YADA SAMHARATE CHAYAM KOORMONGANEVA SARVASHAHA
INDRIYANEENDRIYARTHEBHYAS TASYA PRAJNA PRATISHTITA

When the yogi, like the tortoise drawing back its limbs into its own shell, withdraws all the senses from the sense objects, his wisdom is fixed. He is a sthitaprajna.

The commander in chief of the bodily instruments of cognition is “the intellect.” The intellect pointing outwards gets trapped with the life around. The same intellect pointing inwards and concentrating on the Atman within is said to be a sthitaprajna whose “wisdom is fixed.”

The concentration achieved by the spiritual seeker who has attained mastery over the multitude of distractions from the objective world is explained using an example in this verse.

The Lord has given the example of the tortoise. We see normally a tortoise with its head and neck and limbs protruding out of its shell and moving about in water where it is living. On encountering any objects, the first reaction by it is the withdrawal of all its limbs into its own shell. Once it does withdraw its limbs, it does not get injured by any objects that it comes in contact with. We can throw a brick at it and the brick does not cause any bodily harm to it.

Technically it is a sthitaprajna. It continues to live in the water but does not get perturbed by the world outside. Let us remember that it is not really a sthitaprajna and it is only an example and no examples can give us the true picture of the Atman.

What does a sthitaprajna do?

He continues to live and be part of the society he belongs to. He does not run away into the jungle to escape from distractions.

What are the limbs the Lord is referring to?

The limbs of the tortoise are a comparison to the five sense organs and the life around in the pool of water for the tortoise is compared to the objective world. Our senses do get us the contact with the objective world. The reaction to the contact is made by the mind with or without the help of the intellect. These reactions make us feel pain/pleasures.

The sense organs do perceive, the mind does the duty of feeling and the intellect thinks. Withdrawal from the outer world means not to react to the impulses received by the sense organs, not to feel through the mind and not to think using the intellect. His intellect at the same time has changed its mode of action and deals with the “chaitanya” (consciousness) within. It receives the “ananda” (happiness, peace) from the contact with the chaitanya and lives a life of contentment. The individual carries on all the worldly duties and takes over the obligations to the family and the society. The results of whatever action he conducts, he offers to the Lord by uttering “Sri Krishnarpanamastu.”

Each of the sense organs is like the door to the house. The thief can enter from any door and steal our possessions. The sense organs are the doors for us to receive the impulses that steal our peace.

We can understand by looking at the example of a deaf person. The deaf person does not hear what others are talking about but stays in company of others. The insults thrown at him by
some will not register in his mind and he does not get upset. He is not worried about the abuses spoken by others.

For this one needs to develop “Vyavasayatmika buddhi” about which we have already discussed in sloka 41 of this chapter.

Another point to note from this sloka is that withdrawal of the sense organs from the sense objects does not stop the hankering of the mind which is a store house of results of the past actions. We will see how the mind can be controlled in the next sloka.