.I, beginning *urdhva mulo avak shakha*, which means: With roots upwards and branches downwards, this primeval tree is everlasting. With roots upwards refers to our Brahma with four faces, the secondary creator who is situated above the seven worlds of Bhur, Bhuvah, Svah, Mahah, etc.. The branches downwards refer to all the denizens of creation in the form of humans, animals, birds, fish, plants, insects, etc. The indestructible nature of this tree is due to its being *avyayam* or everlasting like a river with no end and because as a tree it is impossible to uproot until one is weaned from sense gratification and material desires by the mercy of the Supreme Lord. The word *chandamsi* refers to the injunctions and prohibitions of the Vedic scriptures which are symbolized by

the leaves which flourish or dwindle in proportion to the *karma* or reactions to the actions one accrues by adhering to or ignoring such provisions. Leaves are very instrumental in preserving the longevity of trees. Whoever is knowledgeable of this tree as just explained comprehends the Vedic scriptures that the knowledge of non-attachment is the ways and means of uprooting this tree and allows one to achieve *atma tattva*.

### **Verse 02:**

The branches on this *ashvattha* tree symbolize all the *jivas* or embodied beings who arise due to *karma* or reactions to actions. The downward branches symbolize humans, animals, plants, etc. and the upward branches symbolize the demigods administering universal management. All the branches are part of *prakriti* the material substratum pervading physical existence and all are nourished by the three *gunas* or three modes of material nature which are *sattva* or goodness, *rajas* or passion and *tamas* or ignorance. The sprouts on the branches symbolize desires for objects of the senses. This *ashvattha* tree has its roots in Brahma-loka the highest material planet and its branches end in the worlds of humans but there the humans are constantly creating new rootlets which are the *karmas* acquired from performing actions which are enjoined and prohibited in the Vedic scriptures. The activities performed as *jivas* while in bodies of humans exclusively result in higher level or lower level births. By ignoring the injunctions and prohibitions of the Vedic scriptures, the results are lower level births such as animals, reptiles, insects, plants. The adherence to the injunctions and prohibitions of the Vedic scriptures results in higher level births such as the demigods and also human births which still affords a *jiva* the golden opportunity to spiritually evolve and grow; sometimes even achieving *moksha* or liberation from material existence in their very next lifetime.

### **Verse 03:**

The *jivas* or embodied beings immersed in *samsara* or the perpetual cycle of birth and death are unable to comprehend this *ashvattha* or banyan tree and its symbolism. It is impossible for them to understand that this tree symbolizing material existence has its root above in Satyloka with Brahma and its branches descending downwards are all the innumerable *jivas* or embodied beings throughout all of creation. It is also impossible for them to understand that humans are its terminals from where there are branches spreading upwards as well determined by *karma* or reactions to actions based upon following or ignoring the injunctions and prohibitions of the Vedic scriptures which apply when one finally achieves a human form out of the millions of different plants, birds, fish and animal species. As a human one is quickly indoctrinated into *samsara* with the conceptions of “I am; I am a man; I am a king; I am the son of this person; I am the wife of that person; I am beautiful; I am great, etc., etc.”. Such “I am” conceptions keep one locked in *samsara* and causes one to be fully occupied with mundane concerns and worldly affairs appropriate to such conceptions. Such persons look upon their bodily conceptions as their very self and are completely oblivious that they are factually eternal beings possessing an *atma* or

immortal soul. They perceive not that they can gradually wean themselves from this ancient tree by renunciation of the three *gunas* or modes of material nature and detachment from the objects of the senses. Neither do they comprehend that the *atma* is separate and distinct from the physical body. Nor can they differentiate that the ego is not the physical body and the *atma* is not the ego. Bewildered by illusion they believe what is unreal to be real and what is real they cannot perceive. The origin and source is unfathomable to them and so deluded they remain in ignorance. This *ashvattha* tree with roots above and branches below that keeps the *jiva* enslaved in *samsara* can only be destroyed by the sword of non-attachment to objects of the senses.