

BHAGAVAD GITA

The Song of God



Commentary by Swami Mukundananda

Dedication

This elucidation of the Bhagavad Gita is dedicated to my Beloved Spiritual Master, Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj, who is illuminating humankind with the purest rays of divine knowledge. He is immersed in the divine love bliss of Bhagavān and is lovingly engaged in inundating the entire planet with it. This commentary on the Bhagavad Gita has been written to fulfil his instruction to me to preach the knowledge of the Vedic scriptures in the Western world. I pray that by his blessings it will be helpful in guiding sincere seekers of the Truth on the path of enlightenment.

Swami Mukundananda

Introduction

Invocation

*prathamāṁ sadgurum vande śrī kṛiṣṇa tadanantaram
guruḥ pāpātmanāṁ trātā śrī kṛiṣṇastvamalātmanāṁ
mukundānanda prapannoḥāṁ guru pādāravindayoh
tasya preraṇayā tasya divyādeśham vadāmyaham*

“I first offer my respectful obeisance to my Gurudev, Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj, and then to the Supreme Bhagavān Shri Krishna. While Shri Krishna embraces the pure-hearted, my Gurudev is so merciful that he offers shelter even to the spiritually destitute. This insignificant inconsequential Ātman, who goes by the name of Mukundananda in the world, is surrendering at the lotus feet of his Spiritual Master. With his Guru’s permission, inspiration, and grace, he is humbly going to elucidate on spiritual topics.”

*vande vrīndāvanānandāṁ rādhikāṁ parameśvarīm
gopikāṁ paramāṁ śhūddhāṁ hlādinīm śakti rūpiṇīm*

“I offer my respectful obeisance to Radharani, the Supreme goddess and the bliss-giving power of Bhagavān. She is the purest of the *gopīs* and embodies the bliss of Vrindavan.

*kadā drakṣhyāmi nandasya bālakāṁ nīpamālakam
pālakāṁ sarva sattvānāṁ lasattilaka bhālakam*

“When will my eyes see the wonderful form of the Supreme Bhagavān Shri Krishna, who appeared on this earth as the son of Nand? He is adorned with a flower garland around his neck and the holy *tilak* mark on his forehead; he is the protector of virtuous people.”

*ajāta pakṣhā iva mātarāṁ khagāḥ satanyāṁ yathā vatsatarāḥ kṣhudhārtāḥ
priyāṁ priyeva vyuṣhitāṁ viṣhaṇṇā manoravindākṣha didrikṣhate tvām*

“O Bhagavān! As a baby bird yearns for its mother, as a famished infant longs to suckle the mother’s breast, and as a lover craves for the beloved, may my

mind always long for your divine vision.”

The Ascending and Descending Processes of Knowledge

There are two ways of acquiring knowledge. The first is the ascending process, in which we utilize our senses, mind, and intellect to explore, discover, and conclude about the nature of the truth. The second is the descending process, where we simply receive the knowledge from a proper source. The ascending process of gaining knowledge is inherently prone to defects. Since our senses, mind, and intellect are made from the material energy, they are imperfect and limited. As a result, we can never be completely sure about the accuracy and reliability of the knowledge we gain through them.

As the pursuit of material science is based upon the ascending process, even the most acclaimed and undisputed scientific theories of the past are overthrown and superseded by newer ones. For example, the Greek concept of matter as consisting of indivisible atoms was invalidated by Rutherford when he demonstrated that atoms consist of electrons, protons, neutrons, and vast regions of empty space. Rutherford's theory was overthrown by the Quantum theory, which stated that electrons and protons are not solid particles, but vibrating patterns of energy with a dual particle wave nature. This makes us wonder whether what we believe to be true today will also be proven utterly incorrect after a few centuries.

The other process of knowledge, the descending process, on the other hand, is completely devoid of such defects. When we receive knowledge from a perfect source, we can be assured that it is flawless. For example, if we wish to know who our father is, we do not conduct experiments. We simply ask our mother, as she is the authority on this piece of information. Likewise in spiritual matters too, the descending process immediately gives us access to vast reservoirs of knowledge, which would have taken ages of self-effort to unveil.

The only criterion here is that the source from which we receive the knowledge must be infallible and trustworthy. The Vedas are one such source of knowledge.

The Vedas are not the name of any book. They refer to the eternal knowledge of Bhagavān, which he manifests when he creates the world. In this cycle of creation, he first revealed them in the heart of the first-born Brahma. These Vedas were passed on for thousands of years by oral tradition, from master to disciple, and hence another name for them is *śruti* (knowledge received by hearing). They are also called *apauruṣeya* (not created by any human). For this reason, in Indian philosophy the Vedas are considered the ultimate authority for validating any spiritual principle. The validity of any spiritual tenet, whether in the context of the past, present, or future, must be established on the basis of the Vedas. To elaborate their meaning, many more scriptures have been written. These scriptures do not deviate from the authority of the Vedas. Rather, they attempt to expand and explain the knowledge contained in them. Together, all these are termed “Vedic scriptures.”

The Vedic scriptures are vast, but three of them have traditionally been called the *Prasthān Trayī* (three points of commencement for understanding Vedic thought). These are the *Upaniṣads*, the Brahma Sūtras, and the Bhagavad Gita.

The *Upaniṣads* are the section of the Vedas that deal with philosophical knowledge, and are considered the cream of the Vedas. On reading them, the German philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) said, “There is no philosophy in the world as elevating as that of the *Upaniṣads*. It has been the solace of my life and it shall be the solace of my death.” Paul Deussen (1845-1919), another German philosopher, expressed himself thus: “Eternal philosophical truth has seldom found a more striking and decisive expression than in the emancipating knowledge of the philosophy of the *Upaniṣads*.”

However, for a lay person the *Upanishads* are difficult to fathom.

The Brahma Sutras is a synopsis of the *Upanishads*. It was written by Ved Vyas to provide the philosophical conclusion of Vedic knowledge. Thus, it is also called “Vedant,” meaning “the culmination of Vedic thought.” Like the *Upanishads*, the Brahma Sutras is also hard to comprehend and its conciseness often leads to ambiguity and subjective interpretation.

The Bhagavad Gita is more accessible than the above two scriptures. It provides a comprehensive and easy-to-understand summary of the Vedic philosophy. Bhagavad means “of Bhagavān” and Gita means “song.” Hence, the Bhagavad Gita literally means “Song of God.” It is a dialogue that took place between the Supreme Bhagavān Shri Krishna and his devotee Arjun, on the verge of the Mahābhārat war.

In the course of history, hundreds of theories in economics, psychology, sociology, philosophy, etc. were first propounded and then discarded as inaccurate or incomplete. These were all the products of ascending knowledge, and hence imperfect and subject to error. If the Bhagavad Gita were also the creation of a mortal and finite intellect, with the passage of fifty centuries, it would have become outdated and irrelevant. However, the perennial wisdom of the Gita has continued to inspire famous thinkers even in modern times, such as Gandhi, Robert Oppenheimer, Carl Jung, Herman Hesse, and Aldous Huxley, to name just a few, thus indicating its divine origin.

Embedded in the Mahābhārat

The Bhagavad Gita was originally compiled by Ved Vyas as a separate text. Later, when he wrote the Mahābhārat, he embedded the Bhagavad Gita in it. The Mahābhārat contains one hundred thousand verses, and is therefore, the largest poem in the world. It is seven times bigger than the Iliad and Odyssey put together and three times bigger than the Bible. Along with the Ramayana,

it is accorded the status of *Itihās*, meaning historical manuscript of India. Its stories and moral instructions have fashioned the fabric of Indian culture for thousands of years. The Mahābhārat is divided into eighteen sections. The Bhagavad Gita is set in the sixth section, which is called the Bheeshma Parva. It comprises eighteen chapters of the section, beginning from Chapter Twenty-five, and continuing until the Chapter Forty-two.

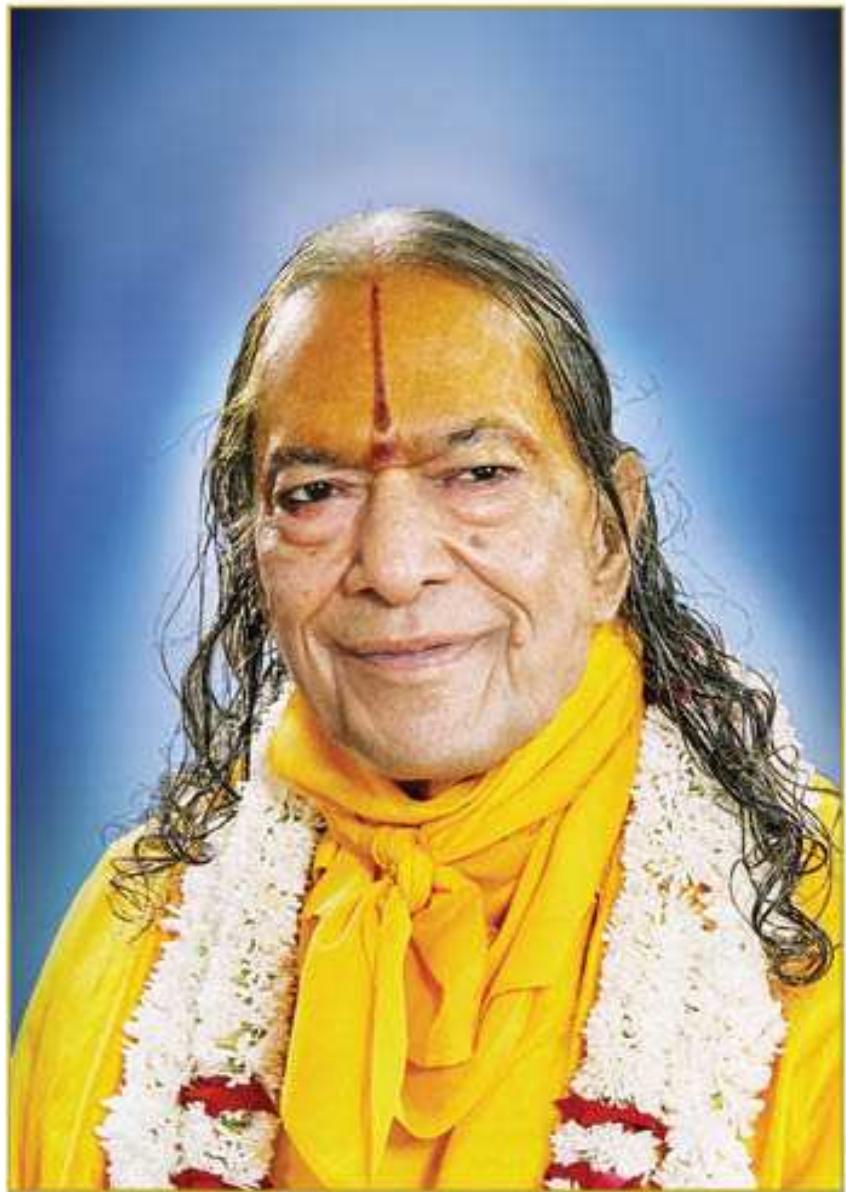
Since the Bhagavad Gita encapsulates most of the important aspects of the knowledge of the Vedas, it is also called Gitopanishad, or the *Gitā Upanishad*. It serves two important purposes as described below.

It Imparts *Brahma Vidyā*

As humankind boldly marches forward expanding its frontiers of knowledge, the realization is dawning that the more we discover and learn, the more there is yet to be known. New sciences emerge every year, leading to the inevitable conclusion that the quest for comprehending the whole truth of creation is a never-ending endeavor. This makes one wonder if there is any one body or source of knowledge that can easily explain everything that exists. According to the Vedas, there is such a branch of knowledge, and that is the science of realizing the Absolute Truth. There is one Absolute Truth, which has been referred to by many names, such as Ishwar, Bhagavan, Bhagavān, Lord, Yahweh, Ahur Mazda, Alakh Niranjan, Shunya, Ikomkar, etc. All other truths have emanated from it and find their position in the scheme of things from it. Thus, the Vedas state: *ekasmin vijñāte sarvamidam vijñātam bhavati* “One who comes to know the Absolute Truth attains knowledge of everything.” The science of knowing the Absolute Truth is called “*Brahma Vidyā*.” The purpose of the Bhagavad Gita, above everything else, is to impart *Brahma Vidyā*, the science of Brahman-realization.

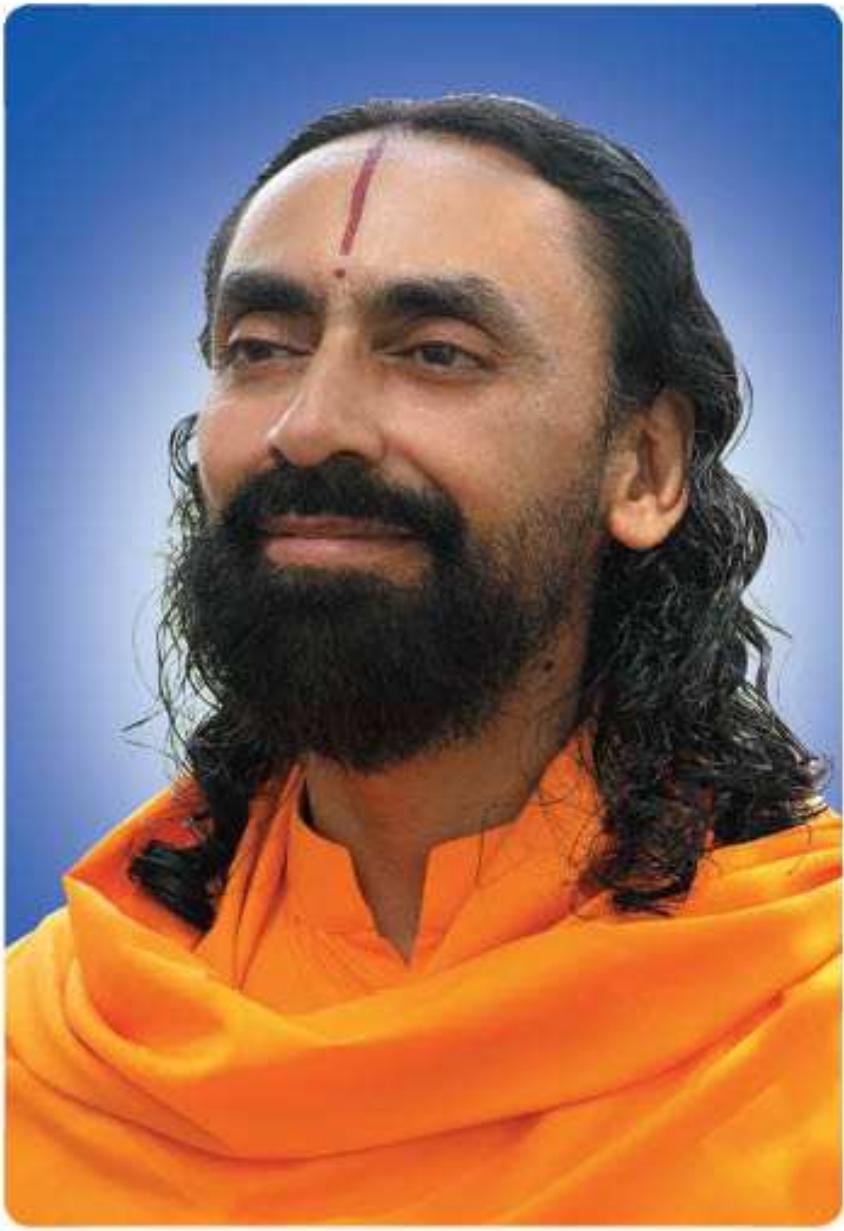
Knowledge that helps a person resolve immediate problems is one kind of

enlightenment, while knowledge that dispels the root of ignorance to solve all problems in one strike is another kind of enlightenment. The Bhagavad Gita aims at the second kind of enlightenment by destroying the darkness of ignorance that has enveloped the Ātman since endless lifetimes. Unable to deal with the immediate problem at hand, Arjun approached Shri Krishna for a palliative to overcome the anguish he was experiencing. Shri Krishna did not just advise him on his immediate problem, but digressed to give a profound discourse on the philosophy of life.



Jagadguru Shree Kripaluji Maharaj





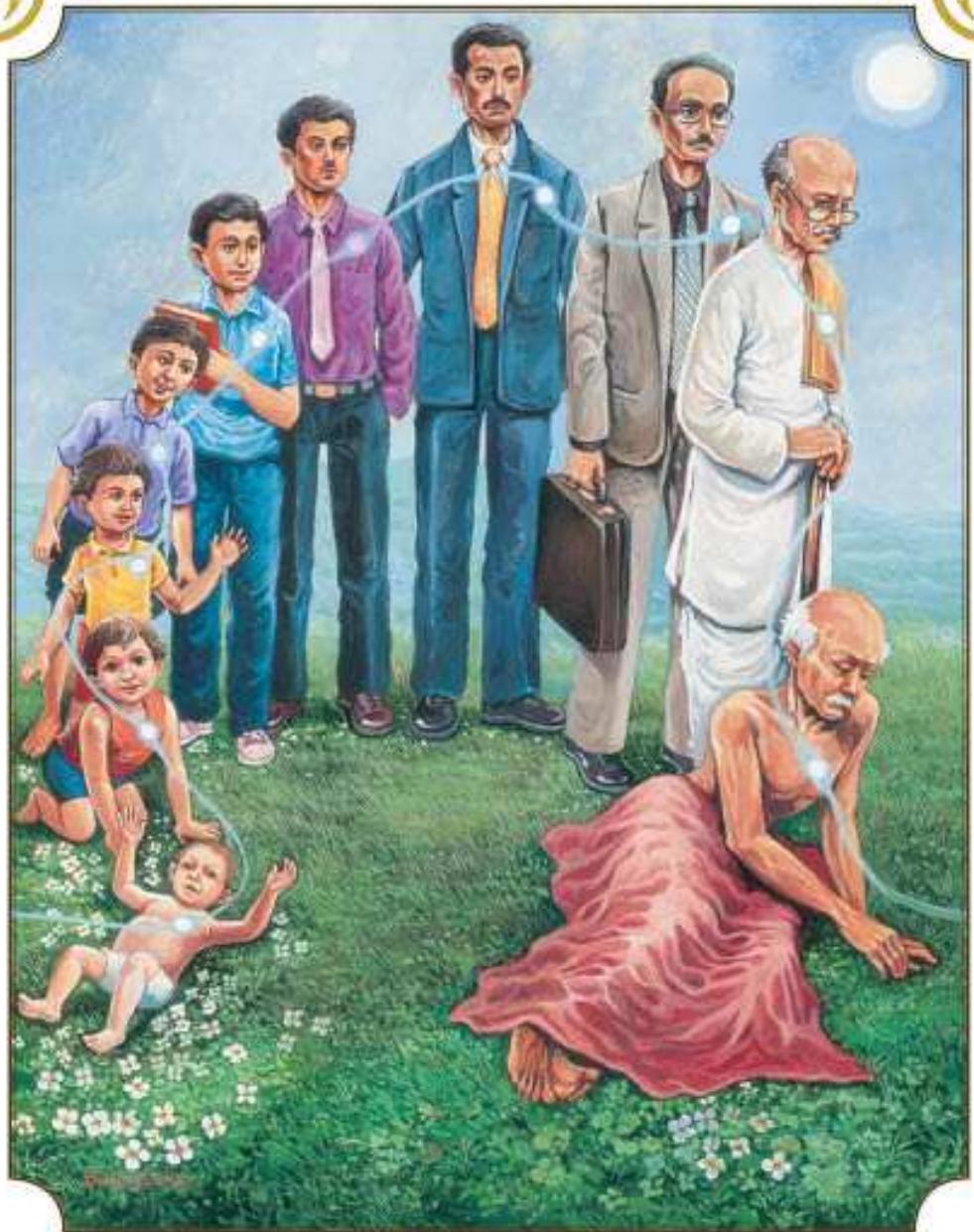
Swami Mukundananda



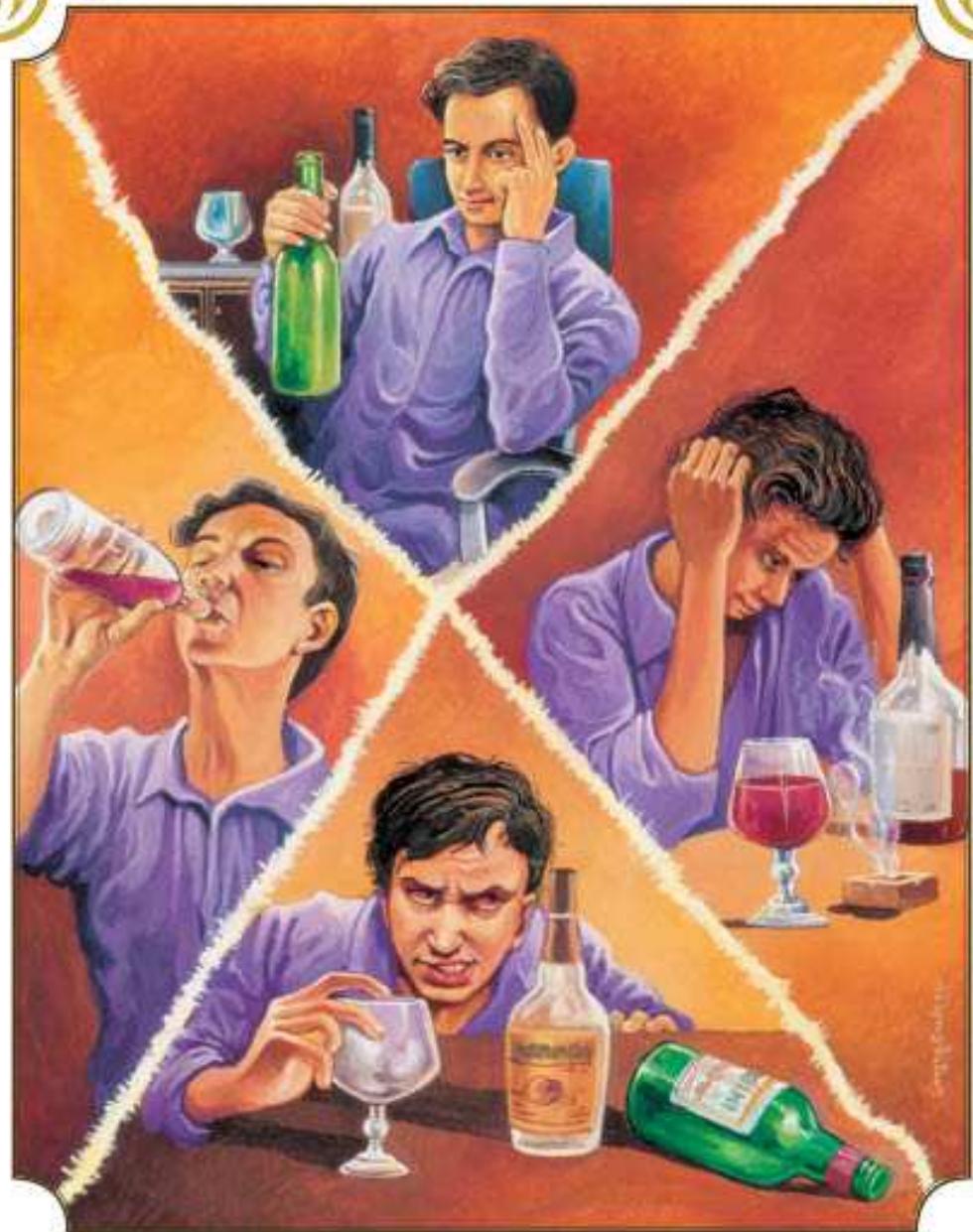
1.1 Dhritarashtra said: O Sanjay, after gathering on the holy field of Kurukshetra, and desiring to fight, what did my sons and the sons of Pandu do?



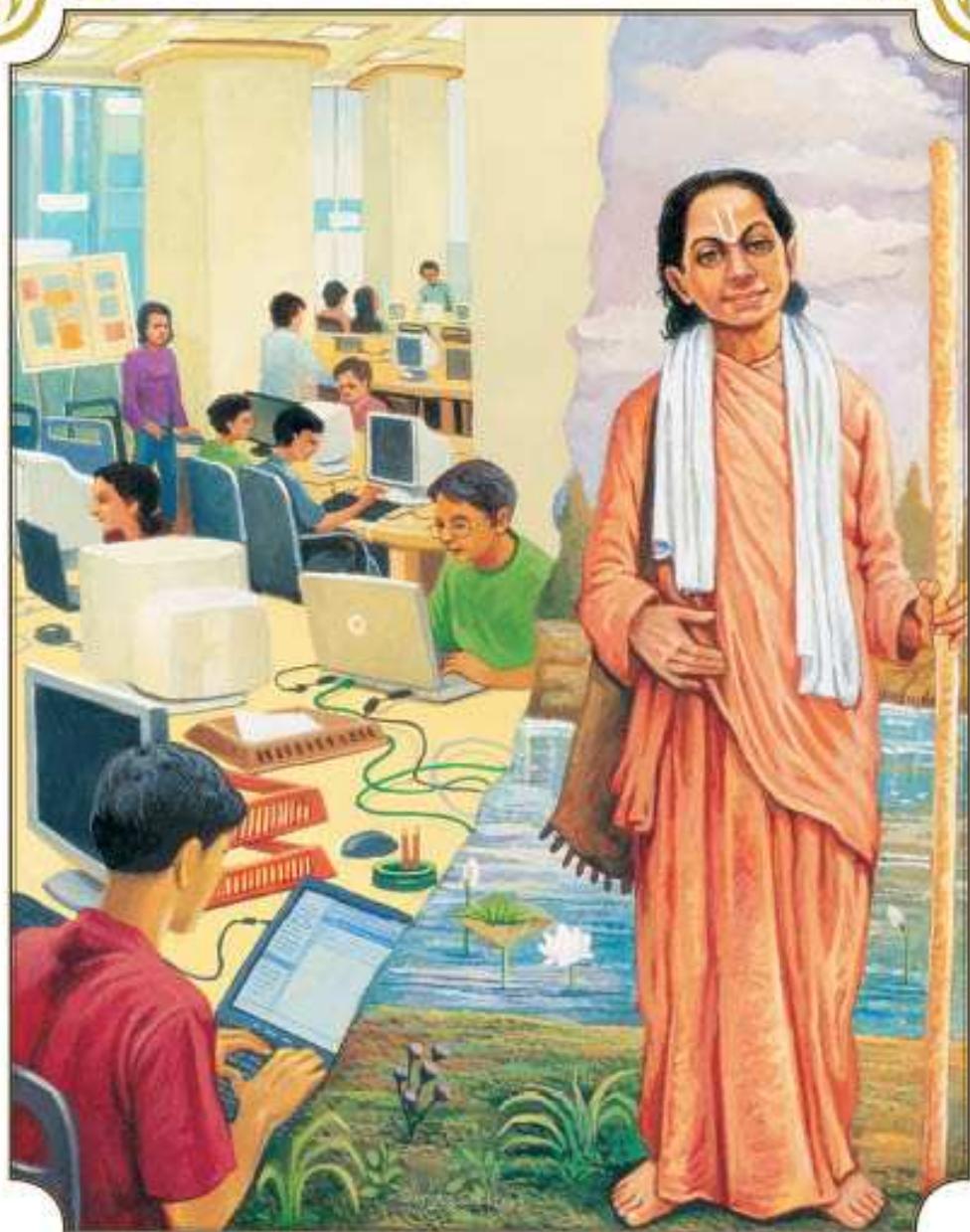
2.2 The Supreme Lord said: My dear Arjun, how has this delusion overcome you in this hour of peril? It is not befitting an honorable person. It leads not to the higher abodes, but to disgrace.



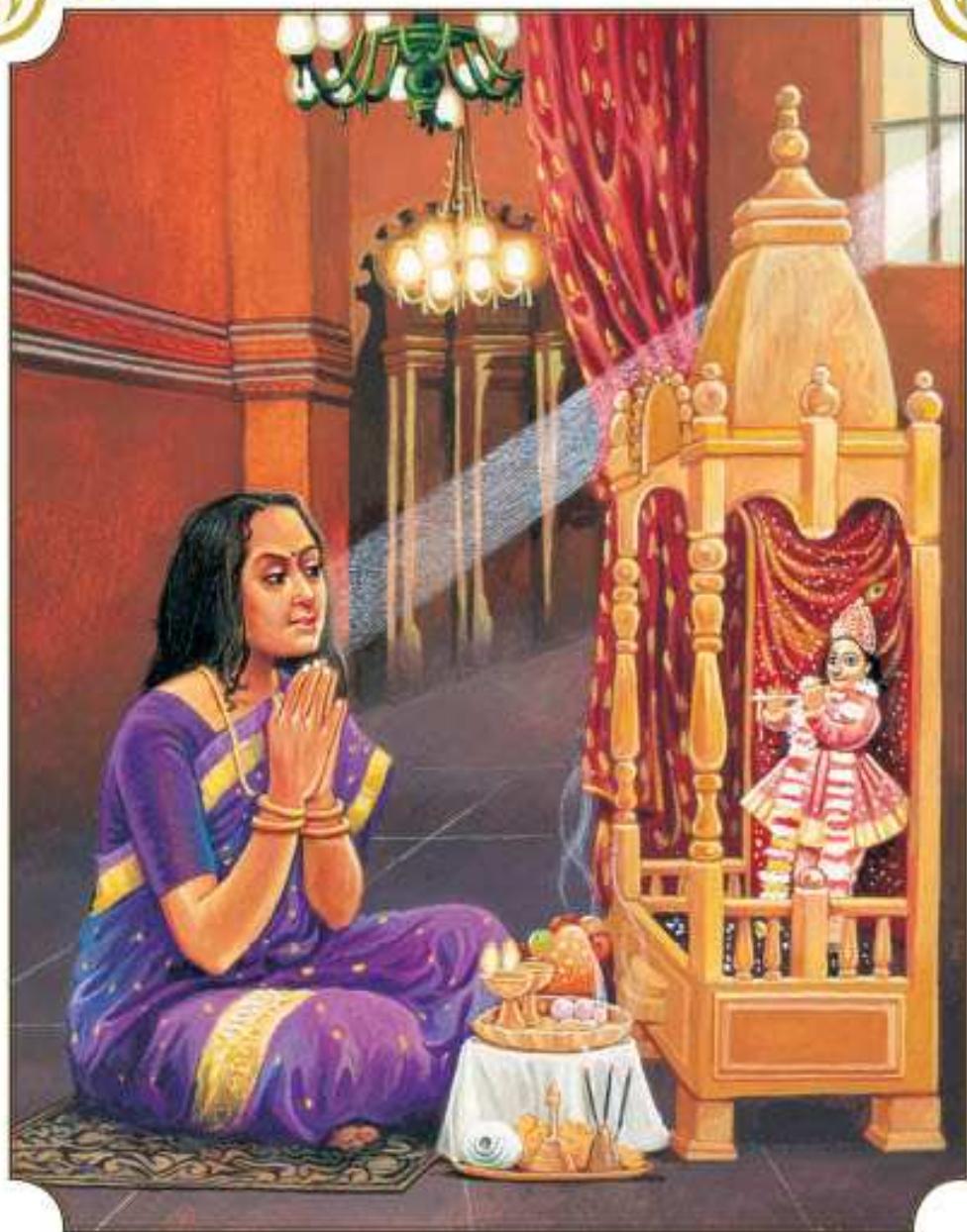
2.13 Just as the embodied soul continuously passes from childhood to youth to old age, similarly, at the time of death, the soul passes into another body. The wise are not deluded by this.



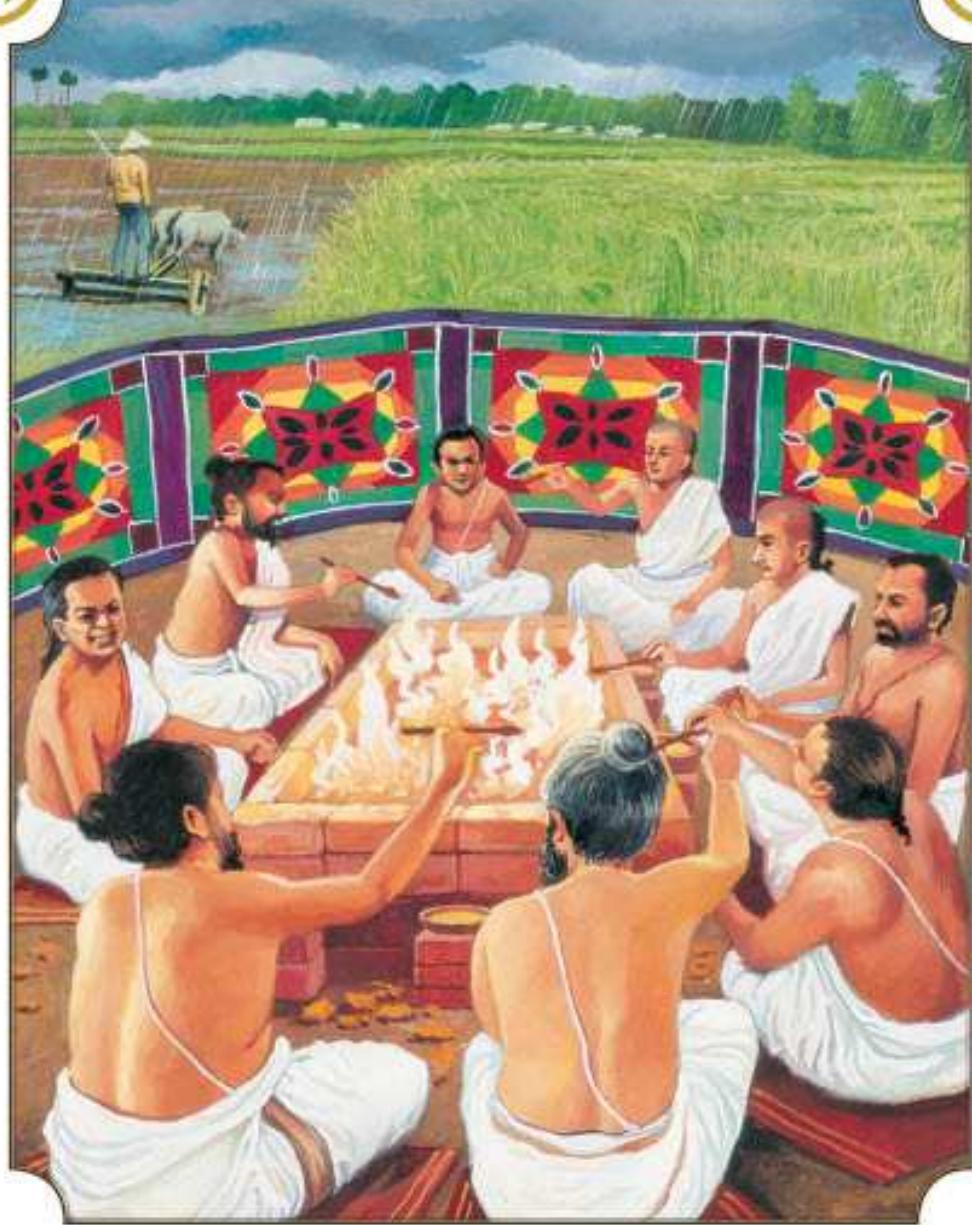
2.62 While contemplating on the objects of the senses, one develops attachment to them. Attachment leads to desire, and from desire arises anger.



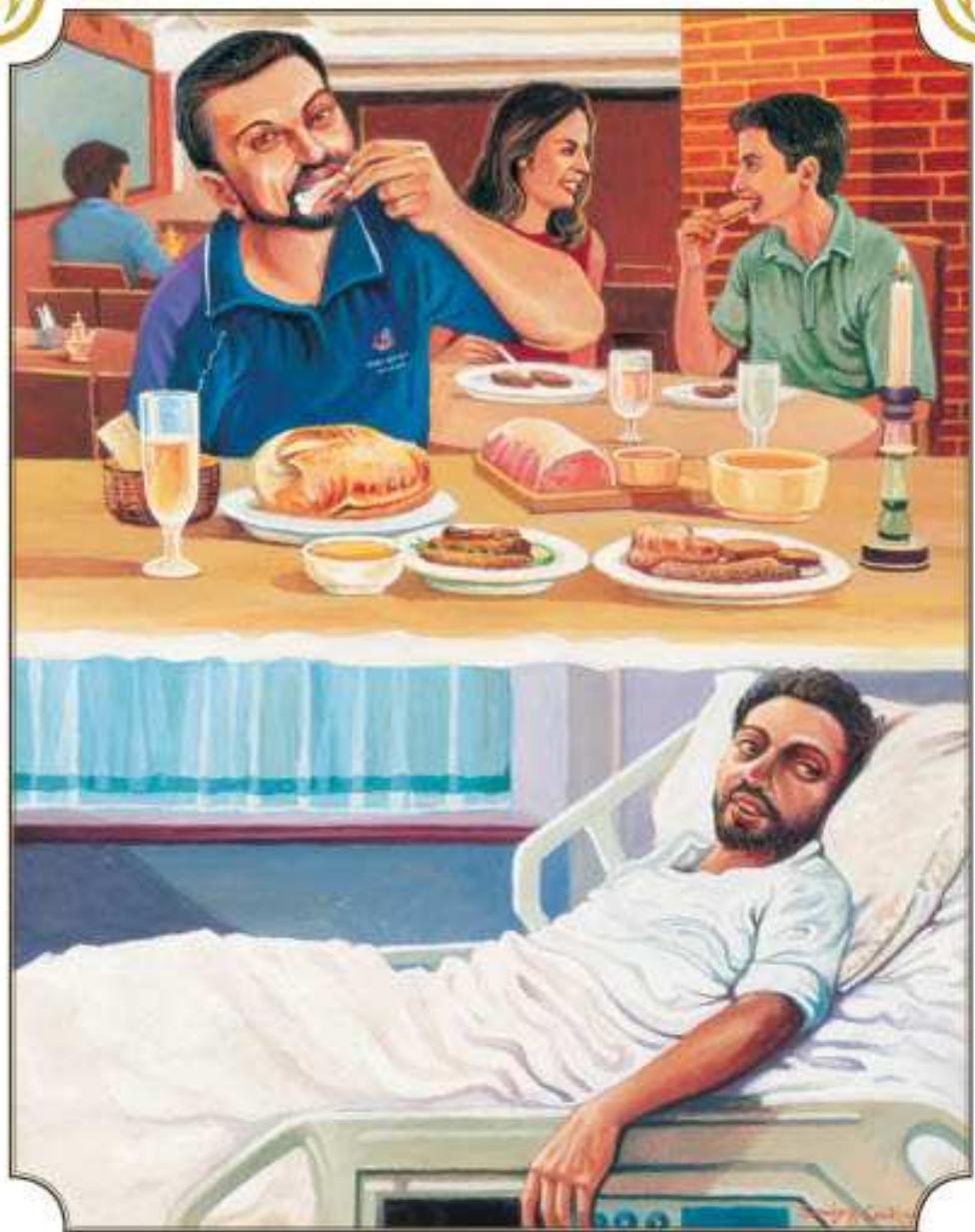
3.3 The Blessed Lord said: O sinless one, the two paths leading to enlightenment were previously explained by me: the path of knowledge, for those inclined toward contemplation, and the path of work for those inclined toward action.



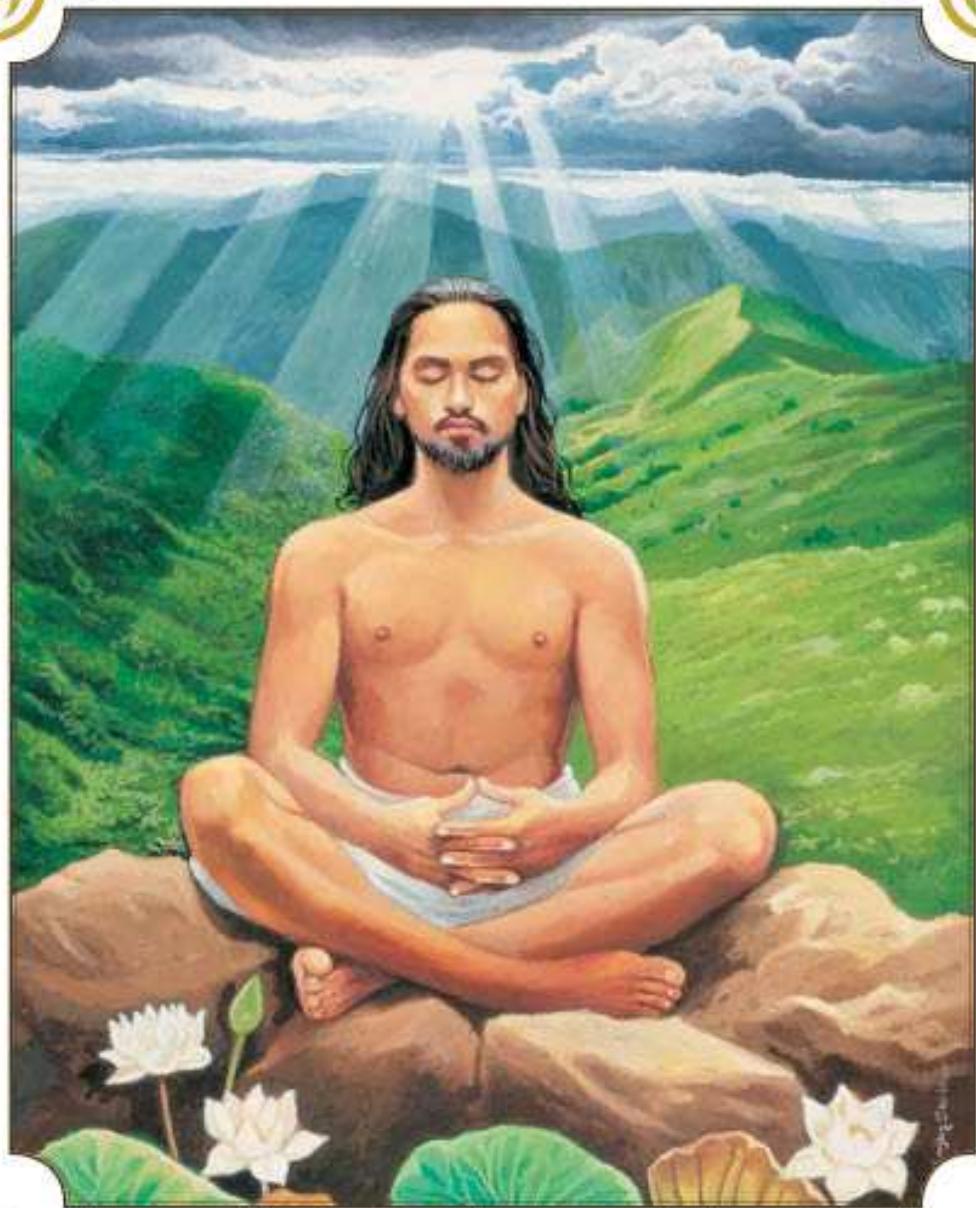
3.13 The spiritually-minded, who eat food that is first offered in sacrifice, are released from all kinds of sin. Others, who cook food for their own enjoyment, verily eat only sin.



3.14 All living beings subsist on food, and food is produced by rains. Rains come from the performance of sacrifice, and sacrifice is produced by the performance of prescribed duties.



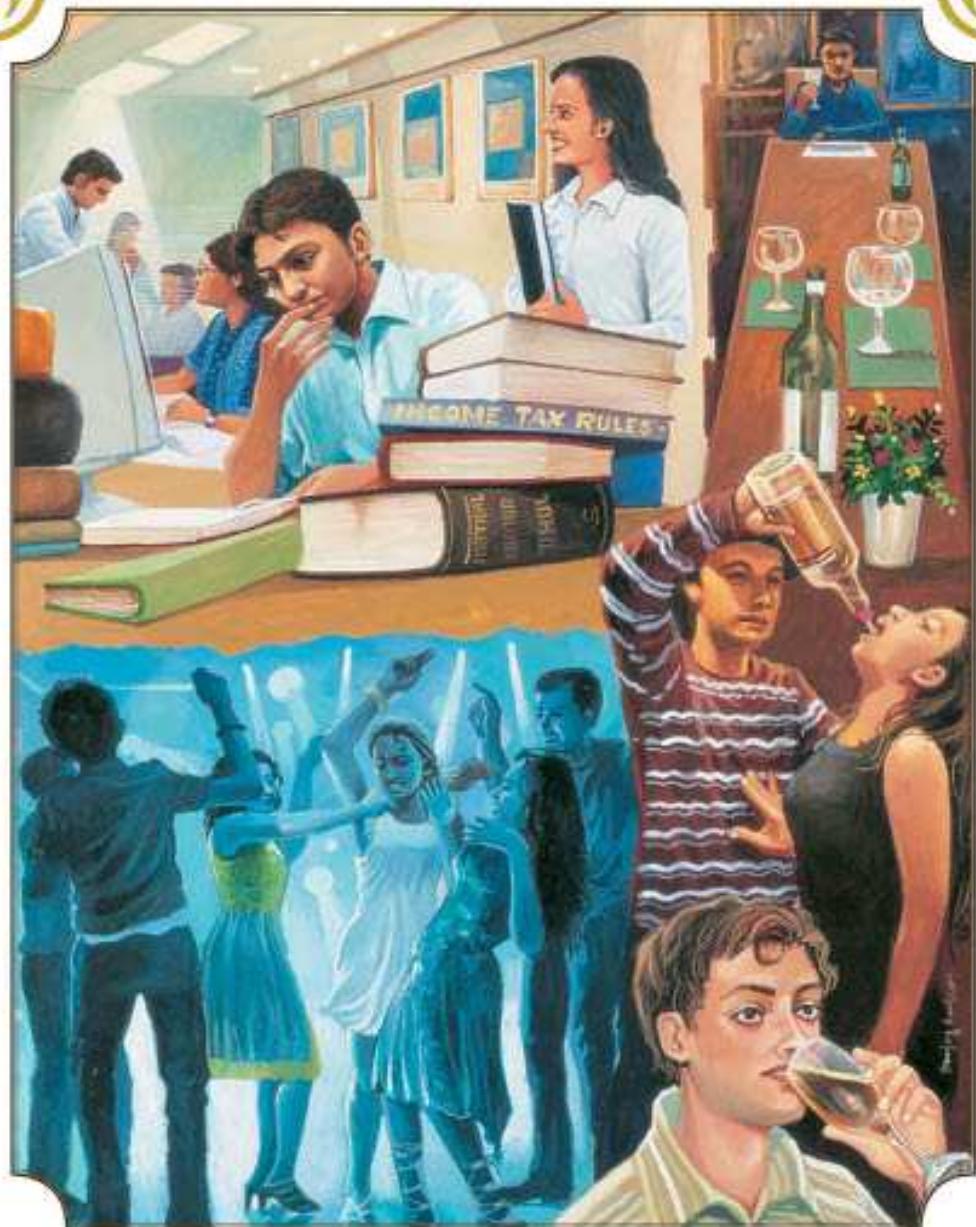
5.22 The pleasures that arise from contact with the sense objects, though appearing as enjoyable to worldly-minded people, are verily a source of misery. O son of Kunti, such pleasures have a beginning and an end, and so the wise do not delight in them.



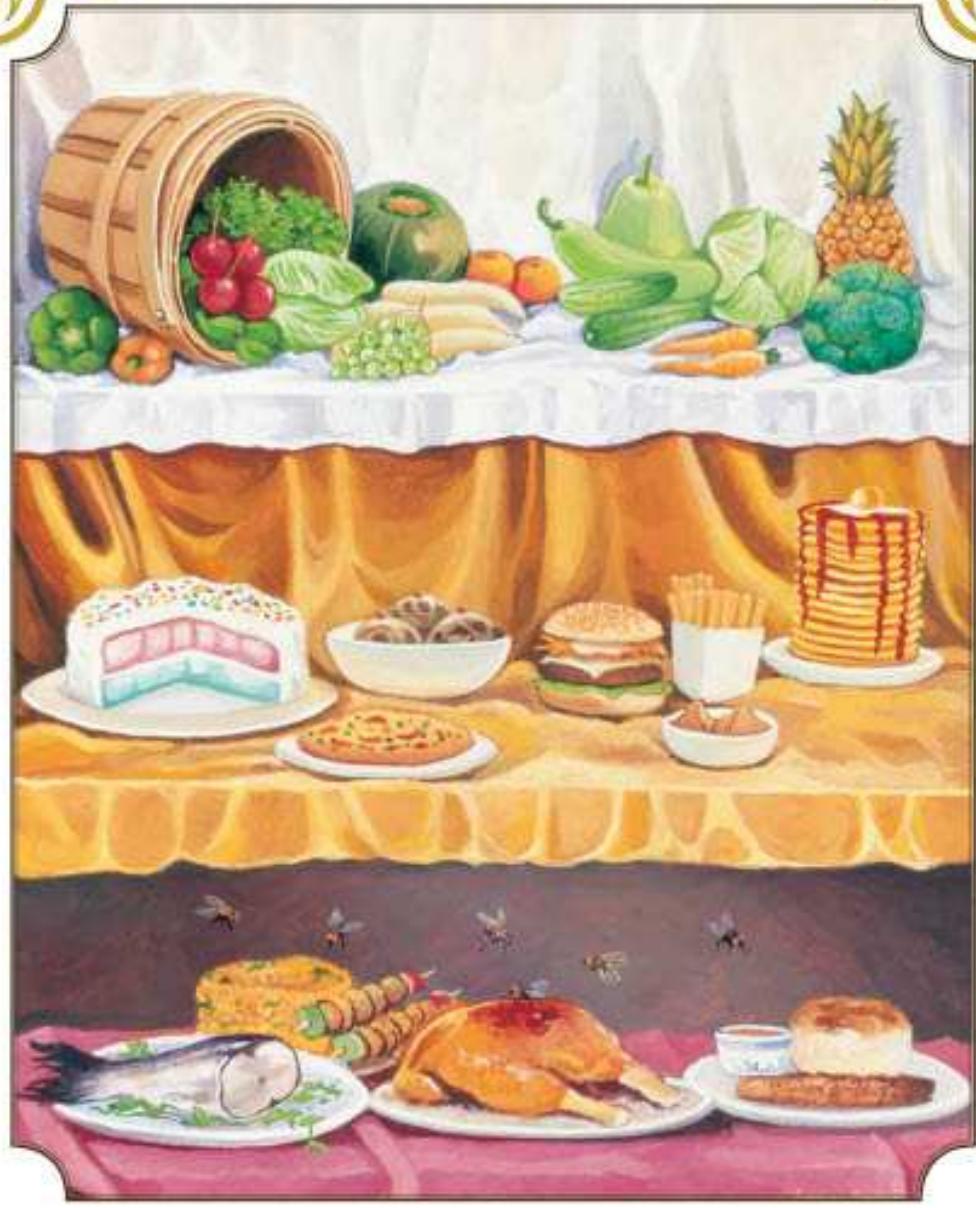
5.28 Shutting out all thoughts of external enjoyment, with the gaze fixed on the space between the eye-brows, equalizing the flow of the incoming and outgoing breath in the nostrils, and thus controlling the senses, mind, and intellect, the sage who becomes free from desire and fear, always lives in freedom.



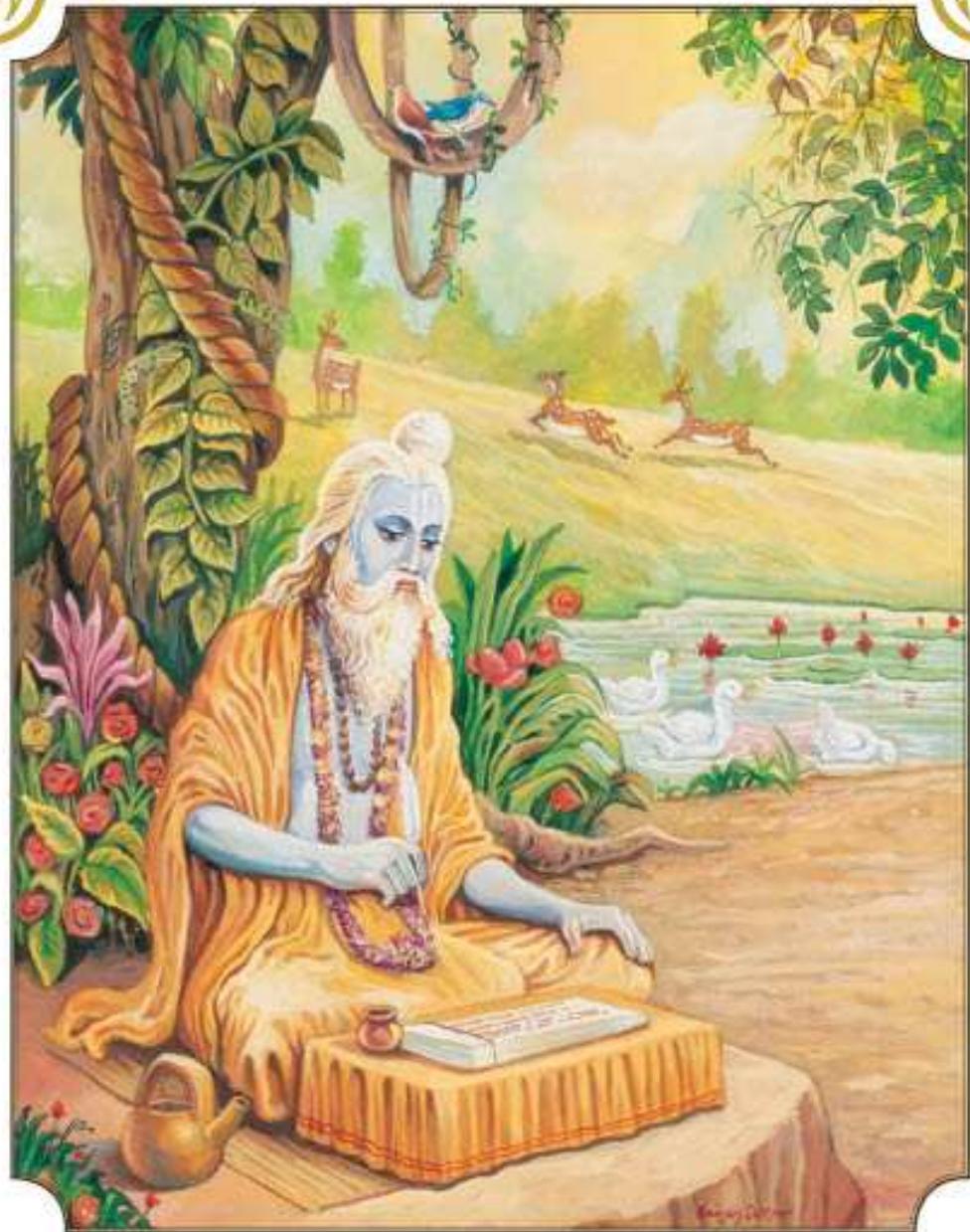
11.6 The Supreme Lord said: Behold, O Parth, my hundreds and thousands of wonderful forms of various shapes, sizes, and colors.



14.5 O mighty-armed Arjun, the material energy consists of three *gunas* (modes)—sattva (goodness), rajas (passion), and tamas (ignorance). These modes bind the eternal soul to the perishable body.



17.8-9 Persons in the mode of goodness prefer foods that promote the life span, and increase virtue, strength, health, happiness, and satisfaction. Foods that are too bitter, too sour, salty, very hot, pungent, dry, and chiliful, are dear to persons in the mode of passion. Foods that are overcooked, stale, putrid, polluted, and impure are dear to persons in the mode of ignorance.



18.75 Ved Vyasa, the author of the Brahma Sūtras, the Puranas, the Mahabharat, etc. was a descension of God, and possessed clairvoyant powers. Thus, he heard the conversation between Shree Krishna and Arjun.

It Teaches the Practice of Yog

For any science to be useful, it must address two aspects—theory and practice. Even the best of theoretical knowledge is insufficient in itself to solve the

problems of life. And if knowledge is not put into practice, it only serves the purpose of intellectual entertainment. The Bhagavad Gita is not content with providing a lofty philosophical understanding; it also describes clear-cut techniques for implementing its spiritual precepts for everyday life. These techniques of applying the science of spirituality in our lives are termed “Yog.” Hence, the Bhagavad Gita is also called “Yog Śāstra,” meaning, the scripture that teaches the practice of Yog.

Inexperienced spiritual practitioners often separate spirituality from temporal life; some look on beatitude as something to be attained in the hereafter. But the Bhagavad Gita makes no such distinction, and aims at the consecration of every aspect of human life in this world itself. Thus, all its eighteen chapters are designated as different types of Yog because they deal with methodologies for the application of spiritual knowledge to practical life. These chapters also describe various systems of Yog, such as *karm yog*, *jñāna yog*, and *bhakti yog*.

The Setting of the Bhagavad Gita

Though the Truth is one and eternal, in different ages it expresses itself in varied locales that impart their unique flavor to its presentation. The teaching of the Bhagavad Gita must therefore not be regarded merely in the light of a generalized philosophy or ethical doctrine. It is the practical application of ethics to human life in a specific situation of crisis that serves as its setting. Since its teachings are exceedingly profound, the Bhagavad Gita required an equally problematic and insurmountable crisis as its setting. Thus, in order to fully appreciate the value of its ideas, the historical flow of events that led to the speaking of the divine message to Arjun by Bhagavān Krishna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra must also be known.

The setting in which the Bhagavad Gita was spoken was the onset of the Mahābhārat, a colossal war that was about to begin between two sets of

cousins, the Kauravas and the Pandavas. The Pandavas—Yudhisthir, Bheem, Arjun, Nakul, and Sahadev—were five noble brothers. Their father, King Pandu, had suffered an unfortunate death while his five sons were still very young. Pandu's throne had been usurped by his step brother, Dhritarashtra, who was blind from birth. Dhritarashtra had a hundred sons, called the Kauravas, the eldest of whom was Duryodhan. For years, the Kauravas, led by Duryodhan, had victimized their cousins, the Pandavas, and governed over the kingdom of Hastinapur, which did not rightfully belong to them.

The Kauravas embodied cruelty, injustice, vice, oppression, and irreligion. On the other hand, the Pandavas were saintly and virtuous—the epitomes of morality, sacrifice, devotion, and compassion. Most importantly, they were great devotees of the Supreme Bhagavān Shri Krishna. Due to the oppression meted out to them by the Kauravas, the miseries of the Pandavas had become so unbearable that a war between the two sides had become imminent. Realizing the unavoidability of the war, both sides had canvassed for support from the scores of kingdoms that littered the landscape of Bharat (India) at that time. The two groups of cousins were so powerful that the war would impact the whole of Bharat. Thus, all the kings in the land were obliged to align themselves with one side or the other.

As a part of the vigorous mobilization attempts, both Arjun and Duryodhan had reached Dwaraka to request the help of Bhagavān Krishna. Being omniscient, Shri Krishna knew that they were coming to entreat his help. He created a situation that set the didactical tone for the approaching battle. He posed to be sleeping in his chamber. Arjun entered the chamber and, in a mood of humbleness, sat by the side of Shri Krishna's feet, waiting for him to wake up. In the meantime, Duryodhan also arrived, and in his characteristic arrogance, sat on a chair behind Shri Krishna's head. When Shri Krishna awoke, his eyes naturally fell first upon Arjun, and later, he was made aware of

the presence of Duryodhan as well. Both parties sought his assistance in the war. Since Arjun and Duryodhan were both Shri Krishna's cousins, he did not wish to be blamed of partiality. So he offered that to one side he would give his huge army of the kingdom of Dwaraka, while to the other side he would himself remain but without any weapons. Since Shri Krishna had seen Arjun first upon waking up, he gave the first choice to him. Arjun elected to have Shri Krishna on his side, though without weapons. He decided that if Bhagavān was with him, he could never lose. Duryodhan was pleased by Arjun's choice, for he believed solely in material strength based upon military might. The Supreme Bhagavān Shri Krishna thus became the charioteer of Arjun in the war.

On the verge of the battle, huge armies had gathered on either side upon the battlefield of Kurukshetra. This was the impending war of Mahābhārat (the great battle of India). The situation was extremely grave, as an era was about to self-destruct itself in internecine warfare. Just before the combat was about to begin, Arjun requested Bhagavān Krishna to pull his chariot between the two armies. On seeing the warriors who had arrayed themselves for combat, Arjun lost heart. In a fit of despondency, he threw down his bow and refused to fight.

Arjun was a victim of a moral paradox. On the one hand, he was facing persons who deserved his respect and veneration such as his grandfather, Bheeshma, his teacher, Dronacharya, etc. On the other hand, his duty as a warrior was to fight the war of righteousness. Yet, no fruits of victory seemed to justify such a heinous act. It seemed like a dilemma without solution. Bewildered, demoralized, disappointed with life, and dejected with the events, Arjun surrendered to the Supreme Bhagavān and supplicated for guidance on what the proper course of action for him was. In this state of Arjun's moral confusion, Shri Krishna set out to enlighten him.

Historicity of the Events

Questions are raised about the historical accuracy of the events described in the Mahābhārat. Similar controversies have raged in Europe over the historicity of Christ and events of his life as described in the Bible. Such a debate may have significance for historians but is not important from a spiritual view point. After all, does it matter whether Jesus was actually born in Nazareth or Bethlehem, as long as we can benefit from his teachings and live the sacred life in accordance with his instructions? Likewise, in seeking the kernel of thought of the Gita, we need not concern ourselves with the details of history, but with the spiritual principles that it threw up and their usefulness in walking the path to enlightenment. Even if we maintain divine sentiments toward a stone deity, we become purified. Our own divine sentiments purify our mind. Then where is the doubt about the purifying effect of contemplating upon the pastimes of Bhagavān with divine sentiments?

When I mentioned to devotees that I intend to write a commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, some in the West suggested that I should make an allegorical interpretation of the Mahābhārat, and explain the Gita accordingly. They referred me to many of the commentaries popular in the West, which have interpreted the whole situation as an allegory. Making such an allegorical interpretation is the easiest thing to do, but the problem with such an approach is that it destroys the beautiful basis of devotion which the Mahābhārat presents us with, and pulls it down to the level of dry intellectual analysis. It is like ordering a field to be bulldozed for agricultural cultivation, without knowledge of the wonderful flower garden that is already growing in it. Similarly, the intention of Ved Vyās in revealing these scriptures was not only to provide us with treasure chests of divine knowledge, but also to present the reader with the enchanting Names, Forms, Virtues, Pastimes, and Abodes of Bhagavān, which provide a sweet basis for attaching the mind to the Supreme Bhagavān.

So, let us not succumb to the temptation of reducing everything to lifeless allegorical interpretations. The Bhagavad Gita already contains in its original form fathomless knowledge to provide abundant nourishment for the intellect, making its dry intellectualization on the part of commentators an unnecessary endeavor. Ved Vyas too was aware of the allegory as a literary tool, and he has used it effectively in his writings. Hence, let us allow Sage Ved Vyas to reveal his own allegories wherever necessary, as he takes us on a journey of both head and heart, and relates the pastimes and message of the Supreme Bhagavān when he descended in the human form upon the earth.

The Language of the Gita

The Bhagavad Gita was recorded and presented to us in Sanskrit, India's historic language. This is decidedly befitting as Sanskrit possesses a highly evolved vocabulary for expressing spiritual concepts. It also has the most perfect grammar amongst all the languages of the world; a grammar that has remained unchanged for thousands of years. Recently, NASA scientists, developing a computer language for work in Artificial Intelligence, were astonished to discover that Sanskrit has a perfect computer-compatible grammar for the purpose. Rick Briggs at the NASA Ames Research Center, CA, wrote in his paper "Knowledge Representation in Sanskrit and Artificial Intelligence (The AI Magazine Spring, 1985 #39)": "There is at least one language, Sanskrit, which for the duration of almost 1,000 years was a living spoken language with a considerable literature of its own. Besides works of literary value, there was a long philosophical and grammatical tradition that has continued to exist with undiminished vigor until the present century. Among the accomplishments of the grammarians can be reckoned a method for paraphrasing Sanskrit in a manner that is identical not only in essence but in form with current work in Artificial Intelligence."

As the medium of the Bhagavad Gita, the Sanskrit language imparts both

profoundness and sophistication. At the same time, it is flexible and provides scope for all traditions to see their perspective included in the divine dialogue.

Worldwide popularity of the Gita

From the time of Shankaracharya, great philosophers customarily wrote their respective commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita. It was also translated from Sanskrit into many other Indian languages, such as the *Jñāneśhwari*, written by Saint Jnaneswar in Marathi in the thirteenth century.

During the British Raj, the popularity of the Gita spread worldwide. It was first translated in English by Charles Wilkins, a merchant with the East India Company. His rendition made a deep impression on the American Transcendentalists, a group of independent thinkers in New England. Ralph Waldo Emerson made it the basis of his poem “Brahma.” Emerson made the Gita required reading for all those who objected to evangelical Christianity. His friend, Henry David Thoreau was also a tremendous enthusiast of the Gita and incorporated its teachings on *Karm Yog* in his own lifestyle and philosophy. And so, for the first time it became a part of the counter culture. A century later, TS Eliot had a lifelong interest in Indian philosophy and incorporated it in his poetry. The Gita also appealed to the German Romantics, notably Schlegel, Humboldt, and Goethe.

Back home in India, leaders of the independence movement, who were winning the respect of the nation, began attributing the source of their inspiration to the Bhagavad Gita. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the leader of the freedom struggle before Gandhi and a respected *karm yogi*, wrote an extensive and scholarly commentary upon the Gita. After him, Gandhi declared that whenever he faced disappointments, he turned to the Gita for guidance and solace. Gandhi’s thinking inspired two other giants of the twentieth century in the west, Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela. This cross-seeding of

ideas that took place between east and west further enhanced the popularity of the Gita. In the 1960s another wave of counter culture swept America. Continuing in the tradition of Swami Vivekananda and Swami Yogananda who had visited the western world earlier, many Indian gurus began arriving in America, such as Swami Vishnudevananda, Swami Satchitananda, and Swami Prabhupada. They all referred to the Gita as the authoritative reference for their teachings. As a result, the Bhagavad Gita rapidly reached the status it possesses today as one of the most popular and well-read books of wisdom in the history of humankind.

Its Teachings are Above Cult and Creed

There is one kind of teaching that propagates a dogma, cult or creed. There is another kind of teaching that propagates ideals and life principles that are supremely above all cults and creeds. Scholars who regard the Gita as the fruit of some particular religious system do injustice to the universality of its message. The ideas it presents are not the speculations of a philosophic intellect, rather they are the enduring truths of spiritual realities that are verifiable in our own existence and sojourn through life. Thus, when the first English edition of the Gita was published, Warren Hastings, the then Governor General of India, wrote in his foreword: “These (writings of the inhabitants of India) will survive when the British dominion of India shall have long ceased to exist, and when the sources which it yielded of wealth and power are lost to remembrance.”

Our approach in studying the Gita must therefore not be a scholastic or academic scrutiny of its message, nor an effort to place its philosophy in the context of contending schools of thought. The Gita is not a treatise of metaphysical philosophy, despite the profusion of metaphysical ideas that arise from its pages. Instead, it seeks the highest truth for the highest practical utility, not for intellectual or even spiritual satisfaction, but as the truth that

saves and opens to us the passage from our present mortal imperfection to an immortal perfection. We must therefore approach it for help and light in receiving the living message that can benefit human beings attain the highest welfare and spiritual perfection.

Commentaries on the Gita

Books of divine knowledge naturally invite several commentaries to be written on them. These commentaries serve to elucidate the eternal edicts they contain. This is just as countries have their respective law books, such as the constitution, etc. In addition, there are commentaries published by lawyers that assist in studying these books. Similarly, commentaries on the scriptures help in bringing forth the gems of knowledge embedded in these holy books. Due to its vast popularity, the Bhagavad Gita has had hundreds of commentaries written on it. Some of the important commentators in history have been Jagadguru Shankaracharya, Jagadguru Ramanujacharya, Jagadguru Madhvacharya, Jagadguru Nimbarkacharya, and Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya, who were all founders of major Vedantic traditions. In the Shaiva tradition, the renowned philosopher Abhinavgupta wrote a commentary, with a slightly variant recension, called “Gitarth Samagraha.”

The beauty about divine knowledge is that the more it is churned the more nectar it produces, and hence the world has undoubtedly been enriched by these insightful commentaries. Simultaneously, we must be aware that commentaries by the great pontiffs conform to their respective life missions. These great acharyas preached the Absolute Truth according to time, place, and circumstance, always with the aim of wellbeing of humankind. Thus, they maintained a missionary zeal to propagate their favorite ideas, and portray their respective perspectives in all the verses of the Bhagavad Gita. While according full respect to their accomplished works, we should bear in mind that Shri Krishna was not an *Advaita vādī* (non-dualist), *Viśiṣṭa advaita vādī*

(qualified non-dualist), *Dwait vādī* (dualist), or *Dwait advaita vādī* (dual non-dualist). He was beyond the polemics of philosophers and so was his message. Thus, we see how the principles of theism, asceticism, dualism, pragmatism, *karm*, *jñana*, *bhakti*, *haṭha*, *sāṅkhya*, etc. are all woven into his teachings. We must therefore be wary of limiting the meaning of the Bhagavad Gita within the perspective of one philosophic tradition, and instead view it as a window to the whole Absolute Truth.

This is the manner of thinking of Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj, who freely quotes from the works of wisdom of all the famous Indian Saints and even Western ones, without getting mired in any one *sampradāya* (religious tradition) or *paramparā* (disciplic succession). When he is asked which of the four *Vaishṇav* *sampradāyas* does he belong to, he humbly points out that the Absolute Truth is one, and it does not restrict itself to any particular *sampradāya*. All genuine *sampradāyas* have begun from Bhagavān. So if there is only one *sampradāya*, which is the *sampradāya* of Bhagavān, then why should we divide them into four? And if we choose to divide the Truth in this manner, the divisions will only keep multiplying. This is exactly what has happened to the *sampradāyas*, as each of the four original ones has further divided into branches and sub-branches, all claiming sole ownership over the entire region of the Absolute Truth. This tendency has partitioned the one *Sanātan Dharma* (Eternal Religion) into numerous *sāmpradāyic* fragments.

As boundaries in the world break down and the flow of information amongst people enhances, the idea that one creed, race, sect, or religion is the sole guardian of the Universal Truth is getting fewer and fewer buyers. Let us align ourselves with this surge of broad-mindedness of the intellect, and permit the shining light of knowledge from the Bhagavad Gita illumine the whole indivisible, untainted Truth. This is, after all, the original pristine purpose of not only the Bhagavad Gita, but all the Vedic scriptures.

About Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj

Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj is a descended Saint who has reestablished the ancient Vedic knowledge in modern times. At the young age of 34, he lectured for ten days in sophisticated Sanskrit, before the Kashi Vidvat Parishat, the supreme body of 500 Vedic scholars in the holy city of Kashi, quoting masterfully from hundreds of Vedic scriptures to reveal the simple straightforward path to Brahman-realization for the present times. When the esteemed body of erudite scholars realized that Kripaluji Maharaj's knowledge was deeper than the combined knowledge of all of them together, they honored him with the title of Jagadguru, or "Spiritual Master of the World." He thus became the fifth Saint in Indian history to receive the original title of Jagadguru, after Jagadguru Shankaracharya, Jagadguru Nimbarkacharya, Jagadguru Ramanujacharya, and Jagadguru Madhvacharya.

The scholars were so impressed with his command of the ancient Vedic texts that they showered many more accolades upon him, such as:

Jagadguruttam —The supreme Jagadguru of Indian history.

Ved Mārga Pratiṣṭhāpanāchārya —The establisher of the true path revealed by the Vedas.

Nikhil Darśan Samanvayāchārya —The reconciler of the import of all the scriptures.

Sanātan Vaidik Dharmapratiṣṭhāpanāchārya —The re-establisher of the eternal Vedic religion in this world.

Satsampradāya Paramāchārya —The founder of the true tradition of spiritual knowledge.

This commentary on the Bhagavad Gita is based upon the insightful understanding of its verses as revealed to me by Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj. The objective of this commentary is not to give an interpretation, but

simply to bring forth the meaning of the verses spoken by the Supreme Bhagavān Shri Krishna. For this objective, I have not hesitated to quote from the books of wisdom and the teachings of saints, holy personalities, and luminaries, around the world.

Constraints in any Translation

It is often well-nigh impossible to find terms in English that are semantically coextensive with the Indic terms. The word meanings of any language are forged by the cultural and philosophical framework of the people who speak that language. Thus, Sanskrit words derive their meanings from the conceptual system of thought in India. Being much different from the western system of thought that has shaped the meanings of English words, there are unavoidable constraints in any work of translation. All renditions of Sanskrit terms in English are therefore approximations.

For example, there is no English word that accurately conveys the meaning of *Brahman* (the formless, attributeless, all-pervading aspect of Bhagavān). The same problem typically arises with translating *dharma* into English. Path of righteousness, one's incumbent duty, virtue, prescribed duties, etc. are all gross approximations of its meaning. In all such cases where suitable English phrases were not available, the original Sanskrit terms have been retained. Such words and phrases have been italicized for identification, and the important ones included in the glossary at the back of the book, with detailed explanations.

Helpful Points to Make the Reading Easier

Understanding a couple of things will make it easier to read this commentary. Firstly, the Gita is a conversation within a conversation within a conversation. The Bheeshma Parva of the Mahābhārat, of which the Bhagavad Gita is a part, is related by Sage Vaishampayan to King Janmejaya. Vaishampayan is thus the one who tells Janmejaya: *Sanjaya uvācha* “Sanjay said,” *Dhritarasthra uvācha*

“Dhritarashtra said,” etc. However, Vaishampayan and Janmejaya do not figure directly as speakers in the Bhagavad Gita.

The Gita begins as a dialogue between King Dhritarashtra and his minister Sanjay. Since Dhritarashtra was blind, he could not be personally present on the battlefield. Dhritarashtra initiates the conversation by asking Sanjay about the proceedings in the battlefield; he does not speak again in the Gita. He is answered by Sanjay, who relates the happenings. Sanjay was a disciple of Ved Vyāsa, and by the grace of his teacher, he possessed the mystic ability of distant vision. Thus he could see from afar all that transpired on the battle ground, and was giving Dhritarashtra a first-hand account of the events on the warfront. Sanjay pops in and out throughout the book as he relates to Dhritarashtra what he sees and hears. Thus, he says: *Śhrī Bhagavān uvācha* “Bhagavān Krishna said ,” and *Arjun uvācha* “Arjun said,” etc.

The major portion of the dialogue is between Bhagavān Krishna and Arjun. Arjun asks questions and Shri Krishna answers. The conversation is a bit one-sided as Shri Krishna does most of the talking.

Secondly, there is a profusion of appellations, also known as epithets. For example, Shri Krishna is referred to by the names Hrishikesh, Keshav, Govind, Madhusudan, Achyut, etc. Similarly, Arjun is called Dhananjaya, Gudakesh, Kaunteya, Parantapa, etc. Often these names are deliberately chosen to convey a particular meaning or flavor to the conversation. Such emphasis has been explained in the commentary whenever necessary.

Important Terms in the Bhagavad Gita

A synopsis of the entire Bhagavad Gita is beyond the scope of this introduction, firstly because it will preempt your reading pleasure in discovering it for yourself, and secondly because it is impossible to summarize everything that Bhagavān Krishna has said in it. However, a few common

terms in the Bhagavad Gita and the rest of the Vedic literature are explained here, to help the reader easily grasp the concepts presented therein.

Bhagavān (God): In the Vedic scriptures, including the Bhagavad Gita, Bhagavān refers to the one Supreme Entity. He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and omnipresent. He is the creator, maintainer, and dissolver of this creation. He possesses innumerable contradictory attributes at the same time. Thus, he is near and yet far, big and yet small, formless and yet possessing a form, without qualities and yet possessing innumerable qualities.

People approach the Supreme Entity in three ways. Some relate to him in his formless all-pervading aspect, which is called *Brahman*. Others choose to worship him as the *ParamĀtman*, who is seated within the hearts of all living beings. Yet others seek to worship him in his personal form, as *Bhagavān*. All these three—*Brahman*, *ParamĀtman*, and *Bhagavān*—are different aspects of the one Ultimate Being.

Occasionally, out of his causeless grace, Bhagavān descends upon the earth and engages in divine pastimes to uplift the Ātman(s). Such a descent is called an *Avatār*. Shri Ram and Shri Krishna are both *Avatārs* of Shri Hari. Since Bhagavān is all-powerful, he is not limited to one form; he can manifest in innumerable forms. But we must remember that all these are different forms of the one Divine Bhagavān, and not different gods.

Ātman (Soul): The individual Ātman is a tiny fragmental part of Bhagavān. It is spiritual in nature, and hence distinct from the material body. The presence of the Ātman imparts consciousness to the body, which is made from insentient matter. When the Ātman leaves, the body becomes dead matter again. The body is perishable, while the Ātman is eternal.

This is a bit different from the Abrahamic concept of new Ātman(s) being created with each birth of a human being upon the earth. According to the

Vedic understanding, the Ātman is without beginning or end; it neither originated on birth nor will it be destroyed when the body dies. What we term as death in worldly parlance is merely the Ātman changing bodies. The Bhagavad Gita likens this to a person changing clothes to put on new ones. The Ātman is not free to choose its next birth, which is decided by Bhagavān based upon the Law of Karma.

Why has the material energy enveloped us in the first place? This is because we have turned our backs toward Bhagavān. Bhagavān is of the nature of light, while the material energy is of the nature of darkness. One who turns away from the light is naturally overcome by darkness. Likewise, the Ātman(s) who have turned their backs toward him have been covered by the material energy.

Understanding the Vedic terminology regarding the word *Ātman* will be helpful. The Ātman that is in the embodied state is called *jīvĀtman* because it keeps the body alive (*jīvit*). These words *Ātman* and *jīvĀtman* are interchangeably used while referring to Ātman(s) in the material realm. Along with the individual Ātman (*jīvĀtman*), Bhagavān is also seated within the body. He is called *ParamĀtman* (Supreme Ātman). He accompanies the *jīvĀtman* life after life, into whichever bodily form it goes. The *ParamĀtman* does not interfere with the activities of the living entity, but remains as a silent witness. The *jīvĀtman* is forgetful of its eternal friend and is struggling to enjoy the material energy.

The word *Ātman*, which literally means Ātman, occurs regularly in the Gita, for a variety of usages. In some places, *Ātman* is used to refer to the *jīvĀtman* (individual Ātman), without including the body, mind, and intellect (e.g. verse 6.20). At times, it refers to the entire personality of the living being, including the Ātman and the body, mind, intellect (e.g. verse 6.20). Occasionally, *Ātman* refers to the mind (e.g. verse 6.5); in a couple of places, *Ātman* is used for the intellect (e.g. verse 5.7). And in some places, it is used for *ParamĀtman* (Supreme

Ātman/Bhagavān, e.g. verse 6.29).

Material Nature (*Prakṛiti* or *Māyā*): The material energy, called *prakṛiti*, is not antithetical to Bhagavān; rather it is one of his innumerable powers. At the time of dissolution, *prakṛiti* remains latent within the being of Bhagavān. When he wishes to create the world, he glances at it, and it begins to unwind from its latent state. It then manifests the various gross and subtle elements of creation.

While one aspect of the material energy, *Māyā*, is responsible for creating the world, its second aspect is instrumental in keeping the Ātman(s) bound to the *samsara* of life and death. *Māyā* makes us forget our identity as divine Ātman(s), and puts us under the illusion of being the material body. Hence we pursue bodily pleasures in the world. After innumerable lifetimes of endeavoring in the material realm, the Ātman comes to the realization that the infinite divine bliss it seeks will not be attained from the world, but from Bhagavān. Then, it must follow the path of Yog to reach the stage of perfection. When the Ātman achieves perfect union with Bhagavān, it becomes liberated from the clutches of the material energy.

Modes of Nature (*Gunas*): The material energy has three constituent modes: *sattva guṇa* (mode of goodness), *rajo guṇa* (mode of passion), *tamo guṇa* (mode of ignorance). These *gunas* exist in varying proportions in our personality and influence us. The mode of ignorance induces laziness, stupor, ignorance, anger, violence, and addiction. Thereby, it pulls the Ātman deeper into the darkness of material illusion. The mode of passion inflames the desires of the mind and senses, and induces one to endeavor passionately for fulfilling worldly ambitions. The mode of goodness illuminates a person with knowledge and nourishes virtuous qualities, such as kindness, patience, and tolerance. It makes the mind peaceful and suitable for spiritual practice. A *sādhak* (spiritual practitioner) must strive to reduce the modes of ignorance and passion by

cultivating the mode of goodness, and then transcend even *sattva guna*. Bhagavān is transcendental to the three *gunas*; by attaching the mind to him we too can ascend to the transcendental platform.

Yajña (Sacrifice): Generally, the term *yajña* refers to fire sacrifice. In the Bhagavad Gita, *yajña* includes all the prescribed actions laid down in the scriptures, when they are done as an offering to the Supreme. The elements of nature are integral parts of the system of Bhagavān's creation. All parts of the system naturally draw from and give back to the whole. The sun lends stability to the earth and provides heat and light necessary for life to exist. Earth creates food from its soil for our nourishment and also holds essential minerals in its womb for a civilized lifestyle. The air moves the life force in our body and enables transmission of sound energy. We humans too are an integral part of the entire system of Bhagavān's creation. The air that we breathe, the earth that we walk upon, the water that we drink, and the light that illuminates our day, are all gifts of creation to us. While we partake of these gifts to sustain our lives, we also have our duties toward the integral system. The Bhagavad Gita states that we are obligated to participate with the creative force of nature by performing our prescribed duties in the service of Bhagavān. That is the *yajña* Bhagavān expects from us.

Consider the example of a hand. It is an integral part of the body. It receives its nourishment—blood, oxygen, nutrients, etc.—from the body, and in turn, it performs necessary functions for the body. If the hand looks on this service as burdensome, and decides to get severed from the body, it cannot sustain itself for even a few minutes. It is in the performance of its *yajña* toward the body that the self-interest of the hand is also fulfilled. Similarly, we individual Ātman(s) are tiny parts of the Supreme and we all have our role to play in the grand scheme of things. When we perform our *yajña* toward him, our self-interest is naturally satiated.

Sacrifice, or *yajña*, should be performed in divine consciousness as an offering to the Supreme Bhagavān. However, people vary in their understanding, and hence perform sacrifice in different manners with dissimilar consciousness. Persons with lesser understanding, and wanting material rewards, make offerings to the celestial deities.

Devatā (Celestial Deities): These are beings that live in the higher planes of existence within this material world, called *Swarg* (the celestial abodes). These celestial beings (*devatās*) are not Bhagavān. They are Ātman(s) like us. They occupy specific positions in the system of Bhagavān's administration and oversee specific aspects of the material world.

Consider the Federal government of a country. There is a Secretary of State, a Finance Secretary, a Secretary of Commerce, an Agriculture Secretary, and so on. These are positions, and select people occupy these positions for a limited tenure. At the end of its tenure, the government changes, all the post-holders change too. The positions remain but the persons holding those positions change. Similarly, in the governance of the affairs of the world, there are positions such as *Agni Dev* (the deity of fire), *Vāyu Dev* (the deity of the wind), *Varuṇ Dev* (the deity of the ocean), *Indra Dev* (the king of the celestial deities), etc. Ātman(s) selected by virtue of their deeds in past lives occupy these seats for a certain amount of time. Then they fall from their position and others occupy these seat. Thus, Ātman(s) become celestial deities only temporarily and, as a result, we cannot compare them to the Supreme Bhagavān.

Many people worship the celestial deities for material rewards. However, we must remember that these *devatās* cannot grant either liberation from material bondage or Brahman-realization. Even if they do bestow material benefits, it is only by the powers they have received from Bhagavān. Hence, the Bhagavad Gita repeatedly discourages people from worshipping the celestial deities and

states that those who are situated in knowledge worship the Supreme Bhagavān.

Divine Abode of Bhagavān: This material realm including, all the celestial abodes, the earth planet, and the hellish planes of existence, is only one-fourth of Bhagavān's entire creation. It is for those Ātman(s) who have not yet attained spiritual perfection. Here, we experience suffering in various forms, such as birth, disease, old-age, and death. Beyond this entire material realm is the spiritual dimension consisting of three-fourths of Bhagavān's creation. It contains innumerable divine abodes of Bhagavān that are referred to in Vedic literature as *Saket Lok* (the abode of Bhagavān Ram), *Golok* (the abode of Bhagavān Krishna), *Vaikunth Lok* (the abode of Bhagavān Narayan), *Shiv Lok* (the abode of Bhagavān Shiv), *Devi Lok* (the abode of Mother Durga), etc. The Bhagavad Gita repeatedly mentions that one who attains Brahman-realization goes to the divine abodes of Bhagavān and does not return to cycle of life and death in the material world again.

Śharanāgati (Surrender): Bhagavān is divine and cannot be comprehended by our material intellect. Similarly, he cannot be perceived by our material senses —the eyes cannot see him, the ears cannot hear him, etc. However, if he decides to bestow his grace upon some living being, he grants his divine energy upon that fortunate Ātman. On receiving his divine grace, one can see him, know him, and attain him. This grace of Bhagavān is not a whimsical act from his side. He bestows his divine grace upon those who surrender to him. Thus, the Bhagavad Gita emphasizes that the Ātman must learn the secret of surrendering to the Supreme Bhagavān.

Yog: The word Yog has been used in the Gita in almost one hundred fifty places, for multiple purposes. It is formed from the root *yuj*, which means “to unite.” From the spiritual perspective, the union of the individual Ātman with

the Bhagavān is called Yog (e.g. verse 5.21). However, the science of accomplishing that union is also called Yog (e.g. verse 4.1). Again, the state of perfection achieved through the process is also referred to as Yog (e.g. 6.18). Union with Bhagavān naturally disentangles one from misery born of contact with material nature. Hence, the state of freedom from suffering is referred to as Yog as well (verse 6.23). Since perfection is accompanied by evenness of mind, such equanimity has also been called Yog (verse 2.48). One who is in the state of Yog performs all activities perfectly, in a spirit of devotion to Bhagavān, and hence dexterity at work is also referred to as Yog (verse 2.50).

One may ask why Yog is necessary. The answer is that searching for happiness in the material world is like chasing a mirage in the desert. The nature of material desires is such that fulfilling them is like quenching a fire by pouring oil on it. For a moment the fire is subdued, but then it flares up with an even greater intensity. Similarly, fulfilling the desires of the mind and senses leads to greed. But obstructing them is also detrimental because it leads to anger. We must thus understand the root cause of why desires arise and then seek to address that. It all begins when we contemplate that there is happiness in some person or object. Repeated contemplation results in attachment of the mind, and attachment gives rise to desire. So if we can firmly decide that the divine bliss the Ātman is seeking is not in material objects, these desires will stop arising. However, the desire for happiness is intrinsic to the nature of the Ātman because it is a tiny part of the infinite ocean of divine bliss. This nature can only be satisfied when the Ātman attains the infinite bliss of Bhagavān. Hence, knowingly or unknowingly, every Ātman is struggling to reach that state of divine consciousness, or Yog.

The various paths of achieving union with Bhagavān are referred to as different systems of Yog, such as *karm yog*, *jñāna yog*, *aśṭāṅg yog*, and *bhakti yog*. Thus spiritual practitioners are in general called *yogis* (e.g. verse 4.25), or *sādhaks*.

Occasionally, the word Yog refers specifically to the process of *aṣṭāṅg yog* (e.g. verse 4.28). In such instances, yogi denotes specifically the practitioner of *aṣṭāṅg yog*.

Jñāna Yog (Path of Knowledge): In this system of Yog, the emphasis is on self-knowledge. The Gita occasionally mentions it as *sāṅkhyā yog* as well. Through the practice of intellectual discrimination, the *jñānī* focusses on realizing the self, which is distinct from all bodily designations and contaminations. Self-realization is considered as the ultimate goal of perfection. The practice of *jñāna yog* is based on self-effort, without support of the grace of Bhagavān. Hence, it is a difficult path and there is danger of downfall at every step.

Aṣṭāṅg Yog (The eight-fold path): It involves a gradual process of purification beginning with mechanical practices and progressing to the control of the mind. In it, the life force is raised through the *sushumṇā* channel in the spinal column. It is brought between the eyebrows, which is the region of the third eye (the inner eye). It is then made to focus on the Supreme Bhagavān with great devotion. This process was presented in a structured system of practice containing eight stages by Maharshi Patanjali in the famous text written by him, called Yog Sutras. Thereby, it came to be known as *aṣṭāṅg yog* or the eight-fold system of Yog. A variation of this is *haṭha yog*, in which the emphasis is on austerities. The *haṭha yogi* strives to gain mastery over the mind and senses by exercising the force of will power.

In many places, the Vedic literature also states that there are only three paths to Brahman-realization—*karm yog*, *jñāna yog*, and *bhakti yog*. In such a classification, *aṣṭāṅg yog* is included in *jñāna yog*.

Bhakti Yog (Path of Devotion): This path involves attaching the mind to the names, forms, virtues, pastimes, etc. of Bhagavān through selfless and exclusive love. One develops a loving relationship with Bhagavān by seeing him as the

eternal father, mother, friend, master, and Ātman-beloved. By surrendering to him and uniting the individual will with the divine will, the devotee attracts the grace of Bhagavān and achieves the goal of spiritual perfection more easily than by the other paths. Although the Bhagavad Gita embraces all the systems of Yog, it consistently emphasizes the path of *bhakti* as the superior system of Yog. This repeated pronouncement by Shri Krishna that he can only be known through *bhakti* is highlighted in the commentary to dispel the misconception amongst some about *bhakti* being an inferior system of Yog.

Karm Yog (Path of Action): *Karm* refers to performing one's worldly obligations and responsibilities, while *Yog* refers to union with Bhagavān. So the practice of uniting the mind with Bhagavān even while doing one's obligatory duties in the world is *karm yog*. This requires detaching the mind from the fruits of actions, by developing a resolute decision of the intellect that all work is meant solely for the pleasure of Bhagavān. Thus, the Gita occasionally refers to it as *buddhi yog*, or the Yog of the intellect. Since most people practice spirituality while living in household life and discharging their worldly duties, *karm yog* becomes necessary for them alongside with any other system of Yog they may pursue.

With this brief explanation of some important terms, I now leave it to the reader to go through the “Song of God” and discover first-hand the wonderful divine wisdom offered by the Supreme Bhagavān Shri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita.

Acknowledgements

I offer my deepest and heartfelt gratitude to my Gurudev, Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj, who is an ocean of divine love and transcendental knowledge. It is only by his grace that an unqualified Ātman like me has been able to receive a drop of knowledge from the infinite reservoir of wisdom that

he possesses. This humble effort is in pursuance of his instruction to preach the Vedic knowledge in the service of human kind.

I express the indebtedness of all humankind to that most benevolent and munificent sage, Ved Vyās, who bestowed upon us the auspicious scripture, the Mahābhārat, with the “Song of God” embedded in it.

I wish to sincerely acknowledge the superlative effort of my editor, Richard Kajuth (Indian name—Ramakrishna), who contemplated painstakingly upon my ramblings and offered numerous constructive suggestions. I was deeply touched by his selfless labor of love and his immense sacrifice of time and effort for this purpose. My genuine gratitude extends to Aarti Malik, who meticulously scanned the text for errors, and also offered invaluable suggestions. Both of them extended their utmost cooperation by consenting to work under stringent time pressure and completing their respective works in a short span of about six months.

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I hope the book will fulfill the sincere objective with which it has been published, and help seekers in their quest for the Absolute Truth and their journey to Brahman-realization.

In the service of the Bhagavān,
Swami Mukundananda

Publisher's Note

The Bhagavad Gita has eighteen chapters, each with multiple verses. For every verse, H.H. Swami Mukundananda ji has organized the content in the following manner:

1. Sanskrit Verse. First, the original Sanskrit verse is presented in Devanagari script.

2. Transliteration. A transliteration of the verse in English script is given, with diacritical marks denoting the exact pronunciation.

3. Word Meanings. The English meanings of individual Sanskrit words and phrases are given.

4. Translation. Next comes the English meaning of the Sanskrit verse.

5. Commentary. Finally, an explanation of the verse follows.

6. Link. Occasionally, at the end of the explanation, a sentence or two has been italicized. The italicized sentences, wherever they occur, help the reader establish the link to the subject matter of the subsequent verses.

Diacritical marks have been used with Sanskrit words to depict their exact pronunciation. In the appendices, you will find a **Pronunciation Guide** for the English transliteration. Diacriticals have not been used with Sanskrit words that are now a part of English language, such as *samsara*. For the sake of elegance of presentation and ease of reading, diacritical marks for proper nouns as well, such as Shri Krishna

Where **Sanskrit words do not have equivalent English phrases** that convey the meaning accurately, Respected Swami ji has retained the original Sanskrit terms. Such words and phrases have been italicized for identification and included in the **Glossary of Sanskrit Words**, at the back of the book, with

detailed explanations. Sometimes for ease of reading, directly after the word, its meaning is presented in brackets.

Since various appellations have been used for Shri Krishna and Arjun in the Bhagavad Gita, a **List of Appellations** and their meanings is given for easy reference.

The **Chapter Headings** for the eighteen chapters reveal the content of the chapter and are self-explanatory.

If you wish to locate a particular subject in the book, you can look up the **Subject Index** in the appendices.

To help you find specific verses of the Bhagavad Gita, an **Index of the First Lines** of all seven hundred verses is provided in the appendices. A similar **Index of the Verses Quoted** by Swami Mukundananda ji in his explanations is also presented.

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Chapter 1

Arjun Viṣhād Yog ~ अर्जुनविषादयोगः

Lamenting the Consequences of War

The Bhagavad Gita was spoken on the battleground of the Mahābhārat war, an enormous war that was just about to begin between two sets of cousins, the Kauravas and the Pandavas. A detailed description of developments that led to the colossal war is given in the Introduction to this book, in the section “The Setting of the Bhagavad Gita.”

The Bhagavad Gita begins to unfold as a dialogue between King Dhritarashtra and his minister Sanjay. Since Dhritarashtra was blind, he could not be personally present on the battlefield. Hence, Sanjay was giving him a first-hand account of the events on the warfront. Sanjay was the disciple of Sage Ved Vyas, the celebrated writer of the Mahābhārat. Ved Vyas possessed the mystic power of being able to see what was happening in distant places. By the grace of his teacher, Sanjay also possessed the mystic ability of distant vision. Thus he could see from afar all that transpired on the battleground.

धृतराष्ट्र उवाच ।
थर्मक्षेत्रे कुरुक्षेत्रे समवेता युयुत्सवः ।
मामकाः पाण्डवाश्चैव किमकुर्वत सञ्जय ॥ 1 ॥

dhritarāshtra uvācha

*dharma-kṣhetre kuru-kṣhetre samavetā yuyutsavah
māmakāḥ pāṇḍavāśchaiva kimakurvata sañjaya*

dhṛitarāśṭraḥ uvācha—Dhritarashtra said; *dharma-kṣhetre*—the land of *dharma*; *kuru-kṣhetre*—at Kurukshetra; *samavetāḥ*—having gathered; *yuyutsavah*—desiring to fight; *māmakāḥ*—my sons; *pāṇḍavāḥ*—the sons of *Pandu*; *cha*—and; *eva*—certainly; *kim*—what; *akurvata*—did they do; *sañjaya*—Sanjay.

Dhritarashtra said: O Sanjay, after gathering on the holy field of Kurukshetra, and desiring to fight, what did my sons and the sons of Pandu do?

King Dhritarashtra, apart from being blind from birth, was also bereft of spiritual wisdom. His attachment to his own sons made him deviate from the path of virtue and usurp the rightful kingdom of the Pandavas. He was conscious of the injustice he had done toward his own nephews, the sons of Pandu. His guilty conscience worried him about the outcome of the battle, and so he inquired from Sanjay about the events on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, where the war was to be fought.

In this verse, the question he asked Sanjay was, what did his sons and the sons of Pandu do, having gathered on the battlefield? Now, it was obvious that they had assembled there with the sole purpose of fighting. So it was natural that they would fight. Why did Dhritarashtra feel the need to ask what they did?

His doubt can be discerned from the words he used—*dharma kṣetra*, the land of *dharma* (virtuous conduct). Kurukshetra was a sacred land. In the Shatapath Brahman, it is described as: *kurukṣetram deva yajanam [v1]*. “Kurukshetra is the sacrificial arena of the celestial deities.” It was thus the land that nourished *dharma*. Dhritarashtra apprehended that the influence of the holy land of Kurukshetra would arouse the faculty of discrimination in his sons and they would regard the massacre of their relatives, the Pandavas, as improper. Thinking thus, they might agree to a peaceful settlement. Dhritarashtra felt

great dissatisfaction at this possibility. He thought if his sons negotiated a truce, the Pandavas would continue to remain an impediment for them, and hence it was preferable that the war took place. At the same time, he was uncertain of the consequences of the war, and wished to ascertain the fate of his sons. As a result, he asked Sanjay about the goings-on at the battleground of Kurukshetra, where the two armies had gathered.

सञ्जय उवाच ।
दृष्ट्वा तु पाण्डवानीकं व्यूढं दुर्योधनस्तदा ।
आचार्यमुपसङ्गम्य राजा वचनमब्रवीत् ॥२॥

*sañjaya uvācha
driṣṭvā tu pāṇḍava-anīkam vyūḍham duryodhanastadā
āchāryamupasaṅgamy rājā vachanamabrvāt*

sanjayaḥ uvācha—Sanjay said; *driṣṭvā*—on observing; *tu*—but; *pāṇḍava-anīkam*—the Pandava army; *vyūḍham*—standing in a military formation; *duryodhanah*—King Duryodhan; *tadā*—then; *āchāryam*—teacher; *upasaṅgamyā*—approached; *rājā*—the king; *vachanam*—words; *abrvāt*—spoke.

Sanjay said: On observing the Pandava army standing in military formation, King Duryodhan approached his teacher Dronacharya, and said the following words.

Dhritarashtra was looking for an affirmation that the battle would still be undertaken by his sons. Sanjay understood Dhritarashtra's intent behind the question and confirmed that there would definitely be war by saying that the Pandavas were standing in military formation ready for war. He further turned the conversation to the subject of what Duryodhan was doing.

Duryodhan, the eldest son of Dhritarashtra, possessed a very evil and cruel nature. Since Dhritarashtra was blind, Duryodhan practically ruled the kingdom of Hastinapur on his behalf. He had a strong dislike for the Pandavas, and was determined to eliminate them, so that he may rule unopposed. He had assumed that the Pandavas would not be able to mobilize

an army that could face his. But what happened was to the contrary, and beholding the extent of military might they had gathered, he was perturbed and unnerved.

Duryodhan's move to approach his military guru, Dronacharya, revealed that he was fearful of the outcome of the war. He went to Dronacharya with the pretense of offering respect, but his actual purpose was to palliate his own anxiety. Thus, Duryodhan spoke nine verses beginning with the next one.

पश्यैतां पाण्डुपुत्राणामाचार्य महतीं चमूम् ।
व्यूढां द्रुपदपुत्रेण तव शिष्येण धीमता ॥३॥

*paśhyaitām pāṇḍu-putrāṇām āchārya mahatīm chamūm
vyūḍhām drupada-putreṇa tava śiṣhyeṇa dhīmatā*

paśhya—behold; *etām*—this; *pāṇḍu-putrāṇām*—of the sons of Pandu; *āchārya*—respected teacher; *mahatīm*—mighty; *chamūm*—army; *vyūḍhām*—arrayed in a military formation; *drupada-putreṇa*—son of Drupad, Dhrishtadyumna; *tava*—by your; *śiṣhyeṇa*—disciple; *dhī-matā*—intelligent.

Duryodhan said: Respected teacher! Behold the mighty army of the sons of Pandu, so expertly arrayed for battle by your own gifted disciple, the son of Drupad.

Duryodhan diplomatically pointed to his military preceptor, Dronacharya, the mistake committed by him in the past. Dronacharya had once had a political quarrel with King Drupad. Angered by the quarrel, Drupad performed a sacrifice, and received a boon to beget a son who would be able to kill Dronacharya. As a result of this boon, Dhrishtadyumna was born to him.

Although Dronacharya knew the purpose of Dhrishtadyumna's birth, yet out of his large-heartedness, when Dhrishtadyumna was entrusted to him for military education, he did not hesitate to impart all his knowledge to him. Now, in the battle, Dhrishtadyumna had taken the side of the Pandavas as the commander-in-chief of their army, and he was the one who had arranged their military phalanx. Duryodhan thus hinted to his teacher that his lenience in the

past had gotten them into the present trouble, and that he should not display any further lenience in fighting the Pandavas now.

अत्र शूरा महेष्वासा भीमार्जुनसमा युधि ।
युयुथानो विराटश्च द्रुपदश्च महारथः ॥ 4 ॥
धृष्टकेतुश्चेकितानः काशिराजश्च वीर्यवान् ।
पुरुजित्कुन्तिभोजश्च शैव्यश्च नरपुङ्गवः ॥ 5 ॥
युधामन्युश्च विक्रान्त उत्तमौजाश्च वीर्यवान् ।
सौभद्रो द्रौपदेयाश्च सर्व एव महारथाः ॥ 6 ॥

*atra śhūrā mahēshvāsā bhīmārjuna-samā yudhi
yuyudhānō virāṭaśhcha drupadaśhcha mahā-rathāḥ
dhṛiṣṭaketuśhchekitānah kāśhirājaśhcha vīryavān
purujit kuntibhojaśhcha śhaibyaśhcha nara-puṅgavah
yudhāmanyuśhcha vikrānta uttamaujāśhcha vīryavān
saubhadro draupadeyāśhcha sarva eva mahā-rathāḥ*

atra—here; *śhūrāḥ*—powerful warriors; *mahā-iśhu-āsāḥ*—great bowmen; *bhīma-arjuna-samāḥ*—equal to Bheem and Arjun; *yudhi*—in military prowess; *yuyudhānah*—Yuyudhan; *virāṭaḥ*—Virat; *cha*—and; *drupadāḥ*—Drupad; *cha*—also; *mahā-rathāḥ*—warriors who could single handedly match the strength of ten thousand ordinary warriors; *dhṛiṣṭaketuḥ*—Dhrishtaketu; *chekitānah*—Chekitan; *kāśhirājāḥ*—Kashiraj; *cha*—and; *vīrya-vān*—heroic; *purujit*—Purujit; *kuntibhojaḥ*—Kuntiboj; *cha*—and; *śhaibyah*—Shaibya; *cha*—and; *nara-puṅgavah*—best of men; *yudhāmanyuḥ*—Yudhamanyu; *cha*—and; *vikrāntaḥ*—courageous; *uttamaujāḥ*—Uttamauja; *cha*—and; *vīrya-vān*—gallant; *saubhadrah*—the son of Subhadra; *draupadeyāḥ*—the sons of Draupadi; *cha*—and; *sarve*—all; *eva*—indeed; *mahā-rathāḥ*—warriors who could single handedly match the strength of ten thousand ordinary warriors.

Behold in their ranks are many powerful warriors, like Yuyudhan, Virat, and Drupad, wielding mighty bows and equal in military prowess to Bheem and Arjun. There are also accomplished heroes like Dhrishtaketu, Chekitan, the gallant King of Kashi, Purujit, Kuntibhoj, and Shaibya—all the best of men. In their ranks, they also have the courageous Yudhamanyu, the gallant Uttamauja, the son of Subhadra, and the sons of Draupadi, who are all great warrior chiefs.

In the eyes of Duryodhan, due to his fear of the looming catastrophe, the army mobilized by the Pandavas seemed larger than it actually was. Expressing his anxiety, he pointed out the *maharathīs* (warriors who could single handedly match the strength of ten thousand ordinary warriors) present on the Pandavas side. Duryodhan mentioned the exceptional heroes amidst the Pandavas ranks, who were all great military commanders equal in strength to Arjun and Bheem, and who would be formidable in the battle.

अस्माकं तु विशिष्टा ये तान्निबोध द्विजोत्तम ।
नायका मम सैन्यस्य संज्ञार्थं तान्ब्रवीमि ते ॥७॥

*asmākam tu viśiṣṭā ye tānnibodha dwijottama
nāyakā mama sainyasya sanjñārtham tānbravīmi te*

asmākam—ours; *tu*—but; *viśiṣṭāḥ*—special; *ye*—who; *tān*—them; *nibodha*—be informed; *dwija-uttama*—best of Brahmnis; *nāyakāḥ*—principal generals; *mama*—our; *sainyasya*—of army; *sanjñā-artham*—for information; *tān*—them; *bravīmi*—I recount; *te*—unto you.

O best of Brahmans, hear too about the principal generals on our side, who are especially qualified to lead. These I now recount unto you.

Duryodhan addressed Dronacharya, the commander-in-chief of the Kaurava army, as *dwijottam* (best amongst the twice-born, or Brahmans). He deliberately used the word to address his teacher. Dronacharya was not really a warrior by profession; he was only a teacher of military science. As a deceitful leader, Duryodhan even entertained shameless doubts about the loyalty of his own preceptor. The hidden meaning in Duryodhan's words was that if Dronacharya did not fight courageously, he would merely be a Brahmin interested in eating fine food served at the palace of Duryodhan.

Having said that, Duryodhan now desired to boost his own morale and that of his teacher, and so he started enumerating the great generals in his own army.

**भवान्भीष्मश्च कर्णश्च कृपश्च समितिज्जयः ।
अश्वत्थामा विकर्णश्च सौमदत्तिस्तथैव च ॥ 8 ॥**

*bhavānbhīṣhmaścha karṇaścha kṛipaścha samitiñjayah
aśhvathāmā vikarṇaścha saumadattis tathaiva cha*

bhavān—yourself; *bhīṣhmaḥ*—Bheeshma; *cha*—and; *karnah*—Karna; *cha*—and; *kripah*—Kripa; *cha*—and; *samitim-jayah*—victorious in battle; *aśhvathāmā*—Ashvatthama; *vikarnah*—Vikarna; *cha*—and; *saumadattih*—Bhurishrava; *tathā*—thus; *eva*—even; *cha*—also.

There are personalities like yourself, Bheeshma, Karna, Kripa, Ashwatthama, Vikarn, and Bhurishrava, who are ever victorious in battle.

**अन्ये च बहवः शूरा मदर्थे त्यक्तजीविताः ।
नानाशस्त्रप्रहरणाः सर्वे युद्धविशारदाः ॥ 9 ॥**

*anye cha bahavah śhūrā madarthe tyaktajīvitāḥ
nānā-śhastra-praharanāḥ sarve yuddha-viśhāradāḥ*

anye—others; *cha*—also; *bahavah*—many; *śhūrāḥ*—heroic warriors; *mat-arthe*—for my sake; *tyakta-jīvitāḥ*—prepared to lay down their lives; *nānā-śhastra-praharanāḥ*—equipped with various kinds of weapons; *sarve*—all; *yuddha-viśhāradāḥ*—skilled in the art of warfare.

Also, there are many other heroic warriors, who are prepared to lay down their lives for my sake. They are all skilled in the art of warfare, and equipped with various kinds of weapons.

**अपर्याप्तं तदस्माकं बलं भीष्माभिरक्षितम् ।
पर्याप्तं त्विदमेतेषां बलं भीमाभिरक्षितम् ॥ 10 ॥**

*aparyāptam tadasmākam balam bhīṣhmābhiraṅkṣitam
paryāptam tvidameteṣhām balam bhīmabhiraṅkṣitam*

aparyāptam—unlimited; *tat*—that; *asmākam*—ours; *balam*—strength; *bhīṣhma*—by Grandsire Bheeshma; *abhirakṣhitam*—safely marshalled; *paryāptam*—limited; *tu*—but; *idam*—this; *eteṣhām*—their; *balam*—strength; *bhīma*—Bheem; *abhirakṣhitam*—carefully marshalled.

The strength of our army is unlimited and we are safely marshalled by Grandsire Bheeshma, while the strength of the Pandava army, carefully marshalled by Bheem, is limited.

Duryodhan's words of self-aggrandizement were the typical utterances of a vainglorious person. When their end draws near, instead of making a humble evaluation of the situation, self-aggrandizing people egotistically indulge in vainglory. This tragic irony of fate was reflected in the statement of Duryodhan, when he said that their strength, secured by Bheeshma, was unlimited.

Grandsire Bheeshma was the commander-in-chief of the Kaurava army. He had received the boon that he could choose his time of death, which made him practically invincible. On the Pandavas' side, the army was secured by Bheem, who was Duryodhan's sworn enemy. Thus, Duryodhan compared the strength of Bheeshma with the might of Bheem. Bheeshma, however, was the uncle of both the Kauravas and the Pandavas, and he was genuinely concerned about the welfare of both sides. His compassion for the Pandavas would prevent him from fighting the war wholeheartedly. Also, he knew that in this holy war, where Bhagavān Krishna himself was present, no power on earth could make the side of *adharma* win. And so, in order to honor his ethical commitment to the subjects of Hastinapur and the Kauravas, he chose to fight against the Pandavas. This decision underscores the enigmatic character of Bheeshma's personality.

अयनेषु च सर्वेषु यथाभागमवस्थिताः ।
भीष्ममेवाभिरक्षन्तु भवन्तः सर्व एव हि ॥ 11 ॥

*ayaneṣhu cha sarveṣhu yathā-bhāgamavasthitāḥ
bhīṣhmamevābhirakṣantu bhavantah sarva eva hi*

ayaneṣhu—at the strategic points; *cha*—also; *sarveṣhu*—all; *yathā-bhāgam*—in respective position; *avasthitāḥ*—situated; *bhīṣhmam*—to Grandsire Bheeshma; *eva*—only; *abhirakṣantu*—defend; *bhavantah*—you; *sarve*—all; *eva hi*—even as.

Therefore, I call upon all the generals of the Kaurava army now to give full support to Grandsire Bheeshma, even as you defend your respective

strategic points.

Duryodhan looked upon Bheeshma's unassailability as the inspiration and strength of his army. Thus, he asked his army generals to rally around Bheeshma, while defending their respective vantage points in the military phalanx.

तस्य सञ्जनयन्हर्षं कुरुवृद्धः पितामहः ।
सिंहनादं विनद्योच्चैः शङ्खं दध्मौ प्रतापवान् ॥ 12 ॥

*tasya sañjanayan harṣham kuru-vṛiddhaḥ pitāmahah
siṁha-nādām vinadyochochchaiḥ śaṅkham dadhmau pratāpavān*

tasya—his; *sañjanayan*—causing; *harṣham*—joy; *kuru-vṛiddhaḥ*—the grand old man of the Kuru dynasty (Bheeshma); *pitāmahah*—grandfather; *siṁha-nādam*—lion's roar; *vinadya*—sounding; *uchchaiḥ*—very loudly; *śaṅkham*—conch shell; *dadhmau*—blew; *pratāpa-vān*—the glorious.

Then, the grand old man of the Kuru dynasty, the glorious patriarch Bheeshma, roared like a lion, and blew his conch shell very loudly, giving joy to Duryodhan.

Grandsire Bheeshma understood the fear in his grand-nephew's heart, and out of his natural compassion for him, he tried to cheer him by blowing his conch shell very loudly. Although he knew that Duryodhan had no chance of victory due to the presence of the Supreme Bhagavān Shri Krishna on the other side, Bheeshma still let his nephew know that he would perform his duty to fight, and no pains would be spared in this connection. In the code of war at that time, this was the inauguration of the battle.

ततः शङ्खाश्च भेर्यश्च पणवानकगोमुखाः ।
सहसैवाभ्यहन्यन्त स शब्दस्तुमुलोऽभवत् ॥ 13 ॥

*tataḥ śaṅkhāścha bheryashcha paṇavānaka-gomukhāḥ
sahasaivābhyananyanta sa śabdastumulo 'bhavat*

tataḥ—thereafter; *śaṅkhāḥ*—conches; *cha*—and; *bheryāḥ*—bugles; *cha*—and; *paṇava-ānaka*—drums and kettledrums; *go-mukhāḥ*—trumpets; *sahasā*—suddenly; *eva*—indeed; *abhyahanyanta*—blared forth; *sah*—that; *śabdāḥ*—sound; *tumulah*—overwhelming; *abhavat*—was.

Thereafter, conches, kettledrums, bugles, trumpets, and horns suddenly blared forth, and their combined sound was overwhelming.

Seeing the great eagerness of Bheeshma for battle, the Kaurava army also became eager, and began creating a tumultuous sound. *Panav* means drums, *ānak* means kettledrums, and *go-mukh* means blowing horns. These are all musical instruments, and the sounds of all these combined together caused a great uproar.

ततः श्वेतैर्हयैर्युक्ते महति स्यन्दने स्थितौ ।
माधवः पाण्डवश्चैव दिव्यौ शङ्खौ प्रदध्मतुः ॥१४॥

*tataḥ śvetairhayairyukte mahati syandane sthitau
mādhavah pāṇḍavaśchaiva divyau śaṅkhau pradadhmatuḥ*

tataḥ—then; *śvetaih*—by white; *hayaiḥ*—horses; *yukte*—yoked; *mahati*—glorious; *syandane*—chariot; *sthitau*—seated; *mādhavah*—Shri Krishna, the husband of the goddess of fortune, Lakshmi; *pāṇḍavah*—Arjun; *cha*—and; *eva*—also; *divyau*—Divine; *śaṅkhau*—conch shells; *pradadhmatuḥ*—blew.

Then, from amidst the Pandava army, seated in a glorious chariot drawn by white horses, Madhav and Arjun blew their Divine conch shells.

After the sound from the Kaurava army had subsided, the Supreme Bhagavān Shri Krishna and Arjun, seated on a magnificent chariot, intrepidly blew their conch shells powerfully, igniting the Pandavas eagerness for battle as well.

Sanjay uses the name “Madhav” for Shri Krishna. *Mā* refers to the goddess of fortune; *dhav* means husband. Shri Krishna in his form as Bhagavān Vishnu is the husband of the goddess of fortune, Lakshmi. The verse indicates that the grace of the goddess of fortune was on the side of the Pandavas, and they would soon be victorious in the war to reclaim the kingdom.

Pandavas means sons of Pandu. Any of the five brothers may be referred to as Pandava. Here the word is being used for Arjun. The glorious chariot on which he was sitting had been gifted to him by Agni, the celestial deity of fire.

पाञ्चजन्यं हृषीकेशो देवदत्तं धनञ्जयः ।
पौण्ड्रं दध्मौ महाशङ्कं भीमकर्मा वृकोदरः ॥ 15 ॥

*pāñchajanyam hrīshīkeśho devadattam dhananjayah
paunḍram dadhmau mahā-śaṅkham bhīma-karmā vṛikodaraḥ*

pāñchajanyam—the conch shell named Panchajanya; *hrīshīka-iśhaḥ*—Shri Krishna, the Bhagavān of the mind and senses; *devadattam*—the conch shell named Devadutta; *dhanam-jayah*—Arjun, the winner of wealth; *paunḍram*—the conch named Paundra; *dadhmau*—blew; *mahā-śaṅkham*—mighty conch; *bhīma-karmā*—one who performs herculean tasks; *vṛika-udarah*—Bheem, the voracious eater.

Hrishikesh blew his conch shell, called Panchajanya, and Arjun blew the Devadutta. Bheem, the voracious eater and performer of herculean tasks, blew his mighty conch, called Paundra.

The word “Hrishikesh” means Bhagavān of the mind and senses, and has been used for Shri Krishna. He is the Supreme Master of everyone’s mind and senses, including his own. Even while performing amazing pastimes on the planet Earth, he maintained complete mastery over his own mind and senses.

अनन्तविजयं राजा कुन्तीपुत्रो युधिष्ठिरः ।
नकुलः सहदेवश्च सुघोषमणिपुष्पकौ ॥ 16 ॥
काश्यश्च परमेष्वासः शिखण्डी च महारथः ।
धृष्टद्युम्नो विराटश्च सात्यकिश्चापराजितः ॥ 17 ॥
द्रुपदो द्रौपदेयाश्च सर्वशः पृथिवीपते ।
सौभद्रश्च महाबाहुः शङ्कान्दध्मुः पृथक् पृथक् ॥ 18 ॥

*anantavijayam rājā kuntī-putro yudhiṣṭhirah
nakulah sahadevaśhcha sughoṣha-manipuṣhpakau
kāśhyaśhcha parameṣhvāsaḥ śikhaṇḍī cha mahā-rathaḥ
dhrīṣṭadyumno virāṭaśhcha sātyakiś chāparājitaḥ
drupado draupadeyāśhcha sarvaśhaḥ pṛithivī-pate
saubhadraśhcha mahā-bāhuḥ śaṅkhāndadhuṁ prithak prithak*

ananta-vijayam—the conch named Anantavijay; *rājā*—king; *kuntī-putrah*—son of Kunti; *yudhiṣṭhirah*—Yudhishtir; *nakulah*—Nakul; *sahadevah*—Sahadev; *cha*—and; *sughoṣha-*

maṇipuṣhpakau—the conche shells named Sughosh and Manipushpak; *kāśyah*—King of Kashi; *cha*—and; *parama-iṣhu-āsaḥ*—the excellent archer; *śikhaṇḍī*—Shikhandi; *cha*—also; *mahā-rathah*—warriors who could single handedly match the strength of ten thousand ordinary warriors; *dhrishtadyumnaḥ*—Dhrishtadyumna; *virātah*—Virat; *cha*—and; *sātyakiḥ*—Satyaki; *cha*—and; *aparājitaḥ*—invincible; *drupadaḥ*—Drupad; *draupadeyāḥ*—the five sons of Draupadi; *cha*—and; *svaśah*—all; *prithivī-pate*—Ruler of the earth; *saubhadraḥ*—Abhimanyu, the son of Subhadra; *cha*—also; *mahā-bāhuḥ*—the mighty-armed; *śaṅkhān*—conch shells; *dadhmuḥ*—blew; *prithak prithak*—individually.

King Yudhishthir, blew the Anantavijay, while Nakul and Sahadev blew the Sughosh and Manipushpak. The excellent archer and king of Kashi, the great warrior Shikhandi, Dhrishtadyumna, Virat, and the invincible Satyaki, Drupad, the five sons of Draupadi, and the mighty-armed Abhimanyu, son of Subhadra, all blew their respective conch shells, O Ruler of the earth.

Yudhisthir was the eldest of the Pandava brothers. Here, he is being called “King”; he had earned the right to that title after performing the *Rājasūya Yajña* and receiving tribute from all the other kings. Also, his bearing exuded royal grace and magnanimity, whether he was in the palace or in exile in the forest.

Dhritarashtra is being called “Ruler of the earth” by Sanjay. To preserve a country or engage it in a ruinous warfare is all in the hands of the ruler. So the hidden implication in the appellation is, “The armies are heading for war. O Ruler, Dhritarashtra, you alone can call them back. What are you going to decide?”

स घोषो धार्तराष्ट्राणां हृदयानि व्यदारयत् ।
नभश्च पृथिवीं चैव तुमुलो नुनादयन् ॥ 19 ॥

*sa ghoṣho dhārtarāṣṭrāṇām hṛidayāni vyadārayat
nabhaśch cha pṛithivīm chaiva tumulo nunādayan*

sah—that; *ghoṣhah*—sound; *dhārtarāṣṭrāṇām*—of Dhritarashtra's sons; *hṛidayāni*—hearts; *vyadārayat*—shattered; *nabhaḥ*—the sky; *cha*—and; *pṛithivīm*—the earth; *cha*—and; *eva*—certainly; *tumulah*—terrific sound; *abhyununādayan*—thundering.

The terrific sound thundered across the sky and the earth, and shattered the hearts of your sons, O Dhritarashtra.

The sound from the conch shells of the Pandava army shattered the hearts of the Kaurava army. However, no such effect on the Pandava army was mentioned when the Kaurava army blew on their conches. Since the Pandavas had taken the shelter of the Bhagavān, they were confident of being preserved. On the other hand, the Kauravas, relying on their own strength, and pricked by the guilty conscience of their crimes, became fearful of defeat.

अथ व्यवस्थितान्दृष्टा धार्तराष्ट्रान् कपिध्वजः ।
प्रवृत्ते शस्त्रसम्पाते धनुरुद्यम्य पाण्डवः ॥ २० ॥
हृषीकेशं तदा वाक्यमिदमाह महीपते ।

*atha vyavasthitān dṛiṣṭvā dhārtarāṣṭrān kapi-dhwajah
pravṛitte śastra-sampāte dhanurudyamya pāṇḍavah
hṛiṣhīkeśham tadā vākyam idam āha mahī-pate*

atha—thereupon; *vyavasthitān*—arrayed; *dṛiṣṭvā*—seeing; *dhārtarāṣṭrān*—Dhritarashtra's sons; *kapi-dhwajah*—the Monkey Bannered; *pravṛitte*—about to commence; *śastra-sampāte*—to use the weapons; *dhanuh*—bow; *udyamya*—taking up; *pāṇḍavah*—Arjun, the son of Pandu; *hṛiṣhīkeśham*—to Shri Krishna; *tadā*—at that time; *vākyam*—words; *idam*—these; *āha*—said; *mahī-pate*—King.

At that time, the son of Pandu, Arjun, who had the insignia of Hanuman on the flag of his chariot, took up his bow. Seeing your sons arrayed against him, O King, Arjun then spoke the following words to Shri Krishna.

Arjun is called by the name Kapi Dhwaj, denoting the presence of the powerful Hanuman on his chariot. There is a story behind this. Arjun once became proud of his skill in archery, and told Shri Krishna that he could not understand why, in the time of Bhagavān Ram, the monkeys labored so much to make the bridge from India to Lanka. Had he been there, he would have made a bridge of arrows. Shri Krishna asked him to Demonstrate. Arjun made

the bridge by releasing a shower of arrows. Shri Krishna called Hanuman to come and test the bridge. When the great Hanuman began walking on it, the bridge started crumbling. Arjun realized that his bridge of arrows would never have been able to uphold the weight of the vast army of Bhagavān Ram, and apologized for his mistake. Hanuman then taught Arjun the lesson to never become proud of his skills. He benevolently gave the boon to Arjun that he would sit on his chariot during the battle of Mahābhārat. Therefore, Arjun's chariot carried the insignia of Hanuman on its flag, from which he got the name "Kapi Dhwaj," or the "Monkey Bannered."

अर्जुन उवाच ।
 सेनयोरुभयोर्मध्ये रथं स्थापय मेऽच्युत ॥ २१ ॥
 यावदेतान्निरीक्षेऽहं योद्धुकामानवस्थितान् ।
 कैर्मया सह योद्धव्यमस्मिन् रणसमुद्यमे ॥ २२ ॥

*arjuna uvācha
 senayor ubhayor madhye ratham sthāpaya me 'chyuta
 yāvadetān nirīkṣhe 'ham yoddhu-kāmān avasthitān
 kairmayā saha yoddhavyam asmin rāṇa-samudyame*

arjunah uvācha—Arjun said; *senayoh*—armies; *ubhayoh*—both; *madhye*—in the middle; *ratham*—chariot; *sthāpaya*—place; *me*—my; *achyuta*—Shri Krishna, the infallible One; *yāvat*—as many as; *etān*—these; *nirīkṣhe*—look; *aham*—I; *yoddhu-kāmān*—for the battle; *avasthitān*—arrayed; *kaiḥ*—with whom; *mayā*—by me; *saha*—together; *yoddhavyam*—must fight; *asmin*—in this; *rāṇa-samudyame*—great combat.

Arjun said: O Infallible One, please take my chariot to the middle of both armies, so that I may look at the warriors arrayed for battle, whom I must fight in this great combat.

Arjun was a devotee of Shri Krishna, who is the Supreme Bhagavān of the entire creation. Yet, in this verse, Arjun instructed the Bhagavān to drive his chariot in to the desired place. This reveals the sweetness of Bhagavān's relationship with His devotees. Indebted by their love for him, the Bhagavān

becomes the servant of his devotees.

*ahaṁ bhakta-parādhīno hyasvatantra iva dvija
sādhubhir grasta-hṛidayo bhaktair bhakta-jana-priyah*
(*Bhāgavatam* 9.4.63)[v2]

“Although I am Supremely Independent, yet I become enslaved by my devotees. They are very dear to me, and I become indebted to them for their love.” Obliged by Arjun’s devotion, Shri Krishna took the position of the chariot driver, while Arjun sat comfortably on the passenger seat giving him instructions.

योत्यमानानवेक्षेऽहं य एतेऽत्र समागताः ।
धार्तराष्ट्रस्य दुर्बुद्धेर्युद्धे प्रियचिकीर्षवः ॥२३॥

*yotsyamānān avekṣhe 'ham ya ete 'tra samāgatāḥ
dhārtarāṣṭrasya durbuddher yuddhe priya-chikīrṣhavah*

yotsyamānān—those who have come to fight; *avekṣhe aham*—I desire to see; *ye*—who; *ete*—those; *atra*—here; *samāgatāḥ*—assembled; *dhārtarāṣṭrasya*—of Dhritarashtra’s son; *durbuddheḥ*—evil-minded; *yuddhe*—in the fight; *priya-chikīrṣhavah*—wishing to please.

I desire to see those who have come here to fight on the side of the evil-minded son of Dhritarashtra, wishing to please him.

The evil-minded sons of Dhritarashtra had usurped the kingdom, and so the warriors fighting from their side were also naturally ill-intentioned. Arjun desired to see those whom he would have to fight in this war. To begin with, Arjun was valiant and eager for the battle. Hence, he referred to the evil-minded sons of Dhritarashtra, conveying how Duryodhan had conspired several times for the destruction of the Pandavas. Arjun’s attitude was, “We are the lawful owners of half of the empire, but he wants to usurp it. He is evil-minded and these kings have assembled to help him, so they are also evil. I want to observe the warriors who are so impatient to wage war. They have favored injustice, and so they are sure to be destroyed by us.”

सञ्जय उवाच ।
एवमुक्तो हृषीकेशो गुडाकेशेन भारत ।
सेनयोरुभयोर्मध्ये स्थापयित्वा रथोत्तमम् ॥ 24 ॥

*sañjaya uvācha
evam ukto hṛiṣhīkeśho guḍākeśhena bhārata
senayor ubhayor madhye sthāpayitvā rathottamam*

sañjayaḥ uvācha—Sanjay said; *evam*—thus; *uktah*—addressed; *hṛiṣhīkeśhah*—Shri Krishna, the Bhagavān of the senses; *guḍākeśhena*—by Arjun, the conqueror of sleep; *bhārata*—descendant of Bharat; *senayoh*—armies; *ubhayoh*—the two; *madhye*—between; *sthāpayitvā*—having drawn; *ratha-uttamam*—magnificent chariot.

Sanjay said: O Dhritarashtra, having thus been addressed by Arjun, the conqueror of sleep, Shri Krishna then drew the magnificent chariot between the two armies.

भीष्मद्रोणप्रमुखतः सर्वेषां च महीक्षिताम् ।
उवाच पार्थं पश्यैतान्समवेतान्कुरुनिति ॥ 25 ॥

*bhiṣhma-droṇa-pramukhataḥ sarveṣhām cha mahī-kṣhitām
uvācha pārtha paśhyaitān samavetān kurūn iti*

bhiṣhma—Grandsire Bheeshma; *droṇa*—Dronacharya; *pramukhataḥ*—in the presence; *sarveṣhām*—all; *cha*—and; *mahī-kṣhitām*—other kings; *uvācha*—said; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *paśhya*—behold; *etān*—these; *samavetān*—gathered; *kurūn*—descendants of Kuru; *iti*—thus.

In the presence of Bheeshma, Dronacharya, and all the other kings, Bhagavān Krishna said: O Parth, behold these Kurus gathered here.

The word “Kuru” includes both the Kauravas and the Pandavas, because they both belong to the Kuru family. Shri Krishna deliberately uses this word to enthuse the feeling of kinship in Arjun and make him feel that they are all one. He wants the feeling of kinship to lead to attachment, which would confuse Arjun, and give Shri Krishna the opportunity to preach the gospel of the Bhagavad Gita for the benefit of the human beings of the forthcoming age of *Kali*. Thus, instead of using the word *dhārtarāshṭrān* (sons of Dhritarashtra), he

uses the word *kurūn* (descendants of Kuru). Just as a surgeon first gives medicine to a patient suffering from a boil, to suppurate it, and then performs surgery to remove the diseased part, the Bhagavān is working in the same way to first arouse the hidden delusion of Arjun, only to destroy it later.

तत्रापश्यतिथतान् पार्थः पितृनथं पितामहान् ।
आचार्यान्मातुलाभ्रातृन्युत्रान्यौत्रान्सखींस्तथा ॥ 26 ॥
श्वशुरान्सुहृदश्चैव सेनयोरुभयोरपि ।

*tatrāpaśyat sthitān pārthaḥ pitṛīn atha pitāmahān
āchāryān mātulān bhrātṛīn putrān paustrān sakhīns tathā
śvāśhurān suhṛidāśchaiva senayor ubhayor api*

tatra—there; *apaśhyat*—saw; *sthitān*—stationed; *pārthaḥ*—Arjun; *pitṛīn*—fathers; *atha*—thereafter; *pitāmahān*—grandfathers; *āchāryān*—teachers; *mātulān*—maternal uncles; *bhrātṛīn*—brothers; *putrān*—sons; *paustrān*—grandsons; *sakhīn*—friends; *tathā*—also; *śvāśhurān*—fathers-in-law; *suhṛidāḥ*—well-wishers; *cha*—and; *eva*—indeed; *senayoh*—armies; *ubhayoh*—in both armies; *api*—also.

There, Arjun could see stationed in both armies, his fathers, grandfathers, teachers, maternal uncles, brothers, cousins, sons, nephews, grand-nephews, friends, fathers-in-law, and well-wishers.

तान्समीक्ष्य स कौन्तेयः सर्वान्बन्धूनवस्थितान् ॥ 27 ॥
कृपया परयाविष्टो विषीदन्निदमब्रवीत् ।

*tān samīkṣhya sa kaunteyah sarvān bandhūn avasthitān
kripayā parayāviṣṭo viṣhīdann idam abravīt*

tān—these; *samīkṣhya*—on seeing; *sah*—they; *kaunteyah*—Arjun, the son of Kunti; *sarvān*—all; *bandhūn*—relatives; *avasthitān*—present; *kripayā*—by compassion; *parayā*—great; *āviṣṭah*—overwhelmed; *viṣhīdan*—deep sorrow; *idam*—this; *abravīt*—spoke.

Seeing all his relatives present there, Arjun, the son of Kunti, was overwhelmed with compassion, and with deep sorrow, spoke the following words.

The sight of his relatives in the battlefield brought for the first time to Arjun's

mind the realization of the consequences of this fratricidal war. The valiant warrior who had come for battle, mentally prepared for dispatching his enemies to the gates of death, to avenge the wrongs that had been committed to the Pandavas, suddenly had a change of heart. Seeing his fellow Kurus assembled in the enemy ranks, his heart sank, his intellect became confused, his bravery was replaced by cowardice toward his duty, and his stoutheartedness gave way to softheartedness. Hence, Sanjay calls him as the son of Kunti, his mother, referring to the softhearted and nurturing side of his nature.

अर्जुन उवाच ।
दृष्टेमं स्वजनं कृष्णा युयुत्सुं समुपस्थितम् ॥ २८ ॥
सीदन्ति मम गात्राणि मुखं च परिशुष्यति ।

*arjuna uvācha
dṛiṣṭvemam sva-janam kṛiṣṇa yuyutsum samupasthitam
sīdanti mama gātrāṇi mukham cha pariśuṣhyati*

arjunah uvācha—Arjun said; *dṛiṣṭvā*—on seeing; *imam*—these; *sva-janam*—kinsmen; *kṛiṣṇa*—Krishna; *yuyutsum*—eager to fight; *samupasthitam*—present; *sīdanti*—quivering; *mama*—my; *gātrāṇi*—limbs; *mukham*—mouth; *cha*—and; *pariśuṣhyati*—is drying up.

Arjun said: O Krishna, seeing my own kinsmen arrayed for battle here and intent on killing each other, my limbs are giving way and my mouth is drying up.

Affection can be either a material or a spiritual sentiment. Attachment for one's relatives is a material emotion arising from the bodily concept of life. Thinking oneself to be the body, one gets attached to the relatives of the body. This attachment is based on ignorance, and drags one further into materialistic consciousness. Ultimately, such attachment ends in pain, for with the end of the body, the familial relationships end too. On the other hand, the Supreme Bhagavān is the Father, Mother, Friend, Master, and Beloved of our Ātman. Consequently, attachment to him is a spiritual sentiment, at the platform of

the Ātman, which elevates the consciousness and illumines the intellect. Love for Bhagavān is oceanic and all-encompassing in its scope, while love for bodily relations is narrow and differentiating. Here, Arjun was experiencing material attachment, which was drowning his mind in an ocean of gloom, and making him tremble at the thought of doing his duty.

वेपथुश्च शरीरे मे रोमहर्षश्च जायते ॥ २९ ॥
गाण्डीवं स्रंसते हस्तात्त्वकचै व परिदह्यते ।
न च शक्नोम्यवस्थातुं भ्रमतीव च मे मनः ॥ ३० ॥
निमित्तानि च पश्यामि विपरीतानि केशव ।
न च श्रेयोऽनुपश्यामि हत्वा स्वजनमाहवे ॥ ३१ ॥

*vepathuś cha śarīre me roma-harṣhaś cha jāyate
gāṇḍīvaṁ sraṁsate hastāt tvak chaiva paridahyate
na cha śaknomy avasthātum bhramatīva cha me manah
nimittāni cha paśhyāmi viparītāni keśhava
na cha śreyo 'nupaśhyāmi hatvā sva-janam āhave*

vepathuh—shuddering; *cha*—and; *śarīre*—on the body; *me*—my; *roma-harṣhaḥ*—standing of bodily hair on end; *cha*—also; *jāyate*—is happening; *gāṇḍīvam*—Arjun's bow; *sraṁsate*—is slipping; *hastāt*—from (my) hand; *tvak*—skin; *cha*—and; *eva*—indeed; *paridahyate*—is burning all over; *na*—not; *cha*—and; *śaknomi*—am able; *avasthātum*—remain steady; *bhramati iva*—whirling like; *cha*—and; *me*—my; *manah*—mind; *nimittāni*—omens; *cha*—and; *paśhyāmi*—I see; *viparītāni*—misfortune; *keśhava*—Shri Krishna, killer of the Keshi demon; *na*—not; *cha*—also; *śreyah*—good; *anupaśhyāmi*—I foresee; *hatvā*—from killing; *sva-janam*—kinsmen; *āhave*—in battle.

My whole body shudders; my hair is standing on end. My bow, the *Gāṇḍīv*, is slipping from my hand, and my skin is burning all over. My mind is in quandary and whirling in confusion; I am unable to hold myself steady any longer. O Krishna, killer of the Keshi demon, I only see omens of misfortune. I do not foresee how any good can come from killing my own kinsmen in this battle.

As Arjun thought of the consequences of the war, he grew worried and sad. The same *Gāṇḍīv* bow, the sound of which had terrified powerful enemies,

began dropping from his hand. His mind was reeling, thinking it was a sin to wage the war. In this unsteadiness of mind, he even descended to the level of accepting superstitious omens portending disastrous failures and imminent consequences.

न काङ्क्षे विजयं कृष्ण न च राज्यं सुखानि च ।
किं नो राज्येन गोविन्द किं भोगैर्जीवितेन वा ॥ 32 ॥

येषामर्थे काङ्क्षतं नो राज्यं भोगाः सुखानि च ।
त इमेऽवस्थिता युद्धे प्राणांस्त्यक्त्वा धनानि च ॥ 33 ॥

*na kāṅkṣhe vijayam kṛiṣhṇa na cha rājyam sukhāni cha
kim no rājyena govinda kim bhogair jīvitena vā*

*yeshām arthe kāṅkṣhitam no rājyam bhogāḥ sukhāni cha
ta ime 'vasthitā yuddhe prāṇāṁs tyaktvā dhanāni cha*

na—nor; *kāṅkṣhe*—do I desire; *vijayam*—victory; *kṛiṣhṇa*—Krishna; *na*—nor; *cha*—as well; *rājyam*—kingdom; *sukhāni*—happiness; *cha*—also; *kim*—what; *nah*—to us; *rājyena*—by kingdom; *govinda*—Krishna, he who gives pleasure to the senses, he who is fond of cows; *kim*—what?; *bhogaiḥ*—pleasures; *jīvitena*—life; *vā*—or; *yeshām*—for whose; *arthe*—sake; *kāṅkṣhitam*—coveted for; *nah*—by us; *rājyam*—kingdom; *bhogāḥ*—pleasures; *sukhāni*—happiness; *cha*—also; *te*—they; *ime*—these; *avasthitāḥ*—stan; *yuddhe*—for battle; *prāṇān*—lives; *tyaktvā*—giving up; *dhanāni*—wealth; *cha*—also.

O Krishna, I do not desire the victory, kingdom, or the happiness accruing it. Of what avail will be a kingdom, pleasures, or even life itself, when the very persons for whom we covet them, are standing before us for battle?

Arjun's confusion arose from the fact that killing itself was considered a sinful act; then to kill one's relatives seemed an even more grossly evil act. Even if he did engage in such a heartless act for the sake of the kingdom, Arjun felt that victory would not give him eventual happiness. He would be unable to share its glory with his friends and relatives, whom he would have to kill to achieve this victory.

Here, Arjun is displaying a lower set of sensibilities, and confusing them for noble ones. Indifference to worldly possessions and material prosperity is a

praiseworthy spiritual virtue, but Arjun is not experiencing spiritual sentiments. Rather, his delusion is masquerading as words of compassion. Virtuous sentiments bring internal harmony, satisfaction, and the joy of the Ātman. If Arjun's compassion was at the transcendental platform, he would have been elevated by the sentiment. But his experience is quite to the contrary —he is feeling discord in his mind and intellect, dissatisfaction with the task at hand, and deep unhappiness within. The effect of the sentiment upon him indicates that his compassion is stemming from delusion.

आचार्याः पितरः पुत्रास्तथैव च पितामहाः ।
मातुलाः श्वशुराः पौत्राः श्यालाः सम्बन्धिनस्तथा ॥३४॥

एतान्न हन्तुमिच्छामि ज्ञतोऽपि मधुसूदन ।
अपि त्रैलोक्यराज्यस्य हेतोः किं नु महीकृते ॥३५॥

*āchāryāḥ pitaraḥ putrāḥ tathaiva cha pitāmahāḥ
mātulāḥ śvaśurāḥ pauṭrāḥ śyālāḥ sambandhināḥ tathā
etān na hantum ichchhāmi ghnato 'pi madhusūdana
api trai-lokya-rājyasya hetoḥ kim nu mahī-krite*

āchāryāḥ—teachers; *pitaraḥ*—fathers; *putrāḥ*—sons; *tathā*—as well; *eva*—indeed; *cha*—also; *pitāmahāḥ*—grandfathers; *mātulāḥ*—maternal uncles; *śvaśurāḥ*—fathers-in-law; *pauṭrāḥ*—grandsons; *śyālāḥ*—brothers-in-law; *sambandhināḥ*—kinsmen; *tathā*—as well; *etān*—these; *na*—not; *hantum*—to slay; *ichchhāmi*—I wish; *ghnataḥ*—killed; *api*—even though; *madhusūdana*—Shri Krishna, killer of the Demon Madhu; *api*—even though; *trai-lokya-rājyasya*—dominion over three worlds; *hetoḥ*—for the sake of; *kim nu*—what to speak of; *mahī-krite*—for the earth.

Teachers, fathers, sons, grandfathers, maternal uncles, grandsons, fathers-in-law, grand-nephews, brothers-in-law, and other kinsmen are present here, staking their lives and riches. O Madhusudan, I do not wish to slay them, even if they attack me. If we kill the sons of Dhritarashtra, O Janardan, what satisfaction will we derive from the dominion over the three worlds, what to speak of this Earth?

Dronacharya and Kripacharya were Arjun's teachers; Bheeshma and Somadatta were his grand-uncles; people like Bhurishrava (son of Somdatta) were like his

father; Purujit, Kuntibhoj, Shalya, and Shakuni were his maternal uncles; the hundred sons of Dhritarashtra were his cousin brothers; Lakshman (Duryodhan's son) was like his child. Arjun refers to all the varieties of his relatives present on the battlefield. He uses the word *api* (which means “even though”) twice. Firstly, “Why should they wish to kill me, even though I am their relative and well-wisher?” Secondly, “Even though they may desire to slay me, why should I wish to slay them?”

निहत्य धार्तराष्ट्रान्: का प्रीतिः स्याजनार्दन ।
पापमेवाश्रयेदस्मान्हत्वैतानाततायिनः ॥ ३६ ॥
तस्मान्नार्हं वयं हन्तुं धार्तराष्ट्रान्स्वबान्धवान् ।
स्वजनं हि कथं हत्वा सुखिनः स्याम माधव ॥ ३७ ॥

*nihatya dhārtarāṣṭrān naḥ kā prītiḥ syāj janārdana
pāpam evāśhrayed asmān hatvaitān ātatāyināḥ
tasmān nārhā vayam hantum dhārtarāṣṭrān sa-bāndhavān
sva-janam hi katham hatvā sukhināḥ syāma mādhava*

nihatya—by killing; *dhārtarāṣṭrān*—the sons of Dhritarashtra; *naḥ*—our; *kā*—what; *prītiḥ*—pleasure; *syāt*—will there be; *janārdana*—he who looks after the public, Shri Krishna; *pāpam*—vices; *eva*—certainly; *āśhrayet*—must come upon; *asmān*—us; *hatvā*—by killing; *etān*—all these; *ātatāyināḥ*—aggressors; *tasmāt*—hence; *na*—never; *arhāḥ*—behoove; *vayam*—we; *hantum*—to kill; *dhārtarāṣṭrān*—the sons of Dhritarashtra; *sa-bāndhavān*—along with friends; *sva-janam*—kinsmen; *hi*—certainly; *katham*—how; *hatvā*—by killing; *sukhināḥ*—happy; *syāma*—will we become; *mādhava*—Shri Krishna, the husband of *YogMāyā*.

O Maintainer of all living entities, what pleasure will we derive from killing the sons of Dhritarashtra? Even though they may be aggressors, sin will certainly come upon us if we slay them. Hence, it does not behoove us to kill our own cousins, the sons of Dhritarashtra, and friends. O Madhav (Krishna), how can we hope to be happy by killing our own kinsmen?

Having said “even though” twice in the last verse to justify his intention not to slay his relatives, Arjun again says, “Even though I were to kill them, what pleasure would I derive from such a victory?”

Fighting and killing is in most situations an ungodly act that brings with it feelings of repentance and guilt. The Vedas state that non-violence is a great virtue, and except in the extreme cases violence is a sin: *mā hinsyāt sarvā bhūtāni* [v3] “Do not kill any living being.” Here, Arjun does not wish to kill his relatives, for he considers it to be a sin. However, the Vasiṣṭha Smṛiti (verse 3.19) states that there are six kinds of aggressors against whom we have the right to defend ourselves: those who set fire to one’s property, those who poison one’s food, those who seek to murder, those who wish to loot wealth, those who come to kidnap one’s wife, and those who usurp one’s kingdom. The Manu Smṛiti (8.351) states that if one kills such an aggressor in self-defense, it is not considered a sin.

यद्यप्येते न पश्यन्ति लोभोपहतचेतसः ।
 कुलक्षयकृतं दोषं मित्रद्रोहे च पातकम् ॥ 38 ॥
 कथं न ज्ञेयमस्माभिः पापादस्मान्निवर्तितुम् ।
 कुलक्षयकृतं दोषं प्रपश्यद्विर्जनार्दन ॥ 39 ॥

*yady apy ete na paśyanti lobhopahata-chetasah
 kula-kṣhaya-kritam doṣam mitra-drohe cha pātakam
 katham na jñeyam asmābhiḥ pāpād asmān nivartitum
 kula-kṣhaya-kritam doṣam prapaśhyadbhir janārdana*

yadi api—even though; *ete*—they; *na*—not; *paśyanti*—see; *lobha*—greed; *upahata*—overpowered; *chetasah*—thoughts; *kula-kṣhaya-kritam*—in annihilating their relatives; *doṣam*—fault; *mitra-drohe*—to wreak treachery upon friends; *cha*—and; *pātakam*—sin; *katham*—why; *na*—not; *jñeyam*—should be known; *asmābhiḥ*—we; *pāpāt*—from sin; *asmāt*—these; *nivartitum*—to turn away; *kula-kṣhaya*—killing the kindred; *kritam*—done; *doṣam*—crime; *prapaśhyadbhiḥ*—who can see; *janārdana*—he who looks after the public, Shri Krishna.

Their thoughts are overpowered by greed and they see no wrong in annihilating their relatives or wreaking treachery upon friends. Yet, O Janardan (Krishna), why should we, who can clearly see the crime in killing our kindred, not turn away from this sin?

Although a warrior by occupation, Arjun abhorred unnecessary violence. An

incident at the end of the battle of Mahābhārat reveals this side of his character. The hundred Kauravas had been killed, but in revenge, Ashwatthama, son of Dronacharya, crept into the Pandava camp at night and killed the five sons of Draupadi while they were sleeping. Arjun caught Ashwatthama, tied him like an animal, and brought him to the feet of Draupadi, who was crying. However, being soft-hearted and forgiving, she said that because Ashwatthama was the son of their Guru, Dronacharya, he should be forgiven. Bheem, on the other hand, wanted Ashwatthama to be killed immediately. In a dilemma, Arjun looked for a solution toward Shri Krishna, who said, “A respect-worthy Brahmin must be forgiven even if he may have temporarily fallen from virtue. But a person who approaches to kill with a lethal weapon must certainly be punished.” Arjun understood Shri Krishna’s equivocal instructions. He did not kill Ashwatthama; instead he cut the Brahmin tuft behind his head, removed the jewel from his forehead, and expelled him from the camp. So, Arjun’s very nature is to shun violence wherever possible. In this particular situation, he says that he knows it is improper to kill kindred and elders:

*ritvikpurohitāchāryair mātulātithisanshritaiḥ
bālavṛiddhāturaivaidyair jñātisambandhibāndhavaiḥ*
(*Manu Smṛiti* 4.179) [v4]

“One should not quarrel with the Brahmin who performs the fire sacrifice, the family priest, teacher, maternal uncle, guest, those who are dependent upon one, children, elders, and relatives.” Arjun thus concluded that being overpowered by greed, the Kauravas might have deviated from propriety and had lost their discrimination, but why should he, who did not have any sinful motive, engage in such an abominable act?

कुलक्षये प्रणश्यन्ति कुलधर्माः सनातनाः ।
धर्मे नष्टे कुलं कृत्स्नमधर्मोऽभिभवत्युत ॥ 40 ॥

*kula-kṣhayे pravaśhyanti kula-dharmāḥ sanātanāḥ
dharme naśte kulaṁ kṛitsnam adharmo 'bhībhavaty uta*

kula-kṣhayē—in the destruction of a dynasty; *pravaśhyanti*—are vanquished; *kula-dharmāḥ*—family traditions; *sanātanāḥ*—eternal; *dharme*—religion; *naśte*—is destroyed; *kulaṁ*—family; *kṛitsnam*—the whole; *adharmah*—irreligion; *abhibhavati*—overcome; *uta*—indeed.

When a dynasty is destroyed, its traditions get vanquished, and the rest of the family becomes involved in irreligion.

Families have age-old traditions and time-honored customs, in accordance with which, elders in the family pass on noble values and ideals to their next generation. These traditions help family members follow human values and religious propriety. If the elders die prematurely, their succeeding generations become bereft of family guidance and training. Arjun points this out by saying that when dynasties get destroyed, their traditions die with them, and the remaining members of the family develop irreligious and wanton habits, thereby losing their chance for spiritual emancipation. Thus according to him, the elders of the family should never be slain.

**अथर्माभिभवात्कृष्ण प्रदुष्यन्ति कुलस्त्रियः ।
स्त्रीषु दुष्टासु वार्ष्णेय जायते वर्णसङ्करः ॥ 41 ॥**

*adharma-bhībhavāt kṛiṣṇa praduṣhyanti kula-striyāḥ
striṣhu duṣṭāsu vārṣhneya jāyate varṇa-saṅkaraḥ*

adharma—irreligion; *abhibhavāt*—preponderance; *kṛiṣṇa*—Shri Krishna; *praduṣhyanti*—become immoral; *kula-striyāḥ*—women of the family; *striṣhu*—of women; *duṣṭāsu*—become immoral; *vārṣhneya*—descendant of Vrishni; *jāyate*—are born; *varṇa-saṅkaraḥ*—unwanted progeny.

With the preponderance of vice, O Krishna, the women of the family become immoral; and from the immorality of women, O descendent of Vrishni, unwanted progeny are born.

The Vedic civilization accorded a very high place in society to women, and laid great importance on the need for women to be virtuous. Hence, the *Manu Smṛiti* states: *yatra nāryas tu pūjyante ramante tatra devatāḥ* (3.56) [v5] “Wherever

women lead chaste and virtuous lives, and for their purity they are worshipped by the rest of society, there the celestial deities become joyous.” However, when women become immoral, then irresponsible men take advantage by indulging in adultery, and thus unwanted children are born.

सङ्करो नरकायैव कुलघ्नानां कुलस्य च ।
पतन्ति पितरो ह्येषां लुप्तपिण्डोदकक्रियाः ॥ 42 ॥

*saṅkaro narakāyaiva kula-ghnānām kulasya cha
patanti pitarohy eṣhām lupta-piṇḍodaka-kriyāḥ*

saṅkarah—unwanted children; *narakāya*—hellish; *eva*—indeed; *kula-ghnānām*—for those who destroy the family; *kulasya*—of the family; *and*—also; *patanti*—fall; *pitaraḥ*—ancestors; *hi*—verily; *eṣhām*—their; *lupta*—deprived of; *piṇḍodaka-kriyāḥ*—performances of sacrificial offereings.

An increase in unwanted children results in hellish life both for the family and for those who destroy the family. Deprived of the sacrificial offerings, the ancestors of such corrupt families also fall.

दोषैरेतैः कुलघ्नानां वर्णसङ्करकारकैः ।
उत्साद्यन्ते जातिधर्माः कुलधर्मश्च शाश्वताः ॥ 43 ॥

*doṣhair etaih kula-ghnānām varṇa-saṅkara-kārakaih
utsādyante jāti-dharmāḥ kula-dharmāś cha śāśvataḥ*

doṣhaiḥ—through evil deeds; *etaih*—these; *kula-ghnānām*—of those who destroy the family; *varṇa-saṅkara*—unwanted progeny; *kārakaiḥ*—causing; *utsādyante*—are ruined; *jāti-dharmāḥ*—social and family welfare activities; *kula-dharmāḥ*—family traditions; *cha*—and; *śāśvataḥ*—eternal.

Through the evil deeds of those who destroy the family tradition and thus give rise to unwanted progeny, a variety of social and family welfare activities are ruined.

उत्सन्नकुलधर्मणां मनुष्याणां जनार्दनं ।
नरकेऽनियतं वासो भवतीत्यनुशुश्रुम ॥ 44 ॥

*utsanna-kula-dharmāṇām manuṣhyāṇām janārdana
narake 'niyatam vāso bhavatītyanuśhuśruma*

utsanna—destroyed; *kula-dharmāṇām*—whose family traditions; *manuṣhyāṇām*—of such human

beings; *janārdana*—he who looks after the public, Shri Krishna; *narake*—in hell; *aniyatam*—indefinite; *vāsah*—dwell; *bhavati*—is; *iti*—thus; *anuśhuśhruma*—I have heard from the learned.

O Janardan (Krishna), I have heard from the learned that those who destroy family traditions dwell in Naraka for an indefinite period of time.

अहो बत महत्पापं कर्तुं व्यवसिता वयम् ।
यद्राज्यसुखलोभेन हन्तुं स्वजनमुद्यताः ॥४५॥

यदि मामप्रतीकारमशस्त्रं शस्त्रपाणयः ।
धार्तराष्ट्रा रणे हन्युस्तन्मे क्षेमतरं भवेत् ॥४६॥

*aho bata mahat pāpam kartum vyavasitā vayam
yad rājya-sukha-lobhena hantum sva-janam udyatāḥ*

*yadi mām apratīkāram aśhastram śhastra-pānayah
dhārtarāṣṭrā rane hanyuḥ tan me kṣhemataram bhavet*

aho—alas; *bata*—how; *mahat*—great; *pāpam*—sins; *kartum*—to perform; *vyavasitāḥ*—have decided; *vayam*—we; *yat*—because; *rājya-sukha-lobhena*—driven by the desire for kingly pleasure; *hantum*—to kill; *sva-janam*—kinsmen; *udyatāḥ*—intending; *yadi*—if; *mām*—me; *apratīkāram*—unresisting; *aśhastram*—unarmed; *śhastra-pānayah*—those with weapons in hand; *dhārtarāṣṭrāḥ*—the sons of Dhritarashtra; *rāne*—on the battlefield; *hanyuḥ*—shall kill; *tat*—that; *me*—to me; *kṣhemataram*—better; *bhavet*—would be.

Alas! How strange it is that we have set our mind to perform this great sin. Driven by the desire for kingly pleasures, we are intent on killing our own kinsmen. It will be better if, with weapons in hand, the sons of Dhritarashtra kill me unarmed and unresisting on the battlefield.

Arjun mentioned a number of evils that would come from the impending battle, but he was not able to see that evil would actually prevail if these wicked people were allowed to thrive in society. He uses the word *aho* to express surprise. The word *bata* means “horrible results”. Arjun is saying, “How surprising it is that we have decided to commit sin by engaging in this war, even though we know of its horrifying consequences.”

As often happens, people are unable to see their own mistakes and instead

attribute them to situations and to others. Similarly, Arjun felt that the sons of Dhritarashtra were motivated by greed, but he could not see that his outpouring of compassion was not a transcendental sentiment, but materialistic infatuation based on the ignorance of being the body. The problem with all of Arjun's arguments was that he was using them to justify his delusion that had been created from his bodily attachment, weakness of heart, and dereliction of duty. Shri Krishna explains the reasons why Arjun's arguments were defective in subsequent chapters.

सञ्जय उवाच ।
एवमुक्त्वार्जुनः सङ्ख्ये रथोपस्थ उपाविशत् ।
विसृज्य सशरं चापं शोकसंविग्नमानसः ॥४७॥

sañjaya uvācha

*evam uktvārjunaḥ saṅkhye rathopastha upāviśhat
visṛijya sa-śaram chāpam śoka-samvigna-mānasah*

sañjayaḥ uvācha—Sanjay said; *evam uktvā*—speaking thus; *arjunah*—Arjun; *saṅkhye*—in the battlefield; *ratha upasthe*—on the chariot; *upāviśhat*—sat; *visṛijya*—casting aside; *sa-śaram*—along with arrows; *chāpam*—the bow; *śoka*—with grief; *saṁvigna*—distressed; *mānasah*—mind.

Sanjay said: Speaking thus, Arjun cast aside his bow and arrows, and sank into the seat of his chariot, his mind in distress and overwhelmed with grief.

Often while speaking, a person gets carried away by the sentiments, and so Arjun's despondency, which he began expressing in verse 1.28, has now reached a climax. He has given up the struggle to engage in his *dhārmic* duty in desperate resignation, which is entirely opposite to the state of self-surrender to Bhagavān in knowledge and devotion. It is appropriate to clarify at this point that Arjun was not a novice bereft of spiritual knowledge. He had been to the celestial abodes and had received instructions from his father Indra, the king of Swarga Loka. In fact, he was Nar in his past life and hence situated in transcendental knowledge (Nar-Narayan were twin descensions, where Nar was

a perfected Ātman and Narayan was the Supreme Bhagavān). The proof of this was the fact that before the battle of Mahābhārat, Arjun chose Shri Krishna on his side, leaving the entire Yadu army for Duryodhan. He possessed the firm conviction that if the Bhagavān was on his side he would never lose. However, Shri Krishna desired to speak the message of the Bhagavad Gita for the benefit of posterity, and so at the opportune moment he deliberately created confusion in Arjun's mind.



Chapter 2

Sāṅkhyā Yog ~ सांख्ययोगः

The Yog of Analytical Knowledge

In this chapter, Arjun reiterates his utter inability to cope with the situation he finds himself in, and refuses to perform his duty in the impending battle. He then formally asks Shri Krishna to be his spiritual teacher, and beseeches him for guidance on the proper path of action in the situation he finds himself in. The Supreme Bhagavān begins imparting him divine knowledge by teaching him about the immortal nature of the self, which is not destroyed when the body is destroyed. It merely changes bodies from lifetime to lifetime, just as a person puts on new garments and discards the old ones. Shri Krishna then moves on to the topic of social responsibilities. He reminds Arjun of his duty as a warrior, which is to fight for upholding righteousness. He explains that the performance of one's social duty is a virtuous act that will open to him the stairway to the celestial abodes, while dereliction of duty will only bring him humiliation and infamy.

Having motivated Arjun from the mundane level, Shri Krishna moves deeper into the science of work. He asks Arjun to work without attachment to the fruits of his actions. He terms the science of working without desire for rewards as *buddhi yog*, or yog of the intellect. The intellect must be used to

restrain the mental yearning for the rewards of work. By acting in such consciousness, bondage-creating karmas will be transformed into bondage-breaking karmas, and Arjun will attain the state beyond sorrows.

Arjun enquires about the symptoms of those who are situated in divine consciousness. In response, Shri Krishna describes how persons situated in transcendence are free from attachment, fear, and anger; they are equipoised and undisturbed in all situations; their senses are subdued; and their minds are ever absorbed in Bhagavān. He also gives a step-by-step explanation of how the afflictions of the mind—lust, anger, greed, etc.—develop, and how they may be eradicated.

सञ्जय उवाच ।
तं तथा कृपयाविष्टमश्रुपूर्णाकुलेक्षणम् ।
विषीदन्तमिदं वाक्यमुवाच मधुसूदनः ॥ १ ॥

*sañjaya uvācha
tam tathā kripayāviṣṭamaśru pūrṇākulekṣhaṇam
viṣhīdantamidam vākyam uvācha madhusūdanah*

sañjayah uvācha—Sanjay said; *tam*—to him (Arjun); *tathā*—thus; *kripayā*—with pity; *āviṣṭam*—overwhelmed; *aśru-pūrṇa*—full of tears; *ākula*—distressed; *īkṣhaṇam*—eyes; *viṣhīdantam*—grief-stricken; *idam*—these; *vākyam*—words; *uvācha*—said; *madhusūdanah*—Shri Krishn, slayer of the Madhu demon.

Sanjay said: Seeing Arjun overwhelmed with pity, his mind grief-stricken, and his eyes full of tears, Shri Krishna spoke the following words.

To describe Arjun's feelings, Sanjay uses the word *kripayā*, meaning pity or compassion. This compassion is of two kinds. One is the divine compassion that Bhagavān and the Saints feel toward the Ātman(s) in the material realm, on seeing their suffering in separation to Bhagavān. The other is the material compassion that we feel upon seeing the bodily distress of others. Material compassion is a noble sentiment that is not perfectly directed. It is like being obsessed with the health of the car while the driver sitting within is famished

for food. Arjun is experiencing this second kind of sentiment. He is overwhelmed with material pity toward his enemies gathered for battle. The fact that Arjun is overcome by grief and despair shows that he is himself in dire need of compassion. Therefore, the idea of his being merciful upon others is meaningless.

In this verse, Shri Krishna is addressed as “Madhusudan.” He had slayed the Demon Madhu, and hence gotten the name Madhusudan, or “slayer of the Madhu demon.” Here, he is about to slay the Demon of doubt that has arisen in Arjun’s mind and is preventing him from discharging his duty.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
कुतस्त्वा कश्मलमिदं विषमे समुपस्थितम् ।
अनार्यजुष्टमस्वर्ग्यमकीर्तिकरमर्जुन ॥२॥

*śhrī bhagavān uvācha
kutastvā kaśmalamidam viṣhame samupasthitam
anārya-juṣṭamaswargyam akīrti-karam arjuna*

śhrī-bhagavān uvācha—Bhagavān Krishna said; *kutah*—wherfrom; *tvā*—to you; *kaśmala*m—delusion; *idam*—this; *viṣhame*—in this hour of peril; *samupasthitam*—overcome; *anārya*—crude person; *juṣṭam*—practiced; *aswargyam*—which does not lead to the higher abodes; *akīrti-karam*—leading to disgrace; *arjuna*—Arjun.

Bhagavān Krishna said: My dear Arjun, how has this delusion overcome you in this hour of peril? It is not befitting an honorable person. It leads not to the higher abodes, but to disgrace.

The word *Ārya* in our sacred books does not refer to any race or ethnic group. The Manu Smṛiti defines an Aryan as a highly evolved and cultured person. “Aryan” connotes goodness, like the term “perfect gentleman.” The aim of the Vedic scriptures is to induce humans to become Aryans in all respects. Shri Krishna finds Arjun’s present condition in conflict with that ideal, and so reprimands him by calling attention to his confusion in how to live up to this ideal state of being under the current circumstances.

The Bhagavad Gita, or “Song of God,” effectively begins from here because Shri Krishna, who was quiet until now, starts speaking in this verse. The Supreme Bhagavān first begins by inducing in Arjun a hunger for knowledge. He does this by pointing out that his state of confusion is dishonorable and inappropriate for virtuous persons. He then goes on to remind Arjun of the consequences of delusion, which are pain, infamy, failure in life, and degradation of the Ātman.

Rather than comforting him, Shri Krishna is making Arjun uncomfortable about his current state. We all feel uncomfortable when we are confused because it is not the natural condition of the Ātman. That feeling of discontentment, if properly channeled, can become a powerful impetus to search for true knowledge. The suitable resolution of doubt helps a person acquire a deeper understanding than before. Thus, Bhagavān sometimes deliberately puts a person in turmoil, so that he or she may be forced to search for knowledge to remove the confusion. And when the doubt is finally resolved, that person reaches a higher level of understanding.

क्लैब्यं मा स्म गमः पार्थ नैतत्त्वव्युपपद्यते ।
क्षुद्रं हृदयदौर्बल्यं त्यक्त्वोत्तिष्ठ परन्तप ॥३॥

*klaibyam mā sma gamah pārtha naitat tvayyupapadyate
kṣhudram hṛidaya-daurbalyam tyaktvottishtha parantapa*

klaibyam—unmanliness; *mā sma*—do not; *gamah*—yield to; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *na*—not; *etat*—this; *tvayi*—to you; *upapadyate*—befitting; *kṣhudram*—petty; *hṛidaya*—heart; *daurbalyam*—weakness; *tyaktvā*—giving up; *uttishtha*—arise; *param-tapa*—conqueror of enemies.

O Parth, it does not befit you to yield to this unmanliness. Give up such petty weakness of heart and arise, O vanquisher of enemies.

Successfully treading the path of enlightenment requires high spirits and morale. One needs to be optimistic, enthusiastic, and energetic to overcome the negativities of the material mind, such as sloth, the rut of habit, ignorance,

and attachment. Shri Krishna is a skillful teacher, and thus having reprimanded Arjun, he now enhances Arjun's internal strength to tackle the situation by encouraging him.

By addressing Arjun as the son of Pritha (another name for Kunti), Shri Krishna invokes him to remember his mother Kunti. She had worshipped Indra, the chief of the celestial deities, and with his blessings Arjun was born. Hence, he was endowed with extraordinary might and valor, similar to that of Indra. Shri Krishna is reminding him of this, encouraging him not to yield to this impotence, which does not befit his illustrious parentage. Again, he addresses Arjun as *Parantapa*, or conqueror of enemies, indicating to him to vanquish the enemy that has arisen within him, namely, the desire for dereliction of his dutiful action as a Kshatriya, or warrior class prince.

Shri Krishna goes on to explain that the way he is feeling is neither moral duty nor true compassion; rather, it is lamentation and delusion. It has its roots in weakness of mind. If his behavior was truly based on wisdom and mercy, then he would experience neither confusion nor grief.

अर्जुन उवाच ।
कथं भीष्ममहं सङ्ख्ये द्रोणं च मधुसूदनं ।
इषुभिः प्रतियोत्स्यामि पूजार्हवरिसूदनं ॥४॥

arjuna uvācha

*katham bhīṣhmam aham sankhye dronam cha madhusūdana
iṣhubhiḥ pratiyotsyāmi pūjār̥hāvari-sūdana*

arjunaḥ uvācha—Arjun said; *katham*—how; *bhīṣhmam*—Bheeshma; *aham*—I; *sankhye*—in battle; *dronam*—Dronacharya; *cha*—and; *madhu-sūdana*—Shri Krishn, slayer of the Madhu demon; *iṣhubhiḥ*—with arrows; *pratiyotsyāmi*—shall I shoot; *pūjār̥hau*—worthy of worship; *ari-sūdana*—destroyer of enemies.

Arjun said: O Madhusudan, how can I shoot arrows in battle on men like Bheeshma and Dronacharya, who are worthy of my worship, O destroyer of enemies?

In response to Shri Krishna's call for action, Arjun presents his confusion. He states that Bheeshma and Dronacharya are worthy of his respect and adoration. Bheeshma was the embodiment of chastity, and remained a lifelong celibate to fulfill the vow he had made to his father. Arjun's military preceptor, Dronacharya, was a genius in the science of warfare, and it was from him that Arjun mastered the art of archery. Kripacharya was another respectable person on the other side, whom Arjun had always held in veneration. To treat these men of high merit as enemies now seemed abominable to the noble-minded Arjun. If even arguing with these venerable elders was improper, then how could he ever think of attacking them with weapons? His statement thus implies, "O Krishna, please do not doubt my courage. I am prepared to fight. But from the perspective of moral duty, my duty is to respect my teachers and to show compassion to the sons of Dhritarashtra."

गुरुनहत्वा हि महानुभावान्
 श्रेयो भोक्तुं भैक्ष्यमपीह लोके ।
 हत्वार्थकामांस्तु गुरुनिहैव
 भुज्जीय भोगान् रुधिरप्रदिग्धान् ॥ ५ ॥

*gurūnahatvā hi mahānubhāvān
 śreyo bhoktum bhaikṣyamapīha loke
 hatvārtha-kāmāṁstu gurūnihaiva
 bhuñjīya bhogān rudhira-pradigdhān*

gurūn—teachers; *ahatvā*—not killing; *hi*—certainly; *mahā-anubhāvān*—noble elders; *śreyah*—better; *bhoktum*—to enjoy life; *bhaikṣyam*—by begging; *api*—even; *iha loke*—in this world; *hatvā*—killing; *artha*—gain; *kāmān*—desiring; *tu*—but; *gurūn*—noble elders; *iha*—in this world; *eva*—certainly; *bhuñjīya*—enjoy; *bhogān*—pleasures; *rudhira*—blood; *pradigdhān*—tainted with.

It would be better to live in this world by begging, than to enjoy life by killing these noble elders, who are my teachers. If we kill them, the wealth and pleasures we enjoy will be tainted with blood.

It could be argued that Arjun needed to fight and win the kingdom to

maintain his livelihood. But, Arjun refutes that line of thought here. He says that he would prefer to live by begging than commit this heinous crime. He further believes that if he does indulge in this heinous act of fighting the war and kills his elders and relatives, his conscience will not allow him to enjoy any of the fruits of his action in this world, such as riches and power.

Shakespeare's play Macbeth carries a telling example of a person not being able to enjoy even the natural state of sleep due to guilty conscience, let alone enjoy any wealth and power that comes along by immoral conduct. Macbeth was a nobleman of Scotland. Once while travelling, the king of Scotland came to rest the night at his house. Macbeth's wife incited him to murder the king and usurp his throne. Macbeth got swayed by her advice and assassinated the king, and thereafter, he and Lady Macbeth were crowned as the king and queen of Scotland. However, for years after that, Macbeth would be found walking in his palace, fully awake at night. The author writes, "Macbeth hath killed sleep, and so Macbeth shall sleep no more." The queen would be found repeatedly washing her hands, as if to remove imaginary blood stains. In this verse, Arjun commiserates that, if he did kill these noble elders, tainted with their blood, his conscience would not let him enjoy all the royal benefits of ruling the kingdom.

न चैतद्विद्धः कतरन्नो गरीयो
यद्वा जयेम यदि वा नो जयेयुः ।
यानेव हत्वा न जिजीविषाम
स्तेऽवस्थिताः प्रमुखे धार्तराष्ट्राः ॥६॥

*na chaitadvidmaḥ kataranno garīyo
yadvā jayema yadi vā no jayeyuh
yāneva hatvā na jijīviṣhāmas
te 'vasthitāḥ pramukhe dhārtarāṣṭrāḥ*

na—not; *cha*—and; *etat*—this; *vidmaḥ*—we know; *katarat*—which; *nah*—for us; *garīyah*—is preferable; *yat vā*—whether; *jayema*—we may conquer; *yadi*—if; *vā*—or; *nah*—us; *jayeyuh*—they may conquer; *yān*—whom; *eva*—certainly; *hatvā*—after killing; *na*—not; *jijīviṣhāmah*—we desire to

live; *te*—they; *avasthitāḥ*—are standing; *pramukhe*—before us; *dhārtarāṣṭhrāḥ*—the sons of Dhritarashtra.

We do not even know which result of this war is preferable for us—conquering them or being conquered by them. Even after killing them we will not desire to live. Yet they have taken the side of Dhritarashtra, and now stand before us on the battlefield.

When evaluating the most suitable course of action, one considers various alternatives and their consequences. Arjun was debating whether it would be desirable to defeat the Kauravas or to be defeated by them. Both alternatives seemed like defeat, for if he did win the war by slaying the Kauravas, he would have no further desire to live.

However, the fact was that Bheeshma, Dronacharya, Kripacharya, etc. had acted ignobly by taking the side of the unrighteous Kauravas. The word *arthakām* has been used for them, implying, “attached to wealth and position,” they had taken the side of the wicked Duryodhan. So, killing them in the war was a natural consequence. In fact, after the war, Bheeshma himself admitted that a teacher who acts ignobly is fit to be abandoned.

Here, special mention needs to be made of Bheeshma. According to the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (verse 9.22.19), he was a great devotee of Shri Krishna. He was a master of his senses, and an icon of chivalry and generosity. He was a knower of the Absolute Truth, and had vowed to always speak the truth in his life. Even death could only come to him when he chose to accept it. For various reasons, he is enumerated amongst the twelve great personalities, or *Mahājans*, mentioned in the Bhāgavatam:

*swayambhūr nāradāḥ śambhuḥ kumārah kapilo manuḥ
prahlādo janako bhīṣhmaḥ balir vaiyāsakir vayam (6.3.20) [v1]*

“These are the twelve great knowers of religious principles—the first-born Brahma, Sage Narad, Bhagavān Shiv, the four Kumars, Bhagavan Kapil (son of

Devahuti), Svayambhuva Manu, Prahlad Maharaj, Janak Maharaj, Grandfather Bheeshma, Bali Maharaj, Shukadev Muni, and Ved Vyās.”

Hence, Bheeshma was an enlightened Ātman, whose actions could never be against the principles of dharma. However, his profound character was beyond mundane reasoning. Even though he fought on the side of the Kauravas, he said to Yudhishthir (the eldest of the Pandava brothers) before the war, “I am obliged to combat on the side of unrighteousness, but I give you the boon that you will be victorious.” Bheeshma knew that the righteous Pandavas, who had the Supreme Bhagavān Shri Krishna on their side, could never lose. By taking the side of *adharma* (unrighteousness), he showed that even the biggest forces on Swarga and earth could not make unholiness win in this holy war. He thus offered the biggest sacrifice of laying down his life, to assist the divine pastimes of Bhagavān Krishna.

Shri Krishna was well aware of Bheeshma’s deep devotion toward him, despite his fighting from the side of the Kauravas. That is why he upheld Bheeshma’s vow by breaking his own. Bheeshma resolved on a particular day during the war, that before sunset on the next day, he would either kill Arjun, the foremost Pandava warrior, or else to save him, Shri Krishna would have to break his own vow of not lifting weapons in the battle of Mahābhārat. Poets describe the vow that Bheeshma made:

*āju jo harihiñ na śastra gahāūñ,
tau lājahuñ gaṅgā jananī ko śāntanu suta na kahāūñ*
(Saint Tulsidas) [v2]

“If I do not make the Supreme Bhagavān Shri Krishna lift weapons, then I will shame my mother Ganga, and I am not the son of King Shantanu.” Bheeshma fought so valiantly that Arjun’s chariot was shattered, and he was stranded on the ground. At that stage, Shri Krishna lifted the chariot wheel and came forward to prevent Bheeshma from killing Arjun. Bheeshma saw the Bhagavān

with the chariot wheel in his hand as a weapon, and broke into a big smile. He understood that *Bhaktavatsala Bhagavān* (Bhagavān who gives pleasure to his devotees) had broken his own vow to honor the vow of his devotee.

In fact, Bheeshma's devotion to Bhagavān Krishna had a very rasik (full of sweetness) flavor to it. He used to meditate on Shri Krishna's pastimes in Vrindavan. There, in the evening when the Bhagavān would return to the village after grazing the cows in the forest, the dust raised from the hooves of the cows would deck his charming face, increasing its beauty and sweetness. During the battle of Mahābhārat, the dust raised from the hooves of the horses too added to Shri Krishna's beauty, and he loved having *darśhan* (divine vision) of his Bhagavān there.

In the last stage of his life, as he lay for six months on the bed of arrows, he meditated on that very vision of Bhagavān, offering the following prayer to Him:

*yudhi turaga-rajo-vidhūmra-viśhvak-kacha-lulita-śramavāry-alaṅkṛitāsyे
mama niśhita-śharair vibhidyamāna-tvachi vilasat-kavache 'stu kṛiṣhṇa ātmā
(Bhāgavatam 1.9.34) [v3]*

“On the battlefield, Bhagavān Krishna's flowing hair was covered with white dust raised by the hooves of the horses, and his face was covered with sweat beads because of his physical effort in driving the chariot. These were like ornaments enhancing the beauty of my Bhagavān; and the wounds dealt by my sharp arrows further intensified the decorations. Let my mind meditate unto that Shri Krishna.”

Bhagavān Krishna reciprocated his loving devotion by himself coming to meet Bheeshma on his deathbed of arrows, and with the *darśhan* of Bhagavān in front of him, Bheeshma, the great *mahājan*, left his body, of his own volition.

कार्पण्यदोषोपहतस्वभावः
 पृच्छामि त्वां धर्मसमूढचेताः ।
 यच्छ्रेयः स्यान्निश्चितं ब्रूहि तन्मे
 शिष्यस्तेऽहं शाथि मां त्वां प्रपन्नम् ॥ 7 ॥

*kārpanya-doṣhopahata-svabhāvah
 pṛichchhāmi tvāṁ dharma-sammūḍha-chetāḥ
 yach-chhreyah syānniśchitam brūhi tanme
 śiṣhyaste 'ham śādhi mām tvāṁ prapannam*

kārpanya-doṣha—the flaw of cowardice; *upahata*—besieged; *sva-bhāvah*—nature; *pṛichchhāmi*—I am asking; *tvāṁ*—to you; *dharma*—duty; *sammūḍha*—confused; *chetāḥ*—in heart; *yat*—what; *śhreyah*—best; *syāt*—may be; *niśchitam*—decisively; *brūhi*—tell; *tat*—that; *me*—to me; *śiṣhyah*—disciple; *te*—your; *aham*—I; *śādhi*—please instruct; *mām*—me; *tvāṁ*—unto you; *prapannam*—surrendered.

I am confused about my duty, and am besieged with anxiety and faintheartedness. I am your disciple, and am surrendered to you. Please instruct me for certain what is best for me.

This is a great moment in the Bhagavad Gita, when for the first time Arjun, who is Shri Krishna's friend and cousin, requests him to be his Guru. Arjun pleads to Shri Krishna that he has been overpowered by *kārpanya doṣh*, or the flaw of cowardice in behavior, and so he requests the Bhagavān to become his Guru and instruct him about the path of auspiciousness.

All the Vedic scriptures declare in unison that it is through the medium of a Spiritual Master that we receive divine knowledge for our eternal welfare:

tadvijñānārthaṁ sagurumevābhigachchhet samitpāniḥ śhrotriyaṁ bhramhaniśhṭham
(Mundakopaniśhad 1.2.12) [v4]

“To know the Absolute Truth, approach a Guru who is both a knower of the scriptures and is practically situated on the platform of Brahman-realization.”

*tasmād guruṁ prapadyeta jijñāsuḥ śhreya uttamam
 śhabde pare cha niśhṇātām brahmaṇy upaśhamāśhrayam*
(Bhāgavatam 11.3.21) [v5]

“Seekers of the Truth should surrender themselves to a Spiritual Master who has understood the conclusion of the scriptures and taken complete shelter of Bhagavān, leaving aside all material considerations.”

The Ramayana states:

guru binu bhava nidhi tarai na koī, jauñ biranchi sankara sama hoī. [v6]

“Not even the most elevated of spiritual aspirants can cross over the material ocean without the grace of the Guru.” Shri Krishna states this himself in the Bhagavad Gita in verse 4.34: “Learn the truth by approaching a spiritual master. Inquire from him with reverence and render service unto him. Such an enlightened Saint can impart knowledge unto you because he has seen the truth.”

To Demonstrate the need for accepting a Guru to gain knowledge, Shri Krishna himself took this step. In his youth, he went to the hermitage of Sandipani Muni to learn sixty-four sciences from him. His classmate, Sudama, remarked regarding this:

*yasya chchhando Māyām brahma deha āvapanam vibho
śreyasām tasya guruṣhu vāso 'tyanta vidambanam*
(*Bhāgavatam* 10.80.45) [v7]

“O Shri Krishna, the Vedas are like your body, manifested from the knowledge that you possess (hence, what requirement do you have for making a Guru). Yet, you too pretend you need to learn from a Guru; this is only your divine *leela* (pastime).” Shri Krishna is in fact the first Guru of the world, because he is the Guru of Brahma, the first-born in this material world. He performed this *leela* for our benefit, to teach by his example that we Ātman(s), who are under the influence of Māyā, will need a Guru to dispel our ignorance. In this verse, Arjun takes the step of surrendering to Shri Krishna as his disciple, and requests his Guru to enlighten him regarding the proper course of action.

न हि प्रपश्यामि ममापनुद्याद्
 यच्छेकमुच्छोषणमिन्द्रियाणाम् ।
 अवाप्य भूमावसपत्नमृद्धं
 राज्यं सुराणामपि चाधिपत्यम् ॥८॥

*na hi prapaśyāmi mamaapnudyād
 yach-chhokam uchchhoṣhaṇam-indriyāṇām
 avāpya bhūmāv-asapatnamriddham
 rājyam surāṇāmapi chādhipatyam*

na—not; *hi*—certainly; *prapaśyāmi*—I see; *mama*—my; *apanudyāt*—drive away; *yat*—which; *shokam*—anguish; *uchchhoṣhaṇam*—is drying up; *indriyāṇām*—of the senses; *avāpya*—after achieving; *bhūmau*—on the earth; *asapatnam*—unrivalled; *riddham*—prosperous; *rājyam*—kingdom; *surāṇām*—like the celestial deities; *api*—even; *cha*—also; *ādhipatyam*—sovereignty.

I can find no means of driving away this anguish that is drying up my senses. Even if I win a prosperous and unrivalled kingdom on the earth, or gain sovereignty like the celestial deities, I will be unable to dispel this grief.

When we are swamped in misery, the intellect keeps analyzing the cause of misery, and when it is able to think no further, then dejection sets in. Since Arjun's problems are looming bigger than his feeble intellectual abilities, his material knowledge is insufficient in saving him from the ocean of grief that he finds himself in. Having accepted Shri Krishna as his Guru, Arjun now pours out his heart to him, to reveal his pitiable state.

Arjun's situation is not unique. This is invariably the situation we sometimes find ourselves in as we go through the journey of life. We want happiness, but we experience misery; we desire knowledge, but are unable to lift the cloud of ignorance; we crave perfect love, but repeatedly meet with disappointment. Our college degrees, acquired knowledge, and mundane scholarships do not provide solutions to these perplexities of life. We need divine knowledge to solve the puzzle of life. That treasure chest of divine knowledge is opened when

we find a true Guru, one who is situated in transcendence, provided we have the humility to learn from him. Such is the path Arjun has decided to take.

सञ्जय उवाच ।
एवमुक्त्वा हृषीकेशं गुडाकेशः परन्तप ।
न योत्स्य इति गोविन्दमुक्त्वा तूष्णीं बभूव ह ॥९॥

*sañjaya uvācha
evam-uktvā hṛiṣhīkeśham guḍākeśhah parantapa
na yotsya iti govindam uktvā tūṣṇīm babhūva ha*

sañjayaḥ uvācha—Sanjay said; *evam*—thus; *uktvā*—having spoken; *hṛiṣhīkeśham*—to Shri Krishna, the master of the mind and senses; *guḍākeśhah*—Arjun, the conquerer of sleep; *parantapah*—Arjun, the chastiser of the enemies; *na yotsye*—I shall not fight; *iti*—thus; *govindam*—Krishna, the giver of pleasure to the senses; *uktvā*—having addressed; *tūṣṇīm*—silent; *babhūva*—became *ha*—he became.

Sanjay said: Having thus spoken, Gudakesh, that chastiser of enemies, addressed Hrishikesh: “Govind, I shall not fight,” and became silent.

The sagacious Sanjay, in his narration to Dhritarashtra, uses very apt names for the personalities he refers to. Here, Arjun is called *Guḍākeśh*, or “conqueror of sleep.” The power of sleep is such that sooner or later, all living beings succumb to it. But with his determination, Arjun had disciplined himself in such a way that sleep would come to him only when he permitted it, and only for the amount of time he chose. By using the name *Guḍākeśh* for Arjun, Sanjay is subtly hinting to Dhritarashtra, “Just as this “hero amongst men” conquered sleep, so too will he conquer his despondency.”

And the word he uses for Shri Krishna is *Hṛiṣhīkeśh*, or “master of the mind and senses.” The subtle hint here is that he who is the master of his senses will definitely ensure that the events are properly managed.

तमुवाच हृषीकेशः प्रहसन्निव भारत ।
सेनयोरुभयोर्मध्ये विषीदन्तमिदं वचः ॥१०॥

tam-uvācha hṛiṣhīkeśhah prahasanniva bhārata

senayorubhayor-madhye viṣhīdantam-idam vachah

tam—to him; *uvācha*—said; *hṛiṣhīkeśhaḥ*—Shri Krishna, the master of mind and senses; *prahasan*—smilingly; *iva*—as if; *bhārata*—Dhritarashtra, descendant of Bharat; *senayoh*—of the armies; *ubhayoh*—of both; *madhye*—in the midst of; *viṣhīdantam*—to the grief-stricken; *idam*—this; *vachah*—words.

O Dhritarashtra, thereafter, in the midst of both the armies, Shri Krishna smilingly spoke the following words to the grief-stricken Arjun.

In sharp contrast to Arjun's words of lamentation, Shri Krishna smiled, displaying that the situation was not making him despair; rather he was perfectly happy with it. Such is the equanimous attitude exhibited by someone with knowledge in all situations.

With our incomplete understanding, we find faults with the situations we are in—we complain and grumble about them, wish to run away from them, and hold them responsible for our misery. But the enlightened Ātman(s) inform us that the world created by Bhagavān is perfect in every way, and both good and bad situations come to us for a divine purpose. They are all arranged for our spiritual evolution, to push us upward in our journey toward perfection. Those who understand this secret are never disturbed in difficult circumstances, facing them with serenity and tranquility.

“The snowflakes fall slowly to the ground, each flake in its proper place” is a famous Taoist expression. It beautifully expresses the inherent perfection in the design of the world and the macro events taking place in it, even though we are not able to perceive it from our material perspective.

The *Chhāndogya Upaniṣhad* explains why earthquakes, hurricanes, cyclones, floods, and typhoons are created in the world by Bhagavān, as a part of the grand scheme of things. It states that Bhagavān deliberately creates difficult situations to prevent people from slowing down in their journey of spiritual progress. When people become complacent, a natural calamity comes along, forcing the

Ātman(s) to strain their abilities to cope with it, which ensures their progress. However, it must be noted that the progress being talked about here is not the external increase of material luxuries, but the internal unfoldment of the glorious divinity of the Ātman over a continuum of lifetimes.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
अशोच्यानन्वशोचस्त्वं प्रज्ञावादांश्च भाषसे ।
गतासूनगतासूंश्च नानुशोचन्ति पण्डिताः ॥ 11 ॥

*śhrī bhagavān uvācha
aśhochyān-anvaśhochas-tvam prajñā-vādānśh cha bhāṣhase
gatāśūn-agatāśūnśh-cha nānuśhochanti paṇḍitāḥ*

śhrī-bhagavān uvācha—Bhagavān Krishna said; *aśhochyān*—not worthy of grief; *anvaśhochah*—are mourning; *tvam*—you; *prajñā-vādān*—words of wisdom; *cha*—and; *bhāṣhase*—speaking; *gata āśūn*—the dead; *agata āśūn*—the living; *cha*—and; *na*—never; *anuśhochanti*—lament; *paṇḍitāḥ*—the wise.

Bhagavān Krishna said: While you speak words of wisdom, you are mourning for that which is not worthy of grief. The wise lament neither for the living nor for the dead.

Starting with this verse, Shri Krishna initiates his discourse with a dramatic opening statement. Arjun is lamenting, for what he feels are very valid reasons. But, rather than commiserating with him, Shri Krishna takes the wind out of his arguments. He says, “Arjun, though you may feel you are speaking words of wisdom, you are actually speaking and acting out of ignorance. No possible reason justifies lamentation. The Pundits—those who are wise—never lament, neither for the living nor for the dead. Hence the grief you visualize in killing your relatives is illusory, and it proves that you are not a Pundit.”

One does not need to go far into the Gita to find a wise person above lamentation, for Grandsire Bheeshma himself was the perfect example. He was a sage who had fathomed the mysteries of life and death, and risen above the dualities of circumstances. Serene in any eventuality, he had even consented to

taking the side of the wicked, if it served the Bhagavān. He thus Demonstrated that those who are surrendered to Bhagavān simply do their duty in all situations, without being affected by outcomes. Such persons never lament because they accept all circumstances as Bhagavān's grace.

न त्वेवाहं जातु नासं न त्वं नेमे जनाधिपाः ।
न चैव न भविष्यामः सर्वे वयमतः परम् ॥ 12 ॥

*na tvevāham jātu nāsam na tvam neme janādhipāḥ
na chaiva na bhaviṣyāmaḥ sarve vayamataḥ param*

na—never; *tu*—however; *eva*—certainly; *aham*—I; *jātu*—at any time; *na*—nor; *āsam*—exist; *na*—nor; *tvam*—you; *na*—nor; *ime*—these; *jana-adhipāḥ*—kings; *na*—never; *cha*—also; *eva*—indeed; *na bhaviṣyāmaḥ*—shall not exist; *sarve vayam*—all of us; *ataḥ*—from now; *param*—after.

Never was there a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor all these kings; nor in the future shall any of us cease to be.

On the gate of the temple of Apollo at Delphi are inscribed the words, *Gnothi Seuton*, or “Know Thyself”[v8]. Even Socrates, the wise old man of Athens, was fond of encouraging people to inquire into the nature of the self. A local legend goes like this. Once, Socrates was walking on the street, absorbed in deep philosophic contemplation, when he accidentally bumped into someone. That man blurted in annoyance, “Can't you see where you walk? Who are you?” Socrates answered with amusement, “My dear fellow, I have been pondering over that question for the last forty years. If you ever come to know who I am, please let me know.”

In the Vedic tradition, whenever divine knowledge is imparted, it usually begins with knowledge of the self. Shri Krishna follows the same approach in the Bhagavad Gita, with a piece of information that would have swept Socrates off his feet. Shri Krishna begins by explaining that the entity that we call the “self” is really the Ātman, not the material body, and is eternal, just as Bhagavān himself is eternal. The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad states:

*jñājñau dwāvajā vīśhaniśhāvajā hyekā bhoktri bhogyartha yuktā
anantaśchātmā viśhwarūpo hyakartā trayam yadā vindate brahmametat (1.9) [v9]*

The above verse states that creation is a combination of three entities—Bhagavān, Ātman, and Māyā—and all the three entities are eternal. *If we believe the Ātman is eternal, then it follows logically that there is life after death of the material body.* Shri Krishna talks about this in the next verse.

**देहिनोऽस्मिन्यथा देहे कौमारं यौवनं जरा ।
तथा देहान्तरप्राप्तिर्थीरस्तत्र न मुह्यति ॥ 13 ॥**

*dehino 'smiṇ yathā dehe kaumāram yauvanam jarā
tathā dehāntara-prāptir dhīras tatra na muhyati*

dehinah—of the embodied; *asmin*—in this; *yathā*—as; *dehe*—in the body; *kaumāram*—childhood; *yauvanam*—youth; *jarā*—old age; *tathā*—similarly; *deha-antara*—another body; *prāptih*—achieves; *dhīrah*—the wise; *tatra*—thereupon; *na muhyati*—are not deluded.

Just as the embodied Ātman continuously passes from childhood to youth to old age, similarly, at the time of death, the Ātman passes into another body. The wise are not deluded by this.

With immaculate logic, Shri Krishna establishes the principle of transmigration of the Ātman from lifetime to lifetime. He explains that in one lifetime itself, we change bodies from childhood to youth to maturity and then to old age. In fact, modern science informs us that cells within the body undergo regeneration—old cells die away and new ones take their place. It is estimated that within seven years, practically all the cells of the body change. Further, the molecules within the cells change even more rapidly. With every breath we inhale, oxygen molecules are absorbed into our cells via the metabolic processes, and molecules that were heretofore locked within the cells are released as carbon dioxide. Scientists estimate that in one year's time, about ninety-eight percent of our bodily molecules change. And yet, despite the continual change of the body, we perceive that we are the same person. That is because we are not the material body, but the spiritual Ātman seated within.

In this verse, the word *deha* means “the body” and *dehi* means “possessor of the body,” or the Ātman. Shri Krishna draws Arjun’s attention to the fact that, since the body is constantly changing, in one lifetime itself, the Ātman passes through many bodies. Similarly, at the time of death, it passes into another body. Actually, what we term as “death” in worldly parlance is merely the Ātman discarding its old dysfunctional body, and what we call “birth” is the Ātman taking on a new body elsewhere. This is the principle of reincarnation.

Most Oriental philosophies accept this concept of reincarnation. It is an integral part of Hinduism, Jainism, and Sikhism. In Buddhism, the Buddha made references to his past lives repeatedly. Many people do not know the extent to which reincarnation was a part of the belief system of the Occidental philosophies as well. In ancient classical Western religious and philosophic circles, famous thinkers such as Pythagoras, Plato, and Socrates accepted reincarnation to be true, and their views were also reflected in Orphism, Hermeticism, Neoplatonism, Manicheanism, and Gnosticism. Within the mainstream Abrahamic faiths, mystics of the three major religions also supported reincarnation. Examples include Jews who studied the Kabbalah, the Christian Cathars. For example, amongst Occidental religions, Josephus, the great ancient Jewish historian, used language in his writings that seem to ascribe belief in some form of reincarnation among the Pharisees and Essenes of his day. Certainly the Jewish Kabbalah prescribes to the idea of reincarnation as *gilgul neshamot*, or the “rolling of the Soul.”

Many of the early Christians believed in the concept of reincarnation. Christian history informs us that, in the 553 AD, the Council of Nicaea, a conclave, was held to discuss the principle of reincarnation, and it was thereafter declared a heresy, apparently to increase the authority of the Church over the lives of the people. Until then, it was commonly accepted. Jesus indirectly proclaimed this doctrine when he told his disciples that John the

Baptist was Elijah the Prophet reincarnated (Matthew 11:13-14, Matthew 17:10-13). This is also mentioned in the Old Testament (Malachi 4:5). Origen, the most learned of the Christian Fathers, declared: “Every man receives a body for himself according to his deserts in former lives.”[v11] Solomon’s Book of Wisdom says: “To be born in sound body with sound limbs is a reward of the virtues of the past lives.” (Wisdom of Solomon 8:19-20) [v12]

Belief in reincarnation is also found in many tribal societies around the world, in places such as Siberia, West Africa, North America, and Australia. Moving to more recent centuries and civilizations, reincarnation has been affirmed by Rosicrucians, Spiritism, Theosophists, and New Age followers. Even more recently, it has even been studied in serious scientific circles at major universities, exemplified by the works of Dr. Ian Stevenson and Dr. Jim Tucker, both at the University of Virginia.

Without accepting the concept of rebirth, it is difficult to make sense out of the suffering, chaos, and incompleteness of the world, and hence, many famous western thinkers believed in this principle. Virgil and Ovid regarded this doctrine as self-evident. The German philosophers Goethe, Fichte, Schelling, and Lessing accepted it. Amongst the more recent philosophers, Hume, Spencer, and Max Mueller, all recognized it as an incontrovertible doctrine. Among Western poets, Browning, Rosetti, Tennyson, and Wordsworth, to mention just a few, all believed in it.

Shri Krishna has previously declared that the wise do not lament. But the fact remains that we do experience happiness and distress. What is the reason for it? He now explains this concept.

मात्रास्पर्शास्तु कौन्तेय शीतोष्णासुखदुःखदाः ।
आगमापायिनोऽनित्यास्तांस्तिक्षस्व भारत ॥ 14 ॥

mātrā-sparśhās tu kaunteya śītoṣhṇa-sukha-duḥkha-dāḥ

āgamāpāyino 'nityās tāns-titikṣhasva bhārata

mātrā-sparśāḥ—contact of the senses with the sense objects; *tu*—indeed; *kaunteya*—Arjun, the son of Kunti; *śīta*—winter; *uṣṇa*—summer; *sukha*—happiness; *duḥkha*—distress; *dāḥ*—give; *āgama*—come; *apāyināḥ*—go; *anityāḥ*—non-permanent; *tān*—them; *titikṣhasva*—tolerate; *bhārata*—descendant of the Bharat.

O son of Kunti, the contact between the senses and the sense objects gives rise to fleeting perceptions of happiness and distress. These are non-permanent, and come and go like the winter and summer seasons. O descendent of Bharat, one must learn to tolerate them without being disturbed.

The human body houses five senses—the senses of sight, smell, taste, touch, and hearing—and these, in contact with their objects of perception, give rise to sensations of happiness and distress. None of these sensations is permanent. They come and go like the changing seasons. Although cool water provides pleasure in the summer, the same water gives distress in the winter. Thus, both the perceptions of happiness and distress experienced through the senses are transitory. If we permit ourselves to be affected by them, we will sway like a pendulum from side to side. A person of discrimination should practice to tolerate both the feelings of happiness and distress without being disturbed by them.

The technique of *Vipassanā*, which is the primary technique of self-realization in Buddhism, is based on this principle of tolerance of sense perceptions. Its practice helps eliminate desire, which, as stated in the four noble truths (the truth of suffering, the truth of the origin of suffering, the truth of the cessation of suffering, and the truth of the path leading to the cessation), is the cause of all suffering. This is not surprising considering that Buddhist philosophy is a subset of the vast Vedic philosophy.

यं हि न व्यथयन्त्येते पुरुषं पुरुषर्षभ ।
समदुःखसुखं थीरं सोऽमृतत्वाय कल्पते ॥ 15 ॥

*yam hi na vyathayantyete puruṣham puruṣharṣhabha
sama-duḥkha-sukham dhīram so 'mr̥itatvāya kalpate*

yam—whom; *hi*—verily; *na*—not; *vyathayanti*—distressed; *ete*—these; *puruṣham*—person; *puruṣha-ṛiṣhabha*—the noblest amongst men, Arjun; *sama*—equipoised; *duḥkha*—distress; *sukham*—happiness; *dhīram*—steady; *sah*—that person; *amṛitatvāya*—for liberation; *kalpate*—becomes eligible.

O Arjun, noblest amongst men, that person who is not affected by happiness and distress, and remains steady in both, becomes eligible for liberation.

In the previous verse, Shri Krishna explained that both the sensations of happiness and distress are fleeting. He now encourages Arjun to rise above these dualities through discrimination. In order to develop this discrimination, we first need to understand the answers to two important questions: 1) Why do we aspire for happiness? 2) Why doesn't material happiness satisfy us?

The answer to the first question is very simple. Bhagavān is an ocean of infinite bliss, and we Ātman(s) are his tiny parts. This basically means that we are tiny fragments of an infinite ocean of bliss. Swami Vivekananda would address people by saying, "O ye children of immortal bliss." Just as a child is drawn to his or her mother, each part is naturally drawn toward its whole. Similarly, being infinitesimal parts of the ocean of bliss, we Ātman(s) too are drawn to this bliss. Hence, everything we do in the world is for the sake of happiness. We all may have different views regarding where happiness lies or what form it might take, but all living beings seek nothing apart from it. This answers the first question.

Now, let's understand the answer to the second question. The Ātman, being a tiny part of Bhagavān, is divine in nature like Bhagavān himself. Hence the

happiness that the Ātman seeks is also divine. Such happiness must possess the following three characteristics:

1. It must be infinite in extent.
2. It must be permanent.
3. It must be ever-fresh.

Such is the happiness of Bhagavān, which is described as *sat-chit-ānand*, or eternal-sentient-ocean of bliss. However, the happiness we experience from the contact of the senses with their objects is the reverse; it is temporary, finite, and insentient. Thus, the material happiness that we perceive through the body can never satisfy the divine Ātman.

With this discrimination, we must practice to tolerate the perception of material happiness. Similarly, we must tolerate the sensation of material distress. (This second aspect is discussed in detail in many future verses, such as 2.48, 5.20, etc.) Only then will we rise above these dualities and the material energy will no longer bind us.

नासतो विद्यते भावो नाभावो विद्यते सतः ।
उभयोरपि दृष्टेऽन्तस्त्वनयोस्तत्त्वदर्शिभिः ॥ 16 ॥

*nāsato vidyate bhāvo nābhāvo vidyate sataḥ
ubhayorapi dṛiṣṭo 'nta stvanayos tattva-darśibhiḥ*

na—no; *asataḥ*—of the temporary; *vidyate*—there is; *bhāvah*—is; *na*—no; *abhaवah*—cessation; *vidyate*—is; *sataḥ*—of the eternal; *ubhayoh*—of the two; *api*—also; *dṛiṣṭah*—observed; *antah*—conclusion; *tu*—verily; *anayoh*—of these; *tattva*—of the truth; *darśibhiḥ*—by the seers.

Of the transient there is no endurance, and of the eternal there is no cessation. This has verily been observed by the seers of the truth, after studying the nature of both.

According to the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, there are three entities in existence:

bhoktā bhogyam preritāram cha matvā sarvam proktam trividham brahmam etat (1.12) [v13]

kṣharam pradhānamamṛitākṣharam haraḥ kṣharātmānāvīśhate deva ekaḥ (1.10) [v14]

sanyuktametatkṣharamakṣharam cha vyaktāvyaktam bharate viśhwamīśhah (1.8) [v15]

All these Ved mantras state that these three entities—Bhagavān, the individual Ātman, and Māyā—are all eternal.

1. Bhagavān is everlasting. Thus he is *sat* (eternally existing). Hence, a name for him in the Vedas is *sat-chit-ānand* (eternal-full of knowledge-ocean of bliss).
2. The Ātman is imperishable, and hence it is *sat*. However, the body will cease to exist one day, and hence it is *asat* (temporary). The Ātman is also *sat-chit-ānand*, but it is also *aṇu* (tiny). Hence the Ātman is *aṇu sat, aṇu chit, and aṇu ānand*.
3. The entity Māyā from which the world has been made is eternal, or *sat*. However, all material objects we see around us came into existence and will be destroyed with time. Thus, they can all be termed as *asat*, or temporary. So while the world itself is *asat*, it is only the entity Māyā that is *sat*.

When we say that the world is *asat*, this should not be confused with *mithyā*. *Asat* (temporary) does not mean *mithyā* (non-existent). Some philosophers claim that the world is *mithyā*, or “non-existent.” They assert that it is only the ignorance within us that is making us perceive the world, and once we are situated in *brahma-jñāna* (knowledge of the Supreme) the world will cease to exist. However, if this were true, then the world should no longer have remained for the Brahman-realized Saints. Since they had destroyed their ignorance, the world should have stopped existing for them. Why then did these Saints write books even after attaining the state of Brahman-realization? Where did the paper and pen come from? The fact that *brahma-jñānīs* use the objects of the world proves that the world exists even for them. Besides, even *brahma-jñānīs* need food to nourish their bodies. The Vedic scriptures state: *paśhvādibhiśchāviśheṣhat* [v16] “Even Brahman-realized Saints feels hungry, just as animals do, and need to eat food.” If the world does not exist for them, then how and why should they eat?

Further, the Taittirīya Upaniṣhad repeatedly informs us that Bhagavān is all-pervading in the world:

*so 'kāMāyāta bahu syāṁ prajāyeyeti sa tapo 'tapyata sa tapastaptvā idamśarvamasrijata
yadidam kim cha tatsriṣhtvā tadevānuprāviśhat tadanupraviśhya sachcha tyachchābhavat
niruktam chāniruktam cha nilayanam chānilaynam cha vijñānam chāvijñānam cha satyam
chānritam cha satyamabhabavat yadidam kim cha tatsatyamityāchakṣhate tadapyeśha śloko
bhavati (2.6.4) [v17]*

This Vedic mantra states that Bhagavān not only created the world, but also permeates every atom of it. If Bhagavān is truly all-pervading in this world, then how can the world have no existence? To say that the world is *mithyā* is to contradict the fact that Bhagavān pervades the world. In this verse, Shri Krishna explains that the world does exist, but it is fleeting. Thus, he calls it as *asat*, or “temporary.” He does not call it *mithyā*, or “non-existent.”

**अविनाशि तु तद्विद्धि येन सर्वमिदं ततम् ।
विनाशमव्ययस्यास्य न कश्चित्कर्तुमर्हति ॥१७॥**

*avināshi tu tadviddhi yena sarvam idam tatam
vināśham avyayasyāsa na kaśchit kartum arhati*

avināshi—indestructible; *tu*—indeed; *tat*—that; *viddhi*—know; *yena*—by whom; *sarvam*—entire; *idam*—this; *tatam*—pervaded; *vināśham*—destruction; *avyayasya*—of the imperishable; *asya*—of it; *na kaśchit*—no one; *kartum*—to cause; *arhati*—is able.

That which pervades the entire body, know it to be indestructible. No one can cause the destruction of the imperishable Ātman.

Shri Krishna establishes the relationship between the body and the Ātman, by saying that the Ātman pervades the body. What does he mean by this? The Ātman is sentient, i.e. it possesses consciousness. The body is made from insentient matter, devoid of consciousness. However, the Ātman passes on the quality of consciousness to the body as well, by residing in it. Hence, the Ātman pervades the body by spreading its consciousness everywhere in it.

Some raise a question here regarding the location of the Ātman. The Vedas

state that the Ātman resides in the heart:

hṛidi hyeṣha ātmā (Praśnopaniṣhad 3.6) [v18]

sa vā eṣha ātmā hṛidi (Chhāndogya Upaniṣad 8.3.3) [v19]

The word *hṛidi* indicates that the Ātman is seated in the region of the heart. Yet, consciousness, which is the symptom of the Ātman, spreads throughout the body. How does this happen? Ved Vyas explains this concept as follows:

avirodhaśchandanavat (Brahma Sūtra 2.3.23) [v20]

“Just as applying sandalwood to your forehead cools the entire body, similarly, the Ātman, although residing locally in the heart, infuses its consciousness throughout the body.”

Again, someone may ask that if consciousness is a characteristic of the Ātman, then how does it spread into the body? This question has also been answered by Ved Vyas:

vyaktireko gandhavat (Brahma Sūtra 2.3.26) [v21]

“Fragrance is a quality of the flower. But the garden where the flower grows also becomes fragrant.” This means that the flower is able to pass on its fragrant quality to the garden. Likewise, the Ātman is sentient, and it also makes the dead matter of the body sentient, by pervading its consciousness in it.

**अन्तवन्त इमे देहा नित्यस्योक्ताः शरीरिणः ।
अनाशिनोऽप्रमेयस्य तस्माद्युद्धयस्व भारत ॥ 18 ॥**

*antavanta ime dehā nityasyoktāḥ śharīriṇah
anāśhino 'prameyasya tasmād yudhyasva bhārata*

anta-vantah—having an end; *ime*—these; *dehāḥ*—material bodies; *nityasya*—eternally; *uktāḥ*—are said; *śharīriṇah*—of the embodied Ātman; *anāśhinaḥ*—indestructible; *aprameyasya*—immeasurable; *tasmāt*—therefore; *yudhyasva*—fight; *bhārata*—descendant of Bharat, Arjun.

Only the material body is perishable; the embodied Ātman within is indestructible, immeasurable, and eternal. Therefore, fight, O descendant

of Bharat.

The gross body is factually made from mud. It is mud that gets converted to vegetables, fruits, grains, lentils, and grass. Cows graze the grass and produce milk. We humans consume these edibles, and they transform into our body. So it is not an exaggeration to say that the body is created from mud.

And at the time of death, when the Ātman departs, the body can have one of the three ends: *kṛimi*, *vid*, or *bhasma*. Either it is burnt, in which case it is converted to ashes and becomes mud. Or it is buried, in which case insects eat it and transform it into mud. Else, it is thrown into the river, in which case the sea creatures make it their fodder and excrete it as waste, which ultimately merges with the mud of the seabed.

In this manner, mud undergoes an amazing cycle in the world. It gets transformed into edibles, bodies are made from these edibles, and the bodies return back into the mud of the earth. The Bible states: “For dust thou are, and unto dust thou shalt return.” (Genesis 3:19) [v22] This phrase refers to the material body. Shri Krishna tells Arjun, “Within that material body is an eternal imperishable entity, which is not made of mud. That is the divine Ātman, the real self.”

य एनं वेत्ति हन्तारं यश्चैनं मन्यते हतम् ।
उभौ तौ न विजानीतो नायं हन्ति न हन्यते ॥ 19 ॥

*ya enam vetti hantāram yaś chainam manyate hatam
ubhau tau na vijānīto nāyam hanti na hanyate*

yah—one who; *enam*—this; *vetti*—knows; *hantāram*—the slayer; *yah*—one who; *cha*—and; *enam*—this; *manyate*—thinks; *hatam*—slain; *ubhau*—both; *tau*—they; *na*—not; *vijānītaḥ*—in knowledge; *na*—neither; *ayam*—this; *hanti*—slays; *na*—nor; *hanyate*—is killed.

Neither of them is in knowledge—the one who thinks the Ātman can slay and the one who thinks the Ātman can be slain. For truly, the Ātman neither kills nor can it be killed.

The illusion of death is created because we identify ourselves with the body. The Ramayana explains this as follows:

jauṇ sapaneṇ sira kāṭai koī, binu jāgeṇ na dūri dukh hoī. [v23]

“If we dream of our head getting cut, we will perceive its pain until we wake up.” The incident in the dream is an illusion, but the experience of the pain continues to torment until we wake up and dispel the illusion. Similarly, in the illusion that we are the body, we fear the experience of death. For the enlightened Ātman whose illusion has been dispelled, this fear of death vanishes.

One may ask that if nobody can kill anyone, then why is murder considered a punishable offense? The answer is that the body is the vehicle of the Ātman, and destroying any living being’s vehicle is violence, which is forbidden. The Vedas clearly instruct: *mā hinsyāt sarvabhūtāni* [v24] “Do not commit violence toward anyone.” In fact, the Vedas even consider killing of animals as a crime. However, there are occasions where the rules change and even violence becomes necessary. For example, in cases where a snake is approaching to bite, or if one is attacked with lethal weapons, or one’s life sustenance is being snatched away, then violence is permitted for self-protection. In the present situation, what is appropriate for Arjun, violence or non-violence, and why? Shri Krishna will explain this to him in great detail, as the dialogue of the Bhagavad Gita progresses. And in the course of the explanation, priceless divine knowledge will be revealed to shed light on the subject.

न जायते म्रियते वा कदाचि
न्यायं भूत्वा भविता वा न भूयः ।
अजो नित्यः शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो
न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे ॥ 20 ॥

*na jāyate mriyate vā kadāchin
nāyam bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyah*

*ajo nityah śhāśhvato 'yam purāṇo
na hanyate hanyamāne śharīre*

na jāyate—is not born; *mriyate*—dies; *vā*—or; *kadāchit*—at any time; *na*—not; *ayam*—this; *bhūtvā*—having once existed; *bhavitā*—will be; *vā*—or; *na*—not; *bhūyah*—further; *ajah*—unborn; *nityah*—eternal; *śhāśhvataḥ*—immortal; *ayam*—this; *purāṇah*—the ancient; *na hanyate*—is not destroyed; *hanyamāne*—is destroyed; *śharīre*—when the body.

The Ātman is neither born, nor does it ever die; nor having once existed, does it ever cease to be. The Ātman is without birth, eternal, immortal, and ageless. It is not destroyed when the body is destroyed.

The eternal nature of the Ātman has been established in this verse, which is ever-existing and beyond birth and death. Consequently, it is devoid of the six types of transformations: *asti, jāyate, vārdhate, vipariṇamate, apakṣhīyate, and vināshyati* “Existence in the womb, birth, growth, procreation, diminution, and death.” These are transformations of the body, not of the self. What we call as death is merely the destruction of the body, but the immortal self remains unaffected by all bodily changes. This concept has been repeatedly emphasized in the Vedas. The Kāṭhāpaniṣhad contains a mantra almost identical to the above verse of the Bhagavad Gita:

*na jāyate mriyate vā vipaśchin nāyam kutaśchin na babhūva kaśchit
ajo nityah śhāśhvato 'yam purāṇo na hanyate hanyamāne śharīre (1.2.18) [v25]*

“The Ātman is not born, nor does it die; it did not spring from something, and nothing sprang from it. It is unborn, eternal, immortal, and ageless. It is not destroyed when the body is destroyed.” The Brīhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣhad states:

sa vā eśha mahān aja ātmājaro 'maro 'mrīto 'bhayaḥ (4.4.25) [v26]

“The Ātman is glorious, unborn, deathless, free from old age, immortal, and fearless.”

**वेदाविनाशिनं नित्यं य एनमजमव्ययम् ।
कथं स पुरुषः पार्थं कं घातयति हन्ति कम् ॥२१॥**

vedāvināśhinam nityam ya enam ajam avyayam

katham sa purushah pārtha kam ghātayati hanti kam

veda—knows; *avināśhinam*—imperishable; *nityam*—eternal; *yah*—who; *enam*—this; *ajam*—unborn; *avyayam*—immutable; *katham*—how; *sah*—that; *puruṣhah*—person; *pārtha*—Parth; *kam*—whom; *ghātayati*—causes to be killed; *hanti*—kills; *kam*—whom.

O Parth, how can one who knows the Ātman to be imperishable, eternal, unborn, and immutable kill anyone or cause anyone to kill?

A spiritually elevated Ātman quells the ego that makes us feel that we are the doers of our actions. In that state, one can see that the Ātman seated within actually does nothing. Such an elevated Ātman, though doing all kinds of actions, is never tainted by them. Shri Krishna is advising Arjun that he must elevate himself to that enlightened level, seeing himself as the non-doer, free from egotism, and perform his duty rather than shirk from it.

वासांसि जीर्णानि यथा विहाय
नवानि गृह्णति नरोऽपराणि ।
तथा शरीराणि विहाय जीर्णा
न्यानि संयाति नवानि देही ॥ 22 ॥

*vāsānsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya
navāni gṛihṇāti naro 'parāni
tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇānya
nyāni sanyāti navāni dehī*

vāsānsi—garments; *jīrṇāni*—worn-out; *yathā*—as; *vihāya*—sheds; *navāni*—new; *gṛihṇāti*—accepts; *narah*—a person; *aparāṇi*—others; *tathā*—likewise; *śarīrāṇi*—bodies; *vihāya*—casting off; *jīrṇānya*—worn-out; *anyāni*—other; *sanyāti*—enters; *navāni*—new; *dehī*—the embodied Ātman.

As a person sheds worn-out garments and wears new ones, likewise, at the time of death, the Ātman casts off its worn-out body and enters a new one.

Continuing to explain the nature of the Ātman, Shri Krishna reiterates the concept of rebirth, comparing it to an everyday activity. When garments become torn and useless, we discard them in favor of new ones, but in doing so we do not change ourselves. In the same manner, the Ātman remains

unchanged, when it discards its worn-out body and takes birth in a new body elsewhere.

The Nyāya Darśhan gives the following argument to prove the existence of rebirth:

jātasya harṣhabhyaśhoka sampratipatteḥ (3.1.18) [v27]

It states that if you observe a little baby, you will find it sometimes becomes happy, sometimes sad, and sometimes fearful, without any apparent reason. According to the Nyāya Darśhan, the little baby is remembering its past life, and hence experiencing these emotions. However, as it grows up, the impressions of the present life are imprinted so strongly upon its mind, that they erase most past memories. Besides, the processes of death and birth are also so painful to the Ātman that they erase a substantial portion of the past life's memories.

The Nyāya Darśhan gives another argument in support of rebirth: *stanyābhilāshāt* (3.1.21) [v28]. It says that a newborn baby has no knowledge of language. How then can a mother teach her baby to suckle her breast when she inserts it in the baby's mouth? However, the newborn child has drunk milk in infinite past lifetimes, even in animal forms, from the breasts, teats, and udders of innumerable mothers. Hence, when the mother puts her breast in the baby's mouth, it automatically starts suckling based on past practice.

Without accepting the concept of rebirth, the disparity between human beings becomes inexplicable and irrational. For example, let us suppose one man is blind from birth. If that person asks why he was punished in this way, what logical answer can be given to him? If we say it was a result of his karmas, he may argue that the present life is the only life he has, and therefore, there are no past karmas at the time of birth that should afflict him. If we say it was the will of Bhagavān, it would also seem implausible, since Bhagavān is all-

merciful and would not unnecessarily want anyone to be blind. The only logical explanation is that the person was born blind as a consequence of karmas from past lives. Thus, from common sense and on the authority of the scriptures we are obliged to believe in the concept of rebirth.

नैनं छिन्दन्ति शस्त्राणि नैनं दहति पावकः ।
न चैनं क्लेदयन्त्यापो न शोषयति मारुतः ॥ 23 ॥

*nainam chhindanti śastrāṇi nainam dahati pāvakah
na chainam kledayantyāpo na śhoṣhayati mārutah*

na—not; *enam*—this Ātman; *chhindanti*—shred; *śastrāṇi*—weapons; *na*—nor; *enam*—this Ātman; *dahati*—burns; *pāvakah*—fire; *na*—not; *cha*—and; *enam*—this Ātman; *kledayanti*—moisten; *āpaḥ*—water; *na*—nor; *śhoṣhayati*—dry; *mārutah*—wind.

Weapons cannot shred the Ātman, nor can fire burn it. Water cannot wet it, nor can the wind dry it.

Consciousness, which is the symptom of the Ātman, can be perceived by material instruments, but the Ātman itself cannot be contacted by any material object. This is so only because the Ātman is divine, and hence beyond the interactions of material objects. Shri Krishna expresses this vividly by saying that wind cannot wither the Ātman, nor can water moisten it or fire burn it.

अच्छेद्योऽयमदाह्योऽयमक्लेद्योऽशोष्य एव च ।
नित्यः सर्वगतः स्थाणुरचलोऽयं सनातनः ॥ 24 ॥

*achchhedyo 'yam adāhyo 'yam akledyo 'śhoṣhya eva cha
nityah sarva-gatah sthāṇur achalo 'yam sanātanah*

achchhedyah—unbreakable; *ayam*—this Ātman; *adāhyah*—incombustible; *ayam*—this Ātman; *akledyah*—cannot be dampened; *ashoṣyah*—cannot be dried; *eva*—indeed; *cha*—and; *nityah*—everlasting; *sarva-gatah*—all-pervading; *sthāṇuh*—unalterable; *achalah*—immutable; *ayam*—this Ātman; *sanātanah*—primordial.

The Ātman is unbreakable and incombustible; it can neither be dampened nor dried. It is everlasting, in all places, unalterable, immutable, and primordial.

The point about immortality is again being driven home here. For the teacher to merely impart perfect knowledge is not enough; for that knowledge to be useful, it must sink deep into the heart of the student. Hence a skillful teacher often repeats a point previously made. In Sanskrit literature, this is called *punarukti*, or “repetition.” Shri Krishna has often used *punarukti*, as a tool in the Bhagavad Gita for stressing the important spiritual principles to ensure that they are grasped deeply by his student.

अव्यक्तोऽयमचिन्त्योऽयमविकार्योऽयमुच्यते ।
तस्मादेवं विदित्वैनं नानुशोचितुमर्हसि ॥ 25 ॥

*avyakto 'yam achintyo 'yam avikāryo 'yam uchyate
tasmādevaṁ viditvainam nānuśhochitum arhasi*

avyaktaḥ—unmanifested; *ayam*—this Ātman; *achintyah*—inconceivable; *ayam*—this Ātman; *avikāryah*—unchangeable; *ayam*—this Ātman; *uchyate*—is said; *tasmāt*—therefore; *evam*—thus; *viditvā*—having known; *enam*—this Ātman; *na*—not; *anuśhochitum*—to grieve; *arhasi*—befitting.

The Ātman is spoken of as invisible, inconceivable, and unchangeable. Knowing this, you should not grieve for the body.

Our eyes, made from material energy, can see only material objects. The Ātman, being divine and beyond the realm of material energy, is invisible to our eyes. Scientists have conducted experiments to perceive its presence. They put a dying person into a glass case and sealed the case, to see whether the departure of the Ātman would crack the glass. However, the Ātman left the body without the glass box getting cracked. Being subtle, the Ātman did not need physical space for its movement.

Being subtler than the material energy, the Ātman is also inconceivable to our intellect. The Kathopanishad says:

*indriyebhyah parā hyarthā arthebhyaśhcha param manah
manasastu parā buddhirbhuddherātmā mahān parah (1.3.10) [v29]*

“Beyond the senses are the objects of the senses; subtler than the objects of the

senses is the mind. Beyond the mind is the intellect; and subtler than the intellect is the Ātman.” The material intellect can only comprehend material concepts, but can never reach the divine Ātman by the power of its contemplation. As a result, knowledge of the self requires external sources, which are the scriptures and the Guru.

अथ चैनं नित्यजातं नित्यं वा मन्यसे मृतम् ।
तथापि त्वं महाबाहो नैवं शोचितुमर्हसि ॥ 26 ॥

*atha chainam nitya-jātam nityam vā manyase mṛitam
tathāpi tvam mahā-bāho naivam śochitum arhasi*

atha—if, however; *cha*—and; *enam*—this Ātman; *nitya-jātam*—taking constant birth; *nityam*—always; *vā*—or; *manyase*—you think; *mṛitam*—dead; *tathā api*—even then; *tvam*—you; *mahā-bāho*—mighty-armed one, Arjun; *na*—not; *enam*—this Ātman; *śochitum*—grieve; *arhasi*—befitting.

**If, however, you think that the self is subject to constant birth and death,
O mighty-armed Arjun, even then you should not grieve like this.**

Shri Krishna uses the word *atha* to indicate that Arjun may want to believe the other explanations that exist about the nature of the self. This verse needs to be understood in the context of the philosophical streams existing in India and their divergent understandings about the nature of self. Indian philosophy has historically comprised of twelve schools of thought. Six of these accept the authority of the Vedas, and hence they are called *Āstik Darśhans*. These are Mīmānsā, Vedānt, Nyāya, Vaiśheśik, Sāṅkhya, and Yog. Within each of these are more branches—for example, the *Vedānt* school of thought is further divided into six schools—*Adavita vāda*, *Dwaita vāda*, *Viśiṣṭādvaita vāda*, *Viśhuddhadvaita vāda*, *Dwaitādvaita vāda*, and *Achintya-bhedābheda vāda*. Each of these has further branches, for example, *Advaita vāda* is subdivided into *Dṛiṣṭi-sṛiṣṭi vāda*, *Avachchheda vāda*, *Bimba-pratibimba vāda*, *Vivarta vāda*, *Ajāta vāda*, etc. We will not go into the details of these schools here. Let it suffice for now to know that all these schools of thought accept the Vedas as the authority of reference. Accordingly, they all accept the

eternal, unchangeable Ātman as the self.

The remaining six schools of Indian philosophy do not accept the authority of the Vedas. These are *Chārvāk vāda*, the four Buddhist schools (*Yogāchār vāda*, *Mādhyamik vāda*, *Vaibhāshik vāda*, and *Sautāntrik vāda*), and Jainism. Each of these has its own explanation for the nature of the self. *Chārvāka vāda* states that the body itself comprises the self, and consciousness is merely a product of the conglomeration of its constituents. Jainism states that the Ātman is the same size as the body, and hence, it is subject to change from birth to birth. The Buddhist schools of thought do not accept the existence of a permanent Ātman, and instead maintain that there is a stream of renewed animation from lifetime to lifetime, which ensures continuity of the individual.

It seems that at the time of Shri Krishna too, versions of the Buddhist philosophy of renewed animation and non-permanence of the Ātman existed. Hence he is explaining that even if Arjun subscribes to this philosophy of renewed animation of the self from life to life, there is still no reason to lament. *Why should one not lament? This is now explained in the next verse.*

जातस्य हि ध्रुवो मृत्युर्धुर्वं जन्म मृतस्य च ।
तस्मादपरिहार्येऽर्थे न त्वं शोचितुमहसि ॥ 27 ॥

*jātasya hi dhruvo mrityur dhruvam janma mritasya cha
tasmat̄ aparihārye 'rthe na tvam̄ śhochitum arhasi*

jātasya—for one who has been born; *hi*—for; *dhruvah*—certain; *mrityuh*—death; *dhruvam*—certain; *janma*—birth; *mritasya*—for the dead; *cha*—and; *tasmat̄*—therefore; *aparihārye arthe*—in this inevitable situation; *na*—not; *tvam̄*—you; *śhochitum*—lament; *arhasi*—befitting.

Death is certain for one who has been born, and rebirth is inevitable for one who has died. Therefore, you should not lament over the inevitable.

In English language, there is a popular idiom, “as sure as death.” Benjamin Franklin said: “The only things certain in life are death and taxes.” The most certain thing in life is that we will meet with death one day. Psychologists

categorize the fear of death as the biggest fear in life. In Patanjali's Yog Darśhan too, *abhinivesh*, or the instinctive urge to survive at all costs, is mentioned as a trait of the material intellect. But for one who has taken birth, death is inevitable. So when something is inevitable, why lament over it?

The Mahābhārat relates an incident regarding this. During the period of their exile in the forest, one day while wandering the five Pandavas were thirsty and came across a well. Yudhishthir asked Bheem to go and fetch water for all of them. When Bheem reached the well, a *yakṣha* (powerful spirit) began speaking from inside the well, "I will only let you take the water if you first answer my questions." Bheem paid no heed and proceeded to draw water. The *yakṣha* pulled him in. After some time when Bheem did not return, a concerned Yudhishthir sent Arjun to see what was happening and fetch water. When Arjun reached the well, the *yakṣha* asked him too, "I have already seized your brother. Do not attempt to draw the water unless you can answer all my questions correctly." Arjun also paid no heed, and the *yakṣha* pulled him into the well. The other brothers, Nakul and Sahadev, followed him, but met with the same fate. Finally, Yudhishtir himself came to the well. Once again, the *yakṣha* said, "Answer my questions if you want to drink water from the well, or I will pull you in, just as I have done to your four brothers." Yudhisthir agreed to answer the questions. The *yakṣha* was actually the celestial deities of death, Yamraj, in disguise. He asked sixty questions, each of which was answered perfectly by Yudhishtir. One of these questions was: *kim āśhcharyam?* "What is the most surprising thing in this world?" Yudhisthir replied:

*ahanyahani bhūtāni gachchhantīha yamālayam
śheśhāḥ sthiratvam ichchhanti kimāśharyamataḥ param (Mahābhārat) [v30]*

"At every moment people are dying. Those who are alive are witnessing this phenomenon, and yet they do not think that one day they will also have to die. What can be more astonishing than this?" Shri Krishna explains in this

verse that life is inescapably a dead end, and so a wise person does not lament over the inevitable.

अव्यक्तादीनि भूतानि व्यक्तमध्यानि भारत ।
अव्यक्तनिधनान्येव तत्र का परिदेवना ॥ 28 ॥

*avyaktādīni bhūtāni vyakta-madhyāni bhārata
avyakta-nidhanānyeva tatra kā paridevanā*

avyakta-ādīni—unmanifest before birth; *bhūtāni*—created beings; *vyakta*—manifest; *madhyāni*—in the middle; *bhārata*—Arjun, scion of Bharat; *avyakta*—unmanifest; *nidhanāni*—on death; *eva*—indeed; *tatra*—therefore; *kā*—why; *paridevanā*—grieve.

O scion of Bharat, all created beings are unmanifest before birth, manifest in life, and again unmanifest on death. So why grieve?

Shri Krishna dispelled the cause of lamentation in respect to the Ātman in verse 2.20, and in respect to the body in verse 2.27. Now he includes both in this verse. Sage Narad instructed Yudhishthir along similar lines, in Śrīmad Bhāgavatam:

*yan manyase dhruvam lokam adhruvam vā na chobhayam
sarvathā na hi śhochyās te snehād anyatra mohajāt (1.13.44) [v31]*

“Whether you consider the personality to be an eternal Ātman or to be a temporary body, or even if you accept it as an inconceivable mixture of Ātman and body, you should not lament in any way. The cause for lamentation is only attachment that arises out of illusion.”

In the material realm, each individual Ātman is bound by three bodies—gross body, subtle body, causal body.

Gross body: Consists of the five gross elements of nature—earth, water, fire, air, and space.

Subtle body: Consists of eighteen elements—five life-airs, five working senses, five knowledge senses, mind, intellect, and ego.

Causal body: Consists of the account of karmas from endless past lives, including the *sanskārs* (tendencies) carried forward from previous lives.

At the time of death, the Ātman discards its gross body, and departs with the subtle and causal bodies. Bhagavān again gives the Ātman another gross body according to its subtle and causal bodies, and sends the Ātman into a suitable mother's womb for the purpose. After the Ātman gives up one gross body, there is a transitional phase before it receives a new gross body. This could be a few seconds in duration or a few years long. So before birth, the Ātman existed with the unmanifest subtle and causal bodies. After death, it still exists in the unmanifest state. It only becomes manifest in the middle. So death is no reason for grief.

आश्चर्यवत्पश्यति कश्चिदेन
माश्चर्यवद्वदति तथैव चान्यः ।
आश्चर्यवच्चैनमन्यः शृणोति
श्रुत्वाप्येनं वेद न चैव कश्चित् ॥ 29 ॥

āśharya-vat paśhyati kaśchid enan
āśharya-vad vadati tathaiva chānyah
āśharya-vach chainam anyaḥ śrīnoti
śhrutvāpyenam veda na chaiva kaśchit

āśharya-vat—as amazing; *paśhyati*—see; *kaśchit*—someone; *enam*—this Ātman; *āśharya-vat*—as amazing; *vadati*—speak of; *tathā*—thus; *eva*—indeed; *cha*—and; *anyah*—other; *āśharya-vat*—similarly amazing; *cha*—also; *enam*—this Ātman; *anyah*—others; *śrīnoti*—hear; *śhrutvā*—having heard; *api*—even; *enam*—this Ātman; *veda*—understand; *na*—not; *cha*—and; *eva*—even; *kaśchit*—some.

Some see the Ātman as amazing, some describe it as amazing, and some hear of the Ātman as amazing, while others, even on hearing, cannot understand it at all.

The whole world is amazing, from the tiniest atoms to the largest galaxies, for they are all wonderful creations of Bhagavān. A little rose flower is also

amazing, in its texture, smell, and beauty. The most amazing is the Supreme Bhagavān himself. It is said that Anant Shesh, the divine ten thousand-headed serpent on whom Bhagavān Vishnu resides, has been singing the glories of Bhagavān since the beginning of creation, and has still not completed them.

The Ātman, being a fragmental part of Bhagavān, is more amazing than the things of the world because it is transcendental to material existence. Just as Bhagavān is divine, its fragment, the Ātman, is also divine. For this reason, mere intellectual prowess is not enough to comprehend the Ātman, since the existence and nature of the Ātman are difficult to grasp. The Kāṭhopaniṣad states:

śhravaṇāyāpi bahubhiryo na labhyah śrīṇvanto 'pi bahavo yaṁ na vidyuḥ
āśhcharyo vaktā kuśhalo 'sya labdhā 'ścharyo jñātā kuśhalānuśhiṣṭah (1.2.7) [v32]

“A teacher who is self-realized is very rare. The opportunity to hear instructions about the science of self-realization from such a teacher is even rarer. If, by great good fortune, such an opportunity presents itself, students who can comprehend this topic are the rarest.” Hence, an enlightened teacher is never discouraged when, despite sincere efforts, the majority of the people are either not interested in, or cannot understand the science of the Ātman.

देही नित्यमवध्योऽयं देहे सर्वस्य भारत ।
तस्मात्सर्वाणि भूतानि न त्वं शोचितुमर्हसि ॥ ३० ॥

dehī nityam avadhyo 'yaṁ dehe sarvasya bhārata
tasmat̄ sarvāṇi bhūtāni na tvam̄ śochitum arhasi

dehī—the Ātman that dwells within the body; *nityam*—always; *avadhyah*—immortal; *ayam*—this Ātman; *dehe*—in the body; *sarvasya*—of everyone; *bhārata*—descendant of Bharat, Arjun; *tasmat̄*—therefore; *sarvāṇi*—for all; *bhūtāni*—living entities; *na*—not; *tvam̄*—you; *śochitum*—mourn; *arhasi*—should.

O Arjun, the Ātman that dwells within the body is immortal; therefore, you should not mourn for anyone.

Often, in the course of his teachings, Shri Krishna explains a concept in a few

verses, and then states a verse summarizing those teachings. This verse is a summary of the instructions on the immortality of the self, and its distinction from the body.

स्वधर्ममपि चावेक्ष्य न विकम्पितुमर्हसि ।
धर्म्याद्धि युद्धाच्छ्रेयोऽन्यतक्षत्रियस्य न विद्यते ॥ ३१ ॥

*swa-dharmam api chāvekṣhya na vikampitum arhasi
dharmyāddhi yuddhāch chhreyo 'nyat kṣhatriyasya na vidyate*

swa-dharmam—one's duty in accordance with the Vedas; *api*—also; *cha*—and; *avekṣhya*—considering; *na*—not; *vikampitum*—to waver; *arhasi*—should; *dharmyāt*—for righteousness; *hi*—indeed; *yuddhāt*—than fighting; *śhreyah*—better; *anyat*—another; *kṣhatriyasya*—of a warrior; *na*—not; *vidyate*—exists.

Besides, considering your duty as a warrior, you should not waver. Indeed, for a warrior, there is no better engagement than fighting for upholding of righteousness.

Swa-dharma is one's duty as an individual, in accordance with the Vedas. There are two kinds of *swa-dharmas*, or prescribed duties for the individual—*para dharma*, or spiritual duties, and *apara dharma*, or material duties. Considering oneself to be the Ātman, the prescribed duty is to love and serve Bhagavān with devotion. This is called *para dharma*. However, since a vast majority of humankind does not possess this spiritual perspective, the Vedas also prescribe duties for those who see themselves as the body. These duties are defined according to one's *āśram* (station in life), and *varṇa* (occupation). They are called *para dharma*, or mundane duties. This distinction between spiritual duties and material duties needs to be kept in mind while understanding the Bhagavad Gita and the Vedic philosophy at large.

By occupation, Arjun was a warrior, and so his occupational duty as a warrior was to fight for the protection of righteousness. Shri Krishna is calling this *swa-dharma*, or prescribed duty at the bodily level.

यदृच्छ्या चोपपन्नं स्वर्गद्वारमपावृतम् ।
सुखिनः क्षत्रियाः पार्थ लभन्ते युद्धमीदृशम् ॥ ३२ ॥

*yadrichchhayā chopapannam swarga-dvāram apāvritam
sukhinah kṣhatriyāḥ pārtha labhante yuddham īdriśham*

yadrichchhayā—unsought; *cha*—and; *upapannam*—come; *swarga*—celestial abodes; *dvāram*—door; *apāvritam*—wide open; *sukhinah*—happy; *kṣhatriyāḥ*—warriors; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *labhante*—obtain; *yuddham*—war; *īdriśham*—such.

O Parth, happy are the warriors to whom such opportunities to defend righteousness come unsought, opening for them the stairway to the celestial abodes.

The warrior class has always been necessary in the world for protecting society. The occupational duties of warriors demand that they be brave and even willing to lay down their lives, if required, for the protection of society. During Vedic times, while killing animals was forbidden for the rest of society, warriors were allowed to go into the forest and practice warfare by killing animals. Such chivalrous warriors were expected to welcome the opportunity to defend righteousness with open arms. The discharge of their duty would be rewarded as a virtuous act in this life and the next.

The proper discharge of one's occupational duties is not a spiritual act in itself, and it does not result in Brahman-realization. It is merely a virtuous deed with positive material rewards. Shri Krishna brings his instructions a step lower and says that even if Arjun is not interested in spiritual teachings, and wishes to remain at the bodily platform, then also his social duty as a warrior is to defend righteousness.

As we can see, the Bhagavad Gita is a call to action, not to inaction. When people are exposed to lectures on spirituality, they often question, “Are you asking me to give up my work?” However, verse after verse, Shri Krishna is giving Arjun the reverse instruction. While Arjun wishes to abandon his duty,

Shri Krishna repeatedly coaxes him to discharge it. The change that Shri Krishna wishes to see in Arjun is an internal one, in his consciousness, and not an external renunciation of works. *He now explains to Arjun the consequences of giving up his duty.*

अथ चेत्वमिमं धर्म्यं संग्रामं न करिष्यसि ।
ततः स्वधर्मं कीर्ति च हित्वा पापमवाप्स्यसि ॥३३॥

*atha chet tvam imam dharmyam saṅgrāmam na kariṣyasi
tataḥ sva-dharmam kīrtim cha hitvā pāpam avāpsyasi*

atha chet—if, however; *tvam*—you; *imam*—this; *dharmyam saṅgrāmam*—righteous war; *na*—not; *kariṣyasi*—act; *tataḥ*—then; *sva-dharmam*—one's duty in accordance with the Vedas; *kīrtim*—reputation; *cha*—and; *hitvā*—abandoning; *pāpam*—sin; *avāpsyasi*—will incur.

If, however, you refuse to fight this righteous war, abandoning your social duty and reputation, you will certainly incur sin.

If a warrior chooses to become non-violent on the battlefield, it will be dereliction of duty, and hence, classified as a sinful act. Hence, Shri Krishna states that if Arjun abandons his duty, considering it to be repugnant and troublesome, he will be committing a sin. The Parāśhar Smṛiti states:

*kṣatriyoḥ hi prajā rakṣaṇśhastrapāṇih pradaṇḍavān
nirjitya parasainyādi kṣhitim dharmena pālayet (1.61) [v33]*

“The occupational duty of a warrior is to protect the citizens of the country from oppression. This requires the application of violence in appropriate cases for the maintenance of law and order. He should thus defeat the soldiers of enemy kings, and help rule the country according to the principles of righteousness.”

अकीर्ति चापि भूतानि
 कथयिष्यन्ति तेऽव्ययाम् ।
 सम्भावितस्य चाकीर्ति
 मरणादतिरिच्यते ॥ 34 ॥

*akīrtim chāpi bhūtāni
 kathayiṣhyanti te 'vyayām
 sambhāvitasya chākīrtir
 maraṇād atirichyate*

akīrtim—infamy; *cha*—and; *api*—also; *bhūtāni*—people; *kathayiṣhyanti*—will speak; *te*—of your; *avyayām*—everlasting; *sambhāvitasya*—of a respectable person; *cha*—and; *akīrtih*—infamy; *maraṇāt*—than death; *atirichyate*—is greater.

People will speak of you as a coward and a deserter. For a respectable person, infamy is worse than death.

For respectable people, social prestige is very important. The particular *guṇas* (modes of nature) of warriors make respect and honor especially important for them. For them, dishonor is worse than death. Shri Krishna reminds Arjun of this, so that if he is not inspired by superior knowledge, he may at least be inspired by inferior knowledge.

Many societies in the world observe the norm that a warrior who runs away from the battlefield out of cowardice is ostracized from society. That could be the extent of dishonor inflicted upon Arjun if he avoided his duty.

भयाद्रणादुपरतं मंस्यन्ते त्वां महारथाः ।
 येषां च त्वं बहुमतो भूत्वा यास्यसि लाघवम् ॥ 35 ॥

*bhayād ranād uparatam mansyante tvāṁ mahā-rathāḥ
 yeṣāṁ cha tvāṁ bahu-mato bhūtvā yāsyasi lāghavam*

bhayāt—out of fear; *ranāt*—from the battlefield; *uparatam*—have fled; *mansyante*—will think; *tvām*—you; *mahā-rathāḥ*—warriors who could single handedly match the strength of ten thousand ordinary warriors; *yeṣām*—for whom; *cha*—and; *tvām*—you; *bahu-mataḥ*—high esteemed; *bhūtvā*—having been; *yāsyasi*—you will loose; *lāghavam*—decreased in value.

The great generals who hold you in high esteem will think that you fled

from the battlefield out of fear, and thus will lose their respect for you.

Arjun was famous as a mighty warrior and a worthy opponent for even the most valiant of the Kauravas warriors, such as Bheeshma, Dronacharya, Karn, etc. He had attained fame by fighting many celestial deities. He had fought and overwhelmed even Bhagavān Shiv, who had come in the disguise of a hunter. Pleased with his valor and skill, Bhagavān Shiv had rewarded him with a celestial weapon, called *Pāshupatāstra*. His teacher at archery, Dronacharya, had also bestowed his blessings upon him in the form of a special weapon. Just before the start of the battle, if Arjun were to retire from the battlefield, these gallant warriors wouldn't know that affection for his relatives had inspired him to flee. They would consider him a coward, and assume that he had abstained from the war in dread of their prowess.

अवाच्यवादांश्च बहून्वदिष्यन्ति तवाहिताः ।
निन्दन्तस्तव सामर्थ्यं ततो दुःखतरं नु किम् ॥ 36 ॥

*avāchya-vādānśh cha bahūn vadishyanti tavāhitāḥ
nindantastava sāmarthyam tato duḥkhataram nu kim*

avāchya-vādān—using harsh words; *cha*—and; *bahūn*—many; *vadishyanti*—will say; *tava*—your; *ahitāḥ*—enemies; *nindataḥ*—defame; *tava*—your; *sāmarthyam*—might; *tataḥ*—than that; *duḥkhataram*—more painful; *nu*—indeed; *kim*—what.

Your enemies will defame and humiliate you with unkind words, disparaging your might. Alas, what could be more painful than that?

If Arjun chose to flee from battle, not only would Arjun's estimation wane in the assembly of mighty warriors, but he would also be disparaged. Shri Krishna uses the word *nindataḥ* which means “to vilify.” *Avāchya vādān* means the use of harsh words such as “Eunuch.” Arjun’s enemies, like Duryodhan, would say many unbecoming things about him, such as, “Look at that impotent Arjun fleeing from the battlefield like a dog with its tail between its legs.” Shri Krishna reminds Arjun that such derision would be very painful to him.

हतो वा प्राप्स्यसि स्वर्गं जित्वा वा भोक्ष्यसे महीम् ।
तस्मादुत्तिष्ठ कौन्तेय युद्धाय कृतनिश्चयः ॥३७॥

*hato vā prāpsyasi swargam jitvā vā bhokṣhyase mahīm
tasmād uttiṣṭha kaunteya yuddhāya kṛita-niśchayāḥ*

hataḥ—slain; *vā*—or; *prāpsyasi*—you will attain; *swargam*—celestial abodes; *jitvā*—by achieving victory; *vā*—or; *bhokṣhyase*—you shall enjoy; *mahīm*—the kingdom on earth; *tasmāt*—therefore; *uttiṣṭha*—arise; *kaunteya*—Arjun, the son of Kunti; *yuddhāya*—for fight; *kṛita-niśchayāḥ*—with determination.

If you fight, you will either be slain on the battlefield and go to the celestial abodes, or you will gain victory and enjoy the kingdom on earth. Therefore arise with determination, O son of Kunti, and be prepared to fight.

Continuing from verse 2.31, Shri Krishna is still giving instructions at the level of occupational duties. He explains to Arjun about the two possibilities arising from the performance of his duty. If Arjun becomes victorious, a kingdom on Earth awaits him, and if he is forced to lay down his life in the discharge of his duty, he will go to the celestial abodes.

सुखदुःखे समे कृत्वा लाभालाभौ जयाजयौ ।
ततो युद्धाय युज्यस्व नैवं पापमवाप्स्यसि ॥३८॥

*sukha-duḥkhe same kṛitvā lābhālābhau jayājayau
tato yuddhāya yujyasva naivam pāpam avāpsyasi*

sukha—happiness; *duḥkhe*—in distress; *same kṛitvā*—treating alike; *lābhālābhau*—gain and loss; *jaya-ajayau*—victory and defeat; *tataḥ*—thereafter; *yuddhāya*—for fighting; *yujyasva*—engage; *na*—never; *evam*—thus; *pāpam*—sin; *avāpsyasi*—shall incur.

Fight for the sake of duty, treating alike happiness and distress, loss and gain, victory and defeat. Fulfilling your responsibility in this way, you will never incur sin.

Having motivated Arjun from the mundane level, Shri Krishna now moves deeper into the science of work. Arjun had expressed his fear that by killing his

enemies he would incur sin. Shri Krishna addresses this apprehension. He advises Arjun to do his duty, without attachment to the fruits of his actions. Such an attitude to work will release him from any sinful reactions.

When we work with selfish motives, we create karmas, which bring about their subsequent karmic reactions. The Māthar Śhruti states:

punyena punya lokam nayati pāpena pāpamubhābhyaṁeva manushyalokam [v34]

“If you do good deeds, you will go to the celestial abodes; if you do bad deeds, you will go to the nether regions; if you do a mixture of both, you will come back to the planet Earth.” In either case, we get bound by the reactions of our karmas. Thus, mundane good deeds are also binding. They result in material rewards, which add to the stockpile of our karmas and thicken the illusion that there is happiness in the world.

However, if we give up selfish motives, then our actions no longer create any karmic reactions. For example, murder is a sin, and the judicial law of every country of the world declares it to be a punishable offence. But if a policeman in the discharge of his duty kills the leader of a gang of bandits, he is not punished for it. If a soldier kills an enemy soldier in battle, he is not punished for it. In fact, he can even be awarded a medal for bravery. The reason for apparent lack of punishment is that these actions are not motivated by any ill-will or personal motive; they are performed as a matter of duty to the country. Bhagavān’s law is quite similar. If one gives up all selfish motives and works merely for the sake of duty toward the Supreme, such work does not create any karmic reactions.

So Shri Krishna advises Arjun to become detached from outcomes and simply focus on doing his duty. When he fights with the attitude of equanimity, treating victory and defeat, pleasure and pain as the same, then despite killing his enemies, he will never incur sin. This subject is also repeated later in the

Bhagavad Gita, in verse 5.10: “Just as a lotus leaf is untouched by water, those who dedicate all their actions to Bhagavān, abandoning all attachment, remain untouched by sin.”

Having declared a profound conclusion about work without attachment, Shri Krishna now says that he will explain the science of work in detail, to reveal the logic behind what he has said.

एषा तेऽभिहिता साङ्ख्ये
बुद्ध्योगे त्विमां शृणु ।
बुद्ध्या युक्तो यया पार्थ
कर्मबन्धं प्रहास्यसि ॥ 39 ॥

*eṣhā te 'bhihitā sāṅkhye
buddhir yoge tvimām śrīṇu
buddhyā yukto yayā pārtha
karma-bandham prahāsyasi*

eṣhā—hitherto; *te*—to you; *abhihitā*—explained; *sāṅkhye*—by analytical knowledge; *buddhiḥ yoge*—by the yog of intellect; *tu*—indeed; *imām*—this; *śrīṇu*—listen; *buddhyā*—by understanding; *yuktah*—united; *yayā*—by which; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *karma-bandham*—bondage of karma; *prahāsyasi*—you shall be released from.

Hitherto, I have explained to you *sāṅkhya yog*, or analytic knowledge regarding the nature of the Ātman. Now listen, O Parth, as I reveal *buddhi yog*, or the Yog of Intellect. When you work with such understanding, you will be freed from the bondage of karma.

The word *Sāṅkhya* comes from the roots *Sāñ*, meaning “complete,” and *khyā*, meaning “to know.” So *Sāṅkhya* means the “complete analytical knowledge of something.” The Sankhya Darshan, which is one of the six philosophical treatises in Indian philosophy, makes an analytical enumeration of the entities in cosmos. It lists twenty-four entities: *pañch-mahābhūta* (earth, water, fire, air, and sky), *pañch tanmātrā* (the five abstract qualities of matter—taste, touch, smell, sound, and sight), *pañch karmendriya* (five working senses), *pañch jñānendriya*

(five knowledge senses), mind, *ahankār* (the entity created by the evolution of *mahān*), *mahān* (the entity created by evolution of *prakṛiti*), *prakṛiti* (the primordial form of the material energy). Apart from these is *purush* or the Ātman, which tries to enjoy *prakṛiti*, and gets bound in it.

Shri Krishna has just explained to Arjun another form of *Sāṅkhyā*, which is the analytical knowledge of the immortal Ātman. He now says that he is going to reveal the science of working without desire for rewards. This requires detachment from the fruits of actions. Such detachment comes by practicing discrimination with the intellect. Hence, Shri Krishna has interestingly called it *buddhi yog*, or “Yog of the Intellect.” In subsequent verses (2.41 and 2.44), he goes on to explain how the intellect plays an important role in bringing the mind to a state of detachment.

**नेहाभिक्रमनाशोऽस्ति प्रत्यवायो न विद्यते ।
स्वल्पमप्यस्य धर्मस्य त्रायते महतो भयात् ॥ ४० ॥**

*nehābhikrama-nāśho 'sti pratyavāyo na vidyate
svalpam apyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt*

na—not; *iha*—in this; *abhibikrama*—efforts; *nāśhah*—loss; *asti*—there is; *pratyavāyah*—adverse result; *na*—not; *vidyate*—is; *su-alpam*—a little; *api*—even; *asya*—of this; *dharmasya*—occupation; *trāyate*—saves; *mahatah*—from great; *bhayāt*—danger.

Working in this state of consciousness, there is no loss or adverse result, and even a little effort saves one from great danger.

The great danger we face is that we may not get the human form in the next life, and instead go into the lower species of life, such as animals, birds, the nether regions, etc. We cannot be complacent that the human form will remain reserved for us, for the next birth will be determined by our karmas and level of consciousness in this life.

There are 8.4 million species of life in existence. The species below human beings—animals, birds, fishes, insects, birds, etc.—do not have an evolved

intellect as we humans do. Yet, they also perform commonplace activities such as eating, sleeping, defending, and mating. Human beings have been endowed with the faculty of knowledge, for a higher purpose, so that they may utilize it to elevate themselves. If humans utilize their intellects merely for doing the animalistic activities of eating, sleeping, mating, and defending, in a deluxe way, it is a misuse of the human form. For example, if someone makes eating as the primary pleasure of life, then the body of a pig becomes more suitable for such a person, and thus, that individual receives a pig's body in the next life. If someone makes sleeping the goal of life, then Bhagavān deems that the body of a polar bear is more suitable for such activity and allots it in the succeeding life. So the great danger before us is that we may not get a human birth in the next life. The Vedas state:

*iha chedavedīdatha satyamasti na chedihāvedīnmahatī vinaśhṭih
(Kenopaniṣhad 2.5) [v35]*

“O human being, the human birth is a rare opportunity. If you do not utilize it to achieve your goal, you will suffer great ruin.” Again, they state:

*iha chedaśhakad boddhum prākśharīrasya visrasah
tataḥ sargeśhu lokeśhu śharīratvāya kalpate (Kathopaniṣhad 2.3.4) [v36]*

“If you do not strive for Brahman-realization in this life, you will continue to rotate in the 8.4 million species of life for many births.”

However, once we commence on the journey of spiritual practice then even if we do not complete the path in this life, Bhagavān sees that our intention to do so existed. Therefore, he grants us the human birth again, to enable us to continue from where we had left off. In this way, we avert the great danger.

Also, Shri Krishna says that no loss ever comes from endeavor made on this path. This is because whatever material assets we accumulate in the present life have to be left behind at the time of death. But if we make any spiritual advancement on the path of Yog, Bhagavān preserves it, and gives us the fruits

in the next life, enabling us to start off from where we had left. *Thus, having informed Arjun about its benefits, Shri Krishna now begins instructing him about the science of working without attachment.*

व्यवसायात्मिका बुद्धिरेकेह कुरुनन्दन ।
बहुशाखा ह्यनन्ताश्च बुद्धयोऽव्यवसायिनाम् ॥ 41 ॥

vyavasāyāt̄mikā buddhir ekeha kuru-nandana
bahu-śākhā hyanantāśh cha buddhaya 'vyavasāyinām

vyavasāya-ātmikā—resolute; *buddhiḥ*—intellect; *ekā*—single; *iha*—on this path; *kuru-nandana*—descendent of the Kurus; *bahu-śākhāḥ*—many-branched; *hi*—indeed; *anantāḥ*—endless; *cha*—also; *buddhayah*—intellect; *avyavasāyinām*—of the irresolute.

O descendent of the Kurus, the intellect of those who are on this path is resolute, and their aim is one-pointed. But the intellect of those who are irresolute is many-branched.

Attachment is a function of the mind. Its manifestation is that the mind repeatedly runs toward the object of its attachment, which could be persons, sensual objects, prestige, bodily comfort, situations, and so on. So if thoughts of some person or object repeatedly come to the mind, it is a possible indication of the mind being attached to it. However, if it is the mind that gets attached, then why is Shri Krishna bringing the intellect into the topic of attachment? Is there any role of the intellect in eliminating attachment?

Within our body is the subtle *antah karan*, which we also colloquially refer to as the heart. It consists of the mind, the intellect, and the ego. In this subtle machine, the intellect is superior to the mind. It makes decisions while the mind creates desires and gets attached to the object of affection as determined by the intellect. For instance, if the intellect decides that money is the source of happiness, the mind hankers for wealth. If the intellect decides that prestige is the most important thing in life, the mind craves for reputation and fame. In other words, the mind develops desires in accordance with the knowledge of

the intellect.

Throughout the day, we humans control our mind with the intellect. While sitting at home, we adopt informal postures in which the mind finds comfort. Yet, we adopt appropriate formal postures while sitting in the office. It is not that the mind enjoys the formality of the office—given its way, it would rather embrace the informality of home. However, the intellect decides that formal behavior is necessary in the office. So the intellect controls the mind, and people sit formally all day long, following the decorum of the workplace, against the nature of the mind. Similarly, the mind does not enjoy doing office work—if it had its way, it would rather sit at home and watch television. But the intellect rules that working in office is necessary to earn a living. Therefore, the intellect again reins in the natural tendency of the mind, and people work eight hours a day, or longer.

The above examples illustrate that as human beings our intellect possesses the ability to control the mind. Thus, we must cultivate the intellect with proper knowledge and use it to guide the mind in the proper direction. *Buddhi yog* is the art of detaching the mind from the fruits of actions, by developing a resolute decision of the intellect that all work is meant for the pleasure of Bhagavān. Such a person of resolute intellect cultivates single-minded focus on the goal, and traverses the path like an arrow released from the bow. This resolve becomes so strong in higher stages of *sādhanā* that nothing can deter the *sādhak* from treading the path. He or she thinks, “Even if there are millions of obstacles on my path, even if the whole world condemns me, even if I have to lay down my life, I will still not give up my *sādhanā*.” But those whose intellect is many-branched find their mind running in various directions. They are unable to develop the focus of mind that is required to tread the path to Bhagavān.

यामिमां पुष्पितां वाचं प्रवदन्त्यविपश्चितः ।
वेदवादरताः पार्थ नान्यदस्तीति वादिनः ॥ 42 ॥

कामात्मानः स्वर्गपरा जन्मकर्मफलप्रदाम् ।
क्रियाविशेषबहुलां भोगैश्वर्यगतिं प्रति ॥ 43 ॥

*yāmimām puṣhpitām vācham pravadanty-avipaśchitah
veda-vāda-ratāḥ pārtha nānyad astīti vādinah*

*kāmātmānah swarga-parā janma-karma-phala-pradām
kriyā-viśeṣha-bahulām bhogaiśhwarya-gatim prati*

yām imām—all these; *puṣhpitām*—flowery; *vācham*—words; *pravadanti*—speak; *avipaśchitah*—those with limited understanding; *veda-vāda-ratāḥ*—attached to the flowery words of the Vedas; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *na anyat*—no other; *asti*—is; *iti*—thus; *vādinah*—advocate; *kāmātmānah*—desirous of sensual pleasure; *swarga-parāḥ*—aiming to achieve the heavenly planets; *janma-karma-phala*—high birth and fruitive results; *pradām*—awarding; *kriyā-viśeṣha*—pompous ritualistic ceremonies; *bahulām*—various; *bhoga*—gratification; *aiśhwarya*—luxury; *gatim*—progress; *prati*—toward.

Those with limited understanding, get attracted to the flowery words of the Vedas, which advocate ostentatious rituals for elevation to the celestial abodes, and presume no higher principle is described in them. They glorify only those portions of the Vedas that please their senses, and perform pompous ritualistic ceremonies for attaining high birth, opulence, sensual enjoyment, and elevation to the heavenly planets.

The Vedas are divided into three sections. These are: *Karm-kāṇḍ* (ritualistic ceremonies), *Jñāna-kāṇḍa* (knowledge section), and *Upāsanā-kāṇḍ* (devotional section). The *Karm-kāṇḍ* section advocates the performance of ritualistic ceremonies for material rewards and promotion to the celestial abodes. Those who seek sensual pleasures glorify this section of the Vedas.

The celestial abodes contain a higher order of material luxuries, and offer greater facility for sensual enjoyment. But elevation to the heavenly abodes does not imply a concurrent spiritual elevation. These celestial planes are also within the material universe, and having gone there, when one's account of

good karmas gets depleted, one again returns to the planet Earth. People with limited understanding strive for the heavenly abodes, thinking that is the whole purpose of the Vedas. In this way, they continue transmigrating in the cycle of life-and-death, without endeavoring for Brahman-realization. However, those with spiritual wisdom do not make even Swarga their goal. The Mundakopaniṣhad states:

*avidyāyāmantare vartamānāḥ svayamdhīrāḥ paṇḍitam manyamānāḥ
jaṅghanyamānāḥ pariyanti mūḍhā andhenāiva nīyamānā yathāndhāḥ* (1.2.8) [v37]

“Those, who practice the ostentatious rituals prescribed in the Vedas for enjoying the celestial pleasures of the higher abodes, think themselves to be scholars of the scriptures, but in reality they are foolish. They are like the blind leading the blind.”

भोगैश्वर्यप्रसक्तानां तयापहृतचेतसाम् ।
व्यवसायात्मिका बुद्धिः समाधौ न विधीयते ॥ 44 ॥

*bhogaiśwarya-prasaktānām tayāpahṛita-chetasām
vyavasāya-ātmikā buddhiḥ samādhau na vidhīyate*

bhoga—gratification; *aiśhwarya*—luxury; *prasaktānām*—whose minds are deeply attached; *tayā*—by that; *apahṛita-chetasām*—bewildered in intellect; *vyavasāya-ātmikā*—resolute; *buddhiḥ*—intellect; *samādhau*—resolute; *na*—never; *vidhīyate*—occurs.

With their minds deeply attached to worldly pleasures and their intellects bewildered by such things, they are unable to possess the resolute determination for success on the path to Bhagavān.

People whose minds are attached to sensual enjoyment concern themselves with *bhog* (gratification), and *aiśhwarya* (luxury). They engage their intellects in enhancing their income and contemplating how to increase their material possessions and maximize their enjoyment. Bewildered in this manner, they are unable to develop the firm resolve required for traversing the path to Brahman-realization.

त्रैगुण्यविषया वेदा निस्त्रैगुण्यो भवार्जुन ।
निर्द्वन्द्वो नित्यसत्त्वस्थो निर्योगक्षेम आत्मवान् ॥ 45 ॥

*trai-guṇya-viṣhayā vedā nistrai-guṇyo bhavārjuna
nirdvandvo nitya-sattva-stho niryoga-kṣhema ātmavān*

trai-guṇya—of the three modes of material nature; *viṣhayāḥ*—subject matter; *vedāḥ*—Vedic scriptures; *nistrai-guṇyah*—above the three modes of material nature, transcendental; *bhava*—be; *arjuna*—Arjun; *nirdvandvah*—free from dualities; *nitya-sattva-sthah*—eternally fixed in truth; *niryoga-kṣhemah*—unconcerned about gain and preservation; *ātma-vān*—situated in the self.

The Vedas deal with the three modes of material nature, O Arjun. Rise above the three modes to a state of pure spiritual consciousness. Freeing yourself from dualities, eternally fixed in truth, and without concern for material gain and safety, be situated in the self.

The material energy binds the divine Ātman to the bodily conception of life, by its three constituent modes. These modes of material nature are *sattva* (mode of goodness), *rajas* (mode of passion), and *tamas* (mode of ignorance). The relative proportion of the three modes varies for every individual, due to their *sanskārs* (tendencies) from countless past lives, and accordingly, everyone has different inclinations and tendencies. The Vedic scriptures accept this disparity and give suitable instructions for all kinds of people. If the *śāstras* did not contain instructions for worldly-minded people, they would have gone further astray. So, the Vedas offer them material rewards for the performance of rigorous rituals, helping them rise from the mode of ignorance to passion, and from passion to goodness.

Thus, the Vedas contain both kinds of knowledge—ritualistic ceremonies for the materially attached and divine knowledge for spiritual aspirants. When Shri Krishna tells Arjun to reject the Vedas, the statement needs to be understood in the context of the preceding and following verses. He is implying that Arjun should not be attracted by the section of the Vedas that propounds rules, regulations, and ceremonies for material rewards. Instead, he

should use the divine section of the Vedic knowledge to elevate himself to the level of Absolute Truth.

**यावानर्थं उदपाने सर्वतः सम्प्लुतोदके ।
तावान्सर्वेषु वेदेषु ब्राह्मणस्य विजानतः ॥४६॥**

*yāvān artha udapāne sarvataḥ samplutodake
tāvānsarveṣhu vedeṣhu brāhmaṇasya vijānataḥ*

yāvān—whatever; *arthāḥ*—purpose; *uda-pāne*—a well of water; *sarvataḥ*—in all respects; *sampluta-udake*—by a large lake; *tāvān*—that many; *sarveṣhu*—in all; *vedeṣhu*—Vedas; *brāhmaṇasya*—one who realizes the Absolute Truth; *vijānataḥ*—who is in complete knowledge.

Whatever purpose is served by a small well of water is naturally served in all respects by the ocean. Similarly, one who realizes the Absolute Truth also fulfills the purpose of all the Vedas.

The Vedas contain 100,000 mantras, describing varieties of rituals, practices, prayers, ceremonies, and gems of knowledge. All these are given with only one aim—to help unite the Ātman with Bhagavān.

*vāsudeva-parā vedā vāsudeva-parā makhāḥ
vāsudeva-parā yogā vāsudeva-parāḥ kriyāḥ
vāsudeva-paramā jñānam vāsudeva-paramā tapāḥ
vāsudeva-paro dharma vāsudeva-parā gatiḥ
(Bhāgavatam 1.2.28-29) [v38]*

“The goal of all the Vedic mantras, the ritualistic activities, spiritual practices, sacrifices, cultivation of knowledge, and performance of duties, is to help the Ātman reach the divine feet of Bhagavān.”

However, just as a medicine pill is often sugar-coated to make it more palatable, similarly to attract materially-minded people, the Vedas also give material allurements. The underlying motive is to help the Ātman gradually get detached from the world and attached to Bhagavān. Thus, one who is attaching the mind to Bhagavān is automatically fulfilling the purpose of all the Vedic mantras. Shri Krishna advises Uddhav:

*ājñāyaivam gunān doṣhān mayādiṣṭān api swakān
dharmān sanyajya yaḥ sarvān māṁ bhajeta sa sattamah
(Bhāgavatam 11.11.32) [v39]*

“The Vedas prescribe varieties of social and ritualistic duties for individuals. But those who grasp their underlying motive, and rejecting all intermediate instructions, wholeheartedly fulfill their duty toward me, I consider them to be the highest devotees.”

**कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन ।
मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥ 47 ॥**

*karmaṇy-evādhikāras te mā phaleṣhu kadāchana
mā karma-phala-hetur bhūr mā te saṅgo 'stvakarmani*

karmaṇi—in prescribed duties; *eva*—only; *adhikāraḥ*—right; *te*—your; *mā*—not; *phaleṣhu*—in the fruits; *kadāchana*—at any time; *mā*—never; *karma-phala*—results of the activities; *hetuh*—cause; *bhūh*—be; *mā*—not; *te*—your; *saṅgah*—attachment; *astu*—must be; *akarmani*—in inaction.

You have a right to perform your prescribed duties, but you are not entitled to the fruits of your actions. Never consider yourself to be the cause of the results of your activities, nor be attached to inaction.

This is an extremely popular verse of the Bhagavad Gita, so much so that even most school children in India are familiar with it. It offers deep insight into the proper spirit of work and is often quoted whenever the topic of *karm yog* is discussed. The verse gives four instructions regarding the science of work: 1) Do your duty, but do not concern yourself with the results. 2) The fruits of your actions are not for your enjoyment. 3) Even while working, give up the pride of doership. 4) Do not be attached to inaction.

Do your duty, but do not concern yourself with the results. We have the right to do our duty, but the results are not dependent only upon our efforts. A number of factors come into play in determining the results—our efforts, destiny (our past karmas), the will of Bhagavān, the efforts of others, the cumulative karmas of the people involved, the place and situation (a matter of

luck), etc. Now if we become anxious for results, we will experience anxiety whenever they are not according to our expectations. So Shri Krishna advises Arjun to give up concern for the results and instead focus solely on doing a good job. The fact is that when we are unconcerned about the results, we are able to focus entirely on our efforts, and the result is even better than before.

A humorous acronym for this is NATO or Not Attached to Outcome. Consider its application to a simple everyday activity such as playing golf. When people play golf, they are engrossed in the fruits—whether their score is under par, over par, etc. Now if they could merely focus on playing the shots to the best of their ability, they would find it the most enjoyable game of golf they have ever played. Additionally, with their complete focus on the shot being played, their game would be raised to a higher level.

The fruits of your actions are not for your enjoyment. To perform actions is an integral part of human nature. Having come into this world, we all have various duties determined by our family situation, social position, occupation, etc. While performing these actions, we must remember that we are not the enjoyers of the results—the results are meant for the pleasure of Bhagavān. The individual Ātman is a tiny part of Bhagavān (verse 15.7), and hence our inherent nature is to serve him through all our actions.

*dāsa bhūtamidam tasya jagatsthāvara jangamam
śrīmannārāyaṇa swāmī jagatānprabhuriśhwaraḥ*
(Padma Purāṇa) [v40]

“Bhagavān is the Master of the entire creation; all moving and non-moving beings are his servants.” Material consciousness is characterized by the following manner of thoughts, “I am the proprietor of all that I possess. It is all meant for my enjoyment. I have the right to enhance my possessions and maximize my enjoyment.” The reverse of this is Spiritual consciousness, which is characterized by thoughts such as, “Bhagavān is the owner and enjoyer of

this entire world. I am merely his selfless servant. I must use all that I have in the service of Bhagavān.” Accordingly, Shri Krishna instructs Arjun not to think of himself as the enjoyer of the fruits of his actions.

Even while working, give up the pride of doership. Shri Krishna wants Arjun to give up kartritwābhīmān, or the ego of being the doer. He instructs Arjun never to chase after preconceived motives attached to his actions nor consider himself as the cause of the results of his actions. However, when we perform actions, then why should we not consider ourselves as the doers of those actions? The reason is that our senses, mind, and intellect are inert; Bhagavān energizes them with his power and puts them at our disposal. As a result, only with the help of the power we receive from him, are we able to work. For example, the tongs in the kitchen are inactive by themselves, but they get energized by someone’s hand, and then they perform even difficult tasks, such as lifting burning coal, etc. Now if we say that the tongs are the doers of actions, it will be inaccurate. If the hand did not energize them, what would they be able to do? They would merely lie inert on the table. Similarly, if Bhagavān did not supply our body-mind-Ātman mechanism with the power to perform actions, we could have done nothing. Thus, we must give up the ego of doing, remembering that Bhagavān is the only source of the power by which we perform all our actions.

All the above thoughts are very nicely summarized in the following popular Sanskrit verse:

*yatkṛitam yatkariṣhyāmi tatsarvam na mayā kṛitam
tvayā kṛitam tu phalabhuk tvameva madhusūdana [v41]*

“Whatever I have achieved and whatever I wish to achieve, I am not the doer of these. O Madhusudan, you are the real doer, and you alone are the enjoyer of their results.”

Do not be attached to inaction. Although the nature of the living being is to work, often situations arise where work seems burdensome and confusing. In such cases, instead of running away from it, we must understand and implement the proper science of work, as explained by Shri Krishna to Arjun. However, it is highly inappropriate if we consider work as laborious and burdensome, and resort to inaction. Becoming attached to inaction is never the solution and is clearly condemned by Shri Krishna.

**योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा धनञ्जय ।
सिद्ध्यसिद्ध्योः समो भूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते ॥ 48 ॥**

*yoga-sthah kuru karmāṇi saṅgam tyaktvā dhanañjaya
siddhy-asiddhyoh samo bhūtvā samatvam yoga uchyate*

yoga-sthah—being steadfast in yog; *kuru*—perform; *karmāṇi*—duties; *saṅgam*—attachment; *tyaktvā*—having abandoned; *dhanañjaya*—Arjun; *siddhi-asiddhyoh*—in success and failure; *samah*—equipoised; *bhūtvā*—becoming; *samatvam*—equanimity; *yogah*—Yog; *uchyate*—is called.

Be steadfast in the performance of your duty, O Arjun, abandoning attachment to success and failure. Such equanimity is called Yog.

The equanimity that enables us to accept all circumstances with serenity is so praiseworthy that Shri Krishna calls it Yog, or union with the Supreme. This equipoise comes from implementing the knowledge of the previous verse. When we understand that the effort is in our hands, not the results, we then concern ourselves only with doing our duty. The results are for the pleasure of Bhagavān, and so we dedicate them to him. Now, if the results are not to our expectations, we calmly accept them as the will of Bhagavān. In this way, we are able to accept fame and infamy, success and failure, pleasure and pain, as Bhagavān's will, and when we learn to embrace both equally, we develop the equanimity that Shri Krishna talks about.

The verse is a very practical solution to the vicissitudes of life. If we are sailing in the ocean in a boat, it is natural to expect the waves of the ocean to shake

the boat. If we get disturbed each time a wave rocks the boat, our miseries would be endless. And if we do not expect the waves to arise, we would be expecting the ocean to become something other than its natural self. Waves are an inseparable phenomenon of the ocean. Similarly, as we wade through the ocean of life, it throws up all kinds of waves that are beyond our control. If we keep struggling to eliminate negative situations, we will be unable to avoid unhappiness. But if we can learn to accept everything that comes our way, without sacrificing our best efforts, we will have surrendered to the will of Bhagavān, and that will be true Yog.

दूरेण ह्यवरं कर्म बुद्धियोगाद्वनज्जय ।
बुद्धौ शरणमन्विच्छ कृपणाः फलहेतवः ॥ 49 ॥

*dūreṇa hy-avaram karma buddhi-yogād dhanañjaya
buddhau śaraṇam anvichchha kṛipaṇāḥ phala-hetavaḥ*

dūreṇa—(discrad) from far away; *hi*—certainly; *avaram*—inferior; *karma*—reward-seeking actions; *buddhi-yogāt*—with the intellect established in Divine knowledge; *dhanañjaya*—Arjun; *buddhau*—divine knowledge and insight; *śaraṇam*—refuge; *anvichchha*—seek; *kṛipaṇāḥ*—miserly; *phala-hetavaḥ*—those seeking fruits of their work.

Seek refuge in divine knowledge and insight, O Arjun, and discard reward-seeking actions that are certainly inferior to works performed with the intellect established in Divine knowledge. Miserly are those who seek to enjoy the fruits of their works.

There are two aspects to work: 1) The external activity we do, 2) Our internal attitude toward it. For example, let us say that a temple is being built in the holy land of Vrindavan. The workers are engaged in a sacred activity, but their attitude is mundane. They are concerned with the salary they receive. If another contractor offers higher wages, they will not mind switching their job. There is also an ascetic living in Vrindavan, who, seeing the glorious temple being built, engages in *kār sevā* (voluntary work) as a service to Bhagavān. The external work performed by the sadhu and the workers are the same, but the

internal attitudes are poles apart.

Here Shri Krishna advises Arjun to move higher in his internal motivation toward work. He declares that those who work with the motivation of self-enjoyment are miserly. Those who are detached from the fruits and dedicate their work to a higher cause are superior. And those who offer the fruits to Bhagavān are truly in knowledge.

The word *kripaṇa* (miserly) has been used here. The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam describes a *kripaṇa*:

*na veda kripahan śreya ātmano guṇa-vastu-dṛik
tasya tān ichchhato yachchhed yadi so 'pi tathā-vidhah* (6.9.49) [v42]

“*Kripaṇa* are those who think that the ultimate reality consists only of sense objects produced from the material energy.” Again, the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, states: *kripaṇo yo 'jitendriyah* (11.19.44) [v43] “A *kripaṇa* is one who has no control over the senses.”

As an individual evolves to higher levels of consciousness, one naturally sheds the desire for enjoying the fruits of work, and moves in the direction of service. Bill Gates, having renounced his position in Microsoft Corporation, now dedicates his energy in the service of society. Similarly, after having had his fill of power and position as the President of USA, Bill Clinton now preaches the glories of service to humankind, and has even written a book on the topic, “Giving—How Each Of Us Can Change The World.” Their engagement in service is praiseworthy, but it is still imperfectly oriented. That service attitude becomes perfect when we learn to do our works for the pleasure of Bhagavān, dedicating all the fruits to him.

बुद्धियुक्तो जहातीह उभे सुकृतदुष्कृते ।
तस्माद्विग्राय युज्यस्व योगः कर्मसु कौशलम् ॥५०॥

buddhi-yukto jahātīha ubhe sukṛita-duṣkṛite

tasmād yogāya yujyasva yogah karmasu kaushalam

buddhi-yuktah—endowed with wisdom; *jahāti*—get rid of; *iha*—in this life; *ubhe*—both; *sukṛita-duṣhkṛite*—good and bad deeds; *tasmāt*—therefore; *yogāya*—for Yog; *yujyasva*—strive for; *yogah*—Yog is; *karmasu kaushalam*—the art of working skillfully.

One who prudently practices the science of work without attachment can get rid of both good and bad reactions in this life itself. Therefore, strive for Yog, which is the art of working skillfully (in proper consciousness).

Upon hearing the science of *karm-yog*, people often wonder that if they give up attachment to results, will their performance go down? Shri Krishna explains that working without personal motivation does not reduce the quality of our work; instead we become even more skillful than before. Consider the example of a sincere surgeon who cuts people with his knife while operating upon them. He performs his duty with equanimity, and is undisturbed irrespective of whether the patient survives or dies. This is because he is merely doing his duty unselfishly, to the best of his ability, and is not attached to the results. Hence, even if the patient dies while being operated upon, the surgeon does not feel guilty of murder. However, if the same surgeon's only child needs to be operated, he does not have the courage to do so. Because of attachment to the results, he fears he will not be able to perform the operation skillfully, and so he seeks the help of another surgeon. This shows that attachment to results does not make us more skillful; rather, the attachment affects our performance adversely. Instead, if we work without attachment, we can do so at our maximum skill level, without feeling nervous, jittery, scared, tense, or excited.

Likewise, Arjun's personal example also illustrates the point that giving up attachment to the fruits does not adversely affect performance. Before hearing the Bhagavad Gita, he intended to engage in war with the desire of winning a kingdom. After hearing the Bhagavad Gita from Shri Krishna, he was fighting because it was his duty to Bhagavān, and Shri Krishna would be pleased by it.

He was still a warrior; however, his internal motivation had changed. The fact that he did his duty without attachment did not make him any less competent than before. In fact, he fought with greater inspiration because his work was directly in service of Bhagavān.

कर्मजं बुद्धियुक्ता हि फलं त्यक्त्वा मनीषिणः ।
जन्मबन्धविनिर्मुक्ताः पदं गच्छन्त्यनामयम् ॥५१॥

*karma-jam buddhi-yuktā hi phalam tyaktvā manīṣhiṇah
janma-bandha-vinirmuktāḥ padam gachchhanty-anāMāyām*

karma-jam—born of fruitive actions; *buddhi-yuktāḥ*—endowed with equanimity of intellect; *hi*—as; *phalam*—fruits; *tyaktvā*—abandoning; *manīṣhiṇah*—the wise; *janma-bandha-vinirmuktāḥ*—freedom from the bondage of life and death; *padam*—state; *gachchhanti*—attain; *anāMāyām*—devoid of sufferings.

The wise endowed with equanimity of intellect, abandon attachment to the fruits of actions, which bind one to the cycle of life and death. By working in such consciousness, they attain the state beyond all suffering.

Shri Krishna continues to expound on the topic of working without attachment to the fruits of actions, and states that it leads one to the state beyond suffering. The paradox of life is that we strive for happiness, but reap misery; we crave love, but we meet with disappointment; we covet life, but know we are moving toward death at every moment. The Bhāgavatam states:

*sukhāya karmāṇi karoti loko na taiḥ sukham vānyad-upāramam vā
vindeta bhūyas tata eva duḥkham yad atra yuktam bhagavān vaden nah (3.5.2) [v44]*

“Every human being engages in fruitive works to get happiness, but finds no satisfaction. Instead, these activities only aggravate the misery.” As a result, practically everyone in this world is unhappy. Some suffer from the miseries of their own body and mind; others are tormented by their family members and relatives; some suffer from scarcity of wealth and the paucity of the necessities of life. Materially minded people know they are unhappy, but they think that others ahead of them must be happy, and so they continue running in the

direction of material growth. This blind pursuit has been going on for many lifetimes and yet there is no sight of happiness. Now, if people could realize that nobody has ever achieved happiness by engaging in fruitive works, they would then understand that the direction in which they are running is futile, and they would think of doing a U-turn toward spiritual life.

Those whose intellects have become steadfast with spiritual knowledge understand that Bhagavān is the Supreme Enjoyer of everything. Consequently, they renounce attachment to the fruits of their actions, offer everything to him, and serenely accept everything that comes as his *prasād* (mercy). In doing so, their actions become free from karmic reactions that bind one to the cycle of life and death.

यदा ते मोहकलिलं बुद्धिव्यतिरिष्यति ।
तदा गन्तासि निर्वेदं श्रोतव्यस्य श्रुतस्य च ॥५२॥

*yadā te moha-kalilam buddhir vyatitarishyati
tadā gantāsi nirvedam śrotavyasya śrutasya cha*

yadā—when; *te*—your; *moha*—delusion; *kalilam*—quagmire; *buddhiḥ*—intellect; *vyatitarishyati*—crosses; *tadā*—then; *gantāsi*—you shall acquire; *nirvedam*—indifferent; *śrotavyasya*—to what is yet to be heard; *śrutasya*—to what has been heard; *cha*—and.

When your intellect crosses the quagmire of delusion, you will then acquire indifference to what has been heard and what is yet to be heard (about enjoyments in this world and the next).

Shri Krishna had previously said that people who are attached to worldly enjoyment get attracted to the flowery words of the Vedas, which propagate ostentatious rituals for gaining worldly opulences and attaining the celestial abodes (verses 2.42–2.43). However, one whose intellect is illumined with spiritual knowledge no longer seeks material sense pleasures, knowing them to be harbingers of misery. Such a person then loses interest in Vedic rituals. The Muṇḍakopaniṣhad states:

parīkṣhya lokānkarmachitānbrāhmaṇo nirvedamāyānnāstyakritah kṛitenā (1.2.12) [v45]

“Realized sages go beyond Vedic rituals, after understanding that the pleasures one attains from fruitive karmas, in this life and in the celestial abodes, are temporary and mixed with misery.”

श्रुतिविप्रतिपन्ना ते यदा स्थास्यति निश्चला ।
समाधावचला बुद्धिस्तदा योगमवाप्स्यसि ॥५३॥

*śruti-vipratipannā te yadā sthāsyati niśchalā
samādhāv-achalā buddhis tadā yogam avāpsyasi*

śruti-vipratipannā—not allured by the fruitive sections of the Vedas; *te*—your; *yadā*—when; *sthāsyati*—remains; *niśchalā*—steadfast; *samādhau*—in divine consciousness; *achalā*—steadfast; *buddhiḥ*—intellect; *tadā*—at that time; *yogam*—Yog; *avāpsyasi*—you will attain.

When your intellect ceases to be allured by the fruitive sections of the Vedas and remains steadfast in divine consciousness, you will then attain the state of perfect Yog.

As *sādhaks* advance on the spiritual path, within their minds their relationship with Bhagavān becomes stronger. At that time, they find the Vedic rituals they were previously performing to be cumbersome and time consuming. They then wonder whether they are obliged to keep performing the rituals, along with their devotion, and if they reject the ritual and dedicate themselves fully to their *sādhanā*, will they be committing an offense? Such people will find the answer to their doubt in this verse. Shri Krishna says that to be fixed in *sādhanā* without being allured to the fruitive sections of the Vedas is not an offence; rather, it is a higher spiritual state.

Madhavendra Puri, the famous 14th century sage, states this sentiment very emphatically. He was a Vedic Brahmin and used to engage in extensive ritualistic practices, but then took to *sanyās* (the renounced order), and engaged wholeheartedly in devotion to Shri Krishna. In his later life, he wrote:

sandhyā vandana bhadramastu bhavate bhoḥ snāna tubhyam namah

*bho devāḥ pitaraśchatarapana vidhau naham kṣhamāḥ kṣhamyatām
yatra kvāpi niśhadya yādava kulottaasya kansadviśhāḥ
smāraṁ smāramaghaṁ harāmi tadalaṁ manye kimanyena me [v46]*

“I wish to apologize to all kinds of rituals as I have no time to respect them. So dear *Sandhyā Vandā* (a set of rituals performed thrice daily by those who have received the sacred thread), holy baths, sacrifices to the celestial deities, offerings to the ancestors, etc. please excuse me. Now, wherever I sit, I remember the Supreme Bhagavān Shri Krishna, the enemy of Kansa, and that is sufficient to release me from material bondage.”

Shri Krishna uses the word *samādhāv-achalā* in this verse, to refer to the state of steadfastness in divine consciousness. The word *Samādhi* has been formed from the roots *sam* (equilibrium) and *dhi* (intellect), meaning, “a state of total equilibrium of the intellect.” One who is steadfast in the higher consciousness, unmoved by material allurements attains that state of *Samādhi*, or perfect Yog.

अर्जुन उवाच ।
स्थितप्रज्ञस्य का भाषा समाधिस्थस्य केशव ।
स्थितधीः किं प्रभाषेत किमासीत व्रजेत किम् ॥५४॥

*arjuna uvācha
sthita-prajñasya kā bhāṣhā samādhi-sthasya keśhava
sthita-dhīḥ kim prabhāṣheta kim āsīta vrajeta kim*

arjunah uvācha—Arjun said; *sthita-prajñasya*—one with steady intellect; *kā*—what; *bhāṣhā*—talk; *samādhi-sthasya*—situated in divine consciousness; *keśhava*—Shri Krishna, killer of the Keshi Demon; *sthita-dhīḥ*—enlightened person; *kim*—what; *prabhāṣheta*—talks; *kim*—how; *āsīta*—sits; *vrajeta*—walks; *kim*—how.

Arjun said: O Keshav, what is the disposition of one who is situated in divine consciousness? How does an enlightened person talk? How does he sit? How does he walk?

The designations *sthita prajña* (one with steady intellect) and *samādhi-stha* (situated in trance) apply to enlightened persons. Having heard from Shri Krishna about

the state of perfect yog, or *Samādhi*, Arjun asks a natural question. He wishes to know the nature of the mind of a person who is in this state. Additionally he wishes to know how this divine state of mind manifests in a person's behavior.

Beginning with this verse, Arjun asks Shri Krishna sixteen sets of questions. In response, Shri Krishna reveals the deepest secrets of *karm yog*, *jñāna yog*, *bhakti yog*, austerity, meditation, etc. The sixteen sets of questions asked by Arjun are:

1. “What is the disposition of one who is situated in divine consciousness? (verse 2.54)
2. “If you consider knowledge superior to fruitive works, then why do you ask me to wage this terrible war?” (verse 3.1)
3. “Why is a person impelled to commit sinful acts, even unwillingly, as if by force?” (verse 3.36)
4. “You were born much after Vivasvan. How am I to understand that in the beginning you instructed this science to him?” (verse 4.4)
5. “You praised the path of renunciation of actions, and again you praised work with devotion. Please tell me decisively which of the two is more beneficial?” (verse 5.1)
6. “O Krishna, the mind is very restless, turbulent, strong and obstinate. It appears to me that it is more difficult to control than the wind.” (verse 6.33)
7. “What is the fate of the unsuccessful yogi who begins the path with faith, but whose mind deviates from Bhagavān due to untamed passions, and is unable to reach the highest perfection in this life?” (verse 6.37)
8. “What is *Brahman* and what is karma? What is *Adhibhūta*, and who are the *Ādhidaiva*? Who is *Ādhiyajña* and how does he dwell in this body? O slayer of the Madhu demon, how can those of steadfast mind be united with you at the time of death?” (verse 8.1-2)

9. “Please describe to me your divine opulences, by which you pervade all the worlds.” (verse 10.16)

10. “I long to see your cosmic form, O Supreme divine Personality.” (verse 11.3)

11. “You, who existed before all creation, I wish to know who you are, for your nature and workings mystify me.” (verse 11.31)

12. “Between those who are steadfastly devoted to your personal form and those who worship the formless *Brahman*, whom do you consider to be more perfect in Yog?” (verse 12.1)

13. “I wish to know about *Prakriti* (Nature) and *Puruśh* (the enjoyer). What is the field of activities, and who is the knower of the field? What is the nature of knowledge, and the object of knowledge?” (verse 13.1)

14. “What are the characteristics of those who have gone beyond the three *gunas*, O Bhagavān? How do they act? How have they passed beyond the bondage of the *gunas*? ” (verse 14.21)

15. “Where do they stand who disregard the injunctions of the scriptures, but still worship with faith?” (verse 17.1)

16. “I wish to understand the nature of *sanyās* (renunciation), and how it is distinct from *tyāg*, or renouncing the fruits of actions.” (verse 18.1)

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
प्रजहाति यदा कामान्सर्वान्यार्थं मनोगतान् ।
आत्मन्येवात्मना तुष्टः स्थितप्रज्ञस्तदोच्यते ॥ ५५ ॥

śrī bhagavān uvācha

*prajahāti yadā kāmān sarvān pārtha mano-gatān
ātmany-evātmanā tuṣṭah sthita-prajñas tadochyate*

śrī-bhagavān uvācha—Bhagavān Krishna said; *prajahāti*—discards; *yadā*—when; *kāmān*—selfish desires; *sarvān*—all; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *manoh-gatān*—of the mind; *ātmani*—of the

self; *eva*—only; *ātmanā*—by the purified mind; *tuṣṭah*—satisfied; *sthita-prajñah*—one with steady intellect; *tadā*—at that time; *uchyate*—is said.

Bhagavān Krishna said: O Parth, when one discards all selfish desires and cravings of the senses that torment the mind, and becomes satisfied in the realization of the self, such a person is said to be transcendently situated.

Shri Krishna begins answering Arjun's questions here, and continues till the end of the chapter. Each fragment is naturally drawn towards its whole; just as a piece of stone is drawn by the force of gravitation towards the earth. The individual Ātman is a fragment of Bhagavān, who is infinite bliss. Hence, the Ātman is a fragment of the ocean of infinite bliss, and it experiences the natural urge for bliss. When it strives to relish the bliss of the Ātman from Bhagavān, it is called "Divine Love." But when, in ignorance of its spiritual nature, it thinks of itself as the body, and seeks to relish the bliss of the body from the world, it is called "lust."

This world has been called *mṛiga triśṇā* in the scriptures, meaning "like the mirage seen by the deer." The sun rays reflecting on the hot desert sand create an illusion of water for the deer. It thinks there is water ahead of it and runs to quench its thirst. But the more it runs toward the water, the more the mirage fades away. Its dull intellect cannot recognize that it is running after an illusion. The unfortunate deer keeps chasing the illusory water and dies of exhaustion on the desert sand. Similarly, the material energy Māyā too creates an illusion of happiness, and we run after that illusory happiness in the hope of quenching the thirst of our senses. But no matter how much we try, happiness keeps fading further away from us. The Garuḍ Purāṇ states:

*chakradharo 'pi suratvam suratvalābhe sakalasurapatitvam
bhavtirum surapatirūrdhvagatitvam tathāpi nanivartate triśṇā (2.12.14) [v47]*

"A king wishes to be the emperor of the whole world; the emperor aspires to be a celestial deities; a celestial deities seeks to be Indra, the king of Swarga Loka;

and Indra desires to be Brahma, the secondary creator. Yet the thirst for material enjoyment does not get satiated.”

But when one learns to turn the mind away from material allurements and renounces the desires of the senses, such a person comes in touch with the inner bliss of the Ātman and becomes transcendently situated. The Kāṭopaniṣad goes to the extent of saying that one who has renounced desires becomes like Bhagavān:

*yadā sarve pramuchyante kāmā ye 'sya hr̥idi śhrītaḥ
atha martyo 'mr̥ito bhavatyatra brahma samaśhnute (2.3.14) [v48]*

“When one eliminates all selfish desires from the heart, then the materially fettered *jīvātmā* (Ātman) attains freedom from birth and death, and becomes Bhagavān-like in virtue.” Shri Krishna states in the above verse that a transcendentally situated person is one who has given up selfish desires and cravings of the senses, and is satisfied in the self.

दुःखेष्वनुद्विग्नमनाः सुखेषु विगतस्पृहः ।
वीतरागभयक्रोधः स्थितधीर्मुनिरुच्यते ॥ ५६ ॥

*duḥkheṣhv-anudvigna-manāḥ sukheṣhu vigata-sprihah
vīta-rāga-bhaya-krodhah sthita-dhīr munir uchyate*

duḥkheṣhu—amidst miseries; *anudvigna-manāḥ*—one whose mind is undisturbed; *sukheṣhu*—in pleasure; *vigata-sprihah*—without craving; *vīta*—free from; *rāga*—attachment; *bhaya*—fear; *krodhah*—anger; *sthita-dhīḥ*—enlightened person; *munih*—a sage; *uchyate*—is called.

One whose mind remains undisturbed amidst misery, who does not crave for pleasure, and who is free from attachment, fear, and anger, is called a sage of steady wisdom.

In this verse, Shri Krishna describes sages of steady wisdom as: 1) *Vīta rāga*—they give up craving for pleasure, 2) *Vīta bhaya*—they remain free from fear, 3) *Vīta krodha*—they are devoid of anger.

An enlightened person does not allow the mind to harbor the material frailties

of lust, anger, greed, envy, etc. Only then can the mind steadily contemplate on transcendence and be fixed in the divine. If one permits the mind to brood over miseries, then the contemplation on the divine ceases and the mind is dragged down from the transcendental level. The process of torture works in the same manner. More than the present pain itself, it is the memories of past pain and apprehensions of future pain that torment the mind. But when the mind drops these two and has to simply grope with the present sensation, the pain surprisingly shrinks to a manageable (within the limits of tolerance) size. It is well known that historically Buddhist monks adopted a similar technique for tolerating torture from invading conquerors.

Similarly, if the mind craves external pleasures, it runs to the objects of enjoyment, and is again diverted from divine contemplation. So a sage of steady wisdom is one who does not allow the mind to hanker for pleasure or lament for miseries. Further, such a sage does not permit the mind to succumb to the urges of fear and anger. In this way, the mind becomes situated on the transcendental level.

यः सर्वत्रानभिस्नेहस्तत्तत्प्राप्य शुभाशुभम् ।
नाभिनन्दति न द्वेष्टि तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥५७॥

*yah sarvatra�abhisnehas tat tat prāpya śhubhāśhubham
nābhinandati na dveṣṭhi tasya prajñā pratishṭhitā*

yah—who; *sarvatra*—in all conditions; *anabhisnehaḥ*—unattached; *tat*—that; *tat*—that; *prāpya*—attaining; *śhubha*—good; *aśhubham*—evil; *na*—neither; *abhinandati*—delight in; *na*—nor; *dveṣṭhi*—dejected by; *tasya*—his; *prajñā*—knowledge; *pratiṣṭhitā*—is fixed.

One who remains unattached under all conditions, and is neither delighted by good fortune nor dejected by tribulation, he is a sage with perfect knowledge.

Rudyard Kipling, a famous British poet, has encapsulated the essence of this verse on *Sthita prajña* (Sage of steady intelligence) in his famous poem “If.” Here

are a few lines from the poem:

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim,
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same...

If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much:
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!

The popularity of this poem shows the natural urge in people to reach the state of enlightenment, which Shri Krishna describes to Arjun. One may wonder how an English poet expressed the same state of enlightenment that is described by the Supreme Bhagavān. The fact is that the urge for enlightenment is the intrinsic nature of the Ātman. Hence, knowingly or unknowingly, everyone craves for it, in all cultures around the world. Shri Krishna is describing it here, in response to Arjun's question.

यदा संहरते चायं कूर्मोऽङ्गानीव सर्वशः ।
इन्द्रियाणीन्द्रियार्थेभ्यस्तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥ 58 ॥

*yadā sanharate chāyam kūrmō 'ṅgānīva sarvaśhah
indriyāṇīndriyārthebhyaḥ tasya prajñā pratishṭhitā*

yadā—when; *sanharate*—withdraw; *cha*—and; *ayam*—this; *kūrmah*—tortoise; *aṅgāni*—limbs; *iva*—as; *sarvaśhah*—fully; *indriyāṇī*—senses; *indriya-arthebhyaḥ*—from the sense objects; *tasya*—his; *prajñā*—divine wisdom; *pratishṭhitā*—fixed in.

One who is able to withdraw the senses from their objects, just as a tortoise withdraws its limbs into its shell, is established in divine wisdom.

Attempting to quench the cravings of the senses by supplying them with their desired objects is like trying to douse a fire by pouring clarified butter on it.

The fire may be smothered for a moment, but then it flares up with redoubled intensity. Hence, the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam states that desires never go away when they are fulfilled; they only come back more strongly:

*na jātu kāmaḥ kāmānām upabhogena śānyati
haviṣhā kṛiṣṇa-vartmeva bhūya evābhivardhate (9.19.14) [v49]*

“Fulfilling the desires of the senses does not extinguish them, just as offering oblations of butter in the fire does not extinguish it; instead, it makes the fire blaze even stronger.”

These desires can be compared to an itch in the body. The itch is troublesome and creates an irresistible urge to scratch. But scratching does not solve the problem. For a few moments, there is relief, and then the itch returns with greater force. Instead, if someone can tolerate the itch for some time, it begins losing its sting, and dies down slowly. That is the secret for getting peace from the itch. The same logic applies to desires as well. The mind and senses throw up myriad desires for happiness, but as long as we are in the game of fulfilling them, happiness remains illusory, like the mirage. But when we learn to discard all these desires, to find happiness in Bhagavān, the mind and senses make peace with us.

So an enlightened sage intelligently masters the senses and the mind. The illustration used in this verse is that of the turtle. Whenever it encounters danger, the turtle protects itself by drawing its limbs and head inside its shell. After the danger passes, the turtle again extracts its limbs and head and continues on its way. The enlightened Ātman possesses similar control over the mind and senses and can retract and extract them according to the needs of the situation.

विषया विनिवर्तने निराहारस्य देहिनः ।
रसवर्जं रसोऽप्यस्य परं दृष्ट्वा निवर्तते ॥ 59 ॥

*viṣhayā vinivartante nirāhārasya dehinah
rasa-varjam raso 'pyasya param dṛiṣṭvā nivartate*

viṣhayāḥ—objects for senses; *vinivartante*—restrain; *nirāhārasya*—practicing self restraint; *dehinah*—for the embodied; *rasa-varjam*—cessation of taste; *rasah*—taste; *api*—however; *asya*—person's; *param*—the Supreme; *dṛiṣṭvā*—on realization; *nivartate*—ceases to be.

Aspirants may restrain the senses from their objects of enjoyment, but the taste for the sense objects remains. However, even this taste ceases for those who realizes the Supreme.

When one gives up eating, as in a fast, the desires of the senses become feeble. Similarly, in sickness one loses interest toward the objects of enjoyment. These states of dispassion are temporary, for the seed of desire remains within the mind. Again when the fast is terminated or the sickness goes away, the desires return.

What is this seed of desire? It is the intrinsic nature of the Ātman for the divine bliss of Bhagavān, of whom it is a tiny fragment. Until it gets that divine bliss, the Ātman can never be contented, and the search for happiness will continue. *Sādhaks* (spiritual aspirants) may forcibly restrain their senses with their will power, but such restrain is temporary because it does not extinguish the internal flame of desire. However, when the Ātman engages in devotion toward Bhagavān, and gets divine bliss, it experiences the higher taste for which it had been craving since infinite lifetimes. The Taittirīya Upaniṣhad states:

raso vai sah rasam hyevāyam labdhvā 'nandī bhavati (2.7.2) [v50]

“Bhagavān is all-bliss. When the Ātman attains Bhagavān, it becomes satiated in bliss.” Then, one naturally develops dispassion toward the lower sensual pleasures. This detachment that comes through devotion is firm and unshakeable.

Thus, the Bhagavad Gita does not teach a dry suppression of desires, instead it teaches the beautiful path of sublimation of desires by directing them toward

Bhagavān. The Saint Ramakrishna Paramahamsa expressed this principle very eloquently, when he said: “Devotion is love for the highest; and the lowest shall fall away by itself.”

यततो ह्यपि कौन्तेय पुरुषस्य विपश्चितः ।
इन्द्रियाणि प्रमाथीनि हरन्ति प्रसभं मनः ॥ ६० ॥

*yatato hyapi kaunteya purushasya vipashchitah
indriyāṇi pramāthīni haranti prasabham manah*

yatataḥ—while practicing self-control; *hi*—for; *api*—even; *kaunteya*—Arjun, the son of Kunti; *puruṣhasya*—of a person; *vipaśhchitah*—one endowed with discrimination; *indriyāṇi*—the senses; *pramāthīni*—turbulent; *haranti*—carry away; *prasabham*—forcibly; *manah*—the mind.

The senses are so strong and turbulent, O son of Kunti, that they can forcibly carry away the mind even of a person endowed with discrimination and practicing self-control.

The senses are like wild horses that have been newly harnessed. They are impetuous and reckless, and hence, disciplining them is an important battle that *sādhaks* have to fight within themselves. Therefore, those desirous of spiritual growth should carefully strive to tame the indulgent senses, which are colored with lust and greed, or else they have the power to sabotage and derail the spiritual process of even the most well-intentioned yogis.

The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam relates a story that perfectly illustrates this statement (canto 9, chapter 6). There was a great sage in ancient times, known as Saubhari. He is mentioned in the Rig Veda, where there is a mantra called Saubhari Sutra. There is also a scripture called the Saubhari Samhita. So he was not just an ordinary sage. Saubhari had attained such control over his body that he used to submerge himself in the river Yamuna and meditate under water. One day, he saw two fish mating. This sight carried away his mind and senses, and the desire for sexual association arose in him. He abandoned his spiritual practice and came out of the water, wondering how to fulfill his

desire.

At that time, the king of Ayodhya was Mandhata, who was a very illustrious and noble ruler. He had fifty daughters, each more beautiful than the other. Saubhari approached the king and asked for the hand of one of the fifty princesses.

King Mandhata wondered about the sanity of the sage and thought to himself, "An old man wanting to get married!" The king knew Saubhari to be a powerful sage, and feared that if he refused, the sage might curse him. But if he consented, the life of one of his daughters would be ruined. He was in a dilemma. So he said, "O holy one! I have no objection to your request. Please take a seat. I shall bring my fifty daughters before you, and whosoever chooses you will become yours in marriage." The king was confident that none of his daughters would choose the old ascetic, and in this way, he would be saved from the sage's curse.

Saubhari was all too aware of the king's intention. He told the king that he would return the following day. That evening, he used his yogic powers to turn himself into a handsome young man. Consequently, when he presented himself at the palace the next day, all the fifty princesses chose him as their husband. The king was bound by the word he had given and was compelled to marry all his daughters to the sage.

Now the king was concerned about the fights that would take place amongst the fifty sisters, since they would have to share a husband. However, Saubhari again used his yogic powers. Putting the king's apprehension to rest, he assumed fifty forms and created fifty palaces for his wives, and lived separately with each one of them. In this manner, thousands of years passed by. The Puranas state that Saubhari had many children from each of them, and those children had further children, until a tiny city had been created. One day,

Saubhari came to his senses, and exclaimed, *aho imam paśhyata me vināśham* (Bhāgavatam 9.6.50) [v51] “O humans! Those of you, who make plans to attain happiness through material acquisitions, be careful. Look at my degradation—where I was and where am I now. I created fifty bodies by my yogic powers, and lived with fifty women for thousands of years. And yet, the senses did not experience fulfillment; they only kept hankering for more. Learn from my downfall and be warned not to venture in this direction.”

तानि सर्वाणि संयम्य युक्त आसीत मत्परः ।
वशे हि यस्येन्द्रियाणि तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥६१॥

*tāni sarvāṇi sanyamya yukta āśīta mat-parah
vaśhe hi yasyendriyāṇi tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā*

tāni—them; *sarvāṇi*—all; *sanyamya*—subduing; *yuktah*—united; *āśīta*—seated; *mat-parah*—toward me (Shri Krishna); *vaśhe*—control; *hi*—certainly; *yasya*—whose; *indriyāṇi*—senses; *tasya*—their; *prajñā*—perfect knowledge *pratiṣṭhitā*—is fixed.

They are established in perfect knowledge, who subdue their senses and keep their minds ever absorbed in me.

In this verse, the word *yuktah* (united) indicates “absorption in devotion,” and *mat parah* means “toward Bhagavān Krishna.” The word *āśīta* (seated) may be understood figuratively here to mean “situated or established.” Having said that the impetuous mind and senses need to be tamed, Shri Krishna now reveals the proper engagement for them, which is absorption in devotion to Bhagavān. The example of King Ambarish in Śrīmad Bhāgavatam illustrates this process this very beautifully:

*sa vai manah kṛiṣhṇa-padāravindayor
vachāmsi vaikuṇṭha-guṇānuvarṇane
karau harer mandira-mārjanādiṣhu
śrutiṁ chakārāchyuta-sat-kathodaye

mukunda-liṅgālaya-darśhane dṛiṣhau
tad-bhṛitya-gātra-sparśhe 'ṅga-saṅgamam
ghrāṇam cha tat-pāda-saroja-saurabhe*

śrīmat-tulasyā rasanām tad-arpite
 pādau hareḥ kṣhetra-padānusarpane
 śhiro hrīśīkeśha-padābhivandane
 kāmaṁ cha dāsye na tu kāma-kāmyayā
 yathottamaśloka-janāśhrayā ratih (9.4.18-20) [v52]

“Ambarish engaged his mind in remembering the lotus feet of Shri Krishna. He engaged his tongue in chanting the wonderful names, forms, virtues, and pastimes of Bhagavān. He used his ears in hearing narrations about the Bhagavān, his eyes in seeing the beautiful deity of Bhagavān in the temple, his sense of touch in massaging the feet of devotees of the Bhagavān, his nostrils in smelling the aroma from fragrant objects that had been offered to the Bhagavān in worship, his feet in circumambulating the temple, and his head in paying obeisance to Bhagavān and His devotees. In this way, he subdued all his senses by engaging them in the service of the Supreme Bhagavān.”

ध्यायतो विषयान्युसः सङ्गस्तेषूपजायते ।
 सङ्गात्सञ्जायते कामः कामात्क्रोधोऽभिजायते ॥ 62 ॥

dhyāyato viṣhayān puṁsaḥ saṅgas teṣhūpajāyate
 saṅgāt sañjāyate kāmaḥ kāmāt krodho 'bhijāyate

dhyāyataḥ—contemplating; *viṣhayān*—sense objects; *puṁsaḥ*—of a person; *saṅgaḥ*—attachment; *teṣhu*—to them (sense objects); *upajāyate*—arises; *saṅgāt*—from attachment; *sañjāyate*—develops; *kāmaḥ*—desire; *kāmāt*—from desire; *krodhah*—anger; *abhijāyate*—arises.

While contemplating on the objects of the senses, one develops attachment to them. Attachment leads to desire, and from desire arises anger.

Anger, greed, lust, etc. are considered in the Vedic scriptures as *mānas rog*, or diseases of the mind. The Ramayana states: *mānas roga kachhuka maiṇ gāe hahiṇ saba keḥ lakhi biralenha pāe* [v53] We are all aware of the diseases of the body—even a single bodily ailment has the power to make one's whole day miserable—but we do not realize that we are being continuously tormented by multiple mental ailments. And since we do not recognize lust, anger, greed, etc. as mental

diseases, we do not try to cure them. Psychology is a branch of human knowledge that attempts to analyze these ailments and propose solutions to them. However, both the analysis and the solution presented by western psychology leave much to be desired, and appear to be gross approximations of the reality of the mind.

In this and the subsequent verse, Shri Krishna has given perfect and penetrating insight into functioning of the mind. He explains that when we repeatedly contemplate that there is happiness in some object, the mind becomes attached to it. For example, in a class there are a number of boys and girls, and they interact innocuously with each other. One day one boy notices something about one girl and starts thinking, “I would be very happy if she were mine.” As he continuously repeats this thought in his mind, his mind becomes attached to her. He tells his friends that he is madly in love with her, and he is unable to study because his mind repeatedly goes to her. His friends ridicule him that they all interact with her in class, but none of them is crazy about her. Why is he losing his sleep and ruining his studies because of her? The fact is that he repeatedly thought that there was happiness in the girl, and so his mind became attached to her.

Now attachment seems quite innocuous by itself. But the problem is that from attachment comes desire. If one is attached to drinks, the desire for drinks comes repeatedly to the mind. If one is attached to cigarettes, then thoughts of the pleasure of smoking cigarettes repeatedly flow in the mind, creating a craving for them. In this way, attachment leads to desire.

Once desire develops, it gives birth to two more problems—greed and anger. Greed comes from the fulfillment of desire. *Jimi pratilābha lobha adhikāt* (Ramayana) [v54] “If you satisfy desire, it leads to greed.” Thus desire is never eliminated by satiating it:

*yat prithivyāṁ vrīhi-yavāṁ hiranyāṁ paśavaḥ striyah
na duhyanti manah-prītim puṁsaḥ kāma-hatasya te
(Bhāgavatam 9.19.13) [v55]*

“If one person were to get all the wealth, luxuries, and sensual objects in the world, that person’s desire would still not be satiated. Hence, knowing it to be the cause of misery, an intelligent person should renounce desire.”

On the flip side what happens if the fulfillment of desire is obstructed? It gives rise to anger. Bear in mind that anger does not arise by itself. It is created from the obstruction of desire; and desire arises from attachment, while attachment comes from contemplation of the sense objects. In this manner, we see how the simple act of contemplating the pleasures of sense objects leads downward to the twin diseases of greed and anger. *In the next verse Shri Krishna continues the chain further down, and explains the consequences of anger.*

**क्रोधाद्वति सम्पोहः सम्पोहात्सृतिविभ्रमः ।
स्मृतिभ्रंशाद् बुद्धिनाशो बुद्धिनाशात्प्रणश्यति ॥ 63 ॥**

*krodhād bhavati sammohah sammohāt smṛiti-vibhramah
smṛiti-bhranśhād buddhi-nāsho buddhi-nāshāt praṇashyati*

krodhāt—from anger; *bhavati*—comes; *sammohah*—clouding of judgement; *sammohāt*—from clouding of judgement; *smṛiti*—memory; *vibhramah*—bewilderment; *smṛiti-bhranśhāt*—from bewilderment of memory; *buddhi-nāshah*—destruction of intellect; *buddhi-nāshāt*—from destruction of intellect; *pranaśhyati*—one is ruined.

Anger leads to clouding of judgment, which results in bewilderment of the memory. When the memory is bewildered, the intellect gets destroyed; and when the intellect is destroyed, one is ruined.

Anger impairs judgment, just as the morning mist creates a hazy covering on the sunlight. In anger, people commit mistakes that they later regret, because the intellect gets clouded by the haze of emotions. People say, “He is twenty years elder to me. Why did I speak in this manner to him? What happened to me?” What happened was that the faculty of judgment was affected by anger,

and hence the mistake of scolding an elder was made.

When the intellect is clouded, it leads to bewilderment of memory. The person then forgets what is right and what is wrong, and flows along with the surge of emotions. The downward descent continues from there, and bewilderment of memory results in destruction of the intellect. And since the intellect is the internal guide, when it gets destroyed, one is ruined. In this manner, the path of descent from divinity to impiety has been described beginning with contemplation on the sense objects to the destruction of the intellect.

रागद्वेषवियुक्तैस्तु विषयानिन्द्रियैश्चरन् ।
आत्मवश्यैर्विधेयात्मा प्रसादमधिगच्छति ॥ 64 ॥

*rāga-dveṣha-viyuktaiḥ tu viṣhayān indriyaiś charan
ātma-vaśhyair-vidheyātmā prasādam adhigachchhati*

rāga—attachment; *dveṣha*—aversion; *viyuktaiḥ*—free; *tu*—but; *viṣhayān*—objects of the senses; *indriyaiḥ*—by the senses; *charan*—while using; *ātma-vaśhyaiḥ*—controlling one's mind; *vidheyātmā*—one who controls the mind; *prasādam*—the Grace of Bhagavān; *adhigachchhati*—attains.

But one who controls the mind, and is free from attachment and aversion, even while using the objects of the senses, attains the Grace of Bhagavān.

The entire downward spiral leading to ruin begins with contemplating happiness in sense objects. Now, the urge for happiness is as natural to the Ātman as thirst is to the physical body. It is impossible to think “I will not contemplate happiness anywhere,” because it is unnatural for the Ātman. The simple solution then is to envision happiness in the proper direction, i.e. in Bhagavān. If we can repeatedly revise the thought that happiness is in Bhagavān, we will develop attachment toward him. This divine attachment will not degrade the mind like material attachment; rather, it will purify it. Bhagavān is all-pure, and when we attach our mind to him, the mind will also become pure.

Thus, whenever Shri Krishna asks us to give up attachment and desire, he is

referring only to material attachment and desire. Spiritual attachment and desire are not to be given up; in fact, they are most praiseworthy. They are to be cultivated and increased for purification of the mind. The greater the burning desire we develop for Bhagavān, the purer our mind will become. The *jñānīs* who propound the worship of the undifferentiated attributeless *Brahman* do not understand this point when they recommend giving up all attachments. However, Shri Krishna states: “Those who attach their minds to me with unadulterated devotion rise above the three modes of material nature and attain the level of the supreme *Brahman*.” (Bhagavad Gita 14.26) He repeatedly urges Arjun to attach his mind to Bhagavān in many verses ahead, such as 8.7, 8.14, 9.22, 9.34, 10.10, 12.8, 11.54, 18.55, 18.58, 18.65, etc.

Attachment and aversion are two sides of the same coin. Aversion is nothing but negative attachment. Just as, in attachment, the object of attachment repeatedly comes to one’s mind; similarly, in aversion, the object of hatred keeps popping into the mind. So attachment and aversion to material objects both have the same effect on the mind—they dirty it and pull it into the three modes of material nature. When the mind is free from both attachment and aversion, and is absorbed in devotion to Bhagavān, one receives the grace of Bhagavān and experiences his unlimited divine bliss. On experiencing that higher taste, the mind no longer feels attracted to the sense objects, even while using them. Thus, even while tasting, touching, smelling, hearing, and seeing, like all of us, the *sthita prajña* is free from both attachment and aversion.

प्रसादे सर्वदुःखानां हानिरस्योपजायते ।
प्रसन्नचेतसो ह्याशु बुद्धिः पर्यवतिष्ठते ॥६५॥

*prasāde sarva-duḥkhānām hānir asyopajāyate
prasanna-chetaso hyāśhu buddhiḥ paryavatiṣṭhate*

prasāde—by divine grace; *sarva*—all; *duḥkhānām*—of sorrows; *hāniḥ*—destruction; *asya*—his; *upajāyate*—comes; *prasanna-chetasaḥ*—with a tranquil mind; *hi*—indeed; *āśhu*—soon; *buddhiḥ*—intellect; *paryavatiṣṭhate*—becomes firmly established.

By divine grace comes the peace in which all sorrows end, and the intellect of such a person of tranquil mind soon becomes firmly established in Bhagavān.

Grace is like a divine energy that floods into a person's personality. By grace, Bhagavān who is *sat-chit-ānand* bestows his divine knowledge, divine love, and divine bliss. This entrenches the intellect, like the North Star, in the love, bliss, and knowledge of Bhagavān. By Bhagavān's grace, when we experience the higher taste of divine bliss, the agitation for sensual happiness is extinguished. Once that hankering for material objects ceases, one goes beyond all suffering and the mind becomes tranquil. In that state of internal fulfillment, the intellect becomes firm in its decision that Bhagavān alone is the source of happiness and is the final goal of the Ātman. Previously, the intellect was accepting this only on the basis of knowledge as stated in the scriptures, but now it gets the experience of perfect peace and divine bliss. This convinces the intellect beyond any shadow of doubt, and it becomes steadily situated in Bhagavān.

नास्ति बुद्धिरयुक्तस्य न चायुक्तस्य भावना ।
न चाभावयतः शान्तिरशान्तस्य कुतः सुखम् ॥ 66 ॥

*nāsti buddhir-ayuktasya na chāyuktasya bhāvanā
na chābhāvayataḥ śāntir aśāntasya kutah sukham*

na—not; *asti*—is; *buddhiḥ*—intellect; *ayuktasya*—not united; *na*—not; *cha*—and; *ayuktasya*—not united; *bhāvanā*—contemplation; *na*—nor; *cha*—and; *abhbāvayataḥ*—for those not united; *śāntih*—peace; *aśāntasya*—of the unpeaceful; *kutah*—where; *sukham*—happiness.

But an undisciplined person, who has not controlled the mind and senses, can neither have a resolute intellect nor steady contemplation on Bhagavān. For one who never unites the mind with Bhagavān there is no peace; and how can one who lacks peace be happy?

This verse strengthens the conclusion of the previous verse by stating the

reverse and negating it. Previously, Shri Krishna said “Know Bhagavān; know peace.” In this verse, he says “No Bhagavān; no peace.” A person who has not learnt to discipline the mind and senses can neither meditate upon Bhagavān nor experience his divine bliss. Without the higher taste, it becomes impossible to renounce the lower taste, and such a person keeps hankering for material happiness, like the bee finds it impossible to renounce the nectar of the flower:

*rātrirgamiṣhyati bhaviṣhyati suprabhātam
bhāsvānudveṣhyati hasiṣhyati paṅkajaśrīḥ
evaṁ vichintayati koṣha gate dvirephe
hā hanta hanta nalinīṁ gaja ujjahāra (Sukti Sudhakar) [v56]*

This popular verse in Sanskrit literature relates a bee’s story. The bee was sitting on a lotus flower, drinking its nectar. As the sun began setting, the petals of the flower began shutting. But the bee was so attached to enjoying the object of its senses that it refused to fly off. It thought, “There is still time for the flower to close. Let me suck some more nectar while I can.” In the same way, we can see old age coming as a sure sign of death, but like the bee, we remain engrossed in enjoying worldly pleasures.

In the meantime, it became dark and the lotus flower closed, trapping the bee. It thought, “Never mind! Let me remain inside my beloved flower for tonight. Tomorrow morning, when its petals open again, I will fly away.” *Kāṣṭha bhedo nipiṇopi sangṛihī kuṇḍhito bhavati padma vibhede* [v57] “A bee has the power to cut through wood. But look at the attachment to the sense objects that the bee which can cut through wood is stuck inside the soft petals of the lotus.” In the meantime, an elephant came, broke the lotus from the stem, and swallowed it. The bee along with the lotus went into the stomach of the elephant. The bee was thinking, “My beloved lotus is going somewhere, and I am happily going along with it.” It died shortly thereafter.

Similarly, we humans too remain engrossed in the gratification of the senses,

and do not heed to the message of the Saints to engage in devotion to Bhagavān. Finally, time overtakes us in the form of death. Here, Shri Krishna says that those who refuse to discipline the senses and engage in devotion continue to be rocked by the three-fold miseries of Māyā. Material desires are like an itching eczema, and the more we indulge in them, the worse they become. How can we be truly happy in this state of material indulgence?

इन्द्रियाणां हि चरतां यन्मनोऽनुविधीयते ।
तदस्य हरति प्रज्ञां वायुर्नावमिवाभसि ॥ ६७ ॥

*indriyāṇām hi charatām yan mano 'nuvidhīyate
tadasya harati prajñām vāyur nāvam ivāmbhasi*

indriyāṇām—of the senses; *hi*—indeed; *charatām*—roaming; *yat*—which; *manah*—the mind; *anuvidhīyate*—becomes constantly engaged; *tat*—that; *asya*—of that; *harati*—carries away; *prajñām*—intellect; *vāyuh*—wind; *nāvam*—boat; *iva*—as; *ambhasi*—on the water.

Just as a strong wind sweeps a boat off its chartered course on the water, even one of the senses on which the mind focuses can lead the intellect astray.

The Kāṭopaniṣad states that Bhagavān has made our five senses outward facing. *parāñchi khāni vyatṛiṇatsvayambhūḥ* (2.1.1) [v58] Hence, they are automatically drawn towards their objects in the external world, and even one of the senses on which the mind focuses has the power to lead it astray.

*kuraṅga mātaṅga pataṅga bṛiṅga mīnāhatāḥ pañchabhireva pañcha
ekāḥ pramādī sa kathāṁ na hanyate yaḥ sevate pañchabhireva pañcha*
(Suktī Sudhakar) [v59]

“Deer are attached to sweet sounds. The hunter attracts them by starting melodious music and then kills them. Bees are attached to fragrance. While they suck its nectar, the flower closes at night, and they get trapped within it. Fish are trapped by the desire for eating, and they swallow the bait of the fishermen. Insects are drawn to light. They come too close to the fire and get burnt. The weakness of elephants is the sense of touch. The hunter uses this to

trap the male elephant by using the female elephant as bait to draw it into the pit. On entering the pit to touch the female, the male elephant is unable to get out, and is killed by the hunter. All these creatures get drawn toward their death by one of their senses. What then will be the fate of a human being who enjoys the objects of all the five senses?" In this verse, Shri Krishna warns Arjun of the power of these senses in leading the mind astray.

तस्माद्यस्य महाबाहो निगृहीतानि सर्वशः ।
इन्द्रियाणीन्द्रियार्थेभ्यस्तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥ 68 ॥

*tasmād yasya mahā-bāho nigṛihītāni sarvaśhaḥ
indriyāṇīndriyārthebhyaḥ tasya prajñā pratishṭhitā*

tasmāt—therefore; *yasya*—whose; *mahā-bāho*—mighty-armed one; *nigṛihītāni*—restrained; *sarvaśhaḥ*—completely; *indriyāṇī*—senses; *indriya-arthebhyaḥ*—from sense objects; *tasya*—of that person; *prajñā*—transcendental knowledge; *pratishṭhitā*—remains fixed.

Therefore, one who has restrained the senses from their objects, O mighty armed Arjun, is firmly established in transcendental knowledge.

Enlightened Ātmans control the intellect through transcendental knowledge. Then, with the purified intellect, they control the mind, and the mind is used to bridle the senses. However, in the materially conditioned state, the reverse takes place. The senses pull the mind in their direction; the mind overpowers the intellect; and the intellect gets derailed from the direction of true welfare. Thus, Shri Krishna says that if the intellect is purified by spiritual knowledge, then the senses will be restrained; and when senses are held in check, the intellect will not be swayed from the path of divine wisdom.

या निशा सर्वभूतानां तस्यां जागर्ति संयमी ।
यस्यां जाग्रति भूतानि सा निशा पश्यतो मुनेः ॥ 69 ॥

*yā niśhā sarva-bhūtānām tasyām jāgarti sanyamī
yasyām jāgrati bhūtāni sā niśhā paśhyato muneḥ*

yā—which; *niśhā*—night; *sarva-bhūtānām*—of all living beings; *tasyām*—in that; *jāgarti*—is awake; *sanyamī*—self-controlled; *yasyām*—in which; *jāgrati*—are awake; *bhūtāni*—creatures; *sā*—that;

niśhā—night; *paśhyataḥ*—see; *muneḥ*—sage.

What all beings consider as day is the night of ignorance for the wise, and what all creatures see as night is the day for the introspective sage.

Shri Krishna has used day and night figuratively here. People often confuse the meaning of this verse by taking the words literally. There was once a Khade Shri Baba (the standing ascetic), whose disciples claimed he was a very big sage. He had not slept in thirty-five years. He would stand in his room, resting on a hanging rope under his armpits. He used the rope to help him remain in the standing position. On being asked what his motivation was for this destructive kind of austerity, he would quote this verse of the Bhagavad Gita: “What all beings see as night, the enlightened sage sees as day.” So to practice it, he had given up sleeping at night. What a misunderstanding of the verse! From all that standing, his feet and lower legs were swollen, and so he could practically do nothing except stand.

Let us try and understand the true meaning of Shri Krishna’s words. Those who are in mundane consciousness look to material enjoyment as the real purpose of life. They consider the opportunity for worldly pleasures as the success of life, or “day,” and deprivation from sense pleasures as darkness, or “night.” On the other hand, those who have become wise with divine knowledge, see sense enjoyment as harmful for the Ātman, and hence view it as “night.” They consider refraining from the objects of the senses as elevating to the Ātman, and hence look on it as “day.” Using those connotations of the words, Shri Krishna states that what is night for the sage is day for the worldly-minded people, and vice versa.

आपूर्यमाणमचलप्रतिष्ठं
 समुद्रमापः प्रविशन्ति यद्वत् ।
 तद्वत्कामा यं प्रविशन्ति सर्वे
 स शान्तिमाजोति न कामकामी ॥ 70 ॥

*āpūryamāṇam achala-pratiṣṭham
 samudram āpah praviśhanti yadvat
 tadvat kāmā yam̄ praviśhanti sarve
 sa śhāntim āpnoti na kāma-kāmī*

āpūryamāṇam—filled from all sides; *achala-pratiṣṭham*—undisturbed; *samudram*—ocean; *āpah*—waters; *praviśhanti*—enter; *yadvat*—as; *tadvat*—likewise; *kāmāḥ*—desires; *yam*—whom; *praviśhanti*—enter; *sarve*—all; *sah*—that person; *śhāntim*—peace; *āpnoti*—attains; *na*—not; *kāma-kāmī*—one who strives to satisfy desires.

Just as the ocean remains undisturbed by the incessant flow of waters from rivers merging into it, likewise the sage who is unmoved despite the flow of desirable objects all around him attains peace, and not the person who strives to satisfy desires.

The ocean is unique in its ability to maintain its undisturbed state, despite being inundated by the incessant flow of rivers into it. All the rivers of the world constantly empty themselves into the oceans, which neither overflow nor get depleted. Shri Krishna uses the word *āpūryamāṇam* (filled from all sides) to describe that even the rivers pouring all their water during the rainy season into the ocean cannot make it flow over. Similarly, the realized sage remains quiescent and unmoved in both conditions—while utilizing sense objects for bodily necessities, or being bereft of them. Only such a sage can attain *śhānti*, or true peace.

विहाय कामान्यः सर्वान्पुमांश्चरति निःस्पृहः ।
 निर्ममो निरहङ्कारः स शान्तिमधिगच्छति ॥ 71 ॥

*vihāya kāmān yah sarvān pumānś charati nihsprihah
 nirmamo nirahankāraḥ sa śhāntim adhigachchhati*

vihāya—giving up; *kāmān*—material desires; *yah*—who; *sarvān*—all; *pumān*—a person; *charati*—

lives; *nihsprihah*—free from hankering; *nirmamah*—without a sense of proprietorship; *nirahankārah*—without egoism; *sah*—that person; *śhāntim*—perfect peace; *adhigachchhati*—attains.

That person, who gives up all material desires and lives free from a sense of greed, proprietorship, and egoism, attains perfect peace.

In this verse, Shri Krishna lists the things that disturb one's peace, and then asks Arjun to give them up.

Material desires. The moment we harbor a desire, we walk into the trap of greed and anger. Either way, we get trapped. So the path to inner peace does not lie in fulfilling desires, but instead in eliminating them.

Greed. Firstly, greed for material advancement is a great waste of time. Secondly, it is an endless chase. In developed countries, very few people are deprived of enough to eat and wear, and yet they remain disturbed; this is because their hankering is still unsatisfied. Thus, those who possess the wealth of contentment possess one of the biggest treasures of life.

Ego. Most of the quarrels that erupt between people stem from the ego. Mark H McCormack, author of *What They Don't Teach You At Harvard Business School* writes: "Most corporate executives are one giant ego, with a couple of arms and legs sticking out." Statistics reveal that a majority of executives, who lose their jobs in the senior management level, do so not because of professional incompetence, but because of interpersonal issues. The way to peace is not to nurture and increase pride, but to get rid of it.

Proprietorship. The feeling of proprietorship is based upon ignorance because the whole world belongs to Bhagavān. We came empty-handed in the world, and we will go back empty-handed. How then can we think of worldly things as ours?

एषा ब्राह्मी स्थितिः पार्थ नैनां प्राप्य विमुह्यति ।
स्थित्वास्यामन्तकालेऽपि ब्रह्मनिर्वाणमृच्छति ॥ 72 ॥

*eszā brāhmī sthitih pārtha nainām prāpya vimuhyati
sthitvāsyām anta-kāle 'pi brahma-nirvāṇam ṛichchhati*

eszā—such; *brāhmī sthitih*—state of Brahman-realization; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *na*—never; *enām*—this; *prāpya*—having attained; *vimuhyati*—is deluded; *sthitvā*—being established; *asyām*—in this; *anta-kāle*—at the hour of death; *api*—even; *brahma-nirvāṇam*—liberation from Māyā; *ṛichchhati*—attains.

O Parth, such is the state of an enlightened Ātman that having attained it, one is never again deluded. Being established in this consciousness even at the hour of death, one is liberated from the cycle of life and death and reaches the Supreme Abode of Bhagavān.

Brahman means Bhagavān, and *Brāhmī sthiti* means the state of Brahman-realization. When the Ātman purifies the heart (the mind and intellect are sometimes jointly referred to as the heart), Bhagavān bestows his divine grace, as mentioned in verse 2.64. By his grace, he grants divine knowledge, divine bliss, and divine love to the Ātman. All these are divine energies that are given by Bhagavān to the Ātman at the time of Brahman-realization.

At the same time, he liberates the Ātman from the bondage of Māyā. The *sañchit karmas* (account of karmas of endless lifetimes) are destroyed. The *avidyā*, ignorance within, from endless lifetimes in the material world, is dispelled. The influence of *tri-gunas*, three modes of material nature, ceases. The *tri-doshas*, three defects of the materially conditioned state come to an end. The *pañch-kleśhas*, five defects of the material intellect, are destroyed. The *pañch-koshas*, five sheaths of the material energy, are burnt. And from that point onward, the Ātman becomes free from the bondage of Māyā for the rest of eternity.

When this state of Brahman-realization is achieved, the Ātman is said to be *jīvan mukt*, or liberated even while residing in the body. Then, at the time of

death, the liberated Ātman finally discards the corporeal body, and it reaches the Supreme Abode of Bhagavān. The Rig Veda states:

tadviṣhnoḥ paramāṁ padam sadā paśyanti sūrayah (1.22.20) [v60]

“Once the Ātman attains Bhagavān, it always remains in union with him. After that, the ignorance of Māyā can never overpower it again.” That state of eternal liberation from Māyā is also called *nirvāṇa*, *mokṣha*, etc. As a result, liberation is a natural consequence of Brahman-realization.



Chapter 3

Karm Yog ~ कर्मयोगः

The Yog of Action

In this chapter, Shri Krishna explains that all beings are compelled to work by their intrinsic modes of nature, and nobody can remain without action for even a moment. Those who display external renunciation by donning the ochre robes, but internally dwell upon sense objects, are hypocrites. Superior to them are those who practice *karm yog*, and continue to engage in action externally, but give up attachment from within. Shri Krishna then stresses that all living beings have responsibilities to fulfill as integral parts of the system of Bhagavān's creation. When we execute our prescribed duties as an obligation to Bhagavān, such work becomes *yajña* (sacrifice). The performance of *yajña* is naturally pleasing to the celestial deities, and they bestow us with material prosperity. Such *yajña* causes the rains to fall, and rain begets grains which are necessary for sustenance of life. Those who do not accept their responsibility in this cycle are sinful; they live only for the delight of their senses, and their lives are in vain.

Shri Krishna then explains that unlike the rest of humankind, the enlightened Ātman(s) who are situated in the self are not obliged to fulfill bodily responsibilities, for they are executing higher responsibilities at the level of the

Ātman. However, if they abandon their social duties, it creates discord in the minds of common people, who tend to follow in the footsteps of the great ones. So, to set a good example for the world to emulate, the wise should continue working, although without any motive for personal reward. This will prevent the ignorant from prematurely abandoning their prescribed duties. It was for this purpose that enlightened kings in the past, such as King Janak and others, performed their works.

Arjun then asks why people commit sinful acts, even unwillingly, as if by force. The Supreme Bhagavān explains that the all-devouring sinful enemy of the world is lust alone. As a fire is covered by smoke, and a mirror is masked by dust, in the same way desire shrouds one's knowledge and drags away the intellect. Shri Krishna then gives the clarion call to Arjun to slay this enemy called desire, which is the embodiment of sin, and bring his senses, mind, and intellect under control.

अर्जुन उवाच ।
ज्यायसी चेत्कर्मणस्ते मता बुद्धिर्जनार्दन ।
तत्किं कर्मणि घोरे मां नियोजयसि केशव ॥१॥
व्यामिश्रेणेव वाक्येन बुद्धिं मोहयसीव मे ।
तदेकं वद निश्चित्य येन श्रेयोऽहमाजुयाम् ॥२॥

*arjuna uvācha
jyāyasī chet karmaṇas te matā buddhir janārdana
tat kiṁ karmaṇi ghore mām niyojayasi keśava
vyāmiśreṇeva vākyena buddhim mohayasi me
tad ekam vada niśchitya yena śreyo 'ham āpnuyām*

arjunaḥ uvācha—Arjun said; *jyāyasī*—superior; *chet*—if; *karmaṇah*—than fruitive action; *te*—by you; *matā*—is considered; *buddhiḥ*—intellect; *janārdana*—he who looks after the public, Krishna; *tat*—then; *kim*—why; *karmaṇi*—action; *ghore*—terrible; *mām*—me; *niyojayasi*—do you engage; *keśava*—Krishna, the killer of the Demon named Keshi; *vyāmiśreṇa iva*—by your apparently ambiguous; *vākyena*—words; *buddhim*—intellect; *mohayasi*—I am getting bewildered; *iva*—as it were; *me*—my; *tat*—therefore; *ekam*—one; *vada*—please tell; *niśchitya*—decisively; *yena*—by which; *śreyah*—the highest good; *aham*—I; *āpnuyām*—may attain.

Arjun said: O Janardan, if you consider knowledge superior to action, then why do you ask me to wage this terrible war? My intellect is bewildered by your ambiguous advice. Please tell me decisively the one path by which I may attain the highest good.

Chapter one introduced the setting in which Arjun's grief and lamentation arose, creating a reason for Shri Krishna to give spiritual instructions. In chapter two, the Bhagavān first explained knowledge of the immortal self. He then reminded Arjun of his duty as a warrior, and said that performing it would result in glory and the celestial abodes. After prodding Arjun to do his occupational work as a Kshatriya, Shri Krishna then revealed a superior principle—the science of *karm yog*—and asked Arjun to detach himself from the fruits of his works. In this way, bondage-creating karmas would be transformed into bondage-breaking karmas. He termed the science of working without desire for rewards as *buddhi yog*, or *yog* of the intellect. By this, he meant that the mind should be detached from worldly temptations by controlling it with a resolute intellect; and the intellect should be made unwavering through the cultivation of spiritual knowledge. He did not suggest that actions should be given up, but rather that attachment to the fruits of actions should be given up.

Arjun misunderstood Shri Krishna's intention, thinking that if knowledge is superior to action, then why should he perform the ghastly duty of waging this war? Hence, he says, “By making contradictory statements, you are bewildering my intellect. I know you are merciful and your desire is not to baffle me, so please dispel my doubt.”

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
लोकेऽस्मिन्द्विविधा निष्ठा पुरा प्रोक्ता मयानघ ।
ज्ञानयोगेन साङ्ख्यानां कर्मयोगेन योगिनाम् ॥३॥

śrī bhagavān uvācha
 loke 'smiñ dvi-vidhā niṣṭhā purā proktā mayānagha
 jñāna-yogena sāṅkhyānāṁ karma-yogena yoginām

śrī-bhagavān uvācha—Bhagavān Krishna said; *loke*—in the world; *asmin*—this; *dvi-vidhā*—two kinds of; *niṣṭhā*—faith; *purā*—previously; *proktā*—explained; *maya*—by me (Shri Krishna); *anagha*—sinless; *jñāna-yogena*—through the path of knowledge; *sāṅkhyānām*—for those inclined toward contemplation; *karma-yogena*—through the path of action; *yoginām*—of the yogis.

Bhagavān Krishna said: O sinless one, the two paths leading to enlightenment were previously explained by me: the path of knowledge, for those inclined toward contemplation, and the path of work for those inclined toward action.

In verse 2.39, Shri Krishna explained the two paths leading to spiritual perfection. The first is the acquisition of knowledge through the analytical study of the nature of the Ātman and its distinction from the body. Shri Krishna refers to this as *sāṅkhya yog*. People with a philosophic bend of mind are inclined toward this path of knowing the self through intellectual analysis. The second is the process of working in the spirit of devotion to Bhagavān, or *karm yog*. Shri Krishna also calls this *buddhi yog*, as explained in the previous verse. Working in this manner purifies the mind, and knowledge naturally awakens in the purified mind, thus leading to enlightenment.

Amongst people interested in the spiritual path, there are those who are inclined toward contemplation and then there are those inclined to action. Hence, both these paths have existed ever since the Ātman's aspiration for Brahman-realization has existed. Shri Krishna touches upon both of them since his message is meant for people of all temperaments and inclinations.

न कर्मणामनारभात्रैष्कर्म्यं पुरुषोऽश्नुते ।
 न च सन्यसनादेव सिद्धिं समधिगच्छति ॥ 4 ॥

*na karmanām anārambhān naishkarmyam puruṣho 'śnute
 na cha sannyasanād eva siddhim samadhigachchhati*

na—not; *karmaṇām*—of actions; *anārambhāt*—by abstaining from; *naiṣhkarmyam*—freedom from karmic reactions; *puruṣah*—a person; *aśhnute*—attains; *na*—not; *cha*—and; *sannyasanāt*—by renunciation; *eva*—only; *siddhim*—perfection; *samadhibigachchhati*—attains.

One cannot achieve freedom from karmic reactions by merely abstaining from work, nor can one attain perfection of knowledge by mere physical renunciation.

The first line of this verse refers to the *karm yogi* (follower of the discipline of work), and the second line refers to the *sāṅkhyā yogi* (follower of the discipline of knowledge).

In the first line, Shri Krishna says that mere abstinence from work does not result in a state of freedom from karmic reactions. The mind continues to engage in fruitive thoughts, and since mental work is also a form of karma, it binds one in karmic reactions, just as physical work does. A true *karm yogi* must learn to work without any attachment to the fruits of actions. This requires cultivation of knowledge in the intellect. Hence, philosophic knowledge is also necessary for success in *karm yog*.

In the second line, Shri Krishna declares that the *sāṅkhyā yogi* cannot attain the state of knowledge merely by renouncing the world and becoming a monk. One may give up the physical objects of the senses, but true knowledge cannot awaken as long as the mind remains impure. The mind has a tendency to repeat its previous thoughts. Such repetition creates a channel within the mind, and new thoughts flow irresistibly in the same direction. Out of previous habit, the materially contaminated mind keeps running in the direction of anxiety, stress, fear, hatred, envy, attachment, and the whole gamut of material emotions. Thus, realized knowledge will not appear in an impure heart by mere physical renunciation. It must be accompanied by congruent action that purifies the mind and intellect. Therefore, action is also necessary for success in *sāṅkhyā yog*.

It is said that devotion without philosophy is sentimentality, and philosophy without devotion is intellectual speculation. Action and knowledge are necessary in both *karm yog* and *sāṅkhyā yog*. It is only their proportion that varies, creating the difference between the two paths.

न हि कश्चित्क्षणमपि जातु तिष्ठत्यकर्मकृत् ।
कार्यते ह्यवशः कर्म सर्वः प्रकृतिजैर्गुणैः ॥ ५ ॥

*na hi kaśchit kṣhaṇam api jātu tiṣṭhatyakarma-kṛit
kāryate hyavaśah karma sarvah prakṛiti-jair gunaiḥ*

na—not; *hi*—certainly; *kaśchit*—anyone; *kṣhaṇam*—a moment; *api*—even; *jātu*—ever; *tiṣṭhati*—can remain; *akarma-kṛit*—without action; *kāryate*—are performed; *hi*—certainly; *avaśah*—helpless; *karma*—work; *sarvah*—all; *prakṛiti-jaiḥ*—born of material nature; *gunaiḥ*—by the qualities.

There is no one who can remain without action even for a moment. Indeed, all beings are compelled to act by their qualities born of material nature (the three *guṇas*).

Some people think that action refers only to professional work, and not to daily activities such as eating, drinking, sleeping, waking and thinking. So when they renounce their profession, they think they are not performing actions. But Shri Krishna considers all activities performed with the body, mind, and tongue as actions. Hence, he tells Arjun that complete inactivity is impossible even for a moment. If we simply sit down, it is an activity; if we lie down, that is also an activity; if we fall asleep, the mind is still engaged in dreaming; even in deep sleep, the heart and other bodily organs are functioning. Thus Shri Krishna declares that for human beings inactivity is an impossible state to reach, since the body-mind-intellect mechanism is compelled by its own make-up of the three *guṇas* (*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*) to perform work in the world. The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam contains a similar verse:

*na hi kaśchit kṣhaṇam api jātu tiṣṭhaty akarma-kṛit
kāryate hy avaśah karma gunaiḥ svābhāvikair balāt (6.1.53) [v1]*

“Nobody can remain inactive for even a moment. Everyone is forced to act by their modes of nature.”

कर्मेन्द्रियाणि संयम्य य आस्ते मनसा स्मरन् ।
इन्द्रियार्थान्विमूढात्मा मिथ्याचारः स उच्यते ॥ ६ ॥

*karmendriyāṇi sanyamya ya āste manasā smaran
indriyārthaṁ vimūḍhaĀtman mithyāchāraḥ sa uchyate*

karma-indriyāṇi—the organs of action; *sanyamya*—restrain; *yah*—who; *āste*—remain; *manasā*—in the mind; *smaran*—to remember; *indriya-arthaṁ*—sense objects; *vimūḍha-Ātman*—the deluded; *mithyā-āchāraḥ*—hypocrite; *sah*—they; *uchyate*—are called.

Those who restrain the external organs of action, while continuing to dwell on sense objects in the mind, certainly delude themselves and are to be called hypocrites.

Attracted by the lure of an ascetic life, people often renounce their work, only to discover later that their renunciation is not accompanied by an equal amount of mental and intellectual withdrawal from the sensual fields. This creates a situation of hypocrisy where one displays an external show of religiosity while internally living a life of ignoble sentiments and base motives. Hence, it is better to face the struggles of the world as a *karm yogi*, than to lead the life of a false ascetic. Running away from the problems of life by prematurely taking *sanyās* is not the way forward in the journey of the evolution of the Ātman. Saint Kabir stated sarcastically:

*mana na raṅgāye ho, raṅgāye yogī kaparā
jatavā baḍhāe yogī dhuniyā ramaule, dahiyā baḍhāe yogī bani gayele bakarā [v2]*

“O Ascetic Yogi, you have donned the ochre robes, but you have ignored dyeing your mind with the color of renunciation. You have grown long locks of hair and smeared ash on your body (as a sign of detachment). But without the internal devotion, the external beard you have sprouted only makes you resemble a goat.” Shri Krishna states in this verse that people who externally

renounce the objects of the senses while continuing to dwell upon them in the mind are hypocrites, and they delude themselves.

The Puranas relate the story of two brothers, Tavrit and Suvrit, to illustrate this point. The brothers were walking from their house to hear the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam discourse at the temple. On the way, it began raining heavily, so they ran into the nearest building for shelter. To their dismay, they found themselves in a brothel, where women of disrepute were dancing to entertain their guests. Tavrit, the elder brother, was appalled and walked out into the rain, to continue to the temple. The younger brother, Suvrit, felt no harm in sitting there for a while to escape getting wet in the rain.

Tavrit reached the temple and sat for the discourse, but in his mind he became remorseful, “O how boring this is! I made a dreadful mistake; I should have remained at the brothel. My brother must be enjoying himself greatly in revelry there.” Suvrit, on the other hand, started thinking, “Why did I remain in this house of sin? My brother is so holy; he is bathing his intellect in the knowledge of the Bhāgavatam. I too should have braved the rain and reached there. After all, I am not made of salt that I would have melted in a little bit of rain.”

When the rain stopped, both started out in the direction of the other. The moment they met, lightning struck them and they both died on the spot. The *Yamdoots* (servants of the deity of Death) came to take Tavrit to Naraka. Tavrit complained, “I think you have made a mistake. I am Tavrit. It was my brother who was sitting at the brothel a little while ago. You should be taking him to Naraka.” The *Yamdoots* replied, “We have made no mistake. He was sitting there to avoid the rain, but in his mind he was longing to be at the Bhāgavatam discourse. On the other hand, while you were sitting and hearing the discourse, your mind was yearning to be at the brothel.” Tavrit was doing

exactly what Shri Krishna declares in this verse; he had externally renounced the objects of the senses, but was dwelling upon them in the mind. This was the improper kind of renunciation. *The next verse states the proper kind of renunciation.*

**यस्त्वन्दियाणि मनसा नियम्यारभतेर्जुन ।
कर्मेन्द्रियैः कर्मयोगमसक्तः स विशिष्यते ॥७॥**

*yas tvindriyāṇi manasā niyamyārabhate 'rjuna
karmendriyaiḥ karma-yogam asaktaḥ sa viśiṣhyate*

yah—who; *tu*—but; *indriyāṇi*—the senses; *manasā*—by the mind; *niyamya*—control; *ārabhate*—begins; *arjuna*—Arjun; *karma-indriyaiḥ*—by the working senses; *karma-yogam*—karm yog; *asaktaḥ*—without attachment; *sah*—they; *viśiṣhyate*—are superior.

But those *karm yogis* who control their knowledge senses with the mind, O Arjun, and engage the working senses in working without attachment, are certainly superior.

The word *karm yog* has been used in this verse. It consists of two main concepts: *karm* (occupational duties) and *Yog* (union with Bhagavān). Hence, a *karm yogi* is one who performs worldly duties while keeping the mind attached to Bhagavān. Such a *karm yogi* is not bound by karma even while performing all kinds of works. This is because what binds one to the law of karma is not actions, but the attachment to the fruits of those actions. And a *karm yogi* has no attachment to the fruits of action. On the other hand, a false renunciant renounces action, but does not forsake attachment, and thus remains bound in the law of karma.

Shri Krishna says here that a person in household life who practices *karm yog* is superior to the false renunciant who continues to dwell on the objects of the senses in the mind. Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj contrasts these two situations very beautifully:

*mana hari meṁ tana jagat meṁ, karmayog yehi jāna
tana hari meṁ mana jagat meṁ, yaha mahāna ajñāna*

(*Bhakti Śhatak* verse 84) [v3]

“When one works in the world with the body, but keeps the mind attached to Bhagavān, know it to be *karm yog*. When one engages in spirituality with the body, but keeps the mind attached to the world, know it to be hypocrisy.”

नियतं कुरु कर्म त्वं कर्म ज्यायो ह्यकर्मणः ।
शरीरयात्रापि च ते न प्रसिद्ध्येदकर्मणः ॥८॥

*niyatam kuru karma tvam karma jyāyo hyakarmaṇah
śharīra-yātrāpi cha te na prasiddhyed akarmaṇah*

niyatam—constantly; *kuru*—perform; *karma*—Vedic duties; *tvam*—you; *karma*—action; *jyāyah*—superior; *hi*—certainly; *akarmaṇah*—than inaction; *śharīra*—bodily; *yātrā*—maintenance; *api*—even; *cha*—and; *te*—your; *na prasiddhyet*—would not be possible; *akarmaṇah*—inaction.

You should thus perform your prescribed Vedic duties, since action is superior to inaction. By ceasing activity, even your bodily maintenance will not be possible.

Until the mind and intellect reach a state where they are absorbed in Brahman-consciousness, physical work performed in an attitude of duty is very beneficial for one’s internal purification. Hence, the Vedas prescribe duties for humans, to help them discipline their mind and senses. In fact, laziness is described as one of the biggest pitfalls on the spiritual path:

*ālasya hi manushyānām śharīrastho mahān ripuḥ
nāstyudyamasamo bandhūḥ kṛitvā yam nāvasīdati* [v4]

“Laziness is the greatest enemy of humans, and is especially pernicious since it resides in their own body. Work is their most trustworthy friend, and is a guarantee against downfall.” Even the basic bodily activities like eating, bathing, and maintaining proper health require work. These obligatory actions are called *nitya karm*. To neglect these basic maintenance activities is not a sign of progress, but an indication of slothfulness, leading to emaciation and weakness of both body and mind. On the other hand, a cared for and nourished body is

a positive adjunct on the road to spirituality. Thus, the state of inertia does not lend itself either to material or spiritual achievement. For the progress of our own Ātman, we should embrace the duties that help elevate and purify our mind and intellect.

यज्ञार्थात्कर्मणोऽन्यत्र लोकोऽयं कर्मबन्धनः ।
तदर्थं कर्म कौन्तेय मुक्तसङ्गः समाचर ॥९॥

*yajñārthāt karmaṇo 'nyatra loka 'yam karma-bandhanah
tad-arthaṁ karma kaunteya mukta-saṅgah samāchara*

yajña-arthāt—for the sake of sacrifice; *karmaṇah*—than action; *anyatra*—else; *lokaḥ*—material world; *ayam*—this; *karma-bandhanah*—bondage through one's work; *tat*—of him; *artham*—for the sake of; *karma*—action; *kaunteya*—Arjun, the son of Kunti; *mukta-saṅgah*—free from attachment; *saṁchara*—perform properly.

Work must be done as a *yajña* (sacrifice) to the Supreme Bhagavān; otherwise, work causes bondage in this material world. Therefore, O son of Kunti, perform your prescribed duties, without being attached to the results, for the satisfaction of Bhagavān.

A knife in the hands of a robber is a weapon for intimidation or committing murder, but in the hands of a surgeon is an invaluable instrument used for saving people's lives. The knife in itself is neither murderous nor benedictory—its effect is determined by how it is used. As Shakespeare said: “For there is nothing good or bad, but thinking makes it so.” Similarly, work in itself is neither good nor bad. Depending upon the state of the mind, it can be either binding or elevating. Work done for the enjoyment of one's senses and the gratification of one's pride is the cause of bondage in the material world, while work performed as *yajña* (sacrifice) for the pleasure of the Supreme Bhagavān liberates one from the bonds of Māyā and attracts divine grace. Since it is our nature to perform actions, we are forced to work in one of the two modes. We cannot remain without working for even a moment as our mind cannot

remain still.

If we do not perform actions as a sacrifice to Bhagavān, we will be forced to work to gratify our mind and senses. Instead, when we perform work as a sacrifice, we then look upon the whole world and everything in it as belonging to Bhagavān, and therefore, meant for utilization in his service. A beautiful ideal for this was established by King Raghu, the ancestor of Bhagavān Ram. Raghu performed the *Viśwajit* sacrifice, which requires donating all of one's possessions in charity.

*sa viśwajitam ājahre yajñam sarvasva dakṣhiṇam
ādānam hi visargāya satām vārimuchām iva*
(Raghuvanśh 4.86) [v5]

“Raghu performed the *Viśwajit yajña* with the thought that just as clouds gather water from the Earth, not for their enjoyment, but to shower it back upon the Earth, similarly, all he possessed as a king had been gathered from the public in taxes, not for his pleasure, but for the pleasure of Bhagavān. So he decided to use his wealth to please Bhagavān by serving his citizens with it.” After the *yajña*, Raghu donated all his possessions to his citizens. Then, donning the rags of a beggar and holding an earthen pot, he went out to beg for his meal.

While resting under a tree, he heard a group of people discussing, “Our king is so benevolent. He has given away everything in charity.” Raghu was pained on hearing his praise and spoke out, “What are you discussing?” They answered, “We are praising our king. There is nobody in the world as charitable as him.” Raghu retorted, “Do not ever say that again. Raghu has given nothing.” They said, “What kind of person are you who are criticizing our king? Everyone knows that Raghu has donated everything he owned.” Raghu replied, “Go and ask your king that when he came into this world did he possess anything? He was born empty-handed, is it not? Then what was his that he has given away?”

This is the spirit of *karm yog*, in which we see the whole world as belonging to

Bhagavān, and hence meant for the satisfaction of Bhagavān. We then perform our duties not for gratifying our mind and senses, but for the pleasure of Bhagavān. Bhagavān Vishnu instructed the Prachetas in this fashion:

*griheśhv āviśhatāṁ chāpi pūṁśāṁ kuśhalā-karmanām
mad-vārtā-yāta-yāmānām na bandhāya grihā matāḥ*
(Bhāgavatam 4.30.19) [v6]

“The perfect *karm yogis*, even while fulfilling their household duties, perform all their works as *yajña* to me, knowing me to be the Enjoyer of all activities. They spend whatever free time they have in hearing and chanting my glories. Such people, though living in the world, never get bound by their actions.”

सहयज्ञाः प्रजाः सृष्टा पुरोवाच प्रजापतिः ।
अनेन प्रसविष्यध्वमेष वोऽस्त्विष्टकामधुक् ॥ 10 ॥

*saha-yajñāḥ prajāḥ sṛiṣṭvā purovācha prajāpatiḥ
anena prasaviṣhyadhvam eṣha vo 'stviṣṭa-kāma-dhuk*

saha—along with; *yajñāḥ*—sacrifices; *prajāḥ*—mankind; *sṛiṣṭvā*—created; *purā*—in beginning; *uvācha*—said; *prajā-patiḥ*—Brahma; *anena*—by this; *prasaviṣhyadhvam*—increase prosperity; *eṣhah*—these; *vah*—your; *astu*—shall be; *iṣṭa-kāma-dhuk*—bestower of all wishes.

In the beginning of creation, Brahma created living beings along with duties, and said, “Prosper in the performance of these *yajñas* (sacrifices), for they shall bestow upon you all you wish to achieve.”

All the elements of nature are integral parts of the system of Bhagavān’s creation. All the parts of the system naturally draw from and give back to the whole. The sun lends stability to the earth and provides heat and light necessary for life to exist. Earth creates food from its soil for our nourishment and also holds essential minerals in its womb for a civilized lifestyle. The air moves the life force in our body and enables transmission of sound energy. We humans too are an integral part of the entire system of Bhagavān’s creation. The air that we breathe, the Earth that we walk upon, the water that we drink,

and the light that illumines our day, are all gifts of creation to us. While we partake of these gifts to sustain our lives, we also have our duties toward the integral system. Shri Krishna says that we are obligated to participate with the creative force of nature by performing our prescribed duties in the service of Bhagavān. That is the *yajña* he expects from us.

Consider the example of a hand. It is an integral part of the body. It receives its nourishment—blood, oxygen, nutrients, etc.—from the body, and in turn, it performs necessary functions for the body. If the hand looks on this service as burdensome, and decides to get severed from the body, it cannot sustain itself for even a few minutes. It is in the performance of its *yajña* toward the body that the self-interest of the hand is also fulfilled. Similarly, we individual Ātman(s) are tiny parts of the Supreme Ātman and we all have our role to play in the grand scheme of things. When we perform our *yajña* toward him, our self-interest is naturally satiated.

Generally, the term *yajña* refers to fire sacrifice. In the Bhagavad Gita, *yajña* includes all the prescribed actions laid down in the scriptures, when they are done as an offering to the Supreme.

देवान्भावयतानेन ते देवा भावयन्तु वः ।
परस्परं भावयन्तः श्रेयः परमवाप्स्यथ ॥ 11 ॥

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

devān—celestial deities; *bhāvayata*—will be pleased; *anena*—by these (sacrifices); *te*—those; *devāḥ*—celestial deities; *bhāvayantu*—will be pleased; *vah*—you; *parasparam*—one another; *bhāvayantah*—pleasing one another; *śreyah*—prosperity; *param*—the supreme; *avāpsyatha*—shall achieve.

By your sacrifices the celestial deities will be pleased, and by cooperation between humans and the celestial deities, prosperity will reign for all.

The celestial deities, or *devatās*, are in-charge of the administration of the universe. The Supreme Bhagavān does his work of managing the universe

through them. These *devatās* live within this material universe, in the higher planes of existence, called *swarg*, or the celestial abodes. The *devatās* are not Bhagavān; they are Ātman(s) like us. They occupy specific posts in the affairs of running the world. Consider the Federal government of a country. There is a Secretary of State, a Secretary of the Treasury, a Secretary of Defense, Attorney General, and so on. These are posts, and chosen people occupy those posts for a limited tenure. At the end of the tenure, the government changes and all the post-holders change too. Similarly, in administering the affairs of the world, there are posts such as *Agni Dev* (the deity of fire), *Vāyu Dev* (the deity of the wind), *Varuṇa Dev* (the deity of the ocean), *Indra Dev* (the king of the celestial deities), etc. Ātman(s) selected by virtue of their deeds in past lives occupy these seats for a fixed number of ages, and administer the affairs of the universe. These are the *devatās* (celestial deities).

The Vedas mention various ceremonies and processes for the satisfaction of the celestial deities, and in turn these *devatās* bestow material prosperity. However, when we perform our *yajña* for the satisfaction of the Supreme Bhagavān, the celestial deities are automatically appeased, just as when we water the root of a tree, the water inevitably reaches its flowers, fruits, leaves, branches, and twigs.

The Skandh Purāṇ states:

*archite deva deveśhe śhaṅkha chakra gadādhare
architāḥ sarve devāḥ syur yataḥ sarva gato hariḥ [v7]*

“By worshipping the Supreme Bhagavān Shri Vishnu, we automatically worship all the celestial deities, since they all derive their power from him.” Thus, the performance of *yajña* is naturally pleasing to the *devatās*, who then create prosperity for living beings by favorably adjusting the elements of material nature.

इष्टान्भोगान्हि वो देवा दास्यन्ते यज्ञभाविताः ।
तैर्दत्तानप्रदायैभ्यो यो भुङ्के स्तेन एव सः ॥ १२ ॥

*iṣṭān bhogān hi vo devā dāsyante yajña-bhāvitāḥ
tair dattān apradāyaibhyo yo bhuṅkte stena eva saḥ*

iṣṭān—desired; *bhogān*—necessities of life; *hi*—certainly; *vaḥ*—unto you; *devāḥ*—the celestial deities; *dāsyante*—will grant; *yajña-bhāvitāḥ*—satisfied by sacrifice; *taiḥ*—by them; *dattān*—things granted; *apradāya*—without offering; *ebhyah*—to them; *yah*—who; *bhuṅkte*—enjoys; *stenāḥ*—thieves; *eva*—verily; *sah*—they.

The celestial deities, being satisfied by the performance of sacrifice, will grant you all the desired necessities of life. But those who enjoy what is given to them, without making offerings in return, are verily thieves.

As administrators of various processes of the universe, the *devatās* provide us with rain, wind, crops, vegetation, minerals, fertile soil, etc. We human beings are indebted to them for all that we receive from them. The *devatās* perform their duty, and expect us to perform our duty in the proper consciousness too. Since these celestial deities are all servants of the Supreme Bhagavān, they become pleased when someone performs a sacrifice for him, and in turn assist such a Ātman by creating favorable material conditions. Thus, it is said that when we strongly resolve to serve Bhagavān, the universe begins to cooperate with us.

However, if we begin looking upon the gifts of nature, not as means of serving the Bhagavān but as objects of our own enjoyment, Shri Krishna calls it a thieving mentality. Often people ask the question, “I lead a virtuous life; I do not harm anyone, nor do I steal anything. But I do not believe in worshipping Bhagavān, nor do I believe in him. Am I doing anything wrong?” This question is answered in the above verse. Such persons may not be doing anything wrong in the eyes of humans, but they are thieves in the eyes of Bhagavān. Let us say, we walk into someone’s house, and without recognizing the owner, we sit on the sofa, eat from the refrigerator, and use the restroom.

We may claim that we are not doing anything wrong, but we will be considered thieves in the eyes of the law, because the house does not belong to us. Similarly, the world that we live in was made by Bhagavān, and everything in it belongs to him. If we utilize his creation for our pleasure, without acknowledging his dominion over it, from the divine perspective we are certainly committing theft.

The famous king in Indian history, Chandragupta, asked Chanakya Pundit, his Guru, “According to the Vedic scriptures, what is the position of the king vis-à-vis his subjects?” Chanakya Pundit replied, “The king is the servant of the subjects and nothing else. His Bhagavān-given duty is to help the citizens of his kingdom progress in their journey toward Brahman-realization.” Whether one is a king, a businessperson, a farmer, or a worker, each person, as an integral member of Bhagavān’s world, is expected to do his or her duty as a service to the Supreme.

**यज्ञशिष्टाशिनः सन्तो मुच्यन्ते सर्वकिल्बिषैः ।
भुञ्जते ते त्वधं पापा ये पचन्त्यात्मकारणात् ॥ १३ ॥**

*yajña-śhiṣṭāśhinah santo muchyante sarva-kilbiṣhaiḥ
bhuñjate te tvagham pāpā ye pachantyātma-kāraṇāt*

yajña-śhiṣṭa—of remnants of food offered in sacrifice; *aśhinah*—eaters; *santah*—saintly persons; *muchyante*—are released; *sarva*—all kinds of; *kilbiṣhaiḥ*—from sins; *bhuñjate*—enjoy; *te*—they; *tu*—but; *agham*—sins; *pāpāḥ*—sinners; *ye*—who; *pachanti*—cook (food); *ātma-kāraṇāt*—for their own sake.

The spiritually-minded, who eat food that is first offered in sacrifice, are released from all kinds of sin. Others, who cook food for their own enjoyment, verily eat only sin.

In the Vedic tradition, food is cooked with the consciousness that the meal is for the pleasure of Bhagavān. A portion of the food items is then put in a plate and a verbal or mental prayer is made for the Bhagavān to come and eat it.

After the offering, the food in the plate is considered *prasād* (grace of Bhagavān). All the food in the plate and the pots is then accepted as Bhagavān's grace and eaten in that consciousness. Other religious traditions follow similar customs. Christianity has the sacrament of the Eucharist, where bread and wine are consecrated and then partaken. Shri Krishna states in this verse that eating *prasād* (food that is first offered as sacrifice to Bhagavān) releases one from sin, while those who eat food without offering commit sin.

The question may arise whether we can offer non-vegetarian items to Bhagavān and then accept the remnants as his *prasād*. The answer to this question is that the Vedas prescribe a vegetarian diet for humans, which includes grains, pulses and beans, vegetables, fruits, dairy products, etc. Apart from the Vedic culture, many spiritually evolved Ātman(s) in the history of all cultures around the world also rejected a non-vegetarian diet that makes the stomach a graveyard for animals. Even though many of them were born in meat-eating families, they gravitated to a vegetarian lifestyle as they advanced on the path of spirituality. Here are quotations from some famous thinkers and personalities advocating vegetarianism:

“To avoid causing terror to living beings, let the disciple refrain from eating meat... the food of the wise is that which is consumed by the sādhus; it does not consist of meat.” The Buddha.

“If you declare that you are naturally designed for such a diet, then first kill for yourself what you want to eat. Do it, however, only through your own resources, unaided by cleaver or cudgel or any kind of ax.” The Roman Plutarch, in the essay, “On Eating Flesh.”

“As long as men massacre animals, they will kill each other. Indeed, he who sows the seeds of murder and pain cannot reap joy and love.” Pythagoras

“Truly man is the king of beasts, for his brutality exceeds them. We live by the death of others. We are burial places! I have since an early age abjured the use of meat...” Leonardo da Vinci.

“Nonviolence leads to the highest ethics, which is the goal of all evolution. Until we stop harming all

living beings, we are all savages." Thomas Edison.

"Flesh-eating is simply immoral, as it involves the performance of an act which is contrary to moral feeling—killing." Leo Tolstoy.

"It may indeed be doubted whether butchers' meat is anywhere a necessary of life... Decency nowhere requires that any man should eat butchers' meat." Adam Smith.

"I look my age. It is the other people who look older than they are. What can you expect from people who eat corpses?" George Bernard Shaw.

"A dead cow or sheep lying in a pasture is recognized as carrion. The same sort of carcass dressed and hung up in a butcher's stall passes as food!" J. H. Kellogg.

"It is my view that the vegetarian manner of living, by its purely physical effect on the human temperament, would most beneficially influence the lot of mankind." Albert Einstein

"I do feel that spiritual progress does demand at some stage that we should cease to kill our fellow creatures for the satisfaction of our bodily wants." Gandhi

In this verse, Shri Krishna goes further and says that even vegetation contains life, and if we eat it for our own sense enjoyment, we get bound in the karmic reactions of destroying life. The word used in the verse is *ātma-kāraṇāt*, meaning "for one's individual pleasure." However, if we eat food as remnants of *yajña* offered to Bhagavān then the consciousness changes. We then look upon our body as the property of Bhagavān, which has been put under our care for his service. And we partake of permitted food, as his grace, with the intention that it will nourish the body. In this sentiment, the entire process is consecrated to the Divine. Bharat Muni states:

*vasusato kratu dakṣhau kāla kāmau dṛitiḥ kuruh
pururavā madravāśhcha viśhwadevāḥ prakīrtitāḥ [v8]*

"Violence is caused unknowingly to living entities in the process of cooking, by the use of the pestle, fire, grinding instruments, water pot, and broom.

Those who cook food for themselves become implicated in the sin. But *yajña* nullifies the sinful reactions.”

अन्नाद्वन्ति भूतानि पर्जन्यादन्नसम्भवः ।
यज्ञाद्वति पर्जन्यो यज्ञः कर्मसमुद्धवः ॥ 14 ॥

*annād bhavanti bhūtāni parjanyād anna-sambhavaḥ
yajñād bhavati parjanyo yajñah karma-samudbhavaḥ*

annāt—from food; *bhavanti*—subsist; *bhūtāni*—living beings; *parjanyāt*—from rains; *anna*—of food grains; *sambhavaḥ*—production; *yajñāt*—from the performance of sacrifice; *bhavati*—becomes possible; *parjanyaḥ*—rain; *yajñah*—performance of sacrifice; *karma*—prescribed duties; *samudbhavaḥ*—born of.

All living beings subsist on food, and food is produced by rains. Rains come from the performance of sacrifice, and sacrifice is produced by the performance of prescribed duties.

Here, Bhagavān Krishna is describing the cycle of nature. Rain begets grains. Grains are eaten and transformed into blood. From blood, semen is created. Semen is the seed from which the human body is created. Human beings perform *yajñas*, and these propitiate the celestial deities, who then cause rains, and so the cycle continues.

कर्म ब्रह्मोद्धवं विद्धि ब्रह्माक्षरसमुद्धवम् ।
तस्मात्सर्वगतं ब्रह्म नित्यं यज्ञे प्रतिष्ठितम् ॥ 15 ॥

*karma brahmodbhavam viddhi brahmākṣara-samudbhavam
tasmāt sarva-gatam brahma nityam yajñe pratiṣṭhitam*

karma—duties; *brahma*—in the Vedas; *udbhavam*—manifested; *viddhi*—you should know; *brahma*—The Vedas; *akṣara*—from the Imperishable (Bhagavān); *samudbhavam*—directly manifested; *tasmāt*—therefore; *sarva-gatam*—all-pervading; *brahma*—The Bhagavān; *nityam*—eternally; *yajñe*—in sacrifice; *pratiṣṭhitam*—established.

The duties for human beings are described in the Vedas, and the Vedas are manifested by Bhagavān himself. Therefore, the all-pervading Bhagavān is eternally present in acts of sacrifice.

The Vedas emanated from the breath of Bhagavān: *asya mahato bhūtasya niḥshvasitametadyadṛigvedo yajurvedah sāmavedo ṛhavaṅgirasaḥ* (Bṛihadāraṇyak Upaniṣhad 4.5.11) [v9] “The four Vedas—Rīg Veda, Yajur Veda, Sāma Veda, Atharva Veda—all emanated from the breath of Shri Hari.” In these eternal Vedas, the duties of humans have been laid down by Bhagavān himself. These duties have been planned in such a way that through their performance materially engrossed persons may gradually learn to control their desires and slowly elevate themselves from the mode of ignorance to the mode of passion, and from the mode of passion to the mode of goodness. These duties are enjoined to be dedicated to him as *yajña*. Hence, duties consecrated as sacrifice to Bhagavān verily become Bhagavān-like, of the nature of Bhagavān, and non-different from him.

The Tantra Sār states *yajña* to be the Supreme Divine Bhagavān himself:

*yajño yajña pumāṁśha chaiva yajñaśho yajña yajñabhāvanah
yajñabhuk cheti pañchĀtmān yajñeśhvijyo hariḥ svayam* [v10]

In the Bhāgavatam (11.19.39), Shri Krishna declares to Uddhav: *yajño ‘ham bhagavattamah* [v11] “I, the Son of Vasudev, am *Yajña*.” The Vedas state: *yajño vai viṣṇuh* [v12] “*Yajña* is indeed Bhagavān Vishnu himself.” Reiterating this principle, Shri Krishna says in this verse that Bhagavān is eternally present in the act of sacrifice.

एवं प्रवर्तितं चक्रं नानुवर्तयतीह यः ।
अघायुरिन्द्रियारामो मोघं पार्थ स जीवति ॥ 16 ॥

*evam pravartitam chakram nānuvartayatīha yah
aghāyur indriyārāmo mogham pārtha sa jīvati*

evam—thus; *pravartitam*—set into motion; *chakram*—cycle; *na*—not; *anuvartayati*—follow; *iha*—in this life; *yah*—who; *agha-āyuh*—sinful living; *indriya-ārāmah*—for the delight of their senses; *mogham*—vainly; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *sah*—they; *jīvati*—live.

O Parth, those who do not accept their responsibility in the cycle of sacrifice established by the Vedas are sinful. They live only for the delight

of their senses; indeed their lives are in vain.

Chakra, or cycle, means an ordered series of events. The cycle from grains to rains has been described in verse 3.14. All members of this universal wheel of action perform their duties and contribute to its smooth rotation. Since we also partake of the fruits of this natural cycle, we too must do our bounden duty in the chain.

We humans are the only ones in this chain who have been bestowed with the ability to choose our actions by our own free will. We can thus either contribute to the harmony of the cycle or bring about discord in the smooth running of this cosmic mechanism. When the majority of the people of human society accept their responsibility to live as integral parts of the universal system, material prosperity abounds and spiritual growth is engendered. Such periods become golden eras in the social and cultural history of humankind. Conversely, when a major section of humankind begins to violate the universal system and rejects its responsibility as an integral part of the cosmic system, then material nature begins to punish, and peace and prosperity become scarce.

The wheel of nature has been set up by Bhagavān for disciplining, training, and elevating all living beings of varying levels of consciousness. Shri Krishna explains to Arjun that those who do not perform the *yajña* enjoined of them become slaves of their senses and lead a sinful existence. Thus, they live in vain. But persons conforming to the divine law become pure at heart and free from material contamination.

यस्त्वात्मरतिरेव स्यादात्मतृप्तश्च मानवः ।
आत्मन्येव च सन्तुष्टस्य कार्यं न विद्यते ॥ 17 ॥

*yas tvātma-ratir eva syād ātma-triptaś cha mānavah
ātmanyeva cha santuṣṭas tasya kāryam na vidyate*

yah—who; *tu*—but; *ātma-ratiḥ*—rejoice in the self; *eva*—certainly; *syāt*—is; *ātma-triptaḥ*—self-satisfied; *cha*—and; *mānavah*—human being; *ātmani*—in the self; *eva*—certainly; *cha*—and; *santuṣṭaḥ*—satisfied; *tasya*—his; *kāryam*—duty; *na*—not; *vidyate*—exist.

But those who rejoice in the self, who are illumined and fully satisfied in the self, for them, there is no duty.

Only those who have given up desires for external objects can rejoice and be satisfied in the self. The root of bondage is our material desires, “This should happen; that should not happen.” Shri Krishna explains a little further ahead in this chapter (in verse 3.37) that desire is the cause of all sins, consequently, it must be renounced. As explained previously (in the purport of verse 2.64), it must be borne in mind that whenever Shri Krishna says we should give up desire, he refers to material desires, and not to the aspirations for spiritual progress or the desire to realize Bhagavān.

However, why do material desires arise in the first place? When we identify the self with the body, we identify with the yearnings of the body and mind as the desires of the self, and these send us spinning into the realm of Māyā. Sage Tulsidas explains:

*jiba jiba te hari te bilagāno taba te deha geha nije mānyo,
māyā basa swarūp bisarāyo tehi brama te dāruṇa duḥkh pāyo. [v13]*

“When the Ātman separated itself from Bhagavān, the material energy covered it in an illusion. By virtue of that illusion, it began thinking of itself as the body, and ever since, in forgetfulness of the self, it has been experiencing immense misery.”

Those who are illumined realize that the self is not material in nature, but divine, and hence imperishable. The perishable objects of the world can never fulfill the thirst of the imperishable Ātman, and therefore it is a folly to hanker after those sense-objects. Thus, self-illumined Ātman(s) learn to unite their consciousness with Bhagavān and experience his infinite bliss within them.

The *karm* (duties) prescribed for the materially conditioned Ātman(s) are no longer applicable to such illumined Ātman(s) because they have already attained the goal of all such *karm*. For example, as long as one is a college student, one is obliged to follow the rules of the university, but for one who has graduated and earned the degree, the rules now become irrelevant. For such liberated Ātman(s), it is said: *brahmavit śruti mūrdhnī* [v14] “Those who have united themselves with Bhagavān now walk on the head of the Vedas,” i.e. they have no need to follow the rules of the Vedas any longer.

The goal of the Vedas is to help unite the Ātman with Bhagavān. Once the Ātman becomes Brahman-realized, the rules of the Vedas, which helped the Ātman to reach that destination, now no longer apply; the Ātman has transcended their area of jurisdiction. For example, a pundit unites a man and woman in wedlock by performing the marriage ceremony. Once the ceremony is over, he says, “You are now husband and wife; I am leaving.” His task is over. If the wife says, “Punditji, the vows you made us take during the marriage ceremony are not being followed by my husband, the pundit will reply, “That is not my area of expertise. My duty was to get you both united in marriage and that work is over.” Similarly the Vedas are there to help unite the self with the Supreme Self. When Brahman-realization takes place, the task of the Vedas is over. Such an enlightened Ātman is no longer obliged to perform the Vedic duties.

नैव तस्य कृतेनार्थो नाकृतेनेह कश्चन ।
न चास्य सर्वभूतेषु कश्चिदर्थव्यपाश्रयः ॥ 18 ॥

*naiva tasya kṛitenārtho nākṛiteneha kaśchana
na chāsya sarva-bhūteṣhu kaśchid artha-vyapāśrayah*

na—not; *eva*—indeed; *tasya*—his; *kṛitena*—by discharge of duty; *arthah*—gain; *na*—not; *akṛitena*—without discharge of duty; *iha*—here; *kaśchana*—whatsoever; *na*—never; *cha*—and; *asya*—of that person; *sarva-bhūteṣhu*—among all living beings; *kaśchit*—any; *artha*—necessity; *vyapāśrayah*—to depend upon.

Such self-realized Ātman(s) have nothing to gain or lose either in discharging or renouncing their duties. Nor do they need to depend on other living beings to fulfill their self-interest.

These self-realized personalities are situated on the transcendental platform of the Ātman. Their every activity is transcendental, in service of Bhagavān. So the duties prescribed for worldly people at the bodily level, in accordance with the *Varnāśram Dharma*, no longer apply to them.

Here, the distinction needs to be made between *karm* and *bhakti*. Previously, Shri Krishna was talking about *karm*, (or prescribed worldly duties) and saying that they must be done as an offering to Bhagavān. This was necessary to purify the mind, helping it rise above worldly contamination. But self-realized Ātman(s) have already reached absorption in Bhagavān and developed purity of mind. These transcendentalists are directly engaged in *bhakti*, or pure spiritual activities, such as meditation, worship, *kīrtan*, service to the Guru, etc. If such Ātman(s) reject their worldly duties, it is not considered a sin. They may continue to perform worldly duties if they wish, but they are not obliged to do them.

Historically, Saints have been of two kinds. 1) Those like Prahlad, Dhruv, Ambarish, Prithu, and Vibheeshan, who continued to discharge their worldly duties even after attaining the transcendental platform. These were the *karm yogis*—externally they were doing their duties with their body while internally their minds were attached to Bhagavān. 2) Those like Shankaracharya, Madhvacharya, Ramanujacharya, and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, who rejected their worldly duties and accepted the renounced order of life. These were the *karm sanyāsīs*, who were both internally and externally, with both body and mind, engaged only in devotion to Bhagavān. In this verse, Shri Krishna tells Arjun that both options exist for the self-realized sage. Now, he states this in the next

verse which of these he recommends to Arjun.

तस्मादसक्तः सततं कार्यं कर्म समाचर । असक्तो ह्याचरन्कर्म परमाजोति पूरुषः ॥ 19 ॥

*tasmād asaktah satataṁ kāryam karma samāchara
asakto hyācharan karma param āpnoti pūruṣah*

tasmāt—therefore; *asaktah*—without attachment; *satataṁ*—constantly; *kāryam*—duty; *karma*—action; *samāchara*—perform; *asaktah*—unattached; *hi*—certainly; *ācharan*—performing; *karma*—work; *param*—the Supreme; *āpnoti*—attains; *pūruṣah*—a person.

Therefore, giving up attachment, perform actions as a matter of duty, for by working without being attached to the fruits, one attains the Supreme.

From verses 3.8 to 3.16, Shri Krishna strongly urged those who have not yet reached the transcendental platform to perform their prescribed duties. In verses 3.17 and 3.18, he stated that the transcendentalist is not obliged to perform prescribed duties. So, what path is more suitable for Arjun? Shri Krishna's recommendation for him is to be a *karm yogi*, and not take *karm sanyās*.

He explains the reason for this in verses 3.20 to 3.26.

कर्मणैव हि संसिद्धिमास्थिता जनकादयः । लोकसंग्रहमेवापि सम्पश्यन्कर्तुमर्हसि ॥ 20 ॥ यद्यदाचरति श्रेष्ठस्तत्तदेवेतरो जनः । स यत्प्रमाणं कुरुते लोकस्तदनुवर्तते ॥ 21 ॥

*karmaṇaiva hi sansiddhim āsthitā janakādayaḥ
loka-saṅgraham evāpi sampaśyan kartum arhasi
yad yad ācharati śreshṭhas tat tad evetaro janah
sa yat pramāṇam kurute lokas tad anuvartate*

karmaṇā—by the performance of prescribed duties; *eva*—only; *hi*—certainly; *sansiddhim*—perfection; *āsthitaḥ*—attained; *janaka-ādayaḥ*—King Janak and other kings; *loka-saṅgraham*—for the welfare of the masses; *eva api*—only; *sampaśyan*—considering; *kartum*—to perform; *arhasi*—you should; *yat* *yat*—whatever; *ācharati*—does; *śreshṭhaḥ*—the best; *tat* *tat*—that (alone); *eva*—certainly; *itarah*—common; *janah*—people; *sah*—they; *yat*—whichever; *pramāṇam*—standard; *kurute*—perform; *lokah*—world; *tat*—that; *anuvartate*—pursues.

By performing their prescribed duties, King Janak and others attained perfection. You should also perform your work to set an example for the good of the world. Whatever actions great persons perform, common people follow. Whatever standards they set, all the world pursues.

King Janak attained perfection through *karm yog*, while discharging his kingly duties. Even after reaching the transcendental platform, he continued to do his worldly duties, purely for the reason that it would set a good example for the world to follow. Many other Saints did the same.

Humanity is inspired by the ideals that they see in the lives of great people. Such leaders inspire society by their example and become shining beacons for the masses to follow. Leaders of society thus have a moral responsibility to set lofty examples for inspiring the rest of the population by their words, deeds, and character. When noble leaders are in the forefront, the rest of society naturally gets uplifted in morality, selflessness, and spiritual strength. But in times when there is a vacuum of principled leadership, the rest of society has no standards to pursue and slumps into self-centeredness, moral bankruptcy, and spiritual lassitude. Hence, great personalities should always act in an exemplary manner to set the standard for the world. Even though they themselves may have risen to the transcendental platform, and may not need to perform prescribed Vedic duties, by doing so, they inspire others to perform prescribed Vedic actions.

If a great leader of society becomes a *karm sanyāsī*, and renounces work, it sets an errant precedent for others. The leader may be at the transcendental platform and therefore eligible to renounce work and engage completely in spirituality. However, others in society use their example as an excuse for escapism, to run away from their responsibilities. Such escapist cite the instances of the great *karm sanyāsīs*, such as Shankaracharya, Madhvacharya, Nimbarkacharya, and

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Following their lofty footsteps, these imposters also renounce worldly duties and take *sanyās*, even though they have not yet attained the purity of mind required for it. In India, we find thousands of such sadhus. They copy the examples of the great *sanyāsīs* and don the ochre robes, without the concurrent internal enlightenment and bliss. Though externally renounced, their nature forces them to seek happiness, and devoid of the divine bliss of Bhagavān, they begin indulging in the lowly pleasure of intoxication. Thus, they slip even below the level of people in household life, as stated in the following verse:

*brahma jñāna jānyo nahīn, karm diye chhiṭakāya,
tulasī aisī Ātman sahaja naraka mahī jāya.* [v15]

Sage Tulsidas says: “One who renounces worldly duties, without the concurrent internal enlightenment with divine knowledge, treads the quick path to Naraka.”

Instead, if a great leader is a *karm yogi*, at least the followers will continue to do their karm and dutifully perform their responsibilities. This will help them learn to discipline their mind and senses, and slowly rise to the transcendental platform. Hence, to present an example for society to follow, Shri Krishna suggests that Arjun should practice *karm yog*. *He now gives his own example to illustrate the above point.*

न मे पार्थस्ति कर्तव्यं त्रिषु लोकेषु किञ्चन ।
नानवाप्तमवाप्तव्यं वर्त एव च कर्मणि ॥ 22 ॥

*na me pārthasti kartavyam triṣu lokeṣhu kiñchana
nānavāptam avāptavyam varta eva cha karmaṇi*

na—not; *me*—mine; *pārtha*—Arjun; *asti*—is; *kartavyam*—duty; *triṣu*—in the three; *lokeṣhu*—worlds; *kiñchana*—any; *na*—not; *anavāptam*—to be attained; *avāptavyam*—to be gained; *varte*—I am engaged; *eva*—yet; *cha*—also; *karmaṇi*—in prescribed duties.

There is no duty for me to do in all the three worlds, O Parth, nor do I

have anything to gain or attain. Yet, I am engaged in prescribed duties.

The reason why we all work is because we need something. We are all tiny parts of Bhagavān, who is an ocean of bliss, and hence we all seek bliss. Since, we have not attained perfect bliss as yet, we feel dissatisfied and incomplete. So whatever we do is for the sake of attaining bliss. However, bliss is one of Bhagavān's energies and he alone possesses it to the infinite extent. He is perfect and complete in himself and has no need of anything outside of himself. Thus, he is also called *Ātmārām* (one who rejoices in the self), *Ātma-ratī* (one who is attracted to his or her own self), and *Ātma-kṛīda* (one who performs divine pastimes with his or her own self).

If such a personality does work, there can be only one reason for it—it will not be for oneself, rather for the welfare of others. Thus, Shri Krishna tells Arjun that although in his personal form as Shri Krishna, he has no duty to perform in the universe, yet he works for the welfare of others. *He next explains the welfare that is accomplished when he works.*

यदि ह्यहं न वर्तेयं जातु कर्मण्यतन्द्रितः ।
मम वर्त्मानुवर्तन्ते मनुष्याः पार्थ सर्वशः ॥२३॥

*yadi hyaham na varteyam jātu karmaṇyatandritah
mama vartmānuvartante manuṣhyāḥ pārtha sarvaśah*

yadi—if; *hi*—certainly; *aham*—I; *na*—not; *varteyam*—thus engage; *jātu*—ever; *karmaṇi*—in the performance of prescribed duties; *atandritah*—carefully; *mama*—my; *vartma*—path; *anuvartante*—follow; *manuṣhyāḥ*—all men; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *sarvaśah*—in all respects.

For if I did not carefully perform the prescribed duties, O Parth, all men would follow my path in all respects.

In his divine pastimes on the Earth, Shri Krishna was playing the role of a king and a great leader. He appeared in the material world as the son of King Vasudeva from the Vrishni dynasty, the foremost of the righteous. If Bhagavān

Krishna did not perform prescribed Vedic activities then so many lesser personalities would follow in his footsteps, thinking that violating them was the standard practice. Bhagavān Krishna states that he would be at fault for leading mankind astray.

**उत्सीदेयुरिमे लोका न कुर्यां कर्म चेदहम् ।
सङ्करस्य च कर्ता स्यामुपहन्यामिमाः प्रजाः ॥२४॥**

*utsīdeyur ime lokā na kuryām karma ched aham
sankarasya cha kartā syām upahanyām imāḥ prajāḥ*

utsīdeyuh—would perish; *ime*—all these; *lokāḥ*—worlds; *na*—not; *kuryām*—I perform; *karma*—prescribed duties; *chet*—if; *aham*—I; *sankarasya*—of uncultured population; *cha*—and; *kartā*—responsible; *syām*—would be; *upahanyām*—would destroy; *imāḥ*—all these; *prajāḥ*—living entities.

If I ceased to perform prescribed actions, all these worlds would perish. I would be responsible for the pandemonium that would prevail, and would thereby destroy the peace of the human race.

When Shri Krishna appeared on the Earth, seemingly as a human being, he conducted himself in all ways and manners, appropriate for his position in society, as a member of the royal warrior class. If he had acted otherwise, other human beings would begin to imitate him, thinking that they must copy the conduct of the worthy son of the righteous King Vasudev. Had Shri Krishna failed to perform Vedic duties, human beings following his example would be led away from the discipline of *karm*, into a state of chaos. This would have been a very serious offence and Bhagavān Krishna would be considered at fault. Thus, he explains to Arjun that if he did not fulfill his occupational duties, it would cause pandemonium in society.

Similarly, Arjun was world-famous for being undefeated in battle, and was the brother of the virtuous King Yudhisthir. If Arjun refused to fulfill his duty to protect dharma, then many other worthy and noble warriors could follow his example and also renounce their prescribed duty of protecting righteousness.

This would bring destruction to the world balance and the rout of innocent and virtuous people. Thus, for the benefit of the entire human race and the welfare of the world, Shri Krishna coaxed Arjun not to neglect performing his prescribed Vedic activities.

सक्ताः कर्मण्यविद्वांसो यथा कुर्वन्ति भारत ।
कुर्याद्विद्वांस्तथासक्तश्चकीषुलोकसंग्रहम् ॥२५॥

*saktāḥ karmaṇyavidvānso yathā kurvanti bhārata
kuryād vidvāns tathāsaktaś chikīrṣhur loka-saṅgraham*

saktāḥ—attached; *karmaṇi*—duties; *avidvānsah*—the ignorant; *yathā*—as much as; *kurvanti*—act; *bhārata*—scion of Bharat (Arjun); *kuryāt*—should do; *vidvān*—the wise; *tathā*—thus; *asaktaḥ*—unattached; *chikīrṣhuh*—wishing; *loka-saṅgraham*—welfare of the world.

As ignorant people perform their duties with attachment to the results, O scion of Bharat, so should the wise act without attachment, for the sake of leading people on the right path.

Previously, in verse 3.20, Shri Krishna had used the expression *loka-saṅgraham evāpi sampaśyan* meaning, “with a view to the welfare of the masses.” In this verse, the expression *loka-saṅgraham chikīrṣhuh* means “wishing the welfare of the world.” Thus, Shri Krishna again emphasizes that the wise should always act for the benefit of humankind.

Also, in this verse the expression *saktāḥ avidvānsah* has been used for people who are as yet in bodily consciousness, and hence attached to worldly pleasures, but who have full faith in the Vedic rituals sanctioned by the scriptures. They are called ignorant because though they have bookish knowledge of the scriptures, they do not comprehend the final goal of Brahman-realization. Such ignorant people perform their duty scrupulously according to the ordinance of the scriptures, without indolence or doubt. They have firm faith that the performance of Vedic duties and rituals will bring the material rewards they desire. If the faith of such people in rituals is broken, without their having

developed faith in the higher principle of devotion, they will have nowhere to go. The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam states:

*tāvat karmāṇi kurvīta na nirvidyeta yāvataḥ
mat-kathā-śhravaṇādau vā śhraddhā yāvan na jāyate (11.20.9) [v16]*

“One should continue to perform *karm* as long as one has not developed renunciation from the sense objects and attachment to Bhagavān.”

Shri Krishna urges Arjun that just as ignorant people faithfully perform ritualistic duties, so also the wise should perform their works dutifully, not for material rewards, but for setting an ideal for the rest of society. Besides, the particular situation in which Arjun finds himself is a *dharma yuddha* (war of righteousness). Thus, for the welfare of society, Arjun should perform his duty as a warrior.

न बुद्धिभेदं जनयेदज्ञानां कर्मसङ्गिनाम् ।
जोषयेत्सर्वकर्माणि विद्वान्युक्तः समाचरन् ॥ 26 ॥

*na buddhi-bhedam janayed ajñānām karma-saṅginām
joṣhayet sarva-karmāṇi vidvān yuktah samācharan*

na—not; *buddhi-bhedam*—discord in the intellects; *janayed*—should create; *ajñānām*—of the ignorant; *karma-saṅginām*—who are attached to fruitive actions; *joṣhayet*—should inspire (them) to perform; *sarva*—all; *karmāṇi*—prescribed; *vidvān*—the wise; *yuktah*—enlightened; *samācharan*—performing properly.

The wise should not create discord in the intellects of ignorant people, who are attached to fruitive actions, by inducing them to stop work. Rather, by performing their duties in an enlightened manner, they should inspire the ignorant also to do their prescribed duties.

Great persons have greater responsibility because common people follow them. So Shri Krishna urges that wise people should not perform any actions or make any utterances that lead the ignorant toward downfall. It may be argued that if the wise feel compassion for the ignorant, they should give them the

highest knowledge—the knowledge of Brahman-realization. Bhagavān Krishna neutralizes this argument by stating *na vichālayet*, meaning the ignorant should not be asked to abandon duties by giving superior instructions they are not qualified to understand.

Usually, people in material consciousness consider only two options. Either they are willing to work hard for fruitive results or they wish to give up all exertions on the plea that all works are laborious, painful, and wrought with evil. Between these, working for results is far superior to the escapist approach. Hence, the spiritually wise in Vedic knowledge should inspire the ignorant to perform their duties with attentiveness and care. If the minds of the ignorant become disturbed and unsettled then they may lose faith in working altogether, and with actions stopped and knowledge not arising, the ignorant will lose out from both sides.

If both the ignorant and the wise perform Vedic actions, then what is the difference between them? Apprehending such a question, Shri Krishna explains this in the next two verses.

प्रकृते: क्रियमाणानि गुणैः कर्माणि सर्वशः ।
अहङ्कारविमूढात्मा कर्ताहमिति मन्यते ॥ 27 ॥

*prakṛiteḥ kriyamāṇāni guṇaiḥ karmāṇi sarvaśah
ahankāra-vimūḍha-Ātman kartāham iti manyate*

prakṛiteḥ—of material nature; *kriyamāṇāni*—carried out; *guṇaiḥ*—by the three modes; *karmāṇi*—activities; *sarvaśah*—all kinds of; *ahankāra-vimūḍha-Ātman*—those who are bewildered by the ego and misidentify themselves with the body; *kartā*—the doer; *aham*—I; *iti*—thus; *manyate*—thinks.

All activities are carried out by the three modes of material nature. But in ignorance, the Ātman, deluded by false identification with the body, thinks itself to be the doer.

We can see that the natural phenomena of the world are not directed by us, but are performed by *prakṛiti*, or Mother Nature. Now, for the actions of our

own body, we usually divide them into two categories: 1) Natural biological functions, such as digestion, blood circulation, heartbeat, etc., which we do not consciously execute but which occur naturally. 2) Actions such as speaking, hearing, walking, sleeping, working etc. that we think we perform.

Both these categories of works are performed by the mind-body-senses mechanism. All the parts of this mechanism are made from *prakṛiti*, or the material energy, which consists of the three modes (*guṇas*)—goodness (*sattva*), passion (*rajas*), and ignorance (*tamas*). Just as waves are not separate from the ocean, but a part of it, similarly the body is a part of Mother Nature from which it is created. Hence, material energy is the doer of everything.

Why then does the Ātman perceive itself to be doing activities? The reason is that, in the grip of the unforgiving ego, the Ātman falsely identifies itself with the body. Hence, it remains under the illusion of doership. Let us say there are two trains standing side-by-side on the railway platform, and a passenger on one train fixes his gaze on the other. When the second train moves, it seems that the first is moving. Likewise the immobile Ātman identifies with the mobility of *prakṛiti*. Thus, it perceives itself as the doer of actions. The moment the Ātman eliminates the ego and surrenders to the will of Bhagavān, it realizes itself as the non-doer.

One may question that if the Ātman is truly the non-doer, then why is it implicated in law of karma for actions performed by the body? The reason is that the Ātman does not itself perform actions, but it does direct the actions of the senses-mind-intellect. For example, a chariot driver does not pull the chariot himself, but he does direct the horses. Now, if there is any accident, it is not the horses that are blamed, but the driver who was directing them. Similarly, the Ātman is held responsible for the actions of the mind-body mechanism because the senses-mind-intellect work on receiving inspiration

from the Ātman.

तत्त्ववित् महाबाहो गुणकर्मविभागयोः ।
गुणा गुणेषु वर्तन्त इति मत्वा न सज्जते ॥ २८ ॥

*tattva-vit tu mahā-bāho guṇa-karma-vibhāgayoh
guṇā guṇeṣhu vartanta iti matvā na sajjate*

tattva-vit—the knower of the Truth; *tu*—but; *mahā-bāho*—mighty-armed one; *guṇa-karma*—from gunas and karma; *vibhāgayoh*—distinguish; *guṇāḥ*—modes of material nature in the shape of the senses, mind, etc.; *guṇeṣhu*—modes of material nature in the shape of objects of perception; *vartante*—are engaged; *iti*—thus; *matvā*—knowing; *na*—never; *sajjate*—becomes attached.

O mighty-armed Arjun, illumined persons distinguish the Ātman as distinct from *guṇas* and *karmas*. They perceive that it is only the *guṇas* (in the shape of the senses, mind, etc.) that move amongst the *guṇas* (in the shape of the objects of perception), and thus they do not get entangled in them.

The previous verse mentioned that the *ahankāra vimūḍhĀtman* (those who are bewildered by the ego and misidentify themselves with the body) think themselves to be the doers. This verse talks about the *tattva-vit*, or the knowers of the Truth. Having thus abolished the ego, they are free from bodily identifications, and are able to discern their spiritual identity distinct from the corporeal body. Hence, they are not beguiled into thinking of themselves as the doers of their material actions, and instead they attribute every activity to the movements of the three *guṇas*. Such Brahman-realized Saints say: *jo karai so hari karai, hota kabīr kabīr* [v17] “Bhagavān is doing everything, but people are thinking that I am doing.”

प्रकृतेर्गुणसम्मूढः सज्जन्ते गुणकर्मसु ।
तानकृत्सनविदो मन्दान्कृत्सनविन्न विचालयेत् ॥ २९ ॥

*prakṛiter guṇa-sammūḍhāḥ sajjante guṇa-karmasu
tān akṛitsna-vido mandān kṛitsna-vin na vichālayet*

prakṛiteḥ—of material nature; *guṇa*—by the modes of material nature; *sammūḍhāḥ*—deluded; *sajjante*—become attached; *guṇa-karmasu*—to results of actions; *tān*—those; *akṛitsna-vidah*—persons without knowledge; *mandān*—the ignorant; *kṛitsna-vit*—persons with knowledge; *na vichālayet*—should not unsettle.

Those who are deluded by the operation of the *guṇas* become attached to the results of their actions. But the wise who understand these truths should not unsettle such ignorant people who know very little.

The question may be raised that if Ātman is distinct from the *guṇas* and their activities, then why are the ignorant attached to sense objects? Shri Krishna explains in this verse that they become bewildered by the *guṇas* of the material energy, and think themselves to be the doers. Infatuated by the three modes of material nature, they work for the express purpose of being able to enjoy sensual and mental delights. They are unable to perform actions as a matter of duty, without desiring rewards.

However, the *kṛitsna-vit* (persons with knowledge) should not disturb the minds of the *akṛitsna-vit* (persons without knowledge). This means that the wise should not force their thoughts onto ignorant persons by saying, “You are the Ātman, not the body, and hence *karm* is meaningless; give it up.” Rather, they should instruct the ignorant to perform their respective *karm*, and slowly help them rise above attachment. In this way, after presenting the distinctions between those who are spiritually wise and those who are ignorant, Shri Krishna gives the sober caution not to unsettle the minds of the ignorant.

**मयि सर्वाणि कर्माणि संन्यस्याध्यात्मचेतसा ।
निराशीर्निर्ममो भूत्वा युध्यस्व विगतज्वरः ॥ ३० ॥**

*mayi sarvāṇi karmāṇi sannyasyādhyātma-chetasā
nirāśhīr nirmamo bhūtvā yudhyasva vigata-jvarah*

mayi—unto me; *sarvāṇi*—all; *karmāṇi*—works; *sannyasya*—renouncing completely; *adhyātma-chetasā*—with the thoughts resting on Bhagavān; *nirāśhīr*—free from hankering for the results of the actions; *nirmamah*—without ownership; *bhūtvā*—so being; *yudhyasva*—fight; *vigata-jvarah*—without mental fever.

Performing all works as an offering unto me, constantly meditate on me as the Supreme. Become free from desire and selfishness, and with your mental grief departed, fight!

In his typical style, Shri Krishna expounds on a topic and then finally presents the summary. The words *adhyātma chetasā* mean “with the thoughts resting on Bhagavān.” *Sanyasya* means “renouncing all activities that are not dedicated to him.” *Nirāśhīḥ* means “without hankering for the results of the actions.” The consciousness of dedicating all actions to Bhagavān requires forsaking claim to proprietorship, and renouncing all desire for personal gain, hankering, and lamentation.

The summary of the instructions in the previous verses is that one should very faithfully reflect, “My Ātman is a tiny part of the Supreme Bhagavān Shri Krishna. He is the Enjoyer and Master of all. All my works are meant for his pleasure, and thus, I should perform my duties in the spirit of *yajña* or sacrifice to him. He supplies the energy by which I accomplish works of *yajña*. Thus, I should not take credit for any actions authored by me.”

ये मे मतमिदं नित्यमनुतिष्ठन्ति मानवाः ।
श्रद्धावन्तोऽनसूयन्तो मुच्यन्ते तेऽपि कर्मभिः ॥ 31 ॥

*ye me matam idam nityam anutishṭhanti mānavāḥ
śraddhāvanto 'nasūyanto muchyante te 'pi karmabhiḥ*

ye—who; *me*—my; *matam*—teachings; *idam*—these; *nityam*—constantly; *anutishṭhanti*—abide by; *mānavāḥ*—human beings; *śraddhā-vantah*—with profound faith; *anasūyatā*—free from cavilling; *muchyante*—become free; *te*—those; *api*—also; *karmabhiḥ*—from the bondage of karma.

Those who abide by these teachings of mine, with profound faith and free from cavil, are released from the bondage of karma.

Very beautifully, the Supreme Bhagavān terms the *siddhānt* (principle) explained by him as *mata* (opinion). An opinion is a personal view, while a principle is

universal fact. Opinions can differ amongst teachers, but the principle is the same. Philosophers and teachers name their opinion as principle, but in the Gita, the Bhagavān has named the principle explained by him as opinion. By his example, he is teaching us humility and cordiality.

Having given the call for action, Shri Krishna now points out the virtues of accepting the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita with faith and following them in one's life. Our prerogative as humans is to know the truth and then modify our lives accordingly. In this way, our mental fever (of lust, anger, greed, envy, illusion, etc.) gets pacified.

In the previous verse, Shri Krishna had clearly explained to Arjun to offer all works to him. But he knows that this statement can cause ridicule from those who have no belief in Bhagavān and rebuke from those who are envious of him. So, he now emphasizes the need for accepting the teachings with conviction. He says that by faithfully following these teachings one becomes free from the bondage of karma. *But what happens to those who are faithless? Their position is explained next.*

ये त्वेतदभ्यसूयन्तो नानुतिष्ठन्ति मे मतम् ।
सर्वज्ञानविमूढांस्तान्विद्धि नष्टानचेतसः ॥ 32 ॥

*ye tvetad abhyasūyanto nānutiṣṭhanti me matam
sarva-jñāna-vimūḍhāns tān viddhi naṣṭān achetasah*

ye—those; *tu*—but; *etat*—this; *abhyasūyantah*—cavilling; *na*—not; *anutiṣṭhanti*—follow; *me*—my; *matam*—teachings; *sarva-jñāna*—in all types of knowledge; *vimūḍhān*—deluded; *tān*—they are; *viddhi*—know; *naṣṭān*—ruined; *achetasah*—devoid of discrimination.

But those who find faults with my teachings, being bereft of knowledge and devoid of discrimination, they disregard these principles and bring about their own ruin.

The teachings presented by Shri Krishna are perfect for our eternal welfare. However, our material intellect has innumerable imperfections, and so we are

not always able to comprehend the sublimity of his teachings or appreciate their benefits. If we could, what would be the difference between us tiny Ātman(s) and Shri Hari? Thus, faith becomes a necessary ingredient for accepting the divine teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. Wherever our intellect is unable to comprehend, rather than finding fault with the teachings, we must submit our intellect, “Shri Krishna has said it. There must be veracity in it, which I cannot understand at present. Let me accept it for now and engage in spiritual *sādhanā*. I will be able to comprehend it in future, when I progress in spirituality through *sādhanā*.” This attitude is called *śraddhā*, or faith.

Jagadguru Shankaracharya defines *śraddhā* as: *guru vedānta vākyeṣhu dridho viśvāsaḥ śraddhā* [v18] “*Śraddhā* is strong faith in the words of the Guru and the scriptures.” Chaitanya Mahaprabhu explained it similarly: *śraddhā śabde viśwāsa kahe sudṛidha niśchaya* (Chaitanya Charitāmṛit, Madhya Leela, 2.62) [v19] “The word *Śraddhā* means strong faith in Bhagavān and Guru, even though we may not comprehend their message at present.” The British poet, Alfred Tennyson said: “By faith alone, embrace believing, where we cannot prove.” So, *śraddhā* means earnestly digesting the comprehensible portions of the Bhagavad Gita, and also accepting the abstruse portions, with the hope that they will become comprehensible in future.

However, one of the persistent defects of the material intellect is pride. Due to pride, whatever the intellect cannot comprehend at present, it often rejects as incorrect. Though Shri Krishna’s teachings are presented by the omniscient Bhagavān for the welfare of the Ātman(s), people still find fault in them, such as, “Why is Bhagavān asking everything to be offered to him? Is he greedy? Is he an egotist that he asks Arjun to worship him?” Shri Krishna says that such people are *achetasah*, or “devoid of discrimination,” because they cannot distinguish between the pure and the impure, the righteous and the unrighteous, the Creator and the created, the Supreme Master and the servant.

Such people “bring about their own ruin,” because they reject the path to eternal salvation and keep rotating in the cycle of life and death.

सदृशं चेष्टते स्वस्याः प्रकृतेज्ञानवानपि ।
प्रकृतिं यान्ति भूतानि निग्रहः किं करिष्यति ॥३३॥

*sadṛiśam cheṣṭate svasyāḥ prakriter jñānavān api
prakṛitim yānti bhūtāni nigrahah kim kariṣhyati*

sadṛiśam—accordingly; *cheṣṭate*—act; *svasyāḥ*—by their own; *prakṛiteḥ*—modes of nature; *jñāna-vān*—the wise; *api*—even; *prakṛitim*—nature; *yānti*—follow; *bhūtāni*—all living beings; *nigrahaḥ*—repression; *kim*—what; *kariṣhyati*—will do.

Even wise people act according to their natures, for all living beings are propelled by their natural tendencies. What will one gain by repression?

Shri Krishna again comes back to the point about action being superior to inaction. Propelled by their natures, people are inclined to act in accordance with their individual modes. Even those who are theoretically learned carry with them the baggage of the *sanskārs* (tendencies and impressions) of endless past lives, the *prārabdh* karma of this life, and the individual traits of their minds and intellects. They find it difficult to resist this force of habit and nature. If the Vedic scriptures instructed them to give up all works and engage in pure spirituality, it would create an unstable situation. Such artificial repression would be counter-productive. The proper and easier way for spiritual advancement is to utilize the immense force of habit and tendencies and dovetail it in the direction of Bhagavān. We have to begin the spiritual ascent from where we stand, and doing so requires we have to first accept our present condition of what we are and then improve on it.

We can see how even animals act according to their unique natures. Ants are such social creatures that they bring food for the community while forsaking it themselves, a quality that is difficult to find in human society. A cow has such intense attachment for its calf that the moment it goes out of its sight, the cow

feels disturbed. Dogs display the virtue of loyalty to depths that cannot be matched by the best of humans. Similarly, we humans too are propelled by our natures. Since Arjun was a warrior by nature, Shri Krishna told him, “Your own *Kṣhatriya* (warrior) nature will compel you to fight.” (Bhagavad Gita 18.59) “You will be driven to do it by your own inclination, born of your nature.” (Bhagavad Gita 18.60) That nature should be sublimated by shifting the goal from worldly enjoyment to Brahman-realization, and performing our prescribed duty without attachment and aversion, in the spirit of service to Bhagavān.

इन्द्रियस्येन्द्रियस्यार्थे रागद्वेषौ व्यवस्थितौ ।
तयोर्न वशमागच्छेत्तौ ह्यस्य परिपन्थिनौ ॥३४॥

*indriyasyendriyasyārthe rāga-dvēshau vyavasthitau
tayor na vaśham āgachchhet tau hyasya paripanthinau*

indriyasya—of the senses; *indriyasya arthe*—in the sense objects; *rāga*—attachment; *dveshau*—aversion; *vyavasthitau*—situated; *tayoh*—of them; *na*—never; *vaśham*—be controlled; *āgachchhet*—should become; *tau*—those; *hi*—certainly; *asya*—for him; *paripanthinau*—foes.

The senses naturally experience attachment and aversion to the sense objects, but do not be controlled by them, for they are way-layers and foes.

Although Shri Krishna previously emphasized that the mind and senses are propelled by their natural tendencies, he now opens up the possibility of harnessing them. As long as we have the material body, for its maintenance, we have to utilize the objects of the senses. Shri Krishna is not asking us to stop consuming what is necessary, but to practice eradicating attachment and aversion. Definitely *sanskārs* (past life tendencies) do have a deep-rooted influence on all living beings, but if we practice the method taught in the Bhagavad Gita, we can succeed in correcting the situation.

The senses naturally run toward the sense objects and their mutual interaction creates sensations of pleasure and pain. For example, the taste buds experience

joy in contact with delicious foods and distress in contact with bitter foods. The mind repeatedly contemplates the sensations of pleasure and pain which it associates with these objects. Thoughts of pleasure in the sense objects create attachment while thoughts of pain create aversion. Shri Krishna tells Arjun to succumb neither to feelings of attachment nor aversion.

In the discharge of our worldly duty, we will have to encounter all kinds of likeable and unlikeable situations. We must practice neither to yearn for the likeable situations, nor to avoid the unlikeable situations. When we stop being slaves of both the likes and dislikes of the mind and senses, we will overcome our lower nature. And when we become indifferent to both pleasure and pain in the discharge of our duty, we will become truly free to act from our higher nature.

श्रेयान्स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात् ।
स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मो भयावहः ॥३५॥

*śhreyān swa-dharmaḥ viguṇaḥ para-dharmāt sv-anuṣṭhitāt
swa-dharme nidhanam śhreyah para-dharmaḥ bhayāvahah*

śhreyān—better; *swa-dharmaḥ*—personal duty; *viguṇaḥ*—tinged with faults; *para-dharmāt*—than another's prescribed duties; *su-anuṣṭhitāt*—perfectly done; *swa-dharme*—in one's personal duties; *nidhanam*—death; *śhreyah*—better; *para-dharmaḥ*—duties prescribed for others; *bhaya-āvahah*—fraught with fear.

It is far better to perform one's natural prescribed duty, though tinged with faults, than to perform another's prescribed duty, though perfectly. In fact, it is preferable to die in the discharge of one's duty, than to follow the path of another, which is fraught with danger.

In this verse, the word *dharma* has been used four times. *Dharma* is a word commonly used in Hinduism and Buddhism. But it is the most elusive word to translate into the English language. Terms like righteousness, good conduct, duty, noble quality, etc. only describe an aspect of its meaning. *Dharma* comes

from the root word *dhri*, which means *dhāran karane yogya*, or “responsibilities, duties, thoughts, and actions that are appropriate for us.” For example, the dharma of the Ātman is to love Bhagavān. It is like the central law of our being.

The suffix *swa* means “the self.” Thus, *swa-dharma* is our personal *dharma*, which is the *dharma* applicable to our context, situation, maturity, and profession in life. This *swa-dharma* can change as our context in life changes, and as we grow spiritually. By asking Arjun to follow his *swa-dharma*, Shri Krishna is telling him to follow his profession, and not change it because someone else may be doing something else.

It is more enjoyable to be ourselves than to pretend to be someone else. The duties born of our nature can be easily performed with stability of mind. The duties of others may seem attractive from a distance and we may think of switching, but that is a risky thing to do. If they conflict with our nature, they will create disharmony in our senses, mind, and intellect. This will be detrimental for our consciousness and will hinder our progress on the spiritual path. Shri Krishna emphasizes this point dramatically by saying that it is better to die in the faithful performance of one’s duty than to be in the unnatural position of doing another’s duty.

अर्जुन उवाच ।
अथ केन प्रयुक्तोऽयं पापं चरति पूरुषः ।
अनिच्छन्नपि वार्ष्णेय बलादिव नियोजितः ॥३६॥

*arjuna uvācha
atha kena prayukto 'yam pāpam charati pūruṣah
anichchhan api vārṣhneya balād iva niyojitaḥ*

arjunaḥ uvācha—Arjun said; *atha*—then; *kena*—by what; *prayuktah*—impelled; *ayam*—one; *pāpam*—sins; *charati*—commit; *pūruṣah*—a person; *anichchhan*—unwillingly; *api*—even; *vārṣhneya*—he who belongs to the Vrishni clan, Shri Krishna; *balāt*—by force; *iva*—as if; *niyojitaḥ*—engaged.

Arjun asked: Why is a person impelled to commit sinful acts, even unwillingly, as if by force, O descendent of Vrishni (Krishna)?

Shri Krishna stated in the previous verse that one should not come under the influence of attraction and aversion. Arjun wishes to lead such a divine life, but finds the advice difficult to implement. So he asks Shri Krishna a question that is very realistic and representative of the human struggle. He says, “What force prevents us from reaching this high ideal? What makes one succumb to attachment and aversion?”

We all have a conscience that makes us feel remorseful while committing a sin. The conscience is grounded in the fact that Bhagavān is the abode of virtue, and as his fragments, we all have an innate attraction for virtue and goodness. The goodness that is the nature of the Ātman gives rise to the voice of conscience. Thus, we cannot make the excuse that we did not know stealing, swindling, libel, extortion, murder, oppression, and corruption are sinful activities. We intuitively know these deeds to be sinful, and yet we commit such acts, as if some strong force impels to do them. Arjun wishes to know what that strong force is.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
काम एष क्रोध एष रजोगुणसमुद्भवः ।
महाशनो महापाप्मा विद्ध्येनमिह वैरिणम् ॥ ३७ ॥

*śrī bhagavān uvācha
kāma eṣha krodha eṣha rajo-guṇa-samudbhavaḥ
mahāśhano mahā-pāpmā viddhyenam iha vairiṇam*

śrī-bhagavān uvācha—Bhagavān Krishna said; *kāmaḥ*—desire; *eṣhah*—this; *kroḍhah*—wrath; *eṣhah*—this; *rajaḥ-guṇa*—the mode of passion; *saṁudbhavaḥ*—born of; *mahā-aśhanah*—all-devouring; *mahā-pāpmā*—greatly sinful; *viddhi*—know; *enam*—this; *iha*—in the material world; *vairiṇam*—the enemy.

Bhagavān Krishna said: It is lust alone, which is born of contact with the mode of passion, and later transformed into anger. Know this as the sinful,

all-devouring enemy in the world.

The Vedas use the word *kām*, or lust, not only for sexual desires but also to include all desires for material enjoyment based on the bodily concept of the self. Thus, lust shows itself in many ways—the urge for money, physical cravings, craving for prestige, the drive for power, etc. This lust is only a perverted reflection of love for Bhagavān, which is the inherent nature of every living being. When the Ātman associates with the material energy in the form of the body, its divine love for Bhagavān is transformed into lust, in association with the mode of passion. Since divine love is the highest power of Bhagavān, its perversion in the material realm, which is lust, is also the most powerful force in worldly activities.

Shri Krishna identifies this “lust” for worldly enjoyment as the cause of sin, as the malignant allure sitting within us. The mode of passion deludes the Ātman into believing that worldly objects will give satisfaction, and so one creates desires for acquiring them. When desire is satisfied, it gives birth to greed; when it is not satisfied, it gives rise to anger. One commits sins under the influence of all three—lust, greed, and anger. Greed is nothing but intensified desire, while anger is frustrated desire. Hence, Shri Krishna labels lust, or desire, as the root of all evil.

**धूमेनाव्रियते वह्निर्थादशो मलेन च ।
यथोल्बेनावृतो गर्भस्तथा तेनेदमावृतम् ॥ 38 ॥**

*dhūmenāvriyate vahnir yathādarśho malena cha
yatholbenāvṛito garbhah tathā tenedam āvṛitam*

dhūmena—by smoke; *āvriyate*—is covered; *vahnih*—fire; *yathā*—just as; *ādarśah*—mirror; *malena*—by dust; *cha*—also; *yathā*—just as; *ulbena*—by the womb; *āvṛitah*—is covered; *garbhah*—embryo; *tathā*—similarly; *tena*—by that (desire); *idam*—this; *āvṛitam*—is covered.

Just as a fire is covered by smoke, a mirror is masked by dust, and an embryo is concealed by the womb, similarly one’s knowledge gets

shrouded by desire.

Knowledge of what is right and what is wrong is called discrimination. This discrimination resides in the intellect. However, lust is such a formidable adversary that it clouds the discriminatory ability of the intellect. Shri Krishna gives three grades of examples to illustrate this principle. Fire, which is the source of light, gets covered by smoke. This partial obscuring is like the thin cloud that *sāttvic* desires create. A mirror, which is naturally reflective, gets obscured by dust. This semi-opacity is like the masking impact of *rājasic* desires on the intellect. And an embryo gets concealed in the womb. This complete obfuscation is like the consequence of *tāmasic* desires subverting the power of discrimination. Similarly, in proportion to the grade of our desires, the spiritual knowledge we may have heard and read gets shrouded.

There is a beautiful allegorical story to illustrate this point. A man used to take his evening walk by the side of a forest. One evening, he decided to walk in the forest instead. When he had walked a couple of miles, the sun began setting and the light started fading. He turned around to walk out of the forest, but to his dismay he found that animals had gathered on the other side. These ferocious animals started chasing him and to escape from them, he ran deeper into the forest. While running, he found a witch standing in front of him with open arms to embrace him. To escape her, he turned direction and ran perpendicular to the animals and the witch. By then, it had become dark. Unable to see much, he ran over a ditch that was covered by vine hanging from a tree. He fell headlong, but his feet became entangled in the vine. As a result, he began hanging upside down above the ditch. After a few moments he came to his senses and saw a snake sitting at the bottom of the ditch, waiting to bite him if he fell down. In the meantime, two mice appeared—one white and one black—and started nibbling at the branch from which the vine was hanging. To confound his problems, some wasps gathered and began stinging him on

his face. In this precarious situation, it was found that the man was smiling. Philosophers gathered to ponder how he could smile in such a dire strait. They looked upwards and found a beehive, from which honey was dripping onto his tongue. He was licking the honey and thinking how pleasurable it was; he had forgotten the animals, the witch, the snake, the mice, and the wasps.

The person in the story may seem insane to us. However, this tale depicts the condition of all humans under the influence of desire. The forest in which the man was walking represents the material world in which we live, where there is danger at every step. The animals that chased him represent diseases that begin to appear in life, and continue harassing us until death. The witch represented old age that is waiting to embrace us with the passage of time. The snake at the bottom of the pit is like the inevitable death that awaits us all. The white and black mice that were nibbling on the branch represent day and night, which are steadily reducing our life and bringing us closer to death. The wasps that were stinging the face are like the innumerable desires that arise in the mind and agitate it, causing us pain and distress. Honey represents the sensual enjoyment we experience in the world, which clouds the discrimination of our intellect. Hence, forgetting our precarious position, we remain absorbed in enjoying the temporary delights of the senses. Shri Krishna states that it is this type of lustful desire that is responsible for shrouding our power of discrimination.

**आवृतं ज्ञानमेतेन ज्ञानिनो नित्यवैरिणा ।
कामरूपेण कौन्तेय दुष्पूरेणानलेन च ॥ 39 ॥**

*āvṛitam jñānam etena jñānino nitya-vairiṇā
kāma-rūpeṇa kaunteya duṣhpūrenānalena cha*

āvṛitam—covered; *jñānam*—knowledge; *etena*—by this; *jñāninaḥ*—of the wise; *nitya-vairiṇā*—by the perpetual enemy; *kāma-rūpeṇa*—in the form of desires; *kaunteya*—Arjun the son of Kunti; *duṣhpūreṇa*—insatiable; *analena*—like fire; *cha*—and.

The knowledge of even the most discerning gets covered by this perpetual enemy in the form of insatiable desire, which is never satisfied and burns like fire, O son of Kunti.

Here, the inimical nature of *kām* or lust is being made even more explicit by Bhagavān Krishna. *kām* means “desire,” *duṣhpureṇa* means “insatiable,” *anala* means “inexhaustible.” Desire overpowers the discriminatory power of the wise and lures them to fulfill it. However, the more they attempt to douse the fire of desire, the more strongly it burns. The Buddha states:

*na kahāpaṇa vassena, titti kāmesu vijjati
appassādā kāmā dukhā kāmā, iti viññāya pandito*
(Dhammapada verse 186)[v20]

“Desire burns like an unquenchable fire, which never brings happiness to anyone. The wise renounce it, knowing it to be the root of misery.” But those who do not understand this secret waste away their life in the futile pursuit of trying to satiate their lust.

इन्द्रियाणि मनो बुद्धिरस्याधिष्ठानमुच्यते ।
एतैर्विमोहयत्येष ज्ञानमावृत्य देहिनम् ॥ 40 ॥

*indriyāni mano buddhir asyādhiṣṭhānam uchyate
etair vimohayatyeṣha jñānam ārvitya dehinam*

indriyāni—the senses; *mano*—the mind; *buddhiḥ*—the intellect; *asya*—of this; *adhiṣṭhānam*—dwelling place; *uchyate*—are said to be; *etaiḥ*—by these; *vimohayati*—deludes; *eṣhaḥ*—this; *jñānam*—knowledge; *ārvitya*—clouds; *dehinam*—the embodied Ātman.

The senses, mind, and intellect are said to be breeding grounds of desire. Through them, it clouds one’s knowledge and deludes the embodied Ātman.

By revealing the locations where lust resides, Shri Krishna now indicates that there is a method of controlling it. The fortress of the enemy must be spotted before one can lay siege on it. In this verse, Shri Krishna states that the senses,

mind, and intellect are the places from where lust exercises its dominion over the Ātman. Under the sway of lust, the sense objects are desired by the senses, the senses infatuate the mind, the mind misleads the intellect, and the intellect loses its discriminatory powers. When the intellect is clouded, the living being is deluded to become a slave of lust and will do anything to satiate it.

These instruments—senses, mind, and intellect—are not bad in themselves. They were given to us for the purpose of achieving Brahman-realization, but we have permitted lust in its many forms to lay siege on them. Now, we have to use the same senses, mind, and intellect to uplift ourselves. *In the following verses, Shri Krishna explains how to do that.*

तस्मात्त्वमिन्द्रियाण्यादौ नियम्य भरतर्षभ ।
पाप्मानं प्रजहि ह्येनं ज्ञानविज्ञाननाशनम् ॥ 41 ॥

*tasmāt tvam indriyāṇyādau niyamya bharatarṣhabha
pāpmānam prajahi hyenam jñāna-vijñāna-nāśanam*

tasmāt—therefore; *tvam*—you; *indriyāni*—senses; *ādau*—in the very beginning; *niyamya*—having controlled; *bharata-ṛishabha*—Arjun, the best of the Bharatas; *pāpmānam*—the sinful; *prajahi*—slay; *hi*—certainly; *enam*—this; *jñāna*—knowledge; *vijñāna*—realization; *nāśanam*—the destroyer

Therefore, O best of the Bharatas, in the very beginning bring the senses under control and slay this enemy called desire, which is the embodiment of sin and destroys knowledge and realization.

Now, Shri Krishna explains how to overcome lust, the root of all evil, which is so pernicious to human consciousness. Having identified the repositories of lust, Shri Krishna asks Arjun, at the outset, to curb the desires of the senses. Permitting them to arise is the cause of our miseries, while eliminating them is the way to peace.

Consider the following example. Ramesh and Dinesh were two fellow students sharing the same room in the hostel. At 10 pm at night, Ramesh developed the desire to smoke cigarettes. He said, “I am getting the urge to smoke.” Dinesh

replied, “It is so late at night. Forget about cigarettes and go to sleep.” “No... no... I will not be able to sleep until I puff the tobacco,” said Ramesh. Dinesh went to sleep, but Ramesh went out in search of cigarettes. The shops nearby had closed. It took him two hours until he finally returned to the hostel with the cigarette and had a smoke.

In the morning, Dinesh asked him, “Ramesh, when did you sleep at night?” “At midnight.” “Really! That means you remained agitated for cigarettes for two hours and when you had your puffs, you returned to the same state that you were in at 10 pm.” “What do you mean by that?” asked Ramesh. “Look, at 10 pm you did not have any desire for cigarettes, and you were peaceful. Then you yourself created the desire for them. From 10 pm to midnight, you remained agitated for cigarettes. Finally, when you smoked them, the disease, which you had created, went away, and you got to sleep. I, on the other hand, did not create any desire, and slept peacefully at 10 pm itself.”

In this way, we create desires for the objects of the senses of the body, and then become agitated by them. When we get the cherished object, the disease of our own creation gets eradicated, and we think of it as happiness.” However, if we think of ourselves as the Ātman and our only purpose is happiness of the Ātman, then it becomes easier to renounce such material desires. Shri Krishna tells Arjun to bring the senses under control, thereby slaying the lust residing in them. *To accomplish this we must use the higher instruments given by Bhagavān to us, as stated in the next verse.*

इन्द्रियाणि पराण्याहुरिन्द्रियेभ्यः परं मनः ।
मनसस्तु परा बुद्धिर्यो बुद्धेः परतस्तु सः ॥ 42 ॥

*indriyāṇi parāṇyāhur indriyebhyah param manah
manasas tu parā buddhir yo buddheḥ paratas tu saḥ*

indriyāṇi—senses; *parāṇi*—superior; *āhuḥ*—are said; *indriyebhyah*—than the senses; *param*—superior; *manah*—the mind; *manasah*—than the mind; *tu*—but; *parā*—superior; *buddhiḥ*—intellect; *yah*—who; *buddheḥ*—than the intellect; *parataḥ*—more superior; *tu*—but; *sah*—that (Ātman).

The senses are superior to the gross body, and superior to the senses is the mind. Beyond the mind is the intellect, and even beyond the intellect is the Ātman.

An inferior entity can be controlled by its superior entity. Shri Krishna explains the gradation of superiority amongst the instruments Bhagavān has provided to us. He describes that the body is made of gross matter; superior to it are the five knowledge-bearing senses (which grasp the perceptions of taste, touch, sight, smell, and sound); beyond the senses is the mind; superior to the mind is the intellect, with its ability to discriminate; but even beyond the intellect is the divine Ātman.

This knowledge of the sequence of superiority amongst the senses, mind, intellect, and Ātman, can now be used for rooting out lust, as explained in the final verse of this chapter.

एवं बुद्धेः परं बुद्ध्वा संस्तभ्यात्मानमात्मना ।
जहि शत्रुं महाबाहो कामरूपं दुरासदम् ॥ 43 ॥

*evam buddheḥ param buddhvā sanstabhyaĀtmannam ātmanā
jahi śhatrum mahā-bāho kāma-rūpaṁ durāsadam*

evam—thus; *buddheḥ*—than the intellect; *param*—superior; *buddhvā*—knowing; *sanstabhya*—subdue; *Ātmannam*—the lower self (senses, mind, and intellect); *ātmanā*—by higher self (Ātman); *jahi*—kill; *śhatrum*—the enemy; *mahā-bāho*—mighty-armed one; *kāma-rūpaṁ*—in the form of desire; *durāsadam*—formidable.

Thus knowing the Ātman to be superior to the material intellect, O mighty armed Arjun, subdue the self (senses, mind, and intellect) by the self (strength of the Ātman), and kill this formidable enemy called lust.

In conclusion, Shri Krishna emphasizes that we should slay this enemy called lust through knowledge of the self. Since the Ātman is a part of Bhagavān, it is divine in nature. Thus, the divine bliss it seeks can only be attained from a divine subject, while the objects of the world are all material. These material

objects can never fulfill the innate longing of the Ātman and so it is futile to create desires for them. We must exert and train the intellect to think in this manner, and then use it to control the mind and the senses.

This is explained very beautifully in the Kathopaniṣad with the help of the model of a chariot:

*Ātmannagvam rathinam viddhi śharīram rathameva tu
buddhim tu sārathim viddhi manah pragrahameva cha
indriyāṇi hayānāhurviṣhayānsteṣhu gocharān
ātmendriyamanoyuktam bhoktetyāhurmanīṣhiṇah*
(1.3.3-4) [v21]

The Upaniṣads say there is a chariot, which has five horses pulling it; the horses have reins in their mouths, which are in the hands of a charioteer; a passenger is sitting at the back of the chariot. Ideally, the passenger should instruct the charioteer, who should then control the reins and guide the horses in the proper direction. However, in this case, the passenger has gone to sleep, and so the horses are holding sway.

In this analogy, the chariot is the body, the horses are the five senses, the reins in the mouth of the horses is the mind, the charioteer is the intellect, and the passenger seated behind is the Ātman residing in the body. The senses (horses) desire pleasurable things. The mind (reins) is not exercising restraint on the senses (horses). The intellect (charioteer) submits to the pull of the reins (mind). So in the materially bound state, the bewildered Ātman does not direct the intellect in the proper direction. Thus, the senses decide the direction where the chariot will go. The Ātman experiences the pleasures of the senses vicariously, but these do not satisfy it. Seated on this chariot, the Ātman (passenger) is moving around in this material world since eternity.

However, if the Ātman wakes up to its higher nature and decides to take a proactive role, it can exercise the intellect in the proper direction. The intellect will then govern the lower self—the mind and the senses—and the chariot will move in the direction of eternal welfare. In this way, the higher self (Ātman)

must be used to control the lower self (senses, mind, and, intellect).



Chapter 4

Jñāna Karm Sanyās Yog ~ **ज्ञानकर्मसन्यसयोगः**

The Yog of Knowledge and the Disciplines of Action

In Chapter four, Shri Krishna strengthens Arjun's faith in the knowledge he is imparting to him by revealing its pristine origin. He explains how this is an eternal science that he taught in the beginning to the Sun diety *Sūrya*, and it was passed on in a continuous tradition to saintly kings. He is now revealing the same supreme science of Yog to Arjun, who is a dear friend and devotee. Arjun asks how Shri Krishna, who exists in the present, could have taught this science eons ago to the Sun diety *Sūrya*. In response, Shri Krishna discloses the divine mystery of his descension. He explains that though Bhagavān is unborn and eternal, yet by his *YogMāyā* power, he descends on the earth to establish dharma (the path of righteousness). However, his birth and activities are both divine, and never tainted by material imperfections. Those who know this secret engage in his devotion with great faith, and on attaining him, do not take birth in this world again.

The chapter then explains the nature of work, and discusses three principles—action, inaction, and forbidden action. It discloses how *karm yogis* are in the

state of inaction even while performing the most engaging works, and thus, they are not entangled in karmic reactions. With this wisdom, the ancient sages performed their works, without being affected by success and failure, happiness and distress, merely as an act of sacrifice for the pleasure of Bhagavān. Sacrifice is of various kinds, and many of them are mentioned here. When sacrifice is properly dedicated, its remnants become like nectar. By partaking of such nectar, performers are cleansed of impurities. Hence, sacrifice must always be performed with proper sentiments and knowledge. With the help of the boat of knowledge, even the biggest sinners can cross over the ocean of material miseries. Such knowledge must be learnt from a genuine spiritual master who has realized the Truth. Shri Krishna, as Arjun's Guru, asks him to pick up the sword of knowledge, and cutting asunder the doubts that have arisen in his heart, stand up and perform his duty.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
इमं विवस्वते योगं प्रोक्तवानहमव्ययम् ।
विवस्वान्मनवे प्राह मनुरिक्ष्वाकवेऽब्रवीत् ॥१॥

*śhrī bhagavān uvācha
imam vivasvate yogam proktavān aham avyayam
vivasvān manave prāha manur ikṣhvākave 'bravīt*

śhrī-bhagavān uvācha—the Supreme Bhagavān Shri Krishna said; *imam*—this; *vivasvate*—to the Sun-Deity; *yogam*—the science of Yog; *proktavān*—taught; *aham*—I; *avyayam*—eternal; *vivasvān*—Sun-Deity; *manave*—to Manu, the original progenitor of humankind; *prāha*—told; *manuh*—Manu; *ikṣhvākave*—to Ikshvaku, first king of the Solar dynasty; *abravīt*—instructed.

Bhagavān Krishna said: I taught this eternal science of Yog to the Sun-Deity, Vivasvan, who passed it on to Manu; and Manu in turn instructed it to Ikshvaku.

Merely imparting invaluable knowledge to someone is not enough. The recipients of that knowledge must appreciate its value and have faith in its authenticity. Only then will they put in the effort required to implement it

practically in their lives. In this verse, Shri Krishna establishes the credibility and importance of the spiritual wisdom he is bestowing on Arjun. Shri Krishna informs Arjun that the knowledge being imparted unto him is not newly created for the convenience of motivating him into battle. It is the same eternal science of Yog that he originally taught to Vivasvan, or Sūrya, Sun diety, who imparted it to Manu, the original progenitor of humankind; Manu in turn taught it to Ikshvaku, first king of the Solar dynasty. This is the descending process of knowledge, where someone who is a perfect authority on the knowledge passes it down to another who wishes to know.

In contrast to this is the ascending process of acquiring knowledge, where one endeavors to enhance the frontiers of understanding through self-effort. The ascending process is laborious, imperfect, and time-consuming. For example, if we wish to learn Physics, we could either try to do it by the ascending process, where we speculate about its principles with our own intellect and then reach conclusions, or we could do it by the descending process, where we approach a good teacher of the subject. The ascending process is exceedingly time-consuming, and we may not even be able to complete the inquiry in our lifetime. We can also not be sure about the validity of our conclusions. In comparison, the descending process gives us instant access to the deepest secrets of Physics. If our teacher has perfect knowledge of Physics, then it is very straightforward—simply listen to the science from him and digest what he says. This descending process of receiving knowledge is both easy and faultless.

Every year, thousands of self-help books are released in the market, which present the authors' solutions to the problems encountered in life. These books may be helpful in a limited way, but because they are based upon the ascending process of attaining knowledge, they are imperfect. Every few years, a new theory comes along that overthrows the current ones. This ascending process is unsuitable for knowing the Absolute Truth. Divine knowledge does

not need to be created by self-effort. It is the energy of Bhagavān, and has existed ever since he has existed, just as heat and light are as old as the fire from which they emanate.

Bhagavān and the individual Ātman are both eternal, and so the science of Yog that unites the Ātman and Bhagavān is also eternal. There is no need to speculate and formulate new theories about it. An amazing endorsement of this truism is the Bhagavad Gita itself, which continues to astound people with the sagacity of its perennial wisdom that remains relevant to our daily lives even fifty centuries after it was spoken. Shri Krishna states here that the knowledge of Yog, which he is revealing to Arjun, is eternal and it was passed down in ancient times through the descending process, from Guru to disciple.

एवं परम्पराप्राप्तमिमं राजर्षयो विदुः ।
स कालेनेह महता योगो नष्टः परन्तप ॥२॥

*evam paramparā-prāptam imam rājarshayo viduh
sa kāleneha mahatā yogo naṣṭah parantapa*

evam—thus; *paramparā*—in a continuous tradition; *prāptam*—received; *imam*—this (science); *rājarishayah*—the saintly kings; *viduh*—understood; *sah*—that; *kālena*—with the long passage of time; *iha*—in this world; *mahatā*—great; *yogah*—the science of Yog; *naṣṭah*—lost; *parantapa*—Arjun, the scorcher of foes.

O subduer of enemies, the saintly kings thus received this science of Yog in a continuous tradition. But with the long passage of time, it was lost to the world.

In the descending process of receiving divine knowledge, the disciple understands the science of Brahman-realization from the Guru, who in turn received it from his Guru. It was in such a tradition that saintly kings like Nimi and Janak understood the science of Yog. This tradition starts from Bhagavān himself, who is the first Guru of the world.

tene brahma hṛidā ya ādi-kavaye muhyanti yat sūrayah (Bhāgavatam 1.1.1)[v1]

Bhagavān revealed this knowledge at the beginning of creation in the heart of the first-born Brahma, and the tradition continued from him. Shri Krishna stated in the last verse that he also revealed this knowledge to the Sun-Deity, Vivasvan, from whom the tradition continued as well. However, the nature of this material world is such, that with the passage of time, this knowledge got lost. Materially-minded and insincere disciples interpret the teachings according to their blemished perspectives. Within a few generations, its pristine purity is contaminated. When this happens, by his causeless grace, Bhagavān reestablishes the tradition for the benefit of humankind. He may do so, either by himself descending in the world, or through a great Brahman-realized Saint, who becomes a conduit for Bhagavān's work on Earth.

Jagadguru Shri Kripalaji Maharaj, who is the fifth original Jagadguru in Indian history, is such a Bhagavān-inspired Saint who has reestablished the ancient knowledge in modern times. When he was only thirty-four years old, the Kashi Vidvat Parishat, the supreme body of 500 Vedic scholars in the holy city of Kashi, honored him with the title of Jagadguru, or “Spiritual Master of the world.” He became the fifth Saint in Indian history to receive the original title of Jagadguru, after Jagadguru Shankaracharya, Jagadguru Nimbarkacharya, Jagadguru Ramanujacharya, and Jagadguru Madhvacharya. This commentary on the Bhagavad Gita has been written based upon its insightful understanding, as revealed to me by Jagadguru Shri Kripalaji Maharaj.

**स एवायं मया तेऽद्य योगः प्रोक्तः पुरातनः ।
भक्तोऽसि मे सखा चेति रहस्यं ह्येतदुत्तमम् ॥३॥**

*sa evāyam mayā te 'adya yogah proktah purātanah
bhakto 'si me sakha cheti rahasyam hyetad uttamam*

sah—that; *eva*—certainly; *ayam*—this; *mayā*—by me; *te*—unto you; *adya*—today; *yogaḥ*—the science of Yog; *proktah*—reveal; *purātanah*—ancient; *bhaktaḥ*—devotee; *asi*—you are; *me*—my; *sakha*—friend; *cha*—and; *iti*—therefore; *rahasyam*—secret; *hi*—certainly; *etat*—this; *uttamam*—supreme.

The same ancient knowledge of Yog, which is the supreme secret, I am today revealing unto you, because you are my friend as well as my devotee, who can understand this transcendental wisdom.

Shri Krishna tells Arjun that the ancient science being imparted to him is an uncommonly known secret. Secrecy in the world is maintained for two reasons: either due to selfishness in keeping the truth to oneself, or to protect the abuse of knowledge. The science of Yog remains a secret, not for either of these reasons, but because it requires a qualification to be understood. That qualification is revealed in this verse as devotion. The deep message of the Bhagavad Gita is not amenable to being understood merely through scholasticism or mastery of the Sanskrit language. It requires devotion, which destroys the subtle envy of the Ātman toward Bhagavān and enables us to accept the humble position as his tiny parts and servitors.

Arjun was a fit student of this science because he was a devotee of the Bhagavān. Devotion to Bhagavān can be practiced in any of the five sequentially higher *bhāvas*, or sentiments: 1) *Śhānt bhāv*: adoring Bhagavān as our King. 2) *Dāsyā bhav*: the sentiment of servitude toward Bhagavān as our Master. 3) *Sakhya bhāv*: considering Bhagavān as our Friend. 4) *Vātsalya bhāv*: considering Bhagavān as our Child. 5) *Mādhurya bhāv*: worshipping Bhagavān as our Ātman-beloved. Arjun worshipped Bhagavān as his Friend, and so Shri Krishna speaks to him as his friend and devotee.

Without a devotional heart, one cannot truly grasp the message of the Bhagavad Gita. This verse also invalidates the commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita written by scholars, *jñānīs*, *yogis*, *tapasvīs*, etc., who lack *bhakti* (devotion) toward Bhagavān. According to this verse, since they are not devotees, they cannot comprehend the true import of the supreme science that was revealed to Arjun, and hence their commentaries are inaccurate and/or incomplete.

अर्जुन उवाच ।
 अपरं भवतो जन्म परं जन्म विवस्वतः ।
 कथमेतद्विजानीया त्वमादौ प्रोक्तवानिति ॥४॥

*arjuna uvācha
 aparam bhavato janma param janma vivasvataḥ
 katham etad vijānīyām tvam ādau proktavān iti*

arjunaḥ uvācha—Arjun said; *aparam*—later; *bhavataḥ*—your; *janma*—birth; *param*—prior; *janma*—birth; *vivasvataḥ*—Vivasvan, the Sun-Deity; *katham*—how; *etat*—this; *vijānīyām*—am I to understand; *tvam*—you; *ādau*—in the beginning; *proktavān*—taught; *iti*—thus.

Arjun said: You were born much after Vivasvan. How am I to understand that in the beginning you instructed this science to him?

Arjun is puzzled by the apparent incongruity of events in Shri Krishna's statement. The Sun deity *Sūrya* has been present since almost the beginning of creation, while Shri Krishna has only recently been born in the world. If Shri Krishna is the son of Vasudev and Devaki, then his statement that he taught this science to Vivasvan, the Sun deity *Sūrya* appears inconsistent to Arjun, and he inquires about it. *Arjun's question invites an exposition on the concept of the divine descension of Bhagavān, and Shri Krishna responds to it in the subsequent verses.*

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
 बहूनि मे व्यतीतानि जन्मानि तव चार्जुन ।
 तान्यहं वेद सर्वाणि न त्वं वेत्थ परन्तप ॥५॥

*śrī bhagavān uvācha
 bahūni me vyatītāni janmāni tava chārjuna
 tānyaham vedā sarvāṇi na tvam vettha parantapa*

śrī-bhagavān uvācha—Bhagavān Krishna said; *bahūni*—many; *me*—of mine; *vyatītāni*—have passed; *janmāni*—births; *tava*—of yours; *cha*—and; *arjuna*—Arjun; *tāni*—them; *aham*—I; *veda*—know; *sarvāṇi*—all; *na*—not; *tvam*—you; *vettha*—know; *parantapa*—Arjun, the scorcher of foes.

Bhagavān Krishna said: Both you and I have had many births, O Arjun. You have forgotten them, while I remember them all, O Parantapa.

Shri Krishna explains that merely because he is standing before Arjun in the human form, he should not be equated with human beings. The president of a country sometimes decides to visit the prison, but if we see the president standing in the jail, we do not erroneously conclude that he is also a convict. We know that he is in the jail merely for an inspection. Similarly, Bhagavān sometimes descends in the material world, but he is never divested of his divine attributes and powers.

In his commentary upon this verse, Shankaracharya states: *yā vāsudeve anīśhvaraśarvajñāśhaṅkā mūrkhāṇāṁ tāṁ pariharan śrī-bhagavān uvācha* (*Śhārīrak Bhāṣhya* on verse 4.5) [v2] “This verse has been spoken by Shri Krishna to refute foolish people who doubt that he is not Bhagavān.” Non-believers argue that Shri Krishna too was born like the rest of us, and he ate, drank, slept, like we all do, and so he could not have been Bhagavān. Here, Shri Krishna emphasizes the difference between the Ātman and Bhagavān by stating that although he descends in the world innumerable times, he still remains omniscient, unlike the Ātman whose knowledge is finite.

The individual Ātman and the Supreme Ātman, Bhagavān, have many similarities—both are *sat-chit-ānand* (eternal, sentient, and blissful). However, there are also many differences. Bhagavān is all-pervading, while the Ātman only pervades the body it inhabits; Bhagavān is all-powerful, while the Ātman does not even have the power to liberate itself from Māyā without Bhagavān’s grace; Bhagavān is the creator of the laws of nature, while the Ātman is subject to these laws; Bhagavān is the upholder of the entire creation, while the Ātman is upheld by him; Bhagavān is all-knowing, while the Ātman does not have complete knowledge even in one subject.

Shri Krishna calls Arjun in this verse as “Parantapa,” meaning “subduer of the enemies.” He implies, “Arjun, you are a valiant warrior who has slayed so many

powerful enemies. Now, do not accept defeat before this doubt that has crept into your mind. Use the sword of knowledge that I am giving you to slay it and be situated in wisdom.”

**अजोऽपि सन्नव्ययात्मा भूतानामीश्वरोऽपि सन् ।
प्रकृतिं स्वामधिष्ठाय सम्भवाम्यात्मायया ॥ ६ ॥**

*ajo 'pi sannavyayātman bhūtānām iśhvaro 'pi san
prakṛitim svām adhiṣṭhāya sambhavāmyātma-māyayā*

ajah—unborn; *api*—although; *san*—being so; *avyaya Ātman*—Imperishable nature; *bhūtānām*—of (all) beings; *iśhvaram*—the Bhagavān; *api*—although; *san*—being; *prakṛitim*—nature; *svām*—of myself; *adhiṣṭhāya*—situated; *sambhavāmi*—I manifest; *ātma-māyayā*—by my *YogMāyā* power.

Although I am unborn, the Bhagavān of all living entities, and have an imperishable nature, yet I appear in this world by virtue of *YogMāyā*, my divine power.

Many people revolt at the idea of a Bhagavān who possesses a form. They are more comfortable with a formless Bhagavān, who is all-pervading, incorporeal, and subtle. Bhagavān is definitely incorporeal and formless, but that does not mean that he cannot simultaneously have a form as well. Since Bhagavān is all-powerful, he has the power to manifest in a form if he wishes. If someone stipulates that Bhagavān cannot have a form, it means that person does not accept him as all-powerful. Thus to say, “Bhagavān is formless,” is an incomplete statement. On the other hand, to say, “Bhagavān manifests in a personal form,” is also only a partial truth. The all-powerful Bhagavān has both aspects to his divine personality—the personal form and the formless aspect. Hence, the Brīhadāraṇyak Upaniṣad states:

dwe vāva brahmaṇo rūpe mūrtam chaiva amūrtam cha (2.3.1) [v3]

“Bhagavān appears in both ways—as the formless Brahman and as the personal Bhagavān.” They are both dimensions of his personality.

In fact, the individual Ātman also has these two dimensions to its existence. It

is formless, and hence, when it leaves the body upon death, it cannot be seen. Yet it takes on a body—not once, but innumerable times—as it transmigrates from birth to birth. When the tiny Ātman is able to possess a body, can the all-powerful Bhagavān not have a form? Or is it that Bhagavān says, “I do not have the power to manifest in a form, and hence I am only a formless light.” For him to be perfect and complete, he must be both personal and formless.

The difference is that while our form is created from the material energy, Māyā, Bhagavān’s form is created by his divine energy, *YogMāyā*. It is thus divine, and beyond material defects. This has been nicely stated in the Padma Purāṇa:

*yastu nirguna ityuktaḥ śhāstreshu jagadīśhvaram
prākṛitarheya sanyuktairguṇairhīnatvamuchyate [v4]*

“Wherever the Vedic scriptures state that Bhagavān does not have a form, they imply that his form is not subject to the blemishes of the material energy; rather, it is a divine form.”

**यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ।
अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥७॥**

*yadā yadā hi dharmasya glāniḥ bhavati bhārata
abhyutthānam adharmasya tadĀtmannam srijāmyaham*

yadā yadā—whenever; *hi*—certainly; *dharmasya*—of righteousness; *glāniḥ*—decline; *bhavati*—is; *bhārata*—Arjun, descendant of Bharat; *abhyutthānam*—increase; *adharmasya*—of unrighteousness; *tadā*—at that time; *Ātmannam*—self; *srijāmi*—manifest; *aham*—I.

Whenever there is a decline in righteousness and an increase in unrighteousness, O Arjun, at that time I manifest myself on earth.

Dharma is verily the prescribed actions that are conducive to our spiritual growth and progress; the reverse of this is *adharma* (unrighteousness). When unrighteousness prevails, the creator and administrator of the world intervenes by descending and reestablishing *dharma*. Such a descention of Bhagavān is called an *Avatār*. The word “Avatar” has been adopted from Sanskrit into

English and is commonly used for people's images on the media screen. In this text, we will be using it in its original Sanskrit connotation, to refer to the divine descension of Bhagavān. Twenty four such descensions have been listed in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam. However, the Vedic scriptures state that there are innumerable descensions of Bhagavān:

*janma-karmābhidhānāni santi me 'ṅga sahasraśah
na śakyante 'nusankhyātum anantatvān mayāpi hi (Bhāgavatam 10.51.36) [v5]*

"Nobody can count the infinite Avatars of Bhagavān since the beginning of eternity." These Avatars are classified in four categories, as stated below:

1. *Āveśhāvatār*—when Bhagavān manifests his special powers in an individual Ātman and acts through him. The sage Narad is an example of *Āveśhāvatār*. The Buddha is also an example of *Āveśhāvatār*.

2. *Prābhavāvatār*—these are the descensions of Bhagavān in the personal form, where he displays some of his divine powers. *Prābhavāvatārs* are also of two kinds:

a) Where Bhagavān reveals himself only for a few moments, completes his work, and then departs. Hansavatar is an example of this, where Bhagavān manifested before the Kumaras, answered their question, and left.

b) Where the Avatar remains on the earth for many years. Ved Vyas, who wrote the eighteen Puranas and the Mahābhārat, and divided the Vedas into four parts, is an example of such an Avatar.

3. *Vaibhavatār*—when Bhagavān descends in his divine form, and manifests more of his divine powers. Matsyavatar, Kurmavatar, Varahavatar are all examples of *Vaibhavatārs*.

4. *Paravāsthāvatār*—when Bhagavān manifests all his divine powers in his personal divine form. Shri Krishna, Shri Ram, and Nrisinghavatar are all *Paravāsthāvatārs*.

This classification does not imply that any one *Avatār* is bigger than the other. Ved Vyas, who is himself an *Avatār*, clearly states this: *sarve pūrṇāḥ śāśvatāścha dehāstasya paramātmānah* (Padma Purāṇ) [v6] “All the descensions of Bhagavān are replete with all divine powers; they are all perfect and complete.” Hence, we should not differentiate one Avatar as bigger and another as smaller. However, in each descension, Bhagavān manifests his powers based on the objectives he wishes to accomplish during that particular descension. The remaining powers reside latently within the Avatar. Hence, the above classifications were created.

परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम् ।
धर्मसंस्थापनार्थाय सम्भवामि युगे युगे ॥८॥

*paritrāṇāya sādhūnām vināśhāya cha duṣhkṛitām
dharma-saṁsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge*

paritrāṇāya—to protect; *sādhūnām*—the righteous; *vināśhāya*—to annihilate; *cha*—and; *duṣhkṛitām*—the wicked; *dharma*—the eternal religion; *saṁsthāpana-arthāya*—to reestablish; *sambhavāmi*—I appear; *yuge yuge*—age after age.

To protect the righteous, to annihilate the wicked, and to reestablish the principles of dharma I appear on this earth, age after age.

Having stated in the last verse that Bhagavān descends in the world, he now states the three reasons for doing so: 1) To annihilate the wicked. 2) To protect the pious. 3) To establish dharma. However, if we closely study these three points, none of the three reasons seem very convincing:

To protect the righteous. Bhagavān is seated in the hearts of his devotees, and always protects them from within. There is no need to take an Avatar for this purpose.

To annihilate the wicked. Bhagavān is all-powerful, and can kill the wicked merely by wishing it. Why should he have to take an Avatar to accomplish this?

To establish dharma. Dharma is eternally described in the Vedas. Bhagavān can reestablish it through a Saint; he does not need to descend himself, in his personal form, to accomplish this.

How then do we make sense of the reasons that have been stated in this verse? Let's delve a little deeper to grasp the import of what Shri Krishna is stating.

The biggest dharma that the Ātman can engage in is devotion to Bhagavān. That is what Bhagavān strengthens by taking an *Avatār*. When Bhagavān descends in the world, he reveals his divine forms, names, virtues, pastimes, abodes, and associates. This provides the Ātman(s) with an easy basis for devotion. Since the mind needs a form to focus upon and to connect with, the formless aspect of Bhagavān is very difficult to worship. On the other hand, devotion to the personal form of Bhagavān is easy for people to comprehend, simple to perform, and sweet to engage in.

Thus, since the descension of Bhagavān Krishna 5,000 years ago, billions of Ātman(s) have made his divine *leelas* (pastimes) as the basis of their devotion, and purified their minds with ease and joy. Similarly, the Ramayana has provided the Ātman(s) with a popular basis for devotion for innumerable centuries. When the TV show, Ramayana, first began airing on Indian national television on Sunday mornings, all the streets of India would become empty. The pastimes of Bhagavān Ram held such fascination for the people that they would be glued to their television sets to see the *leelas* on the screen. This reveals how Bhagavān Ram's descension provided the basis for devotion to billions of Ātman(s) in history. The Ramayana says:

rām eka tāpasa tiya tārī, nāma koṭi khala kumati sudhārī. [v7]

"In his descension period, Bhagavān Ram helped only one Ahalya (Sage Gautam's wife, whom Bhagavān Ram released from the body of stone). However, since then, by chanting the divine name "Ram," billions of fallen

Ātman(s) have elevated themselves.” So a deeper understanding of this verse is:

To establish dharma: Bhagavān descends to establish the dharma of devotion by providing Ātman(s) with his names, forms, pastimes, virtues, abodes, and associates, with the help of which they may engage in *bhakti* and purify their minds.

To kill the wicked: Along with Bhagavān, to help facilitate his divine pastimes, some liberated Saints descend and pretend to be miscreants. For example, Ravan and Kumbhakarna were Jaya and Vijaya who descended from the divine abode of Bhagavān. They pretended to be Demons and opposed and fought with Ram. They could not have been killed by anyone else, since they were divine personalities. So, Bhagavān slayed such Demons as a part of his *leelas*. And having killed them, he sent them to his divine abode, since that was where they came from in the first place.

To protect the righteous: Many Ātman(s) had become sufficiently elevated in their *sādhanā* (spiritual practice) to qualify to meet Bhagavān face-to-face. When Shri Krishna descended in the world, these eligible Ātman(s) got their first opportunity to participate in Bhagavān’s divine pastimes. For example, some *gopīs* (cowherd women of Vrindavan, where Shri Krishna manifested his pastimes) were liberated Ātman(s) who had descended from the divine abode to assist in Shri Krishna’s *leelas*. Other *gopīs* were materially bound Ātman(s) who got their first chance to meet and serve Bhagavān, and participate in his *leelas*. So when Shri Krishna descended in the world, such qualified Ātman(s) got the opportunity to perfect their devotion by directly participating in the pastimes of Bhagavān.

This is the deeper meaning of the verse. However, it is not wrong if someone wishes to cognize the verse more literally or metaphorically.

जन्म कर्म च मे दिव्यमेवं यो वेत्ति तत्त्वतः ।
त्यक्त्वा देहं पुनर्जन्म नैति मामेति सोऽर्जुन ॥९॥

*janma karma cha me divyam evam yo vetti tattvataḥ
tyaktvā deham punar janma naiti mām eti so 'rjuna*

janma—birth; *karma*—activities; *cha*—and; *me*—of mine; *divyam*—divine; *evam*—thus; *yah*—who; *vetti*—know; *tattvataḥ*—in truth; *tyaktvā*—having abandoned; *deham*—the body; *punah*—again; *janma*—birth; *na*—never; *eti*—takes; *mām*—to me; *eti*—comes; *sah*—he; *arjuna*—Arjun.

Those who understand the divine nature of my birth and activities, O Arjun, upon leaving the body, do not have to take birth again, but come to my eternal abode.

Understand this verse in the light of the previous one. Our mind gets cleansed by engaging it in devotional remembrance of Bhagavān. This devotion can either be toward the formless aspect of Bhagavān or toward his personal form. Devotion toward the formless is intangible and nebulous to most people. They find nothing to focus upon or feel connected with during such devotional meditation. Devotion to the personal form of Bhagavān is tangible and simple. Such devotion requires divine sentiments toward the personality of Bhagavān. For people to engage in devotion to Shri Krishna, they must develop divine feelings toward his names, form, virtues, pastimes, abode, and associates. For example, people purify their minds by worshipping stone deities because they harbor the divine sentiments that Bhagavān resides in these deities. It is these sentiments that purify the devotee's mind. The progenitor Manu says:

*na kāṣṭhe vidyate devo na śilāyām na mrītsu cha
bhāve hi vidyate devastasmāt bhāvām samācharet [v8]*

“Bhagavān resides neither in wood nor in stone, but in a devotional heart. Hence, worship the deity with loving sentiments.”

Similarly, if we wish to engage in devotion toward Bhagavān Krishna, we must learn to harbor divine sentiments toward his *leelas*. Those commentators who

give a figurative interpretation to the Mahābhārat and the Bhagavad Gita, do grave injustice by destroying the basis of people's faith in devotion toward Shri Krishna. In this verse, Shri Krishna has emphasized the need for divine sentiments toward his pastimes, for enhancing our devotion.

To develop such divine feelings, we must understand the difference between Bhagavān's actions and ours. We materially bound Ātman(s) have not yet attained divine bliss, and hence the longing of our Ātman is not yet satiated. Thus, our actions are motivated by self-interest and the desire for personal fulfillment. However, Bhagavān's actions have no personal motive because he is perfectly satiated by the infinite bliss of his own personality. He does not need to achieve further personal bliss by performing actions. Therefore, whatever he does is for the welfare of the materially conditioned Ātman(s). Such divine actions that Bhagavān performs are termed as “*leelas*” while the actions we perform are called “work.”

Similarly, Bhagavān's birth is also divine, and unlike ours, it does not take place from a mother's womb. The all-Blissful Bhagavān has no requirement to hang upside down in a mother's womb. The Bhāgavatam states:

*tam adbhatām bālakam ambujekṣhaṇam
chatur-bhujām śhaṅkha gadādyudāyudham (10.3.9) [v9]*

“When Shri Krishna manifested upon birth before Vasudev and Devaki, he was in his four-armed Vishnu form.” This full-sized form could definitely not have resided in Devaki's womb. However, to create in her the feeling that he was there, by his *YogMāyā* power, he simply kept expanding Devaki's womb. Finally, he manifested from the outside, revealing that he had never been inside her:

āvirāśid yathā prāchyām diśhindur iva puṣkalah (Bhāgavatam 10.3.8) [v10]

“As the moon manifests in its full glory in the night sky, similarly the Supreme

Bhagavān Shri Krishna manifested before Devaki and Vasudev.” This is the divine nature of Bhagavān’s birth. If we can develop faith in the divinity of his pastimes and birth, then we will be able to easily engage in devotion to his personal form, and attain the supreme destination.

**वीतरागभयक्रोधा मन्मया मामुपाश्रिताः ।
बहवो ज्ञानतपसा पूता मद्भावमागताः ॥ 10 ॥**

*vīta-rāga-bhaya-krodhā man-mayā mām upāśritāḥ
bahavo jñāna-tapasā pūtā mad-bhāvam āgatāḥ*

vīta—freed from; *rāga*—attachment; *bhaya*—fear; *krodhāḥ*—and anger; *mat-mayā*—completely absorbed in me; *mām*—in me; *upāśritāḥ*—taking refuge (of); *bahavaḥ*—many (persons); *jñāna*—of knowledge; *tapasā*—by the fire of knowledge; *pūtāḥ*—purified; *mat-bhāvam*—my divine love; *āgatāḥ*—attained.

Being freed from attachment, fear, and anger, becoming fully absorbed in me, and taking refuge in me, many persons in the past became purified by knowledge of me, and thus they attained my divine love.

In the previous verse, Bhagavān Krishna explained that those who truly know the divine nature of his birth and pastimes attain him. He now confirms that legions of human beings in all ages became Brahman-realized by this means. They achieved this goal by purifying their minds through devotion. Shri Aurobindo put it very nicely: “You must keep the temple of the heart clean, if you wish to install therein the living presence.” The Bible states: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Matthew 5.8) [v11]

Now, how does the mind get purified? By giving up attachment, fear, and anger, and absorbing the mind in Bhagavān. Actually, attachment is the cause of both fear and anger. Fear arises out of apprehension that the object of our attachment will be snatched away from us. And anger arises when there is an obstruction in attaining the object of our attachment. Attachment is thus the root cause of the mind getting dirty.

This world of Māyā consists of the three modes of material nature—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* (goodness, passion, and ignorance). All objects and personalities in the world come within the realm of these three modes. When we attach our mind to a material object or person, our mind too becomes affected by the three modes. Instead, when we absorb the same mind in Bhagavān, who is beyond the three modes of material nature, such devotion purifies the mind. Thus, the sovereign recipe to cleanse the mind from the defects of lust, anger, greed, envy, and illusion, is to detach it from the world and attach it to the Supreme Bhagavān. Hence, the Ramayana states:

prema bhagati jala binu raghurāī, abhiantara mala kabahuñ jāī [v12]

“Without devotion to Bhagavān, the dirt of the mind will not be washed away.” Even the ardent propagator of *jñāna yog*, Shankaracharya, stated:

*śhuddhayati hi nāntarĀtman kṛiṣṇapadāmbhoja bhaktimṛite
(Prabodh Sudhākar) [v13]*

“Without engaging in devotion to the lotus feet of Bhagavān Krishna, the mind will not be cleansed.”

On reading the previous verse, a question may arise whether Bhagavān Krishna is partial in bestowing his grace upon those who absorb their minds in him versus the worldly-minded Ātman(s). The Supreme Bhagavān addresses this in the next verse.

ये यथा मां प्रपद्यन्ते तांस्तथैव भजाम्यहम् ।
मम वर्त्मानुवर्तन्ते मनुष्याः पार्थ सर्वशः ॥ 11 ॥

*ye yathā mām prapadyante tāns tathaiva bhajāmyaham
mama vartmānuvartante manuṣhyāḥ pārtha sarvaśhaḥ*

ye—who; *yathā*—in whatever way; *mām*—unto me; *prapadyante*—surrender; *tān*—them; *tathā*—so; *eva*—certainly; *bhajāmi*—reciprocate; *aham*—I; *mama*—my; *vartma*—path; *anuvartante*—follow; *manuṣhyāḥ*—men; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *sarvaśhaḥ*—in all respects.

In whatever way people surrender unto me, I reciprocate with them accordingly. Everyone follows my path, knowingly or unknowingly, O son

of Pritha.

Here, Bhagavān Krishna states that he reciprocates with everyone as they surrender to him. For those who deny the existence of Bhagavān, he meets them in the form of the law of karma—he sits inside their hearts, notes their actions, and dispenses the results. But such atheists too cannot get away from serving him; they are obliged to serve Bhagavān’s material energy, Māyā, in its various apparitions, as wealth, luxuries, relatives, prestige, etc. Māyā holds them under the sway of anger, lust, and greed. On the other hand, for those who turn their mind away from worldly attractions and look upon Bhagavān as the goal and refuge, he takes care of them just as a mother takes care of her child.

Shri Krishna uses the word *bhajāmi*, which means “to serve.” He serves the surrendered Ātman(s), by destroying their accumulated karmas of endless lifetimes, cutting the bonds of Māyā, removing the darkness of material existence, and bestowing divine bliss, divine knowledge, and divine love. And when the devotee learns to love Bhagavān selflessly, he willingly enslaves himself to their love. Shri Ram thus tells Hanuman:

*ekaikasyopakārasya prāṇān dāsyāsmi te kape
śheṣhasyehopakārāṇām bhavām ṛṇino vayam
(Vālmīki Ramayana) [v14]*

“O Hanuman, to release myself from the debt of one service you performed for me, I shall have to offer my life to you. For all the other devotional services done by you, I shall remain eternally indebted.” In this way, Bhagavān reciprocates with everyone as they surrender to him.

If Bhagavān is so merciful upon his devotees, why do some people worship the celestial deities instead? He explains in the following verse.

काङ्क्षन्तः कर्मणां सिद्धिं यजन्त इह देवताः ।
क्षिप्रं हि मानुषे लोके सिद्धिर्भवति कर्मजा ॥ १२ ॥

*kāṅkṣantah karmaṇām siddhim yajanta iha devatāḥ
kṣhipram hi mānuṣhe loke siddhir bhavati karma-jā*

kāṅkṣantah—desiring; *karmaṇām*—material activities; *siddhim*—success; *yajante*—worship; *iha*—in this world; *devatāḥ*—the celestial deities; *kṣhipram*—quickly; *hi*—certainly; *mānuṣhe*—in human society; *loke*—within this world; *siddhiḥ*—rewarding; *bhavati*—manifest; *karma-jā*—from material activities.

In this world, those desiring success in material activities worship the celestial deities, since material rewards manifest quickly.

Persons who seek worldly gain worship the celestial deities and seek boons from them. The boons the celestial deities bestow are material and temporary, and they are given only by virtue of the power they have received from the Supreme Bhagavān. There is a beautiful instructive story in this regard:

Saint Farid went to the court of Emperor Akbar, a powerful king in Indian history. He waited in the court for an audience, while Akbar was praying in the next room. Farid peeped into the room to see what was going on, and was amused to hear Akbar praying to Bhagavān for more powerful army, a bigger treasure chest, and success in battle. Without disturbing the king, Farid returned to the royal court.

After completing his prayers, Akbar came and gave him audience. He asked the great Sage if there was anything that he wanted. Farid replied, “I came to ask the Emperor for things I required for my *āśram*. However, I find that the Emperor is himself a beggar before the Bhagavān. Then why should I ask him for any favors, and not directly from the Bhagavān himself?”

The celestial deities give boons only by the powers bestowed upon them by the Supreme Bhagavān. People with small understanding approach them, but those who are intelligent realize that there is no point in going to the

intermediary and they approach the Supreme Bhagavān for the fulfillment of their aspirations. *People are of various kinds, possessing higher and lower aspirations.* Shri Krishna now mentions four categories of qualities and works.

चातुर्वर्णं मया सृष्टं गुणकर्मविभागशः ।
तस्य कर्तारमपि मां विद्ध्यकर्तारमव्ययम् ॥ 13 ॥

*chāturuḥ-varṇyam mayā sṛiṣṭam guna-karma-vibhāgaśah
tasya kartāram api mām viddhyakartāram avyayam*

chāturuḥ-varṇyam—the four categories of occupations; *mayā*—by me; *sṛiṣṭam*—were created; *guṇa*—of quality; *karma*—and activities; *vibhāgaśah*—according to divisions; *tasya*—of that; *kartāram*—the creator; *api*—although; *mām*—me; *viddhi*—know; *akartāram*—non-doer; *avyayam*—unchangeable.

The four categories of occupations were created by me according to people's qualities and activities. Although I am the creator of this system, know me to be the non-doer and eternal.

The Vedas classify people into four categories of occupations, not according to their birth, but according to their natures. Such varieties of occupations exist in every society. Even in communist nations where equality is the overriding principle, the diversity in human beings cannot be smothered. There are the philosophers who are the communist party think-tanks, there are the military men who protect the country, there are the farmers who engage in agriculture, and there are the factory workers.

The Vedic philosophy explains this variety in a more scientific manner. It states that the material energy is constituted of three *guṇas* (modes): *sattva guṇa* (mode of goodness), *rāgo guṇa* (mode of passion), and *tamo guṇa* (mode of ignorance). The Brahmins are those who have a preponderance of the mode of goodness. They are predisposed toward teaching and worship. The Kshatriyas are those who have a preponderance of the mode of passion mixed with a smaller amount of the mode of goodness. They are inclined toward administration and

management. The Vaishyas are those who possess the mode of passion mixed with some mode of ignorance. Accordingly, they form the business and agricultural class. Then there are the Shudras, who are predominated by the mode of ignorance. They form the working class. This classification was neither meant to be according to birth, nor was it unchangeable. Shri Krishna explains in this verse that the classification of the *Varṇāśram* system was according to people's qualities and activities.

Although Bhagavān is the creator of the scheme of the world, yet he is the non-doer. This is similar to the rain. Just as rain water falls equally on the forest, yet from some seeds huge banyan trees sprout, from other seeds beautiful flowers bloom, and from some thorny bushes emerge. The rain, which is impartial, is not answerable for this difference. In the same way, Bhagavān provides the Ātman(s) with the energy to act, but they are free in determining what they wish to do with it; Bhagavān is not responsible for their actions.

न मां कर्माणि लिप्पन्ति न मे कर्मफले स्पृहा ।
इति मां योऽभिजानाति कर्मभिर्स बध्यते ॥ 14 ॥

*na mām karmāṇi limpanti na me karma-phale sprihā
iti mām yo 'bhijānāti karmabhir na sa badhyate*

na—not; *mām*—me; *karmāṇi*—activities; *limpanti*—taint; *na*—nor; *me*—my; *karma-phale*—the fruits of action; *sprihā*—desire; *iti*—thus; *mām*—me; *yah*—who; *abhijānāti*—knows; *karmabhih*—result of action; *na*—never; *sah*—that person; *badhyate*—is bound.

Activities do not taint me, nor do I desire the fruits of action. One who knows me in this way is never bound by the karmic reactions of work.

Bhagavān is all-pure, and whatever he does also becomes pure and auspicious. The Ramayana states:

samaratha kahuñ nahiñ doṣhu gosāīñ, rabi pāvaka surasari kī nāīñ. [v15]

“Pure personalities are never tainted by defects even in contact with impure

situations and entities, like the sun, the fire, and the Ganges.” The sun does not get tainted if sunlight falls on a puddle of urine. The sun retains its purity, while also purifying the dirty puddle. Similarly, if we offer impure objects into the fire, it still retains its purity—the fire is pure, and whatever we pour into it also gets purified. In the same manner, numerous gutters of rainwater merge into the holy Ganges, but this does not make the Ganges a gutter—the Ganges is pure and transforms all those dirty gutters into the holy Ganges. Likewise, Bhagavān is not tainted by the activities he performs.

Activities bind one in karmic reactions when they are performed with the mentality of enjoying the results. However, Bhagavān’s actions are not motivated by selfishness; his every act is driven by compassion for the Ātman(s). Therefore, although he administers the world directly or indirectly, and engages in all kinds of activities in the process, he is never tainted by any reactions. Bhagavān Krishna states here that he is transcendental to the fruitive reactions of work.

Even Saints who are situated in Brahman-consciousness become transcendental to the material energy. Since all their activities are effectuated in love for Bhagavān, such pure-hearted Saints are not bound by the fruitive reactions of work. The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam states:

*yat pāda pañkaja parāga niśheva triptā
yoga prabhāva vidhutākhila karma bandhāḥ

svairām charanti munayo 'pi na nāhyamānās
tasyechchhayātta vapuṣhāḥ kuta eva bandhāḥ (10.33.34) [v16]*

“Material activities never taint the devotees of Bhagavān who are fully satisfied in serving the dust of his lotus feet. Nor do material activities taint those wise sages who have freed themselves from the bondage of fruitive reactions by the power of Yog. So where is the question of bondage for the Bhagavān himself who assumes his transcendental form according to his own sweet will?”

एवं ज्ञात्वा कृतं कर्म पूर्वैरपि मुमुक्षुभिः ।
कुरु कर्मेव तस्मात्त्वं पूर्वैः पूर्वतरं कृतम् ॥ 15 ॥

*evam jñātvā kritam karma pūrvair api mumukshubhiḥ
kuru karmaiva tasmāttvam pūrvaiḥ pūrvataram kritam*

evam—thus; *jñātvā*—knowing; *kritam*—performed; *karma*—actions; *pūrvaiḥ*—of ancient times; *api*—indeed; *mumukshubhiḥ*—seekers of liberation; *kuru*—should perform; *karma*—duty; *eva*—certainly; *tasmāt*—therefore; *tvam*—you; *pūrvaiḥ*—of those ancient sages; *pūrva-taram*—in ancient times; *kritam*—performed.

Knowing this truth, even seekers of liberation in ancient times performed actions. Therefore, following the footsteps of those ancient sages, you too should perform your duty.

The sages who aspire for Bhagavān are not motivated to work for material gain. Why then do they engage in activities in this world? The reason is that they wish to serve Bhagavān, and are inspired to do works for his pleasure. The knowledge of the previous verse assures them that they themselves will never be bound by welfare work that is done in the spirit of devotion. They are also moved by compassion on seeing the sufferings of the materially bound Ātman(s) who are bereft of Bhagavān consciousness, and are inspired to work for their spiritual elevation. The Buddha once said, “After attaining enlightenment, you have two options—either you do nothing, or you help others attain enlightenment.”

Thus, even sages who have no selfish motive for work still engage in activities for the pleasure of Bhagavān. Working in devotion also attracts the grace of Bhagavān. Shri Krishna is advising Arjun to do the same. *Having asked Arjun to perform actions that do not bind one, the Bhagavān now begins expounding the philosophy of action.*

किं कर्म किमकर्मेति कवयोऽप्यत्र मोहिताः ।
तत्ते कर्म प्रवक्ष्यामि यज्ञात्वा मोक्ष्यसेऽशुभात् ॥ 16 ॥

*kim karma kim akarmeti kavayo 'pyatra mohitāḥ
tat te karma pravakṣyāmi yaj jñātvā mokṣhyase 'śhubhāt*

kim—what; *karma*—action; *kim*—what; *akarma*—inaction; *iti*—thus; *kavayah*—the wise; *api*—even; *atra*—in this; *mohitāḥ*—are confused; *tat*—that; *te*—to you; *karma*—action; *pravakṣyāmi*—I shall explain; *yat*—which; *jñātvā*—knowing; *mokṣhyase*—you may free yourself; *aśhubhāt*—from inauspiciousness.

What is action and what is inaction? Even the wise are confused in determining this. Now I shall explain to you the secret of action, by knowing which, you may free yourself from material bondage.

The principles of dharma cannot be determined by mental speculation. Even intelligent persons become confused in the maze of apparently contradictory arguments presented by the scriptures and the sages. For example, the Vedas recommend non-violence. Accordingly in the Mahābhārat, Arjun wishes to follow the same course of action and shun violence but Shri Krishna says that his duty here is to engage in violence. If duty varies with circumstance, then to ascertain one's duty in any particular situation is a complex matter. Yamraj, the celestial deity of Death, stated:

*dharmaṁ tu sākshād bhagavat praṇītam na vai vidur ṛiṣhayo nāpi devāḥ
(Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 6.3.19) [v17]*

“What is proper action and what is improper action? This is difficult to determine even for the great *ṛiṣhis* and the celestial deities. Dharma has been created by Bhagavān himself, and he alone is its true knower.” *Bhagavān Krishna says to Arjun that he shall now reveal to him the esoteric science of action and inaction through which he may free himself from material bondage.*

**कर्मणो ह्यपि बोद्धव्यं बोद्धव्यं च विकर्मणः ।
अकर्मणश्च बोद्धव्यं गहना कर्मणो गतिः ॥१७॥**

*karmaṇo hyapi boddhavyam boddhavyam cha vikarmanah
akarmanash cha boddhavyam gahanā karmaṇo gatih*

karmaṇah—recommended action; *hi*—certainly; *api*—also; *boddhavyam*—should be known; *boddhavyam*—must understand; *cha*—and; *vikarmanah*—forbidden action; *akarmanah*—inaction;

cha—and; *boddhayyam*—must understand; *gahanā*—profound; *karmaṇah*—of action; *gatiḥ*—the true path.

You must understand the nature of all three—recommended action, wrong action, and inaction. The truth about these is profound and difficult to understand.

Work has been divided by Shri Krishna into three categories—action (*karm*), forbidden action (*vikarm*), and inaction (*akarm*).

Action. *Karm* is auspicious actions recommended by the scriptures for regulating the senses and purifying the mind.

Forbidden action. *Vikarm* is inauspicious actions prohibited by the scriptures since they are detrimental and result in degradation of the Ātman.

Inaction. *Akarm* is actions that are performed without attachment to the results, merely for the pleasure of Bhagavān. They neither have any karmic reactions nor do they entangle the Ātman.

कर्मण्यकर्म यः पश्येदकर्मणि च कर्म यः ।
स बुद्धिमान्मनुष्येषु स युक्तः कृत्स्नकर्मकृत् ॥ 18 ॥

*karmanyakarma yaḥ paśhyed akarmani cha karma yaḥ
sa buddhimān manuṣhyeṣu sa yuktaḥ kṛtsna-karma-kṛit*

karmaṇi—action; *akarma*—in inaction; *yah*—who; *paśhyet*—see; *akarmani*—inaction; *cha*—also; *karma*—action; *yah*—who; *sah*—they; *buddhi-mān*—wise; *manuṣhyeṣu*—amongst humans; *sah*—they; *yuktah*—yogis; *kṛtsna-karma-kṛit*—performers all kinds of actions.

Those who see action in inaction and inaction in action are truly wise amongst humans. Although performing all kinds of actions, they are yogis and masters of all their actions.

Action in inaction. There is one kind of inaction where persons look upon their social duties as burdensome, and renounce them out of indolence. They give up actions physically, but their mind continues to contemplate upon the

objects of the senses. Such persons may appear to be inactive, but their lethargic idleness is actually sinful action. When Arjun suggested that he wishes to shy away from his duty of fighting the war, Shri Krishna explained to him that it would be a sin, and he would go to the hellish regions for such inaction.

Inaction in action. There is another kind of inaction performed by *karm yogis*. They execute their social duties without attachment to results, dedicating the fruits of their actions to Bhagavān. Although engaged in all kinds of activities, they are not entangled in karmic reactions, since they have no motive for personal enjoyment. There were many great kings in Indian history—Dhruv, Prahlad, Yudhisthir, Prithu, and Ambarish—who discharged their kingly duties to the best of their abilities, and yet because their minds were not entangled in material desires, their actions were termed *Akarm*, or inaction. Another name for *akarm* is *karm yog*, which has been discussed in detail in the previous two chapters as well.

**यस्य सर्वे समारम्भाः कामसङ्कल्पवर्जिताः ।
ज्ञानाग्निदग्धकर्मणं तमाहुः पण्डितं बृथाः ॥ १९ ॥**

*yasya sarve samārambhāḥ kāma-saṅkalpa-varjitāḥ
jñānāgnī-dagdha-karmāṇām tam āhuh paṇḍitam budhāḥ*

yasya—whose; *sarve*—every; *saṁārambhāḥ*—undertakings; *kāma*—desire for material pleasures; *saṅkalpa*—resolve; *varjitāḥ*—devoid of; *jñāna*—divine knowledge; *agni*—in the fire; *dagdha*—burnt; *karmāṇam*—actions; *tam*—him; *āhuh*—address; *paṇḍitam*—a sage; *budhāḥ*—the wise.

The enlightened sages call those persons wise, whose every action is free from the desire for material pleasures and who have burnt the reactions of work in the fire of divine knowledge.

The Ātman, being a tiny part of Bhagavān who is an ocean of bliss, naturally seeks bliss for itself. However, covered by the material energy, the Ātman mistakenly identifies itself with the material body. In this ignorance, it

performs actions to attain bliss from the world of matter. Since these actions are motivated by the desire for sensual and mental enjoyment, they bind the Ātman in karmic reactions.

In contrast, when the Ātman is illumined with divine knowledge, it realizes that the bliss it seeks will be attained not from the objects of the senses, but in loving service to Bhagavān. It then strives to perform every action for the pleasure of Bhagavān. “Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer as oblation to the sacred fire, whatever you bestow as a gift, and whatever austerities you perform, O son of Kunti, do them as an offering to me.” (Bhagavad Gita 9.27) Since such an enlightened Ātman renounces selfish actions for material pleasures and dedicates all actions to Bhagavān, the works performed produce no karmic reactions. They are said to be burnt in the fire of divine knowledge.

त्यक्त्वा कर्मफलासङ्गं नित्यतृप्तो निराश्रयः ।
कर्मण्यभिप्रवृत्तोऽपि नैव किञ्चित्करोति सः ॥ २० ॥

*tyaktvā karma-phala-āsaṅgam nitya-tripto nirāśhrayah
karmaṇyabhipravṛitto 'pi naiva kiñchit karoti saḥ*

tyaktvā—having given up; *karma-phala-āsaṅgam*—attachment to the fruits of action; *nitya*—always; *triptah*—satisfied; *nirāśhrayah*—without dependence; *karmaṇi*—in activities; *abhipravṛittah*—engaged; *api*—despite; *na*—not; *eva*—certainly; *kiñchit*—anything; *karoti*—do; *sah*—that person.

Such people, having given up attachment to the fruits of their actions, are always satisfied and not dependent on external things. Despite engaging in activities, they do not do anything at all.

Actions cannot be classified by external appearances. It is the state of the mind that determines what is inaction and action. The minds of enlightened persons are absorbed in Bhagavān. Being fully satisfied in devotional union with him, they look upon Bhagavān as their only refuge and do not depend upon external supports. In this state of mind, all their actions are termed as *akarm*, or

inactions.

There is a beautiful story in the Puranas to illustrate this point. The *gopīs* (cowherd women) of Vrindavan once kept a fast. The ceremony of breaking the fast required them to feed a sage. Shri Krishna advised them to feed Sage Durvasa, the elevated ascetic, who lived on the other side of River Yamuna. The *gopīs* prepared a delicious feast and started off, but found the river was very turbulent that day, and no boatman was willing to ferry them across.

The *gopīs* asked Shri Krishna for a solution. He said, “Tell River Yamuna that if Shri Krishna is an *akhaṇḍ brahmacharī* (perfectly celibate since birth), it should give them way.” The *gopīs* started laughing, because they felt that Shri Krishna used to dote upon them, and so there was no question of his being an *akhaṇḍ brahmacharī*. Nevertheless, when they requested River Yamuna in that manner, the river gave them way and a bridge of flowers manifested for their passage across.

The *gopīs* were astonished. They went across to the *āśram* of Sage Durvasa. They requested him to accept the delicious meal they had brought for him. Being an ascetic, he ate only a small portion, which disappointed the *gopīs*. So, Durvasa decided to fulfill their expectations, and using his mystic powers, he ate everything they had brought. The *gopīs* were amazed to see him eat so much, but were very pleased that he had done justice to their cooking.

The *gopīs* now asked Durvasa for help to cross the Yamuna and return to the other side. He replied, “Tell River Yamuna that if Durvasa has not eaten anything today except *doob* (a kind of grass which was the only thing Durvasa used to eat), the river should give way.” The *gopīs* again started laughing, for they had seen him eat such an extravagant meal. Yet to their utmost surprise, when they beseeched River Yamuna in that manner, the river again gave them way.

The *gopīs* asked Shri Krishna the secret behind what had happened. He explained that while Bhagavān and the Saints appear to engage in material activities externally, internally they are always transcendently situated. Thus, even while doing all kinds of actions, they are still considered to be non-doers. Although interacting with the *gopīs* externally, Shri Krishna was an *akhaṇḍ brahmacharī* internally. And though Durvasa ate the delectable meal offered by the *gopīs*, internally his mind only tasted the *doob* grass. Both these were illustrations of inaction in action.

निराशीर्यतचित्तात्मा त्यक्तसर्वपरिग्रहः ।
शारीरं केवलं कर्म कुर्वन्नाज्ञोति किल्बिषम् ॥२१॥

*nirāśhīr yata-chittĀtman tyakta-sarva-parigrahaḥ
śhārīram kevalam karma kurvan nāpnoti kilbiṣham*

nirāśhīh—free from expectations; *yata*—controlled; *chitta-Ātman*—mind and intellect; *tyakta*—having abandoned; *sarva*—all; *parigrahah*—the sense of ownership; *śhārīram*—bodily; *kevalam*—only; *karma*—actions; *kurvan*—performing; *na*—never; *āpnoti*—incurs; *kilbiṣham*—sin.

Free from expectations and the sense of ownership, with mind and intellect fully controlled, they incur no sin, even though performing actions by one's body.

Even according to worldly law, acts of violence that happen accidentally are not considered as punishable offences. If one is driving a car in the correct lane, at the correct speed, with eyes fixed ahead, and someone suddenly comes and falls in front of the car and dies as a result, the court of law will not consider it as a culpable offence, provided it can be proved that the person had no intention to maim or kill. It is the intention of the mind that is of primary importance, and not the action. Similarly, the mystics who work in divine consciousness are released from all sins, because their mind is free from attachment and proprietorship, and their every act is performed with the divine intention of pleasing Bhagavān.

यदृच्छालाभसन्तुष्टो द्वन्द्वातीतो विमत्सरः ।
समः सिद्धावसिद्धौ च कृत्वापि न निबध्यते ॥ 22 ॥

*yadṛichchhā-lābha-santuṣṭo dvandvātīto vimatsarah
samah siddhāvasiddhau cha kṛitvāpi na nibadhyate*

yadṛichchhā—which comes of its own accord; *lābha*—gain; *santuṣṭah*—contented; *dvandva*—duality; *atītah*—surpassed; *vimatsarah*—free from envy; *samah*—equipoised; *siddhau*—in success; *asiddhau*—failure; *cha*—and; *kṛitvā*—performing; *api*—even; *na*—never; *nibadhyate*—is bound.

Content with whatever gain comes of its own accord, and free from envy, they are beyond the dualities of life. Being equipoised in success and failure, they are not bound by their actions, even while performing all kinds of activities.

Just like there are two sides to a coin, so too Bhagavān created this world full of dualities—there is day and night, sweet and sour, hot and cold, rain and drought, etc. The same rose bush has a beautiful flower and also an ugly thorn. Life too brings its share of dualities—happiness and distress, victory and defeat, fame and notoriety. Bhagavān Ram himself, in his divine pastimes, was exiled to the forest the day before he was to be crowned as the king of Ayodhya.

While living in this world, nobody can hope to neutralize the dualities to have only positive experiences. Then how can we successfully deal with the dualities that come our way in life? The solution is to take these dualities in stride, by learning to rise above them in equipoise in all situations. This happens when we develop detachment to the fruits of our actions, concerning ourselves merely with doing our duty in life without yearning for the results. When we perform works for the pleasure of Bhagavān, we see both positive and negative fruits of those works as the will of Bhagavān, and joyfully accept both.

गतसङ्गस्य मुक्तस्य ज्ञानावस्थितचेतसः ।
यज्ञायाचरतः कर्म समग्रं प्रविलीयते ॥ 23 ॥

*gata-saṅgasya muktasya jñānāvasthita-chetasah
yajñāyācharataḥ karma samagram pravilīyate*

gata-saṅgasya—free from material attachments; *muktasya*—of the liberated; *jñānāvasthita*—established in divine knowledge; *chetasah*—whose intellect; *yajñāya*—as a sacrifice (to Bhagavān); *ācharataḥ*—performing; *karma*—action; *samagram*—completely; *pravilīyate*—are freed.

They are released from the bondage of material attachments and their intellect is established in divine knowledge. Since they perform all actions as a sacrifice (to Bhagavān), they are freed from all karmic reactions.

In this verse, Bhagavān Krishna summarizes the conclusion of the previous five verses. Dedication of all one's actions to Bhagavān results from the understanding that the Ātman is eternal servitor of Bhagavān. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu said: *jīvera svarūpa haya kṛiṣhṇera nitya-dāsa* (Chaitanya Charitāmṛit, Madhya Leela, 20.108) [v18] “The Ātman is by nature the servant of Bhagavān.” Those who are established in this knowledge perform all their actions as an offering to him and are released from the sinful reactions of their work.

What is the kind of vision that such Ātman(s) develop? Shri Krishna explains this in the next verse.

ब्रह्मार्पणं ब्रह्म हविर्ब्रह्माग्नौ ब्रह्मणा हुतम् ।
ब्रह्मैव तेन गन्तव्यं ब्रह्मकर्मसमाधिना ॥ 24 ॥

*brahmārpaṇam brahma havir brahmāgnau brahmaṇā hutam
brahmaiva tena gantavyam brahma-karma-samādhinā*

brahma—Brahman; *arpaṇam*—the ladle and other offerings; *brahma*—Brahman; *havih*—the oblation; *brahma*—Brahman; *agnau*—in the sacrificial fire; *brahmaṇā*—by that person; *hutam*—offered; *brahma*—Brahman; *eva*—certainly; *tena*—by that; *gantavyam*—to be attained; *brahma*—Brahman; *karma*—offering; *samādhinā*—those completely absorbed in Brahman-consciousness.

For those who are completely absorbed in Brahman-consciousness, the oblation is Brahman, the ladle with which it is offered is Brahman, the act of offering is Brahman, and the sacrificial fire is also Brahman. Such persons, who view everything as Bhagavān, easily attain him.

Factually, the objects of the world are made from Māyā, the material energy of Bhagavān. Energy is both one with its energetic and also different from it. For example, light is the energy of fire. It can be considered as different from the fire, because it exists outside it. But it can also be reckoned as a part of the fire itself. Hence, when the rays of the sun enter the room through a window, people say, “The sun has come.” Here, they are bundling the sunrays with the sun. The energy is both distinct from the energetic and yet a part of it.

The Ātman too is the energy of Bhagavān—it is a spiritual energy, called *jīva* *śakti*. Shri Krishna states this in verses 7.4 and 7.5. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu stated:

*jīva-tattva śakti, kṛiṣṇa-tattva śaktimān
gītā-viṣṇupurāṇādi tāhāte pramāṇa*
(*Chaitanya Charitāmṛit, Ādi Leela, 7.117*) [v19]

“Bhagavān Krishna is the energetic and the Ātman is his energy. This has been stated in Bhagavad Gita, Viṣṇu Purāṇa, etc.” Thus, the Ātman is also simultaneously one with and different from Bhagavān. Hence, those whose minds are fully absorbed in Brahman-consciousness see the whole world in its unity with Bhagavān as non-different from him. The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam states:

*sarva-bhūteṣhu yaḥ paśhyed bhagavad-bhāvam ātmānaḥ
bhūtāni bhagavatyātmānyeṣha bhāgavatottamah* (11.2.45) [v20]

“One who sees Bhagavān everywhere and in all beings is the highest spiritualist.” For such advanced spiritualists whose minds are completely absorbed in Brahman-consciousness, the person making the sacrifice, the object of the sacrifice, the instruments of the sacrifice, the sacrificial fire, and the act of sacrifice, are all perceived as non-different from Bhagavān.

Having explained the spirit in which sacrifice is to be done, Bhagavān Krishna now relates the different kinds of sacrifice people perform in this world for purification.

दैवमेवापरे यज्ञं योगिनः पर्युपासते ।
ब्रह्माग्नावपरे यज्ञं यज्ञेनैवोपजुह्वति ॥ 25 ॥

*daivam evāpare yajñam yoginah paryupāsate
brahmāgnāvapare yajñam yajñenaivopajuhvati*

daivam—the celestial deities; *eva*—indeed; *apare*—others; *yajñam*—sacrifice; *yoginah*—spiritual practitioners; *paryupāsate*—worship; *brahma*—of the Supreme Truth; *agnau*—in the fire; *apare*—others; *yajñam*—sacrifice; *yajñena*—by sacrifice; *eva*—indeed; *upajuhvati*—offer.

Some yogis worship the celestial deities with material offerings unto them. Others worship perfectly who offer the self as sacrifice in the fire of the Supreme Truth.

Sacrifice, or *yajña*, should be performed in divine consciousness as an offering to the Supreme Bhagavān. However, people vary in their understanding, and hence perform sacrifice in different manners with dissimilar consciousness. Persons with lesser understanding, and wanting material rewards, make offerings to the celestial deities.

Others with deeper understanding of the meaning of *yajña* offer their own selves as sacrifice to the Supreme. This is called *ātma samarpan*, or *Ātmahutī*, or offering one's Ātman to Bhagavān. Yogi Shri Krishna Prem explained this very well: "In this world of dust and din, whenever one makes *Ātmahutī* in the flame of divine love, there is an explosion, which is grace, for no true *Ātmahutī* can ever go in vain." But what is the process of offering one's own self as sacrifice? This is performed by surrendering oneself completely to Bhagavān. Such surrender has six aspects to it, which have been explained in verse 18.66. Here, Shri Krishna continues to explain the different kinds of sacrifice that people perform.

श्रोत्रादीनीन्द्रियाण्यन्ये संयमाग्निषु जुह्वति ।
शब्दादीन्विषयानन्य इन्द्रियाग्निषु जुह्वति ॥ 26 ॥

śrotrādīnīndriyāṇyanye sanyamāgniṣhu juhvati

śabdādīn viṣhayānanya indriyāgniṣhu juhvati

śrotra-ādīni—such as the hearing process; *indriyāṇi*—senses; *anye*—others; *sanyama*—restraint; *agniṣhu*—in the sacrificial fire; *juhvati*—sacrifice; *śabda-ādīn*—sound vibration, etc.; *viṣhayān*—objects of sense-gratification; *anye*—others; *indriya*—of the senses; *agniṣhu*—in the fire; *juhvati*—sacrifice.

Others offer hearing and other senses in the sacrificial fire of restraint. Still others offer sound and other objects of the senses as sacrifice in the fire of the senses.

Fire transforms the nature of things consigned into it. In external ritualistic Vedic sacrifices, it physically consumes oblations offered to it. In the internal practice of spirituality, fire is symbolic. The fire of self-discipline burns the desires of the senses.

Here, Shri Krishna distinguishes between two diametrically opposite approaches to spiritual elevation. One is the path of negation of the senses, which is followed in the practice of *haṭha yog*. In this type of *yajña* (sacrifice), the actions of the senses are suspended, except for the bare maintenance of the body. The mind is completely withdrawn from the senses and made introvertive, by force of will-power.

Opposite to this is the practice of *bhakti yog*. In this second type of *yajña*, the senses are made to behold the glory of the Creator that manifests in every atom of his creation. The senses no longer remain as instruments for material enjoyment; rather they are sublimated to perceive Bhagavān in everything. In verse 7.8, Shri Krishna says: *raso 'ham apsu kaunteya* “Arjun, know me to be the taste in water.” Accordingly, *bhakti yogis* practice to behold Bhagavān through all their senses, in everything they see, hear, taste, feel, and smell. This *yajña* of devotion is simpler than the path of *haṭha yog*; it is joyous to perform, and involves a smaller risk of downfall from the path. If one is riding a bicycle and presses the brakes to stop the forward motion, he will be in an unstable

condition, but if the cyclist simply turns the handle to the left or right, the bicycle will very easily stop its forward motion and still remain stably balanced.

सर्वाणीन्द्रियकर्माणि प्राणकर्माणि चापे ।
आत्मसंयमयोगाग्नौ जुह्वति ज्ञानदीपिते ॥२७॥

*sarvāṇīndriya-karmāṇi prāṇa-karmāṇi chāpare
ātma-sanyama-yogāgnau juhvati jñāna-dīpite*

sarvāṇi—all; *indriya*—the senses; *karmāṇi*—functions; *prāṇa-karmāṇi*—functions of the life breath; *cha*—and; *apare*—others; *ātma-sanyama yogāgnau*—in the fire of the controlled mind; *juhvati*—sacrifice; *jñāna-dīpite*—kindled by knowledge.

Some, inspired by knowledge, offer the functions of all their senses and their life energy in the fire of the controlled mind.

There are some yogis who follow the path of discrimination, or *jñāna yog*, and take the help of knowledge to withdraw their senses from the world. While *hatha yogis* strive to restrain the senses with brute will-power, *jñāna yogis* accomplish the same goal with the repeated practice of discrimination based on knowledge. They engage in deep contemplation upon the illusory nature of the world, and the identity of the self as distinct from the body, mind, intellect, and ego. The senses are withdrawn from the world, and the mind is engaged in meditation upon the self. The goal is to become practically situated in self-knowledge, in the assumption that the self is identical with the Supreme Ultimate reality. As aids to contemplation, they chant aphorisms such as: *tattvamasi* “I am That,” (Chhāndogya Upaniṣad 6.8.7) [21] and *aham brahmāsmi* “I am the Supreme Entity.” (Brīhadāraṇyak Upaniṣad 1.4.10) [v22]

The practice of *jñāna yog* is a very difficult path, which requires a very determined and trained intellect. The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (11.20.7) states: *nirvinñānāṁ jñānayogaḥ* [23] “Success in the practice of *jñāna yog* is only possible for those who are at an advanced stage of renunciation.”

द्रव्ययज्ञास्तपोयज्ञा योगयज्ञास्तथापरे ।
स्वाध्यायज्ञानयज्ञाश्च यतयः संशितव्रताः ॥२८॥

*dravya-yajñās tapo-yajñā yoga-yajñās tathāpare
swādhyāya-jñāna-yajñāśha cha yatayah sanśhita-vratāḥ*

dravya-yajñāḥ—offering one's own wealth as sacrifice; *tapah-yajñāḥ*—offering severe austerities as sacrifice; *yoga-yajñāḥ*—performance of eight-fold path of yogic practices as sacrifice; *tathā*—thus; *apare*—others; *swādhyāya*—cultivating knowledge by studying the scriptures; *jñāna-yajñāḥ*—those offer cultivation of transcendental knowledge as sacrifice; *cha*—also; *yatayah*—these ascetics; *sanśhita-vratāḥ*—observing strict vows.

Some offer their wealth as sacrifice, while others offer severe austerities as sacrifice. Some practice the eight-fold path of yogic practices, and yet others study the scriptures and cultivate knowledge as sacrifice, while observing strict vows.

Human beings differ from each other in their natures, motivations, activities, professions, aspirations, and *sanskārs* (tendencies carrying forward from past lives). Shri Krishna brings Arjun to the understanding that sacrifices can take on hundreds of forms, but when they are dedicated to Bhagavān, they become means of purification of the mind and senses and elevation of the Ātman. In this verse, he mentions three such *yajñas* that can be performed.

Dravya yajña. There are those who are inclined toward earning wealth and donating it in charity toward a divine cause. Although they may engage in large and complicated business endeavors, yet their inner motivation remains to serve Bhagavān with the wealth they earn. In this manner, they offer their propensity for earning money as sacrifice to Bhagavān in devotion. John Wesley, the British preacher and founder of the Methodist Church would instruct his followers: “Make all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can.”

Yog yajña. In Indian philosophy the Yog Darśhan is one of the six philosophical treatises written by six learned sages. Jaimini wrote “Mīmānsā

Darśhan,” Ved Vyas wrote “Vedānt Darśhan,” Gautam wrote “Nyāya Darśhan,” Kanad wrote “Vaiśheśik Darśhan,” Kapil wrote “Sāṅkhyā Darśhan,” and Patañjali wrote “Yog Darśhan.” The Patañjali Yog Darśhan describes an eight-fold path, called *aṣṭāṅg yog*, for spiritual advancement, starting with physical techniques and ending in conquest of the mind. Some people find this path attractive and practice it as sacrifice. However, Patañjali Yog Darśhan clearly states:

samādhisiddhirīśhvara praṇidhānāt (2.45) [v24]

“To attain perfection in Yog, you must surrender to Bhagavān.” So when persons inclined toward *aṣṭāṅg yog* learn to love Bhagavān, they offer their yogic practice as *yajña* in the fire of devotion. An example of this is the yogic system “Jagadguru Kripaluji Yog,” where the physical postures of *aṣṭāṅg yog* are practiced as *yajña* to Bhagavān, along with the chanting of his divine names. Such a combination of yogic postures along with devotion results in the physical, mental, and spiritual purification of the practitioner.

Jñāna yajña. Some persons are inclined toward the cultivation of knowledge. This propensity finds its perfect employment in the study of scriptures for enhancing one’s understanding and love for Bhagavān. *sā vidyā tanmatiryayā* (Bhāgavatam 4.29.49) [v25] “True knowledge is that which increases our devotion to Bhagavān.” Thus, studiously inclined *sādhaks* engage in the sacrifice of knowledge, which when imbued with the spirit of devotion, leads to loving union with Bhagavān.

अपाने जुह्वति प्राणं प्राणेऽपानं तथापरे ।
प्राणापानगती रुद्ध्वा प्राणायामपरायणाः ॥२९॥

अपरे नियताहाराः प्राणान्ग्राणेषु जुह्वति ।
सर्वेऽप्येते यज्ञविदो यज्ञक्षपितकल्मषाः ॥३०॥

*apāne juhvati prānam prāne 'pānam tathāpare
prāṇāpāna-gatī ruddhvā prāṇāyāma-parāyanāḥ*

*apare niyatāhārāḥ prānān prāṇeṣhu juhvati
sarve 'pyete yajña-vido yajña-kṣhapita-kalmaṣhāḥ*

apāne—the incoming breath; *juhvati*—offer; *prāṇam*—the outgoing breath; *prāṇe*—in the outgoing breath; *apānam*—incoming breath; *tathā*—also; *apare*—others; *prāṇa*—of the outgoing breath; *apāna*—and the incoming breath; *gatī*—movement; *ruddhvā*—blocking; *prāṇa-āyāma*—control of breath; *parāyaṇāḥ*—wholly devoted; *apare*—others; *niyata*—having controlled; *āhārāḥ*—food intake; *prānān*—life-breaths; *prāṇeṣhu*—life-energy; *juhvati*—sacrifice; *sarve*—all; *api*—also; *ete*—these; *yajña-vidah*—knowers of sacrifices; *yajña-kṣhapita*—being cleansed by performances of sacrifices; *kalmaṣhāḥ*—of impurities.

Still others offer as sacrifice the outgoing breath in the incoming breath, while some offer the incoming breath into the outgoing breath. Some arduously practice *prāṇāyām* and restrain the incoming and outgoing breaths, purely absorbed in the regulation of the life-energy. Yet others curtail their food intake and offer the breath into the life-energy as sacrifice. All these knowers of sacrifice are cleansed of their impurities as a result of such performances.

Some persons are drawn to the practice of *prāṇāyām*, which is loosely translated as “control of breath.” This involves:

Pūrak—the process of drawing the breath into the lungs.

Rechak—the process of emptying the lungs of breath.

Antar kumbhak—holding the breath in the lungs after inhalation. The outgoing breath gets suspended in the incoming breath during the period of suspension.

Bāhya kumbhak—keeping the lungs empty after exhalation. The incoming breath gets suspended in the outgoing breath during the period of suspension.

Both the *kumbhaks* are advanced techniques and should only be practiced under the supervision of qualified teachers, else they can cause harm. Yogis who are inclined toward the practice of *prāṇāyām* utilize the process of breath control to help tame the senses and bring the mind into focus. Then they offer the controlled mind in the spirit of *yajña* to the Supreme Bhagavān.

Prāṇ is not exactly breath; it is a subtle life force energy that pervades the breath and varieties of animate and inanimate objects. The Vedic scriptures describe five kinds of *prāṇas* in the body—*prāṇ*, *apāṇ*, *vyāṇ*, *samāṇ*, *udāṇ*—that help regulate various physiological bodily functions. Amongst these, *samāṇ* is responsible for the bodily function of digestion. Some people may also be inclined toward fasting. They curtail their eating with the knowledge that diet impacts character and behavior. Such fasting has been employed as a spiritual technique in India since ancient times and also considered here a form of *yajña*. When the diet is curtailed, the senses become weak and the *samāṇ*, which is responsible for digestion, is made to neutralize itself. This is the nature of the sacrifice that some people perform.

People perform these various kinds of austerities for the purpose of purification. It is desire for gratification of the senses and the mind which leads to the heart becoming impure. The aim of all these austerities is to curtail the natural propensity of the senses and mind to seek pleasure in material objects. When these austerities are performed as a sacrifice to the Supreme, they result in the purification of the heart (as mentioned before, the word “heart” is often used to refer to the internal machinery of the mind and intellect).

यज्ञशिष्ठामृतभुजो यान्ति ब्रह्म सनातनम् ।
नायं लोकोऽस्त्वयज्ञस्य कुतोऽन्यः कुरुसत्तम ॥ 31 ॥

*yajña-śiṣṭāmṛita-bhujo yānti brahma sanātanam
nāyam loko 'styayajñasya kuto 'nyah kuru-sattama*

yajña-śiṣṭā amṛita-bhujah—they partake of the nectarean remnants of sacrifice; *yānti*—go; *brahma*—the Absolute Truth; *sanātanam*—eternal; *na*—never; *ayam*—this; *lokaḥ*—planet; *asti*—is; *ayajñasya*—for one who performs no sacrifice; *kutah*—how; *anyah*—other (world); *kuru-sat-tama*—best of the Kurus, Arjun.

Those who know the secret of sacrifice, and engaging in it, partake of its remnants that are like nectar, advance toward the Absolute Truth. O best of the Kurus, those who perform no sacrifice find no happiness either in

this world or the next.

The secret of sacrifice, as mentioned previously, is the understanding that it should be performed for the pleasure of Bhagavān, and then the remnants can be taken as his *prasād* (grace). For example, devotees of the Bhagavān partake of food after offering it to him. After cooking the food, they place it on the altar and pray to Bhagavān to accept their offering. In their mind, they meditate on the sentiment that Bhagavān is actually eating from the plate. At the end of the offering, the remnants on the plate are accepted as *prasād*, or the grace of Bhagavān. Partaking of such nectar-like *prasād* leads to illumination, purification, and spiritual advancement.

In the same mood, devotees offer clothes to Bhagavān and then wear them as his *prasād*. They install his deity in their house, and then live in it with the attitude that their home is the temple of Bhagavān. When objects or activities are offered as sacrifice to Bhagavān, then the remnants, or *prasād*, are a nectar-like blessing for the Ātman. The great devotee Uddhav told Shri Krishna:

*tvayopabhukta-srag-gandha-vāso 'laṅkāra-charchitāḥ
uchchhiṣṭa-bhojino dāsās tava māyāṁ jayema hi
(Bhāgavatam 11.6.46) [v26]*

“I will only eat, smell, wear, live in, and talk about objects that have first been offered to you. In this way, by accepting the remnants as your *prasād*, I will easily conquer Māyā.” Those who do not perform sacrifice remain entangled in the fruitive reactions of work and continue to experience the torments of Māyā.

**एवं बहुविधा यज्ञा वितता ब्रह्मणो मुखे ।
कर्मजान्विद्धि तान्सर्वनेवं ज्ञात्वा विमोक्ष्यसे ॥३२॥**

*evam bahu-vidhā yajñā vitatā brahmaṇo mukhe
karma-jān viddhi tān sarvān evam jñātvā vimokṣyase*

evam—thus; *bahu-vidhāḥ*—various kinds of; *yajñāḥ*—sacrifices; *vitataḥ*—have been described;

brahmaṇah—of the Vedas; *mukhe*—through the mouth; *karma-jān*—originating from works; *viddhi*—know; *tān*—them; *sarvān*—all; *evam*—thus; *jñātvā*—having known; *vimokṣhyase*—you shall be liberated.

All these different kinds of sacrifice have been described in the Vedas. Know them as originating from different types of work; this understanding cuts the knots of material bondage.

One of the beautiful features of the Vedas is that they recognize and cater to the wide variety of human natures. Different kinds of sacrifice have thus been described for different kinds of performers. The common thread running through them is that they are to be done with devotion, as an offering to Bhagavān. With this understanding, one is not bewildered by the multifarious instructions in the Vedas, and by pursuing the particular *yajña* suitable to one's nature, one can be released from material bondage.

**श्रेयान्द्रव्यपयाद्यज्ञानयज्ञः परन्तप ।
सर्वं कर्माखिलं पार्थं ज्ञाने परिसमाप्यते ॥ ३३ ॥**

*śhreyān dravya-mayād yajñāj jñāna-yajñah parantapa
sarvam karmākhilam pārtha jñāne parisamāpyate*

śhreyān—superior; *dravya-mayāt*—of material possessions; *yajñāt*—than the sacrifice; *jñāna-yajñah*—sacrifice performed in knowledge; *parantapa*—subduer of enemies, Arjun; *sarvam*—all; *karma*—works; *akhilam*—all; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *jñāne*—in knowledge; *parisamāpyate*—culminate.

O subduer of enemies, sacrifice performed in knowledge is superior to any mechanical material sacrifice. After all, O Parth, all sacrifices of work culminate in knowledge.

Shri Krishna now puts the previously described sacrifices in proper perspective. He tells Arjun that it is good to do physical acts of devotion, but not good enough. Ritualistic ceremonies, fasts, mantra chants, holy pilgrimages, are all fine, but if they are not performed with knowledge, they remain mere physical activities. Such mechanical activities are better than not doing anything at all,

but they are not sufficient to purify the mind.

Many people chant Bhagavān's name on rosary beads, sit in recitations of the scriptures, visit holy places, and perform worship ceremonies, with the belief that the physical act itself is sufficient for liberating them from material bondage. However, Saint Kabir rejects this idea very eloquently:

*mālā pherata yuga phirā, phirā na mana kā pher,
kar kā manakā dāri ke, manakā manakā pher. [v27]*

“O spiritual aspirant, you have been rotating the chanting beads for many ages, but the mischief of the mind has not ceased. Now put those beads down, and rotate the beads of the mind.” Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj says:

*bandhan aur mokṣha kā, kāraṇ manahi bakhān
yate kauniu bhakti karu, karu man te haridhyān
(Bhakti Shatak verse 19) [v28]*

“The cause of bondage and liberation is the mind. Whatever form of devotion you do, engage your mind in meditating upon Bhagavān.”

Devotional sentiments are nourished by the cultivation of knowledge. For example, let us say that it is your birthday party, and people are coming and handing you gifts. Someone comes and gives you a ragged bag. You look at it disdainfully, thinking it is insignificant in comparison to the other wonderful gifts you have received. That person requests you to look inside the bag. You open it and find a stack of one hundred notes of \$100 denomination. You immediately hug the bag to your chest, and say, “This is the best gift I have received.” Knowledge of its contents developed love for the object. Similarly, cultivating knowledge of Bhagavān and our relationship with him nurtures devotional sentiments. Hence, Shri Krishna explains to Arjun that sacrifices performed in knowledge are superior to the sacrifice of material things. *He now explains the process of acquiring knowledge.*

**तद्विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया ।
उपदेक्ष्यन्ति ते ज्ञानं ज्ञानिनस्तत्त्वदर्शिनः ॥३४॥**

*tad viddhi pranipātena paripraśhnena sevayā
upadekṣhyanti te jñānam jñāninās tattva-darśināḥ*

tat—the Truth; *viddhi*—try to learn; *pranipātena*—by approaching a spiritual master; *paripraśhnena*—by humble inquiries; *sevayā*—by rendering service; *upadekṣhyanti*—can impart; *te*—unto you; *jñānam*—knowledge; *jñānināḥ*—the enlightened; *tattva-darśināḥ*—those who have realized the Truth.

Learn the Truth by approaching a spiritual master. Inquire from him with reverence and render service unto him. Such an enlightened Saint can impart knowledge unto you because he has seen the Truth.

On hearing that sacrifice should be performed in knowledge, the natural question that follows is, how can we obtain spiritual knowledge? Shri Krishna gives the answer in this verse. He says: 1) Approach a spiritual master. 2) Inquire from him submissively. 3) Render service to him.

The Absolute Truth cannot be understood merely by our own contemplation. The Bhāgavatam states:

*anādyavidyā yuktasya puruṣhasyātma vedanam
svato na sambhavād anyas tattva-jño jñāna-do bhavet (11.22.10) [v29]*

“The intellect of the Ātman is clouded by ignorance from endless lifetimes. Covered with nescience, the intellect cannot overcome its ignorance simply by its own effort. One needs to receive knowledge from a Brahman-realized Saint who knows the Absolute Truth.”

The Vedic scriptures advise us repeatedly on the importance of the Guru on the spiritual path.

āchāryavān puruṣho vedah (Chhāndogya Upaniṣhad 6.14.2) [v30]

“Only through a Guru can you understand the Vedas.” The Pañchadaśī states:

tatpādāmburu hadvandva sevā nirmala chetasām

sukhabodhāya tattvasya viveko 'yam vidhīyate (1.2) [v31]

“Serve the Guru with a pure mind, giving up doubts. He will then bring you great happiness by bestowing knowledge of the scriptures and discrimination.”

Jagadguru Shankaracharya stated: *yāvat gururna kartavyo tāvanmuktirna labhyate [v32]* “Until you surrender to a Guru you cannot be liberated from the material energy.”

One of the most magnanimous graces of Bhagavān is when he brings the Ātman in contact with a true Guru. But the process of transfer of spiritual knowledge from the teacher to the student is very different from that of material knowledge. Secular education does not require deep respect for the teacher. The transmission of knowledge can be purchased simply by paying the teacher’s fees. However, spiritual edification is not imparted to the student by a mechanical teaching process, nor is it purchased for a price. It is revealed in the heart of the disciple by the Guru’s grace, when the disciple develops humility, and the Guru is pleased with the service attitude of the disciple. That is why Prahlad Maharaj said:

*naiṣhāṁ matis tāvad urukramāṅghrim spriśhatyanarthāpagamo yadarthah
mahīyasāṁ pāda rajo 'bhiṣhekāṁ niṣhkiñchanānāṁ na vṛiṇīta yāvat*
(*Bhāgavatam* 7.5.32) [v33]

“Until we bathe ourselves in the dust of the lotus feet of a Saint, we can never have an experience of the transcendental platform.” Hence, in this verse Shri Krishna mentions the need for approaching a Guru with reverence, inquiring about the Truth from him with humility, and pleasing him by rendering service.

**यज्ज्ञात्वा न पुनर्मोहमेवं यास्यसि पाण्डव ।
येन भूतान्यशेषेण द्रक्ष्यस्यात्मन्यथो मयि ॥ 35 ॥**

*yaj jñātvā na punar moham evam yāsyasi pāṇḍava
yena bhūtānyashēṣheṇa drakṣhyasyātmanyatho mayi*

yat—which; *jñātvā*—having known; *na*—never; *punah*—again; *moham*—delusion; *evam*—like this; *yāsyasi*—you shall get; *pāndava*—Arjun, the son of Pandu; *yena*—by this; *bhūtāni*—living beings; *aśheśhāṇi*—all; *drakṣhyasi*—you will see; *ātmani*—within me (Shri Krishna); *atho*—that is to say; *mayi*—in me.

Following this path and having achieved enlightenment from a Guru, O Arjun, you will no longer fall into delusion. In the light of that knowledge, you will see that all living beings are but parts of the Supreme, and are within me.

Just as darkness can never engulf the sun, similarly, illusion can never again overcome the Ātman who has once attained enlightenment. *Tadviṣhṇoh paramāṁ padam sadā paśyanti sūrayah* “Those who have realized Bhagavān always remain in Brahman-consciousness.”

Under the illusion of Māyā, we see the world as separate from Bhagavān, and establish friendship or enmity with other human beings depending upon whether they satisfy or harm our self-interest. Divine knowledge that comes with enlightenment changes our perspective and vision of the world. Enlightened Saints see the world as the energy of Bhagavān, and utilize whatever comes their way in the service of Bhagavān. They also see all human beings as parts of Bhagavān and harbor a divine attitude toward everyone. Thus, Hanuman says:

sīyā rāmaMāyā saba jaga jānī, karaūñ pranāma jori juga pānī. (Ramayana) [v34]

“I see the forms of Bhagavān Ram and Mother Sita in everyone, and so I fold my hands and offer my respects to all.”

अपि चेदसि पापेभ्यः सर्वेभ्यः पापकृत्तमः ।
सर्वं ज्ञानप्लवेनैव वृजिनं सन्तरिष्यसि ॥ 36 ॥

*api chet asi pāpebhyaḥ sarvebhyaḥ pāpa-kṛit-tamah
sarvam jñāna-plavenaiva vṛijinam santarishyasi*

api—even; *chet*—if; *asi*—you are; *pāpebhyaḥ*—sinners; *sarvebhyaḥ*—of all; *pāpa-kṛit-tamah*—most sinful; *sarvam*—all; *jñāna-plavena*—by the boat of divine knowledge; *eva*—certainly; *vṛijinam*—

sin; *santariṣhyasi*—you shall cross over.

Even those who are considered the most immoral of all sinners can cross over this ocean of material existence by seating themselves in the boat of divine knowledge.

Material existence is like a vast ocean, where one is tossed around by the waves of birth, disease, old age, and death. The material energy subjects everyone to the three-fold miseries: *ādiātmik*—miseries due to one's own body and mind, *ādibhautik*—miseries due to other living entities, and *ādidaivik*—miseries due to climactic and environmental conditions. In this state of material bondage, there is no respite for the Ātman, and endless lifetimes have gone by being subjected to these conditions. Like a football being kicked around the field, the Ātman is elevated to the celestial abodes, dropped to the hellish planes of existence, and brought back to the earthly realm, etc. according to its karmas of righteous or sinful deeds.

Divine knowledge provides the boat to cross over the material ocean. The ignorant perform karmas and get bound by them. Performing the same karmas as a *yajña* to Bhagavān liberates the knowledgeable. Thus, knowledge becomes the means of cutting material bondage. The Kaṭhopaniṣhad states:

*vijñānasārthiryastu manah pragrahavān narah
so 'dhvanaḥ pāramāpnoti tadviṣhṇoh paramām padam (1.3.9) [v35]*

“Illumine your intellect with divine knowledge; then with the illumined intellect, control the unruly mind, to cross over the material ocean and reach the divine realm.”

यथैधांसि समिद्धोऽग्निर्भस्मसात्कुरुतेऽर्जुन ।
ज्ञानाग्निः सर्वकर्माणि भस्मसात्कुरुते तथा ॥३७॥

*yathaidhānsi samiddho 'gnir bhasma-sāt kurute 'rjuna
jñānāgnih sarva-karmāṇi bhasma-sāt kurute tathā*

yathā—as; *edhānsi*—firewood; *samiddhaḥ*—blazing; *agnih*—fire; *bhasma-sāt*—to ashes; *kurute*—

turns; *arjuna*—Arjun; *jñāna-agnih*—the fire of knowledge; *sarva-karmāṇi*—all reactions from material activities; *bhasma-sāt*—to ashes; *kurute*—it turns; *tathā*—similarly.

As a kindled fire reduces wood to ashes, O Arjun, so does the fire of knowledge burn to ashes all reactions from material activities.

Even a spark of fire has the potential to become a major conflagration and burn down a huge heap of combustible material. In 1666, the Great Fire of London began as only a little flame in a small bakery, but as it grew it consigned to flames 13,200 houses, 87 churches, and most of the city offices.

We too have a heap of karmas attached to each of us, consisting of the reactions of the sinful and righteous deeds performed by us over infinite lifetimes. If we endeavor to exhaust these karmas by reaping their results, it will take many more lifetimes, and in the meantime further karmas will accumulate in an endless process. But Shri Krishna assures Arjun that knowledge has the power to burn our heap of karmas in this lifetime itself. That is because knowledge of the Ātman and its relationship with Bhagavān leads us to surrender to him. When we surrender to Bhagavān, he burns our stockpile of endless lifetimes of karmas and releases us from material bondage.

**न हि ज्ञानेन सदृशं पवित्रमिह विद्यते ।
तत्स्वयं योगसंसिद्धः कालेनात्मनि विन्दति ॥३८॥**

*na hi jñānenā sadṛiśam pavitramiha vidyate
tat svayam yoga-saṁsiddhaḥ kālenātmani vindati*

na—not; *hi*—certainly; *jñānenā*—with divine knowledge; *sadṛiśam*—like; *pavitram*—pure; *iha*—in this world; *vidyate*—exists; *tat*—that; *svayam*—oneself; *yoga*—practice of yog; *samsiddhaḥ*—he who has attained perfection; *kālena*—in course of time; *ātmani*—within the heart; *vindati*—finds.

In this world, there is nothing as purifying as divine knowledge. One who has attained purity of mind through prolonged practice of Yog, receives such knowledge within the heart, in due course of time.

Knowledge has the power to purify, elevate, liberate, and unite a person with

Bhagavān. It is thus supremely sublime and pure. But a distinction needs to be made between two kinds of knowledge—theoretical information and practical realization.

There is one kind of knowledge that is acquired by reading the scriptures and hearing from the Guru. This theoretical information is insufficient by itself. It is just as if someone has memorized a cookbook but has never entered the kitchen. Such theoretical knowledge of cooking does not help in satiating one's hunger. Similarly, one may acquire theoretical knowledge on the topics of the Ātman, Bhagavān, Māyā, *karm*, *jñāna*, and *bhakti* from the Guru, but that by itself does not make a person Brahman-realized. When one practices *sādhanā* in accordance with the theory, it results in purification of the mind. Then, from within one gets realization of the nature of the self and its relationship with Bhagavān. The Sage Patañjali states:

śrutiānumāna-prajñābhyaṁ anya-viśhayā viśheṣhārthatvāt
(*Yog Darśhan* 1.49) [v36]

“The knowledge attained by realization from within through the practice of Yog is far superior to theoretical knowledge of the scriptures.” Such realized knowledge is being extolled by Shri Krishna as the purest sublime thing.

श्रद्धावान् लभते ज्ञानं तत्परः संयतेन्द्रियः ।
ज्ञानं लब्ध्वा परां शान्तिमचिरेणाधिगच्छति ॥३९॥

śhraddhāvān labhate jñānam tat-parah sanyatendriyah
jñānam labdhvā parām śāntim achireṇādhigachchhati

śhraddhā-vān—a faithful person; *labhate*—achieves; *jñānam*—divine knowledge; *tat-parah*—devoted (to that); *sanyata*—controlled; *indriyah*—senses; *jñānam*—transcendental knowledge; *labdhvā*—having achieved; *parām*—supreme; *śāntim*—peace; *achireṇa*—without delay; *adhigachchhati*—attains.

Those whose faith is deep and who have practiced controlling their mind and senses attain divine knowledge. Through such transcendental knowledge, they quickly attain everlasting supreme peace.

Shri Krishna now introduces the concept of faith in the context of knowledge. Not all spiritual truths are immediately perceptible; some of them can only be experienced after having attained sufficient elevation on the path. If we only accept what we can presently verify or comprehend, we will be bereft of the higher spiritual secrets. Faith helps us accept what we cannot understand at present. Jagadguru Shankaracharya has defined faith as follows:

guru vedānta vākyeṣhu dṛidho viśhvāsaḥ śraddhā [v37]

“Faith means firm confidence in the words of the Guru and the scriptures.” When such faith is placed upon a wrong personality, it can lead to disastrous consequences. But when it is placed on the true Guru, it opens the pathway for eternal welfare.

However, blind faith is not a desirable thing. Before placing it on any Guru, we must use our intellect to confirm that the Guru has realized the Absolute Truth, and he is teaching it in accordance with the eternal Vedic scriptures. Once this is confirmed, then we should strive to deepen our faith in such a Guru, and surrender to Bhagavān under his guidance. The Shvetashvatara Upaniṣhad states:

*yasya deve parā bhaktiḥ yathā deve tathā gurau
tasyaite kathitā hyarthāḥ prakāśhante mahātmanah (6.23) [v38]*

“The imports of all the Vedic knowledge is revealed within the hearts of those who engage with unflinching faith in devotion toward Guru and Bhagavān.”

अज्ञश्चाश्रद्धानश्च संशयात्मा विनश्यति ।
नायं लोकोऽस्ति न परो न सुखं संशयात्मनः ॥ ४० ॥

*ajñāś chāśhraddadhānaścha sanśhayātman vinaśhyati
nāyam loka 'sti na paro na sukham sanśhayātmanah*

ajñāḥ—the ignorant; *cha*—and; *āśhraddadhānaḥ*—without faith; *cha*—and; *sanśhaya*—skeptical; *Ātman*—a person; *vinaśhyati*—falls down; *na*—never; *ayam*—in this; *lokah*—world; *asti*—is; *na*—not; *parah*—in the next; *na*—not; *sukham*—happiness; *sanśhaya-ātmanah*—for the skeptical Ātman.

But persons who possess neither faith nor knowledge, and who are of a doubting nature, suffer a downfall. For the skeptical Ātman(s), there is no happiness either in this world or the next.

The Bhakti Rasāmṛit Sindhu classifies *sādhaks* into three classes based on the degree of faith and knowledge:

*śhāstre yuktau cha nipuṇāḥ sarvathā dṛidha-niśchayāḥ
praudha-śhraddho ‘ dhikārī yaḥ sa bhaktāvuttamo mataḥ
yaḥ śhāstrādiśhvaniṇuṇāḥ śhraddhāvān sa tu madhyamah
yo bhavet komala śhraddhaḥ sa kaniṣṭho nigadyate*
(1.2.17-19) [v39]

“The highest *sādhak* (spiritual aspirant) is one who possesses knowledge of the scriptures and is also endowed with firm faith. The medium class *sādhak* is one who does not have knowledge of the scriptures, but is endowed with faith toward Bhagavān and Guru. The lowest class *sādhak* is one, who neither has scriptural knowledge nor is endowed with faith.” For the third category, Shri Krishna says that such persons cannot attain peace either in this life or hereafter.

Even worldly activities require the exercise of faith. For example, if a woman goes to a restaurant and places an order for the meal, she has faith that the restaurant will not mix poison in her food. If, however, she is besieged with doubts and wants to subject every food item to a chemical test first, how will she ever enjoy and finish her meal? Similarly, a man goes to barber shop to get a shave, and sits on the chair while the barber moves the sharp edge of his knife over his throat. Now, if the man doubts the barber and suspects his having the intention of murder, he will not be able to sit still for the barber to be able to shave him. Hence, Shri Krishna says in this verse that for the doubting person there is no happiness either in this world or in the next.

योगसंन्यस्तकर्माणं ज्ञानसञ्छिन्नसंशयम् ।
आत्मवन्तं न कर्माणि निबध्नन्ति धनञ्जय ॥ 41 ॥

*yoga-sannyasta-karmāṇam jñāna-sañchhinna-saṁśayam
ātmavantam na karmāṇi nibadhnanti dhanāñjaya*

yoga-sannyasta-karmāṇam—those who renounce ritualistic *karm*, dedicating their body, mind, and Ātman to Bhagavān; *jñāna*—by knowledge; *sañchhinna*—dispelled; *saṁśayam*—doubts; *ātmavantam*—situated in knowledge of the self; *na*—not; *karmāṇi*—actions; *nibadhnanti*—bind; *dhanāñjaya*—Arjun, the conqueror of wealth.

O Arjun, actions do not bind those who have renounced *karm* in the fire of Yog, whose doubts have been dispelled by knowledge, and who are situated in knowledge of the self.

Karm is actions involved in prescribed rituals and social duties, *sanyās* means “to renounce,” while “yog” means “to unite with Bhagavān.” Here, Shri Krishna has used the word *yogasanyasta karmāṇam*, referring to “those who renounce all ritualistic *karm*, dedicating their body, mind, and Ātman to Bhagavān.” Such persons do their every action as a service to Bhagavān. Shri Krishna says that their work performed in devotion do not bind them.

Only those actions bind one in karma, which are performed to fulfill one’s self-interest. When work is done only for the pleasure of Bhagavān, such action becomes free from all karmic reaction. They are like multiplying numbers with 0 (zero). If we multiply 0 with 10, the result will be 0; if we multiply 0 with 1000, the result will remain 0; and if we multiply 0 with 1 million, the result will still be 0. Similarly, the works that enlightened Ātman(s) perform in the world do not bind them, because they are offered to Bhagavān in the fire of Yog, i.e. they are done for the pleasure of Bhagavān. Thus, although doing all kinds of works, the Saints remain unfettered from the bonds of karma.

तस्मादज्ञानसम्भूतं हृत्स्थं ज्ञानासिनात्मनः ।
छित्त्वैनं संशयं योगमातिष्ठेत्तिष्ठ भारत ॥ 42 ॥

*tasmād ajñāna-sambhūtam hrit-stham jñānāsinātmanah
chhittvainam sanśhayam yogam ātiśhthottishtha bhārata*

tasmāt—therefore; *ajñāna-sambhūtam*—born of ignorance; *hrit-stham*—situated in the heart; *jñāna*—of knowledge; *asīnā*—with the sword; *ātmanah*—of the self; *chhittvā*—cut asunder; *enam*—this; *sanśhayam*—doubt; *yogam*—in *karm yog*; *ātiśhtha*—take shelter; *uttishtha*—arise; *bhārata*—Arjun, descendant of Bharat.

Therefore, with the sword of knowledge, cut asunder the doubts that have arisen in your heart. O scion of Bharat, establish yourself in *karm yog*. Arise, stand up, and take action!

The use of the word heart does not imply the physical machine housed in the chest that pumps blood in the body. The Vedas state that one's physical brain resides in the head, but the subtle mind resides in the region of the heart. That is the reason why in love and hatred one experiences pain in the heart. In this sense, the heart is the source of compassion, love, sympathy, and all the good emotions. So when Shri Krishna mentions doubts that have arisen in the heart, he means doubts that have arisen in the mind, which is the subtle machine that resides in the region of the heart.

In the role of being the Spiritual Master of Arjun, the Bhagavān has imparted to his disciple the knowledge of how to gain insightful wisdom from the practice of *karm yog*. He now advises Arjun to utilize both wisdom and faith to cleave out the doubts from his mind. Then, he gives the call of action and asks Arjun to rise up and do his duty in the spirit of *karm yog*. The dual instructions to both refrain from action and to engage in action still create confusion in Arjun's mind, which he reveals in the opening of the next chapter.



Chapter 5

Karm Sanyās Yog ~ सन्यासयोगः

The Yog of Renunciation

This chapter compares the path of *karm sanyās* (renunciation of actions) with the path of *karm yog* (work in devotion). Shri Krishna explains that both lead to the same goal, and we can choose either of them. However, renunciation of actions cannot be done perfectly until the mind is sufficiently pure, and the purification of the mind is achieved by work in devotion. Hence, *karm yog* is the appropriate option for the majority of humankind. *Karm yogis* do their worldly duties with purified intellect, abandoning attachment to the fruits of their works, and dedicating them to Bhagavān. Thus, they remain unaffected by sin, just as a lotus leaf remains untouched by the water on which it floats. With the light of knowledge, they realize the body to be like a city of nine gates within which the Ātman resides. Thus, they neither consider themselves as the doers nor the enjoyers of their actions. They are endowed with equality of vision and see a Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog, and a dog-eater equally. Such truly learned people develop the flawless qualities of Bhagavān and become seated in the Absolute Truth. Worldly people strive to relish the pleasures that arise from the sense objects, without realizing that they are verily the source of misery. But the *karm yogis* do not delight in them; instead they relish the bliss of

Bhagavān within.

The chapter then goes on to describe the path of renunciation. The *karm sanyāsīs* perform austerities to control their senses, mind, and intellect. They shut out all thoughts of external enjoyment and become free from desire, fear, and anger. Then, consummating their austerities with devotion to Bhagavān, they attain abiding peace.

अर्जुन उवाच ।
संन्यासं कर्मणां कृष्ण पुनर्योगं च शंससि ।
यच्छ्रेय एतयोरेकं तन्मे ब्रूहि सुनिश्चितम् ॥ १ ॥

*arjuna uvācha
sanyāsam karmaṇām kṛiṣṇa punar yogam cha śhansasi
yach chhreya etayor ekam tan me brūhi su-niśchitam*

arjunah uvācha—Arjun said; *sanyāsam*—renunciation; *karmaṇām*—of actions; *kṛiṣṇa*—Shri Krishna; *punah*—again; *yogam*—about *karm yog*; *cha*—also; *śhansasi*—you praise; *yat*—which; *shreyah*—more beneficial; *etayoh*—of the two; *ekam*—one; *tat*—that; *me*—unto me; *brūhi*—please tell; *su-niśchitam*—conclusively.

Arjun said: O Shri Krishna, you praised *karm sanyās* (the path of renunciation of actions), and you also advised to do *karm yog* (work with devotion). Please tell me decisively which of the two is more beneficial?

This is the fifth of Arjun's sixteen questions. Shri Krishna praised both the renunciation of works and work with devotion. Arjun is confused by these apparently equivocal instructions and wishes to understand which of the two is more auspicious for him. Let us review the context of the question.

The first chapter described the nature of Arjun's grief and created the setting for Shri Krishna to begin to relate spiritual knowledge to him. In the second chapter, Shri Krishna revealed to Arjun the science of the self and explained that since the Ātman is immortal, nobody would die in the war, and hence it was foolish to lament. He then reminded Arjun that his *karm* (social duty) as a

warrior was to fight the war on the side of righteousness. But, since *karm* binds one to the fruits of actions, Shri Krishna encouraged Arjun to dedicate the fruits of his works to Bhagavān. His actions would then become *karm yog*, or “united with Bhagavān through works.”

In the third chapter, the Supreme Bhagavān explained that performing one’s duties is necessary because it helps to purify the mind. But he also said that a person who has already developed purity of mind is not obliged to perform any social duty (verse 3.13).

In the fourth chapter, the Bhagavān explained the various kinds of sacrifices (works that can be done for the pleasure of Bhagavān). He concluded by saying that sacrifice performed in knowledge is better than mechanical ritualistic sacrifice. He also said that all sacrifice ends in the knowledge of one’s relationship with Bhagavān. Finally, in verse 4.41, he introduced the principle of *karm sanyās*, in which ritualistic duties and social obligations are renounced and one engages in devotional service with the body, mind, and Ātman.

These instructions perplexed Arjun. He thought that *karm sanyās* (renunciation of works) and *karm yog* (work in devotion) have opposite natures, and it is not possible to perform both simultaneously. Hence, he raises his doubt before Shri Krishna.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
संन्यासः कर्मयोगश्च निःश्रेयसकरावुभौ ।
तयोरस्तु कर्मसंन्यासात्कर्मयोगो विशिष्यते ॥२॥

*śhrī bhagavān uvācha
sanyāsaḥ karma-yogaś cha niḥśhreyasa-karāvubhau
tayos tu karma-sanyāsāt karma-yogo viśhiṣhyate*

śhrī-bhagavān uvācha—Bhagavān Krishna said; *sanyāsaḥ*—renunciation; *karma-yogaḥ*—working in devotion; *cha*—and; *niḥśhreyasa-karau*—lead to the supreme goal; *ubhau*—both; *tayoh*—of the two; *tu*—but; *karma-sanyāsāt*—renunciation of actions; *karma-yogaḥ*—working in devotion; *viśhiṣhyate*—is superior.

Bhagavān Krishna said: Both the path of *karm sanyās* (renunciation of actions) and *karm yog* (working in devotion) lead to the supreme goal. But *karm yog* is superior to *karm sanyās*.

In this verse, Shri Krishna compares *karm sanyās* and *karm yog*. It is a very deep verse; so let's understand it one word at a time.

A *karm yogi* is one who does both, spiritual and social, duties. Social duties are done with the body while the mind is attached to Bhagavān. Jagadguru Kripaluji Maharaj states:

sochu mana yaha karm mama saba lakhata hari guru pyāre
(Sādhan Bhakti Tattva) [v1]

“Dear one! Think always that all your actions are being observed by Bhagavān and Guru.” This is the *sādhanā* of *karm yog*, by which we gradually elevate ourselves from bodily consciousness to spiritual consciousness.

Karm sanyās is for elevated Ātman(s), who have already risen beyond the bodily platform. A *karm sanyāsī* is one who discards social duties due to complete absorption in Bhagavān, and engages entirely in the performance of spiritual duties (devotional service to Bhagavān). This sentiment of *karm sanyās* was nicely expressed by Lakshman, when Bhagavān Ram asked him to fulfill his worldly duties:

more sabai eka tuma swāmī, dīnabandhu ura antarayāmī (Ramayana) [v2]

Lakshman said to Ram, “You are my Master, Father, Mother, Friend, and everything. I will only fulfill my duty toward you with all my might. So please do not tell me about any of my bodily duties. ”

Those who practice *karm sanyās* do not consider themselves to be the body, and as a result, they do not feel obligated to discharge their bodily duties. Such *karm sanyāsīs* dedicate their full time and energy to spirituality, while *karm yogis* have

to split their time between worldly and spiritual duties. The *karm sanyāsīs* can thus move much faster toward Bhagavān, while the *karm yogis* are encumbered with social duties.

However, in this verse, Shri Krishna extols *karm yog* beyond *karm sanyās* and recommends it to Arjun as the preferred path. This is because *karm sanyāsīs* are exposed to a danger. If, having renounced their duties they cannot absorb their mind in Bhagavān, they are left neither here nor there. In India, there are tens of thousands of such sadhus, who felt they were detached, and thus, renounced the world, but their mind was not yet attached to Bhagavān. Consequently, they could not experience the divine bliss of the spiritual path. And so, although wearing the saffron clothes of mendicants, they indulge in grossly sinful activities such as smoking opium. Only the ignorant mistake their sloth as detachment from the world.

On the other hand, *karm yogis* do both their worldly duties and spiritual practice. So if their mind turns away from spirituality, at least they have their work to fall back upon. *Karm yog* is thus the safer path for majority of the people, while *karm sanyās* is only to be pursued under the expert guidance of a Guru.

ज्ञेयः स नित्यसंन्यासी यो न द्वेष्टि न काङ्क्षति ।
निर्द्वन्द्वो हि महाबाहो सुखं बन्धात्प्रमुच्यते ॥३॥

*jñeyah sa nitya-sanyāsī yo na dveṣṭhi na kāṅkṣhati
nirdvandvo hi mahā-bāho sukham bandhāt pramuchyate*

jñeyah—should be considered; *sah*—that person; *nitya*—always; *sanyāsī*—practising renunciation; *yah*—who; *na*—never; *dveṣṭhi*—hate; *na*—nor; *kāṅkṣhati*—desire; *nirdvandvah*—free from all dualities; *hi*—certainly; *mahā-bāho*—mighty-armed one; *sukham*—easily; *bandhāt*—from bondage; *pramuchyate*—is liberated.

The *karm yogis*, who neither desire nor hate anything, should be considered always renounced. Free from all dualities, they are easily

liberated from the bonds of material energy.

Karm yogis continue to discharge their worldly duties while internally practicing detachment. Hence, they accept both positive and negative outcomes with equanimity, as the grace of Bhagavān. The Bhagavān has designed this world so beautifully that it makes us experience both happiness and distress for our gradual elevation. If we continue to lead our regular lives and tolerate whatever comes our way, while happily doing our duty, the world naturally pushes us toward gradual spiritual elevation.

There is a sweet story that illustrates this concept. There was once a piece of wood. It went to a sculptor and said, “Can you please make me beautiful?” The sculptor said, “I am ready to do that. But are you ready for it?” The wood replied, “Yes, I am also ready.” The sculptor took out his tools and began hammering and chiseling. The wood screamed, “What are you doing? Please stop! This is so painful.” The sculptor replied wisely, “If you wish to become beautiful, you will have to bear the pain.” “All right,” said the wood, “Go ahead and do it. But please be gentle and considerate.” The sculptor continued his work again. The wood kept screaming, “Enough for today; I can’t bear it any further. Please do it tomorrow.” The sculptor was undeterred in his task, and in a few days, the wood was transformed into a beautiful deity, fit to sit on the altar of the temple.

In the same way, our hearts are rough and unfinished because of endless lifetimes of attachment in the world. If we wish to become internally beautiful, we must be willing to tolerate pain and let the world do its job of purifying us. So *karm yogis* work with devotion, are equipoised in the results, and practice attaching their mind to Bhagavān.

साहूययोगौ पृथग्बाला: प्रवदन्ति न पण्डताः ।
एकमप्यास्थितः सम्यगुभयोर्विन्दते फलम् ॥४॥

*sāṅkhyā-yogau pṛithag bālāḥ pravadanti na paṇḍitāḥ
ekamapyaśthitāḥ samyag ubhayor vindate phalam*

sāṅkhyā—renunciation of actions; *yogau*—karm yog; *pṛithak*—different; *bālāḥ*—the ignorant; *pravadanti*—say; *na*—never; *paṇḍitāḥ*—the learned; *ekam*—in one; *api*—even; *āsthitāḥ*—being situated; *samyak*—completely; *ubhayoh*—of both; *vindate*—achieve; *phalam*—the result.

Only the ignorant speak of *sāṅkhyā* (renunciation of actions, or *karm sanyās*) and *karm yog* (work in devotion) as different. Those who are truly learned say that by applying ourselves to any one of these paths, we can achieve the results of both.

Here, Shri Krishna uses the word *sāṅkhyā* to refer to *karm sanyās*, or the renunciation of actions with the cultivation of knowledge. It is important to understand here that renunciation is of two kinds: *phalgu vairāgya* and *yukt vairāgya*. *Phalgu vairāgya* is where people look upon the world as cumbersome, and renounce it with the desire of getting rid of responsibilities and hardships. Such *phalgu vairāgya* is an escapist attitude and is unstable. The renunciation of such persons is motivated by the desire to run away from difficulties. When such persons encounter difficulties on the spiritual path, they become detached from there as well, and desire to run back to worldly life. *Yukt vairāgya* is where people see the whole world as the energy of Bhagavān. They do not see what they possess as belonging to them, and do not wish to enjoy it for themselves. Instead, they are motivated by the desire to serve Bhagavān with whatever he has given to them. *Yukt vairāgya* is stable and undeterred by difficulties.

The *karm yogis*, while conducting their daily duties externally, develop the sentiment of *yukt vairāgya*, or stable renunciation. They see themselves as the servants and Bhagavān as the enjoyer, and hence they become fixed in the consciousness of doing everything for his pleasure. Thus, their internal state becomes the same as that of the *karm sanyāsīs*, who are completely absorbed in divine consciousness. Externally, they may appear to be worldly people, but

internally they are no less than *sanyāsīs*.

The Puranas and Itihās relate the examples of great kings in Indian history, who, though externally discharging their kingly duties with diligence and living in royal opulence, were mentally completely absorbed in Brahman-consciousness. Prahlad, Dhruv, Ambarish, Prithu, Vibheeshan, Yudhishtir, etc were all such exemplary *karm yogis*. The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam states:

*gṛihītvā pīndriyair arthaṁ yo na dveṣṭī na hrishyati
viṣṇor māyām idam paśyan sa vai bhāgavatottamah* (11.2.48) [v3]

“One who accepts the objects of the senses, neither yearning for them nor running away from them, in the divine consciousness that everything is the energy of Bhagavān and is to be used in his service, such a person is the highest devotee.” Thus, the truly learned see no difference between *karm yog* and *karm sanyās*. By following one of them, the results of both are achieved.

यत्पाद्वृयैः प्राप्यते स्थानं तद्योगैरपि गम्यते ।
एकं साहृद्यं च योगं च यः पश्यति स पश्यति ॥५॥

*yat sāṅkhyaiḥ prāpyate sthānam tad yogaiḥ api gamyate
ekam sāṅkhyam cha yogam cha yah paśyati sa paśyati*

yat—what; *sāṅkhyaiḥ*—by means of *karm sanyās*; *prāpyate*—is attained; *sthānam*—place; *tat*—that; *yogaiḥ*—by working in devotion; *api*—also; *gamyate*—is attained; *ekam*—one; *sāṅkhyam*—renunciation of actions; *cha*—and; *yogam*—*karm yog*; *cha*—and; *yah*—who; *paśyati*—sees; *sah*—that person; *paśyati*—actually sees.

The supreme state that is attained by means of *karm sanyās* is also attained by working in devotion. Hence, those who see *karm sanyās* and *karm yog* to be identical, truly see things as they are.

In spiritual practice, the intention of the mind is what matters, not the external activities. One may be living in the holy land of Vrindaban, but if the mind contemplates on eating *rasgullās* in Kolkata, one will be deemed to be living in Kolkata. Conversely, if a person lives amidst the hubbub of Kolkata and keeps

the mind absorbed in the Divine Bhagavān of Vrindaban, he will get the benefit of residing there. All the Vedic scriptures state that our level of consciousness is determined by the state of our mind:

mana eva manuṣhyānāṁ kāraṇāṁ bandha mokṣhayoh (Pañchadaśī) [v4]

“The mind is the cause of bondage, and the mind is the cause of liberation.” Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj states the same principle:

*bandhan aur moksha kā, kāraṇ manahi bakhān
yāte kauniu bhakti karu, karu mana te haridhyān*
(*Bhakti Śatak* verse 19) [v5]

“Bondage and liberation depend upon the state of the mind. Whatever form of devotion you choose to do, keep the mind engaged in meditation upon Bhagavān.”

Those who do not possess this spiritual vision see the external distinction between a *karm sanyāsī* and a *karm yogi*, and declare the *karm sanyāsī* to be superior because of the external renunciation. But those who are learned see that both the *karm sanyāsī* and the *karm yogi* have absorbed their minds in Bhagavān, and so they are both identical in their internal consciousness.

संन्यासस्तु महाबाहो दुःखमाप्तुमयोगतः ।
योगयुक्तो मुनिर्ब्रह्म नचिरेणाधिगच्छति ॥ ६ ॥

*sanyāsas tu mahā-bāho duḥkham āptum ayogataḥ
yoga-yukto munir brahma na chireṇādhigachchhati*

sanyāsaḥ—renunciation; *tu*—but; *mahā-bāho*—mighty-armed one; *duḥkham*—distress; *āptum*—attains; *ayogataḥ*—without *karm yog*; *yoga-yuktah*—one who is adept in *karm yog*; *munih*—a sage; *brahma*—Brahman; *na chireṇa*—quickly; *adhigachchhati*—goes.

Perfect renunciation (*karm sanyās*) is difficult to attain without performing work in devotion (*karm yog*), O mighty-armed Arjun, but the sage who is adept in *karm yog* quickly attains the Supreme.

Living in a cave in the Himalayas, a yogi may feel that he has renounced, but

the test of that renunciation comes when he returns to the city. For instance, one sadhu practiced austerities for twelve years in the mountains of Garhwal. He came down to Haridwar to participate in the holy fair called *Kumbh Melā*. In the hustle and bustle of the fair, someone accidentally placed his shoe on the sadhu's bare foot. The sadhu was infuriated, and screamed, "Are you blind? Can you not see where you are going?" Later he repented for permitting anger to overcome him, and lamented, "Twelve years of austerities in the mountains got washed away by living one day in the city!" The world is the arena where our renunciation gets tested.

In this verse, Shri Krishna says that while performing one's duties in the world, a person should slowly learn to rise above anger, greed, and desire. Instead, if one first gives up duties, it is very difficult to purify the mind; and without a pure mind, true detachment remains a distant dream.

We are all propelled to work by our nature. Arjun was a warrior, and if he had artificially renounced his duty, to retire to the forest, his nature would make him work there as well. He would probably gather a few tribesmen and declare himself their king. Instead, it would be more fruitful to use his natural inclinations and talents in the service of Bhagavān. So the Bhagavān instructs him, "Continue to fight, but make one change. At first, you came to this battleground on the presumption of saving a kingdom. Now, instead, simply dedicate your service unselfishly to Bhagavān. In this way, you will naturally purify the mind and achieve true renunciation from within."

A tender and unripe fruit clings fast to the tree that bears and nourishes it. But the same fruit, when fully ripe, severs its connection from its sustainer. Similarly from the material existence, the *karm yogi* gets the experience that matures into wisdom. Just as sound sleep is only possible for those who have worked hard, deep meditation comes to those who have purified their minds

through *karm yog*.

योगयुक्तो विशुद्धात्मा विजितात्मा जितेन्द्रियः ।
सर्वभूतात्मभूतात्मा कुर्वन्नपि न लिप्यते ॥ ७ ॥

*yoga-yukto viśuddha-Ātman vijitātman jitendriyah
sarva-bhūta-ātma-bhūta-Ātman kurvann api na lipyate*

yoga-yuktah—united in consciousness with Bhagavān; *viśuddha-Ātman*—one with purified intellect; *vijita-Ātman*—one who has conquered the mind; *jita-indriyah*—having conquered the senses; *sarva-bhūta-ātma-bhūta-Ātman*—one who sees the Ātman of all Ātman(s) in every living being; *kurvan*—performing; *api*—although; *na*—never; *lipyate*—entangled.

The *karm yogis*, who are of purified intellect, and who control the mind and senses, see the Ātman of all Ātman(s) in every living being. Though performing all kinds of actions, they are never entangled.

The word *Ātman* has been used in multiple ways in the Vedic literature: for Bhagavān, for the Ātman, for the mind, and for the intellect. This verse typifies all these uses. Shri Krishna describes the *karm yogi* who is *yog yukt* (united in consciousness with Bhagavān). He says that such a noble Ātman is: 1) *viśuddha-Ātman*, of purified intellect, 2) *vijitātman*, who has conquered the mind, and 3) *jitendriya*, one who has controlled the senses.

Such *karm yogis*, with purified intellect, see Bhagavān situated in all living beings, and behave respectfully toward everyone without attachment. Since their actions are not motivated by the desire for self-enjoyment, their knowledge is progressively clarified. As their desires are eliminated, the senses, mind, and intellect that were being propelled for sense pleasures come under control. These instruments are now available for the service of the Bhagavān. Devotional service leads to realized knowledge from within. In this way, *karm yog* naturally brings about these successive stages of enlightenment, and hence is no different from *karm sanyās*.

नैव किञ्चित्करोमीति युक्तो मन्येत तत्त्ववित् ।
पश्यञ्शृणवन्स्पृशज्जघ्नश्ननाच्छन्स्वपञ्चवसन् ॥८॥

प्रलपन्विसृजनगृह्णनुन्मिषन्निमिषन्नपि ।
इन्द्रियाणीन्द्रियार्थेषु वर्तन्त इति धारयन् ॥९॥

*naiva kiñchit karomīti yukto manyeta tattva-vit
paśhyāñ śṛiṇvan spriśhañjighrann aśhnangachchhan svapañśhvasan*

*pralapan visrijan grihṇann unmishan nimišhan api
indriyāñindriyārtheṣhu vartanta iti dhārayan*

*na—not; eva—certainly; kiñchit—anything; karomi—I do; iti—thus; yuktaḥ—steadfast in *karm yog*; manyeta—thinks; tattva-vit—one who knows the truth; paśhyan—seeing; śṛiṇvan—hearing; spriśhan—touching; jighran—smelling; aśhnān—eating; gachchhan—moving; svapan—sleeping; śhvasan—breathing; pralapan—talking; visrijan—giving up; grihṇan—accepting; unmishan—opening (the eyes); nimišhan—closing (the eyes); api—although; indriyāñi—the senses; indriya-artheṣhu—in sense-objects; vartante—moving; iti—thus; dhārayan—convinced.*

Those steadfast in this *karm yog*, always think, “I am not the doer,” even while engaged in seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, moving, sleeping, breathing, speaking, excreting, and grasping. With the light of divine knowledge, they see that it is only the material senses that are moving amongst their objects.

Whenever we accomplish anything substantial, we are overcome with the pride that we have done something great. The pride of being the doer of one's actions is a stumbling block to rising beyond material consciousness. However, the Brahman-conscious *karm yogis* overcome this obstacle with ease. With purified intellect, they see themselves as separate from the body, and hence they do not attribute their bodily actions to themselves. The body is made from the material energy of Bhagavān, and thus they attribute all their works as done by the power of Bhagavān. Since they have surrendered to the will of Bhagavān, they depend upon him to inspire their mind and intellect in accordance with his divine will. So, they remain situated in the understanding that Bhagavān is the doer of everything.

The sage Vasishth advised Bhagavān Ram:

kartā bahirkartāntarloke vihara rāghava (Yog Vāsiṣṭh) [v6]

“O Ram, externally engage in actions diligently, but internally practice to see yourself as the non-doer and Bhagavān as the prime mover of all your activities.” In this divine consciousness, the karm yogis see themselves as mere instruments in the hands of Bhagavān. *Shri Krishna explains in the following verse the consequences of work done in this consciousness.*

**ब्रह्मण्याधाय कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा करोति यः ।
लिप्यते न स पापेन पद्मपत्रमिवाभसा ॥ १० ॥**

*brahmaṇyādhāya karmāṇi saṅgam tyaktvā karoti yah
lipyate na sa pāpena padma-patram ivāmbhasā*

brahmaṇi—to Bhagavān; *ādhāya*—dedicating; *karmāṇi*—all actions; *saṅgam*—attachment; *tyaktvā*—abandoning; *karoti*—performs; *yah*—who; *lipyate*—is affected; *na*—never; *sah*—that person; *pāpena*—by sin; *padma-patram*—a lotus leaf; *iva*—like; *ambhasā*—by water.

Those who dedicate their actions to Bhagavān, abandoning all attachment, remain untouched by sin, just as a lotus leaf is untouched by water.

Both Hindu and Buddhist scriptures abound with analogies of the lotus flower. The word is used as a respectful appellation while describing various parts of Bhagavān’s divine body. Hence *charan-kamal* means “lotus-like feet,” *kamalekṣhaṇa* means “lotus-like eyes,” *kar-kamal* means “lotus-like hands,” etc.

Another word for the lotus flower is *pañkaj*, which means “born from mud.” The lotus flower grows from the mud found at the bottom of the lake, yet it rises above the water and blossoms toward the sun. Thus, the lotus flower is often used in Sanskrit literature as an example of something that is born amidst the dirt, and rises above it while retaining its beautiful purity.

Further, the lotus plant has large leaves that float atop the water surface of the lake. Lotus leaves are used in Indian villages for plates, as they are waterproof,

and liquid poured on them does not soak through, but runs off. The beauty of the lotus leaf is that, although the lotus owes its birth, growth, and sustenance to the water, the leaf does not permit itself to be wetted. Water poured on the lotus leaf runs off the side, due to the small hair growing on its surface.

With the help of the beautiful analogy of the lotus leaf, Shri Krishna says that just as it floats atop the surface of the lake, but does not allow itself to be wetted by the water, similarly, the *karm yogis* remain untouched by sin, although performing all kinds of works, because they perform their works in divine consciousness.

कायेन मनसा बुद्ध्या केवलैरिन्द्रियैरपि ।
योगिनः कर्म कुर्वन्ति सङ्गं त्यक्त्वात्मशुद्धये ॥ 11 ॥

*kāyena manasā buddhyā kevalair indriyair api
yoginah karma kurvanti saṅgam tyaktvātma-śuddhaye*

kāyena—with the body; *manasā*—with the mind; *buddhyā*—with the intellect; *kevalaiḥ*—only; *indriyaiḥ*—with the senses; *api*—even; *yoginah*—the yogis; *karma*—actions; *kurvanti*—perform; *saṅgam*—attachment; *tyaktvā*—giving up; *ātma*—of the self; *śuddhaye*—for the purification.

The yogis, while giving up attachment, perform actions with their body, senses, mind, and intellect, only for the purpose of self-purification.

The yogis understand that pursuing material desires in the pursuit of happiness is as futile as chasing the mirage in the desert. Realizing this, they renounce selfish desires, and perform all their actions for the pleasure of Bhagavān, who alone is the *bhoktāram yajña tapasām* (Supreme enjoyer of all activities). However, in this verse, Shri Krishna brings a new twist to the *samarpan* (dedication of works to Bhagavān). He says the enlightened yogis perform their works for the purpose of purification. How then do the works get dedicated to Bhagavān?

The fact is that Bhagavān needs nothing from us. He is the Supreme Bhagavān of everything that exists and is perfect and complete in himself. What can a tiny Ātman offer to the Almighty Bhagavān, that Bhagavān does not already

possess? Hence, it is customary while making an offering to Bhagavān to say: *tvadiyam vastu govinda tubhyameva samarpitam* “O Bhagavān, I am offering your item back to you.” Expressing a similar sentiment, Saint Yamunacharya states:

*mama nātha yad asti yo 'smyaham sakalam taddhī tavaiva mādhava
niyata-svam iti prabuddha-dhāir atha vā kim nu samarpayāmi te*
(*Śrī Stotra Ratna*, 50) [v7]

“O Bhagavān Vishnu, husband of the goddess of Fortune, when I was in ignorance, I thought I would give you many things. But now when I have gained knowledge, I realize that everything I own is already yours. What then can I offer to you?”

However, there is one activity that is in our hands and not in Bhagavān’s hands; that is the purification of our own heart (mind and intellect). When we purify our heart and engage it in devotion to Bhagavān, it pleases him more than anything else. Realizing this, the great yogis make purification of their heart as the foremost goal, not out of selfishness, rather for the pleasure of Bhagavān.

Thus, the yogis understand that the biggest thing they can give to Bhagavān is the purity of their own hearts and they work to achieve it. In the Ramayana, there is a sweet illustration of this principle. Bhagavān Ram found Sugreev to be somewhat frightened before the battle of Lanka so he consoled him in the following manner:

*piśhāchān dānavān yakṣhān prithivyām chaiva rākṣhasān
aṅgugreṇa tānhanyā michchhan harī gaṇeśvaraḥ* (*Vālmīki Ramayana*) [v8]

Bhagavān Ram said, “If I, the Supreme Bhagavān, merely bend the little finger of my left hand, what to speak of Ravan and Kumbhakarn, all the Demons in the world will die.” Sugreev responded, “If that is the case, my Bhagavān, then in order to kill Ravan, what is the need for collecting this army?” The Bhagavān replied, “That is merely to give you all the opportunity to engage in

devotional service for your own purification. However, do not assume that I need your help in annihilating these Demons.”

Our only permanent asset is the purity that we achieve. It goes with us into the next life, while all material assets get left behind. Hence in the final analysis, the success and failure of our life is determined by the extent to which we manage to achieve purity of heart. With this in view, elevated yogis welcome adverse circumstances, because they see them as opportunities for purifying the heart. Saint Tulsidas states:

*nindak niyare rākhiye āṅgan kuṭi chhabāya
nita sābun pānī binā nirmala kare subhāya [v9]*

“If you are desirous of quickly cleansing your heart, cultivate the company of a critic. When you tolerate his acrimonious words, your heart will be cleansed without water and soap.” Thus, when purification of the heart is made the prime motive of actions, adversarial circumstances are then welcomed as god-sent opportunities for further progress, and one remains in equanimity in both success and failure. As we work for the pleasure of Bhagavān, the heart gets purified; and as the heart gets purified, we naturally offer the results of all our actions to the Supreme Bhagavān.

**युक्तः कर्मफलं त्यक्त्वा शान्तिमाप्नोति नैष्ठिकीम् ।
अयुक्तः कामकारेण फले सक्तो निबध्यते ॥ १२ ॥**

*yuktaḥ karma-phalam tyaktvā śhāntim āpnoti naishṭhikīm
ayuktaḥ kāma-kāreṇa phale sakto nibadhyate*

yuktaḥ—one who is united in consciousness with Bhagavān; *karma-phalam*—the results of all activities; *tyaktvā*—giving up; *śhāntim*—peace; *āpnoti*—attains; *naishṭhikīm*—everlasting; *ayuktaḥ*—one who is not united with Bhagavān in consciousness; *kāma-kāreṇa*—impelled by desires; *phale*—in the result; *saktaḥ*—attached; *nibadhyate*—becomes entangled.

Offering the results of all activities to Bhagavān, the *karm yogis* attain everlasting peace. Whereas those who, being impelled by their desires, work with a selfish motive become entangled because they are attached to

the fruits of their actions.

How is it to be understood that performing the same actions some people are bound to material existence and others are released from material bondage? Shri Krishna gives the answer in this verse. Those who are unattached and unmotivated by material rewards are never bound by karma. But those craving reward and obsessed with the desire to enjoy material pleasures become entangled in the reactions of work.

The word *yukt* means “united in consciousness with Bhagavān.” It can also mean “not wanting any reward other than purification of the heart.” Persons who are *yukt* relinquish desire for the rewards of their actions, and instead engage in works for the purpose of self-purification. Therefore, they soon attain divine consciousness and eternal beatitude.

On the other hand, *ayukt* means “not united with Bhagavān in consciousness.” It can also denote “desiring mundane rewards not beneficial to the Ātman.” Such persons, incited by cravings, lustfully desire the rewards of actions. The reactions of work performed in this consciousness bind these *ayukt* persons to the *samsara* or the cycle of life and death.

सर्वकर्माणि मनसा संन्यस्यास्ते सुखं वशी ।
नवद्वारे पुरे देही नैव कुर्वन्न कारयन् ॥ 13 ॥

*sarva-karmāṇi manasā sannyasyāste sukham vaśī
nava-dvāre pure dehī naiva kurvan na kārayan*

sarva—all; *karmāṇi*—activities; *manasā*—by the mind; *sannyasya*—having renounced; *āste*—remains; *sukham*—happily; *vaśī*—the self-controlled; *nava-dvāre*—of nine gates; *pure*—in the city; *dehī*—the embodied being; *na*—never; *eva*—certainly; *kurvan*—doing anything; *na*—not; *kārayan*—causing to be done.

The embodied beings who are self-controlled and detached reside happily in the city of nine gates, free from thinking they are the doers or the cause of anything.

Shri Krishna compares the body with its openings to a city of nine gates. The Ātman is like the king of the city, whose administration is carried out by the ministry of the ego, intellect, mind, senses, and life-energy. The reign over the body continues until time, in the form of death, snatches away the corporeal frame. However, even while the reign continues, the enlightened yogis do not see themselves as the body nor do they consider themselves as the Bhagavān of the body. Rather, they hold the body and all activities performed by it as belonging to Bhagavān. Renouncing all actions through the mind, such enlightened Ātman(s) remain happily situated in their body. This is also called *sākṣhī bhāv*, or the attitude of being the detached observer of all that is happening around.

The analogy in this verse is also given in the Śvetāśhvatar Upaniṣad:

*navadvāre pure deḥī hango lelāyate bahiḥ
vaśhī sarvasya lokasya sthāvarasya charasya cha (3.18) [v10]*

“The body consists of nine gates—two ears, one mouth, two nostrils, two eyes, anus, and genitals. In material consciousness, the Ātman residing with the body identifies itself with this city of nine gates. Within this body also sits the Supreme Bhagavān, who is the controller of all living beings in the world. When the Ātman establishes its connection with the Bhagavān, it becomes free like him, even while residing in the body.”

In the preceding verse, Shri Krishna declared that the embodied Ātman is neither the doer nor the cause of anything. Then the question arises whether Bhagavān is the actual cause of actions in the world? This is answered in the next verse.

न कर्तृत्वं न कर्माणि लोकस्य सृजति प्रभुः ।
न कर्मफलसंयोगं स्वभावस्तु प्रवर्तते ॥ 14 ॥

*na kartritvam na karmāṇi lokasya srijati prabhuḥ
na karma-phala-saṁyogaṁ svabhāvas tu pravartate*

na—neither; *kartritvam*—sense of doership; *na*—nor; *karmāṇi*—actions; *lokasya*—of the people;

srijati—creates; *prabhuḥ*—Bhagavān; *na*—nor; *karma-phala*—fruits of actions; *sanyogam*—connection; *svabhāvah*—one's nature; *tu*—but; *pravartate*—is enacted.

Neither the sense of doership nor the nature of actions comes from Bhagavān; nor does he create the fruits of actions. All this is enacted by the modes of material nature (*gunas*).

In this verse, the word *Prabhu* has been used for Bhagavān, to indicate that he is the Bhagavān of the world. He is also omnipotent and controls the entire universe. Yet, though he conducts the activities of the universe, he remains the non-doer. He is neither the director of our actions, nor does he decree whether we will perform a particular virtuous or evil deed. Had he been our director, there would be no need for elaborate instructions on good and bad actions. All the scriptures would have ended in three short sentences: “O Ātman(s), I am the director of all your works. So you do not need to understand what good or bad action is. I will make you do as I wish.”

Similarly, Bhagavān is not responsible for our getting stuck with the sense of doership. If he had deliberately created the pride of doing in us, then again we could have blamed him for our misdoings. But the fact is that the Ātman brings this pride onto itself out of ignorance. If the Ātman chooses to do away with the ignorance, then Bhagavān helps dispel it with his grace.

Thus, renunciation of the sense of doership is the responsibility of the Ātman. The body is constituted of the three modes of material nature, and all actions are performed by the modes. But out of ignorance, the Ātman identifies with the body and becomes implicated as the doer of actions, which are in fact done by material nature (verse 3.27).

नादते कस्यचित्पापं न चैव सुकृतं विभुः ।
अज्ञानेनावृतं ज्ञानं तेन मुहूर्नि जन्तवः ॥ 15 ॥

nādatte kasyachit pāpaṁ na chaiva sukṛitam vibhuḥ

ajñānenāvṛitam jñānam tena muhyanti jantavah

na—not; *ādatte*—accepts; *kasyachit*—anyone's; *pāpam*—sin; *na*—not; *cha*—and; *eva*—certainly; *su-kṛitam*—virtuous deeds; *vibhuḥ*—the omnipresent Bhagavān; *ajñānena*—by ignorance; *āvṛitam*—covered; *jñānam*—knowledge; *tena*—by that; *muhyanti*—are deluded; *jantavah*—the living entities.

The omnipresent Bhagavān does not involve himself in the sinful or virtuous deeds of anyone. The living entities are deluded because their inner knowledge is covered by ignorance.

Bhagavān is not responsible either for anyone's virtuous deeds or sinful actions. Bhagavān's work in this regard is threefold: 1) He provides the Ātman with the power to act. 2) Once we have performed actions with the power supplied to us, he notes our actions. 3) He gives us the results of our karmas.

The individual Ātman has the freedom to perform good or bad actions by the exercise of its own free will. That free will is the basis of the play of creation and it accounts for the varieties of consciousness amongst the Ātman(s) in existence. Bhagavān's work is like that of an umpire in a cricket match. He keeps giving the results, “Four runs!” “Six runs!” “He's out!” The umpire cannot be blamed for the decision, for it was based upon the way the player performed.

One may ask why Bhagavān granted free will to the Ātman. It is because the Ātman is a tiny part of Bhagavān and it possesses his qualities to a minuscule extent. Bhagavān is *abhijña swarāṭ* (supremely independent), and so the Ātman also possesses a tiny amount of independence to utilize its senses, mind, and intellect in the manner it wishes.

Also, without free will there can be no love. A machine cannot love since it has no independence to choose. Only a personality that has the ability to choose possesses the option to love. Since Bhagavān has created us to love him, he has endowed us with free will. The exercise of our own free will results in good and bad deeds, and we must not blame Bhagavān for them.

In ignorance, some Ātman(s) do not even realize that they possess the freedom to choose their actions and hold Bhagavān responsible for their mistakes. Others realize they possess a free will, but they harbor the pride of doership, in the egoistic notion of being the body. This is again a sign of ignorance. *Shri Krishna explains next how such ignorance can be dispelled.*

ज्ञानेन तु तदज्ञानं येषां नाशितमात्मनः ।
तेषामादित्यवज्ज्ञानं प्रकाशयति तत्परम् ॥ 16 ॥

*jñānenena tu tad ajñānam yeshām nāśhitam ātmanah
teṣhām āditya-vat jñānam prakāshayati tat param*

jñānenena—by divine knowledge; *tu*—but; *tat*—that; *ajñānam*—ignorance; *yeshām*—whose; *nāśhitam*—has been destroyed; *ātmanah*—of the self; *teṣhām*—their; *āditya-vat*—like the sun; *jñānam*—knowledge; *prakāshayati*—illuminates; *tat*—that; *param*—Supreme Entity.

But for those, in whom this ignorance of the self is destroyed by divine knowledge, that knowledge reveals the Supreme Entity, just as the sun illuminates everything in daytime.

The sun's power in removing the darkness of night is incomparable. The Ramayana states:

*rākāpati ṣhorasa uahiṇ tārāgana samudāi
sakala girinha dava lāia binu rabi rāti na jāi [v11]*

“Despite the combined light of the full moon and all the visible stars in a cloudless sky, the night does not go. But the moment the sun rises, the night makes a hasty exit.” The light of the sun is such that the darkness cannot remain before it. The light of Bhagavān’s knowledge has a similar effect in dispelling the darkness of ignorance.

Darkness is responsible for creating illusions. In the darkness of the cinema hall, the light falling on the screen creates the illusion of reality, and people get absorbed in watching it. However, when the main lights in the cinema hall are switched on, the illusion is dispelled and people wake up from their reverie to

realize that they were only watching a movie. Similarly, in the darkness of ignorance, we identify ourselves with the body, and consider ourselves to be the doers and enjoyers of our actions. When the light of Bhagavān's knowledge begins shining brightly, the illusion beats a hasty retreat, and the Ātman wakes up to its true spiritual identity, even while it lives in the city of nine gates. The Ātman had fallen into illusion because Bhagavān's material energy (*avidyā śakti*) had covered it in darkness. The illusion is dispelled when Bhagavān's spiritual energy (*vidyā śakti*) illuminates it with the light of knowledge.

तद्बुद्धयस्तदात्मानस्तन्निष्ठास्तपरायणाः ।
गच्छन्त्यपुनरावृत्तिं ज्ञाननिर्दूतकल्मषाः ॥ १७ ॥

*tad-buddhayas tad-Ātmannas tan-niṣṭhāḥ tat-parāyaṇāḥ
gachchhantyapunar-āvṛittim jñāna-nirdhūta-kalmaṣhāḥ*

tat-buddhayah—those whose intellect is directed toward Bhagavān; *tat-Ātmannaḥ*—those whose heart (mind and intellect) is solely absorbed in Bhagavān; *tat-niṣṭhāḥ*—those whose intellect has firm faith in Bhagavān; *tat-parāyaṇāḥ*—those who strive after Bhagavān as the supreme goal and refuge; *gachchhanti*—go; *apunah-āvṛittim*—not returning; *jñāna*—by knowledge; *nirdhūta*—dispelled; *kalmaṣhāḥ*—sins.

Those whose intellect is fixed in Bhagavān, who are wholly absorbed in Bhagavān, with firm faith in him as the supreme goal, such persons quickly reach the state from which there is no return, their sins having been dispelled by the light of knowledge.

Just as ignorance causes one to suffer in *samsara*, or the perpetual cycle of life and death, knowledge has the power to release one from material bondage. Such knowledge is always accompanied with devotion to Bhagavān. This verse makes very emphatic use of words denoting complete Brahman-consciousness.

Tadbuddhayah means the intellect is directed toward Bhagavān.

Tadātmanah means the heart (mind and intellect) is solely absorbed in Bhagavān.

Tannishthāḥ means the intellect has firm faith in Bhagavān.

Tatparāyanah means striving after Bhagavān as the supreme goal and refuge.

Thus, the sign of true knowledge is that it leads to love for Bhagavān. *Imbued with such love, devotees see him everywhere.*

**विद्याविनयसम्पन्ने ब्राह्मणे गवि हस्तिनि ।
शुनि चैव श्वपाके च पण्डिताः समदर्शिनः ॥ 18 ॥**

*vidyā-vinaya-sampanne brāhmaṇe gavi hastini
śhuni chaiva śhva-pāke cha paṇḍitāḥ sama-darśhināḥ*

vidyā—divine knowledge; *vinaya*—humbleness; *sampanne*—equipped with; *brāhmaṇe*—a Brahmin; *gavi*—a cow; *hastini*—an elephant; *śhuni*—a dog; *cha*—and; *eva*—certainly; *śhva-pāke*—a dog-eater; *cha*—and; *paṇḍitāḥ*—the learned; *sama-darśhināḥ*—see with equal vision.

The truly learned, with the eyes of divine knowledge, see with equal vision a Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog, and a dog-eater.

When we perceive things through the perspective of knowledge, it is called *prajñā chakshu*, which means “with the eyes of knowledge.” Shri Krishna uses the words *vidyā sampanne* to the same effect, but he also adds *vinaya*, meaning “humblessness.” The sign of divine knowledge is that it is accompanied by a sense of humility, while shallow bookish knowledge is accompanied with the pride of scholarship.

Shri Krishna reveals in this verse how divine knowledge bestows a vision so different from physical sight. Endowed with knowledge, devotees see all living beings as Ātman(s) who are fragments of Bhagavān, and are therefore divine in nature. The examples given by Shri Krishna are of diametrically contrasting species and life forms. A Vedic Brahmin who conducts worship ceremonies is respected, while a dog-eater is usually looked down upon as an outcaste; a cow is milked for human consumption, but not a dog; an elephant is used for ceremonial parades, while neither the cow or the dog are. From the physical

perspective, these species are sharp contrasts in the spectrum of life on our planet. However, a truly learned person endowed with spiritual knowledge sees them all as eternal Ātman(s), and hence views them with an equal eye.

The Vedas do not support the view that the Brahmins (priestly class) are of higher caste, while the Shudras (labor class) are of lower caste. The perspective of knowledge is that even though the *Brahmins* conduct worship ceremonies, the *Kṣatriyas* administer society, the *Vaiśyas* conduct business, and the *Śūdras* engage in labor, yet they are all eternal Ātman(s), who are tiny parts of Bhagavān, and hence alike.

इहैव तैर्जितः सर्गो येषां साम्ये स्थितं मनः ।
निर्दोषं हि समं ब्रह्म तस्माद् ब्रह्मणि ते स्थिताः ॥ 19 ॥

*ihaiva tair jitah sargo yeṣhām sāmye sthitam manah
nirdoṣham hi samam brahma tasmād brahmaṇi te sthitāḥ*

iha eva—in this very life; *taiḥ*—by them; *jitah*—conquer; *sargah*—the creation; *yeṣhām*—whose; *sāmye*—in equanimity; *sthitam*—situated; *manah*—mind; *nirdoṣham*—flawless; *hi*—certainly; *samam*—in equality; *brahma*—Bhagavān; *tasmāt*—therefore; *brahmaṇi*—in the Absolute Truth; *te*—they; *sthitāḥ*—are seated.

Those whose minds are established in equality of vision conquer the cycle of birth and death in this very life. They possess the flawless qualities of Bhagavān, and are therefore seated in the Absolute Truth.

Sri Krishna uses the word *sāmye* to mean one possessed of an equal vision toward all living beings, as explained in the previous verse. Further, equality in vision also means to rise beyond likes and dislikes, happiness and misery, pleasure and pain. Shri Krishna says that those who are able to do so transcend the *samsara* of repeated birth and death.

So long as we think of ourselves as the body, we cannot attain this equality of vision because we will experience continued desires and aversions for bodily pleasures and discomforts. Saints rise above bodily consciousness and absorb

their minds in Bhagavān, giving up all worldly attachments. The Ramayana states:

sevahiñ lakhanu sīya raghubīrahi, jimi abibekī puruṣha sarīrahi. [v12]

“Lakshman served Bhagavān Ram and Sita, just as an ignorant person serves his body.”

When one’s mind is situated in this divine consciousness, attachment to bodily pleasures and pains get transcended, and one reaches a state of equanimity. This equipoise that comes through the sacrifice of selfish bodily desires makes one Bhagavān-like in demeanor. The Mahābhārat states: *yo na kāMāyāte kiñchit brahma bhūyāya kalpate* [v13] “One who gives up desires becomes like Bhagavān.”

न प्रहृष्टेत्रियं प्राप्य नोद्विजेत्प्राप्य चाप्रियम् ।
स्थिरबुद्धिरसम्मूढो ब्रह्मविद् ब्रह्मणि स्थितः ॥ २० ॥

*na prahṛiṣhyet priyam prāpya nodvijet prāpya chāpriyam
sthira-buddhir asammūḍho brahma-vid brahmaṇi sthitah*

na—neither; *prahṛiṣhyet*—rejoice; *priyam*—the pleasant; *prāpya*—obtaining; *na*—nor; *udvijet*—become disturbed; *prāpya*—attaining; *cha*—also; *apriyam*—the unpleasant; *sthira-buddhiḥ*—steady intellect; *asammūḍhah*—firmly situated; *brahma-vit*—having a firm understanding of divine knowledge; *brahmaṇi*—established in Bhagavān; *sthitah*—situated.

Established in Bhagavān, having a firm understanding of divine knowledge and not hampered by delusion, they neither rejoice in getting something pleasant nor grieve on experiencing the unpleasant.

The section of this verse—neither rejoicing in pleasure, nor lamenting the unpleasant—is the highest ideal of the *Vipassanā* tradition of meditation in Buddhism. Rigorous training is undertaken to reach this state of clarity and precision, ultimately leading to equanimity, and destruction of self-will. However, the same state is naturally reached in devotion to Bhagavān, when we surrender our will to the divine. In accordance with verse 5.17, when we

unite our will to the will of Bhagavān, then both pleasure and pain are serenely accepted as his grace.

A beautiful story illustrates this attitude. A wild horse once ran into a farm. People congratulated the farmer on his good luck. He said, “Good luck, bad luck, who knows? It is all the will of Bhagavān.” A few days later, the horse ran away, back into the forest. His neighbors commiserated with his bad luck. He said, “Bad luck, good luck, who knows? It is all Bhagavān’s will.” A few more days went by, and the horse returned with twenty more wild horses. Again people congratulated the farmer on his stroke of good luck. He wisely reflected, “What is good and bad luck? This is all Bhagavān’s will.” A few days later, the farmer’s son broke his leg while riding one of the horses. The neighbors came to express grief. The wise farmer responded, “Pleasant and unpleasant, it is only Bhagavān’s will.” Some more days went by, and the king’s soldiers came to recruit all young men into the army for the war that had just broken out. All the young men in the neighborhood were taken into the army, but the farmer’s son was left behind because his leg was broken.

Divine knowledge brings the understanding that our self-interest lies in giving pleasure to Bhagavān. This leads to surrender to the will of Bhagavān, and when the self-will gets merged in the divine will, one develops the equanimity to serenely accept both pleasure and pain as his grace. This is the symptom of a person situated in transcendence.

बाह्यस्पर्शेष्वसक्तात्मा विन्दत्यात्मनि यत्सुखम् ।
स ब्रह्मयोगयुक्तात्मा सुखमक्षयमश्नुते ॥२१॥

*bāhya-sparśheṣhvaskta-Ātman vindatyātmani yat sukham
sa brahma-yoga-yukta-Ātman sukham akṣhayam aśhnute*

bāhya-sparśheṣhu—external sense pleasure; *asakta-Ātman*—those who are unattached; *vindati*—find; *ātmani*—in the self; *yat*—which; *sukham*—bliss; *sah*—that person; *brahma-yoga yukta-Ātman*—thoes who are united with Bhagavān through yog; *sukham*—happiness; *akṣhayam*—unlimited; *aśhnute*—experiences.

Those who are not attached to external sense pleasures realize divine bliss in the self. Being united with Bhagavān through Yog, they experience unending happiness.

The Vedic scriptures repeatedly describe Bhagavān as an ocean of unlimited divine bliss:

ānando brahmeti vyajānāt (*Taittirīya Upaniṣhad* 3.6) [v14]

“Know Bhagavān to be bliss.”

kevalānubhavānanda svarūpaḥ parameśvaraḥ (*Bhāgavatam* 7.6.23) [v15]

“Bhagavān’s form is made of pure bliss.”

ānanda mātra kara pāda mukhodarādi (*Padma Purāṇ*) [v16]

“Bhagavān’s hands, feet, face, stomach, etc. are all made of bliss.”

jo ānand sindhu sukhārāśī (*Ramayana*) [v17]

“Bhagavān is an ocean of bliss and happiness.”

All these mantras and verses from the scriptures emphasize that divine bliss is the nature of Bhagavān’s personality. The yogi, who absorbs the senses, mind and intellect in Bhagavān, begins to experience the infinite bliss of Bhagavān who is seated within.

ये हि संस्पर्शजा भोगा दुःखयोनय एव ते ।
आद्यन्तवन्तः कौन्तेय न तेषु रमते बुधः ॥२२॥

*ye hi sansparsha-jā bhogā duḥkha-yonaya eva te
ādyantavantah kaunteya na teṣu ramate budhaḥ*

ye—which; *hi*—verily; *sansparsha-jāḥ*—born of contact with the sense objects; *bhogāḥ*—pleasures; *duḥkha*—misery; *yonayaḥ*—source of; *eva*—verily; *te*—they are; *ādyā-antavantaḥ*—having beginning and end; *kaunteya*—Arjun, the son of Kunti; *na*—never; *teṣu*—in those; *ramate*—takes delight; *budhaḥ*—the wise.

The pleasures that arise from contact with the sense objects, though appearing as enjoyable to worldly-minded people, are verily a source of

misery. O son of Kunti, such pleasures have a beginning and an end, and so the wise do not delight in them.

The senses create sensations of pleasure in contact with the sense objects. The mind, which is like the sixth sense, derives pleasure from honor, praise, circumstances, success, etc. All these pleasures of body and mind are known as *bhog* (material enjoyment). Such worldly pleasures cannot satisfy the Ātman for the following reasons:

1. Worldly pleasures are finite, and hence the feeling of deficiency remains inherent in them. One may feel happiness on becoming a millionaire, but the same millionaire becomes discontented on seeing a billionaire, and thinks, “If only I also had one billion, then I too would be happy.” In contrast, the bliss of Bhagavān is infinite, and so it gives complete satisfaction.
2. Worldly pleasures are temporary. Once they finish, they again leave one with the feeling of misery. For example, an alcoholic enjoys the pleasure of drinking alcohol at night, but the next morning, the hangover gives him a splitting headache. However, the bliss of Bhagavān is eternal, and once attained, it remains forever.
3. Worldly pleasures are insentient, and hence they continuously decrease. When people see a new Academy Award prize-winning movie, they are overjoyed, but if they have to see the movie a second time to give company to a friend, their joy dries up. And if a second friend insists that they see it a third time, they say, “Give me any punishment, but don’t ask me to see that movie again.” The pleasure from material objects keeps decreasing as we enjoy it. In Economics, this is defined as the Law of Diminishing Returns. But the bliss of Bhagavān is sentient; it is *sat-chit-ānand* (eternal ever-fresh divine bliss). Hence, one can go on chanting the same divine name of Bhagavān all day long, and relish ever-new devotional satisfaction in it.

No sane person enjoying a delicious dessert would be willing to give it up and eat mud instead. Similarly, when one begins to enjoy divine bliss, the mind loses all taste for material pleasures. Those endowed with the faculty of discrimination understand the above three drawbacks of material pleasures, and restrain their senses from them. *Shri Krishna emphasizes this in the next verse.*

शक्नोतीहैव यः सोदुं प्राक्षारीरविमोक्षणात् ।
कामक्रोधोद्धवं वेगं स युक्तः स सुखी नरः ॥ 23 ॥

*śaknotīhaiva yaḥ soḍhum prāk śharīra-vimokṣhaṇāt
kāma-krodhodhbhavam̄ vegam̄ sa yuktah̄ sa sukhī narah̄*

śaknoti—is able; *iha eva*—in the present body; *yaḥ*—who; *soḍhum*—to withstand; *prāk*—before; *śharīra*—the body; *vimokṣhaṇāt*—giving up; *kāma*—desire; *kroḍha*—anger; *udbhavam*—generated from; *vegam*—forces; *sah*—that person; *yuktah*—yogi; *sah*—that person; *sukhī*—happy; *narah*—person.

Those persons are yogis, who before giving up the body are able to check the forces of desire and anger; and they alone are happy.

The human body presents a golden opportunity for the Ātman to reach the Supreme goal of Brahman-realization. In this body, we possess the faculty of discrimination, while animals are driven by their nature. Shri Krishna emphasizes that this power of discrimination should be exercised to restrain the impulses of desire and anger.

One meaning of the word *kām* is lust, but in this verse *kām* is used for all kinds of desires of the body and mind for material pleasures. When the mind does not attain the object of its desire, it modifies its state to exhibit anger. The urges of desire and anger are very powerful, like the strong current of a river. Even animals are subject to these urges, but unlike humans they are not bestowed with the discrimination to restrain them. However, the human intellect has been bestowed with the power of discrimination. The word *soḍhum*

means “to withstand.” This verse instructs us to withstand the urges of desire and anger. Sometimes one restrains the urges of the mind out of embarrassment. Let us say there is a man sitting at the airport. A beautiful lady comes and sits by his side. His mind desires the pleasure of putting his arm around her, but the intellect resists with the thought, “This is improper conduct. The lady may even slap me for it.” To avoid the shame of censure, he restrains himself. Here Shri Krishna is not asking Arjun to restrain the mind out of embarrassment, fear, or apprehension, but through discrimination based on knowledge.

The resolute intellect should be used to check the mind. As soon as the thought of savoring a material pleasure comes to the mind, one should bring the knowledge to the intellect that these are sources of misery. The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam states:

*nāyāṁ deho deha-bhājāṁ nṛiloke
 kaṣṭān kāmān arhate viḍ-bhujāṁ ye
 tapo divyāṁ putrakā yena sattvāṁ
 śuddhyed yasmād brahma-saukhyāṁ tvanantam (5.5.1) [v18]*

“In the human form, one should not undertake great hardships to obtain sensual pleasures, which are available even to creatures that eat excreta (hogs). Instead, one should practice austerities to purify one’s heart, and enjoy the unlimited bliss of Bhagavān.” This opportunity to practice discrimination is available only while the human body exists, and one who is able to check the forces of desire and anger while living, becomes a yogi. Such a person alone tastes the divine bliss within and becomes happy.

**योऽन्तःसुखोऽन्तरामस्तथान्तज्योतिरेव यः ।
 स योगी ब्रह्मनिर्वाणं ब्रह्मभूतोऽधिगच्छति ॥ 24 ॥**

*yo 'ntah-sukho 'ntar-ārāmas tathāntar-jyotir eva yah
 sa yogī brahma-nirvāṇam brahma-bhūto 'dhigachchhati*

yah—who; *antah-sukhah*—happy within the self; *antah-ārāmah*—enjoying within the self; *tathā*—as

well as; *antah-jyotiḥ*—illumined by the inner light; *eva*—certainly; *yah*—who; *sah*—he; *yogi*; *brahma-nirvāṇam*—liberation from material existence; *brahma-bhūtaḥ*—united with the Bhagavān; *adhigachchhati*—attains.

Those who are happy within themselves, enjoying the delight of Bhagavān within, and are illuminated by the inner light, such yogis are united with the Bhagavān and are liberated from material existence.

“Inner light” is the divine knowledge that is bestowed from within in the form of realization, by the grace of Bhagavān, when we surrender to him. The Yog Darshan states:

ritambharā tatra prajñā (1.48) [v19]

In the state of samadhi, one's intellect becomes filled with realization of the Truth.

After instructing Arjun about the need to withstand the impulses of desire and anger, Shri Krishna reveals the confidential means of practicing this. The words *yo 'ntah sukho* mean “one who is internally happy.” There is one kind of happiness that we get from external objects, and another kind of happiness that we experience from within when we absorb the mind in Bhagavān. If we do not experience happiness within, we will not be able to permanently resist external temptations. But when the bliss of Bhagavān starts flowing within the heart, then the fleeting external pleasures seem trivial in comparison and are easy to renounce.

Saint Yamunacharya states:

*yadāvadhi mama chetaḥ kṛiṣṇa-padāravinde
nava-nava-rasa-dhāmanudyata rantum āśīt
tadāvadhi bata nārī-saṅgame smaryamāne
bhavati mukha-vikāraḥ suṣṭu niṣṭhīvanām cha [v20]*

“Ever since I have begun meditating upon the lotus-like feet of Bhagavān Krishna, I have been experiencing ever-increasing bliss. If by chance the

thought of sex pleasure comes to my mind, I spit at the thought and curl my lips in distaste.”

लभन्ते ब्रह्मनिर्वाणमृषयः क्षीणकल्मषाः ।
छिन्नद्वैथा यतात्मानः सर्वभूतहिते रताः ॥ २५ ॥

*labhante brahma-nirvāṇam riṣhayah kṣhīna-kalmaṣhāḥ
chhinna-dvaidhā yatĀtmannaḥ sarva-bhūta-hite ratāḥ*

labhante—achieve; *brahma-nirvāṇam*—liberation from material existence; *riṣhayah*—holy persons; *kṣhīna-kalmaṣhāḥ*—whose sins have been purged; *chhinna*—annihilated; *dvaidhāḥ*—doubts; *yata-Ātmannaḥ*—whose minds are disciplined; *sarva-bhūta*—for all living entities; *hite*—in welfare work; *ratāḥ*—rejoice.

Those holy persons, whose sins have been purged, whose doubts are annihilated, whose minds are disciplined, and who are devoted to the welfare of all beings, attain Bhagavān and are liberated from material existence.

In the preceding verse, Shri Krishna explained the state of the sages who experience the pleasure of Bhagavān within themselves. In this verse, he describes the state of the sages who are actively engaged in the welfare of all beings. The Ramayana states:

para upakāra bachana mana kāyā, santa sahaja subhāu khagarāyā [v21]

“The trait of compassion is the intrinsic nature of Saints. Motivated by it, they use their words, mind, and body for the welfare of others.”

Human welfare is a praiseworthy endeavor. However, welfare schemes that are only committed to bodily care only result in temporary welfare. A person is hungry; he is given food, and his hunger is satiated. But after four hours, he is hungry again. Spiritual welfare goes right to the root of all material suffering, and endeavors to revive the Brahman-consciousness of the Ātman. Hence, the highest welfare activity is to help a person unite his or her consciousness with Bhagavān. This is the kind of welfare work that elevated Ātman(s) with

purified minds engage in. Such welfare activity further attracts Bhagavān's grace, which elevates them even further on the path. Finally, when they have achieved complete purification of the mind and perfected their surrender to Bhagavān, they are liberated to the spiritual realm and the divine Abode.

Thus far in this chapter, Shri Krishna has extolled the path of karm yog. He now speaks the remaining verses for the karm sanyāsīs, revealing that they too attain the final goal.

कामक्रोधवियुक्तानां यतीनां यतचेतसाम् ।
अभितो ब्रह्मनिर्वाणं वर्तते विदितात्मनाम् ॥ 26 ॥

*kāma-krodha-viyuktānām yatīnām yata-chetasām
abhitō brahma-nirvāṇam vartate vidiṭātmanām*

kāma—desires; *krodha*—anger; *vimuktānām*—of those who are liberated; *yatīnām*—of the saintly persons; *yata-chetasām*—those self-realized persons who have subdued their mind; *abhitah*—from every side; *brahma*—spiritual; *nirvāṇam*—liberation from material existence; *vartate*—exists; *vidita-ātmanām*—of those who are self-realized.

For those *sanyāsīs*, who have broken out of anger and lust through constant effort, who have subdued their mind, and are self-realized, liberation from material existence is both here and hereafter.

Karm yog is the safer path to take for most people, as explained in verse 5.2, and that is why Shri Krishna has strongly recommended it to Arjun. However, for someone who is truly detached from the world, *karm sanyās* is also suitable. It is advantageous in that there is no diversion of time and energy toward worldly duties, and one can dedicate oneself fully to the practice of spirituality. There have been many accomplished *sanyāsīs* in history. Shri Krishna states that such true *karm sanyāsīs* also make rapid progress and experience peace everywhere. By eliminating the urges of desire and anger and subduing their mind, they attain perfect peace both in this life and here-after.

We often harbor the misconception that external circumstances are at fault for

the lack of peace in our lives, and we hope for the day when the situation will become conducive to peace of mind. However, peace is not dependent upon the external situation; it is a product of purified senses, mind, and intellect. The *sanyāsīs*, with their mind and thoughts turned inward, find the ocean of peace within, independent of external circumstances. And then, with the internal machinery in order, they experience the same peace everywhere, and are liberated in this itself.

स्पर्शान्कृत्वा बहिर्बाह्यांश्चक्षुश्चैवान्तरे भ्रुवोः ।
प्राणापानौ समौ कृत्वा नासाभ्यन्तरचारिणौ ॥२७॥

यतेन्द्रियमनोबुद्धिर्मुनिर्मोक्षपरायणः ।
विगतेच्छाभयक्रोधो यः सदा मुक्त एव सः ॥२८॥

*sparśhān kṛitvā bahir bāhyānśh chakṣhuśh chaivāntare bhruvoḥ
prāṇāpānau samau kṛitvā nāsābhyanṭara-chāriṇau
yatendriya-mano-buddhir munir mokṣha-parāyaṇaḥ
vigatechchhā-bhaya-krodho yaḥ sadā mukta eva sah*

sparśhān—contacts (through senses); *kṛitvā*—keeping; *bahir*—outside; *bāhyān*—external; *chakṣhuḥ*—eyes; *cha*—and; *eva*—certainly; *antare*—between; *bhruvoḥ*—of the eyebrows; *prāṇa-apānau*—the outgoing and incoming breaths; *samau*—equal; *kṛitvā*—keeping; *nāsā-abhyantara*—within the nostrils; *chāriṇau*—moving; *yata*—controlled; *indriya*—senses; *manah*—mind; *buddhiḥ*—intellect; *munih*—the sage; *mokṣha*—liberation; *parāyaṇaḥ*—dedicated; *vigata*—free; *ichchhā*—desires; *bhaya*—fear; *krodhaḥ*—anger; *yah*—who; *sadā*—always; *muktaḥ*—liberated; *eva*—certainly; *sah*—that person.

Shutting out all thoughts of external enjoyment, with the gaze fixed on the space between the eye-brows, equalizing the flow of the incoming and outgoing breath in the nostrils, and thus controlling the senses, mind, and intellect, the sage who becomes free from desire and fear, always lives in freedom.

Often renunciants are more inclined toward *aśṭāṅg yog* or *haṭha yog* along with their practice of asceticism. Their extreme detachment makes them disinterested in the path of devotion, which requires meditation on the names,

forms, pastimes, and abodes of Bhagavān. Shri Krishna here describes the path that the ascetics take.

He says that such ascetics shut out thoughts of sense objects by controlling their sight and breath. They focus their gaze between their eyebrows. If the eyes are fully closed, sleep may overtake one; and if they are wide open, they may get distracted by the objects around them. In order to avoid both these defects, the ascetics concentrate their gaze, with eyes half-open, between the eyebrows or the tip of the nose. They also harmonize the *prāṇ* (outgoing breath) with the *apān* (incoming breath), until both become suspended in yogic trance. This yogic process enables the controlling of the senses, mind, and intellect. Such persons make liberation from the material energy as their only goal.

Such ascetic practices lead to ātma jñāna (knowledge of the self), not to brahma jñāna (knowledge of Bhagavān). Hence, the ascetic path must also be consummated through devotion to Bhagavān, as stated in the next verse.

भोक्तारं यज्ञतपसां सर्वलोकमहेश्वरम् ।
सुहृदं सर्वभूतानां ज्ञात्वा मां शान्तिमृच्छति ॥ 29 ॥

*bhoktāram yajña-tapasāṁ sarva-loka-maheśvaram
suhṛidam sarva-bhūtānāṁ jñātvā mām śāntim r̥ichchhati*

bhoktāram—the enjoyer; *yajña*—sacrifices; *tapasām*—austerities; *sarva-loka*—of all worlds; *mahā-īśvaram*—the Supreme Bhagavān; *su-hṛidam*—the selfless Friend; *sarva*—of all; *bhūtānām*—the living beings; *jñātvā*—having realized; *mām*—me (Bhagavān Krishna); *śāntim*—peace; *r̥ichchhati*—attains.

Having realized me as the enjoyer of all sacrifices and austerities, the Supreme Bhagavān of all the worlds and the selfless Friend of all living beings, my devotee attains peace.

The ascetic *sādhanā*, explained in the previous two verses, can lead to *ātma jñāna* (knowledge of the self). But *brahma jñāna* (knowledge of Bhagavān) requires the grace of Bhagavān, which comes through devotion. The words *sarva loka*

maheśhwaram mean “Sovereign Bhagavān of all the worlds,” and *suhṛidam sarvabhūtānām* means “benevolent well-wisher of all living beings.” In this way, he emphasizes that the ascetic path too is consummated in surrender to Bhagavān, with the knowledge that the Supreme Bhagavān is the enjoyer of all austerities and sacrifices. Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj has put this very nicely:

hari kā viyogī jīva govind rādhe, sañcho yog soī jo hari se milāde
(Rādhā Govind Geet) [v22]

“The Ātman is disconnected from Bhagavān since eternity. True Yog is that which unites the Ātman with the Bhagavān.” Hence, no system of Yog is complete without the inclusion of *bhakti*.

In his “Song of God,” Shri Krishna beautifully includes all the genuine paths of spiritual practice, but each time, at the end he qualifies them by stating that success in these paths also requires *bhakti*. For example, he uses this system of presentation in verses 6.46-47, 8.22, 11.53-54, 18.54-55, etc. Here too, Shri Krishna ends the topic revealing the necessity of devotion.



Chapter 6

Dhyān Yog ~ ध्यानयोगः

The Yog of Meditation

In this chapter, Shri Krishna continues the comparative evaluation of *karm yog* (practicing spirituality while continuing the worldly duties) and *karm sanyās* (practicing spirituality in the renounced order) from chapter five and recommends the former. When we perform work in devotion, it purifies the mind and deepens our spiritual realization. Then when the mind becomes tranquil, meditation becomes the primary means of elevation. Through meditation, yogis strive to conquer their mind, for while the untrained mind is the worst enemy, the trained mind is the best friend. Shri Krishna cautions Arjun that one cannot attain success on the spiritual path by engaging in severe austerities, and hence one must be temperate in eating, work, recreation, and sleep. He then explains the *sādhanā* for uniting the mind with Bhagavān. Just as a lamp in a windless place does not flicker, likewise the *sādhak* must hold the mind steady in meditation. The mind is indeed difficult to restrain, but by practice and detachment, it can be controlled. So, wherever it wanders, one should bring it back and continually focus it upon Bhagavān. When the mind gets purified, it becomes established in transcendence. In that joyous state called *samādhi*, one experiences boundless divine bliss.

Arjun then questions Shri Krishna about the fate of the aspirant who begins on the path, but is unable to reach the goal due to an unsteady mind. Shri Krishna reassures him that one who strives for Brahman-realization is never overcome by evil. Bhagavān always keeps account of our spiritual merits accumulated in previous lives and reawakens that wisdom in future births, so that we may continue the journey from where we had left off. With the accrued merits of many past lives, yogis are able to reach Bhagavān in their present life itself. The chapter concludes with a declaration that the yogi (one who strives to unite with Bhagavān) is superior to the *tapasvī* (ascetic), the *jñānī* (person of learning), and the *karmī* (ritualistic performer). And amongst all yogis, one who engages in *bhakti* (loving devotion to Bhagavān) is the highest of all.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
अनाश्रितः कर्मफलं कार्यं कर्म करोति यः ।
स संन्यासी च योगी च न निरग्निर्न चाक्रियः ॥ १ ॥

*śrī bhagavān uvācha
anāśhritaḥ karma-phalam kāryam karma karoti yaḥ
sa sanyāsī cha yogī cha na niragnir na chākriyah*

śrī-bhagavān uvācha—Bhagavān Krishna said; *anāśhritaḥ*—not desiring; *karma-phalam*—results of actions; *kāryam*—obligatory; *karma*—work; *karoti*—perform; *yaḥ*—one who; *sah*—that person; *sanyāsī*—in the renounced order; *cha*—and; *yogī*—yogi; *cha*—and; *na*—not; *nih*—without; *agnih*—fire; *na*—not; *cha*—also; *akriyah*—without activity.

Bhagavān Krishna said: Those who perform prescribed duties without desiring the results of their actions are actual *sanyāsīs* (renunciates) and yogis, not those who have merely ceased performing sacrifices such as *agni-hotra yajña* or abandoned bodily activities.

The ritualistic activities described in the Vedas include fire sacrifices, such as *agnihotra yajña*. The rules for those who enter the renounced order of *sanyās* state that they should not perform the ritualistic *karm kāṇḍ* activities; in fact they

should not touch fire at all, not even for the purpose of cooking. And they should subsist on alms instead. However, Shri Krishna states in this verse that merely giving up the sacrificial fire does not make one a *sanyāsī* (renunciant).

Who are true yogis, and who are true *sanyāsīs*? There is much confusion in this regard. People say, “This swamiji is *phalāhārī* (one who eats only fruits and nothing else), and so he must be an elevated yogi.” “This *bābājī* (renunciant) is *dūdhāhārī* (subsists on milk alone), and hence he must be an even higher yogi.” “This guruji is *pavanāhārī* (does not eat, lives only on the breath), and so he must definitely be Brahman-realized.” “This sadhu is a *nāgā bābā* (ascetic who does not wear clothes), and thus he is perfectly renounced.” However, Shri Krishna dismisses all these concepts. He says that such external acts of asceticism do not make anyone either a *sanyāsī* or a yogi. Those who can renounce the fruits of their actions, by offering them to Bhagavān, are the true renunciants and yogis.

Nowadays Yoga has become the buzz word in the western world. Numerous Yoga studios have sprung up in every town of every country of the world. Statistics reveal that one out of every ten persons in America is practicing Yoga. But this word “Yoga” does not exist in the Sanskrit scriptures. The actual word is “Yog,” which means “union.” It refers to the union of the individual consciousness with the divine consciousness. In other words, a yogi is one whose mind is fully absorbed in Bhagavān. It also follows that such a yogi’s mind is naturally detached from the world. Hence, the true yogi is also the true *sanyāsī*.

Persons who perform *karm yog* do all activities in the spirit of humble service to Bhagavān without any desire whatsoever for rewards. Even though they may be *gṛihasthas* (living with a family), such persons are true yogis and the real renunciants.

यं संन्यासमिति प्राहुर्योगं तं विद्धि पाण्डव ।
न ह्यसंन्यस्तसङ्कल्पो योगी भवति कश्चन ॥२॥

*yam sanyāsam iti prāhur yogam tam viddhi pāñdava
na hyasannyasta-saṅkalpo yogī bhavati kaśchana*

yam—what; *sanyāsam*—renunciation; *iti*—thus; *prāhuḥ*—they say; *yogam*—yog; *tam*—that; *viddhi*—know; *pāñdava*—Arjun, the son of Pandu; *na*—not; *hi*—certainly; *asannyasta*—without giving up; *saṅkalpaḥ*—desire; *yogī*—a yogi; *bhavati*—becomes; *kaśchana*—anyone.

What is known as *sanyās* is non-different from Yog, for none become yogis without renouncing worldly desires.

A *sanyāsī* is one who renounces the pleasures of the mind and senses. But mere renunciation is not the goal, nor is it sufficient to reach the goal. Renunciation means that our running in the wrong direction has stopped. We were searching for happiness in the world, and we understood that there is no happiness in material pleasures, so we stopped running toward the world. But, the destination is not reached just by stopping. The destination of the Ātman is Brahman-realization. The process of going toward Bhagavān—taking the mind toward him—is the path of Yog. Those who have incomplete knowledge of the goal of life, look upon renunciation as the highest goal of spirituality. Those who truly understand the goal of life, regard Brahman-realization as the ultimate goal of their spiritual endeavor.

In the purport to verse 5.4, it was explained that there are two kinds of renunciation—*phalgu vairāgya* and *yukt vairāgya*. *Phalgu vairāgya* is that where worldly objects are seen as objects of Māyā, the material energy, and hence renounced because they are detrimental to spiritual progress. *Yukt vairāgya* is that where everything is seen as belonging to Bhagavān, and hence meant to be utilized in his service. In the first kind of renunciation, one would say, “Give up money. Do not touch it. It is a form of Māyā, and it impedes the path of spirituality.” In the second kind of renunciation, one would say, “Money is also

a form of the energy of Bhagavān. Do not waste it or throw it away; utilize whatever you have in your possession for the service of Bhagavān.”

Phalgu vairāgya is unstable, and can easily revert to attachment for the world. The name “*Phalgu*” comes from a river in the city of Gaya, in the state of Bihar in India. The river *Phalgu* runs below the surface. From atop, it seems as if there is no water, but if you dig a few feet, you encounter the stream below. Similarly, many persons renounce the world to go and live in monasteries, only to find that in a few years the renunciation has vanished and the mind is again attached to the world. Their detachment was *phalgu vairāgya*. Finding the world to be troublesome and miserable, they desired to get away from it by taking shelter in monastery. But when they found spiritual life also to be difficult and arduous, they got detached from spirituality as well. Then there are others who establish their loving relationship with Bhagavān. Motivated by the desire to serve him, they renounce the world to live in a monastery. Their renunciation is *yukt vairāgya*. They usually continue the journey even if they face difficulties.

In the first line of this verse, Shri Krishna states that a real *sanyāsī* (renunciant) is one who is a yogi, i.e. one who is uniting the mind with Bhagavān in loving service. In the second line, Shri Krishna states that one cannot be a yogi without giving up material desires. If there are material desires in the mind, then it will naturally run toward the world. Since it is the mind that has to be united with Bhagavān, this is only possible if the mind is free from all material desires. Thus, to be a yogi one has to be a *sanyāsī* from within; and one can only be a *sanyāsī* if one is a yogi.

आरुक्षोर्मुनेर्योगं कर्म कारणमुच्यते ।
योगारुदस्य तस्यैव शमः कारणमुच्यते ॥३॥

*ārurukṣhor muner yogam karma kāraṇam uchyate
yogārūḍhasya tasyaiva śamah kāraṇam uchyate*

ārurukṣhoḥ—a beginner; *muneh*—of a sage; *yogam*—Yog; *karma*—working without attachment;

kāraṇam—the cause; *uchyate*—is said; *yoga ārūḍhasya*—of those who are elevated in Yog; *tasya*—their; *eva*—certainly; *śamah*—meditation; *kāraṇam*—the cause; *uchyate*—is said.

To the Ātman who is aspiring for perfection in Yog, work without attachment is said to be the means; to the sage who is already elevated in Yog, tranquility in meditation is said to be the means.

In chapter 3, verse 2, Shri Krishna mentioned that there are two paths for attaining welfare—the path of contemplation and the path of action. Between these, he recommended to Arjun to follow the path of action. Again in chapter 5, verse 2, he declared it to be the better path. Does this mean that we must keep doing work all our life? Anticipating such a question, Shri Krishna sets the limits for it. When we perform *karm yog*, it leads to the purification of the mind and the ripening of spiritual knowledge. But once the mind has been purified and we advance in Yog, then we can leave *karm yog* and take to *karm sanyās*. Material activities now serve no purpose and meditation now becomes the means.

So the path we must follow filters down to a matter of our eligibility and Shri Krishna explains the criteria of eligibility in this verse. He says that for those who are aspiring for Yog, the path of *karm yog* is more suitable; and those who are elevated in Yog, the path of *karm sanyās* is more suitable.

The word Yog refers to both the goal and the process to reach the goal. When we talk of it as being the goal, we use Yog as meaning “union with Bhagavān.” And when we talk of it as being the process, we use Yog as meaning the “path” to union with Bhagavān.

In this second context, Yog is like a ladder we climb to reach Bhagavān. At the lowest rung, the Ātman is caught in worldliness, with the consciousness absorbed in mundane matter. The ladder of Yog takes the Ātman from that level to the stage where the consciousness is absorbed in the divine. The various

rungs of the ladder have different names, but Yog is a term common to them all. *Yog-ārurukṣhu* are those *sādhaks* who aspire for union with Bhagavān and have just begun climbing the ladder. *Yog-ārūḍha* are those who have become elevated on the ladder.

So, how do we understand when one is elevated in the science of Yog? Shri Krishna explains this next.

यदा हि नेन्द्रियार्थेषु न कर्मस्वनुष्ठजते ।
सर्वसङ्कल्पसंन्यासी योगारूढस्तदोच्यते ॥४॥

*yadā hi nendriyārtheṣhu na karmasv-anuṣṭhajjate
sarva-saṅkalpa-sanyāsī yogārūḍhas tadochyate*

yadā—when; *hi*—certainly; *na*—not; *indriya-artheṣhu*—for sense-objects; *na*—not; *karmasu*—to actions; *anuṣṭhajjate*—is attachment; *sarva-saṅkalpa*—all desires for the fruits of actions; *sanyāsī*—renouncer; *yoga-ārūḍhah*—elevated in the science of Yog; *tadā*—at that time; *uchyate*—is said.

When one is neither attached to sense objects nor to actions, that person is said to be elevated in the science of Yog, for having renounced all desires for the fruits of actions.

As the mind becomes attached to Bhagavān in Yog, it naturally becomes detached from the world. So an easy criterion of evaluating the state of one's mind is to check whether it has become free from all material desires. A person will be considered detached from the world when one no longer craves for sense objects nor is inclined to perform any actions for attaining them. Such a person ceases to look for opportunities to create circumstances to enjoy sensual pleasures, eventually extinguishes all thoughts of enjoying sense objects, and also dissolves the memories of previous enjoyments.

The mind now no longer gushes into self-centered activities at the urge of the senses. When we achieve this level of mastery over the mind, we will be considered elevated in Yog.

उद्धरेदात्मनात्मानं नात्मानमवसादयेत् ।
आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुरात्मैव रिपुरात्मनः ॥५॥

*uddhared ātmanātmannain nĀtmannam avasādayet
ātmaiva hyātmano bandhur ātmaiva ripur ātmanah*

uddharet—elivate; *ātmanā*—through the mind; *Ātmannam*—the self; *na*—not; *Ātmannam*—the self; *avasādayet*—degrade; *Ātman*—the mind; *eva*—certainly; *hi*—indeed; *ātmanah*—of the self; *bandhuh*—friend; *Ātman*—the mind; *eva*—certainly; *ripuh*—enemy; *ātmanah*—of the self.

Elevate yourself through the power of your mind, and not degrade yourself, for the mind can be the friend and also the enemy of the self.

We are responsible for our own elevation or debasement. Nobody can traverse the path of Brahman-realization for us. Saints and Gurus show us the way, but we have to travel it ourselves. There is a saying in Hindi: *ek peda do pakshī baithe, ek guru ek chelā, apanī karanī guru utare, apanī karanī chelā* [v.01] “There are two birds sitting on a tree—one Guru and one disciple. The Guru will descend by his own works, and the disciple will also only be able to climb down by his own karmas.”

We have had innumerable lifetimes before this one, and Brahman-realized Saints were always present on Earth. At any period of time, if the world is devoid of such Saints, then the Ātman(s) of that period cannot become Brahman-realized. How then can they fulfill the purpose of human life, which is Brahman-realization? Thus, Bhagavān ensures that Brahman-realized Saints are always present in every era, to guide the sincere seekers and inspire humanity. So, in infinite past lifetimes, many times we must have met Brahman-realized Saints and yet we did not become Brahman-realized. This means that the problem was not lack of proper guidance, but either our reticence in accepting it or working according to it. Thus, we must first accept responsibility for our present level of spirituality, or lack thereof. Only then will we gain the confidence that if we have brought ourselves to our present

state, we can also elevate ourselves by our efforts.

When we suffer reversals on the path of spiritual growth, we tend to complain that others have caused havoc to us, and they are our enemies. However, our biggest enemy is our own mind. It is the saboteur that thwarts our aspirations for perfection. Shri Krishna states that, on the one hand, as the greatest benefactor of the Ātman, the mind has the potential of giving us the most benefit; on the other hand, as our greatest adversary, it also has the potential for causing the maximum harm. A controlled mind can accomplish many beneficial endeavors, whereas an uncontrolled mind can degrade the consciousness with most ignoble thoughts.

In order to be able to use it as a friend, it is important to understand the mind's nature. Our mind operates at four levels:

1. Mind: When it creates thoughts, we call it *mana*, or the mind.
2. Intellect: When it analyses and decides, we call it *buddhi*, or intellect.
3. Chitta: When it gets attached to an object or person, we call it *chitta*.
4. Ego: When it identifies with the bodily identifications and becomes proud of things like wealth, status, beauty, and learning, we call it *ahankār*, or ego.

These are not four separate entities. They are simply four levels of functioning of the one mind. Hence, we may refer to them all together as the mind, or as the mind-intellect, or as the mind-intellect-ego, or as the mind-intellect-*chitta*-ego. They all refer to the same thing.

The use of the word ego here is different from its connotation in Freudian psychology. Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939), an Austrian neurologist, proposed the first theory of psychology regarding how the mind works. According to him, the ego is the “real self” that bridges the gap between our untamed desires (Id) and the value system that is learnt during childhood (Superego).

Various scriptures describe the mind in one of these four ways for the purpose of explaining the concepts presented there. They are all referring to the same internal apparatus within us, which is together called *antah karan*, or the mind. For example:

- The Pañchadaśī refers to all four together as the mind, and states that it is the cause of material bondage.
- In the Bhagavad Gita, Shri Krishna repeatedly talks of the mind and the intellect as being two things, and emphasizes the need to surrender both to Bhagavān.
- The Yog Darśhan, while analyzing the different elements of nature, talks of three entities: mind, intellect, and ego.
- Shankaracharya, while explaining the apparatus available to the Ātman, classifies the mind into four—mind, intellect, *chitta* and ego.

So when Shri Krishna says that we must use the mind to elevate the self, he means we must use the higher mind to elevate the lower mind. In other words, we must use the intellect to control the mind. How this can be done has been explained in detail in verses 2.41 to 2.44 and again in verse 3.43.

बन्धुरात्मात्मनस्तस्य येनात्मैवात्मना जितः ।
अनात्मनस्तु शत्रुत्वे वर्ते तात्मैव शत्रुवत् ॥ 6 ॥

*bandhur Ātmantmanas tasya yenātmaivātmanā jitah
anātmanas tu śhatrutve vartetātmaiva śhatru-vat*

bandhuḥ—friend; *Ātman*—the mind; *ātmanah*—for the person; *tasya*—of him; *yena*—by whom; *Ātman*—the mind; *eva*—certainly; *ātmanā*—for the person; *jitah*—conquered; *anātmanah*—of those with unconquered mind; *tu*—but; *śhatrutve*—for an enemy; *varteta*—remains; *Ātman*—the mind; *eva*—as; *śhatru-vat*—like an enemy.

For those who have conquered the mind, it is their friend. For those who have failed to do so, the mind works like an enemy.

We dissipate a large portion of our thought power and energy in combating people whom we perceive as enemies and potentially harmful to us. The Vedic scriptures say the biggest enemies—lust, anger, greed, envy, illusion, etc.—reside in our own mind. These internal enemies are even more pernicious than the outer ones. The external Demons may injure us for some time, but the Demons sitting within our own mind have the ability to make us live in constant wretchedness. We all know people who had everything favorable in the world, but lived miserable lives because their own mind tormented them incessantly through depression, hatred, tension, anxiety, and stress.

The Vedic philosophy lays great emphasis on the ramification of thoughts. Illness is not only caused by viruses and bacteria, but also by the negativities we harbor in the mind. If someone accidentally throws a stone at you, it may hurt for a few minutes, but by the next day, you will probably have forgotten about it. However, if someone says something unpleasant, it may continue to agitate your mind for years. This is the immense power of the thoughts. In the Buddhist scripture, the Dhammapada (1.3), the Buddha also expresses this truth vividly:

“I have been insulted! I have been hurt! I have been beaten! I have been robbed! Misery does not cease in those who harbor such thoughts.

I have been insulted! I have been hurt! I have been beaten! I have been robbed!
Anger ceases in those who do not harbor such thoughts.”

When we nourish hatred in our mind, our negative thoughts do more damage to us than the object of our hatred. It has been very sagaciously stated: “Resentment is like drinking poison and hoping that the other person dies.” The problem is that most people do not even realize that their own uncontrolled mind is causing them so much harm. Hence, Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj advises:

mana ko māno śhatru usakī sunahu jani kachhu pyāre (Sādhan Bhakti Tattva) [v1]

“Dear spiritual aspirant, look on your uncontrolled mind as your enemy. Do not come under its sway.”

So, through spiritual practice, if we bring the mind under the control of the intellect, it has the potential to become our best friend. However, the same mind has the potential of becoming our best friend, if we bring it under control of the intellect, through spiritual practice. The more powerful an entity is, the greater is the danger of its misuse, and also the greater is the scope for its utilization. Since the mind is such a powerful machine fitted into our bodies, it can work as a two-edged sword. Thus, those who slide to demoniac levels do so because of their own mind while those who attain sublime heights also do so because of their purified minds. Accordingly, Winston Churchill, the successful British Prime Minister during the Second World War, said: “The price of greatness is the responsibility over your every thought.” In this verse, Shri Krishna enlightens Arjun about the potential harm and benefits our mind can bestow upon us. *In the following three verses, Shri Krishna describes the symptoms of one who is yog-ārūḍha (advanced in Yog).*

जितात्मनः प्रशान्तस्य परमात्मा समाहितः ।
शीतोष्णसुखदुःखेषु तथा मानापमानयोः ॥७॥

*jitātmanah praśhāntasya paramĀtman samāhitah
śhītoṣhṇa-sukha-duḥkheśhu tathā mānāpamānayoh*

jita-ātmanah—one who has conquered one’s mind; *praśhāntasya*—of the peaceful; *parama-Ātman*—Bhagavān; *samāhitah*—steadfast; *śhīta*—in cold; *uṣhṇa*—heat; *sukha*—happiness; *duḥkheśhu*—and distress; *tathā*—also; *māna*—in honor; *apamānayoh*—and dishonor.

The yogis who have conquered the mind rise above the dualities of cold and heat, joy and sorrow, honor and dishonor. Such yogis remain peaceful and steadfast in their devotion to Bhagavān.

Shri Krishna explained in verse 2.14 that the contact between the senses and

the sense objects gives the mind the experience of heat and cold, joy and sorrow. As long as the mind has not been subdued, a person chases after the sensual perceptions of pleasure and recoils from the perceptions of pain. The yogi who conquers the mind is able to see these fleeting perceptions as the workings of the bodily senses, distinct from the immortal Ātman, and thus, remain unmoved by them. Such an advanced yogi rises above the dualities of heat and cold, joy and sorrow, etc.

There are only two realms in which the mind may dwell—one is the realm of Māyā and the other is the realm of Bhagavān. If the mind rises above the sensual dualities of the world, it can easily get absorbed in Bhagavān. Thus, Shri Krishna has stated that an advanced yogi's mind becomes situated in *samādhi* (deep meditation) upon Bhagavān.

ज्ञानविज्ञानतृप्तात्मा कूटस्थो विजितेन्द्रियः ।
युक्त इत्युच्यते योगी समलोष्टाश्मकाञ्चनः ॥८॥

*jñāna-vijñāna-triptĀtman kūṭa-stho vijitendriyah
yukta ityuchyate yogī sama-loṣṭāśma-kāñchanah*

jñāna—knowledge; *vijñāna*—realized knowledge, wisdom from within; *tripta Ātman*—one fully satisfied; *kūṭa-sthah*—undisturbed; *vijita-indriyah*—one who has conquered the senses; *yuktah*—one who is in constant communion with the Supreme; *iti*—thus; *uchyate*—is said; *yogī*—a yogi; *sama*—looks equally; *loṣṭra*—pebbles; *aśma*—stone; *kāñchanah*—gold.

The yogi who are satisfied by knowledge and discrimination, and have conquered their senses, remain undisturbed in all circumstances. They see everything—dirt, stones, and gold—as the same.

Jñāna, or knowledge, is the theoretical understanding obtained by listening to the Guru and from the study of the scriptures. *Vijñāna* is the realization of that knowledge as an internal awakening and wisdom from within. The intellect of the advanced yogi becomes illumined by both *jñāna* and *vijñāna*. Equipped with wisdom, the yogi sees all material objects as modifications of the material

energy. Such a yogi does not differentiate between objects based on their attractiveness to the self. The enlightened yogi sees all things in their relationship with Bhagavān. Since the material energy belongs to Bhagavān, all things are meant for his service.

The word *kuṭastha* refers to one who distances the mind from the fluctuating perceptions of senses in contact with the material energy, neither seeking pleasurable situations nor avoiding unpleasurable ones. *Vijitendriya* is one who has subjugated the senses. The word *yukt* means one who is in constant communion with the Supreme. Such person begins tasting the divine bliss of Bhagavān, and hence becomes a *triptĀtman*, or one fully satisfied by virtue of realized knowledge.

सुहृन्मित्रार्युदासीनमध्यस्थद्वेष्यबन्धुषु ।
साधुष्वपि च पापेषु समबुद्धिर्विशिष्यते ॥९॥

*suhṛin-mitrāryudāśīna-madhyastha-dveṣhya-bandhuṣhu
sāduṣhvapi cha pāpeṣhu sama-buddhir viśiṣhyate*

su-hṛit—toward the well-wishers; *mitra*—friends; *ari*—enemies; *udāśīna*—neutral persons; *madhyastha*—mediators; *dveṣhya*—the envious; *bandhuṣhu*—relatives; *sāduṣhu*—pious; *api*—as well as; *cha*—and; *pāpeṣhu*—the sinners; *sama-buddhiḥ*—of impartial intellect; *viśiṣhyate*—is distinguished.

The yogis look upon all—well-wishers, friends, foes, the pious, and the sinners—with an impartial intellect. The yogi who is of equal intellect toward friend, companion, and foe, neutral among enemies and relatives, and impartial between the righteous and sinful, is considered to be distinguished among human.

It is the nature of the human mind to respond differently to friends and foes. But an elevated yogi's nature is different. Endowed with realized knowledge of Bhagavān, the elevated yogi see the whole creation in its unity with Bhagavān. Thus, they are able to see all living beings with equality of vision. This parity of

vision is also of various levels:

1. “All living beings are divine Ātman(s), and hence parts of Bhagavān.” Thus, they are viewed as equal. *ātmavat sarva bhūteṣhu yaḥ paśhyati sa paṇḍitah* “A true Pundit is one who sees everyone as the Ātman, and hence similar to oneself.”
2. Higher is the vision: “Bhagavān is seated in everyone, and hence all are equally respect worthy.”
3. At the highest level, the yogi develops the vision: “Everyone is the form of Bhagavān.” The Vedic scriptures repeatedly state that the whole world is a veritable form of Bhagavān: *iśhāvāsyam idam sarvam yat kiñcha jagatyām jagat* (Īshopaniṣhad 1) [v2] “The entire universe, with all its living and non-living beings is the manifestation of the Supreme Being, who dwells within it.” *puruṣha evedam sarvam* (Puruṣ Sūktam) [v3] “Bhagavān is everywhere in this world, and everything is his energy.” Hence, the highest yogi sees everyone as the manifestation of Bhagavān. Endowed with this level of vision, Hanuman says: *sīyā rāma Māyā saba jaga jānī* (Ramayana) [v4] “I see the face of Sita Ram in everyone.”

These categories have been further detailed in the commentary to verse 6.31. Referring to all three of the above categories, Shri Krishna says that the yogi who can maintain an equal vision toward all persons is even more elevated than the yogi mentioned in the previous verse. *Having described the state of Yog, starting with the next verse, Shri Krishna describes the practice by which we can achieve that state.*

योगी युज्जीत सततमात्मानं रहसि स्थितः ।
एकाकी यतचित्तात्मा निराशीरपरिग्रहः ॥ १० ॥

*yogī yuñjīta satatam Ātmannam rahasi sthitah
ekākī yata-chittātman nirāśhīr aparigrahaḥ*

yogī—a yogi; *yuñjīta*—should remain enganged in meditation; *satatam*—constantly; *Ātmannam*—self; *rahasi*—in seclusion; *sthitah*—remaining; *ekākī*—alone; *yata-chitta-Ātman*—with a controlled

mind and body; *nirāśhīh*—free from desires; *aparigrahaḥ*—free from desires for possessions for enjoyment.

Those who seek the state of Yog should reside in seclusion, constantly engaged in meditation with a controlled mind and body, getting rid of desires and possessions for enjoyment.

Having stated the characteristics of one who has attained the state of Yog, Shri Krishna now talks about the self-preparation required for it. Mastery in any field requires daily practice. An Olympic swimming champion is not one who goes to the local neighborhood swimming pool once a week on Saturday evenings. Only one who practices for several hours every day achieves the mastery required to win the Olympics. Practice is essential for spiritual mastery as well. Shri Krishna now explains the process of accomplishing spiritual mastery by recommending the daily practice of meditation. The first point he mentions is the need for a secluded place. All day long, we are usually surrounded by a worldly environment; these material activities, people, and conversations, all tend to make the mind more worldly. In order to elevate the mind toward Bhagavān, we need to dedicate some time on a daily basis for secluded *sādhanā*.

The analogy of milk and water can help elucidate this point. If milk is poured into water, it cannot retain its undiluted identity, for water naturally mixes with it. However, if the milk is kept separate from water and converted into yogurt, and then the yogurt is churned to extract butter, the butter becomes immiscible. It can now challenge the water, “I will sit on your head and float; you can do nothing to me because I have become butter now.” Our mind is like the milk and the world is like water. In contact with the world, the mind gets affected by it and becomes worldly. However, an environment of seclusion, which offers minimal contact with the objects of the senses, becomes conducive for elevating the mind and focusing it upon Bhagavān. Once

sufficient attachment for Bhagavān has been achieved, one can challenge the world, “I will live amidst all the dualities of Māyā, but remain untouched by them.”

This instruction for seclusion has been repeated by Shri Krishna in verse 18.52: *vivikt sevī laghvāśhī* “Live in a secluded place; control your diet.” There is a beautiful way of practically applying this instruction without disturbing our professional and social works. In our daily schedule, we can allocate some time for *sādhanā*, or spiritual practice, where we isolate ourselves in a room that is free from worldly disturbances. Shutting ourselves out from the world, we should do *sādhanā* to purify the mind and solidify its focus upon Bhagavān. If we practice in this manner for one to two hours every day, we will reap its benefits all through the day even while engaged in worldly activities. In this manner we will be able to retain the elevated state of consciousness that was gathered during the daily *sādhanā* in isolation from the world.

शुचौ देशे प्रतिष्ठाप्य स्थिरमासनमात्मनः ।
नात्युच्छ्रितं नातिनीचं चैलाजिनकुशोत्तरम् ॥ 11 ॥

*śhuchau deśhe pratiṣṭhāpya sthiram āsanam ātmanah
nātyuchchritam nāti-nīcham chailājina-kuśhottaram*

śhuchau—in a clean; *deśhe*—place; *pratiṣṭhāpya*—having established; *sthiram*—steadfast; *āsanam*—seat; *ātmanah*—his own; *na*—not; *ati*—too; *uchchritam*—high; *na*—not; *ati*—too; *nīcham*—low; *chaila*—cloth; *ajina*—a deerskin; *kuśha*—kuś grass; *uttaram*—one over ther other.

To practice Yog, one should make an *āsan* (seat) in a sanctified place, by placing *kuśh* grass, deer skin, and a cloth, one over the other. The *āsan* should be neither too high nor too low.

Shri Krishna explains in this verse the external practice for *sādhanā*. *Śhuchau deśhe* means a pure or sanctified place. In the initial stages, the external environment does impact the mind. In later stages of *sādhanā*, one is able to achieve internal purity even in dirty and unclean places. But for neophytes, clean surroundings

help in keeping the mind clean as well. A mat of *kush* grass provides temperature insulation from the ground, akin to the yoga mats of today. The deer skin atop it deters poisonous pests like snakes and scorpions from approaching while one is absorbed in meditation. If the *āsan* is too high, there is the risk of falling off; if the *āsan* is too low, there is danger of disturbance from insects on the ground. Some instructions regarding external seating given in this verse may be somewhat anachronous to modern times, in which case the spirit of the instruction is to be absorbed in the thought of Bhagavān, while the instructions for the internal practice remain the same.

तत्रैकाग्रं मनः कृत्वा यतचित्तेन्द्रियक्रियः ।
उपविश्यासने युज्ज्याद्योगमात्मविशुद्धये ॥ 12 ॥

समं कायशिरोग्रीवं धारयन्नचलं स्थिरः ।
सम्प्रेक्ष्य नासिकाग्रं स्वं दिशश्चानवलोकयन् ॥ 13 ॥

*tatraikāgram manah kṛitvā yata-chittendriya-kriyāḥ
upaviśhyāsane yuñjyād yogam ātma-viśhuddhaye*

*samam kāya-śhiro-grīvam dhārayann achalam sthirāḥ
samprekṣhya nāsikāgram svam diśhaś chānavalokayan*

tatra—there; *eka-agram*—one-pointed; *manah*—mind; *kṛitvā*—having made; *yata-chitta*—controlling the mind; *indriya*—senses; *kriyāḥ*—activities; *upaviśhya*—being seated; *āsane*—on the seat; *yuñjyāt yogam*—should strive to practice yog; *ātma viśhuddhaye*—for purification of the mind; *samam*—straight; *kāya*—body; *śhirāḥ*—head; *grīvam*—neck; *dhārayan*—holding; *achalam*—unmoving; *sthirāḥ*—still; *samprekṣhya*—gazing; *nāsika-agram*—at the tip of the nose; *svam*—own; *diśhāḥ*—directions; *cha*—and; *anavalokayan*—not looking

Seated firmly on it, the yogi should strive to purify the mind by focusing it in meditation with one pointed concentration, controlling all thoughts and activities. He must hold the body, neck, and head firmly in a straight line, and gaze at the tip of the nose, without allowing the eyes to wander.

Having described the seating for meditation, Shri Krishna next describes the posture of the body that is best for concentrating the mind. In *sādhanā*, there is

a tendency to become lazy and doze off to sleep. This happens because the material mind does not initially get as much bliss in contemplation on Bhagavān as it does while relishing sense objects. This creates the possibility for the mind to become languid when focused on Bhagavān. Hence, you do not find people dozing off half-way through their meal, but you do see people falling asleep during meditation and the chanting of Bhagavān's names. To avoid this, Shri Krishna gives the instruction to sit erect. The Brahma Sūtra also states three aphorisms regarding the posture for meditation:

āśīnah sambhavāt (4.1.7) [v5] “To do sādhanā, seat yourself properly.”

achalatvam chāpekṣhya (4.1.9)[v6] “Ensure that you sit erect and still.”

dhyānāchcha (4.1.8) [v7] “Seated in this manner, focus the mind in meditation.”

There are a number of meditative *āsanas* described in the Hath Yoga Pradeepika, such as *padmasan*, *ardha padmasan*, *dhyanveer asan*, *siddhasan*, and *sukhasan*. We may adopt any *āsan* in which we can comfortably sit, without moving, during the period of the meditation. Maharshi Patañjali states:

sthira sukhāmāsanam (Patañjali Yog Sūtra 2.46) [v8]

“To practice meditation, sit motionless in any posture that you are comfortable in.” Some people are unable to sit on the floor due to knee problems, etc. They should not feel discouraged, for they can even practice meditation while sitting on a chair, provided they fulfill the condition of sitting motionless and erect.

In this verse, Shri Krishna states that the eyes should be made to focus on the tip of the nose, and prevented from wandering. As a variation, the eyes can also be kept closed. Both these techniques will be helpful in blocking out worldly distractions.

The external seat and posture do need to be appropriate, but meditation is truly a journey within us. Through meditation, we can reach deep within and

cleanse the mind of endless lifetimes of dross. By learning to hold the mind in concentration, we can work upon it to harness its latent potential. The practice of meditation helps organize our personality, awaken our inner consciousness, and expand our self-awareness. The spiritual benefits of meditation are described later, in the purport on verse 6.15. Some of the side benefits are:

- It reins the unbridled mind, and harnesses the thought energy to attain difficult goals.
- It helps maintain mental balance in the midst of adverse circumstances.
- It aids in the development of a strong resolve that is necessary for success in life.
- It enables one to eliminate bad *sanskārs* and habits, and cultivate good qualities.

The best kind of meditation is one where the mind is focused upon Bhagavān. This is clarified in the next two verses.

**प्रशान्तात्मा विगतभीर्ब्रह्मचारिव्रते स्थितः ।
मनः संयम्य मच्चित्तो युक्त आसीत मत्परः ॥ १४ ॥**

*praśhāntātman vigata-bhīr brahmachāri-vrate sthitah
manah sanyamya mach-chitto yukta āsīta mat-parah*

praśhānta—serene; *Ātman*—mind; *vigata-bhīḥ*—fearless; *brahmachāri-vrate*—in the vow of celibacy; *sthitah*—situated; *manah*—mind; *sanyamya*—having controlled; *mat-chittah*—meditate on me (Shri Krishna); *yuktah*—engaged; *āsīta*—should sit; *mat-parah*—having me as the supreme goal.

Thus, with a serene, fearless, and unwavering mind, and staunch in the vow of celibacy, the vigilant yogi should meditate on me, having me alone as the supreme goal.

Shri Krishna emphasizes the practice of celibacy for success in meditation. The sexual desire facilitates the process of procreation in the animal kingdom, and animals indulge in it primarily for that purpose. In most species, there is a particular mating season; animals do not indulge in sexual activity wantonly.

Since humans have greater intellects and the freedom to indulge at will, the activity of procreation is converted into a means of licentious enjoyment. However, the Vedic scriptures lay great emphasis on practicing celibacy. Maharshi Patanjali states: *brahmacharyapratishṭhāyāṁ vīrya lābhah* (Yog Sūtras 2.38) [v9] “The practice of celibacy leads to great enhancement of energy.”

Ayurveda, the Indian science of medicine extolls *brahmacharya* (the practice of celibacy) for its exceptional health benefits. One of the students of Dhanvantari approached his teacher after finishing his full course of Ayurveda (the ancient Indian science of medicine), and asked: “O Sage, now kindly let me know the secret of health.” Dhanvantari replied: “This seminal energy is verily the *ātman*. The secret of health lies in preservation of this vital force. He who wastes this vital and precious energy cannot have physical, mental, moral, and spiritual development.” According to Ayurveda, forty drops of blood go into making one drop of semen. Those who waste their semen develop unsteady and agitated *prāṇ*. They lose their physical and mental energy, and weaken their memory, mind, and intellect. The practice of celibacy leads to a boost of bodily energy, clarity of intellect, gigantic will power, retentive memory, and a keen spiritual intellect. It creates a sparkle in the eyes and a luster on the cheeks.

The definition of celibacy is not restricted to mere abstinence from physical indulgence. The Agni Purāṇ states that the eightfold activities related to sex must be controlled: 1) Thinking about it. 2) Talking about it. 3) Joking about it. 4) Envisioning it. 5) Desiring it. 6) Wooing to get someone interested in it. 7) Enticing someone interested in it. 8) Engaging in it. For one to be considered celibate, all these must be shunned. Thus, celibacy not only requires abstinence from sexual intercourse, but also refraining from masturbation, homosexual acts, and all other sexual practices.

Further, Shri Krishna states here that the object of meditation should be Bhagavān alone. *This point is again reiterated in the next verse.*

युज्जन्नेवं सदात्मानं योगी नियतमानसः ।
शान्तिं निर्वाणपरमां मत्संस्थामधिगच्छति ॥ १५ ॥

*yuñjann evam sadĀtmannam yogī niyata-mānasah
śhantim nirvāṇa-paramām mat-sansthām adhigachchhati*

yuñjan—keeping the mind absorbed in Bhagavān; *evam*—thus; *sadā*—constantly; *Ātmannam*—the mind; *yogī*—a yogi; *niyata-mānasah*—one with a disciplined mind; *śhantim*—peace; *nirvāṇa*—liberation from the material bondage; *paramām*—supreme; *mat-sansthām*—abides in me; *adhigachchhati*—attains.

Thus, constantly keeping the mind absorbed in me, the yogi of disciplined mind attains *nirvāṇa*, and abides in me in supreme peace.

Varieties of techniques for meditation exist in the world. There are Zen techniques, Buddhist techniques, Tantric techniques, Taoist techniques, Vedic techniques, and so on. Each of these has many sub-branches. Amongst the followers of Hinduism itself, there are innumerable techniques being practiced. Which of these should we adopt for our personal practice? Shri Krishna makes this riddle easy to solve. He states that the object of meditation should be Bhagavān himself and Bhagavān alone.

The aim of meditation is not merely to enhance concentration and focus, but also to purify the mind. Meditating on the breath, *chakras*, void, flame, etc. is helpful in developing focus. However, the purification of the mind is only possible when we fix it upon an all-pure object, which is Bhagavān himself. Hence, verse 14.26 states that Bhagavān is beyond the three modes of material nature, and when one fixes the mind upon him, it too rises above the three modes. Thus, meditating upon the *prāṇas* may be called transcendental by its practitioners, but true transcendental meditation is upon Bhagavān alone.

Now what is the way of fixing the mind upon Bhagavān? We can make all of

Bhagavān's divine attributes—names, forms, virtues, pastimes, abodes, associates—the objects of meditation. They are all non-different from Bhagavān and replete with all his energies. Hence, devotees may meditate upon any of these and get the true benefit of meditating upon Bhagavān. In the various *bhakti* traditions in India, the name of Bhagavān is made the basis of contemplation. Thus, the Ramayana states:

brahma rām teñ nāmu bara, bara dāyaka bara dāni [v10]

“Bhagavān's name is bigger than Bhagavān himself, in terms of its utility to the Ātman(s).” Taking the name is a very convenient way of remembering Bhagavān, since it can be taken anywhere and everywhere—while walking, talking, sitting, eating, etc.

However, for most *sādhaks* the name by itself is not sufficiently attractive for enchanting the mind. Due to *sanskārs* of endless lifetimes, the mind is naturally drawn to forms. Using the form of Bhagavān as the basis, meditation becomes natural and easy. This is called *rūp dhyān* meditation.

Once the mind is focused upon the form of Bhagavān, we can then further enhance it by contemplating upon the virtues of Bhagavān—his compassion, his beauty, his knowledge, his love, his benevolence, his grace, and so on. One can then advance in meditation by serving Bhagavān in the mind. We can visualize ourselves offering foodstuffs to him, worshipping him, singing to him, massaging him, fanning him, bathing him, cooking for him, etc. This is called *mānasī sevā* (serving Bhagavān in the mind). In this way, we can meditate upon the names, forms, virtues, pastimes, etc. of Bhagavān. All these become powerful means of fulfilling Shri Krishna's instruction to Arjun, in this verse, to keep the mind absorbed in him.

At the end of the verse, Shri Krishna gives the ultimate benefits of meditation, which are liberation from Māyā and the everlasting beatitude of Brahman-

realization.

नात्यश्नतस्तु योगोऽस्ति न चैकान्तमनश्नतः ।
न चाति स्वप्नशीलस्य जाग्रतो नैव चार्जुन ॥ 16 ॥

*nātyaśhnatastu yogo 'sti na chaikāntam anaśhnataḥ
na chāti-svapna-śhilasya jāgrato naiva chārjuna*

na—not; *ati*—too much; *aśhnataḥ*—of one who eats; *tu*—however; *yogah*—Yog; *asti*—there is; *na*—not; *cha*—and; *ekāntam*—at all; *anaśhnataḥ*—abstaining from eating; *na*—not; *cha*—and; *ati*—too much; *svapna-śhilasya*—of one who sleeps; *jāgrataḥ*—of one who does not sleep enough; *na*—not; *eva*—certainly; *cha*—and; *arjuna*—Arjun.

O Arjun, those who eat too much or eat too little, sleep too much or too little, cannot attain success in Yog.

After describing the object of meditation and the end-goal achieved by it, Shri Krishna gives some regulations to follow. He states that those who break the rules of bodily maintenance cannot be successful in Yog. Often beginners on the path, with their incomplete wisdom state: “You are the Ātman and not this body. So simply engage in spiritual activity, forgetting about the maintenance of the body.”

However, such a philosophy cannot get one too far. It is true that we are not the body, yet the body is our carrier as long as we live, and we are obliged to take care of it. The Ayurvedic text, Charak Samhitā states: *śharīra mādhyam khalu dharma sādhanam* [v11] “The body is the vehicle for engaging in religious activity.” If the body becomes unwell, then spiritual pursuits get impeded too. The Ramayana states: *tanu binu bhajana veda nahiṇ varanā* [v12] “The Vedas do not recommend that we ignore the body, while engaging in spirituality.” In fact, they instruct us to take good care of our body with the help of material science. The Īshopaniṣhad states:

*andhaṁ tamah praviśhanti ye 'vidyām upāsate
tato bhūya iva te tamo ya u vidyāyām ratāḥ (9) [v13]*

“Those who cultivate only material science go to Naraka. But those who cultivate only spiritual science go to an even darker Naraka.” Material science is necessary for the maintenance of our body, while spiritual science is necessary for the manifestation of the internal divinity within us. We must balance both in our lives to reach the goal of life. Hence, *yogāsana*, *prāṇāyām*, and the science of proper diet are an essential part of Vedic knowledge. Each of the four Vedas has its associate Veda for material knowledge. The associate Veda of Atharva Veda is Ayurveda, which is the hoary science of medicine and good health. This Demonstrates that the Vedas lay emphasis on the maintenance of physical health. Accordingly, Shri Krishna says that overeating or not eating at all, extreme activity or complete inactivity, etc. are all impediments to Yog. Spiritual practitioners should take good care of their body, by eating fresh nutritious food, doing daily exercise, and getting the right amount of sleep every night.

युक्ताहारविहारस्य युक्तचेष्टस्य कर्मसु ।
युक्तस्वप्नावबोधस्य योगो भवति दुःखहा ॥१७॥

*yuktāhāra-vihārasya yukta-cheshtasya karmasu
yukta-svapnāvabodhasya yogo bhavati duḥkha-hā*

yukta—moderate; *āhāra*—eating; *vihārasya*—recreation; *yukta cheṣṭasya karmasu* —balanced in work; *yukta*—regulated; *svapna-avabodhasya*—sleep and wakefulness; *yogah*—Yog; *bhavati*—becomes; *duḥkha-hā*—the slayer of sorrows.

But those who are temperate in eating and recreation, balanced in work, and regulated in sleep, can mitigate all sorrows by practicing Yog.

Yog is the union of the Ātman with Bhagavān. The opposite of Yog is *bhog*, which means engagement in sensual pleasures. Indulgence in *bhog* violates the natural laws of the body, and results in *rog* (disease). As stated in the previous verse, if the body becomes diseased, it impedes the practice of Yog. Thus in this verse, Shri Krishna states that by being temperate in bodily activities and

practicing Yog, we can become free from the sorrows of the body and mind.

The same instruction was repeated two-and-a-half millennium after Shri Krishna by Gautam Buddha, when he recommended the golden middle path between severe asceticism and sensual indulgence. There is a beautiful story regarding this. It is said that before gaining enlightenment, Gautam Buddha once gave up eating and drinking, and sat in meditation. However, after a few days of practicing in this manner, the lack of nourishment made him weak and dizzy, and he found it impossible to steady his mind in meditation. At that time, some village women happened to be passing by. They were carrying water pots on their heads that they had filled from the river nearby, and were singing a song. The words of the song were: “Tighten the strings of the *tānpurā* (a stringed Indian musical instrument, resembling a guitar). But do not tighten them so much that the strings break.” Their words entered the ears of Gautam Buddha, and he exclaimed, “These illiterate village women are singing such words of wisdom. They contain a message for us humans. We too should tighten our bodies (practice austerities), but not to the extent that the body is destroyed.”

Benjamin Franklin (1706 – 1790), a founding father of the United States, is highly regarded as a self-made man. In an effort to grow his character, starting at the age of 20, he maintained a diary in which he tracked his performance related to the 13 activities he wanted to grow in. The first activity was “Temperance: Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation.”

यदा विनियतं चित्तमात्मन्येवावतिष्ठते ।
निःस्पृहः सर्वकामेभ्यो युक्त इत्युच्यते तदा ॥ 18 ॥

*yadā viniyatam chittam ātmanyevāvatiṣṭhate
niḥsprihah sarva-kāmebhyo yukta ityuchyate tadā*

yadā—when; *viniyatam*—fully controlled; *chittam*—the mind; *ātmani*—of the self; *eva*—certainly; *avatiṣṭhate*—stays; *nisprihah*—free from cravings; *sarva*—all; *kāmebhyaḥ*—for yearning of the senses; *yuktah*—situated in perfect Yog; *iti*—thus; *uchyate*—is said; *tadā*—then.

With thorough discipline, they learn to withdraw the mind from selfish cravings and rivet it on the unsurpassable good of the self. Such persons are said to be in Yog, and are free from all yearning of the senses.

When does a person complete the practice of Yog? The answer is when the controlled *chitta* (mind) becomes fixed and focused exclusively on Bhagavān. It is then simultaneously and automatically weaned away from all cravings of the senses and desires for worldly enjoyment. At that time one can be considered as *yukt*, or having perfect Yog. At the end of this very chapter, he also states: “Of all yogis, those whose minds are always absorbed in me, and who engage in devotion to me with great faith, I consider them to be the highest of all.”

(Verse 6.47)

यथा दीपो निवातस्थो नेङ्गते सोपमा स्मृता ।
योगिनो यतचित्तस्य युञ्जतो योगमात्मनः ॥ १९ ॥

*yathā dīpo nivāta-stho neṅgate sopamā smṛitā
yogino yata-chittasya yuñjato yogam ātmanah*

yathā—as; *dīpaḥ*—a lamp; *nivāta-sthāḥ*—in a windless place; *na*—does not; *ingate*—flickers; *sā*—this; *upamā*—analogy; *smṛitā*—is considered; *yogināḥ*—of a yogi; *yata-chittasya*—whose mind is disciplined; *yuñjataḥ*—steadily practicing; *yogam*—in meditation; *ātmanah*—on the Supreme.

Just as a lamp in a windless place does not flicker, so the disciplined mind of a yogi remains steady in meditation on the self.

In this verse, Shri Krishna gives the simile of the flame of a lamp. In the wind, the flame flickers naturally and is impossible to control. However, in a windless place, the flame becomes as steady as a picture. Similarly, the mind is fickle by nature and very difficult to control. But when the mind of a yogi is in enthralled union with Bhagavān, it becomes sheltered against the winds of desire. Such a yogi holds the mind steadily under control by the power of devotion.

यत्रोपरमते चित्तं निरुद्धं योगसेवया ।
यत्र चैवात्मनात्मानं पश्यन्नात्मनि तुष्यति ॥ 20 ॥

*yatroparamate chittam niruddham yoga-sevayā
yatra chaivātmanātmanam paśhyann ātmani tuṣhyati*

yatra—when; *uparamate*—rejoice inner joy; *chittam*—the mind; *niruddham*—restrained; *yoga-sevayā*—by the practice of yog; *yatra*—when; *cha*—and; *eva*—certainly; *ātmanā*—through the purified mind; *Ātmannam*—the Ātman; *paśhyan*—behold; *ātmani*—in the self; *tuṣhyati*—is satisfied.

When the mind, restrained from material activities, becomes still by the practice of Yog, then the yogi is able to behold the Ātman through the purified mind, and he rejoices in the inner joy.

Having presented the process of meditation and the state of its perfection, Shri Krishna now reveals the results of such endeavors. When the mind is purified, one is able to perceive the self as distinct from the body, mind, and intellect. For example, if there is muddy water in a glass, we cannot see through it. However, if we put alum in the water, the mud settles down and the water becomes clear. Similarly, when the mind is unclean, it obscures perception of the Ātman and any acquired scriptural knowledge of the *Ātman* is only at the theoretical level. But when the mind becomes pure, the Ātman is directly perceived through realization.

सुखमात्यन्तिकं यत्तद्बुद्धिग्राह्यमतीन्द्रियम् ।
वेत्ति यत्र न चैवायं स्थितश्चलति तत्त्वतः ॥ 21 ॥

*sukham ātyantikam yat tad buddhi-grāhyam atīndriyam
vetti yatra na chaivāyam sthitash chalati tattvataḥ*

sukham—happiness; *ātyantikam*—limitless; *yat*—which; *tat*—that; *buddhi*—by intellect; *grāhyam*—grasp; *atīndriyam*—transcending the senses; *vetti*—knows; *yatra*—wherein; *na*—never; *cha*—and; *eva*—certainly; *ayam*—he; *sthitash*—situated; *chalati*—deviates; *tattvataḥ*—from the Eternal Truth.

In that joyous state of Yog, called *samādhi*, one experiences supreme boundless divine bliss, and thus situated, one never deviates from the Eternal Truth.

The yearning for bliss is intrinsic to the nature of the Ātman. It stems from the fact that we are tiny parts of Bhagavān, who is an ocean of bliss. A number of quotations from the Vedic scriptures establishing this were mentioned in verse 5.21. Here are some more quotations expressing the nature of Bhagavān as having an infinite ocean of bliss:

raso vai sah rasam hyevāyam labdhvā nandī bhavati
(Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.7) [v14]

“Bhagavān is bliss himself; the individual Ātman becomes blissful on attaining him.”

ānandamayo 'bhyāsāt (Brahma Sūtra 1.1.12) [v15]

“Bhagavān is the veritable form of bliss.”

satya jñānānantānanda mātraika rasa mūrtayah
(Bhāgavatam 10.13.54) [v16]

“The divine form of Bhagavān is made of eternity, knowledge, and bliss.”

ānanda sindhu madhya tava vāsā, binu jāne kata marasi piyāsā
(Ramayana) [v17]

“Bhagavān, who is the ocean of bliss, is seated within you. Without knowing him, how can your thirst for happiness be satiated?”

We have been seeking perfect bliss for eons, and everything we do is in search of that bliss. However, from the objects of gratification, the mind and senses perceive only a shadowy reflection of true bliss. This sensual gratification fails to satisfy the longing of the Ātman within, which yearns for the infinite bliss of Bhagavān.

When the mind is in union with Bhagavān, the Ātman experiences the ineffable and sublime bliss beyond the scope of the senses. This state is called *samādhi* in the Vedic scriptures. The Sage Patanjali states: *saṁādhisiddhirīśhvare pranidhānāt* (Patañjali Yog Darśhan 2.45) [v18] “For success in *samādhi*, surrender to

the Supreme Bhagavān.” In the state of *samādhi*, experiencing complete satisfaction and contentment, the Ātman has nothing left to desire, and thus becomes firmly situated in the Absolute Truth, without deviating from it for even a moment.

यं लब्ध्वा चापरं लाभं मन्यते नाधिकं ततः ।
यस्मिन्स्थितो न दुःखेन गुरुणापि विचाल्यते ॥ २२ ॥

*yam labdhvā chāparam lābhā manyate nādhikam tataḥ
yasmin sthito na duḥkhena gurunāpi vichālyate*

yam—which; *labdhvā*—having gained; *cha*—and; *aparam*—any other; *lābhā*—gain; *manyate*—considers; *na*—not; *adhikam*—greater; *tataḥ*—than that; *yasmin*—in which; *sthitaḥ*—being situated; *na*—never; *duḥkhena*—by sorrow; *gurunā*—(by) the greatest; *api*—even; *vichālyate*—is shaken.

Having gained that state, one does not consider any attainment to be greater. Being thus established, one is not shaken even in the midst of the greatest calamity.

In the material realm, no extent of attainment satiates a person totally. A poor person strives hard to become rich, and feels satisfied if he or she is able to become a millionaire. But when that same millionaire looks at a billionaire, discontentment sets in again. The billionaire is also discontented by looking at an even richer person. No matter what happiness we get, when we perceive a higher state of happiness, the feeling of unfulfillment lingers. But happiness achieved from the state of Yog is the infinite bliss of Bhagavān. Since there is nothing higher than that, on experiencing that infinite bliss, the Ātman naturally perceives that it has reached its goal.

Bhagavān’s divine bliss is also eternal, and it can never be snatched away from the yogi who has attained it once. Such a Brahman-realized Ātman, though residing in the material body, remains in the state of divine consciousness. Sometimes, externally, it seems that the Saint is facing tribulations in the form of illness, antagonistic people, and oppressive environment, but internally the

Saint retains divine consciousness and continues to relish the bliss of Bhagavān. Thus, even the biggest difficulty cannot shake such a Saint. Established in union with Bhagavān, the Saint rises above bodily consciousness and is thus not affected by bodily harm. Accordingly, we hear from the Puranas how Prahlad was put in a pit of snakes, tortured with weapons, placed in the fire, thrown off a cliff, etc. but none of these difficulties could break Prahlad's devotional union with Bhagavān.

तं विद्याद् दुःखसंयोगवियोगं योगसञ्ज्ञितम् ।
स निश्चयेन योक्तव्यो योगोऽनिर्विण्णचेतसा ॥ २३ ॥

*tam vidyād duḥkha-sanyoga-viyogam yogasanjñitam
sa niśchayena yoktavyo yogo 'nirviṇṇa-chetasā*

tam—that; *vidyāt*—you shout know; *duḥkha-sanyoga-viyogam*—state of severance from union with misery; *yoga-samjñitam*—is known as yog; *sah*—that; *niśchayena*—resolutely; *yoktavyah*—should be practiced; *yogah*—yog; *anirviṇṇa-chetasā*—with an undeviating mind.

That state of severance from union with misery is known as Yog. This Yog should be resolutely practiced with determination free from pessimism.

The material world is the realm of Māyā, and it has been termed by Shri Krishna in verse 8.15 as *duḥkhālayam aśāśvatam*, or temporary and full of misery. Thus, the material energy Māyā is compared to darkness. It has put us in the darkness of ignorance and is making us suffer in the world. However, the darkness of Māyā naturally gets dispelled when we bring the light of Bhagavān into our heart. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu states this very beautifully:

*kṛiṣṇa sūrya-sama, māyā haya andhakāra
yāhān kṛiṣṇa, tāhān nāhi māyāra adhikāra*
(Chaitanya Charitāmṛit, Madhya Leela, 22.31) [v19]

“Bhagavān is like the light and Māyā is like darkness. Just as darkness does not have the power to engulf light, similarly Māyā can never overcome Bhagavān.”

Now, the nature of Bhagavān is divine bliss while the consequence of Māyā is misery. Thus, one who attains the divine bliss of Bhagavān can never be

overcome by the misery of Māyā again.

Thus, the state of Yog implies both 1) attainment of bliss, and 2) freedom from misery. Shri Krishna emphasizes both successively. In the previous verse, the attainment of bliss was highlighted as the result of Yog; in this verse, freedom from misery is being emphasized.

In the second line of this verse Shri Krishna states that the stage of perfection has to be reached through determined practice. *He then goes on to explain how we must practice meditation.*

सङ्कल्पप्रभवान्कामांस्त्यक्त्वा सर्वानशेषतः ।
मनसैवेन्द्रियग्रामं विनियम्य समन्ततः ॥ 24 ॥

शनैः शनैरुपरमेद्बुद्ध्या धृतिगृहीतया ।
आत्मसंस्थं मनः कृत्वा न किञ्चिदपि चिन्तयेत् ॥ 25 ॥

*saṅkalpa-prabhavān kāmān tyaktvā sarvān aśeṣataḥ
manasaivendriya-grāmam viniyamya samantataḥ
śhanaiḥ śhanair uparamed buddhyā dhṛiti-gṛihītayā
ātma-sansthām manah kṛitvā na kiñchid api chintayet*

saṅkalpa—a resolve; *prabhavān*—born of; *kāmān*—desires; *tyaktvā*—having abandoned; *sarvān*—all; *aśeṣataḥ*—completely; *manasā*—through the mind; *eva*—certainly; *indriya-grāmam*—the group of senses; *viniyamya*—restraining; *samantataḥ*—from all sides; *śhanaiḥ*—gradually; *śhanaiḥ*—gradually; *uparamet*—attain peace; *buddhyā*—by intellect; *dhṛiti-gṛihītayā*—achieved through determination of resolve that is in accordance with scriptures; *ātma-sansthām*—fixed in Bhagavān; *manah*—mind; *kṛitvā*—having made; *na*—not; *kiñchit*—anything; *api*—even; *chintayet*—should think of.

Completely renouncing all desires arising from thoughts of the world, one should restrain the senses from all sides with the mind. Slowly and steadily, with conviction in the intellect, the mind will become fixed in Bhagavān alone, and will think of nothing else.

Meditation requires the dual process of removing the mind from the world and fixing it on Bhagavān. Here, Shri Krishna begins by describing the first part of

the process—taking the mind away from the world.

Thoughts of worldly things, people, events, etc. come to the mind when it is attached to the world. Initially, the thoughts are in the form of *sphurnā* (flashes of feelings and ideas). When we insist on the implementation of *sphurnā*, it becomes *saṅkalp*. Thus, thoughts lead to *saṅkalp* (pursuit of these objects) and *vikalp* (revulsion from them), depending upon whether the attachment is positive or negative. The seed of pursuit and revulsion grows into the plant of desire, “This should happen. This should not happen.” Both *saṅkalp* and *vikalp* immediately create impressions on the mind, like the film of a camera exposed to the light. Thus, they directly impede meditation upon Bhagavān. They also have a natural tendency to flare up, and a desire that is a seed today can become an inferno tomorrow. Thus, one who desires success in meditation should renounce the affinity for material objects.

Having described the first part of the process of meditation—removing the mind from the world—Shri Krishna then talks of the second part. The mind should be made to reside upon Bhagavān. He says this will not happen automatically, but with determined effort, success will come slowly.

Determination of resolve that is in accordance with the scriptures is called *dhrīti*. This determination comes with conviction of the intellect. Many people acquire academic knowledge of the scriptures about the nature of the self and the futility of worldly pursuits. But their daily life is at variance with their knowledge, and they are seen to indulge in sin, sex, and intoxication. This happens because their intellect is not convinced about that knowledge. The power of discrimination comes with the conviction of the intellect about the impermanence of the world and the eternality of one’s relationship with Bhagavān. Thus utilizing the intellect, one must gradually cease sensual indulgence. This is called *pratyāhār*, or control of the mind and senses from

running toward the objects of the senses. Success in *pratyāhār* will not come immediately. It will be achieved through gradual and repeated exercise. *Shri Krishna* explains next what that exercise involves.

यतो यतो निश्चरति मनश्चञ्चलमस्थिरम् ।
ततस्ततो नियम्यैतदात्मन्येव वशं नयेत् ॥ 26 ॥

*yato yato niścharati manashchañchalam asthiram
tatas tato niyamyaitad ātmanyeva vaśham nayet*

yataḥ yataḥ—whenever and wherever; *niśchalati*—wanders; *manah*—the mind; *chañchalam*—restless; *asthiram*—unsteady; *tataḥ tataḥ*—from there; *niyamya*—having restrained; *etat*—this; *ātmani*—on Bhagavān; *eva*—certainly; *vaśham*—control; *nayet*—should bring.

Whenever and wherever the restless and unsteady mind wanders, one should bring it back and continually focus it on Bhagavān.

Success in meditation is not achieved in a day; the path to perfection is long and arduous. When we sit for meditation with the resolve to focus our mind upon Bhagavān, we will find that ever so often it wanders off in worldly *saṅkāp* and *vikalp*. It is thus important to understand the three steps involved in the process of meditation:

1. With the intellect's power of discrimination we decide that the world is not our goal. Hence, we forcefully remove the mind from the world. This requires effort.
2. Again, with the power of discrimination we understand that Bhagavān alone is ours, and Brahman-realization is our goal. Hence, we bring the mind to focus upon Bhagavān. This also requires effort.
3. The mind comes away from Bhagavān, and wanders back into the world. This does not require effort, it happens automatically.

When the third step happens by itself, *sādhaks* often become disappointed, “I tried so hard to focus upon Bhagavān, but the mind went back into the

world.” Shri Krishna asks us not to feel disappointed. He says the mind is fickle and we should be prepared that it will wander off in the direction of its infatuation, despite our best efforts to control it. However, when it does wander off, we should once again repeat steps 1 and 2—take the mind away from the world and bring it back to Bhagavān. Once again, we will experience that step 3 takes place by itself. We should not lose heart, and again repeat steps 1 and 2.

We will have to do this repeatedly. Then slowly, the mind’s attachment toward Bhagavān will start increasing. And simultaneously, its detachment from the world will also increase. As this happens, it will become easier and easier to meditate. But in the beginning, we must be prepared for the battle involved in disciplining the mind.

प्रशान्तमनसं ह्येनं योगिनं सुखमुत्तमम् ।
उपैति शान्तरजसं ब्रह्मभूतमकल्मषम् ॥ 27 ॥

*praśhānta-manasam hyenam yoginam sukham uttamam
upaiti śhānta-rajasam brahma-bhūtam akalmaśham*

praśhānta—peaceful; *manasam*—mind; *hi*—certainly; *enam*—this; *yoginam*—yogi; *sukham*—the highest bliss; *upaiti*—attains; *śhānta-rajasam*—whose passions are subdued; *brahma-bhūtam*—endowed with Brahman-realization; *akalmaśham*—without sin.

Great transcendental happiness comes to the yogi whose mind is calm, whose passions are subdued, who is without sin, and who sees everything in connection with Bhagavān.

As a yogi perfects the practice of withdrawing the mind from sense objects and securing it upon Bhagavān, the passions get subdued and the mind becomes utterly serene. Earlier, effort was required to focus it upon Bhagavān, but now it naturally runs to him. At this stage, the elevated meditator sees everything in its connection with Bhagavān. Sage Narad states:

tat prāpya tad evāvalokayati tad eva śhrinoti

*tad eva bhāṣhayati tad eva chintayati
(Nārad Bhakti Darśhan, Sūtra 55) [v20]*

“The consciousness of the devotee whose mind is united in love with Bhagavān is always absorbed in him. Such a devotee always sees him, hears him, speaks of him, and thinks of him.” When the mind gets absorbed in Bhagavān in this manner, the Ātman begins to experience a glimpse of the infinite bliss of Bhagavān who is seated within.

Sādhaks often ask how they can know that they are progressing. The answer is embedded in this verse. When we find our inner transcendental bliss increasing, we can consider it as a symptom that our mind is coming under control and the consciousness is getting spiritually elevated. Here, Shri Krishna says that when we are *śhānta-rajasam* (free from passion) and *akalmaṣham* (sinless), then we will become *brahma-bhūtam* (endowed with Brahman-realization). At that stage, we will experience *sukham uttamam* (the highest bliss).

युञ्जन्नेवं सदात्मानं योगी विगतकल्पः ।
सुखेन ब्रह्मसंपर्शमत्यन्तं सुखमश्नुते ॥ 28 ॥

*yuñjan evam sadĀtmannam yogī vigata-kalmaṣhah
sukhena brahma-sansparśham atyantam sukham aśhnute*

yuñjan—uniting (the self with Bhagavān); *evam*—thus; *sadā*—always; *Ātmannam*—the self; *yogī*—a yogi; *vigata*—freed from; *kalmaṣhah*—sins; *sukhena*—easily; *brahma-sansparśham*—constantly in touch with the Supreme; *atyantam*—the highest; *sukham*—bliss; *aśhnute*—attains.

The self-controlled yogi, thus uniting the self with Bhagavān, becomes free from material contamination, and being in constant touch with the Supreme, achieves the highest state of perfect happiness.

Happiness can be classified into four categories:

*sāttvikam sukhamātmothaṁ viṣhayotthaṁ tu rājasam
tāmasam moha dainyothaṁ nirguṇam madapāśhrayām
(Bhāgavatam 11.25.29) [v21]*

1. *Tāmasic* happiness. This is the pleasure derived from narcotics, alcohol,

cigarettes, meat products, violence, sleep, etc.

2. *Rājasic* happiness. This is the pleasure from the gratification of the five senses and the mind.

3. *Sāttvic* happiness. This is the pleasure experienced through practicing virtues, such as compassion, service to others, cultivation of knowledge, stilling of the mind, etc. It includes the bliss of self-realization experienced by the *jñānīs* when they stabilize the mind upon the Ātman.

4. *Nirguna* happiness. This is the divine bliss of Bhagavān, which is infinite in extent. Shri Krishna explains that the yogi who becomes free from material contamination and becomes united with Bhagavān attains this highest state of perfect happiness. He has called this unlimited bliss in verse 5.21 and supreme bliss in verse 6.21.

सर्वभूतस्थमात्मानं सर्वभूतानि चात्मनि ।
ईक्षते योगयुक्तात्मा सर्वत्र समदर्शनः ॥२९॥

*sarva-bhūta-stham Ātmannam sarva-bhūtāni chātmani
īkṣhate yoga-yukta-Ātman sarvatra sama-darśanah*

sarva-bhūta-stham—situated in all living beings; *Ātmannam*—Supreme Ātman; *sarva*—all; *bhūtāni*—living beings; *cha*—and; *ātmani*—in Bhagavān; *īkṣhate*—sees; *yoga-yukta-Ātman*—one united in consciousness with Bhagavān; *sarvatra*—everywhere; *sama-darśanah*—equal vision.

The true yogis, uniting their consciousness with Bhagavān, see with equal eye, all living beings in Bhagavān and Bhagavān in all living beings.

During the festival of Diwali in India, shops sell sugar candy molded in various forms, as cars, airplanes, men, women, animals, balls, caps, etc. Children fight with their parents that they want a car, elephant, and so on. The parents smile at their innocuousness, thinking that they are all made from the same sugar ingredient, and are all equally sweet.

Similarly, the ingredient of everything that exists is Bhagavān himself, in the

form of his various energies.

*eka deśhasthitasyāgnirjyotsnā vistāriṇī yathā
parasya brahmaṇah śaktistathedamakhilam jagat (Nārad Pañcharātra) [v22]*

“Just as the sun, while remaining in one place, spreads its light everywhere, similarly the Supreme Bhagavān, by his various energies pervades and sustains everything that exists.” The perfected yogis, in the light of realized knowledge, see everything in its connection with Bhagavān.

**यो मां पश्यति सर्वत्र सर्वं च मयि पश्यति ।
तस्याहं न प्रणश्यामि स च मे न प्रणश्यति ॥ ३० ॥**

*yo mām paśhyati sarvatra sarvam cha mayi paśhyati
tasyāham na praṇaśhyāmi sa cha me na praṇaśhyati*

yah—who; mām—me; paśhyati—see; sarvatra—everywhere; sarvam—everything; cha—and; mayi—in me; paśhyati—see; tasya—for him; aham—I; na—not; praṇaśhyāmi—lost; sah—that person; cha—and; me—to me; na—nor; praṇaśhyati—lost.

For those who see me everywhere and see all things in me, I am never lost, nor are they ever lost to me.

To lose Bhagavān means to let the mind wander away from him, and to be with him means to unite the mind with him. The easy way to unite the mind with Bhagavān is to learn to see everything in its connection with him. For example, let us say that someone hurts us. It is the nature of the mind to develop sentiments of resentment, hatred, etc. toward anyone who harms us. However, if we permit that to happen, then our mind comes away from the divine realm, and the devotional union of our mind with Bhagavān ceases. Instead, if we see the Supreme Bhagavān seated in that person, we will think, “Bhagavān is testing me through this person. He wants me to increase the virtue of tolerance, and that is why he is inspiring this person to behave badly with me. But I will not permit the incident to disturb me.” Thinking in this way, we will be able to prevent the mind from becoming a victim of negative

sentiments.

Similarly, the mind separates from Bhagavān when it gets attached to a friend or relative. Now, if we train the mind to see Bhagavān in that person, then each time the mind wanders toward him or her, we will think, “Shri Krishna is seated in this person, and thus I am feeling this attraction.” In this manner, the mind will continue to retain its devotional absorption in the Supreme.

Sometimes, the mind laments over past incidents. This again separates the mind from the divine realm because lamentation takes the mind into the past and the present contemplation of Bhagavān and Guru ceases. Now if we see that incident in connection with Bhagavān, we will think, “The Bhagavān deliberately arranged for me to experience tribulation in the world, so that I may develop detachment. He is so concerned about my welfare that he mercifully arranges for the proper circumstances that are beneficial for my spiritual progress.” By thinking thus, we will be able to protect our devotional focus. Sage Narad states:

*loka hānau chintā na kāryā niveditātma loka vedatvāt
(Nārad Bhakti Darshan, Sūtra 61) [v23]*

“When you suffer a reversal in the world, do not lament or brood over it. See the grace of Bhagavān in that incident.” Our self-interest lies in somehow or the other keeping the mind in Bhagavān, and the simple trick to accomplish this is to see Bhagavān in everything and everyone. That is the practice stage, which slowly leads to the perfection that is mentioned in this verse, where we are never lost to Bhagavān and he is never lost to us.

**सर्वभूतस्थितं यो मां भजत्येकत्वमास्थितः ।
सर्वथा वर्तमानोऽपि स योगी मयि वर्तते ॥ ३१ ॥**

*sarva-bhūta-sthitam yo mām bhajatyekatvam āsthitaḥ
sarvathā vartamāno 'pi sa yogī mayi vartate*

sarva-bhūta-sthitam—situated in all beings; *yah*—who; *mām*—me; *bhajati*—worships; *ekatvam*—in

unity; *āsthitah*—established; *sarvathā*—in all kinds of; *varta-mānah*—remain; *api*—although; *sah*—he; *yogī*—a yogi; *mayi*—in me; *vartate*—dwells.

The yogi who is established in union with me, and worships me as the Supreme Ātman residing in all beings, dwells only in me, though engaged in all kinds of activities.

Bhagavān is all-pervading in the world. He is also seated in everyone's heart as the Supreme Ātman. In verse 18.61, Shri Krishna states: "I am situated in the hearts of all living beings." Thus, within the body of each living being, there are two personalities—the Ātman and the Supreme Ātman.

1. Those in material consciousness see everyone as the body, and make distinctions on the basis of caste, creed, sex, age, social status, etc.
2. Those in superior consciousness see everyone as the Ātman. Thus in verse 5.18, Shri Krishna states: "The learned, with the eyes of divine knowledge, see with equal vision a Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog, and a dog-eater."
3. The elevated yogis in even higher consciousness see Bhagavān seated as the Supreme Ātman in everyone. They also perceive the world, but they are unconcerned about it. They are like the hansas, the swans who can drink the milk and leave out the water from a mixture of milk and water.
4. The most elevated yogis are called *paramahansas*. They only see Bhagavān, and have no perception of the world. This was the level of realization of Shukadev, the son of Ved Vyas, as stated in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam:

*yam pravrajantam anupetam apeta krityam
dvaipāyano viraha-kātara ājuhāva
putreti tan-Māyātayā taravo 'bhinedustam
sarva-bhūta-hṛidayam munim ānato 'smi (1.2.2) [v24]*

When Shukadev entered the renounced order of *sanyās*, walking away from home in his childhood itself, he was at such an elevated level that he had no perception of the world. He did not even notice the beautiful women bathing

in the nude in a lake, while he happened to pass by there. All that he perceived was Bhagavān; all that he heard was Bhagavān; all that he thought was Bhagavān.

In this verse, Shri Krishna is talking about the perfected yogis who are in the third and fourth stages of the above levels of realization.

**आत्मौपम्येन सर्वत्र समं पश्यति योऽर्जुन ।
सुखं वा यदि वा दुःखं स योगी परमो मतः ॥ 32 ॥**

*ātmaupamyena sarvatra samam paśyati yo 'rjuna
sukham vā yadi vā duḥkham sa yogī paramo mataḥ*

ātma-aupamyena—similar to oneself; *sarvatra*—everywhere; *samam*—equally; *paśyati*—see; *yah*—who; *arjuna*—Arjun; *sukham*—joy; *vā*—or; *yadi*—if; *vā*—or; *duḥkham*—sorrow; *sah*—such; *yogī*—a yogi; *paramah*—highest; *mataḥ*—is considered.

I regard them to be perfect yogis who see the true equality of all living beings and respond to the joys and sorrows of others as if they were their own.

We consider all the limbs of our body as ours, and are equally concerned if any of them is damaged. We are incontrovertible in the conviction that the harm done to any of our limbs is harm done to ourselves. Similarly, those who see Bhagavān in all beings consider the joys and sorrows of others as their own. Therefore, such yogis are always the well-wishers of all Ātman(s) and they strive for the eternal benefit of all. This is the *sama-darśana* (equality of vision) of perfected yogis.

**अर्जुन उवाच ।
योऽयं योगस्त्वया प्रोक्तः साम्येन मधुसूदन ।
एतस्याहं न पश्यामि चञ्चलत्वात्स्थितिं स्थिराम् ॥ 33 ॥**

*arjuna uvācha
yo 'yam yogas tvayā proktah sāmyena madhusūdana
etasyāham na paśhyāmi chañchalatvāt sthitim sthirām*

arjunaḥ uvācha—Arjun said; *yah*—which; *ayam*—this; *yogaḥ*—system of Yog; *tvayā*—by you; *proktah*—described; *sāmyena*—by equanimity; *madhu-sūdana*—Shri Krishna, the killer of the Demon named Madhu; *etasya*—of this; *aham*—I; *na*—do not; *paśhyāmi*—see; *chañchalatvāt*—due to restlessness; *sthitim*—situation; *sthirām*—steady.

Arjun said: The system of Yog that you have described, O Madhusudan, appears impractical and unattainable to me, due to the restless mind.

Arjun speaks this verse, beginning with the words *yo yam*, “This system of Yog,” referring to the process described from verse 6.10 forward. Shri Krishna has just finished explaining that for perfection in Yog we must:

- subdue the senses
- give up all desires
- focus the mind upon Bhagavān alone
- think of him with an unwavering mind
- see everyone with equal vision

Arjun frankly expresses his reservation about what he has heard by saying that it is impracticable. None of the above can be accomplished without controlling the mind. If the mind is restless, then all these aspects of Yog become unattainable as well.

चञ्चलं हि मनः कृष्ण प्रमाथि बलवद्दृढम् ।
तस्याहं निग्रहं मन्ये वायोरिव सुदुष्करम् ॥ 34 ॥

*chañchalam hi manah kṛiṣṇa pramāthi balavad dṛidham
tasyāhaṁ nigrahaṁ manye vāyor iva su-duṣhkaram*

chañchalam—restless; *hi*—certainly; *manah*—mind; *kṛiṣṇa*—Shri Krishna; *pramāthi*—turbulent; *bala-vat*—strong; *dṛidham*—obstinate; *tasya*—its; *aham*—I; *nigrahaṁ*—control; *manye*—think; *vāyoh*—of the wind; *iva*—like; *su-duṣhkaram*—difficult to perform.

The mind is very restless, turbulent, strong and obstinate, O Krishna. It appears to me that it is more difficult to control than the wind.

Arjun speaks for us all when he describes the troublesome mind. It is restless because it keeps flitting in different directions, from subject to subject. It is

turbulent because it creates upheavals in one's consciousness, in the form of hatred, anger, lust, greed, envy, anxiety, fear, attachment, etc. It is strong because it overpowers the intellect with its vigorous currents and destroys the faculty of discrimination. The mind is also obstinate because when it catches a harmful thought, it refuses to let go, and continues to ruminate over it again and again, even to the dismay of the intellect. Thus enumerating its unwholesome characteristics, Arjun declares that the mind is even more difficult to control than the wind. It is a powerful analogy for no one can ever think of controlling the mighty wind in the sky.

In this verse, Arjun has addressed the Bhagavān as Krishna. The word “Krishna” means: *karṣhati yogināṁ paramahansānāṁ chetānsi iti kṛiṣhṇah* [v25] “Krishna is he who forcefully attracts the minds of even the most powerfully-minded yogis and *paramahansas*.” Arjun is thus indicating that Krishna should also attract his restless, turbulent, strong, and obstinate mind.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
असंशयं महाबाहो मनो दुर्निग्रहं चलम् ।
अभ्यासेन तु कौन्तेय वैराग्येण च गृह्णते ॥ 35 ॥

*śrī bhagavān uvācha
asanśhayam mahā-bāho mano durnigraham chalam
abhyāsenā tu kaunteya vairāgyena cha grihyate*

śrī-bhagavān uvācha—Bhagavān Krishna said; *asanśhayam*—undoubtedly; *mahā-bāho*—mighty-armed one; *manoh*—the mind; *durnigraham*—difficult to restrain; *chalam*—restless; *abhyāsenā*—by practice; *tu*—but; *kaunteya*—Arjun, the son of Kunti; *vairāgyena*—by detachment; *cha*—and; *grihyate*—can be controlled.

Bhagavān Krishna said: O mighty-armed son of Kunti, what you say is correct; the mind is indeed very difficult to restrain. But by practice and detachment, it can be controlled.

Shri Krishna responds to Arjun's comment by calling him *Mahābāho*, which means “Mighty armed one.” He implies, “O Arjun, you defeated the bravest

warriors in battle. Can you not defeat the mind?”

Shri Krishna does not deny the problem, by saying, “Arjun, what nonsense are you speaking? The mind can be controlled very easily.” Rather, he agrees with Arjun’s statement that the mind is indeed difficult to control. However, so many things are difficult to achieve in the world and yet we remain undaunted and move forward. For example, sailors know that the sea is dangerous and the possibility of terrible storms exists. Yet, they have never found those dangers as sufficient reasons for remaining ashore. Hence, Shri Krishna assures Arjun that the mind can be controlled by *vairāgya* and *abhyās*.

Vairāgya means detachment. We observe that the mind runs toward the objects of its attachment, toward the direction it has been habituated to running in the past. The elimination of attachment eradicates the unnecessary wanderings of the mind.

Abhyās means practice, or a concerted and persistent effort to change an old habit or develop a new one. Practice is a very important word for *sādhaks*. In all fields of human endeavor, practice is the key that opens the door to mastery and excellence. Take, for example, a mundane activity such as typing. The first time people begin typing, they are able to type one word in a minute. But after a year’s typing, their fingers fly on the keyboard at the speed of eighty words a minute. This proficiency comes solely through practice. Similarly, the obstinate and turbulent mind has to be made to rest on the lotus feet of the Supreme Bhagavān through *abhyās*. Take the mind away from the world—this is *vairāgya*—and bring the mind to rest on Bhagavān—this is *abhyās*. Sage Patanjali gives the same instruction:

abhyāsa vairāgyābhyaṁ tannirodhah (Yog Darśhan 1.12) [v26]

“The perturbations of the mind can be controlled by constant practice and detachment.”

असंयतात्मना योगो दुष्प्राप इति मे मतिः ।
वश्यात्मना तु यतता शक्योऽवाप्तुमुपायतः ॥३६॥

*asañyatātmanā yogo duṣprāpa iti me matih
vaśhyātmanā tu yatata śakyo 'vāptum upāyataḥ*

asanyata-ātmanā—one whose mind is unbridled; *yogah*—Yog; *duṣprāpah*—difficult to attain; *iti*—thus; *me*—my; *matih*—opinion; *vaśhya-ātmanā*—by one whose mind is controlled; *tu*—but; *yatataḥ*—one who strives; *śakyaḥ*—possible; *avāptum*—to achieve; *upāyataḥ*—by right means.

Yog is difficult to attain for one whose mind is unbridled. However, those who have learnt to control the mind, and who strive earnestly by the proper means, can attain perfection in Yog. This is my opinion.

Shri Hari, Shri Krishna, now gives the link between the control of the mind and success in Yog. He says that those who have not learnt to bridle the mind through *abhyās* and *vairāgya* find great difficulty in the practice of Yog. But those who have brought the mind under their control through persistent effort can achieve success by adopting the proper means. The perfect process has already been described by him from verses 6.10 to 6.32. It includes subduing the senses, giving up all desires, focusing the mind upon Bhagavān alone, thinking of him with an unwavering mind, and seeing everyone with equal vision.

This statement creates a doubt in Arjun's mind regarding the sādhak who is unable to control the mind, and he now questions Shri Krishna in this regard.

अर्जुन उवाच ।
अयतिः श्रद्धयोपेतो योगाच्छलितमानसः ।
अप्राप्य योगसंसिद्धिं कां गतिं कृष्ण गच्छति ॥३७॥

*arjuna uvācha
ayatiḥ śraddhayopeto yogāch chalita-mānasah
aprāpya yoga-sansiddhim kān gatim kṛiṣhṇa gachchhati*

arjunah uvācha—Arjun said; *ayatiḥ*—lax; *śraddhayā*—with faith; *upetah*—possessed; *yogāt*—from Yog; *chalita-mānasah*—whose mind becomes deviated; *aprāpya*—failing to attain; *yoga-sansiddhim*—the highest perfection in yog; *kām*—which; *gatim*—destination; *kṛiṣhṇa*—Shri Krishna; *gachchhati*—goes.

Arjun said: What is the fate of the unsuccessful yogi who begins the path with faith, but who does not endeavor sufficiently, due to unsteady mind, and is unable to reach the goal of Yog in this life?

The journey toward Brahman-realization begins with *śhraddhā* (faith). Many sincere Ātman(s) develop faith in the divine knowledge of the scriptures by virtue of the *sanskārs* of their past lives, or the association of saints, or reversals in the world, etc. There can be many reasons that create the *śhraddhā* required to begin the journey. However, if these aspirants do not put in the necessary effort and become *ayatiḥ* (lax), then the mind remains *chalit* (restless). Such aspirants are unable to complete the journey in this life. Arjun inquires into the fate of such *sādhaks*.

कच्चिन्नोभयविभ्रष्टश्छन्नाभ्रमिव नश्यति ।
अप्रतिष्ठे महाबाहो विमूढो ब्रह्मणः पथि ॥ 38 ॥

*kachchin nobhaya-vibhraṣṭaś chhinnābhram iva naśyati
apratiṣṭhaḥo mahā-bāho vimūḍho brahmaṇah pathi*

kachchit—whether; *na*—not; *ubhaya*—both; *vibhraṣṭah*—deviated from; *chhinna*—broken; *abhram*—cloud; *iva*—like; *naśyati*—perishes; *apratiṣṭhah*—without any support; *mahā-bāho*—mighty-armed Krishna; *vimūḍhah*—bewildered; *brahmaṇah* — of Brahman-realization; *pathi*—one on the path.

Does not such a person who deviates from Yog get deprived of both material and spiritual success, O mighty-armed Krishna, and perish like a broken cloud with no position in either sphere?

The desire to attain success is natural to the *jīva*. It comes from being a part of Bhagavān, who is all-perfect, and hence the Ātman too wishes to be perfect and successful like its source—Bhagavān. Success can be attained in two realms —material and spiritual. Those who consider the world to be a source of happiness strive for material advancement. And those who consider spiritual wealth to be the real treasure worthy of possessing, strive for it by rejecting

material endeavors. However, if such spiritualists fail in their attempt, they are apparently left with neither spiritual nor material assets. Thinking in this manner, Arjun asks whether their position is like that of a broken cloud. A cloud, which breaks away from the group of clouds, becomes worthless. It neither offers sufficient shade, nor does it increase its weight and become rain-bearing. It merely blows in the wind and perishes like a non-entity in the sky. Arjun asks whether the unsuccessful yogi suffers a similar fate, with no position in any sphere.

एतन्मे संशयं कृष्ण छेतुमहस्यशेषतः ।
त्वदन्यः संशयस्यास्य छेता न ह्युपपद्यते ॥३९॥

*etan me sanśhayam kṛiṣṇa chhettum arhasyaśheṣataḥ
tvad-anyah sanśhayasyāsyā chhettā na hyupapadyate*

etat—this; *me*—my; *sanśhayam*—doubt; *kṛiṣṇa*—Krishna; *chhettum*—to dispel; *arhasi*—you can; *śheṣataḥ*—completely; *tvat*—than you; *anyah*—other; *sanśhayasya*—of doubt; *asya*—this; *chhettā*—a dispeller; *na*—never; *hi*—certainly; *upapadyate*—is fit.

O Krishna, please dispel this doubt of mine completely, for who other than you can do so?

Doubts arise from ignorance, and the power to dispel doubts comes from knowledge. Scholars of the scriptures possess theoretical knowledge, which is not good enough to dispel doubts, because the scriptures contain many apparent contradictions that can be reconciled only by realization. The Brahman-realized Saints do possess realized knowledge that is limited in extent. They do not become all-knowing. Such realized Saints do possess the power to dispel doubts, but they cannot compete with Bhagavān, who is all-knowing. Bhagavān alone is *sarvajña* (omniscient) and *sarva-śaktimān* (all-powerful), and hence he is supremely competent in removing all ignorance, just as the sun is competent in repealing the darkness.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
 पार्थ नैवेह नामुत्र विनाशस्तस्य विद्यते ।
 न हि कल्याणकृत्कश्चिददुर्गतिं तात गच्छति ॥ 40 ॥

*śhrī bhagavān uvācha
 pārtha naiveha nāmutra vināśhas tasya vidyate
 na hi kalyāna-kṛit kaśchid durgatim tāta gachchhati*

śhrī-bhagavān uvācha—Bhagavān Krishna said; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *na eva*—never; *ihā*—in this world; *na*—never; *amutra*—in the next world; *vināśhaḥ*—destruction; *tasya*—his; *vidyate*—exists; *na*—never; *hi*—certainly; *kalyāna-kṛit*—one who strives for Brahman-realization; *kaśchit*—anyone; *durgatim*—evil destination; *tāta*—my friend; *gachchhati*—goes.

Bhagavān Krishna said: O Parth, One who engages on the spiritual path does not meet with destruction either in this world or the world to come. My dear friend, one who strives for Brahman-realization is never overcome by evil.

The word *Tāta* is a word of endearment, which literally means “son.” By addressing Arjun as *Tāta* in this verse, Shri Krishna is Demonstrating his affection for him. The son is affectionately addressed as *Tāta*. The Guru is like a father to his disciple, and hence the Guru too sometimes affectionately addresses the disciple as *Tāta*. Here, by displaying his affection and grace toward Arjun, Shri Krishna wishes to indicate that Bhagavān takes care of those who tread on his path. They are dear to Bhagavān because they engage in the most auspicious kind of activity, and “the doer of good never comes to grief.” This verse asserts that Bhagavān preserves the devotee both in this world and the world hereafter. This pronouncement is a great assurance to all spiritual aspirants. *Shri Krishna then goes on to explain how Bhagavān preserves the efforts of the yogi who does not complete the journey in the present life.*

प्राप्य पुण्यकृतां लोकानुषित्वा शाश्वतीः समाः ।
शुचीनां श्रीमतां गेहे योगभ्रष्टेऽभिजायते ॥ 41 ॥

अथवा योगिनामेव कुले भवति धीमताम् ।
एतद्विदुर्लभतरं लोके जन्म यदीदृशम् ॥ 42 ॥

*prāpya punya-kṛitām lokān uśhitvā śhāśvatīḥ samāḥ
śhuchinām śrīmatām gehe yoga-bhraṣṭo 'bhijāyate*

*atha vā yoginām eva kule bhavati dhīmatām
etad dhi durlabhataram loke janma yad īdriśham*

prāpya—attain; *punya-kṛitām*—of the virtuous; *lokān*—abodes; *uśhitvā*—after dwelling; *śhāśvatīḥ*—many; *samāḥ*—ages; *śhuchinām*—of the pious; *śrī-matām*—of the prosperous; *gehe*—in the house; *yoga-bhraṣṭah*—the unsuccessful yogis; *abhijāyate*—take birth; *atha vā*—else; *yoginām*—of those endowed with divine wisdom; *eva*—certainly; *kule*—in the family; *bhavati*—take birth; *dhīmatām*—of the wise; *etat*—this; *hi*—certainly; *durlabha-taram*—very rare; *loke*—in this world; *janma*—birth; *yat*—which; *īdriśham*—like this.

The unsuccessful yogis, upon death, go to the abodes of the virtuous. After dwelling there for many ages, they are again reborn in the earth plane, into a family of pious and prosperous people. Else, if they had developed dispassion due to long practice of Yog, they are born into a family endowed with divine wisdom. Such a birth is very difficult to attain in this world.

Residence in the celestial abodes is awarded to those who engage in mundane virtuous deeds and the fruitive *karm-kāṇḍ* activities enjoined in the Vedas. So, why should an unsuccessful yogi go to the celestial abodes? The reason is that the opposite of Yog (union with Bhagavān) is *bhog* (material enjoyment). One falls from Yog because of the desire for *bhog*. So Bhagavān, like an indulgent father, gives that fallen yogi a chance to engage in *bhog* in the next life and realize that it is an exercise in futility, which does not satiate the yearning of the Ātman for permanent bliss. So the fallen yogi is sometimes sent to the celestial abodes for a long time, and then again granted birth on Earth.

Such Ātman(s) are then given birth in a family where they have the opportunity to continue their spiritual journey. *Śhuchi* means those who are of pious and of good character; *Shri* means those who are wealthy. The unsuccessful yogi are either born in a pious family that will nurture the child's spirituality from childhood, or in a wealthy family where all the bodily needs are taken care of and one does not need to engage in the struggle for survival. Such a family environment facilitates the opportunity to engage in spiritual pursuits for the Ātman(s) who are so inclined.

The circumstances, situation, and family of our birth have an important bearing upon the course of our life. From our bodily parents we derive physical hereditary characteristics. This is the genetic process of heredity. However, there is also the process of social heredity. We blindly follow many customs because of the social environment of our upbringing. We do not choose to be Indians, Americans, British, etc. We identify ourselves with a nationality based upon our birth, and even go the extent of developing enmity with people of other nationalities. Invariably, we follow the religion of our parents, on the basis of social heredity.

Thus, the place and family of our birth has a great impact upon our direction and attainment in life. If the place and family of birth were arbitrarily decided in every life, there would be no justice in the world. However, Bhagavān has an account of all our thoughts and actions of endless lifetimes. In accordance with the law of karma, the spiritual assets earned by the unsuccessful yogi in the previous life bear fruit. Accordingly, those yogis who had traversed quite a distance and developed dispassion are not sent to the celestial abodes. They are given birth in a spiritually evolved family, to facilitate the continuance of their journey. Such a birth is a great good fortune because the parents inculcate divine wisdom in the child from the very beginning.

तत्र तं बुद्धिसंयोगं लभते पौर्वदेहिकम् ।
यतते च ततो भूयः संसिद्धौ कुरुनन्दन ॥ 43 ॥

*tatra tam buddhi-sanyogam labhate paurva-dehikam
yatate cha tato bhuyah sansiddhau kuru-nandana*

tatra—there; *tam*—that; *buddhi-sanyogam*—reawaken their wisdom; *labhate*—obtains; *paurva-dehikam*—from the previous lives; *yataste*—strives; *cha*—and; *tatah*—thereafter; *bhuyah*—again; *sansiddhau*—for aperfection; *kuru-nandana*—Arjun, descendant of the Kurus.

On taking such a birth, O descendant of Kurus, they reawaken the wisdom of their previous lives, and strive even harder toward perfection in Yog.

Bhagavān, who is seated within the heart of every living being, is perfectly just. Whatever spiritual assets we had accumulated in the past life—detachment, wisdom, devotion, faith, tolerance, determination, etc.—are known to him. So, at the appropriate time, he gives us the fruits of our past efforts and enhances our spirituality from within, in accordance with our previous attainments. This explains why some people harboring materialistic views suddenly become deeply spiritual. When their spiritual *sanskārs* awaken, they get the benefit of their *sādhanā* of previous lives.

A traveler may break journey to rest the night in a hotel on the wayside. But when he wakes up, he does not need to again tread the distance already covered. He simply moves ahead to cover the remaining distance. Likewise, by Bhagavān's grace, the yogi of past lives receives the previous spiritual assets accumulated, to be able to continue the journey where he had left off, like someone who has woken up from sleep. That is why such a yogi never gets lost.

पूर्वाभ्यासेन तेनैव ह्रियते ह्यवशोऽपि सः ।
जिज्ञासुरपि योगस्य शब्दब्रह्मातिवर्तते ॥ 44 ॥

*pūrvābhyaśena tenaiva hriyate hyavaśho 'pi sah
jijñāsur api yogasya śabda-brahmāativartate*

pūrva—past; *abhyāsena*—discipline; *tena*—by that; *eva*—certainly; *hriyate*—is attracted; *hi*—surely; *avaśhah*—helplessly; *api*—although; *sah*—that person; *jijñāsuh*—inquisitive; *api*—even;

yogasya—about yog; *śabda-brahma*—fruitive portion of the Vedas; *ativartate*—transcends.

Indeed, they feel drawn toward Bhagavān, even against their will, on the strength of their past discipline. Such seekers naturally rise above the ritualistic principles of the scriptures.

Once spiritual sentiments have sprouted, they cannot be wiped out. The Ātman with devotional *sanskārs* (tendencies and impressions) from the present and past lifetimes gets naturally inspired toward spirituality. Such an individual feels drawn toward Bhagavān, and this pull is also referred to as “the call of Bhagavān.” Based upon the past *sanskārs* the call of Bhagavān sometimes becomes so strong that it is said, “The call of Bhagavān is the strongest call in one’s life.” People who experience it reject the entire world and the advice of their friends and relatives to tread the path that draws their heart. That is how in history, great princes, noblemen, wealthy businesspersons, etc. renounced the comfort of their worldly position to become ascetics, yogis, sages, mystics, and swamis. And since their hunger was for Bhagavān alone, they naturally rose above the ritualistic practices prescribed in the Vedas for material advancement.

**प्रयत्नाद्यतमानस्तु योगी संशुद्धकिल्बिषः ।
अनेकजन्मसंसिद्धस्ततो याति परां गतिम् ॥४५॥**

*prayatnād yatamānas tu yogī sanśuddha-kilbiṣhah
aneka-janma-sansiddhas tato yāti parām gatim*

prayatnāt—with great effort; *yatamānah*—endeavoring; *tu*—and; *yogī*—a yogi; *sanśuddha*—purified; *kilbiṣhah*—from material desires; *aneka*—after many, many; *janma*—births; *sansiddhah*—attain perfection; *tataḥ*—then; *yāti*—attains; *parām*—the highest; *gatim*—path.

With the accumulated merits of many past births, when these yogis engage in sincere endeavor in making further progress, they become purified from material desires and attain perfection in this life itself.

The accumulated practice of many past lives becomes the helpful breeze for

spiritual progress. In this breeze, the yogis, continuing from past lives, hoist their sail in the form of sincere endeavor in the present life. Shri Krishna uses the words *prayatnād yata mānasatu*, which means “striving harder than before.” The word *tu* indicates their present endeavor is deeper than in previous lifetimes when they were unsuccessful in completing the journey.

They are thus able to take advantage of the momentum carried forward from the past and allow the favorable wind to sweep them to the goal. To onlookers, it may seem that they covered the entire distance in the present life, but Shri Krishna says: *aneka janma sansiddhah* “Perfection in Yog is the result of the accumulated practice of many lives.”

तपस्विभ्योऽधिको योगी
ज्ञानिभ्योऽपि मतोऽधिकः ।
कर्मिभ्यश्चाधिको योगी
तस्माद्योगी भवार्जुन ॥ 46 ॥

*tapasvibhyo 'dhiko yogī
jñānibhyo 'pi mato 'dhikah
karmibhyaśh chādhiko yogī
tasmād yogī bhavārjuna*

tapasvibhyah—than the ascetics; *adhikah*—superior; *yogī*—a yogi; *jñānibhyah*—than the persons of learning; *api*—even; *mataḥ*—considered; *adhikah*—superior; *karmibhyah*—than the ritualistic performers; *cha*—and; *adhikah*—superior; *yogī*—a yogi; *tasmāt*—therefore; *yogī*—a yogi; *bhava*—just become; *arjuna*—Arjun.

A yogi is superior to the *tapasvī* (ascetic), superior to the *jñānī* (a person of learning), and even superior to the *karmī* (ritualistic performer). Therefore, O Arjun, strive to be a yogi.

A *tapasvī* (ascetic) is one who accepts voluntary mortification and lives an extremely austere lifestyle, refraining from sensual pleasures and the accumulation of material wealth, as an aid in the pursuit of salvation. A *jñānī* is a person of learning who actively engages in the cultivation of knowledge. A

karmī is one who performs the Vedic rituals for attaining material opulence and the celestial abodes. Shri Krishna declares the yogi to be superior to them all. The reason for this is simple. The goal of the *karmī*, *jñānī*, and *tapasvī* is worldly attainment; they are still at the bodily platform of existence. The yogi is striving not for the world, but for Bhagavān. As a result, the yogi's accomplishment is at the spiritual platform and is superior to them all.

**योगिनामपि सर्वेषां मदृतेनान्तरात्मना ।
श्रद्धावान्भजते यो मां स मे युक्ततमो मतः ॥४७॥**

*yoginām api sarveṣhām mad-gatenāntar-ātmanā
śhraddhāvān bhajate yo mām sa me yukta-tamah mataḥ*

yoginām—of all yogis; *api*—however; *sarveṣhām*—all types of; *mat-gatena*—absorbed in me (Bhagavān); *antah*—inner; *ātmanā*—with the mind; *śhraddhā-vān*—with great faith; *bhajate*—engage in devotion; *yah*—who; *mām*—to me; *sah*—he; *me*—by me; *yukta-tamah*—the highest yogi; *mataḥ*—is considered.

Of all yogis, those whose minds are always absorbed in me, and who engage in devotion to me with great faith, them I consider to be the highest of all.

Even amongst yogis, there are *karm yogis*, *bhakti yogis*, *jñāna yogis*, *aṣṭāṅg yogis*, etc. This verse puts to rest the debate about which form of Yog is the highest. Shri Krishna declares the *bhakti yogi* to be the highest, superior to even the best *aṣṭāṅg yogi* and *haṭha yogi*. That is because *bhakti*, or devotion, is the highest power of Bhagavān. It is such a power that binds Bhagavān and makes him a slave of his devotee. Thus, he states in the Bhāgavatam:

*aham bhakta-parādhīno hyasvatāntra iva dvija
sādhubhir grasta-hṛidayo bhaktair bhakta-jana-priyah* (9.4.63) [v27]

“Although I am supremely independent, yet I become enslaved by my devotees. They conquer my heart. What to speak of my devotees, even the devotees of my devotees are very dear to me.” The *bhakti yogi* possesses the power of divine love, and is thus most dear to Bhagavān and considered by him to be

the highest of all.

In this verse, Shri Krishna has used the word *bhajate*. It comes from the root word *bhaj*, which means “to serve.” It is a far more significant word for devotion than “worship,” which means “to adore.” Here, Shri Krishna is talking about those who, not merely adore him, but also serve him with loving devotion. They are thus established in the natural position of the Ātman as the servant of Bhagavān, while the other kinds of yogis are still incomplete in their realization. They have connected themselves with Bhagavān, but they have not yet situated themselves in the understanding that they are his eternal servants.

*muktānām api siddhānām nārāyaṇa-parāyaṇāḥ
su-durlabhaḥ praśhāntĀtman koṭiṣhv api mahā-mune*
(*Bhāgavatam* 6.14.5) [v28]

“Amongst many millions of perfected and liberated saints, the peaceful person who is devoted to the Supreme Bhagavān, Narayan, is very rare.”

Another way of understanding this verse is that *bhakti yog* provides the closest and most complete realization of Bhagavān. This is explained in verse 18.55, where Shri Krishna explains that the *bhakti yogi* alone understands the true personality of Bhagavān.



Chapter 7

Jñāna Vijñāna Yog ~ ज्ञानविज्ञानयोगः

Yog Through The Realization Of Divine Knowledge

This chapter begins by describing the material and spiritual dimensions of Bhagavān's energies. Shri Krishna explains that all these have emanated from him, and they rest in him, as beads strung on a thread. He is the source of the entire creation, and into him it again dissolves. His material energy, Māyā, is very difficult to overcome, but those who surrender to him receive his grace and cross over it easily. Shri Krishna describes the four kinds of people who do not surrender to him, and the four kinds of people who engage in his devotion. Amongst his devotees, he considers as most dear, those who worship him in knowledge, with mind and intellect merged in him. Some, whose intellect has been carried away by material desires, surrender to the celestial deities. But these celestial deities can only bestow temporary material fruits, and even those, by the powers they have received from the Supreme Bhagavān. Thus, the most worthy object of devotion is Bhagavān himself. Shri Krishna confirms that he is the highest reality and ultimate attainment, possessing eternal divine attributes, such as omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence. However, his personality is hidden by a veil of his divine *YogMāyā* power, and hence the imperishable nature of his eternal divine form is not

known to all. If we take shelter in him, he bestows upon us knowledge of himself, and on knowing him, we also get knowledge of the self and the field of karmic actions.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
मय्यासक्तमनाः पार्थं योगं युज्जन्मदाश्रयः ।
असंशयं समग्रं मां यथा ज्ञास्यसि तच्छृणु ॥ १ ॥

*śhrī bhagavān uvācha
mayyāsakta-manāḥ pārtha yogam yuñjan mad-āśhrayah
asanśhayam samagram mām yathā jñāsyasi tach chhriṇu*

śhrī-bhagavān uvācha—Bhagavān Krishna said; *mayi*—to me; *āsakta-manāḥ*—with the mind attached; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *yogam*—bhakti yog; *yuñjan*—practicing; *mat-āśhrayah*—surrendering to me; *asanśhayam*—free from doubt; *samagram*—completely; *mām*—me; *yathā*—how; *jñāsyasi*—you shall know; *tat*—that; *śhrīṇu*—listen.

Bhagavān Krishna said: Now listen, O Arjun, how, with the mind attached exclusively to me, and surrendering to me through the practice of *bhakti yog*, you can know me completely, free from doubt.

At the conclusion of chapter six, Shri Krishna had declared that those who devotedly serve him, with mind focused exclusively on him, are the best amongst all yogis. This statement can lead to some natural questions: What is the way to know the Supreme Bhagavān? How should one meditate upon him? How should a devotee worship Bhagavān? Although Arjun did not raise these questions, yet, out of his compassion, the Bhagavān presupposes them, and begins to answer them. He uses the word *śhrīṇu*, meaning “listen,” and qualifies it with *mad-āśhrayah*, meaning “with your mind focused on me.”

ज्ञानं तेऽहं सविज्ञानमिदं वक्ष्याम्यशेषतः ।
यज्ज्ञात्वा नेह भूयोऽन्यज्ञातव्यमवशिष्यते ॥ २ ॥

*jñānam te 'ham sa-vijñānam idam vakṣhyāmyaśheṣataḥ
yaj jñātvā neha bhūyo 'nyaj jñātavyam-avaśhiṣhyate*

jñānam—knowledge; *te*—unto you; *aham*—I; *sa*—with; *vijñānam*—wisdom; *idam*—this; *vakṣhyāmi*

—shall reveal; *aśheṣataḥ*—in full; *yat*—which; *jñātvā*—having known; *na*—not; *iha*—in this world; *bhūyah*—further; *anyat*—anything else; *jñātavyam*—to be known; *avaśhiṣhyate*—remains.

I shall now reveal unto you fully this knowledge and wisdom, knowing which nothing else remains to be known in this world.

Knowledge that is acquired through the senses, mind, and intellect is called *jñāna*. Knowledge that comes as insight from within, as a consequence of spiritual practice, is called *vijñāna* (wisdom). *Vijñāna* is not intellectual knowledge; it is direct experiential realization. For example, we may keep hearing about the glories of the sweetness of honey kept in a bottle, but it remains theoretical knowledge. However, when we open the lid of the bottle and taste the honey inside, we get experiential realization of its sweetness. Similarly, the theoretical knowledge we get from the Guru and the scriptures is *jñāna*. And when, in accordance with that knowledge we practice *sādhanā* and purify our mind, then the knowledge that awakens within us as realization is called *vijñāna*.

When Sage Ved Vyas decided to write the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam describing the nature, glories, and object of devotion, he was not content to write it on the basis of *jñāna*, and so he first engaged in *bhakti* to get experiential realization of Bhagavān:

*bhakti-yogena manasi samyak pranihite 'male
apaśhyat puruṣham pūrvam māyām cha tad-apāśhrayām*
(*Bhāgavatam* 1.7.4) [v1]

“Through *bhakti yog*, Ved Vyas fixed his mind upon Bhagavān, without any material sentiments, and thus he attained complete vision and realization of Shri Hari along with his external energy, Māyā, which was under his control.” Equipped with this realization, he then wrote the famous scripture.

Shri Krishna declares that he will illumine Arjun with the theoretical knowledge of Shri Hari, and also help him gain the inner wisdom regarding it.

On realization of this knowledge, nothing further will remain to be known.

**मनुष्याणां सहस्रेषु कश्चिद्यतति सिद्धये ।
यततामपि सिद्धानां कश्चिन्मां वेत्ति तत्त्वतः ॥३॥**

*manuṣhyāṇāṁ sahasreṣhu kaśchcid yatati siddhaye
yatatām api siddhānām kaśhchin mām vetti tattvataḥ*

manuṣhyāṇām—of men; *sahasreṣhu*—out of many thousands; *kaśchit*—someone; *yatati*—strives; *siddhaye*—for perfection; *yatatām*—of those who strive; *api*—even; *siddhānām*—of those who have achieved perfection; *kaśhchin*—someone; *mām*—me; *vetti*—knows; *tattvataḥ*—in truth.

Amongst thousands of persons, hardly one strives for perfection; and amongst those who have achieved perfection, hardly one knows me in truth.

In this verse, the word *siddhi* has been used for perfection. This is a word loaded with numerous connotations and meanings. Here are a few meanings of the word *siddhi* from the Sanskrit dictionary: attainment of a supernatural power, accomplishment, success, performance, fulfillment, solution of a problem, completion of cooking or a task, healing, hitting the mark, maturing, supreme felicity, beatitude, an unusual skill or faculty, perfection. Shri Krishna uses the word for perfection on the spiritual path, and says, “Arjun, out of innumerable Ātman(s), only a tiny proportion possess the human form. Amongst those who have attained the human birth, only a few strive for perfection. Even amongst thousands of perfected Ātman(s), those who are aware of my paramount position and divine glories are very rare.”

Why do Ātman(s) who have achieved perfection in spiritual practices not know Bhagavān in truth? This is because without *bhakti*, or loving devotion to the Bhagavān, it is not possible to know or perceive him. Spiritual aspirants who practice *karm*, *jñāna*, *hatha yog*, etc. without including devotion alongside cannot know Bhagavān. In the Bhagavad Gita, Shri Krishna reiterates this fact many times:

“Although he is all-pervading and all living beings are situated in him, yet he can be known only through devotion.” 8.22.

“O Arjun, by devotion alone, and by no other means, can I be seen as I am, standing before you. In this way can you know me, receive my divine vision, and enter into the mysteries of my understanding.” 11.54

“Only by loving devotion does one come to know who I am in truth. Then, having come to know my personality through devotion, one enters my divine realm.” 18.55

Thus, those spiritual aspirants who do not include devotion in their sādhanā remain restricted to theoretical knowledge of Bhagavān. They do not get experiential knowledge of the Absolute Truth.

Having said that one in many human beings knows him in truth, Shri Krishna now launches into a description of the material and spiritual dimensions of his energies. He first introduces apara prakṛiti, the field of material energy, which is an inferior energy, and yet, an energy of Bhagavān.

भूमिरापोऽनलो वायुः खं मनो बुद्धिरेव च ।
अहङ्कार इतीयं मे भिन्ना प्रकृतिरष्ट्था ॥४॥

*bhūmir-āpo 'nalo vāyuh kham mano buddhir eva cha
ahankāra itīyam me bhinnā prakritir aṣṭadhā*

bhūmih—earth; *āpah*—water; *analah*—fire; *vāyuh*—air; *kham*—space; *manah*—mind; *buddhih*—intellect; *eva*—certainly; *cha*—and; *ahankārah*—ego; *iti*—thus; *iyam*—all these; *me*—my; *bhinnā*—divisions; *prakṛitih*—material energy; *aṣṭadhā*—eightfold.

Earth, water, fire, air, space, mind, intellect, and ego—these are eight components of my material energy.

The material energy that composes this world is amazingly complex and fathomless. By classifying and categorizing it, we make it slightly comprehensible to our finite intellects. However, each of these categories has

further innumerable sub-categories. The system of classification used in modern science is to look on it matter as the combination of elements. At present, 118 elements have been discovered and included in the Periodic Table. In the Bhagavad Gita, and the Vedic philosophy in general, a radically different kind of classification is used. Matter is seen as *prakṛiti*, or energy of Bhagavān, and eight divisions of this energy are mentioned in this verse. We can understand how amazingly insightful this is in the light of the trend of modern science in the last century.

In 1905, in his Annus Mirabilis papers, Albert Einstein first propounded the concept of Mass-Energy Equivalence. He stated that matter has the potential of being converted to energy, to the extent that can be numerically determined by the equation E=mc². This understanding radically transformed the previous Newtonian concept of the universe as consisting of solid matter. Then in 1920s, Neil Bohr and other scientists proposed the Quantum theory, quantifying the dual particle-wave nature of matter. Since then, scientists have been searching for a Unified Field Theory, which will allow all forces and matter in the universe to be understood in terms of a single field.

What Shri Krishna presented to Arjun, 5,000 years before the development of modern science, is the perfect Unified Field Theory. He says, “Arjun, all that exists in the universe is a manifestation of my material energy.” It is just one material energy that has unfolded into myriad shapes, forms, and entities in this world. This is described in detail in the Taittirīya Upaniṣhad:

*tasmatvā etasmādātmana ākāśhah sambhūtaḥ ākāshadvayuh vāyoragnih agnerāpaḥ adbhyah
priθivī priθivyā auṣhadhayah auṣhadhībhyo 'nnam annātpuruṣhah sa vā eṣha puruṣho
'nnarasaMāyāḥ (2.1.2) [v2]*

The primordial form of the material energy is *prakṛiti*. When Bhagavān desires to create the world, he glances at it, by which it gets agitated and unfolds into *mahān* (since science has not yet reached to this subtle level of energy, there is

no equivalent word for it in the English language). *Mahān* further unfolds, and the next entity to manifest *ahankār*, which is also subtler than any entity known to science. From *ahankār*, come the *pañch-tanmātrās*, the five perceptions—taste, touch, smell, sight, and sound. From them come the five gross elements—space, air, fire, water, and earth.

In this verse, Shri Krishna not only includes the five gross elements as different manifestations of his energy, he also includes the mind, intellect, and ego, as distinctive elements of his energy. Shri Krishna states that all these are simply parts of his material energy, *Māyā*. *Beyond these is the Ātman energy, or the superior energy of Bhagavān, which he describes in the next verse.*

अपरेयमितस्त्वन्यां प्रकृतिं विद्धि मे पराम् ।
जीवभूतां महाबाहो ययेदं धार्यते जगत् ॥५॥

*apareyam itas tvanyām prakṛitim viddhi me parām
jīva-bhūtām mahā-bāho yayedam dhāryate jagat*

aparā—inferior; *iyam*—this; *itah*—besides this; *tu*—but; *anyām*—another; *prakṛitim*—energy; *viddhi*—know; *me*—my; *parām*—superior; *jīva-bhūtām*—living beings; *mahā-bāho*—mighty-armed one; *yayā*—by whom; *idam*—this; *dhāryate*—the basis; *jagat*—the material world.

Such is my inferior energy. But beyond it, O mighty-armed Arjun, I have a superior energy. This is the *jīva śakti* (the Ātman energy), which comprises the embodied Ātman(s) who are the basis of life in this world.

Shri Krishna now goes totally beyond the realm of material science. He explains that the eight-fold *prakṛiti* mentioned in the previous verse is his inferior material energy. But it is not all that exists. There is also a superior spiritual energy, which is completely transcendental to insentient matter. This energy is the *jīva śakti*, which encapsulates all the Ātman(s) in this world.

The relationship between the *jīva* (individual Ātman) and Bhagavān has been described from various perspectives by India's great philosophers. The non-dualist philosophers state: *jīvo brahmaiva nāparah* “The Ātman itself is Bhagavān.”

However, this contention raises a number of unanswerable questions:

1. Bhagavān is all-powerful and Māyā is his subservient energy. If the Ātman is Bhagavān, then how come it has been overpowered by Māyā? Is Māyā stronger than Bhagavān?
2. We all know that the Ātman is suffering from ignorance. Hence, it perceives the need for scriptures like the Bhagavad Gita and the lectures of saints. How can the Ātman that is subject to the ignorance be considered as Bhagavān, who is all-knowing?
3. Bhagavān is all-pervading in the world. This is repeatedly stated in the Vedas. If the Ātman is Bhagavān then the Ātman must exist everywhere at the same time; so where is the question of going to Swarga and Naraka after death?
4. The Ātman(s) are innumerable in quantity, and they all have their individual identity. However, Bhagavān is one. Now, if the Ātman itself were Bhagavān, then Bhagavān would also have been many.

We thus see that the claim of non-dualistic philosophers that the Ātman itself is Bhagavān makes no sense. On the other hand, the dualist philosophers state that the Ātman is separate from Bhagavān. This answers some of the questions above, but it is an incomplete understanding compared to what Shri Krishna states in this verse. He says that the Ātman is a part of the spiritual energy of Bhagavān.

So Bhagavān is the one Supreme Energetic, and everything that exists—both spiritual and material—is composed of all his various lower and higher energies.

*eka-deśha-sthitasyāgnir jyotsnā vistāriṇī yathā
parasya brahmaṇah śaktis tathedam akhilam jagat (Viṣṇu Purāṇ 1.22.53) [v3]*

“Just as the sun resides in one place, but its sunlight pervades the entire solar system, similarly there is one Bhagavān, who by his infinite powers pervades

the three worlds.” Chaitanya Mahaprabhu said:

*jīva-tattva śakti, kṛiṣṇa-tattva śaktimān
gītā-viṣṇupurāṇādi tāhāte pramāṇa (Chaitanya Charitāmṛit, Ādi Leela, 7.117) [v4]*

“The Ātman is an energy of Bhagavān, while he is the Supreme Energetic.”

Once we accept the concept of the Ātman as a form of his energy, then the non-duality of all creation becomes comprehensible. Any energy is simultaneously one and different from the energetic. For example, a fire and its heat and light can be considered as different entities, but they can also be clubbed together and considered as one. Thus, we can consider the Ātman and Bhagavān as one from the point of view of the energy (Ātman) and the Energetic (Bhagavān). But we can also consider the Ātman and Bhagavān as different, since the energy and Energetic are also distinct entities.

Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj has expressed this so perfectly, encapsulating Shri Krishna’s statement in this verse and the previous one:

*‘jīvu’ ‘māyā’, dui śakti haiñ, śaktimān bhagavān
śaktihīñ bheda abheda bhī, śaktimān te jān (Bhakti Śataκ verse 42) [v5]*

“The Ātman and Māyā are both energies of Bhagavān. Hence, they are both one with Bhagavān and also different from Bhagavān.”

From the perspective of the unity between the energies and Energetic, the entire world is non-different from Bhagavān. Thus, it is stated that the whole world is the veritable form of Bhagavān.

sarvam khalvidam brahma (Chhāndogya Upaniṣhad 3.14.1) [v6]

“All is Brahman.”

īshāvāsyam idam sarvam (Īśopaniṣhad 1) [v7]

“Everything that exists in the world is Bhagavān.”

puruṣha evedam sarvam (Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣhad 3.15) [v8]

“Shri Hari is everything that exists.”

All these Ved Mantras state that there is only one Bhagavān and nothing else in the world. At the same time, from the perspective of diversity between the energy and the Energetic, we can understand that within that unity, there is also tremendous variety. The Ātman is different; matter is different; Bhagavān is different. Matter is insentient, while the Ātman is sentient, and Bhagavān is the supremely sentient source and basis of both Ātman and matter. Many Vedic mantras talk of three entities in creation:

*kṣharam pradhānamamṛitākṣharam harah kṣharĀtmannāvīśhate deva ekaḥ
tasyābhidhyānād yojanāt tattvabhbāvad bhūyaśhchānte viśhwamāyānivrittih
(Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣhad 1.10) [v9]*

“There are three entities in existence: 1) Matter, which is perishable. 2) The individual Ātman(s), who are imperishable. 3) Bhagavān, who is the controller of both matter and the Ātman(s). By meditating upon Bhagavān, uniting with him, and becoming more like him, the Ātman is freed from the world’s illusion.”

We see how the Vedas expound both sides—non-dualistic and dualistic mantras. Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj has upheld the view of simultaneous and inconceivable oneness and difference between the Ātman and Bhagavān.

एतद्योनीनि भूतानि सर्वाणीत्युपधारय ।
अहं कृत्स्नस्य जगतः प्रभवः प्रलयस्तथा ॥६॥

*etad-yonīni bhūtāni sarvāṇītyupadhāraya
aham kṛtsnasya jagataḥ prabhavaḥ pralayaḥ tathā*

etat yonīni—these two (energies) are the source of; *bhūtāni*—living beings; *sarvāṇi*—all; *iti*—that; *upadhāraya*—know; *aham*—I; *kṛtsnasya*—entire; *jagataḥ*—creation; *prabhavaḥ*—the source; *pralayah*—dissolution; *tathā*—and.

Know that all living beings are manifested by these two energies of mine. I am the source of the entire creation, and into me it again dissolves.

All life in the material realm comes into existence by the combination of Ātman(s) and matter. By itself, matter is insentient; the Ātman needs a carrier in the form of the body. By the conjugation of these two energies, living beings manifest.

Bhagavān is the origin of both these energies; the entire creation manifests from him. When the cycle of creation reaches a completion at the end of 100 years of Brahma, the Bhagavān dissolves the manifestation. The five gross elements merge into the five subtle elements, the five subtle elements merge into *ahankār*; *ahankār* merges into *mahān*; *mahān* merges into *prakṛiti*; *prakṛiti* goes and sits in the body of Maha Vishnu (a form of the Supreme Bhagavān). The Ātman(s) who did not get liberated in the cycle of creation also reside in Bhagavān's body in an unmanifest form, awaiting the next cycle of creation. Once again, when Bhagavān wishes to create, the cycle begins (as explained in the commentary of verse 7.4), and the world comes into existence. Hence, Bhagavān is the source, support, and final resting ground for all existence.

मत्तः परतरं नान्यत्किञ्चिदस्ति धनञ्जय ।
मयि सर्वमिदं प्रोतं सूत्रे मणिगणा इव ॥ 7 ॥

*mattah parataram nānyat kiñcid asti dhanāñjaya
mayi sarvam idam protam sūtre maṇi-gaṇā iva*

mattah—than me; *para-taram*—superior; *na*—not; *anyat kiñchit*—anything else; *asti*—there is; *dhanāñjaya*—Arjun, conqueror of wealth; *mayi*—in me; *sarvam*—all; *idam*—which we see; *protam*—is strung; *sūtre*—on a thread; *maṇi-gaṇāḥ*—beads; *iva*—like.

There is nothing higher than myself, O Arjun. Everything rests in me, as beads strung on a thread.

The Supreme Bhagavān Shri Krishna now speaks of his paramount position over everything and his dominion over all. He is the creator, the sustainer, and the annihilator of the universe. He is also the substratum in which everything exists. The analogy used is of beads strung on a thread. Similarly, although

individual Ātman(s) have free will to act as they wish, it is only granted to them by Bhagavān, who upholds them all, and within whom they all exist. Hence, the Śvetāśvatar Upaniṣad states:

*na tatsamaśchābhyaadhikaścha dṛiṣhyate
parāsyā śaktirvividhaiva Śrūyate (6.8) [v10]*

“There is nothing equal to Bhagavān, nor is there anything superior to him.”

This verse of the Bhagavad Gita also dispels the doubt in the mind of many people, who suppose that Shri Krishna is not the Absolute Truth and speculate that there must be some formless entity that is the ultimate source of even Shri Krishna himself. However in this verse, he clearly states that in his personal form of Shri Krishna, as he stands before Arjun, he is the ultimate Supreme Truth. Thus, the first-born Brahma prays to Shri Krishna:

*īśwaraḥ paramaḥ kṛiṣṇaḥ sachcidānanda vigrahaḥ
anādirādir govindah sarva kāraṇa kāraṇam (Brahma Samhitā 5.1) [v11]*

“Shri Krishna is the Supreme Bhagavān, who is eternal, omniscient, and infinite bliss. He is without beginning and end, the origin of all, and the cause of all causes.”

रसोऽहमप्सु कौन्तेय प्रभास्मि शशिसूर्ययोः ।
प्रणवः सर्ववेदेषु शब्दः खे पौरुषं नृषु ॥८॥

*raso 'ham apsu kaunteya prabhāsmi śašhi-sūryayoh
prañavah sarva-vedeshu śabdaḥ khe pauruṣham nriṣhu*

rasah—taste; *aham*—I; *apsu*—in water; *kaunteya*—Arjun, the son of Kunti; *prabhā*—the radiance; *asmi*—I am; *śašhi-sūryayoh*—of the moon and the sun; *prañavah*—the sacred syllable Om; *sarva*—in all; *vedeshu*—Vedas; *śabdaḥ*—sound; *khe*—in ether; *pauruṣham*—ability; *nriṣhu*—in humans.

I am the taste in water, O son of Kunti, and the radiance of the sun and the moon. I am the sacred syllable Om in the Vedic mantras; I am the sound in ether, and the ability in humans.

Having said that he is the origin and the basis of all that exists, Shri Krishna

now explains the truth of his statement in these four verses. When we eat fruits, the sweetness in the taste indicates the presence of sugar in them. Similarly, Shri Krishna reveals his presence in all the modifications of his energies. Thus, he says that in water he is the taste, which is its unique intrinsic property. After all, who can separate the taste of water from water? All other forms of the material energy—gases, fires, solids—need liquids to carry their taste. Try putting a solid on your dry tongue, and you will not taste anything. But when solids are dissolved by the saliva in the mouth, then their taste is perceived by the taste buds on the tongue.

Similarly, *ākāśha* (space) functions as the vehicle for sound. Sound modifies itself into various languages, and Shri Krishna explains that he is the basis of it all, because the sound in space is his energy. Further, he says that he is the syllable “Om,” which is an important element of Vedic mantras. He is also the energy source of all the abilities manifest in humans.

**पुण्यो गन्थः पृथिव्यां च तेजश्चास्मि विभावसौ ।
जीवनं सर्वभूतेषु तपश्चास्मि तपस्विषु ॥१९॥**

*punyo gandhah prithivyām cha tejaś chāsmi vibhāvasau
jīvanam sarva-bhūteṣhu tapaś chāsmi tapasviṣhu*

punyaḥ—pure; *gandhah*—fragrance; *prithivyām*—of the earth; *cha*—and; *tejaḥ*—brilliance; *cha*—and; *asmi*—I am; *vibhāvasau*—in the fire; *jīvanam*—the life-force; *sarva*—in all; *bhūteṣhu*—beings; *tapah*—penance; *cha*—and; *asmi*—I am; *tapasviṣhu*—of the ascetics.

I am the pure fragrance of the Earth, and the brilliance in fire. I am the life-force in all beings, and the penance of the ascetics.

Shri Krishna continues to describe how he is the essential principle in everything. The specialty of ascetics is their denial of bodily pleasures and willful acceptance of austerities for self-purification. The Bhagavān says he is their capacity for penance. In the Earth, he is the fragrance, which is its essential quality; and in fire, he is the radiance of the flame.

बीजं मां सर्वभूतानां विद्धि पार्थ सनातनम् ।
बुद्धिर्बुद्धिमतामस्मि तेजस्तेजस्विनामहम् ॥ 10 ॥

*bījam mām sarva-bhūtānām viddhi pārtha sanātanam
buddhir buddhimatām asmi tejas tejasvinām aham*

bījam—the seed; *mām*—me; *sarva-bhūtānām*—of all beings; *viddhi*—know; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *sanātanam*—the eternal; *buddhiḥ*—intellect; *buddhi-matām*—of the intelligent; *asmi*—(I) am; *tejah*—splendor; *tejasvinām*—of the splendid; *aham*—I.

O Arjun, know that I am the eternal seed of all beings. I am the intellect of the intelligent, and the splendor of the glorious.

The cause is known as the seed of its effect. Hence, the ocean can be considered as the seed of the clouds; the clouds are the seed of the rain. Shri Krishna says that he is the seed from which all beings have been created.

Since everything that exists is a form of the energy of Bhagavān, the splendid qualities visible in outstanding people are all Bhagavān's energies manifesting in them. Intelligent people express a greater amount of brilliance in their thoughts and ideas. Bhagavān says he is that subtle power that makes their thoughts scintillating and analytic.

When someone displays exceptional brilliance that enhances the world in a positive way, it is Bhagavān's power working through him. William Shakespeare displayed such scintillating brilliance in the field of literature that has been unmatched in modern history. It is possible that Bhagavān enhanced his intellect so that his works served to nourish the literature of the major language of the world, English. Swami Vivekananda said that the function of the British Empire was to unite the world in one language. Bill Gates displayed such genius in marketing the Windows operating system that it captured ninety percent of the market share. If this had not happened and there had been multiple operating systems for computers around the world, there would have been extensive chaos, as there is in the video editing field with its multiple

formats—NTSC, PAL, SECAM, etc. Possibly, Bhagavān desired that the world should have one major operating system, to ensure proper interaction, and so he enhanced one person's intellect for the purpose.

The Saints, of course, have always attributed the beauty, brilliance, and knowledge of their works to the grace of Bhagavān. Sage Tulsidas states:

*na maiñ kiyā na kari sakauñ, sahiba kartā mor
karata karāvata āpa haiñ, tulasi tulasi śhor [v12]*

“Neither did I write the Ramayana, nor do I have the ability to write it. The Bhagavān is my Doer. He directs my actions, and acts through me, but the world thinks that Tulsidas is doing them.” Here, Shri Krishna clearly states that he is the brilliance of the brilliant and the intellect of the intelligent.

बलं बलवतां चाहं कामरागविवर्जितम् ।
धर्माविरुद्धो भूतेषु कामोऽस्मि भरतर्षभ ॥ 11 ॥

*balam balavatām chāham kāma-rāga-vivarjitaṁ
dharmāviruddho bhūteṣhu kāmo 'smi bharatarṣhabha*

balam—strength; *bala-vatām*—of the strong; *cha*—and; *aham*—I; *kāma*—desire; *rāga*—passion; *vivarjitaṁ*—devoid of; *dharma-aviruddhaḥ*—not conflicting with dharma; *bhūteṣhu*—in all beings; *kāmaḥ*—sexual activity; *asmī*—(I) am; *bharata-ṛiṣhabha*—Arjun, the best of the Bharats.

O best of the Bharatas, in strong persons, I am their strength devoid of desire and passion. I am sexual activity not conflicting with virtue or scriptural injunctions.

Passion is an active desire for things unattained. Attachment is a passive mental emotion that incites the thirst for more of a desired object, after already experiencing it. So when Shri Krishna states *kāma-rāga-vivarjitaṁ*, meaning “devoid of passion and attachment,” he is explaining the nature of his strength. He is the serene sublime strength that empowers people to perform their duties without deviation or cessation.

Sexual activity, when devoid of regulative principles and carried out for sense

enjoyment, is considered animalistic in nature. But as a part of household life, when it is not contrary to virtue, and is carried out for the purpose of procreation, then is considered aligned to the scriptural injunctions. Shri Krishna says he is such virtuous, controlled, and well-intended sexual activity, within the institution of marriage.

**ये चैव सात्त्विका भावा राजसास्तामसाश्च ये ।
मत्त एवेति तान्विद्धि न त्वहं तेषु ते मयि ॥ १२ ॥**

*ye chaiva sāttvikā bhāvā rājasās tāmasāśha cha ye
matta eveti tān viddhi na tvaham teṣhu te mayi*

ye—whatever; *cha*—and; *eva*—certainly; *sāttvikāḥ*—in the mode of goodness; *bhāvāḥ*—states of material existence; *rājasāḥ*—in the mode of passion; *tāmasāḥ*—in the mode of ignorance; *cha*—and; *ye*—whatever; *mattah*—from me; *eva*—certainly; *iti*—thus; *tān*—those; *viddhi*—know; *na*—not; *tu*—but; *aham*—I; *teṣhu*—in them; *te*—they; *mayi*—in me.

The three states of material existence—goodness, passion, and ignorance—are manifested by my energy. They are in me, but I am beyond them.

Having described his glories in the previous four verses, Shri Krishna now sums them up in this verse. He effectively says, “Arjun, I have explained how I am the essence of all objects. But there is no point in going into details. All good, bad, and ugly objects and states of existence are made possible only by my energy.”

Although all things emanate from Bhagavān, yet he is independent of them and beyond everything. Alfred Tennyson expressed this in his famous poem “In Memorium:”

Our little systems have their day;
They have their day and cease to be.
They are but broken lights of thee,
And thou, O Bhagavān, art more than they.

त्रिभिर्गुणमयैर्भावैरेभिः सर्वमिदं जगत् ।
मोहितं नाभिजानाति मामभ्यः परमव्ययम् ॥ 13 ॥

*tribhir guna-Māyāir bhāvair ebhih sarvam idam jagat
mohitam nābhijānāti māmebhyaḥ param avyayam*

tribhiḥ—by three; *guna-Māyāiḥ*—consisting of the modes of material nature; *bhāvaiḥ*—states; *ebhiḥ*—all these; *sarvam*—whole; *idam*—this; *jagat*—universe; *mohitam*—deluded; *na*—not; *abhijānāti*—know; *mām*—me; *ebhyah*—these; *param*—the supreme; *avyayam*—imperishable.

Deluded by the three modes of Māyā, the people in this world are unable to know me, the imperishable and eternal.

Having heard the previous verses, Arjun may think, “O Bhagavān, if such are your *vibhūtis* (opulences), then why do billions of humans not know you, Bhagavān Krishna, as the Supreme controller and the source of creation?” To answer this, Shri Krishna explains that people are deluded by the material modes of ignorance, passion, and goodness. These three modes of Māyā veil their consciousness and as a result, they become fascinated by ephemeral allurement of bodily pleasures.

One of the meanings of the word “Māyā” comes from the roots *mā* (not) and *yā* (what is). Thus, Māyā means “that which is not what it appears to be.” As an energy of Bhagavān, Māyā is also engaged in his service. Its service is to veil the true nature of the Supreme Bhagavān from Ātman(s) who have not yet attained the eligibility for Brahman-realization. Māyā thus lures and bewilders the Ātman(s) who are *vimukh* from Bhagavān (having their backs turned toward him). At the same time, Māyā gives distress to the Ātman(s) by inflicting them with various troubles caused by subjugation to the three-fold material miseries. In this way, it tries to bring the Ātman(s) to the realization that they can never be happy until they become *sanmukh* toward Bhagavān (having their face turned toward him).

दैवी ह्येषा गुणमयी मम माया दुरत्यया ।
मामेव ये प्रपद्यन्ते मायामेतां तरन्ति ते ॥ 14 ॥

*daivī hyeṣhā guṇa-mayī mama māyā duratyayā
mām eva ye prapadyante māyām etām taranti te*

daivī—divine; *hi*—certainly; *eshā*—this; *guṇa-mayī*—consisting of the three modes of nature; *mama*—my; *māyā*—one of Bhagavān’s energies. It that veils Bhagavān’s true nature from Ātman(s) who have not yet attained the eligibility for Brahman-realization; *duratyayā*—very difficult to overcome; *mām*—unto me; *eva*—certainly; *ye*—who; *prapadyante*—surrender; *māyām etām*—this Māyā; *taranti*—cross over; *te*—they.

My divine energy Māyā, consisting of the three modes of nature, is very difficult to overcome. But those who surrender unto me cross over it easily.

Some people declare the material energy to be *mithyā* (non-existent). They say that we perceive Māyā only because we are in ignorance, but if become seated in knowledge, then Māyā will cease to exist. They claim that the illusion will be dispelled and we will understand that the Ātman itself is the Ultimate reality. However, this verse of the Bhagavad Gita negates such a theory. Shri Krishna states that Māyā is not an illusion; it is an energy of Bhagavān. The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad too states:

māyām tu prakṛitīm vidyānmāyinām tu maheśvaram (4.10) [v13]

“Māyā is the energy (*prakṛiti*), while Bhagavān is the Energetic.” The Ramayana states:

so dāstī raghubīra ki samujheṇi mithyā sopi [v14]

“Some people think Māyā is *mithyā* (non-existent), but factually it is an energy that is engaged in the service of Bhagavān.”

Here, Shri Krishna says that Māyā is very difficult to overcome because it is his energy. If anyone conquers Māyā, it means that person has conquered Bhagavān himself. Since no one can defeat Bhagavān, no one can defeat Māyā either. And because the mind is made from Māyā, no yogi, *jñāni*, ascetic, or

karmī can successfully control the mind merely by self-effort.

Arjun could then ask, “How then will I overcome Māyā?” Shri Krishna gives the answer in the second line of the verse. He says, “Arjun, if you surrender to me, the Supreme Bhagavān, then by my grace, I will take you across the ocean of material existence. I will indicate to Māyā that this Ātman has become mine. Please leave him.” When the material energy gets the indication from Bhagavān, it easily releases such a Ātman from its bondage. Māyā says, “My work was only this much—to keep troubling the Ātman until it reaches the feet of Bhagavān. Since this Ātman has surrendered to Bhagavān, my work is done.”

Understand this through an example from everyday life. Let us say that you wish to meet your friend and reach the gate of his house. He has a board on his fence, saying “Beware of dog.” His pet German Shepherd is standing in the lawn and, as a trained guard dog, growls at you menacingly. You decide to try the back gate and go around the fence. However, the Alsatian comes around too and snarls furiously, conveying the message, “I dare you to step into this house.” When you have no other option, you call out to your friend. He emerges from his house and sees his dog troubling you. He calls out, “No, Smokey! Come and sit here.” The dog is immediately pacified and comes and sits by his master’s side. Now, you open the gate fearlessly and walk in. Similarly, the material energy that is troubling us is subservient to Bhagavān. By our own efforts we cannot overcome it. The way to go across it is to surrender to Bhagavān. This is emphatically conveyed by Shri Krishna in this verse. *If we can cross over Māyā so simply by surrendering to Bhagavān, then why do people not surrender to him? Shri Krishna explains this in the following verse.*

न मां दुष्कृतिनो मूढः प्रपद्यन्ते नराथमाः ।
माययापहृतज्ञाना आसुरं भावमाश्रिताः ॥ 15 ॥

*na māṁ duṣkṛitino mūḍhāḥ prapadyante narādhamāḥ
māyayāpahṛita-jñānā āsuram bhāvam āśritāḥ*

na—not; *māṁ*—unto me; *duṣkṛitinaḥ*—the evil doers; *mūḍhāḥ*—the ignorant; *prapadyante*—surrender; *nara-adhamāḥ*—one who lazily follows one's lower nature; *māyayā*—by Bhagavān's material energy; *apahṛita jñānāḥ*—those with deluded intellect; *āsuram*—demoniac; *bhāvam*—nature; *āśritāḥ*—surrender.

Four kinds of people do not surrender unto me—those ignorant of knowledge, those who lazily follow their lower nature though capable of knowing me, those with deluded intellect, and those with a demoniac nature.

Shri Krishna has given four categories of people who do not surrender to Bhagavān:

1) **The ignorant.** These are the people who are bereft of spiritual knowledge. They are unaware of their identity as the eternal Ātman, the goal of life, which is Brahman-realization, and the process of surrendering to the Bhagavān with loving devotion. Their lack of knowledge prevents them from surrendering to Bhagavān.

2) **Those who lazily follow their lower nature.** These are people who do have basic spiritual knowledge and are aware of what they are supposed to do. However, they do not put in the effort to surrender, out of the force of inertia of their lower nature. This laziness in exerting oneself to act according to the religious principles is a big pitfall on the path of spirituality. There is a Sanskrit saying:

*ālasya hī manuṣhyānāṁ śarīrastho mahān rīpuḥ
nāstyudyamasamo bandhuḥ kṛītvā yāṁ nāvasīdati [v15]*

“Laziness is a big enemy, and it resides in our body itself. Work is a good friend of humans, which never leads to downfall.”

3) **Those with deluded intellect.** These are people who are very proud of their

intellects. If they hear the teachings of the saints and the scriptures, they are not willing to accept them with faith. However, not all spiritual truths are immediately evident. First we need to have faith in the process and begin the practice for only then can we understand the teachings through realization. Those who refuse to have faith in anything that is not evident to them in the present, refuse to surrender to Bhagavān, who is beyond sense perception. Shri Krishna puts these people in the third category.

4) **Those with a demoniac nature.** These are the people who know there is a Bhagavān, but work in evil and diametrically opposite ways to thwart Bhagavān's purpose in the world. Because of a demoniac nature, they hate the nature of Bhagavān's revealed personality. They are unable to stand anyone singing his glories or engaging in his devotion. Quite obviously, such people do not surrender to Bhagavān.

चतुर्विधा भजन्ते मां जनाः सुकृतिनोऽर्जुन ।
आर्तो जिज्ञासुरथर्थी ज्ञानी च भरतर्षभ ॥ 16 ॥

*chatur-vidhā bhajante mām janāḥ sukṛitino 'rjuna
ārto jijñāsur arthaarthī jñānī cha bharatarṣhabha*

chatuh-vidhah—four kinds; *bhajante*—worship; *mām*—me; *janāḥ*—people; *su-kṛitinaḥ*—those who are pious; *arjuna*—Arjun; *ārtah*—the distressed; *jijñāsuḥ*—the seekers of knowledge; *artha-arthī*—the seekers of material gain; *jñānī*—those who are situated in knowledge; *cha*—and; *bharata-riṣhabha*—The best amongst the Bharatas, Arjun.

O best amongst the Bharatas, four kinds of pious people engage in my devotion—the distressed, the seekers after knowledge, the seekers of worldly possessions, and those who are situated in knowledge.

Having described the kinds of people who do not surrender to him, Shri Krishna now categorizes the kinds of people who do take refuge in him.

1) **The distressed.** For some people, when the pot of worldly miseries becomes excessive, it leads them to conclude that running after the world is futile, and it

is better to take shelter in Bhagavān. Likewise, when they see that worldly supports are unable to protect them, they then turn to Bhagavān for protection. Draupadi's surrender to Shri Krishna was an example of this type of surrender. When Draupadi was being disrobed in the assembly of the Kauravas, she first counted upon the protection of her husbands. When they remained silent, she relied upon the pious elders present in the assembly—Dronacharya, Kripacharya, Bheeshma, and Vidur—to help her. When they too failed to offer her protection, she clenched her sari between her teeth. Up to this stage, Shri Krishna did not come to Draupadi's rescue. Finally, when Dushasan pulled her sari with a jerk, it slipped from the grasp of her teeth. At that point, she no longer had any faith in the protection of others, nor was she relying on her own strength. She surrendered herself totally to Shri Krishna, who immediately offered her complete protection. He intervened by extending the length of her sari. No matter how much Dushashan pulled, he was still not able to disrobe Draupadi.

2) **The seekers after knowledge.** Some people take shelter of Bhagavān out of their curiosity to know. They have heard about others finding beatitude in the spiritual realm and this makes them curious to know what it is all about. So, to satisfy their curiosity, they approach the Bhagavān.

3) **The seekers of worldly possessions.** Another kind of people are very clear about what they want but they are convinced that only the Bhagavān can provide it to them, and thus they go to his shelter. For example, Dhruv began his devotion with the desire to become more powerful than his father, King Uttanapad. But when his devotion matured and Bhagavān finally gave him *darshan*, he realized that what he had desired was like broken pieces of glass from someone who possessed the priceless jewel of divine love. He then requested the Bhagavān to bestow pure selfless devotion upon him.

4) **Those who are situated in knowledge.** Finally, there are Ātman(s) who have reached the understanding that they are tiny parts of Bhagavān and their eternal dharma is to love and serve him. Shri Krishna says that these are the fourth kind of people who engage in his devotion.

तेषां ज्ञानी नित्ययुक्त एकभक्तिर्विशिष्यते ।
प्रियो हि ज्ञानिनोऽत्यर्थमहं स च मम प्रियः ॥ १७ ॥

*teṣhām jñānī nitya-yukta eka-bhaktir viśiṣhyate
priyo hi jñānino 'tyartham aham sa cha mama priyah*

teṣhām—amongst these; *jñānī*—those who are situated in knowledge; *nitya-yuktah*—ever steadfast; *eka*—exclusively; *bhaktih*—devotion; *viśiṣhyate*—highest; *priyah*—very dear; *hi*—certainly; *jñāninaḥ*—to the person in knowledge; *atyartham*—highly; *aham*—I; *sah*—he; *cha*—and; *mama*—to me; *priyah*—dear.

Amongst these, I consider them to be the highest, who worship me with knowledge, and are steadfastly and exclusively devoted to me. I am very dear to them and they are dear to me.

Those who approach Bhagavān in distress, for worldly possessions, or in curiosity, do not possess selfless devotion as yet. Slowly, by the process of devotion, their heart becomes pure and they develop knowledge of their eternal relationship with Bhagavān. Then their devotion becomes exclusive, single-minded, and incessant toward Bhagavān. Since they have gained the knowledge that the world is not theirs and not a source of happiness, they neither thirst for favorable circumstances nor lament over unfavorable circumstances. Thus, they become situated in selfless devotion. In a spirit of total self-surrender, they offer themselves as oblation in the fire of love for their Divine Beloved. Hence, Shri Krishna says that such devotees who are situated in knowledge are the dearest to him.

उदारः सर्व एवैते ज्ञानी त्वात्मैव मे मतम् ।
आस्थितः स हि युक्तात्मा मामेवानुत्तमां गतिम् ॥ १८ ॥

*udārāḥ sarva evaite jñānī tvātmaiva me matam
āsthitaḥ sa hi yuktĀtman mām evānuttamām gatim*

udārāḥ—noble; *sarve*—all; *eva*—indeed; *ete*—these; *jñānī*—those in knowledge; *tu*—but; *Ātman*—my very self; *me*—my; *matam*—opinion; *āsthitaḥ*—situated; *sah*—he; *hi*—certainly; *yukta-Ātman*—those who are united; *mām*—in me; *eva*—certainly; *anuttamām*—the supreme; *gatim*—goal.

Indeed, all those who are devoted to me are indeed noble. But those in knowledge, who are of steadfast mind, whose intellect is merged in me, and who have made me alone as their supreme goal, I consider as my very self.

Having stated in verse 7.17 that the *jñānī bhakt* (devotee situated in knowledge) is the highest, Shri Krishna now clarifies that the other three kinds of devotees are also blessed Ātman(s). Whoever engages in devotion for whatever reason is privileged. Still, the devotees who are seated in knowledge do not worship Bhagavān for material reasons. Consequently, Bhagavān gets bound by the selfless, unconditional love of such devotees.

Parā bhakti, or divine love, is very different from worldly love. Divine love is imbued with the desire for the happiness of the Divine Beloved; worldly love is motivated by the desire for self-happiness. Divine love is imbued with the giving attitude, and sacrifice in service of the Beloved; worldly love is characterized by the receiving attitude, where the ultimate goal is to receive something from the beloved. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu describes:

*kāmera tātparya nija-sambhoga kevala
kṛiṣṇa-sukha-tātparya-mātra prema ta' prabala*

*ataeva kāma-preme bahuta antara
kāma andha-tamah, prema nirmala bhāskara
(Chaitanya Charitāmṛit, Ādi Leela, 4.166 & 171) [v16]*

“Lust (worldly love) exists for self-happiness; divine love is harbored for Shri Krishna’s happiness. There is tremendous difference between them—lust is like darkness and ignorance, while divine love is pure and illuminating.” Jagadguru

Shri Kripaluji Maharaj states this very beautifully:

*brahma lok paryanta sukh, aru muktihuñ tyāg,
tabai dharahu paga prema patha, nahiñ lagi jaiheñ dāg.
(Bhakti Śhatak verse 45) [v17]*

“Give up the desires for worldly pleasures and that of liberation if you wish to walk the path of devotion. Else the pure waters of divine love will get tainted with selfishness.” Sage Narad defined pure devotion in this manner:

tat sukha sukhitvam (Nārad Bhakti Darśhan, Sūtra 24) [v18]

“True love is for the happiness of the Beloved.” The materially motivated devotees cannot engage in such devotion but the devotee who is in knowledge rises to this level of selflessness. When someone learns to love Bhagavān in this manner, he becomes a slave of that Devotee. The highest quality of Bhagavān is *bhakta vatsaltā* (his love for his devotees). The Puraṇas state:

*gītvā cha mama nāmāni vicharenmama sannidhau
iti bravīmi te satyam krītoham tasya chārjuna (Ādi Purāṇ 1.2.231) [v19]*

Shri Krishna says: “I become the slave of those devotees of mine, who chant my names and keep me close to them in their thoughts. This is a fact, O Arjun.” Bhagavān feels so indebted toward his selfless devotees that in this verse he goes to the extent of saying he looks upon them as his very self.

**बहूनां जन्मनामन्ते ज्ञानवान्मां प्रपद्यते ।
वासुदेवः सर्वमिति स महात्मा सुदुर्लभः ॥ 19 ॥**

*bahūnām janmanām ante jñānavān mām prapadyate
vāsudevaḥ sarvam iti sa mahā-Ātman su-durlabhaḥ*

bahūnām—many; *janmanām*—births; *ante*—after; *jñāna-vān*—one who is endowed with knowledge; *mām*—unto me; *prapadyate*—surrenders; *vāsudevaḥ*—Shri Krishna, the son of Vasudev; *sarvam*—all; *iti*—that; *sah*—that; *mahā-Ātman*—great Ātman; *su-durlabhaḥ*—very rare.

After many births of spiritual practice, one who is endowed with knowledge surrenders unto me, knowing me to be all that is. Such a great Ātman is indeed very rare.

This verse clears a common misconception. Often people who are intellectually inclined deride *bhakti* (devotion) as inferior to *jñāna* (knowledge). They maintain a supercilious air about themselves being engaged in the cultivation of knowledge and look down upon people engaged in devotion. However, in this verse Shri Krishna states the very reverse. He says that, after cultivating *jñāna* for many lives, when the *jñānī*'s knowledge reaches a ripened state, then he or she finally surrenders to Bhagavān.

The fact is that true knowledge naturally leads to devotion. Let us say that a person was walking on the beach, and he found a ring on the sand. He lifted it up, but had no knowledge of its value. He thought it must be a piece of artificial jewelry, so common nowadays, and must be worth only \$30. The next day, he showed the ring to a goldsmith, and asked, "Can you please value this ring for me?" The goldsmith checked it, and replied, "This is 22 carats gold. It must be worth \$300." On hearing this, the person's love for the ring increased. Now when he looked at the ring, he got as much pleasure as he would on receiving a gift of \$300.

A few more days went by, and his uncle, who was a jeweler, came from another town. He asked his uncle, "Could you evaluate this ring and the stone embedded in it?" His uncle looked at it, and exclaimed, "Where did you get this from? This is a real diamond. It must be worth \$100,000." He is overwhelmed. "Uncle, please do not joke with me." "I am not joking, son. If you do not believe me, sell it to me for \$75,000." Now, he got confirmed knowledge of the true value of the ring. Immediately, his love for the ring increased. He felt he had won a jackpot, and his joy knew no bounds.

See, how the persons love for the ring kept increasing in proportion to his knowledge? When his knowledge was that the ring's worth is \$30, his love for it was to the same extent. When his knowledge became that the ring is valued

at \$300, his love for it increased to the same proportion. When his knowledge became that the ring is actually worth \$100,000, his love for it got enhanced in the same measure.

The example above illustrates the direct correlation between knowledge and love. The *Ramayana* states:

jāneñ binu na hoi paratītī, binu paratīti hoi nahiñ prītī [v20]

“Without knowledge, there cannot be faith; without faith, love cannot grow.” Thus, true knowledge is naturally accompanied by love. If we claim we possess knowledge of *Brahman*, but we feel no love toward him, then our knowledge is merely theoretical.

Here, Shri Krishna explains that after many lifetimes of cultivation of knowledge, when that *jñānī*'s knowledge matures into true wisdom, he surrenders to the Supreme Bhagavān, knowing him to be all that is. The verse states that such a noble Ātman is very rare. He does not say this for *jñānīs*, *karmīs*, *hatha-yogis*, ascetics, etc. He declares it for the devotee, and says that the exalted Ātman who realizes “All is Bhagavān,” and surrenders to him, is very rare.

कामैस्तैस्तैर्हृतज्ञानाः प्रपद्यन्तेऽन्यदेवताः ।
तं तं नियममारथाय प्रकृत्या नियताः स्वया ॥ 20 ॥

*kāmais tais tair hr̥ita-jñānāḥ prapadyante 'nya-devatāḥ
tam tam niyamam āsthāya prakṛityā niyatāḥ svayā*

kāmaiḥ—by material desires; *taiḥ taiḥ*—by various; *hr̥ita-jñānāḥ*—whose knowledge has been carried away; *prapadyante*—surrender; *anya*—to other; *devatāḥ*—celestial deities; *tam tam*—the various; *niyamam*—rules and regulations; *āsthāya*—following; *prakṛityā*—by nature; *niyatāḥ*—controlled; *svayā*—by their own.

Those whose knowledge has been carried away by material desires surrender to the celestial deities. Following their own nature, they worship the *devatās*, practicing rituals meant to propitiate these celestial personalities.

When Shri Krishna (the Supreme Bhagavān) is the basis of all that exists, no celestial deity can be independent of him. Just as the president of a country administers the government with the help of numerous officers, similarly the *devatās* (celestial deities) are all minor officers in Bhagavān's government. Although Ātman(s) like us, they are elevated, and as a result of their pious deeds in their past lives, they have attained a high post in the administration of the material realm.

They cannot grant anyone liberation from the bondage of Māyā because they are themselves not liberated. However, they can grant material things within their jurisdiction. Driven by material desires, people worship the *devatās* and observe the strictures as prescribed for their worship. Shri Krishna says that such persons whose knowledge has been clouded by material desires worship the celestial deities.

यो यो यां यां तनुं भक्तः श्रद्धयार्चितुमिच्छति ।
तस्य तस्याचलां श्रद्धां तामेव विदधाम्यहम् ॥२१॥

*yo yo yām yām tanum bhaktah śraddhayārchitum ichchhati
tasya tasyāchalām śraddhām tām eva vidadhāmyaham*

yah yah—whoever; *yām yām*—whichever; *tanum*—form; *bhaktah*—devotee; *śraddhayā*—with faith; *architum*—to worship; *ichchhati*—desires; *tasya tasya*—to him; *achalām*—steady; *śraddhām*—faith; *tām*—in that; *eva*—certainly; *vidadhāmi*—bestow; *aham*—I.

Whatever celestial form a devotee seeks to worship with faith, I steady the faith of such a devotee in that form.

Faith in the worship of the Supreme Bhagavān is the most beneficial kind of faith, which comes with true knowledge. However, if we look around us in the world, we find innumerable devotees of the celestial deities as well, who engage in their devotion with firm and unflinching faith. We may wonder how these people develop such a high level of faith in a lower form of worship.

Shri Krishna provides the answer in this verse. He says that faith in the celestial

deities is also created by him. When he sees people seeking to worship the *devatās* for the fulfillment of their material desires, he steadies their faith and helps them in their devotion. The celestial deities themselves do not have the ability to generate faith in their devotees. It is the indwelling *ParamĀtman* (Supreme Ātman), who inspires *śraddhā* in them. As Shri Krishna states in verse 15.15, “I am seated in the hearts of all living beings, and from me comes memory, knowledge, and understanding.”

One may ask that why does the Supreme Bhagavān create faith in the celestial deities, when such faith is inappropriately placed. This is just as parents allow their children to shower affection on dolls as if they were real babies. The parents know their child’s affection for the doll is out of ignorance, and yet they encourage the child to love and play with dolls. The reason is that the parents know this will help develop qualities of affection, love, and care, which will be beneficial when the child grows up. Similarly, when Ātman(s) worship the celestial deities for material gains, Bhagavān steadies their faith, in the expectation that the experience will help evolve the Ātman upward. Then, one day the Ātman will surrender to the Supreme Bhagavān, understanding him to be the sumnum bonum of everything.

स तया श्रद्धया युक्तस्तस्याराधनमीहते ।
लभते च ततः कामान्मयैव विहितान्हि तान् ॥ २२ ॥

*sa tayā śraddhayā yuktaḥ tasyārādhanam īhate
labhate cha tataḥ kāmān Māyāiva vihitān hi tān*

sah—he; tayā—with that; śraddhayā—faith; yuktaḥ—endowed with; tasya—of that; ārādhanam—worship; īhate—tries to engage in; labhate—obtains; cha—and; tataḥ—from that; kāmān—desires; mayā—by me; eva—alone; vihitān—granted; hi—certainly; tān—those.

Endowed with faith, the devotee worships a particular celestial deity and obtains the objects of desire. But in reality I alone arrange these benefits.

Labhate means “they obtain.” The devotees of the celestial deities may obtain

their desired ends by worshipping the respective celestial deities, but in actuality it is not the *devatās*, but Bhagavān who grants the benefits to be given. This verse clearly means that the celestial deities do not have the right to sanction material benefits; they can only grant them to their devotees when Bhagavān sanctions it. However, people of mediocre understanding deduce that help comes to them from the gods they worship.

अन्तवत्तु फलं तेषां तद्भवत्यत्प्रमेधसाम् ।
देवान्देवयजो यान्ति मद्भक्ता यान्ति मामपि ॥ 23 ॥

*antavat tu phalam teṣhām tad bhavatyalpa-medhasām
devān deva-yajo yānti mad-bhaktā yānti mām api*

anta-vat—perishable; *tu*—but; *phalam*—fruit; *teṣhām*—by them; *tad*—that; *bhavati*—is; *alpa-medhasām*—people of small understanding; *devān*—to the celestial deities; *deva-yajah*—the worshipers of the celestial deities; *yānti*—go; *mat*—my; *bhaktāḥ*—devotees; *yānti*—go; *mām*—to me; *api*—whereas.

But the fruit gained by these people of small understanding is perishable. Those who worship the celestial deities go to the celestial abodes, while my devotees come to me.

While primary school is necessary, students are expected to outgrow it one day. If a student desires to remain in primary school for longer than necessary, the teacher will discourage it, and coach the student to move forward in life. Similarly, for neophyte devotees wishing to worship the celestial deities, Shri Krishna does steady their faith, as stated in verse 7.21. But the Bhagavad Gita is not for primary school students, and so he tells Arjun to understand the spiritual principle: “One attains the object of one’s worship. Those who worship the *devatās*, go to the planets of the *devatās* after death. Those who worship me, come to me.” When the *devatās* are perishable, the fruits of their worship are also perishable. But since Bhagavān is imperishable, the fruits of his worship are also imperishable. The devotees of Bhagavān attain his eternal service and his eternal abode.

अव्यक्तं व्यक्तिमापन्नं पन्थन्ते मामबुद्धयः ।
परं भावमजानन्तो ममाव्ययमनुत्तमम् ॥ 24 ॥

*avyaktam vyaktim āpannam manyante mām abuddhayah
param bhāvam ajānanto mamaavyayam anuttamam*

avyaktam—formless; *vyaktim*—possessing a personality; *āpannam*—to have assumed; *manyante*—think; *mām*—me; *abuddhayah*—less intelligent; *param*—Supreme; *bhāvam*—nature; *ajānantah*—not understanding; *mama*—my; *avyayam*—imperishable; *anuttamam*—excellent.

The less intelligent think that I, the Supreme Bhagavān Shri Krishna, was formless earlier and have now assumed this personality. They do not understand the imperishable exalted nature of my personal form.

Some people emphatically claim that Bhagavān is only formless, while others assert equally vehemently that the Supreme Bhagavān only exists in a personal form. Both these points of view are restricting and incomplete. Bhagavān is perfect and complete, and therefore, he is both formless and with a form. This has also been discussed in the commentary to verses 4.5 and 4.6.

Amongst the people who accept both aspects of Bhagavān's personality, the debate sometimes ensues regarding which of these is the original form. Did the formless manifest from the personal form of Bhagavān, or vice versa? Shri Krishna resolves this debate here by stating that the divine personality is primordial—it has not manifested from the formless *Brahman*. Bhagavān exists eternally in his divine form in the spiritual realm. The formless *Brahman* is the light that emanates from his transcendental body.

The Padma Purāṇ states:

*yannakhenduruchir brahma dhyeyam brahmādibhiḥ suraiḥ
guṇatrayamatītām tam vande vṛindāvaneśhvaram (Patal Khand 77.60) [v21]*

“The light that emanates from the toe nails of Bhagavān's personality is worshipped as *Brahman* by the *jñānīs*.”

Actually, there is no difference between his personal and formless aspects. It is

not that one is big and the other is small. In the formless *Brahman* aspect, all of Bhagavān's energies and potencies do exist, but they are unmanifest. In his personal aspect, his name, form, pastimes, virtues, abode, and associates are all manifest by his divine energy.

Then why do people think of the Bhagavān as an ordinary human? The answer to this question is explained in the next verse.

नाहं प्रकाशः सर्वस्य योगमायासमावृतः ।
मूढोऽयं नाभिजानाति लोको मामजमव्ययम् ॥ 25 ॥

*nāham prakāśah sarvasya yoga-māyā-samāvṛitah
mūḍho 'yam nābhijānāti loko mām ajam avyayam*

na—not; aham—I; prakāśah—manifest; sarvasya—to everyone; yoga-māyā—Bhagavān's supreme (divine) energy; samāvṛitah—veiled; mūḍhaḥ—deluded; ayam—these; na—not; abhijānāti—know; lokah—persons; mām—me; ajam—unborn; avyayam—immutable.

I am not manifest to everyone, being veiled by my divine *YogMāyā* energy. Hence, those without knowledge do not know that I am without birth and changeless.

Having described two of his energies in verses 7.4 and 7.5, Shri Krishna now mentions his third energy—*YogMāyā*. This is his supreme energy. The Viṣṇu Purāṇ states:

*viṣṇu śaktih parā proktā kṣhetrajñākhyā tathā 'parā^a
avidyā karma sanjñānyā tṛitiyā śaktiriṣhyate (6.7.61) [v22]*

“The Supreme Bhagavān Shri Vishnu has three main energies—*YogMāyā*, the Ātman(s), and Māyā.” Jagadguru Kripaluji Maharaj states:

*śaktimān kī śaktiyāñ, aganita yadapi bakhāna
tin mahañ ‘māyā, ‘jīva, aru, ‘parā, triśakti pradhāna
(Bhakti Śataḥ verse 3) [v23]*

“The Supreme Energetic Shri Krishna has infinite energies. Amongst these, *YogMāyā*, the Ātman(s), and Māyā are the main ones.”

The divine power, *YogMāyā*, is Bhagavān's all-powerful energy. By virtue of it, he manifests his divine pastimes, his divine love bliss, and his divine abode. By that *YogMāyā* power, Bhagavān descends in the world and manifests his divine pastimes on the Earth plane as well. By the same *YogMāyā* power, he keeps himself veiled from us. Although Bhagavān is seated in our hearts, we do not have any perception of his presence within us. *YogMāyā* keeps his divinity obscured from us, until we are eligible for his divine vision. Hence, even if we see the Bhagavān in his personal form at present, we will not be able to recognize him as Bhagavān. When the *YogMāyā* power bestows its grace upon us, it is only then that we get the divine vision to see and recognize Bhagavān.

chidānandaMāyā deha tumhārī, bigata bikāra jāna adhikārī (Ramayana) [v24]

“O Bhagavān, you have a divine form. Only those whose hearts have been purified can know you by your grace.”

The *YogMāyā* power is both formless and also manifests in the personal form, as Radha, Sita, Durga, Kali, Lakshmi, Parvati, etc. These are all divine forms of the *YogMāyā* energy, and all are revered in Vedic culture as the Mother of the universe. They radiate the motherly qualities of tenderness, compassion, forgiveness, grace, and causeless love. More importantly for us, they bestow divine grace upon the Ātman, and grant it the transcendental knowledge by which it can know Bhagavān. Hence, devotees in Vrindavan sing “*Radhe Radhe, Shyam se milā de*”, “O Radha, please bestow your grace and help me meet Shri Krishna.”

Thus, *YogMāyā* performs both functions—it hides Bhagavān from Ātman(s) who are not qualified, and bestows grace upon surrendered Ātman(s), so that they may know him. Those who have their backs turned toward Bhagavān are covered by Māyā, and bereft of the grace of *YogMāyā*. Those who turn their face toward Bhagavān come under the shelter of *YogMāyā*, and get released from

Māyā.

वेदाहं समतीतानि वर्तमानानि चार्जुन ।
भविष्याणि च भूतानि मां तु वेद न कश्चन ॥ 26 ॥

*vedāham samatītāni vartamānāni chārjuna
bhaviṣhyāṇi cha bhūtāni mām tu veda na kaśchana*

veda—know; *aham*—I; *samatītāni*—the past; *vartamānāni*—the present; *cha*—and; *arjuna*—Arjun; *bhaviṣhyāṇi*—the future; *cha*—also; *bhūtāni*—all living beings; *mām*—me; *tu*—but; *veda*—knows; *na kaśchana*—no one.

O Arjun, I know of the past, present, and future, and I also know all living beings; but me no one knows.

Bhagavān is omniscient. He declares here that he is *trikāl-darśī*—he has knowledge of the past, present, and future. We forget what we ourselves were thinking a few hours ago. But Bhagavān remembers the thoughts, words, and deeds of each of the infinite Ātman(s) in the universe, at every moment of their life, in each of their infinite lifetimes. These constitute the *sañchit* karmas (stockpile of karmas of endless lifetimes) for every Ātman. Bhagavān has to maintain account of this so that he may dispense justice in the form of the law of karma. As a result, he says he knows the past, present, and future. The Muṇḍakopaniṣad states:

yah sarvajñah sarvavid�asya jñānaMāyām tapaḥ (1.1.9) [v25]

“Bhagavān is all-knowing and omniscient. His austerity consists of knowledge.”

In this verse, Shri Krishna says that although he knows everything, nobody knows him. Bhagavān is infinite in splendor, glory, energies, qualities, and extent. Our intellect is finite, and hence there is no way it can comprehend the Almighty Bhagavān. All the Vedic scriptures state:

naiṣhā tarkena matirāpaneyā (Kaṭhopaniṣad 1.2.9) [v26]

“Bhagavān is beyond the scope of our intellectual logic.”

yato vācho nivartante aprāpya manasā saha (Taittirīya Upaniṣhad 2.9.1) [v27]

“Our mind and words cannot reach Bhagavān.”

rām atarkya buddhi mana bānī, mata hamāra asa sunahi sayānī (Ramayana) [v28]

“Bhagavān cannot be analyzed by arguments or reached by words, mind, and intellect.”

There is only one personality who knows Bhagavān and that is Bhagavān himself. If he decides to bestow his grace upon some Ātman, he bestows his intellect upon that fortunate Ātman. Equipped with Bhagavān’s power, that fortunate Ātman can then know Bhagavān. Consequently, the concept of grace is of paramount importance in getting to know Bhagavān. This point is discussed in detail later in verses 10.11 and 18.58.

इच्छाद्वेषसमुथेन द्वन्द्वमोहेन भारत ।
सर्वभूतानि सम्मोहं सर्गे यान्ति परन्तप ॥२७॥

*ichchhā-dvesha-samutthena dvandva-mohena bhārata
sarva-bhūtāni sammohāṁ sarge yānti parantapa*

ichchhā—desire; *dvesha*—aversion; *samutthena*—arise from; *dvandva*—of duality; *mohena*—from the illusion; *bhārata*—Arjun, descendent of Bharat; *sarva*—all; *bhūtāni*—living beings; *sammohāṁ*—into delusion; *sarge*—since birth; *yānti*—enter; *parantapa*—Arjun, conqueror of enemies.

O descendent of Bharat, the dualities of desire and aversion arise from illusion. O conqueror of enemies, all living beings in the material realm are from birth deluded by these.

The world is full of dualities—night and day, winter and summer, happiness and distress, pleasure and pain. The biggest dualities are birth and death. These exist in a pair—the moment birth takes place, death is certain; death, in turn, brings subsequent birth. And between the two ends of birth and death is the arena of life. These dualities are an inseparable part of the experience of anyone

who goes through life.

In material consciousness, we desire one and detest the other. This attraction and aversion is not an inherent quality of the dualities, rather it arises from our ignorance. Our mistaken intellect is convinced that material pleasures will fulfill our self-interest. We are also convinced that pain is harmful to our being. We do not realize that materially pleasurable situations thicken the cover of material illusion on the Ātman, while adverse situations have the potential dispelling the illusion and elevating the mind. The root cause of this delusion is ignorance. The sign of spiritual wisdom is that a person rises above attraction and aversion, likes and dislikes, and embraces both as inseparable aspects of Bhagavān's creation.

येषां त्वन्तगतं पापं जनानां पुण्यकर्मणाम् ।
ते द्वन्द्वमोहनिर्मुक्ता भजन्ते मां दृढव्रताः ॥ 28 ॥

*yeṣhām tvanta-gataṁ pāpaṁ janānām puṇya-karmanām
te dvandva-moha-nirmuktā bhajante mām dṛiḍha-vratāḥ*

yeṣhām—whose; *tu*—but; *anta-gataṁ*—completely destroyed; *pāpaṁ*—sins; *janānām*—of persons; *punya*—pious; *karmaṇām*—activities; *te*—they; *dvandva*—of dualities; *moha*—illusion; *nirmuktāḥ*—free from; *bhajante*—worship; *mām*—me; *dṛiḍha-vratāḥ*—with determination.

But persons, whose sins have been destroyed by engaging in pious activities, become free from the illusion of dualities. Such persons worship me with determination.

Shri Krishna stated in verse 2.69 that what the ignorant consider as night, the wise consider as day. Those whose aspiration for Brahman-realization has been awakened welcome pain as an opportunity for self-abnegation and spiritual growth. They are also wary of pleasure that may cloud their Ātman. Thus, they neither pine for pleasure nor have aversion for pain. Such Ātman(s) who have freed their mind from these dualities of desire and hatred are able to worship Bhagavān with unshakeable determination.

जरामरणमोक्षाय मामाश्रित्य यतन्ति ये ।
ते ब्रह्म तद्विदुः कृत्स्नमध्यात्मं कर्म चाखिलम् ॥२९॥

*jarā-maraṇa-mokṣhāya mām āśhritya yatanti ye
te brahma tadviduh kṛtsnam adhyātmam karma chākhilam*

jarā—from old age; *maraṇa*—and death; *mokṣhāya*—for liberation; *mām*—me; *āśhritya*—take shelter in; *yatanti*—strive; *ye*—who; *te*—they; *brahma*—Brahman; *tat*—that; *viduh*—know; *kṛtsnam*—everything; *adhyātmam*—the individual self; *karma*—karmic action; *cha*—and; *akhilam*—entire.

Those who take shelter in me, striving for liberation from old-age and death, come to know Brahman, the individual self, and the entire field of karmic action.

As stated in verse 7.26, Bhagavān cannot be known by the strength of one's intellect. However, those who surrender to him, become recipients of his grace. Then, by virtue of his grace, they are easily able to know him. The Kāṭhopaniṣhad states:

*nāyam Ātman pravachanena labhyo
na medhayā na bahunā śrutenā
yameva iṣha vriṇute tena labhya-
stasya iṣha Ātman vivriṇute tanūṁ svām (1.2.23) [v29]*

“Bhagavān cannot be known by spiritual discourses, nor through the intellect, nor by hearing various kinds of teachings. Only when he bestows his grace upon someone, does that fortunate Ātman come to know him.” And when one gets knowledge of Bhagavān, everything comes to be known in connection with him. The Vedas state: *ekasmin vijñāte sarvam idam vijñātam bhavati* [v30] “If you know Bhagavān, you will know everything.”

Some spiritual aspirants consider *ātma-jñāna* (self-knowledge) as the ultimate goal. However, just as a drop of water is a tiny part of the ocean, *ātma-jñāna* is only a tiny part of *brahma-jñāna* (knowledge of Bhagavān). Those who have knowledge of the drop do not necessarily know the depth, breadth, and power

of the ocean. Similarly, those who know the self do not necessarily know Bhagavān. However, those who get knowledge of Bhagavān, automatically get knowledge of everything that is a part of Bhagavān. Hence, Shri Krishna states that those who take shelter in him come to know him, the Ātman, and the field of karmic action, by Bhagavān's grace.

**साधिभूताधिदैवं मां साधियज्ञं च ये विदुः ।
प्रयाणकालेऽपि च मां ते विदुर्युक्तचेतसः ॥३०॥**

*sādhibhūtādhidaivam mām sādhiyajñam cha ye viduh
prayāṇa-kāle 'pi cha mām te vidur yukta-chetasah*

sa-adhibhūta—governing principle of the field of matter; *adhidaivam*—governing principle of the celestial deities; *mām*—me; *sa-adhiyajña*—governing principle of the Bhagavān all sacrificial performances; *cha*—and; *ye*—who; *viduh*—know; *prayāṇa*—of death; *kāle*—at the time; *api*—even; *cha*—and; *mām*—me; *te*—they; *viduh*—know; *yukta-chetasah*—in full consciousness of me.

Those who know me as the governing principle of the *adhibhūta* (field of matter) and the *adhidaiva* (the celestial deities), and as *adhiyajña* (the Bhagavān all sacrificial performances), such enlightened Ātman(s) are in full consciousness of me even at the time of death.

In the next chapter, Shri Krishna will state that those elevated Ātman(s) who remember him at the time of leaving the body attain his divine abode. However, to remember Bhagavān at the time of death is exceedingly difficult. The reason is that death is an extremely painful experience. It can be likened to 2,000 scorpions biting one at the same time. This is much beyond the capacity of anyone's mind and intellect to tolerate. Even before death comes, the mind and intellect stop working and a person becomes unconscious. How then can one remember Bhagavān at the time of death?

This is only possible for those who are beyond the pleasure and pain of the body. Such persons leave the body with awareness. Shri Krishna states in this verse that those who know him as the governing principle of *adhibhūta*, *adhidaiva*,

and *adhiyajña* are in full consciousness of him even at the time of death. This is because true knowledge leads to complete devotion—the mind becomes fully attached to Bhagavān. Consequently, it becomes detached from the hankering and lamentation at the bodily platform, and such a Ātman is no longer in bodily consciousness.

The words adhibhūta, adhidaiva, and adhiyajña will be explained in the next chapter.



Chapter 8

Akṣhar Brahma Yog ~ अक्षरब्रह्मयोगः

The Yog of Eternal Bhagavān

This chapter briefly explains several important terms and concepts that are presented more fully in the Upaniṣads. It also describes what decides the destination of the Ātman after death. If we can remember Bhagavān at the time of departing from the body, we will certainly attain him. Therefore, we must practice to think of him at all times, alongside with doing our daily works. We can remember him by thinking of his qualities, attributes, and virtues. We must also practice steadfast yogic concentration upon him by chanting his names. When we perfectly absorb our mind in him through exclusive devotion, we will go beyond this material dimension to the spiritual realm.

The chapter then talks about the various abodes that exist in the material realm. It explains how, in the cycle of creation, these abodes and the multitudes of beings on them come into existence, and are then again absorbed back at the time of dissolution. However, transcendental to this manifest and unmanifest creation is the divine abode of Bhagavān. Those who follow the path of light, ultimately reach the divine abode, and never return to this mortal world, while those who follow the path of darkness keep transmigrating in the

endless cycle of birth, disease, old age, and death.

अर्जुन उवाच ।
किं तद्ब्रह्म किमध्यात्मं किं कर्म पुरुषोत्तम ।
अधिभूतं च किं प्रोक्तमधिदैवं किमुच्यते ॥१॥
अधियज्ञः कथं कोऽत्र देहेऽस्मिन्मधुसूदन ।
प्रयाणकाले च कथं ज्ञेयोऽसि नियतात्मभिः ॥२॥

*arjuna uvācha
kim tad brahma kim adhyātmaṁ kim karma puruṣottama
adhibhūtaṁ cha kiṁ proktam adhidaivam kiṁ uchyate
adhiyajñah kathām ko 'tra dehe 'smiñ madhusūdana
prayāṇa-kāle cha kathām jñeyo 'si niyatātmabhiḥ*

arjunah uvācha—Arjun said; *kim*—what; *tat*—that; *brahma*—Brahman; *kim*—what; *adhyātmaṁ*—the individual Ātman; *kim*—what; *karma*—the principle of karma; *puruṣha-uttama*—Shri Krishna, Shri Hari; *adhibhūtaṁ*—the material manifestation; *cha*—and; *kim*—what; *proktam*—is called; *adhidaivam*—the Bhagavān of the celestial deities; *kim*—what; *uchyate*—is called; *adhiyajñah*—the Bhagavān all sacrificial performances; *kathām*—how; *kah*—who; *atra*—here; *dehe*—in body; *asmin*—this; *madhusūdana*—Shri Krishna, the killer of the Demon named Madhu; *prayāṇa-kāle*—at the time of death; *cha*—and; *kathām*—how; *jñeyah*—to be known; *asi*—are (you); *niyatātmabhiḥ*—by those of steadfast mind.

Arjun said: O Supreme Bhagavān, what is Brahman (Absolute Reality), what is adhyātma (the individual Ātman), and what is karma? What is said to be adhibhūta, and who is said to be Adhidaiva? Who is Adhiyajña in the body and how is he the Adhiyajña? O Krishna, how are you to be known at the time of death by those of steadfast mind?

At the conclusion of Chapter seven, Shri Krishna had introduced terms like *Brahman*, *adhibhūta*, *adhyātma*, *adhidaiva*, and *adhiyajña*. Arjun is curious to learn more about these terms, consequently he raises seven questions in these two verses. Six of these questions relate to the terms mentioned by Shri Krishna. The seventh question is about the time of death. Shri Krishna had himself raised the topic in verse 7.30. Arjun now wishes to know how one can remember

Bhagavān at the moment of death.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
अक्षरं ब्रह्म परमं स्वभावोऽध्यात्ममुच्यते ।
भूतभावोद्भवकरो विसर्गः कर्मसञ्ज्ञितः ॥३॥

*śrī bhagavān uvācha
akṣharam brahma paramam svabhāvo 'dhyātmam uchyate
bhūta-bhāva-udbhava-karoh visargah karma-sanjñitah*

śrī-bhagavān uvācha—Bhagavān Krishna said; *akṣharam*—indestructible; *brahma*—*Brahman*; *paramam*—the Supreme; *svabhāvah*—nature; *adhyātmam*—one's own self; *uchyate*—is called; *bhūta-bhāva-udbhava-karoh*—Actions pertaining to the material personality of living beings, and its development; *visargah*—creation; *karma*—fruitive activities; *sanjñitah*—are called.

Bhagavān Krishna said: The Supreme Indestructible Entity is called *Brahman*; one's own self is called *adhyātma*. Actions pertaining to the material personality of living beings, and its development are called *karma*, or fruitive activities.

Shri Krishna says that the Supreme Entity is called *Brahman* (in the Vedas, Bhagavān is referred to by many names and *Brahman* is one of them). It is beyond space, time, and the chain of cause and effect. These are the characteristics of the material realm, while *Brahman* is transcendental to the material plane. It is unaffected by the changes in the universe, and is imperishable. Hence, it is described as *akṣharam*. In the Brīhadāraṇyak Upaniṣhad 3.8.8, *Brahman* has been described in the same manner: “Learned people speak of *Brahman* as *akṣhar* (indestructible). It is also designated as *Param* (Supreme) because it possesses qualities beyond those possessed by Māyā and the Ātman(s).”

The path of spirituality is called *adhyātma*, and science of the Ātman is also called *adhyātma*. But here the word has been used for one's own self, which includes the Ātman, body, mind, and intellect.

Karma is actions performed by the self, which forge the individual's unique conditions of existence from birth to birth. These karmas keep the Ātman rotating in *samsara* (the cycle of material existence).

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

*adhibhūtam kṣharo bhāvah puruṣaḥ chādhidaivatam
adhiyajño 'ham evātra dehe deha-bhṛitām vara*

adhibhūtam—the ever changing physical manifestation; *kṣharah*—perishable; *bhāvah*—nature; *puruṣah*—the cosmic personality of Bhagavān, encompassing the material creation; *cha*—and; *adhidaivatam*—the Bhagavān of the celestial deities; *adhiyajñah*—the Bhagavān of all sacrifices; *aham*—I; *eva*—certainly; *atra*—here; *dehe*—in the body; *deha-bhṛitām*—of the embodied; *vara*—O best.

O best of the embodied Ātman(s), the physical manifestation that is constantly changing is called *adhibhūta*; the universal form of Bhagavān, which presides over the celestial deities in this creation, is called *adhidaiva*; I, who dwell in the heart of every living being, am called *Adhiyajña*, or the Bhagavān of all sacrifices.

The kaleidoscope of the universe, consisting of all manifestations of the five elements—earth, water, fire, air, space—is called *adhibhūta*. The *virāt puruṣ*, which is the complete cosmic personality of Bhagavān encompassing the entire material creation, is called *adhidaiva* because he has sovereignty over the *devatās* (the celestial deities who administer the different departments of the universe). Shri Hari, Shri Krishna, who dwells in the heart of all living beings as the *ParamĀtman* (Supreme Ātman) is called *Adhiyajña*. All *yajñas* (sacrifices) are to be performed for his satisfaction. He is thus the presiding divinity over all the *yajñas* and the one who bestows rewards for all actions.

This verse and the previous one answer six of Arjun's seven questions, which are more in regard to terminology. *The next few verses answer the question*

regarding the moment of death.

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

*anta-kāle cha mām eva smaran muktvā kalevaram
yah prayāti sa mad-bhāvam yāti nāstyatra sanśhayah*

anta-kāle—at the time of death; *cha*—and; *mām*—me; *eva*—alone; *smaran*—remembering; *muktvā*—relinquish; *kalevaram*—the body; *yah*—who; *prayāti*—goes; *sah*—he; *mat-bhāvam*—Bhagavān-like nature; *yāti*—achieves; *na*—no; *asti*—there is; *atra*—here; *sanśhayah*—doubt.

Those who relinquish the body while remembering me at the moment of death will come to me. There is certainly no doubt about this.

In the next verse, Shri Krishna will state the principle that one's next birth is determined by one's state of consciousness at the time of death and the object of one's absorption. So if, at the time of death, one is absorbed in the transcendental names, forms, virtues, pastimes, and abodes of Bhagavān, one will attain the cherished goal of Brahman-realization. Shri Krishna uses the words *mad bhāvam*, which mean “Bhagavān-like nature.” Thus, if one's consciousness is absorbed in Bhagavān at the moment of death, one attains him, and becomes Bhagavān-like in character.

यं यं वापि स्मरन्भावं त्यजत्यन्ते कलेवरम् ।
तं तमेवैति कौन्तेय सदा तद्भावभावितः ॥६॥

*yam yam vāpi smaran bhāvam tyajatyante kalevaram
tam tam evaiti kaunteya sadā tad-bhāva-bhāvitah*

yam yam—whatever; *vā*—or; *api*—even; *smaran*—remembering; *bhāvam*—remembrance; *tyajati*—gives up; *ante*—in the end; *kalevaram*—the body; *tam*—to that; *tam*—to that; *eva*—certainly; *eti*—gets; *kaunteya*—Arjun, the son of Kunti; *sadā*—always; *tat*—that; *bhāva-bhāvitah*—absorbed in contemplation.

Whatever one remembers upon giving up the body at the time of death, O son of Kunti, one attains that state, being always absorbed in such contemplation.

We may succeed in teaching a parrot to say “Good morning!” But if we press its throat hard, it will forget what it has artificially learnt and make its natural sound “Kaw!” Similarly, at the time of death, our mind naturally flows through the channels of thoughts it has created through lifelong habit. The time to decide our travel plans is not when our baggage is already packed; rather, it requires careful planning and execution beforehand. Whatever prominently dominates one’s thoughts at the moment of death will determine one’s next birth. This is what Shri Krishna states in this verse.

One’s final thoughts will naturally be determined by what was constantly contemplated and meditated upon during the span of life, as influenced by one’s daily habits and associations. The Puranas relate the story of Maharaj Bharat. He was a king, but he renounced his kingdom to live in the forest as an ascetic and pursue Brahman-realization. One day, he saw a pregnant deer jump into the water on hearing a tiger roar. Out of fear, the pregnant deer delivered a baby deer that began floating on the water. Bharat felt pity on the baby deer and rescued it. He took it to his hut and began bringing it up. With great affection, he would watch its frolicking movements. He would gather grass to feed it, and would hug it to keep it warm. Slowly, his mind came away from Bhagavān and became absorbed in the deer. The absorption became so deep that, practically all day long, his thoughts would wander toward the deer. When he was about to die, he called out to the deer in fond remembrance, concerned about what would happen to him. Consequently, in his next life, Maharaj Bharat became a deer. However, because he had performed spiritual *sādhanā*, he was aware of the mistake in his previous life, and so even as a deer, he would reside near the *āśrams* of saintly persons in the forest. Finally, when he gave up the deer body, he was again given a human birth. This time, he became the great sage Jadabharat, and attained Brahman-realization by completing his *sādhanā*.

One should not conclude upon reading the verse, that for the attainment of the ultimate goal, the Supreme Bhagavān is only to be meditated upon at the moment of death. This is well-nigh impossible without a lifetime of preparation. The Skandh Purāṇ states that at the time of death it is exceedingly difficult to remember Bhagavān. Death is such a painful experience, that the mind naturally gravitates to the thoughts that constitute one's inner nature. For the mind to think of Bhagavān requires one's inner nature to be united with him. The inner nature is the consciousness that abides within one's mind and intellect. Only if we contemplate something continuously does it manifest as a part of our inner nature. So to develop a Brahman-consciousness inner nature, the Bhagavān must be remembered, recollected, and contemplated upon at every moment of our life. *This is what Shri Krishna states in the next verse.*

तस्मात्सर्वेषु कालेषु मामनुस्मर युध्य च ।
मय्यर्पितमनोबुद्धिर्मामेवैष्यस्यसंशयम् ॥ 7 ॥

*tasmāt sarveṣhu kāleṣhu mām anusmara yudhya cha
mayyarpita-mano-buddhir mām evaiṣhyasyasanśhayam*

tasmāt—therefore; *sarveṣhu*—in all; *kāleṣhu*—times; *mām*—me; *anusmara*—remember; *yudhya*—fight; *cha*—and; *mayi*—to me; *arpita*—surrender; *manah*—mind; *buddhiḥ*—intellect; *mām*—to me; *eva*—surely; *eṣhyasi*—you shall attain; *asanshayah*—without a doubt.

Therefore, always remember me and also do your duty of fighting the war. With mind and intellect surrendered to me, you will definitely attain me; of this, there is no doubt.

The first line of this verse is the essence of teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. It has the power of making our life divine. It also encapsulates the definition of *karm yog*. Shri Krishna says, “Keep your mind attached to me, and do your worldly duty with your body.” This applies to people in all walks of life—doctors, engineers, advocates, housewives, students, etc. In Arjun’s specific case,

he is a warrior and his duty is to fight. So he is being instructed to fulfill his duty, while keeping his mind in Bhagavān. Some people neglect their worldly duties on the plea that they have taken to spiritual life. Others excuse themselves from spiritual practice on the pretext of worldly engagements. People believe that spiritual and material pursuits are irreconcilable. But Bhagavān's message is to sanctify one's entire life.

When we practice such *karm yog*, the worldly works will not suffer because the body is being engaged in them. But since the mind is attached to Bhagavān, these works will not bind one in the law of karma. Only those works result in karmic reactions which are performed with attachment. When that attachment does not exist, even worldly law does not hold one culpable. For example, let us say that one man killed another and is brought to court. The judge asks him, "Did you kill that man?" The man replies, "Yes, your honor, there is no need for any witness. I confess that I killed him." "Then you should be punished!" "No, your honor, you cannot punish me." "Why?" "I had no intention to kill. I was driving the car on the proper side of the road, within speed limits, with my eyes focused ahead. My brakes, steering, everything was perfect. That man suddenly ran in front of my car. What could I do?" If his attorney can establish that the intention to kill did not exist, the judge will let him off without even the slightest punishment.

From the above example we see that even in the world we are not culpable for those actions we perform without attachment. The same principle holds for the law of karma as well. That is why, during the Mahābhārat war, following Shri Krishna's instructions, Arjun did his duty on the battlefield. By the end of the war, Shri Krishna noted that Arjun did not accrue any bad karma. He would have been entangled in karma if he had been fighting the battle with attachment, for worldly gain or fame. However, his mind was attached to Shri Krishna, and so what he was doing was multiplication in zeros, performing his

duty in this world without selfish attachment. Even if you multiply one million with zero, the answer will still be zero.

The condition for *karm yog* has been stated very clearly in this verse: The mind must be constantly engaged in thinking of Bhagavān. The moment the mind forgets Bhagavān, it comes under the attack of the big generals of Māyā's army —lust, anger, greed, envy, hatred, etc. Thus, it is important to always keep it attached to Bhagavān. Often people claim to be *karm yogis* because they say they do both—*karm* and *yog*. For the major part of the day, they do *karm*, and for a few minutes they do *yog* (meditation on Bhagavān). But this is not the definition of *karm yog* that Shri Krishna has given. He states that 1) even while doing the work, the mind must be engaged in thinking of Bhagavān, and 2) the remembrance of Bhagavān must not be intermittent, but constant throughout the day.

Saint Kabir expresses this in his famous couplet:

*sumiran kī sudhi yoñ karo, jyaun gāgar panihāra
bolat dolat surati meñ, kahe kabīra vichār [vI]*

“Remember Bhagavān just as the village woman remembers the water pot on her head. She speaks with others and walks on the path, but her mind keeps holding onto the pot.”

*Shri Krishna explains the consequences of practicing *karm yog* in the next verse.*

**अभ्यासयोगयुक्तेन चेतसा नान्यगामिना ।
परमं पुरुषं दिव्यं याति पार्थनुचिन्तयन् ॥८॥**

*abhyāsa-yoga-yuktena chetasā nānya-gāminā
paramam puruṣam divyam yāti pārthānuchintayan*

abhyāsa-yoga—by practice of *yog*; *yuktena*—being constantly engaged in remembrance; *chetasā*—by the mind; *na anya-gāminā*—without deviating; *paramam puruṣam*—Shri Hari; *divyam*—divine; *yāti*—one attains; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *anuchintayan*—constant remembrance.

With practice, O Parth, when you constantly engage the mind in

remembering me, Shri Hari, without deviating, you will certainly attain me.

This instruction to keep the mind always engaged in meditating upon Bhagavān has been repeated numerous times in the Bhagavad Gita. Here are a few verses:

*ananya-chetāḥ satataṁ 8.14
mayyeva mana ādhatsva 12.8
teṣhāṁ satata-yuktānāṁ 10.10*

The word *abhyāsa* means practice—the training and habituating of the mind to meditate upon Bhagavān. Such practice is to be done, not at fixed times of the day at regular intervals, but continuously, along with all the daily activities of life.

When the mind is attached to Bhagavān, it will get purified, even while performing worldly duties. It is important to remember that what we think with our mind fashions our future, not the actions we perform with our body. It is the mind that is to be engaged in devotion, and it is the mind that is to be surrendered to Bhagavān. And when the absorption of the consciousness in Bhagavān is complete, one will receive the divine grace. By Bhagavān's grace, one will attain liberation from material bondage, and will receive the unlimited divine bliss, divine knowledge, and divine love of Bhagavān. Such a Ātman will become Brahman-realized in this body itself, and upon leaving the body, will go to the abode of Bhagavān.

कविं पुराणमनुशासितार
 मणोरणीयांसमनुस्मरेद्यः ।
 सर्वस्य धातारमचिन्त्यरूप
 मादित्यवर्णं तमसः परस्तात् ॥ 9 ॥

प्रयाणकाले मनसाचलेन
 भक्त्या युक्तो योगबलेन चैव ।
 भ्रुवोर्मध्ये प्राणमावेश्य सम्यक्
 स तं परं पुरुषमुपैति दिव्यम् ॥ 10 ॥

*kavim purāṇam anuśāsitāram
 aṇor aṇīyānsam anusmared yah
 sarvasya dhātāram achintya-rūpam
 āditya-varṇam tamasah parastāt
 prayāṇa-kāle manasāchalena
 bhaktyā yukto yoga-balena chaiva
 bhruvor madhye prāṇam āveśhya samyak
 sa tam param puruṣham upaiti divyam*

kavim—poet; *purāṇam*—ancient; *anuśāsitāram*—the controller; *aṇoh*—than the atom; *aṇīyānsam*—smaller; *anusmaret*—always remembers; *yah*—who; *sarvasya*—of everything; *dhātāram*—the support; *achintya*—inconceivable; *rūpam*—divine form; *āditya-varṇam*—effulgent like the sun; *tamasah*—to the darkness of ignorance; *parastāt*—beyond; *prayāṇa-kāle*—at the time of death; *manasā*—mind; *achalena*—steadily; *bhaktyā*—remembering with great devotion; *yuktaḥ*—united; *yoga-balena*—through the power of yog; *cha*—and; *eva*—certainly; *bhruvoh*—the two eyebrows; *madhye*—between; *prāṇam*—life airs; *āveśhya*—fixing; *samyak*—completely; *sah*—he; *tam*—him; *param puruṣham*—the Supreme Divine Bhagavān; *upaiti*—attains; *divyam*—divine.

Bhagavān is omniscient, the most ancient one, the controller, subtler than the subtlest, the support of all, and the possessor of an inconceivable divine form; he is brighter than the sun, and beyond all darkness of ignorance. One who at the time of death, with unmoving mind attained by the practice of Yog, who fixes the *prāṇ* (life airs) between the eyebrows, and steadily remembers the Divine Bhagavān with great devotion, certainly attains him.

Meditation upon Bhagavān can be of a variety of types. One can meditate

upon the names, forms, qualities, *leelas*, abode, or associates of Bhagavān. All these different aspects of the Supreme Divinity are non-different from him. When we attach our mind to any of these, our mind comes into the divine realm and hence becomes purified. Hence, any or all of these can be made the object of meditation. Here, eight qualities of the Supreme Bhagavān have been described, which can be meditated upon.

Kavi means poet or seer, and by extension, omniscient. As stated in verse 7.26, Bhagavān knows the past, present, and future.

Purāṇ means without beginning and the most ancient. Bhagavān is the origin of everything spiritual and material, but there is nothing from which he has originated and nothing that predates him.

Anuśāsitāram means the Ruler. Bhagavān is the creator of the laws by which the universe runs; he administers its affairs, directly and through his appointed celestial deities. Thus, everything is under his regime.

Anorāṇīyān means subtler than the subtlest. The Ātman is subtler than matter, but Bhagavān is seated within the Ātman, and hence he is subtler than it.

Sarvasya Dhātā means the sustainer of all, just as the ocean is the support of the waves.

Achintya rūpa means of inconceivable form. Since our mind can only conceive material forms, Bhagavān is beyond the scope of our material mind. However, if he bestows his grace, by his *YogMāyā* power he makes our mind divine in nature. Then alone, by his grace, he becomes conceivable.

Āditya varṇa means he is resplendent like the sun.

Tamasah Parastāt means beyond the darkness of ignorance. Just as the sun

can never be covered by the clouds, even though it may seem to us that it has been obscured, similarly Bhagavān can never be covered by the material energy Māyā even though he may be in contact with it in the world.

In *bhakti*, the mind is focused upon the divine attributes of Bhagavān's form, qualities, pastimes, etc. When *bhakti* is performed by itself, it is called *śuddha bhakti* (pure *bhakti*). When it is performed alongside with *aṣṭāṅg yog*, it is called *yog-miśra bhakti* (devotion alloyed with *aṣṭāṅg yog sādhanā*). From verses ten to thirteen, Shri Krishna describes *yog-miśra bhakti*. One of the beauties of the Bhagavad Gita is that it embraces a variety of *sādhanās*, thereby bringing people of diverse upbringing, backgrounds, and personalities in its embrace. When western scholars attempt to read the Hindu scriptures without the help of a Guru, they often become confused by the variety of paths, instructions, and philosophical viewpoints in its various scriptures. However, this variety is actually a blessing. Because of the *sanskārs* (tendencies) of endless lifetimes, we all have different natures and preferences. When four people go to buy clothes for themselves, they end up choosing different colors, styles, and fashions. If the shop kept clothes of only one color and style, it would be unable to cater to the variety inherent in human nature. Similarly, on the spiritual path too, people have performed various *sādhanās* in past lifetimes. The Vedic scriptures embrace that variety, while simultaneously stressing *bhakti* (devotion to Bhagavān) as the common thread that ties them all together.

In *aṣṭāṅg yog*, the life force is raised through the *sūshumṇā* channel in the spinal column. It is brought between the eyebrows, which is the region of the third eye (the inner eye). It is then made to focus on the Supreme Bhagavān with great devotion.

यदक्षरं वेदविदो वदन्ति
 विशन्ति यद्यतयो वीतरागाः ।
 यदिच्छन्तो ब्रह्मचर्यं चरन्ति
 तत्ते पदं संग्रहेण प्रवक्ष्ये ॥ 11 ॥

*yad akṣaram veda-vido vadanti
 viśhanti yad yatayo vīta-rāgāḥ
 yad ichchhanto brahmacharyam charanti
 tat te padam saṅgrahena pravakṣhye*

yat—which; *akṣaram*—Imperishable; *veda-vidah*—scholars of the Vedas; *vadanti*—describe; *viśhanti*—enter; *yat*—which; *yatayah*—great ascetics; *vīta-rāgāḥ*—free from attachment; *yat*—which; *ichchhantah*—desiring; *brahmacharyam*—celibacy; *charanti*—practice; *tat*—that; *te*—to you; *padam*—goal; *saṅgrahena*—briefly; *pravakṣhye*—I shall explain.

Scholars of the Vedas describe him as Imperishable; great ascetics practice the vow of celibacy and renounce worldly pleasures to enter into him. I shall now explain to you briefly the path to that goal.

Bhagavān has been referred to by many names in the Vedas. Some of them are: *Sat, Avyākṛit, Prāṇ, Indra, Dev, Brahman, ParamĀtman, Bhagavān, Puruṣh*. In various places, while referring to the formless aspect of Bhagavān, he has also been called by the name *Akṣhar*. The word *Akṣhar* means “imperishable.” The Brīhadāraṇyak Upaniṣhad states:

etasya vā akṣharasya praśhāsane gārgi sūryachandramasau vidhritau tiṣṭhataḥ
(3.8.9) [v2]

“Under the mighty control of the Imperishable, the sun and the moon are held on their course.” In this verse, Shri Krishna describes the path of *yog-miśhrā bhakti*, to attain the formless aspect of Bhagavān. The word *sangraheṇa* means “in brief.” He will describe the path only briefly, to avoid emphasizing it, since the path is not suitable for everyone.

On this path, one must perform severe austerities, renouncing worldly desires, practicing *brahmacharya*, and living a life of rigid continence. *Brahmacharya* is the

vow of celibacy. Through it, a person's physical energy gets conserved, and then transformed through *sādhanā* into spiritual energy. An aspirant who practices celibacy enhances memory power and the intellect for comprehending spiritual topics. This has been previously explained in detail in verse 6.14.

**सर्वद्वाराणि संयम्य मनो हृदि निरुद्ध्य च ।
मूर्ध्याधायात्मनः प्राणमास्थितो योगधारणाम् ॥ १२ ॥**

*sarva-dvārāṇi sanyamya mano hṛidi nirudhya cha
mūrdhnyādhāyātmanah prāṇam āsthito yoga-dhāraṇām*

sarva-dvārāṇi—all gates; *sanyamya*—restraining; *manah*—the mind; *hṛidi*—in the heart region; *nirudhya*—confining; *cha*—and; *mūrdhni*—in the head; *ādhāya*—establish; *ātmanah*—of the self; *prāṇam*—the life breath; *āsthitah*—situated (in); *yoga-dhāraṇām*—the yogic concentration.

Restraining all the gates of the body and fixing the mind in the heart region, and then drawing the life-breath to the head, one should get established in steadfast yogic concentration.

The world enters the mind through the senses. We first see, hear, touch, taste, and smell the objects of perception. Then the mind dwells upon these objects. Repeated contemplation creates attachment, which automatically creates further repetition of the thoughts in the mind. Restraining the senses is thus an essential aspect of locking the world out of the mind. A practitioner of meditation who neglects this point has to keep grappling with the incessant stream of worldly thoughts that the unrestrained senses create. Hence, Shri Krishna delivers the instruction to guard the gates of the body. The words *sarva-dvārāṇi-sanyamya* mean “controlling the passages that enter the body.” This implies restricting the senses from their normal outgoing tendencies. The words *hṛidi nirudhya* mean “locking the mind in the heart.” This denotes directing devotional feelings from the mind to the *akṣaram* imperishable Supreme Bhagavān enthroned there. The words *yoga-dhāraṇām* mean “uniting the consciousness with Bhagavān.” This refers to meditating upon him with

complete attention.

ओमित्येकाक्षरं ब्रह्म व्याहरन्मामनुस्मरन् ।
यः प्रयाति त्यजन्देहं स याति परमां गतिम् ॥ १३ ॥

*om ityekākṣharam brahma vyāharan mām anusmaran
yah prayāti tyajan deham sa yāti paramām gatim*

om—sacred syllable representing the formless aspect of Bhagavān; *iti*—thus; *eka-akṣharam*—one syllabled; *brahma*—the Absolute Truth; *vyāharan*—chanting; *mām*—me (Shri Krishna); *anusmaran*—remembering; *yah*—who; *prayāti*—departs; *tyajan*—quitting; *deham*—the body; *sah*—he; *yāti*—attains; *paramām*—the supreme; *gatim*—goal.

One who departs from the body while remembering me, the Supreme Personality, and chanting the syllable Om, will attain the supreme goal.

The sacred syllable *Om*, also called *Pranav*, represents the sound manifestation of *Brahman* (the formless aspect of the Supreme Bhagavān, without virtues and attributes). Hence, it is considered imperishable like Bhagavān Himself. Since here Shri Krishna is describing the process of meditation in the context of *ashṭāṅg yog sādhanā*, he states that one should chant the syllable “Om,” to bring the mind into focus, while practicing austerities and maintaining the vow of celibacy. The Vedic scriptures also refer to “Om” as the *anāhat nād*. It is the sound that pervades creation, and can be heard by *yogis* who tune in to it.

The Bible says “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with Bhagavān, and the Word was Bhagavān.” (John 1:1) [v2.1] The Vedic scriptures also state that Bhagavān first created sound, from sound he created space, and then proceeded further in the process of creation. That original sound was “Om.” As a result, it is accorded so much of importance in the Vedic philosophy. It is called a *mahā vākya*, or great sound vibration of the Vedas. It is also called the *bīja mantra*, because it is often attached to the beginning of the Vedic mantras, just as *hrīm*, *klīm*, etc. The vibrations of *Om* consist of three letters: A...U...M. In the proper chanting of *Om*, one begins by making the

sound “A” from the belly, with an open throat and mouth. This is merged into the chanting of the sound “U” that is created from the middle of the mouth. The sequence ends with chanting “M” with the mouth closed. The three parts A ... U ... M have many meanings and interpretations. For the devotees, Om is the name for the impersonal aspect of Bhagavān.

This *Pranav* sound is the object of meditation in *ashtāṅg yog*. In the path of *bhakti yog*, devotees prefer to meditate upon the personal names of the Bhagavān, such as Ram, Krishna, Shiv, etc. because of the greater sweetness of Bhagavān’s bliss in these personal names. The distinction is like the difference between having a baby in the womb and a baby in the lap. The baby in the lap is a far sweeter experience than the baby in the womb.

The final examination of our meditation is the time of death. Those who are able to fix their consciousness upon Bhagavān, despite the intense pain of death, pass this exam. Such persons attain the Supreme destination upon leaving their body. This is extremely difficult and requires a lifetime of practice. In the following verse, *Shri Krishna gives an easy way of gaining such mastery*.

अनन्यचेता: सततं यो मां स्मरति नित्यशः ।
तस्याहं सुलभः पार्थ नित्ययुक्तस्य योगिनः ॥१४॥

*ananya-chetāḥ satataṁ yo mām smarati nityaśhaḥ
tasyāham sulabhaḥ pārtha nitya-yuktasya yoginah*

ananya-chetāḥ—without deviation of the mind; *satataṁ*—always; *yah*—who; *mām*—me; *smarati*—remembers; *nityaśhaḥ*—regularly; *tasya*—to him; *aham*—I; *su-labhaḥ*—easily attainable; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *nitya*—constantly; *yuktasya*—engaged; *yoginah*—of the yogis.

O Parth, for those yogis who always think of me with exclusive devotion, I am easily attainable because of their constant absorption in me.

Throughout the Bhagavad Gita, Shri Krishna has repeatedly stressed upon devotion. In the previous verse, Shri Krishna expounded meditation on the formless manifestation of Bhagavān, devoid of attributes. This is not only dry

but also very difficult. So now he gives an easier alternative, which is meditation upon his personal form as Krishna, Ram, Shiv, Vishnu, etc. This includes the names, forms, virtues, pastimes, abodes, and associates of his supreme divine form.

In the entire Bhagavad Gita, this is the only verse in which Shri Krishna says that he is easy to attain. However, the condition he states is *ananya-chetāḥ*, which means that the mind must be exclusively absorbed in him and him alone. The word *ananya* is very important. Etymologically, it means *na anya*, or “no other.” The mind should be attached to no one else but Bhagavān alone. This condition of exclusivity has often been repeated in the Bhagavad Gita.

*ananyāśh chintayanto mām 9.22
tam eva śaraṇāṁ gachchha 18.62
mām ekam śaraṇāṁ vraja 18.66*

Exclusive devotion has been stressed in the other scriptures too.

mām ekam eva śaraṇam Ātmannām sarva-dehinām (Bhāgavatam 11.12.15) [v3]

“Surrender to me alone, who am the Supreme Ātman of all living beings.”

eka bharoso eka bala ek āsa visvāsa (Ramayana) [v4]

“I have only one support, one strength, one faith, one shelter; and that is Shri Ram.”

anyāśhrayāṇāṁ tyāgo 'nanyatā (Nārad Bhakti Darśhan, Sūtra 10) [v5]

“Reject all other shelters, and become exclusive to Bhagavān.”

Exclusive devotion means that the mind must be attached only to the names, forms, virtues, pastimes, abodes, and associates of Bhagavān. The logic is very simple. The aim of *sādhanā* is to purify the mind, and this is accomplished only by attaching it to the all-pure Bhagavān. However, if we cleanse the mind by contemplating upon Bhagavān, and then again dirty it by dipping it in worldliness, then no matter how long we try, we will never be able to clean it.

This is exactly the mistake that many people make. They love Bhagavān but they also love and get attached to worldly people and objects. So whatever positive gains they accomplish through *sādhanā* become tarnished by worldly attachment. If you apply soap on a cloth to cleanse it, but simultaneously keep throwing dirt upon it, your effort will be an exercise in futility. Hence, Shri Krishna says that it is not just devotion, but exclusive devotion to him that makes him easily attainable.

मामुपेत्य पुनर्जन्म दुःखालयमशाश्वतम् ।
नाप्नुवन्ति महात्मानः संसिद्धिं परमां गताः ॥ १५ ॥

*mām upetya punar janma duḥkhālayam aśhāśhvatam
nāpnuvanti mahā-Ātmannah sansiddhim paramām gatāḥ*

mām—me; *upetya*—having attained; *punah*—again; *janma*—birth; *duḥkha-ālayam*—place full of miseries; *aśhāśhvatam*—temporary; *na*—never; *āpnuvanti*—attain; *mahā-Ātmannah*—the great Ātman(s); *sansiddhim*—perfection; *paramām*—highest; *gatāḥ*—having achieved.

Having attained me, the great Ātman(s) are no more subject to rebirth in this world, which is transient and full of misery, because they have attained the highest perfection.

What is the result of attaining Bhagavān? Those who become Brahman-realized get released from the cycle of life and death, and reach the divine abode of Bhagavān. Thus, they do not have to take birth again in this material world, which is a place of suffering. We suffer the painful process of birth, crying helplessly. Then as babies, we have needs that we can't express, and so we cry. In adolescence we have to grapple with bodily desires that make us suffer mental anguish. In married life, we endure the idiosyncrasies of the spouse. When we reach old age, we suffer from bodily infirmities. All through life, we suffer the miseries from our own body and mind, the behavior of others, and inclement environment. Finally, we suffer the pain of death.

All this misery is not meaningless; it also has a purpose in the grand design of

Bhagavān. It gives us the realization that the material realm is not our permanent home. It is like the reformatory for Ātman(s) like us who have turned their backs toward Bhagavān. If we did not suffer misery here, we would never develop the desire for Bhagavān. For example, if we put our hand in the fire, two things happen—the skin starts getting burnt, and the neurons create a sensation of pain in the brain. The burning of the skin is a bad thing, but the sensation of pain is a good thing. If we did not experience the pain, we would not extract our hand from the fire, and it would suffer extensive damage. The pain is thus an indication that something is wrong, which needs to be corrected. Similarly, the pain we experience in the material realm is Bhagavān's signal that our consciousness is defective and we need to progress from material consciousness toward union with Bhagavān.

Ultimately, we get whatever we have made ourselves worthy of through our chosen efforts. Those who remain with their consciousness turned around from Bhagavān continue rotating in the wheel of birth and death; and those who achieve exclusive devotion to Bhagavān attain his divine abode.

आब्रह्मभुवनाल्लोकाः पुनरावर्तिनोऽर्जुन ।
मामुपेत्य तु कौन्तेय पुनर्जन्म न विद्यते ॥ 16 ॥

*ā-brahma-bhuvanāl lokāḥ punar āvartino 'rjuna
mām upetya tu kaunteya punar janma na vidyate*

ā-brahma-bhuvanāt—up to the abode of Brahma; *lokāḥ*—worlds; *punah āvartinah*—subject to rebirth; *arjuna*—Arjun; *mām*—mine; *upetya*—having attained; *tu*—but; *kaunteya*—Arjun, the son of Kunti; *punah janma*—rebirth; *na*—never; *vidyate*—is.

In all the worlds of this material creation, up to the highest abode of Brahma, you will be subject to rebirth, O Arjun. But on attaining my abode, O son of Kunti, there is no further rebirth.

The Vedic scriptures describe seven planes of existence lower than the earthly plane—*tal*, *atal*, *vital*, *sutal*, *talātal*, *rasātal*, *pātāl*. These are called *narak*, or the hellish

abodes. There are also seven planes of existence starting from the earthly plane and above—*bhūḥ, bhuvaḥ, swaḥ, mahāḥ, janah, tapah, satyah*. The ones above are called *swarg*, or celestial abodes. Other religious traditions also refer to the seven heavens. In Judaism, seven heavens are named in the Talmud, with Araboth named as the highest (see also Psalm 68.4).

The different planes of existence are called the various worlds. There are fourteen worlds in our universe. The highest amongst them is the abode of Brahma, called Brahma Lok. All of these *lokas* are within the realm of Māyā, and the residents of these *lokas* are subject to the cycle of birth and death. Shri Krishna has referred to them in the previous verse as *duḥkhālayam* and *aśhāśvatam* (impermanent and full of misery).

Even Indra, the king of the celestial deities, has to die one day. The Puranas relate that once Indra engaged Vishwakarma, the celestial architect, in the construction of a huge palace. Wearied by its construction, which was not ending, Vishwakarma prayed to Bhagavān for help. Bhagavān came there, and he asked Indra, “Such a huge palace! How many Vishwakarmas have been engaged in its making?” Indra was surprised by the question, and replied, “I thought there was only one Vishwakarma.” Bhagavān smiled and said, “Like this universe with fourteen worlds, there are unlimited universes. Each has one Indra and one Vishwakarma.”

Then Indra saw lines of ants walking toward him. He was surprised and asked from where so many ants were coming. Bhagavān said, “I have brought all those Ātman(s) here who were Indra once in their past lives, and are now in the bodies of ants.” Indra was astonished by their vast number.

Shortly after, Lomesh Rishi came to the scene. He was carrying a straw mat on his head; on his chest was a circle of hair. Some hair had fallen from the circle, creating gaps. Indra received the sage, and politely queried from him, “Sir, why

do you carry a straw mattress on your head. And what is the meaning of the hair circle on your chest?”

Lomesh Rishi replied, “I have received the boon of *chirāyu* (long life). At the end of one Indra’s tenure in this universe, one hair falls off. That explains the gaps in the circle. My disciples wish to build a house for me to stay in, but I think that life is temporary, so why build a residence here? I keep this straw mat, which protects me from rain and the sun. At night, I spread it on the ground and go to sleep.” Indra was astonished, thinking, “This *rishi* has the lifespan of many *Indras*, and yet he says that life is temporary. Then why am I building such a big palace?” His pride was squashed and he let Vishwakarma go.

While reading these stories, we also must not fail to marvel at the amazing insight of the Bhagavad Gita regarding the cosmology of the universe. As late as in the sixteenth century, Nicholas Copernicus was the first western scientist to propose a proper heliocentric theory stating that the sun was in fact the center of the universe. Until then, the entire Western world believed that the earth was the center of the universe. Subsequent advancement in astronomy revealed that the sun was also not the center of the universe, but rotating around the epicenter of a galaxy called the Milky Way. Further progress enabled scientists to conclude that there are many galaxies like the Milky Way, each of them having innumerable stars, like our Sun.

In contrast, Vedic philosophy states five thousand years ago that the earth is *Bhūr Lok*, which is rotating around *Swar Lok*, and between them is the realm called *Bhuvar Lok*. But *Swar Lok* is also not stationary either; it is fixed in the gravitation of *Jana Lok*, and between them is the realm called *Mahar Lok*. But *Jana Lok* is not stationary either; it is rotating around *Brahma Lok* (*Satya Lok*), and between them is the realm called *Tapa Lok*. This explains the seven higher

worlds; similarly, there are seven lower worlds. Now, for an insight given five thousand years ago, this is most amazing!

Shri Krishna says in this verse that all the fourteen worlds in the universe are within the realm of Māyā, and hence their residents are subject to the cycle of birth and death. However, those who attain Brahman-realization are released from the bondage of the material energy. Upon leaving this material body at death, they attain the divine abode of Bhagavān. There, they receive divine bodies in which they eternally participate in the divine pastimes of Bhagavān. Thus, they do not have to take birth in this material world again. Some Saints do come back even after liberation from Māyā. But they do so only to help others get out of bondage as well. These are the great descended Masters and great Prophets, who engage in the divine welfare of humankind.

सहस्रयुगपर्यन्तमहर्यदब्रह्मणो विदुः ।
रात्रिं युगसहस्रान्तां तेऽहोरात्रविदो जनाः ॥ १७ ॥

*sahasra-yuga-paryantam ahar yad brahmaṇo viduḥ
rātrim yuga-sahasrāntām te 'ho-rātra-vido janāḥ*

sahasra—one thousand; *yuga*—age; *paryantam*—until; *ahar*—one day; *yat*—which; *brahmaṇah*—of Brahma; *viduḥ*—know; *rātrim*—night; *yuga-sahasra-antām*—lasts one thousand yugas; *te*—they; *ahar-rātra-vidah*—those who know his day and night; *janāḥ*—people.

One day of Brahma (*kalpa*) lasts a thousand cycles of the four ages (*mahā yug*) and his night also extends for the same span of time. The wise who know this understand the reality about day and night.

The measurements of time in the Vedic cosmological system are also vast and staggering. For example, there are insects that are born in the night; they grow up, procreate, lay eggs, and grow old, all in one night. In the morning, you see them all dead under the street lights. If these insects were told that their entire lifespan was only one night of human beings, they would find it incredulous.

Similarly, the Vedas state that one day and night of the celestial deities, such as Indra and Varun, corresponds to one year on the earth plane. One year of the celestial deities, consisting of 30×12 days is equal to 360 years on the earth plane. 12,000 years of the celestial deities correspond to one *mahā yug* (cycle of four *yugas*) on the earth plane, i.e. 4 million and 320 thousand years. This is the highest unit of time in the world, and is called a *kalp*.

1,000 such *mahā yugas* comprise one day of Brahma,. This is called *kalp* and is the largest unit of time in the world. Equal to that is Brahma's night. By these calculations, Brahma lives for 100 years. By earth calculations, it is 311 trillion 40 billion years.

Thus, the Vedic calculations of time are as follows:

Kali Yug: 432,000 years.

Dwāpar Yug: 864,000 years.

Tretā Yug: 1,296,000 years.

Satya Yug: 1,728,000 years.

Together, they comprise a *Mahā Yug*: 4,320,000 years.

One thousand *Mahā Yugas* comprise one day of Brahma, which is a *kalp*: 43,200,000 years. Of equal duration is Brahma's night. Shri Krishna says that those who understand this are the true knowers of day and night.

The entire duration of the universe is equal to Brahma's lifespan of 100 years: 311 trillion 40 billion years. Brahma is also a Ātman, who has attained that position and is discharging his duties for Bhagavān. Hence, Brahma is also within the cycle of life and death. However, being of extremely elevated consciousness, he is assured that at the end of his life, he will be released from the cycle of life and death and go to the abode of Bhagavān. Occasionally, when no Ātman is eligible to perform the duties of Brahma at the time of the creation of the world, Bhagavān himself becomes Brahma.

अव्यक्ताद्व्यक्तयः सर्वाः प्रभवन्त्यहरागमे ।
रात्र्यागमे प्रलीयन्ते तत्रैवाव्यक्तसञ्ज्ञके ॥ १८ ॥

*avyaktād vyaktayah sarvāḥ prabhavantyahar-āgame
rātryāgame pralīyante tatraivāvyakta-sanjñake*

avyaktād—from the unmanifested; *vyaktayah*—the manifested; *sarvāḥ*—all; *prabhavanti*—emanate; *ahar-āgame*—at the advent of Brahma’s day; *rātri-āgame*—at the fall of Brahma’s night; *pralīyante*—they dissolve; *tatra*—into that; *eva*—certainly; *avyakta-sanjñake*—in that which is called the unmanifest.

At the advent of Brahma’s day, all living beings emanate from the unmanifest source. And at the fall of his night, all embodied beings again merge into their unmanifest source.

In the amazing cosmic play of the universe, the various worlds (planes of existence) and their planetary systems undergo repeated cycles of creation, preservation, and dissolution (*sṛishṭi*, *sthiti*, and *pralaya*). At the end of Brahma’s day, corresponding to one *kalpa* of 4,320,000,000 years, all the planetary systems up to *Mahar Lok* are destroyed. This is called *naimittik pralaya* (partial dissolution). In the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, Shukadev tells Parikshit that just as a child makes structures with toys during the day and dismantles them before sleeping, similarly, Brahma creates the planetary systems and their life forms when he wakes up and dismantles them before sleeping.

At the end of Brahma’s life of 100 years, the entire universe is dissolved. At this time, the entire material creation winds up. The *pañch-mahābhūta* merge into the *pañch-tanmātrās*, the *pañch-tanmātrās* merge into *ahankār*, *ahankār* merges into *mahān*, and *mahān* merges into *prakṛiti*. *Prakṛiti* is the subtle form of the material energy, *Māyā*. *Māyā*, in its primordial state, then goes and sits in the body of the Supreme Bhagavān, Maha Vishnu. This is called *prākrit pralaya*, or *mahāpralaya* (great dissolution). Again, when Maha Vishnu wishes to create, he glances at the material energy in the form of *prakṛiti*, and by his mere glance, it begins unfolding. From *prakṛiti*, *mahān* is created: from *mahān*, *ahankār* is created; from

ahankār, pañch-tanmātrās are created; from *pañch-tanmātrās, pañch-mahābhūta* are created. In this way, unlimited universes are created.

Modern day scientists estimate that there are 100 billion stars in the Milky Way. Like the Milky Way, there are 1 billion galaxies in the universe. Thus, by estimation of scientists, there are 10²⁰ stars in our universe. According to the Vedas, like our universe, there are innumerable universes, of differing sizes and features. Every time, Maha Vishnu breathes in, unlimited universes manifest from the pores of his body, and when he breathes out, all the universes dissolve back. Thus the 100 years of Brahma's life are equal to one breath of Maha Vishnu. Each universe has one Brahma, one Vishnu, and one Shankar. So there are innumerable Brahmās, Vishnus, and Shankars in innumerable universes. All the Vishnus in all the universes are expansions of Maha Vishnu.

**भूतग्रामः स एवायं भूत्वा भूत्वा प्रलीयते ।
रात्र्यागमेऽवशः पार्थं प्रभवत्यहरागमे ॥ 19 ॥**

*bhūta-grāmaḥ sa evāyam bhūtvā bhūtvā pralīyate
rātryāgame 'avaśhaḥ pārtha prabhavat�ahar-āgame*

bhūta-grāmaḥ—the multitude of beings; *sah*—these; *eva*—certainly; *ayam*—this; *bhūtvā bhūtvā*—repeatedly taking birth; *pralīyate*—dissolves; *rātri-āgame*—with the advent of night; *avaśhaḥ*—helpless; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *prabhavati*—become manifest; *aḥaḥ-āgame*—with the advent of day.

The multitudes of beings repeatedly take birth with the advent of Brahma's day, and are reabsorbed on the arrival of the cosmic night, to manifest again automatically on the advent of the next cosmic day.

The Vedas list four *pralayas* (dissolutions):

1. *Nitya Pralaya*: This is the daily dissolution of our consciousness that takes place when we fall into deep sleep.
2. *Naimittik Pralaya*: This is the dissolution of all the abodes up to *Mahar Lok* at the end of Brahma's day. At that time, the Ātman(s) residing in these abodes

become unmanifest. They reside in a state of suspended animation in the body of Vishnu. Again when the Brahma creates these lokas, they are given birth according to their past karmas.

3. *Mahā Pralaya*: This is the dissolution of the entire universe at the end of Brahma's life. At this time, all the Ātman(s) in the universe go into a state of suspended animation in the body of Maha Vishnu. Their gross (*sthūl sharīr*) and subtle (*sūkṣhma sharīr*) bodies dissolve, but the causal body (*kāraṇ sharīr*) remains. When the next cycle of creation takes place, they are again given birth, according to their *sanskārs* and karmas stored in their causal body.

4. *Ātyantik Pralaya*: When the Ātman finally attains Bhagavān, it gets released from the cycle of birth and death forever. *Ātyantik Pralaya* is the dissolution of the bonds of Māyā, which were tying the Ātman since eternity.

परस्तस्मात् भावोऽन्योऽव्यक्तोऽव्यक्तात्सनातनः ।
यः स सर्वेषु भूतेषु नश्यत्सु न विनश्यति ॥ 20 ॥

*paras tasmāt tu bhāvo 'nyo 'vyakto 'vyaktāt sanātanaḥ
yah sa sarveṣu bhūteṣu naśyatsu na vinaśhyati*

parah—transcendental; *tasmāt*—than that; *tu*—but; *bhāvah*—creation; *anyah*—another; *avyaktaḥ*—unmanifest; *avyaktāt*—to the unmanifest; *sanātanaḥ*—eternal; *yah*—who; *sah*—that; *sarveṣu*—all; *bhūteṣu*—in beings; *naśyatsu*—cease to exist; *na*—never; *vinaśhyati*—is annihilated.

Transcendental to this manifest and unmanifest creation, there is yet another unmanifest eternal dimension. That realm does not cease even when all others do.

After completing his exposé on the material worlds and their impermanence, Shri Krishna next goes on to talk about the spiritual dimension. It is beyond the scope of the material energy, and is created by the spiritual *YogMāyā* energy of Bhagavān. It is not destroyed when all the material worlds are destroyed. Shri Krishna mentions in verse 10.42 that the spiritual dimension is three-fourth of Bhagavān's entire creation, while the material dimension is one-

fourth.

अव्यक्तोऽक्षर इत्युक्तस्तमाहुः परमां गतिम् ।
यं प्राप्य न निवर्तन्ते तद्धाम परमं मम ॥२१॥

*avyakto 'kṣhara ityuktas tam āhuḥ paramām gatim
yam prāpya na nivartante tad dhāma paramam mama*

avyaktaḥ—unmanifest; *akṣharaḥ*—imperishable; *iti*—thus; *uktaḥ*—is said; *tam*—that; *āhuḥ*—is called; *paramām*—the supreme; *gatim*—destination; *yam*—which; *prāpya*—having reached; *na*—never; *nivartante*—come back; *tat*—that; *dhāma*—abode; *paramam*—the supreme; *mama*—my.

That unmanifest dimension is the supreme goal, and upon reaching it, one never returns to this mortal world. That is my supreme abode.

The divine sky of the spiritual realm is called *Paravyom*. It contains the eternal abodes of the different forms of Bhagavān, such as Golok (the abode of Shri Krishna), Saket Lok (the abode of Shri Ram), Vaikunth Lok (the abode of Narayan), Shiv Lok (the abode of Sadashiv), Devi Lok (the abode of Mother Durga), etc. In these *Lokas*, the Supreme Bhagavān resides eternally in his divine forms along with his eternal associates. All these forms of Bhagavān are non-different from each other; they are various forms of the same one Bhagavān. Whichever form of Bhagavān one worships, upon Brahman-realization, one goes to the abode of that form of Bhagavān. Receiving a divine body, the Ātman then participates in the divine activities and pastimes of the Bhagavān for the rest of eternity.

पुरुषः स परः पार्थ भक्त्या लभ्यस्त्वनन्यया ।
यस्यान्तःस्थानि भूतानि येन सर्वमिदं ततम् ॥२२॥

*puruṣah sa parah pārtha bhaktyā labhyas tvananyayā
yasyāntaḥ-sthāni bhūtāni yena sarvam idam tatam*

puruṣah—Shri Hari; *sah*—he; *parah*—greatest; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *bhaktyā*—through devotion; *labhyah*—is attainable; *tu*—indeed; *ananyayā*—without another; *yasya*—of whom; *antaḥ-sthāni*—situated within; *bhūtāni*—beings; *yena*—by whom; *sarvam*—all; *idam*—this; *tatam*—is pervaded.

Shri Hari is greater than all that exists. Although he is all-pervading and all living beings are situated in him, yet he can be known only through devotion.

The same Supreme Bhagavān, who resides in his divine abode in the spiritual sky, is seated in our hearts; he is also all-pervading in every atom of the material world. Bhagavān is equally present everywhere; we cannot say that the all-pervading Bhagavān is twenty-five percent present, while in his personal form he is a hundred percent present. He is one hundred percent everywhere. However, that all-pervading presence of Bhagavān does not benefit us because we have no perception of it. Sage Shandilya states:

gavāṁ sarpiḥ śarīrastham na karotyaṅga poṣhanam (Śhāndilya Bhakti Darśan) [v6]

“Milk resides in the body of the cow, but it does not benefit the health of the cow, which is weak and sick.” The same milk is extracted from the body of the cow and converted into yogurt. The yogurt is then fed to the cow with a sprinkling of black pepper and it cures the cow.

Similarly, the all-pervading presence of Bhagavān does not have the intimacy to enrich our devotion. We need to first worship him in his divine form and develop the purity of our heart. Then we attract Bhagavān’s grace, and by his grace, he imbues our senses, mind, and intellect with his divine *YogMāyā* energy. Our senses then become divine and we are able to perceive the Divinity of the Bhagavān, whether in his personal form or in his all-pervading aspect. Thus, Shri Krishna states that he can be known only through *bhakti*.

The need for doing *bhakti* has been repeatedly emphasized by Shri Krishna in the Bhagavad Geeta. In verse, 6.47, he stated that he considers one who is engaged in devotion to him to be the highest of all. Here, he emphatically uses the word *ananyayā*, which means “by no other path” can Bhagavān be known. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu puts this very nicely:

*bhakti mukh nirikṣhata karm yog jñāna
(Chaitanya Charitāmṛit, Madhya 22.17) [v7]*

“Although *karm*, *jñāna*, and *aṣṭāṅg yog* are also pathways to Brahman-realization, all these require the support of *bhakti* for their fulfillment.” Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj says the same thing:

*karm yog aru jñāna saba, sādhana yadapi bakhān
pai binu bhakti sabai janu, mrītaka deha binu prān (Bhakti Śhatak verse 8) [v8]*

“Although *karm*, *jñāna*, and *aṣṭāṅg yog* are paths to Brahman-realization, without blending *bhakti* in them, they all become like dead bodies without life-airs.” The various scriptures also declare:

bhaktyāhamekayā grāhyah śraddhayĀtman priyah satām (Bhāgavatam 11.14.21) [v9]

“I am only attained by my devotees who worship me with faith and love.”

milahiṇ na raghupati binu anurāgā, kien joga tapa gyāna birāgā (Ramayana) [v10]

“One may practice *aṣṭāṅg yog*, engage in austerities, accumulate knowledge, and develop detachment. Yet, without devotion, one will never attain Bhagavān.”

यत्र काले त्वनावृत्तिमावृत्तिं चैव योगिनः ।
प्रयाता यान्ति तं कालं वक्ष्यामि भरतर्षभ ॥ 23 ॥

अग्निज्योतिरहः शुक्लः षण्मासा उत्तरायणम् ।
तत्र प्रयाता गच्छन्ति ब्रह्म ब्रह्मविदो जनाः ॥ 24 ॥

धूमो रात्रिस्तथा कृष्णः षण्मासा दक्षिणायनम् ।
तत्र चान्द्रमसं ज्योतिर्योगी प्राप्य निवर्तते ॥ 25 ॥

शुक्लकृष्णो गती ह्येते जगतः शाश्वते मते ।
एकया यात्यनावृत्तिमन्ययावर्तते पुनः ॥ 26 ॥

*yatra kāle tvanāvrittīm āvrittīm chaiva yogināḥ
prayātā yānti tam kālam vakṣyāmi bharatarshabha
agnir jyotir ahaḥ śuklaḥ ṣaṣ-māsa uttarāyaṇam
tatra prayātā gachchhanti brahma brahma-vido janāḥ*

dhūmo rātris tathā kṛiṣṇah ṣhan-māsā dakṣhiṇāyanam
 tatra chāndramasam jyotir yogī prāpya nivartate
 śhukla-kṛiṣṇe gatī hyete jagataḥ śhāśhvate mate
 ekayā yātyanāvrittīm anyayāvartate punah

yatra—where; *kāle*—time; *tu*—certainly; *anāvrittīm*—no return; *āvrittīm*—return; *cha*—and; *eva*—certainly; *yoginah*—a yogi; *prayātāh*—having departed; *yānti*—attain; *tam*—that; *kālam*—time; *vakṣhyāmi*—I shall describe; *bharata-riṣhabha*—Arjun, the best of the Bharatas; *agnih*—fire; *jyotiḥ*—light; *ahāh*—day; *śhuklah*—the bright fortnight of the moon; *śhat-māsāh*—six months; *uttara-ayanam*—the sun's northern course; *tatra*—there; *prayātāh*—departed; *gachchhanti*—go; *brahma*—*Brahman*; *brahma-vidah*—those who know the *Brahman*; *janāḥ*—persons; *dhūmaḥ*—smoke; *rātriḥ*—night; *tathā*—and; *kṛiṣṇah*—the dark fortnight of the moon; *śhat-māsāh*—six months; *dakṣhiṇāyanam*—the sun's southern course; *tatra*—there; *chāndra-masam*—lunar; *jyotiḥ*—light; *yogī*—a yogi; *prāpya*—attain; *nivartate*—comes back; *śhukla*—bright; *kṛiṣṇe*—dark; *gatī*—paths; *hi*—certainly; *ete*—these; *jagataḥ*—of the material world; *śhāśhvate*—eternal; *mate*—opinion; *ekayā*—by one; *yāti*—goes; *anāvrittīm*—to non return; *anyayā*—by the other; *āvartate*—comes back; *punah*—again.

I shall now describe to you the different paths of passing away from this world, O best of the Bharatas, one of which leads to liberation and the other leads to rebirth. Those who know the Supreme *Brahman*, and who depart from this world, during the six months of the sun's northern course, the bright fortnight of the moon, and the bright part of the day, attain the supreme destination. The practitioners of Vedic rituals, who pass away during the six months of the sun's southern course, the dark fortnight of the moon, the time of smoke, the night, attain the celestial abodes. After enjoying celestial pleasures, they again return to the earth. These two, bright and dark paths, always exist in this world. The way of light leads to liberation and the way of darkness leads to rebirth.

Shri Krishna's statement in these verses still pertains to the question Arjun asked in verse 8.2, "How can we be united with you at the time of death?" Shri Krishna says that there are two paths—the path of light and the path of darkness. Here, in these somewhat cryptic statements, we may discern a wonderful allegory for expressing spiritual concepts around the themes of light and darkness.

The six months of the northern solstice, the bright fortnight of the moon, the bright part of the day, are all characterized by light. Light is symbolic for knowledge, while darkness is symbolic for ignorance. The six months of the southern solstice, the dark fortnight of the moon, the night, all these have the commonality of darkness. Those, whose consciousness is established in Bhagavān and detached from sensual pursuits, depart by the path of light (discrimination and knowledge). Being situated in Brahman-consciousness, they attain the Supreme abode of Bhagavān, and are released from the wheel of *samsara*. But those, whose consciousness is attached to the world, depart by the path of darkness (ignorance). Being entangled in the bodily concept of life and the illusion of separation from Bhagavān, they continue rotating in the cycle of life and death. If they had performed Vedic ritualistic activities, they are temporarily promoted to the celestial abodes, and then have to return to the earth planet. In this way, all human beings have to take one of the two paths after death. It now depends upon them, according to their karmas, whether they pass along the bright path or the dark path.

नैते सृती पार्थ जानन्योगी मुह्यति कश्चन ।
तस्मात्सर्वेषु कालेषु योगयुक्तो भवार्जुन ॥ 27 ॥

*naite sṛitī pārtha jānan yogī muhyati kaśchana
tasmat sarveṣu kāleṣu yoga-yukto bhavārjuna*

na—never; *ete*—these two; *sṛitī*—paths; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *jānan*—knowing; *yogī*—a yogi; *muhyati*—bewildered; *kaśchana*—any; *tasmat*—therefore; *sarveṣu kāleṣu*—always; *yoga-yuktaḥ*—situated in Yog; *bhava*—be; *arjuna*—Arjun.

Yogis who know the secret of these two paths, O Parth, are never bewildered. Therefore, at all times be situated in Yog (union with Bhagavān).

Yogis are aspirants who are striving to unite their minds with Bhagavān. Knowing themselves to be tiny fragments of Bhagavān, and the futility of a

lascivious life, they attach importance to the enhancement of their love for Bhagavān, rather than the temporary perceptions of sense pleasures. Thus, they are the followers of the path of light. Persons who are deluded by the Māyā, thinking of this temporary world as permanent, of their body as the self, and of the miseries of the world as sources of pleasure, follow the path of darkness. The results of both paths are diametrically opposite, one leading to eternal beatitude and the other leading to the continued misery of material existence. Shri Krishna urges Arjun to discriminate between these paths, and become a yogis, thereby following the path of light.

He adds a phrase there, “at all times,” which is very important. Many of us follow the path of light for some time, but then regress to the path of darkness. If someone wishes to go northward, but keeps going four miles south for every mile north, then that person will end up being south of the starting point, despite endeavoring greatly. Similarly, following the path of light for some time in the day does not ensure our progress. We must constantly move ahead in the right direction and stop moving in the wrong direction, only then will we go forward. Hence, Shri Krishna says, “Be a yogi at all times.”

वेदेषु यज्ञेषु तपःसु चैव
दानेषु यत्पुण्यफलं प्रदिष्टम् ।
अत्येति तत्सर्वमिदं विदित्वा
योगी परं स्थानमुपैति चाद्यम् ॥ 28 ॥

*vedeṣhu yajñeṣhu tapaḥsu chaiva
dāneṣhu yat puṇya-phalam pradiṣṭam
atyeti tat sarvam idam viditvā
yogī param sthānam upaiti chādyam*

vedeṣhu—in the study of the Vedas; *yajñeṣhu*—in performance of sacrifices; *taṇaḥsu*—in austerities; *cha*—and; *eva*—certainly; *dāneṣhu*—in giving charities; *yat*—which; *puṇya-phalam*—fruit of merit; *pradiṣṭam*—is gained; *atyeti*—surpasses; *tat sarvam*—all; *idam*—this; *viditvā*—having known; *yogī*—a yogi; *param*—Supreme; *sthānam*—Abode; *upaiti*—achieves; *cha*—and; *ādyam*—original.

The yogis, who know this secret, gain merit far beyond the fruits of Vedic rituals, the study of the Vedas, performance of sacrifices, austerities, and charities. Such yogis reach the Supreme Abode.

We may perform Vedic sacrifices, accumulate knowledge, perform austerities, and donate in charity, but unless we engage in devotion to Bhagavān, we are still not on the path of light. All these mundane good deeds result in material rewards, while devotion to Bhagavān results in liberation from material bondage. Thus, the Ramayana states:

*nema dharma āchāra tapa gyāna jagya japa dāna,
bheshaja puni koṭinha nahiṇ roga jāhiṇ harijāna. [v11]*

“You may engage in good conduct, righteousness, austerities, sacrifices, *ashṭāṅg yog*, chanting of mantras, and charity. But without devotion to Bhagavān, the mind’s disease of material consciousness will not cease.”

The yogis who follow the path of light detach their mind from the world and attach it to Bhagavān, thereby gaining eternal welfare. Thus, Shri Krishna says they reap fruits beyond those bestowed by all other processes.



Chapter 9

Rāja Vidyā Yog ~ राजविद्यराजगुह्ययोगः

Yog through the King of Sciences

In the seventh and eighth chapters, Shri Krishna declared *bhakti* as the easiest means of attaining Yog, and also the highest form of Yog. In the ninth chapter, he speaks of his supreme glories, which inspire awe, reverence and, devotion. He reveals that though he is standing before Arjun in his personal form, he must not be misconstrued to possess a human personality. He explains how he presides over his material energy and creates myriad life-forms at the beginning of creation, absorbs them back at the time of dissolution, and then manifests them again in the next cycle of creation. As the mighty wind blowing everywhere rests always in the sky, likewise all living beings dwell in him. And yet, by his divine *YogMāyā* power, he remains a neutral observer, ever aloof and detached from all these activities.

Shri Krishna resolves the apparent confusion of the Hindu pantheon by explaining that the one Bhagavān is the sole object of worship. He is the goal, the support, the refuge, and the one true friend of all living beings. Those inclined toward the ritualistic ceremonies of the Vedas attain the celestial abodes, and when their pious merits are depleted, they return back to the earth again. But those who engage in exclusive devotion toward the Supreme

Bhagavān go to his abode. Shri Krishna thus exalts the super-excellence of unalloyed *bhakti* that is directed toward him. In such devotion, we must live in complete union with Bhagavān's will, offering all that we have to him, and doing everything for him alone. By such pure devotion, we will be released from the bondage of karmas and attain the goal of mystic union with Bhagavān.

Further, Shri Krishna asserts that he neither favors nor rejects anyone—he is impartial toward all creatures. If even vile sinners come to his shelter, he willingly accepts them and quickly makes them virtuous and pure. He makes a promise that his devotees never perish. Seated within them, he provides what they lack and preserves what they already possess. Thus, we should always think of him, worship him, dedicate our mind and body to him, and make him our supreme goal.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
इदं तु ते गुह्यतमं प्रवक्ष्याम्यनसूयवे ।
ज्ञानं विज्ञानसहितं यज्जात्वा मोक्ष्यसेऽशुभात् ॥ १ ॥

*śhrī bhagavān uvācha
idam tu te guhyatamam pravakṣhyāmyanasyave
jñānam vijñāna-sahitam yaj jñātvā mokṣhyase 'śhubhāt*

śhrī-bhagavān uvācha—Bhagavān Krishna said; *idam*—this; *tu*—but; *te*—to you; *guhya-tamam*—the most confidential; *pravakṣhyāmi*—I shall impart; *anasyave*—nonenvious; *jñānam*—knowledge; *vijñāna*—realized knowledge; *sahitam*—with; *yat*—which; *jñātvā*—knowing; *mokṣhyase*—you will be released; *aśhubhāt*—miseries of material existence.

Bhagavān Krishna said: O Arjun, because you are not envious of me, I shall now impart to you this very confidential knowledge and wisdom, upon knowing which you will be released from the miseries of material existence.

At the very beginning of the topic, Shri Krishna declares the qualification for hearing these teachings. *Anasyave* means “non-envious.” He tells Arjun that he

is revealing this knowledge because Arjun is non-envious of him. Bhagavān Krishna clarifies this because Bhagavān is going to glorify himself profusely here. *Anasūyave* also has the sense of “one who does not scorn.” Those listeners who deride Shri Krishna because they believe he is boasting will not benefit from hearing such a message. Rather, they will incur harm, by thinking, “Look at this egotistic person. He is praising his own self.”

Such an attitude is born of arrogance and pride and it robs a person of devotional reverence. Envious people cannot grasp the simple fact that Bhagavān has no need for anything, and therefore everything he does is for the welfare of the Ātman(s). He only praises himself to enhance devotion in the Ātman(s), and not because he has the material defect of conceit as we do. When Jesus of Nazareth said, “I am the path and the way,” he was saying it motivated by compassion for the souls listening to him, and not out of vanity. As a true Guru, he was telling his disciples that the path to Bhagavān is through the Guru. But the envious-minded do not understand the compassion behind these statements and attribute them to self-conceit. Since Arjun is magnanimous and free from the defect of envy, he is eminently qualified for the profound knowledge that Shri Krishna is going to reveal in this chapter.

In the second chapter, Shri Krishna explained the knowledge of the *Ātman* (*Ātman*) as a separate and distinct entity from the body. That is *guhya*, or secret knowledge. In the seventh and eighth chapters, he explained knowledge of his powers, which is *guhyatar*, or more secret. And in the ninth and subsequent chapters, he will reveal knowledge of his pure *bhakti*, which is *guhyatam*, or the most secret.

राजविद्या राजगुह्यं पवित्रमिदमुत्तमम् ।
प्रत्यक्षावगमं धर्म्यं सुसुखं कर्तुमव्ययम् ॥२॥

*rāja-vidyā rāja-guhyaṁ pavitram idam uttamam
pratyakṣhāvagamam dharmyam su-sukham kartum avyayam*

rāja-vidyā—the king of sciences; *rāja-guhya*m—the most profound secret; *pavitram*—pure; *idam*—this; *uttamam*—highest; *pratyakṣha*—directly perceptible; *avagamam*—directly realizable; *dharma*yam—virtuous; *su-sukham*—easy; *kartum*—to practice; *avyayam*—everlasting.

This knowledge is the king of sciences and the most profound of all secrets. It purifies those who hear it. It is directly realizable, in accordance with dharma, easy to practice, and everlasting in effect.

Rāja means “king.” Shri Krishna uses the metaphor *rāja* to emphasize the paramount position of the knowledge he is going to reveal.

Vidyā means “science.” He does not refer to his teachings as creed, religion, dogma, doctrine, or belief. He declares that what he is going to describe to Arjun is the king of sciences.

Guhya means “secret.” This knowledge is also the supreme secret. Since love is only possible where there is a choice, Bhagavān deliberately hides himself from direct perception, thereby providing the Ātman the freedom to exercise the choice of loving him or not. A machine cannot love, for it is devoid of choices. Bhagavān wants us to love him and so he gives us the option to choose him or not, as we wish. He merely makes us aware of the consequences of what we choose, either way, and then leaves it to us to decide the path we wish to follow.

Pavitram means “pure.” Knowledge of devotion is supremely pure because it is untainted by petty selfishness. It inspires sacrifice of the self at the altar of divine love for the Supreme Bhagavān. *Bhakti* also purifies the devotee by destroying *pāp*, *bīja*, and *avidyā*. *Pāp* is the stockpile of past sins of endless lifetimes of the individual Ātman. *Bhakti* burns them up as a fire burns up a bundle of straw. *Bīja* refers to impurities of the heart, which are the seeds of sinful activities. If the seeds exist, then destroying the results of past sins will not suffice, for the propensity to sin will remain in the heart and one will sin

again. *Bhakti* purifies the heart and destroys the seeds of sin, which are lust, anger, and greed. However, even the destruction of the seeds is not enough. The reason why the heart becomes impure is that there is *avidyā* (ignorance), because of which we identify with the body. Because of this misidentification, we think of the body as the self, and hence create bodily desires thinking they will give happiness to the self. Fulfillment of such material desires further leads to lust, anger, greed, and all the other impurities of the heart. As long as the ignorance remains, even if the heart is cleansed, it will again become impure. Devotion ultimately results in realized knowledge of the Ātman and Bhagavān, which in turn destroys the ignorance of material existence. The benefits of *bhakti* are described in the Bhakti Rasāmṛit Sindhu as follows: *kleśhas tu pāpam tadbījam avidyā cheti te tridhā* (1.1.18) [v1] “*Bhakti* destroys the three poisons—*pāp* (sins), *bīja* (the seed of sins), *avidyā* (the ignorance in the heart).” Only when the three are completely destroyed, does the heart become truly and permanently pure.

Pratyakṣha means “directly perceptible.” The practice of the science of *bhakti* begins with a leap of faith and results in direct perception of Bhagavān. It is not unlike the methodology of other sciences, where we begin an experiment with a hypothesis and conclude with a verified result.

Dharmyam means “virtuous.” Devotion performed without desire for material rewards is the most virtuous action. It is continuously nourished by righteous acts such as service to the Guru.

Kartum susukham means “very easy to practice.” Bhagavān does not need anything from us; he is attained very naturally if we can learn to love him.

When this is the sovereign science and it is easy to practice, then why do people not apply themselves to learning it? Shri Krishna explains this next.

अश्रद्धानाः पुरुषा धर्मस्यास्य परन्तप ।
अप्राप्य मां निवर्तन्ते मृत्युसंसारवर्त्मनि ॥ ३ ॥

*aśhraddadhānāḥ puruṣhā dharmasyāsy parantapa
aprāpya mām nivartante mr̥ityu-samsāra-vartmani*

aśhraddadhānāḥ—people without faith; *puruṣhāḥ*—(such) persons; *dharmasya*—of dharma; *asya*—this; *parantapa*—Arjun, conqueror the enemies; *aprāpya*—without attaining; *mām*—me; *nivartante*—come back; *mr̥ityu*—death; *samsāra*—material existence; *vartmani*—in the path.

People who have no faith in this *dharma* are unable to attain me, O conqueror of enemies. They repeatedly come back to this world in the cycle of birth and death.

In the last two verses, Shri Krishna promised knowledge and then qualified it with eight merits. It is mentioned here as “this dharma,” or the path of loving devotion to Bhagavān.

No matter how wonderful the knowledge and how effective the path, it remains useless to one who refuses to walk on it. As explained in the previous verse, direct perception of Bhagavān comes later; initially, a leap of faith is required to begin the process. The Bhakti Rasāmṛit Sindhu (1.4.15) states: *ādau śraddhā tataḥ sādhusaṅgo iha bhajanakriyā* [v2] “The first step in the path to Brahman-realization is to have faith. Then one begins participating in *satsaṅg* (spiritual programs). This leads to the personal practice of devotion.”

Often people say that they are only willing to believe in what they can directly perceive, and since there is no immediate perception of Bhagavān, they do not believe in him. However, the fact is that we believe in so many things in the world too, without direct perception of them. A judge delivers judgment upon a case concerning an event that took place many years in the past. If the judge adopted the philosophy of believing only what he or she had directly experienced, then the entire legal system would fail. A President administers a country on the basis of reports from all over the country. It is impossible for

him to visit and see all the villages and cities within his domain. Now, if he was not willing to believe these reports, on the grounds that he had no direct perception of what was happening, how would he be able to administer the whole country? So, even in material activities, faith is required at every step. The Bible states this very nicely: “We walk by faith, and not by sight.” (2 Corinthians 5:7) [v3]

There is a beautiful story regarding perception of Bhagavān. A king once accosted a sadhu with the statement, “I do not believe in Bhagavān because I cannot see him.” The sadhu asked for a cow to be brought to king’s court. The king obliged and ordered his servants to bring a cow. The sadhu then requested that it be milked. The king again instructed his servants to do as the sadhu wanted. The sadhu asked, “O King! Do you believe that this milk, freshly taken out from the cow, contains butter?” The king said he had full faith that it did. The sadhu said, “You cannot see the butter in the milk. Then why do you believe it is there?” The king replied, “We cannot see it at present because the butter is pervading the milk, but there is a process for seeing it. If we convert the milk into yogurt, and then churn the yogurt, the butter will become visible.” The sadhu said, “Like the butter in the milk, Bhagavān is everywhere. If we cannot immediately perceive him, we should not jump to the conclusion that there is no Bhagavān. There is a process for perceiving him; if we are willing to have faith and follow the process, we will then get direct perception of Bhagavān and become Brahman-realized.”

Belief in Bhagavān is not a natural process that we as human beings just follow. We have to exercise our free will and actively make a decision to have faith in Bhagavān. In the assembly of the Kauravas, when Duhsasan endeavored to disrobe Draupadi, Bhagavān Krishna saved her from shame and embarrassment by lengthening her sari. All the Kauravas present saw this miracle, but refused to have faith in the omnipotence of Shri Krishna and

come to their senses. The Supreme Bhagavān says in this verse that those who choose not to have faith in the spiritual path remain bereft of divine wisdom and continue rotating in the cycle of life and death.

**मया तत्मिदं सर्वं जगदव्यक्तमूर्तिना ।
मत्स्थानि सर्वभूतानि न चाहं तेष्ववस्थितः ॥४॥**

*mayā tatam idam sarvam jagad avyakta-mūrtinā
mat-sthāni sarva-bhūtāni na chāham teṣhvavasthitah*

mayā—by me; *tatam*—pervaded; *idam*—this; *sarvam*—entire; *jagat*—cosmic manifestation; *avyakta-mūrtinā*—the unmanifested form; *mat-sthāni*—in me; *sarva-bhūtāni*—all living beings; *na*—not; *cha*—and; *aham*—I; *teṣhu*—in them; *avasthitah*—dwell.

This entire cosmic manifestation is pervaded by me in my unmanifest form. All living beings dwell in me, but I do not dwell in them.

The Vedic philosophy does not accept the concept of Bhagavān creating the world and then peeping into it from the seventh Swarga to check whether his world is running all right. They repeatedly propound the theme of Bhagavān being all-pervading in the world:

eko devaḥ sarvabhūteṣhu gūḍhah sarvavyāpī (Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣad 6.11) [v4]

“There is one Bhagavān; he is seated in everyone’s heart; he is also everywhere in the world.”

īshāvāsyam idam sarvam yat kiñcha jagatyām jagat (Īśopaniṣad 1) [v5]

“Bhagavān is everywhere in the world.”

puruṣha evedam sarvam yad bhūtam yachcha bhāvyam (Puruṣh Sūktam) [v6]

“Bhagavān pervades everything that has existed and all that will exist.”

This concept of Bhagavān being everywhere is understood subjectively. Some Eastern philosophers claim that the world is a *parinām* (transformation) of Bhagavān. For example, milk is an unadulterated substance. In contact with acid, it transforms to yogurt. Thus, yogurt is a *parinām* (effect or product) of

milk, when it is transformed. Similarly, the protagonists of *parinām vāda* state that Bhagavān has transformed into the world.

Other philosophers claim that the world is *vivarta* (to mistake one object for another). For example, in the darkness a rope may be mistaken for a snake. In the moonlight, a shining oyster may be mistaken for silver. Similarly, they say that there is only Bhagavān and no world; what we are seeing as the world is actually *Brahman*.

However, according to verses 7.4 and 7.5, the world is neither *parinām* nor *vivarta*. It is created from the material energy of Bhagavān, called Māyā śakti. The Ātman(s) too are the energy of Bhagavān, but they are his superior energy, called Jīva śakti. Therefore, the world and all the Ātman(s) in it are both Bhagavān's energies and are within his personality. However, Shri Krishna also says that he does not dwell in the living beings, i.e. the infinite is not contained by the finite beings. That is because he is far more than the sum total of these two energies. Just as an ocean throws up many waves, and these waves are a part of the ocean, but the ocean is much more than the sum total of the waves, similarly too, the Ātman(s) and Māyā exist within the personality of Bhagavān, yet he is beyond them.

न च मतस्थानि भूतानि पश्य मे योगमैश्वरम् ।
भूतभृत्वा च भूतस्थो ममात्मा भूतभावनः ॥५॥

*na cha mat-sthāni bhūtāni paśhya me yogam aiśhwaram
bhūta-bhṛit na cha bhūta-stho mama-Ātman bhūta-bhāvanah*

na—never; *cha*—and; *mat-sthāni*—abide in me; *bhūtāni*—all living beings; *paśhya*—behold; *me*—*me*; *yogam aiśhwaram*—divine energy; *bhūta-bhṛit*—the sustainer of all living beings; *na*—never; *cha*—yet; *bhūta-sthah*—dwelling in; *mama*—my; *Ātman*—self; *bhūta-bhāvanah*—the creator of all beings

And yet, the living beings do not abide in me. Behold the mystery of my divine energy! Although I am the creator and sustainer of all living beings,

I am not influenced by them or by material nature.

Beyond the two energies mentioned in the purport to the previous verse—*Māyā śakti* and *Jīva śakti*—there is a third energy of Bhagavān. This is called *YogMāyā śakti*, which he refers to in this verse, as divine energy. *YogMāyā* is Bhagavān’s all-powerful energy. It is called *kartum-akartum-samarthah*, or “that which can make the impossible possible,” and is responsible for many of the amazing things we attribute to his personality. For example, Bhagavān is seated in our hearts, yet we have no perception of him. This is because his divine *YogMāyā* power keeps us aloof from him.

Similarly, Bhagavān also keeps himself aloof from the influence of *Māyā*. In the *Bhāgavatam*, the Vedas praise the Bhagavān:

vilajjamānayā yasya sthātumīkṣhā-pathe 'muyā (2.5.13) [v7]

“*Māyā* feels embarrassed to even stand before Bhagavān.” Isn’t it a wonder that although Bhagavān pervades *Māyā*, the material energy, yet he is aloof from it? This is again by the mysterious power of *YogMāyā*.

If the world could influence Bhagavān, then when it decays or is destroyed, his nature and personality will also deteriorate. But despite all modifications in the world, Bhagavān remains established in his personality. Accordingly, the Vedas call Bhagavān by the name *Daśhāngulī*, or “ten fingers.” He is in the world, and yet ten fingers beyond it—untouched by it.

यथाकाशस्थितो नित्यं वायुः सर्वत्रगो महान् ।
तथा सर्वाणि भूतानि मत्स्थानीत्युपधारय ॥६॥

*yathākāsha-sthitah nityam vāyuḥ sarvatra-go mahān
tathā sarvāṇi bhūtāni mat-sthānītyupadhāraya*

yathā—as; *ākāsha-sthitah*—rests in the sky; *nityam*—always; *vāyuḥ*—the wind; *sarvatra-gah*—blowing everywhere; *mahān*—mighty; *tathā*—likewise; *sarvāṇi bhūtāni*—all living beings; *mat-sthāni*—rest in me; *iti*—thus; *upadhāraya*—know.

Know that as the mighty wind blowing everywhere rests always in the sky, likewise all living beings rest always in me.

Shri Krishna has used the term *mat sthāni* three times, from the fourth verse to the sixth verse. It means “all living beings rest in him.” They cannot be separated from him even though they transmigrate in different bodies and accept affinity with matter.

It may be a little difficult to conceive how the world rests in Bhagavān. Greek mythology shows a picture of Atlas holding up the globe. In Greek folklore, Atlas fought with the Titans in the war against the deities of Mount Olympus. As punishment, he was condemned to forever bear the earth and the heavens on his back with the great pillar that supposedly separates them on his shoulders. This is not what Shri Krishna means when he says that he is upholding all beings. The entire cosmos exists in space and space is created by Bhagavān’s energy. Thus, all beings can be said to be resting in him.

The Supreme Bhagavān now gives an analogy to enable Arjun to grasp the concept. The wind has no existence independent from the sky. It moves incessantly and furiously, and yet, it rests within the sky. Likewise, the Ātman(s) have no existence independent of Bhagavān. They move in time, place, and consciousness, through transitory bodies, sometimes rapidly and sometimes slowly, and yet, they always exist within Bhagavān.

From another perspective, everything that exists in cosmos is subordinate to the will of Bhagavān. It is created, maintained, and annihilated in accordance with his will. In this way also, everything can be said to be resting in him.

सर्वभूतानि कौन्तेय प्रकृतिं यान्ति मामिकाम् ।
कल्पक्षये पुनस्तानि कल्पादौ विसृजाम्यहम् ॥ ७ ॥

प्रकृतिं स्वामवष्टश्य विसृजामि पुनः पुनः ।
भूतग्राममिमं कृत्स्नमवशं प्रकृतेर्वशात् ॥ ८ ॥

*sarva-bhūtāni kaunteya prakṛitim yānti māmikām
kalpa-kṣhayē punas tāni kalpādau visṛijāmyaham*

*prakṛitim svām avaśṭabhyā visṛijāmi punah punah
bhūta-grāmam imam kṛitsnam avaśham prakṛiter vaśhāt*

sarva-bhūtāni—all living beings; *kaunteya*—Arjun, the son of Kunti; *prakṛitim*—primordial material energy; *yānti*—merge; *māmikām*—my; *kalpa-kṣhayē*—at the end of a *kalpa*; *punah*—again; *tāni*—them; *kalpa-ādau*—at the beginning of a *kalpa*; *visṛijāmi*—manifest; *aham*—I; *prakṛitim*—the material energy; *svām*—my own; *avaśṭabhyā*—presiding over; *visṛijāmi*—generate; *punah punah*—again and again; *bhūta-grāmam*—myriad forms; *imam*—these; *kṛitsnam*—all; *avaśham*—beyond their control; *prakṛiteḥ*—nature; *vaśhāt*—force.

At the end of one *kalp*, all living beings merge into my primordial material energy. At the beginning of the next creation, O son of Kunti, I manifest them again. Presiding over my material energy, I generate these myriad forms again and again, in accordance with the force of their natures.

Shri Krishna explained in the last two verses that all living beings dwell in him. This statement may bring up the following question: “When *mahāpralaya* (the great annihilation) takes place and the entire world is wound up, then where do all the living beings go?” The answer to this question is being given in this verse.

In the previous chapter, verses 8.16 to 8.19, Shri Krishna explained how creation, maintenance, and annihilation follow a repetitive cycle. Here, the word *kalpa-kṣaya* means “the end of Brahma’s lifespan.” On the completion of Brahma’s life of 100 years, which is equal to 311 trillion 40 billion earth years, the entire cosmic manifestation dissolves and goes into an unmanifest state. The *pañch mahābhūta* merge into the *pañch tanmātrās*; the *pañch tanmātrās* merge into

ahankār; *ahankār* merges into *mahān*; *mahān* merges into *prakṛiti*, the primordial form of the material energy; and *prakṛiti* goes and rests in the divine body of the Supreme Bhagavān, Maha Vishnu.

At that time, all the Ātman(s) within the material creation also go and rest in the body of Bhagavān, in a state of suspended animation. Their gross and subtle bodies merge back into the source, Māyā. However, the causal body still remains. (The three kinds of bodies have been described in detail in the commentary to verse 2.28) After dissolution, when Bhagavān creates the world again, the material energy unwinds in the reverse sequence *prakṛiti—mahān—ahankār—pañch tanmātrā—pañch mahābhūta*. Then, the Ātman(s) that were lying in a state of suspended animation with only causal bodies are again placed in the world. In accordance with their causal bodies, they again receive subtle and gross bodies, and the various life forms are created in the universe. These life forms vary in nature amongst the different planes of existence. In some planetary systems, fire is the dominant element in the body, just as in the earth plane, the dominant bodily elements are earth and water. Hence, the bodies vary in their subtleness and the functions they can perform. Shri Krishna thus calls them myriad life forms.

न च मां तानि कर्मणि निबध्नति धनञ्जय ।
उदासीनवदासीनमसक्तं तेषु कर्मसु ॥९॥

*na cha mām tāni karmāṇi nibadhnanti dhanañjaya
udāśīna-vat āśīnam asaktam teṣu karmasu*

na—none; *cha*—as; *mām*—me; *tāni*—those; *karmāṇi*—actions; *nibadhnanti*—bind; *dhanañjaya*—Arjun, conqueror of wealth; *udāśīna-vat*—as neutral; *āśīnam*—situated; *asaktam*—detached; *teṣu*—those; *karmasu*—actions.

O conqueror of wealth, none of these actions bind me. I remain like a neutral observer, ever detached from these actions.

The material energy is actually inert and insentient. It is devoid of

consciousness, which is the source of life. How then, one may wonder, does it perform the wonderful work of creating such an amazing world? The Ramayana explains this well:

jāsu satyatā teñ jara māyā, bhāsa satya iva moha sahāyā. [v8]

“The material energy is insentient by itself. But when it receives inspiration from Bhagavān, it begins to act as if it were sentient.” This is like a pair of tongs in the kitchen. They are lifeless by themselves. But in the hands of a chef they come to life and do wonderful things such as lifting red-hot bowls. Likewise, by itself, the material energy does not have the power to do anything. When Bhagavān wishes to create the world, he glances at the material energy and animates it. The main idea to keep in mind is that although the process of creation goes on by his will and inspiration of Bhagavān, he remains unaffected by the work of the material energy. He remains ever-blissful and undisturbed in his personality, by virtue of his *hlādinī śakti* (bliss-giving power). Hence, the Vedas call him *Ātmanrām*, meaning “he who rejoices in himself, without any need for external pleasures.” *Having explained that he is unaffected, Bhagavān now explains that he is the non-doer and the supervisor.*

मयाध्यक्षेण प्रकृतिः सूयते सचराचरम् ।
हेतुनानेन कौन्तेय जगद्विपरिवर्तते ॥ 10 ॥

*mayādhya-kṣhenā prakṛitih sūyate sa-charācharam
hetunānena kaunteya jagad viparivartate*

mayā—by me; *adhyakṣhenā*—direction; *prakṛitih*—material energy; *sūyate*—brings into being; *sa*—both; *chara-acharam*—the animate and the inanimate; *hetunā*—reason; *anena*—this; *kaunteya*—Arjun, the son of Kunti; *jagat*—the material world; *viparivartate*—undergoes the changes.

Working under my direction, this material energy brings into being all animate and inanimate forms, O son of Kunti. For this reason, the material world undergoes the changes (of creation, maintenance, and dissolution).

As explained in the last verse, Bhagavān does not directly engage in the work of creating life forms. His various energies and Ātman(s) appointed by him for the purpose do it under his dominion. For example, the President of a country does not personally do every task of the government. He has various departments under him, and officials appointed for performing the different functions. And yet, the accomplishments and failures of the government are attributed to him. This is because he sanctions the government officials for performing tasks under his jurisdiction. Similarly, the first-born Brahma and the material energy accomplish the tasks of creation and manifestation of life forms. Since they work under Bhagavān's sanction, he is also referred to as the Creator.

अवजानन्ति मां मूढा मानुषीं तनुमाश्रितम् ।
परं भावमजानन्तो मम भूतमहेश्वरम् ॥ 11 ॥

*avajānanti mām mūḍhā mānuṣhīm tanum āśritam
param bhāvam ajānanto mama bhūta-maheśvaram*

avajānanti—disregard; *mām*—me; *mūḍhāḥ*—dim-witted; *mānuṣhīm*—human; *tanum*—form; *āśhrītam*—take on; *param*—divine; *bhāvam*—personality; *ajānantaḥ*—not knowing; *mama*—my; *bhūta*—all beings; *mahā-iśhvaram*—the Supreme Bhagavān.

When I descend in my personal form deluded persons are unable to recognize me. They do not know the divinity of my personality, as the Supreme Bhagavān of all beings.

Good teachers occasionally use strong words to jostle their students out of the complacence of shallow thinking, into a deeper state of thoughtfulness. Here, Shri Krishna uses the word *mūḍha*, which means “dim-witted,” to describe those who deny the divinity of his personal form.

Those who say that Bhagavān is only formless and cannot manifest in a personal form, contradict the definition of Bhagavān as being allmighty and all-powerful. The Supreme Bhagavān has created this entire world full of

forms, shapes, and colors. If he can do such an amazing feat of creating myriad forms in the world, can he not create a form for himself? Or is it that Bhagavān says, “I do not have the power to manifest in a personal form, and hence I am only formless light.” To say that he cannot possess a personal form makes him incomplete.

We tiny Ātman(s) also possess forms. If one holds that Bhagavān cannot possess a form, then the corollary is that he has even less power than us a human beings. For Bhagavān to be perfect and complete, he must have both attributes to his personality—a personal aspect and a formless aspect. The Vedic scriptures state:

apaśhyam gopām anipadyamānamā (Rig Veda 1.22.164 sukta 31) [v9]

“I had the vision of Bhagavān as a boy who is never annihilated, and who appeared in a family of cowherds.”

*dwibhūjam mauna mudrāḍhyam vana mālinamīśwaram
(Gopāl Tāpani Upaniṣhad 1.13) [v10]*

“The Bhagavān, wearing a garland of forest flowers, plays his flute, enchantingly forming the mauna mudrā with his hands.”

gūḍham param brahma manusya-lingam (Bhāgavatam 7.15.75) [v11]

“The deepest knowledge is that Bhagavān accepts a human-like form.”

yatrāvatīrṇo bhagavān paramĀtman narākṛitiḥ (Bhāgavatam 9.23.20) [v12]

“At that time, the Supreme Bhagavān, who possesses all opulences, descended in a human-like form.”

*tīshwarah paramah kriṣṇah sachcidānanda vigrahaḥ
anādirādir govindah sarvakārāṇa kāraṇam (Brahma Samhitā 5.1) [v13]*

In this verse, Brahma prays to Shri Krishna, “I worship Bhagavān Krishna whose form is eternal, all-knowing, and blissful. He is without beginning and end, and is the cause of all causes.”

However, in regard to the personal form of Bhagavān, we must keep in mind that it is a divine form, which means it is devoid of all the defects found in material forms. The form of Bhagavān is *sat-chit-ānand*—it is eternal, full of knowledge, and constituted of divine bliss.

*asyāpi deva vapuṣho mad-anugrahaḥasya
svechchhā-Māyāsyā na tu bhūta-Māyāsyā ko 'pi (Bhāgavatam 10.14.2) [v14]*

In this verse, Bhagavān Brahma prays to Shri Krishna, “O Bhagavān, your body is not made of *pañch mahābhūta* (the five great elements); it is divine. And you have descended in this form by your own free will, to bestow your grace upon Ātman(s) like myself.”

In chapter four of the Bhagavad Gita, Shri Krishna stated: “Although I am unborn and imperishable, and the Bhagavān of all living entities, yet I appear in this world, by my *YogMāyā* power, in my original divine form.” (4.6) This means that not only does Bhagavān possess a form, but he also descends in the world as an Avatar.

Since we Ātman(s) have been taking births in the world from time immemorial, it is plausible that we were present in the human form on the earth when a previous descention of Bhagavān was present on the earth. It is even possible that we saw the descention. However, the limitation was that Bhagavān’s form was divine and we possessed material eyes. So when we saw him with our eyes, we were unable to recognize the divinity of his personality.

The divine nature of Bhagavān’s form is such that his divinity is perceived by each person only to the extent of his or her spiritual power. When those who are influenced by *sattva guṇa* see him, they think, “Shri Krishna is a special person. He is very competent but is definitely not Bhagavān.” When those under the spell of *rāgo guṇa* see him, they say, “There is nothing special in him. He is very much like us.” When those dominated by *tamo guṇa* see him, they

think, “He is egotistic and characterless, much worse than us.” It is only the Brahman-realized saints who can recognize him as Bhagavān, since they have received divine vision by his grace. And so, Shri Krishna says that the unaware materially conditioned Ātman(s) do not know him when he takes an avatar in the world.

मोघाशा मोघकर्मणो मोघज्ञाना विचेतसः ।
राक्षसीमासुरीं चैव प्रकृतिं मोहिनीं श्रिताः ॥ 12 ॥

*moghāśhā mogha-karmāṇo mogha-jñānā vichetasah
rākṣhasīm āsurīm chaiva prakṛitīm mohinīm śritāḥ*

mogha-āśhāḥ—of vain hopes; *mogha-karmāṇah*—of vain actions; *mogha-jñānāḥ*—of baffled knowledge; *vichetasah*—deluded; *rākṣhasīm*—demoniac; *āsurīm*—atheistic; *cha*—and; *eva*—certainly; *prakṛitīm*—material energy; *mohinīm*—bewildered; *śritāḥ*—take shelter.

Bewildered by the material energy, such persons embrace demoniac and atheistic views. In that deluded state, their hopes for welfare are in vain, their fruitive actions are wasted, and their culture of knowledge is baffled.

There are many strands of atheistic views relating to the personal form of Bhagavān that are prevalent in the world. Some people declare that Bhagavān cannot descend in the world in a personal form. Consequently, they say that Shri Krishna was not Bhagavān; he was merely a yogi. Others say that Shri Krishna is *Māyā-viśhiṣṭ brahma*, i.e. a lower grade of the Supreme Divinity, due to contact with the material energy. Yet others say that Shri Krishna was a characterless loafer who roamed around with the cowherd maidens of Vrindavan.

According to this verse, all these theories are incorrect, and the intellects of those who subscribe to them are deluded by the material energy. Shri Krishna goes to the extent of saying that those who embrace such ungodly philosophies possess demoniac natures. Since, they do not harbor divine sentiments toward the personal form of the Supreme Bhagavān, they cannot engage in *bhakti*

toward him. And since devotion to the formless aspect of Bhagavān is exceedingly difficult, they cannot do that either. As a result, they remain bereft of the path to eternal welfare. Bewildered by the transient attractions of the material energy, their hopes for eternal well-being are in vain.

महात्मानस्तु मां पार्थं दैवीं प्रकृतिमाश्रिताः ।
भजन्त्यनन्यमनसो ज्ञात्वा भूतादिमव्ययम् ॥ 13 ॥

*mahĀtmannas tu mām pārtha daivīm prakṛitim āśhritāḥ
bhajantyananya-manaso jñātvā bhūtādim avyayam*

mahā-Ātmannah—the great Ātman(s); *tu*—but; *mām*—me; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *daivīm prakṛitim*—divine energy; *āśhritāḥ*—take shelter of; *bhajanti*—engage in devotion; *ananya-manasaḥ*—with mind fixed exclusively; *jñātvā*—knowing; *bhūta*—all creation; *ādim*—the origin; *avyayam*—imperishable.

But the great Ātman(s), who take shelter of my divine energy, O Parth, know me, Bhagavān Krishna, as the origin of all creation. They engage in my devotion with their minds fixed exclusively on me.

Shri Krishna's style of discourse is that he drives the point home by making starkly contrasting comparisons. After describing the ways of the deluded and confused, he now talks about the great Ātman(s). Material life is a prolonged dream, which is being experienced by the Ātman(s) who are sleeping under the sway of the material energy. In contrast, the great Ātman(s) are those who have woken up from their ignorance and brushed aside material consciousness like a bad dream. Released from the grips of the material energy, Māyā, they are now under the shelter of the divine *YogMāyā* energy. Such enlightened Ātman(s) have woken up to the spiritual reality of their eternal relationship with Bhagavān.

Just as Bhagavān has both aspects to his personality—the formless and the personal form—his *YogMāyā* energy also possesses both aspects. It is a formless energy, but it also manifests in the personal form as Radha, Sita, Durga, Lakshmi, Kali, Parvati, etc. All these divine personalities are manifestations of

the divine energy of Bhagavān, and they are all non-different from each other, just as Krishna, Ram, Shiv, Narayan, etc. are non-different forms of the one Bhagavān.

Brahma Vaivartak Purāṇ states:

*yathā tvam rādhikā devī go loke gokule tathā
vaikuṇṭhe cha mahālakṣhmī bhavati cha sarasvatī
kapilasya priyā kāntā bhārata bhāratī satī
dwāravatyām mahālakṣhmī bhavatī rukminiī satī
tvam sītā mithilāyām cha tvachchhāyā draupadī satī
rāvaṇena hṛitā tvam cha tvam cha rāmasya kāminī [v15]*

“O Radha, you are the Divine goddess of Golok (Shri Krishna’s divine abode) and Gokul (Shri Krishna’s abode in the material realm, when he descended on earth 5,000 years ago). You exist in Vaikunth (Bhagavān Vishnu’s abode) as Mahalakshmi. You are the consort of Bhagavān Kapil (one of the descensions of Bhagavān). You reside in Dwaraka as Rukmini (the wife of Shri Krishna). You manifested as Sita in the city of Mithila. The wife of the Pandavas, Draupadi, was like a manifestation of your shadow. It was you who was kidnapped by Ravan in the form of Sita, and you are the wife of Bhagavān Ram.”

In this verse, Shri Krishna mentions that great Ātman(s) take shelter of the divine energy of Bhagavān. The reason is that divine grace, knowledge, love, etc. are all Bhagavān’s divine energies, and are all subservient to the divine *YogMāyā* energy, which is Radha. Hence, by the grace of *YogMāyā*, one receives the love, knowledge, and grace of Bhagavān. Great Ātman(s), who receive divine grace, become endowed with divine love, and engage in uninterrupted devotion toward Bhagavān.

सततं कीर्तयन्तो मां यतन्तश्च दृढव्रताः ।
नमस्यन्तश्च मां भक्त्या नित्ययुक्ता उपासते ॥ 14 ॥

satataṁ kīrtayanto mām yatantaśh cha dṛiḍha-vratāḥ

namasyantaśh cha māṁ bhaktyā nitya-yuktā upāsate

satataṁ—always; *kīrtayantah*—singing divine glories; *māṁ*—me; *yatantah*—striving; *cha*—and; *dṛidha-vratāḥ*—with great determination; *namasyantah*—humbly bowing down; *cha*—and; *māṁ*—me; *bhaktyā*—loving devotion; *nitya-yuktāḥ*—constantly united; *upāsate*—worship.

Always singing my divine glories, striving with great determination, and humbly bowing down before me, they constantly worship me in loving devotion.

Having said that the great Ātman(s) engage in his devotion, Shri Krishna now explains how they do *bhakti*. He says that devotees become attached to *kīrtan* as a means of practicing their devotion and enhancing it. The chanting of the glories of the Bhagavān is called *kīrtan*, which is defined as: *nāma-līlā-guṇadīnām uchchair-bhāṣhā tu kīrtanam* (Bhakti Rasāmṛit Sindhu 1.2.145) [v16] “Singing glories of the names, forms, qualities, pastimes, abodes, and associates of Bhagavān is called *kīrtan*.”

Kīrtan is one of the most powerful means of practicing devotion. It involves the three-fold devotion of *śhravāna* (hearing), *kīrtan* (chanting), and *smarana* (remembering). The goal is to fix the mind upon Bhagavān, but it becomes easier when done alongside with hearing and chanting. As stated in chapter six, the mind is as restless as the wind, and naturally wanders from thought to thought. Hearing and chanting engage the knowledge senses in the divine realm, which helps in repeatedly bringing back the mind from its wanderings.

Kīrtan has many other benefits as well. Often when people practice devotion through *japa* (chanting of mantra or name of Bhagavān on rosary beads) or plain meditation, they find themselves overwhelmed by sleep. However, *kīrtan* is such an engaging process that it usually drives sleep away. Also, chanting blocks out distracting sounds from the environment. *Kīrtan* can be practiced in groups which enables mass participation. In addition, the mind desires variety, which it gets through the medium of *kīrtan* in the form of the names, virtues,

pastimes, abodes, etc. of Bhagavān. And since *kīrtan* involves loud chanting, the divine vibrations of the names of Bhagavān make the entire environment auspicious and holy.

For all these reasons, *kīrtan* has been the most popular form of devotion amongst saints in Indian history. All the famous *bhakti* saints—Soordas, Tulsidas, Meerabai, Guru Nanak, Kabir, Tukaram, Ekanath, Narsi Mehta, Jayadev, Tyagaraja, and others—were great poets. They composed numerous devotional songs, and through them, they engaged in chanting, hearing, and remembering.

The Vedic scriptures particularly extol *kīrtan* as the simplest and most powerful process of devotion in the present age of *Kali*.

*kṛite yad dhyāyato viṣṭṇum tretāyāṁ yajato makhaiḥ
dwāpare paricharyāyāṁ kalau tad dhari-kīrtanāt (Bhāgavatam 12.3.52) [v17]*

“The best process of devotion in the age of Satya was simple meditation upon Bhagavān. In the age of *Tretā*, it was the performance of sacrifices for the pleasure of Bhagavān. In the age of *Dwāpar*, worship of the deities was the recommended process. In the present age of *Kali*, it is *kīrtan* alone.”

*avikārī vā vikārī vā sarva doṣhaika bhājanaḥ
parameṣha param yāti rāma nāmānukīrtanāt (Adhyātma Ramayana) [v18]*

“Whether you are full of desires or free from them, devoid of defects or full of them, if you engage in *kīrtan* of the names of Bhagavān Ram, you will attain the highest destination.”

*sarva dharma bahirbhūtaḥ sarva pāparatasthathā
muchyate nātra sandeho viṣṭṇornamānukīrtanāt (Vaiśampāyan Samhitā) [v19]*

“Even those who are deeply sinful and bereft of religiosity can be saved by the chanting of the names of Bhagavān Vishnu; of this, there is no doubt.”

kalijuga kevala hari guna gāhā, gāvata nara pāvahiṇ bhava thāhā (Ramayana) [v20]

"In this age of *Kali*, there is one means of salvation. By engaging in the chanting of the glories of Bhagavān, one can cross over this material ocean."

However, one must remember that in the process of *kīrtan*, hearing and chanting are helpers. The essence is to remember Bhagavān. If we leave it out, the *kīrtan* will not purify the mind. Thus, Shri Krishna says here that his devotees do *kīrtan*, while constantly engaging the mind in thinking of him. They practice this with great determination for the purification of the mind.

ज्ञानयज्ञेन चाप्यन्ये यजन्तो मामुपासते ।
एकत्वेन पृथक्त्वेन बहुधा विश्वतोमुखम् ॥ १५ ॥

*jñāna-yajñena chāpyanye yajanto mām upāsate
ekatvena prithaktvena bahudhā viśhwato-mukham*

jñāna-yajñena—*yajña* of cultivating knowledge; *cha*—and; *api*—also; *anye*—others; *yajantah*—worship; *mām*—me; *upāsate*—worship; *ekatvena*—undifferentiated oneness; *prithaktvena*—separately; *bahudhā*—various; *viśhwataḥ-mukham*—the cosmic form.

Others, engaging in the *yajña* of cultivating knowledge, worship me by many methods. Some see me as undifferentiated oneness that is non-different from them, while others see me as separate from them. Still others worship me in the infinite manifestations of my cosmic form.

Sādhaks (spiritual practitioners) follow different paths of spirituality to reach the Absolute Truth. Shri Krishna previously described those who are devotees. They surrender themselves with devotion at the lotus feet of the Supreme Bhagavān, in the attitude of being his eternal parts and servants. He now describes some of the other paths that *sādhaks* follow.

Those who follow the path of *jñāna yog* consider themselves to be non-different from Bhagavān. They contemplate deeply on *sūtras* such as: *so 'ham* (I am That), *śivo 'ham* (I am Shiv), etc. Their ultimate goal is to attain realization of the Supreme Entity as the undifferentiated *Brahman*, which possesses the attributes of eternity, knowledge, and bliss, but is devoid of forms, qualities, virtues,

and pastimes. Shri Krishna says that such *jñāna yogis* also worship him, but in his formless all-pervading aspect. In contrast, there are varieties of *aśṭāṅg yogis* etc. who see themselves as distinct from Bhagavān and relate to him accordingly.

Still others worship the manifest universe as Bhagavān. In Vedic philosophy, this is called *viśwarūp upāsanā* (worship of the cosmic form of Bhagavān). In western philosophy, it is called “Pantheism” from the Greek words *pan* (all) and *theos* (Bhagavān). The most famous exponent of this philosophy has been Spinoza. Since the world is a part of Bhagavān, keeping a divine sentiment toward it is not wrong, but it is incomplete. Such devotees do not have knowledge of the other aspects of the Supreme Divine Entity, such as *Brahman* (Bhagavān’s undifferentiated all-pervading manifestation), *ParamĀtman* (the Supreme Ātman seated in everyone’s hearts), and *Bhagavān* (the personal form of Bhagavān).

How can all these divergent approaches worship the same Bhagavān? Shri Krishna answers this in the following verses.

अहं क्रतुरहं यज्ञः स्वधाहमहौषधम् ।
मन्त्रोऽहमहमेवाज्यमहमग्निरहं हुतम् ॥ १६ ॥
पिताहमस्य जगतो माता धाता पितामहः ।
वेद्यं पवित्रमोङ्कार ऋक्साम यजुरेव च ॥ १७ ॥

*aham kratur aham yajñah svadhāham aham auṣhadham
mantra 'ham aham evājyam aham agnir aham hutam*

*pitāham asya jagato mātā dhātā pitāmahah
vedyam pavitram omkāra ṛik sāma yajur eva cha*

*aham—I; kratuḥ—Vedic ritual; aham—I; yajñah—sacrifice; svadhā—oblation; aham—I; aham—I; auṣhadham—medicinal herb; mantrah—Vedic mantra; aham—I; aham—I; eva—also; ājyam—clarified butter; aham—I; agnih—fire; aham—I; hutam—the act offering; pitā—Father; aham—I; asya—of this; jagataḥ—universe; mātā—Mother; dhātā—Sustainer; pitāmahah—Grandsire; vedyam—the goal of knowledge; pavitram—the purifier; om-kāra—the sacred syllable *Om*; ṛik—the Rig Veda; sāma—the Sama Veda; yajuh—the *Yajur Veda*; eva—also; cha—and.*

It is I who am the Vedic ritual, I am the sacrifice, and I am the oblation offered to the ancestors. I am the medicinal herb, and I am the Vedic mantra. I am the clarified butter, I am the fire and the act of offering. Of this universe, I am the Father; I am also the Mother, the Sustainer, and the Grandsire. I am the purifier, the goal of knowledge, the sacred syllable *Om*. I am the Rig Veda, Sama Veda, and the Yajur Veda.

In these verses, Shri Krishna gives a glimpse into the various aspects of his infinite personality. *Kratu* means *yajña* (sacrifice), such as *agnihotra yajñas* mentioned in the Vedas. It also refers to the *yajñas*, such as *vaiśhva deva* that are described in the Smṛiti scriptures. *Aushadham* refers to the potency in medicinal herbs.

Creation emanates from Bhagavān, and hence he is its *Pitā* (Father). Before creation, he holds the unmanifested material energy in his womb, and so he is also its *Mātā* (Mother). He maintains the universe and nourishes it, and thus he is its *Dhātā* (sustainer). He is also the Father of Brahma, who is the creator, and hence, he is the Grandfather of this universe.

The Vedas have emanated from Bhagavān. The Ramayana states: *jākī sahaja svāsa śruti chārī* [v21] “Bhagavān manifested the Vedas by his breath.” They are the knowledge potency of Bhagavān, and hence an aspect of his unlimited personality. Shri Krishna states this truth dramatically by saying that he is the Vedas.

**गतिर्भर्ता प्रभुः साक्षी निवासः शरणं सुहृत् ।
प्रभवः प्रलयः स्थानं निधानं बीजमव्ययम् ॥ 18 ॥**

*gatir bhartā prabhuḥ sākṣhī nivāsaḥ śharanam suhṛit
prabhavaḥ pralayaḥ sthānam nidhānam bijam avyayam*

gatiḥ—the supreme goal; *bhartā*—sustainer; *prabhuḥ*—master; *sākṣhī*—witness; *nivāsaḥ*—abode; *śharanam*—shelter; *su-hṛit*—friend; *prabhavaḥ*—the origin; *pralayaḥ*—dissolution; *sthānam*—store house; *nidhānam*—resting place; *bijam*—seed; *avyayam*—imperishable.

I am the supreme goal of all living beings, and I am also their sustainer, master, witness, abode, shelter, and friend. I am the origin, end, and resting place of creation; I am the storehouse and eternal seed.

Since the Ātman is a tiny part of Bhagavān, its every relationship is with him. However, in bodily consciousness, we look upon the relatives of the body as our father, mother, beloved, child, and friend. We become attached to them and repeatedly bring them to our mind, thereby getting further bound in the material illusion. But none of these worldly relatives can give us the perfect love that our Ātman yearns for. This is for two reasons. Firstly, these relationships are temporary, and separation is unavoidable when either they or we depart from the world. Secondly, even as long as they are alive, the attachment is based on selfishness and so it fluctuates in direct proportion to the extent by which self-interest is satisfied. Thus, the range and intensity of worldly love varies from moment to moment, throughout the day. “My wife is very nice....she is not so nice...she is ok....she is terrible,” this is the extent of fluctuation of love in the drama of the world. On the other hand, Bhagavān is such a relative who has accompanied us lifetime after lifetime. From birth to birth, in every life-form that we went, Bhagavān accompanied us and remained seated in our heart. He is thus our eternal relative. In addition, he has no self-interest from us; he is perfect and complete in himself. He loves us selflessly, for he only desires our eternal welfare. Thus, Bhagavān alone is our perfect relative, who is both eternal and selfless.

To understand this concept from another perspective, consider the analogy of an ocean and the waves that emerge from it. Two neighboring waves in the ocean flow together for some time, and play mirthfully with each other, creating the impression that they have a very deep relationship between them. However, after travelling some distance, one subsides into the ocean, and shortly after, the other does the same. Did they have any relationship between

themselves? No, they were both born from the ocean and their relationship was with the ocean itself. Similarly, Bhagavān is like the ocean and we are like waves who have emanated from him. We create attachments amongst our bodily relations, only to leave everyone upon death, and journey alone into another birth. The truth is that the Ātman(s) are not related to each other, but to Bhagavān, from whom they have all emanated.

In this verse, Shri Krishna is takes us above bodily consciousness and its concomitant attachment to worldly relatives. From the platform of the Ātman, Bhagavān alone is all our relationships; he is our Father, Mother, Sister, Brother, Beloved, and Friend. This theme is reiterated in all the Vedic scriptures:

*divyo deva eko nārāyaṇo mātā pitā bhrātā suhṛit gatiḥ
nivāsaḥ śaraṇam suhṛit gatirnārāyaṇa iti (Subāl Śhruti, mantra 6) [v22]*

“Bhagavān Narayan alone is the Mother, Father, Beloved, and destination of the Ātman.”

more sabai eka tumha swāmī, dīnabhandhu ura antarajāmī. (Ramayana) [v23]

“O Bhagavān Ram, you alone are my Master, the Savior of the destitute, and the Knower of the heart.” Knowing the magnitude of our eternal relationship with Bhagavān, we must endeavor to attach our mind to him alone. Then, the mind will be purified and we will be able to fulfill the condition of *māmekam śaraṇam vraja*, or complete surrender, which is necessary for receiving Bhagavān’s grace. To achieve this single-mindedness, we must cut all the present attachments of the mind and replace them with attachment to Bhagavān. Hence, the Ramayana states:

saba kai mamaṭā tāga bāṭorī, mama pada manahi bāñdha bari ḍorī. [v24]

“Cut all the strings of worldly attachment of your mind; make a rope of these strings, and tie it at the lotus feet of Bhagavān.” To help us tie our mind to

him, Shri Krishna here explains to Arjun that the Ātman's every relationship is with Bhagavān alone.

तपाम्यहमं वर्षं निगृह्णाम्युत्सृजामि च ।
अमृतं चैव मृत्युश्च सदसच्चाहमर्जुन ॥ 19 ॥

*tapāmyaham aham varsham nigrihñāmyutsrijāmi cha
amritam chaiva mṛityuśh cha sad asach chāham arjuna*

tapāmi—radiate heat; *aham*—I; *aham*—I; *varsham*—rain; *nigrihñāmi*—withhold; *utsrijāmi*—send forth; *cha*—and; *amritam*—immortality; *cha*—and; *eva*—also; *mṛityuh*—death; *cha*—and; *sat*—eternal spirit; *asat*—temporary matter; *cha*—and; *aham*—I; *arjuna*—Arjun.

I radiate heat as the sun, and I withhold, as well as send forth rain. I am immortality as well as death personified, O Arjun. I am the spirit as well as matter.

The Puranas describe that when Bhagavān first created the universe, he manifested the first-born Brahma and entrusted him with the work of further creation. Brahma was bewildered by the task of creating the materials and the life-forms in the universe from the subtle material energy. Then Bhagavān revealed knowledge unto him, which is called the Chatushlokī Bhāgavat (the four-versed Bhāgavatam), on the basis of which Brahma proceeded to create the world. Its first verse states very emphatically:

*ahamevāsamevāgre nānyadyatsadasat param
paśchchādaham yadetachcha yo 'vaśiṣhyeta so 'smyaham (Bhāgavatam 2.9.32) [v25]*

Shri Krishna tells Brahma: “I am all that is. Prior to creation, I alone existed. Now that creation has come about, whatever is in the form of the manifested world is my very self. After dissolution, I alone will exist. There is nothing apart from me.”

The above truth implies that the material with which we worship is also Bhagavān. When people venerate the holy Ganges, they immerse the lower half of their body in the river. Then they lift water in their palms and pour it into

the Ganges. In this way, they use the Ganges water itself to worship it. Similarly, when Bhagavān is all that exists, then the material for worshipping him is also non-different from him. Thus, as previously stated in verses 16 and 17, Shri Krishna reveals that he is the Vedas, the sacrificial fire, the syllable “Om,” the clarified butter, and the act of offering. No matter what the form and sentiment of our devotion, there is nothing apart from Bhagavān that we can offer to him. Nevertheless, it is the sentiment of love that pleases Bhagavān, not the material of the offering.

त्रैविद्या मां सोमपाः पूतपापा
यज्ञैरिष्टा स्वर्गतिं प्रार्थयन्ते ।
ते पुण्यमासाद्य सुरेन्द्रलोक
मशनन्ति दिव्यान्दिवि देवभोगान् ॥ 20 ॥

*trai-vidyā mām soma-pāḥ pūta-pāpā
yajñair iṣṭvā svar-gatim prārthayante
te puṇyam āśādya surendra-lokam
aśhnanti divyān divi deva-bhogān*

trai-vidyāḥ—the science of *karm kāṇḍ* (Vedic Rituals); *mām*—me; *soma-pāḥ*—drinkers of the *Soma* juice; *pūta*—purified; *pāpāḥ*—sins; *yajñaiḥ*—through sacrifices; *iṣṭvā*—worship; *svah-gatim*—way to the abode of the king of Swarga Loka; *prārthayante*—seek; *te*—they; *puṇyam*—pious; *āśādya*—attain; *sura-indra*—of Indra; *lokam*—abode; *aśhnanti*—enjoy; *divyān*—celestial; *divi*—in Swarga Loka; *deva-bhogān*—the pleasures of the celestial deities.

Those who are inclined to the fruitive activity described in the Vedas worship me through ritualistic sacrifices. Being purified from sin by drinking the *Soma* juice, which is the remnant of the *yajñas*, they seek to go to Swarga Loka. By virtue of their pious deeds, they go to the abode of Indra, the king of Swarga Loka, and enjoy the pleasures of the celestial deities.

Previously, in verses 9.11 and 9.12, Shri Krishna described the mentality of the non-believers and the demoniac, who embrace atheistic and ungodly views, and the repercussions that such people face. Then, he described the nature of

great Ātman(s), who are engaged in loving devotion to him. Now, in this verse and the next, he mentions those who are not devotees, but are not atheistic either. They perform the ritualistic ceremonies of the Vedas. This science of *karm kāṇḍ* (Vedic rituals) is referred to as *trai-vidyā*.

People who are fascinated by the science of *trai-vidyā* worship the celestial deities, such as Indra, through the performance of *yajñas* (fire sacrifices) and other rituals. They worship the Supreme Bhagavān indirectly because they do not realize that it is he alone who sanctions the gifts that the celestial deities bestow. Ritualistic ceremonies are considered good deeds, but they are not counted as devotion. The performers of ritualistic ceremonies do not get released from the cycle of life and death. They go to the higher planes of existence within the material universe, such as abode of Indra, the king of Swarga Loka. There, they enjoy exquisite celestial delights that are thousands of times more pleasurable than the sensual pleasures available on the earth. *In the following verse, Shri Krishna points out the defect in celestial pleasures.*

ते तं भुक्त्वा स्वर्गलोकं विशालं
क्षीणे पुण्ये मर्त्यलोकं विशन्ति ।
एवं त्रयीथर्ममनुप्रपन्ना
गतागतं कामकामा लभन्ते ॥ 21 ॥

*te tam bhuktvā swarga-lokam viśhālam
kṣhīṇe puṇye martya-lokam viśhanti
evam trayī-dharmam anuprapannā
gatāgatam kāma-kāmā labhante*

te—they; *tam*—that; *bhuktvā*—having enjoyed; *swarga-lokam*—heaven; *viśhālam*—vast; *kṣhīṇe*—at the exhaustion of; *pūṇye*—stock of merits; *martya-lokam*—to the earthly plane; *viśhanti*—return; *evam*—thus; *trayī dharmam*—the *karm-kāṇḍ* portion of the three Vedas; *anuprapannāḥ*—follow; *gata-āgatam*—repeated coming and going; *kāma-kāmāḥ*—desiring objects of enjoyments; *labhante*—attain.

When they have enjoyed the vast pleasures of Swarga Loka, the stock of their merits being exhausted, they return to the earthly plane. Thus, those

who follow the Vedic rituals, desiring objects of enjoyment, repeatedly come and go in this world.

Shri Krishna explains in this verse that the celestial delights of the heavenly abodes are temporary. After people who have been promoted there have fully enjoyed heavenly pleasures and exhausted their merits, they are sent back to the earthly plane. Thus, attaining promotion to the heavenly abodes does not fulfill the eternal quest of the Ātman. We have all been there many times in endless past lifetimes, and yet the hunger of the Ātman for infinite Bliss has not yet been satiated. All the Vedic scriptures support this belief:

*tāvat pramodate swarge yāvat puṇyaṁ samāpyate
kṣhīṇa punyah patatyarvāganichchhan kāla-chālitaḥ* (*Bhāgavatam* 11.10.26) [v26]

“Residents of Swarga enjoy the celestial delights until their merits have been exhausted. Then they are reluctantly forced to fall back to the lower abodes by the passage of time.”

swargahu swalpa anta dukhadāī (*Ramayana*) [v27]

“The attainment of Swarga is temporary, and is followed by miseries.”

Just as a football gets kicked all over the field, Māyā is kicking the Ātman around in forgetfulness of Bhagavān. Sometimes it goes to the lower abodes, while sometimes to the higher abodes. Amongst these multitudes of forms it receives, across the lower and higher abodes, only the human form offers the facility for Brahman-realization. Hence, the scriptures state that even the celestial deities pray to be given birth as a human being, so that they may rectify their previous mistake of going to Swarga Loka, and strive toward Brahman-realization.

durlabham mānuṣham janma prārthayate tridaśhairapi (*Nārad Purāṇ*) [v28]

“The human form is exceedingly rare. Even the celestial deities pray to attain it.” Thus, Bhagavān Ram instructed the residents of Ayodhya:

bareñ bhāga mānuṣha tanu pāvā, sura durlabha saba granthanhi gāvā (Ramayana) [v29]

“O people of Ayodhya, you all are extremely fortunate to have been bestowed a human birth, which is exceedingly rare and is desired even by the residents of Swarga Loka.” When the celestial beings long for a human birth, then why should we humans seek promotion to the celestial abodes? Rather, we should aim for Brahman-realization by engaging in devotion to the Supreme Bhagavān.

अनन्याश्चिन्तयन्तो मां ये जनाः पर्युपासते ।
तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम् ॥ २२ ॥

*ananyāśh chintayanto mām ye janāḥ paryupāsate
teṣhām nityābhiyuktānām yoga-kṣhemam vahāmyaham*

ananyāh—always; *chintayantaḥ*—think of; *mām*—me; *ye*—those who; *janāḥ*—persons; *paryupāsate*—worship exclusively; *teṣhām*—of them; *nitya abhiyuktānām*—who are always absorbed; *yoga*—supply spiritual assets; *kṣhemam*—protect spiritual assets; *vahāmi*—carry; *aham*—I.

There are those who always think of me and engage in exclusive devotion to me. To them, whose minds are always absorbed in me, I provide what they lack and preserve what they already possess.

A mother never thinks of deserting her newborn helpless child who is entirely dependent upon her. The supreme and eternal mother of the Ātman is Bhagavān. In this verse, Bhagavān offers motherly assurance to Ātman(s) who surrender exclusively to him. The words used are *vahāmi aham*, meaning “I personally carry the burden of maintaining my devotees,” just as a married man carries the burden of maintaining his wife and children. Bhagavān promises two things. The first is *yog*—he bestows his devotees the spiritual assets they do not possess. The second is *kṣhem*—he protects the spiritual assets that his devotees already possess.

However, the condition he has placed for this is exclusive surrender. This can again be understood through the same analogy of the mother and child. A

newborn baby is fully dependent upon its mother, who takes care of the baby's welfare entirely. The baby simply cries whenever it needs anything; the mother cleans it, feeds it, bathes it, etc. But when the baby becomes a five-year old child, it begins doing some actions for itself. To that extent the mother reduces her responsibilities. And when the same child becomes a youth and assumes all responsibilities, the mother relinquishes her responsibilities further. Now if the father comes home and asks, "Where is our son?" the mother replies, "He has not returned home after school. He must have gone for a movie with his friends." Her attitude is now more neutral toward him. But when the same boy was a five-year old, and had gotten delayed by ten minutes in returning home from school, both the mother and father would begin worrying, "What has happened? He is a small child. Let's hope he has not met with an accident. Let us phone the school and find out."

In this way, as the boy keeps assuming more responsibilities, his mother keeps relinquishing her responsibilities. Bhagavān's law is exactly the same. When we act from our independent will, thinking that we are the doers of our actions, and depend upon our own prowess and abilities, Bhagavān does not bestow his grace. He merely notes our karmas and gives the result. When we surrender partially to him and partially depend upon material crutches, Bhagavān also partially bestows his grace upon us. And when we offer ourselves exclusively to him, *māmekam śaranam vraja*, Bhagavān bestows his complete grace and takes full responsibility, by preserving what we have and providing what we lack.

**येऽप्यन्यदेवता भक्ता यजन्ते श्रद्धयान्विताः ।
तेऽपि मामेव कौन्तेय यजन्त्यविधिपूर्वकम् ॥ 23 ॥**

*ye 'pyanya-devatā-bhaktā yajante śraddhayānvitāḥ
te 'pi mām eva kaunteya yajantyavidhi-pūrvakam*

ye—those who; *api*—although; *anya*—other; *devatā*—celestial deities; *bhaktāḥ*—devotees; *yajante*—worship; *śraddhayā anvitāḥ*—faithfully; *te*—they; *api*—also; *mām*—me; *eva*—only; *kaunteya*—Arjun, the son of Kunti; *yajanti*—worship; *avidhi-pūrvakam*—by the wrong method.

O son of Kunti, even those devotees who faithfully worship other gods also worship me. But they do so by the wrong method.

Having described the position of those who worship the Supreme Bhagavān, Shri Krishna now explains the situation of those who worship the lower gods for material gains. They are also endowed with faith, and they may have their supplications answered by the celestial deities, but their understanding is incomplete. They do not realize that the celestial beings receive their powers from Bhagavān himself. Hence, they also worship Shri Hari, albeit indirectly. For example, if a government officer redresses a complaint by a citizen, he is not credited with being benevolent. He is merely utilizing the powers in his jurisdiction that have been bestowed upon him by the government. Similarly, all the powers of the celestial deities come from the Supreme Bhagavān. Thus, those with superior understanding do not go by the indirect route; they worship the source of all powers, which is Bhagavān himself. Such worship that is offered to the Supreme Bhagavān automatically satisfies the entire creation:

*yathā taror mūla-niṣhechanena tripyanti tatskandhabhujopaśhākhāḥ
prāṇopahārāchcha yathendriyāṇāṁ tathaiva sarvāraṇam achyutejyā*
(Bhāgavatam 4.31.14) [v30]

“When we water the root of a tree, its trunk, branches, twigs, leaves, and flowers all become nourished. When we put food in our mouth, it nourishes the life airs and the senses automatically. In the same way, by worshipping the Supreme Bhagavān, all his parts, including the *devatās* are also worshipped.” However, if we begin watering the leaves of a tree, while neglecting its roots, the tree will perish. Likewise, the worship offered to the celestial deities certainly makes its way to the Supreme Bhagavān, but such devotees do not get spiritual benefits. *This is elaborated in the next verse.*

अहं हि सर्वयज्ञानां भोक्ता च प्रभुरेव च ।
न तु मामभिजानन्ति तत्त्वेनातश्च्यवन्ति ते ॥ २४ ॥

*aham hi sarva-yajñānām bhoktā cha prabhureva cha
na tu mām abhijānanti tattvenātaś chyavanti te*

*aham—I; hi—verily; sarva—of all; yajñānām—sacrifices; bhoktā—the enjoyer; cha—and; prabhuḥ—the Bhagavān; eva—only; cha—and; na—not; tu—but; mām—me; abhijānanti—realize; tattvena—divine nature; atah—therefore; chyavanti—fall down (wander in *samsara*); te—they.*

I am the enjoyer and the only Bhagavān of all sacrifices. But those who fail to realize my divine nature must be reborn.

Shri Krishna now explains the drawback in worshipping the celestial deities. By virtue of the powers bestowed upon them by the Supreme Bhagavān, they do possess the ability to grant material favors, but they cannot liberate their devotees from the cycle of life and death. They can only offer to others what they themselves possess. When the celestial deities themselves are not liberated from *samsara*, then how can they release their devotees from it? On the other hand, those whose understanding is proper offer their entire veneration at the feet of Bhagavān himself, and when their devotion reaches the stage of perfection, they go beyond the world of mortals to the divine abode.

यान्ति देवव्रता देवान्पितृन्यान्ति पितृव्रताः ।
भूतानि यान्ति भूतेज्या यान्ति मद्याजिनोऽपि माम् ॥ २५ ॥

*yānti deva-vratā devān pitṛīn yānti pitṛi-vratāḥ
bhūtāni yānti bhūtejyā yānti mad-yājino 'pi mām*

yānti—go; deva-vratāḥ—worshipers of celestial deities; devān—amongst the celestial deities; pitṛīn—to the ancestors; yānti—go; pitṛi-vratā—worshippers of ancestors; bhūtāni—to the ghosts; yānti—go; bhūta-ijyāḥ—worshippers of ghosts; yānti—go; mat—my; yājināḥ—devotees; api—and; mām—to me.

Worshippers of the celestial deities take birth amongst the celestial deities, worshippers of the ancestors go to the ancestors, worshippers of ghosts take birth amongst such beings, and my devotees come to me alone.

Devotees can only be elevated to the level of the entity they worship, just as water in a pipe can only rise to the level of the reservoir to which it is connected. In this verse, Shri Krishna explains the implications of worshipping different entities by revealing the varieties of destinations attained. He gives this knowledge to help us conclude that to reach the highest level of spiritual evolution we must worship the Supreme.

The worshippers of Indra (the rain deity), Sūrya (the Sun deity), Kuber (the deity of wealth), Agni (the deity of fire), etc. go to the celestial abodes. Then, when their account of good karmas gets depleted, they are sent back from Swarga Loka. The *Pitars* are the ancestors. It is good to harbor thoughts of gratefulness toward them, but undue concern with their welfare is detrimental. Those who engage in the ancestor worship go to the abodes of their ancestors after death.

Those in the mode of ignorance worship ghosts and spirits. In the Western world, there is witchcraft; in Africa, there is black magic; in India, there are *vām-marg tāntrics*, who invoke ghosts and spirits. Shri Krishna says that persons who indulge in such things take birth amongst ghosts and spirits in their next life.

The highest devotees are those who attach their minds to Shri Hari. The word *vrata* means resolve and undertaking. Such fortunate Ātman(s), who firmly resolve to worship Bhagavān and engage steadfastly in his devotion, go to his divine abode after birth.

**पत्रं पुष्पं फलं तोयं यो मे भक्त्या प्रयच्छति ।
तदहं भक्त्युपहृतमश्नामि प्रयतात्मनः ॥ 26 ॥**

*patram puṣhpam phalam toyam yo me bhaktyā prayachchhati
tadaham bhaktyupahṛitam aśhnāmi prayatātmanah*

patram—a leaf; *puṣhpam*—a flower; *phalam*—a fruit; *toyam*—water; *yah*—who; *me*—to me; *bhaktyā*—with devotion; *prayachchhati*—offers; *tat*—that; *aham*—I; *bhakti-upahṛitam*—offered

with devotion; *aśhnāmi*—partake; *prayata-ātmanah*—one in pure consciousness.

If one offers to me with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or even water, I delightfully partake of that article offered with love by my devotee in pure consciousness.

Having established the benefits of worshipping the Supreme, Shri Krishna now explains how easy it is to do so. In the worship of the *devatās* and the ancestors, there are many rules to propitiate them, which must be strictly followed. But Bhagavān accepts anything that is offered with a loving heart. If you have only a fruit, offer it to Bhagavān, and he will be pleased. If there is no fruit available, offer him a flower. If it is not the season for flowers, offer Bhagavān a mere leaf; even that will suffice, provided it is a gift of love. If leaves are also scarce, make an offering of water, which is available everywhere, but ensure again that you do it with devotion. The word *bhaktyā* has been used in both the first and second lines of the verse. It is the *bhakti* of the devotee that is pleasing to Bhagavān, and not the worth of the offering.

By making this wonderful statement, Shri Krishna reveals the merciful divine nature of Bhagavān. He is not concerned with the material value of our offering. Rather, he values, above everything else, the love with which we make the offering. Thus, the Hari Bhakti Vilas states:

*tulasī-dala-mātreṇa jalasya chulukena cha
vikrīṇīte svam Ātmannam bhaktebhyo bhakta-vatsalah (11.261) [v31]*

“If you offer Bhagavān with sincere love, just a *Tulsī* leaf and as much water as you can hold in your palm, he will offer himself to you in return because he is endeared by love.” How wonderful it is that the Supreme Master of unlimited universes, whose glorious qualities and virtues are amazing beyond description, and by whose mere thought multitudes of universes come into existence and disappear again, accepts even the most humble offering of his devotee that is

given with genuine love. The word used here is *prayatātmanah*, implying, “I accept the offerings of those whose hearts are pure.”

The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam contains exactly the same verse as the above verse of the Bhagavad Gita. While eating dry rice at the house of his friend, Sudama, Shri Krishna said:

*patram puṣhpam phalam toyam yo me bhaktyā prayachchhati
tadaham bhaktyupahṛitam aśhnāmi prayatātmanah (10.81.4) [v32]*

“If one offers me with devotion, a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or even water, I delightfully partake of that article offered with love by my devotee in pure consciousness.”

Whenever Bhagavān descends upon the earth, he exhibits this quality in his divine pastimes. Before the Mahābhārat war, when Shri Krishna went to Hastinapur to explore the possibility of fashioning an agreement between the Kauravas and Pandavas, the evil Duryodhan had proudly prepared for him a meal with fifty-six different items. However, Shri Krishna rejected his hospitality and instead went to the humble hut of Vidurani, who had been longing deeply for the opportunity to serve her beloved Bhagavān. Vidurani was overjoyed on receiving the Supreme Bhagavān at her home. All she had to offer was bananas, but her intellect so benumbed with loving sentiments that she did not even realize she was dropping the fruit and putting the banana peels in his mouth. Nevertheless, seeing her devotion, Shri Krishna blissfully ate the peels, as if they were the most delicious food in the world.

यत्करोषि यदश्नासि यजुहोषि ददासि यत् ।
यत्तपस्यसि कौन्तेय तत्कुरुष्व मदर्पणम् ॥ 27 ॥

*yat karoṣhi yad aśhnāsi yaj juhoṣhi dadāsi yat
yat tapasyasi kaunteya tat kuruṣhva mad-arpaṇam*

yat—whatever; *karoṣhi*—you do; *yat*—whatever; *aśhnāsi*—you eat; *yat*—whatever; *juhoṣhi*—offer to the sacred fire; *dadāsi*—bestow as a gift; *yat*—whatever; *yat*—whatever; *tapasyasi*—austerities you perform; *kaunteya*—Arjun, the son of Kunti; *tat*—them; *kuruṣhva*—do; *mad arpaṇam*—as an

offering to me.

Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer as oblation to the sacred fire, whatever you bestow as a gift, and whatever austerities you perform, O son of Kunti, do them as an offering to me.

In the previous verse, Shri Krishna stated that all objects should be offered to him. Now he says that all actions should also be offered to him. Whatever social duties one may be engaged in, whatever vegetarian food one may be eating, whatever non-alcoholic beverages one may be drinking, whatever Vedic rites one may perform, whatever vows and austerities one may observe, should all be offered mentally to the Supreme Bhagavān. Very often, people separate devotion from their daily life, and look on it as something that is only to be performed inside the temple room. However, devotion is not to be restricted to the periphery of the temple room; it is to be engaged in at every moment of our life.

Sage Narad defines bhakti in this manner:

nāradastu tadarpitā khilāchāratā tadvismaraṇe paramavyākulateti
(Nārad Bhakti Darśhan, Sūtra 19) [v33]

“Devotion means offering your every activity to Bhagavān, and feeling intense separation if ever you lose remembrance of him.” When works are dedicated and mentally delivered to Bhagavān, it is called *arpaṇam*. Such an attitude metamorphoses the mundane activities of material life into divine service of Bhagavān. Swami Vivekananda expressed this attitude toward work when he declared: “No work is secular. Everything is devotion and service.” Saint Kabir stated this in his couplet:

jahañ jahañ chalūñ karūñ parikramā, jo jo karūñ so sevā
jaba sovūñ karūñ daṇḍavat, jānūñ deva na dūjā [v34]

“Wherever I walk, I feel I am circumambulating the Bhagavān’s temple;

whatever I do, I see it as service to Bhagavān. When I go to sleep, I meditate on the sentiment that I am offering obeisance to Bhagavān. In this way, I remain ever united with him.” Without realizing its significance, many people say the following verse in temples:

*kāyena vāchā manasendriyair vā buddhyātmanā vānusṛita-svabhāvāt
karoti yad yat sakalam parasmai nārāyaṇāyeti samarpayet tat*
(*Bhāgavatam* 11.2.36) [v35]

“Whatever one does with body, words, mind, senses, and intellect, in accordance with one’s individual nature, should be offered to the Supreme Bhagavān Narayan.” However, this act of offering is not to be done at the end of the work by merely reciting mantras, such as *śrī kṛiṣṇāya samarpaṇam astu*, etc., as is done in the Vedic rituals. It is to be done while performing the action itself, by maintaining the consciousness that we are working for the pleasure of the Bhagavān. *Having stated that all works should be offered to him, Shri Krishna now lists the benefits of doing so.*

**शुभाशुभफलैरेवं मोक्ष्यसे कर्मबन्धनैः ।
संन्यासयोगयुक्तात्मा विमुक्तो मामुपैष्यसि ॥२८॥**

*śhubhāśhubha-phalair evam mokṣhyase karma-bandhanaiḥ
sanyāsa-yoga-yuktĀtmā vimukto mām upaiṣhyasi*

śhubha aśhubha phalaiḥ—from good and bad results; *evam*—thus; *mokṣhyase*—you shall be freed ; *karma*—work; *bandhanaiḥ*—from the bondage; *sanyāsa-yoga*—renunciation of selfishness; *yukta-Ātmā*—having the mind attached to me; *vimuktah*—liberated; *mām*—to me; *upaiṣhyasi*—you shall reach.

By dedicating all your works to me, you will be freed from the bondage of good and bad results. With your mind attached to me through renunciation, you will be liberated and will reach me.

Every action has defects, just as fire is covered by smoke. When we walk on the earth, we unknowingly kill millions of tiny living entities. In our occupational duties, no matter how careful we are in the fulfillment of our duties, we still

end up harming the environment and hurting others. Even if we eat a cup of yogurt, we still incur the sin of destroying the living entities that reside in it. Some religious sects try to reduce this involuntary killing by tying a cloth over their mouth. Even this does not fully eliminate the destruction of living entities in our breath.

When we perform our actions with the intention of fulfilling our self-interest, we are culpable for the sins we commit, knowingly or unknowingly. In accordance with the law of karma, we have to reap their karmic reactions. Good works can also be binding because they oblige the Ātman to go to the celestial abodes to enjoy their results. Thus, both bad and good karmas result in the continuity of the cycle of birth and death. However, in this verse, Shri Krishna gives a simple solution for destroying all karmic reactions of work. He uses the word *sanyās yog*, meaning renunciation of selfishness. He says that when we dedicate our actions for the pleasure of the Bhagavān, we are freed from the fetters of both good and bad results.

Those who establish themselves in such consciousness are called *yog yuktĀtman* (united in consciousness with Bhagavān). Such yogis become *jīvan mukt* (liberated in consciousness) even in this body. And, upon leaving their mortal frame, they receive a divine body and eternal service in the divine abode of Bhagavān.

समोऽहं सर्वभूतेषु न मे द्वेष्योऽस्ति न प्रियः ।
ये भजन्ति तु मां भक्त्या मयि ते तेषु चाप्यहम् ॥ २९ ॥

*samo 'ham sarva-bhūteṣhu na me dveṣhyo 'sti na priyah
ye bhajanti tu mām bhaktyā mayi te teṣhu chāpyaham*

samah—equally disposed; *aham*—I; *sarva-bhūteṣhu*—to all living beings; *na*—no one; *me*—to me; *dveṣhyah*—not inimical; *asti*—is; *na*—not; *priyah*—dear; *ye*—who; *bhajanti*—worship with love; *tu*—but; *mām*—me; *bhaktyā*—with devotion; *mayi*—reside in me; *te*—such persons; *teṣhu*—in them; *cha*—and; *api*—also; *aham*—I.

I am equally disposed to all living beings; I am neither inimical nor partial to anyone. But the devotees who worship me with love reside in me and I reside in them.

We all intuitively believe that if there is a Bhagavān, he must be perfectly just; there cannot be an unjust Bhagavān. People suffering injustice in the world make statements such as, “Mr. Billionaire, you have the power of money on your side. Do what you like. Bhagavān will settle our dispute. He is watching and will definitely punish you. You cannot escape.” This sort of statement does not indicate that the person making it is a saint, possessing absolute faith in Bhagavān, for even common persons believe that Bhagavān is perfectly just.

However, the previous verse by Shri Krishna creates the doubt that Bhagavān is partial toward his devotees, because while everyone is subject to the law of karma, Bhagavān releases his devotees from it. Isn’t this symptomatic of the defect of partiality? Shri Krishna feels it necessary to clarify this point and begins the verse by saying *samo’ham*, meaning, “No, no, I am equal to all. But I have a uniform law in accordance with which I bestow my grace.” This law was previously stated in verse 4.11: “In whatever way people surrender to me, I reciprocate with them accordingly. Everyone follows my path in all respects, O son of Pritha.”

The rainwater falls equally upon the earth. Yet, the drop that falls on the cornfields gets converted into grain; the drop that falls on the desert bush gets converted into a thorn; the drop that falls in the gutter becomes dirty water; and the drop that falls in the oyster becomes a pearl. There is no partiality on the part of the rain, since it is equitable in bestowing its grace upon the land. The raindrops cannot be held responsible for this variation in results, which are a consequence of the nature of the recipient. Similarly, Bhagavān states here that he is equally disposed toward all living beings, and yet, those who do not

love him are bereft of the benefits of his grace because their hearts are unsuitable vessels for receiving it. So, *what can people do whose hearts are impure? Shri Krishna now reveals the purifying power of bhakti.*

**अपि चेत्सुदुराचारो भजते मामनन्यभाक् ।
साधुरेव स मन्तव्यः सम्यग्व्यवसितो हि सः ॥३०॥**

*api chet su-durāchāro bhajate mām ananya-bhāk
sādhur eva sa mantavyah samyag vyavasito hi sah*

api—even; *chet*—if; *su-durāchāraḥ*—the vilest sinners; *bhajate*—worship; *mām*—me; *ananya-bhāk*—exclusive devotion; *sādhuh*—righteous; *eva*—certainly; *sah*—that person; *mantavyah*—is to be considered; *samyak*—properly; *vyavasitah*—resolve; *hi*—certainly; *sah*—that person.

Even if the vilest sinners worship me with exclusive devotion, they are to be considered righteous, for they have made the proper resolve.

Devotion to the Supreme Bhagavān is so potent that it can reform even the vilest sinner. In the scriptures, the classical examples of this are Ajamil and Valmiki, whose stories are commonly sung in all Indian languages. Valmiki's accumulated sins were so overbearing that he was unable even to enunciate "Ra..ma," the two syllables in Bhagavān Ram's name. His sins were preventing him from taking the divine name. So, his Guru thought of a way of engaging him in devotion by making him chant the reverse, "Ma Ra," with the intention that repetition of "Mara Mara Mara Mara..." will automatically create the sound of "Rama Rama Rama..." As a result, even such a sinful Ātman as Valmiki was reformed by the process of *ananya bhakti* (exclusive devotion) and transformed into a legendary saint.

ulaṭā nāmu japata jagu jānā, bālmīki bhae brahma samānā. (Ramayana) [v36]

"The whole world is testimony to the fact that the sinner Valmiki attained sainthood by chanting the syllables of Bhagavān's name in the reverse order." Therefore, sinners are not condemned to eternal damnation. On the strength of the transforming power of *bhakti*, Shri Krishna declares that even if the vilest

sinners begin worshipping Bhagavān exclusively, they should no longer be designated as sinners. They have made a pure resolve and should thus be considered righteous due to their sublime spiritual intention.

**क्षिप्रं भवति धर्मात्मा शश्वच्छन्ति निगच्छति ।
कौन्तेय प्रतिजानीहि न मे भक्तः प्रणश्यति ॥३१॥**

*kṣipram bhavati dharmĀtman śaśhvach-chhāntim nigachchhati
kaunteya pratijānīhi na me bhaktah praṇaśyati*

kṣipram—quickly; *bhavati*—become; *dharma-Ātman*—virtuous; *śaśhvati-śhāntim*—lasting peace; *nigachchhati*—attain; *kaunteya*—Arjun, the son of Kunti; *pratijānīhi*—declare; *na*—never; *me*—my; *bhaktah*—devotee; *praṇaśyati*—perishes.

Quickly they become virtuous, and attain lasting peace. O son of Kunti, declare it boldly that no devotee of mine is ever lost.

How can devotees be considered venerable, merely for having made the correct resolve? Shri Krishna explains that if they continue the process of exclusive devotion with unflinching faith in Bhagavān, their hearts will become purified and they will swiftly develop saintly virtues.

Divine virtues emanate from Bhagavān himself. He is perfectly just, truthful, compassionate, loving, merciful, etc. Since we Ātman(s) are his tiny parts, we are all naturally drawn to these Bhagavān-like qualities. But the process of becoming virtuous remains an elusive mystery. From childhood, we have heard that we must speak the truth, serve others, be free from anger, etc. and yet we are unable to put those teachings into practice for the simple reason that our mind is impure. Without purification of the mind, blemishes of character cannot be eradicated fully and permanently. Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj declares the irrefutable truth regarding developing divine virtues:

*satya ahinsā ādi mana! bina hari bhajana na pāya
jala te ghrīta nikale nahīñ, kotina kariya upāya (Bhakti Śhatak verse 35) [v37]*

“Oil stains on a cloth cannot be removed by water, no matter how much we

try. Similarly, truthfulness, non-violence, and other virtuous qualities cannot be acquired without engaging in devotion to Bhagavān.” These qualities manifest when the mind is purified; and the purification of the mind cannot take place without attaching it to the all-pure Bhagavān.

Further, Shri Krishna asks Arjun to boldly declare that his devotees will never perish. He does not say, “The *jñānī* (person of knowledge) will not be lost.” Nor does he say, “The *karmī* (performer of rituals) shall not perish.” He makes his promise for his *bhaktas* (devotees), saying that “they shall never come to ruin.” Thereby, he reiterates what he had stated in verse 9.22, that he personally carries the burden of maintaining those who depend upon him and engage in exclusive devotion unto him.

It may seem intriguing why Shri Krishna asks Arjun to make this statement, instead of declaring it himself? The reason is that under special circumstances the Bhagavān sometimes breaks his word, but he never permits his devotees’ word to be broken. For example, Shri Krishna had resolved that he would not lift weapons during the Mahābhārat war. But when Bheeshma, considered the perfect devotee, resolved that he would either kill Arjun by sunset the next day or make the Bhagavān lift weapons to protect him, Shri Krishna broke his own vow to protect the vow made by Bheeshma. Thus, to reaffirm the strength of his statement, Shri Krishna here says, “Arjun, you declare that my devotee will never perish, for I shall guarantee that your word will be kept.”

**मां हि पार्थ व्यपाश्रित्य येऽपि स्युः पापयोनयः ।
स्त्रियो वैश्यास्तथा शूद्रास्तेऽपि यान्ति परां गतिम् ॥ 32 ॥**

*mām hi pārtha vyapāśritya ye 'pi syuḥ pāpa-yonayah
striyo vaiśyās tathā śhūdrās te 'pi yānti parām gatim*

mām—in me; *hi*—certainly; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *vyapāśritya*—take refuge; *ye*—who; *api*—even; *syuḥ*—may be; *pāpa yonayah*—of low birth; *striyah*—women; *vaiśyāḥ*—mercantile people; *tathā*—and; *śhūdrāḥ*—manual workers; *te api*—even they; *yānti*—go; *parām*—the supreme; *gatim*—destination.

All those who take refuge in me, whatever their birth, race, sex, or caste, even those whom society scorns, will attain the supreme destination.

There are Ātman(s) who have the good fortune of being born in pious families, where they are educated in good values and virtuous living from childhood. This is a consequence of their good deeds in past lives. Then, there are also Ātman(s) who have the misfortune of being born in families of drunks, criminals, gamblers, and atheists. This is also the result of sins committed in past lives.

Here, Shri Krishna states that irrespective of birth, sex, caste, or race, whoever takes complete shelter of him will attain the supreme goal. Such is the greatness of the path of devotion that everyone is eligible for it, whereas in other paths there are strict criteria for eligibility.

For the path of *jñāna yog*, Jagadguru Shankaracharya states the eligibility:

*vivekino viraktasya śhamādiguṇa śhalināḥ
mukukṣhoraiva hi brahma jijñāsā yogyatā matāḥ [v38]*

“Only those who possess the four qualifications—discrimination, detachment, disciplined mind and senses, and a deep yearning for liberation—are eligible for practicing the path of *jñāna yog*.

In the path of *karm kāṇḍ* (Vedic rituals), there are six conditions to be met:

*deśhe kāle upāyena dravyam̄ śhraddhā samanvitam̄
pātre pradīyate yattat sakalam̄ dharma lakṣhaṇam̄ [v39]*

“Six criteria must be fulfilled for the fruition of ritualistic activities—the proper place, the correct time, the exact procedure and correct enunciation of mantras, utilization of pure materials, a qualified Brahmin who performs the *yajña*, and staunch faith in its efficacy.”

In the path of *ashṭāṅg yog* as well, there are strict regulations:

śhuchau deśhe pratishṭhāpya (Bhāgavatam 3.28.8) [v40]

“Perform *hatha yog* in a pure place, while seated immovably seated in the proper asan.”

In contrast, *bhakti yog* is such that it can be done by anyone, at any time, place, and circumstance, and with any material.

na deśha niyamastasmin na kāla niyamastathā (Padma Purāṇ) [v41]

This verse states that Bhagavān is not concerned with the time or place where we perform devotion. He only sees the love in our heart. All Ātman(s) are the children of Bhagavān, and he is willing to accept everyone with open arms, provided they come to him with genuine love.”

किं पुनब्राह्मणः पुण्या भक्ता राजर्षयस्तथा ।
अनित्यमसुखं लोकमिमं प्राप्य भजस्व माम् ॥ 33 ॥

*kim punar brāhmaṇāḥ puṇyā bhaktā rājarṣhayas tathā
anityam asukham lokam imam prāpya bhajasva mām*

kim—what; *punah*—then; *brāhmaṇāḥ*—sages; *puṇyāḥ*—meritorious; *bhaktāḥ*—devotees; *rāja-*
*rishi**yayaḥ*—saintly kings; *tathā*—and; *anityam*—transient; *asukham*—joyless; *lokam*—world; *imam*—this; *prāpya*—having achieved; *bhajasva*—engage in devotion; *mām*—unto me.

**What then to speak about kings and sages with meritorious deeds?
Therefore, having come to this transient and joyless world, engage in
devotion unto me.**

When even the most abominable sinners are assured of success on the path of *bhakti*, then why should more qualified Ātman(s) have any doubt? Kings and sages should be even more reassured of attaining the supreme destination by engaging in *ananya bhakti* (exclusive devotion). Shri Krishna thus beckons Arjun, “A saintly king like you should become situated in the knowledge that the world is temporary and a place of misery. Engage yourself in steadfast devotion to me, the possessor of unlimited eternal happiness. Else the blessing of birth in a kingly and saintly family, good education, and favorable material circumstances will all be wasted, if they are not utilized in the pursuit of the

supreme goal."

**मन्मना भव मद्भक्तो मद्याजी मां नमस्कुरु ।
मामेवैष्यसि युक्त्वैवमात्मानं मत्परायणः ॥ ३४ ॥**

*man-manā bhava mad-bhakto mad-yājī mām namaskuru
mām evaiṣhyasi yuktvavam Ātmannam mat-parāyanāḥ*

mat-manāḥ—always think of me; *bhava*—be; *mat*—my; *bhaktah*—devotee; *mat*—my; *yājī*—worshipper; *mām*—to me; *namaskuru*—offer obeisances; *mām*—to me; *eva*—certainly; *eshyasi*—you will come; *yuktvā*—united with me; *evam*—thus; *Ātmannam*—your mind and body; *mat-parāyanāḥ*—having dedicated to me.

Always think of me, be devoted to me, worship me, and offer obeisance to me. Having dedicated your mind and body to me, you will certainly come to me.

Having stressed *bhakti*, the path of devotion, throughout this chapter, Shri Krishna now concludes it by entreating Arjun to become his devotee. He asks Arjun to unite his consciousness with Bhagavān in true Yog, by worshipping him, engaging the mind in meditation upon his divine form, and offering obeisance in pure humility to him.

Namaskuru (the act of humble obeisance) effectively neutralizes vestiges of egotism that may arise in the performance of devotion. Thus, free from pride, with the heart immersed in devotion, one should dedicate all one's thoughts and actions to the Supreme. Shri Krishna assures Arjun that such complete communion with him through *bhakti yog* will definitely result in the attainment of Brahman-realization; of this, there should be no doubt.



Chapter 10

Vibhūti Yog ~ विभूतियोगः

Yog through Appreciating the Infinite Opulences of Bhagavān

This chapter is narrated by Bhagavān Krishna to help Arjun meditate on Bhagavān by reflecting upon his magnificent and resplendent glories. In chapter nine, Shri Krishna revealed the science of *bhakti*, or loving devotion, and described some of his opulences. Here, he expounds further on his infinite glories, with the desire to increase Arjun's *bhakti*. These verses are pleasing to read and enchanting to hear.

Shri Krishna reveals that he is the source of everything that exists. The varieties of qualities of humans arise from him. The seven great Sages, the four great Saints, and the fourteen Manus were born from his mind, and from them all people in the world have descended. Those who know that everything proceeds from him engage in his devotion with great faith. Such devotees derive great satisfaction in conversing about his glories and enlightening others about him. Since their minds are united with him, he dwelling within their hearts gives the divine knowledge by which they can easily attain him.

Upon hearing him, Arjun declares that he is convinced entirely about Shri Krishna's paramount position, and proclaims him to be Shri Hari. He requests the Bhagavān to further describe his divine glories that are like nectar to hear.

Shri Krishna reveals that since he is the beginning, middle, and end of all things, everything that exists is a manifestation of his powers. He is the infinite reservoir of beauty, glory, power, knowledge, and opulence. Whenever we observe extraordinary splendor anywhere, whatever catches our imagination, sends us in raptures, and infuses us with bliss, we should know it to be but a spark of the opulence of Bhagavān. He is the powerhouse from where all beings and things get their magnificence. For the remaining portion of the chapter, he goes on to describe the objects, personalities, and activities that best display his opulence. Finally, he concludes by saying that the magnitude of his glory cannot be judged by the sum total of what he has described, for he upholds unlimited universes in a fraction of his being. Thus, we must make Bhagavān, who is the source of all glory, the object of our worship.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
भूय एव महाबाहो श्रीनु मे परमं वचः ।
यत्तेऽहं प्रीयमाणाय वक्ष्यामि हितकाम्यया ॥१॥

*śrī bhagavān uvācha
bhūya eva mahā-bāho śrīṇu me paramam vachah
yatte 'ham priyamāṇāya vakṣhyāmi hita-kāmyayā*

śrī-bhagavān uvācha—Bhagavān Krishna said; *bhūyah*—again; *eva*—verily; *mahā-bāho*—mighty armed one; *śrīṇu*—hear; *me*—my; *paramam*—divine; *vachah*—teachings; *yat*—which; *te*—to you; *aham*—I; *priyamāṇāya*—you are my beloved confidant; *vakṣhyāmi*—say; *hita-kāmyayā*—for desiring your welfare.

Bhagavān Krishna said: Listen again to my divine teachings, O mighty armed one. Desiring your welfare because you are my beloved friend, I shall reveal them to you.

Shri Krishna is delighted with Arjun's keen interest in hearing his glories. Now, to further enhance his joy and fan his enthusiasm for loving devotion, Shri Krishna declares that he will narrate his sublime glories and incomparable attributes. He uses the words *te priyamāṇāya*, implying "You are my beloved

confidant, and so I am revealing this very special knowledge to you.”

न मे विदुः सुरगणाः प्रभवं न महर्षयः ।
अहमादिर्हि देवानां महर्षीणां च सर्वशः ॥२॥

*na me viduḥ sura-gaṇāḥ prabhavaṁ na maharṣhayah
aham ādir hi devānām maharṣhīnām cha sarvaśhaḥ*

na—neither; *me*—my; *viduḥ*—know; *sura-gaṇāḥ*—the celestial deities; *prabhavam*—origin; *na*—nor; *mahā-rishayah*—the great sages; *aham*—I; *ādih*—the source; *hi*—certainly; *devānām*—of the celestial deities; *mahā-rishīnām*—of the great seers; *cha*—also; *sarvaśhaḥ*—in every way.

Neither celestial deities nor the great sages know my origin. I am the source from which the gods and great seers come.

A father knows about the birth and life of his son, because he witnesses it. But the birth and childhood of his father are beyond the ken of the son, because they occurred before he was born. Likewise, the *devatās* (celestial deities) and the *rishis* (sages) cannot comprehend the real nature of the origin of Bhagavān, who existed before they were even born. And so, the Rig Veda states:

*ko addhā veda ka iha prāvochat, kuta ā jātā kuta iyam viśhrutih
arvāgdevā asya visarjanāya, athā ko veda yata ābabhūva (10.129.6) [v1]*

“Who in the world can know clearly? Who can proclaim from where this universe was born? Who can state where this creation has come from? The *devatās* came after creation. Therefore, who knows from where the universe arose?” Again, the Iśopaniṣhad states:

nainaddevā āpnuvan piurvamarṣhat (Iśopaniṣhad 4) [v2]

“Bhagavān cannot be known by the celestial *devatās*, as he existed before them.” Yet, such inaccessible knowledge will now be given by Shri Krishna to nurture the devotion of his dear friend.

यो मामजमनादिं च वेत्ति लोकमहेश्वरम् ।
असम्पूढः स मर्त्येषु सर्वपापैः प्रमुच्यते ॥३॥

*yo māmajam anādim cha vetti loka-maheśvaram
asampūḍhaḥ sa marthyēṣu sarvapāpaiḥ pramucyate*

asammūdhaḥ sa martyeṣhu sarva-pāpaiḥ pramuchyate

yah—who; *mām*—me; *ajam*—unborn; *anādim*—beginningless; *cha*—and; *vetti*—know; *loka*—of the universe; *mahā-īśhvaram*—the Supreme Bhagavān; *asammūdhaḥ*—undeluded; *sah*—they; *martyeṣhu*—among mortals; *sarva-pāpaiḥ*—from all evils; *pramuchyate*—are freed from.

Those who know me as unborn and beginningless, and as the Supreme Bhagavān of the universe, they among mortals are free from illusion and released from all evils.

Having said that no one can know him, Shri Krishna now states that some people do know him. Is he contradicting himself? No, he means that by self-efforts no one can know Bhagavān, but if Bhagavān himself bestows his grace upon someone, that fortunate Ātman gets to know him. Hence, all those who come to know Bhagavān do so by virtue of his divine grace. As he mentions in verse 10 of this chapter: “To those whose minds are always united with me in devotion, I give the divine knowledge by which they may easily attain me.” Here, Shri Krishna says that those who know him as the Supreme god of all gods are not deluded. Such blessed Ātman(s) become free from all reactions to their past and present actions, and develop loving devotion toward him.

To make the distinction between the Ātman(s) and himself, Shri Krishna declares that he is *loka maheśwaram* (the great Bhagavān of all the abodes of existence). The same declaration has been made in the Śvetāśvatar Upaniṣad:

*tamīśhwaraṇāṁ paramāṁ maheśwaram
tam devatānāṁ paramāṁ cha daivataṁ
patiṁ patināṁ paramāṁ parastād
vidāma devāṁ bhuvaneśmīḍyam (6.7) [v3]*

“The Supreme Bhagavān is the Controller of all controllers; he is the god of all gods. He is the Beloved of all beloveds; he is the Ruler of the world, and beyond the material energy.”

बुद्धिर्ज्ञानप्रसम्पोहः क्षमा सत्यं दमः शमः ।
सुखं दुःखं भवोऽभावो भयं चाभयमेव च ॥४॥

अहिंसा समता तुष्टिस्तपो दानं यशोऽयशः ।
भवन्ति भावा भूतानां मत्त एव पृथग्विधाः ॥५॥

*buddhir jñānam asammoḥaḥ kṣhamā satyam damah śamah
sukham duḥkham bhavo 'bhāvo bhayam chābhayameva cha*

*ahinsā samatā tuṣṭihis tapo dānam yaśhaḥ 'yaśhaḥ
bhavanti bhāvā bhūtānām matta eva pṛithag-vidhāḥ*

buddhiḥ—intellect; *jñānam*—knowledge; *asammoḥaḥ*—clarity of thought; *kṣhamā*—forgiveness; *satyam*—truthfulness; *damah*—control over the senses; *śamah*—control of the mind; *sukham*—joy; *duḥkham*—sorrow; *bhavaḥ*—birth; *abhaवaḥ*—death; *bhayam*—fear; *cha*—and; *abhayam*—courage; *eva*—certainly; *cha*—and; *ahinsā*—nonviolence; *samatā*—equanimity; *tuṣṭihis*—contentment; *tapah*—austerity; *dānam*—charity; *yaśhaḥ*—fame; *ayaśhaḥ*—infamy; *bhavanti*—arise; *bhāvāḥ*—qualities; *bhūtānām*—amongst humans; *mattah*—from me; *eva*—alone; *pṛithak-vidhāḥ*—varieties of.

From me alone arise the varieties in the qualities amongst humans, such as intellect, knowledge, clarity of thought, forgiveness, truthfulness, control over the senses and mind, joy and sorrow, birth and death, fear and courage, non-violence, equanimity, contentment, austerity, charity, fame, and infamy.

In these two verses, Bhagavān Krishna continues to confirm his Supreme godship and absolute dominion over all that exists in creation. Here, he mentions twenty emotions that manifest in a variety of degrees and combinations in different people to form the individual fabric of human nature. He declares that the various moods, temperaments, and dispositions of humankind all emanate from him.

Buddhi is the ability to analyze things in their proper perspective.

Jñānam is the ability to discriminate spiritual from material.

Asammoḥam is the absence of confusion.

Kṣhamā is the ability to forgive those who have harmed us.

Satyam is the veracity to declare the truth for the benefit of all.

Dam means restraining the senses from the sense objects.

Śham is restraint and control of the mind.

Sukham is the emotion of joy and delight.

Duḥkham is the emotion of sorrow and affliction.

Bhavaḥ is the perception of one's existence "I am."

Abhāvaḥ is the experience of death.

Bhaya is the fear of oncoming difficulties.

Abhaya is freedom from fear.

Ahinsā is abstinence from harming any being through word, deed, or thought.

Samatā is equanimity in good and bad situations.

Tuṣṭi is feeling content in whatever comes by ones karma.

Tapa is voluntary austerities for spiritual benefit, in accordance with the Vedas.

Dān is giving in charity to one who is worthy.

Yaśh is fame arising from possessing good qualities.

Ayaśh is infamy for possessing bad qualities.

Shri Krishna states that all these qualities manifest in individuals to the extent sanctioned by him alone. Hence, he is the source of all good and bad natures in living beings. This can be likened to the electric power supplied by the power house being used by various gadgets. The same electric power passing through different gadgets creates different effects. It creates sound in one, light in the other, and heat in the third. Although the manifestations are different, their source is the same electric supply from the powerhouse. Similarly, the energy of Bhagavān manifests in us positively or negatively according to our

purushārtha (the actions we perform by exercising our freedom of choice) in the present and past lives.

महर्षयः सप्त पूर्वे चत्वारो मनवस्तथा ।
मद्भावा मानसा जाता येषां लोक इमाः प्रजाः ॥ ६ ॥

*maharṣhayah sapta pūrve chatvāro manavas tathā
mad-bhāvā mānasā jātā yeṣhām loka imāḥ prajāḥ*

mahā-riṣhayah—the great Sages; *sapta*—seven; *pūrve*—before; *chatvāraḥ*—four; *manavah*—Manus; *tathā*—also; *mat bhāvāḥ*—are born from me; *mānasāḥ*—mind; *jātāḥ*—born; *yeṣhām*—from them; *loke*—in the world; *imāḥ*—all these; *prajāḥ*—people.

The seven great Sages, the four great Saints before them, and the fourteen Manus, are all born from my mind. From them, all the people in the world have descended.

Here, Shri Krishna continues explaining how he is the source of everything that exists. Previously, he mentioned twenty emotions; now, he mentions twenty-five elevated personalities. These are the seven great Sages, the four great Saints, and the fourteen Manus. He also gives a genealogical synopsis of the universe that is born of him.

Brahma was born from the *Hiranyagarbh* energy of Vishnu (the form of Bhagavān that is responsible for administering the material creation). From Brahma were born the four great saints, who are Sanak, Sanandan, Sanat, Sanatan. They are also called the four Kumars. In our universe, the four Kumars are the eldest children of Brahma. Since theirs was an asexual birth from the mind of their father alone, they have no mother. Being eternally liberated Ātman(s) and experts in the science of Yog, they were empowered to help others attain liberation through spiritual *sādhanā*. After the four Kumars, came the seven sages. These are Mareech, Angira, Atri, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, and Vasishtha. They were empowered with the task of procreation of the human population. Then come the fourteen Manus, Svayambhuva,

Swarochisha, Uttam, Tamas, Raivat, Chakshusha, Vaivasvat, Savarni, Dakshasavarni, Brahmasavarni, Dharmasavarni, Rudra-putra, Rochya, and Bhautyaka. They were empowered for the administration of humankind from the celestial abodes, and for the establishment and protection of Vedic dharma. We are presently in the era of the seventh Manu, who is called Vaivasvat Manu. This era is thus called Vaivasvat Manvantar. In the present *kalp* (day of Brahma), there will be seven more Manus.

In the celestial abodes, there are many *devatās* who are discharging the function of maintaining the universe. All these personalities are sons and grandsons of Brahma, who in turn was born from Bhagavān Vishnu, who in turn is a non-different expansion of Shri Krishna. Therefore, we can say that Shri Krishna is the original forefather of all forefathers (*prapitāmaha*).

एतां विभूतिं योगं च मम यो वेत्ति तत्त्वतः ।
सोऽविकल्पेन योगेन युज्यते नात्र संशयः ॥ ७ ॥

*etām vibhūtim yogam cha mama yo vetti tattvataḥ
so 'vikalpena yogena yujyate nātra sanśayah*

etām—these; *vibhūtim*—glories; *yogam*—divine powers; *cha*—and; *mama*—my; *yah*—those who; *vetti*—know; *tattvataḥ*—in truth; *sah*—they; *avikalpena*—unwavering; *yogena*—in *bhakti yog*; *yujyate*—becomes united; *na*—never; *atra*—here; *sanśayah*—doubt.

Those who know in truth my glories and divine powers become united with me through unwavering *bhakti yog*. Of this there is no doubt.

The word *vibhūti* refers to the great *śaktis* (powers) of Bhagavān manifesting in the universe. The word *yogam* refers to Bhagavān's connection with these wonderful powers. In this verse, Shri Krishna explains that when we become aware of the magnificence of the Supreme Bhagavān and become convinced about his glory, we naturally become inclined to engage in his devotion.

Knowledge of the greatness of Bhagavān nourishes the love of the devotees and enhances their devotion. There is a direct relationship between knowledge and

love, as the following example reveals. Let us say that your friend shows you a black pebble-like stone. You have no knowledge of its importance, and thus, you have no love for it either. Your friend says, “This is a *śāligrām*, and a saintly personality has gifted it to me.” A *śāligrām* is a special kind of fossil stone worshipped as a representation of Bhagavān Vishnu. If you are aware of the significance of *śāligrāms*, when you receive this knowledge that the stone is a *śāligrām*, your appreciation for it will increase. Let us say your friend further adds, “Do you know it used to be worshipped five hundred years ago by the great saint, Swami Ramananda?” The moment you hear this piece of knowledge, your respect for the stone will increase further. Each time, it is the knowledge that is boosting your reverence for the stone. Similarly, proper knowledge of Bhagavān enhances devotion toward him. Thus, having described Bhagavān’s majestic splendors that manifest in the wondrous workings of unlimited universes, Shri Krishna states that those who become situated in this knowledge naturally become united with him through unflinching *bhakti*.

अहं सर्वस्य प्रभवो मत्तः सर्वं प्रवर्तते ।
इति मत्वा भजन्ते मां बुधा भावसमन्विताः ॥८॥

*aham sarvasya prabhavo mattah sarvam pravartate
iti matvā bhajante mām budhā bhāva-samanvitāḥ*

aham—I; *sarvasya*—of all creation; *prabhavah*—the origin of; *mattah*—from me; *sarvam*—everything; *pravartate*—proceeds; *iti*—thus; *matvā*—having known; *bhajante*—worship; *mām*—me; *budhāḥ*—the wise; *bhāva-samanvitāḥ*—endowed with great faith and devotion.

I am the origin of all creation. Everything proceeds from me. The wise who know this perfectly worship me with great faith and devotion.

Shri Krishna begins the verse by saying *aham sarvasya prabhavo*, meaning “I am the Supreme Ultimate Truth and the cause of all causes.” He has repeated this multiple times in the Bhagavad Gita, in verses 7.7, 7.12, 10.5, and 15.15. It is

also strongly proclaimed in all the other scriptures. The Rig Veda states:

yam kāmaye tam tam ugram kriṣṇomi tam brahmānam tam riṣhim tam sumedhsam(10.125.5)
[v4]

“I make the persons I love exceedingly mighty; I make them men or women; I make them wise sages; I make a Ātman empowered for the seat of Brahma.” The wise who comprehend this truth develop firm faith and worship him with loving devotion.

Thus, Shri Krishna is the Supreme Bhagavān of both the material and spiritual creations. However, administering creation is not the primary work of Bhagavān. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu states:

swayam bhagavānera karma nahe bhāra-harana
(*Chaitanya Charitāmṛit, Ādi Leela 4.8*) [v5]

“Shri Krishna does not directly involve himself in the works of creating, maintaining, and dissolving the material universes.” Shri Krishna’s primary activity is to engage in eternal loving pastimes with the liberated Ātman(s) in Golok, his divine abode. For the purpose of material creation, he expands himself as Karanodakshayi Vishnu, who is also called Maha Vishnu.

Maha Vishnu is thus the form of the Bhagavān that presides over the material realm, consisting of infinite material universes. Maha Vishnu is also known as *Pratham Purush* (first expansion of Bhagavān in the material realm). He resides in the divine water of the *kāraṇ* (causal) ocean and manifests innumerable material universes from the pores of his body. He then expands himself to reside at the bottom of each universe as Garbhodakshayi Vishnu, who is called *Dwitiya Purush* (second expansion of Bhagavān in the material realm).

From Garbhodakshayi Vishnu, Brahma is born. He guides the process of creation—creating the various gross and subtle elements of the universe, the laws of nature, the galaxies and planetary systems, the forms of life residing in

them, etc. Hence, Brahma is often referred to as the creator of the universe. However, he is actually the secondary creator.

Garbhodakashayi Vishnu further expands himself as Kshirodakshayi Vishnu, and resides at the top of each universe, in a place called *Kṣhīra Sāgar*. Kshirodakshayi Vishnu is also known as *Tṛitīya Puruṣh* (third expansion of Bhagavān in the material realm). He resides at the top of the universe, but he also resides as the Supreme Ātman, in the heart of all living beings in the universe, noting their karmas, keeping an account, and giving the results at the appropriate time. He is thus known as the maintainer of the universe.

All the three forms of Bhagavān Vishnu mentioned here are non-different from Shri Krishna. Thus, in this verse, Shri Krishna states that all spiritual and material creation emanate from him. Shri Krishna is also called the *Avatārī* (the source of all the *Avatārs*). The Śrīmad Bhāgvatam states: *ete chāṁśha kalāḥ pūṁsaḥ kṛiṣṇas tu bhagavān svayam* (1.3.28) [v6] “All the forms of Bhagavān are the expansions, or the expansions of the expansions of Shri Krishna, who is the primordial form of Bhagavān.” And so, the secondary creator Brahma prays to Shri Krishna:

*yasyaikaniśhvitasita kālamathāvalambya
jīvanti lomavilajā jagadañḍanāthāḥ
viśhūnurmahān saihayasya kalāviśheśho
govindamādi puruṣam tamahām bhajāmi*
(*Brahma Samhitā* 5.48) [v7]

“Infinite universes—each having Shankar, Brahma, and Vishnu—manifest from the pores of Maha Vishnu’s body when he breathes in, and again dissolve into him when he breathes out. I worship Shri Krishna of whom Maha Vishnu is an expansion.” *Shri Krishna now goes on to explain how devotees worship him.*

मच्चित्ता मदूतप्राणा बोधयन्तः परस्परम् ।
कथयन्तश्च मां नित्यं तुष्यन्ति च रमन्ति च ॥११॥

*mach-chittā mad-gata-prāṇā bodhayantah parasparam
kathayantaśh cha mām nityam tuṣhyanti cha ramanti cha*

mat-chittāḥ—those with minds fixed on me; *mat-gata-prāṇāḥ*—those who have surrendered their lives to me; *bodhayantah*—enlightening (with divine knowledge of Bhagavān); *parasparam*—one another; *kathayantah*—speaking; *cha*—and; *mām*—about me; *nityam*—continuously; *tuṣhyanti*—satisfaction; *cha*—and; *ramanti*—(they) delight ; *cha*—also.

With their minds fixed on me and their lives surrendered to me, my devotees remain ever contented in me. They derive great satisfaction and bliss in enlightening one another about me, and conversing about my glories.

The nature of the mind is to become absorbed in what it likes most. Devotees of the Bhagavān become absorbed in remembering him because they develop deep adoration for him. His devotion becomes the basis of their life, from which they derive meaning, purpose, and the strength to live. They feel it as essential to remember Bhagavān as a fish feels it essential to have water.

What is most dear to people's hearts can be determined by where they dedicate their mind, body, and wealth. The Bible states: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will also be." (Matthew 6:21) [v8]. You can see where people's hearts are by studying their checkbooks and credit card statements. If they are spending money on fancy cars, that's where their heart is. If they are spending on luxurious holidays, that's what is most dear to them. If they are donating in charity to African children with AIDS, that is what absorbs their attention the most. The love of parents for their children is visible in the fact that they are willing to sacrifice their time and wealth in their welfare. Likewise, the love of the devotees manifests in their dedicating themselves to Bhagavān. Shri Krishna says: *mad-gata-prāṇāḥ*, implying, "My devotees surrender their lives to me."

From such surrender, comes contentment. Since devotees offer the results of their activities to their beloved Bhagavān, they see every situation as coming

from him. Hence, they gladly accept both positive and negative circumstances as the will of Bhagavān, and remain equipoised in both.

While the devotees' love for Bhagavān is displayed in the form of the above characteristics, it also manifests on their lips. They find great relish in conversing about the glories of Bhagavān, and his names, forms, virtues, pastimes, abodes, and devotees. In this way, by engaging in *kīrtan* (chanting) and *shravaṇa* (hearing) regarding the glories of Bhagavān, they relish his sweetness for themselves and share it with others as well. They contribute to one another's progress by enlightening others about divine knowledge of Bhagavān (*bodhayanti*). Speaking and singing about the glories of Bhagavān gives the devotees great satisfaction (*tuṣhyanti*), and delight (*ramanti*). In this way, they worship him through the processes of remembering, hearing, and chanting. This is the threefold *bhakti* comprising of *shravaṇa*, *kīrtan*, and *smaraṇa*. This has previously been described in the commentary on verse 9.14.

Having described how his devotees worship him, Shri Krishna now explains how he responds to their devotional activities.

तेषां सततयुक्तानां भजतां प्रीतिपूर्वकम् ।
ददामि बुद्धियोगं तं येन मामुपयान्ति ते ॥ 10 ॥

*teṣhām satata-yuktānām bhajatām prīti-pūrvakam
dadāmi buddhi-yogam tam yena mām upayānti te*

teṣhām—to them; *satata-yuktānām*—ever steadfast; *bhajatām*—who engage in devotion; *prīti-pūrvakam*—with love; *dadāmi*—I give; *buddhi-yogam*—divine knowledge; *tam*—that; *yena*—by which; *mām*—to me; *upayānti*—come; *te*—they.

To those whose minds are always united with me in loving devotion, I give the divine knowledge by which they can attain me.

Divine knowledge of Bhagavān is not attained by the flight of our intellect. No matter how powerful a mental machine we may possess, we have to admit the fact that our intellect is made from the material energy. Hence, our thoughts,

understanding, and wisdom are confined to the material realm; Bhagavān and his divine realm remain entirely beyond the scope of our corporeal intellect. The Vedas emphatically declare:

*yasyā matam tasya matam matam yasya na veda saḥ
avijñātām vijñātām vijñātam avijñātām* (Kenopaniṣad 2.3) [v9]

“Those who think they can understand Bhagavān with their intellects have no understanding of Bhagavān. Only those who think that he is beyond the scope of their comprehension truly understand him.”

The Brīhadāraṇyak Upaniṣad states:

sa eṣha neti netyĀtman agrīhyoh (3.9.26) [v10]

“One can never comprehend Bhagavān by self-effort based upon the intellect.”

The Ramayana states:

rāma atarkya buddhi mana bānī, mata hamāra asa sunahi sayānī. [v11]

“Bhagavān Ram is beyond the scope of our intellect, mind, and words.” Now, if these statements on the topic of knowing Bhagavān plainly declare that it is not possible to know him, how then can Brahman-realization be possible for anyone? Shri Krishna reveals here how knowledge of Bhagavān can be gained. He says that it is Bhagavān who bestows divine knowledge upon the Ātman, and the fortunate Ātman who receives his grace is able to know him. The Yajur Veda states:

tasya no rāsva tasya no dhehī [v12]

“Without bathing oneself in the nectar emanating from the lotus feet of Bhagavān, no one can know him.” Thus, true knowledge of Bhagavān is not a result of intellectual gymnastics but a consequence of divine grace. Shri Krishna also mentions in this verse that he does not choose the recipient of his grace in a whimsical manner. Rather, he bestows it upon those who unite their minds with him in devotion. *He next talks about what happens when we receive*

divine grace.

तेषामेवानुकम्पार्थमहमज्ञानं तमः ।
नाशयाम्यात्मभावस्थो ज्ञानदीपेन भास्वता ॥ 11 ॥

*teṣhām evānukampārtham aham ajñāna-jam tamah
nāśhayāmyātma-bhāva-stho jñāna-dīpena bhāsvatā*

teṣhām—for them; *eva*—only; *anukampā-ar�am*—out of compassion; *aham*—I; *ajñāna-jam*—born of ignorance; *tamah*—darkness; *nāśhayāmi*—destroy; *ātma-bhāva*—within their hearts; *sthā*—dwelling; *jñāna*—of knowledge; *dīpena*—with the lamp; *bhāsvatā*—luminous.

Out of compassion for them, I, who dwell within their hearts, destroy the darkness born of ignorance, with the luminous lamp of knowledge.

In this verse, Shri Krishna further elaborates the concept of grace. Previously, he had explained that he bestows it upon those who lovingly absorb their minds in him and make him the paramount object of their plans, thoughts, and activities. Now, he reveals what happens when someone receives his grace. He says that he destroys the darkness in their heart with the lamp of wisdom.

Ignorance is often symbolized as darkness, but what is this lamp of wisdom that Bhagavān talks about? At present, our senses, mind, and intellect are all material, while Bhagavān is divine. Hence, we are unable to see him, hear him, know him, or be united with him. When Bhagavān bestows his grace, he confers his divine *YogMāyā* energy upon the Ātman. It is also called *śuddha sattva* (divine mode of goodness), which is distinct from the *sattva guṇa* (mode of goodness) of Māyā. When we receive that *śuddha sattva* energy, our sense, mind, and intellect become divine. To put it simply, by his grace, Bhagavān bestows his divine senses, divine mind, and divine intellect to the Ātman. Equipped with these divine instruments, the Ātman is able to see Bhagavān, hear Bhagavān, know Bhagavān, and be united with Bhagavān. Hence, the Vedānt Darśhan states: *viśheśhānugrahaś cha* (3.4.38) [v13] “Only by Bhagavān’s grace does one gain divine knowledge.” In this way, the torchlight that Shri Krishna refers

to is his divine power. By the light of Bhagavān's divine power the darkness of the material energy is dispelled.

अर्जुन उवाच ।
परं ब्रह्म परं धाम पवित्रं परमं भवान् ।
पुरुषं शाश्वतं दिव्यमादिदेवमजं विभुम् ॥ १२ ॥
आहुस्त्वामृषयः सर्वे देवर्षिनारदस्तथा ।
असितो देवलो व्यासः स्वयं चैव ब्रवीषि मे ॥ १३ ॥

*arjuna uvācha
param brahma param dhāma pavitram paramam bhavān
puruṣham śāśvataṁ divyam ādi-devam ajam vibhum
āhus tvām riṣhayah sarve devarṣhir nāradas tathā
asito devalo vyāsaḥ svayam chaiva braviṣhi me*

arjunah uvācha—Arjun said; param—Supreme; brahma—Brahman; param—Supreme; dhāma—Abode; pavitram—purifier; paramam—Supreme; bhavān—you; puruṣham—personality; śāśvataṁ—Eternal; divyam—Divine; ādi-devam—the Primal Being; ajam—the Unborn; vibhum—the Great; āhuḥ—(they) declare; tvām—you; riṣhayah—sages; sarve—all; deva-riṣhih-nāradah—devarṣhi Narad; tathā—also; asitah—Asit; devalah—Deval; vyāsaḥ—Vyās; svayam—personally; cha—and; eva—even; braviṣhī—you are declaring; me—to me.

Arjun said: You are the Supreme Divine Personality, the Supreme Abode, the Supreme Purifier, the Eternal Bhagavān, the Primal Being, the Unborn, and the Greatest. The great sages, like Narad, Asit, Deval, and Vyas, proclaimed this, and now you are declaring it to me yourself.

Commentators on the Vedic scriptures are sometimes fond of saying that Shri Krishna, Shri Ram etc. are not the Supreme Entity. They claim that the Ultimate Reality is formless and without attributes it takes on forms and manifests as *Avatārs*, and thus these *Avatārs* are a step removed from Bhagavān. However, Arjun refutes such viewpoints by declaring that Shri Krishna in his personal form is the supreme cause of all causes.

Upon hearing the previous four verses, Arjun is convinced entirely about the supreme position of Shri Krishna, and emphatically vents the deep conviction

that he now feels within himself. When great authorities testify knowledge, its credibility gets established. The great saints are the authorities for spiritual knowledge. Thus, Arjun quotes the saints, such as Narad, Asit, Deval, and Vyas, who have proclaimed Shri Krishna as Shri Hari and the cause of all causes. In the Bheeshma Parva of the Mahābhārat, there is a poem in which many sages eulogize Shri Krishna. Sage Narad says: “Shri Krishna is the creator of all the worlds and the knower of all feelings. He is the Bhagavān of the celestial deities, who administer the universe.” (Verse 68.2) Sage Markandeya states: “Bhagavān Krishna is the goal of all religious sacrifices and the essence of austerities. He is the present, past, and future of everything.” (Verse 68.3) Sage Bhrigu says: “He is the Bhagavān of gods and the first original form of Bhagavān Vishnu.” (Verse 68.4) Sage Ved Vyas states: “O Bhagavān Krishna, You are the Bhagavān of the Vasus. You have conferred power on Indra and the other celestial deities.” (Verse 68.5) Sage Angira says: “Bhagavān Krishna is the creator of all beings. All the three worlds exist in his stomach. He is the Supreme Personality of Bhagavānhead.” (Verse 68.6) Elsewhere in the Mahābhārat, Sage Asit and Deval declare: “Shri Krishna is the creator of Brahma, who is the creator of the three worlds.” (Mahābhārat Vana Parva 12.50) Quoting these great authorities, Arjun says that now Shri Krishna is himself reconfirming their statements by declaring that he is the supreme cause of all creation.

सर्वमेतदृतं मन्ये यन्मां वदसि केशव ।
न हि ते भगवन्व्यक्तिं विदुर्देवा न दानवाः ॥ 14 ॥

*sarvam etad ritam manye yan mām vadasi keśhava
na hi te bhagavan vyaktim vidur devā na dānavāḥ*

sarvam—everything; *etat*—this; *ritam*—truth; *manye*—I accept; *yat*—which; *mām*—me; *vadasi*—you tell; *keśhava*—Shri Krishna, the killer of the Demon named Keshi; *na*—neither; *hi*—verily; *te*—your; *bhagavan*—the Supreme Bhagavān; *vyaktim*—personality; *viduh*—can understand; *devāḥ*—the celestial deities; *na*—nor; *dānavāḥ*—the Demons.

O Krishna, I totally accept everything you have told me as the truth. O Bhagavān, neither Devatās nor the Demons can understand your true personality.

Listening attentively to Shri Krishna's divine opulence and unlimited supremacy in brief, Arjun's thirst for hearing more has increased. Wanting Shri Krishna to further describe his glories, he wishes to assure the Bhagavān that he is fully convinced. By using the word *yat*, Arjun means that whatever Shri Krishna has said to him from the seventh to the ninth chapters, he holds as true. He asserts that all Shri Krishna has stated is factual and not any metaphorical description. He addresses Shri Krishna as *Bhagavān*, or the Supreme Bhagavān. The word *Bhagavān* is defined in Devī Bhāgavat Purāṇ in the following manner:

*aiśhwaryasya samagrasya dharmasya yaśhasah śriyah
jñānavairāgyośhchaiva ṣaṇḍāṁ bhagavānnih [v14]*

“*Bhagavān* is he who possesses these six opulences to the infinite extent—strength, knowledge, beauty, fame, opulence, and renunciation.” The *devatās* (celestial deities), *dānavas* (Demons), *mānavas* (human beings) all have finite abilities to understand. They cannot comprehend the full identity of *Bhagavān*.

स्वयमेवात्मनात्मानं वेत्थ त्वं पुरुषोत्तम ।
भूतभावन भूतेश देवदेव जगत्पते ॥ 15 ॥

*swayam evātmanĀtmannām vettha tvam puruṣottama
bhūta-bhāvana bhūteśha deva-deva jagat-pate*

swayam—yourself; *eva*—indeed; *ātmanā*—by yourself; *Ātmannam*—yourself; *vettha*—know; *tvam*—you; *puruṣha-uttama*—the Supreme Personality; *bhūta-bhāvana*—the Creator of all beings; *bhūta-īsha*—the Bhagavān of everything; *deva-deva*—the Bhagavān of gods; *jagat-pate*—the Bhagavān of the universe.

Indeed, you alone know yourself by your inconceivable energy, O Supreme Personality, the Creator and Bhagavān of all beings, the Bhagavān of gods, and the Bhagavān of the universe!

Emphasizing that Shri Krishna is Shri Hari, Arjun refers to him as:

Bhūta-bhāvana – the Creator of all beings, the Universal Father.

Bhūteśh – the Supreme Controller, the Bhagavān of all beings.

Jagat-pate – the Bhagavān and Master of creation.

Deva-deva – the Bhagavān of all the celestial deities.

The Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣhad declares the same fact:

yasmāt param nāparamasti kiñcid (3.9) [v15]

“Bhagavān can never be surpassed; he is beyond everything.”

The previous verse stated that Bhagavān cannot be known by anyone. This is clearly logical. All Ātman(s) possess finite intellects, while Bhagavān is infinite, and hence he is beyond the reach of their intellects. This does not belittle him; rather, it exalts him. The western philosopher F.A. Jacobi stated: “Bhagavān whom we could know would be no Bhagavān.” However in this verse, Arjun states that there is after all one personality who knows Bhagavān, and that is Bhagavān himself. Thus, Shri Krishna alone knows himself, and if he decides to grant his powers upon a Ātman, then that fortunate Ātman comes to know him as well.

वक्तुमर्हस्यशेषेण दिव्या ह्यात्मविभूतयः ।
याभिर्विभूतिभिलोकानिमांस्त्वं व्याप्य तिष्ठसि ॥ 16 ॥
कथं विद्यामहं योगिंस्त्वां सदा परिचिन्तयन् ।
केषु केषु च भावेषु चिन्त्योऽसि भगवन्मया ॥ 17 ॥

*vaktum arhasyaśheṣhenā divyā hyātma-vibhūtayah
yābhīr vibhūtibhir lokān imāṁs tvāṁ vyāpya tiṣṭhasi*

*kathām vidyām aham yogins tvāṁ sadā parichintayan
keṣhu keṣhu cha bhāveṣhu chintyo 'si bhagavan mayā*

vaktum—to describe; *arhasi*—please do; *āśheṣhenā*—completely; *divyāḥ*—divine; *hi*—indeed; *ātma*

—your own; *vibhūtayah*—opulences; *yābhiḥ*—by which; *vibhūtibhiḥ*—opulences; *lokān*—all worlds; *imān*—these; *tvam*—you; *vyāpya*—pervade; *tiṣṭhasi*—reside; *katham*—how; *vidyām aham*—shall I know; *yogin*—the Supreme Master of *YogMāyā*; *tvām*—you; *sadā*—always; *parichintayan*—meditating; *keśhu*—in what; *keśhu*—in what; *cha*—and; *bhāveśhu*—forms; *chintyah asi*—to be thought of; *bhagavan*—Shri Hari; *māyā*—by me.

Please describe to me your divine opulences, by which you pervade all the worlds and reside in them. O Supreme Master of Yog, how may I know you and think of you. And while meditating, in what forms can I think of you, O Supreme Divine Personality?

Here, Yog refers to *YogMāyā* (Bhagavān's divine power), and yogi refers to the Master of *YogMāyā*. Arjun has understood that Shri Krishna is *Bhagavān*. He now wishes to know in what other ways, yet untold, is Shri Krishna's *vibhūti* (transcendental majestic opulence) displayed throughout creation. He wishes to hear about Shri Krishna's eminence and paramount position as the Supreme controller of all creation. Thus, he implores, "I am inquisitive to know your divine manifestations so that I may be endowed with unfaltering devotion. But the revelation of your personality is impossible to receive without your grace. So please be merciful and reveal your many glories by which I may perceive you."

**विस्तरेणात्मनो योगं विभूतिं च जनार्दन ।
भूयः कथय तृप्तिर्हि शृणवतो नास्ति मे ऽमृतम् ॥ १८ ॥**

*vistareṇātmano yogam vibhūtim cha janārdana
bhūyah kathaya triptir hi śrīṇvato nāsti me 'mr̥itam*

vistareṇa—in detail; *ātmanah*—your; *yogam*—divine glories; *vibhūtim*—opulences; *cha*—also; *janaārdana*—Shri Krishna, he who looks after the public; *bhūyah*—again; *kathaya*—describe; *triptih*—satisfaction; *hi*—because; *śrīṇvataḥ*—hearing; *na*—not; *asti*—is; *me*—my; *amṛitam*—nectar.

**Tell me again in detail your divine glories and manifestations, O Janardan.
I can never tire of hearing your nectar.**

Arjun says, “... hearing your nectar,” instead of “... hearing your words that are like nectar.” He has omitted “your words that are like.” This is a literary technique called *atiśhayokti*, or hyperbole (statement of extreme expression), in which the subject of comparison is omitted. He also addresses Shri Krishna as Janardan, which means “a benevolent person from whom distressed people ask for relief.”

Descriptions of Bhagavān’s glories are like nectar for those who love him. He has been drinking Shri Krishna’s ambrosial nectar-like words with his ears, and he now cheers him, by saying *bhūyah kathaya*, “Once more! My thirst for hearing your glories is not satiated.” That is the nature of divine nectar. It satiates us while simultaneously increasing the thirst for more. The sages of Naimisharanya made a similar statement while hearing the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam from Suta Goswami:

*vayam tu na vitripyāma uttamaślokavikrame
yachchhṛiṇyatāṁ rasajñānāṁ svādu svādu pade pade (1.1.19) [v16]*

“Those who are devoted to Bhagavān Krishna never tire of hearing descriptions of his divine pastimes. The nectar of these pastimes is such that the more it is relished the more it increases.”

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
हन्त ते कथयिष्यामि दिव्या ह्यात्मविभूतयः ।
प्राधान्यतः कुरुश्रेष्ठ नास्त्यन्तो विस्तरस्य मे ॥ 19 ॥

*śhrī bhagavān uvācha
hanta te kathayiṣhyāmi divyā hyātma-vibhūtayah
prādhānyataḥ kuru-śreshṭha nāstyanto vistarasya me*

śhrī-bhagavān uvācha—Bhagavān Krishna spoke; *hanta*—yes; *te*—to you; *kathayiṣhyāmi*—I shall describe; *divyāḥ*—divine; *hi*—certainly; *ātma-vibhūtayah*—my divine glories; *prādhānyataḥ*—salient; *kuru-śreshṭha*—best of the Kurus; *na*—not; *asti*—is; *antah*—limit; *vistarasya*—extensive glories; *me*—my.

Bhagavān Krishna spoke: I shall now briefly describe my divine glories to

you, O best of the Kurus, for there is no end to their detail.

The Amar Kosh (ancient Sanskrit dictionary that is widely respected) defines *vibhūti* as *vibhūtir bhūtir aiśhwaryam* [v17] (power and wealth). Bhagavān's powers and wealth are unlimited. Actually, everything about him is unlimited. He has unlimited forms, unlimited names, unlimited abodes, unlimited descensions, unlimited pastimes, unlimited devotees, and so on. Hence, the Vedas refer to him by the name *anant* (unlimited):

anantaśchĀtman viśhvareṇo hyakartā (Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣad 1.9) [v18]

“Bhagavān is infinite and manifests in innumerable forms in the universe. Although he administers the universe, he is yet the non-doer.” The Ramayana states:

hari ananta hari kathā anantā [v19]

“Bhagavān is unlimited, and the pastimes he enacts in his unlimited Avatārs are also unlimited.” Sage Ved Vyas goes to the extent of saying:

*yo vā anantasya gunānanantān anukramiṣyān sa tu bāla-buddhiḥ
rajānsi bhūmer gaṇayet kathañchit kālena naivākhilaśakti dhāmnāḥ
(Bhāgavatam 11.4.2) [v20]*

“Those who think they can count the glories of Bhagavān have a childish intellect. We may be successful in counting the specks of dust on the crest of the earth, but we can never count the unlimited glories of Bhagavān.” Therefore, Shri Krishna says here that he will only be describing a small fraction of his *vibhūtis*.

अहमात्मा गुडाकेश सर्वभूताशयस्थितः ।
अहमादिश्च मध्यं च भूतानामन्त एव च ॥ 20 ॥

*aham Ātman guḍākeśha sarva-bhūtāśaya-sthitāḥ
aham ādiś chā madhyam chā bhūtānām anta eva chā*

aham—I; *Ātman*—Ātman; *guḍākeśha*—Arjun, the conqueror of sleep; *sarva-bhūta*—of all living entities; *āśaya-sthitāḥ*—seated in the heart; *aham*—I; *ādiḥ*—the beginning; *cha*—and; *madhyam*—

middle; *cha*—and; *bhūtānām*—of all beings; *antah*—end; *eva*—even; *cha*—also.

O Arjun, I am seated in the heart of all living entities. I am the beginning, middle, and end of all beings.

Shri Krishna declares that he is not far from the Ātman—in fact he is closer than the closest. The *Ātman* or eternal Ātman is enthroned in the etheric heart of all living beings. The Vedas state: *ya ātmani tiṣṭhati* [v21] “Bhagavān is seated within our Ātman.” Seated inside, he grants the power of consciousness and eternality to the Ātman. If he were to subtract his power, our Ātman itself would become insentient and perish. We Ātman(s) are thus eternal and sentient, not by our own power, but because the supremely sentient and eternal Bhagavān is seated within, and is granting his powers to us. Hence, Shri Krishna declares that he is situated in the heart of all living beings.

Our Ātman is the body of Bhagavān, who is the Ātman of our Ātman. The Bhāgavatam states:

harirhi sākshādbhagavān śharīrināmĀtman jhaṣhānāmiva toyamīpsitam (5.18.13) [v22]

“Bhagavān is the *Ātman* of the *Ātman* (Soul of the Soul) of all living beings.” In the Bhāgavatam again, when Shukadev described how the *gopīs* used to leave their own children to go and see baby Shri Krishna, Parikshit asked him how this was possible:

brahmaṇ parodbhave kṛiṣhṇe iyān premā kathāṁ bhavet (10.14.49) [v23]

“O Brahmin, all mothers are attached to their own children. How did the *gopīs* develop such intense attachment to Shri Krishna, which they did not even feel toward their own child?” Shukadev replied:

kṛiṣhṇamenamavehi tvamĀtmannamakhilātmanām (Bhāgavatam 10.14.55) [v24]

“Please understand that Bhagavān Krishna is the Supreme Ātman of all living beings in the universe. For the benefit of humankind, he has appeared in a human form by his *YogMāyā* power.”

Shri Krishna further states that he is the beginning, middle, and end of all living beings. They have emanated from him, and so he is their beginning. All life that exists in creation is sustained by his energy, and so he is the middle. And those who attain liberation go to his divine abode to live eternally with him. Hence, Bhagavān is also the end of all living beings. Amongst the various definitions of Bhagavān given by the Vedas, one of them is:

yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante yena jātāni jīvanti, yatprayantyabhisamviśanti
(Taittirīya Upaniṣad 3.1.1) [v25]

“Bhagavān is he from whom all living beings have emanated; Bhagavān is he within whom all living beings are situated; Bhagavān is he into whom all living beings shall unite.”

आदित्यानामहं विष्णुज्योतिषां रविरंशुमान् ।
मरीचिर्मरुतामस्मि नक्षत्राणामहं शशी ॥ 21 ॥

*ādityānām aham viṣṇur jyotiṣhām ravir anśhumān
marīchir marutām asmi nakṣhatrāṇām aham śaśī*

ādityānām—amongst the twelve sons of Aditi; *aham*—I; *viṣṇuh*—Bhagavān Vishnu; *jyotiṣhām*—amongst luminous objects; *raviḥ*—the sun; *anśhu-mān*—radiant; *marīchih*—Marichi; *marutām*—of the Maruts; *asmi*—(I) am; *nakṣhatrāṇām*—amongst the stars; *aham*—I; *śaśī*—the moon.

Amongst the twelve sons of Aditi I am Vishnu; amongst luminous objects I am the sun. Know me to be Marichi amongst the Maruts, and the moon amongst the stars in the night sky.

From the Puranas we learn that Sage Kashyap had two wives—Aditi and Diti. From his first wife, Aditi, he fathered twelve celestial personalities—Dhata, Mitra, Aryama, Shakra, Varun, Amsha, Bhaga, Vivasvan, Pusha, Savita, Twashta, and Vaman. Amongst these, Vaman was the Avatar of the Supreme Bhagavān Vishnu. Thus, Shri Krishna states that amongst the Adityas (twelve sons of Aditi), Vishnu (in the form of Vaman) reveals his opulence.

Amongst luminous objects, the sun is supreme. The Ramayana states:

*rākāpati ṣhorasa uahiñ tārāgana samudāi,
sakala girinha dava lāia binu rabi rāti na jāi.* [v26]

“At night, all the lamps along with all the stars in the sky and the moon as well are together insufficient in removing the darkness of the night. But the moment the sun rises, the night gets dispelled.” That is the power of the sun, which Shri Krishna reveals as his *vibhūti*.

Then, he comes to the night sky. There is the well-known saying, “One moon is better than a thousand stars.” Shri Krishna says that amongst all the constellations and stars in the night sky, he is the moon because it best reveals his opulence.

The Puranas further relate that Sage Kashyap fathered *daityas* (Demons) from his second wife Diti. However, apart from the *daityas*, Diti desired to have a son more powerful than Indra (the king of the celestial deities). So she kept her baby in her womb for a year. Indra then used a thunderbolt and split her fetus into many pieces, but it turned into many fetuses. These became the Maruts, or the 49 kinds of winds that flow in the universe, doing tremendous good. The major ones amongst them are Avaha, Pravaha, Nivaha, Purvaha, Udvaha, Samvaha, and Parivaha. The chief wind, known as Parivaha, also bears the name Marichi. Shri Krishna states that his *vibhūti* (opulence) manifests in the wind called “Marichi.”

**वेदानां सामवेदोऽस्मि देवानामस्मि वासवः ।
इन्द्रियाणां मनश्चास्मि भूतानामस्मि चेतना ॥ २२ ॥**

*vedānām sāma-vedo 'smi devānām asmi vāsavah
indriyāṇām manaś chāsmi bhūtānām asmi chetanā*

vedānām—amongst the Vedas; *sāma-vedah*—the Sāma Veda; *asmi*—I am; *devānām*—of all the celestial deities; *asmi*—I am; *vāsavah*—Indra; *indriyāṇām*—of amongst the senses; *manah*—the mind; *ca*—and; *asmi*—I am; *bhūtānām*—amongst the living beings; *asmi*—I am; *chetanā*—consciousness.

I am the Sāma Veda amongst the Vedas, and Indra amongst the celestial

deities. Amongst the senses I am the mind; amongst the living beings I am consciousness.

There are four Vedas—Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sāma Veda, Atharva Veda. Amongst these, the Sāma Veda describes Bhagavān's glories as they manifest in the celestial deities, who are in charge of administering the universe. The Sāma Veda is also the most musical and is sung in praise of the Bhagavān. It is enchanting to those who understand it and it evokes devotion amongst its listeners.

Vasava is another name for Indra, the chief of the celestial deities. He is unparalleled among Ātman(s) in fame, power, and rank. Only a Ātman with many lifetimes of pious deeds is promoted to the position of Indra. Thus, Indra reflects the resplendent glories of Bhagavān.

The five senses function correctly only if the mind is attentive to them. If the mind wanders away, the senses cannot function properly. For example, you hear with your ears what people say, but if your mind wanders away while they are speaking, their words are lost to you. So the mind is the king of the senses. Shri Krishna speaks of it as reflecting his power, and later in the Bhagavad Gita, he mentions it as the sixth and most important sense (verse 15.6).

Consciousness is the quality of the Ātman that distinguishes it from insentient matter. The difference between a living person and a dead person is the presence of consciousness in the living person's body and its absence in a dead person's body. Consciousness exists in the Ātman by the divine power of Bhagavān. Hence, the Vedas state: *chetanaśhchetanānām* (Kaṭhopaniṣad 2.2.13) [v27] “Bhagavān is the sentience in the sentient.”

रुद्राणां शङ्करश्चास्मि वित्तेशो यक्षरक्षसाम् ।
वसूनां पावकश्चास्मि मेरुः शिखरिणामहम् ॥ 23 ॥

*rudrāṇām śaṅkaraś chāsmi vitteśho yakṣha-rakṣhasām
vasūnām pāvakaś chāsmi meruḥ śikharinām aham*

rudrāṇām—amongst the Rudras; *śhaṅkarah*—Bhagavān Shiv; *cha*—and; *asmi*—I am; *vitta-īśhah*—the deity of wealth and the treasurer of the celestial deities; *yakṣha*—amongst the semi-divine Demons; *rakṣhasām*—amongst the Demons; *vasūnām*—amongst the Vasus; *pāvakah*—Agni (fire); *cha*—and; *asmi*—I am; *meruh*—Mount Meru; *śikhariṇām*—amongst the mountains; *aham*—I am.

Amongst the Rudras know me to be Shankar; amongst the Demons I am Kuber. I am Agni amongst the Vasus and Meru amongst the mountains.

The Rudras are the eleven forms of Bhagavān Shiv—Hara, Bahurupa, Tryambaka, Aparajita, Vrisakapi, Shankar, Kapardi, Raivata, Mrigavyadha, Sarva, Kapali. The Puranas have named them differently in different places. Amongst these, Shankar is the original form of Bhagavān Shiv in the universe.

Yakṣhas (semi-divine Demons) are beings who are very fond of acquiring wealth and hoarding it. Their leader, Kuber, is the deity of wealth and the treasurer of the celestial deities. He thus reflects the *vibhūti* of Bhagavān amongst the Demons.

There are eight Vasus—land, water, fire, air, space, sun, moon, and stars. They constitute the gross structure of the universe. Amongst these, *agni* (fire) gives warmth and energy to the rest of the elements. Thus, Shri Krishna mentions it as his special manifestation.

Meru is a mountain in the celestial abodes famed for its rich natural resources. It is believed to be the axis around which many heavenly bodies rotate. Shri Krishna thus speaks of it as his glory. As wealth distinguishes a wealthy person, these glories reveal the *vibhūtis* of Bhagavān.

पुरोधसां च मख्यं मां विद्धि पार्थ बृहस्पतिम् ।
सेनानीनामहं स्कन्दः सरसामस्मि सागरः ॥ 24 ॥

*purodhasām cha mukhyam mām viddhi pārtha brihaspatim
senānīnām aham skandah sarasām asmi sāgarah*

purodhasām—amongst priests; *cha*—and; *mukhyam*—the chiefs; *mām*—me; *viddhi*—know; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *brihaspatim*—Brihaspati; *senānīnām*—warrior chief; *aham*—I; *skandah*—Kartikeya; *sarasām*—amongst reservoirs of water; *asmi*—I am; *sāgarah*—the ocean.

O Arjun, amongst priests I am Brihaspati; amongst warrior chiefs I am Kartikeya; and amongst reservoirs of water know me to be the ocean.

A priest discharges the function of performing ritualistic worship and ceremonies in temples and homes. Brihaspati is the chief priest in Swarga Loka. He is thus the topmost of all priests. Here, Shri Krishna says that amongst priests, he is Brihaspati. However, in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, verse 11.16.22, Shri Krishna states that amongst the priests he is Vashishtha. Why is he differing in the two places? This implies that we should not attach importance to the object, but to the opulence of Bhagavān that manifests in that object. All the objects of glory that Shri Krishna is describing here should also be understood in the same light. It is not the object that is being emphasized, rather Bhagavān's opulence that is manifesting in it.

Kartikeya, the son of Bhagavān Shiv, who is also called Skanda, is the commander-in-chief of the celestial deities. He is thus the chief of all military commanders, and best reflects the opulence of Bhagavān. Shri Krishna further says that amongst stagnant bodies of water, he is the grave and mighty ocean.

महर्षीणां भृगुरहं गिरामस्येकमक्षरम् ।
यज्ञानां जपयज्ञोऽस्मि स्थावराणां हिमालयः ॥२५॥

*maharṣhīṇām bṛigur aham girām asmyekam akṣaram
yajñānām japa-yajño 'smi sthāvarāṇām himālayah*

mahā-rishīṇām—among the great seers; *bṛiguḥ*—Bhrigu; *aham*—I; *girām*—amongst chants; *asmi*—I am; *ekam akṣharam*—the syllable Om; *yajñānām*—of sacrifices; *japa-yajñah*—sacrifice of the devotional repetition of the divine names of Bhagavān; *asmi*—I am; *sthāvarāṇām*—amongst immovable things; *himālayah*—the Himalayas.

I am Bhrigu amongst the great seers and the transcendental Om amongst sounds. Amongst chants know me to be the repetition of the Holy Name; amongst immovable things I am the Himalayas.

While all fruits and flowers grow from the same land, only the best amongst

them are selected for an exhibition. Similarly, everything that is manifest and unmanifest in the universe is the glory of Bhagavān, but the prominent amongst them are singled out for mention as his opulence.

Amongst the sages in the celestial planes of existence, Bhrigu is special. He possesses wisdom, glory, and devotion. Bhagavān Vishnu holds the mark of his foot on his chest as a consequence of a divine pastime described in the Puranas in which Bhrigu tested the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiv. Shri Krishna's glory is revealed best through him.

Worshippers of Bhagavān in his formless aspect like to meditate on the “Om” vibration, which is another *vibhūti* of Bhagavān. Shri Krishna had declared previously, in verses 7.8 and 8.13, the syllable “Om” to be a sacred sound. It is the *anāhat nād* (the sound vibration that pervades creation). It is often present in the beginning of Vedic mantras for invoking auspiciousness. It is said that from the mono-syllable “Om” the Gayatri mantra was revealed, and from the Gayatri mantra, the Vedas were revealed.

The Himalayas are a mountain range lying at the north of India. Since ages, they have inspired spiritual awe and wonder in billions of devotees. Their atmosphere, environment, and solitude are conducive to the performance of austerities for spiritual progress. Thus, many great sages reside in the Himalayas in their subtle bodies, practicing penance for their own advancement and for the benefit of humankind. And so, of the multitude of mountain ranges in this world, the Himalayas best display his opulence.

Yajña is the act of dedicating ourselves to the Supreme. The simplest of all *yajñas* is the chanting of the holy names of Bhagavān. This is called *japa yajña*, or the sacrifice of the devotional repetition of the divine names of Bhagavān. For the practice of ritualistic *yajñas*, a number of rules are applicable, all of which need to be meticulously followed. However, in *japa yajña*, there are no rules. It can be

done anywhere and at any time, and is more purifying than the other forms of *yajñas*. In the present age of *Kali*, the chanting of the names of Bhagavān is even more emphasized.

kalijuga kevala nāma ādhārā, sumiri sumiri nara utarahiṇ pārā. (Ramayana) [v28]

“In the age of *Kali*, the chanting and remembrance of the names of Bhagavān is the most powerful means of crossing the ocean of material existence.”

अश्वत्थः सर्ववृक्षाणां देवर्षीणां च नारदः ।
गन्धर्वाणां चित्ररथः सिद्धानां कपिलो मुनिः ॥२६॥

*aśvatthaḥ sarva-vṛikṣhāṇāṁ devarṣīṇāṁ cha nāradah
gandharvāṇāṁ chirrarathah siddhānāṁ kapilo munih*

aśvatthaḥ—the banyan tree; *sarva-vṛikṣhāṇām*—amongst all trees; *deva-ṛiṣīṇām*—amongst celestial sages; *cha*—and; *nāradah*—Narad; *gandharvāṇām*—amongst the *gandharvas*; *chirrarathah*—Chitrarath; *siddhānām*—of all those who are perfected; *kapilah munih*—sage Kapil.

Amongst trees I am the banyan tree; of the celestial sages I am Narad. Amongst the Gandharvas I am Chitrath, and amongst the siddhas I am the sage Kapil.

The banyan tree has a very soothing effect on people who sit under it. Since it expands by sending down aerial roots, it is huge and provides cooling shade in a large area. The Buddha meditated and attained enlightenment under a banyan tree.

The celestial sage Narad is the Guru of many great personalities such as Ved Vyas, Valmiki, Dhruv, and Prahlad. He is always engaged in singing the glories of Bhagavān and doing divine works throughout the three worlds. He is also famous for deliberately creating quarrels and problems, and people sometimes misunderstand him to be a mischief-maker. However, it is his desire to purify famous personalities that makes him create quarrels around them, which ultimately result in self-introspection and purification.

The Gandharva planet is inhabited by beings who sing beautifully, and amongst them the best singer is Chitrarath. The *siddhas* are yogis who have spiritual perfection. Amongst these, Sage Kapil revealed the *Sāṅkhyā* system of philosophy and also taught the glories of *bhakti yog* (described in detail in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, third canto). He was an *Avatār* of Bhagavān and thus Shri Krishna makes special mention of him as a manifestation of his glory.

उच्चैःश्रवस्पश्वानां विद्धि मामपृतोद्भवम् ।
ऐरावतं गजेन्द्राणां नराणां च नराधिपम् ॥ 27 ॥

*uchchaiḥśhravasam aśhvānām viddhi mām amṛitodbhavam
airāvataṁ gajendrāṇām narāṇām cha narādhipam*

uchchaiḥśhravasam—Uchchaihshrava; *aśhvānām*—amongst horses; *viddhi*—know; *mām*—me; *amṛita-udbhavam*—begotten from the churning of the ocean of nectar; *airāvataṁ*—Airavata; *gaja-indrāṇām*—amongst all Bhagavān-like elephants; *narāṇām*—amongst humans; *cha*—and; *nara-adhipam*—the king.

Amongst horses know me to be Ucchaihshrava, begotten from the churning of the ocean of nectar. I am Airavata amongst all Bhagavān-like elephants, and the king amongst humans.

Shri Krishna continues naming the most magnificent in each category to reveal his glories to Arjun. Ucchaihshrava is a celestial winged-horse that belongs to Indra, the king of the celestial abodes. It is white in color and is the fastest horse in the universe. It emerged during the pastime of the churning of the ocean by *devas* (celestial deities) and *asuras* (Demons). Airavata is a white elephant that serves as the vehicle of Indra. It is also called *ardha-mātang*, or “the elephant of the clouds.”

आयुधानामहं वज्रं धेनूनामस्मि कामधुक् ।
प्रजनश्चास्मि कन्दर्पः सर्पणामस्मि वासुकिः ॥ 28 ॥

*āyudhānām aham vajram dhenūnām asmi kāmadhuk
prajanaś chāsmi kandarpaḥ sarpaṇām asmi vāsukih*

āyudhānām—amongst weapons; *aham*—I; *vajram*—the Vajra (thunderbolt); *dhenūnām*—amongst

cows; *asmi*—I am; *kāma-dhuk*—Kamdhenu; *prajanah*—amongst causes for procreation; *cha*—and; *asmi*—I am; *kandarpaḥ*—Kaamdev, the Bhagavān of love; *sarpāṇām*—amongst serpents; *asmi*—I am; *vāsukih*—serpent Vasuki.

I am the Vajra (thunderbolt) amongst weapons and Kamadhenu amongst the cows. I am Kaamdev, the Bhagavān of love, amongst all causes for procreation; amongst serpents I am Vasuki.

The Puranas relate the story of the sacrifice offered by the great sage Dadhichi, which was unparalleled in history. Indra, the king of Swarga was once driven out of his celestial kingdom by a Demon named Vritrasura. The Demon had a boon whereby he could not be killed by any weapon known till then. In desperation, Indra approached Bhagavān Shiv for help, who took him to Bhagavān Vishnu. Vishnu revealed to Indra that the only weapon that could kill Vritrasura was a thunderbolt made from the bones of the sage Dadhichi. Indra then beseeched Dadhichi to make the ultimate sacrifice of laying down his life so that his bones could be used for making the thunderbolt. Dadhichi accepted the request, but desired to first go on a pilgrimage to all the holy rivers. Indra then brought together all the waters of the holy rivers to Naimisharanya, thereby allowing the sage to have his wish fulfilled without further loss of time. Dadhichi then gave up his body by the practice of yogic techniques. The thunderbolt made from his bones was then used to defeat the Demon Vritrasura, allowing Indra to regain his place as the king of the celestial abodes. Shri Krishna deliberately refers to this thunderbolt here as the representation of the glory of Bhagavān, preferring it above the mace and disc that are always held in the hands of Bhagavān Vishnu.

In this verse, Shri Krishna also reveals that the act of sexual intercourse is not unholy when it is performed for the sole purpose of begetting good children. Kaamdev, the Bhagavān of love (cupid), is responsible for the force of attraction between the opposite sexes that facilitates the continuance of

humankind through procreation. This sexual urge has its origin in Bhagavān, and should not be mis-utilized for sensual enjoyment, but rather be used solely for the purpose of begetting worthy progeny. In verse 7.11 as well, Shri Krishna had declared that he is the sexual desire that is not in conflict with virtue and scriptural injunctions.

**अनन्तश्चास्मि नागानां वरुणो यादसामहम् ।
पितृणामर्यमा चास्मि यमः संयमतामहम् ॥२९॥**

*anantaś chāsmi nāgānām varuṇo yādasām aham
pitṛīnām aryamā chāsmi yamah sanyamatām aham*

anantah—Anant; *cha*—and; *asmi*—I am; *nāgānām*—amongst snakes; *varuṇah*—the celestial deity of the ocean; *yādasām*—amongst aquatic creatures; *aham*—I; *pitṛīnām*—amongst the departed ancestors; *aryamā*—Aryama; *cha*—and; *asmi*—am; *yamah*—the celestial deity of death; *sanyamatām*—amongst dispensers of law; *aham*—I.

**Amongst the snakes I am Anant; amongst aquatic creatures I am Varun.
Amongst the departed ancestors I am Aryama; amongst dispensers of law I
am Yamraj, the deity of death.**

Anant is the divine serpent on whom Bhagavān Vishnu rests. He possesses ten thousand hoods. It is said that he has been describing the glories of Bhagavān with each of his hoods since the beginning of creation, but the description has not yet been completed.

Varun is the celestial deity of the ocean. Aryama is the third son of Aditi. He is worshipped as the head of the departed ancestors. Yamraj is the celestial deity of death. He arranges to take the Ātman from its mortal frame after death. He dispenses justice on behalf of Bhagavān for the Ātman's actions in this life, granting punishment or reward in the next life. He does not deviate an inch from his duties though they may be gruesome and painful. He reflects the glory of Bhagavān as the perfect dispenser of justice.

प्रह्लादश्चास्मि दैत्यानां कालः कलयतामहम् ।
मृगाणां च मृगेन्द्रोऽहं वैनतेयश्च पक्षिणाम् ॥ ३० ॥

*prahlādaś chāsmi daityānām kālah kalayatām aham
mrīgānām cha mrīgendro 'ham vainateyaśha cha pakṣhiṇām*

prahlādaḥ—Prahlad; *cha*—and; *asmi*—I am; *daityānām*—of the Demons; *kālah*—time; *kalayatām*—of all that controls; *aham*—I; *mrīgānām*—amongst animals; *cha*—and; *mrīga-indrah*—the lion; *aham*—I; *vainateyah*—Garud; *cha*—and; *pakṣhiṇām*—amongst birds.

**I am Prahlad amongst the Demons; amongst all that controls I am time.
Know me to be the lion amongst animals, and Garud amongst the birds.**

Prahlad was born as the son of the powerful Demon king, Hiranyakashipu. However, he turned out to be one of the greatest devotees of Bhagavān Vishnu. Thus, amongst the Demons, Prahlad best reflects Bhagavān's glory. Time is the great subduer that wears down even the biggest and mightiest entities of the universe.

The majestic lion is the king of the jungle, and amongst the animals the power of the Bhagavān indeed reveals itself in the lion. Garud is the divine vehicle of Bhagavān Vishnu, and the greatest amongst the birds.

पवनः पवतामस्मि रामः शस्त्रभृतामहम् ।
झषाणां मकरश्चास्मि स्रोतसामस्मि जाह्नवी ॥ ३१ ॥

*pavanah pavatām asmi rāmaḥ śastra-bhṛitām aham
jhaṣhāṇām makaraśha chāsmi srotasām asmi jāhnavī*

pavanah—the wind; *pavatām*—of all that purifies; *asmi*—I am; *rāmaḥ*—Parshuram; *śastra-bhṛitām*—of the carriers of weapons; *aham*—I am; *jhaṣhāṇām*—of all aquatics; *makaraḥ*—crocodile; *cha*—also; *asmi*—I am; *srotasām*—of flowing rivers; *asmi*—I am; *jāhnavī*—the Ganges.

Amongst purifiers I am the wind, and amongst wielders of weapons I am Parshuram. Of water creatures I am the crocodile, and of flowing rivers I am the Ganges.

In nature, wind performs the work of purification very effectively. It converts

impure water into water vapor; it carries away the dirty smells of the earth; it makes fire burn by fuelling it with oxygen. It is thus the great purifier of nature.

Bhagavān Ram was the most powerful warrior on the earth and his bow was the deadliest weapon. Yet, he never once abused his dominant superiority. Every time he utilized his weapon, it was only for good. He was thus the perfect wielder of weapons. Ram was also an *Avatār* of Bhagavān, and thus Shri Krishna identifies with him.

The Ganges is a holy river that has its beginning from the divine feet of the Bhagavān. It descended on earth from the celestial abodes. Many great sages have performed austerities on its banks, adding to the holiness of its waters. Unlike normal water, if water from the Ganges is gathered in a vessel, it does not putrefy for years. This phenomenon was very pronounced earlier, but has reduced in intensity in modern times because of the millions of gallons of pollutants being poured into the Ganges.

सर्गाणामादिरन्तश्च मध्यं चैवाहमर्जुन ।
अध्यात्मविद्या विद्यानां वादः प्रवदतामहम् ॥ ३२ ॥

*sargāṇām ādir antaś cha madhyam chaivāham arjuna
adhyātma-vidyā vidyānām vādah pravadatām aham*

sargāṇām—of all creations; *ādiḥ*—the beginning; *antaḥ*—end; *cha*—and; *madhyam*—middle; *cha*—and; *eva*—indeed; *aham*—I; *arjuna*—Arjun; *adhyātma-vidyā*—science of spirituality; *vidyānām*—amongst sciences; *vādah*—the logical conclusion; *pravadatām*—of debates; *aham*—I.

O Arjun, know me to be the beginning, middle, and end of all creation. Amongst sciences I am the science of spirituality, and in debates I am the logical conclusion.

Earlier in the twentieth verse, Shri Krishna had stated that he is the beginning, middle, and end of all living beings. Now, he states the same for all creation, “All that is created, such as space, air, fire, water, and earth, is called *sarga*. I am

the Creator (*ādi*), Maintainer (*madhya*), and Annihilator (*anta*) of these. Therefore, the processes of creation, maintenance, and dissolution can be meditated upon as my *vibhūtis*.”

Vidyā is the education that a person acquires in relation to subjects of knowledge. The scriptures describe eighteen types of *vidyās*. Amongst them, fourteen are prominent:

*aṅgāni vedāśhchatvāro mīmānsā nyāya vistaraḥ
purāṇāṁ dharmaśāstrāṁ cha vidyā hyetāśhchaturdaśha
āyurvedo dhanurvedo gāndharvaśchaiva te trayah
arthaśāstrāṁ chaturthaṁ tu vidyā hyaṣṭādaśhaiva tāḥ*
(*Vishnu Purān* 3.6.27-28) [v29]

“Śik्षā, Kalp, Vyākaraṇ, Nirukti, Jyotiṣ, Chhanda—these are the six types of knowledge known as Vedāṅg (limbs of the Vedas). Rig, Yajur, Sāma, Atharva—these are the four branches of Vedic knowledge. Along with Mīmānsā, Nyāya, Dharma Śāstra, and the Puranas, these comprise the fourteen chief *vidyās*.” Practice of these *vidyās* cultivates the intellect, deepens the knowledge, and increases awareness of the path of dharma. Additionally, the science of spirituality liberates human beings from material bondage and gives them immortality. Thus, it is superior to the previously mentioned *vidyās*. This is mentioned in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam as well: *sā vidyā tanmatiryayā* (Verse 4.29.49) [v30] “The best knowledge is that by which the intellect becomes attached to the lotus feet of Bhagavān.”

In the field of argument and logic, *jalpa* means to find fault with the opponent’s statements, for the sake of establishing one’s own opinion. *Vitanḍa* means to avoid proper deliberation on the truth through evasion and frivolous arguments. *Vāda* is the logical conclusion of the discussion. Logic is the basis for communication of ideas and establishment of truths. It is because of a universal sense of logic that knowledge can be easily cultivated, taught, and learnt in human society. The universal principles of logic are a manifestation of

the power of Bhagavān.

अक्षराणामकारोऽस्मि द्वन्द्वः सामासिकस्य च ।
अहमेवाक्षयः कालो धाताहं विश्वतोमुखः ॥३३॥

*akṣharāṇām a-kāro 'smi dvandvah sāmāsikasya cha
aham evākṣhayah kālo dhātāham viśhwato-mukhah*

akṣharāṇām—amongst all letters; *a-kārah*—the beginning letter “A”; *asmi*—I am; *dvandvah*—the dual; *sāmāsikasya*—amongst grammatical compounds; *cha*—and; *aham*—I; *eva*—only; *akṣhayah*—endless; *kālah*—time; *dhātā*—amongst the creators; *aham*—I; *viśhwataḥ-mukhah*—Brahma.

I am the beginning “A” amongst all letters; I am the dual word in grammatical compounds. I am the endless Time, and amongst creators I am Brahma.

In Sanskrit, all letters are formed by combining a half-letter with “a.” For example, Hence, the letter “a” is the most important in the Sanskrit alphabet. “A” is also the first vowel of the alphabet, and since the vowels are written before the consonants, “A” comes at the very beginning.

क् + अ = क (k + a = ka).

Although Sanskrit is such an ancient language, it is highly refined and sophisticated. A common procedure in Sanskrit language is to combine words to form compound words. When, in the process of making one compound word, two or more words give up their case endings, it is called *samāsa*, and the resulting word is called *samāsa pada*, or compound word. There are primarily six kinds of *samāsa*: 1) *dwandva*, 2) *bahubṛihī*, 3) *karm dhāray*, 4) *tatpuruṣh*, 5) *dwigu*, 6) *avyayī bhāv*. Amongst these, *dwandva* is the best because both words remain prominent in it, while in the others, either one word becomes more prominent, or both words combine together to give the meaning of a third word. The dual word Radha-Krishna is an example of *dwandva*. Shri Krishna highlights it as his *vibhūti*.

Creation is a magnificent act and awesome to behold. Humankind's most sophisticated and technologically advanced inventions pale in comparison. Therefore, Bhagavān Krishna singles out the first-born Brahma, who made the entire universe, and says that amongst creators, the creative ability of Brahma best reflects the glory of Bhagavān.

मृत्युः सर्वहरश्चाहमुद्भवश्च भविष्यताम् ।
कीर्तिः श्रीर्वाक्च नारीणां स्मृतिर्मेधा धृतिः क्षमा ॥ 34 ॥

*mṛityuh sarva-haraś chāham udbhavaś cha bhavishyatām
kīrtih śrīr vāk cha nārīṇām smṛitir medhā dhṛitih kṣamā*

mṛityuh—death; *sarva-haraḥ*—all-devouring; *cha*—and; *aham*—I; *udbhavaḥ*—the origin; *cha*—and; *bhavishyatām*—those things that are yet to be; *kīrtih*—fame; *śrīḥ*—prospective; *vāk*—fine speech; *cha*—and; *nārīṇām*—amongst feminine qualities; *smṛitiḥ*—memory; *medhā*—intelligence; *dhṛitiḥ*—courage; *kṣamā*—forgiveness.

I am the all-devouring Death, and I am the origin of those things that are yet to be. Amongst feminine qualities I am fame, prosperity, fine speech, memory, intelligence, courage, and forgiveness.

There is a phrase in English, “as sure as death.” For one who is born, death is certain. All life inevitably ends in death, and thus the phrase, “dead end.” Bhagavān is not merely the force of creation; he is also the force of destruction. He devours everything in the form of death. In the cycle of life and death, those who die are born again. Shri Krishna states that he is also the generating principle of all future beings.

Certain qualities are seen as adornments in the personality of women, while other qualities are viewed as especially praiseworthy in men. Ideally, a well-rounded personality is one that possesses both kinds of qualities. Here, Shri Krishna lists fame, prosperity, perfect speech, memory, intelligence, courage, and forgiveness, as virtues that make women glorious. The first three of these qualities manifest on the outside, while the next four manifest on the inside.

Besides this, the progenitor of humankind Prajapati Daksha had twenty-four daughters. Five of these were considered the best of women—Kirti, Smriti, Medha, Dhriti, and Kshama. Shri was the daughter of Sage Bhrigu. Vak was the daughter of Brahma. In accordance with their respective names, these seven women are the presiding deities of the seven qualities mentioned in this verse. Here, Shri Krishna enlists these qualities as his *vibhūtis*.

बृहत्साम तथा साम्नां गायत्री छन्दसामहम् ।
मासानां मार्गशीर्षोऽहमृतूनां कुसुमाकरः ॥ ३५ ॥

bṛihat-sāma tathā sāmnām gāyatrī chandasām aham
māsānām mārga-śhīrsho 'ham ritūnām kusumākarah

bṛihat-sāma—the Brihatsama; *tathā*—also; *sāmnām*—amongst the hymns in the Sama Veda; *gāyatrī*—the Gayatri mantra; *chandasām*—amongst poetic meters; *aham*—I; *māsānām*—of the twelve months; *mārga-śhīrshah*—the month of November-December; *aham*—I; *ritūnām*—of all seasons; *kusuma-ākarah*—spring.

Amongst the hymns in the Sāma Veda know me to be the Brihatsama; amongst poetic meters I am the Gayatri. Of the twelve months of the Hindu calendar I am Margsheersh, and of seasons I am spring, which brings forth flowers.

Earlier Shri Krishna had said that of the Vedas he is the Sāma Veda, which is rich with beautiful devotional songs. Now he says that within the Sāma Veda, he is the Brihatsama, which has an exquisite melody. It is typically sung at midnight.

The Sanskrit language, like other languages, has distinctive systems of rhymes and meters for writing poetry. The poetry of the Vedas is in many meters. Amongst these, the Gayatri meter is very attractive and melodious. A famous mantra set in this meter is the Gayatri mantra. It is also a deeply meaningful prayer:

bhūrbhuvaḥ swaḥ tatsaviturvareṇyam bhargo devasya dhīmahi dhiyo yo nah prachodayāt (Rig Veda 3.62.10) [v31]

“We meditate upon the Bhagavān who is illuminating the three worlds and is worthy of our worship. He is the remover of all sins and the destroyer of ignorance. May he illumine our intellects in the proper direction.” The Gayatri mantra is a part of the sacred thread ceremony for young males, and is recited as a part of the daily rituals. The Devi Gayatri, the Rudra Gayatri, the Brahma Gayatri, the Paramhansa Gayatri, and several other Gayatri mantras are also found in the Vedas.

Margsheersh is the ninth month of the Hindu calendar. It falls in November–December. The temperature at that time in India is just right—neither too hot nor too cold. The crops in the field are harvested at this time of the year. For these reasons it is often the favorite month of the people.

Basant (spring season) is known as *ritu rāja*, or the king of seasons. It is a time when nature seems to be euphorically bursting forth with life. Many festivals are celebrated in spring, epitomizing the joy that pervades the atmosphere. Thus, amongst the seasons, spring manifests Bhagavān’s opulence the most.

द्यूतं छलयतामस्मि तेजस्तेजस्विनामहम् ।
जयोऽस्मि व्यवसायोऽस्मि सत्त्वं सत्त्ववतामहम् ॥ 36 ॥

*dyūtam chhalayatām asmi tejas tejasvinām aham
jayo 'smi vyavasāyo 'smi sattvam sattvavatām aham*

dyūtam—gambling; *chhalayatām*—of all cheats; *asmi*—I am; *tejah*—the splendor; *tejasvinām*—of the splendid; *aham*—I; *jayah*—victory; *asmi*—I am; *vyavasāyah*—firm resolve; *asmi*—I am; *sattvam*—virtue; *sattva-vatām*—of the virtuous; *aham*—I.

I am the gambling of the cheats and the splendor of the splendid. I am the victory of the victorious, the resolve of the resolute, and the virtue of the virtuous.

Shri Krishna mentions not only virtue but also vice as his opulence. Gambling is a dangerous vice that ruins families, businesses, and lives. It was Yudhishthir’s weakness for gambling that led to the Mahābhārat war. But if

gambling is also Bhagavān's glory, then is there no harm in it, and why is it forbidden?

The answer is that Bhagavān grants his power to the Ātman, and along with it, he gives the freedom of choice. If we choose to forget him, he gives us the power to forget. This is just as electric power can be used both to heat and cool a house. The user is free to choose how to utilize the power. However, the powerhouse that supplies the energy is not responsible for either the use or misuse of the power. Similarly, a gambler too possesses intellect and ability that is supplied by Bhagavān. But if he decides to misuse these Bhagavān-given gifts, then Bhagavān is not responsible for the sinful deeds.

Everyone likes victory; it reveals the glory of the Bhagavān. Also, Shri Krishna has laid great emphasis on the quality of determination. It was previously mentioned in verse 2.41, 2.44, and 9.30 as well. The goodness of the virtuous is also a manifestation of Bhagavān's power. All virtues, achievements, glory, victory, and firm resolve originate from Bhagavān. Instead of considering these as our own, we should see them as coming from him.

वृष्णीनां वासुदेवोऽस्मि पाण्डवानां धनञ्जयः ।
मुनीनामप्यहं व्यासः कवीनामुशना कविः ॥३७॥

*vṛiṣhṇīnām vāsudevo 'smi pāṇḍavānām dhananjayaḥ
munīnām apyahaṁ vyāsaḥ kavīnām uśhanā kaviḥ*

vṛiṣhṇīnām—amongst the descendants of Vrishni; *vāsudevaḥ*—Krishna, the son of Vasudev; *asmi*—I am; *pāṇḍavānām*—amongst the Pandavas; *dhananjayaḥ*—Arjun, the conqueror of wealth; *munīnām*—amongst the sages; *api*—also; *aham*—I; *vyāsaḥ*—Ved Vyās; *kavīnām*—amongst the great thinkers; *uśhanā*—Shukracharya; *kaviḥ*—the thinker.

Amongst the descendants of Vrishni, I am Krishna, and amongst the Pandavas I am Arjun. Know me to be Ved Vyās amongst the sages, and Shukracharya amongst the great thinkers.

Bhagavān Krishna took birth on the earth in the Vrishni dynasty as the son of

Vasudev. Since no Ātman can excel the Bhagavān, he is naturally the most glorious personality of the Vrishni dynasty. The Pandavas were the five sons of Pandu—Yudhishthir, Bheem, Arjun, Nakul, and Sahadev. Amongst them, Arjun was an archer par-excellence, and was a very intimate devotee of Shri Krishna. He looked upon the Bhagavān as his dear friend.

Ved Vyas is special amongst the sages. He is also known by the names “Badarayan” and “Krishna Dwaipayan.” He revealed Vedic knowledge in various ways and wrote many scriptures for the welfare of the people. In fact, Ved Vyas was an *Avatār* of Shri Krishna himself and is mentioned in the list of *Avatārs* in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam.

Shukracharya was a very learned sage known for his expertise in the science of ethics. He was compassionate to accept the Demons as his disciples and guide their progress. By virtue of his learning, he has been declared as a *vibhūti* of Bhagavān.

दण्डे दमयतामस्मि नीतिरस्मि जिगीषताम् ।
मौनं चैवास्मि गुह्यानां ज्ञानं ज्ञानवतामहम् ॥ 38 ॥

*dandoe daMāyātām asmi nītiḥ asmi jigīṣhatām
maunam chaivāsmi guhyānām jñānam jñānavatām aham*

dandah—punishment; *daMāyātām*—amongst means of preventing lawlessness; *asmi*—I am; *nītiḥ*—proper conduct; *asmi*—I am; *jigīṣhatām*—amongst those who seek victory; *maunam*—silence; *cha*—and; *eva*—also; *asmi*—I am; *guhyānām*—amongst secrets; *jñānam*—wisdom; *jñāna-vatām*—in the wise; *aham*—I.

I am just punishment amongst means of preventing lawlessness, and proper conduct amongst those who seek victory. Amongst secrets I am silence, and in the wise I am their wisdom.

Human nature is such that mere sermons are not sufficient for ensuring good behavior amongst people. Punishment, when meted out in a timely and just manner, is an important tool for reforming sinful behavior in people and

training them in right conduct. One of its goals is meant to deter those in society that might be inclined to perform wrong actions. Modern management theory describes very nicely how even one minute of proper punishment for wrong actions and one minute of suitable reward for good actions can rectify people's behaviors.

The desire for victory is universal, but those with the strength of character are not willing to sacrifice morals or ethics to achieve it. That victory which is won by the path of righteousness signifies the power of Bhagavān.

A secret is that which is hidden from public knowledge for a specific purpose. There is a saying in English, "A secret known to one person is a secret; a secret known to two people is no longer a secret; and a secret known to three people is news shouted out to the rest of the world." Thus, the greatest secret is that which is hidden in silence.

True wisdom comes to a person with the maturing of spiritual knowledge through self or Bhagavān realization. A person endowed with it develops the perspective of seeing all events, persons, and objects in the light of their relationship with Bhagavān. Such wisdom purifies, fulfills, satisfies, and elevates one. It gives direction to life, the strength to cope with its vicissitudes, and determination to persevere till the end is reached. Shri Krishna says that he is such wisdom that manifests in the wise.

यच्चापि सर्वभूतानां बीजं तदहमर्जुन ।
न तदस्ति विना यत्स्यान्मया भूतं चराचरम् ॥ 39 ॥

*yach chāpi sarva-bhūtānām bījam tad aham arjuna
na tad asti vinā yat syān mayā bhūtam charācharam*

yat—which; *cha*—and; *api*—also; *sarva-bhūtānām*—of all living beings; *bījam*—generating seed; *tat*—that; *aham*—I; *arjuna*—Arjun; *na*—not; *tat*—that; *asti*—is; *vinā*—without; *yat*—which; *syāt*—may exist; *mayā*—me; *bhūtam*—creature; *charā-acharam*—moving and nonmoving.

I am the generating seed of all living beings, O Arjun. No creature moving

or non-moving can exist without me.

Shri Krishna is both the efficient cause of all creation and also the material cause. Efficient cause means that he is the creator who performs the work involved in manifesting the world. Material cause means that he is the material from which creation happens. In verses 7.10 and 9.18, Shri Krishna declared himself as “the eternal seed.” Again here, he states that he is “the generating seed.” He is stressing that he is the origin of everything, and without his potency nothing can exist.

Living beings are born in four ways: *Andaj*—born from eggs, such as birds, snakes, and lizards; *Jarāyuj*—born from the womb, such as humans, cows, dogs, and cats; *Swedaj*—born from sweat, such as lice, ticks, etc; *Udbhij*—sprouting from the earth, such as trees, creepers, grass, and corn. There are also other life forms, such as ghosts, evil spirits, manes, etc. Shri Krishna is the origin of all of them.

**नान्तोऽस्ति मम दिव्यानां विभूतीनां परन्तप ।
एष तूदेशतः प्रोक्तो विभूतेर्विस्तरो मया ॥ 40 ॥**

*nānto 'sti mama divyānām vibhūtīnām parantapa
eṣha tūddeśataḥ prokto vibhūter vistaro mayā*

na—not; *antah*—end; *asti*—is; *mama*—my; *divyānām*—divine; *vibhūtīnām*—manifestations; *parantapa*—Arjun, the conqueror of the enemies; *eṣhah*—this; *tu*—but; *uddeśataḥ*—just one portion; *proktah*—declared; *vibhūteḥ*—of (my) glories; *vistarah*—the breath of the topic; *maya*—by me.

**There is no end to my divine manifestations, O conqueror of enemies.
What I have declared to you is a mere sample of my infinite glories.**

Shri Krishna is now concluding the topic of his opulences. From verses 20 to 39, he has described 82 of his infinite opulences. He now says that he has spoken only one portion (*uddeśataḥ*) of the breadth of the topic (*vistārah*).

The question can be asked that if everything is the opulence of Bhagavān, then

what was the need of mentioning these? The answer is that Arjun had asked Shri Krishna how he should think of him, and these glories have been described in response to Arjun's question. The mind is naturally drawn to specialties, and thus, the Bhagavān has revealed these specialties amongst his powers. Whenever we see a special splendor manifesting anywhere, if we look on it as Bhagavān's glory, then our mind will naturally be transported to him. In the larger scheme of things, however, since Bhagavān's glories are in all things big and small, one can think of the whole world as providing innumerable examples for enhancing our devotion. A paint company in India would advertise, "Whenever you see colors think of us." In this case, Shri Krishna's statement is tantamount to saying, "Wherever you see a manifestation of glory, think of me."

यद्यद्विभूतिमत्पत्त्वं श्रीमदूर्जितमेव वा ।
तत्तदेवावगच्छ त्वं मम तेजोऽशासम्भवम् ॥ 41 ॥

*yad yad vibhūtimat sattvam śrīmad ūrjitam eva vā
tat tad evāvagachchha tvam mama tejo 'nśha-sambhavam*

yat yat—whatever; *vibhūtimat*—opulent; *sattvam*—being; *śrī-mat*—beautiful; *ūrjitam*—glorious; *eva*—also; *vā*—or; *tat tat*—all that; *eva*—only; *avagachchha*—know; *tvam*—you; *mama*—my; *tejah-anśha-sambhavam*—splendor; *anśha*—a part; *sambhavam*—born of.

Whatever you see as beautiful, glorious, or powerful, know it to spring from but a spark of my splendor.

Electricity flowing through a speaker creates sound, but one who does not know the principle behind how it works may think that the sound comes from the speaker itself. Similarly, whenever we observe extraordinary splendor anywhere, whatever catches our imagination, sends us in raptures, and infuses us with bliss, we should know it to be but a spark of the glory of Bhagavān. He is the infinite reservoir of beauty, glory, power, knowledge, and opulence. He is the powerhouse from where all beings and things get their splendor. Thus, we

must make Bhagavān, who is the source of all glory, the object of our worship.

अथवा बहुनैतेन किं ज्ञातेन तवार्जुन ।
विष्टभ्याहमिदं कृत्स्नमेकांशेन स्थितो जगत् ॥ 42 ॥

*atha vā bahunaitena kim jñātena tavārjuna
viṣṭabhyāham idam kṛitsnam ekānśhena sthito jagat*

athavā—or; *bahunā*—detailed; *etena*—by this; *kim*—what; *jñātena tava*—can be known by you; *arjuna*—Arjun; *viṣṭabhyā*—pervade and support; *aham*—I; *idam*—this; *kṛitsnam*—entire; *eka*—by one; *anśhena*—fraction; *sthitah*—am situated; *jagat*—creation.

What need is there for all this detailed knowledge, O Arjun? Simply know that by one fraction of my being, I pervade and support this entire creation.

Shri Krishna's statement indicates that he has already answered the question. Now, of his own accord, he wants to tell something remarkable. Having revealed many amazing aspects of his splendor, he says that the magnitude of his glory cannot be judged even from the sum total of what he has described, for the entire creation of unlimited universes is held within a fraction of his being.

Why does he make a reference to a fraction of his being here? The reason is that the entire material creation consisting of unlimited universes is only one-fourth of Bhagavān's entire manifestation; the remaining three-fourths is the spiritual creation.

pādo 'sya viśhvā bhūtāni tripādasyaṁritam divi (Puruṣ Sūktam Mantra 3) [v32]

“This temporary world made from the material energy is but one part of Shri Hari. The other three parts are his eternal abodes that are beyond the phenomenon of life and death.”

Interestingly, Shri Krishna is in front of Arjun, within the world, yet he reveals that the entire world is within a fraction of his being. This is like the story of

Ganesh and Bhagavān Shiv. Once, Sage Narad gave Bhagavān Shiv a very special fruit. Bhagavān Shiv's two children, Kartikeya and Ganesh both began demanding the fruit from him. Bhagavān Shiv thought that if he would give it to any one of them, the other would think that their father was biased. So Bhagavān Shiv announced a competition for his two children. Whoever circumambulated the entire universe and came back to him first would get the fruit.

On hearing this, Kartikeya immediately started off to circumambulate the universe. He was athletically and powerfully built and decided to take advantage of it. In comparison, Ganesh had a plump body and felt he was handicapped in competing with his brother. So, Ganesh decided to make up for it by using his intellect. Bhagavān Shiv and Parvati were standing there. Ganesh circumambulated them thrice, and then announced, "Father, I have done it. Please give me the fruit." Bhagavān Shiv, "But how have you gone around the universe? You have been with us all the while." Ganesh said, "Father, you are Bhagavān. The entire universe exists within you. If I have gone around you, I have gone around the entire universe." Bhagavān Shiv had to agree that his son Ganesh was very smart, and indeed he had won the competition.

Just as Bhagavān Shiv was standing in one place, and yet the entire world was contained in him, similarly, Shri Krishna announces to Arjun that the entire creation, consisting of unlimited material universes, is held within a fraction of his being.



Chapter 11

Viśhwarūp Darśhan Yog ~ **विश्वरूपदर्शनयोगः**

Yog through Beholding the Cosmic Form of Bhagavān

In the previous chapter, Shri Krishna described his divine *vibhūtis* (opulences) to nourish and increase Arjun's devotion. At the end, he faintly alluded to his universal cosmic form, by saying that all things beautiful, glorious, and powerful manifest from just a spark of his splendor. In this chapter, Arjun requests to see Shri Krishna's *viśhwarūp*, or the infinite cosmic form of Bhagavān that encompasses all the universes. Shri Krishna obliges by granting him divine vision. Arjun then sees the totality of creation in the body of the Bhagavān of gods. He observes unlimited faces, eyes, arms, and stomachs in the wonderful and infinite form of the Bhagavān. The form has no beginning or end, and extends infinitely in every direction. The splendor of that form is more than a thousand suns blazing forth together in the sky. The vision makes Arjun's hair stand on end. He sees the three worlds trembling in fear of Bhagavān's laws. He witnesses the celestial deities taking shelter of him and the great sages extolling him with profuse hymns and prayers. He observes all the sons of Dhritarashtra along with their allied kings rushing headlong into the mouth of that fearsome form, as moths rushing with great speed into the fire to perish.

Arjun then confesses that on beholding the universal form his heart is trembling with fear and he has lost his peace of mind. Terrified, he wishes to know the identity of this awesome Bhagavān, who bears no resemblance now to the Krishna he had known as his teacher and friend. Shri Krishna responds by saying that in the form of time he is the destroyer of the three worlds. He declares that the great Kaurava warriors have already been killed by him, so being assured of victory, Arjun should get up and fight.

In response, Arjun praises him as the Bhagavān who possesses infinite valor and power, and offers him repeated salutations. He asks for forgiveness if during their long friendship he has ever done anything to offend the Bhagavān through mistaking him for a mere human being. He implores for grace and requests to see once again the pleasing form of Bhagavān. Shri Krishna grants his desire and first returns to his four-armed form, and then to his gentle and loving two-armed form. He tells Arjun how difficult it is to have a vision of Bhagavān in the manner that Arjun is seeing him. His personal form cannot be seen by the study of the Vedas, nor by penance, charity, or fire sacrifices. By unalloyed devotion alone can one know him as he is, standing before Arjun, and enter into union with him.

अर्जुन उवाच ।
मदनुग्रहाय परमं गुह्यमध्यात्मसञ्ज्ञितम् ।
यत्त्वयोक्तं वचस्तेन मोहोऽयं विगतो मम ॥१॥

*arjuna uvācha
mad-anugrahāya paramam guhyam adhyātma-sanjñitam
yat tvayoktam vachas tena moho 'yam vigato mama*

arjunaḥ uvācha—Arjun said; *mat-anugrahāya*—out of compassion to me; *paramam*—supreme; *guhyam*—confidential; *adhyātma-sanjñitam*—about spiritual knowledge; *yat*—which; *tvayā*—by you; *uktam*—spoken; *vachah*—words; *tena*—by that; *mohah*—illusion; *ayam*—this; *vigatah*—is dispelled; *mama*—my.

Arjun said: Having heard the supremely confidential spiritual knowledge,

which you have revealed out of compassion to me, my illusion is now dispelled.

Arjun has rejoiced upon hearing Shri Krishna's *vibhūtis*, as well as knowledge about the Supreme Personality, and he feels that his illusion is now dispelled. He has accepted that Shri Krishna is not merely his best friend, but also Shri Hari, who is the source of all opulence in the world. Now in this chapter, he begins by gratefully acknowledging Shri Krishna's compassion in revealing such invaluable knowledge.

**भवाप्ययौ हि भूतानां श्रुतौ विस्तरशो मया ।
त्वत्तः कमलपत्राक्ष माहात्म्यमपि चाव्ययम् ॥२॥**

*bhavāpyayau hi bhūtānām śrutau vistaraśho mayā
tvattah kamala-patrākṣha māhātmyam api chāvyayam*

bhava—appearance; *apyayau*—disappearance; *hi*—indeed; *bhūtānām*—of all living beings; *śrutau*—have heard; *vistaraśhaḥ*—in detail; *mayā*—by me; *tvattah*—from you; *kamala-patra-akṣha*—lotus-eyed one; *māhātmyam*—greatness; *api*—also; *cha*—and; *avyayam*—eternal.

I have heard from you in detail about the appearance and disappearance of all living beings, O lotus-eyed one, and also about your eternal majesty.

Arjun continues his appreciation of Bhagavān Krishna's glories by confirming his paramount position as the source of the appearance and disappearance of the entire material manifestation. He addresses Shri Krishna in the vocative with the words *kamala-patrākṣha*, meaning “whose eyes are like the lotus flower, which is large, soft, and beautiful, and endowed with the attributes of sweetness and gentleness.”

By the above verse, Arjun implies, “O Shri Krishna, I have heard from you about your imperishable majestic glories. Although you are present within all, you are untainted by their imperfections. Although you are the supreme controller, yet you are the non-doer and are not responsible for our actions.

Although you bestow the results of our karmas, you are impartial and equal to all. You are the supreme witness and the dispenser of the results of our actions. I thus conclude that you are the object of adoration of all beings.”

एवमेतद्यथात्थ त्वमात्मानं परमेश्वर ।
द्रष्टुमिच्छामि ते रूपमेश्वरं पुरुषोत्तम ॥३॥

*evam etad yathāttha tvam Ātmannam parameśvara
draṣṭum ichchāmi te rūpam aiśhwaram puruṣottama*

evam—thus; *etat*—this; *yathā*—as; *āttha*—have spoken; *tvam*—you; *Ātmannam*—yourself; *parama-iśvara*—Supreme Bhagavān; *draṣṭum*—to see; *ichchāmi*—I desire; *te*—your; *rūpam*—form; *aiśhwaram*—divine; *puruṣha-uttama*—Shri Krishna, Shri Hari .

O Supreme Bhagavān, you are precisely what you declare yourself to be. Now I desire to see your divine cosmic form, O greatest of persons.

Arjun addresses Shri Krishna as the best person because no other personality is equal to him. Often scholars, basing their opinion upon dry intellectual analysis, have difficulty in accepting the concept of Bhagavān as a person. They wish to perceive Bhagavān as only an impersonal light, without attributes, virtues, qualities, and pastimes. However, when we tiny Ātman(s) possess a personality, then why should we deny a personality to the Supreme Bhagavān? Not only can he have a personality, but he also has the best personality, and therefore he is Shri Hari. The difference between our personality and Bhagavān’s personality is that he is not only a perfect person; he also has his impersonal all-pervading aspect, which is devoid of attributes and form.

Arjun declares that he accepts the reality of Shri Krishna’s divine personality, precisely as has been described to him. He has complete faith in his personal form, and yet, he desires to see Shri Krishna’s *viśwarūp*, or universal form, replete with all opulences. He wishes to view it with his own eyes.

मन्यसे यदि तच्छक्यं मया द्रष्टुमिति प्रभो ।
योगेश्वर ततो मे त्वं दर्शयात्मानमव्ययम् ॥४॥

*manyase yadi tach chhakyam mayā draṣṭum iti prabho
yogeśhvara tato me tvam darśhayĀtmannam avyayam*

manyase—you think; *yadi*—if; *tat*—that; *śhakyam*—possible; *mayā*—by me; *draṣṭum*—to behold; *iti*—thus; *prabho*—Bhagavān; *yoga-īśhvara*—Bhagavān of all mystic powers; *tatah*—then; *me*—to me; *tvam*—you; *darśhaya*—reveal; *Ātmannam*—yourself; *avyayam*—imperishable.

O Bhagavān of all mystic powers, if you think I am strong enough to behold it, then kindly reveal that imperishable cosmic form to me.

In the previous verse, Arjun desired to see the cosmic form of Shri Hari. He now seeks his approval. “O Yogeshwar, I have expressed my wish. If you consider me worthy of it, then by your grace, please reveal your cosmic form to me, and show me your *Yog-aiśhwarya* (mystic opulence).” Yog is the science of uniting the individual Ātman with the Supreme Ātman, and those who practice this science are called yogis. The word *Yogeśhwar* also means “Bhagavān of all yogis.” Since the object of attainment for all yogis is the Supreme Bhagavān, Shri Krishna is consequently the Bhagavān of all yogis. Previously, in verse 10.17, Arjun had addressed the Bhagavān as “Yogi,” implying “Master of yog.” But he has now changed it to “Yogeshwar” because of his increased respect for Shri Krishna.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
पश्य मे पार्थ रूपाणि शतशोऽथ सहस्रशः ।
नानाविधानि दिव्यानि नानावर्णाकृतीनि च ॥५॥

*śhrī-bhagavān uvācha
paśhya me pārtha rūpāṇi śhataśhaḥ 'tha sahasraśhaḥ
nānā-vidhāni divyāni nānā-varṇākṛitīni cha*

śhrī-bhagavān uvācha—Supreme Bhagavān Krishna spoke; *paśhya*—behold; *me*—my; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *rūpāṇi*—forms; *śhataśhaḥ*—by the hundreds; *atha*—and; *sahasraśhaḥ*—thousands; *nānā-vidhāni*—varioius; *divyāni*—divine; *nānā*—various; *varṇa*—colors; *ākṛitīni*—shapes; *cha*—and.

Supreme Bhagavān Krishna spoke: Behold, O Parth, my hundreds and thousands of wonderful forms of various shapes, sizes, and colors.

After listening to Arjun's prayers, Shri Krishna now asks him to have a vision of his *viśhwariūp*, or universal form. He uses the word *paśhya*, meaning "behold" to indicate that Arjun must pay attention. Although the form is one, it has unlimited features, and contains innumerable personalities of multitude shapes and variegated colors. Shri Krishna uses the phrase *śhataśho 'tha sahasraśhah* to indicate they exist in innumerable fashions and multitude ways.

Having asked Arjun to behold his universal form with infinite shapes and colors, Shri Krishna now asks Arjun to observe the celestial deities and other wonders in that cosmic form.

पश्यादित्यान्वसूरुद्रानश्विनौ मरुतस्तथा ।
बहून्यदृष्टपूर्वाणि पश्याश्चर्याणि भारत ॥ 6 ॥

*paśhyādityān vasūn rudrān aśhvinau marutas tathā
bahūny adriṣṭa-pūrvāṇi paśhyāśhcharyāṇi bhārata*

paśhya—behold; *ādityān*—the (twelve) sons of Aditi; *vasūn*—the (eight) Vasus; *rudrān*—the (eleven) Rudras; *aśhvinau*—the (twin) Ashvini Kumars; *marutāḥ*—the (forty-nine) Maruts; *tathā*—and; *bahūni*—many; *adriṣṭa*—never revealed; *pūrvāṇi*—before; *paśhya*—behold; *āśhcharyāṇi*—marvels; *bhārata*—Arjun, scion of the Bharatas.

Behold in me, O scion of the Bharatas, the (twelve) sons of Aditi, the (eight) Vasus, the (eleven) Rudras, the (twin) Ashwini Kumars, as well as the (forty-nine) Maruts and many more marvels never revealed before.

The universal form of the Bhagavān not only contains marvels that exist on earth but also marvels that exist in the higher planetary systems, never before seen together in this manner. He further reveals that the celestial deities are all tiny fragments of his divine form; he shows the twelve Adityas, eight Vasus, eleven Rudras, two Ashwini Kumars, as well as the forty-nine Maruts within himself.

The twelve sons of Aditi are: Dhata, Mitra, Aryama, Shakra, Varun, Amsha, Bhaga, Vivasvan, Pusha, Savita, Tvashta, Vaman. The eight Vasus are: Dara, Dhruv, Soma, Ahah, Anila, Anala, Pratyush, Prabhas.

The eleven Rudras are: Hara, Bahurupa, Tryambaka, Aparajita, Vrisakapi, Shambhu, Kapardi, Raivata, Mrigavyadha, Sarva, Kapali. The two Ashwini Kumars are the twin-born physicians of the gods.

The forty-nine Maruts (wind deities) are: Sattvajyoti, Aditya, Satyajyoti, Tiryagjyoti, Sajyoti, Jyotishman, Harita, Ritajit, Satyajit, Sushena, Senajit, Satyamitra, Abhimitra, Harimitra, Krita, Satya, Dhruv, Dharta, Vidharta, Vidharaya, Dhvanta, Dhuni, Ugra, Bhima, Abhiyu, Sakshipa, Idrik, Anyadrik, Yadrik, Pratikrit, Rik, Samiti, Samrambha, Idriksha, Purusha, Anyadriksha, Chetasa, Samita, Samidriksha, Pratidriksha, Maruti, Sarata, Deva, Disha, Yajuh, Anudrik, Sama, Manusha, and Vish.

इहैकस्थं जगत्कृत्स्नं पश्याद्य सचराचरम् ।
मम देहे गुडाकेश यच्चान्यद्रष्टुमिच्छसि ॥७॥

*ihaika-stham jagat kṛitsnam paśhyādyo sa-charācharam
mama dehe guḍākeśha yach chānyad drashtum ichchhasi*

ihā—here; eka-stham—assembled together; jagat—the universe; kṛitsnam—entire; paśhya—behold; adya—now; sa—with; chara—the moving; acharam—the non-moving; mama—my; dehe—in this form; guḍākeśha—Arjun, the conqueror of sleep; yat—whatever; cha—also; anyat—else; drashtum—to see; ichchhasi—you wish.

Behold now, Arjun, the entire universe, with everything moving and non-moving, assembled together in my universal form. Whatever else you wish to see, observe it all within this universal form.

After hearing Shri Krishna's instructions to behold his form, Arjun wonders where to see it. So Shri Krishna states that it is within the body of Shri Hari. There, he will see infinite universes with all their moving and non-moving entities. Every entity exists in the universal form, and so do the events of the

past and the future. Arjun will thus be able to see the victory of the Pandavas and the defeat of the Kauravas as an event that is a part of the unfoldment of the cosmic plan for the universe.

न तु मां शक्यसे द्रष्टुमनेनैव स्वचक्षुषा ।
दिव्यं ददामि ते चक्षुः पश्य मे योगमैश्वरम् ॥८॥

*na tu mām śakyase draṣṭum anenaiva sva-chakṣuṣā
divyam dadāmi te chakṣuh paśya me yogam aiśwaram*

na—not; *tu*—but; *mām*—me; *śakyase*—you can; *draṣṭum*—to see; *anena*—with these; *eva*—even; *sva-chakṣuṣā*—with your physical eyes; *divyam*—divine; *dadāmi*—I give; *te*—to you; *chakṣuh*—eyes; *paśya*—behond; *me*—my; *yogam aiśwaram*—majestic opulence.

But you cannot see my cosmic form with these physical eyes of yours. Therefore, I grant you divine vision. Behold my majestic opulence!

When the Supreme Bhagavān descends in the world, he has two kinds of forms—one is the material form that can be seen with material eyes, and the other is his divine form that can only be seen with divine vision. Thus, human beings do see him during his descension upon the earth, but they see only his material form. His divine form is not visible to their material eyes. That is the reason why Ātman(s) in this material world cannot recognize Bhagavān when he takes an *Avatār* on earth. Shri Krishna mentioned this in the ninth chapter, verse 11: “Ignorant persons are unable to recognize me when I descend in my personal form. They do not know the divinity of my personality, as the Supreme Bhagavān of all beings.” What people see is only the material form of the divine descension.

The same theory applies to his cosmic form. In the previous two verses, Shri Krishna asked Arjun to see the cosmic form, but Arjun could see nothing because he had material eyes. The physical eyes are insufficient to see that universal form and the ordinary intellect is unequipped to comprehend it. Thus, Shri Krishna now says that he will grant the divine vision with which it

will become possible to behold the universal form with all its majesty.

The granting of spiritual vision is an act of grace by the Supreme Bhagavān. By his grace, Bhagavān adds his divine eyes to the Ātman's material eyes; he adds his divine mind to the Ātman's material mind; he adds his divine intellect to the Ātman's material intellect. Then, equipped with the divine senses, mind, and intellect of Bhagavān, the Ātman can see his divine form, think of it, and comprehend it.

सञ्जय उवाच ।
एवमुक्त्वा ततो राजन्महायोगेश्वरो हरिः ।
दर्शयामास पार्थीय परमं रूपमैश्वरम् ॥९॥

sañjaya uvācha

*evam uktvā tato rājan mahā-yogeśhvaro hariḥ
darśhayām āsa pārthāya paramam rūpam aiśhwaram*

sañjayah uvācha—Sanjay said; *evam*—thus; *uktvā*—having spoken; *tataḥ*—then; *rājan*—King; *mahā-yoga-īśhvaraḥ*—the Supreme Bhagavān of Yog; *hariḥ*—Shri Krishna; *darśhayām āsa*—displayed; *pārthāya*—to Arjun; *paramam*—divine; *rūpam aiśhwaram*—opulence.

Sanjay said: O King, having spoken thus, the Supreme Bhagavān of Yog, Shri Krishna, displayed his divine and opulent form to Arjun.

Arjun had referred to Shri Krishna as “Yogeshwar” in verse 11.4. Now, Sanjay refers to him as “Maha-Yogeshwar,” adding the superlative “great” to the address “Bhagavān of all yogis.” Sanjay was bestowed with the gift of far-sighted vision by his Guru, Ved Vyas. So he also beheld the Bhagavān’s cosmic form in the same manner as Arjun saw it. In the next four verses, Sanjay describes to Dhritarashtra what Arjun saw. The word *aiśhwarya* means “opulence.” The cosmic form of Bhagavān is replete with the manifestation of his opulences, and it invokes fear, awe, and reverence in the beholder.

अनेकवक्त्रनयनमनेकाद्भुतदर्शनम् ।
अनेकदिव्याभरणं दिव्यानेकोद्यतायुधम् ॥ 10 ॥

दिव्यमाल्याम्बरधरं दिव्यगन्धानुलेपनम् ।
सर्वाश्चर्यमयं देवमनन्तं विश्वतोमुखम् ॥ 11 ॥

*aneka-vaktra-nayanam anekādbhuta-darśanam
aneka-divyābharaṇam divyānekodyatāyudham*

*divya-mālyāmbara-dharam divya-gandhānulepanam
sarvāśhcharya-Māyām devam anantam viśhwato-mukham*

aneka—many; *vaktra*—faces; *nayanam*—eyes; *aneka*—many; *adbhuta*—wonderful; *darśanam*—had a vision of; *aneka*—many; *divya*—divine; *ābharaṇam*—ornaments; *divya*—divine; *aneka*—many; *udyata*—uplifted; *āyudham*—weapons; *divya*—divine; *mālya*—garlands; *āmbara*—garments; *dharam*—wearing; *divya*—divine; *gandha*—fragrances; *anulepanam*—anointed with; *sarva*—all; *āśhcharya-Māyām*—wonderful; *devam*—Bhagavān; *anantam*—unlimited; *viśhwataḥ*—all sides; *mukham*—face.

In that cosmic form, Arjun saw unlimited faces and eyes, decorated with many celestial ornaments and wielding many kinds of divine weapons. He wore many garlands on his body and was anointed with many sweet-smelling heavenly fragrances. He revealed himself as the wonderful and infinite Bhagavān whose face is everywhere.

Sanjay elaborates upon Shri Krishna's divine universal form with the words *aneka* (many) and *anant* (unlimited). The entire creation is the body of Bhagavān's cosmic form, and therefore it contains countless faces, eyes, mouths, shapes, colors, and forms. The human intellect is habituated to grasping things within the limited kernel of time, space, and form. The cosmic form of Bhagavān revealed unusual wonders, marvels, and miracles in all directions, transcending the limitations of space and time, and thus it could be aptly termed as wondrous.

दिवि सूर्यसहस्रस्य भवेद्युगपदुत्थिता ।
यदि भा: सदृशी सा स्याद्भासस्तस्य महात्मनः ॥ 12 ॥

*divi sūrya-sahasrasya bhaved yugapad utthitā
yadi bhāḥ sadṛiśhī sā syād bhāsaḥ tasya mahātmanah*

divi—in the sky; *sūrya*—suns; *sahasrasya*—thousand; *bhavet*—were; *yugapat*—simultaneously; *utthitā*—rising; *yadi*—if; *bhāḥ*—splendor; *sadṛiśhī*—like; *sā*—that; *syāt*—would be; *bhāsaḥ*—splendor; *tasya*—of them; *mahā-ātmanah*—the great personality.

If a thousand suns were to blaze forth together in the sky, they would not match the splendor of that great form.

Sanjay now describes the effulgence of the universal form. To give an idea of its dazzling radiance, he compares it to thousands of suns blazing simultaneously in the midday sky. Actually, Bhagavān's effulgence is unlimited; it cannot be quantified in terms of the effulgence of the sun. However, narrators often describe the unknown by extrapolating from the known. The simile of a thousand suns expressed Sanjay's perception that the splendor of the cosmic form had no parallels.

तत्रैकस्थं जगत्कृत्स्नं प्रविभक्तमनेकधा ।
अपश्यदेवदेवस्य शरीरे पाण्डवस्तदा ॥ 13 ॥

*tatraika-stham jagat kṛitsnam pravibhaktam anekadhā
apaśhyat deva-devasya śarīre pāṇḍavas tadā*

tatra—there; *eka-stham*—established in one place; *jagat*—the universe; *kṛitsnam*—entire; *pravibhaktam*—divided; *anekadhā*—many; *apaśhyat*—could see; *deva-devasya*—of the Bhagavān of gods; *śarīre*—in the body; *pāṇḍavah*—Arjun; *tadā*—at that time.

There Arjun could see the totality of the entire universe established in one place, in that body of the Bhagavān of gods.

After describing wondrous spectacles in the cosmic form, Sanjay states that it encompassed the entire universe. Even more amazingly, Arjun saw the totality of existence in the locality of Shri Krishna's body. He beheld the entire creation of infinite universes, with their manifold divisions of galaxies and planetary systems in a mere fraction of the body of the Supreme Bhagavān.

During his childhood pastimes, Shri Krishna had also revealed the cosmic form

to his mother, Yashoda. The Supreme Bhagavān had hidden his mystic opulences and was playing the role of a little child for the pleasure of his devotees. Thinking of Shri Krishna as her son, Yashoda chastised him severely one day, for eating mud despite her constant admonitions, and asked him to open his mouth so that she may see what was in it. However, to her immense wonder, when Shri Krishna opened his mouth, he revealed within it a vision of his cosmic form by his *YogMāyā* power. Yashoda was bewildered to see such unlimited wonders in the mouth of her little child. She was so overcome by the spectacle that she came on the verge of swooning, when Shri Krishna touched her and brought her back to normalcy.

The same cosmic form that the Bhagavān revealed to his mother, Yashoda, he is now revealing to his friend, Arjun. *Now, Sanjay describes Arjun's response to the vision of the cosmic form.*

ततः स विस्मयाविष्टो हृष्टरोमा धनञ्जयः ।
प्रणम्य शिरसा देवं कृताञ्जलिरभाषत ॥ १४ ॥

*tataḥ sa vismayāviṣṭo hrīṣṭa-romā dhanañjayah
praṇamya śirasā devam kṛitāñjalir abhāṣata*

tataḥ—then; *sah*—he; *visMāyā-āviṣṭah*—full of wonder; *hrīṣṭa-romā*—with hair standing on end; *dhanañjayah*—Arjun, the conqueror of wealth; *praṇamya*—bow down; *śirasā*—with (his) head; *devam*—the Bhagavān; *kṛita-añjalih*—with folded hands; *abhāṣata*—he addressed.

Then, Arjun, full of wonder and with hair standing on end, bowed his head with folded hands before the Bhagavān and addressed him thus.

Arjun was struck with amazement and deep reverence on seeing that breathtaking spectacle. It struck devotional chords in his heart that evoked paroxysms of delight. The elation experienced through devotional sentiments occasionally finds expression in physical symptoms. The bhakti scriptures describe eight such symptoms, or the *aṣṭha sāttvic bhāv*, that sometimes manifests in devotees when their heart gets thrilled in devotion:

*stambha swedo 'tha romāñchah svarabhedo 'tha vepathuh
 vaivarṇyamaśhru pralaya ityaśhtau sātvikāḥ smṛitāḥ
 (Bhakti Rasāmṛit Sindhu) [v1]*

“Becoming stupefied, sweating, horripilation, choking of the voice, trembling, complexion becoming ashen, shedding tears, and fainting—these are the physical symptoms by which intense love in the heart sometimes manifests.” That is what Arjun experienced as his hair began standing on end. Bowing down in reverence with folded hands, he uttered the words that follow. *What Arjun said is now described in the next seventeen verses.*

अर्जुन उवाच ।
 पश्यामि देवांस्तव देव देहे
 सर्वास्तथा भूतविशेषसङ्घान् ।
 ब्रह्माणमीशं कमलासनस्थ-
 मृषींश्च सर्वानुरगांश्च दिव्यान् ॥ 15 ॥

*arjuna uvācha
 paśhyāmi devāns tava deva dehe
 sarvāns tathā bhūta-viśheṣha-saṅghān
 brahmāṇam īśham kamalāsana-stham
 riśhīnsh cha sarvān uragānsh cha divyān*

arjunah uvācha—Arjun said; *paśhyāmi*—I behold; *devān*—all the gods; *tava*—your; *deva*—Bhagavān; *dehe*—within the body; *sarvān*—all; *tathā*—as well as; *bhūta viśheṣha-saṅghān*—hosts of different beings; *brahmāṇam*—Bhagavān Brahma; *īśham*—Shiv; *kamala-āsana-stham*—seated on the lotus flower; *riśhīn*—sages; *cha*—and; *sarvān*—all; *uragān*—serpents; *cha*—and; *divyān*—divine.

Arjun said: O Shri Krishna, I behold within your body all the gods and hosts of different beings. I see Brahma seated on the lotus flower; I see Shiv, all the sages, and the celestial serpents.

Arjun exclaimed that he was beholding multitudes of beings from all the three worlds, including the gods of the celestial abodes. The words *kamalāsanastham* refer to Bhagavān Brahma, who sits at the lotus whorl of the universe. Bhagavān Shiv, sages like Vishwamitra, and serpents such as Vasuki were all

visible within the cosmic form.

अनेकबाहूदरवक्त्रनेत्रं
पश्यामि त्वां सर्वतोऽनन्तरूपम् ।
नान्तं न मध्यं न पुनस्तवादिं
पश्यामि विश्वेश्वर विश्वरूप ॥ 16 ॥

*aneka-bāhūdara-vaktra-netram
paśhyāmi tvām sarvato 'nanta-rūpam
nāntam na madhyam na punas tavādim
paśhyāmi viśhweśhwara viśhwa-rūpa*

aneka—infinite; *bāhu*—arms; *udara*—stomachs; *vaktra*—faces; *netram*—eyes; *paśhyāmi*—I see; *tvām*—you; *sarvataḥ*—in every direction; *ananta-rūpam*—infinite forms; *na antam*—without end; *na*—not; *madhyam*—middle; *na*—no; *punah*—again; *tava*—your; *ādim*—beginning; *paśhyāmi*—I see; *viśhwa-īśhwara*—The Bhagavān of the universe; *viśhwa-rūpa*—universal form.

I see your infinite form in every direction, with countless arms, stomachs, faces, and eyes. O Bhagavān of the universe, whose form is the universe itself, I do not see in you any beginning, middle, or end.

Arjun uses two vocatives—*viśhweśhwara*, meaning “controller of the universe” and *viśhwarūp*, meaning “universal form.” He implies, “O Shri Krishna, the universe is nothing but your manifestation and you are also its supreme master.” Further, he expresses the vastness of the form he is experiencing, by saying that from whichever angle he looks, Arjun cannot discern any end to his manifestations. When he searches for the beginning, he is unable to find it. When he tries to see its middle, he again gets no success, and when he searches for the end, he can find no limit to the panorama manifesting before him.

किरीटिनं गदिनं चक्रिणं च
तेजोराशिं सर्वतो दीप्तिमन्तम् ।
पश्यामि त्वां दुर्निरीक्ष्यं समन्ताद्
दीप्तानलाक्ष्युतिमप्रमेयम् ॥ 17 ॥

kirīṭinam gadinam chakriṇam cha

*tejo-rāśhim sarvato dīptimantam
 paśhyāmi tvāṁ durnirīkṣhyam samantād
 dīptānalārka-dyutim aprameyam*

krītinam—adroned with a crown; *gadinam*—with club; *chakriṇam*—with discs; *cha*—and; *tejah-rāśhim*—abode of splendor; *sarvataḥ*—everywhere; *dīpti-mantam*—shining; *paśhyāmi*—I see; *tvāṁ*—you; *durnirīkṣhyam*—difficult to look upon; *samantāt*—in all directions; *dīpta-anala*—blazing fire; *arka*—like the sun; *dyutim*—effulgence; *aprameyam*—immeasurable.

I see your form, adorned with a crown, and armed with the club and disc, shining everywhere as the abode of splendor. It is hard to look upon you in the blazing fire of your effulgence, which is radiating like the sun in all directions.

Physical eyes get blinded upon seeing something very bright. The cosmic form before Arjun had a brilliance that exceeded thousands of blazing suns. As the sun dazzles the eyes, the universal form was immensely stunning to the eyes. He was able to behold it only because he had received divine eyes from the Bhagavān.

Within the universal form, Arjun also perceived the four-armed Vishnu form of the Bhagavān, with the four famous emblems—mace, conch, disc, and lotus flower.

**त्वमक्षरं परमं वेदितव्यं
 त्वमस्य विश्वस्य परं निधानम् ।
 त्वमव्ययः शाश्वतधर्मगोप्ता
 सनातनस्त्वं पुरुषो मतो मे ॥ १८ ॥**

*tvam akṣharāṁ paramāṁ veditavyāṁ
 tvam asya viśwasya param nidhānam
 tvam avyayaḥ śāśhvata-dharma-goptā
 sanātanaḥ tvāṁ puruṣo mato me*

tvam—you; *akṣharam*—the imperishable; *paramam*—the supreme being; *veditavyam*—worthy of being known; *tvam*—you; *asya*—of this; *viśwasya*—of the creation; *param*—supreme; *nidhānam*—support; *tvam*—you; *avyayaḥ*—eternal; *śāśhvata-dharma-goptā*—protector of the eternal religion; *sanātanaḥ*—everlasting; *tvam*—you; *puruṣaḥ*—the Supreme Divine Person; *mataḥ me*—my opinion.

I recognize you as the supreme imperishable being, the ultimate truth to be known by the scriptures. You are the support of all creation; you are the eternal protector of *sanātan dharma* (the eternal religion); and you are the everlasting Supreme Divine Personality.

Arjun announced that he recognized the sovereignty of Shri Krishna's position as the Supreme Bhagavān, who is the support of all creation, and who is to be known through all the scriptures. The Kaṭhopaniṣad states:

sarve vedā yat padamāmananti (1.2.15) [v2]

“The aim of all the Vedic mantras is to take us in the direction of Bhagavān. He is the object of the study of the Vedas.” The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam states:

vāsudeva-parā vedā vāsudeva-parā makhāḥ (1.2.28) [v3]

“The goal of cultivating Vedic knowledge is to reach Bhagavān. All sacrifices are also meant for pleasing him.” In his tribute to Shri Krishna, Arjun expressed his realization that the personal form of the Bhagavān, standing before him, was the same supreme absolute truth that is the object of all Vedic knowledge.

अनादिमध्यान्तमनन्तवीर्य-
मनन्तबाहुं शशिसूर्यनेत्रम् ।
पश्यामि त्वां दीप्तहृताशवक्रं-
स्वतेजसा विश्वमिदं तपन्तम् ॥ 19 ॥

*anādi-madhyāntam ananta-vīryam
ananta-bāhum śaśhi-sūrya-netram
paśhyāmi tvām dīpta-hutāśha-vaktram
sva-tejasā viśhwam idam tapantam*

anādi-madhyāntam—without beginning, middle, or end; *ananta*—infinite; *vīryam*—power; *ananta*—unlimited; *bāhum*—arms; *śaśhi*—the moon; *sūrya*—the sun; *netram*—eyes; *paśhyāmi*—I see; *tvām*—you; *dīpta*—blazing; *hutāśha*—emanating from; *vaktram*—your mouth; *sva-tejasā*—by your radiance; *viśhwam*—universe; *idam*—this; *tapantam*—warming.

You are without beginning, middle, or end; your power has no limits. Your

arms are infinite; the sun and the moon are like your eyes, and fire is like your mouth. I see you warming the entire creation by your radiance.

In the sixteenth verse, Arjun had said that the form of the Bhagavān is without beginning, middle, or end. He repeats this after just three verses, out of his excitement over what he is seeing. If a statement is uttered repeatedly in amazement, it is taken as an expression of wonder and not considered a literary flaw. For example, on seeing a snake, one may scream, “Look, a snake! A snake! A snake!” Similarly, Arjun repeats his words in amazement.

Bhagavān is indeed without a beginning and end. That is because space, time, and causation are within him. So he is beyond the measure of their limits. He cannot be encompassed either by space, time, or causation. Further, the sun, moon, and stars receive their energy from the Bhagavān. Thus, it is he who provides warmth to the universe through these entities.

द्यावापृथिव्योरिदमन्तरं हि
व्याप्तं त्वयैकेन दिशश्च सर्वाः ।
दृष्ट्वाद्भुतं रूपमुग्रं तवेदं
लोकत्रयं प्रव्यथितं महात्मन् ॥ 20 ॥

*dyāv ā-prithivyor idam antaram hi
vyāptam tvayaikena diśhaś cha sarvāḥ
dṛiṣṭvādbhutam rūpam ugram tavedaṁ
loka-trayam pravyathitam mahātman*

dyau-ā-prithivyoḥ—between Swarga and earth; *idam*—this; *antaram*—space between; *hi*—indeed; *vyāptam*—pervaded; *tvayā*—by you; *ekena*—alone; *diśhah*—directions; *cha*—and; *sarvāḥ*—all; *dṛiṣṭvā*—seeing; *adbhutam*—wonderous; *rūpam*—form; *ugram*—terrible; *tava*—your; *idam*—this; *loka*—worlds; *trayam*—three; *pravyathitam*—trembling; *mahā-ātman*—The greatest of all beings.

The space between Swarga and earth and all the directions are pervaded by you alone. Seeing your wondrous and terrible form, I see the three worlds trembling in fear, O Greatest of all beings.

Arjun says, “O Omnipresent Bhagavān, you are pervading in all ten directions, the whole earth, the sky above, and the space in-between. All living beings are shuddering in fear of you.” Why should the three worlds shudder before the universal form when they have not even seen it? Arjun implies that everyone is functioning in fear of Bhagavān’s laws. His edicts are in place, and everyone is obliged to submit to them.

karama pradhāna bisva kari rākhā, jo jasa karai so tasa phala chākhā (Ramayana) [v4]

“The world functions according to the law of karma. Whatever we do, we will have to reap the karmic results.” Like the law of karma, there are innumerable laws in existence. Many scientists make a living out of discovering and theorizing the physical laws of nature, but they can never make the laws. Bhagavān is the supreme law-maker, and everyone is subject to the dominion of his laws.

अमी हि त्वां सुरसङ्घा विशन्ति
केचिद्दीताः प्राज्जलयो गृणन्ति ।
स्वस्तीत्युक्त्वा महर्षिसिद्धसङ्घाः
स्तुवन्ति त्वां स्तुतिभिः पुष्कलाभिः ॥२१॥

*amī hi tvām sura-saṅghā viśhanti
kechid bhītāḥ prāñjalayo griṇanti
svastīty uktvā maharṣhi-siddha-saṅghāḥ
stuvanti tvām stutibhiḥ puṣhkalābhīḥ*

amī—these; *hi*—indeed; *tvām*—you; *sura-saṅghāḥ*—assembly of celestial deities; *viśhanti*—are entering; *kechit*—some; *bhītāḥ*—in fear; *prāñjalayah*—with folded hands; *griṇanti*—praise; *svasti*—auspicious; *iti*—thus; *uktvā*—reciting; *mahā-ṛishi*—great sages; *siddha-saṅghāḥ*—perfect beings; *stuvanti*—are extolling; *tvām*—you; *stutibhiḥ*—with prayers; *puṣhkalābhīḥ*—hymns.

All the celestial deities are taking your shelter by entering into you. In awe, some are praising you with folded hands. The great sages and perfected beings are extolling you with auspicious hymns and profuse prayers.

Arjun is seeing here the *kāla rūp* of Shri Krishna, i.e. his form as all-devouring

time. The marching onslaught of time consumes even the greatest of personalities, including the celestial deities. Arjun sees them entering the universal form, with folded hands, in subservience to the *kāla rūp* of Bhagavān. At the same time, he sees the sages and perfected Ātman(s), extolling the Bhagavān with their thoughts, words, and deeds.

रुद्रादित्या वसवो ये च साध्या
विश्वेऽश्विनौ मरुतश्चोष्मपाश्च ।
गन्धर्वयक्षासुरसिद्धसङ्घा
वीक्षन्ते त्वां विस्मिताश्चैव सर्वे ॥ 22 ॥

*rudrādityā vasavo ye cha sādhyā
viśhve 'śhvinau marutash choṣhmapāśh cha
gandharva-yakṣhāsura-siddha-saṅghā
vīkṣhante tvām vismitāśh chaiva sarve*

rudra—a form of Bhagavān Shiv; *ādityāḥ*—the Adityas; *vasavāḥ*—the Vasus; *ye*—these; *cha*—and; *sādhyāḥ*—the Sadhyas; *viśhve*—the Vishvadevas; *aśhvinau*—the Ashvini kumars; *marutah*—the Maruts; *cha*—and; *uṣhma-pāḥ*—the ancestors; *cha*—and; *gandharva*—Gandharvas; *yakṣha*—the Yakshas; *asura*—the Demons; *siddha*—the perfected beings; *saṅghāḥ*—the assemblies; *vīkṣhante*—are beholding; *tvām*—you; *vismitāḥ*—in wonder; *cha*—and; *eva*—verily; *sarve*—all.

The Rudras, Adityas, Vasus, Sadhyas, Vishvadevas, Ashwini Kumars, Maruts, ancestors, Gandharvas, Yakshas, Asuras, and Siddhas are all beholding you in wonder.

All these personalities receive their positions by the power of Bhagavān and they discharge their respective duties in reverence to the laws of creation. Thus, they are all mentioned as beholding the cosmic form of Bhagavān with wonder.

रूपं महत्ते बहुवक्त्रनेत्रं
महाबाहो बहुबाहूरुपादम् ।
बहूदरं बहुदंष्ट्राकरालं
दृष्ट्वा लोकाः प्रव्यथितास्तथाहम् ॥ 23 ॥

*rūpaṁ mahat te bahu-vaktra-netram
mahā-bāho bahu-bāhūru-pādam
bahūdaram bahu-danṣṭrā-karālam
driṣṭvā lokāḥ pravyathitāḥ tathāham*

rūpaṁ—form; *mahat*—magnificent; *te*—your; *bahu*—many; *vaktra*—mouths; *netram*—eyes; *mahā-bāho*—mighty-armed Bhagavān; *bahu*—many; *bāhu*—arms; *ūru*—thighs; *pādam*—legs; *bahu-udaram*—many stomachs; *bahu-danṣṭrā*—many teeth; *karālam*—terrifying; *driṣṭvā*—seeing; *lokāḥ*—all the worlds; *pravyathitāḥ*—terror-stricken; *tathā*—so also; *aham*—I.

O mighty Bhagavān, in veneration of your magnificent form with its many mouths, eyes, arms, thighs, legs, stomachs, and terrifying teeth, all the worlds are terror-stricken, and so am I.

The numerous hands, legs, faces, and stomach of Bhagavān are everywhere.

The Śvetāśvatar Upaniṣad states:

*sahasraśīrṣhā puruṣhaḥ sahasrākṣhaḥ sahasrapāt
sa bhūmīm viśhwato vṛitvātyatiṣṭhaddaśhāṅgulam (3.14) [v5]*

“The Supreme Entity has thousands of heads, thousands of eyes, and thousands of feet. He envelopes the universe, but is transcendental to it. He resides in all humans, about ten fingers above the navel, in the lotus of the heart.” Those who are beholding and those who are being beheld, the terrified and the terrifying, are all within the universal form of the Bhagavān. Again, the Kaṭhopaniṣad states:

*bhayādasyāgnistapati bhayāt tapati sūryaḥ
bhayādindraśhcha vāyuśhcha mṛityurdhāvati pañchamah (2.3.3) [v6]*

“It is from the fear of Bhagavān that the fire burns and the sun shines. It is out of fear of him that the wind blows and Indra causes the rain to fall. Even Yamraj, the deity of death, trembles before him.”

नभःस्पृशं दीप्तमनेकवर्णं
 व्यात्ताननं दीप्तविशालनेत्रम् ।
 दृष्ट्वा हि त्वां प्रव्यथितान्तरात्मा
 धृतिं न विन्दामि शमं च विष्णो ॥ 24 ॥

*nabhaḥ-spriśham dīptam aneka-varṇam
 vyāttānanam dīpta-viśhāla-netram
 driṣṭvā hi tvām pravyathitāntar-Ātman
 dhṛitim na vindāmi śhamam cha viṣhṇo*

nabhaḥ-spriśham—touching the sky; *dīptam*—effulgent; *aneka*—many; *varṇam*—colors; *vyātta*—open; *ānanam*—mouths; *dīpta*—blazing; *viśhāla*—enormous; *netram*—eyes; *driṣṭvā*—seeing; *hi*—indeed; *tvām*—you; *pravyathitāntar-Ātman*—my heart is trembling with fear; *dhṛitim*—firmness; *na*—not; *vindāmi*—I find; *śhamam*—mental peace; *cha*—and; *viṣhṇo*—Bhagavān Vishnu.

O Bhagavān Vishnu, seeing your form touching the sky, effulgent in many colors, with mouths wide open and enormous blazing eyes, my heart is trembling with fear. I have lost all courage and peace of mind.

Seeing the cosmic form of Bhagavān changed the nature of Arjun's relationship with Shri Krishna. Earlier, he had looked upon him as an intimate friend and interacted in a manner befitting a close associate. He was aware in the back of his head that Shri Krishna was Bhagavān, but the love overflowing in his heart would make him forget the almighty aspect of Shri Krishna's personality. All he would remember was that he loved his friend Shri Krishna more than anything in the world.

That is the nature of love. It absorbs the mind so deeply that the devotee forgets the formal position of his Beloved Bhagavān. And if formality is retained, then love is unable to manifest in its fullness. For example, a wife loves her husband deeply. Though he may be the governor of the state, the wife only looks upon him as her husband, and that is how she is able to interact intimately with him. If she keeps this knowledge in her head that her husband is the governor, then each time he comes by, she will be inclined to stand on

her feet and pay a more ceremonial respect for him. So, the knowledge of the official position of the beloved gets immersed in the loving sentiments. The same phenomenon takes place in devotion to Bhagavān.

The cowherds of Braj merely viewed Shri Krishna as their bosom buddy. Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj describes their pastimes with Shri Krishna very sweetly:

*dekho dekho rī, gwāla bālana yārī
rijhavata khela jitāya sakhana ko, ghorā bani bani banawārī*
(*Prem Ras Madirā, Rasiyā Mādhuri*, Pada 7) [v7]

“Look at the sweetness of the loving interactions between Shri Krishna and his cowherd friends! They play games together, and when Shri Krishna loses the game, he becomes a horse by sitting on all fours and his friend rides on his back.” If the cowherd friends remembered that Shri Krishna was Bhagavān, they would never have the gumption to do such a thing. And the Bhagavān too relishes the intimacy of such interactions with his devotees in which they relate with him as a dear friend.

Shri Krishna enacted the famous Goverdhan *leela* pastime upon the earth, in which he lifted the Goverdhan Hill on the little finger of his left hand, to protect the residents of the land of Braj from the rain caused by Indra, the king of Swarga and the celestial deity of rain. However, Krishna’s little cowherd associates were not impressed. In their eyes, Krishna was merely a loveable friend, and so they did not believe he could lift the hill. Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj states in continuation to the verse above:

nakha dhāryo goverdhana-giri jaba, sakhana kahyo hama giridhārī
(*Prem Ras Madirā, Rasiyā Mādhuri*, Pada 7) [v8]

“When Shri Krishna lifted the Goverdhan Hill, his cowherd friends applied their sticks to the bottom of the hill, thinking that they were the actual lifters of the hill.” At the end, Indra accepted defeat and came seated on his white

elephant. He apologized for having sent the torrential rain, without realizing Shri Krishna's supreme position.

Now, when the cowherd boys saw Indra, the King of Swarga Loka, coming and offering obeisance to their friend Krishna, they realized that Krishna is Bhagavān. So, they began looking at him fearfully from a distance. Seeing their devotional sentiment change from friendship to awe and reverence, Shri Krishna lamented, "That loving exchange we were enjoying has vanished. They are now thinking I am Bhagavān." So by his *YogMāyā* power, he made them forget the significance of what they had seen, and they again felt that Shri Krishna was nothing more than their friend.

Arjun was also a devotee of Shri Krishna in *sakhya bhāv*. He was used to relating to Shri Krishna as his friend. That is why he had agreed to having Shri Krishna as his chariot driver. If his devotion had been motivated by the fact that Shri Krishna was the Supreme Bhagavān of all creation, Arjun would never have allowed him to do such a demeaning service. But now, seeing his infinite splendor and inconceivable opulences, his fraternal sentiment toward Shri Krishna was replaced by fear.

दंष्ट्राकरालानि च ते मुखानि
दृश्वैव कालानलसन्निभानि ।
दिशो न जाने न लभे च शर्म
प्रसीद देवेश जगन्निवास ॥ 25 ॥

*danṣṭrā-karālāni cha te mukhāni
dṛiṣṭvaiva kālānala-sannibhāni
diśho na jāne na labhe cha śharma
prasīda deveśha jagat-nivāsa*

danṣṭrā—teeth; *karālāni*—terrible; *cha*—and; *te*—your; *mukhāni*—mouths; *dṛiṣṭvā*—having seen; *eva*—indeed; *kāla-anala*—the fire of annihilation; *sannibhāni*—resembling; *diśhāḥ*—the directions; *na*—not; *jāne*—know; *na*—not; *labhe*—I obtain; *cha*—and; *śharma*—peace; *prasīda*—have mercy; *deva-iśha*—The Bhagavān of gods; *jagat-nivāsa*—The shelter of the universe.

Having seen your many mouths bearing your terrible teeth, resembling the raging fire at the time of annihilation, I forget where I am and do not know where to go. O Bhagavān of gods, you are the shelter of the universe; please have mercy on me.

The universal form that Arjun beholds is just another aspect of Shri Krishna's personality and is non-different from him. And yet, the vision of it has dried up the camaraderie that Arjun was previously experiencing toward Shri Krishna, and he is overcome with fear. Seeing the many wondrous and amazingly frightful manifestations of the Bhagavān, Arjun is now scared, and thinks that Shri Krishna is angry with him. So he asks for mercy.

अमी च त्वां धृतराष्ट्रस्य पुत्राः
 सर्वे सहैवावनिपालसङ्घैः ।
 भीष्मो द्रोणः सूतपुत्रस्तथासौ
 सहास्मदीयैरपि योधमुख्यैः ॥ 26 ॥

 वक्त्राणि ते त्वरमाणा विशन्ति
 दंष्ट्राकरालानि भयानकानि ।
 केचिद्विलग्ना दशनान्तरेषु
 सन्दृश्यन्ते चूर्णितैरुत्तमाङ्गैः ॥ 27 ॥

*amī cha tvām dhṛitarāśhrasya putrāḥ
 sarve sahaivāvani-pāla-saṅghaiḥ
 bhīṣhmaḥ dronāḥ sūta-putras tathāsau
 sahāsmadīyair api yodha-mukhyaiḥ*

*vaktrāṇi te tvaramāṇā viśhanti
 danṣṭrā-karālāni bhayānakāni
 kechid vilagnā daśhanāntareṣhu
 sandriśhyante chūrṇitair uttamāṅgaiḥ*

amī—these; cha—and; tvām—you; dhṛitarāśhrasya—of Dhritarashtra; putrāḥ—sons; sarve—all; saha—with; eva—even; avani-pāla—their allied kings; saṅghaiḥ—assembly; bhīṣhmaḥ—Bheeshma; dronāḥ—Dronacharya; sūta-putraḥ—Karna; tathā—and also; asau—this; saha—with; asmadīyaiḥ—from our side; api—also; yodha-mukhyaiḥ—generals; vaktrāṇi—mouths; te—your; tvaramāṇāḥ—rushing; viśhanti—enter; danṣṭrā—teeth; karālāni—terrible; bhayānakāni—

fearsome; *kechit*—some; *vilagnāḥ*—getting stuck; *daśhana-antareṣhu*—between the teeth; *sandṛiśhyante*—are seen; *chūrṇitaiḥ*—getting smashed; *uttama-aṅgaiḥ*—heads.

I see all the sons of Dhritarashtra, along with their allied kings, including Bheeshma, Dronacharya, Karn, and also the generals from our side, rushing headlong into your fearsome mouths. I see some with their heads smashed between your terrible teeth.

What are the teeth of Bhagavān that Arjun is referring to? He mentioned them in the previous verse as well. We use our teeth to grind our food. Bhagavān's teeth are his force of destruction that grinds everyone to death with the passage of time. The American poet, H.W. Longfellow wrote:

*Though the mills of Bhagavān grind slowly,
Yet they grind exceeding small;
Though with patience he stands waiting,
With exactness grinds he all. [v9]*

Arjun sees the great Kaurava generals—Bheeshma, Dronacharya, and Karn—and also many of the Pandava generals rushing headlong into the mouth of the Bhagavān, to be ground between his teeth. He is beholding the imminent future in the cosmic form of Bhagavān. Since Bhagavān is beyond the limits of time, so the past, present, and future are visible within him in the present.

Bheeshma, the grandsire of the Kauravas and the Pandavas, was the son of Shantanu and Ganga. To facilitate his father's wish for remarriage, Bheeshma renounced his right to the throne, and also took a lifelong vow of celibacy. However, Bheeshma had continued to support Duryodhan, despite knowing very well that he was evil and was usurping the right of the Pandavas. Thus, he was destined to die in this war of goodness versus evil. The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam describes Bheeshma's prayer to the Bhagavān, when he lay on the bed of arrows at the end of his life:

*sapadi sakhi-vacho niśhamya madhye nija-parayor balayo rathāṁ niveśhya
sthitavati para-sainikāyur akṣhṇā hrītavati pārtha-sakhe ratir mamāstu (1.9.35) [v10]*

“Let my mind meditate upon Arjun’s dear pal, Shri Krishna, who obeyed his friend’s command to drive the chariot to the center of the two armies, and while there, he shortened the lifespan of the opposing generals by his mere glance.” So, Bheeshma himself was aware that the consequence of fighting against the Supreme Bhagavān Shri Krishna would be death.

Dronacharya was the guru of martial arts for both the Kauravas and the Pandavas. He was so impartial that he taught more about military science to Arjun than even to his son, Ashwatthama. However, he felt obliged to help Duryodhan because he was financially dependent upon him for his maintenance. Thus, Dronacharya too was destined to die in the war. Yet, his heroism could be judged from the fact that when the Pandavas were unable to slay him by any means and approached him for help, he told them the way in which he could be killed.

Karn was the bosom friend of Duryodhan and so he fought from the side of the Kauravas. He too had heroic qualities. When Shri Krishna disclosed to him he was the eldest son of Kunti and the Pandavas were actually his brothers, he asked Shri Krishna not to disclose this secret to Yudhisthir, or else he would stop trying to kill Karn and would lose the war. Since Karn had taken the side of Duryodhan in the war, he too was destined to die.

यथा नदीनां बहवोऽम्बुवेगाः
समुद्रमेवाभिमुखा द्रवन्ति ।
तथा तवामी नरलोकवीरा
विशन्ति वक्त्राण्यभिविज्वलन्ति ॥ 28 ॥

यथा प्रदीप्तं ज्वलनं पतङ्गा
विशन्ति नाशाय समृद्धवेगाः ।
तथैव नाशाय विशन्ति लोका-
स्तवापि वक्त्राणि समृद्धवेगाः ॥ 29 ॥

*yathā nadīnām bahavo 'mbu-vegāḥ
 samudram evābhīmukhā dravanti
 tathā tavāmī nara-loka-vīrā
 viśhanti vaktrāṇy abhivijvalanti*

*yathā pradīptam jvalanam pataṅgā
 viśhanti nāśhāya samṛiddha-vegāḥ
 tathaiva nāśhāya viśhanti lokāḥ
 tavāpi vaktrāṇi samṛiddha-vegāḥ*

yathā—as; *nadīnām*—of the rivers; *bahavaḥ*—many; *ambu-vegāḥ*—water waves; *samudram*—the ocean; *eva*—indeed; *abhimukhāḥ*—toward; *dravanti*—flowing rapidly; *tathā*—similarly; *tava*—your; *amī*—these; *nara-loka-vīrāḥ*—kings of human society; *viśhanti*—enter; *vaktrāṇi*—mouths; *abhivijvalanti*—blazing; *yathā*—as; *pradīptam*—blazing; *jvalanam*—fire; *pataṅgāḥ*—moths; *viśhanti*—enter; *nāśhāya*—to be perished; *samṛiddha vegāḥ*—with great speed; *tathā eva*—similarly; *nāśhāya*—to be perished; *viśhanti*—enter; *lokāḥ*—these people; *tava*—your; *api*—also; *vaktrāṇi*—mouths; *samṛiddha-vegāḥ*—with great speed.

As many waves of the rivers flowing rapidly into the ocean, so are all these great warriors entering into your blazing mouths. As moths rush with great speed into the fire to perish, so are all these armies entering with great speed into your mouths.

There were many noble kings and warriors in the war, who fought as their duty and laid down their lives on the battlefield. Arjun compares them to river waves willingly merging into the ocean. There were also many others, who fought out of greed and self-interest. Arjun compares them with moths being lured ignorantly into the incinerating fire. But in both cases, they are marching rapidly toward their imminent death.

लेलिह्यसे ग्रसमानः समन्ता-
 ल्लोकान्समग्रान्वदनैर्ज्वलद्धिः ।
 तेजोभिरापूर्य जगत्समग्रं
 भासस्तवोग्राः प्रतपन्ति विष्णो ॥ 30 ॥

*lelihyase grasamānah samantāl
 lokān samagrān vadanair jvaladbhiḥ
 tejobhir āpūrya jagat samagram
 bhāsas tavogrāḥ pratapanti viṣhṇo*

lelihyase—you are licking; *grasamānah*—devouring; *samantāt*—on all sides; *lokān*—worlds; *samagrān*—all; *vadanaiḥ*—with mouths; *jvaladbhiḥ*—blazing; *tejobhiḥ*—by effulgence; *āpūrya*—filled with; *jagat*—the universe; *samagram*—all; *bhāsaḥ*—rays; *tava*—your; *ugrāḥ*—fierce; *pratapanti*—scorching; *vishno*—Bhagavān Vishnu.

With your fiery tongues you are licking up the hosts of living beings on all sides and devouring them with your blazing mouths. O Vishnu, you are scorching the entire universe with the fierce, all-pervading rays of your effulgence.

The Bhagavān controls the world with grandiose forces of creation, maintenance, and annihilation. At present, he is being perceived by Arjun in this mode as the all-devouring force that is engulfing his friends and allies from all sides. Viewing the apparition of future destined events in the cosmic form of Bhagavān, Arjun sees his enemies being wiped out in the imminent battle. He also sees many of his allies in the grip of death. *Petrified by the spectacle he is seeing, Arjun supplicates before Shri Krishna in the next verse.*

आख्याहि मे को भवानुग्ररूपे
नमोऽस्तु ते देववर प्रसीद ।
विज्ञातुमिच्छामि भवन्तमाद्यं
न हि प्रजानामि तव प्रवृत्तिम् ॥३१॥

*ākhyāhi me ko bhavān ugra-rūpo
namo 'stu te deva-vara prasīda
vijñātum ichchhāmi bhavantam ādyam
na hi prajānāmi tava pravṛittim*

ākhyāhi—tell; *me*—me; *kah*—who; *bhavān*—you; *ugra-rūpaḥ*—fierce form; *namaḥ astu*—I bow; *te*—to you; *deva-vara*—Bhagavān of gods; *prasīda*—be merciful; *vijñātum*—to know; *ichchhāmi*—I wish; *bhavantam*—you; *ādyam*—the primeval; *na*—not; *hi*—because; *prajānāmi*—comprehend; *tava*—your; *pravṛittim*—workings.

Tell me who you are, so fierce of form. O Bhagavān of gods, I bow before you; please bestow your mercy on me. You, who existed before all creation, I wish to know who you are, for I do not comprehend your nature and

workings.

Earlier, Arjun had requested to see the universal form. When Shri Krishna exhibited it, Arjun became bewildered and agitated. Having witnessed an almost unbelievable cosmic spectacle, he now wants to know the very heart of Bhagavān's nature and purpose. Hence, he asks the question, "Who are you and what is your purpose?"

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
कालोऽस्मि लोकक्षयकृत्प्रवृद्धो
लोकान्समाहर्तुमिह प्रवृत्तः ।
ऋतेऽपि त्वां न भविष्यन्ति सर्वे
येऽवस्थिताः प्रत्यनीकेषु योथाः ॥ 32 ॥

*śhrī-bhagavān uvācha
kālo 'smi loka-kṣhaya-kṛit pravṛiddho
lokān samāhartum iha pravṛittah
rite 'pi tvām na bhaviṣyanti sarve
ye 'vasthitāḥ pratyanīkeśhu yodhāḥ*

śhrī-bhagavān uvācha—Bhagavān Krishna said; *kālah*—time; *asmi*—I am; *loka-kṣhaya-kṛit*—the source of destruction of the worlds; *pravṛiddhaḥ*—mighty; *lokān*—the worlds; *samāhartum*—annihilation; *iha*—this world; *pravṛittah*—participation; *rite*—without; *api*—even; *tvām*—you; *na bhaviṣyanti*—shall cease to exist; *sarve*—all; *ye*—who; *avasthitāḥ*—arrayed; *prati-anīkeśhu*—in the opposing army; *yodhāḥ*—the warriors.

Bhagavān Krishna said: I am mighty Time, the source of destruction that comes forth to annihilate the worlds. Even without your participation, the warriors arrayed in the opposing army shall cease to exist.

In response to Arjun's question regarding who he is, Shri Krishna reveals his nature as all-powerful Time, the destroyer of the universe. The word *kāla* is derived from *kalayati*, which is synonymous with *gaṇayati*, meaning "to take count of." All events in nature get buried in time. When Oppenheimer, who was a part of the first atom bomb project, witnessed the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, he quoted this verse of Shri Krishna in the following

manner: “Time...I am the destroyer of all the worlds.” Time counts and controls the lifespan of all beings. It will determine when the great personalities like Bheeshma, Dronacharya, and Karn will meet their end. It will destroy the enemy army arrayed on the battlefield even without Arjun’s participating in the fight, because the Bhagavān wants it to happen as a part of his grand scheme for the world. *If the warriors are already as good as dead, then why should Arjun fight? Shri Krishna explains this in the next verse.*

तस्मात्वमुत्तिष्ठ यशो लभस्व
जित्वा शत्रून्भुद्धक्ष्व राज्यं समृद्धम् ।
मयैवैते निहताः पूर्वमेव
निमित्तमात्रं भव सव्यसाचिन् ॥ 33 ॥

*tasmāt tvam uttiṣṭha yaśho labhasva
jītvā śatrūn bhūnkhṣvā rājyam samṛiddham
Māyāivaite nihatāḥ pūrvam eva
nimitta-mātram bhava savya-sāchin*

tasmāt—therefore; *tvam*—you; *uttiṣṭha*—arise; *yaśhaḥ*—honor; *labhasva*—attain; *jītvā*—conquer; *śatrūn*—foes; *bhūnkhṣvā*—enjoy; *rājyam*—kingdom; *samṛiddham*—prosperous; *māyā*—by me; *eva*—indeed; *ete*—these; *nihatāḥ*—slain; *pūrvam*—already; *eva nimitta-mātram*—only an instrument; *bhava*—become; *savya-sāchin*—Arjun, the one who can shoot arrows with both hands .

Therefore, arise and attain honor! Conquer your foes and enjoy prosperous rulership. These warriors stand already slain by me, and you will only be an instrument of my work, O expert archer.

Shri Krishna has revealed to Arjun his will that the Kauravas should perish and the kingdom of Hastinapur should be administered by the Pandavas in accordance with rules of dharma. He has already decided the annihilation of the unrighteous and the victory of the righteous as the outcome of the battle. His grand scheme for the welfare of the world cannot be averted by any means. He now informs Arjun that he wishes him to be the *nimitta-mātram*, or the instrument of his work. Bhagavān does not need the help of a human for his

work, but humans attain eternal welfare by working to fulfill Bhagavān's wish. Opportunities that come our way to accomplish something for the pleasure of the Bhagavān are a very special blessing. It is by taking these opportunities that we attract his special grace, and achieve our permanent position as the servant of Bhagavān.

Shri Krishna also encourages Arjun to be his instrument by reminding him of the exceptional skills he has received in the art of archery by his grace. Hence, he addresses him with the vocative *savya-sāchin*, meaning expert archer, since Arjun is admirably ambidextrous and is able to discharge arrows with either hand.

द्रोणं च भीष्मं च जयद्रथं च
कर्णं तथान्यानपि योधवीरान् ।
मया हतांस्त्वं जहि मा व्यथिष्ठा
युध्यस्व जेतासि रणे सपत्नान् ॥ ३४ ॥

*droṇam cha bhīṣmam cha jayadratham cha
karṇam tathānyān api yodha-vīrān
mayā hatāṁs tvam jahi mā vyathiṣṭhā
yudhyasva jetā asi rāne sapatnān*

dronam—Dronacharya; *cha*—and; *bhīṣmam*—Bheeshma; *cha*—and; *jayadratham*—Jayadratha; *cha*—and; *karṇam*—Karn; *tathā*—also; *anyān*—others; *api*—also; *yodha-vīrān*—brave warriors; *mayā*—by me; *hatāṁs*—already killed; *tvam*—you; *jahi*—slay; *mā*—not; *vyathiṣṭhāḥ*—be disturbed; *yudhyasva*—fight; *jetā asi*—you shall be victorious; *rāne*—in battle; *sapatnān*—enemies.

Dronacharya, Bheeshma, Jayadratha, Karn, and other brave warriors have already been killed by me. So slay them without being disturbed. Just fight and you will be victorious over your enemies in battle.

Many of the generals on the side of the Kauravas were heretofore undefeated in combat. Jayadrath had the boon that whoever caused his head to fall on the ground would instantly have his own head burst into pieces. Karn had a special weapon called “*Śakti*” given to him by Indra, which would slay anyone against

whom it was used. But it could only be used once, and so Karn had kept it to take vengeance on Arjun. Dronacharya had received the knowledge of all weapons and how to neutralize them from Parshuram, who was an *Avatār* of Bhagavān. Bheeshma had a boon that he would only die when he chose to do so. And yet, if Bhagavān wished them to die in the battle, then nothing could save them. There is a saying:

*vindhya na īndhana pāiye, sāgara judai na nīra
parai upas kuber ghara, jyon̄ vipakṣha raghubīra [v11]*

“If Bhagavān Ram decides to be against you, then you may live in the Vindhya forest, but you will not be able to get firewood to light a fire; you may be by the side of the ocean, but water will be scarce for your usage; and you may live in the house of Kuber, the deity of wealth, but you will not have enough to eat.” Thus, even the biggest arrangements for security cannot avert a person’s death if Bhagavān has willed it to happen. Similarly, Shri Krishna says that he has already decided the outcome, but he wishes Arjun to be the medium to accomplish it and receive the glory of the conquest as a reward for his agency. Just as devotees wish to glorify Bhagavān, it is Bhagavān’s nature to glorify his devotees. Hence, Shri Krishna does not wish the credit to come to him; he wishes people to say after the war, “Arjun fought so valiantly that he secured victory for the Pandavas.”

In spiritual life too, aspirants often become discouraged when they find themselves incapable of removing the defects of anger, greed, envy, lust, pride, etc. Their Guru then encourages them, “Do not be dejected. Fight and you will conquer the enemies of your mind because Bhagavān wants you to succeed. Your effort will be instrumental, while Bhagavān will fashion your victory by his grace.”

What was Arjun’s reaction upon hearing the Bhagavān’s call to action? This is stated in the next verse.

सञ्जय उवाच ।
एतच्छ्रुत्वा वचनं केशवस्य
कृताञ्जलिर्वेपमानः किरीटी ।
नमस्कृत्वा भूय एवाह कृष्णं
सगददं भीतभीतः प्रणाम्य ॥ 35 ॥

*sañjaya uvācha
etach chhrutvā vachanam keśhavasya
kṛitāñjalir vepamānah kirīṭī
namaskṛitvā bhūya evāha kṛiṣṇam
sa-gadgadam bhīta-bhītah pranamya*

sañjayaḥ uvācha—Sanjay said; *etat*—thus; *śhrutvā*—hearing; *vachanam*—words; *keśhavasya*—of Shri Krishna; *kṛita-añjalih*—with joined palms; *vepamānah*—trembling; *kirīṭī*—the crowned one, Arjun; *namaskṛitvā*—with palms joined; *bhūyah*—again; *eva*—indeed; *āha*—spoke; *kṛiṣṇam*—to Shri Krishna; *sa-gadgadam*—in a faltering voice; *bhīta-bhītah*—overwhelmed with fear; *pranamya*—bowed down.

Sanjay said: Hearing these words of Keshav, Arjun trembled with dread. With palms joined, he bowed before Shri Krishna and spoke in a faltering voice, overwhelmed with fear.

Here, Arjun is referred to as “the crowned one.” He had once helped Indra kill two Demons. As a token of his pleasure, Indra had placed a dazzling crown on his head. In this verse, Sanjay refers to the crown on Arjun’s head. But a crown is also the symbol of monarchy, and Sanjay deliberately uses the word to hint to the old king Dhritarashtra that his sons, the Kauravas, will lose the throne to the Pandavas in the impending war.

अर्जुन उवाच ।
स्थाने हृषीकेश तव प्रकीर्त्या
जगत्प्रहृष्टत्यनुरज्यते च ।
रक्षांसि भीतानि दिशो द्रवन्ति
सर्वे नमस्यन्ति च सिद्धसङ्घाः ॥ 36 ॥

arjuna uvācha

*sthāne hrishīkeśha tava prakīrtyā
 jagat prahṛiṣhyaty anurajyate cha
 rakṣhānsi bhūtāni diśho dravanti
 sarve namasyanti cha siddha-saṅghāḥ*

arjunaḥ uvācha—Arjun said; *sthāne*—it is but apt; *hrishīka-īśha*—Shri Krishna, the master of the senses; *tava*—your; *prakīrtyā*—in praise; *jagat*—the universe; *prahṛiṣhyati*—rejoices; *anurajyate*—rejoices; *cha*—and; *rakṣhānsi*—the Demons; *bhūtāni*—fearfully; *diśhāḥ*—in all directions; *dravanti*—flee; *sarve*—all; *namasyanti*—bow down; *cha*—and; *siddha-saṅghāḥ*—hosts of perfected saints.

Arjun said: O Master of the senses, it is but apt that the universe rejoices in giving you praise. Demons flee fearfully from you in all directions and the hosts of perfected saints bow to you.

In this verse and the next ten, Arjun eulogizes Shri Krishna's glories from various perspectives. He uses the word *sthāne*, meaning “it is but apt.” It is but natural that the people of a kingdom who accept the sovereignty of their king delight in glorifying him. It is also natural that those who harbor enmity toward the king fear him and flee from his presence. And it is natural for the king's retinue of ministers to be deeply devoted to him. Arjun draws a parallel to this, saying that it is only appropriate that the world glorifies their Supreme Bhagavān, the Demons become frightened of him, and the saintly personalities offer devotional prayers to him.

कस्माच्च ते न नमेरन्महात्मन्
 गरीयसे ब्रह्मणोऽप्यादिकर्त्रे ।
 अनन्त देवेश जगन्निवास
 त्वमक्षरं सदसत्तत्परं यत् ॥ 37 ॥

*kasmāch cha te na nameran mahā-ātman
 garīyase brahmaṇo 'py ādi-kartre
 ananta deveśha jagan-nivāsa
 tvam akṣharam sad-asat tat paraṁ yat*

kasmāt—why; *cha*—and; *te*—you; *na nameran*—should they not bow down; *mahā-ātman*—The Great one; *garīyase*—who are greater; *brahmaṇah*—than Brahma; *api*—even; *ādi-kartre*—to the original creator; *ananta*—The limitless One; *deva-īśha*—Bhagavān of the *devatās*; *jagat-nivāsa*—Refuge of the universe; *tvam*—you; *akṣharam*—the imperishable; *sat-asat*—manifest and non-

manifest; *tat*—that; *param*—beyond; *yat*—which.

O Great one, who are even greater than Brahma, the original creator, why should they not bow to you? O limitless One, O Bhagavān of the *devatās*, O Refuge of the universe, you are the imperishable reality beyond both the manifest and the non-manifest.

Justifying in four verses why the behavior mentioned in the previous verse is apt, Arjun uses the words *kasmāchcha tena*, meaning “why should they not.” Why shouldn’t all living beings offer their humble respects to the Supreme Bhagavān, when the entire creation emanates from him, is sustained by him, and shall merge back into him? He is everything that is manifest in creation because it is all his energy. He is also everything that remains unmanifest because it is his latent energy. And yet he is beyond both the manifest and the unmanifest because he is the Supreme Energetic—the source and Supreme Master of all the energies. Hence, neither the material energy nor the Ātman(s) can ever do anything to impact his personality, which is transcendental to both.

Arjun specifically mentions that Shri Krishna is greater than the secondary creator Brahma because Brahma is the senior most in the universe. All living beings are either Brahma’s progeny, or the descendants of his progeny. However, Brahma himself was born from a lotus that grew from the navel of Bhagavān Vishnu, who is an expansion of Shri Krishna. Thus, while Brahma is considered as the senior most grandsire of the world, Shri Krishna is Brahma’s Grandsire. It is thus apt that Brahma should bow to him.

त्वमादिदेवः पुरुषः पुराण-
स्त्वमस्य विश्वस्य परं निधानम् ।
वेत्तासि वेद्यं च परं च धाम
त्वया ततं विश्वमनन्तरूप ॥ 38 ॥

*tvam ādi-devah puruṣah purānas
 tvam asya viśhwasya param nidhānam
 vettāsi vedyam cha param cha dhāma
 tvayā tataṁ viśhwam ananta-rūpa*

tvam—you; *ādi-devah*—the original Divine Bhagavān; *puruṣah*—personality; *purānas*—primeval; *tvam*—you; *asya*—of (this); *viśhwasya*—universe; *param*—Supreme; *nidhānam*—resting place; *vettā*—the knower; *asi*—you are; *vedyam*—the object of knowledge; *cha*—and; *param*—Supreme; *cha*—and; *dhāma*—Abode; *tvayā*—by you; *tataṁ*—pervaded; *viśhwam*—the universe; *ananta-rūpa*—possessor of infinite forms.

You are the primeval Bhagavān and the original Divine Personality; you are the sole resting place of this universe. You are both the knower and the object of knowledge; you are the Supreme Abode. O possessor of infinite forms, you alone pervade the entire universe.

Arjun addresses Shri Krishna as the original Divine Person, the cause of all causes. Every object and every personality has a cause, or a source, from which it came into being. Even Bhagavān Vishnu has a cause. Although he is also a form of Bhagavān, he is an expansion of Shri Krishna. However, Shri Krishna is not the expansion of any personality. He is the causeless first cause of everything that exists. Hence, Brahma prays to him:

*īśwarah paramah kṛiṣhaṇah sachchidānanda vigrahaḥ
 anādirādi govindaḥ sarva kāraṇa kāraṇam (Brahma Samhitā 5.1) [v12]*

“Shri Krishna is the original form of the Supreme Bhagavān. His personality is full of knowledge and Bliss. He is the origin of all, but he is without origin. He is the cause of all causes.”

Shri Krishna is omniscient—the knower of everything. Further, he is also the object of all knowledge. The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (4.29.49) states: *sā vidyā tanmatir yayā [v13]* “True knowledge is that which helps us know Bhagavān.” Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj states:

*jo hari sevā hetu ho, soī karm bakhān
 jo hari bhagati barhāve, soī samujhiya jñāna (Bhakti Śhatak verse 66) [v14]*

“Whatever work is done in the service of Bhagavān, know that truly to be *karm*. Whatever knowledge enhances our love for Bhagavān, know that to be true *jñāna*.” Hence, Shri Krishna is both the knower and the object of knowledge.

वायुर्यमोऽग्निर्वरुणः शशाङ्कः
प्रजापतिस्त्वं प्रपितामहश्च ।
नमो नमस्तेऽस्तु सहस्रकृत्वः
पुनश्च भूयोऽपि नमो नमस्ते ॥ 39 ॥

*vāyur yamo 'gnir varunah śaśhāṅkah
prajāpatiḥ tvam prapitāmahaś cha
namo namas te 'stu sahasra-kṛitvah
punaścha bhūyio 'pi namo namas te*

vāyuh—the deity of wind; *yamah*—the deity of death; *agnih*—the deity of fire; *varunah*—the deity of water; *śaśha-aṅkah*—the moon-deity; *prajāpatih*—Brahma; *tvam*—you; *prapitāmahaś*—the great-grandfather; *cha*—and; *namah*—my salutations; *namah*—my salutations; *te*—unto you; *astu*—let there be; *sahasra-kṛitvah*—a thousand times; *punah cha*—and again; *bhūyah*—again; *api*—also; *namah*—(offering) my salutations; *namah te*—offering my salutaions unto you.

You are *Vāyu* (the deity of wind), *Yamraj* (the deity of death), *Agni* (the deity of fire), *Varun* (the deity of water), and *Chandra* (the moon-deity). You are the creator Brahma, and the great-grandfather of all beings. I offer my salutations unto you a thousand times, again and yet again!

Experiencing profuse reverence toward Shri Krishna, Arjun is offering repeated obeisances *sahasra-kṛitvah* (thousands and thousands of times). During Diwali celebrations in India, sugar sweets are made in many shapes—elephant, horse, man, woman, dog, etc. But the ingredient in all of them is the same sugar. Similarly, the celestial deities have their distinct personalities and unique set of duties to discharge in the administration of the world. However, the same one Bhagavān sitting in all of them manifests the special powers they possess.

Consider another example. Varieties of ornaments are made from gold. They all have their distinct individuality, and yet they are all gold. So, just as gold is

not an ornament, but ornaments are golden, likewise Bhagavān is all the *devatās* but the *devatās* are not Bhagavān. Hence, in this verse, Arjun says that Shri Krishna is also *Vāyu*, *Yamrāj*, *Agni*, *Varuṇ*, *Chandra*, and Brahma.

नमः पुरस्तादथ पृष्ठतस्ते
नमोऽस्तु ते सर्वत एव सर्वं ।
अनन्तवीर्यामितविक्रमस्त्वं
सर्वं समाप्नोषि ततोऽसि सर्वः ॥ 40 ॥

*namah purastād atha pṛishṭhatas te
namo 'stu te sarvata eva sarva
ananta-vīryāmita-vikramas tvam
sarvam samāpnoshi tato 'si sarvah*

namah—offering salutations; *purastāt*—from the front; *atha*—and; *pṛishṭhatas*—the rear; *te*—to you; *namah astu*—I offer my salutations; *te*—to you; *sarvataḥ*—from all sides; *eva*—indeed; *sarva*—all; *ananta-vīrya*—infinite power; *amita-vikramah*—infinite valor and might; *tvam*—you; *sarvam*—everything; *samāpnoshi*—pervade; *tataḥ*—thus; *asi*—(you) are; *sarvah*—everything.

O Bhagavān of infinite power, my salutations to you from the front and the rear, indeed from all sides! You possess infinite valor and might and pervade everything, and thus, you are everything.

Arjun continues with his glorification of Shri Krishna by declaring him as *ananta-vīrya* (possessing infinite strength) and *ananta-vikramah* (immeasurably powerful). Overcome with awe, he offers his salutations to Shri Krishna from all sides, repeatedly exclaiming *Namah! Namah!* (I bow down to you again and again).

सखेति मत्वा प्रसभं यदुक्तं
हे कृष्ण हे यादव हे सखेति ।
अजानता महिमानं तवेदं
मया प्रमादात्प्रणयेन वापि ॥ 41 ॥

यच्चावहासार्थमसत्कृतोऽसि
विहारशश्यासनभोजनेषु ।
एकोऽथवाप्यच्युत तत्समक्षं
तत्क्षामये त्वामहमप्रमेयम् ॥ 42 ॥

*sakheti matvā prasabham yad uktam
he kriṣṇa he yādava he sakheti
ajānatā mahimānam tavedam
mayā pramādāt praṇayena vāpi*

*yach chāvahāsārtham asat-kṛito 'si
vihāra-śhayyāsana-bhojaneṣhu
eko 'tha vāpy achyuta tat-samakṣham
tat kṣhāmaye tvām aham aprameyam*

sakhā—friend; *iti*—as; *matvā*—thinking; *prasabham*—presumptuously; *yat*—whatever; *uktam*—addressed; *he kriṣṇa*—O Shri Krishna; *he yādava*—O Shri Krishna, who was born in the Yadu clan; *he sakhe*—O my dear mate; *iti*—thus; *ajānatā*—in ignorance; *mahimānam*—majesty; *tava*—your; *idam*—this; *mayā*—by me; *pramādāt*—out of negligence; *praṇayena*—out of affection; *vā api*—or else; *yat*—whatever; *cha*—also; *avahāsa-artham*—humorously; *asat-kṛitah*—disrespectfully; *asi*—you were; *vihāra*—while at play; *śhayyā*—while resting; *āsana*—while sitting; *bhojaneṣhu*—while eating; *ekah*—(when) alone; *athavā*—or; *api*—even; *achyuta*—Krishna, the infallible one; *tat-samakṣham*—before others; *tat*—all that; *kṣhāmaye*—beg for forgiveness; *tvām*—from you; *aham*—I; *aprameyam*—immeasurable.

Thinking of you as my friend, I presumptuously addressed you as, “O Krishna,” “O Yadav,” “O my dear mate.” I was ignorant of your majesty, showing negligence and undue affection. And if, jestfully, I treated you with disrespect, while playing, resting, sitting, eating, when alone, or before others—for all that I crave forgiveness.

Declaring the unparalleled supremacy of Bhagavān, all the scriptures state:

aham evāsam evāgre nānyat kiñchāntaram bahiḥ (Bhāgavatam 6.4.47) [v15]

“I, the Supreme Bhagavān, am everything that exists. There is nothing beyond me and nothing higher than me.”

tvamomkāraḥ parātparāḥ (Vālmīki Ramayana) [v16]

“The primordial sound “Om” is your manifestation. You are greater than the greatest.”

vāsudevaḥ prah prabhuḥ (Nārad Pañcharātra) [v17]

“Shri Krishna is the ultimate Supreme Bhagavān.”

na devaḥ keśhavāt paraḥ (Nārad Purāṇa) [v18]

“There is no Bhagavān higher than Bhagavān Krishna.”

vidyāt tam puruṣham param (Manu Smṛiti 12.122) [v19]

“Bhagavān is the highest and ultimate personality that exists.” However, as was explained previously (commentary of verse 11.24), when love swells immensely it makes the lover forget the formal position of the beloved. Thus, in his extreme love for Shri Krishna, Arjun had shared many intimate memorable moments with him, blissfully oblivious of his supreme position.

Having seen the universal form of Bhagavān, Arjun is now painfully aware that Shri Krishna is not merely his friend and comrade-in-arms, but is also Shri Hari, whom even the *devatās*, *gandharvas*, *siddhas*, etc. venerate. Thus, he feels regret for the disrespect he thinks he may have shown toward Shri Krishna by audaciously looking upon him as a mere friend. Those who are venerated are not called even by their first names, as a mark of respect toward them. He is worried that due to excessive familiarity, he had put himself on equal status with Bhagavān and had presumptuously addressed him with affectionate vocatives, such as “My friend,” “My dear buddy,” and “O Krishna.” So he implores forgiveness for whatever he may have done in forgetfulness of the divinity of Shri Krishna’s personality.

पतासि लोकस्य चराचरस्य
 त्वमस्य पूज्यश्च गुरुगरीयान् ।
 न त्वत्समोऽस्त्यभ्यधिकः कुतोऽन्यो
 लोकत्रयेऽप्यप्रतिमप्रभाव ॥ 43 ॥

*pitāsi lokasya charācharasya
 tvam asya pūjyāś cha gurur garīyān
 na tvat-samo 'sty abhyadhikah kuto 'nyo
 loka-traye 'py apratima-prabhāva*

pitā—the father; *asi*—you are; *lokasya*—of the entire universe; *chara*—moving; *acharasya*—nonmoving; *tvam*—you; *asya*—of this; *pūjyah*—worshipable; *cha*—and; *guruḥ*—spiritual master; *garīyān*—glorious; *na*—not; *tvat-samah*—equal to you; *asti*—is; *abhyadhikah*—greater; *kutah*—who is?; *anyah*—other; *loka-traye*—in the three worlds; *api*—even; *apratima-prabhāva*—possessor of incomparable power.

You are the father of the entire universe, of all moving and non-moving beings. You are the most deserving of worship and the supreme spiritual master. When there is none equal to you in all the three worlds, then who can possibly be greater than you, O possessor of incomparable power?

Arjun says that Shri Krishna is the greatest and the senior most. The father is always senior to the son. Shri Krishna is the father of the father... of all the fathers that exist. Similarly, he is the spiritual master of the spiritual master... of all the spiritual masters that are present. The first spiritual master was the creator Brahma, who passed on the knowledge to his disciple, and so on. However, Brahma received the Vedic knowledge from Shri Krishna. The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (1.1.1) states: *tene brahma hṛidāya ādi kavaye* [v20] “Shri Krishna imparted Vedic knowledge into the heart of the first-born Brahma.” Thus, he is the supreme spiritual master.

The Śvetāśvatar Upaniṣad states:

na tatsamaś chābhyaḍhikaś cha dṛiśhyate (6.8) [v21]

“Nobody is equal to Bhagavān, nor is anyone superior to him.” Realizing Shri

Krishna to be that same Supreme Bhagavān of the Vedas, Arjun is declaring the above attributes regarding him.

तस्मात्प्रणम्य प्रणिथाय कायं
प्रसादये त्वामहमीशमीङ्ग्यम् ।
पितेव पुत्रस्य सखेव सख्युः
प्रियः प्रियायार्हसि देव सोऽुम् ॥ 44 ॥

*tasmāt praṇamya praṇidhāya kāyam
prasādaye tvām aham īsham īḍyam
piteva putrasya sakheva sakhyuh
priyah priyāyārhasi deva soḍhum*

tasmāt—therefore; *praṇamya*—bowing down; *praṇidhāya*—prostrating; *kāyam*—the body; *prasādaye*—to implore grace; *tvām*—your; *aham*—I; *īsham*—the Supreme Bhagavān; *īḍyam*—adorable; *pitā*—father; *iva*—as; *putrasya*—with a son; *sakha*—friend; *iva*—as; *sakhyuh*—with a friend; *priyah*—a lover; *priyāyāh*—with the beloved; *arhasi*—you should; *deva*—Bhagavān; *soḍhum*—forgive.

Therefore, O adorable Bhagavān, bowing deeply and prostrating before you, I implore you for your grace. As a father tolerates his son, a friend forgives his friend, and a lover pardons the beloved, please forgive me for my offences.

Considering his behavior as transgressions toward Bhagavān, Arjun is asking for pardon. While interacting with Shri Krishna—playing, eating, jesting, talking, and resting—he did not show the respect that is appropriate toward the Supreme Almighty. However, no one minds transgressions when they are made because of a high level of intimacy shared with the other person. No government officer has the privilege to joke with the President of a country. Yet, the President's personal friend, teases him, jests with him, and even scolds him. The President does not mind, rather he values that jest of an intimate friend more than all the respect he receives from his subordinate officers. Thousands of people salute an army general, but they are not as dear to his heart as his wife, who sits intimately by his side. Similarly, Arjun's intimate

dealings with Shri Krishna were not transgressions; they were gestures of the depth of his loving devotion in the sentiment of being a friend. Yet, a devotee is by nature humble, and so, out of humility, he feels that he may have committed transgressions, and hence he is asking for forgiveness.

अदृष्टपूर्वं ह्रिषितोऽस्मि दृष्टव्यं
भयेन च प्रव्यथितं मनो मे ।
तदेव मे दर्शय देवरूपं
प्रसीद देवेश जगन्निवास ॥ 45 ॥

*adṛiṣṭa-pūrvam hrīshito 'smi dṛiṣṭvā
bhayena cha pravyathitam mano me
tad eva me darśhaya deva rūpam
prasīda deveśha jagan-nivāsa*

adṛiṣṭa-pūrvam—that which has not been seen before; *hrīshitaḥ*—great joy; *asmi*—I am; *dṛiṣṭvā*—having seen; *bhayena*—with fear; *cha*—yet; *pravyathitam*—trembles; *manah*—mind; *me*—my; *tat*—that; *eva*—certainly; *me*—to me; *darśhaya*—show; *deva*—Bhagavān; *rūpam*—form; *prasīda*—please have mercy; *deva-īśha*—Bhagavān of gods; *jagan-nivāsa*—abode of the universe.

Having seen your universal form that I had never seen before, I feel great joy. And yet, my mind trembles with fear. Please have mercy on me and again show me your pleasing form, O Bhagavān of gods, O abode of the universe.

There are two kinds of *bhakti*—*aiśhwarya bhakti* and *mādhurya bhakti*. *Aiśhwarya bhakti* is that where the devotee is motivated to engage in devotion by contemplating upon the almighty aspect of Bhagavān. The dominant sentiment in *aiśhwarya bhakti* is of awe and reverence. In such devotion, the feeling of remoteness from Bhagavān and the need for maintaining propriety of conduct is always perceived. Examples of *aiśhwarya bhakti* are the residents of Dwaraka and the residents of Ayodhya, who worshipped Shri Krishna and Bhagavān Ram respectively as their kings. Ordinary citizens are highly respectful and obedient toward their king, although they never feel intimate with him.

Mādhurya bhakti is that where the devotee feels an intimate personal relationship with Bhagavān. The dominant sentiment in such devotion is “Shri Krishna is mine and I am his.” Examples of *mādhurya bhakti* are the cowherd boys of Vrindavan who loved Krishna as their friend, Yashoda and Nand baba, who loved Krishna as their child, and the *gopīs* who loved him as their beloved. *Mādhurya bhakti* is infinitely sweeter than *aiśhwarya bhakti*. Hence, Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj states:

*sabai sarasa rasa dwārikā, mathurā aru braja māhiñ
madhura, madhuratara, madhuratama, rasa brajarasa sama nāhiñ
(Bhakti Śatak verse 70) [v22]*

“The divine bliss of Bhagavān is immensely sweet in all his forms. Yet, there is a gradation in it—the bliss of his Dwaraka pastimes is sweet, the bliss of his Mathura pastimes is sweeter, and the bliss of his Braj pastimes is the sweetest.”

In *Mādhurya bhakti*, forgetting the almighty of Bhagavān, devotees establish four kinds of relationships with Shri Krishna:

Dāsyā bhāv—Shri Krishna is our Master and I am his servant. The devotion of Shri Krishna’s personal servants, such as Raktak, Patrak, etc. was in *dāsyā bhāv*. The sentiment that Bhagavān is our Father or Mother is a variation of *dāsyā bhāv* and is included in it.

Sakhya bhāv—Shri Krishna is our Friend and I am his intimate companion. The devotion of the cowherd boys of Vrindavan, such as Shridama, Madhumangal, Dhansukh, Mansukh, etc. was in *sakhya bhāv*.

Vātsalya bhāv—Shri Krishna is our Child and I am his parent. The devotion of Yashoda and Nand baba was in *vātsalya bhāv*.

Mādhurya bhāv—Shri Krishna is our Beloved and I am his lover. The devotion of the *gopīs* of Vrindavan was in *mādhurya bhāv*.

Arjun is a *sakhyā bhāv* devotee and relishes a fraternal relationship with the Bhagavān. On seeing the universal form of Bhagavān, Arjun experienced tremendous awe and reverence, and yet he longed for the sweetness of *sakhyā bhāv* that he was used to savoring. Hence, he prays to Shri Krishna to hide the almighty form that he is now seeing and again show his human form.

किरीटिनं गदिनं चक्रहस्त-
मिच्छामि त्वां द्रष्टुमहं तथैव ।
तेनैव रूपेण चतुर्भुजेन
सहस्रबाहो भव विश्वमूर्ते ॥ 46 ॥

*kirīṭinam gadinam chakra-hastam
ichchhāmi tvām draṣṭum aham tathaiva
tenaiva rūpeṇa chatur-bhujena
sahasra-bāho bhava viśhwa-mūrte*

kirīṭinam—wearing the crown; *gadinam*—carrying the mace; *chakra-hastam*—disc; *ichchhāmi*—I wish; *tvām*—you; *drashtum*—to see; *aham*—I; *tathā eva*—similarly; *tena eva*—in that; *rūpeṇa*—form; *chatuḥ-bhujena*—four-armed; *sahasra-bāho*—thousand-armed one; *bhava*—be; *viśhwa-mūrte*—universal form.

O thousand-armed one, though you are the embodiment of all creation, I wish to see you in your four-armed form, carrying the mace and disc, and wearing the crown.

By special grace, Arjun has been shown the cosmic form that is not easily seen by anyone. Arjun has realized that Shri Krishna is much more than merely his friend. His divine personality encompasses unlimited universes. Yet, he is not attracted by the infinite opulences and is not interested in doing *aiśhwarya bhakti* of Bhagavān Almighty. Rather, he prefers seeing that Almighty Bhagavān in the human form, so that he can relate to him as before, like a friend. Addressing Bhagavān Krishna as *sahasra-bāho*, meaning “thousand-armed one,” Arjuna is now specifically requesting to see the *chatur-bhuj rūp*, or four- armed form of Bhagavān Krishna.

In the four-armed form, Shri Krishna appeared before Arjun on another occasion as well. When Arjun tied Ashwatthama, the killer of the five sons of Draupadi and brought him before her, at that time Shri Krishna revealed himself in his four-armed form.

*niśhamya bhīma-gaditam draupadyāś cha chatur-bhujah
ālokya vadanaṁ sakhyur idam āha hasanniva (Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 1.7.52) [v23]*

“The four-armed Shri Krishna heard the statements of Bheem, Draupadi, and others. Then he looked toward his dear friend Arjun and began smiling.” By requesting Shri Krishna to manifest in his four-armed form, Arjun is also confirming that the four-armed form of the Bhagavān is non-different from his two-armed form.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
मया प्रसन्नेन तवार्जुनेदं
रूपं परं दर्शितमात्मयोगात् ।
तेजोमयं विश्वमनन्तमाद्यं
यन्मे त्वदन्येन न दृष्टपूर्वम् ॥ 47 ॥

*śrī-bhagavān uvācha
mayā prasannena tavārjunedam
rūpam param darśhitam ātma-yogāt
tejo-Māyām viśhwam anantam ādyam
yan me tvad anyena na dṛiṣṭa-pūrvam*

śrī-bhagavān uvācha—Bhagavān Krishna said; *maya*—by me; *prasannena*—being pleased; *tava*—with you; *arjuna*—Arjun; *idam*—this; *rūpam*—form; *param*—divine; *darśhitam*—shown; *ātma-yogāt*—by my *YogMāyā* power; *tejah-Māyām*—resplendent; *viśhwam*—cosmic; *anantam*—unlimited; *ādyam*—primeval; *yat*—which; *me*—my; *tvat anyena*—other than you; *na dṛiṣṭa-pūrvam*—no one has ever seen.

Bhagavān Krishna said: Arjun, being pleased with you, by my *YogMāyā* power, I gave you a vision of my resplendent, unlimited, and primeval cosmic form. No one before you has ever seen it.

Since Arjun had become fearful and beseeched that the cosmic form be

hidden, Shri Krishna now pacifies him by explaining that there is no need to be scared. He had bestowed a vision of his universal form by his grace, not as a form of punishment, but because he was very pleased with Arjun. He uses hyperbole as a figure of speech to stress how rare it is to see the universal form, by saying that Arjun is the first one to see it. Although Duryodhan and Yashoda were also given a glimpse of the universal form, it was not to this intensity, depth, and magnitude.

Shri Krishna bestowed this divine vision upon Arjun with the help of his *YogMāyā* energy. This is the divine all-powerful energy of Bhagavān. He has referred to it in many places, such as verses 4.5 and 7.25. It is by virtue of this *YogMāyā* energy that Bhagavān is *kartumakartum anyathā karatum samarthah* “He can do the possible, the impossible, and the contradictory at the same time.” This divine power of Bhagavān also manifests in the personal form and is worshipped in the Hindu tradition as the Divine Mother of the universe, in the form of Radha, Durga, Lakshmi, Kali, Sita, Parvati, etc.

न वेदयज्ञाध्ययनैर्न दानै-
न च क्रियाभिर्न तपोभिरुग्रैः ।
एवंरूपः शक्य अहं नृलोके
द्रष्टुं त्वदन्येन कुरुप्रवीर ॥ 48 ॥

*na veda-yajñādhyanair na dānair
na cha kriyābhīr na tapobhīr ugraiḥ
evam-rūpah śakya aham nṛi-loke
draṣṭum tvat anyena kuru-pravīra*

na—not; *veda-yajña*—by performance of sacrifice; *adhyayanaiḥ*—by study of the Vedas; *na*—nor; *dānaiḥ*—by charity; *na*—nor; *cha*—and; *kriyābhīḥ*—by rituals; *na*—not; *tapobhīḥ*—by austerities; *ugraiḥ*—severe; *evam-rūpah*—in this form; *śakyaḥ*—possible; *aham*—I; *nṛi-loke*—in the world of the mortals; *draṣṭum*—to be seen; *tvat*—than you; *anyena*—by another; *kuru-pravīra*—the best of the Kuru warriors.

Not by study of the Vedas, nor by the performance of sacrifice, rituals, or charity, nor even by practicing severe austerities, has any mortal ever seen

what you have seen, O best of the Kuru warriors.

Shri Krishna declares that no amount of self-effort—the study of the Vedic texts, performance of ritualistic ceremonies, undertaking of severe austerities, abstinence from food, or generous acts of charity—is sufficient to bestow a vision of the cosmic form of Bhagavān. This is only possible by his divine grace. This has been repeatedly stated in the Vedas as well:

tasya no rāsva tasya no dhehi (Yajur Veda) [v24]

“Without being anointed in the nectar of the grace of the Supreme Bhagavān, nobody can see him.”

The logic behind this is very straightforward. Our physical eyes are made from matter, and hence all that we can see is also material. The Supreme Bhagavān is non-material—he is divine. To have a vision of his divine form we need divine eyes. When Bhagavān bestows his grace upon the Ātman, he adds his divine power to our material eyes, and only then can we see him.

One may ask that how was Sanjay also able to see that cosmic form, which Arjun saw by divine grace. The Mahābhārat states that Sanjay also received by the grace of his Guru, Ved Vyās, who was an *Avatār* of Bhagavān. Before the war, the Ved Vyās offered his student Sanjay divine vision so that he may be able to communicate the details of the war to Dhritarashtra. Hence, he saw the same cosmic form that Arjun saw. But later, when Duryodhan died, Sanjay was overwhelmed with grief and lost his divine vision.

मा ते व्यथा मा च विमूढभावो
दृश्वा रूपं घोरमीदृढःममेदम् ।
व्यपेतभीः प्रीतमनाः पुनस्त्वं
तदेव मे रूपमिदं प्रपश्य ॥ 49 ॥

*mā te vyathā mā cha vimūḍha-bhāvo
dṛiṣṭvā rūpaṁ ghoram idriṇi mamedam*

*vyapeta-bhīḥ prīta-manāḥ punas tvam
tad eva me rūpam idam prapaśya*

mā te—you shout not be; *vyathā*—afraid; *mā*—not; *cha*—and; *vimūḍha-bhāvah*—bewildered state; *driṣṭivā*—on seeing; *rūpam*—form; *ghoram*—terrible; *īḍrik*—such; *mama*—of mine; *idam*—this; *vyapeta-bhīḥ*—free from fear; *prīta-manāḥ*—cheerful mind; *punāḥ*—again; *tvam*—you; *tat eva*—that very; *me*—my; *rūpam*—form; *idam*—this; *prapaśya*—behold.

Be neither afraid nor bewildered on seeing this terrible form of mine. Be free from fear and with a cheerful heart, behold me once again in my personal form.

Shri Krishna continues to pacify Arjun that rather than being scared, he should feel privileged to be blessed with a vision of the cosmic form. Further, he tells Arjun to behold his personal form again and shed his fear.

सञ्जय उवाच ।
इत्यर्जुनं वासुदेवस्तथोक्त्वा
स्वकं रूपं दर्शयामास भूयः ।
आश्वासयामास च भीतमेनं
भूत्वा पुनः सौम्यवपुर्महात्मा ॥५०॥

*sañjaya uvācha
ity arjunam vāsudevas tathoktvā
svakam rūpam darśhayām āsa bhūyah
āśhvāsayām āsa cha bhītam enam
bhūtvā punah saumya-vapur mahātman*

sañjayaḥ uvācha—Sanjay said; *iti*—thus; *arjunam*—to Arjun; *vāsudevah*—Krishna, the son of Vasudev; *tathā*—in that way; *uktivā*—having spoken; *svakam*—his personal; *rūpam*—form; *darśhayām āsa*—displayed; *bhūyah*—again; *āśhvāsayām āsa*—consoled; *cha*—and; *bhītam*—frightened; *enam*—him; *bhūtvā*—becoming; *punah*—again; *saumya-vapuh*—the gentle (two-armed) form; *mahā-Ātman*—the compassionate.

Sanjay said: Having spoken thus, the compassionate son of Vasudev displayed his personal (four-armed) form again. Then, he further consoled the frightened Arjun by assuming his gentle (two-armed) form.

Shri Krishna hid the vision of his cosmic form, and manifested before Arjun in

his four-armed form, which is adorned with a golden diadem, disc, mace, and lotus flower. It is the repository of all divine opulences such as majesty, omniscience, omnipotence, etc. The four-armed form of Shri Krishna evokes the sentiment of awe and reverence, much like the sentiments of the citizens of a kingdom toward their king. However, Arjun was a *sakhā* (friend) of Shri Krishna, and devotion dominated by the sentiment of awe and reverence would never satisfy him. He had played with Shri Krishna, eaten with him, confided his private secrets to him, and shared loving personal moments with him. Such blissful devotion of *sakhyā bhāv* (devotion where Bhagavān is seen as a personal friend) is infinitely sweeter than *aiśhwarya bhakti* (devotion where Bhagavān is revered as the distant and almighty Bhagavān). Hence, to conform to Arjun's sentiment of devotion, Shri Krishna finally hid even his four-armed form, and transformed into his original two-armed form.

Once in the forest of Vrindavan, Shri Krishna was engaging in loving pastimes with the *gopīs*, when he suddenly disappeared from their midst. The *gopīs* prayed for him to come back. Hearing their supplications, he manifested again, but in his four-armed form. The *gopīs* thought him to be the Supreme Bhagavān Vishnu, and accordingly they paid their obeisance. But they moved on, not being attracted to spend any further time with him. They had been habituated to seeing the Supreme Bhagavān Shri Krishna as their Ātman-beloved, and this form of his as Bhagavān Vishnu held no attraction for them. However, Radharani came onto the scene, and upon seeing her, Shri Krishna became overwhelmed in love for her, and could no longer maintain his four-armed form. His two arms automatically disappeared and he resumed his two-armed form. In this verse too, Shri Krishna returned to his most attractive two-armed form.

अर्जुन उवाच ।
दृष्टेदं मानुषं रूपं तव सौम्यं जनार्दन ।
इदानीमस्मि संवत्तः सचेताः प्रकृतिं गतः ॥ ५१ ॥

*arjuna uvācha
dṛiṣṭvedam mānuṣham rūpam tava saumyam janārdana
idānīm asmi saṁvrittah sa-chetāḥ prakritim gataḥ*

arjunaḥ uvācha—Arjun said; *dṛiṣṭvā*—seeing; *idam*—this; *mānuṣham*—human; *rūpam*—form; *tava*—your; *saumyam*—gentle; *janārdana*—he who looks after the public, Krishna; *idānīm*—now; *asmi*—I am; *saṁvrittah*—composed; *sa-chetāḥ*—in my mind; *prakritim*—to normality; *gataḥ*—have become.

Arjun said: O Shri Krishna, seeing your gentle human form (two-armed), I have regained my composure and my mind is restored to normal.

Seeing Shri Krishna in his beautiful two-armed form reconfirmed and strengthened Arjun's sentiment of *sakhya bhāv*. Thus, Arjun says he has regained his composure and is back to normal. Seeing Shri Krishna's pastimes with the Pandavas, the celestial sage Narad had earlier told Arjun's elder brother, King Yudhishthir: *gūḍham param brahma manusya lingam* (Bhāgavatam 7.15.75) [v25] “Shri Krishna resides in your house and lives with you just like your brother.” Thus, Arjun was habituated to having the privilege of interacting with the Bhagavān as a brother and friend.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
सुदुर्दर्शमिदं रूपं दृष्टवानसि यन्मम ।
देवा अप्यस्य रूपस्य नित्यं दर्शनकाङ्क्षणः ॥ ५२ ॥
नाहं वेदैर्न तपसा न दानेन न चेज्यया ।
शक्य एवंविधो द्रष्टुं दृष्टवानसि मां यथा ॥ ५३ ॥

*śrī-bhagavān uvācha
su-durdarśham idam rūpam dṛiṣṭavān asi yan mama
devā apy asya rūpasya nityam darśhana-kāṅkṣhiṇaḥ
nāham vedair na tapasā na dānena na chejyayā
śakya evam-vidho draṣṭuṁ dṛiṣṭavān asi mām yathā*

śhrī-bhagavān uvācha—Bhagavān Krishna said; *su-durdarśham*—exceedingly difficult to behold; *idam*—this; *rūpam*—form; *dṛiṣṭavān asi*—that you are seeing; *yat*—which; *mama*—of mine; *devāḥ*—the celestial deities; *api*—even; *asya*—this; *rūpasya*—form; *nityam*—eternally; *darśhana-kāṅkṣhiṇah*—aspiring to see; *na*—never; *aham*—I; *vedaiḥ*—by study of the Vedas; *na*—never; *tapasā*—by serious penances; *na*—never; *dānena*—by charity; *na*—never; *cha*—also; *ijyayā*—by worship; *śakyaḥ*—it is possible; *evam-vidhāḥ*—like this; *draṣṭum*—to see; *dṛiṣṭavān*—seeing; *asi*—you are; *mām*—me; *yathā*—as.

Bhagavān Krishna said: This form of mine that you are seeing is exceedingly difficult to behold. Even the celestial deities are eager to see it. Neither by the study of the Vedas, nor by penance, charity, or fire sacrifices, can I be seen as you have seen me.

Having shown Arjun the cosmic form, and having praised it as being unavailable to anyone but him, Shri Krishna does not want him to slacken his love for the personal form of Bhagavān. Hence, Shri Krishna says that the way in which Arjun sees Bhagavān is exceedingly rare. He emphasizes that even the celestial deities yearn to realize Bhagavān in his two-armed personal form as he is standing before Arjun. This is not possible by any amount of Vedic studies, austerities, or fire sacrifices. The basic spiritual principle is that Bhagavān cannot be known by the strength of one's efforts. However, those who engage in devotion to him become recipients of his grace. Then, by virtue of his grace, they are easily able to know him. The Muṇḍakopaniṣhad states:

nāyamĀtman pravachanena labhyo na medhayā na bahunā śrutenā (3.2.3) [v26]

“Bhagavān cannot be known either by spiritual discourses or through the intellect; nor can he be known by hearing various kinds of teachings.” *If none of these means can help realize Bhagavān in his personal form, then how can he be seen in this manner? He now reveals the secret.*

**भक्त्या त्वनन्यया शक्य अहमेवंविधोऽर्जुन ।
ज्ञातुं द्रष्टुं च तत्त्वेन प्रवेष्टुं च परन्तप ॥५४॥**

*bhaktyā tvananyayā śakya aham evam-vidho 'rjuna
jñātum draṣṭum cha tattvena praveṣṭum cha parantapa*

bhaktyā—by devotion; *tu*—alone; *ananyayā*—unalloyed; *śakyaḥ*—possible; *aham*—I; *evam-vidhaḥ*—like this; *arjuna*—Arjun; *jñātum*—to be known; *draṣṭum*—to be seen; *cha*—and; *tattvena*—truly; *praveṣṭum*—to enter into (union with me); *cha*—and; *parantapa*—scorcher of foes.

O Arjun, by unalloyed devotion alone can I be known as I am, standing before you. Thereby, on receiving my divine vision, O scorcher of foes, one can enter into union with me.

In this verse, Shri Krishna emphasizes *bhakti* as the means for attaining him. Earlier, in verse 11.48, he had stated that his universal form can be seen only by devotion. Now, in this verse, Shri Krishna emphatically declares that his two-armed form as he is standing before Arjun can only be realized through *bhakti*. This has been repeatedly stated in the Vedic scriptures:

*bhaktirevainam nayati bhaktirevainam paśyati bhaktirevainam darśhayati bhakti vaśhāḥ
puruṣho bhaktireva garīyasī (Māṭhar Śhruti) [v27]*

“Devotion alone will unite us with Bhagavān; devotion alone will help us see him; devotion alone will help us attain him; Bhagavān is enslaved by true devotion, which is the best of all paths.”

*na sādhayati mām yogo na sāṅkhyam dharma uddhava
na svādhyāyas tapas tyāgo yathā bhaktir mamorjitā (Bhāgavatam 11.14.20) [v28]*

“Uddhav, I come under the control of my devotees and am won over by them. But those who do not engage in devotion can never attain me by practicing *ashṭāṅg yog*, studying *Sāṅkhya* and other philosophies, performing pious acts and austerities, or cultivating renunciation.”

bhaktyāham ekayā grāhyah śraddhayĀtman priyah satām (Bhāgavatam 11.14.21) [v29]

“I am only attained through *bhakti*. Those who engage in my *bhakti* with faith are very dear to me.”

milaḥin na raghupati binu anurāgā, kien joga tapa gyāna birāgā. (Ramayana) [v30]

“Without devotion, one can never attain Bhagavān, no matter how much one endeavors through the practice of *ashṭāṅg yog*, austerities, knowledge, and

detachment.” In the next verse, Shri Krishna describes what *bhakti* is.

मत्कर्मकृन्मत्परमो मद्भक्तः सङ्गवर्जितः ।
निर्वैरः सर्वभूतेषु यः स मामेति पाण्डव ॥ ५५ ॥

*mat-karma-kṛin mat-paramo mad-bhaktah saṅga-varjitaḥ
nirvairah sarva-bhūteṣhu yaḥ sa mām eti pāṇḍava*

mat-karma-kṛit—perform duties for my sake; *mat-paramah*—considering me the Supreme; *mat-bhaktah*—devoted to me; *saṅga-varjitaḥ*—free from attachment; *nirvairah*—without malice; *sarva-bhūteṣhu*—toward all entities; *yaḥ*—who; *sah*—he; *mām*—to me; *eti*—comek; *pāṇḍava*—Arjun, the son of Pandu.

Those who perform all their duties for my sake, who depend upon me and are devoted to me, who are free from attachment, and are without malice toward all beings, such devotees certainly come to me.

At the end of the ninth chapter, Shri Krishna had told Arjun to fix his mind upon him and be devoted to him. To enhance that devotion, he wished to reveal further secrets about himself, which he did in the tenth and eleventh chapters. In the previous verse, he again emphasized the supremacy of the path of devotion. Now, he concludes this chapter by highlighting five characteristics of those who are engaged in exclusive devotion:

They perform all their duties for my sake. Accomplished devotees do not divide their works into material and spiritual. They perform every work for the pleasure of Bhagavān, thus consecrating every act of theirs to him. The Saint Kabir states:

*jahañ jahañ chalūñ karūñ parikramā, jo jo karūñ so sevā
jaba sovūñ karūñ danḍavat, jānūñ deva na dūjā [v31]*

“When I walk, I think I am circumambulating the Bhagavān; when I work, I think I am serving the Bhagavān; and when I sleep, I think I am offering him obeisance. In this manner, I perform no activity other than that which is offered to him.”

They depend upon me. Those who rely upon their spiritual practices to reach Bhagavān are not exclusively dependent upon him. That is because he is attained by his grace, and not by spiritual practice. His exclusive devotees do not even rely upon their devotion as a means of attaining him. Rather, they place their entire faith his grace alone, and see their devotion as merely a way of attracting divine grace.

They are devoted to me. The devotees do not feel the need for performing any of the other spiritual practices, such as cultivation of the knowledge of *Sāṅkhya*, practice of *aśtāṅg yog*, performance of fire sacrifices, etc. In this way, they feel that their relationship is with Bhagavān alone. They behold only their Beloved Bhagavān pervading all objects and personalities.

They are free of attachment. Devotion requires the engagement of the mind. This is only possible if the mind is detached from the world. So exclusive devotees are free from all worldly attachments and repose their mind in Bhagavān alone.

They are without malice toward all beings. If the heart fills up with malice, it will again not remain exclusive toward Bhagavān. Thus, exclusive devotees do not harbor any malice, even toward those who have harmed them. Instead, thinking that Bhagavān resides in the heart of all beings, they see all actions as stemming from him and so they forgive even their wrongdoers.



Chapter 12

Bhakti Yog ~ भक्तियोगः

The Yog of Devotion

This small chapter stresses on the super-excellence of the path of loving devotion over all other types of spiritual practices. It begins with Arjun asking Shri Krishna whom he considers more perfect in Yog—those who are devoted to the personal form of Bhagavān or those who worship the formless *Brahman*. Shri Krishna responds by declaring that both paths lead to Brahman-realization. However, he regards the devotees of his personal form as the best yogis. He explains that meditation on the impersonal unmanifest aspect of Bhagavān is full of tribulations and is exceedingly difficult for embodied beings. But devotees of the personal form, with their consciousness merged in him and all their actions dedicated to him, are swiftly delivered from the cycle of life and death. Shri Krishna thus asks Arjun to surrender his intellect to him, and fix his mind in exclusive loving devotion on him alone.

However, such love is often not forthcoming in the struggling Ātman. So Shri Krishna gives other options, and says that if Arjun cannot immediately reach the stage of complete absorption of the mind in Bhagavān, he should strive to reach that stage of perfection by constant practice. Devotion is not a mysterious gift and can be cultivated by regular effort. If Arjun cannot do even

this much, he should still not admit defeat; rather he should work in devotion for the pleasure of Shri Krishna. If this is also not possible, then he should merely renounce the fruits of his works and be situated in the self. He then explains that higher than mechanical practice is the cultivation of knowledge; higher than the cultivation of knowledge is meditation; and higher than meditation is the renunciation of fruits of actions, which immediately leads to great peace. The remaining verses of the chapter describe the wonderful qualities of Bhagavān's loving devotees who are very dear to him.

अर्जुन उवाच ।
एवं सततयुक्ता ये भक्तास्त्वां पर्युपासते ।
ये चाप्यक्षरमव्यक्तं तेषां के योगवित्तमाः ॥१॥

arjuna uvācha

*evam satata-yuktā ye bhaktās tvāṁ paryupāsate
ye chāpy akṣharam avyaktam teṣhām ke yoga-vittamāḥ*

arjunaḥ uvācha—Arjun said; *evam*—thus; *satata*—steadfastly; *yuktāḥ*—devoted; *ye*—those; *bhaktāḥ*—devotees; *tvāṁ*—you; *paryupāsate*—worship; *ye*—those; *cha*—and; *api*—also; *akṣharam*—the imperishable; *avyaktam*—the formless *Brahman*; *teṣhām*—of them; *ke*—who; *yoga-vit-tamāḥ*—more perfect in Yog.

Arjun inquired: Between those who are steadfastly devoted to your personal form and those who worship the formless *Brahman*, who do you consider to be more perfect in Yog?

In the last chapter, Arjun saw the cosmic form of the Bhagavān, which encompasses the entire universe. Having seen it, he preferred to behold Bhagavān in his personal form, with attributes, qualities, and pastimes. So, he is now curious regarding who are more perfect—the devotees who worship the personal form of Bhagavān or those who worship the impersonal *Brahman*.

Arjun's question once again confirms that Bhagavān has both aspects—the all-pervading formless *Brahman* and the personal form. Those who say that Bhagavān cannot possess a personal form limit him, and those who say that

Bhagavān only exists in a personal form also limit him. Bhagavān is perfect and complete, and so he is both formless and possessing forms. We individual Ātman(s) too have both aspects to our personality. The Ātman is formless, and yet it has taken on a body, not once, but innumerable times, in countless past lifetimes. If we tiny Ātman(s) have the ability to possess a form, can the all-powerful Bhagavān not possess a form whenever he wishes? Even the great proponent of the path of *jñāna yog*, Jagadguru Shankaracharya, stated:

*mūrtam chaivāmūrtam dwe eva brahmaṇo rūpe, ityupaniṣhat tayorvā dwau
bhaktau bhagavadupadiṣṭau, kleśhādakleśhādwā muktisyāderatayormadhye [v1]*

“The Supreme entity is both personal and impersonal. Practitioners of the spiritual path are also of two kinds—devotees of the formless *Brahman*, and devotees of the personal form. But the path of worshipping the formless is very difficult.”

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
मय्यावेश्य मनो ये मां नित्ययुक्ता उपासते ।
श्रद्धया परयोपेतास्ते मे युक्ततमा मताः ॥२॥

*śrī-bhagavān uvācha
mayy āveśhya mano ye mām nitya-yuktā upāsate
śraddhayā parayopetās te me yuktatamā matāḥ*

śrī-bhagavān uvācha—Bhagavān Krishna said; *mayi*—on me; *āveśhya*—fix; *manah*—the mind; *ye*—those; *mām*—me; *nitya yuktāḥ*—always engaged; *upāsate*—worship; *śraddhayā*—with faith; *paraya*—best; *upetāḥ*—endowed; *te*—they; *me*—by me; *yukta-tamāḥ*—situated highest in Yog; *matāḥ*—I consider.

Bhagavān Krishna said: Those who fix their minds on me and always engage in my devotion with steadfast faith, I consider them to be the best yogis.

Bhagavān can be realized in varying degrees of closeness. Let us understand this through an example. Suppose say you are standing by the railway tracks. A train is coming from the distance, with its headlight shining. It seems to you as

if a light is approaching. When the train comes closer, you can see a shimmering form along with the light. Finally, when it comes and stands on the platform in front, you realize, “Oh! It’s a train. I can see all these people sitting inside their compartments, and peeping out of their windows.” The same train seemed like a light from far. As it came closer, it appeared to have a shimmering form along with the light. When it drew even nearer, you realized that it was a train. The train was the same, but on being closer to it, your understanding of its different attributes such as shape, color, passengers, compartments, doors, and windows grew.

Similarly, Bhagavān is perfect and complete, and is the possessor of unlimited energies. His personality is replete with divine names, forms, pastimes, virtues, associates, and abodes. However, he is realized in varying levels of closeness, as the *Brahman* (formless all-pervading manifestation of Bhagavān), the *ParamĀtman* (the Supreme Ātman seated in the heart of all living beings, distinct from the individual Ātman), and *Bhagavān* (the personal manifestation of God that descends upon the earth). The Bhāgavatam states:

*vadanti tat tattva vidastattvam yaj-jñānamadvayam
brahmeti paramātmeti bhagavān iti śabdyate (1.2.11) [v2]*

“The knowers of the Truth have stated that there is only one Supreme Entity that manifests in three ways in the world—*Brahman*, *ParamĀtman*, and *Bhagavān*.” They are not three different gods; rather, they are three manifestations of the one Almighty Bhagavān. However, their qualities are different. This is just as water, steam, and ice are all made from the same substance—hydrogen dioxide molecules—but their physical qualities are different. If a thirsty person asks for water, and we give ice, it will not quench the thirst. Ice and water are both the same substance but their physical properties are different. Similarly, *Brahman*, *ParamĀtman*, and *Bhagavān* are manifestations of the one Supreme Bhagavān but their qualities are different.

Brahman is the all-pervading form of Bhagavān, which is everywhere. The Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣhad states:

eko devah sarvabhūteśhu gūḍhaḥ sarvavyāpi sarvabhūtāntarĀtman.(6.11) [v3]

“There is only one Supreme Entity. He is seated in everything and everyone.” This all-pervading aspect of the Bhagavān is called *Brahman*. It is full of eternality, knowledge, and bliss. However in this aspect, Bhagavān does not manifest his infinite qualities, enchanting personal beauty, and sweet pastimes. He is like a divine light that is *nirguna* (without qualities), *nirvivīsh* (without attributes), *nirākār* (without form).

Those who follow the path of *jñāna yog* worship this aspect of Bhagavān. This is a distant realization of Bhagavān as a formless light, just as the train from far appeared like light.

ParamĀtman is the aspect of Bhagavān that is seated in everyone’s hearts. In verse 18.61, Shri Krishna states: “O Arjun, the Supreme Bhagavān dwells in the hearts of all living beings. According to their karmas, he directs the wanderings of the Ātman(s), who are seated on a machine made of the material energy.” Residing within, Bhagavān notes all our thoughts and actions, keeps an account of them, and gives the results at the appropriate time. We may forget what we have done, but Bhagavān does not. He remembers our every thought, word, and deed, since we were born. And not only in this life! In endless lifetimes, wherever we went, Bhagavān went along with us. He is such a friend who never leaves us for even a moment. This aspect of Bhagavān dwelling within is the *ParamĀtman*.

The path of *ashtāṅg yog*, as revealed by Patanjali in the Yog Darśhan, strives to realize Bhagavān seated inside, and leads to the *ParamĀtman* realization of Bhagavān. Just as the train, which appeared as light from far, was seen as a shimmering form when it came closer, similarly, the realization of the Supreme

Entity as *ParamĀtman* is a closer realization than *Brahman*.

Bhagavān is the aspect of Brahman that manifests with a personal form. The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam states:

*kṛiṣhṇam enam avehi tvam Ātmannam akhilātmanām
jagad-dhitāya so 'pyatra dehīvābhāti māyayā (10.14.55) [v4]*

“The Supreme Bhagavān Who is the Ātman of all Ātman(s), has descended upon the earth in his personal form, as Shri Krishna, for the welfare of the world.” In this *Bhagavān* aspect, Bhagavān manifests all the sweetness of his names, forms, qualities, abodes, pastimes, and associates. These attributes exist in *Brahman* and *ParamĀtman* as well, but they remain latent, just as fire is latent in a match-stick, and only manifests when it is struck against the igniting strip of the matchbox. Similarly, as *Bhagavān*, all the powers and aspects of Bhagavān’s personality, which are latent in the other forms, get revealed.

The path of *bhakti*, or devotion, leads to the realization of the Supreme Entity in his *Bhagavān* aspect. This is the closest realization of Bhagavān, just as the details of a train become visible when it comes and stops in front of the observer. Hence, in verse 18.55, Shri Krishna states: “Only by loving devotion can I, Shri Hari, be known as I am.” Thus, Shri Krishna answers Arjun’s question by clarifying that he considers the devotee of his personal form to be the highest yogi.

ये त्वक्षरमनिर्देश्यमव्यक्तं पर्युपासते ।
सर्वत्रगमचिन्त्यञ्च कूटस्थमचलन्थुवम् ॥ 3 ॥

सन्नियम्येन्द्रियग्रामं सर्वत्र समबुद्धयः ।
ते प्राप्नुवन्ति मामेव सर्वभूतहिते रताः ॥ 4 ॥

*ye tv akṣharam anirdeśhyam avyaktam paryupāsate
sarvatra-gam achintyañcha kūta-stham achalandhruvam
sanniyamyendriya-grāmam sarvatra sama-buddhayah
te prāpnuvanti mām eva sarva-bhūta-hite ratāḥ*

ye—who; *tu*—but; *akṣharam*—the imperishable; *anirdeśhyam*—the indefinable; *avyaktam*—the unmanifest; *paryupāsate*—worship; *sarvatra-gam*—the all-pervading; *achintyam*—the unthinkable; *cha*—and; *kūṭa-stham*—the unchanging; *achalam*—the immovable; *dhruvam*—the eternal; *sanniyamya*—restricting; *indriya-grāmam*—the senses; *sarvatra*—everywhere; *sama-buddhayah*—even-minded; *te*—they; *prāpnuvanti*—attain; *mām*—me; *eva*—also; *sarva-bhūta-hite*—in the welfare of all beings; *ratāḥ*—engaged.

But those who worship the formless aspect of the Absolute Truth—the imperishable, the indefinable, the unmanifest, the all-pervading, the unthinkable, the unchanging, the eternal, and the immoveable—by restraining their senses and being even-minded everywhere, such persons, engaged in the welfare of all beings, also attain me.

Having said that worship of the personal form is the best, Shri Krishna clarifies that in no way does he reject the worship of the formless. Those who devote themselves to the all-pervading, indefinable, unmanifest, inconceivable, immovable, eternal *Brahman*, also attain Bhagavān.

Living beings are of an infinite variety of natures. The Supreme Bhagavān who has created this variety also possesses an infinite variety of aspects to his personality. For the sake of our finite comprehension, we classify the infinite manifestations of Bhagavān into categories. Accordingly, Ved Vyas has classified Bhagavān's various manifestations into three types, *Brahman*, *ParamĀtman*, and *Bhagavān*, as mentioned in the commentary of the previous verse. One may worship either of these categories, but one should never claim that one's conception of Bhagavān is the only correct one while those of the others are erroneous.

In verse 4.11, Shri Krishna had stated: “In whatever way people surrender unto me, I reciprocate with them accordingly. Everyone follows my path in all respects, O son of Pritha.” Here, Shri Krishna confirms that the worshippers of the formless also reach him. Since their choice is to unite with the attributeless manifestation of the Supreme Absolute Truth, Bhagavān meets them as the

unmanifest, all-pervading *Brahman*.

क्लेशोऽधिकतरस्तेषामव्यक्तासक्तचेतसाम् ॥
अव्यक्ता हि गतिर्दुःखं देहवद्धिरवाप्यते ॥५॥

*kleśho 'dhikataras teṣhām avyaktāsakta-chetasām
avyaktā hi gatir duḥkham dehavadbhīr avāpyate*

kleśhah—tribulations; *adhika-tarah*—full of; *teṣhām*—of those; *avyakta*—to the unmanifest; *āsakta*—attached; *chetasām*—whose minds; *avyaktā*—the unmanifest; *hi*—indeed; *gatiḥ*—path; *duḥkham*—exceeding difficulty; *deha-vadbhīḥ*—for the embodied; *avāpyate*—is reached.

For those whose minds are attached to the unmanifest, the path of realization is full of tribulations. Worship of the unmanifest is exceedingly difficult for embodied beings.

Having embraced worshippers of all his various manifestations into the fold, Shri Krishna again reiterates his preference for the worship of the personal form. He surmises the worship of the impersonal *Brahman* by saying that it is an exceedingly challenging path that is full of tribulations.

Why is the worship of the formless *Brahman* so difficult? The first and foremost reason for this is that we humans possess a form ourselves and we have been habituated to interacting with forms in endless lifetimes. Thus, while striving to love Bhagavān as well, if our mind has a wonderful enchanting form to meditate upon, it can easily focus upon it and increase its attachment to the Bhagavān. However, in the case of the formless, the intellect cannot conceive of it, and the mind and senses have no tangible object to relate to. So both the endeavors of meditating on Bhagavān and increasing the mind's attachment to him become difficult.

Worship of *Brahman* is also difficult in comparison to that of *Bhagavān* for another reason. The difference in paths can be understood through the *markat-kiśhore nyāya* (the logic of the baby) monkey, and *mārjār-kiśhore nyāya* (the logic of the baby kitten). The baby monkey is responsible for holding onto her

mother's stomach; it is not helped by its mother. When the mother monkey jumps from one branch to another, the onus of clinging tightly onto the mother is upon the baby, and if it is unable to do so, it falls. In contrast, a kitten is very small and delicate, but the mother takes the responsibility of transporting it from one place to another, by holding the kitten from behind the neck and lifting it up. In the analogy, the devotees of the formless can be compared to the baby monkey and the devotees of the personal form can be compared to the baby kitten. Those who worship the formless *Brahman* have the onus of progressing on the path by themselves, because *Brahman* does not bestow grace upon them. *Brahman* is not only formless, it is also without attributes. It has been described as *nirguna* (without qualities), *nirviśheṣh* (without attributes), and *nirākār* (without form). From this, it follows that *Brahman* does not manifest the quality of grace. The *jñānīs* who worship Bhagavān as *nirguna*, *nirviśheṣh*, and *nirākār*, have to rely entirely upon self-effort for progress. On the other hand, the personal form of Bhagavān is an ocean of compassion and mercy. Hence, devotees of the personal form receive the help of divine support in their *sādhanā*. On the basis of the protection that Bhagavān bestows upon his devotees, Shri Krishna stated in verse 9.31: "O son of Kunti, declare it boldly that my devotee never perishes." *He confirms the same statement in the next two verses.*

ये तु सर्वाणि कर्माणि मयि संन्यस्य मत्परः ।
अनन्येनैव योगेन मां ध्यायन्त उपासते ॥ ६ ॥

तेषामहं समुद्धर्ता मृत्युसंसारसागरात् ।
भवामि नचिरात्पार्थं मय्यावेशितचेतसाम् ॥ ७ ॥

*ye tu sarvāṇi karmāṇi mayi sannyasya mat-parah
ananyenaiva yogena mām dhyāyanta upāsate*

*teṣhām ahaṁ samuddhartā mrityu-saṁsāra-sāgarāt
bhavāmi na chirāt pārtha mayy āveśhita-chetasām*

ye—who; *tu*—but; *sarvāṇi*—all; *karmāṇi*—actions; *mayi*—to me; *sannyasya*—dedicating; *mat-*

parah—regarding me as the Supreme goal; *ananyena*—exclusively; *eva*—certainly; *yogena*—with devotion; *mām*—me; *dhyāyantah*—meditating; *upāsate*—worship; *teṣhām*—of those; *aham*—I; *samuddhartā*—the deliverer; *mṛityu-saṁsāra-sāgarāt*—from the ocean of birth and death; *bhavāmi*—(I) become; *na*—not; *chirāt*—after a long time; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *mayi*—with me; *āveśhita chetasām*—of those whose consciousness is united.

But those who dedicate all their actions to me, regarding me as the Supreme goal, worshiping me and meditating on me with exclusive devotion, O Parth, I swiftly deliver them from the ocean of birth and death, for their consciousness is united with me.

Shri Krishna reiterates that his devotees reach him quickly. Firstly, with the personal form of Bhagavān as the object of their devotion, they easily focus their mind and senses upon him. They engage their tongue and ears in chanting and hearing the divine names of Bhagavān, their eyes in seeing the image of his divine form, their body in performing actions for his pleasure, their mind in thinking of his wonderful pastimes and virtues, and their intellect in contemplating upon his glories. In this way, they quickly unite their consciousness with Bhagavān.

Secondly, since such devotees continuously offer their hearts in interrupted *bhakti*, Bhagavān quickly bestows his grace upon them and removes the obstacles on their path. For those who are in communion with him, he dispels their ignorance with the lamp of knowledge. In this way, Bhagavān himself becomes the savior of his devotees and delivers them from *mṛityu saṁsāra sāgarāt* (the cycle of life and death).

मय्येव मन आधत्स्व मयि बुद्धिं निवेशय ।
निवसिष्यसि मय्येव अत ऊर्ध्वं न संशयः ॥८॥

*mayy eva mana ādhatsva mayi buddhim niveśhaya
nivasiṣhyasi mayy eva ata ūrdhvam na sanśhayah*

mayi—on me; *eva*—alone; *manah*—mind; *ādhatsva*—fix; *mayi*—on me; *buddhim*—intellect; *niveśhaya*—surrender; *nivasiṣhyasi*—you shall always live; *mayi*—in me; *eva*—alone; *atah ūrdhvam*—thereafter; *na*—not; *sanśhayah*—doubt.

Fix your mind on me alone and surrender your intellect to me. There upon, you will always live in me. Of this, there is no doubt.

Having explained that worship of the personal form is better, Shri Krishna now begins to explain how to worship him. He asks Arjun to do two things—fix the mind on Bhagavān and also surrender the intellect to him. The function of the mind is to create desires, attractions, and aversions. The function of the intellect is to think, analyze, and discriminate.

The importance of the mind has been repeatedly stated in the Vedic scriptures:

*chetaḥ khalvasya bandhāya muktaye chātmano matam
guṇeṣhu saktam bandhāya rataṁ vā pum̄si muktaye (Bhāgavatam 3.25.15) [v5]*

“Captivity in Māyā and liberation from it is determined by the mind. If it is attached to the world, one is in bondage, and if the mind is detached from the world, one gets liberated.”

mana eva manuṣhyāṇām kāraṇām bandha mokṣhayoh (Pañchadaśī) [v6]

“Bondage and liberation are decided by the state of the mind.” Mere physical devotion is not sufficient; we must absorb the mind in thinking of Bhagavān. The reason is that without the engagement of the mind, mere sensory activity is of no value. For example, we hear a sermon with our ears, but if the mind wanders off, we will not know what was said. The words will fall on the ears but they will not register. This shows that without engaging the mind the work of the senses does not count. On the other hand, the mind is such an instrument that in it all the senses reside in the subtle form. Thus, even without the actual sensory activity the mind experiences the perceptions of sight, smell, taste, touch, and sound. For example, at night when we sleep our senses are inactive. Yet while dreaming, our mind experiences the objects of all the senses. This proves that the mind has the capacity to experience all perceptions even without the gross senses. Therefore, while noting our karmas,

Bhagavān gives importance to the mental works and not the physical works of the senses.

Even beyond the mind is the intellect. We can only fix the mind upon Bhagavān when we surrender our intellect to him. In material pursuits as well, when we face situations beyond the capability of our intellect, we take guidance from a person with superior intellect. For example, we visit a doctor when we are sick. We have no knowledge of medical science ourselves, and so we follow the advice of a qualified medical doctor. The doctor checks our symptoms, looks at our medical reports, makes a diagnosis, and then prescribes the medicines. We surrender our intellect and take the medicines according to the doctor's prescription. Similarly, if we are involved in a legal case, we take the help of a lawyer. The lawyer instructs us how to handle the interrogation by the opposing lawyer. Having no knowledge of law ourselves, we surrender our intellect and simply do as the lawyer says.

In the same way, at present our intellect is subject to many defects. Akrur, the messenger of Shri Krishna to the *gopīs*, described these imperfections of the intellect in the Bhāgavatam (10.40.25): *anityānātma duḥkheśhu viparyaya matirhyaham* [v7] Akrur said: “Our intellect is strapped with wrong knowledge. Though we are eternal Ātman(s), we think of ourselves to be the perishable body. Although all the objects of the world are perishable, we think they will always remain with us, and hence, we busily accumulate them day and night. And though the pursuit of sensual pleasures only results in misery in the long run, we still chase them in the hope that we will find happiness.” The above three defects of the intellect are called *viparyaya*, or reversals of knowledge under material illusion. The gravity of our problem is further aggravated because our intellect is habituated to this kind of defective thinking from innumerable previous lifetimes. If we run our lives in accordance with the directions of our intellect, we will definitely not make much progress on the divine path. Thus, if we wish

to achieve spiritual success by attaching the mind to Bhagavān, we must surrender our intellect to him and follow his directions. Surrendering the intellect means to think in accordance with the knowledge received from Bhagavān via the medium of the scriptures and the bonafide Guru. The characteristics of a surrendered intellect are described in verse 18.66.

अथ चित्तं समाधातुं न शक्नोषि मयि स्थिरम् ।
अभ्यासयोगेन ततो मामिच्छाप्तुं धनञ्जय ॥९॥

*atha chittam samādhātum na śaknoṣhi mayi sthiram
abhyāsa-yogena tato mām ichchhāptum dhanañjaya*

atha—if; *chittam*—mind; *samādhātum*—to fix; *na śaknoṣhi*—(you) are unable; *mayi*—on me; *sthiram*—steadily; *abhyāsa-yogena*—by uniting with Bhagavān through repeated practice; *tataḥ*—then; *mām*—me; *ichchhā*—desire; *āptum*—to attain; *dhanañjaya*—Arjun, the conqueror of wealth.

If you are unable to fix your mind steadily on me, O Arjun, then practice remembering me with devotion while constantly restraining the mind from worldly affairs.

Fixing the mind upon Shri Krishna is the perfection of *sādhanā* (spiritual practice), but immediately on beginning the path, we cannot expect to become perfect. So, what should those people do, who cannot perfectly fix their mind on Bhagavān? Shri Krishna states here that they should endeavor to remember him with devotion. As the saying goes, “Practice makes perfect.” This is called *abhyāsa yog*, or “union with Bhagavān through repeated practice.” Each time the mind wanders toward other objects and ideas, the devotee must strive to bring it back to Bhagavān through remembrance of his names, forms, virtues, pastimes, abodes, and associates.

Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj emphasizes this repeated practice in his instructions for *sādhaks*:

*jagata te mana ko haṭā kara, lagā hari meñ pyāre
isī kā abhyāsa puni puni, karu nirantara pyāre
(Sādhanā Karu Pyāre) [v8]*

“O dear one, remove the mind from the world and fix it on Bhagavān. Practice this constantly, again and again!”

अभ्यासेऽप्यसमर्थोऽसि मत्कर्मपरमो भव ।
मदर्थमपि कर्माणि कुर्वन्सिद्धिमवाप्यसि ॥ १० ॥

*abhyāse 'py asamartho 'si mat-karma-paramo bhava
mad-artham api karmāṇi kurvan siddhim avāpsyasi*

abhyāse—in practice; *api*—if; *asamarthah*—unable; *asi*—you; *mat-karma paramah*—devotedly work for me; *bhava*—be; *mad-artham*—for my sake; *api*—also; *karmāṇi*—work; *kurvan*—performing; *siddhim*—perfection; *avāpsyasi*—you shall achieve.

If you cannot practice remembering me with devotion, then just try to work for me. Thus performing devotional service to me, you shall achieve the stage of perfection.

The instruction to practice to remember Bhagavān is also often easier said than done. The mind is made from the material energy Māyā and it naturally runs toward the material objects of the world, while taking it toward Bhagavān requires conscious and determined effort. We may hear the instruction that we should think of Bhagavān, and we may desire to implement it, but when we get absorbed in our work, Bhagavān slips out of the mind. So what should those people do who find it difficult to practice the remembrance of Bhagavān at all times of the day? Shri Krishna answers this question in the above verse.

Those who cannot constantly remember Bhagavān should practice to simply work for him. In whatever work they perform, they should cultivate the intention that they are doing it for the pleasure of the Bhagavān, as stated previously in verses 9.27 and 9.28. In household life, a major portion of one's time goes in the maintenance of the family. One should keep doing the same work, but change the internal consciousness. Rather than doing it out of bodily attachment for them, one should develop the consciousness that the family members are all children of Bhagavān, and one has a responsibility to

take care of them for his pleasure. One has to continue earning one's living, but again, a modification can be done in the consciousness with which one works. Rather than thinking that it is for the purpose of earning money for worldly enjoyment, one can think, "I wish to maintain my family and myself with the earnings to enable us all to engage in devotion. And whatever I can save, I will donate in the service of Bhagavān." Similarly, the bodily processes of eating, sleeping, bathing, etc. cannot be given up. But here again, we can develop divine consciousness, "I need to keep my body healthy so that I can serve Bhagavān with it. That is why I will carefully do the tasks required for its maintenance."

When we practice working for the pleasure of Bhagavān, we will naturally stop engaging in selfish activities and move toward those that are more in the nature of devotional service. In this way, by performing all actions for the exclusive satisfaction of the Supreme Bhagavān Krishna, our mind will become steady and we will soon be able to focus upon him. Then, gradually love for Bhagavān will manifest within the heart, and we will gain success in constantly thinking of him.

अथैतदप्यशक्तोऽसि कर्तुं मद्योगमाश्रितः ।
सर्वकर्मफलत्यागं ततः कुरु यतात्मवान् ॥ 11 ॥

*athaitad apy aśhakto 'si kartum mad-yogam āśhritah
sarva-karma-phala-tyāgam tataḥ kuru yatātmavān*

atha—if; *etat*—this; *api*—even; *aśhaktah*—unable; *asi*—you are; *kartum*—to work; *mad-yogam*—with devotion to me; *āśhritah*—taking refuge; *sarva-karma*—of all actions; *phala-tyāgam*—to renounce the fruits; *tatah*—then; *kuru*—do; *yata-ātma-vān*—be situated in the self.

If you are unable to even work for me in devotion, then try to renounce the fruits of your actions and be situated in the self.

Beginning with verse 12.8, Shri Krishna gave three ways for Arjun's welfare. In the third, he asked Arjun to work for him. However, that also requires a

purified and resolute intellect. Those who are not yet convinced about their relationship with Bhagavān, and have not yet made Brahman-realization the goal of their lives, may find it impossible to work for his pleasure. Therefore, Shri Krishna now gives the fourth alternative for welfare. He says, “Arjun keep doing your works as before, but become detached from the fruits of your actions.” Such detachment will purify our mind from the modes of ignorance (*tamas*) and passion (*rajas*), and bring it to the mode of goodness (*sattva*). In this way, renouncing the fruits of our efforts will help remove worldliness from our mind and strengthen the intellect. Then, the purified intellect will more easily be able to comprehend transcendental knowledge, and we will be able to move to the higher levels of *sādhanā*.

**श्रेयो हि ज्ञानमभ्यासाज्ज्ञानाद्यानं विशिष्यते ।
ध्यानात्कर्मफलत्यागस्त्यागाच्छान्तिरनन्तरम् ॥ १२ ॥**

*śhreyo hi jñānam abhyāsāj jñānād dhyānam viśhiṣhyate
dhyānāt karma-phala-tyāgas tyāgāch chhāntir anantaram*

śhreyah—better; *hi*—for; *jñānam*—knowledge; *abhyāsāt*—than (mechanical) practice; *jñānāt*—than knowledge; *dhyānam*—meditation; *viśhiṣhyate*—better; *dhyānāt*—than meditation; *karma-phala-tyāgah*—renunciation of the fruits of actions; *tyāgāt*—renunciation; *śhāntih*—peace; *anantaram*—immediately.

Better than mechanical practice is knowledge; better than knowledge is meditation. Better than meditation is renunciation of the fruits of actions, for peace immediately follows such renunciation.

Many people are at the level of mechanical practice. They perform the rituals enjoined by their religious creed, but do not engage their mind in Bhagavān. When they purchase a new house or a new car, they call the Pundit to perform the *pūjā* (worship) ceremony. And while the Pundit performs the *pūjā*, they sit and talk in the other room or sip a cup of tea. For them, devotion is nothing more than performing the empty ritual. It is often performed by way of ceremonial habits that have been passed on from parents and elders.

Performing rituals mechanically is not a bad thing, for after all, something is better than nothing. At least such people are externally engaging in devotion.

However, Shri Krishna says that higher than mechanical practice is the cultivation of spiritual knowledge. Knowledge bestows the understanding that the goal of life is Brahman-realization and not material progress. One who is versed in knowledge goes beyond the empty rituals and develops the desire to purify the mind. But mere knowledge by itself cannot cleanse the heart. And thus, Shri Krishna says that higher than the cultivation of knowledge is the process of engaging the mind in meditation. By practically controlling the mind through meditation, we begin to develop detachment from worldly pleasures. When the mind develops some measure of the quality of detachment, we can then practice the next step, which is renunciation of the fruits of actions. As explained in the previous verse, this will help remove worldliness from the mind and strengthen the intellect for the subsequent higher stages.

अद्वेष्ट सर्वभूतानां मैत्रः करुण एव च ।
निर्ममो निरहङ्कारः समदुःखसुखः क्षमी ॥ 13 ॥

सन्तुष्टः सततं योगी यतात्मा दृढनिश्चयः ।
मध्यर्पितमनोबुद्धिर्यो मद्भक्तः स मे प्रियः ॥ 14 ॥

*adveṣṭā sarva-bhūtānām maitrah karuṇa eva cha
nirmamo nirahankāraḥ sama-duḥkha-sukhaḥ kṣamī
santuṣṭaḥ satataṁ yogī yata-Ātman dṛiḍha-niśchayāḥ
mayy arpita-mano-buddhir yo mad-bhaktāḥ sa me priyaḥ*

adveṣṭā—free from malice; *sarva-bhūtānām*—toward all living beings; *maitrah*—friendly; *karuṇaḥ*—compassionate; *eva*—indeed; *cha*—and; *nirmamah*—free from attachment to possession; *nirahankāraḥ*—free from egoism; *sama*—equipoised; *duḥkha*—distress; *sukhaḥ*—happiness; *kṣamī*—forgiving; *santuṣṭaḥ*—contented; *satataṁ*—steadily; *yogī*—united in devotion; *yata-Ātman*—self-controlled; *dṛiḍha-niśchayāḥ*—firm in conviction; *mayi*—to me; *arpita*—dedicated; *manah*—mind; *buddhiḥ*—intellect; *yāḥ*—who; *mat-bhaktāḥ*—my devotees; *sah*—they; *me*—to me; *priyah*—very dear.

Those devotees are very dear to me who are free from malice toward all living beings, who are friendly, and compassionate. They are free from attachment to possessions and egotism, equipoised in happiness and distress, and ever-forgiving. They are ever-contented, steadily united with me in devotion, self-controlled, firm in conviction, and dedicated to me in mind and intellect.

Having stated that devotion to his personal form is the best, Shri Krishna now goes on to explain in verses 13 to 19, the qualities of his loving devotees.

Free from malice toward all living beings. The devotees realize that all living beings are tiny parts of Bhagavān. If they harbor envy toward others, it is tantamount to harboring envy toward Bhagavān himself. So the devotees are free from malice even toward those who are inimical toward them.

Friendly and compassionate. Devotion engenders the feeling of unity amongst all living beings by virtue of their being children of the one Bhagavān. The notion of seeing others as alien to oneself is wiped out. This leads to the growth of affability in the devotees and sympathy toward the sufferings of others.

Free from attachment to possessions and egotism. The biggest enemy of devotion is pride. One can only progress on the spiritual path if one practices self-effacement. Proficient devotees naturally become humble and eliminate pride and proprietorship from their personality, as well as the false identification of being the body.

Equipoised in happiness and distress. Devotees have faith that only efforts are in their hands, while the results are in the hands of Bhagavān. So whatever results come their way, they see them as the will of Bhagavān, and accept them with equanimity.

Ever forgiving. Devotees never think of punishing wrongdoers for their emotional satisfaction. Harboring such negative thoughts toward others ruins one's own devotion. So accomplished devotees refuse to harbor unforgiving thoughts in all circumstances and leave the task of punishing wrongdoers upon Bhagavān.

Ever contented. Contentment comes not from increasing our possessions, but by decreasing our wants. Devotees no longer look upon material objects as the source of pleasure, and thus are content with whatever they get.

Steadily united with me in devotion. As explained previously, “Yog” means union. Devotees are yogis because their consciousness is absorbed in Bhagavān. This absorption is not occasional or intermittent, but steady and constant because they are established in their relationship with Bhagavān.

Self-controlled. Devotees attach their mind to Bhagavān in loving devotion. It is thus detached from the world, and this gives them mastery over their mind and senses.

Firm in conviction. The quality of determination comes from possessing a resolute intellect. Since devotees tie their intellect to the knowledge of the scriptures and the instructions of the Guru, it becomes so resolute that even if the whole world tries to convince them otherwise, they do not budge an inch from their position.

Dedicated to me in mind and intellect. The Ātman is a servant of Bhagavān by its inherent nature, and as we become enlightened with this knowledge, we naturally dedicate ourselves to the Supreme Bhagavān. In this surrender, the mind and intellect are of primary importance. When they are devoted to Bhagavān, the rest of the personality—body, working senses, knowledge senses, worldly possessions, and Ātman—naturally get dedicated in his service. Shri Krishna says that devotees who exhibit these qualities are very dear to him.

यस्मान्नोद्विजते लोको लोकान्नोद्विजते च यः ।
हर्षामर्षभयोद्वेगैर्मुक्तो यः स च मे प्रियः ॥ 15 ॥

*yasmān nodvijate loko lokān nodvijate cha yah
harṣhāmarṣha-bhayodvegair mukto yah sa cha me priyah*

yasmāt—by whom; *na*—not; *udvijate*—are agitated; *lokah*—people; *lokāt*—from people; *na*—not; *udvijate*—are disturbed; *cha*—and; *yah*—who; *harṣha*—pleasure; *amarṣha*—pain; *bhaya*—fear; *udvegaiḥ*—anxiety; *muktah*—freed; *yah*—who; *sah*—they; *cha*—and; *me*—to me; *priyah*—very dear.

Those who are not a source of annoyance to anyone and who in turn are not agitated by anyone, who are equal in pleasure and pain, and free from fear and anxiety, such devotees of mine are very dear to me.

The Ātman is by nature pure and uncontaminated. The problem is that it is presently covered by the impure mind. Once these impurities are removed, the glorious qualities of the Ātman naturally shine forth. The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam states:

*yasyāsti bhaktir bhagavatyakiñchanā sarvair guṇais tatra samāsate surāḥ
harāvabhaktasya kuto mahad-guṇā manorathenāsati dhāvato bahih (5.18.12) [v9]*

“All the wonderful qualities of the celestial deities manifest in those who devote themselves to the Supreme Bhagavān. But those who do not engage in devotion only keep running on the chariot of their mind (no matter how many self-transformational techniques they may practice).” Here, Shri Krishna describes some more qualities that develop in his devotees.

Not a source of annoyance to anyone. Devotion melts and softens the heart, and so the devotees naturally become gentle in their dealings with everyone. Besides, they behold Bhagavān seated in everyone and see all as his tiny fragments. Therefore, they can never think of harming anyone.

Not agitated by anyone. Though devotees never hurt others, it does not mean that others do not try to hurt them. The history of Saints around the world

reveals that during their lifetime those who felt threatened by their welfare work and principles often oppressed them. However, the Saints always maintained a compassionate attitude even toward the inimical. Thus, we see how Jesus of Nazareth prayed on the cross, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23.34) [v9.1]

Equal in pleasure and pain. Devotees are equipped with the wisdom of the scriptures, and hence, they are aware that pleasure and pain are both inevitable with the flow of life, just like the passing summer and winter seasons. Hence, with their inexhaustible positive attitude, they see the grace of Bhagavān in both, and utilize all situations to enhance their devotion.

Free from fear and anxiety. The cause of fear and anxiety is attachment. It makes us yearn for the object of attachment and fear separation from it. The moment we become detached from material objects, we become fearless. The devotees are not only free from attachment; they also are in harmony with the will of Bhagavān. Hence, they experience neither fear nor anxiety.

अनपेक्षः शुचिर्दक्ष उदासीनो गतव्यथः ।
सर्वारम्भपरित्यागी यो मद्भक्तः स मे प्रियः ॥ १६ ॥

*anapekṣhah śhuchir dakṣha udāśīno gata-vyathāḥ
sarvārambha-parityāgī yo mad-bhaktah sa me priyah*

anapekṣhah—indifferent to worldly gain; *śhuchiḥ*—pure; *dakṣhah*—skillful; *udāśīnah*—without cares; *gata-vyathāḥ*—untroubled; *sarva-ārambha*—of all undertakings; *parityāgī*—renouncer; *sah*—who; *mat-bhaktah*—my devotee; *sah*—he; *me*—to ne; *priyah*—very dear.

Those who are indifferent to worldly gain, externally and internally pure, skillful, without cares, untroubled, and free from selfishness in all undertakings, such devotees of mine are very dear to me.

Indifferent to worldly gain. To a very poor person, the loss or gain of \$100 would be an important matter, but a multi-billionaire would consider it insignificant and not give any further thought to it. Devotees are rich in divine

love for Bhagavān and they consider it to be the highest treasure worthy of possessing. They also give the highest priority to the loving service of the Bhagavān. Hence, they become unconcerned about worldly gain.

Externally and internally pure. Since their minds are constantly absorbed in the all-pure Bhagavān, devotees become internally cleansed from the defects of lust, anger, greed, envy, ego, etc. In this state of mind, they naturally prefer to keep the external body and environment pure as well. Thus, in accordance with the old saying, “Cleanliness is next to godliness,” they are also externally pure.

Skillful. Devotees look on all their tasks as opportunities to serve Bhagavān. Hence, they perform their works with great care and attention. This naturally makes them skillful.

Without cares. Having faith that Bhagavān is always protecting them in accordance with their surrender, they become without care.

Untroubled. Since devotees are surrendered to the will of Bhagavān, they simply put in their best effort in all endeavors, but leave the results in the hands of the Supreme. Thus, whatever the outcome, they remain untroubled, subjugating their will to the divine will.

Free from selfishness in all undertakings. Their attitude of service makes them rise above petty selfishness.

यो न हृष्यति न द्वेष्टि न शोचति न काङ्क्षति ।
शुभाशुभपरित्यागी भक्तिमान्यः स मे प्रियः ॥ १७ ॥

*yo na hṛishyati na dveshti na śhochati na kāṅkṣhati
śhubha-śhubha-parityāgī bhaktimān yah sa me priyah*

yah—who; *na*—neither; *hṛishyati*—rejoice; *na*—nor; *dveshti*—despair; *na*—neither; *śhochati*—lament; *na*—nor; *kāṅkṣhati*—hanker for gain; *śhubha-aśhubha-parityāgī*—who renounce both good and evil deeds; *bhakti-mān*—full of devotion; *yah*—who; *sah*—that person; *me*—to me; *priyah*—very dear.

Those who neither rejoice in mundane pleasures nor despair in worldly sorrows, who neither lament for any loss nor hanker for any gain, who renounce both good and evil deeds, such persons who are full of devotion are very dear to me.

They neither rejoice in mundane pleasures nor despair in worldly sorrows. If we are in the dark and someone offers help by showing a lamp, we naturally rejoice. Then, if someone blows out the flame, we feel annoyed. But if we are standing under the noonday sun, we feel indifferent whether someone shows us a lamp or another blows it out. Similarly, the devotees of the Bhagavān, being gratified with the divine love bliss of the Bhagavān, rise above pleasure and despair.

Neither lament for any loss nor hanker for any gain. Such devotees neither hanker after pleasant worldly situations nor grieve in unpleasant ones. The Nārad Bhakti Darśhan states:

yatprāpya na kiñcidvāñchhati, na śhochatī, na dveshtī, na ramate, notsāhi bhavati (Sūtra 5).
[v10]

“On attaining divine love for Bhagavān, the devotees neither yearn for pleasant things nor grieve on losing them. They are not hateful of those who harm them. They have no liking for worldly enjoyments. They are not anxious for the enhancement of their worldly position.” Devotees relish the bliss of Bhagavān, so the bliss of all material objects seems insignificant in comparison.

Renounce both good and evil actions. Devotees obviously renounce evil actions (*vikarm*), for they are against their nature and displeasing to Bhagavān. The good actions Shri Krishna refers to are prescribed ritualistic duties (*karm*) mentioned in the scriptures. All actions performed by the devotees become *akarm* (inaction) because they are not performed with any selfish motive and are dedicated to Bhagavān. The concept of *akarm* has been explained in great detail

in verses 4.14 to 4.20.

Full of devotion. *Bhaktimān* means “filled with devotion.” The nature of divine love is such that it keeps increasing for eternity. *Bhakti* poets have said: *prem meñ pūrṇimā nahīñ* “Unlike the moon which waxes to a limit and then wanes, divine love keeps growing without limit.” So, the heart of the devotee contains an ocean of love for Bhagavān. Shri Krishna says that such devotees are very dear to him.

समः शत्रौ च मित्रे च तथा मानापमानयोः ।
शीतोष्णासुखदुःखेषु समः सङ्गविवर्जितः ॥ १८ ॥
तुल्यनिन्दास्तुतिर्मानी सन्तुष्टे येन केनचित् ।
अनिकेतः स्थिरमतिर्भक्तिमान्ये प्रियो नरः ॥ १९ ॥

*samah śhatrau cha mitre cha tathā mānāpamānayoḥ
śhītoṣhṇa-sukha-duḥkheśhu samah saṅga-vivarjitaḥ*

*tulya-nindā-stutir maunī santuṣṭo yena kenachit
aniketaḥ sthira-matir bhaktimān me priyo narah*

samah—alike; *śhatrau*—to a foe; *cha*—and; *mitre*—to a friend; *cha tathā*—as well as; *māna-apamānayoh*—in honor and dishonor; *śhīta-uṣhṇa*—in cold and heat; *sukha-duḥkheśhu*—in joy and sorrow; *samah*—equipoised; *saṅga-vivarjitaḥ*—free from all unfavorable association; *tulya*—alike; *nindā-stutih*—reproach and praise; *maunī*—silent contemplation; *santuṣṭah*—contented; *yena kenachit*—with anything; *aniketaḥ*—without attachment to the place of residence; *sthira*—firmly fixed; *matih*—intellect; *bhakti-mān*—full of devotion; *me*—to me; *priyah*—very dear; *narah*—a person.

Those, who are alike to friend and foe, equipoised in honor and dishonor, cold and heat, joy and sorrow, and are free from all unfavorable association; those who take praise and reproach alike, who are given to silent contemplation, content with what comes their way, without attachment to the place of residence, whose intellect is firmly fixed in me, and who are full of devotion to me, such persons are very dear to me.

Shri Krishna describes ten more qualities here.

Alike to friend and foe. Devotees are positively disposed toward all and are not swayed by the sentiments of enmity and friendship. There is a beautiful story about Prahlad regarding this. Once, his son, Virochan, got into an argument with his Guru's son Sudhanva. Virochan said, "I am superior to you because I am the son of a king." Sudhanva claimed, "I am superior because I am the son of a *Rishi*." They were both young, and in their impetuousness, they laid bets. Both said, "Whoever is proved superior will live while the other will have to die." Now, who would be the judge? Sudhanva said to Virochan, "Your father, Prahlad, will be the judge." Virochan exclaimed, "Really! But then you will complain that he has been partial." "No, my father, *Rishi* Angira, has said that your father Prahlad is perfectly just, and will never differentiate between friend and foe."

The two boys went to Prahlad. Virochan asked, "Father, am I superior or Sudhanva?" Prahlad said, "Why did this question arise?" "Father we have laid bets that whoever is proved superior will remain alive while the other will have to die." Prahlad smiled and said, "Your friend, Sudhanva, is superior since he is the son of your father's Guru." Prahlad ordered his servants, "Take my son to the gallows and hang him."

At that moment, Sudhanva intervened. "Wait!" he said to Prahlad, "I have a second question. Am I superior or you?" Prahlad replied, "I have been born in a family of Demons, while you are the son of a *Rishi*, who is also my Guru. Hence, you are superior." Sudhanva again asked, "In that case, will you obey my instruction?" "Yes, of course," responded Prahlad. "Ok, then leave Virochan," said Sudhanva. Prahlad instructed his servants, "Leave him," in the same manner as he had said, "Take him to the gallows."

The celestial deities showered flowers into his court, and hailed the quality of justice that Prahlad displayed. This attitude of justice came naturally to Prahlad

because by virtue of being a perfect devotee of the Bhagavān he was equal to friend, foe, relative, kith, kin, and outsider.

Equipoised in honor and dishonor. Shri Krishna further mentions that the devotees pay no heed to honor and dishonor. This is just like when a person begins engaging in an illicit relationship, he or she is mindful of what others will say, but when the relationship becomes deep, then the person no longer cares about the disrepute it will bring. Similarly, in the heart of the devotee the flame of divine love burns so brightly that worldly honor and dishonor no longer carry any importance.

Alike in cold and heat, joy and sorrow. The devotees are equipoised in favorable and unfavorable circumstances. They know that none of these are permanent. They come and go like the day and the night, and so they do not consider it worth their while to take their thoughts off Bhagavān and focus on either of them. An incident from the life of Ramakrishna Paramahansa illustrates the nature of saints. He got cancer of the throat in his old age. People asked him to pray to Mother Kali to cure him. He said, “My mind is absorbed in love for Mother Kali. Why should I take it off from her and apply it to this dirty bodily cancer? Whatever Bhagavān has willed, let it happen.”

Free from unfavorable association. Associating with persons or objects is called *sang*. There are two kinds of *sang*. Association that takes our mind to the world is *kusang* (unfavorable association), and that which takes our mind away from the world and toward Bhagavān is called *satsang* (favorable association). Since devotees do not relish worldly thoughts, they naturally avoid *kusang* and engage in *satsang*.

Take praise and reproach alike. For those who are externally motivated, the appreciation and rejection by others is all-important. However, devotees are internally motivated by the principles they value within themselves. Hence,

neither commendation nor denunciation by others makes any difference to them.

Given to silent contemplation. Crows and swans have diametrically opposite choices. While crows are drawn to garbage piles, the majestic swans are attracted by tranquil lakes. Similarly, the minds of worldly people find great relish in conversing about materialistic topics. But the saintly devotees possess pure minds, and thus worldly talks seem as attractive to them as a pile of garbage. This does not mean that they do not converse. Like the swan drawn to the lakes, their minds are drawn towards topics such as the names, forms, pastimes, and glories of Bhagavān.

Content with whatever comes their way. The needs of the devotees shrink to the bare necessities for maintaining the body. Saint Kabir expresses this in his famous couplet:

*mālik itanā dījiye, jāme kuṭumba samāya
main bhī bhūkhā na rahūñ, sādhu na bhūkhā jāya [v11]*

“O Bhagavān, give me just enough for the bare maintenance of my family’s bodily needs, and for giving alms to the sadhu who comes to my door.”

Without attachment to the place of residence. No earthly home can be a permanent residence for the Ātman, for it must necessarily be left behind at the time of death. When the Mogul Emperor, Akbar, built his capital, Fatehpur Sikri, he put the following inscription on the main entrance gate: “The world is a bridge; cross over it but build no house on it.” In the same vein, Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj states:

*jaga meñ raho aise govinda radhey, dharmashālā meñ yātrī raheñ jyoñ batā de
(Rādhā Govind Geet) [v12]*

“Live in this world as a traveler lives in a wayside inn (aware that it is to be vacated the next morning).” Realizing the truth of this statement, devotees

look on their home as only a temporary dwelling place.

Intellect is firmly fixed in me. Devotees have deep conviction in the supremacy of Bhagavān's position in creation and in their eternal relationship with him. They are also firm in their faith that if they surrender to him lovingly, by Bhagavān's grace they will achieve the highest realization. Hence, they neither wander from attraction-to-attraction or from path-to-path. Shri Krishna declares such resolute devotees to be very dear to him.

ये तु धर्म्यामृतमिदं यथोक्तं पर्युपासते ।
श्रद्धाना मत्परमा भक्तास्तेऽतीव मे प्रियाः ॥ 20 ॥

*ye tu dharmaṁritam idam yathoktam paryupāsate
śhraddadhānā mat-paramā bhaktās te 'tīva me priyāḥ*

ye—who; *tu*—indeed; *dharma*—of wisdom; *amṛitam*—nectar; *idam*—this; *yathā*—as; *uktam*—declared; *paryupāsate*—exclusive devotion; *śhraddadhānāḥ*—with faith; *mat-paramāḥ*—intent on me as the supreme goal; *bhaktāḥ*—devotees; *te*—they; *atīva*—exceedingly; *me*—to me; *priyāḥ*—dear.

Those who honor this nectar of wisdom declared here, have faith in me, and are devoted and intent on me as the supreme goal, they are exceedingly dear to me.

Shri Krishna concludes the chapter by summing up his answer to Arjun's question. At the beginning of the chapter, Arjun had asked him regarding whom he considered superior—those who are devoted to his personal form through *bhakti yog*, or those who worship the formless *Brahman* through *jñāna yog*. Shri Krishna responded in the second verse that he considers them to be the highest yogis who steadfastly engage in devotion upon his personal form. He then continued on the topic of *bhakti* by explaining first the means of performing devotion and then the qualities of his devotees. He now ends with the affirmation that the supreme path of spirituality is *bhakti*. Those who make the Supreme Bhagavān as their goal and cultivate devotion with great faith,

imbued with the virtues mentioned in the previous verses, such devotees are exceedingly dear to Bhagavān.



Chapter 13

Kṣhetra Kṣhetrajña Vibhāg Yog ~ क्षेत्रक्षेत्रज्ञविभागयोगः

Yog through Distinguishing the Field and the Knower of the Field

The Bhagavad Gita consists of eighteen chapters, which are composed of three segments. The first set of six chapters describes *karm yog*. The second set describes the glories of *bhakti*, and for the nourishment of *bhakti*, it also dwells upon the opulences of Bhagavān. The third set of six chapters expounds upon *tattva jñāna* (knowledge scriptural terms and principles). The present one is the first of the third set of chapters, and it introduces two terms—*kṣhetra* (the “field”) and *kṣhetrajña* (the “knower of the field”). We may think of the field as the body and the knower of the field as the Ātman that resides within. But this is a simplification, for the field is actually much more—it includes the mind, intellect, and ego, and all other components of the material energy that comprise our personality. In this wider sense, the field of the body encompasses all aspects of our personality, except for the Ātman who is the “knower the field.”

As a farmer sows seeds in a field and reaps the harvest from it, we sow the field

of our body with good or bad thoughts and actions, and reap the consequent destiny. The Buddha had explained: “All that we are is the result of what we have thought; it is founded on our thoughts; and it is made of our thoughts.” Therefore, as we think, that is what we become. The great American thinker, Ralph Waldo Emerson, said: “The ancestor of every action is thought.” Thus, we must learn the art of cultivating the field of our body with appropriate thoughts and actions. This requires knowledge of the distinction between the field and the knower of the field. In the present chapter, Shri Krishna goes into a detailed analysis of this distinction. He enumerates the elements of material nature that compose the field of the body. He describes the modifications that arise in the field, in the form of emotions, sentiments, and feelings. He also mentions the virtues and qualities that purify the field and illumine it with the light of knowledge. Such knowledge helps us gain realization of the Ātman, who is the knower of the field. The chapter then describes Bhagavān, who is the supreme knower of the fields of all the living beings. That Supreme Bhagavān holds contradictory attributes, i.e. he possesses opposite qualities at the same time. So, he is all-pervading in creation and yet seated in the hearts of all living beings. He is thus the Supreme Ātman of all living beings.

Having described the Ātman, the Supreme Ātman, and material nature, Shri Krishna then explains which of these is responsible for actions by living beings, and also which is responsible for cause and effect in the world at large. Those, who can perceive these distinctions and properly pinpoint the causes of action, are the ones who actually see; and they are the ones who are situated in knowledge. They observe the Supreme Ātman present in all living beings, and so they do not degrade themselves by their mind. They can see the variety of living beings situated in the same material nature. And when they see the common spiritual substratum pervading all existence, they attain the realization of *Brahman*.

अर्जुन उवाच ।
 प्रकृतिं पुरुषं चैव क्षेत्रं क्षेत्रज्ञमेव च ।
एतद्वेदितुमिच्छामि ज्ञानं ज्ञेयं च केशव ॥ १ ॥¹

¹ In some editions of the Bhagavad Gita, this verse has been omitted, and the next verse figures as the first verse of the thirteenth chapter.

*arjuna uvācha
 prakṛitīm puruṣam chaiva kṣhetram kṣhetra-jñām eva cha
 etad veditum ichchhāmi jñānam jñeyam cha keśava*

arjunaḥ uvācha—Arjun said; *prakṛitīm*—material nature; *puruṣam*—the enjoyer; *cha*—and; *eva*—indeed; *kṣhetram*—the field of activities; *kṣhetra-jñām*—the knower of the field; *eva*—even; *cha*—also; *etat*—this; *veditum*—to know; *ichchhāmi*—I wish; *jñānam*—knowledge; *jñeyam*—the goal of knowledge; *cha*—and; *keśava*—Krishna, the killer of the Demon named Keshi.

Arjun said: “O Keshav, I wish to understand what are *prakṛiti* and *puruṣ*, and what are *kṣhetra* and *kṣhetrajñā*? I also wish to know what is true knowledge, and what is the goal of this knowledge?

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
 इदं शरीरं कौन्तेय क्षेत्रमित्यभिधीयते ।
एतद्यो वेत्ति तं प्राहुः क्षेत्रज्ञ इति तद्विदः ॥ २ ॥

*śrī-bhagavān uvācha
 idam śharīram kaunteya kṣhetram ity abhidhīyate
 etad yo vetti tam prāhuh kṣhetra-jñā iti tad-vidah*

śrī-bhagavān uvācha—Bhagavān Krishna said; *idam*—this; *śharīram*—body; *kaunteya*—Arjun, the son of Kunti; *kṣhetram*—the field of activities; *iti*—thus; *abhidhīyate*—is termed as; *etad*—this; *yah*—one who; *vetti*—knows; *tam*—that person; *prāhuh*—is called; *kṣhetra-jñāh*—the knower of the field; *iti*—thus; *tat-vidah*—those who discern the truth.

Bhagavān Krishna said: O Arjun, this body is termed as *kṣhetra* (the field of activities), and the one who knows this body is called *kṣhetrajñā* (the knower of the field) by the sages who discern the truth about both.

Here, Shri Krishna begins explaining the topic of distinction between the body and spirit. The Ātman is divine, and can neither eat, see, smell, hear, taste, nor

touch. It vicariously does all these works through the body-mind-intellect mechanism, which is thus termed as the field of activities. In modern science, we have terms like “field of energy.” A magnet has a magnetic field around it, which creates electricity on rapid movement. An electric charge has a force field around it. Here, the body is the receptacle for the activities of the individual. Hence, it is termed as *kṣhetra* (the field of activities).

The Ātman is distinct from the body-mind-intellect mechanism, but forgetful of its divine nature, it identifies with these material entities. Yet, because it has knowledge of the body, it is called *kṣhetrajña* (the knower of the field of the body). This terminology has been given by the self-realized sages, who were transcendentally situated at the platform of the Ātman, and perceived their distinct identity separate from the body.

क्षेत्रज्ञं चापि मां विद्धि सर्वक्षेत्रेषु भारत ।
क्षेत्रक्षेत्रज्ञयोऽनानं यत्तज्ज्ञानं मतं मम ॥३॥

*kṣhetra-jñam chāpi mām viddhi sarva-kṣhetreṣhu bhārata
kṣhetra-kṣhetrajñayor jñānam yat taj jñānam matam mama*

kṣhetra-jñam—the knower of the field; *cha*—also; *api*—only; *mām*—me; *viddhi*—know; *sarva*—all; *kṣhetreṣhu*—in individual fields of activities; *bhārata*—scion of Bharat; *kṣhetra*—the field of activities; *kṣhetra-jñayoh*—of the knower of the field; *jñānam*—understanding of; *yat*—which; *tat*—that; *jñānam*—knowledge; *matam*—opinion; *mama*—my.

O scion of Bharat, I am also the knower of all the individual fields of activity. The understanding of the body as the field of activities, and the Ātman and Bhagavān as the knowers of the field, this I hold to be true knowledge.

The Ātman is only the knower of the individual field of its own body. Even in this limited context, the Ātman’s knowledge of its field is incomplete. Bhagavān is the knower of the fields of all Ātman(s), being situated as the Supreme Ātman in the heart of all living beings. Further, Bhagavān’s

knowledge of each *kshetra* is perfect and complete. By explaining these distinctions, Shri Krishna establishes the position of the three entities vis-à-vis each other—the material body, the Ātman, and the Supreme Ātman.

In the second part of the above verse, he gives his definition of knowledge. “Understanding of the self, the Supreme Bhagavān, the body, and the distinction amongst these, is true knowledge.” In this light, persons with PhDs and DLitts may consider themselves to be erudite, but if they do not understand the distinction between their body, the Ātman, and Bhagavān, then according to Shri Krishna’s definition, they are really not knowledgeable.

तत्क्षेत्रं यच्च यादृक्च यद्विकारि यतश्च यत् ।
स च यो यत्प्रभावश्च तत्समासेन मे शृणु ॥४॥

*tat kṣhetram yach cha yādrik cha yad-vikāri yataś cha yat
sa cha yo yat-prabhāvaścha tat samāsena me śrīṇu*

tat—that; *kṣhetram*—field of activities; *yat*—what; *cha*—and; *yādrik*—its nature; *cha*—and; *yat-vikāri*—how change takes place in it; *yataś*—from what; *cha*—also; *yat*—what; *sah*—he; *cha*—also; *yah*—who; *yat-prabhāvah*—what his powers are; *cha*—and; *tat*—that; *samāsena*—in summary; *me*—from me; *śrīṇu*—listen.

Listen and I will explain to you what that field is and what its nature is. I will also explain how change takes place within it, from what it was created, who the knower of the field of activities is, and what his powers are.

ऋषिभिर्बहुथा गीतं छन्दोभिर्विविधैः पृथक् ।
ब्रह्मसूत्रपदैश्चैव हेतुमद्विर्विनिश्चितैः ॥५॥

*rishiḥibhir bahudhā gītam chhandobhir vividhaiḥ pṛithak
brahma-sūtra-padaish chaiva hetumadbhir viniśhchitaiḥ*

rishiḥibhiḥ—by great sages; *bahudhā*—in manifold ways; *gītam*—sung; *chhandobhiḥ*—in Vedic hymns; *vividhaiḥ*—various; *pṛithak*—variously; *brahma-sūtra*—the Brahma Sūtra; *padaih*—by the

hymns; *cha*—and; *eva*—especially; *hetu-madbhiḥ*—with logic; *viniśchitaiḥ*—conclusive evidence.

Great sages have sung the truth about the field and the knower of the field in manifold ways. It has been stated in various Vedic hymns, and especially revealed in the Brahma Sūtra, with sound logic and conclusive evidence.

Knowledge is appealing to the intellect when it is expressed with precision and clarity, and is substantiated with sound logic. Further, for it to be accepted as infallible, it must be confirmed on the basis of infallible authority. The reference for validating spiritual knowledge is the Vedas.

Vedas: These are not just the name of some books; they are the eternal knowledge of Bhagavān. Whenever Bhagavān creates the world, he manifests the Vedas for the benefit of the Ātman(s). The Brīhadāraṇyak Upaniṣad (4.5.11) states: *niḥśvitasamasya vedāḥ [v1]* “The Vedas manifested from the breath of Bhagavān.” They were first revealed in the heart of the first-born Brahma. From there, they came down through the oral tradition, and hence, another name for them is *Śruti*, or “knowledge received through the ear.” At the beginning of the age of *Kali*, Ved Vyās, who was himself a descension of Bhagavān, put down the Vedas in the form of a book, and divided the one body of knowledge into four portions—Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sāma Veda, and Atharva Veda. Hence, he got the name *Ved Vyās*, or “one who divided the Vedas.” The distinction must be borne in mind that Ved Vyās is never referred to as the composer of the Vedas but merely the one who divided them. Hence, the Vedas are also called *apauruṣeya*, which means “not created by any person.” They are respected as the infallible authority for spiritual knowledge.

bhūtam bhavyam bhaviṣhyam cha sarvam vedāt prasidhyati (Manu Smṛiti 12.97) [v2]

“Any spiritual principle must be validated on the authority of the Vedas.” To elaborate this knowledge of the Vedas, many sages wrote texts and these traditionally became included in the gamut of the Vedic scriptures because

they conform to the authority of the Vedas. Some of the important Vedic scriptures are listed below.

Itihās: These are historical texts, and are two in number, the Ramayana and the Mahābhārat. They describe the history related to two important descensions of Bhagavān. The Ramayana was written by Sage Valmiki, and describes the *leelas*, or divine pastimes, of Bhagavān Ram. Amazingly, it was written by Valmiki before Shri Ram actually displayed his *leelas*. The great poet Sage was empowered with divine vision, by which he could see the pastimes Bhagavān Ram would enact on descending in the world. He thus put them down in 24,000 most beautifully composed Sanskrit verses of the Ramayana. These verses also contain lessons on ideal behavior in various social roles, such as son, brother, wife, king, and married couples. The Ramayana has also been written in many regional languages of India, thereby increasing its popularity amongst the people. The most famous amongst these is the Hindi Ramayana, Ramcharit Manas, written by a great devotee of Bhagavān Ram, Saint Tulsidas.

The Mahābhārat was written by Sage Ved Vyās. It contains 100,000 verses and is considered the longest poem in the world. The divine *leelas* of Bhagavān Krishna are the central theme of the Mahābhārat. It is full of wisdom and guidance related to duties in all stages of human life, and devotion to Bhagavān. The Bhagavad Gita is a portion of the Mahābhārat. It is the most popular Hindu scripture, since it contains the essence of spiritual knowledge, so beautifully described by Bhagavān Krishna himself. It has been translated in many different languages of the world. Innumerable commentaries have been written on the Bhagavad Gita.

Puranas: There are eighteen Puranas, written by Sage Ved Vyās. Together, they contain 400,000 verses. These describe the divine pastimes of the various forms of Bhagavān and his devotees. The Puranas are also full of philosophic

knowledge. They discuss the creation of the universe, its annihilation and recreation, the history of humankind, the genealogy of the celestial deities and the holy sages. The most important amongst them is the *Bhāgavat Purāṇ*, or the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam. It was the last scripture written by Sage Ved Vyas. In it, he mentions that in this scripture, he is going to reveal the highest *dharma* of pure selfless love for Bhagavān. Philosophically, the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam begins where the Bhagavad Gita ends.

Shad-darśhan: These come next in importance amongst the Vedic scriptures. Six sages wrote six scriptures highlighting particular aspects of Hindu philosophy. These became known as the Shad-darshan, or six philosophic works. They are:

1. Mīmānsā: Written by Maharishi (Sage) Jaimini, it describes ritualistic duties and ceremonies.
2. Vedānt Darśhan: Written by Maharishi Ved Vyas, it discusses the nature of the Absolute Truth.
3. Nyāya Darśhan: Written by Maharishi Gautam, it develops a system of logic for understanding life and the Absolute Truth.
4. Vaiśheśik Darshan: Written by Maharishi Kanad, it analyses cosmology and creation from the perspective of its various elements.
5. Yog Darśhan: Written by Maharishi Patañjali, it describes an eightfold path to union with Bhagavān, beginning with physical postures.
6. Sāṅkhya Darśhan: Written by Maharishi Kapil, it describes the evolution of the Universe from prakṛti, the primordial form of the material energy.

Apart from these mentioned above, there are hundreds of other scriptures in the Hindu tradition. It would be impossible to describe them all here. Let it suffice to say that the Vedic scriptures are a vast treasure house of divine

knowledge revealed by Bhagavān and the Saints for the eternal welfare of all humankind.

Amongst these scriptural texts, the Brahma Sūtra (Vedānta Darśhan) is considered as the last word on the topic of the distinction between the Ātman, the material body, and Bhagavān. Hence, Shri Krishna particularly mentions it in the above verse. “Ved” refers to the Vedas, and “ant” means “the conclusion.” Consequently, “Vedānt” means “the conclusion of Vedic knowledge.” Although, the Vedānta Darśhan was written by Sage Ved Vyāsa, many great scholars accepted it as the reference authority for philosophical dissertation and wrote commentaries on it to establish their unique philosophic viewpoint regarding the Ātman and Bhagavān. Jagadguru Shankaracharya’s commentary on the Vedānta Darśhan is called Śārīrak Bhāṣhya, which lays the foundation for the *advait-vād* tradition of philosophy. Many of his followers, such as Vachaspati and Padmapada have elaborated upon his commentary. Jagadguru Nimbarkacharya wrote the Vedānta Pārijāta Saurabh, which explains the *dwait-advait-vād* school of thought. Jagadguru Ramanujacharya’s commentary is called Śrī Bhāṣhya, which lays the basis for the *viśiṣṭ-advait-vād* system of philosophy. Jagadguru Madhvacharya’s commentary is called Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣyam, which is the foundation for the *dwait-vād* school of thought. Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya wrote Aṇu Bhāṣhya, in which he established the *śhuddhadvait-vād* system of philosophy. Apart from these, some of the other well-known commentators have been Bhat Bhaskar, Yadav Prakash, Keshav, Nilakanth, Vijnanabhikshu, and Baladev Vidyabhushan.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, himself a Vedic scholar par excellence, did not write any commentary on the Vedānta Darśhan. He took the view that the writer of the Vedānta, Sage Ved Vyāsa himself, declared that his final scripture the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam is its perfect commentary:

arthoyam brahmaśūtrāṇam sarvopaniṣhadāmapi [v3]

“The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam reveals the meaning and the essence of the Vedānt Darśhan and all the Upaniṣads.” Hence, out of respect for Ved Vyāsa, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu did not deem it fit to write another commentary on the scripture.

महाभूतान्यङ्ककारो बुद्धिरव्यक्त मेव च ।
इन्द्रियाणि दशैकं च पञ्च चेन्द्रियगोचराः ॥६॥

*mahā-bhūtāny ahankāro buddhir avyaktam eva cha
indriyāṇi daśhaikam̄ cha pañcha chendriya-gocharāḥ*

mahā-bhūtāni—the (five) great elements; *ahankāraḥ*—the ego; *buddhiḥ*—the intellect; *avyaktam*—the unmanifested primordial matter; *eva*—indeed; *cha*—and; *indriyāṇi*—the senses; *daśha-ekam*—eleven; *cha*—and; *pañcha*—five; *cha*—and; *indriya-go-charāḥ*—the (five) objects of the senses;

The field of activities is composed of the five great elements, the ego, the intellect, the unmanifest primordial matter, the eleven senses (five knowledge senses, five working senses, and mind), and the five objects of the senses.

The twenty-four elements that constitute the field of activities are: *pañcha-mahābhūta* (the five gross elements—earth, water, fire, air, and space), the *pañch-tanmātrās* (five sense objects—taste, touch, smell, sight, and sound), the five working senses (voice, hands, legs, genitals, and anus), the five knowledge senses (ears, eyes, tongue, skin, and nose), mind, intellect, ego, and *prakṛiti* (the primordial form of the material energy). Shri Krishna uses the word *daśhaikam* (ten plus one) to indicate the eleven senses. In these, he includes the mind along with the five knowledge senses and the five working senses. Previously, in verse 10.22, he had mentioned that amongst the senses he is the mind.

One may wonder why the five sense objects have been included in the field of activities, when they exist outside the body. The reason is that the mind contemplates upon the sense objects, and these five sense objects reside in a subtle form in the mind. That is why, while sleeping, when we dream with our mind, in our dream state we see, hear, feel, taste, and smell, even though our

gross senses are resting on the bed. This illustrates that the gross objects of the senses also exist mentally in the subtle form. Shri Krishna has included them here because he is referring to the entire field of activity for the Ātman. Some other scriptures exclude the five sense objects while describing the body. Instead, they include the five *prāṇas* (life-airs). This is merely a matter of classification and not a philosophical difference.

The same knowledge is also explained in terms of sheaths. The field of the body has five *kośhas* (sheaths) that cover the Ātman that is ensconced within:

AnnaMāyā kośh. It is the gross sheath, consisting of the five gross elements (earth, water, fire, air, and space).

PrāṇaMāyā kośh. It is the life-airs sheath, consisting of the five life airs (*prāṇ, apān, vyān, samān, and udān*).

ManoMāyā kośh. It is the mental sheath, consisting of the mind and the five working senses (voice, hands, legs, genitals, and anus).

VijñānaMāyā kośh. It is the intellectual sheath, consisting of the intellect and the five knowledge senses (ears, eyes, tongue, skin, and nose).

ĀnandMāyā kośh. It is the bliss sheath, which consists of the ego that makes us identify with the tiny bliss of the body-mind-intellect mechanism.

इच्छा द्वेषः सुखं दुःखं सङ्घातश्चेतना धृतिः ।
एतक्षेत्रं समासेन सविकारमुदाहृतम् ॥७॥

*ichchhā dveṣhaḥ sukham duḥkham saṅghātaś chetanā dhṛitih
etat kṣhetram samāsena sa-vikāram udāhṛitam*

ichchhā—desire; *dveṣhaḥ*—aversion; *sukham*—happiness; *duḥkham*—misery; *saṅghātaḥ*—the aggregate; *chetanā*—the consciousness; *dhṛitiḥ*—the will; *etat*—all these; *kṣhetram*—the field of activities; *samāsena*—comprise of; *sa-vikāram*—with modifications; *udāhṛitam*—are said.

Desire and aversion, happiness and misery, the body, consciousness, and

the will—all these comprise the field and its modifications.

Shri Krishna now elucidates the attributes of the *kṣhetra* (field), and its modifications thereof:

Body. The field of activities includes the body, but is much more than that. The body undergoes six transformations until death—*asti* (coming into existence), *jāyate* (birth), *vardhate* (growth), *viparinamate* (reproduction), *apakṣhīyate* (withering with age), *vinaśhyati* (death). The body supports the Ātman in its quest for happiness in the world or in Bhagavān, as the Ātman guides it.

Consciousness. It is the life force that exists in the Ātman, and which it also imparts to the body while it is present in it. This is just as fire has the ability to heat, and if we put an iron rod into it, the rod too becomes red hot with the heat it receives from the fire. Similarly, the Ātman makes the body seem lifelike by imparting the quality of consciousness in it. Shri Krishna thus includes consciousness as a trait of the field of activities.

Will. This is the determination that keeps the constituent elements of the body active and focused in a particular direction. It is the will that enables the Ātman to achieve goals through the field of activities. The will is a quality of the intellect, which is energized by the Ātman. Variations in the will due to the influence of *sattva guṇa*, *rāgo guṇa*, and *tamo guṇa* are described in verses 18.33 to 18.35.

Desire. This is a function of the mind and the intellect, which creates a longing for the acquisition of an object, a situation, a person, etc. In discussing the body, we would probably take desire for granted, but imagine how different the nature of life would have been if there were no desires. So the Supreme Bhagavān, who designed the field of activities and included desire as a part of it, naturally makes special mention of it. The intellect analyses the desirability of an object, and the mind harbors its desire. When one becomes

self-realized, all material desires are extinguished, and now the purified mind harbors the desire for Bhagavān. While material desires are the cause of bondage, spiritual desires lead to liberation.

Aversion. It is a state of the mind and intellect that creates revulsion for objects, persons, and situations that are disagreeable to it, and seeks to avoid them.

Happiness. This is a feeling of pleasure that is experienced in the mind through agreeable circumstances and fulfillment of desires. The mind perceives the sensations of happiness, and the Ātman does so along with it because it identifies with the mind. However, material happiness never satiates the hunger of the Ātman, which remains discontented until it experiences the infinite divine bliss of Bhagavān.

Misery. It is the pain experienced in the mind through disagreeable circumstances.

Now Shri Krishna goes on to describe the virtues and attributes that will enable one to cultivate knowledge, and thereby fulfill the purpose of the field of activities, which is human form.

अमानित्वपदभिष्ठवपहिंसा क्षान्तिराज्वम् ।
आचार्योपासनं शौचं स्थैर्यमात्मविनिग्रहः ॥ 8 ॥

इन्द्रियार्थेषु वैराग्यमनहङ्कार एव च ।
जन्ममृत्युजराव्याधिदुःखदोषानुदर्शनम् ॥ 9 ॥

असक्तिरनभिष्वङ्गः पुत्रदारगृहादिषु ।
नित्यं च समचित्तत्वमिष्टेपपत्तिषु ॥ 10 ॥

मयि चानन्ययोगेन भक्तिरव्यभिचारिणी ।
विविक्तदेशसेवित्वपरतिर्जनसंसदि ॥ 11 ॥
अध्यात्मज्ञाननित्यत्वं तत्त्वज्ञानार्थदर्शनम् ।
एतज्ञानमिति प्रोक्तमज्ञानं यदतोऽन्यथा ॥ 12 ॥

*amānitvam adambhitvam ahinsā kṣhāntir ārjavam
āchāryopāsanam śhaucham sthairyam ātma-vinigrahah
indriyārtheśhu vairāgyam anahankāra eva cha
janma-mṛityu-jarā-vyādhi-duḥkha-doṣhānudarśhanam
asaktir anabhiṣhvāṅgah putra-dāra-gṛihādiṣhu
nityam cha sama-chittatvam iṣṭāniṣṭopapattiṣhu
mayi chānanya-yogena bhaktir avyabhichāriṇī
vivikta-deśha-sevitvam arati jana-sansadi
adhyātma-jñāna-nityatvam tattva-jñānārtha-darśhanam
etaj jñānam iti proktam ajñānam yad ato 'nyathā*

amānitvam—humbleness; *adambhitvam*—freedom from hypocrisy; *ahinsā*—non-violence; *kṣhāntih*—forgiveness; *ārjavam*—simplicity; *āchārya-upāsanam*—service of the Guru; *śhaucham*—cleanliness of body and mind; *sthairyam*—steadfastness; *ātma-vinigrahah*—self-control; *indriya-artheśhu*—toward objects of the senses; *vairāgyam*—dispassion; *anahankāraḥ*—absence of egotism; *eva cha*—and also; *janma*—of birth; *mṛityu*—death; *jarā*—old age; *vyādhi*—disease; *duḥkha*—evils; *doṣha*—faults; *anudarśhanam*—perception; *asaktih*—non-attachment; *anabhiṣhvāṅgah*—absence of craving; *putra*—children; *dāra*—spouse; *gṛihā-ādiṣhu*—home, etc.; *nityam*—constant; *cha*—and; *sama-chittatvam*—even-mindedness; *iṣṭha*—the desirable; *aniṣṭha*—undesirable; *upapattiṣhu*—having obtained; *mayi*—toward me; *cha*—also; *ananya-yogena*—exclusively united; *bhaktih*—devotion; *avyabhichāriṇī*—constant; *vivikta*—solitary; *deśha*—places; *sevitvam*—inclination for; *aratiḥ*—aversion; *jana-sansadi*—for mundane society; *adhyātma*—spiritual; *jñāna*—knowledge; *nityatvam*—constancy; *tattva-jñāna*—knowledge of spiritual principles; *artha*—for; *darśhanam*—philosophy; *etat*—all this; *jñānam*—knowledge; *iti*—thus; *proktam*—declared; *ajñānam*—ignorance; *yat*—what; *ataḥ*—to this; *anyathā*—contrary.

Humbleness; freedom from hypocrisy; non-violence; forgiveness; simplicity; service of the Guru; cleanliness of body and mind; steadfastness; and self-control; dispassion toward the objects of the senses; absence of egotism; keeping in mind the evils of birth, disease, old age, and death; non-attachment; absence of clinging to spouse, children, home, and so on; even-mindedness amidst desired and undesired events in life; constant and exclusive devotion toward me; an inclination for solitary places and an aversion for mundane society; constancy in spiritual knowledge; and philosophical pursuit of the Absolute Truth—all these I declare to be knowledge, and what is contrary to it, I call ignorance.

To gain knowledge of the *kṣhetra* and *kṣhetrajña* is not merely an intellectual exercise. Unlike bookish knowledge that can be cultivated without a change in one's character, the spiritual knowledge that Shri Krishna is talking about requires purification of the heart. (Here, heart does not refer to the physical organ. The inner apparatus of mind and intellect is also sometimes referred to as the heart.) These four verses describe the virtues, habits, behaviors, and attitudes that purify one's life and illuminate it with the light of knowledge.

Humbleness. When we become proud of the attributes of our individual field, such as beauty, intellect, talent, strength, etc. we forget that Bhagavān has given all these attributes to us. Pride thus results in distancing our consciousness from Bhagavān. It is a big obstacle on the path of self-realization since it contaminates the entire field by affecting the qualities of the mind and intellect.

Freedom from hypocrisy. The hypocrite develops an artificial external personality. A person is defective from inside, but creates a facade of virtuosity on the outside. Unfortunately, the external display of virtues is skin-deep and hollow.

Non-violence. The cultivation of knowledge requires respect for all living beings. This requires the practice of non-violence. Hence the scriptures state: *ātmanah pratikūlāni pareśān na samācharet* [v4] “If you dislike a certain behavior from others, do not behave with them in that manner yourself.”

Forgiveness. It is freedom from ill will even toward those who have harmed one. Actually, harboring ill will harms oneself more than the other. By practicing forgiveness, a person of discrimination releases the negativities in the mind and purifies it.

Simplicity. It is straightforwardness in thought, speech, and action. Straightforwardness in thought includes absence of deceit, envy, crookedness, etc. Straightforwardness in speech includes absence of taunt, censure, gossip, ornamentation, etc. Straightforwardness in action includes plainness in living, forthrightness in behavior, etc.

Service of the Guru. Spiritual knowledge is received from the Guru. This imparting of divine knowledge requires the disciple to have an attitude of dedication and devotion toward the Guru. By serving the Guru, the disciple develops humbleness and commitment that enables the Guru to impart knowledge. Thus, Shri Krishna explained to Arjun in verse 4.34: “Learn the truth by approaching a spiritual master. Inquire from him with reverence and render service unto him. Such an enlightened saint can impart knowledge unto you because he has seen the truth.”

Cleanliness of body and mind. Purity should be both internal and external. The Śāṇḍilya Upaniṣad states: *śaucham nāma dwividham-bāhyamāntaram cheti* (1.1) [v5] “There are two types of cleanliness—internal and external.” External cleanliness is helpful in maintaining good health, developing discipline, and uncluttering the mind. But mental cleanliness is even more important, and it is achieved by focusing the mind on the all-pure Bhagavān. Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj

states:

*māyādhīn malīn mana, hai anādi kālīn,
hari virahānala dhoya jala, karu nirmala bani dīn.*
(*Bhakti Śhatak* verse 79) [v6]

“The material mind is dirty since endless lifetimes. Purify it in the fire of longing for Bhagavān, while practicing utmost humility.”

Steadfastness. Self-knowledge and Brahman-realization are not goals that are attainable in a day. Steadfastness is the persistence to remain on the path until the goal is reached. The scriptures state: *charaivaite charaivate, charan vai madhu vindati* [v7] “Keep moving forward. Keep moving forward. Those who do not give up will get the honey at the end.”

Self-control. It is the restraint of the mind and the senses from running after mundane pleasures that dirty the mind and intellect. Self-control prevents the dissipation of the personality through indulgence.

Dispassion toward the objects of the senses. It is a stage higher than the self-control mentioned above, in which we restrain ourselves by force. Dispassion means a lack of taste for sense pleasures that are obstacles on the path of Brahman-realization.

Absence of egotism. Egotism is the conscious awareness of “I,” “me,” and “mine.” This is classified as nescience because it is at the bodily level, arising out of the identification of the self with the body. It is also called the *aham chetanā* (pride arising out of the sense of self). All mystics emphatically declare that to invite Bhagavān into our hearts, we must get rid of the pride of the self.

*jaba maiñ thā taba hari nathīñ, ab hari hai, maiñ nāhīñ
prem galī ati sankarī, yā meñ dwe na samāhīñ* (*Saint Kabir*) [v8]

“When ‘I’ existed, Bhagavān was not there; now Bhagavān exists and ‘I’ do not. The path of divine love is very narrow; it cannot accommodate both ‘I’

and Bhagavān.”

In the path of *jñāna yog* and *ashtāṅg yog*, there are elaborate *sādhanās* for getting rid of the *aham chetanā*. But in the path of *bhakti yog*, it gets eliminated very simply. We add *dās* (servant) in front of *aham* (the sense of self), making it *dāsoham* (I am the servant of Bhagavān). Now the “I” no longer remains harmful and self-consciousness is replaced by Brahman-consciousness.

Keeping in mind the evils of birth, disease, old-age and death. If the intellect is undecided about what is more important—material enhancement or spiritual wealth—then it becomes difficult to develop the strong will required for acquiring knowledge of the self. But when the intellect is convinced about the unattractiveness of the world, it becomes firm in its resolve. To get this firmness, we should constantly contemplate about the miseries that are an inseparable part of life in the material world. This is what set the Buddha on the spiritual path. He saw a sick person, and thought, “O there is sickness in the world. I will also have to fall sick one day.” Then he saw an old person, and thought, “There is also old age. This means that I will also become old one day.” After that, he saw a dead person, and realized, “This is also a part of existence. It means that I too will have to die one day.” The Buddha’s intellect was so perceptive that one exposure to these facts of life made him renounce worldly existence. Since we do not have such decisive intellects, we must repeatedly contemplate on these facts to allow the unattractiveness of the world to sink in.

Non-attachment. It means dispassion toward the world. We have only one mind and if we wish to engage it in pursuing spiritual goals, we have to detach it from material objects and persons. The *sādhak* replaces worldly attachment with love and attachment toward Bhagavān.

Absence of clinging to spouse, children, home, and so on. These are areas

where the mind easily becomes attached. In bodily thinking, one spontaneously identifies with the family and home as “mine.” Thus, they linger upon the mind more often and attachment to them shackles the mind to material consciousness. Attachment causes expectations of the kind of behavior we want from family members, and when these expectations are not met, it leads to mental anguish. Also inevitably, there is separation from the family, either temporarily, if they go to another place, or permanently, if they die. All these experiences and their apprehensions begin to weigh heavily upon the mind and drag it away from Bhagavān. Hence, if we seek immortal bliss, we must practice prudence while interacting with the spouse, child, and home, to prevent the mind from becoming entangled. We must do our duty toward them, without attachment, as a nurse does her duty in the hospital, or as a teacher does her duty toward her students in the school.

Even-mindedness amidst desired and undesired events in life. Pleasurable and painful events come without invitation, just as the night and the day. That is life. To rise above these dualities, we must learn to enhance our spiritual strength through detachment toward the world. We must develop the ability to remain unperturbed by life’s reversals and also not get carried away with the euphoria of success.

Constant and exclusive devotion toward me. Mere detachment means that the mind is not going in the negative direction. But life is more than merely preventing the undesirable. Life is about engaging in the desirable. The desirable goal of life is to consecrate it at the lotus feet of Bhagavān. Therefore, Shri Krishna has highlighted it here.

Inclination for solitary places. Unlike worldly people, devotees are not driven by the need for company to overcome feelings of loneliness. They naturally prefer solitude that enables them to engage their mind in communion with

Bhagavān. Hence, they are naturally inclined to choosing solitary places, where they are able to more deeply absorb themselves in devotional thoughts.

Aversion for mundane society. The sign of a materialistic mind is that it finds pleasure in talks about worldly people and worldly affairs. One who is cultivating divine consciousness develops a natural distaste for these activities, and thus avoids mundane society. At the same time, if it is necessary to participate in it for the sake of service to Bhagavān, the devotee accepts it and develops the strength to remain mentally unaffected by it.

Constancy in spiritual knowledge. To theoretically know something is not enough. One may know that anger is a bad thing but may still give vent to it repeatedly. We have to learn to practically implement spiritual knowledge in our lives. This does not happen by hearing profound truths just once. After hearing them, we must repeatedly contemplate upon them. Such mulling over the divine truths is the constancy in spiritual knowledge that Shri Krishna is talking about.

Philosophical pursuit of the Absolute Truth. Even animals engage in the bodily activities of eating, sleeping, mating, and defending. However, Bhagavān has especially blessed the human form with the faculty of knowledge. This is not to enable us to engage in bodily activities in a deluxe way, but for us to contemplate upon the questions: “Who am I? Why am I here? What is my goal in life? How was this world created? What is my connection with the Creator? How will I fulfill my purpose in life?” This philosophic pursuit of the truth sublimates our thinking above the animalistic level and brings us to hear and read about the divine science of Brahman-realization.

All the virtues, habits, behaviors, and attitudes described above lead to the growth of wisdom and knowledge. The opposite of these are vanity, hypocrisy,

violence, vengeance, duplicity, disrespect for the Guru, uncleanliness of body and mind, unsteadiness, lack of self-control, longing for sense objects, conceit, entanglement in spouse, children, home, etc. Such dispositions cripple the development of self-knowledge. Thus, Shri Krishna calls them ignorance and darkness.

ज्ञेयं यत्तत्रवक्ष्यामि यज्ज्ञात्वामृतमश्रुते ।
अनादिमपरं ब्रह्म न सत्तत्रासदुच्यते ॥ 13 ॥

*jñeyam yat tat pravakṣhyāmi yaj jñātvāmṛitam aśhnute
anādi mat-param brahma na sat tan nāsad uchyate*

jñeyam—ought to be known; *yat*—which; *tat*—that; *pravakṣhyāmi*—I shall now reveal; *yat*—which; *jñātvā*—knowing; *amṛitam*—immortality; *aśhnute*—one achieves; *anādi*—beginningless; *mat-param*—subordinate to me; *brahma*—Brahman; *na*—not; *sat*—existent; *tat*—that; *na*—not; *asat*—non-existent; *uchyate*—is called.

I shall now reveal to you that which ought to be known, and by knowing which, one attains immortality. It is the beginningless *Brahman*, which lies beyond existence and non-existence.

Day and night are like two sides of the same coin for one cannot exist without the other. We can only say it is day in some place if night too falls in that place. But if there is no night, then there is no day either; there is only perpetual light. Similarly, in the case of *Brahman*, the word “existence” is not descriptive enough. Shri Krishna says that *Brahman* is beyond the relative terms of existence and non-existence.

The *Brahman*, in its formless and attributeless aspect, is the object of worship of the *jñānīs*. In its personal form, as *Bhagavān*, it is the object of worship of the *bhaktas*. Residing within the body, it is known as *ParamĀtman*. All these are three manifestations of the same Supreme Reality. Later, in verse 14.27, Shri Krishna states: *brahmaṇo hi pratiṣṭhāham* “I am the basis of the formless *Brahman*.” Thus, the formless *Brahman* and the personal form of *Bhagavān* are both two aspects of the

Supreme Entity. Both exist everywhere, and hence they both can be called all-pervading. Referring to these, Shri Krishna reveals the contradictory qualities that manifest in Bhagavān.

सर्वतः पाणिपादं तत्सर्वतोऽक्षिशिरोमुखम् ।
सर्वतः श्रुतिमल्लोके सर्वमावृत्य तिष्ठति ॥ 14 ॥

*sarvataḥ pāṇi-pādaṁ tat sarvato 'kṣhi-śhiro-mukhaṁ
sarvataḥ śruti-mal loka sarvam āvṛtya tiṣṭhati*

sarvataḥ—everywhere; *pāṇi*—hands; *pādaṁ*—feet; *tat*—that; *sarvataḥ*—everywhere; *akṣhi*—eyes; *śirah*—heads; *mukhaṁ*—faces; *sarvataḥ*—everywhere; *śruti-mat*—having ears; *loke*—in the universe; *sarvam*—everything; *āvṛtya*—pervades; *tiṣṭhati*—exists.

Everywhere are his hands and feet, eyes, heads, and faces. His ears too are in all places, for he pervades everything in the universe.

Often people argue that Bhagavān cannot have hands, feet, eyes, ears, etc. But Shri Krishna says that Bhagavān has all these, and to an innumerable extent. We should never fall into the trap of circumscribing Bhagavān within our limited understanding. He is *kartumakartum anyathā karatum samarthaḥ* “He can do the possible, the impossible, and the reverse of the possible.” For that all-powerful Bhagavān, to say that he cannot have hands and feet, is placing a constraint upon him.

However, Bhagavān’s limbs and senses are divine, while ours are material. The difference between the material and the transcendental is that while we are limited to one set of senses, Bhagavān possesses unlimited hands and legs, eyes, and ears. While our senses exist in one place, Bhagavān’s senses are everywhere. Hence, Bhagavān sees everything that happens in the world, and hears everything that is ever said. This is possible because, just as he is all-pervading in creation, his eyes and ears are also ubiquitous. The Chhāndogya Upaniṣad states: *sarvam khalvidam brahma* (3.14.1) [v9] “Everywhere is *Brahman*.” Hence, he accepts food offerings made to him anywhere in the universe; he hears the prayers of

his devotees, wherever they may be; and he is the witness of all that occurs in the three worlds. If millions of devotees venerate him at the same time, he has no problem in accepting the prayers of all of them.

सर्वेन्द्रियगुणाभासं सर्वेन्द्रियविवर्जितम् ।
असक्तं सर्वभृच्चैव निर्गुणं गुणभोक्तृ च ॥ १५ ॥

*sarvendriya-guṇābhāsam sarvendriya-vivarjitaṁ
asaktam sarva-bhrīch chaiva nirguṇam guṇa-bhoktṛi cha*

sarva—all; *indriya*—senses; *guṇa*—sense-objects; *ābhāsam*—the perciever; *sarva*—all; *indriya*—senses; *vivarjitaṁ*—devoid of; *asaktam*—unattached; *sarva-bhrīt*—the sustainer of all; *cha*—yet; *eva*—indeed; *nirguṇam*—beyond the three modes of material nature; *guṇa-bhoktri*—the enjoyer of the three modes of material nature; *cha*—although.

Though he perceives all sense-objects, yet he is devoid of the senses. He is unattached to anything, and yet he is the sustainer of all. Although he is without attributes, yet he is the enjoyer of the three modes of material nature.

Having stated that Bhagavān's senses are everywhere, Shri Krishna now states the exact opposite, that he does not possess any senses. If we try to understand this through mundane logic, we will find this contradictory. We will inquire, “How can Bhagavān have both infinite senses and also be without senses?” However, mundane logic does not apply to him who is beyond the reach of the intellect. Bhagavān possesses infinite contradictory attributes at the same time. The Brahma Vaivartak Puran states:

viruddha dharmo rūposā vaiśhvaryāt puruṣhottamāḥ [v10]

“The Supreme Bhagavān is the reservoir of innumerable contradictory attributes.” In this verse, Shri Krishna mentions a few of the infinite contradictory attributes that exist in the personality of Bhagavān.

He is devoid of mundane senses like ours, and hence it is correct to say that he does not have senses. *Sarvendriya vivarjitaṁ* means “he is without material senses.”

However, he possesses divine senses that are everywhere, consequently, it is also correct to say that the senses of Bhagavān are in all places. *Sarvendriya gunābhāsam* means “he manifests the functions of the senses and grasps the sense objects.” Including both these attributes, the Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣad states:

apāṇipādo javano grahitā paśhyatyachakṣuh sa śriṇotyakarṇah. (3.19) [v11]

“Bhagavān does not possess material hands, feet, eyes, and ears. Yet he grasps, walks, sees, and hears.”

Further, Shri Krishna states that he is the sustainer of creation, and yet detached from it. In his form as Bhagavān Vishnu, Bhagavān maintains the entire creation. He sits in the hearts of all living beings, notes their karmas, and gives the results. Under Bhagavān Vishnu’s dominion, Brahma manipulates the laws of material science to ensure that the universe functions stably. Also, under Bhagavān Vishnu’s dominion, the celestial deities arrange to provide the air, earth, water, rain, etc. that are necessary for our survival. Hence, Bhagavān is the sustainer of all. Yet, he is complete in himself and is, thus, detached from everyone. The Vedas mention him as *Ātmanrām*, meaning “one who rejoices in the self and has no need of anything external.”

The material energy is subservient to Bhagavān, and it works for his pleasure by serving him. He is thus the enjoyer of the three *guṇas* (modes of material nature). At the same time, he is also *nirguṇa* (beyond the three *guṇas*), because these *guṇas* are material, while Bhagavān is divine.

बहिरन्तश्च भूतानामचरं चरमेव च ।
सूक्ष्मत्वात्तदविज्ञेयं दूरस्थं चान्तिके च तत् ॥ 16 ॥

*bahir antaś cha bhūtānām acharam charam eva cha
sūkṣhmatvāt tad avijñeyam dūra-stham chāntike cha tat*

bahir—outside; *antaḥ*—inside; *cha*—and; *bhūtānām*—all living beings; *acharam*—not moving; *charam*—moving; *eva*—indeed; *cha*—and; *sūkṣhmatvāt*—due to subtlety; *tat*—he; *avijñeyam*—incomprehensible; *dūra-stham*—very far away; *cha*—and; *antike*—very near; *cha*—also; *tat*—he.

He exists outside and inside all living beings, those that are moving and not moving. He is subtle, and hence, he is incomprehensible. He is very far, but he is also very near.

There is a Vedic Mantra that describes Bhagavān in practically the same manner as Shri Krishna has described here:

*tad ejati tan naijati taddūre tadvantike
tad antar asya sarvasya tadusarvasyāsyā bāhyataḥ
(Ishopanishad mantra 5) [v12]*

“The Supreme *Brahman* does not walk, and yet he walks; he is far, but he is also near. He exists inside everything, but he is also outside everything.”

Previously in verse 13.3, Shri Krishna said that to know Bhagavān is true knowledge. However, here he states that the Supreme Entity is incomprehensible. This again seems to be a contradiction, but what he means is that Bhagavān is not knowable by the senses, mind, and intellect. The intellect is made from the material energy, so it cannot reach Bhagavān who is Divine. However, if Bhagavān himself bestows his grace upon someone, that fortunate Ātman can come to know him.

अविभक्तं च भूतेषु विभक्तमिव च स्थितम् ।
भूतभर्तुं च तज्जेयं ग्रसिष्णु प्रभविष्णु च ॥ 17 ॥

*avibhaktam cha bhūteṣhu vibhaktam iva cha sthitam
bhūta-bhartri cha taj jñeyam grasiṣhṇu prabhaviṣhṇu cha*

avibhaktam—indivisible; *cha*—although; *bhūteṣhu*—amongst living beings; *vibhaktam*—divided; *iva*—apparently; *cha*—yet; *sthitam*—situated; *bhūta-bhartri*—the sustainer of all beings; *cha*—also; *tat*—that; *jñeyam*—to be known; *grasiṣhṇu*—the annihilator; *prabhaviṣhṇu*—the creator; *cha*—and.

He is indivisible, yet he appears to be divided amongst living beings. Know the Supreme Entity to be the sustainer, annihilator, and creator of all beings.

Bhagavān’s personality includes his various energies. All manifest and

unmanifest objects are but expansions of his energy. Thus, we can say he is all that exists. Accordingly, Śrīmad Bhāgavatam states:

*dravyam karma cha kālaś cha svabhāvo jīva eva cha
vāsudevāt paro brahman na chānyo 'rtho 'sti tattvataḥ* (2.5.14) [v13]

“The various aspects of creation—time, karma, the natures of individual living beings, and the material ingredients of creation—are all the Supreme Bhagavān Shri Krishna himself. There is nothing in existence apart from him.”

Bhagavān may appear to be divided amongst the objects of his creation, but since he is all that exists, he remains undivided as well. For example, space may seem to be divided amongst the objects that it contains. Yet, all objects are within the one entity called space, which manifested at the beginning of creation. Again, the reflection of the sun in puddles of water appears divided, and yet the sun remains indivisible.

Just as the ocean throws up waves and then absorbs them back into itself, similarly Bhagavān creates the world, maintains it, and then absorbs it back into himself. Therefore, he may be equally seen as the Creator, the Maintainer, and the Destroyer of everything.

**ज्योतिषामपि तज्ज्योतिस्तमसः परमुच्यते ।
ज्ञानं ज्ञेयं ज्ञानगम्यं ह्रदि सर्वस्य विष्ठितम् ॥१८॥**

*jyotiṣhām api tat jyotis tamasah param uchyate
jñānam jñeyam jñāna-gamyam hr̥idi sarvasya viṣṭhitam*

jyotiṣhām—in all luminaries; *api*—and; *tat*—that; *jyotih*—the source of light; *tamasah*—the darkness; *param*—beyond; *uchyate*—is said (to be); *jñānam*—knowledge; *jñeyam*—the object of knowledge; *jñāna-gamyam*—the goal of knowledge; *hr̥idi*—within the heart; *sarvasya*—of all living beings; *viṣṭhitam*—dwells.

He is the source of light in all luminaries, and is entirely beyond the darkness of ignorance. He is knowledge, the object of knowledge, and the goal of knowledge. He dwells within the hearts of all living beings.

Here, Shri Krishna establishes the supremacy of Bhagavān in different ways. There are various illuminating objects, such as the sun, moon, stars, fire, jewels, etc. Left alone, none of these have any power to illuminate. When Bhagavān imparts the power to them, only then can they illumine anything. The Vedas say:

tameva bhāntamanubhāti sarvam tasya bhāsā saravamidaṁ vibhāti
(Kaṭhopaniṣad 2.2.15) [v14]

“Bhagavān makes all things luminous. It is by his luminosity that all luminous objects give light.”

sūryastapati tejasendrah (Vedas) [v15]

“By his radiance, the sun and moon become luminous.” In other words, the luminosity of the sun and the moon is borrowed from Bhagavān. They may lose their luminosity someday, but Bhagavān can never lose his.

Bhagavān has three unique names: *Ved-kṛit*, *Ved-vit*, and *Ved-vedya*. He is *Ved-kṛit*, which means, “One who manifested the Vedas.” He is *Ved-vit*, which means, “One who knows the Vedas.” He is also *Ved-vedya* which means, “One who is to be known through the Vedas.” In the same manner, Shri Krishna describes the Supreme Entity as the *jñeyā* (the object worthy of knowing), *jñāna-gamya* (the goal of all knowledge), and *jñāna* (true knowledge).

इति क्षेत्रं तथा ज्ञानं ज्ञेयं चोक्तं समासतः ।
मद्भक्त एतद्विज्ञाय मद्भावायोपपद्यते ॥ १९ ॥

*iti kṣhetram tathā jñānam jñeyam choktam samāsataḥ
mad-bhaktaḥ etad vijñāya mad-bhāvāyopapadyate*

iti—thus; *kṣhetram*—the nature of the field; *tathā*—and; *jñānam*—the meaning of knowledge; *jñeyam*—the object of knowledge; *cha*—and; *uktam*—revealed; *samāsataḥ*—in summary; *mat-bhaktaḥ*—my devotee; *etat*—this; *vijñāya*—having understood; *mat-bhāvāya*—my divine nature; *upapadyate*—attain.

I have thus revealed to you the nature of the field, the meaning of

knowledge, and the object of knowledge. Only my devotees can understand this in reality, and by doing so, they attain my divine nature.

Shri Krishna now concludes his description of the field and the object of knowledge, by mentioning the fruit of knowing this topic. However, once again, he deems it fit to bring in devotion, and says that only the *bhaktas* (devotees) can truly understand this knowledge. Those who practice *karm*, *jñāna*, *ashṭāṅga*, etc. devoid of *bhakti* cannot truly understand the import of the Bhagavad Gita, even though they themselves may think that they do. *Bhakti* is the essential ingredient in all paths leading to knowledge of Bhagavān.

Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj puts this very nicely:

*jo hari sevā hetu ho, soī karm bakhāna
jo hari bhagati bārhāve, soī samujhiya jñāna* (*Bhakti Śhatak* 66) [v16]

“That work which is done in devotion to Bhagavān is the real *karm*; and that knowledge which increases love for Bhagavān is real knowledge.”

Devotion not only helps us to know Bhagavān, it also makes the devotee Bhagavān-like, and hence, Shri Krishna states that the devotees attain his nature. This has been emphasized in the Vedic scriptures again and again. The Vedas state:

*bhaktirevainam nayati bhaktirevainam paśhyati bhaktirevainam darśhayati bhakti vaśhah
puruṣho bhaktireva bhūyasi* (*Māṭhar Śhruti*) [v17]

“*Bhakti* alone can lead us to Bhagavān. *Bhakti* alone can make us see Bhagavān. *Bhakti* alone can bring us in the presence of Bhagavān. Bhagavān is under the control of *bhakti*. Hence, do *bhakti* exclusively.” Again the Muṇḍakopaniṣhad states:

upāsate puruṣham ye hyakāmāste śukrametadativartanti dhīrāḥ (3.2.1) [v18]

“Those who engage in *bhakti* toward Shri Hari, giving up all material desires, escape the cycle of life and death.” Yet again, the Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣhad states:

yasya deve parā bhaktiryathā deve tathā gurau

tasyaite kathitā hyarthā prakāśhante mahātmanah (6.23) [v19]

“Those who have unflinching *bhakti* toward Bhagavān and identical *bhakti* toward the Guru, in the hearts of such saintly persons, by the grace of Bhagavān the imports of the Vedic scriptures are automatically revealed.” The other Vedic Scriptures also reiterate this emphatically:

*na sādhayati mām yoga na sāṅkhyam dharma uddhava
na svādhyāyas tapas tyāgo yathā bhaktir mamorjītā (Bhāgavatam 11.14.20) [v20]*

Shri Krishna states: “Uddhav, I am not attained by *ashṭāṅg yog*, by the study of *sāṅkhya*, cultivation of scriptural knowledge, austerities, nor by renunciation. It is by *bhakti* alone that I am won over.” In the Bhagavad Gita, Shri Krishna repeatedly states this, in verses 8.22, 11.54, etc. In verse 18.55, he says: “Only by loving devotion does one come to know who I am in truth. Then, having come to know my personality through devotion, one enters my divine realm.”

The Ramayana also says:

rāmahi kevala premu piārā, jāni leu jo jānanihārā. [v21]

“The Supreme Bhagavān Ram is only attained through love. Let this truth be known by all who care to know.” Actually, this principle is emphasized in the other religious traditions as well. In the Jewish Torah it is written: “You shall love the Bhagavān your Bhagavān with all your heart, and with all your Ātman, and with all your might (Deuteronomy 6.5) [v22]. Jesus of Nazareth repeats this commandment in the Christian New Testament as one of the first and foremost commandments to follow (Mark 12.30)

The Guru Granth Sahib states:

*hari sama jaga mahañ vastu nahiñ, prem panth soñ pantha
sadguru sama sajjan nahīñ, gītā sama nahiñ grantha [v23]*

“There is no personality like Bhagavān; there is no path equal to the path of devotion; there is no human equal to the Guru; and there is no scripture that can compare with the Gita.”

प्रकृतिं पुरुषं चैव विद्ध्यनादी उभावपि ।
विकारांश्च गुणांश्चैव विद्धि प्रकृतिसम्भवान् ॥ 20 ॥

*prakṛitim puruṣam chaiva viddhy anādī ubhāv api
vikārānśha cha guṇānśha chaiva viddhi prakṛiti-sambhavān*

prakṛitim—material nature; *puruṣham*—the individual Ātman(s); *cha*—and; *eva*—indeed; *viddhi*—know; *anādī*—beginningless; *ubhāv*—both; *api*—and; *vikārān*—transformations (of the body); *cha*—also; *guṇān*—the three modes of nature; *cha*—and; *eva*—indeed; *viddhi*—know; *prakṛiti*—material energy; *sambhavān*—produced by.

Know that *prakṛiti* (material nature) and *puruṣh* (the individual Ātman(s)) are both beginningless. Also know that all transformations of the body and the three modes of nature are produced by material energy.

The material nature is called Māyā, or *prakṛiti*. Being an energy of Bhagavān, it has existed ever since he has existed; in other words, it is eternal. The Ātman is also eternal, and here it is called *puruṣh* (the living entity), while Bhagavān himself is called *param puruṣh* (the Supreme Living Entity).

The Ātman is also an expansion of the energy of Bhagavān. *śaktitvenaivāṁśhatvam vyañjayanti* (Paramātma Sandarbh 39) [v24] “The Ātman is a fragment of the *jīva śakti* (Ātman energy) of Bhagavān.” While material nature is an insentient energy, the *jīva śakti* is a sentient energy. It is divine and intransmutable. It remains unchanged through different lifetimes, and the different stages of each lifetime. The six stages through which the body passes in one lifetime are: *asti* (existence in the womb), *jāyate* (birth), *vardhate* (growth), *vipariṇamate* (procreation), *apakṣhiyate* (diminution), *vinaśhyati* (death). These changes in the body are brought about by the material energy, called *prakṛiti*, or Māyā. It creates the three modes of nature—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*—and their countless varieties of combinations.

कार्यकारणकर्तृत्वे हेतुः प्रकृतिरुच्यते ।
पुरुषः सुखदुःखानां भोक्तृत्वे हेतुरुच्यते ॥ 21 ॥

*kārya-kāraṇa-kartritve hetuḥ prakṛitir uchyate
puruṣhaḥ sukha-duḥkhānām bhoktṛitve hetur uchyate*

kārya—effect; *kāraṇa*—cause; *kartritve*—in the matter of creation; *hetuḥ*—the medium; *prakṛitiḥ*—the material energy; *uchyate*—is said to be; *puruṣhaḥ*—the individual Ātman; *sukha-duḥkhānām*—of happiness and distress; *bhoktṛitve*—in experiencing; *hetuḥ*—is responsible; *uchyate*—is said to be.

In the matter of creation, the material energy is responsible for cause and effect; in the matter of experiencing happiness and distress, the individual Ātman is declared responsible.

The material energy, with the direction of Brahma, creates myriad elements and forms of life that compose creation. Brahma makes the master plan and the material energy executes it. The Vedas state that there are 8.4 million species of life in the material world. All these bodily forms are transformations of the material energy. Hence, material nature is responsible for all the cause and effect in the world.

The Ātman gets a bodily form (field of activity) according to its past karmas, and it identifies itself with the body, mind, and intellect. Thus, it seeks the pleasure of the bodily senses. When the senses come in contact with the sense objects, the mind experiences a pleasurable sensation. Since the Ātman identifies with the mind, it vicariously enjoys that pleasurable sensation. In this way, the Ātman perceives the sensations of both pleasure and pain, through the medium of the senses, mind, and intellect. This can be compared to a dream state:

*ehi bidhi jaga hari āśhrita rahaī, jadapi asatya deta duḥkh ahaī (Ramayana)
jauñ sapaneñ sira kāṭai koī, binu jāgeñ na dūri dukh hoī (Ramayana) [v25]*

“The world is sustained by Bhagavān. It creates an illusion, which, although unreal, gives misery to the Ātman. This is just like if someone’s head gets cut in a dream, the misery will continue until the person wakes up and stops dreaming.” In this dream state of identifying with the body, the Ātman experiences pleasure and pain in accordance with its own past and present

karmas. As a result, it is said to be responsible for both kinds of experiences.

**पुरुषः प्रकृतिस्थो हि भुङ्के प्रकृतिजानुणान् ।
कारणं गुणसङ्गोऽस्य सदसद्योनिजन्मसु ॥ २२ ॥**

*puruṣah prakṛiti-stho hi bhuṅkte prakṛiti-jān guṇān
kāraṇam guṇa-saṅgo 'sya sad-asad-yoni-janmasu*

puruṣah—the individual Ātman; *prakṛiti-sthah*—seated in the material energy; *hi*—indeed; *bhuṅkte*—desires to enjoy; *prakṛiti-jān*—produced by the material energy; *guṇān*—the three modes of nature; *kāraṇam*—the cause; *guṇa-saṅgah*—the attachment (to three *guṇas*); *asya*—of its; *sat-asat-yoni*—in superior and inferior wombs; *janmasu*—of birth.

When the *puruṣh* (individual Ātman) seated in *prakṛiti* (the material energy) desires to enjoy the three *guṇas*, attachment to them becomes the cause of its birth in superior and inferior wombs.

In the previous verse, Shri Krishna explained that the *puruṣh* (Ātman) is responsible for the experience of pleasure and pain. Now, he explains how this is so. Considering the body to be the self, the Ātman energizes it into activity that is directed at enjoying bodily pleasures. Since the body is made of Māyā, it seeks to enjoy the material energy that is made of the three modes (*guṇas*)—mode of goodness, mode of passion, and mode of ignorance.

Due to the ego, the Ātman identifies itself as the doer and the enjoyer of the body. The body, mind, and intellect perform all the activities, but the Ātman is held responsible for them. Just as when a bus has an accident, the wheels and the steering are not blamed for it; the driver is answerable for any mishap to the bus. Similarly, the senses, mind, and intellect are energized by the Ātman and they work under its dominion. Hence, the Ātman accumulates the karmas for all activities performed by the body. This stockpile of karmas, accumulated from innumerable past lives, causes its repeated birth in superior and inferior wombs.

उपद्रष्टानुमन्ता च भर्ता भोक्ता महेश्वरः ।
परमात्मेति चाप्युक्तो देहेऽस्मिन्पुरुषः परः ॥२३॥

*upadraṣṭānumantā cha bhartā bhoktā maheśvaraḥ
paramātmeti chāpy ukto dehe 'smīn puruṣhaḥ paraḥ*

upadraṣṭā—the witness; *anumantā*—the permitter; *cha*—and; *bhartā*—the supporter; *bhoktā*—the transcendental enjoyer; *mahā-īśvaraḥ*—the ultimate controller; *parama-Ātman*—Superme Ātman; *iti*—that; *cha api*—and also; *uktah*—is said; *dehe*—within the body; *asmin*—this; *puruṣhaḥ paraḥ*—the Supreme Bhagavān.

Within the body also resides the Supreme Bhagavān. He is said to be the witness, the permitter, the supporter, transcendental enjoyer, the ultimate controller, and the *ParamĀtman* (Supreme Ātman).

Shri Krishna has explained the status of the *jīvĀtman* (individual Ātman) within the body. Now in this verse he explains the position of the *ParamĀtman* (Supreme Ātman), who also resides within the body. He previously mentioned the *ParamĀtman* in verse 13.2 as well, when he stated that the individual Ātman is the knower of the individual body while the Supreme Ātman is the knower of all the infinite bodies.

The Supreme Ātman, who is located within everyone, also manifests in the personal form as Bhagavān Vishnu. The Supreme Bhagavān in his form as Vishnu is responsible for maintaining this creation. He resides in the *Kṣhīr Sāgar* (the ocean of milk), at the top of the universe in his personal form. He also expands himself to reside in the hearts of all living beings as the *ParamĀtman*. Seated within, he notes their actions, keeps an account of their karmas, and bestows the results at the proper time. He accompanies the *jīvĀtman* (individual Ātman) to whatever body it receives in each lifetime. He does not hesitate in residing in the body of a snake, a pig, or insect. The Muṇḍakopaniṣhad states:

*dvā suparṇā sayujā sakhyā samānam vṛikṣham pariṣhasvajāte
tayloranyah pippalam svādvatyanaśhnannanyo
samāne vṛikṣhe puruṣho nimagno 'niśhayā śhochati muhyamānaḥ*

juṣhtam yadā paśhyatyanyamīśhamasya mahimānamiti vītaśhokah (3.1.1-2) [v26]

“Two birds are seated in the nest (heart) of the tree (the body) of the living form. They are the *jīvĀtman* (individual Ātman) and *ParamĀtman* (Supreme Ātman). The *jīvĀtman* has its back toward the *ParamĀtman*, and is busy enjoying the fruits of the tree (the results of the karmas it receives while residing in the body). When a sweet fruit comes, it becomes happy; when a bitter fruit comes, it becomes sad. The *ParamĀtman* is a friend of the *jīvĀtman*, but he does not interfere; he simply sits and watches. If the *jīvĀtman* can only turn around to the *ParamĀtman*, all its miseries will come to an end.” The *jīvĀtman* has been bestowed with free will i.e. the freedom to turn away or toward Bhagavān. By the improper use of that free will the *jīvĀtman* is in bondage, and by learning its proper usage, it can attain the eternal service of Bhagavān and experience infinite bliss.

य एवं वेत्ति पुरुषं प्रकृतिं च गुणैः सह ।
सर्वथा वर्तमानोऽपि न स भूयोऽभिजायते ॥ 24 ॥

*ya evam vetti puruṣham prakṛitim cha guṇaiḥ saha
sarvathā vartamāno 'pi na sa bhūyo 'bhijāyate*

yah—who; *evam*—thus; *vetti*—understand; *puruṣham*—Puruṣh; *prakṛitim*—the material nature; *cha*—and; *guṇaiḥ*—the three modes of nature; *saha*—with; *sarvathā*—in every way; *vartamānah*—situated; *api*—although; *na*—not; *sah*—they; *bhūyah*—again; *abhijāyate*—take birth.

Those who understand the truth about Supreme Ātman, the individual Ātman, material nature, and the interaction of the three modes of nature will not take birth here again. They will be liberated regardless of their present condition.

Ignorance has led the Ātman into its present predicament. Having forgotten its spiritual identity as a tiny fragment of Bhagavān, it has fallen into material consciousness. Therefore, knowledge is vital for resurrecting itself from its present position. The Śvetāśhvatar Upaniṣhad states exactly the same thing:

*sanyuktam etat ksharam aksharam cha
 vyaktavyaktam bharate viśhwam iśhaḥ
 anīśhaś chĀtman badhyate bhoktribhāvāj-
 jñātvā devam muchyate sarvapāśhaiḥ (1.8) [v27]*

“There are three entities in creation—the ever-changing material nature, the unchangeable Ātman(s), and the Master of both, who is the Supreme Bhagavān. Ignorance of these entities is the cause of bondage of the Ātman, while knowledge of them helps it cut asunder the fetters of Māyā.”

The knowledge that Shri Krishna is talking about is not just bookish information, but realized wisdom. Realization of knowledge is achieved when we first acquire theoretical knowledge of the three entities from the Guru and the scriptures, and then engage accordingly in spiritual practice. *Shri Krishna now talks about some of these spiritual practices in the next verse.*

**ध्यानेनात्मनि पश्यन्ति केचिदात्मानमात्मना ।
 अन्ये साङ्ख्येन योगेन कर्मयोगेन चापरे ॥ 25 ॥**

*dhyānenātmani paśhyanti kechid Ātmannam ātmanā
 anye sāṅkhyena yogena karma-yogena chāpare*

dhyānenātmani paśhyanti kechid Ātmannam ātmanā—through meditation; *ātmani*—within one’s heart; *paśhyanti*—perceive; *kechit*—some; *Ātmannam*—the Supreme Ātman; *ātmanā*—by the mind; *anye*—others; *sāṅkhyena*—through cultivation of knowledge; *yogena*—the yog system; *karma-yogena*—union with Bhagavān with through path of action; *cha*—and; *apare*—others.

Some try to perceive the Supreme Ātman within their hearts through meditation, and others try to do so through the cultivation of knowledge, while still others strive to attain that realization by the path of action.

Variety is the universal characteristic of Bhagavān’s creation. No two leaves of a tree are alike; no two human beings have exactly the same fingerprints; no two human societies have the same features. Similarly, all Ātman(s) are unique, and they have their distinctive traits that have been acquired in their unique journey through the cycle of life and death. So in the realm of spiritual practice

as well, not all are attracted to the same kind of practice. The beauty of the Bhagavad Gita and the Vedic scriptures is that they realize this inherent variety amongst human beings and accommodate it in their instructions.

Here, Shri Krishna explains that some *sādhaks* (aspirants) find great joy in grappling with their mind and bringing it under control. They are attracted to meditating upon Bhagavān seated within their hearts. They relish the spiritual bliss that they experience when their mind comes to rest upon the Bhagavān within them.

Others find satisfaction in exercising their intellect. The idea of the distinction of the Ātman and the body, mind, intellect, and ego excites them greatly. They relish cultivating knowledge about the three entities—Ātman, Bhagavān, and Māyā—through the processes of *śhravaṇa*, *manan*, *nididhyāsan* (hearing, contemplating, and internalizing with firm faith).

Yet others find their spirits soaring when they can engage in meaningful action. They strive to engage their Bhagavān-given abilities in working for him. Nothing satisfies them more than using the last drop of their energy in service of Bhagavān. In this way, all kinds of *sādhaks* utilize their individual propensities for realizing the Supreme. The fulfillment of any endeavor involving knowledge, action, love, etc. is when it is combined with devotion for the pleasure of Bhagavān. The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam states:

sā vidyā tan-matir yayā (4.29.49) [v28]

“True knowledge is that which helps us develop love for Bhagavān. The fulfillment of karma occurs when it is done for the pleasure of the Bhagavān.”

अन्ये त्वेवमजानन्तः श्रुत्वाच्येभ्य उपासते ।
तेऽपि चातितरन्त्येव मृत्युं श्रुतिपरायणाः ॥ 26 ॥

*anye tv evam ajānantah śrutvānyebhya upāsate
te 'pi chātitarantyeva mṛityum śruti-parāyanāḥ*

anye—others; *tu*—still; *evam*—thus; *ajānantaḥ*—those who are unaware (of spiritual paths); *śrutvā*—by hearing; *anyebhyāḥ*—from others; *upāsate*—begin to worship; *te*—they; *api*—also; *cha*—and; *atitaranti*—cross over; *eva*—even; *mṛityum*—death; *śruti-parāyanāḥ*—devotion to hearing (from saints).

There are still others who are unaware of these spiritual paths, but they hear from others and begin worshipping the Supreme Bhagavān. By such devotion to hearing from saints, they too can gradually cross over the ocean of birth and death.

There are those who are unaware of the methods of *sādhanā*. But somehow, they hear the knowledge through others, and then get drawn to the spiritual path. In fact, this is usually the case with most people who come to spirituality. They did not have any formal education in spiritual knowledge, but somehow they got the opportunity to hear or read about it. Then their interest in devotion to the Bhagavān developed and they began their journey.

In the Vedic tradition, hearing from the saints has been highly emphasized as a powerful tool for spiritual elevation. In the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, King Parikshit asked Shukadev the question: “How can we purify the undesirable entities in our hearts, such as lust, anger, greed, envy, hatred, etc.?” Shukadev replied:

*śrīṇvatāṁ sva-kathāḥ krīṣṇah puṇya-śhravāṇa-kīrtanah
hṛidy antaḥ stho hy abhadraṇi vidhunoti suhṛit satām.*(Bhāgavatam 1.2.17) [v29]

“Parikshit! Simply hear the descriptions of the divine names, forms, pastimes, virtues, abodes, and saints of Bhagavān from a Saint. This will naturally cleanse the heart of the unwanted dirt of endless lifetimes.”

When we hear from the proper source, we develop authentic knowledge of spirituality. Besides this, the deep faith of the saint from whom we hear begins to flow into us. Hearing from the saints is the easiest way of building our faith in the spiritual truths. Further, the enthusiasm of the saint for spiritual activity also brushes onto us. Enthusiasm for devotion provides the force that enables

the *sādhak* to shrug aside the inertia of material consciousness and cut through the obstacles on the path of *sādhanā*. Enthusiasm and faith in the heart are the foundation stones on which the palace of devotion stands.

यावत्सञ्जायते किञ्चित्सत्त्वं स्थावरजङ्गमम् ।
क्षेत्रक्षेत्रज्ञसंयोगात्तद्विद्धि भरतर्षभ ॥२७॥

*yāvat sañjāyate kiñchit sattvam sthāvara-jaṅgamam
kṣhetra-kṣhetrajña-sanyogāt tad viddhi bharatarṣhabha*

yāvat—whatever; *sañjāyate*—manifesting; *kiñchit*—anything; *sattvam*—being; *sthāvara*—unmoving; *jaṅgamam*—moving; *kṣhetra*—field of activities; *kṣhetra-jña*—knower of the field; *sanyogāt*—combination of; *tat*—that; *viddhi*—know; *bharata-ṛishabha*—best of the Bharatas.

O best of the Bharatas, whatever moving or unmoving being you see in existence, know it to be a combination of the field of activities and the knower of the field.

Shri Krishna uses the words *yāvat kiñchit*, meaning “whatsoever form of life that exists,” regardless of how enormous or infinitesimal it may be, is all born of the union of the *kṣhetrajña* (knower of the field) and the *kṣhetra* (field of activities). The Abrahamic traditions accept the existence of the Ātman in humans, but do not accept that other forms of life also have Ātman(s). This concept condones violence toward the other life forms. However, the Vedic philosophy stresses that wherever consciousness exists, there must be the presence of the Ātman. Without it, there can be no consciousness.

In the early twentieth century, Sir J.C. Bose established through experiments that even plants, which are non-moving life forms, can feel and respond to emotions. His experiments proved that soothing music can enhance the growth of plants. When a hunter shoots a bird sitting on a tree, the vibrations of the tree seem to indicate that it weeps for the bird. And when a loving gardener enters the garden, the trees feel joyous. The changes in the vibrations of the tree reveal that it also possesses consciousness and can experience

semblances of emotions. These observations corroborate Shri Krishna's statement here that all life forms possess consciousness; they are the combination of the eternal Ātman, which is the source of consciousness, and the body, which is made of the insentient material energy.

समं सर्वेषु भूतेषु तिष्ठन्तं परमेश्वरम् ।
विनश्यत्स्वविनश्यन्तं यः पश्यति स पश्यति ॥२८॥

*samam sarveshu bhūteṣhu tiṣṭhan-tam parameśvaram
vinaśhyatsv avinaśhyantam yaḥ paśyati sa paśyati*

samam—equally; *sarveshu*—in all; *bhūteṣhu*—beings; *tiṣṭhan-tam*—accompanying; *parama-īśvaram*—Supereme Ātman; *vinaśhyatsu*—amongst the perishable; *avinaśhyantam*—the imperishable; *yaḥ*—who; *paśyati*—see; *sah*—they; *paśyati*—percieve.

They alone truly see, who perceive the *ParamĀtman* (Supreme Ātman) accompanying the Ātman in all beings, and who understand both to be imperishable in this perishable body.

Shri Krishna had previously used the expression *yah paśyati sa paśyati* (they alone truly see, who see that...) Now he states that it is not enough to see the presence of the Ātman within the body. We must also appreciate that Bhagavān, the Supreme Ātman, is seated within all bodies. His presence in the heart of all living beings was previously stated in verse 13.23 in this chapter. It is also mentioned in verses 10.20 and 18.61 of the Bhagavad Gita, and in other Vedic scriptures as well:

*eko devaḥ sarvabhūteṣhu gūḍhaḥ sarvavyāpī sarvabhūtāntarĀtman
(Śvetāśhvatar Upaniṣad 6.11) [v30]*

“Bhagavān is one. He resides in the hearts of all living beings. He is omnipresent. He is the supreme Ātman of all Ātman(s).”

bhavān hi sarva-bhūtānām Ātman sākṣhī sva-dṛig vibho (Bhāgavatam 10.86.31) [v31]

“Bhagavān is seated inside all living beings as the Witness and the Master.”

rām brahma chinaMāyā abināśī, sarba rahit saba ura pura bāśī (Ramayana) [v32]

“The Supreme Bhagavān Ram is eternal and beyond everything. He resides in the hearts of all living entities.”

The Supreme Ātman accompanies the individual Ātman as it journeys from body to body in the cycle of life and death. *Shri Krishna now explains how realizing the presence of Bhagavān in everyone changes the life of the sādhak.*

समं पश्यन्हि सर्वत्र समवस्थितमीश्वरम् ।
न हिनस्यात्मनात्मानं ततो याति परां गतिम् ॥ २९ ॥

*samam paśyan hi sarvatra samavasthitam iśhvaram
na hinasti ātmanātmanam tato yāti parām gatim*

samam—equally; *paśyan*—see; *hi*—indeed; *sarvatra*—everywhere; *samavasthitam*—equally present; *iśhvaram*—Bhagavān as the Supreme Ātman; *na*—do not; *hinasti*—degrade; *ātmanā*—by one's mind; *Ātmanam*—the self; *tataḥ*—thereby; *yāti*—reach; *parām*—the supreme; *gatim*—destination.

Those, who see Bhagavān as the Supreme Ātman equally present everywhere and in all living beings, do not degrade themselves by their mind. Thereby, they reach the supreme destination.

The mind is pleasure seeking by nature and, being a product of the material energy, is spontaneously inclined to material pleasures. If we follow the inclinations of our mind, we become degraded into deeper and deeper material consciousness. The way to prevent this downslide is to keep the mind in check with the help of the intellect. For this, the intellect needs to be empowered with true knowledge.

Those, who learn to see Bhagavān as the supreme Ātman present in all beings, begin to live by this knowledge. They no longer seek personal gain and enjoyment in their relationships with others. They neither get attached to others for the good done by them, nor hate them for any harm caused by them. Rather, seeing everyone as a part of Bhagavān, they maintain a healthy attitude of respect and service toward others. They naturally refrain from

mistreating, cheating, or insulting others, when they perceive in them the presence of Bhagavān. Also, the humanly created distinctions of nationality, creed, caste, sex, status, and color, all become irrelevant. Thus, they elevate their mind by seeing Bhagavān in all living beings, and finally reach the supreme goal.

प्रकृत्यैव च कर्माणि क्रियमाणानि सर्वशः ।
यः पश्यति तथात्मानमकर्तरं स पश्यति ॥ 30 ॥

*prakṛityaiva cha karmāṇi kriyamāṇāni sarvaśah
yah paśhyati tathĀtmannam akartāram sa paśhyati*

prakṛityā—by material nature; *eva*—truly; *cha*—also; *karmāṇi*—actions; *kriyamāṇāni*—are performed; *sarvaśah*—all; *yah*—who; *paśhyati*—see; *tathā*—also; *Ātmannam*—(embodied) Ātman; *akartāram*—actionless; *sah*—they; *paśhyati*—see.

They alone truly see who understand that all actions (of the body) are performed by material nature, while the embodied Ātman actually does nothing.

The Tantra Bhāgavat states: *ahankārāt tu samsāro bhavet jīvasya na svataḥ* [v33] “The ego of being the body and the pride of being the doer trap the Ātman in the *samsara* of life and death.” In material consciousness, the ego makes us identify with the body, and thus we attribute the actions of the body to the Ātman, and think, “I am doing this...I am doing that.” But the enlightened Ātman perceives that while eating, drinking, talking, walking, etc. it is only the body that acts. Yet, it cannot shrug the responsibility of the actions performed by the body. Just as the President is responsible for the decision of the country to go to war, although he does not fight in it himself, similarly, the Ātman is responsible for the actions of a living entity, even though they are performed by the body, mind, and intellect. That is why a spiritual aspirant must keep both sides in mind. Maharishi Vasishth instructed Ram: *kartā bahirkartāntarloke vihara rāghava* (Yog Vāsiṣṭh) [v34] “Ram, while working, externally exert yourself

as if the results depend upon you; but internally, realize yourself to be the non-doer.”

यदा भूतपृथग्भावमेकस्थमनुपश्यति ।
तत एव च विस्तारं ब्रह्म सम्पद्यते तदा ॥ ३१ ॥

*yadā bhūta-pṛithag-bhāvam eka-stham anupaśhyati
tata eva cha vistāram brahma sampadyate tadā*

yadā—when; *bhūta*—living entities; *pṛithak-bhāvam*—diverse variety; *eka-stham*—situated in the same place; *anupaśhyati*—see; *tataḥ*—thereafter; *eva*—indeed; *cha*—and; *vistāram*—from; *brahma*—Brahman; *sampadyate*—(they) attain; *tadā*—then.

When they see the diverse variety of living beings situated in the same material nature, and understand all of them to be born from it, they attain the realization of *Brahman*.

The ocean modifies itself in many forms such as the wave, froth, tide, ripples, etc. One who is shown all these individually for the first time may conclude that they are all different. But one who has knowledge of the ocean sees the inherent unity in all the variety. Similarly, there are numerous forms of life in existence, from the tiniest amoeba to the most powerful celestial deities. All of them are rooted in the same reality—the Ātman, which is a part of Bhagavān, seated in a body, which is made from the material energy. The distinctions between the forms are not due to the Ātman, but due to the different bodies manifested by the material energy. Upon birth, the bodies of all living beings are created from the material energy, and at death, their bodies again merge into it. When we see the variety of living beings all rooted in the same material nature, we realize the unity behind the diversity. And since material nature is the energy of Bhagavān, such an understanding makes us see the same spiritual substratum pervading all existence. This leads to the *Brahman* realization.

अनादित्वान्निर्गुणत्वात्परमात्मायमव्ययः ।
शरीरस्थोऽपि कौन्तेय न करोति न लिप्यते ॥३२॥

*anāditvān nirguṇatvāt paramĀtmanyam ayayah
śharīra-stho 'pi kaunteya na karoti na lipyate*

anāditvāt—being without beginining; *nirguṇatvāt*—being devoid of any material qualities; *parama*—the Supreme; *Ātman*—Ātman; *ayam*—this; *ayayah*—imperishable; *śharīra-sthah*—dwelling in the body; *api*—although; *kaunteya*—Arjun, the son of Kunti; *na*—neither; *karoti*—acts; *na*—nor; *lipyate*—is tainted.

The Supreme Ātman is imperishable, without beginning, and devoid of any material qualities, O son of Kunti. Although situated within the body, it neither acts, nor is it tainted by material energy.

Bhagavān, situated within the heart of the living being as the Supreme Ātman, never identifies with the body, nor is affected by its states of existence. His presence in the material body does not make him material in any way, nor is he subject to the law of karma and the cycle of birth and death, though these are experienced by the Ātman.

यथा सर्वगतं सौक्ष्म्यादाकाशं नोपलिप्यते ।
सर्वत्रावस्थितो देहे तथात्मा नोपलिप्यते ॥३३॥

*yathā sarva-gatam saukṣhmyād ākāśham nopalipyate
sarvatrāvasthito dehe tathĀtman nopalipyate*

yathā—as; *sarva-gatam*—all-pervading; *saukṣhmyāt*—due to subtlety; *ākāśham*—the space; *na*—not; *upalipyate*—is contaminated; *sarvatra*—everywhere; *avasthitah*—situated; *dehe*—the body; *tathā*—similarly; *Ātman*—the Ātman; *na*—not; *upalipyate*—is contaminated.

Space holds everything within it, but being subtle, does not get contaminated by what it holds. Similarly, though its consciousness pervades the body, the Ātman is not affected by the attributes of the body.

The Ātman experiences sleep, waking, tiredness, refreshment, etc., due to the ego that makes it identify with the body. One may ask why changes in the body in which it resides do not taint the Ātman. Shri Krishna explains it with

the example of space. It holds everything, but yet remains unaffected, because it is subtler than the gross objects it holds. Similarly, the Ātman is a subtler energy. It retains its divinity even while it identifies with the material body.

**यथा प्रकाशयत्येकः कृत्स्नं लोकमिमं रविः ।
क्षेत्रं क्षेत्री तथा कृत्स्नं प्रकाशयति भारत ॥ 34 ॥**

*yathā prakāśhayaty ekah kṛitsnam lokam imam ravih
kṣhetram kṣhetrī tathā kṛitsnam prakāśhayati bhārata*

yathā—as; *prakāśhayati*—illuminates; *ekah*—one; *kṛitsnam*—entire; *lokam*—solar system; *imam*—this; *ravih*—sun; *kṣhetram*—the body; *kṣhetrī*—the Ātman; *tathā*—so; *kṛitsnam*—entire; *prakāśhayati*—illumine; *bhārata*—Arjun, the son of Bharat.

Just as one sun illuminates the entire solar system, so does the individual Ātman illumine the entire body (with consciousness).

Although the Ātman energizes the entire body in which it is present with consciousness, yet by itself, it is exceedingly small. *esho 'nurĀtman* (Mundakopaniṣad 3.1.9) [v35] “The Ātman is very tiny in size.” The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad states:

*bälāgraśhatabhāgasya śhatadhā kalpitasya cha
bhāgo jīvah sa vijñeyah sa chānanyāya kalpate* (5.9) [v36]

“If we divide the tip of a hair into a hundred parts, and then divide each part into further hundred parts, we will get the size of the Ātman. These Ātman(s) are innumerable in number.” This is a manner of expressing the minuteness of the Ātman.

How can such an infinitesimal Ātman energize the body, which is huge in comparison? Shri Krishna explains this with the analogy of the sun. Although situated in one place, the sun illuminates the entire solar system with its light. Likewise, the Vedānt Darśhan states:

guṇādvā lokavat (2.3.25) [v37]

“The Ātman, although seated in the heart spreads its consciousness throughout the field of the body.”

क्षेत्रक्षेत्रज्ञयोरेवमन्तरं ज्ञानचक्षुषा ।
भूतप्रकृतिमोक्षं च ये विदुयान्ति ते परम् ॥ 35 ॥

*kṣhetra-kṣhetrajñayor evam antaram jñāna-chakṣuṣhā
bhūta-prakṛiti-mokṣham cha ye vidur yānti te param*

kṣhetra—the body; *kṣhetra-jñayoh*—of the knower of the body; *evam*—thus; *antaram*—the difference; *jñāna-chakṣuṣhā*—with the eyes of knowledge; *bhūta*—the living entity; *prakṛiti-mokṣham*—release from material nature; *cha*—and; *ye*—who; *viduh*—know; *yānti*—approach; *te*—they; *param*—the Supreme.

Those who perceive with the eyes of knowledge the difference between the body and the knower of the body, and the process of release from material nature, attain the supreme destination.

In his customary style, Shri Krishna now winds up the topic of the field and the knower of the field by summing up all that he has said. True knowledge is to know the distinction between the material *kṣhetra* (field of activity) and the spiritual *kṣhetrajña* (knower of the field). Those possessing such discriminative knowledge do not look upon themselves as the material body. They identify with their spiritual nature as Ātman(s) and tiny parts of Bhagavān. Hence, they seek the path of spiritual elevation and release from material nature. Then, by treading on the path of spiritual enlightenment, such persons of wisdom attain their ultimate goal of Brahman-realization.



Chapter 14

Guna Traya Vibhāg Yog ~ **गुणत्रयविभागयोगः**

Yog through Understanding the Three Modes of Material Nature

The previous chapter explained in detail the distinction between the Ātman and the material body. This chapter describes the nature of the material energy, which is the source of the body and its elements, and is thus the origin of both mind and matter. Shri Krishna explains that material nature is constituted of three modes (*guṇas*)—goodness, passion, and ignorance. The body, mind, and intellect that are made from the material energy also possess these three modes, and the mix of the modes in our being determines the color of our personality. The mode of goodness is characterized by peacefulness, well-being, virtue, and serenity; the mode of passion gives rise to endless desires and insatiable ambitions for worldly enhancement; and the mode of ignorance is the cause for delusion, laziness, intoxication, and sleep. Until the Ātman attains illumination, it must learn to deal with these three powerful forces of material nature. Liberation lies in transcending all three of these modes.

Shri Krishna reveals a simple solution for breaking out of the bondage of these

gunas. The Supreme Bhagavān is transcendental to the three modes, and if we attach ourselves to him, then our mind will also rise to the divine platform. At this point, Arjun enquires about the characteristics of those who have gone beyond the three *gunas*. Shri Krishna then systematically explains the traits of such liberated Ātman(s). He explains that illumined persons remain ever equipoised; they are not disturbed when they see the *gunas* functioning in the world, and their effects manifesting in persons, objects, and situations. They see everything as a manifestation of Bhagavān's energies, which are ultimately in his hands. Thus, worldly situations neither make them jubilant nor miserable, and without wavering, they remain established in the self. The chapter ends with Shri Krishna again reminding us of the power of devotion and its ability to make us transcend the three *gunas*.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
 परं भूयः प्रवक्ष्यामि ज्ञानानां ज्ञानमुत्तमम् ।
 यज्ञात्वा मुनयः सर्वे परां सिद्धिमितो गताः ॥१॥

*śrī-bhagavān uvācha
 param bhūyah pravakṣhyāmi jñānānām jñānam uttamam
 yaj jñātvā munayah sarve parām siddhim ito gatāḥ*

śrī-bhagavān uvācha—Bhagavān Krishna said ; *param*—supreme; *bhūyah*—again; *pravakṣhyāmi*—I shall explain; *jñānānām*—of all knowledge; *jñānam uttamam*—the supreme wisdom; *yat*—which; *jñātvā*—knowing; *munayah*—saints; *sarve*—all; *parām*—highest; *siddhim*—perfection; *itah*—through this; *gatāḥ*—attained.

Bhagavān Krishna said: I shall once again explain to you the supreme wisdom, the best of all knowledge; by knowing which, all the great saints attained the highest perfection.

In the previous chapter, Shri Krishna had explained that all life forms are a combination of Ātman and matter. He had also elucidated that *prakṛiti* (material nature) is responsible for creating the field of activities for the *puruṣ* (Ātman). He added that this does not happen independently, but under the

direction of the Supreme Bhagavān, who is also seated within the body of the living being. In this chapter, he goes on to elaborate in detail about the three-fold qualities of material nature (the *gunas*). By gaining this knowledge and imbibing it into our consciousness as realized wisdom, we can ascend to the highest perfection.

इदं ज्ञानमुपाश्रित्य मम साधर्म्यमागतः ।
सर्गेऽपि नोपजायन्ते प्रलये न व्यथन्ति च ॥२॥

*idam jñānam upāśritya mama sādharmyam āgatāḥ
sarge 'pi nopajāyante pralaye na vyathanti cha*

idam—this; *jñānam*—wisdom; *upāśritya*—take refuge in; *mama*—mine; *sādharmyam*—of similar nature; *āgatāḥ*—having attained; *sarge*—at the time of creation; *api*—even; *na*—not; *upajāyante*—are born; *pralaye*—at the time of dissolution; *na-vyathanti*—they will not experience misery; *cha*—and.

Those who take refuge in this wisdom will be united with me. They will not be reborn at the time of creation nor destroyed at the time of dissolution.

Shri Krishna assures Arjun that those who equip themselves with the knowledge he is about to bestow will no longer have to accept repeated confinement in a mother's womb. They will also not be obliged to stay in a state of suspended animation in the womb of Bhagavān at the time of the universal dissolution, or be reborn along with the next creation. The three *guṇas* (modes of material nature) are indeed the cause of bondage, and knowledge of them will illumine the path out of bondage.

Shri Krishna repeatedly uses the strategy of proclaiming the results of what he is about to teach, to bring his student to rapt attention. The words *na vyathanti* mean “they will not experience misery.” The word *sādharmyam* means they will acquire “a similar divine nature” as Bhagavān himself. When the Ātman is released from the bondage of the material energy, it comes under the dominion

of Bhagavān's divine *YogMāyā* energy. The divine energy equips it with Bhagavān's divine knowledge, love, and bliss. As a result, the Ātman becomes of the nature of Bhagavān—it acquires divine Bhagavān-like qualities.

मम योनिर्महद् ब्रह्म तस्मिन्गर्भं दधाम्यहम् ।
सम्भवः सर्वभूतानां ततो भवति भारत ॥ ३ ॥
सर्वयोनिषु कौन्तेय मूर्तयः सम्भवन्ति याः ।
तासां ब्रह्म महद्योनिरहं बीजप्रदः पिता ॥ ४ ॥

*mama yonir mahad brahma tasmin garbham dadhāmy aham
sambhavaḥ sarva-bhūtānām tato bhavati bhārata
sarva-yoniṣhu kaunteya mūrtayah sambhavanti yāḥ
tāsām brahma mahat yonir aham bīja-pradah pitā*

mama—my; *yonih*—womb; *mahat brahma*—the total material substance, *prakṛiti*; *tasmin*—in that; *garbham*—womb; *dadhāmi*—impregnate; *aham*—I; *sambhavaḥ*—birth; *sarva-bhūtānām*—of all living beings; *tataḥ*—thereby; *bhavati*—becomes; *bhārata*—Arjun, the son of Bharat; *sarva*—all; *yoniṣhu*—species of life; *kaunteya*—Arjun, the son of Kunti; *mūrtayah*—forms; *sambhavanti*—are produced; *yāḥ*—which; *tāsām*—of all of them; *brahma-mahat*—great material nature; *yonih*—womb; *aham*—I; *bīja-pradah*—seed-giving; *pitā*—Father.

The total material substance, *prakṛiti*, is the womb. I impregnate it with the individual Ātman(s), and thus all living beings are born. O son of Kunti, for all species of life that are produced, the material nature is the womb, and I am the seed-giving Father.

As explained in chapters 7 and 8, the material creation follows cycles of creation, maintenance, and dissolution. During dissolution, Ātman(s) who are *vimukh* (have their backs) toward Bhagavān remain in a state of suspended animation within the body of Maha Vishnu. The material energy, *prakṛiti*, also lies unmanifest in Bhagavān's *mahodar* (big stomach). When he desires to activate the process of creation, he glances at *prakṛiti*. It then begins to unwind, and sequentially, the entities *mahān*, *ahankār*, *pañch-tanmātrās*, and *pañch-mahābhūta* are created. Also, with the help of the secondary creator Brahma, the material

energy creates various life forms, and Bhagavān casts the Ātman(s) into appropriate bodies, determined by their past karmas. Thus, Shri Krishna states that *prakṛiti* is like the womb and the Ātman(s) are like the sperms. He places the Ātman(s) in the womb of Mother Nature to give birth to multitudes of living beings. Sage Ved Vyas also describes it in the same fashion in Śrīmad Bhāgavatam:

*daivāt kṣhubhita-dharmīṇyāṁ svasyāṁ yonau paraḥ pumān
ādhatta vīryāṁ sāsūta mahat-tattvāṁ hiraṇMāyām* (3.26.19) [v1]

“In the womb of the material energy the Supreme Bhagavān impregnates the Ātman(s). Then, inspired by the karmas of the individual Ātman(s), the material nature gets to work to create suitable life forms for them.” He does not cast all Ātman(s) into the material world, rather only those who are *vimukh*.

सत्त्वं रजस्तम इति गुणाः प्रकृतिसम्भवाः ।
निबध्नन्ति महाबाहो देहे देहिनमव्ययम् ॥५॥

*sattvam rajas tama iti guṇāḥ prakṛiti-sambhavāḥ
nibadhnanti mahā-bāho dehe dehinam avyayam*

sattvam—mode of goodness; *rajaḥ*—mode of passion; *tamaḥ*—mode of ignorance; *iti*—thus; *guṇāḥ*—modes; *prakṛiti*—material nature; *sambhavāḥ*—consists of; *nibadhnanti*—bind; *mahā-bāho*—mighty-armed one; *dehe*—in the body; *dehinam*—the embodied Ātman; *avyayam*—eternal.

O mighty-armed Arjun, the material energy consists of three *gunas* (modes)—*sattva* (goodness), *rajas* (passion), and *tamas* (ignorance). These modes bind the eternal Ātman to the perishable body.

Having explained that all life-forms are born from *purush* and *prakṛiti*, Shri Krishna now explains in the next fourteen verses how *prakṛiti* binds the Ātman. Although it is divine, its identification with the body ties it to material nature. The material energy possess three *gunas*—goodness, passion, and ignorance. Hence the body, mind, and intellect that are made from *prakṛiti* also possess these three modes.

Consider the example of three-color printing. If any one of the colors is released in excess by the machine on the paper, then the picture acquires a hue of that color. Similarly, *prakṛiti* has the ink of the three colors. Based upon one's internal thoughts, the external circumstances, past *sanskārs*, and other factors, one or the other of these modes becomes dominant for that person. And the mode that predominates creates its corresponding shade upon that person's personality. Hence, the Ātman is swayed by the influence of these dominating modes. Shri Krishna now describes the impact of these modes upon the living being.

तत्र सत्त्वं निर्मलत्वात्प्रकाशकमनामयम् ।
सुखसङ्गेन बध्नाति ज्ञानसङ्गेन चानघ ॥६॥

*tatra sattvam nirmalatvāt prakāshakam anāMāyām
sukha-saṅgena badhnāti jñāna-saṅgena chānaghā*

tatra—amongst these; *sattvam*—mode of goodness; *nirmalatvāt*—being purest; *prakāshakam*—illuminating; *anāMāyām*—healthy and full of well-being; *sukha*—happiness; *saṅgena*—attachment; *badhnāti*—binds; *jñāna*—knowledge; *saṅgena*—attachment; *cha*—also; *anagha*—Arjun, the sinless one.

Amongst these, *sattva guṇa*, the mode of goodness, being purer than the others, is illuminating and full of well-being. O sinless one, it binds the Ātman by creating attachment for a sense of happiness and knowledge.

The word *prakāshakam* means “illuminating.” The word *anāMāyām* means “healthy and full of well-being. By extension, it also means “of peaceful quality,” devoid of any inherent cause for pain, discomfort, or misery. The mode of goodness is serene and illuminating. Thus, *sattva guṇa* engenders virtue in one's personality and illuminates the intellect with knowledge. It makes a person become calm, satisfied, charitable, compassionate, helpful, serene, and tranquil. It also nurtures good health and freedom from sickness. While the mode of goodness creates an effect of serenity and happiness, attachment to them itself binds the

Ātman to material nature.

Let us understand this through an example. A traveler was passing through a forest, when three robbers attacked him. The first said, “Let us kill him and steal all his wealth.” The second said, “No, let us not kill him. We will simply bind him, and take away his possessions.” Following the advice of the second robber, they tied him up in ropes and stole his wealth. When they had gone some distance away, the third robber returned. He opened the ropes of the traveler, and took him to the edge of the forest. He showed the way out, and said, “I cannot go out myself, but if you follow this path, you will be able to get out of the forest.”

The first robber was *tamo guṇa*, the mode of ignorance, which literally wants to kill the Ātman, by degrading it into sloth, languor, and nescience. The second robber was *rajo guṇa*, the mode of passion, which excites the passions of the living being, and binds the Ātman in innumerable worldly desires. The third robber was *sattva guṇa*, the mode of goodness, which reduces the vices of the living being, eases the material discomfort and puts the Ātman on the path of virtue. Yet, even *sattva guṇa* is within the realm of material nature. We must not get attached to it; instead, we must use it to step up to the transcendental platform.

Beyond these three, is *śuddha sattva*, the transcendental mode of goodness. It is the mode of the divine energy of Bhagavān that is beyond material nature. When the Ātman becomes Brahman-realized, by his grace, Bhagavān bestows *śuddha sattva* upon the Ātman, making the senses, mind, and intellect divine.

रजो रागात्मकं विद्धि तृष्णासङ्गसमुद्भवम् ।
तन्निबध्नाति कौन्तेय कर्मसङ्गेन देहिनम् ॥ 7 ॥

*rajo rāgātmakam viddhi triṣṭhñā-sanga-samudbhavam
tan nibadhnāti kaunteya karma-saṅgena dehinam*

rajah—mode of passion; *rāga-ātmakam*—of the nature of passion; *viddhi*—know; *triṣṭhñā*—desires;

saṅga—association; *samudbhavam*—arises from; *tat*—that; *nibadhnāti*—binds; *kaunteya*—Arjun, the son of Kunti; *karma-saṅgena*—through attachment to fruitive actions; *dehinam*—the embodied Ātman.

O Arjun, *rajo guṇa* is of the nature of passion. It arises from worldly desires and affections, and binds the Ātman through attachment to fruitive actions.

Shri Krishna now explains the working of *rajo guṇa*, and how it binds the Ātman to material existence. The Patañjali Yog Darśhan describes material activity as the primary manifestation of *rajo guṇa*. Here, Shri Krishna describes its principal manifestation as attachment and desire.

The mode of passion fuels the lust for sensual enjoyment. It inflames desires for mental and physical pleasures. It also promotes attachment to worldly things. Persons influenced by *rajo guṇa* get engrossed in worldly pursuits of status, prestige, career, family, and home. They look on these as sources of pleasure and are motivated to undertake intense activity for the sake of these. In this way, the mode of passion increases desires, and these desires further fuel an increase of the mode of passion. They both nourish each other and trap the Ātman in worldly life.

The way to break out of this is to engage in *karm yog*, i.e. to begin offering the results of one's activities to Bhagavān. This creates detachment from the world, and pacifies the effect of *rajo guṇa*.

तमस्त्वज्ञानं विद्धि मोहनं सर्वदेहिनाम् ।
प्रमादालस्यनिद्राभिस्तन्निबध्नाति भारत ॥८॥

*tamas tv ajñāna-jam viddhi mohanam sarva-dehinām
pramādālasya-nidrābhis tan nibadhnāti bhārata*

tamaḥ—mode of ignorance; *tu*—but; *ajñāna-jam*—born of ignorance; *viddhi*—know; *mohanam*—illusion; *sarva-dehinām*—for all the embodied Ātman(s); *pramāda*—negligence; *ālasya*—laziness; *nidrābhiḥ*—and sleep; *tat*—that; *nibadhnāti*—binds; *bhārata*—Arjun, the son of Bharat.

O Arjun, *tamo guṇa*, which is born of ignorance, is the cause of illusion for the embodied Ātman(s). It deludes all living beings through negligence, laziness, and sleep.

Tamo guṇa is the antithesis of *sattva guṇa*. Persons influenced by it get pleasure through sleep, laziness, intoxication, violence, and gambling. They lose their discrimination of what is right and what is wrong, and do not hesitate in resorting to immoral behavior for fulfilling their self-will. Doing their duty becomes burdensome to them and they neglect it, becoming more inclined to sloth and sleep. In this way, the mode of ignorance leads the Ātman deeper into the darkness of ignorance. It becomes totally oblivious of its spiritual identity, its goal in life, and the opportunity for progress that the human form provides.

**सत्त्वं सुखे सञ्जयति रजः कर्मणि भारत ।
ज्ञानमावृत्य तु तमः प्रमादे सञ्जयत्युत ॥११॥**

*sattvam sukhe sañjayati rajaḥ karmaṇi bhārata
jñānam āvṛitya tu tamah pramāde sañjayaty uta*

sattvam—mode of goodness; *sukhe*—to happiness; *sañjayati*—binds; *rajaḥ*—mode of passion; *karmaṇi*—toward actions; *bhārata*—Arjun, the son of Bharat; *jñānam*—wisdom; *āvṛitya*—clouds; *tu*—but; *tamah*—mode of ignorance; *pramāde*—to delusion; *sañjayati*—binds; *uta*—indeed.

***Sattva* binds one to material happiness; *rajas* conditions the Ātman toward actions; and *tamas* clouds wisdom and binds one to delusion.**

In the mode of goodness, the miseries of material existence reduce, and worldly desires become subdued. This gives rise to a feeling of contentment with one's condition. This is a good thing, but it can have a negative side too. For instance, those who experience pain in the world and are disturbed by the desires in their mind feel impelled to look for a solution to their problems, and this impetus sometimes brings them to the spiritual path. However, those in

goodness can easily become complacent and feel no urge to progress to the transcendental platform. Also, *sattva guna* illuminates the intellect with knowledge. If this is not accompanied by spiritual wisdom, then knowledge results in pride and that pride comes in the way of devotion to Bhagavān. This is often seen in the case of scientists, academicians, scholars, etc. The mode of goodness usually predominates in them, since they spend their time and energy cultivating knowledge. And yet, the knowledge they possess often makes them proud, and they begin to feel that there can be no truth beyond the grasp of their intellect. Thus, they find it difficult to develop faith toward either the scriptures or the Brahman-realized Saints.

In the mode of passion, the Ātman(s) are impelled toward intense activity. Their attachment to the world and preference for pleasure, prestige, wealth, and bodily comforts, propels them to work hard in the world for achieving these goals, which they consider to be the most important in life. *Rajo guna* increases the attraction between man and woman, and generates *kām* (lust). To satiate that lust, man and woman enter into the relationship of marriage and have a home. The upkeep of the home creates the need for wealth, so they begin to work hard for economic development. They engage in intense activity, but each action creates karmas, which further bind them in material existence.

The mode of ignorance clouds the intellect of the living being. The desire for happiness now manifests in perverse manners. For example, everyone knows that cigarette smoking is injurious to health. Every cigarette pack carries a warning to that extent issued by the government authorities. Cigarette smokers read this, and yet do not refrain from smoking. This happens because the intellect loses its discriminative power and does not hesitate to inflict self-injury to get the pleasure of smoking. As someone jokingly said, “A cigarette is a pipe with a fire at one end and a fool at the other.” That is the influence of *tamo guna*, which binds the Ātman in the darkness of ignorance.

रजस्तपश्चाभिभूय सत्त्वं भवति भारत ।
रजः सत्त्वं तमश्चैव तमः सत्त्वं रजस्तथा ॥ 10 ॥

*rajas tamash chābhībhūya sattvam bhavati bhārata
rajaḥ sattvam tamaś chaiva tamah sattvam rajas tathā*

rajaḥ—mode of passion; *tamah*—mode of ignorance; *cha*—and; *abhibhūya*—prevails; *sattvam*—mode of goodness; *bhavati*—becomes; *bhārata*—Arjun, the son of Bharat; *rajaḥ*—mode of passion; *sattvam*—mode of goodness; *tamah*—mode of ignorance; *cha*—and; *eva*—indeed; *tamah*—mode of ignorance; *sattvam*—mode of goodness; *rajaḥ*—mode of passion; *tathā*—also.

Sometimes goodness (*sattva*) prevails over passion (*rajas*) and ignorance (*tamas*), O scion of Bharat. Sometimes passion (*rajas*) dominates goodness (*sattva*) and ignorance (*tamas*), and at other times ignorance (*tamas*) overcomes goodness (*sattva*) and passion (*rajas*).

Shri Krishna now explains how the same individual's temperament oscillates amongst the three *guṇas*. These three *guṇas* are present in the material energy, and our mind is made from the same energy. Hence, all the three *guṇas* are present in our mind as well. They can be compared to three wrestlers competing with each other. Each keeps throwing the others down, and so, sometimes the first is on top, sometimes the second, and sometimes the third. In the same manner, the three *guṇas* keep gaining dominance over the individual's temperament, which oscillates amongst the three modes. Depending upon the external environment, the internal contemplation, and the *sanskārs* (tendencies) of past lives, one or the other *guṇa* begins to dominate. There is no rule for how long it stays—one *guṇa* may dominate the mind and intellect for as short as a moment or for as long as an hour.

If *sattva guṇa* dominates, one becomes peaceful, content, generous, kind, helpful, serene, and tranquil. When *rajo guṇa* gains prominence, one becomes passionate, agitated, ambitious, envious of others success, and develops a gusto for sense pleasures. When *tamo guṇa* becomes prominent, one is overcome by

sleep, laziness, hatred, anger, resentment, violence, and doubt.

For example, let us suppose you are sitting in your library, engaged in study. There is no worldly disturbance, and your mind has become *sāttvic*. After finishing your study, you sit in your living room and switch on the television. Seeing all the images makes your mind *rājasic*, and increases your hankering for sense pleasures. While you are watching your favorite channel, your family member comes and changes the channel. This disturbance causes *tamo guṇa* to increase in your mind, and you are filled with anger. In this way, the mind sways amongst the three *guṇas* and adopts their qualities.

सर्वद्वारेषु देहेऽस्मिन्प्रकाशं उपजायते ।
ज्ञानं यदा तदा विद्याद्विवृद्धं सत्त्वमित्युत ॥ 11 ॥

लोभः प्रवृत्तिराम्भः कर्मणामशमः स्पृहा ।
रजस्येतानि जायन्ते विवृद्धे भरतर्षभ ॥ 12 ॥

अप्रकाशोऽप्रवृत्तिश्च प्रमादो मोह एव च ।
तमस्येतानि जायन्ते विवृद्धे कुरुनन्दन ॥ 13 ॥

*sarva-dvāreṣhu dehe 'smiṇ prakāśha upajāyate
jñānam yadā tadā vidyād vivṛiddham sattvam ity uta
lobhaḥ pravṛittir ārambhah karmaṇām aśhamah sprihā
rajasy etāni jāyante vivṛiddhe bharatarṣhabha

aprakāśho 'pravṛittiś cha pramādo moha eva cha
tamasy etāni jāyante vivṛiddhe kuru-nandana*

sarva—all; *dvāreṣhu*—through the gates; *dehe*—body; *asmin*—in this; *prakāśha*—illumination; *upajāyate*—manifest; *jñānam*—knowledge; *yadā*—when; *tadā*—then; *vidyāt*—know; *vivṛiddham*—predominates; *sattvam*—mode of goodness; *iti*—thus; *uta*—certainly; *lobhaḥ*—greed; *pravṛittiḥ*—activity; *ārambhah*—exertion; *karmaṇām*—for fruitive actions; *aśhamah*—restlessness; *sprihā*—craving; *rajasi*—of the mode of passion; *etāni*—these; *jāyante*—develop; *vivṛiddhe*—when predominates; *bharata-ṛiṣhabha*—the best of the Bharatas, Arjun; *aprakāśhaḥ*—nescience; *apravṛittiḥ*—inertia; *cha*—and; *pramādaḥ*—negligence; *mohah*—delusion; *eva*—indeed; *cha*—also; *tamasi*—mode of ignorance; *etāni*—these; *jāyante*—manifest; *vivṛiddhe*—when dominates; *kuru-nandana*—the joy of the Kurus, Arjun.

When all the gates of the body are illumined by knowledge, know it to be a

manifestation of the mode of goodness. When the mode of passion predominates, O Arjun, the symptoms of greed, exertion for worldly gain, restlessness, and craving develop. O Arjun, nescience, inertia, negligence, and delusion—these are the dominant signs of the mode of ignorance.

Shri Krishna once again repeats how the three modes influence one's thinking. *Sattva guna* leads to the development of virtues and the illumination of knowledge. *Rajo guna* leads to greed, inordinate activity for worldly attainments, and restlessness of the mind. *Tamo guna* results in delusion of the intellect, laziness, and inclination toward intoxication and violence.

In fact, these modes even influence our attitudes toward Bhagavān and the spiritual path. To give an example, when the mode of goodness becomes prominent in the mind, we may start thinking, "I have received so much grace from my Guru. I should endeavor to progress rapidly in my *sādhanā*, since the human form is precious and it should not be wasted in mundane pursuits." When the mode of passion becomes prominent, we may think, "I must surely progress on the spiritual path, but what is the hurry? At present, I have many responsibilities to discharge, and they are more important." When the mode of ignorance dominates, we could think, "I am not really sure if there is any Bhagavān or not, for no one has ever seen him. So why waste time in *sādhanā*?" Notice how the same person's thoughts have oscillated from such heights to the depths of devotion.

For the mind to fluctuate due to the three *guṇas* is very natural. However, we are not to be dejected by this state of affairs, rather, we should understand why it happens and work to rise above it. *Sādhanā* means to fight with the flow of the three *guṇas* in the mind, and force it to maintain the devotional feelings toward Bhagavān and Guru. If our consciousness remained at the highest consciousness all day, there would be no need for *sādhanā*. Though the mind's

natural sentiments may be inclined toward the world, yet with the intellect, we have to force it into the spiritual realm. Initially, this may seem difficult, but with practice it becomes easy. This is just as driving a car is difficult initially, but with practice it becomes natural.

Shri Krishna now begins to explain the destinations bestowed by the three gunas, and the need for making it our goal to transcend them.

यदा सत्त्वे प्रवृद्धे तु प्रलयं याति देहभृत् ।
तदोत्तमविदां लोकानमलान्ग्रतिपद्यते ॥ 14 ॥

रजसि प्रलयं गत्वा कर्मसङ्गिषु जायते ।
तथा प्रलीनस्तमसि मूढयोनिषु जायते ॥ 15 ॥

*yadā sattve pravṛiddhe tu pralayam yāti deha-bhṛit
tadottama-vidām lokān amalān pratipadyate
rajasi pralayam gatvā karma-saṅgiṣhu jāyate
tathā pralīnas tamasi mūḍha-yoniṣhu jāyate*

yadā—when; *sattve*—in the mode of goodness; *pravṛiddhe*—when predominates; *tu*—indeed; *pralayam*—death; *yāti*—reach; *deha-bhṛit*—the embodied; *tadā*—then; *uttama-vidām*—of the learned; *lokān*—abodes; *amalān*—pure; *pratipadyate*—attains; *rajasi*—in the mode of passion; *pralayam*—death; *gatvā*—attaining; *karma-saṅgiṣhu*—among people driven by work; *jāyate*—are born; *tathā*—likewise; *pralīnah*—dying; *tamasi*—in the mode of ignorance; *mūḍha-yoniṣhu*—in the animal kingdom; *jāyate*—takes birth.

Those who die with predominance of *sattva* reach the pure abodes (which are free from *rajas* and *tamas*) of the learned. Those who die with prevalence of the mode of passion are born among people driven by work, while those dying in the mode of ignorance take birth in the animal kingdom.

Shri Krishna explains that the destiny awaiting the Ātman(s) is based upon the *gunas* of their personalities. We get what we deserve is Bhagavān's law, the law of karma. Those who cultivated virtues, knowledge, and a service attitude toward others are born in families of pious people, scholars, social workers, etc.

Or else, they go to the higher celestial abodes. Those who permitted themselves to be overcome by greed, avarice, and worldly ambitions are born in families focused on intense material activity, very often the business class. Those who were inclined to intoxication, violence, laziness, and dereliction of duty are born amongst families of drunks and illiterate people. Otherwise, they are made to descend down the evolutionary ladder and are born into the animal species.

Many people wonder whether having once attained the human form, it is possible to slip back into the lower species. This verse reveals that the human form does not remain permanently reserved for the Ātman. Those who do not put it to good use are subject to the terrible danger of moving downward into the animal forms again. Thus, all the paths are open at all times. The Ātman can climb upward in its spiritual evolution, remain at the same level, or even slide down, based upon the intensity and frequency of the *guṇas* it adopts.

**कर्मणः सुकृतस्याहुः सात्त्विकं निर्मलं फलम् ।
रजसस्तु फलं दुःखमज्ञानं तमसः फलम् ॥१६॥**

*karmanah sukṛitasyāhuḥ sāttvikam nirmalam phalam
rajasas tu phalam duḥkham ajñānam tamasaḥ phalam*

karmanah—of action; *su-kṛitasya*—pure; *āhuḥ*—is said; *sāttvikam*—mode of goodness; *nirmalam*—pure; *phalam*—result; *rajasah*—mode of passion; *tu*—indeed; *phalam*—result; *duḥkham*—pain; *ajñānam*—ignorance; *tamasah*—mode of ignorance; *phalam*—result.

It is said the fruit of actions performed in the mode of goodness bestow pure results. Actions done in the mode of passion result in pain, while those performed in the mode of ignorance result in darkness.

Those influenced by *sattva* are equipped with a measure of purity, virtue, knowledge, and selflessness. Hence, their actions are performed with a relatively pure intention and the results are uplifting and satisfying. Those influenced by *rajas* are agitated by the desires of their senses and mind. The

intention behind their works is primarily self-aggrandizement and sense-gratification for themselves and their dependents. Thus, their works lead to the enjoyment of sense pleasures, which further fuels their sensual desires. Those who are predominated by *tamas* have no respect for scriptural injunctions and codes of conduct. They commit sinful deeds to relish perverse pleasures, which only result in further immersing them in delusion.

सत्त्वात्पञ्जायते ज्ञानं रजसो लोभ एव च ।
प्रमादमोहौ तमसो भवतोऽज्ञानमेव च ॥१७॥

*sattvāt sañjāyate jñānam rajasō lobha eva cha
pramāda-mohau tamaso bhavato 'jñānam eva cha*

sattvāt—from the mode of goodness; *sañjāyate*—arises; *jñānam*—knowledge; *rajasah*—from the mode of passion; *lobhah*—greed; *eva*—indeed; *cha*—and; *pramāda*—negligence; *mohau*—delusion; *tamasah*—from the mode of ignorance; *bhavataḥ*—arise; *ajñānam*—ignorance; *eva*—indeed; *cha*—and.

From the mode of goodness arises knowledge, from the mode of passion arises greed, and from the mode of ignorance arise negligence and delusion.

Having mentioned the variation in the results that accrue from the three *gunas*, Shri Krishna now gives the reason for this. *Sattva guṇa* gives rise to wisdom, which confers the ability to discriminate between right and wrong. It also pacifies the desires of the senses for gratification, and creates a concurrent feeling of happiness and contentment. People influenced by it are inclined toward intellectual pursuits and virtuous ideas. Thus, the mode of goodness promotes wise actions. *Rajo guṇa* inflames the senses, and puts the mind out of control, sending it into a spin of ambitious desires. The living being is trapped by it and over-endeavors for wealth and pleasures that are meaningless from the perspective of the Ātman. *Tamo guṇa* covers the living being with inertia and nescience. Shrouded in ignorance, a person performs wicked and impious deeds and bears consequent results.

**ऊर्ध्वं गच्छन्ति सत्त्वस्था मध्ये तिष्ठन्ति राजसाः ।
जघन्यगुणवृत्तिस्था अधो गच्छन्ति तामसाः ॥ १८ ॥**

*ūrdhvam gachchhanti sattva-sthā madhye tiṣṭhanti rājasāḥ
jaghanya-guṇa-vṛitti-sthā adho gachchhanti tāmasāḥ*

ūrdhvam—upward; *gachchhanti*—rise; *sattva-sthāḥ*—those situated in the mode of goodness; *madhye*—in the middle; *tiṣṭhanti*—stay; *rājasāḥ*—those in the mode of passion; *jaghanya*—abominable; *guṇa*—quality; *vṛitti-sthāḥ*—engaged in activities; *adhaḥ*—down; *gachchhanti*—go; *tāmasāḥ*—those in the mode of ignorance.

Those situated in the mode of goodness rise upward; those in the mode of passion stay in the middle; and those in the mode of ignorance go downward.

Shri Krishna explains that the reincarnation of the Ātman(s) in their next birth is linked to the *guṇas* that predominates their personality. Upon completion of their sojourn in the present life, the Ātman(s) reach the kind of place that corresponds to their *guṇas*. This can be compared to students applying for college admission after completing school. There are many colleges in the country. Those students with good qualifying criteria at the school level gain admission in the best colleges, while those with poor grades and other scores are admitted to the worst ones. Likewise, the Bhāgavatam says:

*sattve pralīnāḥ svar yānti nara-lokāṁ rajo-layāḥ
tamo-layāḥ tu nirayāṁ yānti mām eva nirguṇāḥ (11.25.22) [v2]*

“Those who are in *sattva guṇa* reach the higher celestial abodes; those who are in *rajo guṇa* return to the earth planet; and those who are in *tamo guṇa* go to the nether worlds.”

**नान्यं गुणेभ्यः कर्तारं यदा द्रष्टानुपश्यति ।
गुणेभ्यश्च परं वेत्ति मद्भावं सोऽधिगच्छति ॥ १९ ॥**

*nānyāṁ guṇebhyāḥ kartārāṁ yadā draṣṭānupaśyati
guṇebhyāś ch paraṁ vetti mad-bhāvāṁ so 'dhigachchhati*

na—no; *anyam*—other; *guṇebhyāḥ*—of the *gunas*; *kartāram*—agents of action; *yadā*—when;

draṣṭā—the seer; *anupaśhyati*—see; *guṇebhyah*—to the modes of nature; *cha*—and; *param*—transcendental; *vetti*—know; *mat-bhāvam*—my divine nature; *sah*—they; *adhibachchhati*—attain.

When wise persons see that in all works there are no agents of action other than the three *guṇas*, and they know me to be transcendental to these *guṇas*, they attain my divine nature.

Having revealed the complex workings of the three *guṇas*, Shri Krishna now shows the simple solution for breaking out of their bondage. All the living entities in the world are under the grip of the three *gunas*, and hence the *gunas* are the active agents in all the works being done in the world. But the Supreme Bhagavān is beyond them. Therefore, he is called *tri-guṇātīt* (transcendental to the modes of material nature). Similarly, all the attributes of Bhagavān—his names, forms, virtues, pastimes, abodes, saints—are also *tri-guṇātīt*.

If we attach our mind to any personality or object within the realm of the three *guṇas*, it results in increasing their corresponding color on our mind and intellect. However, if we attach our mind to the divine realm, it transcends the *guṇas* and becomes divine. Those who understand this principle start loosening their relationship with worldly objects and people, and strengthening it, through *bhakti*, with Bhagavān and the Guru. This enables them to transcend the three *guṇas*, and attain the divine nature of Bhagavān. This is further elaborated in verse 14.26.

गुणानेतानतीत्य त्रीन्देही देहसमुद्धवान् ।
जन्ममृत्युजरादुःखैर्विमुक्तोऽमृतमश्रुते ॥ 20 ॥

*guṇān etān atītya trīn dehī deha-samudbhavān
janma-mṛityu-jarā-duḥkhaiḥ vimukto 'mṛitam aśhnute*

guṇān—the three modes of material nature; *etān*—these; *atītya*—transcending; *trīn*—three; *dehī*—the embodied; *deha*—body; *samudbhavān*—produced of; *janma*—birth; *mṛityu*—death; *jarā*—old age; *duḥkhaiḥ*—misery; *vimuktāḥ*—freed from; *amṛitam*—immortality; *aśhnute*—attains.

By transcending the three modes of material nature associated with the

body, one becomes free from birth, disease, old age, and misery, and attains immortality.

If we drink water from a dirty well, we are bound to get a stomach upset. Similarly, if we are influenced by the three modes, we are bound to experience their consequences, which are repeated birth within the material realm, disease, old age, and death. These four are the primary miseries of material life. It was by seeing these that the Buddha first realized that the world is a place of misery, and then searched for the way out of misery.

The Vedas prescribe a number of codes of conduct, social duties, rituals, and regulations for human beings. These prescribed duties and codes of conduct are together called *karm dharma*, or *varṇāśram dharma*, or *śārīrik dharma*. They help elevate us from *tamo guṇa* and *rajo guṇa* to *sattva guṇa*. However, to reach *sattva guṇa* is not enough; it is also a form of bondage. The mode of goodness can be equated to being fettered with chains of gold. Our goal lies even beyond it—to get out of the prison house of material existence.

Shri Krishna explains that when we transcend the three modes, then Māyā no longer binds the living being. Thus, the Ātman gets released from the cycle of life and death and attains immortality. Factually, the Ātman is always immortal. However, its identification with the material body makes it suffer the illusion of birth and death. This illusory experience is against the eternal nature of the Ātman, which seeks release from it. Hence, the material illusion is naturally discomforting to our inner being and, from within, we all seek the taste of immortality.

अर्जुन उवाच ।
कैलिङ्गस्त्रीनुणानेतानतीतो भवति प्रभो ।
किमाचारः कथं चैतांस्त्रीनुणानतिवर्तते ॥ २१ ॥

arjuna uvācha

*kair lingais trīn guṇān etān atīto bhavati prabho
kim āchāraḥ katham chaitāns trīn guṇān ativartate*

arjunah uvācha—Arjun inquired; *kaiḥ*—by what; *lingaiḥ*—symptoms; *trīn*—three; *guṇān*—modes of material nature; *etān*—these; *atītah*—having transcended; *bhavati*—is; *prabho*—Bhagavān; *kim*—what; *āchāraḥ*—conduct; *katham*—how; *cha*—and; *etān*—these; *trīn*—three; *guṇān*—modes of material nature; *ativartate*—transcend.

Arjun inquired: What are the characteristics of those who have gone beyond the three *gunas*, O Bhagavān? How do they act? How do they go beyond the bondage of the *gunas*?

Arjun heard from Shri Krishna about transcending the three *gunas*. So, now he asks three questions in relation to the *gunas*. The word *lingais* means “symptoms.” His first question is: “What are the symptoms of those who have transcended the three *gunas*?” The word *āchāraḥ* means “conduct.” Arjun’s second question is: “In what manner do such transcendentalists conduct themselves?” The word *ativartate* means “transcend.” The third question he asks is: “How does one transcend the three *gunas*? ” *Shri Krishna answers his questions systematically.*

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
प्रकाशं च प्रवृत्तिं च मोहमेव च पाण्डव ।
न द्वेष्टि सम्प्रवृत्तानि न निवृत्तानि काङ्क्षति ॥ 22 ॥
उदासीनवदासीनो गुणौर्यो न विचाल्यते ।
गुणा वर्तन्त इत्येवं योऽवतिष्ठति नेङ्गते ॥ 23 ॥

*śrī-bhagavān uvācha
prakāśham cha pravṛittim cha moham eva cha pāñdava
na dveṣṭhi sampravṛittāni na nivṛittāni kāṅkṣhati
udāśīna-vad āśīno guṇair yo na vichālyate
guṇā vartanta ity evam yo 'vatiṣṭhati neṅgate*

śrī-bhagavān uvācha—Bhagavān Krishna said; *prakāśham*—illumination; *cha*—and; *pravṛittim*—activity; *cha*—and; *moham*—delusion; *eva*—even; *cha*—and; *pāñdava*—Arjun, the son of Pandu; *na dveṣṭhi*—do not hate; *sampravṛittāni*—when present; *na*—nor; *nivṛittāni*—when absent; *kāṅkṣhati*—longs; *udāśīna-vat*—neutral; *āśīnah*—situated; *guṇaiḥ*—to the modes of material nature; *yah*—who;

na—not; *vichālyate*—are disturbed; *guṇāḥ*—modes of material nature; *vartante*—act; *iti-evam*—knowing it in this way; *yah*—who; *avatishṭhati*—established in the self; *na*—not; *iṅgate*—wandering.

Bhagavān Krishna said: O Arjun, The persons who are transcendental to the three *gunas* neither hate illumination (which is born of *sattva*), nor activity (which is born of *rajas*), nor even delusion (which is born of *tamas*), when these are abundantly present, nor do they long for them when they are absent. They remain neutral to the modes of nature and are not disturbed by them. Knowing it is only the *gunas* that act, they stay established in the self, without wavering.

Shri Krishna now clarifies the traits of those who have transcended the three *gunas*. They are not disturbed when they see the *gunas* functioning in the world, and their effects manifesting in persons, objects, and situations around them. Illumined persons do not hate ignorance when they see it, nor get implicated in it. Worldly-minded become overly concerned with the condition of the world. They spend their time and energy brooding about the state of things in the world. The enlightened Ātman(s) also strive for human welfare, but they do so because it is their nature to help others. At the same time, they realize that the world is ultimately in the hands of Bhagavān. They simply have to do their duty to the best of their ability, and leave the rest in the hands of Bhagavān. Having come into Bhagavān's world, our first duty is how to purify ourselves. Then, with a pure mind, we will naturally do good and beneficial works in the world, without allowing worldly situations to bear too heavily upon us. As Gandhi said: "Be the change that you wish to see in the world."

Shri Krishna explains that persons of illumination, who know themselves to be transcendental to the functioning of the modes, are neither miserable nor jubilant when the modes of nature perform their natural functions in the world. In fact, even when they perceive these *gunas* in their mind, they do not

feel disturbed. The mind is made from the material energy, and thus contains the three modes of Māyā. So it is natural for the mind to be subjected to the influence of the *gunas*, and their corresponding thoughts. The problem is that in bodily consciousness we do not see the mind as different from ourselves. And so, when the mind presents a disturbing thought, we feel, “Oh! I am thinking in this negative manner.” We begin to associate with the poisonous thoughts, allowing them to reside in us and damage us spiritually. To the extent that even if the mind presents a thought against Bhagavān and Guru, we accept the thought as ours. If, at that time, we could see the mind as separate from us, we would be able to dissociate ourselves from negative thoughts. We would then reject the thoughts of the mind, “I will have nothing to do with any thought that is not conducive to my devotion.” Persons on the transcendental platform have mastered the art of distancing themselves from all negative thoughts arising in the mind from the flow of the *gunas*.

समदुःखसुखः स्वस्थः समलोष्टाश्मकाञ्चनः ।
तुल्यप्रियाप्रियो धीरस्तुल्यनिन्दात्मसंस्तुतिः ॥२४॥
मानापमानयोस्तुल्यस्तुल्यो मित्रारिपक्षयोः ।
सर्वारम्भपरित्यागी गुणातीतः स उच्यते ॥२५॥

*sama-duḥkha-sukhah sva-sthah sama-loṣṭāśma-kāñchanah
tulya-priyāpriyo dhīras tulya-nindātma-sanstutih
mānāpamānayos tulyas tulyo mitrāri-pakṣhayoh
sarvārambha-parityāgī guṇātītaḥ sa uchyate*

sama—alike; *duḥkha*—distress; *sukhah*—happiness; *sva-sthah*—established in the self; *sama*—equally; *loṣṭa*—a clod; *āśma*—stone; *kāñchanah*—gold; *tulya*—of equal value; *priya*—pleasant; *apriyah*—unpleasant; *dhīrah*—steady; *tulya*—the same; *nindā*—blame; *ātma-sanstutih*—praise; *māna*—honor; *apamānayoh*—dishonor; *tulyah*—equal; *tulyah*—equal; *mitra*—friend; *ari*—foe; *pakṣhayoh*—to the parties; *sarva*—all; *ārambha*—enterprises; *parityāgī*—renoucer; *guṇa-atītaḥ*—risen above the three modes of material nature; *sah*—they; *uchyate*—are said to have.

Those who are alike in happiness and distress; who are established in the self; who look upon a clod, a stone, and a piece of gold as of equal value;

who remain the same amidst pleasant and unpleasant events; who are intelligent; who accept both blame and praise with equanimity; who remain the same in honor and dishonor; who treat both friend and foe alike; and who have abandoned all enterprises – they are said to have risen above the three *gunas*.

Like Bhagavān, the Ātman too is beyond the three *gunas*. In bodily consciousness, we identify with the pain and pleasures of the body, and consequently vacillate between the emotions of elation and dejection. But those who are established on the transcendental platform of the self do not identify either with the happiness or the distress of the body. Such self-realized mystics do perceive the dualities of the world but remain unaffected by them. Thus, they become *nirguna* (beyond the influence of the *gunas*). This gives them an equal vision, with which they see a piece of stone, a lump of earth, gold, favorable and unfavorable situations, criticisms and glorifications as all the same.

**मां च योऽव्यभिचारेण भक्तियोगेन सेवते ।
स गुणान्सपतीत्यैतान्ब्रह्मभूयाय कल्पते ॥ 26 ॥**

*mām cha yo 'vyabhichāreṇa bhakti-yogena sevate
sa gunān samatītyaitān brahma-bhūyāya kalpate*

mām—me; *cha*—only; *yah*—who; *avyabhichāreṇa*—unalloyed; *bhakti-yogena*—through devotion; *sevate*—serve; *sah*—they; *gunān*—the three modes of material nature; *samatītya*—rise above; *etān*—these; *brahma-bhūyāya*—level of Brahman; *kalpate*—comes to.

Those who serve me with unalloyed devotion rise above the three modes of material nature and come to the level of *Brahman*.

Having explained the traits of those who are situated beyond the three *gunas*, Shri Krishna now reveals the one and only method of transcending these modes of material nature. The above verse indicates that mere knowledge of the self and its distinction with the body is not enough. With the help of *bhakti*

yog, the mind has to be fixed on the Supreme Bhagavān, Shri Krishna. Then alone will the mind become *nirguṇa* (untouched by the three modes), just as Shri Krishna is *nirguṇa*.

Many people are of the view that if the mind is fixed upon the personal form of Bhagavān, it will not rise to the transcendental platform. Only when it is attached to the formless *Brahman*, will the mind become transcendental to the modes of material nature. However, this verse refutes such a view. Although the personal form of Bhagavān possesses infinite *gunas* (qualities), these are all divine and beyond the modes of material nature. Hence, the personal form of Bhagavān is also *nirguṇa* (beyond the three material modes). Sage Ved Vyas explains how the personal form of Bhagavān is *nirguṇa*:

*yastu nirguṇa ityuktah śhāstreshu jagadīśhvaram
prākṛitarheya sanyuktairguṇairhīnatvamuchyate (Padma Purāṇ) [v3]*

“Wherever the scriptures refer to Bhagavān as *nirguṇa* (without attributes), they mean that he is without material attributes. Nevertheless, his divine personality is not devoid of qualities—he possesses infinite divine attributes.”

This verse also reveals the proper object of meditation. Transcendental meditation does not mean to meditate upon nothingness. The entity transcendental to the three modes of material nature is Bhagavān. And so, only when the object of our meditation is Bhagavān can it truly be called transcendental meditation.

ब्रह्मणो हि प्रतिष्ठाहममृतस्याव्ययस्य च ।
शाश्वतस्य च धर्मस्य सुखस्यैकान्तिकस्य च ॥ २७ ॥

*brahmaṇo hi pratiṣṭhāham amṛitasyāvyayasya cha
śhāśvatasya cha dharmasya sukhasyaikāntikasya cha*

brahmaṇah—of *Brahman*; *hi*—only; *pratiṣṭhā*—the basis; *aham*—I; *amritasya*—of the immortal; *avyayasya*—of the imperishable; *cha*—and; *śhāśvatasya*—of the eternal; *cha*—and; *dharmasya*—of the dharma; *sukhasya*—of bliss; *aikāntikasya*—unending; *cha*—and.

I am the basis of the formless *Brahman*, the immortal and imperishable, of eternal dharma, and of unending divine bliss.

The previous verse may give rise to the question about the relationship between Shri Krishna and the formless *Brahman*. It was previously stated that the all-powerful Bhagavān has both aspects to his personality—the formless and the personal form. Here, Shri Krishna reveals that the *Brahman* which the *jñānīs* worship is the light from the personal form of Bhagavān. Padma Purāṇ states:

*yannakhenduruchirbrahma dheyam brahmādibhiḥ suraiḥ
guṇatrayamatītam tam vande vṛindāvaneśhvaram (Patal Khand 77.60) [v4]*

“The light that emanates from the toe nails of the feet of the Bhagavān of Vrindavan, Shri Krishna, is the transcendental Brahman that the *jñānīs* and even the celestial deities meditate upon.” Similarly, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu said:

*tāñhāra aṅgera śhuddha kiraṇa-mandala
upaniṣhat kahe tāñre brahma sunirmala
(Chaitanya Charitāmrit, Ādi Leela 2.12) [v5]*

“The effulgence emanating from the divine body of Bhagavān is described by the Upaniṣads as *Brahman*.” Thus, in this verse, Shri Krishna unequivocally confirms that the panacea for the disease of the three *guṇas* is to engage in unwavering devotion to the personal form of the Supreme Bhagavān.



Chapter 15

Puruṣottam Yog ~ पुरुषोत्तमयोगः

The Yog of The Supreme Divine Personality

In the previous chapter, Shri Krishna explained that by transcending the three modes of material nature one attains the divine goal. He also revealed that the best means for going beyond the *gunas* is to engage in exclusive devotion. To engage in such devotion, we must detach the mind from the world and attach it to Bhagavān alone. Thus, it is necessary to understand the nature of the world. In this chapter, Shri Krishna explains this material world in a graphic manner, to help Arjun develop detachment from it. He compares the material world to an upside down *ashvatth* tree (sacred fig). The embodied Ātman wanders up and down the branches of the tree, from lifetime to lifetime, without comprehending from where it originated, how long it has existed, and how it keeps growing. The roots of the tree are above, as it has its source in Bhagavān. The fruitive activities described in the Vedas are like its leaves. The tree is irrigated by the three modes of material nature. These modes create sense objects that are like the buds on the tree. The buds sprout aerial roots that engender further growth of the tree. The chapter describes this symbolism in detail, to convey the idea of how the embodied Ātman suffering in this material world only keeps perpetuating its bondage here, in ignorance of the

nature of this tree of material existence. Shri Krishna explains that the axe of detachment must be used to cut down the tree. Then, we must search for the base of the tree, which is the Supreme Bhagavān himself. Finding the source, we must surrender to him in the manner described in this chapter, and then will attain the divine abode of Bhagavān, from where we will not return to the material world again.

Shri Krishna then describes how the Ātman(s) in this world are divine, being his eternal fragmental parts. But bound by material nature, they are struggling with the six senses including the mind. He explains how the embodied Ātman, though divine, savors the material objects of the senses. He also describes how the Ātman transmigrates to a new body at the time of death, carrying with it the mind and senses from the present life. The ignorant neither realize the presence of the Ātman in the body, nor when it departs from it upon death. But yogis perceive it with the eyes of knowledge and by the purity of their mind. In the same way, Bhagavān is also present in his creation, but he needs to be perceived with the eyes of knowledge. Shri Krishna reveals how we can cognize the existence of Bhagavān in this world through his glories that shine forth everywhere. The chapter ends with explanations of the terms: *kṣhar*; *akṣhar*, and *Puruṣottam*. *Kṣhar* are the perishable beings of the material realm. *Akṣhar* are the liberated beings in the abode of Bhagavān. *Puruṣottam* is Shri Hari, who is the unchanging controller and sustainer of the world. He is transcendental to both the perishable and imperishable beings. He must be worshipped with all our being.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
ऊर्ध्वमूलमधःशाखमश्वत्थं प्राहुरव्ययम् ।
छन्दांसि यस्य पर्णानि यस्तं वेद स वेदवित् ॥ १ ॥

*śrī-bhagavān uvācha
ūrdhvamūlam adhaḥ-śākham aśvattham prāhur avyayam*

chhandānsi yasya parnāni yas tam veda sa veda-vit

śhrī-bhagavān uvācha—Bhagavān Krishna said; *ūrdhva-mūlam*—with roots above; *adhaḥ*—downward; *śhākham*—branches; *aśhvatham*—the sacred fig tree; *prāhuh*—they speak; *avyayam*—eternal; *chhandānsi*—Vedic mantras; *yasya*—of which; *parnāni*—leaves; *yah*—who; *tam*—that; *veda*—knows; *sah*—he; *veda-vit*—the knower of the Vedas.

Bhagavān Krishna said: They speak of an eternal *aśhvath* tree with its roots above and branches below. Its leaves are the Vedic hymns, and one who knows the secret of this tree is the knower of the Vedas.

The word *aśhvath* means that which will not remain the same until even the next day. This world is also *aśhvath*, as it is constantly changing. The Sanskrit dictionary defines the world in the following manner: *sansaratīti sansārah* “That which is constantly shifting is *Sansar* (a Sanskrit word for world).” *Gachchhatīti jagat* “That which is always moving is *Jagat* (another Sanskrit word for world).” Not only is the world always changing, but it will also be annihilated and absorbed back into Bhagavān one day. Thus, everything in it is temporary, or *aśhvath*.

Aśhvath also has another meaning. It is the *peepal* tree (sacred fig), of the banyan tree family. Shri Krishna explains that, for the Ātman, this material world is like a huge *aśhvath* tree. Generally, trees have their roots below and branches above. But this tree has its roots above (*ūrdhva-mūlam*), i.e. it has originated from Bhagavān, it is based in him, and is supported by him. Its trunk and branches extend downward (*adhaḥ-śhākham*), encompassing all the life-forms in all the abodes of the material realm.

The leaves of the tree are those Vedic mantras (*chhandānsi*) that deal with ritualistic ceremonies and their rewards. They provide the juice for nourishing the tree of material existence. By engaging in the fruitive ritualistic *yajñas* described in these Vedic mantras, the Ātman goes to the heavenly abodes to enjoy celestial pleasures, only to descend back to earth when the meritorious

deeds are depleted. Thus, the leaves of the tree nourish it by perpetuating the cycle of life and death. This tree in the form of the world is called eternal (*avyayam*) because its flow is continuous, and its beginning and end are not experienced by the Ātman(s). Just as the water of the sea evaporates to form clouds, then rains down on earth and merges into the sea again in a continuous process, similarly the cycle of life and death is perpetual.

The Vedas also mention this tree:

ūrdhvamūlo 'vākshākha eṣho 'śvatthah sanātanah (*Kaṭhopaniṣad* 2.3.1) [v1]

“The aśvattha tree, with its roots upward and branches downward is eternal.”

*ūrdhvamūlam arvākshākham vṛikṣhaṁ yo samprati
na sa jātu janah śraddhayātmṛityutiyurmā mārayaditi*
(*Taittirīya Āranyak* 1.11.5) [v2]

“Those who know this tree with its roots upward and branches downward will not believe that death can finish them.”

The Vedas describe this tree with the intention that we should endeavor to chop it down. Thus, Shri Krishna says that one who knows the secret of cutting down this tree of *samsara* is the knower of the Vedas (*veda vit*).

अधश्चोर्ध्वं प्रसृतास्तस्य शाखा
गुणप्रवृद्धा विषयप्रवालाः ।
अधश्च मूलान्यनुसन्ततानि
कर्मानुबन्धीनि मनुष्यलोके ॥२॥

*adhaś chordhvam̄ prasṛitāḥ tasya śhākhā
guṇa-pravṛiddhā viṣhaya-pravālāḥ
adhaś cha mūlāny anusantatāni
karmānubandhīni manuṣhya-loke*

adhaḥ—downward; *cha*—and; *ūrdhvam*—upward; *prasṛitāḥ*—extended; *tasya*—its; *śhākhāḥ*—branches; *guṇa*—modes of material nature; *pravṛiddhāḥ*—nourished; *viṣhaya*—objects of the senses; *pravālāḥ*—buds; *adhaḥ*—downward; *cha*—and; *mūlāni*—roots; *anusantatāni*—keep growing; *karma*—actions; *anubandhīni*—bound; *manuṣhya-loke*—in the world of humans.

The branches of the tree extend upward and downward, nourished by the three *guṇas*, with the objects of the senses as tender buds. The roots of the tree hang downward, causing the flow of karma in the human form. Below, its roots branch out causing (karmic) actions in the world of humans.

Shri Krishna continues comparing the material creation with the *aśvatth* tree. The main trunk of the tree is the human form, in which the Ātman performs karmas. The branches (*śhākhās*) of the tree extend both downward (*adhaḥ*) and upward (*ūrddhva*). If the Ātman commits sinful activities, it is reborn either in the animal species or in the nether regions. These are the downward branches. If the Ātman performs virtuous acts, it is reborn in the celestial abodes as a *gandharva*, *devatā*, etc. These are the upward branches.

As a tree is irrigated by water, this tree of material existence is irrigated by the three modes of material nature. These three modes generate sense objects that are like the buds on the tree (*vishaya-pravālāḥ*). The function of buds is to sprout and cause further growth. The buds on this *aśvatth* tree sprout and create material desires that are like the aerial roots of the tree. The specialty of banyan trees is that they send down aerial roots from the branches to the ground. Hence, the aerial roots become secondary trunks, enabling banyan trees to grow to vast sizes. The biggest known banyan tree is “The Great Banyan” in the Botanical Garden of Kolkata. The area occupied by the tree is about four acres. The crown of the tree has a circumference of about 1,100 yards, and there are about 3,300 aerial roots reaching down to the ground. Similarly, in the analogy of the *aśvatth* tree, in the material world the sense objects are like the buds on the tree. They sprout and evoke desires for sensual enjoyment in the individual. These desires are compared to the aerial roots of the tree. They provide juice for the tree to keep growing. Impelled by desires for material enjoyment, the living being engages in karma. But sensual desires are never fulfilled; rather they only

multiply as we try to satiate them. So karmas performed to fulfill desires only serve to increase them further. Thus, the aerial roots of this metaphorical tree keep expanding in size and growing unlimitedly. In this way, they entangle the Ātman further in material consciousness.

न रूपमस्येह तथोपलभ्यते
 नान्तो न चादिर्न च सम्प्रतिष्ठा ।
 अश्ववृथमेनं सुविरुद्धमूल
 मसङ्गशास्त्रेण दृढेन छित्वा ॥३॥
 ततः पदं तत्परिमार्गितव्यं
 यस्मिन्नाता न निवर्तन्ति भूयः ।
 तमेव चाद्यं पुरुषं प्रपद्ये
 यतः प्रवृत्तिः प्रसृता पुराणी ॥४॥

*na rūpam asyeha tathopalabhyate
 nānto na chādir na cha sampratiṣṭhā
 aśvattham enām su-virūḍha-mūlam
 asaṅga-śastreṇa dṛidhenā chhittvā
 tataḥ padam tat parimārgitavyam
 yasmin gatā na nivartanti bhūyah
 tam eva chādyam puruṣham prapadye
 yataḥ pravṛittih prasṛitā purāṇī*

na—not; *rūpam*—form; *asya*—of this; *iha*—in this world; *tathā*—as such; *upalabhyate*—is perceived; *na*—neither; *antah*—end; *na*—nor; *cha*—also; *ādiḥ*—beginning; *na*—never; *cha*—also; *sampratiṣṭhā*—the basis; *aśvattham*—sacred fig tree; *enam*—this; *su-virūḍha-mūlam*—deep-rooted; *asaṅga-śastreṇa*—by the axe of detachment; *dṛidhenā*—strong; *chhittvā*—having cut down; *tataḥ*—then; *padam*—place; *tat*—that; *parimārgitavyam*—one must search out; *yasmin*—where; *gatāḥ*—having gone; *na*—not; *nivartanti*—return; *bhūyah*—again; *tam*—to him; *eva*—certainly; *cha*—and; *ādyam*—original; *puruṣham*—the Supreme Bhagavān; *prapadye*—take refuge; *yataḥ*—whence; *pravṛittih*—the activity; *prasṛitā*—streamed forth; *purāṇī*—very old.

The real form of this tree is not perceived in this world, neither its beginning nor end, nor its continued existence. But this deep-rooted *aśvatth* tree must be cut down with a strong axe of detachment. Then one must search out the base of the tree, which is the Supreme Bhagavān, from

whom streamed forth the activity of the universe a long time ago. Upon taking refuge in him, one will not return to this world again.

The embodied Ātman(s) immersed in *samsara*, or the perpetual cycle of life and death, are unable to comprehend the nature of this *aśvatth* tree. They find the buds of the tree to be very attractive, i.e. they are lured by the objects of the senses and develop desires for them. To fulfill these desires, they undertake great endeavors without realizing that their efforts only nourish the tree to grow even further. When desires are satiated, they come back with redoubled intensity in the form of greed. When they are obstructed, they give rise to anger, which bewilders the intellect and deepens the ignorance.

Shri Krishna explains that this riddle of the *aśvatth* tree is understood only by a few. All that the Ātman understands is “I am Ramprasad, son of Hariprasad, etc. I am living in this town of this country. I want to maximize my happiness. So I act according to my bodily identification, but happiness eludes me and I become confused.” Not comprehending the origin and nature of the tree, the living being engages in worthless actions and endeavors. To satiate one’s materialistic desires, a human being sometimes commits sins and goes downward into the lower species and the nether regions of the material world. Sometimes, the propensity for material enjoyment attracts one to the leaves of the tree, which are the ritualistic ceremonies of the Vedas. By engaging in these activities, one goes upward to the celestial abodes, only to come back again when the pious merits are depleted. Thus, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu said:

*kṛiṣṇa bhuli 'sei jīva anādi-bahirmukha
ataeva māyā tāre deya samsāra-duḥkha
kabhu swarge uṭhāya, kabhu narake ḫubāya
daṇḍya-jane rājā yena nadīte chubāya*
(Chaitanya Charitāmṛit, Madhya Leela 20.117-118) [v3]

“Since the Ātman is forgetful of Bhagavān since eternity, the material energy is

subjecting it to worldly miseries. Sometimes, it lifts the Ātman to the celestial abodes, and other times it drops it down to the hellish regions. This is akin to the torture meted by kings in olden times.” As a form of torture, ancient kings would have a person’s head ducked into the water until he was close to suffocation, and then release him for a few gasps, only to duck him in again. The situation of the Ātman is similar to this. It finds temporary relief in the celestial abodes, only to be dropped back on earth again.

In this manner, endless lifetimes have passed. All the endeavors of the Ātman for material enjoyment are only resulting in expanding the tree further by sending more roots to the ground. However, Shri Krishna says that the axe to cut this tree is dispassion. The word *asāng* means detachment, and it is the remedy for the Ātman’s endless miseries. The desires fuelled by the three modes of material nature will have to be destroyed by the axe of detachment. This axe should be made from knowledge of the self: “I am an eternal spiritual being, and not this material body. The eternal divine bliss that I seek will never be attained from material things. The material desires that I harbor while thinking that I am the body only perpetuate my existence in the *samsara* of life and death. There is no satiation or respite in this direction.” When one develops detachment, further growth of the tree stops and it starts withering.

We must then search for the base of this tree, which is situated above the roots and is higher than everything else. That base is the Supreme Bhagavān, as Shri Krishna previously stated: “I am the source of both the material and spiritual creation. Everything emanates from me. The wise who know this perfectly worship me with great faith and devotion.” (Verse 10.8) Thus, finding the original source of the tree, we must surrender to it in the manner described in this verse: “I submit unto him from whom the universe came into being a long time ago.”

In this manner, the tree that was previously unfathomable and difficult to comprehend can be overcome. Shri Krishna had also previously stated: “My divine energy, Māyā, consisting of the three modes of nature, is very difficult to overcome. But those who surrender unto me cross over it easily.” (Verse 7.14) Hence, on taking refuge of the Supreme Bhagavān, the *aśvath* tree will be cut down. We will not have to return to this world again, and will go to his divine abode after death. *Shri Krishna discloses in the following verse what the process of surrender entails.*

निर्मानमोहा जितसङ्गदोषा
अध्यात्मनित्या विनिवृत्तकामाः ।
द्वन्द्वर्विमुक्ताः सुखदुःखसंज्ञै
गच्छन्त्यमूढाः पदमव्ययं तत् ॥५॥

*nirmāna-mohā jita-saṅga-doṣhā
adhyātma-nityā vinivṛitta-kāmāḥ
dvandvair vimuktāḥ sukha-duḥkha-sanjñair
gachchhanty amūḍhāḥ padam avyayam tat*

niḥ—free from; *māna*—vanity; *mohāḥ*—delusion; *jita*—having overcome; *saṅga*—attachment; *doṣhāḥ*—evils; *adhyātma-nityāḥ*—dwelling constantly in the self and Bhagavān; *vinivṛitta*—freed from; *kāmāḥ*—desire to enjoy senses; *dvandvaiḥ*—from the dualities; *vimuktāḥ*—liberated; *sukha-duḥkha*—pleasure and pain; *sanjñaiḥ*—known as; *gachchhanti*—attain; *amūḍhāḥ*—unbewildered; *padam*—abode; *avyayam*—eternal; *tat*—that.

Those who are free from vanity and delusion, who have overcome the evil of attachment, who dwell constantly in the self and Bhagavān, who are freed from the desire to enjoy the senses, and are beyond the dualities of pleasure and pain, such liberated personalities attain my eternal abode.

Shri Krishna now explains how to surrender to the base of the tree that is the Supreme Bhagavān. He says that one must first of all give up pride that is borne of ignorance. The embodied Ātman, in illusion, presently thinks, “I am the Bhagavān of all I that I have and in future I shall possess even more. All this is for my enjoyment and happiness.” As long as we remain intoxicated by

pride borne of ignorance, we think of ourselves as the enjoyer of material nature. In such a state, we disregard the Bhagavān and have no desire to surrender to his will.

This false notion of being the enjoyer must be removed with the help of knowledge. We must realize that the material energy belongs to Bhagavān and is, therefore, meant for his service. The Ātman too is a servant of Bhagavān, and so the present attitude of enjoying must be transformed into the attitude of service. For this, we must eliminate material attachments that pull the mind toward the world and away from Bhagavān. Instead, we must attach the mind to Bhagavān in an attitude of selfless service, understanding the true nature of the self as an eternal servant of Bhagavān. The Padma Purāṇ states:

*dāsa bhūtamidam tasya jagatsthāvara jangamam
śrīmannārāyaṇa swāmī jagatānprabhuriśhwaraḥ [v4]*

“The Supreme Bhagavān Narayan is the controller and the Bhagavān of the world. All moving and non-moving beings and entities in this creation are his servants.” Hence, the more we develop the desire to serve Bhagavān, the more the illusion of being the enjoyer of *prakṛiti* will be dispelled and the heart will become cleansed. Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj emphasizes this above everything else, as the most powerful means for purifying the heart:

*sau bātana kī bāta ika, dharu muralīdhara dhyāna,
barhavahu sevā-vāsanā, yaha sau jñānana jñāna. (Bhakti Śhatak, verse 74) [v5]*

“Out of a hundred advices for purification, the most important is this. Let your mind be absorbed in the divine flute-player, Shri Krishna, and keep increasing your desire to serve him. This counsel is more important than a hundred such gems of knowledge.”

Once we succeed in cleansing our etheric hearts and become perfectly situated in loving service of Bhagavān, then what happens? Shri Krishna explains in the above verse that such perfected Ātman(s) go to the spiritual realm for the rest

of eternity. When the state of Brahman-consciousness is achieved, the material realm serves no further purpose. The Ātman is then qualified to reside in Bhagavān's divine abode along with the other Brahman-realized Ātman(s). Just as a prison occupies only a small part of a city, so too is the material realm. It is only one-fourth of Bhagavān's entire creation, while the spiritual realm is three-fourths. The Vedas state:

pādo 'sya viśvā bhūtāni, tripādasya amṛitam divi (Puruṣa Sūktam Mantra 3) [v6]

“This temporary world made from the material energy is but one part of creation. The other three parts is the eternal abode of Bhagavān that is beyond the phenomenon of life and death.” *Shri Krishna explains the nature of that eternal abode in the following verse.*

न तद्वासयते सूर्यो न शशाङ्को न पावकः ।
यद्गत्वा न निवर्तन्ते तद्वाम परमं मम ॥ 6 ॥

*na tad bhāsayate sūryo na śaśhāṅko na pāvakah
yad gatvā na nivartante tad dhāma paramam mama*

na—neither; *tat*—that; *bhāsayate*—illumine; *sūryah*—the sun; *na*—nor; *śaśhāṅkah*—the moon; *na*—nor; *pāvakah*—fire; *yat*—where; *gatvā*—having gone; *na*—never; *nivartante*—they return; *tat*—that; *dhāma*—abode; *paramam*—supreme; *mama*—mine.

Neither the sun nor the moon, nor fire can illumine that supreme abode of mine. Having gone there, one does not return to this material world again.

Here, Shri Krishna gives a brief idea of the nature of the divine realm. The sun, moon, and fire are not required to illuminate this spiritual abode as it is naturally self-luminous. While the material realm is made from the material energy, Māyā, the divine realm is made from the spiritual energy, *YogMāyā*. It is transcendental to the dualities and defects of material nature, and is perfect in every way. It is *sat-chit-ānand*, i.e. full of eternality, knowledge, and bliss.

That divine realm consists of a spiritual sky, called *Paravyom*, which contains numerous abodes full of Bhagavān-like opulence and splendors. All the eternal

forms of Bhagavān, such as Krishna, Ram, Narayan, etc. have their own abodes in that spiritual sky, where they reside eternally with their devotees and engage in divine pastimes (*leelas*). Brahma states in his prayers to Shri Krishna:

*goloka-nāmni nija-dhāmni tale cha tasya
devī maheśha-hari-dhāmasu teṣhu teṣhu
te te prabhāva-nichayā vihitāśh cha yena
govindam ādi-puruṣham tam aham bhajāmi*
(*Brahma Samhitā* verse 43) [v7]

“In the spiritual sky is Golok, the personal abode of Shri Krishna. That spiritual sky also contains the abodes of Narayan, Shiv, Durga, etc. I adore Supreme Divine Personality Bhagavān Krishna, by the majesty of whose opulence, this is possible.” About Golok, the divine abode of Shri Krishna, Brahma further says:

*ānanda-chinMāyā-rasa-pratibhāvitābhīs
tābhīr ya eva nija-rūpatayā kalābhīḥ [v8]
goloka eva nivasaty akhilātmā-bhūto
govindam ādi-puruṣham tam aham bhajāmi*
(*Brahma Samhitā* verse 37) [v9]

“I worship Govind, the Supreme Bhagavān, who resides in Golok with the expansion of his own form, Radha. Their eternal associates are the *sakhis*, who are enlivened by the ever-blissful spiritual energy and are the embodiments of sixty-four artistic abilities.” The devotees who attain Bhagavān and go to his supreme abode participate in his divine pastimes that are imbued with the perfection of the spiritual energy. Shri Krishna assures Arjun that those Ātman(s) who go there cross the *samsara* of birth and death.

**ममैवांशो जीवलोके जीवभूतः सनातनः ।
मनःषष्ठानीन्द्रियाणि प्रकृतिस्थानि कर्षति ॥७॥**

*mamaivānśho jīva-loke jīva-bhūtaḥ sanātanaḥ
manah-ṣaṣṭhānīndriyāṇi prakṛiti-sthāni karṣhati*

mama—my; *eva*—only; *anśhāḥ*—fragmental part; *jīva-loke*—in the material world; *jīva-bhūtaḥ*—the embodied Ātman(s); *sanātanaḥ*—eternal; *manah*—with the mind; *ṣaṣṭhānī*—the six; *indriyāṇi*

—senses; *prakṛiti-sthāni*—bound by material nature; *karṣhati*—struggling.

The embodied Ātman(s) in this material world are my eternal fragmental parts. But bound by material nature, they are struggling with the six senses including the mind.

Shri Krishna previously explained that the Ātman(s) who go to his abode do not come back. Now he speaks about the Ātman(s) who remain in the material realm. First, he reassures that they are also his fragmental parts.

So, let us understand the kinds of parts that Bhagavān has. They are of two kinds:

1. *Swāṁśh*. These are all the *Avatārs* of Bhagavān, such as Ram, Nrisingh, Varaha, etc. They are non-different from Shri Krishna, and thus they are called *swāṁśh*, which means integrated parts.

2. *Vibhinnāṁśh*. These are the differentiated parts of Bhagavān. They are not directly fragments of Bhagavān, rather they are parts of his Ātman energy (*jīva śakti*). In this category come all the Ātman(s) in existence. This was stated by Shri Krishna in verse 7.5: “But beyond the material energy, O mighty-armed Arjun, there is another superior energy of mine. This is the embodied Ātman(s) who are the basis of life in this world.”

Further, the *vibhinnāṁśh* Ātman(s) are of three kinds:

1. *Nitya siddha*. These are the Ātman(s) who were always liberated and have therefore resided in the divine realm of Bhagavān since eternity, participating in his divine pastimes.

2. *Sādhan siddha*. These are the Ātman(s) who were previously in the material realm, like us, but they practiced *sādhanā* and attained the Supreme Bhagavān. Now they reside in the divine realm for the rest of eternity and participate in Bhagavān’s pastimes.

3. *Nitya baddha*. These are the Ātman(s) who have been in the material realm since eternity. They are embodied with five senses and the mind, and hence they are struggling.

The Kathopaniṣad states:

parāñchi khāni vyatrinat swayambhū (2.1.2) [v10]

“The creator, Brahma, has made the senses such that they are turned outward toward the world.” For these *vibhinnāñsh nitya baddha* parts, Shri Krishna states that they are struggling to satiate the mind and senses and experiencing misery in the process. *He now explains, in the following verse, what happens to the mind and senses as the Ātman moves into another body upon death.*

शरीरं यदवाप्नोति यच्चाप्युक्तामतीश्वरः ।
गृहीत्वैतानि संयाति वायुर्गन्धानिवाशयात् ॥८॥

*śharīram yad avāpnoti yach chāpy utkrāmatīśhvaram
gṛihītvaitāni sanyāti vāyur gandhān ivāśhayāt*

śharīram—the body; *yat*—as; *avāpnoti*—carries; *yat*—as; *cha api*—also; *utkrāmati*—leaves; *īśhvaram*—the Bhagavān of the material body, the embodied Ātman; *gṛihītvā*—taking; *etāni*—these; *sanyāti*—goes away; *vāyuh*—the air; *gandhān*—fragrance; *iva*—like; *āśhayāt*—from seats.

As the air carries fragrance from place to place, so does the embodied Ātman carry the mind and senses with it, when it leaves an old body and enters a new one.

The phenomenon of transmigration of the Ātman is explained here. The example given is of the breeze transporting the fragrance of flowers from one place to another. Likewise, when the Ātman departs at the time of death, it discards the gross body. But it carries with it the subtle and causal bodies, which include the mind and senses. (The three kinds of bodies were described in detail in verse 2.28)

While the Ātman gets a new body in every life, the mind continues journeying

with it from past lifetimes. This explains why even people who are blind from birth can see dreams. Usually dreams are a result of the distortion of our visions and thoughts during the waking state that get disjointed and connected while asleep. For example, let us say that someone sees a bird flying and thinks, “If I were a bird how nice it would be” In the dream, he finds himself flying in the human body itself. That is because the thoughts and visions of the waking state became distorted and linked in the dream state. However, a person who is blind from birth has never seen any forms and shapes, and yet that person can see dreams because impressions of the waking state are stored in the subconscious of the mind from endless past lifetimes. *Having explained that the Ātman takes the mind and senses with it when it departs from the body, Shri Krishna next explains what it does with these.*

**श्रोत्रं चक्षुः स्पर्शनं च रसनं ग्राणमेव च ।
अधिष्ठाय मनश्चायं विषयानुपसेवते ॥९॥**

*śhrotram chakṣuh sparśhanam cha rasanam ghrāṇam eva cha
adhiṣṭhāya manaśh chāyam viṣhayān upasevate*

śhrotram—ears; chakṣuh—eyes; sparśhanam—the sense of touch; cha—and; rasanam—tongue; ghrāṇam—nose; eva—also; cha—and; adhiṣṭhāya—grouped around; manah—mind; cha—also; ayam—they; viṣhayān—sense objects; upasevate—savors.

Using the sense perceptions of the ears, eyes, skin, tongue, and nose, which are grouped around the mind, the embodied Ātman savors the objects of the senses.

Since the Ātman, being divine, cannot directly taste, touch, feel, smell, or hear, then how does it savor these perceptions? The answer is that the senses and the mind help it to do so. The senses and mind are actually insentient, but they are energized by consciousness of the Ātman and become lifelike. Hence, they perceive pleasure and pain from objects, situations, thoughts, and persons. Due to the ego, the Ātman identifies with the mind and senses, and vicariously

perceives the same pleasures.

The problem is that while the Ātman itself is divine, the happiness it perceives in this manner is material. Thus, no matter how much pleasure the senses and mind bring to the Ātman, it remains dissatisfied. The feeling that it has still not reached its goal persists, and the search continues for perfect happiness that would truly satisfy it. The American philosopher, Ralph Waldo Emerson put this very beautifully: “We grant that human life is mean. But how did we find out that it is mean? What is the ground of this uneasiness, of this old discontent? What is this universal sense of want and ignorance, but the fine innuendo by which the Ātman makes its enormous claim?” Another famous philosopher, Meister Eckhart writes: “There is something in the Ātman which is above the living being, divine and simple. This light is only satisfied with the supra essential essence.”

The infinite, eternal, and divine bliss that the Ātman seeks can only be attained from Bhagavān. When one realizes this, the same senses and mind that were the cause of bondage can be turned in the direction of Bhagavān and utilized as instruments of devotion. A wonderful example of this was Saint Tulsidas, who wrote the Hindi Ramayana. In his youth, he was deeply attached to his wife. Once, she had gone to stay at her parents’ home for a few days, when Tulsidas became eager to meet her. He set off on foot to his father-in-law’s house, but there was a stream on the way and no boatman was willing to take him across, since it was raining heavily. A dead body came floating by. Absorbed in the longing to meet his wife, Tulsidas thought it was a piece of log. He clung to it and went across. His desire to meet his wife, who was living on the second floor of the house, was overpowering him. A snake was hanging from the wall. Tulsidas did not see it carefully and thought it to be a rope. So, rather than waste time by knocking at the main door, he grabbed the snake and climbed up. When he came in through the window, his wife was

astonished. She asked him how he came across the river and how he managed to climb up the wall. He pointed outside to what he had mistaken to be the log of wood and the rope. She was shocked to see the dead body and the snake. She exclaimed, “You have such desire for this body made of blood and flesh. If only you had desired Bhagavān so intensely you would never again have to take birth in this world again.” The words of his wife hit him so hard that he realized his folly and became detached. He renounced his household and went to engage in devotion. He dovetailed toward Bhagavān the desires of his same mind and senses that had troubled him in the past. Thus, by the process of devotion, he purified himself and became the great poet Saint Tulsidas. Later, he wrote:

*kāmihi nāri piāri jimi lobhihi priya jimi dāma,
timi raghunātha nirantara priya lāgahu mohi rāma (Ramayana) [v11]*

“As a lustful man desires a beautiful woman, and as an avaricious person desires wealth, may my mind and senses constantly desire Bhagavān Ram.”

उत्क्रामन्तं स्थितं वापि भुज्जानं वा गुणान्वितम् ।
विमूढा नानुपश्यन्ति पश्यन्ति ज्ञानचक्षुषः ॥ 10 ॥

*utkrāmantam sthitam vāpi bhujjanam vā guṇānvitam
vimūḍhā nānupaśhyanti paśhyanti jñāna-chakṣuṣah*

utkrāmantam—departing; *sthitam*—residing; *vā api*—or even; *bhuñjanam*—enjoys; *vā*—or; *guṇānvitam*—under the spell of the modes of material nature; *vimūḍhāḥ*—the ignorant; *na*—not; *anupaśhyanti*—percieve; *paśhyanti*—behold; *jñāna-chakṣuṣah*—those who possess the eyes of knowledge.

The ignorant do not perceive the Ātman as it resides in the body, and as it enjoys sense objects; nor do they perceive it when it departs. But those who possess the eyes of knowledge can behold it.

Although the Ātman is seated within the body and savors the perceptions of the mind and senses, not everyone cognizes this. The reason is that the Ātman is non-material and cannot be seen or touched by the material senses.

Scientists cannot detect it in laboratories with their instruments, so they mistakenly conclude that the body is the self. This is like a mechanic trying to figure out how a car moves. He traces the movement of the wheels backward and reaches the accelerator, the ignition switch and the steering wheel. He labels these as the car's causes of motion, without realizing that it is a driver who operates these. Similarly, without knowledge of the existence of the Ātman, physiologists conclude that the bodily parts together are the source of life within the body.

However, those who have walked the path of spirituality see with eyes of knowledge that the Ātman energizes these bodily parts. When it departs, even though all the different organs of the material body such as the heart, brain, lungs, etc. are all there, consciousness ceases to exist. Consciousness is a symptom of the Ātman; it is present in the body as long as the Ātman is present and leaves when the Ātman leaves. Only those who possess the eyes of knowledge (*jñāna chakṣu*) can see this. Shri Krishna says here that the ignorant (*vimūḍh*), unaware of their own divine identity, presume the corporeal body to be the self.

यतन्तो योगिनश्चैनं पश्यन्त्यात्मन्यवस्थितम् ।
यतन्तोऽप्यकृतात्मानो नैनं पश्यन्त्यचेतसः ॥ 11 ॥

*yatanto yoginash chainam paśhyanty ātmany avasthitam
yatanto 'py akṛitĀtmanno nainam paśhyanti achetasah*

yatantaḥ—striving; *yoginah*—yogis; *cha*—too; *enam*—this (the Ātman); *paśhyanti*—see; *ātmani*—in the body; *avasthitam*—enshrined; *yatantah*—strive; *api*—even though; *akṛita-Ātmannah*—those whose minds are not purified; *na*—not; *enam*—this; *paśhyanti*—cognize; *achetasah*—.

Striving yogis too are able to realize the Ātman enshrined in the body. However, those whose minds are not purified cannot cognize it, even though they strive to do so.

To strive for knowledge is not enough; our endeavor must also be properly

directed. Humans make the mistake that they seek to know divine entities by the same means as they have gotten to know the world. They take the perception of their senses and the power of their intellect as the basis for deciding the rightness and wrongness of all knowledge. They presume that if their senses cannot perceive something and their intellect cannot comprehend it, then that entity itself cannot exist. And because the Ātman cannot be perceived by their senses, they conclude that there is no such entity. Describing this phenomenon, Alexis Carrel states in his book, Man the Unknown: “Our mind has a natural tendency to reject the things that do not fit into the frame of scientific or philosophical beliefs of our time. After all, scientists are only human. They are saturated with the prejudices of their environment and epoch. They willingly believe that facts which cannot be explained by current theories do not exist. At present times, scientists still look upon telepathy and other metaphysical phenomena as illusions. Evident facts having an unorthodox appearance are suppressed.”

The Nyāya Darśhan calls this kind of thinking as *kūpa-maṇḍūka-nyāya* (the logic of the frog in the well). A frog lived in a well and was very familiar with the dimensions of its own dwelling. One day, a Rana Cancrivora (a species of frogs that lives in the ocean) jumped into the well. They began chatting with each other. The frog of the well asked the ocean frog, “How big is this ocean from where you have come?” The Rana Cancrivora replied, “It is very big.” “Is it five times the size of the well?” “No, much bigger.” “Is it ten times the size of the well?” “No, even bigger.” “Hundred times?” “No, that is nothing. It is far bigger.” “You are lying,” the frog of the well said, “How can anything be more than hundred times the size of my well?” Its intellect had been conditioned by the lifelong experience of the well, and so it could not conceive of the vast ocean. Similarly, limited by the experience of their tiny intellects, materialistic people refuse to accept the possibility of the existence of the non-material

Ātman. However, those who pursue the spiritual path realize that there can be knowledge beyond the purview of their material intellects. With humility and faith, they begin treading the spiritual path and aim to purify their hearts. When the mind becomes cleansed, the presence of the Ātman is naturally perceived. Then the truth of the scriptures is experienced through realization.

Just as the senses cannot initially cognize the Ātman, Bhagavān too is not under their purview, and has to be perceived through the eyes of knowledge. In the following verses, Shri Krishna gives the method for perceiving the existence of Bhagavān.

यदादित्यगतं तेजो जगद्वासयतेऽखिलम् ।
यच्चन्द्रमसि यच्चाग्नौ तत्तेजो विद्धि मामकम् ॥ 12 ॥

*yad āditya-gatam tejo jagad bhāsayate 'khilam
yach chandramasi yach chāgnau tat tejo viddhi māmakam*

yat—which; āditya-gatam—in the sun; tejah—brilliance; jagat—solar system; bhāsayate—illuminates; akhilam—entire; yat—which; chandramasi—in the moon; yat—which; cha—also; agnau—in the fire; tat—that; tejah—brightness; viddhi—know; māmakam—mine.

Know that I am like the brilliance of the sun that illuminates the entire solar system. The radiance of the moon and the brightness of the fire also come from me.

Our human nature is such that we are attracted toward what we feel is significant. By regarding the body, spouse, children, and wealth as significant, we become attracted to them. In these verses, Shri Krishna reveals that it is his energy which manifests in all significant things in creation. He says he is responsible for the effulgence of the sun. Scientists estimate that the sun emits every second as much energy as millions of nuclear power plants. It has been doing so since billions of years, and yet it has neither got depleted, nor has anything gone wrong in its processes. To think that such an amazing celestial body as the sun came into being by random probability, as a result of a big

bang, is naive. The sun is what it is by the glory of Bhagavān.

Similarly, the moon performs an amazing function by lighting up the night sky. Through mundane intellect, we may conclude scientifically that the moonshine just happens to exist because of the reflection of the sun's light. However, this amazing arrangement has been brought into place by Bhagavān's opulence, and the moon is one of the many manifestations of Bhagavān's *vibhūtis* (opulences). In this context, there is a story in the Kenopaniṣhad. It relates that there was a prolonged war between the *devatās* (celestial deities) and the *daityas* (Demons residing in the nether regions), in which the *devatās* finally won. However, their victory led to pride and they began thinking they had secured it by their own prowess. To destroy their pride, Bhagavān manifested as a *yakṣha* (a kind of semi-celestial being), and situated himself in the celestial sky. His form was exceedingly effulgent. Indra, the king of Swarga Loka, first spotted him and was astonished to see that a mere *yakṣha* was more effulgent than him. He sent Agni, the fire Bhagavān to inquire about him. Agni went to the *yakṣha* and said, "I am the fire Bhagavān, and I possess the power of burning the entire universe to ashes in a moment. Now please reveal who you are." Bhagavān, in the form of the *yakṣha*, put a blade of straw in front and said, "Please burn this." Seeing it, Agni began laughing, "Will this puny blade of grass be any test for my unlimited power?" However, when Agni lunged forward to burn it, Bhagavān switched his power source off from inside him. Poor Agni himself began shivering with cold; where question of burning anything else? He returned to Indra, embarrassed at his failure in the assigned task.

Indra then sent Vayu, the wind deity to inquire into the personality of the *yakṣha*. Vayu went and announced, "I am the wind deity and, if I wish, in a moment I can turn the whole world upside down. Now you please reveal who you are." Again, Bhagavān, in the form of the *yakṣha*, put the piece of straw in

front of him and requested, “Please turn this over.” Seeing the straw, Vayu chuckled. He moved ahead with great speed, but in the meantime Bhagavān switched off his energy source too. Poor Vayu found it extremely difficult even to drag his own feet; where was the question of turning anything else over? Finally, Indra went himself, to determine who the *yakṣha* was. However, when Indra came, Bhagavān disappeared, and in his place, his divine *YogMāyā* power, Uma, was seated. When Indra inquired from her about the *yakṣha*, Uma replied, “He was your Supreme Father, from whom all of you celestial deities derive your strength. He had come to destroy your pride.”

गामाविश्य च भूतानि धारयाम्यहमोजसा ।
पुष्णामि चौषधीः सर्वाः सोमो भूत्वा रसात्मकः ॥ 13 ॥

*gām āviśya cha bhūtāni dhārayāmy aham ojasā
puṣṇāmi chauṣhadhīḥ sarvāḥ somo bhūtvā rasātmakah*

gām—earth; *āviśya*—permeating; *cha*—and; *bhūtāni*—living beings; *dhārayāmi*—sustain; *aham*—I; *ojasā*—energy; *puṣṇāmi*—nourish; *cha*—and; *auṣhadhīḥ*—plants; *sarvāḥ*—all; *somah*—the moon; *bhūtvā*—becoming; *rasa-ātmakah*—supplying the juice of life.

Permeating the earth, I nourish all living beings with my energy. Becoming the moon, I nourish all plants with the juice of life.

The word *gām* means earth and the word *ojasā* means energy. The earth is a mass of matter, but by the power of Bhagavān, it is made inhabitable and it sustains various species of movable and non-movable living beings. For example, from childhood we wondered why the ocean water is salty. The fact is that if it were not salty, it would have bred disease in abundance and become uninhabitable. So, whatever the physical phenomena associated with it, ocean water is salty by the will of Bhagavān. George Wald, a Nobel Prize winning scientist states in his book, A Universe that Breeds Life: “If any one of the considerable number of the physical properties of our universe were other than they are, then life, that now appears to be so prevalent, would be impossible, here or anywhere.”

From Shri Krishna's statement, we understand that it is Bhagavān's energy which has brought about the appropriate physical properties for life to exist on the planet earth.

Further, the moonlight, which has the quality of ambrosial nectar, nourishes all plant life, such as herbs, vegetables, fruits, and grains. Shri Krishna states that it is he who imparts this nourishing characteristic to the moonlight.

अहं वैश्वानरो भूत्वा प्राणिनां देहमाश्रितः ।
प्राणापानसमायुक्तः पचाम्यन्नं चतुर्विधम् ॥ 14 ॥

*aham vaiśhvānaro bhūtvā prāṇinām deham āśhritaḥ
prāṇāpāna-samāyuktaḥ pachāmy annām chatur-vidham*

aham—I; vaiśhvānaraḥ—fire of digestion; bhūtvā—becoming; prāṇinām—of all living beings; deham—the body; āśhritaḥ—situated; prāṇa-apāna—outgoing and incoming breath; samāyuktaḥ—keeping in balance; pachāmi—I digest; annam—foods; chatuh-vidham—the four kinds.

It is I who take the form of the fire of digestion in the stomachs of all living beings, and combine with the incoming and outgoing breaths, to digest and assimilate the four kinds of foods.

Scientists would attribute the forces of digestion to the gastric juices secreted by gall bladder, the pancreas, the liver, etc. However, this verse reveals that such thinking is again simplistic. Behind all these gastric juices is Bhagavān's energy that works to make the process of digestion possible. The *vaiśhvānara*, meaning “fire of digestion,” is ignited by the power of Bhagavān. The Brīhadāraṇyak Upaniṣad also states:

*ayam agnir vaiśhvānaro yo 'yam antaḥ puruṣhe
yenedam annām pachyate (5.9.1) [v12]*

“Bhagavān is the fire inside the stomach that enables living beings to digest food.”

The four kinds of food (*chaturvidham*) alluded to in this verse are: 1. *Bhojya*. These include foods that are chewed with the teeth, such as bread, chapatti, etc. 2.

Peya. These are foods that are swallowed, such as milk, juice, etc. 3. *Kośhya.* These are foods that are sucked, such as sugarcane. 4. *Lehya.* These include foods that are licked, such as honey, etc.

In verses 12 to 14, Shri Krishna explained that Bhagavān makes possible all aspects of life. He energizes the earth to make it inhabitable. He energizes the moon to nourish all vegetation, and he becomes the gastric fire to digest the four kinds of food. He now concludes this topic in the next verse by stating that he alone is the goal of all knowledge.

सर्वस्य चाहं हृदि सन्निविष्टे
मत्तः स्मृतिर्ज्ञानमपोहनं च ।
वेदैश्च सर्वैरहमेव वेद्यो
वेदान्तकृद्वेदविदेव चाहम् ॥ 15 ॥

*sarvasya chāham hṛidi sannivিষ্টo
mattah smṛitir jñānam apohanam cha
vedaiśh cha sarvair aham eva vedyo
vedānta-kṛit vedā-vid eva chāham*

sarvasya—of all living beings; *cha*—and; *aham*—I; *hṛidi*—in the hearts; *sannivিষ্টah*—seated; *mattah*—from me; *smṛitih*—memory; *jñānam*—knowledge; *apohanam*—forgetfulness; *cha*—as well as; *vedaiḥ*—by the Vedas; *cha*—and; *sarvaiḥ*—all; *aham*—I; *eva*—alone; *vedyah*—to be known; *vedānta-kṛit*—the author of the Vedānt; *veda-vit*—the knower of the meaning of the Vedas; *eva*—alone; *cha*—and; *aham*—I.

I am seated in the hearts of all living beings, and from me come memory, knowledge, as well as forgetfulness. I alone am to be known by all the Vedas, am the author of the Vedānt, and the knower of the meaning of the Vedas.

Bhagavān has created within us an amazing mechanism equipped with the faculties of knowledge and memory. The brain is its hardware and the mind and intellect are like its software. We often take this mechanism for granted. Surgeons perform a brain transplant and become proud of their feat, but they

do not stop to ponder how this amazing mechanism of the brain got created. There are still many areas where, despite all the progress in technology, computers cannot compare with the functioning of the human brain. For example, software engineers are still struggling with face-recognition technology, while humans can easily recognize people even after their looks change. Hence, we hear remarks such as, “O dear friend, it is nice meeting you after such a long time. You have changed so much since we last met.” This Demonstrates that the human brain can identify faces even though they change over years, while computers cannot even perfectly recognize unchanged faces. At present, engineers are still struggling with scanner software that reads typed material flawlessly. In contrast, humans can perfectly understand even sketchy handwritings of others. Shri Krishna states that the amazing faculties of memory and knowledge come from him.

Further, he also attributes the power of forgetting to him. As unwanted records are destroyed, the living being does away with purposeless retention of memory, without which it would have been clogged with information. Uddhav tells Shri Krishna:

*tvatto jñānam hi jīvānām pramoṣhas te 'tra śaktitah
(Bhāgavatam 11.22.28) [v13]*

“From you alone the knowledge of the living being arises, and by your potency that knowledge is stolen away.”

Apart from this internal faculty of knowledge that we possess, the external source of knowledge is the scriptures, and Shri Krishna reveals his glories in that context as well. It is he who manifested the Vedas at the beginning of creation. However, as Bhagavān is divine and beyond the purview of the intellect, these Vedas are also divine. Hence, he alone knows their true meaning, and if he bestows his grace upon someone, that fortunate Ātman also becomes a knower of the Vedas. Ved Vyāsa, who was an *avatār* of Bhagavān,

wrote the Vedānt Darśhan. Thus, Shri Krishna states that he is the author of the Vedānt as well.

Finally, he says that although the Vedas contain innumerable material and spiritual instructions, the object of all Vedic knowledge is to know him. The fruitive ritualistic ceremonies are also there for a purpose. They lure people who are deeply attached to the material world, and provide them with an intermediate step, before directing them toward Bhagavān. The Kāthopaniṣhad (1.2.15) states: *sarve vedā yat padamāmananti* [v14] “All the Vedic mantras are actually pointing toward Bhagavān.” We may memorize all the Vedic mantras, learn to recite them in proper meter, master all the rites and rituals, engage in meditation, and even awaken the *kundalini* power, but if we do not know Bhagavān, then we do not really understand the true objective of the Vedas. On the other hand, those who develop love for Bhagavān automatically comprehend the purpose of all the Vedic scriptures. Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj states:

sarva śāstra sāra yaha govind rādhe, āthon yām mana hari guru men lagā de
(Rādhā Govind Geet) [v15]

“The essence of all the scriptures is to engage your mind day and night in loving devotion to Bhagavān and Guru.”

In this chapter, from verse 1 to 15, Shri Krishna explained the tree of creation. Now while concluding the topic, he describes the terms kṣhar, akṣhar, and Puruṣottam in the next two verses, to put that knowledge in proper perspective.

द्वाविमौ पुरुषौ लोके क्षरश्चाक्षर एव च ।
क्षरः सर्वाणि भूतानि कूटस्थोऽक्षर उच्यते ॥ 16 ॥

*dvāv imau puruṣhau loke kṣharaśh chākṣhara eva cha
kṣharaḥ sarvāṇi bhūtāni kūṭa-stho 'kṣhara uchyate*

dvau—two; *imau*—these; *puruṣhau*—beings; *loke*—in creation; *kṣharaḥ*—the perishable; *cha*—and; *akṣharaḥ*—the imperishable; *eva*—even; *cha*—and; *kṣharaḥ*—the perishable; *sarvāṇi*—all; *bhūtāni*—beings; *kūṭa-sthaḥ*—the liberated; *akṣharaḥ*—the imperishable; *uchyate*—is said.

There are two kinds of beings in creation, the *kshar* (perishable) and the *akshar* (imperishable). The perishable are all beings in the material realm. The imperishable are the the liberated beings.

In the material realm, Māyā binds the individual Ātman to the material body. Although the Ātman itself is eternal, it repeatedly experiences the phenomenon of birth and death of the body. Thus, Shri Krishna calls the embodied living entities in the material world as *kshar* (perishable). This includes all the beings from the tiniest insect to the highest celestial deities.

Apart from these are the Ātman(s) in the divine realm, the abode of Bhagavān. These Ātman(s) possess an immortal body in which they do not have to experience the phenomenon of death, and hence they are categorized as *akshar* (imperishable).

**उत्तमः पुरुषस्त्वन्यः परमात्मेत्युदाहृतः ।
यो लोकत्रयमाविश्य बिभर्त्यव्यय ईश्वरः ॥ 17 ॥**

*uttamah puruṣhas tv anyah paramātmety udāhṛitah
yo loka-trayam āviśhya bibharty avyaya īśvaraḥ*

uttamah—the Supreme; *puruṣah*—Divine Personality; *tu*—but; *anyah*—besides; *parama-Ātman*—the Supreme Ātman; *iti*—thus; *udāhṛitah*—is said; *yah*—who; *loka trayam*—the three worlds; *āviśhya*—enters; *bibharti*—supports; *avyayah*—indestructible; *īśvaraḥ*—the controller.

Besides these, is Shri Hari, who is the indestructible Supreme Ātman. He enters the three worlds as the unchanging controller and supports all living beings.

Having spoken about the world and the Ātman(s), Shri Krishna now speaks of Bhagavān, who is transcendental to both the worlds and the perishable and imperishable living beings. In the scriptures, he is also designated as *Paramātma*, meaning Supreme Ātman. The epithet of *Param* highlights that *ParamĀtman* is different from the *Ātman*, or the individual Ātman. This verse clearly disproves

the claim of the non-dualistic philosophers who state that the individual Ātman itself is the Supreme Ātman.

The individual Ātman is tiny and only pervades the body that it resides in. However, the Supreme Ātman resides in the hearts of all living beings. He notes their karmas, keeps an account of them, and gives the results at the appropriate moment. He accompanies the Ātman from lifetime to lifetime into whatever body it receives. If the Ātman is given a dog's body in a particular lifetime, the Supreme Ātman accompanies it there as well, and bestows the results of past karmas. Thus, there is such a difference between the fortunes of dogs. Some are stray dogs living wretched lives in the streets of India, while others are pet dogs living in luxury in the United States. This stark difference takes place as a result of their stock of karmas, and it is the Supreme Ātman who hands out the reactions of karmas, while accompanying the Ātman life after life, into whatever species it goes.

The Supreme Ātman who resides in the heart of all living beings also exists in the personal form as the four-armed Kshirodakshayi Vishnu (more commonly known as "Vishnu"). There is a popular saying in Hindi: *mārane vāle ke do hāth, bachāne vāle ke chār hāth* [v 15.1] "The person coming to kill has two arms, but the Protector sitting within has four arms." This four-armed personality being referred to is the *ParamĀtman*, or the Supreme Ātman.

यस्मात्क्षरमतीतोऽहमक्षरादपि चोत्तमः ।
अतोऽस्मि लोके वेदे च प्रथितः पुरुषोत्तमः ॥१८॥

*yasmāt kṣharam atīto 'ham akṣharād api chottamah
ato 'smi loke vede cha prathitah puruṣhottamah*

yasmāt—hence; *kṣharam*—to the perishable; *atītaḥ*—transcendental; *aham*—I; *akṣharāt*—to the imperishable; *api*—even; *cha*—and; *uttamah*—transcendental; *ataḥ*—therefore; *asmī*—I am; *loke*—in the world; *vede*—in the Vedas; *cha*—and; *prathitah*—celebrated; *puruṣha-uttamah*—as Shri Hari.

I am transcendental to the perishable world of matter, and even to the

imperishable Ātman; hence I am celebrated, both in the Vedas and the Smritis, as Shri Hari.

In the last few verses, Shri Krishna described in detail how the glorious things of nature are all manifestations of his opulence. However, he does not exhaust himself in creating the visible universe. His transcendental personality is beyond both material nature and the divine Ātman(s). Here, he calls his divine personality as *Puruṣottam* (Supreme Person).

One may doubt whether Bhagavān Krishna and the Supreme Being he is referring to are the same. To remove any such vestiges of misunderstanding, Shri Krishna phrases this verse so as to refer to himself in the first person singular. Further, he says that the Vedas too proclaim him in this manner:

kṛiṣṇa eva paro devas tam dhyāyet tam rasayet tam yajet tam bhajed
(Gopāl Tāpani Upaniṣad) [v16]

“Bhagavān Krishna is the Supreme Bhagavān. Meditate upon him, relish the bliss of his devotion, and worship him.” Again:

yo 'sau param brahma gopālah (Gopāl Tāpani Upaniṣad) [v17]

“Gopal (Bhagavān Krishna) is the Supreme Being.” One may then ask about the position of Bhagavān Vishnu, Bhagavān Ram, Bhagavān Shiv, etc.? They are all different forms of the same Supreme Being, and they are non-different from each other. As a result, they are all manifestations of *Bhagavān*, or Shri Hari.

यो मामेवमसम्भूदो जानाति पुरुषोत्तमम् ।
स सर्वविद्वज्ञति मां सर्वभावेन भारत ॥ 19 ॥

*yo mām evam asammūḍho jānāti puruṣottamam
sa sarva-vid bhajati mām sarva-bhāvena bhārata*

yah—who; *mām*—me; *evam*—thus; *asammūḍhaḥ*—without a doubt; *jānāti*—know; *puruṣottamam*—Shri Hari; *sah*—they; *sarva-vit*—those with complete knowledge; *bhajati*—worship; *mām*—me; *sarva-bhāvena*—with one’s whole being; *bhārata*—Arjun, the son of Bharat.

Those who know me without doubt as Shri Hari truly have complete knowledge. O Arjun, they worship me with their whole being.

The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam states that Bhagavān can be realized in three ways:

*vadanti tat tattva-vidas tattvam yaj jñānam advayam
brahmeti paramātmeti bhagavān iti śabdyate (1.2.11) [v18]*

“The knowers of the Truth have stated that there is only one Supreme Entity that manifests in three ways in the world—*Brahman*, *ParamĀtman*, and *Bhagavān*. ” These are not three different entities, but merely three manifestations of the same Supreme Entity. For example, water, ice, and steam may appear to be distinct entities, but they are actually three forms of the same substance. Similarly, *Brahman* is the aspect of Bhagavān that is formless and all-pervading. Those who follow the path of *jñāna yog* worship the *Brahman* aspect of Bhagavān. *ParamĀtman* is the aspect of the Supreme Entity that resides in the hearts of all living beings as the Supreme Ātman. The path of *aśtāng yog* leads to the *ParamĀtman* realization of Bhagavān. *Bhagavān* is the aspect of the Bhagavān that manifests in a personal form and performs sweet *leelas* (pastimes). The path of *bhakti*, or devotion, leads to the realization of Bhagavān in his *Bhagavān* aspect. This was also explained previously in verse 12.2.

In this chapter, from verse 12 onwards, Shri Krishna described all these three aspects of Bhagavān. Verses 12 to 14 referred to the all-pervading *Brahman* manifestation, verse 15 mentioned the *ParamĀtman* aspect, and verses 17 and 18 talked about *Bhagavān*. Now, which of these realizations is the highest and most complete? He answers this question here by saying that those who know him through *bhakti* as *Bhagavān*, Shri Hari, truly have complete knowledge of him. A detailed explanation of why the *Bhagavān* realization is the highest is given by Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj in Bhakti Śatak. He begins by quoting the above-stated verse of the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam:

tīna rūp śrī kṛiṣṇa ko, vedavyās batāya,

brahma aura paramĀtman, aru bhagavān kahāya. (Bhakti Śhatak verse 21) [v19]

“Ved Vyas has declared that the Supreme Bhagavān manifests in three ways—*Brahman*, *ParamĀtman*, and *Bhagavān*.” Then he goes on to describe these three manifestations of the Absolute Truth.

*sarvaśakti sampann ho, śakti vikāsa na hoyā,
sata chita ānanda rūp jo, brahma kahāve soya. (Bhakti Śhatak verse 22) [v20]*

“As *Brahman*, the infinite energies of Bhagavān are all latent. He merely displays eternal knowledge and bliss.”

*sarvaśakti sanyukta ho, nāma rūp guṇa hoyā,
līlā parikara rahit ho, paramĀtman hai soya. (Bhakti Śhatak verse 23) [v21]*

“As *ParamĀtman*, Bhagavān displays his form, name, and virtues. But he does not engage in leelas, nor does he have associates.”

*sarvaśakti prākātya ho, līlā vividha prakāra,
viharata parikara saṅg jo, tehi bhagavān pukāra. (Bhakti Śhatak verse 24) [v22]*

“The aspect of Bhagavān in which he manifests all his energies and engages in various loving pastimes with his devotees is called *Bhagavān*.” These verses by Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj clarify that in the *Brahman* and *ParamĀtman* manifestations, Bhagavān does not reveal all his powers. The complete realization of the Supreme Entity is as *Bhagavān*, in which he manifests all his names, forms, virtues, pastimes, abodes, and associates. (This has also been explained in verse 12.2, with the help of the example of a train.) Thus, those who know him as *Bhagavān*, Shri Hari truly have complete knowledge.

**इति गुह्यतमं शास्त्रमिदमुक्तं मयानघ ।
एतद्बुद्ध्वा बुद्धिमान्यात्कृतकृत्यश्च भारत ॥ 20 ॥**

*iti guhyatamān śāstram idam uktam mayānagha
etad buddhvā buddhimān syāt kṛita-kṛityaś cha bhārata*

iti—these; *guhya-tamam*—most secret; *śāstram*—Vedic scriptures; *idam*—this; *uktam*—spoken; *mayā*—by me; *anagha*—Arjun, the sinless one; *etat*—this; *buddhvā*—understanding; *buddhi-mān*—enlightened; *syāt*—one becomes; *kṛita-kṛityaḥ*—who fulfills all that is to be accomplished; *cha*—and; *bhārata*—Arjun, the son of Bharat.

I have shared this most secret principle of the Vedic scriptures with you, O sinless Arjun. By understanding this, a person becomes enlightened, and fulfills all that is to be accomplished.

The final verse of this chapter begins with the word *iti*, meaning “these.” Shri Krishna implies: “In these twenty verses I have summarized the import of all the Vedic scriptures. I have taken you from the description of the nature of the world, to the distinction between matter and spirit, and finally to the highest realization of Absolute Truth as Shri Hari. Now I give you my assurance that whoever embraces this knowledge will become truly enlightened. Such a Ātman will accomplish the goal of all works and duties, which is Brahman-realization.”



Chapter 16

Daivāsura Sampad Vibhāg Yog ~ **दैवासुरसम्पद्विभागयोगः**

Yog through Discerning the Divine and Demoniac Natures

In this chapter, Shri Krishna describes the two kinds of natures amongst human beings—the saintly and the demoniac. The saintly nature develops by following the instructions of the scriptures, cultivating the mode of goodness, and purifying the mind through spiritual practices. It leads to the enhancement of *daivī sampatti* (Bhagavān-like qualities), eventually culminating in Brahman-realization. In contrast, there is also the demoniac nature that develops from associating with the modes of passion and ignorance, and embracing materialistic views. It breeds unwholesome traits in one's personality, and eventually throws the Ātman into hellish kinds of existence.

The chapter begins by describing the saintly virtues of those endowed with a divine nature. It then goes on to describe the demoniac qualities that must be scrupulously shunned because they drag the Ātman further into ignorance and the *samsara* of life and death. Shri Krishna concludes the chapter by saying that the scriptures should be our authority in determining what should be done and what should not be done. We must understand these scriptural injunctions and then perform our actions in this world accordingly.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
 अभयं सत्त्वसंशुद्धिज्ञानयोगव्यवस्थितिः ।
 दानं दमश्च यज्ञश्च स्वाध्यायस्तप आर्जवम् ॥१॥
 अहिंसा सत्यमक्रोधस्त्यागः शान्तिरपैशुनम् ।
 दया भूतेष्वलोलुप्त्वं मार्दवं ह्रीरचापलम् ॥२॥
 तेजः क्षमा धृतिः शौचमद्रोहोनातिमानिता ।
 भवन्ति सम्पदं दैवीमभिजातस्य भारत ॥३॥

*śrī-bhagavān uvācha
 abhayam sattva-sanśuddhir jñāna-yoga-vyavasthitih
 dānam damaśh cha yajñaśh cha svādhyāyas tapa ārjavam
 ahinsā satyam akrodhas tyāgah śāntir apaiśhunam
 dayā bhūteśhv aloluptvam mārdavam hrīr achāpalam
 tejaḥ kṣhamā dhṛitih śaucham adroho nāti-mānitā
 bhavanti sampadam daivīm abhijātasya bhārata*

śrī-bhagavān uvācha—Bhagavān Krishna said; *abhayam*—fearlessness; *sattva-sanśuddhiḥ*—purity of mind; *jñāna*—knowledge; *yoga*—spiritual; *vyavasthitih*—steadfastness; *dānam*—charity; *damah*—control of the senses; *cha*—and; *yajñaḥ*—performance of sacrifice; *cha*—and; *svādhyāyah*—study of sacred books; *tapah*—austerity; *ārjavam*—straightforwardness; *ahinsā*—non-violence; *satyam*—truthfulness; *akrodhah*—absence of anger; *tyāgah*—renunciation; *śāntih*—peacefulness; *apaiśhunam*—restraint from fault-finding; *dayā*—compassion; *bhūteśhu*—toward all living beings; *aloluptvam*—absence of covetousness; *mārdavam*—gentleness; *hrīḥ*—modesty; *achāpalam*—lack of fickleness; *tejaḥ*—vigor; *kṣhamā*—forgiveness; *dhṛitih*—fortitude; *śaucham*—cleanliness; *adrohaḥ*—bearing enmity toward none; *na*—not; *ati-mānitā*—absence of vanity; *bhavanti*—are; *sampadam*—qualities; *daivīm*—Bhagavān-like; *abhijātasya*—of those endowed with; *bhārata*—scion of Bharat.

Bhagavān Krishna said: O scion of Bharat, these are the saintly virtues of those endowed with a divine nature—fearlessness, purity of mind, steadfastness in spiritual knowledge, charity, control of the senses, performance of sacrifice, study of the sacred books, austerity, and straightforwardness; non-violence, truthfulness, absence of anger, renunciation, peacefulness, restraint from fault-finding, compassion toward all living beings, absence of covetousness, gentleness, modesty, and lack of fickleness; vigor, forgiveness, fortitude, cleanliness, bearing enmity

toward none, and absence of vanity.

Here, Shri Krishna describes twenty-six virtues of a saintly nature. These should be cultivated as a part of our spiritual practice for elevating ourselves to the supreme goal.

Fearlessness. It is the state of freedom from concern for present and future miseries. Inordinate attachment of any kind causes fear. Attachment to wealth leads to dread of impoverishment, attachment to social prestige causes fear of infamy, attachment to vice leads to anxiety about the consequences of sin, attachment to bodily comfort causes the fear of ill-health, and so on. Detachment and surrender to Bhagavān vanquish all fear from the heart.

Purity of mind. This is the state of inner cleanliness. The mind generates and harbors thoughts, sentiments, feelings, emotions, etc. When these are ethical, wholesome, positive, and uplifting, the mind is considered pure, and when they are unethical and degrading, the mind is considered impure. Attachment to objects in the modes of passion and ignorance contaminate the mind, while attachment to Bhagavān purifies it.

Steadfastness in spiritual knowledge. It is said: *tattva vismaranāt bhekivat [v1]* “When human beings forget what is right and what is wrong they become like animals.” Thus, the path of virtue is forged by remaining steadfast in the awareness of spiritual principles.

Charity. It refers to the giving away of one’s possessions for a good cause or to needy persons. True charity is that which is done, not with a feeling of superiority, but with a sense of gratefulness to Bhagavān for the opportunity to help. Material charity, done for the welfare of the body, helps others temporarily. Spiritual charity, done at the platform of the Ātman, helps eliminate the cause of all suffering, which is separation from Bhagavān. Consequently, it is considered higher than material charity.

Control of the senses. The senses are notorious in their ability to drag the mind deeper into material illusion. They tempt the living being to seek immediate gratification. However, walking the path of virtue requires forsaking the lower sensual pleasures for achieving the higher goal. Thus, restraint of the senses is an essential virtue for treading the path to Bhagavān.

Performance of sacrifice. It means executing one's Vedic duties and social obligations, even though they may not be enjoyable. Sacrifice is considered perfect when it is done for the pleasure of Bhagavān.

Study of the sacred books. An important aspect of cultivating the divine nature is to feed the intellect with uplifting knowledge from the scriptures. When the intellect is illumined with proper knowledge, one's actions naturally become sublime.

Austerity. The body-mind-senses are such that, if we pamper them, they become pleasure-seeking, but if we restrain them, they become disciplined. Thus, austerity is the voluntary acceptance of hardships for purifying the body, mind, and intellect.

Straightforwardness. Simplicity in speech and conduct unclutters the mind and engenders the sprouting of noble thoughts. The English phrase “simple living, high thinking” aptly expresses the benefits of the virtue of straightforwardness.

Non-violence. It means not impeding the progressive life of other living beings through thought, word, or deed.

Truthfulness. It means restraining oneself from distorting facts to suit one's purpose. Bhagavān is the Absolute Truth, and hence the practice of truthfulness takes us toward him; on the other hand, falsehood, while convenient, takes us away from Bhagavān.

Absence of anger. The manifestation of anger is a defect of the material mind. It takes place when the desires for happiness are obstructed and things do not turn out how one envisaged. By developing detachment and surrender to the will of Bhagavān, one overcomes anger.

Renunciation. The entire material energy belongs to Bhagavān and it is meant for his pleasure. Hence, the opulences of the world are not for one's enjoyment, but for being utilized in the service of Bhagavān. To be fixed in this understanding is renunciation.

Peacefulness. The cultivation of virtue requires mental poise. Peacefulness is the ability to retain inner equilibrium despite disturbing external situations.

Restraint from fault-finding. The whole world and everything in it is a mixture of good and bad qualities. Focusing upon defects in others dirties our mind, while focusing upon their virtues purifies it. The nature of a saintly person is to see his or her own defects and observe the virtues of others.

Compassion toward all living beings. As individuals evolve spiritually, they naturally rise above self-centeredness and develop empathy for all living beings. Compassion is the deep sympathy that arises upon seeing the sufferings of others.

Absence of covetousness. Greed is the desire to accumulate more than what one legitimately needs for the maintenance of the body. Under its sway, people acquire huge amounts of wealth and possessions, though they know, that at the time of death, everything will be left behind. Freedom from such covetousness leads to contentment and inner peace.

Gentleness. The disposition of behaving roughly with others arises from insensitivity to their feelings. But as one grows in spiritual stature, one naturally sheds crudeness in behavior. Gentleness is a sign of spiritual refinement.

Modesty. *Hrih* means “sense of guilt in performing actions contrary to the injunctions of scriptures and society.” The saintly nature is imbued with a ruthless inner conscience that gives one a sense of guilt in committing sinful acts.

Lack of fickleness. We may begin with good intentions, but if we get distracted by temptations and hardships, we cannot complete the journey. Success on the path of virtue comes by unwaveringly pursuing the goal despite all diversions that come on the way.

Vigor. From purity of mind comes a deep inner drive to act according to one’s values and beliefs. Hence, saintly personalities bring immense power and vigor to the tasks they pursue.

Forgiveness or forbearance. This is the ability to tolerate the offences of others, without feeling the need to retaliate. Through forgiveness, one heals the emotional wounds caused by others that would otherwise fester and disturb the mind.

Fortitude. It is the inner strength and determination in pursuing the goal, even when the mind and senses are wearied due to unfavorable circumstances. Most of the important things in the world have been accomplished by people who kept on trying when there seemed to be no hope at all. Sri Aurobindo put this very eloquently: “You have to be more persistent than the difficulty; there is no other way.”

Cleanliness. It refers to both internal and external purity. Virtuous people believe in maintaining external cleanliness because it is conducive to internal purity. George Bernard Shaw said, “Better keep yourself clean and bright; you are the window through which you must see the world.”

Bearing enmity toward none. Bearing enmity toward others poisons our own mind, and this becomes an impediment in the path of spiritual progress. The

quality of freedom from hatred toward others is developed by realizing that they are also like us, and Bhagavān resides in all.

Absence of vanity. Self-praise, boastfulness, ostentation, etc. all stem from pride. Saintly personalities see nothing in themselves to be proud about, but instead, feel gratitude to Bhagavān for the good qualities they possess. Thus, they refrain from self-aggrandizement.

दम्भो दर्पोऽभिमानश्च क्रोधः पारुष्यमेव च ।
अज्ञानं चाभिजातस्य पार्थं सम्पदमासुरीम् ॥४॥

*dambho darpo 'bhimānaś cha krodhah pāruṣhyam eva cha
ajñānam chābhijātasya pārtha sampadam āsurīm*

dambhah—hypocrisy; *darpaḥ*—arrogance; *abhimānah*—conceit; *cha*—and; *krodhah*—anger; *pāruṣhyam*—harshness; *eva*—certainly; *cha*—and; *ajñānam*—ignorance; *cha*—and; *abhijātasya*—of those who possess; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *sampadam*—qualities; *āsurīm*—demoniac.

O Parth, the qualities of those who possess a demoniac nature are hypocrisy, arrogance, conceit, anger, harshness, and ignorance.

Shri Krishna now expounds upon the six traits of those who possess demoniac natures. They are hypocrites, meaning they make an external show of virtuous behavior for impressing others, without possessing the matching internal traits. This creates an artificial Jekyll and Hyde personality, which is impure internally but has the external appearance of being pure.

The behavior of demoniac natured people is arrogant and disrespectful to others. They are proud and conceited about their bodily possessions and designations, such as wealth, education, beauty, position, etc. They become angry when, due to lack of control of the mind, their lust and greed are frustrated. They are cruel and harsh, and devoid of sensitivity for others' sufferings in their interactions with them. They have no understanding of the spiritual principles and hold unrighteousness to be righteousness.

दैवी सम्पदिमोक्षाय निबन्धायासुरी मता ।
मा शुचः सम्पदं दैवीमभिजातोऽसि पाण्डव ॥५॥

*daivī sampad vimokṣhāya nibandhāyāśurī matā
mā śuchah sampadam daivīm abhijāto 'si pāṇḍava*

daivī—divine; *sampat*—qualities; *vimokṣhāya*—toward liberation; *nibandhāyā*—to bondage; *āsurī*—demoniac qualities; *matā*—are considered; *mā*—do not; *śuchah*—grieve; *sampadam*—virtues; *daivīm*—saintly; *abhijātaḥ*—born; *asi*—you are; *pāṇḍava*—Arjun, the son of Pandu.

The divine qualities lead to liberation, while the demoniac qualities are the cause for a continuing destiny of bondage. Grieve not, O Arjun, as you were born with saintly virtues.

Having described the two kinds of natures, Shri Krishna now declares the consequences of both. He says that the demoniac qualities keep one fettered to the *samsara* of life and death, while the cultivation of saintly virtues helps one break through the bondage of Māyā.

To tread the spiritual path successfully and pursue it till the end, a *sādhak* (aspirant) needs to watch out for many things. If even one of the demoniac qualities, such as arrogance, hypocrisy, etc. remains in the personality, it can become the cause of failure. Simultaneously, the divine virtues need to be developed, for without the saintly qualities, our spiritual progress can again become crippled. For example, without fortitude, we will give up the journey when the going becomes difficult; without forgiveness, the mind will be tied down to hatred and not have the ability to be absorbed in Bhagavān. But if we possess the saintly virtues that Shri Krishna mentions, then our ability to progress rapidly and cope with the obstacles on the path increases. Thus, developing good qualities and eliminating the bad ones is an integral part of spiritual practice. A useful technique that helps us work on removing our weaknesses and developing virtues is the maintenance of a personal diary. Many successful persons kept memoirs and diaries to help them develop the

virtues they felt were necessary for success. Gandhi and Benjamin Franklin both mention having used such techniques in their autobiographies.

Some may argue that if we develop devotion to Bhagavān, we will naturally, over time, acquire the saintly virtues described by Shri Krishna. That is indeed true, but it is unlikely that we will start out on the path full of devotion from the outset itself, free all the negative traits, any one of which can dramatically interfere with devotional progress. Most people need to slowly develop *bhakti* through practice, and success in practice will come by possessing saintly qualities and eliminating demoniac ones. Hence, as a part of our efforts in devotion, we must also keep working on ourselves to develop the divine qualities that Shri Krishna has mentioned in this chapter and shed any demoniac ones.

द्वौ भूतसर्गौ लोकेऽस्मिन्दैव आसुर एव च ।
दैवो विस्तरशः प्रोक्त आसुरं पार्थ मे शृणु ॥ ६ ॥

*dvau bhūta-sargau loke 'smiñ daiva āsura eva cha
daivo vistaraśah prokta āsuram pārtha me śrīṇu*

dvau—two; *bhūta-sargau*—of created living beings; *loke*—in the world; *asmin*—this; *daivah*—divine; *āsurah*—demoniac; *eva*—certainly; *cha*—and; *daivah*—the divine; *vistarashah*—at great length; *proktah*—said; *āsuram*—the demoniac; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *me*—from me; *śrīṇu*—hear.

There are two kinds of beings in this world—those endowed with a divine nature and those possessing a demoniac nature. I have described the divine qualities in detail, O Arjun. Now hear from me about the demoniac nature.

All Ātman(s) carry their natures with them from past lives. Accordingly, those cultivated virtuous qualities and performed meritorious deeds in the past lives are the ones who are born with divine natures, while those who indulged in sin and defiled their minds in previous lives carry the same tendencies into the

present one. This explains the varieties of natures of living beings in the world. The divine and demoniac natures are the two extremes of this spectrum.

The living beings in the celestial abodes possess more virtuous qualities, while the demoniac traits dominate in the lower abodes. Humans possess a mixture of both divine and demoniac traits. Even in the crudest butcher, we sometimes find the quality of kindness existing in personal life. And even in elevated spiritual aspirants we find defects of virtue. It is said that in *Satya-yug*, the gods and Demons lived on different planets (i.e., separate planes of existence); in *Tretā-yug*, they resided on the same planet; during *Dwāpar-yug*, they lived in the same family; and in *Kali-yug*, the Bhagavān-like and demoniac natures coexist in the same person's heart. That is the dilemma of human existence, where the higher self pulls it upward toward Bhagavān, while the lower self pulls it downward. *Having described the saintly qualities, Shri Krishna now goes into an extended description of the lower nature, to help us recognize it and avoid it.*

प्रवृत्तिं च निवृत्तिं च जना न विदुरासुराः ।
न शौचं नापि चाचारो न सत्यं तेषु विद्यते ॥७॥

*pravṛittim cha nivṛittim cha janā na vidur āsurāḥ
na śaucham nāpi chāchāro na satyam teṣu vidyate*

pravṛittim—proper actions; *cha*—and; *nivṛittim*—improper actions; *cha*—and; *janāḥ*—persons; *na*—not; *viduh*—comprehend; *āsurāḥ*—those possessing demoniac nature; *na*—neither; *śaucham*—purity; *na*—nor; *api*—even; *cha*—and; *āchāraḥ*—conduct; *na*—nor; *satyam*—truthfulness; *teṣu*—in them; *vidyate*—exist.

Those possessing a demoniac nature do not comprehend what actions are proper and what are improper. Hence, they possess neither purity, nor good conduct, nor even truthfulness.

Dharma consists of codes of conduct that are conducive to one's purification and the general welfare of all living beings. *Adharma* consists of prohibited actions that lead to degradation and cause harm to society. The demoniac nature is

devoid of faith in the knowledge and wisdom of the scriptures. Hence, those under its sway are confused about what is right and wrong action.

A typical example of this is the present trend in western philosophy. Having evolved through various schools of thought after the Renaissance, such as Age of Enlightenment, Humanism, Empiricism, Communism, Existentialism, and Skepticism, the present era in western philosophy is labeled as “Post-modernism.” The prevalent view of Post-modernist thought is that there is no absolute truth. Multitudes have rejected the possibility that such a thing as absolute truth could exist. “All is relative” has become the slogan of the post-modernist era of philosophy. We often hear phrases like “that may be true for you, but it’s not true for me.” Truth is seen as a personal preference or perception that cannot extend beyond a person’s individual boundaries. This viewpoint has a big bearing on the subject of ethics, which deals with the question of right and wrong behavior. If there is no such thing as absolute truth, then there is no ultimate moral rightness or wrongness about anything. Then, people are justified in saying, “It may be right for you but that does not mean it is right for me.”

Such an idea is very appealing to many, but if taken to its logical extreme it proves absurd and disastrous. For example, what if it is right for someone to ignore traffic lights, even when they are red? That person will put the life of others at risk by doing what he believes is right. What if it is considered right by someone to go on a suicide-bombing mission in a heavily populated civilian area amongst people he sees as enemies? He may be fully convinced that what he is doing is correct. But does that make it right in any sense of the word? If there is no such thing as absolute truth, then no-one can really say “he should do that” or “she shouldn’t do that.” All one can say is, “A lot of people do not feel good about this action.” According to the relativist viewpoint, one might respond, “That may be true for you, but it is certainly not true for us.” These

can be the ruinous ethical consequences of disregarding the belief of an absolute truth.

Shri Krishna states that the demoniac nature is confused about what is right and what is wrong, and thus, neither purity, nor truth, nor right conduct is found in them. *In the following verse, he goes on to describe the predominant views of such people.*

असत्यमप्रतिष्ठं ते जगदाहुरनीश्वरम् ।
अपरस्परसम्भूतं किमन्यत्कामहैतुकम् ॥८॥

*asatyam apratiṣṭham te jagad āhur anīśvaram
aparaspara-sambhūtam kim anyat kāma-haitukam*

asatyam—without absolute truth; *apratiṣṭham*—without any basis; *te*—they; *jagat*—the world; *āhuh*—say; *anīśvaram*—without a Bhagavān; *aparaspara*—without cause; *sambhūtam*—created; *kim*—what; *anyat*—other; *kāma-haitukam*—for sexual gratification only.

They say, “The world is without absolute truth, without any basis (for moral order), and without a Bhagavān (who has created or is controlling it). It is created from the combination of the two sexes, and has no purpose other than sexual gratification.”

There are two ways of refraining from immoral behavior. The first is to refrain from unrighteousness through the exercise of will-power. The second way is to abstain from sin due to fear of Bhagavān. People who have the ability to abstain from sinning merely by will-power are very few. The majority of people desist from doing wrong due to the fear of punishment. For example, it is observed on highways that the moment a police car is spotted, people immediately slow down to the permissible speed limit, but when they perceive there is no danger of being caught, they do not hesitate in exceeding the speed limit. Thus, if we believe in Bhagavān, out of fear of him we will refrain from immoral behavior. Instead, if we do not believe in Bhagavān, all his laws will still be applicable to us, and we will suffer the consequences of wrong-behavior.

Those with demoniac natures do not wish to accept this imposition of authority and regulation of behavior that is a necessary corollary of belief in Bhagavān. Instead, they prefer to subscribe to the view that there is no Bhagavān and the world has no basis for moral order. They propagate ideas such as the “Big Bang Theory,” which postulates that the world was created by an accidental explosion that took place at time zero of creation, and thus there is no Bhagavān who sustains the world. Such theories permit them to engage in sensual gratification without scruples or fear of consequences.

Amongst the various forms of sensual gratification, sexual indulgence is the most intense. This is because the material realm is like a distorted reflection of the spiritual realm. In the spiritual realm, divine love is the basis of the activities of the liberated Ātman(s) and their interactions with Bhagavān. In the material realm, its distorted reflection, lust, dominates the consciousness of materially conditioned Ātman(s), particularly those under the mode of passion. Thus, the demoniac-minded see engagement in lustful activities as the purpose of human life.

एतां दृष्टिमवष्टभ्य नष्टात्मानोऽल्पबुद्धयः ।
प्रभवन्त्युग्रकर्मणः क्षयाय जगतोऽहिताः ॥१९॥

*etām dṛiṣṭim avaśṭabhyā naśṭātmanno 'lpa-buddhayaḥ
prabhavanty ugra-karmāṇah kṣhayāya jagato 'hitāḥ*

etām—such; *dṛiṣṭim*—views; *avaśṭabhyā*—holding; *naśṭa*—misdirected; *Ātmannaḥ*—Ātman(s); *alpa-buddhayaḥ*—of small intellect; *prabhavanti*—arise; *ugra*—cruel; *karmāṇah*—actions; *kṣhayāya*—destruction; *jagataḥ*—of the world; *ahitāḥ*—enemies.

Holding fast to such views, these misdirected Ātman(s), with small intellect and cruel actions, arise as enemies of the world threatening its destruction.

Bereft of true self-knowledge, the demoniac-minded fabricate distorted views of the truth with their impure intellects. An example of this is the theory of

Charvak, a well-known materialistic philosopher in Indian history. He said:

*yāvajjīveta sukaṁ jīvet, riṇāṁ kṛitvā ghṛitam pivet
bhasmī bhūtasya dehasya punarāgamanam kutah [v2]*

“As long as you live, enjoy yourself. If drinking ghee gives you pleasure, then do so even if you have to take a debt for the purpose. When the body is cremated, you will cease to exist, and will not come back in the world again (so do not worry of any karmic consequences of your actions).”

In this fashion, the demoniac-minded reject the eternity of the Ātman and the possibility of karmic reactions, so that they may engage in self-serving and even cruel deeds without any qualms. If they happen to possess power over other humans, they impose their misleading materialistic views upon them as well. They do not hesitate to aggressively pursue their self-centered goals, even if it results in grief to others and destruction to the world. In history, humankind has repeatedly witnessed megalomaniac dictators and emperors, such as Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, etc. who were motivated by their perverse views of the truth and brought about untold suffering and devastation to the world.

काममाश्रित्य दुष्पूरं दम्भमानमदान्विताः ।
मोहाद् ग्रीत्वासद्ग्राहान्प्रवर्तन्तेऽशुचिव्रताः ॥ 10 ॥

*kāmam āśhritya duṣhpūram dambha-māna-madānvitāḥ
mohād grihītvāsaṁgrāhān pravartante 'śhuchi-vratāḥ*

kāmam—lust; *āśhritya*—harboring; *duṣhpūram*—insatiable; *dambha*—hypocrisy; *māna*—arrogance; *mada-anvitāḥ*—clinging to false tenets; *mohāt*—the illusioned; *grihītvā*—being attracted to; *asat*—impermanent; *grāhān*—things; *pravartante*—they flourish; *āshuchi-vratāḥ*—with impure resolve.

Harboring insatiable lust, full of hypocrisy, pride and arrogance, the demoniac cling to their false tenets. Thus illusioned, they are attracted to the impermanent and work with impure resolve.

By giving vent to insatiable lustful desires, the demoniac-minded develop

terribly impure etheric hearts. They become full of hypocrisy and pretend to be what they are not. Their deluded intellect embraces wrong ideas and their pride makes them believe that nobody is more intelligent than them. Attracted to the fleeting pleasures of sense objects, their intellect becomes mean, selfish, and arrogant. Thus, they disregard the injunctions of the scriptures and go contrary to what is proper and truthful.

चिन्तामपरिमेयां च प्रलयान्तामुपाश्रिताः ।
कामोपभोगपरमा एतावदिति निश्चिताः ॥ 11 ॥

*chintām aparimeyām cha pralayāntām upāśhritāḥ
kāmopabhoga-paramā etāvad iti niśhchitāḥ*

chintām—anxieties; *aparimeyām*—endless; *cha*—and; *pralaya-antām*—until death; *upāśhritāḥ*—taking refuge; *kāma-upabhoga*—gratification of desires; *paramāḥ*—the purpose of life; *etāvat*—still; *iti*—thus; *niśhchitāḥ*—with complete assurance.

They are obsessed with endless anxieties that end only with death. Still, they maintain with complete assurance that gratification of desires and accumulation of wealth is the highest purpose of life.

Materially inclined people often reject the spiritual path on the grounds that it is too burdensome and laborious, and the final goal is too distant. They prefer to pursue the way of the world that promises to provide immediate gratification, but they end up struggling even more in the worldly direction. Their desires for material attainments torment them and they undertake enormous schemes to fulfill their aspirations. When a cherished object is attained, for a moment they experience relief, but then new anguish begins. They are worried about the object being snatched away and they labor to retain it. Finally, when the inevitable separation from the object of attachment takes place, there is only misery. Thus, it is said:

*yā chintā bhuvi putra pautra bharanavyāpāra sambhāshane
yā chintā dhana dhānya yaśhasām lābhe sadā jāyate
sā chintā yadi nandanandan padadvandvāra vindekṣhanam*

*kā chintā yamarāja bhīma sadandvārapravayāne vibho
(Sukti Sudhakar) [v3]*

“People experience untold worries and stress in worldly endeavors—bringing up children and grandchildren, engaging in business, accumulating wealth and treasures, and acquiring fame. If they show the same level of attachment and concern for developing love for Shri Krishna’s lotus feet, they will never again have to worry about Yamraj, the deity of death (for they will cross over the cycle of life and death).” But the demoniac-minded refuse to accept this blatant fact because their intellects are convinced that worldly pleasures are the highest experience of joy. They cannot even see that death is patiently waiting to carry them off to miserable destinies and more suffering in future lives.

आशापाशशैर्बद्धाः कामक्रोधपरायणाः । ईहन्ते कामभोगार्थमन्यायेनार्थसञ्जयान् ॥ 12 ॥

*āśhā-pāśha-śhatair baddhāḥ kāma-krodha-parāyanāḥ
īhante kāma-bhogārtham anyāyenārtha-sañchayān*

āśhā-pāśha—bondage of desires; *śhataiḥ*—by hundreds; *baddhāḥ*—bound; *kāma*—lust; *krodha*—anger; *parāyanāḥ*—dedicated to; *īhante*—strive; *kāma*—lust; *bhoga*—gratification of the senses; *artham*—for; *anyāyena*—by unjust means; *artha*—wealth; *sañchayān*—to accumulate.

Held in bondage by hundreds of desires, and driven by lust and anger, they strive to accumulate wealth by unjust means, all for the gratification of their senses.

Money is the means for enjoying the world. That is why materialistic people who are driven by insatiable desires accord such priority to accumulating it in their lives. They do not even hesitate to adopt unlawful means for earning wealth. Therefore, double punishment awaits them for their unethical conduct.

The Bhāgavatam states:

*yāvad bhriyeta jaṭharam tāvat svatvam hi dehinām
adhikām yo 'bhimanyeta sa steno daṇḍam arhati (7.14.8) [v4]*

“One is entitled to keep only as much wealth as is necessary for one’s

maintenance (the rest must be given away in charity). If one accumulates more than one's need, one is a thief in the eyes of Bhagavān, and will be punished for it." What is the punishment? Firstly, at the time of death, the wealth one earned will not go along—it will be snatched away. Secondly, according to the law of karma, one will be punished for the sins committed in earning the wealth. Just as, if a smuggler is caught, not only are his goods confiscated, but he is also punished for breaking the law.

इदमद्य मया लब्धमिमं प्राप्ये मनोरथम् ।
 इदमस्तीदमपि मे भविष्यति पुनर्धनम् ॥ 13 ॥
 असौ मया हतः शत्रुहनिष्ये चापरानपि ।
 ईश्वरोऽहमहं भोगी सिद्धोऽहं बलवान्सुखी ॥ 14 ॥
 आद्योऽभिजनवानस्मि कोऽन्योऽस्ति सदृशो मया ।
 यक्ष्ये दास्यामि मोदिष्य इत्यज्ञानविमोहिताः ॥ 15 ॥

*idam adya mayā labdham imam prāpsyē manoratham
 idam astīdam api me bhaviṣyati punar dhanam
 asau mayā hataḥ śatrur hanīṣhye chāparān api
 iśhvārō 'ham aham bhogī siddhāḥ 'ham balavān sukhī
 āḍhyo 'bhijanavān asmi ko 'nyo 'sti sadṛiśho mayā
 yakṣhye dāsyāmi modiṣhya ity ajñāna-vimohitāḥ*

idam—this; *adya*—today; *mayā*—by me; *labdham*—gained; *imam*—this; *prāpsyē*—I shall acquire; *manah-ratham*—desire; *idam*—this; *asti*—is; *idam*—this; *api*—also; *me*—mine; *bhaviṣyati*—in future; *punah*—again; *dhanam*—wealth; *asau*—that; *mayā*—by me; *hataḥ*—has been destroyed; *śatrūḥ*—enemy; *hanīṣhye*—I shall destroy; *cha*—and; *aparān*—others; *api*—also; *iśhvāraḥ*—Bhagavān; *aham*—I; *aham*—I; *bhogī*—the enjoyer; *siddhāḥ*—powerful; *aham*—I; *bala-vān*—powerful; *sukhī*—happy; *āḍhyāḥ*—wealthy; *abhijana-vān*—having highly placed relatives; *asmī*—me; *kah*—who; *anyah*—else; *asti*—is; *sadṛiśhāḥ*—like; *mayā*—to me; *yakṣhye*—I shall perform sacrifices; *dāsyāmi*—I shall give alms; *modiṣhya*—I shall rejoice; *iti*—thus; *ajñāna*—ignorance; *vimohitāḥ*—deluded.

The demoniac persons think, "I have gained so much wealth today, and I shall now fulfill this desire of mine. This is mine, and tomorrow I shall have even more. That enemy has been destroyed by me, and I shall destroy

the others too! I am like Bhagavān himself, I am the enjoyer, I am powerful, and I am happy. I am wealthy and I have highly placed relatives. Who else is equal to me? I shall perform sacrifices (to the celestial deities); I shall give alms; I shall rejoice.” In this way, they are deluded by ignorance.

Ignoring all morality, the demoniac presume they have a right to enjoy whatever they find pleasurable. They make concerted efforts to orchestrate events to fulfill their ambitions. Realizing that the ritualistic practices of the Vedas will help them become materially affluent, they even perform ritualistic ceremonies to accrue abundance and fame from them. However, like the vulture that flies high but keeps its sight fixed low, the demoniac sometimes rise in social status, but their actions remain mean and lowly. Such people respect power and believe in the principle of “might is right.” Hence, they do not hesitate in even harming or injuring others to eliminate obstacles in the fulfillment of their desires. The Suktī Sudhakar states that there are four kinds of people:

*eke satpuruṣāḥ parārthaghaṭakāḥ swārthān parityajya ye
sāmānyāstu parārthamudyamabhṛitāḥ swārthā virodhena ye
te 'mī mānav rākṣasāḥ parahitān swārthāya nighnanti ye
ye tughnanti nirarthakān parahitām te ke na jānīmahe [v5]*

“The first kind of people is the saintly personalities who sacrifice their self-interest for the welfare of others. The second kind is common people who believe in engaging in the welfare of others, provided it does not harm them. The third kind is the demoniac who do not mind harming others, if it helps fulfill their self-interest. There is also a fourth kind of people who harm others, for no reason (except sadistic delight). There is no suitable name for them.” Shri Krishna vividly describes the degraded nature of the demoniac-mentality. Blinded by pride, they think along these lines: “I was born in a wealthy and

aristocratic family. I am rich and powerful, and I do what I like. There is no need for me to bow down before Bhagavān because I am like Bhagavān myself.”

In most cases, when people say “I,” it is their ego speaking, not them. The ego contains personal identifications with opinions, external appearances, resentments, etc. This ego builds a personality of its own, and under its sway, people identify with thoughts, emotions, and bundles of memories, which they see as integral parts of themselves. The ego identifies with owning, but the satisfaction of having is usually short-lived. Concealed within it is a deep-rooted dissatisfaction of “not enough.” This unfulfilled want results in unease, restlessness, boredom, anxiety, and dissatisfaction. Consequently, a much distorted perception of reality is created, which further alienates their perception of “I” from the real self.

The ego creates the biggest untruth in our lives, and makes us believe what we are not. Thus, for progress along the saintly path, all the religious traditions and saints urge us to dismantle our egotistic thought patterns. The Tao Te Ching teaches: “Instead of trying to be the mountain, be the valley of the Universe.”[v6] (Chapter 6) Jesus of Nazareth also stated: “When you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place so that when the host comes, he may say to you, friend, move up higher. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and everyone who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 14:10-11) [v7]. Saint Kabir put this very nicely:

*ūñche pānī na ṭike, nīche hī thaharāye
nīchā hoyā so bhari pī, ūñchā pyāsā jāya [v8]*

“Water does not remain above; it naturally flows down. Those who are low and unassuming drink (Bhagavān’s grace) to their heart’s content, while those who are high and pompous remain thirsty.”

अनेकचित्तविभ्रान्ता मोहजालसमावृताः ।
प्रसक्ताः कामभोगेषु पतन्ति नरकेऽशुचौ ॥ 16 ॥

*aneka-chitta-vibhrāntā moha-jāla-samāvṛitāḥ
prasaktāḥ kāma-bhogeṣhu patanti narake 'śhuchau*

aneka—many; *chitta*—imaginings; *vibhrāntāḥ*—led astray; *moha*—delusion; *jāla*—mesh; *samāvṛitāḥ*—enveloped; *prasaktāḥ*—addicted; *kāma-bhogeṣhu*—gratification of sensuous pleasures; *patanti*—descend; *narake*—to hell; *aśhuchau*—murky.

Possessed and led astray by such imaginings, enveloped in a mesh of delusion, and addicted to the gratification of sensuous pleasures, they descend to the murkiest Naraka.

Under the sway of the ego, people identify with their mind and become confined by its dysfunctional and repetitive thought patterns. They become practically possessed by their own mind, which goes on and on like a broken record, and they live in the reality their thoughts create for them. One such favorite thought pattern of the impure mind is complaining. It loves to whine and feel resentful not only about people but also about situations. The implication is, “This should not be happening,” “I do not want to be here,” “I am being treated unfairly,” etc. Every complaint is a little story that the mind makes up and the individual completely believes in it. The voice in the head tells sad, anxious, or angry stories about one’s life. And the poor individual, under the sway of the ego, accepts what the voice says. When complaining aggravates, it turns into resentment. Resentment means feeling bitter, indignant, aggrieved, or offended. When the resentment becomes longstanding, it is called a grievance. A grievance is a strong negative emotion connected to an event in the past that is being kept alive by compulsive thinking, by retelling the story in the head of “what someone did to me.” In this verse, Shri Krishna says that the demoniac who choose to live in the mesh of delusion created by the ego become bewildered by numerous thoughts of the poorest quality. Consequently, they obscure their own destiny.

Humans are free to perform karmas by their choice, but they are not free to determine the results of their actions. The results are bestowed by Bhagavān in accordance with the law of karma. The Ramayana states:

karama pradhāna bisva kari rākhā, jo jasa karai so tasa phala chākhā [v9]

“Actions are important in this world. Whatever actions people perform, they taste the corresponding fruits.” Hence, everyone has to face the karmic consequences of their actions. The Bible also states: “Be sure your sin will find you out.” (Numbers 32.23) [v9.1] Thus, in their next lives, Bhagavān casts those who choose to cultivate demoniac qualities into inferior states of existence. The principle is very simple:

*ūrdhvam gachchhanti sattvasthā madhye tiṣṭhanti rājasāḥ
jaghanya guṇa vrittisthā adho tiṣṭhanti tāmasāḥ (Garuḍ Purāṇ) [v10]*

“Those who act out of *sāttvic* mentalities rise to the higher levels of existence; those who act out of *rājasic* mentalities remain in the middle regions; and those who act out of a *tāmasic* mentality and are inclined toward sin descend to the lower levels of existence.”

**आत्मसम्भाविताः स्तव्या धनमानमदान्विताः ।
यजन्ते नामयज्ञैस्ते दम्भेनाविधिपूर्वकम् ॥ 17 ॥**

*ātma-sambhāvitāḥ stabdhā dhana-māna-madānvitāḥ
yajante nāma-yajñais te dambhenāvidhi-pūrvakam*

ātma-sambhāvitāḥ—self-conceited; *stabdhāḥ*—stubborn; *dhana*—wealth; *māna*—pride; *mada*—arrogance; *anvitāḥ*—full of; *yajante*—perform sacrifice; *nāma*—in name only; *yajñaiḥ*—sacrifices; *te*—they; *dambhena*—ostentatiously; *avidhi-pūrvakam*—with no regards to the rules of the scriptures.

Such self-conceited and stubborn people, full of pride and arrogant in their wealth, perform ostentatious sacrifices in name only, with no regard to the rules of the scriptures.

Virtuous people perform sacrifice to purify the self and to please Bhagavān.

The travesty is that demoniac people also perform sacrifices, but with an impure intent. They do grandiose ritualistic ceremonies so as to look pious in the eyes of society. But they do not adhere to the injunctions of the scriptures, and instead perform sacrifices for personal advertisement and pretentious display. However, the injunction of the scriptures is: *gūhitasya bhaved vriddhiḥ kīrtitasya bhavet kṣhayah* (Mahābhārat) [v11] “If we advertise a good deed we have done, its merit decreases; if we keep it secret, its merit multiplies.” In this verse, Shri Krishna dismisses the ritualistic ceremonies of the demoniac by saying that they are incorrectly performed.

**अहङ्कारं बलं दर्पं कामं क्रोधं च संश्रिताः ।
मामात्मपरदेहेषु प्रद्विषन्तोऽभ्यसूयकाः ॥ १८ ॥**

*ahankāram balam darpam kāmam krodhām cha sanśritāḥ
mām ātma-para-deheṣu pradviṣhanto 'bhyasūyakāḥ*

ahankāram—egotism; *balam*—strength; *darpam*—arrogance; *kāmam*—desire; *krodhām*—anger; *cha*—and; *sanśritāḥ*—covered by; *mām*—me; *ātma-para-deheṣu*—within one's own and bodies of others; *pradviṣhantah*—abuse; *abhyasūyakāḥ*—the demoniac.

Blinded by egotism, strength, arrogance, desire, and anger, the demonic abuse my presence within their own body and in the bodies of others.

Here, Shri Krishna describes more telltale signs of people possessing demoniac natures. They are vile, malicious, cruel, belligerent, and insolent. Although they do not possess righteous qualities themselves, they enjoy finding fault in everyone else. They consider themselves all-important, and as a consequence of this nature of self-aggrandizement, they are envious of other's success. If ever they are opposed in their schemes, they become enraged and cause agony to others as well as to their own selves. Consequently, they disregard and disrespect the Supreme Ātman who is seated within their own hearts and the hearts of others.

तानहं द्विषतः क्रूरान्संसारेषु नराधमान् ।
क्षिपाम्यजस्त्रमशुभानासुरीष्वेव योनिषु ॥ 19 ॥

आसुरीं योनिमापन्ना मूढा जन्मनि जन्मनि ।
मामप्राप्यैव कौन्तेय ततो यान्त्यधमां गतिम् ॥ 20 ॥

*tān aham dvīṣataḥ krūrān sansāreṣhu narādhamān
kṣipāmy ajasram aśubhān āsurīṣhv eva yoniṣhu*

*āsurīm yonim āpannā mūḍhā janmani janmani
mām aprāpyaiva kaunteya tato yānty adhamām gatim*

tān—these; *aham*—I; *dvīṣataḥ*—hateful; *krūrān*—cruel; *sansāreṣhu*—in the material world; *nara-adhamān*—the vile and vicious of humankind; *kṣipāmi*—I hurl; *ajasram*—again and again; *aśubhān*—inauspicious; *āsurīṣhu*—demoniac; *eva*—indeed; *yoniṣhu*—in to the wombs; *āsurīm*—demoniac; *yonim*—wombs; *āpannāḥ*—gaining; *mūḍhāḥ*—the ignorant; *janmani janmani*—in birth after birth; *mām*—me; *aprāpya*—failing to reach; *eva*—even; *kaunteya*—Arjun, the son of Kunti; *tataḥ*—thereafter; *yānti*—go; *adhamām*—abominable; *gatim*—destination.

These cruel and hateful persons, the vile and vicious of humankind, I constantly hurl into the wombs of those with similar demoniac natures in the cycle of rebirth in the material world. These ignorant Ātman(s) take birth again and again in demoniac wombs. Failing to reach me, O Arjun, they gradually sink to the most abominable type of existence.

Shri Krishna once again describes the repercussions of the demoniac mentality. He says that in their next lives, he gives them birth in families with similar mentalities, where they get a suitable demoniac environment to exercise their free will and heartily vent their degraded nature. From this verse, we can also infer that it is not in the Ātman's hands to choose the species, abode, and environment of its next birth. Bhagavān makes this decision according to the nature and karma of the individual. Thus, the demoniac are sent into lower and degraded wombs, even to the level of snakes, lizards, and scorpions, which are receptacles for the evil-minded.

**त्रिविधं नरकस्येदं द्वारं नाशनमात्मनः ।
कामः क्रोधस्तथा लोभस्तस्मादेतत्त्रयं त्यजेत् ॥२१॥**

*tri-vidham narakasyedam dvāram nāśhanam ātmanah
kāmah krodhas tathā lobhas tasmād etat trayam tyajet*

tri-vidham—three types of; *narakasya*—to the hell; *idam*—this; *dvāram*—gates; *nāśhanam*—destruction; *ātmanah*—self; *kāmah*—lust; *krodhah*—anger; *tathā*—and; *lobhah*—greed; *tasmāt*—therefore; *etat*—these; *trayam*—three; *tyajet*—should abandon.

There are three gates leading to the Naraka of self-destruction for the Ātman—lust, anger, and greed. Therefore, all should abandon these three.

Shri Krishna now describes the origin of the demoniac disposition, and pinpoints lust, anger, and greed as the three causes for it. Previously, in verse 3.36, Arjun had asked him why people are impelled to commit sin, even unwillingly, as if by force. Shri Krishna had answered that it is lust, which later transforms into anger, and is the all-devouring enemy of the world. Greed is also a transformation of lust, as explained in detail in the commentary of verse 2.62. Together, lust, anger, and greed are the foundations from which the demoniac vices develop. They fester in the mind and make it a suitable ground for all other vices to take root. Consequently, Shri Krishna labels them as gateways to Naraka, and strongly advices to shun them to avoid self-destruction. Those desirous of welfare should learn to dread these three and carefully avoid their presence in their own personality.

**एतैर्विमुक्तः कौन्तेय तमोद्वारैस्त्रिभिर्नरः ।
आचरत्यात्मनः श्रेयस्ततो याति परां गतिम् ॥२२॥**

*etair vimuktaḥ kaunteya tamo-dvārais tribhir naraḥ
ācharaty ātmanah śreyas tato yāti parām gatim*

etaih—from this; *vimuktaḥ*—freed; *kaunteya*—Arjun, the son of Kunti; *tamah-dvāraih*—gates to darkness; *tribhiḥ*—three; *naraḥ*—a person; *ācharati*—endeavor; *ātmanah*—Ātman; *śreyah*—welfare; *tataḥ*—thereby; *yāti*—attain; *parām*—supreme; *gatim*—goal.

Those who are freed from the three gates to darkness endeavor for the

welfare of their Ātman, and thereby attain the supreme goal.

In this verse, Shri Krishna gives the result of renouncing lust, anger, and greed. As long as these are present, one is attracted toward *preya*, or happiness that seems sweet in the present but becomes bitter in the end. But when materialistic yearnings diminish, the intellect, freed from the material mode of passion, is able to perceive the shortsightedness of pursuing the path of *preya*. Then one gets drawn toward *shreya*, or happiness that is unpleasant in the present but becomes sweet in the end. And for those attracted to *shreya*, the path of enlightenment opens up. They begin endeavoring for the eternal welfare of their Ātman, thereby moving toward the supreme goal.

**यः शास्त्रविधिमुत्सृज्य वर्तते कामकारतः ।
न स सिद्धिमवाप्नोति न सुखं न परां गतिम् ॥ 23 ॥**

*yah śāstra-vidhim utsṛijya vartate kāma-kārataḥ
na sa siddhim avāpnoti na sukham na parām gatim*

yah—who; *śāstra-vidhim*—scriptural injunctions; *utsṛijya*—discarding; *vartate*—act; *kāma-kārataḥ*—under the impulse of desire; *na*—neither; *sah*—they; *siddhim*—perfection; *avāpnoti*—attain; *na*—nor; *sukham*—happiness; *na*—nor; *parām*—the supreme; *gatim*—goal.

Those who act under the impulse of desire, discarding the injunctions of the scriptures, attain neither perfection, nor happiness, nor the supreme goal in life.

Scriptures are the guide maps given to humans on the journey toward enlightenment. They provide us with knowledge and understanding. They also give us instructions on what to do and what not to do. These instructions are of two kinds—*vidhi* and *nishedh*. The directives to perform certain activities are called *vidhi*. The directives not to perform certain activities are called *nishedh*. By faithfully following both these kinds of injunctions, human beings can proceed toward perfection. But the ways of the demoniac are the reverse of the teachings of the scriptures. They engage in prohibited acts and refrain from

recommended ones. Referring to such people, Shri Krishna declares that those who renounce the authorized path and act according to their whims, impelled by the impulses of their desires, achieve neither true knowledge, nor the perfection of happiness, nor liberation from material bondage.

**तस्माच्छास्त्रं प्रमाणं ते कार्याकार्यव्यवस्थितौ ।
ज्ञात्वा शास्त्रविधानोक्तं कर्म कर्तुमिहार्हसि ॥ 24 ॥**

*tasmāch chhāstram pramāṇam te kāryākārya-vyavasthitau
jñātvā śāstra-vidhānoktam karma kartum ihaṁhasi*

tasmāt—therefore; *śāstram*—scriptures; *pramāṇam*—authority; *te*—your; *kārya*—duty; *akārya*—forbidden action; *vyavasthitau*—in determining; *jñātvā*—having understood; *śāstra*—scriptures; *vidhāna*—injunctions; *uktam*—as revealed; *karma*—actions; *kartum*—perform; *iha*—in this world; *arhasi*—you should.

Therefore, let the scriptures be your authority in determining what should be done and what should not be done. Understand the scriptural injunctions and teachings, and then perform your actions in this world accordingly.

Shri Krishna now gives the final conclusion of the teachings in this chapter. By comparing and differentiating between the divine and demoniac natures, he highlighted how the demoniac nature leads to hellish existence. Thus, he established that nothing is to be gained by discarding the injunctions of the scriptures. Now he drives home the point by stating that the absolute authority in ascertaining the propriety of any activity, or lack of it, are the Vedic scriptures.

Sometimes, even well-intentioned people say, “I do not care for rules. I follow my heart and do my own thing.” It is all very well to follow the heart, but how can they be sure that their heart is not misleading them? As the saying goes, “The road to Naraka is paved with good intentions.” Thus, it is always wise to check with the scriptures whether our heart is truly guiding us in the proper

direction. The Manu Smṛiti states:

bhūtam bhavyam bhaviṣyam cha sarvam vedāt prasidhyati (12.97) [v12]

“The authenticity of any spiritual principle of the past, present, or future, must be established on the basis of the Vedas.” Hence, Shri Krishna concludes by instructing Arjun to comprehend the teachings of the scriptures and act according to them.



Chapter 17

Śhraddhā Traya Vibhāg Yog ~ **श्रद्धात्रयविभागयोगः**

Yog through Discerning the Three Divisions of Faith

In the fourteenth chapter, Shri Krishna had explained the three modes of material nature and the manner in which they hold sway over humans. In this seventeenth chapter, he goes into greater detail about the influence of the *gunas*. First, he discusses the topic of faith and explains that nobody is devoid of faith, for it is an inseparable aspect of human nature. But depending upon the nature of their mind, people's faith takes on a corresponding color—*sāttvic*, *rājasic*, or *tāmasic*. The nature of their faith determines the quality of their life. People also prefer food according to their dispositions. Shri Krishna classifies food into three categories and discusses the impact of each of these upon us. He then moves on to the topic of sacrifice (*yajña*) and how, in each of the three modes of nature, sacrifice takes on different forms. The chapter moves on to the subject of austerity (*tapah*), and explains austerities of the body, speech, and mind. Each of these kinds of austerity takes on a different form as influenced by the mode of goodness, passion, or ignorance. The topic of charity (*dān*) is then discussed, and its three-fold divisions are described.

Finally, Shri Krishna goes beyond the three *gunas* and explains the relevance and import of the words “Om Tat Sat,” which symbolize different aspects of the Absolute Truth. The syllable “Om” is a symbolic representation of the impersonal aspect of Bhagavān; the syllable “Tat” is uttered for consecrating activities and ceremonies to the Supreme Bhagavān; the syllable “Sat” means eternal goodness and virtue. Taken together, they usher the concept of transcendence. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the futility of acts of sacrifice, austerity, and charity, which are done without regard to the injunctions of the scriptures.

अर्जुन उवाच ।
ये शास्त्रविधिमुत्सृज्य यजन्ते श्रद्धयान्विताः ।
तेषां निष्ठा तु का कृष्ण सत्त्वमाहो रजस्तमः ॥ १ ॥

*arjuna uvācha
ye śāstra-vidhim utsrijya yajante śraddhayānvitāḥ
teṣhām niṣṭhā tu kā kṛiṣṇa sattvam āho rajas tamah*

arjunah uvācha—Arjun said; *ye*—who; *śāstra-vidhim*—scriptural injunctions; *utsrijya*—disregard; *yajante*—worship; *śraddhayā-anvitāḥ*—with faith; *teṣhām*—their; *niṣṭhā*—faith; *tu*—indeed; *kā*—what; *kṛiṣṇa*—Krishna; *sattvam*—mode of goodness; *āho*—or; *rajah*—mode of passion; *tamah*—mode of ignorance.

Arjun said: O Krishna, where do they stand who disregard the injunctions of the scriptures, but still worship with faith? Is their faith in the mode of goodness, passion, or ignorance?

In the preceding chapter, Shri Krishna spoke of the differences between the divine and demoniac natures, to help Arjun understand the virtues that should be cultivated and personality traits that should be eradicated. At the end of the chapter, he stated that one who disregards the injunctions of the scriptures, and instead foolishly follows the impulses of the body and the whims of the mind, will not achieve perfection, happiness, or freedom from the cycle of life and death. He thus recommended that people follow the guidance of the

scriptures and act accordingly. This instruction led to the present question. Arjun desires to know the nature of the faith of those who worship without reference to the Vedic scriptures. In particular, he wishes to understand the answer in terms of the three modes of material nature.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
त्रिविधा भवति श्रद्धा देहिनां सा स्वभावजा ।
सात्त्विकी राजसी चैव तामसी चेति तां शृणु ॥२॥

*śhrī-bhagavān uvācha
tri-vidhā bhavati śhraddhā dehinām sā svabhāva-jā
sāttvikī rājasī chaiva tāmasī cheti tām śhrīṇu*

śhrī-bhagavān uvācha—the Supreme Personality said; *tri-vidhā*—of three kinds; *bhavati*—is; *śhraddhā*—faith; *dehinām*—embodied beings; *sā*—which; *sva-bhāva-jā*—born of one's innate nature; *sāttvikī*—of the mode of goodness; *rājasī*—of the mode of passion; *cha*—and; *eva*—certainly; *tāmasī*—of the mode of ignorance; *cha*—and; *iti*—thus; *tām*—about this; *śhrīṇu*—hear.

Bhagavān Krishna said: Every human being is born with innate faith, which can be of three kinds—sāttvic, rājasic, or tāmasic. Now hear about this from me.

Nobody can be without faith, for it is an inseparable aspect of the human personality. Those who do not believe in the scriptures are also not bereft of faith. Their faith is reposed elsewhere. It could be on the logical ability of their intellect, or the perceptions of their senses, or the theories they have decided to believe in. For example, when people say, “I do not believe in Bhagavān because I cannot see him,” they do not have faith in Bhagavān but they have faith in their eyes. Hence, they assume that if their eyes cannot see something, it probably does not exist. This is also a kind of faith. Others say, “I do not believe in the authenticity of the ancient scriptures. Instead I accept the theories of modern science.” This is also a kind of faith, for we have seen in the last few centuries how theories of science keep getting amended and overthrown. It is possible that the present scientific theories we believe to be

true may also be proved incorrect in the future. Accepting them as truths is also a leap of faith. Prof. Charles H. Townes, Nobel Prize winner in Physics, expressed this very nicely: “Science itself requires faith. We don’t know if our logic is correct. I don’t know if you are there. You don’t know if I am here. We may just be imagining all this. I have a faith that the world is what it seems like, and thus I believe you are there. I can’t prove it from any fundamental point of view... Yet I have to accept a certain framework in which to operate. The idea that ‘religion is faith’ and ‘science is knowledge,’ I think, is quite wrong. We scientists believe in the existence of the external world and the validity of our own logic. We feel quite comfortable about it. Nevertheless these are acts of faith. We can’t prove them.” Whether one is a material scientist, a social scientist, or a spiritual scientist, one cannot avoid the leap of faith required in the acceptance of knowledge. *Shri Krishna now explains the reason why different people choose to place their faith in different places.*

सत्त्वानुरूपा सर्वस्य श्रद्धा भवति भारत ।
श्रद्धामयोऽयं पुरुषो यो यच्छ्रद्धः स एव सः ॥३॥

*sattvānurūpā sarvasya śraddhā bhavati bhārata
śraddhā-mayo 'yam puruṣho yo yach-chhraddhaḥ sa eva saḥ*

sattva-anurūpā—conforming to the nature of one's mind; *sarvasya*—all; *śraddhā*—faith; *bhavati*—is; *bhārata*—Arjun, the scion of Bharat; *śraddhāMāyāḥ*—possessing faith; *ayam*—that; *puruṣah*—human being; *yah*—who; *yat-śraddhaḥ*—whatever the nature of their faith; *sah*—their; *eva*—verily; *sah*—they.

The faith of all humans conforms to the nature of their mind. All people possess faith, and whatever the nature of their faith, that is verily what they are.

In the previous verse, it was explained that we all repose our faith somewhere or the other. Where we decide to place our faith and what we choose to believe in practically shapes the direction of our life. Those who develop the conviction that money is of paramount importance in the world spend their

entire life accumulating it. Those who believe that fame counts more than anything else dedicate their time and energy in chasing political posts and social designations. Those who believe in noble values sacrifice everything to uphold them. Gandhi had faith in the incomparable importance of *satya* (truth) and *ahinsā* (non-violence), and by the strength of his convictions he launched a non-violent movement that succeeded in evicting from India the most powerful empire in the world. Those who develop deep faith in the overriding importance of Brahman-realization renounce their material life in search of him. Thus, Shri Krishna states that the quality of our faith decides the direction of our life. In turn, the quality of our faith is decided by the nature of our mind. *And so, in response to Arjun's question, Shri Krishna begins expounding on the kinds of faith that exist.*

यजन्ते सात्त्विका देवान्यक्षरक्षांसि राजसाः ।
प्रेतान्भूतगणांश्चान्ये यजन्ते तामसा जनाः ॥ 4 ॥

*yajante sāttvikā devān yakṣha-rakṣhānsi rājasāḥ
pretān bhūta-gaṇānśh chānye yajante tāmasā janāḥ*

yajante—worship; *sāttvikāḥ*—those in the mode of goodness; *devān*—celestial deities; *yakṣha*—semi-celestial beings who exude power and wealth; *rakṣhānsi*—powerful beings who embody sensual enjoyment, revenge, and wrath; *rājasāḥ*—those in the mode of passion; *pretān-bhūta-gaṇān*—ghosts and spirits; *cha*—and; *anye*—others; *yajante*—worship; *tāmasāḥ*—those in the mode of ignorance; *janāḥ*—persons.

Those in the mode of goodness worship the celestial deities; those in the mode of passion worship the *yakṣhas* and *rākṣhasas*; those in the mode of ignorance worship ghosts and spirits.

It is said that the good are drawn to the good and the bad to the bad. Those in *tamo guna* are drawn toward ghosts and spirits, despite the evil and cruel nature of such beings. Those who are *rājasic* get drawn to the *yakshas* (semi-celestial beings who exude power and wealth) and *rākṣhasas* (powerful beings who embody sensual enjoyment, revenge, and wrath). They even offer the blood of animals to appease these lower beings, with faith in the propriety of such lowly

worship. Those who are imbued with *sattva guna* become attracted to the worship of celestial deities in whom they perceive the qualities of goodness. However, worship is perfectly directed when it is offered to Bhagavān.

अशास्त्रविहितं घोरं तप्यन्ते ये तपो जनाः ।
दम्भाहङ्कारसंयुक्ताः कामरागबलान्विताः ॥५॥
कर्षयन्तः शरीरस्थं भूतग्राममचेतसः ।
मां चैवान्तः शरीरस्थं तान्विद्ध्यासुरनिश्चयान् ॥६॥

*aśhāstra-vihitam ghoram tapyante ye tapo janāḥ
dambhāhankāra-sanyuktāḥ kāma-rāga-balānvitāḥ*

*karṣhayantah śarīra-stham bhūta-grāmam achetasah
mām chaivāntah śarīra-stham tān viddhy āsura-niśchayān*

aśhāstra-vihitam—not enjoined by the scriptures; *ghoram*—stern; *tapyante*—perform; *ye*—who; *tapah*—austerities; *janāḥ*—people; *dambha*—hypocrisy; *ahankāra*—egotism; *sanyuktāḥ*—possessed of; *kāma*—desire; *rāga*—attachment; *bala*—force; *anvitāḥ*—impelled by; *karṣhayantah*—torment; *śarīra-stham*—within the body; *bhūta-grāmam*—elements of the body; *achetasah*—senseless; *mām*—me; *cha*—and; *eva*—even; *antah*—within; *śarīra-stham*—dwelling in the body; *tān*—them; *viddhi*—know; *āsura-niśchayān*—of demoniacal resolves.

Some people perform stern austerities that are not enjoined by the scriptures, but rather motivated by hypocrisy and egotism. Impelled by desire and attachment, they torment not only the elements of their body, but also I who dwell within them as the Supreme Ātman. Know these senseless people to be of demoniacal resolves.

In the name of spirituality, people perform senseless austerities. Some lie on beds of thorns or drive spikes through their bodies as a part of macabre rituals for dominion over material existence. Others keep one hand raised for years, as a procedure they believe will help them gain mystic abilities. Some gaze constantly at the sun, unmindful of the harm it does to their eyes. Others undertake long fasts, withering their body away for imagined material gains. Shri Krishna says: “O Arjun, you asked me about the status of those who disregard the injunctions of the scriptures and yet worship with faith. I am

telling you that faith is visible even in people who perform severe austerities, but it is bereft of a proper basis of knowledge. Such people do possess deep conviction in the efficacy of their practices, but their faith is in the mode of ignorance. Those who abuse and torture their own physical body disrespect the Supreme Ātman who resides within. All these are contrary to the recommended path of the scriptures.”

Having described the three categories of faith, Shri Krishna now explains, corresponding to each of these, the categories of food, activities, sacrifice, charity, and so forth.

आहारस्त्वपि सर्वस्य त्रिविधो भवति प्रियः ।
यज्ञस्तपस्तथा दानं तेषां भेदमिमं शृणु ॥ 7 ॥

*āhāras tv api sarvasya tri-vidho bhavati priyah
yajñas tapas tathā dānam teṣhām bhedam imam śrīṇu*

āhārah—food; tu—indeed; api—even; sarvasya—of all; tri-vidhah—of three kinds; bhavati—is; priyah—dear; yajñah—sacrifice; tapah—austerity; tathā—and; dānam—charity; teṣhām—of them; bhedam—distinctions; imam—this; śrīṇu—hear.

The food persons prefer is according to their dispositions. The same is true for the sacrifice, austerity, and charity they incline toward. Now hear of the distinctions from me.

The mind and body impact each other. Thus, the food people eat influences their nature and vice versa. The Chhāndogya Upaniṣad explains that the coarsest part of the food we eat passes out as feces; the subtler part becomes flesh; and the subtlest part becomes the mind (6.5.1). Again, it states: *āhāra śuddhau sattva śuddhiḥ* (7.26.2) [v1] “By eating pure food, the mind becomes pure.” *The reverse is also true—people with pure minds prefer pure foods.*

आयुःसत्त्वबलारोग्यसुखप्रीतिविवर्धनाः ।
रस्याः स्निग्धाः स्थिरा हृद्या आहाराः सात्त्विकप्रियाः ॥ 8 ॥

āyuh-sattva-balārogya-sukha-prīti-vivardhanāḥ

rasyāḥ snigdhāḥ sthirāḥ hrīdyāḥ āhārāḥ sāttvika-priyāḥ

āyuh sattva—which promote longevity; *bala*—strength; *ārogya*—health; *sukha*—happiness; *prīti*—satisfaction; *vivardhanāḥ*—increase; *rasyāḥ*—juicy; *snigdhāḥ*—succulent; *sthirāḥ*—nourishing; *hrīdyāḥ*—pleasing to the heart; *āhārāḥ*—food; *sāttvika-priyāḥ*—dear to those in the mode of goodness.

Persons in the mode of goodness prefer foods that promote the life span, and increase virtue, strength, health, happiness, and satisfaction. Such foods are juicy, succulent, nourishing, and naturally tasteful.

In Chapter 14, verse 6, Shri Krishna had explained that the mode of goodness is pure, illuminating, and serene, and creates a sense of happiness and satisfaction. Foods in the mode of goodness have the same effect. In the above verse, these foods are described with the words *āyuh sattva*, meaning “which promote longevity.” They bestow good health, virtue, happiness, and satisfaction. Such foods are juicy, naturally tasteful, mild, and beneficial. These include grains, pulses, beans, fruits, vegetables, milk, and other vegetarian foods.

Hence, a vegetarian diet is beneficial for cultivating the qualities of the mode of goodness that are conducive for spiritual life. Numerous *sāttvic* (influenced by the mode of goodness) thinkers and philosophers in history have echoed this sentiment:

"Vegetarianism is a greater progress. From the greater clearness of head and quicker apprehension motivated him to become a vegetarian. Flesh-eating is an unprovoked murder." Benjamin Franklin

"Is it not a reproach that man is a carnivorous animal? True, he can and does live, in a great measure, by preying on other animals; but this is a miserable way. I have no doubt that it is a part of the destiny of the human race, in its gradual improvement, to leave off eating animals, as surely as the savage tribes have left off eating each other when they came in contact with the more civilized." Henry

David Thoreau in "Walden"

"It is necessary to correct the error that vegetarianism has made us weak in mind, or passive or inert in action. I do not regard flesh-food as necessary at any stage." Gandhi.

"O my fellow men, do not defile your bodies with sinful foods. We have corn and we have apples bending down the branches with their weight. There are vegetables that can be cooked and softened over the fire. The earth affords a lavish supply of riches, of innocent foods, and offers you banquets that involve no bloodshed or slaughter; only beasts satisfy their hunger with flesh, and not even all of those, because horses, cattle, and sheep live on grass." Pythagoras

"I do not want to make my stomach a graveyard of dead animals." George Bernard Shaw

Even amongst violence against animals, killing of the cow is particularly heinous. The cow provides milk for human consumption, and so it is like a mother to human beings. To kill the mother cow when it is no longer capable of giving milk is an insensitive, uncultured, and ungrateful act.

कट्वम्ललवणात्युष्णातीक्ष्णरूक्षविदाहिनः ।
आहारा राजसस्येष्टा दुःखशोकामयप्रदाः ॥११॥

kaṭv-amla-lavaṇāty-uṣhṇa- tīkṣhṇa-rūkṣha-vidāhinah
āhārā rājasasyeṣṭā duḥkha-śhokāMāyā-pradāḥ

kaṭu—bitter; amla—sour; lavaṇa—salty; ati-uṣhṇa—very hot; tīkṣhṇa—pungent; rūkṣha—dry; vidāhinah—chilifull; āhārāḥ—food; rājasasya—to persons in the mode of passion; iṣṭāḥ—dear; duḥkha—pain; śhoka—grief; āMāyā—disease; pradāḥ—produce.

Foods that are too bitter, too sour, salty, very hot, pungent, dry, and chilifull, are dear to persons in the mode of passion. Such foods produce pain, grief, and disease.

When vegetarian foods are cooked with excessive chilies, sugar, salt, etc. they

become *rājasic*. While describing them, the word “very” can be added to all the adjectives used. Thus, *rājasic* foods are very bitter, very sour, very salty, very hot, very pungent, very dry, very chilifl, etc. They produce ill-health, agitation, and despair. Persons in the mode of passion find such foods attractive, but those in the mode of goodness find them disgusting. The purpose of eating is not to relish bliss through the palate, but to keep the body healthy and strong. As the old adage states: “Eat to live; do not live to eat.” Thus, the wise partake of foods that are conducive to good health, and have a peaceable impact upon the mind i.e., *sāttvic* foods.

यातयामं गतरसं पूति पर्युषितं च यत् ।
उच्छिष्टमपि चामेध्यं भोजनं तामसप्रियम् ॥ 10 ॥

*yāta-yāmam gata-rasam pūti paryuṣhitam cha yat
uchchhiṣṭam api chāmedhyam bhojanam tāmasa-priyam*

yāta-yāmam—stale foods; *gata-rasam*—tasteless; *pūti*—putrid; *paryuṣhitam*—polluted; *cha*—and; *yat*—which; *uchchhiṣṭam*—left over; *api*—also; *cha*—and; *amedhyam*—impure; *bhojanam*—foods; *tāmasa*—to persons in the mode of ignorance; *priyam*—dear.

Foods that are overcooked, stale, putrid, polluted, and impure are dear to persons in the mode of ignorance.

Cooked foods that have remained for more than one *yām* (three hours) are classified in the mode of ignorance. Foods that are impure, have bad taste, or possess foul smells come in the same category. Impure foods also include all kinds of meat products. Nature has designed the human body to be vegetarian. Human beings do not have long canine teeth as carnivorous animals do, or a wide jaw suitable for tearing flesh. Carnivores have short bowels to allow minimal transit time for the unstable and dead animal food, which putrefies and decays faster. On the contrary, humans have a longer digestive tract for the slow and better absorption of plant food. The stomach of carnivores is more acidic than human beings, which enables them to digest raw meat.

Interestingly, the carnivorous animals do not sweat through their pores. Rather, they regulate body temperature through their tongue. On the other hand, herbivorous animals and humans control bodily temperature by sweating through their skin. While drinking, carnivores lap up water rather than suck it. In contrast, herbivores do not lap up water; they suck it. Humans too suck water while drinking; they do not lap it up. All these physical characteristics of the human body reveal that Bhagavān has not created us as carnivorous creatures, and consequently, meat is considered impure food for humans.

Meat-eating also creates bad karma. The Manu Smṛiti states:

*māṁ sa bhakṣhayitāmutra yasya māṁsam ihādmy aham
etan māṁsasya māṁsatvam pravadanti manīṣhiṇah* (5.55) [v2]

“The word *mānsa* (meat) means “that whom I am eating here will eat me in my next life.” For this reason, the learned say that meat is called *mānsa* (a repeated act: I eat him, he eats me).”

अफलाकाङ्क्षभिर्यज्ञो विधिदृष्टे य इज्यते ।
यष्टव्यमेवेति मनः समाधाय स सात्त्विकः ॥ 11 ॥

*aphalā-ākāṅkṣhibhir yajñō vidhi-driṣṭah ya ijyate
yaṣṭavyam eveti manah samādhāya sa sāttvikah*

aphala-ākāṅkṣhibhiḥ—without expectation of any reward; *yajñah*—sacrifice; *vidhi-driṣṭah*—that is in accordance with the scriptural injunctions; *yaḥ*—which; *ijyate*—is performed; *yaṣṭavyam-eva-iti*—ought to be offered; *manah*—mind; *samādhāya*—with conviction; *sah*—that; *sāttvikah*—of the nature of goodness.

Sacrifice that is performed according to the scriptural injunctions without expectation of rewards, with the firm conviction of the mind that it is a matter of duty is of the nature of goodness.

The nature of *yajña* also corresponds to the three *guṇas*. Shri Krishna begins by explaining the type of sacrifice in the mode of goodness. *Aphala-ākāṅkṣhibhiḥ* means that the sacrifice should be performed without expectation of any reward. *Vidhi driṣṭah* means that it must be done according to the injunctions of

the Vedic scriptures. *Yaṣṭavyam evaiti* means that it must be performed only for the sake of worship of the Bhagavān, as required by the scriptures. When *yajña* is performed in this manner, it is classified in the mode of goodness.

अभिसन्धाय तु फलं दम्भार्थमपि चैव यत् ।
इज्यते भरतश्रेष्ठं यज्ञं विद्धि राजसम् ॥ 12 ॥

*abhisandhāya tu phalam dambhārtham api chaiva yat
ijyate bharata-śreshṭha tam yajñam viddhi rājasam*

abhisandhāya—motivated by; *tu*—but; *phalam*—the result; *dambha*—pride; *artham*—for the sake of; *api*—also; *cha*—and; *eva*—certainly; *yat*—that which; *ijyate*—is performed; *bharata-śreshṭha*—Arjun, the best of the Bharatas; *tam*—that; *yajñam*—sacrifice; *viddhi*—know; *rājasam*—in the mode of passion.

O best of the Bharatas, know that sacrifice, which is performed for material benefit, or with hypocritical aim, to be in the mode of passion.

Sacrifice becomes a form of business with Bhagavān if it is performed with great pomp and show, but the spirit behind it is one of selfishness i.e., “What will I get in return?” Pure devotion is that where one seeks nothing in return. Shri Krishna says that sacrifice may be done with great ceremony, but if it is for the sake of rewards in the form of prestige, aggrandizement, etc. it is *rājasic* in nature.

विधिहीनमसृष्टान्नं मन्त्रहीनमदक्षिणम् ।
श्रद्धाविरहितं यज्ञं तामसं परिचक्षते ॥ 13 ॥

*vidhi-hīnam asriṣṭānnam mantra-hīnam adakṣhiṇam
śraddhā-virahitam yajñam tāmasam parichakṣhate*

vidhi-hīnam—without scriptural direction; *asriṣṭa-antram*—without distribution of *prasādam*; *mantra-hīnam*—with no chanting of the Vedic hymns; *adakṣhiṇam*—with no remunerations to the priests; *śraddhā*—faith; *virahitam*—without; *yajñam*—sacrifice; *tāmasam*—in the mode of ignorance; *parichakṣhate*—is to be considered.

Sacrifice devoid of faith and contrary to the injunctions of the scriptures, in which no food is offered, no mantras chanted, and no donation made, is

to be considered in the mode of ignorance.

At every moment in life, individuals have choices regarding which actions to perform. There are proper actions that are beneficial for society and for us. At the same time, there are inappropriate actions that are harmful for others and us. However, who is to decide what is beneficial and what is harmful? And in case a dispute arises, what is the basis for resolving it? If everyone makes their own decisions then pandemonium will prevail. So the injunctions of the scriptures serve as guide maps and wherever a doubt arises, we consult these scriptures for ascertaining the propriety of any action. However, those in the mode of ignorance do not have faith in the scriptures. They carry out religious ceremonies but disregard the ordinances of the scriptures.

In India, specific gods and goddess associated with each festival are worshipped with great pomp and splendor. Often the motive behind the external grandeur of the ceremony—gaudy decorations, dazzling illumination, and blaring music—is to collect contributions from the neighborhood. Further, the Vedic injunction of offering a donation to the priests performing religious ceremony, as a mark of gratitude and respect, is not followed. Sacrifice in which such injunctions of the scriptures are ignored and a self-determined process is followed, due to laziness, indifference, or belligerence, is in the mode of ignorance. Such faith is actually a form of faithlessness in Bhagavān and the scriptures.

**देवद्विजगुरुप्राज्ञपूजनं शौचमार्जवम् ।
ब्रह्मचर्यमहिंसा च शारीरं तप उच्यते ॥ 14 ॥**

*deva-dwija-guru-prājña- pūjanam śhaucham ārjavam
brahmacharyam ahinsā cha śhārīram tapa uchyate*

deva—the Supreme Bhagavān; *dwija*—the Brahmins; *guru*—the spiritual master; *prājña*—the elders; *pūjanam*—worship; *śhaucham*—cleanliness; *ārjavam*—simplicity; *brahmacharyam*—celibacy; *ahinsā*—non-violence; *cha*—and; *śhārīram*—of the body; *tapah*—austerity; *uchyate*—is declared as.

Worship of the Supreme Bhagavān, the Brahmins, the spiritual master, the wise, and the elders—when this is done with the observance of cleanliness, simplicity, celibacy, and non-violence—is declared as the austerity of the body.

The word *tapah* means “to heat up,” e.g. by placing on fire. In the process of purification, metals are heated and melted, so that the impurities may rise to the top and be removed. When gold is placed in the fire, its impurities get burnt and its luster increases. Similarly, the Vedas state: *atapta tanurnatadā mośhnute* (Rig Veda 9.83.1) [v3] “Without purifying the body through austerity, one cannot reach the final state of yog.” By sincerely practicing austerity, human beings can uplift and transform their lives from the mundane to the divine. Such austerity should be performed without show, with pure intent, in a peaceable manner, in conformance with the guidance of the spiritual master and the scriptures.

Shri Krishna now classifies such austerity into three categories—of the body, speech, and mind. In this verse, he talks of the austerity of the body. When the body is dedicated to the service of the pure and saintly, and all sense indulgence in general, and sexual indulgence in particular, is eschewed, it is acclaimed as austerity of the body. Such austerity should be done with cleanliness, simplicity, and care for not hurting others. Here, “Brahmins” does not refer to those who consider themselves Brahmins by birth, but to those endowed with *sāttvic* qualities, as described in verse 18.42.

अनुद्वेगकरं वाक्यं सत्यं प्रियहितं च यत् ।
स्वाध्यायाभ्यसनं चैव वाङ्मयं तप उच्यते ॥ 15 ॥

*anudvega-karam vākyam satyam priya-hitam cha yat
svādhyāyābhyanan chaiva vāñ-Māyām tapa uchyate*

anudvega-karam—not causing distress; *vākyam*—words; *satyam*—truthful; *priya- hitam*—beneficial; *cha*—and; *yat*—which; *svādhyāya-abhyasanam*—recitation of the Vedic scriptures; *cha*

eva—as well as; *vāñ-Māyām*—of speech; *tapah*—austerity; *uchyate*—are declared as.

Words that do not cause distress, are truthful, inoffensive, and beneficial, as well as the regular recitation of the Vedic scriptures—these are declared as the austerity of speech.

Austerity of speech is speaking words that are truthful, unoffending, pleasing, and beneficial for the listener. The practice of the recitation of Vedic mantras is also included in the austeries of speech. The progenitor, Manu, wrote:

*satyam brūyāt priyam brūyān na brūyāt satyam apriyam
priyam cha nānṛitam brūyāt eṣha dharmah sanātanah (Manu Smṛiti 4.138) [v4]*

“Speak the truth in such a way that it is pleasing to others. Do not speak the truth in a manner injurious to others. Never speak untruth, though it may be pleasant. This is the eternal path of morality and *dharma*.”

मनः प्रसादः सौम्यत्वं मौनमात्मविनिग्रहः ।
भावसंशुद्धिरित्येतत्पो मानसमुच्यते ॥ 16 ॥

*manah-prasādah saumyatvam maunam ātma-vinigrahah
bhāva-sanśuddhir ity etat tapo mānasam uchyate*

manah-prasādah—serenity of thought; *saumyatvam*—gentleness; *maunam*—silence; *ātma-vinigrahah*—self-control; *bhāva-sanśuddhiḥ*—purity of purpose; *iti*—thus; *etat*—these; *tapah*—austerity; *mānasam*—of the mind; *uchyate*—are declared as.

Serenity of thought, gentleness, silence, self-control, and purity of purpose—all these are declared as the austerity of the mind.

Austerity of the mind is higher than the austerity of body and speech, for if we learn to master the mind, the body and speech automatically get mastered, while the reverse is not necessarily true. Factually, the state of the mind determines the state of an individual’s consciousness. Shri Krishna had stated in verse 6.5, “Elevate yourself through the power of your mind and not degrade yourself, for the mind can be the friend and also the enemy of the self.”

The mind may be likened to a garden, which can either be intelligently cultivated or allowed to run wild. Gardeners cultivate their plot, growing fruits, flowers, and vegetables in it. At the same time, they also ensure that it remains free from weeds. Similarly, we must cultivate our own mind with rich and noble thoughts, while weeding out the negative and debilitating thoughts. If we allow resentful, hateful, blaming, unforgiving, critical, and condemning thoughts to reside in our mind, they will have a debilitating effect on our personality. We can never get a fair amount of constructive action out of the mind until we have learned to control it and keep it from becoming stimulated by anger, hatred, dislike, etc. These are the weeds that choke out the manifestation of divine grace within our hearts.

People imagine that their thoughts are secret and have no external consequences because they dwell within the mind, away from the sight of others. They do not realize that thoughts not only forge their inner character but also their external personality. That is why we look upon someone and say, “He seems like a very simple and trustworthy person.” For another person, we say, “She seems to be very cunning and deceitful. Stay away from her.” In each case, it was the thoughts people harbored that sculpted their appearance. Ralph Waldo Emerson said: “There is full confession in the glances of our eyes, in our smiles, in salutations, in the grasp of the hands. Our sin bedaub us, mars all the good impressions. Men do not know why they do not trust us. The vice glasses the eyes, demeans the cheek, pinches the nose, and writes, ‘O fool, fool!’ on the forehead of a king.” Another powerful saying linking thoughts to character states:

“Watch your thoughts, for they become words.

Watch your words, for they become actions.

Watch your actions, for they become habits.

Watch your habits, for they become character.

Watch your character, for it becomes your destiny.”

It is important to realize that we harm ourselves with every negative thought that we harbor in our mind. At the same time, we uplift ourselves with every positive thought that we dwell upon. Henry Van Dyke expressed this very vividly, in his poem “Thoughts are things.”

I hold it true that thoughts are things;
They're endowed with bodies and breath and wings
That which we call our secret thought
Speeds forth to earth's remotest spot,
Leaving its blessings or its woes,
Like tracks behind as it goes.
We build our future, thought by thought.
For good or ill, yet know it not,
Choose, then, thy destiny and wait,
For love brings love, and hate brings hate.

Each thought we dwell upon has consequences, and thought-by-thought, we forge our destiny. For this reason, to veer the mind from negative emotions and make it dwell upon the positive sentiments is considered austerity of the mind.

श्रद्धया परया तप्तं तपस्तत्रिविधं नरैः ।
अफलाकाङ्क्षभिर्युक्तैः सात्त्विकं परिचक्षते ॥ १७ ॥

*śhraddhayā parayā taptam tapas tat tri-vidham naraiḥ
aphalākāṅkṣhibhir yuktaih sāttvikam parichakṣhate*

śhraddhayā—with faith; *parayā*—transcendental; *taptam*—practiced; *tapah*—austerity; *tat*—that; *tri-vidham*—three-fold; *naraiḥ*—by persons; *aphala-ākāṅkṣhibhiḥ*—without yearning for material rewards; *yuktaih*—steadfast; *sāttvikam*—in the mode of goodness; *parichakṣhate*—are designated.

When devout persons with ardent faith practice these three-fold austerities without yearning for material rewards, they are designated as austerities in the mode of goodness.

Having delineated the austerities of the body, speech, and mind, Shri Krishna now mentions their characteristics when they are performed in the mode of goodness. He says that an austerity loses its sanctity when material benefits are sought from its performance. It must be performed in a selfless manner, without attachment to rewards. Also, our faith in the value of the austerity should remain steadfast in both success and failure, and its practice should not be suspended because of laziness or inconvenience.

सत्कारमानपूजार्थं तपो दम्भेन चैव यत् ।
क्रियते तदिह प्रोक्तं राजसं चलमधुवम् ॥ 18 ॥

*satkāra-māna-pūjārtham tapo dambhena chaiva yat
kriyate tad iha proktam rājasam chalam adhruvam*

sat-kāra—respect; *māna*—honor; *pūjā*—adoration; *artham*—for the sake of; *tapah*—austerity; *dambhena*—with ostentation; *cha*—also; *eva*—certainly; *yat*—which; *kriyate*—is performed; *tat*—that; *iha*—in this world; *proktam*—is said; *rājasam*—in the mode of passion; *chalam*—flickering; *adhruvam*—temporary.

Austerity that is performed with ostentation for the sake of gaining honor, respect, and adoration is in the mode of passion. Its benefits are unstable and transitory.

Although austerity is a powerful tool for the purification of the self, not everyone utilizes it with pure intention. A politician labors rigorously to give many lectures a day, which is also a form of austerity, but the purpose is to gain a post and prestige. Similarly, if one engages in spiritual activities to achieve honor and adulation, then the motive is equally material though the means is different. An austerity is classified in the mode of passion if it is performed for the sake of gaining respect, power, or other material rewards.

मूढग्राहेणात्मनो यत्पीडया क्रियते तपः ।
परस्योत्सादनार्थं वा तत्तामसमुदाहृतम् ॥ 19 ॥

*mūḍha-grāhenātmano yat pīḍayā kriyate tapaḥ
parasyotsādanārtham vā tat tāmasam udāhṛitam*

mūḍha—those with confused notions; *grāheṇa*—with endeavor; *ātmanah*—one's own self; *yat*—which; *pīdayā*—torturing; *kriyate*—is performed; *tapah*—austerity; *parasya*—of others; *utsādana-ar�am*—for harming; *vā*—or; *tat*—that; *tāmasam*—in the mode of ignorance; *udāhṛitam*—is described to be.

Austerity that is performed by those with confused notions, and which involves torturing the self or harming others, is described to be in the mode of ignorance.

Mūḍha grāheṇāt refers to people with confused notions or ideas, who in the name of austerity, heedlessly torture themselves or even injure others without any respect for the teachings of the scriptures or the limits of the body. Such austerities accomplish nothing positive. They are performed in bodily consciousness and only serve to propagate the grossness of the personality.

दातव्यमिति यदानं दीयतेऽनुपकारिणे ।
देशे काले च पात्रे च तदानं सात्त्विकं स्मृतम् ॥ 20 ॥

*dātavyam iti yad dānam dīyate 'nupakāriṇe
deśe kāle cha pātre cha tad dānam sāttvikam smṛitam*

dātavyam—worthy of charity; *iti*—thus; *yat*—which; *dānam*—charity; *dīyate*—is given; *anupakāriṇe*—to one who cannot give in return; *deśe*—in the proper place; *kāle*—at the proper time; *cha*—and; *pātre*—to a worthy person; *cha*—and; *tat*—that; *dānam*—charity; *sāttvikam*—in the mode of goodness; *smṛitam*—is stated to be.

Charity given to a worthy person simply because it is right to give, without consideration of anything in return, at the proper time and in the proper place, is stated to be in the mode of goodness.

The three-fold divisions of *dānam*, or charity, are now being described. It is an act of duty to give according to one's capacity. The Bhaviṣhya Purāṇ states: *dānamekam kalau yuge* [v5] “In the age of *Kali*, giving in charity is the means for purification.” The Ramayana states this too:

*pragata chāri pada dharma ke kali mahuṇ ek pradhāna
jena kena bidhi dīnheṇ dāna karai kalyāna* [v6]

“*Dharma* has four basic tenets, one amongst which is the most important in the age of *Kali*—give in charity by whatever means possible.” The act of charity bestows many benefits. It reduces the attachment of the giver toward material objects; it develops the attitude of service; it expands the heart, and fosters the sentiment of compassion for others. Hence, most religious traditions follow the injunction of giving away one-tenth of one’s earnings in charity. The Skandh Purāṇ states:

nyāyopārjita vittasya daśhamānshena dhīmataḥ
kartavyo vinyogaśhcha īshvarapṛityarthameva cha [v7]

“From the wealth you have earned by rightful means, take out one-tenth, and as a matter of duty, give it away in charity. Dedicate your charity for the pleasure of Bhagavān.” Charity is classified as proper or improper, superior or inferior, according to the factors mentioned by Shri Krishna in this verse. When it is offered freely from the heart to worthy recipients, at the proper time, and at the appropriate place, it is bequeathed to be in the mode of goodness.

यत् प्रत्युपकारार्थं फलमुद्दिश्य वा पुनः ।
दीयते च परिक्लिष्टं तदानं राजसं स्मृतम् ॥ 21 ॥

yat tu pratyupakārārtham phalam uddiśhya vā punah
dīyate cha parikliṣṭam tad dānam rājasam smṛitam

yat—which; *tu*—but; *prati-upakāra-artham*—with the hope of a return; *phalam*—reward; *uddiśhya*—expectation; *vā*—or; *punah*—again; *dīyate*—is given; *cha*—and; *parikliṣṭam*—reluctantly; *tad*—that; *dānam*—charity; *rājasam*—in the mode of passion; *smṛitam*—is said to be.

But charity given with reluctance, with the hope of a return or in expectation of a reward, is said to be in the mode of passion.

The best attitude of charity is to give without even being asked to do so. The second-best attitude is to give happily upon being requested for it. The third-best sentiment of charity is to give begrudgingly, having been asked for a

donation, or to regret later, “Why did I give so much? I could have gotten away with a smaller amount.” Shri Krishna classifies this kind of charity in the mode of passion.

अदेशकाले यदानमपात्रेभ्यश्च दीयते ।
असत्कृतमवज्ञातं तत्तामसमुदाहृतम् ॥ 22 ॥

*adeśha-kāle yad dānam apātrebhyaś cha dīyate
asat-kṛitam avajñātām tat tāmasam udāhṛitam*

adeśha—at the wrong place; *kāle*—at the wrong time; *yat*—which; *dānam*—charity; *upātrebhyaḥ*—to unworthy persons; *cha*—and; *dīyate*—is given; *asat-kṛitam*—without respect; *avajñātām*—with contempt; *tat*—that; *tāmasam*—of the nature of nescience; *udāhṛitam*—is held to be.

And that charity, which is given at the wrong place and wrong time to unworthy persons, without showing respect, or with contempt, is held to be of the nature of nescience.

Charity in the mode of ignorance is done without consideration of proper place, person, attitude, or time. No beneficial purpose is served by it. For example, if money is offered to an alcoholic, who uses it to get inebriated, and then ends up committing a murder, the murderer will definitely be punished according to the law of karma, but the person who gave the charity will also be culpable for the offence. This is an example of charity in the mode of ignorance that is given to an undeserving person.

ॐ तत्सदिति निर्देशो ब्रह्मणस्त्रिविधः स्मृतः ।
ब्राह्मणास्तेन वेदाश्च यज्ञाश्च विहिताः पुरा ॥ 23 ॥

*om tat sat iti nirdeśhah brahmaṇas tri-vidhah smṛitah
brāhmaṇāḥ tena vedāśh cha yajñāśh cha vihitāḥ purā*

om tat sat—syllables representing aspects of transcendence; *iti*—thus; *nirdeśhah*—symbolic representatives; *brahmaṇah*—the Supreme Absolute Truth; *tri-vidhah*—of three kinds; *smṛitah*—have been declared; *brāhmaṇāḥ*—the priests; *tena*—from them; *vedāḥ*—scriptures; *cha*—and; *yajñāḥ*—sacrifice; *cha*—and; *vihitāḥ*—came about; *purā*—from the beginning of creation.

The words “Om Tat Sat” have been declared as symbolic representations of

the Supreme Absolute Truth, from the beginning of creation. From them came the priests, scriptures, and sacrifice.

In this chapter, Shri Krishna explained the categories of *yajña* (sacrifice), *tapah* (austerity), and *dān* (charity), according to the three modes of material nature. Amongst these three modes, the mode of ignorance degrades the Ātman into nescience, languor, and sloth. The mode of passion excites the living being and binds it in innumerable desires. The mode of goodness is serene and illuminating, and engenders the development of virtues. Yet, the mode of goodness is also within the realm of Māyā. We must not get attached to it; instead, we must use the mode of goodness as a stepping-stone to reach the transcendental platform. In this verse, Shri Krishna goes beyond the three *gunas*, and discusses the words *Om Tat Sat*, which symbolize different aspects of the Absolute Truth. *In the following verses, he explains the significance of these three words.*

तस्माद् ॐ इत्युदाहृत्य यज्ञदानतपःक्रियाः ।
प्रवर्तन्ते विधानोक्ताः सततं ब्रह्मवादिनाम् ॥२४॥

*tasmād om ity udāhṛitya yajña-dāna-tapah-kriyāḥ
pravartante vidhānoktāḥ satataṁ brahma-vādinām*

tasmāt—therefore; *om*—sacred syllable *om*; *iti*—thus; *udāhṛitya*—by uttering; *yajña*—sacrifice; *dāna*—charity; *tapah*—penance; *kriyāḥ*—performing; *pravartante*—begin; *vidhāna-uktāḥ*—according to the prescriptions of Vedic injunctions; *satatam*—always; *brahma-vādinām*—expounders of the Vedas.

Therefore, when performing acts of sacrifice, offering charity, or undertaking penance, expounders of the Vedas always begin by uttering “Om” according to the prescriptions of Vedic injunctions.

The syllable *Om* is a symbolic representation of the impersonal aspect of Bhagavān. It is also considered as the name for the formless *Brahman*. It is also the primordial sound that pervades creation. Its proper pronunciation is: “Aaa”

with the mouth open, “Ooh” with the lips puckered, and “Mmm” with the lips pursed. It is placed in the beginning of many Vedic mantras as a *bija* (seed) mantra to invoke auspiciousness.

**तदित्यनभिसन्धाय फलं यज्ञतपःक्रियाः ।
दानक्रियाश्च विविधाः क्रियन्ते मोक्षकाङ्क्षभिः ॥ २५ ॥**

*tad ity anabhisandhāya phalam yajña-tapah-kriyāḥ
dāna-kriyāś cha vividhāḥ kriyante mokṣha-kāṅkṣhibhiḥ*

tat—the syllable *Tat*; *iti*—thus; *anabhisandhāya*—without desiring; *phalam*—fruitive rewards; *yajña*—sacrifice; *tapah*—austerity; *kriyāḥ*—acts; *dāna*—charity; *kriyāḥ*—acts; *cha*—and; *vividhāḥ*—various; *kriyante*—are done; *mokṣha-kāṅkṣhibhiḥ*—by seekers of freedom from material entanglements.

Persons who do not desire fruitive rewards, but seek to be free from material entanglements, utter the word “Tat” along with acts of austerity, sacrifice, and charity.

The fruits of all actions belong to Bhagavān, and hence, any *yajña* (sacrifice), *tapah* (austerity), and *dānam* (charity), must be consecrated by offering it for the pleasure of the Supreme Bhagavān. Now, Shri Krishna glorifies the sound vibration “Tat,” which refers to *Brahman*. Chanting *Tat* along with austerity, sacrifice, and charity symbolizes that they are not to be performed for material rewards, but for the eternal welfare of the Ātman through Brahman-realization.

**सद्बावे साधुभावे च सदित्येतत्प्रयुज्यते ।
प्रशस्ते कर्मणि तथा सच्छब्दः पार्थ युज्यते ॥ २६ ॥**

**यज्ञे तपसि दाने च स्थितिः सदिति चोच्यते ।
कर्म चैव तदर्थीयं सदित्येवाभिधीयते ॥ २७ ॥**

*sad-bhāve sādhu-bhāve cha sad ity etat prayujyate
praśaste karmaṇi tathā sach-chhabdah pārtha yujyate*

*yajñe tapasi dāne cha sthitih sad iti chochhyate
karma chaiva tad-arthīyam sad ity evābhidhīyate*

sat-bhāve—with the intention of eternal existence and goodness; *sādhu-bhāve*—with auspicious

inention; *cha*—also; *sat*—the syllable *Sat*; *iti*—thus; *etat*—this; *prayujyate*—is used; *praśhaste*—auspicious; *karmaṇi*—action; *tathā*—also; *sat-śhabdah*—the word "Sat"; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *yujyate*—is used; *yajñe*—in sacrifice; *tapasi*—in penance; *dāne*—in charity; *cha*—and; *sthitiḥ*—established in steadiness; *sat*—the syllable *Sat*; *iti*—thus; *cha*—and; *uchyate*—is pronounced; *karma*—action; *cha*—and; *eva*—indeed; *tat-arthīyam*—for such purposes; *sat*—the syllable *Sat*; *iti*—thus; *eva*—indeed; *abhidhīyate*—is described.

The word “Sat” means eternal existence and goodness. O Arjun, it is also used to describe an auspicious action. Being established in the performance of sacrifice, penance, and charity, is also described by the word “Sat.” And so any act for such purposes is named “Sat.”

Now the auspiciousness of the word “Sat” is being glorified by Shri Krishna. This word *Sat* has many connotations, and the above two verses describe some of these. *Sat* is used to mean perpetual goodness and virtue. In addition, auspicious performance of sacrifice, austerity, and charity is also described as *Sat*. *Sat* also means that which always exists i.e., it is an eternal truth. The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam states:

*satya-vratam satya-param tri-satyam
satyasya yonim nihitam cha satye
satyasya satyam ṛita-satya-netram
satyātmakam tvām śaranam prapannāḥ (10.2.26) [v8]*

“O Bhagavān, your vow is true, for not only are you the Supreme Truth, but you are also the truth in the three phases of the cosmic manifestation—creation, maintenance, and dissolution. You are the origin of all that is true, and you are also its end. You are the essence of all truth, and you are also the eyes by which the truth is seen. Therefore, we surrender unto you, the *Sat* i.e., Supreme Absolute Truth. Kindly give us protection.”

अश्रद्धया हुतं दत्तं तपस्तप्तं कृतं च यत् ।
असदित्युच्यते पार्थं न च तत्प्रेत्य नो इह ॥ 28 ॥

*aśhraddhayā hutam dattam tapas taptaṁ kṛitam cha yat
asad ity uchyate pārtha na cha tat pretya no iha*

aśhraddhayā—without faith; *hutam*—sacrifice; *dattam*—charity; *tapah*—penance; *taptam*—practiced; *kṛitam*—done; *cha*—and; *yat*—which; *asat*—perishable; *iti*—thus; *uchyate*—are termed as; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *na*—not; *cha*—and; *tat*—that; *pretya*—in the next world; *na u*—not; *iha*—in this world.

O son of Pritha, whatever acts of sacrifice or penance are done without faith, are termed as “Asat.” They are useless both in this world and the next.

In order to firmly establish that all Vedic activities should be performed with faith, Shri Krishna now emphasizes the futility of Vedic activities done without it. He says that those who act without faith in the scriptures do not get good fruits in this life because their actions are not perfectly executed. And since they do not fulfill the conditions of the Vedic scriptures, they do not receive good fruits in the next life either. Thus, one's faith should not be based upon one's own impressions of the mind and intellect. Instead, it should be based upon the infallible authority of the Vedic scriptures and the Guru. This is the essence of the seventeenth chapter.



Chapter 18

Moksha Sanyās Yog ~ मोक्षसन्यासयोगः

Yog through the Perfection of Renunciation and Surrender

The final chapter of the Bhagavad Gita is the longest and covers many subjects. Arjun initiates the topic of renunciation with a question about two commonly used Sanskrit words, *sanyās* (renunciation of actions) and *tyāg* (renunciation of desires). Both words come from roots words meaning “to abandon.” A *sanyāsī* (monk) is one who does not participate in family life and withdraws from society to practice *sādhanā* (spiritual discipline). A *tyāgi* is one who engages in activities but gives up selfish desire for enjoying the rewards of actions (this is the connotation of the word in the Gita). Shri Krishna recommends the second kind of renunciation. He advises that sacrifice, charity, penance, and other acts of duty should never be renounced, for they purify even the wise. Rather, they should be performed as a matter of duty simply because they ought to be done, without any attachment to the fruits of these actions.

Then, Shri Krishna goes into a detailed analysis of the three factors that motivate action, the three constituents of action, and the five factors that contribute to the result of action. He describes each of these in terms of the three *gunas*. He establishes that those with deficient understanding see themselves as the only cause of their works. But the enlightened Ātman(s),

with purified intellect, neither consider themselves as the doer nor the enjoyer of their actions. Ever detached from the fruits of what they do, they are not bound in karmic reactions. The chapter then explains why people differ in their motives and activities. According to the three modes of material nature, it describes the kinds of knowledge, the types of actions, and the categories of performers. It then offers the same analysis for the intellect, resolve, and happiness. The chapter then goes on to paint a picture of those who have attained perfection in spiritual life and are situated in *Brahman*-realization. It adds that even such perfect yogis find completion in their realization by engaging in *bhakti*. Thus, the secret of Shri Hari can only be known through loving devotion.

Shri Krishna then reminds Arjun that Bhagavān dwells in the hearts of all living beings, and directs their wanderings according to their karmas. If we remember him and dedicate all our activities to him, taking shelter of him and making him our supreme goal, then by his grace we will overcome all obstacles and difficulties. But if, motivated by pride, we act according to our whims, we will not attain success. Finally, Shri Krishna reveals that the most confidential knowledge is to abandon all varieties of religiosity and simply surrender to Bhagavān. However, this knowledge should not be given to those who are not austere or devoted, for they will misinterpret it and mis-utilize it to irresponsibly abandon actions. But if we explain this confidential knowledge to qualified Ātman(s), it is the greatest act of love and is very pleasing to Bhagavān.

Arjun then informs Shri Krishna that his illusion is dispelled and he is ready to act as instructed. In the end, Sanjay, who has been narrating the dialogue to the blind king Dhritarashtra remarks how amazed and astounded he is on hearing the divine conversation. His hair stands on end in ecstasy, as he recalls the sacred dialogue and remembers the stupendous cosmic form of Bhagavān.

He concludes with a profound pronouncement that victory will always be on the side of Bhagavān and his pure devotee, and so will goodness, supremacy, and opulence, for the darkness of falsehood will always be vanquished by the light of the Absolute Truth.

अर्जुन उवाच ।
सन्यासस्य महाबाहो तत्त्वमिच्छामि वेदितुम् ।
त्यागस्य च हृषीकेश पृथक्केशिनिषूदन ॥ १ ॥

*arjuna uvācha
sanyāsasya mahā-bāho tattvam ichchhāmi veditum
tyāgasya cha hṛishīkeśha prithak keśhi-niṣhūdana*

arjunah uvācha—Arjun said; *sanyāsasya*—of renunciation of actions; *mahā-bāho*—mighty-armed one; *tattvam*—the truth; *ichchhāmi*—I wish; *veditum*—to understand; *tyāgasya*—of renunciation of desires for enjoying the fruits of actions; *cha*—and; *hṛishīkeśha*—Krishna, the Bhagavān of the senses; *prithak*—distinctively; *keśhi-niṣhūdana*—Krishna, the killer of the Keshi demon.

Arjun said: O mighty-armed Krishna, I wish to understand the nature of *sanyās* (renunciation of actions) and *tyāg* (renunciation of the desire for the fruits of actions). O Hrishikesh, I also wish to know the distinction between the two, O Keshinisudan.

Arjun addresses Shri Krishna as “Keshi-nisudan,” meaning “killer of the Keshi demon.” In his divine pastimes on the earth, Bhagavān Krishna had killed a furious and violent Demon called Keshi, who had taken the form of a mad horse and created havoc in the land of Braj. Doubt is also like an untamed horse that runs wild in the mind and destroys the garden of devotion. Arjun indicates, “Just as you slayed the Keshi demon, please slay the Demon of doubt in my mind.” His question is penetrating and poignant. He wishes to know the nature of *sanyās*, which means “renunciation of actions.” He also wishes to know the nature of *tyāg*, which means “renunciation of desires for enjoying the fruits of actions.” Further, he uses the word *prithak*, meaning difference; he wishes to understand the distinction between the two terms. Arjun also refers

to Shri Krishna as Hrishikesh, meaning “master of the senses.” Arjun’s goal is to accomplish the greatest of conquests, which is to subdue the mind and the senses. It is this conquest that can bestow the state of perfect peace. And the Supreme Bhagavān Shri Krishna, as the Master of the senses, himself embodies this state of perfection.

This topic had been explained in the previous chapters as well. Shri Krishna had talked about *sanyās* in verses 5.13 and 9.28, and about *tyāg* in verses 4.20 and 12.11, but he explains it here from another angle. The same truth permits itself to be presented from a variety of perspectives and each perspective provides its own unique appeal. For example, various sections of a garden leave differing impressions on the viewer’s mind, while the entire garden creates yet another impression. The Bhagavad Gita is very much like this. Each chapter is designated as a particular Yog, while the eighteenth chapter is considered the synopsis. In this chapter, Shri Krishna briefly summarizes the perennial principles and eternal truths that were presented in the previous seventeen chapters and establishes the collective conclusion of all of them. After discussing the topics of renunciation and detachment, he goes on to explain the natures of the three *guṇas* and how they affect people’s natural propensities for work. He reiterates that the mode of goodness is the only mode worthy of cultivation. He then concludes that *bhakti*, or exclusive loving devotion to the Supreme Bhagavān is the paramount duty, and its attainment is the goal of human life.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।
काम्यानां कर्मणां न्यासं सन्ध्यासं कवयो विदुः ।
सर्वकर्मफलत्यागं प्राहुस्त्यागं विचक्षणाः ॥२॥

*śrī-bhagavān uvācha
kāmyānām karmaṇām nyāsam sanyāsam kavayo viduh
sarva-karma-phala-tyāgam prāhus tyāgam vichakṣhaṇāḥ*

śhrī-bhagavān uvācha—Bhagavān Krishna said; *kāmyānām*—desireful; *karmaṇām*—of actions; *nyāsam*—giving up; *sanyāsam*—renunciation of actions; *kavayah*—the learned; *viduh*—to understand; *sarva*—all; *karma-phala*—fruits of actions; *tyāgam*—renunciation of desires for enjoying the fruits of actions; *prāhuḥ*—declare; *tyāgam*—renunciation of desires for enjoying the fruits of actions; *vichakṣhanāḥ*—the wise.

Bhagavān Krishna said: Giving up of actions motivated by desire is what the wise understand as *sanyās*. Relinquishing the fruits of all actions is what the learned declare to be *tyāg*.

Kavayah are the learned. Shri Krishna states that learned people consider *sanyās* as the renunciation of works. Those who renounce works for material enjoyment and enter the renounced order are called *karm sanyāsīs*. They continue to do some of the *nitya karm* (daily works for the maintenance of the body), but they renounce *kāmya karm* (works related to acquisition of wealth, progeny, prestige, status, power, etc). Such works bind the Ātman further in the wheel of karma and lead to repeated rebirths in the *samsara* of birth and death.

Vichakṣhanāḥ are the wise. Shri Krishna states that wise people lay emphasis on *tyāg*, meaning “internal renunciation.” This implies not relinquishing the prescribed Vedic duties, rather renouncing the desires for enjoying their fruits. Therefore, the attitude of giving up attachment to the rewards of actions is *tyāg*, while the attitude of giving up works is *sanyas*. Both *sanyās* and *tyāg* seem plausible and reasonable options to pursue for enlightenment. Of these two courses of action, which one does Shri Krishna recommend? He provides more clarity on this topic in the subsequent verses.

त्याज्यं दोषवदित्येके कर्म प्राहुर्मनीषिणः ।
यज्ञदानतपःकर्म न त्याज्यमिति चापरे ॥३॥

*tyājyam doṣha-vad ity eke karma prāhur manīṣhiṇah
yajña-dāna-tapah-karma na tyājyam iti chāpare*

tyājyam—should be given up; *doṣha-vat*—as evil; *iti*—thus; *eke*—some; *karma*—actions; *prāhuḥ*—declare; *manīṣhiṇah*—the learned; *yajña*—sacrifice; *dāna*—charity; *tapah*—penance; *karma*—acts; *na*—never; *tyājyam*—should be abandoned; *iti*—thus; *cha*—and; *apare*—others.

Some learned people declare that all kinds of actions should be given up as evil, while others maintain that acts of sacrifice, charity, and penance should never be abandoned.

Some philosophers, such as those of the *Sāṅkhya* school of thought, are in favor of liquidating mundane life as quickly as possible. They opine that all actions should be abandoned because they are motivated by desire, which promotes further transmigration in the cycle of life and death. They contend that all works are subject to inherent defects, such as indirect violence. For example, if one lights a fire, there is always the possibility of insects getting involuntarily burnt in it. Hence, they recommend the path of cessation of all actions, except those for the sustenance of the body.

Other learned philosophers, such as those of the *Mīmānsā* school of thought, declare that prescribed Vedic activities should never be given up. They contend that wherever there are two contradictory injunctions of the Vedas, if a specific one is more prominent, it annuls the general one. For example, the Vedas instruct us: *mā hinsyāt sarvā bhūtāni* [v1] “Do not commit violence toward any living entity.” This is a general instruction. The same Vedas also instruct us to perform fire sacrifice. This is a specific instruction. It is possible that in performing a fire sacrifice some creatures may get killed in the fire unintentionally. But the *Mīmānsakas* (followers of the *Mīmānsā* philosophy) contend that the specific instruction for performing the sacrifice prevails, and it must be followed even though it conflicts with the general instruction for not committing violence. Therefore, the *Mīmānsakas* say we must never give up beneficial activities, such as sacrifice, charity, and penance.

निश्चयं शृणु मे तत्र त्यागे भरतसत्तम ।
त्यागो हि पुरुषव्याघ्र त्रिविधः सम्प्रकीर्तिः ॥४॥

*niśchayam śrīṇu me tatra tyāge bharata-sattama
tyāgo hi puruṣha-vyāghra tri-vidhah samprakīrtitah*

niśhchayam—conclusion; *śhrinu*—hear; *me*—my; *tatra*—there; *tyāge*—about renunciation of desires for enjoying the fruits of actions; *bharata-sat-tama*—best of the Bharatas; *tyāgah*—renunciation of desires for enjoying the fruits of actions; *hi*—indeed; *puruṣha-vyāghra*—tiger amongst men; *tri-vidhah*—of three kinds; *samprakīrtitah*—declared.

Now hear my conclusion on the subject of renunciation, O tiger amongst men, for renunciation has been declared to be of three kinds.

Renunciation is important because it is the basis for higher life. It is only by giving up the lower desires that we can cultivate the higher aspirations. Likewise, it is by giving up lower actions that we can dedicate ourselves to higher duties and activities, and walk the path of enlightenment. However in the previous verse, Shri Krishna revealed that there are differing views on the true understanding of what renunciation actually entails. Having mentioned the two primary opposing views in the previous verse, Shri Krishna now reveals his opinion, which is the final verdict on the subject. He says that he will expound upon the subject by dividing renunciation into three categories (described in verses 7 to 9). He addresses Arjun as *vyāghra*, meaning “tiger amongst men” because renunciation is for the brave-hearted. Saint Kabir said:

*tīra talavār se jo larai, so śhūrvāra nahīn hoya
māyā taji bhakti kare, śhūra kahāvai soya [v2]*

“One is not brave by virtue of fighting with arrows and swords; that person is truly brave who renounces Māyā and engages in *bhakti*.”

**यज्ञदानतपःकर्म न त्याज्यं कार्यमेव तत् ।
यज्ञो दानं तपश्चैव पावनानि मनीषिणाम् ॥ 5 ॥**

*yajña-dāna-tapah-karma na tyājyam kāryam eva tat
yajño dānam tapaś chaiva pāvanāni maniṣhiṇām*

yajña—sacrifice; *dāna*—charity; *tapah*—penance; *karma*—actions; *na*—never; *tyājyam*—should be abandoned; *kāryam eva*—must certainly be performed; *tat*—that; *yajñah*—sacrifice; *dānam*—charity; *tapah*—penance; *cha*—and; *eva*—indeed; *pāvanāni*—purifying; *maniṣhiṇām*—for the wise.

Actions based upon sacrifice, charity, and penance should never be

abandoned; they must certainly be performed. Indeed, acts of sacrifice, charity, and penance are purifying even for those who are wise.

Here, Shri Krishna pronounces his verdict that we should never renounce actions which elevate us and are beneficial for humankind. Such actions, if performed in the proper consciousness, do not bind us, instead they help us grow spiritually. Consider, for example, a caterpillar. In order to transform itself, it weaves a cocoon for its evolution and encages itself in it. Once it becomes a butterfly, it breaks open the cocoon and soars into the sky. Our position in the world is similar to this. Like the ugly caterpillar, we are presently attached to the world and bereft of noble qualities. As a part of our self-preparation and self-education, we need to perform actions that bring about the inner transformation we desire. *Yajña* (sacrifice), *dān* (charity), and *tapa* (penance) are acts that help in our spiritual evolution and growth. At times, it may seem that they are binding too, but they are like the caterpillar's cocoon. They melt our impurities, beautify us from within, and effectually help us break through the shackles of earthly life. Hence, Shri Krishna instructs in this verse that such auspicious activities must never be abandoned. He now qualifies his statement by revealing the proper attitude with which they must be performed.

**एतान्यपि तु कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा फलानि च ।
कर्तव्यानीति मे पार्थं निश्चितं मतमुत्तमम् ॥६॥**

*etāny api tu karmāṇi saṅgam tyaktvā phalāni cha
kartavyānīti me pārtha niśchitam matam uttamam*

etāni—these; *api tu*—must certainly be; *karmāṇi*—activities; *saṅgam*—attachment; *tyaktvā*—giving up; *phalāni*—rewards; *cha*—and; *kartavyāni*—should be done as duty; *iti*—such; *me*—my; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *niśchitam*—definite; *matam*—opinion; *uttamam*—supreme.

These activities must be performed without attachment and expectation for rewards. This is my definite and supreme verdict, O Arjun.

Acts of sacrifice, charity, and penance should be done in the mood of devotion to the Supreme Bhagavān. If that consciousness has not been attained, then they should verily be performed as a matter of duty, without desire for reward. A mother abandons her selfish joys to perform her duty to her offspring. She offers the milk in her breast to her baby and nourishes the baby. She does not lose by giving to the child, rather she fulfills her motherhood. Similarly, a cow grazes grass in the meadow all day long, but yields the milk in her udder to her calf. The cow does not become any less by performing its duty; on the other hand, people hold it in greater respect. Because these activities are performed selflessly, they are viewed as sacred. Shri Krishna states in this verse that the wise should perform auspicious and beneficial acts in the same attitude of selflessness. He now explains the three kinds of renunciation in the following three verses.

**नियतस्य तु सञ्चासः कर्मणो नोपपद्यते ।
मोहात्तस्य परित्यागस्तामसः परिकीर्तिः ॥७॥**

*niyatasya tu sanyāsaḥ karmano nōpapadyate
mohāt tasya parityāgas tāmasaḥ parikīrtitah*

niyatasya—of prescribed duties; *tu*—but; *sanyāsaḥ*—renunciation; *karmanah*—actions; *na*—never; *upapadyate*—to be performed; *mohāt*—deluded; *tasya*—of that; *parityāgaḥ*—renunciation; *tāmasaḥ*—in the mode of ignorance; *parikīrtitah*—has been declared.

Prescribed duties should never be renounced. Such deluded renunciation is said to be in the mode of ignorance.

Renouncing prohibited actions and unrighteous actions is proper; renouncing desire for the rewards of actions is also proper; but renouncing prescribed duties is never proper. Prescribed duties help purify the mind and elevate it from *tamo guṇa* to *rajo guṇa* to *sattva guṇa*. Abandoning them is an erroneous display of foolishness. Shri Krishna states that giving up prescribed duties in the name of renunciation is said to be in the mode of ignorance.

Having come in this world, we all have obligatory duties. Fulfilling them helps develop many qualities in an individual, such as responsibility, discipline of the mind and senses, tolerance of pain and hardships, etc. Abandoning them, out of ignorance, leads to the degradation of the Ātman. These obligatory duties vary according to one's level of consciousness. For an ordinary person, acts such as earning wealth, taking care of the family, bathing, eating, etc. are prescribed duties. As one gets elevated, these obligatory duties change. For an elevated Ātman, sacrifice, charity, and penance are the duties.

दुःखमित्येव यत्कर्म कायक्लेशभयात्यजेत् ।
स कृत्वा राजसं त्यागं नैव त्यागफलं लभेत् ॥८॥

*duḥkham ity eva yat karma kāya-kleśha-bhayāt tyajet
sa kṛitvā rājasam tyāgam naiva tyāga-phalam labhet*

duḥkham—troublesome; *iti*—as; *eva*—indeed; *yat*—which; *karma*—duties; *kāya*—bodily; *kleśha*—discomfort; *bhayāt*—out of fear; *tyajet*—giving up; *sah*—they; *kṛitvā*—having done; *rājasam*—in the mode of passion; *tyāgam*—renunciation of desires for enjoying the fruits of actions; *na*—never; *eva*—certainly; *tyāga*—renunciation of desires for enjoying the fruits of actions; *phalam*—result; *labhet*—attain.

To give up prescribed duties because they are troublesome or cause bodily discomfort is renunciation in the mode of passion. Such renunciation is never beneficial or elevating.

To advance in life does not mean abandoning our responsibilities, instead it entails increasing them. Novice spiritualists often do not understand this truth. Wishing to avoid pain and taking an escapist attitude, they make spiritual aspiration a pretext for relinquishing their obligatory duties. However, life is never meant to be without burdens. Advanced *sādhaks* are not those who are undisturbed because they do nothing, on the contrary, they retain their peace despite upholding a huge burden placed upon their shoulders. Shri Krishna declares in this verse that giving up duties because they are troublesome is renunciation in the mode of passion.

From the beginning, the Bhagavad Gita is a call for action. Arjun finds his duty unpleasant and bothersome and, as a result, wishes to run away from the battlefield. Shri Krishna calls this ignorance and weakness. He encourages Arjun to continue doing his duty, even though it may be unpleasant, while simultaneously bringing about an internal transformation within him. For this purpose, he enlightens Arjun with spiritual knowledge and helps him develop the eyes of wisdom. Having heard the Bhagavad Gita, Arjun does not change his profession, but changes the consciousness he brings to bear upon his activities. Previously, the motive behind his work was to secure the kingdom of Hastinapur for his comfort and glory. Later, he continues to do his work, but as an act of devotion to Bhagavān.

**कार्यमित्येव यत्कर्म नियतं क्रियतेर्जुन ।
सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा फलं चैव स त्यागः सात्त्विको मतः ॥१९॥**

*kāryam ity eva yat karma niyatam kriyate 'rjuna
saṅgam tyaktvā phalam chaiva sa tyāgah sāttviko mataḥ*

kāryam—as a duty; *iti*—as; *eva*—indeed; *yat*—which; *karma niyatam*—obligatory actions; *kriyate*—are performed; *arjuna*—Arjun; *saṅgam*—attachment; *tyaktvā*—relinquishing; *phalam*—reward; *cha*—and; *eva*—certainly; *sah*—such; *tyāgah*—renunciation of desires for enjoying the fruits of actions; *sāttvikah*—in the mode of goodness; *mataḥ*—considered.

When actions are taken in response to duty, Arjun, and one relinquishes attachment to any reward, it is considered renunciation in the nature of goodness.

Shri Krishna now describes the superior kind of renunciation, where we continue to perform our obligatory duties, but give up attachment to the fruit of actions. He describes this as the highest kind of renunciation, which is situated in the mode of goodness (*sāttvic*).

Renunciation is definitely necessary for spiritual attainment. But the problem is that people's understanding of renunciation is very shallow and they consider

it to be only the external abandonment of works. Such renunciation leads to hypocrisy in which, while externally donning the robes of a renunciant, one internally contemplates upon the objects of the senses. There are many sadhus in India who come in this category. They left the world with the noble intention of Brahman-realization, but because the mind was not yet detached from the objects of their senses, their renunciation did not bestow the desired fruits. Consequently, they found their actions did not lead them to a higher spiritual life at all. The defect was in their sequence—they strove first for external renunciation and later for internal detachment. The instruction of this verse is to reverse the sequence—first develop internal detachment and then renounce externally.

न द्वेष्यकुशलं कर्म कुशले नानुषज्जते ।
त्यागी सत्त्वसमाविष्टो मेधावी छिन्नसंशयः ॥ १० ॥

*na dveṣṭyakuśhalam karma kuśhale nānuṣhajjate
tyāgī sattva-samāviṣṭo medhāvī chhinna-sanśhayah*

na—neither; *dveṣṭti*—hate; *akuśhalam*—disagreeable; *karma*—work; *kuśhale*—to an agreeable; *na*—nor; *anuṣhajjate*—seek; *tyāgī*—one who renounces desires for enjoying the fruits of actions; *sattva*—in the mode of goodness; *samāviṣṭah*—endowed with; *medhāvī*—intelligent; *chhinna-sanśhayah*—those who have no doubts.

Those who neither avoid disagreeable work nor seek work because it is agreeable are persons of true renunciation. They are endowed with the quality of the mode of goodness and have no doubts (about the nature of work).

People who are situated in *sāttvic* renunciation are not miserable in disagreeable circumstances; nor do they get attached to situations that are agreeable to them. They simply do their duty under all conditions, without feeling elated when the going is good or feeling dejected when life becomes tough. They are not like a dry leaf that is tossed hither and tither by every passing breeze. Instead, they are like the reeds in the sea, gently negotiating every rising and

falling wave. While retaining their equanimity and without succumbing to anger, greed, envy, or attachment, they watch the waves of events rising and falling around them. Bal Gangadhar Tilak was a scholar of the Bhagavad Gita and a famous *karm yogi*. Before Gandhi came on the scene, he was at the forefront of the freedom struggle of India. He was asked what position he would choose if India became independent—Prime Minister or Foreign Minister? He replied, “My ambition was to write a book on Differential Calculus. I will fulfill it.” Once, the police arrested him for creating unrest. He asked his friend to find out the provisions under which he was arrested, and to inform him in prison. When the friend reached him after an hour, he was fast asleep in the jail. Another time, he was working in his office, and his clerk brought him the news that his elder son was seriously ill. Instead of getting emotionally wrought, he asked the clerk to get a doctor, and he continued working. Half an hour later, his friend came and conveyed the same news. He said, “I have called for the doctor to see him. What else can I do?” These instances reveal how he retained his composure despite being in the midst of tumultuous situations. He was able to continue performing his actions because of the internal emotional composure; had he been emotionally distressed he would have been unable to sleep in the jail cell or concentrate on his work at the office.

न हि देहभूता शक्यं त्यक्तुं कर्माण्यशेषतः ।
यस्तु कर्मफलत्यागी स त्यागीत्यभिधीयते ॥ 11 ॥

*na hi deha-bhṛitā śakyam tyaktum karmāṇy aśheṣataḥ
yas tu karma-phala-tyāgī sa tyāgīty abhidhīyate*

na—not; *hi*—indeed; *deha-bhṛitā*—for the embodied being; *śakyam*—possible; *tyaktum*—to give up; *karmāṇi*—activities; *aśheṣataḥ*—entirely; *yah*—who; *tu*—but; *karma-phala*—fruits of actions; *tyāgī*—one who renounces all desires for enjoying the fruits of actions; *sah*—they; *tyāgī*—one who renounces all desires for enjoying the fruits of actions; *iti*—as; *abhidhīyate*—are said.

For the embodied being, it is impossible to give up activities entirely. But

those who relinquish the fruits of their actions are said to be truly renounced.

It may be contended that better than renunciation of the fruits of actions is to simply renounce all actions, for then there will be no distraction from meditation and contemplation. Shri Krishna rejects this as a possible option by stating that the state of complete inactivity is impossible for the embodied being. The basic functions for the maintenance of the body, such as, eating, sleeping, bathing, etc. have to be performed by everyone. Besides, standing, sitting, thinking, walking, talking, etc. are also activities that cannot be avoided. If we understand renunciation to be the external abandonment of works, then no one can ever be truly renounced. However, Shri Krishna states here that if one can give up attachment to the fruits of actions, it is considered perfect renunciation.

**अनिष्टमिष्टं मिश्रं च त्रिविधं कर्मणः फलम् ।
भवत्यत्यागिनां प्रेत्य न तु सन्धासिनां क्वचित् ॥ १२ ॥**

*aniṣṭam iṣṭam miṣhram cha tri-vidham karmaṇah phalam
bhavaty atyāginām pretya na tu sanyāsinām kvachit*

aniṣṭam—unpleasant; *iṣṭam*—pleasant; *miṣhram*—mixed; *cha*—and; *tri-vidham*—three-fold; *karmaṇah phalam*—fruits of actions; *bhavati*—accrue; *atyāginām*—to those who are attached to persona reward; *pretya*—after death; *na*—not; *tu*—but; *sanyāsinām*—for the renouncers of actions; *kvachit*—ever.

The three-fold fruits of actions—pleasant, unpleasant, and mixed—accrue even after death to those who are attached to personal reward. But, for those who renounce the fruits of their actions, there are no such results in the here or hereafter.

The three kinds of rewards that the Ātman reaps after death are: 1) *iṣṭam*, or pleasant experiences in the celestial abodes, 2) *aniṣṭam*, or unpleasant experiences in the hellish abodes, and 3) *miṣhram*, or mixed experiences in the

human form on the earth planet. Those who perform virtuous actions are awarded the celestial realms; those who perform unrighteous actions are given birth in the nether realms; and those who perform a mixture of both come back to the human realm. But this applies only when the actions are performed with a desire for rewards. When such fruitive desire is renounced and work is done merely as a duty to Bhagavān, then no such results accrue from actions.

A similar rule exists in the world as well. If one person kills another it is considered murder, which is a crime that can even result in the death sentence. However, if the government declares that someone is a notorious murderer or thief who is wanted dead or alive, then killing such a person is not considered an offence in the eyes of the law. Instead, it is rewarded by the government, and the killer is even respected as a national hero. Similarly, when we give up personal motive in our actions, then the three-fold fruits of actions do not accrue.

पञ्चैतानि महाबाहो कारणानि निबोध मे ।
साङ्ख्ये कृतान्ते प्रोक्तानि सिद्धये सर्वकर्मणाम् ॥ 13 ॥

*pañchaitāni mahā-bāho kāraṇāni nibodha me
sāṅkhye kṛitānte proktāni siddhaye sarva-karmanām*

pañcha—five; *etāni*—these; *mahā-bāho*—mighty-armed one; *kāraṇāni*—causes; *nibodha*—listen; *me*—from me; *sāṅkhye*—of *Sāṅkya*; *kṛita-ante*—stop reactions of karmas; *proktāni*—explains; *siddhaye*—for the accomplishment; *sarva*—all; *karmanām*—of karmas.

O Arjun, now learn from me about the five factors that have been mentioned for the accomplishment of all actions in the doctrine of *Sāṅkhya*, which explains how to stop the reactions of karmas.

On knowing that work can be performed without attachment to the fruits, a natural question arises: “What constitutes action?” Shri Krishna announces to Arjun that he is going to address this question now, as this knowledge will help develop detachment from the results of actions. Simultaneously, he clarifies

that the description of the five limbs of action is not a new analysis, but what has previously been described in the *Sāṅkhyā* philosophy as well. *Sāṅkhyā* refers to the system of philosophy established by Maharishi Kapil, who was a descension of Bhagavān and appeared on the earth as the child of Kardam Muni and Devahuti. The *Sāṅkhyā* philosophy he propounded is based upon a system of analytical rationality. It develops knowledge of the self through an analysis of the elements within the body and in the world. It also ascertains the nature of cause and effect by an analysis of the elements of action.

अधिष्ठानं तथा कर्ता करणं च पृथग्विधम् ।
विविधाश्च पृथक्चेष्टा दैवं चैवात्र पञ्चमम् ॥ 14 ॥

*adhiṣṭhānam tathā kartā karaṇam cha pṛthag-vidham
vividhāś chā pṛithak cheṣṭā daivam chaivātra pañchamam*

adhiṣṭhānam—the body; *tathā*—also; *kartā*—the doer (*Ātman*); *karaṇam*—senses; *cha*—and; *pṛithak-vidham*—various kinds; *vividhāḥ*—many; *cha*—and; *pṛithak*—distinct; *cheṣṭāḥ*—efforts; *daivam*—Divine Providence; *cha eva atra*—these certainly are (causes); *pañchamam*—the fifth.

The body, the doer, the various senses, the many kinds of efforts, and Divine Providence—these are the five factors of action.

In this verse, *adhiṣṭhānam* means “place of residence,” and refers to the body, since karmas can only be performed when the *Ātman* is situated in the body. *Kartā* means “the doer,” and refers to the *Ātman*. Although the *Ātman* itself does not perform actions, it inspires the body-mind-intellect mechanism with the life force to act. Further, it identifies with their actions, due to the influence of the ego. Therefore, it is responsible for the actions performed by the body, and it is called both the knower and the doer. The Praśna Upaniṣad states: *eṣha hi draṣṭā spraṣṭā śrotā ghrātā rasayitā mantā boddhā kartā vijñānĀtman puruṣah sa pare 'kṣhara ātmāni saṁpratiṣṭhate* (4.9) [v3] “It is the *Ātman* that sees, touches, hears, feels, tastes, thinks, and comprehends. Thus, the *Ātman* is to be considered both—the knower and the doer of actions.” The Brahma Sūtra also

states: *jñō 'ta eva* (2.3.18) [v4] “It is truly the Ātman that is the knower.” Again, the Brahma Sūtra states: *kartā śhāstrārthavattvāt* (2.3.33) [v5] “The Ātman is the doer of actions, and this is confirmed by the scriptures.” From the above quotations, it is clear that the Ātman is also a factor in accomplishing actions.

The senses are instruments used for performing actions. Without the senses, the Ātman could not have experienced the sensations of taste, touch, sight, smell, or sound. There are also the five working senses—hands, legs, voice, genitals, and anus. It is with their help that the Ātman accomplishes various kinds of work. Thus, the senses are also listed as factors in accomplishing actions.

Despite all the instruments of action, if one does not put in effort, nothing is ever done. In fact, effort is so important that Chanakya Pandit states in his Neeti Sūtras: *utsāhavatām śhatravopi vaśībhavanti* [v6] “With sufficient effort, even poor destiny can be transformed into good fortune.” *Nirutvāhād daivam patita* [v7] “Without proper effort, even good destiny can be converted into misfortune.” Therefore, *cheṣṭhā* (effort) is another ingredient of action.

Bhagavān is seated within the body of the living being as the witness. Based upon their past karmas, he also bestows different abilities to different people to perform actions. One may call this Divine Providence. For example, some people possess the acumen for earning huge amounts of wealth. Their acquaintances become astonished by their brilliant financial analysis of complex situations. They also seem to be lucky with the risks they take. This special intellect is granted to them by Bhagavān. Similarly, others seem to have Bhagavān-given talents in fields such as sports, music, art, literature, etc. It is Bhagavān who bestows people these special abilities, in accordance with their past karmas. He also grants the results of the present karmas. Hence, he is listed as one of the factors responsible for action.

शरीरवाङ्मनोभिर्यत्कर्म प्रारभते नरः ।
न्यायं वा विपरीतं वा पञ्चैते तस्य हेतवः ॥ 15 ॥

तत्रैवं सति कर्तारमात्मानं केवलं तु यः ।
पश्यत्यकृतबुद्धित्वान्न स पश्यति दुर्मतिः ॥ 16 ॥

*śharīra-vāñ-manobhir yat karma prārabhate narah
nyāyyam vā viparītam vā pañchaite tasya hetavah*

*tatraivam sati kartāram Ātmannam kevalam tu yah
paśhyaty akṛita-buddhitvān na sa paśhyati durmatiḥ*

śharīra-vāk-manobhiḥ—with body, speech, or mind; *yat*—which; *karma*—action; *prārabhate*—performs; *narah*—a person; *nyāyyam*—proper; *vā*—or; *viparītam*—improper; *vā*—or; *pañcha*—five; *ete*—these; *tasya*—their; *hetavah*—factors; *tatra*—there; *evam sati*—in spite of this; *kartāram*—the doer; *Ātmannam*—the Ātman; *kevalam*—only; *tu*—but; *yah*—who; *paśhyati*—see; *akṛita-buddhitvāt*—with impure intellect; *na*—not; *sah*—they; *paśhyati*—see; *durmatiḥ*—foolish.

These five are the contributory factors for whatever action is performed, whether proper or improper, with body, speech, or mind. Those who do not understand this regard the Ātman as the only doer. With their impure intellects they cannot see things as they are.

The three kinds of actions are—*kāyik* (those performed with the body), *vāchik* (those performed by speech), and *mānasik* (those performed by the mind). In each of these categories, whether we do virtuous or sinful acts, the five causes mentioned in the previous verse are responsible. Due to the ego, we think of ourselves as the doers of our actions. “I achieved this.” “I accomplished that.” “I will do this.” These are statements we make under the illusion of being the doer. Shri Krishna’s purpose in revealing this knowledge is to annihilate the Ātman’s pride of doership. Thus, he states that those who see the Ātman only as the contributory factor for action do not see things as they truly are. If the Ātman were not granted a body by Bhagavān, it could not have done anything at all. Further, if the body were not energized by Bhagavān, it could have still done nothing. The Kenopaniṣad states:

yadvāchānabhyuditam yena vāgabhyudyate (1.4) [v8]

“*Brahman* cannot be described by the voice. By its inspiration, the voice gets the power to speak.”

yanmanasā na manute yenāhurmano matam (1.5) [v9]

“*Brahman* cannot be understood by the mind and intellect. By its power, the mind and intellect work.”

yachchakṣuṣhā na paśyati yena chakṣhūṁshi paśyati (1.6) [v10]

“*Brahman* cannot be seen with the eyes. By its inspiration, the eyes see.”

yachchhroṭreṇa na śṛiṇoti yena śrotramidaṁ śrutam (1.7) [v11]

“*Brahman* cannot be heard with the ears. By its power, the ears hear.”

yat prāṇena na prāṇiti yena prāṇah prāṇīyate (1.8) [v12]

“*Brahman* cannot be energized by the life airs. By its inspiration, the life airs function.”

This does not mean that the Ātman has no role in performing karmas. It is like the driver in the car, who controls the steering wheel of the car and decides where to turn it and at what speed to drive. Similarly, the Ātman too governs the actions of the body, mind, and intellect, but it should not claim credit for any action(s) for itself. If we see ourselves to be the sole cause of action, then we want to be the enjoyers of our actions as well. But when we free ourselves from the pride of doership and ascribe the credit of our efforts to the grace of Bhagavān and the tools provided by him, then we also realize that we are not the enjoyers of our actions and all actions are meant for his pleasure. As explained in the next verse, this understanding helps us to dedicate to him every act of sacrifice, charity, and penance, and perform these with devotion.

यस्य नाहृङ्कृते भावो बुद्धिर्यस्य न लिप्यते ।
हत्वाऽपि स इमाँल्लोकान्न हन्ति न निबध्यते ॥ 17 ॥

*yasya nāhankṛito bhāvo buddhir yasya na lipyate
hatvā'pi sa imāl lokān na hanti na nibadhyate*

yasya—whose; *na ahankṛitah*—free from the ego of being the doer; *bhāvah*—nature; *buddhiḥ*—intellect; *yasya*—whose; *na lipyate*—unattached; *hatvā*—slay; *api*—even; *sah*—they; *imān*—this; *lokān*—living beings; *na*—neither; *hanti*—kill; *na*—nor; *nibadhyate*—get bound.

Those who are free from the ego of being the doer, and whose intellect is unattached, though they may slay living beings, they neither kill nor are they bound by actions.

Having described the obtuse intellect in the previous verse, Shri Krishna now describes the pure intellect. He says that those with purified intellect are free from the false pride of being the doer. They also do not seek to enjoy the fruits of their actions. Thus, they are not bound in the karmic reactions of what they do. Previously in verse 5.10 as well, he had stated that those who are detached from results are never tainted by sin. From a material perspective, they may appear to be working, but from a spiritual perspective, they are free from selfish motivations, and therefore they do not become bound by the results of karma.

Rahim Khankhana was a famous poet saint, during the Mughal period in Indian history. Although a Muslim by birth, he was a great devotee of Bhagavān Krishna. When he would give alms in charity, he would lower his eyes. A sweet incident is related about this habit of his. It is said that Saint Tulsidas heard of Rahim's style of giving alms, and asked him:

*aisī denī dena jyuñ, kita sīkhe ho saina
jyon jyon kara ūñchyo karo, tyon tyon niche naina [v13]*

“Sir, where did you learn to give alms like this? Your hands are as high as your eyes are low.” Rahim replied beautifully and in all humbleness:

*denahāra koī aur hai, bhejata hai dina raina
loga bharama hama para karen, yāte niche naina [v14]*

“The giver is someone else, giving day and night. But the world gives me the

credit, and so I lower my eyes.” Understanding that we are not the sole cause responsible for our accomplishments frees us from the egoistic pride of doership.

ज्ञानं ज्ञेयं परिज्ञाता त्रिविधा कर्मचोदना ।
करणं कर्म कर्तेति त्रिविधः कर्मसंग्रहः ॥ १८ ॥

*jñānam jñeyam parijñātā tri-vidhā karma-chodanā
karaṇam karma karteti tri-vidhah karma-saṅgrahaḥ*

jñānam—knowledge; *jñeyam*—the object of knowledge; *parijñātā*—the knower; *tri-vidhā*—three factors; *karma-chodanā*—factors that induce action; *karaṇam*—the instruments of action; *karma*—the act; *kartā*—the doer; *iti*—thus; *tri-vidhah*—threefold; *karma-saṅgrahaḥ*—constituents of action.

Knowledge, the object of knowledge, and the knower—these are the three factors that induce action. The instrument of action, the act itself, and the doer—these are the three constituents of action.

In his systematic treatment of the science of action, Shri Krishna explained its limbs. He also explained the karmic reactions of actions, and the process of becoming free from them. Now, he discusses the three-fold factors that propel actions. These are *jñāna* (knowledge), *jñeya* (the object of knowledge), and *jñātā* (the knower). Together, the three are called the *jñāna tripuṭī* (triad of knowledge).

“Knowledge” is a primary impetus for action; it provides understanding to the “knower” about the “object of knowledge.” This triad jointly induces action. For example, knowledge of the remuneration to be paid by the employer motivates employees to work; information of the discovery of gold in various parts of the world led to gold rushes involving feverish migration by workers; awareness of the importance of winning a medal in the Olympics motivates sportspersons to practice for years. Knowledge also has a correlation to the quality of work. For instance, a degree from a top college carries weight in the job market. Corporations realize that people with higher quality knowledge can perform work more proficiently. That’s why good corporations invest in

the development of their people, such as sponsoring employees for developmental seminars to further advance their skill set.

The second set named is the *karm tripuṭī* (triad of action). It includes the *kartā* (doer), *kāraṇ* (the instrument of action), and *karm* (the act itself). This triad of work jointly constitutes the content of action. The “doer” utilizes the “instruments of action” to perform “the action.” Having analyzed the constituents of action, Shri Krishna now relates them to the three modes of material nature, to explain why people differ from each other in their motives and actions.

ज्ञानं कर्म च कर्ता च त्रिधैव गुणभेदतः ।
प्रोच्यते गुणसङ्ख्याने यथावच्छृणु तान्यपि ॥ 19 ॥

*jñānam karma cha kartā cha tridhaiva guṇa-bhedataḥ
prochyate guṇa-saṅkhyāne yathāvach chhṛīnu tāny api*

jñānam—knowledge; *karma*—action; *cha*—and; *kartā*—doer; *cha*—also; *tridhā*—of three kinds; *eva*—certainly; *guṇa-bhedataḥ*—distinguished according to the three modes of material nature; *prochyate*—are declared; *guṇa-saṅkhyāne*—Sāṅkhya philosophy, which describes the modes of material nature; *yathā-vat*—as they are; *śrīnu*—listen; *tāni*—them; *api*—also.

Knowledge, action, and the doer are declared to be of three kinds in the Sāṅkhya philosophy, distinguished according to the three modes of material nature. Listen, and I will explain their distinctions to you.

Shri Krishna once again refers to the three modes of nature. In chapter 14, he had given an introduction about these modes, and described how they bind the Ātman to the *samsara* of life and death. Then in chapter 17, he went into great detail about how these three modes influence the kinds of faith people develop and also their choice of foods. He also explained the three categories of sacrifice, charity, and penance. Here, according to the three *guṇas*, the Bhagavān will explain the three types of knowledge, action, and doers.

Amongst the six systems of thought in Indian philosophy, the *Sāṅkhya*

philosophy (also called *puruṣh prakṛiti vāda*) is recognized as the authority in the matter of analysis of material nature. It considers the Ātman as the *puruṣh* (Bhagavān), and thus recognizes many *puruṣhas*. *Prakṛiti* is the material nature and includes all things made from it. *Sāṅkhyā* states the cause for misery is the desire of the *puruṣh* to enjoy *prakṛiti*. When this enjoying propensity subsides, then the *puruṣh* is released from the bondage of material nature attains eternal beatitude. The *Sāṅkhyā* system does not acknowledge the existence of the *Param Puruṣh*, or the Supreme Bhagavān, and hence it is insufficient for knowing the Absolute Truth. However, in the matter of knowledge about *prakṛiti* (material nature), Shri Krishna refers to it as the authority.

सर्वभूतेषु येनैकं भावमव्ययमीक्षते ।
अविभक्तं विभक्तेषु तज्जानं विद्धि सात्त्विकम् ॥ 20 ॥

*sarva-bhūteṣhu yenaikam bhāvam avyayam īkṣhate
avibhaktam vibhakteṣhu taj jñānam viddhi sāttvikam*

sarva-bhūteṣhu—within all living beings; *yena*—by which; *ekam*—one; *bhāvam*—nature; *avyayam*—imperishable; *īkṣhate*—one sees; *avibhaktam*—undivided; *vibhakteṣhu*—in diversity; *tat*—that; *jñānam*—knowledge; *viddhi*—understand; *sāttvikam*—in the mode of goodness.

Understand that knowledge to be in the mode of goodness by which a person sees one undivided imperishable reality within all diverse living beings.

Creation gives the appearance of a panorama of diverse living beings and material entities. But the substratum behind this apparent diversity is the Supreme Bhagavān. Those who possess this vision of knowledge see the unity that exists behind the variety of creation, just as an electrical engineer sees the same electricity flowing through different gadgets, and a goldsmith sees the same gold cast into different ornaments. The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam states:

vadanti tat tattva-vidas tattvam yaj jñānam advayam (1.2.11) [v15]

“Knowers of the truth have stated that there is only one entity in existence,

without a second.” Chaitanya Mahaprabhu referred to Bhagavān, in his form as Shri Krishna, as *advaya jñāna tattva* [v16] (one without a second, the only thing and everything that exists in creation), on the basis of the following four criteria:

1. *Sajātīya bhed śūnya*. (He is one with all similar entities.) Shri Krishna is one with the various other forms of Bhagavān, such as Ram, Shiv, Vishnu, etc. since these are different manifestations of the one Bhagavān.

Shri Krishna is also one with the Ātman(s), who are his tiny fragmental parts. A fragment is one with its whole, just as flames are one with the fire of which they are tiny parts.

2. *Vijātīya bhed śūnya*. (He is one with all dissimilar entities.) Dissimilar to Bhagavān is Māyā, which is insentient, while Bhagavān is sentient. However, Māyā is an energy of Bhagavān, and energy is one with its energetic, just as the energies of fire—heat and light—are non-different from it.

3. *Swagat bhed śūnya*. (The various parts of his body are non-different from him.) The amazing thing about Bhagavān’s body is that all the parts perform the functions of all the other parts. The Brahma Samhitā states:

aṅgāni yasya sakalendriya-vṛitti-manti paśhyanti pānti kalayanti chiram jaganti (5.32) [v17]

“With every limb of his body, Bhagavān can see, hear, talk, smell, eat, and think.” Hence, all the limbs of Bhagavān’s body are non-different from him.

4. *Swayam siddha*. (He needs the support of no other entity.) Māyā and the Ātman are both dependent upon Bhagavān for their existence. If he did not energize them, they would cease to exist. On the other hand, Bhagavān is supremely independent and does not need the support of any other entity for his existence.

The Supreme Bhagavān Shri Krishna satisfies all the four above points, and

thus he is the *advaya jñāna tattva*, in other words, he is everything that exists in creation. With this understanding, when we see the entire creation in its unity with Bhagavān, it is considered *sāttvic* knowledge. And love based upon such knowledge is not racial or national, rather it is universal.

पृथक्त्वेन तु यज्ञानं नानाभावान्पृथग्विधान् ।
वेत्ति सर्वेषु भूतेषु तज्ज्ञानं विद्धि राजसम् ॥ 21 ॥

*prithaktvena tu yaj jñānam nānā-bhāvān prithag-vidhān
vetti sarveṣhu bhūteṣhu taj jñānam viddhi rājasam*

prithaktvena—unconnected; *tu*—however; *yat*—which; *jñānam*—knowledge; *nānā-bhāvān*—manifold entities; *prithak-vidhān*—of diversity; *vetti*—consider; *sarveṣhu*—in all; *bhūteṣhu*—living entities; *tat*—that; *jñānam*—knowledge; *viddhi*—know; *rājasam*—in the mode of passion.

That knowledge is to be considered in the mode of passion by which one sees the manifold living entities in diverse bodies as individual and unconnected.

Shri Krishna now explains *rājasic* knowledge. That knowledge is said to be in the mode of passion where the world is not seen in its connection with Bhagavān, and thus the living beings are perceived in their plurality, with distinctions of race, class, creed, sect, nationality, etc. Such knowledge divides the one human society along innumerable lines. When knowledge unites, it is in the mode of goodness, and when knowledge divides, it is in the mode of passion.

यत् कृत्सनवदेकस्मिन्कार्ये सक्तमहैतुकम् ।
अतत्त्वार्थवदल्पं च तत्त्वामसमुदाहृतम् ॥ 22 ॥

*yat tu kṛtsna-vad ekasmin kārye saktam ahaitukam
atattvārtha-vad alpam cha tat tāmasam udāhṛitam*

yat—which; *tu*—but; *kṛtsna-vat*—as if it encompasses the whole; *ekasmin*—in single; *kārye*—action; *saktam*—engrossed; *ahaitukam*—without a reason; *atattvārtha-vat*—not based on truth; *alpam*—fragmental; *cha*—and; *tat*—that; *tāmasam*—in the mode of ignorance; *udāhṛitam*—is said to be.

That knowledge is said to be in the mode of ignorance where one is engrossed in a fragmental concept as if it encompasses the whole, and which is neither grounded in reason nor based on the truth.

When the intellect is dulled under the effect of *tamo guṇa*, it clings to a fragmental concept as if it were the complete truth. People with such views often become fanatic about what they perceive to be the Absolute Truth. Their understanding is usually not even rational, nor grounded in the scriptures or in reality, and yet they zealously desire to impose their beliefs on others. The history of humankind has repeatedly seen religious zealots who imagine themselves as self-appointed champions of Bhagavān and defenders of faith. They fanatically proselytize and find a few followers with the same kind of intellect, creating the phenomenon of the blind leading the blind. However, in the name of serving Bhagavān and religion, they create disruption in society and obstruct its harmonious growth.

**नियतं सङ्गरहितमरागद्वेषतः कृतम् ।
अफलप्रेप्सुना कर्म यत्तस्यात्त्विकमुच्यते ॥ 23 ॥**

*niyatam saṅga-rahitam arāga-dveṣhataḥ kṛitam
aphala-prepsunā karma yat tat sāttvikam uchyate*

niyatam—in accordance with scriptures; *saṅga-rahitam*—free from attachment; *arāga-dveṣhataḥ*—free from attachment and aversion; *kṛitam*—done; *aphala-prepsunā*—without desire for rewards; *karma*—action; *yat*—which; *tat*—that; *sāttvikam*—in the mode of goodness; *uchyate*—is called.

Action that is in accordance with the scriptures, which is free from attachment and aversion, and which is done without desire for rewards, is in the mode of goodness.

Having explained the three kinds of knowledge, Shri Krishna now describes the three kinds of action. In the passage of history, many social scientists and philosophers have given their opinion regarding what is proper action. A few of the important ones and their philosophies are mentioned here.

1. The Epicureans of Greece (third century BC) believed that to “eat, drink, and be merry” was right action.
2. More refined was the philosophy of Hobbs of England (1588 – 1679) and Helvetius of France (1715 – 1771). They said that if everyone becomes selfish and does not think of others, there will be chaos in the world. So they recommended that along with personal sense gratification we should also care for others. For example, if the husband is sick, the wife should take care of him; and if the wife is sick, the husband should take care of her. In the case where helping others conflicts with the self-interest, they advised that self-interest should be given the priority.
3. Joseph Butler’s (1692 – 1752) philosophy went beyond this. He said that the idea of service to others after catering to our own self-interest was wrong. Helping others is a natural human virtue. Even a lioness feeds her cubs while remaining hungry herself. So, service to others must always take priority. However, Butler’s concept of service was limited to the alleviation of material suffering; for example, if a person is hungry, he should be fed. But this does not really solve problems because after six hours the person is hungry again.
4. After Butler came Jeremy Bentham (1748 – 1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806 – 1873). They recommended the utilitarian principle of doing what is best for the majority. They suggested following the majority opinion for determining proper behavior. But if the majority is wrong or misguided then this philosophy falls through, for even a thousand ignorant people together cannot match the quality of thought of one learned person.

Other philosophers recommended following the dictates of the conscience. They suggested that it is the best guide in determining proper behavior. However, the problem is that everyone’s conscience guides differently. Even in one family, two children have different moral values and conscience. Besides, even one person’s conscience changes over time. If a murderer is asked whether he feels bad on killing people, he replies, “Initially I would feel bad, but later it

became as trivial as killing mosquitoes. I feel no remorse.”

Regarding proper action, the Mahābhārat states:

*ātmanah pratikūlāni pareśhām na samācharet
śhrutih smṛitih sadāchārah svasya cha priyamātmanah (5.15.17) [v18]*

“If you do not like it when others behave with you in a certain way, then do not behave with them in that way either. But always verify that your behavior is in accordance with the scriptures.” Conduct yourself with others as you desire them to behave with you. The Bible also says, “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” (Luke 6.31) [v19] Here, Shri Krishna declares, in a similar way that action in the mode of goodness is doing one’s duty in accordance with the scriptures. He further adds that such work should be without attachment or aversion, and without desire to enjoy the results.

**यत् कामेषुना कर्म साहङ्कारेण वा पुनः ।
क्रियते बहुलायासं तद्राजसमुदाहृतम् ॥ 24 ॥**

*yat tu kāmepsunā karma sāhankāreṇa vā punah
kriyate bahulāyāsam tad rājasam udāhṛitam*

yat—which; *tu*—but; *kāma-īpsunā*—prompted by selfish desire; *karma*—action; *sa-ahaṅkāreṇa*—with pride; *vā*—or; *punah*—again; *kriyate*—enacted; *bahula-āyāsam*—stressfully; *tat*—that; *rājasam*—in the nature of passion; *udāhṛitam*—is said to be.

Action that is prompted by selfish desire, enacted with pride, and full of stress, is in the nature of passion.

The nature of *rajo guṇa* is that it creates intense desires for materialistic enhancement and sensual enjoyment. So, action in the mode of passion is motivated by huge ambition and characterized by intense effort. It entails heavy toil and great physical and mental fatigue. An example of *rājasic* action is the corporate world. Management executives regularly complain of stress. This is because their actions are usually motivated by pride and an inordinate ambition for power, prestige, and wealth. The efforts of political leaders, over-

anxious parents, and business persons are also often typical examples of actions in the mode of passion.

अनुबन्धं क्षयं हिंसामनपेक्ष्य च पौरुषम् ।
मोहादारभ्यते कर्म यत्तत्तामसमुच्यते ॥ 25 ॥

*anubandham kṣhayam hinsām anapekṣhya cha pauruṣham
mohād ārabhyate karma yat tat tāmasam uchyate*

anubandham—consequences; *kṣhayam*—loss; *hinsām*—injury; *anapekṣhya*—by disregarding; *cha*—and; *pauruṣham*—one's own ability; *mohāt*—out of delusion; *ārabhyate*—is begun; *karma*—action; *yat*—which; *tat*—that; *tāmasam*—in the mode of ignorance; *uchyate*—is declared to be.

That action is declared to be in the mode of ignorance, which is begun out of delusion, without thought to one's own ability, and disregarding consequences, loss, and injury to others.

The intellects of those in *tamo guṇa* are covered by the fog of ignorance. They are oblivious to or unconcerned with what is right and what is wrong, and are only interested in themselves and their self-interest. They pay no heed to money or resources at hand, or even to the hardships incurred by others. Such work brings harm to them and to others. Shri Krishna uses the word *kṣaya* meaning “decay.” *Tāmasic* action causes decay of one’s health and vitality. It is a waste of effort, a waste of time, and a waste of resources. Typical examples of this are gambling, stealing, corruption, drinking, etc.

मुक्तसङ्गोऽनहंवादी धृत्युत्साहसमन्वितः ।
सिद्ध्यसिद्ध्योर्निर्विकारः कर्ता सात्त्विक उच्यते ॥ 26 ॥

*mukta-saṅgo 'naḥam-vādī dhṛity-utsāha-samanvitaḥ
siddhy-asiddhyor nirvikāraḥ kartā sāttvika uchyate*

mukta-saṅgah—free from worldly attachment; *anaham-vādī*—free from ego; *dhṛiti*—strong resolve; *utsāha*—zeal; *samanvitaḥ*—endowed with; *siddhi-asiddhyoḥ*—in success and failure; *nirvikāraḥ*—unaffected; *kartā*—worker; *sāttvikah*—in the mode of goodness; *uchyate*—is said to be.

The performer is said to be in the mode of goodness, when he or she is free from egotism and attachment, and endowed with enthusiasm and

determination.

Shri Krishna had earlier mentioned the three ingredients of action—knowledge, the action itself, and the doer. Having described the categories of two of them—knowledge and actions—he now moves on to the three kinds of performers of actions. He clarifies that those situated in the mode of goodness are not inactive; rather they work with enthusiasm and determination. The difference is that their work is performed in proper consciousness. *Sāttvic* doers are *mukta sangah*, i.e. they do not try to cling to things in worldly attachment, nor do they believe that worldly things can bestow satisfaction to the Ātman. Hence, they work with noble motives. And since their intentions are pure, they are filled with *utsāha* (zeal) and *dhṛiti* (strong resolve) in their endeavors. Their mental attitude results in the least dissipation of energies while working. Thus, they are able to work tirelessly to fulfill their sublime motives. Though they may accomplish great things, they are *anaham vādī* (free from egotism), and they give all credit for their successes to Bhagavān.

**रागी कर्मफलप्रेष्पुर्लुब्धो हिंसात्मकोऽशुचिः ।
हर्षशोकान्वितः कर्ता राजसः परिकीर्तिः ॥२७॥**

*rāgī karma-phala-prepsur lubdho hinsātmako 'śhuchiḥ
harṣha-śhoka-anvitah kartā rājasah parikīrtitah*

rāgī—craving; *karma-phala*—fruit of work; *prepsuh*—covet; *lubdhah*—greedy; *hinsā-ātmakah*—violent-natured; *aśhuchiḥ*—impure; *harṣha-śhoka-anvitah*—moved by joy and sorrow; *kartā*—performer; *rājasah*—in the mode of passion; *parikīrtitah*—is declared.

The performer is considered in the mode of passion when he or she craves the fruits of the work, is covetous, violent-natured, impure, and moved by joy and sorrow.

The *rājasic* workers are being described here. While the *sāttvic* workers are motivated by the desire for spiritual growth, the *rājasic* workers are deeply ambitious for materialistic enhancement. They do not realize that everything

here is temporary and will have to be left behind one day. Agitated with immoderate *rāg* (desires of the mind and senses), they do not possess the purity of intention. They are convinced that the pleasure they seek is available in the things of the world. Hence, never satisfied by what comes their way, they are *lubdhah* (greedy for more). When they see others succeeding or enjoying more than them, they become *hinsātmakah* (enviously bent on injury). To fulfill their ends, they sometimes sacrifice morality, and hence become *aśhuchih* (impure). When their desires are fulfilled they become elated, and when they are daunted they get dejected. In this way, their lives become *harṣha śoka anvitaḥ* (a mixture of delights and sorrows).

अयुक्तः प्राकृतः स्तब्धः शठो नैष्कृतिकोऽलसः ।
विषादी दीर्घसूत्री च कर्ता तामस उच्यते ॥ 28 ॥

*ayuktah prākṛitah stabdhah śhaṭho naishkritiko 'lasah
viṣhādī dīrgha-sūtrī cha kartā tāmasa uchyate*

ayuktah—undisciplined; *prākṛitah*—vulgar; *stabdhah*—obstinate; *śhaṭhah*—cunning; *naishkritikah*—dishonest or vile; *alasah*—slothful; *viṣhādī*—unhappy and morose; *dīrgha-sūtrī*—procrastinating; *cha*—and; *kartā*—performer; *tāmasah*—in the mode of ignorance; *uchyate*—is said to be.

A performer in the mode of ignorance is one who is undisciplined, vulgar, stubborn, deceitful, slothful, despondent, and procrastinating.

Shri Krishna now gives a description of *tāmasic* workers. Their mind is blotted with negative obsessions and thus they are *ayuktah* (undisciplined). The scriptures give injunctions regarding what is proper and improper behavior. But workers in the mode of ignorance are *stabdhah* (obstinate in their views), for they have closed their ears and mind to reason. Thus, they are often *śhaṭhah* (cunning) and *naishkritikah* (dishonest or vile) in their ways. They are *prākṛitah* (vulgar) because they do not believe in controlling their animal instinct. Though they may have duties to perform, they see effort as laborious and painful, and so they are *alasah* (slothful) and *dīrgha-sūtrī* (procrastinating). Their

ignoble and base thoughts impact them more than anyone else, making them *viṣhādī* (unhappy and morose).

The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam also describes types of performers of actions:

*sāttvikah kārako ṣaṅgī rāgāndho rājasah smṛitah
tāmasah smṛiti-vibhraṣṭo nirguṇo mad-apāśhrayah (11.25.26) [v20]*

“The worker who is detached is *sāttvic* in nature; the one who is excessively attached to action and its results is *rājasic*; one who is devoid of discrimination is *tāmasic*. But the worker who is surrendered to me is transcendental to the three modes.”

बुद्धेर्भेदं धृतेशचैव गुणतस्त्रिविधं शृणु ।
प्रोच्यमानमशेषेण पृथक्त्वेन धनञ्जय ॥ 29 ॥

*buddher bhedam dhṛiteśh chaiva guṇatas tri-vidham śṛiṇu
prochyamānam aśeṣheṇa prithaktvena dhanañjaya*

buddheḥ—of intellect; *bhedam*—the distinctions; *dhṛiteḥ*—of determination; *cha*—and; *eva*—certainly; *guṇataḥ tri-vidham*—according to the three modes of material nature; *śṛiṇu*—hear; *prochyamānam*—described; *aśeṣheṇa*—in detail; *prithaktvena*—distinctly; *dhanañjaya*—conqueror of wealth, Arjun.

Hear now, O Arjun, of the distinctions of intellect and determination, according to the three modes of material nature, as I describe them in detail.

In the previous nine verses, Shri Krishna explained the constituents of work and showed that each of three constituents fall in three categories. Now he explains the two factors that impact the quality and quantity of work. They not only propel action but also control and direct it. These are the intellect and determination. *Buddhi* is the faculty of discrimination that distinguishes between right and wrong. *Dhṛiti* is the inner determination to persist in accomplishing the work undertaken, despite hardships and obstacles on the way. Both are of three kinds in accordance with the modes of nature. Shri

Krishna now discusses both these faculties and their three-fold classifications.

**प्रवृत्तिं च निवृत्तिं च कार्याकार्ये भयाभये ।
बन्धं मोक्षं च या वेति बुद्धिः सा पार्थ सात्त्विकी ॥ ३० ॥**

*pravṛittim cha nivṛittim cha kāryākārye bhayābhaye
bandham mokṣham cha yā vetti buddhiḥ sā pārtha sāttvikī*

pravṛittim—activities; *cha*—and; *nivṛittim*—renunciation from action; *cha*—and; *kārya*—proper action; *akārye*—improper action; *bhaya*—fear; *abhaye*—without fear; *bandham*—what is binding; *mokṣham*—what is liberating; *cha*—and; *yā*—which; *vetti*—understands; *buddhiḥ*—intellect; *sā*—that; *pārtha*—son of Pritha; *sāttvikī*—in the nature of goodness.

The intellect is said to be in the nature of goodness, O Parth, when it understands what is proper action and what is improper action, what is duty and what is non-duty, what is to be feared and what is not to be feared, what is binding and what is liberating.

We constantly exercise our free will to make choices, and our cumulative choices determine where we reach in life. Robert Frost vividly describes this in his poem, The Road Not Taken:

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence;
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

To make proper choices, a developed faculty of discrimination is required. The Bhagavad Gita itself was spoken to Arjun to equip him with the power of discrimination. At the outset, Arjun was confused about his duty. His inordinate attachment to his relatives had bewildered his judgment regarding proper and improper action. Feeling weak and fearful, and in utter confusion, he had surrendered to the Bhagavān and requested him to enlighten him regarding his duty. Through the divine song of wisdom, Bhagavān Krishna helped Arjun develop his power of discrimination, until he finally concluded:

“I have explained to you the knowledge that is more secret than all secrets. Ponder over it deeply, and then do as you wish.” (verse 18.63)

The mode of goodness illuminates the intellect with the light of knowledge thereby refining its ability to discriminate the right and wrong of things, actions, and sentiments. The *sāttvic* intellect is one that makes known to us what type of action is to be performed and what type of action is to be renounced, what is to be feared and what is to be ignored. It explains to us the reason for the shortcomings in our personality and reveals the solution for them.

यया धर्मधर्मं च कार्यं चाकार्यमेव च ।
अयथावत्प्रजानाति बुद्धिः सा पार्थं राजसी ॥३१॥

*yayā dharmam adharmam cha kāryam chākāryam eva cha
ayathāvat prajānāti buddhiḥ sā pārtha rājasī*

yayā—by which; *dharmam*—righteousness; *adharmam*—unrighteousness; *cha*—and; *kāryam*—right conduct; *cha*—and; *akāryam*—wrong conduct; *eva*—certainly; *cha*—and; *ayathā-vat*—confused; *prajānāti*—distinguish; *buddhiḥ*—intellect; *sā*—that; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *rājasī*—in the mode of passion.

The intellect is considered in the mode of passion when it is confused between righteousness and unrighteousness, and cannot distinguish between right and wrong conduct.

The *rājasic* intellect becomes mixed due to personal attachments. At times it sees clearly, but when self-interest comes into play, it becomes tainted and confused. For example, there are people who are very competent in their profession, but childish in familial relationships. They succeed on the career front but become utter failures on the home front because their attachment prevents them from proper perception and conduct. The *rājasic* intellect, colored by attachments and aversions, likes and dislikes is unable to discern the proper course of action. It becomes confused between the important and the

trivial, the permanent and the transient, the valuable and the insignificant.

अधर्मं धर्ममिति या मन्यते तमसावृता ।
सर्वार्थान्विपरीतांश्च बुद्धिः सा पार्थ तामसी ॥ 32 ॥

*adharmaṁ dharmam iti yā manyate tamasāvṛitā
sarvārthān viparītānś cha buddhiḥ sā pārtha tāmasī*

adharmaṁ—irreligion; *dharmam*—religion; *iti*—thus; *yā*—which; *manyate*—imagines; *tamasāvṛitā*—shrouded in darkness; *sarva-arthān*—all things; *viparītān*—opposite; *cha*—and; *buddhiḥ*—intellect; *sā*—that; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *tāmasī*—of the nature of ignorance.

That intellect which is shrouded in darkness, imagining irreligion to be religion, and perceiving untruth to be the truth, is of the nature of ignorance.

The *tāmasic* intellect is without the illumination of sublime knowledge. Hence, it misconstrues *adharma* to be *dharma*. For example, a drunk is attached to the inebriation that drinking alcohol provides. Hence, his poor intellect, covered with the fog of darkness, cannot even perceive the sheer ruin that he brings onto himself, and he does not even mind selling his property to get his next bottle. In the *tāmasic* intellect, the faculty of judgment and the ability for logical reasoning become lost.

धृत्या यया धारयते मनःप्राणेन्द्रियक्रियाः ।
योगेनाव्यभिचारिण्या धृतिः सा पार्थ सत्त्विकी ॥ 33 ॥

*dhrityā yayā dhārayate manah-prāṇendriya-kriyāḥ
yogenāvyabhichāriṇyā dhṛitih sā pārtha sāttvikī*

dhrityā—by determining; *yayā*—which; *dhārayate*—sustains; *manah*—of the mind; *prāṇa*—life-airs; *indriya*—senses; *kriyāḥ*—activities; *yogena*—through Yog; *avyabhichāriṇyā*—with steadfastness; *dhṛitih*—determination; *sā*—that; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *sāttvikī*—in the mode of goodness.

The steadfast will that is developed through Yog, and which sustains the activities of the mind, the life-airs, and the senses, is said to be determination in the mode of goodness.

Dhṛiti (determination) is the inner strength of our mind and intellect to persevere on our path despite difficulties and obstacles. *Dhṛiti* is what keeps our vision focused toward the goal, and mobilizes the latent powers of the body, mind, and intellect to overcome apparently insurmountable impasses on the journey.

Shri Krishna now moves on to describe the three kinds of determination. Through the practice of Yog, the mind becomes disciplined and develops the capacity to rule over the senses and the body. The steadfast willpower that develops when one learns to subdue the senses, discipline the life-airs, and control the mind is *sāttvic dhṛiti* (determination in the mode of goodness).

यया तु धर्मकामार्थान्धृत्या धारयते र्जुन ।
प्रसङ्गेन फलाकाङ्क्षी धृतिः सा पार्थ राजसी ॥ 34 ॥

*yayā tu dharma-kāma-artha-n-dhṛityā dhārayate 'rjuna
prasaṅgena phalākāṅkṣī dhṛitih sā pārtha rājasī*

yayā—by which; *tu*—but; *dharma-kāma-artha-n*—duty, pleasures, and wealth; *dhṛityā*—through steadfast will; *dhārayate*—holds; *arjuna*—Arjun; *prasaṅgena*—due of attachment; *phala-ākāṅkṣī*—desire for rewards; *dhṛitih*—determination; *sā*—that; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *rājasī*—in the mode of passion.

The steadfast will by which one holds to duty, pleasures, and wealth, out of attachment and desire for rewards, is determination in the mode of passion.

Determination is not found exclusively in yogis. Worldly-minded people are also staunchly determined in their pursuits. However, their determination is fanned by their desire to delight in the fruits of their efforts. They are focused on enjoying sensual pleasures, acquiring wealth, etc. And since money is the means for acquiring these, such people cling to money for their very life. Shri Krishna says that determination fuelled by the desire for enjoying rewards is in the mode of passion.

यया स्वप्नं भयं शोकं विषादं मदमेव च ।
न विमुञ्चति दुर्मेथा धृतिः सा पार्थ तामसी ॥ 35 ॥

*yayā svapnam bhayam śhokam viśhādam madam eva cha
na vimuñchati durmedhā dhṛitih sā pārtha tāmasī*

yayā—in which; *svapnam*—dreaming; *bhayam*—fearing; *śhokam*—grieving; *viśhādam*—despair; *madam*—conceit; *eva*—indeed; *cha*—and; *na*—not; *vimuñchati*—give up; *durmedhā*—unintelligent; *dhṛitih*—resolve; *sā*—that; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *tāmasī*—in the mode of ignorance.

That unintelligent resolve is said to be determination in the mode of ignorance, in which one does not give up dreaming, fearing, grieving, despair, and conceit.

Determination is seen in the unintelligent and ignorant too. But it is the obstinacy that arises from fear, despair, and pride. For instance, some people are victims of a fear-complex, and it is interesting to see how they hold on to it with great tenacity, as if it is an inseparable part of their personality. There are others who make their life a living because they cling to some past disappointment and refuse to let go of it, despite observing its ruinous impact upon them. Some insist upon quarreling with all who hurt their ego and its imagined conception of themselves. Shri Krishna states that determination based upon such stubborn clinging to unproductive thoughts is in the mode of ignorance.

सुखं त्रिविधं शृणु मे भरतर्षभ ।
अभ्यासाद्रमते यत्र दुःखान्तं च निगच्छति ॥ 36 ॥

*sukham tv idānīm tri-vidham śhṛiṇu me bharatarṣhabha
abhyāsād ramate yatra duḥkhāntam cha nigachchhati*

sukham—happiness; *tu*—but; *idānīm*—now; *tri-vidham*—of three kinds; *śhṛiṇu*—hear; *me*—from me; *bharata-ṛiṣhabha*—Arjun, the best of the Bharatas; *abhyāsāt*—by practice; *ramate*—rejoices; *yatra*—in which; *duḥkha-antam*—end of all suffering; *cha*—and; *nigachchhati*—reaches.

And now hear from me, O Arjun, of the three kinds of happiness in which the embodied Ātman rejoices, and can even reach the end of all suffering.

In the previous verses, Shri Krishna discussed the constituents of action. Then he described the factors that motivate and control action. Now, he moves on to the goal of action. The ultimate motive behind people's actions is the search for happiness. Everyone desires to be happy, and through their actions they seek fulfillment, peace, and satisfaction. But since everyone's actions differ in their constituent factors, the kind of happiness they derive out of their work is also different. Shri Krishna now goes on to explain the three categories of happiness.

यत्तदग्रे विषमिव परिणामेऽमृतोपमम् ।
तत्सुखं सात्त्विकं प्रोक्तमात्मबुद्धिप्रसादजम् ॥ 37 ॥

*yat tad agre viṣham iva pariṇāme 'mr̥itopamam
tat sukham sāttvikam proktam ātma-buddhi-prasāda-jam*

yat—which; *tat*—that; *agre*—at first; *viṣham iva*—like poison; *pariṇāme*—in the end; *amṛita-upamam*—like nectar; *tat*—that; *sukham*—happiness; *sāttvikam*—in the mode of goodness; *proktam*—is said to be; *ātma-buddhi*—situated in self-knowledge; *prasāda-jam*—generated by the pure intellect.

That which seems like poison at first, but tastes like nectar in the end, is said to be happiness in the mode of goodness. It is generated by the pure intellect that is situated in self-knowledge.

The Indian gooseberry (*āmlā*) is one of those super-foods that are very beneficial for health. It has the Vitamin C of more than 10 oranges. But children dislike it, since it has a bitter taste. Parents in North India encourage children to eat it, saying: *āmle kā khāyā aur baḍoṇ kā kahā, bād meṁ patā chalatā hai* [v20.1] “The benefits of both these—eating of *āmlā* and the advice of the elders—are experienced in the future.” Interestingly, after eating the *āmlā*, in just a couple of minutes, the bitter taste disappears and sweetness is experienced. And the long-term benefits of consuming the natural Vitamin C are undoubtedly numerous. In the above verse, Shri Krishna says that happiness in the mode of goodness is of the same nature; it seems bitter in the short-run, but it tastes like nectar in the end.

The Vedas refer to happiness in the mode of goodness as *śhreya*, which is unpleasant in the present but ultimately beneficial. In contrast to this is *preya*, which is pleasant in the beginning but ultimately harmful. Regarding *śhreya* and *preya*, the Kāṭhopaniṣhad states:

anyachchhreyo 'nyadutaiva preyaste ubhe nānārthe puruṣham sinītaḥ
 tayoḥ śhreya ādadānasya sādhu bhavati hīyate 'rthādy u preyo vṛiṇīte
 śhreyaśhcha preyaśhcha manuṣhyametaстau samparītya vivinakti dhīraḥ
 śhreyo hi dhīro 'bhi preyaso vṛiṇīte preyo mando yogakṣhemād vṛiṇīte
 (1.2.1-2) [v21]

"There are two paths—one is the ‘beneficial’ and the other is the ‘pleasant’. These two lead humans to very different ends. The pleasant is enjoyable in the beginning, but it ends in pain. The ignorant are snared to the pleasant and perish. But the wise are not deceived by its attractions, choose the beneficial, and finally attain happiness."

विषयेन्द्रियसंयोगाद्यतदग्रे अमृतोपमम् ।
 परिणामे विषमिव तत्सुखं राजसं स्मृतम् ॥ 38 ॥

viṣhayendriya-sanyogāt yat tad agre 'mṛitopamam
 pariṇāme viṣham iva tat sukham rājasam smṛitam

viṣhaya—with the sense objects; *indriya*—the senses; *sanyogāt*—from the contact; *yat*—which; *tat*—that; *agre*—at first; *amṛita-upamam*—like nectar; *pariṇāme*—at the end; *viṣham iva*—like poison; *tat*—that; *sukham*—happiness; *rājasam*—in the mode of passion; *smṛitam*—is said to be.

Happiness is said to be in the mode of passion when it is derived from the contact of the senses with their objects. Such happiness is like nectar at first but poison at the end.

Rājasic happiness is experienced as a thrill that arises from the contact between the senses and their objects, but the joy is as short-lived as the contact itself, and leaves in its wake greed, anxiety, guilt, and a thickening of the material illusion. Even in the material realm, for meaningful accomplishment, it is necessary to reject *rājasic* happiness. As a reminder to steer him away from

immediate but misleading joys, India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, used to keep these lines from the poem, Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening, on his desk:

The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

The path to lasting and divine bliss lies not in indulgence, but in renunciation, austerities, and discipline.

यदग्रे चानुबन्धे च सुखं मोहनमात्मनः ।
निद्रालस्यप्रमादोत्थं तत्तामसमुदाहृतम् ॥ 39 ॥

*yad agre chānubandhe cha sukham mohanam ātmanah
nidrālasya-pramādottham tat tāmasam udāhṛitam*

yat—which; *agre*—from beginning; *cha*—and; *anubandhe*—to end; *cha*—and; *sukham*—happiness; *mohanam*—illusory; *ātmanah*—of the self; *nidrā*—sleep; *ālasya*—indolence; *pramāda*—negligence; *uttham*—derived from; *tat*—that; *tāmasam*—in the mode of ignorance; *udāhṛitam*—is said to be.

That happiness which covers the nature of the self from beginning to end, and which is derived from sleep, indolence, and negligence, is said to be in the mode of ignorance.

Tāmasic happiness is of the lowest kind and is foolishness from beginning to end. It throws the Ātman into the darkness of ignorance. And yet, since there is a tiny experience of pleasure in it, people get addicted to it. That is why cigarette smokers find it difficult to break their habit, even while knowing fully well it is harming them. They are unable to reject the happiness they get from the addiction. Shri Krishna states that such pleasures—derived from sleep, laziness, and negligence—are in the mode of ignorance.

न तदस्ति पृथिव्यां वा दिवि देवेषु वा पुनः ।
सत्त्वं प्रकृतिजैर्मुक्तं यदेभिः स्यात्त्रिभिर्गुणैः ॥ ४० ॥

*na tad asti pr̄ithivyām vā divi deveṣhu vā punah
sattvam̄ prakṛiti-jair muktam̄ yad ebhiḥ syāt tribhir guṇaiḥ*

na—no; *tat*—that; *asti*—exists; *pr̄ithivyām*—on earth; *vā*—or; *divi*—the higher celestial abodes; *deveṣhu*—amongst the celestial deities; *vā*—or; *punah*—again; *sattvam*—existence; *prakṛiti-jaiḥ*—born of material nature; *muktam*—liberated; *yat*—that; *ebhiḥ*—from the influence of these; *syāt*—is; *tribhiḥ*—three; *guṇaiḥ*—modes of material nature.

No living being on earth or the higher celestial abodes in this material realm is free from the influence of these three modes of nature.

The Śwetāśhvatar Upaniṣad states that the material energy, Māyā, is tri-colored:

*ajāmekāṁ lohita-śukla-kriṣṇāṁ bahvīḥ prajāḥ srijamānāṁ sa-rūpāḥ
ajo hy eko juṣhamāṇo 'nuśhete jahāty enāṁ bhukta-bhogāṁ ajo 'nyah (4.5) [v22]*

“Material nature has three colors—white, red, and black, i.e. it has three modes—goodness, passion, and ignorance. It is the mother-like womb of the innumerable living beings within the universe. It is brought into existence and supported by the one unborn Bhagavān, who is full of knowledge. Bhagavān, however, does not consort with his material energy. He independently enjoys the pleasure of his transcendental pastimes. But the living entity enjoys her and thus becomes bound.”

Māyā’s domain extends from the nether regions to the celestial abode of Brahma. Since the three modes of nature—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*—are inherent attributes of Māyā, they exist in all the material abodes of existence. Hence all living beings in these abodes, be they humans or the celestial deities, are under the sway of these three modes. The difference is only in the relative proportions of the three *guṇas*. The residents of the nether regions have a predominance of *tamas*; the residents of the earth planet have a predominance of *rajas*; and the residents of the celestial abodes have a predominance of *sattva*. Now, using these three variables, Shri Krishna explains why human beings possess differing

natures.

**ब्राह्मणक्षत्रियविशां शूद्राणां च परन्तप ।
कर्माणि प्रविभक्तानि स्वभावप्रभवैर्गुणैः ॥४१॥**

*brāhmaṇa-kṣatriya-viśhām śhūdrāṇām cha parantapa
karmāṇi pravibhaktāni svabhāva-prabhavaire gunaiḥ*

brāhmaṇa—of the priestly class; *kṣatriya*—the warrior and administrative class; *viśhām*—the mercantile and farming class; *śhūdrāṇām*—of the worker class; *cha*—and; *parantapa*—Arjun, subduer of the enemies; *karmāṇi*—duties; *pravibhaktāni*—distributed; *svabhāva-prabhavaire gunaiḥ*—work based on one's nature and *guṇas*.

The duties of the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras—are distributed according to their qualities, in accordance with their *gunas* (and not by birth).

Someone said very appropriately that to find the perfect profession is like finding a perfect life-partner. But how do we discover the perfect profession for ourselves? Here, Shri Krishna explains that people have different natures, according to the *guṇas* that constitute their personality, and thus different professional duties are suitable for them. The system of *varṇāśhram dharma* was a scientific organization of society according to *svabhāva-prabhavaire gunaiḥ* (work based on one's nature and *guṇas*). In this system of categorization, there were four *āśhrams* (stages in life) and four *varṇas* (occupational categories). The stages in life were: 1) *Brahmacharya āśhram* (student life), which lasted from birth till the age of 25. 2) *Grihastha āśhram* (household life), which was regular married life, from the age of 25 till 50. 3) *Vānaprastha āśhram* (semi-renounced life), which was from the age of 50 till 75. In this stage, one continued to live with the family but practiced renunciation. 4) *Sanyās āśhram* (renounced order), which was from the age of 75 onward, where one gave up all household duties and resided in a holy place, absorbing the mind in Bhagavān.

The four *varṇas* (occupational categories) were Brahmin (priestly class),

Kshatriya (warrior and administrative class), Vaishya (mercantile and farming class), and Shudra (worker class). The *varṇas* were not considered higher or lower amongst themselves. Since the center of society was Bhagavān, everyone worked according to their intrinsic qualities to sustain themselves and society, and make their life a success by progressing toward Brahman-realization. Thus, in the *varṇāśram* system, there was unity in diversity. Diversity is inherent in nature and can never be removed. We have various limbs in our body, and they all perform different functions. Expecting all limbs to perform the same functions is futile. Seeing them all as different is not a sign of ignorance, but factual knowledge of their utilities. Similarly, the variety amidst human beings cannot be ignored. Even in communist countries where equality is the foremost principle, there are party leaders who formulate ideologies; there is the military that wields guns and protects the nation; there are farmers who cultivate the land; and there are industrial workers who do mechanical jobs. The four classes of occupations exist there as well, despite all attempts to equalize. The *varṇāśram* system recognized the diversity in human natures and scientifically prescribed duties and occupations matching people's natures.

However, with the passage of time the *varṇāśram* system deteriorated, and the basis of the *varṇas* changed from one's nature to one's birth. The children of Brahmins started calling themselves as Brahmins, irrespective of whether they possessed the corresponding qualities or not. Also, the concept of upper and lower castes got propagated and the upper castes began looking down upon the lower castes. When the system grew rigid and birth-based, it became dysfunctional. This was a social defect that crept in with time, and was not the original intention of the *Varnāśram* system. *In the next few verses, according to the original categorization of the system, Shri Krishna maps the gunas of people with their natural qualities of work.*

**शामो दमस्तपः शौचं क्षान्तिरार्जवमेव च ।
ज्ञानं विज्ञानमास्तिक्यं ब्रह्मकर्म स्वभावजम् ॥ 42 ॥**

*śhamo dasas tapah śaucham kṣhāntir ārjavam eva cha
jñānam vijñānam āstikyam brahma-karma svabhāva-jam*

śhamah—tranquility; *damah*—restraint; *tapah*—austerity; *śaucham*—purity; *kṣhāntih*—patience; *ārjavam*—integrity; *eva*—certainly; *cha*—and; *jñānam*—knowledge; *vijñānam*—wisdom; *āstikyam*—belief in a hereafter; *brahma*—of the priestly class; *karma*—work; *svabhāva-jam*—born of one's intrinsic qualities.

Tranquility, restraint, austerity, purity, patience, integrity, knowledge, wisdom, and belief in a hereafter—these are the intrinsic qualities of work for Brahmins.

Those who possessed predominantly *sāttvic* natures were the Brahmins. Their primary duties were to undertake austerities, practice purity of mind, do devotion, and inspire others by their examples. Thus, they were expected to be tolerant, humble, and spiritually minded. They were expected to perform Vedic rituals for themselves and for the other classes. Their nature inclined them toward a love for knowledge. So, the profession of teaching—cultivating knowledge and sharing it with others—was also suitable for them. Although they did not participate in the government administration themselves, they guided the executives. And because they possessed wisdom of the scriptures, their views on social and political matters were greatly valued.

**शौर्यं तेजो धृतिर्दक्ष्यं युद्धे चाप्यपलायनम् ।
दानमीश्वरभावश्च क्षात्रं कर्म स्वभावजम् ॥ 43 ॥**

*śhauryam tejo dhṛitir dākṣhyam yuddhe chāpy apalāyanam
dānam iśhvara-bhāvaś cha kṣhātram karma svabhāva-jam*

śhauryam—valor; *tejah*—strength; *dhṛitiḥ*—fortitude; *dākṣhyam* *yuddhe*—skill in weaponry; *cha*—and; *api*—also; *apalāyanam*—not fleeing; *dānam*—large-heartedness; *iśhvara*—leadership; *bhāvah*—qualities; *cha*—and; *kṣhātram*—of the warrior and administrative class; *karma*—work; *svabhāva-jam*—born of one's intrinsic qualities.

Valor, strength, fortitude, skill in weaponry, resolve never to retreat from

battle, large-heartedness in charity, and leadership abilities, these are the natural qualities of work for Kshatriyas.

The Kshatriyas were those whose natures were predominantly *rājasic*, with a mixture of *sattva guṇa*. This made them royal, heroic, daring, commanding, and charitable. Their qualities were suitable for martial and leadership works, and they formed the administrative class that governed the country. Yet, they realized that they were not as learned and pure as the Brahmins. Hence, they respected the Brahmins and took advice from them on ideological, spiritual, and policy matters.

**कृषिगौरक्ष्यवाणिज्यं वैश्यकर्म स्वभावजम् ।
परिचर्यात्मकं कर्म शूद्रस्यापि स्वभावजम् ॥ 44 ॥**

*kṛiṣhi-gau-rakṣhya-vāṇijyam vaiśhya-karma svabhāva-jam
paricharyātmakam karma śūdrasyāpi svabhāva-jam*

kṛiṣhi—agriculture; *gau-rakṣhya*—dairy farming; *vāṇijyam*—commerce; *vaiśhya*—of the mercantile and farming class; *karma*—work; *svabhāva-jam*—born of one's intrinsic qualities; *paricharyā*—serving through work; *ātmakam*—natural; *karma*—duty; *śūdrasya*—of the worker class; *api*—and; *svabhāva-jam*—born of one's intrinsic qualities.

Agriculture, dairy farming, and commerce are the natural works for those with the qualities of Vaishyas. Serving through work is the natural duty for those with the qualities of Shudras.

The Vaishyas were those whose natures were predominantly *rājasic* with a mixture of *tamo guṇa*. They were thus inclined toward producing and possessing economic wealth through business and agriculture. They sustained the economy of the nation and created jobs for the other classes. They were also expected to undertake charitable projects to share their wealth with the deprived sections of society.

The Shudras were those who possessed *tāmasic* natures. They were not inclined toward scholarship, administration, or commercial enterprise. The best way for

their progress was to serve society according to their calling. Artisans, technicians, job-workers, tailors, craftsmen, barbers, etc. were included in this class.

**स्वे स्वे कर्मण्यभिरतः संसिद्धिं लभते नरः ।
स्वकर्मनिरतः सिद्धिं यथा विन्दति तच्छृणु ॥ 45 ॥**

*sve sve karmany abhiratah sansiddhim labhate narah
sva-karma-niratah siddhim yathā vindati tach chhriṇu*

sve sve—respectively; *karmani*—work; *abhiratah*—fulfilling; *sansiddhim*—perfection; *labhate*—achieve; *narah*—a person; *sva-karma*—to one's own prescribed duty; *niratah*—engaged; *siddhim*—perfection; *yathā*—as; *vindati*—attains; *tat*—that; *śhriṇu*—hear.

By fulfilling their duties, born of their innate qualities, human beings can attain perfection. Now hear from me how one can become perfect by discharging one's prescribed duties.

Swa-dharma is the prescribed duties based upon our *gunas* and station in life. Performing them ensures that we use the potential abilities of our body and mind in a constructive and beneficial manner. This leads to purification and growth, and is auspicious for the self and society. And since the prescribed duties are in accordance with our innate qualities, we feel comfortable and stable in discharging them. Then, as we enhance our competence, the *swa-dharma* also changes and we step into the next higher class. In this manner, we keep advancing by dutifully executing our responsibilities.

**यतः प्रवृत्तिर्भूतानां येन सर्वमिदं ततम् ।
स्वकर्मणा तमश्चर्यं सिद्धिं विन्दति मानवः ॥ 46 ॥**

*yataḥ pravṛittir bhūtānām yena sarvam idam tatam
sva-karmanā tam abhyarchya siddhim vindati mānavah*

yataḥ—from whom; *pravṛittiḥ*—have come into being; *bhūtānām*—of all living entities; *yena*—by whom; *sarvam*—all; *idam*—this; *tatam*—pervaded; *sva-karmanā*—by one's natural occupation; *tam*—him; *abhyarchya*—by worshipping; *siddhim*—perfection; *vindati*—attains; *mānavah*—a person.

By performing one's natural occupation, one worships the Creator from

whom all living entities have come into being, and by whom the whole universe is pervaded. By such performance of work, a person easily attains perfection.

No Ātman is superfluous in Bhagavān's creation. His divine plan is for the gradual perfection of all living beings. We all fit into his scheme like tiny cogs in the giant wheel. And he does not expect more from us than the competence he has given to us. Therefore, if we can simply perform our *swa-dharma* in accordance with our nature and position in life, we will participate in his divine plan for our purification. When done in devotional consciousness our work itself becomes a form of worship.

A powerful story illustrating that no duty is ugly or impure, and it is only the consciousness with which we do it that determines its worth, was told to Yudhishthir by Sage Markandeya, in the Vana Parva of the Mahābhārat. The story goes that a young *sanyāsī* went into the forest, where he meditated and performed austerities for a long time. A few years went by, and one day a crow's droppings fell upon him from the tree above. He looked angrily at the bird, and it fell dead on the ground. The *sanyāsī* realized he had developed mystical powers as a result of his austerities. He became filled with pride. Shortly thereafter, he went to a house to beg for alms. The housewife came to the door, and requested him to wait a while, since she was nursing her sick husband. This angered the monk and he glanced angrily at her, thinking, "You wretched woman, how dare you make me wait! You do not know my powers." Reading his mind, the woman replied, "Do not look at me with such anger. I am not a crow to be burnt by your glance." The monk was shocked, and asked how she knew about the incident? The housewife said she did not practice any austerities, but did her duties with devotion and dedication. By virtue of it, she had been illumined and was able to read his mind. She then asked him to meet a righteous butcher who lived in the town of Mithila, and said that he would

answer his questions on *dharma*. The *sanyāsī* overcame his initial hesitation of speaking to a lowly butcher, and went to Mithila. The righteous butcher then explained to him that we all have our respective *swa-dharma*, based upon our past karmas and competence. But if we discharge our natural duty, renouncing the desire for personal gain and rising above the fleeting happiness and misery coming our way, we will purify ourselves and graduate to the next class of *dharma*. In this manner, by doing the prescribed duties and not running away from them, the Ātman gradually evolves from its present gross consciousness to divine consciousness. The lecture the butcher delivered is known as the Vyadha Gita of the Mahābhārat.

This message is particularly applicable to Arjun because he wanted to run away from his *dharma*, thinking it is painful and miserable. In this verse, Shri Krishna instructs him that by doing his prescribed duty in proper consciousness he will be worshipping the Supreme, and will easily attain perfection.

**श्रेयान्स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात् ।
स्वभावनियतं कर्म कुर्वन्नाप्नोति किल्बिषम् ॥४७॥**

*śhreyān swa-dharma viguṇah para-dharmāt sv-anuṣṭhitāt
svabhāva-niyataṁ karma kurvan nāpnoti kilbiṣham*

śhreyān—better; *swa-dharmaḥ*—one's own prescribed occupational duty; *viguṇah*—imperfectly done; *para-dharmāt*—than another's *dharma*; *su-anuṣṭhitāt*—perfectly done; *svabhāva-niyatam*—according to one's innate nature; *karma*—duty; *kurvan*—by performing; *na āpnoti*—does not incur; *kilbiṣham*—sin.

It is better to do one's own *dharma*, even though imperfectly, than to do another's *dharma*, even though perfectly. By doing one's innate duties, a person does not incur sin.

When we do our *swa-dharma* (prescribed occupational duties), there is a two-fold advantage. It is in tune with our disposition. Hence, it is as natural to our personality as flying is to a bird and swimming is to a fish. Secondly, since it is

comfortable to the mind, it can almost be done involuntarily, and the consciousness becomes free to be engaged in devotion.

Instead, if we abandon our duties thinking them to be defective, and take up another's duties unsuitable for our nature, we struggle against the innate inclination of our personality. This was exactly Arjun's situation. His Kshatriya nature was inclined to military and administrative activities. Events drove him to a situation where it was necessary to participate in a war of righteousness. If he were to shirk from his duty and withdraw from the battlefield to practice austerities in the forest, it would not help him spiritually, for even in the forest, he would not be able to get away from his inherent nature. In all likelihood, he would gather the tribal people in the jungle and become their king. Instead, it would be better for him to continue doing his duty born of his nature, and worship Bhagavān by offering the fruits of his works to him.

When one becomes spiritually accomplished the *swa-dharma* changes. It no longer remains at the bodily platform; it becomes the *dharma* of the Ātman, which is devotion to Bhagavān. At that stage, one is justified in giving up occupational duties and engaging wholeheartedly in devotion because that is now the *swa-dharma* of one's nature. For people with that eligibility, Shri Krishna will give the final conclusion in the end of the Bhagavad Gita: "Give up all varieties of *dharma*s and simply surrender unto me." (18.66) However, until that stage is reached, the instruction given in this verse applies. Thus, the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam states:

*tāvat karmāṇi kurvīta na nirvidyeta yāvata
mat-kathā-śhravaṇādau vā śraddhā yāvan na jāyate (11.20.9) [v23]*

"We must keep doing our prescribed occupational duties as long as the taste for devotion through hearing, chanting, and meditating on the *leelas* of Bhagavān has not developed."

सहजं कर्म कौन्तेय सदोषमपि न त्यजेत् ।
सर्वारम्भा हि दोषेण धूमेनाग्निरिवावृताः ॥ 48 ॥

*saha-jam karma kaunteya sa-doṣham api na tyajet
sarvārambhā hi doṣheṇa dhūmenāgnir ivāvṛitāḥ*

saha-jam—born of one's nature; *karma*—duty; *kaunteya*—Arjun, the son of Kunti; *sa-doṣham*—with defects; *api*—even if; *na tyajet*—one should not abandon; *sarvārambhāḥ*—all endeavors; *hi*—indeed; *doṣheṇa*—with evil; *dhūmena*—with smoke; *agnih*—fire; *iva*—as; *avṛitāḥ*—veiled.

One should not abandon duties born of one's nature, even if one sees defects in them, O son of Kunti. Indeed, all endeavors are veiled by some evil, as fire is by smoke.

People sometimes recoil from their duty because they see a defect in it. Here, Shri Krishna states that no work is free from defect, just as fire naturally has smoke on top of it. For example, we cannot breathe without killing millions of microbes. If we cultivate the land, we destroy innumerable microorganisms. If we succeed against competition in business, we deprive others of wealth. When we eat, we deprive another of food. Since *swa-dharma* entails activity, it cannot be devoid of defects.

But the benefits of the *swa-dharma* far outweigh its defects. And the foremost benefit is that it provides a comfortable and natural path for one's purification and elevation. In his book, *Making a Life, Making a Living*, Mark Albion, who was a professor at the Harvard Business School, cites a study in which the careers of 1,500 business school graduates were tracked from 1960 to 1980. From the beginning, graduates were grouped in two categories. In category A were those who said they wanted to make money first, so that they could do what they really wanted to do later, after they had taken care of their financial concerns. Eighty-three percent fell in category A. In category B were those who pursued their interests first, sure that money would eventually follow. Seventeen percent came in category B. After 20 years, there were 101

millionaires. One person was from category A (who wanted to make money first), and one hundred from category B (who pursued their interest first). The overwhelming majority of the people who became wealthy did so thanks to the work they found profoundly absorbing. Mark Albion concludes that for most people there is a difference between work and play. But if they do what they love, then work becomes play, and they never have to work for another day in their life. That is what Shri Krishna is asking Arjun to do—not to abandon the work that is best suited to his nature, even if it has defects in it, rather to work according to his natural propensity. *But for work to be elevating, it must be done in the proper consciousness, described in the next verse.*

असक्तबुद्धिः सर्वत्र जितात्मा विगतस्पृहः ।
नैष्कर्म्यसिद्धिं परमां सन्यासेनाधिगच्छति ॥४९॥

*asakta-buddhiḥ sarvatra jitĀtman vigata-sprihāḥ
naishkarmya-siddhim paramām sanyāsenādhigachchhati*

asakta-buddhiḥ—those whose intellect is unattached; *sarvatra*—everywhere; *jita-Ātman*—who have mastered their mind; *vigata-sprihāḥ*—free from desires; *naishkarmya-siddhim*—state of actionlessness; *paramām*—highest; *sanyāsenā*—by the practice of renunciation; *adhigachchhati*—attain.

Those whose intellect is unattached everywhere, who have mastered the mind, and are free from desires by the practice of renunciation, attain the highest perfection of freedom from action.

In this last chapter, Shri Krishna repeats many of the principles he has already explained. In the beginning of this chapter, he explained to Arjun that merely running away from the responsibilities of life is not *sanyās*, nor is it renunciation. Now he describes the state of actionlessness, or *naishkarmya-siddhi*. This state can be reached even amidst the flow of the world by detaching ourselves from events and outcomes, and simply focusing on doing our duty. This is just as water flowing under a bridge enters from one side and flows out from the other. The bridge is neither the recipient of the water nor its

distributor; it remains unaffected by its flow. Likewise, the *karm yogis* do their duty, but keep the mind unaffected by the stream of events. They do not neglect putting in their best efforts in doing their duty, as an act of worship to Bhagavān, but they leave the final outcome in his hands, and are thus contented and undisturbed with whatever happens.

Here's a simple story to illustrate this point. A man had two daughters; the first was married to a farmer and the second was married to a brick kiln owner. One day, the father rang up the first daughter and inquired how she was doing. She replied, "Father, we are going through economic hardships. Please pray to Bhagavān for us that we may have plentiful rains in the coming months." He then rang up the second daughter, and she requested, "Father, we are low on funds. Please request Bhagavān not to send rains this year, so that we may have lots of sunshine and a good production of bricks." The father heard the opposite requests of his daughters, and thought, "Bhagavān alone knows what is best. Let him do what he feels is best." Such acceptance of the will of Bhagavān brings detachment from outcomes, despite being immersed in the incessant stream of events in the world.

सिद्धिं प्राप्तो यथा ब्रह्म तथाप्नोति निबोध मे ।
समासेनैव कौन्तेय निष्ठा ज्ञानस्य या परा ॥ 50 ॥

*siddhim prāpto yathā brahma tathāpnoti nibodha me
samāsenāiva kaunteya niṣṭhā jñānasya yā parā*

siddhim—perfection; *prāptaḥ*—attained; *yathā*—how; *brahma*—Brahman; *tathā*—also; *āpnoti*—attain; *nibodha*—hear; *me*—from me; *samāsena*—briefly; *eva*—indeed; *kaunteya*—Arjun, the son of Kunti; *niṣṭhā*—firmly fixed; *jñānasya*—of knowledge; *yā*—which; *parā*—transcendental.

Hear from me briefly, O Arjun, and I shall explain how one, who has attained perfection (of cessation of actions), can also attain Brahman by being firmly fixed in transcendental knowledge.

It is one matter to read theoretical knowledge, but it is a different matter to

realize it practically. It is said that good ideas are a dime a dozen, but they are not worth a plug nickel if you don't act on them. The theoretical Pundits may have knowledge of all the scriptures in their head, but still be bereft of realization. On the other hand, the *karm yogis* get opportunities day and night to practice the truths of the scriptures. Thus, the consistent performance of *karm yog* results in the realization of spiritual knowledge. And when one attains the perfection of *naishkarmya-siddhi*, or actionlessness while performing work, transcendental knowledge becomes available through experience. Fixed in that knowledge, the *karm yogi* attains the highest perfection of Brahman-realization. *Shree Krishna explains how this happens in the next verse few verses.*

बुद्ध्या विशुद्ध्या युक्तो धृत्यात्मानं नियम्य च ।
शब्दादीन्विषयांस्त्यक्त्वा रागद्वेषौ व्युदस्य च ॥ ५१ ॥

विविक्तसेवी लघ्वाशी यतवाक्कायमानसः ।
ध्यानयोगपरो नित्यं वैराग्यं समुपाश्रितः ॥ ५२ ॥

अहङ्कारं बलं दर्पं कामं क्रोधं परिग्रहम् ।
विमुच्य निर्ममः शान्तो ब्रह्मभूयाय कल्पते ॥ ५३ ॥

*buddhyā viśhuddhayā yukto dhṛityĀtmannam niyamya cha
śhabdādīn viśhayāns tyaktvā rāga-dveṣhau vyudasya cha*

*vivikta-sevī laghv-āśhī yata-vāk-kāya-mānasah
dhyāna-yoga-paro nityam vairāgyam samupāśhritaḥ*

*ahankāram balam darpam kāmam krodham parigraham
vimuchya nirmamah śānto brahma-bhūyāya kalpate*

buddhyā—intellect; *viśhuddhayā*—purified; *yuktaḥ*—endowed with; *dhṛityā*—by determination; *Ātmannam*—the intellect; *niyamya*—restraining; *cha*—and; *śhabda-ādīn viśhayān*—sound and other objects of the senses; *tyaktvā*—abandoning; *rāga-dveṣhau*—attachment and aversion; *vyudasya*—casting aside; *cha*—and; *vivikta-sevī*—relishing solitude; *laghu-āśhī*—eating light; *yata*—controls; *vāk*—speech; *kāya*—body; *mānasah*—and mind; *dhyāna-yoga-parah*—engaged in meditation; *nityam*—always; *vairāgyam*—dispassion; *samupāśhritaḥ*—having taken shelter of; *ahankāram*—egotism; *balam*—violence; *darpam*—arrogance; *kāmam*—desire; *krodham*—anger; *parigraham*—selfishness; *vimuchya*—being freed from; *nirmamah*—without possessiveness of property; *śāntah*—peaceful; *brahma-bhūyāya*—union with *Brahman*; *kalpate*—is fit.

One becomes fit to attain *Brahman* when he or she possesses a purified intellect and firmly restrains the senses, abandoning sound and other objects of the senses, casting aside attraction and aversion. Such a person relishes solitude, eats lightly, controls body, mind, and speech, is ever engaged in meditation, and practices dispassion. Free from egotism, violence, arrogance, desire, possessiveness of property, and selfishness, such a person, situated in tranquility, is fit for union with *Brahman* (i.e., realization of the Absolute Truth as *Brahman*).

Shri Krishna has been explaining how, by performing our duties in the proper consciousness, we can attain perfection. He now describes the excellence that is required for the perfection of *Brahman*-realization. He says in that state of perfection we develop a purified intellect that is established in transcendental knowledge. The mind is controlled due to not indulging in likes and dislikes. The senses are restrained, and the impulses of the body and speech are tenaciously disciplined. The activities for bodily maintenance, such as eating and sleeping, are wisely held in balance. Such a yogi is deeply contemplative, and hence prefers solitude. The ego and its lust for power and prestige are dissolved. Constantly engaging the mind in transcendence, the yogi is tranquil and free from the bonds of desire, anger, and greed. Such a yogi attains realization of the Absolute Truth as *Brahman*.

**ब्रह्मभूतः प्रसन्नात्मा न शोचति न काङ्क्षति ।
समः सर्वेषु भूतेषु मद्भक्तिं लभते पराम् ॥ 54 ॥**

*brahma-bhūtaḥ prasannātman na śhochati na kāṅkṣhati
samah sarveṣu bhūteṣu mad-bhaktim labhate parām*

brahma-bhūtaḥ—one situated in *Brahman*; *prasanna-Ātman*—mentally serene; *na*—neither; *śhochati*—grieving; *na*—nor; *kāṅkṣhati*—desiring; *samah*—equitably disposed; *sarveṣu*—toward all; *bhūteṣu*—living beings; *mat-bhaktim*—devoiton to me; *labhate*—attains; *parām*—supreme.

One situated in the transcendental *Brahman* realization becomes mentally

serene, neither grieving nor desiring. Being equitably disposed toward all living beings, such a yogi attains supreme devotion unto me.

Shri Krishna concludes his description of the stage of perfection. The words *Brahma-bhūtaḥ* mean the state of *Brahman* realization. Situated in it, one is *prasannĀtman*, meaning serene and unaffected by turbid and painful experiences. *Na śhochati* means one does not grieve nor feel any incompleteness. *Na kāṅkṣhati* means one does not crave for any material thing to make one's happiness complete. Such a yogi sees all living beings with equal vision, realizing the substratum of *Brahman* in all of them. In such a state, one is situated on the platform of realized knowledge. However, Shri Krishna concludes the verse with a twist. He says that in such a realized state of knowledge, one then attains *parā bhakti* (divine love) for Bhagavān.

The *jñānīs* are often fond of saying that *bhakti* is only to be done as an intermediate step toward *Brahman* realization. They claim that *bhakti* is for the purpose of purifying the heart, and at the end of the journey, only *jñāna* remains. Thus, they recommend that those who possess a strong intellect can ignore devotion and simply cultivate knowledge. But the above verse negates such a viewpoint. Shri Krishna states that having attained the highest realization of *jñāna*, one develops *parā bhakti*. Ved Vyāsa has declared the same in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam:

*Ātmanrāmāśh cha munayo nirgranthā apy urukrame
kurvanyt ahaitukīm bhaktim ittham-bhūta-guṇo hariḥ (1.7.10) [v24]*

“Even those who are *Ātmanrām* (rejoicing in the self), established in self-knowledge, and liberated from material bonds, such perfected Ātman(s) desire to possess *bhakti* toward Bhagavān. The super-excellent qualities of Bhagavān are such that they attract even the liberated Ātman(s).” There are many examples of renowned *jñānīs* who had attained self-knowledge and were situated in the realization of the formless *Brahman*. However, when they got a glimpse of the

transcendental divine qualities of Bhagavān, they naturally got drawn toward *bhakti*. Instances of such *jñānīs* from each of the four *yugas* are given here.

The greatest *jñānīs* in *Satya Yuga* were the four sons of Brahma—Sanat Kumar, Sanatan Kumar, Sanak Kumar, and Sanandana Kumar. They were self-realized from birth, and their minds were always absorbed in the formless *Brahman*. These four brothers once visited Vaikunth, the divine abode of Bhagavān Vishnu. There, the fragrance from the *tulsi* (holy basil) leaves at the lotus feet of the Bhagavān entered their nostrils, causing a thrill of ecstasy in their hearts. Immediately, their meditation on the attributeless *Brahman* ended, and they were immersed in the bliss of divine love for Bhagavān Vishnu. They beseeched him for a boon:

*kāmam bhavaḥ sva-vrijinair nirayeśhu naḥ stāch
cheto 'livad yadi nu te padayo rameta (Bhāgavatam 3.15.49) [v25]*

“O Bhagavān, we do not even mind if you send us to Naraka, so long as our mind gets the opportunity to drink the divine love bliss that emanates from your lotus feet.” Just imagine, even after having realized the formless *Brahman*, these foremost *jñānīs* were willing to reside in Naraka for the sake of relishing the bliss of the personal form of Bhagavān.

Let us now move on to *Tretā Yuga*. The topmost *jñānī* in this age was King Janak. He was the father of Sita, the eternal consort of Bhagavān Ram. He was also known as *Videha*, one who was beyond all perceptions of the body. His mind would remain ever absorbed in the formless *Brahman*. One day, however, Sage Vishwamitra came to meet him, along with Bhagavān Ram and Lakshman. What took place then is described in the *Ramayana*:

inhani bilokata ati anurāgā, barabasa brahmasukhahi mana tyāgā [v26]

“On seeing Bhagavān Ram, King Janak became detached from the bliss of the formless *Brahman*, and deeply attached to the personal form of the Supreme

Bhagavān.” In this manner, the greatest *jñānī* of the age of *Tretā* came to the path of *bhakti*.”

The topmost *jñānī* in the age of *Dwāpar* was Shukadev, the son of Sage Ved Vyas. The Puranas describe him as being so elevated that he remained in his mother’s womb for twelve years, thinking that if he came into the world, the material energy, Māyā, would overpower him. Finally, Sage Narad came and spoke to him through his mother’s ear, reassuring him that nothing would happen and he should emerge from the womb. Finally, he emerged, and by his yogic power, he expanded his body to that of a twelve-year old and renounced home to live in the forest. There, he soon reached the highest state of *samādhi*. Years went by, and one day Ved Vyas’s students were cutting wood in the forest, when they saw him in *samādhi*. They went back and told the Sage about it. He told them to recite a verse in Shukadev’s ears, describing the beauty of the personal form of Bhagavān Krishna:

*barhāpiḍam naṭa-vara-vapuh karṇayoh karṇikāram
bibhrad vāsaḥ kanaka-kapiśham vajjayantīm cha mālām
randhrān venor adhara-sudhayāpūrayan gopa-vṛindair
vrindāraṇyaṁ sva-pada-ramaṇam prāviśhad gīta-kīrtih*

(Bhāgavatam 10.21.5) [v27]

“Shri Krishna is adorned with a peacock feathered crown upon his head, and exhibits his form as the greatest dancer. His ears are decorated with blue *karṇikā* flowers. His shawl is the color of brilliant gold. He wears a garland made of *vajjayantī* beads. He fills the holes of his flute with the nectar from his lips. His praises are sung as he enters Vrindavan, surrounded by his cowherd friends, and the marks of his footprints beautify the earth.” Shukadev was absorbed in the formless *Brahman* when the verse entered his ears. Suddenly, the object of his meditation transformed into the enchanting form of Bhagavān Krishna. He felt so deeply attracted to the bliss of the personal form of Bhagavān, that he left his *samādhi* and went back to his father, Ved Vyas. From him, he heard the

Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam, which is full of the sweetness of *bhakti*. Later, on the banks of the Ganges, he related it to King Parikshit, grandson of Arjun. In this manner, the greatest *jñānī* of the age of *Dwāpar* got drawn to the path of *bhakti*.

Finally, we come to *Kali Yuga*. Jagadguru Shankaracharya is widely considered the greatest *jñānī* of this age. He is widely acclaimed as the propagator of *advaita vāda* (non-dualism), in which he stated that there is only one entity in existence, which is the *nirguṇa* (without qualities), *nirviśheṣha* (attributeless), *nirākār* (formless) *Brahman*. However, many people are unaware that from the age of twenty until he left his body at the age of thirty-two, he wrote hundreds of verses in praise of Bhagavān Krishna, Bhagavān Ram, Bhagavān Shiv, Mother Durga, etc. He also visited the four *dhāms* (centers of spirituality in the four corners of India), and worshipped deities of the personal forms of Bhagavān in all of them. In Prabodh Sudhākar, he writes:

kāmyopāsanayārthayantyanudināṁ kiñchitphalam swepsitam
kechit swargamathāpavargamapare yogādiyajñādibhiḥ
asmākaṁ yadunandanāṅghriyugaladhyānāvadhānārthinām
kim lokena damena kim nripatinā swargāpavargaiśhcha kim
(verse 250) [v28]

“Those who perform righteous actions for the attainment of celestial abodes may do so. Those who desire liberation via the path of *jñāna* or *ashtāng yog* may pursue that goal. As for me, I want nothing of these two paths. I wish only to engross myself in the nectar of Shri Krishna’s lotus feet. I do not desire either worldly or heavenly pleasures, nor do I desire liberation. I am a *rasik* who relishes the bliss of divine love.” The fact is that Shankaracharya was a great devotee of Bhagavān Krishna. What he taught in his *bhāṣhyas* (commentaries) was the need of the times. When he appeared upon the earth, Buddhism was prevailing all over India. In such an environment, to reestablish the faith of the Buddhists in the Vedas, he sidelined devotion while writing his *bhāṣhyas*. But later, in the numerous *stutis* (praises) he wrote for the personal forms of

Bhagavān, he revealed his inner devotion. Shankaracharya was thus an example in the age of *Kali*, of someone who had reached the highest realization of *jñāna*, and who then did devotion.

**भक्त्या मामभिजानाति यावान्यश्चास्मि तत्त्वतः ।
ततो मां तत्त्वतो ज्ञात्वा विशते तदनन्तरम् ॥ ५५ ॥**

*bhaktyā mām abhijānāti yāvān yaś chāsmi tattvataḥ
tato mām tattvato jñātvā viśhate tad-anantaram*

bhaktyā—by loving devotion; *mām*—me; *abhijānāti*—one comes to know; *yāvān*—as much as; *yaḥ cha asmi*—as I am; *tattvataḥ*—in truth; *tataḥ*—then; *mām*—me; *tattvataḥ*—in truth; *jñātvā*—having known; *viśhate*—enters; *tat-anantaram*—thereafter.

Only by loving devotion to me does one come to know who I am in truth. Then, having come to know me, my devotee enters into full consciousness of me.

Shri Krishna stated in the previous verse that on becoming situated in transcendental knowledge one develops devotion. Now he says that only through devotion can one come to know Bhagavān's personality. Previously, the *jñānī* had realized Bhagavān as the *nirguna* (quality-less), *nirviśheṣha* (attribute-less), *nirākār* (formless) *Brahman*. But the *jñānī* had no realization of the personal form of Bhagavān. The secret of that personal form cannot be known through *karm*, *jñāna*, *aṣṭāṅg yog*, etc. It is love that opens the door to the impossible and makes way for the inaccessible. Shri Krishna states here that the mystery of Bhagavān's form, virtues, pastimes, abode, and associates can only be comprehended through unalloyed devotion. The devotees understand Bhagavān because they possess the eyes of love.

The Padma Purāṇ mentions a beautiful incident illustrating the above truth. A *rishi* by the name of Jabali saw a very effulgent and peaceful maiden meditating in the forest. He requested her to reveal her identity and purpose of meditation. She replied:

brahmaividyāhamatulā yogim̄ndrairyā cha mṛigya te
 sāham hari padāmbhoja kāmyayā suchiram̄ tapaḥ
 charāmyasmin vane ghore dhyāyantī puruṣhottamam
 brahmānandena pūrnāham̄ tenānandena triptadhīḥ
 tathāpi śhūnyamĀtmannam̄ manye kṛiṣhṇaratī vinā [v29]

“I am *Brahma Vidyā* (the science of knowing the self, which ultimately leads to the *Brahman* realization of Bhagavān). Great yogis and mystics perform austerities to know me. However, I am myself performing severe austerities to develop love at the lotus feet of the personal form of Bhagavān. I am replete and satiated with the bliss of *Brahman*. Yet, without loving attachment to Bhagavān Krishna, I feel empty and void.” Thus, mere knowledge is insufficient for relishing the bliss of the personal form of Bhagavān. It is through *bhakti* that one enters into this secret and achieves full Brahman-consciousness.

सर्वकर्मण्यपि सदा कुर्वाणो मदव्यपाश्रयः ।
 मत्प्रसादादवाज्ञोति शाश्वतं पदमव्ययम् ॥५६॥

sarva-karmāṇy api sadā kurvāṇo mad-vyapāśhrayaḥ
 mat-prasādād avāpnōti śhāśhvataṁ padam avyayam

sarva—all; *karmāṇi*—actions; *api*—though; *sadā*—always; *kurvāṇah*—performing; *mat-vyapāśhrayah*—take full refuge in me; *mat-prasādāt*—by my grace; *avāpnōti*—attain; *śhāśhvataṁ*—the eternal; *padam*—abode; *avyayam*—imperishable.

My devotees, though performing all kinds of actions, take full refuge in me. By my grace, they attain the eternal and imperishable abode.

In the previous verse, Shri Krishna explained that through *bhakti* the devotees enter into full awareness of him. Equipped with it, they see everything in its connection with Bhagavān. They see their body, mind, and intellect as the energies of Bhagavān; they see their material possessions as the property of Bhagavān; they see all living beings and parts and parcels of Bhagavān; and they see themselves as his tiny servants. In that divine consciousness, they do

not give up work, rather they renounce the pride of being the doers and enjoyers of work. They see all work as devotional service to the Supreme, and they depend upon him for its performance.

Then, upon leaving their body, they go to the divine abode of Bhagavān. Just as the material realm is made from the material energy, the divine realm is made from the spiritual energy. Hence, it is free from the defects of material nature, and is perfect in every way. It is *sat-chit-ānand* i.e., full of eternity, knowledge, and bliss. Regarding his divine realm, Shri Krishna had said in verse 15.6: “Neither the sun nor the moon, nor fire can illumine that supreme abode of mine. Having gone there, one does not return to this material world again.”

The various forms of Bhagavān have their own personal abodes in the spiritual realm, where they engage in eternal loving pastimes with their devotees. Those who perfect their selfless loving service toward him go to the abode of their worshipped form of Bhagavān. Thus, the devotees of Bhagavān Krishna go to Golok; those of Bhagavān Vishnu go to Vaikunth; the devotees of Bhagavān Ram go to Saket; the worshippers of Bhagavān Shiv go to Shiv Lok; those of Mother Durga go to Devi Lok, etc. The devotees, who reach these divine abodes, having attained him, participate in his divine pastimes that are imbued with the perfection of the spiritual energy.

चेतसा सर्वकर्माणि मयि सन्न्यस्य मत्परः ।
बुद्धियोगमुपाश्रित्य मच्चित्तः सततं भव ॥५७॥

*chetasā sarva-karmāṇi mayi sannyasya mat-parah
buddhi-yogam upāśritya mach-chittah satatam bhava*

chetasā—by consciousness; *sarva-karmāṇi*—every activity; *mayi*—to me; *sannyasya*—dedicating; *mat-parah*—having me as the supreme goal; *buddhi-yogam*—having the intellect united with Bhagavān; *upāśritya*—taking shelter of; *mat-chittah*—consciousness absorbed in me; *satatam*—always; *bhava*—be.

Dedicate your every activity to me, making me your supreme goal. Taking shelter of the Yog of the intellect, keep your consciousness absorbed in me always.

Yog means “union,” and *buddhi yog* means “having the intellect united with Bhagavān.” This union of the intellect occurs when it is firmly convinced that everything in existence has emanated from Bhagavān, is connected to him, and is meant for his satisfaction. Let us understand the position of the intellect in our internal system.

Within our body is the subtle *antaḥ karaṇ*, which we also refer to colloquially as the heart, or the etheric heart. It has four aspects to it. When it creates thoughts, we call it *mana*, or mind. When it analyses and decides, we call it *buddhi*, or intellect. When it gets attached to an object or person, we call it *chitta*. When it identifies with the attributes of the body and becomes proud, we call it *ahankār*, or ego.

In this internal machinery, the position of the intellect is dominant. It makes decision, while the mind desires in accordance with those decisions, and the *chitta* gets attached to the objects of affection. For example, if the intellect decides that security is the most important thing in the world, then the mind always yearns for security in life. Throughout the day, we humans control our mind with the intellect. That is why anger flows downward. The CEO shouts at the director. The director does not shout back, because the intellect realizes that it will cost him the job; he vents his anger at the manager. The manager controls himself, despite feeling vexed with the director; but finds release by shouting at the foreman. The foreman takes it all out at the worker. The worker purges his frustration on the wife. The wife shouts at the children. In each case, the intellect decides where it is dangerous to get angry, and where it does not have repercussions. The example illustrates that as human beings our

intellect possesses the ability to control the mind.

Thus, we must cultivate the intellect with proper knowledge and use it to guide the mind in the proper direction. This is what Shri Krishna means by *buddhi yog*—developing a resolute decision of the intellect that all work and all things are meant for the pleasure of Bhagavān. For such a person of resolute intellect, the *chitta* easily gets attached to Bhagavān.

मच्चित्तः सर्वदुर्गाणि मत्प्रसादात्तरिष्यसि ।
अथ चेत्त्वमहङ्कारान् श्रोष्यसि विनांक्ष्यसि ॥५८॥

*mach-chittah sarva-durgāṇi mat-prasādāt tarishyasi
atha chet tvam ahankārān na śroshyasi vinaṅkshyasi*

mat-chittah—by always remembering me; *sarva*—all; *durgāṇi*—obstacles; *mat-prasādāt*—by my grace; *tarishyasi*—you shall overcome; *atha*—but; *chet*—if; *tvam*—you; *ahankārāt*—due to pride; *na śroshyasi*—do not listen; *vinaṅkshyasi*—you will perish.

If you remember me always, by my grace you will overcome all obstacles and difficulties. But if, due to pride, you do not listen to my advice, you will perish.

Having advised Arjun what to do in the previous verse, Shri Krishna now declares the benefits of following his advice and the repercussions of not following it. The Ātman should not think that it is in any way independent of Bhagavān. If we take full shelter of the Bhagavān, with the mind fixed upon him, then by his grace all obstacles and difficulties will be resolved. But if, out of vanity, we disregard the instructions, thinking we know better than the eternal wisdom of Bhagavān and the scriptures, we will fail to attain the goal of human life, for there is no one superior to Bhagavān, nor is there any advice better than his.

यदहङ्कारमाश्रित्य न योत्स्य इति मन्यसे ।
मिष्यैष व्यवसायस्ते प्रकृतिस्त्वां नियोक्ष्यति ॥५९॥

yad ahankāram āśhritya na yotsya iti manyase

mithyaiṣha vyavasāyas te prakritis tvāṁ niyokṣhyati

yat—if; ahankāram—motivated by pride; āśhritya—taking shelter; na yotsye—I shall not fight; iti—thus; manyase—you think; mithyā eṣhah—this is all false; vyavasāyah—determination; te—your; prakṛitih—material nature; tvām—you; niyokṣhyati—will engage.

If, motivated by pride, you think, “I shall not fight,” your decision will be in vain. Your own material (Kshatriya) nature will compel you to fight.

Speaking in a chastising mood, Shri Krishna now delivers a word of caution. We should not think we have complete liberty to do what we wish. The Ātman does not lead an independent existence; it is dependent upon Bhagavān’s creation in many ways. In the materially bound state, it is under the influence of the three *guṇas*. The combination of *guṇas* creates our nature, and according to its dictates, we are compelled to act. Hence, we do not have absolute freedom to say, “I will do what I like.” We have to choose between the good advice of Bhagavān and the scriptures or the compulsions of our nature. There is an anecdote regarding one’s nature. A soldier retired after thirty years of service and returned to his hometown. One day, he was standing in the coffee shop drinking a cup of tea, when a friend thought of a practical joke. He screamed from behind, “Attention!” Responding to that command had become a part of the soldier’s nature. Involuntarily, he dropped the cup from his hand and put his hands by his side. Shri Krishna warns Arjun that by nature he is a warrior, and if, out of pride, he decides not to listen to good advice, his Kshatriya nature will still compel him to fight.

**स्वभावजेन कौन्तेय निबद्धः स्वेन कर्मणा ।
कर्तुं नेच्छसि यन्मोहात्करिष्यस्यवशोऽपि तत् ॥ 60 ॥**

*swabhāva-jena kaunteya nibaddhah svena karmanā
kartum nechchhasi yan mohāt karishyasya avaśho 'pi tat*

swabhāva-jena—born of one’s own material nature; kaunteya—Arjun, the son of Kunti; nibaddhaḥ—bound; svena—by your own; karmanā—actions; kartum—to do; na—not; ichchhasi—you wish; yat—which; mohāt—out of delusion; kariṣhyasi—you will do; avaśhah—helplessly; api—even though; tat—that.

O Arjun, that action which out of delusion you do not wish to do, you will be driven to do it by your own inclination, born of your own material nature.

Continuing his words of warning, Shri Krishna further elaborates on the previous theme. He says, “Due to your *sanskārs* of past lives, you have a Kshatriya nature. Your inborn qualities of heroism, chivalry, and patriotism will compel you to fight. You have been trained in past lifetimes and in this one, to honor your duty as a warrior. Is it possible for you to be inactive when you see injustice being meted out to others in front of your eyes? Your nature and inclinations are such that you vehemently oppose evil wherever you see it. Therefore, it is beneficial for you to fight in accordance with my instructions, rather than be compelled by your nature to do the same.”

**ईश्वरः सर्वभूतानां हृदेशे र्जुन तिष्ठति ।
भ्रामयन्सर्वभूतानि यन्त्रारुद्धानि मायया ॥ 61 ॥**

*iśhvareḥ sarva-bhūtānām hṛid-deśhe 'rjuna tishṭhati
bhrāMāyān sarva-bhūtāni yantrārūḍhāni māyayā*

iśhvareḥ—the Supreme Bhagavān; *sarva-bhūtānām*—in all living being; *hṛit-deśhe*—in the hearts; *arjuna*—Arjun; *tishṭhati*—dwells; *bhrāMāyān*—causing to wander; *sarva-bhūtāni*—all living beings; *yantra ārūḍhāni*—seated on a machine; *māyayā*—made of the material energy.

The Supreme Bhagavān dwells in the hearts of all living beings, O Arjun. According to their karmas, he directs the wanderings of the Ātman(s), who are seated on a machine made of the material energy.

Emphasizing the dependence of the Ātman upon Bhagavān, Shri Krishna says, “Arjun, whether you choose to obey me or not, your position will always remain under my dominion. The body in which you reside is a machine made from my material energy. Based upon your past karmas, I have given you the kind of body you deserved. I too am seated in it, and am noting all your thoughts, words, and deeds. So, I will also judge whatever you do in the

present, to decide your future. Do not think you are independent of me in any condition. Hence Arjun, it is in your self-interest to surrender to me.”

तमेव शरणं गच्छ सर्वभावेन भारत ।
तत्प्रसादात्परां शान्तिं स्थानं प्राप्स्यसि शाश्वतम् ॥ ६२ ॥

*tam eva śharanam gachchha sarva-bhāvena bhārata
tat-prasādāt parām śhāntim sthānam prāpsyasi śhāshvatam*

tam—unto him; *eva*—only; *śharanam* *gachchha*—surrender; *sarva-bhāvena*—whole-heartedly; *bhārata*—Arjun, the son of Bharat; *tat-prasādāt*—by his grace; *parām*—supreme; *śhāntim*—peace; *sthānam*—the abode; *prāpsyasi*—you will attain; *śhāshvatam*—eternal.

Surrender exclusively unto him with your whole being, O Bharat. By his grace, you will attain perfect peace and the eternal abode.

Being dependent upon Bhagavān, the Ātman must also depend upon his grace to get out of its present predicament and attain the ultimate goal. Self-effort will never suffice for this. But if Bhagavān bestows his grace, he will grant his divine knowledge and divine bliss upon the Ātman, and release it from the bondage of the material energy. Shri Krishna emphasizes that by his grace, one will attain eternal beatitude and the imperishable abode. However, to receive that grace, the Ātman must qualify itself by surrendering to Bhagavān. Even a worldly father will not hand over all his precious possessions to his child until the child becomes responsible enough to utilize them properly. Similarly, the grace of Bhagavān is not a whimsical act; he has perfectly rational rules on the basis of which he bestows it.

If Bhagavān does not follow rules while bestowing grace, people’s faith in him will break. Let us say, for example, that there is a father who has two sons. He instructs both of them to work hard in the paddy field as it is the cultivation season. One son toils and sweats it out in the blazing sun all day long. In the night when he returns, the father says, “Well done my son. You are obedient, hard-working, and loyal. Here is your reward. Take \$500 and do what you like

with it.” The second son does nothing—he lies in bed all day long, sleeping, drinking, smoking, and abusing his father. At night, suppose the father says, “Never mind, after all you are also my son. Here is \$500; go and enjoy yourself with it.” The result of this will be that the first son’s motivation to work hard will be smothered. He will say, “If this is my father’s reward system, then why should I work? I will also do nothing, for I will receive the \$500 in any case.” Likewise, if Bhagavān grants his grace without our becoming qualified for it, all those who became saints in the past will complain, “What is this? We strived for many lifetimes to purify ourselves and then we became recipients of Bhagavān’s grace, but this person received it without making himself eligible. Then our effort for self-improvement was meaningless.” Bhagavān says, “I do not behave in this irrational manner. I have an eternal condition on the basis of which I bestow my grace. And I have declared this in all the scriptures.” The Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣad states:

*yo brahmāṇam vidadhāti pūrvam yo vai vedānśh cha prahīṇoti tasmai
tam ha devam ātma-buddhi-prakāśam mumukṣhur vai śharanam aham prapadye* (6.18)
[v30]

“We take shelter of that Supreme Being who created Brahma and others. It is by his grace that the Ātman and intellect get illumined.” The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam states:

*mām ekam eva śharanam Ātmannam sarva-dehinām
yāhi sarvātma-bhāvena mayā syā hy akuto-bhayah* (11.12.15) [v31]

“O Uddhav! Giving up all forms of mundane social and religious conventions, simply surrender unto me, the Supreme Ātman of all Ātman(s). Only then can you cross over this material ocean and become fearless.”

Shri Krishna also stated it in verse 7.14 of the Bhagavad Gita: “My divine energy Māyā, consisting of the three modes of nature, is very difficult to overcome. But those who surrender unto me cross over it easily.”

The Ramayana also says:

sanamukha hoi jīva mohi jabahīn, janma koṭi agha nāsahiṇ tabahīn [v32]

“The moment the Ātman surrenders to Bhagavān, its account of sinful deeds in endless past lifetimes is destroyed by his grace.”

In the above verse of the Bhagavad Gita, Shri Krishna has reiterated the principle of the necessity for surrendering to Bhagavān to receive his grace. The details of what it means to surrender are explained in the Hari Bhakti Vilas, Bhakti Rasamrita Sindhu, the Vayu Puran, and the Ahirbudhni Samhita in the following manner:

*ānukūlyasya saṅkalpaḥ pratikūlyasya varjanam
rakṣhiṣyatīti viśhvāso goptritve varanām tathā
ātmanikṣhepa kārpanye śadvidhā śaraṇāgatih
(Hari Bhakti Vilas 11.676) [v33]*

The above verse explains the six aspects of surrender to Bhagavān:

1. To desire only in accordance with the desire of Bhagavān. By nature, we are his servants, and the duty of a servant is to fulfill the desire of the master. So as surrendered devotees of Bhagavān, we must make our will conform to the divine will of Bhagavān. A dry leaf is surrendered to the wind. It does not complain whether the wind lifts it up, takes it forward or backward, or drops it to the ground. Similarly, we too must learn to be happy in the happiness of Bhagavān.

2. Not to desire against the desire of Bhagavān. Whatever we get in life is a result of our past and present karmas. However, the fruits of the karmas do not come by themselves. Bhagavān notes them and gives the results at the appropriate time. Since Bhagavān himself dispenses the results, we must learn to serenely accept them. Usually, when people get wealth, fame, pleasure, and luxuries in the world, they forget to thank Bhagavān. However, if they get suffering, they blame Bhagavān for it, “Why did Bhagavān do this to me?” The

second aspect of surrender means to not complain about whatever Bhagavān gives us.

3. To have firm faith that Bhagavān is protecting us. Bhagavān is the eternal father. He is taking care of all the living beings in creation. There are trillions of ants on the planet earth, and all of them need to eat regularly. Do you ever find that a few thousand ants in your garden have died of starvation? Bhagavān ensures that they are all provided for. On the other hand, elephants eat mounds of food every day. Bhagavān provides for them too. Even a worldly father cares and provides for his children. Why then should we doubt whether our eternal father, Bhagavān, will take care of us or not? To have firm faith in his protection is the third aspect of surrender.

4. To maintain an attitude of gratitude toward Bhagavān. We have received so many priceless gifts from the Bhagavān. The earth that we walk upon, the sunlight with which we see, the air that we breathe, and the water that we drink, are all given to us by Bhagavān. In fact, it is because of him that we exist; he has brought us to life and imparted consciousness in our Ātman. We are not paying him any tax in return, but we must at least feel deeply indebted for all that he has given to us. This is the sentiment of gratitude.

The reverse of this is the sentiment of ungratefulness. For example, a father does so much for his child. The child is told to be grateful to his father for this. But the child responds, “Why should I be grateful? His father took care of him and he is taking care of me.” This is ingratitude toward the worldly father. To be grateful toward Bhagavān, our eternal Father, for all that he has given to us, is the fourth aspect of surrender.

5. To see everything we possess as belonging to Bhagavān. Bhagavān created this entire world; it existed even before we were born, and will continue to exist even after we die. Hence, the true owner of everything is Bhagavān alone.

When we think something belongs to us, we forget the proprietorship of Bhagavān. Let us say that someone comes into your house when you are not at home. He wears your clothes, takes things out of your refrigerator, eats them, and sleeps on your bed. On returning, you ask indignantly, “What have you been doing in my house?” He says, “I have not damaged anything. I have merely used everything properly. Why are you getting annoyed?” You will reply, “You may not have destroyed anything, but it all belongs to me. If you use it without my permission, you are a thief.” Similarly, this world and everything in it belongs to Bhagavān. To remember this and give up our sense of proprietorship is the fifth aspect of surrender.

6. To give up the pride of having surrendered. If we become proud of the good deeds that we have done, the pride dirties our heart and undoes the good we have done. That is why it is important to keep an attitude of humbleness: “If I was able to do something nice, it was only because Bhagavān inspired my intellect in the right direction. Left to myself, I would never have been able to do it.” To keep such an attitude of humility is the sixth aspect of surrender.

If we can perfect these six points of surrender in ourselves, we will fulfill Bhagavān’s condition and he will bestow his Grace upon us.

इति ते ज्ञानमाख्यातं गुह्यादगुह्यतरं मया ।
विमृश्यैतदशेषेण यथेच्छसि तथा कुरु ॥ 63 ॥

*iti te jñānam ākhyātam guhyād guhyataram mayā
vimṛiśyaitad aśheṣhenā yathechchhasi tathā kuru*

iti—thus; *te*—to you; *jñānam*—knowledge; *ākhyātam*—explained; *guhyāt*—than secret knowledge; *guhya-taram*—still more secret knowledge; *mayā*—by me; *vimṛiśya*—pondering; *etat*—on this; *aśheṣhenā*—completely; *yathā*—as; *ichchhasi*—you wish; *tathā*—so; *kuru*—do.

Thus, I have explained to you this knowledge that is more secret than all secrets. Ponder over it deeply, and then do as you wish.

A secret is that knowledge which is not accessible to majority of the people.

Most of the laws of Physics were a secret until a few centuries ago, and many still continue to remain so. Spiritual knowledge is profound and not realizable through direct perception. It needs to be learnt through the Guru and the scriptures. Hence, it is described as secret. In the second chapter, Shri Krishna had revealed knowledge of the Ātman, which is *guhya*, or secret knowledge. In the seventh and eighth chapters, he explained knowledge of his powers, which is *guhyatar*, or more secret. In the ninth and subsequent chapters, he revealed knowledge of his *bhakti*, which is *guhyatamam*, or most secret. In the present chapter, verse 55, he revealed that he can be known in his personal form only by *bhakti*. Shri Krishna is now concluding the Bhagavad Gita. Having spoken the eighteen chapters, including most secret knowledge to Arjun, he now leaves the choice in Arjun's hands. He says, "I have revealed to you profound and confidential knowledge. Now the choice is in your hands." Bhagavān Ram made a similar statement to the residents of Ayodhya. He invited them all for his discourse:

eka bāra raghunātha bolāe, guru dwija purabāsī saba āe (Ramayana) [v34]

"Once, Bhagavān Ram called all the residents of Ayodhya. Everyone, including Guru Vasisht came to hear him." In the discourse, Bhagavān Ram explained to them the purpose of human life and the way to accomplish it. In the end, he concluded:

nahiñ anīti nahiñ kachhu prabhutāī, sunahu karahu jo tumhahi sohāī (Ramayana) [v35]

"The advice I have given to you is neither incorrect nor coercive. Listen to it careful, contemplate over it, and then do what you wish."

This free will to choose between available alternatives has been given to the Ātman by Bhagavān. The freedom of choice is not infinite. One cannot decide, "I choose to be the most intelligent person in the world." Our choices are limited by our past and present karmas. However, we do possess a certain

amount of free will, for we are not machines in the hands of Bhagavān. Sometimes people question that if Bhagavān had not given us free will then we would not have done any evil. But then we would not have done anything good either. The opportunity to good always comes with the danger of doing evil. More importantly, Bhagavān wants us to love him, and love is only possible when there is a choice. A machine cannot love for it does not have any freedom of choice. Bhagavān created us with free will and provided us with choices so that we may choose him and thereby exercise our love for him. Even the all-powerful Bhagavān cannot force the Ātman to love and surrender to him; this decision has to be made by the Ātman itself. Here, Shri Krishna is calling Arjun's attention to his free will and asking him to choose.

सर्वगुह्यतमं भूयः श्रृणु मे परमं वचः ।
इष्टेऽसि मे दृढमिति ततो वक्ष्यामि ते हितम् ॥ 64 ॥

*sarva-guhyatamam bhūyah śrīnu me paramam vachah
iṣṭo 'si me dṛidham iti tato vakṣyāmi te hitam*

sarva-guhya-tamam—the most confidential of all; *bhūyah*—again; *śrīnu*—hear; *me*—by me; *paramam*—supreme; *vachah*—instruction; *iṣṭah asi*—you are dear; *me*—to me; *dṛidham*—very; *iti*—thus; *tatah*—because; *vakṣyāmi*—I am speaking; *te*—for your; *hitam*—benefit.

Hear again my supreme instruction, the most confidential of all knowledge. I am revealing this for your benefit because you are very dear to me.

A teacher may know the deepest secret, but he does not necessarily reveal it to the student. Before sharing it, he considers many things, such as the preparedness of the student to receive it, comprehend it, benefit from it, etc. In the beginning of the Bhagavad Gita, Arjun was bewildered by the problems facing him and asked for guidance from Shri Krishna. The Bhagavān enlightened him with great care and consideration, uplifting his understanding a little by little, through the eighteen chapters. Having seen Arjun receive the

message so well, Shri Krishna now feels confident that he will be able to grasp the final and most profound knowledge as well. Further, he says *iṣhṭo 'si me dṛidhamiti*, meaning, “I am speaking this to you because you are my very dear friend. So I care for you deeply and sincerely desire your best interest.”

मन्मना भव मद्भक्तो मद्याजी मां नमस्कुरु ।
मामेवैष्यसि सत्यं ते प्रतिजाने प्रियोऽसि मे ॥ ६५ ॥

*man-manā bhava mad-bhakto mad-yājī mām namaskuru
mām evaiṣhyasi satyam te pratijāne priyo 'si me*

mat-manāḥ—thinking of me; *bhava*—be; *mat-bhaktah*—my devotee; *mat-yājī*—worship me; *mām*—to me; *namaskuru*—offer obeisance; *mām*—to me; *eva*—certainly; *eṣhyasi*—you will come; *satyam*—truly; *te*—to you; *pratijāne*—I promise; *priyah*—dear; *asi*—you are; *me*—to me.

Always think of me, be devoted to me, worship me, and offer obeisance to me. Doing so, you will certainly come to me. This is my pledge to you, for you are very dear to me.

In chapter 9, Shri Krishna had promised Arjun to reveal to him the most secret knowledge, and then gone on to describe the glories of *bhakti*. Here, he repeats the first line of verse 9.34, asking him to engage in his devotion. By developing deep love for Shri Krishna and having his mind always absorbed in exclusive devotion to him, Arjun will be assured of attaining the supreme destination. The perfect example of someone completely absorbed in devotion was King Ambarish. The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam describes:

*sa vai manah kṛiṣṇa-padāravindayor vacāhīnsi vaikuṇṭha-guṇānuvarṇane
karau harer mandira-mārjanādiśhu śrutiṁ chakārāchyuta-sat-kathodaye
mukunda-liṅgālaya-darśane dṛiṣhṭau tad-bhṛitya-gātra-sparśhe 'ṅga-saṅgamam
ghrāṇam cha tat-pāda-saroja-saurabhe śrīmat-tulasyā rasanām tad-arpite
pādau hareḥ kṣhetra-padānusarpaṇe śhiro hṛiṣhīkeśha-padābhivandane
kāmaṁ cha dāsye na tu kāma-kāmyayā yathottamaśhloka-janāśhrayā ratih
(9.4.18-20) [v36]*

“Ambarish absorbed his mind on the lotus feet of Shri Krishna; he used his

speech in glorifying the qualities of Bhagavān, his hands in cleaning the temple, and his ears in hearing the divine pastimes of the Bhagavān. He engaged his eyes in seeing the deities; he used his limbs in touching the bodies of the devotees, his nose in smelling the fragrance of the *Tulsi* (holy basil) leaves offered at the feet of the Bhagavān, and his tongue in tasting *prasād* (food sanctified by offering to Bhagavān). He utilized his feet for walking to the holy abodes, and his head in offering obeisance to the lotus feet of Bhagavān. He offered all paraphernalia, such as garlands and sandalwood, in the service of Bhagavān. He did all this, not with some selfish motive, but only to attain the selfless service of Bhagavān Krishna, through purification.”

The instruction to wholeheartedly engage in devotion is the essence of all the scriptures, and the summu bonum of all knowledge. However, this is not the most confidential knowledge that Shri Krishna referred to, for he has already mentioned this earlier. *He now reveals this supreme secret in this next verse.*

सर्वधर्मान्यरित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं व्रज ।
अहं त्वां सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः ॥ ६६ ॥

*sarva-dharmān parityajya mām ekam śharanam vraja
aham tvām sarva-pāpebhyo mokṣhayiṣhyāmi mā śhuchah*

sarva-dharmān—all varieties of *dharma*s; *parityajya*—abandoning; *mām*—unto me; *ekam*—only; *śharanam*—take refuge; *vraja*—take; *aham*—I; *tvām*—you; *sarva*—all; *pāpebhyaḥ*—from sinful reactions; *mokṣhayiṣhyāmi*—shall liberate; *mā*—do not; *śhuchah*—fear.

Abandon all varieties of *dharma*s and simply surrender unto me alone. I shall liberate you from all sinful reactions; do not fear.

All along, Shri Krishna had been asking Arjun to do two things simultaneously—engage his mind in devotion, and engage his body in fulfilling his material duty as a warrior. He thus wanted Arjun not to give up his Kshatriya *dharma*, but to do devotion alongside with it. This is the principle of *karm yog*. Now, Shri Krishna reverses this teaching by saying that here is no need to fulfill even

material *dharma*. Arjun can renounce all material duties and simply surrender to Bhagavān. This is the principle of *karm sanyās*. Here, one may question that if we give up all our material *dharmas* will we not incur sin? Shri Krishna tells Arjun not to fear; he will absolve him from all sins, and liberate him from material existence.

To comprehend this instruction of Shri Krishna, we need to understand the term *dharma*. It comes from the root word *dhṛi*, which means *dhāraṇ karane yogya*, or “responsibilities, duties, thoughts, and actions that are appropriate for us.” There are actually two kinds of *dharmas*—material *dharma* and spiritual *dharma*. These two kinds of *dharma* are based upon two different understandings of the “self.” When we identify ourselves as the body, then our *dharma* is determined in accordance with our bodily designations, obligations, duties, and norms. Hence, serving the bodily parents, fulfilling the responsibilities to society, nation, etc. are all bodily *dharma*. This is also called *apara dharma* or material *dharma*. This includes the *dharma* as a Brahmin, Kshatriya, etc. However, when we identify ourselves as the Ātman, we have no material designations of *varṇa* (social class) and *āśram* (status in life). The Ātman’s Father, Mother, Friend, Beloved, and resting place are all Bhagavān. Hence our one and only *dharma* becomes loving devotional service to Bhagavān. This is also called *para dharma* or spiritual *dharma*.

If one leaves the material *dharma* it is considered a sin due to dereliction of duty. But if one leaves material *dharma* and takes the shelter of spiritual *dharma*, it is not a sin. The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam states:

*devarṣhi-bhūtāpta-nṛiṇāṁ pitṛiṇāṁ na kiṅkaro nāyam ṛinī cha rājan
sarvātmanā yaḥ śharanām śharanyām gato mukundām parihritya kartam*
(11.5.41) [v37]

This verse explains that for those who do not surrender to Bhagavān, there are five debts—to the celestial deities, to the sages, to the ancestors, to other

humans, and to other living beings. The *varṇāśram* system includes various procedures for releasing ourselves from these five kinds of debts. However, when we surrender to Bhagavān, we are automatically released from all these debts, just as by watering the roots of a tree, all its branches, twigs, leaves, flowers, and fruit automatically get watered. Similarly, by fulfilling our duty to Bhagavān, we automatically fulfill our duty to everyone. Hence, there is no sin in renouncing material *dharma* if we are properly situated in spiritual *dharma*. In fact, the ultimate goal is to engage completely and wholeheartedly in spiritual *dharma*. The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam states:

*ājñāyaivam gunān doṣhān mayādiṣṭān api svakān
dharmān sanyajya yaḥ sarvān māṁ bhajeta sa tu sattamah* (11.11.32) [v38]

“I have given innumerable instructions regarding the performance of bodily *dharma* in the Vedas. But those who realize the shortcomings in these, and renounce all prescribed duties, to simply engage in my devotional service, I consider them to be the best *sādhaks*.” In the Ramayana, we read how Lakshman renounced all material duties to accompany Bhagavān Ram in the forest. He said:

*guru pitu mātu na jānahu kāhū, kahahu subhāū nātha patiyāū
more sabahiñ eka tuma swāmī, dinabhandhu ura antarayamī* [39]

“O Bhagavān, please believe me, I do not know any teacher, father, mother, etc. As far as I am concerned, you, the savior of the fallen and the knower of the heart, are my Master and my everything.” Similarly, Prahlad said:

mātā nāsti pitā na 'sti na 'sti me swajano janah [v40]

“I do not know any mother, father, or relative (Bhagavān is everything to me).”

In the Bhagavad Gita, Shri Krishna gave Arjun sequentially higher instructions. Initially, he instructed Arjun to do *karm*, i.e. his material *dharma* as a warrior (verse 2.31). But material *dharma* does not result in Brahman-realization; it leads to the celestial abodes, and once the pious merits are

depleted one has to come back. Hence, Shri Krishna next instructed Arjun to do *karm yog*, i.e. his material *dharma* with the body and spiritual *dharma* with the mind. He asked Arjun to fight the war with the body and remember Bhagavān with the mind (verse 8.7). This instruction of *karm yog* forms the major portion of the Bhagavad Gita. Now in the very end, Shri Krishna instructs Arjun to practice *karm sanyās*, i.e. renounce all material *dharma* and simply adopt spiritual *dharma*, which is love for Bhagavān. He should thus fight, not because it is his duty as a warrior, but because Bhagavān wants him to do so.

*But why did Shri Krishna not give this instruction to Arjun earlier? Why did he seem to clearly extol just the reverse in verse 5.2 when he stated *karm yog* superior as to *karm sanyās*? Bhagavān Krishna clearly explains this in the next verse.*

इदं ते नातपस्काय नाभक्ताय कदाचन ।
न चाशुश्रूषवे वाच्यं न च मां योऽभ्यसूयति ॥ ६७ ॥

*idam te nātapaskyāya nābhaktāya kadāchana
na chāśhuśrūṣhave vāchyam na cha mām yo'bhyaśūyatī*

idam—this; *te*—by you; *na*—never; *atapaskāya*—to those who are not austere; *na*—never; *abhaktāya*—to those who are not devoted; *kadāchana*—at any time; *na*—never; *cha*—also; *āśhuśrūṣhave*—to those who are averse to listening (to spiritual topics); *vāchyam*—to be spoken; *na*—never; *cha*—also; *mām*—toward me; *yah*—who; *abhyasūyatī*—those who are envious.

This instruction should never be explained to those who are not austere or to those who are not devoted. It should also not be spoken to those who are averse to listening (to spiritual topics), and especially not to those who are envious of me.

It was explained in the previous verse that if one is situated in loving devotion to Bhagavān, there is no sin in giving up the material duties. However, there is one problem with this instruction. If we have not yet become established in love for Bhagavān, and we prematurely give up material duties, we will be neither here nor there. Thus, *karm sanyās* is only for those who are qualified for

it. And what we are qualified for has to be determined by our Guru, who knows our capabilities and the stringency of the paths. If a student wishes to become a graduate, it will not do to directly go and attend the graduation ceremony. We will have to begin studies sequentially from grade one. Similarly, the vast majority of people are eligible for *karm yog*, and it would be a great folly for them to prematurely take *karm sanyās*. It is better to instruct them to fulfill their bodily *dharma* and practice devotion alongside. That is why, in this verse Shri Krishna says that this confidential teaching given to him is not for everyone. Before sharing it with others, we should check their eligibility for this teaching.

This word of caution applies specifically for the confidential teachings of the previous verse, and in general, for the entire message of the Bhagavad Gita. If it is explained to someone who is envious of Shri Krishna, that person may respond, “Shri Krishna was very conceited. He kept asking Arjun to glorify him.” By misunderstanding the teachings, the faithless listener will be harmed by the divine message. The Padma Purāṇ also states:

aśhraddadhāne vimukhe 'py aśhrīṇvati yaśh chopadeśhah śhiva-nāmāparādhah [v41]

“By giving transcendental instructions to those who are faithless and averse to Bhagavān, we cause them to become offenders.” Hence, Shri Krishna describes the disqualifications for listeners in the above verse.

य इदं परमं गुह्यं मद्भक्तेष्वभिधास्यति ।
भक्तिं मयि परां कृत्वा मामेवैष्यत्यसंशयः ॥ 68 ॥

*ya idam paramam guhyam mad-bhakteṣhv abhidhāsyati
bhaktim mayi parām kṛitvā mām evaiṣhyaty asanśayah*

yah—who; *idam*—this; *paramam*—most; *guhyam*—confidential knowledge; *mat-bhakteṣhu*—amongst my devotees; *abhidhāsyati*—teaches; *bhaktim*—greatest act of love; *mayi*—to me; *parām*—transcendental; *kṛitvā*—doing; *mām*—to me; *eva*—certainly; *eṣhyati*—comes; *asanśayah*—without doubt.

Those, who teach this most confidential knowledge amongst my devotees, perform the greatest act of love. They will come to me without doubt.

Shri Krishna now declares the consequence of properly preaching the message of the Bhagavad Gita. He says such preachers first attain his *para bhakti*, and then attain him.

The opportunity to engage ourselves in devotion is a special blessing of Bhagavān, but the opportunity to help others engage in devotion is an even bigger blessing, which attracts the special grace of Bhagavān. Whenever we share something good with others, we benefit from it too. When we share whatever knowledge we have with others, by grace our own knowledge increases as well. By often giving food to others, we never go hungry ourselves. Saint Kabir said:

*dāna diye dhana nā ghaṭe, nadī ghate na nīra
apane hātha dekha lo, yoñ kyā kahe kabīra [v42]*

“Wealth does not decrease by giving in charity; a river does not become narrow, though people take water from it. I am not saying this without basis; see it yourself in the world.” Thus, those who share the spiritual knowledge of the Bhagavad Gita with others receive the highest blessing themselves.

न च तस्मान्मनुष्येषु कश्चिन्मे प्रियकृतमः ।
भविता न च मे तस्मादन्यः प्रियतरो भुवि ॥ 69 ॥

*na cha tasmān manuṣhyeṣhu kaśchin me priya-kṛittamah
bhavitā na cha me tasmād anyah priyataraḥ bhuvi*

na—no; *cha*—and; *tasmāt*—than them; *manuṣhyeṣhu*—amongst human beings; *kaśchit*—anyone; *me*—to me; *priya-kṛit-tamah*—more dear; *bhavitā*—will be; *na*—never; *cha*—and; *me*—to me; *tasmāt*—than them; *anyah*—another; *priya-tarāḥ*—dearer; *bhuvi*—on this earth.

No human being does more loving service to me than they; nor shall there ever be anyone on this earth more dear to me.

Amongst all the gifts we can give to others, the gift of spiritual knowledge is one of the highest, because it has the capacity to transform the recipient eternally. King Janak had asked his Guru, “The transcendental knowledge you have bestowed upon me is so precious that I feel deeply indebted to you. What can I give you in return?” Guru Ashtavakra replied, “There is nothing you can give that will relinquish you from your debt. The knowledge I gave was divine and all that you possess is material. Worldly objects can never be a price for divine knowledge. But you can do one thing. If ever you find someone who is thirsty for this knowledge, share it with him.” Shri Krishna states here that he considers the sharing of the knowledge of the Bhagavad Gita as the highest loving service one can render to Bhagavān. However, those who lecture on the Bhagavad Gita should not feel they are doing something very great. The proper attitude of the teacher is to see oneself as an instrument in the hands of Bhagavān, and to accord all credit to the grace of the Bhagavān.

अध्येष्यते च य इमं धर्म्यं संवादमावयोः ।
ज्ञानयज्ञेन तेनाहमिष्टः स्यामिति मे मतिः ॥ ७० ॥

*adhyeṣhyate cha ya imam dharmyam saṁvādam āvayoh
jñāna-yajñena tenāham iṣṭah syām iti me matih*

adhyeṣhyate—study; *cha*—and; *yah*—who; *imam*—this; *dharma*—sacred; *saṁvādam*—dialogue; *āvayoh*—of ours; *jñāna*—of knowledge; *yajñena-tena*—through the sacrifice of knowledge; *aham*—I; *iṣṭah*—worshipped; *syām*—shall be; *iti*—such; *me*—my; *matih*—opinion.

And I proclaim that those who study this sacred dialogue of ours will worship me (with their intellect) through the sacrifice of knowledge; such is my view.

Shri Krishna had repeatedly told Arjun to surrender his intellect to him (verses 8.7, 12.8). This does not imply that we stop using the intellect; rather it means we utilize our intellect to the best of our ability in fulfilling his will for us. From the message of the Bhagavad Gita we understand what his will is. Hence,

those who study this sacred dialogue worship Bhagavān with their intellect.

श्रद्धावाननसूयश्च शृणुयादपि यो नरः ।
सोऽपि मुक्तः शुभांल्लोकान्प्राप्नुयात्पुण्यकर्मणाम् ॥ 71 ॥

*śraddhāvān anasūyaśh cha śrīnuyād api yo narah
so 'pi muktaḥ śubhāl lokān prāpnuyāt puṇya-karmanām*

śraddhā-vān—faithful; *anasūyah*—without envy; *cha*—and; *śrīnuyāt*—listen; *api*—certainly; *yah*—who; *narah*—a person; *sah*—that person; *api*—also; *muktaḥ*—liberated; *śubhān*—the auspicious; *lokān*—abodes; *prāpnuyāt*—attain; *puṇya-karmanām*—of the pious.

Even those who only listen to this knowledge with faith and without envy will be liberated from sins and attain the auspicious abodes where the pious dwell.

Not everyone has the intellect to comprehend the deep imports of the dialogue between Shri Krishna and Arjun. Here, Shri Krishna reassures that if such people merely hear with faith, they will also benefit. Bhagavān is seated within them; he will note their sincere endeavor and reward them for it. A story about a disciple of Jagadguru Shankaracharya, called Sananda, illustrates this point. He was illiterate and could not comprehend his Guru's teaching as the other disciples could. But when Shankaracharya delivered the discourse, he would listen with rapt attention and great faith. One day, he was washing his Guru's clothes on the other side of the river. It became time for the class, and the other disciples requested, "Guruji, please begin the class." Shankaracharya replied, "Let us wait; Sananda is not here." "But Guruji, he cannot understand anything," the disciples urged. "That is true; still, he listens with great faith and so I do not wish to disappoint him," said Shankaracharya.

Then, to show the power of faith, Shankaracharya called out, "Sananda! Please come here." On hearing his Guru's words, Sananda did not hesitate. He ran on water. The story goes that wherever he placed his feet, lotus flowers sprang up to support him. He crossed over to the other bank and offered obeisance to his

Guru. At that time, a *stuti* (verses in praise) of the Guru emanated from his mouth in sophisticated Sanskrit. The other disciples were amazed to hear this. Since, lotus flowers had bloomed under his feet, his name became “Padmapada,” meaning “the one with lotus flowers under the feet.” He became one of the four main disciples of Shankaracharya, along with Sureshwaracharya, Hastamalak, and Trotakacharya. In the above verse, Shri Krishna assures Arjun that even those who merely hear the sacred dialogue with great faith will gradually become purified.

कच्चिदेतच्छुतं पार्थ त्वयैकाग्रेण चेतसा ।
कच्चिदज्ञानसम्मोहः प्रनष्टस्ते धनञ्जय ॥ 72 ॥

*kachchid etach shrutam pārtha tvayaikāgreṇa chetasā
kachchid ajñāna-sammohah pranashṭas te dhanañjaya*

kachchit—whether; *etat*—this; *śrutm*—heard; *pārtha*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *tvayā*—by you; *eka-agreṇa chetasā*—with a concentrated mind; *kachchit*—whether; *ajñāna*—ignorance; *sammohah*—delusion; *pranaśṭah*—destroyed; *te*—your; *dhanañjaya*—Arjun, conqueror of wealth.

O Arjun, have you heard me with a concentrated mind? Have your ignorance and delusion been destroyed?

Shri Krishna has taken the position of being Arjun’s teacher. It is natural for the teacher to inquire whether the student has grasped the subject or not. Shri Krishna’s intention of asking the question is that if Arjun has not understood, he is ready to re-explain or go into further details.

अर्जुन उवाच ।
नष्टे मोहः स्मृतिर्लब्धा त्वत्प्रसादान्मयाच्युत ।
स्थितोऽस्मि गतसन्देहः करिष्ये वचनं तव ॥ 73 ॥

*arjuna uvācha
naṣṭo mohaḥ smṛitir labdhā tvat-prasādān mayāchyuta
sthito 'smi gata-sandehaḥ kariṣhye vachanām tava*

arjunaḥ uvācha—Arjun said; *naṣṭaḥ*—dispelled; *mohaḥ*—illusion; *smṛitiḥ*—memory; *labdhā*—regained; *tvat-prasādāt*—by your grace; *mayā*—by me; *achyuta*—Shri Krishna, the infallible one;

sthitah—situated; *asmi*—I am; *gata-sandehah*—free from doubts; *kariṣhye*—I shall act; *vachanam*—instructions; *tava*—your.

Arjun Said: O infallible one, by your grace my illusion has been dispelled, and I am situated in knowledge. I am now free from doubts, and I shall act according to your instructions.

At the outset, Arjun was faced with a bewildering situation, and confused about his duty in the situation. Overwhelmed with sorrow, he had sat down on his chariot, giving up his weapons. He had confessed that he could find no remedy to the grief that attacked his body and senses. But he now finds himself completely transformed, and announces that he is situated in knowledge and no longer perplexed. He has given himself to the will of Bhagavān and shall do what Shri Krishna instructed him to do. This was the impact of the message of Bhagavad Gita upon him. However, he adds *tvat prasādān mayāchyuta*, meaning, “O Shri Krishna, it was not just your lecture, but your grace that dispelled my ignorance.”

Material knowledge does not require grace. We can pay the educational institute or teacher and receive knowledge in return, but spiritual knowledge can neither be purchased nor sold. It is offered through grace and received through faith and humbleness. Thus, if we approach the Bhagavad Gita with an attitude of pride, “I am so intelligent. I will evaluate what the net worth of this message is,” we will never be able to comprehend it. Our intellect will find some apparent defect in the scripture to dwell upon, and on that pretext we will reject the entire scripture as incorrect. There have been so many commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita and innumerable readers of the divine message in the last 5,000 years, but how many people have become enlightened like Arjun? If we wish to truly receive this knowledge, we must not merely read it, but also attract Shri Krishna’s grace with an attitude of faith and loving surrender. Then we will know the purport of the Bhagavad Gita by his

grace.

सञ्जय उवाच ।
इत्यहं वासुदेवस्य पार्थस्य च महात्मनः ।
संवादमिममश्रौषमद्भुतं रोमहर्षणम् ॥ 74 ॥

sañjaya uvācha

*ity aham vāsudevasya pārthasya cha mahātmanah
saṁvādam imam aśrauṣham adbhitam roma-harṣhaṇam*

sañjayah uvācha—Sanjay said; *iti*—thus; *aham*—I; *vāsudevasya*—of Shri Krishna; *pārthasya*—Arjun; *cha*—and; *mahā-ātmanah*—the noble hearted Ātman; *saṁvādam*—conversation; *imam*—this; *aśrauṣham*—have heard; *adbhitam*—wonderful; *roma-harṣhaṇam*—which causes the hair to stand on end.

Sanjay said: Thus, have I heard this wonderful conversation between Shri Krishna, the son of Vasudev, and Arjun, the noble-hearted son of Pritha. So thrilling is the message that my hair is standing on end.

In this way, Sanjay comes to the end of his narration of the divine discourse of the Bhagavad Gita. He refers to Arjun as *mahĀtman* (great Ātman), as he has heeded the advice and instructions of Shri Krishna, and hence has become eminently wise. Sanjay now remarks how amazed and astounded he is on hearing their divine dialogue. The hair standing on end is one of the symptoms of deep devotional fervor. The Bhakti Rasamrita Sindhu states:

*stambha sveda 'tha romāñchah svara bhedo 'tha vepathuh
vaivarṇyamaśru pralaya ityaśṭhau sāttvikāḥ smṛitāḥ [v43]*

“The eight symptoms of devotional ecstasy are: becoming stupefied and motionless, sweating, hair standing on end, choking of the voice, trembling, color of the face becoming ashen, shedding tears, and fainting.” Sanjay is experiencing such intense devotional sentiments that his hair is bristling with divine joy.

One may ask how was it possible for Sanjay to hear this dialogue that took place on a far-off battlefield. He reveals this in the next verse.

व्यासप्रसादाच्छ्रुतवानेतद्गुह्यमहं परम् ।
योगं योगेश्वरात्कृष्णात्पाक्षात्कथयतः स्वयम् ॥ 75 ॥

*vyāsa-prasādāch chhrutavān etad guhyam aham param
yogam yogeśvarāt kṛiṣhnāt sākshāt kathayataḥ svayam*

vyāsa-prasādāt—by the grace of Ved Vyas; *śhrutavān*—have heard; *etat*—this; *guhyam*—secret; *aham*—I; *param*—supreme; *yogam*—Yog; *yoga-īśhvarāt*—from the Lod of Yog; *kṛiṣhnāt*—from Shri Krishna; *sākshāt*—directly; *kathayataḥ*—speaking; *svayam*—himself.

By the grace of Veda Vyas, I have heard this supreme and most secret Yog from the Bhagavān of Yog, Shri Krishna himself.

Shri Krishna Dwaipayan Vyasadev, also known as Sage Ved Vyas, was the spiritual master of Sanjay. By the grace of his Guru, Sanjay had been blessed with the power of clairvoyance, to know all that transpired on the battleground of Kurukshetra while he sat in the royal palace of Hastinapur. Here, Sanjay acknowledges it was by his Guru's mercy that he got the opportunity to hear the supreme science of Yog from the Bhagavān of Yog himself, Shri Krishna.

Ved Vyas, the author of the Brahma Sūtras, the Purāṇas, the Mahābhārat, etc. was a descension of Bhagavān, and possessed all the clairvoyant powers himself. Thus, he not only heard the conversation between Shri Krishna and Arjun, but also the one between Sanjay and Dhritarashtra. Thereby, he included both conversations while compiling the Bhagavad Gita.

राजन्संस्मृत्य संस्मृत्य संवादपिमपद्धतम् ।
केशवार्जुनयोः पुण्यं हृष्यामि च मुहुर्मुहुः ॥ 76 ॥

*rājan sansmr̄itya sansmr̄itya samvādam imam adbhetam
keśhava-arjunayoh punyam hṛiṣhyāmi cha muhuḥ muhuḥ*

rājan—King; *sansmr̄itya* *samsmr̄itya*—repeatedly recalling; *saṁvādam*—dialogue; *imam*—this; *adbhetam*—astonishing; *keśhava-arjunayoh*—between Bhagavān Shri Krishna and Arjun; *punyam*—pious; *hṛiṣhyāmi*—I rejoice; *cha*—and; *muhuḥ muhuḥ*—repeatedly.

As I repeatedly recall this astonishing and wonderful dialogue between the Supreme Bhagavān Shri Krishna and Arjun, O King, I rejoice again and

again.

A spiritual experience gives a happiness that is far more thrilling and satisfying than all the material joys put together. Sanjay is rejoicing in such happiness and sharing his experience with the blind Dhritarashtra. Reflecting and remembering wonderful dialogue, he is feeling divine bliss. This indicates the sublimity of the knowledge contained in this scripture and the divinity of the *leela* (pastimes) that Sanjay was a witness to.

तच्च संस्मृत्य संस्मृत्य रूपमत्यद्भुतं हरेः ।
विस्मयो मे महानराजन्हृष्यामि च पुनः पुनः ॥७७॥

*tach cha sansmr̄itya saṁsmr̄itya rūpam aty-adbhutam hareḥ
vismayo ye mahān rājan hr̄iṣhyāmi cha punah punah*

tat—that; *cha*—and; *sansmr̄itya saṁsmr̄itya*—remembering repeatedly; *rūpam*—cosmic form; *ati*—most; *adbhutam*—wonderful; *hareḥ*—of Bhagavān Krishna; *visMāyāḥ*—astonishment; *me*—my; *mahān*—great; *rājan*—King; *hr̄iṣhyāmi*—I am thrilled with joy; *cha*—and; *punah punah*—over and over again.

And remembering that most astonishing and wonderful cosmic form of Bhagavān Krishna, great is my astonishment, and I am thrilled with joy over and over again.

Arjun was blessed with the vision of the cosmic form of the Bhagavān, which is rarely seen even by the greatest yogis. Shri Krishna told him that he was showing him the universal form because Arjun was his devotee and friend, and thus very dear to him. Sanjay also came to see that cosmic form because he was fortunate to be a part of the divine pastimes as the narrator. There are times when an unexpected grace comes our way. If we utilize it properly, we can progress rapidly in our *sādhanā*. Sanjay is repeatedly contemplating upon what he saw and flowing in the current of devotion.

यत्र योगेश्वरः कृष्णो यत्र पार्थो धनुर्धरः ।
तत्र श्रीविजयो भूतिधुवा नीतिर्मतिर्मम ॥ 78 ॥

*yatra yogeśhvareḥ kṛiṣṇo yatra pārtho dhanur-dharah
tatra śhrīr vijayo bhūtiḥ dhruvā nītiḥ matir mama*

yatra—wherever; *yoga-īśhvareḥ*—Shri Krishna, the Bhagavān of Yog; *kṛiṣṇah*—Shri Krishna; *yatra*—wherever; *pārthah*—Arjun, the son of Pritha; *dhanuh-dharah*—the supreme archer; *tatra*—there; *śhrīḥ*—opulence; *vijayaḥ*—victory; *bhūtiḥ*—prosperity; *dhruvā*—unending; *nītiḥ*—righteousness; *matih mama*—my opinion.

Wherever there is Shri Krishna, the Bhagavān of all Yog, and wherever there is Arjun, the supreme archer, there will also certainly be unending opulence, victory, prosperity, and righteousness. Of this, I am certain.

The Bhagavad Gita concludes with this verse delivering a deep pronouncement. Dhritarashtra was apprehensive of the outcome of the war. Sanjay informs him that material calculations of the relative strengths and numbers of the two armies are irrelevant. There can be only one verdict in this war—victory will always be on the side of Bhagavān and his pure devotee, and so will goodness, supremacy, and abundance.

Bhagavān is the independent, self-sustaining sovereign of the world, and the most worthy object of adoration, and worship. *na tatsamaś chābhyaḍhikāścha drīśhyate* (Śwetaśvatar Upanishad 6.8) [v44] “There is no one equal to him; there is no one greater than him.” He merely needs a proper medium to manifest his incomparable glory. The Ātman who surrenders to him provides such a vehicle for the glory of Bhagavān to shine forth. Thus, wherever the Supreme Bhagavān and his pure devotee are present, the light of the Absolute Truth will always vanquish the darkness of falsehood. There can be no other outcome.

Guide to Hindi Pronunciation

अ	<i>a</i>	as <i>u</i> in <i>but</i>
आ	<i>ā</i>	as <i>a</i> in <i>far</i>
इ	<i>i</i>	as <i>i</i> in <i>pin</i>
ई	<i>ī</i>	as <i>i</i> in <i>machine</i>
उ	<i>u</i>	as <i>u</i> in <i>push</i>
ऊ	<i>ū</i>	as <i>o</i> in <i>move</i>
ए	<i>e</i>	as <i>a</i> in <i>mat</i>
ऐ	<i>ai</i>	As <i>a</i> in <i>evade</i> ; sometimes as <i>ai</i> in <i>aisle</i> with the only difference that <i>a</i> should be pronounced as <i>u</i> in <i>but</i> , not as <i>a</i> in <i>far</i>
ओ	<i>o</i>	as <i>o</i> in <i>go</i>
औ	<i>au</i>	as <i>o</i> in <i>pot</i> , or as <i>aw</i> in <i>Saw</i>
ऋ	<i>ṛi</i>	as <i>ri</i> in <i>Kṛiṣṇa</i>
:	<i>h</i>	it is a strong aspirate; also lengthens the preceding vowel and occurs only at the end of a word. It is pronounced as a final <i>h</i> sound
.	<i>m̐</i>	nasalizes and lengthens the preceding vowel and is pronounced as <i>n</i> in the French word <i>Bon</i> .
क	<i>ka</i>	as <i>ka</i> in <i>kite</i>
ख	<i>kha</i>	as <i>kha</i> in <i>Eckhart</i>
ग	<i>ga</i>	as <i>g</i> in <i>goat</i>
ঘ	<i>gha</i>	as <i>gh</i> in <i>Dighard</i>
ঙ	<i>ṅa</i>	as <i>n</i> in <i>finger</i>
চ	<i>cha</i>	as <i>cha</i> in <i>chair</i>
ছ	<i>chha</i>	as <i>chh</i> in <i>staunchheart</i>
জ	<i>ja</i>	as <i>j</i> in <i>jar</i>
ঝ	<i>jha</i>	as <i>dgeh</i> in <i>Hedgehog</i>
ঞ	<i>ñā</i>	as <i>n</i> in <i>lunch</i>

ଟ	<i>ta</i>	as <i>t</i> in <i>tub</i>
ଠ	<i>tha</i>	as <i>th</i> in <i>hothead</i>
ଡ	<i>da</i>	as <i>d</i> in <i>divine</i>
ଢ	<i>dhā</i>	as <i>dh</i> in <i>Redhead</i>
ଣ	<i>ṇa</i>	as <i>n</i> in <i>burnt</i>
ତ	<i>ta</i>	as <i>t</i> in French word <i>matron</i>
ଥ	<i>tha</i>	as <i>th</i> in <i>ether</i>
ଦ	<i>da</i>	as <i>th</i> in <i>either</i>
ଧ	<i>dha</i>	as <i>dh</i> in <i>Buddha</i>
ନ	<i>na</i>	as <i>n</i> in <i>no</i>
ପ	<i>pa</i>	as <i>p</i> in <i>pink</i>
ଫ	<i>pha</i>	as <i>ph</i> in <i>Uphill</i>
ବ	<i>ba</i>	as <i>b</i> in <i>boy</i>
ଭ	<i>bha</i>	as <i>bh</i> in <i>abhor</i>
ମ	<i>ma</i>	as <i>m</i> in <i>man</i>
ୟ	<i>ya</i>	as <i>y</i> in <i>yes</i>
ର	<i>ra</i>	as <i>r</i> in <i>remember</i>
ଲ	<i>la</i>	as <i>l</i> in <i>light</i>
ଵ	<i>va</i>	as <i>v</i> in <i>vine</i> , as <i>w</i> in <i>swan</i>
ଶ	<i>śha</i>	as <i>sh</i> in <i>shape</i>
ସ	<i>sa</i>	as <i>s</i> in <i>sin</i>
ଷ	<i>ṣha</i>	as <i>sh</i> in <i>show</i>
ହ	<i>ha</i>	as <i>h</i> in <i>hut</i>
କ୍ଷ	<i>kṣha</i>	as <i>ksh</i> in <i>freakshow</i>
ଜ୍ଞ	<i>gya</i>	as <i>gy</i> in <i>bigyoung</i>
ଙ୍ଗ	<i>ṛa</i>	There is no sign in English to represent the sounds ଙ୍ଗ and ଙ୍ଘ. They have been written as <i>ṛa</i> and <i>ṛha</i>
ଝ୍ରୀ	<i>ṛī</i>	as <i>ree</i> in <i>spree</i>

Glossary

A

Abhinivesh—The instinctive urge to desire life.

Abhyās—Practice, or a concerted and persistent effort to change an old habit or develop a new.

Abhyās yog—Union with Bhagavān through repeated practice of devotion.

Adharma—Irreligion.

Adhyātma—1) The individual Ātman, 2) science of spirituality.

Ādiātmik duḥkh—Miseries arising from one's own body and mind.

Ādibhautik duḥkh—Miseries caused by other living entities.

Ādidaivik duḥkh—Miseries caused by climatic and environmental conditions, such as earthquakes, floods etc.

Agni dev—The celestial deity of fire.

Agni-hotra yajña—A ritualistic fire sacrifice, described in the Vedas.

Aham—Sense of the self.

Aham chetanā—Pride arising out of the sense of self.

Ahankār—1) Ego, 2) the entity created by the evolution of *mahān*.

Aiśhwarya bhakti—A type of devotion wherein devotee is motivated to engage in devotion by contemplating upon the almighty aspect of Bhagavān. The dominant sentiment in *aiśhwarya bhakti* is of awe and reverence. In such devotion, the feeling of remoteness from Bhagavān and the need for maintaining propriety of conduct is always perceived.

Akarm—Inaction.

Akṣhar—Imperishable.

Anāhat nād—Sound that pervades creation, and can be heard by yogis who tune in to it.

ĀnandMāyā koś—One of the five sheaths that covers the materially bound

Ātman, consisting of the ego that makes one identify with the tiny bliss of the body-mind-intellect mechanism.

Anant—Without an end, unlimited.

Anant Shesh—The divine ten thousand-headed serpent on whom Bhagavān Vishnu resides.

Ananya bhakti—Exclusive devotion.

AnnaMāyā kośh—One of the five sheaths that covers the materially bound Ātman, it consists of the five gross elements (earth, water, fire, air, and space).

Antaḥ karaṇ—Colloquially referred to as the heart, it consists of the mind, intellect, chitta, and the ego.

Antar kumbhak—Holding the breath in the lungs after inhalation. The outgoing breath gets suspended in the incoming breath during the period of suspension.

Aṇu—Tiny.

Apara dharma—The social aspect of religion, including duties toward parents, friends and relatives, society, etc.

Apauruṣheya—Not created by any person.

Apān—A type of *prāṇ*, it is responsible for controlling the function of elimination of urine and faeces.

Arpaṇam—Dedicating and mentally delivering works to Bhagavān.

Āryan—A person established in goodness, a perfect gentleman.

Asat—Temporary.

Āṣṭa sātvic bhāv—Physical symptoms of devotional absorption such as becoming stupefied, sweating, horripilation, choking of the voice, trembling, complexion becoming ashen, shedding tears, and fainting that sometimes manifest.

Āṣṭāṅg yog—The eight-fold process of Yog propagated by Sage Patanjali.

Asmitā—Pride.

Āśram—1) One of the four phases of life, 2) place similar to a monastery

where dedicated spiritual practitioners reside.

Āstik Darśhans—Schools of thought that accept the authority of the Vedas.

Asura—A demon.

Ātman—The real self, or “Ātman,” that is spiritual in nature, and which imparts consciousness to the body.

Ātmanhuti—See *Ātma samarpan*.

Ātma jñāna—Knowledge limited to that of the self.

Ātma-krīd—One who performs divine pastimes with his or her own self.

Ātman—See *Ātman*.

Ātmanrām—One who rejoices in the self and has no need of anything external.

Ātma-ratī—One who is attracted to his or her own self.

Ātma samarpan—Offering one’s Ātman to Bhagavān.

Avatār—Descention of Bhagavān or his special powers on earth.

Avatārī—The source of all the *Avatārs*, Shri Krishna.

Aveśhāvatār—A person in whom Bhagavān's special powers descend and act through.

Avidyā—Ignorance within.

Avidyā śakti—The aspect of the material energy that puts the Ātman into illusion.

B

Bāhya kumbhak—Keeping the lungs empty after exhalation; the incoming breath gets suspended in the outgoing breath during the period of suspension.

Bhakta vatsaltā—Bhagavān's love for his devotees.

Bhakti—Devotion to Bhagavān.

Bhakti yog—The science of uniting with Bhagavān through Divine Love.

Bhakti yogi—One who practices *bhakti yog*.

Bhāṣhya—Commentary,

Bhāv—Sentiment.

Bhog—Material enjoyment.

Bīja—1) Impurities of the heart, 2) seed.

Bīja mantra—The seed mantra.

Brahmacharya—The practice of celibacy.

Brahmacharya āśram—The first stage of life, in *varṇāśram* system, from birth till the age of 25.

Brahma-jñāna—Knowledge of the Supreme.

Brahma Lok—The abode of Brahma, the highest abode in the material universe.

Brahman—The formless aspect of Bhagavān, which is without Names, Virtues, and Activities.

Brahma Vidyā—The science of Brahman-realization.

Brahmin—Person who has a preponderance of the mode of goodness. They are predisposed toward teaching and worship.

Buddhi—Intellect.

Buddhi yog—The science of controlling by intellect.

C

Chatur-bhuj rūp—Four-armed form of Bhagavān.

Chatushloki Bhagavat—The original form of *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* that Bhagavān whispered into Brahma's ears prior to the creation.

Chitta—The portion of the mind that gets attached to objects and persons.

D

Daityas—Demons.

Dānavs—Demons.

Darśhan—1) Philosophic text written by a sage, 2) divine vision.

Dās—Servant.

Dāsoham—Sentiment of servitude, "I am the servant of Bhagavān."

Dāsyā bhāv—The sentiment of servitude toward Bhagavān as one's Master.

Devatā—celestial deity.

Devi Lok—The divine abode of Mother Durga, located in the Paravyom.

Dhām—Abode.

Dharma—Responsibilities, duties, thoughts, and actions that are appropriate for a person.

Dhārmic—Of or related to Dharma.

Durga—The feminine form of Bhagavān, who oversees material creation and is worshipped as the divine Mother of the universe.

Dwāpar yug—Era that precedes Kali yug, consisting of 864,000 years.

Dwesh—Hatred.

Dwitiya Puruṣ—See Garbhodakshayi Vishnu.

G

Gandharvas—Celestial beings who sing beautifully.

Gāndīv—Arjun's bow.

Garbhodakashayi Vishnu—An expansion of Maha Vishnu who resides at the bottom of each material universe.

Golok—The Divine abode of Shri Krishna, which exists in the spiritual realm, beyond this material world.

Gopīs—The village maidens who resided in Braj, when Shri Krishna displayed his *leelas* there 5000 years ago.

Goverdhan leela—Shri Krishna's famous pastime upon the earth, in which he lifted the Goverdhan Hill on the little finger of his left hand, to protect the residents of Braj from the rain caused by *Indra*.

Grihastha—Household.

Grihastha āśram—The second stage of life in *varṇāśram* system, which is regular married life, from the age of 25 till 50.

Guṇas—Modes of nature.

Guru—A Brahman-realized teacher of spirituality.

H

Hansa—1) The swans, 2) a category of spiritual practitioner, who can perceive Bhagavān within everything and hence does not get attached.

Hanuman—An ardent devotee of Bhagavān Ram who possesses the form of a divine monkey in his pastimes. He is an expansion of Bhagavān Shīv.

Hṛṣṭha Yog—A system of *sādhanā* based on physical practice and the force of will power, for preparing the body and mind for meditation.

HiranyaMāyā—See *Hiranyagarbh*.

Hiranyagarbh—Primordial form of material energy.

Hlādinī Śakti—The Bliss-giving power of Bhagavān.

I

Indra dev—The king of Swarg, who is the celestial deity of rain.

Itihās—The two historical texts of the Indian Civilization, Ramayana, and Mahābhārat.

J

Jagat—World.

Jagadguru—Spiritual Master of the world; similar to the Pope in Christianity.

Japa—Chanting of mantra or name of Bhagavān on rosary beads.

Jīva—Living being.

Jīvan mukt—One liberated even while residing in the body.

Jīva-śakti—Ātman energy of Bhagavān.

JīvĀtman—Individual Ātman.

Jñānī—1) Person of knowledge, 2) one following the path of *jñāna yog*.

Jñāna—Knowledge.

Jñāna-kāṇḍ—The section of the Vedas containing philosophic knowledge.

Jñāna tripuṭī—The knower, the object of knowledge, and knowledge.

Jñāna yog—The system of Yog in which the emphasis is on knowing the self, which is considered to as non-different from Bhagavān.

K

Kaamdev—Cupid.

Kāla—Time.

Kali yug—The present era on the earth planet. This was preceded by *Dwāpar yug*, *Tretā yug*, and *Sat yug*.

Kām—1) Desire, 2) lust.

Kalp—One day of Brahma, comprising of 1000 cycles of four yugas.

Karanodakshayi Vishnu—The form of Bhagavān Vishnu, commonly called Maha Vishnu, who resides in the causal ocean and from whom all the infinite universes come forth.

Karm—Work in accordance with the prescribed rules of the Vedas.

Kāraṇ śharīr—The causal body, consisting of the account of karmas from endless past lives, including the *sanskārs* (tendencies) from previous lives.

Karm Dharma—One's ritualistic and bodily duties according to the Vedas.

Karmī—One who performs *karm*.

Karm-kāṇḍ—1) Ritualistic ceremony, 2) section of the Vedas dealing with ritualistic ceremonies and duties.

Karm sanyāsī—One who renounces worldly duties and engages only in spiritual practice.

Karm triputī—The doer, the instrument of action, and the act itself.

Karm-yog—The practice of uniting the mind with Bhagavān even while doing one's obligatory duties in the world.

Karm yogi—One who practices *Karm-yog*.

Kartritwābhimān—The ego of being the doer.

Kashi Vidvat Parishat—The supreme body of Vedic scholars in the city of

Kashi (highest seat of Vedic learning).

Kauravas—Descendants of Kuru, the term primarily refers to the hundred sons of Dhritarashtra.

Kīrtan—The singing of names, virtues, and pastimes of Bhagavān, usually done in a group.

Kṣatriya—Person with a preponderance of the mode of passion mixed with a smaller amount of the mode of goodness and inclined toward administration and management.

Kṣhetra—The field of activities of the embodies Ātman, i.e. the body.

Kṣhetrajña—The knower of the *Kṣhetra*, the Ātman.

Kshirodakshayi Vishnu—The expansion of Bhagavān Maha Vishnu, who resides at the top of every universe.

Kṣhīr Sagar—Abode of Kshirodakshayi Vishnu, located at the top of every universe.

Kuber—The treasurer of the celestial deities.

Kumbh Melā—A mass Hindu pilgrimage of faith in which devotees gather at a sacred river for a bath in the river. It is held every third year at one of the four places by rotation, viz. Haridwar, Allahabad, Nasik, and Ujjain.

Kundalini—A power that resides at the base of the spine, like a coiled serpent. When it begins rising up the spinal column, it bestows various material mystic abilities.

Kusaṅg—Association that makes one's mind worldly.

L

Leela—A Divine pastime enacted by Bhagavān in His personal form.

Lok—Abode or planet.

Bhagavān Kapil—A descention of Bhagavān, he revealed the *Sāṅkhya* system

of philosophy and also taught the glories of *bhakti yog*.

M

Mādhurya bhāv—The sentiment of worshipping Bhagavān as one's Ātman-beloved.

Mahājan—A great knower of religious principles. Bhāgavatam mentions twelve such great personalities, viz. Brahma, Sage Narad, Bhagavān Shiv, the four Kumars, Bhagavan Kapil (son of Devahuti), Svayambhuva Manu, Prahlad Maharaj, Janak Maharaj, Grandfather Bheeshma, Bali Maharaj, Shukadev Muni, and Ved Vyas.

Mahā pralaya—The great cosmic dissolution at the end of Brahma's life, wherein the entire creation merges back into Maha Vishnu's body.

Mahān—The entity created by evolution of *prakṛiti*.

Maha Vishnu—See Karanodakshayi Vishnu.

Mahā yug—A cycle of four yugas, consisting of *Satya yug*, *Tretā yug*, *Dwāpar yug*, and *Kali yug*.

Mānasī sevā—Serving Bhagavān in the mind.

Mānav—Human being

ManoMāyā Kośh—It is the mental sheath, one of the five sheaths that cover the Ātman in the materially bound state.

Manu—The progenitor of human kind. We are presently in the era of the seventh Manu, who is called Vaivasvat Manu.

Māyā—The material energy from which this world is created. It also puts Ātman(s), who are forgetful of Bhagavān, into illusion, and makes them transmigrate in the cycle of life and death.

Māyā śakti—See Māyā.

Māyā-viśhiṣṭ brahma—An atheistic opinion about Shri Krishna, considering him

as a lower grade of the Supreme Divinity, due to contact with the material energy.

Meru—A mountain in the celestial abodes famed for its rich natural resources. It is believed to be the axis around which many heavenly bodies rotate.

Mīmāṃsā—One of the six philosophical treatises. It was written by Sage Jaimini and describes ritualistic duties and ceremonies.

Mithyā—Non-existent.

Mokṣha—Liberation from the material bondage.

N

Naimittik Pralaya—This is the dissolution of all the abodes up to *Mahar Lok* at the end of Brahma's day.

Naiṣhkarmya-siddhi—The state of actionlessness.

Narad—A celestial sage, who roams the three worlds and was the Guru of many great personalities.

Narak—Hellish abode.

Narayan—The form of Vishnu that resides eternally in the divine realm called the Vaikunth.

Nar-Narayan—The twin descensions, where Nar was a perfected Ātman and Narayan was the Supreme Bhagavān.

Nididhyāsan—Internalizing a concept with firm faith.

Nirākār—Not possessing material form.

Nirguna—Not possessing material qualities.

Nirvāṇ—See *mokṣha*.

Nirviseśh—Not possessing material attributes.

Niṣhedh—These are the directives not to perform certain actions.

Nitya baddha—Ātman(s) bound under the spell of Māyā since eternity.

Nitya karm—The routine activities for bodily maintenance like eating, bathing, etc. plus the daily Vedic rituals such as *sandhyā vandan*.

Nitya pralaya—Daily dissolution of our consciousness that takes place when we fall into deep sleep.

Nitya siddha—The eternally liberated Ātman who has never been under the spell of Māyā and his therefore resided in the divine realm of Bhagavān since eternity, participating in Bhagavān's divine pastimes.

Nrisingh—The half man-half lion descention of Bhagavān Vishnu.

O

Om—It is also the sound that pervades the material universe and can be heard by yogis who tune into it.

P

Pada—A devotional song composed in a traditional style that has been commonly used by many *Bhakti* Saints such as Soordas, Meerabai, Tulsidas, Guru Nanak, Kabir etc.

Pandavas—The sons of Pandu, viz., Yudhishtir, Bheem, Arjun, Nakul, and Sahadev.

Pañch-jñānendriya—The five knowledge acquiring senses—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin.

Pañch-karmendriya—The five working senses—hands, legs, voice, genitals, and anus.

Pañch-kleśhas—The five defects of the material intellect—*avidyā*, *asmitā*, *rāga*, *dweṣha*, and *abhiniveṣha*.

Pañch-kośhas—the five sheaths that cover the materially bound Ātman.

Pañch-mahābhūta—The five gross elements in creation—earth, water, fire, air, and space.

Pañch-tanmātrā—The five subtle elements of creation—taste, touch, smell, sound, and sight.

Pāp—Sin.

Parā bhakti—Divine Love.

Para dharma—The spiritual duty of a person, which is devotion to Bhagavān.

ParamĀtman—The Supreme Ātman, aspect of the Bhagavān who resides in all living beings.

Paramhansa—An elevated Ātman, who effortlessly sees only Bhagavān everywhere.**Paramparā**—1) Social or family custom or tradition, 2) disciplic succession.

Param Puruṣh—The Supreme Bhagavān.

Paravyom—The divine sky of the spiritual realm, containing the eternal abodes of the different forms of Bhagavān, such as Golok, Saket Lok, Vaikunth Lok, Shiv Lok, Devi Lok, etc.

Pariṇām vāda—A school of thought believing that Bhagavān has transformed into the world.

Peepal tree—Sacred fig.

Phalgu vairāgya—Renunciation motived by the desire to run away from difficulties.

Prakriti—The primordial form of the material energy.

Pralaya—Dissolution.

Prāṇ—A subtle life force energy that pervades the breath and varieties of animate and inanimate objects.

PrāṇaMāyā kośh—The life-airs sheath, consisting of the five life-airs.

Praṇav—see *Om*.

Prāṇāyām—Breathing exercise for controlling the breath and assimilating *prānic* energy.

Prārabdh karma—The destiny one is allotted at the time of birth, based on past karmas.

Prasād—Grace of Bhagavān. Specifically items food offered to Bhagavān is then

accepted by devotees as his grace.

Prasthān Trayī—Three points of commencement for understanding Vedic thought. These are the Upaniṣads, the Brahma Sūtras, and the Bhagavad Gita.

Pratham Puruṣh—see Maha Vishnu.

Pratyāhār—Control of the mind and senses from running toward the objects of the senses.

Preya—Happiness that initially appears to be sweet but becomes bitter in the end.

Pūjā—Worship.

Pūrak—A part of the *prāṇāyām* exercise, in which the lungs are filled by drawing the breath into them.

Puruṣhārth—Actions performed by exercising one's freedom of choice.

R

Radha Rani—Bhagavān takes on two forms in His Divine pastimes—Krishna (the Energetic) and Radha Rani (His Divine Energy). Radha is also called the Divine Mother of the Universe, to whom all the other energies of Bhagavān are subservient.

Rāga—Attachment.

Rajas—The mode of passion.

Rajo guna—The mode of passion.

Rākṣhasa—Powerful being who are inclined toward sensual enjoyment, revenge, and wrath.

Rasik—Devotee who is inclined to relishing the sweetness of Bhagavān.

Rechak—A part of the *prāṇāyām* exercise, in which the lungs are emptied of breath.

Rishi—Sage.

Rog—Disease.

Rūp dhyān—Meditation upon the Form of Bhagavān.

S

Sadashiv—The original form of Bhagavān Shiv, from whom all his other forms (eleven Rudras) have emanated.

Sādhak—Spiritual practitioner.

Sādhanā—Spiritual practice.

Sādhan siddha—These are the Ātman(s) who were previously in the material realm, but they practiced *sādhanā* and attained the Supreme Bhagavān. Now they reside in the divine realm for the rest of eternity and participate in Bhagavān's pastimes.

Saket Lok—The abode of Shri Ram situated in the *Paramvyom*.

Sakhā—Friend.

Sakhyā bhāv—The sentiment of devotion to Bhagavān as one's Friend.

Sākṣhī bhāv—The attitude of being the detached observer of the happenings in one's body and mind.

Samādhi—Meditative trance.

Samān—A type of *prāṇ*, it is responsible for the bodily function of digestion.

Samarpan—Dedication of oneself or one's works to Bhagavān.

Sāma Veda—One of the four Vedas. It describes Bhagavān's glories as they manifest in the celestial deities, who are in charge of administering the universe. The *Sāma Veda* is also the most musical and is sung in praise of the Bhagavān.

Sampradāya—A group of practice, views, and attitudes, which are transmitted by each successive generation of followers.

Sāmpradāyic—Of or belonging to a *sampradāya*.

Samsara—The cycle of life and death.

Sanātan dharma—The eternal religion.

Saṅchit karmas—A person's accumulated karmas of endless past lifetimes.

Sandhyā vandan—Set of rituals performed thrice daily at dawn, noon, and dusk by those who have received the sacred thread.

Saṅkalp—Resolve made by the utilization of one's free will.

Sāṅkhya—Complete analytical knowledge of something.

Sāṅkhya Darśhan—One of the six philosophical treaties in Indian philosophy, written by sage Kapil. It makes an analytical enumeration of the entities in cosmos.

Sāṅkhya yog—System of Yog based on analytic knowledge regarding the nature of the Ātman and creation.

Sanskārs—Tendencies coming from previous lives.

Sanyās—The renounced order of life.

Sanyās āśram—The fourth stage of life, which is from the age of 75 onward, where one gives up all household duties and resides in a holy place, absorbing the mind in Bhagavān.

Sanyāsī—One who practices sanyās.

Sarvajña—Omniscient.

Sarva-śaktimān—Omnipotent.

Sat—1) Eternal existence, 2) perpetual goodness and virtue, 3) established in the performane of sacrifice, austerity, and charity.

Sat-chit-ānand—Eternality, sentience, and bliss.

Satsaṅg—Association that purifies the mind.

Sattva—The mode of goodness.

Sattva guṇa—The mode of goodness.

Satya yug—First of the cycle of four yugs lasting for 17.28 million years.

Śāligrām—A special kind of fossil stone worshipped as a representation of Bhagavān.

Śhānt bhāv—The sentiment of adoring Bhagavān as our King.

Śhārīrik dharma—One's bodily duties as described in the Vedic Scriptures.

Śāstra—Scripture.

Shiv Lok—The abode of Sadashiv, situated in the *Paramvyom*.

Śhlok—Verse.

Śhraddhā—Faith.

Śhreya—Happiness that is unpleasant in the beginning but becomes sweet in the end.

Shri Krishna—Bhagavān takes on two forms in His Divine pastimes—Krishna (the Energetic) and Radha Rani (His Divine Energy). Krishna is also called the Complete Brahm (Absolute Bhagavān) of the Universe, to whom all the other forms of Bhagavān are subservient.

Śhruti—Knowledge received through the oral tradition. It is used as another name for the Vedas.

Śhuddha bhakti—Pure *bhakti*, devoid of selfish desires.

Śhuddha sattva—Divine mode of goodness, distinct from the material *sattva guṇa*.

Śhudras—Persons predominated by the mode of ignorance.

Siddhānt—Principle.

Siddhas—Perfected beings.

Siddhi—1) Perfection in something, 2) mystic power accrued by yogic practice.

Smṛitis—Scriptures written by sages.

Soma juice—Ambrosia drunk by the celestial deities.

Sriṣṭi—1) The Process of creation, 2) the act of releasing.

Sthiti—Maintenance of creation.

Sthūla śharīra—Gross body.

Stuti—Eulogizing prayer to Bhagavān.

Sūtra—Aphorism.

Sūkṣhma śharīr—Subtle body.

Suṣhumṇā—The main *prāṇic* channel situated inside spinal column.

Swa-dharma—One's duty as an individual, based upon one's nature, profession,

and stage in life.

Swāṁś—Expansions of Shri Krishna, who are non-different from him.

Swarg—The celestial abodes within the material world, which have far greater facility for enjoyment than the earth planet, but are not beyond the cycle of life and death

T

Tamas—The mode of ignorance.

Tamo guṇa—The mode of ignorance.

Tanpurā—A stringed Indian musical instrument, resembling a guitar.

Tapasvī—Ascetic.

Tat—Brahman.

Tattva jñāna—Knowledge of scriptural concepts and principles.

Tilak—A religious (or decorative) mark on the forehead made by certain thin paste or color in a particular style according to one's religious tradition.

Tretā yug—Second of the cycle of four yugas, consisting of 1.296 million years.

Tri-guṇas—Three modes of material nature, viz., *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*.

Tri-guṇātī—Transcendental to the three modes of material nature.

Trikāl-darśī—One who has knowledge of the past, present, and future.

Tritīya Puruṣh—See Kshirodakashayi.

Tulstī—Holy basil leaf.

Tyāg—Renunciation of fruits of action.

U

Upaniṣads—These are philosophical texts that constitute a section of the Vedas.

Upāsanā Kāṇḍ—Section of the Vedas dealing with different kinds of worship.

V

Vaikunth Lok—The Divine abode of Bhagavān Vishnu in the spiritual realm, beyond the material world.

Vānaprastha āśram—The third stage of life, which is from the age of 50 till 75. In which one practices detachment while living in the household.

Varṇa—The four social classifications according to occupation in Vedic Society.

Varṇāśram dharma—The system of prescribed duties in accordance with one's profession and status in life.

Varuṇa Dev—The celestial deity of the ocean.

Vāyu dev—The celestial deity of the wind.

Vedānt—One of the six philosophical treatises in Indian philosophy, written by Ved Vyāsa.

Vedas—The eternal knowledge of Bhagavān that he manifested at the beginning of creation, and which was passed down from master to disciple through hearing, and finally divided and written in four books—Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sāma Veda, and Atharva Veda.

Ved Vyāsa—Descent of Bhagavān who revealed, compiled, and wrote many scriptures.

Vibhinnānśh—These are the differentiated parts of Bhagavān. These are the Ātman(s), who are the part of his *jīva śakti*.

vibhūti—Opulence.

Vidhi—The directives to perform certain activities or follow certain rules.

VijñānaMāyā kośh—It is the intellectual sheath, one of the five sheaths that cover the Ātman in the materially bound state.

Vipassanā—A Buddhist technique for developing detachment. Rigorous training is undertaken to reach this state of clarity and precision, ultimately leading to equanimity, and destruction of self-will.

Viparyaya—Reversals of knowledge under material illusion.

Virāṭ Puruṣh—The complete form personality of Bhagavān encompassing the entire material creation.

Vishvakarma—The celestial architect.

Viśwarūp—The universal form of Bhagavān.

Vrindavan—The land in Mathura district, India, where Bhagavān Shri Krishna displayed his divine pastimes during his descention upon earth 5000 years ago.

Y

Yajña—Sacrifice.

Yaksha—Semi celestial beings who exude power and wealth.

Yamdoot—Servats of the deity of death.

Yamrāj—The celestial deity of Death.

Yog—1) Union with Bhagavān, 2) system that unites the Ātman with Bhagavān.

YogMāyā—Divine power of Bhagavān.

Yukt vairāgya—Renunciation through seeing the whole world as the energy of Bhagavān. Such practitioners do not see what they possess as belonging to them, and do not wish to enjoy it for themselves. Instead, they are motivated by the desire to serve Bhagavān with whatever he has given to them.

Appellations in the Bhagavad Gita

For Shri Krishna

Achyut —the infallible one
Arisudan —the destroyer of the enemies
Bhagavan —Shri Hari
Govind —he who gives pleasure to the senses, he who is fond of cows
Hrishikesh —the Bhagavān of the senses
Jagannivas —he in whom the entire universe resides
Janardan —he who looks after the public
Keshav —the killer of the Demon named Keshi
Keshinisudan —the killer of the Demon named Keshi
Madhav —the husband of YogMāyā
Madhusudan —the killer of the Demon named Madhu
Purshottam —Shri Hari
Varshneya —he who belongs to the Vrishni clan
Vasudev —the son of Vasudev
Vishnu —the Supreme Bhagavān Vishnu
Yadav —he who was born in the Yadu clan
Yogeshwar —the Bhagavān of Yog

For Arjun

Anagha —the sinless one
Bharatarshabha —the best of the Bharatas
Bharata Sattama —the best of the Bharatas
Bharata Shreshth —the best of the Bharatas
Dhananjay —the conqueror of wealth
Gudakesh —the conqueror of sleep
Kapidhwaj —he whose flag is adorned with the insignia of Hanuman
Kaunteya —the son of Kunti
Kiriti —he who wears a diadem
Kuru Nandan —the joy of the Kurus
Kuru Shreshth —the best of the Kurus
Mahabaho —the mighty-armed

Pandava —the son of Pandu

Parth —the son of Pritha, Kunti

Parantapa —the scorcher of foes

Purushavyaghra —the tiger amongst men

Savyasachin —the one who can shoot arrows with both hands

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<i>rām brahma chinaMāyā abināstī</i>	13.v32
<i>rām eka tāpasa tiya tārī</i>	4.v7
<i>saba kai mamatā tāga baṭorī</i>	9v.24
<i>samaratha kahuñ nahiñ doṣhu gosāiñ</i>	4.v15
<i>sanamukha hoi jīva mohi jabahīñ</i>	18.v32
<i>sevahiñ lakhānu sīya raghubīrahi</i>	5.v12
<i>sīyā rāmaMāyā saba jaga jānī</i>	4.v34, 6.v4
<i>so dāstī raghubīra ki</i>	7.v14
<i>swargahu swalpa anta dukhadātī</i>	9.v27
<i>tanu binu bhajana veda nahiñ varanā</i>	6.v12
<i>ulaṭā nāmu japata jagu jānā</i>	9.v36

Adhyātma Ramayana

<i>avikārī vā vikārī</i>	9.v18
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Vālmīki Ramayana

<i>ekaikasyopakārasya prāṇān dāsyāsmi</i>	4.v14
<i>piśhāchān dānavān yakshān</i>	5.v8
<i>tvamomkārah parātparah</i>	11.v16

Mahābhārat

<i>ahanyahani bhūtāni gachchhantīha</i>	2.v30
<i>ātmanaḥ pratikūlāni pareśhām</i>	13.v4, 18.v18
<i>gūhitasya bhaved vṛiddhiḥ</i>	16.v11
<i>yo na kāMāyātē kiñchit</i>	5.v13

Darśan Śāstras

Nyāya Darśan

<i>jātasya harṣhabhayaśhoka sampratipatteḥ</i>	2.v27
<i>stanyābhilāshāt</i>	2.v28

Patañjali Yog Darśhan

<i>abhyāsa vairāgyābhyaṁ tannirodhah</i>	6.v26
<i>brahmacharya pratiṣṭhāyām</i>	6.v9
<i>ṛitambharā tatra prajñā</i>	5.v19
<i>saṁādhisiddhirīśvara pranidhānāt</i>	6.v18
<i>śrutānumāna-prajñābhyaṁ</i>	4.v36
<i>sthira sukhamāsanam</i>	6.v8

Brahma Sūtra

<i>achalatvāṁ chāpekṣhya</i>	6.v6
<i>avirodhaśhchananavat</i>	2.v20
<i>ānandamayo 'bhyāsāt</i>	6.v15
<i>āśīnaḥ saṁbhavāt</i>	6.v5

<i>dhyānāchcha</i>	6.v7
<i>guṇādvā lokavat</i>	13.v37
<i>jñō 'ta eva</i>	18.v4
<i>kartā śhāstrārthavattvāt</i>	18.v5
<i>viśheśhānugrahaś cha</i>	10.v13
<i>vyaktireko gandhavat</i>	2.v21

Smṛitis

Manu Smṛiti

<i>bhūtam bhavyam bhaviṣhyam</i>	13.v2, 16.v12
<i>mām sa bhakṣhayitāmutra yasya</i>	17.v2
<i>satyam brūyat priyam brūyān</i>	17.v4
<i>ṛitvikpurohitāchāryair mātulātithisamśhritaiḥ</i>	1.v4
<i>vidyāt tam puruṣham param</i>	11.v19
<i>yatra nāryas tu pūjyante</i>	1.v5

Parāśhar Smṛiti

<i>kṣhatriyoḥ hi prajā</i>	2.v33
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Saints, Devotees, and Philosophers

Jagadguru Shri Kripalu Ji Maharaj

Bhakti Śhatak

<i>bandhan aur mokṣha kā</i>	4.v28, 5.v5
<i>brahma lok paryanta sukh</i>	7.v17
<i>'jīvu' 'māyā', dui śakti haiñ</i>	7.v5
<i>jo hari sevā hetu ho, soī karma bakhān</i> .11.v14, 13.v16	
<i>karm yog aru jñāna sab</i>	8.v8
<i>mana hari meñ tana jagat meñ</i>	3.v3
<i>māyādhīn malīn mana</i>	13.v6
<i>sarvaśhakti prākṛtya ho</i>	15.v22
<i>sabai sarasa rasa dwārikā</i>	11.v22
<i>sarva śhakti sampanna ho</i>	15.v20
<i>sarva śhakti sanyukta ho</i>	15.v21
<i>śhaktimān kī śhaktiyāñ</i>	7.v23
<i>satya ahinsā ādi mana</i>	9.v37
<i>sau bātana kī bātā ika</i>	15.v5
<i>tīna rūp śhrī kṛiṣhṇa ko</i>	15.v19

Prem Ras Madirā

<i>dekho dekho rī, gwāla bālana yārī</i>	11.v7
<i>nakha dhāryo goverdhan</i>	11.v8

Rādhā Govind Geet

<i>jaga meñ raho aise govinda radhey</i>	12.v12
<i>sarva śhāstra sāra yaha govind rādhe</i>	15.v15
<i>hari kā viyogī jīva</i>	5.v22

Sādhan Bhakti Tattva

mana ko māno śhatru.....6.v1

sochu mana yaha karm.....5.v1

Sādhanā Karu Pyare

jagata te mana ko haṭā kara.....12.v8

Chanakya

Neeti Sūtra

nirutvāhād daivam patita.....18.v7

utsāhavatām śhatravopi vaśībhavanti.....18.v6

Gopal Bhatt Goswami

Hari Bhakti Vilas

ānukūlyasya saṅkalpaḥ18.v33

tulasī-dala-mātreṇa.....9.v31

Kali Das

Raghuvanśh

sa viśhwajitam ājahre.....3.v5

Kabir

dāna diye dhana nā ghaṭe.....18.v42

jaba maiñ thā taba hari nathīñ.....13.v8

jahañ jahañ chalūñ karūñ parikramā.....9.v34, 11.v31

jo karai so hari karai, hota kabīr kabīr.....3.v17

mana na raṅgāye ho.....3.v2

mālā pherata yuga phirā.....4.v27

mālik itanā dījiye.....12.v11

sumiran kī sudhi yon̄ karo.....8.v1

tīra talavāra se jo laḍai.....18.v2

ūñche pānī na ṭike.....16.v8

Tulasidas

āju jo harihiñ na śhastra gahāūñ.....2.v2

brahma jñāna jānyo nahīñ.....3.v15

jība jība te hari te bilagāno.....3.v13

na maiñ kiyā na kari sakauñ.....7.v12

nindak niyare rākhiye.....5.v9

To Rahim: aisī denī dena jyuñ.....18.v13

Yamnuacharya

Śhrī Stotra Ratna

mama nātha yad asti.....5.v7

yadāvadhi mama chetaḥ.....5.v20

Narad, Devarshi

Nārad Bhakti Darśhan

<i>anyāśhrayāṇāṁ tyāgo</i>	8.v5
<i>loka hānau chintā na kāryā</i>	6.v23
<i>nāradastu tadarpitā khilāchāratā</i>	9.v33
<i>tat prāpya tad evāvalokayati</i>	6.v20
<i>tat sukha sukhitvam</i>	7.v18
<i>yatprāpya na kiñchidvāñchhati</i>	12.v10

Nārad Pañcharātra

<i>eka deśhashtitisyāgnirjyotsnā vistāriṇī</i>	6.v22
<i>vāsudevaḥ prah prabhuh</i>	11.v17

Madhvendra Puri

<i>sandhyā vandana bhadramastu</i>	2.v46
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Jeev Goswami

Parmātma Sandarbh

<i>śaktitvenaivāṁśhatvam</i> vyāñjayanti	13.v24
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Rahim

<i>denahāra koī aur hai</i>	18.v14
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Rup Goswami

Bhakti Rasāmṛit Sindhu

<i>ādau śrauddhā tataḥ</i>	9.v2
<i>stambha svedo 'tha romāñchah</i>	11.v1, 18.v43
<i>śāstre yuktau cha nipunāḥ</i>	4.v39
<i>praudha-śraddho 'dhikār</i>	4.v39
<i>yo bhavet komala śraddhaḥ</i>	4.v39
<i>nāma-lilā-guṇadīnām</i>	9.v16

Shankaracharya

Prabodh Sudhākar

<i>śhuddhayati hi nāntarĀtman</i>	4.v13
<i>vivekino viraktasya śhamādiguṇa</i>	9.v38
<i>yāvat gururna kartavyo</i>	4.v32
<i>yā vāsudeve anīśhvaraśarvajñāshankā</i>	4.v2
<i>guru vedānta vākyeṣhu dṛidho</i>	3.v18, 4.v37
<i>mūrtam chaivāmūrtam dwe</i>	12.v1
<i>kāmyopāsanayārthayantyanudinām</i>	18.v28

Vidyaranya

Pañchadaśī

<i>mana eva manuṣhyāṇāṁ</i>	5.v4, 12.v6
<i>tatpādāmburu hadvandva sevā</i>	4.v31

Other Scriptures

Brahma Samhitā

<i>aṅgāni yasya sakalendriya.....</i>	<i>18.v17</i>
<i>ānanda-chinMāyā-rasa</i>	<i>15.v8</i>
<i>goloka-nāmni nija-dhāmni</i>	<i>15.v7</i>
<i>īśhwaraḥ paramāḥ kṛiṣhṇaḥ.....</i>	<i>7.v11, 9.v13, 11.v12</i>
<i>yasyaikaniśhvasita kālamathāvalambya.....</i>	<i>10.v7</i>

Charak Samhitā

<i>śharīra mādhyam khalu.....</i>	<i>6.v11</i>
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Chaitanya Charitāmṛit

<i>ataeva kāma-preme bahuta antara.....</i>	<i>7.v16</i>
<i>bhakti mukh nirīkshak</i>	<i>8.v7</i>
<i>jīva-tattva śakti, kṛiṣhṇa-tattva śaktimān.....</i>	<i>4.v19</i>
<i>jīvera svarūpa haya.....</i>	<i>4.v18</i>
<i>kabhu swarge uṭhāya.....</i>	<i>15.v3</i>
<i>kāmera tātparya nija-sambhoga kevala.....</i>	<i>7.v16</i>
<i>kṛiṣhṇa bhuli 'sei jīva.....</i>	<i>5.v3</i>
<i>śhraddhā śabde viśhwāsa.....</i>	<i>3.v19</i>
<i>swayam bhagavānera karma</i>	<i>10.v5</i>
<i>tāñhāra aṅgera śhuddha kirāṇa-maṇḍala.....</i>	<i>14.v5</i>
<i>kṛiṣhṇa sūrya-sama, māyā haya andhakāra.....</i>	<i>6.v19</i>

Tantra Bhāgavat

<i>ahankārāt tu samsāro.....</i>	<i>13.v33</i>
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Tantra Sār

<i>yajño yajña pumāṁśh chaiva.....</i>	<i>3.v10</i>
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Vaiśhampāyan Samhitā

<i>sarva dharma bahirbhūtaḥ.....</i>	<i>9.v19</i>
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Yog Vāsiṣṭh

<i>kartā bahirakartāntarloke vihara.....</i>	<i>v6, 13.v34</i>
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Guru Granth Sahib

<i>hari sama jaga mahañ vastu nahiñ.....</i>	<i>13.v23</i>
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The Bible

<i>For dust thou are...(Genesis 3:19).....</i>	<i>2.v22</i>
<i>Be sure your sin...(Numbers 32.23).....</i>	<i>16.v9.1</i>
<i>You shall love the Bhagavān...(Deuteronomy 6.5)..</i>	<i>13.v22</i>
<i>Malachi 4:5.....</i>	<i>2.v11</i>
<i>Blessed are the pure...(Matthew 5.8).....</i>	<i>4.v11</i>
<i>For where your treasure...(Matthew 6:21).....</i>	<i>10.v8</i>
<i>Matthew11:13-14.....</i>	<i>2.v11</i>
<i>Matthew17: 10-13.....</i>	<i>2.v11</i>
<i>Mark 12.30.....</i>	<i>13.v22</i>
<i>Do to others...(Luke 6.31)).....</i>	<i>18.v19</i>
<i>When you are invited...(Luke 14:10-11).....</i>	<i>16.v7</i>
<i>Father, forgive them...(Luke 23.34).....</i>	<i>12.v9.1</i>

In the beginning...(John 1:1).....8.v2.1
We walk by faith...(2 Corinthians 5:7).....9.v3
To be born in sound body...Wisdom of Solomon-
8:19-20.....2.v12

Dhammapada

na kahāpaṇa vassena3.v20

Tao Te Ching

Instead of trying to be the mountain.....16.v6

Sukti Sudhakar and Other Sayings

āmle kā khāyā aur bādoñ kā kahā.....18.v20.1
ek peḍa do pakṣhī baiṭhe.....6.v.01
eke satpuruṣhāḥ parārthaghaṭakāḥ.....16.v5
kuraṅga mātaṅga pataṅga.....2.v59
mārane vāle ke do hāth.....15.v15.1
vīndhya na īndhana pāiye.....11.v11
rātrirgamiṣhyati bhaviṣhyati.....2.v56
yā chintā bhuvi putra15.v3

About the Author

H.H. Swami Mukundananda ji is a world-renowned teacher of Spirituality, Yoga, and Meditation. He is the founder of the yogic system called JKYog, also known as Yoga for the Body, Mind, and Ātman. Swamiji is a unique *sanyāsī* (monk), who has a distinguished technical and management educational background as well. He completed Engineering and Management from two world-renowned institutes in India, IIT (Indian Institute of Technology) and IIM (Indian Institute of Management). He then worked for some time with a top industrial house. However, illustrious education and a promising corporate career did not quench his thirst for knowing the Absolute Truth. The longing for Bhagavān was so strong that he renounced his career and travelled throughout India as a *sanyāsī*. During these travels, he had the opportunity to meet and interact with many great *Āchāryas* and Saints, and learn about the various religious traditions and schools of philosophy in India.

Ultimately, his search took him to the lotus feet of his Spiritual Master, Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj (lovingly called “Maharajji” by his devotees). Under the guidance of Shri Maharajji, he studied the Vedic scriptures and practiced intense *sādhanā*. His Guru then entrusted him with the key task of propagating the ancient knowledge of the Eternal Truth the world over. For the last three decades, Swamiji has been traveling far and wide, awakening hundreds of thousands of seekers. He has a Bhagavān-gifted ability to keep all kinds of audiences enthralled and entertained through wisdom-filled anecdotes, humorous stories, and irrefutable logic. The hallmark of his lectures is the ease with which he dispels various myths and misconceptions associated with the various paths of Brahman-realization, and his ability to penetrate even the toughest minds and convince them with depth of understanding and scriptural veracity.

Swamiji cares deeply about imparting Hindu cultural and religious values to the younger generation, especially in the West. Toward this end, he has conceived a special personality development program for children and young adults. This program is called “The Bal-Mukund Playground for Vedic Wisdom.” It includes character building, yoga, meditation, devotional singing, cultural exposure, and religious training. Many Bal-Mukund centers have been started for the benefit of children, both in USA and in India.

For the youth, Swamiji has conducted programs at prestigious universities such as Princeton, Stanford, Yale, MIT, Duke, and Kellogg School of Management. He has been invited to speak at various Fortune 500 companies like Google, Oracle, etc.

Swamiji has founded many organizations in India with permanent centers and *āśrams*, such as Jagadguru Kripaluji Yog Trust (India), Radha Govind Dham (Delhi), Radha Krishna Bhakti Mandir (Cuttack), Radha Govind Dham (Berhampur), Shyama Shyam Dham (Jajpur), Radha Govind Dham (Parla Khemundi), Radha Govind Dham (Karanjia), etc. In USA, Swamiji has inspired the formation of Jagadguru Kripaluji Yog (JKYog). In the space of a few years, JKYog centers have opened in twenty-five cities throughout the length and breadth of USA. All these organizations are a part of the worldwide mission of Jagadguru Shri Kripaluji Maharaj, with its international headquarters in Bhakti Dham, Mangarh (U.P., India).

Shri Swamiji has inspired people all over the world, on the path of spirituality, holistic health, yoga, meditation, service to society, and Brahman-realization. His warmth and humility touch all those who have had the fortune to have his association. In fact, his very presence radiates grace and bliss.

The Publisher

Other Publications by JKYOG

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- .. Spiritual Dialectics
- .. Essence of Hinduism
- .. Saints of India
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