

Shloka 2-37

**Hatah va prapsaysi svargam, jitva va bhokshayse
maheem,
Tasmat uttishtha Kaunteya, yudhaya kritnishchayah**

Hatah	dying, getting slained
va	by
prapsaysi	will gain
svargam	heavens
jitva	winning, conquering
va	by
bhokshayse	shall enjoy (as a ruler)
maheem	earth
Tasmat	therefore
uttishtha	arise
Kaunteya	son of Kunti (or Arjuna)
yudhaya	to fight
krit nishchayah	resolved, determined

Meaning: By dying (in this battle) you will gain the heavens (higher lokas), by winning (in the battle), you will enjoy the (riches of) earth (as a ruler), therefore, Arjuna, arise, resolved to fight (this righteous war).

Explanation

This is one of the most famous shlokas of the Bhagwad Gita, and is also inscribed in some temples in India. It is a shloka which most soldiers in the Indian army know by heart! Why? In essence, it tells a soldier that no harm can come to him if he is fighting a righteous war. This shloka continues the message of Shloka 2-31 which is that Arjuna should do his “svadharma” by taking part in the righteous war since he is a kshatriya.

In this shloka, Bhagwan Krishna explains to Arjuna, there are only two things that can happen to him by participating in the battle against the Kaurava army. Either he will be killed or he will come out victorious. If he is killed he will enjoy svarga*, and if he wins and conquers the enemy, he will become king and enjoy the pleasures of this earth.

Another important point is that the gains mentioned in this shloka, “svarga” and “pleasures of this earth” are available to all soldiers who participate in a righteous war. However, these gains are only temporary since the benefits of heaven and earth are only temporary according to the philosophy of Karma Yoga. However, if a soldier fights as the highest Karma Yogi would fight, then his gains can be permanent since he is ultimately able to reach Ishwara Himself (as explained in Shloka 8-7).

How does a soldier, who is a Karma Yogi, take part in a battle? An answer is given in Shloka 8-7, and an answer will also be given in the next shloka (Shloka 2-38).

Of course, this does not mean that everyone should go out there and start fighting. No, the Gita message is quite clear on this; **if** you are a soldier or a general in the army (as Arjuna was of the Pandava army) and the time comes to fight a war for your country (for example, taking part in World War II for the Allied army), then everyone from the soldier to the general better be ready to participate. Backing away is especially not allowed on the eve of the battle!

* The literal translation of svarga is heaven, but svarga to Hindus does not mean heaven in the traditional sense. Heaven to Hindus is not a permanent residence for the soul after death. Instead, the followers of Karma Yoga believe that it is a temporary resting place for the soul after which rebirth takes place (this is explained in Shlokas 9-20 and 9-21 of the Gita).

The moral of this shloka is this: Conducting one’s “svadharma” is always beneficial although the gains may be some times temporary.