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your reception of it. This is what *Kṛṣṇa* is saying here when he tells *Arjuna* not to be the cause of *karma-phala*. The *karma-phala-hetu* is *Īśvara*, not *Arjuna*. *Arjuna* is the cause of action, but not the cause of its results.

Further, *Kṛṣṇa* said, 'Let there be no attachment to inaction — *akarmaṇi saṅgaḥ mā astu*.' Action itself is not the problem. It is your response to the result of action that is the problem. Thus, inaction here means fear of action — not of action, as such, but fear that the results you want will not come. Even before you begin doing an action, you expect to fail. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that *karma* itself is not binding. Nor does the *karma-phala* bind him. It is his response to the *karma-phala* that makes *karma* seem like a bondage. Thus, let there be a love for action, but let the results be received by you as *prasāda*.

योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा धनञ्जय ।

सिद्ध्यसिद्ध्योः समो भूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते ॥ ४८ ॥

yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi saṅgaṁ tyaktvā dhanañjaya
siddhyasiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā samatvaṁ yoga ucyate

Verse 48

धनञ्जय *dhanañjaya* — Oh! *Dhanañjaya* (*Arjuna*); योगस्थः *yogasthaḥ* — being steadfast in *yoga*; सङ्गम् *saṅgam* — attachment; त्यक्त्वा *tyaktvā* — abandoning; सिद्ध्यसिद्ध्योः *siddhyasiddhyoḥ* — with reference to success and failure; समः *samaḥ* — the same; भूत्वा *bhūtvā* — being; कर्माणि *karmāṇi* — actions; कुरु *kuru* — do; समत्वं *samatvaṁ* — evenness of mind; योगः उच्यते *yogaḥ ucyate* — is called *yoga*

Remaining steadfast in *yoga*, Oh! *Dhanañjaya*, perform actions, abandoning attachment, remaining the same to success and failure alike.
This evenness of mind is called *yoga*.

The recognition in your life that *Īśvara* is the *karma-phala-dātā* brings about a certain attitude, called *samatva*. *Rāga* and *dveṣa* are the cause for attachment, *saṅga*, which prompts us to say, 'This should or should not happen to me.' The *rāga-dveṣas* become a *saṅga* with reference to any *karma-phala* that is going to affect you. Then only is it *rāga-dveṣa*. But if you have the attitude of *samatva*, *rāga-dveṣas* are neutralised. They are rendered incapable of creating any kind of reaction in you. The *rāga-dveṣas* manifest themselves through various *karmas* and in time by one's attitude of *samatva*, they become neutralised. This is what is meant by *karma-yoga*.

Staying or abiding in *yoga*, being *yogastha*, means enjoying this attitude of *samatva*. This evenness of mind with reference to both success, *siddhi*, and failure, *asiddhi*, is called *yoga*. It is what makes you a *yogī*. *Samatvaṁ yogaḥ ucyate* — is a separate sentence in this verse that defines *yoga*.

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As stated earlier, there are two definitions for *karma-yoga* in this chapter. The first one is this one, *samatva*, whereas the other one is — *yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*.

SCRIPTURALLY ENJOINED KARMA AND THE FOUR ĀŚRAMAS

Scripturally enjoined actions, *vaidika-karmas*, are made up of many rituals. These rituals can be divided into four categories: *kāmya-karmas*, meant for producing given results desired by a given person; *nitya-karma*, daily rituals; *naimittika-karma*, occasional rituals; and *prāyaścitta-karma*, rituals to right any wrongs done.

There is a ritual called *putrakāmeṣṭi* for those who want children. *Daśaratha*, *Rāma*'s father, had no children. Being a king, he had to have children so that there would be someone to rule the kingdom after his death. Naturally, he wanted children. Therefore, he performed the ritual, *putrakāmeṣṭi* and had four children. *Putrakāmeṣṭi* is still done and known to work, even in fairly recent times. Perhaps, any ritual in any religion will work if the person performing it has faith, *śraddhā*, in it. *Putrakāmeṣṭi* is a very expensive ritual, so that only a rich man can do it. We see here how the Veda can be very tricky. This kind of *karma* or ritual is an example of *kāmya-karma*, a ritual performed purely for a given desired result.

Even though *kāmya-karma* was designed and unfolded by the Veda, which tells you that a certain *karma* will produce a certain result, this does not mean that *kāmya-karma* is for *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*. Particular rituals are mentioned for particular results and are purely for desired objects, *kāmya*, such as the desire for a child. Similarly, there are many rituals mentioned in the Veda whose result is said to be heaven. These, too, are all *kāmya-karmas*.

Then there are *nitya-karmas* and *naimittika-karmas*, which can be considered together, *Nitya-karma* means a ritual or prayer that is to be done every day. Which rituals or prayers are to be done, depends on a person's status. An unmarried person, *brahmacārī*, has a two-fold *karma* to perform. The first is a prayer, *sandhyā-vandana*, enjoined by the Veda to be done three times a day — at sunrise, at noon, and at sunset. The second is a fire ritual, *samidhādāna*, performed once a day in the morning, wherein the prayer is, 'May I become brilliant. May I learn. May I be a person who has total control over myself.'

For a married person, called a householder, *gṛhastha*, the *nitya-karmas* differ somewhat. *Sandhyā-vandana* continues, whereas *samidhādāna* is replaced by *agni-hotra*, another fire ritual which is also a *nitya-karma*. This *karma* has to be performed twice a day, morning and evening. On the day of marriage, the fire is lit and it is not allowed to die until the person takes *sannyāsa* or dies. If the married person dies before *sannyāsa*, this same fire is used for the cremation of the body. Thus, the life of a householder is a dedicated, religious life. The person can do anything in between, but these *nitya-karmas* have to be performed every day without fail.

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When a married person withdraws from the duties of a householder and enters the next stage of life called *vānaprastha-āśrama*, a few more *karmas* are added. These are of the nature of meditation. In this third stage of life, *sandhyā-vandana* and *agni-hotra* rituals must still be performed. There is no way of escaping these *karmas* — except by *sannyāsa* or death. In *sannyāsa* the vow or commitment, *dīkṣā*, taken earlier to perform these rituals is given up and the person is no longer bound to do these *karmas*. One's hair and the various accoutrements of the earlier initiation are also given up, including the *gāyatrī-mantra*. Only the 'oṃ-kāra' remains and a few essentials. By saying that he is no longer interested in gaining heaven, having children, and so on, and by saying that no one should be afraid of him thereafter, a man becomes a *sannyāsi*. It is a very serious commitment! But until *sannyāsa*, he must definitely perform the various rituals enjoined by the Veda.

Performing these *nitya-karmas*, you do gain results in the form of *punya* or *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, but the main point here is that they are to be done daily and generally they are done. *Naimittika-karmas*, on the other hand, are those rituals to be done on particular occasions, at a particular time, on a particular day, like on the anniversary of the death of one's mother or father. Such a ritual called *śrāddha*, which must be performed monthly on the new moon day and a more elaborate ritual is done on the anniversary date itself. This, too, is done until *sannyāsa*. *Śrāddha* is not done daily and is only done if one's father or mother has passed away. Because these *karmas* are done on a particular occasion, *nimitta*, they are called *naimittika-karmas*.

Naimittika-karmas are generally performed by householders, although the *śrāddha-karma*, mentioned above, is done by everyone except *sannyāsis*. Other *naimittika-karmas* performed by house holders include the rituals done, on the day when the northern and southern Solstices begin. Eclipses of the sun and moon are also recognised in this way, based on ancient methods of calculation. It has been said that if you think the *śāstra* is false, wait for an eclipse!

Finally, *karmas* that are done to right a wrong, called *prāyaścitta-karmas*, are performed when what is not to be done was done or there was some omission during the performance of any ritual. Thus, a particular *karma* can neutralise the results of wrong action, be it an omission or a commission. An example of *prāyaścitta-karmas* is *cāndrāyaṇa* wherein you regulate the amount of food you eat for one month. Beginning on the full moon day, you take the amount of food that you would ordinarily eat. The next day, you cut it down by one-fifteenth and the second day, by another fifteenth, continuing in this way until the new moon day, during which you eat nothing at all. Then you begin again on the first day after the new moon, on the *prathamā*, by taking one-fifteenth, then two-fifteenths on the second day, adding increments of one fifteenth portion each day until the full moon day, when again you eat as before. During this entire period, certain rituals are performed. *Prāyaścitta-karma* then, is the fourth type of *karma*, a *karma* of atonement.

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THE PURPOSE OF KARMA-YOGA

In *karma-yoga*, you give up *kāmya-karma* and perform *nitya-naimittika-karmas* as an offering to the Lord, as well as for purifying the mind. According to the definition of *kāmya-karma* stated above, *kāma* is always involved. This *kāma* is given up in *karma-yoga*. Śaṅkara says here that by performing these various *vaidika* rituals for the sake of *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, you become a *karma-yogī*. Otherwise, you are only a *karmī*. When you perform *karma* for a particular end alone, you will gain only that end. You will not gain the mind necessary for gaining the knowledge that is *mokṣa*, because you have no *vyavasāyātmikā buddhi*. If, however, you have *vyavasāyātmikā buddhi*, all your *karmas* are directed towards one thing, *mokṣa*. And for *mokṣa*, you require the mind, *antaḥ-karaṇa*, that is prepared. *Mokṣa* is not gained through *karma*; *karma* is only for preparing the mind. Thus, preparing the mind through *karma* becomes *yoga* for you.

In the *Gītā*, the word '*karma*' is usually used with reference to *vaidika-karma*. However, when *Arjuna* was asked to do *karma*, it was not a ritual to be performed. He was to fight; it was his duty. Śaṅkara confirms this also. Fighting is the 'to be done,' obligatory *karma* of a *kṣatriya*. Thus, *karma-yoga* covers all activities. And if *karma* is taken to mean any action performed, which is the actual meaning of the word, then we have to look at *karma* from the standpoint of a person's entire life. The actions then referred to will be those activities that one performs in the attempt to fulfil all one's *rāga-dveṣas*.

Since you do have *rāga-dveṣas*, and they have to be neutralised, what will you do? You cannot just command yourself to give up your likes and dislikes as you would a hat. Likes and dislikes are there; they are not just given up. They constitute the person. However, when you perform actions with a sameness of attitude, *śamatva*, towards the results of your actions, your *rāga-dveṣas* are neutralised. This attitude is *karma-yoga*.

The attitude of *śamatva* mentioned in this verse is not with reference to the action itself; it is with reference to the result, the *phala*, of any action. This attitude is present in the Vedic culture and is called *prasāda-buddhi*. We have seen that even children are named Prasad because they are thought of as *prasāda*. If your son is *prasāda*, then you are also *prasāda* to your parents. Your physical body is not only *prasāda* to others, but also to yourself. A house is called *prasāda*. The food cooked, offered to the Lord, and then eaten is also considered *prasāda*. Thus, this attitude (*prasāda-buddhi*) is an important aspect of *karma-yoga*.

It is important to note here that any translation that says we should perform action without expecting a result has no basis in the Veda. Such an interpretation serves only to create additional complexes. Try as we might, we find that we cannot do *karma* without expecting some result. The truth of the matter is that no one can perform action without

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expecting a result. Even a dull-witted person cannot engage in an activity without expecting a result. Therefore, this meaning of *karma-yoga* must be abandoned.

ANOTHER DEFINITION OF KARMA-YOGA

Although this verse presents a particular line of argument, the fact is that this is not the only way of looking at it. Let us, therefore, look at the other definition of *yoga*, *yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*. *Karmasu* means 'With reference to actions.' Thus, with reference to actions, *yoga* is *kauśala*, meaning the state of mind or the disposition of a *kuśala*, one who is an expert.

All kinds of meanings are given to this word, *kauśala*. It is the abstract noun of the word *kuśala*, expert — the qualities that make an expert. Thus, it has been said that *kauśala* is expertise or skill. From this meaning, a modern translation for this second definition of *yoga* has come about. People say, 'Skill in action is *yoga*,' which seems to convey that it is efficiency of some kind. Although efficiency is always desirable, it is not what *karma-yoga* is about. The inappropriateness of this translation will become clear as we proceed.

In the *Gītā*, the word '*karma*' is usually used with reference to *vaidika-karma*. However, if *karma* is taken to mean any action performed, which is the general meaning of the word, then we have to look at it from the standpoint of the person's entire life. The actions then referred to will be the collective activities that you perform in your attempt to fulfil all your *rāga-dveṣas*.

Here, the 'skill-in-action' interpretation, meaning that if you are very skilful in action you are a *karma-yogī*, must also be abandoned. This is a secular translation designed to bypass *Īśvara*. There are a lot of people who read the *Gītā* without recognizing *Īśvara* at all. Those who want *karma-yoga* without recognizing *Īśvara* as the *karma-phala-dātā* simply cannot have it. There is *karma-yoga* only when *Īśvara* is recognised. *Karma-yoga* is a religious attitude, a devotee's attitude. There is no way of escaping this. There is no such thing as secular *karma-yoga*.

They say that when there is skill in action, when there is efficiency, then the person is a *karma-yogī*. A *yogī* may be efficient in whatever he does, but how can he be efficient if he is given a new job or is just beginning to learn to drive, for example? He has not yet acquired the necessary skill and, therefore, he will be inefficient in this respect. Thus, a *karma-yogī* can definitely be inefficient in a given area. Conversely, merely because a person is efficient in a given area does not mean that he is a *yogī*. A pickpocket, for example, is very efficient in picking pockets, whereas if you try to do it, you will get caught. Even before you pick, you will be picked up! Picking pockets is not easy. Not only do you have to be skilful in getting an object out of someone's pocket, you also need to be a master of deception in order not to be accused. Such a person may

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be skilful in action, but this is definitely not *karma-yoga*. A *yogī* in action may be skilful, but this does not mean that skill in action is *yoga*.

WHAT IS KAUSĀLA?

Then what does the word *kausāla* mean in this definition? To understand this, let us go back to the first definition, *samatvaṃ yogaḥ ucyate*, where *yoga* is defined as sameness. Suppose a man says to the Swami, 'I have my likes and dislikes. For instance, I like my neighbour's money. He has a lot of it and has converted it into gold which he keeps in his safe. I definitely have a *rāga* for his money and I also have a *dveṣa* for this man. I hate him because he is so blatant about his riches. He thinks he is such a big shot and he is always showing off. Therefore, I hate him and I love his money! I want to fulfil my *rāga-dveṣa*. Also, I happened to listen to your talk yesterday. Until then, I had never heard of *karma-yoga*.

'Now I want to ask you, will I continue to be a *karma-yogī* if I carry on with my plan? I have been working on a tunnel between my house and the room in which my neighbour's safe is located. I know how to open the safe. I know how the whole thing has to be done. I have only one hour's work left and then I will be there in the room. I was going to do it last night but, having listened to your talk, what I was doing started to bother me. I really want to be a *karma-yogī*. It looks to me as though I can continue with my plan and still be a *karma-yogī* because you say I have a right, a choice, over my action. I have already sent my wife and children away and I will not give you their address. I am telling you only this much, hoping that you will not tell anyone. I intend to join them tomorrow. Tonight I am off. My house is already empty and, since I have been renting it, I have nothing more to claim from it. Therefore, everything is set and I am going to work.

'Of course I am taking a risk. You say that *Īśvara* is the *karma-phala-dātā*, the giver of the fruits of action. So I am going to work one more hour tonight so that I can clear out the safe. Of course, I do not know what is going to happen. There may be nothing in it at all. My neighbour may have already cleared it out and put the gold elsewhere. Or, the gold may be there but I may get caught. I may be shot or beaten up. I may be handed over to the police and have to be in jail for a number of years. Anything is possible. Or I may get away with it also. My hope, of course, is that I will get away with it. Therefore, whatever comes, I am going to take it as *prasāda*. If I get all the gold, fine, it is *prasāda*. And if I am beaten up, I will take every stroke as *prasāda*. Will that be okay? Do you think I am a *karma-yogī*? Do you think that when the Lord says in the *Gītā* that a *karma-yogī* is very beloved to him he is referring to me? That is what I want to be. I want to be beloved to the Lord. If I take everything as *prasāda*, will I be beloved?'

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It is for this person's sake that we have the definition — *yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*. *Kauśala* is discretion in one's *karma*, in one's choice. It is not an untethered choice without norms. It is choice with discretion, meaning that one's choice should be in keeping with certain norms. This, then, is another very important aspect of *karma-yoga*. The first definition is with reference to the results of action — *karmaphale samah bhūtvā* — which defines *karma-yoga* as an attitude of *amatva*. Whereas this definition is with reference to the action itself — *yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*.

Kauśala is your capacity to interpret correctly. This capacity to interpret with reference to norms for human interaction is the discretion, the expertise. The norm for human interaction is called *dharma* and the opposite is called *adharma*. *Dharma* and *adharma* form the standard norms. They are not absolutes in that they have to be interpreted according to the given situation. The person who can interpret them properly is called *kuśala*. *Dharma* and *adharma* are not to be interpreted according to convenience, but must be in line with what is proper. Proper interpretation of *dharma* is what is meant by *kauśala*. *Kauśala* is *yoga* because, again, you are not in the hands of your *rāga-dveṣas* when you exercise discretion in your choice of action.

DHARMA AND ADHARMA ARE UNIVERSAL

The man in the story has *rāga-dveṣas*. His *rāga* is for the money and the *dveṣa* is for his neighbour to whom the money belongs. He wants to go by his *rāga-dveṣas*. And they are totally against *dharma* and *adharma*. What should not be done, he is doing. Therefore, he is going against *dharma*, which means he is doing *adharma*. But could it not be said that this is all a man-made order? No.

Suppose, in a particular country, there is no law against stealing. Does that mean that if some one takes away what belongs to another, it would not be called stealing? No; it would still be called stealing. This is not the same, as the man-made convention that traffic shall proceed on the right. We naturally all proceed on the right because to do otherwise is a definite risk to life and limb, and it is also illegal. Even if you say you are ready to take the risk, the police will not let you because you are not the only one involved. Other people will be in danger. Convention, then, we can describe as man-made.

But is the law against stealing man-made? No; because the law that stealing is not right, is not man-made; it is universal. If no one had anything that was his or her own, there would be no stealing. Even though there would be people, there would be nothing to steal and therefore no one can steal from the other. However, everyone has something of his or her own and, therefore, there is going to be stealing. Even a Swami has a begging bowl and a *mālā*. These are the two important symbols, *liṅga*, of a *sādhu* and he is supposed to carry them. There are thieves for this also — especially now that they have become rare and therefore costly. Thus, even *sādhus* can lose their few possessions

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because, as long as anyone has something that is his or her own, there is such a thing called stealing. This is universal.

Like *adharma*, *dharma* also is universal, and is not man-made. *Dharma* is something that is commonly sensed by a human being and is meant for human interaction. I live and let live. I want to be left alone in the sense that I do not want the few possessions I have to be stolen. And, at the same time, I let others live in the same way.

There is a particular order that is sensed commonly and this order, called *dharma*, is the very basis upon which we are supposed to interact with our fellow beings. The scriptures confirm this and also say that if you go against the order, your action produces what is called *pāpa* for you. The scriptures do not tell us what is right and wrong, *dharma* and *adharma*, 'Thou shalt do this; thou shalt not do that,' etc. They merely confirm what we already know. We do not need anyone to tell us these things. Indeed, our knowledge is such that we tell everyone else! Scriptures the world over merely confirm the existence of a common-sense *dharma*. It is not that they came into the world at certain periods of time and, finding there was no *dharma*, established one. People knew what was right and wrong before the scriptures came along.

CHOICE IN ACTION IMPLIES NORMS

This common-sense *dharma* is there for a human being because he or she has a choice in action. This choice implies a set of norms, which must be known. If these norms, the *dharma*, were not there, the creation would be defective. I could not have been given a choice without having also been given the norms that go with choice. This would be something like giving a Ferrari to someone who is drunk and does not know how to drive or giving it to someone when it has no brakes!

Having been given a choice, the norms should be common to all without any education being necessary. This is a very important aspect of *dharma*. To be given a choice, but no knowledge of the norms, would also be a defect in the creation. If I did have to be educated about these norms, then no one would have the same opportunity to receive this education. Then certain people would be stealing or getting hurt because they never knew they should not steal or get hurt. They were never taught. Therefore, without any education at all, I know that I should not steal or get hurt. I also know that others do not want to be stolen from or be hurt. This, then, is the common norm.

What is equally common to you and me is the norm on the basis of which we can choose our actions. What I do not want from others, I find others also do not want from me. Therefore, we have a common norm, *dharma*, and the person who is able to interpret his or her to-be-done actions in terms of the *dharma* has *kausalā*.

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Let us now complete the story of the man who wants to continue his plans to steal his neighbour's money and take the result as *prasāda*. He will only be fulfilling one part of the *karma-yoga* definition. The other part will remain unfulfilled because there is no *kauśala*. He is not even interpreting; he is going against the very *dharma*. If someone wanted to rob him, how would he take it? He would not allow it, which means that he should not rob anyone else because it is a wrong action. If everyone were simply to say, 'So what?' to all the norms, all we would have would be confusion. Even today, the society is not so confused, that we are prevented from conducting our lives. People more or less do follow some norms. If everyone were to do exactly what they wanted, they would be hitting others, robbing them, and so on, all of which would be going against *dharma*. There would be no order, only confusion, and no one could live his or her life.

There is order in the world, even today. That is why we are able to live peacefully. Some of us do not even have gates or fences because there is *dharma*. Since there are boundaries that people seem to follow, we cannot say there is no *dharma*. Of course, there is *adharma* too, because choice is there and people are sometimes going to abuse their power of choice.

The man who wants to rob his neighbour has to be told, along with *Arjuna*, that he must conform to *dharma*, even though his likes and dislikes prompt him to do otherwise. What happens to *rāga-dveṣas* then? They are curtailed at the level of action. They must be aligned with *dharma* and *adharma*. If there are lingering likes and dislikes which are not in conformity with *dharma* and *adharma*, there is no one in my heart to claim them. I do not follow them; I do not join them. They rise and they die a natural death. There is no one to claim them because I have no connection with them. They simply rise as fancies and die as fancies. I go only by what is right and wrong.

SUMMARY OF THE DEFINITION OF KARMA-YOGA

To summarise, then, we have a two-part definition for *karma-yoga* — *samatvaṁ yogaḥ ucyate* and *yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*. With reference to the results of your actions, there is a sameness, *samatva*, in your response. Gaining this attitude of *samatva* depends upon the recognition of *Īśvara* as the *karma-phala-dātā*, the giver of the fruits of all actions. Whatever result you gain, the laws do not cheat you in any way. Therefore, as a *karma-yogī* you have the same attitude, towards both the desirable and undesirable results of your actions — *karma-phale samatva-buddhiḥ*. Then, with reference to action itself, because there is choice involved, as a *karma-yogī* you exercise your choice based on certain norms. These norms are indicated by the rules of *dharma* and *adharma*. They are universal, common to all — *sāmānya-dharma*.

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EVEN UNIVERSAL LAWS REQUIRE INTERPRETATION

Although common to all, *sāmānya-dharma* must be interpreted to accommodate given situations so that it is appropriate to the situation. This interpreted *dharma* is referred to as *viśeṣa-dharma*.

Ordinary laws also have similar provisions. That you should keep to the right in traffic is a law that is universal in America. But suppose a huge truck is coming towards me in the same lane. By keeping to the left the driver of the truck is doing the wrong thing and I am doing the right thing. But, I am driving a very small, lightweight car. By keeping to the right, I am right, but if I refuse to interpret the law and do not budge an inch because I am right and he is wrong, I will certainly suffer the consequences.

Suppose, however, I swerve to the left, making sure that I am not going to hit anyone in the process, and then return again to the right when I have avoided the truck, then I have saved the situation. If a police officer sees me going to the left, he or she will not give me a citation, but will go after the truck driver instead. I interpreted the law rightly and the officer will probably congratulate me for escaping serious injury or death.

Every law has an exception. No one has ever made a law, including *Bhagavān*, without there being an exception. For example, Newton's law of gravitation applies only in certain areas. If you are in a spaceship, peanuts cannot be eaten in the same way as they are eaten here. Instead of going into your mouth when you toss them up, they will go to the right or to the left. Even though Newton's law is really *Bhagavān's* law, still it does not operate in the same way in all places at all times. Thus, there are no absolute laws.

That there are no absolute laws, however, does not mean that there is no universality. *Dharma* is universal because I feel the same way as others feel. However, even what is universal has to be interpreted according to the situation. Although you expect people to speak the truth to you and people expect the same from you, sometimes you may have to tell a lie in order to save someone's life. This is *viśeṣa-dharma* or interpreted *dharma*. *Viśeṣa-dharma* is when someone other than yourself is the beneficiary of the lie. Thus, the differences between *dharma* and *adharma* with references to speaking truth depends on whether or not you are the beneficiary of the lie.

Other examples of *viśeṣa-dharma* are those *dharma*s imposed by the scriptures, which are only valid in so far as a given place, time, or culture is concerned. For example, a *brāhmaṇa*, a *kṣatriya*, and a *śūdra* have certain duties to perform within the framework of the Vedic culture only. Therefore, these duties are *viśeṣa-dharma*.

KARMA-YOGA IMPLIES AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE LORD

Sāmānya-dharma and *viśeṣa-dharma* should always be the governing factors when exercising your choice with reference to a given action. You cannot go by your

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rāga-dveṣas alone. When you do go by *dharma* and not by your *rāga-dveṣas*, you are living an ethical life. Such a life, however, may not be *yoga*. *Yoga* comes into the picture only when *Īśvara* is taken into account.

The *Gītā* does not discuss *Īśvara* immediately. It only does so in the third chapter. Another verse, in the eighteenth chapter, explains the role of *Īśvara* in *karma-yoga*.

यतः प्रवृत्तिर्भूतानां येन सर्वमिदं ततम्।

स्वकर्मणा तमभ्यर्च्य सिद्धिं विन्दति मानवः ॥ १८-४६ ॥

yataḥ pravṛttirbhūtānāṃ yena sarvamidaṃ tatam

svakarmaṇā tamabhyarcya siddhiṃ vindati mānavaḥ (Gītā – 18-46)

The one from whom all beings have come into being, by whom all this is pervaded, worshipping him by performing one's duties, a person attains spiritual success.

The Lord is not only the creator but also the creation. Therefore, the creation is non-separate from *Īśvara* and *Īśvara* is both the efficient and the material cause of the creation. No product, *kārya*, is separate from the material of which it is made. The status of being both the efficient and the material cause is, therefore, what is meant by *Īśvara* and that is the reason why the creation is non-separate from the creator.

The creator, on the other hand, is independent of the creation in the sense that even without the creation, the creator remains. At the time of dissolution, for example, the entire creation goes back to *Īśvara*, who alone remains. The creation is like the dream world you create, without which you remain as you are. While the dream world is not independent of you, you can be without it, as you are in deep sleep. Similarly, the creation is not separate from the creator, the Lord.

Anything in the world that is naturally created can be looked at as *Īśvara's* creation, *īśvara-sṛṣṭi*, just as anything you make may be said to be your creation, *jīva-sṛṣṭi*, because your free will is involved. There is, however, only some truth in you being the creator of anything. When you say that the house you built is your own creation, you find, upon analysis, that the statement is not totally true. Because your will and effort are involved, there is some truth to it. But, the earth that the house is standing on is not created by you. Nor are the laws, which allow the house to stand. The materials that are necessary to build and maintain the house are also not created-by you. In this way, you come to see that your 'creation' depends on many aspects, which are not created by you. Therefore, nothing is really created by you although, for the time being, we can assume that there is such a thing as *jīva-sṛṣṭi*.

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THE LAWS OF CREATION ARE NOT SEPARATE FROM THE CREATOR

Your physical body is not created by you. The powers that are necessary to create are not created by you. These are the Lord's creation, *īśvara-sṛṣṭi*, alone. *īśvara-sṛṣṭi* includes the laws of *dharma* also. These laws are not created by us; they are only sensed by us. Gravitation is sensed by people and by monkeys as well. Birds seem to sense it also. They know that when they want to fly, they must flap their wings in order to take off into the air. Every creature seems to know at least some of these laws since they seem to know what they have to do.

The laws that are instinctively known by animals are known to us by our common sense. The laws of *dharma* are also known to us in the same way. Without any education whatsoever, without being taught, we know what is right and wrong. Although this knowledge is generally called 'conscience,' it is actually our simple common-sense knowledge of *dharma* and *adharma*, what is right and wrong. It is basic knowledge that everyone has, about a fact that is already there in the creation. Just as other laws exist as a part of the creation, the law of *dharma* also exists as a part of the creation.

If the Lord is the creator and the creation is non-separate from the creator, then the law of *dharma*, being a part of the creation, is also non-separate from *īśvara*. Therefore, *dharma* becomes *īśvara*. The law of *karma* also becomes *īśvara* in the same way. This is why we can worship the Lord as *dharma* and we have even given him two hands and two legs, in the form of *Rāma*.

When we say *Rāma* was an *avatāra*, we do not need any history at all. Whether *Rāma* existed or not is irrelevant because he is looked upon only as the Lord. He is *dharma* personified. History is necessary only for those who have problems with reference to what is historical. Their concept of the Lord being what it is, such people require history, but we do not require it.

A name and form are given only for the sake of worship and meditation, and that is how *Rāma*, *Kṛṣṇa*, and others are presented. Lord *Kṛṣṇa* is joy itself. He is nothing but joy, in fact, which happened to have developed two hands, two legs, a head, and so on, called *Kṛṣṇa* and then, taking a flute in hand, walked about. Therefore, whether *Kṛṣṇa* existed or not does not mean anything. *Kṛṣṇa* is a particular name and form given to *Parameśvara* whose nature is joy, *ānanda-svarūpa*. Similarly, *Rāma* portrays the Lord as *dharma*. Thus, we look at the Lord from various aspects in the creation and represent these aspects with many different gods called *devatās*.

What happens when I look upon *dharma* as *īśvara*? If I merely conform to *dharma*, I am an ethical person. But if I look upon *dharma* as the Lord, I worship that Lord by doing what is to be done by me at a given time and place. *Dharma* is something already established and I come to sense it. Therefore, what is to be done by me, I do.

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Kṛṣṇa says that by doing the *karma* that is to be done by us, we are worshipping him. How can that be? This is also something we must know.

EVERYTHING IN THE CREATION HAS ITS OWN DHARMA

With reference to this cycle of creation, the Lord is the creator. The world is born of him and sustained by him. It is not that he created the world and then went to sleep. The creation is ON! Every moment new cells are born, new things are born. You yourself are born and new children are born. A continual process of creation, *sṛṣṭi*, existence or sustenance, *sthiti*, and dissolution, *saṁhāra*, is going on.

This second, a recognised unit of time, is born. And as it is born, it is, and it is also gone. This, 'born – is – gone' is a continuous process. The various living beings on this planet — trees, insects, animals, and human beings — all do exactly what is expected of them. In this way, everything goes well. A tree that has to change its colours before winter comes, does so and it keeps doing so, because it is a sugar maple tree and that is what a sugar maple tree has to do. Being programmed, the tree does exactly what it has to do. If it has to make chlorophyll, it makes chlorophyll. If it has to take in carbon dioxide and give out oxygen, it does exactly what it has to do. This is why a sugar cane continues to be sweet and a lime continues to be sour. All vegetation grows upon the same earth and may even belong to the same species. Still, one may be sour and the other sweet — if, for example, a particular orange happens to be a 'lemon!'

An orange is an orange and a lemon is a lemon. If one orange turns out to be a lemon, there is a reason for it; it is because a certain programming is there. It is not that an orange tree decided to have some fun, wanting to see the face of the person who bites into a certain orange and discovers it to be a lemon. The tree does not make any such decision to produce a sour orange. Being programmed as it is, it behaves and contributes to the creation exactly as it must because the creation is ON!

Īśvara himself is in the form of the very world, the very creation. Therefore, every blade of grass is what it is — and it is *Īśvara*. Everything in the vegetable kingdom is *Īśvara's* creation and, having a particular form, does exactly what is expected of it because members of the botanical world do not have free wills.

The world of animals is the same. A snail is always a snail; an oyster is an oyster; a jackal is a jackal; a lion is a lion; a cow is a cow; and a turkey is a turkey. All of them are exactly the same. They do not call themselves snails, lions, and turkeys. A cock will fight like a cock; that is why it is a cock. Similarly, monkeys behave like monkeys, exactly as they should, programmed as they are. They all seem to be fine and are intelligent enough. Even turkeys know how to survive when left to their own devices. The fact that they cannot survive the month of November is only due to the way people choose to celebrate Thanksgiving!

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ONLY HUMAN BEINGS ARE NOT PROGRAMMED

It is only when you come to human beings, even a small child, that you find a difference. When you call a puppy, it wags its tail and comes every time because it connects your calling it by name with a cookie or some other treat in your hand. But, if you call your young child by the same name, whether you hold out a cookie or not, he or she may or may not come. Why? Because the child is much more than a pup. He or she is a complete person with a will of his or her own, asserted from childhood onwards. This is always a problem for parents, especially when they want the child to perform for guests, for instance. If the child is at all concerned about what others will think, there is no way he or she will perform.

Even as adults, most of our worries are based on what others will think, a problem not shared with other living beings. When a cow wants to make a noise, it does so without bothering about what anyone will think. If a dog wants to bark, a donkey wants to bray, or a lion wants to roar, they too do not concern themselves with what others will think. Wherever there is water, all the frogs in the vicinity will gather every evening and put on a 'concert.' The racket they create is so dreadful that you cannot sleep. But, the frogs are not at all concerned with what you or anyone else thinks of their music. Only human beings have this problem because they have free will and a self-image, half of which depends on what others think. Therefore, they are entirely different and are not going to do exactly what is to be done unless they decide to do so.

In the process of growth, a person picks up hundreds of *rāga-dveṣas*, likes and dislikes. Such fancies are always there and we find that convenience is usually the order that we follow. This is why we often do not bother about, 'No Trespassing' signs, and cut across a rectangle diagonally, thereby creating a path, even though it is someone's private property. And, once there is a path, a right to it also seems to be established! This is what is meant by the term, 'grandfather rights.' We also see evidence that convenience is one's nature wherever there is a sign saying, 'Post No Bills.' There will even be a bill stuck right on top of the very sign, perhaps so that the problem will disappear!

Thus, convenience is often the governing factor. We want what is convenient, what is pleasant. Easy gratification is exactly what human beings go for. If some work, pain, or effort is involved, we want to avoid it. The human disposition is like that — going after easy, quick gratification, wanting only what pays off immediately. This is our nature. We have therefore created in ourselves a number of *rāga-dveṣas*, which prompt us to perform various actions that are not often in keeping with *dharma* and *adharma*. To go against *dharma*, the Lord, is to go against the order that is the Lord, and this is *adharma*.

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DOING ONE'S OWN DUTIES IS WORSHIP

Since the creation operates according to this same order, there is definitely a reason that you were born. Your parents may not have wanted you, but somehow you were born. Even if you feel unwanted, still you are here because, without you, this world is definitely incomplete. That is why you are here. It is as simple as that.

If you see a purpose in everything in the world, why should you take your presence in this big politic of humanity as anything other than important? Even in your own body politic, everything has a role to play. Just as a tree is there, you are also there. You are important. You have roles to play and things to do. *Īśvara*'s job is going on and you are a cog in his wheel. This being the case, naturally you have to do your job. You have to know that at this time and place, this is the job that you have to do. This is called *svakarma*. Just as every animal and every tree contributes to this great creation, you too make your contribution. Whatever be your job, your *svakarma*, that very *karma* becomes an offering to *Īśvara*.

Offerings to the Lord need not always be in the form of flowers. *Bhagavān* says that by doing what is to be done by you at a given time, you are worshipping the Lord. Because of your recognition of *Īśvara*, whatever action you perform is your contribution, your offering, *arcana*, to the Lord. You offer your actions unto the Lord, who is in the form of the creation and who continues to do the job of creation. You are one of his limbs. You perform your role, which is an important one. Otherwise, you would not be here.

This is something like a symphony orchestra where, even though it looks as though some of the musicians could be removed, each person has a significant role to play according to the composer. One person may only play one note every fifteen minutes, but that is his or her role to play in the overall scheme of things. Similarly, each of you has your own job to do and when you do it, you are in harmony with *Īśvara*, the Lord. This is why, whenever you do exactly what you have to do, you find satisfaction. Even if it is something you do not want to do, once you do it, you feel great about it. Why? Because you are in harmony with *Īśvara*. Recognizing this, you become a *yogī*.

This recognition is not an ordinary thing; it is a vision. To be in harmony with the world, with what is to be done, with the law of *dharma* that governs all *karma*, is *karma-yoga* — *yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*. Therefore, you choose your *karmas* recognizing *Īśvara* as *dharma*. Then your actions become a form of *arcana* to *Īśvara*. This attitude results in *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, purification of the mind. Once, this happens, it takes no time at all for self-knowledge, *jñāna*, to take place. Since *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* is all that is required, all the steps have been completed — *karma-yoga*, *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, and *jñāna*.

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These steps are mentioned throughout the *Gītā* and *Śaṅkara* also mentions them repeatedly in his *bhāṣya*. Through *karma-yoga*, the mind is purified, and when the mind is pure, knowledge takes place and *mokṣa* is gained. *Karma-yoga*, therefore, is for *mokṣa* alone.

दूरेण ह्यवरं कर्म बुद्धियोगाद्धनञ्जय ।

बुद्धौ शरणमन्विच्छ कृपणाः फलहेतवः ॥ ४९ ॥

dūreṇa hyavaram karma buddhiyogāddhanañjaya
buddhau śaraṇamanviccha kṛpaṇāḥ phalahetavaḥ

Verse 49

धनञ्जय *dhanañjaya* — Oh! *Dhanañjaya* (*Arjuna*); हि *hi* — therefore; बुद्धि-योगात् *buddhi-yogāt* — as compared to *buddhi-yoga* (the *yoga* of proper attitude); कर्म *karma* — action; दूरेण अवरम् *dūreṇa avaram* — is far inferior; बुद्धौ *buddhau* — in the *buddhi-yoga* (of proper attitude); शरणम् *śaraṇam* — refuge; अन्विच्छ *anviccha* — seek; फलहेतवः *phala-hetavaḥ* — those who perform actions only for results; कृपणाः *kṛpaṇāḥ* — misers

Action (based on desire) is therefore far inferior to that performed with the proper attitude of *karma-yoga*. Seek refuge in this *buddhi-yoga* (of proper attitude) Oh! *Dhanañjaya*. Those who perform action only for the results are misers.

The word *buddhi-yoga* means *karma-yoga*, the attitude of sameness towards all results, *samatva*. *Karma* done under the spell of one's *rāga-dveṣas* is far different from *karma-yoga* which involves proper attitude and commitment. The result of such *karma* is received in keeping with one's *rāga-dveṣas* and not with *samatva-buddhi*. This kind of *karma* is thus far inferior, *avaram*, to *buddhi-yoga*, *karma-yoga*.

Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* to take refuge in *karma-yoga-buddhi* — *buddhau śaraṇam anviccha*. 'Go for it, pray for it, *Arjuna*,' he said. Why? Because people who perform *karma* for the sake of the results alone, and not for *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* and *mokṣa*, are misers, *kṛpaṇāḥ*. They want only enjoyments, *bhoga*, and power, *aiśvarya*. For them, there is no *karma-yoga*, which makes them misers because they do not make use of their *buddhi*.

In his commentary on this verse, *Śaṅkara* defines misers, referring to them as helpless weaklings, *dīnāḥ*. Misers are those who have money but do not have the heart to spend it, either on themselves or on others. Those who have no money are not misers because they have no money to spend. Those who do have money and spend when there are occasions to spend are also not misers. A man who has money and spends more than what he has, who does not spend judiciously, is a spendthrift and is just as much a problem as the one who has money and does not spend it at all. A miser cannot spend