

# Chanting Hymn Before Meals

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**Seeker:** Hi, Sundari and James. ☺ I am curious to know what this “important non-dual verse of the *Gita*” you chant with every meal is.

**Sundari:** Here it is:

*Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter IV, Verse 24, A Non-Dual Prayer:

*Brahmarpanam Brahma Havir*

*Brahmagnau Brahmanaahutam*

*Brahmaiva Tena Ghantavyam*

*Brahmakarma Samadhina*

“The means of offering is *Brahman*. The oblation is *Brahman*, offered by *Brahman* into the fire, which is *Brahman*. *Brahman* indeed is to be reached by him who sees everything as *Brahman*.”

## Commentary by Swami Dayananda

In the preceding section, the nature of *atma* was described as *akarta*, meaning that the self performs no action. Action takes place based on desire and will, types of thoughts that belong to the *buddhi*. The physical body, *kaya*, organ of speech, *vak*, and the mind, *manas*, are the three means of action, *karanas*. Here, the physical body refers to the hands and legs, the limbs that are used to perform action. Any action that is done can be grouped under any or all these three. For example, when you offer a prayer, it can be either a mental or a verbal action or a ritual involving physical limbs. All three involve the mind.

If *atma* is the body-mind-sense assemblage, which is the basis for all actions to take place, then I become the actor. Whereas, if this assemblage is not *atma*, then *atma* is free from the body, mind and senses. It is in the form of pure consciousness, *Suddha-caitanya-svarupa*, and performs no action whatsoever. Thus it was said that even while performing action, the wise person does no action whatsoever, because doership is not there for the person.

## How Active a *Jnani* Means Nothing

Also, if the *jnani* performs only those actions that are necessary to sustain the physical body, no results will accrue, because, again, there is no doership. In this way, two types of *janis* were pointed out. One type is in the thick-and-thin of various activities, totally engaged in action, and the second type is not. But even for the *jnani* who performs activities it was said that no action is performed. Why? Because the person sees *akarma* in all *karmas*, meaning that he sees *atma* as actionless in the very activity itself. How much or how little activity you do means nothing. What is

important is whether or not you see *atma* as a non-doer, *akarta*.

There is no rule about how a wise person should be. One person may be very active and another may be a *sannyasi*. A *sannyasi* can also be active or not very active. He may perform only those activities necessary to sustain the body or may be involved in the world because of his *prarabdha*. Either way, there is no *karma* for the person and no results accrue to him, because there is no doership.

In the present verse, we see that, for the wise person, all *karma* and everything connected to the *karma* is *Brahman*. In fact this is what self-knowledge is all about. There is nothing separate from *atma*, which is *Brahman*. This is the knowledge that makes the person wise. *Atma* is equated to *Brahman*, *Brahman* is *jnana*, pure consciousness, and therefore not subject to time, space or any attributes. It is *satya*, pure existence, and *ananta*, limitless, which is the basis, the truth, of everything. In terms of time, *atma* is limitless, and in terms of space also, it is limitless. There is nothing that is independent of this *satya-atma*. Being dependent on *satya*, which is *parambrahma*, everything else is nothing but *parambrahma*, which is *atma*, oneself.

One who sees *atma* as free from action sees *atma* as *Brahman*, and this is *jnana*. Therefore we have to understand *atma* as a non-doer as *param brahma*. With this knowledge, all actions and everything connected to them, including the results, are nullified, negated.

The statement made earlier, *karmani akarmayah pasyet*, was made clearer when it was said, in the last verse, that all the *karmas* of the wise person are totally resolved – *samagram karma praviyate*. To say that a wise person sees *akarma* in *karma* implies that there are actions being done. For example, speaking is an action done for which there is someone who speaks, a subject matter, a way of speaking, a reason for speaking and so on – all of which the *jnani* understands as being non-separate from *param brahma*.

The *karta*, or the agent of action, is *Brahman*. The *karma*, or the object of action, is *Brahman*. The *karana*, or the instrument of action, is *Brahman* and the place where the action is done is *Brahman*. This vision that everything is *Brahman* is unfolded in the present verse by using a Vedic ritual as an example. Krsna is not pointing out the ritual itself here; he is pointing out the wisdom encapsulate in the ritual, the vision that is Vedanta.

## **Krsna Uses a Vedic Ritual to Unfold the Knowledge**

A Vedic ritual is as good as a prayer. It is an action in which a purpose and a result are involved. There is a person who wants a particular result and there is a method of offering a particular oblation. All the *karakas*, all the factors involved in an action, are presented in this verse – an agent of action, an object, a means, a purpose, a place from where the action is coming and a place into which the action is going.

What Krsna is conveying here is that every means of offering is *Brahman* – *brahma arpanam*. Here *arpana* means that by which something is offered – *arpyate anena iti arpanam*. What is the oblation? *Havis*, the oblation which is offered, is also *Brahman* – *brahma havih*. Where is the offering made? *Brahma-agnau* – into the fire of *Brahman*, the fire that is *Brahman*. By whom is the offering made? The offering is made by *Brahman* – *brahmana hutam*. The *karta*, the doer, is *Brahman*. For what purpose is the offering made? The offering is made for the purpose of gaining *Brahman* alone – *brahma eva tena gantavyam*. By whom is this *Brahman* to be gained? By one

who sees everything as *Brahman – brahma-karma-samadhina*.

*Arpana* is that by which something is offered, a wooden ladle, for example, or a *mantra* with which an offering is made. And while offering, a particular *mantra* is chanted to indicate exactly to which *devata*, or deity, the oblation is being offered. For example, the words “*indraya svaha, indrdya idam na mama*” are to invoke the *devata* called Indra, and they mean “This is being offered to Indra; (this) does not belong to me anymore.” Similarly, “*agnaye svaha, agnaye idam na mama*” means “This is for Agni; (this) is no longer mine.” In this way, you are not making the *devata* indebted to you. You offer the oblation to the chosen *devata*, saying, “This is for you alone. I am giving it to you. It is no longer mine.” This then is the meaning of *arpana*.

Whether a ladle or a *mantra*, how is this *arpana* separate from *Brahman*? Nothing is separate from *Brahman*. Therefore sound is *Brahman*, word is *Brahman*, knowledge is *Brahman*, Indra is *Brahman*. Everything is *Brahman*. Because of the wise person’s *brahma-buddhi*, he or she performs the ritual seeing *Brahman* in everything, just as when you see a clay pot, the clay is not missed. Or when you see a golden ornament, the gold is not missed. When you see a shirt, the cloth is not missed.

### **The *Satya* and *Mithya* of the Ritual**

Similarly, when a *jnani* sees anything, *Brahman* is not missed, *Brahman* being the cause of everything. *Brahman* being the truth, the *satya*, of everything, everything is dependent upon *satya-brahma* and is therefore *mithya*. This means that *arpana*, the ladle, the *mantra* and so on are all *mithya*. Thus *arpana* is *Brahman – arpanam*.

The object offered is *havis*, clarified butter or any other thing that is offered as the oblation. This is also *Brahman*. And it is offered by *Brahman*, *Brahmanahutam*. That is, the person who offers the oblation is also *Brahman* – a fact known to the wise person. *Hutam* means “is offered.” This word refers to the act of offering, the *kriya*. *Anena* means “by means of this”; *arpyate* is offered; *arpanam*, the means, the instrument with which the oblation is offered into the fire during a ritual and this could mean both the wooden ladle and the *mantra* with which the offering is made is non-separate from *brahma*. The oblation, *havis*, is offered unto the fire, *agni*, the location in which the act of offering takes place. Here too, *agni* is nothing but *Brahman*, born of *Brahman* and therefore non-separate from *Brahman*.

We see then that all the *karakas* are covered here. The first *karaka*, the *karta*, the one who offers, is *Brahman*; the second *karaka*, the *karma*, or object, is *Brahman*; the third *karaka*, the *karana*, or instrument, is *Brahman*; the purpose of the ritual is *Brahman*; and the fifth *karaka*, from where the action comes, is *Brahman*. Because the sixth *karaka*, the possessive or genitive case, generally does not relate to an action, it does not generally represent one of the six *karakas*. The sixth *karaka*, which takes the locative case, is also here in the verse. Here it is said, “In the fire of *Brahman*, *brahmagnau*.” Therefore the fire into which the offering is made is also *Brahman*.

### **Performing Ritual as a Doer**

If a person performs a ritual for the sake of heaven, he or she is a *karta*. Because I am a *karta*, I want to go to heaven, and this heaven is separate from me. Therefore if I do this particular *karma*, the *karma-phala* will be *punya*, and this *punya* I can later encash for a ticket to heaven.

This is the meaning of a ritual if I am a *karta*, whereas if I know that I am *Brahman*, it is altogether different. *Brahman* is everything, including heaven. This being the case, what is to be gained by the person of knowledge? *Brahman* alone is to be gained by the wise person – *brahmaivatenagantavyam*. This is to say that nothing is to be gained, because the *jnani* is *Brahman*.

*Gantavyam* means “that which is to be reached” or “that which is to be accomplished.” Because the person is already *Brahman*, there is nothing to be gained. Everything being *Brahman*, there is nothing away from *Brahman*, and therefore nothing to be gained that is not *Brahman*. But while this may indeed be a fact, one has to know the fact. Otherwise the person is a *karta*. Then, looking at everything in a ritual as *Brahman* becomes a form of meditation, *upasana*. Wherever you deliberately superimpose something exalted on something ordinary, there is *upasana*, just as you deliberately superimpose the United States on a piece of cloth with so many stars and stripes.

Superimposition need not be deliberate always, like when you mistake an object for something else. Without any deliberation, you may superimpose a snake on a piece of rope, for example. This is a mistake. But to take a wooden or stone statue of Visnu for the Lord is not a mistake, unless of course you take the given form alone as Visnu. This is *upasana*.

### **Knowledge Alone Is Involved Here**

Whereas when a person realises the fact “I am *Brahman*” it is knowledge, not *upasana*. Here in this verse knowledge alone is involved, the ritual being performed by one who sees *Brahman* in all actions, *brahma-karma-samadhi*. Seeing *Brahman* everywhere is called *brahma-karma-samadhi*.

How can one see *Brahman* everywhere? If one goes around with eyes wide open will *Brahman* be seen in everything? When a chair is seen, do you go beyond the chair and see *Brahman*? Seeing *Brahman* is not like looking at a shirt and seeing the cloth. When you see a shirt, you see only the shirt. Obviously then, you do not see *Brahman* in this way. In fact you will not see *Brahman*, because you are *Brahman*! The thought that objectifies the chair is *Brahman*. The space in which the chair is sitting is also *Brahman*. And the chair itself, every particle of it, is nothing but *Brahman*.

The object of any thought is non-separate from the consciousness that is *Brahman*, and the knowledge of the object, the thought itself, is also non-separate from this consciousness. The one who knows, who has the knowledge of the object, is also nothing but consciousness. Therefore the knower, the knowledge and the object of knowledge are all *Brahman*, consciousness, which is *satya*.

Thus the statement, “I am *Brahman*,” means *atma* is *Brahman*, which is *nirvikalpa* – that which does not have the knower-knowledge-known distinction, *jnatr-jjana-jieya bheda*. *Nirvikalpa* does not mean the absence of thought but points to the non-difference between the knower, knowledge and known. Because knowledge is myself, the knower is myself and the object of knowledge is myself; these three are only apparently different. Thus to say, “I am *nirvikalpa*,” is to refer to the fact that there is no real difference between the knower, knowledge and known. This knowledge is always *nirvikalpa*, there being no second thing. Whether you know it or not, this knowledge is always there. Similarly, when you see, the seer, the sight and the seen are all

*Brahman*. And when you hear, the hearer, the hearing and the heard are also *Brahman*.

Thus being in any situation is seeing *Brahman* everywhere – *sarvatra brahma-darshanam*. It is not a matter of opening one's eyes and trying to see *Brahman*. *Brahman* is not an object to be seen with the eyes. To see *Brahman* everywhere is to recognise the fact that the knower, *jnata*, is *Brahman*, the knowledge, *jnana*, is *Brahman*, and what is known, *jneya*, is *Brahman*. All three are *Brahman*, but *Brahman* is independent of all of them.

### **Seeing *Brahman* Everywhere Is Knowledge**

In fact all three – knower, knowledge and known – can be shaken off; they can be removed. And they can return to be removed again. You have them, you remove them, you have them, you remove them – and all the while *Brahman* always is. And the one who has this knowledge, who sees *Brahman* everywhere, is called *brahma-karma-samadhi*.

*Brahma-karma-samadhi* here refers to a person who has an intellect that appreciates that everything is *Brahman* – *brahma eva karma – brahma-karma; brahma-karmasamadhina (samahita buddhih) yasya*. And what is to be gained by the *brahmakarma-samadhi*, one who sees *Brahman* in all action? What is to be gained when everything is *Brahman*? Nothing, except *Brahman* – *brahmaivagantavyam*. If everything is *Brahman*, what result can there be? If the doer is *Brahman*, the done is *Brahman*, the doing is *Brahman*, and the reason for doing it is *Brahman*, where is the result? For whom is the result? And for what purpose is the result?

Knowing that everything is *Brahman*, the *jnani* who is engaged in activity performs action for the sake of the people – *loka-sargrahartham*. Even though there is nothing for the wise person to accomplish, his time is available for helping people. The *jnani* requires nothing to be secure or happy, and therefore his time is no longer required for himself. Whatever time is left in the person's life can therefore be given to the people for them to make use of as best as they can.