

BHAGAVADGITA

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

Chapter 14

RO

14.1 The Lord said -- I shall declare again another kind of knowledge which is distinct from what was taught earlier concerning Gunas such as Sattva, falling within the sphere of Prakrti and Purusa. This knowledge going to be revealed is the best of all forms of knowledge concerning the Prakrti and the self. Having gained this knowledge, all sages, namely, those given to meditation, have attained perfection, beyond this world, the sphere of Samsara, having attained the essential and pure form of the self. He further extols this knowledge, distinguishing it by its fruits:

14.2 They, 'resorting to this knowledge' which will be expounded later, come to partake of My nature, and they attain My status. 'They are not born at the time of creation,' they are not subjected to the process of creation, and they 'suffer not at the time of dissolution,' i.e. they are not subjected to the distress involved in dissolution of the universe. In order to show how the Gunas of Prakrti constitute the cause of bondage, Sri Krsna now declares that, the aggregation of beings, born from the conjunction of Purusa and Prakrti as stated already in the passages, 'Whatever being is born' (13.26), is brought about by the Lord Himself:

14.3 In that great brahman forming my womb, I lay the germ. The non-conscious Prakrti is alluded to in the text 'Earth, water, fire, air, ether, Manas, Buddhi and Ahankara --- thus My Prakrti is eightfold' (7.4-5). This Prakrti is designated here by the name 'the great brahman' by reason of its being the cause of modifications like the Mahat, the Ahankara etc. In the Srutis also, here and there, even the Prakrti is designated as brahman, as in: 'He who is all-knowing, all-wise, whose austerity consists of knowledge --- from Him are produced this brahman as also food, i.e., the universe of name and form' (Mun. U., 1.1.9) The higher Prakrti, which is the mass of conscient selves, alluded to in the passage, 'Know My higher Prakrti to be distinct from this; it is the life-principle' (7.5). It is here expressed by the term 'Garbha', the source or womb in which all living beings originate. I lay the germ, constituting the mass of conscious beings, in that great brahman, which is non-conscious and forms the womb. From that conjunction between the two Prakrtis, brought about by My will is brought forth the origin of all entities from Brahma down to tuft to grass. He continues to say: 'I Myself bring about the conjunction of the conscient and unconscient Prakrtis in the manifested state of effect'.

14.4 In all wombs such as those of gods, Gandharvas, Yaksas, Raksasas, men, animals, beasts, birds, serpents etc., whatever forms are generated, the brahman (Prakrti) is the 'great womb' or cause. Beginning from Mahat and ending with the five elements, Prakrti, with the mass of conscient selves imbedded by Me in it, is the cause. I am

the sowing father. The meaning is that I am the imbedder of the multiplex of conscient selves according to each one's Karma. Now, He teaches the cause of continuing births as divinities etc., of those born in this manner at the beginning of a cycle of creation. It is due to the conjunction of these beings with Prakrti, in keeping with their old Karmas:

14.5 The three Gunas of Prakrti --- Sattva, Rajas and Tamas --- are inherent in the essential nature of Prakrti and are particular expressions of it. They can be known only through their effects such as 'brightness' etc. They are not apparent in the unevolved state of Prakrti but become apparent in its transformations as Mahat etc. They bind the self, which is conjoined with bodies such as those of divinities, men etc., composed of the modifications of Prakrti beginning with Mahat and ending with the elements. The self is immutable, i.e., It is not in Its pristine nature conjoined with the Gunas. But the Gunas bind It when residing in the body. The meaning is that they bind It by virtue of the limiting conditions of Its living in the body. SriKrsna proceeds to speak of the nature of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas and their modes of binding (the self):

14.6 Of 'these', i.e., of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas, the characteristic nature of the Sattva is this: it illuminates on account of its being pure. What is called purity is to be bereft of qualities which veil light and happiness. Because its nature is solely the generation of light and happiness, it constitutes the cause of light and happiness. 'Light' or

illumination is enlightenment about a thing as it is. It is 'not morbid,' i.e., an effect called morbidity (disease) does not exist in its presence. The meaning is, that Sattva is the cause of health. The Guna, called Sattva, however, binds the self by attachment to happiness and knowledge. The meaning is that it causes attachment to happiness and knowledge. When attachment to knowledge and happiness is born, one engages oneself in secular and Vedic means for securing them. Consequently, one is born in such bodies which constitute the means for realising such fruits. Hence the Sattva binds the self through attachment to happiness and knowledge. What is said is this: Sattva generates knowledge and happiness; again it generates attachment to them.

14.7 Rajas is of the nature of passion, namely, it causes sexual desire. 'Passion' (Raga) is mutual yearning between a man and a woman. 'Springing from thirst and attachment' means it is the source of sensuality and attachment. 'Trsna', (thirst, sensuality) is the longing for all sense-objects, such as sound etc. 'Sanga' (attachment) is the inordinate longing for union with one's sons, friends and such other relations. By creating longing for actions, it binds the embodied self. Whatever actions have been begun by the self from longing for sensual enjoyments, they become the cause of births in bodies that constitute the means for experiencing such enjoyments. Therefore Rajas binds the embodied self through attachment to actions. What is said is this: Rajas is the cause of sexuality, sensuality and attachment, and of constant engagement in actions.

14.8 By 'false knowledge' is here to be understood as what is other than knowledge. What is called knowledge is right perception of things. What is other than this is false knowledge. And Tamas springs from knowledge contrary to the true nature of things. It deludes all embodied selves. Delusion is erroneous knowledge. The meaning is that Tamas is the cause of erroneous knowledge. Being the cause of negligence, indolence and sleep, it binds the embodied self through them.

'Negligence' is inattentiveness, which causes one to perform works other than what ought to be done. 'Indolence' is the tendency to avoid work; it may even develop into absolute inaction. 'Sleep.' is the state in which the external organs stop working due to exhaustion and seek to recover from the same. In sleep when only the outgoing action of the senses stop, it is called dream state. When even the mind (Manas) ceases to function, it is called dreamless sleep. He states the cardinal feature forming the ways of bondage through Sattva etc.

14.9 Sattva mainly attaches one to pleasure. Rajas mainly attaches one to actions. But Tamas, veiling knowledge of true things and being the cause of false knowledge, mainly attaches one to actions which are contrary to those which ought to be done. The Sattva and other qualities evolve from the nature of Prakrti, developed into the form of the body. Owing to this fact that they have evolved out of the nature of Prakrti, they always co-exist in bodies at all time. How, then, can they cause effects which are mutually contrary? He replies:

14.10 Even though all the three Gunas of Sattva etc., are associated with the nature of the self conjoined with Prakrti in the form of body, yet owing to the dominance of previous Karmas and the differences in the food nourishing the body, Sattva etc., preponderate or are subdued by turn. Sometimes Sattva preponderates prevailing over Rajas and Tamas; sometimes Rajas preponderates prevailing over Tamas and Sattva, and sometimes Tamas preponderates prevailing over Rajas and Sattva. He teaches that this changing preponderance of the Gunas can be inferred from the knowledge of the effects produced by them.

14.11 When the light of knowledge shines revealing the truth of things emerging through all the gateways of knowledge such as the eyes etc., in the body, one should know that Sattva is prevailing.

14.12 'Greed' is the tendency not to spend one's own property. 'Activity' is the disposition to be active devoid of any purpose. 'Undertaking of works' is engagement in works which yield fruits. 'Unrest' is absence of rest of sense-activities. 'Longing' is the desire for sense objects. These predominate when Rajas has increased. The meaning is that whenever greed etc., prevail, then one should know that Rajas has very much increased.

14.13 'Non-illumination' is the absence of knowledge. 'Inactivity' is immovableness. 'Negligence' is inadvertence resulting in works that

should not be done. 'Delusion' is wrong knowledge. These arise when Tamas waxes strong. By these, one should know that the Tamas has increased very much.

14.14 When the 'Sattva prevails' i.e., while the Sattva continues to be prevalent, if the embodied self meets with death, It reaches the pure worlds, i.e., regions conducive to the knowledge of the self. The purport is this: If Satva preponderates in a person at the time of death, he will be reborn in the families of those who have the knowledge of the self, and thus be qualified to perform auspicious acts which are the means of attaining the true knowledge of the self.

14.15 (a) Meeting with death when Rajas is preponderant, one is reborn in the families of those who act for the sake of fruits for themselves. Being reborn in such families, he becomes qualified to perform auspicious acts which constitute the way for attaining heaven and the like. (b) Similarly, one who dies when Tamas is preponderant is born in the wombs of beings lacking in intelligence, namely, in the wombs of dogs, pigs etc. The meaning is that he is reborn as one incapable of realising any human end.

14.16 Thus, the 'fruit of a good deed,' namely, disinterested work in the form of My worship, performed by one who dies when Sattva prevails --- is birth in the family of those who know the self. There he acquires more Sattva than before and the self becomes more pure, namely, devoid of

the slightest vestige of suffering. So say those who know about the development of Sattva. But the 'fruit of Rajas,' dominating at the time of death, is 'suffering in Samsara.' It consists in successive births in families attached to actions for the sake of fruits. Rebirth of this type increases Rajas further, resulting in actions for gaining their fruits. So say those who know about the developments of this Guna. 'Ignorance' is the result of Tamas. The fruit of Tamas dominating at the time of death, is successive conditions of ignorance. What are the results derived from Sattva etc.? To this, He answers:

14.17 From the increase of Sattva, knowledge i.e., 'true and direct knowledge' of the self arises. From Rajas develops likewise 'intense desire' for heaven etc. From Tamas similarly develops 'negligence' leading to evil deeds; and from this, delusion, i.e., erroneous knowledge; and from that still more Tamas; and thence ignorance, namely absence of knowledge.

14.18 Thus, in the manner explained, those who 'rest in Sattva rise upwards,' namely, they attain liberation from the bonds of Samsara gradually. Those who, 'abiding in Rajas' which produces greed for heaven etc., engage themselves in actions which constitute the means for obtaining such results. Experiencing those results, they are born again and engage in, and perform, the very same acts. So they remain in the 'middle'. This is mostly suffering, as it is characterised by rebirths. Those of Tamasic nature 'stoop down' into lower levels, as Tamas grows

ever worse in them. They go 'downwards' i.e., to the lowest state among human beings, then to the condition of animals; then to that of worms; insects etc., then of immovable things, and even to the condition of shrubs and creepers, and ultimately to the condition of stones, wood, clod of earth, straw etc. Sri Krsna now teaches about the manner of those in whom the Sattva has gradually increased by adopting special holy food and performance of special disinterested deeds, and who thus rise upward by transcending the Gunas.

14.19 The seer has in the first place to totally subdue his Rajas and Tamas and stay in pure Sattva. This is accomplished through nourishment by Sattvika food and the performance of disinterested actions for the propitiation of the Lord. He then perceives 'no agent of action other than the Gunas' i.e., sees that the Gunas are themselves the agents according to their nature. Further he perceives what is 'other than the Gunas,' i.e., perceives the Gunas which are agents and the self who is not an agent of action. Such a seer attains to 'My state,' i.e., gains likeness with Me in transcending the three Gunas etc. The purport is this: The self, pure in nature by Itself, gains agency through various actions by contact with the Gunas springing from past Karmas. When one perceives the self in this way, namely, that the self by Itself is no agent of actions and is of the nature of infinite knowledge, then It attains to My likeness. It is stated that one attains to the likeness of the Lord after perceiving the self as a non-agent and as other than the Gunas. What is meant by the state of likeness to the Lord? Sri Krsna now

describes it:

14.20 The embodied self --- 'crossing beyond these three Gunas,' the Sattva and the rest, which 'arise in the body,' i.e., spring from Prakrti transformed into the form of the body --- perceives the self as different from the Gunas and as of the form of knowledge only. Released thus from birth, death, old age and sorrow, It experiences the immortal self. This is what is meant by My likeness. Arjuna now wants to know about the characteristics of one who has transcended the Gunas and the means of such transcendence:

14.21 Arjuna said -- By what signs, namely, distinguishing features, is a man who has crossed beyond these three Gunas, Sattva and the rest, characterised? What is his behaviour? With what kind of behaviour is he associated and how does it serve as a sign for knowing his state? Such is the meaning. How does he, i.e., by what means does he cross beyond the three Gunas, the Sattva and the rest?

14.22 The Lord said -- He does not hate the effects of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas known as illumination, activity and delusion respectively, when they are prevailing in regard to undesired things other than the self; nor longs for them when they cease, i.e., when desired things other than the self become unavailable. Hating things not conducive to the realisations of the self and longing for things conducive thereof, do not come under this law stated in the Verse.

14.23 He who sits like one 'unconcerned,' namely, whose satisfaction consists in the vision of the self as different from the Gunas and sits like one unconcerned about other things and is not therefore disturbed by the Gunas through hatred and longing and who remains quiet, reflecting: 'The Gunas function in their effects like illumination etc., and so 'rests unshaken,' i.e, does not act in accordance with the effects of the Gunas.

14.24 - 14.25 He who is 'alike in pleasure and pain,' namely, whose mind is equal in pleasure and pain; 'who dwells in his self,' namely, who dwells in his self because his love for the self keeps his mind in equanimity in pleasure and pain arising from the birth, death etc., of his sons and other relatives and friends, and who, because of this, 'looks upon a clod, a stone and a piece of gold as of equal value,' who consequently remains the same towards things dear or hateful, i.e., who treats alike the worldly objects desired and undesired; who is 'intelligent,' namely, proficient in discrimination between the Prakrti and the self; who, therefore, regards blame and praise as alike, namely, who treats with equality praise and blame looking upon good and evil qualities as born of identification with bodies such as those of men etc., and as such unconnected with his real self; who is the 'same in honour and dishonour' because these are feelings based on the misconception that the body is the self, and as a consequence of such discrimination between the body and the self, 'looks alike on friend and foe,' because

he understands that there is no connection between them and himself; and who has thus abandoned all enterprises in which embodied beings are involved --- he who is like this, is said to have risen above the Gunas.

Now Sri Krsna states the main method (technique) for transcending such Gunas:

14.24 - 14.25 He who is 'alike in pleasure and pain,' namely, whose mind is equal in pleasure and pain; 'who dwells in his self,' namely, who dwells in his self because his love for the self keeps his mind in equanimity in pleasure and pain arising from the birth, death etc., of his sons and other relatives and friends, and who, because of this, 'looks upon a clod, a stone and a piece of gold as of equal value,' who consequently remains the same towards things dear or hateful, i.e., who treats alike the worldly objects desired and undesired; who is 'intelligent,' namely, proficient in discrimination between the Prakrti and the self; who, therefore, regards blame and praise as alike, namely, who treats with equality praise and blame looking upon good and evil qualities as born of identification with bodies such as those of men etc., and as such unconnected with his real self; who is the 'same in honour and dishonour' because these are feelings based on the misconception that the body is the self, and as a consequence of such discrimination between the body and the self, 'looks alike on friend and foe,' because he understands that there is no connection between them and himself; and who has thus abandoned all enterprises in which embodied beings are involved --- he who is like this, is said to have risen above the Gunas.

Now Sri Krsna states the main method (technique) for transcending such Gunas:

14.26 The state of transcendence of Gunas is not attained merely by reflecting on the difference between the Prakrti and the self as declared in the text such as, 'When the seer beholds no agent of action other than the Gunas, then he transcends the Gunas, for it is liable then to be sublated by contrary subtle impressions (Vasanas) which have continued from beginningless time. He who, with unswerving Bhakti Yoga, namely, one-pointed Bhakti Yoga, serves Me of true-resolve, supremely compassionate and the ocean of parental affection for supplicants --- such a man crosses over the Gunas of Sattva etc., which are otherwise invincible. He becomes worthy for brahmabhuya, the state of brahman i.e., he becomes qualified for the state of brahman. The meaning is that he attains the self as It really is, immortal and immutable.

14.27 The term 'hi' (for) denotes cause. I, who am to be served by unswerving Bhakti Yoga, am 'the ground of the individual self, immortal and immutable, and also of eternal Dharma,' namely, surpassing eternal prosperity and also perfect felicity, i.e., of the felicity attained by the Jnanin stated in texts such as 'Realising that Vasudeva is all' (7.19). I, being of such nature, devotion to Me helps the Jiva to transcend the Gunas. Although the expression 'eternal Dharma' is indicative of the conduct to be observed, in the given context, it means the goal to be attained; for, what follows and what precedes it, denote the goal and not

conduct. The purport is this: It has been stated that seeking refuge with the Lord is the only means for transcending the Gunas and the attainment of self-realisation, prosperity and the Supreme Being in the earlier text beginning with, 'For this divine Maya of Mine consisting of the three Gunas is hard to break through, except for those who take refuge in Me alone ...' (7.14). Thus, seeking surrender to the Lord with one-pointed mind is the only means for transcending the Gunas and for the attainment of the state of brahman through that. [Here Prapatti, surrender to the Lord, is mentioned as a limb of unswerving Bhakti Yoga according to some interpreters. This is however a disputable point, as some maintain that Prapatti is in itself an independent path].