

## Five Verses of the Thirteenth Chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā*

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William Hastings was the British Governor-General of India from 1773-1785. He wrote a beautiful Introduction to the first ever English translation of the *Bhagavadgītā* by Charles Wilkins. That was in 1784. He says in that Introduction that the writers of the Indian philosophies will survive even when the British Dominion in India will cease to exist, and when the sources which it yielded of wealth and power are lost to remembrances. The statement is absolutely true because the British have left India long ago, but still we remember *Gītā*. We are worshipping the *Gītāchārya*. We are trying to adopt our life according to His teachings. What a wonderful prophecy it is!

We are discussing here '*Kshetra-kshetra-jnāyor jnānam*' which is the essence of the thirteenth chapter of the *Gītā*. Sri Krishna says, there are two categories in human consciousness. The one is spiritually conscious, and the other is inert, *jada*. The same thing is called the subject and the object, the seer and the seen, the knower of the field and the field, that is to say, the *jiva* and the body.

In the broader sense, however, what we call *kshetra* is not merely the individual body, it is *Prakriti*, the universal Nature, of which this body is only a part. You can think like this—at the microscopic level it is body, and at the macroscopic level it is *Prakriti*. Further Krishna says that the body and the Spirit are inseparably mixed up. *Jada* and

*Chaitanya* (Consciousness) are inseparably mixed up here to make up this human personality. It is due to ignorance. To know them as distinct, that they are separate, is real knowledge. In other words, my body is separate from me; I am a distinct spiritual being. This is the knowledge—'*kshetra-kshetra-jnāyor jnānam yat taj jnānam matam mama*'. That means we are trying to find out our true spiritual identity. We are trying to find out who we are really. We are spiritual in nature, we are not just matter. That we identify ourselves with matter is something wrong. It is due to ignorance. This is the essence of the thirteenth chapter of the *Gītā*.

Now I have to analyse five verses, nineteenth to twenty-third. The nineteenth verse speaks of what is meant by creation. In order to understand it, we have to go back to the seventh chapter where the Lord says:

*Bhumir āpo'nalo vāyuh  
kham mano buddhir eva ca /  
Ahankāra iti'yam me  
bhinnā prakritir ashtadhā //7.4//  
Apar'eyam itas tv anyām  
prakritim viddhi me parām /  
Jiva-bhutām mahā-bāho  
yay'edam dhāryate jagat //7.5//*

He says, 'My Nature is divided into eight categories—earth, water, fire, air, sky, mind, understanding, and I-sense. This, O mighty-armed, is My lower Nature. Know that, as different from it, is My higher Nature forming the

source of all *jivas* and the support of the whole universe.’

In these two *shlokas* we learn two terms. One is, *aparā prakriti*, ie matter, and another is *parā prakriti*, that is *jiva*. These two *prakritis* interact with each other to project this world. This is the theme of the *shlokas* nineteen to twenty-two of the thirteenth chapter. The twenty-third *shloka* says, by attaining this knowledge we need not be born again. You will have liberation. That means the result of the knowledge is spoken of in this *shloka*.

Let us begin with the nineteenth *shloka*

*Prakritim purusham c'aiva  
viddhy anādi ubhāvapi /  
Vikārāṁsh ca gunāṁshc'aiva  
viddhi prakriti-sambhavān //13.19//*

—‘Know both *Prakriti* (Nature) and *Purusha* (Spirit) to be beginningless, eternal verities. Know also that all changeful objects and attributes (that constitute the world of daily experience) are sprung from *Prakriti*.’

Suddenly we are introduced to two new terms here—not lower *prakriti* or higher *prakriti*, *aparā prakriti* or *parā prakriti*. The terms introduced here are *Purusha* and *Prakriti*. This is a kind of different approach taken up by Sri Krishna. These two terms are very old. In fact, these terms originally belong to Sāṁkhya philosophy. The basic difference between the Sāṁkhya philosophy and the Vedānta philosophy is that Sāṁkhya philosophy has no place for *Ishvara*, or the God, but in Vedānta philosophy, especially propounded by Sri Krishna and taught in the *Bhagavadgītā*—these two entities form the power of God, or rather two manifestations of the power of God.

God or the supreme Spirit is the *āshraya* or the repository of the *purusha*, the individual spirit and also of the *prakriti*,

inner nature, which through a mutual intermixture become the seed for creation. That is, ‘*Prakritim purusham c'aiva viddhy anādi ubhāvapi*’. They are *anādi* or beginningless or eternal. Shankara makes a very interesting comment here. As long as there is creation they are eternal. If there is no creation, if we realize the Truth, for us there will be no creation; there will be no *purusha* or no *prakriti* at all. As long as creation is there, *Ishvara* is there. As long as *Ishvara* is there, there will be *purusha* and *prakriti*. What was there before the creation? There was no *purusha*, there was no *prakriti*. That means he takes up the non-dualistic approach.

But for another great āchārya, Rāmānuja, *Ishvara* is always *Ishvara*. He likes Personal God. He does not say there is something higher than the Personal God. He rejects that idea. For him, God is the Personal God who can be loved, adored and worshipped. So, for him, the creator God is the absolute God. For Shankara the non-dualistic principle is the absolute God. This is the only difference between them in this context.

Let us learn the meaning of the second line: ‘*Vikārāṁsh ca gunāṁshc'aiva viddhi prakriti-sambhavān*.’ There are two things which are born out of *prakriti*. In the first line we have learnt *Prakriti* and *Purusha* are eternal. They are power of manifestations, or they are the power of God. The second line says *vikāra* and *gunas* are born out of *Prakriti*. What is *vikāra*? Shankara says, *vikāra* means modifications of matter. Our body and the senses are all modifications of matter. These are all *vikāras*. What is meant by the *gunas*? We enjoy *sukha* (pleasure) and *dukha* (pain) in this body. But we do not feel this body at all in the state of *sushupti* or deep sleep. Isn't it? In deep sleep we do not feel this body; there is then no experience of *sukha-dukha*. When we come back to the

waking state (*jāgrat*) then we feel the presence of body and that is why we feel the presence of *sukha* and *dukha*. So there is a connection—connection between the matter, and the *sukha* and *dukha*. The *sukha* and *dukha* are called the *gunas* here. Both *sukha* and *dukha* and the *vikāras*, modifications of matter like body, mind, etc, are born out of *Prakriti*. They have got nothing to do with Spirit. That we should remember at this stage.

Let us go to the next *shloka*. But before that I would like to mention how in the Upanishads we have beautiful divisions of this whole existence. The Upanishads divide the whole of existence into *anna* and *annāda*. These are very simple terms that will help us to understand the next *shloka*. *Anna* means object of enjoyment. Literally, *anna* means food. Food is the object of enjoyment and *annāda* means eater of the food, ie the Spirit, the enjoyer. Without the enjoyer there is no value of enjoyment. Without a seer, there is no value of a scenery. It is the seer or watcher who gives value to the scenery. Here the same idea is presented in the *Gītā* as the *Prakriti* and the *Purusha*—and these ideas, as I have already told you, belong to Sāmkhya philosophy. Now we are in a more advantageous position to understand the *shloka*.

*Kārya-kāraṇa-kartritve  
hetuh prakirtir ucyate /  
Purushah sukha-duḥkhānām  
bhoktritve hetur ucyate //13.20//*

—‘Prakriti is the cause of the formation and functioning of the body and the senses, while it is the Purusha that experiences pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow.’

We have learnt about the world experience in the previous verse. The experience of the world is made possible by the interaction of *Purusha* and *Prakriti*. But

what is the abode of experience? Where this experience takes place? Where this enjoyment takes place? Krishna says, *kārya* and *kāraṇa*. What is *kārya*? The whole body is called *kārya*. *Kāraṇa* means the senses—all thirteen categories. The thirteen categories include five *jnānendriyas*, five *karmendriyas*, mind, intellect and *ahamkāra*. These are all *kāraṇas*. These are the abodes of the enjoyment. These are the places where the enjoyment is felt.

Now the next line: ‘*Purushah sukha-duḥkhānām bhoktritve hetur ucyate*’. In the previous line we have learnt about the abodes of enjoyment. Now how the enjoyment takes place if there is no conscious entity at all? Without a conscious entity there cannot be any kind of enjoyment. That is why Krishna says here, Purusha, the individual spirit, is the cause of enjoyment here. He is called in *Gītā* terminology *bhoktā* or the enjoyer. The *Kathopanishad* also uses the same term:

*Indriyāni hayānāhurvishayāmsteshu  
gocarān;  
Ātmendriyamanoyuktam bhoktetyāhur-  
manishinah (I.iii.4)*

*Bhoktā* is not the real state of individual spirit. When it is united with the body and mind, it will get the enjoyership. Enjoyership is something superimposed, ascribed to the individual self. That is why it is called *bhoktā*. The crux of the matter is that the whole universe is due to the combination of consciousness and unconscious entities. The unconscious entity is called *drishya* in the Upanishad and the conscious entity which reveals it, which gives awareness to it, from which it is made possible to see, experience the particular individual spirit—in this case it is called *drashtā*. And what is seen in unconsciousness nature is called *drishti*. So now in this case both belong to the Lord. This is the special instruction given here by Krishna. The Upanishad does not speak of

these two things as God. Krishna says, both are the powers of God—one power has become the seer and the other power has become the seen. *Parā prakṛiti*, the individual spirit has become the seer and the *aparā prakṛiti* has become the seen. This is what is called *samsāra*. Shankara says, what we call *samsāra* is this world experience. A simple definition indeed. You may not like Shankara’s philosophy, but you should read his commentary to appreciate the insight which each word has got. Shankara’s commentary will give wonderful insight into each and every word of the *Gītā*. This is the speciality of Shankara’s commentary. We may or may not accept the *advaita tattva* in toto. That is left to us. Shankara here says—*sukha-dukhah sambhogah samsārah*. The enjoyment of *sukha-dukhah* is called *samsāra*. Is there anything other than this? Please tell me. Either we experience *sukha*, or *dukha*.

The next verse tells us how *samsāra* appears.

*Purushah prakṛiti-stho hi  
bhunkte prakṛiti-jān gunān /  
Kāranam guna-sango 'sya  
sad-asad-yoni-janmasu //13.21//*

—‘Seated in bodies, which are the products of Prakṛiti, the Puruṣa enjoys the objects and qualities born of Prakṛiti. Attachment to these objects is the cause of the Spirit getting embodiments in evil or exalted wombs.’

As to the question, how the enjoyment takes place, Sri Krishna says that the enjoyer becomes *prakṛitistha*, the individual gets embedded in the *prakṛiti*. That is how this *samsāra* takes place. Suppose, the individual thinks that he is separate from *prakṛiti*, he has nothing to do with *prakṛiti*, then, for him, there will be so *samsāra* at all. The very cause of this *samsāra* is that *puruṣa* becomes *prakṛitistha*. How to understand

the word *prakṛitistha*? Shankara gives a beautiful analysis and says, ‘*prakṛiti ātman tvena gatah*.’ Thinking that *prakṛiti* itself is me, we always think I am the body or I am the mind. But the body is certainly not what we are. It is *prakṛiti*. But we get identified with this *prakṛiti*. This is what is meant by *prakṛitistha*. Due to this *prakṛitistha* state we feel that the qualities of the *prakṛiti* belong to me. Then only I feel I am happy, I am miserable and so on. That means *sukha* and *dukha*, pleasure and pain, belong to *prakṛiti*. How I can get myself identified with the *gunas* or qualities of the *prakṛiti*? Because I am identifying myself with *prakṛiti*, I identify myself with the *gunas* of *prakṛiti*. As a result, I feel I am happy or I am ignorant. The next line says this is the very reason for transmigration. Why we travel from one body to another? Why we have to suffer? This is due to *guna-sanga*. This is the subject of the next line—‘*kāranam guna-sango 'sya sad-asad-yoni-janmasu*.’ *Guna-sanga* means *puruṣa*’s contact with *sukha-dukha*. This *guna-sanga* leads to two kinds of birth. One is *sat janma*, another is *asad janma*, ie good and evil birth. In good birth one has to suffer less, and in evil birth one has to suffer more. Nevertheless both are bondage. So we want to avoid both. How to avoid it? In order to avoid this *samsāra* we should attain knowledge. What kind of knowledge we should have? We should consider ourself as not just individual but identify our individual self with the Cosmic Spirit or *Brahman*. The Upanishad calls the Cosmic Spirit *Brahman*.

Now the next verse. It gives some very philosophically important clues. The Cosmic Spirit and the so-called individual spirit, according to Shankara, according to non-dualism, are not different. They are one and the same. As we feel ourselves to be individuals, we are identified with *prakṛiti*, and consequently we are identified with the

*sukha-dukha*. That blunder is the cause of *samsāra* and transmigration. If we can identify ourselves with the Cosmic Spirit there will be no *samsāra*. This is what is called knowledge here:

*Upadrashtā'numantā ca bhartā bhoktā  
mah'eshvarah /  
param'ātm'eti c'āpy ukto dehe'smin  
purushah parah //13.22//*

—‘In this body, there is also the Transcendent and the Supreme Spirit, who is described as the Supreme Self and Sovereign Lord, the unconcerned Witness, the Sanctioner, the Supporter and the Enjoyer.’

Here the Lord tells us the method, that is, how we should understand our individual spirit. Our individual spirit is not essentially different from the Cosmic Spirit: The first word in this verse is ‘*Upadrashtā*’. *Upa* means nearby, who is nearby, and *drashtā* means one who sees. He is seeing everything. He is seeing, sitting very close by. He is seeing all the activities of the body and the mind. He is only the Witness. He has got nothing to do with their activities. The second one is ‘*anumantā*’. He is the Permitter. That is to say, because of His presence everything is going on. Without His presence there will be no activities of the body and the mind. This is knowledge. Then, ‘*bhartā*’. He is the Sustainer or support, He is consciousness. Without consciousness there can be no activities of *prakriti*—body-mind complex, etc. So He is the Sustainer of everything.

Now, there should be an enjoyer. Who is the enjoyer? During conscious activity He seems to be the enjoyer—because in every activity you will find this consciousness. Every activity, every experience in this world, as I have already pointed out, is the mixture of consciousness and unconsciousness. It is this consciousness

which is called ‘*bhoktā*’ because It permeates every activity of the body and the mind. So He is ‘*Maheshvarah*’, the great Ruler. Shankara makes a beautiful comment here. He says, Maheshvara is the great one. He is the Ruler, He is one with the whole universe, and He is superior to everything. He transcends everything. And that is why He is called *paramātman*. Where this *paramātman* lies? Where this *anumantā* lies? Where this *Upadrashtā* lies? In our own b-o-d-y—in the form of the individual spirit. Definitely, he is not just individual spirit. He is the Cosmic Spirit. And what is the result of this *ātmajnāna*? That is the subject of the twenty-third shloka in which the Lord says:

*Ya evam vetti purusham  
prakritim ca gunaih saha /  
Sarvathā vartamāno'pi  
na sa bhuyo'bhijāyate //13.23//*

—‘Whosoever thus knows the Purusha (Spirit) and Prakriti (Nature), along with its effects, will never be born again, whatever be his mode of living.’

Ignorance causes birth. When we have the knowledge, there will be no more rebirth for us. We should only know what is Purusha and what is Prakriti? Shankara puts it like this: Knowing Purusha means ‘*purusham sākshātaḥ ahamiti*’—‘I am the Purusha, I am the Cosmic Spirit.’ I am not just individual spirit, I am one with the Cosmic Spirit. This is the way of knowing the Purusha. How to know the Prakriti with the gunas etc? Once we get the knowledge, all *prakriti* will die away, will cease to exist for us. There remains only Purusha—the omnipresent, the omniscient and the omnipotent. The *Mundaka Upanishad* tells us—‘*Brahma veda brahmaiva bhavati*’—‘The knower of Brahman becomes Brahman indeed.’ This is the summary of all the *shlokas* presented above.

Krishna blends the old concept of the Sāmkhya philosophy with the Vedānta of the Upanishad and gives us here a coherent world view. Let us understand this. Krishna gives two kinds of views. One is the beautiful coherent world view. This world view will help us to understand the purpose of this creation, the purpose of this world, and our place in it. The next view that Krishna gives is a beautiful, wonderful view of our own lives, an integrated view of our own life in which every action becomes a conscious effort to gain knowledge of discrimination between the Spirit and matter. This is the purpose of the great teaching of

Krishna delivered in the form of the *Bhagavadgītā*.

Swami Vivekananda beautifully summarizes the *sādhana* aspect, the spiritual aspect of the great knowledge in the *Rāja-yoga*. This is the real goal of practising discrimination between the real and the unreal, knowing that Puruṣa is not Nature or Prakṛiti. That Puruṣa is neither matter, nor mind, and because It is not matter and Nature, It cannot change. It is only Nature that changes combining and re-combining, dissolving continually. When through constant practice, we begin to discriminate, ignorance will vanish and the Puruṣa will begin to shine in Its real glory. ■

- \* This is the synopsis of the lecture Swami Vireshananda, Acharya, Training Centre, Belur Math, delivered at the 13th Global Gita Conference held at the Institute on 6 February, 2016. Currently he is an Assistant Minister in the Vedānta Centre of Sydney.

(Continued from page 9)

other holy people, as well as in the scriptures, yet we must also be able to meditate clearly in order to experience these truths for ourselves. Only then will our faith turn to conviction. The study of

the scriptures and of the lives and teachings of holy people is a very important part of our spiritual practices, yet these spiritual states are for us to realize—not just read about. ■

(To be concluded)

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