

Swami Veditatmananda's Chapter 2 Bhagavadgītā Class

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karmaṇyevādhikāraṣṭe mā phaleṣu kadācana

mā karma phala heturbhūḥ mā te saṅgo'stva karmaṇi 47

In the second chapter of the Bhagavadgīta, Lord Krishna says to Arjuna, *Karmaṇi evādhikāra*. Hey Arjuna, it is your *adhikāra*, your responsibility to perform karma, to perform your duty. You cannot lay down your bow and arrow. You cannot become inactive. You cannot give up your responsibility. You have to take responsibility and perform your duty in every situation.

What is the right thing to do in a given situation? In the case of Arjuna it happens to be fighting this battle. Lord Krishna says: *Tasmāt, yudhyasva Bharata*. "Therefore Arjunay yudhyasva, fight!" Meaning, perform your duty. When you perform your duty, which in this case is fighting the battle, *mā phaleṣu adhikāraḥ*, you do not have any responsibility as far as the outcome, the *phalam*, is concerned, *mā phaleṣu kadācana*.

So Lord Krishna here draws a line at responsibility. What is the responsibility? It is performing your duty, doing what is the right thing to do, giving the right response to a given situation. That is our duty, regardless of what the cost is, because doing what is right is not always easy. Very often we may have to pay a price. So Arjuna, be ready to pay the price for performing duties, for doing what is right. *Mā phalesu kadācana*, but do not take responsibility for the outcome.

If you have to judge yourself, judge yourself based on what you do, your effort, but do not judge yourself based on the outcome. Let the outcome be whatever it is. You are not responsible for the outcome. The outcome can be success or failure. Understand that you are not successful, nor are you a failure. That is called not taking responsibility for the outcome, meaning not judging oneself based on the outcome.

So far, self-judgement is there. Ignorance is there. *Kartṛtva*, doership also is there, and we respect that doership. By doing what is the right thing to do, whatever be the cost, the doership is respected. *Sva-dharme nidhanam śreyah, para dharmo bhayāvah*, Later on Lord Krishna will say that in *sva-dharme*, performing your duty even if it means that you have to give up your life, *śreyah* that is better, *nidhanam śreyah*. In this case, not responding to the situation, remaining idle and inactive is in fact bringing more fear, *bhayāvah*, than even sacrificing your life. Because *hato va prāpsyasi svargam*. In case you lose your life by fighting this battle, then the gain is even greater –*prāpsyasi svargam*– you gain heaven. *Jitvā va bhokṣayase mahiim*, and when you win the battle, you'll enjoy the power over the kingdom of the whole earth. So both ways, whether the result is death or life, success or failure, whatever the reason is, as long as you do what is right, there is always gain, never a loss.

So this is the lesson that Lord Krishna gives to Arjuna because he is not willing to pay the price for performing the duty. He has laid down his bow and arrow declaring that "I will not fight the battle." What is the price here? The lives of all the near and dear ones might be the price! And Arjuna is not willing to pay the price. He wants to avoid the pain by taking

the easy way out. Doing what is right very often is painful. And it is glaringly clear in the case of Arjuna what pain is going to be brought about by performing his duty. But not performing duty is much worse than this. Therefore, accept the pain. This will be called virtuous pain. The pain that comes by doing what is the right thing to do is the pain that purifies the mind. Arjuna's pain will come anyway. If you avoid the pain right now, pain will catch up with you because that is the *prarābdha*. Pain is part of a human being, and you can never escape it. Therefore, if you accept the pain by doing what is right, that pain may be a blessing. It will bring out inner purification, bring about your inner growth, and bring about success and happiness.

The fundamental lesson that Lord Krishna gives to everybody is the importance of performing duty or the importance of doing what is right. First is the importance of doing what is right and also the willingness to pay whatever price it requires. Paying that price is not only going to mould you; it will remove the covering around your wholeness and completeness and allow the manifestation of wholeness which is your true nature.

While you perform the duty, what should be the attitude? Now Lord Krishna continues. Let us read this verse.

Yogasthaḥā kuru karmāni saṅgaṃ tyaktvā dhanañjaya

Siddhyasiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā samatvaṃ yoga ucyate 48

Yogasthaḥā karmāni kuru, now when you perform the duty, *yogasthaḥā*. *Sthaḥā* means abiding, abiding in yoga. What is yoga? Yoga is the right attitude. While you perform a duty, may you have the right attitude! That attitude is called yoga here. What is yoga? Lord Krishna himself defines what yoga is. In the second line Lord Krishna says: *Siddhyasiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā samatvaṃ yoga ucyate*.

First Lord Krishna says that when you perform your duty, may you also have the attitude of yoga in your mind. This attitude is called *samatvaṃ*, the sameness of the mind. What is meant by sameness of mind? *Siddhyasiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā*. *Siddhi* means success. *Asiddhi* means failure. *Samo bhūtvā* - may you be equally willing to accept success or failure. What is meant by looking upon success and failure as equal? It produces even-mindedness in success and failure. Hey Arjuna, be equally ready to accept success and failure whatever the outcome is. The earlier verse said *mā phaleṣu kadācana*, you do not take responsibility for the *phala* or the outcome. What does it mean? It means to be willing to accept gracefully. What is meant by graceful acceptance? Not judging yourself. Therefore, without judging yourself, *siddhyāsiddhyoḥ*. *Siddhi* means success, *asiddhi* means failure. So whatever the outcome is, gracefully accept it. And we cannot accept something gracefully when we judge ourselves. When we judge ourselves as successful, that is not graceful acceptance. And when we judge ourselves as failure, also that is not graceful acceptance. Because both of these judgements: whether I am successful or a failure, will create a reaction. When I'm successful I congratulate myself. I take the credit for what happened. Thus, I get elated. I become proud. On the other hand when I am not successful I feel I have failed. Both are reactions. Therefore, with a non-reacting mind accept the outcome. As our Swamiji explained to us, take it as *prasāda*. That is called *prasāda buddhi*. Whatever comes to you, success or failure, may you take it as *prasāda*, the grace of Īshvara.

What do you mean by grace, Swamiji? Success can be called grace. Failure cannot be called grace! Can it be? On one hand, you are given a slap, is this grace of Īshvara? This is called *śradhā*, faith pending discovery. So this is where the *bhakti* or the devotion comes. This is possible only when we are a *bhakta* or devotee of the Lord because the devotee has implicit faith in Īshvara that he is my well-wisher and therefore whatever he does, he does for my wellbeing. This is faith. Because of this implicit trust in Īshvara that a devotee has, he or she is able to accept whatever comes. So-called punishment comes, he knows there is a reason for it. And reward comes, there is a reason.

What is punishment? Punishment is like a sculptor sculpting a stone and this sculptor punishes the stone. With his chisel and hammer he hits at the stone. What a punishment! Is it not so? If the stone has *śraddhā* that this is for its well-being, then it will subject itself to this kind of strokes. Either you get formed or you get broken down. Strokes will come, there is no choice. Therefore, with the trust or faith that the devotee has, he or she knows that this slap that comes to me, or a hammer and a chisel that comes to me, is also for my growth for bringing out the true nature of myself. This is called *siddhyasiddhyoḥ samatvam yoga uchyate*. This attitude which arises from the *bhakti* and the *śraddhā* that the devotee has for the Lord, enabling him or her to give all the benefit of doubt to Īshvara and gracefully or pleasantly, happily accept whatever the outcome may be, is called *samatvam*. This is what is meant by *mā phaleṣu kadācana*. When Lord Krishna says you do not have the *adhikāra*, do not judge yourself by outcome, it means that whatever comes you maintain this attitude of *śraddhā* and *bhakti* towards Īshvara. And so here an important thing is yoga.

Yogasthāḥ kuru karmāni - when you perform the karma you also have the *yogasthiti* explained by *Īshvarārpaṇa yoga*. So perform your action as an offering to Īshvara. And when the outcome comes, accept it as the *prasāda* of Īshvara. So in bringing Īshvara into our lives, what is important is not karma, Īshvara in your life is important. Thus when an action or duty is performed as an offering to Īshvara, he is in your mind. With the outcome also accepted as his *prasāda*, again Īshvara is in mind. This is how we give Īshvara an opportunity to come into our lives. Instead of keeping him away, we give Īshvara an opportunity to do his job. And sometimes when he does his job, it may not be that easily understandable.

You have heard the story of Mahābali. Lord Narayana goes to Mahābali as a dwarf, *vāmana*, as a *brahmacari*. He enters the court of Mahābali and with the very glow emanating from this *vāmana* everybody rises with great respect. Mahābali is pleased and says, what can I do for you? You are a *brahmana* and I am a king, therefore what can I give you?

And the *vāmana* says I am a *brahmacari*. I have a vow, *vrata*, of a *parivrājaka*. I don't keep unnecessary things with me. All I need is a very small piece of land, three steps of land, that's all I want.

That's all you want?

Yes, I need it for my meditation and that's all I need.

He says, do you know who you are talking to? I am Mahābali, the emperor, the sovereign of the three worlds. If you want I can give you the whole earth. I can give you the whole heaven. Ask for it!

So then the *vāmana* gives him a lesson. He says, "We should not keep anything more than what is necessary. Therefore, I just need three steps of land." Then the *balirāja* did the *sankalpa*, then the *vāmana* became *Virāt*. This was a breach of contract, really speaking, because he asked for three steps of land when he is a dwarf. And when the land is given he becomes a cosmic person. In one step he just measures the entire Earth, so this world is measured. And with the second step, *paraloka*, all the rest of the worlds are measured. All fourteen worlds are measured in two steps. There is no place left for putting the third step.

See, you bring Īshvara into your life and this is what happens. And then, Lord Vamana is scolding this Mahābali. "You promised to give me three steps of land and then in two steps everything is covered, where do I put my third step?" So Mahābali said, "Right here on my head, there is one place where your step is not there." So you think this is unfair. What more unfairness can there be than this? Not only Lord Narayana puts his third step on the head of Mahābali, but he pushed him down all the way into *Pātāla* and other lower worlds. Lord Brahma is flabbergasted and also disturbed.

He says to Lord Narayana, "You do this? He is your devotee and he offered you everything. This is what you do! This is not fair at all. It is not justice. He offers you something and you rob everything from him!"

Lord Narayana said, "That is what I do with my devotee. I rob him of all his possessions, fame and power. Everything I take away. Why? So now his mind will be focused on me. As long as all the possessions are there, so long his mind is distracted there." That, Bhagavan doesn't like. He is a very possessive Lord. He wants total attention. He doesn't like your attention to be distracted. So he robbed away everything that can possibly attract the attention so that *vairagya* can be totally focused. It looks like punishment, but it is a blessing in disguise.

This is where Mahābali rāja must have tremendous trust. Because he was warned, his guruji told him, "Hey Bali, don't trust him. He's not a brahmachari. Lord Narayana has come in this form. He will take everything away from you."

Mahābali replied: "If Narayana comes here begging of me, what greater fortune I can have? Certainly I will give him whatever he wants." Look at the concern that the guru has for doing a *sankalpa*. Then Mahābali rāja takes that water in a pot and has to pour water in his hand. The guru becomes a small insect that looks like a mosquito and enters into the spout so the water is stopped. See, this is how the guru protects his disciple. He is protecting him from doing the wrong thing, what he thinks is wrong. This *vāmana* is very determined. He takes kusha grass and inserts it into that spout and the water comes. By the way it looks, Īshvara will do whatever is necessary to make sure that his devotee is blessed, except that is not always very pleasant. It can be painful also. This is where the *śraddhā* is required. *Siddhi-āsiddhyoh prasāda buddhi* is easier said than done because he is a very tough master. He looks like Krishna, dances and all that, which is alright, but then it is not really easy to reach him when required.

Then, Lord Krishna says further:

dūreṇa hyavaram karma buddhiyogāddhanañjaya

buddhau śaraṇamanviccha kṛpaṇāḥ phalahetavaḥ 49

Hey Dhananjaya, *buddhiyogāt karma dūreṇa hyavaram*. Here Lord Krishna introduces the word *buddhiyoga*. This is a word Pujya Swamiji liked very much because karma yoga is *buddhiyoga*. Here the word "*buddhi*" means the attitude. He used to always explain karma yoga is the yoga of attitude. So here Bhagavan Shankaracharya ji interprets the word *buddhi* in two ways. One is that the word *buddhi* is the right attitude. What is the right attitude? Performing action as an offering to the Lord and receiving the outcome as the grace of the Lord. That is the *buddhi*. That is the attitude. See, values are different and attitudes are different. In karma yoga we are talking about attitude. The values are taken for granted, meaning that when you perform an action or perform your duty it is presupposed that your action is performed in keeping with the dharma or the values. That is taken for granted. Meaning that you don't have to tell him that you should be honest and you should follow dharma. So when we perform the duty we follow the values of dharma, honesty, hard work, fairness etcetera. But even that is not enough. In itself it does not make karma yoga. Along with those values you should also have the right attitude, which is what Lord Krishna teaches.

Arjuna does not need to be told that he is a *dharmātmā*, Arjuna is a *dharmātmā*. Pandavas stand for dharma or righteousness. Therefore, the duties are performed in keeping with the values of life or with the order prevailing in the universe. But additionally, there is *buddhi* the right attitude. When you perform even the *dharma* or the duty, also there should be the attitude of yoga or offering to Īshvara. And further, when the outcome comes there is also the yoga of *prasāda buddhi*. This is called *buddhiyoga*.

Now who can maintain this attitude? Who can perform an action as an offering to the Lord? We want to offer to ourselves. The asuras offer to themselves. A devata offers to devatas. So perform the action as an offering to devatas, not to your ego. Who can do that? The one whose goal is *buddhi*. The second meaning of the word *buddhi* is *jñānam*, the self-knowledge. So *buddhi yoga* also means an action performed as a means of *buddhi* or as the means of self-knowledge. So understand that ideally a karma yogi is a *mumūksu*, meaning that what is most valuable to him is the self-knowledge because he has the *viveka* or the discrimination that what I am seeking is *mokṣa*, liberation, freedom, happiness, which is to be discovered as my own self. That being the case, he has *vairagya*, dispassion, about everything else; meaning that he doesn't want any worldly gains, not in this world nor in other worlds. He has *vairagya*, no worldly desires at all.

Bṛhadaranyaka upaniṣad says there are two kinds of lokas in our life: the *ātmā loka* and the *anātmā loka*. So in this universe that consists of the various lokas, the realms, they are of the nature of non-self, *anātmā*. That is what people usually want and perform their karma to get. Those who have *viveka* are not interested in these realms, because they are all subject to the cycle of taking form and then dissolving. I am the only worthwhile goal; therefore nothing else deserves to be the goal! The one who has discovered this is the one who understands that this goal can be reached by self-knowledge. So knowledge is his ultimate goal. When he performs karma also, *buddhi yoga* means attitude or desire that may this karma become the means of self-knowledge. Karma can become the means of self-knowledge only when karma is offered to Īshvara and not to ego or *ahaṅkara*. So the whole package goes together. It will be possible to maintain *ishavaradhan buddhi* in offering to Īshvara, in other words you can call it selfless action or *niṣkāma karma*, when there is no *kāmanā* or desire for worldly things, only when there is *mumukṣutva*, the desire for *mokṣa*.

The word *buddhi yoga* has two meanings. One is while performing action one has the right attitude in offering action to Īshvara. And *buddhi yoga* means that the action is performed as a means of self-knowledge. Those actions are much superior to actions performed out of desire for any *loka* or self-centered motive. Therefore, Arjuna, may you take refuge in the *buddhi* for self-knowledge with the attitude of yoga. *Kṛpanaḥ pala hetavah*, those who perform their karma out of desire for worldly realms or worldly achievements are *kṛpanaḥ*, miserly people because they do not know what they are missing. So with karma, you can get a worldly thing, with karma you can get *mokṣa* also. He alone is really intelligent who performs karma which has *mokṣa* as its maximum potential. Then why should you settle for anything less? They call it opportunity costs. If you have some money with you, a few hundred dollars, different opportunities are there where you can get 20% rate of return, 25% percent rate of return, 30% rate of return or 5% rate of return. What will you choose? If you say that where you get 5% rate of return then You lost 25% because you could have got 30%. So you do have some gain, but you missed out on the infinite. In seeking something finite, the opportunity cost is very great. Therefore, *kṛpanaḥ phala hetavah*. Therefore, those who perform action for this *phalam*, or the worldly gain, are *kṛpanaḥ*, not living life intelligently. Living life intelligently is when the goal is *mokṣa* and self-knowledge and whatever you do is done as a means of that. That being the case, what do I get from that? One who misses out on the infinite in seeking something finite is *kṛpanaḥ*, not living life intelligently.

Next, Lord Krishna says there is a great reward when you perform action in the spirit of a means for self-knowledge.

buddhiyukto jahātiha ubhe sukṛtaduskṛte

***tasmādyogāya yujyasva yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam* 50**

Buddhiyuktah. Remember the word *buddhi* in the previous verse? One meaning is that while performing an action, he performs action as an offering to the Lord and the second meaning is that the goal of *buddhi* is in terms of self-knowledge.

Buddhiyuktah is one who is endowed with this *buddhi*, this understanding, this attitude and this value. *Ubhe sukṛtaduskṛte jahātiha*. The reward is great. See, while choosing to gratify Īshvara, instead of gratifying the ego- these two choices are there, ishvara or ego, when we choose that *Īsvara ardhana buddhi*, meaning gratifying Īshvara then *Ubhe sukṛtaduskṛte jahātiha*, one gives up *jahāti*, *ubhe sukṛta* and *duskṛta*, meaning that one becomes free from the effect of *punya* and *papa*. See, usually when you perform a karma or action, an action brings about a result. So when I perform an action, I am a *karthā*, doer. The one who is a doer or a *karthā* right now, becomes a *bhokta*, or experiencer, when the outcome comes. So *karthā* becomes a *bhokta* and then when I experience the outcome, I react to the outcome either success or failure with elation or depression, *raga* or *dveṣa*. That is a reaction, which creates further action and then further reaction. So this is how karma is called binding when the karma that I perform makes me a *bhokta* or experiencer of the result of action.

Here Lord Krishna teaches a great secret, how to be a *karthā* without becoming a *bhokta*. If you are a *bhokta*, experiencer, then there will be pleasure, pain, and there will be *raga dveṣa*. But then, *buddhiyukto jahātiha*, when you perform the action as an offering to Īshvara, there you are a *karthā* alright, but you are no more accountable for the *sukṛta* or *duskṛta*., the *punya papa* of the result because you are not a *bhokta*. See that's where you break the chain. If *kartṛtva* brings about *bhokṛtva* that brings about *kartṛtva*, that's a chain called bondage. But the way to break that chain is to know that you are a *kartṛ* alright, what kind of *kartṛ*? As a devotee of Īshvara who makes an offering to Īshvara. In that case, you are not accountable for the outcome of *punya* or *papa*. And when this process leads to *buddhi*, self-knowledge, then of course you become free from *kartṛtva*, any sense of doership, in which case in a primary sense you become free from the *sukṛta* or *duskṛta*. That's called *mokṣa* right here. You get liberated while you are here, while alive.

Tasmāt, therefore, hey Arjuna! *Yogāya yujyasva*. Therefore, may you devote yourself to yoga. Let self-knowledge be your goal! Keeping that goal in mind when you perform the action, let your action become an offering to Īshvara. *yogaḥ karmaṣu kauśalam* That yoga with the right attitude is the *kauśalam*, is the real skill in an action. So what's the skill in action? That which makes the action a means for *mokṣa*. Action is usually a means of bondage. It becomes a means that changes the nature of karma. That which is normally a means of bondage, it makes a source of freedom.

So this is how Lord Krishna teaches the karma yoga in the second chapter of the Gītā.

Vote of thanks for new Lecture Hall-Dining Hall complex

Swami Viditatmananda

I congratulate the whole Arsha Vidya team for having made this event possible. They have converted this into a festival and celebration as a fitting tribute to Pujya Swamiji so that his dream has come true. The opening ceremony was very fitting. Not only we had the *homa*, the mantra and the *dānam*, we had a whole festival and everybody participated. The priests were instrumental in creating that festive atmosphere and all of you also joined in.

I am extremely happy with what happened this morning. It shows great auspiciousness, great blessings. Therefore I am sure that sitting there wherever He is, we are enjoying the blessings of Pujya Swamiji. I am sure that the purpose for which this hall was built is going to be served. I had my own questions and doubt, but looking at the whole thing today, I am sure that Pujya Swamiji's dream will definitely come true. We congratulate everybody and thank you. Om!