

# The Essence of Liberation

## INTRODUCTION:

In Hinduism, the oldest surviving religion of the world, the Vedic literature mention a human's life objectives or Purusharthas to be four: Dharma or Righteousness, Artha or Means, Kaama or Desire and Moksha or Liberation. Heavy emphasis is placed on the last, even if it leads to the exclusion of the other three.

If the ultimate aim of life is Moksha, then Lord Krishna beautifully condenses the entire word of God, the Bhagavad Gita, into a single verse, combining Karma, Bhakti and Jnana. In essence, one can take just this verse alone as the Rule of Life itself and follow it meticulously. No other practice or reference shall be necessary.

## **Bhagavad Gita 9:22:**

Ananyaash-Chinthayantho Maam YeJanaah Paryupaasathel  
Theshaam Nithya-Abhiyukthaanaam YogaKshemam Vahaami-Aham||

Understanding the verse part by part reveals the highest philosophy condensed within.

## JNAANA:

The word 'Maam' provides a good starting point. It simply means 'Me' or 'I'. We start with the question of Self-Inquiry: Who am I?, while understanding the important fact that only that which is permanent and constant can be real. By permanent, it also means that such reality should manifest or be revealed in the three Avasthas or states of awareness: wake, dream and deep sleep.

One may in worldly parlance, attach the notion of 'I' to experiences and actions that are made through one's body, limbs and mind. However, on simple examination, one observes that neither the body nor mind nor any of the environment around it, that make up the visible 'world' occurs in the state of deep sleep. However, the 'I', also called 'Aham' existed in deep sleep, which is why a person can say that I slept. Thus, the 'I' is apart from the mind or body, and unlike the latter, is real.

This is exactly similar to the state of dream, where the mind creates an entire world with characters, life, mind and body, obviously none of which are real, but just the mind itself taking many forms. One sees that just as a dreamer creates the dream world, the I, which existed by itself when asleep, creates the world, mind and body when awake. Thus, if the world is a dream, the 'I' is a dreamer.

This means that, the 'I' creates and later absorbs back into itself the world from its own light, as a play of illusion or Maaya, while all the different characters seen in the world are just the same 'I' itself. By itself, the 'I' is beyond the world, has no birth or death, is without a second, and is never destroyed or transformed, and as such is called the Self or 'Atman'. However, the spiritual texts refer to God or Brahman as the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world, while being formless and beyond it. This means that the I and God are one and the same. This is the Mahavakya or Great Saying in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad of the Yajur Veda: "Aham Brahmaasmi".

This is what the Lord refers to in the Gita 9:22 verse above. 'Maam' refers to Me, in particular the Lord, who utters this verse. 'Chinthayantho' translates to thinking or contemplating, in particular, performing Self-Inquiry into the nature of oneself. Anya is different, while 'Ananya' means non-different.

Thus, the Lord in essence states in “Ananyaash Chinthayantho Maam” that *one is to perform Self-Enquiry constantly, understanding with conviction that 'I am not different from the Lord'; I am beyond this body, mind, and world, all of which is a dream, while I, the dreamer, gives light, creates and dissolves the universe as a play of illusion.* This is the essence of wisdom or Jnaana.

### **BHAKTHI:**

The word Upaasana translates to worship and devotion. Literally, the word consists of two parts: Upa meaning near and Aasana meaning to sit. In essence, it means to always be close to the Lord, through intense love and devotion. Understanding that it is God's grace alone which moves one towards and grants Liberation, one reads and hears (Shravana) and contemplates (Manana) upon the glories of the Lord as narrated in various scriptures, along with experiences of grace from one's own life. All these together strengthen one's Bhakthi, and the strongest level of Bhakthi is when one's relationship with God is that of one madly in love, constantly thinking of the Lord and the Lord alone; completely absorbed in devotion, and completely oblivious to the world around, showing disinterest and aversion towards any other source of pleasure.

This is why the Lord prefixes Upaasathe with Pari, meaning everywhere, showing the constancy of devotion, as well as its intensity. Such intense Bhakthi, without the slightest hint of doubt, will lead to Moksha. However, Bhakthi, by itself is the joining of something separated (Vibhakthi). So too, the devotion often involves the thought of devotee as different from the devoted. Such feelings might lead to comparison of one with other devoted people and their devotion, leading to at times, jealousy, anger, lust etc. Thus, while intense Bhakthi is good, it must necessarily be purified with the Jnaana mentioned earlier as Ananya, leading to non-difference or Abheda. In this purified Bhakthi, one is not the body or mind, but the Atman. This Atman is in intense devotion and love with the Atman itself, which is the Lord, and while the devoted and devotee are exactly one and the same, it is for the purpose of immersing in pure bliss and love that such devotion occurs.

Thus, the Lord in “Ye Janaah Paryupaasathe” describes the *devotees who, using the results of the Self-Enquiry Jnaana manifest as the notion or Bhaava of Ananya, are engaged in intense love and devotion or Bhakthi, constantly at all places and all times, without a second thought.* This is devotion or Bhakthi purified by wisdom or Jnaana, or what can be called “Wise Devotion”.

### **MOKSHA:**

What is the result of such Wise Devotion? The result is that one is constantly absorbed in thoughts of the Lord, seeing the Lord as one's own Self, to the extent that one neglects and sidelines the world, its pleasures and pains, as well as the body and mind.

If this is done, one attains Nithya or constant, Yuktha or unity with the Lord. In such a state, one is the Lord itself, as Eternal Existence or Sat, in contrast with the mind, body and world, which is Asat. One is Sentient Consciousness or Chit, in contrast with the world which by itself is lifeless or Achit deriving its life from the Self. The intense Bhakthi purified by Jnaana, results in pure, constant, unalloyed bliss called Aanandam. Completely oblivious to the world, one attains Liberation or Moksha from the miseries, sorrows and pains of life, as well as from the endless cycle of births, deaths and rebirths. Also, as a result of all this, any feeling of individuality or ego, called Ahankaara, is totally destroyed, and the distinction between man and God is demolished.

This is what the Lord states as “Theshaam Nithya Abhiyukthaanaam”: the *constant union with the Lord, leading to Liberation characterized by Existence, Consciousness and Unalloyed Bliss.*

## **KARMA:**

If the Lord instructs one to be in constant purified, intense devotion, one might ask what would happen to one's duties, responsibilities, commitments, and sustenance in the material world?

The Lord has an immediate response to such a question: “Yogakshemam Vahaamyaham”. In both materialistic and spiritual contexts, what is acquired new is referred to as 'Yoga', and what is maintained or sustained is referred to as 'Kshema'.

That is, in the case of those who attempt but have not yet reached Moksha, it becomes something to achieve or Yoga. In the case of those who have attained Moksha, it becomes essential to maintain this state or Kshema. In both cases the Lord personally bears completely all the responsibilities and needs, both material and spiritual, to ensure the 'Nithya Abhi Yuktha'.

This declaration of the Lord contains within itself, a hidden message. As per the Vedic texts and the concept of Karma, it is understood that every person, event and thing that one encounters in life, is only due to one's past Karma or actions. In other words, every action performed with some purpose in mind creates the seed for further action, in the form of tendencies or Vaasanas. These Vaasanas lead one to further Karma, and this does not stop even with death, but the Vaasanas are carrier over to the next birth. The only way out of this is desireless action, or Nishkaama Karma. But, how is this to be done?

Also, the web of Karma and Vaasanas, create a connection between everything and everything else in the world. This means that even chance encounters, as for example even a one-time encounter with some passer-by in the street is a result of past Karma.

Thus, when the Lord promises to personally bear the responsibility of YogaKshema, this means that one's basic necessities such as food, clothing and shelter, as well as one's contacts, acquaintances, one's habits and lifestyles, one's surroundings, and activities of people around the person, as well as one's actions towards oneself or other people, all of these are tuned in accordance to ensure Nithya Abhi Yuktha.

This can be made possible only if it is God's Will alone that controls everyting in this universe. This is a basic truth central not only to Hinduism but to other faiths as well. Christians pray “Thy Will be done” in the Lord's prayer, while Muslims state “Insha Allah” and “Masha Allah”.

Thus, the hidden message here is the prevalence of God's Will, which is a fundamental truth to be remembered always, while also putting to rest, the age-old debate of free will vs destiny. It is this Truth that nullifies the notions of Dharma, Karma, duties and responsibilities. For, while the Lord spends the first 17 chapters in Bhagavad Gita, talking about Dharma, Karma, and what one has to do, what one should not do etc, in the last chapter, the Lord summarises the Gita by telling “Sarva Dharmaan Parithyajya Maam Ekam Sharanam Vraja”, or 'forget all the rules of Dharma etc told earlier, and simply surrender to Me alone'.

In other words, aware of the past, present and future, the Lord has one constant goal in mind: Nithya Abhi Yuktha, and towards this He directs the person and all his surroundings, through His Divine Will. If as part of this, one is required to perform one's duties or certain actions, one is to do so, without the slightest ego, understanding that it is nothing but God's Will working through the person's mind and body. If on the contrary, one does not perform certain actions, or even duties, this is also to be understood as God's Will alone. Rather than pondering or worrying about the non-performance, one is required to take this as a God given opportunity to engage in Jnaana and purified intense Bhakthi as seen earlier.

Such is complete surrender to God, and is also called Nishkaama Karma. Actions done in this manner lack any sense of doership, and thus, Karma or Vaasanas no longer affect the person, eventually granting Moksha.

Thus, by stating “YogaKshemam Vahaamyaham”, the Lord states that *all acquisitions and all sustenance required by a person, physically or spiritually, towards constant union with God, will be borne personally by the Lord Himself, with the understanding that God's Will alone prevails throughout, and if there is any necessity for any action to be performed, it shall be done so by God's Will.*

#### **DIVINE LOVE:**

Having understood the various sections of this verse, the implications are pondered. Firstly, the Lord makes an assurance or promise that He will take care of everything a person ever needs, for the entire life.

In day-to-day life, where are such life-duration promises made? The closest is seen in marriages, where two individuals are united by love, to lead a life together, promising each will lend support to the other till the last breath, to the best of one's capability. Such promises and oaths highlight the love of each towards the other.

So too, in the lifelong promise made by the Lord, one clearly sees that the Lord has an intense love towards the devotee, along with the desire to remain forever in union with the devotee. In fact, the desire of God to be with the devotee is manifold times more than the desire devotees have for being with the Lord, since, the Lord has been waiting patiently but eagerly for several births, for the time, the devotee will be liberated from the cycle of births, and united forever with the Lord.

To highlight this love, the following is a wonderful story cited by many commentators to illustrate the significance of this verse or Shloka.

There was a brahmin who had great faith in this shloka, but lost his faith one day because his family did not get enough alms to have a proper meal one day. In disgust, he tore the palm leaf on which this shloka was written and went out of the house. Later, a boy came to his house with a sack of rations. He informed the brahmin's wife that her husband had sent her the food.

The brahmin's wife noticed that the boy's tongue was bleeding. She found out from the boy that it was her husband who had cut off the boy's tongue. When the brahmin came back, the wife rebuked him for injuring the boy who had delivered the rations. The brahmin, it turns out, knew nothing about the boy or the rations. He quickly realized that it was Ishvara or the Lord who delivered the food, and that when he tore the palm leaf, it injured Ishvara in the form of that boy. So Ishvara did not just deliver the food, he also carried the rations personally on his back.

#### **SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES:**

The ideas found in this verse of the Gita or its import is not a novelty, but reflects the same profound philosophies found in many other texts too. Here are a few excerpts:

- The only useful purpose of the present birth is to turn within and realise the Self. There is nothing else to do - Ramana Maharshi: Talk 219.
- For how many lifetimes have you done hard and painful labor with body, mind and speech? It is now time to stop - Ashtavakra Gita 10.8.

- Waking is long and a dream short; other than this there is no difference - Ramana Maharshi; Who am I? 22.
- Your dream has materialised into the waking reality. All of us here are your own dream-objects -Yoga Vasishta VI.2.151/9
- Brahman is the only truth, the world is unreal, and there is no difference between Brahman and the Self – Brahma Satyam Jagat Mithyam Jivo Brahmaiva Naaparah – Aadi Shankaracharya.
- If the universe be true, let it then be perceived in the state of deep sleep also. As it is not at all perceived, it must be unreal and false, like dreams - Vivekachudamani 234
- What are the marks of an earnest disciple? An intense longing for the removal of sorrow and attainment of joy and intense aversion for any other attainment - Ramana Spiritual Instruction.
- Have faith and patience. Then I will be always with you wherever You are - Shirdi Sai Baba.
- Make Me the sole object of your thoughts and actions; and you will, no doubt, attain Paramartha – Sai Satcharita 19.
- Those who depending exclusively on Me and surrendering all actions to Me, worship Me, constantly meditating on Me with single minded devotion. These, Arjuna, I speedily deliver from the ocean of birth and death, their mind being fixed on Me - Bhagavad Gita 12:6-7.
- I am dependent on him who thinks and hungers after Me and who does not eat anything without first offering it to Me - Shirdi Sai Baba.
- Those who believe and whose heart find satisfaction in the remembrance of Allah. For without doubt, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction - Quran Surah 13:28.
- What else is there in this world, O Rama, except eating, drinking and sensual pleasure? Hence, what is there in this world that a wise man would find worthy of seeking? This world of five elements and the body composed of flesh, blood, hair and all the rest of it, are considered real by the ignorant, and they exist for his entertainment. The wise see in all this an impermanent and unreal but terrible poison - Yoga Vasishta IV.59.
- Fondness or attachment ill becomes an ochre garb – Sai Satcharita 31.
- If you try to help this world with some physical activity, the good that you do may be more than wiped out by the negative mental vibrations which you inflict on the world. If you make your mind pure, you automatically help everyone in the world because each person will receive a cleansing and healing measure of your own purity – Living by the words of Bhagavan 342.
- How is it possible to change world suffering? Realize the Self; that is all that is necessary - Ramana Conscious Immortality 15.
- He, who takes delight in the Self alone and is gratified with the Self and is contained in the Self, has no duty. In this world, that great soul has no use whatsoever for things done nor for things not done; nor has he dependence of any kind on any creature - Bhagavad Gita 3:17-18.
- If one devotes their entire time to me and rests in me; need fear nothing for body and soul – Shirdi Sai Baba.
- In truth the ego has no freewill because there is no ego; but on the level of apparent reality the ego consists of freewill. It is the illusion of freewill that creates the ego and the universe – Ramana Maharshi.
- Work leads to purification of mind, not to perception of reality. The realization of truth is brought about by discrimination and not in the least by ten million of activities - Vivekachudamani 11.
- Let us not pose as the doers, but resign ourselves to the guiding power - Ramana Talk 398.
- Realizing that nothing is done, I do what comes and am happy. Yogis who preach either effort or non-effort are still attached to the body. I neither dissociate nor associate with any of that and am happy - Ashtavakra Gita 13.3-4.

- He says, 'Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the Earth' - The Bible Psalm 46:10.
- He lives happily on whatever comes his way. He is blessed - Ashtavakra Gita 17.7.
- The sage wanders about as He pleases and lives on whatever may come. Contentment ever dwells in his heart. And when the sun sets, he rests where he is - Ashtavakra Gita 18.85.
- The food and clothing necessary for survival will be obtained without any effort as per Karma in previous births. Any efforts taken to earn these is completely in vain. Rather focus on spiritual progress, day and night – Shirdi Sai Baba.
- He who is alike to friend and foe, as well as to honour and ignominy, who remains balanced in heat and cold, pleasure and pain and other contrary experiences, and is free from attachment. He who takes praise and reproach alike, and is given to contemplation and contented with any means of subsistence whatsoever, entertaining no sense of ownership and attachment in respect of his dwelling-place, and full of devotion to Me, that man is dear to Me - Bhagavad Gita 12:18-19.
- He who has turned away from mother, father, kinsmen, friends and relatives, wife and son alone is attached to my feet – Sai Satcharita 44:154.
- Causing the external and internal universe, which are now perceived, to vanish, and meditating on the Reality, the Bliss Embodied, one should pass one's time watchfully, if there be any residue of Prarabdha work left. One should never be careless in one's steadfastness to Brahman, since inadvertence is death itself - Shankara Vivekachudamani 320-321.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

Thus, in verse 9:22 of Bhagavad Gita of just two lines, the Lord has condensed the highest philosophy of mankind, to liberate one from the cycle of births and deaths, and in doing so, has seamlessly elucidated the essence of Jnaana, Bhakthi and Karma. In keeping with the discussion earlier, one might summarize the translation of this verse as follows:

**Performing Self-Enquiry, understanding the Self as non-different from the Lord, (creating and dissolving the universe as a play of illusion), those that are constantly engaged in intense love and devotion, everywhere, to those devotees, for constant union with the Lord in the Liberation of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, all acquisition and sustenance needed physically or spiritually is borne personally by the Lord Himself (with the understanding that God's Will alone prevails throughout in both performance and non-performance of action).**

True to its name as the “Lord's Word”, this verse 9:22 of the Bhagavad Gita, by itself, condenses the heights of human thought, philosophy and spirituality. This verse can be taken as the Rule of Life, a single Commandment of the Lord, which, if a person sincerely follows and abides, is sure to lead the person to Liberation, and thus complete fulfillment of His life.

||OM SRI SAI VENKATESHAAYA NAMAHI||