

Śloka 33

सदृशं चेष्टते स्वस्याः प्रकृतेर्ज्ञानवानपि ।  
प्रकृतिं यान्ति भूतानि निग्रहः किं करिष्यति ॥ ३३ ॥

*sadrśam ceṣṭate svasyāḥ prakṛterjñānavānapi  
prakṛtiṁ yānti bhūtāni nigrahaḥ kiṁ kariṣyati*

सदृशम्	<i>sadrśam</i>	in accordance
चेष्टते	<i>ceṣṭate</i>	acts
स्वस्याः	<i>svasyāḥ</i>	of his own
प्रकृतेः	<i>prakṛteḥ</i>	of nature
ज्ञानवान्	<i>jñānavān</i>	a wise man
अपि	<i>api</i>	even
प्रकृतिम्	<i>prakṛtim</i>	to nature
यान्ति	<i>yānti</i>	follow
भूतानि	<i>bhūtāni</i>	beings
निग्रहः	<i>nigrahaḥ</i>	restraint
किम्	<i>kim</i>	what
करिष्यति	<i>kariṣyati</i>	will do, will accomplish

### VERSE 33

*All Are Forced to Act By Their Natural Tendencies*

33

**All living beings follow their nature; even a person of knowledge acts in accordance with his own nature. What can restraint accomplish?**

In the preceding verse it was stated that those who do not follow the teachings of the Lord are lost. In this verse it is explained that all are forced to act by their natural tendencies.

All living beings are born with different natural tendencies. Like all other species, human beings have natural, general tendencies, but they also have their own individual tendencies. A person's individual tendencies are the fruition of actions performed in past lives. These are called *prārabdha saṁskāra*.

All people are pulled and guided by their **own nature**. Some are natural teachers, while some are natural organizers or rulers. Some people are naturally business-minded, and some are naturally inclined to serve. Even knowledgeable people act in conformity with their own nature. For example, the great poet Kabir Dass was a weaver. After becoming enlightened, his natural tendency to weave remained the same. By restraining nature-born qualities nothing is accomplished. We can restrain only ego-born qualities.

There is a big difference, however, between ordinary people who are pulled and guided by their nature-born qualities, and people of knowledge who are pulled and guided by their nature-born qualities. Ordinary people are attached to action and egocentric desires, whereas people of knowledge are completely unattached.

In II: 61, 62, and 68, it was explained how sense control makes the mind stable. The statement in this verse, **What can restraint accomplish?** does not contradict that idea. It does not mean that morbid feelings such as anger, hate, attachment, and possessiveness should not be restrained. If the evils of the mind are not removed, the mind will not be stable, and the mind, which naturally flows toward attachment, possessiveness, and egocentric desires, will never be released from the grip of nescience.

In III: 5 it was said, "Verily no one can ever remain inactive even for a moment, for everyone is helplessly made to perform action by nature-born qualities." Therefore, this verse states that instead of forcefully renouncing all actions, it is better to keep performing those actions that are not against one's self development

and are in accordance with one's nature-born qualities.

Śloka 34

इन्द्रियस्येन्द्रियस्यार्थे रागद्वेषौ व्यवस्थितौ ।  
तयोर्न वशमागच्छेत्तौ ह्यस्य परिपन्थिनौ ॥ ३४ ॥

*indriyasyendriyasyārthe rāgadveṣau vyavasthitau*  
*tayorna vaśamāgacchetau hyasya paripanthinau*

इन्द्रियस्य	<i>indriyasya</i>	of the senses
इन्द्रियस्य	<i>indriyasya</i>	of the senses
अर्थे	<i>arthe</i>	in the object
रागद्वेषौ	<i>rāgadveṣau</i>	attachment and aversion
व्यवस्थितौ	<i>vyavasthitau</i>	seated
तयोः	<i>tayoḥ</i>	these two
न	<i>na</i>	not
वशम्	<i>vaśam</i>	sway
आगच्छेत्	<i>āgacchet</i>	should come under
तौ	<i>tau</i>	these two
हि	<i>hi</i>	verily
अस्य	<i>asya</i>	one's
परिपन्थितौ	<i>paripanthitau</i>	foes

## VERSES 34-35

### *How to Purify One's Own Nature*

34

**Attachment and aversion for the objects of senses abide in the senses; let none come under their sway, for they are one's foes.**

The preceding verse said that all people are compelled to act according to their nature. From this, though, a question arises, "How can one achieve freedom from the bondage of action?" In this verse and the next, this question is addressed.

The five organs of the senses, which are the ears, skin, eyes, tongue, and nose have their objects, which are sound, touch, form, taste, and smell, respectively. The sense organs' **attachment and aversion** for their respective sense objects are instinctive and natural in everyone. For example, a melodious sound will create attachment in a listener, while a harsh sound will create aversion.

However, neither the senses nor sense objects are capable of creating attachment or aversion independently. In reality it is the mind supporting the senses that creates likes and dislikes. If the mind likes the stimuli caused by an object, then it creates attachment. If it dislikes the stimuli, then it creates aversion. Even though the object remains the same, the mind may like it for some time and later may dislike it. Similarly, an object liked by one person may be disliked by another. This illustrates that the stimuli generated in the sense organs by an object of the senses creates the impulse of likes and dislikes in the mind. Whenever the sense organs come into contact with any outside object, either the mind wants it and gets attached to it, or the mind does not want it and runs away from it.

Both likes and dislikes are caused by the ego, which identifies as "I am," "It is for me," "I like it," or "I dislike it." The sense organs are only an extension of the ego and they continuously work for what the ego wants. In all egoless actions there is neither attachment nor aversion.

One should avoid both attachment and aversion to sense objects because their impulses deceive a person into getting trapped in pleasure and pain. In this way attachment and aversion block the path of redemption, which is why they are the enemies of an aspirant.

Śloka 35

श्रेयान् स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात् ।  
स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मो भयावहः ॥ ३५ ॥

*śreyān svadharmo viguṇaḥ paradharmātsvanuṣṭhitāt  
svadharme nidhanam śreyaḥ paradharmo bhayāvahaḥ*

श्रेयान्	<i>śreyān</i>	better
स्वधर्मः	<i>svadharmaḥ</i>	one's own duty
विगुणः	<i>viguṇaḥ</i>	devoid of merit
परधर्मात्	<i>paradharmāt</i>	than the duty of another
स्वनुष्ठितात्	<i>svanuṣṭhitāt</i>	than well discharged
स्वधर्मे	<i>svadharme</i>	in one's own duty
निधनम्	<i>nidhanam</i>	death
श्रेयः	<i>śreyaḥ</i>	better
परधर्मः	<i>paradharmaḥ</i>	another's duty
भयावहः	<i>bhayāvahaḥ</i>	fraught with fear, full of fear, invites danger

## VERSE 35

*What is the Method to Work Out Desire*

35

**Better is one's own duty, though devoid of merit, than the duty of another well performed. Better is death in one's own duty; another's duty is full of fear (invites danger).**

The previous verse stated that attachment and aversion for objects of the senses are the enemies of an aspirant who is seeking liberation. In this verse Lord Kṛṣṇa advises aspirants to follow their own natural-born qualities in doing their duty.

The term *dharma* is used in several different ways. It is commonly used to mean **duty**, but it is also used to mean virtuousness, good conduct, and natural qualities. Essentially *dharma* means "the law of being" for anything that exists. "The law of being" implies nature-born qualities. For example, the nature-born quality of fire is heat, and the nature-born quality of ice is cold. In a living creature the senses and inner organs all have their respective functions. For example the eye's nature-born quality is seeing, and the heart's nature-born quality is pumping blood.

The functions of human beings in society are also based on their nature-born qualities. Some have the nature-born quality of a teacher, some have the quality of a ruler, some are business-oriented, and some are servers. Each person is different in personality and mental make-up due to differences in thoughts and desires. Thoughts and desires are based on latent impressions in the mind (*samskāras*) of past lives, which become the nature-born qualities in the present birth and are called *svadharma*, or one's own duty. If a person lives and functions according to their own nature-born qualities, then there will be no mental resistance and that person will function in peace and harmony. However, if one functions against one's nature-born qualities, which is termed *paradharma*, there will be mental resistance and disharmony.

The first line of the verse says, "Though one's own duty may be devoid of merit in comparison to the duty of another that is well performed, it is still better." It is better to perform one's own *dharma* because there is no resistance of the mind, and there is no suppression of desires. It is like swimming with the flow of a river. When there is no resistance, there can be peace, harmony, satisfaction, and joy.

The second line of the verse says, "Death in performing one's own duty is better because the duty of another is full of

fear.” To go against one’s own nature-born qualities causes one to be **full of fear** because the mind resists it. The duty becomes a burden to carry. There will be no peace of mind, and there will be fear of failure. **The duty of another** is hard, like swimming against the flow of a river, whereas **one’s own duty** is conducive to mental peace, welfare, and progress. Therefore, it is indeed better for a person to die in the discharging of one’s own duty **well performed**, though less meritorious in comparison to the duty of another. In taking the duty of another, there will always be fear and one will die in fear.

It is likely that Arjuna was thinking that the renunciation of action, which is the “duty” of sages that live a noble life, was a direct path for attaining liberation, while his path of a warrior was devoid of merit. The Lord is reminding Arjuna of the danger that would result from going against the grain of his nature-born qualities as a warrior. Running away from the battlefield and living on alms does not fit his personality or nature. The path of the warrior is the right one for his self-development. His desire (*vāsanā*) from his past birth was the cause of his birth in the *kṣatriya* race. In order to work out that desire and redeem himself, the path of a warrior (*kṣatriya*) is the most suitable.

Śloka 36

अर्जुन उवाच

अथ केन प्रयुक्तोऽयं पापं चरति पूरुषः ।  
अनिच्छन्नपि वार्ष्णेय बलादिव नियोजितः ॥ ३६ ॥

*arjuna uvāca*

*atha kena prayukto'yaṁ pāpaṁ carati pūruṣaḥ  
anicchannapi vārṣṇeya balādiva niyojitaḥ*

अथ	<i>atha</i>	now
केन	<i>kena</i>	by which
प्रयुक्तः	<i>prayuktaḥ</i>	impelled
अयम्	<i>ayam</i>	this
पापम्	<i>pāpam</i>	sin
चरति	<i>carati</i>	does
पूरुषः	<i>pūruṣaḥ</i>	man
अनिच्छन्	<i>anicchan</i>	not wishing, unwilling
अपि	<i>api</i>	even
वार्ष्णेय	<i>vārṣṇeya</i>	O Vārṣṇeya (Kṛṣṇa)
बलात्	<i>balāt</i>	by force
इव	<i>iva</i>	as it were
नियोजितः	<i>niyojitaḥ</i>	constrained, urged

### VERSE 36

*Who Instigates a Person to Perform Sinful Acts  
Pulled Against One's Will*

36

Arjuna said,

**But impelled by what does a man commit this sin, unwillingly even, O Vārṣṇeya (Kṛṣṇa), as if urged by force?**

In III: 34 the Lord said that attachment and aversion are the two enemies that cause pleasure and pain. Consequently they are the enemies of one who is seeking liberation. In III: 35 the Lord said that one should work out the desires (*vāsanās*) inherited from past births by performing one's own duty (*svadharma*). This raises a doubt in Arjuna's mind, and in this verse he asks, "Who instigates a person to perform sinful actions even against their will?"

The divine and the demonic exist in every person. By "divine" it is meant that every person has a clear concept of virtuous and right action. However, when the intellectual understanding of virtuous action comes into practical application that understanding can be sabotaged by the demonic forces within a person. The demonic forces are the animal instincts such as anger, fear, attachment, and desires that exist both collectively and individually.

In general there is a determination in everyone not to perform sinful actions because they know that the result of sinful action is pain and they want to protect themselves from such results. Even though people try hard not to perform sinful acts, the demons within draw them to do so against their will.

Arjuna asks Lord Kṛṣṇa, "What is that force that pulls a person to commit sin?"