

## CHAPTER VIII

### *Akṣara Brahma Yoga*

### The Yoga of Indestructible Brahma

#### Introduction

This chapter is entitled **Akṣara Brahma Yoga**, the Yoga of Indestructible Brahma, and deals with the qualified and absolute aspects of God. The sacred syllable Om is also designated as *akṣara Brahma*.

In the previous chapter, the yoga of knowledge and wisdom was described in detail. In the chapter Śrī Kṛṣṇa glorifies the person of wisdom, and also gives the methods by which wisdom can be attained. The chapter concluded with the statement by Lord Kṛṣṇa that one who has attained Self-realization realizes not only Brahma, but also achieves knowledge of:

*Adhibhūta* (the world of objects), which includes the whole realm of perishable matter. *Adhibhūta* was explained as the lower nature of God in VII: 4, and is explained in Chapter XV as *kṣara puruṣa* (destructible Brahma).

*Adhyātma* (the totality of individual souls), realizing that the individual soul has no separate existence, and that God appears in the form of an individual soul.

*Adhiyajña* (pertaining to sacrifice), realizing that it is God who pervades the hearts of all living beings as the inner witness.

The conclusion of the last chapter was that by knowing the Self, a yogi achieves knowledge of everything. This chapter starts by Arjuna's question on the terms used in VII: 29-30. The terms to which he refers are: 1) Brahma, 2) *adhyātma*, 3) *karma*, 4) *adhibhūta*, 5) *adhidaiva*, and 6) *adhiyajña*. Arjuna wanted to know in exactly what context these terms are used because they can mean so many different things.

## Śloka 1

अर्जुन उवाच

किं तद् ब्रह्म किमध्यात्मं किं कर्म पुरुषोत्तम ।  
अधिभूतं च किं प्रोक्तमधिदैवं किमुच्यते ॥ १ ॥

*arjuna uvāca*

*kiṁ tad brahma kimadhyātmaṁ kiṁ karma puruṣottama  
adhibhūtaṁ ca kiṁ proktam---adhidaivam kimucyate*

|             |                     |                             |
|-------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| अर्जुन उवाच | <i>arjuna uvāca</i> | Arjuna said                 |
| किम्        | <i>kim</i>          | what                        |
| तत्         | <i>tat</i>          | that                        |
| ब्रह्म      | <i>brahma</i>       | Brahma                      |
| किम्        | <i>kim</i>          | what                        |
| अध्यात्मम्  | <i>adhyātmaṁ</i>    | adhyātma                    |
| किम्        | <i>kim</i>          | what                        |
| कर्म        | <i>karma</i>        | action                      |
| पुरुषोत्तम  | <i>puruṣottama</i>  | O Best Among Men<br>(Kṛṣṇa) |
| अधिभूतम्    | <i>adhibhūtaṁ</i>   | adhibhūtaṁ                  |
| च           | <i>ca</i>           | and                         |
| किम्        | <i>kim</i>          | what                        |
| प्रोक्तम्   | <i>proktam</i>      | declared                    |
| अधिदैवम्    | <i>adhidaivam</i>   | adhidaiva                   |
| किम्        | <i>kim</i>          | what                        |
| उच्यते      | <i>ucyate</i>       | is called                   |

## Śloka 2

अधियज्ञः कथं कोऽत्र देहेऽस्मिन्मधुसूदन ।  
 प्रयाणकाले च कथं ज्ञेयोऽसि नियतात्मभिः ॥ २ ॥

*adhijāṅṅaḥ katham ko'tra dehe'sminmadhusūdana*  
*prayāṅṅakāle ca katham jñeyo'si niyatātmabhiḥ*

|             |                      |                          |
|-------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| अधियज्ञः    | <i>adhijāṅṅaḥ</i>    | adhijāṅṅa                |
| कथम्        | <i>katham</i>        | how                      |
| कः          | <i>kaḥ</i>           | who                      |
| अत्र        | <i>atra</i>          | here                     |
| देहे        | <i>dehe</i>          | in body                  |
| अस्मिन्     | <i>asmin</i>         | this                     |
| मधुसूदन     | <i>madhusūdana</i>   | O Madhusūdana<br>(Kṛṣṇa) |
| प्रयाणकाले  | <i>prayāṅṅakāle</i>  | at the time of death     |
| च           | <i>ca</i>            | and                      |
| कथम्        | <i>katham</i>        | how                      |
| ज्ञेयः      | <i>jñeyaḥ</i>        | knowable                 |
| असि         | <i>asi</i>           | are                      |
| नियतात्मभिः | <i>niyatātmabhiḥ</i> | by the self-controlled   |

## VERSES 1-2

Arjuna's Seven Questions:

*Discrimination of the Higher and Lower Natures of the Eternal Self*

1

Arjuna said,

**What is that Brahma? What is adhyātma? What is action? O Best Among Men, what is declared to be adhibhūta, and what is termed as adhidaiva?**

2

**O Madhusūdana (Destroyer of Madhu), who is adhiyajña here and how does adhiyajña dwell in the body? And how are You to be realized at the time of death by the self-controlled?**

In VII: 29-30, Śrī Kṛṣṇa referred to six technical terms from the yoga system. These terms are Brahma, *adhyātma*, *karma*, *adhibhūta*, *adhidaiva*, and *adhiyajña*. These terms can have different meanings when used in different contexts, so Arjuna wants to know the exact definition of these terms in the present context. He is also anxious to know how a yogi who has achieved a steadfast mind as a result of regular spiritual practice realizes the Self at the time of death. Arjuna's questions are as follows:

1) What is that Brahma? The term Brahma is used for the **Vedas**, the god of creation, the absolute divinity, *prakṛti* (primordial nature) and Om. Arjuna wants to know the meaning of "Brahma" in the present context.

2) What is *adhyātma*? This term can be used for the mind, body, senses, intellect, individual soul, or oversoul. Arjuna asks which of these meanings is *adhyātma* referring to in the present context.

3) What is *karma* (action)? Actions are of several kinds, both general and spiritual. The threefold actions (*karmas*) are: *vartman* (present), *agāmi* (yet to happen), and *sancit* (collection). These together denote God's entire scheme of creation of this universe. Arjuna wants to know the meaning of *karma* used in the present context.

4) What is *adhibhūta*? *Adhibhūta* means the five essential elements, or the entire range of the universe's objective reality. Arjuna wants to know the meaning of *adhibhūta* in the present context.

5) What is *adhidaiva*? This is a term used for Hiraṇyagarbha (the god of creation), the individual soul, or any other entity. Arjuna wants to know which of these meanings is referred to in

the present context.

6) Who is *adhiyajña*? This term means God or any particular deity representing the inner witness. Arjuna wants to know how the *adhiyajña* resides in the bodies of various living beings, and why that force is called *adhiyajña*.

7) Finally, Arjuna wants to know how a person of steadfast mind can fix the mind on God at the moment of death and attain Self-realization.

## Śloka 3

श्री भगवानुवाच

अक्षरं ब्रह्म परमं स्वभावोऽध्यात्ममुच्यते ।  
भूतभावोद्भवकरो विसर्गः कर्मसंज्ञितः ॥ ३ ॥

śrī bhagavān uvāca

akṣaram brahma paramam svabhāvo'dhyātmam ucyate  
bhūtabhāvodbhava karo visargaḥ karmasamjñitaḥ

|                  |                         |   |
|------------------|-------------------------|---|
| श्री भगवान् उवाच | śrī bhagavān uvāca      | the Lord said                             |
| अक्षरम्          | akṣaram                 | imperishable                              |
| ब्रह्म           | brahma                  | Brahma                                    |
| परमम्            | paramam                 | supreme                                   |
| स्वभावः          | svabhāvaḥ               | inherent nature                           |
| अध्यात्मम्       | adhyātmam               | one's own Self                            |
| उच्यते           | ucyate                  | is called                                 |
| भूतभाव उद्भवकरः  | bhūtabhāva udbhavakaraḥ | that which causes<br>the origin of beings |
| विसर्गः          | visargaḥ                | offering                                  |
| कर्मसंज्ञितः     | karmasamjñitaḥ          | is called action                          |

## VERSES 3-4

## Lord Kṛṣṇa's Answers to the Seven Questions

3

The Lord said,

**Brahma is the indestructible, the supreme; one's own Self (the individual soul) is called adhyātma; the discharge of spirit (visarga), which brings forth existence of beings, is called karma (action).**

**Brahma is the indestructible, the supreme** - Brahma, which is indestructible and supreme, represents the absolute, formless divinity. Brahma is eternal, self-existent, immutable, and all-pervading. This supreme reality is behind the entire phenomenal world. It is the conscious principle within all beings in the form of the Self (God).

**one's own Self (the individual soul) is called adhyātma** - The presence of the Self, which is the conscious higher nature of God in an individual body, is called *adhyātma*. Although the Self is formless, subtle, and changeless, by the power of its all-pervasiveness it permeates material nature, takes the shape of the body, mind, intellect, and senses, and becomes an individual soul (*jīva*). The totality of individual souls is identical with the supreme Self (God).

**the discharge of spirit (visarga), which brings forth the existence of beings, is called karma** - The creative force that causes the birth and preservation of all insentient and sentient beings is called *karma* (action). Before creation, primordial nature (*prakṛti*) is in a dormant state. The discharge of spirit, called *visarga*, takes place when the conscious principle (*puruṣa*) pervades this inert matter (*prakṛti*). It is the conjunction of the conscious principle and inert matter that awakens life in matter, causing it to be active.

This flow of action (*karma*) in the universe goes on unceasingly in this way, until the final dissolution of the universe. It constitutes the entire field of action referred to in VII: 29. The discharge of spirit is identical with the supreme Self (God).

## Śloka 4

अधिभूतं क्षरो भावः पुरुषश्चाधिदैवतम् ।  
अधियज्ञोऽहमेवात्र देहे देहभृतां वर ॥ ४ ॥

*adhibhūtaṁ kṣaro bhāvaḥ puruṣaścādhidāivatam*  
*adhiyajño'hamevātra dehe dehabhṛtām vara*

|           |                     |                 |
|-----------|---------------------|-----------------|
| अधिभूतम्  | <i>adhibhūtam</i>   | adhibhūta       |
| क्षरः     | <i>kṣaraḥ</i>       | perishable      |
| भावः      | <i>bhāvaḥ</i>       | nature          |
| पुरुषः    | <i>puruṣaḥ</i>      | the soul        |
| च         | <i>ca</i>           | and             |
| अधिदैवतम् | <i>adhidaivatam</i> | adhidaiva       |
| अधियज्ञः  | <i>adhiyajñaḥ</i>   | adhiyajña       |
| अहम्      | <i>aham</i>         | I               |
| एव        | <i>eva</i>          | alone           |
| अत्र      | <i>atra</i>         | here            |
| देहे      | <i>dehe</i>         | in the body     |
| देहभृताम् | <i>dehabhṛtām</i>   | of the Embodied |
| वर        | <i>vara</i>         | O Best          |

**Adhibhūta (elements) constitutes My perishable nature, and this indwelling soul is the adhidaivata. I alone am the adhiyajña here in this body, O Best of the Embodied (Arjuna),**

**Adhibhūta constitutes My perishable nature** - Perishable nature (*kṣara bhāva*) is comprised of the five elements, which constitute the body, mind, senses, intellect, ego, and the various objects of the senses. Collectively these are called *adhibhūta*, which was defined in Chapter IV as the lower nature of God. *Adhibhūta* is sustained by the conscious principle (the Self), which was described in Chapter V as the higher nature of God. Without the energy of the Self (consciousness), the entire phenomenal existence of the universe would be inert and indeed, could not exist.

**this indwelling soul is adhidaivata** - The indwelling soul is called the *adhidaivata*, which is the vital energy (life force) of the entire sentient and insentient creation. The vital energy is also called *Brahmā*, the divine agent that operates in material objects, the body, sense organs, mind, intelligence, and ego. *Brahmā* is the progenitor of all. That is why *Brahmā* is called *adhidaivata*, the presiding deity.

**I alone am the adhiyajña here in this body** - Arjuna's question in verse 2 was, "Who is *adhiyajña* and how does *adhiyajña* dwell in the body?" In this verse the Lord answers the two-part question of Arjuna in one sentence, "I, Myself, am *adhiyajña*," the enjoyer of sacrifices and giver of the fruit of all actions. It is the Self alone that rules over all activities, perceptions, and thoughts in all created beings. It is due to the all-pervasive nature of God in the form of the inner witness that the Lord (the Self) dwells in the body. Hence the Lord says, **I alone am the adhiyajña here in this body**. In answering the six questions of Arjuna, the Lord explains the six phases of the same *Brahma*.

The essence of this verse is that the divine Self alone is real in the elements that constitute the body, mind, and intellect and in all their functions, perceptions, feelings, and thoughts. All else is perishable, delusory, and superimposed on the Self. Hence, by knowing the eternal Self alone, everything is known.

## Śloka 5

अन्तकाले च मामेव स्मरन्मुक्त्वा कलेवरं ।  
यः प्रयाति स मद्भावं याति नास्त्यत्र संशयः ॥ ५ ॥

*antakāle ca māmeva smaranmuktvā kalevaram  
yaḥ prayāti sa madbhāvaṁ yāti nāstyatra saṁśayaḥ*

|          |                  |                      |
|----------|------------------|----------------------|
| अन्तकाले | <i>antakāle</i>  | at the time of death |
| च        | <i>ca</i>        | and                  |
| माम्     | <i>mām</i>       | Me                   |
| एव       | <i>eva</i>       | only                 |
| स्मरन्   | <i>smaran</i>    | remembering          |
| मुक्त्वा | <i>muktvā</i>    | leaving              |
| कलेवरम्  | <i>kalevaram</i> | body                 |
| यः       | <i>yaḥ</i>       | who                  |
| प्रयाति  | <i>prayāti</i>   | goes forth           |
| सः       | <i>saḥ</i>       | he                   |
| मद्भवम्  | <i>madbhavam</i> | My being             |
| याति     | <i>yāti</i>      | attains              |
| न अस्ति  | <i>na asti</i>   | is not               |
| अत्र     | <i>atra</i>      | here                 |
| संशयः    | <i>saṁśayaḥ</i>  | doubt                |