

# **BHAGAVADGITA**

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

**Adidevananda**

**Chapter 15**

**RO**

15.1 The Lord said -- The Vedas speak of the imperishable 'Asvattha tree' called Samsara, which has its 'roots above and branches below', in such passages as the following: This Asvattha tree with its roots above and branches below is eternal' (Ka. U., 6.1), and 'He who knows the tree with its roots above and branches below' (Tai. A., 1.11.5). It has its roots above since it has its roots in Brahma (the Creator otherwise known as Hiranyagarbha) who is seated above the seven worlds. It has 'branches below' ending with denizens like men, animals, beasts, worms, insects, birds and immovables. It is 'immutable' since it cannot be felled, being of the form of a continual flow. It can be felled only at the dawn of perfect knowledge which causes detachment. They say that the leaves of this Asvattha tree constitute the Vedas. 'The Vedas are said to be the leaves', since this tree of Samsara increases by actions prompted by worldly desires as taught in certain Srutis as, 'He who desires prosperity should sacrifice a white animal to Vayu' (Taitt. Sam., 2.1.1) and 'The desirer of offspring shall offer to Indra and Agni a sacrifice with eleven cups of rice-cakes' (Ibid., 2.2.1). Indeed the tree flourishes with the help of leaves. He who knows the Asvattha of such a nature 'knows the Vedas'. The Vedas also set forth the means of felling this tree of Samsara. He who understands this is called the knower of the Vedas, since knowledge of the nature of the tree to be cut off is helpful to the

knowledge concerning the means of felling the tree. This tree spreads downward with men etc., who are the products of their Karma, as branches. It again spreads above into Gandharvas, Yaksas, gods, etc. They are nourished by the Gunas of Sattva etc. They have tender shoots augmented by sense-objects. How does this happen? Sri Krsna explains:

15.2 The 'secondary roots' of this tree having the main roots in the world of Brahman and its crest in men ramify below in the world of men. They bind them according to their Karma. The meaning is that the effects of acts causing bondage become roots in the world of men. For, the effect of actions done in the human state brings about the further condition of men, beasts etc., down below, and of divinities etc., up above.

15.3 - 15.4 The form of this tree, having its origin above, i.e., in the four-faced Brahma and branches below in the sense that man forms the crest through continual lineage therefrom, and also having its branches extended above and below by actions done in the human state and forming secondary roots --- that form of the tree is not understood by people immersed in Samsara. Only this much is perceived: 'I am a man, the son of Devadatta, the father of Yajnadatta; I have property appropriate to these conditions'. Likewise, it is not understood that its destruction can be brought about by detachment from enjoyments which are based on Gunas. Similarly it is not perceived that attachment

to the Gunas alone is the beginning of this (tree). Again, it is not perceived that the basis of this tree is founded on ignorance which is the misconception of self as non-self. Ignorance alone is the basis of this tree, since in it alone the tree is fixed. This Asvattha, described above, firm-rooted, i.e., the roots of which are firm and manifold, is to be cut off by the strong axe of detachment, namely, detachment from the sense objects composed of the three Gunas. This can be forged through perfect knowledge. As one gains detachment from sense-objects, one should seek and find out the goal from which nobody ever returns. How does this attachment to sense-objects, which consists of the Gunas and erroneous knowledge forming its cause, cease to exist? Sri Krsna now answers: One should seek 'refuge (Prapadyet) in the Primal Person' alone in order to overcome this ignorance. One should seek refuge (Prapadyeta) in Him who is primal, namely, the beginning of all entities, as stated in the following text: 'With Me as the Lord, the Prakrti gives birth to all that which moves, and that which does not move' (9.10), 'I am the origin of all; from Me proceed everything' (10.8), and 'There is nothing higher than Me, O Arjuna' (7.7). From Me, the creator of everything, has streamed forth this ancient activity, continuing from time immemorial, of attachment to sense-objects consisting of Gunas. This has been declared already by Me: 'For this divine Maya of Mine consisting of the Gunas is hard to break through. But those who take refuge in me alone shall pass beyond this Maya' (7.14). Or a variant of this stanza is 'prapadya iyatah pravrttih' (in place of 'prapadyet yatah pravrttih'). This gives the sense that this discipline of taking refuge in the

Supreme Person for dispelling of ignorance has continued from a distant past. The tendencies of ancient persons seeking liberation are also ancient. The purport is this: The ancient liberation-seekers, taking refuge in Me alone, were released from bondage. [This can be taken to mean that Prapatti or taking refuge in the Lord had originated in the Bhakti tradition of the Sri-Vaisnavites from ancient sages i.e., from the Alvars who preceded Ramanuja by several centuries. It is not a creation of Ramanuja].

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15.5 Thus, when they have taken refuge in Me, become free from 'perverse notions concerning the self', namely, become free from the delusion in the form of misconceiving the non-self (body) as the self; 'victorious over the evil of attachment', namely, victorious over the evil known as attachment to sense-objects consisting of the Gunas; 'ever devoted to self', namely completely absorbed in the knowledge of the self which is called Adhyatma or knowledge about the self; when they have 'turned away from desires' other than this self-knowledge; when they are liberated from 'dualities called pleasure and pain' --- such 'undeluded souls', namely, those who are able to discern the natures of self and non-self, attain to that 'imperishable status'. They attain the self as It is, in the form of infinite knowledge. Consequently for those who seek refuge in Me, all actions become easy of performance till perfection is attained by My grace.

15.6 The sun cannot illumine the light of the self, nor moon, nor fire. For, knowledge is indeed that which illumines them all. External lights, however, are helpful only in removing the darkness which hinders the contact between the senses and the objects. It is the intelligence of the self that reveals such external lights. What reveals this (i.e., the self) is Yoga (i.e., meditation) only. Beginningless Karma is the hindrance. It has been taught that the way for the erasing of Karma is self-surrender to the

Lord through detachment etc. That supreme light, reaching which they do not return any more is the self, which is My glory (Vibhuti) and therefore belongs to Me and is a part of Myself. Such is the meaning. The supremacy of this light (i.e., individual self) consists in its capacity to illumine the light of knowledge. Knowledge alone can illuminate all things (including the light of the sun which sheds only physical light on objects.).

15.7 That self, whose nature has been described thus, though constituting an everlasting part of Myself, becomes the bound individual self in the world of life. Covered by ignorance in the form of beginningless Karma, It attracts to Itself the five senses and the mind, which are located in the bodies of gods, men etc., and which are particular transformations of Prakrti. Some parts of Myself (i.e., the selves), becoming free from ignorance (Avidya) in the aforesaid manner, remain in their own intrinsic nature. But the bound individual self is very much contracted in power and knowledge. The individual self is the lord of the senses and the mind in bodies, and forms a bound individual in combination with a particular transformation of the Prakrti through Karma. Thus Karma attracts the selves hither and thither according to its nature.

15.8 Whatever body It acquires, and from whatever body It departs, the lord of the senses, i.e., the self, goes on Its way taking with It the senses with the subtle elements, just like the wind carrying scents from place to

place. Just as the wind takes away scents with subtle parts from flower-garlands, sandal, musk and the rest from their places and moves elsewhere --- so does the self. What are these senses? Sri Krsna explains:

15.9 Presiding over these sense-organs, of which the mind is the sixth, the lord of the body drives the organs towards their corresponding objects like sound and the rest and enjoys them.

15.10 The deluded do not perceive the Atman (self) as a form of knowledge separate from its human and other configurations which are particular transformations of Prakrti, with which the self is conjoined when it is in embodied condition, experiencing the objects of the senses. The self also departs from the body when the body dies and assumes another body. The deluded or those who misconceive the body as the self do not understand all this. However, those who possess the eye of knowledge, i.e., have the knowledge concerning the difference between the body and the self, perceive the self as having a form different from the body in all conditions.

15.11 The 'striving Yogins' i.e., those striving in the path of Karma Yoga etc., after practising Prapatti (self-surrender), purify their inner organs of perception and perceive the self as established in its own form as distinct from the body, with the eye of Yoga, But those of 'unrefined minds,' namely those who do not practise Prapatti to Me, and are



therefore of 'uncultivated minds, and devoid of intelligence' find themselves incapable of perceiving the self. They do not perceive It in distinction from the body. Thus, it has been said that the self, whether released or not, is a manifestation of the glory (Vibhuti) of the Lord, Its light of knowledge illuminates even the luminaries such as the sun, moon and fire which help the senses to see by removing the darkness that prevents the contact of the senses with their objects as described (in the verses): 'That supreme light ... is Mine' (15.6) and 'An everlasting part of Myself having become the (bound) self in the world of life' (15.7). Now, He declares that even the lights of the sun and other luminaries, which form particular developments of Prakrti, are Vibhutis of the Lord:

15.12 That brilliance of the sun and other luminaries which illumines the whole universe --- that brilliance belongs to Me. Know that this capacity of illumining is granted to them by Me who have been worshipped severally by them. Sri Krsna states that the power in the earth to support all those that reside on it belongs to Him alone:

15.13 Entering the earth I uphold all beings by My strength, namely, by My irresistible power, Likewise, becoming the Soma consisting of the juice of the nectar, I nourish all herbs.

15.14 Becoming the 'digestive fire', or the fire of digestion, I function within the bodies of all living creatures. In union with various activities of 'inward and outward breaths', I digest the 'four kinds of food' eaten by

individuals. These consist of foods to be chewed, sucked, licked and drunk. The Supreme Person who has the Soma, digestive fire etc., as his glory (Vibhuti) is here equated with Him by means of co-ordinate predication in the verses 'Becoming the juicy Soma' and 'Becoming the digestive fire'. He now sets forth the reason for equating these glories with Himself.

15.15 Controlling everything by My will, I exist as 'the self in their hearts', namely, in the place from which springs knowledge, the root of activity and inactivity of all beings as also of the Soma and digestive fire. So the Srutis declare in the following texts: 'Entering within, He is the ruler of all things and the Self of all' (Tai. A., 3.11), 'He who, dwelling in the earth ... He who, dwelling in the self, is within the self ... who controls the earth' (Br. U. Madh., 3.7. 3. 22); 'The heart which is comparable to an inverted lotus-bud' (Ma. Na., 11.7); and 'Now, here, in the city of brahman, is an abode, a small lotus-flower' (Cha. U., 8.1.1). The Smrtis also declare thus: 'Visnu is the ruler of the whole universe, who permeates the universe' (V. P., 1.17. 20), 'He is the ruler of all, who is minutely small among those who are minutely small (Manu., 12.122); and 'He is the controller, the judge, the King, who is seated in your heart' (Ibid., 8.92). Therefore, the memory of all beings springs from Me alone. 'Memory' is knowledge springing from experience and its subtle impressions. They have for their contents past experiences. 'Knowledge' is determination of a thing through the senses, inference, the scriptures and intuitive meditation. This is also from Me. So does 'Apohana' too.

'Apohana' signifies the cessation of knowledge. 'Apohana' may also mean 'Uhana' (conjectural knowledge). Uhana is 'Uha' (conjecture). 'Uha' is that knowledge which is accessory to the actual means of knowledge (Pramana). It is done by determining whether that means of knowledge can be operative with reference to the particular subject-matter on hand, through the examination of the instruments of that means of knowledge (Pramana). This 'Uha' also comes from Me. Indeed 'I am to be known from all the Vedas,' for I am the inner ruler of Agni, Surya, Soma, Vayu, Sun and Indra and other divinities as their self. The Vedas are intent on speaking of them (i.e., the divinities). 'I am to be known from all the Vedas; for, terms like gods, men etc., signify the individual selves in them. I bring about the fruition of the Veda. 'Vedanta', here means the end, namely, the fruition, of Vedic injunctions like 'Let sacrifice be made to Indra' and 'Let sacrifice be made to Varuna.' For, all Vedas find their consummation in fruition. 'Antakrt' means grantor of fruits. The meaning is: 'I alone am the grantor of the fruition described in the Vedas.' This has been already declared in the verses beginning from, 'Whichever devotee seeks to worship with faith whatever form' and ending with, 'From that faith he gets the objects of his desire, granted in reality by Me alone' (7.21 - 22); and also 'I am the enjoyer and the only Lord of all sacrifices' (9.24). I am the knower of the Vedas; I know the Veda that speaks about Me. The sense is that he who speaks of the meaning of the Vedas as otherwise than this import, is not the knower of the Vedas. Therefore, listen from Me alone the meaning or the essence of the Vedas.

15.16 There are, the Sastras say, 'two kinds of Persons (Purusas)' well known in the world --- 'the perishable and the imperishable.' Of the two, the Persons designated by the term 'perishable' (Ksara) are beings conjoint with non-conscious matter of modifiable nature, from Brahma down to a blade of grass, who can be signified also by the term Jivas (individual selves). Here the term Purusa (Person) is used in singular to indicate the common single condition of being conjoined with non-conscious matter. That which is the 'imperishable' (Aksara) is called 'unchanging' (Kutastha), this is the released self, devoid of association with non-conscious matter, remaining in its own form. It is called 'unchangeable' inasmuch as when free from non-conscious matter, It has no specific connection with particular transformations of non-conscious matter like the bodies of Brahma etc. Here also the designation of the term in singular (as expressing a generic class) denoting the totality of liberated selves, is used on account of the single condition of dissociation from non-conscious matter. It does not mean that before this, in time without beginning, there existed but a single liberated self. So it is stated: 'Purified by the austerity of knowledge, many have attained My state' (4.10); and 'They are not born at the time of creation, nor do they suffer at the time of dissolution' (14.2).

15.17 But there is the 'Supreme Person who is other than the bound and liberated selves' expressed by the terms, the 'perishable' and the 'imperishable'. He forms a completely different category. All Srutis call

Him the Supreme Self. But by that very designation as the Supreme Self, it may be known that the Supreme Person is a category distinct from the bound and the liberated selves. How? 'Entering the threefold world,' supports it. 'Loka' (world) is that which is perceived. There are three such perceivable worlds, He enters the 'three worlds' which can be understood from the authority of the Srutis. These are the world of unconscious matter, the world of conscient selves conjoined with matter, and the world of liberated selves. As understandable from the Srutis, He enters into these three categories as their Atman and supports them. Thus, He is an entity different from the triad which He pervades and maintains. Further He is different, as He is imperishable and as He is the Lord. Being imperishable, He is different from the bound non-conscient matter whose nature is subject to decay. He is different from the bound conscient selves as the latter is subject to Prakrti and follows its laws. He is also distinguished from the liberated selves, because in their previous condition they were connected with matter and mixed with it. Similarly, He is the Lord of these 'three worlds,' a category distinct from those which have to be ruled.

15.18 Inasmuch as I transcend the perishable (i.e., bound) Person of the aforesaid nature, and I am higher, for reasons stated earlier, than the imperishable Person or liberated self, therefore I am styled the Supreme Person in the Smrti and Srutis. The Smrti is called Loka by reason of its leading to the meaning of the Vedas. The meaning is that I am famous in the Srutis and in the Smrti. In the Sruti for instance; 'Reaching the

Supreme Light, it appears in its own nature. He is the Supreme Person' (Cha. U., 8.12.3). In the Smṛti we have texts like 'I will approach Him (Sri Kṛṣṇa), the Supreme Person who is the incarnation of a portion of Viṣṇu, who is without beginning, middle or end' (V. P., 5.17.33).

15.19 He who, without delusion, knows the Supreme Person as Myself, as already stated, i.e., knows Me, as differing in kind from the perishable and the imperishable Persons, because of My being immutable and because of My being distinguished from them as pervading, supporting and ruling etc., by nature --- such a devotee knows all. He knows all that is to be known as the means of attaining Me. He worships Me in 'every way,' i.e., whatever ways of worshipping Me have been prescribed as the means of attaining Me, he worships Me by all these modes of worship. Whatever love is evoked in Me towards one approaching Me by all forms of knowledge having Me for their object, and whatever love is roused up in Me towards those who practise various modes of worship having Me for their object --- all that in a unified form is generated in Me towards one who has the knowledge of Me as described. Now, Sri Kṛṣṇa eulogises this knowledge of the Supreme Person:

15.20 Thus, this Śāstra, the most mysterious of all mysteries and which teaches My aspect as the Supreme Person, has been imparted to you by Me, as you are worthy to receive it because you are sinless. By understanding this, a man will become truly wise and will have fulfilled his duty. Whatever wisdom has to be cultivated for attaining Me, all that

should be taken as cultivated and that whatever duty has to be fulfilled in that connection --- all that is to be taken as fulfilled by knowing this (the Purusottama Vidya). He gets all spiritual fulfilment by this knowledge, except the direct vision of Purusottama. [Probably the idea is that direct vision comes only when the body falls at the end of the quantum of Karma that has brought it into existence. Before that only the state of the Sthitaprajna can be attained. The thin veil of residual Karma still stands in the way.]