

# Hymn of Creation



From Rigveda  
10<sup>th</sup> Mandala, sukta 129

# **NASADIYA SUKTA OF RIG VEDA INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**

# Vedas

- Vedas are traditionally considered **revelations**
- These revelations are ancient (3,000 years?)
- Rig-Veda is the oldest and most revered
- It contains 1,028 hymns or verses which were committed to memory in olden days
- Revelations are not the result of thinking and experience. These lie outside the sphere of ordinary thinking
- Thus they need to be studied with great attention
- We need to meditate on them

# Hymn of Creation

- This presentation will look at one such revelation – the hymn from Rig Veda (10:129) which is about Pre-Creation and Creation of our universe
- The hymn is an expression of deep intuition of the Rishis set down in Seven Verses
- In my view it is an invitation for us to relive our beginnings and harness the enormous potentialities that lie dormant within us

# Rishis (ऋषि)

- The common image of a Rishi is that of a serious ascetic man with matted hair and sitting in a meditating posture
- By Rishi is meant inspired poet or sage, hymn singer, patriarchal sage. Nothing to do with matted hair
- Most of them were married and carried on usual duties including that of raising a family of which they eventually became the patriarchs. Many in India trace their family origins to a Rishi
- Some of them were strict ascetics with transcendental goals
- Sometimes they slipped

Rishi Vishvamitra, rejecting his child who came to be known as Shakuntala. Her son Bharata would found the country of Bharat or India



Painting by Raja Ravi Varma

# Hymn of Creation

- I believe that the hymn compares well with the modern theories of cosmogony and stands shoulder to shoulder with the best of them
- However, that is not the aim of my discussion
- This presentation is mostly my own reflections about this hymn. I have drawn some prose from a book, “Myths and Legends of India” by William Radice

# Hymn of Creation

- It is well known that truth can be arrived at in many ways. One such way is an intuitional method using meditation
- The conclusions arrived at are still valid even though no experiments were carried out
- In some way we can say that the Rishis of this hymn carried out a thought experiment
- One truth that will become obvious is the fact that the Rishi of this hymn did not posit a Creator



# Hymn of Creation

- We have to read the hymn, think about it, and meditate on it.
- Like a kaleidoscope, answers will keep flashing through our brain sometimes called sphota
- There is no final answer about the Origin of the Universe in these verses. They are meant to be reflected upon and meditated
- It is not necessary to compare this hymn with modern ideas of cosmogony. The hymn does not need validation. It stands ever ready to seed our mind with new and fertile thoughts

# Origin of Vedic Hymns

- There is a view of Cosmogony, in India which may be complementary to Creation verse
  - in the beginning there was a resonance (spanda), a vibration – vibration of the primordial substance
  - The resonance grew to be a Nada which is sound without sound. This is represented by the bindu of AUM

# Another theory of cosmogony

- Nada evolved into shabda or sound. The first sound of the universe was AUM
- AUM differentiated into various Vedic Hymns
- These further differentiated into human languages, always subject to error, misunderstanding, and confusion
- The expression that is closest to the first sound of the universe is thus AUM and then arose the sound of the Vedas and Vedic Hymns

Sacred Syllable consisting of A, U, M,  
and the Soundless bindu



**Waking state, dream state, deep sleep state, and the FOURTH (Turiya).  
AUM is the cosmic sound, the first sound of creation**

# Playing the Movie Backwards

- Modern scientists look at the sky. See stars and galaxies. Wonder how all this came about. They run the 'movie' backwards and come to a point in time (singularity). They called it big bang.
- Rishis of the Creation Hymn also ran the movie backwards but more than 3,000 years ago. They saw chaos (disorder) but no singularity

# Before Creation

- Rishis imagined a realm in which there was neither non-existence nor existence – yet there must have been a stirring in it, if out of that nothingness Creation could emerge.
- In the world we know, actors precede action, but before Creation, action must somehow have preceded the actors. It was like a stirring in an infinitely deep, bottomless ocean – yet there was no water and no ocean

# **NASADIYA SUKTA (RIG VEDA X, 129)**

## Then there was neither existence nor non-existence

नासदासीन्नो सदासीत्तदानीं नासीद्रजो नो व्योमा परो यत्।  
किमावरीवः कुह कस्य शर्मन्नम्भः किमासीद्गहनं गभीरम्॥  
१०.१२९.०१

There was no existence then. Neither was there non-existence. There was no air (matter, particle). There was no sky (space, sky) beyond it. What was concealed? (what did it cover?) Where was it? In whose keeping? Was there water? dense, and unfathomable (waters)?



# First Verse

Na Asat Aseet = there was no non-existent (non-being). You could not say it did not exist

Na Sat Aseet = there was no existent. You could not say it existed

Tadanim = Then. Time did not exist. Hence there was no then. Convention of speech. Better translation is as yet or before creation.

Na Aseet Rajaha = there was no air, no matter, no particles. No ethereal space

Na paro Vyoman = nor the ether, space, sky beyond. Para also means supreme absolute being, the universal soul.

Kim Avarivaha = what it covered , concealed it, surrounded it, enclosed it.

Was there a boundary? (the emergent was covered by the void)

Kuha = where

Kasya sharman = whose protection? Sheltered by whom?

Ambhaha kimaseet? Was there water, celestial waters, mystical waters (ambhas)

Gahanam gabheeram = Dense (opaque) and fathomless.

# Neither Existence Nor Non-Existence

- What was this state in the beginning
- The word 'void' may be appropriate here
- Void or Emptiness, not absence of substance but a state full of potentialities and not yet expressed
- The void which covered or concealed within it the wellspring of all that was to emerge

# Then There was neither death or ..

न मृत्युरासीदमृतं न तर्हि न रात्र्या अह्न आसीत्प्रकेतः।  
आनीदवातं स्वर्धया तदेकं तस्माद्धान्यन्न परः किं चनास ॥

१०.१२९.०२

There was neither death nor immortality then.

There was no distinguishing sign of night or of day.(there was neither day nor night)

That One (the undivided, undifferentiated, beyond life and death) breathed, windless, by its own power. (Some sign of activity was there)

Other than that (consciousness?) there was nothing beyond. (there was no other)

# Second Verse

Tarhi Na Mrityuh asept: Then death did not exist

Na Amritam = no immortality

Tarhi = then, at that moment

Na Ratriya ahna asept Praketaha = no distinction between night and day existed. There was no day or night

Praketaha = appearance, sight, division of night and day

Tadekam = that One not meaning God or Creator. But the whole existence-non existence taken as one entity

Anid Avatam = Breathed windless

Svadhaya = by his (Its) own inherent power

Tasmat = from that

dha= for ha

Anyan = Other than that

Parah = beyond

Kin = any

Cha naasa = dis not exist

# Neither Mortality nor Immortality

- Mrityu or mortality is for us is an end of things and perhaps beginning of the new
- That did not exist then.
- There was no immortality then. Immortality, after all, is absence of mortality
- Thus there was no end nor beginning of things then
- The great division that we know – night and day – did not exist then. Time did not exist. The word ‘then’ is used as a convention of speech. It is concept of time applied retrospectively

# That One Breathed

- Who is that One?
- Breathing connotes life (in our view). So the chaos was not totally inert. There was some activity. There was “breathing”, there was “life”, there was stirring
- “This One” was the totality of the original chaos – the existence-nonexistence – there was no Other
- Everything that was to emerge was all there. There was nothing beyond

# Darkness was hidden by darkness

तम आसीत्तमसा गूळ्हमग्रेऽप्रकेतं सलिलं सर्वमा इदम्।  
तुच्छयेनाभवपिहितं यदासीत्तपसस्तन्महिनाजायतैकम्॥  
१०.१२९.०३

In the beginning darkness was hidden by darkness;  
all this was undifferentiated surge (waters were not divided  
into streams, rivers, lakes, oceans etc.).

That which was coming into being – emerging (material  
universe?) was covered with emptiness (void), that One  
emerged through the power of heat.

*The emergent rose out of heat. The modern cosmology also admits  
tremendous heat in the beginning. Light did not emerge till 400,000  
years after big bang*

# Third Verse

Tama = darkness

Aseet = was

Tamasa = by darkness

Goolan = hidden

Agre = in the beginning

Apraketa = unrecognizable

Salilam = surging, flowing, fluctuating, flood, water

Tucchya = void, emptiness

Abhu = coming into being

Aphihitam = covered, concealed

Yad aseet = what existed

Tapasaha = from heat

Mahina = by the power

Ajayata = was born

Tat Ekam = the One



# Darkness was Concealed by Darkness

- Darkness we know was hidden by another darkness we do not know or secret was hidden within another Secret
- All this was undifferentiated water. This undifferentiated water was to become the source of the emergent universe
- Thales, a Greek philosopher before Socrates, held the view that water was the first principle out of which matter evolved. Kalidasa says that water was the first creation of the Creator

# That Which Was to Emerge

- That which was about to emerge (Ābhu) was enveloped by the void. First appearance of matter
- That one (still enveloped by the void) emerged by the power of Heat
- We now have the void and the emergent One who or which was to become all things
- Non-entity (the void) concealed the entity (one who emerged from the power of heat)

# The One Emerged From Heat

- This One obviously is the same Primordial One who breathed windless. The one who breathed windless was still pre-emergent
- This One emerged out of the power of Heat generated within the chaos. It emerged from the undifferentiated surge of primordial liquid
- Heat (Tapas) was thus the first formative or transformative power
- From here on the evolution of the Universe would proceed

# Tapas

- Tapas comes from the verb Tap. This means heat up, warm, consume. Tapas is the heat before the light. It is the cause of light. It is radiant energy that lights up the world
- It is referred to as Bha or Bhas or Bharga
- In Katha Upanishad the disciple asks: “when I see It, will It be self luminous”?
- The Teacher replies; “ there the sun does not shine, nor the moon nor the stars”.

# Radiance

- “There these lightnings do not shine. What to say of this fire? This shining all shine. It is Its radiance that makes all this shine.”
- Tapas is that radiance, that heat that makes the sun, stars, the lightning, the fire shine, that is, to come alive. It is the primal cosmic energy that has set into motion, the cosmic play .
- It is the same radiance, which is higher than of the sun of our world, to whom we pray in Gayatri Mantra. Where we say ‘we meditate upon that which is higher than the radiance of the sun (savitur varenyam)

It is that brilliance that makes all these  
shine

न तत्र सूर्यो भाति न चन्द्रतारकं  
नेमा विद्युतो भान्ति कुतोऽयमग्निः ।  
तमेव भान्तमनुभाति सर्वं  
तस्य भासा सर्वमिदं विभाति ॥ १५ ॥

Katha Upanishad: II, 2,15

# Gayatri Mantra

Rg-Veda III.62.10

Rishi: Vishvamitra

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यम्

भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि

धियो योनः प्रचोदधात्

# Gayatri

- Savitr = stimulator, rouser, vivifier. Divine power and vivifying power of the sun
- Bhargas = radiance, luster, splendor
- Dhimahi = we hold it in our thoughts. We illuminate our thoughts with that radiance
- Dhiyaha, yaha, naha = that which is our thoughts, our prayers, our meditations, perceptions.
- Prachodayat = may that drive on, impel, incite, urge, excite



# Desire Came Upon ...

कामस्तदग्रे समवर्तताधि मनसो रेतः प्रथमं यदासीत्।  
सतो बन्धुमसति निरविन्दन्हृदि प्रतीष्या कवयो  
मनीषा ॥ १०.१२९.०४

In the beginning Desire came over ( surrounded, enclosed, emerged). Desire was the first seed of mind. (no humans or human mind. Desire and mind are coeval with creation. This mind is the universal mind) They found, the Poets seeking (striving) in their heart with wisdom, uncovered the cause of existence in non-existence

A seed sprouts and produces more seeds. Cycle of continuity is established. But the seed was born out of emptiness

# Fourth Verse

Kama = Desire

Agre = in the beginning

Samavartata = Arose, originated, enveloped, surrounded

Adhi = over

In the beginning, at the outset, desire arose

Manasaha – of the mind

Retas = seed, flow, stream

Prathamam = original, primary

Yadaseet = what existed

This was the primary seed of the mind

Sato banhdum asati niravindan = they found (uncovered) the connection of the existent in the non-existent

Hridi = in their hearts

Pratishya = searching,

Kavayaha = poets

Maneesha = with wisdom

# In the beginning Desire arose

- Desire enveloped it (the One) in the beginning
- Desire was the first seed of the mind
- Desire, the seed, arose from the void which surrounded the One who was born of heat
- Thus the poets found the origin of the existent in the non-existent – mind had no existence but nevertheless it became the seed of things to emerge

# Kama ...

Kama means desire, love, affection, longing, wish etc.

Kama here in this hymn is the causeless cause. It is an effect without a cause. It is a longing that came over, enveloped that One who breathed windless. That One is not an entity, not a person, not God, not even the Creator.

# Kama or Desire

- Both the Breather and the Desire arose from those waters which were dense and deep (gahanam, gabhiram), which had no distinguishing features (apraketa) – truly a primordial soup. Those waters (plasma) held the secret of evolution of the universe. The Poet says that the seed of existent is in the non-existent (brain and mind for example).

## Desire Came Upon ...

“Desire came upon that One in the beginning.”

Who felt the desire? There was no human to feel the desire. Desire is primal, predating the appearance of life. Desire is the primal attractive force of creation.

# Kama

- From the chaos, things, beings appear and life appears. Desire is the force behind it. They found the connection between the potential and the actual, between what is and what is not – they found the connecting link which is Desire.

# Desire

What is desire at this stage of the universe? If desire is longing for the other, there was no other. Things had to solidify from the undifferentiated waters, plasma, soup. Particles had to coalesce. What was needed was forces of attraction. This would bring together indifferent particles. The quarks to form The protons and the neutrons; and the electrons had to come together to form matter, stars, and galaxies. Force of attraction lies at the root.



# Kama in the beginning

- Without force of attraction they would not come together. Thus Kama here would imply force of attraction. This is not the human emotion of desire, sexual desire in particular

# Kama in the beginning

- But our frame of reference is our own mind. the language we use does not accommodate the dynamics of the very beginnings – before our mind was born.
- We have to use the words we can understand. From that point of view the use of the word Kama makes much sense. This is the unseen force that shapes the universe we see.

# Desire, the first seed of mind

- Poets (sage, seer, prophet, wise man called Kavi) have some inkling of this, of their poems – the creative action of their poems – begins with a stirring that lies beyond thought. A seed is sown in the mind of a poet, a seed that is the desire for a poem. The seed seems to come from nowhere, and the depths, the watery depths of the mind of a poet, seem not to exist anywhere either. Maybe the depths within which the desire for Creation first stirred were like the bottomless mind of a poet.
- Mind, whose mind? Not human mind surely. Mind existed before humans. Mind is coeval with creation.

# There Were Seed Placers

तिरश्चीनो विततो रश्मिरेषामधः स्विदासी३दुपरि  
स्विदासी३त्।





रेतोधा आसन्महिमान आसन्स्वधा अवस्तात्प्रयतिः  
परस्तात्॥ १०.१२९.०५

Their cord, this ray was extended across. Was there below? Was there above? There were seed-placers (starters of motion), there were powers. There was energy beneath (before), there was effort, exertion, intention above (after). (5)

# Fifth Verse

- Tiraschino = across, transverse, horizontal
- Vitato = drawn, extended, spread out (the fabric of space)
- Rashmi esam = their cord, string, rope, ray of light, beam.
- Adha svidasit, upari svidasit = what was below and was above.
- Retodha asan = there were seed givers
- Mahimana asan = there were powers
- Svadha = inherent power, the power the One used who breathing windless
- Avastat = below, before (in time)
- Prayati = intention, will, exertion
- Parastat = afterwards, later

# Evolving of the Universe

- Nonexistence-existence, dense unfathomable waters  No death or immortality, no time, one who breathed windless, no other  Darkness hidden by darkness, waters without boundary, emergent one was born of Tapas  desire enveloped that one, the first seed of the mind. Existent from the nonexistent  cord was stretched across, above and below, Svadha and Prayati

# Their Cord Was Extended Across

- “Their cord was extended across”. Who is they whose cord was extended across?
- “They” are the powers (mahimana). The fabric (ray, cord) in space had been formed and stretched across.
- Was there above and below? Divisions of space and time began
- This is the beginning of Creation as we know it

# Their Cord Was Extended Across

- From now there would be here and there. Above and below. There would be all the directions. Also, there would be divisions of time. Now and then, past and future. The Space-Time of modern physics had come into existence. Now on, measurements of time and space would begin.



# There were seed-placers: there were powers

- There were begetters. These are not persons or animals. These are begetting powers – origin of origins
- Everything in our universe has an origin – a seed
- Seed transforms from something dormant into something of form and energy
- These seeds – these origins of things and beings emerged
- The seed needs to be energized to become what it is programmed to become. Those powers were also there

# न्स्वधा अवस्तात्प्रयतिः परस्तात्॥

- There are many interpretations of this hymn
- My interpretation is
  - Powers below (Svadha) represent the vast store of Potential Energy in the Universe. This will not be useful unless converted into Kinetic Energy
  - Conversion needs a stimulus, a spark. This is the Prayati

# आसन्स्वधा अवस्तात्प्रयतिः परस्तात्॥



Vishnu the holder, the repository of all energy of the universe is resting and dreaming. The powers that be, are in a potential form. The potential has to be made kinetic as is done by Laxmi massaging Vishnu's feet. Vishnu is Svadha (inherent, potential energy) and Laxmi is Prayati (stimulus, spark, intention, will) starting the process of creation. We are the dream of Brahma who is the dream of Vishnu. We are thus dream of a dream.

# Avalanche



Potential energy resides in the accumulated snow on a mountain. A small disturbance will set off an avalanche. An example of Svadha and Prayati

# Nuclear Explosion



Nuclear energy lies dormant (Svadha) in a potential form. A trigger (Prayati) releases the enormous energy

# Before Creation

- Before Creation there were no points or places; there were no distances or dimensions; no above or below. There were no ties or bonds; no measurements or limits. But somehow, when Creation began, limits were introduced.

# Before Creation

- Maybe at the very beginning – as the first step towards Creation, before energy started, before the seed burst into fire – a cord was stretched, a cord separating yet uniting, the first limitation in a realm that had no limits.
- Henceforth, above and below, here and there, left and right were possible; and from those first limits the other limits of the universe sprang – dark and light, past and future, life and death, death and immortality, earth and heaven.

# Who knows for certain

को अद्धा वेद क इह प्र वोचत्कुत आजाता कुत इयं  
विसृष्टिः।

अर्वाग्देवा अस्य विसर्जनेनाथा को वेद यत आबभूव ॥

१०.१२९.०६

Who knows for certain? Who here will declare? Who here will proclaim how this arose or came to be, from where was this creation? The gods came afterwards, after this came into existence (creation, emerged). Hence who knows how this came into existence



# Sixth Verse

Ko = who

Addha = Truly, Certainly

Veda = Knows, Knew

Ka iha = who here

Pravochat – Proclaim, expose, Propound,

Kuta Ajata = from where did it arise or was born

Kuta iyam visrasthih = from where is this creation

Arvag = after, on this side.

Deva = gods

Asya = of this

Visarjanena = from release, from sending forth

Atha – thus

Ko veda = who knows

Yata ababhava = how, from where it came to be

# Before Creation

- But what came before everything? What came before the gods? What came before the creation itself? The gods have made many things, but they did not make Creation itself, any more than the men and women who engender new life have created the power to make life.

He knows but perhaps He knows not

इयं विसृष्टिर्यत आबभूव यदि वा दधे यदि वा न।  
यो अस्याध्यक्षः परमे व्योमन्सो अङ्ग वेद यदि  
वा न वेद ॥ १०.१२९.०७

This creation (letting go, letting flow). How this came to be? How did this occur? From where did this happen? Perhaps it held itself (coalesced as nucleosynthesis in modern cosmology), it formed itself. Or perhaps not. (was there an agent creating this universe? Was there an agency of God, Creator etc.). He who presides, over there in the yonder space, verily he knows (indeed, truly). Or perhaps he knows not

# Seventh Verse





- Iyam visrashtih = this creation
- Yata ababhava = from where it came to be
- Yadi va dadhe = perhaps it formed itself. It coalesced into creation
- Yadi va na = perhaps not
- Yo asya adhyakshaha = he who is the eye witness
- Parame vyoman = in the space beyond, heaven beyond
- So anga veda = he truly knows
- Yadi va na veda = perhaps he does not know

# Before Creation

- Many stories say that the gods created the world and the universe, but that cannot be so, for the gods themselves came after the Creation. May be the One who looks down on the whole of Creation and knows how it all began; or may be even he doesn't know.

**THE HYMN – CONCLUDING  
REMARKS**

# Evolving of the Universe

- Nonexistence-existence, dense unfathomable waters  No death or immortality, no time, one who breathed windless, no other  Darkness hidden by darkness, waters without boundary, emergent one was born of Tapas  desire enveloped that one, the first seed of the mind. Existent from the nonexistent  cord was stretched across, above and below, Svadha and Prayati

# Evolving of the Universe

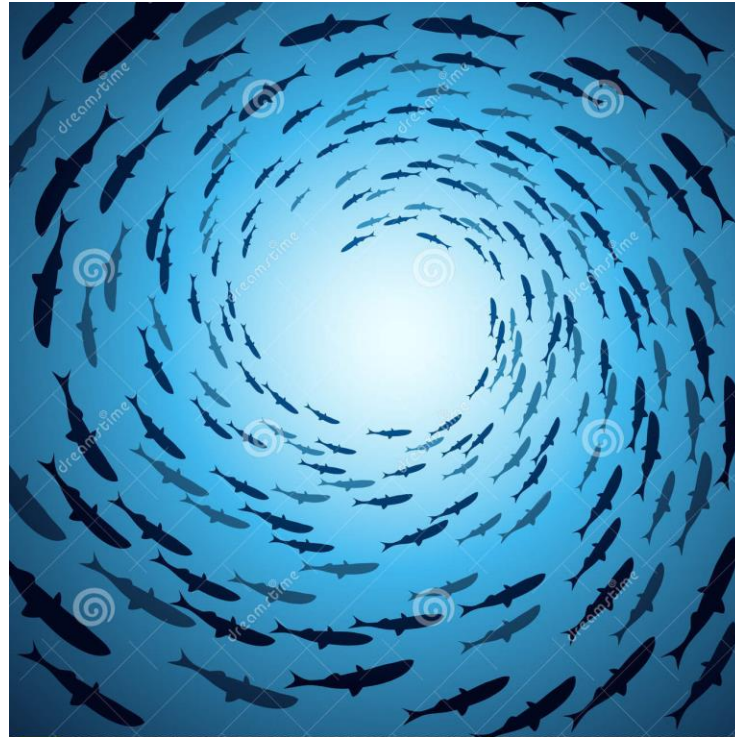
- Evolved without a creator, supervisor. No one knows for certain, no one can proclaim. Gods do not know. Did it form itself, no one knows – even the one high above in the heavens



# Hymn of Creation

- What the Rishi saw was a bottom up universe arising out of chaos and self-arranging into an orderly entity – chaos to cosmos
- There is no suggestion of a top-down process involving a Creator ordering things – one sitting high above in the heavens
- The hymn is short and succinct
- All the Abrahamic religions believe in a creator

Our Universe is an Emergent phenomenon. It is a bottom-up process.



Download from  
Dreamstime.com  
This watermarked image is for previewing purposes only.

31884314  
Elmar1917 | Dreamstime.com

School of fish self-arranged. Example of emergent process

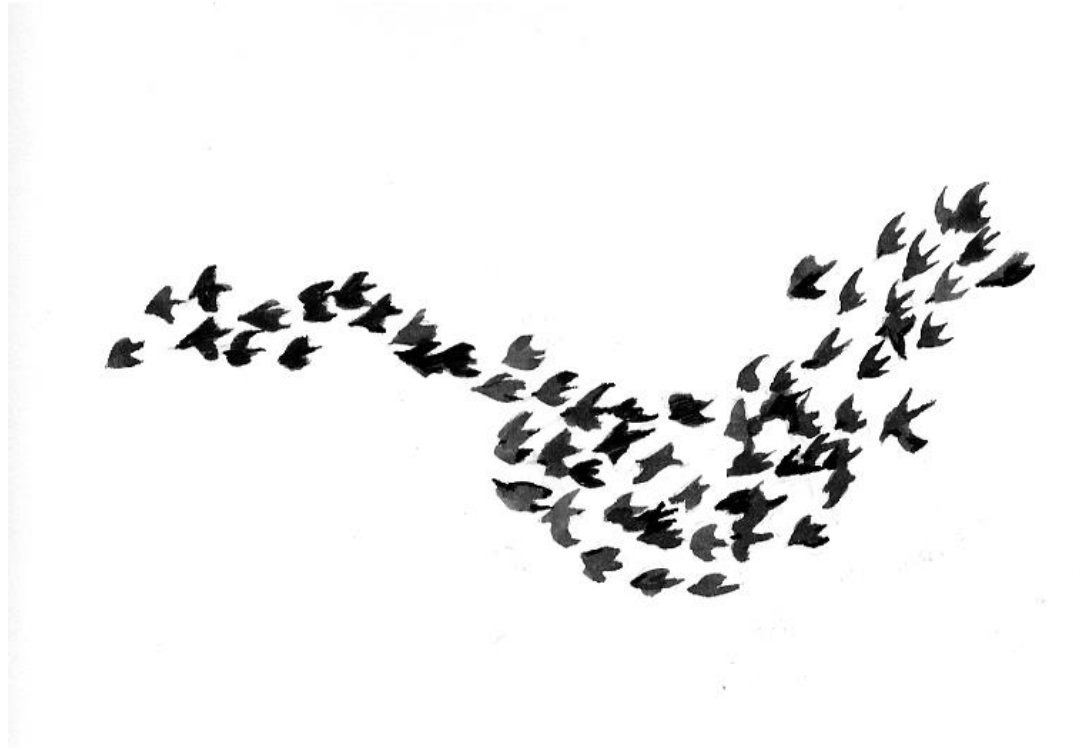
Our Universe is an Emergent phenomenon. It is a bottom-up process.



www.shutterstock.com · 137049056

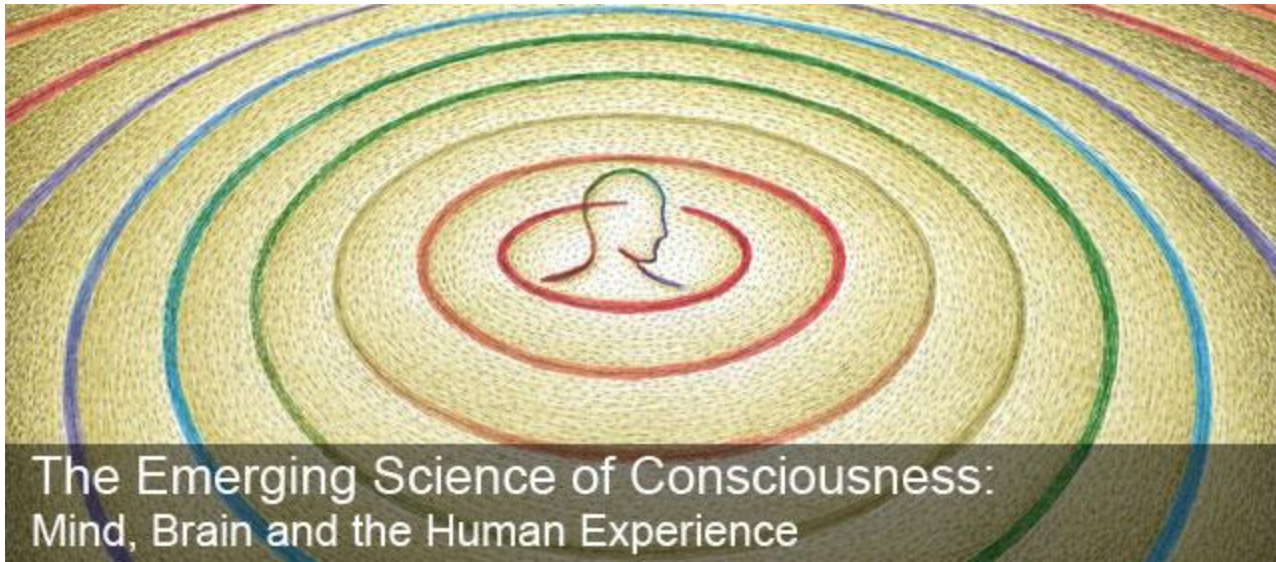
Pattern of sand in a desert is a self-arranged process. Example of emergent process

Our Universe is an Emergent phenomenon. It is a bottom-up process



Pattern of flock of birds is a self-arranged process . Example of emergent process

Our Universe is an Emergent phenomenon. It is a bottom-up process



Brain is a complex structure (enchanted loom) of billions of nerve cells. Intelligence is an emergent property and cannot be predicted by looking at the structure of the brain

# Self-Ordered Balls of Algae



Green Balls of Algae on Sydney's  
Dee Why beach in Australia

# My Thoughts About This Hymn

- The hymn is not about events that happened long ago and far away. It is about here and now. It is not a story or a theory but a view of creation as we can experience it
- The original chaos, the Tapas which is the origin of material things, the desire which envelopes all things, the non-existent as the cause of existent, Svadha and Prayati are the basis of our very existence

# My Thoughts About This Hymn

- We relive creation every day, every moment of our life. Creation is an active and ongoing process. There is continuity in it
- We are not outside the creation looking in on it. We are embedded in it. We walk, talk, and live in that creation



# My Thoughts About This Hymn

- Mandukya Upanishad says that every day we go through four stages of consciousness – waking, dreaming, deep sleep, and the **fourth**
- All these stages can be represented by the symbol A, U, M, and the Bindu
- Our creative thoughts come from our dreams, deep sleep, and from the **fourth**. They take shape in our waking state.

# My Thoughts About This Hymn

- In waking state we act in the created universe
- In dreaming state we create our own universe
- In deep sleep we lose identity of ourselves

# My Thoughts About This Hymn

- In the fourth we touch the undifferentiated state mentioned in the first mantra of this hymn – the original state of nonexistence-existence and the waters द्गहनं गभीरम्
- Thus our aim in reading this hymn is to relive the moments of our coming to be and to touch Reality behind all realities – chaos to cosmos

# My Thoughts About This Hymn

- I believe it is possible to touch the wellspring of our creative abilities by understanding this hymn at a deeper intuitive level, and realize
- सतो बन्धुमसति निरविन्दन्हृदि प्रतीष्या  
कवयो मनीषा

# My Thoughts About This Hymn

- There are no external powers
- There is the inherent power – Svadha and
- There is the stimulus – Prayati
- Both are built into the architecture of Creation and hence in ourselves
- It is Self Power all the way. Lamp unto ourselves

# My Thoughts About This Hymn

- The hymn is a segue to our deeper creative consciousness where we can uncover our dormant potentialities
- If we receive the hymn in its proper spirit, everyday-life may take on a new meaning – a transformation within us, the sphota

**THE END**



# THE STORY OF (OR BEFORE) CREATION

*Myths & Legends of India*

*Selected, retold, and introduced by William  
Radice in a book entitled, Myths & Legends of  
India*



# KARMA IN THE BHAGAVAD-GITA

Karma and Karma Yoga

Presented by

Sachidananda Shastri

# Scriptures

- Hindu religion rests on three foundational scriptures – Vedas, Bhagavad-Gita, and Brahmasutras
- Every scripture has two aspects:
  - One aspect is temporary and belongs to the time and place the scripture was written. The imagery, the accent and psychological idioms belong to that era
  - Second aspect concerns with the permanent truths which can be lived and relived in any era. So each age or era has to validate and revalidate the fundamental truths enunciated in the scripture

# Scriptures

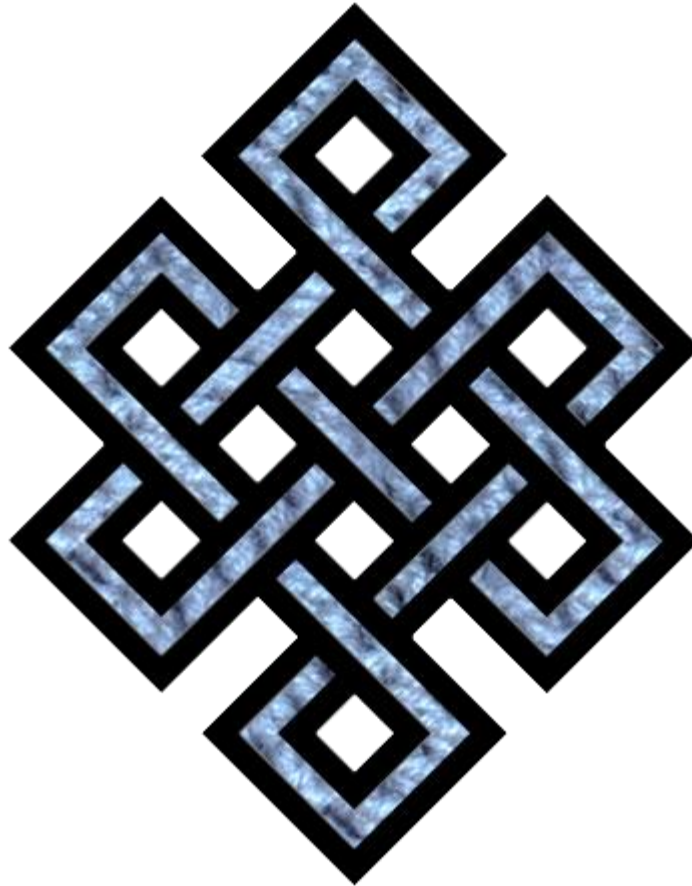
- We are in such an era at the present time
- Centuries have passed since the writing of the Gita. Now we need to examine the relevance of the Gita to our present day world
- Are scriptures meaningful in this day and age?
  - Those religions that perceive the scriptures cast in stone and thus inflexible will inevitably fail
  - Those scriptures which permit reexamination and allow us to re-enunciate the truths contained therein and relive those truths will succeed and survive. Hindu scriptures belong to this category

# Scriptures

- My purpose in presenting this talk is to search the Gita for its teachings on the subject of Karma and see for ourselves if the teachings hold true in the modern age – the Twenty-First Century.
- I have chosen some verses that address this topic – Karma
- First, what is meant by Karma and its inevitable accompaniment, Phala

# Karma and Phala – Two Pivotal Words

- Karman = Duty is the predominant meaning in the Gita. It also means Act, action, performance, occupation, obligation, any religious rite or act, as originating in the hope of future recompense. (one common misuse is to indicate Fate)
  - Phala = fruit, consequence, effect, result, retribution (good or bad), gain or loss, reward or punishment, advantage or disadvantage, benefit, enjoyment, end of an action
- (Every Karma has its Phala. Actions have consequences. Karma and Phala (karmaphala) is a continuous chain unbroken from the beginning of time.)



## Endless Knot of Karma

Action-reaction: Reaction becomes action which has a reaction and so on without end

# Interconnectedness (Jain Temple in Rajasthan)

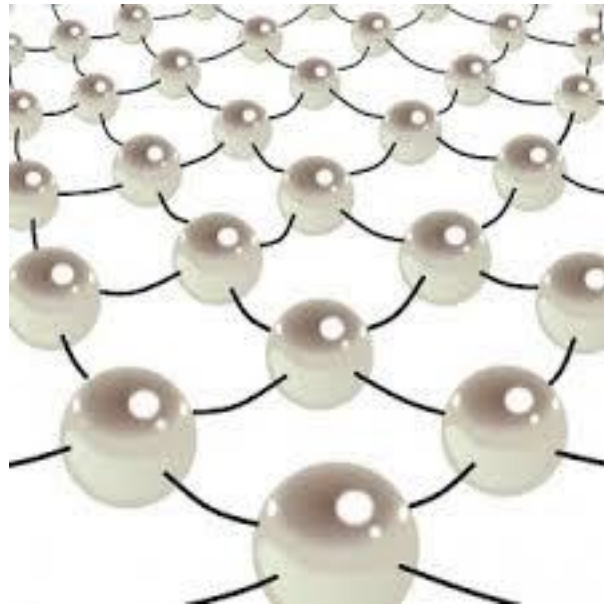


# Prayer Wheel with Endless Knot (Nepal)





# Indra Jala – Net of Indra



Each diamond in the net reflects all other diamonds and is itself reflected in all the others

# The secular and the Transcendental

- We live in a dual world – the world of here and now and the other world of transcendental reality. (Flesh and spirit)

# The secular and the Transcendental

- All secular happenings (actions) have a transcendental aspect to them. Without understanding this truth, our minds get confused. Arjuna was looking only at the secular aspect. The teacher shows him the transcendental
- In the first chapter, Arjuna advances arguments against fighting and throws away his bow already strung with arrow. Krishna smiles and tells him that all his lamentation is due to Moha or delusion

# The secular and the Transcendental

Secular = worldly ; Transcendental = transcending worldly knowledge

- It is hard to live in our secular world and be mindful of the transcendental
- Arjuna (like most of us) does not see it. The Teacher points it out to him
- The dividing line between them is very thin and imperceptible
- The dividing line is like the sharp edge of a razor

# The secular and the Transcendental

क्षुरस्य धारा निशिता दुरत्यया  
दुर्गं पथस्तत्कवयो वदन्ति ॥ १४ ॥

This path is as the sharp edge of a razor. It is impassable. This path is difficult to tread. So say the wise. (Katha Upanishad: II,2,18).

# Karma is what survives

- In Brihadaranyaka Upanishad; 3, 2, 13 there is a dialogue between Yajnavalkya and one Artabhaga, about what remains when a man dies and his bodily remains are absorbed in the elements of nature. After a long discussion they came to the conclusion that Karma is what survives a man after his death. Karma (not the psyche) is the final residue which manifests in the next birth

# What is karma?

- In the philosophy called Purvamimamsa it is claimed that karma is the only all-powerful agency for man's origin, growth, and prosperity

# KARMA IN THE GITA



# Karma in Bhagavad-Gita

- Karma is praised and advised in the book
- Gita is not a book for avoiding war, making peace, preventing war, or even making war. It is about duty
- Arjuna is told to perform his duty without regard to the fruits of his work – even if it involves killing his ‘own people’, svajana
- Cosmic scheme is infinite and known only to God (the transcendental) or the divine in each of us and hence work must be done with ‘heart within and God overhead.’

# Karma is complex in origin

- This presentation is about Action or Karma
- As a foundation of that discussion it is important to remember that all actions are complex due to the innumerable interactions within the nervous system and the environment
- Intention to act is influenced by the personality of the actor: His or her thoughts, emotions, memory, expectations and so on



“I Shall Not Fight.”

# I Shall Not Fight

सञ्जय उवाच ।

एवमुक्त्वा हृषीकेशं गुडाकेशः परन्तपः ।

न योत्स्य इति गोविन्दमुक्त्वा तूष्णीं बभूव ह ॥ २-९ ॥

Thus having addressed Krishna (Hrishiksha, Lord of the senses), Arjuna (Gudakesha, thick haired one), the conqueror of foes, said to Govinda “ I shall not fight” and then he fell silent.

*Arjuna has made a decision not to act. He will be told that this, inaction, is not an option. Decision not to act is itself an act.*

# Desiring other results

- You are shrinking from the results of your works, you desire other results, and turn away from your right path in life because it does not lead you to them. But this idea of works and their results, desire of result as the motive, the work as a means for the satisfaction of desire, is the bondage of the confused who know not what works are, nor their true source, nor their real operation, nor their high utility.

*Based on commentary by Sri Aurobindo*

# You Will Fight

- The Lord smiles and says that all of Arjuna's doubts and objections are due to his mind being deluded, confused - Moha

# Your Own Nature Will Make You Fight

यदहंकारमाश्रित्य न योत्स्य इति मन्यसे ।

मिथ्यैष व्यवसायस्ते प्रकृतिस्त्वां नियोक्ष्यति ॥ १८-५९ ॥

Resorting to your ego-sense you are thinking that you will not fight. This resolve of yours is wrong. Because your own nature (Kshatriya) will impel you to fight. (18:59)

Prakriti, one's nature, impels or compels one to act. Best plan is to cooperate with these natural tendencies and regulate the acts with Buddhi Yoga – discipline of intelligence

# Bound By Your Own Karma ..

स्वभावजेन कौन्तेय निबद्धः स्वेन कर्मणा ।

कर्तुं नेच्छसि यन्मोहात्करिष्यस्यवशोपि तत् ॥ १८-६० ॥

O Son of Kunti, you are bound by your own nature and by your own Karma. That action which you do not wish to undertake due to confusion of mind, you will perform as if you have no control over it. (18:60)

By nature (svabhava) Arjuna is a warrior. That is in his blood. To feel a sense of fulfillment he has to fight, participate in the war. The Lord repeatedly tells Arjuna that all his doubts are due to delusions (mistaken belief, Moha) of his mind. Karma produces our nature (svabhava) and in turn is produced by it. One has to be aware of the circular nature of Karma



# Therefore, Rise, Stand Up

तस्मात्त्वमुत्तिष्ठ यशो लभस्व

जित्वा शत्रून् भुङ्क्ष्व राज्यं समृद्धम् ।

मयैवैते निहताः पूर्वमेव

निमित्तमात्रं भव सव्यसाचिन् ॥ ११-३३ ॥

Therefore, stand up and obtain glory by slaying your enemies (no svajana or svabandhava). Enjoy a kingdom of plenty. These have been slain by me already. O Savyasachin (ambidextrous), be you merely the instrument. (11-33)

Cosmic scheme is known only to God. We are the mere instruments

# Slay Drona, Bhishma, and Others

द्रोणं च भीष्मं च जयद्रथं च  
कर्णं तथान्यानपि योधवीरान् ।  
मया हतांस्त्वं जहि मा व्यथिष्ठा  
युध्यस्व जेतासि रणे सपत्नान् ॥ ११-३४ ॥

Slay, slay without anguish, sense of guilt, Drona, Bhishma, Jayadratha (prince of lunar race, prince of Sindh; son-in-law of Dhritarashtra and abductor of Draupadi) and Karna too and all other warriors. They have been slain by me already. Fight. You will defeat (conquer) your enemy (sapatna) in this battle. (11-34)

**KARMA, WHAT IS IT?**

# That is known as Karma

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

अक्षरं ब्रह्म परमं स्वभावोऽध्यात्ममुच्यते ।

भूतभावोद्भवकरो विसर्गः कर्मसंज्ञितः ॥ ८-३ ॥

The Blessed Lord Spoke:

Brahma is the imperishable, Brahma is Supreme (supracosmic). One's nature (one's self) is called Svabhava (atman). The act of sending forth (creation), which is the cause of origin of all existence is known as Karma (8-3)

Here Karma is defined as the creative power. While Prakriti is the repository of all material universe, Karma is the inciting power which sets Prakriti in Motion, to produce the multiple forms of the cosmos. Origin of this power is Brahman - Atman

# Karma, The Creative Principle

- Karma is the creative force (visarga) that brings beings into existence – *Radhakrishnan*
- Karma is not the creator of beings but is the force behind that creation
- One could write it thus
- Brahman – Atman – Karma (creative force) – Prakriti – creation of ‘things’ and beings etc.

**THREE TYPES OF KARMA (ACTION) AND  
THREE TYPES OF KARTA (ACTOR)**

# Actor and Action

- Of course there is no action without the actor
- Actor and action are intertwined
- As is the actor so is the action
- As is the action – Karma – so is the result – Phala
- There are three classes of actors and three kinds of action

# This action is Sattvic

नियतं सङ्गरहितमरागद्वेषतः कृतम् ।

अफलप्रेप्सुना कर्म यत्तत्सात्त्विकमुच्यते ॥ १८-२३ ॥

Sattvic action is controlled, free from attachment, performed without desire or hate, with no wish to obtain fruit. (18-23)



# This Actor is Sattvic

मुक्तसङ्गोऽनहंवादी धृत्युत्साहसमन्वितः ।

सिद्धयसिद्धयोर्निर्विकारः कर्ता सात्त्विक उच्यते ॥ १८-२६ ॥

Such an actor is said to be of the Sattvic kind: free of attachment, free from egoism, accompanied by steadfastness (courage) and resolution (effort, power, perseverance), unperturbed (unchanged, unmodified) in success or failure.

## This action is Rajasic

यत्तु कामेप्सुना कर्म साहंकारेण वा पुनः ।

क्रियते बहुलायासं तद्राजसमुदाहृतम् ॥ १८-२४ ॥

But that action which is performed with a wish to obtain desires, with selfishness, or again with much effort (trouble, labor), is declared to be Rajasic (18-24)

# Actor of Rajasic Kind

रागी कर्मफलप्रेप्सुर्लुब्धो हिंसात्मकोऽशुचिः ।

हर्षशोकान्वितः कर्ता राजसः परिकीर्तितः ॥ १८-२७ ॥

This actor is said to be of the Rajasic kind (this actor is Rajasic) : passionate, desiring the fruit of action, greedy (avaricious), violent natured (bent on injury), impure, filled with joy and sorrow (18-27)

# This Action is Tamasic

अनुबन्धं क्षयं हिंसामनपेक्ष्य च पौरुषम् ।  
मोहादारभ्यते कर्म यत्तत्तामसमुच्यते ॥ १८-२५ ॥

That action which is undertaken because of delusion (mohat), disregarding consequences (inevitable result) of bondage, loss or injury to others, as well as one's own strength, such action is said to be Tamasic (18-25)

# Actor of Tamasic Kind

अयुक्तः प्राकृतः स्तब्धः शठो नैष्कृतिकोऽलसः ।

विषादी दीर्घसूत्री च कर्ता तामस उच्यते ॥ १८-२८ ॥

Undisciplined, vulgar (ostentatious, vain), obstinate, wicked (false, deceitful), dishonest, lazy (idle, indolent), despondent (desperate, depressed), dilatory (procrastinating), such an actor is said to be Tamasic (18-28)

**TO WORK ALONE THOU HAST RIGHT  
(MOST FAMOUS VERSE IN THE GITA)**

# To Work Alone Thou Hast Right ..

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन ।

मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥ २-४७ ॥

To work alone you have right (control, jurisdiction) but you have no right to the fruits thereof. Do not hanker after the result of action. Do not indulge in inaction.(2-47)

*(Adhikara = privilege, ownership, claim, right especially to do sacrifice, prerogative, jurisdiction, authority. Your privilege is to do action over which you have right, authority etc. the fruits of your action are not part of your authority. Phala = fruit, consequence, result, retribution – good or bad, gain or loss, reward or punishment, advantage or disadvantage. Less influence we exert on action more pure will be the result. Desire for fruit is a distraction.)*

# Adhikara

- The operative word in this verse is Adhikara
- Adhikara is best translated as control or jurisdiction
- You have control over your action but you have no control of the results that follow
- In the production of the result of your action, you are just one factor. Many other factors contribute to the final result over which you have no control



# To Work Alone Thou Hast Right

- If cause and its effect are taken as a chain which has lasted for ever and will last for ever, the question arises as to whether the links in this chain can ever be influenced or broken
- Karma is local and personal. Effects are universal. In chaos theory it is stated that the flutter of a butterfly here may cause typhoon half-way round the world.
- It seems that **motive, desire** is what links Karma with its effect. Usually the motive is one of gain, profit, of success.
- To disconnect motive from Karma is Karmayoga

# To Work Alone Thou Hast Right

- Desire for fruit, the motive, influences our action, our karma.
- The implication in the scripture is that motive adversely affects the outcome of our action
- Karma yoga is thus disconnecting motive from action – Phala from Karma
- Those who know about these things (Buddha among them) have told us that it is possible to work without motive.

You control the scattering of the seeds but  
not the harvest



कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते :

You do the karma with discipline (yoga). The posture, aim, and the swing. You control the movement of the club and strike of the ball – that is all



कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते :

You drive the ball (your control) but where the ball ends up is not in your control



कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते :

You control the tension of the string, the bend of the bow and the aim but you have no control of the arrow once it leaves the bow



कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते :

You throw the pebble in the pond, you control that (Adhikara) but the waves, how far they go, what far shores they reach is beyond your control.



कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते :

You control buying the lottery ticket  
but winning the jackpot is beyond your  
control



कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते :



# Result of Action is unidirectional and non-negotiable

“The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,  
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,  
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.”

*Omar Khayyam*

# Equanimity is Called Yoga

योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा धनञ्जय ।

सिद्धयसिद्धयोः समो भूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते ॥ २-४८ ॥

Do all your works with yoga as your base. O Dhanamjaya (winner of wealth) abandon all attachment to results. Be equal minded, unconcerned with success and failure. Equanimity is called yoga. (2-48)

Yoga here approximates Pantajala Yoga. योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः ॥ २ ॥  
Yoga is total cessation of thought

# Far Inferior Is Karma to Buddhi-Yoga

दूरेण ह्यवरं कर्म बुद्धियोगाद्धनञ्जय ।

बुद्धौ शरणमन्विच्छ कृपणाः फलहेतवः ॥ २-४९ ॥

Far inferior is Karma to Buddhi-Yoga. (yoga is equanimity). Therefore take refuge in Buddhi (intellect which tells you to detach yourself from the results of action). Miserable are they who are motivated by the results of their actions (2:49)

*Since Phala is impersonal, Karma has to be channelized. Channeling is through Buddhi which will direct karma toward non-attachment to the fruits. To disengage karma from mind of many thoughts is the secret. That is pure karma – no bondage*

# Yoga is Skill in Action

बुद्धियुक्तो जहातीह उभे सुकृतदुष्कृते ।

तस्माद्योगाय युज्यस्व योगः कर्मसु कौशलम् ॥ २-५० ॥

One who has yoked his intelligence to his works (buddhiyukta) will be free from results of right and wrong acts, here. Therefore, you be prepared, be ready to act from Buddhi-yoga. Skill in action is called Yoga. (2:50)

We have two definitions of yoga – equanimity and skill in action. Done right your action will be skillfully discharged and it will not lead to mental perturbations. Controlling the motive is the skill. The advice is to ‘spiritualize’ all actions

# Abandoning the Fruits of Actions

कर्मजं बुद्धियुक्ता हि फलं त्यक्त्वा मनीषिणः ।

जन्मबन्धविनिर्मुक्ताः पदं गच्छन्त्यनामयम् ॥ २-५१ ॥

Those who have yoked their intelligence, those wise persons, who have abandoned (let go of the attachment), the fruits of their works are freed from the bondage born of their nature. They will attain a wholesome state of being. (2-51) – physical and mental (Anamaya = free of disease, salubrious, healthy) Janmabandha = fetters of transmigration. Karma is real, Phala is real. The connecting link - our thought is unreal.

# Not by Not Initiating Actions ...

न कर्मणामनारम्भान्नैष्कर्म्यं पुरुषोऽश्रुते ।

न च संन्यसनादेव सिद्धिं समधिगच्छति ॥ ३-४ ॥

Not by not initiating action does a person attain the state of actionless-ness. He does not attain fulfilment just by relinquishing his actions. (3-4)

This equanimity, this skill in action is not to be attained by giving up initiating an action or by total relinquishment of action

# Action Occurs Without Our Consent

न हि कश्चित्क्षणमपि जातु तिष्ठत्यकर्मकृत् ।

कार्यते ह्यवशः कर्म सर्वः प्रकृतिजैर्गुणैः ॥ ३-५ ॥

Not even a moment (at all) passes by without action being done. Actions are being done by all even without their willing them. This is the result of Gunas born of Prakriti

The Gunas engage you in activity. It does not need your permission. This is part of the automatic nature of our being and Karma. But the energy can be channeled.

# Action Being Done Continuously

The eyes cannot choose but see,  
We cannot bid the ear be still,  
Our bodies feel where'er they be,  
Against or with our will

Wordsworth (Quoted by Radhakrishnan)



# Work Always

नियतं कुरु कर्म त्वं कर्म ज्यायो ह्यकर्मणः ।  
शरीरयात्रापि च ते न प्रसिद्धयेदकर्मणः ॥ ३-८ ॥

Be engaged in work constantly (always, decidedly, inevitably, surely). Action is superior to inaction. If you are inactive, even the maintenance of your body will not be possible.

(3-8)

# Perform Action Without Desire

यज्ञार्थात्कर्मणोऽन्यत्र लोकोऽयं कर्मबन्धनः ।

तदर्थं कर्म कौन्तेय मुक्तसङ्गः समाचर ॥ ३-९ ॥

Man gets into bondage if he does work for any reason other than sacrifice (act of worship, devotion, prayer, praise). Therefore, O Son of Kunti, perform all action without desire (abandoning desire) (3-9)

*Act you must. But act without attachment to fruits. This is the consistent teaching in Gita. Yajna in post-Vedic era is the interaction between the individual and the world – world solidarity*

# All Beginnings Have Faults

सहजं कर्म कौन्तेय सदोषमपि न त्यजेत् ।

सर्वारम्भा हि दोषेण धूमेनाग्निरिवावृताः ॥ १८-४८ ॥

That work, O Kaunteya, which is natural and innate should not be given up even if it has faults (disadvantage, inconvenience). All beginnings are covered with faults just as fire is enveloped in smoke. (18-48)

Sahaja here means caste duty. Caste whether hereditary or assumed carries with it responsibilities. All beginnings are faulty but repeating actions results in skilled performance

# GENESIS OF KARMA

# Beings Are Produced By Food ...

अन्नाद्भवन्ति भूतानि पर्जन्यादन्नसम्भवः ।

यज्ञाद्भवति पर्जन्यो यज्ञः कर्मसमुद्भवः ॥ ३-१४ ॥

Beings come into existence because of food. Food is produced by rains. Rains are produced by sacrifice. Sacrifice is produced by work. (3-14)

Vedic notion of sacrifice is an interchange between gods and men. The larger context is interdependence of beings in the cosmos. Sacrifice is the Supreme. It is also the law of life. Individual and the cosmos depend on each other. Sacrifice is self-less-ness.

# Karma Is Born of Brahma ...

कर्म ब्रह्मोद्भवं विद्धि ब्रह्माक्षरसमुद्भवम् ।

तस्मात्सर्वगतं ब्रह्म नित्यं यज्ञे प्रतिष्ठितम् ॥ ३-१५ ॥

Understand, Karma is born from Brahma (Vedas). Brahma is born from the Imperishable. Thus all pervading Brahma (Karma) rests constantly in Sacrifice. (3-15)

Sacrifice in post-Vedic period is act of worship, devotion, offering.  
Karma here implies rites of sacrifice.

# Wheel is Set in Motion

एवं प्रवर्तितं चक्रं नानुवर्तयतीह यः ।

अघायुरिन्द्रियारामो मोघं पार्थ स जीवति ॥ ३-१६ ॥

He who does not follow the wheel thus set in motion (Sacrifice, rain, food, beings), is a malicious person. He delights in the power of sense. Such a person lives a futile life. (3-16)

This is the Chakra , the wheel – no beginning and no end. How does one put one's shoulder to the wheel? By performing sahajam karma.

# **FIVE COMPONENTS OF KARMA**



# Five Factors in Accomplishment of a Task

पञ्चैतानि महाबाहो कारणानि निबोध मे ।

साङ्ख्ये कृतान्ते प्रोक्तानि सिद्धये सर्वकर्मणाम् ॥ १८-१३ ॥

Learn from me O Mighty Armed, these five factors necessary for accomplishment of all actions. These were mentioned in the concluding part of the Samkhya doctrine.

All actions, great and small, good and bad, moral and immoral have these five components

# The Five Factors

अधिष्ठानं तथा कर्ता करणं च पृथग्विधम् ।

विविधाश्च पृथक्क्रेष्टा दैवं चैवात्र पञ्चमम् ॥ १८-१४ ॥

Five Factors:

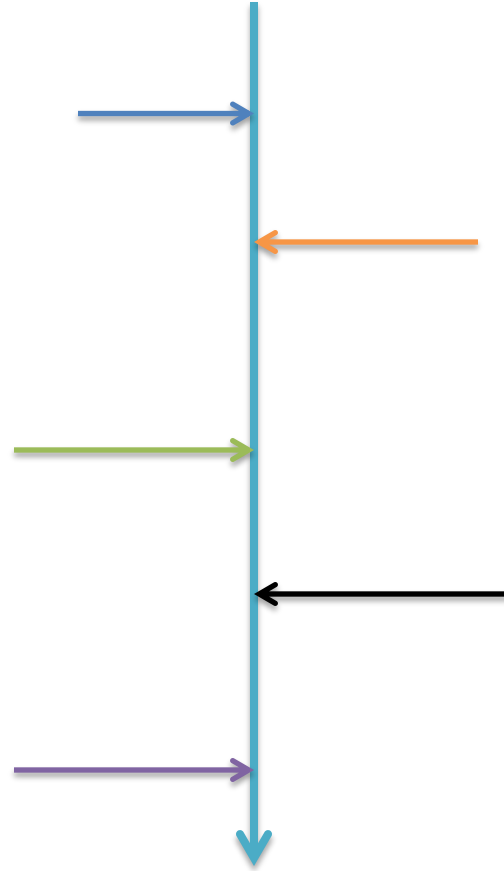
1. The Seat of action. The base from where the action is launched. The place in the chariot for the archer
2. The doer or the actor
3. Implements or instruments of different kinds
4. Many and separate efforts exerted
5. Divine, fate, luck – factor not accounted for by human effort alone

## Karma - Action

Adhishthana – Seat of action, basis, base, standing place of archer

Karanam cha prathagvidham – implements of many sorts

Daiva – fate, luck, chance (in finding the right place and right time etc.)



Karta – the doer of action. Personality, emotions, experience

Vividhascha prathak ceshta – separate and many efforts

## Phala - Fruit or result

Five Factors in the Accomplishment of any Action

# Fate

- This is not about the fate at the end of action but fate at the beginning of action. It is about the circumstances that lead to a particular action
- It is about such unpredictable factors as, being in the right place at the right time, having the right circumstances, right instruments, making the right effort etc.

# Body, Speech, Mind ...

शरीरवाङ्मनोभिर्यत्कर्म प्रारभते नरः ।

न्याय्यं वा विपरीतं वा पञ्चैते तस्य हेतवः ॥ १८-१५ ॥

Whatever work a person starts, initiates with his body, speech, or mind, be they right or wrong, these five are its causes. (18-15)

Sarira has five Karmendriyas.

Manas = mind, thought, intention

Action is done with the body, but initiation comes from speech and mind.

## That Being the Case ...

तत्रैवं सति कर्तारमात्मानं केवलं तु यः ।

पश्यत्यकृतबुद्धित्वान्न स पश्यति दुर्मतिः ॥ १८-१६ ॥

That being the fact, one who considers, sees, himself alone as the cause, He is a man of undisciplined intellect. Such a man of perverted intellect does not see.

Durmati = ignorant, blockhead

Arjuna may have thought that he alone was the true actor

# He Is Called A Hypocrite

कर्मेन्द्रियाणि संयम्य य आस्ते मनसा स्मरन् ।

इन्द्रियार्थान्विमूढात्मा मिथ्याचारः स उच्यते ॥ ३-६ ॥

He who restrains his organs of action but continues to ponder about sensory delights in his mind (karma of mind), such a person who is deluded, is called a hypocrite. (3-6)

One may decide not to act by restraining Karmendriyas, but he may continue to do work by pondering about the work in his mind or speaking about them. After all work is done by body, speech, and mind. If indeed Arjuna did not fight, he would nevertheless continue to think about it

# First Restrain Your Senses

यस्त्विन्द्रियाणि मनसा नियम्यारभतेऽर्जुन ।

कर्मेन्द्रियैः कर्मयोगमसक्तः स विशिष्यते ॥ ३-७ ॥

But he who restraining the organs (sensory and motor) by his mind undertakes acts done by organs of action - Karma Yoga- he is distinguished and he is detached. (3-7).

*Total concentration on the task is implied. Here is the definition of Karma-Yoga. Karma-Yoga is action with detachment. Do the work by the organs of action but with total attention.*



# Standard is set by Superior Person

यद्यदाचरति श्रेष्ठस्तत्तदेवेतरो जनः ।

स यत्प्रमाणं कुरुते लोकस्तदनुवर्तते ॥ ३-२१ ॥

Whatever the superior man does, thus do the rest. Whatever standard he sets, the world follows that (3-21)

**Sreshtha = best, most splendid, most excellent**

# For Him There Is No Obligatory Duty

यस्त्वात्मरतिरेव स्यादात्मतृप्तश्च मानवः ।

आत्मन्येव च सन्तुष्टस्तस्य कार्यं न विद्यते ॥ ३-१७ ॥

He who rejoices in the Self, who is content in himself, who is delighted in himself, for him there is no obligatory duty. (3-17)

One who is satisfied in himself, content in himself has really no strong motive for selfish work. This is to break the link of cause-effect chain.

आत्मन्येवात्मना तुष्टः स्थितप्रज्ञस्तदोच्यते ॥ २-५५ ॥

Such a man does not gain by doing or  
by not doing

नैव तस्य कृतेनार्थो नाकृतेनेह कश्चन ।

न चास्य सर्वभूतेषु कश्चिदर्थव्यपाश्रयः ॥ ३-१८ ॥

He has no purpose (motive, *artha*) at all in action,  
nor any whatever in inaction. And he has no need  
to depend on any being for accomplishment of his  
purpose (3-18)

# Man attains the Supreme

तस्मादसक्तः सततं कार्यं कर्म समाचर ।

असक्तो ह्याचरन्कर्म परमाप्नोति पूरुषः ॥ ३-१९ ॥

Therefore, *do action, action which is your duty, constantly but unattached (detached)*. Indeed, by performing action without attachment, man attains the Supreme. (3-19)

# Act for World Solidarity

कर्मणैव हि संसिद्धिमास्थिता जनकादयः ।

लोकसंग्रहमेवापि सम्पश्यन्कर्तुमर्हसि ॥ ३-२० ॥

With action alone indeed, perfection was attained by kings like Janaka (a Kshatriya like Arjuna). With an eye to holding together of the world (world solidarity), you should act. (3-20)

*anantam bata me vittam yasya me nasti kinchana  
mithilayam pradlptayam na me dahyati kinchana*

*This is Janaka's statement. Totally selfless and detached but constantly engaged in action*

**IMPENETRABLE INDEED IS THE  
COURSE OF KARMA**

# Even The Sages Are Confused

किं कर्म किमकर्मेति कवयोऽप्यत्र मोहिताः ।

तत्ते कर्म प्रवक्ष्यामि यज्ज्ञात्वा मोक्ष्यसेऽशुभात् ॥ ४-१६ ॥

As to what is Action (karma) and what is Inaction (Akarma), even the sages are confused. Therefore I will instruct you regarding Karma knowing which you will be released from misfortunes (4-16)

# Karma, Vikarma, and Akarma

कर्मणो ह्यपि बोद्धव्यं बोद्धव्यं च विकर्मणः ।

अकर्मणश्च बोद्धव्यं गहना कर्मणो गतिः ॥ ४-१७ ॥

One needs to be alerted as to what are actions, one has to be instructed as to what are wrongful (prohibited) actions, and one has to be enlightened as to what are inactions. Indeed the course of Karma is impenetrable (dense, opaque, hard to understand) (4-17)

Gahana refers to a thick and impenetrable forest



# He Who Sees Inaction in Action

कर्मण्यकर्म यः पश्येदकर्मणि च कर्म यः ।

स बुद्धिमान्मनुष्येषु स युक्तः कृत्स्नकर्मकृत् ॥ ४-१८ ॥

One who perceives inaction in action and action in inaction is the wise among humans. He is yoked to discipline, he is performer of all actions (4-18)

This statement pertains to perception. Perception of motion of trees while in a boat is given as example. What is perceived as action may not be action and vice versa. He is wise who understands the difference between perception and Reality. What looks like inaction may be full of action.

# Karma Burnt In The Fire of Wisdom

यस्य सर्वे समारम्भाः कामसङ्कल्पवर्जिताः ।

ज्ञानान्निदग्धकर्माणं तमाहुः पण्डितं बुधाः ॥ ४-१९ ॥

For him whose undertakings (beginnings, commencement) are devoid of desire for results (expectation of results), whose actions – works – are burnt from the fire of wisdom, him the wise call him a learned man (4-19)

**Karma can be burnt in the fire of wisdom so that no seed remains.**

**Action annihilated. This is inaction (non-action) in action.**

**Continuity of the chain of karma depends on desire and expectation.**

He does nothing at all

त्यक्त्वा कर्मफलासङ्गं नित्यतृप्तो निराश्रयः ।

कर्मण्यभिप्रवृत्तोऽपि नैव किञ्चित्करोति सः ॥ ४-२० ॥

He who has abandoned all attachment to the fruits of action, always satisfied, not dependent on anything (results), even when engaged in action, does, in effect, nothing at all. (4-20)

Satisfaction is at the beginning and not at the end. Acting he does not act. Sees inaction in action. He who is opposite of this may not do anything but does work in hopes and expectations. Action in inaction

# Do All That as an Offering to Me

यत्करोषि यदश्नासि यज्जुहोषि ददासि यत् ।

यत्तपस्यसि कौन्तेय तत्कुरुष्व मदर्पणम् ॥ ९-२७ ॥

Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever worship you perform, whatever you give away, whatever penances you perform, O Son of Kunti, do that as an offering to Me (9-27)

You will be free of bonds of Karma

शुभाशुभफलैरेवं मोक्ष्यसे कर्मबन्धनैः ।

संन्यासयोगयुक्तात्मा विमुक्तो मामुपैष्यसि ॥ ९-२८ ॥

Thou shalt certainly be liberated from good and evil fruits, from the bonds of action. Liberated, with thyself disciplined by the Yoga of renunciation, thou shalt come to Me (9-28)

# Whatever I do, I do that as your worship

- आत्मा त्वं गिरिजा मतिः सहचराः प्राणाः शरीरं  
गृहं पूजा ते विषयोपभोगरचना निद्रा  
समाधिस्थितिः।  
सञ्चारः पादयोः प्रदक्षिणविधिः स्तोत्राणि सर्वा  
गिरो यद्यत्कर्म करोमि तत्तदखिलं शम्भो  
तवाराधनम्॥४॥

You are my Self, Parvati is my mind, my breaths are my companions, my house is my body, enjoyment of my senses is your worship, my sleep is my Samadhi, my wanderings are my circumambulation, all my speech is my prayer, whatever works I do, O Shambhu, they are done as your worship.

# All work is an offering

- कायेन वाचा मनसेन्द्रियैर्वा  
बुद्ध्यात्मना वा प्रकृतैः  
स्वभावात् ।  
करोमि यद्यत्सकलं परस्मै  
गुरुवरायेति समर्पयामि

Whatever I do, with my body, with my speech, with my mind, with my organs, with my intellect, or from natural tendencies, all that I do as an offering to You, the Great Teacher

# Do As You Will

इति ते ज्ञानमाख्यातं गुह्याद्गुह्यतरं मया ।

विमृश्यैतदशेषेण यथेच्छसि तथा कुरु ॥ १८-६३ ॥

Thus have I spoken to you, of this knowledge which is Secret beyond secret. Consider (examine, deliberate) this in its totality, be critical. And then do as you please.

*Act as you please. This is act of free will. Act we must. But there is freedom regarding how we act. According to the Gita we must act established in Buddhi yoga. Only way we can influence the cause-effect chain is by free will – will not to be entangled in our expectations, desires and so on.*



# I Will Do Thy Bidding

अर्जुन उवाच ।

नष्टो मोहः स्मृतिलब्धा त्वत्प्रसादान्मयाच्युत ।

स्थितोऽस्मि गतसन्देहः करिष्ये वचनं तव ॥ १८-७३ ॥

Gone is my delusion, I have a clear vision (my memory is restored, code of conduct) all due to Your Grace O Achyuta (imperishable, permanent). I stand here with all doubts gone. I shall do as You say. (18:73) *I shall do thy bidding without putting my own thoughts into its execution. O Achyuta reminds us about the permanence of the transcendental while emphasizing the fact that here in the secular it is easy to have mistaken notions and crippling doubts. This has been the recurring refrain throughout the Gita. While acting in a secular world always be mindful of the transcendental.*

**CONCLUSION**

# Karma Yoga in 21<sup>st</sup> Century

- Karma yoga is alive and well in 21<sup>st</sup> century
- The law of action-reaction is eternal but the free will has a place in influencing or even breaking the chain of cause-effect.
- We can influence the wheel of Karma by being mindful while performing the acts

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते :

# Karma Yoga in 21<sup>st</sup> Century

- As individuals we all occupy some station in our life
- Each station enjoins its own karma or duty. All avenues of life have duty as their moral basis
- You have the right to do your duty (Karma) but not to the anxiety thereof
- At the time of performing the act – any act, the mind should be free from all interfering thoughts; in other words the mind should be empty. (also a requirement of Patanjala Yoga)

# Karma Yoga in 21<sup>st</sup> Century

- The concept of karma as scripturally prescribed rites is not applicable now, in this post-Vedic period
- Karma has become what it always was – action pure and simple
- Karma yoga is action done as science – disciplined action. Disconnect karma from Phala
- Karma, the Gita says, is **equanimity** and **skill in action**

# Karma Yoga in 21<sup>st</sup> Century

- **Ultimate goal of action – karma – is self fulfillment (siddhi) and sustaining the world order (lokasangraha) – world solidarity**
- For that to happen action should be done without emotional overtones (spirit of worship)
- ‘Disinterested but fully engaged’ is the key notion

# Karma Yoga in 21<sup>st</sup> Century

- We admit that cosmic scheme is vast and unintelligible to us - humans
- So the question arises -
- What is the best way to act in a world which we so dimly perceive?
- Do all your work in a spirit of dedication

स्वकर्मणा तमभ्यर्च्य सिद्धिं विन्दति मानवः ॥ १८-४६ ॥

**THE END**