

Reflections from Shrimad Bhagavadgita– Part 36: Chapter 4, Verses 15-19

(January 9 –January 15, 2019)

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ORIGINAL SANSKRIT DOCUMENT

एवं ज्ञात्वा कृतं कर्म पूर्वैरपि मुमुक्षुभिः ।

कुरु कर्मैव तस्मात्त्वं पूर्वैः पूर्वतरं कृतम् ॥ ४-१५ ॥

किं कर्म किमकर्मेति कवयोऽप्यत्र मोहिताः ।

तत्ते कर्म प्रवक्ष्यामि यज्ज्ञात्वा मोक्ष्यसेऽशुभात् ॥ ४-१६ ॥

कर्मणो ह्यपि बोद्धव्यं बोद्धव्यं च विकर्मणः ।

अकर्मणश्च बोद्धव्यं गहना कर्मणो गतिः ॥ ४-१७ ॥

कर्मण्यकर्म यः पश्येदकर्माणि च कर्म यः ।

स बुद्धिमान्मनुष्येषु स युक्तः कृत्स्नकर्मकृत् ॥ ४-१८ ॥

यस्य सर्वे समारम्भाः कामसङ्कल्पवर्जिताः ।

ज्ञानान्निदग्धकर्माणं तमाहुः पण्डितं बुधाः ॥ ४-१९ ॥

TRANSLITERATION

*evam jñātvā kṛitam karma pūrvair apimumukṣhubhiḥ
kuru karmaiva tasmāttvaṁ pūrvaiḥ pūrvatarāṁ
kṛitam*

*kiṁ karma kim akarmeti kavayo 'pyatra mohitāḥ
tat te karma pravakṣhyāmi yaj jñātvā mokṣhyase
'śhubhāt*

*karmaṇo hyapi boddhavyaṁ boddhavyaṁ cha
vikarmaṇaḥ*

akarmaṇaśh cha boddhavyaṁ gahanā karmaṇo gatiḥ

*karmaṇyakarma yaḥ paśhyed akarmaṇi cha karma yaḥ
sa buddhimān manuṣhyeṣhu sa yuktaḥ kṛitsna-karma-
kṛit*

*yasya sarve samārambhāḥ kāma-saṅkalpa-varjitāḥ
jñānāgni-dagdha-karmāṇaṁ tam āhuḥ paṇḍitaṁ
budhāḥ*

TRANSLATION

- (15)** Knowing this truth, even seekers of liberation in ancient times performed actions. Therefore, following the footsteps of those ancient sages, you too should perform your duty.
- (16)** What is action and what is inaction? Even the wise are confused in determining this. Now I shall explain to you the secret of action, by knowing which, you may free yourself from material bondage.
- (17)** You must understand the nature of all three—recommended action, wrong action, and inaction. The truth about these is profound and difficult to understand.
- (18)** Those who see action in inaction and inaction in action are truly wise amongst humans. Although performing all kinds of actions, they are yogis and masters of all their actions.
- (19)** The enlightened sages call those persons wise, whose every action is free from the desire for material pleasures and who have burnt the reactions of work in the fire of divine knowledge.

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Commentary:

Verse 15:

Having asked Arjuna to perform actions that do not bind one, the Lord now begins to expound the philosophy of action. The sages who aspire for God are not motivated to work for material gain. Why then do they engage in activities in this world? The reason is that they wish to serve God, and are inspired to do works for His pleasure. They know that they themselves will never be bound by their welfare work that is done in the spirit of devotion. They are also moved by compassion upon seeing the sufferings of the materially bound souls who are bereft of God consciousness, and are inspired to work for their spiritual elevation. The Buddha once said, “After attaining enlightenment, you have two options—either you do nothing, or you help others attain enlightenment.” The second option is certainly better than the first.

Verse 16:

In the previous three verses Lord Krishna talked about performance of actions, now He promises to give a detailed explanation that will dispel delusion about the nature of actions and inactions. Lord Krishna confirms that even the wise men are bewildered by the subtleties of action and inaction. The actions performed by an aspirant for *moksha* or liberation are considered wise, and are completely different from those seeking sense gratification or rewards for their actions, which are born of ignorance. The confusion about what is a good or bad action arises because of apparently contradictory arguments presented by the scriptures. For example, the Vedas recommend non-violence. Accordingly, in the Mahabharat, Arjuna wishes to follow the same course of action and shun violence, but Lord Krishna tells him that his duty here is to engage in an action that apparently

involves violence. If duty varies with the circumstance, then to ascertain one's duty in any particular situation is a complex matter. Therefore, in the next few verses Lord Krishna explains to Arjuna the esoteric science of action and inaction through which he may free himself from the material bondage.

Verse 17:

Lord Krishna explains to Arjuna that Work can be classified into three categories: **Action** (*karma*), **Forbidden Action** (*vikarma*), and **Inaction** (*akarma*). Action (*Karma*) is an auspicious action recommended by the scriptures for regulating the senses and purifying the mind. Forbidden action (*Vikarma*) is an inauspicious action prohibited by the scriptures since it is detrimental leading to degradation of the soul. Inaction (*Akarma*) is an action that is performed without attachment to the results, merely for the pleasure of God. It neither has any karmic reaction nor does it entangle the soul. Lord Krishna advises Arjuna to fully understand all three categories of Work as they are very profound, mysterious, and not easy to understand.

Verse 18:

Lord Krishna states here that there are two ways Action (*Karma*) and Inaction (*Akarma*) can be related to each other: (a) Action in Inaction, and (b) Inaction in Action. He further comments that the ones who recognize this relationship between Action and Inaction are truly among the wisest of all human beings. For example, a wise man will recognize Action in Inaction when the duties prescribed in Vedas are not performed, such as the observance of *Ekadashi Vrata* (fasting or abstaining from all grains) on the 11th day of waxing and waning moon, and that such *Inaction* leads one to sinful *Action* and binds one to the material world. When Arjuna suggested that he wishes to shy away from his duty of fighting the war, Lord Krishna explained to him that it would be a sin, and he would go to hell for such an *Inaction*. There is a second kind of inaction performed by *karma yogis*, which is called Inaction in Action. They execute their social duties without attachment to results, dedicating the fruits of their actions to God. Although engaged in all kinds of activities, they are not entangled in karmic reactions, since they have no motive for personal enjoyment. There were many great kings in Indian history, who discharged their kingly duties to the best of their abilities, and yet because their minds were not entangled in material desires, their actions were termed *Akarma* or *Inaction*.

Verse 19:

Those actions that are free from desire are known as *sama rambha*. Actions are desired because of hankering for rewards and one who is free from desire and hankering is considered intelligent and wise. Their actions are incapable of sprouting any reactions as they are free from even the thoughts of desire because of being purified by the fire of knowledge which manifests as not desiring the rewards of any action.