

*Modern Reading and Scientific Study of*

# Bhagavad Gita

**From the Author and Physicist who won Bharatiya  
Jnanapith's Moortidevi Award for excellence in  
Indian writing**

**C. RADHAKRISHNAN**





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# **BHAGAVAD GITA**

Modern Reading and Scientific Study

by

**C. Radhakrishnan**

**Second Edition**



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## About the author

C Radhakrishnan is an established author in the Malayalam language. A scientist-turned writer, he has contributed to all branches of creative literature besides popular science. He has been honoured by India's National Akademi of Letters, the Kerala Sahitya Akademi and almost every other body promoting creative literature of the language he writes. He is the winner of Ezhuthachan Award (the highest recognition given to authors in the Malayalam language), and also the Moortidevi Award of the Bharatiya Jnanapith Trust for the best creative work in Indian languages. A multi-faceted personality, he has worked as scientist, popular science journalist, film director, columnist, and editor of national and literary journals.

Born on 15 Feb 1939 in Chamravattom village in Kerala, C. Radhakrishnan became the Winner of Best Student Gold Medal at Achutha Varier High School, Ponnani, winner of Madras University Sharpe Scholarship - Inter: Zamorin's College, Calicut, and Winner of Top Rank Gold medal - Graduation: Physics, Zamorin's College, Calicut - I. PG: Post Graduation - Applied Physics; Research (Astrophysics). The author also won in every literary competition during his academic career. He translated Daniel Defoe (M. Flanders) and Lincoln Bernet (*The Universe and Doctor Einstein*) at age seventeen, and David O.Woodbury's *Outward Bound for Space* in 1962.

C. Radhakrishnan became scientific Assistant at Astrophysical Observatory, Kodaikanal in 1960 and became officer-in-Charge, World-Wide Seismology Centre, Pune in 1962. He helped launch and establish *Science Today* (Times of India), the first popular science magazine of India, at a young age of 24, and later held senior positions with national print media organs. He was also the science Editor of *Link Magazine* and *Patriot Daily*, Delhi, 1968-'72.

The author is a well known Vedantic scholar and has written numerous articles on the subject. He was the editor of Malayalam magazine *Piravi* published by the *School of Bhagavad Gita*. He has done an exhaustive work on the Bhagavad Gita titled "Gitadarsanam" which is very popular in Malayalam language. The present book "Bhagavad Gita" critically approaches yoga sastra in the light of modern science and, at the same time evaluates modern science vis-à-vis yoga sastra.

His research on problems fundamental to astrophysics gave rise to a monograph titled "*Unity of Space-Matter Manifestations*", published as early as in January 1988. "*Stuff and Style of the Universe*", a book which is a popular

science elaboration of the monograph, was published Nov. 2002 by Hi-Tech Books. The first Scientist-President of India, Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, expressed appreciation of the work done, and the model attracted world attention. An article based on the book was also published in '*Science India*' (ISSN 0972-8287) in two issues, which came out on September 2012 and October 2012 (Vol. 15 No. 9 and Vol. 15 No. 10 respectively). Continued researches resulted in the book "*The Secret Behind the Universe*", published July 2016, in which the original ideas were further refined and updated. A condensed version of the physics section of this book was published in January 2017 as an article titled "*Avyakta: The Fabric of Space*" in the *Prespacetime Journal* Vol 7 Issue 16 (Prespacetime Journal (ISSN: 2153-8301), QuantumDream Inc., P.O. Box 267, Stony Brook, NY 11790-0267, USA; is a physics journal which focuses on the origin, nature and mechanism of spacetime and its possible connection to a prespacetime; and models and experimental results on elemental particles, fundamental forces including gravity and related topics.) The entire article is available online to read or download from the journal website, and can be accessed through the author's site: <http://www.c-radakrishnan.info>

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## PREFACE

# Without Prejudices

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There are two diagonally opposite view points on the Bhagavad Gita in relation to science. One rejects it as absolutely unscientific and superstitious whereas another claims that it has more knowledge than whatever modern science has discovered so far. This divergence extends to the evaluation of its utility. While some hold the Gita responsible for all setbacks and degeneration suffered by the Indian polity over thousands of years, many others believe that ultimate salvation can be achieved if one just keeps the Gita under the pillow and sleeps, without even opening it ever.

The Gita advises dependence upon ‘science’ to achieve success in life. (‘Let science be your guide to distinguish between what matters and what does not’ – 16.24). It is obvious that ‘science’ here does not mean modern scientific knowledge only, because it is not the latter’s job to guide a person in emotional turmoil when faced with hard choices in his life. What is referred to here is *adhyatma vidya*, the science of one’s true self. It is also known as *parā vidya*. It makes use of one’s own body, intuition, mind and intellect to find and access knowledge through oneself. On the other hand, modern science is *aparā vidya*, the way to know and manipulate the external world. While the former is based on subjective and nontransferable experiences, the latter is built upon verifiable and impersonal results of objective experiments.

Modern science has been able to transform the material world dramatically. But fundamental questions are yet to be answered. For instance, what is life, why do bodies attract each other, how and where did the universe begin and to what end does it go on? Moreover, indiscretion in the application of scientific knowledge has caused untold miseries from plastic pollution to atomic bombs. In short, science and technology on its own have not been able to help human kind achieve sustainable peace and well being. Moreover, man’s mind and environment have been getting dirtier almost proportional to the advancement of science, if not ahead of it. Mental unrest and tension multiply by geometric

progression.

The emotional state of the observer, experimenter or applicator is no concern of modern science. *Parā vidya*, on the other hand, in addition to seeking knowledge, presents the theory and practice of internal fulfillment. In fact, the knowledge it propounds cannot be imbibed unless one's mind is under control. Relying on superstition is not the answer. Rigid religious texts may not answer complex questions unless one learns for oneself how to work out answers and live accordingly. So the right combination of *parā vidya* (true knowledge of oneself unbiased by superstition) and modern science can be considered a viable antidote to the ills of the world. Vedantic texts form the basis of the *parā* knowledge. Therefore, the need of the hour is to closely examine Vedanta with a scientific approach and modern science in the light obtained from inferences from this. Both are products of human enquiry. Either oversimplified comparisons between the two or immature conclusions will not do. The reading of the Gita that follows is the result of a thoroughly critical attempt to find convergences and divergences between the two and to evolve an approach to life combining the two to the extent logically tenable.

# The Approach

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The structure of Mahabharata of which the Gita is a part is multidimensional. It can be read at many levels. One can consider the Bhagavad Gita to be: 1. Just a great piece of poetry. 2. A true story. 3. The teachings of Krishna the incarnation. 4. The vision of Vedanta made clear to the *kshetra* by its soul. Each approach proves interesting. ‘Make your pick!’ is the compassionate smile on the face of sage Veda Vyasa, the author. In the Gita the narration is blended in such a way as to accommodate all standpoints. Nonetheless, there is every reason to believe that the great sage expects the reader to climb the steps of these approaches to the highest level. It is obvious that he has considered the last step the true stand and hopes everyone reaches there. The true source of this Vedantic discourse is made quite clear: “*The unwise, unable to understand My Supreme position as Mahesvara of all, disrespect Me by considering Me as having some human body to subsist.*” Bhagavad Gita 9.11. The Universal Soul or the *Paramātma* – the source of the discourse – cannot be visualized as human form; there should be no conceptual error. The verses blend with the story because Vyasa is no ordinary poet, but the great sage also intends the understanding and vision of his reader to transcend all the levels. This inference is warranted by many special features of the work itself.

1. The Bhagavad Gita of course is poetry at its best. But it is primarily a book of Vedantic discussion which also contains precautionary warnings about misuse. For instance, the Gita concludes saying, ‘*Thus, the wisdom which is the greatest of all secrets has been revealed to you by Me; now reflect upon it critically and do as you think right.*’ This amounts to declaring that the author does not want his work to be used as any religious text. No text of any religion gives its followers this kind of total freedom regarding its teachings. It is only fair and just that we treat the Gita only as a comprehensive ‘user’s manual’ to the path of conditioning human life.

2. There are 701 stanzas in the Gita. The marathon question-answer session is supposed to be taking place right in the midst of a battlefield after the

clarion call for battle is sounded. Once the ‘March!’ order is issued, no army stays back that long for any reason.

3. Sage Vyasa indicates at the very beginning of the Mahabharata that the entire story is an exercise in magical realism. Look at the genesis of main characters in it. The oldest person of the family is Bhishma. His mother is the symbolic embodiment of the river Ganges. Brothers Pandu and Dhrutarashtra are Vyasa’s own ‘progeny’. Pandavas, the children of Pandu, are actually children of various natural forces. Their wife Draupadi has originated from fire. To top it all, the 101 Kauravas were ‘cloned’ by Vyasa himself!

4. The Bhagavad Gita is written in such a way that two sets of interpretations can be taken from the level of Arjuna himself. One is at the obvious level, where a soldier, confronted with severe internal turmoil in a battlefield due to the prospect of fighting against his relatives and teachers, and confused further by religious concepts in vogue during his time, asks to his friend and teacher for help in alleviating his mental anguish. The other is a person in sorrow because he cannot identify the good or bad tendencies within himself, confusing his inner corruption and sensual craving to be his true relatives and well wishers but also identifying them to be in some way the cause for his mental anguish; his own confusions coming from very subjective issues and so subtle that simple religious concepts are of no help, crying to his inner soul to show a way out. It is indicated in many verses that the second concept is also included by the master poet.

5. The Gita was not written as an independent piece of Vedantic work, rather it is part of the Mahabharata epic. In the Gita, the highest thought processes in Vedanta are blended with beliefs and customs in the background story as perfectly as possible. Whenever some inaccurate custom or belief is presented, the corrections are done in such a way that there is no conflict or problem with the background story. Both the story and the vision hold. The blend is done very capably and only sage Vyasa could do it. But this fact of integration has to be remembered and the verses have to be analyzed in this light rather than literally taken; that is also intended by the poet.

6. The Gita promulgates the view that every object in the universe and the universe itself behaves in particular patterns of ‘liveliness’. ‘Life’ is not a phenomenon that ‘originates’ out of nowhere at some stage in the material evolution of the universe. We know that a subatomic particle is ‘lively’ in its own way; electrons, protons and neutrons have their own patterns of ‘behavior’; a molecule ‘interacts’ in a different way, a macromolecule in yet another and so on. The same is the case with man, family, society, etc. Each one is a different

*kshetra* (field). The entire clan in the story – Kauravas, Pandavas, Draupadi, Krishna and all others, can be together visualized as one *kshetra*. The whole epic then becomes the story of the progress of this *kshetra* towards *moksha* (salvation). The very names of major characters are symbolic. The four *purushartha* (objectives of man) are *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (material wealth), *kāma* (love and desire) and *moksha* (salvation). In Kurukshetra, ‘Dharmaputra’ (name of the eldest brother) literally means the son of justice, ‘Partha’ (his brother Arjuna’s pseudonym meaning ‘one who has won over wealth’) symbolizes mastery over the material world with the action component for it, and Bhima (another brother, name meaning the very big) symbolizes relentless loyalty and love. Draupadi (wife of the Pandavas) is the mind of the *kshetra*, Krishna its soul, and the Kauravas, the villains on the other side of the war, are the unhealthy emotions born of the embodiment of blind greed (Dhrutarashtra – the blind old king). The Kauravas have been given names literally meaning evil. (Will any parent in real life, not to speak of maharajas, name their children this way?) The epic tells the story how the soul of the *kshetra* leads it to *moksha* (salvation). The symbol of decisive action in the material world – Arjuna – at a critical moment asks Krishna, the symbol of the soul, for clarifications and guidelines. Naturally, the dialogue that ensues can have parallels within any individual, any family, any society, any nation or the entire world itself any time. Therefore, anyone anywhere and at any time can read the Gita for help to handle any kind of struggle in life.

7. Arjuna is portrayed as a product of customs, beliefs and education prevalent at that time. His attitudes and doubts are derived from this background. Though different, modern man has his own background and it varies in various measures from individual to individual. So we too have both common questions and individual questions. Whom shall we ask? Ask your real self – your *ātma* or soul – says the Gita. The question how and where to find your Real Self is discussed. Model questions and answers have been provided for help. The need for agents and intermediaries on the road to salvation is ruled out and ritualism discouraged. It is shown that salvation is an experience here and now itself (not anything that will have to wait till after death).

8. The Gita telescopes all Upanishads into it and has a consciousness different from its components. The quality of any *kshetra* depends on the degree of refinement in its internal integration. The Gita is a perfectly integrated *Kshetra* of all kinds and types of erudition.

Anyone or anything, anywhere, is part of many a *kshetra* at the same time. Man has the freedom and ability to know, see and align himself with the highest

path. The emphasis is on the individual. Laws cannot make a good society, religions do not take into account the entire human race, and even heredity with exemplary royal nature need not produce noble rulers. Revolutions will never cease to lead to counter revolutions unless revolutionaries themselves attain that internal nobility and highest path. Holism is the keyword. Philosophy, psychology, sociology, and politics – in fact every science today – underlines the benefits of the holistic approach.

At some point of time in the past, it was wrongly believed that Vedanta negated all worldly life. This was caused by an incorrect interpretation of the idea of *māya*. As long as the human body exists, awareness of a deeper reality will not make the apparent reality any less real; therefore Vedanta does not encourage renunciation of life. For anyone familiar with the total picture of the solar system, sunrise and sunset are no more than ‘apparent’ realities. But the sun does not go around the earth, nor does it actually ‘rise’ in the east or ‘set’ in the west. Yet this does not mean one need not get up in the morning or light a lamp to show the way in the dark! On the other hand, greater understanding should help us to live better.

In this book meticulous care has been taken for providing exact translations of the verses as possible, and the original Sanskrit verses are also provided in English. Terms are quoted as it is; explanations are attempted at all the levels in the commentary.

*Lokāḥ samastāḥ sukhino bhavantu* (Let the whole world turn happy)

## Chapter 1

# **Yoga of Arjuna's Vishada**

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Every chapter of the Gita is about a different kind of ‘*yoga*’ (being together). The meaning of the name of this chapter is ‘Arjuna being together with grief’ and also, ‘our being together with Arjuna’s grief’. The discussions in the Gita evolve from severe grief to sublime happiness.

Even the bravest of the brave often loses courage when it becomes obvious that, to proceed on the right path, one has to fight many persons, emotions, traditions and/or entities near and dear to oneself. More often than not it leads to personality crisis, inaction and failure in life. Many a justification for inaction may be available in terms of custom and tradition. But these will not help escape the impending failure. There is only one way to assure success: Pass on the reigns of one’s actions to the ultimate life force within oneself, the Paramātma which stands supreme to both mind and intellect. Identify with that unified and imperturbable force and act one with it.

Any moral conflict or grief leading to such a union is welcome. Heart-rending dilemmas galore in everybody’s life. Once a person is aware of this way out, even the worst crisis may well prove a blessing. The Gita portrays the way to this transformation. To prepare the ground, the first chapter presents a talented and trained warrior in tormenting conflict with himself. The two great armies of Pandavas and Kauravas are arrayed against each other in the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The epic war is about to begin, but Arjuna, the great warrior, suddenly finds himself unable to fight as he finds victory impossible except over the dead bodies of his own people and revered teachers.

Back in the palace, the blind old King Dhrutarashtra is anxiously waiting for Sanjaya's reports from the battlefield. Kauravas are his sons, and here they are fighting a decisive and final war against the Pandavas - the children of Pandu - his own brother. Dhrutarashtra had silently supported many of the unjust and cruel things done to Pandavas by his sons in the past, and so the blind King is also responsible for the devastating war that is about to begin.

dhṛtarāṣṭra uvāca  
dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre samavetā yuyutsavaḥ  
māmakāḥ pāṇḍavāś caiva kim akurvata sañjaya 1.1

*Dhrutarashtra said:*

*O Sanjaya, what did my people and the sons of Pandu, (all of them) eager to fight; do next in Kurukshetra, the kshetra of dharma?*

Sanjaya, the helper of the blind king Dhrutarashtra, has been bestowed with the power of vision to see beyond space (in science fiction style). (The word Sanjaya means one who has completely overcome all sorts of sightlessness.) Kurukshetra is the name of the battlefield and at the same time symbolic. The second verse of the thirteenth chapter declares that ‘*kshetra*’ (field) means any ‘body’ in general and the human body in particular. All objects in the universe are *kshetras*, from the tiniest particle at the subatomic level to the biggest, i.e., the universe itself. The *dharma* of a *kshetra* is right action which is natural to it. It is significant that the word ‘*kshetra*’ is used more than once in the first stanza itself. The war can be visualized as taking place in more than one *kshetra* at the same time. For instance, Arjuna is one *kshetra*, the entire battlefield another and the world at large yet another.

The basis of all violence is ‘mine-your’ division. Its fuel is ignorance (blindness or lack of vision). Its symbol is the blind king, Dhrutarashtra. It manifests as the feeling that one is separate from the rest of the world. It expresses itself as the desire to acquire and possess every material thing for oneself. Ignorance always hopes that its unjust fight to acquire will win. Gita portrays what happens to that hope, what is the right path in the light of the secrets of being and becoming, and the means to proceed on that path.

sañjaya uvāca  
dṛṣṭvā tu pāṇḍavānīkam vyūḍham duryodhanas tadā  
ācāryam upasaṅgamya rājā vacanam abravīt 1.2

*Sanjaya said:*

*Duryodhana, after seeing the army arrayed by Pandavas for battle, approached Dronacharya in royal flourish and said.*

Duryodhana’s flamboyance is underlined. Drona is his guru but the tyrant assumes superiority. Sage Vyasa has used the word ‘*acharya*’ (teacher) instead

of ‘Drona’. There is a joke in it. A teacher who helps evil minds empower themselves is bound to take painful orders from them without much delay!

Evil has kept the grandsire Bhishma and the teacher Drona in its vicious grasp. They stand on the side of Duryodhana because the prevailing custom of *dharma* warrants it. Yet they know that they're not on the right side, and now they're beginning to reap the results of their stand as indicated by the arrogance of Duryodhana to his teacher. The ego of an evil mind manipulates and enlists even the good feelings in it to serve its purpose!

As every element when excited gives out its own typical wavelength of energy, every living being when excited gives out its natural ‘color’, tune and tenor. The voice that is heard first in any battlefield is that of evil.

paśyaitāṁ pāṇḍuputrāṇām ācārya mahatīṁ camūṁ  
vyūḍhāṁ drupadaputreṇa tava śiṣyeṇa dhīmatā 1.3

*O teacher, see the great army of the sons of Pandu, arrayed by your very intelligent disciple, the son of Drupada.*

Duryodhana tries to provoke Drona and prejudice his mind. Drupada and his son are sworn enemies of Drona. Note that Duryodhana describes the son of Drupada as ‘very intelligent’. The battle array of enemy forces he has formed is called ‘great’. Drona already knows that the one who has sworn to kill him in this war is his own disciple-turned-foe, who is also the son of his arch enemy Drupada. Duryodhana now reminds Drona to intensify the latter's hatred and incite him to fight his very best.

atra śūrā maheśvāsā bhīmārjunasamā yudhi  
yuyudhāno virāṭaśca drupadaś ca mahārathah 1.4  
dhrṣṭaketuś cekitānah kāśirājaś ca vīryavān  
purujit kuntibhojaś ca śaibyaś ca narapuṅgavah 1.5  
yudhamanyuś ca vikrānta uttamaujāś ca vīryavān  
saubhadro draupadeyāś ca sarva eva mahārathah 1.6

*Yuyudhana and Virata, valiant heroes and archers wielding mighty bows and as skilled as Bhima and Arjuna in warfare, maharatha Drupada, Drushtaketu, Chekitana, the valiant King of Kasi, Purujith, Kuntibhoja, Yudhamanyu the mighty fighter, Saibya who is the best of men, the fearless Uttamaujas, Abhimanyu the son of Subhadra and the sons of Draupadi (are present). They are all maharathas.*

It may be recalled that in Vedantic study, the sound 'Om' (*pranavam*) symbolizes the bow, human body the arrow and *moksha* or ultimate spiritual liberation the target. There is another comparison according to which the chariot is the body, sense organs are the horses, the mind the fighter, organs of action the weapons, and one's true self the charioteer. This parallel can be extended to the concept of the great charioteer (maharathi). (In ancient Indian martial terminology a maharathi commands a group of 11,000 archers.) By praising the prowess of the enemy lines, Duryodhana further daunts his teacher. If he really is the best teacher of warfare, now is the time to prove it by defeating all the strong and powerful warriors of the opposite camp. The tone is that of challenge aimed at provocation.

The arrangement of the two armies in the battlefield (as well as in Arjuna's mind) is noteworthy. On the one side, warriors with names meaning 'goodness' and 'light' have arranged their army in the shape of a lotus flower. In ancient Indian thought and poetry lotus symbolizes nonattachment and enlightenment. On the other side, Duryodhana's army under the leadership of fierce Drona and under the command of terrible Bhishma is arranged in eagle (bird of prey) formation.

asmākam tu viśiṣṭā ye tān nibodha dvijottama  
nāyakā mama sainyasya samjñārtham tān bravīmi te 1.7

*Now, O best among Brahmins, I will narrate the names of the outstanding on our side, just for enumeration.*

Duryodhana now addresses Drona as 'best among Brahmins'. Drona is insinuatingly reminded that he's a Brahmin and not a Kshatriya (fighter-caste). This amounts to saying, 'It is widely known that this is not customarily the right job for you, so let the world now see what you can accomplish!'

Duryodhana's performance here, as well as elsewhere, is a classic example of the outcome of imparting weapons and martial arts training to a mind anchored upon evil.

This is also the first indication in the Gita that the caste system was prevalent at that time. It is also indicated that it had already gone decadent. It had lead to imposition of trades without considering the natural predispositions of people, and had also legitimatized those who gave up occupations matching their natural predispositions to gain riches and seats of power. The 'best among Brahmins' is supposed to teach *brahma vidya*, the highest spiritual knowledge; not the art of

warfare. Much worse, it was vengeance – the last thing that befitted a ‘teacher’ – that turned Drona into an instructor of warfare.

Sage Vyasa hides a chuckle in this stanza about the irony inherent in the plight of Drona.

bhavān bhīṣmaś ca karṇaś ca kṛpaś ca samitiñjayah  
aśvatthāmā vikarṇaś ca saumadattis tathaiva ca 1.8

*You, Bhishma, Karna, the ever victorious Kripa, Asvattama, Vikarna, and also the son of Somadatta (are stationed).*

Here again, there is an attempt at subterfuge. Bhishma is the supreme commander of Kaurava forces. So the pecking order should begin with his name. But Duryodhana places Drona first in the list in an attempt to flatter and edge him on.

anye ca bahavaḥ śūrā madarthe tyaktajīvitāḥ  
nānāśastrapraharanāḥ sarve yuddhaviśāradāḥ 1.9

*There are very many other brave men, well versed in using various weapons and ready to die for me. All of them are experts in warfare.*

In his vanity and arrogance, Duryodhana boasts of so many heroes including relatives and friends ready to die for him. The truth is that the Kaurava army has been formed by negotiations, coercions and sometimes even by unhealthy alliances, and is not entirely based on loyalty. And, is this tyrant, on his part, ready to die for anybody? Never! Arjuna, on the other hand, will shortly feel that it is better to die than kill his own people.

aparyāptam tad asmākam balaṁ bhīṣmābhiraṅgitam  
paryāptam tvidam eteśāṁ balaṁ bhīmābhiraṅgitam 1.10

*The (opposite) army under the protection of Bhima is highly capable whereas our army under the protection of Bhishma is not that much (well managed).*

Duryodhana, the shrewd manipulator that he is, here takes recourse to a play of words to achieve his two-pronged objective. ‘Paryaptam’ means both ‘capable’ and ‘limited’. The first meaning is to motivate the crowd of fighters

around him and the second to cater to Drona's jealous mind.

Actually his army is a lot bigger than that of the Pandavas. Duryodhana is confident of winning if Bhishma and Drona, the two major fighters in his army, fight to their full potential. But he is afraid that they have a soft corner for the Pandavas on account of the glaring injustices and atrocities he had perpetrated on them. As any other dictator he always keeps suspicions of everybody around him and tries to pit one confidant against the other. Here he is out to appease Drona by saying that he trusts his teacher better and relies on his superior capability.

ayaneṣu ca sarveṣu yathābhāgam avasthitāḥ  
bhīṣmam evābhirkṣantu bhavantah sarva eva hi 1.11

*Each and every one of you should keep your respective positions in the battle array and protect Bhishma in every way on all sides.*

Bhishma is the protector and commander of the entire Kaurava army. And Duryodhana is asking Drona and the army to protect Bhishma! Over and above the desire to placate Drona, there is a reason why he issues this paradoxical command. Bhishma's mere presence can instill fear in the hearts of even the most powerful of fighters. His station is necessary for the war to proceed in Duryodhana's favor. But can't Bhishma protect himself? He very well can but only if he wills. Even though Bhishma fights on Duryodhana's side owing to custom and tradition, Duryodhana is afraid that Bhishma, in his heart, is on the side of the Pandavas, therefore softness on his part cannot be ruled out.

Many people, even nations, maintain their sway on the basis of their ability to frighten others by reputation and / or appearance. The craze to build and keep a terrific image has even resulted in stockpiling nuclear arms or other weapons of mass destruction. There are many creatures that use their size and sound to frighten their prey or enemies. Among human beings the tendency to frighten others sows seeds of violence and revenge among those thus oppressed. Man has to overcome this primitive emotion, the despicable remnant of evolution, carried forth over countless generations. It is fear that generates the tendency to frighten. Therefore Gita suggests that fear has to be outlived first. Duryodhana, in his heart of hearts, is not sure of the outcome of the war and is afraid. So he wants everybody to protect Bhishma who is the most frightening presence on his side.

Meanwhile, Bhishma too has heard Duryodhana. The rambling of the tyrant has raised feelings of pity in him, so he decides to initiate action (so that no one gets any more time to play silly games).

tasya sañjanayan harṣam kuruvṛddhaḥ pitāmahāḥ  
śimhanādām vinadyocchaiḥ śaṅkham dadhmau pratāpavān 1.12

*Then, the highly regarded Bhishma, the oldest of the Kauravas, gave a lion like roar and blew his conch, raising the spirits of Duryodhana.*

But with this action of Bhishma, the Kurukshetra war formally begins. It marks the point of no return.

tataḥ śaṅkhāś ca bheryāś ca paṇavānakagomukhāḥ  
sahaśivābhyaḥanyanta sa śabdas tumulo/bhavat 1.13

*Following this, the sounds of conches, drums, tabors, cow-horns and other battle instruments blared forth from the Kaurava army. Together, it made a huge conundrum.*

The outcome is jarring and purposeless. Its main feature is the absence of any kind of synchronization. Sound and fury signifying nothing! All evil tendencies perpetuate this way.

tataḥ śvetair hayair yukte mahati syandane sthitau  
mādhavaḥ pāṇḍavaś caiva divyau śaṅkhau pradaghmatuḥ 1.14

*Then, Madhava (Krishna) and Arjuna, seated in their magnificent chariot, yoked with white horses, blew their divine conches exhilaratingly.*

The sounds made by conches from the opposite (virtuous) side are musical and in harmony. They are also in order, first by Krishna, and then by Arjuna.

pāñcajanyam hrṣīkeśo devadattam dhanañjayaḥ  
paunḍram dadhmau mahāśaṅkham bhīmakarmā vṛkodaraḥ 1.15

*Hrishikesa (Krishna) blew the conch Panchajanya, Dhananjaya (Arjuna) blew the Devadatta, and Bhimasena, having a wolf's hunger, capable of tremendous feats, blew the great Paundra.*

White indicates *sattva* character, the hallmark of which is affinity for peace and tranquility. (The *sattva* character is discussed in detail in later chapters.) The

*Isvara* of *Hrishikas* (Lord of the five senses), produces the divine sound born through the sense organs and the five elements which are under his control. ‘*Dhananjaya*’ means one who has won over wealth. The sound of Devadatta blends with that of Panchajanya. (*Devas* are represented as Gods of the sense organs, and the mind as that which is ‘given’ by them.) The sound of Bhīma’s conch then harmoniously blends with it. The name of his conch indicates its enormous size and the depth of its sound.

anañtavijayam rājā kuntīputro yudhiṣṭhirah  
nakulah sahadevaś ca sughoṣamaṇipuṣpakau 1.16

*King Yudhisthira, the son of Kunti, blew the conch Anantavijaya, and Nakula and Sahadeva the Sughosha and Manipushpaka respectively.*

The literal meanings of the names of these conches are noteworthy in that they indicate ‘victory for ever’, ‘beautiful sound’ and ‘pearly, flowery’.

kāśyaś ca parameṣvāsaḥ śikhaṇḍī ca mahārathah  
dhṛṣṭadyumno virāṭaś ca sātyakiś cāparājitah 1.17  
drupado draupadeyāś ca sarvaśaḥ pṛthivīpate  
saubhadraś ca mahābāhuḥ śaṅkhān dadhmuḥ pṛthakpṛthak 1.18  
sa ghoṣo dhātarāṣṭrāṇāṁ hṛdayāni vyadārayat  
nabhaś ca pṛthivīm caiva tumulobhyanunādayan 1.19

*Then, O King, the mighty archer the King of Kasi, Maharatha Shikhandi, Drushtadyumna, Virata, Satyaki the one who has never been defeated in war, Drupada, the sons of Draupadi and Abhimanyu the accomplished warrior, all blew their conches again and again from all sides.*

*The powerful musical sound wrenched the hearts of your sons and reverberated in every nook and corner of the earth and the sky.*

The power and beauty of this sublime music is in sharp contrast with the opposite side's cacophony. A pure tune is a wave radiating straight from the pulse of a well balanced life. Synchronization of such tunes makes a beautiful composition representing the union of like forces. It exemplifies harmony. Its opposite is discord. Harmony can be brought out only by giving in, not by standing apart, greed, force or violence. Life-music of this texture falls in tune with the basic harmony of the universe resulting in universal resonance and sublime happiness.

atha vyavasthitān dṛṣṭvā dhārtarāṣṭrān kapidhvajah  
pravṛtte śastrasampāte dhanur udyamya pāṇḍavah 1.20  
hṛṣikeśam tadā vākyam idam āha mahīpate  
arjuna uvāca  
senayor ubhayor madhye ratham sthāpaya mecyuta 1.21

*O King of the land, then, as the play of weapons was about to begin, Arjuna, the symbol on whose chariot-flag is the monkey, seeing everyone from Duryodhana poised to fight, raised his bow and told Hrishikesa (Krishna), ‘O Achyuta, please place my chariot in the midst of the two armies’.*

Achyuta means one who never goes wrong. The way of address marks Arjuna's complete trust in Krishna. The mention of the monkey symbol suggests that Arjuna's mind will shortly go restless but soon thereafter will acquire great strength and determination comparable with the prowess of Hanuman, the *vanara* (monkey) celebrity.

yāvad etān nirikṣeham yoddhukāmān avasthitān  
kair mayā saha yoddhavyam asmin raṇasamudyame 1.22  
yotsyamānān avekṣeham ya etetra samāgatāḥ  
dhārtarāṣṭrasya durbuddher yuddhe priyacikīrṣavah 1.23

*Let me take a good look at all those who have come and assembled to fight to help evil-minded Kauravas achieve what they want. Let me have the best possible view of all with whom I have to fight, all those who are willing and ready.*

Arjuna is requesting Krishna to take him to the vantage point in the middle of the opposing forces so that he can take stock of the situation and evaluate the odds. There are many warriors arrayed on the side of Arjuna, including his brothers. Yet nobody else wishes to do this. Why? Because Arjuna believes that he is the fighter who would decide the fate of this war. Self importance, ego and performance anxiety are interrelated though it is not necessary that one of these always leads to the other two.

If any venture is to succeed, hindrances on the way have to be correctly estimated. At the same time, obstacles are important too. No physical force is absolutely ‘independent’, its very existence depends on an opposing force. Nothing is achieved without sufficient opposition.

At the philosophical level, Arjuna can also be seen as a student of *brahma vidya*, the science of *brahma*, the study of the essence of being and true becoming. Students of *brahma vidya* have to first estimate the strength and depth of inappropriate desires and uncontrolled passions they have to conquer.

evam ukto hr̄ṣīkeśo guḍākeśena bhārata  
senayor ubhayor madhye sthāpayitvā rathottamam 1.24  
bhīṣmadronapramukhataḥ sarveṣāṁ ca mahīkṣitām  
uvāca pārtha paśyaitān samavetān kurūn iti 1.25

*Krishna, the Lord of the Senses, placed the chariot in the midst of the two armies as requested by Arjuna, the one who has conquered sleep (overcome inattentiveness, laziness, ineptitude). Arjuna could see all warriors, beginning with Bhishma and Drona. Krishna said, ‘Arjuna, behold the Kauravas assembled and ready for war.’*

At the philosophical level what is shown is the symbolic representation of the huge assembly of disquieting passions, beginning with *kāma* (greed, lust) and *krodha* (anger). The one seeing and the one showing can be considered two parts within Arjuna himself – The former his mind-intellect combination and the latter his true self or soul respectively.

tatrāpaśyat sthitān pārthaḥ pitṛn atha pitāmahān  
ācāryān mātulān bhrātṛn putrān paustrān sakhiṁś tathā 1.26  
śvaśurān suhṛdaś caiva senayor ubhayor api  
tān samīkṣya sa kaunteyah sarvān bandhūn avasthitān 1.27

*There, Partha (the son of Pritha, the personification of patience) saw fathers, grandfathers, teachers, maternal uncles, brothers, sons, grandsons and friends in the two armies. The son of Kunti, seeing all his relatives, became filled with compassion and said dejectedly – kṛpayā parayāviṣṭo viṣidann idamabhravīt  
drṣṭvemam svajanam kr̄ṣṇa yuyutsum samupasthitam 1.28  
sīdanti mama gātrāṇi mukhañ ca pariśuṣyati  
vepathuś ca śarīre me romaharṣaś ca jāyate 1.29*

*Krishna, at the sight of all my kinsmen ready to fight and die, my limbs lose strength, my throat goes dry, my body trembles and my hair stands on end.*

The readiness to sacrifice oneself for the protection of one's kinfolk stems

from biological altruism. Many among living things sacrifice themselves to protect their kind. It is also to be remembered that this instinct gets stronger in the case of blood-relations. This being so, how can one kill a person if he happens to be someone supposed to be protected even by self sacrifice? But what if the desire to protect one's own kith or kin, in effect, amounts to approval of dire injustices perpetrated by that person? Further, what if you yourself and the ones close to you were the victims of those atrocities?

All wars are wrong. War is horrible and cruel. It works havoc with man's progress and evolution. Under normal circumstances, one who decides to kill his own blood is considered a curse, worse than a cruel animal. But this is no normal situation and so it warrants an extraordinary solution, however painful.

At the philosophical level, this situation is the symbolic representation of the predicament of a person attempting to identify himself with his real self. An initiate into *brahma vidya* may also find primitive and degenerate emotions, insecurity, pride, hunger for power, arrogance, sensual cravings, jealousy etc. to be his close relatives. He may feel that, devoid of these emotions, his life would be rendered aimless or worthless. This is because he happens to be deeply attached to them by his instincts, impressions about himself and habits. 'I am this, this is my way of life, these are my pleasures and likes' he may feel. Minus them, what for should one live, anyway?

gāñḍīvam stramsate hastāt tvak caiva paridahyate  
na ca śaknomy avasthātum bhramatīva ca me manah 1.30

*The Gandiva slips from my hand. My skin feels as if on fire. I feel so weak I can't even stand up. My mind is in turmoil.*

Gandiva, the mighty bow, is the celebrated weapon of Arjuna.

There is no doubt that the biggest mistake man can make is to launch a war of destruction to capture what belongs to others. It goes without saying that there is no sin more despicable than killing a human being. But then why does every nation still maintain an army? Are the soldiers fighting for their country, sinners? We call ourselves a cultured society, but we have not abandoned capital punishment, the death penalty. When society entrusts a person to go to war, how much is that person alone responsible for his actions?

The discussions that follow help to clarify Arjuna's (and our) doubts on the way to know one's true self. With the acquisition of that knowledge, all these questions are fully answered. Only through threadbare debate can one reach that knowledge and become capable of taking such massive dilemma by its horns.

There is no easy way out.

nimittāni ca paśyāmi viparītāni keśava  
na ca śreyo/nupaśyāmi hatvā svajanam āhave 1.31

*O Kesava, I see conflicting signs. Also, I do not foresee any laudable benefit accruing from killing my kinsmen in war.*

Here, the word 'signs' does not mean 'omens'. It connotes forebodings. Arjuna sees conflicting ramifications because his thoughts are in turmoil. As his mind is off balance, however much he thinks and in whatever fashion, he cannot identify anything good to be gained by the war.

Arjuna is anxious about the outcome of the war and he desperately wants to win. But the symptoms that he shows now are not just that of anxiety neurosis. He had faced the Kauravas and defeated them earlier, but this time he knows that it is a fight to the last, and, to win the war, all on the other side including Bhishma and Drona will have to be killed.

na kāṅkṣe vijayam kṛṣṇa na ca rājyam sukhāni ca  
kim no rājyena govinda kim bhogair jīvitena vā 1.32

*O Krishna, I don't want to win, nor do I want any kingdom, objects of pleasures or riches. O Govinda, what good can any kingdom bestow on us (after everyone dear has been exterminated), what satisfaction can pleasures bring, and what is the use of being alive thereafter?*

'Govindam' means 'that which protects the earth and everything on it'. Arjuna expects that such a presence can very well understand his reluctance to fight and kill his dear ones. Isn't it right he should not? Shouldn't he protect them instead?

At the philosophical level, the very same argument is often raised by patients in de-addiction centers. 'I don't want any job, money, (other) objects of pleasures or treasures. What is the use of all those? What for should one live thereafter?' Clinical psychology will point out that this is the cry of the person in dire need of counseling.

Many people have their own 'dear' pleasures, ones that happen to destroy all their family and social ties and even threaten their very existence. If one is to acquire *brahma vidya*, this 'war' has to be won because unless all restlessness and enslavement within oneself is overcome, the nature of one's true self cannot

be perceived, known and experienced.

yeśām arthe kāṅkṣitam no rājyam bhogāḥ sukhāni ca  
ta ime/vastitā yuddhe prāṇāṁs tyaktvā dhanāni ca 1.33

*The very same people for whose benefit we wish to have a kingdom as well as riches and objects of pleasure are here, staying put to fight, ready to throw away their lives and possessions.*

Biological altruism is very much evident here. This emotion forms the basis of all social divisions including those on the lines of kin, caste and creed. Parochialism, blood feuds, biological self sacrifices and even narrow nationalism are its products. Getting over extremes of this emotion is an essential part of social evolution.

Arjuna's thinking shows evidence of another flaw too. It was not for enjoying any kingdom or riches that Pandavas got ready for war. The war became inevitable as it was the only just and correct path left, and it was never Arjuna's choice. But Arjuna's feeling of self importance has made him visualize the entire war as his own doing and responsibility. Inflated ego is the biggest obstacle for anyone out to find his true self. Put it on priority hit list is the indication from the verse.

Well, what happens if one does not fight at all? At the worldly level, injustices will prevail. Human society will be ransacked by evil forces. At the philosophical level, the forces that thwart one's natural instinct to identify oneself with one's true self will continue to dominate one's life. According to the Gita such a life is a lost game.

ācāryāḥ pitaraḥ putrāḥ tathaiva ca pitāmahāḥ  
mātulāḥ śvaśurāḥ pautrāḥ śyālāḥ sambandhinās tathā 1.34

*Teachers, fathers and sons as well as grandfathers, maternal uncles, fathers-in-law, grandchildren, brothers-in-law – the complete spectrum of relatives – stand there ready for war (staking everything they have including their lives).*

'It is true,' Arjuna means, 'that violence and injustice has been propounded as the way of life in our family by fathers, teachers and other relatives for generations. But does that justify an informed person like me resorting to violence against them? Is it right to eliminate all tradition?'

The verse indicates various flaws plaguing social and judicial practices

through generations. The remnants of such flaws can be found in modern social life too. ‘How to discard those deep passions of craving, rage and hatred which run in the family and, therefore, inherited by me?’ is the famous question. It is relevant, though in varying degrees, in the case of every one of us.

etān na hantum icchhāmi ghnatopi madhusūdana  
api trailokyarājyasya hetoḥ kiṁ nu mahīkṛte 1.35

*O Madhusudana (Krishna), I don't want to destroy them even if, as a consequence, I happen to die at their hands. All treasures of the three worlds together would not make me commit this dastardly act, let alone earthly pleasures.*

Arjuna, as any other person at any time, is the embodiment of popular ideas and beliefs prevalent in that period. Apparently, the earth-heaven-hell (three-world) concept was very much in vogue. The Gita, as it progresses, sidelines it for a more scientific view of the structure of the universe.

Again, Arjuna indirectly reveals that his motive has in it an element of craving for personal gain, which, as the Gita delineates later, is wrong in any action. Attachment to the outcome of action damages efficiency and also diminishes the chance for realization of one's true self.

Arjuna has reached the critical point from where he can proceed either to self-degeneration or on to the road to emancipation. His ‘own’ wild passions are arrayed to detract him. They have the support of habit and tradition. The decision ‘Even if I die, I cannot resist these’ is wrong.

‘Madhusudanam’ also means the bee. A bee collects sweet honey from flowers and does not hurt any flower. So, what should a bee do even if all flowers together are out to attack it? Kill them all?

nihatya dhārtarāṣṭrān naḥ kā prītiḥ syājanārdana  
pāpam evāśrayed asmān hatvaitān ātatāyināḥ 1.36

*O Janardana (Krishna), what happiness will befall us by killing the sons of Dhrutarashtra? Even if they are the worst among sinners, we will be performing no more than an act of sin.*

‘Janardanam’ literally means the divine force that eradicates evil. The subtle suggestion Arjuna puts forth is – it is up to that force (God) to take care of these sinners.

Vis-à-vis the external world there are two misinterpretations of non-violence into which one may easily slip. One results in the tendency to circumvent the responsibility to resist injustice by passing it on to God and keep idle. The other ends up in limiting one's resistance to the extent one personally benefits from it. Both are detrimental to one's emancipation as well as the well being of society.

The same pitfalls are likely in the management of the internal world too. My cravings and habits, even if they are detrimental to my mental and physical health, are 'natural' so let God undo them! Why should I fight them? Or, isn't it enough to 'control' my addiction? (These again, as everyone knows, are the most often heard question in de-addiction centers.) tasmān nārhā vayam hantum dhārtarāṣṭrān svabāndhavān

svajanaṁ hi katham̄ hatvā sukhinah̄ syāma mādhava 1.37

*Therefore, we should not kill the Kauravas, as they are our blood relations. Can we be ever happy after killing our own people? Tell me, O Madhava (Krishna).*

If one is to enjoy life, first of all, one has to have his dear ones around. If they are killed how does one enjoy anything thereafter? 'Madhavam' literally means spring, the season for enjoyment. It also denotes everything sweet and intoxicating. Here again, the indication is that Arjuna's idea of enjoyment is limited to the physical and the earthy.

In the internal world, one asks 'How will I get happiness if I destroy my pleasures, cravings and ego? They are my closest relatives. My happiness depends on them.'

yadyapyete na paśyanti lobhopahatacetasah̄  
kulakṣayakṛtaṁ doṣam̄ mitradrohe ca pātakam 1.38  
katham̄ na jñeyam asmābhīḥ pāpād asmān nivartitum  
kulakṣayakṛtaṁ doṣam̄ prapaśyadbhir janārdana 1.39

*Their thoughts are controlled by greed, so they cannot visualize the sin they are about to perpetrate by hurting their friends and destroying their kin. Be it so, but we are well aware of the consequences. Therefore, tell me, O Janardana (Krishna), is there any reason we should not back away from this carnal act?*

Sociological game theory postulates that the various social conventions prevalent at any time are the outcome of several adjustments through a period of time. But many of these are obstacles in the path of further progress and

evolution.

In the deeper philosophical sense, ‘the cravings that ruin me do not ‘know’ what they are doing, so they should be left free!’ is the argument. However, ignorance of law has never been considered a justification for any crime. In short, Arjuna digs out every reason anybody can imagine for not overcoming one’s greed and other binding emotions so that one can turn to the path of self realization.

Across the world, throughout the ages, people have quoted various documents, verdicts, social conventions or religious texts to justify their mistakes and escape responsibility. Arjuna next proposes something similar here.

kulakṣaye prāṇasyanti kuladharmāḥ sanātanāḥ  
dharme naṣṭe kulaṁ kṛtsnam adharmo/bhibhavaty uta 1.40

*When the clan gets truncated, the forever rites and customs of the clan come to naught. When dharma (the sum total of these guidelines) is lost, the clan is sure to go decadent.*

Arjuna uses the word ‘*dharma*’ to denote the rites and customs of the clan. For example, in a religious rite involving the offering of alcohol to the deity, intoxication is taken as a blessing. When the offering is blocked, the deity will get angry! ‘*Dharma*’ does not mean such rites. Also, the word ‘*sanatana*’ (meaning ‘forever’) cannot be used to denote these kinds of frivolities. The real implications of these terms are available in chapters ahead.

adharmaḥbhibhavāt krṣṇa praduṣyanti kulastriyāḥ  
strīśu duṣṭāsu vārṣṇeya jāyate varṇasaṅkaraḥ 1.41

*O Krishna, adharma will lead to corruption of the women of the clan. O descendant of the Vrishni-clan, when the women of the clan are contaminated, pollution of caste follows.*

Arjuna continues to describe the untoward event of the ‘fall’ of his clan, step by step. Krishna belongs to the Vrishni clan named after Vrishni, son of Yadu. (Literal meaning of the word Vrishni is ‘one who does not believe in any religion’.) The members of any clan are supposed to carry forth the tradition of the clan whatever it is, it is hinted.

There is another meaning to the verse. When the human body is considered

as a family, mind is the woman in it. When the path of wrong action corrupts the mind, malformed progeny in the form of wrong ideas and concepts are born.

saṅkaro narakāyaiva kulaghnānāṁ kulasya ca  
patanti pitaro hy eṣāṁ luptapiṇḍodakakriyāḥ 1.42

*When the clan's caste is polluted, the clan as a whole including those of its members responsible for its truncation and pollution inherits hell and ancestors fall due to deprivation of posthumous rites due, namely offering of the pinda (rice-ball) together with libations (water) and srādha (the annual ritual for the benefit of the dead).*

The deeper contemplation that this verse hints at is actually the opposite: the lives of ancestors become meaningful only when their sons and daughters progress along the right path of human evolution (towards self-realization). On the other hand, when the new generation is held back by meaningless social customs and practices, the ancestors too suffer.

doṣair etaiḥ kulaghnānāṁ varṇasaṅkarakārakaiḥ  
utsādyante jātidharmāḥ kuladharmāś ca śāsvatāḥ 1.43

*Due to this decadence accruing from the caste-polluting activities of clan-destroyers, the forever caste-dharmas and clan-dharmas are undone.*

This part of the dialogue highlights how superstitions together with outdated tradition waylay the society. These compel Arjuna to decide he cannot fight injustice as it may decimate the clan and harm the system. This is an attitude that follows from blind abeyance to the caste-by-birth. Belief in traditional hell and heaven abets it. The combination effectively nips all buds of creative innovation.

Evolution is a continuous process. Tradition and deviation keep dialectically interacting in diverse individuals, clans and societies. The diversity is endless. Each unit has its peculiarities. Any deviation that is retrogressive is to be given up. Any unit that does not want to part with it will stagnate.

utsannakuladharmāṇāṁ manuṣyāṇāṁ janārdana  
narake niyatāṁ vāso bhavatīty anuśūruma 1.44

*We have heard it said (by reliable sources) that those human beings whose clan-dharma has been destroyed are destined to live in hell for ever.*

Arjuna goes on presenting ‘logical’ reasons why he should not fight.

In verses 40-44 Arjuna refers to ideas like clan-dharma, caste-dharma, caste pollution, last rites like *pinda kriya*, hell, life after death and the like. It only shows that even during those times concepts like these had already degenerated into superstitious beliefs. It also suggests that many used these to justify dereliction of duties and responsibilities. The Gita goes on to logically establish that these are misinterpretations of ancient knowledge and do not stand enlightened scrutiny.

aho bata mahat pāpam̄ kartum̄ vyavasitā vayam  
yad rājyasukhalobhena hantum̄ svajanam udyatāḥ 1.45

*Alas! (It surprises me that) I happened to decide to commit this sin of sins! (How come) I ventured to exterminate my own clan in war, yearning for a kingdom and objects of pleasure!*

Wrong argument again! What brought the Pandavas to the battlefield was not the desire for any kingdom or objects of pleasure. The motive was eradication of injustice.

However, Arjuna’s decision not to fight hardens in the light of the justifications he thus discovers. What comes next is the self-suggestion that he does not have to be anxious even in the least about the consequences of that decision!

Anybody who has tried to give up smoking or drinking (at least once!) will be familiar with this stance. The moment the will slackens, justifications against abstention will surface in ample measure. Some of these may seek the support of social compulsions. Even ‘scientific’ discoveries are fished out! (Alcohol improves blood circulation and dissolves clots; human body needs nicotine which also energizes synapses in the brain, etc.) A person venturing to establish control over his bad habits and unhealthy emotions may get ensnared by similar ‘justifications’.

yadi mām apratīkāram aśastram̄ śastrapāṇayaḥ  
dhārtarāṣṭrā rāṇe hanyus tan me kṣemataram̄ bhavet 1.46

*Even if the armed Kauravas kill me as I stand unarmed and unwilling to fight, it will be a better option for me.*

Biological altruism again tends to confirm Arjuna's decision. An emotion that should come to the fore when the family, the clan or human society in general faces external threat now helps foster injustice within the unit to be protected – that too in the form of aggression towards the protector himself and his immediate family! The Gita's counseling proper begins (chapter 2.11) by pointing out this very contradiction. ('You are aggrieved about those who do not deserve your grief.') The verse also reveals that Arjuna is still governed by his ego. He feels that the war is going to be his creation, he is the key factor, he is supposed to conduct the whole show and he alone can lead his side to victory. It is this stance that makes him feel he is solely responsible for all the violence and death to come.

The first obstacle in the path towards self-realization is this blown-up 'I'. It makes one feel separate from the universe and bigger than actual, masks one's true self and promotes ignorance of it.

Evolution happens when deviation overtakes heredity. At the same time, heredity exerts enough control to take care of wayward deviations. Arjuna's stance marks a critical point. Negation of a part of heredity is represented by destroying what his elders and teachers are standing for. But a desirable deviation demands it. A more refined sense of justice is due.

evam uktvārjunah saṅkhye rathopastha upāviśat  
visṛjya saśaram cāpam śokasaṁvignamānasah 1.47

*Sanjaya said:*

*Saying thus, Arjuna, stricken by grief, slumped in the chariot, forsaking his bow together with the arrow.*

A proven warrior like Arjuna, once he takes a firm decision, should not grieve. He should proceed with all his might to implement it instead. But now he is totally incapacitated, he cannot even stand up. The situation is apparently incongruous. What is wrong? The answer is: A voice within him admonishes him, relentlessly telling him that his decision is not right. The result: He can never be at peace with his choice.

Every one of us has had this sort of a dilemma at least once in life. The foolproof knowhow to escape unhurt from such is a felt necessity. Gita provides discussions which matches our internal thought processes to overcome any such situation. It serves not only Arjuna. It is universally applicable to the human condition.

Each one of us, irrespective of caste, religion, class, nationality, age, color or

gender, face many a no-go situation, sometimes every day. So we are all Arjunas. Misery, grief and depression are the products of this internal conflict. It is like cancer eating into the vitals of the mind, destroying it from within. Established moral codes may not be enough to prevent this. Traditions would not help. Religion and beliefs only heighten the confusion as Arjuna finds out. Laws cannot solve this. There is only one way to treat it: Know your real self very clearly, and know how to get answers from your real self. The Gita shows how.

## Chapter 2

# Yoga of Sankhya

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*Sankhya darsana*, accredited to sage Kapila, is one of the six philosophical schools forming the basis of eastern thought. Rigorous logic is its backbone. Logical thought itself came to be known as *sankhya*, just as the word *yoga* came to mean ‘being one with’. The chapter head literally means ‘being one with logic’.

In this chapter, the first ten stanzas show Arjuna, in dire need of enlightenment, becoming a deserving disciple, emotionally prepared to imbibe the wisdom to be imparted. From stanzas 11 to 46, Arjuna’s posers are logically countered by his own beliefs and the various traditions that were in vogue. The remaining stanzas briefly outline *yoga vidya* through a knowledgeable person’s way of life.

sañjaya uvāca  
tam tathā kṛpayāviṣṭam aśrupūrṇākulekṣaṇam  
viśidantam idam vākyam uvāca madhusūdanah 2.1

*Sanjaya said:*

*To him who was thus obsessed with compassion and rendered inactive by grief with eyes full of tears and concerns, Madhusudana spoke these words.*

Irrespective of how brave or accomplished one is, attempts to escape from emotional conflicts often result in sinking further into the quagmire. It is indeed a devastating experience. At some stage, one invariably happens to ask oneself, ‘What is happening to me? What makes me turn an idiot at the most inappropriate time! Why cannot I take resort to rudimentary common sense at least?’

At the philosophical level, the worldly ‘I’, tormented and emotionally disabled, on the verge of complete breakdown, approaches the soul – one’s own deep self within – with the helpless cry for help.

śrībhagavān uvāca  
kutas tvā kaśmalam idam viṣame samupasthitam  
anāryajuṣṭam asvargyam akīrtikaram arjuna 2.2

*Sri Krishna said:*

*O Arjuna, how and whence did this retardation, unbecoming of Aryan men, disgraceful and undesirable, come upon you at this difficult moment of time?*

Krishna knows Arjuna right from childhood. The present mood of dejection and inaction at a most inappropriate time is alien to the known personality of Arjuna. The word *Arya* literally means ‘one who has come from afar (*aral yatha*)’ and *Aryan* means ‘a member of the *Arya* clan’. In course of time however ‘*Aryan*’ came to mean ‘gentleman’, a person of noble birth. ‘*Svarga*’ is Vedic heaven. Arjuna’s mental make-up is based on three precepts: his nobility of birth (warranting steadfastness), his target in life – the *svarga* (heaven) prescribed by the Vedas and his reputation for valor as a Kshatriya (fighter caste).

Anyone anywhere at any time is a product of his tradition, beliefs, faith and self-esteem. Therefore, enlivening these factors is the first step usually taken by personality experts to help fight depression and dejection. But it soon becomes clear from what follows that this is not enough. (There is a hint of a smile on sage Vyasa’s face here. Arjuna’s predicament is derived straight from these very factors!) *klaibyam mā sma gamah pārtha naitat tvayy upapadyate*

*kṣudram hrdayadaurbalyam tyaktvottisṭha paramtapa 2.3*

*O Partha, do not land up in impotence. It does not befit you. O scorcher of enemies, cast off this petty weakness of heart and get up.*

Counseling proceeds along the usual lines. After expressing wonder how such a silly affliction happened to visit a person who is, by virtue of his background and personality, the least likely to be susceptible; a direct attack on the condition is made, along with an empowering and invigorating call to the patient to shake off and get free.

But when the malady is deep, this approach does not work. The patient sincerely believes that his condition is neither fake nor minor. His mind is also working hard to fish out additional arguments and justifications for his disposition. But the more he tries, the murkier his mind gets and his condition worsens.

arjuna uvāca  
katham bhiṣmam aham sāṅkhye droṇam ca madhusūdana  
iṣubhiḥ pratiyotsyāmi pūjār̄hāv arisūdana 2.4

*Arjuna said:*

*How, O Madhusudana, shall I in battle, shoot arrows at Bhishma and Drona who deserve worship instead, O destroyer of foes?*

In the stories, Krishna himself is a battle hero and has fought and killed many an abominable person including his own uncle, the cruel tyrant Kamsa. But the hint is that Krishna never had to fight such revered people. Arjuna seems to suggest to Krishna that, all intimacy notwithstanding, his friend is not able to visualize the real dimensions of his plight.

Arjuna behaves as if he has suddenly woken up to find that the encounter with these revered people is not in any atmosphere of worship (which is how it should be). But in actuality he had known for a long time before that the situation would come to this!

Teachers are to be welcomed by showering flowers on them. Instead, here, deadly arrows are to be shot at them! (The act of drawing an arrow from the quiver on one's back and shooting it at a target is contrasted against selecting a stalk from a flower basket and ceremonially offering it to a deity.) At the philosophical level, every addict claims that his problem is so very special that even the closest of his dear ones cannot comprehend it.

gurūn ahatvā hi mahānubhāvān  
śreyo bhoktum bhaikṣyam apiha loke  
hatvārthakāmāṁstu gurunihaiva  
bhuñjjīya bhogān rudhirapradigdhān 2.5

*If I kill these teachers to gain material assets so as to satisfy worldly desires, all my pleasures will get blood-stained. If I am driven to a life of alms by my decision not to kill great teachers, I am sure that will be a better choice.*

If teachers are not given the respect they deserve, the world will come to naught. True, but the fallacy in the argument in the present situation is that these teachers have taken all the wrong decisions. Their blind adherence to tradition and wrong laws has made inevitable the highly destructive war of the Mahabharata epic. And they are now aligned with forces of evil and injustice

and are ready to fight and even kill Arjuna himself!

na caitad vidmaḥ kataran no garīyo  
yad vā jayema yadi vā no jayeyuḥ  
yān eva hatvā na jijīviṣāmas  
tevasthitāḥ pramukhe dhārtarāṣṭrāḥ 2.6

*We may defeat them, or they may defeat us. I find it hard to decide which will be better for us. We cannot wish to live after slaying the sons of Dhrutarashtra, and they stand facing us.*

At this stage Arjuna gets ensnared by his own bad logic. Any battlefield offers only a win-or-lose option. Even a stalemate is ruled out in a war to the finish. It is certain that the side that refuses to fight will be run over. Abstinence, however lofty its ground serves no purpose, particularly in the present case where the opposition does not nurture any such sentiment. So, not to fight will be suicidal. Every argument however laboriously procured fails to justify abstinence at this stage. At the same time, Arjuna is emotionally unwilling to fight. His mind is so clouded that he is unable to think logically. He realizes he is in a quandary and needs guidance.

It is obvious that the outdated part of tradition has to be undone to establish justice and assure progress. But the same tradition has been Arjuna's world so far. He has been living to protect it. So he does not know what to live for after demolishing it.

In its worst form this dilemma haunts patients in de-addiction centers. Why should one fight the only thing that apparently makes life worthwhile? What good is dead-wood life?

kārpaṇyadoṣopahatasvabhāvah  
pr̥cchāmi tvāṁ dharmasam̥mūḍhacetāḥ  
yac chreyah syān niścitaṁ brūhi tan me  
śiṣyasteham̥ sādhi mām tvāṁ prapannam 2.7

*My disposition is totally overcast by kārpaṇya doṣa. My mind is confused as to my dharma. So I request you. Please tell me decisively what is virtuous for me. I am your disciple. I take refuge in you. Kindly instruct me.*

(*Kārpaṇya doṣa* is an error in judgment ensuing from the assumption that the body-mind apparatus is one's true self and there is nothing deeper.) The

mind-body combine admits that it cannot solve the problem and prays for enlightenment from deeper within. This is a crucial step in the scenario of both self awareness and man's evolution. If this step is not taken, outdated traditions win and deviations are frustrated. In fact, pointing out the importance of this step is one of the major objectives of the Gita. The war, the armies, the weapons, etc. are all symbols. The story is the best method for analysis and study because it provides a picture similar to real life situations.

na hi prapaśyāmi mamāpanudyād  
yac chokam ucchoṣaṇam indriyāṇām  
avāpya bhūmāv asapatnam ṛddham  
rājyam surāṇām api cādhipatyam 2.8

*I do not see that it would help ease the agony that devastates my senses even if I should attain prosperous and unrivaled dominion on earth or even lordship over the Gods.*

The hint is: deeper knowledge becomes available only when one has a felt and real need for it, one prays for it and is ready to accept the enlightenment from within.

sañjaya uvāca  
evam uktvā hrṣīkeśāṁ guḍākeśah paramtapaḥ  
na yotsya iti govindam uktvā tūṣṇīṁ babhūva ha 2.9

*Sanjaya said:*

*Having spoken thus to Hrishikesa, Gudakesa, the destroyer of foes, said to Govinda: 'I will not fight'; and fell silent. Surprising indeed!*

(*Hrishikesa* means 'lord of the senses', *Gudakesa*, 'one who has overcome laziness' and *Govinda*, 'one who can be accessed only through Vedantic knowledge.') Arjuna is a warrior by inclination and training. He is always alert, without let up, all the more now because he is in a dilemma and desperately wants to find a way out. The teacher is described as the Lord of the Senses, meaning it is more than the mundane mind-intellect equipment; it is the soul beyond the body-mind apparatus. Arjuna's silence amounts to praying. He tried to solve the problem with the best help of the worldly knowledge and education he has had and failed. He has now presented it before the supreme teacher within, and falls silent, hopefully and patiently waiting for the help from that

master.

tam uvāca hr̥ṣīkeśah̄ prahasann iva bhārata  
senayor ubhayor madhye viṣidantam idam vacah̄ 2.10

*O Bhārata, then Hrishikesa, as if smiling, spoke these words to him who was despondent in the middle of the two armies.*

‘As if smiling’ (*prahasann iva*) are the key words of the stanza. At the story level, it cannot be that Krishna is amused at Arjuna’s predicament. The smile denotes compassion more than anything else. Krishna is ‘Yogesvara’ (the master of the science of yoga). A yogi’s mind and expression are always pleasant whatever the situation. It is to be remembered that this benevolent smile persists to the end. A knowledgeable person who can easily distinguish between a snake and a piece of rope cannot but smile in compassion at the sorry plight of a friend who mistakes the rope for a snake. True knowledge should help identify the real from the unreal. In its essence, this is what Vedanta is all about. Arjuna is redeemed the moment he becomes capable of sifting the grain from the chaff.

In the philosophical aspect, compassion is the way of *Hrishikesa* (the Lord of the Senses, the soul or *ātma*), for this is our true friend. Guilt, self-pity and frustration come from ego, not from the *ātma* within. The narrative is in such a way that the discourse can be visualized as coming from the soul itself or the supreme teacher within – the True Self.

śrībhagavān uvāca  
aśocyān anvaśocas tvam̄ prajñāvādāṁś ca bhāṣase  
gatāśūn agatāśūmś ca nānuśocanti paṇḍitāḥ 2.11

*The Lord (of the senses) said:*

*You are putting forth wise arguments but you are feeling sorry for those who do not deserve it! The knowledgeable do not grieve over the living and the dead.*

Though Vedanta is generally considered very tough to grasp, it is in fact a simple concept. Its central idea can be accomplished through logical answers to four easy questions. Question one: Isn’t it logical to assume that there is a unified force forever basic behind our vast, complex and ever changing universe? The obvious answer is yes. Question two: Where does that force reside – in some nook or corner of the universe or everywhere at the same time? The latter would be the logical answer. Question three: As we are in the universe,

aren't we too part of that force? Again, the answer is yes. And the last question: Whatever else we are – body, mind and intellect – being perishable, isn't this factor the only permanent thing in us? Again, simple logic demands a positive response. The moment this question is answered in the affirmative we arrive at the first of the four 'great statements' (*mahavakyas*) of Vedanta, namely 'Tat twam asi' ('That is you').

The next step in the study of Vedanta is to learn how this fundamental force functions. It is invisible and unmanifest; therefore there must be a pattern of working behind the universe which is hidden. The cosmology the Gita presents in subsequent chapters portrays a three-level universe consisting of (1) the perishable universe (*Kshara*), (2) the unobservable and eternal substrate (*Akshara*) that creates the perishable universe, hosts it and dissolves it back into itself and (3) the basic unified life force that seeds all pulsations in the substrate and pervades everywhere and everything (*Isvara, Paramātma* or the Universal Soul). This force is fundamental and imperturbable whereas *Kshara* and *Akshara* are dialectical. This knowledge has been available long before the Gita was composed (the Upanishads discuss it), and it is also evinced from the refresher-lesson tone of the part of the text, spoken as if to point out basic lessons forgotten or overlooked.

(All these terms are discussed in detail in later chapters.)

The reason why the knowledgeable do not grieve over the perishable aspect (the body) is because:

natv evāham jātu nāsam na tvam neme janādhipāḥ  
na caiva na bhaviṣyāmaḥ sarve vayam atah param 2.12

*Never was I nonexistent. Neither were you. These rulers of men too were never nonexistent. Similarly, all of us will continue to exist even after our bodies perish.*

The life principle present in all creations is the same as that of the universe. So no life is created when anyone or anything is born and no life is destroyed when anybody or anything dies. Death and birth are no more than transitions. One who knows this has no reason to grieve for the living or the dead (anything in the universe). And anybody who does not know this cannot be termed knowledgeable, even if he appears to speak the language of the wise.

We are part of the universe, so the ultimate life force (*Paramātma*) is present in us too and that is the immortal part as everything else in us are perishable. Names and forms come and go, but the essence of everybody and everything

remains for ever because the soul is immortal. No one can destroy it.

Fear of death and its associated grief at loss of loved ones have haunted man right from the first day of his existence. And it has all along been the worst fear. Freedom from fear of death is ultimate freedom. Sage Vyasa points out that anybody can achieve it. Accurate knowledge and identification of oneself with the True Self based on that knowledge is the way.

dehinosmin yathā dehe kaumāram yauvanam jarā  
tathā dehāntaraprāptir dhīras tatra na muhyati 2.13

*Similar to the body's natural process through childhood, youth and old age, the ātma also takes up other bodies. The transition does not confuse and aggrieve the brave.*

All physical bodies pass through six stages, namely, birth, growth, existence, decay, disease and death. Every stage brings in pains and sorrows typical to it. The life force stays permanently and in continuous flux behind the myriad forms of living beings. These various forms are born, interact with other forms and finally die. Other forms then come to take their places. The universal soul pervades all and everything at all time.

The Upanishads call the life principle in the body *jeevātma*. Each body seems to have a different ātma but this is no more than an illusion. *Jeevātma*, the soul in any body, is, in fact, *Paramātma*, the highest soul or the soul of the universe itself. The dialectic nature of the in-between *Akshara* creates the illusion of difference. The same sun seems to be exclusively possessed by each of any number of open pots of water reflecting it, and that is the true example of the relation between the two (as illustrated in *Gaudapādakārika*, *Mandukya Upanishad*).

As anything and everything in the universe is the manifestation of the *Paramātma* through *Akshara*, there is no need to go in search of where and when life originated. Everything is permeated by the universal soul or *Paramātma*. The *jeevas* of smaller units are organically unified to become the *jeevātma* of the larger assembly. Such assemblages range from the tiniest to the biggest organisms and even within the body as organ systems.

According to the present concept in science, most of the universe is 'dead'. Only very few entities are 'alive'. Obviously, *jeeva* is not the same as 'life' as defined in modern science but has wider implications. Our lack of visualization of *Akshara* is the result of the assumption that the universe means just the observable part of it. *Akshara* is the invisible background based on which the

observable universe evolves and into which it dissolves. It is the dialectical background manifestation and the abode of all *jeevas*.

mātrāsparsās tu kaunteya śītoṣṇasukhaduhkhadāḥ  
āgamāpāyino/nityās tāṁs titikṣasva bhārata 2.14

*O Arjuna, contact of sense organs with objects imparts no more than heat and cold, pleasure and pain. These (experiences) have a beginning and an end; they are temporary. Endure them bravely, O descendant of Bharata.*

The transition that is death terminates the activities of sense organs and the experiences that these provide. If the frivolous nature of these experiences is understood, one can face their loss with equanimity. Sensual pleasures are impermanent. They come and go. Also, a pleasurable object may become a thing of pain in a different situation. The wise are not swayed by them.

It is the mind that experiences the inputs of information gathered by sense organs. The mind decides how to treat the input. A sensation can hold the mind to ransom only if the mind gets totally involved in it; if not it is neglected. The sensations are important but do not mean everything. The experience the mind projects is the result of emotions gathered earlier from sensations in the past. One cannot live without these sensations, but it should be remembered that these are unreliable.

Arjuna feels ‘My limbs fail, my mouth is parched, my body quivers and my hairs stand on end’ (1.29) and ‘The Gandiva-bow slips from my hand, my skin burns all over’ (1.30). The very fact that the attachment to the experience takes Arjuna’s body and mind for a ride shows he has not been selective enough in heeding these sensations nor wise enough in assigning priorities to them.

yam hi na vyathayanty ete puruṣam puruṣarṣabha  
samaduhkhasukham dhīram so/mṛitatvāya kalpate 2.15

*O noble among men, the strong man who surely aggrieves not, the one who takes happiness or sorrow with equanimity, that person is fit for realizing the nectar of immortality.*

It is indicated that what is of paramount importance is not winning a war in any story. It is elevating oneself enough to qualify for experiencing the nectar of immortality. The most important of all wars is the one to vanquish all obstacles in the process of aligning oneself with the fundamental force of the universe. For

that one has to learn to distinguish the eternal from the ephemeral. These emotions and sensations are all temporary.

Arjuna, one among the best of warriors, should know that such distractions, if not readily taken care of, are capable of jeopardizing his intellectual, emotional and physical readiness. So, even to win the war outside, he has to win the war within first.

nāsato vidyate bhāvo nābhāvo vidyate sataḥ  
ubhayor api dṛṣṭo/antas tv anayos tattvadarśibhiḥ 2.16

*That which is not eternal has no true nature of existence. That which is eternal never ceases to be. These two states have been well discerned by the tattvadarsis.*

(*Tattvadarsi* is one who has analyzed the state of brahma; *tat* means brahma.) Anything that changes with time is not eternal. In other words anything that was not there at the very beginning of the universe is not forever. None of what we observe is ‘totally real’ for all time and space – sunrise and sunset for instance. We perceive the sun as rising in the east and setting in the west, but this is untrue; it is the earth rotating on itself. The larger perspective gives an added dimension to obvious ‘truths’. Observed ‘realities’ become ‘unreal’ as the observation post shifts in space and / or time. Realities that do not withstand such shifts of standpoints in space and time are no more than ‘apparent’. If this is the situation within the *Kshara* (material world) itself, how much ‘unreal’ would the material world itself be in comparison to the eternal background substrate of *Akshara*? But this however does not mean that the apparent is negligible. Our sense organs can perceive only these. Our physical comfort and survival depend on our ability for this perception. Physical well being is the foundation on which other aspirations including spiritual can be built. Therefore the material world cannot be renounced as long as there is the body. But by evaluating our perceptions from a higher standpoint and thereby investigating the transience of the material world, we can arrive at the ultimate – the fundamental force behind the universe of opposites.

One should not get lost in the apparent and lose sight of the ultimate. The number and range of instruments in the symphony of the universe is endless. No instrument has priority over any other. What matters most are neither the capabilities of the instruments nor the sensations they present. Of paramount importance is the symphony; individual notes are transitory and unimportant.

If all that can be observed is transient, how can one find the ultimate?

avināśi tu tad viddhi yena sarvam idam tatam  
vināśam avyayasyāsyā na kaścit kartum arhati 2.17

*What is to be reckoned as indestructible is that by which everything in the universe is pervaded. None ever can cause the destruction of that, the imperishable.*

It is indestructible and it pervades everything and every place in the universe. One may comprehend it, but it cannot be observed because it pervades everything including the sense organs and also any instrument for observation. Therefore we cannot see, touch, hear or smell it, because it forms the very basis of these sense organs itself.

Akshara has two components – 1. *Avyakta* - The fabric of space from which all matter is born and dissolves back. 2. *Parā prakṛti* – The nature of resonance of that fabric which allows all matter to remain stable in it and also interact to form this material world.

If the universal soul through Avyakta pervades everything, it should be pervading all bodies as well. If so, how is it related to the human body?

antavanta ime dehā nityasyoktāḥ śarīriṇāḥ  
anāśino/prameyasya tasmād yudhyasva bhārata 2.18

*It has been observed (by the wise) that all these bodies are donned by the Eternal, the Indestructible, the Unobservable; and all those temporary bodies come to an end. Therefore fight, O Bhārata.*

The advice means a lot more than to fight in the story. The actual meaning is the call to eradicate all that causes sorrow. Ignorance of the ultimate, and the emotional turmoil and grief resulting from that ignorance, stand in the way. So fight and destroy this ignorance and move on! (This aspect is further explored in coming chapters.) All bodies are perishable. But no weapon can destroy the soul. (What is destroyed is not eternal.) The soul cannot be observed because the means of observation – the sense organs – are all products of Akshara.

ya enam vetti hantāram yaś cainam manyate hatam  
ubhau tau na vijānīto nāyam hanti na hanyate 2.19

*Anyone who takes the ātma to be the killer and anyone who thinks the ātma*

*can be killed; neither of these knows (the truth). The ātma kills not, nor is it killed.*

Interactions at the level of bodies in the perishable world veil us from understanding the real levels behind apparent phenomena. No one can kill the life force nor does It kill anything. Only forms change.

The verse intends to eradicate the sorrow suffered when one becomes aware of the myriad kills one commits every day in the process of living. Even in the case of a vegetarian meal, a bowl of cereal means thousands of seeds ‘killed’. It is no small relief to know that no soul has been hurt and also that the ‘killer’s’ soul is not involved. The body of a *jeeva* eats the bodies of other *jeevas*.

Neither the judge sentencing a murderer to death nor the hangman who carries out the sentence kills the soul of the sentenced. Similarly, no murderer can ever destroy the soul. However, this fact does not justify the murderer though it exonerates the judge and the hangman. And the judge becomes a murderer if he passes death sentence over the innocent on account of personal dislike, or if he lets go a real murderer due to any attachment with him. Therefore the foremost enemies are one’s likes and dislikes causing the intent to kill, and personal wants linked to one’s own ego, arising out of ignorance about the true self of oneself and others. Therefore the deeper and real meaning of the verse is that if one wants to perform one’s duty, one has to kill this ignorance and this ‘ego’ leading to ‘personal motives’.

na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin  
nāyam bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyah  
ajo nityah sāsvato/yam purāṇo  
na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre 2.20

*It is never born anew, nor does it ever die; after having been, it does not become again; unborn, eternal, forever and ever-new, it does not die when the body dies.*

The ātma is never born, nor does it die. It is incredibly ancient and at the same ever new; time has no effect on it.

For any conclusion to be valid it is not enough if the logic is right; the basic premises have to be valid first. Arjuna sees his blood relations and teachers arrayed against him. They have to be wiped out if the war is to be won. To kill those very people whom he is supposed to protect even at the cost of his life is to commit the sin of sins. The logic is sound. The basic assumption here is: to kill

is sin. The fallacy in it is that Arjuna's enemy on this battlefield is blatantly unjust, and to let them prevail would result in decimation of the good side. So letting evil win is also equivalent to killing, except that it is the good side that will be killed! Till that wondrous day comes when modern society would no longer need soldiers, this will remain a solid fact. There is no point in blaming the poor soldier for fighting the war.

In Arjuna's story, the great poet has beautifully presented a highly complex situation. Grief in this case stems from more reasons – 1. It is the product of the feeling that 'I am killing those I am supposed to protect'. If this (ego) is overcome and Arjuna considers himself as a mere agent of justice (which is the actual truth because the decision to fight is his eldest brother's), there is no reason for grief. So, to manage this grief, Arjuna has to be helped to defeat his ego. 2. There is sorrow that Arjuna has to kill those whom he loves and holds in reverence. There is attachment and even an element of selfishness in love. The soothing balm resorted for alleviating it is by eschewing the infallible truth that in doing his duty in a selfless manner and without attachment, Arjuna would not be actually killing anybody. Knowledge, pure and complete, eradicates all grief. Arjuna's attachments are to perishable aspects – neither the body nor the mind is immortal, these will decay and die. But the *ātma* is above all physical mutability. Therefore the essence of all – is ever present.

vedāvināśinam nityam ya enam ajam avyayam  
katham sa puruṣah pārtha kam ghātayati hanti kam 2.21

*Tell me, O Partha, how can anyone who knows it to be neither increasing nor diminutive, without birth and indestructible, cause death to it?*

Our conclusions are based on our observations which depend on where we stand. If body and life are supposed to be one and the same, another person appears to be an entity totally separate from oneself and also appears lost permanently in death. But the truth is that *jeeva* is indestructible, eternal, unborn and inexhaustible, and *jeeva* in all bodies and everything is basically the same entity, body death being no more than a routine transition.

Any action anyone takes hurts, modifies or even fragments many a worldly force. Some of the forces affected thus are often dear and precious. Dilemmas are the result. They may amount to severe roadblocks and cause total inaction. True knowledge is no license for wanton destruction. Actions should be selfless – without pride, prejudice, partiality, anger, hatred or ego. (The path of ideal action – *karma yoga* – will be mapped out in detail in later chapters. Its

backbone is the path of true knowledge – *jnana yoga*. Its practice is guided not by egoism but by the path of devotion – *bhakti yoga*.) vāsāṁsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya

navāni gṛhṇāti naro/parāṇi  
tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇāni  
anyāni samyāti navāni dehī 2.22

*Just as a man casts off his worn out clothes and puts on new ones, so also ātma casts off worn out bodies and dons others new.*

The ātma (Paramātma) pervades the entire universe, and through the Avyakta it manifests as *jeeva* in all these various bodies. As the body decays and dies, it is cast off; other bodies come to manifest *jeeva*. It is not correct to lose the bigger perspective while observing the smaller picture. The decay and death of any particular body in the Kshara is a surety in the future, but nothing is ever lost when we consider the soul.

The capability of the ātma to manifest loved ones will never cease, because it itself is the life force behind all loved ones. Their true essence is always there, immortal.

nainam chindanti śastrāṇi nainam dahati pāvakah  
na cainaṁ kledayanty āpo na śoṣayati mārutaḥ 2.23

*Weapons cannot cut it, fire cannot burn it, water cannot wet it (and) wind cannot dry it.*

The three states of matter – bhumi, jalam, vayu (solid, liquid and gas), agni (radiation) and akasa (space) – the five elements in apparent nature (Aparā Prakṛti) – are entities in Kshara. Weapons of any kind are products of one or more of these elements, so they too cannot affect that from which these elements are manifested. No tidal wave, however mighty, destroys the ocean. In the same way none of the elements can unmake the Avyakta or hurt the Paramātma.

acchedyoyam adāhyoyam akledyo/śoṣya eva ca  
nityaḥ sarvagataḥ sthāṇur acalo/yam sanātanaḥ 2.24

*It cannot be cut, nor burnt, nor moistened, nor dried up. It is indestructible, all-pervading, stable and without start or end.*

The forever fabric of space ‘Avyakta’ is the dialectical background from which all matter is born and everything dissolves back into it.

These are logical conclusions to such a substrate that hosts everything. Physics already has numerous indications and clues to the background fabric of space. It has also understood that there is a background energy in 'space' and has visualized numerous virtual particles arising out of it. The fact that all matter has wave component is itself definite proof of the unity of space-matter manifestations. 'Spacetime' is the present concept.

Why is this invisible background not fully graspable to physics?

avyakto�am acintyo/�am avikaryo/�am ucyate  
tasmād evam̄ viditvainam̄ nānuśocitum arhasi 2.25

*This is Avyakta (beyond the observational capacity of the senses), incomprehensible (beyond the reasoning capability of the mind) and changeless (beyond transitions of form and content). Know it as such and give up all grief.*

What prevents us from getting experimental evidence to Akshara and Paramātma is explained here. In science, conclusions regarding physical phenomena are derived from observations made through sense organs. But Avyakta is beyond the observational capacity of the senses. This is because all sense organs are its manifestations. The very word ‘Avyakta’ means not clear, unmanifest. Avyakta is incomprehensible because its true nature cannot be derived by simple reasoning. Experimentation is another method science employs to know an object. Here, the object under study should interact with physical agents and / or transform itself with time. But Avyakta cannot be reversely modified by its manifestations. (The three layers of reality – the Kshara, Akshara (Avyakta) and Iswara (Paramātma) – are discussed later in chapter 15, verses 16 and 17.) The ātma which is beyond even the Avyakta is therefore far beyond any harm, pain or destruction.

atha cainam̄ nityajātām̄ nityam̄ vā manyase mṛtam̄  
tathāpi tvam̄ mahābāho naivam̄ śocitum arhasi 2.26

*Or, even if you consider the ātma as something that takes birth and dies over and over again (according to theory of rebirth), O mighty-armed, you have no reason to grieve thus.*

If one believes in the theory of rebirth instead – the jeevātma (individual

soul) is born again assuming another body, even then one need not grieve. In the storyline, Krishna now narrates the belief of rebirth prevalent at that time which Arjuna is familiar with to lessen the latter's grief. According to the theory of rebirth, each body has an individual soul which after death goes to occupy another body just before its birth, in accordance with the good and bad deeds that the former body has performed. However, the theory of rebirths are sidelined in a similar fashion as the theory of heaven and hell in the coming chapters of the Gita, as the discourse goes deeper and deeper into Vedantic thought to answer more advanced questions coming from Arjuna's growing awareness.

Krishna speaks about rebirth to console Arjuna, and then later also encourages Arjuna to fight based on the caste system, pointing out that a warrior would attain glory and 'heaven' if he dies in the war. Yet later on in the Gita these ideas are also sidelined; making some experts opine that Gita has inherent contradictions. But these learned men should remember that Gita is NOT a religious text which gives a rigid version about the structure of the universe and its behavior or an equally rigid code of moral ethics. As we have discussed in the introduction, the Gita is a part of a larger story, an epic; in which highest Vedantic knowledge is blended with the beliefs and customs in the background story as perfectly as possible.

jātasya hi dhruvo mṛtyur dhruvam̄ janma mṛtasya ca  
tasmād aparihārye/rthe na tvam̄ śocitum arhasi 2.27

*(Because) in that case (the theory of rebirth) everyone born is certain to die and the dead are certain to be born again. What is unavoidable need not aggrieve you.*

The argument is logical. Any of the possibilities does not justify sorrow.  
But then what is the real truth?

avyaktādīni bhūtāni vyaktamadhyāni Bhārata  
avyaktanidhanāny eva tatra kā paridevanā 2.28

*O Bhārata, all creations have their beginning in Avyakta, become vyakta (manifest to the five senses) for a while in between, and again become one with Avyakta when they cease to be. What is there in it to grieve?*

Avyakta – the all-pervading non-manifest background is the basic fabric of

the universe. The material universe emerges from it, stays on it and dissolves back into it. The physical universe is ever changing. Anything in it remains steady only for short intervals of time. All these bodies are manifested from the background in the form of matter-waves. They interact, build up, form macromolecules, and become part of the body of a larger entity. The basics of wave interaction – the three *gunas* – are passed on through the same molecules to manifest human beings, the life force stemming from the universal soul. (The three *gunas* are discussed in later chapters.) These entities interact with each other, and even love and hate. All these bodies die. At the end of the universe all matter-waves dissolve back into Avyakta till the next cycle of the universe. There is never any loss or gain, only stories made and played in between. *What is there in it to grieve?*

Sage Vyasa adds that mistaking a lesser reality for the ultimate has always been a characteristic pitfall in human thought.

āścaryavat paśyati kaścid enam  
āścaryavad vadati tathaiva cānyah  
āścaryavac cainam anyah śṛṇoti  
śrutvāpy enam̄ veda na caiva kaścit 2.29

*Some consider it as a wonder. Some describe it as a wonder. Still others hear of it as a wonder. A few others, even though they (are fortunate to) hear (the truth), fail to grasp it.*

Those who comprehend this cycle of the universe cannot help but consider it as a big wonder. Some hear or read about it and come to know, and consider it so too. Some hear about it but fail to grasp it because they search exclusively through their sense organs. The ātma of the universe (Isvara) and the non-manifest substrate (Avyakta), cannot be observed, measured or experimented upon by our sense organs because these organs are the products of the very same. Science does not analyze it, because it cannot be grasped, expressed or taught in terms of units of dimensions and / or means employed to deal with material objects or phenomena. Does this mean it is humanly impossible to know it ever? Of course not. It was understood with the same body-mind-intellect apparatus using the technique known as *parā vidya*. Sage Vyasa delineates it step by step.

dehī nityam avadhyoyam̄ dehe sarvasya Bhārata  
tasmāt sarvāṇi bhūtāni na tvam̄ śocitum arhasi 2.30

*This ātma in all the bodies everywhere in the universe is eternal and indestructible. Therefore you need not grieve about (the fate of) anyone or anything.*

The statement that one should not be grieving over either the living or the dead is further clarified. In the case of an enlightened man this attitude is not the outcome of callous indifference. It is the result of the preferable distancing of oneself from the reach of the snares of the opposites (likes and dislikes; pleasure and pain). The hint is that Arjuna need not worry even about whether he himself survives the war or not.

Material future is unpredictable but the future of the soul is. It is eternal, just as waves come and go but the ocean is for all time.

svadharmaṁ api cāvekṣya na vikampitum arhasi  
dharmyād dhi yuddhāc chreyonyat kṣatriyasya na vidyate 2.31

*And, considering further, you should also not get perturbed when confronted by bounden duty. To a Kshatriya (fighter caste) nothing is considered more glorious than the fight for the right cause.*

For a few verses starting with this, sage Vyasa switches from Vedantic discussion to the story line of the epic. The logic based on the caste system employed here is only for the sake of encouragement to fight. The deeper knowledge discussed in the Gita, as will be seen later on, does not justify any system based on inequalities bestowed by birth, whether caste or color or creed. Human nature does vary but not due to one's parentage alone. People physically and/or mentally weak and even with special needs are born in the Kshatriya caste as well, and that itself is proof against the notion of a 'fighter caste'. But when a person is entrusted by society to protect and preserve justice, then it is his duty to do so, whatever his 'color' or place of birth.

At the philosophical plane, the ego or the 'I', the illusory image produced by the mind-body-intellect combine, is the Kshatriya or the master of the *kshetra* which is the body. It is his noblest duty to fight all wrong inclinations and evil instincts within the body and mind. And once such a fight is initiated, the fighter should not waver.

yadr̥cchayā copapannam svargadvāram apāvṛtam  
sukhinah kṣatriyah pārtha labhante yuddham īdṛśam 2.32

*O Arjuna, blessed and happy Kshatriyas alone get (the chance to fight) a war of this kind – a golden chance akin to the entrance to heaven kept open.*

Here again Vyasa has a hidden smile as ‘heaven’ is mentioned. The real opinion of heaven and hell in the Gita would come later – and it takes a firm stand that the aim of life is not heaven.

atha cet tvam imam dhārmyam saṅgrāmam na kariṣyasi  
tataḥ svadharmaṁ kīrtim ca hitvā pāpam avāpsyasi 2.33

*In case you refuse to fight this war which is your bounden duty, you will be giving up both your reputation and duty and embracing sin.*

Sin is another argument Arjuna had put forth in favor of sparing the wrong-doers. In parā vidya the idea of sin is enlarged to encompass every action that distances oneself with one’s true internal self. But Arjuna is yet to be initiated into that higher learning. As an opening, his idea of sin is given a rude shake. If stopping a wrong-doer is sin, abandoning an essential fight for justice is a greater sin! Reputation too is at stake! For a proud warrior like Arjuna this is tantamount to no less than death.

akīrtim cāpi bhūtāni kathayiṣyanti te/vyayām  
saṁbhāvitasya cākīrtir maraṇād atiricyate 2.34

*Moreover, stories indelibly deprecating you will be widely articulated. In the case of a well known person, bad reputation outlives death.*

To be known well and wide is a pleasure. But the greater the fame achieved, the heavier the impact of a loss of face. An ordinary person’s misdeeds are mostly forgotten soon after his death. But, untoward actions of a famous man, however, are remembered long after he leaves this world. In short, Arjuna is reminded that keeping a reputation is tougher than earning it.

Arjuna argued that death at the hands of the Kauravas was likely to be better applauded by the world than his victory over them. The way of the world is different, Krishna points out.

bhayād raṇād uparatam māṁsyante tvāṁ mahārathāḥ  
yeṣāṁ ca tvāṁ bahumato bhūtvā yāsyasi lāghavam 2.35

*Every proven warrior would infer that you had decided to withdraw from the war because you were afraid. You would become a non-entity in the eyes of the very people who used to consider you great.*

There is a time for everything including compassion. Arjuna could have said no to the war before, and he had ample time for it. Now he cannot back out in the battlefield; he has no choice. Misplaced reluctance to act will be interpreted as outcome of cowardice. This is true whether the fight is against a social evil or one's own addiction to anything.

avācyavādāṁś ca bahūn vadiṣyanti tavāhitāḥ  
nindantas tava sāmarthyam tato duḥkhatarāṁ nu kim 2.36

*Many an unquotable accusation, decrying your proven ability, will be spread by your enemies. What can be more painful than that?*

Reversal of the decision to fight at the last moment cannot be justified on any convincing ground. It cannot be said that he could not foresee who all he would have to fight; he had known it all the time. Nothing has happened to alter the equations or the scenario, the same tyrant and the mad people supporting him are standing on the opposite side. So those who accuse Arjuna of cowardice have enough ground, it is pointed out.

hato vā prāpsyasi svargam jitvā vā bhokṣyase mahīm  
tasmād uttiṣṭha kaunteya yuddhāya kṛtaniścayah 2.37

*O Arjuna, if you win you get this world to enjoy and if you die fighting you enter heaven. Therefore, firmly decide to fight and get up!*

Both this world (of enjoyment) and heaven (with its pleasures) are temporary, and they are inferior to realization of the self according to later verses of the Gita. Access to any throne on earth or lure of heaven or fear of hell should not be the basis of any action. Later on, Gita describes the prevalent idea of heaven as a hallucination almost akin to the result of intoxication. In the light of that perception, this statement can be interpreted also as: If one's higher personality is defeated and effaced in a fight against the lure of an addiction or indulgence in any base emotion, one falls prey to the lure. On the other hand, if the internal war is won, one establishes victory over one's emotions and attains

full command of all senses – the state of bliss.

Sage Veda Vyasa's pristine sense of compassionate humor is evident.

The ordinary traditional concepts in vogue are discussed from verse 31 to verse 37 for encouragement; these are not the important ones. *Adhyatma vidya* takes over again from the next verse onward: sukhaduhkhe same kṛtvā lābhālābhau jayājayau

tato yuddhāya yujyasva naivam pāpam avāpsyasi 2.38

*Fully assure yourself that pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat are equal and enjoin the battle with that even-mindedness; this way you shall not incur any sin.*

It does not matter who or what is fought; what matters is the motive of the fighter. The unselfish person who performs action without considering personal gains, would not have fear of failure or sense of loss or anxiety about victory. But if it is for gain of pleasure or avoidance of pain, there cannot be any victory that lasts. Same is the case if acquisition of material wealth is the motivation. In short, personal ego or selfishness should not come in. The foundation of ego is the assumption that there is a ‘separate’ me as different from the rest of the universe. This assumption is the cause of all evil. In fact, everything and everybody is basically a unique part of the whole. Therefore all actions should befit that notion and flow from it. The river, as it winds its way, uproots everything in its wake and often harms settlements on its shores. It is unavoidable; it is, therefore, no sin.

In the deeper meaning, the goal of all rivers is the sea. All human activity should be aimed at realization of the supreme bliss of being one with the eternal. Ego should be subjugated to this motive and not allowed to evolve and sustain intent of its own thereby increasing the perceptual separation with one's ātma. Anything that increases this perceptual separation from ātma is sin. Any action that helps the self to act jointly with the ātma, thereby reducing the separation, is virtuous. Therefore the direction is to live life by facing its challenges, remaining even minded in pain or pleasure and gain or loss. That way anyone can develop the habit of selfless action and always be one with the soul.

eṣā te/bhihitā sāṅkhye buddhir yogे tv imāṁ śrṇu  
buddhyā yukto yayā pārtha karmabandhaṁ prahāsyasi 2.39

*What has been described to you now, O Partha, is the wisdom of Sankhya darsana. Now listen to the wisdom of yoga, which if imbibed will enable you to*

*cast off all bondage accruable from your actions.*

(The philosophy of *Sankhya* and the world view derived by it is on strict logical grounds. The word *Sankhya* therefore came to be used as a general term meaning the intellectual approach.) The *yoga* approach (the delineation of the path of actual union based on karma or action) is presented next. It is not enough if one acquires knowledge, one should be able to practice it so that the bondage to the temporary does not accrue from any action. *Yoga* is the way of becoming one with the ātma of the universe all the time so that no thought or action stems from any separatist standpoint.

nehābhikramanāśosti pratyavāyo na vidyate  
svalpam apy asya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt 2.40

*(In this) No effort goes waste at any stage, nor will any harmful side-effects occur. Even a little practice protects one from great fear.*

Sometimes human effort goes to waste due to unforeseen circumstances – like in farming when the crop is lost before fruition. Some other human actions produce untoward effects along with or even instead of the desired result – like a prescribed drug giving rise to allergic reactions. But any action based on *yoga* *vidya* (the art of *yoga*) is not blemished by either. Besides, even a little practice of it saves one from great fear. Fear is when there is something to be afraid of, and it is the prime consequence of separatism. Fear of death and fear of failure are the two worst failures any one can have. These are wiped out by the practice of *yoga*.

vyavasāyātmikā buddhir ekeha kurunandana  
bahuśākhā hy anantāś ca buddhayo/vyavasāyinām 2.41

*O Joy of the Kurus, in this world the nature of resolute intellect is single-pointed determination; many-branched and endless indeed are the thoughts of the irresolute.*

Coherence makes any activity powerful and effective. Waves get scattered and dissipated if they are not coordinated and synchronized; when they are, we have powerful lasers.

The Gita now goes on to discuss irresolute people.

yām imām puṣpitām vācam pravadanty avipaścitaḥ  
vedavādaratāḥ pārtha nānyad astīti vādināḥ 2.42

*O Arjuna, ignorant people use flowery language to argue in favor of the many rituals proposed in various religious texts, and rewards like entry into heaven guaranteed by these books. They claim that there is nothing more to do or aspire for in life.*

It is evident from this part of the text that the elaborate rituals prescribed by the Vedas were widely practiced at that time by sections of people who, at birth, inherited the right to perform these rites. They argued in favor of the many rituals like yajna (yajña) proposed in the karma kānda (early part) of the Vedas.

It is in the interest of priesthood to propagate the view that these rituals were the only way to heaven, success in war, material wealth and happiness in this world. The same is the situation in various religions of today. The system of caste-by-birth and the ideas of heaven and hell precede the Gita. Exploitation abetted by superstition was rampant. Correction was overdue.

kāmātmānah svargaparā janmakarmaphalapradām  
kriyāviśeṣabahulām bhogaiśvaryagatim̄ prati 2.43

*They are driven by greed for earthly pleasures. They hold entry into heaven as the greatest of human achievements. They paint rosy pictures of the benefits of many an elaborate ritual – rebirth in upper caste or opulent families, wealth and success in everything one does.*

A sorry picture of the general public being taken for a ride by the clever, the crooked and the manipulative is provided. Provocations, inducements, false promises and attractive slogans – all in beautiful words - were used. But what is awakened is greed – for pleasures (heaven), money or material benefits; in short, the direct opposite to what it should be. A mad race to appease God in various names by various ways to gain personal ends prevails. Sometimes even killing is justified in the name of God. And spiritualism occasionally comes to mean black magic!

bhogaiśvaryaprasaktānām tayāpahṛtacetasām  
vyavasāyātmikā buddhiḥ samādhau na vidhīyate 2.44

*The stolen minds of those who happen to get captivated by these people and*

*their offer of earthly pleasures and money, fail to reach the stage of enlightened resoluteness necessary for steady meditation.*

It has already been pointed out that the path of right action is based on the concept of perceiving pleasure-pain, profit-loss and success-defeat dualities with equanimity (2.38). Submission to any insinuation, provocation, intimidation or attraction that gets one entrapped by these dualities spoils evenness of thought. It is all the same whether one is possessed by the effect of an advertisement or misled by superstitious belief in meaningless rituals of yore. The mind is free only if and when it is undaunted. Meditation presupposes a free mind, and it is the way to tranquility.

The mind is all the more stolen when the person is taught from childhood a rigid set of beliefs, whether based on religion or not. The child is preconditioned to shun creative thinking and made a slave. Later on the community and the ritual system prevent escape of the ‘slave’ and ingrain the rigid thinking process to the ‘ego’ of the subconscious, making any free thinking impossible.

traiguṇyavिषयā vedā nistraiguṇyo bhavārjuna  
nirdvandvo nityasatvastho niryogakṣema ātmavān 2.45

*The ritualistic part of the Vedas is based on three gunas of nature pertaining to the material world; be you above these three. O Arjuna, get free of the pairs of opposites and ever remain in the true form – free from thoughts of acquisition and possession, established in the self.*

It is further explained how and why the ritualistic part of the text of the Vedas, and also the various other religious rituals, contradict the very basis of yoga vidya, namely, even-mindedness. The Vedas are woven out of three basic components – the three gunas that form the basis for the working of the material world. Vedas and indeed all the various religions are all based on the same. They promise multiple aspects derived from the material side including riches, success and long life if the God or forces that they represent are praised or appeased. Vedanta is not built on such a framework. It does not promise wealth, material pleasures or heaven; its aim is being one with the only entity that is everlasting – the immortal soul or the True Self. Its way of life is the training to see all dualities as stemming from the one Akshara or the universal substrate – which is achieved by intelligent detachment in action – not by worshiping God for the fulfillment of desires of the changing world based on the three gunas. Both aim and path are different. If this verse pertaining to difference between religion and

Vedanta is kept in mind, there won't be any future confusion.

Man's primary effort always was to find means to avoid pain and gain pleasure. He remembered in elaborate detail and later recorded everything he thought helped achieve it, including the appeasement of various gods. But as human intelligence developed, it was also discovered that the greatest and everlasting happiness could be reached only through the state of being in union with the eternal life force. A part of this almost-lost science is also recorded towards the end of the Vedas, under the head Vedanta, in the Upanishads. There is apparent contradiction between the two parts, but this structure of the Vedas provides a reflection of the composite profile of evolution of man's intellectual prowess. It is obvious that wherever the *Karma kānda* contradicts Vedanta, the latter is to be taken as true.

yāvān artha udapāne sarvataḥ samplutodake  
tāvān sarveṣu vedeṣu brāhmaṇasya vijānataḥ 2.46

*For the one who has known the brahma, all the religious texts together are of so much use as is a ramshackle waterhole when the whole world is flooded.*

Mistaking the means for the end is a common error. Any religious text is only the way, not the end. Even after outliving the era of superstitious rituals and discovering Vedanta, the early part of the text of the Vedas was often considered holier and more important than its concluding part.

There are three types of knowledge – Jnana (jñāna), Vijnana (vijñāna) and Prajnana (prajñāna). Jnana is knowledge we gain through the sense organs and mind. Vijnana is knowledge put into practice so that it becomes natural and comes without thinking or obvious effort (wisdom or skill). Examples range from swimming to the skill in yoga vidya. The third type, prajnana, is inherent knowledge. 'Prajnanam brahma' is a *mahāvākyā* (great sayings) of Vedanta. It is said that prajnana will surface naturally if one is on the right path, because acting in unison with the universal soul would inherently provide the selfless person knowledge from within.

*Brahmana* is one who strives all the time to realize brahma, the fundamental principle of the universe. He needs the texts to show the way. But, once he learns it, all texts are dispensable; real knowledge (prajnana) comes from the Self within. Paramātmā or Isvara pervades everything in the universe, including oneself. Texts are only required to turn one into the right direction of focus and contemplation.

So what is the first step in learning Vedanta?

karmaṇy evādhikāras te mā phaleṣu kadācana  
mā karmaphalahetur bhūr mā te saṅgostv akarmaṇi 2.47

*You have the right only for action, never to any of its fruits (victory) in any way; never feel you are the cause for the impact of your actions. At the same time, never get addicted to inaction.*

Action is an unavoidable and inevitable adjunct to life. Therefore, the right approach to action is the key to self-realization. Man is born equipped for action and he develops skills and expertise as he grows up. But attachment to the outcome of action becomes a distraction, even anxiety. Also, assuming oneself to be the sole reason for the impact of one's action boosts one's ego which is just another name for ignorance.

The abyss on the other side of the path is also pointed out. It is the labyrinth of inaction. Once all material gain is discounted as target, one may easily slip into inaction and even take refuge in it!

Unfortunately, this part of the text has been widely misinterpreted, mainly by leftist thinkers, even some of the best among them. The citadel of Marxism crumbles if the worker has no right to ask for wages! The statement here, however, relates to the coordinates of an entirely different dimension. Arjuna is being counseled not to be anxious about the outcome of his actions in the war (victory and defeat) and it has no relation to wages of workers.

Man has no absolute control over the outcome of his action. Many a slip is possible between the cup and the lip. There is always anxiety. It jeopardizes the effort and/or leads to inaction. Especially when the heights to be climbed or the hurdles to be crossed look herculean, one is driven to anxiety and inaction as one is plagued by doubts about the outcome. In the present context, stalwarts like Bhishma and Drona are on the other side. They are apparently invincible.

Situations of this kind are not rare in anybody's life. The odds may look totally unfavorable. Victory in the effort is not totally within our control. Just do the best one can, which is the only way. Also know that the ultimate result of any effort is not in our hands, there are so many factors acting in nature that determines the outcome. Practicing this balance of mind is the first training.

The age-old argument of the procrastinator is: "Why bother, why not sit back and relax? Anyway everything ends in death. Let us escape from the situation." But the Gita says that even if it appears to be so in the material sense, there is happiness in the effort and even 'adventure' in it, if the results of the efforts can be ignored while doing it and one is working in unison with the life force in

perfect balance. This is how life is made fruitful by ‘natural’ effort. Inaction is equivalent to death. Therefore awake, arise, and take your challenges by the horns.

yogasthah kuru karmāṇī saṅgam tyaktvā dhanañjaya  
siddhyasiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā samatvam yoga ucyate 2.48

*Perform action, O Dhananjaya, abandoning attachment, being steadfast in yoga, and balanced in success and failure. Evenness of mind is called yoga.*

This is the first definition of yoga.

The word means being together with the spirit of the entire universe. Its methodology is balance in action and evenness of mind. Holism is the basic idea of the Gita and it is against any kind of divisive thinking. Attachment to any divisive factor is failure; and to act with the universe at large, evenness of mind is the essential prerequisite. Dhananjaya means one who has won over (the covetousness to) wealth.

dūreṇa hy avaram karma buddhiyogād dhanañjaya  
buddhau śaraṇam anviccha kṛpaṇāḥ phalahetavah 2.49

*Far lower than the yoga of wisdom is (blind) action; O Dhananjaya, seek you refuge in wisdom; wretched are they whose motive is ‘fruit’.*

Blind action is far less desirable than intelligent action. Wisdom should be in the lead. Take refuge in wisdom. Those who yearn for the material fruits during action are unwise and therefore deserve no more than sympathy.

This most important vision offered by Vedanta is based on the equilibrium poise of mind achievable through yoga vidya. In the case of a thinking person this exercise is a conscious option, whereas in the case of an ignorant person the yearning for the fruit of his effort and the anxiety that comes with it is the routine. Man is free to be or not to be. He alone is equipped to enlarge the freedom thus obtainable. The intelligence that helps make the choice is the same as that which paves the way for acting in unison with the spirit of the universe. Repeated exercise makes yoga or evenness of mind perfect. Those who lack wisdom deserve sympathy. But those who know the truth and still follow the old thinking pattern of un-evolved men are indeed pitiable.

buddhiyukto jahātīha ubhe sukṛtaduṣkṛte

tasmād yogāya yujyasva yogah karmasu kauśalam 2.50

*Endowed with the wisdom of evenness of mind, one casts off in this life both good deeds and evil deeds; therefore get devoted to yoga. Skill in action is yoga.*

This is the second definition of yoga.

A person capable of approaching any action with wisdom of the yoga is no longer attached to his ego. He is happy irrespective of the outcome of his action because that is what he was meant to do and he does it without attachment. His endeavor will be to do his job with utmost skill. (In other words, his job should be what he is skilled to do.) Skill in action is the hallmark of the yogi. Motivation for action, in his case, spontaneously stems from his aptitude and skill and the harmony it provides. He therefore cannot be judged on the basis of any external code of conduct and he does not accumulate any credit or discredit of any kind for whatever is done.

To do anything well, one has to approach it assured of its judiciousness, without anxiety regarding the outcome, minus any expectation of selfish rewards and unafraid of moral or material punishment. Precedents can very well serve as guidelines; but they should never work as binding factors. Outlive traditions and set new precedents if need be. Feel free is the key – free from bonds of the past and anxieties concerning the future; free to decide, function and discard the consequences; and at the same time free from selfishness and the attachments that come with it; to be totally free from within and also outside.

karmajam buddhiyuktā hi phalam tyaktvā maniṣināḥ  
janmabandhavinirmuktāḥ padam gacchhanty anāmayam 2.51

*The knowledgeable with this wisdom, having ignored the fruits during their actions, freed from the fetters of birth, go to the state which is beyond all sorrow.*

Man is equipped to attain a stage of everlasting happiness. In fact his real Self is blissful. But this is hidden by the veil woven out of his attachments by the dialectical concepts of the material world. The intelligent succeed in unveiling themselves by adopting evenness of mind and thereby doing away with bondage created by association with the pairs of opposites. They, equipped with this wisdom, perform more action, not only their job but every challenge in their life, with the result of achieving more balance and evenness of mind. Once one is in the right path, evolution is certain. Practice makes perfect. Wherever they go and whatever they do, they reach unison with the Paramātma, the state which is

beyond all sorrow.

yadā te mohakalilam buddhir vyatitariṣyati  
tadā gantāsi nirvedam śrotavyasya śrutasya ca 2.52

*When your intellect crosses the mire of delusion, then you shall attain impassiveness as to what has been heard and what is yet to be heard.*

Self-realization surpasses all external learning. The flower falls after the fruit stage is reached. The way is yoga – getting attuned to the note of the universe, attainment of harmony with the rest. Once it is achieved, one may become unconcerned to textual knowledge and also whatever remains to be heard and studied. The boat is dispensable once the river is crossed.

śrutivipratipannā te yadā sthāsyati niścalā  
samādhāv acalā buddhis tadā yogam avāpsyasi 2.53

*When your intellect, perplexed by what you have heard, shall stand immovable and steady in the Self, there you shall attain self-realization.*

Learning is supposed to help escape confusion, but it often confuses! For instance, texts mutually contradict. Religious texts speak of great things but also contain outdated statements. The capability to argue well is often mistaken for erudition.

What is suggested is: give up all confusing texts, discard every partisan attempt at justification of any side of an argument, discount all controversies and learn to get attuned to the Self. Thus when one is practicing in the right path, the intellect would stand steady in the Self at the right time, and one need not bother about the rest.

arjuna uvāca  
sthitaprajñasya kā bhāṣā samādhisthasya keśava  
sthitadhīḥ kim prabhāṣeta kim āsīta vrajeta kim 2.54

*Arjuna said:*

*What, O Keśava, is the description of him who has steady wisdom and in that highest state? How does the sthitaprajna (one of steady inherent wisdom) speak, how does he sit, how does he walk?*

As at all times, and possibly also during the days the Gita was composed, there might have been many people making false claims to wisdom and enlightenment. The misconception that the first step to self-realization was giving up the world was also prevalent.

śrībhagavān uvāca  
prajahāti yadā kāmān sarvān pārtha manogatān  
ātmany evātmāna tuṣṭah sthitaprajñas tadocyate 2.55

*The Lord (of the senses) said:*

*O Partha, when a man completely overcomes all desires of the mind, and is contented in the self by the self, he is said to be one of steady inherent wisdom.*

The first ‘self’ is the soul or ātma. The second ‘self’ is one’s worldly self, the usual ‘I’.

The pull of desires become automatically reduced as knowledge that the inner soul is the real me becomes a steady awareness. Without inner peace and internal contentment no one can enjoy the outer world anyway. Inner peace should be the first priority above any other worldly desire. Know the eternal self to be one's true self and one can reach contentment. Only then can inherent knowledge have a steady base to develop.

duḥkheśv anudvignamanāḥ sukheṣु vigataspr̥haḥ  
vitarāgabhayakrodhaḥ sthitadhīr munir ucyate 2.56

*The one whose mind is not shaken by grief and who in prosperity does not hanker after pleasures, is free from attachment, fear and anger; he is called a sage of steady inherent wisdom.*

Vedanta recognizes a person with steady inherent wisdom only if he has natural control over all his passions. The person who struggles with himself for such control possesses knowledge because he is aiming for self-control, but he is not yet at the level of steady wisdom. The verse pertains to one who has been successful in this training.

Fear and anger are enemies to the one practicing yoga vidya because both strengthen the perception of separateness from the object or person causing it. This does not mean one should not move away from a danger. What is meant is to take precaution, not fear. And also to fight for the right cause, but not due to anger or hatred.

yah̄ sarvatrānabhisnehas tattatprāpya śubhāśubham  
nābhinandati na dveṣṭi tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā 2.57

*He who perceives everything dispassionately, who is neither excited nor hating to whatever good or bad that comes to him, his intellect is steady in inherent wisdom.*

To all stimuli, whether good or bad, nice or hateful, that person responds with equanimity. He cannot be led or waylaid. He has inherent control.

It is unfortunate that most of the modern world has no inkling to what these verses mean. People run after pleasures but they lack the internal contentment of the wise to feel happy. The result is increasing material pleasures and increasing depression along with it. But one becomes automatically happy when the intellect develops detachment and remains steady in inherent wisdom. No worldly pleasure can provide any happiness in the long run unless the true inner self is properly understood.

Many of us do not get even the opportunity to realize the strengths endowed within the mind.

yadā saṃharate cāyam kūrmo/ṅgānīva sarvaśah  
indriyāṇīndriyārthebhyas tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā 2.58

*When, like the tortoise which withdraws its limbs from all sides, he withdraws his five senses from the sense-objects, then his intellect is steady in inherent wisdom.*

The tortoise withdraws its limbs when alarmed; but the yogi detaches sense organs from their respective objects of interaction as a part of declining interest due to focus on a different and higher objective. These horses that are the sense organs are neither beaten to death nor cut off from the body. They are only brought under effective control.

Our sense organs are exquisitely refined instruments. For instance, a camera as versatile as the human eye is a far prospect even with today's technology. The same goes for the ears, the nose, the skin and the taste buds. One cannot live well without any of these organs. Everything possible should be done to keep them healthy and in good working condition. The mind often 'imagines' encounters of sense organs with objects of their pleasure and 'experiences' phantom pleasures and pains. The roots of addiction to any sensual pleasure, in

fact, are in the mind. When the mind is liberated from the clutches of longings, the sense organs fall under control.

viśayā vinivartante nirāhārasya dehinah  
rasavarjam raso/py asya param dṛṣṭvā nivartate 2.59

*The objects of the sense organs leave the abstinent man alone, the remnants of longing also leave him as he happens to perceive the Highest Soul.*

There are two broad techniques for mind control – one is through the simple practice of abstinence, the other is by wisdom developed through the practice of karma yoga. Here the technique of abstinence is discussed for mind control. Abstinence will provide a clear mind and sharp intellect. It is a practice which boosts will power and also makes one realize his strengths. The sense organs when restrained will veer round to submission to one's will. But deep down in the mind will remain the rudiments of longings in subtle form. However, these remnants too will leave once the mind is firmly established in the ātma - the immortal part within. But abstinence is no easy game.

yatato hy api kaunteya puruṣasya vipaścitaḥ  
indriyāṇi pramāthīni haranti prasabhamanah 2.60

*The turbulent senses, O Arjuna, often carry away the mind of even the intelligent man by force, though he is strong (in controlling them).*

A word of warning to the students of yoga vidya: Be careful, the senses can appear to be tamed but one should never be over confident; they are far more powerful than anyone may think.

tāni sarvāṇi samyamya yukta āśīta matparah  
vaśe hi yasyendriyāṇi tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā 2.61

*Having won over them, the one who sits steadfast, intend on the Paramātmā (his true self) - his intellect is steady in inherent wisdom.*

The logical outcome of successful practice of yoga vidya is steady inherent wisdom based on the True Self or the Paramātmā.

Next, the consequences of uncontrolled senses are vividly and logically portrayed.

dhyāyato viśayān pumṣaḥ saṅgas teśūpajāyate  
saṅgāt sañjāyate kāmaḥ kāmāt krodho/bhijāyate 2.62

*When a man steadily contemplates on objects of pleasure, ‘attachment’ for them takes root; from attachment ‘craving’ is born; from craving arises anger....*

Pleasures leave memories of them; when the mind goes on imagining more of them the result is greater and greater attachment to the pleasures; attachment leads to craving which, when not allowed by external circumstances, turns into anger....

kroḍhād bhavati saṁmohaḥ saṁmohāt smṛtivibhramah  
smṛtibhramśād buddhināśo buddhināśāt praṇasyati 2.63

*From anger comes ‘delusion’; from delusion ‘lack of memory’ (of all that is learned); from lack of memory the ‘loss of discrimination’; from loss of which one perishes.*

Anxiety and fear wrecks personality by taking us down the ladder of emotional evolution. Refinements accrued through generations are suddenly lost and primitive responses long outlived take over. More and more devices for material comforts generate more desires, greater chances of one or other of these being denied leading to ever-prevailing anger, frustration and destruction of all that one has including one’s own life.

Knowing the chain will prevent intelligent people from falling into the process. The verses help to initiate corrective action early enough so as to prevent self destructive downfall. Observe one's own anger to identify its reason. If one's thoughts and emotions are analyzed one can identify the thought process and imagination that lead to specific desires and cravings.

For an ordinary person immersed in worldly affairs and has not yet heard of meditation, sometimes one's thoughts may prove difficult to identify and control. It is easier for those who are in the habit of observing their own thought processes and emotions. Observation, contemplation and meditation are the three exercises of mind prescribed in yoga vidya.

Negation of emotions is not what is suggested. It is stated (later) that the sense organs are noble and they are not to be disabled or killed. What Gita advises is creative detachment. As wisdom matures, the desire for sensual

pleasures withers and falls, just like a bud breaks open to give birth to the flower and the flower falls as the fruit develops. This is a natural process and not to be brought about by force or a surgical knife. *Veetarāgas* are those who have developed healthy detachment and not the ones indulging in painful self-denial. They progressively learn the art of keeping themselves free from attachments through experience gained from incessant performance of karma (action) without desire. Even after they become masters at *karma yoga*, they keep themselves continuously busy fulfilling their duties.

The means to achieve the right balance is outlined in the next verse:

rāgadveśavimuktais tu viṣayān indriyaiś caran  
ātmavaśyair vidheyātmā prasādam adhigacchati 2.64

*The one who attains prasāda is free from the snares of both attraction and repulsion; he has got the sense organs under his control, even when he is experiencing the sense objects.*

If enough control is achieved, one can freely interact with any and every object in the world without agitation. Prasāda is happiness born out of tranquility attained when the person is free from all worry and internal conflict.

Note that the verse is about how one can be in control while *experiencing* the sense objects, not while *renouncing* them.

A lesson is taken from horse riding. The beast has to be tamed and reined in; one should also learn how to mount it; it should be taken to the place one considers the goal and not allowed to gallop to where it wants. One may fall; get kicked by the horse; even trampled upon by it. The very first lesson is: know the horse well and become its master. And the all-time precaution: never let go of the reins.

prasāde sarvaduhkhānām hānir asyopajāyate  
prasannacetaso hy āśu buddhiḥ paryavatiṣṭhate 2.65

*Prasāda of the mind destroys all pains; because, the intellect of the tranquil-minded soon becomes steady.*

Pain and sorrow are results of inflictions and / or deprivations. Even-mindedness can outlive both and lead to tranquility. A tranquil mind is free.

Happiness of mind presupposes peace and a peaceful mind helps to get happier. ‘Prasāda’ from a Hindu temple today means part of the offering made

by a devotee given back to him / her after submission to the deity by the priest. The word, however, literally means tranquility of mind. Worship is supposed to create it in the devotee.

It is shown that one does not have to give up the world to attain tranquility of mind and spiritual happiness. One can be right in the middle of the world dealing with things material, and still be tranquil. In fact this is the right way. Shutting the world out would not discipline the mind. Outliving all provocations and inducements does. The material world is the arena where the higher state of mind is won as a trophy by practice; and for that this world is not to be discarded or renounced. The details of attitudes that can be adopted in dealing with various situations in life are discussed in detail later on.

nāsti buddhir ayuktasya na cāyuktasya bhāvanā  
na cābhāvayataḥ śāntir aśāntasya kutah sukham 2.66

*Right working of the intellect is impossible for the ayukta; perception too is impossible without it. And, one incapable of perception (of one's real self) can never know lasting peace; and how can one who knows no peace be happy?*

The one who does not use the intellect – the equipment for visualization and perception – cannot use his faculties to the best of his ability and so is unable to visualize the Self within. (Ayukta means ignorant, unintelligent, also the one without practice of yoga.) Only with knowledge and recognition of one's true immortal self can one overcome the innermost disquiet of death. Only a stable mind based on wisdom can perceive the true self and know how to rise above the inputs from his sense organs and emotions related to the material world. That practice to attain control and be the master of oneself is yoga. The success of that practice is when the person can always perceive his true self as the everlasting soul. There is no peace without wisdom.

It is common sense that any pleasure can be enjoyed only if a person approaches it with an element of detachment. One who is obsessed about being happy can never be happy.

indriyāṇāṁ hi caratāṁ yan manonuvidhīyate  
tad asya harati prajñāṁ vāyur nāvam ivāmbhasi 2.67

*For, the mind which follows in the wake of wandering sense organs carries away his discrimination as wind carries away a boat on open waters.*

A boat on high seas and not anchored is the best symbol for a mind not in control. Any wind carries the boat its way. It therefore never stands still at any place nor reaches its destined shores; most often it does not reach any shore at all, moving at random all the time, if not dashed against a hard rock and wrecked. Any navigator, therefore, would do well to have a definite destination in mind early enough, a chart of the way, the skill to overcome the swells and the troughs and, most of all, the expertise to use all available winds to help advance in the chartered direction.

tasmād yasya mahābāho nigṛhitāni sarvaśah  
indriyāṇīndriyārthebhyaḥ tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā 2.68

*Therefore, O mighty-handed, he is steady in inherent wisdom, whose senses are so well mastered that they can in no way drag him to its respective objects.*

Mighty-handed is one with extra-strong arms, well trained to fight powerful foes. Arjuna is encouraged that he has much skill and strength to also destroy what leads his mind astray. The deeper meaning is that any external kingdom or any amount of riches one wins in the battle of life come to naught if the forces that tend to lead one away from harmony with the life principle is not defeated first.

It is clear from all these verses that the Gita is not written just to encourage a war in part of a story. The emphasis is always on victory in the struggles within (the mind).

yā niśā sarvabhūtānāṁ tasyāṁ jāgarti samyamī  
yasyāṁ jāgrati bhūtāni sā niśā paśyato muneh 2.69

*That which is night to all beings, in that the self-controlled man keeps awake. That to which all beings are awake, is what the sage (Muni) considers as night.*

That which the unknowing crave for do not attract the wise; what fails to wake up the unknowing keeps the wise fully awake.

Everything in this universe is acting and reacting, and all these actions and reactions are in accordance with the dialectical nature of Akshara the unobservable substrate. The pleasurable and the favorable are generally accepted by the living and the opposite rejected. Most of the living is motivated towards these temporary joys and they are the ‘light’ to such people. But a Muni (one

who is silent from within) is not. His interest is in the Paramātma, the eternal.

This verse does not mean that everything in the Kshara world is to be renounced; it only shows where the focus of the sage is.

The verse also indicates the direction one has to follow in day to day activities. Everyone without that ultimate awareness swims along with the tide. But those who know about the opposite shore swim against the tide. At the same time, they accept that they are also drifting with the tide, and that it is impossible to stop the tide.

āpūryamāṇam acalapratīṣṭham  
samudram āpaḥ praviśanti yadvat  
tadvat kāmā yam̄ praviśanti sarve  
sa śāntim āpnoti na kāmakāmī 2.70

*As all rivers enter the ocean, which though filled from all sides, remains unmoved; so does contact with sense organs occur to the muni who attains peace; but not to the ‘man of cravings’.*

One may wonder how a Muni or anyone for that matter can attain tranquility if he indulges in worldly activity and allows material experiences to enter him. The answer is explained by pointing out the example of the ocean. All the rivers on earth enter it adding huge quantities of water to it along with a multitude of things of various kinds. But it remains the same all the time. It does not crave for any particular input nor does it resist any. Any addition never makes even the slightest change to its level of composure.

vihāya kāmān yaḥ sarvān pumāṁś carati niḥsprahāḥ  
nirmamo nirahamkārahāḥ sa śāntim adhigacchhati 2.71

*Without greed for anything, without attachment to any possession, without hesitation to part with any dear object, the one who moves about in his life without ego, that person knows lasting peace.*

There are rare occasions when such maturity can naturally develop. But usually it is through the training of yoga vidya as described before. The wise one knows the permanence of the ātma and the temporary nature of all else, hence he is unattached to the perishable including his own body (this verse does not mean he doesn't take care of his body or that he throws away all his material objects; it is the mind that undergoes perceptual change). Detachment makes him

unselfish. Through yoga vidya he is one with the life force, and does not see himself separate from the rest of the universe. He is one with the whole.

eṣā brāhmaṇī sthitih pārtha nainām prāpya vimuhyati  
sthitvāsyām antakāle/pi brahmanirvāṇam ṛcchati 2.72

*This is the brahmic-state, O Partha. Attaining this, one is never deluded thereafter. Being established therein, at least during the end of life, one attains oneness with brahma.*

If this stage in evolution of the mind and the intellect is reached, there is no question of one being deluded any further.

This is a stage that can be reached any time in life; one does not have to wait till the time of death. (Perhaps there was the popular perception even those days that spirituality was for the aged and the about-to-die).

Better late than never!

## Chapter 3

# Yoga of Karma

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The Gita is a popular science version of the Upanishads in question-answer format meant for easy understanding by everyone. The previous chapter presented the distilled summary of knowledge regarding the desirable nature and mode of yoga vidya and a broad outline of ways to bring it about. However the very next question posed by Arjuna suggests that it has been too concise to digest easily and that its practical aspects need to be better presented in greater detail.

There is also a specific reason why Arjuna is confused. *Samnyasa* was prevalent at the time of the Gita, and it was considered the way to *moksha* or enlightenment. The mode of samnyasa practiced during that time was by renouncing all worldly affairs and possessions and by leading a life of contemplation and meditation. These samnyasis (monks) renounced wealth, family and friends, put the scantiest clothing, slept on the ground, attempted negation of all pleasures and rigid control over the senses, did not do any work and tried to subsist on what others gave them, and took no responsibility for anything. This way of life was believed to be the path to get rid of all attachments, and it was also widely believed by the common people that this was the only correct way to God.

arjuna uvāca  
jyāyasī cet karmaṇas te matā buddhir janārdana  
tat kim karmaṇi ghore mām niyojayasi keśava 3.1

*Arjuna said:*

*If buddhi (intellectual knowledge) is, in your opinion, superior to karma (action), O Janardana, why then do you, O Keśava, direct me to participate in this action?*

Yoga vidya as propounded by Vedanta is different from the type of total

renunciation as commonly thought of in samnyasa; but the mind of Arjuna the warrior has been ingrained by what he has seen and learned from youth, therefore he is confused as to the difference when he hears of controlling the sense organs. Such control corresponds to the concept of samnyasa as understood by the common people, but it also implied that he should renounce everything including his duty. The two terms of address are meaningful. Janardana indicates an active state whereas Keśava refers to calm and ever-reposing nature.

Arjuna asks why he should do this duty if the path of knowledge is considered more important than the path of action. Society considers *samnyasis* who have renounced everything (including their duties) as most respectful. This tempting path is also indicated in Arjuna's previous statements, in verse 5 of chapter 2, where he opines that it is better to take up alms for a living. Obviously samnyasa was not only used by people fed up with worldly affairs and seeking enlightenment, but also was an escapist route for others who wished to secretly run away from their duty and responsibility.

Arjuna's stance also indicates that, even in those ancient days, physical work was considered inferior. The upper castes and priests would do no manual labor. Knowledge was taken by the people to mean memorizing the Vedas, Puranas, mantras and tantric texts. Those who did it were considered superior. They did not do any work, so the hallmark of intelligence and greatness was total inaction. Those who sweated it out in the fields or anywhere else or handled dirt to maintain cleanliness were considered inferior, of the lower castes, and segregation was the rule.

In the prevailing social ambit, Arjuna's poser was logical. Society still continues to consider manual labor derogatory; 'white-collar' jobs are believed to be superior and bestowed with greater scales of pay.

vyāmiśreṇeva vākyena buddhim̄ mohayasīva me  
tad ekam̄ vada niścītya yena śreyo/ham̄ āpnuyām 3.2

*Your apparently contradictory words confuse my intellect. Please decide and tell me the singular way that will be beneficial to my welfare.*

It is difficult to think outside established norms, concepts and thought processes in society. Most people are fine-tuned to already established norms and live through it without much thinking about it. That is the reason why social evils like dowry, caste system, corruption and extravagant marriage functions are still prevalent. Even if one's intellect has the capacity for it, progressive thinking

is indeed very difficult because one is accustomed to seeing these and it becomes a social custom to be copied by others. Abstention, renunciation and control of the senses; all these mean only samnyasa to Arjuna, because that is how he has heard of it from childhood.

śrībhagavān uvāca  
loke/smin dvividhā niṣṭhā purā proktā mayānagha  
jñānayogena sāṅkhyānāṁ karmayogena yoginām 3.3

*Janardana (the omnipresent) said:*

*O innocent Arjuna, what I meant was there are in this world two ways to perfection: the path of jnana (yoga of wisdom) of the sankhyans and the path of karma (yoga of action) of the yogis.*

The two ways may appear totally different but they are one and the same ultimately, because the material world is the essential platform for anybody to stand upon and think; air, water and food cannot be overlooked by anyone; whereas to progress on the karma (action) path, one should use his intellect and derive at the right rules of play. Life is a chain-reaction of thought and action.

All this only indicates that one needs both legs to walk. Intelligence and action combined is the only possible style of performance. Knowledge becomes a felt experience only when it is acted upon and action becomes meaningful only when it is guided by knowledge. Total inaction is just another word for suicide.

na karmaṇām anārambhāt naiṣkarmyam puruṣośnute  
na ca samñyasanād eva siddhim samadhigacchati 3.4

*Man cannot attain naishkarma (action-less state) by non-performance of all earthly actions. Neither can he attain siddhi (perfection) by total renunciation alone.*

(‘Action-less state’ refers to nirvana or moksha.)

If actions are to be selfless, they should be performed without attachment and cleanliness of mind should prevail right from the level of the roots. ‘Action-less state’ is when this cleanliness is established, and it cannot be attained just by desisting from doing anything when demoniac yearnings and imaginations remain in the mind all the while. In this case desisting from putting them into action is restrained by fear or lack of opportunity. Also, if the motivation for action is good and it is also part of one's responsibility, how can desisting

oneself from doing it lead to any siddhi?

Some commentators have taken the word karma here to mean ‘yajna’ and other rituals supposed to please several gods. Gita castigates the advocates of these rituals in the previous chapter and also in the coming ones. The word here means the entire gamut of actions performable by man. Neither does the word ‘siddhi’ here mean the special physical powers attainable through yoga of the body. The powers described as ‘ashtaiswarya siddhi’ (the eight divine capabilities), according to Patanjali’s Yogaśāstra, are described therein itself as impediments on the path to ultimate realization, because personal powers lead to more attachment to the perishable body and mind.

It is obvious that if a person immersed in work is to feel ‘I am not doing anything’, he has to be convinced that it is not his ego that drives him; he is only an instrument. This is the essence of the concept of renunciation. One who adopts it goes on doing all that he should. He is bound to. On the other hand, one who, without realizing this, opts for total inaction under the delusion that it is the way to salvation is on the wrong path. Running away from life never helps realize the ultimate purpose of the evolution of life.

Sri Sankara says: “The statement that inaction does not lead to salvation purports that action does lead to it. The answer to the question why inaction does not lead to salvation is: the process of action is the means to salvation, as action is the ‘upāyam’ (method) and salvation is the ‘saddhyam’ (target). The latter is impossible to be realized without the former. The Upanishads and the Gita teach that action is the method to reach ultimate knowledge.”

The logic here is used to eradicate the misuse of Vedanta by negating the premise that salvation is something attainable only if the world and every association with it is given up. In fact, the road to salvation in effect is the effort to distinguish the unreal from the real and identifying oneself more and more with the real. One’s ego which amounts to attachment to the perishable body has to be tapered off and knowledge-giving experiences have to be had. Action is what provides the chance for both.

No one can refuse karma because, with the very birth of the universe, everything has begun to happen. Under the circumstances, even the decision “I won’t act” is an action! It also becomes an obstacle on the road to knowledge.

na hi kaścit kṣaṇam api jātu tiṣṭhaty akarmakṛt  
kāryate hy avaśah karma sarvah prakṛtijair guṇaiḥ 3.5

*Indeed none can ever remain even for a moment without performing action; for, everyone is made to act helplessly by the qualities born of nature.*

Every cell in the body is active all the time one is alive. The process of life is the sum total of all these actions. So, total inaction is the same as death. The decision not to act is un-implementable.

Why is every cell active? They are so because action is the essence of their very existence, as at the basic level all the fundamental particles are products of the oscillating action (waves) ensuing from the dialectical nature of the substrate Akshara, the unseen level of reality behind the Kshara (our visible universe). Avyakta (the fabric of space) possess three ‘gunas’ (characters) – it can expand, contract and remain neutral. Particles of wave-matter are born out of the orchestration of these tendencies, the manifestation of each of which is the unstoppable combination of these wave actions. Nothing that has ‘materialized’ can stop this inherent action.

Further:-

karmendriyāṇi samyamya ya āste manasā smaran  
indriyārthān vimūḍhātmā mithyācāraḥ sa ucyate 3.6

*The one who restrains the organs-of-action but sits yearning for sensual pleasures in his mind is deluded; he is called a hypocrite.*

The body has organs-of-action and organs-of-knowledge. The former (the five sense organs) bring in the sensations; the latter (the mind and intellect) acts on these or on the basis of sensations gathered earlier and stored. Even if nothing is done, one can mentally perform a thousand misdeeds! And each of these is in fact an action. The volcanoes in such repressed minds often burst with devastating effects.

This also exposes some of the self-styled ‘samnyasis’, the frauds who are in fact very much worse by mindset than average human beings; they preach the highest scriptures but secretly yearn for wealth, power, pleasure and material comforts and exploit their followers. Being ‘close to God’ or being ‘like God itself’, confers upon the fraud the highest power in the minds of the simple devotees.

yas tv indriyāṇi manasā niyamyārabhate/rjuna  
karmaindriyaiḥ karmayogam asaktah sa viśiṣyate 3.7

*But whosoever, controlling the senses by using the mind, O Arjuna, engages his organs-of-action in ‘karma yoga’ without attachment; he is noble.*

What is being done is secondary to the state of mind while doing it. The hangman has no murder in mind, the judge has no enmity to the criminal he sentences to capital punishment, the policeman harbors no personal issue to the offender he apprehends, the surgeon makes the incision to heal and not to hurt.

Every time a thief goes into action he becomes a greater thief; every impartial judgment proclaimed by a judge makes him a more evolved and better human being. The two paths are mutually opposite.

The common man who works with his hands and the learned man who works with his intellect are placed on the same footing. The karma yogi has an edge over the inactive one with knowledge because the knowledge the former gathers is in the form of an experience whereas it is only an add-on in the case of the latter. The message is: let your action be a natural happening; let the emphasis be on doing it best. This attitude will eradicate all tension, reservation and lack of confidence.

niyatam kuru karma tvam karma jyāyo hy akarmanah  
śarīrayatrāpi ca te na prasidhyed akarmanah 3.8

*Action is superior to inaction; so perform your niyata karma (bounden duty). Even the very maintenance of the body would become impossible if you go totally inactive.*

Being alive is the result of ever so many ongoing actions within the body, both voluntary and involuntary. One does not have to worry about involuntary functions, but basic necessities like food and water have to be found and taken.

Gita says that if enlightenment is the aim, one has to be alive to bring it about and sustain it. So eat you must and keep alive! Suicide is not *nirvana* is the dig at the proponents of total renunciation.

(‘Niyata karma’ is work deemed necessary by nature. How this can be discerned is indicated further ahead.)

yajñārthāt karmano/nyatra lokoyam karmabandhanaḥ  
tadartham karma kaunteya muktasaṅgaḥ samācara 3.9

*In this world action other than for the sake of ‘yajna’ binds man. (Therefore) O Arjuna, you do your duty for the sake of ‘yajna’ with a mind free of attachment.*

‘Yajna’ is a Vedic ritual in which offerings are made to the Gods by lighting the sacrificial fire and chanting hymns. But the word as used here does not mean that ritual; it denotes its actual ancient meaning, namely ‘holistic action in the interest of the society and also the whole biosphere’.

Students of science know that all happenings in the universe are complimentary. So, no living thing can get on unless it is part of the bigger balance. Anything that acts in ‘self-interest’ contrary to this dictum gets alienated and suffers sooner or later. It is therefore the enlightened self-interest of man too to harmonize his actions with the plan of the great orchestra that the universe is.

The word ‘yajna’ also means Isvara – the Paramātma (life principle) of the universe. Every living thing is its manifestation and acts according to the natural impulses of nature based on the collective biosphere. The other living things know no greed so they do not grab and hoard. This is exactly what is meant by “Look at the birds of the sky; they do not sow; neither do they reap.” In fact they do both. The crucial difference is while they do so they do not feel that it is for their own sake, neither is it performed on the strength of any proprietary right. They work for the well being of the whole by instinct. This is known as ‘sahayajna’ (partaking of the functioning of the world). Any interest narrower than this is detrimental to the world as well as to the doer. Interests get narrow when unwise attachments grow. One cannot truly be part of the balance unless one is detached.

sahayajñāḥ prajāḥ srṣṭvā purovāca prajāpatih  
anena prasaviṣyadhvam eṣa vo/stv iṣṭakāmadhuk 3.10

*After creating everything in the universe with one-to-all functional correlation, the creator (seems to have) said at the very outset: “May you all prosper on the basis of this sahayajna and may it become the kāmadhenu that gives you all that you need.”*

The intention of the poet here is not to introduce a dictatorial creator for the universe. He invites us to take a close look at the situation prevailing. Even the so-called non-living entities – the mountain, the cloud, the wind, the ocean – contribute to create and maintain the equilibrium and balance.

Of course, everything seems to be acting in self-interest. Plants are eaten by animals. Small animals are eaten by carnivores. The carnivores are in turn eaten by microbes after death and the nutrients from their body are broken down to form food for the plants again. Everything seems to exist separately and forms

the food for something else, but have a second look and it becomes apparent that every action is also in the interest of the whole. The biosphere has a balance. What prevails is the rule of hidden cooperation. The waste one produces is food for another. Nothing or nobody is unwanted. If anyone thinks otherwise, he is cutting down the very branch upon which he is sitting!

It is this idea of the ‘sahayajna’ attitude that ancient Vedantic knowledge adds to Charles Darwin’s ideas like ‘natural selection’ and ‘survival of the fittest’. The same sahayajna predisposition makes the atoms club together to form molecules, crystals and macromolecules. The sun, the planets, the moon, radiation, wind, rain and all are the results of the same predisposition; everything is related. The biosphere is a ‘kshetra’; the solar system is another ‘kshetra’. In short, everything supports everything else in nature. In Vedanta creation is about formation of more and more complex myriad forms and balance through ‘sahayajna’; evolution is growing awareness through increasingly complex forms, culminating in union with immortality – the creator and creation finally becoming one. In the Vedantic concept evolution cannot be regarded as simple random selection and survival of the most selfish or adept form.

For a biosphere that lacks forms with awareness, the balance is maintained by nature. For beings of a more aware nature like humans, there is more direct responsibility and the choice that comes with it.

devān bhāvayatānena te devā bhāvayantu vah  
parasparam bhāvayantah śreyah param avāpsyatha 3.11

*With this (‘sahayajna’ dharma) you nourish the ‘Devas’ (different manifestations of the forces in the universe) and the ‘Devas’ will nourish you in turn; you shall attain the supreme heights of prosperity by thus nourishing one another.*

The descriptions of ‘Devas’ in most part of the Vedas and the elaborate and costly rituals propounded therein to propitiate them are corruptions of this grand concept. The word ‘Deva’ is derived from the root meaning ‘light’. It denotes here a part of the basic energy of the universe manifesting itself as a phenomenon in nature, not temple deities or heroes of religious stories. Eastern thought has an age old tradition of considering every object in nature with reverence. Everything from a grain of sand to the Himalayas, from mist to storm, from rain to rivers, and from the insignificant blade of grass to the mighty elephant are all ‘Devas’. There are millions and millions of them. Every ‘Deva’ is related to all other ‘Devas’. Even those that appear harmful on closer

examination turn out to be beneficial, sometimes even crucial. Nothing in the universe is independent of or unrelated to anything. Mutual help is the key to welfare. All alienation and divisiveness creates sorrow. The right attitude is to consider whatever one gets as naturally given and no spoils of plunder. All attempts to ‘subjugate’ and ‘exploit’ nature are suicidal.

No wonder man today has been made to learn this basic lesson the hard way by lapses created, by the species of life that became extinct, and bitter experiences given by chemical and nuclear weapons, degradation of the biosphere, pollution of earth and devastating world wars.

iṣṭān bhogān hi vo devā dāsyante yajñabhāvitāḥ  
tair dattān apradāyaibhyo yo bhuṅkte stena eva saḥ 3.12

*The ‘Devas’ pleased with your ‘sahayajna dharma’ will give you every desired object. Indeed, he who enjoys objects thus given by the ‘Devas’ without offering back whatever is due to them is verily a thief.*

Here the discourse seems to echo the claim of the ritualists that the ‘Devas’ cherished by ‘yajna’ will provide desired objects. But the intention of the poet becomes clear when this statement is re-read substituting the real meanings for the words ‘Deva’ and ‘yajna’: The ‘forces and phenomena of nature’ (‘Devas’), when cherished through ‘dedicated work performed beneficial to the entire biosphere (‘yajna’), will provide the performer with desired objects. The smile of the great poet addressed to the ritualist seems to be: “You are right, if you could only change the way you understand what you yourself say by a little bit”!

Thief and cheat are the right words one who violates a contract deserves. The ideal way of life Gita prescribes is one of give-and-take with every other entity of the universe and not the self-styled entrapment in a secluded compartment after establishing suzerainty over nature and plundering it. That the latter cannot be sustained has already become more than evident.

The bane of ‘sahayajna dharma’ is unselfish cooperation. It means: rights = responsibilities. The pertinent question will be: Have I been able to give in return more than I have taken? The right answer to this alone will lead to the end of all alienation in the world.

This integrative approach is just the opposite of the differentiating perspective of science since the days of Descartes. I am separate from the world; my mind a thing apart from my body; space is apart from matter and so on forms the basis of almost all branches of science. For instance, look at the definition of ‘the economic man’: ‘An animal that always buys and sells only for profit’.

‘Progress’ means exploitation of Nature. ‘Nature’ here includes all life forms including other men. Even the philosophy to end exploitation, as it too is based on the same differentiating perspective, proves futile. Gaining more wealth by doing less work is perceived as ‘smartness’. But it is never the true way of life of any person with wisdom. “Am I just a parasite, or am I giving the world the equivalent of what the world is providing for me?” should be the simple but necessary thought of each and every person regarding his work. That one care would itself cure the world of all maladies.

yajñāśiṣṭāśinah santo mucyante sarvakilbiṣaiḥ  
bhuñjate te tv agham pāpā ye pacanty ātmakāraṇāt 3.13

*The righteous who partake only of the remnants of the sacrifices get cleansed of all blemishes but those who cook (food) only for their own sake, eat but sin.*

We have a definition of sin: it is appropriation of more than what is deserved. The symptom of ‘sin’ is extra-accent on ‘I’ and ‘mine’. It leads to strife.

Sin, in this reckoning, is the climax of foolishness because the best insurance for one’s safety and well being is a world in which all are safe and secure. Misappropriation denies the share of others, creates apprehension, tension and instability. Fools alone dream of making a stable mount in water! Biological evolution is yet to give man the emotional equipment to get over this tomfoolery. Besides, all animal instincts carried from various stages of evolution are there in man too.

The other extreme is also not desirable. Extreme views for nature preservation includes giving up all technology and returning to the bullock-cart age. ‘Aparā vidya’ (the means to know and manipulate the physical environment – modern science) also is a product of the life principle; in no sense is it irrelevant or unnecessary. But it has to be assured that alienation is not the result of using it. Selflessness should be redefined as expanding the horizons of the self to the limits of the universe which is a lot wider than to any group or fraction. So, let ‘parā vidya’ (the means to know and identify oneself with the ultimate reality behind the universe) provide the road-map and modern science be no more than the wheels of the vehicle of life.

annād bhavanti bhūtāni parjanyād annasambhavaḥ  
yajñād bhavati parjanyo yajñāḥ karmasamudbhavaḥ 3.14  
karma brahmodbhavam viddhi brahmākṣarasamudbhavam

tasmāt sarvagatam brahma nityam yajñe pratiṣṭhitam 3.15

*All living things come forth from food; food is produced by the rain (of blessing) that comes out of ‘yajna’ (unselfish action-reaction pattern of the forces of nature) and ‘yajna’ is born of karma.*

*Karma comes forth from Akshara; everything has its roots in brahma. This all-pervading brahma is permanently substantiated on yajna.*

Akshara, through its resonance based on the three gunas, provides the oscillation specifics to form particles small and big. The nature of this background action (in Avyakta, the fabric of space) forms the basis for continuous action (karma) in the manifest universe. All natural phenomena are products of karma, naturally occurring as yajna – the unselfish action-reaction patterns in nature; which in correct balance gives blessings like the rain, providing basis for all growth and well being in nature and food for all organisms including human beings.

evam pravartitam cakram nānuvartayatīha yaḥ  
aghāyur indriyārāmo mogham pārtha sa jīvati 3.16

*He who does not follow here this vast wheel thus set revolving, O Partha, is just a slave to the senses, of a sinful life. He lives in vain.*

Every cell in a body exists only in relation to the rest of the body and therefore has natural responsibilities. Wrong choice makes the cell turn cancerous; it endangers the body and also harms itself.

Everything from freedom to creativity should fall in tune with this wheel of nature. If not, one’s freedom of choice is wasted and life is in vain. Action is to help blend harmoniously with the rest of the universe, to act in the interest of the biosphere, to contribute to its running and well being and attain better and better attunement in life.

yas tv ātmaratir eva syād ātmatrptaś ca mānavah  
ātmany eva ca samtuṣṭas tasya kāryam na vidyate 3.17

*For the man who rejoices in the (fundamental reality of his) self, who is contended with that and feels happy in it, for him there is nothing (more) to be done.*

The person described here as one ‘who has nothing more to do’ has already passed three rigorous tests. One: He has discovered the fundamental reality of his self. Two: He has understood that nothing in the temporary world would give more content than being one with it. Three: He is happily acting in union with the ātma within him. It can be easily seen that this kind of a person will automatically fall in line with his responsibilities and keep acting accordingly. At no point ever will he be at a loss to know what to do next. Pain does not hold him back, profit does not daunt him and failure does not bother him; thus the ‘temporary he’ is not doing anything.

naiva tasya kṛtenārtho nākṛteneha kaścana  
na cāsyā sarvabhūteṣु kaścid arthavyapāśrayah 3.18

*In whatever he does, he does not need to gain anything (for himself); neither does he stand to lose anything (dear to himself) by not doing anything. Also, he does not have to depend on anything in the universe (to keep him going and make him happy).*

The message here is that one who knows the truth and lives with detachment does not need any extra renunciation. He is already higher than the highest ‘samnyasi’. His ‘I’ has surpassed the stage of being no more than just the sum total of sense organ gathered information and experience. He lives as the ‘I’ of the immortal ātma that manifests through the invisible substrate which, by virtue of the latter’s dialectic nature, produces and sustains his body. (That ātma has nothing to gain or lose vis-à-vis the material world; neither does it depend upon the action-reaction scenario relevant only to the manifest.) He is invariably happy as happiness is the very state of that essence. He is not inactive; far from it.

tasmād asaktaḥ satatam kāryam karma samācara  
asakto hy ācaran karma param āpnoti pūruṣah 3.19

*Therefore, always do all the duty which is to be performed without attachment. Man attains identification with the parā (the nature of Akshara) by performing karma without attachment.*

What helped man leave behind animal status were the power of imagination and the faculty of intelligence. But these have not helped us relinquish the load of accumulated primitive instincts. Fear, for instance, when coupled with the

power of imagination, gives birth to weapons of mass destruction. Imaginary deprivations of today, tomorrow and the day after produce insatiable greed. This tragic turn of events prevents intellect and imagination going in their natural way of evolution to help us identify with the fundamental force behind the universe. Freedom from this dark prison is only when the high walls of base instincts are demolished. The way to demolish these is by performing whatever karma one has to do with the spirit of detachment. That is the way to ultimate freedom, both in the outer world and the inside world.

karmaṇaiva hi saṃsiddhim āsthitā janakādayaḥ  
lokasaṃgraham evāpi saṃpaśyan kartum arhasi 3.20

*Many like Janaka achieved the ultimate state only by karma. If not for anything else, one must work to help maintain the world.*

Janaka was a great scholar and also a mighty monarch. He did not renounce his kingdom to attain, act and be with the ultimate reality. On the other hand, the detachment he developed helped him rule judiciously. It does not matter whether one is learned or illiterate, rich or poor; the path of action is always open. Knowledge without action is impossible and action without knowledge is destructive.

yadyad ācarati śreṣṭhas tattad evetaro janaḥ  
sa yat pramāṇam kurute lokas tad anuvartate 3.21

*Whatever an enlightened man performs, the yet-to-be-enlightened also do; whatever he sets up as standard, the world (people in general) follows.*

The assumption that an enlightened man is above all work is again refuted. Enlightenment gets ripe only when it is translated into performance. Naturally, everything an enlightened man does will be attractive to those around him, so they too will try to follow suit; eventually, they will understand what his vision is and also accept it.

It is a further warning that responsible people should never throw away their duties, especially on the basis of faith – not only will it jeopardize themselves; it would also convey the wrong message to other innocent people.

na me pārthāsti kartavyam triṣu lokeṣu kiṃcana  
nānavāptam avāptavyam varta eva ca karmaṇi 3.22

*O Partha, there is nothing in the three worlds that has to be done by me; nor is there anything unattained that is to be attained by me; yet I always keep myself engaged in action.*

The universe is a pulsation that goes on and on with no responsibility to fulfill. Neither has the Paramātma that brings about this any profit motive. Only the phenomenal world need strictly follow certain norms.

Krishna, the master of yoga vidya, has long realized this knowledge that there is nothing more he needs to attain in the perishable world. Yet he continues in the path of righteous action. See me, conveys the verse.

yadi hy aham na varteyam jātu karmaṇy atandritah  
mama vartmānuvartante manuṣyāḥ pārtha sarvaśah 3.23

*For, should I not ever engage myself in attentive action, O son of Pritha; people in this world as a whole would in every manner follow my way.*

Any person will have to follow the path of karma, whether enlightened or not, as long as they live. Because Krishna is widely regarded as a great hero and the supreme master of yoga vidya, with many people considering him as God himself, they would tend to follow blindly what he is doing.

utsīdeyur ime lokā na kuryām karma ced aham  
saṃkarasya ca kartā syām upahanyām imāḥ prajāḥ 3.24

*This world will perish if I do not do action; it would be instrumental in bringing about mixing of everything leading to destruction of all and every being.*

At the story level, Krishna encourages Arjuna to follow his example. Krishna is on the battlefield not because he wants to conquer any kingdom or to settle any account with anyone. He stands to lose nothing if he does not participate in the war. Yet he is active because if he is not, justice will fail, and the resultant victory of the tyrant will lead to collapse of the whole social system.

But the verse has a deeper meaning. At the cosmological level, what happens if the cycle of action becomes disjointed from its base (the Paramātma) for a moment is indicated. The flow of time will be frozen; everything will get mixed up and then grind to a halt; the law of cause and effect will go inoperative; the

world will get dirty as a river that stops flowing. The universe is dead without its life force.

It is inaccurate to interpret this beautiful verse to mean 'God' saying "If I go lazy for a moment, the caste system will collapse and hybrids will be born marking the end of the world". Such insignificant and degrading interpretations spoil the entire meaning and poetry of the Bhagavad Gita.

saktāḥ karmany avidvāṁso yathā kurvanti Bhārata  
kuryād vidvāṁś tathāsaktaś cikīrṣur lokasamgraham 3.25

*O Bhārata, the wise should work for the welfare of the world with the same degree of steadfastness with which the unwise act out of their selfish desires.*

The directive is to pleasantly work for the betterment of the world which is the path to correct evolution. Those who have experienced the pleasure of detached work exhilarate in it. Anyone who is not in the habit can try it out and see for oneself.

na buddhibhedam janayed ajñānāṁ karmasamgiṇināṁ  
joṣayet sarvakarmāṇī vidvān yuktāḥ samācaran 3.26

*Do not confuse the unwise who act out of attachment to worldly gains. Do everything you have as best as you can and in the spirit of sacrifice (and show them the way).*

The unwise that perform action based on their yearnings may not be able to comprehend the meaning of yoga in action, and they may lapse into inaction and lethargy. Therefore such people should not be confused by simply propounding to them about karma yoga. Rather, you have to provide an example to them through work, and make them realize through the spirit of sacrifice (not through arguments).

There is even danger in preaching to the unwise. The story of the humming bird that offered unsolicited advice to a group of monkeys in the forest on a winter night is well known. The monkeys were trying to make fire by confining a few fireflies kept under a couple of twigs and blowing onto them. The bird laughed at them saying it was not how it was done. Infuriated, the monkeys caught hold of it and killed it.

The dig is at those who admonish others to do sacrifices they themselves have not been able to. If a small portion of the 'advisers' today had turned real

examples, the world would have been transformed many times over!

prakṛteḥ kriyamāṇāni guṇaiḥ karmāṇi sarvaśāḥ  
ahamkāravimūḍhātmā kartāham iti manyate 3.27

*Everywhere, all actions are performed by virtue of ‘gunas’ (the three characters) working in prakṛti (nature). But he whose mind is clouded by egoism thinks he is the doer.*

This idea is further elaborated in later chapters as the nature of the universe is explained and the mind-body complex and its relation to the patterns in nature based on the three gunas are detailed.

We did not decide our place of birth; we did not choose our parents. We did not decide the situations we faced. We did not decide even our own basic thought processes, which were developed in childhood and based on a genetic material, which also, we did not decide. Even ‘independent’ decisions are based on our previous experiences and knowledge gained. Even our ideas which we had used to overcome many a challenge were not willfully made. Wherever did we get them? And are we the creator of our talents and intelligence?

The thinking pattern and disposition are based on the gunas in our own nature which decide inclinations, and in a different situation these decisions would be influenced in numerous other ways.

Of course this verse does not mean that we have no ‘choice’ or ‘freedom’. It only stresses the fact there are so many reasons for an event to happen. The intelligent reach up to the ‘ultimate reason’ for all action in the universe. Then the feeling that “I am doing all this” goes away. It is nature which is the reason for most of these ‘choices’ and its patterns even within us are based on the three gunas (fundamental characters).

tattvavit tu mahābāho guṇakarmavibhāgayoḥ  
guṇā guṇeṣu vartanta iti matvā na sajjate 3.28

*O mighty-armed Arjuna, he who knows the principles of ‘gunas’ (characters) and what they do and how, realize that any action is the result of characters interacting with characters; and he remains unattached.*

The principles of interactions by the *gunas* in nature are discussed in detail in later chapters. Right worldview is the key to nonattachment and real contentment.

prakṛter guṇasamṁūḍhāḥ sajante guṇakarmasu  
tān akṛtsnavido mandān kṛtsnavin na vicālayet 3.29

*Those who are unaware of the truth of the ‘gunas’ develop attachment and a sense of pride in their actions, which are actually stemming from these characters in prakṛti (nature). One who knows the truth should not distress the ignorant that are yet to comprehend.*

Of all living things, man alone is capable of developing an ‘I’ out of the totality of inputs through the senses. This ‘I’ is in fact a gateway. One may get stuck at it, enjoy the inputs of the sense organs and remain unbothered about anything else, or enlarge on to the higher level. It is the latter that Vedanta considers as progress along the path of evolution of life.

Isn’t the wise man that has moved ahead duty-bound to take along the rest with him? He is, but not until they desire to transform themselves. No use perturbing them with what they are not ready to digest. Even when someone says he is hungry for it, what is given is a seed that he has to sow within himself and harvest. Vedanta is not taught; it is imbibed. The minimum qualification for entrance to the course is curiosity contributed by one’s own experience; the theory and practical for each student is unique and is based on self study.

mayi sarvāṇi karmāṇi samnyasyādhyātmacetasā  
nirāśīr nirmamo bhūtvā yudhyasva vigatajvarah 3.30

*Dedicating all actions to Me (Paramātma), with the mind steadily renounced in Me, without yearning (for the fruit of action) and attachment, free from (mental) fever, do your duty.*

It is a common mistake to confuse this ‘Me’ as a separate entity from Arjuna; in actuality it is not different but the soul of Arjuna himself. Therefore the meaning is: Dedicate all your actions to the most fundamental life force of the universe, make your mind stay put in the Paramātma, with the firm conviction that there is nothing to be gained or lost, fight unperturbed and win against all base emotions and mental snares, so as to evolve to the higher stages of human life.

ye me matam idam nityam anutiṣṭhanti mānavāḥ  
śraddhāvantonasūyanto mucyante tepi karmabhiḥ 3.31

ye tv etad abhyasūyanto nānūtiṣṭhanti me matam  
sarvajñānavimūḍhāṁs tān viddhi naṣṭān acetasaḥ 3.32

*Those who constantly practice this mata (doctrine) of Mine, with sraddha (interested attention) and without envy, they too escape from getting chained by their actions (of any kind).*

*But those who do not practice wisdom on account of envy and ego, they who refuse knowledge and are devoid of good judgment, know them to be doomed.*

The word ‘mata’ here does not mean religion as it does today; it means ‘opinion’ or ‘viewpoint’. Similarly ‘sraddha’ does not mean ‘faith’ but interested attention.

Even for the learned man, envy may prove a threat from inside. Outwardly some people may be very rich or famous or they may seem to possess every material pleasure. Beware of envy and jealousy; they have the capacity to bring down the most noble of men from the inside. Know what you want very well, stick to your convictions; don’t pay heed to petty smartness and avarice as seen outside. Don’t compare what you have with others’ wealth, fame or worldly fortunes. Envy has more than enough power to break you from inside. The Gita warns every student about the biggest of traps here.

Egotism is the second pitfall. Any knowledge can be received and imbibed only by a humble mind. When one decides that he is already the most intelligent of all, he shuts himself away from self-improvement. Egotism compromises one’s judgment of oneself and the situations that one is in. Envy and egotism are the two factors which lead any person to sure doom.

No code of conduct is stipulated in this verse, it just points to the rational outcome of one governed by these types of emotions and what mind set is favorable for progress. No laws or commands are issued. Neither is Vedanta a religion (it is based on free choices) nor can it be studied exclusively from the outside (it is imbibed through experiences). Be wise, use your intellect, know in depth – is all that is directed.

There is no scope for ill will between those who follow this doctrine and those who do not. The call comes to be careful within and not from any external centre of power.

This leads to the question: In that case, why doesn’t everyone act in the light of the wisdom so freely available?

sadrśāṁ ceṣṭate svasyāḥ prakṛter jñānavān api  
prakṛtiṁ yānti bhūtāni nigrahaḥ kim kariṣyati 3.33

*Even a wise man acts in accordance with his prakṛti (nature). All beings follow their own prakṛti (nature). What can restraint do?*

Detachment should be rightly understood and practiced with the right knowhow. There is no use trying to suppress responses of the sense organs or emotions. The sight and smell of good food will make even the wise man's mouth water. It is natural. There is no harm in letting it happen. Everyone's life is naturally inclined to act in the interest of sustaining itself. It will be suicidal to suppress the stimuli. The same is the case with emotions - likes, dislikes and passions are stronger than the pull of the five sense organs. They all stem from nature. Restraint of one's innermost emotions can only lead to depression.

In that case, what does detachment mean and how is it to be brought about?

indriyasyendriyasyārthe rāgadveṣau vyavasthitau  
taylor na vaśam āgacchhet tau hy asya paripanthinau 3.34

*Attachment and aversion for the objects of the sense organs abide in the sense organs; let no one come under their hold; for, they are his foes (when heeded without any control).*

Sweetness of sugar abides in the tongue and not sugar; the same is true of all sensory experiences on the basis of which likes and dislikes are formed. If the world is understood on the basis of these likes and dislikes, it will be unreal because sensory experiences are only half truths when observed from a higher level of reality. Therefore, for one who wants to find and identify himself with the ultimate reality these attachments to them provide impediments.

It is a fact that all great men of the world subdued their likes and dislikes as they marched on the road to achievement. To progress on the path of Vedanta, these have to be put in their places. Some of these actions may seem strenuous or laden with tension. Giving too much attention to these peripheral aspects may prove detrimental to the tough task being done.

We have seen the exercise of restraint used to master the sense organs in the second chapter. The path of karma can also be used to learn mastery over oneself. Every person has 'vāsanās' (inclinations) imprinted genetically. These seek expression, the equipment for which is the assembly of the sense organs. This can be achieved by expressing or bringing out the inclinations as actions and at the same time learning not to allow the bond with the action getting attached, by practicing mental detachment along with the action. This way is to

gain control over emotions by masterly expression with mental detachment. The various techniques for this are described in later chapters.

śreyān svadharmo viguṇah paradharmāt svanuṣṭhitāt  
svadharme nidhanam śreyah paradharmo bhayāvahaḥ 3.35

*Svadharma, even if not carried out very well, is more elevating than any others' work however well done. It is better to die doing the former; the latter is potent with danger.*

'Svadharma' is work that one is skilled to do, i.e., work that one is by nature inclined to do. It is easier to learn to do that work than learning to perform other chores. The satisfaction one derives from doing 'svadharma' is greater than that is obtained from doing any other. Other people's jobs may appear more attractive sometimes but that does not change one's natural predisposition. No job is higher or lower in status according to the Gita.

The one doing action that he is most inclined to do is in harmony with himself and with the universe. For instance, when a gifted singer sings, he is mostly unaware of hunger and thirst, heat and cold, the world itself; and as the involvement is thorough – to the extent of forgetting oneself fully. If he or she is doing it surpassing ego and all thought of gain or loss, it is in fact the practice of yoga. Therefore what is advised is involvement and not restraint. Enjoyment and involvement in work directly translates to fulfillment in life and also makes the practice of yoga a breeze. For such a person peace, contentment and inherent knowledge always come easy. Every person on this earth is unique; there is a reason why everyone is here however insignificant any person may seem to ignorant people.

arjuna uvāca  
atha kena prayukto� pāpam carati pūruṣah  
anicchann api vārṣṇeya balād iva niyojitah 3.36

*Arjuna said:*

*Then, by what impelled does man commit sin, although against his wishes, constrained, as it were, by force?*

So why does man, even when he has the capacity to understand good and evil, commit sin? Direct question. Is there a Satan behind it? Evil demons?

Isn't it highly intriguing if a patient knows for certain what treatment is best

for his ailment, has access to it, and yet suffers more and more because he does not subject himself to it but persists in a lifestyle that caused the disease in the first place and that makes it worse day by day?

śrībhagavān uvāca  
kāma eṣa krodha eṣa rajoguṇasamudbhavaḥ  
mahāśano mahāpāpmā viddhy enam iha vairiṇam 3.37

*The Lord (of the senses) said:*

*In this world, know that this craving and this anger, (both) born of rajo guna and characterized by insatiable greed and the capability to lead to worst sins, are enemies (of man).*

Of the three capabilities ('gunas') of Akshara – 'rajas' (the tendency to expand), 'tamas' (to get subdued or shrink) and 'sattva' (to be neutral) – aggressiveness is born out of 'rajas'. The root of it is egotism and craving and when these are thwarted, there is aggressive outburst that leads to the destruction of the attacked as well as the attacker. (This process has already been delineated in detail in the previous chapter – 2.62 to 64.) What obtains if *rajo guna* is not reigned in is amply demonstrated by the state of the present-day world. Man, capable of creating heaven for him here upon this very earth, has made hell out of all the raw material available. Most of the bloody massacres, conflicts, poverty and misery on earth are manmade. The spiritual damage it does is much worse by masking man's freedom of access to wisdom. All relevance to goodness itself is lost when this freedom is lost.

So there is no external Satan or devil. Go no further than the mind – is the answer.

dhūmenāvriyate vanhir yathādarśo malena ca  
yatholbenāvṛto garbhās tathā tenedam āvṛtam 3.38  
āvṛtam jñānam etena jñānino nityavairiṇā  
kāmarupeṇa kaunteya duṣpūreṇānalena ca 3.39

*As fire is enveloped by smoke, as a mirror by dust, as embryo by the womb, so is this (knowledge) enveloped by that (craving and anger).*

*Shrouded is knowledge, O Arjuna, by this constant enemy of the wise, in the form of various types of avarice, which, like fire, is ever difficult to be fully appeased.*

During evolution, man acquired the capability to acquire and store knowledge much later than the impulse to survive by aggression and capture. The seed of the knowledge germinated and sprouted within the envelope of the latter which has to be pierced and cast away for wisdom to grow and bloom. If this does not happen, even the shoot of wisdom decays to stick to and thicken the shield around it!

Look how science and technology is being used to hurt fellow men and nature: to burn millions of people to ashes in a matter of seconds, to produce intoxicants and poisons, to adulterate even food...

And the very nature of the fire of desire is such that it can never be extinguished and done away with by any attempt to satiate it, however much it is given to devour.

To help break the cover that encapsulates wisdom, the process of this capture and the means employed for it are explored.

indriyāṇi mano buddhir asyādhiṣṭhānam ucyate  
etair vimohayaty eṣa jñānam āvṛtya dehinam 3.40

*The sense organs, the mind and the intellect are said to be its seat; through these it (rajo guna) blankets the knowledge of the dweller (within the body).*

Sense organs are supposed to help life sustain itself by gathering vital information regarding the surroundings. The inputs they make are categorized by the mind as desirable or undesirable. But when sensual experience of the desirable kind becomes an end by itself, the mind covets for more of it, the intellect make plans along that route, and as desires develop to cravings the very purpose of life and the right direction of evolution are forgotten. Attachment to these strengthens the ego leading to divisions. There is no discernible limit to cravings so once the slide-down starts there is no bottom line.

Having explored the process of decay in detail, the only remedy is prescribed:

tasmāt tvam indriyāṇy ādau niyamya bharatarśabha  
pāpmānam̄ prajahi hy enam̄ jñānavijñānanāśanam 3.41

*Therefore, O best of Bhārata, controlling first the sense organs, kill this sinful thing, this destroyer of knowledge and wisdom.*

The content of knowledge is the body of conclusions from processing of the

inputs from the sense organs, and that of wisdom the product of distillation of these by interactions or experiences. Cravings infest both. It makes knowledge faulty and incomplete; it limits and / or vitiates interactions too. The attitude of ‘give-and-take’ is replaced by ‘plunder-and-grab’.

How is it possible to kill it? The first step is in understanding the hierarchy of the command centre.

indriyāṇि parāṇ्य अहुर् indriyebhyah param manah  
manasas tu parā buddhir yo buddheḥ paratas tu sah 3.42

*It is known that the sense organs are noble; mind is superior to the sense organs; the intellect is superior to the mind; that which is even superior to the intellect is ‘ātma’.*

The sense organs are themselves noble, so the instruction is to keep them in their place and not to cut them out. Removing the tongue does not save one from the craving for any delicacy; the desire for a bewitching aroma outlives removal of the nose. Sense organs should be maintained in good shape and health.

evam buddheḥ param buddhvā samstabhyātmānam ātmanā  
jahi śatruṁ mahābāho kāmarūpaṁ durāsadam 3.43

*Thus knowing that which is superior to intellect, and restraining the self with the help of that, O mighty-armed, you kill this enemy of illusions and craving which is no doubt hard indeed to vanquish.*

Why is this enemy regarded as illusory? It is tough to understand and indentify. ‘Egotism’ is obvious to others but the person under its influence usually fails to understand his defect. Sensual cravings may present to the mind under the guise of ‘love’. Envy may present under the facade of ‘equality to all’. Hunger for power may be wrongly perceived by the mind as ‘taking responsibility for the nation’. Money can buy comforts, but the one under influence of *rājo guna* perceives money itself as happiness. Numerous such illusions are common when *rājo guna* gains the upper hand.

The sense organs are noble, so is the mind. But the order should come from the intellect. Once the hierarchy is understood there is no more need to run around holding the tiger's tail. The only thing to be decided is whether one should take decisions based on the *ātma* which is nobler than the intellect, or consider only the temporary cravings stemming from *rājo guna*. The steps are

clear: know the most superior faculty in you; establish with it, and you can successfully use all your resources to fight and kill the enemy, which is indeed a tough thing to destroy otherwise on account of its illusory nature.

The charge that Gita promulgates the philosophy of war and killing may appear to be proved by the many calls in these verses to kill, if taken literally. It certainly commands to kill; but not people, instead the roots of the real enemy in Arjuna's (ours too) own mind.

Those who waste their time quarreling about the exact date of the Mahabharata war, the missing links in the family trees of the Pandavas and other such issues may not agree with this, but it is a sure bet that the great poet has the last word.

## Chapter 4

# Yoga of Jnana

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Absolute knowledge is ever lasting and incorruptible. It is the intellect's relationship to it which increases or decreases. Whatever knowledge mankind has gained was already present in the universe. For example, Pythagoras theorem or gravitation was there before we came to know about them. Since our knowledge is still limited, there are a lot of things hidden from our purview. Prajnana or absolute knowledge is Isvara.

In this chapter it is also revealed that the one who is imparting this knowledge is not just a person. The narration also succeeds in giving equal consideration to both literal and philosophical aspects. In the first, an enlightened Krishna blesses Arjuna with knowledge, and in the second, Arjuna is being enlightened by the soul within him.

śrībhagavān uvāca  
imam vivasvate yogam proktavān aham avyayam  
vivasvān manave prāha manur ikṣvākavebravīt 4.1

*The Lord (of yoga) said:*

*I taught this imperishable Yoga to Vivasvan. Vivasvan imparted this knowledge to Manu, and Manu to Ikshvaku.*

On the story side, God imparted knowledge to the sun who later taught it to the first man on earth. The sun in the stories is a God who travels in his royal chariot through the sky during day time, imparting light to the world.

On the philosophical side, Isvara provides inherent capacity of yoga (action in union) to all creations in this world starting from the sun. Human beings inherited the capacity for yogic knowledge (which is based on more direct awareness) right from the first person to walk the earth. Transfer of that capacity continues through generations.

evam paramparāprāptam imam rājarshayo viduh  
sa käleneha mahatā yogo naṣṭah paramtapa 4.2

*Many royal sages came to know this Yoga in detail, which was handed down for successive generations. But this great Yoga was lost by the passing of time, O Paramtapa (scorcher of foes).*

The word Yoga means union with absolute knowledge, unification, orchestration, becoming one with nature or to be one with the basic force of the universe.

The royal lineage or kings who knew this knowledge and technique and handed it down through successive generations were also sages. When kings ceased to be sages, they became corrupt. Men moved away from knowledge (or ignorance made them corrupt) and the ancient techniques were lost with time.

sa evāyam mayā te/dya yogah proktah purātanaḥ  
bhaktosi me sakhā ceti rahasyam hy etad uttamam 4.3

*I am imparting to you this ancient Yoga since you are my devotee and friend. This technique is very confidential and noble.*

The two human qualities mentioned in the verse as essential for union with the true self are devotion and friendship. Devotion means loving submission of oneself to the *ātma*. Friendship denotes sense of oneness with the other. (Devotion based on fear or separateness would not bring the required results.)  
arjuna uvāca

aparam bhavato janma param janma vivasvataḥ  
katham etad vijānīyām tvam ādau proktavān iti 4.4

*Arjuna said:*

*The sun's birth took place a long time before you were born. So, how can I reconcile to the fact that you taught this to the sun?*

It is necessary to reach a better understanding of the source to grasp this literally impossible proposition. It should be understood that the narrative is coming from the universal soul within oneself, not from a physical form.

Śrībhagavān uvāca  
bahūni me vyatitāni janmāni tava cārjuna

tāny aham̄ veda sarvāṇi na tvam̄ vettha param̄tapa 4.5

*The Lord (the soul of the universe) said:*

*Many lives of (or related to) both of us have passed, O Arjuna. I know them all, but you do not, O Param̄tapa (scorcher of foes).*

The statement can be understood from all the levels. In the story level this means that an earlier entity with absolute knowledge had imparted this wisdom to the Sun God. However, that entity is not a human form because the birth of the sun is a lot earlier than the time in which the first Manu (the ancestor of humans) walked the earth. It is also to be understood that this knowledge does not pertain to intellectual knowledge of human beings but rather the inherent capacity of yoga which is in the nature and behavior of everything ranging from subatomic particles to heavenly bodies like the sun.

In the philosophical level, I am the Universal soul, ever present in all life forms in the past and present, and I know the life of each one of them, but you are not aware of your previous lineage (or your previous lives for the rebirth believers) because of the perishable and limited nature of your body-mind-intellect combine.

Later chapters in the Gita denounce both rebirth and heaven as improper paths and mention moksha (ultimate union) as the only true aim.

In the next verse the great poet Vyasa continues the highly successful blend:

ajopi sann avyayātmā bhūtānām īśvaro/pi san  
prakṛtim svām adhiṣṭhāya saṁbhavāmy ātmamāyayā 4.6

*Even though I am unborn and imperishable and the Lord of all beings, I manifest based on Māya, which is my own Prakṛti (Nature).*

The universe has three facets. One is the observable universe called *Kshara* (perishable). The other is the un-seeable template from which the *Kshara* comes forth, stays and goes back to. It is named *Akshara* (imperishable). The third is the unified life force ‘*Isvara*’. Everything in the universe including man exists in all the three at the same time – the perishable, the in-between template and the supreme entity. The eternal template *Akshara* between the other two creates *māya* or ignorance about the other side. Its nature is called *parā prakṛti*. It is dialectical and creates the *Kshara* world (our visible universe) through action-reaction patterns (How *parā prakṛti* sustains the perishable world is discussed in detail in later chapters.).

But though events in our world are dictated by prakṛti, there are instances where the basic Life Force intervenes more directly and changes the course of nature. *Prakṛti* creates the universe in action reaction patterns; therefore the nature of this correction depends on the state of Akshara. In the phase of *sruṣṭi* (creation) and *sthiti* (maintenance), most of these corrections are protective and aimed at preservation. But everything in the material world has an end. In the phase of *samhara* (destruction) these corrections could well aid to destructive forces in nature; therefore they may not be protective for temporary manifestations whose death is certain in future. This aspect is further elaborated in a later chapter on *visvarupa*.

There are no miracles obviously disrupting the laws of *prakṛti* (nature), and the *Paramātma* never manifests a miracle contrary to this dictum (There is no need.) Provision exists for numerous natural coincidences and obvious chances in the Kshara world through the rules pertaining to action reaction patterns based on the three characters of Akshara. Isvara manifests through this parā prakṛti (hidden nature), therefore if anybody wants to see evidence of a God based on unnatural or unscientific miracles, he is in for disappointments. Prayers are good but our wishes are pointless if they conflict with basic laws of nature.

In the theoretical sense of the statement "*I manifest based on Māya*", it is inferred that knowledge reveals itself, and in the worldly sense, it is inferred that an event makes an important revelation (scientific or spiritual) or a correction. When dharma (value system) deteriorates, a person with adequate knowledge is born to make the necessary correction in society. (This does not mean God-men.) Even regarding scientific knowledge, the advances that man has attained can be seen as due to knowledge revealing itself. Most of the revelations in science cannot be regarded as results of pure reasoning alone. These revelations usually fall into categories of a paradigm shift or even a quantum jump. Similarly in the production all great works of art, these types of natural miracles are often seen.

Therefore during the phase of *sthiti*:-

yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānir bhavati Bhārata  
abhyutthānam adharmasya tadātmānam sṛjāmy aham 4.7  
paritrāṇāya sādhūnām vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām  
dharmasamsthāpanārthāya saṁbhavāmi yuge yuge 4.8

*O Arjuna, I manifest (as correction) whenever there is fall in dharma and rise of Adharma.*

*For the preservation of the good and the natural and the destruction of all*

*that is unnatural, and thus the reestablishment of dharma, I manifest again and again in different ages.*

(Even when scientific revelations are misused to do evil, absolute knowledge manifests for correction.)

Since all forms are *Isvara*'s own manifestation, this characteristic correction happens through something great on which one can find the direct evidence of the Supreme Entity. Again this does not mean a miracle against nature. Sometimes the correction occurs through the work of great men. But this does not mean a God-man; it only means that the work is carried out through a man of steady inherent knowledge.

The *dharma* (course of right action) of man is different from the dharma of a tiger. Animals act on impulse and not on emotions sponsored by imagination. They do not desire like man; their inclinations are part of a readymade package. They act 'naturally'; they neither overindulge nor violate the provisions of the package. Only when one is given the freedom to choose can one go 'unnatural', in discord with the way of the universe; one's wisdom masked by the 'I' formed out of a bundle of desires. But the same 'I' and the 'choice' is the way for evolution to the next step. Without choice there is no meaning to human life.

Good and evil obviously involves society and these dialectical opposites form the necessary basis for the creation of any social being like man. *Isvara* is not bound by them. But man is manifested by *Isvara* as a social being; therefore good and evil have profound influence on the *dharma* of man. This nature is reflected as human conscience. So the happy and successful life of man in society depends on these concepts, and from the verse it can be understood that *Isvara* favors the collective good in society.

janma karma ca me divyam evam yo vetti tattvataḥ  
tyaktvā deham punarjanma naiti mām eti sorjuna 4.9

*Those who come to know my divine nature of manifestation and action in this light, they do not take birth again, but join me, O Arjuna.*

Even for people like Arjuna who believes in individual rebirth or reincarnation, the path to ultimate release is the same. There is no point in wasting time arguing whether rebirth (reincarnation) is true or not. Whatever beliefs one may have, the path to union with God is same for everyone. That union is based on focus and contemplation on the eternal soul, not on rebirth.

The aim of Vedanta is completeness of prajnana (knowledge that surfaces

automatically from the soul) leading to union and immortality, not intermediate morphogenetic points like heaven or alternate paths like rebirth.

vītarāgabhayakrodhā manmayā mām upāśritāḥ  
bahavo jñānatapasā pūtā madbhāvam āgatāḥ 4.10

*There have been so many pure learners, who, freed from attachment, fear and anger; concentrating purely on Me, attained My Being.*

It is necessary to practice a devotion to knowledge and also a kinship to the same. It is also important to part with the factors that hide knowledge like a veil from the mind, namely fear, anger and attachment. That can be practiced by identifying oneself with the soul always, both in action and inaction; and disregarding other paths like heaven or rebirths. All such paths are distractions and they do not serve any real purpose. Such a person committed to knowledge soon reaches the state of union with the true self. The first step in that direction is to destroy the three enemies mentioned.

ye yathā mām prapadyante tāṁś tathaiva bhajāmy aham  
mama vartmānuvartante manuṣyāḥ pārtha sarvaśāḥ 4.11

*Whatever path a person chooses to approach Me; I bless them in that same way. For, whatever devotional practices people do according to their preferences are all paths to Myself.*

One can begin to approach the truth in many ways. Even an atheist has a vision in his mind. He is searching for a better alternative to the existing religious outfits and beliefs. Whatever stand one takes at the beginning, the idea will grow and evolve. When the worldly person realizes that there is something truer and everlasting than himself, he has already started on the path of discovering the *ātma*. Based on what he has heard, read, seen or habituated to, this learning process continues. Most of the people, irrespective of their faith, pray to their own unique God who is supposed to listen to their woes alone. For some, God is a savior imagined to suit the different needs of individuals or selected communities. The concept grows with the growth of maturity of the individual, but most get stuck at some stage. Some rethink and seek out fresh paths. Whatever the path and wherever the place, they are all in the same route to the Supreme Being. Even denial and anger to God is part of this journey. No religion or belief is wrong or useless. All rivers flow along the same

evolutionary path. Everyone is a co-traveler. There is no point in feeling angry or alienated from anyone. The only thing to remember is that learning should not be finished at kindergarten.

The discovery that there is a unique and fundamental force that sustains this universe is the first step. One can conceive this to be the creator / master. *Tasmaivaham* (I belong to It) is the attitude that reflects a master-servant relationship. Moreover this master is abstract, distinct from oneself and away. At the next step *tavaivaham* (I am Yours), the subject of dedication is nearer, alive and more familiar. The last step is *twamevaham* (I am Yourself) and it makes it all clear. Even then the ‘I-You’ distinction remains, indicating a line of separation. It is only when this too disappears and one unifies with It, one is said to have gained true knowledge. *Jnana yajna* is the effort to strive for this knowledge. There is no need to be worried about the intermediary steps for it also helps us ascend. So whether it is *dvaita* or *advaita* or just nature-worship, progressing in the right attitude will definitely take one to the victory stand.

The soul has no dislike towards anyone taking any path or method. Anyone can take any quantity of water from that huge ocean depending upon the size of the container one has. There is no partiality or favoritism. Thus this concept is exceptional and boundless.

Vedanta does not lead anyone to a particular way of worship but investigates impartially the basic nature of all beliefs and reveals the elemental secrets of *prakṛti* (nature), and finally routes all to the One and only ultimate conclusion.

kāmksantah karmanām siddhim yajanta iha devatāḥ  
kṣipram hi mānuṣe loke siddhir bhavati karmajā 4.12

*In this world, people who thirst for fruits of action worship the Devas (various Gods); because success from actions are quickly obtainable in the human world.*

Guru Nityachaitanya Yati opines that the word ‘world’ signifies a conscious state which encompasses an interest in its full extent. Worlds can be divided into divine, human and demoniac. A detailed discussion of these is provided later. These worlds are also called universes of interest.

In the divine world there is no longing for the fruits of action. The sun gives heat and light and a great teacher imparts education without expecting anything in return. However in the human world, one expects just returns for one’s labor. In the demoniac world, selfishness rules, and one would expect big returns for even the smallest of efforts. Greed, stealing and looting are also examples.

According to instincts, man can be in any one of these worlds. In the human world, success in endeavors is considered easy to attain.

‘Why the demoniac concept, why can’t the omnipresent God lead all people in the right path?’ is the question that comes up here. Not only that light is appreciated because of darkness, there is no light without darkness. The universe is created based on characters of prakṛti (nature) viz., the three ‘gunas’ which give rise to dialectical ‘māya’ (the system of opposites like heat-cold, pain-pleasure, action-reaction, good-evil etc.). It is prakṛti that rules the world under the authority of the Paramātma. The concept of Isvara in Vedanta is different from the God concept of other religions, and this understanding is necessary to discuss the next verse also: cāturvarṇyam mayā srṣṭam guṇakarmavibhāgaśāḥ tasya kartāram api māṁ viddhy akartāram avyayam 4.13

*I (created) form the basis of the four castes (of man) based on combinations of the three gunas and the difference in karma (work temperaments). It may look as if I am the one doing all these, but in truth I should be regarded as non-doer and also eternal.*

Caste system is a social evil. The basic idea of Vedanta also contradicts any system of unequal stratification. “*The man of wisdom treats everybody and everything on equal footing, be it a well educated and humble Brahmin (a man of the highest caste), a cow, an elephant, a dog and (even) one who eats dogs (one of the lowest caste).*” – 5.18. “*They who have their minds (firmly) rooted in the sense of equality have won in this life itself. For brahma is without blemish, and samam (in all equally), and they have anchored on to it.*” – 5.19. And not just these; there are so many verses directly stating the idea. Then why did the great poet, who himself wrote these verses also, allow here that the caste system originated from God himself?

When understood in simple terms as in religious texts, the first part of the verse would mean simply that “God created the four castes”. But the God concept in Vedanta is slightly more complex. The Paramātma forms the basis or foundation of everything. But it is prakṛti that has been given the authority to create and sustain the perishable world in action-reaction pattern. That is why the second part of the verse: “*It may look as if I am the one doing all these, but in truth I should be regarded as non-doer*”. Action-reaction patterns have good-bad and divine-demonic dialectical natures. These may give rise to not only a decadent caste system, but also dowry system, child marriages and indeed all social evils too, and even some of the obscene rituals and customs that human society considered ‘sacred’ in the past. (Divine and demoniac nature are

discussed extensively later.) Everything present in this world, whether good or bad, stems from nature and of course has been ‘allowed’ by God; otherwise they won’t be here in the first place. That doesn’t mean we are to embrace each and every waste material. There is the bad lurking behind the good side of everything, and we are to take the stand which is right; that is what is meant by freedom of choice and the significance of being human.

The first part of this verse has led to a lot of controversies in the past. Wrong-doers who supported the racial discrimination and caste system have quoted these words as justification for their actions. This verse mixed with simple religious beliefs was interpreted to mean that the decadent caste system of racial discrimination was meant to be so by God! Due to this clever misinterpretation, the exploited and downtrodden people of the lower castes were alienated from the ancient wisdom in the Gita and Upanishads. It also created a pre-determined mindset against the Gita which prevented them from trying to learn this. Thus the most potent wisdom for defense against oppression was not studied, but even hated and lost.

There is an extensive discussion on the four castes in the last chapter. It would completely clear all doubts, if not cleared by then.

The life sciences in the Upanishads reveal that every creation in the universe will possess different permutation-combinations of the three gunas stemming from prakṛti. (It will be discussed in detail in a later chapter pertaining to the gunas.) In the human being, the difference in combinations of these gunas becomes evident by differences in thought, interests, aptitudes and predispositions. According to the verse, these four arbitrary divisions are based on differences in work aptitudes and not on birth. There is no possibility that offspring will exhibit the same combinations of character of their parents. Not only that, such a 100% copy is never possible. Nobody becomes anything by birth. Therefore a caste system based on birth is utterly unscientific. Also, it is stupid to consider segregation, or superiority or inferiority between any of these different types. The verse does not mean anything of that nature; instead the Gita later provides verses with directly opposite ideas.

In addition, it cannot be said that a person belonging to any of the four groups would retain the same combination of interests throughout his life. The mental predispositions and areas of activity will change with time. No one can be said as belonging to a particular ‘caste’ for his entire life.

The talents and mental predispositions that anyone is blessed with will be different with each person.

na māṁ karmāṇī limpanti na me karmaphale sprhā

iti māṁ yo/bhijānāti karmabhir na sa badhyate 4.14

*Actions do not bind me. I also do not desire the fruits of action. The one who knows me thus is also not tied down by his actions.*

There is no attachment or a high opinion of oneself in creation. In Vedanta, Isvara is considered *gunatita* (devoid of inclinations, above flavors) and pure. The ego-ridden intellect with no previous acquaintance of this higher vision meets with great difficulty in trying to understand the Vedantic concept of Isvara.

When the person recognizes and becomes one with that part of the life force within himself which is unbound by whatever action his perishable body performs, that person also becomes unchained from his actions.

evam jñātvā kṛtam karma pūrvair api mumukṣubhiḥ  
kuru karmaiva tasmāt tvam pūrvaiḥ pūrvataram kṛtam 4.15

*Knowing this way, those seeking salvation have performed action in the past. Thus, you too perform action the same way it had been done from long time ago.*

It is instructed to follow the ancient knowledge (lost in between) which is now reintroduced. It is also immaterial as to who first discovered or propounded this knowledge.

The correct ancient knowledge about karma (course of action) is now discussed:

kim karma kimakarmeti kavayo/py atra mohitāḥ  
tat te karma pravakṣyāmi yaj jñātvā mokṣyaseśubhāt 4.16

*Even kavi (those with great imagination and insight) are confused in deciding which is karma and akarma. With what knowledge about karma (course of action) can you be freed from doing wrong, that knowledge I will tell you.*

There is a hint that most people during the time the Gita was composed did not know the subtle distinctions pertaining to action. Even great scholars must have been under confusion. Since caste system and racial discrimination were present, most people continued doing jobs imposed on them by birth into a particular caste throughout their lives. Even the Kurukshetra war came about due

to such big mistakes by the rulers. None of the great people of the earlier generations like grandsire Bhishma or great teachers like Drona was proficient enough to show the correct path.

Therefore everything to be known about karma is now related from the basics:

karmaṇo hy api boddhavyam̄ boddhavyam̄ ca vikarmaṇah  
akarmaṇaś ca boddhavyam̄ gahanā karmaṇo gatiḥ 4.17

*Karma (course of right action) is to be known about. Vikarma (wrong action) is also to be learned. Akarma (non-action) is also to be understood. The characteristics of action are indeed deep.*

Course of right action (*karma*) include dutiful action (*niyata karma*) like jobs for living, agriculture etc. and transient action (*naimitika karma*) necessary in various situations. Since these types of action are required for healthy living and service to society, they belong to the group of right action. An action that is unhealthy to oneself or others, against nature or un-virtuous is *vikarma* (wrong action). Inaction can mean masterly inactivity or inactivity from laziness. Inaction will also create its own reaction in nature. Sometimes it is difficult to know the subtle differences between these types in the field of action.

The next verse is about *akarma* (non-action).

karmany akarma yah paśyed akarmaṇi ca karma yah  
sa buddhimān manusyeṣu sa yuktah krtsnakarmakṛt 4.18

*The one who sees action in non-action and non-action in action; that person is a scholar among men. He is Yogi and the one who performs all action.*

On the first look, this declaration feels like a contradiction. How can one see action in non-action and non-action in action? The answer is by thorough knowledge about the three levels of reality.

It is man's egoistic nature that attributes everything to oneself. When he is successful, he praises himself. When something goes wrong he blames himself. Only when he begins to visualize the complete picture and perspective does he understand prakṛti's (nature's) role in all actions. To realize this, one has to feel one with the Paramātmā and understand in what all aspect nature is responsible for action. (That discussion comes in later chapters.) Then one becomes a powerful tool in the hands of nature and that Force and is easily on the way to

enlightenment. Actions do not bind the Paramātma. The most important step in that direction is to stop attributing all of one's action to oneself, to stop judging and punishing either oneself or others, and to stop feeling different from or alien to the rest of the universe. Doing action with such detachment is what is meant by non-action here.

The one who knows this is a scholar and performs all action (he is neither inactive nor renounces action). Akarma (non-action) is different from inaction.

yasya sarve samārambhāḥ kāmasamṛkalpavarjitāḥ  
jñānāgnidagdhakarmāṇāṁ tam āhuḥ paṇḍitāṁ budhāḥ 4.19

*The one whose paths to action are devoid of lust and sankalpa, who has burnt his actions in the fire of knowledge; him the intelligent call scholar.*

Sankalpa means craving imagination of objects in this world. Lust and sankalpa both create ties within the mind of the person.

There is no meaning to life without contentment. But one of the biggest mistakes the human nature makes is to ignore what one is already blessed with and run after mirages. These mirages are due to sankalpa; imagination gone awry. As a result man neither gets peace nor what he wants.

Does this mean that a person's planning and hard work should not be used to better his own future? No. Every person has responsibility to himself and to people who depend on him. Whether his actions are detrimental to society or the biosphere makes the difference. An old man who plants the seed of a mango tree cannot expect the tree to provide him shade or mango. Even if one is planting something for his own needs, he is in the right path if he also likes to share the fruits with others, and his mind is not tied or corrupted by decisions of making money by putting the fruits in pesticides to preserve them and harmful chemicals to artificially ripen them.

Right action should be beneficial to all elements in the world. That means it must also be beneficial to the person who is doing it, at least spiritually. The need for love and appreciation provides a strong base for right action. That need should not become a craving, resentment or greed for material objects. Distorted love is dangerous for oneself and others. The true student of Vedanta has to realize that the same instincts leading to selfishness can also be utilized for right action, help, service and happiness. He is neither supposed to suppress his natural instincts nor torment himself with unnatural sacrifices. Suppressing ones' own emotions will only lead to a useless state of extreme introversion and sometimes severe depression. Instincts are to be channeled, not murdered. It is

through right action and not inaction that the student should continue his learning.

tyaktvā karmaphalāsaṅgam nityatṛpto nirāśrayah  
karmaṇy abhipravṛtto/pi naiva kimcit karoti saḥ 4.20

*The one who is not greedy for the fruits of action, who is content and who does not depend on anything else; that person, even though fully involved in action, is not doing anything.*

It was seen before that no one or nothing can stay inactive. Every action should be done to the best of one's ability. We saw that this mastery in one's action is called 'yoga'. Perfection is doing all action as best as possible without attachment or selfishness.

In short, sportsmanship is the word. Life is a game. Play your best. But, win or lose, take it all in the same vein. Don't brag that you were the cause of victory; don't be grieved if despite your best efforts you turned out to be the cause of losing the game. There should be no favoritism or resentment to people who helped you win or lose. Never play foul. Never give up how many times you fail. And never glorify yourself how many times you win. It is obvious that only the game played this way will be fun and worth it!

The one who is not attached and not tainted (with greed or other ensnarement) does all action but can be considered as not doing anything, because he is doing all actions the same way as the soul is.

nirāśīr yatacittātmā tyaktasarvaparigrahah  
śārīram kevalam karma kurvan nāpnoti kilbiṣam 4.21

*The one who has renounced craving for anything, who has let go all covetable objects that others possess; that one with self-control, doing mere bodily action, acquires no taint.*

It goes without saying that this does not mean renouncing the world. To wish for enlightenment and moksha (liberation) when the whole world is suffering is surely wrong. Everyone in this world is together in yajna. So many debts are there to be cleared for each person. It is injustice to block the noble senses of karma (action) and jnana (intelligence). To keep on doing one's mission without selfishness – that is liberation.

yadṛcchālābhāsaṁtuṣṭo dvandvātīto vimatsaraḥ  
samah siddhāv asiddhau ca kṛtvāpi na nibadhyate 4.22

*The one who finds happiness in what comes to him incidentally, who has won the dual pleasure-pain opposites, who does not compete with anybody and who regards what he gains or loses as equal – that person is not tied down by his actions.*

There is a conviction from long back that what is said here is for hermits or saints. That is a misconception. Anyone with ‘correct education’ will follow this. It is human nature to ignore what one already has and also to overlook all those blessings one gets incidentally. But there is no way to happiness if one is never content with what he has or what he gets. Is there any lasting peace, happiness or satisfaction for people engrossed in cut-throat competitions, thinking full-time about their own selfish profit, margin, capital, business secrets etc? The meanings of words like education, happiness, growth and progress have all become distorted or even opposite to what they were supposed to mean. Just imagine for a moment a world in which everyone works for everyone else according to each person’s talent and disposition, thus fulfilling the needs of all in society. If at least a small percent of people could maintain that vision, the future of mankind would ever remain bright.

gatasāṅgasya muktasya jñānāvasthitacetasaḥ  
yajñāyācarataḥ karma samagram pravilīyate 4.23

*The one who is not attached, who has renounced base emotions like anger and lust, whose intellect is firm in knowledge; his actions performed with yajna concept entirely dissolves away.*

It is again made clear that the basis and encouragement for action with nonattachment and under the yajna concept is true knowledge. Yajna as seen before is coordinated action which takes into consideration the well-being of the entire society and biosphere. The way is simple. Gain the correct knowledge and then put it into action. The hallmark of such true action is when it leaves the one doing it without any blemish of further attachment or entrapment, all his actions naturally dissolving away.

brahmārpaṇam brahma havir brahmāgnau brahmaṇā hutam  
brahmaiva tena gantavyam brahmakarmasamādhinā 4.24

*Havis (food, ghee etc) and the container used to offer them (suvam, chamasa etc) are all brahma. The fire of yajna, the one performing it and the act of yajna are all brahma. In this yajna which is brahma, the goal of the person performing it with the required concentration is brahma.*

Sage Vyasa uses the ritual of Vedic yajna as an example to demonstrate a simple Vedantic truth. The way, vehicle, traveler, goal and journey are all the same.

Many people recite this verse as a ritual before eating but most of the time they don't keep the meaning in mind. The food, the one eating it, the enzymes that are digesting it and the body that is getting its nutrients from it are all brahma. Union with brahma is the aim of this submission. Eating with this conviction converts that action into a major yajna.

There is a hint that the term yajna should be used for such aforesaid actions, not for a ritual in which large quantities of food and animals are burnt. In the ritual of Vedic yajna (e.g. *agnihotra*), the persons who are giving and receiving are regarded as separate individuals. Things considered expensive, like cow, ghee, cereal, horse, soma etc are offered to the fire. All are turned to ash. Yajna ends with the satisfaction that the Gods thus worshipped have accepted the offerings. Vedic yajnas are done for fulfilling specific desires. Most of the time they are carried out as a contract work for people in power or the rich. Never is a sense of union with the universal soul an objective in this. Therefore Gita does not mean such yajnas here. It should be remembered that the word yajna is also used to mean brahma. So the correction indicated here is that all actions should be made 'true yajna' and they all should be done with their sense of union with the Ultimate.

Objects like sun and moon, and phenomena like thunder and lightning and rain and wind were worshipped as gods in the Vedic ritual of yajna, and desirable things were offered to the fire to please the gods. But yajna in the Bhagavad Gita means performing karma beneficial to the entire biosphere with a spirit of offering to the Supreme One (in which all the forces of nature are based on). In this yajna there is the feeling of union – all these are brahma itself. Almost all religious rituals are usually degenerated outcomes of symbolic gestures or keys to denote and remember great truths. Later on the concept becomes forgotten and only the ritual remains. Gita brings up the original concepts to the forefront again.

daivam evāpare yajñam yoginah paryupāsate

brahmāgnāv apare yajñam् yajñenaivopajuvhati 4.25

*Some other yogis perform yajna with concentration, as offering to the Devas. Some others sacrifice yajna using yajna itself, in the fire of brahma.*

The word ‘Deva’ comes from a root which means ‘illumination’. The Devas of man are the five sense organs. Sight, sound etc are illuminated by the corresponding sense organs. People with understanding of yajna see sense-object interaction as offerings from the material world to the Devas (Gods) of the senses. Detachment is achieved when this approach is made into a habit. One also develops a capability for inner peace whatever the type of sense-object interaction. Gradually as detachment occurs, one can see oneself solely as a tool of the soul and do action accordingly so that one’s entire life becomes a yajna (an action of offering to Paramātma).

Some others turn the ritual of yajna itself into the real yajna. Instead of trying to please the various Gods for material benefits, they perform the exercise for union with the ātma. Sankaracharya says; “yajna is a word among many words used to describe the soul.”

From this verse to the 32<sup>nd</sup>, the differences between the yajna concept of Vedic ceremonies and the yajna concept of great scholars who knew about brahma are being pointed out. Many types of yajnas belonging to the latter group are enumerated for further explanation and study.

śrotrādīnīndriyāṇy anye samyamāgniṣu juvhati  
śabdādīn viṣayāṇ anya indriyāgniṣu juvhati 4.26

*Some sacrifice the senses like hearing in the fires of restraint. Still others sacrifice the sense-objects like sound in the fires of the senses.*

The sense organs are mentioned first because they are used to communicate with the external world. There are two ways to be in control of them. One is by sacrificing the objects of the senses. How can the objects of the senses like smell or hearing be sacrificed? They cannot be blocked as long as the body lives. But the sense organs can be restrained and sacrificed by the mind by contemplating on simple truths. It can be understood that stimulation to any sense organ for a prolonged period will result in monotony, however attractive it was in the beginning. There is a limit to the enjoyment obtained from any object, whether through sight, smell, touch or hearing. Thinking along this route will enable any person to develop control over the senses. All enjoyment from the senses are

temporary, they come and go. It is also easily known that delaying the fulfillment brought about by the senses also diminishes interest in them. Contemplating on the less desirable aspects of the objects that are attractive is another easy way to restrain that attraction. Some sacrifice along this route.

The second way is to sacrifice the sense-objects in the fire of the senses itself. This can be done by blocking the mind from the impulses arising from the senses through ignoring the stimulus and detaching the mind. One hears the sound but does not try to decipher the meaning or concentrate or focus on it. In practical life some detach the mind upon hearing provocative statements and remain immune to anger. In meditation the mind is kept blank and no heed is paid to external stimuli.

Anyone can find his own different ways to bring about mastery of the senses. All those belong to any one of these two methods. These different exercises are all yajnas. They are not performed in a temporary shed for a period of time like the yajna ritual of Vedic times. Instead they are to be performed in life, and sage Vyasa is welcoming us all to easy and comfortable ways to perform them, without any racket, self-torment, or help from any priest or ‘authority’.

sarvāṇīndriyakarmāṇi prāṇakarmāṇi cāpare  
ātmasamāmyamayogāgnau juvhati jñānadīpīte 4.27

*Some other yogis sacrifice all activities of the senses and the functions of prāna (breath, vital energy) in the fire of self control set ablaze with knowledge.*

Breath directly influences mental state. Therefore breath is controlled to quiet the mind (For example, a simple exercise in breath control is all it requires to break the hold of anger on oneself). The word prana (prāṇā) denotes not only breath but also all functions of the vital energy of life. Learning breath-control leads to learning control of prana.

In Hatayoga, mastery over the senses and mind is sought about by strict restraint. The meditation mentioned in this verse is similar to that, as all activities related to the senses are restrained by breath control and thereby mastery of prana is sought. But the breath control mentioned here can also be performed in day to day activities to quiet the mind, in which case control over the prana becomes a natural process of growth, metamorphosis or evolution. It changes life as a whole.

dravyayajñās tapoyajñā yogayajñās tathāpare  
svādhyāyajñānayajñāś ca yatayaḥ samśitavrataḥ 4.28

*Still others sacrifice wealth, perform tapas (austerities), practice yoga, do svadhyaya (daily deep study of the scriptures) and strive for knowledge with strong determination.*

These are not just exercises but ways of life. Wealth-sacrifice (*dāna*) or charity helps to eliminate greed from the mind and grow love and compassion. Tapas (austerity) is *yajna* to bond oneself with the orchestra of the universe. The three types of tapas done by the body, mind and word are described in detail later. They provide great progress in *adhyatma vidya* along with unparalleled sense of harmony. The practice of yoga makes learned knowledge innate. *Svadhyaya* (daily study and contemplation) is very important because it helps to memorize the basics, understand better, recollect, clear doubts, and develop the powers of concentration so that higher studies can be attempted. The key to self-control is knowledge. No one can drive a vehicle without knowing how to.

apāne juvhati prāṇam prāṇe/pānam tathāpare  
prāṇāpānagatī ruddhvā prāṇāyāmaparāyanāḥ 4.29

*The ones absorbed in pranayama sacrifices outgoing breath in the incoming, and incoming breath in the outgoing, by controlling the courses of both outgoing and incoming breaths.*

Pranayama (*prāṇāyāma*) is a special exercise as described in *ashtangayoga* and *hatayoga*. After taking the breath inside within a specified time (*poorakam*), it is retained for a time (*kumbhakam*), and then exhaled within a specified time (*rechakam*). All three phases are repeated. Control of the prana and thereby specific strengths (*siddhi*) are aimed in these. But in the *Gita*, pranayama is aimed at union; being one with the *ātma*. This technique is further discussed in the chapter about *dhyana*.

apare niyatāhārāḥ prāṇān prāṇeṣu juvhati  
sarve/py ete yajñavido yajñakṣapitakalmaṣāḥ 4.30

*Still others control their food and sacrifice prana in prana itself. All of these people have known the path of *yajna* and purified themselves in its fires.*

Prana pertains to vital forces in various organ systems in the body. *Yajna* using breath control has been discussed, and now *yajna* using food control is

mentioned. Fasting is considered very important in spiritual circles. Instead of complete fasting, some resort to restriction of favorite foods or specific foodstuffs. Mahatma Gandhi, a very pious follower of the Bhagavad Gita, used to fast for days whenever he felt need for internal purification. Fasting was also his favorite method of protest against injustice.

Fasting confers will power and sharpens the intellect. The basic wants coming from prana is sacrificed in prana itself for the sake of knowledge.

Twelve yajnas have been enumerated. These are all performed as offerings to the soul. The person, who knows about them and the basic principle behind why these are performed, is called the ‘knower of yajna’.

All these yajnas are enumerated for common people; one need not be an expert to perform any of them. Anyone can try them out (except for fasting and breath control which need basic medical fitness). Strenuous meditations and harmful techniques are not to be used, and also not needed for Vedantic practice (The criteria for meditation in Vedanta are described in a later chapter on dhyana).

yajñāśiṣṭāmṛtabhujo yānti brahma sanātanam  
nāyam lokosty ayajñasya kuto/nyah kurusattama 4.31

*O the great among kurus, the one who consumes the nectar-like leftovers in yajna becomes one with brahma itself. He who cannot convert his life into yajna like this has no life here itself; then what of afterlife?*

There is beautiful humor in the directive that one should consume what is left of yajna. In those days yajnas must have been big exercises involving offering of lot of objects in the sacrificial fire with the accompaniment of chanting of *mantras*. Left over meant the remaining *dravya* in the containers. It was believed that consuming these which was regarded like nectar itself would give moksha.

That idea is corrected to mean that one who attains ultimate union is the person who gets the nectar resulting from his efforts at self purification and true knowledge, and not just the leftover from ritualistic yajnas. Also, ritualistic yajnas were mostly conducted aiming at happy afterlife. But the one who has not performed the actual yajnas in life described here (the one who has not known peace due to lack of control of the senses) has no life here itself; why bother about afterlife!

evam bahuvidhā yajñā vitatā brahmaṇo mukhe

karmajān viddhi tān sarvān evam jñātvā vimokṣyase 4.32

*All these different types of yajnas mentioned here have been enumerated from the faces of brahma; they have all been born out of karma. Knowing thus, you will be liberated.*

It was mentioned earlier that all beings created were dependent on ‘sahayajna’ (3.10). Here it is mentioned that all these yajnas are born from karma (action patterns in prakṛti).

In the stories God Brahma is the Creator God having four faces, and from these faces all these action patterns (karma) have formed. Ananta (literally ‘the endless’) is a nāga (snake) with a thousand tongues. He lies curled in long loops one upon another, upon which God Vishnu rests. God Brahma sits on the lotus flower stemming from the midriff of Vishnu.

The visual symbolizes the pre-big-bang moment. Endless time lies coiled on itself. On it the Supreme Entity lies in yogic sleep, sublimely quiet. The universe begins to bud and blossom from its midriff. On that blossom manifests Brahma Deva, the creator with four faces – representing the fabric of space. The four faces may mean that Akshara (brahma) is four dimensional, or it may mean simply the four directions.

From those faces all knowledge pertaining to the Kshara (material) world and all karma (action patterns) are born. With evolution leading to awareness, man has inherited the capacity for that knowledge, along with the techniques for self realization.

When this knowledge was forgotten in the course of human history, these techniques got corrupted and became ritualistic without real basis. Yajna became a wasteful ritual without true direction, and aptitude for work degenerated into hereditary caste system.

Yajna stems from karma, and the latter is the heart of the former. Therefore the knowledge that yajna means performance of all right actions, and true living on that wisdom, is the path to moksha.

śreyān dravyamayād yajñāj jñānayajñāḥ paramtapa  
sarvam karmākhilam pārtha jñāne parisamāpyate 4.33

*O Arjuna, all true actions culminate in wisdom. (Therefore) O the one who makes his enemies repentant (Arjuna); yajna involving (promotion of) wisdom is nobler than that which deals only with material objects.*

Arjuna must have been well acquainted with the practice of ritualistic *yajna* in vogue then in which a variety of materials were burnt. But *yajna* in its true sense is any action sacrificed for wisdom. The more the offering, the brighter the wisdom becomes. One can offer material products (*dravya yajna*) or actual action in the biosphere which leads to wisdom (*jnana yajna*). The latter consists of safeguarding the spark of wisdom already gained, making it the basis of one's life and feeding it with true action, which burns away all ignorance including one's allegiance to meaningless rituals and unhealthy emotions too.

All correct actions end up in wisdom; the crucial question is whether one is able to get it unveiled by one's actions. This can be achieved if wisdom already gained promotes right action and this in turn paves the path to greater wisdom.

tad viddhi prañipātena paripraśnena sevayā  
upadekṣyanti te jñānam jñāninas tattvadarśinah 4.34

*The wise who have envisioned the truth will (be pleased to) impart it to you; gain it from them by offering them sincere and complete respect, serving them (with love) and (humbly) seeking clarifications from them (taking care not to disturb them).*

The student-teacher relation visualized here merits special attention. The emanation of wisdom from the teacher has to be akin to a flower spreading fragrance; the student receiving it should be like the cool and soothing breeze accepting it. The word 'guru' literally means one who eradicates the darkness of ignorance; he is the personification of enlightenment. The disciple should love this embodiment of wisdom and serve him as best as he can with utmost humility and willingness, ever ready like the lotus flower to mop up as much light as possible whenever the sun shines.

yaj jñātvā na punar moham evam yāsyasi pāṇḍava  
yena bhūtāny aśeṣeṇa drakṣyasy ātmany atho mayi 4.35

*O son of Pandu (Arjuna), once you attain this knowledge you will never ever become confused as you have been; it will make you see all of the creations of the universe in your True Self and, as a consequence, in Me (Paramātma).*

As one performs true action leading to wisdom, one can gradually visualize the entire spectrum of karma as stemming from brahma – the continuous flux behind the discontinuous and personal actions performed by various entities. The

entire chain of karma becomes obvious and its connections in nature can be well read. The mind ceases to be confused and becomes calm, and all creations in the universe can be visualized in the True Self or ātma. Knowledgeable action (yajna) leads man to further wisdom.

api ced asi pāpebhyaḥ sarvebhyaḥ pāpakṛttamah  
sarvam jñānaplavenaiva vṛjinam samṛtarisyasi 4.36

*Even if one happens to be the worst sinner among sinners, knowledge is the boat on which the ocean of all sins is crossed.*

There is no more sin for the man who sees every entity as part of his own True Self. Sin is action which is contrary to this wisdom. The one in whom the worldly ‘I’ completely shields the awareness of his true inner self is the one acting most selfishly and against the interest of the entire biosphere. Every deed of this nature removes him further from knowing his inner self. The moment the person realizes this, an alternate path becomes open. Through true action stemming from the ‘yajna’ concept, he can climb back those steps which he had previously fallen.

It is once again made explicitly clear that no one in particular has any monopoly over wisdom; all stand equal chance to have it. ‘The degenerate, the robber, the thief and even the murderer has as much chance to reach it as the Brahmin who has performed agnihotra – an involved and costly Vedic ritual’ as Ezhuthachan, the father of Malayalam language, puts it in his famous Harinama Kirtana. The only things that count are devotion and strength of purpose to turn a new leaf.

yathaidhāṁsi samiddhognir bhasmasāt kuruterjuna  
jñānāgnih sarvakarmāṇi bhasmasāt kurute tathā 4.37

*O Arjuna, as intense fire completely burns logs of firewood to ashes, so this knowledge burns all karma (its bondage) into ashes.*

Most commentators say some actions do not come under this dictum. They point out that, of the three types of *karma* – those that are yet to sprout (*sanjita*), what is being carried out at the moment (*prarabda*) and what remains to get planted in the mind (*agami*) – the second cannot be done away with as the causative commitment has been already initiated. But the Gita text leaves no chance for any exception. It states clearly that all firewood will be burned

irrespective of any kind just as all darkness is banished when the sun comes up. The one who sees all karma stemming from the nature of Akshara (prakṛti), and understands himself as True Self or ātma, even though he is doing everything, in actuality is not performing any action (4.20).

na hi jñānena sadṛśam pavitram iha vidyate  
tat svayam yogasamsiddhah kālenātmani vindati 4.38

*(For the power to purify) Nothing in the universe can stand comparison with knowledge on the part of divinity. The one who has mastered yoga gets to it within himself automatically in the course of time.*

Anyone who trains himself in karma yoga is able to undo the ignorance that shields knowledge which he gains by himself (inherently). In course of time means there may be obstacles in the form of forgetfulness in this knowledge or other worldly things which he may consider more important, but the natural outcome of this knowledge is that he would eventually raise his level.

Knowledge is the best thing to cleanse oneself with. All Upanishads underline this. ‘Satyam jnanam anantam brahma’ (truly, knowledge is the endless brahma) – Taittiriya; ‘Vijnanam anandam brahma – (the bliss of wisdom is brahma) – Brihadaranyaka; ‘Prajnanam brahma’ (Inherent knowledge is brahma) - the fourth mahāvākyā.

Note that the main topic of discussion right in the middle of the great battlefield of Kurukshetra is not any strategic initiative to win the bloody war; it is how to gain ultimate knowledge! – What is the nature of this knowledge, how can it be won, what all happens to stand in the way to gaining it and which weapons are to be used to overcome these blocks are the subjects of these discussions.

Various yajna practices that can help prepare the mind-body-intellect combine to approach and assimilate this knowledge have been described; also shown was how a guru can help. Further tips to acquisition of right knowledge are:-

śraddhāvām labhate jñānam tatparah samyatendriyah  
jñānam labdhvā parām sāntim acireñādhigacchati 4.39

*The one with sraddha, interested in knowledge about the ultimate, and capable of keeping his sense organs under check; he will get that knowledge; and knowledge will quickly take him to most sublime peace.*

Sraddha denotes a quality by which a person is attentive with the interest of an open mind. Attention is that attitude which helps rightly grasp the intent of the text and the teacher. A person with that quality is ready to forego past beliefs nurtured by the ego. If the person does not have this quality of open mind, he may just listen or read, then go back to his ordinary life without an iota of difference. Sometimes he may compare the new thought with what he already believes; if not confirming he would not attempt to grasp it but stick on to some previous line of thinking. Learning demands openness of the mind and intellect. Achieving and also maintaining the required concentration is also impossible if there are attention deficits by the sense organs which are not in control.

Conviction attained through such attention is another name for faith – but faith with a difference. It is not blind; it results from the right understanding of the text and the word of the *guru*. (At the very end of the entire discourse in the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna demands Arjuna to criticize it from end to end and accept only what he deems right!) Blind faith coupled with biological altruism produces communalism, vengeance, terrorism, murder and suicide bombings.

ajñāś cāśraddadhānaś ca samśayātmā vinaśyati  
nāyam loko/sti na paro na sukham samśayātmanah 4.40

*He who has the habit of being unwise, inattentive and doubting has no life here or after. No happiness also.*

The tendency to evaluate and question is not the same as suffering from unending doubt. The former helps improve knowledge whereas the latter blocks the very process of learning. To check and verify any new idea is necessary in any branch of learning. An intelligent person always learns from day to day activities, and he has no doubts about wisdom gained. He is also free of the attitude that nothing can ever be right. But a wavering intellect is non-functional; it may even be out of order.

There are people suspicious of anything even if the fact of it is as clear as daylight. They fail to muster enough courage, strength and attention to deal with a proposition and come to a stable decision. Unsure of themselves, they know no comfort in whatever they infer or do. ‘No life here or after’ means wasting the chance to proceed on the road to positive evolution; not that any eternal hell awaits them.

yogasamnyastakarmāṇam jñānasamchinnasamśayam

ātmavantam na karmāṇī nibadhnanti dhanamjaya 4.41

*The one who has renounced himself of all karma on the strength of yoga, slashed all doubt with (the sword of) knowledge and (firmly) positioned himself on (the platform of) his real self is not enslaved by karma.*

Ultimate peace is the same as absolute freedom. We have seen in the previous verses that renunciation of *karma* means performance of all actions with detachment so as to contribute to the welfare of the biosphere – not giving up work. To develop this attitude one has to decimate all doubts about the true nature of one's real inner self with the sharp sword of clear knowledge. The wisdom of the *yogi* is the same as that of the *jnani* (wise). Both act in the interest of the welfare of the whole. Theory learned however well if not put into practice is as good as not known, and practice with no awareness of theory at all remains incomplete whatever the level of expertise attained.

Gita underlines the complementarities of these two paths. It promises no luxurious next world or superhuman capabilities in this very one, but assures a sublime life of lasting peace and happiness.

tasmād ajñānasañbhūtam hṛtsthām jñānāsinātmanah  
chittvainam samśayam yogam ātiṣṭhottiṣṭha Bhārata 4.42

*Therefore, O the one born in the generation of Bharata (Arjuna), slash this doubt stemming from ignorance lodged in your heart with the sword of knowledge natural to your true self, set your feet firmly on yoga and arise.*

The heart is supposed to be the seat of love, compassion, affection and so on. It also happens to be the place likely to be occupied by doubts that haunt; wisdom too is to dawn there and nowhere else. The call is to slash all resident doubts with the sword of knowledge regarding what is real and what is not. Doubt and wisdom cannot co-exist. Weed out all doubt with knowledge strengthened by action and let wisdom flourish.

These verses point out the most formidable enemy against whom sharp weapons are to be expertly used. To be cut down, slashed, decimated and removed for ever are not people in a battlefield. It is the one despicable foe called ignorance!

Remain steadfast in *yoga* and perform with *yajna* concept (keeping the welfare of all in mind) all duties naturally befitting to one. That is the last word. And *yoga* is not anything that any priest or agent sells for a price, available only

within limits of any caste, religion, sex, age or race, or obtainable only as a very special favor from someone doing rigorous penance in a dark cave deep within the Himalayan ranges. Anyone can easily grasp and comfortably practice it; if once learned, it is never lost; it is like a lamp newly lit within one's heart with the difference that once lit it is not extinguishable by anyone. Its light is the noblest thing in the universe.

## Chapter 5

# Yoga of Samnyasa

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Apparently there were two opposite views at the time the Bhagavad Gita was written – the first considered the material world as a mere delusion and therefore fit only to be given up. This was prevalent among scholars and samnyasis (monks). But equally prevalent also was the materialistic view, that this visible world is the only truth and happiness consists only in gaining material wealth, pleasure and power. Even now these two views are prevalent. In contrast, the vision in the Upanishads was always that the visible world, though perishable, is a manifestation of the fundamental force behind the universe; and therefore the physical universe is neither to be discarded nor accepted as the be-all or the end-all; it is to be accepted but with discretion and dealt with by wisdom.

This chapter begins by Arjuna posing a question which indicates he has not fully digested what has been said. It is obvious that Arjuna is not being portrayed as lacking in intelligence; sage Vyasa points out that obstacles most of the time are one's own deep-rooted preconceptions. The great poet must also have wanted to clear this doubt once and for all.

arjuna uvāca  
samnyāsaṁ karmaṇāṁ kṛṣṇa punar yogam ca śāṁsasi  
yac chreya etayor ekam tan me brūhi suniścitam 5.1

*Arjuna said:*

*O Krishna, you go on alternately praising samnyasa (renunciation) of action, and yoga (performance) of action. Tell me conclusively the one which is the better of the two.*

It has already been hinted that the world in which Arjuna lives is a caste-ridden one. Only the lower castes were supposed to sweat it out in the fields and work places. The idea of 'yajna' also appears to have degenerated into the practice of rituals of complex and costly nature. It had to be salvaged to mean

once again ‘an attitude in life everybody, irrespective of any differences, can maintain’ – the correct and timeless definition of it. Here the idea of ‘samnyasa’ is salvaged from its ruins and its true intent and meaning installed in the minds of people, and it is shown that the path of knowledge (sankhya) does not mean renunciation of action. It is also described how well done and well oriented ‘karma’ performed with detachment can help one identify oneself with the True Self.

Arjuna's doubt again points out to the fact that the material world was considered a mere delusion and therefore fit only to be given up by a large section of scholars during the days the Gita was composed. Total renunciation meant running away from everything, trying to discard the entire material world and withdraw all sense organs from all objects, and fighting with oneself for extinguishing every urge to act in any manner. Common people believed this to be samnyasa.

śrībhagavān uvāca  
samnyāsaḥ karmayogaś ca nihśreyasakarāv ubhau  
tayos tu karmasamnyāsāt karmayogo visiṣyate 5.2

*The Lord (of the universe) said:*

*Samnyasa and yoga of karma (action) are both noble; but yoga of karma is nobler than renunciation of action.*

Arjuna had taken the stand that he preferred renunciation to fighting. He had thought this would be the right course to take. He was wrong. There is an element of selfishness on the part of a person, however great he becomes, if he forgets his ‘sahayajna’ responsibility and works only for his own salvation.

In the philosophical sense, it is better to face inner enemies like ignorance, anger, cravings etc. in direct confrontation and accept challenges rather than running away from them, because in the latter case one cannot learn mastery over the senses or mind control. Neither will it amount to sharpening of one’s wisdom and faculties. It is immaterial whether the struggle is external or internal; the same holds good.

jñeyah sa nityasamnyāsī yo na dveṣṭi na kāṅkṣati  
nirdvandvo hi mahābāho sukham̄ bandhāt pramucyate 5.3

*He is already a perpetual ‘samnyasi’ who neither hates nor craves; for, free from the pair-of-opposites, O mighty armed, he is easily set free from bondage.*

‘Samnyasa’ is further explained. It is a state wherein one neither hates nor craves; not simply someone who is bodily inactive. There is an accusing finger here, pointing at those who, dressed as ‘samnyasis’, lead lazy lives inside monasteries, limiting their activity to meaningless rituals that involve minimal physical exertion.

No one can keep alive unless he acts. Even a perpetual ‘samnyasi’ has to act. Therefore, renunciation at its best only means giving up attachment (hate and craving). Karma yogi does the same. It is in fact more practical as it helps keep the body in a better shape, the mind satisfied and the intellect sharp. It trains the yogi more and more in dealing with desire and hate and acquiring mastery over them and allows ‘sahayajna’ responsibilities to be carried out. The advantages of jumping into the stream and swimming are: one gains better swimming experience, reaches the other shore and also gets oneself cleaned as well!

sāṃkhyayogau pṛthag bālāḥ pravadanti na paṇḍitāḥ  
ekam apy āsthitaḥ samyag ubhayaḥ vindate phalam 5.4

*Only for childlike imagination does ‘sankhya’ (the path of logical knowledge) and yoga (the path of action) appear different; the wise know that he who is truly established at least in one obtains the fruits of both.*

‘Sankhya’ the path of knowledge and ‘karma yoga’ the path of action are, on close scrutiny, interrelated and inter-dependent, though they apparently look separate and independent of each other. Different schools of thought have happened to get established on the basis of each; but both lead to the same.

Knowledge already earned as well as presently acquired is employed in carrying out any action; each action, besides adding to the experience, helps gather wisdom and also provides a further opportunity to improve the ability to remain unattached.

yat sāṃkhyaiḥ prāpyate sthānam tad yogair api gamyate  
ekam sāṃkhyam ca yogam ca yaḥ paśyati sa paśyati 5.5

*Whatever state is reached by the path of knowledge is the same as that reached by the path of karma yoga. Those who realize that both sankhya and yoga are the same realize the ultimate truth.*

The first part of this verse paraphrases the second part of the previous one.

But the second part is a pointer: one may adopt any of these two, but unless it is realized that both are the same, one is not equipped to proceed well. This is because this realization alone warrants that the true natures of the various levels of reality have been understood right. This knowledge is basic to any real spiritual advancement.

If there has been any element of confusion arising from the opening part of the chapter about karma wherein it was said that there are two paths in this world, it is hereby set right: there is, in fact, only one though it appears different till the basic truth is perceived. One's actions are right if they correlate with the logical path of truth (and not with superstition and blind faith). There is only one truth, and the knowledge that the same truth can be referred to by many names is true knowledge.

saṁnyāsas tu mahābāho duḥkham āptum ayogataḥ  
yogayukto munir brahma nacireñādhigacchati 5.6

*Furthermore, O mighty armed, samnyasa is hard to attain without yoga; but one who steadfastly follows yoga soon identifies himself with brahma.*

Without learning the balance of yoga by action in the material world, samnyasa (free from the pair of opposites – 5.3) is difficult to understand or attain. But the one who follows true action soon understands nature's role in karma and identifies with brahma, the dialectical framework behind the material universe. He soon understands the action-reaction patterns stemming from prakṛti and becomes one with brahma. He is the true samnyasi.

The Supreme is the highest level of reality (*mahattamam*). *Akshara* (imperishable level) which is the framework behind the observable world is the next (*mahattaram*). The perishable level (*Kshara*) born of the imperishable (*Akshara*) is the third level (*mahat*). Gita says that all these three levels are equally important. The third level cannot be considered redundant as long as a person is alive. But a wrong assumption that *moksha* (salvation) was to be attained by discarding the material world was commonly believed by some samnyasis (monks). How can one reach out to the other two without gaining the necessary experience, knowledge as well as wisdom required for it from the *Kshara* world? What is the sense in contemplating any topic whatsoever learnt in life if the *Kshara* level of reality is totally discounted and attempting yoga using a life that is 'nonexistent'? Creation inspires awe and happiness in its beauty and complexity; who are we to disapprove and discard it with scorn and contempt? The Bhagavad Gita itself advocates a life of happiness and peace for a span of

hundred years, identifying oneself with the Supreme Self. How can one forget that as long as one lives, it is impossible to discard the world? Everyone has to live through it; illusion or not, there is no escape from nature for a being with a body.

India has for centuries suffered from the consequences of the wrong assumption that to attain *moksha* one has to discard the world: lots of human resources were wasted, the country was enslaved as people became too lethargic to react; on the other hand, *nishkarma kāma* (greed coupled with inaction) replaced *nishkāma karma* (action without selfishness).

‘Samnyasa’ has been defined as ‘avoiding the trap created by the opposites’. But as long as one remains in this world one cannot get away from their reach. No method or means of isolation will help create enough distancing from them. The only way is to live through them all and surpass their influence. This means involvement without attachment and, at the same time, knowing the world better through each interaction. Know darkness and compare it with light to know light better; there is no other way. Experiment and observation should precede derivation. The opposites can be given up only after they are known. Once given up in this manner, the opposites will not keep quarrelling within one’s self through their representative emotions. ‘Muni’ (the silent) is one attaining this state of calmness. The yogi stands a better chance of becoming a ‘muni’ faster, and from there, final identification with the Supreme Self is a breeze.

yogayukto viśuddhātmā vijitātmā jitendriyah  
sarvabhūtātmabhūtātmā kurvann api na lipyate 5.7

*He whose mind is made pure by adhering to karma yoga, who has mastered the self and controlled the senses, who realizes his True Self is the same as that in all beings, is not tainted in action.*

According to Vedanta, the human body is a three-in-one, consisting of the body existing in ‘Kshara’ (the physical body), the one in ‘Akshara’ (the conglomeration of wave oscillations at the level of the fabric of space) and a third existing in ‘Isvara’ (the basic life force). Identifying one’s self only with the first is ‘māya’ (delusion).

The first step towards achieving stable wisdom is to attain purity of mind, the state of being free of craving and anger. This means the senses are controlled and the mind is mastered by the intellect and the intellect is tuned to the ātma. We have seen before that such a person who continues in his path of true action is in actuality not doing anything. There we find the true definition of samnyasa

and the answer to Arjuna's question.

naiva kiṁcit karomīti yukto manyeta tattvavit  
paśyañ śṛṇvan spr̄śañ jighrann aśnan gacchan svapañ śvasan 5.8  
pralapan visṛjan gr̄hṇann unmiṣan nimiṣann api  
indriyāṇīndriyārtheṣu vartanta iti dhārayan 5.9

*Convinced that it is no more than the sense organs interacting with the sense objects, the yogi who grasps the truth of the life principle knows 'I do nothing at all', even as he sees, hears, touches, smells, eats, moves, sleeps, breathes, speaks, holds, gives up, opens and closes his eyes.*

The Upanishads say, 'The ātma is the One which lies beyond and provides light to the observer'.

It is realized that one's True Self is the same as that in every other entity, and though one is in action nothing is being performed by the ātma. This is not a state achievable only at the time of death. So, it is obvious that, even in this state one will continue to do very many material things like the others, but viewed from the highest level of perception, all such actions never add to the separate 'ego' factor of the individual. In other words these actions never 'taint' him.

brahmaṇy ādhāya karmāṇi saṅgam tyaktvā karoti yaḥ  
lipyate na sa pāpena padmapatram ivāmbhasā 5.10

*He who abandons attachment and dedicates his actions to brahma is not touched by wrongness just as a lotus leaf is untouched by water.*

With the help of modern science it is a lot easy now to understand this verse. We know that our body is composed of atoms; the same is the case with all matter. Numerous interactions at the atomic and molecular levels give rise to bigger conglomerations. Go to the basics and everything and everyone are the same. All interactions stem from patterns in nature, which are formed from permutations and combinations of various oscillations at the matter-wave levels; all actions stem from brahma (Akshara). Therefore the directive is to dedicate all these actions to the same 'mother nature' and remain untainted. Let the body and mind act natural and true to what each is supposed to. Detachment comes naturally by knowing the truth. As this wisdom grows deeper, all blemishes on the mirror of one's mind get wiped off so that it reflects just one's true self. The lotus leaf blooms in water, survives in it, accepts nutriments from it and

dissolves back in it, but it not only remains on the surface whatever the water-level always, it never gets wet from the water on any side of it. Similarly our True Self or ātma resides in the material body with all its actions dictated by the latter's nature, but is never tainted.

Actions performed with selfishness or emotional craving is derogatory to this because the worldly 'I' which it strengthens, makes the person feel separate to think as 'mine' and 'yours', and this is corruption when viewed from the true self and also from the interest of the whole. The more it is allowed to exercise itself that way, its imprints multiply and get ingrained deeper in the person's mind and intellect which is then directly reflected in thoughts and actions, making oneself seem that much more separate and distinct from the all pervading Akshara and the unblemished nature of the life force. These imprints are the roots of delusion which tend to establish that the material world is the only real one and body death is final. (The topsy-turvy tree of materialism with its roots going up and branches growing down will be presented later.)

kāyena  
manasā buddhyā kevalair indriyair api

yoginah karma kurvanti saṅgam tyaktvā/tmaśuddhaye 5.11

*Yogis, having abandoned attachment, perform actions by the body, mind, intellect and sense organs for the purification of the self (elimination of worldly ego and craving).*

The yogi does everything in the material world as the common man does, but with an extra goal of being in union with the true self and with a different mental makeup. Therefore the yogi cannot be distinguished simply by the actions he performs. He acts as anybody else with his body, mind, intellect and sense organs, and there may be no observable difference in the style of performance. The fact that there is no worldly ego behind those actions cannot be easily discerned from outside.

yuktah karmaphalam tyaktvā sāntim āpnoti naiṣṭhikīm  
ayuktaḥ kāmakāreṇa phale sakto nibadhyate 5.12

*The yogayukta attains highest peace by steadily ignoring the results (fruits) of his actions; the ignorant continue to ensnare their mind through action motivated by lust and cravings.*

Peace cannot be bought or grabbed; neither can it be brought about by law, revolution or economic development. The individual and the society will come

to it if action is practiced without purely selfish motivation. Such persons will get free of cravings and ego and their work will soon come to be motivated by the ‘sahayajna’ outlook.

The modern concept of ‘profit’ is the direct opposite of this sahayajna concept as according to the former one man’s profit is another’s loss. ‘Isavasya Upanishad’ asks: ‘Whose is this wealth?’ In short, the prevailing worldview of today’s society has to undergo change starting from the basics if man’s well being is to be accomplished.

Also, the other side of the picture is shown to complete the presentation. Cravings bind man tight to the material world and drag him into lifelong hell. Look at the world around: restlessness is increasing. Two-third of the world’s population is still rated below the poverty line. The ‘haves’ too suffer from poverty as they still want what they do not yet have. Isn’t it surprising that even the simple truth that the best insurance for one’s well being is the general well being of the world is not evidently accepted!

sarvakarmāṇī manasā samnyasyāste sukham vaśī<sup>1</sup>  
navadvāre pure dehī naiva kurvan na kārayan 5.13

*Mentally renouncing all actions and fully self-controlled, the ‘embodied one’ rests happily in the nine-gate city, as then he is one with the Paramātma, neither acting nor causing to act.*

The physical body can be compared to a city with nine gates. The one with self-control and free from mental turmoil rests happily within the body. Then the ‘embodied one’ is the same as the supreme self. The body is its abode.

na kartr̄tvam na karmāṇī lokasya sṛjati prabhuḥ  
na karmaphalasamyogam svabhāvas tu pravartate 5.14

*Prabhu (the Supreme Self) does not create doer-ship, karma and association with results of deeds in the world; each entity acts according to its nature.*

(‘Prabhu’ means one who illuminates all, makes others illuminate and is the very principle underlying all luminosity.)

Misconceptions regarding the relationship between God and man are cleared. According to sections of the Vedas that prescribe to the actions of man (‘karma kānda’), God is the all-powerful one who minutely and continuously observes everything that happens in the universe, keeps accounts of deeds good and bad,

judiciously passes judgment and implements it. The same concept is present in most religions. God stipulates deeds for men, the right of each to do his allotted quota and also authorizes each to enjoy the fruits of his labor.

But this is not the way the Upanishads visualize God. *Isvara* is regarded as the seed of creation and also the one beyond all ‘*gunas*’ (characters). Creation begins when the One *Isvara* through the dialectical substrate, *Akshara*, causes the third level of reality to manifest. The dialectical nature of *Akshara* (*parā prakṛti* or *māya*, based on the three *gunas*) provides the illusion of separateness; making ignorance mask absolute knowledge. As the first seeding pulsation of *Akshara* causes the fabric of space to expand forming the observable universe (chapter 14, verses 3 and 4), numerous oscillations are produced which evolve and differentiate. Through resonance in *parā prakṛti* these oscillations interact with each other and build up the particle world in the third level. Resonance specifics works through the three *gunas* or characters, which form the basis of every interaction. *Akshara* is the abode of all *jeevas*; differentiation and evolution of the incomplete and imperfect forms in the third level occur in this background. Brahma is another name for this substrate. All karma and its fruits, and also the person who is the performer of karma, are manifested naturally by action-reaction patterns in *prakṛti* (nature), whereas the Paramātma remains as the inner presence of all. (Yet there are instances where *Isvara* does alter some of these patterns about which we saw in the previous chapter – verse 4.7, 4.8.) Even though the universe and the three characters in everything including man is based on that life principle, *Isvara* does not take any ‘pride’ in what has been created including all tendencies and inclinations in it, neither is *Isvara* attached to any result of the act of creation. Human beings tend to wrongly think that way because knowledge based on any level other than the ultimate one is only partial and therefore imperfect.

nādatte kasyacit pāpam̄ na caiva sukṛtam̄ vibhuḥ  
ajñānenāvṛtam̄ jñānam̄ tena muhyanti jantavah 5.15

*Prabhu (the Supreme Self) does not assume responsibility for deeds good or bad; people are deluded (in thinking that is the case) because true knowledge (inherent in them) is covered up by ignorance.*

Cause and effect, action and reaction, good and bad, beauty and ugliness – these are all expressions stemming from the dialectical nature of *Akshara*. All such can also be termed ‘attitudes and actions ascribed to nature by the mind, which is just another creation of the same nature’. The wrong supposition that all

these are deeds of the Supreme Self is a roadblock in identifying oneself with It. ‘If I am the Supreme Self itself, whatever I feel must be right; isn’t it?’ No, because that feeling comes from the dialectical nature of Akshara. Only if my identification with the supreme presence in me is complete would it be right, but then that question would not arise. And if so, the True Self is a long way away from wanting to hurt, thieve or plunder.

‘Akshara’ and the visible world emerging from it are founded on opposites. When any force is born, its very birth invites the opposite to be born. Which of the two wins where and how depends on nature’s instinct at that point of space and time.

jñānenā tu tad ajñānam yeśām nāśitam ātmanah  
teśām ādityavaj jñānam prakāśayati tat param 5.16

*In whom that avidya (wrong knowledge) has been destroyed by (true) knowledge (of the self); in him that knowledge illuminates the Paramātma like the sun.*

The sun is there even at the peak of the total solar eclipse. What happens is the moon coming in between, masking it. Darkness falls temporarily. Why, just a penny coin held close enough to the eye can mask the sun completely. The funny part of it is we need sunlight to find the coin and do the experiment right, and we take the help of the same light to decide which way the coin should be moved to clear the obstacle. This is why Paramātma is said to be the ultimate reality; no one needs any light to find the sun! It is the same way by which the ātma is behind our perception. It is the One behind our consciousness itself, by which we know we are conscious and we are the observer. It is behind all our faculties, and it illuminates both that which is there and that which is not.

*Vidya* is that which helps one get enlightened and *avidya* leads to ignorance. *Moha* (the forgetfulness caused by craving), *mahamoha* (loss of sense of reality like a veil over the intellect brought about by becoming a slave to avarice), *tamas* (the darkness of ignorance), *tamisra* (hell-like darkness), and *anthatamisra* (the state wherein one mistakes the darkest hell for the wisest of options) are the five *avidyas*; they are blocks on the way to truth.

tadbuddhayas tadātmānas tanniṣṭhās tatparāyaṇāḥ  
gacchānty apunarāvṛttim jñānanirdhūtakalmaṣāḥ 5.17

*They who root their intellect in the knowledge of the Self and always remain*

*dedicated to it, strictly following this knowledge in their actions, depending on it for everything, assuring themselves that their true selves is the same as the ātma, they wipe away all blemishes and attain the state in which there is no return to the materialistic world.*

Vedanta considers the attainment of the state of oneness with the immortal True Self the proper end of all human endeavors. Life, as everything else, germinates from the essence of the universe, grows up in ‘Akshara’, blossoms in ‘Kshara’, and should naturally culminate by identifying itself again with the life force behind the universe. According to the Gita too, the ultimate goal of life is the same. Along with creation and differentiation, the concepts known as ‘natural selection’ and ‘survival of the fittest’ are also expressions of this destiny inherent in the ‘prakṛti-purusha-combine’. It can be surmised that though the progress of evolution of life has been akin to the faltering journey of the blind, this motive is also evident all along the route. Perhaps man has just one more step to climb to arrive.

vidyāvinayasampanne brāhmaṇe gavi hastini  
śuni caiva śvapāke ca pāṇḍitāḥ samadarśināḥ 5.18

*The man of wisdom treats everybody and everything on equal footing, be it a well educated and humble Brahmin (a man of the highest caste), a cow, an elephant, a dog and (even) one who eats dogs (one of the lowest caste).*

In India, for centuries the rulers insisted that anyone born into a Brahmin family is superior. While the cow was revered and the elephant considered precious, the dog was untouchable. Non-vegetarians were to live outside the village. Rank and other seniority considerations came into force even among samnyasis. Those who were supposed to be ‘lower’ were made to obey the ‘higher’ without question. Thus the nation was immersed in darkness for thousands of years despite all the Upanishads. In other nations too, there was racial discrimination (in some places continuing even now).

What better call can be issued in the interest of formation of a model society than this proclamation? Only the one who rises above these atrocities and views everyone on equal footing is wise. He knows everything and everybody in essence is the same as himself.

ihaiva tair jitāḥ sargo yeṣāṁ sāmye sthitāḥ manāḥ  
nirdoṣāḥ hi samāḥ brahma tasmād brahmaṇi te sthitāḥ 5.19

*They who have their minds (firmly) rooted in the sense of equality (described above) have won in this life itself; for brahma is without blemish and samam (same in all), and they have anchored on to it.*

Unblemished means undifferentiated and thus perfect, which is the state of the true essence of the universe. ‘Samam’ here is not equality in quantity; it is the sameness of quality.

na prahr̥ṣyet priyam prāpya nodvijet prāpya cāpriyam  
sthirabuddhir asam̄mūḍho brahmavid brahmaṇi sthitah 5.20

*With steady intellect and free of misconceptions, the one who knows brahma and identifies himself with it, is untouched by euphoria on obtaining what is pleasant or grief on meeting the unpleasant.*

What makes an even-minded person different? He is above likes and dislikes; free of all worldly delusions. Therefore no one can appease, provoke, sadden or frighten him. He does not waver; his intellect is firmly set. Breaking open the shell of worldly ego, he has known the essence of the universe, has acceded his worldly self to it and has got firmly established there.

There is an added effect in this achievement:-

bāhyasparśeṣv asaktātmā vindaty ātmani yat sukham  
sa brahmayogayuktātmā sukham akṣayam aśnute 5.21

*What kind of happiness is (momentarily) obtained when one surpasses the craving for sensual pleasures, that is permanently (unendingly) available to one who has identified himself with brahma.*

There are several stages in the progress towards this happiness. It begins with the happiness felt when one, for the first time in his life, finds himself free from emotional craving and knows contentment and peace. The difference between this type of happiness and the happiness attained through pleasure is that the former does not need a material reason. It cannot be installed in or imparted to anybody by an external agency; one has to come to it and feel the difference.

Sage Vyasa points out that the one who has climbed the first steps feels the happiness temporarily, but for the one who is well versed in brahma vidya

through knowledgeable action and detachment, the feeling of bliss called *brahmananda* is everlasting.

ye hi samsparsajā bhogā duḥkhayonaya eva te  
ādyantavantah kaunteya na teṣu ramate budhah 5.22

*O Arjuna, each and every sensual pleasure has a beginning and an end; they are a source of sorrow; therefore the wise do not get themselves lost in any such.*

All worldly joys have a beginning and an end. There are numerous ways in which pleasures or emotional wants cause sorrow: sadness at non-availability, anxiety about its continuity once it becomes available, fear of losing it, pain of the sense of poverty when it becomes rare, uneasiness when others get it, the birth of a volcano of anger when its availability is found blocked, the fights that may ensue, the personality destruction, the final fall...

No wonder the wise are wary of worldly pleasures.

śaknotīhaiva yaḥ soḍhum prāk śarīravimokṣaṇāt  
kāmakrodhodbhavam̄ vegam̄ sa yuktaḥ sa sukhī narah 5.23

*The one who develops the strength well before death, to keep under control the urges produced by desire and anger before they begin to agitate oneself, he is the (successful) yogi; he is the happy one.*

Heaven is down here; salvation is not after death. It is achievable right amidst all the sound and fury of worldly existence. There are no minimum qualifications prescribed, no preconditions, reservations or restrictions. All, irrespective of caste, creed, religion, sex, age, color or citizenship are good enough for this.

As wisdom matures, the craving for sensual pleasures withers and falls, just as the flower falls when the fruit develops. This is a natural process and not any to be brought about by force or a surgical knife. *Veetaragas* are those who have developed healthy detachment and not the ones indulging in painful self-denial. They progressively learn the art of keeping themselves free through experience gained from performance of *karma* without attachment. After they become masters at *karma yoga*, they cheerfully continue in their path of action.

yo/ntaḥsukho/ntarārāmas tathāntarjyotiḥ eva yaḥ  
sa yogī brahmanirvāṇam̄ brahmabhūto/dhigacchati 5.24

*The yogi who is happy within, rejoicing in the ātma of the universe within his self, and in whose heart shines knowledge about the self, gets undifferentiated as a being of brahma and experiences the bliss natural to it.*

‘Antasukhi’ (the one who gets his happiness from within) can be happy whatever pertains outside. Present concepts in the modern world favor materialistic happiness from outside and people are more or less accustomed to it. But it is common sense that without inner happiness no amount of outside joys can make a person truly happy. One can sit in the middle of an amusement park and still feel profoundly depressed. The ‘antararama’ (one who has for his pleasure a lovely garden within himself) has dissolved his bodily ego in the awareness of the brahma, considers it his ‘country’ and lives there happily. He experiences *brahmananda* or the bliss natural to the state of brahma. He also sees everything around him in the right light of the ātma that he gets from within; he is ‘antarjyoti’ as well. ‘Nirvana’ literally means unity, being one with, and (the fire of desire) getting extinguished. That state is reached when the fires of material cravings are extinguished and unity is established with the essence of the universe after getting free from the stranglehold of ‘māya’ ( delusion).

labhante brahmanirvāṇam ḥṣayaḥ kṣīṇakalmaṣāḥ  
chinnadvaidhā yatātmānah sarvabhūtahite ratāḥ 5.25

*(Such) rishis whose blemishes have been dissolved, who have won over dualities, who are self-controlled and joined in mind with the ātma, they, intent on action based on the welfare of all beings, achieve oneness with brahma.*

The last part of the verse says the accomplished lead an active life in the interest of the well being of everything in the universe. Neither abstention from work nor renunciation of the external world is the way. Look at the lives of the great sages. They performed all actions and served the world till their last breath.

The life of the author of the Gita, Veda Vyasa, itself is a shining example. He collected, classified and edited the Vedas and hence the title; but he erased his physical significance to the extent of keeping even his name off the records. He composed many texts including the Mahabharata, the largest epic in the world ever, which includes the Bhagavad Gita – the compilation of the highest knowledge of Vedanta having the essence of all the major Upanishads. There is a story that he once called his son aloud and everything around including trees and shrubs responded with ‘Yes, father?’

kāmakrodhavyuktānāṁ yatīnāṁ yatacetasāṁ  
abhitō brahmanirvāṇāṁ vartate vidiṭātmanāṁ 5.26

*Brahma nirvana is everywhere and on all sides for those yatis who are free from lust and anger and have reigned in their mind.*

Brahma nirvana means total liberation through oneness with brahma. Yatis are ascetics or the practitioners of brahma vidya. Once the practitioner meets the prerequisites given in this verse and the ones before, further meditation to reach the state of brahma nirvana is provided in the next verse.

sparśān kṛtvā bahir bāhyāṁś cakṣuś caivāntare bhruvoḥ  
prāṇāpānau samau kṛtvā nāsābhyan taracāriṇau 5.27  
yatendriyamanobuddhirmunir mokṣaparāyaṇah  
vigatecchābhayakrodho yaḥ sadā mukta eva saḥ 5.28

*Keeping all external stimuli at bay and fixing the gaze (as though) between the eyebrows, equalizing the outgoing and the incoming breath that is restricted in movement by containing within the nostrils; with sense organs, mind and intellect under control, having moksha as the supreme goal, free from desire, fear and anger – that sage is always liberated.*

An overall picture of the process of ‘dhyana’ (meditation) is presented. External sensory inputs are ignored so that the mind remains unperturbed. Raising the gaze is to be achieved as a free movement and not forced. When gaze is raised to that level it will be at about 45 degrees from the horizontal. This elevation and fixation on a point uplifts the mind and helps concentrate.

It is a proven fact that the state of mind is closely associated with the rhythm of breathing. (How an emotional outburst changes one’s breathing rate is well known.) When breathing is maintained at a controlled rhythm and the quantity inhaled and exhaled is equalized the mind remains calm.

The sense organs, mind and intellect are kept under control. Thoughts that come are not contemplated on but allowed to fade away. In the same way any emotion is also disposed off. After the ground is thus prepared, attention is concentrated on identifying the self with the higher level.

bhoktāram yajñatapasāṁ sarvalokaheśvaram  
suhṛḍām sarvabhūtānāṁ jñātvā māṁ śāntim ṣeṭchati 5.29

*Once it becomes understood that I am the bhokta of all yajna and tapas, the Mahesvara of all worlds, and suhrut to all, that yogi attains supreme peace.*

These words provide clues to visualizing the Supreme Entity during contemplation or meditation. ‘Yajna’, ‘tapas’, ‘Mahesvara’, ‘bhokta’ and ‘suhrut’ are some of the key words in Vedanta. They are redefined (to cleanse them of connotations that later came to be wrongly attributed to them.) ‘Yajna’ is action dedicated to identify oneself with the life force of the universe and not ritualistic yajna. ‘Tapas’ is the effort to acquire mind control, power of detachment and a higher standard of spiritual living; and not the acrobatics of standing on one foot amidst fire and so on (How the body, the mind and the spoken word can be used for ‘tapas’ is discussed in detail later). All ‘tapas’ and ‘yajna’ are appreciated by the Paramātma and finally dissolved in the same. (The furnace burns to purify the gold in it.) ‘Mahesvara’ is the central power that governs all the forces that help us experience various things; not an overlord who has likes and dislikes of his own. (For convenience, each force of this kind is described separately – as a unique ‘Deva’ in the case of different experiences, for instance, as the ‘Deva’ of vision in the experience of sight). ‘Mahesvara’ is the totality of all such ‘Devas’. What is referred to as ‘Lord’, ‘Prabhu’ and ‘Mahesvara’ is no external factor but one’s own self in its pristine reality. ‘Bhokta’ means acceptor or appreciator to what is dedicated. ‘Suhrut’ means friend – the One who is always there (within us) and knows everything about ourselves, always ready to help in the path to Itself. The option is always open.

The first two verses in the next chapter are also to be read along with this for final settlement of doubts related to samnyasa. (In Gita the chapter divisions are somewhat arbitrary.)

## Chapter 6

# Yoga of Dhyana

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The eighteen chapters of the Gita can be subjectively grouped into three equal segments of six chapters, each group expatiating one of the three words in the ‘mahāvākya’ (grand statement) ‘tat twam asi’ (you are that). The first six chapters generally pertain to ‘twam’ (you). This part prepares the student to receive the knowledge of ‘tat’ (that) provided in the next six chapters, and the last six chapters details more about the process of becoming (‘asi’).

The first chapter begins with grief which generally prompts man to seek the truth of his existence. The second chapter logically summarizes the subject matter of the treatise as any scientific study of any subject invariably has to do at the onset. The third chapter deals with ‘karma’ (action) which is the only means man can employ to experiment and find out. The ideal kind of action – ‘sahayajna’ (action in the interest of the whole universe carried out with detachment) is suggested, together with the knowledge of why this is the way. The next chapter defuses the tussle between proponents of knowledge and action, philosophically establishing the unity of both and showing how and why the latter when performed with the help of the former is the only true way for both worldly life and moksha (salvation). The fifth chapter focuses on the main enemies of the karma yogi: craving and anger – both having their roots in bodily ego – and explains samnyasa in its accurate sense (based on action) which is the effective strategy to defeat these. And now, the ploughed, weeded and adequately readied mind is cultivated with lessons of concentration and dedication to reach one’s own self.

No other text dealing with the ocean-wide philosophy of the east presents the concept of meditation in as comprehensive and simple a style as the Gita does. The goal is clearly defined, the path well chalked out (as far as can be provided from outside) together with ways to circumnavigate blocks and change direction in case wrong turns are incidentally taken. No superstitious, incredible or extraordinary ‘effects’ are promised, it goes without saying that the subject is dealt with in thoroughly scientific fashion. Meditation (dhyana) is established as

a technique one can take recourse to succeed in material as well as spiritual life.

The project sketched out in the Gita is intended to make life meaningful and successful and not at all to give it up. It provides for the establishment of the natural purity and transparency of the self. The result is a rare kind of presence of mind devoid of vacillations, fear and despair. This causes the flower within bloom to its real splendor leading to full fructification.

Patanjali in his Yogasastra defines yoga as ‘total cessation of mental activity’ ('chittavruthinirodha'). (It can be surmised that the Gita uses the words ‘sankhya’ and ‘yoga’ in the sense that were in vogue before the rigid schools of thought in the name of the two had emerged.) The Gita does not divide the world into the spiritual and the physical; it maintains there is only one. Rein in the wild horses of desire and anger, lead a happy and comfortable life and achieve the ultimate bliss of getting identified with the Supreme Entity of the universe, it welcomes.

The first two verses are a continuation from the previous chapter that summarizes how true samnyasa is equal to yoga.

śrībhagavān uvāca  
anāśritah karmaphalam kāryam karma karoti yah  
sa samnyāsī ca yogī ca na niragnir na cākriyah 6.1

*The Lord (Bhokta of all yajna) said:*

*One who carries out all of his deemed duties without giving any consideration to the results of these actions is ‘samnyasi’ and ‘yogi’ at the same time; not the one who gives up ‘agni’, or activity to subsist.*

‘Agni’ here is taken from the Vedic idea of the fire for ‘yajna’, kept burning by the high priest at his residence. It is supposed to be his social responsibility to keep that fire burning for all time. The word ‘agni’ in real life as poetically used in this verse means the entire gamut of social responsibilities prevalent at any time. Giving up all such does not make anybody a ‘samnyasi’ or a ‘yogi’. (It has already been pointed out earlier that blind fulfillment of such traditional chores also does not make anyone any better.) Activity to subsist, like ‘prana karma’, is action necessary to keep oneself alive, e.g., breathing. ‘Agni’ and ‘activity for subsistence’ are at the two ends of the wide spectrum of human actions. What is meant directly is: blind compliance with or total renunciation of any action is not the issue. There is no way one can distinguish the spiritual from the physical because there is no discernible division of that kind. It is all the same. It is immaterial what is done or not done; it is the state of mind behind the action that

matters.

Swami Chinmayananda compares the ‘samnyasi’ who, ‘giving up the world’, goes to the banks of the river Ganges and spends his life as an ‘alasavratha’ (one dedicated to laziness) to a stone on the bed of the river and finds the latter a lot more laudable! What renunciation means is to perform every bounden duty with detachment but without fail, and not to crave for the outcome of any action.

yam samnyāsam iti prāhur yogam tam viddhi pāñdava  
na hy asamnyastasamkalpo yogī bhavati kaścana 6.2

*O son of Pandu, know that what is called as ‘samnyasa’ is ‘yoga’ itself; for, no one becomes a ‘yogi’ unless sankalpa is renounced.*

Past experiences of pleasure and pain become memories. Likes and dislikes predispose the person to action patterns. Aims and goals provide drive in the material world. From all these sprout visualizations of future experiences and achievements. When enticing or wishful imagination is intense it generates cravings and thought-processes which become binding to the person. They work in the background, even at the subconscious level, and are often expressed as passions. Sankalpa means intensely wishful and selfish imagination which is powerful enough to sustain the material world in the mind of the person as ultimate, to the neglect of all other levels. They may be related to lust or revenge, but any strong goal or aim in life can also create the sankalpa thought pattern which sustains itself and drives the person passionately to his imagined aim.

This does not mean all imagination is taboo. Renunciation of sankalpa means holding the higher levels as the highest aim even when working with an aim in the material world. Constant watch over the drive and direction behind thought processes is advised. Never should it ensnare the person to make him forget his True Self and the ‘sahayajna’ path. It is a common misconception that passionate pursuit of selfish desires provides drive for achieving goals; instead such a path provides only ensnarement, alienation, anxiety and fatigue. Karma yoga is the way to fulfillment of any aim. The moment the ones that draw sustenance from cravings are weeded out, action becomes an ecstatic experience; like when a musician sings forgetting his remuneration, the audience and himself.

True and ultimate knowledge, ageless but dissipated and fragmented over time, is resuscitated and integrated so as to help it assume its original wholesomeness, beauty and purity. It was established earlier that ‘sankhya’ (knowledge) and ‘yoga’ (action) are one and the same. Now, ‘samnyasa’ and

‘yoga’ are synthesized. Ultimate knowledge and the approach to life based on it is just one; like it is water alone that makes the ocean, the river, the cloud and the mist.

At the same time this verse warns both ‘samnyasis’ and ‘yogis’ about the pitfall in their paths. If the ‘samnyasi’ gives up all imagination and creativity under the false impression that it is the right way he misses the opportunity to perform the ‘yajna’ that is life in the interest of the biosphere and the chance to radiate love and compassion in every knowledgeable action he performs. At the other end of the spectrum is the ‘yogi’ who employs his practice of ‘yoga’ to try for worldly possessions, positions or magical powers, only to miss the bus as he has not been able to renounce sankalpa.

In summary, the ‘samnyasi’ who goes on doing work in the ‘sahayajna’ spirit and the ‘yogi’ who has renounced sankalpa are no different from each other.

ārurukṣor muner yogam karma kāraṇam ucyate  
yogārūḍhasya tasyaiva śamaḥ kāraṇam ucyate 6.3

*For the muni who strives to attain yoga, karma (action without sankalpa behind it) is the means; whereas for the yogarudha, (the same kind of) action is the means to strengthen and maintain his śama (completely detached demeanor).*

(The word ‘śama’ means alleviating the passion, craze and fervor related to the material world in the light of true wisdom and not abstention from action.) *Yogarudha* is the one who is firmly established in yoga (firm on the saddle of yoga).

Our actions often need mid-course corrections in the light of additional knowhow gained in the very process of action. The action then becomes a lesson – an instrument in our progress towards better knowledge. Even after ultimate wisdom is achieved, detached involvement in action makes one’s position assured and firm on the saddle.

One can just take a look around to see who are happier and more comfortable between the selfish and the unselfish, the angry and the patient, the givers and the greedy. The moment one realizes which way true happiness is, one is on the path of yoga.

yadā hi nendriyārtheṣu na karmasv anuṣajjate  
sarvasamṛkalpasamnyāsī yogārūḍhas tadocaye 6.4

*When one has successfully renounced all sankalpa and remains totally*

*detached from sense organ inputs and karma, he is called ‘yogarudha’.*

There are many blocks on this road to breaking the shackles of sankalpa. Patanjali’s ‘Yogasastra’ describes the five most important: ‘avidya’, ‘asmita’, ‘raga’, ‘dvesha’ and ‘abhinivesa’. Of these the last four originate from within the mind and are not external; hence the advice to be detached.

‘Avidya’ (literally ‘lack of education’) is misconception regarding the reality of oneself and one’s relationship with the universe. One should surmount it by acquiring knowledge in adhyatma vidya. ‘Asmita’ is one’s craving for sensual pleasures; it has to be overcome by ‘śama’ which means alleviation by contemplation of the transient nature of these pleasures and the less desirable aspects of these objects, and also through withdrawal of the mind. ‘Rāga’ is attraction created by memory of previous experiences of pleasure which, again, has to be countered by ‘śama’ (by mental detachment). ‘Dvesha’ or vengeful thought is the impulse to make a hated person come to grief (which has to be replaced with compassion), and ‘abhinivesa’ is the emotion that generates greed (which has to be nullified by contentment with being One with the ātma).

As and when the snares of sankalpa are overcome, the understanding that one is the true self itself will get doubly assured. That is the state of the ‘yogarudha’. One who is firmly settled there cannot be visited by any further grief. He then takes recourse to actions that add firmness to the state; this cannot be done if he gives up the perishable world of action.

This state is achieved by practice and exercise. Mental tuning is obtained by continuous observation of one's emotions and thoughts and correcting or modifying them as and when needed, without self torment, guilt and denial:-

uddhared ātmānām nātmānam avasādayet  
ātmaiva hy ātmano bandhur ātmaiva ripur ātmanah 6.5

*Uplift the self with the self. Do not fatigue the self. Because the only bandhu (relative, friend) the self has is the self itself. The enemy of the self is also the self itself.*

This verse is one of the gems in the Gita. Modern psychology is only arriving to the level of this verse written so long ago. If the self is not in the right path, the self itself becomes our true enemy. Every negative feeling – guilt, self-blame, torment, anger, frustration – all come from within and they all indicate that the self is not in friendship with oneself. The self is our only true friend and therefore we should not fatigue our self by getting degraded by our own thoughts

and actions.

This is a key stanza; it contains the gist of the wisdom of Vedanta. At the same time it is simple primary knowledge, helping anyone start from scratch. Plain common sense is enough to grasp it.

In Vedanta there are four ‘I’ in every person – 1. The mind (*manas*) which is the platform on which the sense organs and memory reflect to form various thoughts, 2. The intellect (*buddhi*) which is the rational thought and command centre, 3. The *jeevātma* (which is the network of inclinations - *vasana*) and its subconscious level from which emotions stem from, 4. The *Paramātma* which illuminates the observer behind everything (which is not in any way changed by any of these). Modern psychology does not differentiate between mind and intellect, though some methods chalk out ways by dividing the mind to a ‘child’ part and an ‘adult’ part. Modern psychology does not consider the *jeevātma* though it has got some idea about the subconscious, and about the *Paramātma* it has no idea whatsoever.

An ‘ideal’ image for oneself is coined by every grown-up person’s intellect but most of the time one fails to conform to that. The intellect is the main factor in forming and maintaining one’s personality and conforming to set patterns. One feels good when conforming to what is expected and bad otherwise. The difference between the ideal ‘I’ and the practical ‘I’, for some, is the measure of fall from perfection. For others it is based on their concepts of good and bad.

For those concentrating on perfection in their actions, the way is karma yoga. For the ones who are worried about wrongs that they have committed or can commit in the future, this gap between the ideal I and the actual I has to be filled so as to reach the heights of their personality by becoming culturally rich. There is only one way to do that: establish firm friendship with oneself and let the mind won over thus manage the sense organs. This command-and-control path will uplift the worldly ‘I’.

In both these situations, corrections are not by fatiguing the self. Under no condition should the self be tormented or blamed for imperfection. If the mind feels afraid or inadequate, it has to be befriended and comforted, not beaten or pushed more by a criticizing intellect. A befriended and loved self can perform the most impossible of feats. The uplifted worldly ‘I’ through friendship, will, in turn, help by action and observation to refine the ‘I’ further by integration with emotional inclinations (the third I), and so on till full and final identification with the fourth ‘I’ (the *Paramātma*) is reached. Once the person is integrated with himself, he can integrate with the society, then with nature and finally with the True Self. Vedanta advocates successful integration at all these levels.

If the process is reversed or stalled, it is the worldly ‘I’ that gets degraded

first. This amounts to causing damage to the bridge to cross the river. To gather knowledge, to process it, to experiment with this knowledge through action and earn wisdom – man has no other friend. No one knows us better than ourselves.

Look at the warrior Arjuna, for instance. He sits sad and depressed, opting for inaction – not because he is abused or wounded. The crisis stems from his worldly ‘I’ making decisions based upon emotions not refined by better wisdom; it becomes a greater enemy than the one confronting him!

Every religion tries to outline the relationship between the worldly ‘I’ of man and the ultimate force running the universe. Upanishads chalk out a path for this relationship till all the levels achieve fusion. ‘Adhyatma vidya’ (spiritual education based on ancient wisdom) establishes beyond all doubt that this fusion cannot be reached through formation of any organization or group and thereby rules out all regimentation. Instead the Gita welcomes all to the path assuring success to each one in tune with his own effort.

Vedanta not only underlines the fact that anyone can uplift himself but also insists that one has to do it oneself. No priest or ritual can help. No kind of god helps as an external agency. Even the best of teachers can only help one open his eyes; one has to see for oneself. The Gita demolishes all untenable notions that existed at the time and bestows man with perfect freedom and undeniable right in all matters concerning one’s uplift.

Opposite of integration is schizophrenia. Love yourself, love others, love the universe. Both modern psychology and Vedanta converge their vision to the same path.

bandhur ātmātmanas tasya yenātmaivātmanā jitah  
anātmanas tu śatrutve vartetātmaiva śatruvat 6.6

*For the one who has won over his self by the self in this way, his self is his benefactor; but, for the one whose self has not been integrated, it remains as inimical as an external foe.*

It is a simple and self-evident fact that one that has won over his own mind always succeeds over those who haven’t. Even if he doesn’t win in everything, he can take a defeat stoically, analyze it calmly and learn from it. The one who behaves with symptoms of split perception like greed, anger and delusion suffers loss, pain and grief. Always the greatest pain lies in tormenting oneself. The great like Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Theresa and Martin Luther King were people who had commendable control over their minds. Every sane person has, in some measure, acquired it and felt the difference.

But, on the average, what is accomplished is just a minuscule fragment of what can be. Most of us do not know what goes on even in our conscious mind most of the time. What havoc the wounds and wrong convictions carried unchecked at the level of the subconscious make has been unearthed by modern psychology. To gather ample knowledge at first-hand about the extent and variety of damage done by one's own self turning inimical towards one's self, just visit a mental asylum or jail anywhere in the world.

But these are extreme cases. Though most of humanity is on this side of the fences, many of us suffer the infliction in varying degrees. Proof of it is available in the form of the tension, depression, sleeplessness and frustration visiting us. How to correct these maladies of the mind is given in these verses. The beauty of it is: we can do it ourselves without medicines or priests or black magic. Just know right, do right, be a friend to the self and contemplate upon the ultimate level of reality.

jitātmanah prasāntasya paramātmā samāhitah  
śītoṣṇasukhaduhkheṣu tathā mānāpamānayoh 6.7

*The one who has won over the mind and the senses continue to be in the peaceful state of self amidst pleasure-pain, heat-cold, honor-dishonor and similar opposites, and in that person the Paramātma resides as the True Self.*

The proof of having won over the mind is happiness. If one can manage to get at least pass-marks, the success will be reflected as peace of mind. No coaching center or government order can help. Also, the examiner and the examined are the same; results are immediately available. The convocation is instantaneous; there is no scroll of honor; the winner himself becomes a walking diploma.

Once graduated, a glimpse of the inner world is available as the weed-cover of craving-prompted imaginations, passions and negativities are swept aside. This insight is the greatest achievement in life. The Gita assures that this is available to the common man in the same manner as to great yogis.

The weed-cover masking the Innermost Self has three layers: the one created by waves ensuing from external inputs of 'opposites' like pain and pleasure at the level of the body, another caused by sankalpa and passions of the mind, and the last generated by honor-dishonor disturbances to the ego originating at the level of the intellect. In the ignorant, the worldly 'I' configured out of these three develops an assumed personality and stands guard to keep them in place, unable even to recognize its true Innermost Nature.

jñānavijñānatṛptātmā kūṭastho vijitendriyah  
yukta ity ucyate yogī samaloṣṭāśmakāñcanah 6.8

*The one who is content with jnana (knowledge gathered) and vijnana (the wisdom gained out of practical experience with that knowledge) with regard to the True Self; stable and in complete control over his senses; considers mud, stone and gold on equal footing; he is called ‘yogayukta’.*

A knowledgeable intellect will not get perturbed by honor or dishonor; that person will know that these are just fleeting thoughts or the mind playing with itself. Those with firm minds will not be perturbed by grief; disquiets will be erased by the knowledge that these are ephemeral and the true self is above them. If senses are under control, sensory inputs will not be able to lead anyone astray. Even if the mind tends to go astray the intellect will easily disallow it. ‘Avidya’ (ignorance) masks the ātma making use of the senses-mind-intellect combine. The same three are also the instruments to sweep the mask away. Therefore, as long as they are free and not slaves of ignorance, they are benefactors.

Wisdom is man’s greatest asset, repeats the Gita over and again. Wisdom that leaves nothing more to get wise about is the essence of the universe – ‘Isvara’. Beyond the ātma there is nothing more to know. It is the only boat available to help cross every ocean of misery.

The product of all fragmented strands of wisdom integrating into one is entitled ‘samahitam’ (the integrated). In the light of this, there is no difference between any two things or phenomena; it is all the same in their essence. In that perception, mud and gold are the same. This does not mean the yogi should overlook all worldly differences; similitude is only at the level of evaluation of ultimate reality; no ‘yogi’, however accomplished, can eat mud instead of food.

The question now arises is: can the same approach be adopted in the case of human relations?

suhṛṇmitrāryudāśinamadhyasthadveṣyabandhuṣu  
sādhuṣv api ca pāpeṣu samabuddhir viśiṣyate 6.9

*He is special, who sees the same in equal state in everybody irrespective of whether he is friend, benefactor, relative, enemy, stranger, one who hates, mediator, disinterested person, good one or bad.*

All kinds of relationships are listed together with the various dispositions of people around. It is natural to get more attached to some and dislike some others. Sorrow or guilt is caused when either is belied. Human attitudes being as fickle as the weather, emotional involvements are counterproductive unless they are firmly based on true awareness of the ultimate level of reality. Love thy neighbor. It is not his fault if he does not know the truth that what makes everybody tick is the same spark.

Even though the way we behave has to be different with different types of people, Vedanta advices us to see the *ātma* equally in all these at the same time. We may have to show disapproval or act disinterested in certain situations, but no longer can we hate or be angry with anybody or anything in this universe once the truth strengthens in our heart. (A wise person will have nothing to do with anger anyway.) It is made explicit that the wise man is above caste, creed, religion, sex, clan, color, country and language. The Gita advocates citizenship of the universe, shows the path to acquire it and also details the ways to stick to it once acquired.

For the wise man who knows what is real and what is not, the world around observed by the sense organs when compared with the entirety of the multi-verse is infinitesimally small and insignificant; he knows that it goes on changing every second and that his own body too is ephemeral. At the same time he knows that his innermost self is eternal and it is the same as in everybody and everything. He simultaneously balances his stand very well at all the three levels of reality.

Once this knowledge is grasped, the further practical meditative technique of Vedanta is outlined in the next set of verses:-

yogī yuñjīta satatam ātmānam̄ rahasi sthitah̄  
ekākī yatacittātmā nirāśīr aparigrahaḥ 6.10

*The yogi should always meditate in a private place, alone, with his mind and sense organs under control, without any craving for anything from anybody, and practice always being one with the *ātma* (the real self).*

This is an exercise one can do whenever convenient. Alone and unnoticed by others implies the particular state of mind and also free from disturbances to meditation. It does not matter where one is; be it in a closed room, inside a forest or in a Himalayan valley, it is enough if attention can be focused on the innermost self. It is to be done ‘satatam’ (always). This one word indicates that it *can* always be done (by anyone).

No guided tours are there. No ritual or ‘mantra’ is needed. For Vedanta, self-learning is always the way. To meditate one must control one’s own body, mind and intellect. In continuation of this progress and parallel to it, one can practice ‘sahayajna’ involvement with the external world too.

śucau deśe pratiṣṭhāpya sthiram āsanam ātmanah  
nātyucchritam nātinīcam cailājinakuśottaram 6.11

*After placing oneself on a steady seat covered with (dry) grass, leather and cloth one upon the other (in that order) at a spot neither very high nor very low in tidy surroundings –*

Patanjali in his Yoga Sutra defines the seating arrangement as ‘stira-sukam’ (firm and comfortable).

A tidy spot is advised as one’s state of body and mind very much depends on cleanliness of the surroundings. Ants, flies and mosquitoes are quite enough to make a beginner restless. Similarly, height of perch instills subconscious fear of fall and a seat in a pit generates insecurity as surroundings remain unobservable.

Dry grass insulates from dampness and cushions; leather provides thermal insulation and keeps niggardly insects away; cloth provides a familiar feel. All the three are non-conductors of electricity too.

In short, find a comfortable seat in a good surrounding away from all avoidable disturbances; at the same time it should not be extra-comfortable or luxurious.

tatraikāgram manah kṛtvā yatacittendriyakriyah  
upaviṣyāsane yuñjyād yogam ātmaviśuddhaye 6.12

*There, positioning oneself, ignoring thoughts from the mind and inputs from the sense organs, bring oneself to (mental) cleanliness and concentrate on the practice of union.*

Whatever random thoughts that arise are steadily ignored and the mind is focused on the union with the Paramātma. Similarly sensory stimuli like touch, smell, hearing etc are also steadily ignored. After a time the mind enters a restful, tranquil state in which the steady state of being one with the ātma can be achieved.

Some of those who are ignorant about the true nature of meditation consider it as something ‘miraculous’ and some are even wary of it. In truth meditation is

a simple exercise of the mind and it has nothing to do with any ‘magic’.

saṁmaṁ kāyaśirogrīvaṁ dhārayann acalam sthirah  
saṁprekṣya nāsikāgraṁ svam diśās cānavalokayan 6.13  
praśāntātmā vigatabhīr brahmacārivrate sthitah  
manah samyamya maccitto yukta āsīta matparaḥ 6.14

*Firmly holding the body, head and neck erect and steady; avoiding looking at the surroundings by holding the gaze as if fixed at the root of the nose (centre of the eyebrows); free from all fear and with happy disposition, in brahmachari vrata, one should rein in the mind, focus it upon the ātma, and with the highest interest in It, always remain in union.*

The mind is stirred if the body moves and vice versa. Even if the torso, neck and head are held straight and high, movement of any other part will affect the poise; the whole of the body should therefore be kept still (‘achalam’). At the same time it should not be stiff. Let the seat be comfortable so that one does not feel like altering the posture. Keeping the body straight helps to keep the mind straight and facilitate unhindered blood circulation and ease of breathing. Avoid meditation while tired, as steady posturing may not be easy.

Eyes are to be fixed only *as if* at the point prescribed; do not waste the power of concentration to focus the eyes and keep them exactly there. (The root of the nose is not the subject of meditation!) This is done to free the mind from the subject of sight and to bring it to something else. Mind follows eyes. When eyes waver, mind too does. So to keep the eyes from wandering; better fix them as if at an angle of medium elevation (to give the mind an elevated feeling) and tacitly at point that imparts restfulness. This can be done after closing the eyes too.

If this position is maintained for a while, it will help to free consciousness from direct awareness of the external world and also of desire-oriented emotions, and to take it to an ‘interim’ state – akin to the one between sleep and wakefulness.

The term ‘brahmachari vrata’ does not mean anything that can be achieved by ablutions many times a day, avoiding the sight of women, wearing saffron, chanting ‘mantras’ or going about begging. It means here a state of mind free from all sensual and material thoughts and worldly affairs at the time of meditation.

yuñjann evam sadātmānam yogī niyatamānasah

śāntim nirvāṇaparamāṁ matsamsthām adhigacchati 6.15

*Always keeping the controlled mind thus joined, the yogi attains the blissful peace of eternal existence in Me.*

Meditation is a journey into us. At first there exists differentiation between the knower and the known; the knower exists outside and separate. The statement describes a situation in which this distinction disappears.

nātyaśnatas tu yogo/sti na caikāntam anaśnataḥ  
na cātisvapnaśīlasya jāgrato naiva cārjuna 6.16

*O Arjuna, yoga is not possible for the one who eats too much, or for the one who does not eat at all; or for one who sleeps too much, or for one who is sleepless.*

Every doubt, be it deeply philosophical or downright elementary, is anticipated and cleared (by the compassionate teacher).

Not only for this meditation, but also in real life, 'yoga' is not possible without adhering to this verse. In real life the eating habits mentioned here also denotes approach to all worldly experiences. Unquenchable greed as well as unconditional refusal is unwelcome; same way, sleep, though it is the rest the body badly needs when tired, is another word for keeping away from action. It is to be noted that no kind or item of food is prescribed or tabooed; neither is it specified when to eat; individual taste and choice is held legitimate. It can be inferred that rigorous fasts and other rituals that punish the human body are not at all favored.

Human body is composed of innumerable forces and as many material particles. Its well being depends on how good is the coordination of these. For best results, every component has to maintain 'sahayajna' attitude to every other. Give-and-take with the world outside should be with the same attitude. Internal and external problems are sure to haunt if any act on the part of any component goes out of tune.

yuktāhāravihārasya yuktaceṣṭasya karmasu  
yuktasvapnāvabodhasya yogo bhavati duḥkhahā 6.17

*For the person who eats the right food in the required amount, who has adequate recreation, who is appropriate in exertion while he works, and who*

*sleeps as needed by the body; yoga is the eliminator of all sorrow.*

‘Vihara’ means entertainment, exercise, the act of appreciation of the arts and so on. It is supposed to provide rest and also refreshment to the mind so as to maintain it in positive and creative mood. A yogi can easily become a child and join children in their game; he should.

yadā viniyatam cittam ātmany evāvatiṣṭhate  
niḥsprahāḥ sarvakāmebhyo yukta ity ucyate tadā 6.18

*When one’s perfectly controlled mind is totally settled in the (innermost) Self and (thereby) free from longing for all (objects of desire), one is called a ‘yogayukta’.*

During meditation every desire or material pleasure is to be forgotten for the mind to be completely settled in the Self. Any worldly desire or emotion may entice the mind to lose focus. Only when our innermost self is totally free can we meditate effectively. The entire spectrum of desires has to be shaken off. It ranges from the want to have a sweetmeat to the yearning for a passport to heaven.

yathā dīpo nivātastho neñgate sopamā smṛtā  
yogino yatacittasya yuñjato yogam ātmanah 6.19

*The yogi who practices meditation with total control of mind to identify himself with his innermost self is compared (by those who know) with the non-flickering flame of a lamp situated in windless environment.*

The flame of a lamp is a continuous stream of molecules undergoing chemical change; the structure of the mind is the outcome of a continuous stream of thoughts undergoing transformations. The flame splutters if the oil is adulterated; mind is unsteady when desires and emotions make it lose focus. The flame sways with the wind from any direction; so does the mind get perturbed by external stimuli from outside. At the same time the light of the very lamp is needed to look for impurities in the oil in it and to remove them, and also to guard the flame from the wind by placing barriers. In the same way the mind itself is to be used to understand and counter whatever causes it to waver. The steadier the lamp, the better the light and greater is the chance to make it even more unwavering.

One must with staunch devotion concentrate on that inner flame, says Sri Sankara: ‘The oil of the *jnanadipa* (lamp of knowledge) is the blessings of the Supreme One, the consciousness that one derives out of *brahmacharya* (free from all sensual and material thoughts and worldly affairs at the time of meditation) is its wick.... The oxygen to help this flame is our ultimate concentration on the Supreme One.... The stability of the mind that has gained control over the stormy nature of sensations helps keep the flame stable.... The integrated vision that results from unwavering *dhyana* (meditation) done all the time maintain constant access to the serenity of the rays emanating from it...’

yatroparamate cittam̄ niruddham̄ yogasevayā  
yatra caivātmanātmānam̄ paśyann ātmani tuṣyati 6.20  
sukham̄ ātyantikam̄ yat tad buddhigrāhyam̄ atīndriyam̄  
vetti yatra na caivāyam̄ sthitāś calati tattvataḥ 6.21  
yam̄ labdhvā cāparam̄ lābhām̄ manyate nādhikam̄ tataḥ  
yasmin sthito na duḥkhena guruṇāpi vicālyate 6.22  
tam̄ vidyād duḥkhasaṁyogaviyogaṁ yogasaṁjñitam̄  
sa niścayena yoktavyo yogo/nirviṇṇacetasā 6.23

*When the mind restrained by the exercise of yoga is at total peace; when the true Self is discovered and there is contentment within; when the delight that cannot be known to the sense organs but can be perceived by the intellect is experienced; when that state is reached from which the self no longer changes direction; when that which is obtained is understood to be more than anything which is ever obtainable in the material world; when in that state not even the biggest of grief can cause mental unrest; that state is to be known to be the farewell to any chance of union with sorrow of any kind; it is called 'yoga'. To it, the mind has to be joined steadily, happily and without strain.*

The discovery of the true nature of the mind and the self by itself ends in precious joy that can be experienced only by the intellect. The sense organs have nothing to do with it. One knows about it only when one gets to experience it. None else can impart it; one has to come to it all by oneself. As it springs from within, no external force or agency can promote or plug it. There is no other joy comparable with it. Once it is availed and tasted, one can never slip back into ignorance regarding attachment and real happiness. Practice has to be continued to keep the state of mind steady to turn the temporary experience to everlasting.

This is the best summary and description available in the whole of the Vedas and the Upanishads of the height of yogic experience as achievable by the

intuitive faculty of the human mind. The poet has beautifully and effectively presented for the common man what is generally supposed to be beyond words.

The path chalked out is open to all. No basic qualifications are prescribed; nobody is barred; no ground rules imposed. Success depends only upon one's dedication and concentration. There is nothing to lose except sorrow, pain, misery and desperation.

saṅkalpaprabhavān kāmāṁś tyaktvā sarvān aśeṣataḥ  
manasaivendriyagrāmam viniyamya samantataḥ 6.24  
śanaiḥ śanair uparamed buddhyā dhṛtigr̥hītayā  
ātmasamsthām manah kṛtvā na kiṁcid api cintayet 6.25

*Abandoning without reserve all desires born of sankalpa and making use of the mind to completely ignore sense organ stimuli from all sides; with the help of the intellect held firm in the ātma through wisdom, the mind is to be gradually and completely dissolved in the innermost self. Do not think of anything else.*

Mind and intellect together form the major equipment in the practice of 'yoga'. (The role of the body ends when it is kept steady so as to keep the mind calm.)

The mind is the product of inputs from outside and impulses from within. Memories of pleasurable experiences and imagination of worldly happiness generate desires and thoughts based on them. They are no more than waves on the surface of the mind, though once a pattern of thought is established based on them, meditation is lost and the person goes on thinking about it. Steady effort is then needed to break the thought flow and the emotion behind it by ignoring it. Disturbances brought about by external stimuli through the sense organs, like sound or light, also create loss of focus.

In the depths of the mind exists peace of the innermost self. The mind is a different kind of sea in the sense its waves can be controlled if the calm within is allowed to surface. This can be achieved by constant practice. The viewfinder in this exhilarating sport is provided by true wisdom established within the intellect.

Ordinarily, the mind is in the habit of accepting impressions from outside through the sense organs, a process which is continuous for a person in the state of wakefulness. Based on these are a variety of emotions – the desires it generates through imagination from past experiences, fear factor and a lot of other passions. This leads to the mind being permanently tossed about by thought waves.

This direction of the arrow of the flow is altered by the practice of ‘yoga’. For a person who is unfamiliar with meditation, practice can be slow in progress. Besides the fact that any difficult task is best carried out if undertaken slowly and with perseverance, there are biological reasons as well. Every mental attitude is related to the release of several hormones (like adrenaline) from the ductless glands of the body. Bottling in is likely to harm the body in several ways. In short, these hormones cannot be plugged; they have to cease being produced in quantities detrimental to the body and mind. This happens when the mind is calmed gradually; adrenaline, elevated blood pressure and tension should come down naturally.

yato yato niścarati manaś cañcalam asthiram  
tatas tato niyamyaitad ātmany eva vaśam nayet 6.26

*Whichever way the unsettled and wavering mind tends to wander, it should be controlled and brought back to be with the (innermost) self.*

This is a common problem to the beginner. One who has never practiced thought control can get baffled. The mind often tends to wander.

The monkey is several hundred times more curious than man and its attention does not remain on any branch long enough. Human mind too has the same trait. It has to always occupy itself with a thought and it does not remain firm with any beyond a certain period of time; it climbs up or jumps down to something new!

But actually everybody does mind control in day-to-day life, though in varying degrees. The student preparing for an exam often finds he has wandered far away from the subject of study on the wings of a stray thought and brings back attention to the lesson. Success in the exam depends on how often and decisively he is able to do this.

Make the mind firm by patient practice, points out the Gita; not by coercion. Let it discover its true nature and function; once it finds out where it really and truly belongs and what all strengths it is born with, one would indeed be surprised!

praśāntamanasam hy enam yoginam sukham uttamam  
upaiti sāntarajasam brahmabhūtam akalmaśam 6.27

*The one whose mind has achieved total peace, whose guna of rajas has subsided, whose blemishes have been cleared away, that yogi becomes one with*

*brahma and attains the highest level of happiness; it is definite.*

*Rajas* is one of the three *gunas* (characters) in nature. It's reflection through the human mind was discussed in chapter 3, verses 37 to 40. The three gunas are also to be discussed extensively in later chapters. Blemish is anything that contributes to the feeling of separateness, because whatever is separate is not perfect. Even a successful meditation can be blemished with the feeling 'I have achieved it'. *Prasantam* is when the mind gets completely calm.

A clue to the practitioner is hidden in this statement: don't grind your teeth and swear 'I will do it'; let it happen as flowers blossom – naturally; let 'I' take a back seat right from the beginning.

yuñjann evam sadātmānam yogī vigatakalmaṣah  
sukhena brahmāsamsparśam atyantam sukham aśnute 6.28

*The yogi, thus trying to join the mind always and steadily and getting free of all kalmasha, easily comes to enjoy the highest level of happiness ensuing through being one with the brahma.*

The stress is on the eradication of all '*kalmasha*' (blemish) in one's person. Blemish in Vedanta is the feeling of being separate; it relates to ego, the delusion that creates the feeling 'I am' to the exclusion of the deeper levels of reality.

Physical pain is a must in life because without the perception of pain there is invariably neglect which would destroy the complex organs of action as well as internal organs as early as in childhood. But both physical pain and mental anguish are exclusive characteristics of the perishable material world and they have no meaning at an immortal level. In contrast, bliss is considered an emotion different from the Kshara level, and this can be experienced as one becomes an (undifferentiated) being of brahma through meditation.

To obtain pleasures from external objects one often has to pay high prices or toil much, whereas this bliss is akin to the happiness an artist or a scientist gets from a rare revelation. The difference is: the former depends on external factors whereas the latter does not depend on any external factor and can be made permanent by continued practice.

The hallmark of being in that state of oneness with brahma is:

sarvabhūtastham ātmānam sarvabhūtāni cātmani  
ikṣate yogayuktātmā sarvatra samadarśanah 6.29

*The yogayukta sees his self being seated also in all beings and all beings in his self; he sees the same everywhere.*

We get to know the physical world around us with our physical body; we recognize emotions in others in the light of our own emotions and ideas. Similarly we recognize everything as Brahma, just as there are no pots but mud if looked at from the standpoint of mud, and there are no ornaments but only gold if seen from the point of view of gold. And the True Self permeates everything when we view the world from the standpoint of the innermost reality in ourselves.

The experience of yoga is more than getting to know one's innermost reality; it incorporates the resultant worldview also. When the essence of all things is seen existing in oneself and one's own essence existing in all things, what is realized is the essence of the entire universe. The final fruit of meditation is the realization of oneself to be immortal (not through the changing conglomeration which is the body; and not by being a God-man). Those who have enjoyed it cannot be ensnared again, and nothing in the material world – even disease or death – turn them to grief anymore. If there is a goal for man it must be reaching that level and no less. The Upanishads discover that the one who meditates upon the essence of the universe becomes one with that. The Gita indicates that it is the be-all and the end-all of the process of evolution of life and everyone can reach it. Also, it is indicated that this is a 'natural becoming' and therefore accessible to all.

yo mām paśyati sarvatra sarvam ca mayi paśyati  
tasyāham na praṇaśyāmi sa ca me na praṇaśyati 6.30

*Whosoever sees Me in everything, and everything in Me (Isvara), for him I never cease to be and he too never cease to exist (in Me).*

'Isavasya Upanishad' opens with the statement '*isavasyam idam sarvam*' ('Isam' – Isvara, the basic reality or ātma of the universe – pervades everything here). To make it clearer, the Gita here also says everything resides in 'Me' (Isam, Isvara). The person who realizes this as deep conviction becomes one with that – his eternal, Immortal Self. The worldly 'I' subjugated totally and refined absolutely establishes itself as the universal 'I'. This is no miracle worked out by any ritual. Meditation helps one stand 'erect' and walk freely, as a child is helped by a parental finger to get up and steady itself on its feet.

sarvabhūtasthitam yo māṁ bhajaty ekatvam āsthitaḥ  
sarvathā vartamānōpi sa yogī mayi vartate 6.31

*Whosoever sees Me with devotion as the One present in everything and every being, and constantly tries to be one with Me, whatever be his way and style in day to day life, he is always with Me.*

Two conclusions follow from this statement: 1. ‘*Moksha*’ (salvation, literally ‘total freedom’) is not a post-mortem affair; it refers to a way of life. 2. What matters is what a person really is and not what he does or how he lives.

Underlined is the fact that, enlightened or not, no one is greater or lesser. The nature of the presence in all is the same irrespective of whether one knows about it or not. The ‘I know; you don’t’ attitude also is the product of worldly ego or ignorance.

ātmaupamyena sarvatra samam paśyati yo/rjuna  
sukham vā yadi vā duḥkham sa yogī paramo mataḥ 6.32

*O Arjuna, the one who can recognize the ātma as everywhere and same in all this, even in pain or pleasure, he is the greatest yogi.*

Knowledge is fine, but its strength is proved only if it is remembered at the most difficult of times. It is a standing joke that man prays only when he is in trouble; at all other times he forgets! Pain also makes a person give up all concept of God altogether; he becomes so intensely aware of his physical body or his mental anguish that there is no space in his mind for anything else. Therefore the opposites of pain and pleasure present the tests to attainment of wisdom. *Jnana* (plain knowledge) is not enough; it has to be lived and acted on to be assimilated (*vijnana*). The most difficult phases for a normal person to be aware of the ātma which is the same everywhere are during these two extremes.

It is known to modern science that self-suggestion and hypnosis can alleviate body pain; the one proficient at meditation on the ātma can do the same.

Now a relevant doubt is presented:

arjuna uvāca  
yo yam yogas tvayā proktah sāmyena madhusūdana  
etasyāham na paśyāmi cañcalatvāt sthitim sthirām 6.33

*Arjuna said:*

*This ‘yoga’ of equanimity (based upon the control of mind) you presented, O Madhusudana, I am afraid, is difficult for me to be pursued consistently as mind is constantly varying by nature.*

The mind cannot be made steady enough to persevere in the effort, and even if a fleeting kind of success is attained, it is difficult to sustain it due to the same problem. ‘Isn’t it too far-fetched a dream, Krishna?’ is the simple question from Arjuna. The ‘Puranas’ (legends) are replete with instances of great ‘yogis’ being waylaid by unseemly aberrations of their minds. Some of them, blinded by anger, blew their tops and cursed innocents; one could not resist the sexual impulse and procreated in a reindeer! Another got infatuated by a dancing damsel and forgot all about his vow of celibacy! Right there in front of Arjuna, great men like Bhishma and Drona fail to maintain equanimity.

cañcalam hi manah kṛṣṇa pramāthi balavad dṛḍham  
tasyāham nigrahām manye vāyor iva suduṣkaram 6.34

*For the mind certainly wavers; it forcefully provokes (the senses); it is strong (sometimes beyond the control of the intellect); it is firmly set (by established alliances with emotions and desires); (I feel) controlling it is as tough as preventing (the movement of) air.*

There can be so many obstacles such as: ‘*Vyadhi*’ (disease), ‘*styanam*’ (loss of interest in course of time; some minds are very enthusiastic at the beginning but rapidly lose interest), ‘*samsaya*’ (doubts about the correctness of practice and / or the final goal), ‘*pramada*’ (tendency to leave halfway), ‘*alasya*’ (laziness), ‘*avirati*’ (inability to withdraw the mind from wrong, even after realizing it is wrong), ‘*bhrantidarsanam*’ (development of untrue convictions; which are very common as the human mind tends to make wrong generalizations based on emotion), ‘*alabdhabhumika*’ (disappointment; the feeling that nothing good is going to happen however much one tries) and ‘*anavastitatvam*’ (restlessness of mind as in the case of a whiff of cloud straying in the wind).

śrībhagavān uvāca  
asañśayam mahābāho mano durnigrahām calam  
abhyāsenā tu kaunteya vairāgyeṇā ca grhyate 6.35

*The Lord (of yoga) said:  
O son of Kunti, undoubtedly the mind is difficult to control and is restless,*

*but, O mighty-armed one, it can be held by abhyasa and by vairagya.*

Arjuna is addressed as ‘mighty armed’ to point out that he *can* win any powerful adversary. He is also addressed as ‘the sun of Kunti’; Kunti is supposed to be patience incarnate. So Arjuna is equipped with adequate weapons to win and with enough patience which any fighter must have in ample measure.

A fight cannot be won if the strength of the adversary is underestimated. So the first part of the verse fully accepts the problem of fickleness of the mind (as against the prowess to control it). The second half is devoted to presentation of the strategy. *Abhyasa* (undaunted practice) is advised. Try again. How is a layer of water-weeds completely covering the surface of a pond cleared? Remove some. When the rest moves in to fill the gap, remove again. The job will certainly get done.

Preparing a seat as prescribed and sitting upon it is much easier than bringing the mind to obediently concentrate. A beginner may find his Waterloo here! The teacher knows it and comes up with compassionate help. The weeds that cover the lake are stubborn; however much one sweeps them away, they come back with a vengeance and cover up the clearing. The beginner’s effort to concentrate is marred by landslides of memories from past experiences. They bring in torrents of thoughts and anxieties. The mouth and the eyes the sense organs cannot be physically clamped shut; they will continue to file a steady stream of inputs as usual. And whatever concentration achieved goes in the wake of all this!

‘*Raga*’ means color. Persistent colored thoughts that mar clear vision are held by pleasing emotions like romance and attractive sensory experiences; during meditation they are to be ignored by dispassion. The colors vanish enabling the mind to attain ‘*vairagya*’ (color-free state).

In terms of psychology, most upheavals of the mind are conditioned reflexes. If the mind gets unconditioned and independent, the disturbances subside.

It is assured that patient practice will yield results.

asam̄yatātmanā yogo duṣprāpa iti me matih  
vaśyātmanā tu yatata śakyo/vāptum upāyataḥ 6.36

*It is sure that the state of yoga cannot be achieved without control of oneself. The one who has won over the mind can achieve this state if he tries well (along the lines prescribed).*

Aren’t we accustomed to giving up various material comforts for achieving

our ends? The student getting ready to face an exam, the politician facing an election, the artist preparing for a stage show, the scientist pursuing a critical experiment that may lead to a new finding – all these give up a lot of physical comforts and pleasures without as much as a single thought. Identification with one's innermost self is a precious goal. There must be determined effort at meditation – simply giving up a type of food, a drink, a game of tennis, a movie and so on will not work.

‘Yoga’ is the state after the removal of the curtain between the worldly ‘I’ and one’s innermost self. The very faculties of the worldly ‘I’ become useful equipment for catalyzing the fusion.

arjuna uvāca  
ayatiḥ śraddhayopeto yogāc calitamānasah  
aprāpya yogasamśiddhim kām gatim kṛṣṇa gacchati 6.37  
kacchin nobhayavibhraṣṭaś chinnābhram iva naśyati  
apratiṣṭho mahābāho vimūḍho brahmaṇah pathi 6.38

*Arjuna said:*

*O Krishna, what is the fate of the one who, after embracing the path of yoga in all earnestness, fails to complete the effort and goes off track due to insufficient control over the mind?*

*Fallen from both, does he not, O mighty-armed, perish like a dismembered cloud, support-less and off-course in this path of identification with the brahma?*

One has a small world of oneself here on earth that one knows well with all its pleasures and attractions; Arjuna sees the yogi's path as change of direction for another level of eternal happiness; its detachment destroying focus and strength in this world and diluting one's go-getting capacity. His doubt is: what if one, after giving up the passionate drive in the world, fail to reach ultimate union? Can one return to his ordinary existence?

Balance in life is indeed difficult to understand and hard to implement. If one's thinking is further preconditioned by existing beliefs, it becomes almost impossible.

We are all accustomed to our own individual ways of living and thought. Changing the pattern of thought and life style always has danger of losing all that we have strived to earn and protect till now. For people whose struggles for wealth and comfort have been fruitful till then due to sankalpa and craving; renunciation would apparently mean paucity of driving force and material loss.

etan me samśayam kṛṣṇa chettum arhasy aśeṣataḥ  
tvadanyaḥ samśayasyāya chettā na hy upapadyate 6.39

*O Krishna, you deserve to be requested to completely remove this doubt of mine because there is none other than you (in the whole world) duly equipped to remove my doubt.*

Krishna is Arjuna's comrade and boyhood friend, his partner in every prank and play and now he is his charioteer in a great war that is to begin; so he is the most-suited counselor to be approached for help to eradicate all anxiety (pertaining to the war outside). The ātma, one's only true friend and the one who knows everything about oneself, is one's only true counselor to eradicate all anxieties and inner struggles related to the path to oneself (philosophically). Arjuna is now about to stake everything including his very life in a big gamble (both philosophically within his mind and story wise outside).

śrībhagavān uvāca  
pārtha naiveha nāmutra vināśas tasya vidyate  
na hi kalyāṇakṛt kaścid durgatim tāta gacchati 6.40

*The Lord (of the universe) said:*

*O Arjuna, he (the one who fails to adhere to the practice of yoga) does not suffer any loss (destruction) here or after. O son (a very endearing way of address), be assured that the kalyanakrit never meets with bad future, ever.*

The guru is supposed to consider his disciple as his own son. Philosophically, as the ātma of the universe is the father of every entity (as will be seen later) Arjuna's worldly 'I' is considered the son of his innermost True Self.

'Kalyanakrit' means one who strives to be virtuous. Understanding everything in its true sense would give a rare balance of mind and total happiness which are a lot more precious than craving for material comfort. And even if it apparently gives an impression that a person may lose if his drive based on selfish passion is compromised, in actuality that drive would only get stronger and more fulfilling if it is transferred to virtuous considerations of oneself and others. It was also stated before that the material world was not to be given up. Further, the one who sees abundance and strives to be virtuous will continue to get abundance and will not perish either now or in the future. It is a definite fact and the observed way of the world. Therefore the strongest

assurance: ‘*O son, be assured that the kalyanakrit never meets with bad future, ever.*’

Terms ‘here’ and ‘there’ are used not only to indicate the past, present and future, but also existence on this side of death and beyond it. Arjuna, a firm believer of rebirths, also indicates that he wishes to know what will happen after death to such a person who stops his practice of yoga. In the Gita Arjuna’s own concepts regarding heaven, rebirth and so on are not questioned but left as such (without further explanation or correction) because the story line, as we saw earlier, is blended with Vedantic ideas to produce combined thought. However, the Gita points out in multiple places that rebirths only prolong a painful process without union, and even heaven has a beginning and an end; so the better option is to forget them both and strive to identify one’s self with the True Self of the universe which is eternal.

prāpya puṇyakṛtāṁ lokān uṣitvā sāśvatīḥ samāḥ  
śucinām śrīmatām gehe yogabhraṣṭo/bhijāyate 6.41

*Even for the one who tries hard but fails to be successful in the path of yoga, he attains punyalokas (the worlds of the good people), dwells there for very long years and is born again in the houses of the pure and the blessed.*

The verse points out that even if there is a system of rebirth the yogi will have only gains. It is also to be noted here that no particular clan, caste or religion is mentioned, only virtue.

athavā yoginām eva kule bhavati dhīmatām  
etad dhi durlabhataram loke janma yad īdrśam 6.42

*Or, he is even born in the generation of a wise yogi; verily, a birth like this is very difficult to obtain in this world.*

Here again, no caste or religion is mentioned. ‘Kulam’ literally means generation, but for a guru, his family is inclusive of the entire population of his disciples.

However, all people born in good families may not become virtuous. This verse also does not mean that the greatness of a particular family is to be considered above the person's own virtue.

tatra tam buddhisamyogam labhate paurvadehikam

yataste ca tato bhūyah samsiddhau kurunandana 6.43  
pūrvābhyaśena tenaiva hriyate hy avaśo/pi saḥ  
jijñāsur api yogasya śabdabrahmātivartate 6.44

*There he comes to be united with the wisdom acquired in his former life and strives more than before to become one with his true self.*

*By that former practice he is forcibly pulled to yoga even despite himself (even if obstacles make it difficult for him). The mere yearning to know the nature of yoga itself helps one overtake the knowledge of the (entire) ‘karma kānda’ (prescriptions for action) in the Vedas.*

The moment the very urge to know the basic nature of ‘yoga’ is born, one reaches beyond the auspicious results promised by the Vedas for performing the whole gamut of rituals prescribed therein. This statement is clear regarding the supremacy of yoga.

Yoga is a realistic experience beyond all words and rituals. The Gita, of course, does not ascribe much credibility to the complicated rituals the ‘karma kānda’ of the Vedas prescribes. While upholding the primacy of realization as against textual knowledge, it has already been said that wells and ponds are not needed to quench anyone’s thirst when the whole world is flooded. A wise man even if he is placed in a very hard and dirty situation lives clean and happy.

prayatnād yatamānas tu yogī samśuddhakilbiṣaḥ  
anekajanmasamsiddhas tato yāti parām gatim 6.45

*But (in comparison with the path prescribed by the ‘karma kānda’ of the Vedas), the yogi who strives with assiduity, purified from blemishes and perfected (gradually) through many births, then attains the highest goal.*

If one takes a close look at the blueprint of the path of evolution beginning with the smallest particle of matter, it can be seen that it has been a long way through atoms joining together to form molecules, molecules joining to form macromolecules, proteins, nutrients, single-celled life-forms and so on to man. ‘Jeeva’, in every individual’s case, has undergone countless transformations. Even after man came into existence, there have been many stages – the caveman, the stone-age man, the metal-age man to the present one. The Gita provides us with the map to the easiest route ahead; and assures that every man, without any distinction, can make it to success.

tapasvibhyo/dhiko yogī jñānibhyopi matodhikah  
karmibhyaś cādhiko yogī tasmād yogī bhavārjuna 6.46

*The yogi is higher than the tapasvi (one who has taken to the path of penance), the jnani (the intellectual) and also the karmi (the activist); therefore become a yogi, O Arjuna.*

The yogi is better than all. The path of penance often deviates from actual life; penances are extras whereas the yogi performs whatever penances when and where necessary in and as part of actual life. Intellectuals are great but the yogi puts that intellect into practice in his very life itself. Activists work for worldly causes and even for spirituality but the yogi lives what he preaches and his life is the activism, and he does not have any sectarian tendencies. Furthermore, through the practice of dhyana (meditation), the yogi can, from the very first step itself, hold his viewfinder steady on that final goal. That is why it was said (in the previous stanza) that the moment the very urge to know the basic nature of yoga is born, one reaches beyond the auspicious results promised by the ‘karma kānda’ of the Vedas (and also the manual for action prescribed by all religions).

yoginām api sarveṣāṁ madgatenāntarātmanā  
śraddhāvān bhajate yo mām sa me yuktatamo mataḥ 6.47

*Among all yogis, he who devotes Me with total sraddha, his self never wandering elsewhere; he is the best accomplished.*

One has to be always vigilant to insist ‘no, not there; here!’ if the mind is straying, it is to be taken back and brought to one’s innermost reality. ‘Sraddha’ is just another word for this interested attention. It makes the emotional frame to be effectively and stably focused (concentrating) on the innermost self. ‘Bhaj’ means full devotion, washing away all bodily ego and vanity in the process. ‘Yoga’ happens when this devotion and sraddha are successful.

The most appropriate subject of concentration is identified too. Even today, different schools suggest varying objects for meditation, ranging from symbols, kundalini, various Gods, idols and ‘mantras’. Why go for small places when there is a whole empire to be won appears to be intent of the smile on Sage Vyasa’s face. Make the ultimate reality of the universe itself the subject of meditation. One who has mastered the ability to concentrate (whatever be the object) can easily bring his prowess to bear upon the final highest subject. Anyone grasping the rudiments of this exercise will learn to sift his thoughts to

suit his aim.

Dhyana (meditation) as discussed in this chapter is the most comfortable, convenient and the shortest exercise for Arjuna (indeed for all of mankind) to end all sorrow, enjoy life, enthusiastically indulge in action that does not taint and to help realize the successful culmination of the long and arduous process of biological evolution.

## Chapter 7

# Yoga of Vijnana

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Knowledge is the most important in life but alone it would never suffice to make one successful. One becomes a person of wisdom only when knowledge couples with experiences in life. While knowledge can be imparted to others, wisdom cannot be done so but must be acquired by the person himself through learning to live according to that knowledge – through improvisation. For such an approach it is imperative to have advanced knowledge about what role the Supreme Entity (Paramātma) plays behind the working of the universe. This inquiry brings more information on prakṛti and how it provides the framework of the complex material world, and more light on the true nature of the Supreme Entity. The description also outlines how to convert the knowledge (*jnana*) at each stage into wisdom (*vijnana*).

śrībhagavān uvāca  
mayy āsaktamanāḥ pārtha yogam yuñjan madāśrayaḥ  
asamśayaṁ samagram mām yathā jñāsyasi tac chṛṇu 7.1

*The Mahesvara said:*

*O Arjuna, the one who practices yoga with unflinching attachment to Me and approaching me with total devotion realizes Me wholly and indubitably. Listen to me to know how.*

Sri Aravinda Maharshi comments that from this chapter onwards we enter into the core of the Gita. Like Ramanujacharyar, Aravind Maharshi also states that devotion is the character of wisdom. Nataraja Guru visualizes ‘mayyasaktamana’ as a condition in which the entire mortal mind is filled with the realization of the Supreme. Jnanadevan in his *Jnaneswary* sees wisdom as special enlightenment that helps outlive sensory knowledge.

Translated in simple terms, it all means that the one who has his mind fully attached to the Supreme One, considers It with the highest devotion and

concentrates on It with the ardent desire to *yoga* (being in union), along with offering constant dedication by engaging in action (*karma*) with the *yajna* concept (action correlating with the welfare of the entire biosphere) will definitely become capable of completing his wisdom (*anubhava jnana*) in the subject.

jñānam te/ham savijñānam idam vakṣyāmy aśeṣataḥ  
yaj jñātvā neha bhūyo/nyaj jñātavyam avaśīṣyate 7.2

*I'll impart fully and precisely what is to be known by you with total conviction, knowing which nothing would remain in this world to be known further.*

There is nothing to be known beyond the Paramātmā. It is hinted that since this is the most important, it requires the full attention of the listener. This cue itself shows that what is about to be presented is pregnant with deeper implications and hence may not be easy to grasp.

There is mention of this supreme knowledge in the Upanishads.

*What is to be completely known is that by knowing which the unheard of is heard about, the indefinite becomes definite, and the unknowable or unknown becomes known.* (Chandogya Upanishad: 6.1.3.) *It is the self that should be realized - should be heard of, contemplated on and meditated upon. One turns wise by the realization of the self - through hearing about it, contemplation and meditation alone.* (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.4.5) In Mundaka Upanishad, Shaunaka approaches sage Angiras and asks “By knowing what will everything be known?” to which Angiras answers that there are two types of knowledge - *parā vidya* and *aparā vidya*.

*The four Vedas, shiksha, kalpa, vyakarana, nirukta, chandas, jyotisha are all aparā knowledge. Only knowledge about Akshara pertains to parā knowledge.* (Mundaka Upanishad 1.1.5) (First of the six auxiliary disciplines of the Vedas, *Shiksha* deals with phonetics, phonology and morphophonology. *Kalpa*, second of the six auxiliary disciplines deals with ritual; *Vyakarana*, the third, deals with grammar; *nirukta*, the fourth, deals with etymology; *chandas*, the fifth, deals with rules of versification, and *jyotisha*, the last, deals with astrology. Present day science which is a study of the materialistic world also falls into the *aparā vidya* category.) It is to be noted that the Bhagavad Gita does not advocate the *parā* (knowledge about Akshara) alone neglecting the *aparā* (limited and earthly). Rather it states that both *parā* and *aparā* knowledge are important. That which is *aparā* must develop into *parā* so that both are incorporated in one. It is

not possible to realize the *parā* (nature of the Akshara) without the help of the *aparā* (worldly nature). For instance, one cannot know the teachings in books and the findings of sages without learning the language and its structure. How can one study the universe except through diligent observation of and careful reflection upon the basic phenomena in nature?

Even though science has made miraculous progress, knowledge about the universal substrate (Akshara), and the basic life force behind the whole scenario (Isvara) are still scarce. Why is it that in this world the people who possess such wisdom are so scarce is what is explained next.

manuṣyāṇāṁ sahasreṣu kaścid yatati siddhaye  
yatatām api siddhānāṁ kaścin māṁ vetti tattvataḥ 7.3

*Only one among thousands of men puts the effort to know Me, out of which, despite their efforts, only one (among thousands) realizes Me truly.*

One can only take a horse to water, one cannot force it drink; likewise the knowledge in the Upanishads can only guide us to truth so that we extend the right efforts to strive for this wisdom, which we alone can put forth in order to help ourselves. These poor conversion ratios are not in the least meant to discourage us. One may not reach in perfect union and harmony overnight, but every step taken in the effort helps us to get rid of great miseries that abound us as mortals we are, and hence is precious.

This verse also tells us that the outcome of our actions (evolution) now depends on our will. Being human beings we have almost reached the threshold of total awareness. We have the freedom to decide for ourselves – whether to turn back, lead a life without any progress or move forward. These three paths are further demonstrated in detail in later chapters. The Supreme Life Force enjoys full and complete independence and it is in our freedom of choice to realize it as our own true self or discard that knowledge.

The desire to evolve is explicit in our mortal life. Then what makes this supreme realization so difficult? How and why is it hidden? That brings us to the discussion about the deeper knowledge of the in-between template of hidden nature and its framework within the human body.

bhūmir āpo/nalo vāyuḥ kham mano buddhir eva ca  
ahamkāra itīyam me bhinnā prakṛtir aṣṭadhā 7.4  
apareyam itas tvanyāṁ prakṛtiṁ viddhi me parām  
jīvabhūtāṁ mahābāho yayedam dhāryate jagat 7.5

*My prakṛti (obvious nature) is split into eight: bhūmi, jalam, vayu, agni, akasa, mind, intellect and ahamkara.*

*Know that this obvious nature is aparā. The nature which is distinct from this, on which all life and entities in this universe is based on, is My parā nature.*

The three levels of cosmology in Vedanta are:

1. *Kshara* (Perishable) – the ever changing world where there is both origin and destruction – the world that we perceive. *Aparā prakṛti* is the (obvious) nature of this world.

2. *Akshara* (Imperishable) – the substrate or medium from which *Kshara* is born and gets dissolved back to. It is indestructible and cannot be cut, destroyed or perceived. *Parā prakṛti* is the (hidden) nature of this substrate, and it acts by resonance through *Avyakta* (the fabric of space) reflecting its dialectical nature to the *Kshara* world.

3. *Isvara* (the Supreme Being) - the *Paramātma*.

All obvious phenomena belong to *aparā* nature - *bhūmi* (solid), *jalam* (liquid), *vayu* (gas), i.e., the solid-liquid-gaseous phases of matter, *akasa* (space) and *agni* (radiation). They together with the mind, the intellect, and the subjective ‘I’ (*ahamkara*, the base on which the mind-intellect-combine works as a different entity), together comprise the human body.

The hidden or *parā* nature is the characteristic nature of *Akshara*. The fabric of space (*Avyakta*) which, being a continuous substrate, can only be in one of the three states - *vikasa* (expanding), *sankocha* (contracting), or *sama* (balanced). These represent the *rajas*, *tamas* and *sattva* gunas respectively. These three gunas form the basis of expansion-contraction patterns (oscillations) of *Avyakta*. (The expansion cycle is the present phase resulting from the big bang.) The same type of oscillations forms the basis for resonant wave patterns at the subatomic level resulting in the formation of wave-matter i.e., atoms and macromolecules. The hidden nature of these three gunas and its interactions which result in forming the resonance specifics in *Avyakta* is called *parā* nature. (Recollect that *Avyakta* and its *parā* nature are together called *Akshara*.) Since these gunas or expansion-contraction patterns are opposite in nature, the *parā* nature which forms the basis for apparent (*aparā*) nature is dialectical.

etadyonīni bhūtāni sarvāṇīty upadhāraya  
aham kṛtsnasya jagataḥ prabhavaḥ pralayas tathā 7.6

*Be aware that everything born anywhere in the universe is from this one*

(*parā*) Mother Nature. Therefore everything has manifested from Me (through it), and everything also finally dissolves in Me.

Before the primordial pulsation or the big bang, there is only One entity; Akshara is hidden within the universal soul and everything is One (Advaita). After Akshara (Mother Nature) manifests as different from the Supreme Entity and is seeded by the latter, all matter-waves form. (Seeding and formation of the universe is described in chapter 14, verses 3 to 5.) Therefore every entity has its beginning in the universal soul. The matter-waves build up macromolecules and form associations resulting in the obvious (*aparā*) nature of the material world. (Prakṛti or nature itself is of two types – the apparent *aparā* and the hidden *parā*.) Finally near to the end of the expansion phase of the universe, every matter-wave dissolves back into the fabric of space to end the cycle. At the end of all these cycles or after numerous universes, *parā* prakṛti itself becomes one with the Paramātma; thus everything becomes the One Entity from which it had all started. It is mentioned in later verses that both these entities are eternal and indestructible.

Therefore it is the Paramātma which manifests in all beings, alive or carcass. It is the Supreme Entity which is the basis for the energy of the sense-memory-intellect faculties which is why these are held as precious. But the *ahamkara* (ego) sprouting from the dialectics of the *Akshara* acts like a cover that conceals from our identity the true essence of our life. The higher aim in life therefore must be to rise above that cover. The Supreme One is the basis of life in everything and hence is the foundation of the co-existent elements of this universe.

At the level of the *parā* prakṛti there is ‘jeeva’ and ‘remembrance of patterns’, which in turn dictate apparent nature of the Kshara. Akshara is the abode of ‘jeeva’ and inclinations. ‘World’ at this higher level means not only the basis for the material nature but also the entire arena of experiences permitted by the faculties of senses, the emotions experienced by the mind and the thoughts and ideas woven by the intellect. And everything including the Akshara level is pervaded by the Supreme Being.

mattah parataram nānyat kiṁcid asti dhanamjaya  
mayi sarvam idam protam sūtre maṇigaṇā iva 7.7

*Nowhere is there anything more supreme than Me. Just like various gems are garlanded on a string, so is the entire universe held on Me.*

This verse stands out for its poetical beauty as well as gravity of thought. The Supreme is the permanent One, true and ultimate. A heap of beads cannot be considered as a garland. Here countless beads are made and intricately strung to form the beautiful garland. Are these beads permanent? No. They are born, grow and wither away. New beads come to take their places. The string is permanent while the beads are transient and only a person who knows this truth is capable of enjoying the beauty of the whole garland. The path to supreme knowledge is complete only when one also comes to understand that this garland cannot be worn by one filled with ego and vanity.

Well, are there any clues to the make-up of this garland? Is the great thread that holds it explicit anywhere? What are the evidences for its existence?

raso/ham apsu kaunteya prabhāsmi śāśisūryayoh  
pranavah̄ sarvavedesu śabdah̄ khe pauruṣam nr̄su 7.8

*See Me as the rasa of water, (the source of) radiance of the sun and the moon, the primordial root syllable Om within all the Vedas, (the secret of the existence of) sound in the sky and (the source of) ability (paurusha) in men.*

Each specific thing in nature is qualified by its own *rasa* (essence) without which it would cease to be it. That *rasa* (essence) is dictated by parā nature and the Supreme Entity is the basis for that essential essence of everything. Radiance is the most defining characteristic of the solar system. All sound waves from the lowest to the highest are based on the ātma, as also the abilities and potentials of human beings. The monosyllable ‘Om’ denotes resonance of Akshara and encompasses the three states of oscillations in the universe – the ‘ā’ sound in ‘Om’ symbolizes the *rajo guna* (the tendency to spread), the ‘ū’ sound signifies *tamo guna* (the tendency to contract), and the ‘ma’ sound signifies *sattva guna* (the tendency to remain stable and balanced). The sound waves and the cyclic potency of all the pulsing energy fields of Akshara is based on this resonance. Each sound is a rhythm, a wave. The function of all the rhythms in Akshara right from nuclear transmutations to sound waves in the air and including the spectrum of electromagnetic rays is based on the Supreme One, so also are human beings and their energetic ability. The duty of anything and everything is part of the functioning of the universe and therefore based on the Supreme Being, and is justified as *yajna* in *karma*. Creation is not just the making of the diverse forms of matter in the universe but also the bond between all these beings.

puṇyo gandhah pṛthivyāṁ ca tejas cāsmi vibhāvasau  
jīvanāṁ sarvabhūteṣu tapaś cāsmi tapasviṣu 7.9

*I am represented by the chaste and pure fragrance of this earth, the heat in fire, the vitality of all beings and the self-restraint in all sages.*

The idea in the earlier verse is further elucidated. The Supreme Being is described as the basic entity for that quality in all matter in the universe which helps develop the various links between different formations. Heat – the very essence of fire without which there cannot be any life, as well as the austerity of the ascetics which determines their righteous crux, are all strung on this thread (Me). The Supreme is the life secret of all beings hence omnipresent.

(It is to be remembered that the verses do not mean *Isvara* is this thing and that thing, instead these are all evidences and clues that help understand that everything is linked to It.) bījam mām sarvabhūtānāṁ viddhi pārtha sanātanam  
buddhir buddhimatāṁ asmi tejasvināṁ aham 7.10

*Realize that I am the eternal origin of all entities and I represent the wisdom and splendor of the intelligent and the splendid respectively.*

When it is specified that the Supreme is like a string of which the gist of the spiritually intelligent and the physically splendid – their wisdom and prowess – are components, it feels just like a continuation of the earlier verses; but the statement that the Supreme One is the eternal origin of all beings leads to an altogether different area of thought.

The Supreme Entity is the eternal origin of everything in the universe. The big bang is initiated with the Supreme One triggering the dialectical Akshara, causing the fabric of space (*Avyakta*) to spread as a spiral. Endless varieties of wave actions and their combinations are generated in *Avyakta* based on its three *gunas*. The state of the matter thus given birth to continuously changes with the change in consistency of this background expanding obscure medium. These differences manifest as variations in frequency, amplitude and energy levels of these wave forms which we call matter.

It is this diversity which helps standing wave forms – particles of matter – to develop bonds between themselves, attract or repulse and even de-construct and re-align. But as *Avyakta* expands further bringing about continuous variation in its consistency, these associations and bonds are affected. By the time the expansion cycle is complete, all matter generated is dissolved. The reverse cycle is a big-crunch, in the process of which, again, matter of a different description

(mirror-matter) is produced but these too are nullified as the crunch reaches the pre-big-bang stage. Thus one beat of the entire universe is completed.

The Supreme Being is the very basis and reason for the creation of the universe. All standing wave forms (matter) in the universe, small or big, are harmonically attuned to the rhythm of the cycle beginning with the big-bang, the biggest primary – *bīja spanda*. Further explanation regarding the cyclic character of the functioning of the universe is provided in later chapters.

balam̄ balavatām̄ cāham̄ kāmarāgavivarjitaṁ  
dharmāviruddho bhūteṣu kāmo/smi bharatarṣabha 7.11

*Visualize Me as the strength of the powerful whose power is devoid of kāma and rāga, and kāma in accordance with dharma in all beings.*

The splendor of the splendid and the self-control of the nonattached are identified to be strong evidences of the Supreme itself. Power is strong only if it is devoid of *kāma-raga* (*kāma* is the attraction to sensual pleasure and material objects, while *rāga* is the passion one has towards worldly possessions).

The powerful only has power when their actions are not driven by *kāma*. It is also mentioned that *kāma* in accordance with dharma (path of right action) is also noble, giving an indication that the material world is not to be discarded. Without *kāma*, human race would be long extinct!

One small verse explains everything about power and love! No further directives are needed.

ye caiva sātvikā bhāvā rājasās tāmasāś ca ye  
matta eveti tān viddhi na tv aham̄ teṣu te mayi 7.12

*Know that all states of being – whether sattvik, rajasa or tamasa – stem from Me; though I am not within them, these are within Me.*

The Supreme One manifests through Akshara using the latter's dialectical nature based on the *gunas*, giving birth to everything in the universe. Paramātma is therefore omnipresent as the sea is present in all the tides, though no single tide could ever contain the entire sea. All states of being – the *sattvik*, the *rajasa* and the *tamasa* – are born from the Supreme One though It is not contained by any of these characteristics of the parā prakṛti.

The essence of dialectics being the presence of the opposite in any development, the entire milieu of the paradox of the phenomenon called the

universe allows the multiplicity of unrighteous desires and impious tendencies which is unavoidable. Every wave has to have a trough as well as a crest. The good and the bad are the phenomenal characteristics essential for the process of conceiving that which is single as dual and also to later on be revised as unified itself. Without this knowledge it is difficult to decipher the unified principle behind all the characteristic differences of numerous entities.

tribhir guṇamayair bhāvair ebhiḥ sarvam idam jagat  
mohitam nābhijānāti mām ebhyah param avyayam 7.13

*This entire universe is deluded by the expression of the three gunas; (which is why) I who am beyond this (untouched by it) and imperishable remain generally unknown.*

If God is the ultimate truth of all goodness, wisdom and mercy, then why did It create the circumstances for injustice and ignorance is the question that reverberates throughout all religions (as also among atheists). According to Christianity and Islam, Devil and Iblīs have been created only to test mankind of its perseverance. Religions postulate hell and heaven as the wages of good and bad are not found being paid in good and proper measure on earth. Those who believe that the universe is an illusion (*māya*) acquit God saying if one mistakes a rope for a snake, the rope cannot be obviously blamed for it. Still, one may have doubts unsettled regarding the circumstance about the creation of misapprehension putting the very role of God in suspicion. For instance, why was a situation for mistaking the rope as a serpent created? The atheists do not believe in ‘God’ because they are not satisfied with the descriptions provided and they want better alternatives.

Vedanta goes beyond religious concepts to explain that evil and ignorance are inevitable for the creation of this universe as both these are evolved from the three qualities (*gunas*) of the rhythmic vibes in the imperishable Akshara. Creation is dialectical and both the pros and cons of everything come up. None of these can be discarded as illusory. One must exist in this mixture of the good and the evil concepts and realize the Self by doing *karma* along the path of *dharma*.

A permanent solution to all miseries in life cannot be attained just by studying the perishable universe (*Kshara*). One needs to transgress beyond the duality of this perishable world and reach beyond the limits of the imperishable (*Akshara*) also to know the Eternal Self, the union to which is achievable while rooted in the *Kshara* and by making use of the same perishable material world.

daivī hy eṣā guṇamayī mama māyā duratyayā  
mām eva ye prapadyante māyām etāṁ taranti te 7.14

*My māya (specter of delusion), this goddess-like Nature, flourishing on the basis of the (three) gunas, is indeed forceful and very difficult to tide over. (However) Those who devote themselves to Me shall be able to surmount this māya.*

(That which phenomenally exists in It, just like the blue in the sky, is māya, the subjective reality of the Supreme Entity. The word *māya* literally means delusion. Here it means the cover of parā nature that conceals the True Self, with the former's inherent duality born from the three gunas of Akshara.) One could go beyond this phenomenal shield (phenomenal because it is the hidden nature of Akshara) only if we wield the weapon of true wisdom with enough clout derived from total dedication to the Paramātma.

To complete the picture, the aspect of ignorance is also mentioned:

na māṁ duṣkṛtino mūḍhāḥ prapadyante narādhamāḥ  
māyayā/pahṛtajñānā āśuram bhāvam āśritāḥ 7.15

*The wrong-doers, the ignorant, the degraded and those who have been robbed of their wisdom by māya betake to the nature of the demoniac and hence do not dedicate themselves to Me.*

The word *yajna* means action in the interest of the entire universe. Pursuits made for one's own material happiness which are contradictory to the interest of the rest of the world are considered wrong, and the mental temperament which refuses to give up such a course of action is adjudged to amount to debilitation. However much learned that person is otherwise, Vedanta calls him ignorant. One who believes that the material world is the only truth is being taken for a ride by *māya*, forbidding him from access to the ultimate truth and the Real Self. The sense organs are godly in nature, and if they serve to make one realize that one should not be a slave to such stuck frames of mind, such disposition is *deva* (divine). When the same sense organs sow the seeds of craving in the mind without giving any space to wisdom, the disposition is *asura* (demoniac) in nature. More about divine and demoniac natures are explained in detail in the sixteenth chapter.

caturvidhā bhajante māṁ janāḥ sukṛtino/rjuna  
ārto jijñāsur arthārthī jñānī ca bharatarṣabha 7.16

*Four types of pious people - those who are distressed with diseases and so on, the seekers of knowledge, the pursuers of worldly pleasures, and men of wisdom – render their devotion unto Me.*

*Bhajan* (recitation of hymns and prayers) does not mean a hysterical commotion seen commonly these days, but it is a medium to dedicate the self completely unto the Supreme One and to concentrate on it. The men belonging to these above mentioned four categories become pious only because they have been able to overlook their own worldly self at least rudimentarily. In a sense there is no one born as a human being who does not belong to any one of these categories at some time during their life.

teṣāṁ jñānī nityayukta ekabhaktir viśiṣyate  
priyo hi jñānino/tyartham aham sa ca mama priyah 7.17

*Among them the man of wisdom – the yogi who is steadily devoted to Me – is special; and since I am always close (dear) to him, so he is to Me.*

Love devoid of preconditions is considered transparent and sacred. The man of wisdom always concentrates on the Supreme One and surrenders his self wholly and completely with the utmost dedication without expecting anything in return. He is the performer of all action but at the same time he is least worried about any worldly concerns and is thus free from all burdens whatsoever by his mindset. His devotion makes his self inseparable from the Supreme Self.

udārāḥ sarva evaite jñānī tv ātmava me matam  
āsthitaḥ sa hi yuktātmā mām evānuttamāṁ gatim 7.18

*All these men are worthy though I am of the opinion that the man of wisdom and I are not separate entities as he is completely occupied in self-realization of Me as the highest attainment.*

Here the self of the man of wisdom equals the Supreme Self, for he is incessantly trying to establish and maintain the pull in the realization of the Self through selfless devotion, dedication and purity of thought, resulting in the experience of complete freedom from all burdens.

One may wonder as to what happens to the persons belonging to the other three categories? At least some among these will reach a stage of realization of the True Self as their increasing knowledge gradually heightens at each step of karma and dedication, finally touching the level of ultimate wisdom. The possibility of slowly increasing curiosity of the other groups of men attaining this knowledge as they get immersed in correct action also cannot be ruled out.

No intermediary like a sorcerer, priest or any other can help to attain this state. There is no special device that can be crafted and employed for the purpose; one's body, mind and intellect are the only devices available. It is silly to perceive God as a person who may be easily flattered with one's futile offerings of wealth or sacrifices and vainglorious display of prayers and salutations.

bahūnām janmanām ante jñānavān mām prapadyate  
vāsudevaḥ sarvam iti sa mahātmā sudurlabhaḥ 7.19

*The one trekking the path of wisdom, after countless births (generations), realizes that all is Vasudeva and becomes one with Me. Such great souls are indeed very rare.*

Vasudeva means the light of life behind all living beings. Sage Vyasa explains the word as ‘*sattva visuddha*’ or pure essence. Ramanuja says that it is possible to perceive everything in this universe as Vasudeva without differentiating it as illusion or reality.

Evolution of life is a slow process. It had taken millions of years for all living things to gradually shed the deficiencies and deformities to attain the levels of perfection eventually enjoyed by them. Amidst this, man is mentally and physically equipped to attain identification with the Supreme One. He also has the potential to accelerate, at will, his evolution towards it. But the freedom that such a potential provides allows him to tread the opposite direction as well. This verse is optimistic in note and could be taken as an encouragement that man should make full use of his potential in the highest direction.

kāmais tais tair hṛtajñānāḥ prapadyante/nyadevatāḥ  
tam tam niyamam āsthāya prakṛtyā niyatāḥ svayā 7.20

*Those divested of rational thinking due to diverse desires induced by their individual natures worship lesser devata (various Gods) acclimatizing to the respective rites and rituals already in force.*

Minds of men become trapped in several uncontrollable mundane desires. Stuck with such materialistic urges they worship not the Supreme Entity but results of primeval imagination supposed to gratify worldly desires of the worshipper, following rites and rituals specified by so-called tradition.

To appease different Gods, special forms of worship and rituals come into existence from time to time, along with many complicated rituals, sacrifices, *poojas* and *yajnas*. Each particular mode of worship cultivates strong emotional attachment and people are fastened to it as if struck with a mental imbalance or caught up in a hurricane. This state is described as ‘compulsion’ by psychiatrists. This way is different from that of the realization of the Paramātma but people tread the former path due to sheer ignorance. The pious and curious are also susceptible to be enraptured to such side routes.

yo yo yāṁ yāṁ tanum̄ bhaktah̄ śraddhayārcitum icchatī  
tasyācalāṁ śraddhāṁ tām̄ eva vidadhāmy aham 7.21

*Whosoever form any devotee desires to worship with faith – that (same) faith of his I provide (allow) to be (firm and) unflinching.*

*Yadbhavo tat bhavati* (you become whatever you think you are) is a psychological reality. Our quintessential nature dominates our thoughts which is the reason why we emerge successful in achieving something we so firmly desire. (A contradicting possibility also opens up: whenever someone thinks and contemplates on the desirous ruin of an enemy, he would also be doomed in the like fashion. It is often said that if we continuously abuse any person, he will be eventually relieved of that defect while it gets transferred into our being).

The essence of all *vasanas* (tendencies) through which life passed in evolution till now are present in modern man. But, fortunately for us, this bothersome bundle co-exists with the urge to unite with the nature of the Supreme Self. If any part of the former intervenes in the progress of the latter, the pilgrimage is stalled at that point.

Our mind by its true nature always displays the tendency of dedication, which is endowed to it by the Paramātma. Just like a climber which grows stout and holds firmer on to which it clings to, the human mind attaches itself to the Supreme Entity. Nevertheless, the same urge will make it climb on and get firmly attached to any apparently reliable but lesser-lasting post! That is why people get stuck with idol worship, God-men and various other lesser God concepts.

It is also stated in this verse that unfortunately, Isvara does not mess with our freedom of choice even when they are openly stupid!

sa tayā śraddhayā yuktaś tasyāradhanam īhate  
labhate ca tataḥ kāmān mayaivah vihitān hi tān 7.22

*He who, endued with that faith, engages in the worship of that Devata obtains desire-fulfillments; all these being ordained, indeed, by (the reason being) Me (alone).*

All karma (actions) has its roots in brahma (*karma brahmodbhavam viddhi* – verse 3.15). Fundamental energy for all action stems from the Paramātma-Akshara combine. This is also the basis for all experiences too. Again, the ability to concentrate is Its gift, so dividends are available. Hence, whatever fulfillment is obtained, it accrues from the ātma itself, though its apparent origin is the *Devata* worshipped.

Various beliefs, creeds and rituals co-exist in this world where anything from the cow to the worm, a piece of stone to the nine planets (*navagraha*) and demigods like *kuttichathan* are worshipped. Man's belief gets stronger in the idol when his prayers are apparently answered and he is 'provided' what he wants. Most of the time this 'blessing' is natural and would have come on its own, some are due to pure coincidences. The Gita postulates that everything belongs to the same screenplay with just one director. Anything that comes may have apparent sources but in reality they have all come from the one source through the one Mother Nature. It would suffice if those who are caught up in the gaps epochal in the path to the Supreme One realize the limitations of their temporary destinations.

antavat tu phalam teṣām tad bhavaty alpamedhasām  
devān devayajo yānti madbhaktā yānti mām api 7.23

*But the 'fruits' that accrue to those devotees with little intelligence are finite. My devotees will become one with Me whereas the worshippers of anything less wholesome identifies only with that.*

*Chandogya Upanishad* refers to the ultimate knowledge and state that we could obtain as '*bhaumam*', while '*alpam*' (insufficient understanding) is its antonym.

Not only that such people are fooled by their own faith, but they also miss

the highest path.

Everything in the universe craves for the state of bliss. The capabilities of our body-mind-combine too are meant to provide the state of absolute happiness, though happiness transient and worldly often leads mankind astray and away from the real state of union. Vyasa says that it is indeed deplorable if we humans beings endowed with a superior quality of intellect are not able to conceive that these very gifted senses ought to be used in an admirable way to realize the one Everlasting Self and thus achieve that permanent state and eternal happiness. If at least some of the effort and dedication wasted on earning worldly pleasures of transient nature is invested in an attempt to become one with the True Self, it would pay most precious dividends!

avyaktam vyaktim āpannam manyante mām abuddhayah  
param bhāvam ajānanto mamāvyayam anuttamam 7.24

*The ignorant, unable to comprehend the Avyakta from which all beings are manifested, unknowing of My imperishable and supreme state of Being, consider Me as some embodied form.*

Words are inadequate to describe the Supreme Being but there are no other means; verses till 27 try to verbally present the eternal entity with as much clarity as possible. The faculties of senses and intellect and the expression of these – the words – are all elements of the perishable nature (*aparā*). When these try to describe the imperishable (*parā*) nature from which it is born it would be like a salt doll attempting to measure the depths of the ocean. Avyakta is the substrate or the fabric of space from which all matter waves are manifested as we saw before. It is difficult to comprehend that entity which is even beyond ‘space’, and even great physicists fail to understand it. Moreover, the Paramātma is beyond even the Avyakta; it is that dexterity of the individual which facilitates the senses to perceive subjects, the intellect to know and the imagination to visualize. Therefore the *ātma* cannot be measured by the intellect-sense organ combine per se.

We always tend to understand an entity in comparison with some other, but here the Supreme One is unparalleled. It is imperishable even after everything else expires. ‘Abuddhaya’ are those who accept everything without subjecting it to intelligent scrutiny. Such people think that God is in the form of some embodiment or other, including maybe a human form.

What is criticized is idol worship of all kinds, worship of incarnation and God-men. Such worship may help as a starting point but it should blossom into a

perspective so as to include all creations. Play-school should not be the be-all and end-all of one's education. Again, the more we worship this way, the more we become trapped into that mindset and lose our prospects of further evolution according to previous verses. While it is true that Isvara is present in any particular thing or person, it is totally wrong to assume that the presence is exclusive or preferential.

This is really the most challenging ratiocination ever. We worship Lord Krishna's gentle countenance and his sweet words as we imagine him speaking to Arjuna. But are we really capable of carrying our thoughts beyond this physical level?

It is extremely difficult to realize the Supreme One and also to explain about it to others though we may have no difficulty in understanding its presence, as our sense organs, mind and intellect work with its energy – provided we wipe them clean of all accumulated filth and dirt of craving and greed. We have godly people who have all treaded this way like Buddha, Mahaveera, Christ, etc. They walked this earth as the *ātma* of all beings here and served humanity using their body and intellect. All *avatars* (incarnations) are Isvara itself but the converse is not true. The Supreme One is not any avatar.

In principle, all of us – anything and everything in the universe – are avatars. In no one is the Supreme in excess of any other even by an iota. But why is this truth so delayed from most of us? Why do many think that the Supreme Entity is this person or the other?

nāham prakāśah sarvasya yogamāyāsamāvṛtaḥ  
mūḍho/yam nābhijānāti loko mām ajam avyayam 7.25

*Not understandable to everyone am I, being veiled by the illusory yogamāya of nature (sattva-rajas-tamo gunas); these ignorant men never realize Me as unborn and imperishable.*

The yoga concerning the structure of the three gunas in the *parā* nature is called as *yogamāya* (the union between the dialectical medium of Prakṛti and the Paramātma). The veil of *māya* conceals the Paramātma like the mirage conceals the desert, tides the sea, the serpent the rope, etc.). The ignorance created by *māya* among human beings generally evince as the feeling of continued existence on this earth and the consequent desire to own everything that gives or looks promising to offer pleasure, disregarding the other true levels of reality that are not apparent to the sense organs.

Everything we usually come to know has a beginning and an end. We are too

familiar with both as natural and inevitable in our lives to imagine or perceive one without either. Our common sense prompts us to assume that there is such a Presence. This is a great challenge when our logic advocates that there must inevitably be such a possibility and, at the same time, our worldly experience blocks conviction. It is extremely difficult to conceptualize the beginning of anything that is never ever born although it has a definite beginning – for example, the sun is not born from any mother though it has a definite beginning. There is not even such a beginning for the Supreme Entity. Therefore there is no end too.

Reasoning is the basis of Science. Since anything perceivable cannot be devoid of a beginning, the concept of the originator without a beginning (*adi karana*) is not welcome to it as that would then have to eventually produce a reason for such an existence too. The reason why science is always poles apart from the Vedantic concept is due to its inability to regard anything that is not dialectical. Thus it is never allowed to recognize the Supreme Entity that can assume to be the very cause to transform itself into the universe in effect.

We are unable to correctly predict even the weather as we are in no position to comprehend completely the entire range of factors that affect the weather. It is impossible to gain such knowledge as the extent and variety and dynamism involved is too much to manage. We try to assume a lot depending on whatever little we are aware about and we mostly go wrong. If we are to be competent enough to know everything we must also strive to know more about the knower himself, the equipment that helps us know and the basis of everything – the ātma that is the source of it all. Behind all questions to which we don't have answers is this Great Presence.

vedāham̄ samatītāni vartamānāni cārjuna  
bhaviṣyāṇi ca bhūtāni mām̄ tu veda na kaścana 7.26

*O Arjuna, I know of all beings having born, being now and yet to come, though none of them can ever comprehend Me.*

The Supreme is *prajnana* (knowledge ultimate), and for It *māya* (illusion) is a one-way-looking transparent glass. It (the soul within) is able to know all, but we on this side of the veil are not able to see and distinguish It. (It has been said that an important quality of the brahma (*brahmalakshana*) is that the Supreme Entity alone can make itself seen). The ātma is well aware of the patterns of parā nature, and it was also described in chapter 4 (verse 8) that there is alteration of some of these patterns by the Supreme One.

Does this mean that the future is pre-ordained and everything happens only in a specific way? No. This aspect comes to further scrutiny in chapter 11 (discussion on verse 32).

icchādveśasamutthena dvandvamohena Bhārata  
sarvabhūtāni saṁmohāḥ sarge yānti paramtapa 7.27

*By the illusion of the pairs-of-opposites arising from likes and dislikes, O Bhārata, all beings are deluded from birth onwards.*

The human body grows as new cells grow faster than the pace of destruction of the old ones. We experience everything that fosters the nourishment and growth of these as favorable and also vice-versa. Past experiences provide any being the power of differentiating between the favorable and the unfavorable. These likes and dislikes become our basic preferences. These preferences lead to desires and start influencing our thoughts which finally lead to the pattern of our actions and reactions. We mark and distinguish the results of our deeds and strive hard to maximize positivity and minimize negativity; this becomes our sole occupancy. Since our mind now bound with the shackles of our preferences is what sends signals to the intellect, the ultimate truth which is above all these opposites remains unreachable and sealed within.

There is yet another side to this picture. Every new birth exhibits the nature, temperament and specific fervor for actions accumulated through generations before. Even this growth along continuity, however, is invested with its own dialectics. The conflict is between mere cyclic repetition and the urge to evolve a deviation. The tie is decided by the pursuit of the being. It is already said that even a little wisdom obtained will continue to swell as one grows and this is true even from one generation to the next. Another option is to remain content with the cyclical repetition immersed in the duality of individual preferences of worldly life. The third option is further immersion into the quagmire of desire-aversion duality, allowing *māya* a greater chance to hold one to ransom. This amounts to a slide-down on the path of evolution of life which is otherwise naturally oriented towards immortality. It is towards immortality that mortality should naturally reach out – to be guided from death to eternity, from false to true, and from dark to light is what the ancient prayer is from time immemorial (*Asatoma satgamaya, tamaso ma jyotirgamaya, mrityorma amritam gamaya, Om shanti, shanti, shanti hi*).

Gita emphasizes that in whichever condition, all beings must continuously strive to overcome the ignorance which begins from birth onwards. Let wisdom

score and lead in the fight with ignorance at least by a small margin. The lead will never get reversed. It will be carried over to subsequent generations and to society. In this struggle it is our own pursuits that steer us coupled with the guidance and teaching we receive from our roots (parents & ancestors).

yeśāṁ tv antagataṁ pāpam janānām puṇyakarmaṇām  
te dvandvamohanirmuktā bhajante māṁ dṛḍhavratāḥ 7.28

*Those who are rid from all blemishes by engaging in virtuous activities become free from the delusions of duality (created by the illusion born from their likes-dislikes) and conscientiously and determinedly engage in devotional services unto Me.*

All those activities we engage intended for the benefit of all in the universe are virtuous. But selfish actions with no regard to the biosphere or even causing hurt to others snares the person further to deep-rooted duality born from the illusory nature of likes-dislikes. The realization of the right goals enables one to perceive things in a different manner and do deeds in a selfless way, and the virtue of these deeds puts one in the right direction along which one starts worshipping the Paramātma in a conscientious and determined approach.

The very super clerk Chitragupta assigned with the task of precisely managing the virtue-sin accounts of living beings so as to grant rewards and punishments after death is a myth. The story may at best frighten wrong-doers by pointing out the record of cruel punishments meted out by him in the past. Every religion does this trick of frightening to various extend.

Vedanta rejects heaven and hell. But it brings new light to bear upon the proverb ‘you reap what you sow’. Sins accumulate as modulations which decide the progress and development of the person, even to subsequent generations. Furthermore, *prakṛti* (nature) would not allow the person to get away, be it through action-reaction patterns pertaining to laws in society, punishment, imprisonment or other repercussions. ‘Sin’ also separates the intellect and inner self further from union with immortality, instills fear and hate and makes the person permanently separated from peace of mind. Thus from both inside and outside, one has to pay for it.

From birth onwards every being is caught in the duality of the illusions and the handicap varies from person to person, making ‘right education’ necessary from childhood onwards. To the extent the knowledge is gained, one’s growing *sattvik* nature and the conductive attitude of parents and teachers will help achieve the light of wisdom at a greater pace. It is not true that everyone born

anywhere is a sinner.

jarāmarañamokṣāya mām āśritya yatanti ye  
te brahma tad viduh kṛtsnam adhyātmam karma cākhilam 7.29

*All those who, taking refuge in Me, and endeavoring to seek eternal liberation from the mortal world, get to learn the truth about brahma, karma, as well as all the adhyatma (spiritual) secrets.*

Such people become aware of the secrets of their own mind as well as the patterns bringing up the universe. (The word ‘adhyatma’ means that which concerns the space within.) The secrets of the sustained cycle of action-reaction phenomena in the cosmos are also discovered.

Modern biological research has been striving hard to raise the life span of human being thus prolonging death to the most; *adhyatma vidya* (education in matters relating to the space within) offers a sure way to avoid death forever. One could evolve into the state of the *jeevanmukta* (free of birth and death) by realizing the True Self in this very mortal life; this realization is what is called as *moksha* (salvation, ultimate freedom). Having known the secrets of the universe including the process of life and death, happiness and progress acquire meanings entirely different from the ordinary. All the conditions of knowledge are fulfilled and one no more feels afraid of death; one passes it just as one passed childhood and youth; death is no longer any decimation forever.

There is a misconception that pious people are failures in the competition-laden modern life but in fact the person of wisdom conceived by Vedanta philosophy is dynamic by way of karma yoga to mark his presence on all fronts of human activity and hence stands out distinctly from the crowd. The light from such persons keep on guiding the world even after they cease to exist physically.

sādhibhūtādhidaivam mām sādhiyajñam ca ye viduh  
prayāṇakālepi ca mām te vidur yuktacetasah 7.30

*Those who know me as the Adhibhuta, Adhidaiva, and as the Adhiyajna, they who are of steady intellect know me even during the time of their death.*

When it is said that such persons are able to feel the presence of the Supreme Entity always, it means that they do not lose their conscientiousness even at a time when all beings are most vulnerable and susceptible to feelings of doubt and confusion (especially at the time of death). It shows that knowledge once

acquired never ever fades away and only the one with wisdom (the *yogi*) is capable of maintaining such steadfast equanimity and concentration. This verse is also the door to the next chapter which opens with further elucidation of the meanings of these key words.

## Chapter 8

# Yoga of Akshara (Brahma)

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Communication can be termed successful only if the key components of the transmitted message reach the target audience as intended. The need for delineating the meaning of terms occurs in three conditions: if the terms are newly coined / developed to promote a novel concept, if the concept though old is presented before an audience who are new to it, or if there has incurred certain semantic changes in the particular word (term) due to the gradual progression (or distortion) of language and its usage.

Here, the concept that is being defined more concretely is neither a new one, nor is the one who receives it (Arjuna) new to it. We may well infer that the essential terms and concepts had already come to be dealt with subtle ambiguity, providing scope to multiple levels of interpretations, even erosion of original intent during those ancient times.

The terms *brahma, adhyatma, karma, adhibhuta, adhidaiva and adhiyajna* were used towards the end of the previous chapter. In those days each of these may have had a wide range of implications. Although there might be only one true meaning, each of these terms opened varying interpretations, depending upon the tastes and interests of the various scholars.

A clear understanding of the above six terms would assure us the knowledge of our relationship with the universe apart from a thorough understanding of our own selves. Just like the various mud walls of the bund are breached to allow the gush of water to the ocean, so the Gita perfects the path towards *brahma vidya* from amidst the glade of ambiguity and doubts.

arjuna uvāca

kim̄ tad brahma kim̄ adhyātmam̄ kim̄ karma puruṣottama

adhibhūtam̄ ca kim̄ proktam adhidaivam̄ kim̄ ucyate 8.1

adhiyajñah̄ katham̄ ko/tra dehe/smin madhusūdana

prayāṇakāle ca katham̄ jñeyo/si niyatātmabhiḥ 8.2

*Arjuna said:*

*O, Purushottama! Tell me, what is brahma? What is adhyatma? What is karma? What is adhibhuta? What is called as adhidaiva? What is known as adhiyajna? Who sits in whichever way as the sole governing principle in our body?*

*And even during the final transition phase (the moment of death); how do they, the learned yogis capable of self-control, realize You?*

It is to be noted that the question is asked to the *Purushottama* – the highest Purusha (entity). The learned yogis realize none other than that Supreme Entity – the Paramātma.

Arjuna also wants to know how best one can prepare oneself to face death. He is in a battlefield and as a qualified warrior he may expect any mishap likely to befall including his own death. The question is relevant as it clearly poses on how to concentrate on *Purushottama* at the final moment of death even if it happens to be sudden and unexpected.

śrībhagavān uvāca  
akṣaram brahma paramam svabhāvodyātmam ucyate  
bhūtabhāvo/dbhavakaro visargah karmasamjñitah 8.3  
adhibhūtam kṣaro bhāvah puruṣaś cādhidaivatam  
adhiyajño/ham evātra dehe dehabhṛtām vara 8.4

*The Purushottama said:*

*Brahma is Akshara itself, the highest. The swabhava (nature) of Purushottama is called as adhyatma – the reason behind the nature of all bhuta (beings and entities) in the universe. The actions leading to the development of all living beings in the universe is karma.*

*The Kshara world – all that is perishable (the entire visible universe, jagat) – with all bodies in it is adhibhuta. Adhidaiva is the splendor (chaitanya) of Purushottama that manifests itself in all the powers of prakṛti (Akshara); and in human beings through the sense-mind-intellect combine. O the best of all beings on earth (Arjuna), know that I within the body, am adhiyajna (the Lord of all right action), most certainly.*

*Adhibhuta* is the common name for all that is perishable including all matter. *Brahma* is another name for Akshara, that which sustains the perishing and renewing Kshara. (The word *brahma* means ‘that which tends to expand’, and it denotes the present state of Avyakta resulting in the expanding universe.) Kshara

evolves from, stays in it and finally dissolves itself into it.

*Adhyatma* *vidya* sees every sensory experience as the fruit of *yajna* (offering). Sense organ is the *homakunda* (fire-altar). For instance, when the external form of an object (visualized as *havis* i.e., the substance to be offered) is delivered to the eye which is the fire-altar, the *devata* (the force) in charge of perception is pleased and grants the boon to see. Worldly life is the sum total of such blessings. (This is a symbolic picture; the sense organs do not have varied *devatas*. The Supreme itself is the *devata* of all senses.) In short, everything is the Supreme Purusha. *Purushottama*'s dialectical form is Akshara (enigmatic essence – Akshara) and the explicit *Purushottama bhava* is *adhyatma*. This manifests in the faculties of sense organs, mind and intellect alike. Svetasvatara Upanishad says that the reason behind the creation of all beings and entities and indeed this whole universe is neither ‘time’ nor ‘disposition of the Supreme One’; the only reason is the splendor of that Highest Entity.

antakāle ca mām eva smaran muktvā kalevaram  
yah prayāti sa madbhāvam yāti nāsty atra samśayah 8.5

*There is no doubt that the one that departs the body concentrating on Me, at least during his last moments, attains My state.*

Arjuna's worries about death are cleared here. If one can identify with the true self during the time of death, one can find the immortal part of oneself and be one with it. It cannot be assumed that by *antakala* (the last stage), only the few moments before death are meant. It also does not mean that one may waste one's life-force in superfluities till the last moment and then, in a couple of minutes, can get identified and call it a day! Such a person cannot establish and sustain *Paramātma smarana* (thought about the Supreme Purusha) at the time of death; it demands longer exercise and acquaintance with the theory and the practice of *yoga*.

The verse does not mean any miraculous type of union with ‘God’ with the accompaniment of ‘blazing light’ etc. at the time of death. The body, intellect and mind are equally perishable at death; therefore consciousness stemming from the mind must also dissolve along with the mind. People lose consciousness during their last movements. Those who have lost most of their mental lucidity due to senile dementia or Alzheimer's disease or stroke or various other such diseases also do not qualify for this last moment lucidity. The Supreme Self is not the wakeful consciousness (*jagrat*), it is beyond it and the very light that powers the mind. How the Supreme Self is in *yoga* (union) with

our mind-body-intellect combination is to be discussed in detail in chapter 13.

Here it is meant that we all have that Immortal Self within oneself, therefore nothing is lost at death; and knowing the truth and comprehending it at the moment of loss of final awareness can enable one to have a peaceful and contented ending – to be permanently joined to the immortal principle beyond the mind and materialistic consciousness. How the yogayukta – the expert practitioner – can be union at the phase of death in his state of yoga will also be explained in verse 10 of this chapter.

Even during life itself, after identification with the Supreme Self is achieved, the individual self can reside in the temple called body and perform *karma* till the body comes to its natural end. That is the *sarvottama* (most ideal) form of living. *Jeevanmukta* is a person who is successful with such a merge while alive.

yam̄ yam̄ vāpi smaran bhāvam̄ tyajaty ante kalevaram  
tam̄ tam evaiti kaunteya sadā tadbhāvabhāvitah 8.6

*O Arjuna, one becomes one with whatever one has in mind at the final moment of separation of the deha (body) (during death), being absorbed in it through constant imaginative contemplation on it.*

Arjuna is further assured that there is a state of attainment even after death, consistent with his concepts of rebirth. ‘*Yad bhavo tat bhavati*’ (one becomes whatever one thinks one's nature is). This is also the reason why Bhagavad Gita does not deny the concepts of rebirths and afterlife in heaven. The Gita maintains that the one who strongly believes in them and desires any of these, placing their *constant imaginative contemplation* on it, can attain illusory heaven or rebirth.

But it is also mentioned many times in the Gita that there is no permanent truth greater than the *Supreme Purusha*, and the Gita does not encourage any such transient strata or positions and imaginative contemplation on them. From the next verse onwards, higher Vedantic knowledge is brought back to discussion: *tasmāt sarveṣu kāleṣu mām anusmara yudhya ca*  
*mayy arpitamanobuddhir mām evaiṣyasya asamśayah 8.7*

*Therefore worship Me at all times, concentrating on Me alone and keep fighting (against wrong notions, debilitating doubts, greed and sankalpa). By constant dedication of your mind and intellect unto Me, shall you attain Me. This is definite.*

The war to be waged in life is with bad instincts like anger and lust, which is made easy by one's concentration on the Supreme Self.

How to mentally be one with the True Self and at the same time live as the mortal? A picture of an actor on stage may exemplify the point better. An actor represents a character on stage for a period but he is also an individual different from it. Unless and until the individual transforms into the cast of the character there is no play. But if the actor completely forgets his real nature and becomes only the character, then it is sure to create mishaps (for instance, a fight may become quite real!). The fruits of performance can be attained by the person even while on the stage of life; but along with it if one trains not to forget his real self, it gives way to *thanmayi bhava* (the feeling of being one) even long before the fall of the final curtain in life.

There are three *mantras* to success – equality, self-control and *sudarsana* (right knowledge and focus). Gita advices us to face all the challenges with ease holding steadfast to these success tips focusing firmly on the path of oneness with the Supreme Self. Experience is the teacher.

abhyāsayogayuktena cetasā nānyagāminā  
paramam puruṣam divyam yāti pārthānucintayan 8.8

*O Partha, the yogayukta with continuous abhyasa and with the mind that does not wander anywhere attains the divine and highest purusha.*

Human beings are capable of mastering anything and everything through untiring efforts. The history of physically challenged people who have conquered Mt. Everest is enough evidence to this. Regular and systematic work can perform miracles, but it demands attention and concentration. *Abhyasa* means exercise and training.

It does not matter which driving school a person was enrolled in or which vehicle did he drive the way, rather the importance lies on the fact that one has learned the skill of driving and does not forget his destination. That is why Sree Narayana Guru said that no matter what the caste or creed one follows, it is the man inside who is important.

Just like a child remembers its mother occasionally in between his games, no matter however interesting the game might be, likewise is the relationship between man and Isvara. One must not be perturbed if focus occasionally falls off the track, for it is always possible to bring it back to the same point. Constant contemplation is required because the person who opts for such focus gets a clearer picture: kavīm purāṇam anuśāsitāram

añor aṇīyāṁsam anusmared yaḥ  
sarvasya dhātāram acintyarūpam  
ādityavarṇam tamasah parastāt 8.9

*One always contemplates on the kavi (omniscient), the primordial (who was present even before time), the anusasita (highest authority), who is smaller than the anu (atom) yet the foundation on which everything stands, whose form is inconceivable yet resplendent and overcoming all darkness like the sun.*

The various possibilities of *adhyatma vidya* (spiritual knowledge) and the main hurdle that presents in learning and teaching of it are being exemplified here. The problem is that the *Supreme Purusha* cannot be described either through words or a painting or through sensory identifications like smell or touch. The person who contemplates on it must search in his own way and the above verse helps to get a general idea for that search. Simple guidance would help to reach this path of union; just like an infant's mouth finds its way on minimal guidance to its mother's breast for the life nectar; similarly, the man who focuses on this instinct naturally succeeds. Singing a eulogy on the taste of that *amrut*, here through this verse we are approximated as much as possible towards clarity of the concept.

It is the spiritual splendor (*ātma chaitanya*) that illuminates our thoughts deep within. Since the thoughts of all beings in this universe are illuminated by the same *ātma chaitanya*, It is obviously aware of internal developments in all; hence it is omniscient (*kavi*). This universe may perish altogether but the *ātma* never ever perishes. Therefore it is eternal and its origin is primordial. As this *ātma* is the power behind all the faculties of our mind-intellect-senses it can be taken as the highest authority, ruling along with nature. (The idea can be paralleled with the example of the children who are controlled by their parents, though the games they indulge in are absolutely their own.) The *ātma* is there within the smallest structure; so it is smaller than the smallest. We can never conceive its structure because it is structure-less, everywhere without beginning or end, and also pervades the tiniest subatomic particle to the universe. The *Supreme Purusha* is *dhāta* (the sustainer of everything in this universe).

One must not be deceived that the *Purushottama* is also something that can be dealt with one's reason, for it is beyond the cause-effect chain in the *prakṛti* and it is that which paves way for the very thought process in us to happen. We think in terms of objects or phenomenon in the material world but the *Supreme Purusha* cannot be described as any of these, therefore appearing inconceivable with thought or word. However, the *ātma* is self-illuminating and as radiant as

the sun. This means that we only have to awaken our awareness or consciousness to It and let ourselves be illuminated, rather than trying to give it attributes. Just like a man who is asleep is not conscious about the worldly self of awakened state, the ignorant man never realizes the Supreme Self within him.

This Sun called the Purushottama knows no eclipses. It is beyond darkness and day-night differences. It is always there and never obliterated. It is knowledge absolute, only veiled by ignorance which creates the illusion of separateness.

prayāṇakāle manasācalena  
bhaktyā yukto yogabalenā caiva  
bhruvor madhye prāṇam āveśya samyak  
sa tam param puruṣam upaiti divyam 8.10

*He who, at the time of departure (death) sustains his prana at bhru madhya (the point where the eyebrows meet), develops unflinching concentration, remains locked to devotion on the power of the yoga state thus achieved – unites himself with the illuminant Supreme Purusha.*

The main requirement is selfless and totally unconditional devotion – complete self-dedication, otherwise such a state is not possible during the final moments. What is described is the union of the *yogi* as he reaches the pinnacle of devotion through *dhyana* (meditation) with the Supreme Entity. What dies forever is the mirage of worldly ego.

The power of *yoga* is presented in association with ardent devotion. It is the power the mind gathers through the constant practice of *dhyana*. This is no reference to any occult; in fact this refutes the role of any. Gathering all *prana* to assemble at the meeting point of the eyebrows means bringing all life energy (diminishing at the time of death) to concentrate on the One subject. The action-fronts of *prana* are diverse as the life forces of various organ systems. They drive the sense organs, facilitate cognition, digest food, take nutriments from the digested food to various parts of the body, gather waste and dispose it and, of course, at the level of the central nervous system create the thirst for more and more knowledge and the yearning to be one with the Supreme Purusha. Biological transactions are also the basis for the various thought processes. The discussions in the previous chapter on meditation can be remembered here.

Control over *prana* is not easy but it can be gained. The ancients knew control of breath through which heart rate could be modified and features of circulatory system including blood pressure could be controlled to within limits.

Aspects of nervous system like sensory perception can be altered and mental abilities can be refined.

yad akṣaram vedavido vadanti  
viśanti yad yatayo vītarāgāḥ  
yad icchanto brahmacyaram caranti  
tat te padam samgraheṇa pravakṣye 8.11

*What is called by the name of Akshara by those who have learnt the truth in the scriptures; into that which the yatis enter after the renunciation of all rāga; that which is attained by people who vow brahmacharya (celibacy); I will explain in brief to you now.*

The detailing is about three categories. The first are those who have gathered the real wisdom of the texts (the knowledgeable) consider Akshara as imperishable. Their experience is our guidance.

Yatis constituting the second group are those who try to dedicate their self wholly for union with complete devotion after freeing their mind from entanglements of possessiveness and worldly desires. Hence they ultimately become one with it.

Brahmacharya or celibacy was practiced along with various exercises in ancient times for supreme concentration and channeling of entire life energy by bringing it to strong focus. Since sensual pleasures causes the strongest dissipation of life energy, it was advised abstention for the period in which such exercises, meditation and contemplation were performed.

sarvadvārāṇi samyamya mano hr̥di nirudhya ca  
mūrdhny ādhāyātmanah prāṇam āsthito yogadhāraṇām 8.12  
om ity ekākṣaram brahma vyāharan mām anusmaran  
yah prayāti tyajan deham sa yāti paramām gatim 8.13

*One who leaves the body controlling the doors of all sense organs and dissolving the mind in the heart, concentrating all of one's prana in the forehead, reciting the one-word embodiment of brahma – the 'Om', and constantly remembering Me and holding on to Me, attains the highest of all goals.*

As the person realizes that death is near, the remaining things to be done are to close all doors of the physical senses and dissolve the mind in the heart (the

‘heart’ in Vedanta is not the organ that pumps blood; it denotes the link of the body to the soul - the *ātma*). Dissolving the mind means dissolution of all thoughts to be one with the *ātma* (which is beyond the bundle of mind-memory-consciousness).

Whatever ebbing prana are held at the forehead, rhythmically repeating ‘Om’. In fact, every breath is a silent (internal) recitation of ‘Om’. With each breath only the Paramātma is to be held on to. ‘Om’ symbolically and practically contains the universe and Akshara in a single sound. (The ancient sages cannot be blamed for the large misuse of the sound in ritualistic black magic.) How is it possible to forget apprehension and anxiety and think only of the Paramātma at the time of death?

ananyacetāḥ satataṁ yo māṁ smarati nityaśāḥ  
tasyāham sulabhaḥ pārtha nityayuktasya yogināḥ 8.14

*O Arjuna, one who thinks of Me always, without any feeling of separation, always trying to be one with Me, finds Me easily.*

This verse condenses all that was earlier said in the chapter, (with the undertone of a compassionate smile that enough and more has been stated), and once more emphasizes that devotion is the only way. Union is for one who continuously worships the Supreme Purusha; there is no point in waiting for any particular *muhurta* (auspicious time) or special occasion. ‘Abheda’ (inseparability) is the characteristic feature of ardent devotion. The devotee and his devotional subject become one and the same.

mām upetya punarjanma duḥkhālayam aśāsvatam  
nāpnuvanti mahātmānaḥ saṃsiddhiṁ paramāṁ gatāḥ 8.15  
ā brahmabhuvanāl lokāḥ punarāvartinorjuna  
mām upetya tu kaunteya punarjanma na vidyate 8.16

*Those great souls who have achieved such perfection of devotion (as described in the previous verse) attain Me, rid from the miserable and temporary rebirths.*

*O Arjuna, know that all the worlds up to the world of Brahma Deva are subject to the cycle of birth and death. But the one who attains Me knows no rebirth.*

All aspirations about netherworlds of unabated and superior happiness of the

material kind, indeed any types of heaven are discouraged. As all worlds are transitory, rebirth, wherever it is, even in the next *kalpa* or cycle of the universe, is said as nothing more than short-lived and miserable. The Supreme One is the only way to immortality and eternal happiness.

Seven worlds – *bhuloka* (earth), *bhuvar loka*, *swarloka*, *jnanaloka*, *tapoloka*, *satyaloka*, and *brahmaloka* – are enunciated in scriptures like the *Devi Bhagavad*. Their mirror images thrown in, there are supposed to be 14 worlds. (The seven worlds can also be seen as different levels reached by awareness on one's path to ultimate realization; the mirror images representing levels in the opposite direction.) Science would in future discover numerous worlds in other solar systems. The possibilities in the next cycle of the universe can be anybody's guess. But all these are transient – any heaven being no exception. None of these can serve as ultimate destination. As a result of the pulsing act of the universe, everything in the *brahma loka* is cyclically born and erased time and again. Therefore all the worlds that are dependent on the nature of the brahma (which practically means every one of them in every cycle) cannot escape dissolution. Those who seek heaven as their ultimate goal are unwise, as specified earlier.

The concept of Brahma Deva was discussed in verse 32 of chapter 4. All knowledge and karma pertaining to all the worlds in the universe are born from Brahma.

sahasrayugaparyantam ahar yad brahmaṇo viduh  
rātrīm̄ yugasahasrāntāṁ te/ahorātravido janāḥ 8.17

*The day of brahma lasts thousands of yugas (eons), and then for thousands of eons it is night. People who know of them know true day and night.*

The concept of 'Brahma Deva' was discussed in detail along with verse 4:32. The reference here is to the way time was reckoned in ancient times: When two fresh lotus petals layered one on top of the other are pierced by the sharpest imaginable needle at the fastest it can go, the time its point takes to touch the top surface of the bottom leaf after it emerges from the bottom surface of the top leaf is called as '*alpa kalam*'. Thirty *alpa kalam* is called as one *thrudi*. Thirty *thrudi* is one *kala*. Thirty *kala* is one *kashta* - it is also called as one moment (*nimisha*, *nhodi* or *matra*). Four *nimisha* is one *ganitam*, sixty *ganitam* is one *vinazhika*. Sixty *vinazhika* (One *vinazhika* is 24 seconds and one *nazhika* is 24 minutes) is one *ghadika* and sixty *ghadika* is one day and night (24 hours). 30 days and nights make one lunar month. Twelve lunar months (Chandra *masa*) is one

human year, or one *deva* day and night. Three hundred *deva* days and nights are equal to one *deva* year. 12000 such *deva* years is one *chaturyuga*. And so it goes on multiplying till it reaches one Brahma day. The same is the length of the night.

This calculation is based on the day-night span. It goes below the earth day to the lowest imaginable interval and also travels up to the Brahma lifespan. The sharpness of the needle or the force of the thrust is not specified. The significance of *alpa kala* lies in its relation to the time of a day. The basis of the calculation of Brahma's life is also the earth day. The sages understood the flaws in calculating the time period of the cosmic world on the basis of the routine experiences at the earthly level as it is not possible to evaluate the *kalpa* (one *brahma* day) or the lifespan of Brahma using the time confines of the period of gyration of Earth or the period of its revolution, as neither can be expected to remain steady for that long a period.

The time we are conscious of is reckoned as the interval between two specific events or in terms of the frequency of cyclic events like birth, growth and death at the physical - *kshara* - level. There is yet another time that we can never measure - the time at the level of the *akshara*. Time in *kshara* fluctuates with change in the background consistency of *avyakta* and the velocity with which the oscillation moves through it. Physics knows that when a particle is accelerated near the speed of light, its internal clock will slow down. There is no absolute time in the *kshara* world. It is cyclical, starting with each pulsation of *akshara* from the big bang and ending in dissolution, and then beginning again. In contrast the time pertaining to *akshara* is stable.

The universe itself as well as every oscillatory wave in it has its own unique frequency. Time can be reckoned on the basis of any of these. But as every oscillation the universe contains severally dissolves back into *akshara*, such times too will cease to be. Ultimate time at the level of the third reality is timelessness. One cannot measure it with 'knowable' time, it is incomparable. Ancient sages believed that the reckoning should be the other way – beginning with *brahma ayussu* and coming down to the shortest imaginable subdivision.

(Modern science is yet to comprehend the correlation between 'knowable' time and 'ultimate' time. Therefore it calls the realm of ultimate time 'discontinuity', and, as no law of physics can stand in that realm it is branded as unknowable.) The ancients also knew that any reckoning of time apparent is subject to changes in the constitution and character of the medium of *akshara* brought about by the act of pulsation of the entire universe, as the frequencies of pulsation of all components of all matter depend on the consistency of *akshara*.

avyaktād vyaktayah sarvāḥ prabhavanty aharāgame  
rātryāgame pralīyante tatraivāvyaktasamjñake 8.18

*In the morning of that day, from that which is called by the name Avyakta, everything becomes manifest. When night comes, into that Avyakta itself, everything dissolves or fades totally.*

The verses directly point to the cyclical nature of the universe. The expansion is turbulent; it leads to the formation of numerous oscillatory waves in *avyakta*. Once the ‘big-bang’ stage passes, oscillations that resonate well with its surroundings join together, radiate extra content and/or grab some to gain better stability. Matter is no more than condensed packages of energy oscillating the same way the universe does, the energy inside condensing and expanding spirally. The physical world – *kshara* – is the outcome of such waves moving, interacting with each other and coalescing in an expanding ocean of energy.

After the expansion cycle is done comes the reverse phase and all oscillations are by then dissolved back into the fabric. The contraction cycle is night of the *brahma*, which hosts the world of mirror particles, and no star or galaxy can exist in it because of antigravity – total darkness prevails which last for same duration of the expansion phase. This phase too would end, and the universe is wiped clean for the next cycle. *Those who know of them know true day and night.*

Scientists know that the universe is expanding now, but they cannot say whether this expansion will continue forever. What happened before the big-bang or how the universe will return to its original state is yet unknown. There is no force detectable by our present instruments which can start a contraction phase. The concept of the fabric of space (*Akshara*) is necessary to know about the contraction phase.

*“As the spider spins out the web from its stomach, as the hairs grow from the human body, as the plants sprout from the earth; so does the universe manifest from the Akshara.”* – Mundaka Upanishad 1.1.6.

bhūtagrāmaḥ sa evāyam bhūtvā bhūtvā pralīyate  
rātryāgamevaśah pārtha prabhavaty aharāgame 8.19

*O Arjuna, the entire set of creation (in this universe) is manifested during the day, then gets spent and dissolves back at the advent of the night, again and again.*

Complete demolition and restructuring goes on and on, cycle after cycle in the pulsation of the universe. Exact replication of creations of the previous cycle is neither necessary nor warranted. Different stories come to play. There is every possibility that when the universe goes into the next cycle a new Earth and a new sun be formed, but it is unlikely to be an exact replica of what obtains now. The question whether another *Tempest* would be composed by another Shakespeare in the next *kalpa* is as irrelevant as the expectation that a jackfruit would be grown exactly in the same position on the same branch of the tree next year too.

paras tasmāt tu bhāvo/nyovyakto/vyaktāt sanātanaḥ  
yah sa sarveṣu bhūteṣu naśyatsu na vinaśyati 8.20

*But there is a different presence even beyond Akshara; it is the secret of secrets and eternal; it is not wiped out even when the entire set of creation is destroyed.*

This verse shows the happy progress of the great ancient sages who strived to understand the nature of the universe through their intellect. First, the temporary, continuously changing and perishing nature of the obvious world (the Kshara) is well understood through constant and diligent observation, leading to the obvious conclusion that if something huge like this could exist, change and renew in this fashion, it must have a stable base to do so. Contemplation and meditation on this unravels Avyakta, the fabric of space, along with the picture of the pulsating universe. Then, life in its plethora of beings with their patterns of birth and death are observed and contemplated on. It is then realized that there must be something greater than even the substrate background which forms the basis of all entities, and which is beyond all changes in the universe. It is then recognized as the ‘most hidden of all secrets’; something that is even basic to the Avyakta (the word itself means unclear to the senses) would of course be ungraspable to the mind.

Also discernible here is the umbilical cord connection between the Paramātma and all creations. It is beyond the sense organs, intellect and the consciousness, providing the splendor that drives the senses, the mind and the intellect; naturally, It is not discernible by any of these. The same connection helped us evolve to the extent of becoming aware of the Paramātma. Life is getting more and more prepared to get back to that which it has been standing apart. The universe as whole is impatiently pulsing on in its effort to enjoin its true principle. This effort on the part of the universe becomes fruitful to the extent every living being becomes aware of that factor. Once the mind is united

with the Supreme Purusha there is no comeback to ‘separateness’ and no death even at the total wipeout at the end of the *kalpa* (cycle of the universe).

avyakto/kṣara ity uktas tam āhuḥ paramāṁ gatim  
yam prāpya na nivartante tad dhāma paramam mama 8.21

*That which is called by the names ‘Avyakta’ and ‘Akshara’ is said to be (My highest abode. The state attained after which there is no reverting; that is My divine Body.*

Whether called Akshara or Avyakta, there is only one substrate, the Divine Body of the Lord. We, manifested out of matter waves from that Divine Body, do not identify the True Soul or the Divine Body by limitations of sense organs and mind. Understanding the truth leads to perceiving the matter-wave *kshetra* (field) in Akshara which form the *samghatha* (our body complex) in the perishable world. Just like there are numerous individual living cells in our body which interact with each other, help, protect and even phagocytose (eat) damaged cells, so are all individual living beings interrelated and together forming larger *kshetras* or bodies in nature and the biosphere. The entire universe is thus an interacting flux of live *kshetras* manifested from the Divine Body of the One Soul. Once this knowledge leads to that awareness, and action and exercise enlarges conviction to wisdom, that state of *brahmasayujya* (union with the unblemished nature of brahma) is attained, after which there is no reverting to mundane nature in the material world.

puruṣah sa parah pārtha bhaktyā labhyas tv ananyayā  
yasyāntahsthanī bhūtāni yena sarvam idam tatam 8.22

*O Arjuna, the One which resides within every being, the One who is present everywhere in this universe, that Supreme Purusha is attainable through unflinching devotion.*

(Since the bodies of all beings are comparable to *puras* or towns, and the Supreme One resides in all of them, the latter is called as *purusha*).

This is a pilgrimage. The strength of the tendencies (*vasanas*) inherited through previous generations and the amount of effort made together decides the outcome. Everyone who decides to go this way is a *yogi*.

yatra kāle tv anāvṛttim āvṛttim caiva yoginah

prayātā yānti tam kālam vakṣyāmi bharatarśabha 8.23

*O the greatest of all Bhāratas (Arjuna), the time (or path) those yogis go never to return (to this world), as also the time (path) others go to return, that time I will tell you now.*

The composer of Gita ingenuously establishes a very crucial fusion through verses 23-26. Traditional ideas that continued to prevail regarding the ‘worlds’ that the *jeeva* travels after death are integrated with the levels of experience a practitioner of *yoga* envisages.

According to traditional belief, the *jeevātma* after death travels through either of the two ways – *shuklagati* or *krishnagati*. When the *jeeva*, passing through light, daytime, progressing moon phase, *uttarayana kala* (six months of sun’s progression between winter solstice and summer solstice), *suryamandala* (space under the influence of the sun), *chandramandala* (space under the influence of the moon) etc. and reaches the highest goal of immortality with the ātma, that path is called as *shuklagati*. When the *jeeva* passing through smoke, night, declining moon phase, *dakshinayana* (six months of sun’s progression from summer solstice to winter solstice) reaches *pitruloka* (the world of the departed) and from there goes to *chandramandala*, is born as *deva* after becoming the *anna* (food) of *Devas*, to live in the heavenly abode till the capital of virtues earned is all spent, after which to become clouds that pour down as rains and, through the food of living things to enter the bodies of parents to be born once again, it is called as *krishnagati*.

This highly poetic traditional concept woven with exquisite symbols is integrated by the Gita with the philosophical background of the science of yoga. The Gita says that human life is oriented either towards identifying itself with the immortality of the ātma or enjoyment of material pleasures. In the former there is attainment of the state of permanent peace undaunted by death, the latter greedily embraces sensual pleasure and is born again and again only to die as many times. The former is the path towards enlightenment and the latter leads to ignorance, heaven and rebirth.

agnir jotir ahaḥ śuklah ṣaṇmāsā uttarāyaṇam  
tatra prayātā gacchanti brahma brahmavido janāḥ 8.24

*The brahma jnani (the knower of brahma) follows the path of fire, light, daytime, the bright fortnight, the six months of the northern solstice and become one with brahma.*

At the story level this verse indicates the ‘*kramamukti*’ (progressive attainment of salvation) described by the Vedas to be realized by *jeeva* of those who embark on the course called *Devayanam* (the way of *Devas*). Traditional belief was (and is in many minds even today) that such *jeevas* reach *brahmaloka* (the world of the creator) crossing *suryamandala* and, after enjoying divine bliss till the end of the *kalpa*, unifies with the Brahma Deva (brahma) and become one with the Supreme Entity.

In the philosophical level, fire, light, daytime, progressive moon phase, the time of northern solstice, etc. All symbolize the splendor of the Supreme Entity. The journey towards light is called as ‘*Devayana*’.

dhūmo rātris tathā krṣṇah ṣaṇmāsā dakṣiṇāyanam  
tatra cāndramasam jyotir yogī prāpya nivartate 8.25

*Those who travel through smoke, night, declining moon phase and the period of southern solstice get born again after attaining chandaloka (the world subject to cyclic growth and decay).*

The ‘*chandrayana*’ path that the Vedas describe is the way of those who crave for ‘heavenly’ bliss. They are subject to rebirth once the reserve balance of their virtues is redeemed in the heavenly abode. Smoke, night, phase of declining moon, and period of southern solstice – all symbolize *aparā prakṛti* (and the perishable world). Considering it as the ultimate is tantamount to darkness or ignorance. ‘*Chandra*’ in the Vedas is the *Devata* (archetypal image of the driving force) of worldliness.

śuklakṛṣṇe gatī hy ete jagataḥ śāsvate mate  
ekayā yāty anāvṛttim anyayāvartate punaḥ 8.26

*The Path of White and the Path of Black available for the world are thought to be both eternal; by the former one goes to return not; by the latter he returns again.*

Only human beings have got the free will to decide which way one should choose. As stagnancy is not a feature of this universe, every being has to keep moving on along the road of change. Our aim has great contribution in shaping our destiny. The one who strives for eternal salvation will unify with the Supreme Purusha and the one who craves for worldly pleasures shall have those

through rebirths or other ways. The orientation of desires is influenced by evolutionary preferences, hereditary values, knowledge and the force of habits acquired.

As there are two ways in this universe for each individual, it also signifies that every individual may be confounded by ways which are split into two within oneself too. There is a relief that if mid-way one realizes that the choice is poor, he / she may with a strong will, start treading the other way. There is always the possibility of a second chance, however late in the day one seeks the option!

naite sṛtī pārtha jānan yogī muhyati kaścana  
tasmāt sarveṣu kāleṣu yogayukto bhavārjuna 8.27

*Know that no yogi will delude away from the path of self-realization once he learns about these two ways. Therefore, O Arjuna, always be yogayukta.*

Right knowledge about the two different ways is the ideal guidance. *Yogayukta* is one engaged in uniting one's self with the True Self. It is instructed earlier that along with this dedication we ought to continue our life as it demands and not evade from one's righteous duty. There is no point in cultivating any habitual craving for worldly pleasures because they are all temporary, dependent on outside factors and inferior to the everlasting bliss of the self and immortality. Even if one supposes that there is an afterlife, heaven is temporary and only till the balance sheet of good is over, and rebirth is nothing but more pain and death for a little bit of material pleasure. Therefore no person with a rational mind will turn away from the right path once he gets to know the facts. For the yogi who knows the truth and tries to live accordingly, there is both success in this world and permanent union; for the deluded one who is interested only in selfish material pleasure, there is neither this world nor after.

vedeṣu yajñeṣu tapaḥsu caiva  
dāneṣu yat puṇyaphalam pradiṣṭam  
atyeti tat sarvam idam viditvā  
yogī param sthānam upaiti cādyam 8.28

*Whatever meritorious virtue is believed to be obtained by the study of the Vedas, performance of yajnas (large-scale ritualistic offerings made to agni – fire), the practice of painstaking penances, acts of charity etc.; the yogi who knows this goes above all those and attains the highest level.*

This concluding verse is a direct attack on the concept of heaven, and is also a superbly brave indictment against all the classifying criteria of people in the society. Vedic texts propound that through *yajnas* prescribed by the Vedas and also through study of the Vedic texts one can surely attain *svarga* (heaven). But these texts were the sole right of the hegemonic class of the *chaturvarnya* polity in India as their birthright. No one (even the emperor) could perform these *yajnas* without the help of *purohits* (priests). Penance also was one of the exclusive prerogatives of the upper castes. What charities can a person who is struggling to make both ends meet do?

Here, God's will is clearly explicit through Vyasa's words (who puts it with a twinkle in his eye) that anybody of any birth, race or ethnicity is equal in the Higher Entity, and to unite with the Ultimate is a right that everybody possesses, irrespective of his caste, creed, age, sex, fame or power. Why waste time and energy scrambling for tit-bit leftovers while the greatest of bonanzas is there within ourselves!

The verse clarifies in no uncertain terms that whatever good deeds anyone does for attaining heaven is inferior compared to the way of life of the yogi. *Yoga* (the effort to be with the Supreme) is the ultimate way out for anybody and everybody, no matter whether one is a *chandala* (considered belonging to the lowest caste) or a *brahmana* (considered member of the highest caste), man or woman, a girl having her menstruation (believed to be impure), or one who has just had a sanctifying dip in the Ganges, rich or poor, famous or destitute, able or deformed, or even a former thief or burglar. It is not insurance for a blissful afterlife in heaven but a pedestrian ticket to salvation so as to experience happy life here and eternal bliss in union. The path is also offered and explained in the simplest style ever. There is no application form to be filled, no registration fee, no intermediary agent to be appeased, no verification process or notification in any gazetteer. Take the wide-open door; it is right there behind the curtain of our ignorance!

## Chapter 9

# **Yoga of the Highest Secret, The Raja Vidya**

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This chapter shares the highest of all knowledge which is also most hidden among all sciences. The word ‘*raja*’ means king.

Why Vedantic knowledge is hidden has been discussed earlier. This knowledge cannot be obtained through inputs through the sense organs or through experimentation or computational methods. The discipline that one ought to know is called as *vidya* (science). *Vedanta* means the end of all knowledge (the highest knowledge) as can be comprehended by the human mind. Therefore *adhyatma vidya* or the study of the ultimate reality is the king of all *vidyas*. A secret is that which is yet to be discovered. In this case the means to discover it are also secrets. The ultimate *vidya* that helps unveil all secrets are, naturally, the *vidya* of all *vidyas*.

In this chapter Sage Vyasa explains the deepest secrets in *brahma vidya* in a nutshell, as to how the universe is manifest by the *prakṛti*, how everything works on this framework and based on what, and in what way the *Paramātma* pervades each and all. Also briefly explained are the methods of union followed by the great sages of ancient past.

There are clues to the society of the period when the *Gita* was composed in this chapter too. Many diverse ritualistic practices were conducted frequently. The *chaturvarnya* (four-caste) polity in the then society distinguished people by the standards of birth as the high and the low. Women were largely marginalized and the downtrodden classes of the society were deprived of right to education. There existed the belief that the downtrodden could never ever succeed in knowing the Supreme One. The concepts of virtue-sin (*punya-papa*), heaven-hell (*svarga-naraka*) and rebirths based on these were considered paramount. The *purohits* (priests) gained huge rewards; even entire villages were given as *dakshina* (remuneration for performing the *yajna*, as they were the only sanctified ‘middlemen’ between men and God). Superstitions thrived at the cost

of wisdom. All of them are rendered insignificant by this superb science.

Vedantic knowledge sows that revolutionary seed of questioning the existent dogma of baseless beliefs without threatening the foundation of the already existing basic belief in God. It is also directed that all answers, whether obtained from great philosophers or from one's own inner self, are to be subjected to relentless scrutiny. Accept any spiritual instruction from any quarter only with a pinch of salt; never adhere to any custom or belief without logical questioning.

In this chapter, the discourse begins directly on the subject without even waiting for queries – as if the Supreme Self illuminates within oneself on Its own even before the mind formulates the question; the radiance of the ever-pervading light becoming spontaneously manifest.

śrībhagavān uvāca  
idam tu te guhyatamam pravakṣyāmy anasūyave  
jñānam vijñānasahitam yaj jñātvā mokṣyase/śubhāt 9.1

*The Lord (of the universe) said:*

*To you who does not envy, I shall now impart this, the most hidden of all secrets, this knowledge combined with experience (for realization); which having known, you will be free from all afflictions.*

The primary requirement to seek this knowledge is stable mind which is free of separatism. Also one must neither feel greater than any person who is knowledgeable nor scorn another person. Acknowledgement of another's knowledge is a must to imbibe it, but if a person is envious he would not be able to do so. It is also easy for the half-learned to develop a tendency to scorn others due to ego. Instead, respect for the learned is the hallmark of a true student. In the Upanishads the teachers address their students as ‘sowmya’(soft) or ‘vatsa’ (lovable).

rājavidyā rājaguhyam pavitram idam uttamam  
pratyakṣāvagamam dharmyam susukham kartum avyayam 9.2

*This is the king of all knowledge and the most hidden of all secrets. It is the purest and noblest, can be learned by practice and experienced, matches with the path of dharma, is a joy to practice and also imperishable.*

The way to this wisdom is of the most secretive nature only because this knowledge is the most subtle. It is hidden beneath many layers of ignorance. Just

like the petals of the flower have to be opened to reveal the innermost part of it, likewise is this utmost secret. And accessing it would not be enough, one must be mentally prepared to feel it. This bright divine gem which is self-illuminating lies in the dark depths of caves of māya (illusion). Sustained effort is needed to dive deep and bring it up. But the yearning to find it is naturally latent in all forms of life. (There is an indirect hint that it would be better to keep this knowledge a secret from those who haven't yet recognized this urge on their own).

Whatever action helps retain a thing for what it was meant for originally is its *dharma* (righteous duty). Each element in the universe is different from every other. This distinctiveness bestows a specific *dharma* to each of the elements. However, when these elements come together to form 'larger' beings, the 'set' comes to have its own overriding *dharma*. Amidst these differences, there exists a most essential *dharma* for living beings, above everything, which is the urge to evolve and become one with the everlasting facet of the universe – the *Paramātma* or *Purushottama*. This *vidya* is the secret to following its way; hence it is called as the supreme *dharma*. It is the noblest because it is the highest goal in life; it is the purest in that it can clear away the biggest of blemishes and correct any person without any compulsion or order. It is also a joy to practice because its practice involves calming the mind and becoming one with the highest happiness, both through the way and at the goal.

Knowledge becomes complete only through practical experiences. (In his notes on the Gita Dr. S. Radhakrishnan writes that *jnana* (knowledge) is the wealth of the scholars while *vijnana* (wisdom) is the experience of the *rishis*.) This *vidya* is imperishable because it is not plain knowledge but wisdom. As one never forgets cycling or swimming to any extent in one's life, so is this *vidya* too. Once one masters it, wisdom stays till the end of one's life. *Aparā vidya* (knowledge pertaining to the material world) is forgettable, while *parā vidya* (wisdom that helps become one with the ātma) is eternal. Even a small introduction to this *vidya* will save us from great fears (as was explained earlier – 2.40).

One needs to pass no entrance exam to be admitted to this course. The minimum qualification is steadfast dedication and complete riddance from jealousy.

aśraddadhānāḥ puruṣā dharmasyāsy paramṛtapa  
aprāpya mām nivartante mr̥tyusamśāravartmani 9.3

*O the scorcher of foes (Arjuna), those who do not dedicate themselves to this*

*dharma, unable to attain Me, return to the path of samsara the hallmark of which is death.*

“Scorcher of foes” is the cue to provide what will happen to those who cannot overcome their real foes. Passions of anger, hatred and greed are the foes in this path. So also are ignorance, jealousy and sankalpa. One is not able to focus with complete dedication on one’s true *dharma* because of not being powerful of mind to “scorch” these. Only the most powerful can destroy their own weaknesses, the less powerful usually blame others. *Ātma swarupa* (being one) is the essence of human life and those who cannot concentrate on it cannot attain the Supreme Purusha. They continue *samsara* (concentrating on material life only, without being aware or interested in any higher level), the hallmark of which is death (Death is the only thing that is definite in the material world).

Dedication is a word that means faith too, but here it implies faith resulting from thorough knowledge reinstated by experience (not superstitions).

mayā tatam idam sarvam jagad avyaktamūrtinā  
matsthāni sarvabhūtāni na cāham teṣv avasthitah 9.4

*This entire world is pervaded by Me through the template of Avyakta; all beings exist in Me, but I do not (exclusively) dwell in them.*

Starting with this verse we enter into the most hidden of secrets. The Supreme Entity, though omnipresent, is indiscernible through the human faculties of sense organs. This is because there is an unseen template in between – the Avyakta which forms the fabric of space from which all matter is formed, in which it rests and into which it finally dissolves. But our faculties cannot perceive Avyakta because we differentiate between matter and space only. Even behind ‘space’, Avyakta is there and invisible to the eyes. It is a continuous framework or fabric which hosts all matter, radiation and space. Matter moves in it without obstruction because all matter are just wave-forms in this background template itself. (Science has got some indirect evidences about this basic fabric of space though we have only yet reached up to the ‘spacetime’ concept now.) The Supreme Entity is even beyond this hidden template, thus it is described as the secret of secrets, beyond reach of sense organs ever, and even incomprehensible to the mind. Since the Supreme Purusha cannot be restricted to dwell exclusively in any ‘matter’ or ‘material’, it cannot be said that It vests solely in it. (This also decisively challenges the claim of any fraud who masquerades as God.) It is extremely difficult to realize the Supreme and also to

explain about it to others as our sense organs, mind and intellect work with its light. We cannot even see or feel the Avyakta, then how can we visualize the Supreme?

na ca matsthāni bhūtāni paśya me yogam aiśvaram  
bhūtabhṛṇ na ca bhūtastho mamātmā bhūtabhāvanah 9.5

*Nor do beings exist (directly) in Me. Though it is in My nature to create the entities of the world and govern them, I do not reside (directly) in them. Look at the (true) divine nature of My yoga!*

I pervade all living beings; I am the reason for the universe itself, I am the reason for creation and their sustenance, but they do not reside in Me; neither are they directly governed by Me. My interception with the universe is indeed splendidous; it merits special attention and study.

This is by no means any religious verse or mundane explanation; it goes beyond all that is known in both science and philosophy.

All entities in the universe are born form the template of Avyakta; and the life and action of each being is derived from the Supreme One based on that framework. All entities reside in Avyakta; therefore they do not directly reside in the Paramātma. The Paramātma governs all through the Prakṛti and therefore do not govern entities directly. The yoga or union giving rise to the nature of the universe is indeed very divine and very special. The individual life form situated in the Kshara realm does not directly comprehend either the Prakṛti or the Purushottama in their vast eternity. The three levels – Kshara, Akshara and Isvara – are further explained in verses 16, 17 and 18 in the fifteenth chapter.

Modern science accredits only the Kshara realm and does not acknowledge the presence of Akshara (Avyakta or the unseen and imperishable template) and Isvara (which is the level of the basic energy of the universe). Science cannot handle anything that cannot be sensed, weighed and measured. It cannot enter a world in which fundamental units of measurement of mass, time and length cease to be fundamental. The level of Akshara is one such. All physical constants are subject to continuous change in accordance with the change of nature of Akshara. (Unless this is taken into account one cannot visualize the complete and plausible model for the physical universe.) yathākāśasthito nityam  
vāyuḥ sarvatrago mahān

tathā sarvāṇī bhūtāni matsthānīty upadhāraya 9.6

*Just like the air that pervades all through is always situated in akasa (space),*

*likewise all living entities reside in Me.*

This is a beautiful comparison which explains the hidden levels in the simplest way possible. Here, the Purushottama is compared to space and Avyakta is compared to the air that vests in space. Both space and air are invisible. We cannot see space or air, yet we know that both exist. As air resides in space, in the same way everything in the Kshara resides in the Avyakta and Avyakta resides in the Purushottama.

sarvabhūtāni kaunteya prakṛtiṁ yānti māmikāṁ  
kalpakṣaye punas tāni kalpādau visṛjāmy aham 9.7  
prakṛtiṁ svām avaṣṭabhya visṛjāmi punah punah  
bhūtagrāmam imam kṛtsnam avaśam̄ prakṛter vaśat 9.8

*O Arjuna, all beings dissolve into My prakṛti at the end of the kalpa; they are brought forth again at the beginning of the (next) kalpa by (based on) Me.*

*Employing My prakṛti, all these vulnerable and delicate multitude of beings are sent forth again and again, dependent and subject to the rule of the prakṛti.*

As the discussion of the most hidden secrets in the universe goes deeper and deeper the picture of the hidden nature (*parā prakṛti*) gets more and more revealed. It was discussed in the previous chapter about ‘true day and night’ – all matter being produced in the beginning of the kalpa and all of it being dissolved at the end (verses 8.17, 8.18). The expanding phase of the universe is symbolically described as Brahma Deva’s day while the contracting phase is night. Brahma is another name for Akshara (verse 8.3). The word ‘brahma’ means ‘that which tends to expand’. At the beginning of the expansive phase (the Big Bang), numerous wave oscillations are developed in the course of the process of transition of Akshara (The nature of Akshara is called *parā prakṛti*, the Mother Nature beyond the obvious *aparā* nature of the material world). All entities of the world are born out of interactions between these primary wave oscillations and are subject to continuous change, their higher conglomerations (entities) subject to birth, evolution and death. On account of this changing background they are all vulnerable, feeble and imperfect; and their life and sustenance are governed by Mother Nature (*parā prakṛti*). All these wave forms are completely dissolved back into the same *parā prakṛti* (Akshara) at the end of the expansion phase of this great pulse, like a slate wiped clean.

It is likely that our universe is just one among countless such occupying a multi-verse. It is also probable that the internal scenarios in the case of two

consecutive cycles of any of these pulses, be it a small atom or the *brahmand* (our universe) itself, are not repetitions. Possibly each *brahmand* evolves with each cycle.

In modern cosmology, there are three models to the universe. One is the steady-state universe taking the view that the universe will always exist as the same. The second is the concept of the expanding universe. According to it, since all galaxies seem to be distancing from each other, the universe is ever expanding, and everything is separating out and spreading apart till all die a cold lonely death. Even afterwards the universe would still continue to expand for infinity! The third visualizes a pulsating universe. This theory advocates that the universe will contract after expansion and then repeat the cycle again, and these cycles will go on for ever.

Out of these three, the first one stands already rejected. The second is accepted now. The third, the obvious solution, direly needs the concept of *Avyakta*; otherwise science would have no inkling of the expanding substrate. What exactly is expanding would remain beyond grasp if space is believed to be empty, as there is ‘nothing’ to contract after expansion. The ‘hidden energy’ behind the expansion phase also behaves in unknown fashion too! (But it is also definite that everything should come back together; it has done that before, else how would the big bang occur?) Unless and until the presence of the omnipresent substrate *Akshara* (*Avyakta*) is understood and some insight to the force behind its expansion and contraction phases is gained, a sustainable final view is unlikely to emerge. In fact our world could well be just one of the innumerable pulsations in the *maha prapancha* (multi-verse).

na ca māṁ tāni karmāṇī nibadhnanti dhanamjaya  
udāśinavad āśinam asaktam teṣu karmasu 9.9

*O the one who has won over wealth (Arjuna), I, existing as if indifferent, am not in any way attached by any of these acts.*

The one who has won over wealth implies both gainer of wealth and the one who has won over the snare of wealth on the mind.

Though all activities in this universe issue forth and have their base in the Supreme Entity, they happen through Its *prakṛti* the dialectic medium, and therefore the Highest Self is unattached to any of these activities. Look at the incessant shower of solar energy falling on the surface of the earth, irrespective of whether a lotus buds or a tree withers or the very life on earth ceases to exist. A rope is never affected by the different ways in which it is used, be it a swing

or a noose. The power of nuclear energy remains fundamentally unchanged whether it is used for making a devastating bomb or as therapeutic resource in the treatment of cancer. The Supreme One which is the basis for all energy and matter is in a state of a total nonattachment, appearing apparently “indifferent” to everything that is happening in this world.

mayādhyakṣeṇa prakṛtiḥ sūyate sacarācaram  
hetunānena kaunteya jagad viparivartate 9.10

*O Arjuna; prakṛti gives birth to all and everything in the world under my authority; it is in the same way that change continues to go on in the world.*

This is a very important verse that directly explains everything that goes on in the world in a simple and straightforward way. Everything is manifest as matter waves and changes take place by interaction between waves in Avyakta based on the rules of the background – the dialectic Parā Nature. Therefore all that occurs here is according to nature's rules. It is prakṛti (Mother Nature or Akshara) that is responsible for all the actual scripting and execution of the play. This scripting not only pertains to the birth of everything but also to the continuing spectrum of changes to which apparent nature and all entities in it are subject to. Nature is dialectical (based on the gunas) and changes take place in action-reaction patterns.

As the patterns of nature and the hidden force behind it form the underlying framework for the material world and all related knowledge and other vidyas (sciences), there is no vidya greater than this one. Our entire modern science is study based on nature and its laws. As this knowledge is more basic than that, there is no other vidya which is more secretive than this. As this goes further than all material knowledge, there is no other knowledge beyond this; it is the highest or the Raja of all vidya. As one can experience and practice it on one's own, it is the most convincing. Palpable dividends are available at every step.

avajānanti māṁ mūḍhā mānuṣīṁ tanum āśritam  
param bhāvam ajānanto mama bhūtamahēśvaram 9.11

*The unwise, unable to understand My Supreme position as Mahesvara of all, disrespect Me by considering Me as taking some human body to subsist.*

Even though prakṛti is the apparent ruler, it does so under the authority of the Purushottama or Supreme Purusha. The one who is beyond and controls the

nature of the prakṛti itself is the Mahesvara of all, the Supreme Entity above all nature and rule. But some people who are utterly ignorant consider Isvara merely as some form – maybe a human being. In fact, all names, forms and bodies reside in It. All forms reside in Isvara but Isvara does not exclusively reside in any of them; the vessel should never be misunderstood for the presence of any particular item within it. So many petty conflicts and mighty wars have popped up in the name of stone, wood or metal artifices that are worshipped as exclusive embodiments of God. Many frauds in the name of incarnation and God-men fool, exploit and destroy poor devotees before ending up in jails.

The feeling that the mishaps and miseries that one faces in life are caused by God's displeasure or anger is the result of conceiving God in the warp of a human personality. The humanization of God is a malady ensuing from the premises of what is known as humano-centrism. It only shows how incredibly distant we are from the knowledge of the state of ultimate reality.

What has already been said in an earlier verse is repeated here which stresses the importance of this concept. (Note that the word 'kshetra' is nowhere in the Bhagavad Gita used to denote an external temple; it denotes the human body itself; the verse propounding this idea follows in the chapter on kshetra and Kshetrajna. There is no reference anywhere to idol worship.) The Supreme Purusha equally resides in all beings alike. It is wrong to assume that It resides in just one and not in any other. Of course the presence is there in a piece of stone; but also there in equal measure in every other piece of stone too. One is free to take any path of devotion of any stone one wants to; it is one's pleasure; but it is not at all right if one fights others who desire to take recourse to other routes which they consider right; it is lamentable ignorance.

This verse also gives us the cue that one who is not able to conceive everything in the world as equal is off the mark, ever. The formless God will ever remain unperceivable to one who fails to see his own brother who stands just next to him.

Such people are:-

moghāśā moghakarmāṇo moghajñānā vicetasah  
rākṣasīm āsurīm caiva prakṛtim mohinīm śritāḥ 9.12

*Of vain hopes, of vain actions, of vain knowledge, and senseless; they are possessed of the delusive nature of rakshasas and asuras.*

There are no words sharper than these to fight the advocates of black magic, superstitions, idol worship and God-men cults. The *Bhagvatam* also says the

same: (*aham sarvesu bhutesu bhutatma avastitah sada tamavajnaya mam murtya kurutercavidambanam* – The prayers of those who do not recognize Me in all living entities and try to worship idols thinking I vest only in them are swept away as ashes – 3.19.21).

Their worship is futile; none of the desires prompting them to it would ever materialize. The knowledge they have is waste and their intellect is unable to remain steady. *Asura* temperament is that which makes one indulge only in sensual pleasures; and when access to these are blocked one is driven to engage in demoniac cruelties. It is the extreme of delusional ignorance coupled with wrong choices. Obviously, atrocities from self-torture to human sacrifice come under the ambit of this criticism. The *asura* never gets satiated with worldly pleasures and hence indulge in *rakshasa* (cruel) activity. (A detailed view on *deva prakṛti* (divine nature) and *asura prakṛti* (demoniac nature) is discussed in a later chapter).

It follows that even during those old days, not just the sacrificial ritual of beasts alone but that of humans as well existed, and there might have been lot of sorcerers exploiting society. The warning is: keep away from all such, know right and take the road to realization.

mahātmānas tu mām pārtha daivīṁ prakṛtim āśritāḥ  
bhajanty ananyamanaso jñātvā bhūtādim avyayam 9.13

*But, O Arjuna, the great (among men) rely on *deva prakṛti* (divine nature) and with unflinching concentration pray to Me who they realize as the imperishable origin of all creations.*

Only bad thoughts emerge from indulgence in atrocious actions, tending to make one all the more emotionally corrupt and more prone to cruelties. The way to greatness is just the opposite. It is easy too. One needs to do just three things: rely on *deva prakṛti* – to be moderate in temperament with control over desires and emotions; realize the Supreme One as the origin of all beings of the world; and meditate on that one Paramātma with unflinching concentration and utmost dedication.

This is Royal science, Royal secret, the purest and the greatest; it is forever and realizable by direct intuitive knowledge; it can be very comfortably practiced by indulging in self-evident (natural) duties.

Surprisingly, familiarizing and mastering such a big secret is not at all difficult is the overall cue provided here. As this is the natural way of everything whether animate or inanimate, this path becomes more and more enjoyable as

one continues to tread on it. Self-imposed starvation, giving up the world, dwelling in caves in the wilderness, saffron-colored robes or any painstaking regime is not needed to achieve this.

Right knowledge is the key to open the secrets of evolution of all beings in the universe. Find out the origin of all things *i.e.* the ultimate reality and, dedicating all of one's actions to it, live creatively. In the *Jnaneswary* (a commentary on the Gita by Jnanaeswar Maharaj with special accent on devotion) the 'great' are specified thus: 'I reside permanently in the austere hearts of the great people... the honey of knowledge brims in such hearts... they are like trees of peace... the buds of full moon blooms in these tree boughs... even salvation is not their greatest aim... they live in this world like gods... they become Me and do karma on My behalf.'

Any person who rises to this level will have only empathy towards others in the society. They can never consider themselves 'more equal' or hold themselves back from the task of loving everybody and taking up difficulties for others. There has been no greater call for equality, ever. Swami Chinmayananda calls this as 'spiritual socialism'.

satatam kīrtayanto mām yatantaś ca dṛḍhavrataḥ  
namasyantaś ca mām bhaktyā nityayuktā upāsate 9.14

*Such persons with determinate concentration always eulogize, strive (to be in constant union), pray and prostrate (accept Me as higher than body ego) to attain Me.*

The *kirtana* (eulogy) sung in the accompaniment of blaring music as seen in hysterical religious meetings is not what is intended, but the silent prayers in the mind that continuously eulogize the Supreme Purusha. To the question as to how may one ever differentiate between these two *kirtanas*, the answer is rather simple – the former is occasional whereas the latter can go on all the time within one.

Religious rituals and fasting that are observed only on days considered auspicious are of no importance unless they are helpful for the continuous realization of Isvara and the dedication of one's self unto the Supreme Self. Of course it is not possible to physically prostrate all through day and night, but one's mind can do it always, wherever the body is and whatever it is engaged to.

jñānayajñena cāpy anye yajanto mām upāsate  
ekatvena pr̥thaktvena bahudhā viśvatomukham 9.15

*Some others worship Me through their dispassionate effort to gain ultimate wisdom, either trying to be one with Me or remaining separate. I have innumerable faces all over the universe (so I can be approached in any manner anywhere).*

*Jnana yajna* is the sustained effort for right knowledge. One can go about it in any manner one chooses. There are different routes too. Natarajaguru points out that Gita is an effort to integrate all concepts that strive to unify man with God into a consolidated universal perception, the absence of which makes the followers of different prophets violently disagree, quarrel and fight each other. Guru Nityachaitanya Yati explicitly says that if one realizes that the status accredited to the Supreme Being in the Bhagavad Gita is the same as to Jove in the Old Testament and to God in the New Testament and also to Allah in the Quran, then there is no other entity which stands as distinct from God, in any philosophical angle. '*I have innumerable faces all over the universe*' (so I can be approached in any manner anywhere). Here the highest of all sciences unites every religion and every concept to the One God which is beyond all name and form.

aham kratur aham yajñah svadhāham aham auṣadham  
mantra/aham aham evājyam aham agnir aham hutam 9.16

*I am yajna, the karma specified in the smritis, the oblations offered to the ancestors, medicinal herbs (food) and also the mantra, clarified butter and other sacred items offered to fire in a yajna. I am also the very sacrificial fire of the yajna as well as the act of offering, and all incantations.*

This verse points onto a lofty thought with a compassionate smile. The acts of worship in the Mahabharata times (when the Bhagavad Gita was written) were through *agnihotradi shrauta karma* (*kratuh* or Vedic rituals), *panchayajnadi smarta karma* (*yajna* or rituals prescribed in the *smritis*) and *pitru preeti srādha karma* (*srādha* or oblations to the departed ancestors). But the persons who were involved in such rituals either as a beneficiary or as actual performer never knew that the items which were inevitable for such rituals, the *mantras* (chants) recited during the time of the offering and also the very persons involved in sacrificial deeds are all various manifestations based on the Supreme Purusha. This verse seems to say that if such sacrifices were also accompanied with that realization, it would have been fruitful.

This reinstates the position established in stanzas 2.42 to 2.44 discussed in the section pertaining to religion: all rituals are futile if not accompanied by *yajna bhavana* (the feeling of being one with the entire universe). Devoid of it, tradition is liable to be misused to aid and abet exploitation of society by ignorant or greedy priests in the guise of the wise.

And there is more to it:

pitāham asya jagato mātā dhātā pitāmahaḥ  
vedyam̄ pavitram̄ om̄kāra ṛk sāma yajur eva ca 9.17

*I can be considered the Father, Mother and the Ancestor of this universe and responsible for all results of actions. I am the philosophical truth that one must realize and I am the purifying and primordial reverberation ‘Om’. I am the Rig-Sama-Yajur Vedas and the like also.*

(The last word ‘ca’ – meaning ‘also’ – in the verse is generally taken to indicate Adharva Veda too or the entire gamut of Vedic texts.)

All living beings evolve from the Akshara which is the inseparable prakṛti of the Supreme Purusha; hence the Supreme One is the progenitor (ancestor) of this universe. As It is the seed that sprouts in Akshara to become the universe, It is the Father of the universe as well. Therefore, whatever is done to appease the ancestors should in fact be devoted to the Supreme Purusha. If beneficial results are sought after while performing the rituals, then again the Supreme Purusha is to be considered first because all the fruits of all actions are governed by the Supreme Purusha as issued from the prakṛti. The Purushottama is the source of all Devas (forces) also. Whatever has to be known, the purest syllable ‘Om’ and all texts of knowledge have to be understood as expressions of the Supreme. (This can also be taken to mean all rituals of any kind performed anywhere in the world and also the scriptures of any religion, because there is only one Supreme Entity, whatever name It is addressed to by mankind.) Knowing the True Self means overcoming the feeling of incompleteness, imperfection and mortality; the three prime characteristics of any mortal being of nature – which is a must and a true goal for any species with heightened awareness like the human being.

gatir bhartā prabhuh̄ sāksī nivāsaḥ̄ śaraṇam̄ suhṝ  
prabhavaḥ̄ pralayaḥ̄ sthānam̄ nidhānam̄ bijam̄ avyam 9.18

*I am the One who presides over the course and result of actions, the Bharta,*

*Prabhu, Sakshi, Nivasa, Saranam, Suhrut, the Prabhava and Pralaya, the Sthana, Nidhana, and the Imperishable Bija to everything in the universe.*

This is another important verse in which what all the Purushottama signifies to entities in nature is explained in so many terms. *Bharta* = the One who nourishes; *Prabhu* = the One who illuminates all; *Sakshi* = the One who sees and knows all, the omniscient; *Nivasa* = abode; *Saranam* = ultimate refuge; *Suhrut* = friend, the one closest to the heart and emotions; *Prabhava* = the origin of everything; *Pralaya* = the act of complete dissolution of the universe; *Sthana* = the foundation; *Nidhana* = support, that from which issues all the factors and material useful to life; *Bija* = the seed from which growth of everything happens.

“There is nothing that does not grow other than from the bija; growth is always manifesting in the universe; hence the bija is imperishable,” says Adi Sankara. When the seed matures into the tree it does not mean that the seed is nowhere because the tree contains it. Any change of shape or place does not mean absence. Whereas the seed is the cause and the tree its effect, the association envisaged here ensues from a state where the cause and the effect form a united whole.

Let us examine something that resembles this closely. Even while we are in deep sleep, our knowledge, character, personality and worldly awareness reside in us as ‘seed-consciousness’. Moreover, we are one with that, too. As we wake up, all these are born again like a tree sprouting from a seed. Likewise, everything that we human beings are, our creativity, love and whatever greatness we have produced are all there in the seed. So are all beings, indeed the whole universe. We see people lament following death of some great person, that such a loss can never be compensated. We erect monuments, we believe loss is forever. In truth there is no loss. The seed capable of producing all this and much more is immortal, and it is all there, dormant. We know that death is must for the Kshara world but there is no reason to lament. The Supreme Purusha is the sum total of all – the seed that blossoms into the universe; its expansion and creation.

Again this does not mean that all thoughts, actions and bodies existed in this same fashion in the seed; nor does it mean that all this was destined to happen in only this way. The ‘seed’ provides the sum total of not only all these possibilities but a lot more. For example, we imagine a lot of things but do only a few in comparison. For all our thoughts and actions, the mind can be considered the seed. This does not mean that all these thoughts and actions had always resided in our mind, nor does it mean that they would be carried out only in a particular fashion. The nature of the ‘seed’ points to the inherent capabilities and capacity to bring forth all this, and also with all its random variations. That is why it is

said that there is no loss even in death, ever; and no cause for sorrow.

The pre-big-bang stage is termed *bijavasta* (the seed-stage) of the universe. The Upanishads call it *Hiranyagarbha* (the golden womb or the golden egg, the universal germ. As Per the Rig-Veda, it is the source of the manifested cosmos). This is the point from which all beings and the entire universe originated.

*Pralaya* signifies the destruction or dissolution of the universe. Every manifest entity must undergo dissolution; anything that is born has to die.

tapāmy aham aham varṣam nigr̥hāmy utsṛjāmi ca  
amṛtam caiva mr̥tyuś ca sad asac cāham arjuna 9.19

*O Arjuna, I provide the energy for the world to go on. I am the cause for the rains to pour and not. I am (the basis of) deathlessness and death (at the same time) as well as the real and the unreal.*

The energy resource that begins from the Supreme Being is explicit in the prakṛti through the dialectic manifestations that exist in it. Heat and cold, rains and sun, birth and death, scarcity and abundance, all are continuously manifested.

The heat in the heater, the light in the bulb and the frost in the fridge are all created by the same electrical energy. Atom bomb and electricity can be made from the same energy. If there is a magnet there would be obviously two poles to it. One needs to know how to handle the energy that splits up into opposites and play the drama of dialectic interaction. One must be able to perceive also that which is beyond the dialectic. On the strength of that perception, one can easily and truly realize the secret behind the phenomenon known as change, and the difference between death and immortality as well as reality and unreality.

traividyā mām somapāḥ pūtāpāpā  
yajñair iṣṭvā svargatim prārthayante  
te puṇyam āsādya surendralokam  
āsnanti divyān divi devabhogān 9.20  
te tam bhuktvā svargalokam viśālam  
kṣīne puṇye martyalokam viśanti  
evam trayīdharmam anuprapannā  
gatāgataṁ kāmakāmā labhante 9.21

*Those who are familiar with the texts of the Vedas perform yajnas, drink the wine of soma, get free from all dejections and aversions and pray for the*

*attainment of heavenly bliss. They attain the heaven which is the fruit of their action and experience the lustrous bhoga (luxuries) enjoyed by the habitants of heaven.*

*They experience the bliss of the expansive heaven and as the effects of their deeds are redeemed, return to man's world. Those who crave for (such) pleasure and try to make use of the methods prescribed in the Vedas (and other religious texts) to that end are endlessly shuttled between the worlds.*

The Vedas loudly claim that if yajnas are performed as prescribed and the complicated ritual is successfully concluded by drinking *soma rasa* (the milky juice of a creeper plant, perhaps belonging to the group of *ephdira* or *periploca*) one may get free from all *papa* (sin), reach heaven and enjoy heavenly bliss.

Most commentaries ignore the satirical punch in these verses. But Jnanaeswar Maharaj does not mince words: ‘Hey Arjuna! How can be something termed happy which continuously strives for the *anitya* (short-lived) without caring for the *nitya* (eternal)? Know that my state of being is *satchitananda* – the ultimate happiness resulting from being one with the *chit* (mind) of the eternal. For those who attain Me, *svarga* (heaven) and *naraka* (hell) are equally illusory. What may be the condition of those who, without knowing me, try to attain *punya* (divinity by virtuous action)? They sow *papa* (sin, because their good deeds are based on selfish desires to get to heaven) thinking it is *punya* (good deeds) and reap heavenly bliss, but only on a momentary basis. They sit on the *devapita* (the divine seat), visit *Amaravathy* (the most fabulous part of heaven) mounting *Airavat* (the white elephant with four tusks), enjoy tumblers brimming with *amrut* (potion that helps one feel eternal); gods are at their behest to serve them, and *Apsaras* (lady court dancers of Indra the king of heaven, known for their exemplary beauty) like Rambha and Urvashi are forever at their disposal to entertain them with dance and song; they have *Kamadeva* (the lord of sexual desire) to give them company in their night chambers! What else can anyone seek more? But for how long will it remain? The position of such men is the same as the ones who spend their entire fortune on prostitutes and at last turn up to be so worthless that they cannot even knock again on such doors. Their happiness would at best resemble that of one who finds a bag of gold in his dream.’

If the *jeevātma* (soul, which is like a reflection of the *Paramātma* plus all the innate tendencies – *vasanas*) can act like a separate template needed to project the image of the body-mind-intellect combine of the person into an illusionary world after life, then the nature of this heaven is an extension of the person's cravings when he was alive. If there is such a thing, then that world of pure

pleasure can never be a true world because nature does not work in a one-sided fashion. Also, common sense suggests that people, friends and relationships in our world cannot be remade using the same people in the same fashion in heaven, because if it were it would stop being heaven as all those other people would have their own wishes and priorities! – Which makes it equivalent to the situation here on earth. So the place and the people there are illusory, *if at all there is one.*

So *if* there is such an illusion which is tailor-made for the person, after entering it post mortem and doing whatever the person craves at will and as he pleases in the large heavenly world, fulfilling all his wants and innate desires, he would return as a rebirth (projected there means there is a template based on which he can be projected back also) to get those real life experiences again, once more accumulating all the desires and snares to continue the cycle. This cycle of coming and going occurs because there are people who strongly believe that this is the right path, and if you do good, heaven is your reward. In the same way hell is illusory, born from a person's self torment and guilt, where he goes after death to suffer great punishments, actually created from conflict with his own inner self. What *bhava* (belief and attitude) one takes strongly in life and assumes it into his *jeevātma*, especially at the time of death, can happen.

There is no other way to better describe the transient pleasure derived from the intoxicating drink *soma rasa* made from the *soma* vine which provides a temporary pleasure trip to heavenly bliss followed by the deflated condition and hangover. (In the light of verses 2.42 and 2.43 seen earlier, there is no room for doubt regarding the indented import of this portion of the text).

It is stated beyond all doubt that the *yajna*-way to heaven is similar to the temporary elation one may get after consuming a hallucinating or intoxicating drink. The verse is indicative of not just the shortcomings of the *yajna* but the striving for heaven as a concept in religious texts altogether.

Furthermore, for rebirth to happen, the *jeevātma* template needed to project the blueprint of the body-mind-intellect combine of the person must remain after death to morph a rebirth. And even then the body-mind-intellect complex is not reborn; the person would be entirely different; only the *vasanas* are the same. However, modern biology takes sides in this question by proving that *vasanas* are genetically linked rather than anything else, and they are transmitted through generations; therefore rebirth takes a dubious second place in modern scientific view. Even in the next *kalpa* there is only a remote possibility of the same organism getting morphed again because the whole creation and sustenance is based on random action-reaction patterns in the dialectical *prakṛti* and repetition in the same vein is indeed a far remote possibility.

The Gita also sidelines both heaven and rebirth, considering both to be inferior and visualizing them as *choices* rather than the law. Therefore, in contrast to the path outlined in the previous verses, the only noble choice is:-

ananyāś cintayanto māṁ ye janāḥ paryupāsate  
teṣāṁ nityābhīyuktānāṁ yogakṣemāṁ vahāmy aham 9.22

*I look after the kshema and the yoga of those who, with unflinching devotion and a steady and stable mind, always yearn to be with Me.*

*Kshema* is the maintenance of all (wisdom) that has been attained while *yoga* refers to the practice of wisdom.

The plight of those who seek only heavenly bliss has already been discussed. According to adhyatma vidya (the science of the self) one needs to only concentrate with unflinching devotion with a steadfast mind and realize that one is not a separate entity from the Supreme One. When one does that one is always adjoined. Doing it steadily is enough; the rest will automatically follow.

Even if visualization of *Isvara* is not possible and concentration difficult, and even if one manages to get a taste of realization but finds it difficult to maintain that state, one need not worry. The blocks will be removed by the *ātma* itself if we can steadily keep our mind and devotion on the Supreme One. What is yet to be grasped is to be attained by *yoga* (the steadfastness to concentrate on *Isvara*) and, at the same time, the knowledge already gained has to be maintained (*kshema*). The Bhagavad Gita gives immense importance to the word *yoga* and from the beginning to the end we find all chapter heads with the word *yoga*. *Yoga* here denotes every path that leads to the Supreme – *jnana* (knowledge), *karma* (action) and *bhakti* (devotion). The word *Upanishad* itself means being close to the teacher (*guru*), and *guru* is another word for the Supreme Purusha.

This verse is right at the exact middle of the entire treatise of the Bhagavad Gita and some scholars call this its manifesto.

The hallmark of *yoga* is its universal applicability. It fits all ages, does not depend on outside help; it has no price tag and involves no complicated routine. We need to bear the burden of the quest for the *ātma swarupa* (Paramātma) only till we reach the canoe that would effectively transport us to the other shore. Our determination to unite with the *ātma swarupa* itself is enough; the rest would be taken care of. Whether we put the burden down on the floor of the canoe or whether we place it on our heads while in the canoe, the compassionate hint is that it is always the canoe which bears the weight of it!

As an example for steadfast concentration, Dr. Radhakrishnan quotes from

the Sufi devotee, Rabia: ‘As I am constantly devoted to God, I do not get the time to hate the devil. I met a prophet in my dream who asked me whether I loved him. I replied, ‘O, Holy messenger, who can ever hate you? But since I am completely devoted to God, I get no chance to love or hate any other body’’.

On the materialistic side, yoga also means progress and kshema can be taken to mean well-being in life. Our materialistic pursuits begin and end in the thought that we need to work hard to meet basic necessities that we believe only we can achieve, and in this mad rat race our life struggle comes to an end whether the material targets are attained or not. Sense of loss, disappointment and tension multiplies in direct proportion with the size of the content of what we call ‘necessities’. Gita tells us how we can be relieved of this by diligently performing all karma with the yajna mentality, dedicating everything to Isvara and in the process becoming free and light. Once that dedication is complete, one’s work is also complete, and it is the True Self that then decides our yoga and kshema as we work in tandem with It. One must always remember that one is nothing but an instrument (*‘nimittamatram bhava savyasachin’*) (11.33).

yepy anyadevatābhaktā yajante śraddhayānvitāḥ  
te/pi mām eva kaunteya yajanty avidhipūrvakam 9.23

*O Arjuna, even those devotees who worship other gods with dedication is in actuality worshipping Me alone, (though) in deviant ways.*

This ‘I’ means the eternal Supreme Entity of the universe. Everything from the faculties of the sense organs to the mighty sun is driven by energy ensuing from It. Therefore, one who devotedly worships anything whatever is in fact worshipping It, though indirectly.

We may infer that several gods were being worshipped at that time according to as many sets of watertight codes of rituals. Even today, there are as much or more all over the world and particularly in India. This verse succeeds in bringing all these under one umbrella. Whatever name the Supreme Entity is called, there is of course only One such entity. Truth leads to tolerance and ultimate truth leads to ultimate tolerance; all the wise sages in different times and places have said it in diverse ways. When the Supreme is established as unified and eternal, the intent of all prophets and *rishis* converge to It.

Guru Nityachaitanya Yati elaborates on it thus: ‘Henri Bergson classifies religions as open and closed, and also distinguishes those that are permanently set from the dynamic. That the Gita does not belong to either, or is both at the same time, makes it uniquely outstanding. It is absurd to consider the Gita as a

religious text of the Hindus, for it serves as a scientific treatise to all ages, to all people in the world irrespective of caste, creed, rituals or belief.'

aham hi sarvayajñānām bhoktā ca prabhur eva ca  
na tu mām abhijānanti tattvenātāś cyavanti te 9.24

*Of all yajnas I am the bhokta (in the guise of the different Devas – forces – intended to be propitiated) and the lord (the one presiding, the source from which all rewards are given). But they do not know Me in principle and hence deviate from the (right) path.*

'Bhokta' means acceptor or appreciator of what is dedicated. In the ritualistic yajna the various Devas (gods) were considered as bhokta. But it is said here that in truth, the Paramātma is the bhokta of everything, not only in ritualistic yajna but also the real yajna performed in life.

For the one who thinks why rear a cow, isn't rearing the udder sufficient, the taste of milk is sure to become long lost memory. One may procure an udder, construct a very expensive shed with marble and provide enough feed and care, and also feel happy that one is doing the job in a fantastic way, but in vain. However, it can be seen that the Paramātma is still the benefactor of such activity and also the source based on which 'appropriate rewards' are disbursed even for such a silly endeavor. The only difference is that one gets not what he intended by such methods.

Ninety-nine percent of the people irrespective of their faith pray to a God who is supposed to listen to their woes alone. God is savior as imagined to suit different needs of individuals or selected communities, but even this God can be considered to indirectly represent the Supreme Entity of the universe, because of the obvious reason that there is only One such entity. Ignorance by itself is not a sin.

There are two ways in which one may deviate from the right path. Praying to other Devas is *shiroveshtana pranayama* (catching one's nose by going round the head). Though one is praying to ātma swarupa itself, doing so without rightly understanding It is not recommendable. It is a clear vision of the target that endows karma with *yajna bhavana* (yajna concept). The murderer and the surgeon inflict wounds but their aims are different. (However, if the surgery is done only for money or fame, the difference narrows down and even gets reversed after a point.) yānti devavrataḥ devān pitṛn yānti pitrvratāḥ

bhūtāni yānti bhūtejyā yānti madyājino/pi mām 9.25

*Those who worship Devas attain them; those who worship ancestors attain them. They that worship bhutas attain them. Those who worship Me attain Me.*

Apart from the obvious humor, the verse once again highlights man's choices. There are other routes also if we consider heaven and rebirth. *Yad bhavo tat bhavati* (one becomes what one tries to identify with).

In the deeper philosophical sense, *Deva* means that which illuminates (*divyati iti deva*). As the sense organs illuminate, one gets different experiences. These experiences, in turn, illuminate one's mind. Faculties of senses are called as Devas. The human mind is the abode of these Devas; so it is also referred to as heaven. Those who consider the illuminating and the reasoning faculties of the mind as of paramount importance can be called *devavratas*. In this sense, scientists are *devavratas*. They worship or dedicate themselves to the study of materialistic nature and attain the knowledge pertaining to the same. So are artists, who worship the faculties of the mind and the sense organs producing works of enjoyment and beauty.

Generally, one who dedicates oneself for subjective knowledge and the experience from it gains such from its outcome. Those who crave for worldly wealth which will enable them to have sumptuous delicacies, fashionable dresses, cozy feather-soft beds and other such comforts of life, which they believe is their ultimate goal in life and dedicate their life for the very same purpose, succeed in making wealth.

Those who worship the ancestors imbibe the personality and character of the forefathers they worship. They dedicate their lives in many ways to preserve tradition. There have been generations of men and women who faultlessly memorized all Vedic texts and dedicated their lives to impart it down the line.

*Bhutas*, apart from representing goblin-like fictional characters, also mean the *pancha bhutas* (the building blocks of the world – solid, liquid, gas, space and radiation) in the philosophical sense. People who dedicate their lives for cultivation, mining, irrigation, production etc. can be said to worship *pancha bhutas* as their life is heavily dependent on these. They reap harvests in reward to their worship.

Thus, whatever be the service domain in the materialistic world, one can be successful through continuous dedication. At the same time through steadfast mind, the one who incessantly concentrates to be in union with the *ātma swarupa* attains it. If not he attains only the materialistic part that he strives for.

One more question remains on the aspect of worship and dedication: are there any rituals needed for worship of this Supreme Entity? Do they correspond to what is written in religious texts?

patram puṣpam phalam toyam yo me bhaktyā prayacchat  
tad aham bhaktyupahṛtam aśnāmi prayatātmanah 9.26

*Whoever dedicates unto Me whatever – leaf, flower, fruit or water – with utmost devotion, I accept that offering given with devotion by the pure at heart.*

*Bhakti* is simple dedication that is true, complete and pure. The innocence and purity manifest in such devotion is divine. The simplest way to dedicate oneself to the Supreme is self-evident. Anyone, even the poorest of the poor, can easily tread in the path of devotion. There is no need to follow any costly rites and rituals in vogue. Isvara and devotee both know how true the devotion is; no external person has got anything to do with it. There is no particular style of worship as told by someone else; there should be no fear or doubt about this. Whatever it be, fruit, flower or leaf, dedication is what matters. Offering with a pure mind and complete devotion is guaranteed to be accepted and there is also a hint that anything else is futile. Rituals are only to foster our devotion; it has no other reason or meaning.

Of course the Lord of The Universe does not need leaves, flowers, and fruits; as all these already belong to that same entity. While offering something back from nature, the idea that everything is owned by that Presence is also symbolically represented and realized. Also it is an admission of the fact that nothing ‘belongs’ to any individual except for the same Presence within oneself. There is nothing to feel vain about any possession. For how long will wealth or power last? Did we create the gold? Would we take it with us in the last moments or afterwards? Who blessed us with it for this short time?

*Ātma suddhi* is purity of the mind and karma (deeds). Dedication of these offerings has to be with pure devotion towards *ātma swarupa*. Through such remembrances, the Supreme One is revered for all the past blessings at different steps on the long path of evolution that has finally taken one to reach realization. The symbolic meaning of any offering, whatever it may be, is always the offering of oneself. Through such self-dedication, one must develop the consciousness of offering everything one has in possession to the Real Owner.

In temples, the various food offerings (*nivedyam*) made to God are tasty but most of it does not help evolve this symbolic dedication of everything that the individual possesses to God. Installation of a gold-plated *dhvajam* (flagstaff) or plating the entire roof of the temple with gold is no better; perhaps even counterproductive as it fosters the ego of the devotee at the expense of devotion.

yat karoshi yad asnasi yaj juhoши dadasi yat  
yat tapasyasi kaunteya tat kuruṣva madarpaṇam 9.27

*O Arjuna, dedicate unto Me everything – whatsoever you engage in, you experience, you sacrifice, you donate as charity or whatever penance you do.*

Gita repeatedly asserts that there is no meaning in any of the pretentious hardships that penance involves but rather it is the mental performance of self-dedication that really matters while doing austerities. Our life can completely be converted into an *upasana* (austerity); just dedicate all deeds – physical and mental unto the Supreme One. Prayers are not required to be done in a secluded place amidst the mountains or in a cave sheltered by the woods. One can engage in lifelong devotion and dedication even while enjoying the worldly life. As we engage in this dedication, there happen four great miracles. One: we feel the ultimate freedom. As we get rid of the feeling that we are struggling just for ourselves, we become free of all desires related with the fruit of our deeds. Two: our thoughts and actions become austere. Whatever we offer unto the Supreme One must always be clean of all filth. Three: we will gain immense strength. As we perform deeds which will unify us with the Supreme Entity, we will also tend to be as strong as that Presence. Four: we forever remain in a state of peaceful happiness. Sorrows and misery vanish forever.

śubhāśubhaphalair evam mokṣyase karmabandhanaiḥ  
samnyāsayogayuktātmā vimukto mām upaiṣyasi 9.28

*In this way, you will be released of all the bondages resulting from the favorable-unfavorable fruits of karma (action). Getting thus totally free and becoming yogayukta – the one with the yoga of samnyasa – you will be with Me.*

Samnyasa has to be understood strictly the way Bhagavad Gita has defined it. We saw earlier that the samnyasi is the same as the yogayukta (verse 6.2). The freedom, thought elevation, austerity, power, pleasantness and blissful state of mind obtained through dedication helps in the gain of eternal knowledge. This knowledge helps dedication get deeper. As knowledge, action and emotional composure (*mano bhava*) get accurate one ascends to the ultimate status.

The intelligent never grieve about the inauspicious-auspicious divide in their life as said in earlier chapters. Gita encourages ultimate freedom that transcends the pulls of all dialectical opposites, making the person strong enough to accept all auspicious and inauspicious turns in life alike.

samoham sarvabhūteṣu na me dveṣyo/sti na priyah  
ye bhajanti tu mām bhaktyā mayi te teṣu cāpy aham 9.29

*I reside equally in all beings. I do not hate any nor do I show favoritism to any. But who all worship Me with devotion are in Me and I am in them.*

There is no room for doubt whether in uniting with *ātma swarupa* there is any special prescription as to conditions of eligibility – VIP privileges or disqualifications. The hallmark of the Supreme One is universal equality. There is nobody ‘more equal’ because the Paramātma resides in all beings alike. But, from those among the countless kshetras (bodies) of endless variety, one with the dedicated urge to identify with the *ātma* of the universe is one with the Supreme One and the Supreme One is one with him. This is as simple as saying ‘one takes note that he is in the sunlight only when one feels he is in it’; and it can also be said that the sunlight feels our presence in it then.

One may ask why everybody does not get to feel so. It is because feelings at the physical level while one is awake are products of the opposing forces produced by Akshara. This itself is a veil – *māya* – that masks the presence of the Supreme One, the nature of which is absolute calmness beyond all opposing forces. Man has the ability to use the same faculty for feeling to go beyond oneself, unveil the truth and venture to identify with It. Such persons are the true devotees; they are with the Paramātma and the Paramātma is with them.

As sunshine is showered on all equally and as the gravitational force binds all, the laws of nature equally affect the criminal and the saint and indeed all beings in the universe irrespective of status or achievement. This perception allows a great deal of freedom for man to transgress his diverse deficiencies and weaknesses.

api cet sudurācāro bhajate mām ananyabhāk  
sādhur eva sa mantavyah samyag vyavasito hi sah 9.30

*Even if the worst of wrong-doers devotes on Me with a steady mind, he is correctly resolved and oriented in the right direction and would become saintly.*

Here, the verse does not deal with reactions of the external world but pertains to the ‘internal’ makeup of the person. We have seen earlier that nature, and human laws based on it, will not leave the criminal alone. But for the ‘inner self’ of the person, the notion that mistakes are beyond forgiving is corrected. There

is ample logic to it. *Papa* (offence) is something that is done contrary to *yajna bhavana* (disposition to do action for the welfare of all); from *papa* the *asura vasanas* (demoniac inclinations) are born. When one realizes that this is a vicious cycle one can successfully reverse thrust, begin to move in the opposite direction, strive with devotion unto the Supreme One with selfless dedication and steady mind, and escape the cycle. The Supreme Being is truth ultimate and eternal; It can be accessed by anyone. It was discussed that this knowledge consumes all karma including the aptitudes (*vasanas*) they leave behind as the fire burns down to ashes the wood (4.37).

kṣipram bhavati dharmātmā śāsvacchāntim nigacchhati  
kaunteya pratijānīhi na me bhaktah praṇasyati 9.31

*Soon he becomes righteous and attains eternal peace. O Arjuna, know for certain that My devotee never perishes.*

One for whom this *dharma* (*yajna bhavana*) has become his very self is known as *dharmaatma* (*dharma eva atmayasya*). In *Isavasya Upanishad* the reference to *satyadharma* also means the same. *Yajna bhavana* makes one dedicate all karma to the Supreme One, and the one whose self is bound by such *dharma* tends to outlive all greed and anger as well as cravings born of imagination stemming from memories of the past, thereby moving to eternal peace. It is this eternal peace that is opposite to the concept of doom. Destruction of the self (*ātma nasa*) is the end of the road when one is taken for a ride by the forces of atrocities, cravings and hatred. Human life is not meant for it. This verse tells us that this sad plight would never ever confine anyone who dedicates all his deeds selflessly to the Supreme Purusha. The metamorphosis of Valmiki from a dacoit to a great sage is proof positive.

In the external world also it is high time for some rethinking. Put the person in a cell and give him inhuman punishment ingraining guilt and frustration into him; and when he is released after his term we may well be releasing a *rakshasa* (inhumanly cruel beast) into society. Restrict his freedom for a time in which we can manage to reform him and we may well be releasing a saintly person. Jails should be such centers for reformation, not places for complete destruction of a person's remaining personality and virtue. And once there is a system to impart 'proper education' from childhood onwards (in a society with wisdom), we would not need reformation centers, even.

māṁ hi pārtha vyapāśritya ye/pi syuḥ pāpayonayaḥ

striyo vaiśyās tathā śūdrās tepi yānti parāṁ gatim 9.32

*O Arjuna, even women, vaisyas and sudras and others of such so called low births also attain the Ultimate through sincere devotion and dedication, regarding Me as their refuge.*

Note that the Gita mentions those who were thought to belong to the lower strata of the society only after it refers to the antisocials. This indicates their social standing based on the caste system in those days. If there is anybody potent of invaluable selfless love, it is the mothers in any society at all times. But women as a class were included in the *adharma* (debased) category. Those who toiled in the most menial of jobs to do service to the rest of the society were categorized as lowest. (Has mankind outlived that notion yet?) There was a heavy prejudice associated with some people born to some particular castes. Arjuna has already talked about rich tradition, nobility of birth, corruption of women through inter-ethnic marital relationships and also about rituals assigned to different castes (*katham na jñeyam asmābhiḥ...* 1.39 to 44). Even in today's world, some still classify jobs as higher and menial, not thinking that the people doing 'menial jobs' are equally important in society with the latter contributing perhaps a lot more in just one day than the former in their entire life.

Whoever has been condemned as downtrodden, untouchables and outcastes by society are not undeserving in union with the Supreme Purusha in any way whatsoever. This challenges the then civil-criminal codes – the *Manusmriti* and the *Yajnavalkya Smriti*. (The majority of the people were not even allowed to enter places of worship or learn religious texts as based on the caste system.) The message firmly establishes that all humans belong to just one caste; the evolution of life that took man to the membership of that universal caste has been a pilgrimage to ultimately attain eternal Oneness; and everyone has the right and the instinct to complete the journey.

kim punar brāhmaṇāḥ puṇyā bhaktā rājarṣayas tathā  
anityam asukham lokam imam prāpya bhajasva mām 9.33

*And should I specifically mention about the ones who have realized brahma and the saintly kings? Having born into this transient and unhappy world, do worship Me devoutly.*

Whoever the person is and to whichever class, clan or caste he is supposed to belong to by the ignorant society, there is only one thing that should be done:

maintain unflinching and steadfast devotion towards the Supreme Entity. ‘Having fallen into fast-flowing waters, dirty too, there is no option left other than to swim to safety’ is the simple instruction (with an empathetic smile)! What may happen if one hesitates to swim is already known – death by drowning, of course. There is also the hint that the fall into these waters is a golden opportunity to learn and practice the art of swimming and get to the opposite shore!

Life on earth is described as unhappy because pain is the strongest sensation obtainable in this world (This is also an evolutionary requirement for complex living entities). The highest pleasure is no match for severe body pain and the highest happiness is also no match for mental anguish. On top of it all are numerous insensible things that human beings set up like the caste system, and the importance given to money and selfish personal pleasure over even the most intimate of relationships. But knowing the simple truth is also a blessing, and the knowledge that there is much pain in this world gives us strength to take it boldly and helps us face hardships. The verse is optimistic as it provides further solace, support and strength brought about by devotion to the Supreme Purusha – hence the suggestion ‘*do worship Me devoutly*’.

manmanā bhava madbhakto madyājī mām namaskuru  
mām evaiṣyasi yuktaivam ātmānam matparāyaṇah 9.34

*Fix your mind on Me; be devoted to Me; perform your actions dedicated to Me; bow to Me; and having thus fixing Me as the supreme goal and uniting your (whole) self with Me, you shall be with Me forever.*

This is the sum-up of the *vidya* that enjoys the kingly status among all sciences and is the secret of all secrets. After understanding well how the Paramātma is Supreme and the role of nature (both obvious and hidden) in governing the world, and realizing that heaven or rebirth is not an option, one needs to do just four more things to master this knowledge. And, any from those considered the lowest of the low by caste, gender or ethnicity can comfortably and easily do all and attain release from the mortal and painful mindset.

First, focus the mind on the Supreme Purusha. A nutshell of the concept for that focus is presented. The pattern of proper worship is also given. To tread the path towards It is the second step. Become a devotee. Cultivate unflinching dedication – *bhakti* – i.e. devotion without any expectation of material dividends. Thirdly, enhance this devotion by transforming each action to adoration of the Supreme One and dedicating all those actions. If necessary, the mode of a simple

independent ritual for further adherence of the mind is also given, along with further explanation of what dedication means. Finally, always offer salutations to the Supreme One; bow to the Supreme Entity. It is to be remembered that this is to help demolish our own vanity, not to satisfy some whim of God. The Supreme Entity is not a childish one and cannot be pleased by praise; we have discussed the verse (9.29) stating that It has no favoritism. We bow to acknowledge the higher presence in our own self and train ourself. Once the ego, pride and vanity are surmounted, there is no place for the subjective ‘I’; the whole world including oneself is just a divine presence.

## Chapter 10

# Yoga of Vibhuti

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Human nature looks for evidences. Usually any person wants to know of God based on two concepts – 1. The name, shape and form of God. 2. The wonders and miracles performed by It. Here Arjuna knows that the entity is beyond all name and form. Therefore he asks how such an Entity can be contemplated on, and what evidences (are there any miracles?) upon which one can find the characteristic evidence of that Supreme Purusha.

Śrībhagavān uvāca  
bhūya eva mahābāho śṛṇu me paramāṁ vacaḥ  
yat te/ham̄ priyamānāya vakṣyāmi hitakāmyayā 10.1

*The Supreme One said:*

*O the one with powerful arms (Arjuna), listen to My words about the supreme truth; which I, wishing (you and the world) welfare, will deliver to you who delight in hearing Me.*

Calling Arjuna as the ‘most powerful’ (the one with great arms - *mahanou bahu yasya*) is certainly to encourage him. It amounts to saying there is nothing impossible for someone of his prowess. The real kingdom to be conquered is the boundless world of one’s own internal space. The weapon for the fight – adhyatma vidya – has been already given; with such a weapon in mighty hands, success is definite.

The master is leading happily his student who has already with much ease learnt all theories, to the world of practice. Knowledge through contemplation and meditation dawns to the person who delights in being one with the True Self. Everything depends on our interest and focus on the subject; the person searching for some other motive like personal power fail to understand the deepest of truths.

It is also said that such advices are an innate characteristic of *ātma swarupa* that proves beneficial to the devout. ‘Beneficial’ does not mean ‘pleasurable at

the material level', as can be discerned from a close reading of the text. It has been already said that the Supreme endows nobody with *papa* (sin) or *punya* (virtue) – (verse 5.15); rather, what is meant is that it helps unification of one's self with the Highest Self; in conformation with the natural evolution of the universe.

na me viduh suraganāḥ prabhavam na maharṣayah  
aham ādir hi devānām maharṣīnām ca sarvaśah 10.2

*Neither the multitude of Devas nor Rishis know my origin; for, in every way, I am the primary source of all Devas and Rishis.*

At the story level the Devas are inhabitants of Devaloka who are more evolved and powerful than human beings. The Rishis are great ascetics; legendary ones in the Puranas who have tremendous power due to tapas.

In the philosophical sense the sense organs are called *Devas* (*devamakhyatamindriye -Abidhana Chintamani*). They provide light for us to realize the outer world. The concept of the *Sapta Rishis* – seven great Rishis – symbolically present the seven prime means of cognition, namely the mahatatwa (the principle beyond the material world), ahamkara (the separate 'I'-ness present in all animate and inanimate entities), and the five basic elements that stimulate the senses (the perception of form and the factors behind hearing, seeing, feeling of touch, smell and taste). These are characters bearing names from Brigu to Vasishta in the Puranas.

The Supreme Purusha being beyond the origin and the life of these Devas and Rishis, they are in no position to discern It's origin. Jnaneswary poses a relevant question in the context: 'just as a fetus can never know the age of the mother carrying it in the womb, Devas and Rishis cannot ever explore the origin of the Supreme Purusha ever. Does the fish in the sea ever comprehend the entire sea? Can any fly do a tour of the entire sky?' (The knowledge of even the rishis can be compared to these paradigms).

'To avoid perceiving the Supreme Entity as one among the numerous creations that is going to be discussed hence, the Supreme One is accredited with the status of being unparalleled,' Natarajaguru rightly observes. (In the holy Quran, the almighty is established as different from everything by the definition *la ilaha illallah*. Allah is given only 99 names. Of the hundred – meaning all that is imaginable – the one that is left out is beyond all efforts at articulation. That the Supreme One is incomparable is what is established here too.) This verse also promulgates a distinctive feature of the knowledge of the Supreme Entity.

There is nobody who has seen the Supreme Entity and those who claim to have, in fact, have not because no sense organ can perceive It. Even for gaining awareness of the Entity, one ought to strive on one's own and also have to love that search. No amount of physical examination of any object will reveal It. It is suggested that the best way is to look within (us). That which illuminates our being from within is the Supreme Purusha itself. It is shrouded by the veil of ignorance.

yo mām ajam anādim ca vetti lokamaheśvaram  
asam̄mūḍhah sa martyeṣu sarvapāpaiḥ pramucyate 10.3

*He who among mortals knows Me as unborn and beginning-less, and as the Mahesvara of all the worlds, is un-deluded and liberated from all sin.*

This verse is meant for two things – 1. As the clue to aid our contemplation, 2. As to point out the difference between the nature of this Entity and our worldly perception.

The One that resides within has three prominent features. First, it is without birth. If anything exists without birth, it must be eternal. If it has to be present in all times, then time itself should also be born from it. It is the beginning and the end.

The core or the principle of existence in all *kshetras* (bodies) resides as the *Paramātma* (the Supreme One); so It is *Mahesvara* – the Great Lord of the worlds. It knows everything and It is our True Self; the person who sees It thus is beyond all wrong deeds and is automatically liberated from all sin.

Ignorance shall be wiped off completely if these three ideas in the verse are understood and perfected by karma to gain wisdom. His *ātma swarupa jnana* (knowledge about the *Paramātma*) erases all as light effaces all darkness away.

The methodology of the present day science constantly deals with the opposing nature of the known forces in nature, and thus is incapable of any unification. No proof can be found for the Supreme Purusha that is the very cause to transform itself into the universe in effect, because the Entity cannot be evidenced based on anything in the material world. Present physics also advocates the presence of the physical constants in the materialistic world and clings to these concepts and thus is unable to realize the higher levels of reality. That this difficulty shall be soon overcome is certain. ‘Discontinuities’ where science’s physical constants cannot be valued are already acknowledged.

buddhir jñānam asam̄mohaḥ kṣamā satyam̄ damah śamah

sukham duḥkham bhavobhāvo bhayam cābhayam eva ca 10.4  
ahimsā samatā tuṣṭis tapo dānam yaśo/yaśah  
bhavanti bhāvā bhūtānām matta eva pṛthagvidhāḥ 10.5

*Buddhi, jnana, asammoha, kshama, satyam, sama, dama, happiness, sorrow, manifestation or unmanifestation, fear and also fearlessness; ahimsa, samata, tushti, tapas, dāna, fame, infamy – all these different kinds of quality of beings have the basis of their origin from Me.*

*Buddhi* = intelligence. *Jnana* = Knowledge. *Asammoha* = the wise approach regarding what to seek and do, unconfused. *Satyam* = truth. *Dama* = the control over the sense organs. *Sama* = control obtained by calming the mind. *Ahimsa* = restraining one's act of employing word, deed or thought to hurt based on feeling of 'otherness'. *Samata* = visualizing everything and everyone as equal (in the Supreme Self). *Tushti* = contentment. *Tapas* = hard effort, austerities. *Dāna* = charity.

Most of these qualities can be deemed as virtuous though some Sanskrit scholars are of the opinion that some words carry their opposite connotation as well. We can conceive that since divine presence is observed more in good qualities, it is given more prominence. Seven essential virtues (buddhi to sama) are mentioned along which come the duality-based happiness-sorrow, pleasure-pain, fame-infamy and fear-fearlessness aspects. Natarajaguru opines out that, as the opposing features yield to give place to constant virtues, the mind steadily gets greater freedom to concentrate on the thrust to yoga.

Sorrow, fear, infamy – 'how come vice as its base in God', is likely to come up again. (Remember that the caste system was also created based on God – chapter 4 verse 13.) In the Semitic creeds the Satan is a huge umbrella term to codify all vices. But Upanishads consider these virtues and vices as equal paradigms in reality. We have seen verses explaining the secret of the construction of the universe based on the dialectical nature of the *parā prakṛti* (the imperishable medium – the second layer of reality). The underlying plurality of the creations makes explicit the endless possibility of permutations and combinations of the innumerable forces opposing, re-enforcing, repulsing and attracting. Human beings have choice, based on which the yogi goes above all opposites by detachment and preference to the virtuous to integrate with the ultimate reality. The dialectic thought process that Hegel and Marx propounded – the thesis-anti-thesis-synthesis way – is similar in style to Vedanta's study of the material world.

There are people who view goodness as the sign of the presence of the God

and the bad as proof of its absence. But even then, the presence and absence can exist only dialectically. One needs the other to manifest. Though darkness, an illusion in this universe, is not contributed by the sun; one cannot restrict perceiving nature as the reason for the darkness that creeps in. When both light and the darkness are understood as prakṛti's way of creating the world, the truth basic to both becomes discernible and the knowledgeable person can stay one step detached in the mind from all such kinds of opposites (through preference of the divine above the demoniac nature – the two types of inclinations are described in a later chapter). This is the path of *brahma vidya*.

maharṣayah̄ sapta pūrve catvāro manavas tathā  
madbhāvā mānasā jātā yeśāṁ loka imāḥ̄ prajāḥ̄ 10.6

*The seven great rishis, the four who came into existence before them, as well as the Manus, vested with My splendor and born of (My) mind; from them are these creatures in all the world (originated and sustained).*

The four who came into existence before the *saptarshis* in the stories are the four *kumaras* (eternal children) - Sanalkumara, Sanaka, Sanatana and Sanandana. Manus are law-makers and they are 14 in number.

At the philosophical level the *kumaras* likely represent childlike and open principles that form four pillars of creation in Akshara. (In the stories they are depicted as children with complete knowledge.) The children play not just one game but a series of games, each following the earlier, but each having a different set of rules. Any game has to have a set of rules; so does every world that is created. (Science is the study of learning those rules.) There is said to be fourteen *Manvantaras* for one *kalpa* period, and each of these Manvantara is headed by a different Manu, therefore each Manu may have been visualized to represent a set of rules for a phase of the universe created in that order. (The time of six Manus namely Svayambhuva, Svarocisa, Uttama, Tamasa, Raivata and Chakshusha is already over. The present Manu is Vaivasvata.) etāṁ vibhūtim̄ yogam̄ ca mama yo vetti tattvataḥ̄

so/vikampena yogena yuṣyate nātra samśayah̄ 10.7

*For the one who knows the vibhutis and My yoga with them all – there is no doubt that he would get established in union through stable yogic path.*

Knowing the many wonders in the complex universe and understanding the nature of their union with the universal soul would enable the person walking the

path of yoga to perceive more clearly how the Supreme Purusha is in yoga (union) with the world and also with one's self.

There is also scope for major correction. Humanization of God by the ignorant resulted in human emotions like desire, fear and anxiety being visualized as characters of God too. Many Gods were also worshipped, with some even showing multiple human follies. They had to be appeased with ritualistic devotion. The symbols, archetypes and pictures word-painted by poets also gradually degenerated into the statuses of various gods. These could be bought and possessed through self-styled priests who flourished as intermediaries and who declared themselves as superior. God-men and frauds vied with each other to make their merchandise more popular so that people thronged to them. Ignorance resulted in mad rushes and unruly behavior to be the first for *darsan* (visualization of the idol), and even stampedes resulting in death.

The knowledgeable ones though, conceive the universe in a different light:-

aham sarvasya prabhavo mattah sarvam pravartate  
iti matvā bhajante mām budhā bhāvasamanvitāḥ 10.8

*I am the source of all; everything functions based on Me; understanding thus, the wise ones, endowed with My nature (detachment), worship Me.*

The wise ones engage in two things: they realize that the Supreme Purusha is the ultimate source and the basis for the working of the entire universe; they seek union with the Supreme One through dedication, detachment in action and worship.

Natarajaguru says that when we analyze the worth of things by reasoning alone, only static merits are accounted. The method is *nirjeeva* (devoid of life, merely mechanical). Those who develop devotion and the experience of meditation, however, will be able to realize oneself as an inseparable part of the dynamic universe and experience *bhava samanvitatva* (becoming one in the self with the Paramātma).

A scientist sees the world as an outsider. The seeker of the truth here does not place himself outside the object of study, rather, he is an inevitable part of the study; the deciphering of the secrets behind the universe is always with both one's thought as well as experience.

maccittā madgataprāṇā bodhayantah̄ parasparam  
kathayantaś ca mām nityam̄ tuṣyanti ca ramanti ca 10.9

*With their minds always resting in Me, with their prana absorbed in Me, they, enlightening one another and ever speaking of Me, are delighted and content.*

Whatever the various thoughts and feelings that happen in daily life, the devout always striving to be in union would observe them from a separate view point – from the Real Self. Even perception to body pain lessens when observed from that view point. Such person shall be able to focus on and be with the Supreme One all the time. *Machitta* is one who is in this state of detached observation.

Likewise, *malgataprana* is the one who keeps himself aware that all life forces like breathing, heartbeat, digestion etc are directly connected to the fundamental basis and stemming from it – the *Paramātma*. As these activities are evidence of the *jeeva* (life) in the body; so they are nothing but direct connection of the body to the *Paramātma* (universal soul), like an ever present umbilical cord. Thus the basic life forces like cardiac activity are all mentally connected continuously to the *Paramātma* and are dedicated to It. With this wisdom and exercise they dedicate their *jeeva* in the Supreme.

The more the likeminded engage in discussions of their subject of study, the clearer gets the picture they have. Combined study is therefore advised in all disciplines. This is an important routine to all those who strive to acquire brahma vidya too (*tat chintanam tat kadanam anyonam tat prabhodanam eka deka paratvam ca brahmabhyasam vidhurbuddhah* –*Panchadasi* 7, 106).

Jnanaeswar Maharaj's comments are valid in the context. He compares such ultimate devotees with the sun which spreads its light equally in all directions. Just like a full blown lotus cannot conceal the fragrance within itself, these suns impart their truth and the happiness they experience to any king or beggar, wise or fool, and they remain unknown and unconcerned with all their worldly experiences including the passage of time.

teṣāṁ satatayuktānāṁ bhajatāṁ pṛītipūrvakam  
dadāmi buddhiyogam tam yena mām upayānti te 10.10

*To the ever-steadfast, worshipping Me with love, I provide the buddhi yoga by which they can be with Me.*

(*Buddhi yoga* = being one with *buddhi* – intellect – and / or making one's *buddhi* one with the Supreme.) This incoming blessing is not under our control;

when and in what way cannot be predicted. It comes as inspiration, inner comprehension, realization and ideas, making use of *buddhi* (intellect) to surface. It also means that devotion has to be compounded by the intellect at every step; under no circumstances does Vedanta advocate blind faith or superstition.

After one gathers basic knowledge about the Paramātma (universal soul), more can be obtained through complete and steadfast dedication. Devoting oneself without reservation to whatever little is known is the way to know more. At the same time, keeping the mind open is also very important. There is a lot to be known and learned. Humility and selfless dedication are recommended; development of this knowledge is also endowed by the Supreme alone.

The Supreme knowledge is the Supreme Being Itself which has neither a beginning nor an end and hence is eternal. What varies from person to person is the awareness of It, depending upon one's nature as also one's efforts for the realization. Success is assured as the seeker is the same as the sought. But one's individuality will have to undergo a metamorphosis fuelled by unconditional devotion. One may know the Self a little more and love It more or love It more and get to know It a little more. Whichever be the way, once it gets started, it automatically illumines (self inspires) so that the further way becomes easier and feasible.

The Gita advises devotion and dedication to the Supreme Purusha not as means to attain any magical power at the physical or mental level (*siddhi*); the goal is realization of It. Of all endowments to man, the intellect (*buddhi*) is regarded as the highest faculty. Once it begins to work in the right direction it will find only the Supreme Entity in everything. When this perspective becomes available, devotion towards the Supreme One fuels the further way; and love towards the Highest Self which develops based on overall integration of the person's personality boost that devotion. Once one realizes the Supreme Purusha, unbound happiness is experienced; that state is made permanent by incessant practice. That the union can be achieved only after death is a wrong concept.

How the path of the devout is illuminated is explained:

teṣām evānukampārtham aham ajñānajam tamah  
nāśayāmy ātmabhāvastho jñānadīpena bhāsvatā 10.11

*I, dwelling within their intellect, bless them by destroying that darkness born of ignorance with the luminous lamp of knowledge.*

The beginning dawns with the humble realization that one needs

illumination. It is when this need is felt and the person searches for it in the right path with the right devotion, that he discovers the fact that light is available right within himself and that it is present everywhere else too; sheer ignorance and vanity had so far blocked it from sight. At the start, only a faint glimmer of that great light shall be visible; it will be available in full measure as he progresses in yoga. It will completely efface the darkness of all ignorance.

The Supreme knowledge resides in us as the small flame inside an earthen pitcher; the walls of the pot block it, but the moment a small opening is made, the flame provides enough light to help remove the remaining portions of the walls of the pot; so does this internal flame of knowledge also help to self-illumine ourselves. Moreover it rightly illuminates the way of material life too, so that one shall not be confused and stranded thereafter.

The flame of knowledge (the blessing of the Supreme One) pervades all through the world and so also within every human being in equal measure; the decision to comprehend it and move ahead towards identifying oneself with it is left to one's discretion. Man always has a choice. And what man proposes in this regard, God does not dispose otherwise! What is assured is: one who follows that light will never ever walk in darkness.

param brahma param dhāma pavitram paramam bhavān  
puruṣam sāsvatam divyam ādidevam ajam vibhum 10.12  
āhus tvām ṛṣayah sarve devarśir nāradas tathā  
asito devalo vyāsaḥ svayam caiva bravīṣi me 10.13

*Arjuna said:*

*You are the Supreme Being, the param Brahma and the highest abode, the purest and the ultimate. You are the eternal and divine purusha, the first divine God and unborn, omnipresent.*

*All the rishis have thus declared You, as also the deva rishi Narada, Asita, Devala and Vyasa; and now the same You Yourself say to me.*

The ancestors already had sowed the seeds of the concept of the Supreme One in Arjuna's mind; as a descendant of Bhishma and disciple of the revered Vedic Brahmin Drona, Arjuna must have been familiar with the concept of the Paramātma. (It has to be noted that Narada is the only *deva rishi* (a Vedic percept) mentioned; Asita, Devala and Vyasa are pre-Vedic sages).

What is highlighted more is Arjuna's wonder and happiness at the coincidence of hearing directly what he already knew than the mere satisfaction of a piece of information being re-confirmed. What was dry knowledge is now

re-administered as an ecstatic experience. With this, Arjuna's mind overwhelms with a rare feeling of devotion and extreme joy as he has never ever realized earlier.

Even now, Arjuna's *jnanadipa* (the light of knowledge within) is quite distinct from the Supreme Purusha. He is yet to become one with his True Self. The journey towards that realization has only auspiciously begun.

We are reminded that one needs to approach and understand ancient texts on guard, and to be well ready to rethink in the light of organic experiencing. The Gita does not allude to anything outside the Upanishads; rather it tries to revive what is earlier taught coupled with the lessons of practical experience.

Arjuna testifies to the transformation of dry fact into felt wisdom:

sarvam etad ṛtam manye yan mām vadasi Keśava  
na hi te bhagavan vyaktim̄ vidur devā na dānavāḥ 10.14

*O the One whose abode is the ocean of Akshara, I accept as fact all that You have told me. O divine Lord, neither the Devas nor the Danavas know your identity.*

*Danava* means *asura*, a concept that is the exact opposite of *Deva*; at the philosophical level, mind is considered heaven where *Devas* – pleasant sensations – reside, and *Asuras* are sensations that hurt, distract and waylay.

Arjuna accepts as true all that he has been told. But the wise enquirer present in us all is what is now noticeable in Arjuna whose intellect is searching for further evidence. The first step to enquire the reason behind any phenomenon is to know the very phenomenon itself.

svayam evātmānātmaṁ vettha tvam̄ puruṣottama  
bhūtabhāvana bhūteśa devadeva jagatpate 10.15

*O Purushottama (the Highest Purusha), O Source of all beings, Lord of all beings, God of gods and Ruler of the world, only You Yourself who knows the ātma through the ātma can know You.*

The forever beginning-less and endless entity cannot be totally known by the human intellect. But being one with the Supreme Purusha does not necessitate that one should know everything in advance. Arjuna's words brim with the supreme ecstasy of having known at least this much about the Supreme Purusha who is imparting such ultimate knowledge to him. It is logical to infer that the

omnipresent also knows everything in this universe.

As per *nyaya sastra* - the science of logic - determining the real identity of a thing can be in five ways: *pratyaksha* (sight), *anumana* (inference), *shabda* (sound), *arthapti* (contrasting), *anupalabdi* (verification through the experience of the knowledge gained). If the authenticity of the source is beyond doubt, *shabda* should be true. The identity of the Supreme is known to the Supreme alone. Therefore the knowledge coming directly from the Ātma is ultimate truth.

vaktum arhasy aśeṣena divyā hy ātmavibhūtayah  
yābhīr vibhūtibhir lokān imāṁs tvāṁ vyāpya tiṣṭhasi 10.16

(Therefore), You (alone) are entitled to describe to me in the fullest measure, those vibhutis of Yours by which You exist as Ātma pervading all these worlds.

Vibhuti means divine glory; something on which one can find the characteristic evidence of Isvara, maybe a miracle.

kathāṁ vidyām aham yogīṁs tvāṁ sadā paricintayan  
keṣu keṣu ca bhāveṣu cintyosi bhagavan mayā 10.17

O Yogi, how should I (in what way) know You for steady contemplation? In what aspects or things, O Lord, are You to be thought of by me?

There are three important points to be noted here. One is the overwhelming desire to realize God just like a child waiting to unite with its mother. The same is the state of Arjuna who hungers to know the *ātma swarupa* (the nature of the soul). Second is the unceasing doubt that pervades everyone who tries to imagine the status of the Supreme Being. Try to imagine one who has no beginning or end (*anadi*), eternal, unknowable and omnipresent! We who are accustomed only to seeing concrete forms shall surely find it very hard to comprehend. Third is that the *Purushottama* or Supreme Purusha by the process of *yoga māya* is omnipresent in the universe through the dialectical *prakṛti*. (Note that the Supreme Being is addressed as *yogin*. It appears to be acting as a super-magician juggling transient creations of endless variety in a huge world, balancing everything out of an apparently ‘empty’ background!) This universe is immensely diverse and pluralistic. Beauty and ugliness, purity and filth, mercy and cruelty, greatness and pettiness, strength and fatigue – everything is simultaneously manifest here. Is the Supreme Purusha equally residing in all these alike? If yes, how is this *yoga* (being one with all) plausible? If no, in

which all types of entities is the Supreme Being manifest? Furthermore, are there any actual miracles in the world that the Supreme Being directly performs?

vistareñātmano yogam vibhūtim ca janārdana  
bhūyah kathaya trptir hi śṛṇvato nāsti memṛtam 10.18

*O Janardana, tell me again in detail, Your powers of yoga and Vibhuti (divine glory); for I have not had enough hearing Your nectar-like words.*

*Janardana* means one who uproots all evils including bad thoughts (*asuras*) in the minds of people and, also one who is approached by all seeking salvation. Therefore it means omnipresent (means *janaṇa sarvata ardati*). *Janardana* is the basis of all life and also the sustenance of the universe. (Arjuna is not addressing a human form here; we have already seen verses implying a higher approach.) The questions indicate that Arjuna has attained the status of the most deserving disciple by his thinking nature coupled with intense devotion to the Supreme One. Jnanaeswar Maharaj paraphrases Arjuna's words as "O Lord, please do not stop pouring out this nectar of words. Who will say that they have had enough of the light of the sun? Who will feel fed up of the moon ever? Can the ever flowing Ganges sustain even an iota of dirt? I have had *brahmadarsan* from the words coming forth from Thy lips. It is ever fragrant like the pure sandal."

śrībhagavān uvāca  
hanta te kathayiṣyāmi divyā hy ātmavibhūtayah  
prādhānyataḥ kuruśreṣṭha nāsty anto vistarasya me 10.19

*The omnipresent Lord said:*

*Surprising indeed! All right, I will tell you about a few of My Vibhuti in their prominence, O best of the Kurus; but there is no end to the details of my extent.*

There is reason for expressing astonishment. Words of any language cannot express the splendor of the Supreme or the intricacies of the *yoga māya* that works through the dialectical manifestation, *prakṛti*. Arjuna is requesting the Lord for a verbal presentations of concepts that cannot be known, though (a very few) can be experienced. Even today science often takes Arjuna's stance. It insists upon presentations through words and symbols. That expression of astonishment is for Arjuna (and for ourselves) to understand all these limitations.

Those who are accustomed with the idea of quantitative extension in science may doubt how *vibhuti* (divine glories) can be termed as countless and eternal

unless the Supreme Being from which they originate is a material entity describable in terms of numbers and age. The most splendid of *vibhutis* are not material objects; these are qualities like *shakti* (power), *teja* (glamour), *paurusha* (splendor), *vidya* (knowledge) and *mahatwa* (greatness), opines Shankarananda Swami, pointing out that these are beyond reckoning by material qualities. Science insists that anything un-quantifiable is not scientifically relevant. This insistence is both the strength as well as the weakness of science. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa says with an empathetic smile that any attempt to present Isvara in quantitative terms will be no better than an effort to describe the city of Varanasi on the basis of impressions gathered from a picture of it.

The various gods that are popularly adored are not the vibhutis described in the Gita. Neither are astonishing miracles and display of super powers of God. Instead, the divine glories in the Bhagavad Gita are entirely different in style from those enumerated in various religious texts.

aham ātmā guḍākeśa sarvabhūtāśayasthitāḥ  
aham ādiś ca madhyam ca bhūtānām anta eva ca 10.20

*O Gudakesa (Arjuna), I am the ātma (Self) residing in the hearts of all beings; I am the beginning and the base and also the end of all beings.*

*Gudakesa* is one who has defeated sleep. It does not mean Arjuna never sleeps. Used metaphorically the word indicates he never slips from his sense of reality. (Sleep makes us forgetful of our real whereabouts.) Arjuna is the one who has transgressed the borders of all worldly desires capable of producing the state of drowsy numbness.

It can be considered that the life in living beings and the life of the universe are manifestations of the same entity and that the Soul is also present in non-living things like rocks and dirt. The basis of the difficulty in differentiating the living and non-living exists even today in the form of the dividing line biology draws between the animate and the inanimate. Science still struggles to find the origin of life. However, Vedanta's views of *sajeeva* (the live) and *nirjeeva* (the dead) goes a lot deeper. Gita says that there is nothing in this universe that is devoid of the universal soul. If the *panchabhutas* (the five elements) are *nirjeeva* (dead) then how does the *sarira* (physical body) born from these have life? Each energy wave and each atom or cell behaves as if it has a purpose and a working pattern of its own. The smallest nucleus as well as every region of space is *sajeeva*. So is the *prakṛti* from which the material world is formed. In Vedanta, individual living beings are perceived only as *samghatha* (coordinated assembly

of subsystems) of comparatively big *kshetras*. The *kshetra* is discussed in detail later in chapter 13.

ādityānām aham viṣṇur jyotiṣām ravir amśumān  
marīcir marutām asmi nakṣatrāṇām aham śaśī 10.21

*Think of Me as Vishnu among the (twelve) Adityas; among luminaries as the radiant sun; Marichi among the Maruts; and the moon among the stars in the night sky.*

Arjuna had wanted to know in what all aspects or edifices could the Lord be thought of by him (verse 10.17). In stories, Adityas are the children of Aditi (daughter of Daksha and wife of Kasyapa). There is disagreement between Vedic scholars on their exact number. The Bhagavata Purana lists a total of twelve sun-gods – the *Adityas* – Vishnu, Indra, Aryama, Dhata, Tvashta, Vivaswa, Pushya, Savita, Mitra, Varuna, Amsuman and Bhaga.

Why does the gallery of vibhutis begin with the Adityas? What is the specialty of the first sun-god Vishnu, the son of Aditi?

There are clues in the literal meanings of the words used. Aditi means the primordial power (*adi shakti* - the mother to all Devas). It is universal, indivisible and eternal and represents Mother Nature – *parā prakṛti*. (The word *aditi* literally means ‘that which cannot be cut’.) Our world is only one among countless millions of such worlds in the *brahmada*. Vishnu among sun-gods (Adityas) is different from Lord Vishnu. The former is Aditi's (*prakṛti*'s) first born. This Vibhuti can be taken to mean either the first type of sun (sun-god) in this universe, or we can visualize it as the post-primordial expansion phase which has the splendor of countless millions of ordinary suns. One would certainly be able to realize the divine glory and eternal nature of the Supreme Purusha by contemplating on this Aditya.

Guru Nityachaitanya Yati points out that the universe evolves and comes into being just like one waking up to a great consciousness and Vishnu can be understood as that. ‘The process of the dawning of a great idea is akin to light emanating from darkness... The master-symbol is therefore Vishnu born in the form of light out of the indivisible Aditi.’

Our sun, one of the millions in our galaxy, is something we see, feel, know and depend for survival. It is *Amsuman* (the profusely radiant) that we see, not any of the distant *Ravis* (suns) or the dim or dead stars in the galaxy. This sun illuminates the entire solar system besides holding everything from the planets with their moons to meteors and comets in their steady orbits. This can be taken

as the next vibhuti for contemplation and realization.

Maruts denotes *vayu* (air) and literally means that which causes death. Our life is dependent on the air around us. The ceasing of respiration is in fact only a *lakshana* (cue) of death. The cause of death is in fact the ‘outdating’ of the *sarira* (the *samghatha* called the body) in Akshara (the field it lives).

Due to the expansion after the big bang the consistency of the medium of Akshara is continuously and constantly changing. (This change is opposite in direction in the expansion and contraction phases of the universe.) Every wave oscillation in Akshara depends on the consistency of the background for its survival. The steady change in consistency of Akshara can be termed a ‘wind blowing’. The speed of this ‘wind’ in our world today can be reckoned only in terms of variation in ‘half-lives’ of materials. Everything and anything has got a half-life, and those in which the half-life is not evident like our proton will develop it later on due to continuing expansion of the fabric of space (Avyakta). One can meditate on this great wind to understand the divine glory of the Supreme One.

The term *nakshatra* literally means that which keeps moving, has no instinct for violence and provides relief to those who depend on it, and includes all sources that illuminate the night. The moon is the most significant and welcome, as among all lights in the night sky the brightest is certainly the moon. After the sun, the moon is the next wonderful Vibhuti for all living things on earth. Moon also symbolically depicts the waxing and waning (expansion and contraction) phases of the universe besides being a convincing example of the precise balancing acts that go into what is called the grand design of the world.

All the meanings attributed to *nakshatra* would suit the human mind. Therefore it can as well be the mind that is indicated here. After *Vishnu* (primordial life principle) and *Amsuman Ravi* (radiant intellect) it is obviously *sasi* (calm and comfortable mind) that can be used to visualize the yoga of the Supreme One.

vedānāṁ sāmavedo/smi devānāṁ asmi vāsavah  
indriyānāṁ manaś cāsmi bhūtānāṁ asmi cetanā 10.22

*Among the Vedas, see Me as the Sama Veda; among Devas Indra; among the senses the mind; and as chetana in all beings.*

*Sama* means that which wipes out evil and calms the mind. Though the word *Veda* in common parlance denotes the four Vedas, its literal meaning is ‘that which imparts knowledge’. *Sama-Veda* hence means all knowledge that imparts

peace and harmony to one's heart. One cannot fail to notice the melody in the composition of Sama Veda which accounts for its overall beauty. It is an example of Vibhuti (divine glory).

*Chetana* means purposeful life force of the *samghatha* (body). It is further explained in chapter 13, verses 6 and 7.

Among all *Devas* (faculties of senses), Indra (the mind) enjoys the most prominent position as the centre of all enjoyment. The seat of Indra also means the pinnacle of all pleasures. Though never realized it is the most cherished dream of all men. But Indra stands constantly threatened by *Asuras* (in the form of greed, anger, lust and frustration). One can always learn from Indra to how to fight distractions so as to reach supreme bliss.

Indra is the king of all senses and therefore symbolizes the human mind. Though mythology has it that his seat is the throne of heaven, Gita indicates that he in fact resides in the hearts of men. Concentrate on him as the Vibhuti (divine glory) of the Supreme Purusha. The genesis of the two Vedic concepts, Indra and heaven, is indicated here. These are symbols designed to teach the student of brahma vidya how a pure mind in search of happiness is haunted by blemishes and in what way its steadfastness can be maintained.

rudrāṇāṁ śamkaraś cāsmi vitteśo yakṣarakṣasām  
vasūnāṁ pāvakaś cāsmi meruḥ śikhariṇām aham 10.23

*And among the Rudras I am represented by Sankara; among the Yakshas and Rakshas the lord of wealth (Kubera); among the Vasus the Pavaka (Agni); and among the mountains the Meru.*

These are famous characters in the various texts and folklore at that time.

The Supreme Presence is more easily evidenced in some creations by our mind. It must be noted that while highlighting these, no interest of any particular creed is specially heeded. Also it is to be remembered that this does not mean that God should be seen as this and that; these are all only palpable evidences to that Presence. Nityachaitanya Yati opines in this context that these are the fundamental values that have been dearest to the human race in the whole world alike, ever. The extant myths and the poetic fantasy, traditional forms and symbols, cultural beliefs are all turned into appropriate raw materials to convey the message intended by the composer. A simultaneous attempt is carried out to represent the true implication of these. (That there existed conflicts of interest on the basis of superstitious beliefs that each of these had degenerated could be easily inferred.) Rudra is one who 'makes the wicked weep'. The *Matsya*

*Purana* mentions the ferocious eleven Rudras – Kabali (Sankara), Pingala, Bhima, Virupaksa, Vilohita, Ajesha, Sasana, Sasta, Sambhu, Chanda and Dhruva; of which Sankara is the kindest. In these stories Sankara can be taken as an example of the divine glory as he is more of a forgiving nature.

Yaksha and Rakshas are *upadevadas* – divine manifestations of secondary importance. Guru Nityachaitanya Yati opines that these signify certain personal aspects or temperaments related to each individual. For instance, all of the means a man uses to save himself offers him *raksha* (security) and therefore are his *rakshas*. (This term is not to be confused with *rakshasa* – the wantonly cruel person.) Highlighting of the ability to amass wealth as the most important of all abilities of man to save oneself from danger is half a joke and half a lesson! Among mythological figures Kubera is an uncouth dwarf, barely three feet tall, obese, pot-bellied and with a small head that sports an ugly mouth full of deformed teeth. His wealth is guarded by similarly hard-hearted and monstrous creatures. Still, among these groups, the divine evidence can be taken as this king. The oblique reference is perhaps to the utter foolishness of wasting one's inborn ability, the realization of which of course is a divine clue to the Supreme.

*Vasus* are the forces behind weather formation and change of seasons. They are the eight elements; symbolically gods representing aspects of nature and / or atmospheric phenomenon, namely Prithvi, Agni, Vayu, Antariksha, Adithya, Dyaus, Chandrama, and Nakshatra. *Pavaka* means that which purifies. *Agni* is its other name. It is of the greatest import among *vasus*. *Chandogya Upanishad* says that it manifests in all *vasus*. *Agni* or radiation is the mode of transfer of energy from one part of Akshara to another. It is there as the universe is born, maintained, transformed and finally wiped out. *Agni*, therefore, is a vibhuti itself.

*Meru* is an imaginary Vedic mountain – the abode of Devas – from which in all directions flow various branches of the river Ganga. The word *meru* means that which by height touches the heavenly bodies (*minoti jyotishi*). *Meru* represents both the picture of the human mind and also the vision of the highest ever imaginable by it. One can visualize the presence of the Supreme Purusha by concentrating on this vibhuti that is capable of encompassing the totality of the great universe.

It is to be kept in mind that while introducing the symbols and concepts that were in vogue a long while before it, Gita redefines each so as to establish the original intent that prompted their creation. (A parallel to this effort on the same lines can be found in Jung's book 'Man and his Symbols').

purodhasāṁ ca mukhyām māṁ viddhi pārtha bṛhaspatim

senānīnām aham skandah sarasām asmi sāgarah 10.24

*O Partha, know Me as Brihaspati the best among spiritual leaders; among generals see Me as Skanda; and among lakes the ocean.*

Brihaspati is the master of all words and the teacher to all Devas. Our faculties of sense organs are guided by the mind which in turn is guided by intellect, and the word (both within or from outside) is the medium to make this feasible. Each word is an integration of a sound and its meaning (similar to the integration of the *prakṛti* and the *purusha*) and therefore the master of words is a vibhuti.

Skanda (The deity also known as Karthikeyan, Murugan or Subrahmanian) is considered a guru by virtue of his meditative intelligence, and a mighty commander due to his expertise in action. He keeps fighting all demoniac forces effectively. The symbol represents the will to act coupled with the goodness within us.

The apparent endlessness of the ocean which is the habitat of so many multitude of living beings makes it incomparable. It is not difficult to see why the ocean is also considered a vibhuti or divine splendor.

maharṣīnām bhrgur aham girām asmy ekam akṣaram  
yajñānām japa yajño/smi sthāvarāṇām himālayah 10.25

*See Me as Bhrigu among Maharis; among words the one-syllable ‘Om’; among yajnas the japa (chant); among things that stand firm the Himalayas.*

The Upanishads say that Bhrigu Maharishi attained oneness with the Supreme Purusha through steadfast penance (the *Taittiriya Upanishad*). He is, therefore, a model worthy of emulation.

Of all words the one-syllable ‘Om’ can be taken as a vibhuti of the Supreme One. ‘Om’ is the representation of the resonance in Avyakta and therefore reflects the secret of creation of the universe, and is the basic note behind it. One may concentrate on it to know the divine glory of the Supreme Purusha, or use it to sync the music of one’s life with the orchestra of the universe.

*Japa* is recitation of a word or sentence pertaining to the Supreme One, with its meaning constantly and exclusively maintained in the mind. This helps attain single-mindedness which in other words is total dedication. Therefore the highest yajna is japa.

Himalayas are the best paradigm to illustrate consistency in a world which is

inconsistent and ever changing. Moreover the extension and loftiness enhances its magnificence. It symbolizes the Supreme Purusha on both counts.

There is another aspect too. The great ones who lived on these valleys and mountains and devoted themselves to knowledge challenged even the limits of human intelligence. Again, reaching the highest peak has always been a challenge.

aśvatthaḥ sarvavṛkṣāṇāṁ devarṣīṇāṁ ca nāradah  
gandharvāṇāṁ citrarathah siddhānāṁ kapilo munih 10.26

*Among all trees (visualize Me as) the Aswattha; Narada among all deva rishis; Chitraratha among all Gandharvas; and sage Kapila among all siddhas.*

The *peepal* tree is the biggest of trees yet it is born from the smallest of seeds. It lives for centuries, refurbishing itself all along by issuing fresh roots that reach the ground from its branches. Its every leaf is always engaged in murmuring – the chant of *japa yajna*. Its contribution to help sustain the ecological balance of the biosphere is immense. It is home to many creepers, insects, birds and other creatures and also a good resource of shade and comfort to human beings.

*Deva rishi* is a term that denotes the personification of all good qualities. But Narada in the stories has earned a bad name as one who continuously trades in gossip and puts people and even gods against each other. This may therefore appear a contradiction in terms but it is not. He is in fact the avatar of *sattvik* (noble) qualities; every story of his trading in gossip actually poses questions wrapped up in golden foil of humor; the answers to which lead to better knowledge of the Supreme Purusha. Also, he is the embodiment of devotion (*bhakti*). Since it is *bhakti* that is most essential to seek, find and identify oneself with the Purushottama, Narada symbolizes that which guides all the faculties of sense organs (*Devas*) in the right way; this is the reason why Narada is said to be the best of *deva rishis*.

In the Gita heaven is not the abode of five-star comforts no bills attached and reserved for do-gooders for life after death; it is the most brilliantly painted illusionary world the human mind can ever conjure up, providing all comforts and devoid of all worries and sorrows. Its song and dance portfolio is handled by *Gandharvas*. *Gandha*, literally meaning smell, here denotes the aesthetic essence of a thing.

*Gandharvas* are supposed to be masters of the arts and romance; highly creative to appreciate aesthetic magnificence of things and produce the most

artistic expression of them. They have their own world – the *gandharva loka*; and Chitraratha is their leader, the most talented of them. In the philosophical sense it means that those who are eminent in the field of art, both as doers and enjoyers, are Chitrarathas; as all art is creativity oriented at producing aesthetic enlightenment that dissolves one's worldly self.

*Siddhas* in the stories are those who have through their meticulous pursuit mastered the art of performing miracles by activating latent special prowess not routinely accessible (paranormal capabilities). But the knowledge in Vedanta does not support unearthly powers; any power has to have a natural explanation. Sage Kapila is also not a person with such hocus pocus; instead he is a great thinker and the pioneer of *sankhya* philosophy, the ultimate goal of which is *kaivalya* that is not distinct from *moksha* (salvation i.e. identification with the Supreme One). Thus, the convergence of *sankhya* and *yoga* philosophies is highlighted and the ultimate goal of human life is redefined.

uccaiḥśravasam aśvānāṁ viddhi mām amṛtodbhavam  
airāvatam gajendrāṇāṁ narāṇāṁ ca narādhipam 10.27

*Visualize Me among horses as Uchaisravas born from the amrut, Airavat among the great elephants, and among men the King.*

*Uchaisravas* and *Airavat* are born out of *amrut* obtained by churning the ocean of milk. Both these are said to be important among the vibhuti of the Supreme Purusha. The statement becomes meaningful only if the ‘churning of the ocean of milk’ by the Devas and Asuras is understood in its philosophical sense. The mind is the ocean of milk, and *amrut* is the blissfully sweet nectar of immortality which one gets with the final union with *Paramātma*. One churns one’s mind in life in the material world. As the churning goes on with good qualities like self-control, love and tolerance on the one side (the Devas), and bad qualities like greed, anger and hatred on other (the Asuras), many articles and values (actions and emotions) surface, including even the deadliest of poisons (*kalakutam*). But it does not matter as *Mahesvara* will contain any poison (The Highest Lord of the Self can help obliterate any poison surfacing from the mind).

*Uchaisravas*, a unique kind of horse able to hear the farthest sound in the clearest manner and reach at its source the fastest ever possible, shall be a very useful gift. Mounted on it, one will be able to respond to the message as to which way to turn to the path of *yoga* in life, no matter however low and vague the signal is, and get to it fast.

*Airavat* is a huge white elephant. As per the *Gudavaboda sastra*, a white elephant signifies inner power and completeness. In this context, Nityachaitanya Yati recalls a dream story from *buddhacharita* – how queen Maya dreamt of a six-tusked white elephant entering her womb before she conceived prince Siddhartha.

As in most other species of animals, in human societies too there arise natural leaders. Kings of yore were such. They were naturally gifted with the quality of leadership. They were manifestations of *Isvara chaitanya* (splendor / godliness). Later, as access to the throne became just a matter of birth, kingship ceased to mean such refinement. This verse therefore exemplifies how ideal leaders of men are.

āyudhānām ahaṁ vajraṁ dhenūnām asmi kāmadhuk  
prajanaś cāsmi kandarpaḥ sarpāṇām asmi vāsukih 10.28

*I represent Vajra (thunderbolt) among all weapons; Kāmadhuk among cows; Kāma deva among all that procreate; and Vasuki among serpents.*

*Vajra* is the weapon of Indra – the symbol of the mind. Only when Indra is successful in embracing complete *brahmacharya* (the highest mental control) does he get this weapon. Vajra can be used for offense as well as defense; similarly in the hands of the self-controlled the mind will prove to be the strongest tool. One can get direct evidence of the Supreme Purusha by contemplating on this weapon also.

*Kāma deva* (the god of love) who is in charge of all procreation is the embodiment of love that does not contradict *dharma*. That love is also a divine glory; a direct evidence of the Supreme Entity.

In folklore, serpents are portrayed as the dwellers of the underworld (*pathala*). Symbolically, it is the world of sensual pleasures and Vasuki is the king of that world. It is this very Vasuki who was bound as the churning chord around the mountain called *Mantaram* to churn the ocean of milk. Vasuki vomits *kalakutam* (the deadliest venom) before amrut emerges from the ocean of milk. These are extremes in the world of experience (*anubhava loka*) – the amrut capable of giving eternal joy and the venom that causes instant death. Vasuki literally means the one who has a gem adorning his head; he is the king of *sarpas*.

*Kamadhenu*, the magical cow that fulfils any wish, too, emerges from the ocean of milk while churned. But, again, it serves only those who have self-control.

anantaś cāsmi nāgānāṁ varuṇo yādasām aham  
pitṛṇāṁ aryamā cāsmi yamah samyamatām aham 10.29

*Visualize Me as Ananta among Nagas; Varuna among water deities; Aryama among those who live on the other side of death; and Yama among those who exercise control.*

Ananta (literally ‘the endless’) is a *naga* (snake) on which God Vishnu lies in yogic sleep. The visual was earlier discussed in verse 32 of chapter 4.

There are many *jala Devatas* (deities of water) in the *Puranas*; Varuna is the most important of them. Son of Aditi (literally ‘the indivisible’), he is also a *dikpalaka* – one of the eight who keep watch at either end of each of the four space coordinates. Water always finds its level and is inevitable for the sustenance of life. *Vishuddhi* (purity) is its *adidevata* (guiding principle).

Ancient folklore is full of delightful visualizations. Aryama is another son of Aditi. He is the ruler of the kingdom of ancestors (*pitru loka*). Guru Nityachaitanya Yati says that, viewed in a psychological perspective, Aryama symbolizes the power that revitalizes such memory as in sleep, which after getting lost in unconsciousness would be illumined in the consciousness again.

The destruction of all that is already existent is to prepare the dais for new creations. This is an inevitable process. No creation in the universe enjoys uninterrupted continuity. The normal human heart pauses 72 times in a minute and our breath for 18 times on average. Blood flows through the veins as waves – move-stop-and-move! All energy transactions are bound by unavoidable intermissions. This has already been proven by Max Planck’s quantum theory. Our sun would have burnt itself long back if energy emission from it did not follow this rule and emanated as a continuous stream. All waves propagate in stop-and-go fashion. The intervals are too brief to become evident to our sense organs.

Impediment to smooth flow constitutes a major instrument in the maintenance of the ‘law and order’ obtained in the universe. The world is sustaining because of the pauses or the hindrances. Death is one such. It prompts us to wonder about, think of and look for the Supreme Entity and the humility thus gained helps check the growth of a separate ego. Restrictions are often misconstrued as punishments, death being the heaviest. The rule of death without any scope for appeal is personified as god Yama. In fact, that concept is a direct hint of the Supreme itself.

prahlādaś cāsmi daityānāṁ kālah kalayatām aham  
mr̥gāṇāṁ ca mr̥gendrohaṁ vainateyaś ca pakṣinām 10.30

*Visualize me as Prahlad among Daityas; time among the means to reckon; the ‘lord of beasts’ (lion) among animals; and Vainateya (Garuda) among birds.*

If *deva* signifies light, *Daitya* or *Asura* signifies darkness. Daityas are the ones born from *Diti* (the divided). Darkness prevents us from seeing anything in its entirety; at the most we may touch and feel a small part of it at a time. As light always eradicates darkness, in the story the birth of the enlightened Prahlad proves detrimental to his cruel father Hiranyakasipu, the emperor of the Daityas. ‘*Hiranya*’ means addiction to gold. Hiranyakasipu went about wrapping himself in a robe woven with threads of pure gold. The story of Prahlad is a brave event of resistance against established traditions of ignorance and also negation of the concept of decadency attributed by birth, indicating that these constitute blocks on the way to true wisdom.

Time is the most important among the fundamental units of physics for two reasons. Measures of mass and length can be verified by re-measurement but time once measured is unavailable for verification; it is gone. The mass and the length of an object vary in course of time. Any interval of time measured anywhere is a part of the life of the entire universe. Therefore the one who studies time gets a chance to know it as a vibhuti of the Supreme.

In the ever changing world we live in, time is reckoned in terms of the period of wait between two events or an event and its repetition. Observation of time is not independent of physical changes. But physical changes are products of the consistency of *Avyakta* – the universal medium – which does not remain the same anywhere, ever. Modern science is yet to differentiate between ‘apparent time’, ‘absolute time’ and ‘ultimate time’ (timelessness). For it, apparent time is all that there is because it is unable to mark the rate of change of time in comparison to the absolute time of *Avyakta*, as the background changes in consistency.

Lion stands first among animals in respect to its valor and strength. Its strength represents the purposeful unification of many a different force. This uniqueness can be considered as an expression of the divine glory of the Supreme. Likewise Garuda (the son of Vinatha and therefore Vainatheya) possesses exemplary strength and size.

Lion is a physical reality whereas Garuda is not. Yet both are equally relevant as concepts for contemplation. One gets a cue of how myths are formed and the connection between myths and reality. It is also obtained that, in a way,

all imagination is reality, and the universe is also stemming from primordial imagination though this does not confine to the sensory level of perception.

pavanah pavatām asmi rāmah śastrabhṛtām aham  
jhaṣāṇāṁ makaraś cāsmi strotasām asmi jāhnavī 10.31

*Among purifiers on the move see Me as the wind; visualize Me as Rama among warriors; among fishes the Makara; and among rivers the Jahnavi.*

The word *pavana* popularly understood as ‘air’ also means Vishnu, ‘that which purifies’. The word also means the potter’s workplace, removing of chaff, and filtering.

Lord Rama who is the best among the wielder of weapons is another clue to the Purushottama. All sciences and skills are manifestations of the fundamental principle of the universe. Any skill can always help one to realize the Purushottama. Rama stands first among archers. (He was able to conquer the ten-headed monster of worldly desires of *kāma* and *krodha* – Ravana.) Makara fish is the vehicle of Varuna. (Literally the word means a whale or a crocodile). The flag of Kama deva also bears the insignia of makara fish. This is yet another symbolic image. Wonders of the world, on land or in the oceans, are paraded as clues to the splendor of the Supreme Entity. The starting point of all knowledge is also this wonder in realization.

Jahnavi is a synonym for the Ganges, but what is referred to here is the mythological more than the real. The choice of the word Jahnavi points to the myth in which Bhagirata, after Herculean effort (as his name means), made a mighty river flow from heaven to earth. But in that flow it inundated the ashram of sage Janu and the angry sage drank up all the torrential waters. When appeased by prayers, he released the river through his ear. So the Ganges also became known as Jahnavi, literally, ‘born of Janu’.

Another version of the birth of Ganges is that when Vamana lifted his foot to measure the three feet of earth that he had been granted by Mahabali, his foot reached *Satyaloka* (or *Brahmaloka*, the abode of the Brahma as per the Puranas.) and as Lord Brahma washed his feet, the water flowed from heaven as the Ganges. There is yet another story of the river’s birth from the tresses of Shiva as a symbol of his compassion. Ganga is called Mahesvari for its powers of cleansing the sins of people who bathe in it. It is natural that there originated many stories about the ‘flowing greatness’ that exhilarates human minds through the ages. One can realize the Supreme One also by contemplating on this endless flow through time and myths.

The proposition that the Supreme's Presence can be more obviously evidenced in certain phenomena is likely to lead to the foolish question: in which of these does it reside in greater measure? Answers suggested may differ leading to controversies and even strife as on lines currently existing among faiths. The way to avoid that pitfall and to escape from that perception even if one temporarily slips into it is to adequately know the single, ultimate and omnipresent Supreme Being well enough.

sargāñām ādir antaś ca madhyam̄ caivāham Arjuna  
adhyātmavidyā vidyānām vādah̄ pravadatām aham 10.32

*O Arjuna, I am the beginning, the stable base and also the end among creations; among sciences I am adhyatma vidya (yoga sastra); and the logic in all arguments.*

If one is able to see the entire universe as a huge book, the Supreme Entity is the beginning and the end of every chapter of it, and also the basis for the paper on which the story is written. Adhyatma vidya – the science by which one can walk the path of ultimate knowledge originates from the Supreme Itself.

Well meaning arguments help attain better understanding of the real and the false, so the splendor of the Supreme Purusha can be discerned in them. There are three types of discussions – *Jalpam* is argument prompted by pride and anger; it is destructive. Arguments that employ lies, false proof and manipulation belong to the class of *vithandam*; it is equally undesirable. These are mostly what go on in the world today. Argument employing sincere reasoning and correct logic which is called *vaadam* alone can show the way to truth. In this both sides will leave the discussion feeling happy and more learned.

akṣarāñām akāro/smi dvandvah̄ sāmāsikasya ca  
aham evākṣayah̄ kālo dhātāham̄ viśvatomukhah̄ 10.33

*Among letters visualize Me as the letter 'A', among all samasa (compound words) the dvandva; see Me as the akshaya time, and the dhata with faces everywhere in the universe.*

The sound that is the easiest to produce after opening one's mouth is 'A'. No wonder the first letter of almost all languages is 'A'. Of the three components of the syllable 'Om' the first one is 'a'. Therefore the sound can be taken to represent the *ātma*, and it is the essence of all words, says the Upanishads (*akrao*

*vai sarva vak*). All letters in Sanskrit need to be articulated with the ‘a’ sound. Words and sentences get a unique note with the soft flow of this phoneme.

The universe is filled with diverse objects with many dialectical opposites. Among these, in the final analysis, none is more important than any other. Words are combined with this in mind. *Samasa* literally means ‘being together as equals’ (*Samasa* = *sam* + *asa*). As per the grammatical importance of the constituent words, *samasa* are of four categories, namely, *tatpurusha* (The first component is a case relationship with the other), *bahuvrihi* (Nouns compounded with no head – possessive), *dvandva* (Consist of two or more noun stems), *avyayibhava* (Indeclinable compound formation). Of these *dvandva* provides for absolute equality of importance for the words constituting the combination (*ubhayapadarta pradhanam*) as in *Ramalakshmanau* (Rama and Lakshmana.) Similarly joy-grief, love-hate, heat-cold, etc. are equal in *dvandva*. The Supreme Purusha is identified with equality in everything and hence *dvandva samasa* is a symbol of It.

Of the two kinds of time – apparent (*alpakala*) and absolute (*mahakala*), the former was mentioned in verse 30 (time among the means to reckon). This verse deals with the latter – the absolute time. The fundamental units of length, weight and time are relative, but *mahakala* is not. In fact everything else depends on it. Its flow causes the creation, the sustenance and dissolution of everything in the universe. It is a manifestation worth studying.

We all have just one face, that is, we are able to see only what is in front of us at a time though our actions affect everything in all directions. Neither are we omnipresent. Therefore we are not able to accurately take into consideration everything that goes on or predict the results of actions. The Purushottama is omniscience itself, aware of all that goes on in all parts of the universe all the time, and can be said as the source from which everything is given (*dhata*) as the result of actions through nature.

mṛtyuḥ sarvaharaś cāham udbhavaś ca bhaviṣyatām  
kīrtiḥ śrīr vāk ca nārīṇāṁ smṛtir medhā dhṛtiḥ kṣamā 10.34

*I am (the source of) all-devouring death as well as the origin of all future births; in women (visualize Me in) the abilities of kirthi, sri, speech, memory, medha, dhriti and kshama.*

Death which effaces everything can be considered as a process where the slate is wiped clean. *Sarva* means ‘all, nothing left out’. In the universe, waves of creation and destruction follow one after the other. Creation is the dialectical

opposite of destruction. During both the expansion and the contraction phases of the universe, the consistency of Avyakta at all regions varies leading at first to the birth of all matter waves and finally the termination of all existing ones. Birth and death are therefore two sides of the same coin and events which if thought about in depth will lead to the awareness of the Supreme Purusha.

The prosperity of all children lies in the qualities of motherhood. The nature of motherhood is in selflessly going on performing karma and seeing all children as one and equal though they may differ in their qualities, skills and contributions. This is the path of karma yoga. *Kirthi* is fame and prosperity, and in the center of such families one cannot but note the respected feminine presence. *Sri* is the divine aura and nature of the feminine personality resembling Goddess Lakshmi (This attractiveness is not due to external beauty but is rather an inner quality). These are all examples of the divine glory of the Supreme Entity. Calmness, righteousness and the quality of guiding others to the right path is what can be called as splendor in all females. More than the physical beauty it is this feminine splendor that marked the unparalleled heroine of Kalidasa's magnum opus, *Sakuntala*. The ability to speak affectionately so as to pacify and console is another natural quality of womanhood. Children dominate constantly in the mother's mind as memory inviolable. A mother may forget her needs but never those of her children. The instinctive foresight which women possess is called as *medha*; endowed more in women, perhaps to guard and protect their children. Hence women are gifted with a higher potential. The world is yet to recognize it in due measure, though it has realized that women are better at speech and memory. (Women are better than men in all the qualities listed in this verse.) Haimavathi alias Uma (goddess Parvathy as mentioned in the Kena Upanishad, who instructs Indra about the Yaksha who was Brahma itself.) is the first teacher of brahma vidya. Gargi (scholar and invitee to the first conference on philosophy at King Janaka's court) indulges in a discussion with Yajnavalkya, the greatest scholar of the day in the court of Janaka.

*Dhriti* means fortitude (courage and determination) and does not mean foolhardiness in terms of bravery or battle. Women have more determination, and it is also well known that they can endure more pain than men; either mental or physical (even though they are under more hormonal influence). Perhaps this is an adaptation nature has given in relation to childbirth. Also, to rescue her children, any woman however fragile she might be is sure to fight even to death with any fierce monster whatsoever. Which man can cut his own flesh and throw it to the wolves that are about to trounce upon the young?

The virtue of *kshama* (patience) is also recognized to be better in women. All these qualities represent the divine glory of the Supreme One.

bṛhatsāma tathā sāmnāṁ gāyatrī chandasām aham  
māsānāṁ mārgaśīrṣoham ṛtūnāṁ kusumākaraḥ 10.35

*Likewise, see Me as the brihat-sama among the hymns of the Sama Veda; among metres the Gayatri; among months the Margasirsha (December-January); and among seasons the season of flowers (spring).*

This verse shows how identification of the Supreme is possible through clues that soften the heart. Sama Veda contains hymns of great musical quality, to master the recitation of which many years of practice is required. Of all Sama lyrics brihat-sama are the most important according to the Chandogya Upanishad. The sweetness of melody and the power of diction make it unique. It gives one complete joy and contentment. It is the ability to bring about this result that makes Chitraratha the most outstanding among the Gandharvas. The ideal singer and the ideal song are equally great.

*Gayatri* is a simple Sanskrit metre which has three lines with eight syllables in each. The famous *Gayatri mantra* is set in this metre. It is highly melodious and is believed to have the rhythm of the heart. *Gayatri* uses the minimum number of syllables yet penetrates to the depths of one's heart creating ripples of joyous enlightenment.

*Margasirsha* is the ninth among the lunar months beginning with *chaitra*. It is the month of the *thiruvatira* (the night of splendor) festival. It spans the period when man's instinct for romance is accentuated by resplendent moonlight and cozy climate. Therefore it highlights life's intimate association with nature and its moods. As nature is a *bhava* (expression) of the Supreme, this realization underlines the fact that man is one with It. Similarly, spring is the season when the entire earth is laden with flowers, eager to get pollinated and fructify.

The above mentioned are experiences of pure worldly happiness. These are all divine glories of the Supreme expressed through nature and available to one and all without any distinction of any kind.

dyutam̄ chalayatām asmi tejas tejasvinām aham  
jayo/smi vyavasāyosmi sattvam̄ sattvavatām aham 10.36

*See Me in the ingenuity of the gamblers and the splendor of the splendid; see Me as assiduous effort and victory; see Me as the goodness in the good.*

As the Purushottama is everywhere and in everything as the omniscient and

omnipresent, It can be seen as the basis from which every ingenuity comes, irrespective of whether it is to cheat, indulge in destruction, do good or do bad. In nature, most predators prey by employing deceit. (In this context we can remember verse 4.13 that the caste-system also is based on the same Paramātma.) Often, it leaves us wondering, if the skills displayed for doing wrong were used for noble deeds instead. Any capability on the part of anything or anyone is an evidence of the divine glory of the Supreme Entity. Just because someone is using his gift for cheating, it does not cease to be a gift, it just means that he has taken the wrong choice. The ingenuity of an expert cheat is admirable but it would have given him and the world a lot more real happiness if he had used the same capability to use it with yajna concept to identify himself with the Supreme Entity.

*Gunas* (tendencies) are neither good nor bad in themselves. The universe is built upon the three *gunas* - *sattva, rajas and tamas*. There is no wishing any one *guna* away; all three are part of nature. The way to bliss is the right integration of self and action based on it so that the state of the Supreme Being is realized.

Again, perseverance in any matter is a gift from the fundamental force that runs the universe. The basic question is: should one use it exclusively to gain a paltry material something or employ it also on aligning oneself with the highest path? It has already been said that a well-settled intellect is the hallmark of the enlightened. Therefore, one can analyze the perseverance of the wise and realize the Supreme One.

The goodness of the good not only means the mental makeup of a good person but also the actions that express that goodness. These are obvious vibhutis and people find it easier to identify the Supreme Entity in them.

vṛṣṇīnāṁ vāsudevo/smi pāñḍavānāṁ dhanamjayah  
munīnāṁ apy aham vyāsaḥ kavīnām uśanā kaviḥ 10.37

*Visualize Me as Vāsudeva among the Vrishnis; among the Pandavas, Dhananjaya (Arjuna); also, Vyasa among munis; and among poets Usana, the great seer.*

(*Vrishnis* are descendants of Vrishni, son of Yadu, the first of the Yadavas. Therefore Vrishnis are also called as Yadavas. Since Krishna was the son of Vasudeva (a Yadava by birth), he is also called as Vāsudeva.) Vāsudeva means one who has identified himself with the Supreme and also experiences the bliss of that state.

Visualize ‘Me’ as Krishna among Vrishnis and Arjuna among Pandavas.

They are both examples of the divine glories of the Supreme Purusha. The verse also provides direct clue to the source of the discourse – the ‘Me’ is the Ātma Itself.

Among the five Pandavas only Arjuna is the one selected to become the recipient of the Gita. (Arjuna is also called as *Dhananjaya* meaning one who has won over *dhana* (wealth), which can be interpreted in both ways – one who is very rich, and one whose mind has won over the snares that tie him to wealth.) He is the greatest archer of all times, of unparalleled skill.

*Muni* is the one who scientifically evaluates all propositions with a silent mind (calm so that emotions do not quarrel within it). Vyasa means a muni whose imagination spans the entire diameter of all knowledge. (It is to be noted that though the composer of the Mahabharata that includes the Gita is Vyasa, the author is not flattering himself. He understands that whatever work he represents in his name is just the Great One's divine glory and it has nothing to do with his own prowess.

*Usanas* literally means ‘one who wants the Asuras to prosper’. The reference is to the *guru* (teacher) of the Asuras – Sukracharya. Rig-Veda mentions him as *kavi* (poet) though compositions by him are not to be found in ancient texts. *Kavi* is ‘one who unearths coded expressions of truth’. It is obvious that this person did contribute a lot but there is no way of knowing who unearthed what and in whose name it was known later. It also cannot be concluded that there were, in reality, no people who later came to be known as Asuras or that there were no learned scholars among them. (There is also the warning that one should not be prejudiced while evaluating one’s ancestors.) *Kavi* is one who supposed to have deep insight into the highest of realities – the presence of the Supreme.

dañḍo damayatāṁ asmi nītir asmi jīgīṣatāṁ  
maunam̄ caivāsmi guhyānām̄ jñānam̄ jñānavatāṁ aham 10.38

*I represent the acts of punishment of all keepers of the law; the sense of justice in all those who aspire to succeed; also, likewise, see Me as silence among all secrets and the wisdom of the wise.*

This verse concentrates on knowledge and power. Administrators, family heads and teachers may have to enforce punishments. If they ever think that they have the right to punish, or that punishment is their responsibility, they are mistaken. The truth is he / she is only a correction tool of the Supreme Purusha working through the hands of *prakṛti* (nature), engaged in such activities for the good of the world without any selfish interest whatsoever. Then all instruments

of punishment turn into evidences of the Supreme Lord. Moreover any person can contemplate on such impartial punishment he gets and correct himself so as to achieve godliness.

Any victory is meaningless unless it is just. Theft and looting are failures however much they succeed materially. Victory is only if there is benefit to the inner person, which translates into good for everybody in the world. Therefore sense of true justice is definitely an example of divine glory.

*Muni* is one who is devoid of internal and external noise. He is silent within even while busily interacting with the outside world. He is beyond the pangs of lust, desire and grief; his happy self never getting divided on the lines of opposites and quarreling with itself. He is integrated and therefore always content; in unison with the Supreme Self. Adhyatma vidya is the most hidden of all vidyas. The person who knows this is called as *jnani* (wise). His wisdom is another example of divine glory.

yac cāpi sarvabhūtānāṁ bījam tad aham Arjuna  
na tad asti vinā yat syān mayā bhūtam carācaram 10.39

*O Arjuna, and whatever is the seed of all beings, that also am I; there is no being, whether moving or unmoving, that can exist without Me.*

The nature of the ‘seed’ was discussed in the previous chapter (verse 18) – it is a major example of divine glory. In fact everything stems from that One Entity and there is nothing that exists separate or outside from the Paramātma.

nānto/sti mama divyānāṁ vibhūtīnāṁ paramtapa  
eṣa tūḍdeśataḥ prokto vibhūter vistaro mayā 10.40

*O Arjuna, there is no end to My vibhuti; what I have described is only a brief account of a very wide spectra.*

As ‘there is no being, whether moving or unmoving, that can exist without Me’, everything in the universe is a vibhuti of the Supreme. A few important and easily perceivable ones have been listed as promised. It will be prudent to avoid the misunderstanding that the Supreme Entity cannot be discerned other than through these or exclusively through these. One can look for oneself and find as many as one wants; as the Supreme One has faces at every point in the universe (*visvatomugham*), availability is unlimited. Just look around, everything we see is a miracle. Look anywhere, the Supreme One is there! The examples provided

are intended to prepare one only for recognizing this.

An astrophysicist observes the stars that are within the range of his telescope and elicits laws that govern the entire lot of stars in the sky. None can fully count or observe all the stars in the universe. This is the methodology that science follows in every investigation. Darwin's theory of evolution is based on a study of only some animals, not every living thing. Since Darwin was wise and dedicated, a few representative samples were sufficient to establish his view. A new drug's effectiveness is tested only on a few patients. All knowledge acquired by man has accrued through generalization. Likewise here a few major examples are taken to generalize the obvious Absolute Principle behind everything in this universe. A prime generalization of adhyatma vidya is: everything in the universe is an expression of the splendor of the Supreme One.

yad yad vibhūtimat sattvam śrīmad ūrjitam eva vā  
tat tad evāvagaccha tvam mama tejo/mśasambhavam 10.41

*Know that whatever majestic, prosperous or powerful there is, they are all only evidence of a small part of My splendor.*

In comparison with the other peaks, the Himalayas; and in comparison with the other oceans, the Pacific is majestic. The golden yellow with which corns carpet the meadows before the harvest, the enchanting twilight, the merciful rains that cool the earth, the hue of blossoms all around during spring and the innocence that brims in little children are all examples of splendor.

It is the forces of nature that are powerful. The sun that endows heat, warmth and energy to the entire solar system; thunder and lightning; volcanoes and hurricanes are all far stronger than all human strength put together!

Since, majesty, splendor and power are easily found as perceivable evidences of the Supreme Entity, these are specified. Deductively one can find that in every being of the universe there is this presence of the Purushottama. Thus we end up in the discovery that the entire universe is pervaded by the one Supreme Purusha.

athavā bahunaitena kim jñātena tavārjuna  
viṣṭabhyāham idam kṛtsnam ekāṁśena sthito jagat 10.42

*O Arjuna, but of what avail to you is the knowledge of all these diverse details? I encompass the entire world by a very small part of Myself.*

Knowledge can be of two types. Given a limited stock of anything, one can count their number and know how many there are. But this is of no use when the stock is unmanageable like the grains of sand on a beach or the number of stars in the sky. The other kind of knowledge is that which is obtained by reasonable generalization of the results of close and careful observation of events and processes. This knowledge alone can defeat the limits of quantification and be fruitful in the long run.

The sum total of what ought to be deciphered from the objects and concepts presented so far are thought of and analyzed, and the gist of the knowledge that can be gleaned from the exercise is also provided: The Purushottama bears the world through a small part of Itself. How much ‘big’ can we assume the ‘Supreme Purusha’ is, to calculate the ‘small part’? What is the indication here?

It means that the Supreme Purusha cannot be understood through fractions, measurements, calculations and stocktaking or moving up and down the endless steps of causes and effects. It is not difficult to understand what is meant by a ‘small part’ by the mind; it doesn't mean a ‘physical’ fraction. But try to calculate and derive a fraction and you fail there. Such enquiry is of course relevant but it is not the path to reach the very source. Once again we get a chance to ponder about the strengths and limitations of modern science.

## Chapter 11

# Yoga of Visvarupa

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Many examples were given in the last chapter in reply to the question where to look for easy perception of Isvara's presence (which is in fact everywhere, though not apparent). Revealing that Its (scientific) miracles are in fact countless (of which only a few were pointed out), the final stance was: why bother to look in nooks and corners, just know that the Supreme Purusha bases the foundation for the entire universe with a small part of It.

When ascending the steps of dhyana (meditation), the mind gradually becomes pure and steady but at the intermediate stages the higher vision obtained can only be the trans-space-trans-time-state of a particular thing the intellect wants to see. Perception will continue to remain incomplete until even the distinction between the viewer and the vision vanishes. In short, even the vision of the divine cosmic-form presented in this chapter is no more than a view from a wayside inn on the pilgrimage to final union.

But this view transmutes learning into experience. Anyone who gets the fortunate chance to have a look at the depths of the universe through a large telescope will harbor no doubts about this; it is equally enough if a drop of rainwater is viewed through a microscope. Next, sage Vyasa projects a 3-D animation picture of the structure and functioning of the cosmos. The transformations that space and matter undergo over long periods of time are screened in fast motion. The run of the picture from the past to the present is extended into the future in steady continuity. Sanjaya the all-seeing takes his stand to one side of the screen, pointer in hand, to invite our attention to both Arjuna the viewer and the view of the cosmos Arjuna glimpses.

Sanjaya also provides a detailed running commentary of what comes on screen for the benefit of the blind emperor Dhrutarashtra, who, being a soul deluded by selfish desires, fails to acquire any part of the wisdom the experience of the vision provides for Arjuna. Instead, the emperor only takes greater recourse to the relieving thought that this show of the divine cosmic-form is no more than an illusion. Those who are ignorant as to what to look for generally fail to see; even those who know cannot recognize if they do not have enough

detachment and dedication.

This chapter of the Gita too, just as every other, can be read at many different levels as discussed in the introductory part, based on the kshetra concept: 1). Krishna and Arjuna can be seen as two disparate individuals, the former vividly describing the birth, growth and death of the universe to the latter who accepts it all with a receptive and creative mind. These two are friends but separate *kshetras* (*idam śarīram kaunteya kṣetram ity abhidhīyate* - O Arjuna, this human body is known as the kshetra). The word *kshetra* means *that which degenerates or decays*. So the scene can be taken to mean the more knowledgeable of the two educating his intimate friend on the *Ātma* in a palatable manner. 2). The two personages can be seen as two parts of the same body or *kshetra*; in all *kshetras* the *Ātma* is the *Kshetrajna* – the one who knows all about the *kshetra*. Here Arjuna, confronted with the most critical situation of his life, scans through conventional knowledge he has gathered to find a solution, fails, concentrates on his inner self and gets enlightened by it. 3). The whole of Kurukshetra, with all present therein can be seen to represent one *kshetra*. This view transforms the epic of the Mahabharata into a record of the progress of the *purushartha* (*dharma, artha, kāma and moksha*) of the totality. *Artha purushartha* gets upset as it finds itself related by blood and training to demoniac forces of greed and lust, takes recourse to counseling by *moksha purushartha* and is enabled to arrive at true wisdom.

The story and beliefs are blended together with Vedantic wisdom in such a way that the ones interested in the story can enjoy that aspect to the utmost and the ones looking for wisdom can gain it without effort. It can be seen that sage Vyasa has taken great care to make his statements relevant to all levels at the same time. The reader is free to halt at the story part and call it a day. But the sage has dropped enough hints to indicate he prefers everybody to progress through it and reach the higher levels of knowledge. Even the ability for this progress is a vibhuti of the Supreme Entity. It is the same that has enabled him to compose the epic. Therefore, *muninam apyaham vyasa* (among munis see Me as Vyasa) (10.7) is just a statement of fact.

arjuna uvāca  
madanugrahāya paramam guhyam adhyātmasamjñitam  
yat tvayoktam vacas tena moho/yam vigato mama 11.1

*Arjuna said:*

*Through the words of compassion regarding the highest secret of the Self  
You have blessed me with, I have become free of all moha.*

*Adhyatma vidya* is knowledge that helps cognize the *Ātma* from what is not. Therefore it is the highest and most intricate of all knowledge. It is great blessing to obtain it. With that blessing one becomes free from *raga-dvesha* (like-dislike) traps. *Moha* means misconception, especially about mistaking the transient for the real. It is like dirt on the mirror which is wiped off by true knowledge. Arjuna's words ring with the happiness of one cured of a painful disease.

bhavāpyayau hi bhūtānāṁ śrutau vistaraśo mayā  
tvattah kamalapatrākṣa māhātmyam api cāvyayam 11.2

*I have heard from you in detail, O Lotus-eyed one, the origin and destruction of beings and also of inexhaustible greatness (of the Supreme One).*

The way of address shows genuine love. In the story Krishna is Arjuna's close friend and teacher. In the philosophical sense, Indian poetic tradition sees lotus leaves and petals as symbols of detachment since water does not wet them despite constant contact. The Supreme Purusha which is the same as the True Self within us is similarly detached. Arjuna is now going to make a request for a great blessing!

evam etad yathāttha tvam ātmānam parameśvara  
draṣṭum icchāmi te rūpam aiśvaram puruṣottama 11.3

*O Paramesvara (the Supreme Lord of the world), (I am convinced that) what all You have told of Yourself (the Paramātma) is true. Now, O Purushottama (the highest of the three levels of reality), I yearn to see your Divine Form.*

Here the mode of address becomes different from the story line and gains more significance in the philosophical context. *Paramesvara* is the unquestionable overlord of all the forces in the world including those that drive the sense organs and the mind within oneself (the illuminations called *Devas*). It is the *Kshetrajna* (the all-knowing one within the kshetra which is the human body, and also within the larger *kshetra* comprising the whole of the universe.), the *Paramātma* Itself, no other. It is Its form that Arjuna yearns to see. Of the three *purushas* (realities) of the universe – *Kshara*, *Akshara* and *Isvara* – the third, also known as *Purushottama*, is the highest of all the levels, the primary cause of and the immortal basis to all life in the *Kshara*.

Arjuna is thoroughly convinced of the truth of whatever he has heard. He is

enamored by it. He cannot wait to see it all!

manyase yadi tac chakyam̄ mayā draṣṭum iti prabho  
yogeśvara tato me tvam̄ darsayātmānam avyayam 11.4

*O Prabhu, if You consider me deserving of seeing, do You please, then, O Lord of all yoga, let me see Your imperishable form.*

*Yoga* means the act of being together. *Mahesvara* is *Yogesvara* too. Any accretion or apparent separation in the universe is the result of yogic action. *Yogesvara* decides either way. Fusion of anything with anything else cannot take place without Its blessing.

The prescriptions of brahma vidya (the study of knowing the Brahma) demand this stance. The sense-mind-intellect-combine and the prana (life-force of organ systems) function based on the Supreme Purusha. The essence of brahma vidya is to consciously fuse oneself with That. The means and the end are the same. The efficacy of the preparedness of the means rests on the Supreme Purusha. Therefore the one who prepares himself cannot be the judge. This is why the request is prefaced with the true devotion of ‘If You consider me deserving’.

But the request is wrong in a certain aspect – Purushottama, the One who is greater than and beyond even the Akshara, has no name or form. Yet Man always yearns to *see* God, paint pictures of the Ultimate, describe in words what the Supreme Entity looks like, and call It by unique names.

None of the beings born in the Kshara world can ‘see’ Avyakta or visualize the formless Presence behind it. Therefore what Arjuna is shown are visions related to the Cosmic structure of the Universe and also conceptual symbols of how the universe is organized and how it functions; which he can ‘see’ using a special internal awareness. It is also indicated that these cosmic visions are obtained through Arjuna's own meditation by the nature of the visuals that he sees.

śrībhagavān uvāca  
paśya me pārtha rūpāṇi śataśo/tha sahastraśaḥ  
nānāvidhāni divyāni nānāvarṇākṛtiṇi ca 11.5

*The Mahesvara said:*

*You may see, O Partha, My forms by hundreds and thousands, of different sorts and of various colors and shapes, all carrying light.*

Arjuna's cosmic vision begins. What follows is quite an extraordinary show. The vision redefines all spiritual cultures of all time at one go. It reveals a picture of the universe as a cosmic body pervaded by *Isvara*, a picture totally different from the pictures available in most religious texts and Puranas. The unique way it is presented by the sage poet is itself splendid.

The first to be seen are hundreds of thousands of varied forms – the countless objects of the Kshara world that anyone can see by opening one's eyes wide enough. Shapes and colors widely vary. Size and distance alone set limits to ordinary observation. Even if these limits are overcome what is seen is a world of creations that came into being at the behest of the Supreme.

The 3-D animation projection picturing the transformations in the universe begins with the high resolution still-shot of the realistic world. If anyone feels disappointed about this being just a mundane image and no special vision of the cosmos, just wait for a moment. Here it comes!

paśyādityān vasūn rudrān aśvinau marutas tathā  
bahūny adṛṣṭapūrvāṇi paśyāścaryāṇi bhārata 11.6

*O Bhārata, behold the Adityas, the Rudras, the Aswins and also the Maruts; behold many wonders never seen before.*

The second shot consists of sights much rarer, the personifications of ancient concepts that Arjuna has not been able so far to perceive – the famous characters of the Puranas namely the *adityas*, the *vasus*, the *rudras*, the *maruts* and the *aswins*. Along with them there are many wonders of ancient repute, so far unseen.

What is meant by the resurrection of these ancient characters? The picture serves to illustrate a particular stage in the process of dhyana. As emotions and thoughts are controlled and the person yearns to see what he has not ever seen before, what often get projected into the mind are the imaginary concepts associated with primordial beliefs. They assume the stance of reality. The characters and sights arising in Arjuna's mind are the ones stemming from his tradition. The experience of another person brought up in a society with another set of archetypal images will be different.

One has to pass through these preliminaries to get in touch with one's real Self. What follows are the visuals to guide one towards it. It is better to know in advance that even these are wayside shows as the culmination of the vision of the cosmos is in the discovery of the formless and non-dualistic Essence of the

universe.

The universe itself is supposed to be the conceptualization by the Supreme. The tree of reality is born out of the seed of imagination. In fact, every man is lead more by the concepts in his mind than the realities around.

ihāikastham jagat kṛtsnam paśyādya sacarācaram  
mama dehe guḍākeśa yac cānyad draṣṭum icchasi 11.7

*O Gudakesa, behold here in a united state in My body the entire universe with all the moving and the unmoving in it as well as whatever else you long to see.*

‘Whatever else you long to see’ is the hint to what Arjuna is seeing through meditation. But ‘see everything apiece but do not miss the unity in the diversity’ is the hint to true knowledge in the verse. The universe as a whole is in ‘My’ body. See it as one. The best way to see any forest is to see every tree but, at the same time, not missing the awareness of the forest as a whole.

*Gudakesa* is one who has defeated sleep. Laziness and sleep, the symptoms of the influence of *tamo guna*, have to be outlived if wisdom is to be acquired.

The subject of Arjuna’s *dhyana* now expands to the limits of the universe. Everything seen apiece before is knit into the total. He sees everything he yearns to see, but all of it is part of the whole. However, despite having ascended yet another step on the path of *yoga* Arjuna still is on the plane of consciousness at the material level. ‘Sight’, for him, is what is obtained by the physical eye. He is yet unable to see beyond the limitations of form, time and space. To see what is ahead and the conceptualizations on which all is built and rests, he has to be given that ability.

na tu māṁ śakyase draṣṭum anenaiva svacakṣuṣā  
divyam dadāmi te cakṣuh paśya me yogam aiśvaram 11.8

*But you are surely not able to behold Me (My yoga) with those (physical) eyes of yours; (therefore) I give you the divine-eye. Behold My godly yoga (of the state of union with the universe).*

How the Supreme Being is in yogic fusion is not discernible with physical sense organs. The Upanishads repeatedly say that any equipment pertaining to the Kshara cannot encompass the Akshara. Our physical eye, however healthy it is, can see only the material world, that too within limits. For instance, objects

smaller or beyond a certain distance – microscopic structures which are too small or stars which are too far away – cannot be seen. Though these limits can be surmounted to some extent by microscopes and telescopes, we cannot see any part of the unknowable world of Akshara. All equipments we make are products of Akshara. No wave can prove successful in measuring the ocean. And the ocean – the Akshara – itself cannot be used to measure the Aksharatita – what lies even beyond it.

The internal eye alone can help ‘see’ the Ultimate picture. Even as these verses are explained, readers can ‘grasp’ the concept. That vision can be further strengthened by wisdom that blossoms after the mind gets free of all dualism. One should cease to be anchored in the material world and feel, ‘I am the other levels too’. It is on the basis of the strength of this feeling that the real kind of wisdom – *prajnana* – begins to dawn within. Successful *dhyana* (meditation) can lead one to that state.

In fact, we reach that state by the splendor of the True Self residing within ourselves. ‘Special vision’ is that which is brought by uplifting the self with the help of the Self, and not ‘I will give you special viewing glasses’ (as those provided in cinema theatres for special projections).

sañjaya uvāca  
evam uktvā tato rājan mahāyogeśvaro hariḥ  
darśayām āsa pārthāya paramam rūpam aiśvaram 11.9

*Sanjaya said:*

*Saying thus, O King, Hari the Maha Yogesvara, demonstrated that Supreme Form of Isvara for the benefit of Partha.*

‘Hari’ means one who decimates all ignorance in those who identify themselves with Him. Maha Yogesvara means God of the greatest of yoga. The Supreme Form is not actual but conceptual as Isvara is formless. The splendor and glory of this form are revealed in the coming verses.

Look at the list of those who are privileged to have the great vision. Whatever Arjuna sees, Sanjaya too does. At the same time, Sanjaya sees Arjuna too. Vyasa sees all including Sanjaya! Vyasa and Sanjaya have been given the divine eye permanently!

Jnanaeswar Maharaj (who did a commentary on the Gita with special accent on *bhakti* (the yoga of devotion) says: ‘At this stage, the material world so far familiar vanishes from Arjuna’s mind just as dreams from one awaking.’

The next five verses are presented neither by the one who shows nor the one

seeing the animation, but by the witness Sanjaya who sees both. Wasn't it enough if Arjuna recounted all that he saw? Why is Sanjaya brought in between?

For the benefit of readers who are provided through the ages a word-picture of everything, there has to be someone to register the reactions of Arjuna while experiencing the great vision. This information is critical in grasping the full import of the vision itself. Therefore Vyasa includes Sanjaya too in the picture presented. The clues provided by Arjuna's reactions help understand the meaning of the vision better and so is looked into as the show progresses.

Sanjaya's intervention is also required to maintain the progress of development of the deep philosophical parallel meaning of the narration. Present in the kshetra (body) is one witnessing the entire evolution of the kshetra. In common parlance it is called 'conscience'. Sanjaya witnesses the travails of the clan of the Kurus in which now there is a decisive war between demoniac desires born to blind greed and the will of dharma. Bhishma the incarnation of ego and Drona the master of weaponry are on the wrong side. On the other side the guiding principle is moksha purushartha. In this context can the conscience of the kshetra help maintain silence and not warn the father of those demoniac desires by dropping sufficient hints about the obvious outcome?

Arjuna is not eligible for fusion of his self with the Supreme Self till he defeats every base desire; for the time being, he therefore experiences the divine vision not within himself but externally. Remnants of the feeling of alienation reflect as the persistence of elements of material circumstances in the vision.

anekavaktranayanam anekādbhutadarśanam  
anekadivyābharaṇam divyānekodyatāyudham 11.10  
divyamālyāmbaradharām divyagandhānulepanam  
sarvāścaryamayam̄ devam anantam̄ viśvatomukham 11.11

(*Arjuna was shown or Arjuna saw*) *The ever-wonderful, resplendent and endless form facing all sides with numerous mouths and eyes, with numerous surprising sights, with numerous divine ornaments, with numerous divine weapons uplifted, wearing divine garlands and apparel anointed with divine unguents.*

This first picture is painted in earthly colors and is based on Arjuna's concepts of God deep down within his mind. Yet it is unavailable in any other scripture. There are some similarities with the imagery portrayed by the *Purusha Sukta mantra* of the Rig Veda – 9, 4.90; but this is unique. It clearly illustrates the ascension of the concept of God from the one in the Vedas to that in the

Upanishads. This picture marks the beginning of the expression of a paradigm shift in the evolution of spiritual ideation.

‘*Divyam*’ is the key word of the description. It is the adjective of the word ‘*deva*’ meaning light. In the Vedas, light is represented by Devas and darkness by Asuras. Arjuna is certainly acquainted with the Vedas. Though the energy that goes into the composition of any spectacle belongs to the *ātma* of the universe, the ingredients that make it are contributed by no other than dualistic Akshara.

The Vedas resort to the worship of many Devas and rituals like Agnihotra. Vedanta, on the other hand, strives to impart a spiritual culture based on dhyana. Note that the only emotion the picture just portrayed evokes is wonder. It shows no benevolence or anger. Though attractive in its own way it is endless and has faces everywhere in the universe. These are characteristics that suit the Purushottama and not ascribable to any Deva of the Vedas. Of course a few Devas have more than two but not countless hands and faces. Here all Devas (known then) are incorporated into one picture as in a vast collage. At the same time it is given the dimensions of the Supreme Purusha. It is implied that all products of human imagination ensue from the splendor of the Supreme.

divi sūryasahastrasya bhaved yugapad utthitā  
yadi bhāḥ sadṛśī sā syād bhāsas tasya mahātmanah 11.12

*The radiance of a thousand suns rising simultaneously in the sky may somewhat equal that of the Great One.*

Robert Oppenheimer, the head of the Los Alamos Project team of scientists that successfully exploded the first ever nuclear fission bomb in human history (now nicknamed ‘baby bomb’ as its yield is very small as against that of modern nuclear weapons) is reported to have involuntarily recited this stanza from memory at the sight of the explosion.

As the aforesaid picture turns into one of so great a brilliance as to become unbearable even to those who have been given the divine eye, it gets closer to the image of the Purushottama. The picture therefore becomes an expression of the inexpressible. The garlands, the ornaments, the weapons and the unguents all become indiscernible by the powerful radiance – the vision begins to transcend Arjuna’s concepts of God.

tatraikastham jagat kṛtsnam pravibhaktam anekadhā  
apaśyad devadevasya śarīre pāṇḍavas tadā 11.13

*At that moment Arjuna saw staying united in it – in the (celestial) Body of the Deva of Devas - the entire universe of innumerable divisions.*

The universe with its millions of different bodies, fields, spaces and forces stands united in one entity. No galaxy, sun, planet, substance, molecule, atom, subatomic particle or wave of radiation is separate. Time is irrelevant. Size is also irrelevant as both matter and space, the products of Avyakta, are also part of that form. It contains the seed of everything. Forces remain unified in it. The picture can also mean the primordial pulsation leading to creation of the universe. The radiance emerging from it at the start of its primary pulsing blinds even Arjuna who has been given the divine eye.

tataḥ sa vismayāviṣṭo hr̥ṣṭaromā dhanamjayah  
praṇamya śirasā devam kṛtāñjalir abhāṣata 11.14

*Then, Dhananjaya, possessed by wonder, his hair standing on end, bowed down his head to the Lord and spoke thus with hands joined in reverence:*

Arjuna (*Dhananjaya* is a synonym meaning one who won over wealth) has been desirous of the wealth of this rare sight and it proves to be even beyond his wildest expectations. What had he possibly expected? A sight of God obviously in tune with whatever he had been able to formulate in his imagination, not this. This surpassed it all.

Next we find Arjuna waking up from the state of bewilderment, resuming his role as a student of dhyana yoga and recounting with fervor and respect whatever he further observes, talking to himself in the way of one overcome with awe.

arjuna uvāca  
paśyāmi devāṁś tava deva dehe  
sarvāṁś tathā bhūtaviśeṣasamghān  
brahmāṇam īśam kamalāsanastham  
ṛṣīmś ca sarvān uragāṁś ca divyān 11.15

Arjuna said:

*O Lord, I see all the Devas and (also) hosts of various classes of beings, Brahma the deity of creation positioned on the lotus, the rishis and all the divine uraga.*

What Arjuna sees now has more meaning to it than their being direct products of the archetypal images already present in his mind. The primordial essence of the universe has begun to expand. The space of four directions (dimensions?) is born. It (Brahma Deva) rests on the petals of resonance consequent to and in tune with the primordial pulsing act; it emanates from the centre of the original pulsing act and sweeps. The mother of all creations is the dialectical medium of Akshara (Brahma), the waves in which also carry heat and light. Devas are embodiments of light (energy) necessary for all transactions in the world. *Rishis* (awareness at various levels) are present. The word *uraga* means reptile, and divine reptiles mean serpents which usually symbolize different scales of time in Vedanta.

Using modern scientific knowledge of the prehistoric era, in our contemplation we can include the glorious Age of Reptiles too from the past – the dinosaurs which ruled the earth for 135 million years – the most enigmatic and divine of all prehistoric life forms in the evolution of life.

anekabāhūdaravaktranetram  
paśyāmi tvāṁ sarvatonantarūpam  
nāntaṁ na madhyam na punas tavādim  
paśyāmi viśveśvara viśvarūpa 11.16

*O the One with manifold arms, mouths, stomachs and eyes; I see You everywhere, boundless; but O Isvara of the Universe, I don't see either the beginning or the middle or the end of You, O Cosmic-Form.*

In the cosmic body of the universe, millions of kinds of objects evolving are all seen. Each is transforming itself and its surroundings through action. There are hands everywhere as each development (karma) has to be the work of one or the other. Everything is food for something else and digests what it gets or takes; so there are stomachs everywhere. Everything ‘observes’ in some manner or other all objects around it; so there are so many eyes too.

No one can see the beginning, the midpoint or the end of it. We cannot even see the beginning or end of the material universe itself. Our solar system, together with the local galaxy that houses it, groups up with Andromeda and about thirty other galaxies to form what is known as the local cluster. A number of such other clusters together form super-clusters. There are stars and galaxies wherever one looks; no end is in view in any direction. Light coming from galaxies millions of light years away can reveal the shape of things thereabouts

that long back but even that does not help reach the very beginning. It is certain that physical means cannot surmount the difficulty. Also, the laws of physics available now are unable to explain the state before the birth of time and space.

Modern cosmology is of the view that the very beginning is unknowable, it being in the realm of discontinuity. The limit of the universe in any direction cannot be found though it has to be certainly real. The universe is supposed to be ‘finite but unbound’.

This also brings us to the basic difference between the nature of our imagination and that of its material representation. We feel we have been able to imagine this grand picture but just try to paint or sculpt it! How many hands, faces, stomachs, eyes and all can one draw if each of these items has to be *everywhere*? Also these literal objects are not what Arjuna really sees; these are conceptual representations of what he perceives by the divine eye that has been granted.

kirīṭināṁ gadiṇāṁ cakriṇāṁ ca  
tejorāśīṁ sarvato dīptimantam  
paśyāmi tvāṁ durnirīkṣyām samantād  
dīptānalārkadyutim aprameyam 11.17

*Wherever I look I see Your crowned presence, with club and chakra, as a source of luminosity that outshines everything, hard to look at like fiercely burning fire and sun and impossible to identify as any particular object.*

The incomparable vision is also correlated in Arjuna’s mind with his concept of the crowned picture of four-armed God Vishnu, having the ultimate destructive weapon *sudarsana chakra* in one hand, lotus flower in another, conch shell in the third and club in the last – the latter picture seems to have been in vogue even before the Gita was composed. Crowned presence indicates the true ruler of the world as the Lord is the Supreme Entity. *Sudarsana* literally means ‘correct vision’, chakra the ‘wheel’ indicating the wheel of time or the cyclic (pulsating) nature of events in the cosmos; a combination of the two representing accurate knowledge of Akshara resurrected by destroying ignorance. Inter alia, the wheel also signifies the role of cyclic time as a destroyer. The lotus represents the beauty of ever-blossoming diversity, always yearning for light and maintaining nonattachment with its surroundings. The conch carries special significance – its spiral form symbolizes the spiral of expansion of the fabric of space, and also represents wave-forms of matter and radiation (physics is yet to understand the nature of these wave forms). Symbolic

with music, the sound produced from the conch shell represents the primordial ‘Om’, the resonance behind all wave oscillations in Avyakta. The club symbolizes personal strengths in the material world – such as physical, intellectual and creative prowess provided by the Goddess of Māya (Mother Nature), and the same strengths used for the upholding of justice. All of that has its source in the Supreme Entity.

In Vedantic concepts the Supreme Purusha is seen as the embodiment of light. This is not light per se, but the light with which we see our own thoughts and emotions. It is the same as that which helps the eyes to see, the ears to hear, the tongue to taste, the nose to smell and the skin to feel touch. Our sense organs cannot see it as such just as an electric bulb cannot see the flow of current in its own light however brilliant.

This light pervades the entire cosmos. No wonder its source has the radiance of a thousand suns and furious fire. All radiations available anywhere emanate from it. It is compared with fire and sun as these two are the mightiest forms of burning man knows. In fact It is the unified force.

It cannot be identified as anything because a definition is possible only if comparison with a thing already known is feasible. Also, the formulation of a definition also presupposes continuity of the cause-effect relationship which is not applicable in this situation.

The path to true knowledge in any subject is to identify and give up all preconceptions that limit the progress of the learner. The first to be found in any investigation are these. Arjuna sees projected in front of him the images he has been harboring in his conscious and subconscious mind. One has to look beyond them to see the truth.

tvam akṣaram paramam veditavyam  
tvam asya viśvasya param nidhānam  
tvam avyayah śāśvatadharmaoptā  
sanātanas tvam puruṣo mato me 11.18

*I think You are higher than the Imperishable Akshara Itself, the Supreme Being worthy to be known, the ultimate foundation of this universe, the one who eternally safeguards dharma, the level of reality beyond beginning.*

Now the vision of cosmic reality advances to the level beyond the Kshara and the Akshara – the transient world and its permanent template. Every object in the time-and-space-bound physical universe continuously undergoes changes. This is not possible without the existence of an unchanging substructure or

foundation just as there cannot be any picture minus a canvas. Worldly experiences are drawn on our mindscape. The canvas Akshara is immortal as it never changes. But the Purushottama is higher than even this level.

*Dharma* literally means ‘what one wears’. It obviously also meant the code of civil conduct from days very ancient. Tribal chiefs, religious leaders, priests of all kinds and kings might have made and implemented various kinds of civil and criminal procedure codes. Equally old should be the wrong feeling that these laws constituted dharma, and that the people who enacted these were the protectors of dharma and even that whatever they decided was dharma for all time. This misunderstanding continues to this day and may persist tomorrow too. No man made rule can be everlasting. Gita corrects it showing that dharma should mean the unique way of life derived from the ultimate vision, and everybody inclusive of the aforesaid is to abide by it. The nature of this dharma has been explained earlier. It is based on the inherent nature of man; and even though reflected as society's code of existing rules, dharma should evolve with the evolution of humankind based on what is good for the benefit of everything in the biosphere and the universe. Whatever does not conform to it eventually gets wiped off as it is not in tune with nature and evolution. As prakṛti rules the universe under the authority of the Purushottama as seen previously (chapter 9 verse 10), the Supreme Entity is the one who eternally safeguards this dharma; rigid codes egoistically adhered to by man and resisting improvements are bound to become obsolete (including religious laws, caste system, strict rituals and established ways of priesthood).

The verse ends with an in-depth realization of all that Arjuna has seen so far: You are the level of reality beyond all beginning. Therefore, identifying You with anything at the Kshara and Akshara levels is ruled out.

anādimadhyāntam anantavīryam  
anantabāhum̄ śāśisūryanetram  
paśyāmi tvām̄ dīptahutāśavaktram̄  
svatejasā viśvam idam̄ tapantam 11.19

*I see You without beginning, middle or end, infinite in power, of endless arms, the sun and the moon being Your eyes, the raging fire Your mouth, heating the whole universe with Your radiance.*

The result of any observation depends on the nature and position of the platform from which it is made. Arjuna stands upon the awareness created by his experiences so far. The shining eyes in the form of the sun and the moon cannot

be literally taken as ‘physical eyes’ because one eye cannot be smaller and different than the other. There are obviously two aspects of the splendor of the Purushottama – the sun and the moon, and Arjuna is seeing its conceptual visualization (he is not seeing with the naked eye). It is to be remembered that Arjuna's vision does not focus on material objects of the universe; he is ‘seeing’ the general concepts related to the working of the universe in the forms.

Wherever acts of creation, sustenance and destruction go on in the universe can be symbolically called the faces of the Purushottama. It should not be visualized as the ‘physical’ mouth or face of the Cosmic Body. It is the presence of the ‘great fire’ that makes possible the birth, existence or death not only of a galaxy or a sun but also of even the atomic nucleus. From *vaisvanara* (the fire that burns to digest food in the stomach), through the heat that often makes the spoken word painful and to the shine of the suns and moons on our faces in the form of eyes – everything is It.

The heating universally provided for which also the Purushottama is the reason, keeps the entire universe (not just the solar system or the local galaxy) warm. Every living thing depends upon this warmth to exist. An example is the background microwave radiation in space which maintains the temperature of the entire universe at 2.725 Kelvin. The source of this microwave radiation is yet to be ascertained – it is conjectured that it is the remnant of the big-bang. What is certain is: it is independent of the suns in the universe.

It is again said that Purushottama has no beginning, middle or end. And as every movement and transformation of anything everywhere is worked out based on the ‘hands’ of the Cosmic Body of the Purushottama, the number of Its hands is infinite. It appears to be working non-stop with countless hands.

dyāvāpr̥thivyor idam antaram hi  
vyāptam tvayaikena diśāś ca sarvāḥ  
dṛṣṭvādbhutam rupam ugram tavedam  
lokatrayam pravyathitam mahātman 11.20

*All quarters (visible) between the earth and the sky and everywhere beyond is pervaded by You alone. O Great Soul, seeing this wonderful and terrible form of Yours all the three worlds are grievously frightened.*

One is surprised and terrified by the sight of the unexpected. Arjuna thinks that the whole world is frightened too. What did Arjuna anticipate when he pleaded to be shown the ‘form’ of the Lord? A presentation of the picture of God that he already had in mind, for sure. Pictures of several gods are available in the

Puranas. But what is shown is none of that. That in itself is surprising. Indeed, every reader of this text in olden days is sure to have felt it; readers of today may feel it as well. The feeling leads to the recognition that ‘this’ is the truth and not what one thought earlier. In the case of Arjuna, the resentment that a dear old idea is being disproved is compensated by his awe in what he sees and the truth that he instinctively understands. Anyone anywhere who desires to know the truth about the *Supreme Purusha* and is devoted to the fulfillment of that aim will any day be in the same state.

But this picture generates fear too as it totally obliterates the familiar surroundings of the world including one’s own physical existence for a totally pervading entity of absolute power on which one has no control whatsoever. Correlating the beliefs of Arjuna, Puranas postulate three worlds – earth, heaven and hell – none of which seems to exist anymore. The sense of physical loss and also the feeling of helplessness are terrific.

Consciousness attains many states during the process of dhyana. At the start, the vision obtained relates to the state of mind while initiating dhyana. One step further, even this vision dissolves and one enters the stage of the awareness of insignificance of one’s own material existence, simultaneously providing the feelings of wonder, fear and awe.

amī hi tvāṁ surasamghā viśanti  
kecid bhītāḥ prāñjalayo gr̥ṇanti  
svastīty uktvā maharśisiddhasamghāḥ  
stuvanti tvāṁ stutibhiḥ puṣkalābhiḥ 11.21

*All of these hosts of Devas enter You and disappear; some extol You in fear with joined palms; groups of great rishis and siddhas wish you ‘swasti’ and also praise You with hymns meaningful and devotional.*

Devas mean beams of light as well as forces; *maharishi* is one always enjoying the bliss of ultimate knowledge; *siddha* is one who has attained the awareness of Ātma. *Swasti* literally means the state of peace and quiet.

When confronted with the ultimate reality, those who have had no knowledge of it are frightened out of their wits and can only fall prostrate before it and cry for help. But those who know are happy at the vision, wish for eternal peace and extol the *Supreme Purusha*.

*Kurukshetra* symbolically represents the great *kshetra*, the universe itself, and proves to be the field for integration of opposites. Most men are afraid to die and cry for help if threatened by decimation. Some face it bravely as they know

it is part of the game. For them it is duty first and they hold *Isvara* as their only resort. In the conflict between dharma and adharma they are on the side of dharma; they are sure about the happy ending of the play, however tragic any particular scene happens to be. Then there are those who know the script writer of the show and also the one presiding over even the writing of the script; they are deeply aware and praise the Ultimate Reality whatever happens.

rudrādityā vasavo ye ca sādhyā  
viśveśvinau marutaś coṣmapāś ca  
gandharvayakṣāsurasiddhasamghā  
vīkṣante tvām vismitāś caiva sarve 11.22

*Rudras, Adityas, Vasus, Saddhyas, Visve-devas, the two Aswins, Maruths, Ushmapas and hosts of Gandharvas, Yakshas, Asuras and Siddhas – they are all looking at You, quite astonished.*

All these are characters from the Vedas and the Puranas. *Rudras* originated from the (knit) brows of Brahma the Creator for the destruction of the wicked. They are eleven in number. *Adityas* are the sun-gods, the twelve children of *Aditi* (literally, the ‘undivided’). *Vasus* are the eight sons of *Vasu*, the daughter of Daksha and the Lord of Dharma. (The word ‘*vasu*’ means diamond.) *Saddhyas* are the twelve *Devas* representing qualities like fearlessness. These are also known as *ganadevas* as they always remain together (Qualities are often found together). *Visve-Devas* are children of *Visva*. They are invoked in connection with the annual rituals for the dead. The two *Aswins*, sons of the sun, are known as ‘physicians for the Devas’. *Maruts* are the 49 sons of *Diti*; lightning and thunder are their weapons. Though begotten in the *Asura* clan, the Lord of the *Devas* befriended them and granted them *Deva* status. *Ushmapas* are spirits of the dead (the term means ‘those who drink heat’). *Gandharvas* are multi-faceted artists belonging to heaven; they are sons of *Kashyapa Prajapati* and *Arishta*. *Asuras* are those who live in ego-ridden and desire-laden worlds. *Yakshas* and *Yakshis* are guards of the treasures of *Kubera* the Lord of riches. They do not hurt any and therefore are also known as *punya jana* (well-meaning people).

These images from the Vedas and the Puranas represent various dispositions and forces relevant to nature as well as man. These were the images feared, held in awe, adored and worshipped during Arjuna’s days. Arjuna sees them all as viewing the Cosmic Form in astonishment.

rūpam̄ mahat te bahuvaktranetram̄

mahābāho bahubāhūrūpādam  
bahūdaram bahudañṣṭrākarālam  
dṛṣṭvā lokāḥ pravyathitās tathāham 11.23

*O Mighty-armed, having seen Your immeasurable form, with many mouths and eyes, many arms, thighs, and feet, with many stomachs and fearsome with many tusks, the worlds are frightened and so am I.*

The visual has progressed a little more. It is a blood-chilling sight that frightens even Arjuna who is supposed to be legendarily brave. What is now seen is not the embodiment of creative benevolence; but the concept of the destructive side of nature which would grind all worlds to paste, indicated by the concept of the many fearsome tusks. Verses 18 to 22 were indicative to the time of creation and maintenance. From this verse onwards aspects of *samhara* (destruction) are also visualized.

nabhaḥsprśam dīptam anekavarṇam  
vyāttānanam dīptaviśālanetram  
dṛṣṭvā hi tvām pravyathitāntarātmā  
dhṛtim na vindāmi śamam ca viṣṇo 11.24

*O Lord Vishnu, the mere sight of Your form so huge as to go beyond the limits of the sky, flaming in so many colors, with mouths wide open and large fiery eyes, I am terrified at heart and I find neither courage nor peace.*

‘Vishnu’ means that with which everything is filled up. ‘Vish’ means ‘to pervade’.

Visualize the explosion of supernovae and powerful pulsars and one gets a picture of the ‘intense fire flaming in so many colors’. We, very comfortable on our cozy little planet and well protected from numerous cosmic phenomena, never think of them during most of our lives, and some of us haven’t even heard of them. Awe and wonder are what is felt when things huge and great are seen. But when everything that is tremendous are seen in the Cosmic Body of the Lord, larger than imaginable and belonging to the One in absolute control, with immense destructive capabilities much beyond comprehension, we understand our insignificance and utter helplessness. At that movement any person, even one as brave as Arjuna, becomes terrified at heart.

damṣṭrākarālāni ca te mukhāni

dṛṣṭvaiva kālānalasamnibhāni  
diśo na jāne na labhe ca śarma  
prasīda deveśa jagannivāsa 11.25

*O Lord of the Devas, a mere look at Your mouths fearsome with tusks (blazing) like doomsday fires, I know not the four quarters, nor do I find peace, O Abode of the Universe, bless me please.*

The picture is conceptual but it asserts that natural destruction is definite at all levels from the subatomic to the universal. Men caught in explosions and natural phenomena like volcanic eruption fare no better than ants caught in fire on a small piece of paper. Tusk symbolizes organ for tearing apart. Even Devas cannot save anybody as they are themselves subject to such dictates of Prakṛti (Akshara). The shock of this realization may prove numbing, maddening, even heart-breaking. However, even at that stage of realization, there are options open: One may turn wise, guess the truth of what is happening, try to know the True Self better, live life with detachment and get identified with the *Supreme Purusha*. The other way is to either attempt resistance in vain or try to forget and escape the question till death. For any living entity, death is certain. For any manifest entity, (animate or inanimate) dissolution is also definite. Hence it is also definite that trying to find a way to body-immortality by any manipulation through medical science is also destined to fail. How one takes death is left to one's discretion. In any case, anyone who has had one look at this picture will never opt for might as against wisdom.

The following few verses of the Bhagavad Gita prosaically demonstrate time in action in the battlefield through the words of Arjuna:-

amī ca tvāṁ dhṛtarāṣṭrasya putrāḥ  
sarve sahaivāvanipālasamghaiḥ  
bhīṣmo dronāḥ sūtāputras tathāsau  
sahāsmadīyair api yodhamukhyaiḥ 11.26  
vaktrāṇi te tvaramāṇā viśanti  
damṣṭrākarālāni bhayānakāni  
kecid vilagnā daśanāntareṣu  
samdṛsyante cūrṇitair uttamāṅgaiḥ 11.27

*All the sons of Dhritarashtra with hosts of rulers of the earth, Bhishma, Drona, Karna, with the warrior chieftains of ours, precipitately enter Your mouths with terrible teeth fearful to behold. Some are found sticking in the gaps*

*between the teeth with their heads crushed to pulp.*

Among those taking part in the Kurukshetra war; Bhishma the mightiest of warriors and also one who is endowed with the special ability to live as long as he desires to, Drona the most revered teacher of every kind of weaponry and martial practices, and Karna, the son of no less a Deva than the sun (though brought up by a charioteer) and whom Arjuna considers it most difficult to defeat in archery, together with many other powerful leaders of these armies are found being chewed to paste in the mouth of mighty time; some of them with their heads crushed and sticking in the gaps of the gruesome and fierce teeth of time.

All of these people die almost like moths venturing into fire. Bhishma puts down his weapons and courts death. Drona too, though misled by the false statement that his son is killed, accepts death on his own. Karna, in fact, signs his own death warrant the moment he promises his mother that she will have the full complement of her five sons even after the war. Trapped by the caste-ridden society for marginalizing him, he had no option but to die fighting for Duryodhana who had helped him save his honor at a very crucial moment. All the three had willfully opted to fight on the wrong side.

yathā nadīnāṁ bahavombuvegāḥ  
samudram evābhīmukhā dravanti  
tathā tavāmī nāralokavīrā  
viśanti vaktrāṇy abhivijvalanti 11.28

*As many torrents of rivers flow towards the ocean, so these heroes among men enter Your mouths burning fiercely and intensely.*

The span of human life from birth to death stands comparison with the river which is a flow from its origin to the ocean. Just as the objective of the river is not reaching the ocean, the goal of life is not death. But death for man is a natural transit as much as entry into the ocean is for the river. The contours of the landmasses decide the path of the river, naturally. But no landscape or shore ever claims credit for taking any river to any ocean. Similarly, in the final analysis, no one in particular is solely responsible for the death of another person. Whatever the immediate cause, the cause ultimate is Nature which in turn is presided over by the Supreme, yet man always tends to be intoxicated by personal power to forget the basic lesson. History is replete with amusing anecdotes of big blunders made by great emperors and dictators who were

foolish enough to think that they were all powerful and had absolute control over their destinies.

It is one's duty to eliminate all undesirable emotions blocking one's path towards identifying the self with the *Supreme Purusha*. Nature persuades us to do it and we are no more than instruments; in fact the Supreme One is the primary reason for this too. It is the same reason that places Arjuna (and us too) in such impossible situations that make us ponder, concentrate and understand, so that freedom from all sorrows are availed through these lessons.

yathā pradīptam jvalanam pataṅgā  
viśanti nāśaya samṛddhavēgāḥ  
tathaiva nāśaya viśanti lokās  
tavāpi vaktrāṇi samṛddhavēgāḥ 11.29

*These beings hastily rush into Your mouths for death as moths hurriedly rush into a blazing fire for their destruction.*

The river ceases to exist the moment it enters the ocean, and it does not make any conscious effort to that end. But the living kingdom blessed with freedom of choice often hastens to death at a faster pace! To sage Vyasa, Nature seems to be an open book explaining the relentlessly played do-undo game presided by the Purushottama.

And finally, during *pralaya* (dissolution of the universe):-

lelihyase grasamānaḥ samantāḥ  
lokān samagrān vadair jvaladbhiḥ  
tejobhir āpūrya jagat samagram  
bhāsas tavogrāḥ pratapanti viṣṇo 11.30

*Devouring all worlds on every side with your burning mouths, You lick Your lips. Your terrific radiation, filling the whole universe with light, O Vishnu, burns.*

Here the visual represents the all-destructive time, as terrific as the pyre on which the entire universe is burning to ashes – just the opposite of the benevolent cradle of creation giving rise to flower-like galaxies, juggling with nebulae and star birth and playfully rotating the planets and suns.

The universe as a whole is a huge pulse. The expansion phase begins when the *Supreme Purusha* seeds the Akshara, the dialectical medium. The three

gunas of Akshara result in the formation of resonant oscillations (standing waves) small and big, which we call matter. These combine, attract, repulse and radiate to make the physical world possible, but are wiped off as the expansion phase draws to its close. A different set gets born during the reverse phase, again to be wiped off towards the close of it. The sequence repeats. This means destruction is as much a part of the process as creation.

The physical universe is made and unmade by the variations in the ‘consistency’ of Akshara brought about by the act of pulsation of the universe. Anything from supernovae to black holes is possible. Think of the black hole to visualize a ‘mouth’ of the Cosmic Body that devours anything and everything that gets near. It ‘licks up’ everything that comes to it from any direction, inclusive of even electromagnetic radiation. A black-hole is therefore difficult to be detected and observed.

At every step the visuals of the Purushottama obtained with the ‘special insight’ deviates more and more from all concepts of God then (as well as now).

ākhyāhi me ko bhavān ugrarūpo  
namo/stu te devavara prasīda  
vijñātum icchāmi bhavantam ādyam  
na hi prajānāmi tava pravṛttim 11.31

*O God Supreme, please tell me who You are, so fierce in form? I pray to You. Have mercy. I yearn to know You the Prime Cause. I know not indeed your purpose.*

Arjuna is unable to digest the vision attained through the exercise of dhyana. The obvious reason is: his mental state is yet not ripe enough to know the full truth. He is unable to outlive fear and astonishment; he cannot identify the great devourer seen in the picture. He is unable to believe this image has got anything to do with God. Bowing and praying for mercy are results of fear. From the clues already available he has come to know that this is the first ever cause of the universe but is yet unable to draw relevant conclusions from that knowledge. Hence the heart-broken helplessness: - *I know not indeed your purpose.*

The terrible image of time at the stage of *samhara* (destruction) shockingly contradicts with the picture of God as a kind and merciful personage. Why is it represented like this? Does salvation mean identification of one’s self with this too?

Not only in war; when a tsunami, earthquake, drought, epidemic or cyclone wipes out thousands of men including innocent children, our faith in divine

justice and protection gets uprooted. Unable to decide whether all this is God's doing and wondering what for, we are thrown into a crisis.

śrībhagavān uvāca  
kālosmi lokakṣayakṛt pravṛddho  
lokān samāhartum iha pravṛttah  
ṛtepi tvāṁ na bhaviṣyanti sarve  
ye/vasthitāḥ pratyanīkeśu yodhāḥ 11.32

*The Supreme Purusha said:*

*I represent here the mighty time causing destruction of the worlds; now favoring total wipe out of all. Even if you are not there, none of the warriors in the opposing armies is going to be alive.*

Arjuna could not understand the concept of time from the visual. But the important thing meant here is that there is no escaping the phase of natural destruction. Money heaped up in banks, megaton weapons stockpiled anywhere or mighty armies however well deployed cannot help. Even the mightiest person is no better than a word written with chalk on a slate that is being wiped clean. Events of the physical world are indeed unpredictable, be it the future of a molecule of water, an atom of plutonium, a galaxy or a human life. Probability theory says no possibility is to be ruled out.

But man always wants to be certain, considers any dear 'body form' as observed by the senses as precious and its destruction as the end of everything. Uncertainty and unpredictability leads to a sense of insecurity and depressive psychosis. This is because what is under review seldom happens to be the totality of the universe. Man attaches too much importance to the body; even when every person on earth is certain to die we are afraid of death. Our ignorance makes us feel that everything is lost in death and it is the permanent end. It is difficult to keep in mind the conviction that continuous creation presupposes continuous re-making and that the life of it all never ceases to be. We have to see beyond the apparent destruction by understanding that death of the physical body is inevitable but it is in no way the end of all. Without that maturity, we cannot progress in the path of knowledge beyond this visual presentation. But no problem; as more and more of Vedantic truth unfolds we will get wise enough to keep our composure and hope and pray for the best.

These verses also show that the Supreme Entity knows the future of the war that is going to take place.

Does this mean that the entire future is pre-ordained? To answer this

question, the discussion in a previous section about the nature of the ‘*bija*’ (seed) may be recalled. This expansion cycle of *Avyakta* will end with *pralaya* (dissolution) near the end of the phase (the time of this is pre-ordained). This correlates with half-life of wave-matter (even the ones stable now like the proton would later develop a half-life as *Avyakta* further expands). But in between, the life of a small being and the interactions it makes would make no difference to the pre-ordained final time of this universe. Therefore the present expansion phase of the universe has a definite beginning and a definite end, but a random (obscure) middle; because events in-between take place at random by action-reaction patterns of *prakṛti* based on apparent time. This time-bubble or the wheel of time is the framework on which the *Kshara* world is based on and provides the scope for choice in life for all temporary beings including man; even though most of the choices are actually naturally made (by nature itself). Viewing from another angle, time can be visualized as two-dimensional such that all possibilities exist at random, though all entities in it are aware of only one-dimension (similar to a one-dimensional projection of a two-dimensional space). This implies numerous possibilities which exist parallel to us. They all begin to diverge from the beginning of the universe and come together near the stage of *pralaya*. This probability also is ingrained in the basis of the script written down by the action-reaction patterns of *prakṛti* and its dialectical nature and this pattern is obvious to the *Purushottama*. Therefore the *Supreme Purusha* is well aware of this game of probabilities of random events. We have also seen the verse about how the Supreme governs nature and makes alterations. There are no magical miracles involved in this. Taking the example of the great epic itself, the Supreme One changes course of the war (or favors the maximum probability) through the enlightened Krishna, who interferes at all the right movements to ensure victory for the Pandavas. Most of the heroes of the opposite army are eliminated by precise interventions through Krishna.

The universe is cyclical but we and our solar system are random events in the universe, and even this galaxy may not be the same in the next *kalpa*; we had discussed the verses pertaining to this too. In contrast to this apparent bubble of time, the absolute time of *Akshara* is linear, unwavering and infinite, and holds an endless number of finite times of universes like ours, coming one after another (with all their beginnings and ends pre-destined but the in-between random till that particular finite time set is over). The time scale of the *Supreme Purusha* transcends even this too, remaining unknowable and incomprehensible and the entity can only be described as ‘timeless’.) At the level of perishable entities, time is the leveler of all. Life is a process of continuous creation, maintenance and destruction. For instance, our body itself at any time is the sum

total of cells born so far and yet to die and get disposed of. Our existence means lending a hand to the processes of creation, maintenance and destruction that go on all around and within us. Our body plays host to a large variety of microbes and kills as many too all the time. We cultivate and harvest. Thousands of grains (seeds) die for every single meal.

tasmāt tvam uttiṣṭha yaśo labhasva  
jītvā śatrūn bhuṅkṣva rājyam samṛddham  
mayaivaite nihatāḥ pūrvam eva  
nimittamātram bhava savyasācin 11.33

*Hence, stand up and earn fame by vanquishing the bad ones and enjoy the flourishing kingdom; indeed, they have already been slain by Me (through time and nature); O great archer, you just be instrumental.*

It has been observed that our knowing about an event by itself may change the event. It obviously does if we have a part to play in it. Free will now assumes the status of the precious capability to ascertain and act according to the natural path and also to what interventions are made by the Supreme Entity. One may use dhyana to tune oneself up with the True Self. One's untarnished natural instinct to unselfishly work for the good of the entire biosphere and the universe is Its will during times of *sruṣhti* (creation) and *sthiti* (maintenance). The symbol of the *Supreme Purusha* for presiding over the *sthiti* phase of the universe is God Vishnu, and it is shown in stories that the same symbol is the source of all incarnations which help in such maintenance. (We have already seen that incarnations are concepts and corrections; we have also been discouraged to see human being as God. – Verse 9.11). Merging of our will with the will of the True Self makes us instruments for the All-powerful, and the tuning of the mind (yoga) would also make our lives most enjoyable; problems of hurdles, pain or defeat would not arise anymore.

On the material plane, the meaning of the verse is obvious: Arjuna is on a war-field. The situation has crossed the point of no return. The best option he has now is to know that he is on the side of the True Self, that the destiny of the fight is ordained and also that his opponents have all been already sentenced to death by time, so just do his duty well and win fame and land. When pregnancy matures, the obvious option is to happily deliver a healthy child and become a natural mother.

Philosophically, the message is: get up, defeat all base emotions however dear they are to you and win fame and the kingdom of everlasting happiness by

identification of the self with the Supreme Self, by the ‘will’ of which these enemies have already been ‘pre-destroyed’. Consider one as a mere instrument; it will then be easy to defeat ego as well!

We may combine the messages at both levels and adopt the ‘fusion’ approach in day-to-day life. The common factors of the two are: optimism regarding the outcome and the simultaneous chance to subjugate ego. That approach is sure to make life successful and pleasant.

dronām ca bhiṣmām ca jayadrathām ca  
karṇām tathānyān api yodhavīrān  
mayā hatāṁs tvām jahi mā vyathiṣṭhā  
yudhyasva jetāsi raṇe sapatnān 11.34

*Drona, Bhishma, Jayadratha, Karna and other brave warriors – those have already been destined to die by Me; destroy them in war (be instrumental in the natural course); do not be distressed; fight and you shall win this battle.*

This war is a phenomenal one with giants arrayed; it may genuinely put anyone, even a mighty warrior like Arjuna, on tenterhooks. Bhishma is blessed to get one-half of the might of anyone who fights him and does not have to die unless he wants to. Drona is Arjuna’s own teacher and the best known expert in the art of war. However, Arjuna is a little relieved that these two are morally on his side, though on the other side de facto. In the case of Karna and Jayadratha, there is no such consoling factor. Karna who enjoys special protection accorded by his father Surya (sun) has been antagonistic to Arjuna right from childhood days. Jayadratha has a boon from his father that anyone beheading him will find his own head automatically cut off. Many others on the opposing side are almost equally strong. It is going to be very tough, well nigh impossible! Add to it is the sticky problem of blood relationship.

It is reiterated that all of them are already destined to die. Arjuna’s role is merely instrumental. So he does not have to be sorrowful about any blood relationship getting hurt by his hand. ‘This is not your decision, so fight uninhibitedly and remove the rotten ones according to present laws in society’ is the clear-cut directive.

The Gita also becomes a shining example of successful self-counseling as it is seen as a discourse between a strong, intelligent person and his True Self; either while faced with strong challenges in life or while blocked by his own wrong emotions or external factors from doing what he considers right. He is told that Isvara has already willed the dismissal of all blockades; it is enough if

he does his best to what he can and is supposed to do; no tough external challenge or wrong emotion would be able to stand in his way. Give up all grief, get up and do it.

(The clue to the right understanding of the Gita is: decide the level of approach at the outset. Do we treat it as a two friends in a story trying to sort out a problem faced by one of them? Or, is it the running commentary on the progress of a practitioner of yoga vidya under the guidance of a master of the art? Or, is it the exchange between an aggrieved but intelligent person with the charioteer of his conscience – his soul? If all characters of the Mahabharata together are imagined to constitute one *kshetra* or body, Krishna is its *Kshetrajna*. It will be prudent to keep all these levels in mind all the time and strictly avoid any mix-up.) sañjaya uvāca

etac chrutvā vacanam keśavasya  
kṛtāñjalir vepamānah kīrtī  
namaskṛtvā bhūya evāha krṣṇam  
sagadgadām bhītabhītaḥ praṇamya 11.35

*Sanjaya said:*

*Having heard these words of the Lord, Kirti (Arjuna), with joined palms, trembling and prostrating himself, again addressed the Lord, in a choked voice, bowing down, overwhelmed with fear.*

Sanjaya the all-seeing reporter is sure of Arjuna's victory; this is indicated by the term *Kirti* ('the crowned one') he employs to refer to him. But Dhrutarashtra, blinded by selfishness, fails to get the clue. He expects his dear sons and their cohorts to succeed in grabbing everything, and believes that all these visuals are nothing but the illusory magic of Krishna.

Fear grips Arjuna very tight; he can barely talk. One may wonder how a warrior legendarily known for bravery can be so badly inflicted by fear. Fear resides in every living thing however strong or brave. There are limits to the strength of any mortal being, beyond which rages the storms of fear that forces one to find shelter in faith and devotion. Relief at landing there bursts out as tears. From that point onwards, gathering courage is easier.

What is special about the present context is the fact that the refuge itself is the object of fear! The Supreme is *ekam* ('one'); It helps the destruction as well as creation in nature. But there is no 'other' to help. Though its destructive manifestation of time is frightening, Its benevolent side itself is the only refuge.

arjuna uvāca

sthāne hṛṣīkeśa tava prakīrtyā  
jagat prahr̄ṣyat� anurajyate ca  
rakṣāṁsi bhītāni diśo dravanti  
sarve namasyanti ca siddhasamghāḥ 11.36

*Arjuna said:*

*It is but proper, O Hrishikesa, that the world delights and rejoices in Your praise; Rakshasas fly in fear to all quarters, and Siddhas bow to thee.*

‘Hrishikesa’ is ‘lord of the senses’. ‘Rakshasa’ is ‘spirit of conceit and sin’. As the Supreme One is the ultimate lord of all senses, a life knowing it and lived in praise of it naturally provides every delight and happiness. The moment one’s true Self is identified, every tendency to sin and harbor conceit (*rakshasa*) flies away. More and more good thoughts (*siddhas*) sprout to extol the Supreme One.

Bad dispositions flee and good intentions germinate as one goes devout. This happens the moment one crosses the border between fear and devotion. The *Supreme Purusha* is no longer perceived as terrible; It is taken as the most intimate of all.

kasmāc ca te na nameran mahātman  
garīyase brahmaṇopy ādikartre  
ananta deveśa jagannivāsa  
tvam akṣaram sad asat tatparam् yat 11.37

*And why should they not, O Great One, bow to You, superior (to all else), the prime cause even of Brahma Deva, O Infinite Being, O Lord of Lords, O Abode of the universe, You are the imperishable, that which is beyond both the sat and the asat.*

This stanza is a song of devotion. Also, crucial information regarding the Supreme Entity is provided in a nutshell. It is the greatest, the Lord of all lords. It is the cause of even the creator god Brahma Deva (the concept of Brahma – the cradle of creation). It is infinite, imperishable and beyond all transitions of every kind. Conceits flee It and wisdom keeps singing in praise of It.

‘Sat’ means ‘imperishable’, ‘the real’ and ‘the ultimate cause’. But the senses-mind-intellect-combine cannot observe it. What it can see is ‘asat’ i.e. ‘the perishable’, the ‘(comparatively) unreal’ and the ‘(apparently) resultant’. The forces that lead the sense-mind-intellect-combine to experiences are invisible to it. The *sat* is usually regarded as Akshara, and *asat* the Kshara world.

The Supreme Being is beyond both.

The wise know the truth and are happy all the time. For them birth and death are transitions and temporary pleasure and pain do not have import. The Supreme Entity is gleaned when consciousness rises above the double wall of ignorance created by opposites. Even a fleeting view of the Purushottama is enough to launch one into a permanent trajectory of ardent devotion.

tvam ādidevah̄ puruṣah̄ purāṇas  
tvam asya viśvasya param̄ nidhānam  
vettāsi vedyam̄ ca param̄ ca dhāma  
tvayā tataṁ viśvam anantaruṇa 11.38

*You are the Primal God, the (most) ancient Purusha (reality), You are the ultimate refuge of the universe. You are the knower, the known and the Abode-Supreme. By You is the universe pervaded, O Being of infinite forms.*

You are *Purushottama* (the reality beyond Kshara and Akshara) i.e. the Ultimate, seeding the dialectical medium Akshara and manifesting the material world Kshara. You are the source of all radiation. You are forever. You are the essence that existed before creation and will last after total annihilation. You are the depository of all knowledge. As everything is known if You are known, You are the one to be known. You are the basis for everything. You pervade the entire universe in endless forms.

You are the unified form of the various forces acting in myriad ways all over the universe. You are the primal energy. Matter and radiation are your manifestations. You are ageless as time is born out of You. You preside over all creation of resonant oscillations small and big in the expansion and contraction phases of the pulse called universe, and everything created thus, You dissolve at the close of every phase of every pulsation. The energy that enlivens the senses-mind-intellect-combine to act is You.

vāyur yamo/gnir varuṇah̄ śāśāṅkah̄  
prajāpatis tvam̄ prapitāmahaś ca  
namo namas te/stu sahastrakṛtvah̄  
punaś ca bhūyopi namo namas te 11.39

*You are Vayu, Yama, Agni, Varuna, the moon, Prajapati, and the great grandfather of all. I pray to you! I worship You a thousand times and I pray to You again.*

Vayu (god of air), Yama (god of death), Agni (god of fire), Varuna (god of oceans), Chandra (moon-god), Prajapati (god of governance) etc. were the deities worshipped during Vedic times. They were supposed to be independent with powers unlimited. There was no Supreme authority or ultimate force. Pluralism ruled the roost. Gita redefines true wisdom as one that understands the unification of all the forces, and also reiterates that even this wisdom itself is a manifestation of that Unified One.

This wisdom, when put into practice, will affect a sea of change. All squabbles about which god is more powerful comes to an end in front of plain truth. The folly of the rush to the most visited place of worship and all strife to be the first in the queue when it opens would become old stories.

All communal strife vanishes in the light of this great knowledge which enables us to say ‘a thousand prayers to the Supreme One that is called by any name such as Allah, Jehovah and Paramesvara’. The cardinal truth that all objects of worship are varying visions of the One dawns. A thousand prayers to that truth, and again and again and again prayers to it! All great rishis and prophets said the same thing over and over again, advising man to kneel and prostrate oneself before the One and pray to It. But we who had been habituated to using pocket dictionaries preferred the smaller versions to the all-embracing encyclopedia and lost the meanings of great voices and words.

namah̄ purastād atha prṣṭhatas te  
namostu te sarvata eva sarva  
anantavīryāmitavikramas tvam̄  
sarvam̄ samāpnoṣi tato/si sarvah̄ 11.40

*Prayers to You, from before and behind! Prayers to you from every side! O All! You infinite in power and infinite in Prowess, pervade all; wherefore You are the All.*

All stipulations regarding the direction to which one should turn to worship God is done away with. Any direction is all right as the Supreme Entity is everywhere all around. To be precise, one has to be conscious of all directions at the same time!

The worship of each of the Vedic deities mentioned in the previous verse was marked by well laid-out and intricate rituals. (Some of it is still in vogue.) There were stipulations regarding the direction one had to face, the number of times one should pray, fall prostrate, the kind and mode of offerings; intricate

rules regarding the yajna to be performed, the mantras to be recited, the musical instruments to be played, the decorations for the idol and so on. As against all that, the Gita prescribes no formality to worship the Supreme One!

At the same time, there is no scope for any doubt regarding the power and prowess of the Purushottama as It is seen as the sum total of all the gods (all the forces) who by themselves were known to be very powerful. The main difference is that the steady state of the *Supreme Purusha* is *nirguna* (superior and therefore devoid of the gunas or character) and *nissanga* (unattached); Its prowess can be understood only through the dialectical nature of Akshara. The thrill of this discernment is expressed in this verse.

The *Supreme Purusha* is present everywhere including our bodies; so, irrespective of the direction we turn to while prostrating to It or even if we do not bow at all, our *jeeva* is ever in this attitude of worship. All that one has to do is to take cognizance of this fact and make the prayer a conscious effort. The result will be astonishingly fruitful. The Supreme Self residing in us will tend to illuminate our senses-mind-intellect-combine better and better, making our material life more and more enjoyable and the process of identification easier and quicker.

This vision became available to Arjuna in his dhyana (meditation) due to Krishna's help and guidance, and the mind of the great warrior is filled with awe for Krishna. In his mind Krishna is now the highest guru (teacher) in the whole world and this reverence and devotion reflects in the next verse. Arjuna now fully understands the depth of yoga that Krishna has mastered in being with the True Self, and therefore in his eyes Krishna is now even equivalent to the *Supreme Purusha* Itself.

sakheti matvā prasabham yad uktam  
he kṛṣṇa he yādava he sakheti  
ajānatā mahimānam tavedam  
mayā pramādāt pranayena vāpi 11.41  
yac cāvahāśārtham asatkr̥tosī  
vihāraśayyāsanabhojaneśu  
eko/thavāpy acyuta tatsamakṣam  
tat kṣāmaye tvām aham aprameyam 11.42

*O Achyuta (the one who never makes a mistake), I have often addressed You as 'Hi Krishna', 'Yadav', 'buddy', etc. with careless indifference out of friendship, never realizing your real greatness and unaware of this vision. Also, I have often playfully or in idle moments while eating, sitting, lying down or*

*relaxing, both while we were alone and in the company of others, teased you for fun. O Indefinable, I pray to be pardoned for all that.*

The deep friendship between Krishna and Arjuna is one of the hearty relationships portrayed in the epic of the Mahabharata. Krishna has always stood firm with Arjuna in fun and fervor and frolic. The bond now assumes greater depths. (That this bond is forever is reiterated by Sanjaya also towards the very end of the Gita – 18.78.) Taken at the story level, the portrayal here is that of a particular stage in the interaction between two close friends Arjuna and Krishna. The former, a mighty warrior in his own right but pitted against almost impossible odds in terms of might and also worried about his own blood relations and teachers on the other side, gets depressed to the extent of lapsing into inaction. The latter, his close confidant and charioteer, also the highest master of the art of yoga vidya, rises to the occasion, helps his friend with lessons in yoga and also guides his friend in visualizing the structure of the universe including a projection into the future depicting the victorious end of the war, through ‘special insight’. Arjuna is stunned by the experience and apologizes in earnest for all his frivolous behavior in the past to that highest practitioner of yoga vidya whom he had so far regarded casually as his best friend.

In the philosophical side the situation represents a certain stage in the progress of a student of yoga. Arjuna, facing a situation in life too aggrieving to be solved on his own, accepts yoga-master Krishna as his guru, gets instructed in the art and associated wisdom, is avowedly convinced of it and goes into *dhyana* upon the Purushottama wishing to see It. The path adopted is *saguna dhyana* (concentrating on an object initially and going beyond even that ultimately). The object employed is the body of the guru himself; the attempt proves successful and Arjuna gets baffled and overcome by devotion.

At a still higher level, what is depicted is Arjuna’s (or anybody’s) successful effort at introspection. One’s True Self is identified, and wisdom is gained from awareness stemming from and conferred by the ātma, leading to a vision of the fundamental reality of the universe. This also makes one realize the true nature of one’s Real Self which has so far been taken as no more than a casual friend or a simple voice of conscience. The revelation is baffling and one is induced to pray for pardon for not having known the Supreme Self earlier.

If the entire Kurukshetra is taken as one body, it interacts with and gets to know its True Self, the most fundamental reality. Here again, the surprise and the apologetic stance are relevant. The knowledge is stunning and creates a sense of loss for not having accessed it earlier. The process of introspection and the

revelation in the form of the Gita happens here and now for the first time in the evolution of the universe!

pitāsi lokasya carācarasya  
tvam asya pūjyaś ca gurur garīyān  
na tvatsamo/sty abhyadhikah kutonyo  
lokatraye/py apratimaprabhāva 11.43

*You are the Father (of everything in) the world, moving and unmoving. You are the greatest teacher; there is none equal. How can there be another superior to You in all the three worlds, O Being of unequalled splendor?*

This verse can be viewed as deep worship to both the *Supreme Purusha* and also to the greatest teacher present before Arjuna now. The two words on emphasis are Guru and Supreme; the former leads one to the latter. For the devoted and faithful disciple, the guru is respected as the highest one. (*gurur gareeyan.*) (In the tradition of the Upanishads the guru is even considered as one's father and the father is also considered as the first guru.) The greatest guru is the *Supreme Purusha* Itself from which all knowledge unfolds. When that knowledge (adhyatma vidya) flows through the guru, both sources become one and the same.

tasmāt praṇamya praṇidhāya kāyam  
prasādaye tvām aham īśam īḍyam  
piteva putrasya sakheva sakhyuḥ  
priyah priyāyārhasi deva soḍhum 11.44

*Therefore, bowing down, prostrating my body, I beg Your blessing, O Isvara, the One who should be prayed to. As a father forgiving his son, a friend his friend, a lover his beloved, even so forgive and bless me, O Deva.*

‘May God bless as father (blesses) a son’ says Rig Veda (1.1.9). ‘O Lord, You are our father. Please teach us as a father does.’ (Yajur Veda). In both, father and teacher are equated with God. What is more in this stanza are friendliness and love that inevitably stem from deep-rooted devotion.

Here is a great warrior prostrating his body praying. We too can. We accept the greatness of the one we bow down to, outliving our ego. Bow down to the guru; bow down to God. If we are fortunate to have the two as one and the same (as Arjuna sees in the yoga between Krishna and the Supreme Entity), it is all the

better.

Ego is always a major roadblock for dhyana. It is natural to begin the process of dhyana thinking ‘I am doing dhyana’ or ‘The one doing dhyana is I’. But if dhyana is to move forward this ‘I’ has to move back. One has to dedicate everything one is and finally forget even one’s ‘I’ self.

Another obstacle is the feeling of guilt. All wrong can be considered as done towards the object of dhyana. Actually it is done to the Self itself as the True Self encompasses everything and everybody in the universe. So anyone can ask for forgiveness to Isvara.

The love of a father, a friend, a lover or any other kind has its source in Isvara. Hatred towards anything or anybody is the biggest obstacle that impedes the progress of dhyana.

adr̥ṣṭapūrvam̄ hr̥ṣito/smi dr̥ṣṭvā  
bhayena ca pravyathitam̄ mano me  
tad eva me darśaya deva rūpam̄  
prasīda deveśa jagannivāsa 11.45

*I am delighted, having seen what was never seen before; (but at the same time) my mind is distressed with fear. O the One with the Body of Light, let me see no more than Your previous form, O God of gods, O Abode of the Universe.*

The effort to dive deep into one’s self starts from cleaning the mind of all thoughts and allowing it to come up with anything from within it so that these imaginary visions too are examined and done away with. They are often beautiful, surprising and even frightening. The mind projects pictures stored deep down along all the way to the bottom. These are different from normal kind of dreams. Some may have the frightening feeling of one going nonexistent as ego is progressively shed. So much so, one is forced to halt, take a breather and start all over again.

Arjuna has been progressing along the path of *saguna dhyana* (*dhyana* on a specific object). *Dhyana* on any object, even a piece of stone, leads to devotion to that object and knowledge about it culminating in the revelation of its most basic identity which is the Supreme Entity.

kirīṭinam̄ gadinam̄ cakrahastam̄  
icchāmi tvām̄ draṣṭum aham̄ tathaiva  
tenaiva rūpeṇa caturbhujena  
sahastrabāho bhava viśvamūrte 11.46

*I desire to see You as (portrayed) before with four arms, crowned, and holding the club and the chakra, O thousand (infinitely) armed Form of the Universe.*

The intents of the symbolic image of four-armed Vishnu have been discussed before. This was the picture of God that Arjuna had previously imbibed and come to love and devote himself from the *Vedas*. He desires it to be reinstated instead of the wonder-horror total picture perceived just now.

Every believer desires God to appear before him in the form he or she conceives. Many of us familiar with color pictures of gods and goddesses printed in offset presses should have often felt this way.

God can be imagined in any form from a picture through an idol to a shapeless piece of stone because all forms are God's. But the Supreme Purusha is formless, unable to be 'seen'. Its manifestations and concepts that run the world alone had been 'visible'. Of course, imagination too is reality at a certain level but it cannot be taken for the Fundamental.

śrībhagavān uvāca  
mayā prasannena tavārjunedam  
rūpam param darśitam ātmayogat  
tejomayam viśvam anantam ādyam  
yan me tvadanyena na dṛṣṭapūrvam 11.47

*The Supreme One said:*

*O Arjuna, I, have blessed you by showing unto you the great Cosmic Body through the power of My yoga. It is universal, endless, illuminating; it precedes everything. It has never been seen (like this) by anyone other than you.*

The Lord welcomed Arjuna to the exercise with the liberal offer that Arjuna might see anything he wanted. The outcome of the war was of course one thing Arjuna definitely wanted to see. He saw that too. But the devastating apparition representing time frightened him. Why did the Lord lead his intimate devotee to the point of losing his wits out of mortal fear?

The ultimate truth is unpleasant and horrendous because the entire universe is to be dissolved eventually. Not even an iota of the created will remain. Likes and dislikes are responses to experiences during the very short interval called life that is only apparently stable. The future, at any point in it, is unknown. For knowledge to be complete and devotion to be accurate, this vision too is needed

for proper direction.

Again, how can it be said that what Arjuna has seen has not been seen by anyone else? Arjuna himself observes many a *rishi* seeing it. The mystery is solved if yoga vidya is understood a little better. Progress in it may be rewarded by many a vision on the way, but they will be different depending upon the make-up of the practitioner. Experiences in dhyana vary from person to person.

na veda yajñādhyayanair na dānaiḥ  
na ca kriyābhīr na tapobhīr ugraiḥ  
evaṁrūpaḥ śakya aham nr̥loke  
draṣṭum tvadanyena kurupravīra 11.48

*O the best of the Kurus, none other than you among human beings can see this Cosmic Form whether by mastering the Vedas, doing yajnas or severe penance, getting scholarly or carrying out complicated rituals or acts of charity.*

Gita, through a warning note, tries to bring to the right path all those who hold themselves superior on the basis of scholarship, expertise in rituals or physical self-punishment in the form of severe penances supposed to yield special powers. None of these will help get the total vision Arjuna got. Isvara will remain incomprehensible till approached with dedication and devotion on the part of the aspirant.

Gita also provides a cross-sectional view of the social conditions prevailing at the time of its composition. This stanza refers to self-styled ‘scholars’ who went about proudly launching and winning intricate arguments regarding the import of various sections of the Vedas, those who earned wealth by unjust means and then tried to earn God’s blessing and public acclaim by demonstratively donating a paltry part of their wealth to the poor, the unscrupulous practitioners of ‘tantra’ and ‘mantra’ who claimed to appease God for a consideration, and the foolish that punished their bodies with forms of ‘penance’ some of which prescribed self-punishments including standing on one toe inside a wall of fire.

Even today there are people who frolic in loud but empty discussions on the scriptures, international peddlers of narcotics and weapons parading as apostles of charity, wholesale and retail sellers of ‘God’s blessings’ obtainable through rituals and black magic with price tags to suit all pockets, and ‘God-men’ who claim they are incarnations and who even justify their ‘divine nature’ based on Krishna’s role in the Bhagavad Gita!

The great weapon of ‘*sudarsana*’ (wisdom born out of right perspective) in

the Gita can end and forestall the multi-billion ‘spiritual industry’.

mā te vyathā mā ca vimūḍhabhāvo  
drṣṭvā rūpam̄ ghoram̄ idṛṇī mamedam̄  
vyapetabhīḥ prītamanāḥ punas tvam̄  
tad eva me rūpam̄ idam̄ prapaśya 11.49

*Do not get frightened and stunned by this terrific form shown by Me. With a gladdened heart and all fear dispelled, now behold again that previous form of Mine (that you are familiar with).*

Arjuna reached the level of dhyana he could attain at one go. It is a revealing experience but frightening too. He had become one with cosmic concepts for a brief while. (It is to be kept in mind that Mahabharata also portrays Arjuna and Krishna as parts of a continuum.) In the story level, the fighter understood the charioteer better. In a higher plane, the conscious mind identified the True Self. The awareness of the Kurukshetra moved one more step in its effort to identify itself with the *Supreme Purusha*.

sañjaya uvāca  
ity arjunam̄ vāsudevas tathoktvā svakam̄ rūpam̄ darśayām̄ āsa bhūyah̄  
āsvāsayām̄ āsa ca bhītam̄ enam̄ bhūtvā punah̄ saumyavapur mahātmā 11.50

*Sanjaya said:*

*Vāsudeva, having thus spoken to Arjuna, again presented His (worldly) form. The Great One, assuming the gentle form, consoled the terrified Arjuna.*

Though Arjuna is told ‘No other man has seen what you have’, Sanjaya has seen all. Dhrutarashtra the blind king too saw it through the words of Sanjaya. All those who read the Gita too have seen it ever since. But Vyasa has a knowing smile: None of these has seen what Arjuna had because what everyone else saw was his or her own conceptualization. Even Sanjaya, who reports on the basis of a special capability to see all, has the vision colored through his nature and taste.

Arjuna has already been told of the secret of secrets in regard to the universe and also instructed how to go about realizing it. He was provided the vision of the cosmos to convert that understanding to quick experience. But the practice of brahma vidya does not end with theoretical knowledge or the vision attained at a certain level of dhyana. There are miles to go.

arjuna uvāca  
dṛṣṭvedam mānuṣam rūpam tava saumyam janārdana  
idānīm asmi samvṛttah sacetah prakṛtim gatah 11.51

*Arjuna said:*

*O Janardana, I am now composed, alert and restored to my own nature after seeing this gentle human form of Yours.*

Janardana means one who uproots all evils; it implies omnipresence (janan sarvata ardati). Janardana is the basis of all life and also the sustenance of the universe.

Arjuna says this with a long sigh of relief. The wonderful but horrendous apparition is gone; he now sees the human and gentle form of Krishna instead. But their relationship has been altered somewhat. Hereafter Arjuna probably cannot bring himself to address Krishna as ‘Yadav’, ‘buddy!’ and all. A new dimension has been added to their relationship – that of teacher and disciple.

The verse also brings out the difference between seeing Krishna of God and Krishna as God. “This gentle human form of Yours” is the correct method to understand the yoga of Krishna with the Supreme Entity; not the other way round. (“*The ignorant, unable to comprehend the Avyakta from which all beings are manifested, consider Me as some embodied form.*” – verse 7.24; and again “*The unwise, unable to understand My Supreme position as Mahesvara of all, disrespect Me by considering Me as having some human body to subsist*” – verse 9.11.) It is implied that any object can be observed and concentrated upon so as to perceive the basic structure and functioning of the universe and to glean a vision of the basic essence of the universe. However, for identification and alignment of one’s self with the Paramātma, one has to go beyond the particular, the immediate and the means employed as a stepping stone. Be it any image of God, it should not be taken for the Eternal Self.

The dialogue now moves on to the deep sense of devotion necessary while gathering knowledge and carrying out actions in the role of an instrument at the hands of that Supreme One.

śrībhagavān uvāca  
sudurdarśam idam rūpam dṛṣṭvān asi yan mama  
devā apy asya rūpasya nityam darśanakāṅkṣināḥ 11.52

*The Purushottama said:*

*This visvarupa of Mine that you have just seen is very difficult to get a glimpse of; even Devas forever yearn to see it.*

Deva (literally ‘light’ or ‘force’) in Vedic literature means a god with superhuman powers. Such gods are supposed to control the forces of nature. But the Gita says they always live with the hope of getting this vision, which means they do not get it in the normal course. It is also implied that yajnas to appease these gods will not help anyone get this vision. How can any god who has not had it himself take one to it?

nāham̄ vedair na tapasā na dānena na cejayā  
śakya evam̄vidho draṣṭum̄ drṣṭavān̄ asi mām̄ yathā 11.53

*Veda (the scripture), tapas (penance), dana (act of charity) or yajna (sacrificial offering) will not enable anyone to see Me in the Cosmic Form that you just now have.*

The earlier statement is reinforced to indicate that this is a very important aspect. The word Veda can be taken to mean knowledge per se as well as the gamut of Vedic literature. It would also imply all religious texts. Dry knowledge in whatever format does not help obtain the vision of the Self. Knowledge has to be transformed into wisdom through experience. The same is the case with penance and acts of charity. These will not yield anything unless there is something else:-

bhaktyā tv ananyayā śakya aham evam̄vidho/rjuna  
jñātum̄ draṣṭum̄ ca tattvena praveṣṭum̄ ca param̄tapa 11.54

*O Arjuna, by single-minded devotion can I and this Cosmic Body be known, seen and also entered into, O Param̄tapa (scorcher of foes).*

Was it the ability to amass wealth (the word Arjuna connotes that) or his prowess to make his enemies sorry for having confronted him (as indicated by the word Param̄tapa) that qualified him? Not at all! It was not his knowledge of the Vedas, acts of charity, the penance of any kind he might have had ever performed or the yajnas he had helped conduct, either. Exclusive and unparalleled devotion alone was what enabled him to access the sight and knowledge pertaining to the Supreme Purusha.

Becoming one with the highest entity is different from the knowledge of It.

Knowing the path is different from walking the path. Insight into the limits to observation by the sense organs and limitations of the sense organs themselves will follow in due course.

All Vedanta texts like the Narada Bhakti Sutra reiterate the primacy of devotion among the means to attain salvation. The Gita too highlights it at several instances; there are pointed references to it in every chapter.

Devotion is dedication at its best. It does not mean bowing down to a god in a place of worship with a view to ask for some favor or other. In day to day life it is beyond anybody's guess as to which god will get pleased first so various gods are worshipped one after the other or even collectively. This is the general picture of 'devotion' currently in vogue.

Superstitions vanish only at the advent of wisdom. The style of devotion undergoes a sea of change after understanding the import of the cosmic vision; the True Self alone matters as everybody and everything including oneself is known to perish at some stage or other. As true wisdom matures prayers for perishable objects diminish; in its place the pull to the only immortal aspect strengthens. The might of the wise is derived from this realization and their devotion is hallmarked by dedication. Finally, the devotee and the object of devotion become one and the same.

The path of devotion is based on the capabilities of a great fortune man has been bestowed with – the mind. But most often the mind is bogged down by 'unwise' reports filed by the sense organs depending on stimuli from the external world as well as the tendencies already present in the individual. Doors to astonishing possibilities open when the intellect begins to experience the pleasure of keeping the mind free of both. Such a mind becomes capable of guiding one's life along the path then chalked out by the rational intellect. Man alone is imbued with this unique ability. The mind has to be befriended so that it walks in true wisdom as a matter of routine and habit. Adhyatma vidya is the path for this. 'Be one with the True Self' is its cardinal slogan.

matkarmakṛṇ matparamo madbhaktah saṅgavarjitaḥ  
nirvairah̄ sarvabhūteṣu yaḥ sa mām eti pāṇḍava 11.55

*O Pandava (Arjuna), he who dedicates all actions to Me, considers Me as the Supreme, is devoted to Me, is free from attachment, and bears enmity towards none becomes one with Me.*

The definition of devotion is summarized so as to clear any lingering uncertainties and doubts. This verse is the door to the next chapter on devotion.

We are ready for it once the cosmic vision is assimilated. There is a warning also here – enmity towards anything or anyone is counterproductive to true devotion. The logic involved is very simple. Everything in the universe is the abode of the *Supreme Purusha*. Therefore enmity of any kind to any is in fact enmity towards the True Self. Devotion cannot co-exist with any trace of it. Moreover, enmity is an infliction upon the human mind akin to a few drops of poison in water. It spreads and dissolves to reach every molecular space, making the mind unsuitable to devote itself to the Universal Soul.

‘Do not blame or hate the erring ones’ is another message this stanza gives. Ignorance is no crime. The truly devotional affectionately guide the wrong ones. Even if they have to carry out strict roles in society they don’t hate any criminal. They don’t lose hope; neither do they ever shirk their bounden duties to themselves, their family, their surroundings and the universe in general. They know it is futile to yearn for salvation for themselves alone, leaving behind the rest of the world and forgetting their plight. They act on behalf of the Purushottama and for It. This is why karma yoga (being one with right action) has been advised in preference to abstention from all action.

‘Lead the blessed life of the very embodiment of bliss for a hundred years, working for the benefit of the entire universe and in love with all’ has been the traditional blessing showered upon their dear disciples by the Upanishad gurus.

## Chapter 12

# Yoga of Bhakti

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During the days the Gita was composed, many Gods were worshipped in very many forms by various kinds of believers. The Vedas mention innumerable gods. At the other extreme were followers of Sankhya and other schools of thought that did not attach much importance to the practice of worship at all.

Gita reinstates Upanishad thought that God is all-pervading and therefore beyond any form or name; instead all names and forms have their source in that *Supreme Purusha*. But though the ideal object of worship is the fundamental entity beyond all forms and names, there is scope for innumerable variations of style and method. That style is individual and evolves with the progress of each person.

The wisdom contained in the Gita is unique whichever way or at whatever level one approaches it. As Maharshi Aurobindo says: ‘Gita is much more than Advaita pure and simple. Though Gita describes the illusory nature of Prakṛti that manifests in three forms in the scenario of creation, the thought process is not akin to the māya concept of Sankara. It establishes Prakṛti that manifests as life forms as the ultimate unity itself. Though it maintains that the end of spiritual seeking is ‘living in God’ and not ‘dissolving’ in Him, it is not Visishta Advaita. Despite the fact it describes the process of creation with the help of the Prakṛti-Purusha doublet, it is not Sankhya. Again, it is not Vaishnava Advaita that treats Krishna as the incarnation of Vishnu and hence the supreme God.... Its target is over and above the interests of its commentators.... It is not intended as a weapon for use in wars of logic. It is the door that opens to the perfect world of spiritual experience.’ Our efforts should be to discern its original and live message.

All doubts vanish if devotion and worship are seen in this light. While there is unlimited freedom of choice pertaining to the nature of individual devotion, it is pointed out that the ultimate target is the un-definable reality. Gita, in its integrating pursuit, accepts the values involved in various forms of worship but warns against getting stuck at any side-step on the way. There is no compromise regarding the ultimate target to meditate upon: the formless essence of the

universe and no less (Chapter 7, verses 21 to 23).

Dr S. Radhakrishnan points out: ‘It is this stance of the Gita that there are very many ways to the same truth and that all of them are right that makes this book of knowledge the mother of all wisdom. The people of the sub-continent have been always able to readily accept all diversities because the culture of this wisdom resides in them.’

Gita defines devotion as the heart-to-heart relation between the worshipper and the worshipped. Dedication is the mode of it. While the previous chapters together provide the knowledge preparatory to it, this chapter describes what true devotion is and helps to develop it.

arjuna uvāca  
evam satatayuktā ye bhaktās tvāṁ paryupāsate  
ye cāpy akṣaram avyaktam teṣāṁ ke yogavittamāḥ 12.1

*Arjuna said:*

*Those devotees who, ever-steadfast, thus worship You and those who concentrate the Avyakta which is Akshara itself – which of them are better tuned to yoga?*

Arjuna's question is relevant because there must have been great scholars with profound knowledge of the fabric of space (Avyakta) during that time participating in various academic discussions about Akshara. And there must also have been lots of saintly devotees with not much scholarly knowledge. The level of Akshara with its fabric of space cannot be easily understood by common people, and Arjuna himself is not a scholar but a soldier with only the basic knowledge in these areas, and a simple devotee.

śrībhagavān uvāca  
mayy āveśya mano ye māṁ nityayuktā upāsate  
śraddhayā parayopetāḥ te me yuktatamā matāḥ 12.2

*The Supreme One said:*

*Those who, entering their mind in Me, ever steadfast and devoted to Me with utmost sraddha, in My opinion, are the best established in yoga.*

Meditation is best when focused on the Supreme Entity behind the universe itself. One may worship it in any manner one likes in the way any vehicle is chosen for a journey in accordance with one’s fancy and the features of the path.

But to reach there, there are other things more important such as: One: Entering the mind in Me means the mind has to be firmly set on Isvara (Or whatever name one wants to call It) to feel one with It. What is intended is a steady sense of purpose. If anyone wants to get deeply in love with another, it is not enough if the person gets to know the other or even if he just gets into a momentary contact with the other. To get one's mind firmly set on devotion to the Lord is not easy. Even peripheral contact using the mind takes a lot of fumbling. And even if the mind gets devotionally set on it and reaches the feeling of oneness with the sense of bliss it provides, the mind would return and not stay there. Sustained devotion is difficult. Sometimes oneness with the True Self makes one's 'I' cease to be. It is a stage difficult to get reconciled with. Many a doubt arises. From the 'I think, I decide, I speak, I do' state one reaches the situation where one is just an observer. Even from this level one's mind often slips back.

Two: Steadfast devotion means the sense of identification with the object of meditation must be always and not casual or occasional. Human mind by nature is wavering and unsteady. It will tend to stray from the object of contemplation. But it can be made strong and firm too – harder than steel – as proved by a mother's love for the baby. What makes the mind waver is its probing nature, ego and changing attention.

Three: Meditation calls for rightly focused concentration. 'Sraddha' is not faith. It is the quality of concentration which is linked to the basic nature of the person. The types of sraddha are discussed in detail later. Here the sraddha should be total commitment after every possible scrutiny, and firm attachment to wisdom attained by distilling of one's own direct experiences. It is a path sought and found by oneself irrespective of what way one got started.

ye tv akṣaram anirdeśyam avyaktam paryupāsate  
sarvatragam acintyam ca kūṭastham acalam dhruvam 12.3  
saṁniyamyendriyagrāmaṁ sarvatra samabuddhayāḥ  
te prāpnuvanti mām eva sarvabhūtahite ratāḥ 12.4

*But also those who, having restrained all the sense organs, remaining even-minded everywhere and seeing the same (Akshara) in everything, ever rejoicing in the welfare of all beings; and in that state concentrating on the omnipresent, achalam, dhruvam, unthinkable and indefinable (by scientific methods) kutastha; the unchangeable Avyakta which is Akshara itself – they too get themselves identified with Me.*

Those who concentrate on Akshara also come to Me because these

intelligent observers cannot fail to see the reason behind the fabric of space and the way the universe is manifested. But their path is more difficult than that of the simple ardent devotee's.

Avyakta cannot be defined as it has no form or 'quantity'. The fabric of space is unbound so it cannot be identified with the help of borders. It cannot be seen and specified as a visual. It cannot be tested by lab investigations and proved. Words cannot describe it as it is beyond all comparisons.

It is everywhere. If it were not it would become discontinuous and subject to boundaries and amenable to forms making it unfit to be '*kutastha*' (the ultimate basis of everything). The fabric of space is like the (*kutam*) anvil of the metal worker that shapes myriads of products but remains as it is despite all the forms produced in it.

The intellect cannot comprehend it as it has no form. Thoughts develop in terms of pictures visualized. Reason is what connects these pictures. One cannot think or reason about anything formless.

It is *achalam* (that which does not move). *Akshara* cannot 'go' anywhere because it is the fabric of space itself and there is no 'vacancy' for it. Everything moves in it but it stays put.

It is *dhruvam* (permanent – beyond change). Corruption or destruction can happen only to that which is subject to death or dissolution (time limitations). The fabric of space is there even prior to the big bang. The universe is its pulsation. It outlives the null points of all of its beats.

In fact this is the basic challenge posed and solved by the art and science of yoga. If the sense organs, the mind and the intellect cannot know the reality of *Akshara* behind the universe what can? How can an unknowable entity be approached?

The science of yoga (*yoga sastra*) begins with the great discovery that the very same senses-mind-intellect combine that stage violent storms and hurricanes within the person, can be calmed, trained, befriended and directed. Then the same mind and intellect can be made the instruments to see in itself the secrets behind the working of the universe. The essentials of the art are listed here: One: Establish mastery over the sense organs as the seeds of all storms enter the mind through them.

Two: develop a strict sense of equanimity. Brahma (*Akshara*) is same everywhere and in everything. Perceiving sameness is possible only when one earns the wisdom to distinguish between truth, half-truth and falsehood, because the true essence of things and feelings can be discerned then. The mind when unperturbed rests on its mother's lap. It is the most comfortable ground it can have. This serene comfort is the beginning of the bliss yoga can bring in.

Three: Get trained to be happy at the common good. This is the antidote for all dissatisfactions likely to be harvested from failed actions performed with selfish motives. With the realization that one is just a cell in the body of the universe and one's bliss lies in the maintenance of the well being of the whole, the 'I' that limits one to a very minuscule and separate existence dies a natural death. Sowing and reaping become actions that do not bind the bird by attachment to self-interest. One's will becomes the will of the whole.

After thus introducing the qualities basic to success in this endeavor, a warning is issued posing a challenge to these thinkers, together with a clue.

Kleśo/dhikataras teṣāṁ avyaktāsaktacetasām  
avyaktā hi gatir duḥkham dehavadbhīr avāpyate 12.5

*It is more difficult for those whose minds are set on Avyakta; for the goal – Avyakta – is very hard for the dehavad to be held.*

The clue lies in the word *dehavad* (one imbued with the body). Meditating upon Avyakta is tougher because of the body. Man is always aware of the body, very attached to it, even proud of it, almost to the exclusion of finer feelings. So are all living things. But man alone can realize that his body is also only a visible manifestation of the fabric of space; a conglomeration of numerous matter-waves of the fabric itself, moving by wave-motion to the adjacent part. Nothing around is actually different from one's body and the feeling of being separate from the surroundings is only an illusion. This realization would overtake pride. Concentration and study on it rubs off the physical ego so that after a while the awareness of separation can be given up. The selflessness earned through concentration naturally takes the scholar to higher goals.

In general, the human mind always has to lean on something. Like a naughty child it refuses to be idle as well. When a form is worshipped, both characteristics can come into play in the process. There is the form to lean on to. There are a lot of things to be arranged for the ritualistic worship.

Instead when the devotion is to the Supreme One which has no name or form, the supremacy of the physical 'I' gets slowly eroded, the center of prime importance shifting to the object of worship, cultivating selflessness in the devotee. This seed sprouts and thrives on decayed ego.

While Avyakta is the focus of attention, the mind has nothing to lean on and the organs of action will keep crying for work. Concentration without devotion is tougher to sustain for the mind. There is hardly any strong foothold. Under the circumstances, the practice of dhyana will be more difficult.

ye tu sarvāṇī karmāṇī mayi samnyasya matparaḥ  
ananyenaiva yogena māṁ dhyāyanta upāsate 12.6  
teṣāṁ aham samuddhartā mṛtyusamsārasāgarāt  
bhavāmi na cirāt pārtha mayy āveśitacetasām 12.7

*But those who dedicate all actions to Me, regard Me as the supreme goal, meditate on me with single-minded fervor – for them whose minds are set on Me, Arjuna, I certainly become – before long – the one who saves them from the ocean of the sorrows of the world including death.*

We often worship our own physical and / or mental images, like Narsikos did. (We have full-length mirrors now and do not have to wait for a chance to see our physical image in calm water.) Even if the mirror is almost perfect this image is not the exact truth. In the case of the mental image, the veracity of our estimate is far from real. In any case these images can never be sustained over a period of time.

The first step in spiritual evolution is outgrowing these images with a form outside and different. Importance shifts to this, freeing one to some extent from the clutches of self-centeredness. The next step is getting out of the fort of ‘one’s own’ God. By the realization that one is able to get out of these fortresses because one is led by one’s pure Self, we come to recognize it as the supreme reality. The discovery that it is there right inside us makes the journey all the more easier and happier. Sooner or later, one is able to position oneself in that. This is the state of bliss. As the mind tends to slip, the next step is maintaining that state steadfastly. Though difficult it is possible for sure, says this verse, if a few simple stances and actions are accepted. First of all, dedicate all actions to the Lord of the universe. Active involvement in worldly affairs has been already rated better than abstention. The good of the society, the biosphere and the universe as a whole has to be taken into account for all action, and any correction should be done not with enmity but with feeling of kinship and oneness. What is intended as the highest path of action is the one carried out upon the assumption that it is actually performed as worship to the Supreme One, and the individual doer being no more than an apparatus. This removes all selfish motivation. Dedication means this attitude. If successfully adopted it will prove a great inspiration and, at the same time, welcome relief on the action front. One does not have to worry about consequences or results when action is dedicated like this to the Supreme One. It instills confidence. Every action in discordance with the larger interests of the biosphere is bad and vice versa.

Freedom as well as the ability to act becomes natural when one is the devotee of the Highest.

Then practice yoga (unity) with the Supreme. One should not be disappointed about the mind slipping back or feeling fed up. The nature of the mind is like that, the only way to bring it back is befriending it and not by criticism. Gradual and steady focus over a period of days, months or sometimes years may be needed for most. Some go back to their routine and forget about meditation but again reroute to the path in later months or years. Here the verse is encouraging us to be steady in meditation. The acid test of any love is whether there is greater interest in anything else. *Ananya yoga* is exclusive attention on being one with the Lord.

mayy eva mana ādhatsva mayi buddhim̄ niveśaya  
nivasiṣyasi mayy eva ata ūrdhvam̄ na samśayah̄ 12.8

*Fix your mind on Me, join your intellect with Me; then (thereafter) you shall, no doubt, live in Me alone.*

Human mind is often compared to a deep ocean. There may be many currents at many levels of it at the same time, some of which are even at cross purposes. Emotional conflicts tending to cause damage to mental health arise out of situations in which one is forced to hate the ones loved or vice versa. Some pleasures gained as a result of momentary enthusiasm often become ground to lifelong pain. Gita advises to surrender all currents, conflicts and scars to the Supreme Soul. Put the entire gamut of the mind at Its feet so that all miseries subside.

Intellect too can face the same kind of problems. Inadequacy of knowledge is one reason. Inadequacy of the power of reasoning may make it impossible to decide what is right. Corruption of thought processes by lust or greed or pride can occur in very subtle ways leading to wrong choices, which result in the person believing that he is doing the right thing though in actuality he is not. Surrendering the intellect to the Supreme Self can remove the motive of selfishness and lead to correct decisions without the accompaniment of pride of the decision-maker. It will also help intellect to discover its limitations. All turbidity vanishes.

Again, it is not enough if the mind and the intellect are set right differently. Conflicts may arise between them like the mind finding what the intellect approves as disagreeable and the intellect vetoing what the mind fondles as dear – leading to personality conflicts and ruin. Well being is only when thoughts and

emotions reconcile. Success of any venture depends on this reconciliation too. The trick is to bundle up the mind and the intellect and surrender it as a whole, and proceed in the way only as directed by the soul. That will mark the end of all disturbances.

Using the intellect also means avoidance of blind faith. Your inferences about the Supreme Being should not conflict with already proven modern science. It should not conflict with common sense or logic. We had earlier seen a verse encouraging us to use our intellect to develop and enlarge on the correct idea of Isvara. Once we know for sure, don't doubt anymore – that has also been pointed out in another verse.

The prize is being one with the Lord Itself. It is said to be attainable without recourse to any intricate ritual, *yajna*, *mantra*, *tantra*, *tapas*, sacrifice or clergy. The stanzas that follow evince the wonderful simplicity of the yoga of devotion (*bhakti yoga*). Easier paths are chalked out for those who find it hard to follow the regime just prescribed.

atha cittam samādhātum na śaknośi mayi sthiram  
abhyāsayogena tato mām ichāptum dhanamjaya 12.9

*If you are unable to fix your mind steadily upon Me, then, wish to reach me through the exercises of yoga.*

The various exercises of meditation have been enumerated earlier. Find a calm and quiet place, make a comfortable seat and train the mind to get focused on the Supreme One by consistently leading the mind back to It from wherever it strays whenever.

It is like any other balancing act that is learned through practice. The exercise becomes part of our nature through practice. Repeated trials help develop the capability. This is how children learn to stand erect and walk. In fact it is the same in all action and every thought process.

When we stretch a hand a take the pen on the table, the hand does not move in a straight line towards the pen though we feel it does. What actually happens is: Our eyes watch the movement of the hand with respect to the position of the pen at every instant of the action and the brain issues orders to correct. (The exercise can also be done blindly, but the path is then imprinted in the brain beforehand by observing the position of the pen and drawing a plan of action for the hand and the movement of the hand is then imaginarily observed as against this plan to make correction.) The process degenerates in neurological disorders.

All balancing acts are achieved by effective coordination through correction

by feedback. From steadyng the rocket in its assigned path to taking a decision all natural processes are results of this process. Biological evolution follows the same.

Training the mind in the same way to maintain balance in meditation is the means to achieve identification with the Eternal Supreme Self. One may slip in the beginning just as at the early stages of cycling. Try again; don't give up. It is equally important not to aspire to master the art at the very first trial.

Abhyāse/py asamarthosi matkarmaparamo bhava  
madaratham api karmāṇi kurvan siddhim avāpsyasi 12.10

*In case you are unable even to practice yoga, do whatever you do for My sake; you will attain your goal by entirely acting on My behalf.*

Well, if one finds it well nigh impossible to train the mind in this fashion, there is an easier way. It is human nature that all cannot do everything equally well. Nature provides many routes to the same end. (The robber who could not pronounce 'Rama Rama' ('God God') could utter 'Mara Mara' (tree tree) and became Saint Valmiki as repeated utterance of the latter resulted in the former.) The alternate is to always perform actions as dedicated to the *Supreme Purusha*. If done in the right spirit of worship this will gradually remove self-centeredness and identify one's interests with those of the biosphere. When commitment in the form of loyalty and love gets firm enough, the pride that 'I am the one who does this' will disappear. There is nothing that a mother would not do in the service of her children. A loyal employee will be ready to go to any length to protect the interests of his institution. Their actions are devoid of ego too.

There is of course a critical factor for dedication of all actions – they should not in any way conflict with the higher levels such as the society and the biosphere. Right awareness of the omnipresent Ātma and universal love are important factors here. It is common to find sectarian parties doing what is right for their community or their religious group, disregarding the interests of the total society. Needless to say that their dedication and sincerity and love for their community actually create more evil than good.

An ordinary cell in our body illustrates the state of the devotee following this path. It has its own part to play in the form of unique individual actions. But all of it is performed in the interests of the body. Every cell has the opportunity to prove its 'efficiency', 'loyalty' and 'wisdom' but is the healthiest when it acts in the interest of the whole body. Human life is the happiest and the most fruitful when it surrenders itself completely to the interests of the biosphere and the live

universe.

The verse highlights performing all actions as worship to the Supreme One. It is easier to remember this dedication while performing every action. Doing everything for the Lord's sake; the mind, slowly becoming unselfish and constantly thinking about the ātma in every action, will tend to orient itself to union with the Supreme Self. From then on, the flow of selfless action will naturally move towards the estuary of final identification with the Supreme.

If actions for the sake of the Lord are also difficult to perform there is yet another way.

athaitad apy aśakto/si kartum madyogam āśritah  
sarvakarmaphalatyāgam tataḥ kuru yatātmavān 12.11

*If you are unable to do even this, then taking refuge in Me, renounce craving in the fruits of all actions.*

'Unto the last' is the motto of good teachers. If one cannot stably dedicate one's actions in mind, one does not have to despair. There is still an easier way. Just try to control the mind to be able to give up the craving for the fruits of all actions. Take refuge in the highest Self. Whenever worried or anxious, visualize the universal soul within oneself and ask what to do and what is best. Then, whatever one has to do – simply concentrate on doing it as best as possible and forget it. Note that the advice is not to give up the fruits of actions. (Recollect the chapter on karma yoga for the detailed discussion on this.) A calm and clean mind naturally proceeds to dhyana and the art of yoga in action.

Maharshi Aurobindo, Lokmanya Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi lay stress on action without desire (karma yoga) in their commentaries on the Gita, most probably because this is the easiest path that can be taken by ordinary people in everyday life. Jnanaeswar Maharaj points at clouds and plants to illustrate how one can function without desiring for fruits of it.

If the thesis of 'action without desire in its fruits' is taken literally, it is enough to turn whole communities and even nations to become exploited on its goodness. India has suffered from this aberration to a great extent. Generations slipped into centuries-long slavery, indifference and inaction. Along with this *samnyasa* was misunderstood as the renouncement of all action. All action was deemed undesirable. The kind of karma yoga naturally practiced by even bees and ants became unattainable to man. The whole philosophy became counterproductive and degenerated, extinguishing even the lamp in the process.

Exploitation is rampant in the world. If you are a good person, the chances

are that someone has already exploited you. If you are a good person, chances are that you have already been cast down many times, and you would have felt out of sync with the over-smart, fast and selfish world. But being good is never a limitation and Vedanta says one must be oneself. There are numerous virtuous paths to resistance to all evil tendencies within and outside; devoid of anger or enmity. The example of that great follower of the Bhagavad Gita – Mahatma Gandhi – and his struggles against oppression and exploitation is enough to understand what strength Vedantic knowledge can bestow to a good man.

Every man is endowed with the capability to control anger and desire; only, it varies according to the type of basic instincts. Gita takes care of these as well like a compassionate teacher taking along also those who are slow at learning. At this point a smile is visible on the face of the sage who composed Gita. It blossoms when the next versa reveals that the exercises suggested for the benefit of the least endowed are equally effective for the most brilliant as well.

śreyo hi jñānam abhyāsāj jñānād dhyānam viśiṣyate  
dhyānāt karmaphalatyāgas tyāgāc chāntir anantaram 12.12

*Realized wisdom is indeed special than training (of yoga); meditation is still special; but renunciation of craving for the fruits of action is even more special; peace (the end of all perturbations) immediately follows renunciation.*

Practice after fully digesting the theory is good, but better than even that is the renunciation of all craving for the benefit of both the knowledge and the practice because the ensuing freedom leads to permanent peace.

Anybody in any walk of life eventually gets convinced of this fact. Basic knowledge of the subject is important in whatever one does. But if that knowledge has not been tested and verified it serves no practical purpose. However, even if one is fully qualified, experienced and equipped, if the mind is haunted by the cravings for the fruits of the action (anxiety for victory or greed for money) the work suffers and falters. If trained to fortify the mind against this craving, not only the work is done better and easier but also peace prevails supreme all along and even after.

The idea of total renunciation of the world is summarily dismissed. Inaction is ruled out, for, the one who does not act at all cannot renounce the fruit of anything! The one who renounces the world totally has no chance to sacrifice any fruit of any action. He is also throwing the baby away along with the bathwater.

The birds of the sky sow and reap but they do it instinctively. They spread

the seed with no desire to harvest later and they do not harvest the field for use from here to eternity. They have no anxiety regarding factors outside their control – whether the seeds would sprout and provide them food for the future or not. The bondage that the desire for the outcome of action creates imprisons the mind in a world of insatiable yearnings without allowing it to gain its natural state ever.

adveṣṭā sarvabhūtānāṁ maitraḥ karuṇā eva ca  
nirmamo nirahaṁkāraḥ samaduhkhasukhaḥ kṣamī 12.13  
saṁtuṣṭaḥ satataṁ yogī yatātmā dṛḍhaniścayaḥ  
mayy arpitamanobuddhir yo madbhaktah sa me priyah 12.14

*The devotee who hates no creature, is friendly and compassionate to all, free from attachment (bondage) and egoism, balanced (thinking of Me) in pleasure and pain, patient and forgiving, content, steadily trying to be in union with Me, self-controlled, having unwavering strength of purpose, with mind and intellect dedicated to Me, I regard him close to Me.*

Eleven essential qualities of a devotee are enumerated. These, in fact, form the nature of the fully evolved human being. It is declared that devotion can take one to that height. At the same time, it is hinted that unless one cultivates these qualities, devotion cannot be sustained.

It is obvious that one who loves the ātma of the universe cannot hate anything or anybody. Natural emotions in an evolved being like man are friendliness and compassion. There is no separate ‘I’; egoism disappears.

The basic nature of the unmanifest prakṛti is dialectical. Our body – the product of it – is therefore imprisoned within the fort of opposites. Pain is inevitable as long as there is a body to experience pleasure. But one can view the experiences of both with equanimity, keeping the mind to be in union with the ātma. Balance gives peace. The devotee recognizes the opposites as sporadic and short-lived expressions and holds on to the Supreme which is imperturbable and eternal. No pain or ordeal shakes his sense of purpose. Patience is the outcome of peace with oneself leading to calming of all perturbation of the mind. He is the one of firm will, who can keep his mind and intellect surrendered to the Supreme Self. Priyah means dear to, and it should be interpreted as being close to union with the True Self, not as a favorite of God (*I reside equally in all beings. I do not hate any nor do I show favoritism to any. But who all worship Me with devotion are in Me and I am in them.* – verse 9.29).

Sage Vyasa cleanses concepts of values over which dirt and damage were

inflicted over time, and redefines them. This chapter re-explores the path of devotion. The best form of devotion is: understand the concept of the most perfect and the greatest entity in the universe, fix it in mind as the most important, dedicate one's actions and life to it and be devoted to it the most. (There must have been many degraded forms of worship in practice then as there are even today.) yasmān no/dvijate loko lokān nodvijate ca yah  
harṣāmarṣabhadvegair mukto yah sa ca me priyah 12.15

*He by whom the world is not agitated and who cannot be agitated by the (events of the) world, who is free from (the clutches of) fervor, envy, fear and anxiety – he is close to Me.*

Gita calls those who are ‘cured’ of all worldly inflictions by many names: sthitaprajna (the stable minded), jnani (wise), karma yogi (doer of right action), etc. The list is now extended to accommodate bhakta (devotee). Though their whereabouts may vary more or less in details their basic quality remains the same: they have dedicated their lives to the Supreme Entity. In other words they are ‘the most joined’ to it. They reached that ‘healthy’ stage by taking a course of medicine prepared out of wisdom, right action and love in right proportions.

The one who identifies his self to the Self of the universe is not perturbed by anything. Everything and everybody is ‘his’ as his self is the same as that which is in everyone. He cannot do anything unless it is in the interest of the whole world just as one’s left hand never tends to hurt the right. Death does not frighten him because he knows his life is eternal. If it gets out of the net it is still there in the river. He is not worried about losing anything he has. The only way to eternal peace and bliss is becoming one with the ultimate truth. (There is none other.) Presented in the briefest form in the verse here is the only antidote to the hell man has created for himself. If is applied, there will be no threat whatsoever thereafter to peace, equality and environmental cleanliness. No manifestos or revolutions will be necessary. On the other hand, no hollow ritual of any religion can help, as also any material ‘growth’ of any dimension brought in by modern science and technology.

All religions in the world, in their essence, advocate this panacea in various styles and doses. But most practitioners unfortunately miss the point. And the result is the present-day world – a veritable hell left over by the unending tragedy of conflicts in the name of faith!

Gita affords primary status to the individual, not crowds, societies or nations. The reason is simple. A good structure needs firm bricks to build it. Identifying one’s self with that of the universe is an individualistic affair and not a social

action. One who cannot rule himself cannot rule anyone else well; neither can he be ruled well by any authority. He will see any common rule as an infringement upon his freedom, preferring to be anarchic.

As the ideal end of all evolution is seen as the state of being one with the ātma of the universe, the universe as a whole can be supposed to rejoice at each one taking a step in that direction. A few more tips for the successful completion of the journey are now given.

anapekṣah śucir dakṣa udāśīno gatavyathah  
sarvārambhaparityāgī yo madbhaktah sa me priyah 12.16

*Anapeksha (he who does not appeal), pure, alert, udasina (detached) and untroubled, the sarvarambha parityagi (renouncing all enterprises that involve ego) who is devoted to Me (in this way) is close to Me.*

To the fourteen qualities of the devotee mentioned in the two verses before, six more are added.

*Anapeksha* is the one who does not appeal. Appealing does not mean the one who applies for anything including a job or a passport, or appeals to the court. It means here a habit by which one always sees another as superior to him whenever he wants something from that person. It ranges from praising to boot-licking to achieve something. The same habit is seen to be followed by immature devotees too. Praying with the accompaniment of cringing, craving and flattering – for the attainment of material items – is not the sign of devotion.

*Anapeksha* also implies a state of mind. The warning is against applications piling up in the mind. It is an unsettling situation. Life goes unbearable in direct proportion with applications. How can one ever know peace if he cannot decide what all he really needs and where and how to get them? The world around us is the best example of what happens when everyone wants everything everybody else has and more. Meditation is impossible and devotion is fruitless unless one collects all such applications from the mind, shreds it and feeds an incinerator.

Purity of mind reflects in our environment. It cannot be consistently clean outside if it is not clean inside and vice versa. Dirt in the mind causes as much itching as it does on the body. Hangover from attachments and hatred pile up as dirt in the mind. One cannot meditate unless all itches are cured.

‘*Udasina*’ is the one who is detached and does not mean indifference towards everything.

Peace cannot co-exist with sorrow. Sorrows are born out of unsatisfied yearnings as well as losses incurred. These accumulate as life goes on.

Moreover, sorrows by nature putrefy and make the mind a stinking garbage dump, nauseating and suffocating us. The remedy is instantaneous recycling of all waste. The devotee burns all sorrows in devotion and worshipful action, sweeping it to feed the ever-burning fire of wisdom.

‘*Sarvarambha parityagi*’ is not one who never ventures to do anything. He does everything warranted except those for selfishness or pride. The one who does anything only with the view to advance his own pride swallows his own bait. He feels miserable irrespective of whether he wins or fails. Victory means one has to either maintain his name and fame or further increase it in the next venture. If he fails he hates and curses himself and the whole world. In either case what is lost is peace.

yo na hr̥ṣyati na dveṣṭi na śocati na kāñkṣati  
śubhāśubhaparityāgī bhaktimān yah sa me priyah 12.17

*He who neither gloats nor hates, nor grieves nor expects, renouncing in his mind whether it is the good or the bad that comes to him, he is ardently devoted and is close to Me.*

On the face of it this may seem to mean that a good devotee is devoid of all emotions, his physical existence amounting to a big zero; he is as good as dead. That is not what is meant here.

Gloating means allowing oneself to be carried on the wings of the sense of achievement when a rare gain is at hand, with a comparison with others that he has been proven better. The feeling is subtle and therefore difficult to identify from happiness. ‘*Dvesha*’ is more than dislike; it is hate which induces permanent aversion. ‘*Kanksha*’ (expectation) is now identified by almost all modern psychologists as the root cause of disappointment and loneliness in human relations. What they have learned now has been identified by these wise ancients thousands of years ago. If you want to live happy, you shouldn't expect; but rather learn to love and give and provide, and the world will reciprocate. Only when relations become so fostered can you effectively convey what you want; but then it would cease to be an expectation. Love without expecting anything back is the method of true devotion to the Lord too. In any challenge in the material world also, the equation is doing our best without expecting anything. We had seen that in the path of karma yoga in detail.

The mind goes on classifying experiences, objects and events into the ‘good’ and ‘bad’. What ‘falls’ on you is not entirely under your control. Then why classify it and trap the mind into it? Some people think; “O God, why does all

such things happen to me?" They are in the habit of counting the fortunate and the unfortunate things that happens to them. Detachment from such silly thought processes helps maintain peace of mind so as to concentrate on the Supreme all the time.

saṁahā śatru ca mitre ca tathā mānāpamānayoḥ  
śītoṣṇasukhaduhkheṣu samaḥ saṅgavivarjitaḥ 12.18  
tulyanindāstutir maunī samtuṣṭo yena kenacit  
aniketaḥ sthiramatir bhaktimān me priyo naraḥ 12.19

*He who perceives the same in foe and friend, in honor and dishonor, in cold and heat and in pleasure and pain, who is free of attachment, who is equally silent in censure and praise, content, the aniketa, steady of intellect, full of devotion – that man is close to Me.*

This verse does not mean how we deal with friend and foe or cold and heat; it deals with what we perceive as common in all these. It does not mean we shouldn't defend ourselves from traps sprung by vicious people, nor does it mean we shouldn't protect ourselves from cold and heat. It doesn't mean we should expose ourselves to degrading situations where we can be insulted.

This verse indicates the level of mental maturity one has to reach regarding all these opposites. Honor is what accentuates the image of 'I'. It is the same image that makes one think of 'defeating' his foe. Egoism is at the root of these distinctions derived at by the intellect. As the categorization goes on more friend-enemy duos and honor-dishonor events present themselves. The noose gets gradually tightened (by oneself). If egoism is reigned in, intelligence gets free from the vicious circle releasing the mind too from unsettling experiences.

Heat and cold are experiences at the level of the body. In philosophy the combination of these two words is used to mean all that affects the body just as the term 'pleasure and pain' refers to all that affects the mind. (The thought of fire does not burn the mind; one's loving nature remains unchanged even if deported to Antarctica.) The heat-cold duality has varying ranges of desirability. In temperate climates a 'warm' reception is welcome whereas in the equatorial regions 'cool' is more comfortable. If a finger dipped in hot water is soon immersed in water not so very hot, the water feels cold. Pleasure often metamorphoses itself into pain and vice versa like a foe turning a friend and the reverse of it.

Insults and praises target our egotism. None wastes time insulting or praising the selfless. A flower is not spoken to in praise by anyone enjoying its beauty

and fragrance. None stands back to insult a gutter however badly it stinks. No washer-man likes, dislikes, honors, dishonors or thanks the stone he uses. Let the bubble of egotism burst and one is instantly free!

There is an easy way to uproot egotism from one's makeup. Cut short all talk related to one's own opinion – internal as well as external. The more one talks or listens to such trash the more egoistic one becomes. Even great orators often get carried away and come up with what would have been better left unsaid! The arrow issuing from one's bow is said to be easier to be held back than the word ensuing from one's mouth. It is words we utter to the outside world or within us, and the deeds that we do or plan to do, that cause honor, dishonor, insult or praise to others and ourselves. Therefore the way to peace is external and internal silence in all matters related to pride. Whether someone praises or insults, the way of the devotee is not to heed it.

We belabor to amass enough to meet all demands for umpteen generations. But we cannot be sure of even the earth under our feet or even our own heartbeat the next second! What is actually needed is the firm conviction that if we stick to the wisest path, everything will be fine from here to eternity, not only for us but for the entire universe. If this outlook gets common all misery on earth will vanish. Not even the cruellest of leopards hunt and kill with a view to store enough to meet its lifelong requirement. In other words, it all boils down to the issue of capital. The world's resources are nobody's private property. The science of economics will have to be entirely re-constructed.

Dogs are (falsely) accused of a desire to see the house of its master burn down so that it can sleep comfortably in the warm ash of it. This, in fact, is a dig at the dark desires hidden in human minds. Man, a creature of habits, builds addictive associations with various aspects and facilities available wherever he lives, to pick them up. These imprison one in the tentacles of mental moorings. 'Aniketa' is one who avoids this. Rolling stones are proverbially supposed not to carry any moss. A devotee should be wary about gaining such fixed habits that stifle freshness and spontaneity and suffocate creativity. The verse does not mean one should be constantly changing his house or whereabouts; the focus is on changing internal rigidness.

Thirty-six qualities of a devotee have been outlined so far. A close look at these qualities reveals a common feature – each one helps to abate egotism, selfishness, greed and possessiveness and saves one from exclusive body-consciousness so as to lead to awareness of the real self which is the essence of the universe.

ye tu dharmyāmṛtam idam yathoktam paryupāsate

śraddadhānā matparamā bhaktāḥ te/tīva me priyāḥ 12.20

*They who think of Me as the highest goal and follow this nectar of dharma with sraddha in the right way as described above, I consider such devotees as indeed very close to Me.*

It is very significant that in this chapter of the Bhagavad Gita which exclusively deals with devotion, nowhere is anything about any ritualistic act of worship, idol or yajna mentioned. Temples or temple culture does not figure in it. The information provided pertains to lifestyle and mental outlook the devotee has to adopt to reach the highest state of being, and it is established that true devotion means adherence to these qualities. Noisy *bhajans*, clamoring and hysteria are not the way. Devotion is not meant for any particular class, creed, caste, sex, color or country. Nobody is excluded. There is no hint that anyone anywhere has any bit more right, scope or priority on the path of devotion. No priest or middleman is required. ‘*Manava*’ (man) is the benefactor. All are cordially invited to the delicious nectar of *bhakti* (devotion) lovingly served.

## Chapter 13

# Yoga of Kshetra and Kshetrajna

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Irrespective of whether animate or inanimate, everything in the universe is considered a body. Combinations of small bodies of various sizes and kinds constitute larger bodies. There are many levels – beginning with the smallest particle to the entire cosmos. The distinction between the ‘live’ and the ‘dead’ is merely based on physical behavior of the body.

The character and constitution of bodies are closely scrutinized to evince the presence and nature of the soul or *Paramātma*. Of the two methods science employs – a) drawing universal conclusions from results of observations confirmed by experiments, and b) starting with a conceptual vision and verifying it by logical analysis as well as thought and practical experiments – Vedanta mostly depends on the latter and also believes that the life and awareness of the researcher itself constitute the best laboratory and machinery for the work. (The first method also won’t work at the second and third levels of fundamental reality). Complicated and costly contraptions and grant-in-aids are not envisaged. Gita sifts the grain from the chaff from among findings of all and one who went this way since the first days of knowledge, integrates the essence of it all and presents an eminently overpowering vision. Introduced along with this is the technology of the ‘practical routine’ to test it in one’s own life.

This part of the text of the Gita deals with one of the most intriguing aspects of Vedantic vision – how the soul is established within the human body and in what way it is in yoga with the body.

arjuna uvāca  
prakṛtiṁ puruṣam caiva kṣetram kṣetrajñam eva ca  
etad veditum icchāmi jñānam jñeyam ca keśava 13.1

*Arjuna said:*

*O Kesava, I yearn to know about prakṛti, purusha, kshetra, Kshetrajna, the nature of knowledge itself and what is there to be known.*

*Prakṛti* and *Purusha* are technical terms used in Sankhya philosophy. The question shows that Arjuna is now in the position of the seeker, and also that these ideas have been confused by the divergence of views on the subject prevalent at the time. Arjuna wants to know whether the two concepts referred in the previous chapters correspond to the meanings given in the Sankhya philosophy, and if not what the difference is. He also wants clarification on the *kshetra* concept. And in addition to defining what real knowledge is, Arjuna wants to know what remains to be known so that his knowledge can be complete.

Of the six topics indicated by Arjuna, the *kshetra* and the *Kshetrajna* concepts are taken up first for elucidation, as they serve as gateways to the other four.

śrībhagavān uvāca  
idam śarīram kaunteya kṣetram ity abhidhīyate  
etad yo vetti tam prāhuḥ kṣetrajña iti tadvidah 13.2

*The Lord of all kshetra said:*

*O Arjuna, this very body is termed kshetra. The one who knows it well enough is called Kshetrajna by the wise.*

‘*Kshetra*’ literally means ‘that which is subject to degeneration and (therefore) transient’; it also means ‘field’. The word ‘*sarira*’ (meaning ‘body’) implies the ever-decaying stature of all living bodies. The body goes on shedding cells which are more than replaced during childhood but after a stage, the scale gets tilted. ‘*Idam sariram*’ means this human body. *Kshetra* is called temple. Translated literally to English, it means “this body is the temple of God”.

Parallel to the three levels of reality in the universe – *Kshara*, *Akshara* and *Isvara* – there are three levels to the body: *stula sarira* (the physical, perishable), *sukshma sarira* (the field corresponding to the body in the *Akshara*) and *karana sarira* (the presence of the *Paramātma*). The third is the *Kshetrajna* or the one that knows all about the *kshetra* (the one with *jnana* about the *kshetra*). It is the same in all *kshetras* and therefore is the total of all knowledge.

kṣetrajñam cāpi mām viddhi sarvakṣetreṣu Bhārata  
kṣetrakṣetrajñayor jñānam yat taj jñānam matam mama 13.3

*O descendant of Bharata (Arjuna), know me as the Kshetrajna of all*

*kshetras. Knowledge according to Me is the same as wisdom regarding the kshetra and the Kshetrajna.*

*Kshetrajna* resides not only in bodies small, big, living and non-living; it pervades the entire universe. Therefore it is omniscient. In contrast, information gathered from outside by the organs of perception can at best only be relative. Our senses gather information on the basis of opposites. For instance, the sense of heat depends on the sense of cold. Absolute knowledge can be gained only through thoroughly independent perception and uninhibited observation. Knowledge at the physical level can lead only to techniques for manipulating the material world (*aparā vidya*). Science had confined itself mostly to this category. Of late, however, scientists are recognizing this limitation. *Aparā vidya* itself, when learnt well, can help realize its own limitations. Take any field of study in science – any scholar in any specialty cannot help but wonder at the complexity of creation.

For proper progress the proverbial horse has to be taken to its right place at the front of the cart. Instead of allowing the mind to be controlled by the inputs from the senses and the intellect to be driven by such a mind, wisdom should be the charioteer and the horses in their right place. *Aparā vidya* should be led by wisdom.

tat kṣetram् yac ca yādṛk ca yadvikāri yataś ca yat  
sa ca yo yatprabhāvaś ca tat samāsena me śṛṇu 13.4

*What that kshetra is and what its nature is, and with what all inclinations, from how (and in what manner) it has formed, who that Kshetrajna is and what all unique attributes He has, you may now hear from Me in brief.*

‘That’ *kshetra* means the human body referred earlier.

ṛṣibhir bahudhā gītam् chandobhir vividhaiḥ pṛthak  
brahmaśūtrapadaiś caiva hetumadbhir viniścitaīḥ 13.5

*Rishis (researchers) of old have put it in very many diverse ways. Again, even in the Vedas the mode and style of presentations vary. Brahma sutra treats the subject strictly logically leaving no ground for doubt.*

This resembles the way a well learned professor begins a class. After naming the subject, the diversity of views as well as the differences in opinion made by

the forerunners is mentioned as general introduction. The text he is going to depend upon is then introduced, and also the reason for this selection.

It has to be remembered here that Brahma sutra too is the work of Vyasa, the author of the Bhagavad Gita. The reference here is to point out why Brahma sutra had to be composed – it was to put an end to the prevailing confusion. But this subject is not found to be discussed in such a fashion in the Brahma sutra text available now. The only inference is that the Brahma sutra text, like some of the other major ancient works, has also been subjected to truncations and loss of parts along with polluted additions through the passage of eons.

mahābhūtāny ahamkāro buddhir avyaktam eva ca  
indriyāṇi daśaikam ca pañca cendriyagocarāḥ 13.6  
icchā dveṣah sukham duḥkham samghātaś cetanā dhṛtiḥ  
etat kṣetram samāsena savikāram udāhṛtam 13.7

*The kshetra (body) can be briefly described as constituted by the five basic elements (bhumi, vayu, jalam, agni and akasa), ahamkara, intellect and Avyakta – the five sense organs and five organs for action, the mind and the five subjects with which the sensory organs interact with – this combine has inclinations of desire, hatred, pleasure and sorrow; samghatha, chetana and dhriti.*

The build and character of the physical body is dealt with first. To go beyond it to the nature of the *Kshetrajna* and *prakṛti*, the body has to be studied well first, along the way it is related to the higher levels. Once the organs of perception are rightly employed to gather knowledge of the surroundings conductive to looking inside, one is ready.

The five basic elements are matter in the three states plus space and radiation. *Avyakta* is the ever-pervading dialectical medium. The 24 principles of the Sankhya philosophy are enumerated along with four instincts and three qualities.

The structure of the body is detailed. *Avyakta* is the fabric of space on which the body manifests as the *samghatha* (assembly) of numerous units of matter-waves. Aided by the dialectical nature of Akshara which is inherent in the component of these wave forms (for example, the dialectical crest and trough of the wave) the senses are sustained based on their nature of opposite interactions with their ‘subjects’. *Ahamkara* is the state of being a separate entity, which starts from the atomic level, grows with molecular growth and finally evolves to the body. *Samghatha* is the tendency for assembly and coordination, which is reflected from the molecular level up to the level of the organ systems in the

background of *Avyakta*. *Chetana* is the purposeful life force of the living assembly, and *dhriti* the inherent stable strength (fortitude or stamina) of the body that forms vitality and also bears injury and pain and repairs and recoups. The mind is the coordination point between the dialectical sensory inputs and memory of their experiences; and the intellect is the seat of reason and decisions.

Instincts sustain the body. Conclusions from perceptions based on the desire-hate and pleasure-pain opposites guide to comfortable existence.

Today we are fortunate to have the means to elaborately study the human body. Modern biology, especially anatomy and physiology study aspects of all organs including those of action and those of sensory inputs and the *samghatha* (assembly of organ systems); and more about thought processes of the mind and intellect can be learned with some help from psychology. Study of *chetana* can be further advanced by knowledge about the material codes – genetics and DNA, based on which *vasanas* (instincts) are expressed from the cellular level to the level of the entire body. The DNA is the manifest blueprint through which these patterns are transmitted across generations. (Codes and blueprints are more suggestive of intelligence behind them rather than random events.) The basic elements (*pancha bhuta*) and how they are associated in the body are well discussed under modern biochemistry.

*Avyakta* is not yet in the purview of modern science.

amānitvam adambhitvam ahimsā kṣāntir ārjavam  
ācāryopāsanam śaucam sthairyam ātmavinigrahaḥ 13.8  
indriyārtheṣu vairāgyam anahamkāra eva ca  
janmamṛtyujarāvyādhiduhkhadoṣānudarśanam 13.9  
asaktir anabhiṣvaṅgaḥ putradāragṛhādiṣu  
nityam ca samacittatvam iṣṭāniṣṭopapattiṣu 13.10  
mayi cānanyayogena bhaktir avyabhicāriṇī  
viviktadeśasevitvam aratir janasamsadi 13.11  
adhyātmajñānanityatvam tattvajñānārthadarśanam  
etaj jñānam iti proktam ajñānam yad ato/nyathā 13.12

*Amanitva, adambhitva, ahimsa, kshanti, arjava, acharya upasana, saucha, sthairyam, atmavinigraha, vairagya from the senses and anahamkara; understanding that birth, death, jara and vyadhi constitute sorrow and pain; asakti; knowledge that one's kids, wife and home aren't everything; perceiving sameness behind all that bring about like and dislike; bhakti in Me which does not waver by entering into anything else; selecting to live in a country which is devoid of violence and impure nature (living in a place which is clean and*

*culturally habitable); disinterest in crowds; stable stance in adhyatma vidya; and always checking one's experiences with the knowledge pertaining to the ātma:- knowledge means all these. Whatever are not these is all ignorance.*

*Amanitva* = the feeling that one is not greater than any other, not resorting to 'ballooning' of the ego, humility. *Adambhitva* = unassuming, not to act with complexity, not intent on showing off one's prowess, not putting up a show of greatness or richness. *Ahimsa* = lack of the tendency to hurt, a quality attained by overcoming the division of 'mine' and 'yours'. These qualities can be attained easily if the feeling 'I am my body alone' is done away with.

*Kshanti* = the ability to endure. *Arjava* = straightforwardness born out of courage of conviction. *Acharya upasana* = worship of the wisdom of the *guru* (teacher). *Saucha* = cleanliness of mind and body, such as bathing and elimination of bad thoughts. *Sthairyā* = firm sense of target. *Atmavinigraha* = control over the cravings of the mind and the senses. *Vairagya* = understanding that sensual pleasures are small and insignificant. *Anahamkara* = not having egotism; the state in which one realizes one is no more than instrumental in any action.

*Jara* = sensual cravings even during the ravages of old age like fallen tooth, wrinkled skin and weak and tremulous limbs. *Vyadhi* = disease.

*Asakti* = nonattachment.

Disinterest in crowds also means being averse to mass hysteria. Meditation is a strictly individual enterprise; mass psychosis will prove only a deterrent.

The Upanishads advice to live for a century expertly indulging in well-meant earthly action; they do not advocate discarding the enormous capacity for physical action the body is endowed with, renouncing human life and trying to live like a log of wood. And all that one does should help progress on the path towards the ultimate truth.

jñeyam̄ yat tat pravakṣyāmi yaj jñātvāmṛtam/aśnute  
anādimat param̄ brahma na sat tan nāsad ucyate 13.13

*What is to be known, and with what knowledge one obtains immortality, I will tell you now. It is beginning-less and higher to brahma. It cannot be termed sat or asat.*

There are two problems on the way to knowing Paramātma: a) it has no beginning and b) it is neither the apparent nor the hidden substrate. Man finds it difficult to understand anything beyond simple space and time. Existence of a

thing is ‘felt’ only if it is within the limits of our experience. In other words, anything unborn is perceived nonexistent; same way, anything that is not explicitly or implicitly discernible with the sense organs too is thought of in the same way.

What we experience as real are the phenomena of the physical world. These in fact are merely apparent (*asat*). These have definite beginning and end. *Paramātma* does not, so it cannot be any of these. *Akshara* – the substrate or universal medium or *parā prakṛti* – is the next higher level of reality in the universe. (Though real, *sat* is beyond perception by our sense organs and, therefore, apparently nonexistent to us.) But *Paramātma* is not even that because *Akshara* is dialectical and also endowed with the three *gunas* (the three tendencies). *Paramātma* has no attributes; It is at the highest level of reality – beyond *Kshara* and *Akshara*. It is *aksharatita*. (Verses 3 & 4 of the next chapter and verses 15 to 18 of chapter 15 will shed more light on the three levels of reality.) Hurdles on the path to knowing the *Paramātma* can be cleared only with the conviction that the same beginning-less and beyond-the-senses reality resides in us too. Identification with it is complete when it is realized that this very knowledge itself is It.

sarvataḥ pāṇipādaṁ tat sarvato/kṣīsiromukham  
sarvataḥ śrutimal loke sarvam āvṛtya tiṣṭhati 13.14

*That which has feet, legs, heads, eyes, faces and ears everywhere, and exists by pervading everything in the universe.*

The statement that it has hands, legs, etc. everywhere is not to be taken literally. The picture was explained earlier in chapter 11 (Visvarupa). Our *kshetra* (body) is compared with the *kshetra* of the universe. Every movement in the universe is an action of that body. It sees, hears, tastes and eats in numerous ways. It includes all other *kshetras*. *Paramātma* is the *soul* of that body. It is fully present in all and every part of the universe.

The Upanishads generally explain the concept of the *Paramātma* through negations. ‘*Neti, neti*’ (nor this and neither that) is the way. Ascribable qualities are negated one by one like *asthulam ananu* (neither big nor small). In sharp contrast with it, Gita says compassionately ‘*iti iti*’ (this is it, that is it). It is like pointing to the depths of the ocean to indicate the target instead of negating everything the seeker brings up after strenuous diving.

So how is the universal soul present in this body? From the next verse onwards we enter into the details of this intriguing yoga.

sarvendriyaguṇābhāsam̄ sarvendriyavivarjitam  
asaktam̄ sarvabhṛc caiva nirguṇam̄ guṇabhoktr̄ ca 13.15

*It lights the sense organs but itself has no sense organs. Though it does not join with anything (the parts of the body described in previous verses), it forms the foundation to all. It has no gunas (three flavors or characters) but experiences all gunas.*

How does the Paramātma light the sense organs but be without them? Different wavelengths of light that meet the eye are coded as impulses and taken to the brain. It is the mind that distinguishes between darkness and light and also ‘experiences’ different colors. We do not see them as wavelengths at all; we see them in the illusion of colors. The visible spectrum is just a narrow band of the vast range of electromagnetic radiations.

Similarly, out of the few waves of sound of limited range of wavelengths the ears are geared to gather, the brain perceives various ‘tones’ which the mind categorizes as music, noise etc. Again, the audible range is a very small part of the available bonanza of sound waves.

The mind distinguishes differences in body contact through nerve-ends that respond to stimuli in various categories – touch, pressure and pain. The nerve-ends together provide a wide range of orchestrated experiences. Pain is actually illusory because it is nothing but what the mind assumes when a particular type of nerve ending is stimulated. We can perform any painless surgery when the particular nerve innervating that area is anesthetized. During unconsciousness also there is no pain.

Of the things that dissolve on the tongue, the mind recognizes the contact with various chemical substances as sweet, sour, salty and bitter. All of these are illusory because it is only felt so by the mind and we never know the real chemical nature of these foods. Desirable combinations of these are termed tasty and vice versa. In the same way, chemicals that enter the nostrils are experienced as good or bad smell by the mind.

The leaf appears green as it absorbs all other wavelengths of the visible spectrum and reflects a certain wavelength alone. It is not ‘green’; we ascribe that name to the color the mind has assumed for that particular wavelength. We create the picture of the world as our mind sees it based on sensory inputs we get. If we look at the world from the next higher level Akshara, we will be aware of oscillations (waves) of Akshara everywhere and nothing else. The third level of reality is at a still higher plane. Viewed from that level, the observer, the

observed, light and darkness – all become inseparable, and awareness transcends illusions of sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell – and of course – pain. Being on that level, one is the knower of everything, yet freed from all illusions including pain and death.

Our senses are enlivened by Paramātma. But the senses and their illusions do not ‘fool’ It. Similarly, all ‘sense organs’ anywhere in the bodies of the cosmos are lighted by Paramātma but these are not illusory to It; neither does It need any of these to know or exist.

And that’s not all. Most of us believe that there are only so many types of sense organs that we have. But there are more. Some animals have senses different from ours. Bats for instance ‘see’ by sound. Migratory birds use a sense that we do not have. They make use of the geomagnetic field to navigate thousands of kilometers across continents and oceans.

Though Paramātma is the foundation for any part of the body, it is not attached to any. How is that possible? Avyakta is the fabric of space from which all matter-waves of the body originate. In fact the body is nothing but an assembly of numerous tiny wave-forms of Avyakta oscillating with the energy seeded by the Paramātma (seeding is to be discussed later in chapter 14 verses 3 to 5). The Paramātma is also what creates the master pulsation of Avyakta, giving rise to the big bang and the energy present in all these waves (both matter and electromagnetic waves).

The universe is made by the three tendencies (gunas) of Akshara. (Akshara is Avyakta plus its resonance, denoted by the letter Om). But these gunas being the components of wave forms in Avyakta do not act on the Paramātma. The relationship is exemplified by that between air and the raincloud. The latter stands in the former but cannot wet it by any amount of downpour.

How does the *Paramātma* ‘experience’ the gunas? The three characters – sattva, rajas and tamas form the basis of interaction of all actions in the Kshara world. The True Self illuminating all the sense organs knows all opposite experiences arising from them in accurate manner. Illuminating the mind and the intellect, the True Self – the *Kshetrajna* – has jnana (knowledge) of all thought processes and emotions as the mind’s reflections. Being beyond the body, the ātma knows death and the illusion of pain but does not die or feel pain. Being beyond the universe, the ātma knows heat and cold but is not burnt in the big bang nor is frozen at absolute zero temperature. Being beyond *Avyakta*, It knows space but is not confined, and is both near and far at the same time. In fact this is the only level It directly interacts, seeding *Akshara* and causing the pulsation of the universe, the resonance of which determines the absolute time; but being beyond *Akshara* itself, It knows time but is not limited by time – It is timeless.

bahir antaś ca bhūtānām acaram caram eva ca  
sūkṣmatvāt tad avijñeyam dūrastham cāntike ca tat 13.16

*It resides inside and outside all bodies irrespective of whether animate or inanimate. It is there far away and also very near. (But) as it is all-pervading, it cannot be cognized by the sense organs.*

Each and every body that shifts position from anywhere to anywhere else cannot be out of It as It is all-pervasive; however far or in whichever direction anything moves. This is because space itself is a product of Akshara, and Paramātma is the One beyond Akshara itself. As It is beyond space It is very near as well as very far. (This also implies that for those who know It, It is near and vice versa.) It is not discernible by the sense organs as It is at the deepest level of reality. We cannot see electricity with the bulb. It is said that the cause is subtler than the effect; the subtlest, the ultimate cause, is all-pervading, so it cannot be measured, shifted or dissected with any instrument. All parts of the knowledge-gathering-processing equipment we have – the sense-mind-intellect combine – are Its products, pervaded by It and ‘lighted’ by It. Therefore It is beyond the reach of routine cognition.

There are several limits to the mind. It does not even know how many organs there are in the body, in what shape they are, and in what all ways they work; unless it gathers that information from external sensory sources (through reading or hearing). Therefore the mind is no more than a mirror for the inputs from the sense organs plus memory of these experiences. The intellect only thinks and rationalizes over the images in the mind. And one is ‘conscious’ only when the sense organs and the mind are awake. So it is obvious that all three – mind, intellect and consciousness – pertain purely to the Kshara level. It is the Paramātma which illuminates the sense organs, mind and consciousness alike. Wakeful consciousness (*jagrat*) depends on the sense organs and mind and is incomparable to cognizance at the highest level. At the ultimate level of reality there are no sense organs separate from each other or an organ of mind separate from what it knows.

The highest state was called *turiya* by the ancient sages, which is beyond the *jagrat* (wakeful consciousness), *swapna* (dreaming state) or *sushupti* (deep sleep / unconscious state). It is through meditation that at least some aspect of being one with the ātma can be experienced – by turning off both sensory stimuli and thoughts in the mind, and traversing material consciousness. The same state of ‘unaware union’ can also be sampled through karma yoga, wisdom reaching to

the highest level and devotion.

avibhaktam ca bhūteṣu vibhaktam iva ca sthitam  
bhūtabhartṛ ca taj jñeyam grasiṣṇu prabhaviṣṇu ca 13.17

*What is to be known sits as if divided in various bodies, but it is indivisible; it is to be understood as (the base) that which gives birth to, governs and dissolves back all bodies.*

We may think that inside each and every one of our bodies there is a different soul. “Your life is separate from me because I see you separate. Your mind is separate. You feel pain separately. I hear you talk. You can walk away. Your thinking is different. I bump into you. We do not breathe together. Our hearts are different. Even if you die I will continue living.” But the truth is that it only appears that way, different life is an illusion. *It sits as if divided but It is indivisible.* The reasons we perceive it as divided and different is because we confuse the soul with *jeeva*, the purposeful life instinct of the assembly of organ systems (*samghatha*). That is why people believe it as ‘leaving’ the body at death. This apparent life itself has its foundation in the soul or *Paramātma*. The inputs from the sense organs like pain and pleasure, the conclusions in the mind, the consciousness which comes from sensory and mental awareness, and the *samghatha* which is the separate assembly of organ systems permitting us to move and live as separate entities make us ignorant about the soul but aware of only the apparent or manifest life form. It does not mean that the *ātma* (soul) in you is different from mine. It is possible to transplant the heart or liver or kidney. The nervous system is the central coordination unit of the *samghatha*, and medical science assumes brain death as conclusive. But death is nothing but disintegration of the *samghatha* or ceasing of functioning of the body as a single unit. Even after brain death, the life of other tissues and organs systems can be maintained by adequate medical support. We can indefinitely prolong life in a brain-dead body. Organs can be donated after death. It is also possible with tissue culture to independently grow organs of the human body. *Chetana*, the individual life instinct of the *samghatha*, can be manipulated by genetic recombination. It is even possible to clone beings.

The logic is simple – just like there is a fabric of space from which all matter and energy waves are manifested, there is a soul from which all individual purposeful life forms are manifested.

All these apparent manifestations are controlled and dictated by *prakṛti* (nature), and nothing takes place in the manifest world (*Kshara*) contradictory to

its rules. Continuity of the human body is further demonstrated at the atomic level in *Avyakta*. The body is composed of matter waves, and moving occurs by transferring its energy to the adjacent *Avyakta* so that a different part can claim its wave action. In other words the body is not different from the surroundings; the illusion of difference arises only at the macroscopic level. Indeed in Vedanta it is customary to consider both the sensory organ and its subject as one; for example sight and the vision it sees are considered one and the same.

*Paramātma* is nothing to be ‘reached’, neither is it a target to be ‘attained’ at death. This is because all and everybody are already in it. We have to be aware of it to climb those steps of higher awareness and knowledge by which our own ‘short’ life is better fulfilled. But people generally are not aware because for all living things that perceive with the sense organs, recognize with the mind and know with routine consciousness, the material world is daylight and awareness of the *Paramātma* is shrouded as the darkness of night. Only for the wise that have outgrown the sense organs and the mind is it the other way.

A glance at outer space reveals unfathomable depths of ‘vacant spaces’. It is a common mistake to think that the celestial bodies and their clusters that radiate and attract are the depositories of *Paramātma* and the spaces in between are devoid of It. The truth is: it pervades the entire universe without break.

The range of wavelengths that the eye can observe is termed light by us. But ‘enlightening’ or ‘illuminating’ is often used as another word for *Paramātma* in Vedanta. What is the difference?

jyotiṣām api taj jyotis tamasāḥ param ucyate  
jñānam jñeyam jñānagamyam hr̥di sarvasya viṣṭhitam 13.18

*The source that enlightens all luminous bodies (like the sun) is said to be beyond darkness too. It is what is to be known, knowledge itself, and also what is to be obtained through knowledge; it resides at the heart of all (bodies).*

All bodies mean both animate and inanimate objects. Heart does not mean the anatomical blood-pumping organ but the conceptual aspect of the body hosting the *ātma*.

Just as eyes cannot see in the dark, we need light inside to see our own thoughts and emotions. That ‘light’ is the manifestation of *Paramātma*, but *Paramātma* ‘enlightens’ light and darkness in equal measure. Light is dialectically related to darkness. Light is indebted to the surrounding darkness for its brilliance as much as a shadow is indebted to light for its birth. *Paramātma* is not dialectical. It is wherefrom both light and darkness originate.

(Even while wisdom is compared to light as against the darkness of ignorance, the ‘light’ that Paramātma is credited with is the one that illuminates both.) Modern cosmology has located sources of darkness as well as those of light. There are ‘sources’ that absorb light as vehemently as some others that radiate it. Black holes can be said to radiate darkness.

iti kṣetram tathā jñānam jñeyam coktam sanāsataḥ  
madbhakta etad vijñāya madbhāvāyopapadyate 13.19

*The kshetra (human body), jnana (true knowledge) and the jneyam (right knowledge to be known) are thus briefly and clearly told. When a devotee who seeks me in right earnest is able to grasp well this knowledge, he can identify himself with my state.*

What we saw were a set of very important verses which explained in detail the yoga of the ātma (*Kshetrajna*) with the human body. Understanding these will clear any person’s doubts in this regard and help to identify with the ātma within, and also grasp the significance of why the body is called the temple of God, and how the *Kshetrajna* is in yoga with the body as well as the entire universe.

prakṛtim puruṣam caiva viddhy anādi ubhāv api  
vikārāñś ca gunāmś caiva viddhi prakṛtisambhavān 13.20

*Know that prakṛti as well as purusha are beginning-less (forever). Also know that (all) emotions and gunas are born out of prakṛti.*

God is perceived as the Father and Nature as the Mother in many cultures. The two universal constants – male and female, can be extrapolated to describe the two entities in Vedanta also. The three levels of reality are the *Purushottama*, *Akshara* and *Kshara*. *Purushottama* (*Isvara*) provides the seeding for the *Kshara* world at the start of the primary pulse which manifests as the universe (to be discussed in verses 3 and 4 of the next chapter), resulting in all entities in the *Kshara* world getting manifested from the *Akshara*. Thus the *Purushottama* and *Akshara* can be described as *purusha* and *prakṛti* respectively – the Universal Father and Mother. They are eternal whereas the material world gets cyclically manifested and dissolved. The word *prakṛti* means nature. Here the verse implies the *parā prakṛti* (hidden nature of the *Avyakta* and its resonance; the Mother Nature beyond the apparent nature. We have seen verses discussing *parā*

and *aparā* nature before – verses 7.4, 7.5 and 7.6). *Parā prakṛti* is dialectical and based on the three *gunas* – the *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, which, acting in total form the resonant nature of the entity. How the *gunas* become instrumental in forming these patterns in obvious nature and produce the various emotions and dispositions (inherent in entities of nature including human beings) are all discussed in detail in chapter 14. Interactions and the various degrees of combinations of these *gunas* are responsible for both the action-reaction patterns in nature and also the unapparent emotions that work in the background.

kārya kāraṇa kartr̄tve hetuh prakṛtir ucyate  
puruṣah sukhaduhkhānām bhoktr̄tve hetur ucyate 13.21

*Prakṛti* is said to be the reason for the *karya-karana* (cause-effect) relationships within the body. *Purusha* is said to be the reason for the experiences of pleasure and pain.

All cause-and-effect interactions have their origin from the background, i.e., the mother nature or *parā prakṛti*. Action-reaction patterns based on these work within the human body also. *Purusha* resides in the body and illuminates all experiences resulting from these cause-effect interactions including pleasure and pain.

The sense organs apprehend their respective subjects (*vishayas*). The mind classifies these inputs. The intellect decides their level of tolerance; the organs for action (*karma indriyas*) act accordingly. *Parā prakṛti* is said to be the cause of making of all of these, while *Purusha* provides the light for experiencing these interactions.

Events in the material world and our equipment to handle them are born (brought about) by *prakṛti*. From blood circulation to digestion of food, all functions of the body depend on action-reaction patterns in nature. The integration of these functions keeps the body functional. Internal organs go on even while one is unconscious.

The decision making intellect too act through the action-reaction chain of *prakṛti*. Most of the decisions we take depend on our reaction patterns which come naturally from the light of previous experiences, plus *vasanas* (innate tendencies) imprinted earlier in the subconscious and the DNA. Thus even reluctance, rethinking and even the decision not to think any more are all much influenced by *prakṛti* – nature.

In a different situation or at another time or in the case of another person, the decisions are different but the process of decision making remains same and

comes through the same route. Yet even though nature has such a large role in decision making, the intellect has a tendency to assume that this is purely ‘my’ decision. Once the reaction patterns that lead to decisions are identified properly, the intellect can be integrated with nature. It is the ego that assumes ‘I am different’, ‘It is my decision’ and so on.

This does not mean that those who know the truth will not think or decide at all. They do, with the difference that they know at the same time how it all comes about so that egotism can be discarded.

In the body pleasure and pain are apparently brought in by *prakṛti* but these ‘experiences’ are illuminated by the *purusha*. For easier understanding, take a close look at the way one draws a picture. Of course the paints, canvas and brushes are inevitable and are supplied by nature but the picture is the product of imagination and experience. The painters are us. The creativity involved in the painting reflects from the *purusha*. So also is the light by which we can experience happiness in the creation.

puruṣah prakṛtistho hi bhūnkte prakṛtijān guṇān  
kāraṇāṁ guṇasaṅgosya sadasadyonjanmasu 13.22

*(This) purusha, while residing in prakṛti, accepts (samples) the gunas (flavors) emerging from the prakṛti. The involvement of (this) purusha with various kinds of these gunas results in the formation of various bodies (as perceived as) from both good and bad birth canals (sources).*

People not only tend to see different souls in different organisms, but also tend to differentiate them as good or bad. Some see carnivores as bad animals. Some hate cockroaches; some are terrified of spiders and insects. It is the permutation combinations of various macromolecules evolving through patterns based on the three *gunas* of *prakṛti*, with the involvement of the one *Paramātma*, that result in all these varied life forms.

The assembly of organ systems (*samghatha*) grows as a separate living being by the association with the *Paramātma* in *prakṛti*. This growth is based on *ahamkara*, the instinct of being separate which is a basic nature of all beings and which contributes to evolution and differentiation.

The wave action of a particle marks it out from its surroundings; it is stable and separate and thus can be said to have *ahamkara* of its own. As two particles form a union, the new entity acquires an *ahamkara* over and above those of the two building blocks in it. This is the next step in the evolution of ‘ego’ (the feeling that ‘I am separate’), which is essential for evolution of life, but it masks

the *Paramātma*. As the buildup progresses through macromolecules, proteins etc. the mask gets thicker. By the time it reaches man, it assumes highest proportions. In human beings, the Innate Self, the *Paramātma*, is masked by *ahamkara* and the experiences stemming from the sense organs beginning from birth itself, and by the mind which develops based on these experiences. Through these, a separate ‘I’ based on body-consciousness develops, which gradually establishes firm stronghold through the intellect. This ‘I’ comes to believe wrongly that it is the real *Kshetrajna* and there is no other.

This ‘I’ is the progeny of interactions with nature based on action reaction patterns stemming from the three *gunas*, and it works through the intellect depending upon the instincts that person develops in life and also from previous generations. It is further strengthened by pain and pleasure and ensnared to the body through fear and happiness. It becomes stronger through decisions taken by the intellect, which the ‘I’ believes to be entirely its own. Gradually, knowledge about the Real Self becomes more and more difficult to grasp. But when wisdom begins to dawn the True Self is recognized by the mind, and all snares slowly start loosening their grip. Maybe this also signals the end of evolution because the mind now begins to express an instinct to shed all encumbrances and get identified with the soul of the universe. After complete union with the Eternal Self, there is logically no more steps in evolution.

What is this ‘I’? Is it an embodiment of the immortal Self, or just a mortal going through the struggle of life for a small period of time? We have the freedom to choose the answer based on abilities provided by the same *ātma*.

upadraṣṭānumantā ca bhartā bhoktā maheśvarah  
paramātmeti cāpyukto dehe/smin puruṣah paraḥ 13.23

*(This) Purusha who resides in our bodies as sakshi, bharta, bhokta and the Mahesvara; this Paramātma, is acclaimed by all the wise as the greatest.*

These terms have been discussed in detail in chapter 9 verses 11, 18 and 24.

ya evam vetti puruṣam prakṛtim ca guṇaiḥ saha  
sarvathā vartamānopi na sa bhūyo/bhijāyate 13.24

*In this way the one who comprehends purusha and prakṛti with its gunas, whatever be his occupation or situation, will never again have to be born (return into the snares of the material world) again.*

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa says: ‘A room kept in the dark for a thousand years gets illuminated the moment a lamp is lit in it.’ Once one comprehends how the three gunas in *prakṛti* plays such decisive roles in his life, and the role of the *Mahesvara* (the highest God, the True Self) within himself, that person would never be ensnared again. Whatever occupation or social situation he is in, this knowledge would mean total freedom. There is no more scope for ego or envy because he is everything. Whereas any materialistic knowledge will only make the person come back again and again into the ties of apparent reality and there is no ultimate escape from the perishable world hallmarked by death; this is the only knowledge that will save him from all such mental sorrow in a lasting way.

For the ones believing in rebirths, this verse also implies cessation of birth and death cycles.

The bliss of being cannot sustain in a mind haunted by the fear of death. The unwise consider death as the end of everything. But energy transforming itself from one level of reality to another is neither loss nor gain. If ever *prakṛti* loses its dialectical character and goes calm, it does not cease to be; neither does its relationship with *purusha* change any bit. Just as the material world lay latent in *prakṛti* before it blossomed out of it, *prakṛti* then remains latent in *purusha*. This is why it was said earlier that *prakṛti* as well as *purusha* is eternal.

dhyānenātmani paśyanti kecid ātmānam ātmanā  
anye sāṃkhyena yogena karmayogena cāpare 13.25

*Some perceive the Paramātma within themselves through dhyana yoga (yoga of meditation); some others through jnana yoga (yoga of knowledge); still others through karma yoga (yoga of action).*

All three have been described before. These verses are for re-reading and recollection of what has been previously discussed, in the light of knowledge related to the body and the *Kshetrajna*.

When an external object is perceived one becomes just aware of its existence and does not identify oneself with it. But when *Paramātma* is perceived within, it is identification too.

anye tv evam ajānantah śrutvā/nyebhya upāsate  
te/pi cātitaranty eva mr̥tyum śruti-parāyanāḥ 13.26

*Others who do not know how to follow these paths, hear (understand) from*

*others and follow suit. These who thus firmly rely on word of mouth instruction (from the accurately learned) too surely save themselves from the shores of death.*

It does not matter if one cannot see; knowledge can be acquired as long as one can hear; deficiency, if any, can be surmounted by accepting well thought out premises from others and working out the path on that basis. In short, ardent attention can ameliorate any limitation.

What is important is orientation. The impulse to identify oneself with the Eternal Self is like a seed that falls on fertile ground. Once it sprouts it grows on its own.

yāvat samjāyate kiṁcit sattvam sthāvarajaṅgamam  
kṣetrakṣetrajñasamyoगāt tad viddhi bharatarśabha 13.27

*O the greatest in the generation of Bharata (Arjuna), know that whatever entity born (in the universe), moving or unmoving, is the outcome of the yoga between the kshetra (body) and the Kshetrajna (Paramātma).*

What was said in particular about the human body (*idam sarira*) is now generalized. Every body in this world, whether animate or inanimate, has the presence of the *Paramātma*. This presence is the *Kshetrajna*, the One who knows the *kshetra*. It is there in every particle of matter. If this is taken into account while fixing the point of origin of life, entities that do not grow and reproduce can no longer be regarded as ‘soulless’. The Upanishads maintain that even grains of sand carry the hidden capacity of manifest life. The same atoms and molecules in sand form part of a living body under the right associations.

The fortunate prowess to shape his own destiny invests man with a great choice to know that the same soul of the universe is there in everything and everybody, and he should treat all as equal. On the other hand if egotism gets the better of the situation, he will be led to feel superior to all other creations and the same logic will make it imperative on his part to assume *concede superiority amidst his own species*. *It is even assumed and claimed that superiority means the presence of God in larger purer measure, and ultimately some muster enough ignorance to parade the streets claiming they are God itself!*

samam̄ sarveṣu bhūteṣu tiṣṭhantam̄ parameśvaram  
vinaśyatsv avinaśyantam̄ yaḥ paśyati sa paśyati 13.28

*Whosoever sees the forever Paramesvara that exists equally in all creations which, even as one beholds, go out of existence, that person sees the truth.*

*Kshetras* vary in qualities, capabilities and tendencies. But the wise perceive the uniformly present and the most pervading essence in all and not the differences. They know that these differences and even these bodies are ever changing and perishable.

This wisdom removes all dislike for and hatred towards anybody, teaches to outlive revulsion of all kinds and love all as one loves oneself. Two-pronged self-training in this light helps to: a) develop the skill to correct with impeccable tolerance and without animosity anyone indulging in unseemly actions; b) practice personal hygiene without feeling revulsion for anything. Awareness of the soul within one and all motivates one to the two-pronged training and this awareness gets more and more established as it progresses, finally enabling one to experience the presence of the *Paramātma* of the universe everywhere.

Let the exercise begin from the feeling that the other person too has the same soul. Body-centeredness is at the root of all revulsion. A thing is held ‘bad’ if it is likely to hurt the body or the body does not need or like it. It is purely personal, not objective. Millions of micro-organisms thrive on ‘rotten’ stuff; they must love it dearly. At the same time, enough care should be taken to keep one’s body protected, clean and secure.

From nowhere can any ‘help’ or ‘special consideration’ be bought for discerning the truth or identifying oneself with the *ātma* of the universe. Any kind of intermediaries / agencies is summarily ruled out.

samam paśyan hi sarvatra samavasthitam īśvaram  
 na hinasty ātmātāmānam tato yāti parām gatim 13.29

*(Moreover) The one who sees the Isvara pervading everything and everywhere as equal and the same does not destroy (the perception of) the Real Self within oneself, and as a result obtains the highest path.*

Every living thing always tries to enjoy the happiness of being its real self. Man, if not imbued with wisdom regarding himself and the universe, falls short of cultivating it to the consciously enjoyable level. In other words, it amounts to deprival of the bliss of being oneself. The Gita describes this as suicide (destroying the self).

The hitch is the notion ‘I am this body and not that inner self’. Suicide is the net result of the attitude that the sorrows and pleasures of one’s mortal body are

all that there is. To some it happens only once; but to many others a lot more often.

No one can ‘destroy’ the *ātma*. Here destroying the real self means total neglect. (If one ignores another completely, that person is dead to him. Physical suicide is the extreme case where one ‘kills’ the entire world.) The concept of suicide the Gita presents has wide ramifications. Hating comes under its ambit in varying degrees because *Paramātma* is present in all bodies equally. All words, thoughts, expressions and actions that contradict this sense of equality lead to greater and greater ignorance which ties one more to the mortal body and hence is considered the same as suicide.

prakṛtyaiva ca karmāṇi kriyamāṇāni sarvaśah  
yah paśyati tathātmānam akartāram sa paśyati 13.30

*He who sees that all actions of the body (constituted as detailed earlier) are, in every way performed by prakṛti, and, similarly, that his Inner Self only remains as the basis (of life), he sees right.*

We have already discussed how the action reaction patterns in nature work, and also how the intellect is made to believe that everything is performed by the individual.

The world admires ‘self-made’ men. The media often features some and they seem to like it too. Even if it is forgotten that none can ‘father himself’, there is very little anybody can do for himself and even that is not exactly done by ‘him’! Most of that is claimed and said including the statement that ‘I am a self-made man’ is what *prakṛti* has done through the body and the patterns in the intellect. The biggest contribution by the worldly ‘I’ is the ‘feeling proud’ part! Even that is what comes out when a particular tendency interacts with the ways of *prakṛti*! But with more and more indulgences of the kind, the person becomes more and more ignorant.

The wise understand the patterns of nature in the act including within themselves, leading to relinquishment of both egotism and pride in the act and the gloat and boast of victory. The tendency to be vainglorious is absent making one that much closer to identification with *Paramātma*. As water does not wet the lotus leaf born and living in it, results of actions do not add to the layers of ignorance of the liberated and the detached.

yadā bhūtapr̥thagbhāvam ekastham anupaśyati  
tata eva ca vistāram brahma sampadyate tadā 13.31

*When one sees all apparently separate creations as residing in one, and (at the same time he sees) that same unity spread to fill the entirety, that person becomes one with brahma.*

There is infinite diversity in creation. Even among the same genus and species, every individual is different. But all entities reside in *Akshara* as waves in an ocean after being produced by the ocean till dissolution in it. The perishable world blossoms from *Akshara* in a process presided over by *Purushottama*.

One should know this truth and also experience it. As the word ‘*pasyati*’ literally refers to the physical act of seeing, it is meant here as recognition and realization with equal clarity as physical seeing. And the ‘sight’ should stay permanent. When it does there is no room for comparison, sense of loss or gain, intolerance, envy or enmity.

anāditvān nirguṇatvāt paramātmāyam avyayaḥ  
śarīrastho/pi kaunteya na karoti na lipyate 13.32

*O Arjuna, the forever Paramātma, despite its presence in all sarira (human bodies), does nothing and is not mixed (physically reacting) with anything due to its beginning-less and character-free state.*

*Sarira* of so many individuals have come and gone ever since the birth of humankind. The foundation of Vedanta lies in the basic assumption that no living body can exist without a permanent source – one that is not subjected to birth and death. *Paramātma* is that fundamental source. Similarly the ever changing world has to have a basis that is changeless – that is *Akshara*. The *Paramātma* is the cause of life in everything and is un-caused. (We find it hard to imagine a causeless entity because we are thoroughly rooted in the dialectical nature of *Akshara* – a standpoint from which we cannot see beyond the *Kshara* world.) If an entity is there which has to be the basis of all emotions, tendencies, likes, dislikes and proneness to action and interaction, it has to be unaltered by any of these; beginning-less and without wear and tear. Tendencies, by nature, come and go. The existence of this perfect and eternal source had been repeatedly tested and confirmed – not in laboratories worth billions of dollars but in the hearts of those who knew its secret as real experience, by knowing which there remained nothing more to look for and know.

*Prakṛti* (the nature of *Akshara*) is what acts, and the feedback of actions can

therefore affect only the worldly body through its corresponding field in Akshara. The essence, at the ultimate level of reality, ever remains aloof. The situation is illustrated by an example: yathā sarvagatam saukṣmyād ākāśam nopalipyate

sarvatrāvasthito dehe tathātmā nopalipyate 13.33

*Just as akasa (space), though it is present in everything and everywhere due to its capacity to pervade all, is not blemished (by anything), the Paramātma remains unblemished (by anything) despite its full and universal presence.*

*Sukshmatwam* is the capability to pervade deep. Space has it in ample measure. The other four elements exist in space and space pervades them all. Everything from smoke to smell invades space; mountains seem to divide it and clouds appear to hide it. All vessels carry it all the time irrespective of whether they are full of anything else or empty. It is not driven out when a building is erected; it is there even after the building is demolished. Whatever comes and goes does never leave any imprint on it! In the same way the Paramātma is unblemished even though present in all.

Space is the manifestation of *Akshara*, and the *Purushottama* is even beyond this. So, naturally, the latter has *sukshmatwam* to perfection.

yathā prakāśayaty ekaḥ kṛtsnam lokam imam raviḥ  
kṣetram kṣetrī tathā kṛtsnam prakāśayati Bhārata 13.34

*O the one belonging to the generation of Bharata (Arjuna); Paramātma, in the capacity of Kshetrajna of the kshetra (body) of the universe, powers the entire universe just as the one and only one sun powers this world.*

The comparison helps understand the nature of *Paramātma* some more. One: Similar to the *Paramātma*, the sun, all alone, illuminates the entire solar system in an attitude of total detachment – uninterested in the outcome of the action and without feeling proud on any count. Two: The *Paramātma* blossomed the *prakṛti* at the very beginning of the present phase of expansion of the universe, in the same way the sun blossoms the earth. All that the universe has developed into is Its doing. It is unobservable. It is not tarnished by anything happening anywhere. Three: Solar energy becomes many a thing from moonshine to fossil fuels. Similarly the power which originated from the *purusha* transforms in many ways. The force that puts *Akshara* into expansion phase at the beginning of the universe cascades into myriads of forces.

However, the comparison cannot be stretched beyond a point because, whereas one can see the sun illuminating everything on earth, there is no chance to directly observe *Paramātma* powering our mind-intellect combine and everything else around us. (The problem arising when an event at one level of reality is contrasted with an apparently similar one at a different level has been a classical subject of discussion in philosophy. In this context, Guru Nityachaitanya Yati points to the reference to it in Plato's 'Laws'.)

kṣetrakṣetrajñayor evam antaram jñānacakṣuṣā

bhūtaprakṛtimokṣam ca ye vidur yānti te param 13.35

*They who gain wisdom through this insight into the relation and difference between the kshetra and Kshetrajna and also liberation from the material nature of existence, rise to the greatest state of being.*

The material nature of existence is the life of misconception, believing that one is no more than mortal and perceiving wrongly the mortal self as the sole performer of all actions. The invitation is to open one's eyes and see the fundamental realities of both the *Kshetrajna* and the *prakṛti*. The eye that sees the material world alone will not do because the nature of fundamental realities eludes detection as long as the eye that sees is considered different from what is seen. The ways in which *Paramātma* relates itself with the body and at the same time is different from it (yoga of the *Kshetrajna*) have to be rightly understood on the lines explained in these verses.

One rooted in the material state of existence is unaware of the presence of *Paramātma* and experiences pleasure-pain inputs alone. He expresses inclinations upon his instincts as coded on his DNA. Only when the senses-mind-intellect combine calms down and mellows does the real nature of the *ātma* reveal itself. That provides a glimpse of the *Kshetrajna*. No one else can flash a torch and help. One has to do it oneself. Once discovered, It has to be held in steady view till one becomes one with knowledge and also the Knower. This unification provides the greatest and the most lasting bliss available in human life.

Unification is the key word. If the body is considered separate from *Purushottama*, the attempt to identify the former with the latter will prove tough. '*Dvaitat bhayam bhavati*' – sense of dualism leads to fear. Perceive the inner continuity and extent that perception to include one and all.

## Chapter 14

# Yoga of the Three Guna

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How can creations of endless variety including living things form out of the interactions between the *Paramātma* and the *prakṛti*?

Various shades and strengths of the three basic tendencies in *prakṛti* – *rajas* (the urge to expand), *sattva* (the urge to remain stable / neutral) and *tamas* (the urge to contract) give rise to numerous varieties of force-couplets that blossom in dialectical *prakṛti* as permutations and combinations. What is called creation is the product of combination of these forces. The origin of creations can be compared to the development of millions of words in languages out of a few alphabets and the formation of waves of a trillion descriptions out of the same sea. The details of the yoga of these three basic tendencies in forming the framework of the world is explored in this chapter.

śrībhagavān uvāca  
param bhūyah pravakṣyāmi jñānānāṁ jñānam uttamam  
yaj jñātvā munayah sarve parāṁ siddhim ito gatāḥ 14.1

*The Lord of all beings said:*

*What knowledge was instrumental for the muni (thinkers) to achieve the highest siddhi, that noblest and greatest of knowledge I will further reveal to you.*

The opening message of the chapter is to develop a firm footing on this knowledge. The more is heard about it the better. It is also suggested that mere hearing is not enough; one must meditate on the subject and realize the meaning of what is heard. *Muni* are those who do *manana* – contemplation and meditation.

Precaution is to be taken against the word *siddhi* being misunderstood. It literally means ‘what one has obtained’ but is often misused to connote supernatural powers. (A example of the person the Bhagavad Gita considers as

'*siddha*' is mentioned in chapter 10 verse 26.) Here '*siddhi*' is considered to mean natural human capabilities tuned by focus and exercise to reach its highest potential. (Overenthusiastic disciples often narrate stories of how their *guru* showed supernatural powers and during the time of death was raised directly to the skies or was dissolved in a flood of light. Such stories must have been common during that time too.) idam jñānam upāśritya mama sādharmyam āgatāḥ

sargepi no/pajāyante pralaye na vyathanti ca 14.2

*They who get themselves identified with Me (Paramātma) by mastering this knowledge do not get deluded that they are born by the act of creation by prakṛti and do not aggrieve (about getting terminated) as the converse also happens when prakṛti brings about pralaya.*

For the one who has been able to identify himself with *Paramātma*, birth and death are no more than routine happenings in *prakṛti*; the most fundamental reality of the True Self is unaffected by any such. Pralaya pertains to total dissolution of the universe at the end of the expansion cycle and can also be taken to mean the end of the *samghatha* of the individual entity.

mama yonir mahad brahma tasmin garbhām dadhāmy aham  
saṁbhavaḥ sarvabhūtānām tato bhavati bhārata 14.3

*O descendant of the generation of Bharata (Arjuna), the vast Brahma is the birthplace of My creation. In That I impregnate. Thus everything here happens or manifests.*

Brahma is another name for *Akshara* (*parā prakṛti*). The word *brahma* literally means 'that which has the tendency to expand'. This tendency for expansion results from the seeding by the *Paramātma* creating the primordial pulsation – the big bang. The expanding fabric of space or the background substrate for all matter and radiation in the universe is called *Avyakta*.

sarvayoniṣu kaunteya mūrtayah saṁbhavanti yāḥ  
tāsām brahma mahad yonir aham bījapradaḥ pitā 14.4

*O Arjuna, for whatever manifestations or forms taking birth, in any place of birth, the vast Brahma is the true birthplace, and I am the Seeding Father.*

All entities in the universe are born from *prakṛti* (*brahma*) after the primary pulsation. The energy seeded into *Avyakta* drives it to expand explosively, in the process forming numerous oscillatory waves in *Avyakta*. These give rise to matter waves and radiation. Any matter wave formed anywhere in the universe is the result of the primordial pulsation and born out of background nature (*parā prakṛti, brahma*); therefore this entity can be considered the Mother of all, and the *Purushottama* the seeding Father.

The consistency of *avyakta* at any point anywhere in the universe keeps on changing based on its expanding nature of this phase of the universe. Unifications, dissociations, leakages, grabs, fissions and fusions go on relentlessly as long as *avyakta* is neither too condensed nor too expanded to form or harbour any oscillation – at the pinnacles of the two phases during its own oscillation. What is created in one phase is thoroughly undone as it reaches the other extreme of the phase. This process is cyclical and the universe is manifested and dissolved through every expansion-contraction cycle.

sattvam rajas tama iti guṇāḥ prakṛtisambhavāḥ  
nibadhnanti mahābāho dehe dehinam avyayam 14.5

*O Arjuna, the three gunas – sattva, rajas and tamas – arising from prakṛti ties the forever dehi (purposeful life force, energy) to the body.*

The word ‘*guna*’ also means ‘the rope that ties’. The situation can be viewed as the *gunas* binding the energy as an oscillation (matter wave) and preventing it from evening out with the surrounding *Avyakta*. *Rajas* signifies the tendency to expand, to be in excess, and to dominate. *Tamas* signifies the tendency to contract, to be lacking and to be recessive. *Sattva* signifies the tendency to be stable, to be at peace and to be neutral. The *gunas* not only tie energy into a primary oscillation, they also ‘tie’ such oscillations together by making use of their excesses and deficiencies in resonance-fitness. The constituents of the atom – the neutron, proton and electron – are easily correlated with the three *gunas* as neutral, positive and negative. Even pertaining to formation of macromolecules – the same principles of excess, deficiency and relative neutrality in relation to number of electrons play the deciding factor. As the buildup continues, the building blocks are the same but the complexity also builds up as the range and kind of permutation-combination of these *gunas* change, resulting in the myriad of complex creations of the material world. The energy or the purposeful force trapped in the oscillation makes use of the first chance it finds to team up with other oscillations that display an out-of-tuneness (either excess or deficiency)

complementary to its own. The same ‘emotion’ results in building up the entire spectrum of bodies, large and small, in the universe.

The overall ‘attitude’ of an oscillation, whether it is a primary or a consortium, towards its surroundings and other oscillations is the expression of its outstanding *guna*. But modern science does not call it an ‘emotion’ till it manifests in ‘living’ things. If it is *sattva*, it is inert, neutral and peaceful; if *rajas* it tends to expand, take initiative and grab what it needs; if *tamas* it is lacking or meekly allows to be subjected. The same patterns are expressed in bigger assemblies, and ultimately in living things including the human being.

The nature of *Paramātma* is *gunatita* – beyond the reach of *gunas*. But It forms the basis of the purposeful energy trapped in the oscillation leading to expression of these tendencies.

Ahamkara is the ‘I’ (as in ‘I am separate’). Every wave has it. As long as it is there the serenely calm disposition of *Paramātma* is blanketed by it. At the same time, it is the *gunas* that make the body grow and keep it enjoined and coordinated.

tatra sattvam nirmalatvāt prakāśakam anāmayam  
sukhasaṅgena badhnāti jñānasaṅgena cānagha 14.6

*O the never-tainted (Arjuna), among these gunas, sattva, due to (its) purity, is healthy and brilliant. It ties the dehi (purposeful life force) to the body through its affinity for happiness and knowledge.*

The three *gunas* of *Avyakta* are the basic characters determining all the reflective emotions of the life force in all objects of the manifest world – starting from atoms to large assemblies, building on to living beings including man. In compounds it reflects as inert and stable nature. In nature it reflects as balanced seasons and healthy climate. *Sattva guna* (the tendency to be neutral) is indicative of balanced stability. It is therefore pure – beyond the hold of the opposites, impartial. (The way Arjuna is addressed indicates that the student of *adhyatma vidya* should cultivate this attitude of mind.) In human beings the character reflects as a stable and peaceful state. Clean intellect is brilliant as it reveals the potential to gain knowledge. It is therefore healthy and produces the urge for pure happiness. This *guna* binds the purposeful life force to the body with the experiences of this happiness and positivism, and this urge for knowledge. However, being held in bondage, even if it is in a golden cage, is not equivalent to being totally free; therefore, *sattva guna*, though closer to the characterless state of the *Paramātma*, is still a *guna* from the *prakṛti*. When

accumulated, this leads to what is known as ‘positive pleasure conditioning’, which bonds the mind to the perishable body.

rajo rāgātmakam viddhi trṣṇāsaṅgasamudbhavam  
tan nibadhnāti kaunteya karmasaṅgena dehinam 14.7

*O Arjuna, know that rajo guna is born out of greed for what one does not have and possessiveness to what has been obtained; desire is its very core. It ties the life force to the body as the rope of attachment to actions that help fulfill desire.*

*Rajas* is the tendency to expand. At the atomic and molecular levels it is expressed as the tendency to ‘gather’ what it lacks from other like entities for stability. At the level of living beings it is further elaborated like the tendencies for attacking and devouring prey. *Rajo guna* is a tendency of *prakṛti* and cannot be classified as bad in animals. In human beings the *guna* is also the drive for relentless activity, expanding into new horizons and being adventurous. But this is also the tendency to grab wealth and possession in human beings, and when such tendencies are uncontrolled they taint the mind-intellect equipment and prevent the dawning of wisdom therein. Instead, attachment is reinstated at every step. Expansion of the ‘empire’ and captivation of what is subjugated are its ways. What one looks for here too is happiness and better knowledge of ways to earn it. But desire and pursuit for happiness through material means without the accompaniment of wisdom that comes through *sattva guna* when the mind is peaceful; becomes tainted, unhealthy and not welfare-oriented because it leads to greater stress on things physical, sharpens body-centeredness and boosts egotism. Life comes to be governed by efforts to gain more and keep possessions more secure. The bondage gets tighter at every step.

Beasts of prey neither feel proud of the hunt that succeeds nor feel any sense of loss at the one that fails. They do not desire to hunt and store to last all their lives and even beyond. But in the case of man, imagination that can be better employed to seek his real self is misdirected at amassing and securing material gains. *Rajo guna* boosts ego to such an extent that some even feel they are the masters and owners of the entire universe; weapons of mass destruction are designed and built; there are even dreams to conquer and subjugate faraway constellations; and dreams of mastery of even the entire universe are fondly harbored by some, so tied to *rajas* that they cannot even laugh heartily at their own foolishness. It is felt that the entire universe and all it contains has been built to offer comforts and pleasures to humankind. What is experienced today in

the form of pollution, unrest, inequality, friction and misery is the outcome of this *guna* at its height. Man is not the unbeatable master of the universe; he is the universe. The difference between the two is just a matter of attitude; but the shift cannot be achieved unless our herculean ego is cornered and undone.

tamas tv ajñānajam viddhi mohanam̄ sarvadehinām  
pramādālasyanidrābhīs tan nibadhnāti bhārata 14.8

*O descendant of Bharata (Arjuna), know that tamo guna is the product of ignorance; it entices all bodies. It ties the life force to the body through the ropes of pramada, alasya and nidra.*

*Pramada* = forgetting one's duty, inaction. *Alasya* = inability to concentrate. *Nidra* = sleep (getting lost). The word 'tu' ('but') purports that *tamo guna* should be specially noted for its capacity to more *strongly* bind the mind than the other two.

As *antakarana* (the mind-intellect equipment) is in the balanced state in *sattva guna* the inputs of knowledge-gathering equipment (the sense organs) are registered in their true colors. *Rajo guna* makes one's attention stray and jeopardizes wisdom but does not mask material knowledge; *tamas* tarnishes all effort to know anything right. Do-wrong and not-do-anything attitudes are the ropes with which it binds the mind.

The behavior of all creations proves that the *tamo guna* is also present in every being in varying degrees. Most living things are in the state once their hunger, thirst and instinct to reproduce are satisfied. Man too is invested with this tendency. (Look at the social media joke: 'If only I could get a job so that I can take leave for a few days!') Many, bound by *rajo guna*, run after physical pleasure and materials that are supposed to add to it. Some, under the influence of *tamas*, take resort to alcohol or drugs to tranquilize themselves to 'enjoy' ineptitude and forgetfulness. As a result the number of loafers, addicts and criminals keeps growing.

*Tamas* makes one feel that light (meaning knowledge) is darkness (ignorance). It enslaves one with the feeling that laziness, inaction and sleep are the most comfortable experiences. Evolution of life can be seen as escape from this slavery. The progress of evolution has been from the inanimate to the animate and from less intelligent beings to better states. Life forms with huge bodies and small brains gave way to beings in which the ratio went in favor of the brain.

But *tamas* is no unnecessary appendage in nature; it is a must for all wave

matter and its combinations to exist because all oscillations have to have two extremes. Objects can be recognized only as a blend of shades of both light and darkness. Mistakes help one learn to correct. Forgetfulness is a great boon more often than not. Adequate sleep is as important as food for a living being, and there is bliss in much wanted sleep. In short: the universe cannot exist without *tamas*.

It is obvious that no *guna* can exist in isolation. *Rajas* needs its opposite *tamas* to exist and both equally need *sattva* for stability and to facilitate transition from one from to the other. It is the various combinations that matter.

‘*Bhārata*’ is ‘one who takes pleasure in ‘*bha*’ (light = wisdom).

sattvam̄ sukhe samjayati rajaḥ karmaṇi bhārata  
jñānam̄ āvṛtya tu tamah̄ pramāde samjayaty uta 14.9

*O descendent of Bharata (Arjuna), sattva makes (man) inclined to the experience of peace and happiness, rajas (makes man) inclined to action (in the material world), and tamas by shielding wisdom (makes man) inclined to inaction based on misconception.*

Every creation is the product of the three *gunas* acting at the same time. A piece of rock, the embodiment of inactivity and hence *tamo guna*, for instance, has *rajas* (the potential to act) in the form of gravitational attraction, potential and kinetic energies and radio-activity; it has *sattva* too in the form of stability from the atomic level to the macroscopic level, and also latent in it to come awake the wisdom when it finally becomes parts of the cells that make a living body. Also, there is *tamas* even in the person who has identified himself with the greatest of realities. He employs it to attain and maintain equilibrium. There is *rajas* too in him which he puts to use to perform actions.

rajas tamaś cābhībhūya sattvam̄ bhavati Bhārata  
rajaḥ sattvam̄ tamaś caiva tamah̄ sattvam̄ rajas tathā 14.10

*O descendent of Bharata (Arjuna), (sometimes) sattva comes to the fore shadowing rajas and tamas; (at another time) rajas comes to the fore shadowing sattva and tamas; (at yet another time) tamas comes to the fore shadowing sattva and rajas.*

At any point in the course of its oscillation a wave is in the grip of one of the three *gunas*. While it is passing through its equilibrium the other two phases are

shadowed. Any *guna*, when it is in bloom, shadows the other two. Our states of mind, if closely watched, will also reveal this certain ‘exclusivist’ demeanor. It is impossible to simultaneously harbor opposite feelings. One cannot be kind and cruel to the same subject at the same time. Feelings are the results of the *gunas* enmeshing in endless shades. The final outcome rules the roost at any instant of time.

Human body is an ensemble of countless millions of fundamental particles. Each of these has its own balance sheet in terms of the activity of its *gunas* at any time. The sub-assemblies of the body too have their own balances; the total outcome of these influences our state of mind from moment to moment. Any emotion stems from two immediate sources: one, the tendencies the body carries as modulations on it from its evolution through generations, and two, the knowledge and experiences gathered through the present body. The faculty to view each at source and control them is available in one’s self as intelligence. *Brahma vidya* and its applied form *yoga* are meant for nurturing this faculty to keep under harness without any hassle, the tendencies inherited as well as the desires that stem from tastes already experienced earlier.

It has to be remembered that no person lives out his life based on entirely a single *guna*. The net balance of various permutation combinations of these *gunas* makes the total character and personality of any person. This is at any time the result of the interactions that go on within him and his engagement with the external world at the moment, both being momentary. So, any conclusion about the character of any person cannot be for all time; assumptions regarding permanent differences on this basis, including those that are based on caste or creed or religion, are unscientific.

Character can be shaped well only by keeping the *gunas* under control. The estimate one has of oneself and one’s inclinations can be corrected only through character formation. But the *gunas* are not observable; they can be identified only by what they do. It is therefore important to know the symptoms of each *guna*.

The *guna* in the forefront at the moment is the motivating factor behind behavior.

sarvadvāreṣu dehe/smin prakāśa upajāyate  
jñānam yadā tadā vidyād vivṛddham sattvam ity uta 14.11

*When all sense organs in this body is emanating light conductive to knowledge, then it should be known that sattva is the dominant guna (shadowing the other two).*

It is easy to know if one's attitude is well balanced; it is when one is 'fully awake'. The opposite is what obtains when one 'fails to know where one is', 'can't remember a thing' or 'loses consciousness'.

If the mind and the sense organs are well balanced, all undesirable inputs are blocked. A happy mind keeps its balanced attitude steady. This is 'light emanating from the mind and the sense organs', hinting that this is mostly knowledge about material science. This enables one to observe, evaluate and view the external world with positivism and helps succeed in life. Clear mind also reflects the true character of one's self. Jnanaeswar Maharaj comments: 'The lotus that blossoms in the spring, though rooted to a fixed position, spreads its fragrance all around. In the same way, the radiance that emanates from pure *sattva guna* illuminates the world. Just as the *hansa* (the proverbial swan with magical powers) separates milk from water added to it, untainted *sattva guna* can highlight wisdom from the mixture that the material world is.'

It is easy to distinguish a person in whom *sattva guna* dominates by the positive outlook with which he leads his life. Health, peace, and a desire for balanced happiness in the material objects also reflect a state of mind ready for higher contemplation. But it is in no way hinted that this state is reserved for any caste, religion, sex or age. Besides, it is not guaranteed that it is never lost if once attained. Impermanence and lack of reservation are applicable equally well to the other *gunas* as well.

lobhaḥ pravṛttir ārambhaḥ karmaṇām aśamah spr̥hā  
rajasy etāni jāyante vivṛddhe bharatarṣabha 14.12

O the great descendant of Bharata (Arjuna), rajo *guna* in dominance gives rise to *pravrtti* (continuous action in the material world), *arambha* (launching of novel avenues), *asama* (continual persistence in desirous action without satisfaction of the desire), *lobha* (the tendency to grab and be miserly), and *spruha* (unquenchable appetite for material pleasures).

It is obvious that uncontrolled *rajo guna* is the path to self-destruction. It manifests with loss of satisfaction and contentment (even in apparently well to do situations), desire for the unseemly, intense boredom and a feeling of lack of time, and relentless action without definite direction. In the whole package there is a strong desire for happiness but whatever the person does under the influence of *rajo guna* will not gain him the happiness he is aiming for. The person develops the urge to capture empires of it, enslaves himself to material pleasures

or money leading to addiction to them and culminates in the stand that he should have every pleasure anywhere in the world. *Rajo guna* makes one forget whatever good things he already has, and cravings and envy come to gain the upper hand of the otherwise good person; making him selfish and unmindful of other people's sufferings (I am also not happy; so why should I care?). The misery that results is not limited to the one captivated; it represses fellow beings and has fallout that pollutes the whole of the environment. If and when the victims rise in revolt and give it back in the same coin, the 'disease' spreads causing sorrow all round. It is obvious that the present modern world is now mostly under the sway of this particular *guna*.

Proponents of the caste system have always put up the false claim that *rajo guna* is the hallmark of the *Kshatriya* caste (in line with the argument that *sattva* is the *guna* born with the Brahmin caste). The verse here does not correspond to that view at all. Also, the Gita has portrayed great *rajarshis* (rulers with wisdom) like Janaka; the symptoms enumerated above are in no way applicable to them. All assumptions of superiority that tend to help discrimination, including any that arises from caste-consciousness, are symptoms of primitivism and has got nothing to do with the Vedantic way of scientific analysis.

Aprakāśo/pravṛttiś ca pramādo moha eva ca  
tamasy etāni jāyante vivṛddhe kurunandana 14.13

*O descendent of the Kurus (Arjuna), when tamo guna has the upper hand, ignorance, inaction and procrastination, confusion, proneness to error, misplaced conviction and delusion will be on the rise.*

The hallmark of *tamo guna* (unlike in the case of *rajo guna*) is not aggressiveness; it is laziness – disinterestedness, escapism, withdrawal and slumber. As a result, ignorance is accumulated.

Also, this part of the text once again summarily dismisses all efforts to use the concept of the three *gunas* to substantiate discrimination on the basis of caste or religion. For instance, if it is *tamo guna* that rules the *sudra* by virtue of birth (this is the theory put forth by discriminators on the basis of caste), whatever a *sudra* does should turn out inefficient, devoid of attention and therefore nonproductive. Moreover, he will be the laziest and most sulking fellow on earth. But in fact it is those who are discriminated against that enthusiastically and efficiently perform everything to feed, clothe and serve the rest of the community, thus proving they are truly wise (bestowed with *sattva guna*). It is baseless to use the text of the Gita to propound discrimination. No division based

on caste or creed or color can be formulated on the concept of the three *gunas*. One beyond-all—*guna* can of course be called a Brahmana (literally meaning one who knows all about the *brahma*) but this state cannot be inherited; it has to be achieved.

The state of *Paramātma* is beyond-all—*guna*. Creation begins with the appearance of *gunas* in the dialectical nature of prakṛti. The *gunas* produce particles and also make them attract or repel and bond together leading to the buildup of life in due course; the continuing process helps evolution reach its ultimate goal – the state of beyond-all—*guna*, the eternal.

The next two verses are the continuation of verses 41 to 43 of chapter 6 by which the *gunas* are correlated with rebirths also, for those interested in that line of thinking.

yadā sattve pravṛddhe tu pralayam yāti dehabhṛt  
tadottamavidāṁ lokān amalān pratipadyate 14.14  
rajasī pralayam gatvā karmasaṅgiṣu jāyate  
tathā pralīnas tamasi mūḍhayoniṣu jāyate 14.15

*If pralaya (of the body) happens when sattva guna dominates, the jeeva enters the world of purity occupied by the wise.*

*If pralaya happens when rajo guna dominates, that person is born among those who are attached to (relentless) action (without higher wisdom); while dissolution when tamo guna is in domination results in being born among the ignorant and deluded.*

*Pralaya* means final dissolution.

We return to the core discussions:

karmaṇah sukṛtasyāhuḥ sāttvikam nirmalam phalam  
rajasas tu phalam duḥkham ajñānam tamasah phalam 14.16

*Good deeds is said to yield untainted and happy experiences due to improvement in (the prominence of) sattva guna whereas action based on rajo guna yields (mental unrest leading to) sorrow, and action based on tamo guna yields ignorance.*

Good deeds accentuate *sattva guna*, providing pure happiness. The ‘secret’ of ‘progress’ is therefore right action. It does not matter even if it is carried out mechanically to begin with; it will purify the mind in due course.

Wrong action leads the mind to ungainly pastures. On the other hand, if the organs of action of the body are engaged in right action it will befriend the mind sooner or later and bring it to pure happiness. Doing good is better than getting textual instruction in morals. Expert educational psychologists even recommend teaching children do good deeds even before they learn the reason for doing them.

Mental unrest is the symptom of *rājo guna*. It decimates peace. Efforts to ameliorate the situation only worsens the problem as all remedies the person under the influence of the *guna* can visualize are associated with more and more material things and pleasures, and incessant action for one's own happiness. Buy, sell, manipulate, grab, gain, earn and hoard more by any means are the solutions generally thought of. Cut throat competition at break neck speed is the symptom of *rājo guna* in a nutshell. The symptom strongly highlights the predominant *guna* in our world at present. Worse levels of anxiety, tension and fear are the result. Net balance consists of greater doses of sorrow. The person under the influence of *rājo guna* overlooks everything good that he already has and focuses exclusively on what he doesn't have. Infatuation and mirages such as romance are subtly different from love; unfortunately such people realize it only when they have lost the latter.

Unless the person understands the hold of *rājo guna* on him, wisdom and the path to get out of the stronghold of the *guna* through balanced action (*karma yoga*) are not easy to come by and it is difficult for *sattva guna* to gain the upper hand. Therefore the person may resort to *tamas* to overcome his perpetual mental fever and sleeplessness. Alcohol and drugs are not far away. *Tamo guna* yields laziness, ignorance and lack of vigilance, but also some solace from *rājo guna* by duping one's mind. It prevents one from doing anything well. But as no attention is brought to bear upon feedback from actions nothing positive is learned from any, and ignorance alone accumulates from any experience.

sattvāt samjāyate jñānam rājaso lobha eva ca  
pramādamohau tamaso bhavato/jñānam eva ca 14.17

*Sattva guna produces wisdom, in the same way rājo guna produces lobha (avarice) and tamo guna produces misunderstanding and ignorance.*

A trend once set is carried on till it is undone in so many steps and another taken on along similar lines. The predominance of a *guna* once established tends to sustain itself using the dialectical nature of *Akshara*. This is because the outcome produced by these *gunas* exerts feedbacks as described in this verse.

Therefore: *ūrdhvam gacchanti sattvasthā madhye tiṣṭhanti rājasāḥ  
jaghanyaguṇavṛttisthā adho gacchhanti tāmasāḥ* 14.18

*Those who are established in sattva guna go upward; those established in rajo guna remain in between (at the material level); those established in tamo guna and (therefore) act unwise go downward.*

It is clear that the directional arrows indicated here follow the mutually opposite paths biological evolution can take for the human being. People in whom *sattva guna* dominates gravitate to likeminded people and selects clean and healthy places to live in. Their subsequent generations get the same set of genes and also imbibe the wisdom that their parents have. The society which develops around these people get to the forefront not only because of their good nature but also due to their clear intellect with provides better thinking and facilitates intellectual development. Their graph is upward and the direction is towards Oneness and eternal life.

On the other hand, people in whom *rajo guna* predominates gradually develop their own societies of cut throat competition and distrust, where everything from water to love is ‘sold’. Money becomes the center point of society and nobody is happy. Material knowledge is very high but science does not focus on the goodness necessary for peace and well being. Hospitals and schools become revenue generating centers instead of offering solace and knowledge respectively, and medical science produces more and more physically healthy but unhappy and broke people. Insurance becomes cheating. How can wisdom be obtained by money? Creativity becomes a show business. Madness and mental fever rules, and one out of every three people undergo treatment for depression even while society continues to build up theme parks, multiplexes and other avenues for enjoyments.

People with excess *tamo guna* gravitate to form drunkards and goons. Their associations develop to create the so called underworld. Drugs and liquor and all sorts of abomination prevail. Their subsequent generations are condemned to suffer from the sins of their ancestors. Their graph is downward in evolution, and the direction is towards the animal. The arrow points to reverse evolution to a decadent society bent on superstition, favoring ignorance for whatever knowledge already present, even killing for the sake of God, black magic and witchcraft; impulsive people who live on basic instincts, raw emotion, physical dominance and bullying.

*nānyam guṇebhyah kartāram yadā draṣṭānupaśyati*

guṇebhyaś ca param vetti madbhāvam so/dhigacchhati 14.19

*When the observer (residing in the body) discerns that there is nothing other than the gunas creating the working of the world, and at the same time, that there is a fundamental truth beyond all gunas, then My state is attained.*

The *Paramātma* resides everywhere in the *Kshara* (the world that manifests from *Akshara*, stays in it and goes back into it). *Akshara* is the basis of all *gunas*. Therefore *gunas* make all the actions of the universe, and the *Paramātma* pervades all. What is underlined is the attitude of total detachment at the highest level. The observer in us should succeed in visualizing the situation and also experience it continuously.

It is a little tough because the relationship outlined is both unity and dualism at the same time: see the whole as unity and at the same time understand the difference of the fundamental from everything else. It helps if it is remembered that if anything is found to vary it certainly should have something that does not vary at all as its basis, and this has to be the source.

There are two possible approaches to truth: one, go by dissection to the very fundamental particle of matter and learn the secret of creation and, two, integrate all creations till one reaches the level of the universe and finds the same truth. The end of all knowledge is the point where the knower, the known and the knowledge become one and the same; this knowledge itself is *Paramātma* according to the last of the four *mahāvākyas* (great statements) of Vedanta, namely, ‘*prajnanam brahma*’. This is to be attained while one is alive and by making use of the equipment the body has. The *gunas* as well as the body produced by the *gunas* are the means to it.

guṇān etān atītya trīn dehī dehasamudbhavān  
janmamṛtyujarāduḥkhair vimukto/mṛtam aśnute 14.20

*The dehi, when it rises above these three gunas that is the reason for birth of the body, gets liberated from the sorrows of birth, life and death and enjoys amrut (the experience and happiness of immortality).*

The invitation given is to enter the state of perfection without giving up the body. Just recognize what the body is made of and how, and know that *Paramātma* is beyond the *gunas* that make and work the body. What prevents this recognition and wisdom is the bondage created by the same *gunas* which shrouds the presence of *Paramātma* within. Just imbibe the correct knowledge

and act on that wisdom so that *prajnana* (inherent knowledge) can dawn to bless perfect visibility.

The body and the mind are in captivity at the hands of the *gunas*. The more the captivity is entertained, the deeper it gets rooted leading to the wrong feeling that changes that happen to the body are happening to the Real Self. Illusory conclusions like ‘I am rich’, ‘I am poor’, ‘I am old’, ‘I am a cancer patient’ and so on are made. As a result we are made to suffer the sorrows in all the five natural transitions that visit every living being – birth, growth, adulthood, senility and demise.

Well, is there a way to do away with all the sorrows, ever? The answer is: there is. Liberate oneself from the bondage of the *gunas* by means of stable awareness about them which gives rise to the dialectical nature of human experience; and of the true life force even beyond it at the same time. This awareness is the gateway to eternal peace.

If the steps of biological evolution to the emergence of man are closely watched it can be ascertained that the human condition has at its command all the equipment, inclination and inspiration to this end. Man has developed a unique and matured capacity for abstract thinking; he also has earned the rare freedom to use it as he pleases. It is significant that these special faculties happily mesh with most other parts of creation and is no way at loggerheads with any. No thread in the carpet is unwanted. No sane person ever ‘fights to capture’ his own limbs. The golden path stretches out in the obvious direction: fight and defeat the bondage of the *gunas* that makes one feel separate from and wary of every other creation, realize the basis for all is the same and that the ultimate reality is beyond and totally free of all *gunas*.

Two questions arise at this stage: one, what is the practical way to outlive the *gunas* and, two, what will be the lifestyle of the one who has succeeded?

arjuna uvāca  
kair liṅgais trīn guṇān etān atīto bhavati prabho  
kimācāraḥ katham caitāṁś trīn guṇān ativartate 14.21

*Arjuna said:*

*O Prabhu, what marks the one who happens to outgrow these three gunas? How will he conduct himself in this world? How does he manage to rise above the gunas?*

(‘Prabhu’ means one who illuminates all and is the very principle underlying all luminosity.)

Whenever the Lord introduces those who have been able to identify themselves with *Paramātma*, Arjuna repeats the same question: what marks them out? The person who has reached the pinnacle of human evolution is thought of as quite mysterious by anyone with no more than worldly awareness. Any attempt to fathom the mystery is a step in the right direction. (There must have been many a story about ‘learned’ men performing miracles during those times. Even today people tend to expect some such surprising abilities from those who are believed to be closer to God or with higher knowledge or vision.) There is enough ground for doubt if the term ‘outgrow’ is not understood right. If it is taken to mean ‘getting rid of’ or ‘eradication’, the body cannot survive. There cannot be any picture minus the wall on which it is painted. The body is born from and sustained by the *gunas*. Therefore life cannot even exist without them.

The problem looks the same as: when one’s heart has to be stopped for surgery to repair it and there is no support of simulation, and if at all one survives without a heart, what kind of life can that be?

So does the *gunatita* have ‘Godly’ powers? How does he walk or talk? We echo Arjuna’s thoughts and read on. The next four verses present the parameters of the internal and external existence of the *gunatita* (one who has outlived the *gunas*) and the one next reveals how he reaches there.

śrībhagavān uvāca  
prakāśam ca pravṛttim ca moham eva ca pāṇḍava  
ta dveṣṭi sampravṛttāni na nivṛttāni kāṅkṣati 14.22

*The Lord of all knowledge said:*

*O son of Pandu (Arjuna), the one who neither hates nor expects the input of light (knowledge input) (the influence of sattva guna), the impulse for action (the influence of rajo guna) and the onslaught of moha (the influence of tamo guna) when these occur (is gunatita).*

Rising above does not mean eradication. Life is related to the *gunas* every minute; the mind reflects the effect of the predominant *guna* at the instant. Moods come and go as clouds to the open sky. One should not hate them or fight with oneself for control. Just understand the source and nature of these impulses, be aware and stay above them. The ability to remain unruffled by any such is the effect of being with the True Inner Self; all these are superficial and related to the body alone.

We had earlier discussed about ‘expectations’. Do not expect knowledge to

dawn always. There are times when *tamo guna* predominates in any learned person and it is human to err. *Moha* is wrong understanding and perception. Mistakes only reveal better paths.

udāśinavad āśino gunair yo na vicālyate  
gunā vartanta ity eva yo/vatiṣṭhati neṅgate 14.23

*He who, understanding that it is just the gunas displaying their natural effects, who remains unaffected, stable in mind, imperturbable and behaves like indifferent to the gunas (is gunatita).*

The characteristics of the *gunatita* are the same as the methods used to attain and maintain that state. The key to become *gunatita* is to observe one's own nature based on the gunas and understand the natural effects they produce within oneself so that one can stay above them, unaffected.

A person who does not know oneself well cannot control himself and as a consequence cannot control anyone else or even allow anyone else to control him. Practical tests alone prove the efficacy of any education. All of the law-abiding need not be basically good; abstention from violation may be due to lack of chance or courage. Righteousness is proven only if one casts away the wrong path with disdain even when there is ample chance to play foul.

Being like indifferent does not mean shirking responsibility or attitude of indifference to whatever happens in the world. Be concerned but take a stand beyond involvement and remain 'as if indifferent'. Of course, this is not a façade for the world outside to see; it is the attitude to oneself. Selfish indifference is almost the opposite of a detached approach. The difference is illustrated by a sincere judge hearing both sides 'as if indifferent' and pronouncing impartial judgment after weighing the arguments for both sides. If he is moved by the antics or theatricalities of the parties concerned, truth is likely to slip through his fingers as much as if he is literally indifferent. His unwavering composure resembling a flame where there is no wind may look as lifeless as the stump of a tree; but the judgment will reveal his worth.

samaduhkhasukhaḥ svasthaḥ samaloṣṭāśmakāñcanah  
tulyapriyāpriyo dhīras tulyanindātmasaṁstutiḥ 14.24

*He who calmly positions himself in his own Real Self, preserves his mental disposition equally in pain and pleasure, ascribes the same 'true' value to a piece of stone, a lump of earth and a block of gold, views the praise-abuse and*

*like-dislike opposites with equanimity, and remains courageous (is gunatita).*

The *gunatita* does not lose his courage of conviction even when he, with a crown of thorns on his head and a heavy wooden cross on his shoulder, is mercilessly whipped and edged on to the mount where he is to be crucified. This is because he has recognized the basic fabric of his existence and identified himself with that which is beyond all oppression and repression.

As one wakes up to the ultimate reality of oneself, one's sorrows and preferences undergo a sea of change. The precious possessions of childhood – the pebbles, peacock feathers, broken pieces of glass bangles – lose value as one grows up. The abuse heaped on one in a dream wherein one was a beggar, as well as the praise earned as a monarch in another dream, go irrelevant after waking up.

One cannot sleep forever; all dreams have to end. Usually one spends the intermission reliving the nice dream one had and / or trying to forget the bad one. It is a lot better to get fully awake, realize the transient nature of dreams, find what one really is and begin the effort to be that. One is really grown up only when one fully awakes to ultimate truth. This maturity is the most important difference between Vedanta and what obtains in the present modern world. Cut-throat competition to build dream empires of various material descriptions consumes practically all of the life energy of the modern world.

The four tidal waves that relentlessly kick us about are pointed out by this stanza. Each one is a dialectical buildup. Success-failure, profit-loss, pleasure-pain and praise-abuse keep kicking us about in worldly affairs. The ball gets kicked without repose wherever it is headed. Before the pain of the final kick at the penalty area is somewhat alleviated by the applause from the gallery, there comes the next kick-off.

Though the *gunatita* too apparently lives the same life he is courageous, calm and serene within. Most others consider the affects of the three *gunas* as their 'own earnings', suffer pain from smashes and kicks, roll and weep all through life till they get deflated or torn up by a thrash, never getting any chance to taste the great bliss latent in one's own heart.

mānāpamānayos tulyas tulyo mitrāripakṣayoh  
sarvārambhaparityāgī guṇātītah sa ucyate 14.25

*He, who considers pride and loss of face as equal experiences, sees the same in friend and foe, and does not start numerous actions (due to unrest of mind) is the one known as gunatita.*

Pride is the product of vanity and vanity is the consolidated expression of the institution ‘I’. (‘I am separate’, ‘I am different’.) For the one who has identified himself with *Paramātma* that pervades everything, anything and everything is ‘I’. (“Take away this feeling of ‘I’ from me”, prays Ezhuthachan, Kerala’s renaissance poet, in *Harinamakeertana*, “and in its place put the entire world”.) If one does not form a ballooned out image of oneself, where is the place for accepting praise or abuse? I am the suffering leper and the orphaned child, thought Mother Theresa; whoever is hurt in a riot it is I who am hurt, thought Mahatma Gandhi.

The barrier between friend and foe dissolves along the same lines. Whatever action we take with a friend who loves us and the antisocial who tries to hurt us, we have to learn to keep in mind the same fundamental truth behind all of them and strive to discard any hatred for the foe from the mind. No foe can remain a foe unless we permit our mind to keep it that way.

‘*Sarvarambha parityagi*’ (one who does not initiate numerous actions) in the present context means one who does not start the various types of actions due to *rājo guna*, and also one who does not launch endeavors to promote entirely selfish interests. The verse does not mean one who does not start anything and celebrates utter laziness. On the contrary this type of person can work more happily as he is more focused; and as profit motive due to *rājo guna* is not what drives him, he can enjoy what he is doing without the fear of failure. Thus he also enjoys the best possible freedom of action.

Capitalism and profit motive cannot produce lasting happiness and peace either for the entrepreneur or for the rest of the world. The *gunas* have to be used not to get more and more enmeshed in them but to help get out of their bondage. Water is not for getting drowned; while thrown into it the best use one can put it is use it to swim and reach the shore. How this is done was discussed in the chapter on devotion. Similar to the case of the ideal devotee, the qualities ascribed to the *gunatita* are the same as the pathways to that status. The end is the same as the means. The means are exercises till one reaches the maturity; once there the same is the natural way of life.

There is no examination to be passed, no certificate to be got. Another person, whoever he is, cannot assess or testify. One is one’s own judge. Those who imbibe that wisdom will naturally not make a show of it because they do not look for any approbation, applause, honor, position or power. The world therefore cannot spot them. They follow no rituals, wear no insignia, flag or staff, speak no special language, employ no unique way of speech, assume no titles or establish no institutions to propagate their views. Only those who are on

the way to that level or are already there can identify them.

māṁ ca yo/vyabhicāreṇa bhaktiyogena sevate  
sa guṇān samatītyaitān brahmabhūyāya kalpate 14.26  
brahmaṇo hi pratiṣṭhāham amṛtasyāvyayasya ca  
śāśvatasya ca dharmasya sukhasyaikāntikasya ca 14.27

*Whoever serves Me with devotion and without the mind wandering anywhere else – he will rise above the gunas and become ready for becoming a being entirely of brahma.*

*For, the nectar of all immortality, the dharma of all time and the highest happiness – they all have their seat in that brahma.*

Becoming a being of *brahma* means dissolution of all that is holding the person in bondage within the *Kshara* world. This amounts to total freedom of the mind by understanding the three *gunas* very well and going above them by installing devotion above all other fluctuating emotions and living unperturbed in the path of wisdom. (We have seen that *brahma* is another name for *Akshara*.) Vedanta considers pain as exclusively belonging to the mortal aspect – of the perishable or *Kshara* world. Brahma is considered the seat of bliss, and being of that state also amounts to total freedom for all eternity. At the same time it is to be reached while being entrenched in *Kshara* and also depending on it for everything.

‘*Sanatana dharma*’ is a much misunderstood word. It is often mistaken for what all is prescribed in the *karma kānda* (ritualistic part) of the Vedas and even used to mean the rules and conventions of organized religion including the caste system. However, ‘*sanatana*’ means ‘for all time’; rituals, rules and conventions in force in any society cannot be forever even if they succeed to remain in force for a couple of centuries. Therefore, the ‘*dharma*’ (right attitude regarding action) referred to is no other than the action to serve the entire biosphere (*yajna bhavana*) the postulates of which evolve with human evolution. We have seen that dharma is upheld by the *Purushottama* and men need not fret to implement it.

The intellect man is endowed with is way above what other living things have. It is the explicit proof (*vibhuti* – divine glory) of the *Paramātma* and it can be used to seek identification with the same.

Keeping the sense organs fully awake and using the intelligence to filter out the untrue from their inputs, through the vehicle of devotion driven by guileless action to get free from the tangle of emotions and impulses stemming from the

*gunas*, one can identify and become one with the True Self. One's will is the fuel. The inner self is to be kindled to burn out worldly ego and be with the ultimate. ('*Uplift the self with the self....*' Chapter 6, verses 5 and 6). It is ludicrous to squander life-energy in worthless pursuits or dissipate through intoxication or narcotic hallucination.

## Chapter 15

# Yoga of Purushottama

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How does the perishable world replete with objects of pleasure and pain look in comparison with an entity beyond time and *gunas*? The compassionate smile on the face of Sage Vyasa seems to mean: change your standpoint and stance; look at it head down!

The material world is shown as an *Aswattha* tree (peepal – *Ficus Religiosa*) standing head down. A tree is the best symbol to represent the material world as, being the representative of the plant world, it amply suits the study of the course of evolution of life all the way up from its deep roots. (It is an interesting fact that different communities in various parts of the world have their ‘own’ special trees of reverence. It is *Aswattha* in India, Oak for the Celt civilization, Ash for the Scandinavians and the lemon tree for the Germans.) Know the tree of life well enough and outlive its limitations.

śrībhagavān uvāca  
ūrdhvamūlam adhahśākham aśvattham̄ prāhur avyam  
chandāṁsi yasya parṇāni yas tam̄ veda sa vedavit 15.1

*The Supreme One said:*

*The Aswattha (that stands) with branches down and roots up is said to be since time immemorial. The Vedas are its leaves. The one who knows it (this tree) is the true Vedajna (one who knows the Vedas).*

The word *Aswattha* means ‘*naswa api stita iti*’ (that which does not last even for a day). However, the tree appears to last for centuries. But this is not a contradiction of terms. The river can be said to change every day as all the water that made it in the previous day is replaced. In the same way the *Aswattha* too sheds its leaves for new ones; the cells in its branches and its trunk get replaced; branches drop roots down at different times to reach the earth and draw sustenance. The huge tree gives a strong impression that it is forever. It seems to outlive man by centuries; so it can be called very ancient, near immortal.

The world of earthly experience, transforming itself all the time, seems to last from the birth of time and space to eternity; the ever-kept continuity of change creates an impression of permanence. One plans and decides future courses of action on the assumption that the world will be there tomorrow as of today.

It is the soil that keeps the tree firm, takes care of the roots and keeps them hidden from sight. For this tree *Akshara* is the soil providing the nourishment and basis of existence; the seed of *Paramātma* sprouts in it to make the tree. *Akshara*, like the sub soil, is invisible to the naked eye because it is on the other side of the sense organs. Branches and leaves grow to this side – these are temporary. Everything including our bodies are on this side.

*Vedas* (religious texts) are seen as leaves of this tree in the sense that with time, so many different religions come and go. These leaves grow, provide oxygen for the world for some time, then after their job are done; they fall to be replaced by newer ones. One who knows the entire tree is the one who really knows.

adhaś cordhvam̄ prasṛtāstasya śākhā  
guṇapratyāddhā viṣayapravālāḥ  
adhaś ca mūlāny anusamṛtatāni  
karmānubandhīni manuṣyaloke 15.2

*The branches of this tree nourished by the gunas and bestowed with tender shoots by objects of sensory perception spread to all sides; its roots go deep inside (unseen) binding man's world through karma (action) to prakṛti.*

The objects of sensory perception when perceived by the sense organs provide experiences. Material knowledge is derived from these experiences. This is the foliage. It keeps changing. Only true knowledge – about the higher levels beyond the sense organs – is forever. Material knowledge adds to the perception that the tree is actually upright – the wrong idea.

Adventitious roots form from the branches; as they reach the soil they burrow deep and plant themselves to become more roots. These are fresh links to the action reaction chain of the *prakṛti*, making the tree stronger, or in other words, the illusion of the material world more powerful. The chain of worldly experiences through actions leads to more snares to *prakṛti*.

The Aswattha symbol can represent any *kshetra* however big or small. Every creation exists in a world of its own. The differences in perceptions become verbally expressible in the case of man. Man looks around, learns from

experiences to survive better and is captivated by his own imagination; but fails to perceive the immortal levels of himself as the tree itself is upside down and its roots well hidden by the limitations of the sense organs.

na rūpam asyeha tathopalabhyate  
nānto na cādir na ca sampratiṣṭhā  
aśvattham enam suvirūḍhamūlam  
asaṅgaśastreṇa dṛḍhenā chittvā 15.3  
tataḥ padam tatparimārgitavyam  
yasmin gatā na nivartanti bhūyah  
tameva cādyam puruṣam prapadye  
yataḥ pravṛttih prasṛtā purāṇī 15.4

*Under the circumstances there is no way to know either its beginning or end or its state or how it is established. Cutting this strongly rooted Aswattha with the mighty sword of detachment, the final refuge is to be looked for; which once entered warrants no return. To the One from which this ancient tree had issued long back, (firmly decide to) take refuge in that highest source.*

Neither the nature of this Aswattha nor its beginning or end can be studied with any material equipment as all such are its own products and subject to its ever-continuing evolution. This tree holds each and every person through the mind and hides the real levels of truth. What gives it more roots to harden itself in Akshara is the bundle of emotional feedbacks from the various actions that the person performs. It keeps diverting attention to the worldly shoots, leaves, flowers and fruits. The way out is to cut it down with the strong weapon of detachment. ('Chittva' means 'cut apart' in addition to 'cut down'.) But this is far from easy because 1. This tree is the Aswattha, one of the largest and strongest of trees, its size itself giving the impression of permanence. 2. It has strong vitality – cut at a place and it repairs and grows back. Furthermore, fresh roots spring from even the branches themselves.

Even after attaining significant Vedantic knowledge, we find people who return to almost pure materialistic existence and forget what they have learned and the heights that they had reached. But even such people when they return to their learned ways find their comeback easier. Every time a cut of detachment is imposed on the tree, it does lose some of its vitality.

As we saw earlier, detachment does not mean negation of life. Detachment is a quality of mind in all actions performed in the *Kshara* world. The way to keep rats out is to keep the premises clean and not burn down the house.

The path to detachment is:

nirmānamohā jitasaṅgadōṣā  
adhyātmanityā vinivṛttakāmāḥ  
dvandvair vimuktāḥ sukhaduhkhasamjñaiḥ  
gacchhanty amūḍhāḥ padam avyayam tat 15.5

*Those who are rid of vanity and wrong perception, have won over all unhealthy attachments, are committed always to adhyatma knowledge, have freed themselves from cravings, are liberated from the grip of dialectical opposites such as pleasure and pain and, (so) are above ignorance, reach the eternal state.*

Vedanta is not just a dry compendium of thoughts; it is the ‘users’ manual’ for human life anywhere. Its mission proves fruitful when the user wins. The way is discussed with as much attention as bestowed upon defining the target. The five capabilities repeated here are the means to keep one’s mind balanced – the condition that makes *yoga* assured.

Vanity is like crystal-ware; it demands constant attention and it is also derogatory to union. Wrong perception can change the target or obscure the path. The weapon of detachment cannot be wielded as long as one of these holds one captive.

Greed is born out of imagining pleasures, riches and power experienced before or imagined afresh as extensions of what has already been had. Greed only leads to greater greed with illusion further strangulating the person; and denial, to anger and frustration. The vicious cycle plays havoc with the mind and the intellect, taking the person down towards disintegration of personality.

The mind should be committed to adhyatma knowledge and always set on the Paramātma. Always is the key word. A plant has to be kept stable and unmoved if it is to take root. Unwavering sense of target provides calm perseverance – freedom from pride, wrong perception and greed. *Prakṛti* is dialectical and any development is closely associated with its opposite. The opposites of pain and pleasure have ample power to make the person forget the truth beyond them. The mind has to be habituated the freedom to be above them by bringing it back to the Real Self again and again.

Ignorance is the result of inborn incapability (as in the case of animals) or lack of attention. Any person free of serious mental disorder can alleviate it if willing to take the effort. If he doesn’t, basic questions like ‘who am I?’, ‘how does the world work?’ or ‘what is life meant for?’ go unanswered, or worse still,

are answered badly making him trapped in wrong perceptions. As a result he errs in the long term or sometimes even in day to day life.

The five traits mentioned are like five flowers on the same garland. Any trait, if cultivated well, will calm the mind making it fertile and ready for the other four.

na tad bhāsayate sūryo na śāśāṅko na pāvakah  
yad gatvā na nivartante tad dhāma paramam mama 15.6

*Neither the sun nor the moon nor (any) fire does illuminate it. That which one does not have to come back after identifying oneself with, that is the greatest dhamma (nurturing abode) of Mine.*

Brahma is the abode of the Lord. No sun can illuminate it because it is the substrate for the sun itself. But it can be illuminated through the mind; one can become aware of it. The experience of it is bliss; it is a transition of awareness, incomparable and unlike whatever is obtained in the Kshara. In the material world anything like the skill in voice control mastered by the musician or the mastery over words commanded by a grammarian can be lost due to lack of practice. But once that level of Akshara is achieved one has already made a major perceptual change, surpassing the Kshara and the transitions called birth and death associated with it. Everlasting bliss is the experience at that level.

mamaivāṁśo jīvaloke jīvabhūtaḥ sanātanaḥ  
manahṣaṣṭhānīndriyāṇi prakṛtisthāni karşıti 15.7

*The everlasting part of Me appearing (apparently) severally as jeeva (life form) in the bhuta loka (animate world) holds with it all of the six sense organs including the mind which are vested in prakṛti.*

‘Part’ of Me cannot be taken literally. This is one of the examples in Vedantic explanation which shows limitation of language. We had already seen that the living entity only appears separate from the *Paramātma* and is actually the same life force (verse 13.17), represented by the combination of the *samghatha* and its total life instinct, the *chetana*. The *jeeva* is a general term to describe the life present in a unit living body. It holds and works the unit as a separate entity.

śarīram yad avāpnoti yac cāpy utkrāmatīśvarah

gr̥hitvaitāni samyāti vāyur gandhān ivāśayāt 15.8

*Whenever (this part of) Isvara assumes or leaves whichever body, the (basis of) mind and the senses are carried away like fragrance of flowers by the wind.*

In reality Isvara does not ‘enter’ or ‘depart’ but is omnipresent. Life is a continuous flux – the sperm and ovum combining to form the zygote are both alive, the numerous cells that differentiate to form the human body have life of their own, so does the various organ systems (prana) and the whole body (jeeva). Actually all these are only different *kshetras* telescoping into each other. Even at death of the body all cells do not die together; most of the individual cells die from lack of nutrients and oxygen due to failure of the circulatory system. But whichever way we look, the essence of life – the single basis of all this life activity vested in prakṛti – cannot be materially seen or proved.

It can be assumed that the apparently separate life (*jeeva*) starts as a unique body from the stage of the single celled zygote, because before that the life instincts for the single body are divided in the ovum and sperm and the basic unit has not been formed. It’s functioning as a unique entity starts with the formation of this first cell, which grows to become the fully mature human being according to the combined DNA blueprint in the first cell. Similarly at death, though every sense organ practically remains structurally intact as far as its composition from *pancha bhuta* (the five basic elements) is concerned, the body does not see, smell, hear, taste or feel touch. Everything including the nervous system and the sense organs are there still in the body. But their essence – the *jeeva* – is carried away like the fragrance of flowers by the wind. It is a remarkable comparison because fragrance is carried away by the wind and dissolves in air, and neither fragrance nor air can be seen; so does the individual *jeeva* dissolve in the eternal life force.

śrotram cakṣuh sparśanam ca rasanam ghrāṇam eva ca  
adhiṣṭhāya manaś cāyam viṣayān upasevate 15.9

*The *jeeva* (individual life) experiences the material world by means of sight, sound, taste, smell and touch together with the mind.*

The life form carries on it in the form of modulations (materially blueprinted by DNA) the imprint of feedback from actions indulged all along previous generations; these include basic deviations at transition points in evolution. The major question that arises here is: was it environment alone that caused the

deviation, or did the instincts in *Prakṛti* play any part in it? The concept of life Vedanta provides, says that it did. It is largely in agreement with modern genetics except in that genetics will need something more than Darwin to catch up with Vedanta as the latter indicates that inclinations at birth are determined not by heredity alone; *Prakṛti* (Akshara) has an important role in making the chromosomes act the way they do.

The DNA is regarded as the blueprint and template of protein synthesis, but that does not explain how the few DNA in the single celled zygote can mastermind the complex differentiation, growth, awareness leading to separation into the various organ systems and function and behavior of each and every cell in all of these (which are countless, and go on being born and dead throughout the life cycle of an individual). ‘Blueprint’ always points to a purpose for which a large volume of information is coded. But here the drive and purpose behind the code is unknown because it lies unmanifested in Akshara. Science has not reached that level now, though it has indirectly learned to make use of that information and purpose in varying amounts through genetic manipulation, tissue culture and cloning based on the material level.

utkrāmantam̄ sthitam̄ vāpi bhuñjānam̄ vā guṇānvitam  
vimūḍhā nānupaśyanti paśyanti jñānacakṣuṣah 15.10

*As life ‘leaves’ the body; when life remains within the body; and as life experiences worldly inputs and shows various reactions based on the (three) gunas, the ignorant do not grasp this ‘life’. Only those with eyes of true wisdom see it.*

The ignorant understand life as ‘leaving’ the body, life ‘within’ the body, the person dying etc. They rejoice when a child is born and cry their hearts out when somebody close to them dies. Neither do they know what is going on nor do they maintain a serious interest to understand the real truth behind this entire phenomenon. They simply return to their lives once the emotional part is settled with.

yatanto yoginaś cainam̄ paśyanty ātmāny avasthitam  
yatantopy akṛtātmāno nainam̄ paśyanty acetasaḥ 15.11

*The yogi who tirelessly strives will see (know) Him as established within himself. But the one without inner clarity will not see (know) Him however much he tries.*

In contrast to the ignorant mentioned in the previous verse, the wise one who understands that there is a lot more behind this mystery of life and strives with an open mind to know the truth will ultimately see the True Self within himself.

There are many who complain that despite reading and learning, nothing could be achieved. This is what happens if one tries to build without necessary foundation. The necessary preparation of a clean mind is the required precondition as mentioned in the verse. A clean mind is one without special attachment to the perishable body or one harboring no misconceptions about life and God. Anybody who wants to know the truth will have to approach the subject with a completely open mind; if there is bias already ingrained from previous religious texts or other sources related to ego and opinions of the person, then this search will turn out to be difficult. Nothing can be successfully sought out without dedication. The example of the camel and the eye of the needle beautifully illustrate the situation. No money-lender who insists upon a pound of flesh can ever concentrate on any effort that does not bring in even a nickel in profit. Wisdom cannot be earned by action based on attachment; *jnana yoga* cannot progress even an inch unless *karma yoga* leads it.

Not only will the one who tries with a clean mind perceive the *ātma* within himself; he will understand It further:

yad ādityagatam tejo jagad bhāsayatekhilam  
yac candramasi yac cāgnau tat tejo viddhi māmakam 15.12

*That teja which is vested with the sun and illuminates the entire world, and similarly the teja which is vested with the moon and fire is to be known as belonging to Me.*

The word ‘teja’ has a wide range of meanings: Splendor, glory, luster, brilliance, shining, the embryo, light, power, semen, marrow, spiritual strength or force, essence, sharpness, fire, flame, grace, charm, substantiality, valor, prowess, gold, the brain, impatience and the speed of a horse.

Light helps us see. The sun or moon or fires of various kinds produce light. Light (photon) is an oscillation in Avyakta. Space came into existence only after the expansion of the universe through the seeding of *Akshara* by the *Purushottama*. The birth of particles, their accretion as well as radiation came about in the process of evolution of the universe, and all their energy therefore stems from the *Paramātma*. Therefore the *teja* of all those bright heavenly objects out there and indeed every fire that is present in any part the universe is

sourced in the *Paramātma*.

Light cannot reversely illuminate the *Paramātma* but awareness of the *Paramātma* does not depend upon any light to be revealed. One can be aware even in the darkest of surroundings. The brilliance of *Paramātma* is the ‘light’ that illuminates this awareness. The same light alone can help see *Paramātma* itself.

In distributing their light, the sun, moon or fire does not distinguish between the wise and the ignorant. But to use it wisely one should know the secret of its splendor. This is equally true of any other blessing available in the world. Enough light and roads in good condition cannot take anyone anywhere unless one is wise about where one wants to go.

gām āviśya ca bhūtāni dhārayāmy aham ojasā  
puṣṇāmi cauśadhīḥ sarvāḥ somo bhūtvā rasātmakah 15.13

*Moreover, pervading the earth, I sustain all animate and inanimate objects; through the moon which is the embodiment of rasa, I grow and nourish the world of flora.*

This verse reminds one about the concerns of geophysics and biochemistry. The creations on earth inclusive of the living depend on protection by many a critical act of balancing of forces. If the earth rotates a bit faster or slower the oceans cannot remain in the present form. But for the right amount of tilt of the axis of the earth, seasons are out of question. If the earth gets a little closer or further away from the sun its surface cannot maintain the temperature range to offer sustenance to complex living entities.

Even if all physical factors are conducive, but for the right kind of chemical environment, life forms cannot be evolved and nourished. The presence, percentage predominance and interactions between various chemical elements on land, in the ocean and the atmosphere are critical. The innate quality of water is its *rasa* – the ability to induce affinity for union with whatever can be dissolved in it. This has made the birth and evolution of biological specimens of higher order easy.

‘*Rasatmaka*’ means the embodiment of *rasa*. *Rasa* is the natural encouragement that prompts molecules to take part in various reactions detailed by organic chemistry. The cycle of the moon has profound influence on the biosphere of earth. It is in many aspects linked to health and emotional well being of living things.

aham vaiśvānaro bhūtvā prāṇinām deham āśritah  
prāṇāpānasamāyuktaḥ pacāmy annam caturvidham 15.14

*I (Paramātma), by means of association within the bodies of living things, am the source of vaisvanara (the fire that digests food) and, working along with prana (the breath that is inhaled) and apana (the exhaled breath) digest (all of) the four types of food.*

It goes without saying that ‘I’ stand for *Paramātma* (not the person physically present and speaking).

Just as there is no smoke without fire, there is no heat too without fire. The life force, based on *vaisvanara* and working in tandem with *prana* and *apana*, digests all the four types of food so that it can be absorbed by the body. Why does *vaisvanara* require the *prana* and *apana* for digestion? This is because oxygen necessary for cellular metabolism is obtained through respiration. If the two do not work hand in hand there is no digestion or heat production.

Food comes in four types: *kadya* (to be chewed), *choshya* (to be sucked), *peya* (to be gulped) and *lehya* (to be licked). It comes in many kinds: vegetables, meat, raw, cooked, dry, ripe and so on. (Food can also be classified according to its end benefits as: 1. for the *prana* (individual *jeeva* of the different systems like digestion, circulation and respiration), 2. for the (total) body, 3. for the mind and 4. for wisdom.) The symptom of *vaisvanara* is hunger. It can be generalized as ‘demand’. The word ‘*anna*’ (food) can, in the same way, be generalized as ‘availability’ or ‘supply’. The existence of the entire biosphere is related to these two aspects. The ‘*sahayajna*’ (ready to co-operate) disposition of living beings is critical for the balancing of these. The basis for this disposition on the part of creation, again, is *Paramātma*. (‘*sahayajñāḥ prajāḥ sṛṣṭvā...*’ – 3.10.) Besides, each body has its own balance to maintain. The air that is taken in has to balance with what is exhaled; the intake of food has to balance with body’s complex requirements; water balance has to be correct; pH of the blood has to be meticulously maintained, the balance of vitamins, minerals and other nutriments too has to be kept. The traffic along the alimentary canal has to maintain a certain steady pace. The *jeeva* of both the body and the individual subsystems have pre-detailed programs for maintaining these. The life force of the *jeeva* and all the *prana* is the *Paramātma*.

sarvasya cāham hṛdi samnvisti  
mattah smṛtir jñānam apohanam ca  
vedaiś ca sarvair aham eva vedyo

vedāntakṛd vedavid eva cāham 15.15

*I am stationed in the hearts of all. All derive knowledge, memory and forgetfulness from me. I am the ultimate target of all knowledge; I know all of the Vedas; I am the creator of Vedanta.*

Knowledge, memory and forgetfulness are created by the *gunas*. When knowledge is complete there is no separateness, therefore without ignorance there is no created (separate) being. So all the three – knowledge, ignorance and forgetfulness – are derived from That source of absolute knowledge, and they are all important in material life. *Prajnanam brahma*, the insight behind Vedantic cosmology and indeed all creativity look miraculous but are natural to the human brain through ‘tuning’ to brahma obtained by peaceful contemplation and meditation. (This does not indicate superstitions, miraculous powers and other such stuff. Anything not permitted by Prakṛti simply cannot happen.) In living beings knowledge is sustained through memory but whatever need not be retained has to be forgotten too. Just think of what happens if one remembers all that is experienced every minute of life! The working of the brain is: new information being stored in the place of the expendable among the old, continuously. One forgets the unimportant and retains the pertinent which again is wiped when something more relevant crops up. Again, if the mind is to calm down one has to forget disturbing events. The natural culmination of this activity is to know the most relevant finally. The most important entity in the universe is *Paramātma*; therefore all avenues of real knowledge should lead to it. If the going is right, all enquiries would lead to that ‘I’. All sciences, religions and philosophies target it. Whosoever knew right has known *Paramātma* alone. It follows that there are absolutely no ground for any divisiveness; all sectarianism is foolish.

As ‘My’ knowledge is complete, ‘I’ am the one who knows everything to be known (the Vedas; meaning all religions also) and, as a result, ‘I’ am the creator of Vedanta. As the (textual) Vedas precede Vedanta, it is suggested that Vedanta amounts to improvement over the Vedas. Also, by an earlier statement that right knowledge is without any beginning, it is also implied that the aberrations that cropped up in between have been corrected.

The next three most important verses explain Vedantic cosmology in a nutshell and also in such a clear way that there is no scope for confusion:-

dvāv imau puruṣau loke kṣaraś cākṣara eva ca  
kṣarāḥ sarvāṇi bhūtāni kūṭasthokṣara ucyate 15.16

*It is said that there are two purusha dwelling in all bodies in the universe – Kshara: that which is the form or structure or manifestation; and Akshara: the kutastha.*

Every structure and manifestation in this universe, including human beings must exist in these levels at the same time. Humans experience one – the *kshara* world in which myriad creations are born, exist and disappear, our own bodies included. The other level produces this world, remains forever and is unobservable and unalterable by any physical means, and also dissolves back everything created from it. The former is known as *Kshara* meaning that which perishes and the latter as *Akshara* meaning the imperishable. *Kutastha* means similar to an anvil of the black-smith, which allows every body to change its shape but itself remains changeless. This is the best explanation that can be given to the fabric of space (invisible substrate) in which all matter is hosted. (*Purusha* generally means an ‘entity’ and has nothing to do with gender.) *Akshara* or *avyakta* is the unobservable fabric of space that pervades the entire universe. It is unchanged even when it produces and holds intensely burning suns or formidable black-holes and allows these and even their assemblies to move in it with enormous speeds. It is the mother of everything including space and time as there cannot be creation without space and causation without time. It is dialectical because all forces in it are found to have opposites. It is capable of pulsating spirally with a resonance (denoted by the letter Om) leading to the stable formation of particles and radiation. The cyclic nature of its pulsation that creates the universe is reflected in all its products.

Lack of knowledge about the way in which *kshara* is manifested from *akshara* is at the root of the problem in understanding it. Matter is just a wave oscillation in the fabric of space (*avyakta*), harmoniously syncing its frequency with the *avyakta* around it; it easily moves in *avyakta* by waving of its content (a quantum of energy) from point to point.

Modern science is still fighting shy of accepting the deeper layer of reality in the form of *akshara*; it believes the scant matter available in enormous emptiness alone is the universe. This is almost like considering the few ants that crawl in a football ground as all that there is to the ground.

But, of course, there is a basic problem: physics needs constants to settle equations; it depends on the invariance of units. Acceptance of the idea of space-matter unity will involve demolishing the pillars of physics built so far to accommodate an un-definable entity that cannot be measured, weighed, dissected or handled with any device, as any imaginable equipment will

necessarily be its product. There is no experimental evidence, and no scope for it.

And Vedanta makes it all the tougher as it completes the picture by adding yet another level of reality – the ultimate – to the two already pointed out.

uttamah̄ puruṣas tv anyah̄ paramātmety udāhṛtaḥ  
yo lokatrayam āviśya bibharty avyaya īśvarah̄ 15.17

*But the greatest (purusha) distinct from the other two (Kshara and Akshara), is termed Paramātma; the one pervading all the three worlds (levels), the ruler, the forever Isvara.*

Of the three levels, the greatest purusha is the most sublime, the fundamental. It is the eternal presence that rules the other two levels. The Bhagavad Gita is the presentation of that voice of the *Paramātma* enumerated by sage Vyasa, symbolized by Krishna in the charioteer's seat as well as by the ātma in Arjuna's heart and also everywhere else in the universe. In reality *prajnana* or absolute knowledge dawns from within, the *Paramātma* does not 'talk' and the picture should not be taken literally.

*Paramātma* is the basis for the universe. *Akshara* is the dialectical substrate in which it continues to be imperturbably present. The fabric of space of *Akshara* is called *Avyakta* and its nature is called *parā prakṛti*. It is the substrate upon which millions of small and big oscillations come into being, exist, interact and get dissolved in the universe, based on its three gunas (basic characteristics of wave form in *Avyakta*). Being unseen and undetectable (even to modern science), it creates the *māya* (illusion) that there is only the observable universe. The universe is the *Kshara* (changing and perishing world), and its nature is *aparā prakṛti* (obvious nature). The *Paramātma* pervades all this; single and unparalleled. All the three levels are 'real' to human beings or to any entity born in the world; the material world cannot be differentiated from the spiritual, and the world cannot be renounced.

The light from the *ātma* providing the ability to understand and the choice to select the path of true action based on 'yajna concept' is only available to the human being. Man is a social being and hence *prakṛti* has also endowed man with concepts of good and evil.

An unchanging basic factor has to be needed to grasp the changing nature of something else. Despite changes in size, shape and age of one's body, one's position and character; and even after most of the cells that constitute the body are replaced, there is a deep observer that remains the same. This 'I', the True

self – *Paramātma*, is the factor by which one can be aware of oneself; the very light behind consciousness and awareness. But this real ‘I’ is eclipsed by the ‘I’ of the material world.

yasmāt kṣaram atītoham akṣarād api cottamah  
atosmi loke vede ca prathitah puruṣottamaḥ 15.18

*What makes me beyond the Kshara and, even higher than the Akshara, renders me well known in the world as well as in the Vedas as Purushottama (the highest among the three purusha).*

The *Purushottama* fathers every creation, permeates the entire universe, presides over the *prakṛti* and therefore is the absolute ruler, serves as the basic principle within – from the smallest particle to the clusters of galaxies – and is the witness that sees and knows all. Those among men who really knew ‘Me’ therefore call Me *Purushottama*.

yo mām evam asaṁmūḍho jānāti puruṣottamam  
sa sarvavid bhajati mām sarvabhāvena bhārata 15.19

*O the one happy to be enlightened (Arjuna), whoever outlives ignorance to know me thus as Purushottama has known the highest; he invariably becomes totally devoted to me (Paramātma).*

Ignorance follows from inability to know and / or lack of interest. When these limitations are overcome the time is ripe for gaining knowledge. The yearning for knowledge improves with the experience of it. Cognition leads to recognition and thus the *Paramātma* is known. This is different from other kinds of knowledge where the knower remains separate from what is known. Here, knowing means getting identified with.

The status of *Purushottama* (supreme entity) given to God is common to all religions. Jesus Christ makes the Jews repeat their own dictum: ‘Love God your Father with full strength, full heart, full mind and all self.’ God reveals himself to Moses as ‘I am that I am.’ The Holy Koran uses the term ‘All Powerful’ throughout.

Identification makes knowledge complete. A person with this wisdom cannot help but become devoted to the Supreme One. Devotion leads to more wisdom and wisdom in turn leads to more devotion. Knowledge without devotion is forgetful and fruitless; devotion without knowledge is aimless, immature and

even counterproductive. Action with *yajna bhavana* (dedication towards the good of the entire biosphere) brings in both devotion and wisdom. Devotion sprouts in the mind purified by detached action. The experience of that action leads to better wisdom too. The Gita advocates a life well coordinated and serene leading to realization of the self.

iti guhyatamam̄ śāstram idam uktam̄ mayānagha  
etat buddhvā buddhimān syāt kṛtakṛtyaś ca bhārata 15.20

*O sinless (Arjuna), I (Paramātma) have thus told you the most hidden secret – this science. O the one happy to be enlightened (Arjuna), knowing it will make one kritakritya and wise.*

Sin is indulging in what one knows one should not. Doing it perturbs the mind. Once done, it leaves the feeling of guilt, sorrow and a nagging sense of self-contempt. In either case the mind loses its calm. Wisdom cannot be planted in a disturbed mind. Therefore the sinful cannot be told what is to be wisely grasped.

Just as one can hide oneself or get hidden, knowledge too can hide itself or get hidden. The knowledge spoken of here cannot be hidden by anyone but it hides itself. It is accessible only to those who deserve it; it has to be shared only by those who are empowered by It to do it. The sinless alone can imbibe it. Nothing short of full dedication allows its practice to be successful. In short, it is invaluable.

‘*Sastra*’ means ‘that which is taught by *sasana* – direct instruction by a guru’. In ancient India, teaching meant sharing of the experience of realization by the guru. It is a package of awareness that helps eradicate the ignorance damping the vision of the disciple. But the practical application of the lesson has to be done by the disciple himself.

‘*Kritakritya*’ is ‘one who has done all there is to be done’ – the one who is satisfied and contented with his life and actions. Imbibing the secret of secrets given here can be regarded as the objective of human life because it is ‘*parama purushartha*’ – ‘the highest achievement in human life’.

*Paramātma* is omnipresent and imperturbable and It reflects in the mind that is calm and steady. The mind can be steadied by practice. For that it has to be pure.

Evolution has invested man with the ability to attain this state of mind. But of course the capability varies from person to person because inclinations and tendencies vary. Yet the opportunity and the freedom to attempt are open to all.

Once a beginning is made in this direction, however rudimentary it is, the experience of it gets imprinted. This imprint is such that, once made, it never gets erased on its own. Those who have kindled this aspect of character are said to have '*daivi sampati*' – 'having the asset of light'. The opposite kind has '*asuri sampati*' – 'having the asset of darkness'. The next chapter deals with these traits.

## Chapter 16

# **Yoga of Deva and Asura Assets**

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The entire universe is founded on action; and (it has been already shown that) one cannot even keep oneself alive if one does not act and react. Every birth is into the flow of actions; one cannot help but swim. But swim one must in the right direction. There are many possible directions. However these can be broadly classified into two in terms of the commonality of features: one leading to tranquility and the other to its opposite. One may term the first as divine-oriented and the second as demoniac-oriented. The Bhagavad Gita calls them such. ‘*Divine*’ is the adjective of ‘*deva*’ meaning light; ‘*asura*’ (demoniac) has meanings ranging from cruelty and hardness to blood. The dialectical relation between the two is illustrated in terms of the concepts of *Devas* (Gods) and *Asuras* (Demons).

Earlier chapters explained how and why various living things naturally tend to swim in different directions based on the gunas despite the fact that the same *Paramātma* resides in all. It was also shown that the gift of intelligence gives man freedom of choice regarding the ideal direction and man alone has the acumen to change his inclinations at will.

The following verses provide knowledge to evaluate one’s natural inclinations and correct them oneself and set one’s sights as he considers right. The insight provided does not amount to codes of conduct associated with any religion, caste or faith. It is the result of close observation and precise scrutiny of human nature – scientific in other words. It is observed for all time as evinced by the fact that it is pertinent to the conditions obtaining today more than ever before.

Society is free to shape and implement laws of moral conduct in two ways: one, frame regulations to eradicate the injustices prevalent at the time; and if implemented effectively these do help ameliorate the situation for the time being. But inclinations, being the results of the three *gunas* or tendencies, if not corrected at the individual level, will bring about other kinds of injustices in the course of time. If the laws in force are considered for all time and as a matter of faith, the society will not be able to gain access to any provision for evolving

them or bringing in a fresh code. As a result, injustices will rule the roost despite all faith in the old order. The other way is to study human nature scientifically and place indicator signals at all turning points. If it is done on the basis of an all-embracing vision valid for all time, these can serve as long as humanity lasts. The Gita points out the good and the bad in human nature from this stand point.

No specific codes of conduct are suggested; what is introduced is only a threadbare discussion. Indications are provided which help understand oneself. The driver himself can and has to decide which way to turn. The Gita understands that individuals and the society cannot be corrected by external pressure. ('*nigrahaḥ kim kariṣyati?*' – What can compulsion achieve?) Even if roadblocks are put and passengers diverted with a whistle and a baton to persuade, human nature looks for the earliest shortcut to the forbidden path, unless one decides against it oneself.

These verses help everyone to observe the symptoms in one's own character and evaluate the direction one moves. The decision to make changes or not is left to us. The Gita reinstates this again at the very close of it: '*yathecchasi tathā kuru*' 18.63 – 'do as you think right'.

śrībhagavān uvāca  
abhayam sattvasamśuddhir jñānayogavyavasthitih  
dānam damaś ca yajñaś ca svādhyāyas tapa ārjavam 16.1  
ahimsā satyam akrodhas tyāgah śāntir apaiśunam  
dayā bhūteṣv aloluptvam mārdavam hrīr acāpalam 16.2  
tejah kṣamā dhṛtiḥ śaucam adroho nātimānitā  
bhavanti sampadam daivīm abhijātasya bhārata 16.3

*The Lord of all senses said:*

*Fearlessness, clarity of mind pertaining to adhyatma vidya and deep-rooted conviction regarding yoga of knowledge, generosity to share what one has with those who deserve, control over the sense organs, attitude of dedication of all actions to Isvara, habitual learning (reading and contemplation) regarding what is deep within one's self, general self restrictions beneficial for pursuing knowledge, straightforwardness born out of courage of conviction, free from the feeling of being apart, truthfulness, ability to keep oneself above anger and possessiveness, control over one's mind, abstinence from blaming others, compassion, being above greed, softness of approach to all creatures, shameful at doing wrong, brilliance, patience, perseverance, capability to grasp ideas, the habit of keeping one's body clean, not hurting others and doing away with any inflated image of oneself – O the one always looking for wisdom*

(Arjuna), all these are natural assets to the one with Deva (divine) inclinations.

Anybody anywhere can check these traits in themselves. There is no insistence upon being right in the case of all or any. No stricture is passed if they are unfavorable. No minimum qualification is prescribed except the readiness for betterment. There is no persuasion, provocation or intimidation. The call is to try and get to know God; not to fear him and just obey. Actions are neither prescribed nor tabooed.

dambho darpobhimānaś ca krodhah pāruṣyam eva ca  
ajñānam cābhijātasya pārtha sampadam āsurīm 16.4

*O Arjuna; vanity, arrogance, assuming and projecting greatness, self-conceit, anger and also harshness and ignorance are the assets accompanying asura (demoniac) traits.*

A haughty person is always worried about damages to his inflated ego. He feels unduly proud on account of any of these – education, riches, family, position, achievements or even physical strength and behaves insolently; he is conceited. Vanity is the result of fostering and enjoying an inflated image one creates for oneself. The threat of a sharp needle-prick on that inflated balloon infuriates such a person; imaginary threats keep haunting him. This results in insolence and denies him all chance to ponder over his real position in the universe and his obligations to the rest of the world. It is a vicious circle that results in more and more ignorance.

This verse can be viewed as continuation and / or further explanation of the part that describes the step-by-step downfall of man earlier. These traits are intensified during periods of unchecked *rāja guna*.

Modern psychology understands that most mental problems originate when the self-image of one cannot be sustained. Every aberration from addiction to suicide and murder can be traced to damages inflicted upon self-image.

daivī sampad vimokṣāya nibandhāyāśurī matā  
mā śucāḥ sampadam daivīm abhijātosi pāṇḍava 16.5

*O son of Pandu (Arjuna), deva assets lead to liberation and asura assets to ensnarement. But, don't you worry; you are with divine assets.*

Those who come out successful in the self-verification process are set to

proceed to ultimate freedom; egotists on the other hand get more and more enslaved by worldly confines as they live on. The fact that there are two conveyor belts like these and everyone is already positioned on one or the other naturally makes one wonder where he is heading. As if in response, the composer of the Gita says: ‘Don’t you worry; you are with divine assets.’ These are no hollow words of consolation. All those who have begun looking for truth, patiently gathering the hidden secrets of the universe and awareness of one’s real self, getting devoted to the force underlying everything – i.e., all who have persisted for wisdom certainly do have the right asset in them. The fact that one has given up much time for this search is proof positive.

Heaven and hell are no other than two kinds of life on earth – these are the extremes one can have right here. Ultimate freedom is liberation from all associations with misery; the opposite is total entanglement in sorrow. The ever-moving conveyor belts go in opposite directions. But one does not have to despair. One can jump belts by action supported by right knowledge and the choice for betterment. Also, it is never too late. The chance remains open till the very end of the journey. Hardly any other philosophy has been able to define morality in such an all-embracing, scientific and universal fashion.

dvau bhūtasargau lokesmin daiva āsura eva ca  
daivo vistaraśāḥ prokta āsuram pārtha me śṛṇu 16.6

*O Arjuna, the dispositions of creatures in this world (can be classified to belong to either the deva or the asura traits. The former has been already described in detail; (now) you may hear from me about the latter.*

The manifest world is dialectical. Wisdom and ignorance are in it just as light and darkness. But man has the ability to distinguish between the two. It is the approach to them that matters. One who knows right cannot hate the wrong ones because their life force too is based on the *Paramātma*. Also, *Paramātma* is present in equal measure in creations of both dispositions. The energy and the ability to act stem from *Paramātma* irrespective of whether one does good or evil. Therefore what basically differentiates the former from the latter is only wrong choice based on ignorance kindled by *rajo guna*. Numerous are the examples to prove it. Nuclear science + ignorance = nuclear bomb; fire + ignorance = conflagration; the urge to mate + ignorance = sexual assault; faith + ignorance = terrorism.

Good or bad is not exclusively present in any creation. Both are there in all. One’s disposition at any time is decided by what rules the other. Evolutionary

refinement (culture) is reckoned in terms of one's ability to lead one's life energy on the path towards real happiness. There are two strains to it: inherited (*niyatavipakam*) and earned (*aniyatavipakam*). Both can be altered by conscious effort. But neither of these layers can be controlled by any law imposed from outside. Changes cannot be transplanted; they have to blossom from within. It has been observed earlier that those who cannot rule themselves cannot be ruled by anyone else. The wise will not despise any; the prodigal son is always welcome back.

*Asura* (demonic) disposition is described in greater detail to make (self) recognition and expulsion easier.

pravṛttim ca nivṛttim ca janā na vidur āsurāḥ  
na śaucam nāpi cācāro na satyam teṣu vidyate 16.7

*Those who have asura disposition do not know when to act, nor do they know when to refrain from action. Neither do they know clean habits, nobility of thought or commitment to truth.*

It is to be remembered that this mixture of dispositions is not a ‘template’ seen in an individual, but each of them may be present in varying amounts.

Some choose inaction when their help is most wanted. They tend to ignore, thinking ‘why bother’. There have been instances where people bleed to death in accidents and not one tries to help, even though some are interested in capturing photos on their cell phones! In the same way some do things or speak out where it was better to ignore the whole incident. Such over-reactions jeopardize relationships and jobs and land the person sometimes even in deeper trouble, like in criminal cases. When to act and when not to is not properly understood by the person with demoniac disposition. Pride and vanity are mostly behind these reactions.

A civilized man is clean within and outside. Cleanliness provides comfort and health for the one who is habituated to it and also makes those around him feel good. Garbage in the surroundings points more to garbage in the minds of the people behind pollution.

There is a saying that ‘a hundred lies can be told to make a girl's marriage happen’. Here the question is not whether ‘white lies’ are good or bad. The verse points to a disposition of certain people to make excuses and tell lies whenever they can. They say it unblinking and naturally and people close to them know the trait and even despise them for it. This nature is part of their own inherent thinking and they have the habit of fooling themselves also the same way. The

disposition is demoniac because they cannot search for any truth about themselves or that of the one behind the universe.

The way one acts bespeaks the kind of one's relationship with the universe. Actions go astray if relationships are not well understood. To reckon relationships well one should be able to know love. Failure to distinguish the mature from the immature leads to misunderstood relationships. Such people are rightly called unwise. They also infect others with ignorance by offering them easy but wrong solutions and options.

Wisdom can be earned any time and it immediately cures. It makes one clean, act the right way and helps one imbibe basic commitment to truth. The Gita compassionately hopes everybody does.

asatyam apratiṣṭham te jagad āhur anīśvaram  
aparasparasambhūtam kim anyat kāmahaitukam 16.8

*Some argue that the world is baseless and without any fundamental truth or God, and is the product of reactions between unlike and lifeless entities; and exists solely for the fulfillment of sensual pleasures, and so ask ‘for what else is all this?’*

In these dispositions the problem is not that of lack of intelligence; it is just that one's intelligence does not get applied right. Even those who perceive the world only on the basis of material experiences do come to know that everything around them keeps changing. But that knowledge does not fructify and result in the realization of the simple truth that any scenario of eternal change cannot happen without a changeless base. So it is concluded that the universe is ‘essence-less’ (*asat*). It is further argued that the universe has no foundation and there is no fundamental and united force behind it.

In the absence of any cognition of the second and the third levels of reality (*Akshara* and *Purushottama*), the process of creation is explained as interaction between unlike entities taking place as a result of natural interactions between lifeless particles, the vision cornerstone to present materialistic science.

The urge to mate is considered the most prominent rationale and is seen everywhere. Lust is therefore supposed to be the prime thing, and it is assumed to be the sole purpose of the human body. Love is held as no more than an appetizer to it. The result is breakdown of all relationships, total fragmentation of society – making life null and void of all potential for happiness.

With *sankalpa* (one sided imagination) added to this biased vision, people caught in wrong perception try to maintain a great attraction to the body of the

opposite sex in their minds, ignoring the fact that the body is also unattractive and impure in various respects. *Yogasutra* lists four conditions as the structure of *avidya* (ignorance): enhanced attraction to (unattractive) bodies like the human body, perceiving temporary objects as permanent, seeing happiness in sensual activities which ultimately result in mental pain and anguish, and perceiving the *ātma* as various material objects.

It may appear miraculous that thousands of years ago these sages had the insight to visualize the emergence of Freudian theories and materialistic science. But the perceptual error that leads to these dispositions is also universal and ancient. It was already in vogue during Vedic times, held by *charvayatas* and *lokayatikas* (atheists). In ancient Greece Democritus and his disciples were empiricists. Western philosophers like Locke laid stress on direct observation. These as well as the materialists that followed were indeed great thinkers. But the conclusions that followed (like man is the chief executive of the world, the only purpose of human life is the enjoyment of physical pleasures, etc.) cannot be sustained. Bertrand Russell endlessly ridicules those with world views such as that rabbits have long ears only to help hunters take unfaltering aim.

Unfortunately for the world, super-materialism cannot be just laughed away; it creates much greater harm than any silly joke can.

etāṁ drṣṭim avaśṭabhyā naṣṭātmānolpabuddhayāḥ  
prabhavanty ugrakarmāṇāḥ kṣayāya jagatohitāḥ 16.9

*Accepting these kinds of worldviews and (as a result) losing (by negation) the Paramātma residing as one's True Self, all awareness completely entangled in smaller environments (and conditions), they tend to initiate terrific deeds, turning dangerous to themselves and to the world.*

Dictators are examples. Such people restrict their view to certain conditions and environments as they lose the larger perspective. The essence of the universe is *Paramātma*, the all-pervading and the equally placed in all creations. It is the eternal presence in all things and everybody. Not being aware of its presence amounts to having lost it – the fate of the proverbial donkey carrying a heavy load on its back, not knowing that it is a collection of precious gems. Intelligence will blossom if the presence beyond the phenomenal world is be perceived. If it does not, it falls short of its possible reach; it becomes stunted (*alpabuddhi*).

Man is endowed with capabilities greater and more diverse than other living things have. Intelligence when stunted either fails to recognize the bonanza or tend to misuse it. No-holds-barred hunting is resorted to day after day. One coins

one's own jurisprudence which is designed to justify any atrocity one perpetrates. The world is hurt. The fact that the world including oneself is being undermined does not dawn.

Even many who partake faiths that postulate the immortality of the soul and one's eligibility for eternal life after death, often fall short of fully comprehending the scope and depth of this vision. As a result they have beaten, crushed and burned many people considered not to belong to their religion. Even co-believers if considered or accused to be wanting in faith were not spared. Millions of Jews were exterminated in gas chambers by the forces of Hitler. In the name of Jesus the Apostle of Love and Allah the Most Merciful, millions lost their lives in crusades. As many or more have perished in internecine fights within one and the same faith. The nuclear bombs that burned millions of people alive in Japan were 'sanctified' before dispatch!

Nothing less than the full perspective can be beneficial to the entire mankind. If not, those who fail to recognize the real import of their faith can harm the world even more than the havoc worked by those who openly deny the very existence of the eternal basis for the universe. This is because demoniac disposition can be all the more difficult to understand if it is camouflaged behind obviously good motives, and especially behind faith. Respective verses about this trait as compounded by *rājō guna* were discussed at the end of chapter 3, encouraging one to destroy this enemy of illusions within.

kāmam āśritya duṣpūram dambhamānamadānvitāḥ  
mohād gr̥hitvāsadgrāhān pravartanteśucivratāḥ 16.10

*Driven by endless desires and cravings and becoming obsessed with egotism, false pride and vanity, some fall into wrong routes to achieve unworthy targets which cannot be obtained through direct and good paths but through ways prescribed by ignorance.*

There are lots of people who desire to show the world they are smart, but some tend to make a show of that at the expense of their own goodness. They visualize smartness as winning petty quarrels, fooling other people in small ways and making money through impure means like corruption. The feeling of petty vanity that these people get from such actions tie them more to such dispositions. Greed for land and money destroys many a relation and friendship.

But situations become a lot worse when these types of dispositions are organized and large scale. What is exposed here is the reason why modern world that is supposed to be developed and civilized is fast moving away from peace

and justice. Many are prey to insatiable greed. It has been widely accepted that desires and ocean waves never subside. Advertisements promote greed, lust, pride, envy and the feeling of false prestige. Enterprises that sell contraptions and services of pleasure and prestige count upon greed becoming universal. Life becomes a rat race to grab the ever-receding mirage of sensuous pleasures. The power-greedy fish for votes with the bait of the promise to satiate voters' greed better!

All air, land and water on earth have already been polluted in the process. Among all living things man has earned the unique status of being the only one that irrevocably spoils its habitat. Debris and garbage have been dumped everywhere from the bottom of the Pacific Ocean to the peaks of the Himalayas and even in outer space. This despicable condition has been caused by the false assumption by many an individual, company and government that as long as one's selfish interests are met it does not matter what happens to the world at large. Recession, famine, social injustice, weapon trade, terrorism, drug trafficking, murder, loot and war are all examples of what follows from the inability to distinguish between what is desirable and what is not.

The Gita does not promulgate any wholesale division of humanity into compartments of good and evil. Most men are in between the extremes on the spectrum occupied by child molesters at one end and Mother Theresas at the other. The balance sheet is always in favor of good. That is why human race has sustained itself and come so far, all manmade catastrophes notwithstanding. There is every scope for optimism too as wisdom can be attained by anyone any time.

For help in identifying the traits of demoniac disposition and for further clarification of these symptoms within oneself, sage Vyasa now explains these frames of mind further:

cintām aparimeyāṁ ca pralayāntām upāśritāḥ  
kāmopabhogaparamā etāvad iti niścitāḥ 16.11  
āśāpāśāśatair baddhāḥ kāmakrodhaparāyaṇāḥ  
īhante kāmabhogārtham anyāyenārthaśaṁcayān 16.12

*Moreover, with mental unrest and tension extending (as if) till the end of the universe, they target material pleasures, deciding there is nothing else to seek, getting ensnared in countless vines of want and cravings, relentlessly striving to make money through unjust means to satiate their lusts.*

Anxiety neurosis is the result when safety considerations degenerate into

worry. When safety and happiness are equated with money, feverish efforts are made to grab more and more of it. Unjust means are sought to amass it aplenty on a war footing. But mental strain and pain are the result whether one succeeds or not. Defeat makes one angry and success brings in, besides the feeling of guilt, greater fear of thieves, burglars, taxmen and police.

The ‘economic man’ is defined as ‘one who always buys and sells only for profit’. Education becomes a tool to recruit people of great intelligence as workers to satisfy the demoniac dispositions of money making machines.

When unjust means are adopted to maximize profit, exploitation is the rule, and constant attention is necessary to keep one’s grip on others’ necks, and also to ward off anyone establishing a similar grip on one’s own neck! The resultant neurosis lasts till death. If it is realized that this kind of competition does not help anyone survive any better but only makes everything worse, then there is hope.

While engaged in this kind of ‘enterprise’, these people hold on to apparently logical justifications, but that only helps spread the disease. As man is a social being, attitudes and approaches are often contagious, even infectious. As the neurosis spreads the world at large becomes restless as it is now. Just observe the world around. Modern science and technology has provided every means to collect every necessary resource, refine and distribute it all over the world fast. But more than half of the world’s population is starving. A great chunk of manpower and other resources go into nonproductive sectors like armed services, stockpiling of weapons and security arrangements. Yet no one anywhere feels secure. No spot on earth remains unpolluted. Justification for all these comes as peculiar equations like ‘progress = competition’. Even people with good dispositions are dragged on to the general disease by ‘one can’t keep away when the whole world is on the move’.

The exposition of the quality of life and its yield in the case of those who refuse to admit that there exists any purpose other than enjoyment of material pleasures helps introspection.

idam adya mayā labdham imam̄ prāpsyē manoratham  
idam astīdam api me bhaviṣyati punar dhanam 16.13  
asau mayā hataḥ śatruḥ haniṣye cāparān̄ api  
īśvaro.aham̄ aham̄ bhogī siddhoham̄ balavān̄ sukhī 16.14

*‘Look, I have achieved this today; tomorrow I will realize this other; I already have this much of assets; there is this and this other to come; I have just finished off this (mighty) foe; I will certainly eliminate others too who stand in*

*my way in the future; I rule everything; I command the best of all that there is in this world; I am a man of great achievements; I am powerful; I have all pleasures....'*

The height of asura (demoniac) disposition is the total negation of all else on earth. The concept of the ‘demon’, plundering and butchering and gloating about it all is very clear as we read through this disposition. Isavasya Upanishad asks ‘whose wealth is it?’ The answer in very many minds today, though not freely expressed in so many words, is ‘doesn’t matter whose; I must have it all’! Even the experience that one cannot hold water in the bowl of one’s hand for long or heap up water or dig a hole on water surface does not provide any cue against greed developing into neurosis. The only solution is the question asked to oneself, based on knowledge about oneself and the world: ‘what actually do I need for myself to be happy?’ The Gita wants us to probe ourselves to find out whether we do so and also encourages the human world to better evolve to that stance.

Greed is insatiable. The satisfaction that any material achievement provides is just temporary; moreover, it generates no more than another dimension to it. Like fire, it grows more ferocious when fed. The one captivated by greed never lives; he is fighting all the time and preparing his surroundings to realize a grandiose world that keeps receding till his last day.

Worms living in a heap of dirt devour the waste but when there is no more of it eat each other. The fat one that outlasts all is, however, destined to die of starvation.

Cut-throat competition rules the roost for control over markets, financial institutions and seats of power. Food and even medicines are adulterated. Bad coins are fast driving out all good ones.

The main problem is this ‘I’ as described prosaically in the verse. It creates ‘you’ – a different entity. ‘I’ wants to enslave ‘you’ because if ‘I’ do not, ‘you’ cannot be used to pull my bandwagon; moreover, ‘you’ may get strong enough to enslave ‘I’ and make ‘I’ do it for you. So every ‘you’ that is yet to become slave of ‘I’ is my enemy. ‘I’ fears ‘you’ may prove a hindrance to my hunger-satisfaction.

All sorts of subversions and atrocity are considered ‘good’ in diplomacy among ‘civilized’ nations, proving that even the most powerful nations fear every other one. Great dictators in any walk of life are in fact hopeless cowards. But these can rule only when people at large too lose a good part of their bravery and direction. History is replete with instances of what happened to ‘leaders’ who claim the throne and declare death to anything threatening them including

God. The Gita openly wonders why men are yet unable to weed out from their minds the foolhardy aspirations that dig their sorry grave.

āḍhyobhijanavān asmi konyosti sadṛśo mayā  
yakṣye dāsyāmi modiṣya ity ajñānavimohitāḥ 16.15

*'I am a person coming from a high family; I am great; can anyone on earth claim to be my equal? I will get many yajnas performed; I will offer prodigious 'dana' (donations); I will keep myself always happy....' they who are waylaid by ignorance feel.*

Demonic dispositions can come from even apparently good aspects like religion, worship, noble lineage and charity. Once more we get an insight that it is the disposition that matters, not the belief or action.

Wisdom alone can save one. It alone helps escape from untenable conclusions. There is no difference between any two people but for variations obtained in the process of biological evolution. Nobody is higher or lower. Nobility by birth is an illusion. The ocean of milk when churned produced *kalakutam* the deadly poison as well as *amrut* the potion that wards off death.

It is surprising why one does not realize that the very feeling of extra self-importance is the symptom of the lack of average wisdom. Even great *rishis* fell prey to this fallacy. Sage Parasurama, confronting Sri Rama, roars in anger: 'How can there be a Rama other than me anywhere in this world?' However, a fallacy is a fallacy none the less. Organizing expensive events like elaborate yajnas and offering gifts were perhaps part of elitist behavior even during those days. Similar events are arranged by the vainglorious today just to provide them with the opportunity to be at the centre-stage of it. The pleasure they derive lasts no longer than a soap bubble does. They live in fools' paradise.

Here again the Gita prompts us to introspect. Do I feel greater than others, even by the good things that I do? Do I feel that I must be shown a lot more respect? Do I feel my family's status has to be recognized more? Does the sponsorship of a *mahamela* (a great event) or making a huge donation so as to attract public attention to me and my stature entice me, and is that enticement the real reason for making that charity? If the answer is yes, I better know that I am even more ignorant and in no way better than the ones not performing the so called charity.

anekacittavibhrāntā mohajālasamāvṛtāḥ  
prasaktāḥ kāmabhogeṣu patanti narakeśu cau 16.16

*Trapped in numerous conflicting thoughts and mental turmoil, deluded by innumerable illusions aided by wrong perceptions, tied to material pleasure and endless craving; they fall into miserable hell set up by their own innate inclinations.*

Sense organs are always on the lookout for the kind of pleasures they can have, and mind is always on the lookout for projected happiness. Each time one has an interaction with the world, the taste of it is deposited in the mind. The mind is waylaid by its tendency to go into attractive one sided imaginations (*sankalpa*) of power, material possessions and pleasures. It is enraged when these desires are thwarted; rage muffles and sickens its prowess. As a result it loses the capability to see within itself and experience the True Self. Hell is created in the psyche unenlightened by wisdom. How can a sickened mind know love, peace and contentment? The mentally ill make any heaven a hell. Their discontent and restlessness turn the entire society restless. A few ignorant people can turn any fresh water pond muddy. On the other hand, the enlightened converts any hell into heaven by their mere presence. Their entry resembles the cool breeze that heralds rain to a region visited by drought – like a Florence Nightingale holding a candle and walking into the darkness of the hospital ward of pain and misery.

ātmasambhāvitāḥ stabdhā dhanamānamadānvitāḥ  
yajante nāmayajñais te dambhenāvidhipūrvakam 16.17

*Those who, set firm (like rock) in ignorance and keep singing their own praise, intoxicated with money, power and position; demonstratively perform namesake yajnas (spectacular events the society holds in high esteem) without caring for the prescribed process or keeping the purpose of it all in perspective.*

The unwise soon lose whatever sense of values they have. For people with demoniac disposition, whatever they do is right. The ignorant is always convinced of their greatness. They remain rock-stubborn in that attitude. Insensitive to finer feelings, they are not bothered about wounding the hearts of bodies of others. If all wisdom is lost, man is no more humane. The unwise are set in a posture like a donkey standing firm in the middle of a pathway; and they pose a greater problem than real donkeys. The donkey is a lot better because it does not have addiction to money and power.

The misguided perform ritualistic yajnas to boost their image in society. Acts

of charity are used for publicity.

It is a pity that meaningless events are organized today on a large scale even in the name of spiritualism. Mountains of money go to waste. Hysterical chanting and highly provocative speeches advocating divisive polarization take place. An entire area is polluted with sound, dust, dirt and hatred. At the end of the day someone makes money in the name of some idol, idea, party, community or caste leaving humanity to become the worse for it.

Ignorance is the mother of haughtiness too. The haughty considers the rest of humanity as garbage. They cannot stand dissent. They are autocrats and dictators. They become stumbling blocks in the flow of dynamic social life and also human evolution.

For the ideal fructification of any human action two sets of prescriptions have to be followed. At the material level the science of it has to be mastered and kept to help perfect the art or the craft concerned. At the philosophical level the action should promote the welfare of all. These are applicable for anything from planting a seed to piloting a spacecraft. If the quality of the soil, the desired weather conditions, the kind and amount of fertilizer and the necessary physical protection are not taken care of, the seed may not sprout at all; even if it does it may not grow; even if it grows it may not bear fruit; if at all it does all that the quantity of the produce may turn out to be unworthy of the time and effort. Similarly, if the scientific methods are not strictly followed, the spacecraft may slip off its orbit, fail to stabilize, perish in re-entry or even end up in an explosion. On the other hand, if the philosophical prescriptions are violated, agricultural products coming into the market may be contaminated with the presence of unallowable levels of toxic chemicals, hormones and fertilizers; the spacecraft that should have served the whole of humanity may carry thermonuclear weapons and intercontinental missiles.

ahamkāram balam darpam kāmam krodham ca samśritāḥ  
mām ātmaparadeheṣु pradviṣantobhyasūyakāḥ 16.18

*Those who take on the assumption that they can do anything, depending upon body (physical) strength to do what they desire, believing that no one can be equal to them, adhering to sensual pleasures and anger – those of demoniac dispositions live enviously, hating and trying to hurt Me residing in their own bodies as well as in others.*

Most people of demoniac disposition are atheists. This is not because of the inadequacies felt in established religions for true atheists of good disposition.

Instead, for demoniac people, God is another source of power to which they cannot bow due to their arrogance or accept due to their own wrong-doings. They hate and envy any source of power or righteousness.

If no attempt is made to subjugate the bodily ego to the True Self, it will enslave the entirety of one's identity. The fuel of life's energy supposed to be spent on purposeful action will get misused in efforts to gratify the sense organs, the cravings of the mind and the ego projected by the intellect. Arrogance means total lack of concern regarding how one's action affects others. This pre-empts enlightenment from feedback. Every obstacle generates only anger to which one's awareness of one's True Self is the first casualty.

Jealousy is the feeling of sorrow about others having any material pleasure or goodness that one does not have. That one feeling is capable of dragging one to corruption, dislike for good people, yearning for another person's unhappiness, sexual adultery; in fact any crime imaginable. The peculiarity of this emotion is its power to make a person do wrong, even if he doesn't really desire that object or pleasure. If a person is of jealous disposition, that grave mental disease has to be completely healed; otherwise not even one step of advancement can be taken in the path of wisdom.

Every living being is comfortable when provided with the biological space akin to it. But the haughty are intolerant. They have no regard for the 'space' of any other. They tend to enslave or exterminate every other being so as to increase territory. Enmity is the emotion that rules them. It is expressed as the 'either you or me' threat. This being so it is impossible for them to see that the same Paramātma resides in the other too. The True Self is thus neglected and even negated. Any virtuous facet attempting to correct them is hated too. Non-recognition of it is a mistake by itself; hating it multiplies the gravity of it many fold.

tān aham dviṣataḥ krurān saṁsāreṣu narādhamān  
kṣipāmy ajasram aśubhān āsurīṣv eva yoniṣu 16.19

*These cruel and abominable specimens of men who hate and hurt in the course of this material life are doomed. I (become instrumental to) dump their future lives (generations) again and again in unholy births with demoniac assets.*

What is meant is not *Paramātma* sitting in final judgment over anybody. The natural course of action that the *prakṛti* takes is presented. Demoniac tendencies run through generations. In addition to transmitting their wrong genes which have been further enhanced in demoniac assets by their cruelty and

abominations, these people also provide the wrong ideas and circumstances for their offspring to grow. The value system that these children imbibe from their parents and surroundings are decadent and it is like a noose that has begun to tighten even before any actual mistake is done. It may seem unjust that innocent children have to suffer for the crimes of their parents but in effect that is what happens in nature. This is also only a general observation and not the rule; Lord Krishna was born in the house of the demoniac Kansa and pious and gentle Prahlad in the house of cruel Hiranyakasipu.

If one wants to consider rebirth also (that meaning can also be taken from the verse), demoniac assets make the next birth of that person to be in decadent circumstances getting the person more trapped in the same nature.

āsurīṁ yonim āpannā mūḍhā janmanjanmani  
mām aprāpyaiva kaunteya tato yānty adhamāṁ gatim 16.20

*O Arjuna, accumulating more and more demoniac assets birth after birth, they find it impossible to reach Me (Paramātma) and go down (the scale of evolution).*

We all have a conscience objecting whenever something wrong is thought of. The protest from within varies in intensity from person to person but, however feeble, it is always there. It gets blunted if discarded again and again. After a stage it may be no longer heard. But there is the possibility that any time the internal voice may succeed in making another sage Valmiki out of the dastardly robber that he was. In nature any turn of events is the synthesis of a thesis and an antithesis, it is so by the dialectical nature of Akshara. The *rishis* of old were able to understand this well.

It is often found that the advancements made in terms of evolution (in other words the refinement or culture) are eroded or lost when pressures mount. On the defendant's stand in criminal courts we find many who weep 'I couldn't stand it any longer; I became a beast!' The acid test is to meet any such challenge and not to become the beast. That is the essence of being man. Wisdom regarding what one really is alone can provide the will. Nothing more is necessary. The cardinal equation is rather simple: hell + wisdom = heaven.

The inclination, if it happens to be no more than minuscule, can be nurtured and cultured. The Gita says it can be even germinated afresh on any ground (because it is discretely present everywhere as *Paramātma*). The spiral that may lead one down to hell (on earth) extends upward to heaven (on earth) too: a little wisdom germinates the inclination towards the divine and this in turn generates

more wisdom.

trividham narakasyedam dvāram nāśanam ātmanah  
kāmaḥ krodhas tathā lobhas tasmād etat trayam tyajet 16.21

*In this world there are three open doors which lead man to hell and destroy the self. They are kāma, krodha and lobha. These three are to be discarded.*

*Kāma* means lust and *Krodha* means anger. *Lobha* denotes greed – the strong emotion to keep everything to oneself unjustly. The urge to hoard everything even when one does not want it at any imaginable future and despite the world badly needing it is the third door.

These three are independent destroyers of the self in the sense that they can disintegrate the mind and personality of even a basically good person. Anger and hatred are useless in life; these are remnants of an age long past in evolution. Even while we uproot the statue of Lord Buddha and beat to kill the rabid dog that is trying to bite us, we can avoid hating that dog. Sexual impulse is no horse that cannot be reined in; remembering unattractive aspects and blocking sankalpa (one-sided imagination) – the path of *sama* (alleviation in the mind) – is all that is needed in the usual course. While storing anything for the next day, it can be made sure that this does not amount to denial of today's need to another or help bring about artificial scarcity. Pragmatic wisdom is enough to make anyone aware that the best insurance for one's happiness and security is everybody else being happy and secure. In fact, even one's 'selfish' interests are best served by becoming one with the rest of the biosphere.

etair vimuktah kaunteya tamodvārais tribhir narah  
ācaraty ātmanah śreyas tato yāti parām gatim 16.22

*O Arjuna, anyone who, escaping from these three doors leading to hell, does action for the sreyas of his self and thereby reaches the highest state.*

'Sreyas' implies upliftment or refinement so that the self can naturally reach the heights that it is supposed to be. It is brought about through action. Action, therefore, is upheld as the most important part of human existence. Such growth benefits the individual, the society and the entire biosphere at the same time. Relinquishing the world is not the way to liberation.

Actions for survival, self-propagation and earning livelihood are essential duties. But the senses including the mind should not get enslaved while these

actions are undertaken. From the very beginning to the end the Gita discusses the wisdom and the methodology to escape this slavery and also details remedial actions to get free if at all already ensnared. Fortunate in life is the one who is able to distinguish accurately between the needed, optional and unnecessary. When such a self recognizes the True Self, then it reaches towards perfection.

yah śāstravidhim utsṛjya vartate kāmakārataḥ  
na sa siddhim avāpnoti na sukham na parām gatim 16.23

*Whoever refuses to heed the instructions of the knowledgeable in the sastras and remains enslaved by greed and lust misses life's purpose, real happiness and the highest path.*

The word 'sastra' means science. Modern science has very many branches from animal husbandry to architecture and each has its own theories and calculations as propounded by great masters of the field; but everything refers to the material world. Ancient Indian thought (*sastra*) is classified into two – the *aparā vidya* (studies pertaining to the material world, in which modern science can also be considered); and the *parā vidya* (studies pertaining to the two other levels of reality – the *Akshara* and *Isvara*). The word 'sastra' here obviously refers to both, as it is presented as associated with 'life's purpose', 'real happiness' and 'identification with the *Paramātma*'.

In those days *parā vidya* was learned from *sruti* (what has been said and heard) as different from *aparā vidya* in which instructions were mostly given by living teachers. In the language of Immanuel Kant *sruti* is knowledge *a priori*. It is ageless. There is yet another branch known as *smṛiti* – what has to be kept in mind through experiences (*a posteriori*). It is subject to change as per time and place. But these changes are to be brought about in the light of basic tenets laid down by *sruti*. Whenever in doubt the rule is: go by *sruti*.

In short, *sruti* is paramount wisdom. All choices made should be made in its light. Also, choices have to be corroborated with the teachings of the masters and should be perfectly acceptable to rational thought. It is also to be ascertained that one's ego has not influenced decisions regarding this knowledge and the actions based on it. For that wisdom is a must.

What makes *sruti* ageless? It conveys a vision which is not reachable by direct observation or application of the law of causation. But derivation of any kind from this vision matches direct observations and experiences. The truth presented is sustained by verification of its implications. For instance, look at the dictum that there is an eternal but unobservable entity behind the ever-changing

physical universe. One cannot keep wiping and writing over and over again unless one has a slate in the first place! Deeper knowledge banishes wrong assumptions too. Real knowledge of the self, for instance, puts an end to the wrong impression that one is no more than the perishable body. The student imbibing *sruti* checks his experiences with the vision he gets and assimilates what he finds admissible in the light of his own reason.

What is heard is assimilated through contemplation and meditation by the student, aided by disciplined life and action based on this so that he is taken to higher levels of awareness and cognition. This is the path the forerunners have walked. They are the gurus. *Sruti* says the stature of *Paramātma* is the same as the wisdom (felt knowledge, *vijnana*) ascertained by meditating upon what they have promulgated (*prajnanam brahma*). It is eternal and unchangeable. So one does not have to (neither can) look for when it dawned and to whom first, and such search is also irrelevant. Becoming one with paramount wisdom is the challenge inherent in *brahma vidya*. Success depends on the combination of inclination and effort.

tasmāc chāstram̄ pramāṇam̄ te kāryākāryavyavasthitau  
jñātvā sāstravidhānoktam̄ karma kartum ihārhasi 16.24

*Therefore make sastra your fundamental criterion for understanding the actual from the immaterial, the accurate from the inaccurate. Understanding the points in the sastra clearly, thus you are entitled to do action.*

Therefore make science your criteria for all action. The science (*sastra*) mentioned here includes both material science (present modern science) and wisdom.

Students have to be careful about several kinds of pitfalls related to sources of ancient knowledge: The validity of the text is one such. Selfish pretenders in the garb of enlightened souls may create spurious texts to suit their purpose and convenience, mutilate or misinterpret the sayings of the real gurus or even add their own opinions to it. Also, even great texts are manmade and there is some outdatedness in at least some part of any ancient text. Therefore blind faith to any text however great, even to the Upanishads, are to be discouraged. Pay obeisance to the ancients whose wisdom gives light even to the modern world and respect the texts, but approach them in a critical fashion.

There will always be those who ascribe exclusive importance to the ritualistic part of knowledge either due to habituated way of thinking, or with a view to material gains as they work in tandem with the egotists looking for fame

and wealth bestowed by hi-profile and spectacular events. Then there are organizations with god-men at the top looking for armies to safeguard their interests, distributing icons and talismans (always carrying a bust or picture of the god-man) and selling a neatly tied-up (commercial) package for (easy and assured) salvation. They are also to be shunned.

The earnest student has to steer clear of such deviations, find out his own way, make independent decisions, continuously try to transmute all availed knowledge into wisdom, and always remember that there is still a lot more to learn.

Science without wisdom is the curse that haunts the world today. Just take a look around. Every educated person today fully knows what all has to be done to transform this world into heaven but that knowledge has not been converted into action. For instance, does anyone in his right sense deny that one should love one's neighbor as one loves oneself? If everyone of the world (at least a sizeable bulk of the world's population) puts it into practice won't every problem haunting the world disappear pronto! But it remains a piece of information; it has not become an inherent habit like what a mother instinctively feels for her child – a part of her instinct.

How is a piece of acquired knowledge transmuted into wisdom? There are two steps. First it is examined closely for fallacies and limitations with a view to perfection. Knowledge passing this test becomes a conviction. Then it is made the subject of action; it makes the student one with the knowledge. The first step is logical activity that involves just the intellect. But the second step involves the entire being of the student and therefore is more crucial. This is how knowledge becomes a habit – an inherent instinct. Wisdom develops only this way. What decides the success of this habit is the attention devoted (*sraddha*) – its intensity, type and overall efficiency. The next chapter discusses about this quality.

## Chapter 17

# Yoga of Three Types of Sraddha

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Knowledge is obtained from parents, teachers, texts and friends. But its availability may fall short; it may not be accepted as its packing and delivery is not to one's liking; one may already be predisposed against it due to blind belief in some other philosophy; it is rejected as it clashes with temporary likes and wants at the moment; it is not popular in the circle of one's friends; one is too lazy to make the effort, not used to thinking or does not have time; it is forbidden by social pressure or even royal decree. Even when knowledge is available, it is mostly in corrupted format and may have issues, irrelevant thought and unnecessary accompaniments.

Man's focus varies from person to person. What one is interested may be ignored by another.

arjuna uvāca  
ye śāstravidhim utsṛjya yajante śraddhayānvitāḥ  
teṣāṁ niṣṭhā tu kā krṣṇa sattvam āho rajas tamah 17.1

*Arjuna said:*

*O Lord, which of the gunas can be said to be prominent in those who, though not following the methods prescribed by religion, perform all actions with the welfare of all in mind and with total dedication – sattva, rajas or tamas?*

Arjuna thinks of *sutra* in terms of religious laws prevalent at that time, but this is different from what the Lord meant by *sutra*. (The latter pertains to *yoga* of both *parā vidya* and *aparā vidya* according to Vedantic ideas.) However the question is relevant as it leads to discussion on the established framework of religions of all times. Daily rituals and codes of conduct to be followed are prescribed not only in Judaism, Christianity and Islam but also for followers of *Vaishnava*, *Saiva*, *Ganapatya*, *Sakteya*, *Jaina* and *Buddha* faiths. Even the noblest of men are considered 'outcasts' 'by their own people' if they do not comply with the framework of their established religions.

The import of the question surpasses the boundaries of all religions and nationalities, to what can qualitatively transform the society. Penal orders or heavy punishment cannot bring it about. Any code of conduct can be violated while keeping every letter of it. No monarch or religious head can do anything much about it. Right action should spontaneously sprout from the deep root of wisdom with scientific thinking being its nutrient, and grow and provide shade for the world. For that, the Gita holds the view that the content (basic ideals) has to be as good as the vessel (religion); it even goes beyond and suggests that the quality of the content is a lot more important than the vessel; even if the vessel is made of gold there is no difference. (The *rishi* in the Upanishad ventures further and postulates that ‘truth is always covered and thereby rendered out of sight by a vessel of gold’.) Behind every action there is decision stemming from an emotional disposition which, in turn, is the combined product of the person’s natural inclinations, knowledge and the conviction stemming from it. This in common parlance is known as faith. Though commonalities can be attributed, in the final analysis, it varies from person to person. If it is flawed, all action may either prove as futile as pouring water on a pitcher kept upside down or, worse, result in catastrophes like releasing the proverbial genie in the pitcher.

This faith is reflected in the *sraddha* (likeable or interested attention) of the individual. Therefore the answer goes further than the apparent question, discarding the religious link with the *gunas* and instead linking *sraddha* itself directly to the *gunas*, classifying it into three categories. Once more it is implied that it is the ‘content’ that is important, not the outer ‘religion’.

śrībhagavān uvāca  
trividhā bhavati śraddhā dehināṁ sā svabhāvajā  
sāttvikī rājasī caiva tāmasī ceti tām śṛṇu 17.2

*The Lord of all wisdom said:*

*The sraddha that you ask about occurs spontaneously in living things in three ways associated with the prominence of the three gunas – sattva, rajas and tamas. Be carefully attentive, I will tell you about them.*

Each living thing has an exclusive identity that makes its creation relevant. These individual deviations are over and above the common characteristics of the species. Minute variations occur in content, frequency and mode, bringing about the feasibility of and the scope and urge for evolving endless combinations. The background of this scenario related to *Akshara* and the *gunas* has been already looked into.

Among living things man is imbued with freedom and will to change his own disposition. This depends on the genetic inclinations of the individual, the knowledge he has imbibed and also his social and material circumstances. All the three *gunas* have gone into the making of his inclinations. The prevalent emotional state also varies from moment to moment. Light of wisdom is always there at the end of the tunnel, but the thicker the fog the harder it is to see through. However, the Gita assures that no effort goes waste. There are two avenues open to man: either get along with what is availed or change it by will. The operational mechanism to bring about this change is to alter one's *sraddha* (interested attention).

sattvānurūpā sarvasya śraddhā bhavati Bhārata  
śraddhāmayaḥ/yaṁ puruṣo yo yacchraddhāḥ sa eva saḥ 17.3

*O lover of light (Arjuna), everyone's sraddha follows from his basic nature. Sraddha is a trait of this (physical) entity. Everyone is shaped by his sraddha.*

It is not enough if the word *sraddha'* is understood as faith (in God), or simply as religion in Arjuna's question. *Sraddha* denotes the attention pattern of man which stems from his basic nature. The man who treats life merely as the chance to enjoy physical pleasures 'sees' that aspect more in life than other individuals by predisposed attention. The person with negativity in thinking is more predisposed to fail and also misses opportunities than the one with positively attuned *sraddha*. Attention patterns form the world of experiences. These patterns 'attract' the person to his field of interest, and if well oriented can reach up to the level of ultimate truth.

Changing the pattern of thought is in fact the hottest topic for all self-help authors of the modern world. But ancient Vedantic wisdom goes a lot deeper and identifies the roots of this trait and also provides comprehensive solutions to all problems; not just for "how to make friends", "how to be successful in smiling", etc.

Inclinations shown by lesser living things as conditioned reflexes appear in man as part of a matured and developed culture. Attention patterns also develop along the same route. These can be changed – effortlessly too – once one understands oneself very well.

yajante sāttvikā devān yakṣarakṣāṁsi rājasāḥ  
pretān bhūtagaṇāñś cānye yajante tāmasā janāḥ 17.4

*The sattvik worship the (the concept of) Devas, the rajasa worship (the concept of) Yakshas and Rakshas and the tamasa worship (the concept of) spirits and material objects.*

The first aspect of religion is who one worships. In answer to Arjuna's question, here the various 'God' concepts are discussed at the start. Most people need a protector, either real or imagined. Who one worships reveals the nature of his faith and that faith is linked to his attention pattern and his interests. (In ancient India, religion was not a 'hereditary' concept – meaning that the child was not forced into a 'religion' at birth, and any philosophy or mode of worship was considered as an independent choice.) The *sattvik* (in whom *sattva guna* is prominent) prays to the forces of light out of natural affinity for them. 'Deva' means light. The spectrum of worship varies from the concept of different Gods (who are perceived as embodiments of light) to the one God, all usually based on religion. (The *sattvik* adhere to healthy religious concepts but the *gunatita* does not need religion.) *Sattvik* usually pray for knowledge, happiness, health and general refinement of themselves, and also for the well being of all entities in the biosphere (*lokah samastah sukhino bhavantu* – may the whole world be happy and peaceful). Among the religious, these are the people who also accept and respect others' views. They are not misled by the 'pleasure' tactics of the sense organs, and neither are they interested in comparisons of 'my God and your God' or 'my religion and your religion'. They see through the world of experience.

The most enlightened of them follow the *karma yoga* and dedicate all their actions to the Ultimate One who illuminates even light itself; they are at the level of the *gunatita* (the one above the *gunas*). The sense organs, the mind and the intellect are all expression of the so called *Devas*, and we have earlier seen the verse that helps this concept in identification with the *Paramātma* in the chapter on *dhyana*.

The *rajasa* too interact with the world with the same equipment but their perception is colored and clouded by security, money, power and love-hate vicissitudes. Therefore they pray for material items or money (*yakshas* are the keepers of money, and this concept signifies that), their own long life and protection from adversaries, and for victory in competitions and strife (*rakshas* are protectors; the word should not be confused with *Rakshasa*). But this flaws their concept of the True God because their prayer is based on material welfare of themselves and competition, which means that the good of the rest in the society or the biosphere will have to take second place. They cannot see the total picture and so they fail to realize that the God of All would not regard them with

extra love at the expense of others. Owing to this flawed thought process the *rajasa* also finds it easier to worship different gods, or maybe a favorite god which is different from what the others worship. They believe that such and such gods are ‘more powerful’, and major temples are likely to host more powerful ones. *Yantras* (magical medallions) and talismans supposed to carry the blessings of the gods they worship are bought at high prices and publicly worn. It is million-dollar business now. There are readymade *yantras* for all occasions and needs like passing an exam, getting a job, marrying the person one likes, and getting one’s enemy killed. God-men flourish, offering very special services at special rates. Places of worship vie with each other to attract devotees with fanciful stories and tall claims of powerful interventions and miracles discretely circulated.

Even among worshippers of ‘One God’, there is tremendous amount of egotism regarding their God owing to *rajas*. There are many religious fanatics who believe that their God is the only real God and their religion the only religion in the entire universe. But the truth is that no religion claims even one third of the population on this small planet! One God should mean God for the entire universe; but their God is not God to even half of humankind.

Owing to the disposition to take short cuts without considering the good and bad in them, the *tamasa* worship gods which they believe give them what they want with the least botheration. They favor hysteria and commotions as means of worship which give them the emotional ‘high’ to forget reality. Some of them even prefer alcohol and drugs for worship. As this mental frame grows, such people find it increasingly difficult to pray to the concepts of light but easier to worship the so called dark forces. Some pray to spirits to come forth and show them the future and also to hurt their enemies. Some pray to exclusive material objects like personal little idols worn over necklaces or ribbons. Some perform sacrifices and even obscene rituals and chanting, hoping to propitiate *kuttichatan*, devils and demons. Though in remote places, human sacrifices are yet to go extinct! Practitioners of black magic sign contracts for pots of money offering to exterminate any enemy or bankrupt him.

Most people are a mix, their patterns of attention overlapping all the three *gunas*, and also changing with time. But the deeper any kind of faith gets, the stronger is the identification of one’s self with it so that one’s ego becomes the seat of it. As ego is at a level deeper than the intellect, changing the *sraddha* is pretty difficult.

aśāstravihitam ghoram tapyante ye tapo janāḥ  
dambhāhamkārasamyuktāḥ kāmarāgabalānvitāḥ 17.5

karṣayantah śarīrastham bhūtagrāmam acetasaḥ  
māṁ caivāntahśarīrastham tān viddhy āsuraniścayān 17.6

*Know that the unwise who, wedded to arrogance and haughtiness, relying on (brute) force based on (undue) attachment and (insatiable) desire, take to task the sense organs (the body) and even Me that reside in them (the identification of the True Self) by performing unscientific and horrible acts of tapas, are of demoniac disposition.*

‘Tapas’ means ‘determined effort’. But here the effort described amounts to terrific punishment of one’s own body due to insatiable desire and undue attachment, with a passion relying on brute force. The *Puranas* are full of stories of various people doing this kind of *tapas* and eliciting special powers and weapons from various gods. The warning here is very clear: it is alright as fiction; but don’t think it will work; it won’t. Moreover, it will damage the sense organs and also further cloud the chance of knowing the real presence within oneself.

The compassionate humor of the sage points to three sets of people. The first is the lot who wants all the wealth and pleasures in this world and undertakes to stress themselves horribly for it. They are arrogant, haughty and consider themselves powerful. They are greedy too. Some even spend their entire life on such pursuits. The hint offered with a knowing smile is: they may get what they want but they won’t be an inch happier or ultimately reach anywhere beyond their own physical and spiritual destruction.

The second consists of the lot that thinks and declares haughtily that they are the best of the ‘yogis’. They perform numerous extreme exercises and meditations for gaining various powers. They believe that they can perform various miracles with the powers they would eventually develop. Some claim that they have already developed them, and some claim they have already reached the state of demigods. People who go for extreme steps in the belief that it may help them to gain personal powers are actually trekking the wrong path, because all of these actually provide more attachment to the body and increase the ego factor of the individual, obscuring the True Self that much more. Simple exercises and meditation are provided in the *Gita* and sage Vyasa encourages them only for identification with the True Self and never favors any extreme form of exercise or meditation for personal power. Also we have already seen that *prakṛti* would not permit unnatural powers, so the ones trying for such things are simply wasting their time.

The first two sets are examples for *rajas* underlying the demoniac

disposition. But the third set of people at whom the poet's merciful finger points is on the wrong path based on *tamas*. People who suffer are the ignorant lot who fall prey to the machinations of the exploiters in the name of faith who, for pleasing God, advocate everything from inflicting severe pain and injury upon oneself to human sacrifice; the helpless and mentally ill subjected to cruel punishment in the guise of treating their condition. Lots of devotees roll half-naked in the hot sun on the rough granite path around a sanctum sanctorum hoping for extra dividends. Many penalize themselves undertaking tedious fasts and taxing pilgrimages. There are ongoing rackets involving astrologers suggesting remedial rituals to ward off or ameliorate dark forebodings foretold by stars, working hand-in-glove with performers of black magic and collecting commissions from them. Elaborate rituals are carried out on contract basis involving huge pots of money and heavy blocks of gold. Some think and declare haughtily that they are the best of the *tantris* (performers of the occult) and can carry out all Vedic rituals to perfection for huge considerations (*dakshina*); they conduct elaborate and highly expensive *yajnas* for the welfare of the rich. These have been highlighted earlier in a previous section on religion, and termed '*avipaschita*' (mentally unsound).

Demoniac disposition is that which takes one down the steps of evolution. ('*Those who are established in tamo guna go downward... 14.18.*') The very inclination to look for demoniac disposition in others without analyzing oneself first shows evidence of it in oneself. It is easy to analyze one's sraddha along the line of these verses. If fear is at the root of one's attention, it is not approvable because it is born out of the darkness of *rajas* and *tamas*. Fear of the world and fear of the future are not favorable bases to develop attention patterns. Greed is only a child of the fear of deprivation. Devils and demons are imagined and attempted to be propitiated because of fear-induced confusion. True faithful attention can be cultivated only by those capable of withstanding fear as well as the temptation to threaten.

The inherent nature of one's attention reflects in numerous personality traits of the person.

āhāras tv api sarvasya trividho bhavati priyah  
yajñas tapas tathā dānam teṣāṁ bhedam imam śrnu 17.7

*There are three kinds even in the preference for food. Same way, there are three kinds of yajna, dana and tapas. Now listen to me to know about the differences between these (in terms of their relation to sraddha).*

‘*Yajna*’ is action correlating with the interests of the biosphere. ‘*Dana*’ is the act of sharing and charity. ‘*Tapas*’ is concentration with determined effort.

Food is what maintains the body. (‘*Aharam*’ means ‘that which is added’. Food is continuously added to the body. The cells that die are continuously replaced by new ones which are formed and grown with nutriments obtained from food.) At any moment in the life of anybody, inclinations fostered by the ruling *guna* manifest. For man the good thing is that there is always scope for observation by maintaining awareness. So one can always ‘see’ what the inside situation is, and modify as it suits oneself.

āyuḥsattvabalārogyasukhaprītivardhanāḥ  
rasyāḥ snigdhāḥ sthirā hr̥dyā āhārāḥ sāttvikapriyāḥ 17.8

*Sattvik preference is food that accentuate longevity, enthusiasm, mind-power, physical strength, health and happiness; (they want it to be) rasya, snigdha, sthira and hearty.*

*Isavasya Upanishad* advocates everyone to live as best as possible for one hundred years. Long life is welcome as many duties to be performed are protracted. The first three chapters of *Ashtanga hrudaya*, the basic textbook of Ayurveda, deal with techniques to safeguard longevity. A balanced diet is prescribed. Ayurveda equates longevity with *sattva guna*. Life that lasts longer also has a better chance to gain wisdom as the light inside may take time to shine.

Strength sustains enthusiasm to act. One is healthy when the mind and the body are enjoined well with everything that helps longevity. *Sthira* means capable of providing the body with lasting buildup. Satisfaction occurs when one is happy with what he has. ‘*Rasya*’ is sweet, juicy and moist. Sattvik enjoy sweets but they care for their health and have it only moderately. ‘*Sneha*’ is ‘love’ as well as ‘oil’; ‘*snigdha*’ is its adjective; butter is ‘*snigdha*’. Food that pleases the eye, has good flavor and taste, and agrees with one’s stomach is hearty.

It is to be noted that only the nature of food is dealt with; there are no indications regarding its content. Vegetarian vs. non-vegetarian controversy is not a Vedantic topic; it is left as an individual choice.

kaṭvamlalavaṇātyuṣṇatīkṣṇarūkṣavidāhināḥ  
āhārā rājasasyeṣṭā duḥkhaśokāmayapradāḥ 17.9

*The pungent, sour, salty, hard, hot and spicy food devoid of softness so that it tends to burn the body and results in loss of feeling of well being, unpleasantness and disease are rajasa foods.*

*Rajasa* food over-stimulates and makes the senses aflame. Some prefer food that has to be bitten or torn off by the hand and mouth. Those who eat strong and heavy foods are sorry for it later in terms of indigestion and disease; sometimes they even pay dearly for it as some of these foods are linked to cancer. Instead of health and longevity, *rajasa* food provides raw stimulation to the tongue, nose and body. Even when such food is contraindicated these people find it hard to resist. Diabetes patients crave for more sugar and those with high blood pressure dream of an extra pinch of salt! They feel sad about the condition and sadder later when they happen to indulge. This mental state is typical of all physical pleasures enjoyed with *rajas* as the drive.

In fact all addictions stem from *rajas* state of mind. Neither fighting the urge nor indulging on the sly provide permanent solution. Only by befriending oneself and leading oneself to genuine mental detachment can the habit be broken.

Most of the food the modern world consumes is junk. Many from freezers in supermarkets and stores are contaminated with pesticides and strong preservatives; their contents are anybody's guess no matter what is printed on their glossy covers. They contain additives for taste to compensate for loss of freshness; these too are unhealthy when used above certain quantity. Anarchic food habits, established, promoted and sustained by constant advertisements rule in the present society.

Any *guna* gives rise to the aptitudes akin to it when it comes to the lead; it blossoms further when these aptitudes are entertained and cultivated. Habits once formed are difficult to correct.

yātayāmam gatarasam pūti paryuṣitam ca yat  
ucchiṣṭam api cāmedhyam bhojanam tāmasapriyam 17.10

*Food that has been cooked before a yama (three hours), that has lost all freshness; is tasteless, dirty, left over waste, even rotten food – they are all foods relished by the tamasa.*

There is one type of food which has all these qualities and is specific to the *tamasa* interest – alcohol. It is considered more precious the older it gets.

The verse provides the perfect picture of what happens if there is no order or

cleanliness in food habits. As the life of the *tamasa*, so too their food. Over and above the roaches and the mice we chase away, there are millions of unseen guests who come uninvited to share our food. The moment the heat from the oven subsides enough, microbes, fungi and bacteria venture in. They consume the nutritive part of the food; they themselves plus their excreta and the chemicals they catalyze constitute toxins. The longer the food is allowed to remain cold and unattended the greater the decomposition. The lazier the people are, the more they are satisfied with such foods.

aphalāṅkṣibhir yajño vidhidṛṣṭo ya ijyate  
yaṣṭavyam eveti manah samādhāya sa sāttvikah 17.11

*Yajna performed according to sastra by those who do not yearn for the result of it, and carried out with conviction that it is one's duty and responsibility, is sattvik in nature.*

Every ritual prescribed in the Vedas is oriented towards well defined ‘fruits’. Therefore ‘*yajna*’ here does not mean any such. Moreover, the Vedas do not reveal any rationale in regard to the *yajnas* they prescribe; the procedure alone is given. On the other hand, *brahma vidya* is *yoga sastra*. It is logically well founded. In the light of it all creations are linked; the entire universe is established by action. So, what is referred to as action here is the part one is to duly and naturally perform, as a part of the total scheme of things in the biosphere and universe.

Thus if action is carried out on the basis of scientific principles (*sastra*), with due sense of responsibility and with evenness of mind in success or failure, it is *sattvik* action. *Sastra* here means the basic science necessary for the action (for any job there are many scientific principles involved; whether the field is agriculture, engineering, medicine or economics) plus *brahma vidya* (*yoga sastra*). The extra-wide worldview of *brahma vidya* has provision for unique rules of procedure for every kind of worldly action. Everyone from the surgeon who does an open-heart procedure through the footballer on the ground to the singer on the stage and the nurse helping a patient has to know the techniques and the necessary science, apply the rules stipulated and modified by the latest research in the area. At the same time, the feeling of duty, the will and readiness to do it and lack of selfishness regarding the fruit of it should be there to make it the right kind of *yajna*. *Brahma vidya* permits modification of all and every rule of procedure in the light of experience and better knowledge. No rules are laid for all time.

The balanced state of the human body is the product of countless actions by countless forces and creations. Countless debts are to be repaid. Also, this repayment is essential for the well being of the whole universe and the creations in it. In short, *sattvik yajna* is the same as *karma yoga*.

abhisamdhāya tu phalam dambhārtham api caiva yat  
ijyate bharataśreṣṭha tam yajñam viddhi rājasam 17.12

*O the great descendent of Bharata (Arjuna), but know that whatever yajna is carried out with its fruit in constant yearning and with the intent of demonstrating one's prowess is rajasa.*

Actions done can be due to certain deeper yearnings which may or may not be evident to the individual himself. The prevalent way of the present *rajasa* world is to ask ‘What do I get out of it?’ before taking every step. Precious time and energy is wasted on ‘profitable’ efforts which provide nothing to the society as a whole. ‘Rush’ is the word whether it is gold, diamond or oil; it is often ‘mad’ too. Most come to grief but soon begin a rush in some other direction. Mirages are galore.

vidhihīnam asṛṣṭānnam mantrahīnam adakṣiṇam  
śraddhāvirahitam yajñam tāmasam paricakṣate 17.13

*Tamasa yajna is said to be that which is performed without adhering to sastra, creating annam (the offering) or offering dakshina; and also unaccompanied by mantra.*

Technical terminology of the Vedas is employed, and the symbolism behind the concept of *yajna* of the pre-Vedic period which was lost during the transition to the Vedic period is being highlighted. The Vedas ascribe merely literal meanings to the words, *annam*, *dakshina* and *mantra*.

The *sastra* intended here is true science which includes both modern science involved in the work as seen before, plus *brahma vidya* which is necessary in the philosophical concept of doing it. Actions that take both into equal consideration are *sattvik*, actions that ignore the latter are *rajasa*, and actions that ignore both are *tamasa*.

‘*Annam*’ means ‘that which goes into the making of the creations’ (verse 3.14 and 3.15). The creation of *annam* (helping the ongoing process of maintenance of the biosphere) should be the purpose of right action. ‘*Dakshina*’

is payment of dues – repaying debts to parents and teachers. ‘*Mantra*’ is prayer expressed in the mind; the worship and dedication of the action to the Supreme Being as described in earlier sections.

Faith becomes wholesome when wisdom combines with dedication. The *tamasa* are ignorant. Though they may have dedication, it is blind and misplaced.

Next the Gita removes misconceptions about *tapas* and describes in detail what true *tapas* is and how the three types of *tapas* can be done with the body, mind and word.

devadvijaguruprājñapūjanam ūcam ārjavam  
brahmacharyam ahimsā ca sārīram tapa ucyate 17.14

*Respecting the Devas, Dvijas, teachers and the wise; physical cleanliness; arjava; brahmacharya and ahimsa constitute tapas at the level of the body.*

‘*Tapas*’ literally means ‘to heat’, ‘to put to task’, ‘to force to work’, ‘to educate’, etc. Here it means determined effort which favors oneself to move forward on the path of union with the True Self. The body has a natural instinct to achieve whatever evolutionary progress it can. It varies from person to person and also with time within the same person in accordance with the comparative levels of the changing *gunas*. When led by this instinct the natural behavior is as described here; it also means that by making one take care in this way, the above instinct can be kindled.

‘*Deva*’ means that which illuminates. Every enlightening source is to be respected, whether book or idea. (*Devas* also symbolize gods which activate the sense organs. What activates the mind is the god of *Devas* or *Devendra*. The sense organs therefore are indicative of the presence of Paramātma within us.) ‘*Devas*’ are also forces of nature, favorable as well as unfavorable. Both kind have to be given due respect.

‘*Dvija*’ does not indicate any caste. It literally means ‘twice-born’ – one who has been enabled to lead a ‘second’ life of enlightenment after earning wisdom. In Christianity, baptism demarcates the beginning of a second life (‘Man has to be born again in the soul’). In Vedanta, initiation does not mean a ritual. Knowledge is to be earned from parents first, then formally and directly from gurus, and from texts and other messages from the wise both living or departed; and then have to be imbibed by bringing it into the path of action (life). Such a knowledgeable person always should be respectfully regarded.

In India showing respect with the body traditionally implies the hand gesture

of cupped or folded palms (putting the palms together). Teachers are also paid obeisance by bowing or prostrating before them. Books and alphabets are culturally respected in Kerala, and there is a custom that if at all any book is accidentally stepped on, it is picked up, touched reverentially and kept in some higher place. Every year on Navaratri festival there is a custom of writing all alphabets along with prayers.

*Arjava* is strength and enthusiasm based on straightforwardness and conviction, the opposite of laziness at the level of the body. It helps one stay in the chosen path preventing faltering on the basis of tiredness, laziness or fear, and gets things done as required by the mind and intellect. *Brahmacharya* is the same as ‘*Paramātmacharya*’. It means ‘trying to be one with *that*’. At the level of the body this implies simple abstinence from doing wrong things with the body which would pose problems to this goal; not throwing away all material and sensual pleasures. *Ahimsa* of the body means restraining oneself to prevent physically hurting anyone.

These are the types of *tapas* recommended at the level of the body.

anudvegakaram् vākyam् satyam् priyahitam् ca yat  
svādhyāyābhyanam् caiva vāñmayam् tapa ucyate 17.15

*Speaking in a way that do not cause anger or hurt, speaking the truth, speaking in a friendly way and with intention to do good to others; and reading and studying adhyatma vidya are said to be tapas of the word.*

However well meaning one is, if the matter is displeasingly presented, it would create the opposite effect. One’s worldly existence itself stands to benefit if the art of pleasant and endearing verbal communication is practiced. The decision to stick to the truth and to express only that which will lead to the welfare of all will put an end to all extravagance in the use of words. This is the practical instruction to avoid wasting life energy in hollow verbiage. It also helps prevent arguments on any subject worsening into provocation of each other to the extent of world wars. Loudspeakers will get their hard-earned rest; external and internal peace will prevail; the word will cease to get polluted by human sound.

However, strict adherence to the superficial meaning of truthfulness and sweetness is not advocated. For instance, a doctor may find it necessary to convey the full extent of the gravity of the disease to make a patient take an unpleasant medicine or agree to an unavoidable intervention. It may not sound very sweet after all. Truth is sacrosanct but presenting it out of context or in the

wrong context may not serve general welfare. Unpleasant truth that still helps the world is worth communicating as against the pleasant that does not. Also, there is no point in adhering to truth which prevents escape of one from a molester or a criminal. Speaking the truth has to be kept as determined effort but there is no need to hang on to only its superficial aspects.

Sustained effort (*tapas*) at study of Vedantic texts is recommended by the verse. It is easy to forget knowledge gained through reading. A habit can be formed in reading verses every day, which is one way of determined effort pertaining to learning of *adhyatma vidya*.

The word is used to communicate with oneself more than to talk to the world outside. The best example is when a lesson is read aloud again to memorize. Logical thinking always takes place in the form of discourse within. Conscious effort to exercise control over thinking patterns, again, is *tapas*. Mind without control refuses to take any break; it goes on and on talking to itself. Most often it is all about trivialities of the material world. From this the mind can be diverted by memorizing verses that teach about the eternal presence in everyone so that all trivialities are jettisoned from the mindscape. When this is repeated the essence of the lesson permeates deeper. When calmed, the mind will find its level – a serene state of happiness. It is in this state that it can feel the presence of the eternal within oneself.

This also redefines the path of literature or any art. It can shock, excite, entice, kindle various emotions or simply entertain, but the greater works will always be uplifting the general level of awareness of truth; beneficial to the entire human race and sometimes presenting a level beyond human existence in palatable fashion. Any story ever told, being told now and to be told any time in the future is in reality no more than a figment of imagination. But a good one buds straight from the life force of the universe and creates a consciousness that contributes to welfare of all. Many a great poet had to walk through fire to create precious compositions that for all time help humanity guide themselves all the way up on the ladder of aesthetic evolution.

manahprasādaḥ saumyatvam maunam ātmavinigrahaḥ  
bhāvasaṁśuddhir ity etat tapo mānasam ucyate 17.16

*Prasada of the mind, saumyatvam, silence, keeping the impulses from the sense organs under control, emotional refinement – these are the tapas of the mind.*

*Prasada* (pleasantness of mind) is the best boon anyone can have in life. For

some it comes naturally; for others there are certain conditions to be satisfied. Only a peaceful mind can be pleasant. Peace is when disturbing emotions like hate, vengeance, anger and envy are thrown out from the mind. *Prasada* has to be thus consciously exercised. If thought or emotional correction is found to be hard to achieve due to wrong outside stimuli, one can also be careful to keep away from such wrong situations and low people that create and sustain these feelings. At the same time this should not amount to escaping from problems of life; disturbances arising from facing them have to be controlled by training oneself for it. Calmness is the state of mind which cannot be perturbed or provoked. Action stemming from wisdom contributes to calmness and pleasantness.

Mind is a two-way traffic highway. Drives from inclinations and emotions pass through it to the sense organs and stimuli from interactions with the world outside brought in by the sense organs flow through it in the opposite direction. Effective traffic control is a challenge; blocks and accidents occur if not done well.

One can be silent only when the mind is calm, and silence helps one keep calm. Mental silence is the opposite of mental unrest. If there is unrest one of the two paths can be taken: 1. finding a path of action to solve a genuine worry or sorrow, and 2. diverting the mind from helpless sorrows or useless worries. When these are done with the element of detachment and keeping the Supreme Entity in mind they become methods of learning too. Silence is the hallmark of a settled mind. ‘*Muni*’ (the silent) is one who is silent within even while he is communicating with the outside world by any means.

Just as physical form, emotional disposition too varies from person to person. Passionate dispositions block healthy expression of emotions and predispose to explosions of pent up unspoken feelings. Guilt and hateful self correction lead to addiction mentalities. ‘Emotion’ lies at the heart of the person and makes what one really is. Refinement starts from knowing one’s emotions, befriending them and modifying the ones blocking spiritual development and evolution. That too requires determined effort or *tapas*.

śraddhayā parayā taptam̄ tapas tat trividham̄ naraiḥ  
aphalākāṅkṣibhir yuktaīḥ sāttvikam̄ paricakṣate 17.17

*Those are considered sattvik, who have set their minds on the Paramātma and carry out all three kinds of tapas with steadfast attention and detachment to the results of their endeavors.*

It is encouraged to carry out the three types of *tapas* together. These will provide a personality independent from the mundane like-dislike dualities and praise-insult reactions in day to day life. Over and above achieving spiritual advancement, this will also help a lot in the material world itself. A personality devoid of a firm base usually rests on pride-disrespect responses and like-dislike dualities, and it always makes one more aware of one's own material life and stance. But a personality evolved on the basis of the three *tapas* will neither count its strength based on mere ego related problems nor does it depend on outside factors. Therefore the natural result is a stronger and nobler life. Not only will it help avoid the buildup of an ego-based personality, but also shock-absorb recoils and untoward turns of events to outlive any sense of failure and insufficiency; all feelings of insecurity and inferiority will get nipped in the bud. The quality of life will improve and lot more energy will be available for creative enterprises.

The most interesting aspect of such refinement is that once these personality traits are established, then *tapas* itself is not required to maintain it; all the goodness and nobility will reflect in life on its own as habits natural to that person.

Anyone who is detached and has steadfast faith in *Paramātma* can easily and comfortably carry out these three kinds of *tapas*. The reverse is equally true: anyone who carries out these three kinds of *tapas* can easily become detached and comfortably develop steadfast faith in *Paramātma*.

Anything man does is related to one or more of these three: the body, the word and the mind (*mana*, *vacha*, *karma*). If all the three are under control, one becomes infallible. Progress is assured.

Aptitude is important. The person on a swing makes a start by a small movement and builds upon it by making extra input of energy at the right moment during every swing. The care to be taken all the while: hold on against dissipation of momentum by constant application of the minimum force necessary to maintain it. Also, please be aware and careful of the possibility of slip-and-fall also.

satkāramānapūjārtham̄ tapo dambhena caiva yat  
kriyate tad iha proktam̄ rājasam̄ calam adhruvam 17.18

*When the disposition to perform *tapas* is due to a desire for praise, tribute or recognition of the person's knowledge and powers by others, and also vainglorious – that *tapas* is baseless and does not make any lasting value addition; it is said to be rajasa.*

Even when performing *tapas*, one is reminded to check one's disposition occasionally. *Tapas* is entirely a 'self oriented' effort; it has nothing to do with another person's recognition or praise.

When *rajo guna* is in blossom (masking the other two) the worldly configuration 'I' hides the eternal presence just as the huge sun is fully covered by the small moon in between during a total solar eclipse. Body consciousness then rules supreme; desire for competition, dominance and recognition above others take over.

*Tapas* carried out for approbation and acclaim from outside neither can be sustained nor is beneficial to the growth of the person. For instance, if one practices humility and sweetness of behavior only as a put-on, he will revert to his true nature if he finds he is not getting enough dividends for playing the role. Even if one succeeds in winning approbation and acclaim it is just for the moment and also an act.

Self searching investigations go this way: Did I think of anyone else other than myself during the day? What were the true intentions behind what I said and did? Did I want everybody's praise, reward or respect? Did I want to demonstrate that I am great? Did I secretly think - "you just wait, I will show you"! Deep down, had I also felt I cannot respect anyone else or hold anybody greater than me?

If the answer is yes, it is obvious that I cannot co-operate with another person of the same nature in any manner nor even co-exist with him without strife for no longer than a few minutes. This attitude is at the root of most of the so-called competition prevailing in the modern world. In this case there is hardly any time or scope for introspection with a view to improving inner peace and real happiness.

mūḍhagrāheṇātmano yat pīḍayā kriyate tapah  
parasyotsādanārthaṁ vā tat tāmasam udāhṛtam 17.19

*What tapas is carried out in utter ignorance, hurting one's own body and mind, with selfish motives (or worse) with the intent of hurting others (and whatever is theirs) is said to exemplify the tamasa variety.*

Examples for both *rajasik* and *tamasik tapas* were seen in the verse related to demoniac disposition earlier (17.5, 17.6). Determined effort is taken to do numerous stupid things by some people. Some pierce different parts of their bodies with tridents small and big; some whip and wound their own bodies;

some others wear crowns of thorns and climb mountains with heavy wooden crosses on their shoulders; yet others strike at their own heads with swords and profusely bleed; some walk on burning embers – all as matters of faith, to appease God! Worse is the case of people who take determined effort to kill others for God, and is also even ready to get killed in the process!

Lot of people venture to earn ‘star value’ by indulging in dangerous acts of self-punishment – some even call it *yajna*; like the *cycle yajna* where non-stop cycling without rest or food or toilet amenities goes on for days at a stretch, and *sarpa yajna* wherein a man lives for a number of days in a small glass enclosure amidst hundreds of poisonous snakes. Some eat heaps of food in record time; some eat live scorpions in dozens in a matter of minutes....

Extreme cases of *tamasa tapas* involving mind, word and deed are the actions of those who evolve ‘scientific’ ways to adulterate everything from food to medicines or device methods of production and dispatch of nuclear and chemical weapons that can kill and / or mutilate millions.

Even acts of charity, generally considered good in any form, has distinctions on the same lines.

dātavyam iti yad dānam dīyate/nupakāriṇe  
deśe kāle ca pātre ca tad dānam sāttvikam smṛtam 17.20

*Dana, born out of decision to give from within, for those who do not have the capacity to return any of it, at the right time, place and plate, is considered sattvik.*

Charity is the act to cleanse oneself of the drive to live only for one’s own sake. The urge for sharing should well up from within. Attachment to the thing to be shared makes the act of giving away difficult. So charity is best to practice detachment. But if the giver sees himself as some way superior and the taker as inferior, poorer or secondary, then it is of no avail. Nothing in nature; neither the sun that provides the entire world with light nor the mango tree that provides tasty fruit assumes that stance.

Sharing with those from whom anything can be expected in return is not charity but trading. Also, the recipient should deserve it. Indiscriminate sharing may leave the deserving empty-handed and serve the cunning ones. The one who cries the loudest for help may go to the liquor shop with what he got while another, dying of starvation, is unable to raise his voice at all. It is not right to go to a rich country to share while one’s own neighbors are in bad plight. Timing too is important. Help in time may save many a life.

Even in the far future when mankind evolves to a stage where there is no poverty, *dana* still has relevance in the form of sharing. That is how money itself will become irrelevant in human society. These ideas may appear utopian in the present *rajas* dominated world but doubtless this is the direction pointed out in evolution.

yat tu prattyupakārārthaṁ phalam uddīṣya vā punah  
dīyate ca parikliṣṭam tad dānam rājasam smṛtam 17.21

*Dana carried out with the intent of getting repaid or for any other selfish interest – half-heartedly or with sorrow and a sense of loss – is said to be rajasa.*

Bartering is not sharing. It is *rajasa* as much as doling out with condescension is. Does one feel sorry for giving? If so it indicates that the thing given was due to some other motive – fear, or avoidance of a nuisance, or with an intention to get some favor later on. Was the sharing done as part of a plan to get cheap service or an attractive gift tomorrow? Was one arranging a visa for oneself to heaven by doing a good thing?

Giving away whatever one has to others with the intent of earning a reputation for compassion when one's own family is starving is *rajasa dana*. So also is the act of arranging a feast for the rich in the city miles away, getting photographed with them and arranging it to be printed in newspapers while one's own villagers are starving. Neither is it right to be miserly in providing one's employees their salaries, all the while giving off large amounts in charity someplace else – such facades are commonly seen in today's life.

In the modern world most of what is shared is *rajasa*. If anything is offered free there are baits attached. Most transactions leave the giver and the taker sorrier.

adeśakāle yad dānam apātrebhyaś ca dīyate  
asatkṛtam avajñātām tat tāmasam udāhṛtam 17.22

*Any act of dana to the undeserving, in the wrong place or time or plate, asat krutam, done disrespectfully and with insult, exemplifies the tamasa variety.*

'Sat' means that which exists for ever; 'asat', that which does not. 'Asat krutam' is that which is obliterated. It also denotes 'turning that which is permanent into its opposite'. *Paramātma* alone is permanent. One can make it impermanent only in one way: Forget it completely so that it does not exist as far

as one is concerned. *Rajasa* and *tamasa* sharing is as good as it did not take place.

Giving away rotten food to the beggar along with insults to drive him off is a typical example of *tamasa dana*. So also is donating old and useless junk which makes the recipient himself feel worthless. (The Kata Upanishad begins with Nachiketa making an attempt to prevent his father from doing such an act of *tamasa dana* – donating sick and emaciated cattle.) om̄ tat sad iti nirdeśo brahmaṇas trividhaḥ smṛtaḥ

brāhmaṇāḥ tena vedāś ca yajñāś ca vihitāḥ purā 17.23

*Brahma is constantly remembered by the three words ‘Om’, ‘tat’ and ‘sat’. Those who have known that brahma, their knowledge itself, and the entire gamut of yajna are explained by these words.*

These three words denote *brahma*. The redefinition of the *mantra* ‘*Om Tat Sat*’ in the following verses suggests that even during the days the Gita was composed there were serious instances of its misuse by ignorant priests and also practitioners of black magic. What is done these days is also mostly lip service to it. Odd sounds produced to go with meaningless but dramatic gestures are often interspersed with the chanting of this *mantra* for establishing credibility. Its real import has been lost.

tasmād om ity udāhṛtya yajñadānatapaḥkriyāḥ  
pravartante vidhānoktāḥ satataṁ brahmavādinām 17.24

*Therefore (as ‘Om’ is the synonym of brahma) they who exercise brahma vidya begin yajna, dana or tapas as outlined in sastra, by reciting ‘Om’.*

‘*Om*’ describes *brahma* (which is another name for *Akshara*) on the basis of the fundamental principle of resonance in pulsation that leads to creation, maintenance and destruction of the universe, and also forms the nature of all matter-waves and radiation. The act of wave oscillation incorporates the three tendencies to expand, to contract and to be neutral. The universe as a whole and everything it contains are made through these. ‘*Om*’ is used to understand and keep in mind this resonance behind the working of everything. It is the key to the awareness of the eternal reality of *Akshara* in its entirety perceived by a great vision. Those who exercise *brahma vidya* keep reminding themselves of the basic reality all the while. It was earlier described how to carry out *yajna* (action which includes welfare of the entire biosphere) and the three types of *tapas*, and

also *dana*, performing all three based on *sutra* (material sciences plus *brahma vidya*). Along with this, Om provides a one-word-reminder of that resonance which can be uttered in one breath and with reverence. By practice, the word as it is recited brings into mental focus the essence of the whole of *brahma vidya*.

tad ity anabhisamdhāya phalam yajñatapahkriyāḥ  
dānakriyāś ca vividhāḥ kriyante mokṣakāṅkṣibhiḥ 17.25

*Those intent upon liberating themselves (from mortality) go into actions of *yajna*, *dana* and *tapas*, reciting ‘tat’ and giving up all attachment to results.*

‘*Tat*’ is ‘that’ – *Akshara*, the dialectical form imbued with the three *gunas*. The ‘doer’ of everything is therefore *tat*. The awareness about this fact erases all haughtiness and pride. Results of any action are determined by the forces in *Akshara*. They are not ‘earned’ by any other ‘doer’. If the reality of *Akshara* and its nature (*parā prakṛti*) are kept in mind, one can carry out every action more efficiently, impersonally and in an integrated way with the natural flow of events in the universe.

This is the second step in preparing oneself for detached action. After recollecting the secret of the origin and functioning of the material universe – *Om*, the symbol of oscillations; the substrate in which the wave act occurs together with its qualities and capabilities are also thought of so as to recollect nature's overwhelming role (as the real performer) in the working of the world.

sadbhāve sādhubhāve ca sad ity etat prayujyate  
praśaste karmaṇi tathā sacchabdah pārtha yujyate 17.26

*O Arjuna, ‘Sat’ is used to indicate the presence of the true and the actual; also, good and noble actions are indicated by the use of it.*

When the word *Sat* is used as an adjective it indicates noble and good actions (*sat karma*). When it is remembered and / or uttered at the point of initiation of an action, it prompts one to make assurance doubly sure that one is doing the good and right thing.

As a noun it means ‘the actual’ – the real true substrate behind the observed *Kshara* world. It is the *Akshara* which provides the base and manifests the material universe (*Kshara*), through its fabric of space – *Avyakta*. That is, as such, the eternal reality in us as well as in anything and anywhere in the universe. It is also the starting point of the chain reaction of events in *prakṛti*

(nature) in which one is, in fact, no more than an intermediary agent. Compared to it the material world (*Kshara*) is temporary and ever changing – denoted as *asat*. Both that permanence and the goodness in deed are remembered by the key word ‘*sat*’ during every *yajna*, *dana* and *tapas*.

yajñe tapasi dāne ca sthitih sad iti cocyate  
karma caiva tadarthiyam sad ity evābhidhīyate 17.27

*Also, the persistent will to perform yajna, dana and tapas is described as Sat. (All) Actions towards identifying one’s self with the Ātma are denoted as Sat.*

The principle behind the good path (*sat marga*) is stated. The prerequisite is the sustained adherence to perform all the three with the right disposition. All effort towards it is *sat achara* (good routine). Whatever it is, is *Sat*.

To make all actions *Sat* (good, true), correct attention to underlying disposition and to the procedure and goodness of action is required based on the knowledge in the verses already discussed:-

aśraddhayā hutam dattam tapas taptam kṛtam ca yat  
asad ity ucyate pārtha na ca tat prepya no iha 17.28

*O Arjuna; yajna, dana and tapas performed without such sraddha (attention), (why,) whatever done without sraddha is said to be asat; it would do no good (to anyone) here or after death.*

*Asat* is the opposite of *Sat*; meaning bad, untrue.

Thus, an all-time meaning for *sat-achara* (good routine in society) is obtained. In any society the standards of goodness in vogue at any time may get outdated after a while. Any fox that lost the tip of its tail in an accident can, if it has sufficient gift of the gab, persuade its community to accept it as standard model of beauty and gentlemanliness. If it has power too it can even make the possession of a wholesome tail punishable! The human race can certainly do well with an all encompassing vision that outlive time and place. It should help take the right path under any circumstance. Arjuna got debilitated by doubt at a critical juncture in life because of the absence of such a vision. But that vision can be grasped only on the basis of unerring attention to the knowledge of the structure of the universe plus our place in it.

*Sraddha* (attention) is the symptom of life. It has been indicated earlier that its degeneration is akin to the process of dying. What happens to the outcome of

*sraddha* if it falls short of that total vision is explained here.

For instance, consider any *yajna*. Good and steadfast *sraddha* means the firm conviction that the performer himself, the implements with which he performs, the things offered, that which consumes the offering and the very act of offering are all *brahma*. (In fact, ritualistic *yajna* is a symbolic representation of any action in the universe. In course of time, the ritual became all important and the symbolism was lost.) In the absence of this attention to Vedantic vision, any *yajna* proves useless for now and ever after. All such efforts go to waste.

What is offered in a *yajna* is called ‘*hutam*’. Life energy is sacrificed in every human action. This energy has its source in the *Paramātma* (It is God given). (The word God shares its origin with that of the Sanskrit word ‘*hutam*’.) Lack of *sraddha* (intelligent attention) may make the effort counterproductive in two ways: the material result is adversely affected; and also one is taken astray from the path of realization.

If *dana* (charity) is not undertaken with proper *sraddha*, the time, the place and the very recipient may prove undeserving, the attitude may stray from respect for the recipient to that of condescension or even ridicule. The entire exercise becomes pointless. If *tapas* lacks proper *sraddha* it is like gathering water with a leaky bucket. One may waste all of one’s life and yet get not a single drop to drink!

At that time, spiritualism was taken for afterlife by many. Even now many people think so. There are traditional rituals supposed to assure easy passage into heaven. There are practitioners too who perform these rituals for a fee. One does not even have to understand the meaning of the *mantras*; they are often uttered mutilated. These exercises do not result in any benefit except for the hired performer.

## Chapter 18

# **Yoga of Moksha through Karma**

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Modern world is familiar with the satellite-launch rocket vehicle. It lifts off from firm ground, gradually acquires speed, attains planned levels of height at planned intervals of time after liftoff and gives its payload a final push to put it into the pre-set trajectory.

The successful culmination of the launch gives the satellite all freedom to be on its own. Where it is placed, it is not bothered by ‘earthly’ disturbances like dust, air-drag, pollution, rain or wind. In effect it is free even from the pull of gravity. But it has, in exchange, left behind all ‘firm ground’ in the bargain.

One cannot liberate oneself any bit unless something or other is given up. But one’s very existence will be jeopardized if everything is given up. For instance, the satellite has not given up its relationship with gravity; it has just balanced it with another force. Also, it has not given up the Earth; it has attained a new equilibrium with its pull. The following verses reveal the theoretical plausibility of a ‘higher’ level of existence within the reach of all and teach the technology to attain it.

The subject of all religions and philosophies is the relationship between this ‘higher’ level of being and the usual ‘earthly’ one. There have been many different standpoints and controversies; there are, still. The extreme positions are: a) there is nothing but what is down here and b) the only real thing is the upper level and all the rest is illusion. ‘Satanic’ forces have been postulated to thwart man’s efforts to improve his position. But Gita presents the Vedantic wisdom that what stands in the way of upgrading our level are the forces of Nature, and these can be countered by other forces obtainable from Nature itself; which is no less revolutionary than rocket-launch technology!

This finding is derived from the study of interaction between man and Nature. Nature is dialectical; action is therefore the keyword. To be alive means indulgence in continuous action at the material level. There is a limit to what one can renounce. Where to take recourse to that and get rid of; and where to engage and rely on detachment is a minute-to-minute challenge for anybody.

The measure of worldly stuff that one can carry on one’s station up there is

limited; the rest are unnecessary and simply dead weights. Wise discretion has to be employed as to carry which and give up what. Liberation is intricately related to action and renunciation. Knowledge of this relationship is the fuel for the final boost and also the guidance mechanism crucial to the success of the mission. It is also hinted that from here on one will have to use on-board facilities alone to fulfill one's mission.

arjuna uvāca  
saṁnyāsasya mahābāho tattvam icchāmi veditum  
tyāgasya ca hrṣīkeśa pr̄thak keśiniṣūdana 18.1

*Arjuna said:*

*O Lord of all the senses, I desire to know the difference in the essence of (truth about) samnyasa and tyaga.*

*Samnyasa* was widely regarded as renunciation, which means sacrificing or renouncing everything in this world. However, in the previous chapters it was made clear that the material world is not to be sacrificed and dutiful actions have to be done. It was also proved that true samnyasa was the same as yoga itself because the ‘samnyasi’ who goes on doing work in the ‘sahayajna’ spirit and the ‘yogi’ who has renounced sankalpa are no different from each other. (*yam saṁnyāsam iti prāhur yogam tam viddhi pāṇḍava* – verse 6.2) *Tyaga* means sacrifice; so what does it mean in this new light? The yoga of *karma* and *jnana*, as explained earlier, stipulates giving up of certain mindsets and advocates action coupled with nonattachment to the results of action. If that is samnyasa itself, then what is the meaning to the impetus of sacrifice in samnyasa? What exactly is to be sacrificed? Also, does the right way point to performing only dutiful work, with sacrifice to all of one's material happiness and pleasure or even one's relationships?

śrībhagavān uvāca  
kāmyānām karmaṇām nyāsām saṁnyāsam kavayo viduh  
sarvakarmaphalatyāgam prāhus tyāgam vicakṣaṇāḥ 18.2

*The Lord of the senses said:*

*Great scholars state ‘samnyasa’ as the ‘renunciation of all actions that stem from likes and desires’; wise men describe ‘tyaga’ as ‘the renunciation of the results of actions’.*

It was the opinion of scholars here that abstention from what all one loves to do for oneself (ignoring all desires) is *samnyasa*. Earthly desires are products of the inclinations of the sense organs. Most wants are for the perishable material self. But liberation follows from being one with everything else. However, there is a lot of scope for discretion here because one may consider an action ‘desirable’ on account of its benefit for the society or the biosphere. Abstention from any such action cannot be advocated. Also, no scholar can propose self denial even in the material world because it is counterproductive.

tyājyam doṣavad ity eke karma prāhur manīṣinah  
yajñadānatapah karma na tyājyam iti cāpare 18.3

*Some scholars postulate that the very idea of action is fraught with possibilities of bondage and therefore all action is to be abandoned while yet others maintain that actions such as yajna, dana and tapas are not to be shunned.*

This is another reason why *samnyasa* was interpreted as renunciation of all actions – every action is fraught with the possibility of bondage. The ground is tricky! Therefore the wrong conclusion by some scholars to renounce the entire world! But the problem is every action, even inaction, invites reaction and disturbs Nature in some way. To be alive means to act. Any movement by the mind or the body amounts to action. It has already been concluded in previous sections that no living thing can give up actions. It will also be re-confirmed shortly in further verses. Total abstention from all physical action amounts only to suicide.

niścayam śṛṇu me tatra tyāge bharatasattama  
tyāgo hi puruṣavyāghra trividhaḥ samprakīrtitaḥ 18.4

*O the greatest of the descendants of Bharata (Arjuna), learn from Me the final solution to the riddle regarding this subject of tyaga; O the most courageous (Arjuna), tyaga (giving up) has been said to be of three kinds.*

Note the ways in which Arjuna is addressed here. His great courage and capabilities are repeatedly alluded to. This is when he is being provided with the secrets of *tyaga* (sacrifice). Sage Vyasa hints that it needs much greater courage and endurance for *tyaga*. Only the most courageous can sacrifice.

yajñadānatapaḥkarma na tyājyam kāryam eva tat  
yajño dānam tapaś caiva pāvanāni manīṣinām 18.5

*Yajna, dana, and tapas are actions that are not to be sacrificed; these must be performed because they (the three actions) provide purity to the mind of the wise further.*

It has been said earlier that any action performed unselfishly is *yajna*. Everything from cultivating land to teaching someone can thus become *yajna*. Those who indulge in such activity get more and more ennobled by it. Everything in the universe including all living beings are linked to nature through such activities. Gifting too purifies the giver. The word ‘*tapas*’ covers actions by the body, mind or word that helps one move ahead towards liberation, as we have seen. It cannot be given up. All the three help one climb the steps of (evolutionary) progress.

etāny api tu karmāṇi saṅgam tyaktvā phalāni ca  
kartavyānīti me pārtha niścitam matam uttamam 18.6

*O Arjuna, it is My firm and highest opinion that these three have to be performed without selfish motives and attachment to results.*

Action with emotional attachment and / or with a view to enjoying its fruits inevitably leads to bondage. (Caring for a patient will then come to relate only to the fee charged; sowing and reaping will depend exclusively upon the profit available. Anxiety to the results will jeopardize actions and destroy the performer's peace of mind. ‘Mine’ and ‘for-my-sake’ approach leads to emotional attachments overlooking even natural justice.) Action itself cannot be adjudged by any other criterion; it is neither divine nor demoniac, or good or bad. What is good in a certain situation may prove bad in another. For example, action with a cutting agent by a surgeon and by a criminal are different – the disposition, intent and situation decides what type of action it is.

niyatasya tu samnyāsaḥ karmaṇo nopapadyate  
mohāt tasya parityāgas tāmasaḥ parikīrtitah 18.7

*Actions that can be deemed as (natural) responsibilities are not to be sacrificed; abandoning them due to moha (misconception) is said to be example of tamasa tyaga.*

There are day-to-day chores like finding and preparing food, cleaning one's body and premises and so on (*nitya karma*). Then there is meeting the responsibilities of family and the society (*kartavya karma*). Action stemming from one's natural aptitude and work (*svadharma karma*) follows. Additional work may be called for at short notice if accidents or natural disasters occur (*anushangika karma*). These are all due and should never be shunned. The ignorant or the lazy alone do so out of wrong disposition (*tamasa guna*).

Just imagine one refusing to bathe or brush his teeth, denying responsibility to anyone, giving up his trade, turning his face the other way when his neighbor's house is on fire, running away from life in the name of *samnyasa*, deserting his hapless family and old parents. Imagine what follows if the world takes him as a model and begins to go his way! Being altogether idle or unbearably untidy would never make anyone any monk.

Some people have ample justifications for this type of abandonment (*tamasa tyaga*). Help an accident victim to hospital and the police becomes a pain on your back; the waste dumped in public places and the acts of injustice around me are not my personal problem; just because I married someone doesn't mean I have to bear burdens like this... It can be easily seen that each of such attitudes is a definite slide-back on the path of cultural progress. Every time one succumbs, the mind loses part of its tranquility.

duḥkham ity eva yat karma kāyakleśabhayāt tyajet  
sa kṛtvā rājasam̄ tyāgam̄ naiva tyāgaphalam̄ labhet 18.8

*Any action abandoned out of fear of physical strain exemplifies rajasa tyaga (abandonment prompted by rajo guna). It does not confer the benefits of karmaphala tyaga (renunciation of the result of action).*

The benefit of true renunciation of results of action is peace of mind. Personal feeling of ownership transforms itself to peace when it is realized that the body-mind-intellect complex does not decide the results of actions. All anxiety and pride vanishes. Dedication to the Supreme Being takes over and the natural outcome is true happiness. Such a person would not find a need to shirk his responsibilities, however challenging they may be.

But it has been observed earlier that one in whom *rajo guna* is in the fore will ascribe prime importance to his sensual pleasure and his feeling of comfort. The dominating mindset would also result in vanity over success and blaming himself for failure. Anxiety is the rule. These mentalities make the person shun

work that involves any physical discomfiture and for which result cannot be assured. His mental unrest from *rājo guna* will also prevent the person from ‘wasting time’ as he would see it. What gets discarded this way may include one’s bounden duties.

kāryam ity eva yat karma niyatam kriyaterjuna  
saṅgam tyaktvā phalam caiva sa tyāgaḥ sāttviko mataḥ 18.9

*Arjuna, when one's bounden duty and responsibility is understood as his dharma and undertaken without emotional attachment or craving for the results, it is said to be sattvik tyaga.*

So this is the definition of true *tyaga* (sacrifice). Simply put, sacrifice is *doing* one's duty and responsibility. It is to be done with a sense of detachment about the outcome, well understanding these as ‘what I *have* to do’. For actions pertaining to the person's responsibility, job and duty, what is sacrificed in action is one's time, effort and leisure; along with craving for the results of the endeavor. Only such a person is entitled to be called a *tyagi*. Through such a mindset, the time or the effort sacrificed will never feel wasted. For a situation related to one's responsibilities (family or other); do one's best keeping the mind on the Supreme Entity. In internal conflict and worry, take refuge in the Ātma, ask the highest Self within oneself, and perform the action chalked out. For one's job – do it with skill; because skill in action is *yoga* (the verse was seen earlier). The surprising and most enlightening part of living according to *brahma vidya* is – sacrifice as described here would not feel like sacrifice at all! No one is bothered about doing anything for loved ones nor can he dislike what he is skilled in and likes to do as a job. (Verses relating to job aptitude and selection will be discussed shortly.) Similarly sacrificing time and effort for the good of others, sometimes even felt as troublesome or difficult at the beginning, will eventually result in a purely happy state because it kindles the *sattvik* type of joy in the mind (The types of happiness are also discussed in later verses.) The world and one's body placed in it are parts of the apparatus available to help one climb higher on the ladder of evolution. It is to be made use of, not discarded. Here the final solution is given to Arjuna's question. Neither the consideration that all actions lead to bondage (verse 18.3) nor the idea of self denial of all of one's likes in day to day happiness (verse 18.2) is encouraged. Vedanta does not advocate self denial, though effort needed is in the conditioning of the mind to prevent slavery or ensnarement to material pleasures. Right actions done well will destroy whatever primitive inclinations that remain.

There is more. Suppression of the desire to act only leads to loss of peace of mind. Abstention from any action alone will not eradicate the craving to perform it and for its result; elimination of symptoms is not enough to eradicate a disease. But once the disease is done away with, it does not matter even if rudiments of symptoms prevail; they would not last for long.

na dveṣṭyakuśalam karma kuśale nānuṣajjate  
tyāgī sattvasamāviṣṭo medhāvī chinnasamśayah 18.10

*The one in whom sattva guna leads, who has discerned the truth and who harbors no doubts, does not dislike intense work or become attracted to leisurely (or fanciful) work.*

The one who has chosen a work according to his aptitude and has trained in the skill of doing it, and has also understood what real sacrifice is, goes happily about his job and is not worried about intense work. For him it is a likeable challenge. The one who has finally understood this and also reached this mindset is unbeatable. Together with detachment to results and no emotional snares, he becomes as perfect as a human can get. Needless to say that he would enjoy it. A person who has reached this habit will carry out all his other responsibilities in the same manner, as he has inherently understood the truth about the working of the world and is without doubt.

For some, however, choices are not easy. There are two kinds of handicaps likely. The first is the tradition-versus-deviation dilemma. One working in the area of social justice often finds oneself blocked by it. At such a juncture, readiness and a leaflet of rules would not be sufficient; there must be enough courage and conviction based on wisdom. The second is distraction by worldly allurements including those brought in by instincts like biological altruism. No good farmer leaves the weeds to grow even if they are siblings of the crop plant. Situations may arise in which the pleasant *svadharma* can be pursued only by carrying out somewhat unpleasant actions too, for a law enforcement officer or judge.

Every right action ideally performed is a two-pronged weapon. It paves the way to conform to the design of the universe and enjoy the bliss of being (one with it); it trims primitive inclinations by consistently denying them any play.

The successful *karma yogi* functions in the world like the sun providing heat and light; without emotional involvement or any craving for returns, or any pride in the great work relentlessly done.

na hi dehabhṛtā śakyam tyaktum karmāṇy aśeṣataḥ  
yas tu karmaphalatyāgī sa tyāgīty abhidhīyate 18.11

*Anyone with a body can never give up all karma. But whosoever gives up all craving for the fruits of his action (as he does his duty) is called tyagi.*

All creations in the universe are born out of *karma* (action), exist in *karma* and dissolve back by *karma*. Bodies cannot exist removed from action (3.5). Being idle too is action; each cell in the body is still at work, internal organs go on, breathing continues and the mind as well as the intellect is active. If any dutiful action is avoided another takes its place. Holes and pits dug in water do not last. The only way out is to discern one's bounden duty and perform it without attachment to it or craving for its result.

If one considers oneself as separate from nature, clashes may arise between one's interests and the interests of society or the biosphere. The gulf is widened as self-interests are upheld leading to more clashes; and the essence of the universe becomes that much distanced from realization. Progress in the opposite direction, on the other hand, bridges the gap as inclinations that strengthen the craving are weakened.

Look at a member of any orchestra. He cannot stop or leave halfway. If he works only for the wages it is a burden; if he is too much attached to it he is likely to slip. But if he becomes a natural part of the whole he enjoys it to the hilt. It does not mean he should not accept the remuneration offered.

aniṣṭam iṣṭam miśram ca trividham karmaṇah phalam  
bhavaty atyāginām pretya na tu samnyāsinām kvacit 18.12

*For those whose detachment in regard to the results of karma is not complete, the net balance of accrued impact during a lifetime will be either good, bad or a mixture of the two; but for those samnyasis who have completely sacrificed the results of their karma in the aforesaid way, no balance of any kind ever remains even after death.*

(Note: these *samnyasis* are to be strictly seen in the light of previous verses; they do not live according to the wrong notion of renunciation but are performers of all action.) Most people perceive themselves separate from the rest of the universe and do not realize their true self (*Paramātma*). They believe that every *karma* (action) has a definite material result affecting them according to the good and bad in those actions. They expect whatever force they understand

as God to confer rewards for good and punishment for wrong-doing, correlating with exact balance sheets. This is the reason for belief in heaven-hell and rebirth too. Reward and punishment must somehow be made equal in the balance sheet. Good people who suffer here is found to have no justice sometimes, so there should be a heaven; bad people who do abominable crimes also are found to escape sometimes which makes it necessary for a hell or rebirth to make them suffer for their sins.

But happiness and sorrow cannot be correlated exactly with material pleasure or lack of it. The situation is a lot more complicated than simple reward and punishment at the level of the body. An average person even in somewhat restrained circumstances may be a lot happier than someone very rich with every freedom. There is a lot of difference in the quality of happiness even in people under the same conditions. (Different types of happiness are discussed in later verses.) How *prakṛti* reacts to offense was also discussed earlier in detail. Sins accumulate as modulations which decide the progress of the person and extend to involve subsequent generations also. *Prakṛti* would hold the person responsible physically through the action-reaction patterns pertaining to laws in society, punishment, imprisonment or other repercussions. ‘Sin’ also separates the intellect and inner self further from union with immortality, instills fear and hate and makes the person permanently separated from peace of mind. Thus from both inside and outside one is made to pay for it. Whether for momentary pleasure or material riches, no sane person with right knowledge will opt for this stupid package; so we don't need rebirth or hell to frighten people to remain good, we need only right education. What biological evolution means and the way it progresses and what its true target is have also been explained earlier.

The *tyagi* is a person with such an all-encompassing idea, who is totally detached and thus unaffected by the outcome of whatever *karma* he performs. Such people harbor no craving that can be strengthened. In fact, their attitude to actions helps erase whatever traces of craving they inherited.

Actions stem from desires generated by instincts and also as reactions from stimuli obtained through the sense organs from one's surroundings. What is meant by ‘fruit of action’ here is not the material outcome but the effect it generates on the mind. For instance, the result of a farmer's action is not the crop but the way the disposition of the farmer is altered by the performance of the action and the crop it yields.

What is ‘desirable’ is the depletion of cravings and not the total renunciation of all good desires beneficial to all. This mindset leads to greater peace of mind and happiness as the bondages within get loose and identification with *Paramātma* is closer. Detachment alone helps achieve it. Action based on

detachment helps develop mastery over cravings. This leads to readiness to act for the common good.

When detachment is complete, there is identification with the *ātma*; all bounden duties can then be performed with total unconcern and blissfully. There is no accumulation of cravings in the mind or the subconscious by feedback. In this sense ‘actions do not have any result anymore’. It does not mean that the seed the detached one sows will not sprout or that the detached are not supposed to cultivate any crop. In fact any monk too is supposed to carry out all bounden duties. If any such one says ‘I am detached, feed me and carry me on your shoulder’, he is a fake for sure.

Those who work only for their own selfish motives are prompted by *rājo guna*. They carry the craving to do so. However they also carry at the same time, though to a lesser degree, the impulse to resist this instinct. The fight is there within. This, symbolically, is the fight between the *Devas* and the *Asuras* or in the battlefield of Kurukshetra as outlined in the Mahabharata epic. This war has to be won to attain what is known as *moksha purushartha* (liberation, the ultimate target of evolution). The weapon to fight with is firm detachment.

Cast off all hangover of the past as well as all fear and anxiety on account of the future; dedicate all actions to *Paramātma* and keep earning more and more freedom. Get away from the mindset of rebirth and heaven, stop looking at rewards and punishments at the perishable level; do what you have to in this world in the light of true knowledge about yourself and your soul, thus being in union with the Supreme Self and experiencing true happiness whatever the material situation is – says sage Vyasa.

pañcaitāni mahābāho kāraṇāni nibodha me  
sāṃkhye kṛtānte proktāni siddhaye sarvakarmaṇām 18.13

*O the mighty-armed (Arjuna), know from Me the five causes leading to the accomplishment of all actions as declared in the Sankhya system, which fully analyses all karma.*

(The *Sankhya* texts now available do not mention these five causes. There is no knowing which texts available at the time of Vyasa did. The word ‘*sankhya*’ was also used as a synonym for ‘knowledge’ at that time. ‘All true actions lead to wisdom ...’ in verse 4.33 also points to this general idea.) Seeking of truth begins by searching for the source of all *karma*. All action originates from the beginning of the pulsing act of the universe. To know the secret of action, one should therefore know the *Paramātma*. The best and easiest place to look for it

is within oneself. *Sastra* (Vedantic sciences) had carried out that search long ago. Some of the results are there in the Upanishads. Gita uses the findings of that enquiry in explaining *karma*.

The factors that bring about *karma* are now investigated and the way they are bonded together is closely looked into.

adhiṣṭhānam tathā kartā karaṇam ca pṛthagvidham  
vividhāś ca pṛthakceṣṭā daivam caivātra pañcamam 18.14

*The adhisthanam, the karta (doer), the various instruments, different types of motion, and also daiva the fifth factor.*

The first factor is the *adhisthanam* (foundation). Anything and everything has to have a basis. In the case of *karma*, it must exist before all *karma* comes into being and must also outlast all *karma*. One may think that the body is the reason for human activities. But the human body itself is the product of ever so many actions that preceded its coming into being. Even after the body dies, so many actions at the cellular level like decomposition continues. Action needs movement and it can enact itself only on the basis of something that is stable and ever present. Therefore *Paramātma* alone can be the foundation for all actions. ('The wise among men discern non-action (*akarma*) in every action (*karma*)' – 4.18. He has come to know the foundation of all action.) It has been established that the doer (*karta*) of actions is *prakṛti* (based on the three *gunas* of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*). Its action patterns lead to continuous *karma*. Instruments are the numerous animate and inanimate entities in the world through which these patterns lead to individual actions.

Various kinds of motion and nature's laws pertaining to it form the fourth factor. No object in the universe is 'at rest'; everything from the smallest fundamental particle to vast oceans and galactic clusters keeps moving. Nothing can act unless it moves in some fashion and everything that moves acts. An object will remain at rest or continue to be in constant velocity unless acted upon by an external force. All forces are interactions between different bodies, and to every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Laws of motion in nature are founded on the dialectical nature of *Akshara*. A series of previous such movements or events lead to *karma* at the individual level.

The fifth factor of *karma* is *daiva*. The word means both God and fate (chance, favorability, uncertainty, probability or unpredictability). It was discussed in verse 13 in chapter 11 (time was discussed in detail in that section) that the universe need not be pre-ordained except during at both ends – creation

and pralaya. The random and obscure part of in-between time provides a series of events leading to any type of *karma*, and this is so much influenced by the uncertainty factor that it is impossible to fully know how and what would lead to a particular *karma* to be performed in a particular way. The same fifth factor is also the mode through which *dharma* is favored by the *Purushottama* (verse 4.6 to 4.8) over and above *prakṛti*'s rule. Therefore both the meanings of 'God's will' and 'fate' leading to *karma* can be attributed to the fifth factor.

Gamblers depend on the uncertainty factor; the lazy and the coward use it as an excuse for escaping from challenges. The wise men of old thank God for a good harvest and again thank him for saving at least a small part of it even if the crop gets devastated by flood or drought. No one has ever won over the fifth factor and no material weapon has ever been successful in outwitting unpredictability. Only those great people who have sacrificed the results of their *karma* by detachment have ever gone above fate; because for them, whatever happens is God's will.

When the assumed doer (*karta*) is man, the same factors lead to *karma* based on the human body: śarīravāñmanobhir yat karma prārabhate naraḥ nyāyyam vā viparītam vā pañcaite tasya hetavah 18.15

*For whatever karma man initiates with his body, word or mind; whether good or otherwise, these five alone are the reasons.*

How the universal factors work in the case of human *karma* is now discussed. In the terminology of modern logic: the general is exemplified by the particular.

The 'I' in the idea that 'I am doing this' is the doer. It is the product of Nature – internal and external. The instincts inherited may prompt 'I'; so do stimuli reaching the sense organs or thoughts in the mind. This 'I' has been discussed extensively together with verses 13.21 and 13.22. It is represented by the human intellect – the decision making factor in conscious state. The body, mind and sense organs are the instruments which are prerequisites for doing *karma*; their nature and capabilities are dictated by *prakṛti*. Action takes place by their movements. (It is to be remembered that the word, irrespective of whether already spoken or only formed in the mind, is also *karma*.) To sum up, when the human body is taken as the *karta* (doer) based on freedom of choice, the five reasons for all *karma* are: 1. The true foundation of the body which is the Paramātma, 2. The *karta* or the 'I' – the intellect (which is highly influenced by nature and acts according to it), 3. The instruments – the mind and the *karmendryas* (organs of the body), the characteristics of all of which are derived

from nature, 4. Various types of motion and events in the world which prompts *karma* from the body, and 5. The uncertainty factor related to selection of that particular body or person in that unique action-reaction chain in the flux of *Akshara*.

(Note that ideas like good-bad outcomes or rebirth are not considered here as reasons for *karma*.)

tatraivam̄ sati kartāram ātmānam̄ kevalam̄ tu yah  
paśyaty akṛtabuddhitvān na sa paśyati durmatih 18.16

*Now, this being the truth of the matter, he who, owing to his untrained understanding, looks upon his ‘self’ as the only ‘doer’ is prevented by his limited intelligence from seeing right.*

The most critical and damaging shortcomings likely to degrade human action are limitations of breadth and depth of vision on the part of the doer. Conclusions go wrong. If the mind happens to be not widened enough by wisdom the horizon of outlook gets small. If the wide range and spectrum of the five factors in nature leading to human *karma* is not recognized, the great expanse of truth is missed. One feels to be the only cause for one’s action. It boosts ego and anxiety and results in feeling separate from the rest of the universe which means distancing oneself from identification with the True Self. Craving for the fruits of action as seen earlier is antithetic to the desirable direction of life’s evolution.

On the other hand, one with a mind refined with wisdom considers himself just as a spark from the foundation of the universe. He is also aware of the fact that all equipments and instruments of action as also all movements anywhere stem from *prakṛti*. For him, any involvement of any part of his body in any action is an act of worship; freedom means being identified with *Paramātma* and maintaining the status of a witness in relation to all that is going on in and around including in his mind and intellect. Therefore he is not attached and the fruits of his actions do not perturb him.

yasya nāhamkṛto bhāvo buddhir yasya na lipyate  
hatvā/api sa imāml lokān na hanti na nibadhyate 18.17

*He who harbors no feeling of ahamkara that ‘I am doing this’ and whose intellect is not attached (to any personal motive) does not kill any even if he exterminates the (whole) world, and is not tainted by any such action.*

No one in particular can be held responsible for whatever naturally happens. For instance, the apparent final cause for a landslide may be a bird landing on a rock in the region. But that bird cannot be held responsible. Fortunately for it, it does not accuse itself; it doesn't know. Man, because he knows a little more than the bird but not enough to grasp all, is likely to feel guilty in similar circumstances. Based on the few links that we can perceive in the cause-and-effect chain that extends endlessly, man tries to fix responsibility for every event either on someone else and / or often blame oneself and carry the feeling of guilt. In fact the spectrum of responsibility in man ranges from the utterly irresponsible to those who assume themselves as responsible for everything even remotely related to them.

Animals and birds of prey, living things that kill to save themselves and even natural events like typhoons and tsunamis are examples of complete unawareness. Starting from here, evolution should progress to know the ultimate state of everything. Man, who is in-between the two states therefore naturally feels anywhere in the entire wide spectrum depending on individual preconditioning of thought. This feeling, stemming from ignorance based on the dialectical nature of *Akshara* and our half-cooked worldview traps and ensnares us strongly to the ties of results of all of our *karma*.

The heights of stupidity man can assume based on responsibility is amply demonstrated by fanatical priests who deliberately misinterpret this verse to mean one can kill the whole world in the name of God. (There are such men corrupting all religions.) It only helps exemplify to what extent human intelligence can degenerate despite all life-saving and compassionate discourses!

This verse just means that no one is responsible for actions done without intent to hurt anybody in any way. As we saw before, neither the judge nor the law enforcement officer has purposeful intent to harm anybody. Also, the action reaction patterns of nature are complicated and the uncertainty factor makes it impossible to make sure why this person was forced to do such a thing, and also why only a good outcome cannot be assured especially in risky situations. This factor is well known to people working in various fields such as medicine. Self-blame for factors beyond human control or anxiety of the future are not the way of a knowledgeable person. Understanding well the five factors of *karma* is the way to comprehend the situation and one's true responsibility in it.

The ultimate reality behind all creations of the universe is *Paramātma*. It neither kills nor is killed (verse 2.19). It has no craving for any action but everything that happens is by virtue of Its presence. If the fruits of actions are not to become further chains tied to personal ego (the feeling of separateness)

due to guilt or backlashes stemming from lack of or excess of the feeling of responsibility, or anxiety about the future; right knowledge has to be gained and enough training in its light performed by way of *karma yoga* to assimilate it.

Next, the impulse for action is further analyzed so that the process of ego-development can be understood.

jñānam jñeyam parijñātā trividhā karmacodanā  
karaṇam karma karteti trividhaḥ karmasamgrahah 18.18

*The impulse to karma is three-fold: knowledge, the subject of knowledge and the knower. (Similarly) Implementation of karma is through the act, the karta and the means to act.*

After analyzing the five reasons for all *karma* from the human point of view, impulses for action or immediate reasons are noted. Knowledge is the first of the three impulses for *karma*. One runs away from a poisonous snake because of the knowledge that it is poisonous. One harbors this knowledge all the while but runs only now because the snake, the subject of the knowledge (the second impulse to *karma*), is there right in front. The third impulse is the knower himself – the person who runs away due to fear. This *karma* takes place only if all three impulses are present. The funny part is: one may run if a piece of rope is mistaken for a snake and also even if the snake is not poisonous. Only if the *karta* (doer) knows right and correctly decides the path of *karma* can his life be happy and beneficial. Therefore both the *karta* (doer) and the *jnana* (knowledge) of the doer have to be studied well. (Unconscious state and reflexes are not studied here; only those actions which are related to decision making intellect are important in these discussions because this is the *karma* related to ego, responsibility and deliberate effort to union.) jñānam karma ca kartā ca tridhaiva guṇabhedataḥ

procyate gunasamkhyāne yathāvac chṛṇu tāny api 18.19

*The science of the gunas says *jnana*, *karma* and the *karta* are all divided into three types based on the (preponderance of the) gunas; you may hear about these now.*

*Jnana*, *karma* and *bhakti* have been dealt with earlier. All the three were described as *yoga* with *Paramātma*; union is the common factor achievable through all. Emphasis was laid upon the necessity to keep the processes of all three well integrated.

Gita ascribes utmost importance to *jnana* (knowledge), the achievement of which is taken to mean evolutionary progress. A close look at how the intellect gets built up will reveal the pattern of integration desirable. The pain-pleasure duality of the surroundings is recognized immediately after birth. Natural instincts help the child recognize the mother and its immediate surroundings. This rudimentary knowledge makes it cry and move its limbs; more is known from the responses to these actions. Thus the process of learning starts through a ‘buildup-by-feedback’ process. At a certain stage of growth a basic sense of reality gets set. What follows thereafter is handled against this backdrop which can generally be described as one’s primary mindset.

If this sense of reality is not on the lines of true knowledge regarding the nature of the world as described earlier, further progress becomes difficult. This is because the developing *sradha* of the child becomes adherent to that view and pattern. However, this can still be re-molded later by trying to imbibe *sattvik* knowledge. The nature of that *jnana* (knowledge) is discussed next:

*sarvabhūteṣu yenaikam bhāvam avyayam ikṣate*

*avibhaktam vibhakteṣu taj jñānam viddhi sāttvikam* 18.20

*The jnana that perceives the same indivisible, united and indestructible presence in all apparently separate animate or inanimate entities is to be known as sattvik.*

The three *gunas* – *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* – are facets in the transformation process of *Avyakta* during the various stages of its spiral pulsation. All creations are born, supported and dissolved by virtue of various combinations of portions of *Avyakta* depending on the *guna* blossoming in it at the moment. But *Avyakta* the pulsating medium and *Paramātma* the fundamental force that agitates it are invisible to us. The moment the picture is fully comprehended the unity of the universe is established.

If viewed from the bottom of a small well the sky is just a small round patch above. Viewed from level ground, however, it is a large hemisphere; it is a full sphere if viewed from high above; it is endless, colorless and shapeless if viewed from outer space. The next stage is the knowledge that it is not empty but the medium *Avyakta*; the final step is the revelation that it is a field manifestation of the fundamental force behind the universe. The fundamental life force, the *Purushottama*, is ever present and pervades all equally.

Unless it is realized that the myriad creations each one appearing to be on its own are in reality the various facets of the one and same thing, the full picture is not obtained and the felt experience remains ever out of reach. Only by gaining

that total vision will considerations of ‘my’ profit or loss and ‘my’ pleasure or pain become powerless to ensnare the person. Otherwise the fertile human brain will continue to imagine and enlarge on the worldly ‘I’, highlighting again and again ‘my’ sorrows, ‘my’ wants, the loss of ‘my’ loved ones, ‘my’ failings, ‘my’ gains etc. The basic principle of *Vedanta* that this ‘I’ is not the ‘lasting I’ will not get rooted in the mind.

pṛthaktvena tu yaj jñānam nānābhāvān pṛthagvidhān  
vetti sarveṣu bhūteṣu taj jñānam viddhi rājasam 18.21

*But, jnana that sees creations only as separated, unrelated, dissimilar and unconnected entities is said to be of the rajo guna type.*

It is very tragic that instead of knowing everything as one and that I am all, one chooses to get cut off and isolated and ends up a self-made outcast. This is the sad story of one born a monarch becoming a beggar through wrong personal choice. It is exactly what most of the knowledge of the modern world directs one to aspire for. One’s pleasure is supposed to be in acquiring in kind and quantity what no other has; one’s enjoyment stems from the envy one can generate in others; one who chases material desires best is slated to win the most and so on.

Differentiation is the most accepted dictum of modern science and education, not integration. Whatever be the subject studied – from microbes to stars – the method is to observe differences and categorize. Equipments in use and procedures of evaluation pose problems if unity is attempted to be discerned instead. Even Darwin’s study was aimed at differentiating one form of life from another and not in observing the common factors in all life forms pointing to the underlying unity of life in everything. That was why he failed to see the role of Mother Nature behind all integrated *kshetras* (life fields), and the one unified entity or soul behind the universe and Its role in determining the course of evolution of life – the fact that each deviation, whether it helped better survival or not, represented yet another branching to attempt another avenue for identification with the immortal true self – the *Paramātma*.

Divisions rule the arena of education. Schools and colleges that segregate on the basis of race and religion still exist. Universities make watertight compartments of most subjects of study. Specialization has splintered the medical profession to such an extent that no specialist is now capable of considering the whole of the body and mind of any patient. Marx studied man in terms of classes. Organized religions maintain strict borders. Laws always prescribe divided loyalty – one part to God and the other to Caesar. The concept

of unity rules nowhere.

Knowledge leading to sectarianism is the root cause of all hell on earth. Best friends come to look upon each other as enemies; artificial lines of separation are drawn on flimsy ground. Ego and alienation lead to stupid wars and stupider attempts at revolutions. (Misconceived crusades believed to be for the good are the most difficult to be done away with.) *yat tu kṛtsnavad ekasmin kārye saktam ahetukam*

*atattvārthavad alpam ca tat tāmasam udāhṛtam 18.22*

*The jnana that is fragmented by setting upon (mere) trivialities and stubbornly attached to such excluding any higher vision, without logic or rational backing, unprincipled and limited to small environments – that (kind of) jnana is called tamasa.*

The knowledge that justifies killing for religion or for a dose of dope, the knowledge of making ‘food’ out of plastic, knowledge related to ‘minting’ money and high technology burglary, the knowledge pertaining to ‘satan’ and witchcraft, superstitions etc., all come under this group. Numerous examples can be thought of. Terrorists are stuck on fragmentary piece of knowledge ignoring the great compassion and goodness advocated by religions. Burglars see their actions as ‘taking’ money from the rich and believe that there is nothing wrong in it. Some even pray to God before venturing for the next burglary.

*niyatam saṅgarahitam arāgadveṣataḥ kṛtam  
aphalaprepsunā karma yat tat sāttvikam ucyate 18.23*

*Karma that is understood as niyata (ought to be done, one's responsibility) and carried out without attachment; devoid of raga and dvesha and disregarding results is said to be sattvik.*

After discussing knowledge, *karma* is next analyzed based on the three gunas. Action too follows the state of prominence of *gunas*. It is obvious that ideal knowledge is a prerequisite for ideal action; and ideal action further enhances ideal knowledge.

*Raga* means passionate attachment and *dvesha* means passionate hatred. Detachment is the keyword in *sattvik karma*. It makes all action natural, happy and easy too. As seen earlier, *sattvik karma* is equivalent to *karma yoga*.

Look at the river flowing. The nature of water coupled with topography decides the course of the river. Mountains and valleys neither protest nor

welcome the flow. Whether it is a head-on fall or a tranquil slope it is the same for the water that passes. The river claims no credit for finding and making its difficult path to the ocean; the landscape claims no credit for channelizing the huge quantity of water all the way to the ocean either.

As long as the flow is natural, the water is clean. In the same way the life of man has a spotless flow in society and the world based on his circumstances and responsibilities. It has to be set free and natural on that route. There is nothing in it to be specially attached to pain, pleasure, sorrow, pride, success or defeat along any stages on that path. Everything is bound to pass.

yat tu kāmepsunā karma sāhamkāreṇa vā punah  
kriyate bahulāyāsam tad rājasam udāhṛtam 18.24

*Karma that promotes the craving for results at every step, cultivates egotism and is carried out with great strain exemplifies the rajasa variety.*

*Rajasa karma* is the outcome of *rajasa* knowledge. Basic unity is missed and one supposes to be exclusively on his own. Achievement means success in earning physical comfort, status related to ego and material riches for oneself and for those who are considered one's own. Pride is what drives that person and the job also becomes a show of that smartness. Such action driven by attachment and the craving for results naturally proves burdensome and is fraught with anxiety and tension. An example is a person having some other aptitude or skill but trying to become a doctor because that status is more respected in society, and the situation becomes worse all the more when he is greedy for money. Skill in action and inherent satisfaction from doing the job are forgotten. Ignoring one's aptitude in this way for the satisfaction of personal ego and material gains will result in both the person and the society being less happy because of that choice. (Actually *sattvik karma* may involve more strain to the body but the person would not feel it as bothersome.) When one feels severed from the rest of the universe, that person's happiness is perceived as something that has to be obtained from the outside world with effort. Unblemished happiness that happens only in a peaceful mind will also not be available. The 'mortal only' mindset contributes to a feeling of lack of time which results in perpetual mental unrest. 'I' becomes the fulcrum of that person's mental makeup. The pleasures one can get and the happiness one can enjoy from the world are of course limited and temporary; but the *rajasa* mindset knows no other kind; it gets stuck on these and decides that there is nothing else, thereby increasing the craving for material pleasures. Sometimes they opt for these pleasures to be derived through

the wrong routes also thereby compounding their enslavement and making release all the more hard.

anubandham kṣayam himsām anapekṣya ca pauruṣam  
mohād ārabhyate karma yat tat tāmasam ucyate 18.25

*Karma that issues from ignorance and is carried out unmindful of its consequences, one's future, the extent of damage it does to the world in general and without assessing one's ability to undertake it exemplifies the tamasa variety.*

*Tamasa karma* stems from *tamasa* knowledge. Ignorance may be bliss but not the right kind of bliss and certainly not for long either. A burglar does his *karma* not understanding that he is compromising his entire life in the process just for a few temporary gains. A religious fanatic believes he is doing the right thing and cannot understand that he is working on *tamasa* (fragmentary) knowledge and becoming the cause of death for numerous innocent people including children.

Acting without caring for consequences and without any definite worldview, and feeling happy at the prospect of the entire world dying except oneself, one's wife and mountains of gold – are examples of when *tamo guna* leads one by the nose. This is even one step worse than the attitude of just being separate from the rest of the universe. It sanctions the exploitation of the rest of the world along with laziness and utter disregard – leading to grievous pollution of the world outside as well as within.

The manufacturers of intoxicating drinks, even if they do not drink what they make, are often so badly intoxicated by profits that they add pesticides and other poisons to reap better profits. Their *karma* has no consideration about the future, how many are going to die, how much they themselves and the world in general are going to lose, how long a jail-term they may get and whether they will be able to withstand it.

Look at some of our entrepreneurs. They have grandiose ideas; they invest with the hope of reaping super-profits and go for loans without caution and crash. This list is endless. Politicians intoxicated with the taste and prospect of power instill caste and communal feelings to grab the right to rule; some even promote terrorism and amass money; huge cartels manufacture weapons for overt and covert mass destruction to hold the world to ransom; self-styled custodians of occult powers sell talismans worth trillions of dollars; god-men with or without money-chain businesses exploit superstitions that already exist

and cultivate fresh cults; wholesalers of food-crops poisons the world to slow death through pesticides they wantonly use to preserve their profits. In all these and similar *karma* the operators degrade their own lives and also endanger the unsuspecting besides alluring the gullible to follow their path.

muktasaṅgo/nahaṁvādī dhṛtyutsāhasamanvitah  
siddhyasiddhyor nirvikārah kartā sāttvika ucyate 18.26

*The one who performs karma with detachment, unselfishly and without ego, endowed with dhriti (fortitude) and enthusiasm, and unaffected by success or failure, that karta is sattvik.*

The discussion now shifts to the *karta* (doer). Instincts foster actions. But instincts can be re-shaped by indulging in right *karma* provided there is at least a small spark of the instinct to do so. This, even if not available at birth, can be instilled by circumstances or effort. *Jnana* (knowledge) and *karma* (action) remoulds the *karta* (doer), and the doer in turn modifies his *karma* and his approach based on the wisdom he attains.

Ideal knowledge is another name for untarnished awareness of *Paramātma*. One who has it goes beyond all dualism. In that imperturbable state his actions remain unblemished; he does not feel he is the one doing and deciding everything. But despite being unconcerned by the outcome of what he does, he never compromises on the quality of work because he is totally absorbed, persistent and, therefore, fully dedicated and enthusiastic; he is not affected by success or failure (as he is not driven by craving, pride or ego); the disappointment of failure or overconfidence of success does not affect further *karma*.

A look at the lives of great souls will prove the truth of this. One does not have to go that far. Observe an ideal surgeon at work. He is neither attracted to nor dislikes any of his patients, is not bothered what amount of fee he gets and does not assume that it is he who performs the surgery or decides the success in it. He will try his best, he is careful and does whatever can be done, he does not know indifference or complacency, what he does is not affected by the successes or failures encountered before except what he has learned from them, and the all-important thing before him is the patient in front of him at present and the disease. The All Powerful who had allowed that disease had also made him a surgeon to try to cure it; that is all!

Anyone in any walk of life can adopt a comparable attitude. It goes without saying that peace and well being on earth will be proportional to the percentage

of people who succeed in doing so.

rāgī karmaphalaprepSUR lubdho himsātmako/śuciḥ  
harṣāśokānvitah̄ kartā rājasah̄ parikīrtitah̄ 18.27

*The one who is attached and (therefore) craves for the fruits of action, unsatisfied however much is obtained and therefore unmindful of hurting the other to achieve what he wants, thus impure at heart and freely allowing himself to be preyed upon by grief and happiness alike, that karta is rajasa.*

This kind of *karta* (doer) is the product of *rajasa* knowledge. But anywhere on the way he can turn to the right path if he takes note of the signboards put by Gita. The problem is: he has to feel the urge. Till then the fire of cravings will feed on material achievements and keep growing; he will demand payment even for a small help he does to anyone, fight shy of parting with a penny even if it will save a life and suffer mental poverty despite all the wealth amassed and therefore will always be ready to hurt any for his own gain. His justice is what suits his convenience and he will hold himself solely responsible for all that happens to him, thus feeling wretched for days on end if he loses even in a small way. This also makes him the seat of various conflicting emotions and mental turmoil which he soon accepts as natural in day to day life. *Rajasa karta* are prone to emotional outbursts and wild passion including uncontrollable anger and violence. Such people lack patience and they cannot think, act or speak calmly.

ayuktah̄ prākṛtaḥ stabdhah̄ śaṭho naiṣkṛtiko/lasah̄  
viṣādī dīrghasūtrī ca kartā tāmasa ucyate 18.28

*The one who has no wisdom and cannot concentrate on what he does, the prakrita, stabdha, scheming, lazy, depressed and prone to procrastination – he is said to be tamasa karta.*

They have no vision or wisdom; are not interested in their own potential; do not take effort to command enough concentration to complete any job; are stubborn and rough in their dealings; keep blaming others for their own poor character; scheme to undermine any good befalling anyone; look for ways to avoid work and neglect even personal cleanliness out of sheer laziness. *Prakrita* directly points to lower steps in evolution. The word means primitive and unrefined – as the Stone Age man. *Stabdha* means stuck frame of mind and

inability to think rationally.

An alcoholic is a typical example of the *tamasa karta*. He pays dearly for his attempt to forget himself. He does not take into account the future of his own liver and stomach, squanders what all he has and then begs, borrows, steals and even robs. Whatever remains of the violence stemming from intoxication after attacking the milestone by the roadside is directed at one's hapless family and neighbors.

From the description of the result of preponderance of *gunas* in relation to knowledge, karma and the doer, it is clear that infinite combinations and gradations are possible. Nature has no definite lines of demarcation for anything. It is a continuous spectrum, variations in degrees infinite and transitions almost imperceptible. Each has its specifics, demanding open-minded enquiry. It is true of the effort to know ourselves too. Every individual is special mix which is changing too. Better if one learns to assess oneself before attempting to brand any other.

It is also evident that the one who acts (the doer) is the most important factor on stage so he is now put on the dissection table for further in-depth study. He is driven by his 'I'. It is 'I' that decides the way of expression of instincts within and also what to do with inputs from outside. Closer examination reveals that the intellect – *buddhi* – is the command centre of 'I'. The ability to implement such command – *dhriti* – is the sum total of the faculty for perseverant enforcement. Any drawback suffered by 'I' can be traced to one of these or both together.

buddher bhedam dhṛteś caiva guṇatas trividham śṛṇu  
procyamānam aśeṣena pr̥thaktvena dhanamjaya 18.29

*O the one who has won over wealth (Arjuna), I will now present the three-fold variations caused by the prominences of the (three) gunas in buddhi and dhriti analyzed threadbare and in full; listen.*

As everything else in Nature, *buddhi* and *dhriti* too are formed by the combinations of the three gunas. These divisions are, however, not mutually exclusive. Like in all creations, in these two too the *gunas* are co-existent. No creation can exist with only one or any missing. Only their predominance varies from creation to creation; and in the same creation no predominance is for all time! Gita says it can be altered at will. The first step in that direction is to study the patterns in detail and full.

Whatever one does is on the basis of knowledge available at the moment plus the will and equipment to implement his decision. The moment a soldier

realizes that the person confronting him is friend and not foe his decision regarding response changes and the mode of action too is altered. Hate gives way to friendliness.

What if one knows for sure that there are no enemies at all in the world? The decision will be to work for the good of the entire world and the will and the equipment to act will follow suit. One's life will no longer swing between opposites like love and hate without respite. In that state the results of one's actions do not ensnare him to the opposites. If one has to kill a mad dog trying to bite others, it will be an act without any sort of hatred. This impassionate mindset will not change even if it was one's own pet. It then does not amount to *himsa* (violence).

pravṛttim ca nivṛttim ca kāryākārye bhayābhaye  
bandham mokṣam ca yā vetti buddhiḥ sā pārtha sāttvikī 18.30

*O Partha (Arjuna), the buddhi that clearly distinguishes between when to act and when not; what matters and what does not, what is to be done and what is not to be done, what is fear and what is fearlessness, what is bondage and what is liberation – is sattvik.*

We had earlier discussed a related verse elaborating on the idea of ‘when to act and when not to’. The hallmark of *sattvik* nature is the freedom from ego-related *karma*. The intellect when dominated by *sattva guna* clearly perceives when to do something and when to refrain from it; and when to say something and when to keep silence. The person does not wish to be heard just for the sake of his presence there i.e., his action and speech are not ego-related. In contrast the *rajasa* – the ego ridden person – interferes and argues in unnecessary matters; such a person cannot keep silent nor does he know when to act or to distinguish between what is important and trivial. He argues for trivial issues and ignores the important ones depending on his ego factor, his stand and the opinions that he had voiced previously.

Fear is different from cowardice. The former is a feeling while the latter is a conscious choice. Courage is also different from foolhardiness. The *sattvik* intellect clearly distinguishes the state of affairs and understands what it has to do in difficult situations. To be brave is to accept one's fear and rise to the situation to confront what one has to. For that the situation has to be accurately assessed and one's responsibility and part to play in the challenge have to be well understood.

Fear is nature's primitive warning of intellect-perceived danger. The root of

all fear is when the body is considered the be-all and the end-all of existence. Fearless can be cultivated in a balanced fashion by gaining wisdom and performing *karma* along its lines.

No call is made for giving up all activities of every kind and going recluse. The emphasis is on doing everything with the perspective of the ultimate reality always in view. Knowledge of that reality therefore is of paramount importance. Everyone is born inquisitive but most do not use it well and full. Get born and born again into wider and wider knowledge, because this is the natural direction of the process of life's evolution.

If the *karta* (doer) is wise enough the action cannot go bad. One having a good intellect can easily acquire wisdom through well-coordinated action. This also means that a sharp intellect alone is not enough to make progress. Intellect is only the equipment; it has to be applied to understand, explore, evaluate and experiment so as to conclude. The net result is experience. One may gather information regarding a landscape from a detailed map but to experience the place one has to go there; the map is useless otherwise.

yayā dharmam adharmam ca kāryam cākāryam eva ca  
ayathāvat prajānāti buddhiḥ sā pārtha rājasī 18.31

*O Partha (Arjuna), the intellect that unrealistically perceives dharma, adharma, what matters and what does not is known as rajasa.*

*Rajasa* intellect is bright but its direction is opposite. It is set on capturing and possessing wealth but does not know what for. Its main concern is sensual pleasure and material wealth and it entertains grandiose dreams about them, but it is not realized that this happiness never adequately compensates for the mental strain taken to get them, the sorrows suffered in earning them or the extent of hurt inflicted on others in the process. All available time is spent on worldly interests that are temporary leading to a hollow feeling to life which is typical of *rajasa* intellect; the person gets no chance or occasion to get interested in the joys of giving and sharing, true love or the fundamental force governing the universe. As this life style continues the person gets more and more averse to the very existence of such a fundamental entity and gradually tends to conclude there is none such. The inability to see the total picture makes the intellect base itself only on the perishable self and the person to feel solely responsible for everything from victory and defeat, undermining the ability to distinguish *karma* from *akarma*, fear from fearlessness and what matters from what does not.

Just imagine a dangerous situation controlled by an egotist and one can grasp

the full import of *rājo guna*. Vanity undermines common sense but these people also never listen to others.

The one whose intellect is under the influence of *rājo guna* tries to be on the side of good and correct others too but his attempted action is corrupted by ego and separatism which results in blaming the other, arguments and even fights. One can commonly see these sorts of arguments; in fact almost all such quarrels are in truth based on ego and it can be observed that the real issue soon takes a backseat as the argument progresses. (*Rājo guna* is of illusory nature and comes often disguised as for good, and it is not obvious to the person under influence who believes he is arguing for a good cause.) Argument over dharma leads to adharma. At its height even murders are committed from a slight insult perceived by the ego.

There is release from this ‘I’ only when one understands that ‘I’ am all, in the sense all creations down to the last piece of stone. Then alone will ‘I’ born as ‘everything’ will stop degenerating into ‘nobody’ and ‘insecure’ and therefore an ‘aggressor’ to protect ‘myself’ and ‘my’ people. Once that sense dawns there will be no ground for anxiety or degradation; no more borders, armies or weapons; and paradise will never again be lost. Any correction will never again require an iota of hurt or hate; instead both the giver and the recipient will be all the more happy for it.

These are those who, not knowing the truth that the entire world belongs to them, constantly feel deprived despite the great lot of everything they have. Real poverty is the lack of food, clothes and shelter. But *rajasa* intellect is always in ‘imaginary’ poverty. Great emperors spend sleepless nights over a remaining small island yet to be conquered! Especially unfortunate are those who opt to remain away from happiness by their own choice.

It is human experience that every good deed makes one happy. But *rājo guna* intellect insists upon adequate material return for every act. Examples are those who lament: ‘Look at those sinners who live happily as against me whom God has forsaken despite tons of good deeds I have performed!’

The hint is: it is never too late to analyze oneself.

adharmaṁ dharmam iti yā manyate tamasāvṛta  
sarvārthān viparītāñś ca buddhiḥ sā pārtha tāmasī 18.32

*O Partha (Arjuna), that intellect which, eclipsed by ignorance, considers adharma as dharma and everything else as the opposite of what it actually is, is governed by tamasa guna.*

On the first view it may appear that seeing things upside down is rare among man but unfortunately it is not. Foremost examples are riots and wars on the basis of religion or politics. *Adharma* (evil) is understood as *dharma* (goodness). The assumption that one's happiness does not correlate in any way to the level of unhappiness of the rest of the world and the hope that one can live on an island of peace when the rest of the world burns are, again, products of *tamasa* intellect. Look at what a Hitler sticking to his flawed intellect did! At the same time, such people believe and propagate justifications for all that they do! Many among perpetrators of grievous offences try to justify what they do to themselves and the world by claiming allegiance to some faith or philosophy or other, and they sincerely believe it too.

Animals and the inanimate do not have the faculty of logical discretion. Acting unwise is therefore no fault of theirs. One may wonder why man, imbued with the faculty of reason, should believe in idiotic thoughts so sincerely and err on this score. It is because of the domination of *tamasa* on the intellect. Once more Bhagavad Gita highlights this unfortunate state of mind for introspection and to root out this flaw in thought if anyone harbors it. Observe the symptoms from the level of the ultimate reality to diagnose the disease; there are numerous small and big ways this *guna* can lie in the depths of one's thinking process; once such flawed thoughts are found it can be weeded out and the mind well cured.

The intellect that goes on in this upside-down fashion causes its own downfall. This is because its conclusions point to the lower rungs of evolution and in turn generate actions that enhance the same. This is a vicious spiral. The observation made earlier (14.19) that 'up goes the one rooted in *sattva*, the *rajasa* stagnate in the middle through generations, and down falls the *tamasa*' is based on this insight.

dhṛtyā yayā dhārayate manahprāṇendriyakriyāḥ  
yogenāvyabhicāriṇyā dhṛtiḥ sā pārtha sāttvikī 18.33

*O Partha (Arjuna), the unfaltering dharana (fortitude) that enables (one) to channelize in full measure the power of the mind, the sense organs and the prana without going astray, that dhriti is sattvik in nature.*

Control over the mind, sense organs and *prana* (the life force of the various organ systems) had been discussed before. *Dhriti* (fortitude) is the combination of *sthairya* (determination) and *dhairyā* (courage). As biological processes are involved in all human actions and attitudes, fatigue and slippage is natural. *Sthairya* is the ability to overcome both there and then.

A terrified mind sometimes forecloses the sense organs and even shuts down the force of life. Medical science very well knows what trauma can do. The mind and the sense organs may also get out of control in extreme conditions of craving, envy or hate. Offenders in courtrooms are often heard saying ‘I was blinded with fury’ and ‘I lost control when I heard it’.

*Sattvik dhriti* is based on self control. It is needless to say that one with his mind, senses and *prana* under control is the master of every situation. A mind firmly set on the True Self is infallible and is the route to such inner strength. Nothing external can have the power to make that person slip. Yoga is the technique to reach it and maintain it that way.

yayā tu dharmakāmārthān dhṛtyā dhārayate/rjuna  
prasaṅgena phalākāṅkṣī dhṛtiḥ sā pārtha rājasī 18.34

*O Partha (Arjuna), the dhriti by which one holds fast to dharma, artha and kāma, through attachment and desire for the fruits of actions, that dhriti is rajasa.*

*Purushartha* (that which are to be achieved in human life) are said to be four: *dharma* (sense of righteousness), *artha* (money and the material means to exist), *kāma* (fulfillment of desires including love) and *moksha* (final union, liberation). *Dhriti* (fortitude) is necessary for all. (The last one – *moksha* – is a little different from the other three in the sense it is a becoming and not a material thing to be achieved. The craving for result is part of the game in all the other three material targets.) The one in whom *sattva guna* is predominant considers the first three *purushartha* only as temporary phases in the route to achieve the last. Though he accepts them in his life, he does not get enslaved by them; makes no allowance for craving for them and does not evaluate success or failure on the basis of victory in those pursuits. The one with *rajo guna* on the other hand misconstrues means as end and gets entangled in attachment like one on a pilgrimage getting lost in the glitter of a wayside fair. Moderate amount of resources and wealth is necessary for survival but no wise person wastes the force of life in amassing it beyond actual need. The gift of *dhriti* (fortitude) is used pointlessly and completely wasted by the *rajasa*. He spends all life to amass wealth or beget sensual pleasures, forgetting family, friends, relationships etc. Caught or not in corruption or other illegalities, the person is not able to use most of the money; the *rajasa* mindset also cannot bear to spend or part with it. The person is often fated to watch it being squandered by descendants. By the time it is realized that

everything has been in vain, life is all over!

*Dharma* is the basic understanding of one's duties. For man the concept is intricately related to society and based on ideas like truth and justice. The way of the *sattvik* is in understanding oneself and proceeding along that route, imposing checks and balances on oneself. Correction of the outside world if any is done with the feeling of kinship. But the way of the *rajasa* is in thinking that his version of *dharma* is best and everyone else has to follow suit or be corrected. It was discussed earlier that any such correction based on ego or force is bound to fail in the long run.

yayā svapnam bhayam śokam viśādam madam eva ca  
na vimuñcati durmedhā dhṛtiḥ sā pārtha tāmasī 18.35

*O Partha (Arjuna), the dhriti by which an ignorant one does not abandon dreaming, fear, grief, depression and also passion (mania), that dhriti is tamasa.*

We had already seen that there is a flaw in the *buddhi* (intellect, thought process) when influenced by *tamo guna*. The spectrum varies from wrong perceptions to various delusions. These people are in the habit of building imaginary heavens for oneself. If it is shattered another dream is immediately woven to fill the vacuum. The psychology of the gambler is laid out threadbare. In Mahabharata the very son of Dharma Raja got enticed by it to the extent he gambled away even his wife and brothers!

Dreams often degenerate into nightmares – the other side of the coin. Flawed imagination weaves fear as well. A sour throat is enough to bring in the fear of cancer in all its agony! One may spend sleepless nights fearing attacks by imaginary enemies; possible tsunamis, earthquakes, floods, dam-bursts or landslides can do much worse! Though tainted by *tamo guna*, these imaginations are held by one's fortitude making escape from the mindset difficult.

The same *guna* is the reason for obsessive compulsive disorders. Passion held by *tamasa* fortitude soon outgrows its reason and becomes a perpetual feeling debilitating the mind, cultivating stubbornness bordering on insanity and dragging one along dangerous paths. These flaws are all well studied by modern psychiatry.

Fortitude by itself is not bad; it is the facility available to be employed to execute decisions. The problem is at the source.

Everyone performs *karma* based on one's knowledge. That *karma* is controlled by the intellect and the impressions the intellect gathers while doing it is strengthened by fortitude. From this *dhriti* more instincts are formed and gain

strength, and the person becomes more predisposed to such patterns.

Human action is always oriented towards happiness. So variations in style and content of happiness must also be studied. Now we discuss that very important aspect too – the study of happiness from Vedantic point of view.

sukham tv idānīm trividham śrnu me bharatarśabha  
abhyāsād ramate yatra duḥkhāntam ca nigacchhati 18.36

*O the best among the generation of Bharata (Arjuna), now hear from Me of the three types of happiness in which one rejoices by habit and tries to be free of pain.*

Everybody wants to be happy. All impetus to life is actually the happiness that can be gained in it. But how many succeed and succeed well? Why does the majority fail to make it to the level desired? As the Bhagavad Gita is the practical handbook of Vedantic life, the content and kind of happiness also have to be analyzed in depth.

Happiness varies in intensity and kind. Most joys cannot get intense beyond a definite limit; most are temporary also. Corresponding to the four levels – at the body, mind, intellect and ātma; they may be called pleasure, happiness, delight and bliss respectively. A melody, a beautiful sight, luscious taste, nice aroma or soft touch makes one happy at the sense organ (body) level. There are two limits to pleasure at this level – it does not last and sustained stimulation leads to tolerance and indifference.

The second kind pertains to happiness at the level of the mind. There have been several avenues to it all through the ages – games, hobbies, adventure, friendships, arts and so on. The greater the involvement the deeper the happiness derived. Physical comforts are often overlooked to gain happiness of the mind. Therefore the latter is subtler (it is more difficult to understand than at the body level) but stronger. Entertainments for the mind often fall in line with social conventions. These too are temporary and rely heavily upon external factors.

Happiness at the level of the intellect can be called delight, and it is subtler but stronger than that at the level of the mind. People sacrifice many joys for doing their duty or when working hard with a higher aim in life. Happiness at the level of ātma can be called bliss, which is again subtler (most difficult to understand) but the strongest.

Gita helps one to have a close look at the happy experiences one has had and examine their nature and intensity; it also provides a methodology for deeper understanding of the process. All happiness is categorized into three based on

the three *gunas*. The state of predominance of the three *gunas* decides the nature and type of reflection.

Gita also tells us that we are habituated to our concepts of happiness; if one enjoys doing something he is likely to follow that path. One may enjoy gardening while another may prefer reading.

yat tadagre viṣam iva pariṇāme/mṛtopamam  
tat sukham sāttvikam proktam ātmabuddhiprasādajam 18.37

*Happiness that may be bitter to begin with but turns out to be sweet as nectar in course of time, and also corresponds with one's awareness of one's self, is said to be sattvik.*

The delight derived out of helping another in distress is an example. (There is ‘light’ in it.) The more this is experienced the greater the ‘enlightenment’ we have about our own self. It often involves bothersome and unseemly work and even one’s own life may be at stake – like when someone is rescued from a watery grave – but the life saved remains a constant source of warmth, consolation and delight.

Helping someone, self control and sacrifices made to the common good are examples which provide such delight. What an artist gets when he succeeds well in expressing his creativity is another example. He is in a state of ecstasy. His body, mind and intellect enjoin in the effort and share the bliss. Often it is hard and painstaking work to begin with; slowly he is carried away by it and the finished product is joy for him forever.

Parting with a dear possession to give it to a deserving person – be it a chocolate, money or any material possession – provides the same kind of happiness. The satisfaction of consuming the chocolate oneself does not last beyond the time the taste of it lingers in the mouth whereas the feeling of fulfillment that ensues from sharing it with someone lasts a lot longer.

The pleasure derived from any action while performed with *yajna bhavana* – dedication to the cause of universal well being – is the same. One does not have to wait for very big opportunities to begin working for this type of happiness. It can begin with whatever little help can be done in various available circumstances. The change in the life and vision of the person doing it is immediately noticeable. Care can also be taken to help someone at least in a small way before criticizing anybody. There are so many things one can do – the Gita throws open the doors to experiment – to understand the many subtle layers of happiness within oneself.

With practice of mind control, it is possible to sift through the network of thoughts and find the true reason for any worry or solution to any problem. One can also learn to give up unwanted thought processes. A little time and patience in this regard will provide a clear intellect which is a source of much delight to the person. It gets easier to avoid anxieties and helps one take right decisions.

It is also possible to relinquish all worry and tension by contemplating on the highest and immortal Self and by asking for direction as to whatever actions one has to perform to overcome those challenges, to get clear answers from that universal perspective. Ardent devotees, those who have outlived the play of the *gunas* and the ones with their minds set in wisdom enjoy bliss all the time. It is the feeling of love for the entire universe and the entire universe loving one in return. Bliss at the level of the *ātma* (soul), cannot be imported, gifted or derived from external factors. The one ‘liberated’ is happy without any reason; he cannot be made unhappy by anything or anybody. (Of course it does not mean that such a state is attained by giving up the world and all that it offers.) Untainted and sustainable bliss is the basic nature of *Paramātma*. It has to blossom from within; the way it can be cultivated was discussed in many earlier verses.

viṣayendriyasañyogād yat tad agre/mṛtopamam  
parināme viṣam iva tat sukham rājasam smṛtam 18.38

*The pleasure which is like nectar to start with but proves poisonous at the end, being born out of the union of sense organs and their subjects, is known as rājasa.*

*Rajasa* pleasure is at its climax at the very start. The first mouthful of a deliciously sweet dish offers the height of satisfaction. The next mouthful does not provide as much, and the next still less. If yet another helping is offered when gorged and completely full, the person may even feel frustrated and angry! Also, the net outcome is indigestion and discomfort.

It is a torture if it is the person likes sweets and also happens to be diabetic and under medical instruction not to take sugar! He may decide ‘why not a little, after all’. Anyway a tablet is to be taken; an additional dose won’t make such a big difference. However, the enjoyment of the dish is marred by the feeling of guilt; he cannot have enough; and the problems of rising of blood sugar level are also to be suffered by himself.

There are two major problems associated with sensual pleasures: 1. If the person has no mental control and doesn’t have knowledge about the limitations of pleasure arising from the sense organs, he won’t know where to stop, and 2.

For such a person there is also agony of not being able to access it when not at hand and in losing it. A mental pleasure is similarly marred by the fear of losing the object of pleasure. For instance, the joy of getting a diamond is accompanied by the fear of being robbed of it.

So many people suffer throughout their lives as a consequence of indulging in some small pleasure at the wrong time and in the wrong place.

In happiness at the levels of both the sense organs and the mind, there is danger of *sankalpa* as seen in verses in previous chapters. The process of the downfall of man (2.62, 2.63) begins with the sweet remembrance of material pleasures which make the mind develop imaginative attachment and ensnarement. Womanizers, debauchees, greedy and corrupt people are made in this way. When their cravings from *sankalpa* are blocked there is anger and even irrational violence. The irony of it is: the huge effort made to generate, support and keep the means of material pleasures is not at all compensated by what they provide. It is all ephemeral, little and only dreamlike. Moreover, what one does to get it more often than not hurts everybody else, pollutes the environment and proves destructive to oneself in the long run.

yad agre cānubandhe ca sukham̄ mohanam̄ ātmanah̄  
nidrālasyapramādottham̄ tat tāmasam udāhṛtam 18.39

*The pleasure that is born out of sleepiness, laziness and mistakes, and helps one forget oneself, is said to be of the tamasa kind.*

*Rajasa* pleasure is ‘much ado about nothing’ but it does not choke the flow of the force of life and find enjoyment in ‘slow suicide’. *Tamasa* pleasure does. Dope suppresses normal reactions, creates a half-awake state and a hollow sense of well being. This provides a floating or zero-gravity feel. It results from the suppression of will and promotes laziness, indecision and inaction. It is unfortunate if the result of the total lack of discretionary ability to guide one’s own life is interpreted and felt as a kind of pleasure!

A review of the pleasures one enjoys will reveal the state of predominance of the *gunas*. Nature is dialectical; the *gunas* are part of it; they rule the structure and movements of all bodies; but our nature of happiness can be well understood by introspective observation, and the habitual predominance of the *gunas* in happiness can be altered by making use of the knowledge discussed in these verses.

na tad asti pr̄thivyām̄ vā divi deveṣu vā punah̄

sattvam̄ prakṛtijair muktam̄ yad ebhiḥ syāt tribhir gunaiḥ 18.40

*Nothing that exists on earth or in the sky or among the Devas or anywhere else is free from the influence of the three gunas that are part of Nature.*

Avyakta when compressed has the tendency to expand (*rajas*), if expanded it has the tendency to contract (*tamas*) and if left free it tends to reach its ‘flat’ – neutral – state (*sattva*). (Upanishads use the word *sattva* also to refer to the state nearest to the uninvolved character of the fundamental energy – the *Paramātma*. It is uninfluenced by the *gunas* and therefore known as *gunatita*.) All entities and forces which are born out of Avyakta behave as warranted by the predominance of *gunas* in them. *Devas* mean gods in the story level and forces of nature in the philosophical level. Human body is a conglomerate of wave oscillations (matter waves) and therefore infinite variations in combination by degrees is possible. But amidst all creations, man alone can change his destiny by altering the state of *guna* predominance.

Human nature too can be broadly classified into groups for understanding of the orderly functioning of society. Some prefer calm and peaceful existence as in learning and teaching; some opt for a hectic pace; some others prefer to be of service to others and produce goods and services without which none will be able to survive. Those who love knowledge may opt to become teachers and transfer knowledge down through generations; they are the torch bearers. The physically strong and adventurous come to the rescue of the rest during natural and other calamities and also become law enforcers. Those who buy and sell goods and services offer their contribution to the well being of the society.

brāhmaṇa kṣatriya vasiṣṭām̄ śūdrāṇām̄ ca paramītapa  
karmāṇi pravibhaktāni svabhāvaprabhavair gunaiḥ 18.41

śamo dama tapaḥ śaucam̄ kṣāntir ārjavam eva ca  
jñānam̄ vijñānam̄ āstikyam̄ brahmakarma svabhāvajam 18.42

*O the nightmare of enemies (Arjuna), the functions of Brahmana, Kshatriya, Sudra and Vaisya are different depending upon character differences arising out of the (permutation combinations of) gunas born of Nature (Avyakta).*

*Control over the mind (sama); control over sense organs (dama); tapas (of body, mind and word); cleanliness (of mind and body); patience; straightforwardness; knowledge; experience of applied knowledge and adherence to union with the Paramātma are natural to Brahmins.*

The answer Gita provides for the question ‘who is a *Brahmin*’ is the same as what Vajrasuchika Upanishad gives. The Upanishad poses the question ‘is *jeeva* that makes a *Brahmin*?’ and answers: ‘it cannot be because the *jeeva* in all the innumerable bodies that came into being in the past and that are going to come into being in the future are all of the same nature... *jeeva* is one in all the bodies; so it cannot be that which makes a *Brahmin*.’

‘In that case, is it the body that makes a *Brahmin*?’ asks the Upanishad and answers: ‘that too is impossible because all human bodies from that of the one considered the lowest to that of the most revered are of the same five elements; they face decay and death the same way; all are endowed with *dharma* and *adharma*; also, there is no observable rule in existence that makes *Brahmin* white-skinned, *Kshatriya* cream-skinned, *Vaisya* brown-skinned and *Sudra* black-skinned.’

‘Is *Brahmin* a caste?’ asks the Upanishad and answers: ‘that too is impossible as many maharshis (sages) are said to have come from so many castes; they attained wisdom despite any caste; therefore caste cannot decide the *Brahmin*.’

The Upanishad proceeds to establish in the same manner that neither knowledge nor *karma* nor *dharma* decides who a *Brahmin* is, and then goes on to define a *Brahmin* with the same vision as found in Gita here: ‘One who has established control over his mind (*sama*), has liberated himself from *kāma* (lust and craving), passion etc., has reigned in his sense organs (*dama*), has no urge to compete with others and in whom no traces of arrogance and vanity can be found; one who has realized in full that *ātma* which is the supreme and beyond caste—*guna-karma* aspersions, the embodiment of truth-wisdom-bliss, that which does never decay, the foundation for all *kalpa* (time-spans), the One that resides in all creations, pervades inside and outside everything like the sky, is another word for unbroken bliss by nature, eludes material evidence, is realizable through felt experience and enlightens and shines in various ways. He is the person who has known this as if seen within his own palm and has reached that fulfilled state of completeness in life. This is the final opinion of all *Sruti*, *Smriti*, *Itihasa* and *Purana*. *Brahmin hood* cannot be obtained in any other way.’

The list described above relates to attitudes, state of mind, lifestyles stemming from *sattvik* wisdom and realization of one’s real self – all to be acquired through exercise and sustained action consistent with the motto of identifying oneself with *Paramātma*. *Samabuddhi* – the ability to consider one as equal to all and vice versa – is the baseline of the effort to attain *nirvana*. Anyone who claims superiority or even greater equality cannot pass even the primary test.

The qualities prescribed cannot be granted, conferred or mechanically manufactured. They have to be there naturally or acquired through natural transitions as a result of consistent training. In the absence of these qualities none becomes a *Brahmin* no matter whether one is born to *Brahmin* parents or not; and irrespective of parentage or lineage anyone qualifies to the state if these qualities are present. The ones with complete knowledge like Vyasa and Vidura in the Mahabharata are *Brahmins*, whereas Drona who is born in a *Brahmin* family turns out to be a *Kshatriya*. In Chapter one Arjuna mistakenly presents division of labor in society as castes. He has already been corrected earlier; the last vestiges of doubt are now eradicated.

The Vedantic knowledge present in the Gita is the most effective weapon against inequalities claimed on the basis of caste just as against other injustices, superstitions and extortions in society.

śauryam tejo dhṛtir dākṣyam yuddhe cāpy apalāyanam  
dānam īśvarabhāvaś ca kṣātram karma svabhāvajam 18.43

*Saurya, teja, dhriti, dakshyam, relentless in action without cowardice, dana and iswarabhava are the natural traits of Kshatriya.*

*Saurya* is the strength of mind and readiness to counter foes who appear to be even more powerful than oneself. *Teja* is the attractiveness that reflects in the eyes and in the body language as contributed by self-confidence. *Dakshyam* is ability to do the right thing at the right time. *Dhriti* is fortitude (against hardships and physical strain), never getting fatigued or giving up. Prometheus and Bhagiratha are examples. *Iswarabhava* is the protective stance born out of a confident sense of responsibility to save fellow human beings from any sort of danger. *Dana* is charity and sharing.

Such heroes are there in ancient tales in most regions on earth where they saved their society from natural calamities or the attack of horrendous outlaws and brought justice too. Emperors and monarchs came into existence in their garb. But when the throne became inheritable, the crown happened to be placed on clowns and madmen as well.

In today's world the traits enumerated in the verse are to be the hallmarks of law enforcers, leaders and the military. The ones without these traits are not fit for these jobs. Note that *dana* is given as an important trait – these jobs require sacrifices more than any other. Such people would not become corrupt when reaching offices of power. We can easily corroborate these traits when we think of great leaders eternally revered by the people.

The people in power should be free from *rāja guna* traits like craving for power or greed for money; and *tamo guna* traits like cowardice, lethargy or delusional ideas (such as Hitler's).

Leaders are to be evolved naturally – great ones like Mahatma Gandhi and Abraham Lincoln. But in human society even thieves, robbers and scoundrels are found to access the top seat. In the animal kingdom natural leaderships come to the fore – the tusker that leads the elephant herd for instance. We have been neither able to keep it that way or set up safeguards to eliminate the honestly inefficient and the dishonestly efficient.

There is always a tendency to put the entire blame on the leadership available, but the quality of the ‘common mind’ of the *kshetra* of society also plays an important role. This mind too has states of preponderance of *gunas*. A society under the *tamo guna* sway – lazy, shortsighted, careless and intoxicated – cannot do any better. It is ‘*yata raja thata praja*’ (like people, like king). The greedy aspirant for power makes use of cravings in the minds of common men to win their support. The only solution is when the individual – the basic unit of society – improves his *guna* status so that the mind of the society can evolve. If this does not happen, no amount of legislation can help because, ironically, the implementation of every law will invite finding of more loopholes to escape from it! In a society of wise men laws or weapons of any kind will not be necessary to enforce peace and justice.

In fact, every person has his own unique view, even within religious frameworks. As the person matures his vision would get wider and his ‘inner religion’ would progress accordingly.

kṛṣigaurakṣyavāṇijyam vaiśyakarma svabhāvajam  
paricaryātmakam karma śūdrasyāpi svabhāvajam 18.44

*Farming, animal husbandry and trading are natural to those who have affinity for Vaisya karma, whereas those with Sudra traits are inclined to service, taking care of others.*

The society has different needs – production, preservation, dissemination of knowledge, making of goods and services and their distribution, maintenance of justice and order, protection of life and property, looking after those who need help and so on. In an ideal society, each person gravitates to the role he is inclined to do and nature sees to it that sufficient strength in terms of numbers is available in various roles just as the man-woman ratio remains more or less the same throughout. If we take the whole human society as a single body we can

further understand this process of differentiation in jobs. (That body has intellect for thinking, hands to perform, stomach to eat food and legs to go forth.) In this natural selection, no one is to be forced or restricted to a role either in the name of birth or by any other compulsion.

*Vaisya karma* ranges from farming to economic expertise. *Sudra karma* pertains to a wide spectrum of service – doctors, nurses, various people working in charity institutions, workers involved in cleaning and maintenance and various other important direct services to humankind.

It is obvious when considering these numerous types of jobs that these four broad categories cannot be explained simply by the preponderance of a single *guna* in any of them. Three primary colors red, green and blue can produce a million colors based on their mixing and can also be used to paint an infinite number of pictures. The final picture may have no similarity to any of the primary colors, and such consideration is also immaterial. In the same way the *gunas* are present in complex combinations which provide multiple traits in a person, different blends of these traits leading to numerous aptitudes. Also, for any job to be well done in any of the four categories, *karma yoga* is the ideal way which implies that *sattva guna* should take the lead in doing it. (The way to perform any *karma* in any of these categories is with *yajna* concept and detachment to the results.) Thus Vedantic study refutes caste system based on higher and lower *gunas* (Such as *Kshatriya* having more *rajo guna* and *Sudra* considered the lowest because of having more *tamo guna*. Simplified distinctions like these are silly because a person with preponderance of *rajo guna* can never make a good keeper of law; nor can a person with preponderance of *tamo guna* become of any value in providing an important service to human society.) Because aptitude for jobs results from a mix of various inborn and acquired traits in numerous combinations and degrees, infinite are the possibilities. Also the combination can change any time either by circumstances or by deliberate effort on the part of the person concerned.

This system of broad division serves only to help one analyze oneself so as to find out one's aptitudes. (The method of such self-analysis is evident as we study other verses in the Bhagavad Gita.) But what began as a method for such independent personal analysis and choice degenerated in course of time into imposition of hereditary labor to form the caste system. Together with it came the distinction between the manual laborer and the intellectual. The former was soon considered inferior, unequal and even uncivilized, which was further deteriorated by the understanding of the concept of *gunas* in a childish and silly manner into the picture. Priesthood ruled supreme. The largest chunk of society toiling to produce goods and services became downtrodden. A great part of

human resources – creators, innovators, reformers, leaders and so on – was stifled as it belonged to this stratum. The entire society stagnated.

A thorough understanding of basic Vedantic ideas in correlation with this part of the text will help us put the last nail on the coffin of the hereditary caste system by scientifically ruling out all traces of credibility for it. When the king's son and no other became king, kings who could not rule occupied the throne; same way, teachers who could not teach, farmers who could not farm, traders who could not trade, soldiers who could not fight and doctors who could not diagnose made life for themselves and others miserable. The worst part was: a scale of 'respectability' came into vogue according to which those working in the top priority areas of production and distribution of goods including food and services were made 'untouchables'.

Anyone, whatever be his *guna* combination, has an innate natural instinct to refine himself, change his disposition through knowledge, action and devotion; and move ahead on the path towards identifying himself with *Paramātma*. Any system that stifles it for any reason is antithetic to the very purpose of the origin of life and evolution.

sve sve karmany abhirataḥ samsiddhim labhate narah  
svakarmanirataḥ siddhim yathā vindati tac chṛṇu 18.45

*The one who relishes in doing his (natural) karma achieves identification with the ātma. Hear from Me how the one who does svakarma achieves this siddhi.*

*Svakarma* means one's own *karma* – the *karma* natural to that person. It is the job that he can do with maximum skill and contentment, something that is most likeable to him and that which can dissolve his separate self and achieve oneness naturally. Among all living things man has the largest scope for selection of work and also the ability to like what he is doing. Backward societies consider the so-called status of job as paramount and the amount of money that can be obtained from it as most important. But the evolved society is one in which all jobs are perceived equally attractive and the world is progressing to that.

An average man spends one-third of his life doing work. Therefore job satisfaction is as important as what material gains accrue from the work. The ideal situation is: the work is enjoyable and interesting and it pays one enough to live well. This also provides the most meaningful definition of wealth. It is what Nature gives in return for offering what effort one can in accordance with the

traits one has been endowed with.

There is no ‘good’ or ‘bad’ job. Any job done well is ‘good’ and any job that is done poorly is ‘bad’.

But is there a situation in the ‘modern world’ conducive to life along these lines? Extra emphasis on money has converted the barter days of product-money-product to be replaced by the era of money-product-profit. The moneyed man is considered great in all walks of life. Money-for-living has turned upside down to living-for-money. ‘Good enterprising’ means an ‘enviable con job’. Anyone can be made rich if the gains from a portion of another person's effort can be taken by ‘commission’ or in other ways. ‘Industry’ comes to mean such a set-up where most of the laborer’s effort can be taken from him and a small part could be returned as ‘salary’. If there are ‘assets’ obtained by birth they can be turned into ‘capital’ to make more money.

‘Mine-yours’ division lies at the root of all individual wealth and assets. Most of today’s workers have no love lost for the work they do. He is alienated from his work; he is working just for the wage packet. He is likely to be dismissed if he demands a raise; the knowledge that there are others ready to work for the same or even a lesser salary makes him alienated from his fellowmen outside as his bargaining power is affected because of them. On the other hand, inflation makes him pay more and more for everything including the very products he himself makes.

As more capital is generated and more alienation centers come into being the haves and have-nots are pitched against each other; the society becomes fraught with suspicion, hatred and friction. Everybody ceases to be happy. Greater profits mean greater alienation. Private property embraces human resources as well bringing slavery and bonded labor into vogue. The hard working and struggling person finds no means to make more money than required for mere survival or sometimes not even for mere survival itself.

But the remedy suggested proves worse than the disease. Instead of evaluating and understanding the basic reality of the situation and suggesting long-lasting correction, the have-nots are provided only two paths ahead of them – 1. Somehow make money to become richer than their masters thereby contributing more to the misery already in the world, 2. Hate their bosses as a race and organize bloodbaths to exterminate them.

But the leaders of such revolutions, after overthrowing the so-called exploiters, step into their shoes! Communism became state capitalism – a much more ominous devil than the one removed. Counter-revolutions became necessary which necessitated more counter-revolutions which, irrespective of whether they won or lost only paved the way to more bloodbaths.

The point is that unless the basic issue is addressed a solution is impossible. Only if the change in mindset affects both the rich and the poor alike would this work out. The exploited also have to take the firm decision that they would never become exploiters themselves. Only then will they be able to join the *rishi* of the Isavasya Upanishad and ask themselves ‘whose is all the wealth on earth?’ The man of capital should also understand that the world sees true gentlemen in and respect only those who care and distribute the profit to the ones who have toiled for their institution or company.

In the next stage of evolution, *yajna* concept is to be the basis for human work and progress; not capital or money. Anything that is taken (from nature or others or from the biosphere) is to be returned in full and more. Responsibilities always outweigh rights. There is no future in parasitic life for any knowledgeable species. Whatever be the work, the contribution that anyone can make is substantial – through his aptitude, through the job that he likes best and is most skilled at. This vision held strong by the men of wisdom should become influential enough to bring the others in its sway. Highest fulfillment in human life is found when the person knows happiness in toiling for the good of others. Only then can everyone be able to love everybody else, share every resource with pleasure, feel that one belongs to the society and the biosphere, find and do what work one likes most and can do best, get immersed in his work, feel one with it and experience the bliss of being free and full.

yataḥ pravṛttir bhūtānāṁ yena sarvam idam tatam  
svakarmanā tam abhyarcya siddhim vindati mānavah 18.46

*To That from which all karma in the world is sourced upon, to That which pervades everything seen here, man opens the road to his liberation by dedicating himself through all his work.*

All doubts cease when truth is understood. What is this truth? That everything was started as a cascade process of action from the first pulsation of *prakṛti* brought about by the *Paramātma*. The chain process continues, one following from the other, multiplying by virtue of the dialectical nature of the medium (*Avyakta*). Any *karma* by any agency including man is a part of it. Therefore the obvious choice to take is visualize all *karma* as the means to get devoted to that highest entity. As that devotion progresses the pattern of *karma* in the *prakṛti* becomes more obvious too and we come to understand that this ‘I’ that was thought of as alone and separate is not separate at all.

This teaching to visualize one’s work (whatever be the work) as devotion to

the *Supreme Purusha* thereby leading to *moksha* (ultimate liberation) is one of the most important and unique feature of the Gita. The message is two-pronged. One: doing is always better than not doing; inaction takes one away from the mainstream; it does not amount to liberation which in essence means freedom from ignorance that makes the unreal appear real and takes one away from realizing the *Paramātma*. Two: find *svadharma* and do it at any cost. Do the job that you like and also remain liking the job you do. The worldly ‘I’ does not bother as long as one is engaged in it; the person is acting in unison with the fundamental force. Cravings cease to pester, laziness does not drag and the anxiety and attachment to the fruits of *karma* do not ensnare. On the other hand, if there is no liking for the job one does, one longs to get free and away. There is alienation, mental strife, the feeling of slavery and sorrow.

It is obvious that a society is the happiest and at its best when all members of it have identified their *svadharma* and are able to do it and also live happily on what it brings to them. Work alone is not sufficient. It must be of the right kind and done with the right vision. The greater the percentage of those who either do not do anything or are doing jobs from which they want to get away, the sorrier will be the plight of the society. Good education and good governance are thus defined afresh. Good education is what gives the student the ability and the chance to find *svadharma* and also refine the skill to do it, in addition to imparting the worldview that helps him on the path of realization. Good governance is coordinating the *svadharma karma* of people conductive to sustained progress over and above the five basic requirements in society, along with controlling order and justice so as to promote and sustain these activities, all the while interfering only minimally. (The five basic requirements in society are: 1. Essential commodities like food, water, clothing, housing and cleanliness for all, 2. All amenities in the medical field like hospitals, treatment and life saving drugs available equally to all, 3. The system of justice approachable by all irrespective of money or position, 4. Education available equally at all levels so that any student is able to follow his aptitude to whatever level of graduation he finds necessary, 5. Stability which confers unthreatened status and maintenance of this ideal basic system in the future.) The index of progress too can be derived; it is based neither on industrial growth index nor on per-capita income nor GNP. It is the IGH – Index of Gross Happiness. Super powers and rich capitalist countries are likely to be found far down on such a rank list. It is certain that tomorrow’s world will be led by those societies that earn the pride of place on it.

śreyān svadharma viguṇaḥ paradharmot svanuṣṭhitāt

svabhāvaniyatam karma kurvan nāpnoti kilbiṣam 18.47

*Performing svadharma though viguna (destitute of merit) makes one nobler than carrying out the dharma of others even efficiently, because doing work that naturally befits one's total make-up is never sinful.*

Modern society rests on comparisons. Everyone compares oneself with the rest in terms of a wide range of attributes and achievements – appearance, lifestyle, asset, position and so on. Most often it makes one unhappy as there will always be several others with more. The word *viguna* means, in addition to ‘that which does not yield enough’, also ‘not up to the mark’. The thing one likes to do and is doing well may not seem as ‘fanciful’ or ‘great’ or ‘famous’ as much as one wants. But it is to be remembered that happiness and contentment are not decided by ‘showing-off’. Sometimes the person would be able to do that coveted job of the other person even better than him, but the satisfaction levels would be different. Toiling on something based on envy is also not the way to happiness. It is similar to putting on a dress that has been tailored for someone else, ignoring the body's discomfiture.

This stanza also looks at ‘sin’ from a different angle. Sin is not just a bad deed. It is what one is ‘not supposed to do’. But ‘not supposed’ by whom? The answer here is ‘by oneself’. If I feel another job is better because of such and such recognition to the other person, that decision is based on envy rather than my aptitude. If I fall prey to that emotion I will hate my natural job, hate myself, the circumstances that make me do it and even the force that is fundamental to the universe which runs the whole show. If I take up someone else's job based on an aptitude different from mine, I will find no satisfaction in doing it even if I manage to do it better than the other person. Hate and alienation are the antithesis of *yoga* – the urge and the effort to be one with everything else. Hate undermines *yajna bhavana* – the attitude that one is acting in the interest of the whole universe.

sahajam karma kaunteya sadoṣam api na tyajet  
sarvārambhā hi doṣeṇa dhūmenāgnir ivāvṛtāḥ 18.48

*Svadharma, even if it is blemished, is not to be abandoned; for, all (karma) that is initiated is (by its very nature) blemished like fire with smoke.*

Any and every action by anything anywhere in the universe involves a tussle; the action is successful only if it is won. When a step is taken the foot lifted has

to vanquish the force of gravity. The tree, just like many other living things, grows up against gravity. Light vanquishes darkness. Becoming a part of the universe means always going against a variety of forces. In addition there are numerous blemishes on the material side too; take the case of a judge. He would need to pronounce severe punishments in certain situations according to existing laws. What if he decides that punishing another is also sin and refrains from that *karma*? That is not all. Every action has numerous ‘side-effects’ – unintended things that happen as a consequence. Recollect the five factors in *karma* and one can get an idea of how complex the situation is.

Every *karma* is a deviation from the state of the *ātma*, because the True Self being beyond the *prakṛti* does not perform any. But does that factor warrant completely discarding all *karma*? It is for this question that the wrong answer was given – that of complete abstinence from all action. Sage Vyasa refutes this argument by explaining that no one can survive even a day by discarding *karma*, and also, very importantly, chalks out the path to liberation through *karma* itself – the natural route for humankind. Accept all imperfections and shortcomings (every *karma* has them) and continue to perform the *karma* one likes most and can do with utmost skill, with the spirit of detachment – that is the path to ultimate liberation as well as success in this world itself.

asaktabuddhiḥ sarvatra jitātmā vigataspr̥haḥ  
naiśkarmyasiddhim paramāṁ samnyāsenādhigacchati 18.49

*He whose intellect is unattached everywhere, who has won over himself totally, from whom all craving has fled – he – through samnyasa, attains the supreme state of freedom-from-action.*

*Samnyasa* should be strictly understood as described in the Gita – the one who has completely sacrificed the results of his *karma* in the form of *true tyaga* (verses 18.7 to 18.11).

The mind feels ‘I do’; the intellect feels ‘I gather the fruits of what I do’. Memories of experiences and / or impulses coming in through sense organs induce sustained one-sided imagination (*sankalpa*) leading to passionate attachment and cravings that in turn progress to such *karma*. Once these stop issuing, it is like a hurricane has moved away leaving one free. The ‘action-less state’ (*naishkarma siddhi*) is attainable through *yoga* of *karma*. Practicing nonattachment, winning over the self and going above all desires have all been discussed in detail earlier. After teaching the mind and the body this *sastra* (science of *adhyatma vidya*) and in the process learning to lead life in the path of

this wisdom, as the person continues to perform one's *karma* 'naturally' – the result is equivalent to the action-less state. It is a 'becoming' through *jnana karma* (knowledgeable action); not an 'attaining' through plain thought and renunciation of *karma*.

siddhim prāpto yathā brahma tathāpnoti nibodha me  
samāsenava kaunteya niṣṭhā jñānasya yā parā 18.50

*O Arjuna, know from Me in brief how, after reaching the action-less state, one attains the state of brahma – the highest experience based on the adherence to (this) knowledge.*

The last step on the ladder of knowledge is qualified as 'parā' meaning the highest to be achieved in life. (The fourth and last *mahāvākyā* (great statement) of Vedanta is '*prajnanam brahma*' – inherent knowledge is *brahma* itself.) Any doubts about how the ancients knew about *Avyakta*, *Akshara*, the three levels of reality and this ultimate science of life still beyond the grasp of modern scientific knowledge can be cleared by following the same path taken by them. Only thing is that from simple awareness of surroundings (*bodha*) to developing this (*mahaprajna*), there is a path of *karma* that has to be followed in life based on *sattvik* type of knowledge.

The natural level of human mind at its purest best cannot be accessed routinely; it has to appear on its own after all accumulated dirt on it in the form of thoughts, emotions and memories that we have deposited is removed. Endless waves of inputs from the sense organs, memories and emotions continuously come into the mind. Not even in sleep does modern man get free of them; even his dreams are turbulent and sleep devoid of relaxation. In short the mind is turned into a waste bin that smells perpetually of rot and dust. Clearing the mind is not an easy task; we have time only to deposit more waste into the mind, then how is it possible for *prajnana* to dawn in it? To know how difficult this process of cleaning is, just try not to think of anything at all for a while! *Dhyana* and *yoga* are techniques to achieve this clarity of the intellect. But our habits have forced us to believe that the mind is a one-way route. The evidence to the contrary is that creative ideas cannot be traced as to where they come from – they emerge from within. The artist or writer dedicates himself enough to open the mind to allow the flow to come in. In fact every revelation, be that of any great work in science or art – has its source in inherent knowledge. Gaining an idea is not the result of plain reasoning or simply 'willing' it to happen.

The 'state of no action' described earlier is the way to get the mind cleaned

and stay cleaned permanently. The successful state described here has no emotional entanglement in what is being done and no feedback is implanted in the person's awareness whatever the result of his actions. He does not have *sankalpa* and the passion from it for wish-fulfillment. His sleep is deeper and refreshing; his mind a clean mirror that reflects inherent knowledge.

Meditation has been elaborately discussed in the chapter on *dhyana yoga*. Here it is enumerated briefly with addition of prerequisites described in the chapters that followed for higher identification.

buddhyā viśuddhayā yukto dhṛtyātmānam niyamyā ca  
śabdādīn viṣayāṁś tyaktvā rāgadveṣau vyudasya ca 18.51  
viviktasevī laghvāśī yatavākkāyamānasah  
dhyānayogaparo nityam vairāgyam samupāśritah 18.52

*Endowed with a clean intellect, firmly doing away with all thoughts, concentrating the mind, ignoring all stimuli to the sense organs like sound, remaining free of emotions like love and hate, Dwelling in solitude, eating in moderation; the body, mind and word well controlled, with highest interest in meditation in the ātma; totally disinterested in all material pleasures...*

Anything that poses a distraction to meditation is to be cleared from the mind. The mind should get free of cravings and fears to become clean and pure. This is naturally brought about by gaining true insight into experiences for a person in this state. Let the befriended mind concentrate on the *ātma*. Inputs by the sense organs and the pull and push of love and hate have already been overcome. In fact it is not as difficult as it appears in print this way. One can make an effort and find out for oneself. Small effort yields big success. The first to be got rid of is the feeling 'this is beyond me'. Mind-control is within the prowess of every human being; differences are only of degree. There will be none who has not congratulated oneself at some instance saying 'Thank God, I could hold on to myself; otherwise....!' There are many who admonish themselves openly: 'Control yourself....!' Students at entrance coaching centers often opt for a concentration-camp-style life to improve their studies; artists and scientists forget the whole world in their work! This knowledge helps one to be successful on both counts – both in the material world and in the inner world of happiness.

Solitude helps avoid distraction and facilitates better concentration. What is said of food covers the entire range of basic necessities of the body. Moderation is advised, not total abstention. (It has been already said that those who try to

give up all food and sleep are unfit for the practice of *yoga*.) *Tapas* of one's mind, body and word have been described earlier. The chapter on *dhyana yoga* has pointed out in what all ways concentration can be conceived.

ahamkāram balam darpam kāmam krodham parigraham  
vimucya nirmamah śānto brahmabhūyāya kalpate 18.53

*When one is free from the clutches of egotism, balam, darpam, kāma, krodha and parigraha and gets perfectly calm and detached from everything, he is said to be fit to become (one with) brahma.*

*Kāma* (lust) and *krodha* (anger) are associates of *sankalpa*. *Balam* (application of force) is its expression. *Darpam* (arrogance) results when ego makes a public show of itself. Taking 'valuables' of others by the use of all these is *parigraha* (possession).

*Samadhi* is another word for perfect inner calm. The intellect is no longer interested in the subjects dealt with by the sense organs, is free from all emotion and has outlived all anxiety regarding success in action; it is anchored to the real self. The calmness mentioned here is the state of perfect equilibrium after all perturbations settle. All these steps had been well discussed in *dhyana yoga*, and the present verses provide further clarification.

brahmabhūtah prasannātmā na śocati na kāṅkṣati  
samah sarveṣu bhūteṣu madbhaktim labhate parām 18.54

*The one who has known brahma and is one with it remains always happy and neither grieves nor craves about anything material; he sees every entity (animate or inanimate) as equal and one. (Thus) he develops utmost devotion to Me.*

*Bhakti* (devotion) is at the very pinnacle of spiritual experience. It is the natural product of wisdom and refinement.

The prerequisite to this experience in meditation is the wisdom and Vedantic way of life described in earlier chapters and the way of performing one's *karma* as described in this chapter. After learning, contemplation and further re-reading to grasp the basic concepts well, the person can try to apply these principles in day to day life. This may take some time as there can be much to change within oneself. One may be used to attachment and anxiety in any action, and re-learning the way to face challenges may be initially difficult to understand.

Befriending the self and uplifting the self to take control is also difficult to understand for a beginner, and there may be many occasions when the practitioner needs to come back to the book to re-read and further clarify how to proceed. Then there is the concept of *tapas* which require modification of one's character. The blessing is that none of these will prove detrimental to the person's life but will further enhance his skill and happiness. Following this is the modification in the vision related to one's own *karma* or work. It enables not only to choose one's *karma*, but to do it with skill, love it and perform it with an ever-encompassing vision so that work becomes most productive to both the individual doing it and to the society. Coordination with other's *karma* is the natural part in his action as he understands the part of anyone's *karma* in the larger action bouquet of the society and biosphere.

It is when this knowledge becomes wisdom and is woven into the fabric of life of that individual that the person meets all the criteria for being one with *brahma*. Devotion to the *Paramātma* comes natural to that person.

bhaktyā mām abhijānāti yāvān yaś cāsmi tattvataḥ  
tato mām tattvato jñātvā viśate tadanantaram 18.55

*With that highest form of devotion, he comes to truly know the extent of My splendor and the real nature of Mine; in this way he comes to know Me well and with the experience becomes One with Me.*

No complicated types of meditation are recommended to this effect. As we read through the Gita we cannot help noticing that there are no complex concepts of reality, extra-sensory perception or gimmicks related to 'higher' knowledge; nor does Gita promise 'miraculous powers' and 'fanciful lights' in this becoming.

sarvakarmāṇy api sadā kurvāṇo madvyapāśrayaḥ  
matprasādād avāpnoti śāsvatam padam avyayam 18.56

*The one who takes refuge in Me; even though continuing to perform various types of karma, by My prasada gradually reaches that highest state of union with immortality and achieves flawless happiness.*

The paramount bliss of becoming one with the Immortal Self is not reserved for anyone in particular. It is attainable by all including those among us toiling day and night; neither is it too tough to get to. One does not have to go on

pilgrimages, perform *yajna*, depend upon the services of sorcerers, fight to be the first in the line for *darsan*, give bribes for preferential treatment or observe fasts. Inevitable is just this: always keep *Paramātma* as the ultimate refuge; do not lose sight of the True Self whatever one is doing or not doing; dedicate everything to the *Paramātma*; relentlessly endeavor to sustain and enlarge upon whatever knowledge of *Paramātma* is gleaned. *Prasada* is the blessing of tranquility and happiness; here it is implied that it is conferred by the True Self Itself.

cetasā sarvakarmāṇī mayi samñyasya matparaḥ  
buddhiyogam upāśritya maccittah satataṁ bhava 18.57

*Dedicating through the mind every karma you perform to Me by samnyasa (sacrificing attachment and desire for result), considering Me as the ultimate achievement, keeping buddhi yoga as the basic support, always hold unto Me in your mind.*

The intellect and inherent knowledge are the supports in this progress; evolution is never based on superstition. *Buddhi yoga* was discussed in detail in verses 10.10 and 10.11.

The mind must gradually get used to the Vedantic way of life where, after relinquishing pride in action and attachment to the results of action, skill in both action and *yoga vidya* become functional like reflexes. This will enable the person to also concentrate on the Supreme Entity even when facing the biggest hardships. Only the person himself can assess his progress because this is an internal evolution.

To relinquish pride in action one should realize that the root of action lies even beyond the reach of one's inclinations and rests in Nature which is itself the source of all instincts (Also recollect the five factors causing all *karma*.) Knowing the full extent in nature's role can also help one correct wrong notions about results of all action including options regarding rebirth. To make these two a habit, one's mind has to be tuned to living based on core Vedantic principles. Dedication of all action to *Paramātma* (doing all actions in a spirit of worship) is the easiest way to get attuned.

maccittah sarvadurgāṇī matprasādat tariṣyasi  
atha cet tvam ahamkārān na śroṣyasi vinaṅkṣyasi 18.58

*Always fixing your mind upon Me, you shall, by My prasada, overcome all*

*obstacles easily; but if, from egotism you do not conform, you will (naturally) perish.*

Egotism is the biggest foe. It manifests as the feeling that I am separate, acting on my own, deciding and experiencing all results of my actions myself, and being responsible for everything related to me. Diagonally opposite is the stance that I am part of the unity called the universe, my happiness in work is related to the interests of the biosphere; the links in the chain of *karma* are numerous and I do not decide any result on my own; there is nothing that I can gain only for myself; my body and intellect are transient. This is the way to evolutionary progress as against the former.

Right path devoid of egotism provides enjoyable calmness of mind. Prasada, the blessing of the Supreme Entity, is felt in this tranquility itself. It is there everywhere in the universe. When detected and experienced, it provides the further strength to navigate, rise above all obstacles and achieve final realization.

If egotism does not permit selecting this path then alienation from the True Self is the result. Ego is the villain. It bestows inordinate importance to the body-mind-intellect combine which prevents one from ever visualizing the immortal part of oneself. Egotism makes one feel that one knows what is best for oneself even while one in fact is totally ignorant. It clouds judgment and makes the trivial seem important and the crucial as insignificant, predisposes the person to shun anybody's advice or help in any matter and provides dangerous overconfidence. Arrogance always leads to catastrophe.

This statement amounts to a warning, not a threat. After all, no good or bad fortune is given gratis, imposed or available readymade; it is by one's own choice.

yad ahamkāram āśritya na yotsya iti manyase  
mithyaiṣa vyavasāyas te prakṛtis tvāṁ niyokṣyati 18.59

*Anchoring yourself on ego (separatism), if you think 'I will not fight', that decision of yours is in vain; for, Nature will make you involved in it.*

Arjuna's present situation is not his making; he cannot prevent the war by just abstaining from it. He cannot leave his brothers to failure and death and resort to renunciation. All war is primitive and cruel but this is not the situation to voice that opinion; he had the time for it earlier and it is over. Now he has no choice. It is also never right for a soldier to escape from the middle of the battlefield by renunciation and become a monk. Arjuna is a soldier by his nature

and he is the most skilled in his *karma*. (The role of the five factors – the reasons for all *karma* – is to be considered here, especially that of the uncertainty factor. The complex patterns leading to Arjuna's present position in the battlefield likely started long before the warrior was even born.) Even great dictators are ultimately subject to nature's whims; they have to swallow their dreams and proclamations; even roll in dust. On the other hand even a Dharmaputra who had taken a vow that he will always speak the truth, only the truth and nothing but the truth; had to lie. Even in our ordinary life, anyone looking back will find many things that he was sure of getting done but could not, and many other things he had decided not to agree with but had to accept later on. The person may feel sorry in either case. If all *karma* is dedicated to *Paramātma* and carried out in the interest of the whole, such inherent contradictions will never arise.

Nature cyclically creates, maintains and destroys. Born every second are the transient results of continuous *karma* by many factors; among these, man alone has the ability to mentally separate oneself and watch what is going on. But this does not amount to the ability to abstain from the drama. One can observe his own breathing, even control it to a certain extent but cannot help but breathe. Anyone can boldly decide that he is going to end that slavery by not breathing anymore but none will succeed in implementing it as Nature will make him breathe in a couple of minutes.

An example of the deep intricacies in the chain of karma is Bhishma himself, the legendary *mahavrita* (man of great vow), who indirectly caused his entire clan to perish because of his vow not to exercise executive power ever; finally ending up awaiting death on a bed of arrows amidst decaying carcasses in the battlefield.

svabhāvajena kaunteya nibaddhaḥ svena karmaṇā  
kartum necchasi yan mohāt kariṣyasya avaśopi tat 18.60

*O Arjuna, bound by your own work (svadharma) born out of your character; if you become reluctant to carry it out due to ignorance regarding this innate nature of yours; you will be helplessly driven to do the same later.*

Fish is to swim; snakes are to crawl; sun is to shine; flowers are to blossom. In the same way, every man has his function to perform. A certain gamut of actions enjoins every creation with the universe. The 'action-bond' is in force equally for a piece of rock and the spiritually realized. There is no escaping it, the only way out is to outgrow it by subjecting oneself to it through *yoga vidya*.

Arjuna is a natural soldier. His skill in archery is the best in the world; no

man on earth can ever even dream of defeating him. It is in his nature to enjoy this skill and be One in the process; this is his *svadharma*.

Even if one decides that he would not fight against wrong emotions and passions in his mind; when it becomes well nigh impossible to live along with them he will be forced to finally resort to it. Those skilled men who are law enforcers by disposition – even if they decide to abstain from force against others – will be compelled to do so when faced with more abominable criminals. Even if such people decide never to fight, outlaws will try to specifically eliminate them because such people always pose a threat to them. When food becomes high-prized and scarce, even if farmers had decided never to cultivate any more, they will be forced to do so – otherwise they will also starve! Only they can find the solution to the problem.

Ignorance of any law is no excuse in Nature's court. What is not learned is taught under compulsion. 'I don't like this dish; I won't eat it' is all right till one gets really hungry and there is nothing else; one will have to swallow the same dish and also one's pride too! 'I won't give this to anybody' is also easy to say but may be well impossible to implement in the long run.

īśvarah sarvabhūtānāṁ hr̥ddeśe/rjuna tiṣṭhati  
bhrāmayan sarvabhūtāni yantrārūḍhāni māyayā 18.61

*O Arjuna, Isvara resides in the heart of every creation; It's māya generating the illusion in every entity that they are on a joyride, as if all are mounted on a (swinging) machine.*

A cursory look around us is enough to prove the presence and prowess of *Isvara* (*Paramātma*). It resides in the heart of everything. The very first place to look for It, therefore, is within one's own heart. The fact that everything behaves as if it is part of a huge machine necessitates its presence in all. Mother Nature (*prakṛti*) is the machine and *Isvara* the force and source that governs it from within itself. From Nature is born all creations and their *karma*, again, at *Isvara*'s own behest.

*Prakṛti* creates all *kshetras* (bodies). All bodies exist in *Avyakta* and act prompted by the dialectical nature (*māya*) of *Avyakta*. The unperturbed status of the *Paramātma* is therefore hidden behind this spectrum of opposites (*māya*). Obvious are the numerous assemblies of particles that form *kshetras*, with the feeling of the separate 'I' (*ahamkara*) that it develops. *Paramātma* (*Isvara*) resides at the hearts all these *kshetras*. The 'I' eclipses that soul from our view and assumes responsibility for actions that in fact are originating from the

*prakṛti* based on *māya*. Each body is different from every other; altogether the illusion creates apparent confusion.

Pain – physical and emotional – plays the most important part of this illusion that ties one exclusively to the body. Sense organs and mind trap man to physical pain whereas emotional pain is contributed by the mind. There is no pain when the body and mind are asleep (as in patients under anesthesia, those who are in deep sleep or those with damaged nerves or in diseases like leprosy). A discussion on the illusory nature of sensory innervation and physical pain was done earlier under verse 13.15. Emotional pain is always born out of either anxiety caused by fear of future events or sense of loss accruing from past events. Awareness of *Paramātma* and the path of *karma yoga* are the ways to outgrow it. Both physical and emotional types of pain are illusory.

If these topics are studied well – the dialectical nature (*māya*, the opposites), the unfailing law of the *Kshara* world (if there is birth there is death), the illusory nature of pain, human temptation to ascribe paramount importance to transient and fleeting experiences, the snares of *sankalpa*, nature's role in the working of the world, yoga of the *kshetra* and the *Kshetrajna* and the permanence of the True Self – one can open the lock of the prison of illusions in the mind.

As long as one fails to find any fault in the feeling of illusion one is under the sway of it: ‘I’ enjoy, weep, laugh and struggle’. The moment one realizes, at least minimally, the true nature of the situation, the same ‘I’ helps identify oneself with the fundamental ‘I’ that stands beyond the illusion even while the apparent I is performing all *karma*. Man already has the instinct and the equipment to achieve the union. Here is how to use the gift to outgrow all illusions: tam eva śaraṇam gaccha sarvabhāvena Bhārata

tatprasādāt parām̄ śāntim̄ sthānam̄ prāpsyasi śāśvatam 18.62

*O the one born in the generation of Bharata (Arjuna), take refuge in it (Isvara) using all your faculties and everything that you may have. By Its prasada shall you reach that state of eternal and paramount peace.*

‘Bhārata’ means ‘one who finds pleasure in light, i.e., knowledge’. ‘Bhāratiya’ also means the same. (How much is the present *Bharatiya* interested in highest knowledge can also be thought of here.) It is logical to suppose that there is a force that is the cause for this endless and complex universe having numerous entities interacting in infinite ways. The second step to this logical reasoning is that it resides in every nook and corner of the universe; not just in a ‘heaven’ or someplace else. The third step is that if such a force is present

everywhere; it should be within us too. And since death is certain for every born entity including us, this factor is the only thing in us which is immortal. These four simple logical steps take us to the core knowledge of Vedanta.

Knowledge that is not applied goes to waste; it is as good as absent. Every man, at some time or other, at least for fleeting moments, feels the immortality in him, yearns for it and finds the bliss of it; but the feel is lost in the overpowering illusion presented by the *Kshara* world. Even if the intellect zooms in on that fundamental reality, the emotional frame cannot readily follow suit. Only by total devotion can the emotional aspect be focused – by taking total refuge – converting all action into worship and asking guidance for whatever is to be done. One does not have to give up the world and run away to any forest or mountain looking for *Paramātma*; it is there right inside oneself. Even while doing whatever is being done; it is possible to make an all-out effort to get identified with the True Self. Success is assured as that is where the will of the universe wants life to go, and the *Paramātma* is sure to bless the effort.

iti te jñānam ākhyātāṁ guhyād guhyataram mayā  
vimṛśyaitad aśeṣena yathēcchasi tathā kuru 18.63

*Thus, the knowledge which is the greatest of all secrets has been revealed to you by Me; now reflect upon it critically from end to end and do as you think right.*

It is declared that what has been stated so far is knowledge. There are three kinds of knowledge possible: one is that which is gained through the sense organs such as knowledge about the surroundings. Logical findings as in science, which are based on established or proven facts is the second. That gathered beyond rational intelligence – *prajnana* – is the third; only in a clear mind can inherent knowledge dawn. The three are varieties of the same light. But the last is something special: one has to get it by oneself; those that have achieved it can only guide. It is the path to this knowledge that has been laid out.

It is also declared that this knowledge is the secret of secrets. Knowledge gathered by sense organs is a secret till it is gained. Light, for instance, is a secret till it dawns. Deeper is the knowledge gained by intelligence. Deeper still are the secrets that can be accessed only through knowledge even beyond the sense-mind-intellect combine.

Two very important instructions are also given in this verse.

The first instruction is to subject all that has been said to exhaustive criticism. What is meant by ‘criticism’? Examination of a finding of science in

the light of day-to-day experiences is its criticism. As this is knowledge still deeper, the advice is to subject it to examination in the light of both scientific theory and day-to-day experiences. The wise should not accept anything unless it is fully convincing.

The second instruction is: act only according to the results of that criticism; do as you think right and do not accept unless found accurate. *No religious text offers this freedom; therefore the Bhagavad Gita is not a religious text.* It is a logical discourse and the ‘users’ manual’ for the phenomenon called human life.

The *yoga guru* first teaches the disciple to plough his mind with instruments of logic; he then plants the seeds of *jnana* (knowledge that has to be ripened into wisdom through experience and introspection). The crop depends on aptitude and instinct of the disciple.

sarvaguhyatamam bhūyah śr̄ṇu me paramam vacah  
iṣṭosi me dṛḍham iti tato vakṣyāmi te hitam 18.64

*Hear My supreme word, the most secret of all; you are indeed very close to Me, hence I am doing this for your welfare.*

The *guru-sishya* bond is as strong as father-son relationship. The bond between *Paramātma* and a devotee is of the firmest kind in the universe. Arjuna has already earned the *prasada* of *Paramātma*, meaning he has gained its light based on both selves being close; the bond now proves its worth, it opens shortcuts to reach paramount knowledge circumventing tedious intellectual exercises that may be beyond the capacity of the devotee.

Listen to the words of *Paramātma* from within you again. It is the greatest and the deepest secret of all. It is revealed to you to help you find the right way because your self is so close to and dear to the True Self and thus you have already earned the *prasada* of the *Paramātma*.

‘Again’ because this is further elucidation of what has already been said earlier (9.34). The knowledge which is ‘the secret of secrets’ will naturally be very intricate too. What if the disciple does not have enough intelligence to grasp, analyze and utilize it? Will he have to fall short of identifying himself? The path to It is revealed to answer the question.

manmanā bhava madbhakto madyājī mām namaskuru  
mām evaiṣyasi satyam te pratijāne priyo/si me 18.65

*Fix your mind on Me. Become My devotee. Turn all karma to yajnas*

*dedicated to Me. (Always) bow down to Me. Then you shall surely come to Me. I truly promise you; for you are so dear (so close) to Me.*

What is important is sincerity of purpose. To adopt the right attitude; to fix the mind on the most supreme and omnipresent; to never waver; to be firmly devoted; to do karma and dedicate all actions as worship; to maintain humility and bow down demolishing ego; these will do.

One should not miss the warning note here: it is not in learning all philosophical and religious texts by heart, winning arguments, giving discourses, taking up intellectual pursuits to find God and even claiming the *sarvajna peeta* (the chair reserved for the most knowledgeable); if one does not emotionally reach the stage prescribed one cannot reach union.

But if the person has to become a devotee of this description, doesn't he have to give up his allegiance to the deities he used to worship and the various rituals?

sarvadharmaṁ parityajya mām ekam̄ śaraṇam̄ vraja  
aham̄ tvā sarvapāpebhyo mokṣyayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ 18.66

*Give up every dharma and take refuge in Me alone. You do not have to worry (at all). I will liberate you from all sins.*

*Dharma* literally means whatever one thinks right and follows – basic concepts of right and wrong pertaining to one's actions. It ensues from the sense of reality one comes to maintain at the attainment of ‘maturity in life’; it is the first of the *purushartha* on the basis of which the other three – *kāma* (love and pleasures), *artha* (money and material gains) and *moksha* (ultimate liberation) – are to be sought and attained; if *dharma* (basic concepts of right and wrong) is either flawed or conflicts with other realities in society, one will err in this and life will become an internal battlefield instead. This is why human body is called *dharma kshetra* (the field of *dharma*). (Gita starts with “*dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre*”.) If and when such turmoil occurs, the instruction is to give up everything including oneself and take refuge in that *Supreme Purusha* alone. The directives that surface in the mind through Its *prasada* would be enough to bring about a better sense of *dharma* and eliminate all wrong within and outside. (Only the one who is able to dedicate oneself completely can do so; that is why this verse comes towards the last in the Gita.) Give up all faith in rituals like *yajnas*, concepts like heaven and hell, considerations about the fruits of *karma* including rebirth and adherence to practices connected with *chaturvarnyna*. These are appendages of the worldly ‘I’ based on the prevalent *dharma* at that time. The

self gets closer to the Real Self as these are disentangled.

This premise is so revolutionary that it challenges even the threat that giving up traditional rituals would amount to sin. The advocates of superstitions use threats about sin and impending hell to make their prey fall in line. If Arjuna or any of us harbors the fear, Gita assures absolute insulation against all such terrific prospects. This assurance is based on the solid logic that while one is dedicated to *Purushottama* – the most Supreme of all – no other can ever hurt or touch the person for not adhering to ‘lesser powers’.

Well, when such a sure, simple and clear path is available, why not declare it from all rooftops?

idam te nātapaskāya nābhaktāya kadācana  
na cāśuśrūṣave vācyam na ca mām yo/bhyasūyati 18.67

*You should never speak about it (this science) to anyone not interested in it, incapable of concentration, not devoted or hates Me due to pride and envy.*

Again this verse is in direct contradiction with the views of established religions regarding the spreading of their faith. Most religions advocate spreading of their ideas even in ‘coercive’ fashion. Once again the uniqueness of the motivation behind the creation of the Gita gets highlighted. Without natural instinct and a mind fertile to devotion, no one can be successful in this path.

There are people who are naturally interested in the highest knowledge; they strive for it and get it. Those who do not want to listen to it have no aptitude for it; aptitude is primary to eligibility. The ability to concentrate is a must to grasp it. Even if that ability is preset, this knowledge is not fit for one who does not have moist enough mind for devotion – a hard and dry mind is not fertile for it. The attitude ‘I am greater than any force’ is the sure sign of a worldly ‘I’ inflated with ego; such people have to be left alone till they either realize the folly on their own or meet with whatever end awaits them in the path of degeneration; they cannot be changed by pressure from outside.

Inter alia, it also means that even those who are not yet ready can come to deserve later. A change of attitude, readiness to try and grasp, desire for the love of humanity and God, humility – anyone qualifies. No section of people is permanently barred. There is every scope for optimism for everybody. None is barred on the basis of caste, religion, country, clan, age, sex or any such. But remember: do not serve unless the plate is clean and readily placed. No farmer has to be advised not to sow on rocks but it is customary to include that too in the primary textbook.

Do not instruct anyone with the help of the threat of punishment, exerting emotional compulsion or under provocation. The use of such methods to bring in others into the fold of one's faith is a symptom of immaturity and the product of a feeling of insecurity. A wise person will never feel inclined to do that. The basic tenet of the concept of tolerance is enunciated here.

Vedanta maintains that man is capable of two types of knowledge: one brought from outside and planted, and the other correlated from within oneself; it belongs to the latter; it just helps us discover ourselves and, finally, our real self. For a discerning student the proof of any lesson is wholehearted approval of it from within him.

ya idam paramam guhyam madbhaktev abhidhāsyati  
bhaktim mayi parām kṛtvā mām evaiṣyaty asamśayah 18.68

*He who, with supreme devotion to Me, directly teaches this highest and hidden knowledge to My devotees, shall doubtless become one with Me.*

The mental attitude with which Gita should be taught is prescribed; to whom all and to what effect is also reiterated. The *guru* (teacher) must anchor himself on devotion – not concerned about who all fall prostrate before him, what amount of *dakshina* (contribution) has been given, how much of the media has come to cover his talk and how many of power, prestige and money are there among the audience. He should never feel that the audience is composed of less informed people; his effort should never be to demonstrate his scholarship. Devotion should naturally emanate from him like scent from a flower so as to reach the heart of everybody around. (Upanishads say that the disciples of the ideal *guru* would learn everything even if he never uttered a word!) The highest beneficiary of this type of *satsang* (= being together with the good) is the *guru* himself. While preparing oneself to teach others the person thinks deeper and thereby learns more. Dedication to *Paramātma* and efforts to know It better are two main facets of devotion. As he endeavors to answer doubts posed by the disciples he is made aware of many aspects of the subjects he has not considered before and his own wisdom improves. After a while he ceases to have any doubt about anything at all.

na ca tasmān manusyeṣu kaścin me priyakṛttamah  
bhavitā na ca me tasmād anyah priyataro bhuvi 18.69

*Moreover, I have none closer (dearer) than him among men; in the future*

*too there is going to be none closer.*

*Paramātma* is, by definition, beyond all likes and dislikes; how can one be dearer to It than another? This verse may be misunderstood if the entity is considered different and the intended meaning of the word ‘dear’ is wrongly evinced. (“*I reside equally in all beings. I do not hate any nor do I show favoritism to any. But who all worship Me with devotion are in Me and I am in them*” – verse 9.29) *Paramātma* is no external superpower or authority. It is everywhere and in everyone as well. Its state is untainted and everlasting bliss. But in the normal course of life it is eclipsed from view by one’s worldly ‘I’; It is never seen; understood, approached or felt; at the most one happens to get a fleeting taste of the state of bliss and that too only on rare occasions. We are dear to *Paramātma* means we are dear to the ‘real’ ourselves. The True Self is most pleased when we are one with it. The *guru* is one with It when he trains others to approach It; as that is the very pinnacle of human achievement none ever can better that record.

adhyeṣyate ca ya imam dharmyam saṃvādam āvayoh  
jñānayajñena tenāham iṣṭah syām iti me matih 18.70

*There is more: whoever deeply studies this discourse between us about the ideal dharma for life, I consider the one as devotedly worshipping Me with the yajna of jnana.*

‘*Yajna*’ as prescribed in the Vedas is the ritual where material objects are offered to fire with the accompaniment of chanting of *mantras*. We have seen that *jnana yajna* means something entirely different. It is coined by analogy to mean the process of earning knowledge by burning ignorance. The mind is the fire-pit (*homa kunda*). Wisdom is the fire (*agni*). It has to be produced by churning the ‘*arani*’ (friction-device) within oneself or received from its custodians (*gurus*). Once a spark of it is put in place we have a lot of fuel to be offered to it (*ahuti*) in terms of ignorance and superstition. The fire burns mightier as more and more of it is fed to it. The process of this *yajna* is available in Gita in the earlier chapters; it says which kind of ignorance is to be burned when and in what manner.

The *yajna* is concluded when all *ajnana* (ignorance) is burned. Wisdom attains ‘fire-purity’ (*agni-suddhi*) and brings *Paramātma* into clear focus. Thereafter it is a matter of devotion and devotion alone. One does not have to construct any *yajna sala* (a specially designed temporary construction) for this

*yajna*. It can go on parallel to indulgence in daily chores and *svadharma*.

One who is totally ignorant has no doubts; doubts begin with the dawn of knowledge. Doubts also contribute to the growth of knowledge by searching for answers. A doubt if not cleared stifles the mind; it can be cleared either by one's own effort or with the help of those who already know. Arjuna is a role model of one who has genuine doubts he is not able to solve and Gita a complete repository of answers.

The fire keeps growing with every doubt burned. The doubts of fundamental nature anyone anywhere in the world ever may have about oneself, life and the world around; have been assorted, analyzed, logically answered and integrated into an all-embracing philosophy in the Gita. It serves anyone at any level of wisdom and paves the way from there up.

Gita does not directly negate any concept of any kind whether it is the dichotomy of God and man, multiple lesser Gods, the existence of heaven and hell, ritualistic *yajnas* or faith in rebirth. It presents an overwhelming higher vision that makes every other idea reduced to the state of just a firefly in broad sunlight. Everybody of any primary belief is given the chance to grow through the path one is inclined to take – there are very many combinations to the one and only one highest level. No readymade avenues are provided.

*Paramātma*, according to *Vedanta*, is just another name for ultimate knowledge including that which helps one achieve oneness with it. Knowledge as well as what eclipses it and what helps one see through that shroud are all the same. Worship of knowledge, again, is knowledge itself. The happy end of the journey is when the worshipper becomes one with the worshipped.

śraddhāvān anasūyaś ca śṛṇuyād api yo narah  
so/pi muktaḥ śubhām lokān prāpnuyāt puṇyakarmaṇām 18.71

(Even) Anyone having *sraddha* (interested attention), free from envy, upon hearing it (this discourse) is liberated and shall attain the happy places of the righteous.

We don't notice many a thing though placed right in front of us, nor do we become aware of many sounds. To notice something, one has to be interested in it. Those who do not like music cannot enjoy even Mozart's symphony. The one who in his vanity believes he is a greater singer than Thyagaraja, the Carnatic maestro, will not find the nectar-like devotion in his music enjoyable. Notice that envy is mentioned as a great drawback many times in the discourse. Faith, devotion and humility are traits necessary for any lesson to benefit. One who has

these is in fact the right disciple even if he is listening only from outside the walls of the classroom. The seeds thus implanted will grow in him and bear fruit as great spiritual experience; it does not matter even if he is illiterate. He achieves what spirituality actually should: liberation from limits to knowing the real self and feeling one with the whole – the bliss of loving all and being loved by all.

Happy places or worlds are within oneself – the higher levels of happiness; not any to be enjoyed after death. The path Gita shows leads to great achievements at all places and levels – material, cultural and spiritual.

kaccid etac chrutam pārtha tvayaikāgreṇa cetasā  
kaccid ajñānasamṛmohaḥ pranaṣṭas te dhananjaya 18.72

*O Partha (Arjuna), has (all of) this been heard with attentive mind? O Dhananjaya (the one who has won over wealth), has all confusion caused by the lack of knowledge been well dispelled?*

Ignorance leads to confusion. Ignorance can happen in many a way. Errors of the mind lead to one variety – mistaking a snake for a piece of rope and vice versa. Errors of reason, the other kind, create more grievous confusion – leading to conclusions like ‘I am the greatest’ and ‘the universe has no foundation’.

Knowledge alone can prevent or ameliorate sorrow stemming from these. It should help solve all riddles and confusions of the material world by revealing the ultimate reality behind all phenomena. It should grow to a level of wisdom at which there is no longer any confusion regarding what to do and what not, wherein all mental turmoil ceases and all sorrows end. Arjuna is asked (we are too) whether the lessons of Gita have been found capable of helping to reach that.

It is to be noted that it is not asked in the verse whether that highest state of *yoga* (union) has been reached. No lesson, however precious, yields that result unless it is made a part of one’s being by continuous efforts at its practical application.

The questions one can ask oneself after reading Gita are: Has it been well understood? Has it been digested? Has it succeeded in driving home its relevance? Does it carry enough intellectual conviction? And, finally, is one ready to remodel one’s life in the light of this paramount knowledge?

arjuna uvāca  
naṣṭo mohaḥ smṛtir labdhā tvatprasādān mayācyuta

sthitosmi gatasamdehaḥ kariṣye vacanam tava 18.73

*Arjuna said:*

*O the one who does not commit any error (Achyuta), by your grace I have ceased to be confused; I have understood the ultimate truth; no more doubts linger. I will follow your advice in my action.*

‘Achyuta’ literally means ‘one beyond decay’. It also denotes ‘one who cannot err’ and ‘one who uplifts those who are devoted’.

The devoted disciple has been blessed with what was sought. Lessons for all time have been obtained; all ignorance is gone; elevated, he is ready for bold action. Gratitude marks these words.

Compare this Arjuna with the sorrow-stricken, confused, dispirited, depressed and good-for-nothing one found at the beginning. He has regained presence of mind, survived all confusion; he is in high spirits, eager for action and ready to face anything. The difference is no less than that between the dead and the resurrected.

Gita ends here. What follows is the spontaneous reaction of the one who has been listening to it verbatim – us too – astounded and happy.

sañjaya uvāca  
ity aham vāsudevasya pārthasya ca mahātmanah  
samvādam imam aśrauṣam adbhitam romaharṣaṇam 18.74

*Sanjaya said:*

*Thus I heard this amazing and awe-inspiring discourse between Vasudeva (the one residing in everything) and Partha the great one.*

This dialogue has been between a great man's self and the self of the universe. No one has heard or reported any such before. Its content is all the more unique. The top-secret formula of vision to end all mental turmoil and sorrow and provide eternal bliss has been revealed. Blinding light suddenly dawns upon utter darkness of ignorance. No wonder it proves amazing, even awe-inspiring.

Gita can be read as Arjuna (anyone any time anywhere in the world for that matter) talking to his self while faced with a no-go situation in life. The worldly ‘I’ asks questions in supplication and the ‘I’ of the universe present deep within oneself compassionately responds. As a result, the former is enriched, metamorphosed and sublimated by the latter to the extent the two become one

and the same. It is indeed a wonderful and blissful development.

vyāsaprasādāc chrutavān etad guhyam aham param  
yogam yogesvarat kṛṣṇat sākṣat kathayataḥ svayam 18.75

*I, blessed by Vyasa, could (directly) hear this great secret of the (science of) yoga that expounds the ultimate truth from Krishna the greatest master of yoga himself.*

From the great discourse we are now subtly taken back to the story. Just before the war of Kurukshetra began, Vyasa came and told the blind king Dhrutarashtra that if the latter wanted to see the war, he could be temporarily given magical vision for it. Perhaps apprehensive of witnessing the defeat and death of his sons – he knew they were wrong, what was ahead, and was hoping against hope – the blind king said no and wanted the boon to be granted instead to Sanjaya, his aid and assistant, from whom he said he would gather all the news. This was done, and here Sanjaya gratefully remembers the blessing by Vyasa which enabled him to see and hear all that goes on at every point of the battlefield all the time. This also provided him with the fortunate chance to directly witness the entire episode of Gita.

The secret of the universe has been presented. The chance to get it is rare indeed. It is so encompassing that there is nothing more to know. The blessing extends to all who read Gita. It is Vyasa's blessing. If he had not composed the Mahabharata and placed Gita in it no one could have had access to this most hidden of all knowledge. (The worldly 'I' of Vyasa, the composer of the epic, thanks *Paramātma* by the *prasada* of which the apparently impossible task could be accomplished.) The paramount knowledge of Gita is freely available to even those who have been blinded by avarice and ignorance. But, used to relishing the comforts and conveniences of being blind, they are not ready to go for it and face it squarely. However, they too want to know what is going on so that they can ascertain whether their nefarious stratagem needs to be reviewed or altered. Mentally otherwise engaged – they live as prey to greed, anxiety and fear defeat – they miss the essence of it and collect only the chaff even if it is reported verbatim to them.

But Sanjaya, though attached to the wrong bandwagon by circumstances, is a righteous man; he is blissfully happy both at the chance to hear the sublime message and with its glorious content. The two personages are dramatically contrasted by Vyasa with a smile: look at the ways the detached and the greedy react to real knowledge even when it is made freely available in the most

palatable form!

rājan samśmrtya samśmrtya samvādam imam adbhitam  
keśavārjunayoh punyam hrṣyāmi ca muhur muhuḥ 18.76

*O King (Dhrutarashtra), I remember and recollect again and again the wonderful and virtuous discourse between Krishna and Arjuna I feel intense delight again and again!*

However full the cow's udder is with milk the mosquito only goes for blood. Dhrutarashtra's interest in the discourse is very limited; he wants to find out which way and how far it is likely to affect the chances of his wards in the war; he is afraid of Arjuna and Krishna and hates them; he views their discourse at best as a conspiracy and an illusion of Krishna; he is predisposed against it. He is poles apart from Sanjaya who finds it as sweet as nectar. The two represent typical examples of the extremes pointed out earlier in regard to basic fitness for imparting Vedantic knowledge (verse 18.67).

Virtuous and pure information provides happiness to the intelligent person while being heard (*savana ananda*) and also when remembered (*smarana ananda*). Each time the discourse in the Gita is remembered, it will bring fresh experience providing further happiness.

Those who are experienced in reading the Gita would know that every time a verse is re-approached it opens the way to a new idea. Like a veritable magical chest it never fails to keep us amazed and delighted.

tac ca samśmrtya samśmrtya rūpam atyadbhitam hareḥ  
vismayo me mahān rājan hrṣyāmi ca punah punah 18.77

*Recollecting again and again that most amazing form of Hari, great is my wonder, O king, and I continue to rejoice many a time.*

Chapter 11 presents, as in a movie; the origin, sustenance and dissolution of the universe, along with the core concepts behind the working of the universe as various visualizations. The greatest wonder one can ever imagine is this display of the fundamental force of the universe and its innumerable effects. But the wise alone can feel happy at the sight because the primary conclusion from the picture is that nothing present now is going to last beyond a point in time. The old goes away making way for the new while the foundation remains unchanged. Unless one identifies oneself with the fundamental force and feels that one's real

self transcends all mortality, one cannot rejoice.

What one obtains if this realization is lacking is personified by Dhrutarashtra. He cannot see but certainly can paint vivid pictures in his mind, probably more arresting than what those blessed with sight ever can. Time personified, a monster, is chewing his hundred-and-one sons along with their allies the mighty Bhishma, Drona, Karna and others, their crushed heads deposited in the gaps of its canine teeth, licking and relishing at the taste! How can Dhrutarashtra, for whom nothing beyond the victory of his sons matters, applaud and feel happy!

To rejoice even at the prospect of total destruction of everything including us, one has to be aware that there is more to life than our mere bodies – the real us. If that is not had, all cosmology surely goes to waste; human effort only gets centered upon conquering as many galaxies as possible to finally govern all but oneself, far from inner peace.

Gita on the other hand understands that success in life depends upon how much of peace, freedom, happiness and wonder one is able to experience. For this everyone has different paths and one has to find one's own way. A final clue is given as farewell.

yatra yogeśvaraḥ krṣṇo yatra pārtho dhanurdharaḥ  
tatra śrīr vijayo bhūtir dhruvā nītir matir mama 18.78

*I am of the firm opinion that prosperity, success, growth and justice will flourish (only) wherever Yogesvara Krishna and bow-armed Arjuna (together) are.*

After reporting everything clearly and truly, Sanjaya the gifted media-man signs off after writing an ‘editorial tailpiece’ on the basis of all that was observed and heard. Here again, he does not accuse anyone or speculate any bit.

He provides the world’s briefest answer as to what can make human life comfortable and happy. What will assure prosperity, success, development and justice?

The answer: the presence (together) of Krishna (practical *yoga vidya*) and Arjuna with the bow (readiness for skilled *karma*).

It will be a grievous error to assume that this means just two actual personalities. What Vyasa means are two concepts: knowledge of *yoga* and expert action. The first concept – *yoga vidya* is the knowledge outlining the way to perform all *karma* with *yajna* concept (action correlating with the benefit of the biosphere and the entire world) keeping the *ātma* in mind and remaining

detached to the results of all endeavors.

The second is the readiness for expert action. Arjuna with raised bow; not the Arjuna with the lowered one. The bow, rather being a weapon of war, is depicted here as the symbol of readiness for skilled action. Arjuna symbolizes efficiency, accuracy, skill, courage, agility, tact, strategy, energy, perseverance and patience. Then, whether in the struggles of life or in the mastery over oneself, such a person would know no defeat. Right attitude and efficient action is a win-win combination.

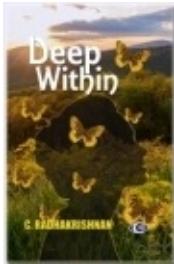
Note that there is no word about giving up the world, working for one's own *moksha* (liberation), 'do's and 'don'ts', the touchable or the untouchable, rituals or tradition, scholarly texts or involved deliberations, establishments, institutions or any such.

In this final verdict Sanjaya summarizes the entire intent of the Bhagavad Gita. There is no spirituality as separate from physical existence. The two together make one whole – the complete life. When material sciences (*aparā vidya*) join hands with the 'science of the self' (*parā vidya*) there will be a new era the world has been waiting all along for.

The tragedy of the modern world is super-materialism rejecting wisdom, instead of wisdom being the guide to human progress. Sanjaya takes leave affectionately wishing the whole world a life of untainted bliss lived in the light of true knowledge of the fundamental force behind the universe and powered by work done wholeheartedly for the welfare of all and with utmost expertise.

*Gita ends*

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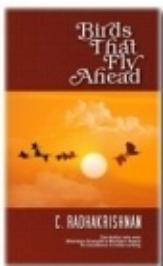
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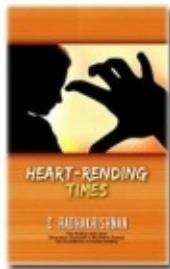
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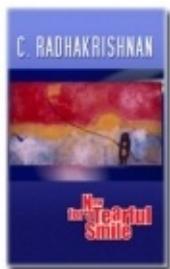


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This book is a unique and poignant love story of two very special people living under assumed identities for different reasons; and a thriller chasing the intriguing tentacles of espionage activities and the untold stories behind political assassinations in India.

This landmark novel, a socio-political silhouette of contemporary India, is a poignant juxtaposition of materialism and spirituality, contemporary geopolitics and history in the making, India and the world, urban and tribal cultures, tragedy and comedy, saints and sinners, displacement and assimilation, cyanide tablets and self-healing, arms and man, war and peace, hospitals and hermitages... innumerable are the strands that form the warp and weft of this literary milestone. It thrills, threatens, moves, shocks, calms and exhilarates!

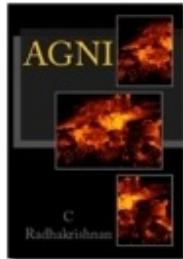


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## Agni

Agni was originally written in 1963 in Malayalam and published in the same year. After 25 impressions and serving as textbook for various University courses, the author trans-created it for world readership.

In Sanskrit ‘Agni’ means fire. It tells the story of a remote village of special nativity in simple style and with compassionate humor. The backdrop of socio-cultural ambience presented is real and unique to that time period in Kerala. The book analyzes various dimensions of the love / violence equation and provides a delightful reading experience.

The Novelette was filmed in 1973. Now a part of the Indian Panorama of Feature Films, Agni has been screened at major international film festivals including Manheim, Istanbul, Moscow and Locarno.