

CHAPTER 3

|| KARMAYOGA ||

Arjuna said:

1. *O Krishna, if wisdom is deemed by you superior to action, then why do you, O Keshava, urge me to do this horrible deed?*

Then Arjuna said, I have carefully listened to whatever you have said, O merciful Lord. From what you say it appears that both the deed and the doer do not survive. If this is your definite view, O Infinite Lord, then why are you insisting that I should fight? Don't you feel any scruples in involving me in this heinous crime? Since you have negated action in its entirety, then why are you forcing me to do this violent deed? O Krishna, think over this, that after extolling freedom from action, you are urging me to commit violence (1-5).

2. *With perplexing words you are confusing, as it were, my understanding. Tell me positively the one way by which I shall win the highest good.*

Lord, if you talk like this, what should ignorant men like me do? I should say that reason has now reached its tether. If this is your advice, how does it differ from a confused statement? This is how you have satisfied my craving for knowledge. If a physician, after prescribing a diet, himself gives poison, how will the patient survive? Pray tell me that, as one guides a blind man into a blind alley, or offers wine to a monkey, so your advice has completely bewildered me. As I lacked understanding and was moreover confused, O Krishna, I sought your advice (6-10).

But you surprise me with an advice, which is confusing. Is this the way to behave with your disciple? I solely depend upon your instruction. If you behave like this, I should say I am undone. By instructing me like this, do you think that you have treated me well? What hope is there for me to acquire knowledge now? My desire for knowledge has gone; moreover, my mind which has been steady so far has now become unsettled. O Lord, your conduct is beyond my comprehension. I do not know whether you are trying to sound me or to befool me, or imparting to me an esoteric doctrine (11-15). I have made an effort to comprehend it but have not been able to realise its truth. Therefore, listen, O Lord, do not talk to me in riddles, but explain to me your thoughts in plain language. O Krishna, dull-witted that I am, give me your advice in such a way that I too can understand it (16-20). While it is necessary to prescribe medicine to cure a disease, it should be very tasty and sweet.

So be kind enough to explain to me the philosophical truth, which is meaningful and appropriate in a way, I can understand. After finding a teacher like you, why should I feel shy of making a request? You are our Divine mother; so why should I hesitate to ask for a favour from you. If the milk of the wish-yielding cow becomes available by a stroke of luck, why should I remain in want? If the philosopher's stone comes to hand, what can impede anyone's desire? He should merely make a wish for whatever he needs. O Lord, if, after reaching the sea of

nectar any one should still feel pangs of thirst, why should he take all the trouble to get there? Therefore, O Lord, after worshipping you in my previous births, I have had the good fortune to meet you (21-25). Then why should I not beseech you for whatever I want, O Supreme God? This is the most opportune time for me to get whatever I want. My merit has triumphed over all my afflictions and borne fruit, and all my desires have been fulfilled. For you, the abode of all auspicious qualities, O God of Gods, have become favourably inclined to us. Even as no time is inappropriate for an infant to suckle its mother, so, O merciful Lord, I am asking you this question of my free will (26-30). Partha said, "Please tender me your definite advice, which is easy to follow here and beneficial in the next world."

The blessed Lord said:

3. *In this world I had declared before a two-fold dedication, O sinless one, through the Yoga of knowledge for the Sankhyas and the Yoga of action for the yogis.*

Lord Krishna was surprised at this speech of Arjuna and said: "O Arjuna, this is what is implied in my instruction. While explaining to you *buddhiyoga*, I broached the *Sankhya* doctrine, which arose out of it. But you did not grasp this point and so you have become confused. Now please note that I have declared both these paths. Know, O Arjuna that these two traditions have been revealed by me of yore (31-35). One of them known as the path of knowledge is followed by the *Sankhyas*, who after realising the Self, become one with him. The other is called the path of action in which the seekers perform their duties skilfully and eventually achieve emancipation. Although these two paths are different, they lead to the same result, even as one derives the same satisfaction by eating food cooked by himself or by another. Or as the rivers flowing east and west follow different courses, but eventually join the sea to become one in the end, so these two paths point and lead to the same truth. But the seeker has to choose that path which suits his capacity (36-40). Look, a bird can fly straight to the tree and seize the fruit all at once. Tell me, can a man do it with the same speed? He will have to climb the tree slowly from one branch to another and follow this method until he reaches the fruit in the end. So by adopting the way of the birds, the *Sankhyas* pursue the way of knowledge and soon attain final release. The *yogis*, on the other hand, follow the path of action and, by performing the prescribed duties, achieve liberation in course of time.

4. *Not by refraining from action does a man win freedom from action, nor by (mere) renunciation does he attain perfection.*

If a person gives up work like a perfected sage, he will certainly not attain freedom from action (41-45). If a person says that by renouncing his current duties he will achieve freedom from action, he is only talking nonsense. If you have a strong desire to cross the river and reach the other shore, how can you do so without a ferry? Or if you want the satisfaction of eating, how can you get it without eating food cooked by yourself or cooked by others? So long as you don't become desireless, you cannot give up your legitimate work. Only when you achieve bliss, all physical effort comes to an end. Therefore, listen, O Partha, whoever is intent upon achieving freedom from action, should not avoid performing his proper duties (46-50). Do you think that if you perform an action, it will be done, or if you abandon it at will, it will remain undone? This is mere empty talk. If you reflect over it carefully, you will realise that you cannot renounce actions by merely refraining from them.

5. *Nor even for a moment can anyone remain without doing work; for everyone is driven helplessly to action by the qualities born of nature.*

So long as your body is the seat of *prakriti*, it is no use saying that you will perform this action or abandon that action; if you say so, it is due to ignorance. For the functions of the body naturally depend upon the qualities. Tell me, if a person abandons all his prescribed duties, will his sense organs cease to function? Will his ears stop hearing or his eyes lose their sight or will his nostrils become blocked and cease to smell (51-55)? Will his breathing come to a stop or will his mind be free from doubt? Will he cease to be affected by hunger and thirst? Will he give up waking or sleep and will his legs forget to walk? Even if all this comes to pass, can he avoid birth and death? If all this does not cease, what is it that he has given up? Hence a person who is subject to his nature cannot give up actions. Action is dependent upon something else (*prakriti*) and arises from its qualities; and so it is futile to think that you will undertake or abandon action at all. Mind you, even if a person sits without movement in a carriage, he must move with it, being dependent upon it (56-60). Just as a dry leaf, when caught in the wind, remains whirling in the sky, even if it has no motion of its own, so an inactive person continues to remain active under the influence of nature and the modifications of his senses. Therefore, so long as he is attached to his nature, he cannot give up actions. If anyone says that he will give them up it is merely due to his willfulness.

6. *Whoever restrains his organs of action and sits brooding over the sense-objects is said to be a self-deluded hypocrite.*

Some, in order to become free from action, abandon their prescribed duties and try to arrest the tendencies of their organs of action. They will not be able to relinquish action, as they will start brooding over it. They are wretches as they affect the airs (of a monk) (61-65). You should learn to recognise, O Partha, such persons who are really attached to sense-objects and should not entertain wrong notions about them. Now listen, I shall tell you, as the occasion requires, the characteristics of a person who is free from desire.

7. *But he, who, controlling his senses by the mind, performs, O Arjuna, the Yoga of action with the organs of action, excels.*

A desireless person remains steady in the contemplation of the Supreme Self, but behaves outwardly according to the local customs. He does not command the senses or fear sensuous enjoyment, nor does he avoid legitimate work, which falls to his lot. He does not restrain the tendencies of the organs of action but at the same time he is not overcome by their impulses (66-70). Even as a lotus petal does not get wet in water, he is neither affected by passion nor tainted by delusion. Since he remains in the world, he looks like anybody else. Just as the sun appears as a reflection in contact with water, he looks outwardly like an ordinary person and no one can gauge his true nature. If you see a person with these characteristics, know him to be liberated. You recognise him by his freedom from the bonds of desire. O Arjuna, such a person becomes distinguished as a *yogi* in this world.

Therefore, I say unto you that you should become a *yogi* (71-75). Practice self-control and be steady in your mind; then let the organs of action go about their way merrily.

8. *Perform your duty; for action is better than inaction. Even the maintenance of your body will not be possible without working.*

Hence one cannot achieve freedom from action by renouncing action. Then why should you think of undertaking prohibited actions? You should therefore, perform without self-interest the appropriate duties which have fallen to your lot. O Partha, you do not seem to know this wonder of wonders, that disinterested work by itself frees one from action. See, if one performs one's duty without self-interest according to his capacity, by that very action he is sure to attain liberation (76-80).

9. *Save for work done for a sacrifice, this world is in bondage to work. For that reason, O Arjuna, perform action without attachment.*

My boy, know that one's duty itself is an obligatory sacrifice. If one performs his duty, sin does not affect him. When a person abandons his duty and takes delight in prohibited deeds, he becomes entangled in worldly bondage. Therefore, know that the discharge of one's duty is a continuous sacrificial session. Whoever performs his duty as a sacrifice does not suffer bondage. A person becomes bound by his actions in this world, if he comes under the spell of *Maya* and strays from his path of duty. In this connection, O Partha, I shall tell you a story. When *Lord Brahma* created the world (81-85),

10. *After creating beings along with sacrifice, the Creator said of yore, by this shall ye multiply; let this be to you the wish-yielding cow.*

He created human beings together with the obligatory sacrifices. But they did not understand the sacrifices, as they were subtle. The people entreated the Creator, "O God, what refuge have we here?" Then *Lord Brahma*, born from the lotus, gave this reply: I have already ordained the duties according to your class. Perform these duties and your desires will be fulfilled. You need not observe vows or self-restraint or torment your body or go on a long pilgrimage. You need not perform *yogic* practices or resort to charms or magic or undertake ritual worship with a selfish motive (86-90). Do not worship other gods and instead do your duty as a sacrifice restfully. Perform your duty without a selfish motive, even as a chaste wife serves her husband faithfully. This sacrifice in the form of duty is to be performed by you." so said *Brahma*, the Lord of *Satyaloka*, the heaven of truth. He added: Folks, if you follow your duty, it will fulfill your desires like the wish-yielding cow and never let you down.

11. *With this (sacrifice) serve the gods and let the gods serve you; thus nourishing each other you shall reap the highest good.*

If you do this, you will propitiate all the gods: and they in their turn will grant you all the desired objects (91-95). If you worship the gods by performing your duties, they will undoubtedly look after your welfare. If you pray to the gods, they will become pleased with you. When you become united with this mutual bond of love, you will be able to accomplish whatever you wish to do, and all the desires that you entertain will be fulfilled. Whatever you say will come true, you will command obedience, and the great miraculous powers will wait upon you and carry out your orders. Just as the forest laden with fruits welcomes the spring with its gorgeous beauty (96-100);

12. *The gods nourished by sacrifice will give you desired enjoyments. He is verily a thief who enjoys their gifts without giving anything in return.*

So good fortune will come looking for you with all pleasures. My children, if you will perform your duties with dedication, you will gain all enjoyments and become happy. But he, who amassing wealth, follows the whims of his senses, and coveting sensuous enjoyments, will not use the God-given riches as a reward of his sacrifice in the worship of gods by performing his duties, who will not offer oblations into the fire and worship to the gods, or feed the *Brahmins* on proper occasions (101-105), who is remiss in his devotion to his teacher and hospitality to the guests, and will not give satisfaction to his communality, in short, if he, infatuated with his wealth, neglects his duty, and remains wholly absorbed in sensuous enjoyments, he will have to suffer the plight of losing whatever he has and will be unable to enjoy pleasures which come his way. Just as the Self does not dwell in the body when one's span of life is over, or the goddess of wealth does not stay in the house of an unlucky person, so the neglect of duty destroys the very foundation of happiness, in the same way as the light is extinguished when the lamp stops burning (106-110). Thus he who ignores his call of duty loses his freedom. Bear this in mind, O folks, so said *Lord Brahma*. He added: Death will punish him who forsakes his duty, and treating him as a thief, will take away all his possessions. Just as ghosts gather in the cemetery with night-fall, all faults around him will come searching for him. Then all sorrows in the three worlds, sins of various kinds and penury of every sort without exception will befall him. My children, that arrogant person will be reduced to such a state that he cannot escape it even at the time of dissolution of the world (111-115). Therefore, you should not abandon your duty and give the senses free reign. This is the instruction, which *Lord Brahma* gave to the people. If the aquatic creatures got out of water they would die instantaneously, so a person should not cease to do his duty even for a moment. *Lord Brahma* reaffirmed, "You should be devoted to the performance of your duty, all the time."

13. *The virtuous who eat the remains of sacrifice are freed from all sins. But the wicked who cook for their own sake verily eat sin.*

He added: Folks, you should spend your riches in performing your prescribed duties without a selfish motive. You should worship the sacred fire, your teacher and elders and serve the *Brahmins* and perform the *shraddha* rites (116-120). After performing the prescribed sacrifices and offering oblations into the fire, you should enjoy at home whatever remains thereafter with your family. This act of enjoyment itself will destroy all your sins, even as a person taking a sip of nectar is cured of serious maladies, so whoever eats the remains of sacrifice becomes free from sins. Just as one devoted to truth is not affected by the slightest delusion, so whoever eats the leavings of sacrifice is not affected by blemishes. Therefore, a person should earn riches lawfully, utilise them in performing his duty and then enjoy in contentment whatever is left (121-125), O Partha he should not act otherwise.

Lord Krishna told this ancient tale to Arjuna and said: those who identify the Self with the body and regard the sense-objects as the objects of enjoyment, do not know that there is something beyond it. They do not know that their riches are the means of sacrifice and use it for their comfort out of egoism and delusion. They get savory dishes prepared according to their tastes, and when they eat them, these sinners eat sin only. They should regard all

their wealth as the means of sacrifice and offer it to the primal Lord by way of sacrifice in the form of duty (126-130). Instead of doing this, the ignorant people get cooked a variety of dishes for their own enjoyment. That food which should be utilised for sacrifice in order to propitiate the gods is not an ordinary thing. You should not regard it as ordinary food, but of the very nature of *Brahman*, because that food sustains the life of all creatures.

14. *Creatures live by food, food is produced by rain; rain is caused by sacrifice, and sacrifice arises from action.*
15. *Know that the ritual has its origin in the Veda, and the Veda originates from the Imperishable. The all-pervading Veda is, therefore, ever established in sacrifice.*

All creatures grow on food, and food is produced by rain. Rain arises from sacrifice, sacrifice from action and action from the *Vedas* (131-135). The *Vedas* spring from the imperishable *Brahman*, and therefore this moving and stationery world is based on *Brahman*. The foundation of sacrifice based on action is thus the eternal *Veda*. Bear this in mind, O Arjuna.

16. *Whoever on earth does not keep turning the wheel thus set in motion leads a sinful life, gratifying his senses and lives in vain, O Partha.*

O Partha, I told you briefly the origin and tradition of sacrifice. Therefore, whoever being infatuated with his wealth, does not perform in this world his duty as sacrifice, is a great sinner. Know him to be a burden on this earth because he has pampered his senses by committing wicked deeds (136-140). His birth and actions, O Arjuna, are barren and unproductive, even like untimely clouds which do not produce rain. If a person does not perform his duty, know that his life is worthless like the teat hanging from the throat of a goat. Therefore no one should abandon his duty; on the contrary one should resort to it with his heart and soul. Look, when one acquires a body (according to his past actions) work follows as a matter of course; then why should one avoid one's legitimate work? O Arjuna, he who loathes work even after acquiring a body is boorish (141-145).

17. *But the man who delights in the Self is satisfied with the Self and is contented in the self, has no duty to perform.*

Look! even if a person is endowed with a physical body, so long as he takes delight in the Self, he is not tainted by action. If he becomes satisfied with the knowledge of the Self, his work is done; and, therefore, he easily becomes free from attachment to work.

18. *For then he does not concern himself with action or inaction on this earth; nor does he have any purpose of his own dependent on anybody.*

Just as when one becomes satisfied, the means of satisfaction become redundant, so when a person who is immersed in blissful Self, he has no further use for work. Arjuna, a person has to perform *sadhana*, only until he attains the knowledge of the Self.

19. *Therefore, always perform, without attachment, action that needs to be done. Verily working without attachment, one obtains the highest good.*

Therefore, you should perform your legitimate duty without desire (146-150). O Partha, all those who performed their duties without self-interest have truly attained the state of liberation.

20. *Janaka and others indeed attained emancipation through action only. You should also work keeping in view the guidance of the world.*

See, even without giving up action, *Janaka* and others attained the bliss of salvation. Therefore, O Arjuna, have faith in action; it also helps in another way. If you perform work, others will receive guidance from it and will avoid pain in the long run. Even those who have become desireless and attained fulfilment, also have a duty to perform for the people (151-55). Just as a man having sight guides the blind by walking in front of them, so a wise person should display to the ignorant his duty by his own conduct. If he does not do so, how will an ignorant person come to know his duty and how will he understand the right path?

21. *Whatever a great man does, others also do the same; whatever standard he sets for himself the people follow that.*

Whatever the elders do, the others call it right conduct. All ordinary people follow their lead. Since this is a natural thing, no one should renounce action. Especially sages should continue to perform action.

22. *I have no task to perform, O Partha, whatsoever in the three worlds; nor have I anything to gain which I do not have. Still I continue to work.*

But, O Partha, why talk about others? Look to me, I too remain in the path of action (156-160). If you think that I perform my duty to avoid some calamity, or because I have to satisfy some desire of mine, you know that there is none else who is as perfect as myself, and that I have all the necessary means at my beck and call. I restored the dead son of my *Guru Sandipani*; and you were a witness to my prowess. Though I have no desire of my own, I remain active.

23. *If I did not continue unflinching in work at all, men all around, O Partha, will follow my path.*

As for myself, I do my duty as a person having desire does; but this I do only with one specific aim in view. It is this that all beings who depend upon me, do not go astray (161-165).

24. *These worlds will be ruined if I did not perform action, I should be the agent of mixture of castes and destroy these creatures.*

If I remain desireless and absorbed in myself, how will the people go about their business? If the people were to follow the path of wisdom and act accordingly, the affairs of the world will come to a stop. Hence even he who is capable and all-wise should not abandon action at any cost.

25. *As the ignorant attached to action work, O Bharata, so the wise should work without attachment, desiring the welfare of the world.*

Just as a person with desire performs action keeping in view its fruit, the desireless person should also devote himself to work in the same way. So Arjuna, I have been telling you repeatedly that the society has to be protected by all means (166-170). The wise man should follow the path of action and carry the people with him and should not let others think him different from them.

26. *Let him not unsettle the minds of the ignorant that cling to action. Rather the enlightened man should by working in the spirit of Yoga, encourage devotion to the works.*

Arjuna, how can the child that suckles its mother with difficulty, eat sweetmeats? So one should not give those to him. One should not disclose even in fun, freedom from action to one who is not even fit for action. The inactive person should be lead to the path of action by praising it and setting his own example before him. Thus if one performs work in this spirit for the guidance of the world, it does not lead to bondage (171-175). This is just like the actors in the role of king and queen, who do not think themselves to be male and female, but make others think them to be so.

27. *All actions are wrought by the qualities of nature in all cases. One whose mind is deluded by egoism thinks, 'I am the doer'.*

Arjuna, if we take another's burden on our head, shall we not bend down under that burden? Likewise, even though good and bad actions are produced by the qualities of nature, an ignorant person thinks himself to be the agent through delusion. One should not disclose this secret truth to a conceited person of narrow outlook. Arjuna, this is enough for the present. I shall now tell you what is beneficial to you. Listen attentively (176-180).

28. *But one who knows truly the division and functions of qualities, does not get attached thinking that the qualities (senses) act on qualities (objects)*

The modifications of *prakriti* from which actions spring do not affect the wise men at all. After relinquishing attachment they have gone beyond the qualities and actions and abide in their bodies as the witnesses of their actions. Although they remain in their bodies, they are not affected by the actions, as the sun, who gives light to the creatures, is not tainted by their actions.

29. *Those deluded by the qualities of nature become attached to their functions. Let not the person who knows all, unsettle the minds of those who know little.*

He who comes under the spell of *prakriti* and becomes deluded by its qualities becomes tainted by the actions. When senses remain active under the pull of the qualities, he perforce thinks himself to be responsible for his actions (181-185).

30. *Surrendering all actions to me with your thought on the Self and giving up desire and possessions fight free from mental fever.*

Therefore, perform your legitimate duties and dedicate them to me, all the time keeping your mind fixed on me. And you should not entertain the false pride that you are the agent of an action and will achieve a definite purpose. Give up attachment to the body, abandon all desires and then enjoy all sensuous pleasures as they come. Now take up the bow in hand, mount the chariot and resort to the heroic spirit with a calm mind. Establish your reputation, enhance the dignity of the warrior's duty and relieve this world from its oppressive burden (186-190). Now, O Partha, discard all doubt, pay attention to the war, and talk about nothing else.

31. *Men who follow this teaching of mine with faith and without caviling, are also released from actions.*

Those who accept with reverence this definite teaching of mine and practice it with faith, O Arjuna, know that they are actionless even while performing actions. It is, therefore, proper for you to perform the prescribed tasks.

32. *But as for those who cavil at this advice and fail to act upon it, know them to be deluded in all knowledge, witless and lost.*
33. *Even the man of knowledge acts according to his nature. (All) beings follow their nature; what can restraint achieve?*

Those who being subject to *prakriti* indulge the senses, cavil at my teaching and ignore it, they think it commonplace and disregarding it call it simply a rhetorical eulogy (*arthavada*) loquaciously (191-195). Know this without doubt that they are intoxicated with delusion, filled with the poison of sense-objects and sunk in the bog of ignorance. Just as a corpse has no use for a gem placed in its hand, or a blind person does not know for certain when it dawns, or as the crow derives no benefit from the rise of the moon, so the ignorant person does not like discriminating knowledge. Moreover O Arjuna, you should not converse with such persons who are not well-disposed to spiritual truth. They not only do not accept my teaching but also denounce it. Tell me, can the moth bear sun-light (196-200)? When the moth hugs the flame, it meets with sure death. In the same way self-indulgence leads to self-destruction. So a wise man should not pamper his senses even out of curiosity. Tell me, can one safely play with a serpent or keep company with a tiger? Can one possibly digest a dose of virulent poison? If fire breaks out while playing with it, it soon flares up beyond control. So if a person indulges his senses, he does not fare well. Truly speaking, O Arjuna, why should we toil to acquire the means of sensuous enjoyment for this body which is dependent on qualities (201-205)? Why should we pile up provisions with great effort and maintain this body from birth to death? Why should we exhaust ourselves to amass wealth and then nurture this body in utter neglect of our duty? And when this body which is the aggregate of five elements returns to them, where do we seek the reward of our exertion? Therefore, know that the maintenance of the body is open plunder; and so we should not pay much attention to it.

34. *Attachment and aversion are settled in every sense for its object. Let no one fall into their power, for they are one's enemies.*

It is true that when the senses are fed with their favourite objects, the mind finds true satisfaction. (206-210). But this is like the company of a gentle-looking thug, until they leave the border of the town. When a person beguiled by the sweet taste of poison develops a fondness for it, it proves fatal in the end. Desire, which is inherent in the senses, gives rise to a false hope of pleasure, even as the bait attached to the angle deceives the fish. The fish does not know that the angle which is concealed will take away its life; likewise if you entertain this desire and hope for sensuous enjoyment, you will land yourself in the fire of wrath (211-215). As the huntsman surrounds the deer through his trackers and drives it to a place where it can be killed, the senses act in the same way. So you should not get attached to them. O Partha, know that both desire and anger are ruinous to man. Do not, therefore, yield to them or even remember them. But do not let the happiness of your natural state get stifled.

35. *Better is one's duty, though destitute of merit, than another's duty well-performed. Better is death in the discharge of one's duty; another's duty is fraught with danger.*

Even if one's duty is difficult to perform, one's good lies in performing it. Even if another's duty seems better, one should discharge one's duty only (216-220). Tell me, should a *Brahmin* even though poor, partake of sweet dishes which are prepared in the house of a *Shudra*? Why

should a person do such an improper thing? Why should he long for unwarranted things and wish to acquire them? Think over it. After seeing the attractive white houses of others, should a person pull down his thatched cottage? Leaving this aside, even if one's wife is ugly, it is better to enjoy married life with her. So even if one's duty is difficult to perform, that alone conduces to happiness in the other world (221-225). Milk mixed with sugar is well-known for its sweetness; but how can a person suffering from worms take it? Even if one takes it, it will be due to his obstinacy; because it is not wholesome food for his condition. Therefore, a person should carefully think what is good for him, and not practise what is wrong for him, even though right for others. Even if he has to lose his life in performing his duty, it is the best course for him in both the worlds, so said Lord Krishna, God of all gods. Thereupon, Arjuna said, "Lord I have a request to make (226-230). I have listened with attention to all that you have said; but I have to ask you something which is bothering me."

Arjuna said:

36. *Then driven by what, O Krishna, does a person commit sin, even against his will, as though constrained by force?*

O Lord, how is it that even the wise fall from their state and take to the wrong path? How is it that those who know everything including the means of release go astray and take up another's duty? A blind person cannot distinguish between grain and husk; but why should a clear-sighted person be so deceived? Those who renounce worldly ties from others and do not attain satiety and even those who have retired to the forest return to the country (231-235). When they try to hide and escape from sin, they are forcibly drawn into the commission of sin. That which strikes us as disgusting overtakes us and dwells in us; and even when we try to escape from it, it pursues us relentlessly. There is a power, which compels us to commit a wrong thing. Tell me what is this inflexible power, so Partha said to Krishna.

The blessed Lord said:

37. *It is desire, it is anger, born of rajas quality all-consuming, most evil; know this to be the foe on earth.*

Listen now to what that Supreme Person who gives delight to the hearts of men and who is the object of desire of desireless *yogis* said. They are, he said, desire and anger, which lack even a trace of compassion; they are regarded as the equal of the god of death (236-240). They are like serpents that guard the treasure of knowledge, like tigers in the valley of sense-objects or cut-throats in the path of duty. They are like boulders in the fortress of the body, like enclosures in the parish of the senses, and they cause commotion through delusion etc. These passions possess the qualities of *rajas*, the root cause of demoniacal endowments, and are nurtured by ignorance. Though really born of *rajas* they are the favourites of *tamas*, which has gifted them their very essence, namely negligence and delusion. They receive great honour in the city of the god of death, as they are the sworn enemies of life (241-245). When their hunger becomes acute, the whole world is not sufficient to make a mouthful. They carry on their activities with the aid given by hope. When this hope closes her fist in sport, all the fourteen worlds are too small to fill it. Delusion is her favourite younger sister. When this delusion plays the children's game of cooking etc, she swallows all the three worlds, and passion

prospers in her service. Delusion pays respect to them and they have dealings with egoism, which makes the whole world dance round its fingers. They have scooped out the inside of truth and filled it with falsehood and they have given currency to hypocrisy in the world (246-250). They have stripped chaste peace, adorned the whore *Maya* and have ruined bands of good men through her. They have destroyed the might of discriminating knowledge, peeled the hide of dispassion and twisted the neck of tranquility. They have cut down the forest of contentment, pulled down the fortress of fortitude and uprooted and thrown away the saplings of joy. They have plucked out the shoots of knowledge, erased the alphabet of happiness, and kindled the three kinds of miseries in the heart of man. They have come into being with the body and are bound to the body and so they cannot be found even by god *Brahma* (251-255). They reside close to the intellect and live in the company of knowledge; and so they spread like an uncontrollable epidemic. They drown a person without water, burn him without fire, and devour him without even saying a word. They strike a person without a weapon, tie him up without a rope and laying a wager ruin the wise. They sink a person without mire, bind him without fetters, and as they dwell within, they are not like anything that we know.

38. *As fire is enveloped by smoke, as mirror is covered with dust, as the embryo is encased in the womb, so is (knowledge) obscured by it.*

Even as a serpent seeks the root of a sandal tree and encircles it, or the womb encloses the foetus (256-260), or as the sun becomes obscure without his light, or as there is no fire without smoke or a mirror without dirt, so we have not seen knowledge singly without this desire, just as the seed is born covered with husk,

39. *Wisdom is smothered, O Arjuna, by this constant enemy of the wise in the form of desire, which is insatiable like fire.*

Wisdom is enveloped by desire and wrath, and so it has become difficult to fathom. It is only by conquering desire that one can attain wisdom; but it is not possible to subdue passion and hatred. Whatever strength one acquires to destroy them, goes to their aid, even as fuel boosts fire (261-265).

40. *The senses, the mind and the intellect are said to be its seat; clouding the wisdom by these means, it deludes the embodied Self.*

So whatever means are employed to overcome them seem to help them. Even the *Hathayogis* are overcome by them. There is, however, only one way of escape from this trouble. I shall explain it to you, if you feel like pursuing it.

41. *Therefore, O best of Bharatas, restraining these senses at first, cast off this evil desire, destructive of wisdom and knowledge.*

42. *The senses are superior, but higher than the senses is the mind. Higher than the mind is the intellect, but higher than the intellect is he (i.e. the Self).*

43. *Thus knowing him to be higher than the intellect and controlling yourself by the Self, crush this desire, your unassailable foe.*

Their first habitation is in the senses from which all activity proceeds. You should, therefore,

3 : KARMAYOGA

bring your senses under control. Then your mind will cease to wander, and your intellect will escape from their clutches, and these evil ones will lose their support. Since the mirage cannot exist without the sun's rays so if they are banished from the heart, they will certainly cease (266-270). When desire and wrath are both extinguished you will attain the kingdom of God and enjoy supreme bliss. This union between the Self and God is the secret between teacher and disciple. When one remains steady in this state, one will never stray from it. *Sanjaya* said, "O King, listen, so said the prince of the perfect ones, the Lord of the goddess of wealth, the God of gods."

Now the Lord will relate an ancient tale, on hearing which Arjuna will ask a question. The worth and poetical flavour of that tale will delight the hearers (271-275). *Jnanadeva*, the disciple of *Nivrutti*, says, "Elders, sharpen your wits and then enjoy this conversation between Lord Krishna and Arjuna (276)."

