

BHAGAVADGITA

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

Chapter 8

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8.1-- 8.2 Arjuna said -- What are that brahman, Adhyatma and Karma which have been mentioned as what should be known by those who aspire for release from old age and death while they take refuge with the Lord? What are Adhibuta and Adhidaiva, which should be known by the aspirants for wealth? Who is Adhiyajna that is to be known by the three groups as their dying hour. In what manner are You to be known by these three groups who are self-controlled?

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8.3 The Lord said -- That which is the Supreme Imperishable (Aksara) has been named 'that brahman' The Aksara is that which cannot be destroyed and forms the totality of all individual selves. The Srutis say to this effect: 'The Avyakta is dissolved into the Aksara, the Aksara is dissolved into Tamas' (Su. U., 2). The supreme Aksara is the essential

form of the self, separated from Prakrti. One's own material nature (the body) is spoken of as Adhyatma or that which dwells with the self. This material nature (Svabhava) is Prakrti. It does not form the self but attaches itself to the self in the form of subtle elements, impressions etc. This has been taught in the Vidya of Five Fires (Cha. U., 5). Both these (the Aksara and the Adhyatma) should be known by the aspirants for liberation (Kaivalya) --- the former as what should be attained and the latter as what should be relinquished. Karma is that force which produces the origination of mundane beings. 'Beings' here means beings such as the human beings. The creative force which produces their origination is contact with woman. It has been described in the Sruti passage thus: 'The waters sacrificed in the fifth oblations become those who are named Purusas' (Cha. U., 5.3.3). That creative force is called Karma. All the acts associated with that should be considered by aspirants after release as calling for abstention. This abstention will also be inculcated immediately in the text, 'Desiring which they practise the vow of continence' (8.11).

8.4 The perishable existences which have been declared as fit to be known by the seekers of wealth, power etc., form the Adhibhuta. They are superior material entities that remain in ether or space and other elements. They are the evolutes of material elements and are perishable in their nature. They are also of the nature of sound, touch etc., supported by their basic subtle elements but different from, and finer than, ordinary sound etc., and are of many kinds. Sound, touch, form,

taste and smell on this kind, which are manifold and rooted in their several bases, are to be gained by the seekers after prosperity and should be contemplated upon by them. Adhidaivata connotes Purusa. The Purusa is superior to divinities like Indra, Prajapati and others, and is the experiencer of sound etc., which are different from, and superior to, the multitude of enjoyments of Indra, Prajapati etc. The condition of being such an enjoyer is to be contemplated upon by the seekers after prosperity, as the end to be attained. I alone am connoted by the term Adhiyajna (sacrifice). Adhiyajna denotes one who is propitiated in sacrifices. Indra and others, to whom sacrifices are made, form My body. I dwell as their Self and I alone am the object of worship by sacrifice. In this manner the three groups of qualified devotees should contemplate at the time of the practice of periodical and occasional rituals like the great sacrifices. This is also common to all the three groups of devotees.

8.5 He who, at the last moment, while leaving the body, departs remembering Me alone, attains My being; he attains My condition. In whatever way he meditates on Me, he attains that very form, in the same manner as the royal sage Bharata attained the form of the deer remembered by him at death. Such is the meaning. Sri Krsna further elucidates that it is the nature of one's last thought that leads to the attainment of a similar form by the meditator:

8.6 'At the end,' at the time of death, remembering whatsoever thought one abandons the body, to that alone one goes after death. The final thought arises only with reference to objects perviously ruminated upon in one's thought. As the final thought results only about an object previously contemplated upon,

8.7 Therefore, at all times, until your departure, remember Me, day after day. Engage yourself in actions appropriate to your station and stage in life, which would make you remember Me. These actions are prescribed by the Srutis and Smrtis and comprise the periodical and occasional rites. Thus, by this means, with your mind and intellect set on Me, you will remember Me at the time of death and thus attain to Me in the manner desired by you. There is no doubt about this. Thus, having laid down the common principle that the attainment of one's end is dependent on one's last thought, Sri Krsna proceeds to describe different modes of contemplation (Upasana) to be practised by the three groups of devotees for acquiring their objectives. Of these, he first speaks about the modes of contemplation to be adopted by the seekers of enjoyments and power and the type of the last thought consistent with their contemplation.

8.8 Contemplating on Me, the Supreme Divine Person, in the way to be specified further, at the last moment, with a mind trained by constant practice and Yoga, and not moving towards anything else, one reaches Me alone, i.e., attains a form similar to that of Mine, by virtue of the

attributes of enjoyment and the prosperity contemplated upon, like the royal sage Bharata who acquired the form of a deer on account of contemplating on it at the last moment. Abhyasa is the training of the mind to be often in touch with the object of meditation at all times without obstruction to the performance of the prescribed periodical and occasional rituals. Yoga is the meditation practised day by day at the time of Yoga practice in the manner prescribed.

8.9 - 8.10 He who focusses his life-breath between the eyebrows at the time of death with a mind rendered unswerving through its purification achieved by the strength of Yoga conjoined with Bhakti practised day after day; and he who contemplates on the 'Kavi' i.e., the Omniscient, the 'Primeval', i.e., who existed always, 'the Ruler,' i.e., who governs the universe, 'who is subtler than the subtle,' i.e., who is subtler than the individual self, 'who is the Dhata' of all, i.e., the creator of all, 'whose nature is inconceivable,' i.e., whose nature is other than everything else, 'who is sun-coloured and beyond darkness,' i.e., who possesses a divine form peculiar to Himself --- he who concentrates on Him, the Divine Person described above, between the eyebrows, attains Him alone. He attains His state and comes to have power and glory similar to His. Such is the meaning. Then He describes the mode of meditation to be adopted by the seeker of Kaivalya or the Jijnasu (i.e., of one who seeks to know his own self or Atman in contrast to one whose object is God-realisation).

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8.11 I shall show you briefly that goal which the knowers of the Veda call 'the imperishable,' i.e., as endowed with attributes like non-grossness etc., --- that imperishable which 'the ascetics freed from passion enter'; that imperishable 'desiring to attain which men practise continence'. What is attained by the mind as its goal is called 'pada'. I shall tell you briefly My essential nature which is beyond all description and which is explained in the whole of Vedanta and which is to be meditated upon. Such is the meaning.

8.12 - 8.13 Subduing all the senses like ear etc., which constitute the 'doorways' for sense impressions, i.e., withdrawing them from their natural functions; holding the mind in Me, the imperishable 'seated within the lotus of the heart'; practising 'steady abstraction of mind (Dharana) which is called concentration or Yoga,' i.e., abiding in Me alone in a steady manner; uttering the sacred 'syllable Om,' the brahman which connotes Me; remembering Me, who am expressed by the syllable Om; and fixing his 'life-breath within the head' --- whosoever abandons the body and departs in this way reaches the highest state. He reaches the pure self freed from Prakrti, which is akin to My form. From that state there is no return. Such is the meaning. Later on Sri Krsna will elucidate: 'They describe that as the highest goal of the Atman, which is not destroyed when all things are destroyed, which is unmanifest and imperishable' (8.20--21). Thus, the modes of contemplation on the Lord by the aspirants after prosperity and Kaivalya (Atmann-consciousness) have been taught according to the goal they lead to. Now, Sri Krsna teaches the way of meditation on the Lord by the Jnanin and the mode of attainment by him.

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8.15 Having attained Me, they are not subject to rebirth, which leads to a condition that is transient and an abode of sorrow. These great souls, i.e., men of noble minds, worship and attain Me as the sorrow object of attainment; because they possess knowledge of My essential nature as it really is; they are unable to maintain or sustain themselves without Me, as I am exceedingly dear to them. With their minds deeply attached to Me and completely dependent on Me, they reach Me as the supreme goal. Sri Krsna next teaches the reason for the return to Samsara of those aspirants for Aisvarya (prosperity) and for the non-return to

Samsara of those who have reached the Lord:

8.16 All the worlds, from the realm of Brahma included in the Brahmanda (cosmic sphere), are spheres in which experiences conferring Aisvarya (prosperity and power) can be obtained. But they are destructible and those who attain them are subject to return. Therefore destruction, i.e., return is unavoidable for the aspirants for Aisvarya, as the regions where it is attained perish. On the contrary there is no rebirth to those who attain Me, the Omniscient, who has true resolves, whose sport is creation, sustentation and dissolution of the entire universe, who is supremely compassionate and who is always of the same form. For these reasons there is no destruction in the case of those who attain Me.

He now elucidates the time-period settled by the Supreme Person's will in regard to the evolution and dissolution of the worlds upto the cosmic sphere of Brahma and of those who are within them.

8.17 These men who know the order of the day and night as established by My will in regard to all beings, beginning with man and ending with Brahma --- they understand that what forms Brahma's day is a unit comprising in it a thousand periods of four Yugas (Catur-yugas) and anight is a unit of equal duration.

8.18 Thus, at the dawn of a day of Brahma, the manifest entities existing in the three worlds, possessing body, senses, objects, and places of enjoyment appear from the non-manifest (Avyakta), which is

the condition of Brahma's body in that state, and at the beginning of the night they are dissolved into the condition of the unevolved (Avyakta) which forms the body of Brahma then.

8.19 The same multitude of beings, controlled by Karma, evolves again and again, undergoing dissolution at the coming of night. Again at the coming of the day it comes forth. Similarly, at the end of the life span of Brahma which consists of a hundred years of three hundred and sixty days each, each Brahma-day being a thousand Caturyugas, all the worlds including that of Brahma and Brahma himself dissolve into Me in accordance with the order thus described in the Srutis: 'The earth is dissolved into the waters, the waters are dissolved into light' etc., (Su. U., 2). The process of involution ends, after passing through all the other stages of dissolution, with the Avyakta, Akasa and Tamas. Therefore, for every other entity except Myself, origination and annihilation are unavoidable. So for those who seek Aisvarya (prosperity and power) birth and dissolution according to the above mentioned time arrangement are unavoidable. But in the case of those who attain to Me, there is no return again to Samsara. [The immense duration of time, according to ancient thinkers, is as follows: Catur-yuga, or a unit of the four yugas of Krta, Treta, Dvapara and Kali, has a cumulative duration of 4,320,000 human years. A thousand such periods constitute a day time of Brahma and a similar period his night. Periodic creation and dissolution of the universe take place in these two periods respectively. One year of Brahma consists of 360 such diurnal period. A Brahma has

a life-span of 100 such years --- i.e., 311, 040, 000,000,000 human years. At the end of it, there is a Mahapralaya, and a new Brahma comes into being. Time thus goes on endlessly]. Now Sri Krsna teaches that there is no return to Samsara even for those who have attained Kaivalya (isolation of the self).

8.20 - 8.21 Superior, as an object of human end, to this unmanifest (Avyakta), which is inanimate Prakrti, there is another state of being, of a kind different from this, but also called Avyakta. It has only knowledge-form and is also unmanifest. It is the self, Atman. It is unmanifest because It cannot be apprehended by any means of knowledge (Pramanas). The meaning is that Its nature is unique and that It can be known only to Itself. That is, It can be understood only vaguely in the ordinary ways of knowing. It is eternal, namely, ever-enduring, because It is not subject to origination and annihilation. In texts like 'For those who meditate on the imperishable, undefinable, the unmanifest' (12.3) and 'The imperishable is called the unchanging' (15.16) --- that being the self. It has been called the unmanifest (Avyakta) and imperishable (Aksara); when all material elements like ether, etc., with their causes and effects are annihilated, the self is not annihilated in spite of It being found alone with all the elements. [The elements are what constitute the bodies of beings.] The knowers of the Vedas declare It as the highest end. The meaning is that the imperishable entity which has been denoted by the term 'highest goal' in the passage, 'Whosoever abandons the body and departs (in the manner described) reaches the

highest state (Dhama)' (8.13), is the self (Atman) abiding in Its essential nature free from the contact with the Prakrti. This self, which abides thus in Its essential nature, by attaining which It does not return, --- this is My 'highest abode,' i.e., is the highest object of My control. The inanimate Prakrti is one object of My control. The animate Prakrti associated with this inanimate Prakrti is the second object of My control. The pristine nature of the freed self, free from contact with inanimate matter, is the highest object of My rule. Such is the meaning. This state is also one of non-return to Samsara. Or the term 'dhama' may signify 'luminosity'. And luminosity connotes knowledge. The essential nature of the freed self is boundless knowledge, or supreme light, which stands in contrast to the shrunken knowledge of the self, when involved in Prakrti. [The description given above is that of Kaivalya, the state of self-luminous existence as the pure self]. Sri Krsna now teaches that the object of attainment for the Jnanin, is totally different from this:

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8.22 That Supreme Person has been declared in such texts as 'There is nothing higher than Myself, O Arjuna. All this is strung on Me, as rows of gems are on a thread' (7.7), and 'Who am beyond them and immutable' (7.13) --- He is the Supreme Person in whom all beings abide and by whom all this is pervaded. He is to be attained by undivided devotion as described in 'Whose mind is not in anything else' (8.14). Now, Sri Krsna teaches the 'path of light,' described in the Srutis which is common to the knowers of the true nature of the self and to the persons who are devoted to the Supreme Person. The nature of this path is qualified as one of 'non-return to Samsara.' In the case of a person journeying through the 'path of light,' as described in the text of the worship of Five Fires is as follows: 'So those who know It (i.e., the eternal nature of the individual self) thus, as taught in the Vidya of the Five Fires, and those too who worship in the forest with faith and Tapas go to the deity ruling over the rays of light, and from there to the deity of the day' (Cha. U., 5.10.1). The attainment of the Supreme Brahman and the non-return to birth are declared with reference to those who go by the path of light, etc., by the teaching that 'He the Supreme Being leads them to Brahman ... Those who reach by this path do not return to the (wordly) life of man' (Cha. U., 4.15.5). This declaration of the goal in the text, 'Those who know it thus etc.,' is not with reference to the attainment of the Atman which constitutes only the limb of the science of Brahman as taught in the beginning of Prajapati's teaching. For there will then arise purposelessness for the separate teaching of the same in

regard to the principal science of the Supreme in the text. 'Those who are in the forest worship by means of faith and austerity etc.,' (Cha. U., 5.10.1). It is taught in the Vidya (meditation) of Five Fires: 'Thus, indeed, in the fifth oblation the waters become Purusa' (Cha. U., 5.9.1) and 'Those with a balance of good Karmas ... and those with a balance of bad Karmas' (Ibid., 5.10.7). What is to be understood here is that the state of existence as men and other beings, which has its origin in good and evil Karmas, refer to the 'waters' which alone are mixed with other elements (i.e., to the body-mind); as for the self, there is only contact with them and not identification. Thus, is declared the difference between intelligent self and inanimate matter. Then, by the texts, 'Those who know this' (Ibid., 5.10.1), 'Those who go to the rays of light' (Ibid.), and 'They who proceed by it return not to the human condition here,' it is instructed that those who know this concerning the sentient and inanimate entities --- the one to be attained and the other to be rejected ----, they jourey along the path described by the terms 'beginning with light and do not return to Samsara'. On account of the passage, 'He leads them to the Brahman' (Ibid., 4.15.5), which holds that the Brahman is attained by both the knower of real nature of the self and the devotees of the Supreme Person and also because of the axiom of 'results according to efforts' (Tat-kratu-nyaya), the entity self, separated from the inanimate matter, should be constantly meditated upon as having its sole joy in absolute subservience to the Supreme Brahman who is Its self. The self's nature of finding only joy consists in absolute subservience to the Surpeme Person. This is proved from the Srutis like

'He who dwells within the self ... whose body is the self' (Sa. Bra., 14.6.5.5.30).

8.23 - 8.24 Here, the term 'time' denotes a path, having many deities beginning with day and ending with year. The deities preside over divisions of time. The meaning is --- I declare to you the path departing in which Yogins do not return and also the path departing in which the doers of good actions return. By the clause, 'Light in the form of fire, the day, bright fortnight, six months of the northern course,' year also is denoted.

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8.25 This denotes the world of the manes etc., described by the term 'starting with smoke.' Here the term Yogin connotes one associated with good actions.

8.26 The bright path is characterised by the terms 'starting with light.' The dark path is characterised by the terms 'starting with smoke.' By the

bright path a man goes to the plane of no-return, but he who goes by the dark path returns again. In the Sruti both the bright and dark paths are said to be eternal in relation to Jnanis and doers of good actions of many kinds. This is corroborated in the text: 'Those who know this and those who worship with faith do Tapas in the forest etc., they go to the light' (Cha. U., 5.10.1), and 'But those who in the village perform Vedic and secular acts of a meritorious nature and the giving of alms --- they pass to the smoke' (ibid., 5.10.3).

8.27 Having known these two paths, no Yogin is deluded. On the contrary, he goes by the path of gods, his own path. Therefore, be integrated every day with Yoga called meditation on the path described by the terms starting with light. Next Sri Krsna speaks of the fruit of knowing the import of the Sastras, as taught in the two chapters 7 and 8.

8.28 Whatever fruit is said to accrue for meritorious actions in the form of the regular study of the Vedas Rg, Yajus, Saman and Atharvan as also for the performance of sacrifices, austerities, gifts --- all these does not transcend on knowing this, namely the greatness of the Lord as taught in the two chapters (7 and 8). By immense joy arising from the knowledge of this, he regards all these results as negligible as straw. Be being a Yogin, viz., a Jnanin, he reaches the supreme, primal abode which is without beginning and is attainable by such a Jnanin.

