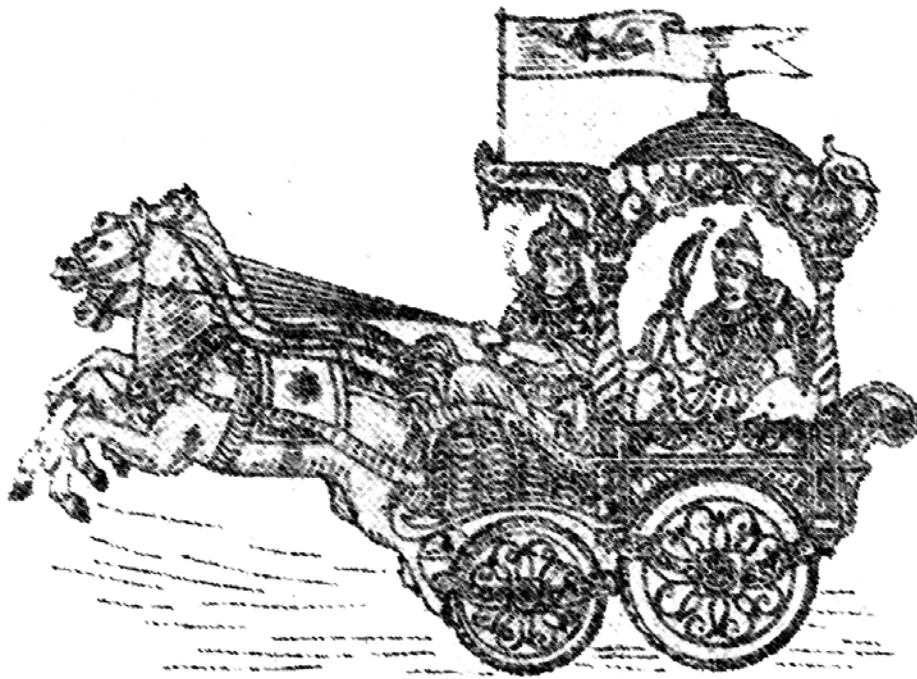


THE SONG OF GOD

(Bhagavad Gītā)

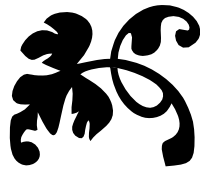


daily readings

The Song Of God

(Bhagavad Gita)

daily readings



Commentary by

**Swami
Venkatesananda**

with Forewords by

H.H. Sri Swami Chidananda

H.H. Sri Swami Chinmayananda

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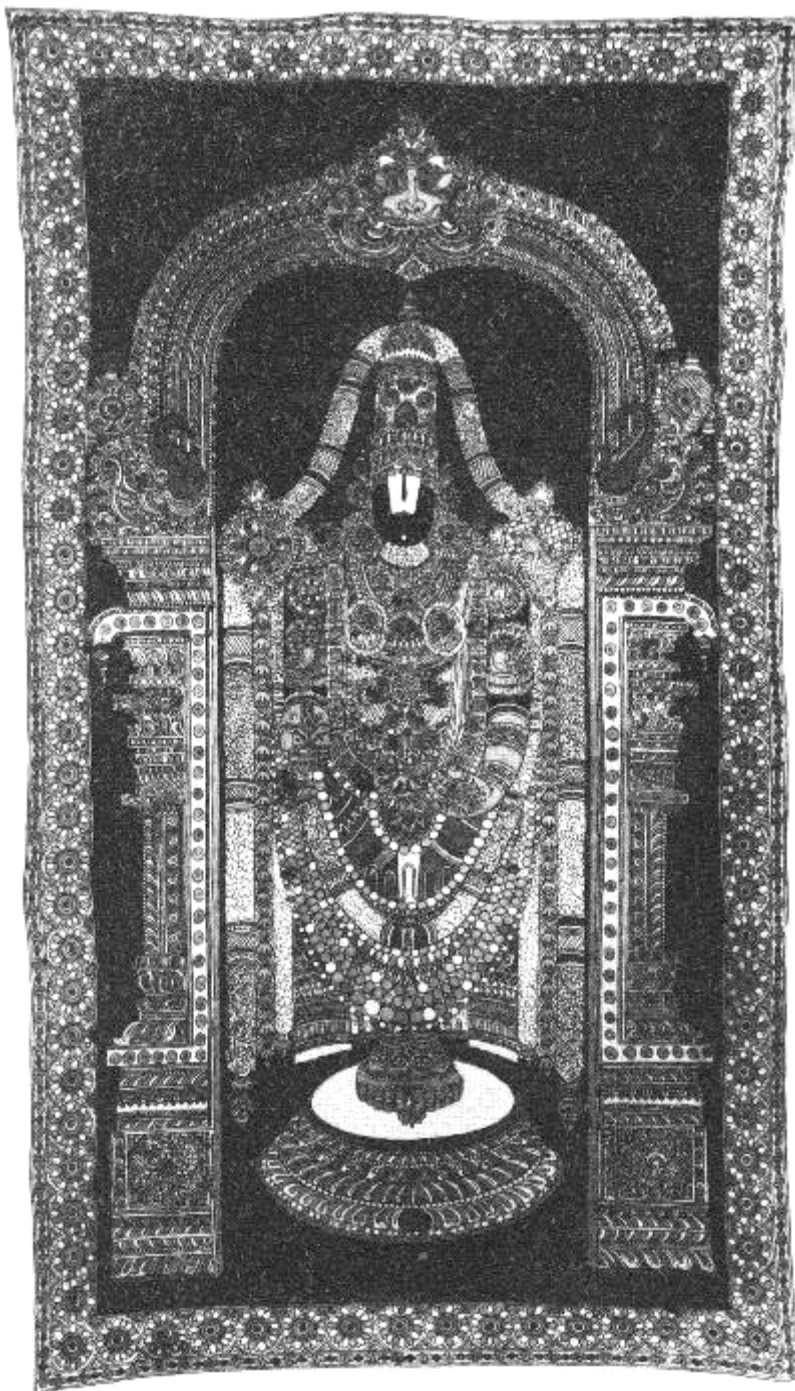
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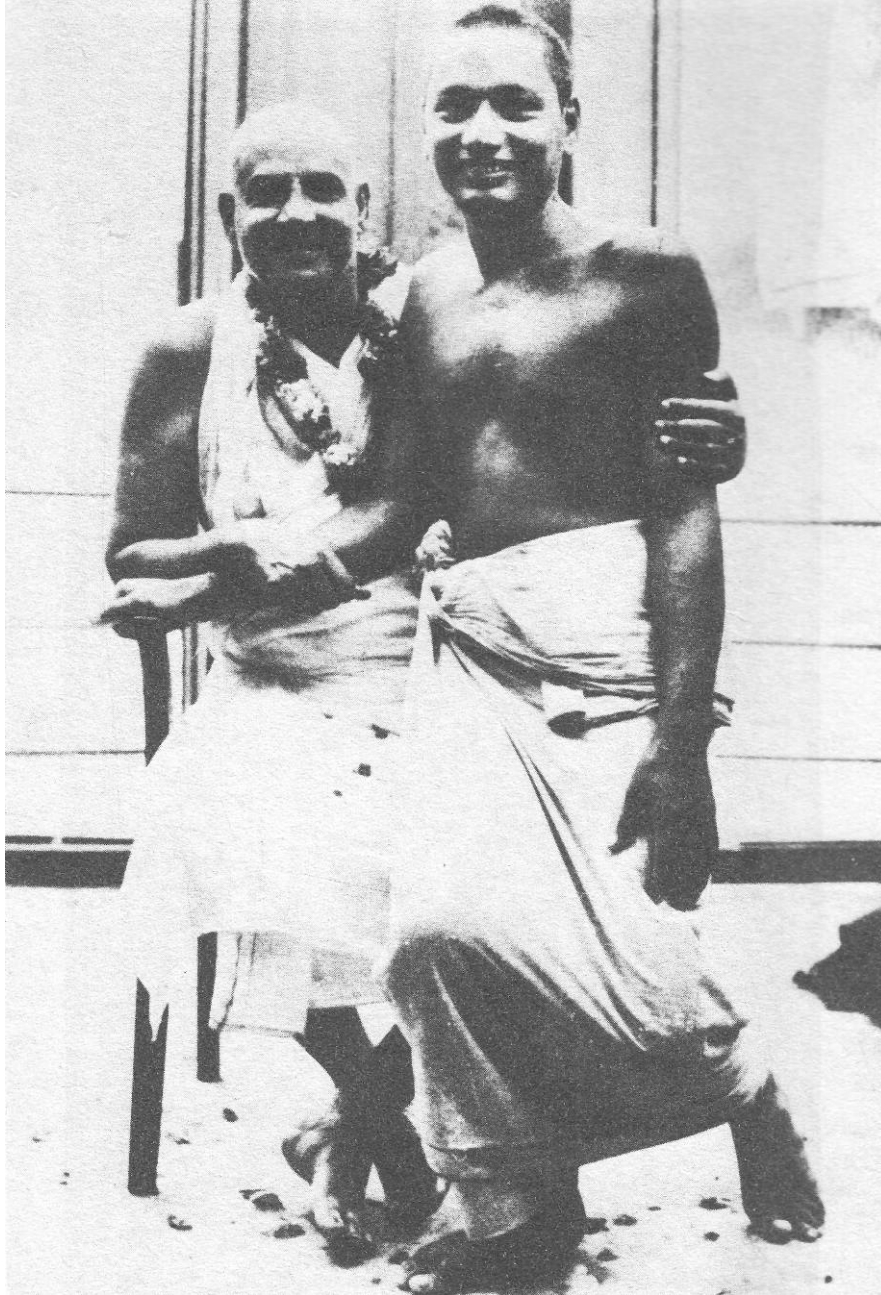
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Lord Venkateśa



*Gurudev Sri Swami Sivananda with his disciple,
Swami Venkatesananda*

WORSHIPFUL OFFERING

At the feet of

GURUDEV SWAMI SIVANANDA

It has always bordered on the miraculous. Gurudev blessed me and sent me overseas in 1961 and I have been asked to speak, speak and speak to all sorts of audiences in several countries. Before I stand up on the platform and after I get down from it, I have always been sceptical of my worthiness to be there. But I have always experienced an inner transformation the moment I offer the prayer to the guru: Gurudev took over. It was he who spoke and I have always been the first listener.

I am nothing. It is Gurudev who has carried on his own mission: that it has been through this particular instrument is a blessing upon it. In the process, the instrument itself has been chastened, purified and in spite of its unworthiness, glorified. But, no one should ever forget that all glory, all praise, should be offered to Gurudev.

May his light shine forever in our hearts.

Swami Venkatesananda

EDITOR'S NOTE

While in Mauritius in September 1982, Swami Venkatesananda began to revise his book of the translation and commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā – ‘The Song of God’ as daily readings. His objective was to expand and clarify the commentaries as well as to include many new ideas. I was visiting Mauritius at that time and Swamiji gave me the blessing of editing the work.

As an introduction, he wishes to include a condensation of the talks-series on the Bhagavad Gītā which he had delivered to students of the Yoga Vedanta Forest Academy, Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India, between November 1981 and January 1982. This was prepared and edited by Swami Lakshmi Ananda. Swamiji himself completed the editing.

On December 2nd 1982, Swamiji entered into Mahāsamādhi. He had worked on the revision till the page for May 3rd and it was left to me to continue. In order to do this, material was taken from Swamiji's latest talks on the Gītā in which he had expressed many novel and revolutionary ideas.

Swamiji's inspiration has been the guiding light all along, and I sincerely hope that the final result is in accordance with what he envisaged. Any shortcomings are due entirely to inadequacy on the part of the editor.

Finally, all of us involved in the production of this book, as well as devotees the world over, join to offer our deepest gratitude to beloved Swami Venkatesanandaji for his intense dedication, infinite patience and boundless love and guidance. Thank you, Swamiji, for pointing the way.

Venkataramani

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FOREWORD

(to the third edition)

H.H. ŚRĪ SWAMI CHIDANANDA

President, The Divine Life Society (World Headquarters), Rishikesh, India.

Homage unto the divine. Glory be to the Lord who gave us divine wisdom by manifesting himself as a world teacher, the blessed Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and imparting to mankind the unique, universal teachings of the Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā. Worshipful adorations to lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the most beloved teacher of humanity, the giver of the Gītā wisdom. My heart-felt admiration and silent prostrations at the feet of Śrī Swami Venkatesanandaji Maharaj who has verily served as a messenger of the blessed lord Kṛṣṇa himself by bringing his Gītā teachings within the reach of countless people in numerous countries all over the modern English-knowing world.

The Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā is a unique scripture due to a variety of reasons. It presents us within its brief range of seven hundred verses, in a most compact yet comprehensive way, the very quintessence of the ancient vedic religion of India. It holds within its pages a most thrilling and deeply significant message for the entire mankind for all times to come. The Gītā embodies in itself an amazing revelation of the age-old mystery of man, the universe and God. It is at once an exposition of the nature of the transcendental reality, a discourse upon the supreme art of drawing near to the divine and entering into a lasting and beautiful relationship with it; and at the same time a wonderful manual on the science of self-realisation, giving practical instructions on the processes for attaining God-experience. No wonder therefore, that now in the third quarter of the twentieth century all true seekers after divine experience hail the Gītā as one of the most invaluable treasures in the common wisdom-heritage of mankind in this world. For, it has a timeless message and its teachings are of eternal validity.

The Song of God constitutes a signal achievement in the annals of the present century religious history by bringing out the living waters of spiritual wisdom and making them enter into and join the living flow of the common current of man's daily life. This confluence helps to make your daily life divine, and lifts it up from the earthly rut and elevates it to a new spiritual level. Spread, as the discourses are, over a period of 366 days, this admirable volume, the most successful in effectively providing divine manna as well as practical spiritual exercises for your entire year, can well become your life-long companion. Herein lies the great value to the possessor of this book.

My beloved spiritual brother, the revered Swami Venkatesanandaji Maharaj is now a well-known religious preacher and spiritual teacher in almost all parts of the world in both the hemispheres. He has indeed put the world into a debt of gratitude by these daily discourses lovingly compiled by his faithful followers in this book form. They contain instructive, inspiring, informative and intuitive daily readings that can help the reader to transform his activities and spiritualise his whole life. The secret of saintly author's success in this work is his own personal spiritual life wherein he sincerely tries to live the Gītā teachings himself. He seeks to ever keep himself inwardly in a state of yoga, even in the midst of his active mission when engaged in carrying out his holy guru, Swami Sivanandaji's, spiritual awakening work. To Swami Venkatesanandaji this work

is a devout service to his fellow beings and a worship offered to the God enshrined in man. Such worshipful service is the key-note of his dedicated life. His teachings have their own wonderful charm, powerful appeal and spiritual force, because the saint-author has emptied himself of his ego and, renouncing his sense of doership, he has made himself into a worthy instrument in the hands of God and his holy Master, Swami Sivananda, of worshipful memory. By bringing the practical application of the Gītā spiritual teachings into man's daily life in the present-day world of the space age, Swami Venkatesanandaji has carried further ahead the work of his beloved Guru, who had expounded to the people of this century, vedānta in daily life, yoga in daily life and upaniṣad for busy man.

It is a great joy to me to express my views as a foreword to this invaluable book and I take this opportunity of wishing Swamiji a most progressive and successful future of many long years of such noble service unto God and man. I pray for his highest blessedness and divine illumination. May this book have the widest circulation that it richly deserves.

SWAMI CHIDANANDA

19th November, 1971

Divine Life Society,
P.O. Shivanandanagar,
via Rishikesh,
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Swami Venkatesananda and H.H. Sri Swami Chidananda

FOREWORD

H.H. ŚRĪ SWAMI CHINMAYANANDA

President, Chinmaya Tapovan Trust, Sidhabari.

Founder, World-wide Chinmaya Mission.

Founder, Sandeepany,

MASTER YOURSELF

Lord, it seems, in His Infinite lavishness, as though crazy in His maddening love for us, gave each one of us a very precious gift at our birth itself. This highly sophisticated equipment, freely offered to each one of us as ‘His birthday present’, has been, in our ignorance and innocence, often misused, sometimes abused, and almost never rightly employed. A ‘hand-book of instructions’ was needed to explain how to get the best performance from our vehicles. And that hand-book, in Hinduism, is the Bhagavad Gītā, the Bible or the Koran of the Hindus.

Generally, man lives under the compulsions of his immediate hungers and desires, and so he may not easily recognise the beauty of a selfless, and therefore desireless, life of service and love. The scriptural text-books are the only literature available to us to get ourselves educated in this richer way of living. Gītā particularly deals with this theme.

Swami Venkatesananda has made the study Gītā of easier for all students. He has prescribed the daily dose, and has lovingly sweetened each dose with a pinch of sugary comments, which can explode the meaning into your bosom.

Sincere students, who faithfully go through this world-famous text-book, leaning on these Venkatesa-bits, some five times, can gain all the theoretical knowledge on how-to-live; thereafter, it depends upon each seeker how much of it is brought by him into his personal life-style.

True benefit in spiritual studies can come to us only when we become ready for a total transmutation of our own life. If that heroism is not in us we are only cluttering our understanding with some data, information, bits of knowledge. Be prepared to change – a creative movement in yourself: from a life of empty search for excitements to a solid gain in self-unfoldment.

You are meant to succeed, to achieve. If you fail and do not achieve what you want, it is only because your equipment is not properly tuned up. There is now a lot of dissipation of your vital mental energies, due to your wrong values and improper attitudes. Gītā reveals the secrets of readjusting your own personality to bring out the true melody of right living, and to invoke the fuller dynamism needed for all great successes and meaningful achievements.

May all diligent and sincere students reach out and gain this self-mastery in action here,
and in their meditation seats.

Love, Love, Love

SWAMI CHINMAYANANDA
SANDDEPANY (HIM)
Sidhabari 176 057



*Swami Venkatesananda with H.H. Sri Swami Krishnananda
and H.H. Sri Swami Chinmayananda*

SCHEME OF TRANSLITERATION

Vowels:	a	ā	i	ī	u	ū	ṛ	ṝ	ḷ	e	ai	o	au	ṁ	ḥ
Consonants:	gutturals		k	kh	g	gh	ṅ								
	palatals		c	ch	j	jh	ñ								
cerebrals	ṭ	ṭh	ḍ	ḍh	ṇ										
dentals	t	th	d	dh	n										
labials	p	ph	b	bh	m										
semi-vowels	y	r	l	v											
sibilants	s	as in sun				ś	palatal sibilant				ṣ	cerebral sibilant as in shun			
aspirate	h														

Please Note:

1. The pronunciation of the syllable 'jñ' (e.g. jñāna – meaning knowledge or wisdom) is similar to the 'gn' or 'ny' found in the French word 'montagne' or the Zulu word 'nyanga'.
2. The use of capitals has been reduced to the absolute minimum.
3. The transliterated spelling for most Sanskrit proper nouns and words has been retained throughout the text and commentary. e.g. Kṛṣṇa, saṁnyāsa.
4. In this edition, anglicised Sanskrit adjectival forms and plurals have been abandoned. The adjectives are rendered in their transliterated Sanskrit form (e.g. vaidika, rājasa), whilst, in the case of plurals, an accent has merely been added to elongate the final vowel irrespective of the correct grammatical form (e.g. jīvā, yogī, rājasā). For this, we crave the indulgence of Sanskrit scholars.
5. Chapter numbers appear at the top left-hand corner of each page and verse numbers at the top right-hand corner. For example:

V

22nd April

10,11

PREFACE

Is it possible in the modern world to live a life of peace and joy, free from tension, anxiety, fear and frustration? Yes! The Bhagavad Gītā illumines that possibility.

In this volume, the transliteration of the original text is followed by its literal transliteration (which is Gurudev Sivananda's own). Then follow a few thoughts offered at your feet. This is not a commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā, but it can serve as a supplement to the standard commentaries! It is meant as a spiritual stimulant, to help you understand the scripture better.

The best way to use it is to study a page a day, and then meditate on the verses themselves. By the grace of God and guru, you will receive more light from within, and greater, and ever greater, understanding of the spiritual truth revealed in the scripture.

This is the sole object with which this labour of love is offered at the feet of the Lord present in your heart.

Here is the story of the Mahābhārata, in brief:

Two brothers, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who was born blind, and Pāṇḍu, who was born anaemic (white), had a hundred wicked sons and five pious sons respectively. The wicked sons of the former were keen to 'take over' their cousins' share of the kingdom and tried all means, fair and foul, to achieve their ambition. God's grace, however, rescued the sons of Pāṇḍu from peril after peril.

The wicked hundred contrived to banish the pious five from the kingdom for a period of thirteen years, and when they returned after successfully completing the period of exile, the wicked ones flatly refused to give them their rightful share of the kingdom.

Lord Kṛṣṇa, who was a friend of the pious five, made a last-minute attempt to avert the armed conflict which, however, became inevitable.

The impartial lord Kṛṣṇa offered to help both the parties: they could choose either himself or his vast army. The wicked hundred chose the army, and the pious five were happy that they could have God incarnate on their side. Kṛṣṇa served as the charioteer of Arjuna, one of the pious five.

Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the blind king, was complacent that his sons' superior might, the numerical superiority of their army and the presence on their side of Bhīṣma of unparalleled valour – who could not be slain against his own will – would ensure their victory. However, on the tenth day of the battle, Bhīṣma fell. The blind king's faith was shaken and he called upon his intuitive minister, Sañjaya, to narrate the events of the war to him.

Now read on. . .

INTRODUCTION

The Bhagavad Gītā (Song of God) has captured the imagination of thinking men and women all over the world. It has been translated into many languages and has among its devotees people belonging to many religions and nationalities. The uniqueness of the gospel of the Bhagavad Gītā lies in the fact that its follower need not belong to a particular formal religion or sect.

“Each man devoted to his own duty attains perfection,” declares the prophet of cosmic vision, śrī Kṛṣṇa who continues to explain succinctly how this perfection is attained.

He from whom all the beings have evolved and by whom all this is pervaded – worshipping him (God) with the due performance of his own duty, man attains perfection.

(18:46)

Here, then, is a unique gospel which does not tamper with your station in life, distract you from your duties, disturb your faith nor lure you away from the path you have chosen but illumines your path and strengthens your faith. Its proclaimed object is to free you from worry and anxiety, to protect you from yourself – your own lower self, full of unruly desires and unjustified prejudices, deluded by ageless ignorance and therefore haunted by meaningless fears of imaginary calamities.

In the Gītā Dhyānaṁ which is chanted before reading the Gītā, there is a lovely verse. In it the Gītā is considered the milk, the upaniṣad are compared to the cow and Kṛṣṇa to the cowherd. The Indian cowherd never milks the cow till the calf has had some and thus inspires the cow to release the milk. Here it is Arjuna who serves that role. They whose intelligence is filled with goodness enjoy this drink.

Please do not get the wrong impression that Kṛṣṇa himself gave the teaching chapter by chapter: “That was the second chapter, and now begins the third chapter.” It was a continuing dialogue. If you understand that, you might also appreciate why the thoughts are all jumbled. For instance, karma yoga is discussed in the second, third, fourth and last chapters.

Scriptures have all been obviously put together by human beings however much you and I may wish to believe that they are direct revelations of God. Of course, it is God speaking through them – so on the one hand you can see that all teaching comes from God; on the other hand you can see that all teaching is man-made, polluted by human speech.

The Yoga Vāsiṣṭha says: ‘Study this scripture and you will be free. If you think that because it is man-made you have no faith in it, go and seek some other scripture, but find enlightenment.’ So, study the Gītā, but stop the mind from selective understanding. If you are accepting or rejecting a scripture or a teaching because your mind likes it or dislikes it, you are in the same mill, going round and round and round, it is totally useless.

There is a great risk in trying to philosophise a teaching. A teaching is a teaching! The mind that wants to analyse that teaching runs into infinite, endless difficulty, because once you begin to analyse something there is no end to it. The teaching is totally outside.

Unity, diversity, perishable, imperishable, you, I, he, etc., are all words and ideas created by the mind, sustained by the mind and dependent on the mind. God is the dictionary in which all these words are found, and in which all these ideas can prevail. No word has a meaning built into it. The meaning of a word arises within you – often because of conventional usage, but always because of your understanding or non-understanding. Words have no meaning at all except to the extent that we intuit some meaning to them.

We are so full of definitions and our own understanding, that it is impossible to teach us. It is our own understanding that receives the new knowledge and therefore it instantly becomes old. It is far easier to teach someone who is totally raw than someone who thinks he knows or can understand. Therefore Arjuna could not be taught until he collapsed.

Swami Sivananda once said: “If you want to become a professor, please go to the library and study all the commentaries on the Bhagavad Gītā and write one of your own. On the other hand, if your main motivation in seeking to study the Bhagavad Gītā is to practise it and attain self-realisation, then take one verse and **live** it.” Knowledge and action are not two divergent paths; they can be like railroad tracks – both of them leading in the same direction. The Yoga Vāsishtha says that a bird flies with two wings, not one. You must know what you are doing, and do what you know to be right.

We should take up the study of the Bhagavad Gītā with humility, with an eagerness to know what this tiny little scripture has to offer us to enrich our lives, to enable us to become useful citizens and, by God’s grace, to know for ourselves what life is about. We are asked to study the Bhagavad Gītā in order that the message may be incorporated in us so that it might become operative when the time arises – incorporated in the literal sense that it becomes part of the cells of our body.

Thousands of years ago there was a conflict between they who were called the Pāṇḍavā and they who were called the Kauravā. One person cannot quarrel with himself. A quarrel or conflict means between two forces and a union means between two forces. Without this division there is no conflict – and no union! We are told that the Pāṇḍavā had chosen lord Kṛṣṇa to be on their side, not to fight on their side – Kṛṣṇa was merely driver of an armoured car.

What has this to do with us? Is the Bhagavad Gītā relevant to us? If it is not we are wasting our time, or, what is even worse, we might misinterpret the message.

It has a relevance to us because there is ongoing conflict in us. When you are not in conflict with anybody here, you experience conflict within when you recognise that experience is division, division means conflict; there is a division between the idea you have of what you should be and the knowledge you have of what you are. Is it possible for you to observe this division either arising or existing in you all the time?

The conflict (and its resolution) implies two forces. If in reality you are split into two forces, you cannot become reconciled. You cannot find this union within yourself unless you ‘die’ – then you (‘I’) do not exist! The entire Bhagavad Gītā is an investigation into the question: ‘Is this split real?’. You experience this split, there seems to be this inner conflict. You cannot attempt a reconciliation, a union, because any attempt at bringing it about pre-supposes a division. Therefore the scripture tries to divert your attention from

either accepting or rejecting this division, and introduces a third approach – vicāra, investigation. Instead of assuming that there is a division and that division must inevitably lead to conflict, is it possible to look into it? That is what Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna. And that is what is relevant to us in the daily battle of our lives. The reason why, perhaps, Kṛṣṇa chose the battlefield to deliver this message!

There are apparently two contradictory schools of thought – one saying that you must love your neighbour, and the other saying you **are** your neighbour. If you are your neighbour, why should you love your neighbour? As long as the division lasts and until this knowledge or experience of oneness arises, it is better to love him than to fight with him. Two things are possible when there is a division – you can love or you can hate. When the division has gone you will know what love really is.

THE SECRET OF DISCIPLESHIP

The Mahābhārata story tells us that Kṛṣṇa and his beloved pupil Arjuna were great friends all their lives. They had plenty of time to talk about ātmā jñāna – self-realisation. On the other hand it seems to be very improbable that right in the middle of a battle, two people, who were the kingpins in the battle, found not only the time, but the psychological climate to discuss philosophy. I am not saying this did not happen – but there again, that may have a relevance to us.

When Kṛṣṇa placed the chariot between the two armies and pointed out to Arjuna the people with whom he had to fight, Arjuna collapsed. Having collapsed, he was not prepared to admit “I am not capable of standing. I am trembling, I am nervous.” Arjuna, the student, was a learned person – and it is highly impossible to teach a learned person. He said: “Kṛṣṇa – I should not fight these people. I am not weak, I know the truth, I know what is righteous and what is not righteous; if we kill all these men here there will be an overpopulation of women....All these moral laws on which the society is based will crumble and we who are responsible for this will all go to hell.” There is not a single flaw in that argument because it is based on cultural patterns, tradition and righteousness as it is taught in the religious schools – not on the battlefield.

Arjuna’s problem was that he knew what was right and what was wrong. Is that a problem? If you know what is right and what is wrong, why do you not do what is right and avoid what is wrong? Because the doer of the action is far removed from the knower of right and wrong. The doer of right and wrong is burdened with the memory of what is right and wrong. He is burdened with knowledge. Instead of knowledge – of truth becoming flesh – the knowledge has remained unassimilated and it prevents him from functioning in the here and now. There is a funny story: a fox and a cat met in the wilds. They were discussing methods of escaping when attacked. The cat said: “Climb the tree.” The fox said: “You are stupid. I know a hundred methods. I can chase the hunter, I can throw mud in his eyes, I can run away, I can howl.” As the fox was saying all this, a hunter came. The cat quickly went up the tree but the fox was trying to figure out what to do.

You can guess that he did not come to a conclusion; he did not have to because his conclusion came immediately! When all this knowledge is stored up as memory, it paralyses the doer of the deed.

THE INNER GURU

If you understand the spirit of the first chapter and the philosophy in the first few verses of the second chapter till the verse in which Arjuna says: “I am confused. I am your disciple. I surrender myself to you. Teach me what is good”, you have understood the entire Bhagavad Gītā. He did not say: “I have handed everything over to the guru.” The guru is not a porter who carries your luggage! You cannot hand everything over to him. You must try your best, you must use all your faculties –mental, physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual – God gave them to you in order that you may use them and then go to him only when you are in serious trouble. If they prove inadequate then return to the source, the guru, for more.

Who and what is a guru? A guru can be a person or an impersonal experience of reality. Guru is one (or that) which dispels the darkness of your ignorance. If this does not happen, there is no guru. In the Bhagavad Gītā, Arjuna did not appoint Kṛṣṇa as his guru. What is most important here is the expression ‘śiṣyas te ‘haṁ’ – I am your disciple. You have no right to appoint someone as your guru, but you can, by looking within yourself and examining, investigating yourself, find out if you are a good disciple or not.

People often use the word ‘surrender’. It is easy to surrender when you have tried your utmost to deal with a problem, and you see no way out of it. Then surrender is natural – what else are you going to do? **Then** you become a disciple, then you will joyously listen to what the other person says. Therefore real discipleship is the guru. You have found the guru if you have found what it is to be a true disciple.

If this spirit of discipleship is absent, teaching is futile. My guru, Swami Sivananda, never talked philosophy unless someone sought his counsel seriously and earnestly. Thus, in the first few verses of the second chapter, Kṛṣṇa merely laughs and keeps quiet. Only when Arjuna asked as a disciple did Kṛṣṇa say: “You are worrying yourself unnecessarily.” It is a beautiful formula upon which you can meditate.

NOT THE WHOLE, BUT TRUTH

What is of extraordinary beauty in the first few verses of the second chapter is that Kṛṣṇa seems to look at things from all angles. If you have a problem, it need not always have a single simple solution or answer. For instance if you are aggressive, the problem may be psychological, physiological, social, cultural or spiritual. How do you find the truth then? It is not possible for anyone to have a total view of life. For instance, you are taking a bath in the Gaṅgā in Rishikesh; someone is taking a bath about fifty miles upstream; another is drowning in Calcutta. Is anyone taking a bath in the Gaṅgā? Yes. The total Gaṅgā? No. Can we say that no one is taking a bath in the (total) Gaṅgā? That also is not right! Then is it not possible for us to come to grips with the totality of things which is the truth? Is that only a speculation of philosophers? Are we bound to fragmentation, is there no way out of this? Yes, there is, and it is extremely simple. It is the fact that each one can only look at the truth from his own point of view. You cannot look at any problem from anyone else’s point of view. The recognition that ‘this is only my point of view – not the whole truth – and that there are other points of view’, is the **whole** truth! There is the clear understanding that as long as the mind functions it can only comprehend a fraction of this truth.

If you do not understand that, it creates a twofold problem. One, you think you have isolated yourself from the totality, and two, you think that a fragment of the totality **is** the totality. The moment this understanding arises in your heart you become humble, simple, adaptable and universal.

All confusion arises on account of fragmented thought. Thought can only be fragmented, it is the source of fragmentation. It is not possible for the thought process to comprehend the whole truth. So, whilst you attack the problem from several angles you do not pretend that that alone is sufficient. This is precisely why Kṛṣṇa advances several arguments. No one solution is adequate to any problem. When you realise that as long as thought functions it can only function fragmentarily, then you immediately understand the whole truth. This realisation is the very basis of humility and sincerity and non-fanaticism and an exploring spirit; you are free from vehemence or fanaticism. These are the qualities I noticed in Gurudev Sivananda.

Kṛṣṇa uses several arguments to make Arjuna ‘fight’, that is – to do what had to be done. Kṛṣṇa insists that you have to do **something**. Never mind what you like to do and what you do not like to do, find out who it is that determines what has to be done. Then Kṛṣṇa suggests several ways of looking at the problem of death. Death is inevitable. Why do you worry and bring high philosophical arguments into this problem which is so simple? If you think you are the body, the body will die. If you think you are not only the body, that you dwell in this body, then you will not die.

There is another remarkable argument in the course of the first few verses of the second chapter:

The unreal has no being, there is no non-being of the real. The truth about both has been seen by knowers of the truth.

(2:16)

Fantastic! ‘You are worried that these people are going to be killed.’ What is going to be killed is the body, and the body (the form) is condemned to die. But that which **is** is not destroyed. You cannot possibly wipe out that which exists. That which does not exist does not exist; you cannot create something which does not exist! The mind indulges in a peculiar double trick. Looking for reality it somehow thinks it is different from the reality. That is precisely why you are looking! You are looking for the truth because you think that you are different from the truth. If you honestly and totally believe that, probably you will get somewhere, but having mentally dissected yourself from reality, suddenly you think that you are the body. This is what they call ‘māyā’ – illusion. Merely look at this and you will see that that which is **is**, there is no illusion. If this thing called illusion is thus disposed of, then you begin the correct investigation of the truth. You suddenly realise that illusion is not the perception of a non-existent object (like the mathematical zero) but that because you wanted to see something you assumed must exist, you failed to see what **IS**! Total emptying of assumptions is the immediate realisation of what is – the reality.

THE SELF-CONSUMING REALITY

There is infinite diversity – which is perhaps a contradiction in terms: the infinite is infinite, it cannot be diversified; and what is diversified or fragmented cannot be

infinite...yet the universe is infinite diversity. The indivisible space appears to be divided in infinite ways. (If you understand that sentence either you should be enlightened or go completely mad!)

Kṛṣṇa goes into all these discussions concerning the ultimate truth for the simple reason that action which is not backed up by true understanding is itself bondage. Any action that is backed up by right understanding is itself liberation. Mere doing is mechanical. Reflex actions and instinctive actions are mechanical actions. There is something else which rides your shoulders asking inconvenient questions. The more awake you are and the more insistent and persistent, the more inconvenient the questions become. Till the questioner himself is found, the questioning will not stop. Strangely enough, when the answer is found, there is no one to listen to it!

THE MEANING OF FREED—OM

It seems to be important not only to live, but to understand the meaning of life. Kṛṣṇa very wisely skirts around the problem of the purpose of life. He gives us an inkling into the meaning of life, but he does not really say “This is your duty”. What should be done is not so simple. It cannot be laid down by yourself or others as a sort of ‘forever’ rule, and therefore the understanding of the fundamentals of action, of the source of action – which is knowledge – becomes tremendously important.

Kṛṣṇa counters Arjuna’s argument that ‘war means killing, and therefore destruction of righteousness’, by pointing out that ‘that which you think is destruction is not destruction. But by saying: ‘I am doing this and therefore I will not do that’, you are destroying something which should not be destroyed, which is the spirit of right understanding, or Buddhi Yoga.’ The understander of the truth and the doer of the action, in our case, are complete and total strangers to each other. Your understanding of the truth concerning life and the source of action is one thing, and the understanding from which action arises is quite another. Therefore, there is this perpetual inner conflict, confusion and disharmony within oneself, and therefore disharmony with the environment.

Here it is not a question of ‘must I do this, or must I do something else?’ Explore the source of this action, which is buddhi, link that with clear understanding of what has to be done, and find out who is the doer of this action.

The unawakened intelligence has no ability to understand, but tremendous ability to **mis**understand. Our life is governed by mischief and misunderstanding, bound together. If there is no misunderstanding, or if there is correct understanding of the truth, there is absolutely no loss in your life. You are unaffected whether your life is called gainful, a success or a failure.

In this there is no loss of effort, nor is there any harm. Even a little of this knowledge protects one from great fear.

(2:40)

If you have understood this, it is gain for ever and ever. You are freed from fear for all time to come because from there on there is no loss.

What is the meaning of life? To live. Living means action, and this life of action can also be looked at from innumerable points of view by numberless people. You yourself can look at an action in a hundred thousand ways. So, doing may have a thousand meanings, but the only thing that it does not require is ambition, motivation. Doing, being in the present, that itself is the present from God. Motivation implies linking this action with the thing called future – which does not exist!

If the present can be freed from an illusory future, it becomes the greatest present that you can give to the world, and to yourself.

REAL AND IMITATION YOGI

There are many different interpretations of one of the most important questions asked by Arjuna.

Arjuna said: What, O Kṛṣṇa is the description of him who has steady wisdom, and is merged in the superconscious state? How does one of steady wisdom speak, how does he sit, how does he walk?

(2:54)

A generous interpretation is that he really and sincerely wanted to know what the characteristics of an enlightened person were. We are all seekers of truth interested in meeting the holy men, but if you are able to examine yourself and are able to see for yourself what makes you go to these holy ones, you might discover something tremendously interesting. When you look at an enlightened person you see the way he or she smiles, gesticulates, chants and so on – the external behaviour. Immediately you set about to imitate this external behaviour, hoping thereby that somehow the spirit will follow. It does not! Whereas we should study the lives of the great men and endeavour to derive some inspiration from them, we should also realise that holiness is not something which is worn around the shoulders. It is the spirit that is holy. So Arjuna's question has doubtful significance to us. When we observe a holy man, it is important to remember that whereas his actions are the outflow of the spirit, the actions in themselves are not understandable, except against the background of that spirit. It is very difficult to understand the spirit in which the holy man functions. It is easy to imitate him. In the beginning of the third chapter there is a lovely question.

Arjuna said: If it be thought by thee that knowledge is superior to action, O Kṛṣṇa, why then dost thou ask me to engage in this terrible action?

(3:1)

'If you consider that the spirit and the understanding are more important than the action, why do you want me to fight? I have understood that I am the ātmā, that all this is the spirit and there is no body at all. I have also understood that one should be totally unaffected by success and failure, pain and pleasure, honour and dishonour. My understanding is perfect.' But what is the meaning of that understanding? When you are in a happy situation, when everything is going fine, your body is healthy, your family is wonderful and you have no trouble at all, it is very easy to say you are balanced, even-minded in success and failure. But what happens when dishonour and failure hit you? By merely pretending to have understood and isolating yourself (if that is possible) from human society, how would you know that you have really understood yourself? You

cannot know that you have understood the truth that the enlightened person is even-minded in success and failure unless you plunge yourself into something which can lead to success or failure. So it is life that reveals the depth of our understanding and it is the depth of understanding that flavours life. One without the other is ridiculous and ununderstandable.

In order to answer Arjuna's question, the Lord adopted a very interesting and humorous attitude: "Yes, yes, you are right."

That was Gurudev's method. He would say: "Yes, yes, you are right", and slowly take you round and round and make you see that you were an absolute idiot!

Kṛṣṇa said: In this world there is a twofold path, as I said before, O sinless one, the path of knowledge of the sāṅkhyā and the path of action of the yogī.

(3:3)

The word 'yoga' in the Bhagavad Gītā often means 'action', what you and I call karma yoga – the yoga of living, of action – not stupid mechanical action, but action based on innate intelligence. But what is implied in the verse is a taunt! "In previous ages when I taught jñāna yoga, people understood that it implied living an enlightened life. They did not ask silly questions as you ask now. I also taught karma yoga but that did not mean it is mechanical action. It implied right understanding.

"But," continues Kṛṣṇa, "it is not possible for you not to do anything even for a single moment." So, let us do what has to be done with the right understanding. What is right understanding? There is a beautiful verse:

The world (and the individual) is bound by actions other than those performed as yajña. Do thou, therefore, perform action as sacrifice, free from attachment.

(3:9)

Do it in the spirit of yajña, meaning sacrifice.

To me the English word 'sacrifice' sounds like 'to make something sacred'. Any action that springs from correct understanding is yajña. If your actions are not directed towards better understanding of yourself, of the world, of God, then you are caught. If your actions are directed towards a better understanding, greater wisdom and insight, you realise that it will not do to dig into the past, you have to be moving, flowing. Gaṅgā is holy only because it is flowing. Life is flowing. Do not dam it anywhere. Then you are damned! Life is flowing and this flow ensures that you are not caught anywhere. If there are obstacles you either jump over them, get around them, or push them away. Life has to flow and it is in that flow that greater and greater understanding, greater and greater wisdom, self-knowledge and insight arise. In order to ensure this and in order to ensure that life is a continuous unarrested flow, as it flows you must be tremendously aware, and that awareness is free.

So for this insight to be ever aware of the flow called life, it has to be totally free, and therefore observant. That freedom is also insisted upon by Kṛṣṇa.

Therefore, without attachment do thou always perform action which should be done (your duty). For, by performing action without attachment man reaches the supreme.

(3:19)

This is the central theme of the Bhagavad Gītā. Any action that is motivated towards a goal is destructive. When you free this inner awareness or insight, of both past and future, what has to be done is done. Kṛṣṇa demands that such should be the behaviour of even enlightened people.

As the ignorant men act from attachment to action, O Arjuna, so should the wise act without attachment, wishing the welfare of the world.

(3:25)

WHO ARE YOU?

We all have had ideas concerning life; and, like the fox which has a great deal of ideas about how to escape, you will find in times of need that those ideas are utterly useless. Ideas are incapable of action.

The eyes are open, a form is seen. At one point it is called the seer, at the other point it is called the seen. Seeing is in the middle. Seeing alone is reality. When confronted by brilliant light, the eyes close. An idea arises 'Ah, that's terrible'. That **idea** is not part of the reality; it is like the image in the mirror, you can neither say it is real nor unreal. Ideas are both real and unreal; real in the sense that the stuff they are made of is real, unreal in the sense that they are non-functional.

An experiencing arises and along with the experiencing there is a polarisation – at one end is the idea-of-the-experiencer and at the other end there is the idea-of-experience. Both of them are momentary. The experiences come and go in the flow of this river called life. What is it that seeks to perpetuate itself as if it is an existential fact? The experiencer. Love and hate are born, and along with them fear is also born, of this self-perpetuating experiencer. These are born when the momentary experiencer, arising with an experience, seeks to immortalize itself. That is what you call the ego, the jivā, and so on.

They say that the senses are superior. Superior to the senses is the mind. Superior to the mind is the intellect. One who is superior even to the intellect is that.

(3:42)

There is a sort of hierarchy within you: the senses function at the behest of the mind, the mind functions at the behest of an intelligence that determines this is right, this is wrong; this is good, this is bad, etc., on the basis of past experience. The experiencer, instead of dying with the death of each experience, somehow perpetuates itself. Who is it? Find out. Beyond all this is that. Beyond the buddhi is that.

When 'that' is realised, life goes on because it is not yours. The senses will continue to function in this world – hunger will arise, thirst will arise, food will be eaten, water

drunk – but an unnatural attraction called ‘love’ or an unnatural repulsion called ‘hate’ will become extinct.

Kṛṣṇa said: I taught this yoga to the sun. If you want an illustration of what I have been talking about, look at the sun.

(4:1)

Can you live like the sun, shine without intending to do so, scorch without intending to do so? Instead of following the trend of this beautiful discourse, in response, Arjuna asks a totally irrelevant question:

You were born only recently. The sun must have been there for millions of years. How can you say that you taught this yoga to the sun?

(4:4)

Kṛṣṇa utilises that opportunity to declare another truth:

You and I were born many times. You do not know it, I know it.

(4:5)

(You are trapped in action, in thought, in idea – and I am not.)

That is the only difference between man and God. Man does not know, not because he is condemned to unknowing, but he **loves** this unknowing. He does not bother to know what is unknowingness.

He who thus knows in true light, my divine birth and action – having abandoned the body, is not born again. He comes to me, O Arjuna.

(4:9)

Freed from attachment, fear and anger, absorbed in me, taking refuge in me, purified by the fire of knowledge – many have attained to my being.

(4:10)

If you also awaken yourself and gain this knowledge, you will be like God. It is only in the Bhagavad Gītā that this expression occurs quite a few times. The devotee, the jñāni, the yogi ‘who does this, enters into my nature’. Fantastic statement! You can enter into the very nature of God. It is perhaps not even difficult to gain this knowledge. And when that knowledge arises the ignorant idea that you entertain of yourself disappears.

DOUBTLESS LIVING

The fourth chapter closes with a most inspiring verse which could liberate you once for all:

Therefore with the sword of the knowledge (of the self) cut asunder the doubt of the self born of ignorance, residing in thy heart, and take refuge in yoga. Arise, O Arjuna.

(4:42)

This is the supreme perfection of life. You have to act. Life means action, activity, but that action must be flavoured with insight, with an enlightened vision which does not

create a division (or, which does not have a division), in which insight is action, life. Activity is life; and jñāna – insight – reveals this truth and therefore instantly frees action from desire and aversion: ‘I do not like to do this’; ‘I love to do this’. In both cases your jñāna is veiled; there is no insight.

If the awareness or understanding is constantly looking for the source of action without pretending to know what it is, it is possible to discover that action does not depend upon ambition. Ambition is totally unnecessary for action. Action happens, without ambition and without inhibition.

In the light of this understanding there is no doubt, no hesitation. This is perhaps one of the main characteristics of enlightenment, which is confirmed by what Arjuna says at the end of the Bhagavad Gītā:

All my doubts have vanished, my delusion is gone. I can see clearly that ‘I’
is not necessary for living.

(18:73)

There is a very clear understanding or knowledge, ‘I am not doing any of this’. ‘I’ is not necessary for this action, and therefore all these factors which are based on the ‘I’, on the ego – ‘I like this, I do not like this’, etc. – are totally unnecessary for life and action. The very awareness of the source of action frees you instantly from likes and dislikes, because right there you see, without any doubt whatsoever, that your own private attractions and aversions have nothing to do with action. In **this** insight (jñāna), there is a clear unmistakable awareness which precludes all doubt and hesitation. Everyone has an insight, but in some cases it is dirty. It is not that the fool is devoid of insight, intelligence, but the medium is dirty so the light that shines through seems to be dirty, too.

The yogi also performs the same actions as you do, but only his body, mind, buddhi and senses are functioning. What is not functioning is the perpetuating ‘I’. The experiencer, or the performer of actions, arises and dies instantly. The repetitive function is so fast that you think there is a continuity and install a thing called ‘ego’ as if it is a continuing factor. It is an experiencer that arises with each experience and collapses instantly. The illustration of the spark at the end of a rope is usually given. When it is twirled it creates the idea of a continuing circle, whereas what exists is nothing but one little spark. So what is absent here is continuing self-existent reality called the ego, which is very much alive in the stupid man and totally absent in the enlightened yogi.

Why is there this action at all? Kṛṣṇa says in the sixth chapter:

Practise yoga for the purification of the self.

(6:12)

There is energy in the body, there is restlessness in the mind – the mind is restlessness. In order to work out that restlessness, we are to be active. In order to purify the senses, the body, the mind, there is some sort of action, some sort of activity. Action is nature’s way of purifying itself. That means that no action has any futuristic intention. An action is there because... there is neither appointment nor consequent disappointment. Life flows without any difficulty whatsoever.

God's own nature keeps the entire universe vibrating, scintillating, but in that there is neither an action nor an actor. The ego is seen to be non-existent and therefore there is great peace within. There is non-movement of consciousness which co-exists with infinite movement, where the infinite diversity is realised at the same time, without the infinite militating against the diversity. There is *samaṁ*, the sort of sameness which is not the antithesis of dividedness.

Here and now you are free – not tomorrow, or after you die, but here and now.

GET RID OF THE PHANTOM

At one point Arjuna actually said that it was better to run away and live by begging than to kill his people. There has been an idea in the minds of very well-meaning, good people that the only way to avoid doing something wrong is to avoid the situation in which you might **do** something wrong. This was considered *saṁnyāsa* renunciation. This is not wrong in itself. But 'you cannot avoid doing wrong by running away from a wrong situation', does not mean 'and therefore you must put yourself in an ugly situation and struggle'. Totally independent of these two there is a third attitude or approach, which leads directly to the truth. That is *saṁnyāsa*. This is beautifully described in the words of Jesus Christ: "Give your heart to God."

What is unwise or *unsaṁnyāsic* (if you permit that expression) is to put something where it does not belong. That is also the definition of the word 'dirt'. Dirt is matter out of its place. The word '*saṁnyāsa*' is not only 'placing', but 'placing it very well' so that it does not become a problem to you.

Do thou, O Arjuna, know yoga to be that which they call renunciation. No one verily becomes a *yogi* who has not renounced thoughts, scheming or planning.

(6:2)

The *yogi* (or the *saṁnyāsī*) who has trained himself in this fashion to understand *saṁkalpa* (thought, idea and so on) and to understand where what belongs and is able to put it where it belongs, behaves in a certain way.

He who is of the same mind to the good-hearted, friends, enemies, the indifferent, the neutral, the hateful, the relatives, the righteous and the unrighteous, excels.

(6:9)

He recognises a friend as a friend, an enemy as an enemy, a *sādhū* as a holy person. His heart is always at peace.

The word '*buddhi*' does not mean some kind of a rationalising faculty. (Rationalisation is a perversion. When you are tempted to rationalise something or justify something, please look within. There is an objection – call it your conscience or the voice of God. Something says "No, I should not do this", but you do it all the same. **Then** you are tempted to rationalise.) *Buddhi* is an intelligence that is awake, an inner awareness, or insight which does not get agitated.

Why do we react the way we react? We have all used the expression: ‘I should not have done that. Normally I do not do that. I was taken unawares’, without really understanding what it means. Is it possible to remain aware of what is going on in your own heart while being actively and busily engaged in life? The only problem is that you do not know how. That is the business of the sixth chapter, the chapter on meditation.

Meditation is not something that is meant to shut out the world, the world is not your enemy. ‘You are your own friend, you are your own enemy’. You do not have to shut the world out of yourself, you **are** the world! But, it may be necessary at first when you are learning to look within. Kṛṣṇa gives an elaborate description of how to sit and how to keep the back straight. After giving all these practical instructions in great detail, Kṛṣṇa says: “Do not think of anything.” How do you do that? If you think ‘I should not think’, you are **thinking** you should not think! Meditation is not merely thinking that you are not thinking, nor suppressing all thoughts by sheer use of will force. In order not to think, there is only one way, and that is to find out what thought is and what saṁkalpa is. It is in that context Kṛṣṇa gives us a beautiful picture.

As a lamp placed in a windless spot does not flicker – to such is compared
the yogi of controlled mind, practising yoga in the self.

(6:19)

When you are trying to find the root of thought or saṁkalpa, it is then that the mind is absolutely still – like a lamp in a windless room. You can use a mantra and an image of God, provided you can come to this point. A mantra is a thought, a mental activity. The mind, the consciousness, is moving within you. That is what is called a mantra. If you trace the sound of the mantra to its own source, you know where thought arises. So, when you are sitting for your initial practice of meditation the mind is made still – not by suppressing anything, but by trying to find the root of the mantra. When you have found that, you have found the key to life, the key to saṁkalpa. Then you are never taken unawares.

That is the most important feature of meditation. It is then that you are a yogi, a saṁnyāsī. You can get angry in an appropriate situation; you can be very loving in an appropriate situation. The Bhagavad Gītā is the gospel of appropriate behaviour or appropriate action. That is the greatest achievement – if you want to call it an achievement – or greatest gain if you want to call it a gain.

...having obtained which, he thinks there is no other gain superior to it;
wherein established, he is not moved even by heavy sorrow. Let that be
known by the name of yoga, the severance from union with pain.

(6:22, 23)

You find the root of saṁkalpa. Instantly you know ‘This is the movement of mind.’ This movement is stopped by understanding it, not by suppressing it. If you are hungry, you know you are hungry. Go to the kitchen and eat. If you are not hungry and the cake is on the table, it can stay there. When you are hungry you put it in the mouth, when you are not hungry you leave it on the table. You have placed it in the right place. It is quite

simple. Nothing more is expected of us. The rest is God's grace. Find this yoga and you will not be affected by the worst calamity, the worst misfortune.

Pain and pleasure will be there in your life; you cannot avoid them. As long as the body is there, it will experience some pleasure and it will experience some pain. No problem. But there is something else which says "I am hurt." When the body is hurt it might pull away, it knows how to behave, but that which says "I am hurt" does not exist except as *samkalpa*, as an imaginary entity. This imaginary entity cannot be got rid of except through enlightenment. Yoga is merely disconnecting something which did not exist from contact with what exists. Then, in whatever condition you are in, you live in God.

I AM THINE, ALL IS THINE, MY LORD

The seventh chapter opens with a tremendously important declaration.

O Arjuna, hear how you shall without doubt know me fully, with the mind intent on me, practising yoga and taking refuge in me.

(7:1)

The essential teaching of Kṛṣṇa is anāsakti yoga, total non-attachment, total non-contact. When you come into contact with something, you are asking for trouble because that contact will come to an end and you will be miserable. Yet, here, we are asked to remain in intimate and constant contact with God! There is good reason for this.

How to restrain the mind and rob it of its restlessness, thereby making it no-mind? By abhyāsa and vairāgya. This is usually translated imperfectly, into ‘practice’ and ‘dispassion’. A very holy man who lived in Uttarkashi thirty years ago explained it to me in just two sentences (but please remember that it is what he said, not what I said or what we can understand from it). “Abhyāsa means: to know that everything is God. Vairāgya means: that there is no world.” Another great holy man, Swami Nisreyasananda, who belongs to the Ramakrishna Order, said more or less the same thing in a different context: “Close your eyes when you meditate – then you realise the infinite or God within. Open your eyes and you see God in all.”

God, perceived through the senses and conceived by the mind, is called the world, the body, personality, individuality and all that. The world, the personality, the individuality seen through the eyes of wisdom, is God. When your vision becomes wisdom, division is gone. There should not only be no doubt or hesitation, but the knowledge of the totality – that nothing remains outside it. Is there a knowledge like that? If there is, can **we know** that? If you know that, you are standing outside – so it’s not a totality! Any knowledge that you want to know is already divided knowledge and therefore no knowledge. If the individuality is still there and this individuality aspires to a knowledge, it is only fragmented knowledge and therefore no knowledge.

I shall declare to thee in full this knowledge, combined with direct realisation, after knowing which nothing more here remains to be known.

(7:2)

Such a knowledge implies the coming to an end of what has been assumed to exist – ego – ego in a very special sense. Until then all the seeking that you are indulging in is part of the seeker, all that you are observing is part of the observer. The ego itself, the mind itself, is indulging in some sort of acrobatics. As long as the observer is there the observation is part of the observer. It is his own projection, it is the same mind. As long as the ego is there saying: “I am seeking God, I want this liberation” you are slightly more social than the other fellow who says: “I want your property”. You are more acceptable to others because you are not a threat!

Where there is an observer, a seeker, whether he seeks a thing called ‘world’ or a thing called ‘God’, he is still seeking, and that seeking seeks something that the seeker has invented and projected out of himself. Who is the seeker? There is a problem! If there is a seeker, an observer, who is to observe this observer? Or, who is to seek the seeker and

find him? How does the knower become known? That is, my objective knowledge, ‘me’, also becomes ‘my object of knowledge. How can ‘I’ become the object of my own knowledge? How can ‘I’ know my self? Which one is the ‘me’? It is at that point that what is popularly known as self-surrender happens.

The direct realisation arises which is thus stated by Kṛṣṇa:

Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect and egoism – thus is my nature divided eightfold. This is the inferior prakṛti, O mighty-armed Arjuna; know thou as different from it, my higher prakṛti (nature) the very life-element, by which this world is upheld.

(7:4, 5)

There is one factor which is especially thrilling: “ ‘I’ exist”. This thing called ‘I’ is everywhere. This principle called ‘I am’ is very different from what you and I assume it to be. ‘I do not belong to myself, but to God to whom everything belongs!’ That is self-surrender.

Whatever beings are pure, active and inert, know that they proceed from me. They are in me, yet I am not in them.

(7:12)

All these moods are also **of** the divine, but the divine is not confined to them. We constantly make a mistake in trying to think that we can somehow find God within ‘**myself**’. When this God enters ‘myself’, then it becomes a little cap for my self!

There is nothing other than the divine. Please do not think that God especially manifests in your heart only when you are in an exalted mood. When you are in a sleepy mood also, God is manifest in you. God is always there – but not **in** those moods; God is not confined to anything.

It is possible that one day you begin to wonder and realise: “I am, but I am not mine; the body exists, it is not mine; the world exists, it is not mine. And when there is confusion, even that confusion, Lord, is not mine.” There is surrender. Every moment you are surrendering, whatever happens you are surrendering – surrendering in the sense that there is no sense of ‘mine’.

In order that we might not pat ourselves on the back Kṛṣṇa cautions us:

I am not manifest to all (as I am) veiled by the yoga māyā. This deluded world does not know me, the unborn and the imperishable.

(7:25)

This truth is not easily perceived, because everything is mixed up, everywhere. It is not easy for a person to become aware of this.

But those men of virtuous deeds whose sins have come to an end, and who are freed from the delusion of the pairs of opposites, worship me, steadfast in their vow.

(7:28)

Who will understand and appreciate this? Only they whose sins have come to an end can enter into the spirit of this teaching. Otherwise you hear the words and you try to translate them in your own way and get caught – sometimes in an iron cage, sometimes in a brass cage and sometimes in a golden cage. The golden cage is nice, but it takes a little more to realise that even **that** is a cage, a prison.

If you practise what you are taught it is only to come to that point where it is possible for this teaching to be received, not by the mind, not by the intellect, but by the heart, directly.

INDIVI(SIBLE) DUALITY

Knowledge, to be complete, perfect and free from the possibility of doubt arising, should be total knowledge – or knowledge of the totality. Knowledge of the totality implies the synthesis, the unification (yoga) of knowledge, the knower and the known. That is, there is an experienced division, which is intuitively realised to be non-existent, and which is also intuitively realised as the source of all pain and sorrow. Can this experienced division be realised to be non-existent? That is what they call an intuitive understanding, or self-realisation, enlightenment, etc. If that is also an experienced (divided) experience, if you see God as you are seeing another, you are seeing something which you have created, which comes into your life and departs from your life.

Everything that has a beginning has an end. A state in which neither a beginning nor an end was experienced, the deep sleep state, was a state of no problems, no pain, no sorrow, no division. Can **that** state ‘prevail’? (If you use the word ‘experience’ you are trapped. An experience **arises** and therefore it has to come to an end.)

This is the problem dealt with in the Bhagavad Gītā: on the one hand there is an experienced division, on the other hand there is an intuited state of non-division. That intuition at the same time reveals that the state of divisionlessness is also free from sorrow – sorrow being an experience. And, (what is important), any experience related to that which has a beginning and an end, which comes into being and goes, is sorrow.

The enjoyments that are born of contacts are only wombs of pain, for they have a beginning and an end. O Arjuna, the wise do not rejoice in them.

(5:22)

You are trapped in something which is itself passing, which had a beginning, which will have an end, but which seems to **be** in the middle. Madmen, sages, mystics and fools see the reality each in a different sense; to each one that reality exists. But the question is: is the reality real in itself – or does it come into being because you think it exists? Who is going to answer this question? ‘You’ cannot answer it, as, for instance, you cannot possibly convince a lamp that there is a thing called darkness. So, whether the problem, the world and the objects exist because you think all these things exist, you do not know; but they are.

When you think of a division between you and another, the division exists. When you think he is your friend, he becomes your friend; when you think he is your enemy, he becomes your enemy, and your existence is similarly comprehended by him. This much is certain.

Therefore what you are should be understood, not as something different and distinct from him, but in essence, without any relation to him at all, without comparison or contrast.

Is there a total knowledge which has in it the elements of the homogeneity of deep sleep and the awareness of waking? Can these two be combined in such a way that while remaining quite awake, alive, you can **live** homogeneity? In chapter eighteen there is a most beautiful expression:

That by which one sees the one indestructible reality in all beings, not separate in all the separate beings – know thou that knowledge to be **sāttvika**.

(18:20)

It is undivided and yet it **is**. It exists in diverse objects as if divided. Hence the sages have used the most beautiful and apt illustration of indivisible space which is capable of being thought of as not only divisible, but **divided**. This total knowledge appears to be divided on the surface, with the self, or me, as the perceiver, as the knower. Can this become a totality, where knowledge alone exists, but without a contradiction of the knower and the known? If you expect, for instance, that a man of enlightenment is not aware of the world, then you are trapped in the division between total knowledge and its opposite – which exists only in your mind, not in his – and you are forcing your concept of knowledge on the man of enlightenment and demanding that he, being a man of enlightenment, should behave in a certain way that **you** think he should, because you think he is different from you! But, his state cannot be described.

Awareness is not awareness unless it is at least aware of itself, and from that arises awareness of the other. A lamp is not a lamp if it does not illumine itself and at the same time illumine everything. We are seeking to combine all these. How is that done?

Kṛṣṇa emphasises that in order to have a comprehensive knowledge of the totality of existence, one should understand *adhiyajña*, *adhibhūtaṁ*, *adhidaivaṁ*. Do not make nice little images of these words and of *ātmā*, *jivā*, *ahaṁkāra*, *manas*, *citta* and so on. Is it possible to study all these factors without creating images of them? They are not things which you can think of. Between the words ‘thing’ and ‘think’ there is no difference. That which you can think of is a thing, is material. Even a thought, if you can think of **it**, is a thing, an object of your knowledge. It is a trap; it will destroy your knowledge. Kṛṣṇa said:

This knowledge should be sustained till *antakāle* (the time of death).

(8:5)

Meaning: however much you might pretend to have understood that time is a creature of the mind, you must allow for the temporal existence of time. It is beautiful! Appropriate action in this world is possible only if you do not pretend to have solved the problem. When you look directly into the eyes of the problem, then the problem itself will dissolve. So, without pretending to have solved the problem, become intensely aware of it. We are different but we are **equally** different. Become intensely aware of diversity, of your difference from him. Just as he is different to you, you are different to him. But, he can be hungry, you also can be hungry. He feels cold, you also feel cold.

Why do we consider each other different? Is it possible, therefore, without assuming that unity and diversity are conflicting factors, to discover (not think) that they are complementary factors? Is it possible to see that what is known as matter, mind, ātmā, jivā and self are inscrutable factors that have to be understood? In order to understand, one must stop assuming, one must stop building images of these.

The blessed Lord said: Brahman is the un-perishable, the supreme. His essential nature is called self-knowledge (the adhyātmān). The offering (unto the gods) which causes the creation and existence of beings is called karma.

(8:3)

The supreme (or the totality), does not undergo any change. The totality does not decay. What a magnificent truth! There is constant change – which implies constancy, plus change. These two are not contradictory, but complementary. ‘Svabhāvo ’dhyatmam ucyate’ – the nature inherent in this totality is called adhyātmā. Or, to put it the other way around, ātmā or selfhood is inherent in this totality, even down to the point of individuality. That is, you do not belong to yourself, yourself belongs to that totality. What is called adhibhūtaṁ or elements have a beginning and an end. This is a cycle which goes on.

No one can arrest it. Even gods when they incarnated, had to die.

Adhibhūtaṁ (knowledge of the elements) pertains to my perishable nature and the puruṣa is the adhidaivaṁ. I alone am the adhiyajña here in the body, O Arjuna.

(8:4)

Puruṣa is that which is able to observe all changing phenomena. Changing phenomena here means not only the world or the universe outside, but your own body, mental states, your own states of consciousness or existence, your own states of maturity and immaturity.

Yajña is a certain type of knowledge which enables you to give and take, which enables you to engage yourself in appropriate action, and to understand that all creatures in this universe have the same needs as you have. What is your idea of self-sacrifice? For the ritualists, yajña is something where you prepare a sacred fire and pour some things into it. Yajña is self-sacrifice. But the body is not the self and the mind is not the self, and all that you are doing in the name of yajña or self-sacrifice is sacrificing that which is not your self. If you have two shirts and you give one to her and the other to him, it is not self-sacrifice, it is shirt sacrifice!

Kṛṣṇa makes a most noble, sublime, intriguing, enigmatic and inspiring statement. In effect, he says:

This spirit of self-sacrifice is not what you think it is, it is the divine presence. The recognition of the divine omnipresence is self-sacrifice.

Why so? If you still cling to the definition of the word ‘sacrifice’ as something which is killed, then it is at the moment of the realisation of the omnipresence that the idea of

self or ego is destroyed, totally and completely. If you adopt the other view of the word sacrifice (which is to ‘make sacred’) then the very moment at which you realise this divine omnipresence, the self has been made sacred. That is, it is no longer your self, it is no longer my self, it is God’s self.

NOW – AND AT THE LAST HOUR

There is a beautiful mantra in the Taittirīya upaniṣad which says that God created all this and then he ‘entered into all things, the real and the unreal, making everything real’. It is a beautiful idea. It occurs also in the Bhagavad Gītā:

I am immortality and also death, existence and non-existence, O Arjuna.

(9:19)

‘I am the reality, I am the unreality. I am that which is perishable and that which is imperishable.’ That which is perishable and that which is imperishable are two sides of the same coin. What is called perishable is also imperishable, it is another aspect of the imperishable.

You find yourself trapped in the idea ‘I am this body’ or at least ‘the body is mine’. Do not worry about who manufactured the trap, that is not your problem, but the body is still yours, so you have to feed it, clothe it, look after it. It is a sort of vehicle, an instrument, a house of God bestowed upon you by God himself. Still there is this funny feeling that the body is ‘not me, but related to me’. How all this I-ness and mine-ness arose in relation to the body we do not know.

And, whosoever, leaving the body, goes forth remembering me alone, at the time of death, he attains my being; there is no doubt about this.

(8:5)

What is it that dies? You cannot die – but there is a disconnection between what you call ‘you’, and the body (or, there is a suspension of the idea ‘I am the body’ or ‘the body is mine’).

Great haṭha yogī insisted upon a period of meditation at midnight, just before you fall asleep. Fall asleep with this consciousness: ‘That which is real and that which is unreal, that which is perishable and that which is imperishable is all that one imperishable being that can never cease to be’. That is the pivotal teaching of the Bhagavad Gītā – the reality can never cease to be, the unreality has never come into being. If it is possible to sustain this truth right up to the moment of falling asleep, you will probably wake up with the same feeling, contemplating this tremendous truth that nothing but God exists. Nothing but God has **ever** existed. Nothing but the reality could **ever** exist.

Who knows how to maintain this awareness? It is very easy to cite stories like the Ajāmila story, where a rascal suddenly remembers God at the last minute, or, Katvaṅga, who when condemned to death, suddenly said: “Oh, I still have one hour, let me meditate.” What is not so easy is to answer the serious question: when at the hour of death, your volition is suspended, and the entire brain bursts with innumerable memories, and when there is nobody to help you, are you sure you will remember God? And, **IF NOT?** (“When your throat is choked, at the time of death, who will help you for your salvation?” sang Swami Sivananda.) That is why Kṛṣṇa insisted:

Therefore at all times remember me only and fight. With mind and intellect fixed (or absorbed) in me, thou shalt doubtless come to me alone.

(8:7)

“Do it now”, as Gurudev used to say. Then it is possible that you will think of God even then, not otherwise. Then naturally you will be absorbed into him.

What really happens is, suddenly you wake up to the realisation that the body is not even yours. First the idea that ‘I am the body’ is lost, but ‘the body is mine’ is an idea that persists. As long as the *prāṇa* vibrates in that body, prompted by the mind, the idea that the body is yours will not go. When the *prāṇa* ceases to vibrate in that body then suddenly you think: “Hey, I thought it was mine, it is not mine. Because I, as such, am not.”

‘I am’, or what is known as *aham sphuraṇa*, is a part of the cosmic being. ‘I am’, but not in the sense that ‘I am Swami Venkatesananda’. That thing came into being a few years ago and it will cease to be a little later. It is an idea.

Whosoever at the end leaves the body, thinking of any (state of) being, to that being only does he go, Arjuna, because of his constant thought of that being.

(8:6)

Whatever be the state of your mind at the time that the idea ‘this body is mine’ is penultimately suspended (or, to use a simple word, when you die), that thought-form is vitally important since that is the seed for what happens afterwards. Swami Harisharananda used to give a beautiful example to illustrate what I am saying (but it can be misunderstood, also). You are sitting for a portrait which is of great importance to you. You have dressed yourself very nicely and you want to look your best. The photographer adjusts the camera and the lens and everything and says: “Smile.” You smile. He says: “Sorry, I forgot to advance the film.” Then he says: “Smile.” You smile. “Oh, sorry, I forgot to focus.” By that time you are frustrated. Now that he has focused the camera, advanced the film and is about to click, a fly sits on your nose and you wrinkle your nose. **That** is the picture you get! You cannot protest: “My God, I smiled then, I was charming then. Just at the last moment the fly came and sat on my nose and I pulled a face.” That is unfortunately the picture that the camera got! But Kṛṣṇa does not want us to assume that whatever might have been our mood before, we can somehow smile at the moment of the clicking of the camera (as fashion models do) and have a nice photograph. The example is not valid there. Unless you have trained your mind all the time, it is unlikely that at the last hour the state of your mind, or consciousness, will be what you hope it will be.

When you investigate the truth and realise that what is permanent and what is impermanent, what is perishable and what is imperishable, is all part of the one cosmic being, then your heart, your mind, your entire being is rooted in God. That is what is known as *brahmacharya* – to live, to move and have one’s being in Brahman. That is when even at the last moment you are rooted in that consciousness, and therefore there is no more dreaming. Just as in deep sleep there is neither a pleasant dream nor a nightmare, in deep-rootedness-in-God there is neither sorrow nor joy. That is called

brahma-nirvāṇa. There, this thing called saṁsāra ceases. You have reached supreme perfection.

What happens till then? You keep on going round and round. In your own daily life you experience different moods and the world that is experienced in one mood is perhaps very different from the same world experienced in another mood. So that you have around you an inter-penetrating world of several planes. You go on changing from one mood to the other every day. You were a loving person two or three hours ago, you are a very serious person now. An hour later you may become very angry about something, and then you might experience dullness, fatigue and sleep. Have **you** changed because of that? No, no. There is a change, and yet there is no change. In the same way it is possible that the entire universe keeps on churning from one mood to the other.

So our first endeavour should be to lead a pure and disciplined life in order that we might contact the central core of our personality, to realise that it is not **our** personality, that it is all God. Once you are there you see that all these belong to him, not to 'me'. There is no 'me' – except a sort of memory. 'I am' is him, everything is him. Then there is no more sorrow, no more coming, no more going. That 'I am' can undergo all sorts of changes, the changes brought about by sattva, rajas and tamas, but there is no problem in that. If this is understood, then the entire world-play is understood; if this is misunderstood, there is great danger.

In order that the misunderstanding may not arise, the Bhagavad Gītā cautions:

But verily there exists, higher than the unmanifested, another unmanifested eternal being who is not destroyed when all beings are destroyed (dissolved).

(8:20)

The reality is not the perishable or the imperishable, or a mere synthesis of these. Reality is not the assembly of different parts of what you call reality, but something entirely different. God is not the assembly of the different pieces of what is called the universe put together, but non-different from that and yet something that is unthinkable. So, even though the perishable and the imperishable are all parts of this one total being, this totality cannot be thought of by the mind. Therefore, go to the source of thought and let thought collapse. Truth is beyond that which is manifest, beyond that which is unmanifest, beyond that which is perishable, beyond that which is imperishable. Indescribable is this supreme truth. And that does not come to an end even when all things come to an end.

A GREAT SECRET

The ninth chapter opens with a great flourish. Kṛṣṇa declares:

I shall now declare to thee who does not cavil, the greatest secret, the knowledge combined with direct self-realisation. Having known this thou shalt be free from evil. It is the kingly science and the kingly secret.

(9:1, 2)

Just as the king is considered to be the foremost of men, this is the foremost knowledge. Not only that, it is an extremely subtle secret – secret not because it has been hidden away by some god, *māyā* or what have you, but because you have not thought about it or investigated it. You have never turned within to look.

We have never bothered to understand life; we have never bothered to understand ourselves until a tragedy or a calamity overtakes us. Even then not all the people bother to look into the facts or the truth concerning life, the self, the world. Hence it remains a secret just by default. The truth is extremely simple but because of some kind of kink in our own brain we cannot possibly believe this to be true. We think that the truth or God-realisation must be such a complicated affair, that the truth that is right in front of us seems to be too simple to be true, and therefore, ignoring it, we look for something that is imaginary – complicated.

This life, when it is lived and investigated in the proper manner, reveals the truth instantly. The nature of reality is not hidden away except to the extent that you have not bothered to investigate it. The extraordinary feature of Kṛṣṇa's teaching is that instead of looking at your body and denying its reality, he asks you to look at it and see it as God's own nature. The body is not a non-existent illusion, but it is not what you **think** it is. The totality that pervades the entire universe is not obvious to that which is unable to perceive the totality. The senses being fragmented, limited, can only perceive or respond to a certain limited field, called the sense field, so that the eyes can only see, the ears can only hear. That is not to say that what is heard is unreal and what is seen is unreal. The unreal cannot be seen or heard and so on. For instance, what the eye sees is only a certain limited spectrum of light. That is not the totality of life.

Understanding of the limitation of the senses is understanding of the existence of the totality. There is an unmanifest presence which you cannot possibly be conscious of. It is something which one cannot comprehend either with the senses or with the mind. Kṛṣṇa says:

As the mighty wind, moving everywhere, rests always in space, even so, know thou that all beings rest in me.

(9:6)

These acts do not bind me, O Arjuna, sitting like one indifferent, unattached to those acts.

(9:9)

‘All this creation takes place, diverse beings exist and dissolve and I pervade all of them, but the divine omnipresence is not polluted.’ It is not possible to conceptualise the

relationship of God, world and you; hence the apparently contradictory declarations in verses four and five of chapter nine. God pervades all things in a non-obvious (avyakta-mūrtinā) way. Thus, the enquiring mind is pushed to its own ultimate limits so that surrender may happen.

God, being the indwelling omnipresence, is in you, but not confined to you. In the very core of your being there dwells this omnipresence. It penetrates every cell of your being, because it is omnipresent. And yet it is outside the comprehension of your senses and your mind – which means neither the senses nor the mind can function independent of this omnipresence, and that omnipresence is unaffected by what is being done by the senses and the mind.

In the upaniṣad you are given an illustration which is very beautiful. The sun shines, and aided by the light of the sun, because of the light of the sun, we sit here and contemplate God. One man goes on with his building work, earning his bread; another cheats; another man picks someone else's pocket; another man kills. Though in a manner of speaking the sun is responsible for all, the sun is unaffected by the sins or the virtues of the people functioning in sunlight. In the same way, the omnipresence oversees all that goes on in this universe and yet it is not affected by it.

Just as you are endowed with a nature, this cosmic omnipresence also has got a nature of its own. What you are seeing in front of you is the manifestation of that nature. If you study yourself you will understand the cosmic being, because the omnipresent is present in you without being confined to you, so that the characteristics of the omnipresence can be intuited – not understood mentally, intellectually or psychologically – by becoming aware of what goes on in you.

The omnipresence is omniscient and omnipotent at the same time. The omnipotence manifests itself everywhere as all this and the same omnipotence stirs in you, as it were. You are not different from the universe. In you this same omnipotence stirs and the omniscience (which is in you) thinks 'I am doing it'. You are caught. The simple truth is that the omnipresence is God, God is the indwelling omnipresence, 'I am that I am'; and that indwelling omnipresence is omniscient and therefore there is awareness. It is not **'my'** awareness.

The indwelling omnipresence which is omniscient is also omnipotent and therefore is capable of diverse action. The sensory faculties experience the world as if it were outside and the faculties of action express themselves as if the action arises in the ego, but all these arise not in the 'me' but in God. All the elements that are involved in living are but the manifestations of the omnipotence of the omniscient, omnipresent being. One who realises this is instantly liberated. Why need the reality be **realised**? Because it is not obvious. Paradoxically, the truth or God is the omnipresent but unobvious reality in what is obvious. A delightful 'hide and seek'!

THE TRUTH BEYOND DEFINITION

That which exists in the three periods of time – and therefore which is beyond time – that which exists everywhere, and that which is conscious of all things at the same time, is obviously beyond guessing. In that omniscient being the universe arises as part of its own nature. The arising of the universe is potentially inherent in the cosmic being. If this is not seen, then one cannot see the omnipresence.

In that omnipresence there is no distinction between unity and diversity. In a dream there are hundreds of thousands of people, hundreds of thousands of beings, and in that dream you also exist as if independent of them – that is, independent of **you**. Crazy, but true! If that is sort of inferentially clear, then suddenly one realises that even these definitions of unity and diversity are merely words which are coined by an immature mind groping to find the truth. They are not truth.

There is nothing called unity, there is nothing called diversity. This division again is created by the mind which is stupid. In that unity this diversity exists and the two together are called omnipresent. Where the distinction between unity and diversity vanishes and one seems to merge into the other without distinction, without a contradiction, is what is called omnipresent. Omnipresent does not mean that God dwells in you; ‘God dwells in you’ means that there is something other than God also in you – which is not omnipresence. God does not dwell in you as tea in a cup – the cup being you and God dwells in it – then you are denying the word ‘omnipresent’ immediately!

It is the omnipresent that functions in a certain way, in what apparently looks like a diversity within itself, and since it is omniscient it is all the time conscious of this omnipresence, that all this is happening within the one which is also the many. And it is also omnipotent so it is able to function in infinitely diverse ways. Why does a dog bark, the swami speak, somebody sing? That is how it **is**! That is how the omnipresent, omnipotence, omniscience manifests itself. When that is understood, the Bhagavad Gītā is simply thrilling. If you do not understand this, you go on performing these ceremonies – doing charity and good actions in strict accordance with the injunctions and the prohibitions of the scriptures – which is very good, excellent.

If you examine your own conduct very carefully, whether you are a religious person completely and totally committed to tradition, or a philanthropic person who has been brought up on the idea that you must do good to everybody, that God has placed you on this earth in order to promote human welfare and that sort of thing, it is not difficult at all to detect the presence of fear. The best part of human goodness is unfortunately based on fear. You are good to your friend because you are afraid that otherwise your security or happiness is threatened. As long as you are doing something good, it is very good, but since this goodness is based upon fear of consequences the goodness is not free, it is constrained, conditioned.

In the same way, if you are able to look at yourself you might see that you are religious, you go to the temple, you pray and you do japa because you are afraid of some unknown unhappiness striking you. And you are afraid that for all the sins that you have committed here you might be sent to hell. These possibilities are present in our lives and we are aware of them.

As long as this fear exists, it brings in some kind of a hope that ‘by doing **this** I am ensuring my happiness here and maybe a better life after I drop this body.’ Fear and hope keep chasing each other without an apparent end. Can one recognise here and now, immediately, that ‘I am’ is true but ‘I’ do not belong to ‘me’? ‘I am’ but I am myself part of that cosmic being. This ‘I am’ has a dual form, one as an individual, the other as part of the cosmic totality. It is exactly like space. There is space called the room, but it is an integral, indivisible part of the total space. Even so the individual seems to be dual, but it is indivisible. Indivi(sible) duality has become individuality. It is merely a point of view.

So, if in the correct understanding or realisation of this simple truth it is possible for you and me to live in the constant realisation that all these ‘I am’s’ are integral parts of this totality called God; and the intelligence that functions and the manifestations of that intelligence in infinite forms – whether it is called cleverness, crookedness, wickedness, saintliness, holiness, unholiness – are all part of that cosmic intelligence, then it becomes impossible for the mind **not** to be constantly conscious of God. Kṛṣṇa says:

Do this, and your security is guaranteed.

If you dwell constantly in God in this manner, if your own awareness, attention, consciousness, mind, citta is directed in this manner constantly, then your security is guaranteed. In other words, if you realise that God is omniscient and omnipresent and omnipotent, why will you desire anything? And will you be afraid of losing anything that you have? Knowing that he is here, he knows everything and he can do everything, is supreme security. In that state, if your limbs fall away, that is precisely what is needed. He knows best. That surrender happens when all that we have discussed so far becomes a realisation.

Occasionally we may have a glimpse of this truth, but it is not easy to sustain this awareness, because our own wrong thinking and wrong upbringing stand in the way. We have been brought up from babyhood to regard **this** as **mine** – ‘I must protect it – and I must have **that** also. The more I have the better it is, the more secure I will be.’ It is not easy suddenly to realise that God is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent and that even without praying for what you need, it is provided. Occasionally one may get into this realisation, but it is soon lost because of what they call saṁskārā and vāsanā. Hence Kṛṣṇa, whose approach is always comprehensive, suggests that if you find it difficult to live in this realisation all the time:

Whatever thou doest, whatever thou eatest, whatever thou offereth in sacrifice, whatever thou givest, whatever thou practiseth as austerity, O Arjuna, do it as an offering to me.

(9:27)

Whatever you do, whether you regard that action as righteous or unrighteous, good or evil, know that this action arises in God, so it is offered unto God. Even the offerer is God, but since you have in this bhakti yoga a sense of duality, whatever you do, offer it to God. As you go on offering all these at the feet of this omnipresent being, gradually you will grow in this tiny little trick of pushing this ego away.

On the one hand you are trying to link yourself up with God all the time; on the other hand saṁskārā also have their own play. But gradually the good saṁskārā grow stronger and the other saṁskārās get weaker. You are moving towards the light with faltering steps.

Soon he becomes righteous and attains to eternal peace, O Arjuna, know thou for certain that my devotee is never destroyed.

(9:31)

Once you turn towards the light, darkness is dispelled.

How much more then the holy brāhmāna and devoted royal saints! Having obtained this impermanent and misery-ridden world, do thou worship me.

(9:33)

Fix thy mind on me (saturate the mind with me); be devoted to me; sacrifice unto (work for) me; bow down to me; having thus united thy whole self with me, taking me as thy supreme goal, thou shalt come unto me.

(9:34)

Therefore try with all your being to resort to or to be devoted to God.

SEE GOD IN ALL

The all is something which cannot be intellectually understood. All is the totality. The totality is not a conglomeration of the several; unity is not assembled diversity. But, but what? So, the elaboration of the teaching becomes necessary. God is all, God is everything – not every **thing**, but **everything**. As Gurudev used to say: “God is the all in all.” That is what is meant by the word ‘omnipresent’. Till one is established in perfect moral conduct, till one’s heart is pure and the mind is unagitated by love and hate, desire and aversion, it is not possible to realise the truth that ‘God is all in all’. The heart must be pure and the mind uncluttered and unagitated. The central teaching of the Bhagavad Gītā is to be able to see that the entire universe is pervaded by the omnipresent omniscience, and the universe of diversity is the manifestation of the omnipotence of the omnipresent omniscience.

God fills the entire universe inside out. One may think that it is clear in a classroom or meditation room, but in what is called ‘real life’ it is not clear at all. If you fall into the error of regarding what is socially unacceptable or considered evil as also part of the manifestation of God, then it is possible that you fall into the same trap. Once you are trapped you are out of God-consciousness.

How to realise this, not merely to speak or think of it? In order to do that one has to experience the presence of God. As a further aid to the understanding of this truth, and as a sort of restraint to us against the wrong application of these sublime truths, in the tenth chapter Kṛṣṇa gives us a list of vibhūtī or special manifestations. Vibhūtī is that which reminds you of the truth. Gurudev Sivananda was very fond of this whole chapter, for the simple reason that it enables you to ascend the ladder of God-consciousness

without missing out on anything and without merely assuming that you are God-conscious. (How he actually lived this is described in ‘Sivananda Yoga’.)

That which is called omnipresent God is also the guru and it is also the self. In the guru this omnipresence is unveiled, in the disciple it is veiled. Once the veil is removed, instantly you see that these three (God, guru, disciple) which were regarded as three are exactly the same.

Neither the hosts of the gods nor the great sages know my origin. (Even the maharṣī do not know me in essence,) because they came after me. I am their creator.

(10:2)

Your own physiological faculties are considered to be presided over by the great sages. In other words, the intellectual faculties are not ‘mine’. They are the sage’s, the maharṣī’s, but even they are incapable of directly perceiving the reality. Once you are freed from the idea ‘This is my mind, this is my intellect, this is my buddhi’, then God’s light can be reflected even in your intellectual faculties. The light of God is directly reflected in the buddhi of the guru; that is why he is able to teach. His buddhi and his intellect are not considered to be ‘mine’ (that is, his personal property), they are direct reflections of God. They can see but they **also** do not know the totality of God. They can have a vision or a glimpse of God, they cannot know the totality of God. And God is nothing but totality. Again a tremendous puzzle. You can look outside the window and see the sky but you can never see the total sky. You can go down and sip Gaṅgā water but you can never drink the whole of Gaṅgā’s water. How would you describe the phenomenon of taking a little bit of Gaṅgā water in your palm and sipping it, feeling quite satisfied that you have drunk Gaṅgā water? That is called vibhūti.

Intellect, wisdom, non-delusion, forgiveness, truth, self-restraint, calmness, happiness, pain, existence or birth, non-existence or death, fear and also fearlessness, non-injury, equanimity, contentment, austerity, beneficence, fame, ill-fame – these different kinds of natures of beings arise from me alone.

(10:4, 5)

All these opposites arise in God, in that one – not in ‘me’. Can that be understood? It is not easy to grasp – but one who lived in that understanding was Swami Sivananda. If there was great joy he welcomed it – if there was great sorrow he welcomed that also – that is also from God.

Till you realise that all experiences arise **in** God and **because** of him, you have not really and truly entered into the spirit of the teaching of the vibhūti yoga; till then look for that God-contact in the special manifestations that are mentioned in this chapter – like the Himālayā, the Gaṅgā – so that when you look at these you train your mind to think of God. By practising this vibhūti yoga, by drawing closer and closer to this omnipresence, you can be permanently ‘hooked on’ to God. This is not a mere dry, intellectual pastime, but one which you love with all your heart and soul.

Suddenly you realise that even though you are trying to see God in all, somehow the mind keeps what is called ‘yourself’ as something distinct and separate from this omnipresence. ‘I see God in all’ – even that excludes yourself. You are the seer, the observer and so on. Can **that** division disappear? By what kind of self-effort does the self get eliminated? Do you understand the beauty of the question? If you do all sorts of exercises your limbs grow stronger, so the more you exert yourself, the more adamant will the ego become. (Therefore Gurudev used to say that the *saṁnyās abhimān* or the egoism of a *saṁnyāsi* is terrible. It is accepted, adored by people, therefore there is no challenge and it is very difficult to break it.)

So, you can go up to where you learn to see God in all, where you learn to talk about God all the time with your peers, friends and comrades, but the self that experiences all this cannot annihilate itself. It can come to the end of its tether and begin to wonder “If all this is God, who am I?”

If at that point you think, “Oh I am enlightened”, you are finished. Enlightenment is not an achievement or the end result of self-effort. Self-effort is needed, self-effort is vital, and without self-effort nothing is gained, but self-effort cannot annihilate the self. Enlightenment is a gift of God, it is not the end result of any effort put forth by a sincere seeker. Knocking is important, but the key is with the other person. Gurudev said, very beautifully: “Ignorance knocked at the door, wisdom opened the door, and ignorance was no more. Darkness knocked at the door, light opened the door, and darkness was no more.” That might be what they call God-realisation.

When the buddhi becomes totally absorbed in God there is nobody to stand up and say: “I have seen God.” It is not a matter of you deserve or you demand, but it is granted by pure grace, pure divine compassion.

Out of mere compassion for them, I, dwelling within their self, destroy the darkness born of ignorance by the luminous lamp of knowledge.

(10:11)

When you think you deserve it, you least deserve it. When you deserve it, it may be granted unto you. You may not even know, because the moment that door is open **you** cease to be. The way in which *vibhūti yoga* is to be practised is described in great detail, but the long and the short of it is given in verse twenty.

I am the self, O Arjuna, seated in the hearts of all beings; I am the beginning, the middle and also the end of all beings.

(10:20)

What is this self? When you enquire into this do you recognise that you regard this self **itself** as some kind of an object? In order to understand what this means, one has to cultivate God-consciousness, which is to be able to see God in all.

When this feeling of the presence of God is generated again and again, your whole being becomes saturated with it and that is the beginning of *vibhūti yoga*.

FROM DIVISION TO DIVINE VISION

The basic problem in the practice of vibhūti yoga is: are we aware of the difference between seeing inwardly and thinking? Otherwise one can live in a fool's paradise. If you are sincere, serious and earnest, and if you are fully aware of what is happening within you, you realise a fantastic truth: that you still have a consciousness that you are different from this world; there is no realisation that "whatever I am, the whole of me is part of this universe." When you talk of the world you are always talking about something outside of you – you, meaning the skin. You realise that the world outside responds and corresponds to the state of awareness you are in. When your awareness is of yourself as the body, the world outside looks like a body, a physical, material universe. So what you see outside is directly related to the state of awareness in which you are in at the moment.

Happiness, unhappiness, fear, fearlessness, arise from God, have their origin in him, so that whenever you are afraid, you look within. The origin of this fear itself is God; when you feel fearlessness, the origin of this fearlessness is God; when you think that you or someone else is intelligent, wise – that wisdom arises in him....So all your faculties have God as the basis.

In all beings I am desire unopposed to dharma.

(7:11)

In some translations you might find 'I am lust' – so even this thing called desire, craving or lust which is considered to be unspiritual, arises in God. When the mind, the intelligence, the awareness recognise that all these have God as their source, they do not conflict with the divine will. In his last prayer, the great warrior, sage Bhīṣma, declares: "O God, in order to sustain this universe of becoming (birth and death) you yourself manifest as lust in the human heart." He who recognises this does not **entertain** lust. It is not I who generate this emotion, the emotion comes from him. That is an extremely delicate and beautiful truth which has to be handled with extreme care. First find the root of your own faculties and emotions, and the source of this universe, and only then will you learn to recognise that there is correspondence in all this. Whatever be the state of awareness you are in, that is what is reflected outside. If your state of awareness is gross, you see a gross universe; if your state of awareness is a bit more refined, you see the whole universe sustained by subtle forces; if you rise to another state of awareness you realise that there is nothing but God. When that prevails, only then will you recognise the whole universe as a manifestation of God.

I exist, supporting this whole world by one part of myself.

(10:42)

It is only when one becomes immediately conscious of this that one develops true love of God and humility at the same time.

Arjuna, who was not only a disciple but a great personal friend and relative of Kṛṣṇa, must have heard of this concept of having a vision of God. "If you are such a fantastic being and you say that the sun and moon are your manifestations and you are the cosmic being who pervades the entire universe, what a marvellous thing it would be to have a look at you like that", and half pleadingly and half seriously Arjuna prays:

If thou, O Lord, thinkest it possible for me to see it, do thou then, O Lord of the yogī, show me thy imperishable self.

(11:4)

The rest of the eleventh chapter is a description of what Arjuna saw, and the dialogue that took place between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa.

Right in the beginning Kṛṣṇa says:

With these physical eyes you cannot see anything but physical forms.

(11:8)

There is an implied teaching here which should not go unnoticed: with these physical eyes you cannot see God. Can we translate that also to mean that what you see with your physical eyes is God seen through physical eyes, and therefore it appears as the world? Otherwise the expression: ‘God is omnipresent’ is useless. You are struggling again with something which you want to eliminate. You think that there is something other than God, something non-god which has to be eliminated in order to be able to see God. By doing that you are **creating** the non-god. You are looking at God with your physical eyes and therefore this very God appears to you as the physical universe. You are looking at the world through your mind tainted, polluted, perverted by thoughts about love and hate, and therefore you find things to love, and things to hate. Right and wrong are instantly related to love and hate. What you love is always right. What you hate is always wrong. The person you love is always right. The person you dislike is always wrong; even if that person does something good, you think it is by chance – he really did not mean to do it.

I give thee the divine eye; behold my lordly yoga.

(11:8)

“Therefore,” says Kṛṣṇa, “I will bestow upon you divine insight with which alone you can see God in all and all in God. Through this you can perceive the cosmic being.” Gurudev’s own cosmic vision is described in several places in his writings where he talks about how it grew in him right from his childhood, seeking to break down barriers built by the human mind – caste barriers, colour barriers, social barriers and so on – till he could reach a state when the one who almost murdered him could be seen as a manifestation of God. It is an extraordinarily beautiful state. When your awareness is divine, when your vision is divine, you cannot see any evil anywhere. And it is only that divine vision which sees God. Physical eyes do not have to change their composition, but when that which sees – the seer – is jñāna (wisdom), then you will see Brahman alone everywhere. There is a very inspiring poem which Kṛṣṇa dwells there, you will see everything as Kṛṣṇa only!

So it is a two-way traffic. If the awareness is heightened, then the perception is also altered. Till **this** happens, **that** will not happen. This is the catch, and also the safety catch, so we do not bluff ourselves and think that we are in a state of God-consciousness, that everything is God. Everything is God, but you are not God-conscious, therefore you are only **thinking** you are seeing God. **Seeing** God is a different story.

COSMIC VISION

We always try to put the cart before the horse. Our problem always arises from that. Therefore the teaching concerning cosmic vision and so on seems to be understandable and many of the problems of the world also seem to be totally incomprehensible. How can God create such a world in which there is so much of suffering and sorrow? Does he **want** this? Only if you have seen God (as the popular saying goes) can you find an answer to these questions. Only when the heart is pure can it be elevated to an awareness that can become aware of God, of the divine presence. Once that has been achieved it is possible to know what God is and why all these things take place, to know what is right and what is wrong. So, first you conform, in a manner of speaking, to the social norms to ethical and moral principles and so on. Unless you do that, your ego will be very active and very gross, unable to comprehend the subtle truth concerning the existence of the universe as a manifestation of God, as nothing but God.

Having seen the colossal cosmic form of God, Arjuna was frightened. It was Kṛṣṇa's own grace that enabled him to see (or experience) the cosmic form, and yet he was frightened. If the heart is not pure and the ego has not been thoroughly thinned out and transparent, then spiritual experiences can even be frightening. It is like death – even to discipline the ego is death. Unless you are prepared to die, it is not possible for these truths to be comprehended.

What is the cosmic vision described here in the eleventh chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā? Let us take just this one verse:

Arjuna said: I see all the gods, O God, in thy body, and also the hosts of various classes of beings, Brahmā, the Lord seated on the lotus, all the sages and the celestial serpents.

(11:15)

Does it mean that he is having a form of hallucination? I am not entirely dismissing that possibility. Books on astronomy often refer to a cluster of what you call stars which, when connected together, give the appearance of the constellation, a lion's head, ram's head and so on. Is it possible that that cluster of stars is imagined by the astronomer to resemble a lion's head, or is it really a lion's head, which you and I see as a mere cluster of stars? Who is to tell? So, it is quite possible that we are part of this cosmic body of God. It is quite possible that you and I are part of just one small cell in the body of the one huge deva called Viṣṇu. Your own body consists of three thousand billion cells. What sort of idea does one cell have of your whole body? Unimaginable!

Who is it that is seeing this cosmic form? The description goes on that Arjuna himself is seen in this cosmic form, just as you in your dream create all sorts of people and you yourself seem to be present in the dream, experiencing various relationships with the dream creations. How can you be your own object of perception? What is that cosmic vision? And yet there is a sense of I-ness. 'I' am. 'I' am experiencing all this. It is nearly impossible to answer this question.

In this context it is quite possible that a fragment of the totality is aware of an enormously huge fragment of the totality (or the totality is aware of an enormous fragment of the totality). Some awareness of God arises in your heart and it is aware of a

fragment of the totality – in other words, God is aware of his own total manifestation. It cannot be an experience ‘of the totality’ since you, the experiencer, still seem to be standing outside of it. Therefore it is called a *vr̥tti*. Though it is of cosmic proportion, it is still a *vr̥tti* that arises in that pure awareness within you. It is still a state, a fragment. For just one brief moment there is the experience of a fragment of the totality, and the experience is experienced by what is nearly the totality itself – God himself! Only God can realise himself, not you and I.

What is described here is the ego in its penultimate state. It is not completely dead, but gasping for the last time. Once this breathing ends, it concludes. But in the case of Arjuna it does not end, he comes back, saying: “Oh, I am afraid. I am frightened even to look at this.”

All the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, with the hosts of kings of the earth, Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Karna, with the chief among our warriors, they hurriedly enter into thy mouths with terrible teeth and fearful to behold. Some are found sticking in the gaps between the teeth with their heads crushed to powder. Verily, just as many torrents of rivers flow towards the ocean, even so these heroes in the world of men enter thy flaming mouths. As moths hurriedly rush into a blazing fire for their own destruction, so also these creatures hurriedly rush into thy mouths for their own destruction.

(11:26-29)

Arjuna, as Arjuna, has not been completely effaced or merged in the cosmic being. He still seems to stand aside.

The war has not yet started and yet Arjuna sees future events as if they are present. This is another very great puzzle. How is it possible for someone to see into the future and foretell precisely what is going to happen? And, if the future is so definitely fixed and what is to happen must inevitably happen, then what on earth are we doing here? Are we then totally mechanical beings whose behaviour is absolutely predetermined? That does not seem to make any sense at all. In which case, why do these prophets go and warn someone not to do something, as if destiny could be altered? It is a very serious problem which cannot be conclusively resolved unless we discover the source of the problem within ourselves – the ego interference in life.

You do not know what your destiny is. Certain things are predetermined and certain things are left to you. Which is which – it is not possible for the human mind to determine. Therefore Kṛṣṇa says: “Do what is appropriate at the moment and leave the rest in the hands of God.”

I am the mighty world-destroying time, now engaged in destroying the worlds. Even without thee, none of the warriors arrayed in the hostile armies shall live.

(11:32)

Beautiful. Kṛṣṇa says: “The thing that you are afraid of is God. How can you be afraid of God when you love God?” The Lord himself is time. In time things are born, in time things exist, in time they dissolve. Time is also incomprehensible because it is divine.

Your mind divides it into the past, present and future but it is indivisible into past, present and future. You cannot divide time; you cannot divide space. Here one is reminded of the central teaching of Buddha, that everything that has a beginning must have an end – that is the divine law.

Only when a disciplined and pure heart understands this can the problems concerning our lives – what to do, what not to do, what is my duty here, what is appropriate that I should do now – also be clearly seen. After resuming his usual form as Arjuna's friend, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna:

This is an extraordinary experience that was granted to you by me out of pure love and affection just because you are my friend. (*Means, you do not deserve it!*) I see that even though you are my friend, you are still frightened.

(11:47)

I think there is a great message in that which should not be lost sight of: that the person who desires God probably does not deserve God – desire for God is desire! So when you hear the expression 'one should desire God' it merely means one should desire nothing else. It does not mean that you should go on craving for God and bashing your head against a stone wall. It is the ego that does that, and God, being beyond ego, is aware of what the ego is doing. Just as the ego clamours for worldly attainments, achievements and possessions, it also clamours for a thing called God-vision.

But, by single-minded devotion can I, of this form, be known and seen in reality and also entered into, O Arjuna.

(11:54)

You cannot attain this vision by whatever you do or however much you may aspire. When you grow in love of God, in total devotion – when the heart loves nothing else, sees nothing else, is aware of nothing else – it is only then that the heart can recognise the divine presence in all. It is then that you enter into that divine presence and feel the divine presence everywhere.

He who does all actions for me, who looks upon me as the supreme, who is devoted to me, who is free from attachment, who bears enmity towards no creature, comes to me, O Arjuna.

(11:55)

When you have not entered into this intimate love relationship with God, regard yourself as an instrument in his hands. Whatever you do, do it for his sake. Let God be your only motivation in life. You are living only for God, for God-realisation. God, as time, will take everything away. Everything that has a beginning must have an end, so do not get attached to any of these. But remain devoted forever to that which is permanent, eternal – God. Ensure that in your heart there is no hate for any being whatsoever.

One who lives in that fashion, totally devoted to God, dwells in God and suddenly realises that it has always been so, he has never been away.

GLIMPSE OF GOD-LOVE

The only person who is aware constantly that 'I exist' is yourself. You do not know what that 'yourself' is, but you think it is the body or the personality. So, even when you are not aware of your existence, 'I' exists, 'I' is the sole reality (more or less).

What is known as this 'I am' is not what you regard as 'me'. 'I am' is a fact of existence but 'me' is nothing but a conglomeration of memory. Where there is no memory the 'me' does not exist, as in the case of the enlightened man. Though his senses are very keen he lives in this world as if he is blind, deaf and dumb. His actions do not spring from memory. Only when all memory has been suspended does one have the sort of cosmic vision that is described in the eleventh chapter.

I know not the four quarters, nor do I find peace. Have mercy, O Lord of the gods, O abode of the universe.

(11:25)

'I do not know which is east, which is west.' Only the sense of 'I am' is there. What is of consequence to the wise person is: how does this 'me' arise? The beginning of conflict is the arising of the idea, 'I am different from you'. If you investigate this problem thoroughly you realise that once this dualistic idea has arisen it seems to spread and envelop nearly everything, so that eventually you feel 'I am different, distinct and separate from the totality, from God, and God seems to exist only outside us. Therefore we fear God, feeling: 'God will punish me, God will reward me, God will deal with me.' What arrogance! If you have a cosmic vision, in that cosmic vision you find you are almost nothing. You and I are totally non-existent as independent personalities.

How to reach this cosmic vision? By not considering ourselves as something independent. This must happen simultaneously at least at three levels. (That is what is called yoga, integration.) One: the I-me level. Within each one of us there seems to be some kind of an inner conflict between thinking, feeling and living. When this inner conflict is there, your emotions lead you in one way, your mind leads you in another direction, and life is full of fear. So yoga is, at first, integration of these three: thought, emotion and life. So first there is the integration of 'I' and 'me'. Secondly: there is the next integration: 'I' and 'you' – you meaning neighbour or anybody. The third integration is of 'I' and 'he' – he meaning God or **that**.

Unless this integration is actually achieved one does not have the cosmic vision, and unless one has the cosmic vision one cannot have this total integration either. So the cosmic vision or integration arises simultaneously with the disintegration of the 'me'. So the penultimate step is not for 'me' to take. Only he who practises total bhakti obtains this cosmic vision.

But, by single-minded devotion can I, of this form, be known and seen in reality and also entered into, O Arjuna.

(11:54)

In the beginning bhakti involves a sense of duality. You are aware right now that you are independent of the totality, that when you are hungry, **you** are hungry, not another person. This is where we start. From there you look out and gradually begin to

wonder...‘The Himālayā, the Gaṅgā, the Aśvattha tree, the images of God, a strong man, a beautiful face, a wealthy man, prosperous person, a famous person – I did not create these – all that is somehow a manifestation of God.’ Then slowly the faultfinding nature drops away, and when that goes you begin to realise that there is something happening within you which is not the ego. Then there is a recognition of the presence of God in and through your own faculties. As this goes on, gradually you have a wonderful feeling, which is described in the twelfth chapter:

Those who, fixing their mind on me, worship me, ever steadfast and endowed with supreme faith, these are the best in yoga in my opinion.

(12:2)

Realise that it is impossible to isolate yourself from the omnipresence. So what do you do now? “Push yourself into me”, he says. Gradually your awareness expands and then you have a feeling that God is everywhere. It is not ‘he is in me’, but ‘I am in him’. Then whatever you see, whoever you see is all God and God only. To understand that, one has to live with a great master like Gurudev and see how he handled this problem. Gurudev could become angry – supreme love could also manifest annoyance. Sage Vasiṣṭha calls such a person a mahātyāgi, whose nature cannot be understood by the little human intelligence or intellect.

Having restrained all the senses, even-minded, everywhere intent on the welfare of all beings – verily they also come unto me only.

(12:4)

What is the nature of that person who, as it were, has entered his consciousness in this cosmic being? His senses are under control. The ‘me’ has already been entered into God, so that he is virtuous without the need for a carrot and a stick, without threat or temptation, without fear. He is unafraid and yet he is pure. Therefore this purity is natural.

This supreme devotee, or the bhakta, is totally involved in the welfare of all beings. Can you be really and sincerely devoted to the welfare of all beings? Is it possible for you even to conceive of a type of behaviour which is conducive to the welfare of all beings? Go on doing whatever good you want to do, and as you keep on contemplating this you realise that you cannot do this, only God can. Suddenly one day, like a bolt from the blue, you realise that one thing can be done and that is that any action that arises in the ‘me’ can be put away. Any action that ‘I’ do **must** be partial. The only time that you do not offend anybody at all, and perhaps you promote the welfare of all beings, is when you are fast asleep. Why is it so? Because you are totally unconscious of self or ego. Is it possible to live such a life?

You can do all this, but as long as the body functions there is a mind that is related to the body. Awareness or consciousness, though cosmic, is somehow related to the body as long as it lasts, and that relation of the consciousness or awareness with the body is called mind. So as long as the body lasts, whatever be the state of the inner awakening (the awakening of the intelligence) it is still not out of the woods. The ‘me’ is still there. You are still not out of this saṁsāra.

When you are completely and totally dedicated to God, till the end of this physical existence or till the end of the personality, then it is up to God to grant you total freedom. Till the end be careful – any time it is possible to slip. Mokṣa is not your right, it is not the ego's prerogative, but is a blessing, a gift, a boon from God.

To knock is your job, to open is His.

One who is devoted to me throughout his life in this manner, him I liberate from saṁsāra.

(12:7)

Only that intelligence that understands this is integrated and totally in love with God.

THE LADDER OF DIVINE LOVE

There is a lovely saying in Tamil that three things help others but do not help themselves: a ladder, a boat and lemon pickles. A fourth can be added – a teacher! One should understand the catalytic purpose of a ladder, neither ignore it nor hang on to it.

Āsana, prāṇāyama, meditation, concentration, pūjā, japa, kīrtan, svādhyāya and satsaṅg are spiritual practices (sādhana), a ladder – very useful, tremendously important, unwise to ignore. They become abhyāsa yoga as long as God is your only goal. They are of great value if they are spiritually orientated. If remembrance of God is not there, the whole thing is a wash-out. If your intentions and your goal are not spiritual, however much your practices may appear to be spiritual on the surface, they are only pretension.

If the sādhana is directed towards enlightenment you should at least be able to recognise that though you want God-realisation and have been doing all this to attain it, God-realisation is still not there – your sādhana is nothing to boast about. (That is where your ego is cut to size.) So, as a sincere spiritual seeker you must at least recognise that though you have been practising this sādhana regularly, sincerely and seriously, you are still full of doubts, problems and difficulties which you create for yourself (and you experience) – and probably create for others also. There is disharmony between others and you, produced by you – not by the others. So instead of worrying about why God created the world, the more sensible question could be 'Why did I come into being at all?'

Spiritual practice must have as its goal that which is beautifully stated in the Bhagavad Gītā:

Fix thy mind on me only, thy intellect in me, thou shalt no doubt live in me alone hereafter.

(12:8)

Place your mind in God. Then you will dwell in him, because you have been swallowed by him.

If thou art unable to fix thy mind steadily on me, then by the yoga of constant practice do thou seek to reach me, O Arjuna.

(12:9)

It is a very moving verse. It is as if Kṛṣṇa comes down a little bit on this ladder that we are visualising and pleads: “If you are unable to do this (if there is still a sense of duality that you are different from God, and therefore the rest of creation), then by abhyāsa yoga strive again and again to reach me.”

More often than not we forget the last part of this verse. Why am I doing all this? Not in order to cultivate and strengthen the ego, but in order to attain God. If this is not forgotten even for a single split second, then all your abhyāsa becomes meaningful. There is no condemnation of routine religious practices. If some sort of spiritual routine (sādhana) helps you, please go on – but not mechanically, without understanding why you are doing it.

In the eighth chapter there is an expression which suggests: ‘If at the time you leave this body your consciousness is of God, you become God; of a human being, you become a human being; of an animal, you become an animal.’ That is because you have been thinking about **that** constantly. Supposing you have been behaving mechanically all your life – you will be born as a machine next birth! Your bhava, your inner being, is saturated with this machine mentality. (Maybe you will come back as a tape-recorder in an ashram. You will be filled with interesting discourses – which, like this ladder, raft and schoolmaster – will be of great inspiration to everybody except you!) Whatever you do that is good and humanitarian is greatly appreciated by others. But some time or the other you should also remember **why** you are doing all that.

Abhyāsa yoga here covers everything – bhakti yoga, karmā yoga and haṭha yoga practices, meditation, prāṇāyama, āsana. In and through all that, you are trying to **remember** God. Do you know what ‘remember’ is? These limbs are the members of ‘my body’. Re-member means that somehow the wrist was cut off and some nice surgeon put it back again. A member was cut off and it was re-membered! So what is it to remember God? It is not possible to explain. There was a certain unity which was somehow dismembered by the mind. Once the problem of the mind is overcome, then the dismemberment is abolished and you remember God.

When you take diagonal corners of a handkerchief you see that ‘this is one end of a handkerchief and that is the other end’. There are two ends. If you fold it the usual way, you see the handkerchief alone. It does not have any ends, it is just one handkerchief. It is your mind that created a division in which there is no division. Look again and you see two ends. Even if you are enlightened you will still see that, but you are not bluffed or deceived or deluded by it. Enlightenment merely means that. Nothing need be altered in the world.

It is the mind that creates a division. When you see this, when this becomes a living truth to you, it seems as if suddenly you wake up and your mind enters into God – only to realise that it has always been there! Nothing that does not exist can ever come into being. Kṛṣṇa reminded us of this in the second chapter. This is the central message which should not be lost sight of.

Does enlightenment mean that you will be free from all this confusion, sorrow, sin and so on? Perhaps all this may be free from you (the ego)! Is that not a better idea? When the me has gone, the oneness that already exists is remembered. That is called bhakti, that is called love. But unfortunately you blink again and see that the handkerchief has

two ends. One is definitely the left and the other is the right end. Then you practise your sādhana again, to remind yourself – or to **re**-member the truth.

What is known as the mind is itself the omnipresent omniscience. Somehow or other we assume that it is ‘my’ mind. It is not ‘**my**’ mind. ‘Me’ is itself the creation of this mind. God is not in need of ‘**my**’ love – and as long as there is a sense of separation, there **is** no love! Love is the direct experience of the unity that already exists. If that is not there, there is no love. Is it possible to constantly remember that whatever action flows in this universe from what is called ‘me’, arises not in ‘me’ but in God, in this omnipresent omnipotence. You cannot create a blade of grass, you can cut it; you cannot create a flower, you can cut it and offer it to God, you cannot create a fruit, you can eat it. You cannot create yourself. You cannot produce a thought. You cannot even (what is ‘called’) control the mind and ensure that only good thoughts arise, and no bad thoughts. Suddenly you realise that the ‘me’ is itself a creature of the mind, that ‘I am not capable of anything’ and that all actions performed by whomever, arise in God, in this omnipresent omnipotence. Here the abhyāsa as sādhana is abandoned.

‘I’, being a psychological factor, is an imaginary nothing – it is like a shadow which has absolutely no power whatsoever to do anything.

If thou art unable to practise even this abhyāsa yoga, be thou intent on doing actions for my sake; even by doing actions for my sake, thou shalt attain perfection.

(12:10)

Though psychologically you think you are doing or not doing, it is the work of the omnipresent omnipotence. All the śakti belongs to the śākta. You live your life without any problem and without the necessity to drastically change it, and yet lead an enlightened life.

Even this requires some sort of an understanding. Some of us have experienced at some time or the other that with the best of intentions you do what you consider absolutely right and it leads to precisely the opposite results. Therefore Kṛṣṇa says:

If thou art unable to do even this, then, taking refuge in union with me, renounce the fruits of all actions with the self controlled.

(12:11)

‘First do what you have to do, but forget about the results.’ This you can do. So Kṛṣṇa has come down three or four steps to your level. You are not going to practise any sort of spiritual discipline, you cannot realise that it is God who is doing all this, but you can realise that whatever you are doing, your actions may lead to contrary results. So seeing this merely as a fact, stop anticipating anything, expecting any rewards or results. By this abandonment also you will instantly attain peace of mind.

Better indeed is knowledge than practice; than knowledge meditation is better; than meditation the renunciation of fruits of actions. Peace immediately follows renunciation.

(12:12)

If you abandon the fruits of actions you will instantly become peaceful. And when the mind is at peace it will somehow realise that God is the source of all these actions, and therefore you could not determine what action should lead to what result. Then you have ascended one step in the ladder. Then constantly seek to find where all this happened. Who determines it? Who is the controller of life here? Constantly seeking, *abhyāsa*. Then one day by God's grace suddenly the truth is realised.

In the last eight verses of this chapter certain characteristics of the devotee are given in order that we might grow into them, that they might become natural. (Only that which is natural is God's creation. An artificial creation has entertainment value, but no real value.) One should study these eight verses and remember them constantly, and see that as long as all these are not naturally and effortlessly present in you, you are not a devotee of God. That realisation is enough to shatter the ego and to keep the *sādhana* flowing.

He who is free from wants, pure, expert, unconcerned and untroubled,
renouncing all undertakings or commencements – he who is thus devoted
to me, is dear to me.

(12:16)

Does this mean that the devotee of God does not initiate any action? Ramana Maharshi once commented on this saying that a *jñānī* (who is the same as a *bhakta*) does not egoistically embark upon a project, but responds to the needs of the people around. This is one way of putting it. The other way is to realise that everything happens because of God, because of the divine omnipotence. One who lives in this consciousness, lives in God all the time. That is *bhakti yoga*.

Bhakti yoga is not merely indulging in some sort of *sādhana* **called** *bhakti*, but where a consciousness of duality suddenly merges in a consciousness of non-duality. That is, as the handkerchief is held, you keep seeing the two ends. Suddenly you see the one handkerchief. That alone exists. That is *bhakti*.

THE SUBJECT-OBJECT TANGLE

Bhakti is not a mere pretension or emotionalism. In the thirteenth chapter you have an extremely interesting statement:

My devotee, knowing this, enters into my being.

(13:18)

He who claims to be the devotee of God becomes one with him. There is a deluded feeling of independence from God, (the totality), and that disappears. (All descriptions are infantile, ineffectual attempts at describing what is impossible to describe.) You do not 'become' God, but you will share his nature – your actions will not be **your** actions but **his** actions. Your existence will not be something that is independent of the totality. There will not even be an experience of being independent of the totality. That which never existed ceases to be. A bunch of words which have absolutely no meaning, yet that is the truth.

Thus the field, as well as knowledge and the knowable have been briefly stated.

(13:18)

In this chapter is revealed a tremendously important truth and that falls into what, to our present state of misunderstanding, appears to be three different categories: kṣetra, jñāna, jñeyam. Kṣetra means ‘the field’, jñāna is highest knowledge, jñeyam means the knowable and that which is to be known. What is knowledge is described, what is to be known is described, but who is this knower who knows all this?

The Bhagavad Gītā is full of unanswered questions.

When a question is answered in a clear-cut fashion you have destroyed the spirit of enquiry, the only instrument that you have of reaching enlightenment. That insight with which it may be possible to reach this point of enlightenment is snuffed out immediately an answer is given.

There is a very interesting incident in the Yoga Vāsiṣṭha. After Vasiṣṭha had explained in so many different ways with stories and illustrations, that the world as you experience it is not the truth, he said: “This is all accidental and even that famous law of cause and effect operates because...(b-cause) you think there is a cause, and then you see (c-cause)!” That is the a.b.c. of cause and effect! There may be none. Rāma said: “If you and I are both non-existent, then who are you and who are you teaching?” Vasiṣṭha remained absolutely silent. Rāma taunted: “Why are you silent?” Then Vasiṣṭha made a most beautiful statement: “Rāma, I did not keep quiet because I could not answer your question, but silence was the only answer.”

Kṛṣṇa says a lot but everything that he says raises a question and does not always provide an answer.

This body, O Arjuna, is called the field; he who knows it is called the knower of the field by those who know of them, i.e., by the sages.

(13:1)

What is ‘this body’? The body of Arjuna, of Kṛṣṇa or the (cosmic) body described in the eleventh chapter? Do not ask. You will find out. The word ‘body’ does not merely mean an assembly of physical parts or physiological mechanisms, but the body of anything. Within this thing called physical body there are a million bodies and yet this whole thing is one body – an extension of that is that the society is a body of people, a nation is a body of people, the earth is a body of living beings. What applies to one applies to all.

Do you feel puzzled and mystified? If you are afraid of confusion, you can never discover the truth. A complacent existence – ‘God is there somewhere above the roof and I am alright’, is a living death, That which is alive and vigorous is worried, ‘What on earth is this body which is talked about here?’ He who knows this, is the knower, the kṣetrajña – knower in the sense that he knows the kṣetra, the field.

In the Brhadāraṇyaka upaniṣad, Yājñavalkya is asked: “When the sun is set and the stars are not seen and there is no light and nobody makes any noise, what is the light in which you function?” That is the light of the ātmā! It is so simple, so clear and yet so

impossible! That, in this body, which knows from moment to moment that ‘this is my right hand, this is my left hand, I am sitting on my bottom, I am hungry, I am thirsty, I am drowsy’ is kṣetrajñā.

What the field is and of what nature, what are its modifications, and whence it is and also who he is and what his powers are – hear all that from me in brief.

(13:3)

Instead of using the words ‘field’ and ‘the knower of the field’ one can use the words ‘object’ and ‘subject’. The body is an object in relation to the subject that is aware of the body. If you contemplate upon this, with one stroke you have worked out a remarkable miracle – something has been disconnected from the body. When you directly realise that ‘I am aware of the body’ as ‘I am aware of this shirt’, you realise that the body is an object.

The great elements, egoism, intellect and also the unmanifested nature, the ten senses and one (mind) and the five objects of the sense,

(13:5)

Desire, hatred, pleasure, pain, the power that holds the elements together, intelligence, fortitude – the field has thus been briefly described with its modifications.

(13:6)

Hope, desire, love, hate, happiness and unhappiness are all the objects. Something else is aware of all these. All this is the field or object, and there is a subject. Who is the subject? The same subject/object are referred to differently in verse twenty.

Here the object is called prakṛti.

In the production of the effect and the cause, the nature is said to be the cause; in the experience of pleasure and pain, the soul is said to be the cause.

(13:20)

Things happen in this universe and those happenings are brought about by different agencies. This is a most difficult point to understand because of our habit of using the mind and the intellect to understand this. You are writing with that pen. Writing is the action, pen (or your hand) is the instrument. There is certainly an awareness of writing. Here, even that is brought into the field of object. The paper is an object, pen is an object, the arm is an object, but even that which thinks ‘I am writing’ (ahaṁkāra) is an object. If you understand that you are enlightened!

Can you get rid of that ahaṁkāra? If you do, who is going to write? It is part of nature (prakṛti). Can you get rid of your nature? What does it mean? Does the tree suddenly become something else? A tree is a tree – that is its nature. It stands there gloriously without any bother, worry, anxiety or fear. The eyes see, the ears hear, that is natural – but whose nature? Does my nature belong to memory or the ‘me’? Kṛṣṇa says: “No”; it looks like that, but it is not so.

The soul seated in nature experiences the qualities born of nature; attachment to the qualities is the cause of his birth in good and evil wombs.

(13:21)

There is consciousness within you. If that consciousness was not there, then the nature would not operate. In a manner of speaking, it is the consciousness that becomes aware of the diverse experiences and expressions, and that consciousness is uninvolved in those expressions and experiences – but you think you are involved.

Attachment to the qualities is the cause of his birth in good and evil wombs.

(13:21)

Though it is the power in the eye, the faculty of seeing, that sees, you cannot avoid entertaining the idea that ‘I see’ however much you struggle. Why is it so? Because of habit. Birth after birth you have done this. It is merely a habit.

If somehow you realise this truth directly (not as a teaching or a concept), you realise that the eyes see because of their faculty and the thought ‘I see’ arises because of a bad habit. Suddenly the whole thing ceases. You are no longer caught.

WHAT AN EXPERIENCE!

The universe is not our problem. Our problem is more immediate – the birth of an experience, and the birth of an experience is attended by the same circumstances that attend the birth of the universe.

Wherever a being is born, whether unmoving or moving, know thou, O best of the Bharatā, that it is from the union between the field and its knower.

(13:26)

When the subject becomes aware and experiences the object, (or apparently, not really, comes into contact with the object) it is then that the experience is born. It is a birth of a phenomenon that is going to rule you – your mind, your heart, your whole life. Whether an experience is one of pleasure or pain, it is an experience, and the birth of an experience being repeated, forms a habit which you are trapped in for the rest of your life.

The moment there is a subject there is an object, because the subject is subject only in relation to the object and the object is object only in relation to the subject. Neither of them is independently true. Truth is between the two. When you say: “I am aware of your presence”, the subject and the object arise at the same time. (So, in the handkerchief analogy, you cannot have a handkerchief with only one end. It must have two ends. If you are talking of ends it has two ends, if you are talking of the handkerchief, it is one.)

If I ask you: “Do you think ‘I am’?” your answer is “Yes, **you are**.” So ‘I am’ is equal to ‘you are’, because we are still referring to the same thing. This itself is called ‘I am’ and also ‘you are’. The two are exactly the same. It is awareness which makes this possible,

and that awareness is like the whole handkerchief in which there is neither 'east' nor 'west'. To the awareness we are merely two poles, two ends, indivisibly one forever. It is not possible to understand it because the understander creates a thing called an 'object of understanding'. Thus, being always a totality, experience cannot be divided.

There is something very interesting here. Suppose you shake someone's hand in great friendship. In you there arises an experience of joy, but at the very same time there is an experience in the other person. The object of your experience has its **own** experience, it is the subject of that experience. To that you are an object. Suddenly you realise: 'There is an experience. One side of it is me and one side of it is you'. That is called 'witness-consciousness'. Witness-consciousness is not merely repeating "I am not the body. I am the witness of this body" – you say that because you are so inextricably tied to 'I am the body' idea, that it is not possible to get rid of it so easily.

When does 'a' desk become 'my' desk? When does 'a' cap become 'my' cap? If this understanding can really arise in you then the problem of 'mineness' has been solved. Then it is possible to cultivate the habit of seeing the world as it **is** without relating it to oneself. This is part of the witness-consciousness process.

There is still this fundamental problem of 'I am the body'. It is difficult because the intelligence with which you enquire into the nature of this relationship called 'I and mine' itself arose out of this habit pattern, it is a product of the illusion that 'I am this body'. If you can get rid of the idea 'This is mine – this shawl is mine, this seat is mine', you are a *jīvanmukta*. (If you can get rid of the idea 'I am this body' you are a *videhamukta*. That is a situation that the human mind cannot understand at present because the mind began to function only after the habit pattern was formed.)

What is called witness-consciousness can be developed only to the extent of dealing with 'mineness' – not with the 'I am the body' idea. ('I am not the body' is merely a sentence with no meaning whatsoever. It is the suspicion that you are the body that makes you say that you are not the body!) A first step to witness-consciousness is to become immediately, intensely aware that you are you, I am I, and that 'you are **my** friend' is nonsense. Once you are able to get to that point suddenly you realise that the knower (subject) becomes aware of the field (object), which includes pleasure, pain and so on. All these are the object of the subject.

You are the experiencer, the *puruṣa*, and you are looking at something else which is an experience, an object. Self is the subject and you are constantly seeking for the non-self. Self is *ānanda*, happiness, and you are seeking... what? – must be unhappiness! If the subject is happiness, why is it looking for something else? And, if the subject is unhappiness, whatever it does it will **still** be unhappy. This is another puzzle. I am not giving an answer, merely posing a question. Whatever you are, you are the subject. Whatever you are, the object must have a different characteristic in relation to you. For instance, if you are hungry you need food, because there is an empty space in your stomach which needs to be filled. A full stomach does not need more food. So, when there is a state of fullness, there is no movement at all. Then you become *yogārūḍha*. Once you have reached the fullness you are quiet, silent, maybe inactive also. It is only by understanding this process of apparent contact between subject and object, and therefore the dynamics of experience, that one can free oneself from contact with objects, from the conception of objects, and thereby eventually arrive at the non-

conception of an object – which instantly dissolves the subject as subject! In that awareness there is no subject-object relationship. The subject and object both cease to be, together – but it is not a state of unawareness because awareness being awareness cannot be unaware.

Do thou also know me as the knower of the field in all fields, O Arjuna;
knowledge of both the field and the knower of the field is considered by me
to be the knowledge.

(13:2)

Intellectually understanding this truth is fragmentary understanding which is not understanding. What is understanding? Kṛṣṇa gives a long list of characteristics of a jñānī (one who knows). Gurudev Swami Sivananda was very fond of these few verses.

Humility, unpretentiousness, non-injury, forgiveness, uprightness, service
of the teacher, purity, steadfastness, self-control,

Indifference to the objects of the senses and also absence of egoism,
perception of (or reflection on) the evil in birth, death, old age, sickness
and pain,

Non-attachment, non-identification of the self with son, wife, home and
the rest, and constant even-mindedness on the attainment of the desirable
and the undesirable.

Unswerving devotion unto me by the yoga of non-separation, resort to
solitary places, distaste for the society of people,

Constancy in knowledge of the self, perception of the end of true
knowledge – this is declared to be knowledge, and what is opposed to it is
ignorance.

(13:7-11)

When all these qualities are present in you, then it is possible to say that you have jñāna (knowledge). These qualities cannot be cultivated. When you study this list you will realise that cultivating one quality has to be at the expense of another quality. If you are dispassionate and you do not want to get involved with anybody, how are you going to practise this thing called cosmic love? And if you are practising cosmic love and serving everybody, someone says: “You have lost your vairāgya (dispassion).” All these problems arise because we are still intellectualising, conceptualising these qualities which are the characteristics of the enlightened person. To the enlightened person himself, these problems do not arise.

I will declare that which has to be known, knowing which one attains to
immortality, the beginningless supreme Brahman, called neither being nor
non-being.

With hands and feet everywhere, with eyes, heads and mouths everywhere,
with ears everywhere, he exists in the worlds enveloping all.

Shining by the functions of all the senses, yet without the senses;
unattached, yet supporting all; devoid of qualities, yet their experiencer,

Without and within all beings, the unmoving and also the moving; because of its subtlety, unknowable; and near and far away is that.

And, undivided, yet he exists as if divided in beings: he is to be known as the supporter of beings: he dissolves and generates all these.

That, the light of all lights, is said to be beyond darkness; knowledge, the knowable and the goal of knowledge, seated in the hearts of all.

(13:12-17)

The supreme beauty of this is that nothing is denied. You realise that the entire universe is the object of this cosmic knower, which is called God. He alone exists and this alone is his prakṛti – an object in your own consciousness. You touch the core of that consciousness and suddenly you realise ‘Even **that** is not mine.’

INSIGHT! NOT OUTSIDE

The Bhagavad Gītā does not demand that the seeker after truth should run away from ‘life’. If that was the intention, this beautiful expression: ‘non-attachment to, or non-psychological dependence upon son, wife, wealth and so on’, found in the thirteenth chapter, would be meaningless. Without having to change your external appearance or your social, political, domestic or civil status, to find this insight is what is referred to as jñāna. So that it applies immediately to your life and mind without waiting for an external change.

Jñāna is best defined as insight – not intellectual or emotional assent or understanding. It is not something that **appeals** to **you**, because then the ‘me’ (the ego) is still there. Gurudev often pointed out that jñāna is not against reason, but it is not the end product of logic. It is independent of reason, of emotion, of life-style, of social status. It has to be discovered in your very life, because it is the very basis of all experience. That is what gives value to life, that is the very meaning of life, that is the source of life. Without that there is no experience. Insight is not thought-power or intelligence that you can cultivate, nor is it the result of some sort of discipline that you can practise. It is not something which needs to be or **can** be developed, because it is independent of the ‘me’, the ego. It has nothing whatsoever to do with anything that you do.

It demands a certain inner alertness and a certain inner freedom to remain aware in and through all experiences, whether the mind, on re-awakening after the experience, retrospectively calls it pain or pleasure, happiness or unhappiness. At the time of the experience there is no happiness or unhappiness. It is after the experience that the mind wakes up and says: “It is good: let me have it again.” The bliss is gone and memory, the ‘me’, takes over. But whether the ‘me’ arose or did not arise, in and through all these, the content (which is pure awareness) never undergoes any change.

One needs intense awareness to discover this. That awareness is lost sight of the moment a feeling or a misunderstanding arises that **this** comes from **that**. Somebody slaps you on your cheek. It hurts. You call him a rascal. At that moment, if you are alert, you will notice that your pain has gone. Your attention is on that man. So alertness is lost the moment that awareness is directed towards something else. There is a stage in which you can remain aware of what goes on within you, while being aware at the same time of what goes on around you. But in your present state, either you are able to remain

aware of your own experiences or allow the awareness to flow towards the presumed object of the experience.

We are almost all the time caught up in the awareness of the object, so that the experience which arises in consciousness is completely lost sight of. That is why the teachers give you a sort of neutral stimulation, and call it concentration or meditation.

It is possible for one who has learnt the art of meditation to understand it in an extremely simple way. You may concentrate your attention upon the breath or upon a thought. With the help of both of these it is possible to find what the state of your mind or your inner being is when inhalation has stopped and exhalation has not yet begun. Thought comes to an end at this juncture. You can pursue a thought to its own source. It comes to a stop. Before the next thought arises, what is the state of your being? That is consciousness, awareness. It is not an object of awareness, it is awareness. Awareness cannot cease to exist or to remain aware. 'I am' itself is an experience of that pure awareness, which is the content of all our experiences, thoughts and expressions.

Insight is freedom. The moment it leans on something **outside**, it ceases to be **insight**. That insight is, at the same time, virtue of the highest order. In this insight you see that you are not really attached to each other, that there is no attachment. This non-attachment is not one which involves effort or isolation. The enlightened person who is always alone, is never lonely – he is all-one. You had to see Swami Sivananda to understand this. Wherever he was, whatever situation he was in, surrounded by whomever, he was one with the Lord, and therefore he was alone – one with all, al(l)one.

Others also, not knowing thus, worship, having heard of it from others; they too, cross beyond death, regarding what they have heard as the supreme refuge.

(13:25)

Upāsate means to sit near to, draw closer. So hearing this truth again and again, repeatedly, you draw closer and closer to this truth. Your mind and your heart, bit by bit, enter into this truth. Truth enters into your mind and your heart slowly.

Know thou that nature and the spirit are both without beginnings; and modifications and qualities are born of nature.

(13:19)

What is puruṣa, what is prakṛti and what are the guṇā? Puruṣa is like fire. The flame of a candle is fire, but what is fire? It is something which is intangible, it is what is responsible for the flame burning there. Whatever fire is, it fills this flame. If you have a painting of this flame, it will not burn – there is no fire. On account of the presence of that, flame becomes a flame. The same thing when it can be seen and experienced, becomes prakṛti. The puruṣa and the prakṛti are eternally present, eternally together. Though they seem to be two, they are inseparably one. That is, what you see is prakṛti. Unseen and filling the entire thing is the puruṣa.

This flame has three qualities. One, that it is luminous; two, that it is hot; three, that there is some smoke. The smoke is produced by the flame and yet is capable of putting it

out. If you contemplate this, it is shattering! In the light generated by this fire you are able to see – that is **sattva**, luminosity.

The luminosity of a flame is non-different from the flame, it is part of the nature of this flame, it cannot be separated from this flame. Even so, **sattva** cannot be isolated. When your mind is clear and calm, then **sattva** prevails. **Rajas**, which is compared to the heat of the flame, is characterised by restlessness. **Rajas** means restless activity, restlessness, dynamism, dirt, unclarity. In winter a little bit of heat is good; in summer you do not like it; and you have to use heat fairly carefully – otherwise you burn your fingers. **Rajas** is good, without it you cannot function, but that function has to be carefully done in light. **Tamas** is blinding darkness, doubt, dullness, sleep, stupidity, but it is not independent of **prakṛti** and **puruṣa**. This is one of the most beautiful teachings in the **Bhagavad Gītā**.

There is a suggestion that **sattva**, **rajas** and **tamas** are inevitably inherent in the whole universe. These are the integral parts of objectivity. As long as there are objects and awareness of those objects, these three will last. They belong to the nature of God, not to ‘me’. When in the light of insight this truth is seen, **you** are free. But, the light of insight cannot function if **tamas** is allowed to preponderate. If you accept **tamas** as God’s will, then the insight is gone, and you do not see anything. So in order to kindle this flame of insight within you, you blow away all the smoke, but not because you think smoke is terrible. What you think is terrible is also a part of the divine plan – but if you use that argument to rationalise your own stupidity, you remain stupid. So first blow away that cloud of stupidity from your consciousness. When you become aware you suddenly realise: ‘O God, what I thought was evil is also a part of your nature or **prakṛti**.’

AT THE THRESHOLD

In that insight you realise the interaction between **puruṣa** and **prakṛti**, which gives rise to the so-called creation which is nothing more than the realisation of this consciousness of its own inherent nature.

When the infinite is activated and becomes aware of its own nature, all this infinite variety is formed – including what is called ‘you’, ‘me’, ‘I’. All these millions of ‘I’s are the sprouts in this infinite garden. You arrive at this insight not **through** a technique or a process, but not **without** a technique. Self-realisation is not something which you can pick up from a guru or scripture, but it is not had if you do not have any of these.

It is not very easy to understand this insight because the observer is part of the observation itself! The observer is not independent of the observed until the observation itself becomes the observer, or the fact is realised that observation is the observer, like sleep is the sleeper. There is no being, independent of sleep, who is asleep, who thinks ‘I am asleep’. There is sleep and nothing else. Similarly, can there be an observation without an observer? That is insight, that is **jñāna**. In that **jñāna** there may arise a polarity, but that polarity does not divide this **jñāna**. It is like the two ends of the handkerchief. You cannot cut a handkerchief into two, hoping to get only one end. Merely see it is one handkerchief and there are no two ends. (Still there are two ends if you want to see them as two ends!)

It is important to remain aware of the arising of the idea ‘This is mine’, whether it is related to an external object called the body or to another external object called a good thought, a bad thought, a feeling of happiness or unhappiness, of brilliance or dullness and stupidity, of excitement. Where do they arise? When the attention is focused in this manner, then one is in a state of *pratyāhāra*.

Some, by meditation, behold the self in the self by the self, others by the yoga of action.

(13:24)

It is a very enigmatic statement. How can one see one’s self? You cannot see the self. But when the attention has thus returned to its own source, there is no external flow of attention. There is insight. It is not my insight, it is not your insight. It is insight. Is that the ultimate truth? No. Kṛṣṇa calls it *sattva*.

When through every gate (sense) in this body, the wisdom-light shines, then it may be known that *sattva* is predominant.

(14:11)

What does it mean? There is an insight into all psychological functions. There is nothing concerning the body or the mind that is unclear to you. *Sattva* is fairly close to self-realisation. You are still aware that your mind is calm. If the mind is calm, the ‘me’ looking at the mind and at the calmness is still there. There is still a foolish idea that this is ‘**my**’ calmness, this is ‘**my**’ mind. When you are in some such state of mind, considering yourself a great saint, immediately stand near one of these boisterous children and ask yourself: “Where does my mind end and his mind start? The child is excited and I am peaceful.” Look carefully to see if you can find from where your mind starts. When there is no such division in space, ‘my’ calmness is not ‘my’ calmness. It so happens that in this particular area of this room there is a little bit of calmness for the time being. It may be disturbed in fifteen minutes time. Spiritual glory is useless deception.

Greed, activity, the undertaking of actions, restlessness, longing – these arise when *rajas* is predominant, O Arjuna.

(14:12)

Wait a little bit more, then lust, anger and greed start. That is *rajas*. When there is *tamas* you feel fatigued and sleepy. Kṛṣṇa warns us that all three of these can be fetters. *Sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* are part of this universal nature. What was described as *prakṛti* or *kṣetra* are subject to these three states of being. There is nothing in the entire universe which is totally free from one or the other of the three *guṇā*. If *tamas* was not there at all, a person would not be stupid or foolish – but perhaps he would not be thinking. If *rajas* was totally absent, then there would be no motion, no activity. *Sattva* cannot be completely absent. These three constitute the very substance of creation of every living organism.

Sattva, rajas and tamas – these qualities, O Arjuna, born of the divine nature, bind fast in the body, the embodied, the indestructible.

(14:12)

These three qualities bind the embodied being in the body. And therefore as long as you and I consider that ‘this body is mine’ (or not mine) it is not possible to get out of this clutch, except through grace. As falling asleep is an experience which arises when the ‘me’ comes to an end, possibly this experience of that which is beyond these three guṇā will arrive when the ‘me’ comes to an end. That is purely a matter of grace. So it is possible for you to become completely and totally free of the sense of possession and end all psychological relationship, but it is not so easy to end the relationship to this body and come to the clear understanding that this ‘body is not I’.

Of these, sattva which from its stainlessness, is luminous and healthy, binds by attachment to happiness and by attachment to knowledge, O sinless one.

(14:6)

Even sattva will bind you by an experience of happiness independent of the objects. Still it is an experience and therefore it is fragmented, divided. Any experience that is experienced as if it were separate from the experiencer is fragmented experience and therefore likely to come to an end.

To be devoted to what you regard as jñāna as wisdom, is another contact, another attachment, another bondage. There is one way out of this.

When the seer beholds no agent other than the guṇā and knows that which is higher than them, he attains to my being.

(14:19)

If there is intelligence, what is its source? If there is restlessness, dullness, stupidity, activity, what is the source? Why is it that you can only sleep when sleep comes to you; you can only be active when there is energy in you; you are intelligent, clear and wise only on certain occasions and not on certain other occasions? Obviously because these are beyond ‘me’, the ego. When those states prevail, they manifest their own characteristics which you assume to be ‘mine’.

All these activities, whether they are called sāttvikā, rājasā or tāmasā, belong to this cosmic nature. When you come face to face with this, you are at the threshold, knocking. What is beyond that? Is there something beyond that? And the beyond reveals itself to itself!

KNOCK, KNOCK!

The body is able to function only because it has a cohesiveness which makes it one unit, it is not an assemblage of spare parts. In that vision there is no bondage. But if you look at the whole body through a microscope you see different parts put together. When you view prakṛti as composed of sattva, rajas, tamas, you suddenly see that each one is a rope that binds the dehī (embodied). Whoever regards the body as ‘this I am’, or ‘this is mine’ is bound to that by one or the other of these three, or all the three together.

How do we get out of this? First of all by realising,

When the seer beholds no agent other than the guṇā and knows that which is higher than them, he attains to my being.

(14:19)

There is no word here to suggest that it is the ego or the jivā that does it. Translated in as simple a way as possible, draṣṭā is ‘attention’ which becomes aware. This awareness suddenly wakes to the understanding that there is a sense of lightness, of enlightenment, of understanding, of knowledge; that is sattva – not ‘me’, not ‘mine’. There is dynamism; that is rajas – not ‘me’, not ‘mine’. There is dullness; that is tamas – not ‘me’, not ‘mine’. When this understanding arises, the draṣṭā is aware that it is not involved in any of these. In the words of śrī Gurudev: “The wise man knows which guṇa is operating when.” If you know which guṇa is operating now, you are out of it, you are not caught in it.

You are never satisfied with the prevailing guṇā. This is something very peculiar. Though you enjoy sleep, when it comes to an end it is painful even to lie in bed. You may be doing the most splendid job on earth but it is not satisfying. Something in you says: “I want to have more knowledge, because only knowledge is accompanied by the sense of satisfaction.” Soon you are aspiring to sattva. What do you do when you have this tremendous enlightenment and understanding of the fundamentals of life? When you are very happy, bubbling with joy, you want to share it with someone else, so you start establishing a relationship, forming a society of happy people. Even that is bondage. How does one transcend this?

The blessed Lord said: Light, activity and delusion – when they are present, O Arjuna, he hates not, nor does he long for them when they are absent.

(14:22)

In one phraseology or another, this teaching is repeated nearly in every chapter. ‘Whatever be the guṇa that prevails....’ How do you complete that sentence – ‘The wise man accepts it’? Kṛṣṇa does not say so.

Only if you understand this very carefully, might you also understand what appears to be strange behaviour on the part of these great ones. You and I are subject to changing moods, but they are not, they **reflect** changing moods. There is a beautiful sutrā in the Yoga Sūtrā of Patañjali: ‘Like crystal the yogi merely reflects what is happening around him’. Therefore the yogi sleeps when tamas prevails, is active when rajas prevails; and is intelligent and happy when sattva prevails, without being bound by any of these.

What you regard as jñāna or understanding or knowledge (sattva) is not freedom. Even that is a bondage. You come into contact with jñāna – which means you are still a seeker, looking at jñāna as if it were a cloak. How to be totally free of this is the theme of the fifteenth chapter, which is the most inspiring chapter. It contains the very essence of the Bhagavad Gītā message. Do not let craving arise, because it is this craving that gives rise to all the rest of it. When there is a craving, there is attachment, hate, fear. All these

are related to a future. It is this craving that creates a thing called tomorrow. Therefore that thing called tomorrow is bondage.

In the fourteenth chapter we were cautioned that *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* can bind because you create the division between the experiencer and the experience of *sattva*, of *rajas*, of *tamas*. Having created that division, you bring them into conflict.

Even on the human plane, we love one another because we regard one another as different. Yet at all levels we are indivisibly one – the *prāṇa* is one; the mind is one; the consciousness is one.

A thing called contact arises only between two separate, independent objects. When there is only one there is no contact. It is the rejection of what is and the longing for what is not that is the problem. That is what causes this becoming – movement from one mood of being to another mood of being. All these are the products of apparent division in consciousness. But, as space is indivisible, consciousness is indivisible.

An eternal portion of myself, having become a living soul in the world of life, draws to itself the five senses with the mind for the sixth, abiding in nature.

(15:7)

This is inexpressibly beautiful. Its meaning can only be realised within oneself. It is something which cannot be translated or transmitted. What you call ‘*jīva*’ (living soul) is a cell of my (God’s) own being. This universe is filled with *jīvā* – embodied or disembodied. Consciousness or awareness is also everywhere. The *guṇā* are operating everywhere, and this *jīva* – which is everywhere) is taken for a ride by these *guṇā*.

When the Lord (the individual soul) obtains a body and when he leaves it, he takes these and goes with them as the wind takes the scents from their seats (flowers, etc.).

(15:8)

And, I am seated in the hearts of all; from me are memory, knowledge, as well as their absence. I am verily that which has to be known by all the *vedā*; I am indeed the author of the *vedānta* and the knower of the *vedā* am I.

(15:15)

Fantastic statement! I do not think you will find this in any other scriptural text in the world. Even forgetfulness of self is part of this game, so do not get upset about your own stupidity. Sit down and realise: ‘Lord, I have forgotten you, thanks to your own power. Aha! But, I remember God.’ By giving thanks to his own *māyā*, you have abolished it! It is fantastic!

Permeating the earth I support all beings by (my) energy; and having become the watery moon I nourish all herbs.

(15:13)

The essence of food is also a divine manifestation. That is why in the ashram we are asked to repeat this chapter before eating.

Having become the fire Vaiśvānara, I abide in the body of living beings and, associated with the prāṇa and the apāna, digest the fourfold food.

(15:14)

‘I am this thing called the gastric fire that is able to digest your food’. (Nobody, except God, can really deal with all the stuff that we put into this fire!) This digestive system is not under your control. It is totally independent. You are the slave. It has its own law, its own way of functioning. The master of that is that divine spark that exists in all beings, that sustains life. ‘Life is not mine – I am not this life.’ This is also part of this puruṣa looking at prakṛti, and prakṛti looking at puruṣa. One who realises this goes beyond the guṇā.

IS IT CLEAR?

In the fifteenth chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā the entire universe is visualised as a tree with roots above and branches below. This is the universal process, which metaphorically has its roots in God, grows downward and then strikes roots down, so that in a manner of speaking you emerge from God, you come down into this universe and you become trapped in this universe by the three qualities – sattva, rajas and tamas, each one of them tying you here by its own characteristics.

Its form is not perceived here as such, neither its end nor its origin, nor its foundation nor resting place; having cut asunder this firmly rooted peepul tree with the strong axe of non-attachment.

(15:3)

Kṛṣṇa suggests that you cut this down by the weapon of non-contact. How is this possible? By the realisation that the jivā, the mind, the senses and the universe are ‘not me’ and are ‘not mine’.

An eternal portion of myself, having become a living soul in the world of life, draws to itself the five senses with the mind for the sixth, abiding in nature.

(15:7)

When the Lord (the individual soul) obtains a body and when he leaves it, he takes these and goes with them as the wind takes the scents from their seats (flowers, etc.).

(15:8)

Presiding over the ear, the eye, touch, taste and smell, as well as the mind, he enjoys the objects of the senses.

(15:9)

The deluded do not see Him who departs, stays and enjoys; but they who possess the eye of knowledge behold him.

(15:10)

That which is considered *jivā* is God himself, it is part of that flame from which it has never and can never be isolated. A flame is composed of billions of sparks, but they cannot be isolated. That spark is the *jivā*. Then the analogy is changed to a particle of fragrance that is emitted by an incense stick. It seems to pervade a certain space. Does the space cease to be what it was because this aroma fills that space? Does the air which comes into contact with this aroma undergo a change? No, very soon the aroma is dispersed and the air becomes air again, the space remains space. Why was this space unaffected and why did the air appear to be affected to begin with but somehow freed itself from it? If you understand this you have got *mokṣa* in the palm of your hand.

The ultimate reality, the absolute or the infinite is like space – omnipresent, eternal, totally unaffected by what goes on within. You and I are not like that. We seem to be trapped in a certain type of conditioning or ignorance, *māyā* or *avidyā*, even as air that comes into contact with this perfume seems to have undergone a change. Suppose there are a couple of dead rats here and all the windows are closed; there is a terrible foul smell. If you open all the windows and doors, suddenly this room is not polluted any more. The moment the air in the room was brought into contact with the infinite air, the unpollutability of the air asserted itself. What you regarded as pollution has been absorbed by the same air, neither by rejecting nor accepting it, but by asserting the omnipresence of this air itself. So that nothing – not even what you regarded as foul, or filthy – is rejected, but has been absorbed by the cosmic whole. To that cosmic whole this is not pollution at all.

If that is clear you have understood what *asaṅga* means. *Asaṅga* does not mean non-attachment, detachment or thinking that you are holy, so that you say: “All these things are filthy. I am going to get rid of them or keep myself away from them.” That will lead to a dreadful form of violence from which there is no escape. On the other hand, to say that this is also God is a pitfall, and there is no getting out of that. Neither accepting evil as inevitable nor as something other than self and kicking it, is going to redeem us. When the seeker enquires into the nature of what-is, that ‘what-is’ absorbs all that is good and all that was considered evil, and therefore transcends it. That is what is described in the sixteenth chapter.

There are two types of beings in this world, the divine and the demoniacal.

(16:6)

Kṛṣṇa says here that the universe itself, as it flows, has these two elements, *daiva* and *āśura*, built into it. As soon as you are born in this world, you find that you are subjected to things called front and back, top and bottom, day and night, good and evil. Such is the flow of life. Where you are muddled, indecisive, confused, where there is delusion, there is *āśura* nature. That state of awareness or mind where things are clear, is *daiva*, divine. If there is an evil quality or habit in you, the moment you become aware of it as undesirable it will drop away. So, to remain in constant awareness is *daiva*, to remain in

constant unawareness is āsura. (If you understand this one half a verse, you have understood what life is about and what the Bhagavad Gītā teaching is all about!)

The āsura quality can function only as long as you are unaware. In the **light** of this awareness, darkness **must** disappear. Though there is this dualism called light and darkness built into this universe, light does not **know** darkness. Light does not dispel darkness as you might chase a thief from your room, though you and I use the expression. If there is an evil thought or feeling, the moment you become aware of it, it is gone. If it does not go, you have not learned to look!

You cannot cultivate a virtuous quality, however much you try. (If you have tried, you will understand what I am talking about.) When you understand this, it is then that true humility enters your heart and you say: “God, I have tried my best. I cannot do it – you had better take charge.” Then the moment that you face this light, or this truth or reality, you become an abode of all virtues. When you face the light, you are enlightened, illumined, there is clarity, you are a god, you are divine.

If you deliberately try to cultivate these virtues, it will compel you to face the light all the time – and it is also possible that you will acquire the first of the noble virtues described in the thirteenth chapter – humility. All your arrogance ‘I am a virtuous man, a holy man’, will drop away because you know what a struggle it is, how frustrating it is. Then you realise if the whole universe has come out of him, these divine and demoniacal qualities are also his. This cosmic being absorbs everything into it.

Darkness exists as long as we are in darkness. The only way to remain out of this darkness is paradoxically to remain **aware** of that darkness. But when you begin to **see** that darkness, the darkness is gone. It does not leave you only when you do not see it as evil, but also when you do not see it as something nice.

Bewildered by many a fancy, entangled in the snare of delusion, addicted
to the gratification of lust, they fall into a foul hell.

(16:16)

So Kṛṣṇa cautions, “Avoid lust, anger and greed.”

In the fifteenth chapter there is a description of the aśvattha. Aśvattha means the peepul tree; aśva means ‘no tomorrow’, that which is ‘established in no tomorrow’. If that makes sense to you, you have understood the entire Bhagavad Gītā and you have the key to enlightenment in your hands. This universe that you see seems to be solid, permanent, but Kṛṣṇa tells us that it is not. It is something that will not be there tomorrow. But, when you entertain a craving or a desire, that desire makes you think that this world is going to be like this tomorrow also, that you will come back and enjoy it. We should not forget that all our cravings, desires, fears and hopes are futuristic, related to something **called** the future which does not exist now. And we are trapped in a web of ideas only because we think that that future is a real substance, whereas it is merely conjured up by hopes and aspirations and the fear, and so on. Once this craving has collapsed, tomorrow vanishes. Do today what in the light of your awareness today, has to be done. If you can live this moment as if there is no other moment, no tomorrow, you are the conqueror of the whole world, even of heaven. One has to witness this, as in the case of Swami Sivananda. He never believed in tomorrow. D.I.N. Do It Now.

Everything he did he did as if there were no tomorrow. It had to be done now, today. Tomorrow is created by your desire, and the desire is sustained by your foolish idea of tomorrow. This is the central theme of the Bhagavad Gītā.

The sixteenth chapter is extremely interesting, in that it reveals to us that what is known as ‘āśura’ or diabolical is as much part of this creation as ‘daiva’ or divine. Hence, it is not for the puny human mind and intellect to accept or reject these. It is good to understand the constituent factors in both these trends in creation; it is also good to understand that whereas the daiva leads to liberation, the āśura tends towards bondage. This understanding itself is sufficient incentive to promote the daiva in oneself and to move away from the āśura – and this is of vital importance – without judging and condemning the āśura nature in ‘others’.

It is extremely interesting in this context to see that Kṛṣṇa uses some of the expressions that the self-righteous often use in their descriptions of ‘others who are of a sinful nature’. They (the self-righteous) often consider themselves ‘perfected ones’, ‘blissful ones’, ‘divine beings’ and so on. This is the direct result of perceiving the āśura factors in others; and it cannot but lead to the āśura nature taking root in oneself and growing there into what the self-righteous consider to be undesirable (āśura) nature.

When all this becomes clear, it is clear that clarity itself is what is important; and that clarity is daiva or divine. When that clarity is present, it makes it clear that all that is good in oneself is ‘the nature of the Lord and part of his creation (not **mine**)’ and that all that is good **or sinful** in others is also part of the same creation and hence beyond one’s jurisdiction. When this clarity of perception is absent, then one falls into the āśura stream of creation; the virulent, violent and self-assertive rājasa ego (in the words of Gurudev Sivananda) arises and leads one to hell or the three constituents of diabolic nature (lust, anger and greed).

Uncertainty is very different from doubt. Doubt itself may be characterised either by clarity or uncertainty. When doubt is accompanied by uncertainty, it becomes destructive; and it compels one to abandon the very search for truth or God, by making you doubt the very existence of God and the validity of the teaching. However, when doubt is accompanied by clarity, it enables you to see that the teaching is not clear to you and induces you to seek – and to seek greater clarity. This is healthy doubt, constructive doubt, where there is ‘clarity of one’s own uncertainty’, whereas in the destructive form of doubt there is deceptive ‘clarity’ which arrogantly and blindly rejects the truth that what it suffers from is uncertainty. It therefore shuts the door to freedom in its own face.

When there is clarity and even healthy doubt, then it is important for the seeker immediately to seek the help and assistance of a guru who is well versed in the scriptures and who has had direct experience of the reality. The guru will surely transmit his knowledge of the scripture, reinforced by his own direct experience, to the seeker thus dispelling the uncertainty and leading him to the daiva or perfect clarity.

THE SECRET OF OBEDIENCE

Towards the end of the sixteenth chapter, great emphasis is laid on śāstrā – tasmāc chāstraṁ pramāṇaṁ te – ‘Therefore let scripture be your guide’.

Therefore, let the scriptures be the authority in determining what ought to be done and what ought not to be done. Having known what is said in the ordinance of the scriptures, thou shouldst act here in this world.

(16:24)

What are śāstrā? It is a very serious question if you are seriously interested in sādhana. If you are not serious in sādhana, then of course you accept something on the basis of whatever you like. If any scripture is your authority (it does not matter what it is), then you are safe. The scripture contains something which suits you and something which does not suit you. Any scripture can be your guide. A person, however righteous his actions may be, does not attain perfection if he is a slave to his own thoughts, concepts, ideas and cravings. If you follow a scripture or the guru only to the extent you wish to follow, then you are lost, because you are following yourself, nobody else – neither guru nor scripture. Obedience seems to be the key factor in all these religious traditions. No religious tradition asks you to disobey a teacher or a scripture. If you develop the faculty of total obedience, then doing what you wish to do – obviously in accordance with the dictates of your own mind and cravings – is suspended, and you are free, liberated. You have found the key to unlock the door of the hideout of your ego. It is an extremely difficult discipline to be totally obedient. If you are **totally** (not selectively, conveniently) obedient, whatever be the guru or scripture, you are free.

Is it possible to have complete śraddhā? Śraddhā is not mere faith or belief, but something totally different. Śraddhā is not faith in the sense that ‘I have faith in you and therefore I will do what you ask me to do’. In six months you might have dropped that and picked up something else. That ‘śraddhā’ was an ego trip. When śraddhā is there, there is total obedience, which is very different from what you and I **call** obedience. (In that there is an inner conflict.) This is what we found in our lives with the Master. We never **obeyed** him. If he said something, there was no question; which means that to us that was the right thing. This is not intellectual understanding or emotional response. These are fragmented and they are bound to cause problems. It is not easy to bring about an integrated total obedience. But, is it possible for you to implicitly obey a teacher or a scripture, without question and totally, without any part of your inner organism – neither the mind nor the emotion nor the physical being – rebelling against it? We think ‘I will obey selectively when it suits me.’

I am sure you have heard this even if you have not observed it within yourself. You go to a guru, and you find him wonderfully inspiring. You do all that he tells you to do. Then suddenly you discover (I am quoting) “He is not the same man that I met some years ago. He is alright, but I am not going to obey him **now**.” So obedience is not possible for the human being ruled by the ego. What is craving is ego, what is ego is craving; what is mind is ego, what is ego is mind, one is indistinguishable from the other. If you detect a desire or a craving within yourself and observe it, you find that that is the ego.

If you can obey without reserve, you are liberated then and there. You look within and there is no discordant note, no rebellion. The master says: “Do this.” The mind says: “Ah, that’s it,” the heart says: “I love to do it,” and the whole body responds to it. If that is possible, then you are free. If you follow your own cravings (which arise in their

millions every minute), you do not get anywhere. If one is a slave to the restless mind, one is bound to be constantly restless. There is no peace, no happiness.

He who, having cast aside the ordinances of the scriptures, acts under the impulse of desire, attains not perfection, nor happiness, nor the supreme goal.

(16:23)

Śraddhā could also be called witness-consciousness, or what some great masters have called ‘choiceless awareness’ – an awareness in which there is no choice, awareness without judgement.

So, while living our daily life in accordance with the scripture, it is vitally important at the same time to look within and see that this is not done because I like it, but because that is the command of the teacher, of the scripture. It is so easy and yet so impossibly difficult. Nobody is going to tell you to do something which you **cannot** do. Your guru will obviously know what you are capable of doing and will not ask you to do something more. But there is this inner resistance and disobedience: “Why should I do this? I want to do something else.” While doing what the teacher says, at the same time you **must** observe yourself and see what goes on within. If you are a yogi, body, mind and soul will be in total harmony; thinking, feeling and living will be in total harmony. So merely obeying the letter of the scripture will not do.

Then there is an integrated and total obedience which is not selective. In such obedience itself is liberation, and therefore it is not ‘obedience’. The ego has been so completely and so thoroughly set aside that in you there is no other thought, no other feeling. That is called ‘śraddhā’. Śraddhā is not faith based on the ego but it is already self-transcendence. It is the stuff of which your total being is made. Śraddhā is not faith in the sense that I have faith in you and therefore I will do what you ask me to do. In six months you might have dropped that and picked up something else. That śraddhā was an ego trip.

Śraddhā means the total response of the whole being. Sattva, rajas or tamas could be predominating. We shall not forget that no one, from the most supremely enlightened man or woman to the silliest donkey, is totally sāttvika, totally rājasa or totally tāmasa. If you understand this, only then can Gurudev’s teachings and how he was able to live with people of such completely different temperaments, be understood. If a change has to happen, that has to happen naturally within you. It should not be brought about by some external agency, because these three qualities, being constantly in a ferment, will keep changing.

Kṛṣṇa does not condemn anybody. He cautions that the mind functions on the basis of likes and dislikes and as long as the embodied being is driven by these likes and dislikes, there is no salvation, there is no freedom. Once you free yourself from them, you become the image of God and you perform the role allotted to you by God.

LIFE WITHOUT EXTERNAL GUIDE

How does one determine whether an action is right or not right? That was Arjuna's question, and the entire Bhagavad Gītā is the answer. What is the action that will instantly, here and now, free us from the experienced bondage, limitation? How does one determine right action? Right action must be absolutely free, without giving rise to a problem **now** or sowing the seed now for a problem to arise later. Can such action happen in our lives?

The Gītā is the gospel of appropriate action. The expressions used repeatedly are: *niyataṁ karmā*, *kāryaṁ karmā*, *sva karmā*. Unfortunately, we translate these words into 'duty'. But 'appropriate action' is better. Is it possible for a human being, so heavily loaded with memories and cravings related to a future hope or fear, to rise above the ego and to find this appropriate action? Can you use a scripture as a measure of your action from moment to moment? If an action does not measure up to the scripture, reject the action. As long as you have integrated and total obedience to that scripture, you will find the truth – not because the scripture gives you the truth, but because you come face to face with the source of your own cravings – the ego. There are people who may not adopt a scripture and they have no faith in a teacher. If your heart says that this teacher is a hypocrite, you cannot follow him; and if your heart starts off with a rejection of the scripture, you cannot have any faith in it.

Verse twenty three of chapter sixteen says:

He who, having cast aside the ordinances of the scriptures, acts under the impulse of desire, attains not perfection, nor happiness, nor the supreme goal.

It implies that the man who rejects the scripture but follows the dictates of his own cravings goes to hell. But there are people who may discard all scriptures and teachers and yet find the truth, if they have *śraddhā*.

Arjuna said: Those who, setting aside the ordinances of the scriptures perform sacrifice with faith, what is their condition, O Kṛṣṇa? Is it *sattva*, *rajas* or *tamas*?

(17:1)

If you have this *śraddhā*, your body and mind are functioning very efficiently while living a full life – eating, drinking, thinking, talking, doing charity, engaging yourself in austerities – with or without reference to any scripture whatsoever and without the guidance of a teacher. You are living endowed with something by which you are able to observe what is happening – in the body, the mind and life. When this observation takes place there is clarity, and associated with that clarity is a great joy. You realise that this is *sattva*. When you are able to observe that the body, the nerves, the mind and intelligence within are agitated, you realise that there is *rajas*. When it is dull, stupid, fatigued, sleepy, drowsy, lazy, you realise that there is *tamas*. The words do not matter at all. Gurudev Swami Sivananda used to ask: "Do you know what *guṇa* is operating at a given moment?" If you know, that knowledge must lead to one or the other of the two alternatives. One: You suit your action to the *guṇa* that prevails – if the mind is dull, go

to sleep; if you are in an enlightened state of mind, sit and meditate; if the body is full of energy, restless, get up and do some work. Appropriate behaviour happens. Two: You detect within yourself a sort of laziness and stupidity which seems to be unending. If it is possible for this observation to observe the prevalence of *tamas* without condemning and judging, you realise that the observation itself is free. That which is aware of this *tamas* is not *tamas* – and the moment it opens its eyes wide and looks, the *tamas* is gone. It is so simple – provided you do not indulge in hypocritical self-condemnation.

If there is this *śraddhā*, the observation observes the state of mind without condemning it, but not necessarily without distinguishing one from the other. It is one thing to distinguish and another to discriminate, to judge. The human being constantly discriminates, and hopes that somehow this discrimination will lead him to the realisation of the absolute – in which there is no discrimination and no duality! Is it possible for such a stupid creature to rise above the ego? If it is possible for the inner observation to distinguish *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* without judging one or the other as superior or inferior, then *śraddhā* is born.

This whole process by which there is immediate (meaning without mediation) and intense (meaning neither past, future nor even present tense) observation is *śraddhā*. You see yellow, you see blue. In that sight, there is no judgement. Observation does not judge, but something else arises which says: “Oh, this is beautiful, that is ugly.” It is the observer – which is memory, ‘me’, ego – that indulges in this. The observation itself is completely pure. Observation alone is the truth.

Those men who practise terrific austerities not enjoined by the scriptures, given to hypocrisy and egoism, impelled by the force of lust and attachment, are determined to be diabolical.

(17:5, 6)

There is not a single word of condemnation here. *Āsuraniścaya* – beautiful! I wish I could convey this joy to you. *Āsuraniścayan* means that they are ‘determined to be diabolical’ – it only means they do not have insight. It is not a crime not to have insight. You enjoy life in your own way and life will teach you. If it does not, there is something else which is pure grace – death – which will create another chance. You cannot be a fool for all time to come.

Later on in the same chapter you have the three-fold *tapas*:

Worship of the gods, the twice-born, the teachers and the wise, purity, straightforwardness, celibacy and non-injury are called the austerities of the body.

Speech which causes no excitement, truthful, pleasant and beneficial, to practice of the study of the *vedā*, are called the austerity of speech.

Serenity of mind, good-heartedness, silence, self-control, purity of nature – this is called mental austerity.

(17:14-16)

None of these things can be laid down as a rule. All involve constant self-awareness – śraddhā. Honesty cannot be defined; what is defined is not honesty. Brahmacharyaṁ is not only celibacy but total one-pointedness to live, to move and to have one's being in God. Ahimsā is to be totally non-violent in thought, word and deed – what you say should not upset anybody, excite anybody, disturb anybody's peace of mind. You cannot do that mechanically on the basis of the teaching that somebody gives you. Mouna is not merely not talking, but silencing the mind.

This is tapas. When you engage yourself in tapas you find your śraddhā blazing forth, and tapas is natural to you. No tapas performed without śraddhā can have these characteristics. If you perform any austerity which does not have these characteristics, there is no śraddhā: you are doing it without thought.

If you do not have this, then blindly obey a scripture or a teacher and you will be alright. Either way you are alright, because either way you will detect the ego and its play and transcend it.

WHAT IS RENUNCIATION?

The question “What must I do?” can only be determined by the answer to the question “Who does it?” One can read in the teachings of śrī Kṛṣṇa several distinctly clear messages: you are not the doer. There is nothing called an independent, individual doer. You are part of the totality. As such you are not even a part (only that can be considered a part which can part from the rest), but you are the universe. You are not an independent self-existence which could assert its freedom from something else. When that integral unity with the totality is understood or realised, then action is seen to spring from that. That is what you call God's will.

In the Bhagavad Gītā there is not a single teaching ‘either/or’. Kṛṣṇa says: “If you cannot do this you can do that, if you cannot do that you can do this.” You may not be able instantly to realise that all action is nothing but a scintillation of the totality called God, and therefore everything in the universe called good, all bad, evil or indifferent, is nothing but his job. There is a very specific verse:

The blessed Lord said: The sages understand saṁnyāsa to be the renunciation of desire-motivated action; the wise declare the abandonment of the fruits of all action as tyāga.

(18:2)

Desirable, undesirable and indifferent fortunes are known to exist in the world. They who have not abandoned desires and cravings are subject to these three. One who has abandoned the idea that he is the doer is not subjected to any of these.

Arjuna said: I desire to know, O mighty-armed, the essence or truth of renunciation, O Hṛṣīkeśa, as also of abandonment, O slayer of Keśi.

(18:1)

In view of the teaching so far, what on earth are you going to renounce? What must be abandoned? And what is saṁnyāsa? We are told that self-realisation is not had without becoming a saṁnyāsaī. The great sage Yajñavalkya told his wife Maitreyī: “I can give you

all my wealth, but if you will live as a wealthy woman lives, you will not have self-knowledge. A wealthy woman can lead a comfortable life but not attain immortality or self-realisation.”

Remain choicelessly aware, cultivate or awaken this inner intelligence. Abandon all action that is prompted by desire, craving. There is a mantra in the upaniṣad which Gurudev was fond of: ‘Even although this ātmān is everywhere, it is not seen. But this ātmān can be seen, can be realised, can be experienced by one who has an extremely subtle, sharp intelligence.’ In this subtle, sharp intelligence one has to see the distinction between desire or craving, and a natural urge.

So once again we are in trouble. We who are constantly looking for ‘dos and do nots’, clear cut rules and regulations, are once again thrown back on to our own resource or inner intelligence. Is this a craving – or a nameless, formless urge? The nameless, formless urge arises in God. Craving is something that interferes in that. Action is life, life is action, but something says: “I am doing this.” ‘I am doing this’ is never complete. It is always ‘I am doing this – in order to get that.’ Is such ambition inevitably part of life? Is it even needed for a job to be done? If you can do it (or let this happen) without any ambition or craving, you have found saṁnyāsa.

Do what has to be done and keep quiet. What comes out of it is not your problem at all. That is a lesson that nature teaches us. A million seeds are produced by every tree, of which only two or three perhaps grow into further trees. Out of the million actions that are generated by you, maybe one or two may bear fruit. The others maybe not. Who are you to decide? This is a fantastic lesson.

Some philosophers declare that action should be abandoned as an evil; while others (declare) that acts of sacrifice, gift and austerity should not be relinquished.

(18:3)

There is a traditional teaching that all actions should be abandoned. An egoistic action leads to a reaction that knocks the ego. As you sow, so shall you reap. But every seed that falls on the ground need not necessarily germinate. You sow, nothing grows up there. What shall you reap? Only disappointment! It applies only to egoistic action, where the reaction is not so much the result of what you do, but your own fear and disappointment.

The traditionalists assumed that every seed planted must somehow grow and that you also are bound to reap. You may not! I do not mean to suggest that the law of action and reaction is therefore totally false; but please examine it anew. It may be truth; it may not be. They who accepted this doctrine said you should not do anything. What does that mean? Another problem. Can you ‘not do’ anything at all? How do you **do** nothing? They took this doctrine to the extent that you do not even function in this world, just live like a log of wood. “This is one point of view” Kṛṣṇa says. If you want to be like that, please try.

Acts of sacrifice, gift and austerity should not be abandoned, but should be performed; sacrifice, gift and also austerity are the purifiers of the wise.

(18:5)

This is also a tradition. One tradition is that no action should be performed, the other is that you must engage yourself in rituals – *yajña*, *dāna*, *tapas* – from morning to night. Tradition gets watered down. Tradition leads to the destruction of the spirit and the careful preservation of the letter. Tradition is so strong because everyone who feels insecure takes shelter in that tradition and wants the security of the tradition. These traditions (which are not wrong in themselves) unfortunately become deadly carcasses. The meaning is lost but we go on with the tradition. As the Bible says: ‘The letter killeth the spirit’.

Yajña, *dāna* and *tapas*, which constitute humanness in a human being, are said to be non-negotiable, non-renounceable. *Yajña* is adoration of God; *dāna* is charity, giving; *tapas* is something that burns up the veil. *Tapas* could be verbal, physical, mental or psychological, but the essential quality of *tapas* – a factor that burns up the veil of ignorance – should not be lost sight of. If you observe very carefully without prejudice, you will see that these three are natural to non-human creatures.

Yajña has completely lost its meaning. It becomes just pouring something into the fire. There is nothing good or bad there, but there is a total misunderstanding. You must understand the doctrine of non-action from an entirely different approach. You do not have to abandon action in order to find this non-action, but by merely reflecting on the source of action you realise “it is not ‘I’ who is doing it.” There, your actions happen without an actor coming up, observation takes place without an observer coming up. You can even say: “I am sitting here,” but the inner feeling is quite different. It is not an egoistic feeling. In the same way, *yajñā*, *dāna* and *tapas* can be performed without diluting them, without destroying the spirit. So Kṛṣṇa goes on to say:

But even these actions should be performed leaving aside attachment and the desire for rewards, O Arjuna; this is my certain and best conviction.

(18:6)

Yajña, *dāna* and *tapas* must be practised. Abandoning them is the function of the terrible pleasure-loving ego, which revels in stupidity, in ignorance. These three are meant to thin out egoism. Egoism is the universal religion of all humanity. It is a religion that exalts the ego and makes it God. The abandonment of *yajña*, *dāna* and *tapas* is egoism; the adoption of *yajña*, *dāna* and *tapas* without understanding the spirit, is foolishness!

Sacrifice, gift and also austerity are the purifiers of the wise.

(18:5)

A beautiful expression. In the sixth chapter Kṛṣṇa said: “You must practise yoga. You must meditate in order to purify yourself.” Here again he says: “*Yajña*, *dāna* and *tapas* must be practised because they are purifiers.”

PERFECTION IS

Verily, the renunciation of obligatory action is not proper; the abandonment of the same from delusion is declared to be *tamas*.

(18:7)

Here Kṛṣṇa uses the very beautiful expression ‘niyataṁ’. Niyataṁ is what is ordained. It also means something which is extraordinarily beautiful, and something that makes things move – hence very often it is translated into ‘world order’. It is the impulse that keeps things as they are and makes them do what they do, i.e., water flow, ice freeze, fire glow, wind blow.

You are the fruit of that impulse. That you cannot abandon. Even yajña, dāna and tapas, which are essentially human characteristics, do not belong to you because you have cultivated them, but they are determined by niyati. These qualities are there, not because you want them to be in you in order that you might reach a certain goal, but because that is the only way in which a human being is made.

To lead a natural life means you become completely and totally one with this niyati. You do not want to defy niyati and you have no consciousness of obeying destiny; you just live in total harmony. A tree full of luscious fruits is completely different from us – when you have something precious, beautiful or glorious in you, you lock it up, whereas when the fruit becomes really ripe the trees drop it. That is ‘niyati’. That is as it should be.

He who is free from the egoistic notion, whose intelligence is not tainted (by good or evil), though he slays these people, he slayeth not nor is he bound (by any action).

(18:17)

Non-attachment is possible only when the sense of doership is not there. It is easy to understand, but if you do not want to understand, it is impossible to understand! Nobody in the whole universe is going to say: “I am not”. ‘I am’, ‘ahaṁ bhāvanā’, is correct, but ‘ahaṁkāra’ is very doubtful. One who is certain that ‘I’ is not the doer of this action, that this action is part of niyati, does not cling to the action or to the result – like the blessed tree, when the fruit is ripe, it drops. It is then that you are totally in niyati, inseparable from niyati and therefore unattached to it.

Non-attachment, or non-contact, is not an arrogant and isolationist separation from all but a total integration with everything; and therefore the expression ‘to be detached’ is very defective – though one understands what it means. To be non-attached is not to be detached, but to realise oneness. When I am one with you I am not attached to you but I am not detached **from** you. Therefore the ‘buddhi’ does not come into contact with anything – not because it stands aloof as a sort of super divinity, but it is one and therefore there is no contact. It is not an aloofness but an all-oneness. If that is sort of clear, then the second half of that verse becomes meaningful – otherwise it is dreadful.

... though he slays these people, he slayeth not nor is he bound (by any action).

(18:17)

Even if that person destroys the entire universe, he does nothing and he is not bound. Therefore if the tree drops one of its big branches when you are sitting underneath, for meditation, and you are instantly crushed, it does not sin. Can you also pretend to be like that? If you cut a branch, the tree stands there absolutely non-resistant. Can you similarly be totally unaffected by the consequences? So, hypocrisy will not do here, it is a

waste of time. (Only if that is more or less clear can we read epics like the Mahābhārata and understand what they mean.)

The most crucial message of the Bhagavad Gītā is contained in verses forty-five and forty-six of the eighteenth chapter.

Each man devoted to his own duty attains perfection. How he attains perfection while being engaged in his own duty – hear now.

(18:45)

He from whom all the beings have evolved and by whom all this is pervaded – worshipping him with his own action, man attains perfection.

(18:46)

If you can be totally devoted to whatever you are doing, you will immediately come face to face with your likes and dislikes, and realise that you are not devoted to the action but to what comes out of it. If you are totally devoted to the action that happens right now, then you will have freed yourself and also have understood what Kṛṣṇa said earlier: “Yoga is skill in action.” You will become a great expert in whatever you are doing because your whole being is there in that action. If there is no ‘doership’ in this action, if you are observing without creating an observer so that the action alone is, then it becomes total, tremendously efficient, and yoga. That action itself is perfection because you have no sense of doership, and it is from God that the action arises.

How does one who is trapped in these two errors of perception – ‘I am talking’, ‘I am talking to **you**’ – get out of them? Kṛṣṇa suggests a method. “Use every one of these actions as a flower and adore the Lord through these actions.” Realise that all these beings towards whom you direct your actions are the offspring of this cosmic being, or God. The offspring is identical with the parent, so all these beings who are the offspring of God, **are** God. Therefore all these beings that have emanated from God are pervaded by God. Therefore I am talking – but I am offering this as a flower at the feet of God who dwells in all.

This in itself is not perfection, but it will remove all the stupid ideas, such as ‘You are so and so and I am talking to you in order that...’, that have crept into your consciousness and veiled the truth. As this dirt is wiped away, knowledge of the truth arises. That is, there is the faculty of speech which speaks, there is the faculty of hearing that hears and there is a faculty of understanding that understands. ‘I am’ – there are so many ‘I am’s’ sitting here. The faculty of speech expresses through one ‘I am’, the faculty of understanding expresses through a second ‘I am’, the faculty of non-understanding expresses through a third ‘I am’ and the faculty of misunderstanding expresses through a fourth ‘I am’. No problem, everything is correct.

When that understanding arises:

He whose intellect is unattached everywhere, who has subdued his self, from whom desire has fled – he, by renunciation, attains the supreme state of freedom from action.

(18:49)

– then there is non-attachment, self-control and self-transcendence. Suddenly something (desire, ambition) that seemed to propel you in various directions is gone, and ‘niyati’ has taken its place. What happens, happens. Then and only then does one become a non-doer of any action whatsoever. It is then that you can justifiably say that God does everything.

The Lord dwells (abides) in the hearts of all beings, O Arjuna, causing all beings, by his illusive power, to revolve as if mounted on a machine.

(18:61)

This is a great verse. I think it contains in it the acme of Kṛṣṇa’s humour. He says: “What do you think you are doing? Do you think you are fighting? Do you think you do not want to fight? There is a God sitting in your heart and in the hearts of all beings, and you are being made to dance like a puppet.” This is a verse of extraordinary beauty, humour, truth and mystery. It is quite simple – and yet not so simple. ‘God is in the very heart of your whole being, and not only yours, but the entire universe.’ What does it mean? You cannot understand because you are caught in this *māyā* and you are being whirled around as on a merry-go-round – where you are being whirled around so fast that nothing seems to be clear. That is our fate.

Finally Kṛṣṇa says:

Abandoning all dharma, take refuge in me alone: I will liberate thee from all sins; grieve not.

(18:66)

Where are all the dharma mentioned here? Dharma is something that upholds, that brings us together. Dharma is also something that is worn, a dress that is put on. But, deeper than external coverings and dresses are the false notions and ideas ‘I am this, I am that; I am doing this, I will not do that’. Somehow we become confirmed in those notions even to the extent of regarding them as duty or non-duty.

Where do all these things arise? In ‘me’, in memory, in something that aspires for liberation. There is nothing wrong with aspiring for liberation provided you know where you are bound. And it is possible that the very effort of understanding this bondage **is** liberation.

When this bondage is sought to be understood, there is inner awakening. Then the guru is seen – whether it is the indwelling presence (or God), or an external personality who is also God in another form. Then, one by one, all your cravings drop away. Your eyes are open, they see; your ears are open, they hear; when breath flows through the throat and the vocal cords, they speak; when energy moves in your brain, that is thought. None of these things belongs to you. But, it is possible for us to deceive ourselves. Therefore constantly seek to find God within, and as you seek, ‘niyati’ will take over.

God cannot be found as long as the ‘I am’ functions. As long as you are clinging to the religion called **egoism**, you cannot find your foothold in Godism. As you seek to find this God, you have to go beyond this egoism. There ‘niyati’ takes over – perfection **IS**.

GĪTĀ DHYĀNAM

MEDITATION ON THE GĪTĀ

(To be recited at the commencement of the Gītā study)

Om pārthāya pratibodhitām bhagavatā nārāyaṇena svayaṁ
vyāseṇa grathitām purāṇa muninā madhye mahābhārataṁ
advaitā 'mṛta varṣiṇīm bhagavatīm aṣṭādaśā 'dhyāyinīm
am̐ba tvām anusaṁdadhāmi bhagavad gīte bhava dveṣiṇīm

1. Om. O Bhagavad Gītā, with which Pārtha (Arjuna) was illumined by lord Nārāyaṇa himself and which was composed within the Mahābhārata by the ancient sage Vyāsa, O divine mother, the destroyer of rebirth, the showerer of the nectar of advaita (oneness), and consisting of eighteen chapters – upon Thee, O Bhagavad Gītā, O affectionate mother, I meditate!

namo 'stu te vyāsa viśhāla buddhe
phullā 'ravindā 'yata patra netra
yena tvayā bhārata taila pūrṇaḥ
prajvālito jñānamayaḥ pradīpaḥ

2. Salutations unto Thee, O Vyāsa, of broad intellect, and with eyes like the petals of full-blown lotuses, by whom the lamp of knowledge, filled with the oil of the Mahābhārata, has been lighted!

prapanna pārijātāya tottravetrai 'ka pāṇaye
jñāna mudrāya kṛṣṇāya gītā 'mṛta duhe namaḥ

3. Salutations to Kṛṣṇa, the pārijātā or the bestower of all desires for those who take refuge in him, the holder of the whip in one hand, the holder of the symbol of knowledge and the milker of the divine nectar of the Bhagavad Gītā.

sarvo 'paniṣado gāvo dogdhā gopāla nandanaḥ
pārtho vatsaḥ sudhīr bhoktā dugdhaṁ gītā'mṛtaṁ mahat

4. All the upaniṣad are the cows, the milker is Kṛṣṇa the cowherd boy, Arjuna is the calf, men of purified intellect are the drinkers, the milk is the great nectar of the Gītā.

vasudeva sutaṁ devaṁ kaṁsa cāṇūra mardanaṁ
devakī paramā 'nandaṁ kṛṣṇaṁ vande jagad gurum

5. I salute lord Kṛṣṇa, the world teacher, the son of Vasudeva, the destroyer of Kaṁsa and Cāṇūra, the supreme bliss of Devakī.

bhīṣma droṇa taṭṭa jayadratha jalā gāndhāra nīlotpalā
śalya grāhvatī krpeṇa vahanī karṇena velākulā
aśvatthāma vikarṇa ghora makarā duryodhanā 'vartinī
so 'tīrṇā khalu pāṇḍavai raṇa nadī kaivartakaḥ keśavaḥ

6. With Kṛṣṇa as the helmsman, verily, was crossed by the Pāṇḍavā the battle-river whose banks were Bhīṣma and Droṇa, whose water was Jayadratha, whose blue lotus was the king of Gāndhāra, whose crocodile was Śalya, whose current was Kṛpā, whose billow was Karṇa, whose terrible alligators were Aśvatthāma and Vikarṇa, whose whirlpool was Duryodhana.

pārāśarya vacaḥ sarojaṁ amalāṁ gītārtha gandhotkaṭaṁ
nānākhyā 'nakakesaraṁ hari kathā sambodhanā 'bodhitaṁ
loke sajjana ṣaṭpadair ahar ahaḥ pepīyamānaṁ mudā
bhūyād bhārata paṅkajaṁ kali mala pradhvaṁsi naḥ śreyase

7. May this lotus of the Mahābhārata, born in the lake of the words of Vyāsa, sweet with the fragrance of the meaning of the Gītā, with many stories as its stamens, fully opened by the discourses on Hari, the destroyer of the sins of Kali, and drunk joyously by the bees of good men in the world, day by day, become the bestower of good on us.

mūkaṁ karoti vācāraṁ paṅguṁ laṅghayate giriṁ
yat kṛpā tam ahaṁ vande paramā 'nanda mādhabaṁ

8. I salute that Kṛṣṇa, the source of supreme bliss, whose grace makes the dumb eloquent and the cripple cross mountains!

yaṁ brahmā varuṇe 'ndra rudra marutaḥ
stunvanti divyaiḥ stavair
vedaiḥ sāṅga pada kramo 'paniṣadair
gāyanti yaṁ sāmagāḥ
dhyānā 'vasthita tad gatena manasā
paśyanti yaṁ yogino
yasyā 'ntaṁ na viduḥ surā 'sura gaṇā
devāya tasmai namaḥ

9. Salutations to that God whom Brahmā, Varuṇa, Indra, Rudra and the Marut praise with divine hymns, of whom the Sāma-chanters sing by the vedā and their aṅgā, (in the pada and krama methods), and by the upaniṣad, whom the yogī see with their minds absorbed in him through meditation, and whose ends the hosts of the devā and asurā know not.

OM

OM NAMO BHAGAVATE VĀSUDEVĀYA

OM NAMAḤ ŚIVĀNANDĀYA

OM NAMO VEṅKATEŚĀYA

OM TAT SAT



GĪTĀ MĀHĀTMYA

THE GLORY OF THE GĪTĀ

(To be read at the end of the day's Gītā study)

śrī ganeśāya namaḥ! śrī gopāla kṛṣṇāya namaḥ!

dharo 'vāca:

bhagavan paramesāna bhaktir avyabhicāriṇī
prārabdham bhujiyamānasya katham bhavati he prabho

1. The Earth said: O Lord! The Supreme One! How can unflinching devotion arise in him who is immersed in his worldly life, O Lord?

śrī viṣṇur uvāca:

prārabdham bhujiyamāno hi gītā 'bhyāsa rataḥ sadā
sa muktaḥ sa sukhī loke karmaṇā no 'palipyate.

2. Lord Viṣṇu said: Though engaged in the performance of worldly duties, one who is regular in the study of the Gītā, becomes free. He is the happy man in this world. He is not bound by karma.

mahā pāpādi pāpāni gītā dhyānam karoti cet
kvacit sparśam na kurvanti nalinī dalam am̐buvat

3. Just as the water stains not the lotus leaf, even so, sins do not taint him who is regular in the recitation of the Gītā.

gītāyāḥ pustakam yatra yatra pāṭhaḥ pravartate
tatra sarvāṇi tīrthāni prayāgā 'dīni tatra vai

4. All the sacred centres of pilgrimage like Prayāga, etc., dwell in that place where the book, the Gītā, is kept and where the Gītā is read.

sarve devās ca ṛṣayo yogīnaḥ pannagāś ca ye
gopālā gopikā vā 'pi nārado 'ddhava pārṣadaiḥ

5. All the gods, sages, yogī, divine serpents, gopālā, gopikā (friends and devotees of lord Kṛṣṇa), Nārada, Uddhava and others (dwell there).

sahāyo jāyate śīghram yatra gītā pravartate
yatra gītā vicāraś ca paṭhanam pāṭhanam śrutam
tatrā 'ham niścitam pṛthvi nivasāmi sadai 'va hi

6. Help comes quickly where the Gītā is recited and, O Earth, I dwell at all times where the Gītā is read, heard, taught and contemplated upon.

gītā 'śraye 'ham tiṣṭhāmi gītā me co 'ttamam grham
gītā jñānam upāśritya trīmllokān pālayāmy aham

7. I take refuge in the Gītā and the Gītā is my best abode. I protect the three worlds with the knowledge of the Gītā.

gītā me paramā vidyā brahma rūpā na saṁśayaḥ
ardha mātṛā 'kṣarā nityā svā 'nirvācyā padātmikā

8. The Gītā is my highest science, which is doubtless of the form of Brahman, the eternal, the ardhāmātrā (of the sacred monosyllable Om), the ineffable splendour of the self.

cidānandena kṛṣṇena proktā sva mukhato 'rjunam
veda trayī parānandā tatvā 'rtha jñāna saṁyutā

9. It was spoken by the blessed Kṛṣṇa, the all-knowing, through his own mouth to Arjuna. It contains the essence of the three vedā, the knowledge of the reality. It is full of supreme bliss.

yo 'ṣṭādaśa jape nityam nāro niścala mānasah
jñāna siddhim sa labhate tato yāti param padam

10. He who recites the eighteen chapters of the Gītā daily, with a pure, unshaken mind, attains perfection in knowledge, and reaches the highest state or supreme goal.

pāthe 'samarthaḥ sampūrṇe tato 'rdham paṭham ācaret
tadā go dānam puṇyam labhate nā 'tra saṁśayaḥ

11. If a complete reading is not possible, even if only half is read, he attains the benefit of giving a cow as a gift. There is no doubt about this.

tribhāgaṁ paṭhamānas tu gaṅgā snāna phalam labhet
ṣaḍaṁśam japamānas tu soma yāga phalam labhet

12. He who recites one-third part of it achieves the merit of a bath in the sacred river Gaṅgā, and he who recites one-sixth of it attains the merit of performing a soma-ritual.

ekā 'dhyāyam tu yo nityam paṭhate bhakti saṁyutaḥ
rudra lokam avāpnoti gaṇo bhūtvā vases ciraṁ

13. That person who reads one chapter with great devotion attains to the world of Rudra and, having become an attendant of lord Śiva, lives there for many years.

adhyāyam śloka pādam vā nityam yaḥ paṭhate narah
sa yāti naratām yāvan manvantaram vasundhare

14. If one reads a quarter of a chapter or even part of a verse daily, he, O Earth, retains a human body till the end of a world-cycle.

gītāyāḥ śloka daśakam sapta pañca catuṣṭayam
dvau trīṇ ekam tad ardham vā ślokānām yaḥ paṭhen narah
candra lokam avāpnoti varṣāṇām ayutam dhruvam
gītā pāṭha samāyukto mṛto mānuṣatām vrajet

15, 16. He who repeats ten, seven, five, four, three, two verses or even one or half a verse, attains the region of the moon and lives there for 10,000 years. Accustomed to the daily study of the Gītā, the dying man comes back to life again as a human being.

gītā 'bhyāsaṁ punaḥ kṛtvā labhate muktim uttamāṁ
gīte 'ty uccāra saṁyukto mriyamāṇo gatim labhet.

17. By repeated study of the Gītā he attains liberation. Uttering 'Gītā' at the time of death, one attains liberation.

gītā 'rtha śravaṇā 'sakto mahā pāpa yuto 'pi vā
vaikuṇṭhaṁ samavāpnoti viṣṇunā saha modate

18. Though full of sins, one who is ever intent on hearing the meaning of the Gītā, goes to the kingdom of God and rejoices with lord Viṣṇu.

gītā 'rthaṁ dhyāyate nityaṁ kṛtvā karmāṇi bhūriśaḥ
jīvanmuktaḥ sa vijñeyo dehā 'nte paramaṁ padam

19. He who meditates on the meaning of the Gītā, having performed a lot of good actions, attains the supreme goal after death. Such a man should be known as a jivānmukta (sage liberated while living).

gītāṁ āśritya bahavo bhūbhujo janakā dayāḥ
nirdhūta kalmaṣā loke gītā yātāḥ paraṁ padam

20. In this world, taking refuge in the Gītā, many kings like Janaka and others reached the highest state or goal, purified of all sins.

gītāyāḥ paṭhanam kṛtvā mātṛmyaṁ naiva yaḥ paṭhet
vṛthā pāṭho bhavet tasya śrama eva hy udāhṛtaḥ

21. He who fails to read this Glory of the Gītā after having read the Gītā, loses the benefit thereby, and the effort alone remains.

(This is to test and confirm the faith of the reader in the Gītā. It is not a mere book but the **Song of God** and should therefore be studied with great faith and devotion which this **Glory of the Gītā** generates in one's heart.)

etan mātṛmya saṁyuktaṁ gītā 'bhyāsaṁ karoti yaḥ
sa tat phalam avāpnoti durlabhāṁ gatim āpnuyāt

22. One who studies the Gītā, together with this **Glory of the Gītā**, attains the fruits mentioned above and reaches the state which is otherwise very difficult to attain.

sūta uvāca:
mātṛmyaṁ etad gītāyā māyā proktaṁ sanātanaṁ
gītānte ca paṭhed yas tu yad uktaṁ tat phalam labhet.

23. Sūta said: This greatness or **Glory of the Gītā**, which is eternal, as narrated by me, should be read at the end of the study of the Gītā, and the fruits mentioned therein will be obtained.

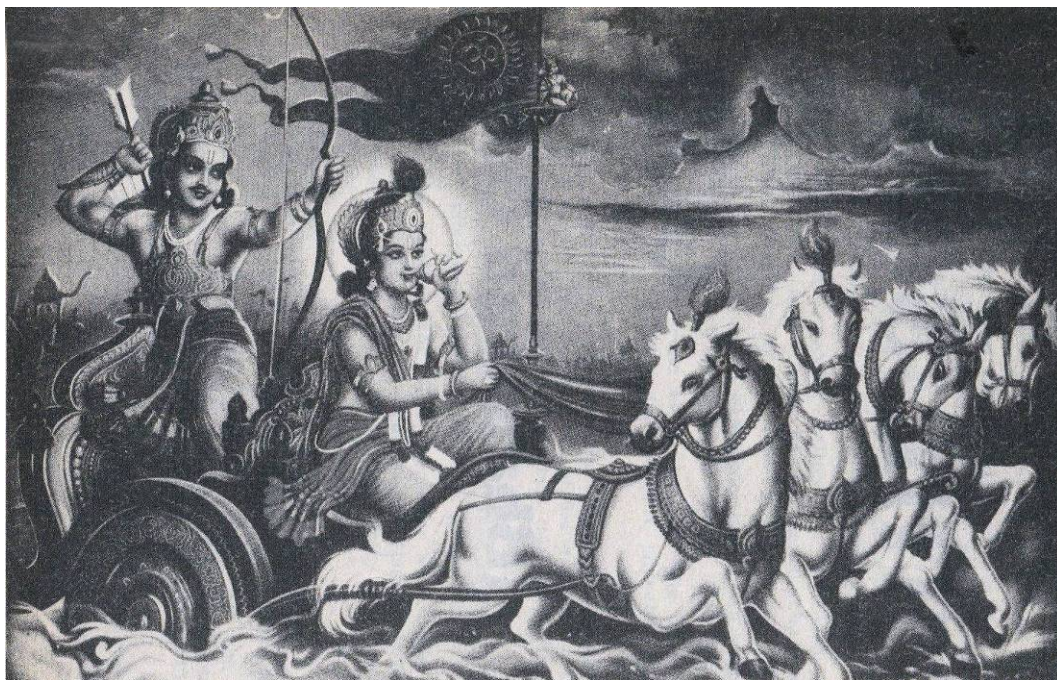
iti śrī varāha purāṇe śrī gītā mātṛmyaṁ etad saṁpūrṇam.

Thus ends the **Glory of the Gītā** contained in the Varāha purāṇa.



The Song Of God

(Bhagavad Gita)
daily readings



Lord Krishna, the charioteer, and Arjuna, the archer.

THE MONTH OF JANUARY

Kṛṣṇa's gospel will not suffer in the least if the first chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā is ignored. But, the blind man will continue to be blind and unseeing, the hero will continue to fool himself and refuse to look at his 'friends' and his 'enemies' in the correct perspective.

The following is not intended to suggest that the Bhagavad Gītā or the Mahābhārata itself is an allegory. Yet one cannot but be struck by the lesson it provides.

The scripture opens with the blind king's question expressing his concern and his eagerness to 'know'. The spiritually blind man, secure in his false sense of material security, must awaken, must begin to question, must want to know. When he does, Sañjaya enters the picture. Sañjaya is self-conquest, discipline (which is disciple misspelt). Without discipline, if one goes to the guru, one would be treated as a guest! – and one would derive no greater benefit.

Even after one awakes and becomes a discipl(in)e one needs a guru: or else one may make a mistake and consider that error to be the truth, clinging to it and mistaking that for faith, love, devotion, etc. It is when the disciple surrenders himself to the guru and serves him, that his heart is purified and becomes transparent so that the guru's light shines through him without any effort on the part of either.

Similarly we learn vital lessons from Arjuna's conduct. He asks Kṛṣṇa to place the chariot between the two armies so that he can take a good look at his enemies. We enter life determined to fight our enemies. (Kṛṣṇa himself says that these enemies are within!) We blow the conch, beat our drums and jump into the battle. Proudly we ask or pray to God to lead us, to guide us (to where we can see the enemies). Often he places the chariot of our life right in front of the most delicate relationships – Bhīṣma, the grandfather and Droṇa, the teacher. Mysteriously, he reveals to us that we are bound by our self-esteem, by our blind attachment to our family traditions, our culture and our ancestry (symbolised by Bhīṣma the grandfather) and our philosophy, doctrine, dogma, our cult and religious tradition (represented by Droṇa the teacher). We begin to reclassify these – the inner enemies – into kith and kin! We are ready and eager to renounce some relations (often unimportant trifles), but we cling to the dreadful chains that bind us. We give up father, mother, property, home and wealth, but we cling to a caste, a cult, a religious tradition, a spiritual leader, etc. The latter do not seem to be 'enemies'. Without realising that all 'my' is eneMY, we endeavour to find spiritual sanction for these new attachments and impotently refuse to fight the battle of our spiritual life.

The spiritual hero ought to see the inner enemies for himself; it will not do to take them for granted on the testimony of others. This does not mean that one should subject oneself to temptations or walk into the snare of sensuality. But one must see evil as evil for oneself, and not just believe it is evil because somebody else has said so!



CHAPTER I

THE YOGA OF THE DESPONDENCY OF ARJUNA

I

1st JANUARY

1, 2

dhṛtarāṣṭra uvāca
❖ dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre samavetā yuyutsavaḥ
māmakāḥ pāṇḍavās cai 'va kim akurvata saṁjaya
sāṁjaya uvāca
❖ drṣṭvā tu pāṇḍavānīkaṁ vyūḍhaṁ duryodhanas tadā
ācāryam upasaṁgaṁya rājā vacanam abravīt

Dhṛtarāṣṭra asked: What did the Pāṇḍavā and my sons do when they had assembled on the holy land of Kurukṣetra, eager to fight, O Saṁjaya?

Saṁjaya replied: Seeing the army of the Pāṇḍavā drawn up in battle array, king Duryodhana approached the preceptor and addressed him thus.

Dhṛtarāṣṭra was the blind father of Duryodhana and his brothers. He was blind in his affection for his sons, blind to dharma (righteousness or duty) and had a blind faith that physical might would triumph. Bhīṣma's fall on the tenth day of the battle reminded him of the unalterable law – dharma or truth alone triumphs.

Saṁjaya discreetly refers to Duryodhana as the king. It is the mark of a wise man that he does not wound anyone's feelings and sentiments under any circumstance. He does not take undue advantage of even an opponents faults. He is full of sympathy even for the wicked in their physical and mental sufferings.

The Mahābhārata paints Duryodhana as the villain. There was no great sin which he had not committed. He had no respect for the elders. He had great faith in the strength of the mighty and little in the goodness of the holy. Yet, at this eventful juncture when he is embarking on a war that could well mean life or death for him, the first person he thinks of is not his evil advisers nor even the great generalissimo, but his preceptor, Droṇa. Without the preceptor's grace and blessing no worldly undertaking or spiritual practice can ever bear fruit. This conviction was so deeply ingrained in the ancient Indian that even the wicked Duryodhana was full of it.

- ❖ paśyai 'tām pāṇḍuputrāṇām ācārya mahatīm camūm
vyūdhām drupadaputreṇa tava śiṣyeṇa dhīmatā
- ❖ atra sūrā maheṣvāsā bhīmārjunasamā yudhi
yududhāno virāṭaś ca drupadaś ca mahārathaḥ
- ❖ dhr̥ṣṭaketuś cekitānaḥ kāsīrājaś ca vīryavān
purujit kuntibhojaś ca śaibyaś ca narapuṅgavaḥ
- ❖ yudhāmanyuś ca vikrānta uttamaujāś ca vīryavān
saubhadro draupadeyāś ca sarva eva mahārathāḥ

Behold, O teacher, this mighty army of the Pāṇḍavā, arrayed by thy wise disciple, the son of Drupada.

Here are heroes, mighty archers equal in battle to Bhīma and Arjuna, Yuyudhāna, Virāṭa and Drupada, of the great car (mighty warriors).

Dhr̥ṣṭaketu, Cekitāna and the valiant king of Kāśī, Purujit, Kuntibhoja and Śaibya, the best of men.

The strong Yudhāmanyu and the brave Uttamauja, the son of Subhadra (Abhimanyu) and the sons of Draupadī who are all great heroes.

No man is perfect. The good man has his faults. The evil one has to his credit sublime thoughts and chivalrous actions, however rare they may be. Both of them are subject to temptations. But the good man shakes off evil after a brief encounter. The wicked man similarly shies away from goodness just as fast!

Having approached the teacher, Duryodhana does not fall at the guru's feet and ask for blessings. Nor does he wait upon him for guidance or direction. His aggressive and arrogant nature immediately overpowers even guru-bhakti (devotion to the preceptor). The result? Taunting words and commands! "Look at this powerful army of our enemy: it is arrayed by one whom **you** taught!"

The wicked man's heart trembles in fear and the Pāṇḍavā army (though numerically weaker) appears to be a 'mighty army'. The will quakes before a sense of guilt and the vision is blurred.

- ❖asmākaṁ tu viśiṣṭā ye tān nibodha dvijottama
nāyakā mama sainyasya saṁjñārthaṁ tān bravīmi te
- ❖bhavān bhīṣmaś ca karṇaś ca kṛpaś ca samitiṁjayah
aśvatthāmā vikarṇaś ca saumadattis tathai 'va ca
- ❖anye ca bahavaḥ śūrā madarthe tyaktajīvitāḥ
nānāśāstrapraharaṇāḥ sarve yuddhaviśārādāḥ
- ❖aparyāptaṁ tad asmākaṁ balaṁ bhīṣmābhirakṣitaṁ
paryāptaṁ tv idam eteṣāṁ balaṁ bhīmābhirakṣitaṁ

Know also, O best among brāhmaṇā, the names of those who are the most distinguished amongst as – the leaders of my army. I recount them for your information.

Thyself and Bhīṣma, Karṇa, Kṛpa, the victorious in war, Aśvatthāmā, Vikarṇa and also Jayadratha, the son of Somadatta.

And also many other heroes who have given up their lives for my sake, armed with various weapons and missiles, all well skilled in battle.

This army of ours, marshalled by Bhīṣma, is insufficient, whereas that army of theirs, marshalled by Bhīma, is sufficient.

What impudence! Does the teacher need to be told all this? Also, Duryodhana fears that 'my army' is insufficient. The singular and unmistakable characteristic of the wicked man is vanity and belligerence which seeks more and more destructive power.

Yet the ominous truth escapes his lips. These great warriors 'have given up their lives for my sake'! Anxiety fills the evil heart. He sees the enemy army in the true light. It is both formidable and sufficient, whereas his own army is insufficient. The two vital factors that ensure victory are on the Pāṇḍava side. They are, in the words of the Holy Bible, God and his righteousness. Minus these, might and numbers are mere liabilities.

Perhaps in a flash of momentary intuition, Duryodhana realised the unrighteousness of his cause. Such moments are granted even to evil-doers. The courageous one shakes the evil off, without a false sense of dignity or vain desire overcoming him. We need err only once if we have a little wisdom left in us.

❖ ayaneṣu ca sarveṣu yathābhāgam avasthitāḥ
 bhīṣmam evā 'bhirakṣantu bhavantaḥ sarva eva hi
 ❖ tasya saṁjanayan harṣaṁ kuruvṛddhaḥ pitāmahaḥ
 siṁhanādaṁ vinadyo 'ccaiḥ śaṅkhaṁ dadhmau pratāpavān
 ❖ tataḥ śaṅkhāś ca bheryaś ca paṇavānakagomukhāḥ
 sahasai 'vā 'bhyahanyanta sa śābdas tumulo 'bhavat

Therefore, do ye all, stationed in your respective positions, in the several divisions of the army, protect Bhīṣma alone.

Duryodhana's glorious grandsire (Bhīṣma), the oldest of the Kauravā, in order to cheer him, now roared like a lion and blew his conch.

Then, conches and kettledrums, tabors, drums and cowhorns blared forth quite suddenly and the sound was tumultuous.

Forgetting to whom he is talking, Duryodhana instructs the venerable teacher: "Protect the commander-in-chief". The righteous impulse of turning to the teacher at the crucial hour is smothered by accumulated evil tendencies strengthened by frequent repetitions and reinforced by insatiable lust for power. Even in the hour of danger the wicked man's haughty head refuses to bow, and his heart refuses to pray. Adversity often turns a man away from the evil path, but that is true only of one who is on the borderline between good and evil. We have seen that the same calamity which compels one to abandon the evil path and to strive to become a saint, goads another into the darker mazes of vice. Only deliberate cultivation of good habits and tendencies can effect a healthy conditioning of our heart which, even if it is not naturally bent Godward, will turn to him the moment it is given shock.

Duryodhana speaks to Droṇa. The latter does not reply! The insulting and impudent behaviour of the wicked deserves only one treatment – indifference. The commander-in-chief, however, steps in, and without a word, signals the commencement of the battle.

- ❖ tataḥ śvetair hayair yukte mahati syandane sthitau
mādhavaḥ pāṇḍavaś cai 'va divyau śāṅkhau pradadhmatuḥ
- ❖ pāñcajanyaṁ hr̥ṣīkeśo devadattaṁ dhanamjayah
pauṇḍraṁ dadhmau mahāśāṅkhaṁ bhīmakarmā vṛkodaraḥ
- ❖ anantavijayaṁ rājā kuntīputro yudhiṣṭhiraḥ
nakulaḥ sahadevaś ca sughoṣamaṇipuṣpakau
- ❖ kāśyaś ca parameśvāsaḥ śikhaṇḍī ca mahārathaḥ
dhr̥ṣṭadyum̐no virāṭaś ca sātyakiś cā parājitaḥ
- ❖ drupado draupadeyāś ca sarvaśaḥ pṛthivīpate
saubhadraś ca mahābāhuḥ śāṅkhān dadhmuḥ pṛthak-pṛthak
- ❖ sa ghoṣo dhārtarāṣṭrāṇāṁ hr̥dayāni vyadārayat
nabhaś ca pṛthivīm cai 'va tumulo vyanunādayan

Then, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, seated in their magnificent chariot, yoked with white horses, blew their divine conches.

Kṛṣṇa blew the pāñcajanya, Arjuna blew the devadatta and Bhīma of terrible deeds blew the great conch pauṇḍra.

Yudhiṣṭhira blew the anantavijaya, Nakula and Sahadeva blew the sughoṣa and maṇipuṣpaka.

The king of Kāśī, an excellent archer, Śikhaṇḍin, the mighty hero, Dhr̥ṣṭadyum̐na and Virāṭa and the unconquered Sātyaki,

Drupada and the sons of Draupadī, and the mighty-armed Abhimanyu blew their respective conches.

That tumultuous sound rent the hearts of the Kauravā, making both heaven and earth resound.

The Lord's conch is called pāñcajanya, the matrix of the five elements or tanmātrā. The sound that issues from his conch is the supreme Om-kāra, the vibration which is the origin of all creation.

Arjuna's chariot has the Lord himself as the charioteer. The Kaṭhopanīṣad likens the senses to horses and the intelligence to the charioteer. When the Lord himself is the charioteer, it is no wonder that the steeds are white, a colour symbolising purity. If we hand the reins of our mind over to the Lord, then it is certain that our senses will be purified and all their functions will be pure and sinless.

The end of the night and the dawn of the day are unwelcome events to thieves and prostitutes. Even the auspicious sound of the conches of the Lord and his devotees pierce the hearts of the wicked. Fear is not outside but within them.

❖atha vyavasthitān dr̥ṣṭvā dhārtarāṣṭrān kapidhvajāḥ
 pravṛtte śāstrasampāte dhanur udyamya pāṇḍavaḥ
 ❖hr̥ṣīkeśam tadā vākyam idam āha mahīpate
 senayor ubhayor madhye ratham sthāpaya me 'cyuta
 ❖yāvad etān nirīkṣe 'ham yoddhukāmān avasthitān
 kair mayā saha yoddhavyam asmin raṇasamudyame
 ❖yotsyamānān avekṣe 'ham ya ete 'tra samāgatāḥ
 dhārtarāṣṭrasya durbuddher yuddhe priyacikīrṣavaḥ

Then, seeing the people of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's party standing arrayed and the discharge of weapons about to begin, Arjuna, whose ensign was that of a monkey, took up his bow and said the following to Kṛṣṇa.

Place my chariot in the middle of the two armies, O Kṛṣṇa, so that I may behold those who stand here desirous to fight, and know with whom I must fight, as the battle is about to commence.

For I desire to observe those who are assembled here to fight, wishing to please the evil-minded Duryodhana.

Arjuna is the son of Pāṇḍu, the 'white' king. White is symbolic of purity. The offsprings of purity are virtuous qualities. In the Bhagavad Gītā, Arjuna is the disciple, the seeker. He represents the good man who, as yet, is not steady in his wisdom – alluded to by the restless monkey ensign! Only by the grace of God is it possible to curb this restless tendency of the mind. Otherwise, like Arjuna, who at this juncture is enthusiastic about the righteous war but later changes his mind, we, too, will swing constantly between zeal and despair in our spiritual life.

The Lord is ever ready to save his devotee. In fact, he rejoices to be the devotee's servant! The Lord of the universe condescends to become Arjuna's charioteer. What humility! What love! God's love of the devotee is immeasurably greater than even the greatest devotee's love of God. Countless stories are current in India to show that the Lord is ever ready to serve the devotee in every way.

- sañjaya uvāca
❖ evam ukto hr̥ṣīkeśo guḍākeśena bhārata
senayor ubhayor madhye sthāpayitvā rathottamaṁ
❖ bhīṣmadroṇapramukhataḥ sarveṣāṁ ca mahīkṣitāṁ
uvāca pārtha paśyai 'tān samavetān kurūn iti
❖ tatrā 'paśyat sthitān pārthaḥ pitṛn atha pitāmahān
ācāryān mātulān bhrātṛn putrān pautrān sakhīṁs tathā
❖ śvaśūrān suhr̥daś cai 'va senayor ubhayor api
tān samīkṣya sa kaunteyaḥ sarvān bandhūn avasthitān

Sanjaya said: Thus addressed by Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa, having stationed that best of chariots in the midst of the two armies, in front of Bhīṣma and Droṇa and all the rulers of the earth, said: “O Arjuna, behold these Kurū gathered together.”

Then Arjuna saw stationed there, fathers and grandfathers, teachers, maternal uncles, brothers, sons, grandsons and companions, too, fathers-in-law and friends also, in both the armies. Seeing all these kinsmen thus standing arrayed,

The greatest of all moments in the history of the world, the moment when the yoga of the Bhagavad Gītā was revealed, arrived. Arjuna was the chosen channel. The Lord was manoeuvring Arjuna into the position in which the ideal stage would be set up. Hence, he places the chariot right in front of the two people for whom Arjuna had the greatest respect and love – Bhīṣma and Droṇa. Not only that, the Lord miraculously brings about a change in Arjuna's vision.

Arjuna, who but a moment before was thinking of the Kauravā army as the 'enemy', 'evil-minded', etc., suddenly beholds all the warriors in a different light – as kinsmen and friends. Enthusiasm for war yields place to sorrow and confusion.

The external situations or circumstances have but a neutral intrinsic value: it is one's own mind that attributes pleasure and pain, good and evil to them. As we shall see, this is the very core of the yoga of the Bhagavad Gītā; and, lord Kṛṣṇa creates the most suitable climate for his teaching by bringing out the contrast in the two attitudes of Arjuna.

❖ kṛpayā parayā 'viṣṭo viṣīdann idam abravīt
 arjuna uvāca
 dr̥ṣṭve 'maṁ svajānaṁ kṛṣṇa yuyutsum samupasthitam
 ❖ sīdanti mama gātrāṇi mukhaṁ ca pariśuṣyati
 vepathuś ca śarīre me romaharṣaś ca jāyate
 ❖ gāṇḍīvaṁ sraṁsate hastāt tvak cai 'va paridahyate
 na ca śaknoṁy avasthātum bhramatī 'va ca me manaḥ
 ❖ nimittāni ca paśyāmi viparītāni keśava
 na ca śreyo 'nupaśyāmi hatvā svajanam āhave

Arjuna spoke thus, sorrowfully, filled with deep pity: Seeing these, my kinsmen, O Kṛṣṇa, arrayed and eager to fight, my limbs fail and my mouth is parched, my body quivers and my hairs stand on end, the bow slips from my hand and my skin burns all over. I am unable even to stand and my mind is reeling, as it were. And I see adverse omens, O Keśava, I do not see any good in killing my kinsmen in battle.

The seed of all our miseries is beautifully exposed to our view. 'Suffering' does not move us to pity. We are not at all 'grieved' over death. We do not shed tears when we read of earthquakes and aircrashes. Only identification of our own self with the persons involved gives rise to grief. 'A boy drowned in the sea' is news; 'My son was drowned' is a heart-breaking tragedy! Both boys were living beings, born of parents, but the latter was 'my son', and that makes all the difference.

Delusion is a mental state, but it has a devastating effect on even our physical being. Psychosomatic medicine is discovering the truth that our health depends not so much on health foods and tonics, on strong muscles and sturdy limbs, but on the state of our mind which is ultimately dependent on a correct attitude to life. The Bhagavad Gītā gives us this correct attitude.

The 'adverse omens' – did Arjuna actually see any? We should not forget the Pāṇḍavā were victorious. The omens could have portended the destruction of their own children. Or perhaps the fear and the confusion which overwhelmed Arjuna made him 'see things'.

❖na kāṅkṣe vijayaṁ kṛṣṇa na ca rājyaṁ sukhāni ca
 kiṁ no rājyena govinda kiṁ bhogair jīvitena vā
 ❖yeṣāṁ arthe kāṅkṣitaṁ no rājyaṁ bhogāḥ sukhāni ca
 ta ime 'vasthitā yuddhe prāṇāṁs tyaktvā dhanāni ca

For I desire not victory, O Kṛṣṇa, nor kingdom, nor pleasures. Of what avail is dominion to us, O Kṛṣṇa, or pleasures or even life?

Those for whose sake we desire kingdom, enjoyments and pleasures, stand here in battle, having renounced life and wealth.

Vasiṣṭha, Kṛṣṇa and Buddha have all acclaimed with one voice that desire alone is the root-cause of all miseries and of transmigration. Here we have Arjuna voicing the same thoughts and the same wisdom, yet he was wrong!

To all outward appearances the sage might behave like a madman, but a madman is not a sage! Between escapism and renunciation there is this vital difference – the inner attitude. Kṛṣṇa does not advocate escapism. He revives in us the true spirit of renunciation.

“I do not want victory or pleasure, so I will not fight,” says Arjuna.

“You should not run after victory or pleasure, not even the pleasure of abstaining from the battle; therefore you should fight,” says Kṛṣṇa.

The argument is the same, but the conclusions are different because the inner approach is different. Hence, we should not blindly trust our intellect, but should seek wise counsel in order that the inner intelligence may be awakened.

Again, “It is for our relatives’ sake that we seek kingdom, etc., and I won’t fight since they may be killed in war,” says Arjuna. “No, not for their sake, but for God’s sake, for the sake of your duty or God’s will, you shall fight,” replies the Lord.

The path of duty is often unpleasant to the pleasure-seeking mind or ego-centred personality. It demands unwinking vigilance to prevent insincerity and unwisdom from veiling true insight.

- ❖ ācāryāḥ pitarāḥ putrās tathai 'va ca pitāmahāḥ
mātulāḥ śvaśurāḥ pautrāḥ śyālāḥ sambandhinas tathā
- ❖ etān na hantum icchāmi ghnato 'pi madhusūdana
api trailokyārājyasya hetoḥ kiṁ nu mahīkrte
- ❖ nihatya dhārtarāṣṭrān naḥ kām prītiḥ syāj janārdana
pāpam evā 'śrayed asmān hatvai 'tān ātatāyinaḥ
- ❖ tasmān nā 'rhā vyaṁ hantum dhārtarāṣṭrān svabāndhavān
svajanaṁ hi katham hatvā sukhinaḥ syāma mādava

Teachers, fathers, sons and also grandfathers, maternal uncles, fathers-in-law, grandsons, brothers-in-law and other relatives: these I do not wish to kill though they kill me, O Kṛṣṇa, even for the sake of dominion over the three worlds, let alone killing them for the sake of the earth.

By killing these sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, what pleasure can be ours, O Kṛṣṇa? Only sin will accrue by killing these felons.

Therefore we should not kill the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, our relatives; for how can we be happy by killing our own people?

Verse 35 is reminiscent of the words of the great spiritual hero of the Kaṭhapaniṣad, viz., Naciketas. There, the guru (Yama) is pleased. But, here, the guru (Kṛṣṇa) does not applaud Arjuna's dispassionate words. Mere aversion to worldly pleasures is valueless without devotion to God. It can only lead us to self-imposed misery and poverty-stricken life. As Gurudev used to say, we should 'detach the mind from the objects and attach it to the Lord'.

The Lord, as the indweller, knew that Arjuna's heart was enshrouded by spiritual ignorance. In order to remove it, he gave it an opportunity to manifest itself, by placing the chariot in front of Bhīṣma and Droṇa. Arjuna's cleverness weaves a web of logic to hide his ignorance and faintheartedness. He forgets that it is the duty of rulers to punish felons, and suggests that even that is fraught with sin! Why? 'Because they are our relations'. All animate and inanimate creatures in the world are God's creations; but relationship is our creation and the source of grief.

❖ yady apy ete na paśyanti lobhopahatacetasah
 kulakṣayakṛtaṁ doṣaṁ mitradrohe ca pātakaṁ
 ❖ kathaṁ na jñeyam asmābhiḥ pāpād asmān nivartitum
 kulakṣayakṛtaṁ doṣaṁ prapaśyadbhir janārdana

Though they, with intelligence overpowered by greed, see no evil in the destruction of families and no sin in hostility to friends, why should not we, who clearly see evil in the destruction of a family, learn to turn away from this sin, O Kṛṣṇa?

It is easier to perceive fault in others than within oneself. The Kauravā were greedy. They would do anything to retain sovereignty of the usurped kingdom. ‘So they do not see the sin in killing kinsmen; we are wiser and so should desist from it’ – is Arjuna’s argument. One man’s vanity shields another’s transgression with a seemingly lofty rationalisation.

No wise man will ever justify war. But wise men have from time immemorial indulged in what they regarded as righteous war. War itself is evil, but when it is the only remedy for a greater evil – to dethrone evil which has usurped the place of dharma – war is a necessity. Then, and only then, to fight is dharma (righteousness or duty). To run away from it is adharma! Just as an unruffled mind and a loving heart guide the surgeon’s skilled hand to remove a malignant growth, the wise and chivalrous ruler must be guided by a clear vision of dharma and by a deep love for all his people in order to deal firmly with wickedness.

Arjuna was wrong in saying that as they were his kinsmen, he should not kill them, nor is it right to say that since they were his enemies, Kṛṣṇa asked him to kill them. It was only because they were the perpetrators of adharma that it was Arjuna’s duty (as a prince) to exterminate them. If dharma was on the Kauravā side, even if they were his enemies, Kṛṣṇa would have asked Arjuna to look within himself and destroy his real enemy – adharma, (unrighteousness).

- ❖ kulakṣaye praṇaśyanti kuladharmāḥ sanātanāḥ
dharme naṣṭe kulam kṛtsnam adharmo 'bhibhavaty uta
- ❖ adharmābhibhavāt kṛṣṇa praduṣyanti kulastriyaḥ
strīṣu duṣṭāsu vārṣṇeya jāyate varṇasaṁkaraḥ
- ❖ saṁkaro narakāyai 'va kulaghnānām kulasya ca
patanti pitaro hy eṣām luptapiṇḍodakakriyāḥ

In the destruction of a family, the immemorial rites of that family perish. On the destruction of spirituality, impiety overcomes the whole family. By the prevalence of impiety, O Kṛṣṇa, the women of the family become corrupt. And, with the women being corrupted there arises intermingling of castes. Confusion of castes leads the slayers of the family to hell, for their forefathers fall, deprived of the offerings of rice-balls and libations.

This is an argument of sterling value and unassailable logic, though not in this context. As Aldous Huxley points out in his 'Perennial Philosophy', the chaos in the world of today is partly attributable to the collapse of the caste system. No one seems to know what is each one's duty (which is one's function in society), and when an inner conflict arises, different theorists, leaders and philosophers pull him in different directions. The poor man himself goes to the hospital with 'tension' and nervous breakdown.

When knowledgeable persons in a society are either killed in war or lured away to other countries or avocations, the 'spirit' of the customs, traditions and rites is lost, leaving the dead carcass of a ritual to which the masses cling. When the spirit is lost, piety or righteousness is lost. The custodians of piety (our womenfolk) become corrupt and there is confusion of castes. No one has a clear idea of his duty, and consequently there is chaos.

Though all are equal – socially, politically, economically and in the eyes of God – this does not mean that inter-racial or inter-caste marriage is the only or even the best way in which to demonstrate this equality. The history of mankind is the story of such inter-racial fusion, though its primary result may be confusion of duties and neglect of the cultures of both the parties. However, it leads to a re-awakening of the spirit, a re-assessment of cultural values and a new civilisation. But, this natural process of blending should not be forced prematurely.

❖doṣair etaiḥ kulaghnānām varṇasaṁkarakāraiḥ
 utsādyante jātīdharmāḥ kuladharmāś ca śāśvatāḥ
 ❖utsannakuladharmāṇām manuṣyāṇām janārdana
 narake 'niyataṁ vāso bhavati 'ty anuśūruma

By these evil deeds of the destroyers of the family, which cause confusion of castes, the eternal religious rites of the caste and the family are destroyed. We have heard, O Kṛṣṇa, that dwelling in hell for an unknown period is inevitable for those men in whose families the religious practices have been destroyed.

The hell referred to need not be elsewhere, but here itself! Every war leaves a long, tragic and horrendous trail of widows, orphans, 'illegitimate' children, social misfits and outcasts. All this happens even without war, in a rootless or uprooted community. When the motive is physical attraction or material consideration, marriage between people of different cultural backgrounds, intellectual equipment and spiritual values or even tastes and temperaments, sooner or later leads to unhappiness. If some of these families appear to be 'happy' it is only because they have no idea at all of real domestic harmony.

Of course, this does not apply where the parties to the marriage belong to different cultural groups but their intellectual and spiritual equipment is similar or complementary, and they are therefore prepared to and capable of making the necessary adjustments.

With regard to the social structure, Aldous Huxley says in his 'Perennial Philosophy':

'Contemporary history is the hideous record of what happens when political bosses, businessmen or class-conscious proletarians assume the Brahman's function of formulating a philosophy of life; when usurers dictate policy and debate the issues of war and peace; and when the warrior's caste duty is imposed on all and sundry, regardless of psycho-physical make-up and vocation.'

Such a world in which this sort of chaos prevails is hell. Whereas in ancient times, even the events in a war were predictable, today our daily life even in peace-time is unpredictable. The result is continuous anxiety and tension.

❖ aho bata mahat pāpaṁ kartuṁ vyavasitā vayan
 yad rājyasukhalobhena hantuṁ svajanam udyatāḥ
 ❖ yadi mām apratikāram āśastraṁ śastrapāṇayah
 dhṛtarāṣṭrā raṇe hanyus tan me kṣemataraṁ bhavet
 saṁjaya uvāca
 ❖ evam uktvā 'rjunaḥ saṁkhye rathopastha upāviśat
 visrjya saśaraṁ cāpaṁ śokasaṁvignamānasah

Alas! We are involved in a great sin in that we are prepared to kill our kinsmen through greed for the pleasures of a kingdom.

If the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra with weapons in hand should slay me in battle, unresisting and unarmed, that would be better for me.

Saṁjaya said: Having thus spoken in the midst of the battlefield, Arjuna, casting away his bow and arrow, sat down on the seat of the chariot, his mind overwhelmed with sorrow.

If the motive of the war was 'greed for the pleasures of a kingdom' that war was undoubtedly unrighteous, but here the noble heart of Arjuna was merely reflecting the wrong attitude of the Kauravā! 'They are greedy and they are ready to fight; we are ready to fight and so we are also greedy' – is the simple equation in his mind. Kṛṣṇa will point out that **his** attitude, the divine will, was different and hence Arjuna had to fight.

'Resist not evil' should never be misconstrued to mean 'encourage evil'. There is an orderly (democratic, if you like) way of dealing with evil which does not involve the disturbance of the mental equilibrium of anyone. 'Great sin' is not this action or that action, but according to Kṛṣṇa, kāma (desire) and krodha (hatred) are the fountains of the greatest sins. Selfish motive is the greatest sin. Lust, anger and greed disturb one's inner equilibrium and hence they are the 'gates to hell', according to the Bhagavad Gītā. They are 'of insatiable hunger', says Kṛṣṇa: they consume our peace of mind, our happiness, our vitality and the tranquillity of our inner being, which is one of the fundamental characteristics of yoga.

Thus are we led to the threshold of this yoga.



OM TAT SAT

iti śrīmad bhagavad gītāsūpaniṣatsu brahma vidyāyām
yogaśāstre śrī kṛṣṇarjuna saṁvāde
arjuna viṣāda yogo nāma prathamo 'dhyāyaḥ

Thus in the upaniṣad of the glorious Bhagavad Gītā,
the science of the eternal, the scripture of yoga,
the dialogue between śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna,
ends the first discourse entitled:

THE YOGA OF THE DESPONDENCY OF ARJUNA

CHAPTER II

THE SĀṆKHYA YOGA

II

15th JANUARY

1-3

- saṁjaya uvāca
❖ taṁ tathā kṛpayā 'viṣṭam aśrupūrṇāṅkulekṣaṇaṁ
viṣīdantam idaṁ vākyam uvāca madhusūdanaḥ
śrībhagavān uvāca
❖ kutas tvā kaśmalam idaṁ viṣame samupasthitaṁ
anāryajuṣṭam asvargyam akīrtikaram arjuna
❖ klaibyaṁ mā sma gamaḥ pārtha nai 'tat tvayy upapadyate
kṣudraṁ hṛdayadaurbalyaṁ tyaktvo 'tīṣṭha paraṁtapa

Sanjaya said: To him who was thus overcome with pity and who was despondent, with eyes full of tears and agitated, Kṛṣṇa spoke these words:

Whence has this perilous strait come upon thee, this dejection which is unworthy of you, disgraceful and which will close the gates of heaven upon you, O Arjuna?

Yield not to impotence, O Arjuna. It does not befit thee. Cast off this mean weakness of the heart. Stand up, O scorcher of the foes!

Lord Kṛṣṇa proves to be a superb diagnostician here. What afflicted Arjuna was not compassion or a sense of righteousness. It was 'weakness of the heart' unworthy of a great warrior. It was disgraceful; and what was most important, since it was against dharma (the will of God) it would close the gate of heaven upon Arjuna! It was sheer impotence.

Yoga or religion is intended to break down the ego which is the prison of the soul. It demands unwinking vigilance to ensure that the sādhanā or a virtuous life itself does not become a prison-house, reinforcing the ego! Virtue, created and maintained by a wrong motive or egoistical attitude, is prison. This does not mean that we ever sanction vice: if a seeker exposes himself to sin, he will never be able to reach the goal.

What is needed is virtue as a fortress. But the difference is this: the key of the fortress is in your keeping; the key of the prison-house is in another's. The spiritual hero dares to be virtuous. The coward is scared to err, though he would very much like to! The hero can go beyond the walls of the fortress, but remains within it because the glitter of the external world does not delude him. The impotent man imagines he is free in his dark prison-cell.

arjuna uvāca
 ❖kathaṁ bhīṣmam ahaṁ saṁkhye droṇaṁ ca madhusūdana
 iṣubhiḥ pratiyotsyāmi pūjārhāv arisūdana
 ❖gurūn ahatvā hi mahānubhāvān
 śreyo bhoktuṁ bhaikṣyam apī 'ha loke
 hatvā 'rthakāmāns tu gurūn ihai 'va
 bhuñjīya bhogān rudhirapradigdhān
 ❖na cai 'tad vidmaḥ kataran no garīyo
 yad vā jayema yadi vāno jayeyuḥ
 yān eva hatvā na jijīviṣāmas
 te 'vasthitāḥ pramukhe dhārtarāṣṭrāḥ

Arjuna said: How, O Madhusūdana, shall I fight with arrows in battle against Bhīṣma and Droṇa, who are fit to be worshipped?

Indeed, in this world it is better to accept alms than to slay the most noble teachers. But if I kill them, even in this world all my enjoyments of wealth and pleasures will be stained with blood.

I can hardly tell which will be better: that we should conquer them or that they should conquer us. The sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, after slaying those whom we do not even wish to live, stand facing us.

Up to this point in the Bhagavad Gītā, Arjuna is the guru, the wise man, who could discriminate between right and wrong. Now, the vehement assertion of knowledge of dharma has yielded to a confusion – perhaps brought on by the gentle chiding administered by Kṛṣṇa.

These are inevitable stages through which everyone passes. The fool thinks he is the wisest man in the world and has a solution to all problems that face mankind. He is sure that God exists or does not exist. He is, paradoxically enough, convinced of his own and everyone else's duty. There is no confusion in him; in his case 'ignorance is bliss'. He has not sufficiently evolved to enter into the state of confusion that lies between the lower orders of human beings and the true (i.e. enlightened) human being. The unenlightened human being almost constantly finds himself on the horns of a dilemma. Often he is ridiculed by the fool: "I told you, give up all this philosophising and be happy as I am." It is good to know that confusion is a stage higher than ignorance. It lasts till we find a guru or preceptor who opens the gates of wisdom for us to enter – guru in the sense of 'light that dispels darkness'. Such a guru may be personal or impersonal.

❖kārpaṇyadoṣophatasvabhāvaḥ
 ṛcchāmi tvāṁ dharmasāṁmūḍhacetāḥ
 yac chreyaḥ syān niścitaṁ brūhi tan me
 śiṣyas te 'haṁ śādhi mām tvāṁ prapannaṁ

My heart is overpowered by the taint of pity. My mind is confused as to duty. I ask thee, tell me decisively what is good for me. I am thy disciple. Instruct me who has taken refuge in thee.

This is one of the greatest verses in the scripture. It is the spark that ignites the magazine of wisdom.

Much of the perversion that our philosophy has been subjected to of late can be directly attributed to the tragic fact that we have ignored an ancient wise injunction, 'Do not proffer advice unless you are asked to'.

If spiritual knowledge is treated as a commodity, the seller goes on his knees pleading with the prospective buyer! The latter feels that he (and therefore his own ignorance) is superior to the former's 'wares'. He might condescend to buy, but remodels it to suit his taste, affixes his own label to it and remarkets it. The result is evident in any book-shop.

The guru waits not only for the disciple to ask, but to get into the proper attitude of receptivity. If the disciple has made no effort to deal with his problem or has his own solution to it, he is not receptive. If he has reached the end of his own resources he does not doubt the guru! Unless the disciple completely surrenders or empties himself, he cannot benefit by instruction from even God himself! The disciple has to discard his own 'knowledge' (ignorance) at the door when he enters the guru's abode. And, of course, he will leave the abode through the gate of true wisdom, thus leaving ignorance behind.

One who thus surrenders himself to the guru should wish for 'śreyas', i.e., his ultimate, enduring and supreme good which is God-realisation. Arjuna, the ideal aspirant, thrice insisted upon 'śreyas' (I:31, II:5 and 7). The Kaṭha upaniṣad makes a clear distinction between śreyas which is sought by the wise, and preyas (pleasure) sought by the fool.

❖na hi prapaśyāmi mamā 'panudyād
 yac chokam ucchoṣaṇam indriyāṇām
 avāpya bhūmāv asapatnam ṛddham
 rājyaṁ surāṇām api cā 'dhipatyaṁ

I do not see that it would remove this sorrow that burns up my senses, even if I should attain prosperous and unrivalled dominion on earth or lordship over the gods (in heaven).

Of course not! Nothing in this world, or in heaven (both of which are distasteful to Arjuna now) or in hell (which he decidedly wishes to avoid) contains the secret 'alchemical' substance that can end sorrow. So, a wise man should renounce 'the three worlds'. Logic ends there. If it does not, it leads us astray. The next step might be 'since I have renounced the three worlds, I should have nothing to do with them' or 'since I have renounced the three worlds, why should I be afraid to fight or act in this world?'

We should know the right and wrong application of logic. It is true that the body is unreal. But, so long as it lasts, it has to be fed. Even the condemned prisoner has to be given his last meal. To neglect it is *adharma*.

Arjuna is grieved over the prospect of his having to kill his own kith and kin, though he knows that they are the worst sinners (*ātātāyin*). 'Resist not evil' is a dictum that should be cautiously applied here. Society cannot run on Utopian ideals. But that should not permit everyone to fight evil and thus generate evil in themselves. Hence, the caste system allocated this task to the *kṣatriya*, (the ruler or administrator). The others shall not resist evil, but hand it over to the *kṣatriya* whose duty it becomes. For him to shirk it is *adharma*! But if he does it as his duty, impartially and impersonally, he is not inwardly disturbed and he does not incur sin. Law and order are maintained without disordering anyone's mind! The duty has to be discharged not for the sake of heaven or of earth, nor for the fear of hell, but because it is God's will. The Lord says that he incarnates in order to subdue evil. (cf IV: 8).

saṁjaya uvāca
 ❖evam uktvā hr̥ṣīkeśaṁ guḍākeśaḥ paramtapah
 na yotsya iti govindam uktvā tūṣṇīm babhūva ha
 ❖tam uvāca hr̥ṣīkeśaḥ prahasann iva bhārata
 senayor ubhayor madhye viṣīdantam idaṁ vacaḥ

Sanjaya said: Having spoken thus to the Lord, Arjuna, the destroyer of foes, said to Kṛṣṇa, “I will not fight,” and became silent.

To him who was despondent in the midst of the two armies, Kṛṣṇa, as if smiling, O Dhṛtarāṣṭra, spoke these words:

It is strange what ignorance and delusion can do to man. Arjuna was ‘the destroyer of foes’. He could fight with lord Śiva himself! He was afraid of none – men, angels or demons. Yet, here he is, despondent and effeminately weeping right in the middle of the two armies, just in that situation where a warrior loves to be and is born to be; in the very situation that is ideal for him to demonstrate his valour and his chivalry; right at his post of sacred duty.

We often complain of lack of opportunities. We blame our fate and curse our neighbours. We are displeased with everyone else, men and gods! But we fail to realise that not they but our own spiritual ignorance and delusion are our real enemies.

So long as this delusion is not removed and the ignorance overcome, we shall refuse to utilise the opportunity even if the Lord himself offers it to us. We will bluntly tell him, as Arjuna said: “I will not fight the inner foes.” In the darkness of self-imposed ignorance the foes seem to be friends, the closed eyes refuse to see the inner light and we continue to be the slaves of the tyrant known as egoism, weeping and wailing, unwilling to give up the sources of our sorrows and unable to endure their torment.

If we have the right attitude of surrender to God, and if we prayerfully approach him, he will, without the least delay and in a pleasant way, impart the highest wisdom to us, dispelling ignorance and delusion once and for all. He is the light within each one of us.

śrībhagavān uvāca
 ❖ aśocyān anvaśocas tvaṁ prajñāvādāmś ca bhāṣase
 gatāsūn agatāsūmś ca nā 'nuśocanti paṇḍitāḥ

The blessed Lord said: Thou has grieved for those that should not be grieved for, yet thou speakest words of wisdom. The wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead.

This is the key-note of the Gītā: grieve not. This verse can be used as a mantra or a talisman. When worry knocks at the door, when grief threatens to overwhelm us, we should visualise śrī Kṛṣṇa standing in front of us and telling us: “You are grieving or worrying unnecessarily.”

When we are consumed with remorse over the dead past and with sorrow concerning the unborn future, let us visualise him saying to us: “You are worrying unnecessarily.” When a man dies, his body is cremated. Otherwise it would decompose and stink. When an event is past, do not keep it and cherish it in your mind. Cremate it and forget it: otherwise it will decompose in the mind and stink. Do not worry about the future, for tomorrow will bring its own problem and the problem will have its own solution, just as yesterday's and today's problems have had.

Many only talk like wise men! How very different is their action from their words! To harmonise thought, word and deed is the first principle of yoga.

The truly wise do not grieve for ‘the dead, nor for those whose life-breath has not yet ceased’ knowing that all created things are subject to change and dissolution.

There is a distinction between thinking and worrying. Thinking is essential; worrying is unnecessary – it actually prevents thinking. Constructive thought is the first step to contemplation and eventual cessation of divisible thinking. It is made possible only when the inner awareness is freed from past (which exists but as memory) and future (which exists but as worry – a mixture of fear and hope). Only the present **is** – it is a present (gift) from God!

❖na tv evā 'haṁ jātu nā 'saṁ na tvaṁ ne 'me janādhīpāḥ
 na cai 'va na bhaviṣyāmaḥ sarve vayam ataḥ paraṁ
 ❖dehino 'smin yathā dehe kaumāraṁ yauvanaṁ jarā
 tatha dehāntaraprāptir dhīras tatra na muhyati

Indeed, never at any time was I not, nor these rulers of men; nor, verily, shall we ever cease to be hereafter.

Just as in this body the embodied one passes into childhood, youth and old age, so also does he pass into another body. The hero does not grieve thereat.

The grief is only for one who confuses the self and the changing body. The self – which is the 'I am' within us all – is immortal and eternal. The individual soul is like the immortal cell in the eternal body of the infinite Lord. It is undying. Only the body dies.

The changes we call childhood, youth and old age do not affect the 'I'. Even so the change called 'death' does not affect it. 'I' does not really die; 'I' creates another body.

The realisation of this immortal nature of the soul will liberate us from grief and delusion in regard to birth and death. We must always realise our nature. It is inevitable therefore that we should seek to realise God, our substratum. If you hold me down in a lake I struggle to come up because I am life and I struggle to release myself from death. Even the eventual natural death is only release from a dying body. Even so, throughout our life, we are endeavouring to overcome this prison-house of finitude and to realise that 'I am that infinite self'. Hence our ceaseless striving for freedom from slavery and from physical and mental illness, for peace and happiness unending; though we fail to realise that it is absurd to look for these in ever-changing phenomena. Such striving therefore, only makes us worse!

When the hairs turn grey, be happy you have hair. When they fall out, be happy you have the head. When death threatens you, be happy your soul is immortal. There is no death for the soul. Childhood, youth and old age are commas, whereas the phenomenon of 'death' is a semi-colon in the soul's perennial song.

❖ mātrāsparśās tu kaunteya sītoṣṇasukhaduḥkhadāḥ
 āgamāpāyino 'nityās tāms titikṣasva bhārata
 ❖ yaṁ hi na vyathayanty ete puruṣaṁ puruṣarṣabha
 samaduḥkhasukhaṁ dhīraṁ so 'mṛtatvōya kalpate

The contacts of the senses with the objects, O Arjuna, which cause heat and cold, pleasure and pain, have a beginning and an end; they are impermanent. Endure them bravely.

Surely, that hero whom these afflict not, O Arjuna, to whom pleasure and pain are the same, is fit for attaining immortality.

The self that ceases to identify itself with the body and through it with the outside world, is at peace within itself. He who imagines the self to be the body and the senses, undergoes the varied experiences of heat and cold, pain and pleasure, and so on. He does not enjoy tranquillity because these experiences are impermanent, fleeting and momentary. Two distinct stages are described in these two verses. The first is *titikṣa* or endurance. The second is *sama* or equanimity (balanced state of mind). The first involves psychological effort. The second is effortless and natural.

If you are walking in a forest on a cold morning and a monkey jumps on you and tears your shirt so that the cold wind blows on your bare back, you endure the cold which you feel intensely. This is *titikṣa*. At the same time, the cold wind is also blowing on your face. You are not even aware of it. This is *sama* or equanimity, in which the external condition fails to affect you in the least. The spiritual aspirant strives to practise endurance. He is a hero who has reached the second stage and to whom pain and pleasure are alike.

“The more you are able to identify yourself with the immortal, all-pervading self, the less will you be affected by the pairs of opposites.” —**Swami Sivananda**.

❖nā 'sato vidyate bhāvo nā 'bhāvo vidyate sataḥ
ubhayor api dṛṣṭo 'ntas tv anayos tattvadarśibhiḥ

The unreal has no being: there is no non-being of the real. The truth about both has been seen by the knowers of the truth.

The reality or God alone exists: that which always exists is God. That which is, is eternal and infinite. No one can bring into being that which is not! It is simple and does not need God to tell us! But God tells us because only he **knows** the totality; we cannot know the totality, ours is always a point of view. That which intuitively knows this knows the totality.

Then, what is this world? It is like the appearance of 'a snake in the rope', of a second moon when one suffers from diplopia, of the illusion of a mirage, of ghosts in posts in the dark courtyard, and of a second pill on the palm (when the one that is there, is touched by the scissor-crossed index and middle fingers of the other hand). When did the snake die? When did the second moon set? When did the water of the mirage evaporate? Where did the ghosts go? Who took the second pill? They never existed; they were but illusory phenomena, non-existent but experienced!

Life itself is a long dream. We are unable to realise the illusoriness of the external objects because the dream is still on. We resist the awakening influence – like the dreamer of a pleasant dream – and pull the blanket of ignorance over our faces.

When it is said: "The world is unreal", it is not suggested that we are seeing the world where nothing exists. We only mean to say that there is wrong perception: something exists (the self or God) and we see it as something else (world). To the little boy sitting under the tree, its shadow appears to be a phantom born at midday, growing till sunset and dying then!

The jīvanmukta (liberated being) is aware of both – viz., the reality and the fact that to the unenlightened the appearance is experienced as real. Hence, he is never deluded, even as we see the shadow come into being, grow and vanish, but we are not deceived by it. He is aware of the appearance (world) and its substratum (the self).

❖avināśi tu tad viddhi yena sarvam idaṁ tatam
vināśam avyayasyā 'sya na kaścit kartum arhati

Know that, by whom all this is pervaded, to be indestructible. None can cause the destruction of that, the imperishable.

Every being is pervaded by God, inside and outside. A block of ice submerged in water has not only water on all sides, but is itself water, though in solid form.

That all-pervading God is indestructible, and living faith in the all-pervading reality gives us a wonderful sense of security. But identification of the self with the passing phantom gives rise to insecurity and grief. The servant may be healthier and stronger than his master, but there is always a lurking sense of insecurity in him because he does not know when his dismissal will come. Reliance on 'solid' matter generates insecurity; whereas reliance on subtle and invisible God confers security on us. Matter changes; the spirit is unchanging.

Life becomes meaningful and all activities are purposeful only on the basis of faith in the enduring reality.

All scriptures proclaim the truth that God pervades all inside and outside; in short, God alone exists, naught else.

Whatever exists in this universe is pervaded by God. – **Īśāvāsyā upaniṣad.**

Lord Nārāyaṇa dwells, pervading everything within and without – all that is heard of and all that is seen in the entire universe. – **Nārāyaṇa Suktam.**

All this is indeed Brahman or the absolute; there is no diversity here. – **Upaniṣad.**

Realisation of this unity will free us from sorrow. 'Burn this forest of ignorance with the fire of conviction that 'I am one and pure consciousness'. Be free from sorrow. Be blissful.' – **Aṣṭavakra Gītā.**

❖ antavanta ime dehā nityasyo 'ktāḥ śarīriṇaḥ
anāśino 'prameyasya tasmād yudhyasva bhārata

These bodies of the embodied self, who is eternal, indestructible and immeasurable, are said to have an end. Therefore fight, O Arjuna.

What was the need for all this discourse on the nature of the self to make Arjuna fight? Was it not enough to point out that it was his duty as a prince?

No. It would only be putting off the evil day. Arjuna was neither weak nor effeminate. He was guḍākeśa and paramtapa – one who had successfully combated sleep and lethargy (internal foes) and also all his external enemies among whom were gods! He had full command even over the involuntary functions of his body and could sleep or remain awake as he pleased. He was a wise and learned man, too, yet even he was overcome by grief.

Grief is born of ignorance of the nature of the self and of māyā or illusion, and also born of the false identification (confusion) of the self with the not-self (which includes the world, body, mind and senses). Your mind indulges in a peculiar double trick. It looks for reality because it thinks you are different from the truth. Having dissected yourself from reality mentally, suddenly you think that 'I am the body'. This is what they call 'māyā', illusion, born of ignorance. Arjuna's collapse on the battlefield was the best opportunity for Kṛṣṇa to uproot this tree of ignorance.

This can be applied to our own life, too. We suffer again and again only because we do not go to the root of the problem but remain satisfied with makeshift solutions. The wise man need suffer only once. His wisdom will seek the root and destroy it there. Thus he will never suffer again.

Do the 'bodies' have an 'end'? Does matter come to an end, annihilation? They are 'said to have an end'! Popular belief can often be illogical or unscientific – and it may be unnecessary, futile and impossible to uproot such belief. Unless the abandonment of the belief is vital to self-knowledge, any controversy concerning it may at best be diversionary waste of effort and psychological distraction.

❖ ya enaṁ vetti hantāraṁ yaś cai 'naṁ manyate hataṁ
 ubhau tau na vijānīto nā 'yaṁ hanti na hanyate
 ❖ na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin
 nā 'yaṁ bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ
 ajo nityaḥ śāśvato 'yaṁ purāṇo
 na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre

Neither he who takes the self to be the slayer nor he who thinks the self is slain, knows. The self slays not, nor is the self slain.

The self is not born, nor does the self ever die. After having been, the self again does not cease to be. Unborn, eternal, changeless and ancient, the self is not killed when the body is killed.

Kṛṣṇa takes us here to the pinnacle of wisdom from where we have an indescribably glorious vision of the absolute, the one that has never undergone a change.

The self is unborn. There is no birth and death for the self. Cosmic consciousness looked at from an individual stand-point, so to say, is ātmā (the self) – the sky that appears to us through the window as distinct from the sky-in-itself, which is Brahman. It is the narrowness of our focus that generates worries in us! A broader and deeper outlook will give us a magnificent view of what is and a realisation of its changelessness.

Cosmic consciousness alone is, even as the sky alone is, undiminished by the clouds or walls that prevent our perception of it. It is avidyā or ignorance that prevents our realisation of cosmic consciousness. Ignorance is not a positive factor. It is a nothing. How can nothing bring about any change in the reality? How can ignorance affect it either? If we are all in a hall and suddenly the lights go off, it is true that we shall not be able to see one another. But, because the darkness descends upon us, we are not crushed nor are we in any way affected by it, and we are exactly as we were. God alone exists, totally unaffected by the apparent (because they are caused by ignorance) changes in this world and in our body and mind.

❖ vedā 'vināśinaṁ nityaṁ ya enam ajam avyayaṁ
kathaṁ sa puruṣaḥ pāṛtha kaṁ ghātayati hanti kaṁ

Whosoever knows the self to be indestructible, eternal, unborn and inexhaustible, how can that man slay, O Arjuna, or cause to be slain?

Daily, we are aware of three states of consciousness. In deep sleep, there is no diversity. In the dream state, one (the mind) creates an illusion of diversity in itself! In the waking state, there is an apparent diversity: apparent because it is based on primordial ignorance and it will not stand investigation. These three states are experienced by the single ego, but the laws governing them are different. You cannot prosecute a man for killing another in a dream! Nor can he ignore a wall because he did not see it in his sleep.

The same argument applies to the different states of spiritual awakening, too. It is true that ultimately God alone exists and that he is eternal and immortal. But, in the state in which Arjuna found himself, he could not ask Kṛṣṇa the very pertinent question: "If all these heroes are essentially indestructible, why do you ask me to kill them?" He had not transcended the gross state of experience of the physical world and had to play the game in accordance with the laws that governed that state. Here we have a strange paradox. The battle of life has to be fought in the world which we should investigate all the time and realise that it is the effect of our own ignorance. Failure to fight the battle of life in this spirit will sanction ignorance and seal the door through which we should rise into the higher states of consciousness.

This is the extremely delicate art of living: to play our part in this world as though it were a reality and yet never to forget the ultimate reality which appears, through mistaken perception, as the world.

❖vāsāmsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya navāni grhṇāti nara 'parāṇi
tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇāny anyāni saṁyāti navāni dehī

Just as a man casts off worn out clothes and puts on new ones, so also the embodied one casts off worn out bodies and enters others which are new.

'Reincarnation' is a fact only in relation to the physical body. The self is unborn and undying! Life is continuous, only the dress is replaced by new ones every now and then.

All religions are agreed that the soul is imperishable and survives the body. There seems to be difference of opinion only in regard to its donning a physical body post mortem. It is admitted, too, that the soul on departing from here undergoes various experiences necessary for eventual ascension into the kingdom of God or to become one with him, expressed as you care to put it.

The spirit or the soul cannot act without body, or rather, the instrument by which the soul functions and gathers experiences is called body, and getting into or assuming one of these is known as 'incarnation'. The soul does not enjoy the pleasures of a heaven or suffer the pains of a hell, except through the medium of a body composed of the five elements, organised to suit the peculiar conditions of its existence at that stage, and so subtle or gross.

There is a great difference between the physiological structure of fish and bird and that of the human being, but basically they are all composed of the five elements. The fish-body is adapted to life in the sea, the bird-body to flight, and the human-body to a different kind of life. Similarly, the souls incarnating on other planets might assume or obtain physical bodies adapted to the conditions there.

The soul is really not reborn (in fact it was never born at all), but when it assumes a new body, we say it is born.

This verse takes the sting out of death and removes fear of death from our heart. Who would not like new clothes?

It also reminds us that the body is only a garment bound to deteriorate and become useless. We should keep it clean and healthy, but not forget the self which is the enduring reality.

- ❖nai 'naṁ chindanti śastrāṇi nai 'naṁ dahati pāvakaḥ
na cai 'naṁ kledayanty āpo na śoṣayati mūrutaḥ
- ❖acchedyo 'yam adāhyo 'yam akledyo 'śoṣya eva ca
nityaḥ sarvagataḥ sthāṇur acalo 'yam sanātanaḥ
- ❖avyakto 'yam acintyo 'yam avikāryo 'yam ucyate
tasmād evaṁ viditvai 'naṁ nā 'nuśocitum arhasi

Weapons do not cut the self. Fire burns it not. Water wets it not. Wind dries it not.

This self cannot be cut, burnt, wetted, or dried up. It is eternal, all-pervading, stable, immovable and ancient.

This self is said to be unmanifested, unthinkable and unchangeable. Therefore, knowing this to be such thou shouldst not grieve.

Expressions like 'I am injured. I am burnt' are defective. Even so, 'I am a bad man', etc. They betray a confusion of the self (to which the 'I' points) and the body and mind which are subject to all these afflictions. Take the expression 'I am sick'. If it is true, then I cannot be made healthy! It is just like the expression 'This is paper' which cannot be made into a loaf of bread!

Injury, burning, evil nature, sickness, and so on, are superimpositions on the self which has nothing to do with these and hence is able to shake them off at will. Its essential nature as the immortal, eternal, all-pervading, stable and ancient self asserts itself.

Thus, even common expressions like 'I am a man', if pursued as an inward enquiry will lead us to their logical conclusion, the self. 'I' is really not 'a man', for the 'I' is really distinct from the 'man-body'. The 'I' is beyond all these modifications. It is the subtle essence hidden in all bodies, one and immutable.

'That which is the subtle essence of all, in **that** all that exists has its being. That is the truth. That is the self. That thou art, O Śvetaketu' – **Chāndogya upaniṣad**.

It is foolish to pretend that all this is true. Our Master pointed out the danger of assumed knowledge. "Wicked people catch fish in the Gaṅga and kill them, rationalising their action with the lofty verse 'weapons do not cut the self.' Such perversion of truth will only make self-realisation more remote.

❖atha cai 'naṁ nityajātaṁ nityaṁ vā manyase mṛtaṁ
 tathā 'pi tvaṁ mahābāho naivaṁ śocitum arhasi
 ❖jātasya hi dhruvo mṛtyur dhruvaṁ janma mṛtasya ca
 tasmād aparihārye 'rthe na tvaṁ śocitum arhasi

But even if thou thinkest of the self as being constantly born and constantly dying, even then, O mighty-armed, thou shouldst not grieve.

For certain is death for the born, and certain is birth for the dead; therefore, over the inevitable thou shouldst not grieve.

Kṛṣṇa's expressions are very clever and guarded! He does not concede that the self is born and it dies. But if you think so, even then there is no cause for grief.

We should learn to accept the inevitable. As a famous prayer goes: 'God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.' Birth and death are inevitable; so why worry?

In the second verse, we see the cautious wording. Death is certain for that which is born and birth for the dead. But, where is it said that the self is born or it dies? Birth and death belong to the illusion (conventional or traditional usage), not to the self, the substratum for the 'I'. I am not born nor do I die; birth and death belong to the confusion. At best, 'birth' and 'death' are conventional expressions like the 'rising' and 'setting' of the sun. For not even the 'body' dies finally. Birth and death are two apparent stages in a ceaseless change. They have social implications, but cease to be true when investigated into.

When you drive along a tar road in the morning, you find a mirage. When the sun sets, the mirage disappears (dies). Oh, no, it is not dead; the next morning, when the sun rises, the mirage is born again!

We can accept the inevitable with wisdom and courage only if we are firmly rooted in the truth or the permanent reality which is totally unaffected by these passing phenomena.

❖avyaktādīni bhūtāni vyaktamadyāni bhārata
avyaktanidhanāny eva tatra kā paridevanā

Beings are unmanifested in their beginning, manifested in their middle state, O Arjuna, and unmanifested again in their end. What is there to grieve about?

This is a very important thought which can immediately liberate us from worry and grief. We clothe the moment with the mantle of eternity and worry over its magnitude. We forget that what happens now has had a cause in the unknown past and will in turn have an effect in the unknown future. In the darkness of total ignorance, we grope and break our bones.

We cling to our ‘possessions’, forgetting that we were alive before they came to us. We fear their loss. We grieve over the loss. Ignorant of the laws of karma (cause and effect) we strive all the time to push unhappiness away and to acquire happiness. Pushing unhappiness away involves us in greater unhappiness. Feverish striving to acquire happiness is only misery!

The Bhāgavatam reminds us of the mystery of life: ‘You do not work for unhappiness and yet find yourself in it. Even so, happiness will be yours unsought-for.’ They are the effects of adṛṣṭa (the unseen karma). Meditation upon this will rob us of all tensions, grief and delusion, and will snap all our attachments.

‘The relationship as son, friend, teacher, father, mother, wife, brother or sister is formed through the body on account of attachment and delusion. Just as planks unite and separate in the river, just as pilgrims unite and separate in a public inn, so also fathers, mothers, sons and brothers unite and separate in this world. He who thus understands the nature of the body and all human relationships based on it, will not grieve.’ — **Swami Sivananda.**

The enigma of a ‘future’ is tantalising. People are irresistibly drawn to others who profess the ability to ‘read the future’. How strange! What is the use of this knowledge if ‘what will be will be’; and how can one trust the prophesy if the future calamity can somehow be averted? One who knows ‘what is’ is not worried about what was or what will be.

THE MONTH OF FEBRUARY

The Bhagavad Gītā is a small scripture of seven hundred verses, a part of the epic Mahābhārata which describes the conflict between the hundred vicious sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and the five pious sons of Pāṇḍu. The scripture was revealed by the Lord incarnate, śrī Kṛṣṇa, to one of the five pious sons, the warrior Arjuna, on the battlefield.

There are some who wonder: would it have been possible for Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna to have had the frame of mind needed to discuss yoga with the war looming large over their heads?... But, can it not be that Kṛṣṇa wanted to teach us a lesson through this very act of revealing the scripture on the battlefield? Yes, philosophy is not for ‘discussion over a club table’, in the words of my Master, nor should it recline in an armchair and be treated as an intellectual pastime. It should be a weapon in our daily battle of life. That is the sole object with which these few thoughts are offered at the feet of the Lord seated in your heart.

Why does Kṛṣṇa go into all these discussions concerning the ultimate truth? For a very simple reason: action which is not backed up by true understanding is itself bondage. Any action or right knowledge that is backed up by right understanding is itself liberation. It is as simple as that. That is also what we are told right at the very beginning of the Yoga Vāsiṣṭha. The bird does not fly with only one wing. It has two wings and in the middle is the bird. One wing is knowledge, the other is action and in the middle is life! Your life is not merely understanding or merely doing. The unawakened mind, when it listens to the revolutionary philosophy of the Bhagavad Gītā, is capable of only one thing – misunderstanding. This is why understanding alone is not enough. It is like trying to fly on one wing, which is impossible. (The other wing is karma yoga.) Similarly, action alone is not enough either; understanding is the other wing.

Who is the doer of the action? The doer of the action at one point is the enjoyer of the experience at the other end. If, for instance, you pick up a cane and bring it down, you are the striker and the other is the struck. Your action is his experience and his action is your experience. Therefore, we are all bound together, brought together by every action that proceeds from one or the other. With clear understanding of this, you instantly become aware of the inner source of this action, and therefore of the source of experience. The source of expression is the source of experience. It is called expression at one end of the cane, and experience at the other end. You and the other are one. It is the same fool who hits and who is hit! This is not, ‘Do as you would be done by’. In that there is duality; but here there is no duality. The cane is only one. At one end what happens is called expression and at the other end what happens is called experience. Therefore, you are not hitting and nobody is hit. It is the cane which keeps jumping around! When this truth-in-action is directly realised, there arises wisdom beyond experience and expression.

❖ āścaryavat paśyati kaścīd enam
 āścaryavad vadati tathai 'va cā 'nyaḥ
 āścaryavac cai 'nam anyāḥ śṛṇoti
 śrutvā 'py enaṁ veda na cai 'va kaścīd

One sees this (self) as a wonder. Another speaks of it as a wonder. Another hears of it as a wonder. Yet, having heard, none understands it at all.

Wonderful is self-realisation. The ultimate experience is non-dual and therefore inexpressible. It is not had by the mind. The self is conscious of itself. It cannot be put into words, nor even formed as a concept within oneself, yet one who has had that experience tries to speak of it and can only say: "It is a wonder!"

The disciple listens to the master's inexpressible wonderment at the transcendental experience. He is thrilled. Yet, it remains beyond the three acts of seeing, description and hearing.

The self alone exists. The one appears as many. The unconditioned appears to be conditioned in the individual. That is the power of *māyā*, God's illusory power. Just as the blueness of the sky and water in the mirage are optical illusions, this is cosmic illusion. Do not question further. When the house is on fire, the first requirement is not a fruitless research into its cause, but to put it out.

The *upaniṣad* also declare that the self is not realised by much learning or discussion, but only by God's grace earned by self-surrender.

"The verse may also be interpreted in this manner: He that sees, hears and speaks of the self is a wonderful man. Such a man is very rare. He is one among many thousands. Thus the self is very hard to understand." —**Swami Sivananda**.

❖dehī nityam avadhyo 'yaṁ dehe sarvasya bhārata
tasmāt sarvāṇi bhūtāni na tvaṁ śocitum arhasi

This self, the indweller in the body of everyone, is ever indestructible, O Arjuna, therefore, thou shouldst not grieve for any creature.

This is the summing up of the philosophic argument.

The body undergoes change: even the elements are not destroyed in the sense that they cease to be. Matter, too, in its ultimate analysis is indestructible, because, as has been proved by science, 'mass is static or inert energy'. Life cannot be destroyed: energy itself is indestructible. Its apparent destruction is mere transmutation.

Body and life are themselves tools in the hands of the soul which is of the nature of pure consciousness. Body is inert. Life is blind energy. It is the soul which is the conscious director within these two. There is no power greater than this, for this consciousness is all-pervading and therefore one without a second.

"This Brahman, this creator, all these gods, these five great elements, all these small creatures, and others, the seeds of creation, the egg-born, the womb-born, the sweat-born, the sprout-born, horses, cows, men, elephants, whatever else breathes and moves or flies, or is immovable – all these are guided by consciousness and are supported by consciousness. The universe has consciousness for its guide. Consciousness is the basis or stay of all. Verily, consciousness is Brahman", declares the Aitareya upaniṣad. That Brahman is the self of all.

In the words of sage Yājñavalkya of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka upaniṣad: "When the self alone is all this ..." how can it be destroyed? "It is incomprehensible, imperishable, unattached, free and not subject to pain or destruction." Hence, this soul is not physical or psychological – not a concept or an entity totally independent of other entities. Though incomprehensible, it is 'realisable'. It is realised to be one in all.

- ❖svadharmam api cā 'vekṣya na vikāṃpitum arhasi
dharmyād dhi yuddhāc chreyo 'nyat kṣatriyasya na vidyate
- ❖yadṛcchayā co 'papannaṃ svargadvāram apāvṛtaṃ
sukhinaḥ kṣatriyāḥ pārtha labhante yuddham īdṛśaṃ
- ❖atha cet tvaṃ imaṃ dharmyaṃ saṃgrāmaṃ na kariṣyasi
tataḥ svadharmam kīrtiṃ ca hitvā pāpam avāpsyasi

Further, having regard to thy duty, thou shouldst not waver. For, there is nothing higher for a kṣatriyā than a righteous war.

Happy are the kṣatriyā, O Arjuna, who are called upon to fight in such a battle that comes of itself as an open door to heaven.

But, if thou wilt not fight this righteous war, then, having abandoned thine own duty and fame, thou shalt incur sin.

Society cannot be conducted nor can man live on transcendental knowledge alone! A synthesis of high ideals and practical common sense is essential, this is achieved in our smṛtī or dharma śāstrā which are codes of morality and which, therefore, recognise the existence (relative and fleeting) of phenomena.

As we shall see, the Bhagavad Gītā emphasises one's adherence to one's own dharma at all costs.

'Righteous war' was fought only in the days prior to the discovery of the aeroplane and gun-powder. Now, no war – hot, cold or lukewarm – is righteous because there is no battlefield and there is indiscriminate destruction of all everywhere, without any restraint by proper rules of conduct. Innocent children are killed. Non-combatants and people who have no idea what the war is about are killed. In the present context, all wars should be banished – hot war with guns and bombs, cold war in the field of propaganda and commerce, and lukewarm war over a conference table.

Though the philosophy of the indestructibility of the self could be applied to both commandments 'fight' and 'do not fight', it is the dharma śāstra or secular duty that gives it the right direction.

❖ akīrtiṁ cā 'pi bhūtāni kathayiṣyanti te 'vyayāṁ
 sambhāvitasya cā 'kīrtir maraṇād atiricyate
 ❖ bhayād raṇād uparataṁ māṁsyante tvāṁ mahārathāḥ
 yeṣāṁ ca tvaṁ bahumato bhūtvā yāsyasi lāghavaṁ
 ❖ avācyavādāṁś ca bahūn vadiṣyanti tavā 'hitāḥ
 nindantas tava sāmartyaṁ tato duḥkhataraṁ nu kiṁ

People, too, will recount the everlasting dishonour. And, to one who has been honoured, dishonour is worse than death.

The great heroes will think that thou hast withdrawn from the battle through fear. And, thou wilt be lightly held by them who have thought much of thee.

The enemies also, disputing thy power, will speak many abusive words. What is more painful than this?

A wise man does not **seek** honour, knowing that its loss is worse than death.

When Kṛṣṇa insists on equanimity in honour and dishonour (XII:19), why does he say here that dishonour is worse than death to a kṣatriya? We should not confuse the two. They belong to two different aspects of our life. Discipline has two aspects – self-discipline and social discipline. A wise man does not sacrifice one for the other. For instance, if a taxi-driver speaks disrespectfully to a judge on the seashore, the latter puts up with this personal effrontery as a matter of self-discipline. But the same judge should charge even a minister with contempt of court if the latter said anything derogatory of the judge in his official capacity.

Social discipline, on the other hand, should not lead you to take upon yourself the burden of reforming society and maintaining what you consider to be law and order in the whole world. Then you might lose sight of self-discipline. An undisciplined man cannot promote social discipline, either.

This is an extremely delicate manoeuvre, more difficult than tight-rope walking!

❖hato vā prāpsyasi svargaṁ jtvā vā bhokṣyase mahīm
 tasmād uttiṣṭha kaunteya yuddhāya kṛtaniścayaḥ
 ❖sukhaduḥkhe same kṛtvā lābhālābhau jayājayau
 tato yuddhāya yujyasva nai 'vaṁ pāpam avāpsyasi

Slain, thou wilt obtain heaven; victorious, thou wilt enjoy the earth.
 Therefore, stand up, O Arjuna, resolved to fight.

Having made pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat the
 same, engage thou in battle for the sake of battle. Thus thou shalt not incur
 sin.

Here is a clever argument based on the highest wisdom! In karma yoga, the action itself is the goal and its performance its sufficient reward. Hence, whatever happens in consequence is joyously welcomed. Duty-consciousness at once lifts one's mind above the pairs of opposites given here by Kṛṣṇa.

Pain and pleasure, etc., are mental modifications brought about by the contact or identification of the soul (puruṣa) and the world (prakṛti) – (XIII:20).

But here, what we need bear in mind is the central fact that we are prevented from doing our duty in this world by perverted notions of pain and pleasure, gain and loss, and so on. Instinctively we avoid pain and we refuse to do that which (we fear) might cause pain or loss to us, even if that is our sacred duty. Our own intellect now comes to the aid of this behaviour, and we weave very clever arguments to justify our action and make it appear righteous. This is precisely where man with his intelligence can be worse than beast which is totally instinctual in its behaviour.

Equanimity and a balanced mind which regards pain and pleasure alike are the indispensable prerequisites to the performance of one's own dharma and, hence, to the attainment of salvation.

❖eṣā te 'bhihitā sāṅkhye buddhir yoge tv imāṁ śṛṇu
 buddhyā yukto yayā pārtha karmabandhaṁ prahāsyasi
 ❖ne 'hā 'bhikramaṇāśo 'sti pratyavāyo na vidyate
 svalpam apy asya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt

This which has been taught to thee, is wisdom (buddhi) concerning sāṅkhya. Now listen to wisdom concerning yoga, endowed with which, O Arjuna, thou shalt cast off the bonds of action.

In this there is no loss of effort, nor is there any harm. Even a little of this knowledge protects one from great fear.

There is a vital synthesis here. It is between action and knowledge. Philosophy carried in the brain is an intellectual burden. Life or action not guided by philosophy (in the sense of wisdom) or an altruistic outlook (which implies an unceasing investigation into truth) is blind. As Socrates said: "The unexamined life is not worth living."

We should learn to 'be good' and 'do good'. The welfare of society depends upon our good actions – so we should 'do good'. Society does not bother even if our motive is bad and attitude commonplace. But our own good and our salvation depend upon our inner motives and attitude. Therefore, we should be good. Knowledge and action must be integrated. Learning and life must blend.

The word 'yoga' introduced here has a variety of meanings, as we shall see in due course. Yoga means 'union' or 'integration'. Roughly: 'integration of man and the transcendent being' is sāṅkhya or inward knowledge, and 'integration of man and the immanent Godhead, the universe' is buddhi yoga.

When we take this path of yoga, we are on the right road to salvation. Every step takes us nearer the goal and thus there is no loss of effort at all here. The knowledge and confidence that we are on the right path itself frees us from all fear. The very movement of investigation saves us from sorrow and hence fear. Fear arises only in the darkness known as ignorance.

❖vyavasāyātmikā buddhir eke 'ha kurunandana
 bahuśākhā hy anantās ca buddhaya 'vyavasāyinām

Here, O Arjuna, there is but one-pointed determination. Many-branched and endless are the thoughts of the irresolute.

Having taken this path, one must not waver or stray into the by-lanes. 'Vyavasāya' is a word commonly used to mean 'agriculture' too. If a man wants to cultivate a piece of land, he should apply himself with one-pointedness to his task. If he tills the soil and then changes his mind, or if he sows the seed and neglects the farm on account of other interests, he will not reap a rich harvest.

'Yoga' is self-culture and is governed by the same laws as agriculture. Here they are in brief:

1. We burn the bush. We remove the evil qualities in our nature.
2. We plough the ground. We resort to several yoga practices in order to prepare the ground. We 'turn' the soil, bringing the hidden part to light: the dark, hidden evils must be brought to light and thus removed.
3. We sow the seed. We resort to the guru who sows the spiritual seed in the form of a mantra and also of spiritual knowledge.
4. We water the field. We vitalise the mantra by faithful repetition and by meditation on its significance, and the instructions of the guru by augmenting our faith in and devotion to him.
5. As the young sprouts come up, we carefully guard them against weeds, animals and thieves. As we progress on the path of yoga, we guard our faith and devotion against evil activities and evil company, by ever-alert watchfulness.

Such one-pointed attention ultimately yields us the rich harvest of spiritual experiences and self-realisation. Such one-pointedness is brahmacharya.

- ❖ yām imām puṣpitām vācam pravadanty avipaścitaḥ
vedavādaratāḥ pārtha nā 'nyad asti 'ti vādinaḥ
- ❖ kāmātmānaḥ svargaparā janmakarmaphalapradām
kriyāviśeṣabahulām bhogaiśvaryagatiṁ prati
- ❖ bhogaiśvaryaprasaktānām tayā 'pahṛtacetasām
vyavasāyātmikā buddhiḥ samādhau na vidhīyate

Flowery speech is uttered by the unwise, taking pleasure in the eulogising words of the vedā, O Arjuna, saying: "There is nothing else."

Full of desires, having heaven as their goal, they utter speech which promises birth as the reward of actions, and prescribe various specific actions for the attainment of pleasure and power.

For those who are attached to pleasure and power, whose minds are drawn away by such teaching, that determinate reason is not formed which is steadily bent on meditation and samādhī.

'Veda' means 'knowledge'. The vedā prescribe certain actions calculated to lead us to heaven. In modern parlance, even 'science' can be included here. Does not science promise to bring heaven on to earth? All these may be noble professions. But an element of our personality which neither science nor ritualistic religion is able to keep in check, destroys what they build. That is desire which is the cause of sorrow. We do not want to bring heaven to earth nor do we want to go to a heaven from here. We should liberate ourselves from sorrow inherent in birth and death.

Kṛṣṇa has given a clear psychological picture of our life here. We are all goaded in our activity only by these two: lust for pleasure and lust for power. Everyone wants to become Īśvara or God (as the word aiśvaryaprasakta in verse forty-four implies), even with powers to create (e.g., the scientist who wants to create the living cell), to protect (every father feels he is protecting the family) and to destroy. Though it is not openly admitted for fear of blasphemy, such desire is there in our hearts. Man has intelligence and also free-will. If the former is overwhelmed by desire, he is left with mere free-will goaded by base instincts. When lust usurps the throne and dethrones wisdom, free-will follows. Yoga is beyond the reach of such a one.

❖traiguṇyaviṣayā vedā nistraiguṇyo bhavā 'rjuna
 nirdvandvo nityasattvastho niryogakṣema ātmavān
 ❖yāvān artha udapāne sarvataḥ samplutodake
 tāvān sarveṣu vedeṣu brāhmaṇasya vijānataḥ

The vedā deal with the three attributes of nature. Be thou above these three attributes, O Arjuna. Free yourself from the pairs of opposites and ever remain in the quality of *sattva*, free from the thoughts of acquisition and preservation, and be established in the self.

To the brāhmaṇa who has known the self, all the vedā are of as much use as is a reservoir of water in a place where there is a flood.

These two are tricky verses! The vedā (the ancient scriptures and the modern scientific scriptures, too!) deal with the created universe. We should go beyond them, i.e., the three qualities of nature (inertia, dynamism and goodness). But, Kṛṣṇa wants us 'ever to remain in the quality of goodness'! That is: be above even that, but now, of your own choice and not out of compulsion, be good. Do not treat goodness as a passport to heaven or as a testimonial needed for a good living, or even as a sound policy, but as something you wish to be and to do, because evil is foolish and dangerous.

The second verse has a double-meaning! The universe and the scriptures dealing with it are of no use to the sage of self-realisation. Or:

Do we not find that in a place flooded by water, we cannot use it for drinking? A reservoir is still useful, and has its limited use. Even so, the sage of self-realisation would still use the vedā and modern science in their own limited spheres of utility, realising that self-realisation is infinitely superior to these. He is carefree for he has no desires. He is not anxious to acquire anything in particular nor to preserve what he has. Where is the good in clinging to passing shadows? He holds, without a sense of possession! If you abandon all care concerning *yogakṣema* (acquisition and preservation – material welfare), and if you are totally devoted to God, he takes care of you! (cf IX:22).

❖karmaṇy evā 'dhikāras te mā phaleṣu kadācana
mā karmaphalahetur bhūr mā te saṅgo 'stv akarmaṇi

Thy right is to work only, but never to its fruits. Let not the fruits of action
be thy motive, nor let thy attachment be to inaction.

This is the central teaching of the Bhagavad Gītā. Its many shades are dealt with in several other verses, but here it is good to stress a factor often ignored.

'Thy right is to work only' implies that we have a right to work and to do, a right which we should exercise. This sentence is often read with the emphasis on 'only', but every word deserves emphasis and every emphasis will reveal a new interpretation! Karma will create the necessary circumstances around us and bestow on us the rewards of our own past actions. But, in those circumstances and with those rewards, we yet enjoy the freedom to work and to do what we care to. We are not asked to surrender this right, but to exercise it and thus not to 'let thy attachment be to inaction'.

'Not to the fruits thereof' implies that there is someone else in charge of the reward – God. ('Reward' is euphemism for a 'future event'.) Leave it to him. This is not slave-mentality or fatalism. It is joyous participation in his plan. Joyous participation brushes aside ideas like: 'Is God a capricious being who will visit us with pain though we do everything selflessly?' The joy of doing what we can and should is itself the greatest and immediate reward. On the contrary, it is the man of hope who always suffers, even from the fear of the hope not being capable of realisation!

"I do not long even for the fruits of dharma is my nature. He who wants to milk the cow of dharma for his own pleasure, does not get it!"—Yudhiṣṭhira, in the Mahābhārata.

❖yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi saṅgaṁ tyaktvā dhanamjaya
siddhyasiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā samatvaṁ yoga ucyate

Perform action, O Arjuna, being steadfast in yoga, abandoning attachment and remaining balanced in success and failure. Evenness of mind is called yoga.

Yoga is ‘union’. We should be in union with God. That is to be steadfast in yoga. It is not possible if we have attachment to ‘the world’ which includes the little self, its actions and motives. A simultaneous achievement of this two-fold yoga is conducive to a balanced state of mind; in Gurudev’s words, it is “Detach the mind from the world and attach it to the Lord.”

Man, in his eagerness for the desired results of actions, is intensely attached to the actions themselves. ‘I do’ – and why? Because ‘I expect this to happen’. If this happens, it is success and ‘I am happy’. If that happens, it is failure and ‘I am unhappy’. Even if it is success and even if I am happy for the moment, it is in the shadow of a terribly oppressive fear that it may not last; and the success is eclipsed by fear of loss! Hence, man grieves all the time – in success and in failure. To the truly wise man, therefore, everyone in the world is in misery; the only difference is of degree.

Happy is the man who has a balanced mind; balanced in success and failure. To him success is not success: it is duty discharged. To him failure is not failure: for even that is duty discharged. He has done what had to be done – the appropriate action – in the right spirit. That is one’s duty. Duty discharged is success. Therefore, in a way, it is perennial success, though that success does not belong to him, but to the Lord with whom he is united. God is the master: for his is ‘the kingdom, and the power and the glory for ever and ever’. Man shares them, for he is a cell in the great body of God, but if he is not in tune with God’s will, he degenerates and dies.

❖dūreṇa hy avaram̐ karma buddhiyogād dhanam̐jaya
 buddhau śaraṇam anviccha kṛpaṇāḥ phalahetavaḥ
 ❖buddhiyukto jahātī 'ha ubhe sukṛtaduṣkṛte
 tasmād yogāya yujyasva yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam̐

Far lower than the yoga of wisdom (buddhi yoga) is action, O Arjuna. Seek thou refuge in wisdom. Wretched are they whose motive is the reward.

Endowed with wisdom (evenness of mind), one casts off in this life both good and evil deeds. Therefore, devote thyself to yoga. Yoga is skill in action.

Mere action, however philanthropic or humanitarian, is but labour! Even a mule may convey great learning by carrying a huge load of the best literature; but no one will confer a doctorate on it!

The word 'refuge' is important. Before performing any action, look to buddhi for orders. This buddhi should be 'attached or united' to God. This is buddhi yoga. This is 'skill in action', another characteristic of yoga.

History extols the great deeds of men of extraordinary skill who have shaped nations. History is concerned with social values, not with inner wisdom. But our scriptures (which are also historical documents) exalt only men of wisdom who excelled in buddhi yoga and who were, therefore, in tune with God. Our scriptures, again, abound in instances where the material part of an action was insignificant but the spiritual content was great: the spirit is vital. When thousands of tons of earth are crushed, you get a small but most precious diamond.

The yogi goes beyond good and evil deeds. Is this a licence? No. Ask yourself: "Am I a yogi? Am I in constant and conscious communion with God?" If you are, you will never indulge in evil action. **All** your actions will be the manifestation of God's will. That is true skill in action: to do...to put your whole heart and soul into the doing itself...yet, to be free from selfish motive...to do one's duty knowing it is the will of God.

❖karmajaṁ buddhiyuktā hi phalaṁ tyaktvā maṇiṣiṇaḥ
janmabandhavinirmuktāḥ padaṁ gacchanty anāmayam

The wise, possessed of knowledge, having abandoned the fruits of their actions and being freed from the fetters of birth, go to the place which is beyond all evil.

In this and the last few verses has been compressed food for years of contemplation. Yoga is balanced state of mind; yoga is skill in action; yoga is renunciation of the fruits of action; yoga is uniting the buddhi with God. A one-sided approach lands a pseudo-yogi in a ditch. To justify his failure in the daily battle of life, he invents a fictitious line of demarcation between mundane life and divine life! Kṛṣṇa's promise is not of a distant paradise to be reached through vales of tears, but freedom from grief here and now.

The yogi must be discriminative and wise. He must be calm and clever. He must be desireless and dexterous. He must be selfless and sensible. He must be a practical idealist! He must be a blend of the best of both the worlds! For it is the omniscient, omnipotent God whose will works through him; and even as every cell in our body shares the life of the whole body, the little finite man lives in tune with the infinite, happy and blissful here, now and forever.

The fetters were forged by ignorance. Buddhi yoga loosens them. The free yogi soars into the region of eternal light. Evil, pain, grief, delusion and all the negative fancies of his world-dreaming life disappear. To the enlightened, there is no evil; to even the smallest candle there is no darkness. The enlightened one is totally free from evil in himself; and he does not see evil in others – the 'others' are his own self! He is no longer bound by birth, even if he, to fulfil the Lord's mission, is reborn here. He is never tainted by sin nor is he harassed by rain; they do not exist for him. He is a step higher than the yogi mentioned under verse sixteen.

❖ yadā te mohakalilam buddhir vyatitariṣyati
 tadā gantāsi nirvedaṁ śrotavyasya śrutasya ca
 ❖ śrutivipratipannā te yadā sthāsyati niścalā
 samādhāv acalā buddhis tadā yogam avāpsyasi

When thy intellect crosses beyond the mire of delusion, then thou shalt attain to indifference as to what has been heard and what has yet to be heard.

When thy intellect, perplexed by what thou hast heard, shall stand immovable and steady in the self, then thou shalt attain self-realisation.

The mind is filled with wrong thought-forms – the traditions, dogmas, preconceived ideas, prejudices – all from the dead past. We have dead, crystallised and fossilised ideas of good and evil. We want to do what is regarded as good, at least to win the favour of society! Completely unselfish, desireless or egoless spontaneous action is, therefore, meaningless to us!

This delusion will not disappear when we utter a magic formula. We hear the truth from the great ones, and then hear it again and again. (Reading is a form of hearing through the eyes!) As truth slowly sinks in, delusion gets shaken.

But what is heard does not produce yoga any more than removing the bandage from your eyes creates the sun in the sky! As the Zen Buddhists, in particular, believe: truth shines as a flash of lightning of its own accord, not in response to any action on our part. When the mind is 'shocked' by the understanding that all the thoughts entertained so far were false and others which may arise now and later are equally false, it is perplexed and becomes still. That stillness is *samādhī*. That is yoga. There is no more need to hear.

The young girl buys a number of books on obstetrics. She has read a few. A few are still on the shelf. In the meantime, she has a baby. She **knows** now. There is no need to read those books!

arjuna uvāca
 ❖sthitaprajñasya kā bhāṣā samādhisthasya keśava
 sthitadhīḥ kiṁ prabhāṣeta kiṁ āsīta vrajeta kiṁ

Arjuna said: What, O Kṛṣṇa, is the description of him who has steady wisdom and is merged in the super-conscious state? How does one of steady wisdom speak, how does he sit, how does he walk?

The state of unruffled wisdom or cosmic consciousness is within the apprehension of neither thought nor speech. One cannot grasp it by thought nor can it be described in words. Teaching or instruction necessarily involves description. If that is ruled out, how is anyone even to aspire to cosmic consciousness?

Hence, our great scriptures are replete with stories illustrative of the ideal man. For instance, even the simple virtue of ‘endurance’ can be misunderstood to suggest impotent submission. What is the difference between enlightened surrender and helpless slave-mentality? Outwardly both of them might look similar. To bring out the inward distinction, we have the stories of the trials and tribulations which the Pāṇḍavā had to endure.

In reply to Arjuna’s query, Kṛṣṇa gives the vital characteristics of a sage: they are illustrated in great detail in the lives of Rṣabha, Jada Bhārata, and devotees like Prahlāda and Sudama. It is from their personal example that we derive direct inspiration. They can (and should) only inspire (breathe into) us. Having received the breath of religious life, we should live it and not even try to compare ourselves with or blindly copy them.

Study of the lives of great saints is the greatest spiritual tonic or food, which no yoga aspirant can afford to neglect. Spiritual truths live in them. Studying their lives and studying scriptures bear the same relation as eating sugar and eating paper with the word ‘sugar’ written on it – without, of course, discounting the value of scriptural study, which has its own place of secondary importance in the aspirant’s life.

śrībhagavān uvāca

❖ prajahāti yadā kāmān sarvān pārtha manogatān
ātmany evā 'tmanā tuṣṭaḥ sthitaprajñas tado 'cyate

The blessed Lord said: When a man completely casts off, O Arjuna, all the desires of the mind, and when his self is satisfied in the self, then is he said to be one of steady wisdom.

To the modern man, thoroughly prejudiced by the psychologist's emphatic declarations that an action invariably springs from a desire (almost always selfish) and a personal motive, the Gītā-ideal is incomprehensible. The biologist, in his study of the behaviour of an individual cell, often forgets that it is governed by the over-all life of the whole organism. It is the life and activity of the total organism that motivate the life and activity of the single cell. Man is part of a whole. Cosmic consciousness expresses itself in cosmic life. Man himself is a cell in the body of God. When personal and selfish desires pull him in a direction away from that of the divine will, he experiences pain. If he lives in tune with the divine will, he is free from pain and he enjoys a sense of fulfilment, since he consciously desires the divine will and is thus saved from frustration which would be inevitable if he desired the contrary.

Desirelessness or indifference to the result of action should not make us callous. Often people cover up their inefficiency with 'See, I am not bothered about the outcome'. If you did not do it well, then you deserve nothing but failure! Only if you did your best, and did your duty well, and then remained unconcerned about the result, have you understood the spirit of the Gītā. Surely one should learn to distinguish between 'natural desires or urges' like hunger, and 'desires of the mind' like craving for chocolate. When the 'desires of the mind' are cast off and the mind is relieved of selfish motives and desires, we joyously participate in the divine will, and, therefore, in supreme bliss or cosmic consciousness.

❖duḥkheṣv anudvignamanāḥ sukheṣu vigataspr̥haḥ
vītarāgabhayakrodhaḥ sthitadhīr munir ucyate

He whose mind is not shaken by adversity, who does not hanker after pleasures, and who is free from attachment, fear and anger, is called a sage of steady wisdom.

This is a vital teaching of the Gītā, repeated by the Lord over and over for emphasis and clearer understanding. The yogi should greet pleasure and pain, prosperity and adversity and such pairs of inseparable (or complementary) opposites with unshakable equanimity. Obviously, he, too, becomes their target in due time, and he, too, is human enough to know what is what!

He should also be free from ‘attachment, fear and anger’. Rāga is inordinate liking. Bhaya is fear. Krodha is anger. These three are relative and depend entirely on our mental attitude or conditioning. The ‘object’ does not demand attachment, evoke fear or rouse us to anger. But our attitude generates these emotions.

Our attitude is the product of the sum-total of our tendencies or the past impressions left in our mind by our own past actions and experiences. All people are not afraid of rats nor does everyone feel attracted by sweetmeats! The tendencies are different. However, these tendencies can be altered, slowly but steadily and surely. That is the purpose of yoga. We do not readily see the hidden springs of these tendencies in the subconscious. We are aware only of their peripheral manifestation in the conscious mind. When, through meditation, we quieten the conscious mind, the subconscious sources will be revealed.

First sublimate these emotions. Be attached to God and a holy life, fear sinfulness, and be ‘angry’ with the veil of ignorance that hides the self. When thus the sensual tendencies are crushed, even these sublimated emotions will be merged in their own goal, which is God-realisation. We shall then shine as sthitaprajñā, sages of steady wisdom.

❖ yaḥ sarvatrā 'nabhisnehas tat-tat prāpya śubhāśubham
nā 'bhinandati na dveṣṭi tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā

He who is everywhere without attachment, who neither rejoices nor despises on meeting with anything – good or bad, his wisdom is established.

The foremost principle to be grasped in dealing with these pairs of complementary opposites is that they are vital to all growth. Heat and cold, rain and sun, night and day are necessary for plant growth, and for the growth of our vital 'vegetable' nature. Pleasure and pain, success and failure, honour and dishonour, are necessary for the growth of our 'mental' nature, the psychological aspect which should thus be purified of its dross and cleared of misunderstanding to arrive at the saner stability of mental equilibrium. Good and evil are necessary in the same way in order to raise us above them!

It is only because we have a much too narrow vision which prevents us from seeing life as a whole, that we seek and cling to what we regard as pleasant and fight to get away from what we come to feel as unpleasant. If we rouse our wisdom and raise ourselves from the purely earth-earthly life, we shall, from the lofty heights of yoga, enjoy the enthralling vision of the **whole** life, and perceive the wondrous pattern of these opposites ironically blending to create divine life. The pairs of opposites will lose their dreadful significance and will reveal their true nature as essential factors for our spiritual growth. The seed destroys itself to create the plant. The plant sacrifices itself to feed man. Man voluntarily sacrifices his pleasure to promote others' welfare. The whole universe is constantly subjecting itself to this endless alternation of opposites in order that the soul may be liberated from their thralldom. He who sees thus is a sage of steady wisdom. Happiness seeks him unsought: happiness, when sought, is a worthless prize – for it is its own price. Steady wisdom pursues its own source – the self, eternal, infinite fountain of bliss.

❖yadā saṁharate cā 'yaṁ kūṛmo 'ṅgānī 'va sarvaśaḥ
indriyāṇī 'ndriyārthebhyas tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā

When, like the tortoise which withdraws its limbs on all sides, he withdraws his senses from the sense-objects, then his wisdom becomes steady.

This is a vital yoga practice which should be applied to our daily life. The tortoise is a slow-moving animal which is therefore most vulnerable to enemy attack. Yet God's wisdom has provided it with natural protective armour.

Our spiritual progress or evolution is also very slow. All our life, all the way to spiritual perfection, we are extremely vulnerable to adverse influences. Unless we provide ourselves with a spiritual armour, we shall not reach the goal!

Our Master used to stress our spiritual need to have a background of thought which is our spiritual shell into which we can withdraw our limbs (the senses and the mind) whenever they are threatened by temptation or 'sneha'. (This word 'sneha' which usually means friendship or attachment, also means glue!) Before we get stuck in the world, we should withdraw our free 'limbs' into this 'shell,' into this background of thought.

The best way to build this shell is thus: have a **mantra** (a name of God) and a mental image of God. Repeat this **mantra** constantly and also visualise the image of God as much as you can. This must be done specially and intensely in the morning and at bedtime. The meditation-current must be generated then; the armour must be 'built inside' then. Even without any provocation, we should withdraw the mind into that shell whenever the mind is not actually occupied in essential activity so that the mind is never idle and is therefore not vulnerable. Especially when we are subject to temptation, we should immediately and intensely repeat the **mantra** and contemplate on God so that the mind is protected by the spiritual armour – the background of thought.

❖viṣayā vinivartante nirāhāṣya dehinaḥ
rasavarjaṁ raso 'py asya paraṁ dr̥ṣṭvā nivartate

The objects of the senses turn away from the abstinent man, leaving the longing behind: but this longing also turns away on seeing the supreme.

Which shall we restrain first – the mind or the senses? If we starve the senses, they temporarily lose their keenness for sense-enjoyments. But the complacency is deceptive and often dangerous; for the taste is still lurking unperceived in the mind! Unless the mind is also controlled, we are not out of the woods. But the mind cannot be controlled unless and until the senses are under control! The two must go hand in hand for success to be achieved.

Cravings, desires, hatred, fear, anger, etc., are all deep-rooted habits formed in the citta or the subconscious mind. This throws up ripples (vṛttī) which manifest on the surface as thoughts and emotions. When the vṛttī arises, we should endeavour not to act upon it but to let it drop back into the citta itself. At the same time, we should discover and deal with the real cause.

Cravings give birth to evil actions. But the craving (and the wrong mental attitude to life) itself springs from distorted exaggerated values of worldly objects and enjoyments. Let us never forget that neither indulgence nor rejection can help us in getting complete mastery over the mind; the mind will run after only that which it has been taught to value. Hence Kṛṣṇa asks us to become 'mat-parah' (that is, we should regard God as the only stable value in our life, worth seeking). When God is seen thus, even roots of cravings die. The world and its pleasures will then lose the glamour that tempts the worldly man and repels the ascetic. They will drop away as valueless factors in the life of a sage of steady wisdom. The mind and even the senses will seek only God and rest in him. It is then that one becomes a true devotee, directing the functions of all his senses and mind towards the realisation of God's indwelling omnipresence. It is then that daily life becomes divine life.

❖yatato hy api kaunteya puruṣasya vipaścitah
 indriyāṇi pramāthīni haranti prasabham manah
 ❖tāni sarvāṇi samyamya yukta āsīta matparaḥ
 vaśe hi yasye 'ndriyāṇi tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā

The turbulent senses, O Arjuna, violently carry away the mind of a wise man though he be striving to control them.

Having restrained them all, he should sit steadfast, intent on me. His wisdom is steady whose senses are under control.

The senses are powerful, too! The wise spiritual aspirant can never ignore this in the belief that since they depend upon the mind for their functioning, all that he has to do is to sit and brood over the methods of controlling the mind!

The very fact that the senses still function is proof that the mind is 'leaking' through them. As long as we are alive, the senses will continue to function in however feeble and restrained a manner. A small hole in the side of a very big dam can break the whole dam, however strong it is. Only when attachment to the body (or the false notion 'I am this body') is completely removed can we 'seal' the inner holes of the senses. Then the senses will not react in the ordinary way to worldly impressions; this is illustrated in the story in which Bhagavān Ṛṣabha Deva walked into a forest fire'.

Till that state is reached, one should practise both śama (control of mind) and dama (control of the senses). One-sided control here is no control at all. It is like filling a pot without closing the holes through which water leaks. This two-fold control will be truly effective only if our stable value is God, which is meant by 'intent on me'. When the mind is intent on God, the senses function only by past momentum or according to God's will and their pleasure-seeking impetus is cut off. Our wisdom is rooted firmly in God, our stable value.

❖dhyāyato viṣayān puṁsaḥ saṅgas teṣū 'pajāyate
 saṅgāt saṁjāyate kāmaḥ kāmāt krodho 'bhijāyate
 ❖krodhād bhavati saṁmohaḥ saṁmohāt smṛtīvibhramaḥ
 smṛtibhramśād buddhināśo buddhināśāt praṇāśyati

When a man thinks of the objects, attachment for them arises. From attachment desire is born. From desire anger arises. From anger comes delusion. From delusion loss of memory. From loss of memory the destruction of discrimination. From destruction of discrimination, he perishes.

This is somewhat parallel in construction to Arjuna's words in Chapter I, verses 40-42. What are the 'steps to destruction' (anartha-parampara)? Arjuna had traced it from war to the destruction of traditional religion. Here, lord Kṛṣṇa points out that the trigger of self-destruction is within oneself. It is the very act of thinking! Self-willed and desire-motivated thinking leads man away from his own self. Going away from his own centre, the self, he roams on the periphery of worldly life, and, like a rudderless ship on the stormy uncharted sea, wanders aimlessly, helplessly and hopelessly, till he 'destroys himself'. What can be more self-destructive than to miss the goal of human life, which is self-realisation or to be established in the self?

'Dhyāna' or contemplation is the channel by which the mind goes towards construction (integration or self-realisation) or destruction. When it thinks of the worldly objects, it takes the path to destruction. This thinking is an important idea. It can be positive or negative. The man who dislikes wine is thinking about it as much as the man who likes it! Failure to appreciate this thwarts the well-intentioned efforts of ascetics. Thought itself must be dropped, not by the suppression of thought – which is done by another thought – but by becoming aware of its root and source, which is the 'I' thought! The self is right 'next' to this. Enquiring into the self or God is meditation. 'Meditation' must be of God and this is possible if our stable value is God and only God, which implies the dropping away of every conditioning – for God is the unconditioned.

❖rāgadveṣaviyuktais tu viṣayān indriyaiś caran
 ātmavaśyair vidheyātmā prasādam adhigacchati
 ❖prasāde sarvaduḥkhānām hānir asyo 'pajāyate
 prasannacetaso hy āśu buddhiḥ paryavatiṣṭhate

But the self-controlled man, moving among the objects with the senses under restraint and free from attraction and repulsion, attains to peace.

In that peace all pains are destroyed: for the intellect of the tranquil-minded soon becomes steady.

This is the technique of yoga in essence. The mind and senses are controlled by the yogi. Control is not suppression, repression, ignoring evil and thinking of the opposite, or resorting to a routine method – all of which, though initially helpful and desirable, will inevitably fail. It is inner alertness. As life flows on, the yogi watches the mind and the senses constantly; the enlightened buddhi which is in constant contact with the self within watches over the mind and the senses. Desires and the latent psychological impressions which give rise to them are thus effectively monitored.

It is difficult to decide where the world is! The objects outside have no value for you if you are not conscious of them. When the mind alights on an object either directly or through resurrection of past experiences stored as memory, the object is reproduced in the mind. This causes a desire to arise, because the mind selects particular objects on account of its past tendencies or conditioning. Desire in turn gives rise to anger and one loses his temper; losing one's temper means losing the temper (keenness) of the intelligence within. When thus one's discrimination is lost, the ego identifies itself with the mind (and therefore the object in it) and forgets its substratum, the atman. This was described in verses 62-63 above.

The wise man's buddhi treats both the mental image and the external object, as objects of perception. He develops the witness-consciousness. Even as a spectator is unaffected by the events in the ring, the yogi is the blissful, peaceful and silent witness of this world-play.

❖nā 'sti buddhir ayuktasya na cā 'yuktasya bhāvanā
na cā 'bhāvayataḥ śāntir aśāntasya kutaḥ sukhaṁ

There is no knowledge of the self to the unsteady and to the unsteady no meditation is possible, and to the unmeditative there can be no peace and to the man who has no peace, how can there be happiness?

'Peace above all' should be the wise man's motto to guide his life. For if there is no peace of mind, one cannot have the least happiness here. Peace cannot be had in the market! One cannot strive for this peace which is disturbed by the very effort! It has to be discovered within oneself, and what is more important and difficult, too, it has to be preserved without being disturbed by anything that happens around one. This is possible only if we meditate regularly and build a 'shock-proof' protective armour around ourselves. Meditation will provide us with the background of thought (like 'I am the immortal ātman, a witness of this world-play untouched by pain') and, by diligent, effortless alertness we should maintain this background of thought. This background of thought is, however, not thought, but an awareness of truth beyond thought. It is this truth which is realised in meditation.

Peace is happiness: they are indistinguishable. Even worldly happiness is not possible if we do not enjoy peace of mind. Craving for pleasure drives pleasure or happiness away by creating a tension or stress. Satisfying this craving only temporarily allays the tension by weakening it. But soon the tension is built up again: it is pain. The peace sustained by regular meditation and coupled with the four-fold bhāvanā or sane attitude towards our neighbours (friendliness towards equals, happiness at the status of superiors, compassion for the less fortunate, and indifference towards the wicked) will ensure unperturbable inner tranquillity and, thus, supreme and perennial bliss. The awareness of truth beyond thought – the inner light – will make it impossible for any **disturbing** thought to arise, though natural life (with the natural functions, thought, word and deed) will continue to flow in inner and outer harmony.

❖ indriyāṇāṁ hi caratām yaṁ mano 'nuvidhīyate
 tad asya harati prajñām vāyur nāvam ivā 'mbhasi
 ❖ tasmād yasya mahābāho nigrhītāni sarvaśaḥ
 indriyāṇi 'ndriyārthebhyas tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā

For the mind which follows in the wake of the wandering senses, carries away one's discrimination, as the wind carries away a boat on the waters.

Therefore, O Arjuna, his knowledge is steady whose senses are completely restrained from sense-objects.

Kṛṣṇa does not encourage us to run away from the world. It is the most unintelligent way of self-restraint, even if it were possible. Nor does he favour violent suppression of the senses and the mind. His yoga is one of intelligence and common sense. Elsewhere, he reminds us that the senses will always respond to the sense-objects and foolish, violent restraint is useless.

The wise aspirant will sincerely, silently and non-violently change his mental substance and effect sublimation of his nature. The yukta or yogi views the world from his point of union with or awareness of the reality; his inner values are radically different from the values of the worldly man. He is not carried away by emotions and sentiments, desires and cravings.

It is not easy; the old morbid habits must be changed. Here, a few practical hints can be of use. Make an involuntary habit voluntary. Then substitute a new mental response to external stimuli for the old response. Start the new habit with the greatest possible enthusiasm. Avoid slipping into the old habit. Exercise the new habit consciously and voluntarily as often as possible. In this process, you will come face to face with the conditioning which sustained the old habits. They will drop away, unwanted. The new, healthy habits will become effortless. You will go beyond all conditioning and be established in the wisdom of God.

❖yā niśā sarvabhūtānām tasyām jāgati saṁyamī
yasyām jāgrati bhūtāni sā niśā paśyato muneḥ

That state which is night to all beings, to the self-controlled man is wakefulness; when all beings are awake, that is night for the sage who sees.

The worldly man is ignorant. The sage ‘does not understand’ how the worldly man finds his pleasure in the objects of the world, in spite of the fact that the daily deep sleep experience teaches him that all happiness is within and life teaches him that pleasure is inseparable from pain.

The worldly man is ignorant of the path that leads him to bliss of the self. The sage turns a blind eye on worldly pleasures which do not attract him. For him they are like an object lying in a dark chamber. At night one who is in a brightly illumined room sees only darkness outside, even if there is moonlight; in the divine light of his self-realisation, the sage sees the world as a pale and misty illusion.

Tamas or darkness or ignorance is exceedingly difficult to remove. Illusion dies hard. It is possible to remove the pain in an aching hand; but sometimes there is pain ‘in’ an amputated hand – the hand that is not there or the phantom limb! This pain is extremely difficult to cure.

The worldly man has no idea at all of the inner world of the qualities of nature, the senses, the mind, the buddhi, etc. He is completely at the mercy of nature which, in his case, is base nature, the large residue of past incarnations. The sage is aware of this inner world and is also aware that the outer world is part of the body of God. The earth disappears from his view; the whole space looks blue – the colour of the body of God! A word of caution: there is no use in attempting to gain this vision without practising self-control. This vision is not imagination nor is it psychedelic experience. It is the vision of the unconditioned when all conditioning has dropped away.

❖ āpūryamāṇām acalapratiṣṭhaṁ
 samudram āpaḥ praviśanti yadvat
 tadvat kāmā yaṁ praviśanti sarve
 sa śāntim āpnoti na kāmakāmī

He attains peace into whom all desires enter as waters enter the ocean which, filled from all sides, remains unmoved; but not the man who is full of desires.

The mind which runs outside, carried away by the senses is full of evil qualities, the chief among which is ceaseless and insatiable desire, born of *rajas* and *tamas*. The mind that is controlled by *buddhi* is pure. The pure mind is peaceful. Desirelessness is peace.

Kṛṣṇa gives us a beautiful picture vividly illustrating this wonderful truth. Water rises from the ocean as vapour. The wind drives it over the land where the clouds drift over hill-tops and the water comes down as rain. As little streams and rivers, it is then drawn down, and its fate before it reaches the plains is one of extreme uncertainty and restlessness. As it flows over the plains, it is a bit calmer, but not till it reaches the ocean does it attain that supreme peace which was its own original nature! However, the vapour that rises from the ocean regains its original state at once if it rains on the ocean itself. Ocean itself remains the same all the time.

The man who is ignorant and full of *rajas* and *tamas* is like the cloud driven over the land – restless and unhappy. Only when he reaches the plain of the guru's feet and satsang does he have a little peace. After much restlessness he attains God, the ocean. But the desireless, *sāttvika* man knows how to redirect every desire into its own source, the self. When a desire arises in the mind, let it get reabsorbed into itself, the source of bliss. The self or what-is does not undergo increase or decrease, though all life apparently emerges from it and returns to it.

❖vihāya kāmān yaḥ sarvān pumāṁś carati niḥspṛhaḥ
nirmamo nirahaṁkāraḥ sa śāntim adhigacchati

The man attains peace who, abandoning all desires moves about without longing, without the sense of mine (possessiveness) and without egoism.

The egoless man is not a lifeless stone. He lives; only he lives. He lives in God and God lives in him and works through him. His actions are not governed by profit-motive. He is not egoistic in whatever he does.

The egoless man is an inspiration to all mankind. He is God on earth. He possesses nothing, yet even an emperor is a pauper compared to him. My Master used to say: “A saṁnyāsin is one who has no bank balance of his own, but operates on the purses of all; one who has no house of his own, but dwells in the houses of all.”

The man who constantly uses the two words ‘I want...’ is a pauper even if he is an emperor; only a beggar is constantly in want. On the other hand, he who is free from the sense of want is the emperor of emperors. He is a sage, a man who has no desires, no sense of possessiveness and no egoism.

This is the greatest teaching. This is the message of Kṛṣṇa. My Master was fond of this verse. Meditate on this verse every morning. Study daily stories of great sages like Jada Bhārata who lived such a life of total renunciation, and yet moved about and even worked Jada Bhārata carried Rahugana’s palanquin!) in this world.

Desire is the cause of our woes. Desire binds us to saṁsāra. Desire keeps us away from God. Desirelessness is the threshold of liberation. You cannot even desire to be desireless. True, desire for self-realisation ends all other desires and, if it is genuine, ends itself. But, even that desire has to be abandoned. Desire for God is **desire**, ‘for God’ is an after-thought. Desire and self come to an end when their source is investigated.

❖eṣā brāhmī sthitiḥ pārtha nai 'nām prāpya vimuhyati
sthitvā 'syām antakāle 'pi brahmanirvāṇam ṛcchati

This is the seat of Brahman, O Arjuna. Attaining to this, none is deluded. Being established therein, even at the end of life, one attains to oneness with Brahman.

To be totally desireless, mine-ness-less and egoless, is to live in tune with the infinite. The ego is the limiting factor. It is this sense of separation that is subject to grief and suffering, to sin and sorrow. Since even this arises in the reality or cosmic consciousness, it is experienced as if it (the sense of separation) were real! In fact, it is a non-entity. It is but the aggregate of beginningless ignorance, conditioning and thought. In its shadow, the cell which is one with the body of God, an integral part of the body of God, forever inseparable from it, assumes individual, private, limited and egoistic existence. It enjoys for a moment now and then, and suffers over long periods. The momentary joy arises when a 'desire' subsides; sorrow when the desire prevails. It is deluded into thinking that there is diversity here, feeling that some are good and others are evil, some friends and others enemies. This delusion-created conditioning or diversity is the field for the ceaseless play of manifold evil. All sins have their origin in it; all problems arise in it; it is restlessness itself.

One who is free from this egoism is rid of this delusion and thus the offsprings of delusion. He is never deluded. He has experienced the infinite in the egoless state. No words can describe this experience; the mind is powerless to grasp it.

Here is a hint and a warning: if one is established in this cosmic consciousness, one will not be deluded. In other words, if one is inclined to be deluded, obviously one is not established in it. If, however, one falters in it (as Jada Bhārata did), even at the hour of death, one is subject to birth and death. If one is firmly established till the last hour, he attains to brāhma-nirvāṇa, final liberation.

This is the goal of life. Eternal vigilance or ceaseless awareness is the path.



OM TAT SAT

iti śrīmad bhagavad gītāsūpaniṣatsu brahma vidyāyām
yogaśāstre śrī kṛṣṇarjuna saṁvāde
sāṁkhya yogo nāma divītyo 'dhyāyaḥ

Thus in the upaniṣad of the glorious Bhagavad Gītā,
the science of the eternal, the scripture of yoga,
the dialogue between śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna,
ends the second discourse entitled:

THE SĀṆKHYA YOGA

THE MONTH OF MARCH

At this stage in the Gītā we are on the threshold of a revolutionary concept of religion. In the popular mind, throughout the ages, religion means church-going, hymn-singing, cloister-life, fasting and feasting. World and work are considered somehow opposed to reality and religion. Kṛṣṇa delivers a stunning blow to this misconception. He would prefer service without religion to religion without service!

In the life of the former there is a void, a vacuum, which will be filled sooner or later with God, whereas the latter is full ... of nonsense ... and even the corrective influence to restore the proper balance between religion and service, may have to await a complete degeneration of the pseudo-religion.

Only God can restore this balance – and he does, by periodically manifesting himself on this earth-plane. Two such manifestations rule the hearts of humanity today – Kṛṣṇa and Christ. Are they two? Do not even the names sound similar? And their lives... and their teachings...?

Christ was born in the manger; Kṛṣṇa in a prison-cell.

Both were whisked away to a far-off place immediately after nativity. The former, for fear of Herod; the latter, for fear of Kāṁsa – both of whom were the rulers of the country.

Both of them sought early in their lives to effect far-reaching reform in the modes of worship.

Both of them had control over the elements.

Both of them exalted the power of faith – Christ said faith could move mountains, and Kṛṣṇa demonstrated it by lifting a mountain with his little finger.

Both of them taught wonderful ethical and spiritual lessons. The ‘Sermon on the Mount’ and the Bhagavad Gītā contain the same gems of truth.

Both of them were glorified by some as God and ridiculed by others.

Both of them were killed.

Both of them blessed their tormentors. Christ forgave them; Kṛṣṇa insisted that his killer should go to heaven first.

Even the legend which says that lord Kṛṣṇa married over sixteen thousand wives might mean no more than this: every Christian nun is considered the bride of Christ, and it is possible that even at the time the biography was written, there were over sixteen thousand of them.

Are they two or one? Historians charm us with well-reasoned arguments to prove Christ lived two thousand years ago, and Kṛṣṇa (if at all) nearly four or five thousand years ago. In prehistoric calculations, thousands of years are but hours in contemporary history! Could it be that Christ lived a little earlier and Kṛṣṇa a little later than at present

believed? Could it be then, that we are talking about the same person, some calling him Christ and others, Kṛṣṇa?

There is a 'missing period' in the life of Christ. Some are endeavouring to fill it by surmising that he must have travelled east. It is just as possible that some of the stories connected with Kṛṣṇa's early life could also have been 'fillers' to link up over the missing period.

Any guess is hazardous. But if God reveals the truth, may it not unite us all – Hindu and Christian – in the realisation that we are all truly brothers and sisters, worshipping the same divinity?

CHAPTER III

THE YOGA OF ACTION

III

1st MARCH

1, 2

arjuna uvāca
❖ jyāyasī cet karmaṇas te matā buddhir janārdana
tat kiṁ karmaṇi ghore mām niyojayasi keśava
❖ vyāmiśreṇa 'va vākyena buddhiṁ mohayasī 'va me
tad ekaṁ vada niścītya yena śreyo 'ham āpnuyām

Arjuna said: If it be thought by thee that knowledge is superior to action, O Kṛṣṇa, why then dost thou ask me to engage in this terrible action.

With these apparently perplexing words, thou confusest, as it were, my understanding; therefore tell me that one way for certain by which I may attain bliss.

The pendulum swings from one extreme to the other – that is its nature. The subtle middle path where the opposites blend is elusive and the gross mind refuses even to believe in it or see it. We all know what is activity. We all know what is knowledge. With us knowledge is in the mind and action flows from the limbs. We do not even feel it necessary to find their point of contact, or the subtle middle path where God meets man, where the divine meets and blends into life, forming divine life. In it there is no contradiction between knowledge and action. On the contrary, knowledge is action.

In the absence of true understanding, confusion is quite natural; it is inherent in the very nature of the mind, but the vain ego always tries to blame it on others! Kṛṣṇa did not confuse Arjuna; the confusion is in Arjuna's own mind. This is extremely difficult to see in the initial stages of our spiritual progress.

The disciple (Arjuna) is yet keen on attaining śreyas (the ultimate good). Whenever we are on the horns of a dilemma (even a real one), we should look for the path that will lead us to our ultimate spiritual good, the śreya-marga. Much of our misery is due to the fact that very often we are satisfied with superficial solutions which yield immediate satisfaction, though it may be temporary and unsatisfactory in the long run. The sincere spiritual aspirant has his eyes rivetted on śreyas.

śrībhagavān uvāca

❖loke 'smin dvividhā niṣṭhā purā proktā mayā 'nagha
jñānayogena sāṅkhyānām karmayogena yoginām

The blessed Lord said: In this world there is a twofold path, as I said before, O sinless one; the path of knowledge of the sāṅkhyā and the path of action of the yogī.

This is a truly Kṛṣṇa-like statement!

There are not two paths; the path is a synthesis of the two, it is twofold! The path to God-realisation is two-fold; in fact the statement need not be restricted to refer to the path to God-realisation! In this world, the path taken by anyone and everyone is of this twofold nature! Kṛṣṇa does not exclude anyone in this world.

The sāṅkhyā or the 'philosophers' speculated about the reality. The yogī were busy living a life of service and rituals. The former did not interest themselves in living. The latter did not ensure that the service or the ritual had the light of knowledge to illumine and enliven the spirit in it. The two drifted apart; the philosopher and the yogi specialised in their own fields, and built their own empires which in course of time actually became antagonistic! If they are exclusive of each other, there is conflict and confusion, knowledge becomes hypocritical and action becomes destructive and self-aggrandising. Thus, the two which sound very healthy and wholesome, actually produce contrary results. Kṛṣṇa reconciles them. On another level, neglect of this 'wholesome' approach is fraught with danger. Modern science bears witness to this. The so-called 'true science' generates knowledge of nuclear forces and of genetic mutations. Applied technology creates dangerous weapons – for which neither accepts responsibility. A 'wholesome' (holistic) approach will bring them together – and avoid dabbling with destructive forces.

The path is twofold. The two (knowledge and action) must blend in every one of us. As we shall presently see, the one implies and includes the other: a philosopher is no philosopher if he refuses to act on his philosophy – obviously he is not sure of it! A yogi is not a yogi if he does not know what he is doing! Blind action and lame philosophy must unite to march forward to the goal of divine life. This is Kṛṣṇa's yoga – buddhi yoga.

❖na karmanām anārambhān naiṣkarmyaṁ puruṣo 'śnute
 na ca saṁnyasanāḍ eva siddhiṁ samadhigacchati
 ❖na hi kaścit kṣaṇam api jātu tiṣṭhaty akarmakṛt
 kār्याte hy avaśaḥ karma sarvaḥ prakṛtijair guṇaiḥ

Not by non-performance of actions does man reach actionlessness; nor by mere renunciation does he attain to perfection.

Verily none can ever remain for even a moment without performing action; for everyone is made to act helplessly indeed by the qualities born of nature.

The vicious circle has to be broken. It is the self-perpetuating momentum of karma. Action produces reaction and the reaction serves as action producing its own reaction. Cause gives birth to result which serves as the cause for another chain-result. It is like the seed and the plant, the egg and the hen – one leads to the other in an endless chain.

Shall we sit quietly then, and refuse to have anything to do with this? This view of actionlessness appeals to some, but not to Kṛṣṇa.

Action is threefold – thought, word and deed. Action is performed by the individual at various levels of his consciousness, on different planes of his inner being. It is ignorance to think that we live only on the periphery of our personalities. Deep within are the springs of real action. Whether they take gross, subtle or causal forms, they are actions still, enough to keep the wheel of karma in motion. For, refusal is an action, as firmly based on the false ego as the performance of action. 'Action for material achievement' and 'refusal to act believing that only thereby one can achieve salvation' are both equally deceptive mental conditioning. This conditioning is bondage – neither action nor what one believes to be inaction.

As we shall see, the whole creation is the body of God and individuals live as part of his nature. The qualities of his nature will function, independent of individual will; to try to stop this is as easy as it is to chew up the stars! Kṛṣṇa's solution to this is the yoga of the Bhagavad Gītā. It is true transcendence (naiṣkarmyaṁ) in which the ego is stripped of its mask. All action is seen to be life, and the self is realised to be divine – Divine Life.

❖karmendriyāṇi saṁyamya ya āste manasā smaran
 indriyārthān vimūḍhātmā mithyācārāḥ sa ucyate
 ❖yas tv indriyāṇi manasā niyamya 'rabhate 'rjuna
 karmendriyaiḥ karmayogam asaktaḥ sa viśiṣyate

He who, restraining the organs of action, sits thinking of the sense-objects in mind, he, of deluded understanding, is a hypocrite.

But, whosoever, controlling the senses by the mind, O Arjuna, engages himself in karma yoga with the organs of action, without attachment – he excels.

Kṛṣṇa's yoga is karma yoga or buddhi yoga; the yoga that does not discourage activity, but, on the contrary, insists on intelligent dynamism. The man who refuses do his duty vainly rebels against God's will. There is activity in his mind; if the mind is not active, he would cease to live. Even the mind's recognition of the position of one's own limbs is the result of wrong identification of the self with the body which is part of the world. Foolish suppression of mental activity will only result in an explosion which could take the form of a simple mental aberration, a criminal tendency or lunacy. What is vital is a direct perception of the conditioning which generates aspirations and aversions which in turn taint one's mental and physical activity. Such perception dispels the psychological conditioning and its offspring (the ego), and reveals the divine as the source and goal of all life.

Kṛṣṇa's ideal is one of self-controlled participation in the divine will, which is karma yoga. Control is not suppression or repression. In any field of life, suppression only means compression which, sooner or later, leads to explosion. We see this happen in the life of a man, of society, of communities and of nations. Control, on the other hand, is right expression – neither suppression nor licence. This is the middle path of the Buddha, the buddhi yoga of Kṛṣṇa, the Christian way, and the Divine Life of our Master. An excellent parallel is seen in the expression – “Mr. So-and-so has good control of the car.” He knows when to stop or to start, which way to go and at what speed. The enigma of this yoga lies in its simplicity.

❖niyataṁ kuru karma tvaṁ karma jyāyo hy akarmaṇaḥ
 śarīrayātrā 'pi ca te na prasiddhyed akarmaṇaḥ
 ❖yajñārthāt karmaṇo 'nyatra loko 'yaṁ karmabandhanaḥ
 tadārthaṁ karma kaunteya muktasaṅgaḥ samācara

Do thou perform thy duty, for action is superior to inaction. Even the maintenance of the body would not be possible for thee by inaction.

The world is bound by actions other than those performed as yajña. Do thou, therefore, perform action as sacrifice, free from attachment.

Kṛṣṇa has the divine genius of going at once to the root of the problem. What binds man to the wheel of action-reaction, or more simply, sin and suffering? Selfish desire and attachment. Removal of these two liberates us from it.

On the other hand, if we stubbornly and ignorantly refuse to take part in the world's activity, we lose the best way to understand the nature and strength of the chain that binds us. It is the ego, the 'me' It is the ego that suggests that inaction is liberation. The approval and adulation of ignorant people stiffens and strengthens the ego of the pseudo sage who has 'renounced the world'. Covering filth with a Persian carpet cannot remove it. Therefore, Kṛṣṇa advocates positive action and vigilant effort at self-purification.

We are bound to the wheel of karma by selfish desires. These must be sacrificed, and our actions should be our sacrifice at the altar of the omnipresent God. 'Ya' (that) 'jñā' (knowledge) – that action which is of knowledge and leads to knowledge. If yajña means 'animal sacrifice', the animal to be sacrificed is not outside, but within us. That animal is the personality full of selfishness, lust, hatred and egoism – in a word, 'me'. But if sacrifice means 'offering' then we should offer all our actions to God as sacrifice. If sacrifice means 'to make sacred' then everything (**all** our actions, experiences, and even the ego) should be offered to God to be made sacred. Self-sacrificing, selfless service will not bind us, but liberate us.

But even these should be performed without attachment to the actions (the feeling that we do or do not do) and their rewards.

❖sahayajñāḥ prajāḥ sṛṣtvā puro 'vāca prajāpatiḥ
 anena prasaviṣyadhvam eṣa vo 'stv iṣṭakāmadhuk
 ❖devān bhāvayatā 'nena te devā bhāvayantu vaḥ
 parasparam bhāvayantaḥ śreyaḥ param avāpsyatha

In the beginning, the Creator, having created mankind together with sacrifice, said: "By this shall ye propagate; let this be the milch cow of your desires.

"With this do ye nourish the gods and may those gods nourish you. Thus nourishing one another, ye shall attain to the highest good."

The spirit of sacrifice was created by God. It is God himself. Hence we find that the seed dies to give birth to the plant, the mother suffers birth-pangs to create new life. Metaphysically even creation is the supreme self-sacrifice of God – the one who has become many. It is this spirit of sacrifice that promotes life and well-being here.

In this sense it is not a 'slaughter of a victim' (as 'sacrifice' is translated by the dictionary) but a mystical, magical, divine transmutation of all substances and of all activities inherent in life. In this there is no loss, but fulfilment. The fulfilment of a seed growing into a tree, the fulfilment of motherhood, and the fulfilment of all life by the realisation of potential divinity. With the sacrifice of self-limitation, the self realises its oneness with the cosmic being, the drop shines as the ocean in supreme cosmic love. Thus sacrifice is pure love in which there is no sin, no sorrow.

Which gods do we nourish by sacrifice? If the above injunction is read with the commandment in the Taittirīya upaniṣad that we should treat our parents, teacher and guest as god, it is clear that the god is our neighbour in the Christian sense. In other words, we should all serve one another: and the word yajña or sacrifice reminds us that we should not have the slightest trace of selfishness. Our charitable acts should leave no egoistical trace behind, even as ghee poured into fire is totally consumed.

We make one another's life miserable here only on account of selfish desires, greed and inferior motives. When the spirit of self-sacrificing service governs the actions of man and when he learns to rejoice in the happiness of his neighbour, then we will have paradise on earth and everyone's desires will be fulfilled. This doctrine of self-sacrificing, selfless service is truly the wish-fulfilling cow.

❖ iṣṭān bhogān hi vo devā dāsyante yajñabhāvitāḥ
tair dattān apradāyai 'bhyo yo bhuñkte stena eva saḥ

The gods, nourished by the sacrifice, will give you the desired objects. So, he who enjoys the objects given by the gods without offering to them, is verily a thief.

This is a great psychological truth.

When the spirit of yajña or sacrifice rules the heart of man and becomes the content of his thoughts, words and deeds, even the gods are pleased and man obtains the desired objects. He is peaceful, happy and prosperous.

Who and where are the gods? They are the subtle forces or powers that animate the whole of creation. They have their seats in the various organs of the body, too. Thoughts and emotions have a tremendous effect on these. Anxiety grips the stomach. Anger alters the colour of the skin and the eyes. Fear chokes the throat. Thoughts are things! Good thoughts can favourably influence the gods presiding over the organs of our body. The selfless man's face is bright and cheerful. Compassion flows from his eyes. His speech is honeyed and sweet. His gait is soft. The vibrations that emanate from him are holy and beneficent. People readily pick them up and also react favourably. The selfless person is not deliberately setting an example for others to emulate – any such motivation would re-activate selfishness, however subtle it may be. But people may be inspired.

Thus the selfless man's limbs are strong and healthy. He thinks well, speaks well and acts well. He achieves the desired objective; the gods presiding over his limbs enable him to do that. The gods residing in all, and in the very atmosphere, also help him in every possible way.

The man who is selfish, who grabs, is a thief. A society composed of such people can obviously not be prosperous. Selfishness is the most deadly virus which is highly contagious. In no time one man's selfishness expands to epidemic proportions. It destroys one's vision and perverts one's intelligence. If you observe yourself and the world you live in, you can see for yourself the havoc it can cause.

❖yajñāśiṣṭāśinaḥ santo mucyante sarvakilbiṣaiḥ
 bhuñjate te tv agham pāpā ye pacanty ātmakāraṇāt

The righteous who eat the remnants of the sacrifice are freed from all sins;
 but those sinful ones who cook food only for their own sake verily eat sin.

Not the ritual called ‘yajña’, but the simple universal daily act of cooking food itself is regarded as ‘yajña’ or sacrifice here. It is symbolic and illustrative, but not descriptive and exhaustive. Even so, all our actions should be acts of self-sacrificing, selfless service – always for others, never for ourselves. We are ‘the other’ of others!

That settles once and for all this futile wrangling over ethics – what is good and what is evil? Self-sacrificing, selfless and desireless service is good; selfish action is evil. It does not matter what the action appears to be externally – an act of selfless service is good. It does not matter how grand and philanthropic it looks – a selfish action is evil.

The spirit of sacrifice was woven into the very fabric of our life, so that we were almost compelled to feed our fellow-men and animals and insects before we ate. Self-sacrifice is our religion. Charity is our supreme duty. Our prayer to the Lord is that everyone should be happy; all beings should enjoy peace, happiness and prosperity. Bali-dāna (popularly, an animal sacrifice or its symbolic equivalent) is the culminating point of yajña. According to Bhāgavatam, king Bali gave everything to the Lord and eventually offered himself too, in an act of supreme self-sacrifice. True Bali-dāna is total sacrifice of our whole being, our very soul, at the altar of God so that in the full and direct realisation that the ‘I’ is and has always been a non-entity, a shadowy dividing factor, even the thought ‘I do this’ or ‘I enjoy’ or ‘I suffer’ is no more in our heart. Charity involves sacrifice. Sacrifice leads to self-sacrifice. We are freed from sin.

❖ annād bhavanti bhūtāni parjanyaḥ annasambhavaḥ
 yajñād bhavati parjanyo yajñaḥ karmasamudbhavaḥ
 ❖ karma brahmodbhavaḥ viddhi brahmā 'kṣarasamudbhavaḥ
 tasmāt sarvagataḥ brahma nityaḥ yajñe pratiṣṭhitaḥ

From food come forth beings; from rain food is produced; from sacrifice arises rain and sacrifice is born of action.

Know thou that action comes from Brahma and Brahma comes from the imperishable. Therefore, the all-pervading Brahma ever rests in sacrifice.

Sacrifice produces rain! It is asserted by some that the smoke that rises from the sacrificial (homa) pit brings about the necessary change in the atmosphere to induce the cloud to rain.

Even subtler than this is the power of good thoughts. There is a proverb in Tamil which says that if there is one good man in the village, the entire village will be blessed with sufficient rain to ensure its prosperity. The selfish man is more concerned with destroying the prosperity of the neighbour than with building his own, for he wants to shine as a superior person, one better than the neighbour. When all are selfish, the whole atmosphere is full of vicious thought-currents; ill-will fills the whole place and the mood of destruction prevails. The very elements respond to such thought-vibrations and we have famine and pestilence.

On the other hand, if there is self-sacrificing selflessness in the heart of man, then there is prosperity. It is easy enough to see that with that selflessness in his heart, man will ever try to promote the prosperity of others. His actions will be pure and prosperity-promoting. Such pure action is divine, rooted in the imperishable, the eternal law that has created and that sustains the whole universe.

This is the law of the divine. Man should live a self-sacrificing, selfless life of service to all. Sacrifice is born of action. It is action, it is life. A life of sacrifice is therefore a full and dynamic life. Sacrifice knits knowledge and action into the fabric of divine life.

❖ evaṁ pravartitaṁ cakraṁ nā 'nuvartayati 'ha yaḥ
 aghāyur indriyārāmo moghaṁ pārtha sa jīvati

He who does not follow here the wheel thus set revolving, who is of sinful life, rejoicing in the senses, he lives in vain, O Arjuna.

The first principle of the Gītā-way of life is introduced here.

The whole of creation is constructed on the law of reciprocal self-sacrificing service. Charity characterises God's good world. Charity is not a good policy, or a privilege or even a meritorious act; it is the law of life!

Life is one and universal. It is the very nature of cosmic being – God. The recognition of this truth – that all are indivisibly though not visibly one – is love. The expression of this love is service, charity and reciprocity. Not in a condescending attitude, but... there is no choice!

Look at God's good world. Between the plant and the mineral, between the plant and the human, there is reciprocal service. What man gives out, including his out-going breath full of carbon-dioxide, is food for the plants. Whatever the plants give, including the oxygen that they 'breathe out', is food for man. One is not doing charity to the plants by breathing out carbon dioxide! One will die if one refuses to do so. Neglect of charity is starving the soul.

No tree eats its own fruit. On the other hand, trees live and propagate themselves by giving off their fruits to man. Man cultivates them, not for their sake, but for the sake of the luscious fruits! He eats them and then plants the seed, helping the plants to perpetuate themselves. Even so, charity will enable us to live well in society, grow and perpetuate the human race. He who rejoices in the pleasures of the senses, refusing to serve others, is like the tree eating its own fruits! It is sin. He destroys himself ultimately. He transgresses the law of God. He is a thief.

❖ yas tv ātmaratir eva syād ātmatrptaś ca mānavah
 ātmany eva ca saṁtuṣṭas tasya kāryaṁ na vidyate
 ❖ nai 'va tasya kṛtenā 'rtho nā 'kṛtene 'ha kaścana
 na cā 'sya sarvabhūteṣu kaścid arthavyapāśrayaḥ

But for that man who rejoices only in the self, who is satisfied with the self and who is content in the self alone, verily there is nothing to do.

For him there is no importance whatever in what is done and what is not done, nor does he depend on any being for any object.

As long as you yourself are dependent on others, so long as your happiness and well-being are dependent on the services of others, serve and be good. These two verses both have a philosophic import and offer practical advice.

Is this not a common failing of man? He expects others to serve him and work for him. He wants to enjoy all comforts himself at the expense of fellow-men. He will cheat those dependent on him, but will moan and grumble if he himself is let down. Here is Kṛṣṇa's sweet warning. As long as you expect others to serve you and to promote your prosperity, as long as your own happiness depends on what others do to you, take a deep interest in the happiness of others too. It is the re-statement of the golden rule: "Do unto others as you wish them to do unto you".

However, there is a state of being where the sage rests in the self. He is not obliged to do or not to do. But what is the self in which the sage rests? Self is awareness – the all, the indivisible – not the fragmented thought-born personality which we selfishly call the self. Self is 'the choiceless awareness' in the words of Ramana Maḥarṣi, 'witness consciousness' of Gurudev Sivananda, and 'observation without an observer' of Kṛṣṇaji. When it is veiled, another self (the ego) arises apparently, not really, and thinks (the mind) that it is dependent or independent of others. Awareness being self does not **have** a self to generate selfishness. The sage who rests in the self alone is unselfish! The entire universe is his body. He is like the sun: by his light he illumines all. He is one with all and thus does everything through everyone. Though he might apparently be inactive; yet, he does nothing, though the body and mind might be busy, for the fragmented ego has vanished with the lifted veil.

❖tasmād asaktaḥ satataṁ kāryaṁ karma samācara
asakto hy ācāraṁ karma param āpnoti pūruṣaḥ

Therefore, without attachment do thou always perform action which should be done (your duty). For, by performing action without attachment man reaches the supreme.

Kṛṣṇa is not in favour of our abandoning our 'duty'. Various expressions are used; niyataṁ karma (action in accord with the cosmic order); kāryaṁ karma (action that should be done), or sva-karma (one's natural action). And these are used as synonyms for sva-dharma (one's own duty). Duty holds society together. My duty is your privilege and vice versa. Action performed with this ideal in view is dharma. It holds people together in love and harmony.

Both selfish action and the performance of another's function (obviously taken over through selfish desire) are to be abandoned, but not one's own duty. Not even a monk should renounce his own duty; Kṛṣṇa gives a revolutionary definition even to saṁnyāsa.

Our scriptures give us several instances of yogī attaining perfection while leading their normal household lives in the right spirit, i.e. without desire and without attachment. An exaggerated value of worldly objects creates desire in the mind. This desire gives rise to attachment to the actions calculated to secure the desired object and the reward too. This attachment is the source of all sins; it itself is sin. Renunciation of attachment is the surest way to attain perfection. The world is not a hindrance. Work is not a hindrance either. But attachment is a definite hindrance on our path to perfection.

What is popularly known as 'detachment' is not the true opposite of or antidote to attachment: that is another form of attachment – attachment to self-interest, self-esteem and the adoration of one's ideology, and aversion to others. Non-attachment is the discovery of the truth concerning attachment itself. Even so with 'duty'. It is the discovery of what is 'natural' to oneself, not some injunctions and prohibitions prescribed or proscribed by others.

❖karmaṇai 'va hi saṁsiddhim āsthitā janakādayaḥ
 lokasaṁgraham evā 'pi saṁpaśyan kartum arhasi
 ❖yad-yad ācarati śreṣṭhas tat-tad eve 'taro janaḥ
 sa yat pramāṇaṁ kurute lokas tad anuvartate

Verily, Janaka and others attained perfection by action only. Even with a view to the protection of the masses thou should perform action.

Whatsoever a great man does, that other men also do. Whatever he sets up as the standard, that the world follows.

Yet another reason why one should not abandon one's duty is given here. People are fond of imitation and a sinful action is more readily copied than a virtuous one! Even a sage like king Janaka, therefore, persisted in the performance of his duties. People blindly follow their leader and if the leader is even slightly negligent in his duties, the followers totally abandon theirs!

So, then, firstly as a kind of reciprocity in return for the benefits that the yogi enjoys in this world, and secondly in order to set the right example for others to emulate, one should engage oneself in the performance of one's duty, even though he has nothing to achieve thereby. This is a double-edged sword and has to be handled wisely. If the only motivation is to be an exemplar, it might give rise to hypocrisy; but rightly understood, even an initial hypocritical example might lead to right action.

Again, the sage who has cut off all attachment and who lives in complete dissociation of even his own body, will let the body exhaust its own karma and the past momentum. He does nothing; it is the body and mind that function in the world of matter. Why will he prevent them from doing so if he is unattached to them? True, he will not supply them with fresh fuel to gain more momentum. He is unattached, desireless and egoless, but if he even forcibly restrains them, he comes into contact with them and identifies the self with them. The worldly man is a slave of the senses, the ascetic holds them back, but they are both in contact with them. The sage is not.

❖na me pārthā 'sti kartavyaṁ triṣu lokeṣu kiṁcana
 nā 'navāptam avāptavyaṁ varta eva ca karmaṇi
 ❖yadi hy ahaṁ na varteyaṁ jātu karmaṇy atandritaḥ
 mama vartmā 'nuvartante manuṣyāḥ pārtha sarvaśaḥ
 ❖utsīdeyur ime lokā na kuryāṁ karma ced ahaṁ
 saṁkarasya ca kartā syāṁ upahanyāṁ imāḥ prajāḥ

There is nothing in the three worlds, O Arjuna, that should be done by me, nor is there anything unattained that should be attained. Yet I engage myself in action.

For, should I not engage myself in action, unwearied, men would in every way follow my path, O Arjuna.

These worlds would perish if I did not perform action. I would be the author of confusion of castes and destruction of these beings.

God, when he incarnates himself here in this world, also engages himself in unwearied action. That is as it should be. Saints and sages are seen to engage themselves in unwearied action for the welfare of mankind. The unselfish man is more active than the selfish one. The former's service is spontaneous, enthusiastic and zealous, free from procrastination and postponement which characterise the half-hearted service of the calculating man of lust and greed. The unselfish man has more time and energy to work because he has no worry about profit and loss.

We have the glorious examples of saints before us, but we do not follow them. (Do we ever follow anyone's good example?) Even in their lives we try to pick out only defects as excuses for our own indulgence. We discover human weaknesses in their personalities, and we turn our blind eye on the vital spiritual truths illustrated in their lives. It is the worst tragedy. We are the real losers. The moment we realise the emptiness and the sorrowfulness of our own pleasure-seeking life, we shall desist from evil, and without seeming to and without effort, follow the example of the good.

“One should try to live for a hundred years, doing one's duty”. —Īśāvāsya upaniṣad.

❖saktāḥ karmaṇy avidvāṁso yathā kurvanti bhārata
kuryād vidvāṁs tathā 'saktaś cikīrṣur lokasaṁgrahaṁ

As the ignorant men act out of attachment to action, O Arjuna, so should the wise act without attachment, wishing the welfare of the world.

The verb is the most important word in this verse, and it is often overlooked. The tone is not optional but obligatory. The wise man is left with no choice; in fact the very validity of his wisdom would be questioned if he did not abide by the commandment contained in this verse.

What is ignorance? Identification of the self, which is but the witness consciousness, with the body and the world, which constantly change. What is wisdom? Realisation that the self is but the witness of this world-process and world-activity. The wise man will, therefore, not interfere with the course of nature, either by positively providing fuel for it by his own desires or cravings, or by negatively holding it back by refusing to let his body function as part of the world, which it is!

The world is maintained by God's energy and the world includes the wise man's physical being, too. He is part of the whole, and his egoistic withdrawal from life will confuse the minds of others on the field.

In order, therefore, to ensure the welfare of the society in which he lives and to set an example for others to follow, the wise man must do his duty in this world, and what is more important, do it as if he were as interested in the affairs of the world as the ignorant (so that the ignorant man has no excuse to avoid following the wise). The difference is not in external appearance or behaviour, but it is the wise man's inward spirit of non-attachment.

Is it possible for one to deceive oneself and others that he lives in this spirit? Surely it is. Deceiving others is waste of time. Self-deception is a misnomer – surely, the wise man is free from pretension. His wisdom is luminous enough to keep away the darkness of attachment born of ignorance.

❖na buddhibhedam janayed ajñānām karmasaṅginām
joṣayet sarvakarmāṇi vidvān yuktaḥ samācāraṇ

Let no wise man unsettle the mind of ignorant people who are attached to action; he should engage them in all actions, himself fulfilling the actions with devotion.

This is the basis and the sanction for all the different cults and religions in the world. They are all one in their aim and they lead all men to the same goal, but people differ in their temperaments. Their beliefs will be in accordance with their temperaments.

Proselytisation has always meant demoralisation. Once a man's faith is drastically disturbed, it is nearly always difficult for him to find stable ground to stand on. Once a man is told that what he and his forefathers firmly and devoutly believed is myth and nonsense, it is well-nigh impossible to make him believe entirely and wholeheartedly in what is dished out to him by the proselytiser. He may accept it as a temporary expedient, but the slightest provocation is enough to uproot the new belief!

Kṛṣṇa does not encourage even premature revelation of what he considers as the ultimate truth. Even if we find that our brothers are ignorant of it, even if we find them engaging themselves in what appears to us to be fruitless activity or misguided spiritual effort, our duty is not to shake their faith but to fulfill it. This is a more delicate operation than brain or heart surgery – neither the organ itself nor any part of the healthy tissue should be affected in the least. Extreme care is called for to ensure that the fundamental faith is not disturbed. Even harmless superstitions are allowed.

However, in God's good time, the man himself will realise the fictitiousness of false beliefs, and when he is mature and 'awake', he will drop all beliefs (cf II: 52, 53). It is then that faith arises in him. Faith is not a 'religious denomination' or 'belief' but it is the reflection of God in the heart of the godly. It is, as it were, the penultimate stage to God-realisation or self-knowledge.

- ❖ prakṛteḥ kriyamāṇāni guṇaiḥ karmāṇi sarvaśaḥ
ahamkāravimūḍhātmā kartā ham iti manyate
- ❖ tattvavit tu mahābāho guṇakarmavibhāgayoḥ
guṇā guṇeṣu vartanta iti matvā na sajjate
- ❖ prakṛter guṇasaṁmūḍhāḥ sajjante guṇakarmasu
tān akr̥tsnavido mandān kṛtsnavin na vicālayet

All actions are wrought in all cases by the qualities of nature only. He whose mind is deluded by egoism thinks “I am the doer”.

But he who knows the truth, O Arjuna, about the divisions of the qualities and their functions, knowing that the guṇā, as senses, move amidst the guṇā, as the sense-objects, is not attached.

Those deluded by the qualities of nature are attached to the functions of the qualities. The man of perfect knowledge should not unsettle the foolish one who is of imperfect knowledge.

What is nature? It is God’s nature. In accordance with God’s will, the qualities in his nature are constantly active. We are also part of his nature. We are all cells, as it were, in the cosmic body of God, but we assume to ourselves an independent personality on account of ignorance.

This individuality is a mystery. It is truly indivi-(sible)-duality. We are all truly indivisible, one in him. We are all together the body of God. To realise this is wisdom. To forget it is ignorance.

In our own body, for instance, at every moment millions of cells are performing various vital functions. They work in harmony, in accordance with the dictates of the single unified life-force that commands all of them. There is, therefore, harmony and health in the whole body. In the same way, if all of us feel and realise that we are the body of God and carry out his will, there will be peace and prosperity in this world; but the foolish ones assume false egoism and thus create disharmony and disaster.

Expressions like ‘good and evil’, ‘right and wrong’, lose their significance in this light. But the wise man will not disturb the mind of those who believe in them!

❖ mayi sarvāṇi karmāṇi saṁnyasyā 'dhyātmacetasā
nirāśīr nirmamo bhūtvā yudhyasva vigatajvaraḥ

Renouncing all actions in me, with the mind centred in the self, free from hope and egoism, and from (mental) fever, do thou fight.

The commandment to fight should not be taken literally! Arjuna was a warrior and his duty was to fight a righteous battle. In other words, it is a commandment that we should all do our duty, in the spirit of this verse.

'Renouncing all actions in me' (that is, God); the Sanskrit word is 'nyasya' which is difficult to translate. It also means 'placing all your actions in God', or in other words 'feeling that all actions are done by God'. The actions of a foolish man seem to have their roots in him, but the wise man knows that his actions spring from God.

He whose mind is wayward, swayed by the storms of desires and cravings, and whose mind is, therefore, not centred in his own self, thinks that he thinks, he sees, he works and he speaks. His actions are egoistic. He arrogates to himself the power to do, not to do and to undo, which in fact he does not possess!

His actions are naturally directed towards a selfish, base and worldly goal or hope. Hopeful of attaining the desired goal and at the same time afraid of not being able to reach it, this egoistic man is constantly torn by the two opposing forces of attraction and repulsion. This tension is referred to as mental fever here. The wise man is free from this tension or mental fever. He knows that God's will is done here; he is free from personal hopes. He is centred in the self or ātman. He is free, peaceful and blissful.

But he is not self-centred in the sense of selfish – even if that is taken to mean he is interested in doing his duty. Self is not an object. It is the universal subject. The mind does not know it. Thought...and attention...and lastly awareness seek the self, the centre, the subject. This is meditation. This is 'mind centred in the self'.

❖ ye me matam idam nityam anutiṣṭhanti mānavāḥ
 śraddhāvanto 'nasūyanto mucyante te 'pi karmabhiḥ
 ❖ ye tv etad abhyasūyanto nā 'nutiṣṭhanti me matam
 sarvajñānavimūḍhāṁś tān viddhi naṣṭān acetasaḥ

Those men who constantly practise this teaching of mine with faith and without cavilling, they too are freed from karma.

But those who carp at my teaching and do not practise it, deluded in all knowledge and devoid of discrimination, know them to be doomed to destruction.

The idea is quite clear and plain. He who practises this buddhi yoga, feeling that he is one with the entire creation, that one cosmic consciousness pervades all and in that consciousness he is one with all – is instantly freed from ignorance and from all karma which give rise to birth and death. Renunciation of egoism destroys the 'bundle of karma' (sañcita) waiting to fructify; these 'effects' of past actions, not yet ripe for fructification, are deprived of the ego-centred body on which to spend their force. Even prārabdha karma or karma which has already begun to work itself out in this birth through the present body, is deprived of its 'sting' since the yogi does not identify himself with the body and its experiences of pleasure and pain, etc. The actions that he now performs (the āgami or kriyamāṇa) are not performed by his ego; his mind is centred in God and therefore there is direct realisation that the actions spring from the divine. Hence they do not affect him in the least. He is liberated from karma (the law of action and reaction, cause and effect). When the body falls, he is totally absorbed into the infinite.

Only the faithful man will practise this but its effectiveness does not depend on faith – in the sense of belief! It is not a naive doctrine to hypnotise the gullible, but a scientific approach to divine life. Nor is there a suggestion that it is the only path! There are other means to freedom – 'they too are freed'!

Self-knowledge or self-surrender (surrender to the divine) is common to all religions. All religions encourage the seeker to surrender himself to the divine or to seek and discover that there is no self independent of the totality or God. Regardless of what the religion is called, it will lead you to this freedom.

❖sadrśam ceṣṭate svasyāḥ prakṛter jñānavān api
 prakṛtiṁ yānti bhūtāni nigrahaḥ kiṁ kariṣyati
 ❖indriyasye 'ndriasyā 'rthe rāgadveṣau vyavasthitau
 tayor na vaśam āgacchet tau hy asya paripanthinau

Even a wise man acts in accordance with his own nature; beings will follow nature, what can restraint do?

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

Your physical body (and mind) and the senses are part of the cosmic nature of God and hence not 'yours'. They function in accordance with the nature of the energy or power they possess. The eyes see illumined objects. The ears hear sounds. The tongue tastes. These things happen even in the case of the wisest of men, so long as there is life in the body. As long as the mind is linked with the body, the senses will function naturally.

There is a vibratory correlation between the senses and their particular objects. It is like wavelengths and the broadcasting system. When you tune the radio, at a particular point the receiver picks up certain wavelengths (short, medium or long) and not others. The vibratory scale of light and sight, sound and ear, smell and nose, etc., are identical, and so they mutually react. This reaction is either favourable or unfavourable, in accordance with whether the sensation is pleasant or unpleasant. Up to this point, the process is automatic and mechanical. If the mind is introverted and the intelligence is united with the self, there will be equilibrium within oneself even though the senses might continue to react naturally. But if the mind (through thought) registers a pleasant experience, for example, likes it, revives it as memory and hope, and desires a repetition, the chain-reaction towards self-destruction is set in motion. (cf II:62, 63).

The Kṛṣṇa-approach should not be missed. You cannot assume what nature is, and what is natural. Man's mind has suffered terrible pollution over thousands of years with what we call civilisation and tradition. To be natural is to live as the image of God!

❖śreyān svadharmo viguṇaḥ paradharmāt svanuṣṭhitāt
svadharma nidhanaṁ śreyaḥ paradharmo bhayāvahaḥ

Better is one's own duty, though devoid of merit, than the duty of another well discharged. Better is death in one's own duty; the duty of another is fraught with fear.

This is the natural corollary of the basic teaching of the Bhagavad Gītā that all life is sacred, that there is nothing high or low in life's activities, and that our actions should not be motivated by private desires. Why and when does one switch from the discharge of one's own duties to take on the duties of another? More often than not (i.e. when it is not as part of the natural evolutionary process) when he is tempted by an earthly reward, or by self-aggrandisement.

Even today the amateur who is not really qualified to do a job and does something out of his way, gets a lot of publicity! This desire for name and fame and perhaps the material benefits accruing from them, attracts people, tempting them away from their own duty into the provinces of others.

The professional does his work with a calm mind. The amateur torments himself day and night. The glare of the limelight makes him lose his head. The natural public criticism depresses and annoys him. These are the emotional states which Kṛṣṇa expressly asks us to avoid.

The central ideal of the Bhagavad Gītā is equanimity above all. Anything that disturbs the inner equilibrium is fraught with fear and danger. We must attain that equanimity and then never let anything in the world disturb it.

Total tranquillity of the mind is indispensable for enabling us to look within, to study the nature of mind and thought, to see our conditioning and the source of fear, to realise what true love is and to recognise its caricature with which we are familiar, as also to realise what our real nature is and how perverted it has become. This awareness is the first step towards the enlightened life that Kṛṣṇa reveals to us.

arjuna uvāca

❖atha kena prayukto 'yaṁ pāpaṁ carati pūruṣaḥ
anicchann api vārṣṇeya balād iva niyojitaḥ
śrībhagavān uvāca

❖kāma eṣa krodha eṣa rajoguṇasamudbhavaḥ
mahāśano mahāpāpmā viddhy enam iha vairiṇaṁ

Arjuna asked: But impelled by what does man commit sin, though against his wishes, O Kṛṣṇa, constrained, as it were, by force?

The blessed Lord said: It is desire, it is anger born of the quality of rajas, all-devouring, all-sinful; know this as the foe here.

The question is extremely pertinent; if nature (God's nature) is responsible for all actions, and if it is inevitable that the senses should automatically respond to the stimuli from the sense-objects, then how is man responsible for any evil that may proceed from such response? Why is it said that a particular action is sinful and a particular person a sinner?

Kṛṣṇa goes straight to the root of the problem and reveals the true culprit. Desire is sin. Anger or hate is sin. Rāgā (likes) and dveṣā (dislikes) are sinful. When man is prompted to perform an action by desire or selfish motive, he sins.

If the inner motive or attitude alone is the governing factor, then can we stretch this rule to cover our sins? Obviously not. For we should never forget that we shall know our duty truly only if our mind is tranquil and our intelligence united with God. Ordinarily, we should adhere to accepted moral standards. Such acceptance immediately leads to inner tranquillity. When there is tranquillity, insight is bright, unagitated. Desire arises when insight is veiled and when there is unawareness. When insight becomes aware of the arising of desire, the distinction between natural urges (like hunger and thirst) and unnatural craving is realised; the unnatural does not happen and the natural is not translated into 'my desire' by thought. Thus the way for unawareness and lack of insight to encourage pursuit of pleasure and the formation of likes and dislikes is not paved.

❖dhūmenā 'vriyate vahnir yathā 'darśo malena ca
 yatho 'lbenā 'vr̥to garbhas tathā tene 'dam āvr̥taṁ
 ❖āvr̥taṁ jñānam etena jñānino nityavairiṇā
 kāmārūpeṇa kaunteya duṣpūreṇā 'nalena ca

As fire is enveloped by smoke, as a mirror by dust, and as an embryo by the amnion, so is this (wisdom) enveloped by that (desire).

O Arjuna, wisdom is enveloped by this constant enemy of the wise in the form of desire, which is unappeasable as fire.

By 'desire' is meant selfish desire, which is neither natural to life (as desire for food) nor the uncaused desire for God which is accompanied by wisdom and unselfishness and which naturally leads to its own extinction in God-realisation. Desire and anger (hate) are two sides of the same coin.

Smoke hides fire and brings about darkness where there should be light. Similarly, desire envelops wisdom and brings about evil where there should be divinity.

The mirror is hidden by dust and cannot function. Similarly, desire nullifies wisdom and puts it out of commission. Even the wise man under the influence of desire is unable to see his own face! Hence our life is a song of regrets and remorse.

But there is one saving feature. Desire encloses wisdom but is unable to overwhelm it, dissolve it or even dilute it. Just as the amnion envelops the foetus in the womb, but the child is not adversely affected by it.

It is possible to fan the flame to dispel smoke. It is possible to wipe the mirror and to see one's face in it. It is possible for the child to be delivered, untainted by the amnion. Even so, it is possible for wisdom to be fanned by right living and by right meditation; it is possible to wipe desire off wisdom by selfless service; it is possible in samādhi (perfect absorption of the mind) to deliver wisdom from the clutches of desire and to enjoy divine communion.

Desire to be desireless is indeed desirable. But it can be deceptive. Hence the need for the utmost vigilance – and even more, God's grace.

❖ indriyāṇi mano buddhir asyā 'dhiṣṭhānam ucyate
 etair vimohayaty eṣa jñānam āvṛtya dehinam
 ❖ tasmāt tvam indriyāṇy ādau niyāmya bharatarṣabha
 pāpmānaṁ prajahi hy enaṁ jñānavijñānanāśanaṁ

The senses, the mind and the intellect are said to be the seats of desire; through these it deludes the embodied by veiling his wisdom.

Therefore, O Arjuna, controlling the senses first, do thou kill this sinful thing, the destroyer of knowledge and realisation.

Responsiveness to sense-stimuli is inherent in the senses, mind and Intellect. All these are the material half of divine nature. Water dissolves salt but not stone. Fire burns dry firewood but not a plantain stem. There is a responsive relationship. This responsiveness is instinct in the senses, impulsiveness in the mind and judgement in the intellect. The same power is given a different attribute when it operates from its different seats. Thought converts these natural responses into pleasure which gives rise to desire, or craving which veils wisdom.

Wisdom refers here to the right knowledge of the nature of desire and also the nature of the witness consciousness within. The effort to curb instincts and impulsiveness and also to restore saner values is meaningful only because the self is forever untouched by desire. This is wisdom.

This wisdom is veiled by the turbulent senses, impure mind and unwise intellect ridden by false values. It is as if we are looking at the bed of a lake through the disturbed surface of muddy water which covers the pearl as also pebbles on the bed. A start must be made somewhere. The desire-aggravating activity of the senses must be curbed first; of course, this is only another way of denoting control of the mind. When the mind and senses are calm, the intellect must be made to abandon its false values.

“With what and by whom is the mind controlled?” – is a question that does not admit an easy answer. The desire to give up desire arises in the mind, but when it is rightly understood there is awakening of an intelligence other than the mind.

❖ indriyāṇi parāṇy āhur indriyebhyaḥ param manah
 manasas tu parā buddhir yo buddheḥ paratas tu saḥ
 ❖ evaṁ buddheḥ param buddhvā samstabhyā 'tmānam ātmanā
 jahi śatruṁ mahābāho kāmārūpaṁ durāsadam

They say that the senses are superior. Superior to the senses is the mind. Superior to the mind is the intellect. One who is superior even to the intellect is the self.

Thus knowing him who is superior to the intellect and restraining the self by the self, slay thou, O Arjuna, the enemy in the form of desire which is hard to conquer.

The subtle has greater power over the gross which cannot limit the former, even as the prison-wall cannot limit one's thoughts. The senses, the mind and the intellect are like the brick, mortar and plaster of a house in which the master (the self) dwells. They have no freedom to act and they depend on one another and ultimately on the self or pure awareness.

We are not really slaves of the external world. All the beauty in the world is nothing to a blind man. The most delightful orchestra is silent pantomime for the deaf. The senses are superior to the objects.

What can the senses do if the mind switches off the inner controls? When you are intently listening to a soft whisper of your beloved, you do not see the person standing in front of you. The mind is superior to the senses.

Husband, wife and child walk past a department store. The man remembers only an amazing new piece of electronic equipment – he is an engineer. The wife remembers only a new dress, and the child saw nothing but a toy! The intellect provided the scale of values; the mind, acting on this, directed the senses to 'work on' the scene in front. The intellect is the governor!

Behind even this 'light' that illumines our inner world, there is the light of lights. the self or spark of God, in whose borrowed light the intellect shines. If we learn to appeal to him in meditation, he will so illumine the intellect that it will present the divine scale of values for the mind and senses to act upon. The self restrains the self on account of its indivisibility.



OM TAT SAT

iti śrīmad bhagavad gītāsūpaniṣatsu brahma vidyāyām
yogaśāstre śrī kṛṣṇarjuna saṁvāde
karma yogo nāma tṛtīyo 'dhyāyaḥ

Thus in the upaniṣad of the glorious Bhagavad Gītā,
the science of the eternal, the scripture of yoga,
the dialogue between śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna,
ends the third discourse entitled:

THE YOGA OF ACTION

CHAPTER IV

THE YOGA OF WISDOM

IV

26th MARCH

1-3

śrībhagavān uvāca
❖ imam vivasvate yogam proktavān aham avyayam
vivasvān manave prāha manur ikṣvākave 'bravīt
❖ evam paramparāprāptam imam rājarṣayo viduḥ
sa kālene 'ha mahatā yogo naṣṭaḥ paramtapa
❖ sa evā 'yam mayā te 'dya yogaḥ proktaḥ purātanaḥ
bhakto 'si me sakhā ce 'ti rahasyam hy etad uttamaḥ

The blessed Lord said: I taught this imperishable yoga to Vivasvān, he told it to Manu, Manu proclaimed it to Īkṣvāku. This, handed down thus in regular succession, the royal sages knew. This yoga, by long lapse of time, has been lost here, O Arjuna.

That same ancient yoga has been today taught to thee by me, for thou art my devotee and my friend. It is the supreme secret.

'There is nothing new under the sun'! The same old truth is re-stated over and over. The presentation is different – adapted to suit different peoples, generations and conditions prevalent.

The Mahābhārata has eighteen chapters or 'books'. The Gītā has eighteen chapters. One plus eight is nine, the final number. It is a symbol of finality – the last word. There are some who are sure that the Gītā contains the 'last word'. Others claim the title for the Holy Bible or the Holy Quran. One who realises that all these three spring from the same source sees no confusion here. The Indian wisely adds, however, that this 'last word' can be re-stated time and time again, with a slight difference in the modulation and accent. This is the secret of his tolerance, understanding and all-inclusiveness.

Truth gets perverted and lost on account of disuse and misuse. The intellect is incapable of comprehending the spiritual truth which spiritual experience alone can approach. When the latter is absent, the intellect feels compelled to spin a web of myth and superstition (known as philosophy) around the truth which is totally covered up in this cobweb in course of time.

The Lord revives true knowledge once more.

- arjuna uvāca
 ❖aparaṁ bhavato janma paraṁ janma vivasvataḥ
 katham etad vijñānīyāṁ tvam ādau proktavān iti
 śrībhavagān uvāca
 ❖bahūni me vyatītāni janmāni tava cā 'rjuna
 tāny ahaṁ veda sarvāṇi na tvaṁ vettha paraṁtapa
 ❖ajo 'pi sann avyayātmā bhūtānām īśvaro 'pi san
 prakṛtim svām adhiṣṭhāya sambhavāmy ātmamāyayā

Arjuna said: Later on was thy birth, and prior to it was the birth of the sun.
 How am I to understand that thou taughtest this yoga in the beginning?

The blessed Lord said: Many births of mine have passed as well as of thine,
 O Arjuna. I know them all but thou knowest not.

Though I am unborn, of imperishable nature, and though I am the Lord of
 all beings, yet, ruling over my own nature, I am born by my own māyā.

God is omnipresent and omnipotent. He is like the umpire in a football match: he lets the two teams (the divine and the undivine) play on; he himself remains unnoticed till the need arises and then he suddenly reveals his presence. The word 'avatāra' or 'descent' is only symbolic. God, who is omnipresent, bursts into manifestation, even as electricity, which is subtle and 'does not seem to exist at all', reveals itself through a light-bulb or where there is a short-circuit.

You and I have had countless births. God has also manifested himself countless times. You and I are also manifestations or incarnations of the omnipresent God! So were Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Buddha, Zarathustra, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, etc. There is this little (!) difference: two people go into the sea; the fool is drowning and the life-saver jumps in to save him. We are drowning in ignorance and evil. God (as the saviours and prophets) comes to save us. We are bound by ignorance and māyā. He play-acts as if bound, in order to liberate us.

It is blasphemy to say that this cannot happen. It is a rash denial of the omnipotence of God. True, the special manifestation does not cancel his omnipresence. When there is a great white cloud above us it does not mean there is no water-vapour anywhere else. God is ever omnipresent, even while he is with us as an avatāra.

❖yadā-yadā hi dharmasya glānir bhavati bhārata
 abhyutthānam adharmasya tadā 'tmānaṁ sṛjāmy ahaṁ

Whenever there is a decline of righteousness, O Arjuna, and the rise of unrighteousness, then I manifest myself.

When does God thus manifest himself? Whenever the forces divine, 'the children of light', are overwhelmed by the undivine forces or the offspring of darkness, there is a divine manifestation to restore the balance.

This, however, seems to run counter to the scriptural declaration 'satyameva jayate' (truth alone triumphs). Is it possible for unrighteousness to overwhelm righteousness, even temporarily? No. Even that seeming triumph of unrighteousness is but a victory to righteousness.

Legend and history bear witness to this process. First there is oppression of the good by the evil. The wicked have no need to reflect, no qualms of conscience. The good are circumspect. The former take undue advantage. ("You need not turn the other cheek – I know where it is", says the wicked man who persists in his oppression of the good.) When this oppression reaches the limit, there is compression which disturbs the very core of the 'good' being oppressed. At this core, there is God. When evil reaches this core, there is explosion; his power manifests itself in its own glory. This is the historical process: oppression, compression, explosion. The first two are necessary conditions for the third and hence it is possible to see in the seeming triumph of unrighteousness a true victory for righteousness. Extreme unrighteousness does a signal service of bringing God and divine power into manifestation.

If all this is puzzling, the Bhāgavatam fans it further. It is not as though the children of light are God's and the wicked ones are the creatures of some other creator. They are all God's children. There are periods in the cyclic world-process when one or the other of these creatures holds sway. That, too, is God's play.

❖paritrāṇāya sādḥūnām vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām
dharmasaṁsthāpanārthāya saṁbhavāmi yuge-yuge

For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of righteousness, I am born in every age.

What does God do when he manifests himself? He protects the good, destroys the evil and establishes righteousness. Please note that ‘the good’ need not be confined to ‘good people’. ‘Protection of the good and destruction of the evil...’ (Fill up the blanks, as you like!) Even good and evil tendencies may be brought within the meaning of this verse. Only the good are protected: not a privileged community. Hence, ‘be good; do good’ if you want God’s protection!

There is no real destruction even of wicked people – they have to be purified and redeemed. Only the evil nature or tendencies have to be destroyed. Hence even the good people whom Rāma and Kṛṣṇa protected, died, and the wicked ones whom they killed went to heaven (because their evil nature had been removed).

This is the only definition of the purpose of *avatāra*. The criterion that determines who is an *avatāra* is not supernatural birth or deeds, not supernatural appearance or disappearance, but the power to establish righteousness. Hence we regard the human Rāma as an *avatāra* and not the powerful and ‘superhuman’ Rāvana. In this light, Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Buddha, Zarathustra, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed and Mahāvīra, are all *avatārā* of God.

We admit that the son of God is even as God; the son of a lion is lion. We admit that the Prophet of Islam, too, is an *avatāra*; the messenger sent by light is light only. When a candle gives birth to another, it is also a candle – not son of the candle or the messenger of the candle.

Since this *avatāra* effectively veils himself with his own *māyā*, he may behave as God or man, he may proclaim his divinity or hide it – if he upholds righteousness, he is God.

❖janma karma ca me divyam evaṁ yo vetti tattvataḥ
tyaktvā dehaṁ punarjanma nai 'ti mām eti so 'rjuna

He who thus knows my divine birth and action in true light, having abandoned the body, is not born again. He comes to me, O Arjuna.

At this stage it is necessary to remind ourselves that the first person singular used in this scripture does not refer to the personality 'Kṛṣṇa', but to the godhead revealing itself through him. The speaker could well have been Kṛṣṇa, Christ, Buddha or Allah. The meaning and the significance will not suffer in the least.

It is in this light that we should take the declaration of lord Jesus that he is 'the light, the truth and the way and that no one goes to the Father but through "me".' We can realise the unmanifest godhead only through the manifest divinity.

There is, however, no harm in the followers of Kṛṣṇa regarding him as their only way, and the followers of Christ adhering to his feet with equal zeal. What is harmful, however, is running others down, which is a waste of time anyway. It is absurd, too, to say: "Only my mother is a woman capable of giving birth to human children, yours cannot be." We all have only one mother, but motherhood is not restricted to that woman – it is common to all women.

The manifest divinity is more easily accessible to the embodied being than the unmanifest transcendental being. In fact, that is the very purpose of manifestation or *avatāra*: God symbolically descending to our level in order to accept, redeem and uplift us. When we learn not to cavil at these *avatārā*, but to accept, adore and worship them, knowing their true divine nature, we shall have attained enlightenment and liberation.

It is equally important to remember that 'knowing their true nature' implies recognition of the essential divine nature of oneself and the urgent need to shake off the dust that covers it. Such recognition is an *avatāra*, too!

❖vītarāgabhayakrodhā manmayā mām upāśritāḥ
bahavo jñānatapasā pūtā madbhāvam āgatāḥ

Freed from attachment, fear and anger, absorbed in me, taking refuge in me, purified by the fire of knowledge – many have attained to my being.

When we are thus convinced of the divine purpose behind this creation, viz., the establishment of righteousness and the destruction of evil, we give up vainly craving for the objects of the world and getting attached to them. Desire and anger cease in us. When we assure ourselves of God's protection if we are good, then fear ceases. The good can never be harmed by anyone; and here, legends and history assure us that the truly good man blesses his oppressors, for they compel him to seek refuge at the feet of God. Western psychology tells us that 'likes, dislikes and fear' are present even in a new-born baby. But these are absent in the yogi! There is a radical transmutation.

All this is possible only if we kindle the fire of knowledge within us and keep it forever alive. This fire dispels the darkness of ignorance and gives us the comfort of the warmth of divine assurance. It saves us from the pit of temptations, from the evil within ourselves, and promotes goodness in us; for we begin to realise that goodness is closer to God. This knowledge confers upon us the greatest boon of forbearance and fortitude to endure the fleabites of evil forces in the certain conviction that they cannot harm us, but on the contrary, they do keep us awake in God.

This knowledge thus liberates us from our own evil tendencies and reveals to us that even the good ones are but the protégés of God. True goodness and righteousness belong to him. We are immediately filled with wonderment and gratitude in which we let our little ego be absorbed in him. We attain to God's being. We return to the centre, source and goal of our being, the ground of our existence.

The knower of God becomes God; says the upaniṣad: charcoal offered into fire becomes fire. This man-of-god is man only to our human vision – in truth he is one with God.

THE MONTH OF APRIL

Lord Kṛṣṇa's searchlight illuminates the inside of man! Religion gets a revolutionary meaning. Life glows with a divine purpose. Man's puny individuality receives a fatal blow, only to be resurrected in and as God. Step by step we are led into the heart of the reality where nothing but God exists and where even the visible universe is but the body of God.

The little ego asserts itself. It has its own petty desires and cravings, attachments and aversions, dogmas and doctrines. Kṛṣṇa warns us: "These must go". That is the meaning of 'saṁnyāsa' (renunciation).

We should practise true saṁnyāsa without advertising it. It is not for others' but for our own sake. Advertisement might provoke some to antagonism and prompt others to hero-worship, thus the purpose will be defeated. Incidentally, the following is a wise rule if you value your peace of mind: never let anyone know the innermost secrets of your life, what you value most and wish to achieve – or else, you will be exposing your vulnerable points.

Kṛṣṇa advocates gradual growth or evolution, not over-night transformation or revolution. You might be tempted to swear: "I will be totally selfless from this moment." Avoid that temptation. Prayerfully hold the ideal in front of the mind's eye every day. If you take a vow, you will only be provoking all the latent inner enemies (and external forces) which will compel you to break the vow the very next day. Have you not noticed that on the day you resolve to fast, you feel hungry earlier than usual? When the vow is broken you will waste further time and energy in useless remorse.

By God's grace, we shall come out victorious, in due time!

❖ ye yathā māṁ prapadyante tāṁs tathai 'va bhajāṁy ahaṁ
 mama vartmā 'nuvartante manuṣyāḥ pārtha sarvaśaḥ
 ❖ kāṅkṣantaḥ karmaṇāṁ siddhiṁ yajanta iha devatāḥ
 kṣipraṁ hi mānuṣe loke siddhir bhavati karmajā

In whatever way men approach me, even so do I go to them. My path do men tread in all ways, O Arjuna.

Those who long for success in action in this world sacrifice to (worship) the gods, because success is quickly attained by men through (such) action.

This could well have been the basis of the numerous 'spiritual healing' techniques evolved specially by the westerners. If one realises that God is good, perfect, full of light, life and love, then he experiences these qualities in him and around him; God himself comes to him as such. One who has no faith in an abiding truth or reality surrounds himself with darkness. He who regards God as a tyrant is terrified.

God has bestowed upon man intelligence which is but a spark of God's consciousness, and free-will which is particularisation of God's omnipotence; man can use them for his own uplift or downfall. He is free within wide boundaries.

Even in the 'religious' approach, the Hindu firmly believes that the countless viewpoints of God (which are the different religions) are all valid and will lead us to the same God. The ultimate experience, viz., God realising himself, is beyond the pale of the ego; but the highest spiritual experiences, too, may differ from man to man, as is revealed in the 'different' religions. This conviction fills us with tolerance and understanding, without loss of individuality.

Even they who seek material gains (or even spiritual perfection) resort only to God through the various divinities (powers of God's nature); and God responds to them via the same channel, as the fruits of those actions (success or failure, pain and pleasure and so on). We adore God alone in various ways. This knowledge frees us from fear, attachment, anger, intolerance and proselytism.

❖cāturvarṇyaṁ mayā sṛṣṭaṁ guṇakarmavibhāgaśaḥ
 tasya kartāram api māṁ viddhy akartāram avyayaṁ
 ❖na māṁ karmāṇi līpanti na me karmaphale sprhā
 iti māṁ yo 'bhijānāti karmabhir na sa badhyate

The fourfold caste has been created by me according to the differentiation of guṇa and karma. Though I am the author thereof, know me as non-doer and immutable.

Actions do not taint me, nor have I a desire for the fruit of actions. He who knows me thus is not bound by actions.

Men, desiring worldly rewards, work in different fields. Their inherent and predominant quality or nature (guṇa) leads them along these paths of activity (karma). God, as we noticed in the last two verses, 'goes' to them along those very paths. He provides them with the congenial atmosphere in which they can evolve with the help of their own guṇa and their own karma; the yoga of the Gītā does not demand transplantation, but only transmutation. This congenial atmosphere is the caste system in its pure and uncorrupted form.

God, being the centre of all, is equidistant from all, whatever their caste and whatever be their duty or activity. God-oriented performance of one's own duty is the direct road to perfection. This path (the caste system) originates in his nature, but it should not be attributed to him (that is, it should not be regarded as the absolute!), because it is the individual's nature that determines or paves it, and as this nature undergoes transmutation, the path might vanish in the destination!

God is not bound by anything in this universe. God is not even bound by this notion of 'unboundability'; so he may incarnate himself and appear to be bound! He is beyond all concepts.

The second verse can also be used as a formula to meditate upon, in order to disentangle the soul from the mesh of our body and mind. The 'me', then, would refer to the soul, the witness consciousness, the true self which is not tainted by any action of the body and mind. This meditation will liberate us from bondage to karmā.

❖ evaṁ jñātvā kṛtaṁ karma pūrvair api mumukṣubhiḥ
 kuru karmai 'va tasmāt tvaṁ pūrvaiḥ pūrvataraṁ kṛtaṁ

Having known this, the ancient seekers after freedom also performed action; therefore do thou also perform action, as did the ancients in days of yore.

This is the doctrine of total freedom of the Bhagavad Gītā. In the light of this doctrine, even 'bounden duty' is sublimated into joyous abandonment which is but a synonym of a free participation in the divine will. We seek not only freedom from external authority (and the consequent mental conditioning) but freedom from inner reaction to authority (which is an expression of vanity).

Glimpses of this freedom are seen in ourselves during sleep and during deep meditation. The inner intelligence which had, during its unawakened states known as waking and dream, foolishly bound itself to the body and the mind, which are nothing more than the bricks and mortar of its residence, realises upon awakening that pain and pleasure and so on, which it had to endure during those two states, were the necessary sequel of its wrong identification of itself with its residence.

As in the human body, so also in the body of God called the universe. We are tiny cells in that body of God. His life pulsates in us as our immortal being. His power flows through us as will. His consciousness shines in us as intelligence. None of these is 'ours'. Yet, if we but joyously offer our little self to the care of the great body, then even as a tiny copper wire becomes charged with formidable electric current on account of its passive contact, we too, shall share his life, power and consciousness.

Not bound to anything in this world we shall still take part in all its activity as a witness, in choiceless awareness. Realising that both egoistical action and egoistical withdrawal are forms of the false identification of the soul of our soul with the body and mind, we shall surrender ourselves to God's will and live in this house of God, unaffected by its construction, alteration and demolition, freely moving in it and using it in accordance with the divine will, which is natural and appropriate action.

❖ kiṁ karma kim akarme 'ti kavayo 'py atra mohitāḥ
 tat te karma pravakṣyāmi yaj jñātvā mokṣyase 'śubhāt
 ❖ karmaṇo hy api boddhavyaṁ boddhavyaṁ ca vikarmaṇaḥ
 akarmaṇaś ca boddhavyaṁ gahanā karmaṇo gatiḥ

What is action? What is inaction? As to this, even the wise are confused. Therefore, I shall teach thee such action, by knowing which thou shalt be liberated from evil.

For verily, the true nature of action should be known, as also of forbidden action and of inaction; it is hard to understand the course of action.

People have asked themselves: "What should I do?" The self-arrogating ego has led them along the by-lanes of varied activities, often described as duties and scripturally ordained injunctions, and sometimes restrained them to a state of inaction on the assumption that all action is tainted with evil. Are actions good or evil in themselves, or are they to be judged by their results? If the latter, how is it possible for us to foresee the result? If the former, who is the judge to tell us which action is good and which evil and what are the criteria? These problems have worried even the great ones.

As a renowned saint of India declared: "The scriptures differ among themselves and even the sages differ among themselves. Truly, the secret of righteousness is hidden from mortal gaze. That path which the holy ones have trodden should be followed." The Mahābhārata illustrates this riddle. The righteous Yudhiṣṭhira is often faced with this fundamental problem: "What is right action?" On top of all this, lord Kṛṣṇa himself suggests what appears on the surface to be decidedly unrighteous!

Yet, an action may be unrighteous from the standpoint of human law and righteous according to the divine law. The world has only too often witnessed diabolical rulers impose their will on their subjects with the sanctity and 'cover' of the divine law! Modern political and religious institutions have taught us that even man's conscience can be so coloured as to regard man-made law with greater veneration than divine law which is deliberately obscured from his vision. What is right?

❖karmaṇy akarma yaḥ paśyed akarmaṇi ca karma yaḥ
sa buddhimān manuṣyeṣu sa yuktaḥ kṛtsnakarmakṛt

He who seeth inaction in action and action in inaction, he is wise among men; he is a yogi and the performer of all actions.

The puzzle can be solved only by ‘seeing’ the whole universe as the one body of God. Indwelling this universe is the cosmic consciousness which is the eternal witness since it is uninvolved (like space) in whatever takes place in it. In God’s body the countless cells vibrate constantly; these cells are the different worlds (and the beings in them). When they vibrate in accordance with the divine law which is the operative part of God’s divine nature, they are said to be good and to do good, and to engage themselves in right action. This attunement, however, is spontaneous and not rationalised or willed.

When the cells, on account of the inherent free-will, fall out of alignment with the divine will, the latter, in order to protect the total organism from injury, allows the rebellious cell to disintegrate by its own power – even as a palm tree defying a storm is felled, whereas a blade of grass which bows to the storm is saved; and, even as a healthy cell in our body is protected and a cell which will not cooperate with the life-force is eliminated. Vicious actions disrupt the social structure, which is the body of God. When such disruption has already taken place, the divine will employs other cells to restore harmony by quelling the rebellion – resulting in activity which partakes of the nature of the rebellious cells themselves. This explains lord Kṛṣṇa’s mysterious ways.

On such occasions, if our attunement to the divine will is blind and impulsive, we might at times find ourselves on the horns of a dilemma. But if our attunement is based on the right understanding that we who seem to be ever active do nothing and that it is the intangible divine will which is ever active, then we realise the unity of our own little intelligence with his, our finite will with his infinite will and our whole being with his. The ‘I’ dissolves in the all, the doer of all actions.

The impulsive man’s instinctual action and the rationalist’s selfish, clever and calculated action are in truth inaction: both of them are reactions, the former to external stimuli and the latter to circumstances. A wise man observes himself and the world around him, and this self-awareness acts spontaneously and non-volitionally. Hence true action is ‘inaction’. Self-awareness is total action.

❖ yasya sarve samārambhāḥ kāmasaṁkalpavarjitāḥ
 jñānāgnidagdhakarmāṇaṁ tam āhuḥ paṇḍitaṁ budhāḥ
 ❖ tyaktvā karmaphalāsaṅgaṁ nityatṛpto nirāśrayaḥ
 karmany abhipravṛtto 'pi nai 'va kiṁcit karoti saḥ

He whose undertakings are all devoid of desires and selfish purposes and whose actions have been burnt by the fire of knowledge, –him the wise call a sage.

Having abandoned attachment to the fruits of actions, ever content, depending on nothing, he does not do anything though engaged in activity.

The ever-vibrant universe is rooted in the supremely quiescent Brahman (absolute reality) who is supreme peace itself. The ever active body is indwelt by the self which is the peace that passeth understanding. Beneath the turbulent surface, the ocean itself is calm. Fragmentation is conflict, wholeness (holiness) is peace.

Activity is the nature of form, quiescence is the nature of the spirit. Ignorant superimposition of the characteristics of the form on the spirit is the root-cause of endless suffering. He who regards the quiescent spirit as the doer of actions paradoxically endeavours to restrain the form (body and mind) from their natural activity! Such a man is full of tensions. He thinks he knows what to do and what not to do; he is full of desires and schemes. Desires and schemes are the generators of tension. He does not know what he is. Only self-knowledge removes selfishness. Hence Gurudev Sivananda emphasised: “Be good, do good”, in that order.

The cell that is ignorant of the body entertains selfish desires and has its own private schemes. When the fire of the knowledge that we are all cells in the body of God burns this ignorance, then contentment born of total self-surrender to the will of God arises. Selfishness, egoism and their retinue of evil disappear, even as the ghosts of the dreamer’s dream vanish on his waking.

A man who is awake in this knowledge is not idle; he is a true channel for the flow of God’s will. The actions of such a man are movements in cosmic consciousness, without cause, without goal, without dependency, and without the idea ‘I do this’.

❖nirāśīr yatacittātmā tyaktasarvaparigrahaḥ
 śārīraṁ kevalaṁ karma kurvan nā 'pnoti kilbiṣaṁ
 ❖yadṛcchālābhasaṁtuṣṭo dvandvātīto vimatsaraḥ
 samaḥ siddhāv asiddhau ca kṛtvā 'pi na nibadhyate

Without hope and with the mind and the self controlled, having abandoned all greed, doing mere bodily action, he incurs no sin.

Content with what comes to him without effort, free from the pairs of opposites and envy, even-minded in success and failure, though acting, he is not bound.

Desire and its consequent 'planned activity', are the generators of evil; when they happen to be in accordance with divine will they confirm the ego in its self-arrogating doership of actions; when they are not and so there is failure, they cause tension which intensifies the soul's ignorance.

The wise man's mind, too, may entertain hope. If he is a perfected yogi, it will invariably be the reflection of the divine will. If he is an earnest seeker, he will hope for success, but be prepared for the opposite! Thus he goes beyond both. This is not merely 'positive thinking', but 'perfect thinking'. We strive, for that is our birthright and the expression of divine nature in us, too. This effort may even be backed by 'positive thinking' and wishing for the best. But it is free from egoistic projection of self-will, for we are prepared for what at the moment appears to be the worst (in the knowledge that God's will is ever the best). This fusion of positive and negative is perfect thinking which transcends both.

Pain and pleasure, success and failure, are the egoistic interpretation of the divine will when the selfish man breaks life into fragments or foolishly imagines that the coin of life has only one – the pleasant, successful side! Corners and patches of a painting appear ugly or beautiful, dark or bright; but when the whole painting is seen, they coalesce into a masterpiece of portraiture.

The yogi is not a gloomy pessimist. He hopes for the best, but accepts whatever happens as the best. In him the sins of ignorance, desire and private hope, are absent.

❖ gataśaṅgasya muktasya jñānāvasthitacetasaḥ
 yajñāyā 'carataḥ karma samagraṁ pravīṇyate
 ❖ brahmā 'rpaṇaṁ brahma havir brahmāgnau brahmaṇā hutam
 brahmai 'va tena gantavyaṁ brahmakarmasamādhinā

To one who is devoid of attachment, who is liberated, whose mind is established in knowledge, who works for the sake of sacrifice, the whole action is dissolved.

Brahman is the oblation. Brahman is the clarified butter. By Brahman is the oblation poured into the fire (Brahman). Brahman verily shall be reached by him who always sees Brahman in action.

The sage who is established in wisdom regards his whole life itself as a sacrifice. Yajña (sacrifice) is Viṣṇu (God) – God sacrificed his unity, as it were, in the fire diversity, creating infinite beings and imposing on himself the duty of preserving and redeeming them.

Nothing can be 'outside' the infinite God. Nothing can be apart from his being. This creation, too, is within him. All the activity that is experienced takes place within him. The only suitable analogy is the dream in which the dreamer creates space, time and material diversity within himself and views the phenomenon as if he were apart from the other dream-objects, which derive their power, intelligence and individuality from the dreamer himself. Hence, the world is often spoken of as God's dream.

This knowledge should be sustained even in our waking state of consciousness. God is in all. God is the all. God is the all-in-all. The symbol of the Indian ritual of yajña or havan can be extended to include all actions. The performer of the action, the instruments used, the act itself and the one to whom it is directed – all are God only.

God or the reality is not a static existence but a process, beginningless and endless. Thus, there is nothing unsacred in the universe. To live in this spirit is brahma-karma-samādhī or egoless participation in the will of God, described in verse twenty-one as 'doing mere bodily action' without the least trace of egoistic notion which creates isolation from the totality. The wise man sees that the bodily functions are already and always will be independent of the ego!

❖daivam evā 'pare yajñam yoginaḥ paryupāsate
brahmāgnāv apare yajñam yajñenai 'vo 'pajuhvati

Some yogī perform sacrifice to the gods. Others offer as sacrifice yajña (sacrifice itself) in the fire of Brahman.

The highest wisdom is not attained overnight. Man's consciousness is shadowed by ignorance and superstition, pride and prejudice, false notions and ideologies. It is not given to all to uproot this mighty tree of ignorance with a single axe-stroke of supreme wisdom. The path of the majority lies through gradual evolution and sublimation. This sounds easy; it is not. One has to be eternally vigilant if one is not to slide back or to run round in circles. Eternal vigilance is not different from instant enlightenment!

There are some yogī who 'sacrifice' to the gods. They engage themselves in ritualistic worship. When the ritual is performed with right understanding (that the whole universe is God's self-sacrifice), it transforms one's whole life into divine life. The yogi's vision expands to include in his concept of God, his parents, teachers and guests. The ritual widens into charity. The heart is gradually purified, eventually to let the light of God shine unobstructed by the distortion of the ego.

There are others who do not worship the gods, but perform religious rites, for their own sake. Though these rites promise heaven to the performer, he is encouraged to cut out this desire, in order that his action may lead him to the supreme. Hence even the oblations are followed by the formula 'na mama' – 'not mine' or 'not for me'. When these sacrifices purify one's heart the light of God reveals itself.

Eventually, this yogi offers sacrifice itself as an oblation into the fire of Brahman, the absolute. All activities which were superimposed on Brahman, in ignorance, are offered in the knowledge of the transcendental reality which is the eternal witness of the dynamism of its nature.

❖śrotrādīnī 'ndriyāṇy anye saṁyamāgniṣu juhvati
 śabdādīn viṣayān anyā indriyāgniṣu juhvati
 ❖sarvāṇī 'ndriyakarmāṇi prāṇakarmāṇi cā 'pare
 ātmasaṁyamayogāgnau juhvati jñānadīpīte

Some again offer hearing and other senses as sacrifice in the fire of restraint. Others offer sound and other objects of the senses as sacrifice in the fire of the senses.

Others again sacrifice all the functions of the senses and those of the breath in the fire of the yoga of self-restraint kindled by knowledge.

These are not external but internal 'rituals'. External rituals are props for an internal process of meditation. To the vast majority of people they are necessary. There are a few spiritual heroes, however, who can dispense with them and enter the inner realm.

1. First kindle the fire of self-restraint within. Into that burning desire for achieving perfect restraint, offer the cravings and longings of the senses as and when they arise. The symbolism of the fire-worship will greatly help.
2. In the case of such activity and even such righteous enjoyments as are inevitable to the living of life, visualise the senses themselves as the sacrificial fire. Offer the objects of enjoyment into this fire; this is a very effective way of getting rid of 'likes and dislikes' which are the result of over-rating the objects of the world. The objects are like inert firewood, fuel for the senses which are the fire to be sustained so long as it is necessary for the enlightenment of the soul.
3. In a higher kind of meditation, the fire is saṁyama (combined practice of concentration, meditation and samādhi) and the oblation is the action (present and past) of all the senses and even the vital force.

Once the oblation is offered into the fire it becomes one with the fire which alone shines. Thus, when the senses and the vital force are offered into the fire of ātmasaṁyama, the self alone shines, after absorbing the oblations (senses and vital force) into itself.

❖dravyayajñās tapoyajñā yogayajñās tathā 'pare
 svādhyāyajñānayajñās ca yatayaḥ samśitavratāḥ
 ❖apāne juhvati prāṇam prāṇe 'pānam tathā 'pare
 prāṇāpānagatī ruddhvā prāṇāyāmaparāyaṇāḥ

Others again offer wealth, austerity and yoga as sacrifice, while the ascetics of self-restraint and rigid vows offer study of scriptures and knowledge as sacrifice.

Others offer as sacrifice the apāna in the prāṇa, and the prāṇa in the apāna, restraining the courses of the prāṇa and the apāna, solely absorbed in the restraint of the life-force.

Gradually, the spirit of yajña or sacrifice should widen to include all of one's activities, sacred and secular. In all these the symbolism of 'sacred oblation' should be well understood and rightly applied.

1. In charity, the receiver is the fire and the gift is the oblation. The wise man expects not even a word of thanks; the act is complete in itself.
2. In austerity, the fire is renunciation and self-denial, and desires and cravings are the oblation. The fire blazes more brightly with each oblation.
3. In yoga, the inner self is the fire and the mental modifications are the oblations. The fire purifies the latter, transforms them into pure thoughts (sat samkalpa).
4. Svādhyāya or self-study of scriptures: desire for self-knowledge is the fire which is augmented with successive oblations of study of scriptures.
5. Jñāna-yajña or the wisdom-sacrifice: seekers after truth are the fire and knowledge itself is the oblation. The former are enlightened.
6. In prāṇāyāma, the solar (positive, prāṇa) force is offered in (united with) the lunar (negative, apāna) force; and the negative is poured into the positive – at the solar plexus. The fire thus generated rouses the latent kundalinī śakti, whose union with Śiva at the crown of the head is enlightenment.

❖apare niyatāhārāḥ prāṇān prāṇeṣu juhvati
 sarve 'py ete yajñavido yajñakṣapitakalmaṣāḥ
 ❖yajñāśiṣṭāmṛtabhujo yānti brahma sanātanaṁ
 nā 'yaṁ loko 'sty ayajñasya kuto 'nyaḥ kurusattama

Others who regulate their diet offer life-breaths in life-breaths. All these are knowers of sacrifice, whose sins are destroyed by sacrifice.

Those who 'eat' the remnants of the sacrifice, which are like nectar, go to the eternal Brahman. This world is not for the man who does not perform sacrifice; how then can he have the other, O Arjuna?

Lastly, there are those who are abstemious in their diet. They eat merely to keep body and soul together. When the life-force in them clamours for more, they turn it upon itself (offering, as it were, the life-force itself as the oblation into it).

The spirit of sacrifice destroys sin. All these practices are neither good nor bad in themselves. For example, austerity (tapas or fire) can either lead to the destruction of the sinful nature or increase one's vanity – depending on the inner spirit. The spirit of yajña 'detaches' the self from the activity itself, thus allowing the latter to wipe the mirror clean so that in it the ever-pure self is instantly reflected in all its glory. Failure to understand and adopt this symbolism will often result in our wiping the mirror with the face, thus transferring the evil tendency from the mirror (the body and mind) to the skin of the face (the ego). The spirit of sacrifice also warns us not to expect anything in return; only the ashes of purity or sattva will remain after the sacrifice. The sacred ashes are so dear to lord Śiva (the divine auspiciousness itself) who naturally bestows upon us all that is good.

This residue of the sacrifice is nectar which confers immortality on us. We must let it nourish our life in every way. (It also refers to the remnants of charity, specially of food, which become holy and soul-purifying.)

He who is devoid of the spirit of sacrifice – the selfish man given wholly to sense-indulgence – is a burden on earth.

❖ evaṁ bahuvīdhā yajñā vitatā brahmaṇo mukhe
 karmajān viddhi tān sarvān evaṁ jñātvā vimokṣyase
 ❖ śreyān dravyamayād yajñāḥ jñānayaññāḥ paramtapa
 sarvaṁ karmā 'khilam pāṛtha jñāne parisamāpyate

Thus, manifold sacrifices are spread out before Brahman. Know them all as born of action and thus knowing, thou shalt be liberated.

Superior is wisdom-sacrifice to the sacrifice with objects. All actions in their entirety, O Arjuna, culminate in knowledge.

The sacrifices given here in the *Gītā* are only examples. They indicate the essence of the art of life, the spirit of sacrifice or unselfishness. It is not an ideal known as unselfishness, but the direct realisation that there is no self independent of the totality. With this shall man flavour all the actions of his life. The Creator intended that this spirit should govern all activities of all beings here. Whereas the so-called 'lower' orders of creation (the plants, and the animals to a great extent) instinctively live in this spirit, man, instead of consciously participating in God's will which this spirit inculcates, dares to flout it and arrogate the action to himself. He who knows that all sacrifices involve action and all actions should be performed as sacrifice, is liberated – from ignorance and egoism, sin and suffering.

Of the sacrifices described in this chapter and of the many more alluded to, the wisdom-sacrifice is the best. All other gifts and all other activities are transitory in their effect. Life itself is short, and even the most spectacular action is reduced to a few lines in a book of history and one more tendency in the soul – if it is not accompanied by right knowledge. Knowledge, on the other hand, liberates the soul from bondage to *saṁsāra* or the ever-revolving wheel of birth and death. Do not forget that the giver of knowledge is a devotee who considers the recipient as his Lord!

Whereas actions are inevitable, knowledge is the goal. The inevitable actions should be performed in the spirit of sacrifice; but knowledge should be acquired and imparted at every turn. For self-knowledge is the goal of actions themselves.

❖ tad viddhi pranīpātena paripraśnena sevayā
 upadekṣyanti te jñānaṁ jñāninas tattvadarśinaḥ
 ❖ yaj jñātvā na punar moham evaṁ yāsyasi pāṇḍava
 yena bhūtāny aśeṣeṇa drakṣyasi ātmany atho mayi

Know that knowledge by prostration, by question and by service; the wise who have realised the truth will instruct thee in it.

Knowing that, thou shalt not again get deluded like this, O Arjuna; and by that thou shalt see all beings in thy self and also in me.

This knowledge which is the goal as well as the basis of all actions, the knowledge of the spirit of sacrifice, has to be acquired from the ‘knowers of truth’, but they wait till the seeker approaches them in the attitude of discipleship.

Prostration is only a symbol of surrender – *prapatti*. This Sanskrit word has a wonderful import. The student realises in his heart that he is sunk in grief for lack of knowledge, that he cannot obtain it on his own (from books etc.), and that the guru alone can guide him to it. Before this three-fold fact is immediately and directly ‘seen’, and one’s own vain ‘knowledge’ firmly rejected – all of which enables true humility to arise in one’s heart – no knowledge is of any practical use. Even if some knowledge is acquired, it only acts as an intellectual burden, sinking man a little lower into the mire of vanity. But once the right attitude is acquired, there is deep and genuine yearning at heart and we can learn from anything and anybody. Dattatreya had twenty four *gurū*.

The *jñāni* or the guru is like a bridge. The bridge is the ‘other shore’s’ helping hand reaching out to this. The guru is God’s helping hand reaching out to the seeker. The seeker must surrender his vanity to the guru and prove his devotion by whole-souled service. The guru will then impart the highest knowledge to the disciple, understanding, grasping and assimilating which, the latter will experience cosmic consciousness. Incorrect understanding of any of the factors involved will lead to a dreadful caricature of the beautiful guru-disciple relationship.

❖api ced asi pāpebhyaḥ sarvebhyaḥ pāpakṛttamaḥ
 sarvaṁ jñānaplavenai 'va vṛjinaṁ saṁtariṣyasi
 ❖yathai 'dhāmsi samiddho 'gnir bhasmasāt kurute 'rjuna
 jñānāgniḥ sarvakarmāṇi bhasmasāt kurute tathā

Even if thou art the most sinful of all sinners, yet thou shalt verily cross all sins by the raft of knowledge.

As the blazing fire reduces fuel to ashes, O Arjuna, so does the fire of knowledge reduce all actions to ashes.

This jñāna or intuitional knowledge or wisdom is fire. It burns. It purifies. It illumines. It burns all the impurities within the human heart. It purifies all that it touches. It illumines the truth. The self, hidden in the heart of man by the veil of ignorance with its heavy encrustation of sinful deeds birth after birth, is the truth. It is the veil that is affected by sin. The self – like space – is unaffected by whatever happens; it is unlimited and ever pure.

When the fire of knowledge is kindled in the human heart by the sage-guru, this fire reduces the evil (which is veil mis-spelt) – to ashes. The heavy encrustation of sin only makes the fire grow more fierce! The thickness of this encrustation is immaterial; fire is unaltered by what it burns, and fire burns all! Quantity is not the criterion here; a spark can reduce a whole forest to ashes.

Unlike most forest fires, but like the fire that catches a veil, this fire of knowledge destroys the very roots, the entire veil of sinfulness. With ignorance is burnt desire along with its ramifications as sinful tendencies. The fruits of past actions (sañcita karma) are burnt too, for they were themselves part of the dream from which the wise man has been awakened. The future actions (āgāmi karma) are egoless and desireless and so bear no fruit. But 'sarva karmāṇi' is plural, not dual. Even prārabdha karma (the effects of past actions which have begun to fructify) which governs this incarnation, is 'cheated' by the wise man who does not identify the self with the body and the mind. (Prārabdha karma can afflict only the body and the mind.) Thus freed from karma and ignorance, even the most sinful man shines as a sage in the light of knowledge of the self. Neither the **veil** of ignorance, nor the **evil** action, nor to **live** in sin and suffering (note the three words in bold type have the same letters) is based on truth. They are born of non-understanding and die on understanding.

❖na hi jñānena sadṛśaṁ pavitram iha vidyate
 tat svayaṁ yogasaṁsiddhaḥ kālenā 'tmani vindati
 ❖śraddhāvān labhate jñānaṁ tatparaḥ saṁyatendriyaḥ
 jñānaṁ labdhvā parāṁ śāntim acireṇā 'dhigacchati

Verily, there is no purifier in this world like knowledge. He who is perfected in yoga finds it in the self in time.

The man who is full of faith, who is devoted to it, and who has subdued the senses obtains knowledge. And, having obtained the knowledge, he goes at once to the supreme peace.

No one is barred from knowledge of God or self-realisation. No one is eternally damned here. All beings will gradually evolve into perfection. In due time, every living being (even a worm which you may tread on!) will attain perfection in yoga and find knowledge in the self. That is the purpose of creation; the world exists to provide schooling for the individual so that it may attain perfection. Perfection is the direct experience that imperfection (self-limitation, sin and sorrow) is but a dream. Self-realisation is the truth: self is ever real!

There are some who say: "We shall get it in due time – why bother?" They fail to see that only when the time has come does one bother. The pregnant woman bides her time. It is only when the time arrives that she bothers! Not that she bothers because she wants to. The seeker cannot help it; his time has come. For the others, too, the time will come, for all are evolving towards perfection.

How can we recognise whose time has arrived? By faith. The seeker who is at the threshold of knowledge is full of faith. This faith is totally different from the faith (blind, biased belief) that breeds conflict. This faith is born of a veiled vision of truth. In the ignorant the truth is veiled; in the faithful truth shines through the veil. This faith compels him to be devoted to that, the self or God, with his body, mind, heart and whole being. This whole-souled devotion is accompanied by its natural corollary – he is self-controlled and his mind and senses do not run riot. All this burns the veil and reveals knowledge.

This knowledge quickly leads the seeker to the supreme peace or Brahman.

- ❖ ajñāś cā 'śraddadhānaś ca saṁśayātmā vinaśyati
nā 'yaṁ loka 'sti na paro na sukhaṁ saṁśayātmanaḥ
- ❖ yogasaṁnyastakarmāṇaṁ jñānasamchinnasaṁśayaṁ
ātmavantaṁ na karmāṇi nibadhnanti dhanamjaya
- ❖ tasmād ajñānasambhūtaṁ hṛtsthaṁ jñānāsinā 'tmanaḥ
chittvai 'naṁ saṁśayaṁ yogam ātiṣṭho 'tiṣṭha bhārata

The ignorant, the faithless, the doubting self goes to destruction; there is neither this world nor the other, nor happiness for the doubting.

He who has renounced actions by yoga, whose doubts are rent asunder by knowledge and who is self-possessed – actions do not bind him, O Arjuna.

Therefore, with the sword of the knowledge cut asunder the doubt of the self born of ignorance residing in thy heart and take refuge in yoga. Arise, O Arjuna.

He whose time has not yet come is known by his faithlessness. He goes to 'destruction', not total annihilation, but destruction of this precious opportunity granted by the Lord. This human birth is the door to liberation. He who utilises it for this great purpose is saved; he who does not, slams the door in his own face. He destroys, as it were, the raft that could have taken him across the ocean of saṁsāra.

Doubt is a great destroyer. We are commanded by the Lord to question our preceptors. Towards the conclusion of the Gītā, Kṛṣṇa further commands Arjuna to reflect over what he had told him. We should question the guru and then reflect over what he tells us; but with faith, not with a doubting intellect! Questioning and doubting are two very different mental actions. Questioning is a necessary step to the acquisition of knowledge; doubting is refusal to listen, refusal to think, refusal to look within, refusal to understand. Under cover of doubt, the ego thrives – the ego manages not to doubt itself. The man whose heart is full of doubts has no peace, no happiness even in this world; he does nothing good which could earn him a better world hereafter. What a loss!

Doubt must be slain by knowledge. The seeker must quickly begin the practice of yoga!



OM TAT SAT

iti śrīmad bhagavad gītāsūpaniṣatsu brahma vidyāyām
yogaśāstre śrī kṛṣṇarjuna saṁvāde
jñāna karma saṁnyasa yogo nāma caturtho 'dhyāyaḥ

Thus in the upaniṣad of the glorious Bhagavad Gītā,
the science of the eternal, the scripture of yoga,
the dialogue between śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna,
ends the fourth discourse entitled:

THE YOGA OF WISDOM

CHAPTER V

THE YOGA OF RENUNCIATION OF ACTION

V

18th APRIL

1-3

arjuna uvāca

- ❖saṁnyāsaṁ karmaṇāṁ kṛṣṇa punar yogaṁ ca śaṁsasi
yac chreya etayor ekaṁ tan me brūhi suniścitaṁ
śrībhagavān uvāca
- ❖saṁnyāsaḥ karmayogaś ca niḥśreyasakarāv ubhau
tayos tu karmasaṁnyāsāt karmayogo viśiṣyate
- ❖jñeyaḥ sa nityasaṁnyāsī yo na dveṣṭi na kāṅkṣati
nirvandvo hi mahābāho sukhaṁ bandhāt pramucyate

Arjuna said: Renunciation of all actions, O Kṛṣṇa, thou praisest, and again yoga. Tell me conclusively that which is the better of the two.

The blessed Lord said: Renunciation and the yoga of action, both lead to the highest bliss. But, of the two, the yoga of action is superior to the renunciation of action.

He should be known as a perpetual renunciate who neither hates nor desires. For, free from the pairs of opposites, O Arjuna, he is easily set free from bondage.

The confusion arose over a misunderstanding of verse forty-one of the previous chapter! The word ‘saṁnyāsa’ meant (and means even now to the narrow-minded, orthodox bigot) giving up of all activities and enjoyments. Enjoyment was supposed to cause attachment and action provided the fuel to keep the wheel of karma revolving. To talk of saṁnyāsa and activity in the same breath was obviously a contradiction in their eyes.

The famous story of queen Cūḍālā in the Yoga Vāsiṣṭha brings out the kernel of renunciation graphically. Renunciation should be of that which is ‘mine’. Worldly objects belong to the world; renouncing them would be like the beggar in South India renouncing his claims to the throne of England: they do not exist! Attachment to worldly activities may be replaced by attachment to so-called spiritual activities, with no real spiritual benefit! If a king enjoys his cup of wine, a mendicant might sip a cup of milk with equal pleasure! Patañjali warns us that even the ‘bliss’ of savikalpa samādhi is an extremely subtle substitute for sense-pleasure. Real renunciation is abandonment of egoistic acceptance and rejection, love and hatred, likes and dislikes. Real renunciation is renunciation of the only thing that ‘belongs to me’ viz., ignorance, the foolish ideas of ‘I’ (in relation to the body) and ‘mine’ (in relation to the objects of the world).

Longing and aversion both spring from false values. By giving both up one is freed from their bondage while remaining active.

❖sāṁkhyayogau pṛthag bālāḥ pravadanti na paṇḍitāḥ
 ekam apy āsthitaḥ saṁyag ubhayor vindate phalaṁ
 ❖yat sāṁkhyaiḥ prāpyate sthānaṁ tad yogair api gaṁyate
 ekaṁ sāṁkhyāṁ ca yogaṁ ca yaḥ paśyati sa paśyati

Children (fools), not the wise, speak of knowledge and the yoga of action, as though they are distinct and different. He who is truly established in one obtains the fruits of both.

That place which is reached by the men of knowledge is reached by the yogī. He perceives aright who has understood that knowledge and action are one.

Why does man ‘renounce’ objects of sense-enjoyments? When a scorpion falls into your lap, why do you throw it away? Because you fear it will sting you. The sting will give you pain and take away happiness – sense-pleasure, which you wish to enjoy! You value that pleasure and you credit the scorpion with the power to take it away. Similarly in the case of other objects; you superimpose on them a certain exaggerated value in relation to your own egoistic pleasure-instinct. So long as this valuation lasts, even their renunciation is of no value. For, the renunciation of pleasure is motivated by the desire for pleasure (euphemistically called supreme bliss or heaven).

Knowledge deflates this value. In the light of knowledge the man of wisdom perceives the whole universe (of which his body and mind are parts) as the body of God with the countless beings doing their duty as cells in it. Likewise, such a man’s body and mind obey his will, unfettered by his self-arrogating ego.

Being established in this knowledge, he finds that the only factor to be renounced is ego and its private reactions (likes and dislikes): even this is not ‘renunciation’, as the ego as an independent entity is non-existent – knowledge enables one to realise the unreal as unreal. God rules the wise man’s body and mind which function according to his will. It cannot be otherwise. Knowledge of God gives knowledge of his will and this will is done by the yogi spontaneously. Knowledge and action are two sides of the same coin. To be established well in one is to practise both!

❖saṁnyāsas tu mahābāho duḥkham āptum ayogataḥ
 yogayukto munir brahma nacireṇā 'dhigacchati
 ❖yogayukto viśuddhātmā vijitātmā jitendriyaḥ
 sarvabhūtātmabhūtātmā kurvann api na lipyate

But renunciation, O Arjuna, is hard to attain without yoga. The yoga-harmonised sage quickly goes to Brahman.

He who is devoted to the path of action, whose mind is quite pure, who has conquered the self, who has controlled his senses and who realises his self as the self in all beings – though acting, he is not tainted.

This renunciation of egoism, private desires and hopes is impossible without the practice of yoga (which is described in the next two verses). It will be seen therefrom that the practice of this yoga involves dynamic living. Without this dynamism one might fall into the error of clinging to inflated, subtle, false values, after unwittingly renouncing the right values – even as a man who peels a banana sitting inside a railway compartment might throw the fruit out of the window and put the skin into his mouth!

The ever-watchful yogi acts in this world in the right spirit. He finds that life itself offers him countless opportunities of discovering his own hidden evils, of purifying his heart, of detecting the wiles of the cunning ego, of understanding the innumerable guises in which his own lower self might appear and lead him astray, and of piercing the veil of māyā.

He who practises the yoga described in the next few verses will discover that the world, far from being a hindrance, is truly a great help in the practice of yoga. The Bhāgavatam assures us that that is truly the purpose of the Lord's creation – to help the souls to evolve, to awaken and to lead them to enlightenment.

The yogi must realise that his self is the self of all; and how can he do that if he 'renounces' the world and all activities? It is in the context of an active life in the world that the yogi discovers how the momentary experiencer (the ego) is turned into a permanent entity by a trick of memory (the me). This discovery is the ending of the ego, and the arising of the spirit of yoga.

❖nai 'va kiṁcit karomī 'ti yukto manyeta tattvavit
 paśyañ śṛṇvan sprśañ jighrann aśnan gacchan svapañ śvasan
 ❖pralapan visṛjan gṛhṇann unmiṣan nimiṣann api
 indriyāṇi 'ndriyārtheṣu vartanta iti dhārayan

“I do nothing at all”, thus would the harmonised knower of truth think – seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, going, sleeping, breathing,

Speaking, letting go, seizing, opening and closing the eyes – convinced that the senses move among the sense-objects.

There is a subtle snag here; it is not as though the ‘I’ feels greatly superior to all these activities and makes this declaration as a business executive might: “I do nothing, my staff is efficient.” The ‘I’ itself loses its first person-ness, being absorbed in the cosmic being. Failure to appreciate this will land us in perversion and terrible vanity. The truth has to be discovered, not assumed and asserted. This is possible not by a physical or even psychological withdrawal from the world but by an unceasing enquiry into the source of all action – not ‘I’ but ‘God’.

Is it possible for one to be devoid of this ‘I’ and yet continue to live and act? Yes; though, in the very nature of phenomena such people are bound to be extremely rare. To give a crude analogy, they function like plants. Plants have life and perhaps wonderful intelligence. Even today scientists are struggling to discover what makes the grass green and why it is capable of manufacturing food direct from the elements, whereas man has to depend upon plants for his nutrition. The plants have no individual ego-sense. They respond to God’s nature, to his will.

Similarly the egoless man responds to God’s will – rather, he serves as a clear channel, absolutely non-resisting, for his will. But in his case the guiding factor is intuition, a ray of God’s own omniscience, which lets him do God’s will spontaneously. Since there is no egoistic intelligence in him, he is not even aware of this intuitive wisdom. But we can recognise him by the total absence of personal selfish desires in him and by the unbroken peace that he radiates. He is no longer man, but he is God.

❖brahmaṇy ādhāya karmāṇi saṅgaṁ tyaktvā karoti yaḥ

lipyate na sa pāpena padmapatram ivā 'mbhasā

❖kāyena manasā buddhyā kevalair indriyair api

yoginaḥ karma kurvanti saṅgaṁ tyaktvā 'tmaśuddhaye

He who does actions, offering them to Brahman, and abandoning attachment, is not tainted by sin as a lotus leaf is untainted by water.

The yogī, having abandoned attachment, perform actions only with the body, mind, intellect and even by the senses, for the purification of the self.

The emphasis on 'abandoning attachment' is worth meditating upon. Those two words are like a double-edged sword without even a handle – it is difficult to hold! Likewise it is difficult to realise this state of non-attachment. The man who says: "I am not attached to anything" is terribly attached to that estimation of himself. It is not 'doing this' or 'refraining from this' that is the criterion; for both may be born of 'attachment'! No guidance whatsoever can be given here – the mind may get attached to the guidance, and mistake the description for the truth. Only the vigilant yogi knows what this means.

The yogi is ever mindful of the presence of God in himself (which he had mistaken for the 'I') and the omnipresence of God in all beings. He endeavours to keep this awareness steady in his mind all the time. But the mind might play wonderful tricks with him, too. A pleasurable object or person might appear to be truly full of God; and the yogi might find his mind sticking to it (incidentally, the Sanskrit word for 'friendship' is 'sneha' which also means 'glue'!). He has to retrieve his heart from it with skill but retain the right attitude to God's omnipresence. Again, the ego might assert itself and proclaim that God is the indwelling presence, specially manifest in the yogi's heart, goading him to keep away from this or that. The ego might speak in God's voice! The ego might spread a subtle net of self-importance in which the yogi might be caught. If, however, he is able to find the subtle middle path – without withholding himself and without getting attached – he will live in God, doing his will, never tainted by the sin of egoism. The second verse gives freedom of action not only to the body and the senses, but to the mind and the rational faculty. The ego? It has no permanent existence.

❖ yuktaḥ karmaphalaṁ tyaktvā śāntim āpnoti naiṣṭhikīm
 ayuktaḥ kāmakāreṇa phale sakto nibaghyate
 ❖ sarvakarmāṇi manasā samnyasyā 'ste sukhaṁ vaśī
 navadvāre pure dehī nai 'va kurvan na kārayan

The yogi, having abandoned the fruit of action, attains to the eternal peace.
 The non-yogi, impelled by desire, attached to the fruit, is bound.

Mentally renouncing all actions and self-controlled, the embodied one
 rests happily in the nine-gated city, neither acting nor causing others to
 act.

Whether the doer of all actions is God himself, or whether it is his nature (prakṛti), it is certainly not the individual ego. The individual ego rises and falls with every action or experience; the real ego is part of God's nature! The whole universe is the body of God in which his will prevails, guided by his consciousness. In this context, renunciation of desire for 'fruits of actions' is the most natural and sensible thing to do! Even the most vital organ in our body (the heart), which functions day and night, does not demand a reward! Yet we, who are little parts of a cell of the body of God do nothing unless assured of a reward! This desire is bondage. Its renunciation is liberation. When this is clearly seen, the desire does not arise at all. Even as every cell of our body receives its nourishment and life-force as long as it does its job, even so we shall receive from God what we deserve. Why beg for it?

Kṛṣṇa asks us to atomise ourselves and regard our self as the citizen of this nine-gated city, the body. The body has its own king (God) and administratrix (God's nature or prakṛti). The citizen enjoys peace, prosperity and security by merely living in obedience to the law. It is useless on his part to suffer the king's headaches. The same analogy can be applied to us who are cells in God's cosmic body. He is the doer or perhaps he causes his nature to do; but we neither do anything nor do we cause anything else to do. It is the motor which rotates the many wheels, not the other way round. God is the cosmic motor.

❖ na kartṛtvaṁ na karmāṇi lokasya sṛjati prabhuḥ
 na karmaphalasaṁyogaṁ svabhāvas tu pravartate
 ❖ nā 'datte kasyacit pāpaṁ na cai 'va sukrtaṁ vibhuḥ
 ajñānenā 'vṛtaṁ jñānaṁ tena muhyanti jantavaḥ

The Lord creates for the world neither agency nor actions (egoistic action or ka karma as the law of causation), nor union with the fruits of actions. But it is nature that prevails.

The Lord takes neither the demerit nor even the merit of any. Knowledge is enveloped by ignorance. Therefore beings are deluded.

There is plenty of work to do in the Lord's good world – but it is his world, his body. His life, power, nature or śakti is the motive force. His consciousness or intelligence is the guiding force. His own body, the universe, is the field. The innumerable microcosmic beings are cells in that body, joyously and purposefully participating in his work, sharing his life, power and nature, and united with his consciousness or intelligence. The individualised fraction is not the whole; but it is non-different from the whole and when it realises its true nature as such, it is indivisibly one with the whole.

Egoism is a mysterious deluding power. Individuation is inherent in the infinite as a potentiality all the time. Creation is the actualisation of this potentiality. Like the unperceivable dot on the circumference of a circle, like the raindrop which has not isolated itself from the rain-bearing cloud, it should be (and is) ever one with the infinite (though misunderstood to be only part of it). How this assumes independence of the infinite is a mystery! Is it ever independent of the infinite, in truth?

But, thank God, such division is a product of ignorance. When this ignorance is removed it will vanish. Even the law of cause and effect is based on this ignorant and egoistic idea of agency. In God, in his eyes, there is neither cause nor effect, neither merit nor demerit,

How does one wake up? WAKE UP!

❖jñānena tu tad ajñānaṁ yeṣāṁ nāśitam ātmanaḥ
 teṣāṁ ādityavaj jñānaṁ prakāśayati tat paraṁ
 ❖tadbuddhayas tadātmānas tanniṣṭhās tatparāyaṇāḥ
 gacchanty apunarāvṛttiṁ jñānanirdhūtakalmaṣāḥ

But to those whose ignorance is destroyed by the knowledge of the self, like the sun, knowledge reveals the supreme Brahman.

Their intellect absorbed in that, their self being that, established in that, with that for their supreme goal, they go whence there is no return, their sins dispelled by knowledge.

When one wakes up, his dream with all the dream-objects (pleasant and unpleasant), dream-experiences (happiness and misery), dream-actions (good and bad), dream-creations (heaven and hell) and the dream-personality (bound to a delusion) vanish. Man immediately realises that he is a cell in the body of God, that his self is the self of all, that by virtue of his oneness with the all, he is the all! Not the deluded and ignorant 'I', but God's nature prevails here, and functions in him, as it functions in the entire universe. This, however, is not mental activity, nor intellectual assent, nor a pious belief. It is realisation; one who has it need not intellectualise it or verbalise it.

The yogi who has this knowledge enters the state of sleepless sleep. In sleep, too, our entire physical organism functions, in obedience to God's nature. We are at peace and we commit no sin. The man who lets God's nature or will prevail even during the waking hours is at peace and commits no sin. He lives in the constant awareness that Brahman alone is true, the 'world' as such is false perception, and the individual soul is, in essence, one with Brahman. His self realises its identity with the supreme self. It is not a question of faith or belief, but firm conviction, an unshakable one like the conviction 'I am a human being', needing no proof. This conviction, permeating every thought, word and deed, itself is his goal. With ignorance, egoism and self-limitation gone, he is not subjected to limitation (birth) any more!

❖vidyāvinayasampanne brāhmaṇe gavi hastini
 śuni cai 'va śvapāke ca paṇḍitāḥ samadarśinaḥ
 ❖ihai 'va tair jitaḥ sargo yeṣāṃ sāmnye sthitaṃ manaḥ
 nirdoṣaṃ hi samaṃ brahma tasmād brahmaṇi te sthitāḥ

Sages look with an equal eye on a brāhmaṇa endowed with learning and humility, on a cow, on an elephant, and even on a dog and an outcaste.

Even here, birth is overcome by those whose minds rest in 'sameness'. Brahman is spotless indeed and 'sameness'. Therefore they are established in Brahman.

This doctrine of essential equality or 'sameness' is difficult for the ignorance-conditioned intellect to grasp. It is not the dull and drab sameness of uniformity in which all skins will be treated to have the same colour, all noses and faces will be standardised by plastic surgery, all men (and all beings) will eat the same food, wear the same clothes and will be treated in identical manner. The sage views all in the same light. He does not forget that they have different duties, places and needs – as cells in different parts of the one body of God. He recognises that the dog and the cow are one in God, and this recognition takes the form in him of attitudes and actions as befit the different roles allotted to them. The application of this doctrine is not as simple as it sounds! For, it is the seeing of sameness that is vital, and any action that substitutes this seeing will lead us astray.

This 'sameness' is the nature of God. God is faultless and spotless. We see that also in his nature, the five elements are all pure and purifying. The self is identical with God and thus free from sin. Sin is ignorance. In the dark, you see some animals moving in the backyard. You throw a stone and go to sleep satisfied that they have gone. They were but shadows! But the 'stone-throwing' created an impression in your mind. In our lives such actions give rise to tendencies that lead to sin and rebirth. The enlightened soul does not get involved in delusion, sin, and therefore birth and death! Absorbed in 'sameness' it realises its eternal oneness with Brahman, the infinite.

❖na prahr̥ṣyet priyaṁ prāpya no 'dvijet prāpya cā 'priyaṁ
 sthirabuddhir asaṁmūḍho brahmavid brahmaṇi sthitaḥ
 ❖bāhyasparśeṣv asaktātmā vindaty ātmani yat sukhaṁ
 sa brahmayogayuktātmā sukham akṣayam aśnute

Resting in Brahman with steady intellect and undeluded, the knower of Brahman neither rejoiceth on obtaining what is pleasant nor grieveth on obtaining what is unpleasant.

With the self unattached to external contacts he finds happiness in the self. With the self engaged in union with Brahman he attains to endless happiness.

The knowledge outlined in the preceding verses is a double-edged sword. The clever, cunning and pleasure-seeking ego often uses it in pursuit of its own revelry in the darkness of ignorance. Hence, the ancient sages had wisely withheld this knowledge from the unclean hands of the undisciplined soul Kṛṣṇa, while throwing the gates of knowledge open to all, exposes 'the other edge' of the sword clearly.

It is easy to say "God's will" or "I see God in all", when the mind and senses are pampered and the ego is inflated. It does not demand spiritual heroism to demonstrate brave equanimity when life is smooth and fortune is smiling. But, just as night follows day, their counterparts follow them. **Then** is the time to demonstrate true equilibrium of mind! If you can truly be indifferent to misfortune, dishonour, failure and pain, you are a yogi.

This is possible by a twofold sādhana:

1. Detach the mind from external contacts. Reduce the self to zero. In your own heart experience the bliss of God.
2. Expand. Know that the self is the all-pervading Brahman. Realise you are the all. Enjoy the perennial bliss.

In (1) the external disturbing elements do not even touch you. In (2) you identify yourself with them too; you are the robber and you are the robbed – you have only changed the lost object from one hand to the other! You will ever be happy.

However, unless this sādhana springs from, or is at least accompanied by self-knowledge, it will lead either to hypocrisy or, worse, to repression of emotion.

❖ye hi saṁsparśajā bhogā duḥkhaṇaya eva te
 ādyantavantaḥ kaunteya na teṣu ramate budhaḥ

The enjoyments that are born of contacts are only wombs of pain, for they have a beginning and an end. O Arjuna, the wise do not rejoice in them.

This applies even to our own physical body! When there is a rash on the skin, scratching it feels pleasant, but the result is a worsening of the condition. When there is high fever the tongue likes food and drink which aggravate the misery. As cells in the body of God, this is true of us. These ‘cells’, conditioned perversely by the pleasure-seeking ego, indulge in ‘contacts’ which are harmful.

The soul, which is forever one with the supreme being, is carried away by these momentary sense-pleasures. They are not eternal. When they come they appear to be pleasant, but this is soon followed by their departure which causes unpleasantness over prolonged periods. This tragedy, however, is the direct result of the mind labelling and liking the momentary experience as ‘pleasure’, thus making it desirable and giving rise to a craving for repetition.

A careful observation will reveal that, in truth, the so-called worldly pleasures are ‘the mothers of pain’. By looking at the offspring, it is possible to know the genes of the parent. We know that in this world every indulgence in worldly ‘pleasure’ is sooner or later followed (as its offspring) by great pain. The pleasure that gave birth to this pain should, logically, have been pain only. It was; but was mistaken for pleasure.

This definition must qualify the wise man whose characteristics we studied in the foregoing verses. He is naturally not interested in worldly pleasures. Mark that Kṛṣṇa does not ask him to shun them! There is no struggle involved in this. He who is blissful in God is just not interested in worldly pleasures, in perpetuating them by thought.

Even the description of these pleasures as ‘wombs of pain’ and ‘limited by time’ is but a statement of fact and not a preventive threat! We should not forget that the *yogi* is tranquil, not even frightened by contact with worldly objects.

❖śaknotī 'hai 'va yaḥ soḍhum prāk śarīravimokṣaṇāt
 kāmakrodhodbhavaṁ vegaṁ sā yuktaḥ sa sukhī naraḥ
 ❖yo 'ntaḥsukho 'ntarārāmas tathā 'ntarjyotir eva yaḥ
 sa yogī brahmanirvāṇaṁ brahmabhūto 'dhigacchati

He who, while still here, is able to withstand the impulse born of desire and anger, before liberation from the body – is a yogi. He is a happy man.

He who is happy within, who rejoices within and who is illuminated within, that yogi attains absolute freedom or mokṣa – himself becoming Brahman.

In the inner depth of one's being is the point of contact with Brahman the absolute. It is significant, therefore, that modern science has turned its searchlight of analysis on the 'nucleus', the subtler-than-the-cell structure, for a knowledge of the fundamentals. No wonder, either, that herein is discovered amazing intelligence, power and order. Are we on the threshold of a scientific discovery of God?

We, too, shall find our peace and bliss, light and life, in that innermost depth where the soul is God. We shall realise that the force of God's love holding the whole universe together is misunderstood by the soul as the source of that sense-pleasure which is easily experienced. The soul foolishly desires such pleasure, transferring it to external objects. The yogi clears this mist of ignorance and rejoices within the self.

Pleasure is not the goal of Indian ethics or religion. If personal pleasure is good (and so the goal of man), then there would be chaos in this world; for what is pleasant for one causes pain in another; and someone's pleasure is always bought at the expense of another's.

Kṛṣṇa, therefore, deliberately turns man's vision away from pleasure-seeking desire. Pleasure and pain will still seek us out, on account of past karma, but if we refrain from desiring pleasure and hating pain, karma will work itself out and we shall be liberated.

❖ labhante brahmanirvāṇam ṛṣayaḥ kṣīṇakalmaṣāḥ
 chinnadvaidhā yatāmānaḥ sarvabhūtahite ratāḥ
 ❖ kāmakrodhaviyuktānāṁ yatīnāṁ yatacetasāṁ
 abhito brahmanirvāṇaṁ vartate veditātmanāṁ

The sages obtain absolute freedom or mokṣa – they whose sins have been destroyed, whose perception of dualities is torn asunder, who are self-controlled and intent on the welfare of all beings.

Absolute freedom or bliss of Brahman exists on all sides for those self-controlled ascetics who are free from desire and anger, who have controlled their thoughts and who have realised the self.

The whole series of verses describing the nature of a wise man should be read together in order to obtain a clear picture of Kṛṣṇa's idea. Half-knowledge is like jumping half the width of an abyss.

'Sameness' is Brahman; and if we get firmly established in perfect equanimity and equilibrium of mind, we shall realise our oneness with the absolute. That sounds simple! But that is only part of the definition.

The wise man is full of dispassion. He does not allow himself to be led away by desire and hatred – the two emotions (e-motion, i.e. externalised movement) that lead the soul away from its centre, Brahman. That seems simple, perhaps, especially to a dry kill-joy ascetic. But this again is only partial description.

Such dispassion must be born of an inner experience of supreme bliss. The wise man is full of it. He is convinced of its reality. You may think: "Perhaps even this is not so difficult after all; people have discovered drugs which will create an inner wonderland." Oh, no....

This bliss is not hallucination, but an inner light. It is not a fool's paradise, but the paradise of the sage who sees the self in all and is, therefore, vigorously engaged in the promotion of the welfare of all beings!

Such bliss is the true, perfect, perfection.

THE MONTH OF MAY

We are now dealing with an exciting part of the scripture. In this, Kṛṣṇa hands us the key to the kingdom of eternal bliss.

When we enter the spiritual path of yoga, we should be prepared to face one enigma after another. Our reaction to environment and opportunity is largely determined by our own pre-conditioning (mainly brought forward from previous incarnations); but this is not absolute, and we even have the privilege of wiping away the whole ugly picture of past vicious tendencies, if only we care to be awake, alert, see and recognise them and vigilantly exercise our free-will to eradicate them. While we depend very much on divine grace for our spiritual practice and progress, the Lord himself will continue to remain aloof and witness them. Here we are thrown upon our own resources, as it were; but, however much we try, the ultimate experience is God's gift which he will bestow upon us only when there is no egoistic receiver. We shall, of course, not know when this false ego has been totally negated; for then who is there to know? These are some of the enigmatic paradoxes we encounter on our march to God – but an intelligent understanding of the principles involved makes the pursuit a deeply interesting spiritual adventure.

In our spiritual practice, the guru will help and without him we may get lost. Fellow spiritual aspirants may help too. However, no one but your own pure (purified) mind can lead you towards God. That pure mind alone is your best friend. Even the guru's instructions must be assimilated and made your own. Otherwise, a lifeless imitation might result. Spoonfeeding by the guru will cripple the inner God-given faculties, producing dullness and spiritual suicide. You have to discover the great truth yourself.

Modern scientific knowledge is highly unscientific in this respect. It has a label for everything, including psychological expressions and experiences. This robs us of our greatest opportunity to know, intimately and immediately. The words 'infinite', 'eternal', 'absolute' that come across on a printed page create an illusion of understanding and knowledge within us, thereby preventing immediate and intimate knowledge of the real, inner meaning (not the dictionary meaning) of these words – the truth they indicate.

We might, of course, make use of all these crutches, but without feeling complacent enough to dispense with our own legs, Kṛṣṇa very carefully warns us again and again against such spiritual sloth and slavery.

❖ sparśān kṛtvā bahir bāhyāṁś cakṣuś cai 'vā 'ntare bhruvoḥ
 prāṇāpānau samau kṛtvā nāsābhyantaracāriṇau
 ❖ yatendriyamanobuddhir munir mokṣaparāyaṇaḥ
 vigatecchābhayakrodho yaḥ sadā mukta eva saḥ

Shutting out (all) external contacts and fixing the gaze between the eyebrows, equalising the outgoing and the incoming breaths moving within the nostrils,

With the senses, the mind and the intellect controlled, having liberation as his supreme goal, free from desire, fear and anger – the sage is verily liberated forever.

It is all very well to talk of inner experience of the supreme bliss, the spiritual light, and so on, but that is not enough. Intellectual understanding or theory is the starting point, but it is useless unless translated into practice, leading to the realisation which the theory vaguely suggests. Kṛṣṇa is one hundred percent practical in his approach to life in the world and to God-realisation, and introduces here the way in which the inner spiritual experience is to be had by the seeker after the reality.

Experience of the 'sameness' is prevented by the desire-filled mind and deluded intellect identifying the self with passing phenomenal experiences had via the limited, finite and deceptive senses, and the consequent creation and adoption of false values. Hence, Kṛṣṇa's yoga consists in inner enlightenment in which the seeker's scale of values is radically altered, the spiritual truth taking the place of the older material ones until the evaluating ego dissolves itself in choiceless awareness (witness consciousness).

Here, again, one should know the art of discerning and disconnecting the disturbing elements! Kṛṣṇa describes this technique in detail in the next chapter.

Behaviourism (a school of western psychology) recognises that fear, rage and love are the three innate emotions even of an infant – the natural or animal instincts. Yoga recognises these emotions, too, and demands that the yogi should be free of them, in order to attain perfection.

❖bhoktāraṁ yajñātapasāṁ sarvalokamaheśvaraṁ
 suhṛdaṁ sarvabhūtānāṁ jñātvā mām śāntim ṛcchati

He who knows me as the enjoyer of sacrifices and austerities, the great
 Lord of all the worlds and the friend of all beings, attains to peace.

Before proceeding to describe the technique, Kṛṣṇa assures us that God's grace will certainly enable us to achieve that perfection which is also supreme peace.

We need God's grace to achieve success in anything, most of all in our spiritual quest. That grace is available to us all, pervading all throughout our lives. There is a reason for it. God is the dearest friend of all beings, and this friend-indeed will enable us to overcome all obstacles and crown all our efforts with success.

Nor is it difficult to propitiate God and earn his grace, for he is the enjoyer of all sacrifices and austerities. All our actions and services, all our charities and austerities, all our prayers and adorations reach God. If only man recognises this great truth, then his whole life and all his actions are spiritualised and sublimated. Every action that he performs and every prayer that he offers flows towards the Lord, deepening and widening the channel day after day and hour after hour, so that at the same time God's grace may flow towards him in ever-increasing abundance.

No one need despair. No one need fear obstacles. With a changed angle of vision the seeker looks upon obstacles as stepping stones. The thing that obstructs our smooth progress along the corridor is not an obstacle, but a step meant to lead us upward and onward!

God's grace alone will enable us to see it in this light and God is waiting to shower his grace on us! It is God's grace that enabled all this to be written, it is God's grace that enables you to listen to his song! Divine life is divine grace.



OM TAT SAT

iti śrīmad bhagavad gītāsūpaniṣatsu brahma vidyāyām
yogaśāstre śrī kṛṣṇarjuna saṁvāde
karma saṁnyasa yogo nāma pañcamo 'dhyāyaḥ

Thus in the upaniṣad of the glorious Bhagavad Gītā,
the science of the eternal, the scripture of yoga,
the dialogue between śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna,
ends the fifth discourse entitled:

THE YOGA OF RENUNCIATION OF ACTION

CHAPTER VI

THE YOGA OF MEDITATION

VI

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śrībhagavān uvāca

- ❖ anāśritaḥ karmaphalaṁ kāryaṁ karma karoti yaḥ
sa saṁnyāsī ca yogī ca na niragnir na cā 'kriyaḥ
- ❖ yaṁ saṁnyāsam iti prāhur yogarṁ taṁ viddhi pāṇḍava
na hy asaṁnyastasaṁkalpo yogī bhavati kaścana

The blessed Lord said: He who performs his duty without depending on the fruits of his actions – he is a saṁnyāsī and a yogi, not he who is without (ritual) fire and without activity.

Do thou, O Arjuna, know yoga to be that which they call renunciation. No one verily becomes a yogi who has not renounced thoughts, scheming or planning.

Kṛṣṇa breaks down all man-made distinctions, created by a mind limited by its own preconceived ideas and imperfections. The man of renunciation (saṁnyāsī) wore the orange robe, had the title of 'swami' and was learned in vedānta: he abandoned all rites and rituals, and did not engage himself even in social activity. The yogi, on the other hand, practised certain psycho-physical exercises and possessed and exhibited certain psychic powers. The saṁnyāsī need not necessarily do these and the yogi need not necessarily be a man of renunciation. That was the belief.

It is not the validity of these distinctions but the underlying idea that matters. Caught in the snare of these distinctions, we often tend to lose sight of the goal of both renunciation and yoga! We make them an end in themselves, leading in different directions.

Kṛṣṇa points out the synthesis. Yoga is saṁnyāsa. How can we ever contemplate God if we have not learnt to detach the mind from the world, and to remove worldliness from our mind? How, on the other hand, can we learn to detach the mind from the world, if we do not attach it to God? The two attributes – detaching the mind from the world (saṁnyāsa) and attaching it to God (yoga) – are but two ends of the same stick.

Where such synthesis does not prevail, there is hypocrisy, pride and conflict. Where it does, there is sincerity, humility and harmony – whatever be the outward appearance.

❖ārurukṣor muner yogaṁ karma kāraṇam ucyate
 yogārūḍhasya tasyai 'va śamaḥ kāraṇam ucyate
 ❖yadā hi ne 'ndriyārtheṣu na karmasv anuṣajjate
 sarvasaṁkalpasamnyāsī yogārūḍhas tado 'cyate

For a sage who wishes to attain to yoga, action is said to be the means. For the same sage who has attained to yoga, quiescence is said to be the means.

When a man is not attached to the sense-objects or to actions, having renounced all wishes or schemes, then he is said to have attained to yoga.

Indeed, there are stages in the seeker's life when he should be involved in certain external practices and there are stages when he becomes engaged in internal practices. In the highest stages, however, the sage is completely quiescent, at rest in the self which is cosmic consciousness.

Until the state which is known as yoga is reached, one should not renounce external practices, for premature renunciation would prevent progress. This is true even of worldly objects and duties. It is more sensible and wiser to cultivate the proper attitude to them and to establish in oneself the correct scale of values, so that the objects drop away, their values deflated, and the 'duties' are seen in their true Light as the ego's excuse to cling to the world. The ego does not initiate action. Action comes from somewhere else. Correct scale of values, the correct sense of proportion is itself 'saṁnyāsa', usually translated as 'renunciation'. Physically pushing the world away might only drive it deeper within oneself, psychologically.

Yet this should not be interpreted to mean undue emphasis on action. A stage comes in the life of every seeker when the external and later the internal action is no longer necessary; then, resting in the peace of the self he realises that that is both the doer of all actions and the witness of all passing phenomena! This is not a state to be presumed; it has its own criteria – complete non-attachment and the absence of selfish desires and worldly (and heavenly!) dreams and schemes, which are inwardly and actually 'seen' as haunting phantoms. At that stage a false sense of duty or the need for demonstrative practices drop away unnoticed.

❖uddhared ātmanā 'tmānam nā 'tmānam avasādayet
 ātmai 'va hy ātmano bandhur ātmai 'va ripur ātmanaḥ
 ❖bandhur ātmā 'tmanas tasya yenā 'tmai 'vā 'tmanā jitaḥ
 anātmanas tu śatrutve vartetā 'tmai 'va śatruvat

Let a man lift himself by his own self alone, let him not lower himself. For this self alone is the friend of oneself and this self alone is the enemy of oneself.

The self is the friend of the self for him who has conquered himself by the self, but to the unconquered self, this self stands in the position of the enemy like the external foe.

How often do we blame our failures on others, on external conditions and on the weather? Everyone is given what we call 'some blessings' – some misfortune and some good fortune. All these are mixed very nicely. It is not that some people are favoured and others are not favoured. Life does not know any distinction whatsoever. The real trouble lies within ourselves – why do we want to look elsewhere for a solution? The wise man knows that his own impure mind is his worst enemy and the pure mind his best friend.

Yet it is not as though these two are distinct and different. Hence Kṛṣṇa uses the same word 'self' risking confusion. Just as we have one body with a head and limbs, even so we have an 'antahkaraṇa' (inner instrument or subtle body), the mind, which has its different aspects and functions. Just as a single iron rod may be hot at the end close to fire, and cold at the end farthest from fire, the same mind is pure and strong where it is turned towards the indwelling presence of God, and impure and weak where it is turned away from him and towards the world of sense-experiences.

God has given every man the free-will to adjust the mind in such a way as to bring the whole of it close to God, or to remain turned away from him. The worldly man chooses the latter alternative and thus his own mind becomes his worst enemy, tormenting him with desires and cravings, love and hatred, likes and dislikes. In the case of the wise man, however, the whole mind is close to God and is, therefore, luminous with the knowledge of the indwelling omnipresence.

❖jitātmanaḥ praśāntasya paramātmā samāhitaḥ
 śītoṣṇasukhaduḥkheṣu tathā mānāpamānayoḥ
 ❖jñānavijñānatṛptātmā kūṭastho vijitendriyaḥ
 yukta ity ucyate yogī samaloṣṭaśmakāñcanaḥ

The supreme self of him who is self-controlled and peaceful is balanced in cold and heat, pleasure and pain, as also in honour and dishonour.

The yogi who is satisfied with the knowledge and the wisdom of the self, who has conquered the senses, and to whom a clod of earth, a piece of stone and gold are the same, is said to be harmonised.

Conquest of the senses does not mean their total inhibition. To be of the same mind does not imply insensibility. It is easy for an idiot to bear insult and injury. One who suffers from the disease known as syringomyelia does not feel heat and cold. Yet, I know from the example of my own Master, that the yogi is extremely sensible (perhaps sensitive too). It is this that enables him to sympathise with others in distress, to feel their need for a blanket in winter, and to desist from hurting their sentiments. My Master showed us that the yogi is far from being a wooden-headed, stone-hearted and insensible creature.

The first verse makes it clear that it is the supreme self that is balanced; the self-controlled yogi does not identify that self with the body undergoing the varied experiences of heat and cold, and the mind experiencing pleasure and pain. He recognises that his abode is subject to the vagaries of the climate; he takes the necessary steps to remedy the situation, without losing his inner balance. The inner balance is lost when there is false identification of the self with the body and the mind.

Concomitant with this wrong identification is the false value that the deluded mind attaches to the objects of the world. The yogi will use a clod of earth to clean his hands, a stone to keep his papers from flying and a piece of gold to feed the hungry – but he has risen above the false sense of values. Each object's true value is its value in context.

The man who cannot distinguish gold from mud is a madman; one who sees the difference but is not affected by it, is a sage. He knows the true value of every object in God's nature, and fulfils God's will in every way.

❖suhṛṇmitrāryudāsīnamadhyasthadveṣyabandhuṣu
sādhūsv api ca pāpeṣu samabuddhir viśiṣyate

He who is of the same mind to the good-hearted, friends, enemies, the indifferent, the neutral, the hateful, the relatives, the righteous and the unrighteous, excels.

In chapter V, verse 18, the Lord said that the wise men have ‘equal vision’. This is a very important concept or teaching in the Bhagavad Gītā and needs clear-cut understanding. Our Master used to point out ‘samadarśī’ (man of equal vision) is different from ‘samavartī’ (man who behaves alike to all). We are asked to see the same self in all; but that should not lead us to the absurd position of trying to feed the goat with meat and the tiger with grass.

To remove the possibility of such misconception the Lord uses another expression here – ‘samabuddhi’. This same-mindedness is an entirely inner state which is very difficult to bring down to the level of exhibitionism. The yogi is aware of his unruffled state of mind when he meets any of the people listed in the verse above.

The yogi knows the difference between a newspaper and a currency note, but the sight of the currency note does not produce in him the excitement that it does in a worldly man. The only sign by which we shall know how he feels is the total absence of greed he exhibits and his unwillingness to hoard wealth.

The yogi has trained his buddhi or intelligence to be aware of the indwelling presence in all. But as long as he lives in the physical body, in this material world, he has a double-consciousness: he sees the gold and the clod of earth, but is aware that they both are part of God’s nature. His intelligence is aware of God’s omnipresence, though the mind and senses still receive the varied impressions in the world. His actions and reactions are strictly in accordance with God’s will, unconditioned by personal likes and dislikes, love or hatred. He is naturally not attached to anything, neither rejecting it nor clinging to it, but enjoys it while it is there, knowing that everything is pervaded by God and his will be done. His individual ‘me’ always knows itself as part of the great ‘He’.

❖yogī yuñjīta satatam ātmānaṁ rahasi sthitaḥ
 ekākī yatacittātmā nirāśjir aparigrahaḥ
 ❖śucau deśe pratiṣṭhāpya sthiram āsanam ātmanaḥ
 nā 'tyucchritaṁ nā 'tinīcaṁ cailājinakuśottaram

Let the yogi try constantly to keep the mind steady, remaining in solitude, alone with the mind and the self controlled, and free from hope and greed.

In a clean spot, having established a firm seat of his own, neither too high nor too low, made of a cloth, a skin and kuśa-grass, one over the other...

Now follows practical instruction on the art of meditation. It is not as if God is somebody else upon whom we meditate. When the wandering self abandons its pleasure-seeking misadventure, God-consciousness is experienced. The effort put forth is more to restrain this waywardness of the mind than to 'see' anything. Seeing sights and hearing sounds are often subtler expressions of the waywardness of the mind. Patañjali (the author of Rāja Yoga Sūtrā) asks us to beware of them.

The 'hope and greed' mentioned here need not necessarily be restricted to worldliness. Even greed for rapid spiritual evolution may be included, for such greed will inevitably give the ego the best chance to present illusions of supernormal phenomena and thus distract the self from its higher pursuits.

Solitude is important; we should choose for the following practice a place and a time where and when we are not likely to be disturbed and where, therefore, our attention is secure. However, true solitude is psychological and inward – the knowledge that you and I are alone in this world.

A clean spot refers not only to physical and outward cleanliness, but also to the 'atmosphere' of the place. It should be holy – associated with God. In meditation the mind becomes extremely subtle and is therefore subject to the very vibrations in the atmosphere.

The seat should neither be too low (thus subject to disturbance from insects) nor too high (causing fear of a fall). The prescribed seat of grass, skin (deer-skin) and cloth prevents the body from being affected by the condition of the earth and also preserves the inner magnetic force, preventing it from being 'earthed' and lost.

❖tatrai 'kāgraṃ manaḥ kṛtvā yatacittendriyakriyaḥ
upaviśyā 'sane yuñjyād yogam ātmaviśuddhaye

There, having made the mind one-pointed, with the actions of the citta (the subconscious mind) and the senses controlled, let him, seated on the seat, practise yoga for the purification of the self.

The light of the self is veiled by its own rays blinding our conditioned and limited perception. These rays are conducted via the mind (conscious and subconscious) and the senses in order to illumine the world. In meditation, the yogi controls the inner rays in such a way that his attention is not distracted by the senses and the activity of citta (subconscious mind).

The citta functions on account of:

- (a) latent desires and tendencies (memory), and
- (b) the movement of prāṇa.

The yogi, therefore, practises prāṇāyāma (regulated breathing) and turns the desires upon their own source! Thus the citta is freed from turbulent activity and it therefore becomes transparent enough to reveal the underlying essential divinity of the self.

The mind and the senses are already turbulent. Violently subduing them will only result in making them more turbulent! A wind opposed by another will only make a whirlwind. 'Control' is best illustrated in the expression: 'He has good control of the motor-car'. Not that he has shut the engine off, but he knows in which direction to steer, when to apply the brakes or press the accelerator. Controlling the mind and the senses, therefore, implies that we are their masters, their skilled manipulators, not their prison warders.

Some people foolishly assert that the aggregate of the senses is the mind. On the contrary, the senses are the leaking holes of the mind. Hence, when they are controlled, the energy and the intelligence that leak through them will be made available for the higher purpose of purification of the self.

When control is achieved, the self is experienced as ever-present and eternal reality. Meditation does not create the self but only removes the opacity, purifying the mind so that the insight shines, unveiling the truth. When the mirror is cleaned the face is seen; the cleaning did not 'create' the image, but only removed the dirt which hid the image.

❖samarṁ kāyaśirogrīvaṁ dhārayann acalaṁ sthiraḥ
 saṁprekṣya nāsikāgraṁ svaṁ diśaś cā 'navalokayan
 ❖praśāntātmā vigatabhīr brahmacārivrate sthitaḥ
 manaḥ saṁyamya maccitto yukta āsīta matparaḥ

Let him firmly hold his body, head and neck erect and still, gazing at the tip of his nose, without looking around,

Serene-minded, fearless, firm in the vow of a brahmacārī, having controlled the mind, thinking of me and balanced in mind, let him sit, having me as his supreme goal.

The body and mind are interrelated. If the mind is unsteady, the body shakes too; as in anger. If the body is agitated, the mind is not steady. The body must be kept still in order that it may be forgotten and transcended.

The 'erect' posture is the natural one (though it is considered to be a special 'yogi's posture' on account of the distortion of our normal posture). In it the vital force or prāṇa flows smoothly, especially along the spine, thus ensuring equilibrium both of the body and the mind, which the prāṇa links and enlivens.

'Nāsikā-agra' in the original text may mean 'tip, root or front of the nose'. Sanskrit is a rich and flexible language. Certain yogī claim that special psychic merits accrue from gazing at the tip or the root of the nose (between the eyebrows). It is best to look directly in front of the nose at a symbol of God or the flame of a lamp. When you think of God and endeavour to visualise him within yourself, you will discover that the vision is 'abstracted' and therefore even the objects in front of you fade away. The important point is to sit 'without looking around'.

Once the desired concentration of mind and internal visualisation of God have been achieved, then it matters little if the eyes are kept open or closed. The visualisation is imagination. Imagination has image in. Looking at it enquiringly reveals the substance of which this in-image is made. If the visualisation is dull, the result is nil.

'Brahmacārī' is one whose mind 'roams in God or Brahman' (though in a restricted sense, it refers to continence). 'Fearlessness' is extolled because in deep contemplation, when one 'forgets' the body, one is apt to be afraid of 'losing it'. One whose goal is God is fearless and is prepared to sacrifice anything to reach him.

❖ yuñjann evaṁ sadā 'tmānaṁ yogī niyatamānasah
śāntiṁ nirvāṇaparamāṁ matsaṁsthām adhigacchati

Thus always keeping the mind balanced, the yogi, with the mind controlled, attains to the peace abiding in me, which culminates in liberation.

The yogi seated in meditation learns 'to balance his mind'. Kṛṣṇa, by quietly and unpretentiously slipping this verse in here, points out at this stage that the yogi's balanced mind is not at all upset at any time. 'Always' warns us against the delusion that peace is attained only during meditation. If this balance or peace is itself a type of meditation, then such meditation too, is continuous and unbroken.

In fact, you will notice that the popular misconceptions about meditation are swept away by Kṛṣṇa. He does not decry or condemn them; he does not even want us to discourage others who have their own ways of approaching the truth. He wisely instructs us in the best way, his own way, in which we shall ever dwell in him.

The yogi does not enjoy the peace 'of mind' or 'of meditation', but the peace abiding in God or the peace of abiding in God. When the mind is controlled and the attention is focused on God excluding the distracting rays which reflect over the surface of the mind and leak through the senses, the yogi discovers that the whole universe is pervaded by God-consciousness, filled with God's life and clothed in his body. In a not-so-obvious manner, it is the one divine presence that pervades all things. When that truth sinks deeper and deeper, the yogi suddenly discovers that the inside-outside divisions are non-existent. With closed eyes, he sees God within; with open eyes he sees God all round. God lives in him, and he dwells in God.

The peace of abiding in God culminates in nirvāṇa (liberation). Nirvāṇa is completely stripping oneself. There are no coverings. All covering is ignorance. Not that the yogi should go about naked; but he should (and does) cease to identify the self with the changing forms of the body and of mentality. He sees everything, right from 'his' (erstwhile) ego, mind and senses, down remotest object in the world, as none other than the one consciousness. Nirvāṇa is the extinction of pleasure seeking, whether it was seeking for worldly pleasure, heavenly pleasure or some other goal described as supreme bliss.

❖nā 'tyaśnatas tu yogo 'sti na cai kāntam anaśnataḥ
 na cā 'tisvapnasīlasya jāgrato nai 'va cā 'rjuna
 ❖yuktāhāravihārasya yuktaceṣṭasya karmasu
 yuktasvapnāvabodhasya yogo bhavati duḥkhahā

Verily yoga is not possible for him who eats too much, nor for him who does not eat at all, nor for him who sleeps too much nor for him who is (always) awake, O Arjuna.

Yoga becomes the destroyer of pain for him who is moderate in eating and recreation, who is moderate in exertion in actions, who is moderate in sleep and wakefulness.

Yoga is not a physical, mental or psychic feat. It is **life** itself; not the kind of restless life swinging constantly between the two extremes of exhilaration and depression, indulgence and denial, sensuousness and asceticism, but the harmonious flow of the divine will along the wise middle path. The Kāthopaniṣad characterises the spiritual path as 'the razor's edge', difficult to tread. The razor's edge is difficult to tread, not on account of the fear that it may injure our feet, but because it is so sharp that it is invisible.

On both sides of this subtle middle path there is danger, pain and suffering. Both of them (extremes) imply a strong identification of the body, mind and the personal ego with the self. Yoga aims precisely at the removal of this false identification, and the consequent private desire and 'seeking' under whatever label it appears.

The man who loves eating is a glutton; but the man who refuses to eat is an egoist. The former identifies the self (ātmā) with the body; the latter, with the vain personality or egoism which swells with pride at its ability to go without food. Both of them are confusing the self with the not-self. The yogi, however, dissociates the body, mind and ego from the real self, while allowing God's nature to reveal itself through all these.

In gluttony there is pain, as also in abstention. Pleasure is invariably followed by pain. Vanity is accompanied by fear or injured pride. The yogi who pursues the middle path is blissfully free from all these. Only he lives; others drag on in miserable existence.

❖ yadā viniyataṁ cittam ātmany evā 'vatiṣṭhate
 niḥspṛhaḥ sarvakāmebhyo yukta ity ucyate tadā
 ❖ yathā dīpo nivāstho ne 'ṅate so 'pamā smṛtā
 yogino yatacittasya yuñjato yogam ātmanaḥ

When the perfectly controlled mind rests in the self only, free from longing for all the objects of desires, then it is said: "He is united".

As a lamp placed in a windless spot does not flicker – to such is compared the yogi of controlled mind, practising yoga in the self.

Again and again, Kṛṣṇa reminds us that control of mind and yoga imply non-attachment which itself does not mean vain, foolish and egoistic hatred of, or 'running away from' anything in this world, nor deluded cruelty inflicted on one's own body. Non-attachment is an intelligent understanding of the real nature of the soul as the 'image of God', and the body, mind and ego as the external nature of God. The body, mind and ego provide an abode for the individualised self to dwell in, become perfect and thus witness the reality of God.

The body exists, even as the house exists. It comes into contact with various objects of this world, even as the house comes into contact with wind, rain and sunshine. From these contacts the mind is continually learning its lessons in this vast school of the world. However, ignorance attributes pleasure and pain to the objects and experiences, and consequently reacts with attachment and aversion. These are the factors that keep the individual soul in bondage. They constantly disturb the inner equilibrium, being themselves the fruits of inner disharmony. If the mind is not at peace, life is a nightmare, a string of endless trials.

The yogi's mind, on the other hand, is like a lamp in a windless spot, burning calmly and steadily, illuminating all that surrounds it. This is one of the reasons why the seeker has a lamp (or candle) burning at the altar always – to remind him of the ideal he is striving for. It should never be forgotten that this inner harmony should prevail at all times, not only during meditation. The lamp in a windless place is not inert but it is unimaginably intense activity called combustion. Similarly, the yogi's steady mind is not dull. It is the home of blossoming insight. In that insight life flows on uninterruptedly, blissfully, in strict accordance with God's will.

- ❖ yatro 'paramate cittam nirruddham yogasevayā
yatra cai 'vā 'tmanā 'tmānam paśyann ātmani tuṣyati
- ❖ sukham ātyantikam yat tad buddhigrāhyam atīndriyam
veti yatra na cai 'vā 'yam sthitaś calati tattvataḥ

When the mind, restrained by the practice of yoga, attains to quietude and when seeing the self by the self, he is satisfied in his own self,

When he (the yogi) feels that infinite bliss which can be grasped by the pure intellect and which transcends the senses, and established wherein he never moves from the reality...

Satisfaction is an inner subjective experience. When the sensual urge, the surge of the animal passions (which is nothing more than tension, stress or pain), subsides on account of an artificial release of the tension by the appeasement of that urge, there supersedes an experience of satisfaction within oneself; but since it is merely an appeasement, the tension builds up once again and once again man experiences pain. As he continues with this policy of appeasement, the intervals between two periods of stress become shorter and shorter and there is continuous pain.

The yogi knows this and he therefore consciously remains rooted in the fountain-source of satisfaction, satisfaction in the self (ātma). He resolutely refuses to let the tension or urge build up, culminating in futile appeasement. Such an attitude is possible only if we are able to lift the veil of ignorance which hides the fountain of infinite bliss beyond the intellect and the senses. The veil usually confuses our vision and deludes us into thinking that the happiness that is experienced after the appeasement of the urge, comes from the appeasement itself. It is thought that causes this confusion; thought is the veil. Thought links the external experience with the inner delight – and craves for its repetition and continuance. Thought silenced is meditation.

The yogi overcomes this confusion through meditation. Delight experienced in meditation, without any external prop, gives the lie to the old notion that happiness is outside. Independent happiness is the most intense, and it is unshakable because it is self-dependent. So long as our peace or happiness depends upon external agencies, we cannot be happy.

❖yam labdhvā cā 'param lābham manyate nā 'dhikam tataḥ
 yasmin sthito na duḥkhena guruṇā 'pi vicālyate
 ❖taṁ vidyād duḥkhasaṁyogaviyogaṁ yogasaṁjñitaṁ
 sa niścayena yuktavyo yogo 'nirviṇṇacetasā

...having obtained which, he thinks there is no other superior gain;
 wherein established, he is not moved even by heavy sorrow,

Let that be known by the name of yoga, the severance from union with
 pain. This yoga should be practised with determination and with an
 understanding mind.

When everything is all right and the sun is shining on you, you may think that you have no doubts at all and that you know exactly what God is, what meditation means, and that you see God. But when there is trouble in life, where is that God? Suddenly the ego rises; there is insecurity, fear, agony and all your belief deserts you. This is the danger of a belief. So Kṛṣṇa says here: If you have a vision of truth, test it against this definition: established in that truth, can you withstand the greatest calamity and smile?" If you can, then it is possible that you have discovered the truth. If you have not been put through such a test, then suspend the judgement.

As long as we identify the self with mind, body and the world, and experience only external 'pleasure', we are always in pain. When this deluded identification is removed and the consciousness is united with the self (as in yoga) then we are in bliss, we are bliss itself.

This is the highest attainment; for there can be no happiness greater than the bliss that is independent and complete. This bliss cannot be removed from one established in it, nor can it be modified in him.

Since he is totally detached from the world, the body and the mind, and since he has realised that the self is an independent silent witness of the world phenomena (including his body and mind), he remains unmoved in all conditions. He knows the self to be the immortal, eternal, all-full, perfect and independent bliss. The real divinity within.

What we need is firm determination (not the pig-headed obstinacy with which it is confused), real understanding and an intelligent approach to the truth of our essential, divine being.

❖saṁkalpaprabhavān kāmāṁs tyaktvā sarvān aśeṣataḥ
 manasai 've 'ndriyagrāmaṁ viniyaṁya samantataḥ
 ❖śanaiḥ-śanair upamed buddhyā dhṛtigṛhītayā
 ātmasaṁsthaṁ manaḥ kṛtvā na kiṁcid api cintayet

Abandoning without reserve all desires born of thought and imagination and completely restraining the whole group of the senses by the mind from all sides,

Little by little let him attain to quietude by the intellect held firmly; having made the mind establish itself in the self, let him not think of anything.

Saṁkalpa has been translated into thought, notion, concept. But, simply, it is when a thought is entertained and strengthened. The saṁkalpa is formed between the experiencer and an experience which takes place in the mind. So, what we call our thoughts are not very different from imagination, yet, throughout the day we think!

Suddenly we realise that life has been a slave to these saṁkalpā (these imaginary objects which give rise to cravings and desires), and we have painted a gruesome world in which we see friends, enemies, saints, sinners and so on; and because this mind or saṁkalpa interferes, we do not know what is natural to us, and life is a struggle. The yogi, having determined this, constantly endeavours to withdraw himself into his own self – knowing that this is the greatest source of joy and satisfaction – whilst carrying on his normal activity in the yoga spirit.

That is what my Master called his 'background of thought'. Even while he worked, lived and enjoyed in the external world, as it were, he was established within the self. This swinging between meditation and life is Kṛṣṇa's way of intimating their unity. One without the other is imperfect and incomplete.

During the active state, the yogi tries to realise, 'All this is God'; but in order to prevent subtle attachment and self-delusion creeping in, during meditation he tries to remove the consciousness of the all completely, and remains rooted in the self alone. Firmly holding on to the one God thought, 'All this is God', the mind drops all other thoughts and desires and remains serene. But, God is not thought; hence even this has to be transcended. Beyond thought is a dimension quite different from all that has been thought of or expressed. Kṛṣṇa, the supreme preceptor, points to that.

- ❖ yato-yato niścarati manaś cañcalam asthiram
tatas-tato niyaṁyai 'tad ātmany eva vaśam nayet
- ❖ praśāntamanasaṁ hy enaṁ yoginaṁ sukham uttamaṁ
upaiti śāntarajasam brahmabhūtam akalmaṣam
- ❖ yuñjann evaṁ sadā 'tmānaṁ yogī vigatakalmaṣaḥ
sukhena brahmasaṁsparśam atyantam sukhamaśnute

From whatever cause the restless and unsteady mind wanders away, from that let him restrain it and bring it under the control of the self alone.

Supreme bliss verily comes to this yogi whose mind is quite peaceful, whose passion is quieted, who has become Brahman and who is free from sin.

The yogi, always engaging the self thus, freed from sins, easily enjoys the infinite bliss of contact with Brahman.

“Detach the mind from the objects, attach it to the Lord”, said my Master, Swami Sivananda. This is not easy, but it is not impossible, and, what is vital to remember, it has got to be done.

The mind, wandering away from the centre of our being, seeking the contact of the objects of this world, is the cause of sin and is itself sin. This, verily, is suffering too. The mind, uprooted from its own centre (the self) wanders in misery, weeping in pain, groping in darkness, desperate in anxiety. Even as a child that has strayed away from its mother is filled with dread, weeps, and is unable to enjoy the carnival, the mind of the worldly man who has lost his contact with God is filled with worries and he is unable to enjoy the omnipresence of God.

When that mind is detached from the contact of worldly objects by constant and persistent practice, and when it is simultaneously attached to Brahman (God), it enables the yogi to enjoy infinite bliss which is his own essential nature.

Once this inner contact is made, the yogi should try to remain in it. It will be easy because the happiness derived from it is incomparably superior to all else and the mind will be ready and eager to drop all other pursuits. The path thenceforth becomes easy and smooth. Remaining firmly established in Brahman, the yogi becomes Brahman, i.e., he realises that Brahman alone is real, and the 'I' has never been real. I exist, of course, but not as 'I' or 'me' or 'mine'. The ego-sense, the mind, the intellect, the world and matter are there, but as integral, inseparable God.

❖sarvabhūtaṣṭham ātmānaṁ sarvabhūtāni cā 'tmani
 īkṣate yogayuktātmā sarvatra samadarśanaḥ
 ❖yo māṁ paśyati sarvatra sarvaṁ ca mayi paśyati
 tasyā 'haṁ na praṇaśyāmi sa ca me na praṇaśyati

With the mind harmonised by yoga he sees the self abiding in all beings and all beings in the self; he sees the same everywhere.

He who sees me everywhere and sees everything in me, never becomes separated from me, nor do I become separated from him.

Meditation (as described in verses 11 to 14 above) is only a part – though a vital, indispensable spirit-awakening part – of yoga, but should never be regarded as all that yoga means. God is omnipresent. God-realisation must, therefore, definitely mean realising his omnipresence, not only within oneself or within one's own sanctuary, but in and ultimately as all.

When we come into contact with the objects and personalities in this world, the mind immediately reacts in the customary way furnishing them with names, forms and assumed attributes (like good and evil, ugly and beautiful, pleasant and unpleasant).

Language is a screen. We use words to cover up what we do not want to see. We indulge in this name-calling because we do not know the truth and do not care to know the truth. However, it is possible to reach the realisation that ignorance has created these names and the simultaneous illusion that 'I know', whereas in fact, we do not know anything. One who is able to enter into that spirit gets the grace and enlightenment.

Therefore, the yoga student is asked to meditate and first establish inner contact. Once this is done, it is easier to overlook the name and form of the objects and personalities and perceive the divine essence in all.

Meditation alone without this dynamic practice of the omnipresence of God is of very little use. Meditation itself is not possible if our daily life denies his omnipresence. We can make no progress if we start the car and do not make a move!

It is the one infinite being that shines through all this diversity as all this. To see this is, in fact, meditation. Then there is neither withdrawal from nor involvement in the world. Saṁsāra (the perennial stream) flows on neither calling for your involvement nor demanding your withdrawal. To see this is to see God; to see God is to be God!

❖ sarvabhūta-sthitaṁ yo māṁ bhajaty ekatvam āsthitaḥ
 sarvathā vartamāno 'pi sa yogī mayi vartate
 ❖ ātmaupaṁyena sarvatra samaṁ paśyati yo 'rjuna
 sukhaṁ vā yadi vā duḥkhaṁ sa yogī paramo mataḥ

He who, being established in unity, worships me who dwells in all beings,
 that yogi abides in me, whatever be his mode of living.

He who, through the likeness of the self, O Arjuna, sees 'same-ness'
 everywhere, be it pleasure or pain, he is regarded as the highest yogi.

This is the goal of yoga, clearly stated here and still more graphically reiterated in verse 46 of the eighteenth chapter. We worship God in shrines, churches and mosques; we approach him through his various manifestations (which we shall study in the tenth chapter); we sit in a secluded spot and meditate upon his presence in our heart, but all these are the 'exercises' necessary to acquire proficiency in the art of yoga. Without them we shall get nowhere; but if we get stuck in them we shall get nowhere either.

Kṛṣṇa clearly declares two vital truths here: the yogi should worship all beings in whom God dwells, and his mode of living is immaterial if this attitude of worshipfulness is ensured. Whatever be one's trade or occupation, one can be a yogi. Whatever be one's caste, religion, colour or nationality, one can be a yogi. From God's standpoint, there is nothing secular or mean, profane or impure, because he is the source of everything. It is the inner attitude of worshipfulness that is important. That is the philosopher's stone which transforms all activity into yoga. The yogi does not entertain the least idea of profit; he does not feel he helps anyone or even that he serves anyone; he worships all beings. This worship naturally takes the form of loving (God-loving) service.

Just as the Lord dwells in one's own body and mind. with all their weakness and imperfections, he also dwells in others' bodies and minds. The yogi transcends good and evil. Pleasure and pain are events, not experiences: praise and censure are opinions which do not affect him. His mind (or, rather, the mind) is rooted in God-consciousness and therefore he goes beyond all these and rests in 'same-ness' which is the omnipresence of God.

arjuna uvāca
 ❖yo 'yaṁ yogas tvayā proktaḥ sām̐yena madhusūdana
 etasyā 'haṁ na paśyāmi cañcalatvāt sthitiṁ sthirāṁ
 ❖cañcalaṁ hi manaḥ kṛṣṇa pramāthi balavad dṛḍhaṁ
 tasyā 'haṁ nigrahaṁ manye vāyor iva suduṣkaraṁ

Arjuna said: This yoga of equanimity taught by thee, O Kṛṣṇa, I do not see its steady continuance, because of the restlessness of the mind.

The mind verily is restless, turbulent, strong and unyielding, O Kṛṣṇa; I deem it as difficult to control as to control the wind.

Anyone who has endeavoured to fix the mind knows how difficult it is; if the object of our attention is outside, and sensuously attractive, perhaps it compels our attention. Anyone who has tried to focus the attention on an idea or an ideal within oneself will appreciate what Arjuna says here! An otherwise passive mind becomes suddenly active; the otherwise placid lake of the mind becomes agitated; and the mind takes us farther away from the inner ideal than we ever imagined it could!

The power of delusion, of ignorance, of animal desires and instincts, is so strong that any attempt at controlling the mind is seriously resented by it. It is the experience of many that “since beginning to concentrate and meditate, the inner impurities seem to have grown”. We seem to be farther from God now than before we even thought about him.

It is good to know that it is a step towards God, a sign of progress! The inner devil has been disturbed, shaken from his complacent existence as the Lord of our inner world. Like an angry cat at bay, he is now fighting with his back to the wall – he is cornered!

The fight is hard and long-drawn, but let us fight the good fight with faith in the Lord, for once the mind itself is offered at the feet of the Lord, to serve him, it will become our best friend. This is the symbolism of Hanumān (the son of wind – wind and mind are the same, only the ‘m’ is upside-down) in the Rāmāyana. This restless ‘monkey’ (the mind) is invincible, wise, and heroic, and is able to work wonders, once it is made to serve the Lord.

śrībhagavān uvāca
 ❖ asaṁśayaṁ mahābāho mano durnigrahaṁ calaṁ
 abhyāseṇa tu kaunteya vairāgyeṇa ca grhyate
 ❖ asaṁyatātmanā yogo duṣprāpa iti me matiḥ
 vaśyātmanā tu yatatā śakyo 'vāptum upāyataḥ

The blessed Lord said: Undoubtedly, O mighty-armed Arjuna, the mind is difficult to control and restless; but by practice and by dispassion it may be restrained.

I think yoga is hard to be attained by one of uncontrolled self, but the self-controlled and striving one can attain to it by the proper means.

The greatest aid to control of mind is the realisation that the uncontrolled mind is our worst foe and sooner or later it must be controlled (and will be) before we can reach the goal. Well then, why not now?

Practice makes everything perfect. No one achieves proficiency in anything without persistent practice with ever-increasing intensity. If two slices of bread do not appease our hunger, we ask for more, but if two hours' meditation is not enough to still our mind, we do not prolong and intensify it, but abandon meditation altogether! Why this illogical approach?

In the word 'practice' are included several allied practices like yoga postures (āsaṇa), prāṇāyāma (breathing), study of scriptures, repetition of holy names and singing hymns. 'Practice' should not be merely repetitive and dull. Practice is alertness, constant vigilance.

However, practice alone will not do. Practice without vairāgya (dispassion) only helps us to master the technique of mind control, but not to control the mind. If we are strongly attached to the pleasures of the senses while 'practising' to free ourselves from them, we labour aimlessly and vainly, like drunken men who row a boat the whole night without first loosening the chain that binds it to the shore! We might develop our muscles but we will not reach our destination.

Vairāgya is inner absence of infatuated desire or craving. It is not 'running away' but 'turning away' from worldly pleasures. Even with wide open eyes, while moving about in the world, the gaze is turned within; and the yogi thus perceives the Lord in and through the world. He neither shuns the world nor clings to it, but pierces the veil and perceives the Lord. That is true vairāgya or dispassion.

arjuna uvāca
 ❖ ayatiḥ śraddhāyo 'peto yogāc calitamānasah
 aprāpya yogasāmsiddhiṁ kām gatiṁ kṛṣṇa gacchati
 ❖ kaccin no 'bhayavibhraṣṭaś chinnābhram iva naśyati
 apratiṣṭho mahābāho vimūḍho brahmaṇaḥ pathi
 ❖ etan me saṁśayaṁ kṛṣṇa chettum arhasy aśeṣataḥ
 tvadanyaḥ saṁśayasyā 'sya chettā na hy upapadyate

Arjuna said: He who is unable to control himself though he has faith, and whose mind wanders away from yoga, what end does he, having failed to attain perfection in yoga, meet, O Kṛṣṇa?

Fallen from both, does he not perish like a rent cloud, supportless, O mighty-armed, deluded on the path of Brahman?

This doubt of mind, O Kṛṣṇa, do thou dispel completely; because it is not possible for any but thee to dispel this doubt.

Granted, it is possible to control the mind if we have the necessary faith. But, faith in the electric kettle alone will not boil the water! We have to fill it with water, plug it in and switch on the current. Yet, something might still go wrong somewhere and our purpose may be defeated.

This is especially true in the path of yoga. Worldly duties and scriptural rituals often drop away from the student of yoga, yet, in the words of lord Kṛṣṇa, if these are abandoned prematurely, out of delusion or because they are painful and troublesome, it would be wrong. How does one know?

Sometimes the scriptures themselves warn us that the abandonment of these duties is sin. We are on the horns of a dilemma now. We, as students of yoga, do not have sufficient faith in the scriptures to fulfil our duties. We have faith in yoga; but we may not have the will-power, the understanding, single-minded dedication to the quest and the ability to look within and see that pleasure is a mental creation and pleasure-seeking a folly. We have leapt off one cliff of the ravine but have not been able to reach the opposite side, or so it seems.

Are we doomed to destruction or frustration, then?

It is a very real and valid fear. We abandon worldly pleasures, but have no inner strength to reach supreme bliss. Do we then wander about as demented men or stray dogs?

śrībhagavān uvāca
 ❖pārtha nai 've 'ha nā 'mutra vināśas tasya vidyate
 na hi kalyāṇakṛt kaścīd durgatim tāta gacchati

The blessed Lord said: O Arjuna, neither in this world, nor in the next world is there destruction for him; none, verily, who does good, O my son, ever comes to grief.

Once again we have a great verse in the Bhagavad Gītā, every verse of which is indeed memorable and inspiring. Lord Kṛṣṇa goes one step beyond the answer to the immediate question and makes a sweeping, most reassuring generalisation. Every verse in the Gītā should be in gold lettering, but this one should be studded in diamonds.

With what loving solicitude the Lord addresses Arjuna (and so you and me) – “O my son” – everyone and every devotee especially, is the son of God. How lovingly does he assure us that we are forever safe, if we do good always!

At some time or other in life everyone is overwhelmed by the doubt: “What is the use of doing good in this world of injustice with its perverted scale of values?” We often find rogues prospering, cruel oppressors and heartless exploiters rolling in wealth and power, while the voiceless, god-fearing man of righteousness and the humble servant of God are trampled upon. Yet Kṛṣṇa assures us that no evil ever befalls the good man! Our welfare is already guaranteed by the omnipresent divinity, God.

We should revise our empirical logic. The wicked man's road to hell lies through an increase of worldly wealth and power, the good man's path to God-realisation lies through apparent (he does not feel it, since his mind is devoted to God) suffering in which he sheds all his worldliness, lurking evil tendencies and the effects of his own past karma. Let us rejoice! Never shall we suffer in the least if we do good, and even if in the eyes of the world we pass through suffering, inwardly we shall rejoice that we are drawing closer to God. These experiences (wrongly called suffering) are birth-pangs after which we shall be reborn in God, to enjoy perennial bliss and immortality. He who has rightly understood that pleasure is a creature of thought and is thus free of it, is also free of pain.

❖prāpya puṇyakṛtām lokān uṣitvā śāśvatīḥ samāḥ
 śucīnām śrīmatām gehe yogabhraṣṭo 'bhijāyate
 ❖athavā yoginām eva kule bhavati dhīmatām
 etad dhi durlabhataram loka janma yad īdrśam

Having attained to the worlds of the righteous and having dwelt there for everlasting years (many millennia) he who was unsuccessful in yoga is reborn in a house of the pure and (spiritually) wealthy.

Or, he is born in a family of even the wise yogī; verily a birth like this is very difficult to obtain in this world.

The theory of evolution is inextricably bound up with the theory of reincarnation. Self-purification which leads to the instantaneous, spontaneous and indescribable realisation of the ever-present self-luminous self, is not possible in a single life-span, though this need not necessarily involve taking birth after birth. You are trapped in this world in which you experience a succession of happiness and unhappiness, success and failure, pleasure and pain. Something is born in you, something dies in you. That itself is enough reincarnation. Each day you are born and you die a thousand times. Every hope is a new birth. Every frustration is a death. With faith you will recognise naturally, in and through these changes, something that is immutable. This is the key to self-realisation.

Even the 'intervals' of physical 'death' (which is only an unusually extended form of deep sleep) are an indispensable step in this delicate process of purification, meant to ensure that the overall effect of the accomplishments of each life-span is preserved and the cumbersome and distracting details are washed away. Thus, life-span after life-span, the individual soul is dyed deeper and deeper into the colour of God. That is what Jesus meant when he said: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect". The perfection alluded to here is a perfection equal to the perfection of God.

Kṛṣṇa specifically mentions that the soul incarnates in worlds other than this; several recent incidents prove that it is possible for the soul to return to this very earth. Even the 'recall' of Lazarus by Jesus points to this possibility. However, that we assume a body suitable for further evolution towards divine perfection is certain.

Rightly understood, this doctrine will not cause despair or pessimism because of the 'length of time' this process of self-purification needs. 'Time' itself is relative and illusory: he who vigilantly strives to discover perfection lives in the eternal now.

❖ tatra taṁ buddhisam̐yogaṁ labhate paurvadehikaṁ
 yatate ca tato bhūyaḥ saṁsiddhau kurunandana
 ❖ pūrvābhyāsenā tenai 'va hriyate hy avaśo 'pi saḥ
 jijñāsur api yogasya śabdabrahmā 'tivartate

There he comes in touch with the knowledge acquired in his former body and strives more than before for perfection, O Arjuna.

By that very former practice he is borne on in spite of himself. Even he who merely wishes to know yoga goes beyond the śabda-brahman, the rituals of the vedā.

In his next incarnation in the house of a yogi, the seeker's spiritual aspiration is rekindled. We have a beautiful synthesis of the theories of individual evolution and heredity. Man is now what he had made of himself in the past birth. He carries with him the subtle residue of the sum-total of all his actions, good and evil.

How does this reconcile with our discoveries about heredity? Let us bear in mind that heredity does not always operate; it is an influence even as environment is an influence. It influences...what? The evolving soul, which has its characteristics largely determined by the activities in a past birth. Hence, genius is seldom inherited. With few exceptions it seems to appear spontaneously in families not unusually gifted.

However, Kṛṣṇa gives us a clue to the reconciliation of the two theories. The evolving soul is reborn in a family of kindred souls; this appears to our unenlightened vision to be the operation of the law of heredity.

Hereditary influences and environmental influences may or may not be conducive to spirituality – even one's own superficial tendencies may be unspiritual! No one is perfect in the world and the incarnating soul is certainly not so. As Jesus Christ would have said: "Why call me good? Only God is good". Yet, the force of past yoga practice compels the aspirant to pursue the goal from where he left the path in the previous incarnation. A study of the lives of saints is the best way to understand this paradox. Often they are suddenly whisked away from a worldly life to the path of yoga.

❖ prayatnād yatamānas tu yogī saṁśuddhakilbiṣaḥ
 anekaajanmasaṁsiddhas tato yāti parām gatim

But the yogi who strives with diligence, purified of sins and perfected gradually through many births, reaches the highest goal.

‘Eternal damnation’ is a childish idea. If it is found in some scriptures, it is used only as a figure of speech – a hyperbole. It is meant to ‘frighten’ immature souls from the path of unrighteousness.

How can the good God damn us forever, having created us in his image? He, who is our father and mother, will never condemn us forever. If purgatory is a place of purification, hell is only a place of intenser purification. The difference is one of degree, not of essential nature – as the difference between a wash basin and a bathtub.

Our scriptures emphatically declare that God, having created us, has entered into us as the soul of our soul. The soul is nothing other than the image of God. He is the sole reality in us. Even if it were possible for God to condemn us forever, in effect he would be condemning himself – which is too absurd to deserve a second thought.

There is only one course open to the soul of man and that is redemption. We must be redeemed, and that is why the Lord sends us teachers, saints, saviours and his own incarnations time and again. If we assiduously follow their precepts, we shall reach the goal sooner.

After studying the Gītā, put into practice a little of what you have learnt. In yoga, the light-switch for the next stage of the staircase is on the previous one, to which you first have to climb. Then the next stage becomes visible! You cannot see the final stage or goal now. Others have seen, described the levels and have also erected the stairway of yoga practice. Have faith. Follow their instructions diligently. You, too, will reach the highest goal.

‘Blind faith’ is blindness, not faith. Faith implies a glimpse and a longing for a vision. This faith (very different indeed from ‘religious faith’) sustains spiritual efforts. Spiritual progress is ‘gradual’ – this is a statement of fact, not a commandment to make it so slow!

❖tapasvibhyo 'dhiko yogī jñānibhyo 'pi mato 'dhikaḥ
 karmibhyaś cā 'dhiko yogī tasmād yogī bhavā 'rjuna
 ❖yoginām api sarveṣāṁ madgatenā 'ntarātmanā
 śraddhāvān bhajate yo māṁ sa me yuktatamo mataḥ

The yogi is thought to be superior to the ascetics and even superior to men of (theoretical) knowledge, he is also superior to men of (mere selfish) action; therefore be thou a yogi, O Arjuna.

And, among all the yogī, he who, full of faith and with his inner self merged in me, worships me, is deemed by me to be the most devout.

Here the expression 'yogi' should be taken to mean one who practises the yoga described in the previous verses – he who has harmonised himself with the indwelling omnipresence and he who, therefore, is freed from all self-centred attachments and aversions, selfishness and egoism.

Asceticism and erudition often lead us only farther from God, by adding the reinforcement of vanity to the naturally impenetrable wall of ignorance. The aim of yoga is to break down the little ego in order that the cosmic 'I' (which is non-different from 'he' and 'you') may be revealed. Mere asceticism, erudition or even service only fattens the little ego and thus blocks even the struggle for its eradication.

For the eventual transcendence of the ego, several paths have been laid down by our ancient masters. In all of them there is lurking danger ever present: if the sense of direction is lost, if the means are mistaken for the end, or if the landmarks usurp the glory of destination, great may be the fall. That is what is known as the goalless wandering in the jungle of dogma.

Kṛṣṇa presents a revolutionary concept of yoga here; and it is a wonderful aid to meditation, too. Instead of trying to fill the finite heart with the infinite Lord, the devotee is asked to offer himself into the heart of God! This attitude can be adopted in meditation too. Start with the visualisation of God in the heart, let him expand and take over, your body, the room, and the whole world. Merge yourself in him. If the meditation is not imagination but realisation, humility arises and the seeker is swallowed up in the seeking. The ego dissolves and the 'king of the universe' is seen (see-king).



OM TAT SAT

iti śrīmad bhagavad gītāsūpaniṣatsu brahma vidyāyām
yogaśāstre śrī kṛṣṇarjuna saṁvāde
ātmā saṁyama yogo nāma ṣaṣṭho 'dhyāyaḥ

Thus in the upaniṣad of the glorious Bhagavad Gītā,
the science of the eternal, the scripture of yoga,
the dialogue between śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna,
ends the sixth discourse entitled:

THE YOGA OF MEDITATION

CHAPTER VII

THE YOGA OF WISDOM AND REALISATION

VII

28th MAY

1, 2

śrībhagavān uvāca
❖ mayy āsaktamanāḥ pārtha yogam yuñjan madāśrayaḥ
asaṁśayaṁ samagraṁ māṁ yathā jñāsyasi tac chr̥ṇu
❖ jñānam te 'haṁ savijñānam idaṁ vakṣyāmy aśeṣataḥ
yaj jñātvā ne 'ha bhūyo 'nyaj jñātavyam aviśiṣyate

The blessed Lord said: O Arjuna, hear how you shall without doubt know me fully, with the mind intent on me, practising yoga and taking refuge in me.

I shall declare to thee in full this knowledge combined with direct realisation, after knowing which nothing more here remains to be known.

The scriptures are full of knowledge and wisdom garnered from direct, intuitive, inner experience. The masters can impart knowledge to you and lead you to the threshold of the highest experience, saving you from pitfalls and inspiring you at every step. However, the great sage Vasiṣṭha says: “Enlightenment is not reached by resorting to a teacher or a teaching; but it is not had without them.” The teacher and the teaching act as catalysts, their purpose is unknown. They are necessary, but not to be dependent upon.

We ourselves should be intent on God-realisation, on the practice of yoga. We shall have to equip ourselves with the four means to salvation: discrimination, dispassion, virtues conducive to tranquillity of the mind and an intense yearning for God.

Knowledge of God is beyond the mind and intellect. It must be devoutly and lovingly received by the heart. This wisdom is not something which can be gained merely by studying or listening to discourses. It is not in words, nor in concepts. But, unless the mind is calm and the intellect open, that knowledge cannot gain admission into the inner chambers of our being. And unless the heart is pure, free from passions, attractions, selfishness and worldly pursuits, it will not receive the knowledge. Only the pure heart is ‘intent on God’.

How are we to ensure these receptive conditions? There is only one aid here – satsang or constant association with the wise, the devout and other spiritual seekers. Study of their works also constitutes satsang. Frequent gatherings to talk about God and yoga, to contemplate the nature of the world and life, to meditate upon God and thus to acquire a reassessment of values, are a great help, too. However, these must awaken us from our slumber of ignorance, keeping us vigilantly watchful of the mind and aware of the sorrow that thought-process is.

❖manuṣyāṇāṁ sahasreṣu kaścīd yatati siddhaye
yatatām api siddhānāṁ kaścin mām vetti tattvataḥ

Among thousands of men, one perchance strives for perfection; even among those successful strivers, only one perchance knows me in essence.

Humanity can be likened to a pyramid, broad at its base and becoming progressively narrower as we ascend to the top. The world is full of souls who have risen just one step above the animal, still not secure in their foothold even there! Yet, they too shall reach the goal in God's good time, even though they are full of instinctual behaviour and are interested only in their own survival. They are animals in human disguise and are labourers who toil for mere selfish ends. A few more births of experience chisel them into better human shape and they are elevated to the rank of workers, promoting their own welfare with one hand and the welfare of others with the other. Experience soon teaches them the futility of such work and they begin to question: "What is the purpose of all this?" They seek an answer, becoming seekers. This fire of quest burns furiously in their heart, consuming the animal nature, selfishness, and self-seeking. It also sheds a beam of light on their path to God-realisation. In that light, in course of time, they see the truth and become sages. The world is full of labourers, few workers, fewer seekers and still fewer and rarer, sages.

The striving seeker will eventually become a sage, perhaps now or a million years hence. In the words of the Bible: "Many are called, few are chosen". Nobody knows what determines this, but this doctrine of grace must be understood correctly. Only he who has completely surrendered himself to the divine becomes eligible for grace. Not one who is satisfied merely with intellectual understanding, but he whose heart is receptive to spiritual truths.

Yet, he who has truly surrendered himself to God does not know it. This total surrender is not for the ego to determine; only God can determine it. Hardly one of the sages, the perfected ones, **knows** God in essence! Why? Because on attaining perfection they merge in him. In that state of complete integration God reveals himself, but only to a few. It is they who return to the world as God's gift of himself, to guide us as our masters.

❖bhūmir āpo 'nalo vāyuh khaṁ mano buddhir eva ca
 ahaṁkara itī 'yaṁ me bhinnā prakṛtir aṣṭadhā
 ❖apare 'yam itas tv anyāṁ prakṛtiṁ viddhi me parāṁ
 jīvabhūtāṁ mahābāho yaye 'daṁ dhāryate jagat

Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect and egoism – thus is my nature divided eightfold.

This is the inferior nature, O mighty-armed Arjuna; know thou as different from it my higher nature, the very life-element, by which this world is upheld.

What is nature? It is God's nature! This long-forgotten truth is revealed here. Its realisation opens the kingdom of God to all - scientists, biologists, artists and poets, all worshippers of (God's) nature. Therefore let us never forget again that they who think of, admit the existence of, and are devoted to (God's) nature cannot escape the admission of the existence of God.

The five elements which constitute this material universe, and mind, intellect and egoism are all God's own nature – they do not belong to you! This is a startling revelation. The mind is a modification of the same substance – God's nature, though subtler, and so it reacts automatically to the five elements. Even the ego is part of this nature. It is ignorance and misconception to regard it as independent.

So, we are told here that all the material manifestations of the universe are the inferior nature of God. But, just as in our body the life-force is distinct from the skin, flesh, bone, etc., (inasmuch as it can withdraw itself from the body), there is a divine spark in all beings which is called the jīva, the living soul, the 'image of God within'. This is God's superior nature.

If we adopt the image of God concept, then we find that mirror and image are mutually dependent – one cannot exist without the other. What Kṛṣṇa suggests here is: God is the reality, mirror is the material substance – the elements, mind, intellect and ego - and the soul is the reflection in that mirror. The reality, God in his essence, is, in a certain sense, beyond the mirror and the image. It is God reflected in matter (including the mind) that is seen as the individual personality or consciousness – the soul. So, we are given a new and beautiful vision here: the entire material universe is the inferior aspect of God – the body of God – and the indwelling spirit or soul is his superior nature.

❖etadyonīni bhūtāni sarvāṇī 'ty upadhāraya
 ahaṁ kṛtsnasya jagataḥ prabhavaḥ pralayas tathā
 ❖mattaḥ parataraṁ nā 'nyat kiṁcid asti dhanamjaya
 mayi sarvam idaṁ protaṁ sūtre maṇigaṇā iva

Know that these two (natures) are the womb of all beings. So I am the source and dissolution of the whole universe.

There is nothing whatsoever higher (other) than me, O Arjuna. All this is strung on me, as clusters of beads on a string.

There is nothing other than God! God alone exists. He alone is the reality. How can the unreal exist? God is not an entity that you and I can see or experience through the senses, through the intellect. But what **exists**, the complete cosmic entity, is God. Even the word 'God' is unnecessary, because there is nothing outside of him, therefore there is no name, there is no form. If we must feel that the material universe and all the diverse beings have an existence, we should realise that all of them together constitute the body of God, while the indwelling consciousness, the soul of this universe, is the spirit of God. What a superb vision!

We talk of creation and dissolution of the universe. All that is nothing but the manifestation and the unmanifestation of the nature of God. There are some sages who treat even such expressions as 'God willed the creation into being' as imperfect explanations meant for spiritual children (the soothing syrup!). The sun shines without intending to shine; that is God's very nature. Even so, all the elements and the life-potency (DNA) are God's nature and the manifestation-potential is always present in him. This potential is made manifest and then unmanifest, alternately; that again is his nature.

In ignorance of the unity of God, we assume that he created the world as a man creates a piece of pottery. When we clearly realise that there is nothing other than God then we see that whatever arises, arises in that consciousness. In the analogy used, consider a rosary in which the beads and the connecting string are of the same thread. Thus, one string appears as 108 beads and their connecting link. So, God alone appears as these myriads of beings and their connecting link, yet he is the only reality.

THE MONTH OF JUNE

Yoga is both philosophy and religion – not in their sectarian connotation, but in their true sense. It is love of the highest wisdom; and it is a practical way to realise that self is God.

“Life is short; time is fleeting,” repeatedly warned our Master. He said: “It is difficult to get a human birth, therefore, try your best to realise the self in this birth.” We know that we shall become perfect sooner or later; but, having attained this human birth, why not realise the self in this very birth?

What happens when one leaves this world? Where does he go and what kind of birth does he take? What can I do to avoid a rebirth in this world of pain and death? What is the extent of this universe and the length of its life? All these and many other questions are discussed and answered by the Lord in this holy scripture, Bhagavad Gītā.

In the sixth chapter, we noticed how very practical his approach to meditation was. Now, he gives us more practical instructions which enable us, on the one hand, to remember him constantly, and on the other to withdraw the soul from the body, (when the time arrives for us to leave this world) in a special way so that we deliberately take an immense stride towards liberation.

❖raso 'ham apsu kaunteya prabhā 'smi śaśisūryayoḥ
 praṇavaḥ sarvavedeṣu śabdaḥ khe pauruṣaṁ nṛṣu
 ❖puṇyo gandhaḥ pṛthivyāṁ ca tajaś cā 'smi vibhāvasau
 jīvanaṁ sarvabhūteṣu tapaś cā 'smi tapasviṣu

I am the sapidity in water, O Arjuna; I am the light in the moon and the sun; I am the syllable Om̐ in all the vedā, sound in ether and virility in men.

I am the sweet fragrance in earth and the brilliance in the fire, the life in all beings, and I am the austerity in ascetics.

Here we are 'lured' from the gross to the subtle. The sense of taste is associated with water. It is 'housed' in the watery portion of all tasteful objects; and when it is brought into contact with our tongue, too, the first reaction is salivation. What actually is that essence (rasa) in that liquid or watery portion which we refer to as taste? It is God's manifestation; something which is beyond the reach (at least, yet) of the modern scientist. Water, and even the water-element in sugar, salt, vinegar, pepper, are but the carriers, vehicles or abodes of this innermost essence which is the real secret of taste. The nature of these vehicles can be altered: if you add pepper-water to a lump of sugar, it will not be sweet any longer! But there is an unalterable essence within that vehicle called sugar which is so subtle that no sense or instrument can discover it. That is the reality or manifestation of God. It is that which gives the distinctive quality to these vehicles.

Scientists have been asking themselves, "What makes the grass green?" Chlorophyll. "How is that formed?" The ultimate principle in this quest is the manifestation of God – not God himself, yet! That is the 'life principle' in all beings. Its existence can be guessed, experienced, but not grasped by the senses or the mind. We ought to be grateful to God that his divine power is gently leading even the most atheistic and materialistic of scientists of today towards this penultimate step of sheer wonderment.

Wonderment gives rise to quest, enquiry. Without the latter, the wonderment may degenerate into sensuality, emotional exhibitionism or materialism. Enquiry is discovery.

❖bījam mām sarvabhūtānām viddhi pārtha sanātanaṁ
 buddhir buddhimatām asmi tejas tejasvinām ahaṁ
 ❖balaṁ balavatām cā 'haṁ kāmarāgavivarjitaṁ
 dharmāviruddho bhūteṣu kāmo 'smi bharataṛṣabha

Know me, O Arjuna, as the eternal seed of all beings: I am the intelligence of the intelligent; the splendour of the splendid am I.

Of the strong, I am the strength devoid of desire and attachment, and in all beings, I am desire unopposed to dharma, O Arjuna.

The goal of the modern scientist was reached by the yogi via pure spiritual enquiry. Their angle of approach is different, but their goal is the same. The scientist approaches it from the external form; the yogi from the inner spirit. Hence, our Master granted that even the scientist was an 'externalised raja yogin'.

Kṛṣṇa does not let us abandon this quest of truth at any wayside station. We must not be satisfied merely with labels and names. As seekers of the truth we must go to the root or seed of such qualities as asceticism, strength, splendour or intelligence, and there come face to face with that which gave rise to them in the various beings. If we are vigilant, anything will lead us to the ultimate reality, for all things are rooted in God.

A clear understanding of this philosophy will give us two life-transforming secrets:

- (1) Subjectively, if we wish to grow in any of these virtues (like asceticism) we should meditate upon God as their source, and
- (2) Objectively, we should see God in the strong, the wise, and so on, and thus avoid jealousy, fear and other negative and destructive emotions.

The qualifying statements in respect of 'strength' and 'desire' should be meditated upon. Benevolent strength and desire that do not transgress righteousness are God's own manifestations. If there were no desire at all, life would come to a standstill. Therefore God himself, his energy, his consciousness, his power manifests itself as desire in the human heart and in the hearts of living beings, to carry on the function of creation. What is absent there is 'I desire' or 'my desire'. In the heart of the yogi who adopts this vision there is no undivine desire, and therefore he does not judge others. In one who has such an ennobling vision, what has to be done is done spontaneously by God's will, as determined by him.

❖ye cai 'va sāttvikā bhāvā rājasās tāmasāś ca ye
 matta eve 'ti tāt viddhi na tv ahaṁ teṣu te mayi
 ❖tribhir guṇamayair bhāvair ebhiḥ sarvam idaṁ jagat
 mohitaṁ nā 'bhijānāti mām ebhyaḥ param avyayaṁ

Whatever beings are pure, active and inert, know that they proceed from me. They are in me, yet I am not in them.

Deluded by these natures, composed of the three qualities of nature, all this world does not know Me as distinct from them and immutable.

Kṛṣṇa is very cautious! Asceticism, and so on, are the manifestation of his nature, not to be confused with him. He remains further behind, beneath and within them. Again, 'within' should not be taken to mean that he is somehow encased, limited or restricted by them. They are all in him, but he is not 'contained' in them as a pot contains water! God is like the crystal which reflects the colour of a nearby object. It is ignorance that attributes to the crystal itself the colour of the object.

A crude analogy may help. Look at the flame of a candle. The extremely subtle, intangible, axiomatic and self-existent power that carries out the process of combustion in that flame is comparable to God. The flame of fire itself resembles his nature (though in philosophy even his nature and its modes are subtler than the candle-flame). The fire of the flame has three characteristics: light, heat and smoke, comparable respectively to *sattvā*, *rajas* and *tamas*, which are modes of God's divine nature. All beings in the universe (sentient and inert) participate in these three qualities because they all form part of God's nature.

If we do not see that these qualities flow from the divine, we remain deluded by the manifest phenomena, not caring to probe them to discover the reality. However, sooner or later man asks the right question, and, pursuing the right line of approach, he discovers that just as the ocean is one indivisible mass of water, so the three distinctions of *sattvā*, *rajas* and *tamas* do not exist separately in God. They are made only in order to promote our understanding. The truth is seen to be transcendent – something which embraces all these. They exist in God without division, yet he is beyond them and also changeless.

❖daivī hy eṣā guṇamayī mama māyā duratyayā
 mām eva ye prapadyante māyām etām taranti te
 ❖na mām duṣkṛtino mūḍhāḥ prapadyante narādhamāḥ
 māyayā 'pahṛtajñānā āsuram bhāvam āśritāḥ

Verily, this divine illusion of mine, made up of the three qualities of nature, is difficult to cross over; those who take refuge in me alone, cross over this illusion.

The evil-doers, the deluded and the lowest of men do not seek me; they whose knowledge is destroyed by illusion follow the ways of demons.

Māyā is regarded as an illusion, and illusion is such only to one who regards that illusion as the reality. A careful study of these two stanzas reveals to us several great truths. Evil-doers are so because they are deluded and their knowledge is destroyed by this illusion. But their own reality cannot be destroyed by this or even by the worst sin or evil, as Kṛṣṇa never tires of repeating. Sin is only a product of delusion demanding nothing sensational or spectacular to remove it. We must awaken ourselves to the fact that as long as we are in the grip of the delusion of the three modes of nature, the guṇā, we shall go on erring. The fact that people are different and that stupidity, dynamism or piety prevail in this universe, is divine nature manifesting in a particular form. The arising of this vision enables us to cross this illusion.

Nature is God's nature; and the 'guṇā' are modes of his nature. Yet, they have the power to delude us. Smoke is born of fire; yet, when it enters our eyes, it can compel us to close them against the light of fire. Tamas – inertia or stupidity – is a quality which effectively prevents us from even perceiving the truth about nature.

This illusory power is divine and hence outside the pale of rationalisation. It is like the 'liquid that will dissolve everything' – where can it be stored? The human intelligence itself is a reflection of spirit in matter, part of this illusion. Knowledge of the reality will dissolve all illusion, including the rationalising power of the intellect! This knowledge is not intellectual but intuitive, immediate experience, obtainable only by total self-surrender and relentless quest.

Hence, the Kāthopaniṣad warns us: "Arise, awake, resort to the Master and learn. The path is like the razor's edge, difficult to perceive and to tread."

❖caturvidhā bhajante mām janāḥ sukr̥tino 'rjuna
 āрто jijñāsura arthārthī jñānī ca bharataṣabha
 ❖teṣāṁ jñānī nityayukta ekabhaktir viśiṣyate
 priyo hi jñānino 'tyartham ahaṁ sa ca mama priyaḥ

Four kinds of virtuous men worship me, O Arjuna. They are the distressed, the seeker of knowledge, the seeker of wealth and the wise, O Lord of the Bharatā.

Of them, the wise, ever steadfast and devoted to the one, excels; for I am exceedingly dear to the wise and he is dear to me.

To pray and to worship God motivelessly is of course good. Some people feel that it is a sign of depravity to pray for selfish ends and material advantages. Here, Kṛṣṇa disagrees: they who worship him for these are surely virtuous men (not necessarily wise). The poor man who prays to God for wealth is surely nobler and more virtuous than the thief or dacoit. The sick man who prays for relief is better than the drug addict. In fact, one of the purposes of poverty and sickness is to turn man to God. Unconsciously the poor and sick recognise this if they are virtuous and that recognition or awareness comes by God's grace. A hot pan will burn your finger, whether you touch it knowingly or unknowingly. Even so, the fire of God's power will devour desire and ignorance whether you touch it deliberately or accidentally. Thus, prayer is good whatever the motive. When the prayer-contact is made, the Lord's love burns to ashes all earthly desires and frees us from all selfishness and egoism.

However, this does not minimise the glory of unselfish love of God for his own sake. The wise man, jñānī, who loves God motivelessly is supreme. He knows the appearance as appearance, and therefore he knows the reality of the appearance. He is fully aware that the diverse world phenomena are purely manifestations of God's divine nature. Hence, he knows that he loves God because he cannot help doing so since God is the very soul of his soul. He knows, too, that this eternal unity or oneness is expressed in him as irrepressible love. He is the pure iron needle; God is the magnet. In his case the devotion and surrender are natural. He rests in God, in unbroken, eternal communion.

❖udārāḥ sarva evai 'te jñānī tv ātmai 'va me matarṁ
 āsthitaḥ sa hi yuktātmā mām evā 'nuttamām gatiṁ
 ❖bahūnāṁ janmanām ante jñānavān mām prapadyate
 vāsudevaḥ sarvam iti sa mahātmā sudurlabhaḥ

Noble indeed are all these; but I deem the wise man as my very self; for, steadfast in mind he is established in me alone as the supreme goal.

At the end of many births the wise man comes to me, realising that all this is Vāsudeva (the innermost self); such a great soul is very hard to find.

The wise devotee of the Lord, knows that his love of God is nothing other than a manifestation of his unity with God. In his endeavour to gain the vision of the truth concerning life, the world, the ego, appearance and the reality, the wise seeker sees one physical appearance as different from another, but inwardly he realises that these differences are superficial. Just as all trees grow from the same soil, so all manifest creation has its origin in God. This is an unalterable, eternal fact of existence. In that vision there is wisdom, insight, enlightenment and incomparable love.

This sublime state of supreme love of God is not attained in a single lifetime. We adore the perfected saint, the man of God, but seldom realise that he has not attained this state by chance or even by magic or miracle, but by many lifetimes of persistent and intense endeavour to reach the pinnacle of God-consciousness.

The expression used here is 'Vāsudeva'. This is a proper name of Kṛṣṇa which also means 'that which envelops all' – the omnipresent. By which sign can we recognise the 'great soul'? He is so expansive of heart that in his cosmic vision all beings are experienced as the one omnipresent being. He has been working towards this highest realisation by constantly endeavouring to remove name and form and by 'seeing' the hidden inner essence – God. We, too, shall eventually reach this goal, only to realise that what we sought is the seeker's love!

One optimistic note is possible here. When the Bhagavad Gītā tells us: "After many lifetimes of striving one attains this perfection", I think it is proper for us to ask: "How do you know that all of us have not already been striving for many lifetimes, and this is the last one?" It is possible.

❖kāmais tais-tair hr̥tajñānāḥ prapadyante 'nyadevatāḥ
 taṁ-taṁ niyamam āsthāya prakṛtyā niyatāḥ svayā
 ❖yo-yo yām-yām tanuṁ bhaktaḥ śraddhayā 'rcitum icchati
 tasya-tasyā 'calām śraddhām tām eva vidadhāmy ahaṁ

Those whose wisdom has been rent away by this or that desire go to other gods, following this or that rite, led by their own nature.

Whatsoever form any devotee desires to worship with faith – that faith of his I make firm and unflinching.

Here is a sample of the most wonderful Kṛṣṇa-approach to any problem. A defective or negative aspect of our life, an imperfect or distorted vision of the truth, are not allowed to pass unnoticed, but they are not condemned outright. Every thing has its own place in creation – that which we call good, evil or neutral. It is easy to idealise but difficult for many and nearly impossible for the vast majority to put this concept into practice.

How often do we find the disastrous and arrogant attitude on the part of some religious leaders who profess to monopolise the truth whilst vehemently condemning all other faiths! What a colossal waste of time! What a loss of a great opportunity to embrace all and thus reach perfection! If only all religious leaders would mind their own business! There is no harm in glorifying their own viewpoint, but they should not bother to judge others. If they can, they should help those treading other paths, encouraging each in his own path, instead of disturbing the faith of others, proselytising with fervour and then leaving them untended and in the lurch.

The world would be a much happier place for everyone to live in if all were left to worship God in their own way. This understanding is the divine attitude. Kṛṣṇa commands: strengthen everyone in his own faith: never disturb anyone's faith.

The truth is that God or the infinite pervades the entire universe. There is nothing and nobody outside of it. Hence, verse twenty-one tells us: whatever the form in which the devotee wishes to adore God, let him do so. Even the materialist who, encouraged and motivated by his own desires and cravings, worships power or wealth, will eventually, in God's good time, discover the futility of such worship and arrive at the pinnacle of self-realisation. A few seeds of divine thought sown in him will germinate in their own time, but an immature, premature leap will only be ineffective.

❖sa tayā śraddhayā yuktas tasyā 'rāḍhanam iḥate
 labhate ca tataḥ kāmān mayai 'va vihitān hi tān
 ❖antavat tu phalaṁ teṣāṁ tad bhavaty alpamedhasāṁ
 devān devayajo yānti madbhaktā yānti mām api

Endowed with that faith, he engages in the worship of that (form) and from it he obtains his desires, these being verily ordained by me (alone).

Verily the reward that accrues to those men of small intelligence is finite. The worshippers of the gods go to them, but my devotees come to me.

The superficial meaning is clear as daylight. No one is compelled to accept or reject any particular method of worship of any form of the supreme being as long as that worship is with the faith that: 'I am worshipping God'. The Hindu is not an idol worshipper. He worships God, the divine presence in the idol which is the medium through which he can contact God. He worships God in and through his gurū and the saints, in and through God's manifestations in the mineral, plant, animal, human and celestial kingdoms; but there is the everpresent faith that he is worshipping not the form but the spirit in all these. This faith is initially based on intellectual or metaphysical grounds and the testimony of sages and saints. In due course, it becomes a conviction born of direct realisation.

The great declaration of the vedā: 'The reality is one, sages designate it variously' indicates that whatever religion people profess, they are worshipping the supreme being in their own way, with faith. God, being omnipresent, responds to the devotee's prayers, meditation or worship in his own way. Having this attitude, the devotee regards whatever he receives in his life as the gift of God, and he is forever happy and unperturbed.

He who recognises the all-pervasiveness of God and still worships the supreme being alone **through** his different aspects will go to the supreme; but he who, unable to comprehend this truth, worships the forms themselves as God – even he is not lost! He will become one with that aspect of God and in course of time realise God's infinity. What a heart-warming doctrine! No one is condemned forever. Whatever be one's concept of God, **faith** redeems him, for while the form remains as such, God is made manifest in the heart.

❖avyaktaṁ vyaktim āpannam manyante mām abuddhayaḥ
 param bhāvam ajānanto mamā 'vyayam anuttamaṁ
 ❖nā 'haṁ prakāśaḥ sarvasya yogamāyāsamāvṛtaḥ
 mūḍho 'yaṁ nā 'bhijānāti loko mām ajam avyayaṁ

The unintelligent think of me, the unmanifest, as having manifestation, knowing not my higher, immutable and most excellent nature.

I am not manifest to all (as I am) veiled by the yoga māyā. This deluded world does not know me, the unborn and imperishable.

The fundamental nature of reality is that it is unborn, unmanifest, unchanging. But, the infinite has two aspects: one is the unmanifest and the other the manifest aspect. God is the unmanifest being, the infinite which is unmanifest. This is capable of infinite manifestation, not only limited to this world. We have very little idea of the manifest infinite, let alone the unmanifest! Our world consists only of father, mother, wife, children and acquaintances. Yet, the unmanifest is not exhausted by its own manifestation. It is infinite.

Just as clouds come together and disperse, the elements present various patterns. The ignorant man imagines that worlds and bodies come into being, grow and die. These changes pertain to the compounded elements or the interaction of the three modes of nature. They belong to the inferior nature and not to the essential nature of God.

God is not obvious. There is an illusion, yoga māyā, based primarily on the senses and the intellect, which have limited function and no ability to perceive the truth. The eyes see, the ears hear, and the mind believes that the messages brought in by the senses constitute the entire truth. The intellect creates its own limitations, regarding them as absolutes which therefore appear to be obvious. This is where the danger lies: what is obvious to one is not obvious to all beings. It is your own mental projection or point of view, a māyā. (We must recognise, too, that even the belief in the existence of God is just one point of view!)

The deluded man, identifying the Lord with the manifestations of his nature, is satisfied and does not pursue further. He forgets the total truth and considers his individual belief to be the ultimate truth. Buddha provides the ideal prescription, however: can you see that all points of view are narrow and limited, and refuse to have a point of view of your own? If you must have one, know that even it is only a point of view. Then you are totally free.

❖ vedā 'haṁ samatītāni vartamānāni cā 'rjuna
 bhaviṣyāṇi ca bhūtāni mām tu veda na kaścana
 ❖ icchādveṣasamutthena dvandvamohena bhārata
 sarvabhūtāni saṁmohaṁ sarge yānti paramtapa

I know, O Arjuna, the beings of the past, the present and the future; but no one knows me.

By the delusion of the pairs of opposites arising from desire and aversion, O Bhārata, all beings are subject to delusion at birth (or creation), O Paramtapa.

Scientists, discussing the travel through space of light rays, assure us that if at this moment someone on a planet or star one hundred light years away, were able to 'see' the earth, he would be witnessing what took place here a hundred years ago! Similarly, the 'future', too, is already 'present' somewhere; only it has not yet come into our view.

This may sound fatalistic, but is only so where the material or physical part of the universe is concerned – which is the very least of it! The seasons and the changes, the floods and the earthquakes are as predictable as eclipses. However, unpredictable are man's reaction and his inner attitude, for it is life that reveals the depth of our understanding, and it is the depth of understanding that flavours life. Some sages have conceded that whereas even man's actions and reactions are predetermined, he is free to be egoistic and thus feel bound to sin and suffering, or to realise that he is the witness consciousness and thus be liberated from these.

Each individual conscious soul is, at the very dawn of creation (the birth of the soul), enshrouded in ignorance which gives rise to egoity. This is followed by attraction and repulsion, attachment and aversion, likes and dislikes, and these in their turn, sustain the whole cycle of delusion-ignorance-egoity-action-reaction. If the 'I' sits in the judgement seat, trying to determine whether someone is good, bad or indifferent, one cannot understand God.

Objects come into being, exist and disappear in this world – it is God's will. But ignorant man desires some and dislikes others; thus he is not only bound, but reaps a harvest of pain and pleasure! He who is able to overcome these is undeluded by the pairs of opposites and to him both past and future are 'ever-present', God being the river which touches the beginning, the middle and the end at the same time.

- ❖ yeṣāṁ tv antagataṁ pāpaṁ janānāṁ puṇyakarmaṇāṁ
te dvandvamohanirmuktā bhajante mām dṛḍhavrataḥ
- ❖ jarāmaraṇamokṣāya mām āśritya yatanti ye
te brahma tad viduḥ kṛtsnam adhyātmaṁ karma cā 'khilam
- ❖ sādhibhūtādhidaivaṁ mām sādhiyajñāṁ ca ye viduḥ
prayānakāle 'pi mām te vidur yuktacetasaḥ

But those men of virtuous deeds whose sins have come to an end, and who are freed from the delusion of the pairs of opposites, worship me, steadfast in their vows.

Those who strive for liberation from old age and death, taking refuge in me, realise in full that Brahman, the complete knowledge of the self and all action.

Those who know me with the adhibhūta (pertaining to the elements), adhidaiva (pertaining to the gods) and the adhiyajña (pertaining to sacrifice), know me even at the time of departure from this world, steadfast in mind.

The vision of God cannot be obtained unless the heart and mind are made completely pure through perfectly ethical and moral conduct, when sinful tendencies have been totally overcome. A man meditating on the form of his guru without forgetting the ideal he stands for, grows in the virtues of the guru. Through worship of the various manifestations of the Lord, much virtue is gained and sinfulness ceases.

There is no effort, even, to abandon sinfulness (such effort would likely become the seed of future sin – arrogance). Sinfulness has to drop away. It is not possible to acquire virtue, to abandon wickedness or to grow in humility. When the right vision is acquired, these happen automatically. Till then, one must strive to grow in virtue and reduce wickedness by all means. Virtue and God-realisation are simultaneous, without the relationship of cause and effect.

God is the very essence and soul of this material universe. He is the basis of whatever concepts of God each one of us may have (however diverse these may be), and the spirit whose supreme sacrifice constitutes creation. Such a homogeneous and comprehensive truth can only be grasped when the mind is steady and the heart absolutely pure. In that transparent heart the light of God is truly reflected. May we all enjoy that vision in this very birth.



OM TAT SAT

iti śrīmad bhagavad gītāsūpaniṣatsu brahma vidyāyām
yogaśāstre śrī kṛṣṇarjuna saṁvāde
jñāna vijñāna yogo nāma saptamo 'dhyāyaḥ

Thus in the upaniṣad of the glorious Bhagavad Gītā,
the science of the eternal, the scripture of yoga,
the dialogue between śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna,
ends the seventh discourse entitled:

THE YOGA OF WISDOM AND REALISATION

CHAPTER VIII

THE YOGA OF THE IMPERISHABLE BRAHMAN

VIII

12th JUNE

1, 2

arjuna uvāca

- ❖ kim tad brahma kim adhyātmam kim karma puruṣottama
adhibhūtam ca kim proktam adhidaivam kim ucyate
- ❖ adhiyajñaḥ katham ko 'tra dehe 'smin madhusūdana
prayānakāle ca katham jñeyo 'si niyatātmabhiḥ

Arjuna said: What is that Brahman? What is adhyātmān? What is karmā?
What is declared to be the adhibhūta? And, what is adhidaiva said to be?

O Kṛṣṇa, what is adhiyajña here in this body, and how does it function?
And, how art thou to be known by the self-controlled at the time of death?

The Indian approach to the reality is both analytic and synthetic. The sage or the yogi does not approve of or sanction a mere off-hand rejection of anything, even if he is assured that ultimately he will have to reject it. All the philosophical categories must be clearly analysed, understood, and synthesised, ignoring the illusory differences.

Take, for instance, the great declaration of the upaniṣad: "That (Brahman) thou (the soul) art". The two must be clearly analysed and understood in their own respective aspects. Brahman is the infinite, greater than the greatest and beyond all limitations. The ātman is the innermost self, the subtlest of the subtle, minuter than the minutest, and that which is left after all the personal. limiting adjuncts have been negated, by the process of: 'I' is not this body, 'I' is not this vital sheath, 'I' is not this mind, 'I' is not this intellect and 'I' is not this causal ignorance. It is not as though this is a negative practice whereby the seeker attempts to reject or nullify the body, mind and so on, but the practice involves seeing the body in its true nature as merely body, the mind as mind, etc., not involving or belonging to the ego, 'I'. It generates in the seeker the understanding of the self as abstract, nameless and formless. Herein lies the genius of the Indian philosopher-sage. When this analytical-synthesis is pushed to its logical conclusion, the result is the immediate realisation of the 'identity' of 'that' (Brahman) and 'thou' (ātman).

Even though God himself is all the characteristics mentioned in the last two verses, Arjuna, the good seeker, seeks to know them as they are.

śrībhagavān uvāca
 ❖akṣaraṁ brahma paramaṁ svabhāvo 'dhyātman ucyate
 bhūtabhāvodbhava-karo visargaḥ karmasaṁjñitaḥ

The blessed Lord said: Brahman is the imperishable, the supreme. His essential nature is called self-knowledge (the adhyātman). The offering (unto the gods) which causes the creation and existence of beings is called karma.

The absolute (Brahman) is imperishable, supreme, infinite and beyond all these descriptive attributes. Any description limits it. Thus our Master used to say: “To define Brahman is to deny Brahman”. Hence it was that Buddha refrained from discussing it, and that Dakṣiṇāmūrti conveyed the wordless knowledge of it to the Sanatkumāra, by silence filled with transcendental knowledge.

Brahman is not an inert nothingness or a void. The supreme or totality does not undergo any change or decay. Yet, in it there is constant change, which implies constancy and change. These are not contradictory but complementary. The nature inherent in this totality is adhyātma. Or, conversely, ātma, or selfhood, is inherent in this totality even to the point of individuality. That is, you do not belong to yourself; yourself belongs to the totality. This totality has, as its very substratum, infinite diversity which is the self of all; just as the night sky is studded with millions of diamonds – the stars. Thus, self-knowledge is a re-attainment of something which the personality has lost. When the personality is keenly analysed, it becomes transparent, revealing its own substratum – that cosmic consciousness which is the goal, the supreme fulfilment or self-knowledge.

The compound word ‘bhūtabhāvodbhava-karo’ suggests a dream or vision of something as if it existed. That is the karma of the totality or God. Hence, God does not ‘create’ as the carpenter creates furniture, but in that cosmic being there arises a feeling (bhāvanā) of the manifestation (bhūta) of all this multidiversity. That is called the universe which is maintained by God’s grace, so that the souls therein may gain the necessary experience to attain self-knowledge. Understood in this light, even the law of karma is seen as a contributory factor towards evolution and attainment of self-knowledge.

❖adhibhūtaṁ kṣaro bhāvaḥ puruṣaś cā 'dhidaivataṁ
adhiyajña 'ham evā 'tra dehe dehabhṛtāṁ vara

Adhibhūtaṁ (knowledge of the elements) pertains to my perishable nature and the puruṣa is the adhidaivaṁ. I alone am the adhiyajña here in the body, O Arjuna.

The elements, adhibhūtaṁ, have a beginning and an end. This is a continuous cycle which no one can arrest. They are not totally destroyed, but as their nature changes, the forms perish; like the transition from ice to water to vapour. The fundamental essence, however, is changeless. It is absolute immaturity to be afraid of the inevitable.

In this world, things grow, decay and disappear from view, but there is something which is capable of observing the structure that starts as a wedding procession and itself turns into a funeral procession. That observer is called the puruṣa. This term is almost impossible to translate. According to the two systems of Indian philosophy (sāṅkhya and yoga) puruṣa is the imperishable, individual soul, uninvolved in the body and mind. According to the vedā it is the cosmic consciousness that pervades all, the God of gods. Puruṣa is that which is able to observe all changing phenomena including those of your own body, mental states, states of consciousness or existence, and your states of immaturity and maturity.

A subtle distinction is made here between the perishable nature of the supreme being and the imperishable nature (puruṣa). These are not two separable entities but two integrated principles, like the smallest blood capillaries which are all-pervading in our body! The distinction between adhibhūtaṁ and adhidaivaṁ is one of viewpoint only, not of essence.

God alone is the principle of sacrifice in the body (cosmic and individual). Hence the vedā call him yajña (sacrifice). Yajña is a certain type of knowledge which enables you to give and take, to engage yourself in appropriate action, and to understand that all creatures in this universe have the same needs as you have. The spirit of sacrifice is God himself. By living a life of sacrifice we shall shed all illusion and delusion and attain self-knowledge.

Do not read this with your eyes, mind or intellect, but with the eyes of your heart!

❖ antakāle ca mām eva smaran muktvā kalevaram
 yaḥ prayāti sa madbhāvaṁ yāti nā 'sty atra saṁśayaḥ
 ❖ yaṁ-yaṁ vā 'pi smaran bhāvaṁ tyajaty ante kalevaram
 taṁ-tam evai 'ti kaunteya sadā tadbhāvabhāvitaḥ

And, whosoever, leaving the body, goes forth remembering me alone, at the time of death, he attains my being; there is no doubt about this.

Whosoever at the end leaves the body, thinking of any (state of) being, to that being only does he go, Arjuna, because of his constant thought of that being.

“Where will I go from here?” – this question has worried every man at some time or other. Kṛṣṇa's answer is extremely simple. It will depend entirely upon the state of your inner being (that is what *bhāva* means) at the time the soul leaves the body. If that state is one of total saturation with God, then the soul reaches him.

This does not contradict the *karma* theory, but completes or fulfils it. The state of inner being of man is made not only of his actions, but also of the impressions they left behind and his desires and aspirations, all put together. This is what determines his next incarnation, for the very simple reason that it acts like a crystal inviting others of the same substance to adhere to it and thus to form a new body.

‘Antakāla’ is when the body is released from ‘my’ grip or connection. In other words, the idea that “I am this body” or “the body is mine” is suspended. ‘Antakāle’ is the last hour. This occurs not only at the time of what is called death, but every night when one goes to sleep!

Normally, the state of one's inner being is reflected in the last thought which is sure to be the image of one's ruling passion in life. There are some who persist in thinking bestial thoughts though they may have neither the courage nor the opportunity to act on them. They may appear ‘evolved’, but the inner picture (*bhāva*) is of an animal. When the human mask is dropped at death, they assume the real shape (i.e. that of an animal). Yet, we wonder, “How can a human being descend into an animal birth?”

No theorising, wishful thinking or rationalisation is of any use here. The fact is not altered by one's belief or disbelief. Hence the vital need, without ‘planning’ for a better birth in the future, is to be better now.

❖ tasmāt sarveṣu kāleṣu mām anusmara yudhya ca
 mayy arpitamanobuddhir mām evai 'śyasy asaṁśayaṁ
 ❖ abhyāsayogayuktena cetasā nā 'nyagāminā
 paramaṁ puruṣaṁ divyaṁ yāti pārthā 'nucintayan

Therefore, at all times remember me only and fight. With mind and intellect fixed (or absorbed) in me, thou shalt doubtless come to me alone.

With the mind not moving towards any other thing, made steadfast by the method of habitual meditation, and constantly meditating (on the divine), one goes to the supreme person, the resplendent, O Arjuna.

This is the yoga of the Bhagavad Gītā which will, with guaranteed certainty, lead us to the Lord. It is buddhi yoga (the yoga of understanding); not confined to any physical activity – whether it be charity, service, ritual or yoga practices such as āsanā, prāṇāyāma, concentration and meditation – though these are not excluded, looked down upon or discouraged. The yogi must acquire, by diligent cultivation, what my Master Swami Sivananda called 'double consciousness'. He must be able to realise the crystalline nature of the self, and also perceive all activity as being sustained by the modes of the guṇā (the divine nature). Realising that he is the immortal self or atman, he must behold the ever-active nature of God of which the self is but a silent, non-participant witness. The self, being non-different from the infinite, ceases to interfere in this shadow-play of nature on the 'silver screen' of God.

Established in this realisation, contemplation of the omnipresent God is not contradicted by activity. The yogi does not shy away from what must be done. With body and mind he works in this world doing his every duty flawlessly and efficiently. Only, in his heart, likes and dislikes, fear, pleasure and pain are absent. His inner being stands aside, ever vigilant yet uninvolved, in constant remembrance of God. This is 'continuous meditation', 'dynamic contemplation' or 'contemplative dynamism' – the innermost teaching of the Bhagavad Gītā. There is no suppression or repression, but a whole-souled participation in the divine will without the least tinge of egoism. Hence, the yogi is never drawn towards the objects, though he moves amidst them. He lives in God.

❖kaviṁ purāṇam anuśāsītāram
 aṇor aṇīyāṁsam anusmared yaḥ
 sarvasya dhātāram acintyarūpam
 ādityavarṇaṁ tamasaḥ parastāt
 ❖prayāṇakāle manasā 'calena
 bhaktyā yukto yogabalena cai 'va
 bhruvor madhye prāṇam āveśya saṁyak
 sa taṁ paraṁ puruṣam upaiti divyaṁ

Whosoever meditates on the omniscient, the ancient, the ruler of the whole universe, minuter than an atom, the supporter of all, of inconceivable form, effulgent like the sun and beyond the darkness of ignorance,

At the time of death, with unshaken mind, endowed with devotion by the power of yoga, fixing the whole life-breath in the middle of the two eyebrows, he reaches that resplendent, supreme person.

This is the *yogi's* conscious exit from the body. As a result of continuous and intense practice of yoga (particularly *haṭha yoga*), the *yogi* attains perfect control over *prāṇa*, the life-force – not just the breath that flows in the nostrils, nor even the oxygen in the air, but the extremely subtle divine power that utilises all these gross substances and maintains the soul's abode, the human body.

That life-force (*prāṇa*) is spread out and distributed throughout the body to activate its various functions. The *haṭha yogi* gives the same *prāṇa* various names to indicate the different functions it performs. He designates the force that moves upwards as *prāṇa* and the force that tends to move downwards as *apāna*. The former is positive and the latter negative. By a process of regulated breathing, the *yogi* brings them together, reversing their course. Their fusion gives him power similar, say, to high-voltage electricity. With this he awakens the dormant psychic power in him, the *kuṇḍalinī śakti*, which is then led by stages from one centre of consciousness to the next along the innermost core of the spinal cord, and eventually to the *ājñā cakra*, the centre between the eyebrows. With this psychic power, the whole *prāṇa* is also withdrawn. From the *ājñā cakra*, he merges his self in God-consciousness and is liberated.

In the case of the *yogi*, as the body is dropped, handed over to the elements, as it were, the entire being is totally saturated with the realisation of God's omnipresence, and there is no further movement. He reaches the supreme.

- ❖ yad akṣaram vedavido vadanti
viśanti yad yatayo vītarāgāḥ
- ❖ yad icchanto brahmacaryam caranti
tat te padam saṁgrahaṇa pravakṣye

That which is declared imperishable (akṣara) by those who know the vedā;
that which the self-controlled and passion-free men enter, that desiring
which they observe brahmacarya – that goal I will declare to thee in brief.

‘Kṣara’ is something which ‘causes to flow’, ‘pour out’, according to the vedā. ‘Akṣara’ in the vedā is that which is not thus involved in ‘flowing out’, ‘pouring out’, i.e., that which is uninvolved in creation. That akṣara is the supreme transcendental reality, the ever-present thing-in-itself, the coloured pieces of glass in a kaleidoscope, the fundamental principle, the unmodified substance whose modifications and manifestations appear to us as the created universe. It is the screen on which the ever-moving objects and the colourful panorama are projected. One who is absorbed in watching the drama projected on the screen is unaware of the screen on which it is projected. It demands tremendous inner discipline to perceive, as it were, the screen and the film independently, at the same time.

Hence, the ancients prescribed an austere and ethical life of self-control and total freedom from passion – for normally the mind is kept in a state of continuous flux by passions and is thus prevented from perceiving the screen, the substratum. Then the mind, free from desires and passions, is not thus disturbed and with the requisite training will be able to perceive the substratum. This training is called ‘brahmacarya’ – ‘to live, move and have one’s being in Brahman (God)’. Its own preliminary step is continence, the restraint of one of the most powerful instincts in man.

What such yogī reach and how they reach it is now explained by Kṛṣṇa.

❖sarvadvārāṇi saṁyamya mano hr̥di nirudhya ca
 mūrdhny ādhāyā 'tmanah prāṇam āsthito yogadhāraṇām
 ❖aum ity ekākṣaram brahma vyāharan mām anusmaran
 yaḥ prayāti tyajan dehaṁ sa yāti paramām gatim

Having closed all the gates, confined the mind in the heart and fixed the life-breath in the head, engaged in the practice of concentration,

Uttering the one syllabled Om̐ – the Brahman – and remembering me, he who departs, leaving the body, attains to the supreme goal.

Just as it is important for us to know how to live, it is equally important for us to know how to die – not to be afraid of death, to block it from our minds or even to long for it. Death is inevitable. The Bhagavad Gītā, in addition to teaching the art of living, gives instructions in the art of dying.

The haṭha yogi closes all the 'gates' of the body with the help of a few simple psycho-physical exercises. Sitting in siddhāsana, he presses the left heel firmly on the perineum thus closing the rectum and places the right heel on the generative organ, closing that 'gate' too. By the practice of yoni mudrā he closes the other 'gates': the ears with the thumbs, the eyes with the index fingers, the nostrils with the middle fingers, the upper and lower lips respectively with the ring and little fingers. Now he sees the subtle core of the suṣūmnā nādī or the spinal cord as a radiant hollow tube through which the awakened kuṇḍalinī śakti ascends, piercing centre after centre of the gross elements. With his mind fixed in his heart, symbolically at the feet of the Lord, he takes the kuṇḍalinī śakti (prāṇa) to the crown of the head. Thus the prāṇa has been consciously and deliberately withdrawn from the whole body i.e., from matter.

When the time comes for him to leave the body, the yogi utters the monosyllable Om̐, the sound-picture of the absolute, and discards the body remembering God. In accordance with the law of last thought-form, he reaches God.

If we train ourselves in the art of withdrawing the prāṇa from the body now, by constant, diligent effort and daily practice of these exercises, perhaps we will use them in the last hour, and departure will be facilitated.

❖ ananyacetāḥ satataṁ yo mām smarati nityaśaḥ
 tasyā 'haṁ sulabhaḥ pārtha nityayuktasya yoginaḥ
 ❖ mām upetya punarjanma duḥkhālayam aśāśvataṁ
 nāpnuvanti mahātmānaḥ sarṁsiddhiṁ paramām gatāḥ

I am easily attainable by that ever steadfast yogi who constantly and daily remembers me, not thinking of anything else, O Pārtha.

Having attained Me these great souls do not again take birth in this world which is impermanent and the place of pain; they have reached the highest perfection.

If a man thinks of God constantly and daily (a double emphasis!), he will automatically think of him in the last hour, too. All devotees of the Lord recognise the near-impossibility of governing one's own last thoughts. One devotee actually prayed in pathetic and pleading tone: "O Lord, may my mind enter your lotus feet right now; for who knows what it will think of when my throat is choked in the last hour of my life." This is specially true these days when sudden and violent accidents and heart attacks snatch life away, without notice. Therefore, it is all the more important to be ever God-conscious so that even if the last moment were untimely, the mind would by habit think of God and reach him.

Desire and karma, which together constitute the 'state of inner being' called bhāva, determine the next incarnation. When ignorance-born desire and ego-engineered activity (karma) cease, then, freed from these shackles, the soul awakens from the slumber of ignorance, and shaking off the dream-state of bondage regains self-knowledge.

Once the individualised consciousness has become totally merged with the cosmic consciousness there is no return to this world of 'pain and impermanence'. It is like throwing a bucket of water into a lake; that same water can never be retrieved. Lord Buddha's life teaches us that pain and suffering exist in this world in order to remind us of a state of being in which these shall not be, and to lead us to that state.

❖ ā brahmabhuvanāl lokāḥ punarāvartino 'rjuna
mām upetya tu kaunteya punarjanma na vidyate

All the worlds including the world of the creator are subject to return (re-manifestation), O Arjuna; but he who reaches me, O son of Kunti, has no rebirth.

Every moment, the past moment is dead; and each moment dies an instant after it is born. Death is co-existent with life. That is, there is birth, death and rebirth moment after moment. When one realises this, life and discipline become effortless. To live in this spirit where there is death every moment, one had to see a great Master like my Gurudev Swami Sivananda.

When death is brought into life, there is no attachment or craving. The ego, as the storehouse of experiences, is dropped and when this happens there is God. This is possible only by grace.

Some extremely ignorant people ask: "What happens to me after I become one with God?" The fact that they are so seriously concerned about what happens to their individual personality is proof positive that God-realisation is still far away from them. A seeker once wrote to our Master: "I have realised God; now, please tell me what to do." What an absurd question! If he has realised and become one with God the omniscient, does he not know? Yet, the world is full of such wonderful people whom we have to answer. The simple answer is: "When you become one with God, his will and yours will be in perfect alignment."

A lump of salt coming into contact with the ocean becomes inseparably one with the ocean. It is not lost, but has attained to the incomparable dignity and glory of oceanhood. Similarly, God-realisation is no loss of personality; it is the expansion of that personality to cosmic dimensions. The sage of self-realisation thus becomes God himself. When, as in the case of specially chosen masters, the personality is 'returned' to the world, it is no longer a limited, egoistic, imperfect personality, but a gift from God of a part of himself. That is why we regard the guru as God.

❖ sahasrayugaparyantam ahar yad brahmaṇo viduḥ
 rātriṃ yugasahasrāntāṃ te 'horātravido janāḥ
 ❖ avyaktād vyaktayaḥ sarvāḥ prabhavanty aharāgame
 rātryāgame praliyante tatrai 'vā 'vyaktasamjñake

Those people who know the day of Brahmā (the creator) which is of a duration of a thousand ages, and the night which is also of a thousand ages' duration, they know the real meaning of night and day.

From the unmanifested, all the manifested worlds proceed at the coming of the 'day'; at the coming of the 'night' they dissolve verily into that alone which is called the unmanifested.

Indian astronomers and sages of intuitive wisdom have calculated that a mahāyuga (age) is of the duration of 4,320,000 years according to the earth calendar. A thousand of these constitutes the creator's 'day-time' – the period during which the manifest world 'exists'. After this there is an equal duration of the 'night' of the creator. I believe the latest scientific discovery is that just as once everything emerged from God, later, everything will collapse into itself – first there was an explosion, and later there will be an implosion where everything will be sucked into its own centre. The entire universe will be reduced to a pin-point called a 'singularity'. What is wrong with calling this Brahman, God?

Though here and there in our scriptures there is a description of 'creation', such descriptions are quickly followed by a statement that it is a repetitive process. At the beginning of creation, the creator re-creates what was during the previous 'day of the creator'. No one can ever visualise a 'creation from nothing', for then we should foolishly accept the idea that this manifest universe has existed only for a brief while and before that, from beginningless time, there was nothing! It is a cycle, with its projection and reabsorption; beginningless and endless (though he who is awake to self-knowledge is not caught in this relentlessly turning wheel). Many scientists and astronomers today seem to agree with this view of an ever-existing universe, condensing and expanding.

Meditation on the magnitude of the universe will save you from the worries of the moment. The words and the concepts of 'time', 'night' and 'day' are relative and illusory. Realising this, all fear falls away from you.

- ❖bhūtagrāmaḥ sa evā 'yaṁ bhūtvā-bhūtvā praliyate
rātryāgame 'vaśaḥ pārtha prabhavaty aharāgame
- ❖paras tasmāt tu bhāvo 'nyo 'vyakto 'vyaktāt sanātanah
yaḥ sa sarveṣu bhūteṣu naśyatsu na vinaśyati

This same multitude of beings, being born again and again, is dissolved, helplessly, O Arjuna, at the coming of the night and comes forth at the coming of the day.

But verily there exists, higher than the unmanifested, another unmanifested eternal being who is not destroyed when all beings are destroyed (dissolved).

All this coming and going, according to one school of thought (amply supported by the Bhāgavatam which contains highly colourful stories of such creation), takes place in the mind of God. (See also II:20.) The Hebrew word in the Genesis story of the Bible, which is usually translated 'In the beginning' also means 'In the head' – creation took place in God's head.

The universe is an extensive and prolonged 'dream' of God. Even as during the course of our own dream the dream-objects are indeed real, the objects of this universe seem to be real to us, while the dream of the cosmic dreamer is still in progress.

Otherwise, how is it that though scientists have proved that the whole universe is nothing more than a perpetual movement of light-waves, and that all objects of this universe are, in the ultimate analysis, nothing but energy, we persist in seeing a variety of objects? What sees what? "I see this paper". When 'I' and 'paper' are both vibrations of energy, what makes 'I', 'I', and 'paper', 'paper'?

When thus we pursue all our sense-perceptions (which together we call the manifest universe), we arrive at the ultimate unmanifested principle – the reality or the absolute. That absolute is beyond the intellect and the senses. The unmanifested (root-matter or mūlaprakṛti) which projects itself and withdraws such manifestation is what Fred Hoyle calls the eternally self-creating root element of which the universe is composed. It keeps changing, over the substratum of the absolute which is unchanging. That is Brahman. That is the self. "That thou art", cry out the upaniṣad!

❖avyakto 'kṣara ity uktas tam āhuḥ paramāṁ gatim
 yaṁ prāpya na nivartante tad dhāma paramaṁ mama
 ❖puruṣaḥ sa paraḥ pārtha bhaktyā labhyas tv ananyayā
 yasyā 'ntaḥsthāni bhūtāni yena sarvam idaṁ tatam

What is called unmanifested and the imperishable; that they say is the highest goal. They who reach it do not return to this universe. That is the highest abode.

That highest puruṣa, O Arjuna, is attainable by unswerving devotion to him alone within whom all beings dwell and by whom all this is pervaded.

Being beyond the intellect and definition, the absolute (eternal godhead) is attainable only by devotion. Faith, love and total self-surrender are the only means here; not intellectuality, reasoning or ratiocination. Intellect is but a creature of the cosmic dream. Hence, it can only lead us either farther from God or, at best, to his threshold (if we make it sub-serve faith, that is). Devotion is the key which unlocks the gates of eternal truth.

Kṛṣṇa emphasises again and again that while the seeker ought to do everything possible in his power to be good, to do good, to practise yoga for the purification of the self, the ultimate freedom, buddhi yoga, the eye of intuition or nirvāṇa can only be God's gift. Even the self that demands them, that seeks them, must disappear in the fire of the seeking! The seeker and the sought must become one, merging in that point when the seeker has nothing more to seek. It is then that the sought is revealed or experienced. The seeker is the sought, for the self is non-existent and illusory. God-love tears the veil of illusion and removes the distinction between the seeker and the sought. This is the path of devotion of love and of self-surrender.

Even the Kāṭhapaniṣad declares that the self cannot be realised by one through much learning, but reveals itself to whom it will. This does not mean that God is whimsical, but that total egolessness is known only by God.

This much is certain: devotion and self-surrender guarantee self-realisation.

❖ yatra kāle tv anāvṛttim āvṛttim cai 'va yogīnaḥ
 prayātā yānti taṁ kālāṁ vakṣyāmi bharatarṣabha
 ❖ agnir jyotir ahaḥ śuklaḥ ṣaṇmāsā uttarāyaṇaṁ
 tatra prayātā gacchanti brahma brahmavido janāḥ
 ❖ dhūmo rātris tathā kṛṣṇaḥ ṣaṇmāsā dakṣiṇāyaṇaṁ
 tatra cāndramasaṁ jyotir yogī prāpya nivartate
 ❖ śuklakṛṣṇe gatī hy ete jagataḥ śāśvate mate
 ekayā yāty anāvṛttim anyayā 'vartate punaḥ

Now I will tell thee, O Arjuna, the times, departing at which the yogī will return or not return.

Fire, light, daytime, the bright fortnight, the six months of the northern path of the sun (the northern solstice) – departing then (by these), men who have known Brahman go to Brahman.

Attaining to the lunar light by smoke, night-time, the dark fortnight also, the six months of the southern path of the sun (the southern solstice), the yogī returns.

The bright and the dark paths of the world are verily thought to be eternal; by the one a man goes not to return and by the other he returns.

These verses can be taken literally or symbolically.

What is there during the day that you find absent at night? The sun, the representative of the light. Thus, these verses may mean that if you have lived an enlightened life in full consciousness, in light, in clarity, in doubtlessness, then of course you go to Brahman. You are liberated, free. But if the life is characterised by darkness, if it is full of doubts, regrets and remorse, then of course you keep going round and round in this world cycle.

Not all people who pass on during the periods mentioned in verse 24 attain Brahman. Only those 'who have known Brahman'. The yogi who has undergone the psycho-physical practices mentioned earlier in this chapter ought to be able to separate the soul from the body at will. On the analogy of Bhīṣma (who was 'slain' in battle, but who discarded his body at a later date), some feel that the yogi, to discard the body, must choose such time as the path of light will open to him. There are others, however, who declare that the yogi or sage who is awake to the reality gives his body no special value at all and lets it fall when it may, to decay and return to the natural elements. Such a sage does not 'depart' at all, but becomes one with Brahman immediately.

❖nai 'te sṛtī pārtha jānan yogī muhyati kaścana
 tasmāt sarveṣu kāleṣu yogayukto bhavā 'rjuna
 ❖vedeṣu yajñeṣu tapaḥsu cai 'va
 dāneṣu yat puṇyaphalaṁ pradiṣṭaṁ
 atyeti tat sarvam idaṁ viditvā
 yogī paraṁ sthānam upaiti cā 'dyaṁ

Knowing these paths, O Arjuna, no yogi is deluded; therefore at all times be steadfast in yoga.

Whatever fruit of merit is declared to accrue from the vedā, sacrifices, austerities, and gifts, the yogi goes beyond all this, having known this; and he attains to the supreme primeval abode.

What man who has clearly understood this continual birth-death-rebirth cycle and the endless miseries that it brings with it, could be foolish and blind enough to cling to this earthly life or value it?

Think of the millions of years that you have eaten, drunk and slept, enjoyed sensual pleasures and suffered the consequent misery. Should you still wallow in delusion?

Think of the thousands of births you have had and the thousands of parents, wives, husbands and children that you have had in those births. Should you still wallow in delusion?

Think of the desires gratified and thus strengthened, the ambitions fulfilled, the houses built, money made and property acquired, and think of how all these have been razed to the earth by the ravages of time – the millions of millennia that this universe has existed. Should you still wallow in delusion?

Think of the insignificance of a short span of fifty years of active life in comparison to the millions of years that constitute a day of the creator. What can you do during this short span that can compare to self-realisation which can liberate you from transmigration for ever? Should you still wallow in delusion?

Think of the insignificance of this life-span and rejoice that its pleasures and even its pains do not last a split-second – “Even this will pass away, balance your mind in pain and joy” said our Master. Do not wallow in delusion, but seek to attain the supreme abode this very moment.



OM TAT SAT

iti śrīmad bhagavad gītāsūpaniṣatsu brahma vidyāyām
yogaśāstre śrī kṛṣṇarjuna saṁvāde
akṣara brahmā yogo nāma 'ṣṭamo 'dhyāyaḥ

Thus in the upaniṣad of the glorious Bhagavad Gītā,
the science of the eternal, the scripture of yoga,
the dialogue between śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna,
ends the eighth discourse entitled:

THE YOGA OF THE IMPERISHABLE BRAHMAN

CHAPTER IX

THE YOGA OF THE KINGLY SCIENCE AND THE KINGLY SECRET

IX

27th JUNE

1, 2

śrībhagavān uvāca

- ❖ idam tu te guhyatamaṁ pravakṣyāmy anasūyave
jñānaṁ vijñānasahitaṁ yaj jñātvā mokṣyase 'śubhāt
- ❖ rājavidyā rājaguhyam pavitram idam uttamaṁ
pratyakṣāvagamam dharmyam susukham kartum avyayam

The blessed Lord said: I shall now declare to thee who does not wrangle, the greatest secret, the knowledge combined with direct self-realisation. Having known this, thou shalt be free from evil.

This is the kingly science, the kingly secret, the supreme purifier, realisable by direct intuitional knowledge, according to righteousness, very easy to perform and imperishable.

In the last chapter the Lord quietly slipped in an idea which, on the surface, looks impossible: "Think of God constantly and at the same time never neglect your duty here." How does a single person split himself into two, for how else can one fulfil this commandment? In this chapter, Kṛṣṇa answers this vital question. Hence all the flourish at the very outset.

'Rājavidyā' literally means 'the king of all knowledge'. This highest knowledge is available only to one who is king of his mind and senses, since these are the outlets through which true intuitive knowledge is lost.

Kṛṣṇa is no vain egoist. The precarious middle path is imperceptibly subtle, so we are not usually sure where humility ends and timidity begins. A simple rule might help: personal effrontery must be humbly borne, but the glory of the divine wisdom must not be under-rated or allowed to be trampled upon. Kṛṣṇa demonstrated true and divine humility by becoming Arjuna's charioteer, but he is emphatic that the yoga he now teaches is a kingly science. It is a kingly science, no doubt, yet the fanfare is also used in order to enable us to listen more attentively – this is no ordinary science!

The word 'secret' is used, perhaps, so that we will be tempted to spread the message! Maybe, Kṛṣṇa also meant, when he declared the teaching to be a secret, that although the interpretation of the words may be clear, the message is secret and requires investigation. It is a profound secret on the non-verbal level, and must be understood not with the head, but with the heart. When that happens, it becomes a living truth and instantly you are purified.

❖ aśraddadhānāḥ puruṣā dharmasyā 'sya paramtapa
aprāpya mām nivartante mṛtyusaṁsāravartmani

Those who have no faith in this dharma (knowledge of the self), O Arjuna, return to the path of this world of death without attaining me.

The word 'śraddhā' cannot be easily translated. Merely translating it into 'faith' does not make it clear. However, the rest of the verse gives an indication of its meaning. If that something called 'śraddhā' is not there, you do not reach the truth or self-realisation. If you do not reach self-realisation, you experience birth and death again and again. You are trapped in this world in which you constantly experience happiness and unhappiness, success and failure, pleasure and pain. When this 'śraddhā' arises, then the constant succession of changes – beginnings and endings – is like water on a duck's back and the ultimate truth becomes 'realisable by direct intuitional knowledge'.

'Śraddhā' – we shall call it faith – is important. If a man has no faith in a teaching he fails to adopt it in his life. Hence, though this dharma (knowledge of the self) is a kingly science and though God and all saints are ever ready, willing and eager to bring more and more souls on to this path, the path becomes a 'kingly secret'.

Lack of faith makes us doubt the value of practice, so we wallow in delusion! If we have the necessary faith, however, we take up the practice and realise that self-knowledge which is superior to all else.

Self-knowledge is different from a layman's knowledge of the radio; all he knows is how to turn the knobs, the rest was done by the engineer. In self-knowledge there is no second-hand knowledge, hearsay or dependence upon the authority of someone else. Here, we accept a working hypothesis – on faith – practise yoga, attain direct realisation, and prove the hypothesis ourselves.

Faith itself will purify our heart and mind. If it does not lead to this, self purification, it is not 'śraddhā'. Our heart and soul are polluted because of our identification of the soul with inert and changing matter. Rain water is pure, but is polluted on coming into contact with the earth. When this identification of the self with the body and mind ceases, we regain our pristine purity. If we have this 'śraddhā', then we let life flow in a profound realisation which has been described in the rest of this chapter.

❖ mayā tatam idaṁ sarvaṁ jagad avyaktamūrtinā
matsthāni sarvabhūtāni na cā 'haṁ teṣv avasthitāḥ

All this world is pervaded by me in my unmanifest aspect; all beings exist in me, but I do not dwell in (am not confined to) them.

What is that kingly science or kingly secret?

As is characteristic of Kṛṣṇa, he gives, in a simple, straightforward verse, the whole truth. The entire universe is completely permeated by God, the reality, but in an unmanifested, not-so-obvious guise. That is what is really meant in Gurudev's famous Universal Prayer: 'You are omnipresent'. Omnipresent means that there is nothing other than God. If that understanding arises, there is nothing to be negated. This understanding is prevented by various factors, one of which is thinking that this may not be the reality. Instead of investigating what the reality is, the mind assumes that the reality must have certain characteristics and whatever does not possess these characteristics is not the reality. It gets caught up in its own web of thought, of māyā.

The truth of God's omnipresence is, in fact, scientific, though science, which is fast moving towards the same conclusion, may yet take some time before even surmising it. We have already reached the stage at which we are scientifically assured that only one thing exists in the universe – vibrant energy – which, when it is comparatively at rest, appears to be mass. All the elements are atoms arranged in a particular combination and the atoms themselves are distinguished in accordance with the number of electrons and protons they contain. Yet, how is it that a table is different from a book?

There is obviously some erroneous perception in the beholder. Who is this beholder? The man. He, too, shares the same fate as the universe which to him appears outside. He is also composed of the same elements and factors. Though in reality one alone exists, there is this mysterious 'internal reflection'. It is loosely comparable to the dream of a sleeping man: objects created in and by the one mind acting on one another. Though in calmer and saner moments we may glimpse this truth, it is hard to realise and live in it.

This is Kṛṣṇa's yoga: constantly remember that God is the sole, though not-so-obvious, reality pervading all, including you, but never limited to or conditioned by anything in the universe.

❖na ca matsthāni bhūtāni paśya me yogam aiśvaraṁ
bhūtabhṛn na ca bhūtastho mamā 'tmā bhūtabhāvanaḥ

Nor do beings exist in me; behold my divine yoga: supporting all beings
but not dwelling in them, is my self, the efficient cause of beings.

“Measure not the immeasurable in words”, warned lord Buddha. Dakṣiṇāmūrti indicated it by silence and the symbol of wisdom (cin-mudrā). The vaidika seers exclaimed “Hau, hau”, unable to find words to express their vision. Sage Yajñavalkya declared that all positive definitions are distractions and that the reality can only be approached by the total negation of all names and forms, thoughts and concepts – ‘neti, neti’, ‘not this, not this’.

Yet, if no one said anything, no one (except the rarest few to whom silence is meaningful) could learn. Here we are, on the horns of a dilemma. The method adopted by the Indian sage to overcome this is paradoxical. Every thesis is immediately opposed by its antithesis, and the resultant inexpressible synthesis is the nearest point which human intellect can reach before awakening to the reality (an event which the Zen Buddhists call ‘satori’) which is enlightenment.

The previous verse said ‘all beings exist in me’, and here we are told ‘nor do beings exist in me’! Deep meditation on this conundrum will remove the suggestion of duality and plurality implied in the first statement. It is not like saying: “sweets are in the tin”, but rather “vapour is pervaded by water”, where vapour and water are not two different things, but one is just the manifestation of the other. Thus, the reality is there, everywhere, all the time, in not-so-obvious a manner.

God is the creator and sustainer of all beings, yet not outside them. God dwells in all beings, yet is not limited to them. All beings are pervaded by him, yet not as ‘all beings’ (diverse and different) but in a mysterious manner all are forever one with him, without in any way affecting him, tainting him, limiting him or conditioning him. This indeed is the divine yoga; and the Lord explains it further in the following verses.

THE MONTH OF JULY

A novel method for self-realisation is suggested by the Lord in the Bhagavad Gītā. Other methods had been suggested before him. There were those who wanted us to close our eyes to the world, go into seclusion and by a process of introverted mental gaze, perceive the light of the self within. Others insisted on our doing our duties and serving humanity with the sole intention of self-purification, but refused to discuss the next step.

Kṛṣṇa is a genius. He discloses that the very duties and the service that we are compelled to perform daily contain in themselves not only agents to purify us, but to reveal (unveil) God for us to see! But how?

We should see the world, but not **as** the world; we should see it as the manifestation of God, his power, his glory. In other words, this is as if we were sitting in the cinema with wide open eyes and not only seeing the moving figures, but the screen on which they are projected. Try it!

The essence of this method is to be able to perceive the substratum (God) even though looking at the name and form. When you look at a wise man, you immediately remember that the wisdom in him is God. You learn to abstract that from the name and form (and other such factors), perceive that alone to the exclusion of everything else and realise that it is the manifestation of God.

This demands rigorous preliminary discipline and training; the training was prescribed and described in chapter six. Modern Zen Buddhism, too, leads its adherents along this royal road to self-realisation. First you see the tree; then you see the void; and then again you see the tree! But the second time, though the tree is the same, you are quite different and your inner vision is enlightened. That is the difference between the layman and a sage – the latter is enlightened. May you shine as an enlightened sage!

❖yathā 'kāśasthito nityam vāyuh sarvatrago mahān
tathā sarvāṇi bhūtāni matsthānī 'ty upadhāraya

As the mighty wind, moving everywhere, rests always in space, even so,
know thou that all beings rest in me.

The reality is just like space and what is obvious is like the wind – the movement of air in space. This wind, existing and moving in space, enables all things to come into being, to flourish. In a manner of speaking it is the wind of life-force or *prāṇa* that manifests itself as all this. Vibrating somewhere it is called something; vibrating elsewhere it is called something else. *Prāṇa* or life-force is responsible for the manifestation of the diverse phenomena and diverse beings. Yet, space is totally unaffected by these beings arising, existing and dissolving. This is an important concept which must be clearly grasped. All things exist in space; they are part of space, as it were.

When a building is erected, space has not vanished or been destroyed. It is still there, not merely as the enclosed space within the building, but as the space that even the solid walls 'occupy'. It is **in** the building – not confined to it, but really confining it! God exists in us in this sense only. By virtue of his omnipresence he is within us and all around us.

In quantum physics we are knocking at the door of this truth, having come close to the immateriality of matter. We are just dancing sub-atomic particles, which may also be waves. If all of us are mere waves of energy, we are not so solid after all!

So, the not-so-obvious is the reality in all that seems to be obvious. This is the distinction between material and immaterial beings. Water in a jar moves with the jar. The immaterial space in an empty jar, being omnipresent, does not move with it. Similarly, the omnipresent God is not subject to activity, birth and death. Despite the cyclonic activity in the universe, the self or Brahman or God is ever quiescent. Even the birth and death of beings are only apparent.

You are space, my friend, mere space. That space is filled with the divine presence whose nature is *cit-śakti* – not blind energy, but energy which is full of consciousness. This consciousness somehow becomes aware of a world and of an infinite variety of creatures. That awareness itself is the creator and that awareness itself you are.

❖sarvabhūtāni kaunteya prakṛtiṁ yānti māmikāṁ
kalpakṣaye punas tāni kalpādaḥ visrjāmy ahaṁ
❖prakṛtiṁ svām avaṣṭabhya visrjāmi punaḥ-punaḥ
bhūtagrāmam imam kṛtsnam avaśaṁ prakṛter vaśāt

All beings, O Arjuna ‘go into’ my nature at the end of a kalpa; I send them forth again at the beginning of (the next) kalpa.

Animating my nature, I again and again send forth all this multitude of beings, helpless by the force of nature.

The ‘big bang’ theory of creation states that all matter was condensed into a single superatom billions of years ago and when it burst the universe was born. The force was such that the universe is still scattering! On the other hand, the ‘steady state’ theory asserts that the universe is beginningless and endless and that out of the rudimentary hydrogen, new galaxies are constantly being formed to fill the space vacated by others moving away.

Kṛṣṇa reconciles the two. The ‘big bang’ is manifestation of his nature at the beginning of a kalpa (age). Since it is still in process of manifestation, we are not able to realise that one day all these will be withdrawn into his nature, i.e., when the galaxies have dispersed far enough from one another to exhaust the original impulse, they will begin to return to the centre. God, his nature and the potentiality of manifestation and unmanifestation, projection and withdrawal are all eternal; hence the continuous creation theory is also true.

Kalpa is a super-astronomical period of time; but in reality it is only kalpanā (imagination) – a thought in the divine mind. Thought involves both imagining and guessing in response to sensory stimuli. Careful observation shows that at one point, just before we drop off to sleep, it seems as though the senses and the imagining faculties are returning to our nature; and once the imagining and guessing has ceased, they have returned. When we wake (in dream or otherwise), those faculties start streaming out. This happens to us every day, and to God every one of his days, which means that there is nothing but God.

❖na ca mām tāni karmāṇi nibadhnanti dhanamjaya
 udāsīnavad āsīnam asaktam teṣu karmasu
 ❖mayā 'dhyakṣeṇa prakṛtiḥ sūyate sacarācaram
 hetunā 'nena kaunteya jagad viparivartate

These acts do not bind me, O Arjuna, sitting like one indifferent, unattached to those acts.

Under me as supervisor, nature produces the moving and the unmoving; because of this, O Arjuna, the world revolves.

When are we 'bound'? When we are affected. The vital truth to be realised and always borne in mind is that nothing external really affects us, but that 'we affect ourselves'. Hence it is that Kṛṣṇa warns us that we are our own friend or foe. No one can irritate us; we irritate ourselves. No one can insult us (beyond expressing their opinions about us); we interpret their opinions as insults. This affection is caused by attachment, itself born of ignorant identification of the self with the body and mind; so we are bound.

When we realise directly, not merely intellectually or intuitively, that whatever experience we may have is just our experience, and even so there are countless other experiences; that what we see is just one point of view and even so there are countless points of view, then instantly we will be loving, humble and enlightened. We realise we are just one small point of the cosmos and we learn to look at everything in the universe as part of this totality.

Here is a puzzle. I am your guest and we both go to the sea for a swim. I am attacked by a shark. The shark is happy. I yell with pain. You are worried. A few soft-hearted women weep; others disdainfully turn their faces away. A photographer is busy taking the 'picture of the year'. Now, we know that God dwells in all. How does **he** feel about the incident?

He is unaffected, for the simple reason that he does not identify himself with any one of the actors in this drama. It does not mean that he is cruelly indifferent to the pains and sufferings of man; he is totally free from ignorance and false identification, and so is free from these pains and sufferings. Man, too, by identifying his self with God can thus free himself. This identification is not a mental activity but the identification of the reality – the homogeneity or unity in this universe (which is not obvious) – after the cessation of mental activity. That is the goal of yoga.

❖avajānanti mām mūḍhā mānuṣīm tanum āśritam
 param bhāvam ajānanto mama bhūta-maheśvaram
 ❖moghāśā moghakarmāṇo moghajñānā vicetasah
 rākṣasīm āsurīm cai 'va prakṛtiṁ mohinīm śritāḥ

Fools disregard me, clad in human form, not knowing my higher being as the great Lord of all beings.

Of vain hopes, of vain actions, of vain knowledge and senseless, they verily are possessed of the deceitful nature of demons and undivine beings.

'People do not recognise me clad in human form' may refer to particular incarnations such as Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Moses, Mohammed, Buddha, Jesus and so on, but it may also mean that we do not recognise the not-so-obvious divinity in one another. The embodied self is none other than the supreme self; only illusion limits it. That is why Gurudev Swami Sivananda emphasised: "See God in all" and Baba Muktananda used to say: "Treat one another as God."

What appears to be a human form is nothing but an outer appearance; and appearance appears to appear only to one to whom it appears. Thus the same reality that is in you shines in all. It is one divine being that dwells in the hearts of all. Let the consciousness expand to see this unobvious truth with the eye of the insight.

You have the privilege of keeping this insight open – observing, enquiring, seeking constantly for this reality concerning yourself, all your relationships and what exists. You also have the privilege of shutting your eyes and creating your own reality.

'Asurī' means the absence of light, all that is darkened. In other words, one whose insight is darkened or closed. When we are blind spiritually, we see a separate reality created by our own ignorance. They are fools who accept the verdict of the senses, the intellect and their limited faculties and fail to realise the infinite. Their life is wasted in groping in darkness and self-limited by hugging ignorance. Even their fondest hopes, greatest actions and profoundest knowledge are tainted by illusion and therefore useless.

Ignorance is undivine; hence their nature is undivine and sinful. They can become divine – if they open their inner eye.

❖ mahātmānas tu mām pārtha daivīm prakṛtim āśritāḥ
 bhajanty ananyamanaso jñātvā bhūta-dim avyayaṁ
 ❖ satataṁ kīrtayanto mām yatantaś ca dṛḍhavrataḥ
 namasyantaś ca mām bhaktyā nityayuktā upāsate

But the great souls, O Arjuna, partaking of my divine nature, worship me with a single mind, knowing me as the imperishable source of beings.

Always glorifying me, striving, firm in vows, prostrating before me, they worship me with devotion, always steadfast.

The previous two verses stated the characteristics of a person of diabolical nature. Here we are introduced to the characteristics of the man of divine nature. Nature is God's own nature. It is the law of manifestation, however, that everything has two poles or sides. All that is within material, temporal, rational or conceptual levels has two extremes which are the pairs of opposites. Ignorance and knowledge, divine and undivine, manifest and unmanifest, truth and falsehood, reality and unreality – these always co-exist as the two poles of a single manifest being. However, God is beyond these because he is beyond all materiality, temporality, rationalisation or concept.

God's nature, when it is manifest here, has the two extremities of the divine and the undivine. The human soul, however, is endowed with the intelligence to discriminate between the two, to make the choice; and the will to make that choice operative, i.e., act upon that choice. We shall see more about this division of divine and undivine natures in a later chapter.

Suffice it to say here that those who have chosen to pursue divine nature, partake of that divine nature and adore God with all their being while at the same time realising that he is the divine presence in all beings. Bowing to all beings as the shrines of the divine spark, they serve all, love all and adore all beings. This is the symbolism of the holy cross, too, in which are synthesised the two commandments of lord Jesus: "Love thy Lord" and "Love thy neighbour as thine own self"; the vertical beam representing the former, the horizontal beam representing the latter and the intersection indicating their identity.

❖jñānayajñena cā 'py anye yajanto mām upāsate
 ekatvena pṛthaktvena bahudhā viśvatomukhaṁ
 ❖ahaṁ kratuḥ ahaṁ yajñāḥ svadhā 'ham ahaṁ auṣadhaṁ
 mantraḥ 'ham ahaṁ evā 'jyam ahaṁ agniḥ ahaṁ hutaḥ

Others also sacrificing with the wisdom-sacrifice worship me, the all-faced, as one, as distinct, and as manifold.

I am the kratu (vaidika ritual); I am the yajña; I am the offering to the ancestors (manes); I am the medicinal herb and all the plants; I am the mantra; I am also the ghee or the clarified butter; I am the fire; I am the oblation.

There is not and need not be a uniform approach to the infinite hidden in all finite objects. One can approach the infinite through any or all of the finite objects; but the object of our quest must be the infinite; the finite objects should not bedim or dazzle our vision, sidetrack our quest or thwart our endeavour.

There are various yajñā or ritualistic acts described and proscribed for seekers in the vedā. Kṛṣṇa introduces a new yajña here in the Bhagavad Gītā. It is the jñāna-yajña – the wisdom-worship or sacrifice where the symbolism of the ritual is pierced and the truth realised and revealed.

Based on this right understanding, all our actions can be and should be directed towards God who is 'faced in all directions' (i.e. omnipresent), who is one and who is manifold, neither limited by the one nor by the other. He can be worshipped as one, as many, as distinct or as identical; for he is ultimately beyond all these. The path to the transcendental is everywhere and through all. After all, is not God the seeker, the quest, the goal, the path and all? That is what Kṛṣṇa points out to us in the second verse above, using the symbolism with which the people of his time were familiar, the havan (fire worship).

When the spirit of sacrifice is thus fostered, our interdependence is seen. One sacrifices to the other – the seed sacrificing itself gives rise to the tree, the tree sacrifices itself to produce the fruit (food). Hence, there is an interconnectedness where we are all interwoven into the fabric of the world. Once this comprehensive understanding is attained, the worldliness of the world vanishes, and the seeker of wisdom rests in God. He experiences God in himself and in all.

❖pitā 'ham asya jagato mātā dhātā pitāmahaḥ
 vedyam pavitram omkāra ṛk sāma yajur eva ca
 ❖gatiḥ bhartā prabhuḥ śakṣī nivāsaḥ śaraṇam suhṛt
 prabhavaḥ pralayaḥ sthānam nidhānam bījam avyayaḥ
 ❖tapāmy aham aham varṣam nigṛhṇāmy utsṛjāmi ca
 amṛtam cai 'va mṛtyuś ca sad asac cā 'ham arjuna

I am the father of this world, the mother, the dispenser of the fruits of actions and the grandfather; the thing to be known, the purifier, the sacred mono-syllable (Om), and also the Rig-, the Sāma- and the Yajur-vedā.

I am the goal, the supporter, the Lord, the witness, the abode, the shelter, the friend, the origin, the dissolution, the foundation, the treasure-house, and the imperishable seed.

I give heat. I withhold and send forth the rain; I am immortality and also death, existence and non-existence, O Arjuna.

From the transcendental to the abstract! The mind is unable to think of even space and its dimensionlessness. It cannot transcend its own finite nature and yet remain 'mind'; the knower-beyond-mind is intuition. The transcendental reality can only be intuitively grasped, for it is beyond thought and rationalisation. Whatever may be thought of by the mind is the reality converted into a thought by the mind, converted into a substance by the mind. The reality has no name, no form, no quality, no attribute and can neither be characterised as existence nor non-existence, for then we fall into the error of 'pairs of opposites'.

Is there, then, no hope for the man who is unable to rise to the level of the realisation of the transcendental? Is the jet the only mode of travel? Is there no ship for the man of weak heart? Yes; meditate upon these abstract concepts, but remember that they are pointers and guideposts, not the destination.

The synthesis of opposites in the third verse is very important. God is not this or that; yet he is this **and** that, by virtue of being their substratum and reality. He embraces all opposites because he transcends them all. From his point of view the opposites are like the light and shade of a painting, like the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system in us, performing opposite functions for a common benefit, under the direction of life.

❖traividya mām somapāḥ pūtapāpā
 yajñāir iṣṭvā svargatimprārthayante
 te puṇyam āsādyā surendralokam
 aśnanti divyān divi devabhogān
 ❖te taṁ bhuktvā svargalokaṁ viśālaṁ
 kṣīṇe puṇye martyalokaṁ viśanti
 ❖evaṁ trayīdharmam anuprapannā
 gatāgataṁ kāmakāmā labhante

The knowers of the three *vedā*, the drinkers of the soma, purified of all sins, worshipping me by sacrifices, pray for the way to heaven; they reach the holy world of the Lord of the gods and enjoy in heaven the divine pleasure of the gods.

They, having enjoyed the vast heaven, enter the world of mortals when their merit is exhausted; thus abiding by the injunctions of the three *vedā* and desiring objects of desires, they attain to the state of going and returning.

The realisation of the absolute is our goal. We may take the smooth path or the rugged one. We may swim across or ride in a ferry-boat. The path of holiness and the path of diabolical beings are not different. Life is the same, but the insight of the holy ones shines brightly whilst the eyesight of the insight of diabolical beings is closed. In our quest we should never for a moment forget the goal.

The *vedā* and other scriptures are like the ferry-boat, and they are also like the mighty banyan tree that provides cool shade to the weary traveller scorched by the sun (of austerities and of the intense inner effort to transcend the mind). They encourage the despondent soul by providing him with tangible versions of the intangible, clothing the immaterial with the material, the spirit with form. He who complacently surrenders to these and goes to sleep under the banyan tree, abandoning the quest, exposes himself to the danger of wild animals (of desires and evil actions later in this life and subsequent lives).

Rituals, forms and scriptural injunctions are useful only so long as we do not forget the real, ultimate goal, which is realisation of the absolute. They do not take us to the destination, but are only pointers without which it may be difficult to find the way. However, they should never be regarded as the goal or a substitute for the goal.

Do all the good you can – obviously because you are convinced that you will go to heaven. This conviction moulds your *citta* (subconscious mind). And, it determines your next incarnation – meaning: on dropping this body you will be convinced that you are in heaven!

❖ananyāś cintayanto mām ye janāḥ paryupāsate
teṣāṁ nityābhyuktānām yogakṣemaṁ vahāmy ahaṁ

To those men who worship me alone, thinking of no other, of those ever-united, I secure that which is not already possessed and preserve what they already possess.

This is the royal secret, the royal road to the realisation of the absolute! We should disengage ourselves from the self-manufactured snare of illusion. Thinking of God for a while and then of the objects of the world for the rest of the time betrays insincerity and a doubt. The test of our sincerity here is the natural attitude of our mind to be ever conscious of God. This habit must be cultivated, realising that it is on account of his grace that we are able to see, speak, hear, think and so on. By merely becoming aware of this tremendous truth, we are freed from our own motivations and we live free, doing whatever has to be done. We are able to be intensely active and at the same time constantly aware of God's existence.

Kṛṣṇa uses a clever psychological approach here: "Think of me always; and I shall protect you." If God only protects those who constantly think of him, who protects the others? God alone. To him all are equal and he is not partial towards any, except inasmuch as they open themselves to him and therefore receive his grace in greater abundance. If you have the courage and the intelligence to investigate life, you find that all that you needed at a certain moment had already been created years ago. The wheat for the bread that you had this morning grew specifically for you three years ago!

When the devotee meditates upon the assurance contained in this verse, the hypnotic suggestion of the Lord takes effect upon him and he lets himself go entirely. It dawns upon him like a flash of lightning that God and God alone is the protector of all; and thenceforth he abandons all selfish activity and dedicates himself to the service of mankind in the spirit of the *Gītā*, remembering God constantly.

It does not mean that such a devotee will be indifferent to the business of the world; on the contrary, he will make himself an egoless, selfless and dynamic instrument in the hands of the Lord, for his will to be done. The actual technique of attaining this state of being will be explained as we go on.

❖ye 'py anyadevatābhaktā yajante śraddhayā 'nvitāḥ
 te 'pi mām eva kaunteya yajanty avidhipūrvakam
 ❖aham hi sarvayajñānām bhoktā ca prabhur eva ca
 na tu mām abhijānanti tattvenā 'taś cyavanti te
 ❖yānti devavratā devān pitṛn yānti pitṛvratāḥ
 bhūtāni yānti bhūtejyā yānti madyājino 'pi mām

Even those devotees who, endowed with faith, worship other gods, worship me alone, O Arjuna, by the wrong (imperfect) method.

I alone am the enjoyer and also the Lord of all sacrifices and worship; but they do not know me in essence and hence they fall on the path (or from the path).

The worshippers of the gods go to them; to the ancestors go the ancestor-worshippers; to the deities who preside over the elements go their worshippers; but my devotee comes to me.

At the outset a word of caution. It is possible to see the 'me' and 'God' that occur in the Bhagavad Gītā as implying the transcendental cosmic reality, the infinite which is manifest in infinite ways and whose nature is the entire manifest creation. That is the correct principle, the right approach, the proper method.

Those who cannot rise immediately to this height in yoga sādhana (spiritual practice) are not forsaken. They can approach God through any of the paths, modes or symbols, but they should never forget that the goal is the supreme being and not the path, mode or symbol chosen. If this is remembered, the great indwelling presence in all will accept their worship and lead them to the correct method, through the spirit of enquiry.

It is on account of ignorance or misunderstanding that the frail human heart accepts the symbol as the truth, the part as the whole, the aspect as the reality. When this happens, the soul reaches union with those objects of adoration. Though it has lost a golden opportunity of direct self-realisation, it will return here to make further progress. Thus, whatever path or symbol is chosen for worship, there should be an awareness that the symbol is worshipped 'as God' in the sense that what is actually worshipped is the infinite, not-so-obvious reality in the universe. What is obvious is a mental creation. From that, investigation into the nature of God begins, and then the answer arises – God-realisation happens. When this happens, the questioner is absent. Swami Sivananda has a beautiful poem which says: "Ignorance knocked, wisdom opened and ignorance ceased to be!" Ignorance cannot face wisdom, darkness cannot face light, the ego cannot face God.

❖patraṁ puṣpaṁ phalaṁ toyaṁ yo me bhaktyā prayacchati
 tad ahaṁ bhaktyupahṛtam aśnāmi prayatātmanaḥ
 ❖yat karoṣi yad aśnāsi yaj juhoṣi dadāsi yat
 yat tapasyasi kaunteya tat kuruṣva madarpaṇaṁ

Whoever offers me with devotion and a pure mind, a leaf, a flower, a fruit or a little water – I accept.

Whatever thou doest, whatever thou eatest, whatever thou offerest in sacrifice, whatever thou givest, whatever thou practisest as austerity, O Arjuna, do it as an offering unto me.

Whatever may be our approach to the supreme being, in accordance with our inner equipment, predisposition, temperament and taste, we ought to make it a point to feel that in and through the chosen symbol, we are contacting the supreme being himself, as he is the indwelling presence. (cf verse 24).

It is not so much what we do that matters, but with what feeling we do it. Just as almost any appealing and God-reminding symbol can be chosen to represent the supreme being, almost anything may be used to represent the inner spirit with which we approach him. A leaf, a flower – it does not matter what; for it is but a symbol that stands for the spirit of worshipfulness and total surrender which fills our heart. **Minus** this spirit, the offering is of very little value. **Minus** the recognition of the presence of the supreme being in the object, as we have seen, the worship is imperfect and will not liberate us.

When these two conditions have been ensured, it only remains for us to treat our whole life as worship of God and to offer all our actions as flowers of our worship of him.

Verse 26 may be taken to refer to ritualistic idol worship and also to charity. To the God who dwells in all we may offer in charity anything, however little it is, with love. This attitude encourages charity. Some people feel that unless they give in a big way, they should not think of giving at all. It is a great loss. So give **what** you can, but give with **love**, feeling that you are worshipping the indwelling presence thereby.

These two verses are life-transforming. Our Master used to recite verse 26 whenever he gave anything to anybody, thus revealing his attitude – worship of the indwelling God.

❖śubhāśubhaphalair evaṁ mokṣyase karmabandhanaiḥ
 saṁnyāsayogayuktātmā vimukto mām upaiśyasi
 ❖samo 'haṁ sarvabhūteṣu na me dveṣyo 'sti na priyaḥ
 ye bhajanti tu mām bhaktyā mayi te teṣu cā 'py ahaṁ

Thus shalt thou be freed from the bonds of actions yielding good and evil fruits; with the mind steadfast in the yoga of renunciation and liberated, thou shalt come unto me.

The same am I to all beings; to me there is none hateful or dear; but those who worship me with devotion are in me and I am also in them.

Liberation is from ignorance; renunciation is of its offspring – egoism and mineness. When the devotee of the omnipresence humbly performs all the activities of his life as worship of God, he is liberated from ignorance and the ignorant belief that some actions are high and others low or menial; that some actions yield auspicious and others inauspicious fruits. In a truly holy man, action does not need a motivation, since everything connected with every action is holy and divine. In his view, all actions are performed 'by God, to God, for his own sake', thus he is unbiased. Such a man is a supreme devotee of the Lord and quickly reaches him.

To the uninitiated and evil-veiled eye it looks as though God is somehow partial when one man, who to all outward appearances is like any other man, is granted liberation! He seems to be the beloved of God, the chosen one. Is God, then, a whimsical being with his own private loves?

In the history of religions, many have claimed to be 'the chosen' people, race or men. The idea occurs even in the Kaṭha upaniṣad! 'The self reveals itself to whom it pleases'. The Holy Quran also resorts to such expression. This divine mystery is explained in the Gītā: God chooses the humble ones who have totally surrendered themselves to him, to serve as his instrument, knowing that they will never misuse that privilege or thereby become swollen-headed. They are chosen because they deserve such choice; and such choice is therefore in the interest of all. There is no suggestion that certain communities or peoples will be chosen. In the eyes of God all have an equal opportunity to be chosen. All needles stand an equal chance of being attracted by the magnet, but the clean needle enjoys that privilege, while the rusty one does not.

He who thinks he is fit to be chosen, he who says that he is the chosen one, is **not** chosen.

❖api cet sudurācāro bhajate mām ananyabhāk
 sādhur eva sa mantavyaḥ saṁyag vyavasito hi saḥ
 ❖kṣipraṁ bhavati dharmātmā śāśvacchāntiṁ nigacchati
 kaunteya pratijānīhi na me bhaktaḥ praṇaśyati

Even if the worst sinner worships me, with devotion to none else, he too should indeed be regarded as righteous, for he has rightly resolved.

Soon he becomes righteous and attains to eternal peace; O Arjuna, know thou for certain that my devotee is never destroyed.

Judaism and Islam, in particular, have declarations that only God is worthy of our worship. May I humbly suggest that in these two verses, Kṛṣṇa, while agreeing with the biblical and the quranic commandment, exposes the context and, therefore, the true inner meaning?

The sinner (and the worldly man in general) worships and is devoted to a thousand objects and personalities in this world: in fact, that is why he sins, for to forget God in being attached to passing phenomena is itself the worst sin. The 'jealous God', with the compassionate intent of bringing him to the right path, visits him with mixed, varied and unexpected experiences in the form of pain and pleasure, etc. If he realises his folly (usually by association with men of spiritual insight), and if he has the strength of will to resolve aright, he will naturally be devoted to God and God alone.

'He has rightly resolved' is not merely resolution but an application of energies or attention in the right direction. If you turn and move towards the light, it is possible that for every two steps forward, you are pulled back one and a half. Never mind, you are still moving forward!

One with such resolution soon becomes a devotee of God, in his own way. An understanding of the expression 'devoted to God in his own way' offers an appreciation of the innumerable ways in which God has been attained. In the *Bhāgavatam* there is a lovely verse which says that people have attained God by fearing him, loving him, hating him, fighting with him or befriending him. In fact, people have attained him in all manner of ways. We are devoted to God in accordance with our own nature. Thus, the freedom to worship him in any manner the seeker likes has already been granted.

❖mām hi pārtha vyapāśritya ye 'pi syuḥ pāpayonayaḥ
 striyo vaiśyās tathā śūdrās te 'pi yānti parām gatiṁ
 ❖kiṁ punar brāhmaṇāḥ puṇyā bhaktā rājarṣayas tathā
 anityam asukhaṁ lokam imaṁ prāpya bhajasva mām

For, taking refuge in me, even they who, O Arjuna, may be of a sinful birth
 – women, businessmen as well as labourers attain the supreme goal.

How much more, then, the holy brāhmaṇā and devoted royal saints!
 Having obtained this impermanent and misery-ridden world, do thou
 worship me.

When we take refuge in God, we offer ourselves to him and become his property. It then becomes his responsibility to preserve that property. God will not let us go. A deluded miser clings to a piece of gold and risks his very life for it; how much more valuable is a human soul! (Remember lord Jesus comparing sparrows and the human being?) Moreover, since to God, the love of the human soul is **natural**, born of their eternal unity, once this re-union is effected it is not lost. The divine grip over the human soul may even take the form of worldly losses and bereavements. These are meant only to prevent the devotee from 'adoring anything but God'. The Lord might now scrape the adhering taints of past sinful life, which may be felt as pain by the human mind, and polish it, possibly giving the experience of psychic visions, just as the jeweller's rubbing and polishing of gold jewellery are prompted by his love of his property and his eagerness to increase its lustre and therefore its worth.

When thus visited by the conventionally misunderstood pain, misery and dishonour, the devotee sees them as proper signs of the true nature of the world in which he is born (impermanent and frustrating), and of the redeeming grace of God, which thus prevents him from being deluded. He does not blame the Lord nor is his devotion disturbed.

Endowed with this understanding, men and women of all castes and orders of life become eligible for the light which leads them to the supreme goal, without the least partiality or victimisation incident upon their birth.

❖manmanā bhava madbhakto madyājī mām namaskuru
mām evai 'śyasi yuktvai 'vam ātmānam matparāyaṇaḥ

Fix thy mind on me (saturate thy mind with me); be devoted to me; sacrifice unto (work for) me; bow down to me; having thus united thy whole self with me, taking me as the supreme goal, thou shalt come unto me.

This is the essence of Gurudev's integral yoga. This is the essence of the Bhagavad Gītā. Kṛṣṇa is so fond of this idea that he repeats it at the end of his teaching.

The delusion that envelops our understanding must go. The ignorance that veils the reality and projects the false appearance must be dispelled. The mind must be rid of its clouds of diversity. This is achieved by saturating the mind with God. The process of meditation is not like dropping a stone into a cup of water, but like dropping a lump of sugar into it – when the mind is thus fixed on God and becomes saturated with him, its very nature is changed! That is the meaning, purpose and fruit of meditation.

This is simultaneously accompanied by a whole-souled devotion to the Lord. With the evaporation of the delusions of the mind, its desires, based on lop-sided valuations, vanish. Then the evanescence of the world and the eternity of the bliss of the self are understood. The heart drops the world and clings to the lotus feet of the Lord.

The 'hands' spontaneously, involuntarily and joyously participate in this adoration of the omnipresent being by working for the Lord, serving all (the Lord in all) for his sake.

Thus the three aspects of our personality – the head, the heart and the hand – are integrated and our whole being is directed towards realisation of God as the only goal of our life. Then our life is not idle day-dreaming; it is full of dynamic action – karma yoga. It is selfless but not soul-less service, full of love of the omnipresent God – bhakti. It is neither blind action nor sentimentalism, but is filled with and directed by the light of God-consciousness – jñāna.

Has not such a devotee already 'come to God'?



OM TAT SAT

iti śrīmad bhagavad gītāsūpaniṣatsu brahma vidyāyām
yogaśāstre śrī kṛṣṇarjuna saṁvāde
rāja vidyā rāja guhya yogo nāma navamo 'dhyāyaḥ

Thus in the upaniṣad of the glorious Bhagavad Gītā,
the science of the eternal, the scripture of yoga,
the dialogue between śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna,
ends the ninth discourse entitled:

THE YOGA OF THE KINGLY SCIENCE AND THE KINGLY SECRET

CHAPTER X

THE YOGA OF THE DIVINE GLORIES

X

16th JULY

1, 2

śrībhagavān uvāca
❖bhūya eva mahābāho śṛṇu me paramaṁ vacaḥ
yat te 'haṁ prīyamāṇāya vaksyāmi hitakāmyayā
❖na me viduḥ suragaṇāḥ prabhavaṁ na maharṣayaḥ
aham ādir hi devānāṁ maharṣiṇāṁ ca sarvaśaḥ

The blessed Lord said: Again, O Arjuna, listen to my supreme word (message) which I will declare to thee who art beloved, for thy welfare.

Neither the hosts of the gods nor the great sages know my origin; for in every way I am the source of all of them.

The spiritual meaning here should not be overlooked. “I will tell you this wonderful truth, for I alone can” – i.e., only God can know God. The Kenopaniṣad ridicules the little man who prattles: “I know God”, and emphatically poses the riddle: “He who knows, knows not, and he who knows not, knows”. How can I know God? Can the finite measure the infinite? At best, the ‘I’ can disappear and dissolve in God.

The commandment ‘Please listen’ is important, too. Spiritual truths are not heard by the physical ear, the conditioned mind or the prejudiced intellect, but with the ear in the centre of the **heart**. When the truth is heard with that ear, a fresh mind and calm intellect, it becomes a living truth – the word made flesh.

Two types of beings are mentioned in the second verse – gods and sages. This can be interpreted both literally and metaphorically. Metaphorically, the gods are the powers that preside over the various organs and functions of the body. Each element is presided over by a divinity and governs an organ. The sages can be interpreted to refer to the mental faculties. These (the senses and the mind) cannot know God, for he is their creator and Lord.

Literally, the gods and sages were also created by God and hence are finite and in some measure imperfect – incapable of grasping the infinite. No doubt, through their insight they have become intuitively aware of the reality of God, but they cannot know him because he cannot be objectified. There is something in the master which is in direct communion with God. This omnipresence which is the unveiled divinity in the master is also in every being, but as the veiled divinity.

❖yo mām ajam anādiṁ ca vetti lokamaheśvaram
asaṁmūḍhaḥ sa martyeṣu sarvapāpaiḥ pramucyate

He who knows me as unborn and beginningless, as the great Lord of the worlds, he, among mortals, is undeluded and liberated from all sins.

What is God's own knowledge of himself? What is God's wisdom concerning himself?

First, he is unborn and, therefore, beginningless; and second, he is the great Lord of the worlds, or planes of consciousness or viewpoints. Here is an interesting thesis, antithesis, synthesis and transcendence. God is unborn and is not involved in all these passing appearances or phenomena. Who, then, is the controller of these phenomena which, by their orderliness and purposefulness, suggest such a governor? It is God. He is not involved in them, yet they do not function independently of him! Shall we, then, compare God to a despotic ruler who whimsically controls the destinies of people without getting involved in their miseries in any way? Oh, no! That would leave no room for his great compassion and love, which virtually 'compel' him to serve those who are devoted to him. He is very intimately conscious of the problems and strivings of mankind and, therefore, whenever the balance of right-and-wrong is greatly upset, he incarnates himself.

God's own nature keeps the entire universe vibrating and scintillating, but in that there is neither an action nor an actor. In other words he is not limited to unity, mere infinity (as opposed to finitude), or transcendental (as opposed to sensible) nature. He is one; he is many; he is one in many; he is many in one; and he is that inexpressible 'something' which we all try to express in various ways.

Hence one who realises God as this, that, both, neither, and that which remains when all pairs of opposites have been affirmed, denied and transcended (by fusion), is never deluded. He is free from sin, for if sin is forgetfulness of God, he never forgets God!

❖ buddhir jñānam asaṁmohaḥ kṣamā satyaṁ damaḥ śamaḥ
 sukhaṁ duḥkaṁ bhavo 'bhāvo bhayaṁ cā 'bhayaṁ eva ca
 ❖ ahimsā samatā tuṣṭis tapo dānaṁ yaśo 'yaśaḥ
 bhavanti bhāva bhūtānāṁ matta eva pṛthagvidhāḥ

Intellect, wisdom, non-delusion, forgiveness, truth, self-restraint, calmness, happiness, pain, existence or birth, non-existence or death, fear and also fearlessness;

Non-injury, equanimity, contentment, austerity, beneficence, fame, ill-fame – these different kinds of natures of beings arise from me alone.

The danger of a negative approach in metaphysics is that the subtle truth which transcends (but in a way includes) all viewpoints is lost sight of. Hence, the goal of the yogi is beyond philosophy and metaphysics. It is the great eloquent silence which is the substratum for the one (the monosyllable Om) and the many (language and speech), beyond all affirmations and denials. That goal is the supreme peace which is the foundation of the created universe (one) and all the objects in it (many). It is that supreme bliss which is the basis for the experience of undifferentiated happiness (one) and of different experiences (many) from the highest pleasure to the worst pain.

God is the bed of the river, and all these are its waters which flow on and on from immemorial past to unforeseeable future. In the light of this truth the shadow called the ego vanishes. Hence, the Lord enumerates a few of the many qualities that characterise our inner being and topography. You will notice that they all arise from him. You will notice, too, that they are self-contradictory. We see this wonder in nature: elements like fire and water are present everywhere and peacefully co-exist though their natures are different. All of them have God as their substratum. They all spring from him, they exist on account of him, but they do not in any way limit him – nor need we 'protect' him by denying their indescribable and wonderful relation with him.

One who sees this welcomes all experiences. Such a one was Swami Sivananda. He welcomed joy and sorrow; he was not ashamed to be glorified, nor was he bothered if he was insulted even by his own disciples. All these arise in God. However, this spirit is not easy to grasp. What do we do till then? Look for that God experience.

❖ maharṣayaḥ sapta pūrve catvāro manavas tathā
 madbhāva mānasā jātā yeṣāṁ loka imāḥ prajāḥ
 ❖ etāṁ vibhūtiṁ yogaṁ ca mama yo vetti tattvataḥ
 so 'vikarṇpena yogena yujyate nā 'tra saṁśayaḥ

The seven great sages, the ancient four and also the manū, possessed of powers like me, were born of my mind; from them are these creatures born in this world.

He who in truth knows these manifold manifestations of my being and yoga-power of mine become established in the unshakable yoga; there is no doubt about it.

Hinduism, especially Hindu mythology, has woven colourful legends into a charming pattern of creation. The Bhāgavatam and many other scriptures contain interesting stories which invariably conclude with the note, 'All this is the Lord's play'. The four ancient sages who were first born of the Creator's mind were not interested in progeny. The second lot of seven were prompted by the indweller to do this job, whilst the four illuminated the path of renunciation and return. These eleven sages and the manū, 'were born of my mind'. In other words, they are not to be mistaken for gross, physical, material beings! They are the thought-forms or the dreams of the Lord. They are the archetypes in the macrocosm of certain physio-mental faculties in the microcosm.

The four ancient sages represent the four aspects the mind – the conscious, the subconscious, the intellect and the egoity. The seven sages, however, represent the seven dhātū (components) of the physical body. The manū are thoughts themselves in the waking state, and dreams of the dream-state. But all these are only in cosmic mind! – i.e., they are God's dreams. And, 'from them are these creatures born in this world'! – i.e., the concrete material, sensible world that seems to exist is nothing more than God's dream-object. Why, then, do we not experience it as such? Because the dream is still in progress and we are all dream-objects. Whilst the dream is in progress, no one can convince the dreamer that he is dreaming! All seems so real. It is only on awakening that the dream is realised to have been a dream. The knower of this truth practises the 'unshakable yoga' for he is no more deluded, though he sees both sides – the dream and the dreamer dreaming his dream!

❖ ahaṁ sarvasya prabhavo mattaḥ sarvaṁ pravartate
 iti matvā bhajante mām budhā bhāvasamanvitāḥ
 ❖ maccittā madgataprāṇā bodhayantaḥ paraspamaṁ
 kathayantaś ca mām nityaṁ tuṣyanti ca ramanti ca

I am the source of all; from me everything evolves; understanding thus, the wise, endowed with meditation (or the proper attitude) worship me.

With their mind and their life wholly absorbed in me, enlightening each other and ever speaking of me, they are satisfied and delighted.

God is the source of all. The whole universe has issued from him as dream objects issue from your consciousness during dream; yet it remains within him, pervaded by him, essentially one with him – nay, is he himself.

The enlightened ones do not merely repeat these formulae or think about these truths, but what they say and think is flavoured by the nature of their own being. It is not the lips that utter the words, or the brain that thinks these thoughts. It is the entire being which expresses the truth, for that being is steeped in the realisation of this truth.

The Lord is Lord of the universe. When you enter into the spirit of this teaching, your citta becomes totally saturated with God. The word ‘saturated’ is highly inadequate because saturated means that there is a medium in which something else is held, whereas ‘maccittā’ does not mean that. God is not a percept or a concept. When all mental activities cease and the unreality of the ego is realised, God reveals himself, and you realise that everything there is totally pervaded by him. When your whole being cries out that this is the truth, what happens to you is maccittā.

So, the enlightened person is silent, unless it be the divine will that he should teach. Such enlightened men talk to one another, keeping one another awake and enlightened. To them there is absolutely no guru-disciple or teacher-taught relationship, but it is merely a case of enlightened persons talking about God. That is the spirit in which the Bhāgavataṁ was narrated, and that is the spirit in which all the great ones assemble, singing the glories of God without in the least considering themselves to be more enlightened than the others. In their eyes it is simply two hands scratching two sides of the face.

❖teṣāṁ satatayuktānāṁ bhajatāṁ prītipūrvakāṁ
 dadāmi buddhiyogaṁ taṁ yena mām upayānti te
 ❖teṣāṁ evā 'nukāṁpārtham aham ajñānajaṁ tamaḥ
 nāśayāmy ātmabhāvastho jñānadīpena bhāsvatā

To them who are ever steadfast, worshipping me with love, I give the yoga of discrimination by which they come to me.

Out of mere compassion for them, I, dwelling within their self, destroy the darkness born of ignorance by the luminous lamp of knowledge.

We can talk about God. We can love God. We can constantly meditate upon God. We can serve humanity as manifest God. We can – and should – do all these and much more. But God-realisation is his gift. We should not forget this for a single moment in our life. Hence, lord Kṛṣṇa reminds us of this great truth at every turn in the Gītā.

We cannot demand (except in the sense of yearning) God-realisation. Who demands? The ego! We do not deserve God-realisation so long as the ego is active. When the ego is not there, who is there to demand? This is the greatest of all puzzles, which only God can solve. Therefore the wise seeker leaves this final step to him.

This does not mean that fatalistically we give up our sādhana (spiritual practice). Oh, no. That would be impossible if we were sincere in our spiritual aspiration and if we were mature enough to commence our spiritual return-flight. The man who says: “I am unable to do even japa, (repetition of God’s name) or meditation, because God has not blessed me with such opportunities and grace,” is still far below the ‘human’ stage of evolution (though, like an actor, he may wear a human mask). In addition, he is clever enough to invent a philosophic argument to hide it! It is our irrepressible nature to strive, to do sādhana, but only God destroys our ignorance – not because we deserve it, but out of sheer compassion. What do we deserve? We have only used the faculties bestowed upon us by him, as they should be used. Is there great merit in this? No. So if God destroys our ignorance, it is not because we deserve it (if our arrogance feels so, the veil of ignorance will become thicker), but out of his sheer compassion for us.

arjuna uvāca
 ❖param brahma param dhāma pavitraṁ paramaṁ bhavān
 puruṣaṁ śāśvataṁ divyaṁ ādidevam ajaṁ vibhuṁ
 ❖āhus tvāṁ ṛṣayaḥ sarve devarṣir nāradas tathā
 asita devalo vyāsaḥ svayaṁ cai 'va bravīṣi me
 ❖sarvaṁ etad ṛtaṁ manye yaṁ mām vadasi keśava
 na hi te bhagavan vyaktiṁ vidur devā na dānavāḥ
 ❖svayam evā 'tmanā 'tmānaṁ vettha tvaṁ puruṣottama
 bhūtabhāvana bhūteśa devadeva jagatpate

Arjuna said: Thou art the supreme Brahman, the supreme abode, the supreme purifier, eternal, divine person, the primeval God, the unborn and omnipresent.

All the sages have thus declared thee, as also the divine sage Nārada; so also Asita, Devala and Vyāsa; and now thou thyself sayest so to me.

I believe all this that thou sayest to me as true, O Kṛṣṇa, verily, O blessed Lord! Neither the gods nor the demons know thy manifestation.

Verily, thou thyself knowest thyself by thyself, O supreme person, O source and Lord of beings, O God of gods, O ruler of the world!

Hymns are as old as time, and hymn singing is a method adopted by the devout seeker (a) to side-track the doubting intellect, with its insatiable 'appetite' to destroy knowledge aimlessly, and (b) to appeal directly to the light of God within to reveal itself. In the east, the Sāma chanters particularly, resorted to singing the glories of God in his various aspects, invoking his blessings and grace in various ways and for different purposes. In the west, the psalmist did the same. (Incidentally, note the phonetic similarity between psalm and Sāma – which refer to the same thing – and which were later extended to 'charm' in white and black magic.) This ancient method has been recaptured by the highly advanced scientist of today and reintroduced into society in the form of 'suggestion' which the psychologist defines as 'the inducing, or the attempt to induce an idea, belief, decision, action, etc., by one individual in another through stimulation, whether verbal or otherwise, but exclusive of argument'. Even as hypnosis can be self-applied, suggestion, too, can become auto-suggestion; but it should again be 'exclusive of argument'.

It has, however, been the experience of all mystics that such acceptance was eventually rewarded by direct experience of the reality which the hymn 'suggested'.

❖vaktum arhasy aśeṣeṇa divyā hy ātmavibhūṭayaḥ
 yābhir vibhūtibhir lokān imāṃs tvam vyāpya tiṣṭhasi
 ❖katham vidyām ahaṃ yogīṃs tvām sadā paricintayan
 keṣu-keṣu ca bhāveṣu cintyo 'si bhagavan mayā
 ❖vistareṇā 'tmano yogaṃ vibhūtiṃ ca janārdana
 bhūyaḥ kathaya tṛptir hi śṛṇvato nā 'sti me 'mrtaṃ

Thou shouldst indeed tell, without reserve, of thy divine glories by which thou existeth, pervading all these worlds. (None else can do so.)

How shall I, ever meditating, know thee, O yogin? In what aspects or things, O blessed Lord, art thou to be thought of by me?

Tell me again in detail, O Kṛṣṇa, of thy yoga power and glory; for I am not satisfied with what I have heard of thy life-giving and nectar-like speech.

‘Tell me again’ – not only indicates Arjuna’s thirst for wisdom but a method which all of us can adopt to whip up interest, keep away boredom and thus keep the inner receptor open for the reception of divine light. In the words of the wise there is always a germinal seed.

Arjuna is a wise seeker; his prayer here is the prayer of all sincere seekers who realise their own limitations though they will rise above them one day. Our mind can grasp only that which is ‘below’ it in the degree of subtlety. It cannot grasp something which is more subtle. The sieve is a very crude illustration; if the particles of flour are smaller than the perforations of the sieve, it cannot hold them. That which is capable of being grasped is obviously more limited than the grasping instrument. But, is it possible to limit the infinite?

The transcendental aspect of God is extremely subtle and so cannot be grasped by the mind and intellect. The mind can govern the senses and grasp through them the object of their perception. However, the mind also has the power to fall back on itself and thus, in a mysterious way, experience (and infer) that which is the essence of the objects and of itself – not, however, as an object of thought. This process can be called intuition.

The wise devotee resorting to ‘manifestations of God’ in order to meditate upon him, utilises these two avenues open to him. He approaches God through God’s own manifestations, but he also wisely peeps through these into their ‘heart’ where, as it were, he first infers and later experiences the presence of a super-physical, spiritual reality.

śrībhagavān uvāca
 ❖hanta te kathayiṣyāmi divyā hy ātmavibhūṭayaḥ
 prādhānyataḥ kuruśreṣṭha nā 'sty anto vistarasya me
 ❖aham ātmā guḍākeśa sarvabhūṭāśayasthitaḥ
 aham ādiś ca madhyaṁ ca bhūtānām anta eva ca

The blessed Lord said: Very well. Now I will declare to thee my divine glories in their prominence, O Arjuna. There is no end to their detailed description.

I am the self, O Arjuna, seated in the hearts of all beings; I am the beginning, the middle and also the end of all beings.

Here is a very interesting prologue to a startling approach to the supreme being – a warning that we should accept the symbol, but not confine the reality to it. God is in it, but not confined to it. It is God, but not to the exclusion of anything else. If the caution administered in these two verses is borne in mind, almost anything will lead us to God – for in effect the whole universe is the manifestation of a part of his infinite glory and power. Again, we can only take a few manifestations, we cannot encompass even these in their entirety with our limited mind. Try to think of space in its entirety. The mind reels and staggers!

But any form will do – for God is the self in the hearts of all beings. He is the reality in all appearances. He is the truth represented by the symbol. He is the noumenon in all phenomena. He is the formless Brahman in all forms. He is **that** in this.

Everything in the universe is filled with the same energy, with the same intelligence, the same consciousness. Thus, the objects that we use in our life, the actions that we do with this body, the persons to whom our actions are directed, are nothing but the manifestations of God. This is a remarkable truth, which, until it becomes a realisation, is a remarkable attitude.

Constant vigilance is necessary in order not to lose sight of the goal. We have our feet planted firmly on the ground and let our heart and mind fly aloft in the realms of the infinite. We grasp the form and let the indwelling presence envelop our heart, our consciousness.

❖ ādityānām ahaṁ viṣṇur jyotiṣām ravir aṁśumān
 marīcir marutām asmi nakṣatrāṇām ahaṁ śaśī
 ❖ vedānām sāmavedo 'smi devānām asmi vāsavaḥ
 indriyāṇām manaś cā 'smi bhūtānām asmi cetanā
 ❖ rudrāṇām śaṁkaraś cā 'smi vitteśo yakṣarakṣasām
 vasūnām pāvakaś cā 'smi meruḥ śikhariṇām ahaṁ

Among the twelve ādityā, I am Viṣṇu; among the luminaries, the radiant sun; I am Marīci among the wind-gods; among the stars the moon am I.

Among the vedā I am the Sāma-veda; I am Vāsava among the gods; among the senses I am the mind; and I am intelligence among living beings.

And, among the rudrā, I am Śaṁkara. Among the yakṣā and rakṣasā, Kubera. Among the vasū I am fire. Among the mountains I am the Meru.

All these names of gods deserve deep study and research. We do not recognise the existence of many gods. We are not polytheists. We are not even pantheists, believing in one deity somehow enveloping all. Indeed, we are not even monotheists, believing in one God. We are monists, believing that one alone exists, and that ultimately even the distinction between God, world and man ought to be resolved into the transcendental self-realisation of non-duality. All the names of gods and deities, divine and demoniacal beings, mentioned in the scriptures and alluded to here have a meaning and are not mere proper names.

The twelve ādityā have been identified with the twelve signs of the zodiac. The twelve suns are worth identifying in the heavens, of whom the most powerful is Viṣṇu whose light envelops all (that is the literal meaning of the word). 'Of all luminaries I am the sun' – which is most luminous. In all these it will be noticed that we are asked to regard the best as the manifestation of God. This does not mean that only the best is his manifestation. At the present stage it is easier for the mind to accept it to be so, and eventually its vision will expand in concentric circles to include all else into it, for, 'among the senses I am the mind'. Thus, the mind's own undefiled substratum with unlimited potentialities, is God himself. He is the 'intelligence among living beings'. When this 'knower' of all is understood and realised, all objects will be perceived as divine, one with the subject!

- ❖purodhasām ca mukhyaṁ mām viddhi pārtha bṛhaspatiṁ
senānīnām ahaṁ skandaḥ sarasām asmi sāgaraḥ
- ❖maharṣīnām bṛgur ahaṁ girām asmy ekam akṣaraṁ
yajñānām japayajño 'smi sthāvarāṇām himālayaḥ
- ❖āsvatthaḥ sarvavṛkṣāṇām devarṣīnām ca nāradaḥ
gandharvāṇām citrarathaḥ siddhānaṁ kapilo muniḥ
- ❖uccaiḥśravasam āsvānām viddhi mām amṛtodbhavaṁ
airāvataṁ gajendrāṇām narāṇām ca narādhipaṁ

And, among the household priests, O Arjuna, know me to be the chief, Bṛhaspati. Among the generals of the army, I am Skanda. Among reservoirs of water, I am the ocean.

Among the great sages I am Bṛgu. Among words I am the monosyllable Om. Among sacrifices I am the sacrifice known as japa (silent repetition of a mantra). Among the immovables I am the Himālayā.

Among the trees I am the peepul. Among the divine sages I am Nārada. Among gandharvā, Citraratha. Among the perfected, I am sage Kapila.

Know me as uccaiḥśravas born of nectar among horses. Among lordly elephants I am Airāvata. Among men, I am the king.

God's manifestations are not confined to the human kingdom. A careful study will reveal the astonishing truth that the Lord describes himself as the best among all animate, inanimate and insentient objects, and it is a blunder to limit God to human beings alone! There are infinite varieties of plants, animals and minerals. This merely shows that God is infinite. The essence is one and infinite, the manifestation is diverse and infinite. Infinity plus one equals infinity plus infinity. In all these diverse phenomena the truth is only one, yet has no specific form but is not condemned to formlessness.

God's own grace is guiding the research of modern scientists to the discovery that even minerals are alive, 'vibrating' masses of energy. When we come to regard the entire universe as the body of God, we can easily understand that the mineral kingdom is to him what the hairs and nails are to us.

The yajña for this age is mantra repetition. However, we neglect this simple but highly efficacious mode of adoring God, and cling to outmoded and anti-social forms of sacrifice (like animal sacrifice). The yajña of japa is a continuous pouring of the oblation of the mantra into the 'inner fire' of godlove.

- ❖ āyudhūnām ahaṁ vajraṁ dhenūnām asmi kāmādhuk
prajānaś cā 'smi kandarpaḥ sarpāṇām asmi vāsukiḥ
- ❖ anantaś cā 'smi nāgānām varuṇo yādasām ahaṁ
pitṛṇām aryamā cā 'smi yamaḥ saṁyamātām ahaṁ
- ❖ prahlādaś cā 'smi daityānām kālāḥ kalayatām ahaṁ
mṛgāṇām ca mṛgendro 'haṁ vainateyaś ca pakṣiṇām
- ❖ pavanaḥ pavatām asmi rāmaḥ śāstrabhṛtām ahaṁ
jhaṣāṇām makaraś cā 'smi srotasām asmi jāhnavī

Among weapons I am the thunderbolt; among cows I am the wish-fulfilling cow; I am the god of love, the progenitor; among serpents I am Vāsuki.

I am Ananta among the nāgā. I am Varuṇa among water-deities. Aryaman among the manes am I. I am Yama among the governors.

I am Prahlāda among the demons. Among the reckoners I am time. Among beasts I am their king, the lion. And, Garuda among birds.

Among the purifiers I am the wind. Rāma among the warriors am I. Among fishes I am the shark. Among rivers I am the Gaṅgā.

With great tact, wisdom and circumspection, lord Kṛṣṇa introduces here objects and concepts that are generally regarded as 'evil' by man. Weapons are evil, but God is the thunderbolt, the most terrible among them – equal to a number of 500-megaton hydrogen bombs together! He is not only the celestial wish-fulfilling cow, but also the chief of poisonous and non-poisonous serpents. He is the God of love whom sages and yogī dread! Even so, he is the shark, the lion, and so on.

All these have their own place in God's plan. We do not remember this and hence we fear them and regard them as evil and unnecessary. They seem to be unpleasant to our self-centred, self-loving and luxury-addicted personality and hence we hate them. Yet the more we push them away, the more we cling to them. 'I am Yama among the governors' – but for Yama (identified with death) this world would not even have standing room for the population, and the aged would be compelled to lead an existence worse than death. Yama or death regulates all things in this world. Without such a governor, the pendulum might swing too much towards one extreme.

There is great good within what we regard as evil; the inclusion of Prahlāda's name in this list is indicative of this. Though born of demoniacal ancestry, Prahlāda was a great devotee of the Lord. It is not from which genes we were born, but what we are that matters; and in all of us there is the highest divinity waiting to be revealed and unfolded.

❖sargāṇām ādir antaś madhyaṁ cai 'vā 'ham arjuna
 adhyātmavidyā vidyānām vādaḥ pravadatām ahaṁ
 ❖akṣarāṇām akāro 'smi dvandvaḥ sāmāsikasya ca
 aham evā 'kṣayaḥ kālo dhātā 'haṁ viśvatomukhaḥ
 ❖mr̥tyuḥ sarvaharaś cā 'ham udbhavaś ca bhaviṣatām
 kīrtiḥ śrīr vāk ca nārīṇām smṛtir medhā dhṛtiḥ kṣamā
 ❖bṛhatsāma tathā sāmnam gāyatrī chandasām ahaṁ
 māsānām mārḡasīrṣo 'ham ṛtūnām kusumākaraḥ

Among creations, I am the beginning, the middle and also the end, O Arjuna. Among the sciences, I am the science of the self. I am logic among controversialists.

Among the letters of the alphabets, I am the letter 'A'. I am 'and' (the dual) among the compounds. I am verily the inexhaustible or everlasting time. I am the dispenser of the fruits of actions, having faces in all directions.

I am the all devouring death and the prosperity of those who are to be prosperous. Among the feminine qualities I am fame, prosperity, speech, memory, intelligence, firmness and forgiveness.

Among the hymns also I am the Bṛhatsāman. Among metres I am the Gāyatrī. Among the months I am the Mārḡasīrṣa. Among the seasons, I am spring.

God is the source and end of all beings and, therefore, all creations. But he is the middle, too. If the middle is absent, there is neither one end nor the other. Though 'I' and 'you' seem to be very real, the only reality is what is between us – the connecting link – which is God, the consciousness, life. That is the meaning of the words 'omnipresent', 'eternal', 'infinite', which we use freely without considering their significance. The omnipresent God alone exists; and the one cannot undergo birth or death (beginning or end). Birth is of another, and dissolution is into another. Hence, God is without these stages, yet he is their substratum.

It is worth noting that the science of the self is regarded as the best of sciences. Modern science, though predominantly materialistic so far, is gradually leading us to this conclusion. Note, too, that the prosperity of a wealthy man comes from God. If you are able to behold that prosperity as a divine manifestation, all jealousy, desire and hatred vanish and you admire only the divine.

The Lord exalts logic among controversialists. Discussion and even controversy may lead those taking part to greater and greater heights of search for the truth. Provided, of course, it does not generate lower passions, heat and hatred, we can use logic and pursue it to its own logical conclusion, leaping from there into God's lap.

❖dyūtaṁ chalayatām asmi tejas tejasvinām ahaṁ
 jayo 'smi vyavasāyo 'smi sattvaṁ sattvavatām ahaṁ
 ❖vṛṣṇīnām vāsudevo 'smi pāṇḍavānām dhanamjayaḥ
 munīnām apy ahaṁ vyāsaḥ kavīnām uśanā kaviḥ
 ❖daṇḍo damayatām asmi nītir asmi jigīṣatām
 maunaṁ cai 'vā 'smi guhyānām jñānaṁ jñānavatām ahaṁ

I am the gambling of the fraudulent. I am the splendour of the splendid. I am victory. I am determination. I am the goodness of the good.

Among the Vṛṣṇī I am Vāsudeva. Among the Pāṇḍavā I am Arjuna. Among the sages I am Vyāsa. Among poets I am Uśanā, the poet.

Among punishers I am the sceptre. Among those who seek victory I am statesmanship. Also, among secrets I am silence. Knowledge among knowers I am.

We have reached the conclusion of this list of special manifestations, given by the Lord for our meditation in order to enable us to perceive their underlying divinity and eventually, by a process of expansion of our inner vision, to perceive all as God. Kṛṣṇa also identifies himself as God's manifestation, as well as the disciple Arjuna and the chronicler Vyāsa.

If the goodness of the good is God's manifestation, even so is the gambling of the cheat! This does not mean that Kṛṣṇa sanctions gambling or that we should become expert gamblers before we can know God! Far from it. Here is a double-edged sword. Subjectively, these evils are to be ruthlessly and scrupulously avoided, as they lead us away from God. Objectively, when these qualities are found in others, we should refrain from condemning them, but endeavour to 'see through' even this veil of evil and enjoy a vision of the glorious God hidden within.

This teaching and this technique, when applied to our daily life, enable us to develop the spirit of understanding. We learn to find God (and not faults) in all. All are evolving. We must not cultivate faults in ourselves, but we must not despair when their presence in us comes to our notice. Furthermore, we must not recognise the presence of faults in others – thinking about others' faults only imports them into ourselves. It is when we are confronted with our own failures that humility arises, paving the way for devotion and growth in the divine.

The best way to preserve a secret is 'silence'! What a divinity of practical wisdom Kṛṣṇa is!!

❖yac cā 'pi sarvabhūtānām bījaṁ tad aham arjuna
 na tad asti vinā yat syān mayā bhūtaṁ carācaram
 ❖nā 'nto 'sti mama divyānām vibhūtinām paramtapa
 eṣa tū 'ddeśataḥ prokto vibhūter vistaro mayā

Whatever is the seed of all beings, that also am I, O Arjuna. There is no being whether moving or unmoving that can exist without me.

There is no end to my divine glories, O Arjuna; but this is a brief statement by me of the particulars of my divine glories.

There is an interesting dialogue in the Chāndogya upaniṣad between a guru and disciple. The guru asks the disciple to bring a small (banyan) fruit – a variety of the fig. The fruit is then broken. There are thousands of small seeds in it. One of them is isolated and broken. “What do you find?” asks the guru. The disciple replies: “Nothing.” “Ah, well, nothing? It is that nothing that has given birth to this gigantic tree.” That nothing contains the complete blue-print of the whole tree to its minutest details. That is what makes the mango tree spring from the mango-seed and a banyan tree from the banyan seed, without the slightest error. Scientists nowadays are busy analysing the mysterious factor in the human seed that is responsible for transmitting various characteristics from parent to offspring. Even this search is bound, eventually, to lead us to the feet of God, provided, of course, that at the right moment we allow thought with its concepts and images, as also reason with its thesis and antithesis, to drop away, yielding place to pure wonderment.

Beyond this ‘seed’ is the unmanifest, transcendental godhead. That godhead is clothed, as it were, with this manifestation-potential; even as each isolated, invisible electron coursing through a copper-wire contains the potentiality of the manifestation of its light and power. This manifestation-potential and the consciousness ‘within’ it are not really two different and distinct entities, but one and the same. Hence, if we zealously pursue our quest, anything – moving or unmoving – will take us to the goal, God.

❖ yad-yad vibhūtimat sattvaṁ śrīmad ūrjitam eva vā
 tat-tad evā 'vagaccha tvaṁ mama tejoṁ 'śasambhavaṁ
 ❖ athavā bahunai 'tena kiṁ jñātena tavā 'rjuna
 viṣṭabhyā 'ham idaṁ kṛtsnam ekāṁśena sthito jagat

Whatever being there is, glorious, prosperous or powerful, that know thou to be a manifestation of a part of my splendour.

But, of what avail to thee is the knowledge of all these details, O Arjuna? I exist, supporting this whole world by one part of myself.

Mr. J. Louis Orton in his 'Hypnotism Made Practical' says: "A lecturer began to address his audience thus: 'What is mind? Nobody knows. We only know the **manifestations** of mind.' The lecturer might have said just as truly: 'What is matter? Nobody knows. We know only the **manifestations** of matter.' What do we know except through manifestations?" This question drove the ancient eastern mystic into the depths of his own being.

God's divine glory is spread out before us in this manifest universe. God's divine potency within the earth, in the rays of the sun and the showers of rain, bestows prosperity on us all. God's divine power (call it love) sustains the entire creation, keeping the stars and planets at the precise distance from one another conducive to the welfare of all, and guides them along their individual orbits in accordance with his eternal law. His power creates, sustains and dissolves (redeems).

Yet all the manifestations do not exhaust God, either spatially or spiritually. We can go to the limits of this universe, but we shall still find God spread out beyond. We can dive ever deeper into the heart of each atom of matter, only to discover with unabated wonderment that we have entered a greater realm of his power and his glory. For the manifest universe is the expression of a very small part of his power and glory. May he reveal himself to us! For only he can – when our mind stops functioning. It is God we are seeing, it is God we are living in. Unfortunately we try to grasp this truth with our puny little mind and senses, and all we can clasp is a pebble.



OM TAT SAT

iti śrīmad bhagavad gītāsūpaniṣatsu brahma vidyāyām
yogaśāstre śrī kṛṣṇarjuna saṁvāde
vibhūti yogo nāma daśamo 'dhyāyaḥ

Thus in the upaniṣad of the glorious Bhagavad Gītā,
the science of the eternal, the scripture of yoga,
the dialogue between śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna,
ends the tenth discourse entitled:

THE YOGA OF THE DIVINE GLORIES

THE MONTH OF AUGUST

The climax is reached this month.

Whatever be the nature of knowledge and wisdom, it is a colossal waste if it merely adorns our intellect or heart. We should have the courage of our own convictions and live up to them. We should **experience** what we understand to be the highest truth (even with our own limited vision); for only then is even a verification of its validity possible. We may err; it is human. But if we do not have the daring, if we are ever standing on the brink, hesitant, we may die with a great weight in our heart – the weight of falsehood misunderstood as the truth! Hence, by all means look before you leap...take a second look, and a third...but for heaven's sake, **leap**.

Arjuna takes a leap and is granted the cosmic vision. Out of this experience, several facts emerge which are discussed this month.

Until we see the universe as God's body, we remain outside the inner court of yoga. Karma yoga is possible only if we realise we are one with God, and therefore with all. Bhakti yoga is puerile if it is confined to idol worship and does not embrace karma yoga. Jñāna yoga degenerates into intellectual gymnastics if the truth is not realised. But when the universe is seen as God's body, and God as the indwelling omnipresent consciousness, a great and courage-infusing affirmation of solace reverberates in every cell of our being. It leads us to *nimitta bhāvanā* – “I am only an instrument in the hands of God” – which is not a feeling or an attitude, but a living, even if unexpressed, truth.

Liberation from the thralldom of ignorance is liberation from this mysterious ego-consciousness. The sage of cosmic consciousness sees God working through him, for the benefit, as it were, of the universe which, too, is God himself! Supreme peace reigns in the heart which is alive to this truth!

CHAPTER XI

THE YOGA OF THE VISION OF THE COSMIC FORM

XI

1st AUGUST

1, 2

arjuna uvāca

- ❖ madanugrahāya paramaṁ guhyam adhyātmasaṁjñitam
yat tvayo 'ktaṁ vacas tena moho 'yaṁ vigato mama
- ❖ bhavāpyayau hi bhūtānāṁ śrutau vistaraśo mayā
tvattaḥ kamalapatrākṣa mātṛnyam api cā 'vyayaṁ

Arjuna said: By this word (explanation) of the highest secret concerning the self, which thou has spoken out of compassion towards me, my delusion is gone.

The origin and the destruction of beings verily have been heard by me in detail from thee, O lotus-eyed Lord, and also thy inexhaustible greatness.

You can try this interesting experiment! At the end of an hour-long discourse, ask the members of the audience to recapitulate what they heard. You will be shocked to find how much of the discourse has flowed off the duck's back. Often people ask: "But how can I improve my grasping power and memory?" Become interested and remain interested in the whole discourse; otherwise the mind, which works on the basis of the buddhi's (discriminative power's) valuation, will refuse to concentrate, absorb and retain.

In order to be interested or to listen, you must be 'on the same wave-length' as the master; his words must be meaningful to you as both of you are embarking on the spiritual adventure together. These words should enter your being and become living truths in you, not because you heard them from a great man, but because you see the truth. It is then that knowledge begins to flow.

Considering that Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna were on the battlefield, these two verses, which sum up the teaching so far, are excellent indications of the intellectual powers of Arjuna. "My delusion is gone," he says. That was the purpose of the Gītā and hence we can say it ended with the tenth chapter. Even at the end of the eighteenth chapter, Arjuna only repeats these words. Hence it is right to conclude that the first ten chapters of the Gītā contain its philosophy and the remaining eight contain the practical application of this philosophy. The eleventh chapter is more in the nature of a demonstration of the great truths expounded by the Lord in the tenth chapter.

Lotus is symbolic of unfoldment. Lotus-eyed therefore means 'one whose inner vision has unfolded to infinite vision'.

❖evam etad yathā 'ttha tvam ātmānam parameśvara
 draṣṭum icchāmi te rūpam aiśvaram puruṣottama
 ❖manyase yadi tac chakyaṁ mayā draṣṭum iti prabho
 yogeśvara tato me tvaṁ darśayā 'tmānam avyayaṁ

So it is, O supreme Lord, as thou hast declared thyself to be. I desire to see thy form as Īśvara, O supreme person.

If thou, o Lord, thinkest it possible for me to see it, do thou then, O Lord of the yogī, show me thy imperishable self.

Arjuna had heard, as a keen student should hear, all the instructions of the Lord with one-pointed attention, asking a question here and there with a genuine eagerness to have his doubts cleared, rather than to doubt or decry. This approach greatly encourages the teacher. It provides the 'intellectual cross-ventilation', as it were, inviting the outside wind to blow in. As we shall see towards the end of the Bhagavad Gītā, the Lord compels neither blind allegiance to nor blind rejection of his teachings.

The wisest approach to all teaching is: receive, then analyse in the light of your own intelligence; you have a right to do so and need not surrender that right. Do not doubt or condemn anything, but accept what appears acceptable to you and let the rest drop away. Only that much was good for you at that stage of your evolution; perhaps the other factors were meant for others to whom they might appeal.

This acceptance should not be mechanical, but should 'happen', because aided by the teacher, you yourself see the truth of the teaching. This communion between the guru and the disciple is real, though non-verbal communication. Here, the physiological organs of hearing are open, the mind is silent, the heart is afire with affection and the truth instantly becomes enshrined in the heart.

The conclusion of the tenth chapter proved too great a temptation for Arjuna to resist. What is the Lord's form as 'Īśvara'? Īśa or Īśvara means 'is', the simple English verb, though vedānta gives it all sorts of complicated explanations. It is 'suchness'. When all appearances or manifestations have been overcome, what remains **is** – **That** is all – That **is** all – That is **All**. If you shift the emphasis to each of these three words separately and meditate upon them, you will truly understand what Īśa or Īśvara (and perhaps Jesus) means.

śrī bhagavān uvāca
 ❖paśya me pārtha rūpāṇi śataśo 'tha sahasraśaḥ
 nānāvidhāni divyāni nānāvarṇākṛtīni ca

The blessed Lord said: Behold, O Arjuna, forms of mine, by the hundreds and thousands, of different sorts, divine and of various colours and shapes.

With a shudder of excitement and divine anticipation, we now enter the kingdom of direct realisation. As we shall presently see, this realisation is extra-sensory and even extra-rational. The senses function only within an extremely narrow and limited field. The rational faculties are similarly bound by certain traditional laws and codes fed into the intellect by aeons of ignorance. The only relevant answer to the question: “How do you know that God or the ultimate reality exists?” is the counter-question: “Why do you speak through your mouth?” Honest rationalisation is bound to lead one to a logical absurdity or cul-de-sac; for ignorance is the parent of intellect whose offspring is logic. Hence, your questions are always based on assumptions which you do not question!

The expression ‘my forms’ thus gives rise to a misunderstanding that God has some special forms – ‘hundreds and thousands’ of them. This **may** be true; nevertheless it is a convenient expression. However, we must recognise that all expressions or theories are limitations and are, therefore, incapable of approaching the absolute. When you mistake a theory for the truth, you are caught and so thoroughly confused that it is impossible to find the truth. Yet, we have to admit the use of the theory (the half-truth) as a stepping-stone to truth. Says Bertrand Russell: “I shall never forget my disappointment when I found that Euclid started with axioms.... Since I was anxious to go on, I admitted it provisionally....”

Every theory is born of man’s quest for a solution to an immediate problem; such problems being sorrow, anxiety, inability to relate to the environment or to others. When the theory is used as an aid only, the truth is suddenly discovered to be extremely simple. Intellect, logic or rationalisation is the catalyst and should reduce dogmas, superstitions, bias, prejudice and ignorance to the pure ash of direct self-realisation.

❖ paśyā 'dityān vasūn rudrān aśvinau marutas tathā
 bahūny adr̥ṣṭapūrvāṇi paśyā 'ścaryāṇi bhārata
 ❖ ihai kasthaṁ jagat kṛtsnaṁ paśyā 'dya sacarācaram
 mama dehe guḍākeśa yac cā 'nyad draṣṭum icchasi

Behold the ādityā, the vasū, the rudrā, the two aśvin and also the marut;
 behold many wonders never seen before, O Arjuna.

Now behold, O Arjuna, in this, my body, the whole universe, centred in one
 – including the moving and the unmoving – and whatever else thou
 desirest to see.

One of the most significant and beautiful declarations repeated in the Bhagavad Gītā a number of times in different formulations is that there is nothing in the universe except the divine. In chapter ten, verses 21-23, we came across the same expressions as we have in verse 6 above. I repeat: these 'names' are worth investigating to discover their physical or astronomical identity.

Verse 7 is most important. The universe is God's body (though this is not obvious). This one thought will solve all our problems and dissolve the ignorance that produced them. This cosmic body of God is centred in one, rooted in one, built around one. An imperfect analogy, again, has to raise us to this stage. Just as our body and mind are superimpositions on the one soul, just as the different parts of the body and the different faculties of the mind inhere in the one soul – even so the multifarious moving and unmoving, sentient and insentient objects of the world are centred in the one which needs no name because it is unique, incapable of being compared or contrasted. The diversity implied is apparent, yet the charm lies in the wisdom of perceiving the underlying unity.

Life is not obvious, the truth is not obvious. What is obvious is a creation of the mind. Thus, you can see in the universe (the body of God) 'whatever else thou desirest to see'. The world is only the projection of our (past and present) wishful thinking; the reality is that it is the body of God. However, even this knowledge is not so obvious. Hence, the wise man constantly remembers that there is an unobvious reality in the universe which is **the** reality.

❖na tu mām śakyase draṣṭum anenai 'va svacakṣuṣā
divyaṁ dadāmi te cakṣuḥ paśya me yogam aiśvaram

But thou art not able to behold me with these, thine own eyes; I give thee
the divine eye; behold my lordly yoga.

These physical eyes of ours are useless beyond a certain very limited range of the spectrum. We cannot see what the microscope or the telescope sees. We cannot see what the X-ray sees.

Hence, neither the 'severally all' nor the 'underlying one' is within the field of our physical vision. We are able to see only a few of the several, and the one is, of course, beyond the limits of our visualisation. This is not because of the insufficiency or inefficiency of the 'light within', but because of the limitation of the senses themselves. Helen Keller was able to enjoy the beauty of a flower, though she was blind from a very early age.

It is an incontrovertible fact that the divine eye potentially exists in us, whether or not the pineal gland is the atrophied remnant of this divine eye (the third eye), or whether or not it lies at the centre of the eyebrows. The brain-centre or 'sixth sense' enables us to visualise, with closed eyes, a scene not present before us. **That** is the divine eye which is far beyond all our present concepts of extra-sensory perception. That light is still available and active, even when this brain-centre is 'closed'.

As we shall presently see, this 'sense' is able to transcend space and time, and cannot be adequately explained. There is not even a need for explanations, since this is and can only be God's gift ('I give thee'). As long as the 'I' functions, the divine eye remains closed. When the non-existence of the 'I' is directly realised, the divine eye perceives all as the divine. This divine eye is not an organ, but the realisation of the divine.

'Yogamaiśvaram' in the text has been translated as 'lordly yoga'. Yoga is union. Īśvara's yoga is the immediate union of the reality and the appearance, the one and the many – which is and shall ever be a divine mystery to the little 'I'.

śaṁjaya uvāca
 ❖evam uktvā tato rājan mahāyogeśvaro hariḥ
 darśayām āsa pārthāya paramaṁ rūpam aiśvaraṁ
 ❖anekavaktranayanam anekādbhutadarśanaṁ
 anekadivyābharaṇaṁ divyānekodyatāyudham
 ❖divyamālyāṁbaradharaṁ divyagandhānulepanaṁ
 sarvāścaryamayam devam anantaṁ viśatomukham

Saṁjaya said: Having said thus, O king, the great Lord of yoga, Hari, showed to Arjuna his supreme form as the Lord.

With numerous mouths and eyes, with numerous wonderful sights, with numerous divine ornaments, with numerous divine weapons uplifted,

Wearing divine garlands and apparel, anointed with divine unguents, the all-wonderful, resplendent, infinite, with faces on all sides.

The anthropomorphic tinge often deters the Indian himself! He closes the Bhagavad Gītā as a book with which he would not like to associate himself. That is the best climate for antagonistic winds to blow. Proselytisation thus gets its best handle.

When you yourself admit that there is something wrong with your religion, it is unnecessary for the opponent to convince you of it; he only sees his victim in you.

If you carefully look into any scripture in the world, you will find such anthropomorphic presentation of spiritual truths – the only one which can be easily grasped by the human mind. Poets have described the sky as the diamond-studded crown of the earth; scientists have given names to cyclones; and writers often describe the fate of a ship ('she') in a cyclone in almost human terms! 'Life' magazine published a series of articles on the human body, literally painting landscapes and factories into it!

All the mouths and all the eyes of all beings are God's. The wonderful sights in the world that meet the eye are his. The divine weapons may be thunder, lightning, earthquakes and volcanoes. When the whole world is God's body, are not the countless gardens of the world garlands on his body? The infinite has, obviously, 'faces on all sides' – every vibrant electron is its 'magic eye'.

I shall explain later why even this 'explanation' of the anthropomorphic presentation is unnecessary.

❖divi sūryasahasrasya bhaved yugapad utthitā
 yadi bhāḥ sadṛśī sā syād bhāsas tasya mahātmanah
 ❖tatrai 'kasthaṁ jagat kṛstnaṁ pravibhaktam anekadhā
 apaśyad devadevasya śarīre pāṇḍavas tadā

If the splendour of a thousand suns were to blaze out at once in the sky,
 that would be the splendour of that mighty being.

There, in the body of the God of gods, Arjuna then saw the whole universe,
 resting in one, with its many groups.

The divine eye with which Arjuna was able to 'see' God was capable of transcending time, space and materiality. Here, in verse 12, we have perhaps a description of the state of the universe at the beginning of the kalpa (the birth of the present universe). Scientists and astronomers tell us that before the stars and planets condensed into their present forms, the universe was in a state of hot plasma, radiant with the radiance of a thousand suns. That was just after the scientist's 'superatom' or the Indian's 'golden egg' broke. Perhaps Arjuna had a vision of that; or perhaps all materiality dissolved and he saw through the divine eye only 'light' within the atom.

What did he see in the body of the God of gods? He saw: (1) the whole universe, (2) resting in one, (3) divided into many groups.

This is extremely difficult though vital to understand. We know God pervades all in an imperceptible way. However, in everything there is the obvious factor which is resorted to the moment the unobvious truth is abandoned. Then the obvious becomes the focal point of a relationship which is unnatural. The unobvious 'relationship' is a oneness – and therefore it is not a relationship! God or the self alone exists. This means he is all-one. But he is not even conditioned by that criterion, or condemned to be one! All the different strata of creation, all the different orders of beings, are he (that is what is meant by 'pervaded by God') on account of his omnipresence. The whole universe, which is the body of the God of gods, rests in him, not as an entirely different entity – like a child resting in its mother's lap – nor as identical unity, but in a relationship which is vaguely felt by us (the life-spark) in relation to our body: "It is I, and yet, not so".

❖ tataḥ sa vismayāviṣṭo hr̥ṣṭaromā dhanamjayah
 praṇamya śirasā devaṁ kṛtāñjalir abhāṣata
 arjuna uvāca
 ❖ paśyāmi devāṁs tava deva dehe
 sarvāṁs tathā bhūtaviśeṣasaṅghān
 brahmāṇam īśaṁ kamalāsanastham
 ṛṣīṁś ca sarvān uragāṁś ca divyān

Then, Arjuna, filled with wonder and with his hair standing on end, bowed down his head to the God and with palms joined, spoke:

Arjuna said: I see all the gods, O God, in thy body, and also the hosts of various classes of beings, Brahmā, the Lord seated on the lotus, all the sages and the celestial serpents.

‘Hair standing on end’ has been described to be one of the signs of religious experience.

The experience that Arjuna describes in these verses tallies with what rāja yoga styles ‘savikalpa samādhi’. The seer, sight and seen; the knower, knowledge and known – have not yet merged into one. The triad is still maintained. This is the highest experience granted to the surviving individual as long as there is still a trace of ego or duality. From here the salt doll (individual soul) takes a leap into the sea (Brahman). In the words of sage Yājñavalkya, in that state one does not know another; hence it is the state of existence-knowledge-bliss absolute, undivided and infinite – ‘nirvikalpa samādhi’.

However, Arjuna still retains the ‘I’ and is therefore able to enjoy the cosmic vision. It is not without its price, as we shall see – he is terrified.

Here are mentioned five categories of beings:

- (1) all the gods – the deities that indwell and govern the elements and the different phenomena;
- (2) Brahmā, the creator of the universe – the power hidden in the ‘super-atom’ of the astronomer or the ‘golden egg’ of the Indian;
- (3) various classes of beings;
- (4) the sages – the men of the highest evolutionary level; and
- (5) serpents.

From the highest divinity, the creator himself, to the lowest creature, specifically mentioned as ‘serpents’, all are pervaded by God. The serpent symbolises ‘time’ as well as ‘evil’; all these, too, are in God, for, let us remind ourselves, he is omnipresent.

❖ anekabāhūdaravaktranetraṁ
 paśyāmi tvāṁ sarvato 'ntarūpaṁ
 nā 'ntaṁ na madhyaṁ na punas tavā 'diṁ
 paśyāmi viśveśvara viśparūpa
 ❖ kirīṭinaṁ gadiṇaṁ cakriṇaṁ ca
 tejorāśiṁ sarvato dīptimantaṁ
 paśyāmi tvāṁ durnirīkṣyaṁ samantād
 dīptānalārkadyutim aprameyaṁ

I see thee of boundless form on every side with many arms, stomachs, mouths and eyes; neither the end nor the middle nor also the beginning do I see, O Lord of the universe, O cosmic form.

I see thee with the diadem, the club and the discus, a mass of radiance shining everywhere, very hard to look at, blazing all round like burning fire and the sun, and immeasurable.

If these verses sound like gibberish, it is only because the experience is beyond expression or description. No description is ever the same as that which is described, and no description ever describes what it pretends to describe. This has been the joyously tortuous experience of every sage; the experience of the highest is inexpressible, but the urge to express is irrepressible! The result is paradox, contradiction and extra-logical synthesis of the opposites. We laugh at these, but they forgive us knowing that we are still dreaming this world—scene of logic and reason which they have transcended.

Time, the beginning, the middle and the end, is not an object of sense, however subtle, but a mode of thought. The eternal now which (con)fuses the past, present and future is a state in which the beginning, middle and end are indistinguishably united. Hence Arjuna is unable to see them.

Once again we are confronted with the anthropomorphic description (the diadem, the club, etc.) though it is all pervaded by a mass of radiance. From a certain point of view it is possible to 'see' such forms in this very universe. This was brought home to me at the planetarium in Johannesburg. The constellations have names and descriptive patterns, and with a little bit of mental adjustment it is possible to see those descriptive forms in the constellations. The diadem, the club, etc., may all refer to such phenomena.

❖tvam akṣaram paramaṁ veditavyam
 tvam asya viśvasya paraṁ nidhānam
 tvam avyayaḥ śāśvatadharmagoptā
 sanātanas tvam puruṣo mato me
 ❖anādimadhyāntam anantavīryam
 anantabāhuṁ śasisūryanetraṁ
 paśyāmi tvāṁ dīptahutāśavaktraṁ
 svatejasā viśvam idaṁ tapantaṁ

Thou art the imperishable, the supreme being, who should be known.
 Thou art the great treasure-house of this universe; thou art the
 imperishable protector of the eternal dharma; thou art the ancient person,
 I deem.

I see thee without beginning, middle or end, infinite in power, of endless
 arms, the sun and the moon being thine eyes, the burning fire thy mouth,
 heating the whole universe with thy radiance.

God is the inexhaustible treasure-house of this universe for the very simple reason that
 nothing in him is ever destroyed! There is and can only be change of form or mutation.
 That, in fact, is the meaning of the Sanskrit word ‘naṣ’ – to become invisible. We call it
 ‘destruction’ for it suits our limited vision and understanding; “what I cannot see does
 not exist!”

Arjuna’s experience here supports the ‘continuous creation’ or ‘steady state’ theory in
 regard to the universe. God’s nature (the vast universe) becomes partly manifest and
 that manifestation later becomes unmanifest. It does not in any way alter the quantum
 of his nature which remains constant. As scientists are saying nowadays, the
 distribution of the galaxies today is the same as it was millions of years ago and will be
 the same millions of years hence; they may change place or form (though in infinite
 space such expressions have no real meaning), but essentially they will remain the same.

‘The sun and the moon being thine eyes’ and the subsequent descriptions in verse 19
 make us wonder: are we actually seeing parts of God’s infinite body and calling it the
 universe with its diverse classes of existence? Kṛṣṇa’s friends were once entering the
 mouth of a python, saying: “Look at this mountain-cave; does it not look like the mouth
 of a python?” Are we making the same mistake? When actually looking at the cosmic
 form of the Lord, are we saying: “Look at the sun and the moon, they are like the two
 eyes of the Lord.”? They are, perhaps, his eyes!

❖dyāvāpṛthivyor idam antaraṁ hi
 vyāptaṁ tvayai 'kena diśaś ca sarvāḥ
 dr̥ṣṭvā 'dbhutaṁ rūpam ugraṁ tav 'daṁ
 lokatrayaṁ pravyathitaṁ mahātman
 ❖amī hi tvāṁ surasaṅghā viśanti
 kecid bhītāḥ prāñjalayo gr̥ṇanti
 svastī 'ty uktvā mahar̥ṣisiddhasaṅghāḥ
 stuvanti tvāṁ stutibhiḥ puṣkalābhiḥ

This space between the earth and the heaven and all the quarters are filled by thee alone; having seen this, thy wonderful and terrible form, the three worlds are trembling with fear, O great-souled being.

Verily, into thee enter these hosts of gods; some extol thee in fear with joined palms; bands of great sages and perfected ones say: "May it be well", and praise thee with sublime hymns.

Different theories have been advanced to explain what is often dismissed as nothing – space. The corpuscular theory admitted of a 'substance' called ether, but the wave theory made that unnecessary. Theories apart, intuitive common sense inevitably presumes that space as such is a tremendous power which is able to hold all other substances within it. Even for these 'waves' to radiate there should be a stable substratum, and that is what we regard as space. The power and the consciousness in that space is God.

'The three worlds are trembling with fear'! A simple common sense explanation is possible for this. Do we not know that the entire universe is a limitless panorama of vibrant atoms? Apply that condition to yourself. When you vibrate, what is the condition called? Trembling. When do you tremble? In fear.

We need not be troubled if the explanations sound ludicrous. They will serve two purposes:

- (1) To help us develop faith in the scripture and not dismiss it as nonsense, and
- (2) To lead us to the door of intuitive realisation, even as the Zen koans do.

It is then that we realise that these explanations are not nonsense, but non-sense – beyond the senses. It is then that we understand the beauty of Kierkegaard's expression: "God does not exist, he is eternal". These puzzling paradoxes do bring the transcendental close to the eye of intuition, breaking all conditioned mental activity. Then this insight becomes intuitively aware of its own reality which is God.

❖rudrādityā vasavo ye ca sādhyā
 viśve 'śvinau marutaś co 'ṣmapāś ca
 ❖gandharvayakṣāsurasiddhasaṅghā
 vīkṣante tvāṁ vismitāś cai 'va sarve

The rudrā, ādityā, vasū, sādhyā, viśvedevā, the two aśvin, marut, the manes and the hosts of celestial singers, yakṣā, demons and the perfected ones, are all looking at thee, in great astonishment.

The 'sādhyā' are a class of deities. However, the term may also imply that it is possible to attain and know them, to propitiate them and to win their grace. The transcendental truth offers the finite intellect of man an open window in and through these designations. They are not the final goal, even as the window is not the sky, or the door our destination; yet, the wise man realises that without the window he cannot view the sky, and the door leads him to his destination.

As has been repeatedly emphasised, these divinities are the macrocosmic correlations of several functions and faculties in the individual. Meditation upon them, therefore, promotes those very functions and faculties in the individual. Take for instance the viśvedevā. As Gurudev points out in his commentary on the Gītā: "They were considered protectors of human beings. They were called guardians of the world. They were givers of plenty to the human beings." They are: kratu (sacrifice, intelligence, purpose, desire, determination), dakṣa (dexterity), vasu (wealth, gold, water), satya (truth), kāma (desire, lust), dhvanī (sound), kalā (art), rocaka (hunger, tonic), adrava (non-fluid, i.e., solid), purūrava (a mythical link between god and man). Is there any doubt that these promote our prosperity?

The two aśvin are divine physicians. They appear in the sky before the dawn in a golden carriage drawn by horses and birds and they bring treasures to men, averting misfortunes and sickness. The signposts of legend, symbolism and myth point down the road of common sense. Of course you can have these treasures – only if you are awake! Then the whole day (the greatest treasure) is yours; early rising will give you good health and avert sickness, too; and you can meditate and avert your misfortunes.

❖rūpaṁ mahat te bahuvaḥkṛāṇaṁ
 mahābāho bahubāhūrupādāṁ
 bahūdaraṁ bahudaṁṣṭrākārāṇaṁ
 drṣṭvā lokāḥ pravṛthitās tathā 'haṁ
 ❖nabhaḥsprśāṁ dīptam anekavarṇaṁ
 vyāttānanaṁ dīptaviśālanetraṁ
 drṣṭvā hi tvāṁ pravṛthitāntarātmā
 dhṛtiṁ na vindāmi śamaṁ ca viṣṇo

Having seen thy immeasurable form with many mouths and eyes, O mighty-armed, with many arms, thighs and feet, with many stomachs and fearful with many teeth – the worlds are terrified and so am I.

On seeing thee touching the sky, shining in many colours, with mouths wide open, with large fiery eyes, I am terrified at heart and find neither courage nor peace, O Viṣṇu.

The scene keeps constantly changing, even as the ‘appearance’ of the universe changes constantly over the unchanging substratum. Good and evil, pleasantness and unpleasantness, beauty and ugliness – are all the attributes which the finite human mind projects on this ever-changing pattern. However, the difference between the obvious (the manifest) and the unobvious (the unmanifest infinity) is that the obvious is capable of being grasped by the senses or the mind whereas the unobvious is not. None-the-less, the finite helplessly tries to delimit the infinite, and the standard way in which it does this is to limit the infinite to a form and stick the label of a name to it. Then, endeavouring to understand this, the finite once again drapes the infinite with the only apparel it has, hence creating the various attributes mentioned above. That is the inevitable fruit of the finite trying to grasp the infinite. The vicious circle is now complete. Having bestowed these attributes on the infinite, the finite trembles before it and weeps aloud.

Expressions like “Oh, it is terrible. It is a catastrophe. It is evil”, and so on, issue constantly from the lips of the finite being as the direct result of his original sin of trying to grasp the infinite, instead of offering himself to it. It is best to surrender to the ocean, there to swim in bliss and peace.

These two verses should stop us from envying Arjuna’s lot. Sages and yogī have had similar (though not identical) cosmic visions. We shall see towards the conclusion of this chapter the prerequisite for the cosmic vision, and the risk of testing our strength by trying to lift a hill.

- ❖ daṁṣṭrākarālāni ca te mukhāni
 dr̥ṣṭvai 'va kālānalasannibhāni
 diśo na jāne na labhe ca śarma
 prasīda deveśa jagannivāsa
- ❖ amī ca tvām dhṛtarāṣṭrasya putrāḥ
 sarve sahai 'vā 'vanipālasaṅghaiḥ
 bhīṣmo droṇaḥ sūtaputras tathā 'sau
 sahā 'smadīyair api yodhamukhyaiḥ
- ❖ vaktrāṇi te tvaramāṇā viśanti
 daṁṣṭrākarālāni bhayānakāni
 kecid vilagnā daśanāntareṣu
 samdr̥śyante cūrṇitair uttamāṅgaiḥ

Having seen thy mouths fearful with teeth (blazing) like the fires of cosmic dissolution, I know not the four quarters, nor do I find peace. Have mercy, O Lord of the gods, O abode of the universe.

All the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, with the hosts of kings of the earth, Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Karṇa, with the chief among our warriors,

They hurriedly enter into thy mouths with terrible teeth and fearful to behold. Some are found sticking in the gaps between the teeth with their heads crushed to powder.

This 'fearful mouth' is all-changing time – as revealed in verse 32. Here we are only concerned with Arjuna's vision.

'I know not the four quarters' means that space seems to lose its spatiality, for the mind and the intellect, when confronted with the cosmic vision, stand still. East, west, north and south are arbitrary creations of man for his own orientation. 'Above' and 'below' are merely relative. These words have no meaning in limitless space where there is no floor or ceiling. When the divine eye perceives the cosmic being, the intellect is awakened to its own limitations, and man, who derives his sense of security from the creations of ignorance, suddenly finds himself in a state of divine insecurity. If even this earth is a pin-point in the cosmos which does not respond to the human sense of direction, what else can man rely upon? There is a momentary doubting restlessness, which, however, is removed by realisation of the cosmic consciousness.

Even the time-sense is blurred in this vision. Arjuna, with his divine eye, sees even at this stage, the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra entering death. It is a known fact that the light of the distant star we see today left it hundreds years ago; and something is happening there at this very moment which will be revealed to our limited vision only in the far future. Thus, elsewhere, the present is past and the future is already present!

❖yathā nadīnām bahavo 'mbuvegāḥ
 samudram evā 'bhimukhā dravanti
 tathā tavā 'mī naralokavīrā
 viśanti vaktrāṇy abhivijvalanti
 ❖yathā pradīptaṁ jvalanaṁ patāṅgā
 viśanti nāśāya samṛddhavegāḥ
 tathai 'va nāśāya viśanti lokās
 tavā 'pi vaktrāṇi samṛddhavegāḥ

Verily, just as many torrents of rivers flow towards the ocean, even so these heroes in the world of men enter thy flaming mouths.

As moths hurriedly rush into a blazing fire for their own destruction, so also these creatures hurriedly rush into thy mouths for their own destruction.

The mystery deepens. Into this great being's 'mouth' enter all beings, as rivers enter the ocean. Into this great being's 'mouth' enter all beings, as moths rush into a blazing fire.

Two similes are used with good purpose for there is a wonderful distinction between the two, and a significant reason why the Lord used two to illustrate a single factor. The river entering the ocean finds its fulfilment; but the moth entering the fire finds its destruction – not in the sense of annihilation, but in the sense of non-fulfilment.

These are the two courses open to each human being. The wise one chooses the former which the Kaṭhōpanisad calls 'śreyo mārگا' It implies turning away from the objects of the senses, daring to defy obstacles (just as the river encounters obstacles in its progress), overcoming them in various ways and eventually surrendering the limited personality which has been the cause of all our woes in order that we may become one with the whole. The path does not seem to be rosy and smooth, tempting and attractive, but the goal is supreme peace and total fulfilment.

The unwise man, blinded by the blazing fire of illusion, refuses to see the reality and takes to the 'preyo mārگا' – the path of pleasure – which pleases the senses. The blazing fire is beautiful! It is tempting and inviting. The ignorant moth rushes towards it, having no time to think or reflect, since the call of the senses (the eye of the moth in this case) is irresistible. At the first touch of the fringe of flame, the wings of the moth are destroyed; and man loses his wisdom and will. Now it is too late. All his vain effort is destroyed.

❖lelihyase grasamānaḥ samantāl-
 lokān samagrān vadanair jvaladbhiḥ
 tejobhir āpūrya jagat samagram
 bhāsas tavo 'grāḥ pratapanti viṣṇo
 ❖ākhyāhi me ko bhavān ugrarūpo
 namo 'stu te devavara prasīda
 vijñātum icchāmi bhavantam ādyaṁ
 na hi prajānāmi tava pravṛttiṁ

Thou lickest up, devouring all the worlds on every side with thy flaming mouths. Thy fierce rays, filling the whole world with radiance, are burning, O Viṣṇu.

Tell me who thou art, so fierce in form. Salutations to thee, O God supreme; have mercy, I desire to know thee, the original being. I know not indeed thy doing.

In the previous chapter Kṛṣṇa mentioned that among the ādityā (cosmic suns), he is Viṣṇu. This cosmic ray (let us call him so, tentatively) is capable of devouring everything; its radiance fills the whole world, burning all. We know that of the elements (earth, water, fire and air), it is fire that is capable of destroying and burning anything. Earth, water and air, in fact, promote life and its growth. Air, too, can at most move a thing from one place to another. But fire burns and destroys. When a dead insect lies exposed to the elements, especially to the sun, it quickly decomposes – it is destroyed. A subtle cosmic power acts on it. There is a balancing force that sustains this universe, that maintains the essential nature of all the objects, and at the same time the dynamic nature of the universe tends to disturb that equilibrium.

Viṣṇu (meaning: all-pervading) is that factor in divine nature, that aspect of God that maintains the whole creation by bringing about a continuous change in form. while preserving (forming?) the substratum. When the molecules are broken into atoms, the atom into its components, and each in its turn resolved into the sheer energy they are made of and in which they maintain their individuality, what remains is Viṣṇu (or more correctly, the power of Viṣṇu). Perhaps one day, following Einstein's lead, science will surmise, if not discover, the existence of such a unified substance in whose heart there is that power which reduces everything to simplicity, only to reassemble several such simplicities to make another complexity to suit its purpose.

Verse 31 indicates that Arjuna has gone beyond the limitation of every memory; he has forgotten Kṛṣṇa and what he is doing! Unless we are free of conditioning and we look afresh (as Arjuna has done), we do not see the truth.

śrī bhagavān uvāca
 ❖kālo 'smi lokakṣayakṛt pravṛddho
 lokān samāhartum iha pravṛttaḥ
 ṛte 'pi tvām na bhaviṣyanti sarve
 ye 'vasthitāḥ pratyānīkeṣu yodhāḥ

The blessed Lord said: I am the mighty world-destroying time, now engaged in destroying the worlds. Even without thee, none of the warriors arrayed in the hostile armies shall live.

This highly inspiring verse was recalled to memory by Oppenheimer, the physicist, as he sat in his watch-tower during the first atomic test explosion during World War II. He confessed that the destructive mushroom which he saw in the sky reminded him of the great utterance of lord Kṛṣṇa: "I am the all-destroying time". "This is it," thought Oppenheimer. How true. The bomb, like all-devouring time, does not discriminate between combatant and non-combatant, good and wicked, men, women or children; it reduces all of them – and even inanimate objects – to their elemental state.

'Lokakṣayakṛt' has been translated into 'world-destroying'. 'Kṣaya' has several meanings, one of which is 'an abode'. This destruction is, in other words, not annihilation, but a return to the original abode, to the original state of matter from which newer forms could be fashioned. Once this fact is clearly grasped, very much heart-break can be avoided.

Even so, the other expression 'lokānsamāhartum' has been translated into 'destroying the worlds'. 'Ahartum' has other meanings, too! Surprisingly enough, one of them is 'to unite, to bring together'. This meaning is in line with the spirit of the Bhagavad Gītā. It is as though the Lord said: "I have given you enough intelligence, discrimination and free-will to see that you are all one and to live in such unity. If life cannot unite you, then death will!"

The great misunderstanding about the role of Śiva in Hindu scriptures should be removed. He is not the 'destroyer'. The universe, being his own body – an inseparable part of the eternal – cannot be destroyed. It and all beings in it can only be redeemed. Thus, Śiva is the redeemer. For the redemption of the ignorance-imprisoned individual soul, he periodically re-shapes its outer covering, to suit better its evolutionary state.

❖ tasmāt tvam uttiṣṭha yaśo labhasva
 jītvā śatrūn bhuñkṣva rājyaṁ samṛddhaṁ
 mayai 'vai 'te nihatāḥ pūrvam eva
 nimittamātraṁ bhava savyasācin

Therefore, stand up and obtain fame. Conquer the enemies and enjoy the unrivalled kingdom. Verily, by me have they been already slain. Be thou a mere instrument, O Arjuna.

God is the redeemer. At the appropriate time all souls shall vacate their habitation and find a new abode (kṣaya). Even if, on account of delusive attachment or infatuation, one wishes to prolong indefinitely the life of one's beloved ones, it is impossible. Hence, Lord Kṛṣṇa has declared in the previous stanza: "Even without thee, these shall not live."

Kṛṣṇa repeats that argument in this verse: "They have already been slain by me". In fact, that spiritual event in the mind of God has to be worked out on the physical plane by human instrumentality. The bhāvanā (attitude to life that Kṛṣṇa inculcates in this verse, the nimitta-bhāvanā (attitude of being a mere instrument in the hands of God) is an important one. It has several implications.

1. That I am an instrument in God's hands, and do nothing on my own. On the one hand this generates true humility: all glory is God's. On the other, it bestows tremendous power on us: God, who is working through this instrument, is omnipotent. It should be clear that the instrument does not say it is one; it is not even aware it is one! For, true humility is not experienced within oneself, but is seen by others. To function as an instrument is to be totally free of ego.
2. To be an instrument in God's hands itself is great glory. We must accord this glory to his instruments, through whom his will functions, viz., saints and all others generally.
3. God's grace flows through our benefactors to us. By expressing our gratitude to them we thank God. By bowing to them, we bow to God.
4. We shed the puerile attitude of egoistically refusing helpful human intervention in our life, by saying: "God will help me". The right attitude is: "It is God, even now, who is helping me through this person"; and to that God-in-him we bow in gratitude.
5. All negative emotions like jealousy, hatred, contempt, etc., leave us. Everybody is an instrument in the hands of God.

❖ droṇaṁ ca bhīṣmaṁ ca jayadrathaṁ ca
 karṇaṁ tathā 'nyān api yodhavīrān
 mayā hatāns tvaṁ jahi mā vyathiṣṭhā
 yudhyasva jetāsi raṇe sapatnān
 saṁjaya uvāca

❖ etac chrutvā vacanaṁ keśavasya
 kṛtāñjalir vepamānaḥ kirīṭi
 namaskṛtvā bhūya evā 'ha kṛṣṇaṁ
 sagadgadaṁ bhītabhītaḥ praṇaṁya

Droṇa, Bhīṣma, Jayadratha, Karṇa and other brave warriors – these are already slain by me; do thou kill, be not distressed with fear; fight and thou shalt conquer thy enemies in battle.

Saṁjaya said: Having heard that speech of lord Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna, with joined palms, trembling, prostrating himself, again addressed Kṛṣṇa, in a choked voice, bowing down, overwhelmed with fear.

The most important and vital truth is repeated thrice for emphasis. People criticise repetition, yet on closer scrutiny it is discovered that their 'intellect' rebels against truth. Light hurts the owl's eyes. Having once seen the light by accident, the owl refuses to face it again.

The yogi in spiritual communion with the Lord whom he perceives through the inner eye of wisdom or intuition, forgets space, time and materiality. Arjuna did not know where he was, what the situation was or who was standing in front of him! But the divine being does not 'forget'. It is good to remember that: even if **we** forget our duty, the divine will not forget it or allow us to forget it.

Bow down to the inevitable. Killing is sin, but cremation is not. 'These brave warriors have already been slain by me', and what you are really going to do is to cremate them! How can one kill a dead body? Therefore, fear not and be not distressed. 'Fight and thou shalt conquer thy enemies in battle', for the simple reason that they have no life!

Having heard these flaming words of truth from the supreme Lord, Arjuna, still overwhelmed with fear but full of devotion to him, begins to praise him and sing his glories. Such inspiration founded on devotion and ecstatic communion with God is the origin of all hymns and liturgy. Sooner or later in one's life a situation is reached where one is overwhelmed by the magnitude of the power beyond human might – transcendent and yet accessible to the human being; and then there arises spontaneous devotion to it. At that point the discriminating mind is silenced and śaktipāt (the direct, non-verbal transmission of truth) happens.

arjuna uvāca
 ❖sthāne hr̥ṣīkeśa tava prakīrtyā
 jagat prahr̥ṣyaty anurajyate ca
 rakṣāṁsi bhītāni dīśo dravanti
 sarve namasyanti ca siddhasaṅghāḥ
 ❖kasmāc ca te na nameran mahātman
 garīyase brahmaṇo 'py ādikartre
 ananta deveśa jagannivāsa
 tvam akṣaraṁ sad asat tatparaṁ yat

Arjuna said: It is meet, O Kṛṣṇa, that the world delights and rejoices in thy praise; demons fly in fear to all quarters and the hosts of the perfected ones bow to thee.

And, why should they not, O great soul, bow to thee who art greater than all, the primal cause even of the creator, O infinite being, O Lord of the gods, O abode of the universe. Thou art the imperishable, the being, the non-being and that which is the supreme (beyond both).

In verse 23, Arjuna said that all the worlds are terrified. Now he says that the world delights and rejoices in God's praise. This is not a contradiction, but a revelation of the great truth that the phenomenal scene changes and that in creation, which is but a play of dualities, misery and happiness alternate every few 'moments'!

Here, Arjuna sees the world's rejoicing, the demons flight and the perfected ones' devotion. It is a beautiful thought: the situation outside is the same, but we react in the way that our own inner condition demands. The good world (mankind) delights and rejoices in God's praise, glorifying him for all good that they see – the objects that bring them happiness. They are good; they see everything as good; they seek happiness; they get that happiness and they praise God.

The demons, the wicked beings – the demoniacal, the animal clothed in human garb – see their own reflection in the environment. They are afraid of even God's own goodness and flee. The perfected ones who have gone beyond good and evil, to whom happiness and misery are but subjective projections which they have ceded, see in the external manifest universe the nature of God, understand its magnitude and praise him.

By addressing the Lord as 'mahātman' a great soul, Arjuna reflects Patañjali's concept of Īśvara as puruṣaviśeṣa (a special and exalted soul).

❖tvam ādidevaḥ puruṣaḥ purāṇas–
 tvam asya viśvasya paraṁ nidhānaṁ
 vettā 'si vedyaṁ ca paraṁ ca dhāma
 tvayā tataṁ viśvam anantarūpa

Thou art the primal God, the ancient puruṣa, the supreme refuge of this universe, the knower, the knowable and the supreme abode. By thee is the universe pervaded, O being of infinite forms.

We are often confronted with the unavoidable confusion which arises when an attribute assumes a proper name; a functional or characteristic definition surrenders its value and is used as a label.

'Thou art the ādideva': deva is a being of light; in fact, light itself. Thus the term could be translated: thou art the first light! It was this first light that 'saw' (in biblical language) that darkness was on the face of the earth, and demanded light. It is the eternal light which shines when all else is dark. Even now, it is that which shines through all else. That light, being luminous, does not need another to illuminate it. It illuminates itself and the other!

'The ancient puruṣa': puruṣa does not merely mean 'man' but the indwelling presence, one who lives in the body. The ancient body is the body of God – the whole universe. This ancient body was never lifeless; the Lord has dwelt in it from beginningless time and it is he who dwells in it even now.

'Param nidhānaṁ': supreme refuge. Nidhānaṁ may also mean: preserver, reservoir, treasure, wealth. If the ever-changing matter did not have cosmic consciousness as its permanent, stable and indwelling presence, there would be chaos in the universe. That presence is the preserving treasure of the cosmos. It is the reservoir of inexhaustible soul-force which untiringly and ceaselessly perpetuates this world-play. And, when all matter is temporarily dissolved, the soul-force returns to its own centre, that which we call God.

Who is to know this cosmic indweller? Only God can know himself. 'I' cannot know him; the finite cannot comprehend the infinite. He it is who knows, and he knows himself!

❖vāyur yamo 'gnir varuṇaḥ śaśāṅkaḥ
 prajāpatis tvam prapitāmahaś ca
 namo namas te 'stu sahasrakṛtvaḥ
 punaś ca bhūyo 'pi namo namas te
 ❖namaḥ purastād atha prṣṭhatas te
 namo 'stu te sarvata eva sarva
 anantavīryāmitavikramas tvam
 sarvaṁ samāpnoṣi tato 'si sarvaḥ

Thou art Vāyu, Yama, Agni, Varuṇa, the moon, the creator, and the great-grandfather. Salutations, salutations unto thee, a thousand times, and again salutations, salutations unto thee.

Salutations to thee, from front and behind. Salutations to thee on every side, O all. Infinite in power and prowess, thou pervadest all; wherefore thou art all.

The famous vaidika declaration is echoed here: God is one, sages call him variously as Indra, Varuṇa, etc. These are but the functional attributes of God. Even as the creator, he is not to be limited to that function, for he is the 'great-grandfather'. Sometimes the creator is styled as grandfather (the father of my father). God is even the 'father' of the creator, not only in the mythological sense, but because he is the original essence of which even the creator is but an aspect.

The omnipresent being has neither a front nor a back, but the allusion here is to the bright and the dark side of his divine nature. We should learn to admire and adore both the front (glory) of God and the back (the dark or so-called evil side) of God. The two together constitute his nature. We are able to recognise the bright side only by comparison with the dark side. Suffering evokes compassion in us. Sickness in one offers another the opportunity to serve; one man's poverty is another's occasion for charity. Even national calamities like famine, earthquake, flood, and the worst of all – war – bring out great hidden, divine qualities in many. The suffering involved is, of course, occasioned by one's own karma.

Lastly, the appearance on the world-scene of mighty evil forces that are able to threaten goodness is but a trigger for the divine forces to intervene and restore the balance. Hence the advent of an avatāra (cf IV:7). He who knows this keeps on the bright side of God, without hating the other side.

❖ sakhe 'ti matvā prasabham yad uktam
 he kṛṣṇa he yādava he sakhe 'ti
 ajānatā mahimānam tave 'dam
 mayā pramādāt praṇayena vā 'pi
 ❖ yac cā 'vahāsārtham asatkṛto 'si
 vihāśāyāsanabhojaneṣu
 eko 'thavā 'py acyuta tatsamakṣam
 tat kṣāmaye tvām aham aprameyam

Whatever I have presumptuously said from carelessness or love, addressing thee as O Kṛṣṇa, O Yādava, O friend, regarding thee merely as a friend, unknowing of this, thy greatness;

In whatever way I may have insulted thee for the sake of fun while at play, reposing, sitting or at meals, when alone (with thee), O acyuta, or in company – that I implore thee, immeasurable one, to forgive.

Here again lord Kṛṣṇa acts as the supreme illusionist. Step by step, Arjuna was rising to the level of the absolute. He saw the universe being indwelt by God. He realised that even the vaidika gods are but the Lord's own manifestations. Even good and evil (and all such paradoxes) merged in the Lord. All distinctions began to fade away and Arjuna saw that God and God alone pervaded everything. Even the idea of an 'everything' seemed to be absurd from that point of view. "Wherefore thou art all," said he. One more step and even the seer in Arjuna would have dissolved in the sight and the seen in the state of nirvikalpa samādhi.

...That was not yet to be. Hence, obviously by the influence of his will, Kṛṣṇa spreads a veil over Arjuna's eyes (as he had done before in the case of his mothers, Yaśodā and Devakī) inducing an awareness that Arjuna was standing in front of the cosmic form revealed to him by Kṛṣṇa. Memory returns to him. Mind awakes and with it the ordinary consciousness. He begins to apologise to the cosmic being for his unbecoming conduct in ignorance.

At every turn in the Bhagavad Gītā this great truth is rubbed into us. The highest spiritual realisation is God's gift. Though this should not lead to the absurd conclusion that the Lord is whimsical, and though we should not forget that we have no business to desire God-realisation without first deserving it, we should remember that only God can realise himself and that our only task is to sacrifice our little ego at his feet. This sacrifice is not an act of the ego but the dawn of the light of truth in which the shadow of the ego dissolves.

❖pitā 'si lokasya carācarasya
 tvam asya pūjyaś ca gurur garīyān
 na tvatsamo 'sty abhyadhikaḥ kuto 'nyo
 lokatraye 'py apratimaprabhāva
 ❖tasmāt praṇaṁya praṇidhāya kāyaṁ
 prasādaye tvām aham īśam īḍyaṁ
 pite 'va putrasya sakhe 'va sakhyuḥ
 priyaḥ priyāyā 'rhasi deva soḍhuṁ

Thou art the father of this world, moving and unmoving. Thou art to be adored by this world. Thou, the greatest guru, for none there exists who is equal to thee; how can there be then, another superior to thee in the three worlds, O being of unequalled power?

Therefore, bowing down, prostrating my body, I crave thy forgiveness, O adorable Lord. As a father forgives his son, a friend his friend, a lover his beloved, even so shouldst thou forgive me, O God.

The rapid descent to human consciousness is evident in these two verses. From the vision of the all, Arjuna's focus narrows first to the immeasurable one, then the world seems to be apart from the Lord who is considered its father. He then recedes further as the worshipful one; then further still, he is just the *Īśvara*, a special soul, the guru of all. Lastly, the Lord is brought to the level at which he could be compared and contrasted with the many things that exist in the three worlds, seen once again as distinct entities.

Arjuna returns to body-consciousness in verse 44. Though he continues to implore forgiveness, one notices the unmistakable symptoms of realisation of the glory of God receding further from his consciousness. Strangely enough, he betrays the trend towards the very inner attitude which he condemned a few minutes ago! Once again he assumes an air of intimacy with the Lord – a father-son relationship, a lover-beloved relationship. Once again he takes the privilege of regarding him as a friend. Though he is still dazed by the vision and knows he is addressing God, the transition to the earth-consciousness is clearly evident. Strange indeed are God's ways and the power of his *māyā* (delusion). He alone veils. He alone unveils the truth. Inscrutable are his ways.

Let us ever have **our** face turned towards him. Even if we thus see only his 'back', let us persist; soon his face will be visible to us. Though that will be when he wills it, why should we worry? – As long as **our** face is turned towards him!

❖adrṣṭapūrvam hrṣito 'smi drṣṭvā
 bhayena ca pravyathitam mano me
 tad eva me darśaya deva rūpam
 prasīda deveśa jagannivāsa
 ❖kirīṭinam gadinam cakrahastam
 icchāmi tvām draṣṭum aham tathai 'va
 tenai 'va rūpeṇa caturbhujena
 sahasrabāho bhava viśvamūrte

I am delighted, having seen what has never been seen before; and yet my mind is distressed with fear. Show me that form only, O God; have mercy, O God of gods, O abode of the universe.

I desire to see thee as before, crowned, bearing a mace, with the discus in hand, in thy former form only, having four arms, O thousand-armed cosmic form.

Having made the preparation and ensured that we deserve God's grace, we should remove all aspirations and await his grace. (There are some who insist that even the aspiration or desire for God should go, for it, too, is a symptom of egoism. Others claim that desire for God will act as a catalyst helping all other desires to be reduced to ashes, itself not requiring such treatment.) If, while awaiting his grace, we are restless and impatient, we ought to assure ourselves that the state of complete egolessness has not been reached and that therefore we do not deserve his supreme grace!

'Desire' for God implies that the aspirant knows what God is – which is obviously absurd. God is an unknown quantity, infinity; so how is it possible to know the extent of God? What is the meaning of the word infinite? When one desires God, it is in fact a desire to free oneself from the known conditions of limitation, fragmentation and consequent ignorance and sorrow.

Arjuna was obviously a very good aspirant. He had received the highest knowledge direct from the Lord's lips. In addition to deserving the cosmic vision, he also desired it, though he couched his prayer in humble words: "If you think it possible, please show me the cosmic form." The Lord consented and blessed him with the divine eye through which he saw the cosmic form.

In spite of all these precautionary measures, Arjuna was still frightened! On the spiritual path, haste is disastrous. While we should be ever active, we should never for a moment forget that the only pre-requisite for God-realisation is total egolessness. Only when the ego has been fully surrendered to the Lord is the cosmic vision granted.

śrī bhagavān uvāca
 ❖ mayā prasannena tavā 'rjune 'daṁ
 rūpaṁ paraṁ darśitam ātmayogāt
 tejomayaṁ viśvam anantam ādyaṁ
 yan me tvadanyena na dṛṣṭapūrvam

The blessed Lord said: O Arjuna, this cosmic form has graciously been shown to thee by me by my own yoga power; full of splendour, primeval and infinite, this cosmic form of mine has never been seen before by anyone other than thyself.

This all-important truth bears repetition any number of times: the ultimate vision of God is his own gift. In other words, the ego cannot see God, the shadow cannot grasp the substance, darkness cannot see light. Any 'vision' that the ego has is its own creation. The ego will not accept something it does not understand, and therefore creates a misunderstanding! Even the eye of intuition with which the yogi sees God is God's own gift. People often wonder what that eye of intuition looks like. Countless guesses have been made with (to say the least) amusing results. In the hands of the spiritually jejune, it has even degenerated to a surgical operation!

A wise Sanskrit maxim says: "Only a wise man knows what makes a man wise; the barren woman is not aware of labour pains". One who does not possess the eye of intuition does not know what it is; in the realm beyond the intellect 'knowing' is 'being'. Thus, as long as the mind thinks, there will always be the rising and setting of an experiencer, the ego, with each experience; and as long as one's individual ego functions, he shuts out the gift of God. That gift is the eye of intuition.

But what is the eye of intuition? Ask him who is its bestower. No man knows. From the rapturous exclamations of those who have 'seen' the cosmic form with the eye of intuition, others have tried to presume what it might be. Guesses are children of ignorance; and the arrogance which gives birth to them makes them diabolical imposters.

According to the Bhāgavataṁ, Akrūra had a cosmic vision before the Mahābhārata war; yet Kṛṣṇa says here that no one had seen it before Arjuna. There is no contradiction here if we realise that each man's experience is his own – unique and unparalleled. The ultimate experience of the absolute is the same for all, even as deep sleep is; but even the penultimate experience of a cosmic vision can differ, just as people's dreams are unique and individual.

❖na vedayajñādhyayanair na dānair
 na ca kriyābhir na tapobhir ugraiḥ
 evaṁ rūpaḥ śakya ahaṁ nṛloke
 draṣṭuṁ tvadanyena kurupravīra

Neither by the study of the vedā and sacrifices, nor by gifts nor by rituals
 nor by severe austerities can I be seen in this form in the world of men by
 any other than thyself, O great hero of the kurū.

Dr. Zimmer, in his monumental work on “Philosophies of India”, expresses the view that before the vedā were introduced into India by the invading Aryans (there are others who question this!) there flourished there a religion whose hall-mark was world-and-life-negation, e.g. Jainism.

Zimmer includes even sāṅkhya and yoga (in their empirical form) in the pre-Aryan religious thought. Yoga insists on stoutly refusing to let the puruṣa (individual soul) identify himself with the activities of prakṛti (the active principle); kaivalya (isolation of the puruṣa from prakṛti), which was taken to imply non-participation in the world, regards all life as unhappiness, to the wise. Austerity and ‘withdrawal’ were vigorously advocated by these pre-Aryans.

The vedā, on the other hand, extol an active life of sacrifices (yajñā), rituals and gifts. They are intensely interested in this world and in the world of heavenly pleasures, considering austerities to be more expiatory than self-liberating.

Historians place the Mahābhārata and the Bhagavad Gītā (which is part of that epic) at a much later date than the former two, viz., sāṅkhya-yoga and vedā. Here, Kṛṣṇa boldly proclaims that neither the pre-Aryan austerities and withdrawal from the world, nor the Aryan study of vedā, sacrifices and rituals can enable one to attain the beatific vision which Arjuna had.

Later sages of vedānta, too, have admitted that performance or non-performance of any action (both involving egoistic notions) do not lead to liberation, which is awakening from the slumber of ignorance. How does man wake up, then? **Wake up!** When the time comes, the Lord will awaken you, provided you are ready to wake up. ‘Time’, here, is not used in the traditional sense, but in the sense of ‘maturity’, which is thinning out of the selfishness.

❖ mā te vyathā mā ca vimūḍhabhāvo
 dr̥ṣṭvā rūpaṁ ghoram īdṛṇ mame 'daṁ
 vyapetabhīḥ prīṭamanāḥ punas tvaṁ
 tad eva me rūpaṁ idaṁ prapaśya
 saṁjaya uvāca
 ❖ ity arjunaṁ vāsudevas tatho 'ktvā
 svakaṁ rūpaṁ darśayām āsa bhūyaḥ
 āśvāsayām āsa ca bhītām enaṁ
 bhūtvā punaḥ saumya vapur mahātmā

Be not afraid, nor bewildered, on seeing such a terrible form of mine as this; with thy fear dispelled and with a gladdened heart, now behold again this former form of mine.

Saṁjaya said: Having thus spoken to Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa again showed his own form and the great soul, assuming his gentle form, consoled him who was terrified.

Stand alone on a sand dune in a vast desert. Float alone on a wooden plank in the middle of an ocean. Sit alone in a dense forest, with not a man or beast around you. You are immediately terror-stricken. The limited mind of man is afraid of the limitless – even if this merely means ‘vast’. If such is the case with mere earthly vastness, how then can the limited mind of man approach the truly limitless infinite being? It trembles with mortal fear unless previously trained; this training is gradual, even as the training of a parachutist is gradual, unless one perceives spontaneously that limitation is itself the cause of fear and the infinite is instant freedom. All the yoga practices are intended to prevent this fear.

In the initial stages of yoga sādhana, when one is asked to meditate (especially if the aspirant does not believe in a personalised form of God and attempts formless contemplation) and when he is at the point of ‘going into meditation’, the aspirant gets frightened and returns to body-consciousness with trembling fear; it makes him feel that he is dropping into a bottomless dark abyss. Hence the vital need to prepare oneself, and kindle the light of understanding.

Haṭha yoga prepares the physical and vital being; rāja yoga the mental and the psychic being; bhakti yoga the emotional being; and karma yoga pushes the ego out of the way. When jñāna yoga eventually opens the door, the entire being is flooded with divine light. Then such light no longer blinds but is gladly welcomed. To ignore this preparation is to look for trouble. Complete self-surrender and acceptance of God’s will are the best preparation.

arjuna uvāca
 ❖ dr̥ṣṭve 'daṁ mānuṣaṁ rūpaṁ tava saumyaṁ janārdana
 idānīm asmi saṁvṛttaḥ sacetāḥ prakṛtim gataḥ
 śrībhagavān uvāca
 ❖ sudurdarśam idaṁ rūpaṁ dr̥ṣṭavān asi yan mama
 devā apy asya rūpasya nityaṁ darśanakāñkṣiṇaḥ

Arjuna said: Having seen this, thy gentle human form, O Kṛṣṇa, now I am composed and am restored to my own nature.

The blessed Lord said: Very hard indeed it is to see this form of mine which thou hast seen. Even the gods are ever longing to behold it.

The gentle 'form' of God is easier to meditate upon; and when the time comes, this form itself will lead us to the formless being. It avoids the danger of violent inner disturbances on the one hand and merely lapsing into the void (a kind of sleep) on the other. There is, no doubt, the risk of getting stuck there and forgetting the goal; but if the aspirant is sincere this will not happen.

'Hard to see' may mean:

(a) it is rare, and

(b) it is a psycho-spiritual adventure which demands all the strength and talents of the heroic.

It is bound to be rare; for the man-in-the-street is so readily tempted by the glittering objects of sense-pleasure that he deems it a piteous waste of time to even turn away from them. It is only a Moses, a Buddha, a Jesus, a Dayananda, a Ramakrishna or a Sivananda who is able to 'see through' the imposter called sense-pleasure and avoid him. In the very nature of life, such people are bound to be rare.

Without this natural disinclination for sense-pleasure (*vairāgya*), it is not possible to build up a psycho-spiritual personality that is strong enough to undertake the adventure into the infinite. Kṛṣṇa indicates that the gods, who are certainly not ignorant and stupid beings, are 'ever longing' to behold the cosmic form, but in them, this disinclination for sense-pleasure is not **natural**. The dwellers of heaven lead a life of ESP (extra-sensuous pleasure!) and their longing does not bear fruit. Man, on the other hand, not being subject to such intensity of pleasure, can turn away from it altogether, and with a little reflection over the pain of worldly existence, develop a natural dislike for it – thus turning to God.

❖nā 'haṁ vedair na tapasā na dānena na ce 'jyayā
 śakya evaṁvidho draṣṭuṁ dr̥ṣṭavān asi mām yathā
 ❖bhaktyā tv ananyayā śakya aham evaṁvidho 'rjuna
 jñātuṁ draṣṭuṁ ca tattvena praveṣṭuṁ ca param̐tapa

Neither by the vedā nor by austerity, nor by gift, nor by sacrifice, can I be seen in this form as thou hast seen me.

But, by single-minded devotion, can I, of this form, be known and seen in reality and also entered into, O Arjuna.

The Bhagavad Gītā is a scripture revealed on the battle-field to deal with an urgent situation (eventually with all our urgent situations in life). The repetitions, the loose-ends and the seeming contradictions are themselves proof positive of the authenticity and historic context of the book. If it was a 'well-thought-out and reasoned' text, these would have been avoided.

The idea in verse 53 had already been expressed in verse 48. What is worse still, in chapter eighteen Kṛṣṇa extols the virtues of 'austerity, gift and sacrifice' and insists that they should not be given up. They are terribly important; yet here we are told that God cannot be seen with the help of these.

The wise student should endeavour to read such ideas together and ponder the real inner meaning. Austerity, charity and self-sacrifice are indeed most essential, not for self-realisation but for self-purification. With their help we dehypnotise ourselves and overcome the hallucination of worldly life and sense-pleasure. Hence, Kṛṣṇa wisely warns us in the eighteenth chapter that even the three purifiers should be performed without attachment. Dirt on the body is removed by soap; but the soap itself should then be washed away.

Only by single-minded devotion can God be realised. 'Ananya bhakti' means love or devotion in which there is no other involved. This devotion is not exclusive of anything, but all-inclusive. Here, 'all' is a synonym for God. One who sees God and God alone everywhere 'enters' into the reality, and swims saturated in his omnipresence.

❖matkarmakṛṇ matparamo madbhaktaḥ saṅgavarjitaḥ
nirvairaḥ sarvabhūteṣu yaḥ sa mām eti pāṇḍava

He who does all actions for me, who looks upon me as the supreme, who is devoted to me, who is free from attachment, who bears enmity towards no creature, comes to me, O Arjuna.

Kṛṣṇa is so fond of this idea that he repeats it thrice in the scripture. He concludes the ninth chapter and also his teaching in the eighteenth chapter on the same note. This spiritual alchemy transforms all life into divine life. It is the bridge that links the contraries, the secret that unravels all mysteries, the solution to all the riddles of the Bhagavad Gītā.

No activity will lead you to God, yet you cannot remain without action even for a second. Life itself is action. Actions arise in God's nature and that nature carries on the world-play. Therefore, work – but 'work for me' – realising that God is the source of action; 'I' am not the doer at all. God is your supreme goal, but let not this idea tempt you to neglect your duties.

Knowing that God is in all, that God is the all, be devoted to the welfare of all beings. Beware, however, lest you should get attached to them. You love them – no, not 'them', but the God in them.

This non-attachment, in its turn, has one peril. It may lead you to a life of isolation, a dread of people and of living with them and serving them. It may even make you feel that the world and its peoples are your enemies who will lead you astray, so that you should avoid them like poison! If you entertain this idea, you will be throwing the child away with the bathwater. You will be shutting the omnipresent God out of your heart.

The perception of truth or the reality transforms the world into the love of God without touching it or wanting to change it. In the delicate art of loving all and yet not becoming attached to them (loving them); of loving God in them, and yet not regarding 'them' as different from God – lies the secret of self-realisation.



OM TAT SAT

iti śrīmad bhagavad gītāsūpaniṣatsu brahma vidyāyām
yogaśāstre śrī kṛṣṇarjuna saṁvāde
viśvarupa darśana yogo nāmai 'kādaśo 'dhyāyaḥ

Thus in the upaniṣad of the glorious Bhagavad Gītā,
the science of the eternal, the scripture of yoga,
the dialogue between śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna,
ends the eleventh discourse entitled:

THE YOGA OF THE VISION OF THE COSMIC FORM

THE MONTH OF SEPTEMBER

The great Indologist, Dr. Heinrich Zimmer, pays an eloquent tribute to the Bhagavad Gītā: “The Bhagavad Gītā has become the most popular, widely memorised, authoritative statement of the basic guiding principles of Indian religious life” and says, “It was in the great paradoxes of the epoch-making Bhagavad Gītā that the non-Brahmanical, pre-Aryan thought of aboriginal India became fruitfully combined and harmonised with the Vedic ideas of the Aryan invaders. In the eighteen brief chapters was displayed a kaleidoscopic inter-working of the two traditions that for some ten centuries had been contending for the control and mastery of the Indian mind”. Kṛṣṇa’s genius was synthesis. The one continuous basic note in the whole scripture is the bold declaration of the truth that this synthesis is the inevitable consequence of the realisation that the reality (God) alone exists, and even the apparent diversity and distinctions have to be resolved in him.

Even in the practice of yoga, though each may choose that path to which his temperament qualifies him, Kṛṣṇa asks us to synthesise the different approaches into one sādhanā. Devotion, service, meditative communion and intuitive realisation are all necessary for each one of us. We should love God alone at all times but that does not mean we love God and hate all. We learn to love God in all. In order not to cheat ourselves, we should remember that all of us love one another because of his omnipresence – God-love – and ensure that there is no personal attachment.

Place God in yourself. Feel he is in every part of you. He fills you now. Place yourself in God; feel you are part of him. God is all around you now – in all, as all. Now he is all-in-all – omnipresent. You do not confine him to yourself. And, you do not push him out either! Wisdom and synthesis at every turn. By a series of paradoxes, Kṛṣṇa leads us to his lotus feet.

CHAPTER XII

THE YOGA OF DEVOTION

XII

1st SEPTEMBER

1, 2

arjuna uvāca
❖ evaṁ satatayuktā ye bhaktās tvāṁ paryupāsate
ye cā 'py akṣaram avyaktam teṣāṁ ke yogavittamāḥ
śrībhagavān uvāca
❖ mayy āveśya mano ye mām nityayuktā upāsate
śraddhayā parayo 'petās te me yuktatamā matāḥ

Arjuna said: Those devotees who, ever steadfast thus worship thee and those also who worship the imperishable and the unmanifested – which of them are better versed in yoga?

The blessed Lord said: Those who, fixing their mind on me, worship me, ever steadfast and endowed with supreme faith, these are the best in yoga in my opinion.

Indian and other schools of thought differ about the right attitude. Some say: God should be approached as nameless and formless – to give him form is false and heretical. Others hold that God can only be approached through his manifestations. Even J. Louis Orton in his book “Hypnotism Made Practical”, asks “What do we know except through manifestation?” The danger in this method is that the image of the manifestation may be contaminated by us transferring our own worldly defects, innate in our family, possessions and environment, to the image itself. Thus, instead of helping us to overcome our egoism, this method may subtly feed it. Much can be said for and against both points of view.

Kṛṣṇa has his own method of dealing with a controversy! He asserts the truth, but has no dogma – our goal is to realise “I am God”, and we can reach it only if we turn away from ‘dogma’ (the word when reversed reads ‘am-god’!). Therefore, he repeats what he had said at the conclusion of the previous chapter: “Whatever be your approach to me, remember that one-pointedness, steadfastness, and faith are essential, and you must merge yourself in me”. (cf XII:5).

❖ ye tv akṣaram anirdeśyam avyaktaṁ paryupāsate
 sarvatragam acintyaṁ ca kūṭastham acalaṁ dhruvaṁ
 ❖ samñiyaṁye 'ndriyagrāmaṁ sarvatra samabuddhayaḥ
 te prāpnuvanti mām eva sarvabhūtahite ratāḥ

Those who worship the imperishable, the indefinable, the unmanifest, the omnipresent, the unthinkable, the immovable and the eternal,

Having restrained all the senses, even-minded, everywhere intent on the welfare of all beings – verily they also come unto me only.

The answer to Arjuna's question is highly interesting. Deep meditation on the first five verses of the twelfth chapter will teach us the best way to handle controversial matters. In the heat of controversy, we often forget the real issue! Hence, Kṛṣṇa reiterated the vital factor in verse 2. He does not beg the question nor evade it completely; discussion, argumentation and even controversy are good! Metaphysical 'friction' is like mechanical friction – it generates both energy and heat. Energy is desirable and heat is undesirable. Wisdom in argument acts like radiator-water, enabling us to absorb energy and avoid heat!

One of the best ways to do so is to understand the opponent's viewpoint; there is some truth in all viewpoints. In verses 3 and 4, Kṛṣṇa concedes that even 'they who are devoted to the nameless and the formless being, come to me'. By quietly slipping in the word 'eva' (only), he pricks the bubble of the 'superiority' of a particular path. If the fundamentals enunciated in verse 2 are borne in mind, both paths lead to the same goal!

If your temperament leads you to the path of the unmanifest, nameless, formless being – by all means tread it – 'it will lead you also to me only'. But, please do not cheat yourself; make sure that you recognise God's omnipresence in all beings by serving them, and that you recognise the real impediments to all yoga (these being the wisdom-veiling power in the senses and the mind) by controlling them. You can say God is transcendental, but you cannot say the mind and senses are unsubstantial and ignore them.

Till one is well established in the realisation of the omnipresence of God, there can be no love. There is merely a business transaction or contract ("I love you because..."). When one is truly in love, the heart expands. The great devotees and yogī are devoted to the welfare of all beings. In their actions and attitude to life, one perceives love.

❖kleśo 'dhikataras teṣāṁ avyaktāsaktacetasāṁ
avyaktā hi gatiṛ duḥkhaṁ dehavadbhir avāpyate

Greater is their trouble whose minds are set on the unmanifest; for the goal, the unmanifest, is very hard for the embodied to reach.

Here, again, you will notice that there is no wholesale condemnation of another's different point of view. The god-man is sincerely eager to perceive and to understand the truth that underlies all viewpoints; this truth is common to all, and the defect, if any, belongs to human imperfection (which again is universal, isn't it?). It is only a fool who considers that his viewpoint alone is correct. A wise man knows that if another's argument appears defective to him, his argument may similarly appear defective to the other! Accepting this premise, if we look for the common factors, we shall find them in plenty.

There are those, admits Kṛṣṇa, whose temperament may qualify them for abstract meditation on the absolute. We shall not forget here that even in their case, control of the mind and senses should be natural and effortless, and even they will be keenly devoted to the welfare of all beings. They will not foolishly deny the existence of the manifold manifest beings on earth and lead a parasitical life. They will first deny the validity of their own sense-impressions and the cravings of the mind, and thus deplete these of their soul-distracting power.

The sincere spiritual aspirant who, wrongly feeling that the path of the nameless-formless meditation is **superior**, enters it, will find that the trouble there is greater than on the other path. To remove a thorn with another thorn is easy; to blow it away with an electric fan may be possible, but more difficult! An embodied being will find it easier to divert the senses from the world to a sense-comprehensible God and to wipe the world of names and forms from the mind by filling it with nameful-formful God.

If, however, you have risen above body-consciousness, you can tread the difficult road to God-realisation! Even then you will see and serve the one self in all beings.

❖ye tu sarvāṇi karmāṇi mayi saṁnyasya matparāḥ
 ananyenai 'va yogena mām dhyāyanta upāsate
 ❖teṣāṁ ahaṁ samuddhartā mṛtyusaṁsārasāgarāt
 bhavāmi nacirāt pārtha mayy āveśitacetasām

But to those who worship me, renouncing all actions in me, regarding me
 as the supreme goal, meditating on me with single-minded yoga,

To those whose minds are set on me, O Arjuna, verily I become ere long the
 saviour from the ocean of saṁsāra.

'Upāsate' has been translated into 'worship'. Literally, it means 'sitting near'. The devotee always feels that God is close to him – the unseen, but mysteriously experienced presence, feebly comparable to the experience of the fragrance of a rose. He constantly inhales the fragrance or aroma of holiness. The fragrance emanates from a flower, and the flower has a name; the living presence is often attributed to a form, and the form given a name. That is part of the *ananya yoga* described here, where the relationship between the omnipresent God, the devotee (and all other persons) is one of non-division.

The other part consists in single-minded devotion: in performing all actions for God's sake (which is really what the word '*saṁnyasya*' in the text means), for he, not the work or its rewards, is our supreme goal. The devotee is ever active yet never forgets God. The catalyst that achieves these has already been described – it is 'seeing God in all'. Most important for this are the spirit of enquiry and inner tranquillity of the mind.

The *yogi* here does not deny offhand the validity of sense-perceptions; he sees through them. He does not shut his eyes to name and form, but he perceives their underlying substratum and essence and recognises that that essence has charmingly clothed itself in the name and form. If God has chosen to appear to him in that mask or personality, he lovingly greets him in that form; taking care, of course, to greet God-in-the-form and not the form itself for its own sake. This prevents him from slipping into the void or into lethargy.

In that love the truth is born, and with it, liberation and peace. The *yogi* is released from the ocean of saṁsāra.

❖ mayy eva mana ādhatsva mayi buddhiṁ niveśaya
nivasīṣyasi mayy eva ata ūrdhvaṁ na saṁśayaḥ

Fix thy mind on me only, thy intellect in me, thou shalt no doubt live in me alone hereafter.

Again and again, the spiritual aspirant tries to pour the infinite into the finite. He meditates on God. He enthrones him in the lotus of his heart. All these practices are valuable aids to yoga, but in themselves they may become obstacles. They may lead us into a kind of *tamasa*, self-satisfied state in which the ego, the problem maker in our life, enters the field of religion or spirituality and projects experiences of visions and voices which delude the soul, producing illusions of spiritual evolution and preventing it from proceeding further. Never make a method an end in itself.

Kṛṣṇa tells us: “Collect your mind and enter it (*niveśaya*, in the text) into me”. Arjuna actually saw that he himself was in the cosmic form. We are all in God. When we practise meditation, it is profitable for us to feel not only that he is in us, but that we are in him, too.

Even when we are asked to meditate on the Lord seated in the heart, it is only as a means to rid us of the ego, the ‘I’. When God is enthroned in the heart, his infinity fills it, making it impossible for the ego to exist there; darkness cannot co-exist with light.

The formula of *vedānta*, ‘I am Brahman’ implies the same truth. It is not as though the ‘I’ is God. It is not as though that ‘I’ is to be pushed into Brahman. We should realise that Brahman alone exists even now and that ignorance alone identifies him with the ego-consciousness.

The method (whichever be the path pursued) is firmly and calmly to assert (in the sense of ‘perceive’) the Lord’s presence in us and everywhere. Start with feeling his presence in the heart. Let him then envelop you. Let him envelop the whole universe. Then forget that you are meditating on him. He and he alone exists; not ‘I’. Is there any doubt that ‘thou shalt live in him thereafter’?

❖ ātha cittam samādhātum na śaknoṣi mayi sthiram
 abhyāsayogena tato mām icchā 'ptum dhanamjaya

If thou art unable to fix thy mind steadily on me, then, by the yoga of constant practice, do thou seek to reach me, O Arjuna.

A great truth was expressed in a simple manner in the previous verse: 'If you place your mind and intellect in me, you will live in me'. We live where our mind is; life is governed by our scale of values, which in turn creates an inner world. A greedy man of insatiable desires finds his millions insufficient to give him happiness. A jealous minister of a great nation spends sleepless nights at the injustice that keeps him pinned to a position lower than the highest. These frustrations are not the fault of the outer world such people live in (the world in which they occupy enviable positions), but of the inner world of all-consuming desire. One who is able to create a stable inner world of spiritual values will live for ever in God. Your stable value must be remembrance of God, all the rest being added to your life as secondary adjuncts.

However, all are not privileged to enter this mansion of desirelessness and renunciation of false values. It is for a microscopic minority. The others are haunted by a perverse scale of values, their minds and intellects constantly wandering into the by-lanes of sense-enjoyment, material acquisition, and a competitive desire to have 'more than my neighbour'. Kṛṣṇa does not condemn them; he condemns none! He has to reach out to them. They have to be redeemed, to be saved from themselves.

In pleading tone, he says: "Please desire to attain me through abhyāsa yoga." Mahatma Gandhi felt that abhyāsa yoga included all such practices as yoga āsana, prāṇāyāma, concentration, meditation, etc. The mind does wander; well, then, at least endeavour to contemplate the stable value of God several times a day. Gradually the intervals between these periods of contemplation will diminish and eventually vanish. Abhyāsa yoga is like knocking at the door: 'Knock and it shall be opened unto you'. Then it will be possible for you to enter and rest in God.

❖ abhyāse 'py asamartho 'si matkarmaparamo bhava
madartham api karmāṇi kurvan siddhim avāpsyasi

If thou art unable to practise even this abhyāsa yoga, be thou intent on doing actions for my sake; even by doing actions for my sake, thou shalt attain perfection.

This is a Bhagavad Gītā characteristic. More than one's own best is not expected of anyone. Though it is possible to interpret these few verses as representing a ladder which ultimately leads the aspirant to union with God, Kṛṣṇa makes the rung appear as the roof. Each step is the goal itself. Each span of the bridge is itself the other shore – an outstretched arm of the shore itself! This also avoids the pitfall of 'assuming what the goal is' and then deluding oneself that one is there! The only 'goal' we have is 'the next step' we actually 'see'.

Sincerity is the only criterion, and a sincere expression of one's eagerness to realise God is all that is demanded of each aspirant. No maximum or minimum limit is set as the qualification for perfection. The best of your ability, the best of your knowledge and understanding is the best, according to your own light. The fruit of that best is beatitude.

This sincere eagerness will eagerly grasp the helping hand of God that descends as his grace and rush forward to his feet without arguing: "But, I thought that was all I had to do!" If, after doing one's best at that particular stage of evolution, God's grace illumines another rung, at the same time bestowing upon the aspirant the will and the power to rise to it, he will unquestioningly obey. However, there is no suggestion that such will be the case. Each spiritual practice must be done whole-heartedly. The requisite whole-heartedness will be absent if one has even the slightest awareness that it is only a 'step' towards perfection.

If worldly values are too persistent to allow even a transient elevation to God as the stable value, then continue doing your work, but do it for his sake. The men and women of the various religious orders provide the best examples here; how diligently they do all that they do 'for God's sake'!

❖athai 'tad apy aśakto 'si kartuṁ madyogam āśritaḥ
 sarvakarmaphalatyāgaṁ tataḥ kuru yatātmavān
 ❖śreyo hi jñānam abhyāsaj-jñānād dhyānaṁ viśiṣyate
 dhyānāt karmaphalatyāgas tyāgāc chāntir anantaram

If thou art unable to do even this, then, taking refuge in union with me, renounce the fruits of all actions with the self controlled.

Better indeed is knowledge than practice; than knowledge, meditation is better; than meditation, the renunciation of fruits of actions. Peace immediately follows renunciation.

To maintain the mental attitude 'for the sake of God' needs a certain amount of devotion and inner vigilance. However, if these are absent, then, too, such a person is not condemned. The word 'then' in the text can be placed after 'me' – which now gives the verse an atheistic flavour. In fact, Kṛṣṇa does suggest here that it is possible for a man to be good and saintly without having the traditional 'faith in God', but the qualification 'self-controlled' suggests that he has transcended that state of faith, perhaps, and is established in an impersonal, involuntary (in the sense, natural) feeling of God's omnipresence which compels such goodness accompanied by self-control. If the 'faithful' endeavour belonged to a past birth, it is possible for its details to be submerged revealing only the overall effect.

Even a superficial rendering of the first verse is a call to common sense. 'If you cannot do any of the above, then work without expectation of reward.' Kṛṣṇa does not say that you are to reject all rewards, but that you should not lean on the rewards. As it is, we cannot (and certainly do not) always achieve what we want to. A rival, a germ or a change of weather can frustrate all our efforts and ruin our ambitions. So, why not be desireless, just doing our duty? We may get nothing at all out of it, or we may get the world. From here, the previous verse is just one automatic step forward. Desirelessness creates a vacuum: "If I am not working for profit, then for what?" – which is filled by the answer: "For God's sake."

Yet, desirelessness or renunciation of reward itself will bestow on us the peace that passeth understanding'.

❖ adveṣṭā sarvabhūtānāṃ maitraḥ karuṇa eva ca
 nirmamo nirahaṃkāraḥ samaduḥkhasukhaḥ kṣamī
 ❖ saṃtuṣṭaḥ satataṃ yogī yatātmā dṛḍhaniścayaḥ
 mayy arpitamanobuddhir yo madbhaktaḥ sa me priyaḥ

He who hates no creature, who is friendly and compassionate to all, who is free from attachment and egoism, balanced in pleasure and pain, and forgiving,

Ever content, steady in meditation, self-controlled, possessed of firm conviction, with the mind and intellect offered to me, he, my devotee, is dear to me.

The eight concluding verses of this chapter are thrilling and superb. They are called ‘amṛtāṣṭakaṃ’ – the immortal eight. Kṛṣṇa, who has said that there was none dear or antagonistic to him, suddenly declares that there are some who are extremely dear to him! Who they are and what their nature is, he describes in these eight verses.

We should remember:

(a) That God is not a worldly ruler with friends and enemies.

(b) That he who answers to these descriptions becomes receptive to God’s divine, omnipresent love. The pure heart receives and reflects this love, even as pure iron-filings rush to the magnet, while rusted ones do not, through no fault of the magnet itself.

(c) That whether we regard God as aloof and unconcerned with the world, or in his omniscience, as able to fulfil the delicate dual role of a witness and active participant in this world-play, he is never whimsical.

(d) That the characteristics mentioned in connection with the devotee are almost the same as those mentioned in connection with descriptions of the sthitaprajña (one who is unshakably established in superconsciousness) or guṇātīta (one who has transcended the three qualities of nature), following jñāna or karma yoga paths. In fact, a close study of the Bhagavad Gītā should convince us that these paths are but one path viewed from the aspirant’s particular standpoint, even as descriptions of the universe and of God vary, depending upon the standpoint of the viewer.

(e) Since God is one’s innermost reality, this God-love dispels the psychotic self-love and self-hate which distort man’s vision and estimation of himself with consequent maladjustment in society.

❖ yasmān no 'dvijate loko lokān no 'dvijate ca yaḥ
 harṣāmarṣabhayodvegair mukto yaḥ sa ca me priyaḥ
 ❖ anapekṣaḥ śucir dakṣa udāsīno gatavyathaḥ
 sarvārambhaparityāgī yo madbhaktaḥ sa me priyaḥ

He by whom the world is not agitated and who cannot be agitated by the world, who is freed from joy, envy, fear and anxiety – he is dear to me.

He who is free from wants, pure, expert, unconcerned and untroubled, renouncing all undertakings or commencements – he who is thus devoted to me, is dear to me.

The modern world, in its mad rush for an immediate magic cure to our maladies, finds no time to seek the root of any problem. Wars, revolutions, strikes and other socio-political agitations, various international controls, birth control and tranquillisers – are all proof of our incompetence and unwillingness to look for the root of the problem. Head-aches, complexes and neuroses are symptoms, not diseases in themselves. They warn us of the presence in and around us of reactionary forces which violently disturb our inner equilibrium. Population explosion is a sign of altered social and family values – where pleasure has usurped duty's place. Strikes, and so on, reveal that in commerce, profit rules and not a sense of duty to our fellow-men. Wars and revolutions betray, again, that our scale of values has dangerously degenerated.

The devotee is not a revolutionary or a reactionary. He does not indulge in disputations and proselytising missions. The world often hero-worships such people, unjustifiably, for they are still worldly however exalted and useful that worldliness may be! The true devotee realises that such agitation is unnecessary and is thus unaffected by the agitations of the world. By precept and personal example he radiates truth without agitating anyone's heart. He is a lover of peace; he is peace. Thus he is free from wants and ever happy. The flame of faith and love is kindled in his heart leaving no room for egoism, selfishness, hate, jealousy or fear.

By God's grace, this seeker is gradually led to direct realisation of his cosmic presence.

❖yo na hr̥ṣyati na dveṣṭi na śocati na kāṅkṣati
 śubhāśubhaparit̥yāgī bhaktimān yaḥ sa me priyaḥ
 ❖samaḥ śatrau ca mitre ca tathā mātāpamānayoḥ
 śītoṣṇasukhaduḥkheṣu samaḥ saṅgavivarjitaḥ
 ❖tulyanindāstutir maunī saṁtuṣṭo yena kenacit
 aniketaḥ sthīramatir bhaktimān me priyo naraḥ

He who neither rejoices nor hates, nor grieves, nor desires, renouncing good and evil, and who is full of devotion, is dear to me.

He who is the same to foe and friend, and also in honour and dishonour, who is the same in cold and heat and in pleasure and pain, who is free from attachment,

He to whom censure and praise are equal, who is silent, content with anything, homeless, of a steady mind, and full of devotion – that man is dear to me.

When the tilt in the scale of values is corrected, the inner balance is restored. It is then that one is able to see the situation outside as it is, not as it appeared to be through the coloured glass of personal desires, egoism and conditioning. It is then that one is able to play his role efficiently, with a pure heart, free from anxiety. This role may demand the seeker's dynamic participation in the external conflict between the forces of light and those of darkness. It may lead him through alternate success and failure, honour and dishonour. But since he has offered all his actions to God, and since his own ego does not commence any undertaking – which is always prompted and conducted by the Lord – he has surpassed good and evil. He knows that what happens to him is God's will and calmly accepts it.

Do these verses make it appear as though the devotee is a dull and heartless walking corpse? Certainly not! His compassion keeps him busy in the service of all creatures. But, he has entered his mind and intellect into God who created the world, sustains it and who thus works through him, his devotee.

The vital difference is that the devotee sees God where we see the world. We work, while he worships his Lord through all his work.

Humility, devotion, surrender and non-condemnation are the beautiful attitudes of a devotee of God, of a sincere seeker.

❖ye tu dharmyāmṛtaṁ idaṁ yathoktaṁ paryupāsate
śraddadhānā matparamā bhaktās te 'tīva me priyāḥ

They, verily, who follow this immortal dharma as described above, endowed with faith, regarding me as their supreme goal, they, the devotees, are exceedingly dear to me.

‘Dharmyāmṛtaṁ’ is translated into immortal dharma. It is also immortalising dharma. Kṛṣṇa makes it plain at every opportunity that his is not a new doctrine or philosophy but a re-statement and reiteration of the eternal (not just the oldest, but also the ever-new) dharma.

It is dharma – the balance which sustains the universe and every living creature, the cohesive force that keeps us together. It is not Hinduism, Christianity, Islam or Judaism in their restricted sense, but their very essence and soul. It is eternal but capable of being re-interpreted and re-delivered from time to time. Wood remains wood, but every human generation fashions some new gadget out of it, putting it to different uses. Initially, man made houses, bridges and boats with wood. When iron and concrete superseded wood in construction, it was used for paper. Now man makes various garments from wood. All these have two factors in common: wood and service to man.

Modern man, though he does not discard objects of nature (like wood), sneers at dharma, feeling it is out of date. However, it is eternal and can and should still serve man, making his life happier and richer. Just as there are factories and research laboratories to discover newer uses for old materials, there should be more spiritual research centres to re-discover this eternal dharma, this pattern of our existence, and suggest ways and means of applying it to the present-day world.

To the man-of-God these verses representing the eternal dharma are like a blue-print for perfection. He builds his personality on their pattern – not by blindly copying, but by intelligently living. He lives as if he were a great devotee of God, for that is his objective. He grows in the characteristics mentioned in these verses and in course of time is established in them.

These eight verses are worth daily repetition, contemplating their meaning.



OM TAT SAT

iti śrīmad bhagavad gītāsūpaniṣatsu brahma vidyāyām
yogaśāstre śrī kṛṣṇarjuna saṁvāde
bhakti yogo nama dvādaśo 'dhyāyaḥ

Thus in the upaniṣad of the glorious Bhagavad Gītā,
the science of the eternal, the scripture of yoga,
the dialogue between śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna,
ends the twelfth discourse entitled:

THE YOGA OF DEVOTION

CHAPTER XIII

THE YOGA OF THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE FIELD AND THE KNOWER OF THE FIELD

XIII

13th SEPTEMBER

1, 2

arjuna uvāca

- ❖ prakṛtim puruṣaṁ caiva kṣetraṁ kṣetrājñaṁ eva ca
etad veditum icchāmi jñānaṁ jñeyaṁ ca keśava
śrībhagavān uvāca
- ❖ idaṁ śarīraṁ kaunteya kṣetram ity abhīdhiyate
etad yo vetti taṁ prāhuḥ kṣetrājña itī tadvidah

Arjuna said: I wish to learn about nature and the spirit, the field and the knower of the field, knowledge and that which ought to be known.

The blessed Lord said: This body, O Arjuna, is called the field; he who knows it is called the knower of the field, by those who know of them, i.e. by the sages.

If this chapter is regarded as a necessary follow-up to the eleventh chapter to amplify certain truths mentioned in it, and if, as many have done, we omit from our study Arjuna's question, then Kṛṣṇa's statement that this body is called the field may be taken to refer to the cosmic body. "You were wonderstruck by merely witnessing my cosmic body; even that is only the field, the material playground in which I carry out my divine play." 'This body' may also mean the individual body.

In fact, Indian philosophy insists on equating the microcosm with the macrocosm; the former is but the miniature of the latter. There is a world within an atom; and the world itself may be an atom in something of greater magnitude!

Within this body, the field, as its all-pervading soul, resides the knower of the body – the soul. It is an extremely subtle and powerful intelligence. Thus, the field is a phenomenon which can be observed. (This could be part of the personality.) The entity which understands this, the observing intelligence, is the knower of the field. Correct understanding of the field and its knower constitute wisdom. Without this, our whole life becomes a complete mess because we confuse the observed phenomenon with the observing intelligence. With this confusion arises ignorance, fear, attachment and wrong action.

The field (body) is like a sports-field or swimming pool in which the soul exercises itself to grow stronger, purer and to attain perfection. One must not run away from it or sink, but swim. Without the body, the soul cannot evolve; and by getting attached to it, the soul cannot evolve either! Hence, a knowledge of both the body and the soul is essential.

❖kṣetrajñāṁ cā 'pi māṁ viddhi sarvakṣetreṣu bhārata
 kṣetrakṣetrajñāyor jñānaṁ yat taj jñānaṁ mataṁ mama
 ❖tat kṣetraṁ yac ca yādrk ca yadvikāri yataś ca yat
 sa ca yo yatprabhāvaś ca tat samāsenā me śṛṇu
 ❖ṛṣibhir bahudhā gītāṁ chandobhir vividhaiḥ pṛthak
 brahmasūtrapadais cai 'va hetumadbhir viniścitaiḥ

Do thou also know me as the knower of the field in all fields, O Arjuna. Knowledge of both the field and the knower of the field is considered by me to be true knowledge.

What the field is and of what nature, what its modifications are and whence it is, and also who he is and what his powers are – hear all that from me in brief.

Sages have sung in many ways, in various distinctive chants and also in the suggestive words indicative of the absolute, full of reasoning and decisive.

Please remember that God is the soul of all beings. He is the sole reality, the cosmic consciousness which, by virtue of its all-pervasiveness, is the substratum for the individualised consciousness, too, though its true nature is veiled by ignorance. Whether you take the whole universe as one entity, the macrocosm, and accept the Lord as the knower of this mighty field, or you believe that this universe is composed of millions upon millions of beings, each of them being an independent field, God is the knower of them (or it).

Knowledge of exclusively either (the field or its knower) is incomplete; knowledge of both is true knowledge. As long as diversity is visible to our eyes and as long as the mind thinks in terms of diversity, it will be impossible for it to conceive of another reality; it cannot see what it sees as reality to be unreal. Therefore, the reality can only be established by ceaseless investigation. It is true that from the point of view of the absolute, this diversity does not exist as diversity; that is not because the absolute is exclusive of 'all these' but because it includes and transcends them. A knowledge of the absolute can be had, therefore, only by acquiring an integral knowledge of the matter and the spirit, and then transcending them by God's grace. Hence the Īśāvāsya upaniṣad commands man to acquire a knowledge of both 'knowledge and ignorance'. When he tries to understand matter, it is suddenly transformed into spirit and the veil is lifted.

❖ mahābhūtāny ahaṁkāro buddhir avyaktam eva ca
 indriyāṇi daśai 'kaṁ ca pañca ce 'ndriyagocarāḥ
 ❖ icchā dveṣaḥ sukhaṁ duḥkhaṁ saṁghātaś cetanā dhṛtiḥ
 etat kṣetraṁ samāśena savikāram udāhṛtaṁ

The great elements, egoism, intellect and also the unmanifested nature, the ten senses and one (mind), and the five objects of the senses,

Desire, hatred, pleasure, pain, the power that holds the elements together, intelligence, fortitude – the field has thus been briefly described with its modifications.

The field is the object, and the knower is the subject. Here we are given a description of the object. Strange as it may seem, even egoism and the intellect are included in the list of objects! Viewing the whole universe as the body of God, it is apparent that individualisation is inherent in that body. When we realise this, a host of puzzling questions is banished. Even this egoism is not a totally foreign commodity imported in ignorance, but it is inherent in the 'object' of God, who is the subject. However, in states of ignorance it assumes alarming proportions.

Again, since we (the ego) are ourselves objects, limited and veiled, occupying but a small part of the 'field', it is impossible for the little 'I' either to completely understand other 'objects', or to fully understand the subject of whom we are only allowed occasional glimpses.

Our waking and dreaming consciousness is filled with objects acting as subjects, such subjects acting as objects for others in their turn. The object is thus a projection of the subject on to something else, another subject! Hence, any scene is the object of the eye, the eye is the object of the nerves, the nerves of the brain, the brain of the intellect and the intellect of the ego-sense, which itself is the object of the self – the sole subject.

Even thoughts and emotions (desire and so on) are objects of the self or consciousness. One who knows them thus has full control over them and does not identify with them. When we are tempted to be certain about the source of our emotions and thoughts, whether happy or unhappy, we should remind ourselves that what is obvious may not be true. Let us enquire into the emotion till we arrive at the reality that is hinted at. It is the ego's ignorant identification of the knower with the field that gives rise to karma, sin and rebirth. The wise man is free from this bondage. The body is not his, yet it functions; the mind is not his, yet it thinks. In his case there is instant harmony within, and great love.

- ❖ amānitvam adam̐bhitvam ahimsā kṣāntir ārjavam̐
ācāryopāśanam̐ śaucam̐ sthairyam ātmavinigrahaḥ
- ❖ indriyārtheṣu vairāgyam anaham̐kāra eva ca
janmamṛtyujarāvyaḍhiduḥkhadoṣānudarśanam̐
- ❖ asaktir anabhiṣvaṅgaḥ putradāragṛhādiṣu
nityam̐ ca samacittatvam iṣṭāniṣṭopapattiṣu

Humility, unpretentiousness, non-injury, forgiveness, uprightness, service of the teacher, purity, steadfastness, self-control.

Indifference to the objects of the senses and also absence of egoism, perception of (or reflection on) the evil in birth, death, old age, sickness and pain,

Non-attachment, non-identification of the self with son, wife, home and the rest, and constant even-mindedness on the attainment of the desirable and the undesirable,

Jñāna or true wisdom is recognition that the silent and tranquil spectator enjoys the show. It is common experience that our wisdom is overpowered by the heat generated by intense activity; yet, in calmer moments, all of us ‘know’ what we should have done! Mental modifications are events that take place in our mind (brain). The ego-sense, the ‘I’ seated in the heart, need only watch those mental modifications without getting involved in them. Thy life would flow smoothly and our thoughts, words and deeds would be full of wisdom.

But the ego-sense has the age-old habit of identifying itself with these mental modifications. For instance, when the body needs nourishment, we say: “I am hungry”, and not “the body is hungry”. When the mind is confused, we say: “I am confused”. The ‘I’ jumps from the heart, the whirlpool of thought-currents; this is e-motion (motion outwards). Hence, the ignorant man is subject to wrong emotions, which are the symptoms of ignorance.

However, wisdom must not be confused with intellectuality. Jñāna is knowing that the ‘I’ is a silent witness of the world, the senses and even the mental modifications and is not necessarily involved in them. Can you be good and do good without intention? If, in being or doing good, there is an intention or motivation, it is not goodness but something else. Can the qualities mentioned in these verses be present in you? If they can, you will behave like one who has this jñāna or wisdom.

- ❖ mayi cā 'nanyayogena bhaktir avyabhicāriṇī
viviktadeśasevitvam aratir janasaṁsadi
- ❖ adhyātmajñānanityatvaṁ tattvajñānārthadarśanaṁ
etaḥ jñānam iti proktaṁ ajñānaṁ yad ato 'nyathā

Unswerving devotion unto me by the yoga of non-separation, resort to solitary places, distaste for the society of people,

Constancy in knowledge of the self, perception of the end of true knowledge – this is declared to be knowledge, and what is opposed to it is ignorance.

Unswerving devotion to God is not possible without non-attachment to the world and non-identification of the self with son, wife, and so on – qualities mentioned in the previous verse. Such attachment and identification are the products of ignorance. There is really no 'attachment' anywhere in creation! We came into this world alone and we shall go alone, leaving even the body behind. All are independent, though ignorantly, we do not live that independent life here. We develop 'sneha' (a word for friendship and also for glue!) which makes us cling to things unwisely. Hence our suffering. The fire of wisdom will make this glue melt so that we neither cling nor kick. The capacity to live with or to part from one another is non-attachment; and this process is as simple as life entering and leaving the body. This non-attachment, its counterpart – 'unswerving devotion to God' – and the other divine qualities mentioned in these five verses, are the chief characteristics of jñāna or wisdom.

If they are not found in a man who is otherwise deemed 'wise', his wisdom is locked up within his intellect; and it is extremely difficult to teach that 'great wise man' once the lock has rusted! The rust should be wiped out by the cultivation of the good qualities mentioned in these five verses. Then the wisdom within will reveal itself.

Our Master, Śrī Swami Sivananda, was very fond of these five verses. If you cultivate these qualities, the source of all evil, which is the mind and the ahaṁkāra or ego-sense, will come into the open because their existence is threatened! Gurudev used to say that this is the best way to purify the mind and conquer egoism.

❖ jñeyam yat tat pravakṣyāmi yaj jñātvā 'mṛtam aśnute
 anādimat param brahma na sat tan nā 'sad ucyate
 ❖ sarvataḥpāṇipādaṁ tat sarvato 'kṣīromukhaṁ
 sarvataḥśrutimal loke sarvam āvṛtya tiṣṭhati

I will declare that which has to be known, knowing which one attains to immortality, the beginningless supreme Brahman, called neither being nor non-being.

With hands and feet everywhere, with eyes, heads and mouths everywhere, with ears everywhere, he exists in the worlds enveloping all.

Now Kṛṣṇa describes the knower of the field, the subject. One should know what this subject is. Such knowledge is twofold: *parokṣa* (indirect and intellectual) and *aparokṣa* (direct and intuitive). The former is knowledge by contact, via a medium (e.g., scripture, guru) and the latter is knowledge by identity. It is immediate knowledge, without a medium, and arises from direct experience. Such knowledge is real knowledge and puts an end to all doubt and uncertainty.

The power to reveal that immediate knowledge is vested only in God; only he really **knows**. To him the whole universe and the power and the intelligence in it are 'objects' of his own 'thought' (if there be such). The ego and the individual intellect are themselves objects and products ignorance. Hence Kṛṣṇa says: "I will declare that which has to be known" (first indirectly, from the lips of the guru – here Kṛṣṇa himself), and "knowing which (i.e. having knowledge by identity) one attains to immortality".

That supreme subject of all can be described neither in positive nor negative terms. As our Master often said, "To define Brahman is to deny Brahman." The intellect can grasp and speech express only finite entities. Yajñavalkya asks an extremely pertinent question in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka upaniṣad: "With what shall one know the knower?"

Here, the Lord reveals the great truth: '**that**' is omnipresent. What you call the world is really God seeing through the eyes, ears, tongue, skin and so on. What you call a thought or an idea is God conceived, grasped by thought. So, there is nothing other than God here. Such is his glory that he himself appears as all this diversity. It all belongs to God, whether the immediately visible form be that of a saint or an ant.

❖sarvendriyaguṇābhāsaṁ sarvendriyavivarjitaṁ
 asaktaṁ sarvabhṛc cai 'va nirguṇaṁ guṇabhoktr ca
 ❖bahir antaś ca bhūtānām acaraṁ caram eva ca
 sūkṣmatvāt tad avijñeyaṁ dūrasthaṁ cā 'ntike ca tat

Shining by the functions of all the senses, yet without the senses;
 unattached, yet supporting all; devoid of qualities, yet their experiencer,

Without and within all beings, the unmoving and also the moving; because
 of its subtlety, unknowable; and near and far away is that.

These verses are not for discussion or rationalisation, but for meditation. When you say: “I see that” (pointing to an object) you are really singing the glory of God! The ‘I’ in you is God and he is in that object, too; and, the sight itself has been made possible by his power. Yet, he is not limited or conditioned by the senses. Because he is all-pervading, the soul of everything, he is not attached to anybody or anything. This apparent diversity is nothing but the manifestation of God’s power and glory. Hence he supports them all in the sense that they do not and cannot exist but for him. He is free; yet all our experiences are possible only because he is the consciousness in them.

God is all-pervading, but because he is extremely subtle, being the one homogeneous essence when all names and forms are reduced to their fundamental homogeneity, he is (intellectually) unknowable. In other words, he is the supreme subject, and therefore can never be objectively perceived.

To those who realise him through intuitive knowledge, he is indeed near, for what can be nearer than our innermost self? Yet the ignorant man relates to the world in a distorted way, pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain and unhappiness. He is subject to endless misery and delusion, and in his state of ignorance God seems to be far away.

The Īśāvāsyā upaniṣad asks: “If one realises that the self (God) is all, how shall he ever experience grief or delusion?” In that realisation (not mere intellectual knowledge), the world is seen as it is and there is no attachment, hate or fear. With that vision the world and life are transformed into something very beautiful – you do not manipulate the world or try to revolutionise your life, yet everything flows.

❖avibhaktam ca bhūteṣu vibhaktam iva ca sthitam
 bhūtabharṭṛ ca taj jñeyam grasiṣṇu prabhaviṣṇu ca
 ❖jyotiṣām api taj jyotis tamasaḥ param ucyate
 jñānam jñeyam jñānagamyam hṛdi sarvasya viṣṭhitam

He is undivided, yet he exists as if divided, in beings; he is to be known as the supporter of beings; he dissolves and generates all these.

That, the light of all lights, is said to be beyond darkness; knowledge, the knowable and the goal of knowledge, seated in the hearts of all.

If the ultimate reality, the supreme subject or Brahman is dismissed as indescribable, teaching and consequently realisation would be rendered extremely difficult, and people undergoing varied experiences in this world, even if they see that all life is afire with sorrow, will not turn to God, but seek to quench that burning by resorting to remedies worse than disease. Remember that half-knowledge has always been used as the ladder to ascend to full knowledge. The mathematics teacher in a primary school is sure that a point is a point and a straight line is a straight line. If he told his little students that a point is only a concept and cannot be described on paper and that a straight line will curve when drawn long enough, their confusion would make it impossible to teach them mathematics. As Śrī K.M. Sen says in his book on Hinduism: “Statements about Brahman, to be intelligible, must be empirical forms. The wise recognise these forms to be necessities of concrete thought, but fools take them to be real truth.”

Thus, definitions like creator, supporter, destroyer or redeemer, light, and ‘seated in the hearts of all’ are to be taken figuratively. They are given to enable us to know that which is beyond the pale of rational knowledge. Kṛṣṇa does not want to get lost in the maze of descriptions of the indescribable and reminds us that he is undivided, omnipresent. The previous verses (especially verse 12) might lead to a void; hence the hint here that God is beyond darkness, he is the light of lights. He is the soul of all – human, sub-human, super-human, animate and inanimate. He is the knower, known and knowledge. However, all these are mere pointers. Even so, all teaching is a pointer; the guru’s role, too, is to be a living pointer. They remind us that there is some kind of mist hiding the truth within. This truth is: God alone exists.

❖iti kṣetram tathā jñānam jñeyam co 'ktaṁ samāsataḥ
 madbhakta etad vijñāya madbhāvāyo 'papadyate
 ❖prakṛtiṁ puruṣam cai 'va viddhy anādī ubhāv api
 vikārāś ca guṇāś cai 'va viddhi prakṛtisambhavan

Thus the field, as well as knowledge and the knowable, have been briefly stated. My devotee, knowing this, enters into my being.

Know thou that nature and the spirit are both without beginnings; and modifications and qualities are born of nature.

The genius of Kṛṣṇa has compressed into just a dozen verses an inexhaustible wealth of knowledge and deep wisdom. Whole volumes can be written explaining each verse; but they would be hopelessly inadequate compared to deep meditation on each one.

But wait, there are some posers here! Such meditation is possible only to 'my devotee' – God's devotee, not only the devotee of the God-form Kṛṣṇa. Without love, knowledge is hypocrisy, for true knowledge brings complete understanding, and understanding engenders love. On the other hand, love, even of God, without knowledge may perhaps lead us to superstition, not to God-realisation. Rāmānuja Acharya holds that knowledge is one of the most essential aids to God-love.

So if God's devotee attains this knowledge, what becomes of him? He 'enters into my being' – he becomes one with God. No true seeker after God is interested in the academic disputation about whether he retains his individuality or becomes God himself. Perhaps we live in him as fish in the ocean – part of him and yet distinct.

What is significant, however, is the fact that such a devotee shares God's nature (mat-bhavam). He sees the world as God sees it; he does God's will. Hence, he does not remain inert and inactive, but joyously participates in the divine will.

He realises that God and his nature are eternal; not distinct and separate, but related like fire and heat. The potentiality of manifestation is inherent in the spirit; and when this activates, nature becomes manifest, undergoes modifications and possesses qualities. But the wise devotee knows that even in and through such manifestation, God alone exists.

- ❖kārya kāraṇa kartṛtve hetuḥ prakṛtir ucyate
puruṣaḥ sukhaduḥkhānām bhoktṛtve hetur ucyate
- ❖puruṣaḥ prakṛtistho hi bhuṅkte prakṛtijān guṇān
kāraṇam guṇasaṅgo 'sya sadasadyonijanmasu

In the production of the effect and the cause, nature is said to be the cause; in the experience of pleasure and pain, the soul is said to be the cause.

The soul, seated in nature, experiences the qualities born of nature; attachment to the qualities is the cause of his birth in good and evil wombs.

Kṛṣṇa's genius is synthesis, and here is a synthesis of subjective idealism and materialism. There are those who say that the outside world is a projection of one's own mind; and others who assert that matter alone is real and that the spirit is the fermentation of matter. Kṛṣṇa points out that both spirit and matter exist, though of course not as two but as God and his nature.

Our experiences of 'pleasant' and 'unpleasant' are merely subjective (to drink ice water is pleasant in summer yet agonizing if the teeth are sensitive). However, although butter and lime look alike, one is soothing and pleasant, the other caustic and irritating. There is a mysterious power in lime which distinguishes it from butter. That power is śakti or prakṛti or (God's) nature. The entire universe is vibrant with life, prakṛti, and that nature functions. The nature of water is to flow; the nature of fire is to burn. Counterpart to this mysterious power is a mysterious consciousness in us which experiences that nature – puruṣa or the individual soul. The two, prakṛti and puruṣa, seem to understand each other very well indeed.

Since puruṣa was the experiencer, some philosophers accorded this a superior status and regarded nature as inert. Others saw that the qualities in nature were able to influence puruṣa and so declared that nature is para-śakti (supreme power) and puruṣa is powerless without her. (You, the puruṣa, could not drink water and enjoy the sweetness of honey but for prakṛti.) Let us then accept both, together! For nature is God's nature – they are not two but one! A clear understanding of this indivi(sible)duality frees us from confusion, likes and dislikes, cravings and aversion – the 'ought to be' and the 'ought not to be'. Nature prevails in God's sight.

❖ upadraṣṭā numantā ca bhartā bhoktā maheśvaraḥ
 paramātmē 'ti cā 'py ukto dehe 'smin puruṣaḥ paraḥ
 ❖ ya evaṁ vetti puruṣaṁ prakṛtiṁ ca guṇaiḥ saha
 sarvathā vartamāno 'pi na sa bhūyo 'bhijāyate

The supreme soul in this body is also called the spectator, the permitter, the supporter, the enjoyer, the great Lord and the supreme self.

He who thus knows the spirit and matter together with the qualities, in whatever condition he may be, he is not born again.

It is good to have a clear idea of the two-in-one and their distinct functions, as that will enable us to undeludedly recognise their manifestations. In that light of clarity we shall not, like king Canute, order the waves of ever-changing phenomena to stop; nor shall we get entangled in the web of these changes, regarding them as inevitable.

The supreme soul 'in this body' is called the *jīva*, though on account of ignorance, this *jīva* considers himself limited. He is a 'spectator': and that is when he is happy. He is the 'permitter': having the prerogative to say "Yes" or "No", and is not as helpless as he sometimes imagines himself to be. Recognising this power of the soul, one is able to freely exercise his free-will. The *jīva* is the 'supporter': it is sheer delusion which makes him feel dependent upon material phenomena. Yet he is also the 'enjoyer', and because of the fact that he enjoys the material phenomena, he may come to feel that they are indispensable for his happiness. Nevertheless, he is the 'great Lord and the supreme self', if only he wakes up from his slumber of ignorance!

He who knows this secret will neither resist nor cling to the world. He will not blame the world or himself for living in such a world. He knows the depth of the ocean, but he also knows his own power to swim or float on its surface. He does not get drowned. Convinced of this, it does not matter what profession he is engaged in, he is a *jñānī* (sage). He is not born again for whatever may be his mode of living, such a *yogi* lives in God. (cf VI:31).

❖dhyānenā 'tmani paśyanti kecid ātmānam ātmanā
 anye sām̐khyena yogena karmayogena cā 'pare
 ❖anye tv evam ajānantaḥ śrutvā 'nyebhya upāsate
 te 'pi cā 'titaranty eva mṛtyum śrutiparāyaṇaḥ

Some, by meditation, behold the self in the self by the self, others by the yoga of knowledge, and others by the yoga of action.

Others also, not knowing thus, worship, having heard of it from others; they, too, cross beyond death, regarding what they have heard as the supreme refuge.

The goal was described in the previous verses; now the paths are pointed out. There is variety in creation; the infinite can be viewed from infinite angles and approached in infinite ways. Temperament and tradition are the main guiding (not deciding) factors here. The waters of the ocean are the same, whatever be the name given to the ocean at different points on the globe.

The man of mystic temperament 'beholds the self in the self by the self' in deep meditation. Note that Kṛṣṇa cleverly avoids the subject-object experience in meditation and the 'I see God' or 'I see a brilliant light' type of psychic phenomenon so widely confused with meditation and *rāja yoga*. 'I' do not see the self, but the self itself sees the self in the self. Self-realisation is merely seeing that what you and I previously regarded as the self, never existed!

Others, endowed with an intuitive temperament, may use reason to transcend itself, intellect to silence itself, and in the searchlight of their self-knowledge realise that the ego was never an entity. The whole universe shines as God and his nature.

Those of a dynamic temperament may reach the same goal by self-effacing, self-sacrificing and selfless service, feeling 'God serves God'.

Even devotees of the Lord who humbly worship him as they have been taught by their ancestors and preceptors, will reach God. This is a gentle rebuke for so many *yogī* and intellectual giants who sigh with grief that these devotees, 'ignorantly' worshipping God, are 'lost souls' whom it is their duty to 'save'! Leave them alone. The Lord whom they worship will look after them. Moreover, they must awaken themselves, save themselves. No one else can do it for them. They must find and go their own way.

❖yāvat saṁjāyate kiṁcit sattvaṁ sthāvarajaṅgamaṁ
kṣetrakṣetrajñāsaṁyogāt tad viddhi bharataṛṣabha

Wherever a being is born, whether unmoving or moving, know thou, O best of the Bharata, that it is from the union between the field and its knower.

Creation itself involves both the subject (knower) and the object (the field). Creation can be viewed from two standpoints. ‘I think; therefore, I am’ is true, though not in the Cartesian sense of a division, for awareness or consciousness is consciousness’s awareness of itself, which is the universe. ‘I am; therefore, I think’ is equally true. For, in order to be able to project a thought, the thinker should exist and the thought (as well as the thought-subject) must also exist. There is actually no conflict or contradiction between these two viewpoints; they are complementary to each other.

Here, again, it is obvious that the apparent contradiction springs from the fact that we regard matter and spirit as two eternally separate and distinct factors and, in accordance with our own bias, tend to exaggerate the importance of one over the other. In fact, God exists because God is you!

God and his nature, subject and object, matter and spirit, the field and its knower – are in truth one and indivisible. All beings that exist in the universe are the products of the perpetual union between the two (God and his nature). Creation is never ex nihilo; God’s nature has ever been his, and its manifestation has always been in a potential state – even when all beings return to the state of formless dissolution during the ‘night of the creator’. Once again, when consciousness (cit) actively engages itself in becoming aware of its own potentialities (śakti), the diverse beings are ‘created’. Hence the universe is but cit-śakti made manifest. He who knows this lives in cosmic consciousness, and he realises that animate and inanimate objects pulsate with cosmic life and float in cosmic consciousness.

- ❖samarṁ sarveṣu bhūteṣu tiṣṭantaṁ parameśvaraṁ
vinaśyatsv avinaśyantaṁ yaḥ paśyati sa paśyati
- ❖samarṁ paśyan hi sarvatra samavasthitam īśvaraṁ
na hinasty ātmanā 'tmānaṁ tato yāti parāṁ gatim

He sees, who sees the supreme Lord existing equally in all beings, the unperishing within the perishing.

Because he, who sees the same Lord equally dwelling everywhere does not destroy the self by the self, he goes to the highest goal.

‘Samarṁ’ has been translated ‘equally’; but ‘samely’ would express it better. ‘Equally’ suggests quantitative similarity. ‘Sameness’ is much more than quantitative or qualitative similarity, for it expresses **identity**.

Some philosophers hold that this ‘sameness’ has in part been ‘transformed’ (pariṇāma-vāda) into the visible diversity; though they assert that the substratum of this diversity is the same. The fundamental hydrogen atom has combined and re-combined to produce the various elements; but it is clear that this reversible process suggests that the ‘reality’ of matter is the simple hydrogen atom (if that is the ultimate material particle which cannot be further reduced).

Another view is that this diversification of the one, this complication of the simple, is only apparent, not real. The ‘sameness’ has not actually been transformed into the diversity, but only appears to be so. What exists is just one thing, like space. There is infinite diversity that seems to exist in space merely because we think in terms of diversity. The popular simile is that of the snake in the rope. When in the darkness the rope appears to be a snake, the rope has not even in part been transformed into a snake. Thus, according to this view, the combination of atoms (which scientists themselves declare are ever independent of one another) is an idea; and the fusion of several simple atoms into more complex atoms is similarly an idea. Although a group of trees is called a forest, each tree is a tree and nothing more – ‘forest’ only being an idea in the mind. The elements are thus only a mode of thought – the reality being the Lord (and his nature which is forever one with him).

Knowing this, one does not become egoistic. The egoist ‘destroys’ (veils) the self by his little self (the ego) and thereby destroys his wisdom, peace and happiness.

❖ prakṛtyai 'va ca karmāṇi kriyamāṇāni sarvaśaḥ
yaḥ paśyati tathā 'tmānam akartāraṁ sa paśyati

He sees, who sees that all actions are performed by nature alone and that the self is actionless.

The cause of sin and suffering is the self-hypnosis of the *puruṣa* (the individual soul) in feeling that he is somehow involved in the world and particularly in the body; that it is he who sees, hears, tastes, grasps with the hands, walks and works; and that it is he who enjoys and suffers.

Suffering arises on account of isolation, and the purpose of yoga and all spiritual practice is to de-hypnotise the *puruṣa*, ultimately to lead him to the realisation that the reality alone is, and that the manifest universe, including himself, and all the changes that take place in it are but the expression of the qualities of God's nature – neither good nor evil, neither pleasant nor unpleasant.

All self-isolation is sin, because it is inevitable that when you consider yourself an entity totally different from another, you must enter into some relationship. Then you begin to love one and hate another. Out of that, sin and sorrow arise. Death of a dear one is painful, but death of an enemy causes rejoicing in the heart! An earthquake in mid-ocean or unpopulated territory, which throws up fresh land or fertilizes the existing land, is a welcome event; whereas when it affects objects of one's self-identification, it is a great evil.

One has to pass through the process of disentangling oneself from this web of illusory super-imposition of the not-self upon the self. Hence, as a sort of de-hypnotising auto-suggestion, the *yogi* is asked to assert and realise that his self does nothing at all, and that nature alone is ever active; thus making it look as though nature is an independent agent. Once this dissociation has been achieved, it will be clear to the enlightened soul that even this duality is only apparent, and that to reality God alone exists, the universe is his nature and the changing phenomena occur on account of the qualities inherent in that nature. Arriving at this wisdom, the enlightened one does not isolate himself and is ever happy, at one with nature.

❖yadā bhūtapṛthagbhāvam ekastham anupaśyati
tata eva ca vistāraṁ brahma saṁpadyate tadā

When a man sees the whole variety of beings as resting in the one, and spreading forth from that alone, he then becomes Brahman.

Taken literally, this verse can give rise to all sorts of misconceptions. The variety of beings does not rest in the one as, for instance, ‘birds rest on a tree’. If we adopt the ‘actual transformation’ (pariṇāma-vāda) of creation, (see verse 27 above), a more apt simile would be the fish in the ocean – born in the ocean, existing in it and dissolving in it – truly part of the ocean, but with a distinct personality. It is possible to catch the fish and show that it is separate from the ocean only because ocean is not omnipresent. Since God is omnipresent this paradox does not arise in him.

If, however, we adopt the second view that there is only an ‘apparent transformation’ (vivarta-vāda) which is illusory, then this variety and the one bear the same relationship as the different oceans, seas and bays of the world bear to the one vast homogeneous mass of water that the ocean really is. It is not as though the Indian ocean, the Atlantic ocean, the Pacific ocean, and so on, rest in the one ocean that encircles the world, but there is in truth only one ocean – the variety being a mere idea.

‘All beings’ includes one’s self, too. It needs no special emphasis that he who thus sees the one reality realises that even his own individuality is but an idea, for in truth only God exists. He then becomes Brahman, in the same way as the Arabian sea becomes the ocean when the name and the limitation are removed.

Kṛṣṇa, however, does not permit us a day-dreaming phantasm of oneness; that oneness is not exclusive of the diversity. The obvious (the diversity), in a manner of speaking, clothes the unobvious (the oneness) which is the reality. Nothing that is of value, of sense or of importance in our lives is obvious. He who has realised that unobvious oneness knows that the variety spreads forth from that alone, and shares the dynamism of the diversity, while inwardly enjoying the peace of the one.

❖ anāditvān nirguṇatvāt paramātmā 'yam avyayaḥ
 śarīrastho 'pi kaunteya na karoti na lipyate
 ❖ yathā sarvagataṁ sauksṇyād ākāśaṁ no 'palipyate
 sarvatrā 'vasthito dehe tathā 'tmā no 'palipyate

Being without beginning and being devoid of qualities, the supreme self, imperishable, though dwelling in the body, O Arjuna, neither acts nor is tainted.

As the all-pervading ether is not tainted, because of its subtlety, so the self seated everywhere in the body is not tainted.

The statement that the supreme self is devoid of qualities seems to suggest exclusiveness and a distinction between the self and (its) nature. This is not so. The difference lies in the viewpoint: a dark cloud hangs between earth and outer space. A man standing on earth says: "The sky is dark"; whereas a man flying above, in the sky, says: "The earth is dark". The truth is, all of them are as they are. The cosmonaut flying aloft in outer space will not even notice the thick cloud covering our particular town. We see it because our vision is limited and circumscribed; his (and God's) vision is vast and unrestricted!

Smoke pouring out of a factory chimney taints that chimney with soot; but the sky remains untainted even after years of this sort of pollution. The chimney is gross and limited, hence it receives and keeps the taint. The sky is subtle and unlimited; no taint can stick to it.

From the empirical or individual standpoint, the qualities of nature exist in God; but from the absolute standpoint, the self is devoid of any quality. The yogi realises the distinction between truth and viewpoint – truth being that which exists and viewpoint being the mental activity. Realising this, his mind and heart (the gross and limited) are totally surrendered to God (the subtle and infinite).

What a golden message of courage and hope! Your soul is ever free and pure. Let not the 'past' depress you or dampen your spirit. Acquire the eye of wisdom and the ghost of sin and suffering will vanish. You are a sinner only so long as your own grossness and ignorant limitation make you believe yourself to be. Wake up! You are the ever-pure immortal self.

❖yathā prakāśayaty ekaḥ kṛtsnaṁ lokam imaṁ raviḥ
 kṣetraṁ kṣetrī tathā kṛtsnaṁ prakāśayati bhārata
 ❖kṣetrakṣetrajñayor evaṁ antaraṁ jñānacakṣuṣā
 bhūtaprakṛtimokṣaṁ ca ye vidur yānti te paraṁ

Just as the one sun illumines the whole world, so also the Lord of the field (God) illumines the whole field, O Arjuna.

They who, by the eye of wisdom, perceive the distinction between the field and its knower, and also the liberation from the nature of being, go to the supreme.

The scientist tells us that the earth was part of the sun and broke away from it long ago. Even today, the same sun sheds light and life on the whole of the earth. Though apart, the earth is still ‘part’ of the sun (the solar system) enjoying the benefits of a close ‘commonwealth’ association.

In the same way, when consciousness remembered its own potentialities, the manifestation-potential was actualised into infinite combinations of atoms and molecules, giving rise to a variety of beings together called the ‘kṣetra’ – the field, the body of God. This body is not inert and useless but is indwelt and illumined by the light of God whose power dances in every atom of existence, inviting us to realise him and thus go beyond sin and suffering.

The common man’s vision is so gross that only the grossness of diversity is visible to him. He is sense-limited, sense-bound and mind-enslaved. It is necessary for him first to acquire subtlety of vision, delicacy of understanding and freedom from the bondage of ideological slavery before he can arrive at cosmic consciousness. Hence Kṛṣṇa demands that the wise disciple should first acquire that sharpness of wisdom which will enable him to pare nature from God, by which process alone he can glimpse the universal substratum (God) and then proceed to liberate himself from the illusion of ‘bhūta-prakṛti’ or elemental nature.

He discovers that he is not even part of the world, he is the world – if one point is removed from the circumference of a circle, there is no circle! There is one solid mass of awareness which is able to respond to every situation in life as it arises. We are all swimming in that ocean of awareness. Thus the wise disciple will know the supreme and realise that he and he alone exists – one without a second.



OM TAT SAT

iti śrīmad bhagavad gītāsūpaniṣatsu brahma vidyāyām
yogaśāstre śrī kṛṣṇarjuna saṁvāde
kṣetra kṣetrajña vibhāga yogo nāma trayodaśo 'dhyāyaḥ

Thus in the upaniṣad of the glorious Bhagavad Gītā,
the science of the eternal, the scripture of yoga,
the dialogue between śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna,
ends the thirteenth discourse entitled:

THE YOGA OF THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN
THE FIELD AND THE KNOWER OF THE FIELD

THE MONTH OF OCTOBER

Indian mythology tells the story of the Lord (Trivikrama) who measured the heaven and the earth with two strides and placed his foot on the head of man as the ‘third’ of three strides, thus bringing the three worlds together.

This allegorical story has been esoterically interpreted in different ways. He, the undying one, appears to be born, to live and to die, in all; he, the ever-wakeful one, wakes, dreams and sleeps in the individual’s consciousness. He is the creator, preserver, redeemer and that which transcends them all and exists as their underlying unity.

Here, in the fourteenth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, we are granted a vision of that supreme being who forms the substratum:

(i) for all perishable beings,

(ii) for the imperishable divine spark that exists in them all, and

(iii) who, being free from all limitations of individualisation and contact with ever-changing phenomena, transcends them all.

He is the supreme being, at once transcendent and immanent. He is the life-giving substance in the plant; he is the digestive fire in the human; he is the light in the sun. In fact, one who keeps his eyes and ears open cannot fail to recognise this supreme being every moment of his life.

According to scientists, the entire universe will implode and become a singularity. Thus, in that singularity or single point is the whole universe – all one. This is the most intense mixture of all. We are all one.

Realisation of this divine mystery frees one not only from bondage but from grief, here and now.

CHAPTER XIV

THE YOGA OF THE DIVISION OF THE THREE GUṆĀ

XIV

1st OCTOBER

1, 2

śrībhagavān uvāca

- ❖ param bhūyaḥ pravakṣyāmi jñānānām jñānam uttamam
yaj jñātvā munayaḥ sarve parām siddhim ito gatāḥ
- ❖ idaṁ jñānam upāśritya mama sādharṁyam āgatāḥ
sarge 'pi no 'pajāyante pralaye na vyathanti ca

The blessed Lord said: I will again declare to thee that supreme knowledge, the best of all knowledge, having known which all the sages have gone to the supreme perfection after this life.

They who, having taken refuge in this knowledge, have attained to unity with me, are neither born at the time of creation nor are they disturbed at the time of dissolution.

Once again we are being prepared for a big surprise.

The Gītā is a blazing spiritual fire. It helps us light the torch of wisdom in our own heart. A lamp cannot be lighted except from another flame, yet, if the lamp to be lighted is not brought into heart-to-heart contact with the flame it is not lighted, however glorious and fierce the flame may be. Not proximity, but only intimate contact between the lamp and the flame can ensure lighting. That is what the words 'upāsanā' (usually translated into 'worship') and 'upaniṣad' (unfortunately thought of as the words of a book) mean; and that is the vital factor in guru-disciple relationship.

When you look at someone whom you love, the ignition of the torch of inner wisdom, śaktipāta, happens instantly. That look **is** śaktipāta – a non-verbal communication even though it may be accompanied by some verbal utterance. Ramana Maḥarṣi says very beautifully: "When you learn to silence your mind and think with your heart, you can be a recipient of this śaktipāta." In the realm of transcendental wisdom, the intellect can only act as the bridesmaid. The heart is the bride.

When devotion makes a direct approach to divinity, intellect follows and understands. Reality is not opposed to reason, but transcends it. Divinity is not subject to reason and logic (which are the playground of intellect born of ignorance), yet when the heart obtains a glimpse of it, the intellect is able to provide the rationale.

Kṛṣṇa, therefore, announces dramatically that he is about to reveal a great truth which will free us from birth and death.

- ❖mama yonir mahad brahma tasmin garbhaṁ dadhāmy ahaṁ
saṁbhavaḥ sarvabhūtānāṁ tato bhavatī bhārata
- ❖sarvayoniṣu kaunteya mūrtayaḥ saṁbhavanti yāḥ
tāsāṁ brahma mahad yonir ahaṁ bījapradāḥ pitā

My womb is the great Brahma; in that I place the germ; thence, O Arjuna, is the birth of all beings.

Whatever forms are produced, O Arjuna, in any womb whatsoever, the great Brahma is their womb and I am the seed-giving father.

This is a divine mystery, not because it has been hidden away by any sect or clan, but because it is beyond the reach of the intellect – hence incomprehensible; and of speech – hence indescribable. Only revelation is of any avail here; this revelation should be devoutly received and then intellectually understood.

God alone is the reality. That is the deep significance of the simple word ‘omnipresent’ which all of us use in relation to him. This reality has with it, in an inexplicable way (māyā), infinite energy (prakṛti or divine nature) which is capable of either remaining latent or becoming patent. This is logically acceptable because it cannot be disproved!

That energy is called mahat-brahma. Visualise it as a cosmic mirror with infinite reflectors. The one being is immediately manifested in all these reflectors as infinite beings. Since the one being is all-consciousness, the reflected infinite beings, too, come to possess that consciousness, but in a reflected way; and it is this reflection we refer to as ‘intelligence’ in the individual. Essentially it is divine, but it is finite and shines in reflected glory. This perhaps is the meaning of the biblical expression: “Man is made in the image of God”.

For the purpose of human comprehension, this divine act of reflection is expressed as impregnation. However, the inevitable duality of father and mother should not confuse us into super-imposing duality on the one being. Rather, the analogy should be modified to a curved mirror (of horse-shoe shape) with the two poles reflecting on each other thus producing infinite mirrors within mirrors. Since God is consciousness, these infinite reflections are endowed with intelligence.

❖sattvaṁ rajas tama iti guṇāḥ prakṛtisambhavāḥ
nibadhnanti mahābāho dehe dehinam avyayaṁ

Sattva, rajas and tamas – these qualities, O Arjuna, born of the divine nature, bind fast in the body, the embodied, the indestructible.

Even when the sky is clear, you know there is moisture in it. When there is pressure or depression somewhere, this moisture condenses into white clouds. If the atmospheric change continues, white cloud changes into black, rain-bearing cloud. That black cloud, though one, has hidden in it the potentiality of drop-formation – one yet many! In a few minutes the drops form and they do not linger in the sky but fall to earth.

In vedānta (Indian philosophy) the clear sky is comparable to Brahman the absolute, with prakṛti or nature ‘hidden’ in it. The pressure is comparable to the original vibration (Om) or the word or logos: the white cloud, to Īśvara (the supreme personal God); the black cloud, to hiranyagarbha (the world-soul) when you view it as a whole, and to virāt (manifestation) when you view it as just an aggregate of individuals.

Rain-water in Australia, America and Africa, is all the same. The difference lies in what it falls on; then it becomes good, bad or indifferent.

The three qualities belong to divine nature. Take fire, for example. The mysterious power that burns in fire is God. The visible flame is divine nature. This flame has inherent in it three qualities: light, heat and smoke (comparable to sattva, rajas and tamas respectively). Similarly, the entire universe is composed of three strands of existence. One is the light. In every atom there is something luminous, and it is because of this inner light that we exist and are able to recognise one another. Then, there is something in every atom which is dynamic, which vibrates; and, in addition, every atom has something which the scientist calls inertia. This eventually makes up the mass of material, physical bodies.

The individual soul is pure; it is actually not different from God. However, it is caught in these three qualities of divine nature. Why? – we do not conclusively know.

- ❖ tatra sattvaṁ nirmalatvāt prakāśakam anāmayam
sukhasaṅgena badhnāti jñānasaṅgena cā 'nagha
- ❖ rajo rāgātmakam viddhi tṛṣṇāsaṅgasamudbhavam
tan nibadhnāti kaunteya karmasaṅgena dehinam
- ❖ tamas tv ajñānam viddhi mohanam sarvadehinām
pramādālasyanidrābhis tan nibadhnāti bhārata

Of these, *sattva*, which from its stainlessness is luminous and healthy, binds by attachment to happiness and by attachment to knowledge, o sinless one.

Know thou *rajas* to be of the nature of passion, the source of thirst (for sensual enjoyment) and attachment; it binds fast, O Arjuna, the embodied one by attachment to action.

But know thou *tamas* to be born of ignorance, deluding all embodied beings; it binds fast, O Arjuna, by heedlessness, indolence and sleep.

These are the fundamental characteristics of the three qualities of nature. A knowledge of these three qualities is extremely essential. Our Master often asked: "Do you know which *guṇa* (quality) is operating in you at a particular time?" If we do, then we shall be able to adapt our life and activity in such a way as to utilise the operation of the particular quality and prevent it from leading us away from our centre, God. So long as one is embodied, one cannot completely disentangle oneself from these qualities of nature.

Social workers often delude themselves that the service they render is itself yoga. Deep meditation on these three verses will awaken them to the truth that their service is often *rājasa*, which is always accompanied by attachment and desire for worldly objects, name and fame. Introspection will enable them to retain the activity and eliminate attachment or desire.

A man who cares for nothing, who is not sincere enough to love anyone, or daring enough to hate, may pat his own back and think himself nearly a sage. Verse 8 reminds him that he is *tāmasa*. He should remove the heedlessness and then maintain equilibrium.

Even knowledge and happiness, though *sāttvika*, are only bondages. Knowing this, the aspirant is careful not to stop there. All the qualities must be transcended and the self realised here and now.

❖sattvaṁ sukhe saṁjayati rajaḥ karmaṇi bhārata
 jñānam āvṛtya tu tamaḥ pramāde saṁjayaty uta
 ❖rajas tamaś cā 'bhibhūya sattvaṁ bhavati bhārata
 rajaḥ sattvaṁ tamaś cai 'va tamaḥ sattvaṁ rajas tathā

Sattva leads to happiness; rajas to action, O Arjuna; while tamas verily shrouding knowledge leads to heedlessness.

Now sattva arises, O Arjuna, having overpowered rajas and tamas; now rajas, having overpowered sattva and tamas; and now tamas, having overpowered sattva and rajas.

The introspective spiritual aspirant is amazed, shocked and terrified when he discovers that in spite of himself his moods continuously change. Now he is happy; now he is restless; now he is lazy. Now he is wise; now he is passionate; now he is idle. “How is it,” he wonders, “that in spite of being one whole, I am sometimes holy, sometimes human and at other times beastly?”

When he is advanced enough in meditation and when he has developed the witness-consciousness, he will realise that these passing moods need not necessarily affect ‘him’, that they do not ‘belong’ to him, but that they are the triple streams of sattva, rajas and tamas – part of the divine nature – which merely cast their shadows on him as they march past.

What is a personality if the wisdom, the dynamism and the stupidity it has are all removed? All of us, the greatest of saints and the worst of sinners, are subject to these three qualities, though the proportion may vary, because we are part of nature. However, in ignorance we superimpose their effects upon ourselves.

Even though these qualities may obstruct the vision of the true self, they do not affect or alter it. The soul is ever pure, unaffected by any of the three qualities of nature. This is the fountain-source of the sage’s strength. If a coloured object is placed near a crystal, the crystal appears to undergo a complete change. In fact, it remains unchanged in its essential nature – it merely reflects the colour of the object in front of it. A clear understanding of this truth frees man from fear, grief and delusion, and throws open the path to redemption.

❖ sarvadvāreṣu dehe 'smin prakāśa upajāyate
 jñānaṁ yadā tadā vidyād vivṛddhaṁ sattvam ity uta
 ❖ lobhaḥ pravṛttir ārambhaḥ karmaṇām aśamaḥ sprhā
 rajasy etāni jāyante vivṛddhe bharataṣabha
 ❖ aprakāśo 'pravṛttiś ca pramādo moha eva ca
 tamasy etāni jāyante vivṛddhe kurunandana

When, through every gate (sense) in this body the wisdom-light shines, then it may be known that **sattva** is predominant.

Greed, activity, the undertaking of actions, restlessness, longing – these arise when **rajas** is predominant, O Arjuna.

Darkness, inertness, heedlessness and delusion – these arise when **tamas** is predominant, O Arjuna.

Here and in the seventeenth (and part of the eighteenth) chapter, Kṛṣṇa classifies the three **guṇā** in great detail. Our endeavour should always be to keep clear of unnecessary **tamas** (sleep, for instance, may be necessary), and turn even **rājasa** energy **sattva**-ward. Even **sattva** is not the goal; but it is the quality nearest the centre. It is a transparent veil and hence allows a full vision of the reality. In all that we engage ourselves in, if we avoid the **tāmasa** category and increase the **sattva** in us, so that it will utilise the **rājasa** energy for our own and others spiritual evolution, we shall soon discover the path of **sattva**-transcendence.

When **sattva** prevails, there is wisdom and light all the senses. They do not distract the mind. Knowledge of this will help us utilise these periods for meditation on God (which will sustain the **sattva**) and for spiritual ministry.

When **rajas** prevails, there is restlessness within and the urge to be active. One may not be able to completely avoid this, nor is it always necessary to avoid it. Nārada, in his *Bhakti Sutrā*, assures us that even desire, egoism and so on can be directed towards God. When there is longing for a worldly object, it is possible, with good preliminary training, or to turn the longing Godward!

When **tamas** prevails and there is stupidity in the mind, we should avoid its expression in actions and, – various methods like *yoga āsana*, *prāṇāyama*, a brisk walk, and so on, drive **tamas** away.

Knowledge of the **guṇā** for understanding of oneself is a great help.

❖ yadā sattve pravṛddhe tu pralayaṁ yāti dehabhṛt
 tado 'ttamavidāṁ lokān amalān pratipadyate
 ❖ rajasi pralayaṁ gatvā karmasaṅgiṣu jāyate
 tathā pralīnas tamasi mūḍhayoniṣu jāyate

If the embodied one meets with death when *sattva* is predominant, then he attains to the spotless worlds of the knowers of the highest.

Meeting with death in *rajas*, he is born among those who are attached to action; and dying in *tamas*, he is born in the womb of the senseless.

Kṛṣṇa has already emphasised the great truth that one's subsequent birth is determined by the 'bhāva' (state of one's inner being) at the time life departs from the body. Now he expands the idea.

If that *bhāva* is *sāttvika*, he will ascend to higher regions. Though in the literal sense the verse does imply that even if by accident the wicked man is in a *sāttvika* state, e.g. he is in holy company, he will rise to a higher region; normally this is not possible. At the time of departure from the world that quality alone will prevail which has been predominant most of our life.

Two conclusions are derived from this:

- (i) That we should endeavour to keep the heart and mind always *sāttvika*, by remembering God constantly.
- (ii) Whatever has been the biography of the dying man, those related to him would do him the greatest service if they, at the slightest premonition of the end, surround him with a spiritual atmosphere, singing of God's names, recitation of scriptures, etc., and prevent any show of worldly affections and attachments which will effectively prevent him from rising higher in evolution.

The fact has been clearly stated here that it is not inevitable that the soul returns to this earth; it may do so, or it may ascend to the regions of pure souls or descend into the worlds of the senseless (human or sub-human).

In photography, the quality of the print depends on the state of the negative. Similarly with nature. Abandon the complacent attitude that once a human being, always a human being. If the heart and mind are subhuman, where is the injustice in earning a subhuman birth?

❖karmaṇaḥ sukṛtasyā 'huḥ sāttvikam nirmalam phalam
 rajasas tu phalam duḥkham ajñānam tamasaḥ phalam

The fruit of good action, they say, is sāttvika and pure; verily the fruit of rajas is pain, and ignorance is the fruit of tamas.

We should avoid the misunderstanding that these three qualities are gross material objects like fire or water. Their function is not as simple as the dictum: if you are hot, get into water; if you are cold, go near fire. They are subtle qualities of nature, being what heat is to fire and coolness is to ice. Heat and fire have no independent or cause-and-effect relationship, but an intimate and immediate relationship; for the distinction between them is purely academic. One depends on the other; because one is the other.

The fruit of good action is sāttvika or pure; and the manifestation of the sāttvika is good action. Similarly, the fruit of passionate activity is rājasā, manifesting pain. The quality of rajas, passionate activity and pain are three shades of the same factor. In the same way, ignorance is tamas; ignorance is the fruit of tamas, and tamas is the fruit of ignorance. One cannot draw a distinctive line anywhere.

This, however, should not lead us to a vicious circle. We must deliberately break through somewhere. We should endeavour, with the help of the 'categories' given in detail in the seventeenth and the eighteenth chapters of the Gītā, to increase the sattva in us. This will result in our actions being good, which in turn will result in greater increase of sattva.

Rajas, unless based on or directed towards sattva, is itself pain. Aimless dynamism will sooner or later result in disillusionment and the painful realisation that all endeavour not directed towards the realisation of God was waste.

We should beware of this, as also the complacent attitude, "All is well, I don't care", that tamas or ignorance gives rise to.

❖sattvāt samjāyate jñānam rajaso lobha eva da
 pramādamohau tamaso bhavato 'jñānam eva ca
 ❖ūrdhvaṁ gacchanti sattvasthā madhye tiṣṭhanti rājasāḥ
 jaghanyaguṇavṛttisthā adho gacchanti tāmasāḥ

From *sattva* arises knowledge, and greed from *rajas*; heedlessness and delusion arise from *tamas*, and also ignorance.

Those who are seated in *sattva* go upwards; the *rājasū* dwell in the middle; and the *tāmasā*, abiding in the function of the lowest *guṇa*, go downwards.

Kṛṣṇa gradually unfolds the secret doctrine. When you carefully look at all your activities, you discover to your astonishment that they fall into one or the other of these three categories. They are part of the divine nature. Though the soul itself is independent of them, it vainly clings to them, identifies itself with them, and thereby appears to be coloured by them. An example may be given of a man living in a house with wet paint of different colours on the walls and doors. If he keeps away from the walls and the doors, he can still live in the house without being tainted by the coloured paint. But, he admires some colour, touches it, and is tainted. He dislikes some colour, wants to rub it off, and is also tainted. In the dark, ignorantly, he leans against a wall or a door to rest, and becomes tainted.

In the same way it is the ignorant soul, the slumbering soul living in darkness, that vainly imagines it is the doer of actions and the sufferer of consequences.

It is the characteristic of these three qualities to go up (*sattva*), to go on (*rajas*) or to go down (*tamas*). The elevator in a building goes up and down. You will not, unless you sit in it! However, in spiritual life it is preferable to go up rather than down; hence it is said 'cultivate *sattva* and remain established in it at the time of death', so that you can have a better life next time from which to realise God.

Even in the case of 'going down' it is not the soul that is thus condemned; on account of its false identification it only believes it has descended the ladder of evolution.

❖ nā 'nyam guṇebhyaḥ kartāraṁ yadā draṣṭā 'nupaśyati
 guṇebhyaś ca paraṁ vetti madbhāvaṁ so 'dhigacchati
 ❖ guṇān etān atītya trīn dehī dehasamudbhavān
 janmamṛtyujarāduḥkhair vimukto 'mṛtam aśnute

When the seer beholds no agent other than the guṇā and knows that which is higher than them, he attains to my being.

The embodied one, having crossed beyond these three guṇā, out of which the body is evolved, is freed from birth, death, decay and pain, and attains to immortality.

When this dissociation of the self with the guṇā, or this disentanglement of the spirit from matter, or even this detachment is mentioned, modern man immediately jumps up and exclaims: "That will lead to callousness and disruption of the social structure."

The average man knows only three attitudes in personal relationship:

intense clinging,

hateful kicking,

and indifference, which is often the worst of the three.

There is a fourth, and that is called non-attachment.

In non-attachment, love is not lost, but it is preserved from the corroding influence of selfishness and possessiveness. This love does not tire or overwhelm. Its soft touch does not hurt even a rose petal. It does not demand, but it gives. It does not cling to the personality, nor does it neglect the spirit that has made the personality its home. It is a wonderful relationship too sacred for words.

This extends to all activities of the sage. He does not identify himself with the three guṇā, but for that matter does not forcibly restrain them. They work; and he knows their workings. He is the ever-blissful witness. He is conscious of his self which is the self of all. This realisation flows through the guṇā, thus directing their operations towards the welfare of all beings. He is freed from thralldom to the guṇā. He is immortal. The guṇā gave birth to the body. When the body is dropped, the self remains as the universal self, infinite and all-blissful. When the body is living, the guṇā function on their own without his ego-interference, even as his breathing goes on! He is free.

arjuna uvāca
 ❖ kair liṅgais trīn guṇān etān atīto bhavati prabho
 kimācāraḥ katharṁ cai 'tāms trīn guṇān ativartate
 śrībhagavān uvāca
 ❖ prakāśam ca pravṛttiṁ ca moham eva ca pāṇḍava
 na dveṣṭi saṁpravṛttāni na nivṛttāni kāṅkṣati
 ❖ udāsīnavad āsīno guṇair yon a vicālyate
 guṇā vartanta ity eva yo 'vatiṣṭhati ne 'ṅgate

Arjuna said: What are the marks of him who has crossed over the three qualities, O Lord? What is his conduct and how does he go beyond these three qualities?

The blessed Lord said: Light, activity and delusion – when they are present, O Arjuna, he hates them not, nor does he long for them when they are absent.

He who, seated like one unconcerned, is not moved by the qualities, and who, knowing that the qualities are active, is self-centred and moves not (is a guṇātīta).

Once again we should remember we cannot sail in paper boats. Kṛṣṇa's approach is entirely scientific:

- (i) First, there is the theoretical exposition of a principle.
- (ii) Then there is the 'model' – the exemplar – the illustration of that principle.
- (iii) Then, practice – the model in real life, the application of the principle.

We can ennoble our lives only with the help of these three. Without the theory, we might misunderstand the example. We might interpret the theory in our own way, and reach nowhere near perfection. Without practical application we might make a business commodity of the principle and trade in the name of the example. It is only when all three are adopted in our own life, one following the other in the given order, that we reach the goal – and we shall, very soon.

The sage, yogi, saṁnyāsī or 'guṇātīta' (one who has gone beyond the guṇā) is not a sour-faced embittered personality who does not sleep (because it is tamas), does not talk or smile (because it is rajas), and does not study, discuss, or even enjoy a meal (because it may be sattva); such an attitude is tantamount to committing suicide. It is negatively associating the self with the guṇā. The wise seeker should be indifferent, but even then he is only 'like one unconcerned' – he is a witness and therefore in a position to direct the guṇā to a divine purpose, without foolishly and vainly trying to stifle their operation.

❖samaduḥkhasukhaḥ svasthaḥ samaloṣṭāśmakāñcanaḥ
 tulyapriyāpriyo dhīras tulyanindātmasaṁstutiḥ
 ❖mānāpamānayos tulyas tulyo mitrāripakṣayoḥ
 sarvārambhaparityāgī guṇātītaḥ sa ucyate

Alike in pleasure and pain, who dwells in the self, to whom a clod of earth, stone and gold are alike, to whom the dear and the unfriendly are alike, firm, the same in censure and praise,

The same in honour and dishonour, the same to friend and foe, abandoning all undertakings – he is said to have crossed the qualities.

These verses refer to the inner attitude of non-attachment and non-identification with the world, body and senses, not to any physical activity or inactivity. Ignorance of this great truth will inevitably lead the aspirant to *tāmasa* inertia, heedlessness, delusion and destruction. Cultivate the inner attitude; the activity will take care of itself.

‘To whom a clod of earth, stone and gold are alike’ has given rise to grotesque misinterpretations. People imagine that the sage sweeps away golden ornaments, treating them as dirt. Only madmen do so; sages are not mad – even if their conduct is regarded eccentric by our perverted intelligence! To them, a piece of gold, a stone and a clod of earth all have their own particular use and value – none greater than the other. Hence, they are all alike.

‘Abandoning all undertakings’ has also been taken to mean a life of automation or sheer laziness – a deliberate suppression of all urge to life and activity. However, the sage knows his body, vital sheath and even his mental frame are all products of matter together with the *guṇā* that govern all physical phenomena. He has crossed over them. It is only while one is crossing a stream that one tries to float along with the current or swim against it. Once on the other bank it matters not whether the current stops, flows or dries up.

One who has thus crossed the *guṇā* will similarly not bother himself about what matter (including his body and mind) does. However, it is clear that he will not do evil, for the evil fuel of desire is absent. Through him the divine works; it knows what to do with God’s creation (clay and gold) and in his creation (what activities to undertake). In such a sage, life flows in total harmony and bliss.

❖ māṁ ca yo 'vyabhicāreṇa bhaktiyogena sevate
 sa guṇān samatītyai 'tān brahmabhūyāya kalpate
 ❖ brahmaṇo hi pratiṣṭhā 'ham amṛtasyā 'vyayasya ca
 śāśvatasya ca dharmasya sukhasyai 'kāntikasya ca

And he who serves me with unswerving devotion, he, crossing beyond the qualities, is fit for becoming Brahman.

For I am the abode of Brahman, the immortal and the immutable, of everlasting dharma and of absolute bliss.

We should be careful and vigilant when we study the Bhagavad Gītā. Kṛṣṇa is discussing the sage who has crossed the guṇā – which suggests a great introvert and philosopher.

But he does not want us to forget that that is only one aspect of the yogi's life. Even such an evolved yogi does not cease to 'serve'. When one attains the state of nonattachment to the guṇā, the guṇā that constitute the body still continue to operate, while the detachment directs them along useful channels to do the divine will. Peace and desirelessness ensure that that service is rendered as Gods instrument to his omnipresence. But service itself is never given up; neither is single-hearted devotion to him. This synthesis of wisdom-action-devotion leads the aspirant to the absolute, Brahman.

Do not discuss Brahman. As our Master often said: "To define Brahman is to deny Brahman." Truth is indescribable. It is so indescribably simple that every description complicates it! But the vain human intellect cannot desist from attempting such description and definition. Kṛṣṇa tells us here: "All right, if you must say Brahman is absolute, infinite, existence-knowledge-bliss, supreme peace and eternal bliss, go on – but I am the abode of Brahman!"

If you are audacious enough to define Brahman, then he is beyond even that! Somewhere, at some time, the intellect has to stop in silence. When all this play of logic and reason, intellect and (let us say) intuition, has ceased, when there is supreme silence, what is, is he! But do not mistake that silence itself for him.

May he guide us to himself.



OM TAT SAT

iti śrīmad bhagavad gītāsūpaniṣatsu brahma vidyāyām
yogaśāstre śrī kṛṣṇarjuna saṁvāde
guṇā traya vibhāga yoga nāma caturdaśo 'dhyāyaḥ

Thus in the upaniṣad of the glorious Bhagavad Gītā,
the science of the eternal, the scripture of yoga,
the dialogue between śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna,
ends the fourteenth discourse entitled:

THE YOGA OF THE DIVISION OF THE THREE GUṆA

CHAPTER XV

THE YOGA OF THE SUPREME SPIRIT

XV

14th OCTOBER

1, 2

śrībhagavān uvāca
❖ ūrdhvamūlam adhaḥśākham aśvattham prāhur avyayam
chandāmsi yasya parṇāni yas taṁ veda sa vedavit
❖ adhaś co 'rdvam prasṭās tasya śākhā
guṇapravṛddhā viṣayapavālāḥ
adhaś ca mūlāny anusaṁtatāni
karmānubandhīni manuṣyaloke

The blessed Lord said: They (the wise) speak of the indestructible peepul tree having its root above and branches below, whose leaves are the metres or hymns; he who knows it is a knower of the vedā.

Below and above spread its branches, nourished by the guṇā; sense-objects are its buds; and below in the world of men stretch forth the roots, originating action.

A picturesque description of the cosmos. Kṛṣṇa had already described the peepul tree as one of his special manifestations. Those who have seen this tree will admit that it is truly majestic and grand. Its majesty and grandeur qualify it for this special mention. Its roots go deep into the soil. Hence Kṛṣṇa takes it up once again to illustrate the cosmos.

All trees have their roots below; but this tree, which is the image of the cosmos, has its roots above – not literally, but allegorically. Strange but true it is, that this material universe has its roots in the transcendent reality. Nothing exists but that. The substratum of what appears to be is that; and incidentally, even the power of illusion that makes the illusory appearance possible is in a way transcendent, too, for it cannot be properly explained. The cosmos-tree has its roots above.

To the yogī, this tree might mean the suṣūmnā-nāḍī (the psychic counterpart of the spinal cord), which has its root in the medulla oblongata (known as the 'Tree of Life' in French). The trunk extends downwards, and contains the various cakrā on whose petals are the various letters (varṇā) which are here described as the chandās (hymns composed of those letters). The nāḍī (subtle counterparts) branch out from this trunk with sense-objects as the buds.

This inverted tree has a root again below, which generates actions; the mūlāḍhāra and the other lower cakrā are thus referred to.

The tree and its root are of one substance – God.

❖na rūpam asye 'ha tatho 'palabhyate
 nā 'nto na cā 'dir na ca saṁpratiṣṭhā
 aśvattham enaṁ suvirūḍhamūlam
 asaṅgaśastreṇa dṛḍhena chittvā
 ❖tataḥ padam tat parimārgitavyam
 yasmin gatā na nivartanti bhūyaḥ
 tam eva cā 'dyaṁ puruṣaṁ prapadye
 yataḥ pravṛttiḥ prasṛtā purāṇī

Its form is not perceived here as such, neither its end nor its origin, nor its foundation nor resting place; having cut asunder this firmly rooted peepul tree with the strong axe of non-attachment,

Then that goal should be sought for, whither having gone none returns. I seek refuge in that primeval puruṣa whence streamed forth the ancient activity or energy.

The cosmic tree which has its root in the transcendental being, shares its characteristics. What is hidden in the root becomes manifest in the tree. It is all God and only God. Yet, whereas we are ready to admit that God is indescribable and imperceivably subtle, we boast that we **know** what this world is!

That is a mistake. We only see what we wish or fear to see. The world outside is a cloud with forms and figures projected on to it by our mind. The cloud is real, but the forms are not. The substratum of the world is real, but the appearance is a manifestation and projection on to it of our own likes and dislikes, fears and delusions. These phantoms are the offspring of attachment. Non-attachment removes them, enabling us to perceive the underlying reality.

Think of a banana. The skin adheres to it and seems to encase it. Peel it, and the fruit is left perfect. Such is the spirit of non-attachment in the Bhagavad Gītā. Do your duty but do not get attached. Neither must you let detachment make you neglect your duty. The banana is like the soul, not to be held and encased by its skin body. That must eventually be dropped, leaving the soul to attain mokṣa (liberation).

'I seek refuge', as said by Kṛṣṇa, is only initiation where he teaches Arjuna the formula: he who takes refuge in the supreme puruṣa returns not to this world. The mature seeker surrenders the idea that he is somehow distinct from the cosmos; the drop joins the ocean and becomes the divinity of the ocean. That oneness cannot be fragmented, it is indivisible.

❖nirmānamohā jitasanḡadoṣā
 adhyātmanityā vinivṛttakāmāḥ
 dvandvair vimuktāḥ sukhaduḥkhasanḡjñair
 gacchanty amūḡhāḥ padam avyayaḡ tat

Free from pride and delusion, victorious over the evil of attachment, dwelling constantly in the self, their desires having completely turned away, freed from the pairs of opposites known as pleasure and pain, the undeluded reach the eternal goal.

How much wisdom can be compressed into a couplet! How careful, too, are the words chosen by the Lord! Attachment is the root of all evil, perhaps the only evil! –not to be destroyed or annihilated, for that would be contrary to the law of nature, but definitely to be conquered.

However, attachment is deep in our very nature as love which is a synonym for oneness. Some attachment is all right as long as it is attachment to God. Our Master used to say: “Detach the mind from the world and attach it to the Lord.” Wean it from the gross impure attachments and let it incline to the subtle and pure attachments; from them, lead it to God. One may or may not necessarily accept the conventional meanings of ‘pure’ and ‘impure’, but as one matures, this distinction becomes clear in one’s own self. Purity is transparent and impurity is opaque, dense, dull and veiling.

Even so with desire. The gross impure desire must be weaned from sensual pleasures, refine itself until it is no longer ‘desire’ in the accepted sense and so incline towards God. Such desire is like fire which burns everything, but which burns itself out as soon as its task is over.

Pleasure and pain are in a way part of this world-process, *samsara*, like day and night. They may be **there** in the world, but one must free oneself from their sway. This is possible only if there is attachment to no object other than the self in which the yogi dwells constantly, witnessing the procession of the pairs of opposites without getting involved in them. The undeluded soul is thus well established in truth and reaches the great goal of self-realisation.

One should meditate daily upon this verse.

❖na tad bhāsayate sūryo na śasāṅko na pāvakaḥ
yad gatvā na nivartante tad dhāma paramaṁ mama

Neither doth the sun illumine there nor the moon, nor the fire; having gone thither, they return not: this is my supreme abode.

This is the favourite idea of the men-of-God. It is echoed in at least three principal upaniṣad. Our life is governed by the sun, the moon and fire. We see the world by their light. All our experiences are regulated and limited by them. Earlier, Kṛṣṇa even made it look as though they concern our death too!

Going and coming, time, space and materiality do not operate in the absolute. Where shall that which is everywhere come or go to? In it, everything is here and now. Matter is only the spirit perceived through material eyes.

Who can describe it? It is incomparable to even the grandest objects in the universe which are perceived as the sun, the moon and the fire. The Kāthopaniṣad reminds us that even these shine because of that self – ‘sight’ is possible not merely because the sun, the moon and the fire are there, but because ‘I see’! The sun is reflected in a mirror, and not the mirror in the sun. With what then does one perceive the omnipresence? This supreme state of consciousness can only be found in its own light. Therefore, an aspirant should constantly resort to this inner light which is independent of external sources.

And who can describe it? For one who goes there (an expression used only to help our comprehension, not to suggest that there is an actual ‘going’), returns not. This is not annihilation but fulfilment. The individual is not destroyed, but the limitation is removed. The part becomes one with the whole, is seen as the whole.

Some argue that, assuming all souls attain mokṣa. God creates a fresh universe, they are bound to return. The answer is: the same individual cannot come back! If you pour a bucket of water into the ocean then immediately plunge in another bucket and take out some water, **that** can never be the **same** water. The first bucketful has become one with the ocean; this is fresh ocean water. The whole argument is, however, fallacious; infinity minus infinity is infinity.

❖mamai 'vā 'mśo jīvaloke jīvabhūtaḥ sanātanaḥ
manaḥṣaṣṭhānī 'ndriyāṇi prakṛtisthāni karṣati

An eternal portion of myself, having become a living soul in the world of life, draws to itself the five senses with the mind for the sixth, abiding in nature.

The jīva or the living soul is the Lord himself. It has a mysterious dual relationship with the supreme being, even as a cell in our body has a dual relation with 'us'. If the cells do not constitute our body, what else is the body? Yet do we not refer to them as being different from the body?

In its essential nature, the jīva is none other than God; yet in a mysterious way (which we call ignorance on account of the fact that the soul thus ignores its identity with the supreme being) it deludes itself that it is an independent particle.

This individual independent existence, however, is in a way willed by God himself – 'I am one, may I become many', for the purpose of his experiencing his own bliss-nature. For this purpose the jīva or the living soul 'attracts to itself' the organs of perception and action, as well as their co-ordinating agent, the mind. Through these it objectifies its own natural bliss and tastes it. Yet such is the nature of ignorance that very soon the jīva is deluded into imagining that happiness is in the outside objects and not in its own nature, objectified for the purpose of a certain experience.

In the ultimate analysis even sensual pleasure experienced in the external world is nothing but the bliss of Brahman; but it is veiled by ignorance and sustains the jīva's delusion of duality and plurality.

Whereas the bliss of meditation is unexciting and peaceful, sensual pleasure is preceded and accompanied by restlessness and excitement, and followed by exhaustion. All pleasure which disturbs the mental equilibrium and the calmness of the spirit is to be avoided. It is this disturbance which is the only risk in sensual pleasures. The pleasure inherent in the sense objects is also derived from the absolute, whose perfect expression can only be experienced in perfect tranquillity. We do glimpse this state occasionally in our life; but the mind jumps in, 'enjoys' it, labels it as pleasure and craves for repetition. This craving turns delight into pleasure and so into pain.

❖śarīraṁ yad avāpnoti yac cā 'py utkrāmatī 'śvaraḥ
grhītvai 'tāni saṁyāti vāyur gandhān ivā 'śayāt

When the Lord (the individual soul) obtains a body and when he leaves it, he takes these and goes with them as the wind takes the scents from their seats (flowers, etc.).

The individual soul is, in biblical language, 'the image of God'. Now we should change the metaphor. It is the light of God reflected in buddhi, which is an extremely subtle form of matter.

The mirror is inert material; yet when it is held in such a way that it faces the sun and is able to reflect sunlight on to your face, it dazzles your eyes. It is this reflection that moves from body to body, from mirror to mirror – not the self which is God. Yet, does not the reflection in the mirror have the same brilliance as the sun itself? Hence, Kṛṣṇa refers here to the jīva itself as the Lord (Īśvara).

We do not deny the validity of genetic theories. We know that the foetus is the result of a fusion between the ovum and the sperm. But it is the jīva that brought them together and then, forming a nucleus with them, attracted more and more of other particles of matter, shaped the body of the baby, and finally 'entered into it' as the soul. Hence there are several theories regarding the time that the soul enters the foetus.

After birth, the process of cell-replacement carries on continuously, till the need arises for a wholesale abandonment of the worn-out body in exchange for a new one. When the old cloth has too many patches, the person finds a new one; when the 'surgeon', time, has performed too many operations on the body, nature steps in to help providing a new one. The body and its organs were only the gross instruments with which the jīva performed its work and had its experiences.

Though the tools are worn out, the workman is not; he leaves with all his talents intact. Taking them with him as air wafts fragrance, he enters a new body and begins to work with new tools.

❖śrotraṁ cakṣuḥ sparśanaṁ ca rasanāṁ ghrāṇam eva ca
 adhiṣṭāya manaś cā 'yaṁ viṣayān upasevate
 ❖utkrāmantāṁ sthitaṁ vā 'pi bhuñjānaṁ va guṇānvitaṁ
 vimūḍhā nā 'nupaśyanti paśyanti jñānacakṣuṣaḥ

Presiding over the ear, the eye, touch, taste and smell, as well as the mind,
 he enjoys the objects of the senses.

The deluded do not see him, he who departs, stays and enjoys; but they,
 who possess the eye of knowledge, behold him.

Such is the mysterious play of the divine, that the Lord himself, in and through infinite beings, enjoys the bliss of his own nature in his own nature. That was the object of creation, according to some schools of thought. To illustrate this they paint a graphic picture: there, on an ocean (of infinite existence), floats the little divine baby on a banyan leaf. It holds and sucks its big toe as if asking itself: "How sweet is my toe which my devotees kiss?"

The relation between this senses and the sense-pleasure is such that when the former taste the latter they forget the Lord and the purpose of creation, deluding themselves that objective enjoyment is the goal and that pleasure is independent of the self or God. The Kāṭhōpanisad explains why: the very nature of the senses is to flow out towards the objective world, though supreme bliss is in the self (which is all-pervading). When the senses thus flow out, the mind and intellect are externalised and consciousness moves away from the centre. That is when one is said to be deluded. He does not realise that behind all these activities is the Lord himself, and he sees the world as a playground of havoc, passion, fear and hopes.

However, the senses of the undeluded are avenues of enlightenment and to them the world looks very different. Since they possess the eye of knowledge, they perceive the Lord alone within themselves and realise that all experiences serve him and are derived from his own nature spread throughout the universe.

Some of the mystifying passages in the scriptures which seem to sanction worldly pleasures can be understood in their right perspective only if we bear this great truth in mind. But to understand rightly demands great purity of heart and penetrating intelligence.

❖yatanto yoginaś cai 'naṁ paśyanty ātmany avasthitam
yatanto 'py akṛtātmāno nai 'naṁ paśyanty acetasaḥ

The yogī striving (for perfection) behold him dwelling in the self; but, the unrefined and unintelligent, even though striving, see him not.

The outgoing tendency of the mind and the senses does not permit the ignorant man to turn his gaze within and behold the self. The Kathopanīśad describes the supreme effort of the rare hero who averts his gaze from the objects of the senses in order to behold the self and thus attain immortality.

This introversion is exceedingly important, as otherwise total ignorance makes one mistake a rope for a snake, and suffer; or perceive silver in mother-of-pearl, and enjoy a phantom! It is an uphill task, like taking a river to its own source on the hilltop. This is not aversion to (in the sense of hatred towards) anything or anybody here, but an intelligent recognition of the source of all bliss, which is the self.

Once this introversion is truly achieved, life assumes a different meaning altogether. The yogi begins to see that the same self dwells in all. 'Pleasure' loses its tantalising attraction for him and its power to titillate. Cravings cease, because what is outside can be found within. When the mind is purified by right living, right thinking, right meditation, service and so on, it becomes transparent and instantly abolishes the fictitious distinction between inside and the outside. The yogi seems to live in two worlds simultaneously, because to his enlightened vision, their boundaries vanish.

His is the extremely subtle middle path like razor's edge, which the gross vision of the unrefined unintelligent cannot behold. In him there is neither attraction nor repulsion, whereas in the deluded there is always either craving or disgust.

Kṛṣṇa's is the yoga of intelligence. No amount of idle striving or abstinence from activity will lead to an expansion of consciousness, but refinement of the intelligence and purity of heart lead to the realisation of the ātman (self).

❖yad ādityagataṁ tejo jagad bhāsayate 'khilam
 yac candramasi yac cā 'gnau tat tejo viddhi māmakaṁ

That light which, residing in the sun, illumines the whole world, that which is in the moon and in the fire – know that light to be mine.

The self-realised yogi is not a nose-gazer nor does he live a life confined to the cave, forest or monastery. God is the indwelling light, but he is also the light in the sun, the moon, the stars and the fire.

This and the following two verses establish an intimate relation between man and God. Man is filled with the light of God; he is surrounded by the light of God. Once the cataract of ignorance is removed, he shall see God everywhere – God and nothing but God.

Even so is it said in the Holy Bible: “And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light; and they shall reign for ever and ever”. (Revelations 22:4,5).

When it is said that God gives them light, it does not mean that the scientist's discoveries are untrue. The scriptural testimony only provides a clue to the ultimate mystery which science has still to approach. Whilst accepting the validity of the scientist's explanations of the principle of combustion in the sun, its reflection in the moon, and the clash of gasses that keeps the fire burning, the scripture goes one step further, suggesting who ordained the law that all these obey, who limits their powers so that they do not cause a universal holocaust. All wise men admit that there is some law and an intelligent administrator of that law. To that power, that cosmic intelligence, the scriptures give an indicative name – God and its equivalent in other languages.

Read with verse 6, this verse reminds us that in the cosmos, the sun and heavenly bodies; and in the individual, the mind and intellect, are like mirrors reflecting God's light. God is not the subject projecting an object, nor an object which can be seen by the subject. God is the all. No part of the all can become aware of the totality – only the all can be aware of itself.

❖gām āviśya ca bhūtāni dhārayāmy aham ojasā
 puṣṇāmi cau 'śadhīḥ sarvāḥ somo bhūtvā rasātmakaḥ
 ❖aham vaiśvānaro bhūtvā prāṇinām deham āśritaḥ
 prāṇāpānasamāyuktaḥ pacāmy annam caturvidham

Permeating the earth I support all beings by (my) energy; and having become the watery moon I nourish all herbs.

Having become the fire, Vaiśvānara, I abide in the body of living beings and, associated with the *prāṇa* and the *apāna*, digest the fourfold food.

'Soma' in the text has been variously interpreted, and in the context of the *vedā*, it has been taken to mean a kind of intoxicating drink. The sense in which it has been used here makes it clear that 'soma' is 'watery' energy or some kind of an 'essence' (*rasa*) which the moon bestows on the herbs.

These verses bring God nearer home, explaining the daily function of our body. Kṛṣṇa neither cancels the vitamin theory nor the herbalists' ecstatic belief in the miracle that herbs can work. He intensifies both! Mineral salts nourish plant life and plants nourish animals, but the power of nourishment is God's. Scientists have carefully analysed the assessed mineral salts and described their composition in terms of different molecules. Kṛṣṇa only expresses in another way the truth which scientists, in the glory of that intelligence which is the reflected light of God, have made clear. There can be but one answer to the questions: "Who organised the molecules?", "Who guided the scientists' intelligence?" – God.

Within the human body, as the gastric fire, it is his power again that digests all kinds of foods. A study of the process of digestion is an amazing indicator of the divine power that functions within our own body! It is good to cultivate the habit of feeling the presence of God in all these functions. It will promote the health of body, mind and soul.

It is also good to remember all the time that saying 'God' is not knowing him! When 'God' is given as the answer to our questions, the question is not answered, – the quest is intensified. The verbal answer is but a word. Truth eludes words.

❖sarvasya cā 'haṁ hr̥di saṁniviṣṭo
 mattaḥ smṛtir jñānam apohanam ca
 vedaiś ca sarvair aham eva vedyo
 vedāntakṛd vedavid eva cā 'haṁ

And, I am seated in the hearts of all; from me are memory, knowledge, as well as their absence. I am verily that which has to be known by all the vedā; I am indeed the author of the vedānta and the knower of the vedā am I.

Here is a clear-cut statement of the sublime truth that all is God. Memory is from God; knowledge is from God; their absence is also from God! Good is divine, and that which men call 'evil' is also divine (though God does not call it evil).

If we wish to realise that the classification of good and evil are illusory and that they both are in God and from him, we should at the same time be prepared to regard, with equal eye, pain and pleasure which are extensions of evil and good! To one who has transcended the latter pair, the former does not exist.

Śaiva siddhānta also declares that it is God who veils and it is he again who reveals. Why does he veil? In order that we may seek him, and then he unveils, in order that we may realise him. There is no further 'why'; this is the truth which has to be accepted.

It is this power to which the vedā offer their prayers. Its glory do they sing. 'Vedā' might refer to all branches of knowledge, sacred and secular, including modern science. All of them will ultimately lead us to a realisation of God's omnipresence. For, if we pursue with an incisive 'why', the acquisition of any knowledge, we shall ultimately end up confessing "I do not know." Only God knows why this unceasing and unquenchable thirst to know is there in the heart of man. Only he knows all knowledge (vedā) and the end of all knowledge (vedānta). When knowledge as subject-object relationship comes to an end, it shines in its own light as pure awareness (God) in which there is no distinction between the knower, knowledge and the object of knowledge.

Thus, from a look at the sun in verse 12, Kṛṣṇa has brought God-consciousness closer to our very self. In that process the object (the experience) and the subject (the experiencer) seem to merge into one. This is yoga.

❖dvāv imau puruṣau loke kṣaraś cā 'kṣara eva ca
kṣaraḥ sarvāṇi bhūtāni kūṭastho 'kṣara ucyate

Two puruṣa there are in this world, the perishable and the imperishable.
All beings are the perishable and the kūṭastha is called the imperishable.

'Kūṭastha' is the unchanging rock-like substratum of the individual personality, the unobvious.

The perishable puruṣa (the para prakṛti – cf VIII:5) is the living soul, 'Adam' after the fall from the Garden of Eden, the 'raindrop' that has disconnected itself from the cloud.

The imperishable puruṣa is the substratum of this second personality – not different from it in the main, yet with a subtle difference, like the raindrop in the process of formation. There is the potentiality of drop formation in the dark rain-bearing cloud; as the water is becoming effective as a drop, it is still one with the cloud. Just so is the imperishable puruṣa one with God, though the manifestation-potential is beginning to express itself. One, yet not exactly so!

A mysterious power called māyā rules this manifestation-potentiality state in the infinite being. Mysterious indeed, only to be likened to the atmospheric disturbance which makes subtle water vapour visible to the human eye as cloud. Kṛṣṇa calls māyā 'my power' in order to prevent us vainly arguing about it. The human being's focus is too puny to comprehend the total working of this power of māyā. In this limited vision, avidyā or ignorance, changes are observed. We can, perhaps, at any given moment, only focus on one 'drop' and therefore feel that it is different from another – thus one being assumes independence from the rest.

This fictitious distinction which is jīvahood (egoity), caused by avidyā, only fades at the dawn of that knowledge which enables us to 'understand' māyā. The vision becomes unconditioned and limitless and none of these changes are seen to be true. We realise that the self is, was, and will ever be one with the infinite.

❖uttamaḥ puruṣas tv anyah paramātmē 'ty udāhṛtaḥ
 yo lokatrayam āviśya bibharti avyaya īśvaraḥ
 ❖yasmāt kṣaram atīto 'ham akṣarād api co 'ttamaḥ
 ato 'smi loke vede ca prathitaḥ puruṣottamaḥ

But distinct is the supreme puruṣa called the highest self, the indestructible Lord who, pervading the three worlds, sustains them.

As I transcend the perishable and am even higher than the imperishable, I am declared as the highest puruṣa in the world and in the veda.

The following analogy is inadequate, as most analogies are, but will enable us to grasp vaguely the distinction between the perishable and the imperishable puruṣa mentioned in the previous verse, and the supreme puruṣa mentioned in this.

The 'drop in the cloud' is superior to the 'drop let loose'. The latter gets caught up in the process of saṁsāra or world-play, whereas the former can still escape that fate if the rain does not fall.

The ātmā is the purest 'creation' of God: Adam was 'whole' till Eve was shaped from his own bone. The jīva (Eve) is imperfect, the mother of Cain (meaning possession or mineness in Hebrew) and Abel (in Hebrew, vanity).

But even the 'drop in the cloud', and for that matter the dark cloud, too, is in perpetual danger of falling! Hence, that also is not the state of supreme felicity. There is a state higher than that – the state of being, untainted even by the possibility of becoming. That is the state of the supreme puruṣa. In the cloud analogy, it is comparable to the clear sky in which the least trace of a cloud is not visible; before the mysterious māyā exerts her influence to generate the 'white cloud' (the Īśvara-consciousness – the highest concept of a personal god).

God is the supreme puruṣa, and the name puruṣa is given only to show that prakṛti (his nature) is ever latent in him, just as water-vapour is latent in the clear sky.

God is the vital factor in all beings. Without him they have no life, no existence. That supreme self permeates every atom of existence, enabling us to live and function. Forget all comparison and look within to discover the three planes of the perishable, the imperishable and the transcendent substratum, and to discover the truth that they are not three but one.

❖yo mām evaṁ asaṁmūḍho jñāti puruṣottamaṁ
 sa sarvavid bhajati mām sarvabhāvena bhārata
 ❖iti guhyatamaṁ śāstram idam uktam mayā 'nagha
 etad buddhvā buddhimān syāt kṛtakṛtyaś ca bhārata

He who, undeluded, knows me thus as the highest puruṣa, he, knowing all, worships me with his whole being (sarvabhāvena), O Arjuna.

Thus, this most secret science has been taught by me, O sinless one; on knowing this, a man becomes wise, and all his duties are accomplished, O Arjuna.

He who knows the unobvious sustaining reality knows that God alone pervades all, and that he is beyond all limitations, beyond māyā (illusion) and avidyā (ignorance). God is the substratum of the jīva, that living soul and perishable person, as well as of the ātmā, the imperishable person or puruṣa.

However, God is in neither jīva nor ātmā, for though the waves are part of the ocean, the ocean is not part of the waves. Such knowledge cures delusion, making evident the unreality of distinction between the three which is born of ignorance; and that the loss of jīvahood is supreme gain – heralding the realisation that the substratum of the immortal ātman is the infinite being.

This infinite being is the all, the all-in-all. Bhakti yoga prescribes five attitudes which the devotee can have towards God. The attitudes of: peaceful contemplation, mother-child or child-parent; master-servant; friendship and lover-beloved.

Knowing that God is all, the devotee worships him in all the five bhāva (attitudes), 'sarvabhāvena'. He looks upon his parents or children, his master or servant, his friends, his beloved and the stranger as the manifestation of God, and he regards God as all these.

'Sarvabhāvena' is the commandment of the Holy Bible too: "Love thy God with all thy heart". In the heart of the devotee there is no room for finite, imperfect, selfish and sensuous love. He loves all; not the heterogeneous, but the homogeneous God-in-all.

If we begin with the obvious and examine the not-so-obvious sources of these obvious phenomena, then it possible for us to be free from self-created problems and eventually arrive at the grand discovery of the profound secret.



OM TAT SAT

iti śrīmad bhagavad gītāsūpaniṣatsu brahma vidyāyām
yogaśāstre śrī kṛṣṇarjuna saṁvāde
puruṣottama yogo nāma pañcadaśo 'dhyāyaḥ

Thus in the upaniṣad of the glorious Bhagavad Gītā,
the science of the eternal, the scripture of yoga,
the dialogue between śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna,
ends the fifteenth discourse entitled:

THE YOGA OF THE SUPREME SPIRIT

CHAPTER XVI

THE YOGA OF THE DIVISION BETWEEN THE DIVINE AND THE DEMONIAL

XVI

28th OCTOBER

1-3

śrībhagavān uvāca
❖ abhayaṁ sattvaśuddhir jñānayogavyavasthiḥ
dānaṁ damaś ca yajñaś ca svādhyāyas tapa ārjavan
❖ ahimsā satyam akrodhas tyāgaḥ śāntir apaisunam
dayā bhūteṣv aloluptvaṁ mārdaṁ hrīr acāpalaṁ
❖ tejaḥ kṣamā dhṛtiḥ śaucam adroho nā 'timānitā
bhavanti saṁpadaṁ daivīm abhijāasya bhārata

The blessed Lord said: Fearlessness, purity of heart, steadfastness in knowledge and yoga, alms giving, control of the senses, sacrifice, study of scriptures, austerity and straightforwardness,

Harmlessness, truth, absence of anger, renunciation, peacefulness, absence of crookedness, compassion towards beings, uncovetousness, gentleness, modesty, absence of fickleness,

Vigour, forgiveness, fortitude, purity, absence of hatred, absence of pride – these belong to the one born for a divine state, O Arjuna.

All these qualities belong to the daivī-prakṛti or divine nature. 'One born for a divine state' seems to imply a fatalistic slant or determinism. Either one is born good or wicked! To some extent perhaps this is true. Those who have attempted to alter their 'nature' would testify that they are carried away by the hidden vāsanā (tendencies) in spite of themselves. Yet, on the other hand, the born-good people formed their good tendencies by self-effort in a past birth; otherwise, if one's tendencies unalterably governed one's life, there could be no way out at all.

The Yoga Vāsistha gives us abundant hope. 'Our previous and present efforts, in case they are in contrary directions, are like two arms fighting against each other. The more powerful of the two always overcomes the other'. Again, 'One should, therefore, overcome one's unfavourable destiny by greater effort in the present, gnashing one's teeth!' The last phrase recognises the difficulty of the task, but the optimist treats difficulties as steps to achievement.

Our Master was very fond of these verses; he quoted them often. He recommended that we should systematically cultivate these virtues, selecting them one by one and deliberately tending them in ourselves.

❖dambho darpo 'bhimānaś ca krodhaḥ pārūṣyam eva ca
 ajñānaṁ cā 'bhijātasya pārtha saṁpadam āsurīm
 ❖daivī saṁpad vimokṣāya nibandhāyā 'surī matā
 mā śucaḥ saṁpadam daivīm abhijāto 'si pāṇḍava

Hypocrisy, arrogance and self-conceit, anger and also harshness and ignorance, belong to one who is born for a demoniacal state, O Arjuna.

The divine nature is deemed for liberation, and the demoniacal for bondage. Grieve not, O Arjuna, thou art born with divine qualities.

Kṛṣṇa is very clever. As our Master often reminded us: "Positive always overcomes negative". Instead of people worrying themselves over prohibitions, if they concentrated on positive injunctions, the world would be a better place and they themselves would move rapidly towards God.

In the whole of the Bhagavad Gītā there are so few verses dealing with the evil side of life that one would have wondered if Kṛṣṇa had forgotten all about it, had he not made mention of it here. After a full enumeration (and repetition) of the divine qualities, he now gives the essence of diabolical nature in one verse.

'Hypocrisy' is their chief quality, hence it is extremely difficult to recognise evil beings. Even other qualities like arrogance, self-conceit and anger, when veiled by hypocrisy, can create the illusion of virtues! They masquerade as self-respect, righteous indignation and dignified bearing. The harsh man pretends that he is a strict disciplinarian, constantly striving for 'your own betterment'. The ignorant fool lets the devil in him quote scripture. 'Knowledge of scriptures is not necessary, only personal realisation is' – a pious sentiment, but the illiterate fool who says so is not interested in personal realisation either!

How wonderful of Kṛṣṇa to reassure Arjuna (and through him, you and me) that we are born with divine qualities. But for them, Arjuna would not have accepted him as his guru; but for them, we would not have turned our attention to his teachings contained in the Bhagavad Gītā!

❖dvau bhūtasargau loka 'smin daiva āsura eva ca
daivo vistaraśaḥ prokta āsuram pārtha me śṛṇu

There are two types of beings in this world, the divine and the demoniacal; the divine has been described at length; hear from me, O Arjuna, of the demoniacal.

The expression is extremely well guarded! This created universe has two aspects. Both good and evil are found in it, for that is the meaning of creation. (One, alone, would be like painting a portrait in one colour on identically coloured paper.) Good and evil differ in their destinations. The divine path leads to liberation or God-realisation; the demoniacal path leads to bondage. Well, then, choose!

In spite of the warnings contained in our scriptures not to wrack the poor brain with transcendental questions like the origin of the world, of karma, or 'which came first – hen or egg', people do ask: "How did the first man commit sin?" The answer is simple: "God gave you intelligence and free-will – and **you** chose to taste the forbidden fruit! Why did you do it? Ask yourself!" Even in the biblical story, we read that God, having created Adam and Eve, expressly warned them not to taste the forbidden fruit; yet, the 'snake' (obviously created by God himself?) was able to tempt them. It was Adam's choice. There is no sense in arguing "why"; it is a statement of fact concerning an event in history! Never argue beyond a certain point! If you demand an explanation, the Indian philosopher answers: "It is because of avidyā" ("I've no idea" is phonetically similar) or ignorance. Wisdom and spiritual maturity consists in being alert, inwardly aware and watchful so that at every step and in every circumstance the right choice is made.

We have seen that the entire nature is made up of three guṇā (qualities), sattva, rajas and tamas. Sattva is, of course, good; and tamas evil. Rajas can be both good and evil: if it is based on sattva it is good, and if it based on tamas, it is evil. If we compare these three qualities to the three qualities of fire (light, heat and smoke), we realise that light is always good and smoke (which blinds us) is always bad and that heat can be either good or bad depending upon the use we make of it. Vice holds one down like a vise. Virtue liberates us.

❖ pravṛttiṁ ca nivṛttiṁ ca janā na vidur āsurāḥ
na śaucaṁ nā 'pi cā 'cāro na satyaṁ teṣu vidyate

The demoniacal know not what to do and what to refrain from; neither purity, nor right conduct, nor truth is found in them.

The basic characteristics of the devil's disciple are detailed in this and the following verses. Kṛṣṇa does not want to emphasise evil overmuch, and therefore gives briefly the qualities found in the evil ones.

Do you not detect a tone of sympathy rather than one of condemnation in this verse? 'They know not what to do' is an expression parallel to the famous words of lord Jesus.

Much of the evil in the world is born of ignorance, for very few people know what to do and what to refrain from. They are ignorant. The light of true knowledge has not been lit in them. I do not suggest that such knowledge will at once lift them into the kingdom of righteousness; but, with the exception of those who deliberately **choose** to be wicked, the vast majority of people who grope in the darkness of ignorance and whose ignorance confuses them as to their duty, making evil appear as 'necessary in the circumstances', will definitely grow spiritually if more and more people take upon themselves the duty of educating their brethren (especially the younger generation) in the art of right conduct. There has been grave and universal neglect in this regard, and hence the problems that face the world multiply daily. Consequently, the world is rolling towards catastrophe after catastrophe.

Is that not the sole purpose of the Bhagavad Gītā? To guide man aright in the daily battle of life, to direct him who stands at the cross-roads, to instruct him in right conduct and to reveal truth in his heart? The teaching is pure and the teaching is purifying. Thus, if every one who has understood this message undertakes to **educate** two more people, we shall all be blessed, and the future would certainly be bright. To 'educate' is to 'bring out' the truth which is present in the other man. Proselytisation destroys the faith, the vital spark in man. To reform is to give a new form to the old evil. Thus, we should educate, not reform or proselytise.

THE MONTH OF NOVEMBER

The month starts on a rather negative note! Evil is not absolute, but has a frightening ephemeral existence which it will not do to ignore. But it is also futile to waste our life lamenting over it. Kṛṣṇa gives it just the status it deserves – as a pointer to the wrong road, as a warning sign, as a beacon to guide the navigator.

Where does this evil exist? What is sin? How does one overcome sin? Does the Lord forgive us? Can we get the better of our fate? These questions have been discussed endlessly by both scholars and laymen.

One day I was explaining to a few students the law of karma, vis-à-vis the above problem and remarked: “If you do not want a seed you have sown to sprout, you must pull it out. For this purpose you will have to dig down to the same depth as originally, to get hold of the seed.” A member of the audience burst out laughing; that is exactly what she had done the previous day!

Rajas (activity) based on tamas (stupidity) is sin or evil. In order to cancel it we should resort to rajas based on sattva (purity). The intensity and the ‘depth’ should be at least the same in both cases. Should there be any difference, the latter should go deeper than the former.

Tapas or penance or austerity has always been resorted to for the purpose of absolution. What does tapas do? It burns (tapas means burning) the veil (evil misspelt), reveals the truth and corrects the error of perception. We had taken the unreal body, senses and the world to be the reality; and hence had fallen into the trap of evil. That misconception must be replaced by the right knowledge of God as the self and sole reality. Not by merely uttering a set formula like ‘aham brahmāsmi’ but by affirming God as the only reality through our thought, word and deed. To make sure that there is no self-deception, we deliberately mortify the body and the senses. It is often the self-deluding ego that rebels against this, advancing a convenient philosophy in excuse. (On the other hand, if repentance is done mechanically without burning the veil of ignorance, this very tapas may feed the ego!)

The ‘pain’ thus self-inflicted in wise austerity also cancels the external karma. The karma which demands ‘restoration of balance’ is thus faced (not evaded) and worked out willingly. It also removes the guilty conscience. Kṛṣṇa gives a new meaning to tapas: a simple, austere life and goodness. You will readily see how this positively destroys the veil of ignorance by denying the mind and senses the delusion-fattening food of self-indulging pleasure.

However, evil done to another is not entirely rooted out by any amount of self-punishment. The offended must forgive the offender. The Holy Bible makes this clear. There is an interesting incident in the life of lord Gauraṅga, which illustrates this. Though he actually took upon himself the sins of a villain, the latter could not gain peace of mind till those whom he had offended had forgiven him.

God-realisation or self-realisation is like an earthquake compared to our feeble attempts to pull out the seeds sown. It destroys all sins, all sinful tendencies and that root of all sins – ignorance of God.

True atonement (at-one-ment) is when the self is realised to be one with God, and all evil realised as dream and non-existent. Even an attempt to realise the self frees one from great fear, says the Lord; and sincere prayer to the Lord can earn for us his all-forgiving mercy. When does one know that his forgiveness has been earned? When evil thought does not even arise in the mind.

❖ asatyam apratiṣṭhaṁ te jagad āhur anīśvaram
 aparasparasambhūtaṁ kim anyat kāmahaitukaṁ
 ❖ etaṁ drṣṭim avaṣṭabhya naṣṭātmāno 'lpabuddhayaḥ
 prabhavanty ugrakarmāṇaḥ kṣayāya jagato 'hitāḥ

They (the diabolical ones) say: “This universe is ‘without truth’ without (moral) basis, without a God, brought about by mutual union, with lust for its cause; what else?”

Holding this view, these ruined souls of small intellect and fierce deeds come forth as the enemies of the world for its destruction.

Even the devil’s disciples have their own philosophy, for no one can live **without** philosophy, without an understanding, however crude, of the pattern of existence. There is just this difference, however: the ‘deva’ is one whose nature and hence whose philosophy is all light, in whom the light of self-knowledge shines brightly; while the ‘āśura’ is one ‘whose light is darkness’ – in the words of the Bible. That is what is meant by ‘āśura’ – he does not care to see. He blinds himself and revels in the darkness of ignorance. He is so thoroughly absorbed in the appearance, he does not care for the reality, for the truth.

‘Asatyam’, translated as ‘without truth’, is the opposite of ‘satyam’ and should mean ‘based on falsehood’. There are thousands in the world today who are convinced that ‘in this modern world, it is useless to be good,’ and that ‘one should move with the times, and nowadays untruth is the law.’ They are incorrigible because their conscience sanctions untruth.

They have existed at all times in the history of the world. In ancient times they were called the cārvakā or materialists, with an extremely simple philosophy: ‘Man is born of the sexes coming together, he exists to immortalise this act and dies when it is no longer possible. All life centres around sensual pleasure.’

It is not so much the philosophy, but its application that is dreadful. Since pleasure, not loving service, is the goal, each man grabs as much of it as possible. From whom? From his own neighbour! The āśura’s love of darkness does not even recognise a friend. He is ruthless, relentless and remorseless, and it is dangerous to associate with him! Pursuit of pleasure ruins both society and the pursuer who is part of it.

❖kāmam āśritya duṣpūraṁ daṁbhamānamadānvitāḥ
 mohād grhītvā 'sadgrāhān pravartante 'śucivratāḥ
 ❖cintām aparimeyāṁ ca pralayāntām upāśritāḥ
 kāmopabhogaparamā etāvad iti niścītāḥ
 ❖āśāpāśāśatair baddhāḥ kāmakrodhaparāyaṇāḥ
 ihante kāmabhogārtham anyāyenā 'rthasañcayān

Filled with insatiable desires, full of hypocrisy, pride and arrogance, holding evil ideas through delusion, they work with impure resolves.

Giving themselves over to immeasurable cares ending only with death, regarding gratification of lust as their highest aim and feeling sure that that is all,

Bound by a hundred ties of hope, given over to lust and anger, they strive to obtain by unlawful means hoards of wealth for sensual enjoyments.

They are the living exemplars of the antithesis of lord Buddha's 'Noble Eightfold Path'. The light within them is dark, their motives are impure, their ideas are delusion-ridden, their resolves are diabolical, and their thoughts and actions are governed only by lust for pleasure and power. Since 'falsehood' is their creed, they are not even true to their own self. This is the worst part of their personality make-up. With all their devilry, one should not be surprised if they assume an air of self-righteousness and quote the scriptures in their favour!

The twelfth chapter of the Bhāgavatam gives a graphic description of such people. By shouting aloud, they impress upon all that the untruth they utter, alone is truth. Their haughtiness frightens away the humble and prevents anyone from pointing out that such overweening pride is contrary to all scriptural teachings. Their arrogance grinds all opposition into submission.

But are they happy? No. Their cares are immeasurable and end only with 'pralaya' (translated as 'death', but it may also mean 'dissolution of the world'). They have no God to turn to for solace; money is their only God and hence they earn money by all means – mostly foul – and thus ensure that there is no hindrance in their pleasure-seeking Life. They seldom realise that such life itself is hell here and now.

- ❖ idam adya mayā labdham imaṁ prāpsyē manoratham
idam asti 'dam api me bhaviṣyati punar dhanam
- ❖ asau mayā hataḥ śatrur haniṣye cā 'parān api
īśvaro 'ham aham bhogī siddho 'ham balavān sukhī
- ❖ ādhyo 'bhijanavān asmi ko 'nyo 'sti sadṛśo mayā
yakṣye dāsyāmi modiṣya ity ajñānavimohitāḥ
- ❖ anekacittavibhrāntā mohajālasamāvṛtāḥ
prasaktāḥ kāmabhogeṣu patanti narake 'śucau

“This has been gained by me today; this desire I shall obtain; this is mine and this wealth also shall be mine in future.

“That enemy has been slain by me; and others also I shall slay. I am the Lord. I enjoy. I am perfect (siddha), powerful and happy.

“I am rich and born in a noble family. Who else is equal to me? I will sacrifice. I will give (charity). I will rejoice.” – thus deluded by ignorance,

Bewildered by many a fancy, entangled in the snare of delusion, addicted to the gratification of lust, they fall into a foul hell.

Kṛṣṇa even quotes their words – a rare honour not accorded to the pious devotee! – in order that we may not even mistakenly utter such words. Kṛṣṇa does not dwell too much on the dark side of human nature, nor shall we. But he has succinctly given the very essence of this side of nature, and it is good to realise that extreme vigilance is needed not to let the devil masquerade in holy garb.

How often do religious leaders in the world indulge in expressions like the above! My Master often said: “Spiritual pride is the worst enemy of the seeker after God.” The Zen masters emphasised that “The ordinary life is Tao (truth)”. A saintly sister-seeker in South Africa, after pursuing much-publicised holiness, has discovered: “In a strange way my life has become a very simple one – in the little things I see perfection and beauty and fulfilment.”

The spiritual path is regarded as the ‘razor’s edge’, not because it may cut one’s foot, but because it is the perceivably subtle middle path which cannot be seen by the naked eye. The holy ones tread this path of life with their inner eye, the insight, open. As long as this insight is allowed to function without distortion or diversion by the mind, so long holiness prevails. Holiness is as simple as that.

❖ ātmasambhāvitāḥ stabdhā dhanamānamadānvitāḥ
 yajante nāmayajñais te dambhenā 'vidhipūrvakam
 ❖ ahaṁkāraṁ balaṁ darpaṁ kāmaṁ krodhaṁ ca saṁśritāḥ
 mām ātmaparadeheṣu pradviṣanto 'bhyasūyakāḥ

Self-conceited, stubborn, filled with the pride and intoxication of wealth, they perform sacrifices in (or for) name out of ostentation, contrary to scriptural ordinances.

Given over to egoism, power, haughtiness, lust and anger, these malicious people hate me in their own bodies and those of others.

Three types of yajñā (sacrifices) are specially mentioned in the Bhagavad Gītā:

- (i) Jñāna yajña (dissemination of spiritual knowledge) which is dear to the Lord.
- (ii) Japa yajña (repetition of the divine name or mantra) which is the Lord's own special manifestation, and
- (iii) Nāma yajña which may mean either sacrifice merely in name, i.e. without the spirit or divine purpose behind it, or sacrifice for the sake of winning name and fame (publicity stunt).

The last is diabolical.

It is not the action itself that counts in the eyes of the Lord, but the spirit that motivates it. Hence, the sacrifice and the charity that these demons perform do not please him, for even these are geared to the destruction of others. Their charity is like the 'free gifts' and 'prizes' offered by rival firms as part of their sales promotion programmes, aimed at the destruction of others' business.

Elsewhere in the Gītā it has been said that even they who hate God (and thus think of him constantly) also reach him. The hatred of the demons does not amount to that. They 'hate me in their own bodies and those of others'. The first takes the form of a reluctance to turn within and live for even a short while a day with one's own self (they take a transistor radio to disturb the peace of the seaside or public park); the second implies exploitation and cruelty shown to others, without recognising that in them, too, there is the spark of God.

The description of the diabolical state comes to an end with these verses. May we never approach it in thought, word or deed!

❖tān ahaṁ dviṣataḥ krūrān saṁsāreṣu narādhamān
 kṣipāmy ajasram aśubhān āsurīṣv eva yoniṣu
 ❖āsurīm yonim āpannā mūḍhā janmani-janmani
 mām aprāpyai 'va kaunteya tato yānty adhamām gatim

These cruel haters, worst among men in the world, I hurl these evil-doers into the wombs of demons only.

Entering into demoniacal wombs and deluded, birth after birth, not attaining me, they thus fall, O Arjuna, into a condition still lower than that.

Even the wicked ones have a human garb – let us not forget that. But their inmost personality (the 'bhāva') is that of a demon. Hence, they deserve (and desire?) only birth as demons. There is no injustice in this. Naturally, therefore, our next birth will be in accordance with the 'bhāva' (innermost nature) of our being.

The 'wombs of demons' may very well mean 'houses of power and affluence'. The answer to the oft-asked question "Why do wicked men prosper?" is "So that they may commit more crimes and descend into the lowest depths sooner – and so that eventually they may rise from there sooner, too, and be redeemed." Injustice is man's invention; God is just.

"Cannot God avoid all this and directly redeem the sinner?" asks a friend. Yes, of course he can, as the exceptional cases in our legends prove, but having bestowed on man intelligence and free-will, God would rather let the soul lovingly, knowingly and deliberately choose to love him, even after some amount of painful wandering in lower births.

'A condition still lower than that' is what is popularly called 'hell'. This is not outside God's creation, but inside it. It is a state of being which is 'farthest from light', a plane of existence farthest from the divine. Such hell may be within the heart of man, in the darkest corners of a guilty conscience, in the vicious dens of modern living or in a far distant planet or star.

'Farthest' does not necessarily imply spatial distance; a person standing close to light but facing away from with blindfolded eyes, is farthest from that light!

Hell may exist in all these forms; one need not necessarily cancel the other!

❖trividhaṁ narakasye 'daṁ dvāraṁ nāśanam ātmanaḥ
 kāmaḥ krodhas tathā lobhas tasmād etat trayam tyajet
 ❖etair vimuktaḥ kaunteya tamodvārais tribhir naraḥ
 ācaraty ātmanaḥ śreyas tato yāti parām gatim

Triple is the gate of this hell, destructive of the self – lust, anger and greed;
 therefore one should abandon these three.

A man who is liberated from these three gates to darkness, O Arjuna,
 practises what is good for him and thus goes to the supreme goal.

The expression used in the first verse is 'hell' while that used in the second verse is 'gate to darkness'. The significance of the synonym is clear. Hell is a state of ignorance: ignorance of the meaning and purpose of human birth, ignorance of the spirit encased in the physical body, ignorance of man's place and his duty in society.

These two verses do not exclude the idea of there being a heaven and hell in outer space, but just as feasible is the attitude that, since in our materialistic times spiritual ignorance has enormously increased the number of sinners, the great cities – those creations of materialism – are virtually our hells; and our heavens, so rare and few, are those places of retreat such as my Master's monastery in the Himālayā. The darkness of city life is the darkness of spiritual ignorance; and the contented harmony of such withdrawn groups of people who are consciously practising the rules of the spirit, heavenly bliss.

From our position on this earth, there are four gates leading out. Three of them open out to hell. They are: lust (all sorts of desires), anger (hatred) and greed. The ignorance-blinded man goes out through one or other of these gates and arrives in hell where he suffers self-destruction. Has he not destroyed a precious opportunity to attain self-realisation?

These three gates are open wider than the fourth which the ignorant man does not perceive at all. This gate leads to the heaven of redemption and is the gateway of goodness. In order to pass through this gate one should carefully lead a good life, willing to sacrifice temporary pleasure in favour of eternal bliss.

- ❖ yaḥ śāstravidhim utsrjya vartate kāmakārataḥ
 na sa siddhim avāpnoti na sukhaṁ na parāṁ gatim
 ❖ tasmāc chāstraṁ pramāṇaṁ te kāryākāryavyavasthitau
 jñātvā śāstravidhānoktaṁ karma kartum ihā 'rhasi

He who acts under the impulse of desire, having cast aside the ordinances of the scriptures, attains not perfection nor happiness nor the supreme goal.

Therefore, let the scriptures be the authority in determining what ought to be done and what ought not to be done. Having known what is said in the ordinance of the scriptures, thou shouldst act here in this world.

Nārada in his Bhakti Sutrā declares that saints (the supreme devotees of the Lord) invest scripture with authority. Scripture itself has the sage for its author, the sage for its model and the sage as its goal. It is, therefore, reliable and serves not only as an indicator of the 'supreme goal', but as the only tangible trail (barring its living embodiment, the guru) of the intangible and subtle middle path. By telling us what to do and what not to do, the scripture simplifies the greatest problem, indirectly suggesting the solution; and by turning our disciplined gaze inwards, helps us rediscover the middle path ourselves. If the scripture itself creates problems, that is what it is meant to do; the solution should ultimately come from within. The navigator depends upon the charts; but the charts will not steer for him! In the sea of life, steering is trickier than in the field of navigation.

The primary object of the scripture is to halt the waywardness of the mind and to curb the egoistic will and its determination to execute its diabolical intentions. To follow the scripture is freedom from slavery to the dictates of one's own ego – the worst of all slave drivers and tyrants. However, blind obedience will defeat the scripture's purpose; one should not cease to exercise one's own intelligence.

As the great master Shankaracharya has stated: the scripture is of no use to the enlightened one who is already wise, nor to the fool who is not going to change. Kṛṣṇa asks those in between to 'know what is said' in the scripture, whatever it may be, and then act. Neither the ego, nor the scripture, nor an external being is your authority; only this 'knowledge' is your authority. The real seeker after truth will find the same message in the Bible, the Bhagavad Gītā or any other scripture.



OM TAT SAT

iti śrīmad bhagavad gītāsūpaniṣatsu brahma vidyāyām
yogaśāstre śrī kṛṣṇarjuna saṁvāde
daivāsura saṁpad vibhāga yogo nāma caturdaśo 'dhyāyaḥ

Thus in the upaniṣad of the glorious Bhagavad Gītā,
the science of the eternal, the scripture of yoga,
the dialogue between śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna,
ends the sixteenth discourse entitled:

THE YOGA OF THE DIVISION BETWEEN
THE DIVINE AND THE DEMONIAL

CHAPTER XVII

THE YOGA OF THE DIVISION OF THREEFOLD FAITH

XVII

8th NOVEMBER

1

arjuna uvāca
❖ ye śāstravidhim utsrjya yajante śraddhayā 'nvitāḥ
teśāṁ niṣṭhā tu kā kṛṣṇa sattvam āho rajas tamaḥ

Arjuna said: Those who, setting aside the ordinances of the scriptures, perform sacrifice with faith, what is their condition, O Kṛṣṇa? Is it sattva, rajas or tamas?

The Indian philosopher does not encourage evil but he does recognise its inevitable presence in society. He aims at a perfect society, but realises that this itself means taking note of the existing imperfections. He is a realistic idealist. He is like the wise schoolmaster who wants his students to pass the examination with distinction, but does not expect them to be brilliant on the day of their admission to the school; and is patient enough to correct their errors during their school career.

To adhere to the injunctions of a scripture is, of course, the simple, ideal course. However, there are those who do not; and whatever be the reason, not all of them are diabolical in their outlook on life. The revisions and editions of a scripture generate suspicion in the heart of some. The primitiveness of a scripture shocks others. A third group may well ask: "When we have the open book of life in front of us, why need we waste our time on other scriptures?" Still another group may be illiterate and hence cannot study a scripture and may, at the same time, not be able to enjoy the privilege of hearing the scripture from someone else, particularly someone who inspires their confidence.

Life teaches you, if you have faith. Faith is most important. Your own inner equipment will fit you into one or other of the three qualities of nature. Sattva-based activity will increase sattva; tamas-based activity will intensify darkness. The former, by bestowing peace and happiness, will confirm the faith into conviction; the latter, by bringing restlessness and misery in its train, will be detected by the inner faith as the path to be abandoned – but only if there is genuine faith. This faith is not a religious cult or a doctrine or a dogma. It is light in the midst of darkness which leads you from falsehood to truth.

Even the most unorthodox are not barred from salvation!

śrībhagavān uvāca
 ❖trividhā bhavati śraddhā dehinām sā svabhāvajā
 sāttvikī rājasī cai 'va tāmāsī ce 'ti tām śṛṇu
 ❖satvānurūpā sarvasya śraddhā bhavati bhārata
 śraddhāmayo 'yaṁ puruṣo yo yacchraddhaḥ sa eva saḥ

The blessed Lord said: Threefold is the faith of the embodied, which is inherent in their nature – the sāttvika (pure), the rājasa (passionate) and the tāmāsa (dark). Do thou hear of it.

The faith of each is in accordance with his nature, O Arjuna. The man consists of his faith; as a man's faith is, so is he.

Faith exists in everyone in three stages: belief, faith and conviction. You believe in your neighbour's words; you have faith in what the guru says; but you are convinced of your own personal experience. Of these, belief is the weakest, conviction the strongest, but faith exists in the hearts of all. It is faith that forms the character of a person. If the person lacks character, it is not so much because his faith is weak, but because he has faith in his weakness!

One's own deeds of past births endow one with the type of faith that is inherent, innate to one's nature. The universal human weakness of self-justification might blur one's vision and lead to self-over-estimation; but the cautious man is easily able to detect the hidden springs of his character and determine which quality of nature is predominant in him.

This, like the colour of one's skin or eyes, is not a fault or disqualification; that is the most important thing to remember. There is no 'normal' person in this world; and, of course, each man is 'normal' to his own nature!

The psychologist's 'sword' of 'abnormality' has ruined the life of many – stifling talents and compelling the psychologist-disapproved characteristics to commit suicide. Abnormality rarely exists in nature, but abounds in the psychiatrist's clinic, created and confirmed by him. Self-understanding will promote self-culture and self-realisation. One need not fit into another's jacket, but one must be true to one's own self and grow in the image of God – that which one essentially is. Jealousy, envy and imitation are a waste of time and lead to psychological suicide.

❖yajante sāttvikā devān yakṣarakṣāṁsi rājasāḥ
pretān bhūtagaṇaṁś cā 'nye yajante tāmasā janāḥ

The sāttvika or the pure men worship the gods; the rājasā or the passionate worship the yaksā and the rakṣasā; the others (the tāmasā or the deluded people) worship the ghosts and the hosts of the nature-spirits.

We should not commit the grievous error here of considering that the tāmasā people deliberately choose to worship ghosts! Not at all. That is their idea of God.

Even the 'gods' are the reflections of different aspects of the supreme being in the medium of māyā and therefore not really real. Consequently, they are classifiable into sāttvika, rājasā and tāmasā. The good or the 'benevolent' gods are sāttvika; wrathful and emotional gods are rājasā; and the semi-divine beings of malevolent nature are tāmasā. They are not essentially different from him, the supreme being; for, let us not forget for a single moment that naught exists but he. Lord Kṛṣṇa himself has pointed out that even they who worship these other gods worship him only, though the wrong way. They are the light of the divine looked at through different filters.

The word 'worship' is important here. No one worships any but God. The aspect of God 'visible' to the individual is that aspect which he is capable of perceiving. This capability is determined by his innate nature or the quality which is predominant in him.

A clear understanding of this doctrine enables us to grow. The child does not grow into an adult merely by throwing the doll away. The subtle inner transformation (growth) continues steadily. Swami Sivananda used to say very often: "I have sown the seed, it will germinate in its own time. Even if the man does whatever he likes, it will work." Hence, Kṛṣṇa warns us: "Do not disturb anyone's faith, but help him grow inwardly."

At each stage, it is God who is worshipped and who accepts that worship if it is offered in full faith.

❖ aśāstravihitam ghoram tapyante ye tapo janāḥ
 dambhāhamkārasamyuktāḥ kāmārāgalānvitāḥ
 ❖ karṣayantaḥ śarīrastham bhūtagrāmam acetasaḥ
 mām cai 'vā 'ntaḥśarīrastham tām viddhy āsuraniścayān

Those men who practise terrific austerities not enjoined by the scriptures,
 given to hypocrisy and egoism, impelled by the force of lust and
 attachment,

Senseless, torturing all the elements in the body and me also who dwells in
 the body – know thou these to be of demoniacal resolves.

These two verses properly belong to the previous chapter! They contain enough food for
 a world of thought. Zimmer, in his book on 'The Philosophies of India', feels that "The
 practice of Tapas belongs to the pre-Aryan, non-Vedic heritage of archaic Indian
 asceticism." When you bear in mind that Kṛṣṇa (the dark one) is often regarded as of
 non-Aryan stock, the puzzle is even more puzzling. Zimmer rightly claims that the Gītā
 represents the fusion of all the then-existing cultures and religious faiths – the scripture
 for the next age.

Spectacular asceticism is not unknown in other parts of the world. When emperor
 Constantine recognised Christianity, some of the 'faithful', fearing the evaporation of the
 true Christian spirit in its exposure to political heat, 'renounced' the world and lived an
 extremely austere life in deserts and forests. St. Anthony was one of them; and even
 when he eventually came out to preach, he preached extreme asceticism.

It has been said: 'With some of these men it is obvious that ascetic discipline had
 become perverted into an unpleasant form of exhibitionism.' And this is true of their kin
 in other religions, too. In Hindu mythology, demons are often described as great
 tapasvin (men of austerity)!

Such ascetic practices as standing in freezing water or sitting on burning sands are
 against nature. As Kṛṣṇa says here, they 'torture the body and me also who dwells in the
 body.' Instead of purifying the self, they strengthen the ego and are therefore a block to
 insight – the key to God-realisation.

Asceticism on the one hand and sense-indulgence on the other are to be avoided; the
 middle path is the Gītā's.

- ❖ āhāras tv api sarvasya trividho bhavati priyaḥ
yajñas tapas tathā dānaṁ teṣāṁ bhedaṁ imaṁ śṛṇu
- ❖ āyuhṣattvabalārogyasukhaprītivardhanāḥ
rasyāḥ snigdhaḥ sthīrā hṛdyā āhārāḥ sātत्वikapriyāḥ
- ❖ kaṭvaṁlalavaṇātyuṣṇatīkṣṇarūkṣavidāhināḥ
āhārā rājasasye 'ṣṭā duḥkhaśokāmayapradāḥ
- ❖ yātayāmaṁ gatarasaṁ pūti paryuṣitaṁ ca yat
ucciṣṭam api cā 'medhyaṁ bhojanaṁ tāmasapriyaṁ

The food also which is dear to each is threefold, as also sacrifice, austerity and almsgiving. Hear thou the distinction of these.

The foods which increase life, purity, strength, health, joy and cheerfulness, which are savoury and oleaginous, substantial and agreeable, are dear to the sātत्वika people.

The foods that are bitter, sour, saline, excessively hot, pungent, dry and burning, are liked by the rājasā and are productive of pain, grief and disease.

That which is stale, tasteless, putrid, rotten and impure refuse, is the food liked by the tāmasā.

The classification of food is clear enough to need no comment.

There are two important points in these four verses, which should not go unnoticed. The first is: Kṛṣṇa mentions that certain foods 'increase life' – which makes one wonder by what standard the life-span is fixed. Kṛṣṇa seems to have forestalled the modern biologist by recognising the 'biological age' and by formulating rules that will decelerate the speed with which death overtakes the living organism. This is the most effective answer to anyone who thinks we are fatalists.

The second is the assertion that only the tāmasā or dull-witted, stupid people will like 'stale' food (literally 'food cooked over three hours previously'). The refrigerator does the mischief here. While it arrests decay, it is unable to preserve the life-giving freshness of even fruits. It is worse with flesh (not that we encourage flesh eating!) which develops toxic qualities. Furthermore it prevents charity! While the ancient villager distributed the surplus to people and animals, the modern housewife preserves it in the refrigerator.

Kṛṣṇa does not condemn any, but he merely points out who likes what! It is for you to choose. If you choose the tāmasa, you are at liberty to; but know where it leads you.

- ❖aphalākāṅkṣibhir yajño vidhidrṣto ya ijjate
yaṣṭavyam eve 'ti manaḥ samādhāya sa sāttvikaḥ
- ❖abhisamdhāya tu phalaṁ dambhārtham api cai 'va yat
ijyate bhārataśreṣṭha taṁ yajñāṁ viddhi rājasam
- ❖vidhihīnam arṣṭānnam mantrahīnam adakṣiṇam
sraddhāviraḥitam yajñam tāmasam paricakṣate

That sacrifice which is offered by men without desire for reward, as enjoined by the scripture, with a firm faith that to do so is a duty, is sāttvika or pure.

The sacrifice which is offered, O Arjuna, seeking a reward and for ostentation, know thou that to be a rājasa yajña.

They declare that sacrifice to be tāmasa which is contrary to the ordinances of the scriptures, in which no food is distributed, which is devoid of mantra and gifts, and which is devoid of faith.

This covers all forms of rituals and worships and could eventually be extended to embrace all departments of life itself.

It is easy to understand who performs the sāttvika and the rājasa types of sacrifices, and why. But it is difficult to understand the true significance of the tāmasa type. If I had not witnessed them, I would have refused to believe such a thing possible!

The ritual lacks scriptural sanction. No one concerned with its performance knows any mantra. The whole thing is a big farce and the carnival spirit prevails; and hence no one even thinks of charity (gifts of food, etc.), which might at least provide a relieving feature. On top of it all, the performer and those concerned have not the least faith in the ritual. Result: all sorts of sacrilegious words and deeds in the name of God and dharma. If all this had been done for the sake of earning name and fame, it would at best become rājasa. But no. It is done mechanically, prompted by a nebulous idea: "My grandfather used to do something like this."

This carcass of a ritual is without justification for its existence. We should have the courage to revive the spirit of it, if at all possible, or bury it, replacing it by more meaningful rites.

Rituals have great spiritual value. They can effect a spiritual revolution within, if correctly performed.

❖devadvijaguruprājñapūjanam śaucam ārjavam
brahmacaryam ahimsā ca śarīram tapa ucyate

Worship of the gods, the twice-born, the teachers and the wise, purity, straightforwardness, celibacy and non-injury are called the austerities of the body.

Tapas is 'heat, burning fire'. This fire has three functions symbolised in the three aspects of śakti (God as mother): Durga, Laksmī and Sarasvatī. The 'destructive' Durga burns impurities; the benign Laksmī purifies; and Sarasvatī, the goddess of wisdom, illumines. This classification is no gradation of importance! One is as important as the other. If illumination is regarded as the most important, it should be remembered that it can come only after the destruction of the baser nature – which is, therefore, more important!

The practices mentioned here will effect this threefold miracle in the physical part of our being.

'Worship of the twice-born' might include those who are 'born again' in God, those who are God's devotees and saints, and need not necessarily be taken to refer to the higher castes. In India, even when the caste system prevailed, there were many 'low-caste' saints who were adored by people of higher castes!

When all our talents and faculties are Godward directed, when they are restrained from wandering along the pleasure-grooves of sense-enjoyments, the threefold inner transformation is effected. It should be remembered that while it is essential that the senses (the external physical organism) should be controlled, it is useless to waste one's inner powers foolishly suppressing their natural urges, such as hunger. The impulse to suppress any natural urge is often a very strong ego. Once again, the invisibly subtle middle path must be clearly seen, by the grace of God, and carefully trodden. The only aids in this spiritual march to the goal are constant vigilance, faith and sincerity. Our Master always stressed the fact that if we take care of the positive side (e.g. worship of the gods), the negative aspects (lust, anger) will die a natural death. Otherwise, vain is the struggle to eradicate evil.

The middle path cannot be seen physically or automatically. 'Constant vigilance' (in the words of my Master) is needed, and that **itself** is the path, the march and the goal.

❖ anudvegakaram vākyaṁ satyaṁ priyahitaṁ ca yat
svādhyāyābhyasanam cai 'va vānmayam tapa ucyate

Speech which causes no excitement, truthful, pleasant and beneficial, the practice of the study of the vedā, are called the austerity of speech.

Have you seen the mild and watery cucumber igniting, by its root, the grass hidden in rags? I have! There sits the cucumber, smooth tongued, smooth skinned, hand-picking his extra polite words to fulfil a double purpose: on the one hand to gain admiration for his 'saintliness' from the easily beguiled, on the other to inflame the heart of the person who sees through him. The picture he thus achieves is of a saintly man confronted by a vicious creature. But the Lord, seated in the hearts of both, knows that if the 'saint's' provocation is subtle, it is infallibly powerful and hence he **shares** the guilt with the roused. It is not that the other man is free from guilt! Fewer of such hypocrites would much enhance the peace of the world. If your speech is provocative, you share the guilt of the provoked.

The ideal of truth has been debated ad infinitum. It has been pointed out that tradition (sometimes backed by scriptural (?) authority) condones untruth in certain special circumstances. It has also been argued that if we soften truth to make it pleasant, we shall ruin discipline and promote villainy. No one expects us to be metamorphosed into saints overnight! Hence, here and there in 'scriptures', especially the legends, we find examples of half-truths. Life is not composed of ideals any more than a house is made of only the roof; but it is highly important to recognise what is not right, even if we yield to it, rather than elevate it to absolute rightness because of the circumstances.

Only he who has even tried to practise the austerity of speech can realise the burning, purifying and illuminating power it has. When the lips close upon an unpleasant truth or a pleasant untruth, the switch is on and the fire of speech austerity consumes baser instincts; it can even be physically felt in the forehead!

❖manahprasādaḥ saumyatvaṁ maunam ātmavinigrahaḥ
bhāvasaṁśuddhir ity etat tapo mānasam ucyate

Serenity of mind, good-heartedness, silence, self-control, purity of nature
– this is called mental austerity.

With the passage of time and loss of practice, concepts change and words lose their meaning. Who can explain what serenity (prasāda) means? This word ‘prasād’ has been used several times in the Gītā, but in common parlance it refers to fruits and sweetmeats distributed after worship in temples. Who can fathom the depth of symbolism of the ‘prasād’? The sweetmeat given to us is only an external symbol of the sweetness of disposition that God’s grace bestows upon the devotee’s mind. ‘Serenity’ is used for want of an accurate word. It is not the gravity of a corpse, nor the sour-faced dryness of a pessimist, nor even the unsmiling, worried look of the ascetic who expects the volcano of suppressed emotions to erupt any moment. Serenity is the radiant, glorious though unexcited joy that glows on the face from the presence of God within. It is difficult to define or to describe, but easily recognisable when seen.

Good-heartedness is not to be mistaken for mere freedom from blood pressure and palpitation. Kṛṣṇa, you have caught us unawares – the heart cannot be good unless you and you alone reign supreme there! The godless ‘good’ heart is a hypocrite’s haven, the devil’s paradise. When God is enthroned in it, goodwill prevails; incidentally ‘goodwill’ on earth is only God’s will flowing freely through a pure, egoless and divine heart. The ego’s goodwill is what one pays heavily for in business.

Silence and self-control are disciplines of the mind. This verse is full of riddles. We usually associate silence with speech – the absence of speech. Real silence, however, is a desire-free, disturbance-free, peaceful mind. When there is peace of mind, the self is seen, and all ignorance-born, self-imposed limitations come to light and therefore disintegrate. A mind that is thus ever peaceful, ever alert is itself meditation.

Practise these and the ego will go.

- ❖ śraddhayā parayā taptam tapas tat trividham naraiḥ
aphalākāṅkṣibhir yuktaih sāttvikam paricakṣate
- ❖ satkāramānapūjārtham tapo dambhena cai 'va yat
kriyate tad iha proktam rājasam calam adhruvam
- ❖ mūdhagrāheṇā 'tmano yat pīḍayā kriyate tapaḥ
parasyo 'tsādanārtham vā tat tāmāsam udāhṛtam

This threefold austerity, practised by steadfast men with the utmost faith, desiring no reward, they call sāttvika.

The austerity which is practised with the object of gaining good reception, honour and worship, and with hypocrisy, is here said to be rājasa, unstable and transitory.

That austerity which is practised out of a foolish notion, with self-torture, or for the purpose of destroying another, is declared to be tāmāsa.

It is strange that even the three types of austerity (of body, speech and mind) can be practised in a rājasa or tāmāsa way! – though the words ‘This threefold austerity’ may apply only to the first verse and the other two may allude to other forms of austerity – in which case the meaning is abundantly clear and simple.

The most noble deeds can be performed hypocritically, but the effect will be the very opposite of what is desired. There is, however, a saving feature in such hypocritical good work and austerity – they are ‘unstable and transitory’. Hypocrisy has been unequivocally condemned in all our scriptures, but it has always existed. Hypocrites have their little day! It is true that their magic spell ends soon, but not soon enough to minimise the havoc caused. The genius of the hypocrite uses a noble garb and sometimes it is impossible to detect him before he has achieved his purpose, though this is always a short-lived one. Let us be thankful for small mercies!

The third category is an allusion to the demoniacal type of austerity. It is difficult to see how it can satisfy the standards of the austerity of mind mentioned in verse 16. There is, however, no limit to the perversions of the tāmāsa or deluded mind which can always interpret scriptures in its own way!

- ❖ dātavyam iti yad dānaṁ dīyate 'nupakāriṇe
deśe kāle ca pātre ca tad dānaṁ sātṭvikaṁ smṛtaṁ
- ❖ yat tu pratyupakārārthaṁ phalam uddīśya vā punaḥ
dīyate ca parikliṣṭaṁ tad dānaṁ rājasam smṛtaṁ
- ❖ adeśakāle yad dānam apātrebhyaś ca dīyate
asatkṛtaṁ avajñātaṁ tat tāmasam udāhṛtaṁ

That gift which is given to one who does nothing in return, knowing it to be a duty to give in a fit (proper) place and time to a worthy person, that gift is held to be sātṭvika.

And, that gift which is given with a view to receiving something in return, or looking for a reward, or reluctantly, is held to be rājasa.

The gift that is given at a wrong place and time, to unworthy persons, without respect or with insult is declared to be tāmasa.

The upaniṣad command us to give, to give with respect and love, and to give in plenty. That is the spirit. Our Master always gave and encouraged even indiscriminate giving. Giving is good; and if the gift is given with a good heart, even a vicious man's heart will be touched, and in due course, such a deed may have the effect that one might plan by withholding the gift – the reformation of the wicked man ('unworthy persons'). His conscience awakened not so much by our denying help as by our giving freely and making him feel, "Here is one who trusts me and gives, though I am cheating him; I should ensure that I deserve it." This transformation is not achieved in a day, however.

There are others who are always complaining that they do not find a person worthy of helping or giving to. They will never find one! Does God give us food only because we deserve it? Does the earth produce food only be eaten by the deserving? Which one of us truly deserves all the blessings one enjoys? Moreover, what is ours in this world? We only give away in charity what belongs to the Lord himself present in the other man! Did we bring any wealth with us when we were born, or shall we take anything with us when we die?

Well, if you wish to do charity **only** to the deserving person, then keep that money and do not use it, or go and find the deserving person. Do not use it for yourself, but give it. You will immediately find there are many deserving persons in this world!

❖aum̐ tat sad iti nirdeśo brahmaṇas trividhaḥ smṛtaḥ
brāhmaṇās tena vedās ca yajñās ca vihitāḥ purā

‘Om̐ tat sat’ – this has been declared to be the triple designation of Brahman. By that were created formerly the brāhmaṇā, the vedā and the sacrifices.

The absolute needs no name! God has no proper names or improper ones. Incidentally, therefore, the names by which religions are known are also fictitious, man-made, faction-generating tools of the evil mind that perverts even truth for its false ends. All religion is the individual’s path to God-realisation; what need has one to distinguish it, and from what? It is when I wish to establish that ‘my’ religion is superior to ‘your’ religion, that I introduce names! It is when I wish to assert that ‘my’ God is real and ‘yours’ unreal that I begin calling him names (sorry!).

‘Om̐’ has been declared to be the indicator of the infinite, absolute being. Its proper intonation suggests fullness, perfection, and a subtle transcendence that is indescribable. It is the simplest of all sounds, as simple as God himself. In sound it is comparable to the seven colours of the solar spectrum that blend to form the white colour. When you listen to the distant noise of the market place or fair, when no particular sound is distinguishable, it is heard as one big roar of Om̐. It is a mystic symbol of the infinite. Meditation on Om̐ and listening to the inner psychic Om̐-sound by closing the ears with the thumbs and listening with the right ear, are powerful tranquillisers of the wayward mind.

‘Tat’ is the word ‘that’. Not this, but that; where all that is created – phenomenal, material and non-eternal – is included in ‘this’, and what remains when all ‘this’ is negated is ‘tat’.

This ‘tat’ is not non-existence, a mere negation or void, it is ‘sat’ – the reality. That reality is not something which is opposed to non-reality, but it is the indescribable substratum of all existence. **That** reality alone exists and has nothing outside of itself; where is the need to call it by any name? Yet all names are God’s.

- ❖ tasmād om ity udāhṛtya yajñādānatapaḥkriyāḥ
pravartante vidhānuktāḥ satataṁ brahmavādinām
- ❖ tad ity anabhisamdhāya phalaṁ yajñatapaḥkriyāḥ
dānakriyāś ca vividhāḥ kriyante mokṣakāṅkṣibhiḥ
- ❖ sadbhāve sādhubhāve ca sad ity etat prayujyate
praśaste karmaṇi tathā sachabdaḥ pārtha yujyate

Therefore, with the utterance of Om, are the acts of sacrifice, gift and austerity, as enjoined in the scriptures, always begun by the students of Brahman.

Uttering ‘tat’ without aiming at the fruits, are the acts of sacrifice and austerity and the various acts of gift performed by the seekers of liberation.

The word ‘sat’ is used in the sense of reality and of goodness; and so also, O Arjuna, the word ‘sat’ is used in the sense of an auspicious act.

There is really no difference between the implications of one of the three words and those of another. All three have the same meaning and significance. ‘Om tat sat’ can roughly be translated into ‘the infinite is that reality’. The orthodox Hindu may regard it as a great mantra and believe that the words themselves have spiritual, psychic and even magic power; but their real value is in the psychological effect of reminding ourselves of the infinite nature of the reality which is the substratum of all creation. It acts as a cleansing fire, purifying our heart of all impure, selfish motives and illumining the great reality within the inmost core of our being.

My Master used this formula frequently even during his routine office work.

The mantra silences the ego within and diverts the mind from ‘the world’ to God, making us realise that he is the omnipresent reality whom we are serving in all, to whom we are directing our sacrifice or gift. It has been said that this mantra has the power to transform all acts into holy ones; it is certain that one who keeps in mind the significance of the holy formula will never indulge any unholy action.

It is good to cultivate the habit of thinking of God before, during and after the performance of every action. This formula, or any other such formula, will help us here, provided it does not become a mechanical, meaningless, repetition.

❖yajñe tapasi dāne ca sthitiḥ sad iti co 'cyate
 karma cai 'va tadarthīyaṁ sad ity evā 'bhidhīyate
 ❖aśraddhayā hutam dattam tapas taptam kṛtam ca yat
 asad ity ucyate pārtha na ca tat pretya no iha

Steadfastness in sacrifice, austerity and gift, is also called 'sat'; and also action in connection with these (or for the sake of the supreme) is called 'sat'.

Whatever is sacrificed, given or performed, and whatever austerity is practised without faith, it is called 'asad', O Arjuna. It is naught here or hereafter (after death).

The discussion on faith is thus beautifully wound up. Adherence to the scripture is good. It presupposes faith in the scripture and in God. In the absence of a scripture it is permissible to pursue one's own nature, with faith in oneself. Here it is good to bear in mind the threefold classification. Whereas *sattva* is 'close to the 'sat' or truth', *tamas* is also a quality of nature; even the *tāmasa* man is not damned for ever.

Since 'sat' is the inner reality, remembrance of it helps us draw closer to it, thus increasing *sattva*. This is the purpose of repetition of *mantra*. Constant remembrance of God enables us to become godly, *sāttvika*. 'Remembrance' here is not an act of memory, for it relates to the reality which has to be discovered from moment to moment; we should remember to discover it!

Not only meditating upon the word 'sat', but also upon its significance as the unchanging reality, will enable us to imitate that changelessness in our own life and actions. This results in steadfastness – a quality which is the exact opposite of the diabolical fickleness of the hypocrite. Steadfastness is the indication and the test of inner faith.

If there is no faith, however, the action is useless. It is good to remind ourselves repeatedly that selfless action is not soulless action, and that the desireless man is not a robot, mechanically responding to stimuli in a pre-set routine fashion. He knows that action is nature's way of purifying itself, and thus life flows with no difficulty whatsoever.

Kṛṣṇa's *Gītā* is the very opposite of the gospel of inert and stupid activity. It is unselfish but supreme dynamism. Only the small ego stifles life; yoga is joyous participation in the divine will.



OM TAT SAT

iti śrīmad bhagavad gītāsūpaniṣatsu brahma vidyāyām
yogaśāstre śrī kṛṣṇarjuna saṁvāde
śraddhā traya vibhāga yogo nāma saptadaśo 'dhyāyaḥ

Thus in the upaniṣad of the glorious Bhagavad Gītā,
the science of the eternal, the scripture of yoga,
the dialogue between śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna,
ends the seventeenth discourse entitled:

THE YOGA OF THE DIVISION OF THREEFOLD FAITH

CHAPTER XVIII

THE YOGA OF LIBERATION BY RENUNCIATION

XVIII

22nd NOVEMBER

1, 2

arjuna uvāca

- ❖ saṁnyāsasya mahābāho tattvam icchāmi veditum
tyāgasya ca hr̥ṣīkeśa pṛthak keśiniṣūdana
śrī bhagavān uvāca
- ❖ kāmīyānām karmaṇām nyāsaṁ saṁnyāsaṁ kavayo viduḥ
sarvakarmaphalatyaḡaṁ prāhus tyāgaṁ vicakṣaṇāḥ

Arjuna said: I desire to know, O mighty armed, the essence or truth of renunciation, O Hr̥ṣīkeśa, as also of abandonment, O slayer of Keśi.

The blessed Lord said: The sages understand saṁnyāsa to be renunciation of desire-motivated action; the wise declare the abandonment of the fruits of all action as tyāga.

At the close of chapter 16, Kṛṣṇa had emphasised the importance of following scriptural injunctions. The next chapter answered Arjuna's question: "If one did not know the scriptural injunctions but was endowed with faith, what happens to him?" Now in this chapter Arjuna asks the other question: "If a man knew the scripture...?"

The scriptures emphasise the need for renunciation, tyāga. 'Without tyāga there can be no self-realisation'. Renunciation meant abandonment of all that was considered worldly. Only a few could do this; they rose in public esteem and endeavoured to preserve it by perpetuating an error! The more spectacular and beyond the reach of the common man they made this tyāga, the surer were they of their own position of prestige and power. It was conveniently ignored that one should renounce only what is one's own – the false ego and its vanity, prestige and possession – and that renouncing what does not belong to one (e.g. home, property, wealth) is meaningless!

Of course, the position corrupted their heart and their renunciation was a mockery, even by their own theoretical standards. But they had enough hold on society by now to make any renunciation unnecessary. We find this in all holy orders, whatever be the religion.

Lord Kṛṣṇa opens the door wider, so that all may enter the realm of renunciation. The swami engaged in self-willed desire-prompted action is no better than a business executive, except that the latter is more honest! The layman who performs the most prosaic task without egoism or selfish desire qualifies for self-realisation. If he engages himself in the selfless service of humanity, but has not a single thought for the fruits of such service, he is a man of tyāga.

❖ tyājyaṁ doṣavad ity eke karma prāhur manīṣiṇaḥ
 yajñādānatapaḥkarma na tyājyam iti cā 'pare
 ❖ niścayaṁ śṛṇu me tatra tyāge bharatasattama
 tyāgo hi puruṣavyāghra trividhaḥ saṁprakīrtitaḥ

Some philosophers declare that action should be abandoned as an evil; while others (declare) that acts of sacrifice, gift and austerity should not be relinquished.

Hear from me the conclusion or the final truth about this abandonment, O best of the Bharatā; abandonment, verily, O best of men, has been declared to be of three kinds.

Society in those days was divided into two sections. There were those who followed the karma kāṇḍa (ritualistic portion) of the vedā and to whom those rituals were too sacred ever to be abandoned. There were the others who followed the jñāna kāṇḍa (wisdom portion) of the vedā and were convinced that to do anything was to invite rebirth, to enjoy or to suffer the consequences.

The basic philosophy of the latter is sound; but how few can realise that renunciation of the 'world' means total abandonment of all attachment, even to one's own body and the modifications of one's own mind? Kṛṣṇa recognises that that is the goal, though for its achievement no hypocritical abandonment of the world is necessary, but a revolution in the inner attitude, which he has already clearly stated: "While doing all your actions, feel 'you' are not doing anything". This necessarily implies that the saṁnyāsī, who realises, 'I am not doing', is incapable of withdrawing from life or activity. If, on the other hand, formal renunciation is overemphasised, then the evil pointed out on the previous page cannot be avoided. Such renunciation cancels out the spirit of the scripture.

Who but the Lord can conclusively tell us what the true spirit of renunciation is? Only he knows where and how the devil of human vanity quotes scripture to exploit the gullible. Arjuna had also prayed to the Lord to be definite and conclusive in his instructions. Hence, Kṛṣṇa's declaration that what follows is the final truth.

❖yajñādānatapaḥkarma na tyājyaṁ kāryam eva tat
 yajño dānaṁ tapaś cai 'va pāvanāni manīṣiṇām
 ❖etāny api tu karmāṇi saṅgaṁ tyaktvā phalāni ca
 kartavyānī 'ti me pārtha niścitaṁ matam uttamaṁ

Acts of sacrifice, gift and austerity should not be abandoned, but should be performed; sacrifice, gift and also austerity are the purifiers of the wise.

But even these actions should be performed leaving aside attachment and the desire for rewards, O Arjuna; this is my certain and best conviction.

It has been said that Kṛṣṇa's Gītā is a synthesis of the best in Aryan and non-Aryan traditions. Kṛṣṇa accepts the ancient Aryan yajña (sacrifice), the non-Aryan tapas or austerity, synthesises them and shows that this synthesis is superior to either of its components. Then he rejects routine ritual (the vaidika sacrifices) and foolish tapas – to give us buddhi yoga. This is indeed the highest statesmanship.

Tapas or austerity has already been dealt with in great detail. Suffice it to say here that simple life itself is tapas. Simplicity enables one to be free from slavery to the world and makes charity possible. Charity alters values. What is mine, becomes another's by charity; and freedom from attachment spares me the worry concerning it. Objects have value only on account of attachment! Realisation of this deflates the value of even those objects which we retain out of necessity; then they can be given away without leaving a dent in our heart.

Charity, too, has been dealt with earlier. It is really giving away what actually does not belong to one! But sacrifice, which to me sounds like making something sacred, something leading to self-knowledge, is self-sacrifice or the abandonment of all that one identifies one's self with. In the ritual yajña, when pouring ghee into the fire, one utters the mantra 'svāhā', which literally means 'killing of the self'. It frees one from the prison-house of the ego, to roam in the realm of the infinite. The ego is just an idea. The assumption that it is real is one's only 'possession' – **that** must be sacrificed. Then one sees that one's other possessions were not possessions at all and charity becomes natural.

All these should be performed without desire for rewards. Charity done with an eye to name and fame is only payment of advertisement charges!

❖niyatasya tu saṁnyāsaḥ karmaṇo no 'papadyate
 mohāt tasya parityāgas tāmasaḥ parikīrtitaḥ
 ❖duḥkham ity eva yat karma kāyakleśabhayāt tyajet
 sa kṛtvā rājasam tyāgaṁ nai 'va tyāgaphalam labhet

Verily, the renunciation of obligatory action is not proper; the abandonment of the same from delusion is declared to be *tāmasa*.

He who abandons action on account of the fear of bodily trouble (because it is painful), does not obtain the merit of renunciation by doing such *rāja*sa renunciation.

Again, the razor's edge of lord Kṛṣṇa. Here he mentions that one should not renounce obligatory duties (including the scripturally enjoined rituals); earlier he said that the performance of all these would only gain for us a holiday in heaven; and later again he commands us; "Abandon all dharma"! Nārada, in his *Bhakti Sutrā*, also declares that the true devotee of the Lord has no use for worldly and scriptural duties. How does one reconcile all these?

By practising *buddhi yoga*. Turn the mirror of *buddhi* (the value-giving discriminative faculty) towards God. Recognise only God as the stable value, and let his light be reflected through the *buddhi*. Let the mind and the senses function in that reflected light. There is no need to abandon any duties, for when the time comes they will drop away. When we go to sleep, we do not abandon the world; it fades into nothingness. Let that also happen to the duties of the world.

However, the deluded man, by prematurely abandoning the world and its duties, only strengthens egoism! 'I am a holy man; this I shall not do, for it is beneath my dignity' — where is holiness in this trend of thought? It is the seed of immense inner conflict.

There is yet another type of renunciation. The man who cannot earn, renounces wealth. Even in the practice of yoga, what we feel is difficult for us, we renounce with a high-sounding philosophy to justify it. Man is unable face the problems of family life and so with great fanfare renounces it. That is not renunciation, but impotence, cowardice, and never leads one to the goal of life. This, again, should not be misunderstood; the man who refuses to renounce 'worldly life', even after realising that it is painful, is attached to it! Let the inner light of wisdom decide!

❖kāryam ity eva yat karma niyataṁ kriyate 'rjuna
 saṅgaṁ tyaktvā phalaṁ cai 'va sa tyāgaḥ sāttviko mataḥ
 ❖na dveṣṭy akuśalaṁ karma kuśale nā 'nuṣajjate
 tyāgī sattvasamāviṣṭo medhāvī chinnaśayaḥ

Whatever obligatory action is done, O Arjuna, merely because it ought to be done, abandoning attachment and also the desire for reward, that renunciation is regarded as sāttvika.

The man of renunciation, pervaded by purity, intelligent and with his doubts cut asunder, does not hate a disagreeable task nor is he attached to an agreeable one.

The wise man abandons what ought to be abandoned – attachment and desire for reward. He may adopt what the popular mind regards as the 'monastic life', if he feels that that is his obligatory action. But that is not because he is attached to his own ideas of holiness, or because he expects honour and worship. (We have already been told that these cravings are demoniacal.) His stable value is God. In him God is 'awake', for the ego is in a comatose state. His life progresses smoothly because he sees that he does not determine his own destiny. With that enlightened understanding, what has to be done (God's will) is done without any thought of a reward or consequence. There is no egoistic pushing on his part.

A word of caution here: we are again facing the razor's edge! It is foolish to camouflage our own desire-prompted egoistic activities on the pretext that it is God's will that we should continue them. The manifestations of the ego, lust, anger and greed, attachment and desire for reward, must be abandoned. Non-abandonment of these will revive and maintain the ego.

This philosophy seems to be easy to understand and apply, but actually it is difficult for the simple reason that it elevates us so much, we are confused as to both direction and path. If there is the least impurity of heart, delusion or non-intelligence present, and if there is the least doubt alive in the heart, the ego will once again play havoc in the garb of self-surrender. Only God can guide us; we must ensure that we deserve his grace.

We should constantly and vigilantly look within for the reality. Then attachment and 'possession' are realised to be unreal and are dropped by the mind. When this happens, one lives in God, one realises God.

❖na hi dehabhṛtā śakyam tyaktuṁ karmāṇy aśeṣataḥ
 yas tu karmaphalatyāgī sa tyāgī 'ty abhidhīyate
 ❖aniṣṭam iṣṭam miśraṁ ca trividham karmanāḥ phalaṁ
 bhavaty atyāgināṁ pretya na tu saṁnyāsināṁ kvacit

Verily, it is not possible for an embodied being to abandon actions entirely; but he who relinquishes the rewards of actions is verily called a man of renunciation.

The threefold fruit of action (evil, good and mixed) accrues after death to the non-abandoners, but never to the abandoners.

It is God's will that has brought spirit and matter into being. It is his will that sustains this world-play by the projection of his apparent diversity. The universe dances to his tunes. The individual's own body and mind, being part of the universe, are caught up in this cosmic dance; who but God himself can stop it? One who tries to stop the dance is egoistic and, therefore, cut off from God. That kind of renunciation is delusion.

The true man of renunciation, on the other hand, renounces the desire for reward. A little contemplation will reveal to us the utter stupidity of expecting a reward for something that is done by God's will, by his own instrument (each individual soul), with the help of objects of his own creation! It is as if 'I' expected a reward for some work you have done, which is entirely illogical. Abandonment of this delusion is true renunciation. We then let God's will flow through us, without egoistic motive, and this itself is liberation or God-realisation.

Karma binds only the deluded egoistic soul. It has no meaning in God's eyes; for he is the all-pervading, eternal being. He pervades heaven, hell and this world, but he also transcends them. It is only the deluded soul that believes it does something, expecting some reward. After death, it sometimes gets a good reward, sometimes an indifferent one and sometimes an evil one. To one who has abandoned egoism and does God's will without personal profit-motive, to whom the whole universe is God's own manifestation and this world-play is a solo act by God – there is no pain, no pleasure, no sin, no virtue, no hell, no heaven. Seen from that universal focus which is God, all is divine harmony.

- ❖pañcai 'tāni mahābāho kāraṇāni nibhodha me
sāṁkhye kṛtānte proktāni siddhaye sarvakarmaṇām
- ❖adhiṣṭhānaṁ tathā kartā karaṇaṁ ca pṛthagvidhaṁ
vividhāś ca pṛthakceṣṭā daivaṁ cai 'vā 'tra pañcamaṁ

Learn from me, O mighty-armed Arjuna, these five causes as declared in the sāṁkhya system for the accomplishment of all actions:

The seat (body), the doer, the various senses, the different functions of various sorts, and the presiding deity also – the fifth.

Look at it from any point of view you like; you cannot escape the conclusion that the self is not the doer or the enjoyer. However, the doubter says: “But, I do feel the pain” or “But how can anything be done if I don’t want to do it?” That ‘but’ is a dangerous conjunction which muffles the voice of truth and amplifies the ego’s alluring and deluding whisper. Here Kṛṣṇa flashes the light of truth on the truth. As he said to Arjuna, so he says to every man:

“You say you will fight or you will not fight. You want to do what is right and avoid what is wrong. You feel that that choice alone will determine whether you go to heaven or hell after death, whether you will have an auspicious or inauspicious birth. All these hinge upon a central fallacy: the feeling that you are the doer! Now listen to my analysis.

“There are the five factors that enter the accomplishment of all actions: the body, which obviously seems to do and to enjoy, is of course the first. In that body itself we see the various subtle sense-organs which, to some extent, seem to be distinct from it. The sense-organs of knowledge and of action are co-ordinated and they function – this is the third factor. Then we have the gods who preside over these functions (this may also refer to the jīva or individualised self, or to the light in which the senses function – ‘deva’ means light). Finally, there is a mysterious principle of egoism, ignorance and delusion which identifies the functions and activities of all these with the self which is the silent witness, thus creating the idea of doership.”

If you look within, you suddenly discover that all your experiences are made possible by the intelligence that functions in you. That intelligence is not yours, it is a fragment of the cosmic consciousness. The ego, which arose with those experiences is also part of that consciousness; it, itself, does not exist.

❖śārīravāṇmanobhir yat karma prārabhate naraḥ
 nyāyyaṁ vā viparītaṁ vā pañcai 'te tasya hetavaḥ
 ❖tatrai 'vaṁ sati kartāram ātmānaṁ kevalaṁ tu yaḥ
 paśyaty akṛtabuddhitvān na sa paśyati durmatiḥ

Whatever action a man performs with his body, speech and mind – whether right or the reverse – these five are its causes.

Now, such being the case, verily he who – owing to untrained understanding – looks upon his self, which is isolated, as the agent, he of perverted intelligence sees not.

The body, senses and the mind perform their duties with the energy invested in them by the divine nature of the Lord. The Lord's own consciousness (apparently looked upon as the various deities) presides over the senses and carries on the activities of the world. His energy, as the sun, the celestial body, illumines the objects of the world; his energy as the sun within, perceives the world through the medium of the eyes. The self is but a silent witness of all these diverse functions. This is one view. From this view the 'daivaṁ' of the previous verse refers to the deities presiding over the various sense-functions.

The supreme Lord (daivaṁ) has willed this universe into existence and he himself dwells within each body inspiring the mind and the senses to function. 'I' does no-thing at all! 'I do nothing, it is the Lord who does everything', feels the devotee of the Lord. This is another view.

Whichever be the attitude adopted, in accordance with one's own training and temperament, and one's own discovery, the 'I' is seen to be a shady impostor who belongs neither to the material side nor to the spiritual side of one's being.

A story is told of how a vagabond entered a village where a four-day wedding feast was in progress. Uninvited, he entered the bride's house and received honour due to the members of the groom's party. He mingled with the latter pretending to belong to the bride's party. Then someone asked him: "Who are you?" At that he quietly slipped away. That is just what the ego does when confronted with the question, 'Who is "I"?' It is a mirage, a shadow, robber seen in a dream. It is an uninvited guest, which can, however, cause a lot of havoc.

❖ yasya nā 'hamkrto bhāvo buddhir yasya na lipyate
hatvā 'pi sa imāṃl lokān na hanti na nibadhyate

He who is free from the egoistic notion, whose intelligence is not tainted (by good or evil), though he slays these people, he slayeth not nor is he bound (by any action).

This mysterious egoistic notion is the cause of all our sins and sufferings. In fact it is this notion that sins and that suffers, too. The 'I' creates its own ghosts, desire and hatred, clings to them and fears them. In the one it sees many and gets bewildered. Forgetful of God, the supreme bliss, it is subjected to frustration. Frantically working for happiness, it loses it! Man walks the burning sands of the desert in order to quench his thirst at a far lake, only to find that the lake is a mirage. How can these unreal causes produce such real effects? Because in the darkness of unawareness, the 'I' arises and thinks it is real, vainly imagining (and creating) evils and sufferings. This is the only sin.

Hence our Master insisted again and again: "Turn the gaze". When you turn the searchlight of truth on this mysterious 'I', you will discover, not the 'I' nor its vanishing trick, but the substratum for the 'I' and for the whole universe, which is God, Brahman, the paramātmān.

Even a dry blade of grass cannot be wafted by the wind except by God's will. This has been the unanimous verdict of all sages, saints and prophets. The whole universe is run by his will.

Actions do not bind; it is only the egoistic identification that binds. The hateful murderer is sent to the gallows, yet the executioner gets paid for a similar action. In war, the same action on a larger scale wins the hero a medal! Look within and you will know the difference. The understanding and knowledge, 'Thy will be done', frees us instantly, enabling us to perceive the truth, to experience that God is good, that the universe is good and that the soul is eternally good. The 'I' was but a bad dream. Forget it.

But, beware, let the 'I' not create a God for you to fear, to love, to worship and to realise. God, here, is the truth, the reality who is 'present' when all thoughts march out, following the I-thought.

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The goal is in sight. That is all even the most purified ego can independently (though with the inevitable help of divine grace) achieve. The golden shackle still binds and the golden needle will still prick.

Goodness is good. To live is to turn away from evil (reverse spelling). But that is not enough, for 'live' contains in it the seed of all evil (anagram of veil) – (ego). When that 'i' is replaced by its self-negation – 'o', live becomes 'love' which is God.

This vowel is a constant: $0+0=0$; $0-0=0$; $0\times 0=0$; $0\div 0=0$. And, when looked at from any side, this 'o' is still a zero. It is beginningless and endless. Only total and complete self-surrender makes the seeker divine, perfect, and eternal (constant). That is the culmination of evolution (just as zero is full, complete and the fulfilment of the point, the arc, the semicircle and even the 'straight' line).

Strangely enough, such surrender is impossible without control – which perhaps implies the exercise of the ego in the right direction. We cannot consciously and deliberately surrender our body, mind and soul to God unless we know what they are! All ethical discipline, all moral codes, all psychophysical yoga practices aim at coming to grips with our personality; not in order to make it more powerful, but to affect the realisation that all our moods and actions, whether dull, dynamic or divine, originate in God. With this realisation the ego dissolves, humility arises and true surrender follows naturally.

“Renounce all, everything, to me”, says Kṛṣṇa. Lip-service to surrender will not do. Between conscious self-surrender and unconscious passivity, there is the same difference as there is between super-consciousness and sleep; between offering a fruit to God and, having forgotten its existence, allowing it to rot. When the egoistic self is surrendered, the higher self (God) shines in its own glory. That is our goal, nothing short of it will do. May we reach it, here and now.

❖ jñānaṁ jñeyaṁ parijñātā trividhā karmacodanā
 karaṇaṁ karma karte 'ti trividhaḥ karmasaṁgrahaḥ
 ❖ jñānaṁ karma ca kartā ca tridhai 'va guṇabhedaḥ
 procyate guṇasaṁhyāne yathāvac chṛṇu tāny api

Knowledge, the knowable and the knower form the threefold impulse to action; the organ, the action and the agent form the threefold basis of action.

Knowledge, action and actor are declared in the science of the guṇā (saṅkhya philosophy) to be of three kinds only, according to the distinction of the guṇā. Hear them also duly.

Kṛṣṇa does not split hairs in philosophy, and consequently does not give us a splitting headache. On the other hand, fear of analysis often leads to vague generalisations. Kṛṣṇa's teaching is entirely free from this, too. The word of God has the invariable characteristic of being clear, succinct and direct. I have seen this in our Master's approach to all problems. He could go to the root of any problem without beating about the bush and getting lost; and without dabbling on the surface and getting nowhere.

Self-purification is a delicate art. It is surgery without incision. It demands a subtlety of vision without magnification. What is the 'self' and what are the components that should be purified? Ignorance of this might land us in semi-purification (which is not purification!).

What constitutes an action? Listen to the wonderfully precise analysis. Action springs from knowledge (theory); we have an idea of the 'knowable', the experientable, the object, the goal; and the knower is the subject. Subject-object-predicate: these are the three invariable constituents of an action. Purify them and all actions are pure.

The physical being, its activity, and the idea of agency – are the mechanics of action. Purify them, too.

These six are then reduced to three: knowledge, action (directed towards the right 'knowable' or object) and actor (the self, the knower, the agent who identifies himself as the organ of action). These three are classified into the threefold division in the following verses.

❖ sarvabhūteṣu yenai 'kaṁ bhāvam avyayam īkṣate
 avibhaktaṁ vibhakteṣu taj jñānaṁ viddhi sāttvikaṁ
 ❖ prthaktvena tu yaj jñānaṁ nānābhāvān prthagvidhān
 veti sarveṣu bhūteṣu taj jñānaṁ viddhi rājasān
 ❖ yat tu kṛtsnavad ekasmin kārye saktam ahaitukaṁ
 atattvārthavad alpaṁ ca tat tāmasam udāhṛtaṁ

That by which one sees the one indestructible reality in all beings, not separate in all the separate beings – know thou that knowledge to be sāttvika.

But that knowledge which sees in all beings various entities of distinct kinds as different from one another – know thou that knowledge to be rājasa.

But that which clings to one single effect as if it were the whole, without reason, without foundation in truth, and trivial – that is declared to be tāmasa.

This doctrine can be applied to religion, speculative philosophy, sociology, human relations and ethics generally. One can meditate upon these three verses and derive a wealth of meaning and inspiration from them.

Since the ultimate reality is one, the wise man, the sāttvika person sees the one reality in all; the perception of the all being the inevitable consequence of the perceiver's limitation as the individual. The eyes have neither microscopic nor telescopic vision and cannot, therefore, perceive the grand unity. Even if that were possible, there would still exist the distinction between the perceiver and the perceived 'unity'. The sāttvika knower, however, intuitively feels the unity that underlies the diversity.

Rājasa knowledge confers on this diversity not an apparent but a real existence. It enables us to realise that there are others, other paths and so on, and leads us to 'live and let live' policy.

Tāmasa knowledge does not recognise any but its own point of view. It is the 'frog in the well'. It is dogmatic. It is a wonder that people who call themselves knowledgeable assert that there is only one viewpoint! Have they actually ascertained that there are no others? How can one assert that his religion or concept of God alone is true, till he knows how many religions there are (which is of course impossible)? Everyone's viewpoint is valid, but especially valid for himself. We should recognise the validity of others' viewpoints and ultimately the one that runs through all.

- ❖niyataṁ saṅgarahitam arāgadveṣataḥ kṛtaṁ
aphalaprepsunā karma yat tat sāt̥tvikam ucyate
- ❖yat tu kāmepsunā karma sāharṁkāreṇa vā punaḥ
kriyate bahulāyāsaṁ tad rājasam udāhṛtaṁ
- ❖anubandham kṣayaṁ himsām anavekṣya ca pauruṣaṁ
mohād ārabhyate karma yat tat tāmāsam ucyate

An action which is ordained, which is free from attachment and which is done without love or hatred by one who is not desirous of any reward – that action is declared to be sāt̥tvika.

But that action which is done by one longing for the fulfilment of desires or gain with egoism or with much effort – that is declared to be rājasa (passionate).

That action which is undertaken out of delusion, without a regard for the consequences, loss, injury and (one's own) ability – that is declared to be tāmāsa (dark).

Lord Kṛṣṇa's path is one of 'adventure with calculated risk'. He does not encourage weak-heartedness or impotence. Nor does he encourage self-destructive foolhardiness. The third of the above verses warns us that we should calculate the consequences, not with pessimistic withdrawal but in order that the effort may be matched with the task, that unnecessary loss and injury may be avoided, and that we may not try to jump on to our own shoulders. It should not be misconstrued as cowardice. Many there are who waste precious talent and life battling with impossible situations. I have seen a young man whose only spiritual sādhana was to develop powers to endure the severe Himālayan cold! His motive: to be acclaimed by the public as a great yogi. He did not live long enough to enjoy that renown. What a waste! Our Master, on the contrary, gave such practices a lesser value, realising their doubtful spiritual consequences. If your body cannot endure the cold, put on a coat. But then study the first of the three verses and act on it. Such action will promote sattva (divinity, purity or light within).

Gītā-action is a fine art: finer than the best dancing, the most delicate painting or the most soulful music. We should know what to do (our duty) and what not to do (useless task); yet we should do what we do without an eye to its reward ('usefulness'), without attachment (which a sense of duty might lead to) and without egoism.

- ❖muktasaṅgo 'nahanvādī dhr̥tyutsāhasamanvitaḥ
siddhasiddhyor nirvikāraḥ kartā sāttvika ucyate
- ❖rāgī karmaphalaprepsur lubdho himsātmako 'śuciḥ
harṣaśokānviṭaḥ kartā rājasaḥ parikīrtitaḥ
- ❖ayuktaḥ prākṛtaḥ stabdhaḥ śaṭho naiṣkṛtiko 'lasaḥ
viṣādī dīrghasūtrī ca kartā tāmasa ucyate

An agent who is free from attachment, non-egoistic, endowed with firmness and enthusiasm, and unaffected by success or failure, is called *sāttvika* (pure).

Passionate, desiring to obtain the reward of actions, greedy, cruel, impure, moved by joy and sorrow, such an agent is said to be *rājasa* (passionate).

Unsteady, vulgar, unbending, cheating, malicious, lazy, desponding and procrastinating – such an agent is called *tāmasa*.

If the light within (knowledge) that illumines our life and the actions that proceed in that light are *sāttvika* or pure, obviously the agent will also be pure. But no. Kṛṣṇa does not let us take anything for granted. In the bloodless, weaponless inner warfare, a moment's non-vigilance might undo a lifetime's hard work. The inner agent (the ignorance-born ego) cannot be destroyed because it is a shadow. It has to be discovered.

In reality, the ego (the agent) is not a devil, but God-asleep. The veil of ignorance or deep sleep has to be removed. This is achieved by *sattva* (the quality, 'va', reality, 'sat'). The agent with the veil on is the little self or ego; the agent minus the veil is the self identical wins the supreme self whose thought is spread out as the universe and whose will maintains the cosmic play. Sun shines, earth revolves – but ignorance calls it the passage of time! There is a constant change of atoms in this universe; the ego superimposes on this an endless series of concepts – birth, death, success, failure, pain, pleasure, heat, cold, etc.

Thus deluded, the ego lives a completely isolated and self-centred life (*tāmasa*). By evolution and effort, it graduates to the passionate life (*rājasa*). Then, through deliberate avoidance of the nature of the above two, and by the conscious cultivation of the *sāttvika* attitude, ego becomes non-ego, joyously surrendering to the divine participating in God's will and enjoying the bliss that he is.

❖buddher bhedaṁ dhr̥teś cai 'va guṇatas trividhaṁ śṛṇu
procyamānam aśeṣeṇa pṛthaktvena dhanamjaya

Hear thou the threefold division of intellect and firmness according to the
guṇā as I declare them fully and distinctly, O Arjuna.

With unambiguous clarity the dynamics of action have been dealt with. We have been told what our inner self should be like, what the characteristics of our actions should be and in what light they should be performed. Yet Kṛṣṇa is not satisfied!

'Knowledge' (the light) itself is often classified as superior and inferior. The superior aspect of this knowledge (the light) was described in verse 20. A novice seeker, not very spiritually evolved, might not find that description quite satisfying; and even in the case of an intelligent seeker whose ego still revels in the deep slumber of ignorance, that description might be misinterpreted to the ego's own advantage.

The compassionate Lord comes down to the level of the seeker and analyses this factor still further. Here we have the classification of knowledge as the discriminating principle, buddhi. This buddhi itself can also be either pure, passionate or dull. A clear understanding of the classification makes it possible for one to ascend the ladder and attain a sāttvika state.

In following verses, another wonderful truth unfolds itself. In order to reach our destination, we need three things: a fight outside (the sun, the moon, a lamp, etc.); the sense of sight within; and the spirit of perseverance. The last is what has been called 'firmness' in this verse. Firmness is a quality, neither good nor bad – as is everything in this universe. All too often we tenaciously cling to childish ideas and ideals, resisting all good influences that endeavour to guide us, in the false belief that it is the devil tempting us and that we should tenaciously stick to our own ideas and practices. Degenerate forms of idolatry, patriotism, a sense of social and domestic responsibility – are some instances where tenacity might mean bondage.

It is good to remember that any theory or idea that distracts the attention from the simple truth is to be discarded, while one which leads towards the centre, towards the simple truth within, is useful.

- ❖ pravṛttiṁ ca nivṛttiṁ ca kāryākārye bhayābhaye
bandhaṁ mokṣaṁ ca yā vetti buddhiḥ sā pārtha sāttvikī
- ❖ yayā dharmāṁ adharmāṁ ca kāryaṁ cā 'kāryam eva ca
ayathāvat prajānāti buddhiḥ sa pārtha rājasī
- ❖ adharmāṁ dharmam iti yā manyate tamasā 'vṛtā
sarvārthān viparītāṁś ca buddhiḥ sā pārtha tāmasī

That which knows the path of work and that of renunciation, what ought to be done and what ought not to be done, fear and fearlessness, bondage and liberation – that intellect is sāttvika (pure), O Arjuna.

That by which one wrongly understands dharma and adharma and also what ought to be done and what ought not to be done – that intellect, O Arjuna, is rājasa (middling).

That which, enveloped in darkness, sees adharma as dharma and all things perverted – that intellect, O Arjuna, is tāmasa (stupid).

No one can lay down a universal 'do's and don'ts' code in great detail. The 'guiding light', knowledge, is universal but the code of morals is not. It is based on the divine law, but adapted to time, place and circumstance. This is what we call tradition, or dharma in its restricted sense. The tradition concerning the path of work (household life) and that concerning the path of renunciation are different. One should know them. Tradition has great use: it keeps a society together and organised, thus freeing each one from the unnecessary task of carrying another's burden and from being weighed down by little cares and petty anxieties. A sage rises above tradition, but does not wilfully abandon it.

The man with the middling intellect, in the heat of passionate dynamism, misunderstands the moral law and the tradition, but can be taught and trained to give these wrong notions.

But not so the last category! The man of tāmasa buddhi is not so much a sinner as an unevolved brute – stupid and ignorance-ridden. His 'permitted actions' are deluded actions, thus he deliberately violates moral law and tradition. It is in this respect that laws which approve of exploitation of man by man, divorce and so on, on the plea that they are in conformity with 'changed times', are immoral. Even if all of us tell lies, it is still unrighteous.

Recognition of this leaves the door open for the abandonment of these notions.

- ❖ dhṛtyā yayā dhārayate manaḥprāṇendriyakriyāḥ
yogenā 'vyabhicāriṇyā dhṛtiḥ sā pārtha sāttvikī
- ❖ yayā tu dharmakāmārthān dhṛtyā dhārayate 'rjuna
prasaṅgena phalākāṅkṣī dhṛtiḥ sā pārtha rājasi
- ❖ yayā svapnaṁ bhayaṁ śokaṁ viśādaṁ madam eva ca
na vimuñcati durmedhā dhṛtiḥ sā pārtha tāmasī

The unwavering firmness by which, through yoga, the functions of the mind, the life-force and the senses are restrained – that firmness, O Arjuna, is sāttvika.

But that firmness, O Arjuna, by which on account of attachment and desire for reward one holds fast to dharma, enjoyment of pleasures and earning of wealth – that firmness, O Arjuna, is rājasa.

That by which a stupid man does not abandon sleep, fear, grief, despair and also conceit – that firmness, O Arjuna, is tāmasa.

The classification and the description of each category is very explicit. But a great thought is hidden in a simple expression in the last verse. It leads us once again to a puzzling paradox.

The word paradox means something that is beyond teaching, something that cannot even be caught, but glimpsed – like the beauty of a flower. Once caught, the flower is broken into a thousand pieces; truth that is caught is destroyed instantly.

Thus, we should know our own limitations. We should know what to fear, but should not cling to fear – it is tāmasa. Neither should we cling to despair. That, too, is tāmasa. Millions in the world today waste their lives in hiding, through sheer despair and morbid fear. They do not realise how illogical they are. Would it not be better to face the situation and either die, or live happily? We should not throw away life by valuing life itself more than the living of it.

Rājasa firmness is also not very highly commended and is not our goal. However, it is better to be functional with a doubtful motive or even in selfishness, than to crouch under a blanket of fear and despair. This dynamism will in due course lead us to the firmness of a yogi described in the first verse. We should be firmly rooted in contemplation of the Lord and carefully avoid clinging to anything else. “Attach your mind to the Lord and detach it from the world,” sang our Master.

❖sukhaṁ tv idānīm trividhaṁ śṛṇu me bharataṛṣabha
abhyāsād ramate yatra duḥkhāntaṁ ca nigacchati

And now hear from me, O Arjuna, of the threefold pleasure; in which one rejoices by practice and surely comes to the end of pain.

Whatever a man does, he seeks happiness through it. In fact, this pursuit of happiness is one of the fundamental motive-forces of evolution. Intuition of this truth has given rise in sages to the vision that the self-experience and self-expression by the supreme self of its own bliss-nature is the reason underlying this mysterious process of becoming (creation and evolution). Consciousness locked in the mineral grows as a plant, moves about as an animal with a simple consciousness, thinks and contemplates as man with self-consciousness, till it arrives at the destination, which is self-realisation where bliss is experienced as one's own essential nature.

Man, the crown of creation, is a complete picture of this world-process. He bears within himself the impressions of the beginningless struggle to attain self-realisation – the impressions left in him by the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms, and the impressions left in him by his own past lower-human incarnations. Hence, he is torn (as no plant or animal is) between the higher aspirations and the lower appetites.

It is good to know, therefore, when our pleasure-seeking promotes our evolution and when it halts it. Man, with a self-consciousness and a will of his own, can choose between sagehood or beasthood. Few would knowingly choose the latter but it is possible in a state of ignorance to knock at the wrong door. The pleasure-seeking mind has a tendency to grab the nearest pleasure-source. Yet, if the nature of the choice is clearly defined, the wise man might be saved from error, and discover that moments of happiness or pleasure generally lie in the interval between experiences of excitement or craving. (When a craving subsides, we think we are happy!)

Hence, the following clear-cut classification pleasure or happiness.

- ❖yat tad agre viṣam iva pariṇāme 'mr̥topamaṁ
tat sukhaṁ sāt̥tvikaṁ proktam ātmabuddhiprasādaḥ
- ❖viṣayendriyaśaṁyogād yat tad agre 'mr̥topamaṁ
pariṇāme viṣam iva tat sukhaṁ rājasam smṛtaṁ
- ❖yad agre cā 'nubandhe ca sukhaṁ mohanam ātmanaḥ
nidrālasyaḥpramādotthaṁ tat tāmasam udāhṛtaṁ

That which is like poison at first but in the end like nectar - that pleasure is declared to be sāt̥tvika, born of the purity of one's own mind due to self-realisation.

That pleasure which arises from the contact of the sense-organs with the objects, which is at first like nectar, and in the end like poison – that is declared to be rājasa.

That pleasure which at first and in the sequel is delusive of the self, arising from sleep, indolence and heedlessness – that pleasure is declared to be tāmasa.

There is a declaration in the upaniṣad that all the pleasures of this universe are a drop in the ocean of bliss that is God.

Yet, tāmasa pleasure is 'delusive of the self', i.e. it prevents us from arriving at our destination – that bliss which is the essential nature of the self. Like smoke which compels us to close our eyes and thus prevents us from utilising the light and heat also generated by fire, tāmasa pleasure blinds our vision to the light of truth and to the energy within us which could be put to good use.

Rājasa pleasure is all that falls under the heading of 'happiness' in the civilised man's dictionary – wife, children, property, position in society, good food and drink, amusements and pastimes. These are all better than tāmasa pleasure, because they give us temporary pleasure. The saving feature here is the impermanence of this pleasure, which might awaken an intelligent man to look for its sāt̥tvika counterpart. The unintelligent man, however, might switch from one type of rājasa pleasure to another and discover the truth about them too late.

It is difficult for embodied beings to be completely free from the taint of rājasa pleasure. Even in the seeker, the taste for pleasure remains long after he has begun to restrain the senses. The recognition of true sāt̥tvika pleasure (bliss of self-absorption) is the fruit or reward of self-realisation. That alone is sāt̥tvika pleasure which is born of, leads to and enables us to remain established in the self.

❖na tad asti pṛthivayāṁ vā divi deveṣu vā punaḥ
sattvaṁ prakṛtijair muktaṁ yad ebhiḥ syāt tribhir guṇaiḥ

There is no being on earth or again in heaven among the gods, that is liberated from the three qualities born of nature.

All motion and manifestation are subject to the three qualities of nature that have been described so vividly by lord Kṛṣṇa. Not only the gross, but the extremely subtle objects of nature are subject to them. Gross and subtle, heaven and hell, earth and the beyond are all relative terms, one serving as the frame of reference for the other. They are not absolute.

The absolute (the subject, unknowable by the intellect and hence not a concept) is intuitively realised, in an indescribable transcendental experience, as beyond the qualities. This should not lead us to the absurd position of regarding the qualities as something ‘outside’ the one God, who is pure existence, is unsullied and unaffected by anything that happens in this universe, because whatever happens, happens not because of his will or his grace (these are imperfect, inadequate human expressions), but because **that** is his nature. The one is unaffected by the qualities, even as the cobra is unaffected by its venom. Through the veins and arteries of our body run impure and pure blood; together they form one system and we do not regard the arteries as ‘good’ and the veins as ‘injurious’ to our physical well-being.

The three qualities constitute divine nature which is indistinguishable from the supreme reality. Even the sage’s body and mind are subject to the qualities, though **sattva** preponderates in them. But the sage resting in the self **witnesses** the play of the guṇā, without identifying himself (his self) with them. Hence, in our approach to them we should beware of judging them by our ignorant and intellectual standards.

Kṛṣṇa also warns us here that we can grow in **sattva** only by consciously choosing the **sāttvika** in all things and, eventually transcending **sattva** by his grace, we passively offer ourselves in total surrender to him.

❖ brāhmaṇakṣatriyaviśāṁ śūdrāṇāṁ ca param̐tapa
karmāṇi pravibhaktāni svabhāvaprabhavair guṇaiḥ

Of brāhmaṇā, kṣatriyā and vaiśyā, as also of śūdrā, O Arjuna, the duties are distributed according to the qualities born of their own nature.

At each incarnation we bring forward with us our 'nature'. This nature manifests the preponderant quality which determines our 'caste'. This is nothing more than a cast – a mould for casting. The Oxford dictionary's definition of it as 'any of the E.Ind. hereditary classes with members shunning intercourse with the other castes' is plain mischievous mis-statement.

The 'nature' that is brought forward undergoes incessant change. It is true that the basic aspects do not change, e.g. one who is born a male dies a male, but a great degree of change in other aspects is possible. After all, the 'brought forward' nature was the cumulative effect of the continuous interaction of the self and environment, of aspiration and limitation, of the upward pull of spiritual evolution and the downward pull of animal urges.

If that nature determined the caste in which we were born, the latter, too, would undergo the same change as the former. As we shall presently see, the gulf that separates one caste from the other – the gulf of fundamental nature – is wide enough to make it difficult for one to jump from one to the other. But we should bear in mind:

(a) that it is impossible to assert that any human being falls entirely within one category – he always has some element of the other categories, and

(b) that the transfer, though difficult, is not impossible, as is demonstrated in the legendary heroes who achieved it, and also in modern sex-change experiments.

What is perhaps more difficult and vitally important is to be efficient and diligent in the righteous expression of one's own essential nature, without the presumption that one is superior or inferior to another – which is false and artificial.

So, dharma can be looked at from two extremely simple angles. Firstly, your own essential nature and secondly, a certain built-in balance that sustains the entire universe and the human personality – a universal vibration.

- ❖śamo damas tapaḥ śaucam kṣāntir ārjavam eva ca
jñānam vijñānam āstikyaṁ brahmakarma svabhāvajaṁ
- ❖śauryaṁ tejo dhṛtir dākṣyaṁ yuddhe cā 'py apalāyanam
dānam īśvarabhāvaś ca kṣātraṁ karma svabhāvajaṁ
- ❖kṛṣigaurakṣyavāṇijyaṁ vaiśyakarma svabhāvajaṁ
paricaryātmakam karma śūdrasyā 'pi svabhāvajaṁ

Serenity, self-restraint, austerity, purity, forgiveness and also uprightness, knowledge, realisation and belief in God are the duties of the born brāhmaṇā, of their own nature.

Prowess, splendour, firmness, dexterity and also not fleeing from battle, generosity and lordliness are the duties of the kṣatriyā, born of their own nature.

Agriculture, cattle-rearing and trade are the duties of the vaiśyā (merchants), born of their own nature; and action consisting of service is the duty of the śūdrā (servant-class), born of their own nature.

Where is it said that the mere accident of birth or erudite scholarship are the qualifications of a brāhmaṇā? Elsewhere, the word 'brāhmaṇā' has been defined as one who knows Brahman or the absolute. Shankaracharya defines 'paṇḍit' as one who knows 'paṇḍa' or knowledge pertaining to self-realisation.

It is said in the Bhāgavataṁ that in this kali age, 'members of the three castes are mostly converted into śūdrā' (12.II:4). Even here, it is not because people value service or realise the dignity of labour, but because the qualifications for belonging to the other three are absent. This moral degeneration and ethical apathy often assume strange roles: the brāhmaṇā and the kṣatriyā fight to stay as such, not because they are qualified to, but because such fighting is easier than the acquisition of the qualifications. Even the vaiśyā do not produce wealth or food in the right spirit, but in order to become wealthier and stay wealthier than the others. Wealth is the god of the present (kali) age. Says the Bhāgavataṁ: 'In the kali age, wealth alone will be the criterion of pedigree, morality and merit' (12.II:2). All people, including the śūdrā, serve...not one another, not the neighbour, not God, but wealth. Thus they are not even śūdrā in the real sense!

The caste system is gone (though a new caste or class system has taken its place). Has this led to real unity and understanding? Oh, yes, in one way – for we are all worshipping wealth as the only god. But wealth engenders hatred, jealousy and enmity, not love. God is love, and it is God we should worship.

❖sve-sve karmaṇy abhirataḥ saṁsiddhiṁ labhate naraḥ
 svakarmanirataḥ siddhiṁ yathā vindati tac chr̥ṇu
 ❖yataḥ pravṛttir bhūtānāṁ yena sarvam idaṁ tataṁ
 svakarmanā tam abhyarcya siddhiṁ vindati mānavaḥ

Each man, devoted to his own duty, attains perfection. How he attains perfection while being engaged in his own duty – hear now.

He from whom all the beings have evolved and by whom all this is pervaded – worshipping that one with the due performance of his own duty, man attains perfection.

In our day to day activity, this truth that God pervades everything in the universe is not reflected. Our cravings, our hate, our fear, our jealousy, our envy and the competitive spirit which characterises all our thoughts, words and deeds, are the direct denial of the reality we seem to understand intellectually.

With what green eyes the poor brāhmaṇā looks at the rich farmer or trader! With what envy the kṣatriya, with all his pomp and power, views the status that the brāhmaṇā enjoys! What would the trader not do to ‘buy’ the political boss or the paṇḍit! And, lastly, how fervently members of the workers’ union wish to assert their superiority over everyone else!

All this is unnecessary. Is salvation the exclusive privilege of men of only certain castes or professions? An emphatic ‘No’ is the reply, for the simple reason that (a) all are born of God and (b) God dwells in all of us. (If it can be asserted that one born in a ‘low’ caste cannot attain God-realisation, then it should also be proved that God does not dwell in him!)

This eternal oneness already exists between God and every man; no one can cancel it. All that is needed now is to realise that relationship. The man is asleep in his own house. All that he has to do is to wake up, to realise that fact. You cannot say: “Unless you become somebody else the house cannot be yours.”

Do your own duty – whatever that ‘work’ be. But adopt this wonderful life-transforming inner attitude: treat that work as worship of God. Who is that God? He who created all beings and who further pervades all of them. He and he alone exists. You are not serving anybody here, but God. Service of fellow-men, service of all creatures is worship of God. Realise this and be free – that freedom from ego and desire is perfection.

The second of the above two verses should be inscribed on the tablet of our heart. It is the heart of the Gītā.

❖śreyān svadharmo viguṇaḥ paradharmāt svanuṣṭhitāt
svabhāvanīyatam karma kurvan nā 'pnoti kilbiṣam

Better is one's own duty (though) destitute of merits than the duty of another well performed. He who does the duty ordained by his own nature incurs no sin.

The word 'svadharma' in the text, translated into 'one's own duty', can be extended to cover everything that a man is expected to do – expected not only in the obligatory but in a more natural sense, e.g., you expect a dog to bark at a stranger. That single word is difficult and delicate to translate; it is capable of triggering bitter controversy.

The tiger killing other animals incurs no sin. Perhaps the savage cannibal incurs no sin either, for he is still on the animal plane. A butcher carrying on his family trade incurs no sin. They can attain God-realisation by realising that all these activities pertain to their physical nature and that the self is the witness-consciousness.

It is 'desire born of rajo-guṇā, passion-quality' that holds man in bondage, not the performance of his duty – whatever that may be. The detached performance of his duty will ensure, in the case of a butcher, that it will drop away in God's good time; but its wilful abandonment by him in favour of a more esteemed occupation will only strengthen his ego and fulfil its desire for respectability.

The due performance of one's own duties, even mechanically, will gain for the man a natural promotion on the path of evolution, but a wise performance of the same duties, ascribing them to nature, whilst the seeker stands by as witness-consciousness, will secure self-realisation for him.

Where 'the expression of one's nature' involves anti-social activity, society will curb it; and that again is lawful.

The verse also unequivocally affirms Kṛṣṇa's firm view that proselytisation is a spiritual crime. One who is converted and one who converts, blasphemes against the omnipresence of God.

❖sahajāṁ karma kaunteya sadoṣam api na tyajet
 sarvārambhā hi doṣeṇa dhūmenā 'gnir ivā 'vṛtāḥ
 ❖asaktabuddhiḥ sarvatra jītātmā vigataspr̥haḥ
 naiṣkarm̐yasiddhiṁ paramāṁ saṁnyāsenā 'dhigacchati

One should not abandon, O Arjuna, the duty to which one is born, though faulty; for, all 'beginnings' are enveloped by evil, as fire by smoke.

He whose intellect is unattached everywhere, who has subdued his self, from whom desire has fled – he, by renunciation, attains the supreme state of freedom from action.

The previous injunction is reinforced. The goal of Gītā yoga is detached dynamism, egoless activity. Dynamism and detachment, efficiency and egolessness are possible only if one applies oneself to one's innate talents and faculties, if one discovers oneself, instead of struggling to imitate someone else. Abandoning them and looking for something else decreases efficiency and feeds the ego.

With the exception of those who are born, for unknown reasons, into the 'wrong' families, the vast majority of human beings find it easier to carry on the professions natural to them. It is 'in the blood', as we say. Hence, the carpenter's son has great chances of shining as a skilful carpenter. Barring exceptions, if he attempts to become a singer,

- (i) his natural talents are suppressed and lost to the world,
- (ii) he has to work against too many odds – upbringing, environment, etc., and so is constantly frustrated and worsted by those who are 'born to sing', and
- (iii) the unnaturalness of the situation makes him vain over little successes and the least defeat hurts his vanity deeply.

Kṛṣṇa tells us: "All beginnings, all undertakings are enveloped by evil; why are you anxious to abandon what is natural to you and struggle to achieve the unnatural?" Your goal is to make your life so easy and smooth-flowing that you can rise above the idea of 'I am the doer', so that you may rest in the supreme state of actionlessness. When you begin to do something strange and new, the desire that goads you, the effort that accompanies it, and the expectancy or fear of the consequences will conspire to keep you away from your own centre, i.e., witness-consciousness.

The correct understanding of this makes life clear and enables you to live in total harmony and bliss.

❖siddhiṁ prāpto yathā brahma tathā 'pnoti nibodha me
 samāsenai 'va kaunteya niṣṭhā jñānasya yā parā
 ❖buddhyā viśuddhayā yukto dhr̥tyā 'tmānaṁ niyamaṁ ca
 śabdādīn viśayāṁś tyaktvā rāga-dveṣau vyudasya ca

Learn from me in brief, O Arjuna, how he who has attained perfection reaches Brahman, that supreme state of knowledge.

Endowed with a pure intellect, controlling the self by firmness, relinquishing sound and other objects and abandoning attraction and hatred,

What does the one who wants to realise God abandon? Not any particular occupation or form of life. There is no purpose in jumping from frying pan to fire. When someone approached Ramana Maḥarṣi for permission to take saṁnyās, the latter significantly remarked: "So long you have identified yourself with a householder's life and status, and now you wish to identify yourself with a swami's life and status. What is the use? Remove all such identifications by self-realisation."

Indian history and legend contain countless illustrations of this vital truth: God-realisation does not depend upon learning or upon particular professions or accidents of birth, but solely upon self-discipline which is elaborated upon in the three verses, 51 to 53.

One should have an extremely pure intellect ('viśuddha') in the text does not mean merely 'pure', but exceptionally pure). Only that exceptionally pure intellect (the perfect mirror) will be able to reflect the true glory of the self.

The self must be controlled. We can effectively do that only by making the self obey the dictates of the divine within and not by acceding to the (self's) demands. It is the self that clamours for recognition; the will of the divine will naturally and inevitably assert itself. The latter requires no special effort or endeavour. The former involves self-aggrandisement, with love of those who promote it and hatred of those that thwart it – these are the factors to be abandoned.

How does one's birth or the expression of God-given innate talent hamper this self-discipline?

❖viviktasevī laghvāśī yatavākkāyamānasah
 dhyānayogaparo nityam vairāgyam samupāśritaḥ
 ❖ahamkāram balaṁ darpaṁ kāmam krodham parigraham
 vimucya nirmamaḥ śānto brahmabhūyāya kalpate

Dwelling in solitude, eating but little, with speech, body and mind subdued, always engaged in meditation and concentration, taking refuge in dispassion,

Having abandoned egoism, (a show of) strength, arrogance, desire, anger and covetousness, free from the notion of 'mine', and peaceful – he is fit for becoming Brahman.

The three verses, 51 to 53, may indicate what we should do after establishing ourselves in the perfection mentioned earlier! They may also be construed to indicate the symptomology of perfection itself: perfection and 'becoming Brahman' being two sides of the same coin.

The practice of 'seeing God in all' and serving and loving all as the manifestation of the supreme reality, which was described in previous verses, is an essential preliminary and auxiliary to what is taught in these verses. The seeker who shuns the world will only drive it into his subconscious and revive it in solitude. His world-hatred may appear to be a qualification for retiring into seclusion. If he is sincere, however, he will soon discover that isolation is a function of thought, it is not a feat, and therefore he has no control over himself, and his speech, body and mind are not subdued but suppressed.

Again, to be 'always engaged in meditation' demands the use of mighty intelligence. Whereas this is easy for the man who has perfected himself by the method of worshipping God with every action, it is impossible for others. Any forced egoistic attempt towards this end will only dig the pit of *tamas* from which it is extremely difficult to rescue oneself!

Our Master insisted that the seeker should intelligently combine a number of spiritual practices to prevent this. In all cases, one should be honest with oneself, never yielding to hypocrisy and showiness. All this may take a lifetime, but then the reward is well worth the effort. If yoga is made extremely unpleasant, the mind will revolt; if it is made too pleasant, it will be caught. The middle path alone is good.

❖brahmabhūtaḥ prasannātmā na śocati na kāṅkṣati
 samaḥ sarveṣu bhūteṣu madbhaktim labhate parām
 ❖bhaktyā mām abhijānāti yāvān yas cā 'smi tattvataḥ
 tato mām tattvato jñātvā viśate tadanantaram

Becoming Brahman, serene in the self, he neither grieves nor desires; the same to all beings, he obtains supreme devotion unto me.

By devotion he knows me in truth, what and why I am; then having known me in truth, he forthwith enters in the supreme.

'The more one knows, the better one knows how little he knows.' The fool is complacent; the sage is ever peaceful; but the sincere (sin-seer) seeker is acutely conscious of his own imperfection and so is dissatisfied. The closer to perfection he gets, the more magnified the defects appear. In a market-place even a major explosion is mild; in a sound-proof studio, the dropping of a pin sounds like thunder.

There is an ever-present danger in reading a text book on yoga: one becomes intellectually conscious of a 'goal' on the authority of the author of the text. This often tempts one to imagine having reached the goal or to despair of ever getting there!

To us, even the yoga prescribed in verse 46 looks like the ultimate goal! The one who has reached it discovers that the goal is further on. The perfected seeker (verse 46) acquires fitness for becoming Brahman (51 to 53). Becoming Brahman is still a state of becoming, not being! He sees his own self in all and he realises that the same God dwells in all beings, but still there is a subtle (and hence powerful) sense of individuality. There is no selfishness or vanity; there is no grief or desire. The mind is serene and the heart is filled with supreme devotion (para bhakti) to the Lord. ('Me' in the text is not a reference to the personalised Kṛṣṇa, but to the impersonal omnipresence.) Inferior devotion leads one to the threshold of this state of 'becoming Brahman' which generates supreme devotion, enabling the seeker to know (in the sense, realise) God by identity: 'I am Brahman'. There is just a trace of the 'I' now; and by God's grace, the seeker forthwith enters the supreme. That is the supreme fulfilment of human life, the goal of all evolutionary process.

Do not mistake this for idle reverie! For...

❖sarvakarmāṇy api sadā kurvāṇo madvyapāśrayaḥ
 matprasādād avāpnoti śāśvataṁ padam avyayaṁ
 ❖cetasā sarvakarmāṇi mayi saṁnyasya matparaḥ
 buddhiyogam upāśritya maccittaḥ satataṁ bhava

Doing all actions always, taking refuge in me, by my grace he obtains the eternal indestructible state or abode.

Mentally renouncing all actions in me, having me as the highest goal, resorting to the yoga of discrimination, do thou ever fix thy mind on me.

Egoistic action and selfishness are incompatible with this yoga. But not activity in itself. Our Master emphasised that he who would aspire to become one with God will be as busy as God himself! More active than the worldly man, he will, unlike the worldly man, be utterly unselfish.

He who takes refuge in God naturally shares God's nature – his compassion for all creatures – even as he who 'takes refuge' in a motor car, railway train, ship or aeroplane moves as fast as these vehicles. One does not have to run within the railway compartment and even so, the spiritual aspirant does not exercise his egoism to do his duty. His body and mind move within the Lord and as the Lord wills that they should.

In such complete self-surrender, he obtains the grace of the Lord. Once more, Kṛṣṇa reminds us that the goal is not to be reached by individual self-effort but only by the grace of God. The ego has no admission there; and if the ego is surrendered, who enters?

The aspirant's highest and only duty is again clearly stated in verse 57. The word 'renouncing' is a poor equivalent for the word 'saṁnyasya' in the text. How does one describe the 'action' of flying in an aeroplane? You may say: "I flew to South Africa"; but what do you feel inside you? When you realise your error, how do you express the truth? That is 'saṁnyasya'. Meditate upon this with keen discrimination. "I flew." "No, the plane flew me." "But I flew too".... Silence! That is 'saṁnyasya'.

The ego is absent in all yoga activity. But the ego has never been present, never been real. How did it **appear** to be, and, **who** asserts that it is absent now? Again, silence.

❖maccittāḥ sarvadurgāṇi matprasādāt tariṣyasi
atha cet tvam ahaṁkārān na śroṣyasi vinaṅkṣyasi

Fixing thy mind on me, thou shalt by my grace, overcome all obstacles; but
if from egoism thou wilt not hear me, thou shalt perish.

The word ‘maccittāḥ’ in the text is one of Kṛṣṇa’s favourites. The translation ‘fixing thy mind on me’, is rather weak. It is not like fixing a stamp on an envelope, but more like fixing a pot of water over a fire – the water is converted into vapour which shares with the fire its energy and heat. A closer similarity is coal thrown into fire: it becomes fire – it is fire now. However, no comparison is valid, because the duality thus presumed is not there in reality. When the devotee’s mind is thus fixed on God, he no longer remains a man but becomes a divinity, sharing the Lord’s power and glory.

But he must not test or measure that power or that glory. The yogi, being tempted to test his psychic power, loses contact with God.

Psychic powers, mental distractions and physical ailments are all regarded as obstacles on the spiritual path. If the seeker remains ‘fixed’ in his devotion to God, calmly and patiently awaiting the descent of his grace, that grace itself will remove all the obstacles for the seeker and enable him to realise God. What form this grace takes, one cannot say. Our Master used to say that God removes the pleasure-centres of those whom he wants to bless. If wealth, wife and children are the obstacles, God will remove them. If psychic powers are the obstacles, his grace will take them away. Whatever stands in between God and the seeker, his grace will remove, if the seeker sincerely and perseveringly applies himself to yoga.

‘Thou shalt perish’ is only a dramatic juxtaposition of ideas. If you are truly devoted to the infinite and you have discovered that whatever be your pursuit and whatever blessings you derive from your life, they all come from the one infinite being, then your heart is wedded the infinite and you merge in the infinite. If you are devoted to egoism, you will waste this precious life.

❖ yad ahaṁkāram āśritya na yotsya iti manyase
 mithyai 'śa vyavasāyas te prakṛtis tvām niyokṣyati
 ❖ svabhāvajena kaunteya nibaddhaḥ svena karmaṇā
 kartuṁ ne 'cchasi yan mohāt kariṣyasy avaśo 'pi tat

If, filled with egoism, thou thinkest: "I will not fight", vain is this, thy resolve; nature will compel thee.

O Arjuna, bound by thine own karma born of thine own nature, that which from delusion thou wishest not to do, even that thou shalt do helplessly.

These verses may sound fatalistic and seem to sanction predestination – perhaps justifiably so. Man has striven day and night to conquer nature, yet he has not succeeded in making the sun rise in the west nor in making the apple fall upwards. At great trouble and expense, he pumps water up, but it quickly flows down. Death freezes all individual achievements into a pleasant memory. Time bulldozes civilisations into non-existence, creating a pastime for archaeologists. Hunger and thirst, illness and death, heat and cold, and numerous other forms of suffering inherent in earthly life always have the last laugh.

Nature, whether cosmic or personal, cannot be cancelled. A natural law is inviolable, eternal; and all the realities of nature are constant. Thus, nature can only be understood. If such understanding creates the impression that we can defy nature, it is a delusion. Nature will continue her play. The ego standing in front of her and defying her will be crushed; the ego pushing her from behind will frustrate itself. We can neither desire nor desist egoistically.

This nature includes what we call 'my' body and mind. All these function. It is natural. But where is the ego, the self? Who or what is it? Why does it wish to desire or desist? And, what does the egoistic man achieve?

Sin is neither in God nor in nature, but is hidden in the defiance and the desire. Knowing this, the wise one does not incur sin. Yet, repressed desires still remain within the ignorant man, indicating that he is only clinging to illusion and turning what seems to be valid knowledge into a tool of this illusion. Whatever one does in ignorance is sinful. Even egoistic virtue is only postponed vice. Egoism born of ignorance is the sinner – thank God it is only born of ignorance and hence not real.

❖īśvaraḥ sarvabhūtānāṃ hr̥ddeśe 'rjuna tiṣṭhati
bhrāmayan sarvabhūtāni yantrārūḍhāni māyayā

The Lord dwells (abides) in the hearts of all beings, O Arjuna, causing all beings, by his illusive power, to revolve as if mounted on a machine.

God and his inscrutable illusive power (māyā) constitute the entire universe. God's real nature is veiled by this illusive power which cannot even be understood, because the understanding power in us is also a manifestation of māyā. Our own intuition and the direct realisation of the great sages confirm the truth which has been beautifully expressed by Tulasidas, the author of Rāmāyaṇa in Hindi, thus: "I realise that the whole universe is "Sītā-Rāma" – Sītā representing māyā and Rāma representing the Lord.

Though Īśvara and māyā are two-in-one (symbolised in the beautiful picture of Śiva and Pārvatī sharing the two halves of one body), they are the opposite poles. In the text, the word used for 'dwells' is 'tiṣṭhati' (stands firm). So, the Lord stands firm in all beings; but māyā is dynamic and makes everyone revolve. Thus, when we are at peace within ourselves, we may understand that we are in the light of the Lord; and when the mind is restless, it is caught in māyā.

We can learn a wonderful lesson by watching a merry-go-round. The children farthest from the centre whirl wildly, those midway move more slowly and the one at the centre is at peace. You have the free-will to choose where you wish to be.

God dwells in the hearts of all beings; these beings are part of nature. The infinite reflections of God in his own nature are misunderstood as the ego! There is naught else which you may hold up as 'ego'!

Another great lesson is alluded to here. Anything that leads us to our centre is the grace of God (Īśvara). Anything that tempts us away from there is the work of māyā. Thus, pleasure, prosperity and success make us extrovert: they are the tempting baits of māyā. Pain, adversity and failure (should) bring us back to ourselves. Obviously they are the signs of the grace of God!

❖ tam eva śaraṇaṁ gaccha sarvabhāvena bhārata
tatprasādāt parāṁ śāntiṁ sthānaṁ prāpsyasi śāśvataṁ

Fly unto him for refuge with all thy being, O Arjuna; by his grace thou shalt obtain supreme peace and the eternal abode.

‘Śaraṇaṁ’ in the text means ‘asylum’, ‘refuge’. Until we take refuge or seek asylum in the centre of our being, we shall be whirled helplessly on the wheel or the merry-go-round of birth and death. We can take birth again and again, experiencing newer joys and suffering up-to-date agonies, but we shall remain where we were ages ago, bound to individuality and the fleshy tabernacle.

The centre, referred to as the ‘heart’ in the previous verse is equated to God in this verse. ‘The heart of all beings’ neither confines God to a limited space (though the physical heart has been used as the focal point for meditation by all devotees) nor cancels his omnipresence. It is the ‘heart’ of each cell in living beings, of each atom of existence. Science indirectly admits of the existence of a mighty intelligence (which it calls ‘nuclear power’) within the nucleus of an atom, where, contrary to all known laws of electromagnetism, several protons (having positive charge which should normally compel them to repel one another) live in unity, and which at the same time keep the electrons vibrating around the nucleus. That intelligence is God or God’s. In him disharmonies are harmonised, all opposites are integrated. By taking refuge in him man shall be able to transcend the puzzling and tormenting pulls of the extremes; in him alone can one find lasting and unalloyed peace.

‘Sarvabhāvena’ in the text has been translated ‘with all thy being’. It can also mean: ‘convert all your emotions into devotion and direct that to God. Love him as your master, your friend, your parent and your lover; seek him in all these attitudes (bhāva).’ At every turn it is good to remind ourselves that all this is not ego-activity, but its dissolution in the light of knowledge, in the light of love.

With the descent of this light of knowledge into your heart, a perception of the truth arises which transforms the world into the love of God without touching it. And this perception transforms your life, too, without changing it, so that established thus in God’s supreme love, you will know no sorrow nor will you ever be subject to sin.

❖iti te jñānam ākhyātaraṁ guhyād guhyataraṁ mayā
 vimṛśyai 'tad aśeṣeṇa yathe 'cchasi tathā kuru
 ❖sarvaguhyatamaṁ bhūyaḥ śṛṇu me paramaṁ vacaḥ
 iṣṭo 'si me dṛḍham iti tato vakṣyāmi te hitaṁ

Thus has wisdom, more secret than secrecy itself, been declared unto thee by me; having reflected over it fully, then act as thou wishest.

Hear thou again my supreme word, most secret of all; because thou art dearly beloved of me, I will tell thee what is good.

In verse 63 above, we are given a hint of the divine law. Having bestowed intelligence and free-will upon man and having revealed the greatest of all secrets to him, the Lord does not make a mockery of that gift by depriving man of its use! 'Reflect over what I have said fully and then act as thou wishest.'

This exercise of the individuality and its concomitant free-will is the fundamental principle in the law of karma. God created Adam and warned him specifically not to taste the forbidden fruit; yet, the serpent (also God's creation?) was able to lead him astray. "Why did the first man choose to subject himself to evil?" asks the wiseacre. Why do you make a wrong choice? It is impossible for the limited human understanding to unravel this mystery.

The problem of right or wrong action is guided by the act of vigilant observation. What is needed is insight. There is absolutely no guidance except the kindling of inner light – the awakening of the insight. If this is there, it is able to take care of life's problems as they arise. The problem is not what you should do or if you should do something, but to remain aware of the source of the impulse to act. In the light of the insight, that source is revealed, and then the necessary changes in one personality are brought about in order that one's actions are proper.

As lord Buddha said, instead of worrying our poor little head with these transcendental questions, we should listen to God's supreme word, the greatest secret, in the full knowledge and faith that God loves us dearly and that he has revealed this knowledge to us because it is good for us. 'Listening' is our foremost duty! This listening implies neither acceptance nor rejection, but a 'tuning in'. When we thus tune in to the song of God, the truth unveils itself.

❖manmanā bhava madbhakto madyājī mām namaskuru
mām evai 'śyasi satyaṁ te pratijāne priyo 'si me

Fix thy mind on me, be devoted to me, sacrifice to me (work for my sake), bow down to me. Thus thou shalt come to me; truly do I promise unto thee, for thou art dear to me.

Kṛṣṇa sums up the yoga of the Bhagavad Gītā in this single verse. It is integral yoga. It is the yoga of synthesis. It carries out a concerted attack against the worst human enemy – ignorance, and its offspring – the individualisation of consciousness. As our Master often warned us, one-sided development is no development at all. It is like trying to empty the ocean with a bucket. The ego will withdraw itself from the point of attack and build itself up elsewhere, only to return and reassert itself when the seeker is non-vigilant.

The meditator, the devotee of God, the 'selfless' worker – can all fall into the great error of developing atrocious 'spiritual' vanity. The exclusive meditator might shun the 'world' and even devotional practices as well as service; the devotee might look down upon the non-devotee; the selfless worker might feel that he is the saviour of mankind – these attitudes are more dangerous than plain wickedness. They were quartered in the human personality by the urge to specialise, by an eagerness to shine 'above all others'. Hence, Kṛṣṇa adds here: 'Practise all these – meditation, devotion, selfless service – and at the same time bow down to me, the omnipresent.' True humility is born of the realisation of God's omnipresence and the unreality of the ego.

When the head, the heart and the hand are all offered to God; when the thought, will and emotion are all sublimated into holiness – there is less chance of vanity creeping in. But complacency here is dangerous. While practising all these, observe the arising of an evil or distracting thought or a temptation. That is the 'me'. Push it out. Bow down to all, feeling the presence of God, so that you will not even mistakenly feel you are superior to anyone. Then you will become pure, self-controlled and therefore divine.

❖sarvadharmān parityajya mām ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja
 ahaṁ tvā sarvapāpebhyo mokṣayiṣāmi mā śucaḥ

Abandoning all dharma, take refuge in me alone. I will liberate thee from all sins; grieve not.

‘Dharma’ here can be interpreted variously. Let us look at it in two ways:

Narrow, sectarian and organised religion is often confused with dharma. To an extent it is true that organised religion supports the masses, thus shielding them from degradation; it unites and keeps them together. But when foolishly clung to, it strangulates the very people whom it kept together. ‘Abandonment of all dharma’, however, does not mean that we should egoistically and deludedly give them up, but we should not cling to them as if they were an end in themselves, as if they were the truth. The various ‘religions’ were created by man, not by God; they were born after God and man. They can help man find God but should never be substituted for God.

The inherent nature of the body, mind, etc., is often designated as their dharma. Its abandonment implies a vigilant non-identification of the divine with the function of the body, mind, etc.

This renunciation, however, is not possible unless we are rooted in God and we take refuge in him. Taking refuge in him itself is freedom from all sin and sorrow. In him there is no sin and no sorrow, even as in the sun there is no darkness.

God is bliss. Bliss is not something he possesses and which he therefore gives us in answer to our prayer. Even the happiness we derive from prayer is merely the fruit of contact with him. We should surrender ourselves to him, to bliss. As long as our ego separates us from him, so long shall we continue to be unhappy. All the gross and subtle manifestations of this ego (selfishness, love individualised existence, private desires, one’s own philosophy, sectarianism, bigotry, a superiority complex, an air of holiness) should be vigilantly avoided so nothing stands between us and him. Then this very world becomes the playground of the spirit, and everything connected with it (whether it was previously called pleasure pain, happiness or sorrow) is instantly transformed into bliss – the play of God.

- ❖ idam te nā 'tapaskāya nā 'bhaktāya kadācana
na cā 'śuśrūṣave vācyaṁ na ca mām yo 'bhyasūyati
- ❖ ya imam paramam guhyam madbhakteṣv abhidhāsyati
bhaktim mayi parām kṛtvā mām evai 'śyaty asaṁśayaḥ
- ❖ na ca tasmān manuṣyeṣu kaścin me priyakṛttamaḥ
bhavitā na ca me tasmād anyāḥ priyataro bhuvi

This is never to be spoken by thee to one who is devoid of austerities or devotion, nor to one who does not render service or who does not desire to listen, nor to one who wrangles at me.

He who with supreme devotion to me will teach this supreme secret to my devotees, shall doubtless come to me.

Nor is there any among men who does dearer service to me, nor shall there be another on earth dearer to me than he.

Kṛṣṇa obviously knew that his instructions to Arjuna would live for ever as the spiritual guiding light for humanity. In the present day context, when the printing machine, public address system, radio, television and tape-recorder have to some extent replaced personal tuition, the admonition of verse 67 above, seems to be out of place. Yet one cannot fail to notice that they who fall within the qualifications of this verse do not care to visit assemblies where the Gītā is taught; and the teaching is so sublime that even if they went but once, out of curiosity, they would not go for more, unless, by God's grace, there came a change within them.

The message of the Bhagavad Gītā will not produce a lasting impression upon the mind of one who has no devotion, who is given to sense-indulgence, who is selfish or atheistic. Hence, if one with these qualifications comes to discuss the Gītā with you, keep quiet! In a public meeting, your words are received eagerly by the devout. In private conversation, give the knowledge only to those who are faithful, eager to learn, unselfish and full of devotion to God.

Spreading the knowledge of the Gītā itself can build an inner fortress of divinity into which we can retire when assailed by temptations; and an outer fortress, too, in as much as worldly-minded people will not bother us and we shall have excellent company of the devout all the time.

Even they who at first think we are mad, will, in God's good time, get the infection and be happy that they are mad, too – mad for God.

❖ adhyeṣyate ca ya imam dharmyam saṁvādam āvayoḥ
 jñānayajñena tenā 'ham iṣṭaḥ syām iti me matiḥ
 ❖ śraddhāvān anasūyaś ca śṛṇuyād api yo naraḥ
 so 'pi muktaḥ śubhāṁ lokān prāpnuyāt puṇyakarmaṇām

And he who will study this sacred dialogue of ours, by him I shall have been worshipped by the sacrifice of wisdom (worship) – such is my conviction.

The man also who hears this, full of faith and free from malice, he, too, liberated, shall attain to the happy worlds of those of righteous deeds.

Jñāna yajña (sacrifice through wisdom) is a form of worship. It is worshipping God as the light of knowledge. The Gītā is God's word, uttered by his lips. In days of yore fire was produced by rubbing two pieces of wood together. The divine fire of the Gītā has been produced by the rubbing together of the two lips of the Lord. It is of the Lord, it is he himself. A lamp lit from another is lamp, too.

Jñāna yajña is dissemination of spiritual knowledge, which was dear to our Master, too. You study the Gītā with others. You are benefited and so are they. Kṛṣṇa uses the symbolism that was familiar to Arjuna – yajña, in which a priest, surrounded by devotees, offered clarified butter into the sacred fire. In jñāna yajña the article offered is wisdom (jñāna). The priest does not create clarified butter, the lecturer does not create wisdom. If the fire is dull, the clarified butter will augment it; but if it is dead it is wasted. The audience is the fire here. If it is eager though not wise, the discourse will augment the wisdom in the members. But if the audience is totally disinterested, then the wisdom falls on deaf ears – it is wasted (hence the warning in verse 67).

Hearing is the first part of jñāna yoga (the yoga of wisdom). If the heart of the hearer is pure, the wisdom blossoms in it quickly and the seeker is liberated from this world of pain and death. The hearer is not asked to accept everything blindly, but to 'listen', to reflect over it and to meditate on it, so that the knowledge becomes one with him.

❖kaccid etac chrutaṁ pārtha tvayai 'kāgreṇa cetasā
 kaccid ajñānasaṁmohaḥ pranaṣṭas te dhanamjaya
 arjuna uvāca
 ❖naṣṭo mohaḥ smṛtir labdhā tvatprasādān mayā 'cyuta
 sthito 'smi gatasandehaḥ kariṣye vacanaṁ tava

Has this been heard, O Arjuna, with one-pointed mind? Has the delusion of thine ignorance been destroyed, O Dhanamjaya?

Arjuna said: Destroyed is my delusion as I have gained my memory (knowledge) through thy grace, O Kṛṣṇa. I am firm, my doubts are gone. I will act according to thy word.

If one-pointedness of mind is not gained, we shall not understand or profit by even the word of God. There are many in this world who ask but will not hear! There are others who sit in front of the master, but only physically – their mind is elsewhere. They merely nod their heads at the truths, but the heart is untouched and the gut-level, where the action is, is completely untouched. There are still others who, while listening, mentally carry on an argument, accepting some ideas and rejecting others. This multi-activity only tires them, preventing them from grasping the real meaning of the lesson imparted. They might hear the words, but unless they are supermen, they will miss their depth and complain that the explanations are not satisfactory.

Whilst we do not advocate slavish blind acceptance of any teaching, we do assert that it is better (and less strenuous) to do the hearing first, receive (not necessarily accept) the ideas and 'reserve judgement'. Once rapport has been established by the teacher and the taught, it is more profitable to self-hypnotise ourselves (not in the technical sense) in order that our finite little egoistic intellect may not interrupt the free flow of supreme wisdom from the lips of the master to our heart. Only then will we be able to declare with Arjuna that 'my delusion has been destroyed' and 'I have regained the knowledge which was there always' (the knowledge that the body is not the self). The mark of enlightenment is given as doubtlessness – a heart in which there is no doubt at all, and 'I am firm' reminds us of the state of the *sthitaprajña* (sage of firm wisdom) mentioned at the end of the second chapter.

Where does this lead to? We do God's will, joyously participating in the dynamism of nature, egolessly.

sañjaya uvāca
 ❖ity ahaṁ vāsudevasya pārthasya ca mahātmanah
 sañvādam imam āsrauṣam adbhutaṁ romaharṣaṇaṁ
 ❖vyāsaprasādāc chrutavān etad guhyam ahaṁ param
 yogaṁ yogeśvarāt kṛṣṇāt sāksāt kathayataḥ svayaṁ
 ❖rājan saṁsmṛtya-saṁsmṛtya sañvādam imam adbhutaṁ
 keśavārjunayoḥ puṇyaṁ hr̥ṣyāmi ca muhur-muhuh
 ❖tac ca saṁsmṛtya-saṁsmṛtya rūpam atyadbhutaṁ hareḥ
 vismayo me mahān rājan hr̥ṣyāmi ca punaḥ-punaḥ

Sanjaya said: Thus I have heard this wonderful dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and the high-souled Arjuna, which causes the hair to stand on end.

Through the grace of Vyāsa I have heard this supreme and most secret yoga direct from Kṛṣṇa, the lord of yoga, himself declaring it.

O King, remembering this wonderful and holy dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, I rejoice again and again.

And, remembering again and again also, that most wonderful form of Hari, great is my wonder, O King; and I rejoice again and again.

How could Sañjaya hear this dialogue direct from God? How could Sañjaya see the divine cosmic form when he was seated in the palace and was not on the battlefield? These questions would have been valid in the last century, not in this. Radio and television have enabled us, even in this totally materialistic age, to hear someone's voice over thousands of miles and to see someone as if in person. Even if we are reluctant to accept the validity of psychic phenomena and the possibility of a psychic communion between Sañjaya and Kṛṣṇa (initiated by sage Vyāsa himself), what prevents us from accepting the possible existence of radio and television in that remote time? One may ask why these things did not exist in India a hundred years ago. But consider this: should a nuclear war destroy modern civilisation, the generation that will live in this world a couple hundred years hence might ask the same question and doubt the richness of the present civilisation.

If we cultivate the necessary faith and the necessary power of inner communion, we can still experience the thrill that was Sañjaya's privilege. Throw away the books and commentaries; dive within your self and listen to the Gītā direct from God's lips. To foster that spirit within you is the only purpose of any commentary.

❖ yatra yogeśvaraḥ kṛṣṇo yatra pāṛtho dhanurdharaḥ
tatra śrīr vijayo bhūtir dhruvā nītir matir mama

Wherever there is Kṛṣṇa, the lord of yoga, wherever there is Arjuna, the archer, there are prosperity, victory, happiness and firm policy; such is my conviction.

This simple verse has attained the high status of being regarded as ‘Gītā in one verse’, yet on the face of it, it does not seem to contain the least portion of the Gītā’s message! Moreover, the condition prerequisite is frighteningly impossible. Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna lived thousands of years ago. May be, what Saṁjaya said applied then – how does it help us now?

The answer is: look within. Let your whole soul become Arjuna, the seeker. Mentally repeat the famous verse in the second chapter: ‘Lord, I seek refuge at thy feet. I am thy disciple. Instruct me.’ But you should also be an archer – Arjuna! The Kāṭhupanisad compares the self with the arrow, in relation to Brahman the absolute – the target. Om̐ is the bow. String the bow by the utterance of Om̐. Fix the self to it, firmly. With intense concentration of mind, let the arrow (self) fly towards that supreme being who is the self of your self. Then you are the true – Arjuna.

When you seek God thus, you shall discover him within the innermost chambers of your being. He who is dark to the worldly man’s eyes will shine as the light of lights for you, as if a thousand suns arose simultaneously. There within you, you will ‘see’ both Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, once again, as they have always been – together, as one. This is self-realisation; this is the goal of all human life; this is the truth which all the scriptures point out.

In self-realisation alone is there true prosperity and victory, for so-called worldly prosperity is adversity only, leading you away from the goal. In self-realisation alone is there ever-lasting happiness; all else is only non-happiness. In self-realisation alone is there firm justice; only the sage of self-realisation is established in truth. May you reach this goal in this very birth, nay ‘here and now,’ as our Master used to say.



OM TAT SAT

iti śrīmad bhagavad gītāsūpaniṣatsu brahma vidyāyām
yogaśāstre śrī kṛṣṇarjuna saṁvāde
mokṣa saṁnāsyā yogo nāma 'ṣṭādaśo 'dhyāyaḥ

Thus in the upaniṣad of the glorious Bhagavad Gītā,
the science of the eternal, the scripture of yoga,
the dialogue between śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna,
ends the eighteenth discourse entitled:

THE YOGA OF LIBERATION BY RENUNCIATION

CONCLUSION

This was a glimpse of the gospel of lord Kṛṣṇa – simple, direct, yet profound. It is not one of pessimism or of escapism, but is full of robust common sense. And if it sometimes seems to be puzzling, it is because common sense is so uncommon in the complex world of today.

You may be quite certain that one direction is east and the opposite west. But if you move a little, you suddenly discover that east and west meet in you! You are the divider, and from another point of view, you are the meeting point. In fact, it is the mind that creates all this duality which multiplies into endless diversity, creating conflicts and confusion all the way through.

There is only oneness or cosmic unity. There just cannot be two infinities or two omnipresences. The origin of the perception of diversity is enshrouded in mystery (māyā). But Kṛṣṇa boldly assumes responsibility for even that! “I am seated in the hearts of all; from me are memory, knowledge, **as well as their absence**,” says he.

The manifest universe is the body of God and the supreme spirit is the indweller. Even this distinction was made to suit human analogy and to satisfy the duality-ridden intellect. We make an arbitrary distinction between our body and our spirit which seems to be justified because at one stage (death), the spirit leaves the body. This, obviously, does not apply to the Lord and his body, for he is eternal and infinite, and does not leave his body.

What a sublime vision! What a world-uniting doctrine! What a fountain of love! What a soft blow to shatter all distinctions and differences! What a divine cord of love to unite all mankind in oneness – divinity!

OM TAT SAT



