

Bhagavadgītā

One who has that knowledge is called *mahātmā*. Generally the word *mahātmā*, is used for any *sādhu*, any saint. In that case, the word *ātmā* refers to the *antaḥ-karaṇa* and the word *mahātmā* indicates a person whose mind or heart is very big. But here, because of the context, *mahātmā* is the one whose *ātmā* is *Brahman*. There is no one equal to that *mahātmā* because you cannot improve upon limitlessness. He is a *mahātmā*. And he is very difficult to find. This is why, even though all are beloved, the *jñānī* is distinguished.

In this verse *Kṛṣṇa* has said that it is very difficult to find a *mahātmā*, who knows everything is *Vāsudeva*. Even though only devotees are being discussed here, all of them are not able to recognise *Vāsudeva* as *ātmā*. Why is it so difficult to recognise that the Lord is everything? This is the reason.

कामैस्तैस्तैर्हतज्ञानाः प्रपद्यन्तेऽन्यदेवताः ।

तं तं नियममास्थाय प्रकृत्या नियताः स्वया ॥ २० ॥

kāmaistairhṛtajñānāḥ prapadyante'nyadevatāḥ

taṁ taṁ niyamamāsthāya prakṛtyā niyatāḥ svayā

Verse 20

तैः तैः कामैः *taiḥ taiḥ kāmaiḥ* — by those particular desires; हतज्ञानाः *hṛta-jñānāḥ* — whose discrimination is robbed away; तम् तम् नियमम् *taṁ taṁ niyamam* — whatever are the stipulations for that; आस्थाय *āsthāya* — following; प्रकृत्या स्वया *prakṛtyā svayā* — by their own dispositions; नियताः *niyatāḥ* — driven; अन्यदेवताः *anya-devatāḥ* — other (lesser) gods; प्रपद्यन्ते *prapadyante* — they worship

Those whose discrimination is robbed away by their own particular desires, driven by their own dispositions, worship other gods following what is stipulated.

DESIRES ROB ONE OF DISCRIMINATION

Hṛta-jñānāḥ — are those whose discrimination is robbed away. *Hṛta* means robbed, taken away, and what is robbed is *jñāna*, discrimination. If they do not have discrimination between *ātmā*, and *anātmā*, what they want will not be very clear to them.

How have they been robbed of their discrimination? *Kāmaiḥ taiḥ taiḥ* — by those desires. Because desires differ from person to person, the plural is used here. Each person has his own unique desires and by those he is robbed of his discrimination. Without an object you cannot have a desire. So, *Śaṅkara* says here that their discrimination is robbed away by objects like son, wealth, heaven and so on — *putra-paśu-svargādi viṣayaiḥ*. *Putra* is son. If one has money, one wants a heir. If he has no money, even though he has nothing to give, he still wants a son. Perhaps the hope

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is that the son will improve his lot. Each one wants to continue to live in the form of his son. A man also wants a son to continue the family name. And every woman has an inbuilt desire to have a child because there is a natural fulfilment there. If she chooses not to, it is because of other problems. In Indian society there is also a religious reason to have a son. Only a son can perform the funerary rites of a parent. *Putra* also stands for *kāma*, all forms of pleasure. This desire for progeny is one of the most powerful desires and is therefore, mentioned separately. *Paśu*, cattle, is the symbol for all forms of wealth. In an agricultural society, the number of cattle a person had indicated the amount of land he owned. *Svarga* is heaven. The word *ādi* meaning etc., indicates power, fame, and so on.

By these various objects of desire, people are *hr̥ta-jñānas*, those who are robbed of their discrimination. Because of the predominance of the desires for various things, discrimination between *ātmā*, and *anātmā*, or between *nitya* and *anitya* does not arise in such people. They are too busy fulfilling their desires.

THEY IMPLORE OTHER GODS

Anya-devatāḥ prapadyante — they propitiate other *devatās*. In doing so, they meet with a number of obstructions. To ward these off and enhance the results of their efforts, they invoke *Īśvara* in the form of different *devatās*. They implore — *prapadyante*, other gods — *anya-devatās*. There are prayers to invoke a specific *devatā* for a specific result and for certain results there are certain specified rituals. So, to fulfil their desires they invoke various other *devatās*.

All the *devatās* they worship are looked upon as other than *ātmā*, which is *Vāsudeva*. They do not think about *ātmā*, being *Vāsudeva* and that they have to gain this knowledge. The desire for knowledge, *jijñāsā*, does not arise in them.

EACH IS IMPELLED BY HIS OWN DISPOSITION

Driven by their own dispositions — *svayā prakṛtyā niyatāḥ*— they approach other *devatās* for what they want or they go to *deva-loka* and become *devatās* themselves as a result of their worship. When the same result can be achieved by worshipping any deity why should one choose a given deity? It all depends upon his own *saṃskāra*, tendency. Perhaps he had worshipped that deity in his previous life, or in this life. Because of what was done before, certain things attract, certain things do not. Even though they may not have prejudices against other deities, still, one attracts. So, they follow that particular form of worship — all for the fulfilment of their own unique set of desires.

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WORSHIP IS ACCORDING TO STIPULATIONS

How do they worship? Following a particular stipulation — *taṃ taṃ niyamam āsthāya* — they invoke a given *devatā*. The repetition, *taṃ taṃ*, indicates that according to each desire, there is a particular type of worship available. If one wants a son, he cannot perform a ritual which is meant to bring rain. He will perform *putra-kāmeṣṭi*, a particular ritual meant for the birth of a son. There are rules about, how to perform this ritual, who are the *devatās* involved, what are the oblations, what are the *mantras*, and what are the gifts to be given. All these are called *niyamas*, rules. *Āsthaya* means ‘following these rules or stipulations.’

Driven by their own disposition, following a particular set of rules, they worship *devatās* other than *ātmā*, *Vāsudeva*. There is nothing wrong in this. The only problem is that they are only interested in *dharma* or *artha* or *kāma*. So, it becomes very difficult to see that *Vāsudeva* is all this. To gain that vision they have to see the limitations of these desires and pursue the understanding of *ātmā*. And for that they must have *nitya-anitya-viveka*. The desire for *mokṣa* must be there. If it is not, the desire for *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma* loom large in their minds.

Even *Arjuna*, up to now, was only interested in *dharma-artha-kāma*. He became interested in *mokṣa* only a few chapters ago, a few hours ago, perhaps. Since *Kṛṣṇa* started talking to him, only an hour or two would have passed. Before that *Arjuna* was interested in fighting and in establishing *dharma*.

Therefore, robbed of their discrimination by various desires, driven by their particular disposition, they propitiate different *devatās* according to the stipulations. As a result, they don't come to Me. This applies to all forms of religion where *Īśvara* is other than you. In the next verse, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* says that in whichever form they worship, in that form I bless them.

यो यो यां यां तनुं भक्तः श्रद्धयार्चितुमिच्छति ।

तस्य तस्याचलां श्रद्धां तामेव विदधाम्यहम् ॥ २१ ॥

yo yo yāṃ yāṃ tanuṃ bhaktaḥ śraddhayārcitumicchati

tasya tasyācalāṃ śraddhāṃ tāmeva vidadhāmyaham

Verse 21

यः यः *yah yah* — whoever; भक्तः *bhaktaḥ* — the devotee; याम् याम् *yām yām* — whichever; तनुम् *tanum* — particular form; श्रद्धया *śraddhayā* — with faith; अर्चितुम् *arcitum* — to worship; इच्छति *icchati* — he desires; तस्य तस्य *tasya tasya* — for each one of them; ताम् एव श्रद्धाम् *tām eva śraddhām* — indeed that same *śraddhā*; अचलाम् *acalām* — unshakeable; विदधामि अहम् *vidadhāmi aham* — I make

Whoever be the devotee and in whichever form (of a *devatā*) he wishes to worship with faith, indeed that same faith, I make firm for him.

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Yaḥ yaḥ bhaktaḥ – whoever be the devotee, whether he be an *ārta*, a devotee in distress, or an *arthārthī*, someone who wants help for his accomplishments, *yāṃ yāṃ tanum* – whichever particular form, *śraddhayā arcitum icchati* – he desires to worship with faith, I make that faith unshakeable — so says *Bhagavān*. *Bhakta* here is a person whose primary concern is fulfilling his desires; but because he has *śraddhā*, he is a devotee rather than a simple *kāmī*. This restricts the meaning of *bhakta* to an *ārta* and an *arthārthī*. He will invoke the Lord in a particular form, *tanu*, according to his *śraddhā*; but because he does not see that *Vāsudeva* is everything, he propitiates a particular aspect of the Lord and performs a specific ritual invoking that form of *devatā*.

With *śraddhā* he desires to worship, or to praise a particular form of *devatā*. According to his understanding he may insist that this is the only form of the Lord or he may accommodate other forms of worship.

THE LORD HIMSELF ESTABLISHES A DEVOTEE'S ŚRADDHĀ

The Lord says '*tasya acalām śraddhām vidadhāmi aham*. The important thing here is *śraddhā*. Earlier *Kṛṣṇa* had said that, the one who has *śraddhā* gains knowledge of the identity of the individual and *Īśvara* — *śraddhāvān labhate jñānam*.¹ In this verse he says whatever *śraddhā* he now has, that, I make it firm, unshakeable, for him — *tasya acalām śraddhām vidadhāmi aham*. For the one whose *śraddhā* manifests as a worship of a particular *devatā* for a particular result, I make his *śraddhā* firm. How? By giving the results. Suppose someone performs a particular ritual and he does not get the promised result, then his *śraddhā* will quickly disappear. I make sure that it does not by giving the results. They are doing *karmas* for which results are to be given. That result I give. Even though they are worshipping only a fraction of me, even though they don't worship me totally, still I make firm whatever *śraddhā* they have. I am available in the particular form of *devatā* that they invoke. No *devatā* is separate from Me but I am more than these *devatās*. The difficulty is that these devotees think that this particular *devatā* is *Īśvara*. But I do not disturb that at all. I give them results only according to their *śraddhā*. If I were to interfere and tell them, 'I am you,' it would not help because they are not ready for it. Even if the Lord appears before such people, they will ask for a promotion. They already have a certain firmness in their *śraddhā*. I make it more firm by giving the result. This he tells in the next verse.

स तया श्रद्धया युक्तस्तस्याराधनमीहते ।

लभते च ततः कामान् मयैव विहितान् हि तान् ॥ २२ ॥

sa tayā śraddhayā yuktastasyārādhnamihate
labhate ca tataḥ kāmān mayaiiva vihītān hi tān

Verse 22

There are two different ways of reading the second line of this verse as given

¹ *Gītā* – 4-39