

## Chapter V

Detachment from the fruits of action; the person of steady wisdom.

If you have an eye on the fruits of your actions, you are liable to be affected by worry, anxiety, and restlessness. The question may arise: if the fruits have to be given up, how can one manage to live? But why this weakness of heart, this nervousness? He who has assured you, saying, “I will care for your well-being (*Yoga-kshemam vamyaham*),” will certainly look after that. He will give the means and the wherewithal. All you have to consider is: which is more important, a happy life or liberation from the circle of life and death? Happy living is of only short duration; the joy of liberation is eternal, unshakeable.

On this point, many commentators have exercised their intelligence and written differently. Many have said that the giving up of fruit is advised because there is no right or authority for the doer to desire the fruit. This is a great blunder. The Lord has said in the *Gita*, “refuse the fruit (*maa phaleshu*)” —that is to say, the deed yields results, but the doer should not desire the result or do it with the result in view. If Krishna’s intention was to say that the doer has no right to the fruit, He would have said, “It is fruitless (*na phaleshu —na* meaning no)”. So if you desist from action (*karma*), you will be transgressing the Lord’s command. That would be a serious mistake.

When one has a right to engage in action (*karma*), one has a right also to the fruit; nobody can deny this or refuse this right. But doers can, out of their own free will and determination, refuse to be affected by the result, whether favourable or unfavourable. The *Gita* shows the way: “Do —but don’t be attached to the consequence.” The desire for the result of your action is a sign of passion (*rajoguna*). The giving up of action because you can not benefit by the fruit is a sign of dullness (*thamoguna*). To engage in action, to know that the result will follow, and yet not to be attached to it or concerned with it —that is the sign of the quality of purity and serenity (*sathwaguna*).

The *yogi* who dedicates all actions to God, who has learned this secret of “action combined with renouncing the fruits thereof”, should have equal-mindedness (*sama-buddhi*) more than mind with attachments (*sanga-buddhi*). For, the intellect with attachments draws him into entanglements. “This action is mine; its results are due to my endeavours. I am the person entitled to it” —such are the thoughts that bind the doer. Krishna advised that one should rise above this mind with attachments and desires. He declared that equanimity (*sama-thvam*) is the genuine devotional practice (*Sama-thvam yogamuchyathe*).

In the second chapter, Krishna has made clear in a general way four principal points: the principle of renouncing the fruits of action, or absolute surrender (*saranagathi*), the *sankhya* (see the glossary) teaching, the *yogic* attitude (restraint, self control), and the nature of the person of steady integral spiritual wisdom (*sthitha-prajna*). We have noted the first three already. Now about the fourth.

Krishna taught Arjuna the nature and characteristics of the person of steady wisdom when Arjuna questioned him. Arjuna prayed “Oh Kesava!”, and when that appellation was used, Krishna smiled, for He knew then that Arjuna had understood His splendour. Do you ask how? Well, what does “Kesava” mean? It means, “He who is Brahma, Vishnu, Siva, the three forms.” Through Krishna’s grace, Arjuna had reached that stage of realization.

When Arjuna prayed for Kesava to tell him the true characteristics of a person of steady wisdom, He replied, “Partha! Such a person will be free from all desire and stable in the knowledge and awareness of the *Atma* only.”

Now, there are two processes in this: To give up all the promptings of desire in the mind is the negative process; to implant ever-present joy therein is the positive aspect. The negative process is to remove all the seedlings of wrong and evil from the mind; the positive process is to grow, in the field thus cleansed, the crop of attachment to God! The plucking of the weeds is the negative stage; the cultivation of the crop you need is the positive stage. The weeds are pleasures that the senses draw from the objective world; the crop is attachment to God.

The mind is a bundle of wishes, and, unless these wishes are removed by their roots, there is no hope of destroying the mind, which is a great obstacle in the path of spiritual progress. When the yarn that comprises the cloth is taken out, one by one, what remains of the cloth? Nothing. The mind is made of the warp and woof of wishes. When mind vanishes, one becomes steady in wisdom (*sthitha-prajna*).

So the first thing to be conquered is the demon of desire (*kama*). For this, it is unnecessary to wage a huge war. It is also unnecessary to use pleasing words to persuade the desire to disappear. Desires will not disappear for fear of the one or for favour of the other. Desires are objective; they belong to the category of the “seen”. With the conviction that “I am the see-er only, not the seen”, the steady-minded one releases themselves from attachment. By this means, desire is conquered. You must watch the working of the mind from outside it; do not get involved in it. That is the meaning of this discipline.

The faculty of the mind is like a strong current of electricity. It has to be watched from a distance and not be contacted or touched. Touch the current, and you are reduced to ashes. So too, contact and attachment give the mind the chance to ruin you. The farther you are from it, the better. By skillful methods, you have to make the best use of it for your own welfare.

The bliss in which the person of steady wisdom is immersed does not arise from external objects; that person has no need of them, either. Bliss is in everyone as part of their very nature. Those with pure consciousness find the highest bliss in the realization of their own reality, the *Atma*. That joy is self-earned, so to say. It is known only to the individual; it is self-evident.

Since Arjuna had not known this, Krishna had to clarify it in simple terms in verses 56–58 of Chapter II.

Joy or grief can be met with in three forms: caused by one’s self (*adi-atma*), caused by the five elements or the material world (*adi-bhauthika*), and caused by fate, i.e. natural disasters (*adi-daivika*). It is well known that sins bring grief as retribution and meritorious deeds bring joy as reward. So, advice is given to avoid sins and perform meritorious deeds. But the person of steady wisdom knows neither the pain of grief nor the thrill of joy. Such a person is not repulsed by one or attracted by the other and does not retreat before pain or run toward pleasure. Only those ignorant of the *Atma* will exult or droop when stricken with joy or grief.

The person of steady wisdom (*sthitha-prajna*) will be ever engaged in contemplation and rumination. The person is called a sage, and their intellect is steady, because the senses do not harry it.

One point has to be understood here. Conquest of the senses is essential for spiritual discipline, but that is not all. As long as the objective world continues to attract the mind, one cannot claim complete success. That is why Krishna says, “Arjuna! Establish mastery over the senses; then you need have no fear, for they become serpents with the fangs removed.”

But there is still danger from thoughts and impulses that draw you outward. Desire has no limit; it can never be satiated. So, along with mastery of the senses, one must also establish mastery of the mind. That is the sign of

a person of steady wisdom. If this double mastery is absent, the person is a wisdomless individual, not a steady-wisdom individual. Where does the wisdomless individual go? To perdition; nowhere else.

The upward path, the higher stage—that is for the person of steady wisdom. Of these two masteries, if the mind is subdued, that alone is enough; it is not necessary then to conquer the external senses. If the mind has no attachment to objects, the senses have nothing to cling to; they perish by inanition; love and hate are both starved out of existence. The bonds with the objective world are cut, although the senses may yet be affected by it. For the one who has been blessed with awareness of the *Atma*, how can anything worldly bring grief or joy?

Just as the stars fade into invisibility when the sun rises, so too, when the sun of knowledge or wisdom rises, grief, agitation, and ignorance vanish.

People have three chief instruments: the mind, the intellect, and the senses. It is when these three work in unison and cooperate with one another that either “immersion in the flux” or “liberation in the knowledge of the *Atma*” is realized. Krishna anticipated that Arjuna would be puzzled to know what would happen “when which operates with which”. So Krishna provided the answer. “Arjuna,” He said, “when the mind cooperates with the senses, you enter into the flux called the objective world (*samsara*); when it subordinates itself to the intellect, you attain the knowledge of the *Atma*. One path leads to surrender to the world; the other, to surrender to God. The intellect must resolve; the mind must carry out the resolution. That is the correct procedure.”

The senses have to be fully destroyed. That is the hallmark of a person of steady wisdom. So when all beings are experiencing night, the person of steady wisdom would keep himself awake. When all beings are awake, the person of steady wisdom would be asleep. The literal meaning of this is that what is night for one is day for the other. But that would be absurd. It would mean the person of steady wisdom is the one who sleeps during the day and keeps awake at night.

The inner meaning of this statement is very profound. Ordinary people are vigilant in affairs that concern the senses that arise out of this world. Wakefulness for them is the care they bestow on worldly pursuits. But the person of steady wisdom is unconcerned with these very things and is, so to say, asleep. What does sleep mean? It means the happiness resulting from inactivity of the senses. And vigilance? It means yielding to the senses and catering to them. When ordinary people are pursuing the senses and their demands, the person of steady wisdom is asleep. This can also be put in other words: forget the stage of *Atma* consciousness and you relapse into body awareness.

This is what happens: the ordinary person sleeps in the *Atma* stage and wakes into body consciousness. The case of people of steady wisdom is different; they sleep in body-consciousness and wake in the awareness of the *Atma*. They will not awake, even by mistake, in the sensory world, the world where the ordinary person is most vigilant! This is the inner meaning. It is far from the literal meaning, which, if taken as true, would entitle thieves, watchmen, and others to the name “people of steady wisdom (*sthitha-prajna*)”, because they keep awake at night and sleep during the day! Only those who have given up traces of desire and become mere instruments can achieve peace. Krishna ends the description of people of steady wisdom with an emphasis on “the giving up of desire”.

To people sorrowing on the battlefield of life, bewildered by attractions and distractions, not knowing where to turn and what road to take, Madhava taught this *sankhya yoga*—the path of knowledge, see Chapter II. The other chapters are like commentaries on the teaching in this chapter.

“Arjuna! prepare yourself for giving up the mind, for being merged in your own Self. Withdraw the mind

from sound, touch, sight, taste, and smell —the five elements. Then you become a man of steady wisdom,” said Krishna.

In Chapter II, Krishna elaborated (in verses 11–30) on the true nature of the Self (*Atma-thathwa*) in a simple, easily understandable style. Then, in verses 39–75, He taught the virtuous-action (*dharmakarma*) attitude, which is essential for attaining the God-head, an attitude that is based on the *yoga* of action, which itself is embodied in a balanced state of intellect —which has already been prescribed.