

Sloka 5 (Chapter 3)

**NA HI KASHCHIT KSHANAMAPI JATU TISHTATI AKARMA KRIT
KARYATE HY AVASHAHA KARMA SARVAHA PRAKRITIJAIR GUNAIH.**

No one can ever remain, even for a moment, without performing work. Everyone, without his will, is made to do work by the qualities born of prakriti.

It is not so difficult to understand the first half of the verse. We all know that there are basically two types of actions:

Voluntary

Involuntary.

From the point of view of our own physical body, we conduct a number of involuntary actions. It is as though we do not know them but we carry on doing those actions according to a time clock set in our brain.

Act of breathing, circulation, digestion are some of the examples of involuntary actions we conduct. By nature, for the sole purpose of survival, we conduct these involuntary actions. Failure to breathe, failure of circulatory system end up with catastrophic consequences. Digestion is almost a continuous process within our body. We survive because of these involuntary actions.

The act of blinking is another example of involuntary action. It is to protect our eye, a delicate organ and an essential one for survival in this world. By nature, to protect the eyes, we conduct the act of blinking.

The second half of the verse is a little bit difficult to understand. The Lord says that everyone, without his will is made to work by the qualities born of prakriti. This refers to both voluntary and involuntary actions. We have looked at some examples of involuntary actions at the beginning of this verse. Let us look at some of the voluntary actions.

What we are and what we do voluntarily also to a large extent depends upon what we call as “thought imprints” called as “Vasanas”. These are stored in the mind and are the precursors of all our actions. The hindu philosophy is based on the theory of rebirth after the physical death. We have no control over where we are born next, what form we take and when after death we are born again. The present life is considered to be one of several births and deaths in our life. The life is a sojourn of innumerable births and deaths that ultimately leads one to “Liberation.” We had many births before and will have many more births to come. Depending on the purity of thoughts and actions we either climb upwards towards the path of attaining final Liberation or fall down into the world of lower forms of birth.

Based on this theory of rebirth after the physical death, is the aspect of “Gunas.” The gunas are the thought imprints from the previous births stored in the mind at the time of the new birth into this world. The birth as human is to exhaust the stored vasana imprints and not to instil any new vasanas. This is a rarity and only rare souls manage to achieve this state of “no stored vasanas in the mind” and attain the final liberation.

“Prakriti” is nature. The word “nature” refers to one’s own nature and also refers to the five gross elements: “earth, water, fire, air and space.” Here, the word refers to our own nature.

The gunas are classified broadly into “Pure, Passionate and Indolent.” (Satvas, Rajas and Tamas.)

The Hindu philosophy classifies the entire population on the basis of these three qualities into the four following categories:

Brahmana
Kshatriya
Vaishya
Shoodra.

Brahmana shows predominance of pure thoughts and is recognised by his knowledge of the Self, the scriptures and the like. He is considered to be an evolved soul.

Kshatriya with combination of Pure and Passionate qualities, the pure predominating, is physically strong and conducts duties to protect the innocent and those under his shelter. The warrior class of people of the old ages belonged to this class. Arjuna belonged to this group.

Vaishya also with predominance of pure and passionate qualities, a touch of tamasic quality, but with passionate predominating. They conduct actions for personal gains. Business class of people belong to this group.

Shoodra, with a mixture of rajasic and tamasic qualities, tamas predominating. They are not as clever as the other three class of people as such but physically strong and conduct duties pertaining to the menial tasks and work needing predominantly physical strength.

Each one of us is born into this world with a bundle of thought imprints that dictate the type of actions we conduct later on in our lives.

The Lord is particularly referring to Arjuna in this instance. Arjuna had taken shelter under Krishna at the beginning of this war. He was confused. He was born as Kshatriya and had a duty to fight and protect but wanted to escape from his duties and give away the kingdom to Duryodhana who was a personification of “unrighteousness.”

If he had absconded from his duties and went away to the forest, his thought imprints would not have changed overnight. He would still carry the gunas of a kshatriya and his association with life in the forest would have made him conduct actions sooner or later that befit his qualities.

This is the summary of this verse. By stopping here, one may get a wrong notion that if it is so, that the nature determines all our actions, there is no room for change. We are what we are and we can do what our thought imprints dictate. This is the wrong notion. The human birth is associated with having the “Intellect”, the reasoning capacity. There is room for the better in the form of influence by the parents and the society in the early part of one’s life. The education provided by the society is supposed to assist the individual in modifying his actions for the benefit of the society. In Hindu philosophy and tradition prominent role is given to the “Guru”, a learned master of the scriptures. His role is to impart the scriptural knowledge into the seeker and assist him in the path of spiritual progress.

These are voluntary actions. Let us understand this clearly. Yes, it is true that the gunas we are born with dictate the type of work we conduct. At the same time, we have an opportunity to change the thought imprints in our mind. This is a slow process and by what we call as “Practice” (Abhyasa) it is possible to change. Starting from the time of birth into this world, there is a latent period before the baby can become a child and then an adult. During this early period of one’s life, the immediate family (mother, father etc) and the society outside the family has an opportunity to bring in a change in the quality of thoughts. It is a slow process but not an impossible task.

The Puranas tell us the story of Prahlada to highlight this point. He was born in a demonic family as the son of the demon Hiranyakashipu. Destiny made his mother, while he was still in the mother's womb, to reside in the abode of sage Narada. She was given discourses on the Lord Vishnu, the Supreme. This changed Prahlada's thought imprints while he was still in mother's womb from a demonical one to a saintly nature.