

BHAGAVADGITA

English translation of Sri Ramanuja's Sanskrit Commentary - Swami

Adidevananda

Chapter 12

RO

12.1 Arjuna said -- These are two types of spiritual aspirants who are contrasted thus: (1) On the one hand there are those devotees who adore You 'thus'; namely, in the way taught in such text as 'Whosoever works for Me' (11.55), and who are desirous of being ever 'integrated' with You, namely, considering You as the supreme end. They adore You in utter devotion --- You, the ocean of boundless attributes of limitless excellence like grace, affability, omniscience, true resolve etc., and endowed with all glory. (2) On the other hand there are those who meditate on the 'Imperishable', (Aksara) namely, the individual self in its true nature, which is the same as the 'Unmanifest' (Avyakta), namely that whose nature cannot be grasped by organs such as the eye etc. The question posed is: Which of these two classes of devotees have greater knowledge of Yoga? Who would reach their respective goals sooner? Such is the meaning of the question. Sri Krsna clearly states later on, 'O Arjuna, I become before long their redeemer from the fatal sea of recurring births and deaths' (12.7), with reference to the speed with which the latter kind of devotees reach Him.

12.2 The Lord said -- I consider them to be the highest among the Yogins (i.e., among those striving for realisation) --- them who worship Me focusing their minds upon Me as one exceedingly dear to them, who

are endowed with supreme faith, and who are ever 'integrated' with Me, namely ever desirous of constant union with Me. Those who thus worship Me, focusing their minds on Me as their supreme goal, attain Me soon and easily. Such is the meaning.

12.3 - 12.5 The individual self meditated upon by those who follow the path of the 'Aksara' (the Imperishable) is thus described: It cannot be 'defined' in terms indicated by expressions like gods and men etc., for It is different from the body; It is 'imperceptible' through the senses such as eyes; It is 'omnipresent and unthinkable,' for though It exists everywhere in bodies such as those of gods and others, It cannot be conceived in terms of those bodies, as It is an entity of an altogether different kind; It is 'common to all beings' i.e., alike in all beings but different from the bodily forms distinguishing them; It is 'immovable' as It does not move out of Its unique nature, being unmodifiable, and therefore eternal. Such aspirants are further described as those who, 'subduing their senses' like the eye from their natural operations, look upon all beings of different forms as 'equal' by virtue of their knowledge of the sameness of the nature of the selves as knowers in all. Therefore they are not given 'to take pleasure in the misfortune of others,' as such feelings proceed from one's identification with one's own special bodily form. Those who meditate on the Imperishable Principle (individual self) in this way, even they come to Me. It means that they also realise their essential self, which, in respect of freedom from Samsara, is like My own Self. So Sri Krsna will declare later on: 'Partaking of My nature' (14.2).

Also the Sruti says: 'Untainted, he attains supreme equality' (Mun. U., 3.1.3). Likewise He will declare the Supreme Brahman as being distinct from the freed self which is without modification and is denoted by the term 'Imperishable' (Aksara), and is described as unchanging (Kutastha). 'The Highest Person is other than this Imperishable' (15.16 - 17). But in the teaching in Aksara-vidya 'Now that higher science by which that Aksara is known' (Mun. U., 1.5) the entity that is designated by the term Aksara is Supreme Brahman Himself; for He is the source of all beings, etc. Greater is the difficulty of those whose minds are attached to the unmanifest. The path of the unmanifest is a psychosis of the mind with the unmanifest as its object. It is accomplished with difficulty by embodied beings, who have misconceived the body as the self. For, embodied beings mistake the body for the self. The superiority of those who adore the Supreme Being is now stated clearly:

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12.6 - 12.7 But those who, with a mind 'focused on Me,' the Supreme Self, and 'intent upon Me,' namely, holding Me as their sole object, dedicating to Me all their actions --- i.e., including all worldly actions like eating which are meant for supporting the body, as also Vedic rites like sacrifices, gifts, fire-offerings, austerities etc., generally done by worldly-minded people for other purposes --- worship Me and meditate on Me with exclusive devotion, namely, with devotion without any other purpose, adoring Me by all such acts as meditation, worship, prostration, praises and hymns which are by themselves exceedingly dear to them and are equal to the end itself --- to these I become soon their saviour from the sea of Samsara which, on account of its being antagonistic to the attainment of Myself, is deadly.

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12.8 'Focus your mind on Me alone,' on account of My being the unsurpassed end of human endeavour and on My being easily attainable without delay. Focus your mind in meditation on Me alone. Let your Buddhi 'enter into Me,' strengthened by the conviction that I alone am the supreme object to be attained. Then you will 'live in Me alone,' i.e., You will live in Me alone immediately after focusing your mind on Me by forming the conviction that I alone am the supreme object to be attained.

12.9 Now, if you are unable to focus your mind immediately on Me in deep meditation, then seek to reach Me by the 'practice of repetition

(Abhyasa Yoga)'. By the repeated practice of remembrance full of immense love, concentrate your mind on Me the ocean of manifold attributes innate to Me like, beauty, affability, friendliness, affection, compassion, sweetness, majesty, magnanimity, heroism, valour, might, omniscience, freedom from wants, unfailing resolves, sovereignty over all, being the cause of all etc., and being antagonistic to all that is evil. All these attributes are of unlimited excellence in the Supreme Person.

12.10 If you are incapable of practising remembrance in the above manner, then devote yourself to 'My deeds.' Such devotional acts consist in the construction of temples, laying out temple gardens, lighting up lamps therein, sweeping, sprinkling water and plastering the floor of holy shrines, gathering flowers, engaging in My worship, chanting My names, circumambulating My temples, praising Me, prostrating before Me etc. Do these with great affection. Even performing such works which are exceedingly dear to Me, you will, before long, get your mind steadily focused on Me as through the practice of repetitions, and will gain perfection through attaining Me.

12.11 If you are unable to do even this 'taking refuge in My Yoga,' i.e., if you are unable even to do actions for My sake, which forms the sprout of Bhakti Yoga, wherein through meditation I am made the exclusive and sole object of love --- then you should resort to Aksara Yoga described in the first six chapters. It consists in contemplation on the nature of the individual self. This engenders devotion to the Lord. As a means for

practice of this (Aksara Yoga), renounce the fruit of every action. The state of mind that holds Me as the only worthy object of attainment and love arises only when all the sins of an aspirant are destroyed without exception. 'One with a controlled mind' means one with the mind subdued. When the individual self is visualised to be of the nature of a Sesa (subsidiary) to the Lord, and when the veil of nescience consisting in identifying the self with the body is removed by contemplation on the self generated through the performance of works without attachment to the fruits and with My propitiation as the sole objective --- then supreme Bhakti to Me will originate by itself. [The point driven home is this: It is nescience that stands between the Jiva and the Lord. This nescience consists in identification of the self with the body. It is through works done without an eye on their fruits but exclusively as an offering to the Lord, that this nescience is removed. Thus Karma Yoga is the sprout of self-realisation, and of Bhakti. On the nescience being removed, the knowledge that one (i.e., the Jiva) is a Sesa (an absolutely dependent liege) of the Lord, dawns on the Jiva. Such knowledge generates exclusive devotion or Bhakti accompanied by Prapatti. Or if the Jiva gets immersed in Its own bliss, It will attain Kaivalya.] In the same manner, Sri Krsna will further show in the text beginning with 'By worshipping Him with his work will a man reach perfection' (18.46) and ending with 'Forsaking the feeling of I and with no feeling of mine and tranquil, one becomes worthy of the state of Brahman. Having realised the state of Brahman, tranquil, he neither grieves nor craves. Regarding all beings alike, he attains supreme devotion to Me' (18.53-54).

12.12 More than the practice of remembrance (of the Lord), which is difficult in the absence of love for the Lord, the direct knowledge of the self, arising from the contemplation of the imperishable self (Aksara), is conducive to the well-being of the self. Better than the imperfect knowledge of the self, is perfect meditation on the self, as it is more conducive to the well-being of the self. More conducive than imperfect meditation (i.e., meditation unaccompanied with renunciation), is the activity performed with renunciation of the fruits. It is only after the annihilation of sins, through the performance of works accompanied by renunciation of fruits, that peace of mind is attained. When the mind is at peace, perfect meditation on the self is possible. From meditation results the direct realisation of the self. From the direct realisation of the self results supreme devotion. It is in this way that Atmanistha or devotion to the individual self becomes useful for a person who is incapable of practising loving devotion to the Supreme Being. And for one practising the discipline for attaining the self (Jnana Yoga) without acquisition of perfect tranquillity of mind, disinterested activity (Karma Yoga), including in it meditation on the self, is the better path for the knowledge of the self. [Thus the steps are performance of works without desire for fruits, equanimity of mind, meditation on the self, self-realisation, and devotion to the Lord.] Now Sri Krsna enumerates the attributes required of one intent on performance of disinterested activity:

12.13 - 12.14 In these and succeeding verses the Lord mentions the nature of the Karma Yogi who adores Him through his works. In other words the Bhakti element in Karma Yoga is emphasised. He never hates any being even though they hate him and do him wrong. For he thinks that the Lord impels these beings to hate him and do him wrong for atoning for his transgressions. He is 'friendly', evincing a friendly disposition towards all beings whether they hate him or do him wrong. He is 'compassionate', evincing compassion towards their sufferings. He is free from the 'feeling of mine,' i.e., he is not possessive with regard to his body, senses and all things associated with them. He is free from the feeling of 'I', i.e., is free from the delusion that his body is the self. Therefore, 'pain and pleasure are the same to him,' i.e., he is free from distress and delight resulting from pain and pleasure arising from his deeds. He is 'enduring', unaffected even by those two (i.e., pleasure and pain) due to the inevitable contact of sense-objects. He is 'content', namely, satisfied with whatever chance may bring him for the sustenance of his body. He 'ever meditates,' i.e., is constantly intent on contemplating on the self as separate from the body. He is 'self-restrained', namely, he controls the activities of his mind. He is of 'firm conviction' regarding the meanings taught in the science of the self. His 'mind and reason are dedicated to Me' i.e., his mind and reason are dedicated to Me in the form 'Bhagavan Vasudeva alone is propitiated by disinterested activities, and when duly propitiated, He will bring about for me the direct vision of the self.' Such a devotee of mine, i.e., who works in this manner as a Karma Yogin, is dear to Me.

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in this manner as a Karma Yogin, is dear to Me.

12.15 That person who is engaged in Karma Yoga does not become the cause of 'fear to the world'; he does nothing to cause fear to the world. He has no cause to 'fear the world,' i.e., no action on the part of others can cause him fear because of the certainty that he is not inimical to the world. Therefore he is not in the habit of showing favour towards someone and intolerance towards others; he has no fear of some or repulsion for others. Such a person is dear to Me.

12.16 He who is free from 'desires', i.e., who has no longing for anything except the self; who is 'pure', namely, whose body is nourished on the food prescribed by the Sastras; who is an 'expert' namely, who is an expert in performing actions prescribed by the Sastras; who is 'indifferent', i.e., not interested in matters other than those enjoined by the Sastras; who is free from 'agony', i.e., of pain caused by heat, cold, contact with coarse things etc., which are inevitably associated with the performance of rites prescribed by the Sastras; who renounces all 'undertakings,' i.e., who renounces all undertakings except those demanded by the Sastras --- the devotee who is like this is dear to Me.

12.17 He who does not 'rejoice', i.e., that Karma Yogin, who, on obtaining things which cause joy to man, does not rejoice; who does not 'hate', does not hate on obtaining anything undesirable; who is not

'grieved' by common sorrows which cause grief among men, as the loss of wife, son, fortune etc.; who 'does not desire' anything like wife, son, fortune etc.; not already acquired by him; who 'renounces good and evil,' i.e., who renounces both merit and demerit because, like demert, merit also causes bondage, there being no difference between them in this respect --- he who is like this and devoted to Me is dear to Me.

12.18 - 12.19 The absence of hate etc., towards foes, friends etc., has already been taught in the stanza beginning with, 'He who never hates any being' (11.13). What is now taught is that equanimity to be practised even when such persons mentioned above are present before one who is superior to those having a general equanimous temperament referred to earlier. Who has no 'home', namely, who is not attached to home, etc., as he possesses firmness of mind with regard to the self. Because of this, he is 'same even in honour and dishonour.' He who is devoted to Me and who is like this --- he is dear to Me. Showing the superiority of Bhakti-Nistha over Atma-nistha, Sri Krsna now concludes in accordance with what is stated at the beginning of this chapter in Verse 2.

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12.20 But those who follow Bhakti Yoga --- 'which is a nectar of virtuous duty,' i.e., which is at once virtuous duty and nectar, and which even as a means, is equal to its end in conferring bliss on those who follow is as stated above, i.e., in the manner taught in the stanza beginning with 'Those who, focusing their minds on Me' (12.2) --- such devotees are exceedingly dear to Me.