

BHAGAVADGITA

English translation of Sri Ramanuja's Sanskrit Commentary - Swami Adidevananda

Chapter 5

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5.1 Arjuna said -- 'You praise the renunciation of actions, i.e., Jnana Yoga at one time, and next Karma Yoga'. This is what is objected to: In the second chapter, you have said that Karma Yoga alone should be practised first by an aspirant for release; and that the vision of the self should be achieved by means of Jnana Yoga by one whose mind has its blemishes washed away by Karma Yoga. Again, in the third and fourth chapters, you have praised Karma Yoga or devotion to Karma as better than Jnana Yoga even for one who has attained the stage of Jnana Yoga, and that, as a means of attaining the self, it (Karma Yoga) is independent of Jnana Yoga. Therefore, of these two, Jnana Yoga and Karma Yoga --- tell me precisely which by itself is superior, i.e., most excellent, being more easy to practise, and quicker to confer the vision of the self.

5.2 The Lord said -- Even while granting that some persons are competent for the practice of Jnana Yoga exclusively, it has to be conceded that renunciation, i.e., Jnana Yoga, and Karma Yoga can be practised as independent of each other in the pursuit of the highest excellence. Still, of these two, Karma Yoga excels over the renunciation of actions, i.e., Jnana Yoga. Sri Krsna explains why this is so.

5.3 That Karma Yogin, who, being satisfied with the experience of the self implied in Karma Yoga, does not desire anything different therefrom and consequently does not hate anything, and who, because of this, resignedly endures the pairs of opposites --- he should be understood as ever given to renunciation, i.e., even devoted to Jnana Yoga. Such a one therefore is freed from bondage because of his being firmly devoted to Karma Yoga which is easy to practise. The independence of Jnana Yoga and Karma Yoga from each other as means for attainment of the self is now declared.

5.4 Those who say that Karma Yoga and Jnana Yoga are distinct because of the difference in results, are children, i.e., are persons with incomplete knowledge; they do not know the entire truth. The meaning is that they do not possess true knowledge, who say that Karma Yoga results in Jnana Yoga only and that Jnana Yoga alone results in the vision of the self and that the two are thus distinct because of the difference in their fruits. But on the contrary as both have only the vision of the self as the fruit, a person who is firmly set in one of them, wins that one fruit common to both. Sri Krsna further expounds the same:

5.5 The fruit in the form of the vision of the self which is attained by the Sankhyans (i.e.) Jnana Yogins, the same is attained alone by those who are Karma Yogins. He alone is wise who sees that Sankhya and the Yoga are one and the same because of their having the same result.

Sri Krsna points out, if the aforesaid is the case, wherein the difference between them lies.

5.6 Renunciation, i.e., Jnana Yoga, cannot be attained without Yoga, i.e., Karma Yoga. A person following Yoga, i.e., following Karma Yoga, being himself a Muni, i.e., one engaged in the contemplation of self, after practising Karma Yoga reaches with ease the Brahman i.e., attains the self soon, i.e., in a short time. But one following Jnana Yoga by itself, completes Jnana Yoga with great difficulty only. On account of this great difficulty, he attains the self after a long period only.

5.7 But a Karma Yogin remains engaged in the performance of pure actions prescribed by the Sastras, which are of the nature of propitiation of the Supreme Person. By this, he becomes purified in mind. He thus subdues his self, i.e., subdues his mind easily, because his mind is engaged in the virtuous actions he has been performing before.

Therefore his senses are subdued. His self is said to have become the self of all beings. Because of his being devoted to contemplation on the true nature of the self, he finds that his self is similar to the self of all beings like gods etc. One who contemplates on the true nature of the self understands that all selves are of the same form or nature. The distinctions obtaining among gods, men etc., cannot pertain to the form of the self, because those distinctions are founded on particular modifications of Prakrti i.e., the bodies of beings. Sri Krsna will teach: 'For the Brahman (an individual self), when untainted, is the same

everywhere' (5.19). The meaning of this is that when dissociated from the Prakriti, i.e., the body, the self is of the same nature everywhere, i.e., in the bodies of gods, men etc. It is of the same form of knowledge. The meaning is that one, who has become enlightened in this way, active though he be, is not tainted on account of erroneously conceiving what is other than the self (the body) as the self. He is not at all associated therewith. Therefore, he attains the self without any delay. As Karma Yoga is superior to Jnana Yoga because it is more easily pursued and is more rapidly efficacious in securing the fruits, listen to its requirement:

5.8 - 5.9 Thus he who knows the truth concerning the self should reflect in mind that the ear and the other organs of sensation (Jnanendriyas) as also organs of action (Karmendriyas) and the vital currents (the Pranas) are occupied with their own respective objects. Thus he should know, 'I do not do anything at all.' He should reflect, 'My intrinsic nature is one of knowledge. The sense of agency comes because of the association of the self with the senses and the Pranas which are rooted in Karma. It does not spring from my essential nature.'

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5.10 Here the term, Brahman denotes Prakrti. Later on Sri Krsna will say: 'The great Brahman is My womb' (14.3). Since Prakrti abides in the form of senses which are particular off-shoots of Prakrti, he who, as said in the passage beginning with 'Even though he is seeing, hearing ...' (5.8), understands that all actions proceed from Brahman (Prakrti); renounces all attachment while engaging himself in all actions, reflecting, 'I am doing nothing.' Such a person, though existing in contact with Prakrti, is not contaminated by sin which is the result of the wrong identification of the Atman with Prakrti and is the cause of bondage. Just as a lotus leaf is not wetted by water, actions do not affect or defile a person with sin, if he is free from such identification with the body.

5.11 Renouncing attachment to heaven etc., the Yogins perform actions accomplishable by the body, the mind and the intellect for the purification of themselves, i.e., for annulling the bonds of his previous Karma which have affected the self and which involve the self in Samsara.

5.12 A Yogin is one who has no hankering for fruits other than the self, and who is exclusively devoted to the self. If a man renounces the fruits of actions and performs actions merely for the purification of himself, he attains lasting peace, i.e., he attains bliss which is of the form of lasting

experience of the self. The unsteady person is one who is inclined towards fruits other than the self. He has turned himself away from the vision of the self. Being impelled by desire, he becomes attached to fruits of actions, and remains bound for ever by them. That is, he becomes a perpetual Samsarin or one involved in transmigratory cycle endlessly. What is said is this: Free of attachment for fruits and attributing one's actions to Prakrti which has developed into the form of senses, one should perform actions merely to free the self from bondage. Next, the shifting of agency to Prakrti, from which the body has come into existence, is described:

5.13 The embodied self who is self-controlled, renounces all actions to the city of nine gates, i.e., the body with its sensory and motor functions which are nine in number. He discriminates that all actions are due to conjunction of the self with the body which is rooted in previous Karmas, and is not by Its own nature. [It means that the self merely rests in the body, without any identification with bodily activities.] Sri Krsna now teaches the natural condition of the self as It is:

5.14 When the world of embodied selves exists in conjunction with the Prakrti in the form of gods, animals, men, immobile things etc., the master (Prabhu i.e., the Jiva who is the master of the body), who is not subject to Karma and is established in Its own essential nature, does not bring about: (i) the agency of gods, men etc. (ii) their manifold and particular actions and (iii) their connection with the fruits in the form of

embodiment as gods etc., resulting from their actions. Who then brings about agency etc.? It is only the tendencies that act. A tendency (Svabhava) is subtle impressions (Vasanas) originating from Prakrti. The meaning is that agency, etc., do not originate from the natural or pristine condition of the self but are generated by the subtle impressions created by misconceiving those forms of Prakrti etc., as of the self. This is the result of the conjunction of the self with Prakrti in the form of gods, etc., which has been generated by the flow of previous Karmas brought about in beginningless time.

5.15 Because, It, the Atman is 'all-pervading', i.e., is not limited to particular area or space included in the bodies of gods, men etc.; It is not the relative or the enemy of any one. For this reason It does not take away or remove the evil or suffering of anyone such as a son who is related and therefore dear to one; nor does It take away, i.e., remove the happiness of anyone whom It deems with aversion. All this is the effect of Vasanas or subtle impressions of Prakrti. How does do these contrary Vasanas originate in the case of one whose intrinsic nature is as described above? In answer it is said that knowledge is enveloped by the darkness of ignorance. The Atman's knowledge is enveloped, i.e., contracted by preceding Karmas which are opposed to knowledge, so that a person may be qualified to experience the fruits of his own Karma. It is by this Karma, which contracts knowledge, and can join the Jiva with the bodies of gods etc., that the misconception that the bodies are the selves is produced. Consequently there will originate the Vasanas or

the unconscious subtle impressions born of such misapprehension of the self and the inclination to undertake actions corresponding to them.

Sri Krsna now brings into proper sequence what has been taught before in the following verses: 'You will completely cross over the sea of all your sins with the boat of knowledge' (4.36), and 'The fire of knowledge reduces all Karmas to ashes in the same way' (4.37), and 'For there is no purifier here equal to knowledge' (4.38).

5.16 While all these selves are thus deluded, in the case of enlightened souls, their delusive ignorance --- which envelops knowledge and which is of the form of accumulated, beginningless and endless Karma --- is destroyed by knowledge. As already described this knowledge is produced by the teachings of the scriptures about the real nature of the self, which are enriched by daily practice. The purity of this knowledge is unexcelled. And in the case of those selves who regain the knowledge that is natural to Them, it is found that it is unlimited and uncontracted and illumining everything like the sun. Plurality of the selves in Their essence is expressly mentioned in the case of those whose ignorance is overcome, in the expression 'for those' in the text. What was stated at the commencement, 'There never was a time when I did not exist' (2.12) is expressed here with greater clarity. Moreover, this plurality is not due to limiting adjuncts imposed on a single universal self. For, as stated here, there cannot be any trace of such adjuncts for those whose ignorance is destroyed, and still They are described as a plurality. Hence knowledge is taught as an attribute inseparable from the essential nature

of the self, because a difference between the self and its knowledge is made out in the statement, 'Knowledge, in their case illuminates like the sun'. By the illustration of the sun, the relation of the knower to his knowledge is brought out to be similar to the luminous object and its luminosity. Therefore, it is appropriate to understand that knowledge contracts by Karma in the stage of Samsara and expands in the stage of Moksa (release). [In this system the Atman has two forms of Jnana or Knowledge --- Dharmi-Jnana (self-awareness) and Dharma-bhuta-Jnana (awareness of objects other than itself). It is the latter that is contracted by ignorance and expands by knowledge. See Introduction.]

5.17 'Those whose intellects pursue It,' i.e., those who have determined to have the vision of the self in this way; 'those whose minds think about It,' i.e., those whose minds have the self for their aim, those who undergo discipline for It, i.e., those who are devoted to the practices for Its attainment; 'those who hold It as their highest object,' i.e., those who consider It as their highest goal --- such persons, having their previous impurities cleansed by the knowledge which is practised in this way, attain the self as taught. 'From that state there is no return' --- the state from which there is no return means the state of the self. The meaning is that they attain the self which rests in Its own nature.

5.18 The sages are those who know the real nature of the self in all beings. They see the selves to be of the same nature, though they are perceived in extremely dissimilar embodiments such as those of one

endowed with learning and humility, a mere Brahmana, a cow, an elephant, a dog, a dog-eater etc., because they all have the same form of knowledge in their nature as the Atman. The dissimilarity of the forms observed is due to Prakrti (body) and not to any dissimilarity in the self; consequently they, the wise, perceive the self as the same everywhere, because all selves, though distinct, have the same form of knowledge.

5.19 By those whose minds rest in equalness with regard to all selves in the aforesaid manner, even here, i.e., even at the stage of executing the means, Samsara is overcome. For the Brahman is of the same nature everywhere when uncontaminated. The meaning is that the substance of self, when free from the contaminations resulting from contact with the Prakrti (body), is the same everywhere i.e., as the Brahman (the Atman). If they are fixed in the equality of all selves, they verily abide in Brahman. The abidance in the Brahman is verily the conquest of Samsara. Those who contemplate on the sameness of all selves, because of their having the form of knowledge, they are liberated. Sri Krsna now teaches that mode of life by following which the maturity of knowledge in the form of sameness of vision comes to a Karma Yogin.

5.20 Whatever is experienced as pleasant by one staying in a body and remaining in a particular condition because of the subtle impressions of his old Karmas, and whatever is experienced as unpleasant --- on attaining those two types of experiences, one should not feel joy or grief. How? By having the mind on that 'Which is steadfast' i.e., the self,

'Undeluded,' i.e., one must be free from the delusion of identity of the steadfast self with the transient body. And how can this be? He who knows Brahman and abides in Brahman, i.e., by becoming a knower of Brahman by instruction by the teachers --- such a person abides steadily, engaged in the practices towards winning Brahman. What is said is this: From the instructions received from the sages who know the truth, one should learn what has to be learnt about the self. Endeavouring to actualise the same, one does not consider the body as the self and remains fixed in the joyous experience of the vision of the steadfast self. Let him not rejoice and grieve when he experiences pleasant and unpleasant things, as such experiences result from the Prakrti and are transient.

5.21 He who finds happiness in the self within himself, his mind detached from external contact in the manner already mentioned, i.e., from experience of objects other than the self --- such a person abandoning the contemplation on Prakrti or bodily experiences, has his mind engaged in the contemplation on Brahman i.e., the Atman. Thus he attains everlasting bliss which consists in the experience of Brahman (the self). Sri Krsna speaks of the abandonment of material pleasure as easy:

5.22 Those pleasures which result from the contact of sense objects with the senses, are the wombs of pain, i.e., have pain as their ultimate fruit 'They have a beginning and an end,' i.e., they are seen to remain

only for a brief period and the reaction that follows their cessation is painful. He who knows what they themselves are, i.e., know themselves as Atman, will not find pleasure in them.

5.23 When a man is able to withstand, i.e., to control the impulses of emotions like desire and anger by his longing for the experience of self, he is released 'here itself from the body,' i.e., even during the state when he is practising the means for release, he gains the capacity for experiencing the self. But he becomes blessed by the experience and gets immersed in the bliss of the self only after the fall of the body (at the end of his Prarabdha or operative Karma). [The implication is that in this system there is no Jivan-Mukti or complete liberation even when the body is alive. Only the state of Sthita-prajna or of 'one of steady wisdom' can be attained by an embodied Jiva.]

5.24 He who, renouncing all the experiences of outside objects, 'finds joy within,' i.e., finds his sole joy in experiencing the self; 'who has his pleasure within,' i.e., whose pleasure-garden is the self; and with regard to whom the self increases his happiness by Its own qualities like bliss, knowledge, sinlessness, etc.; 'whose light is within,' i.e., who lives, directing his knowledge solely on the self --- a person of such a description is the Yogin, who 'having become the Brahman (the self), attains the bliss of the Brahman' i.e., the bliss of experiencing the self.

5.25 The sages are seers who are devoted to the vision of the self. For them the pairs of opposites are annulled; i.e., they are freed from pairs of opposites like cold and heat, etc. 'They have their minds well subdued,' i.e., their minds are directed to the self. 'They are devoted to the welfare of all beings,' i.e., they are interested in the welfare of all beings like their own selves. Those persons who are like this have all their impurities, which are incompatible with the attainment of the self, annulled, and they attain to the bliss of the Brahman. For those possessing the characteristics mentioned above, Sri Krsna now teaches that the Brahman is easy to attain.

5.26 To those who are free from desire and wrath; 'who are wont to exert themselves' i.e., who are practising self-control; whose 'thought is controlled,' i.e., whose minds are subdued; 'who have conquered them,' i.e., whose minds are under their control --- to such persons the beatitude of the Brahman is close at hand. The beatitude of the Brahman is already in hand to persons of this type. Sri Krsna concludes the examination of Karma Yoga already stated, as reaching the highest point in the practice of mental concentration (Yoga) having for its object the vision of the self:

5.27 - 5.28 'Shutting off all contact with outside objects,' i.e., stopping the outward functioning of the senses; seated with his trunk straightened in a posture fit for meditation (Yoga); 'fixing the gaze between the eye-brows,' i.e., at the root of the nose where the eye-brows meet;

'equalising inward and outward breaths,' i.e., making exhalatory and inhalatory breath move equally: making the senses, Manas and intellect no longer capable of anything except the vision of the self, consequently being free from 'desire, fear and wrath'; 'who is intent on release as his final goal,' i.e., having release as his only aim --- the sage who is thus intent on the vision of the self 'is indeed liberated for ever,' i.e., he is almost a liberated person, as he would soon be in the ultimate stage of fruition. Sri Krsna now says that Karma Yoga, described above, which is facilitated by the performance of obligatory and occasional rites and which culminates in meditation (Yoga), is easy to practise:

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5.29 Knowing Me as the enjoyer of all sacrifices and austerities, as the Supreme Lord of all the worlds, and as the Friend of every being, he attains peace, i.e., wins happiness even while performing Karma Yoga. 'Him who is the Supreme Lord of all worlds' means 'Him who is the Lord of all the lords of the worlds.' For the Sruti says: 'Him who is the supreme mighty Lord of lords' (Sve. U., 6.7). The meaning is that knowing Me as the Supreme Lord of all the worlds and the 'friend' of all and considering Karma Yoga to be My worship, he becomes gladly engaged in it. All beings endeavour to please a 'friend'.