

21. The five Yajnas

Birth occurs owing to Karma

Karma is the cause of pleasure and pain

It is the cause of good and evil

The world is made of Karma stuff.

THE world is permeated by *Brahman*. It is equally permeated by *Karma*. Creation itself is the outcome of action. Man as a part of creation is also a product of the process.

Man represents the *jiva sakthi* (vital force) encased in the body. The body is the result of *Karma* (deeds in one's previous life). All activities associated with the body, speech and mind are *Karma*. In the performance of *Karma*, five factors are involved. One is the body. The second is the doer. The third comprise the sensory organs. The fourth covers the varied actions. The fifth is the common factor in all beings, the Divine Principle.

The Divine underlies all things. Forgetting this fact, and attributing all activities to the sense organs, man is engaged in actions for achieving desired results. Man is reborn to reap the fruits of his actions. He is thus caught up in the cycle of birth and rebirth.

Acts of *Swadharm* and *Paradharm*

So, man should aim at performing actions without concern for the fruits thereof. There are two types of actions--described in the Gita as *Swadharm* and *Paradharm*. *Swadharm* is generally regarded as duties related to one's caste, vocation or--stage in life and it is considered meritorious to perform these duties. But *Swadharm* is not related to community, caste or creed. "*Swa*" refers to *Atma* (the Self) and *Swadharm* means duties relating to the *Atma*. It is not liable to change in character or form. It is based on the eternal verities. It is unchanging. *Swadharm* enjoys man to perform the duties relating to the *Atma* as the primary obligation.

Paradharm refers to actions related to the physical entity. Such actions are based on likes and dislikes, on ideas of "Mine" and "thine." They are fraught with danger and hence the Gita has cautioned against them. We are continually worried about what may happen in the future. All that we do in the present have their consequences in due course. Hence we must engage ourselves in good actions to ensure good results later.

In all these actions, there are three categories; *Satwic Karma*, *Rajasic Karma* and *Tamasic Karma*. *Satwic* actions are those which are done without any selfish or egoistic motives, with no concern for the fruits and as an offering to the Divine. *Satwic* deeds serve the Divine and win the Grace of God. All actions done out of self-interest and conceit for the sake of the rewards therefrom are *Rajasic*. Most actions done by common people in ordinary daily life belong to this category. Almost everyone in the world indulges in *Rajasic* actions. One must strive to convert them into *Satwic* actions.

The third type of actions is *Tamasic* in nature, They are deeds done out of selfish motives, causing harm to others and inflicting pain on them. They lack compassion and are impelled by narrow mindedness, stemming wholly from self interest. They are pregnant with evil.

Five *yajnas* prescribed by *sastras*

In the ordinary course of life, man does many actions which, wittingly or unwittingly, cause harm to other beings. To atone for such actions, five *yajnas*--propitiatory rites--have been prescribed by the *sastras*. These are: *Deva Yajna*, *Pitru Yajna*, *Bhoota Yajna*, *Manushya Yajna* and *Rishi Yajna* or *Brahma Yajna*. The inner significance of each of these *Yajnas* should be clearly understood by everyone.

Deva Yajna: In numerous daily activities like walking, breathing, and others, unconsciously people cause the death of many creatures like ants, insects and micro-organisms. To atone for these sins committed unknowingly, *Deva Yajnas*, to propitiate various deities, have been prescribed. Moreover, in our body, in every organ and limb, the presiding deities are present in the form of *rasa* (a subtle fluid). Hence these deities are called *Angirasas* (the presiding deities of the *Angas* or limbs). Because these deities in the subtle form protect the organs concerned, gratitude has to be expressed to them in the form of *Deva Yajnas*. During the states like sleep, these deities take care of the body. As the body has been given to man for the performance of his duties man should be grateful to the deities who protect it. "The body is essential for the fulfilment of *dharm*a." To meditate on the *Anga Devas*, to worship them and express gratitude to them is man's first duty.

Sacrifice to the manes as atonement

Pitru Yajnas: When a branch is broken, a flower is plucked or a tree is cut down, many small creatures may be losing their lives. Recognising one's responsibility for this loss of lives, one should perform *Pitru Yajna* (sacrifice to the manes) by way of atonement. In addition, one should remember that he owes his body and all that it contains, as well as the food that has nourished him in childhood, to his parents. As long as they are alive, it is one's duty to serve them and keep them happy. The obsequies and ceremonies that are performed after their death are laid down to honour their memory. By performing *Pitru Yajnas*, the ancestors are propitiated.

Bhoota Yajnas: When we take a bath or wash our clothes, or sweep the house, many living creatures may be losing their lives. To atone for the death of such creatures, *Bhoota Yajnas* (offerings to the *Bhootas*) have to be made. This practice has come down from the times of ancient sages. The *rishis* used to maintain deer, cows, and other animals in *their ashrams* and look after them with loving care as expression of their love for all living beings. Following their example, other people used to scatter sugar or flour near anthills for feeding the ants. To offer the remains of one's food after a meal to cows or dogs or other creatures is also a form of *Bhoota Yajna*. Even today many people keep dogs, parrots or other pets at home. By showing love towards living things in this way, some atonement is made for the unconscious harm done to various creatures in daily life.

Manava or *Manushya Yajna*: These *Yajnas* or rituals are done to atone for many offences committed against various beings in the course of daily life, in actions done during work or play.

Rishi or *Brahma Yajna*: Considering human birth as a precious gift, the ancient sages provided through the scriptures, the Upanishads and the *Dharma Sastras*, a body of principles for guiding man's life so that he may strive to attain the true goal of life--namely Self-realisation. They laid down the four *Purusharthas* - *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha*--as guidelines for humanity. These regulations, which are not applicable to animals or birds, have been prescribed for man alone because he alone is endowed with powers of enquiry and discrimination to choose between right and wrong. All laws and *Sastras* are intended only for man. Sins, *Sastras* and *saapam* (curse) are designed only for man. The *rishis* laid down the royal road of righteous life, for all

humanity. It is our duty to show our gratitude to them by meditating on them and offering worship to them through *Rishi Yajnas*.

There is no higher *dharma* than compassion

The practice of absolute non-violence, that is, causing no harm to any living thing, is impossible in daily life, because unconsciously many micro-organisms are being destroyed even in the processes of breathing, walking, talking or eating. What should be avoided is consciously causing harm. The price has to be paid for conscious offences by suffering and retribution. There is no escape from the rule: As you sow, so shall you reap. The results of your past deeds, good or bad, will bind you like a chain. It is to atone for all such actions that worship of the three principal deities during dawn, noon and evening has been prescribed. At dawn the Sun represents the form of Brahma. At noon he has the form of Eswara. In the evening he represents Vishnu. The performance of *Sandhya* worship (of the sun) in the morning, noon and evening thus becomes worship of the *Trimurthis* (Brahma, Siva and Vishnu). Very few are aware of the significance of these rituals.

These five types of *yajnas* have to be performed every day to atone for the sins committed in the course of daily activities. There is no need to have elaborate arrangement for performing these *yajnas*. If you carry out the behests of your parents, meditate on the deities, offer food to the animals in the house or outside or at least give alms to a beggar, you can propitiate the divine and redeem your life. You would do well to remember that there is no greater

gift than the gift of food to the hungry, there are no greater gods than one's parents, there is no higher *dharma* than compassion, no more profitable acquisition than the company of the good, no worse enemy than anger, no worse disease than debt, no worse death than infamy, no higher merit than remembering the Lord.

It is futile to expect that merely by reciting a few *mantras* one can atone for one's sins. Only through right action can expiation take place. Without a clean heart, all worship is useless. Without spiritual purity, religious observances are valueless. How can you have pure food, if the cooking utensils are unclean?

People indulge in high-sounding talk about spiritual matters. But without application in practice, such talk has no meaning.

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Even the thought that you have not benefited from the puja or japam you do, should not pollute your faith. To practise sadhana is your duty, your innermost urge, your genuine activity. Leave the rest to the Will of God.

BABA