

BG 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?

Commentary: The two armies had gathered on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, well prepared to fight a war that was inevitable. Still, in this verse, King Dhritarashtra asked Sanjay, what his sons and his brother Pandu's sons were doing on the battlefield? It was apparent that they would fight, then why did he ask such a question?

The blind King Dhritarashtra's fondness for his own sons had clouded his spiritual wisdom and deviated him from the path of virtue. He had usurped the kingdom of Hastinapur from the rightful heirs; the Pandavas, sons of his brother Pandu. Feeling guilty of the injustice he had done towards his nephews, his conscience worried him about the outcome of this battle.

The words dharma kshetra, the land of dharma (virtuous conduct) used by Dhritarashtra depict the dilemma he was experiencing. Kurukshetra is described as kurukshetra deva yajanam in the Shatapath Brahman, the Vedic textbook detailing rituals. It means "Kurukshetra is the sacrificial arena of the celestial gods." Hence, it was regarded as the sacred land that nourished dharma.

Dhritarashtra feared that the holy land might influence the minds of his sons. If it aroused the faculty of discrimination, they might turn away from killing their cousins and negotiate a truce. A peaceful settlement meant that the Pandavas would continue being a hindrance for them. He felt great displeasure at these possibilities, instead preferred that this war transpires. He was uncertain of the consequences of the war, yet desired to determine the fate of his sons. Therefore, he asked Sanjay about the activities of the two armies on the battleground.

BG 1.2: Sanjay said: On observing the Pandava army standing in military formation, King Duryodhan approached his teacher Dronacharya, and said the following words.

Commentary: Sanjay understood Dhritarashtra's concern, who wanted an assurance that the battle would eventuate. Sanjay tried to allay his worry by informing that the Pandava army was standing in a military formation, ready for battle. Then he moved on to tell him what his son Duryodhana was doing on the battlefield.

As King Dhritarashtra was blind, his eldest son Duryodhana virtually ruled the kingdom of Hastinapur. In the Mahabharata, he is described as very rude, egoistic, evil and cruel by nature. Since his childhood, he had a strong dislike for the Pandavas and left no opportunity to demean them. He was aware that to rule over the entire kingdom of Hastinapur unchallenged he needed to eliminate them. However, standing on the battlefield, when he saw the large Pandava army, he was baffled. He had underestimated the Pandavas, the extent of military might they had gathered was way beyond his expectation.

Duryodhana approached his guru Dronacharya with the pretense of offering respect, but his actual purpose was to palliate his own nervousness. His move towards his guru also reveals that the mammoth military formation of the Pandava army unnerved him and he was now fearful of the outcome of this war.

The next nine verses are spoken by Duryodhan.

BG 1.3: 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.

Commentary: Duryodhana asked Dronacharya to look at the skillfully arranged military phalanx of the Pandava army led by their commander-in-chief Dhrishtadyumna, King Dhrupad's son. He was also one of Dronacharya's pupils. Duryodhana was subtly reminding his teacher of a mistake he had committed in the past.

Many years back, Dronacharya along with the Pandavas had defeated King Drupad in a battle and took

away half his kingdom. To avenge his defeat, Drupad performed a sacrifice to beget a son. Dhristadyumna was born out of that sacrificial fire, with a boon that he would kill Dronacharya in the future. Even though Dronacharya was aware, when he was approached for Dhristadyumna's military training, he very humbly accepted and imparted all his knowledge impartially to his pupil.

Duryodhana was reminding Dronacharya that even though Dhristadyumna was his pupil, he was also Drupad's son, with a boon to kill him. He wanted to ensure that as in the past, Dronacharya should not become lenient towards his pupils, now that, they were on the battlefield.

BG 1.4-6: 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 Dhristaketu, 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.

Commentary: Due to his anxiety, the Pandava army seemed much larger to Duryodhan than it actually was. He had never expected his opponents would mobilize an army of warriors with such military prowess, who would be formidable in battle. Out of fear of the looming catastrophe, he started enumerating the names of all the mahārathīs (warriors who were singly equivalent in strength to ten thousand ordinary warriors) gathered on the Pandava side. They were all exceptional heroes, and great military commanders, equivalent in valor to his cousins Arjun and Bheem.

BG 1.7: O best of Brahmins, hear too about the principal generals on our side, who are especially qualified to lead. These I now recount unto you.

Commentary: Dronacharya was a teacher of military science and not really a warrior. However, he was on the battlefield as one of the commanders of the Kaurava army. An impudent Duryodhana even doubted the loyalty of his own preceptor. Cunning Duryodhana purposefully addressed his teacher as dwijottama (best amongst the twice-born, or Brahmins). His denigrating and veiled reminder for Dronacharya was that, if he did not display his valor in this battle, he would be considered a lowly Brahmin, who was only interested in the fine food and lavish lifestyle at the king's palace.

Then to cover up his vicious words and boost his teacher's and his own morale; Duryodhana started naming all the great generals present on the Kaurava side, describing their valor and military expertise.

BG 1.8: There are personalities like yourself, Bheeshma, Karna, Kripa, Ashwatthama, Vikarna, and Bhurishrava, who are ever victorious in battle.

Commentary: In this verse, Duryodhana continues to assess the strengths of his army by naming key warriors who support him. He mentions mighty and renowned fighters—Bheeshma, Karna, Kripacharya, Ashwatthama, Vikarna, and Bhurishrava—as “ever victorious in battle.”

Each of these warriors is a symbol of immense power and prestige:

Bheeshma, the grandsire, is unmatched in skill and wisdom, bound by his vow to fight for the Kauravas.

Karna, known for his loyalty and generosity, is a formidable archer and rival to Arjuna.

Kripa, a revered teacher and master of warfare, is respected for both his knowledge and valor.

Ashwatthama, the son of Drona, is a fierce warrior with divine blessings.

Vikarna, Duryodhana's brother, though morally conflicted, stands firm with his kin.

Bhurishrava, from a noble lineage, is known for bravery and strength.

Duryodhana calls them “nitya vijayinah”—eternally victorious—perhaps to bolster his confidence and rally his forces. However, there’s an undertone of anxiety in this detailed evaluation. Despite listing such powerful allies, Duryodhana feels the need to assert their strength, hinting at his inner insecurity facing the Pandava army, especially with Krishna on their side.

This verse highlights the contrast between material strength and inner righteousness—a theme that runs throughout the Gita. While Duryodhana has great warriors, their cause lacks dharma (righteousness), which ultimately influences the outcome of the war.

In essence, this verse reflects not just a count of warriors, but the mindset of a leader seeking reassurance through worldly power rather than spiritual truth.

BG 1.9: 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.

BG 1.10: 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

Commentary: The commander-in-chief of the Kaurava army was Grandsire Bheeshma. Apart from being an exceptional warrior, he had an extraordinary boon. He could choose the time of his death, this meant he was practically invincible. Duryodhana felt that under Bheeshma’s command their army was undefeatable. Whereas, the Pandava army was secured by Duryodhana’s sworn enemy, Bheema. Hence, he started comparing his Grandfather Bheeshma’s strength with his cousin Bheema.

Vinaash kale vipreet buddhi as the proverb goes, which means that when the end draws near, egoistic people indulge in vainglory instead of being humble in evaluating their situation. This tragic irony of fate is reflected here in Duryodhana’s self-aggrandizing statement that; their army’s strength secured by Bheeshma was unlimited.

However, both Kauravas and Pandavas were Bheeshma’s grandchildren and as the oldest living member of the Kuru family, he was concerned about their welfare. He was compassionate towards the Pandavas, but was bound by his ethical commitment towards the throne of Hastinapur and its subjects. Therefore, halfheartedly, he led the Kaurava army against them.

Bheeshma was also aware that in this holy war, along with all the great warriors of the world the Supreme Lord Krishna Himself was present. Lord Krishna was with the Pandavas, which meant Dharma was on their side, and no power in the entire universe could make the side of Adharma win.

He had vowed to protect the kingdom of Hastinapur and its subjects and to fulfill his responsibility towards them Bheeshma led the Kaurava army, even though he was aware of their wrongdoings. This decision of Bheeshma accentuates his strength of character and enigmatic personality.

BG 1.11: 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.

Commentary: Duryodhana urged all the Kaurava generals to make sure they are around Grandsire Bheeshma and give him full support while they defend their own respective positions in the military phalanx. Duryodhana beheld Bheeshma’s unassailability as an advantage and wanted to use it as strength and inspiration for his army

BG 1.12: 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

Commentary: Bheeshma was aware that Duryodhana had no chance of victory as the Supreme Lord Shree Krishna was on the opposite side. However, he understood his grand-nephew's anxiety and to cheer him up he blew his conch shell loudly. In olden days, blowing of the conch shell in the battlefield signaled the start of the war. This also conveyed to Duryodhana that Bheeshma was ready to lead the Kaurava army and he would fight dutifully and spare no pain.

BG 1.13: Thereafter, conches, kettledrums, bugles, trumpets, and horns suddenly blared forth, and their combined sound was overwhelming.

Commentary: On hearing Bheeshma's call for battle, everyone in the Kaurava army also started playing various instruments eagerly, creating tumultuous sound. Sha khā means conches, pa av are drums, ānak kettledrums, bhreyah bugles, and go-mukh are blowing horns. All these instruments playing together created a loud pandemonium.

BG 1.14: Then, from amidst the Pandava army, seated in a glorious chariot drawn by white horses, Madhav and Arjun blew their Divine conch shells.

Commentary: The uproar of the Kaurava army had started to wane. Then from the Pandava side, seated on a magnificent chariot the Supreme Lord Shree Krishna and Arjun, both blew their conch shells intrepidly, which ignited the enthusiasm of the Pandava army as well.

Here, Sanjay has addressed Lord Shree Krishna as "Madhav". It is a combination of two words, Mā which refers to goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity and dhav is used for husband. Goddess Lakshmi is Lord Vishnu's wife, who is one of the many forms of Shree Krishna. This verse implies that the goddess of prosperity was with the Pandavas, and by her grace, they would be triumphant in this war and reclaim their kingdom soon.

The sons of King Pandu are called Pandavas and it may be used for any of the five brothers. In this verse, the Pandava being referred to is Arjun, the third among the five. He was a mighty warrior and a superior archer. His magnificent chariot was a gift from Agni, the celestial god of fire.

BG 1.15: 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.

Commentary: In this verse, Shree Krishna is addressed as "Hrishikesh" which means the Lord of the mind and senses. Shree Krishna is the Sovereign Master of everybody's minds and senses. Throughout his wonderful pastimes, he displayed complete control over his mind and senses.

BG 1.16-18: King Yudhishtira, blew the Anantavijay, while Nakul and Sahadev blew the Sugshosh 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.

Commentary: Yudhishtira, the eldest Pandava is being addressed here as "King." He always displayed royal grace and nobility, whether living in a palace or in a forest when in exile. He also got this title by performing the Rājasūya Yajña a royal sacrifice, which earned him tributes from all the other kings of the world.

In this verse, Sanjay also called Dhritarashtra the "Ruler of the earth." The real reason for this appellation was to remind him of his duties as the ruler of the country. With so many kings and princes participating

from both sides in this war, it was as if the entire earth was split into two parties. It was definite that this mammoth war would cause irreversible destruction. The only person who could stop the war at this juncture was Dhritarashtra, and Sanjay wanted to know if he was willing to do that.

BG 1.19: The terrific sound thundered across the sky and the earth, and shattered the hearts of your sons, O Dhritarashtra.

Commentary:Sanjay conveyed to Dhritarashtra, that the tremendous sound of the various conch shells from the Pandava army was shattering the hearts of his sons. Whereas, he did not mention any such reaction from the Pandavas, when the Kauravas were creating a commotion. The Kauravas were fearful, as their conscience pricked them for their crimes and misdeeds. They were relying solely on their physical strength to fight the war. However, the Pandavas were confident and felt protected, as the Supreme Lord Shree Krishna was by their side, their victory was definite.

BG 1.20: 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 Shree Krishna

Commentary:Here Sanjay addresses Arjun by another name, “Kapi Dhvaj,” which means “Monkey Bannered.” This denotes the presence of the mighty Monkey God; Hanuman on Arjun’s chariot. It so happened that, once Arjun became very boastful of his archery skills and quipped at Shree Krishna. He said, “I do not understand why during Lord Rama’s time, the monkeys worked so hard to make a bridge from India to Lanka with heavy stones? If I was there, I would have made a bridge of arrows.” The Omniscient Lord asked him, “Alright, go ahead show me your bridge.”

Very skillfully Arjun showered thousands of arrows and made a huge bridge. Now, it was time to test it. Shree Krishna called upon great Hanuman for the job. As soon as Hanuman started walking on the bridge, it started crumbling under his feet. Arjun realized his folly; his bridge of arrows could not have upheld the weight of Lord Rama’s huge army. He asked for their forgiveness. Subsequently, Hanuman gave Arjun lessons on being humble and never be proud of his skills. He also granted Arjun a boon that, during the great war, he would seat himself on Arjun’s chariot. Therefore, Arjun’s chariot flag carried the insignia of the great Hanuman.

BG 1.21-22: 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.

Commentary:Arjun was a skilled warrior, and the most powerful Hanuman was sitting on top of his magnificent chariot. Moreover, his devotion towards the Supreme Lord Shree Krishna was such that, the Lord himself had agreed to be Arjun’s charioteer. Here, Arjun was seated on the passenger seat giving instructions to Shree Krishna, his charioteer. He addresses the Lord as Achyuta, the most dependable One and requests him to place the chariot in the middle of the battlefield.

aha bhakta-parādhīno hyasvatantra iva dvija
sādhubhir grasta-h idayo bhaktair bhakta-jana-priya
(Bhagavatam 9.4.63)

“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.” Such is the beauty of God’s bond with his devotees that He gets enslaved, beholden by His devotees’ love.

BG 1.23: 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.

Commentary:Arjun was fearless, the Supreme Lord was his charioteer. His outlook was that the

Pandavas were legitimately entitled to half the kingdom of Hastinapur, but the wicked sons of Dhritarashtra, the Kauravas had not agreed to share. Arjun was ready for battle, eager to get back what was rightfully theirs and punish them for all their past wrongdoings.

His request for the chariot to be placed in the middle of the battlefield was to take a closer look at the Kaurava army. Arjun wanted to see all those who had taken the side of injustice. He wanted to punish them equally, as they had chosen to be on the wrong side, none of them would be spared.

BG 1.24: Sanjaya said: O Dhritarashtra, having thus been addressed by Arjun, the conqueror of sleep, Shree Krishna then drew the magnificent chariot between the two armies.

Commentary: Here, Dhritarashtra is being addressed as Bhārata by Sanjaya, which means, “O descendant of the great King Bharat.”

Commentary:

In this verse, Sanjaya continues narrating the scene from the battlefield of Kurukshetra to King Dhritarashtra. The verse appears simple on the surface—describing Shree Krishna positioning the chariot—but it carries deep symbolic significance.

1. Symbolic Names:

- **Hrishikesha (Shree Krishna):**

This name means "Lord of the senses." It reminds us that Krishna is not just a charioteer but the Supreme Divine who governs all faculties of living beings. He is in control of Arjuna's journey—both literally (by holding the reins) and spiritually (by guiding him on the path of righteousness).

- **Gudakesha (Arjuna):**

This name means “conqueror of sleep or darkness.” It symbolizes Arjuna's spiritual readiness. Sleep here is symbolic of ignorance, and Arjuna's name reflects his awakening and quest for truth. Despite being such a noble warrior, even he becomes confused—highlighting that doubt can affect even the strongest when dharma (righteousness) becomes unclear.

- **Bhārata (Dhritarashtra):**

Sanjaya respectfully addresses the blind king as "O descendant of Bharata," linking him to the glorious lineage of King Bharata. It serves as a subtle reminder to Dhritarashtra of the greatness of his ancestry, in contrast to the blindness (both physical and moral) that now affects his judgment.

2. The Chariot Between the Two Armies:

This moment is pivotal. The chariot's placement between the two armies symbolizes the position of the human mind when caught between two forces—righteousness and attachment. Arjuna stands between duty and emotion, between kinship and dharma.

Krishna places Arjuna in a situation where he can fully observe both sides. This isn't just a military tactic—it's a spiritual lesson. Sometimes we need to see the whole picture, including the uncomfortable parts, to understand our dharma.

3. Spiritual Allegory:

The scene can also be seen as an allegory:

- The **battlefield** is life.
- The **chariot** is the body.

- **Arjuna** is the individual soul (jiva).
- **Krishna**, the divine charioteer, is the Supreme Soul (Paramatma).
- The **two armies** represent opposing tendencies in life—material desires vs. spiritual goals.

BG 1.25: In the presence of Bheeshma, Dronacharya, and all the other kings, Shree Krishna said: O Parth, behold these Kurus gathered here.

Commentary: Shree Krishna called Arjun “Parth, son of Pritha, another name for his mother Kunti.” Then he pointed at all the warriors like Bhishma, Drona and other kings on the Kaurava side and deliberately used the word “Kuru” to address them. It was to remind Arjun that both Kauravas and Pandavas were all decedents of the great king Kuru. Therefore, the enemy he was so eager to kill was actually his own family and relatives. The Omniscient Lord was sowing the seed of delusion in Arjun’s mind, only to eliminate it later. He was preparing the ground for the gospel he was about to preach - The Bhagavad Geeta, which would benefit the future generations in the age of Kali.

BG 1.26: 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.

Commentary: In this verse, Arjuna surveys the battlefield and sees, on both sides, not just warriors—but loved ones: fathers, grandfathers, teachers, uncles, brothers, sons, nephews, and close friends. This moment marks a profound emotional turning point for him.

The Mahabharata war was not a battle between strangers—it was a civil war among kin. Arjuna, standing between the two armies, is overwhelmed by the personal relationships that span both camps. This verse vividly illustrates the painful complexity of dharma (duty) when personal bonds and righteous obligations collide.

These are not just names or ranks; they are people who shaped Arjuna’s life—mentors like Dronacharya, elders like Bheeshma, beloved brothers, and even students and juniors. His mind is not focused on victory anymore; it is pulled into sorrow and compassion.

This moment of recognition initiates Arjuna’s inner crisis. The warrior who picked up his bow with determination now begins to question the very purpose of war. How can one fight when the opponents are family? What is the value of victory if it comes at such a personal cost?

This verse reminds us that the real battlefield is often internal. It’s not just about external conflicts but the emotional and moral turmoil within. Arjuna’s dilemma is timeless—it represents the struggle between duty and emotion, righteousness and attachment, action and consequence.

Thus, this verse sets the stage for the spiritual discourse that follows, as Arjuna’s heart begins to seek answers beyond the material realm.

BG 1.27: Seeing all his relatives present there, Arjun, the son of Kunti, was overwhelmed with compassion, and with deep sorrow, spoke the following words

Commentary:Shree Krishna's words had the desired effect on Arjun. Looking at the armies on both sides of the battlefield, his heart sank, they were all "Kurus" his relatives. The brave warrior who wanted to punish the Kauravas for all their wickedness a few minutes back suddenly became fearful. Comprehending the devastation this war would cause, his valor started to diminish. Hence, Sanjay has called him Kaunteyah the son of Kunti, denoting that Arjun had become softhearted, similar to his mother. However, Arjun was now very confused and his mind filled with questions

BG 1.28: 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.

Commentary:Arjun realized that all the warriors on the battlefield ready to shed blood were none other than his own relatives, friends, and family. He was filled with remorse and fearful of performing his duty of fighting this war. The cause for these sentiments was his attachment towards his bodily relatives. He became forgetful of his spiritual existence, that he was not just the body. His affection for his bodily relatives had blinded his consciousness.

In the materialistic concept, we consider ourselves to be only the body, which is emotionally attached to all its bodily relatives. As this attachment is based on ignorance it carries with it the physical burdens of life like pain, sorrow, grief, and death. Only the death of the physical body can end these materialistic attachments. We are more than just the physical body; our eternal souls are beyond life and death. Tangled in the various attachments of the material world, we keep forgetting that the Supreme Lord is our only permanent relative. He is the Father, Mother, Friend, Master, and Beloved of our soul.

BG 1.29-31: My whole body shudders; my hair is standing on end. My bow, the Gā īv, 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.

Commentary:Here Arjun has addressed Shree Krishna as Keśhava, killer of a demon called Keshi. Yet, for Arjun the thought of killing his own relatives troubled him to such an extent that, his body started to tremble. He was unable to even hold his magnificent bow Gā īv, which could emit sounds that petrified even the most powerful enemies. Arjun had become so disillusioned that superstition started gripping him. He could only see bad omens indicating severe devastation. Thus, he felt it would be a sin to engage in such a battle.

BG 1.32-33: O Krishna, I do not desire victory, kingdom, or the happiness accruing to 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?

Commentary:Taking away someone's life itself is immoral, and killing a relative is considered even more sinful. Arjun was in a dilemma, what would he gain with victory achieved by such a heinous act? It would not give him any joy; as he would have lost all the people who mattered to him.

Detachment to worldly assets is a commendable virtue. Even though Arjun's thoughts were moral and virtuous, they were not spiritual sentiments. They were budding out of compassion and attachment towards his relatives. Spiritual sentiments bestow peace, harmony, and happiness to a soul. However, Arjun's situation was not such he was disillusioned, confused, and losing control over his body and mind.

BG 1.34-35: 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, what satisfaction will we derive from the dominion over the three worlds, what to speak of this Earth?

Commentary:Arjun looked at the vast gathering of warriors on the battlefield and started considering his relationships with them. His teachers, Dronacharya and Kripacharaya; grand uncle Bheeshma and Somadutta; Bhurishrava (Somdatta's son); Kuntibhoj, Purujit, Shalya, and Shakuni his maternal uncles. The hundred Kauravas were his uncle Dhritarashtra's sons; their sons, grandsons, and several other relatives had all assembled there prepared for a battle till death.

Twice in this verse, Arjun used the word *api* which means "even though." He addresses Shree Krishna as Madhusudan, the killer of a demon named Madhu and says, "O Madhusudan, I do not wish to kill them even though I am aware they are eager to do so." Again, he says, "Even though for the sake of victory over the three worlds we fight, what joy would we get by killing our own folks?"

BG 1.36-37: 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?

Commentary:Similar to the previous verses, Arjun continues to explicate his unwillingness to kill his relatives by using the words "even though" again. Addressing Shree Krishna as Janardhana, sustainer of the populace, he said, "Even though I am aware that they are willing to attack us, I feel it would be a sin to kill my uncle Dhritarashtra's sons."

Then addressing him as Madhav, Goddess Lakshmi's husband, Arjun said, "It is not proper on our part to kill our cousins and relatives, how can we ever be happy by doing such a deed?"

Under most circumstances killing or taking someone's life is considered a grave sin, which subsequently causes guilt and repentance. The Vedas state: *mā hinsyāt sarvā bhūtāni* "Do not kill any living being." Unless absolutely necessary in an extreme situation, violence in any form is a sin and non-violence a superior virtue. In Arjun's case, even though the enemy's wrong deeds were unpardonable, he was not willing to kill them considering it to be immoral.

However, according to Vasiṣṭha Smṛiti (verse 3.19) under six circumstances it is acceptable to kill; in order to protect themselves from such enemies who have: set fire to their property, tried to poison them, conspired to murder, loot their wealth, kidnap or dishonor their women, or seize their kingdom. Even the Manu Smṛiti (8.351) mentions that it is not considered a sin if someone kills an attacker in self-defense.

BG 1.38-39: 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?

Commentary:Arjun was a proclaimed warrior, but due to his righteous nature, he tried to avoid violence whenever possible. This side of his character is well revealed in an incident that took place towards the end of the Mahabharat war.

Duryodhana was badly injured, and only a handful of warriors were remaining on the Kaurava side. Ashwatthama was one of them. He wanted to avenge his father Dronacharya and his friends Kauravas' death. He sneaked into the Pandava camp at night while everyone was fast asleep and went on a carnage. Several warriors including Draupadi's five sons were killed in this attack. The Pandavas, along with Draupadi and Shree Krishna were away that night. When they returned to the camp, they were devastated. Arjun went after Ashwatthama, caught him and threw him at the feet of Draupadi, who was grieving the death of her young sons. Bheem was raging and wanted to kill Ashwatthama right way, but Draupadi was a soft-hearted lady of forgiving nature. She said that Ashwatthama was their Guru Drona's son and a Brahmin, therefore, they should forgive him. Arjun was unsure what to do next and wanted guidance from Shree Krishna, who then 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 what the Lord meant; he did not kill Ashwatthama. Instead, he cut his brahmin’s tuft, removed the jewel of immense power from his forehead, and let him go.

itvikpurohitāchāryair mātulātithisanśhritai
bālav iddhāturair vaidyair jñātisam bandhibāndhavai
(Manu Sm iti 4.179)

“One should not squabble with, the Brahmin who performs the fire sacrifice, the family priest, teacher, maternal uncle, guest, dependent children, elders, doctor or relatives.”

Arjun was aware that killing one’s own relatives was a great sin. He said to Shree Krishna, “Greed has blinded them (Kauravas) and they do not realize that it is a great sin to kill their own relatives and friends, but why should we do the same thing, when we can avoid this transgression?”

BG 1.40: When a dynasty is destroyed, its traditions get vanquished, and the rest of the family becomes involved in irreligion

Commentary:The elder members of the family bear age-old traditions, customs, ideals and noble values of a community, which they pass on to their next generations. These traditions help nurture moral values in families and build religious propriety in a society. If the elders die early, their valuable knowledge goes with them and in the absence of proper guidance, the next generation sways away from the virtuous path. Therefore, Arjun was of the opinion that the elders of a family should be spared.

BG 1.41: 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.

Commentary:Women occupied a very high status in Vedic society. For families to be religious, and societies to be moral, it is necessary that their women be virtuous. According to the Manu Sm iti: yatra nāryas tu pūjyante ramante tatra devatā (3.56) “Societies where women are worshiped, for they are chaste and virtuous, the celestial gods are joyous.”

Arjun became concerned and started comprehending, “What would happen to the society in the absence of guidance and protection of elders? The women of the family may get misled.” Therefore, Arjun said to Shree Krishna that if the women of the family turn towards immorality, and commit adultery, they would bear illegitimate children. This would not only destroy peace and happiness of the future generations but also deprive the ancestors of their Vedic rites. Family traditions will be abandoned and the welfare of society will be at stake.

BG 1.42: An increase in unwanted children results in hellish life both for the family and for those who destroy the family. Deprived of sacrificial offerings, the ancestors of such corrupt families also fall.

Commentary:In this verse, Arjuna continues expressing the consequences of war. He fears that killing so many men in battle will destroy family traditions and values, leading to varna-sankara—unwanted or unrighteous offspring.

When noble family structures collapse, moral and spiritual values are lost. Without proper guidance, future generations may grow up without discipline or dharma. Arjuna believes this leads not only to societal decay but also spiritual downfall.

He adds that when family duties are neglected—especially sacred rituals and offerings—the ancestors (pit s) suffer, as they depend on such acts for peace in the afterlife. Without living descendants maintaining those rites, even the dead are affected.

This verse reflects Arjuna's deep concern for dharma and the long-term spiritual damage war could cause. His compassion is sincere, but it also reveals his growing confusion—focusing on consequences without understanding the greater purpose behind righteous action.

Here, Krishna will soon guide him to see beyond emotional reasoning and act according to a higher spiritual wisdom.

BG 1.43: 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
Arjuna continues to express the grave consequences of war. He says that when family traditions are destroyed and unrighteous offspring arise, it leads to the collapse of essential social and spiritual practices.

Family traditions (like moral upbringing, religious duties, and cultural values) are the backbone of a stable society. When these are disrupted, the next generations may lack discipline, respect, and dharma. As a result, important rituals, duties, and welfare activities—meant to uphold both individual and societal well-being—fade away.

Arjuna views this destruction not just as physical but spiritual and cultural. He fears that the war, driven by ambition and revenge, will break the very foundation of society.

This verse emphasizes how interconnected family, tradition, and social harmony are in the Vedic worldview—and why Arjuna is so disturbed by the idea of fighting his own kin.

BG 1.44: O Janardan (Krishna), I have heard from the learned that those who destroy family traditions dwell in hell for an indefinite period of time

Commentary:

At this point in Chapter 1, Arjuna is overwhelmed with sorrow and moral confusion. His inner conflict intensifies as he reflects on the devastating consequences of war—not just in terms of physical destruction but also moral and spiritual degradation. This verse highlights his concern for **dharma**, or righteousness, particularly the dharma associated with **family and society**.

BG 1.45-46: Alas! How strange it is that we have set our mind to perform this great sin with horrifying consequences. Driven by the desire for kingly pleasures, we are intent on killing our own kinsmen. It would be better if, with weapons in hand, the sons of Dhritarashtra kill me unarmed and unresisting on the battlefield.

Commentary: Arjun was surprised; despite being aware that this war would only bring misfortune to all, those who were in the battlefield and the families they would leave behind; they were all hankering to commit this sin. He started with the word “aho,” which means ‘alas’. He had enumerated all the possible catastrophes that were imminent if this war took place, but he was ignoring the very fact that if the wrongdoers were not punished, it would cause greater damage to the society.

Often, we keep blaming the circumstances or others but turn a blind eye towards our own weaknesses. Arjun's justification for not killing his greedy cousins and relatives was driven by his own attachment and compassion towards them. Even though he felt it was a sin to kill them, as they were his relatives, he did not realize that his sentiments were actually materialistic and not transcendental. Blinded by compassion, he had forgotten his dharma as a warrior; that he was beyond this material body. His delusion had come to a point where he was willing to drop his weapons and allow his enemy to kill him unarmed.

BG 1.47: 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.

Commentary: Arjun's reluctance to fight the war had now reached its climax. He had now surrendered to his grief and slumped into deep dejection. His condition was the creation of his own material attachments and caused his dereliction of duty. This was a completely unexpected behavior from someone who was considered the epitome of devotion and self-surrender to God. In fact, before the battle, when both parties were mobilizing their armies; given a choice between the entire armed Yadu army and the unarmed Lord

Shree Krishna; Arjun chose the Lord, as he had complete faith in him.

At this point let us consider who Arjun really was. He was definitely not a novice, bereft of spiritual knowledge. His celestial father was Indra, the king of heaven. Arjun had been to his abode and received several boons from him and other celestial beings. In his past life, Arjun was Nar, part of the twin descensions the Nar-Narayan; where Nar was the perfected soul situated in transcendental knowledge and Narayan the Supreme Lord. Then why in the battlefield of Kurukshetra, a grand warrior of such stature was dropping his weapons? What was the cause of his misery?

For the benefit of future generations, Shree Krishna wanted to bring forth the knowledge of the Bhagavad Gita. By intentionally confusing Arjun, the Lord had created this opportunity. In this chapter, Arjun put forth to the Lord several arguments and justifications why he should not fight this war, and in the subsequent chapters Shree Krishna has elaborated upon why Arjun's arguments were inappropriate, and the way forward.

BG 2.1: Sanjay said: Seeing Arjun overwhelmed with pity, his mind grief-stricken, and his eyes full of tears, Shree Krishna spoke the following words.

Commentary: To describe Arjun's feelings, Sanjay uses the word *kṛipayā*, meaning pity or compassion. This compassion is of two kinds. One is the divine compassion that God and the saints feel toward the souls in the material realm, on seeing their suffering in separation to God. 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, Shree 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.

BG 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.

Commentary: 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. Shree 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 Shree Krishna, who was quiet until now, starts speaking in this verse. The Supreme Lord 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 soul.

Rather than comforting him, Shree 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 soul. 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, God 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.

BG 2.3: 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.

Commentary: 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. Shree 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), Shree Krishna

invokes him to remember his mother Kunti. She had worshipped Indra, the chief of the celestial gods, and with his blessings Arjun was born. Hence, he was endowed with extraordinary might and valor, similar to that of Indra. Shree 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.

Shree 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.

BG 2.4: 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?

Commentary: In response to Shree 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."

BG 2.5: 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.

Commentary: 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.

BG 2.6: 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 the sons of Dhritarashtra, and

now stand before us on the battlefield

Commentary: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 Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam (verse 9.22.19), he was a great devotee of Shree 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 nāradaḥ śhambhuḥ kumāraḥ kapilo manuḥ
prahlādo janako bhīṣhmo balir vaiyāsakir vayam (6.3.20) [v1]

"These are the twelve great knowers of religious principles—the first-born Brahma, Sage Narad, Lord Shiv, the four Kumars, Bhagavan Kapil (son of Devahuti), Svayambhuva Manu, Prahlad Maharaj, Janak Maharaj, Grandfather Bheeshma, Bali Maharaj, Shukadev Muni, and Ved Vyas."

Hence, Bheeshma was an enlightened soul, 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 Yudhishtir (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 Lord Shree Krishna on their side, could never lose. By taking the side of adharma (unrighteousness), he showed that even the biggest forces on heaven 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 Lord Krishna.

Shree 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, Shree Krishna would have to break his own vow of not lifting weapons in the battle of Mahabharat. Poets describe the vow that Bheeshma made:

āju jo harihiṇ na śhastra gahāūñ,
tau lājahuñ gaṅgā jananī ko śhāntanu suta na kahāūñ
(Saint Soordas) [v2]

"If I do not make the Supreme Lord Shree 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, Shree Krishna lifted the chariot wheel and came forward to prevent Bheeshma from killing Arjun. Bheeshma saw the Lord with the chariot wheel in his hand as a weapon, and broke into a big smile. He understood that Bhaktavatsala Bhagavān (God who gives pleasure to his devotees) had broken his own vow to honor the vow of his devotee.

In fact, Bheeshma's devotion to Lord Krishna had a very rasik (full of sweetness) flavor to it. He used to meditate on Shree Krishna's pastimes in Vrindavan. There, in the evening when the Lord 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 Mahabharat, the dust raised from the hooves of the horses too added to Shree Krishna's beauty, and he loved having darśhan (divine vision) of his Lord 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 God, offering the following prayer to Him:

yudhi turaga-rajo-vidhūmra-viṣhvak-kacha-lulita-śhramavāry-alaṅkṛitāsyē
mama niśhita-śharair vibhidyamāna-tvachi vilasat-kavache 'stu kṛiṣhṇa ātmā
(Bhāgavatam 1.9.34) [v3]

"On the battlefield, Lord 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 Lord; and the wounds dealt by my sharp arrows further intensified the decorations. Let my mind meditate unto that Shree Krishna."

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

BG 2.7: 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

Commentary: This is a great moment in the Bhagavad Gita, when for the first time Arjun, who is Shree Krishna's friend and cousin, requests him to be his Guru. Arjun pleads to Shree Krishna that he has been overpowered by kārpaṇya doṣh, or the flaw of cowardice in behavior, and so he requests the Lord 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:

tadvijñānārtham sa gurumevābhigachchhet samitpāṇiḥ śhrotriyam brahmaniṣṭham
(Muṇḍakopaniṣhad 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 God-realization."

tasmād guruṁ prapadyeta jijñāsuḥ śhreyā uttamam
śhābde pare cha niṣṇātam 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 God, leaving aside all material considerations."

The Ramayan states:

guru binu bhava nidhi tarai na koī, jaun 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." Shree 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, Shree 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 mayam brahma deha āvapanam vibho
śhreyasām tasya guruṣhu vāso 'tyanta viḍambanam
(Bhāgavatam 10.80.45) [v7]

"O Shree 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)." Shree 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 souls, who are under the influence of Maya, will need a Guru to dispel our ignorance. In this verse, Arjun takes the step of surrendering to Shree Krishna as his disciple, and requests his Guru to enlighten him regarding the proper course of action.

BG 2.8: 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 gods, I will be unable to dispel this grief

Commentary: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 Shree 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.

BG 2.9: Sanjay said: Having thus spoken, Gudakesh, that chastiser of enemies, addressed Hrishikesh: "Govind, I shall not fight," and became silent.

Commentary: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 Shree 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.

BG 2.10: O Dhritarashtra, thereafter, in the midst of both the armies, Shree Krishna smilingly spoke the following words to the grief-stricken Arjun.

Commentary:In sharp contrast to Arjun's words of lamentation, Shree 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 souls inform us that the world created by God 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 Chhândogya Upaniṣhad explains why earthquakes, hurricanes, cyclones, floods, and typhoons are created in the world by God, as a part of the grand scheme of things. It states that God 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 souls 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 soul over a continuum of lifetime.

BG 2.11: The Supreme Lord 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.

Commentary: Starting with this verse, Shree 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, Shree 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 Lord. He thus demonstrated that those who are surrendered to God simply do their duty in all situations, without being affected by outcomes. Such persons never lament because they accept all circumstances as God's grace.

BG 2.12: 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.

Commentary: 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. Shree Krishna follows the same approach in the Bhagavad Gita, with a piece of information that would have swept Socrates off his feet. Shree Krishna begins by explaining that the entity that we call the "self" is really the soul, not the material body, and is eternal, just as God himself is eternal. The Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣhad states:

jñājñau dwāvajā viśhaniśhāvajā hyekā bhoktrī bhogyārtha yuktā
anantaśhchātma viśhwarūpo hyakartā trayam yadā vindate brahmametad (1.9) [v9]

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

BG 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.

Commentary: With immaculate logic, Shree Krishna establishes the principle of transmigration of the soul 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 soul seated within.

In this verse, the word deha means "the body" and dehi means "possessor of the body," or the soul. Shree Krishna draws Arjun's attention to the fact that, since the body is constantly changing, in one lifetime itself, the soul 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 soul discarding its old dysfunctional body, and what we call "birth" is the soul 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, Manichaenism, 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, and Muslim Shia sects such as the Alawi Shias and the Druze. 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." The great Sufi mystic, Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi declared:

I died out of the stone and I became a plant;
I died out of the plant and became an animal;
I died out of the animal and became a man.
Why then should I fear to die?
When did I grow less by dying?

I shall die out of man and shall become an angel!" [v10]

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, Rossetti, Tennyson, and Wordsworth, to mention just a few, all believed in it.

Shree 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.

BG 2.14: 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.

Commentary: 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.

BG 2.15: O Arjun, noblest amongst men, that person who is not affected by happiness and distress, and remains steady in both, becomes eligible for liberation.

Commentary: In the previous verse, Shree 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. God is an ocean of infinite bliss, and we souls 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 souls 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 soul, being a tiny part of God, is divine in nature like God himself. Hence the happiness that the soul seeks is also divine. Such happiness must possess the following three characteristics:

It must be infinite in extent.

It must be permanent.

It must be ever-fresh.

Such is the happiness of God, 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 soul.

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.

BG 2.16: Of the transient there is no endurance, and of the eternal there is no cessation. This has verily been observed and concluded by the seers of the Truth, after studying the nature of both

Commentary: According to the Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣhad, there are three entities in existence:

bhoktā bhogyaṁ preritāraṁ cha matvā sarvaṁ proktaṁ trividhaṁ brahmametad (1.12) [v13]

kṣharaṁ pradhānamamṛitākṣharaṁ haraḥ kṣharātmānāvīśhate deva ekaḥ (1.10) [v14]
sanyuktametatkṣharamakṣharaṁ cha vyaktāvyaaktaṁ bharate viśhvamīśhaḥ (1.8) [v15]

All these Ved mantras state that these three entities—God, the individual soul, and Maya—are all eternal.

1. God 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 soul is imperishable, and hence it is sat. However, the body will cease to exist one day, and hence it is asat (temporary). The soul is also sat-chit-ānand, but it is also aṇu (tiny). Hence the soul is aṇu sat, aṇu chit, and aṇu

ānand.

3. The entity Maya 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 Maya 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 God-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 God-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 God-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 God is all-pervading in the world:

so 'kāmayata bahu syām prajāyeyeti sa tapo 'tapyata sa tapastaptvā
idamsarvamasrijata yadidaṁ kiṁ cha tatsṛiṣhtvā tadevānuprāviṣhat tadanupraviṣhya
sachcha tyachchābhavat niruktaṁ chāniruktaṁ cha nilayanaṁ chānilaynaṁ cha
vijñānaṁ chāvijñānaṁ cha satyaṁ chānṛitaṁ cha satyamabhavat yadidaṁ kiṁ cha
tatsatyamityāchakṣhate tadapyeṣha śhloko bhavati (2.6.4) [v17]

This Vedic mantra states that God not only created the world, but also permeates every atom of it. If God 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 God pervades the world. In this verse, Shree 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.”

BG 2.17: That which pervades the entire body, know it to be indestructible. No one can cause the destruction of the imperishable soul

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

Some raise a question here regarding the location of the soul. The Vedas state that the soul resides in the heart:

hṛidi hyeṣha ātmā (Prašnopaniṣhad 3.6) [v18]
sa vā eṣha ātmā hṛidi (Chhāndogya Upaniṣhad 8.3.3) [v19]

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

avirodhaśhchandanaṁ (Brahma Sūtra 2.3.23) [v20]

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

Again, someone may ask that if consciousness is a characteristic of the soul, 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 soul is sentient, and it also makes the dead matter of the body sentient, by pervading its consciousness in it.

BG 2.18: Only the material body is perishable; the embodied soul within is indestructible, immeasurable, and eternal. Therefore, fight, O descendent of Bharat.

Commentary: 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 soul departs, the body can have one of the three ends: *kṛimī*, *viḍ*, 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 art, and unto dust thou shalt return." (Genesis 3:19)[v22] This phrase refers to the material body. Shree Krishna tells Arjun, "Within that material body is an eternal imperishable entity, which is not made of mud. That is the divine soul, the real self."

BG 2.19: Neither of them is in knowledge—the one who thinks the soul can slay and the one who thinks the soul can be slain. For truly, the soul neither kills nor can it be killed.

Commentary: The illusion of death is created because we identify ourselves with the body. The Ramayan 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 soul 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 soul, 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? Shree 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.

BG 2.20: The soul is neither born, nor does it ever die; nor having once existed, does it ever cease to be. The soul is without birth, eternal, immortal, and ageless. It is not destroyed when the body is destroyed

Commentary: The eternal nature of the soul 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, vardhate, vipariṇamate, apakṣhīyate, and vinaśhyati "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 Kaṭhopanishad contains a mantra almost identical to the above verse of the Bhagavad Gita:

na jāyate mriyate vā vipaśhchin nāyaṁ kutaśhchin na babhūva kaśhchit

ajo nityaḥ śhāśhvato 'yaṁ purāṇo na hanyate hanyamāne śharīre (1.2.18) [v25]

"The soul 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 Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad states:

sa vā eṣha mahān aja ātmājaro 'maro 'mṛito 'bhayaḥ (4.4.25) [v26]

"The soul is glorious, unborn, deathless, free from old age, immortal, and fearless."

BG 2.21: O Parth, how can one who knows the soul to be imperishable, eternal, unborn, and immutable kill anyone or cause anyone to kill?

Commentary: A spiritually elevated soul quells the ego that makes us feel that we are the doers of our actions. In that state, one can see that the soul seated within actually does nothing. Such an elevated soul, though doing all kinds of actions, is never tainted by them. Shree 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.

BG 2.22: As a person sheds worn-out garments and wears new ones, likewise, at the time of death, the soul casts off its worn-out body and enters a new one.

Commentary: Continuing to explain the nature of the soul, Shree 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 soul 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 harṣhabhayaśhoka 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 soul that they erase a substantial portion of the past life's memories.

The Nyāya Darśhan gives another argument in support of rebirth: stanyābhilāṣhāt (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 God, it would also seem implausible, since God 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.

BG 2.23: Weapons cannot shred the soul, nor can fire burn it. Water cannot wet it, nor can the wind dry it

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

BG 2.24: The soul is unbreakable and incombustible; it can neither be dampened nor dried. It is everlasting, in all places, unalterable, immutable, and primordial.

Commentary: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." Shree 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.

BG 2.25: The soul is spoken of as invisible, inconceivable, and unchangeable. Knowing this, you should not grieve for the body.

Commentary:Our eyes, made from material energy, can see only material objects. The soul, 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 soul would crack the glass. However, the soul left the body without the glass box getting cracked. Being subtle, the soul did not need physical space for its movement.

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

indriyebhyaḥ parā hyarthā arthebhyāśhcha param manah
manasastu parā buddhirbhuddherātmā mahān paraḥ (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 soul." The material intellect can only comprehend material concepts, but can never reach the divine soul by the power of its contemplation. As a result, knowledge of the self requires external sources, which are the scriptures and the Guru.

BG 2.26: 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

Commentary: Shree 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 *Mīmāṃsā*, *Vedānt*, *Nyāya*, *Vaiśheṣhik*, *Sāṅkhya*, and *Yog*. Within each of these are more branches—for example, the *Vedānt* school of thought is further divided into six schools—*Ādāvaita vāda*, *Dvaita vāda*, *Viśhiṣṭādvaita vāda*, *Viśhuddhādvaita vāda*, *Dwaitādvaita vāda*, and *Achintya-bhedābheda vāda*. Each of these has further branches, for example, *Ādvaita 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 soul 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*, *Mādhyaṃik vāda*, *Vaibhāṣhik 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 soul 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 soul, 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 Shree Krishna too, versions of the Buddhist philosophy of renewed animation and non-permanence of the soul 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.

BG 2.27: 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.

Commentary: 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, *abhiniveśh*, 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 Mahabharat 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. Yudhishtir asked Bheem to go and fetch water for all of them. When Bheem reached the well, a *yakṣha* (semi-celestial being) 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

Yudhishtir 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." Yudhishtir agreed to answer the questions. The yakṣha was actually the celestial God 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?" Yudhishtir replied:

ahany ahani bhūtāni gachchhantiha yamālayam
śheṣhāḥ sthiratvam ichchhanti kimāśhcharyamataḥ param (Mahabharat) [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?" Shree Krishna explains in this verse that life is inescapably a dead end, and so a wise person does not lament over the inevitable.

BG 2.28: O scion of Bharat, all created beings are unmanifest before birth, manifest in life, and again unmanifest on death. So why grieve

Commentary: Shree Krishna dispelled the cause of lamentation in respect to the soul in verse 2.20, and in respect to the body in verse 2.27. Now he includes both in this verse. Sage Narad instructed Yudhishtir along similar lines, in Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam:

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

"Whether you consider the personality to be an eternal soul or to be a temporary body, or even if you accept it as an inconceivable mixture of soul 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 soul 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 soul discards its gross body, and departs with the subtle and causal bodies. God again gives the soul another gross body according to its subtle and causal bodies, and sends the soul into a suitable mother's womb for the purpose. After the soul 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 soul 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.

BG 2.29: Some see the soul as amazing, some describe it as amazing, and some hear of the soul as amazing, while others, even on hearing, cannot understand it at all

Commentary: The whole world is amazing, from the tiniest atoms to the largest galaxies, for they are all wonderful creations of God. A little rose flower is also amazing, in its texture, smell, and beauty. The most amazing is the Supreme Lord himself. It is said that Anant Shesh, the divine ten thousand-headed serpent on whom Lord Vishnu resides, has been singing the glories of God since the beginning of creation, and has still not completed them.

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

śhravaṇāyāpi bahubhiryo na labhyaḥ śhrīṇvanto 'pi bahavo yaṁ na vidyuh
āśhcharyo vaktā kuśhalo 'sya labdhā 'ścharyo jñātā kuśhalānuśhiṣṭaḥ (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 soul.

BG 2.30: O Arjun, the soul that dwells within the body is immortal; therefore, you should not mourn for anyone.

Commentary: Often, in the course of his teachings, Shree 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.

BG 2.31: 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

Commentary: 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 soul, the prescribed duty is to love and serve God 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 āśhram (station in life), and varṇa (occupation). They are called apara 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. Shree Krishna is calling this swa-dharma, or prescribed duty at the bodily level.

BG 2.32: O Parth, happy are the warriors to whom such opportunities to defend righteousness come unsought, opening for them the stairway to the celestial abodes

Commentary: 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 God-realization. It is merely a virtuous deed with positive material rewards. Shree 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, Shree Krishna is giving Arjun the reverse instruction. While Arjun wishes to abandon his duty, Shree Krishna repeatedly coaxes him to discharge it. The change that Shree 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.

BG 2.33: If, however, you refuse to fight this righteous war, abandoning your social duty and reputation, you will certainly incur sin.

Commentary: 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, Shree 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 rakṣaṇāśhastrapāṇiḥ pradaṇḍavān
nirjitya parasainyādi kṣhitiṁ dharmeṇa 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."

BG 2.34: People will speak of you as a coward and a deserter. For a respectable person, infamy is worse than death

Commentary: 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. Shree 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.

BG 2.35: 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.

Commentary: 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 gods. He had fought and overwhelmed even Lord Shiv, who had come in the disguise of a hunter. Pleased with his valor and skill, Lord 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.

BG 2.36: Your enemies will defame and humiliate you with unkind words, disparaging your might. Alas, what could be more painful than that?

Commentary: 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. Shree 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." Shree Krishna reminds Arjun that such derision would be very painful to him.

BG 2.37: 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.

Commentary: Continuing from verse 2.31, Shree 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.

BG 2.38: 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.

Commentary: Having motivated Arjun from the mundane level, Shree Krishna now moves deeper into the science of work. Arjun had expressed his fear that by killing his enemies he would incur sin. Shree 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:

punvena punya lokam nayati papena papamubhābhyāmeva manuṣhyalokam [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. God'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 Shree 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 God, abandoning all attachment, remain untouched by sin."

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

BG 2.39: Hitherto, I have explained to you Sāṅkhya Yog, or analytic knowledge regarding the nature of the soul. 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.

Commentary: The word Sāṅkhya comes from the roots Sāṅ, meaning "complete," and khyā, meaning "to know." So Sāṅkhya means the "complete analytical knowledge of something." The Sāṅkhya 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 puruṣh or the soul, which tries to enjoy prakṛiti, and gets bound in it.

Shree Krishna has just explained to Arjun another form of Sāṅkhya, which is the analytical knowledge of the immortal soul. 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, Shree 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.

BG 2.40: Working in this state of consciousness, there is no loss or adverse result, and even a little effort saves one from great danger

Commentary: 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 God 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 chedavedidatha satyamasti na chedihāvedīnmahatī vinaṣṭhiḥ
(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 prākṣharīrasya visrasaḥ
tataḥ sargeṣhu lokeṣhu śharīratvāya kalpate (Kaṭhopaniṣhad 2.3.4) [v36]

"If you do not strive for God-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, God 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, Shree 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, God 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, Shree Krishna now begins instructing him about the science of working without attachment.

BG 2.41: O descendant 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.

Commentary: 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 Shree 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 antaḥ karaṇ, 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 God. 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 God.

BG 2.42-43: 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

Commentary: The Vedas are divided into three sections. These are: Karm-kāṇḍ (ritualistic ceremonies), Jñāna-kāṇḍa (knowledge section), and Upāsana-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 God-realization. However, those with spiritual wisdom do not make even heaven their goal. The Muṇḍakopaniṣhad states:

avidyāyāmantare vartamānāḥ svayamdhīrāḥ paṇḍitaḥ manyamānāḥ
jaṅghanyamānāḥ pariyanti mūḍhā andhenaiva 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."

BG 2.44: 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 God

Commentary: 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 God-realization.

BG 2.45: 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

Commentary: The material energy binds the divine soul 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 their sanskāras (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

śhāstras 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 Shree 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.

BG 2.46: Whatever purpose is served by a small well of water is naturally served in all respects by a large lake. Similarly, one who realizes the Absolute Truth also fulfills the purpose of all the Vedas

Commentary: 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 soul with God.

vāsudeva-parā vedā vāsudeva-parā makhāḥ
vāsudeva-parā yogā vāsudeva-parāḥ kriyāḥ
vāsudeva-param jñānam vāsudeva-param tapaḥ
vāsudeva-paro dharmo 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 soul reach the divine feet of God.”

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 soul gradually get detached from the world and attached to God. Thus, one who is attaching the mind to God is automatically fulfilling the purpose of all the Vedic mantras. Shree Krishna advises Uddhav:

ājñāyaivam guṇān doṣhān mayādiṣṭhān api swakān
dharmān santyajya yaḥ sarvān mām bhajeta sa sattamaḥ

(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.”

BG 2.47: 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.

Commentary: 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 God, 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 Shree 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 God. The individual soul is a tiny part of God (verse 15.7), and hence our inherent nature is to serve him through all our actions.

dāsa bhūtamidaṁ tasya jagatsthāvara jangamam
śhrīmannārāyaṇa swāmī jagatāṁprabhurīśhvaraḥ (Padma Puran)[v40]

“God 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, “God 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 God.” Accordingly, Shree 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. Shree Krishna wants Arjun to give up kartritwābhimān, 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; God 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 God did not supply our body-mind-soul mechanism with the power to perform actions, we could have done nothing. Thus, we must give up the ego of doing, remembering that God 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:

yatkṛitaṁ yatkariṣhyāmi tatsarvaṁ na mayā kṛitaṁ
tvayā kṛitaṁ 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 Shree 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 Shree Krishna.

BG 2.48: Be steadfast in the performance of your duty, O Arjun, abandoning attachment to success and failure. Such equanimity is called Yog.

Commentary: The equanimity that enables us to accept all circumstances with serenity is so praiseworthy that Shree 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 God, and so we dedicate them to him. Now, if the results are not to our expectations, we calmly accept them as the will of God. In this way, we are able to accept fame and infamy, success and failure, pleasure and pain, as God's will, and when we learn to embrace both equally, we develop the equanimity that Shree 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 God, and that will be true Yog.

BG 2.49: 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.

Commentary: 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 God. The external work performed by the sadhu and the workers are the same, but the internal attitudes are poles apart.

Here Shree 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 God are truly in knowledge.

The word kṛipāṇa (miserly) has been used here. The Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam describes a kṛipāṇa:

na veda kṛipāṇaḥ śhreya ātmano guṇa-vastu-dṛik
tasya tān ichchhato yachchhed yadi so 'pi tathā-vidhaḥ (6.9.49)[v42]

"Kṛipāṇa are those who think that the ultimate reality consists only of sense objects produced from the material energy." Again, the Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam, states: kṛipāṇo yo 'jitendriyaḥ (11.19.44)[v43] "A kṛipāṇa 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 God, dedicating all the fruits to him.

BG 2.50: 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).

Commentary: Upon hearing the science of karm-yog, people often wonder that if they give up attachment to results, will their performance go down? Shree 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 Shree Krishna, he was fighting because it was his duty to God, and Shree 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 God.

BG 2.51: 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.

Commentary: Shree 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 sukhaṁ vānyad-upāramaṁ vā

vindeta bhūyas tata eva duḥkhaṁ yad atra yuktaṁ bhagavān vaden naḥ (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 God 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 prasāda (mercy). In doing so, their actions become free from karmic reactions that bind one to the cycle of life and death.

BG 2.52: 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).

Commentary: Shree 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 Muṇḍakopaniṣad states:

parīkṣhya lokāṅkarmachitāṁbrāhmaṇo nirvedamāyānnāstyakṛitaḥ kṛitena (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.”

BG 2.53: 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.

Commentary: As sādhaṅks advance on the spiritual path, within their minds their relationship with God 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. Shree Krishna says that to be fixed in sādhanā without being allured to the fruitive sections of the Vedas is not an offense; 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 sanyāsa (the renounced order), and engaged wholeheartedly in devotion to Shree Krishna. In his later life, he wrote:

sandhyā vandana bhadramastu bhavate bhoḥ snāna tubhyaṁ namaḥ
bho devāḥ pitaraśhchatarapaṇa vidhau nahaṁ kṣamaḥ kṣamyatāṁ
yatra kvāpi niṣhadya yādava kulottaasya kansadvīṣhaḥ
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 Vandan (a set of rituals performed thrice daily by those who have received the sacred thread), holy baths, sacrifices to the celestial gods, offerings to the ancestors, etc. please excuse me. Now, wherever I sit, I remember the Supreme Lord Shree Krishna, the enemy of Kansa, and that is sufficient to release me from material bondage."

Shree 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.

BG 2.54: 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?

Commentary: The designations sthita prajña (one with steady intellect) and samādhi-stha (situated in trance) apply to enlightened persons. Having heard from Shree 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 Shree Krishna sixteen sets of questions. In response, Shree 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 6.34)
7. "What is the fate of the unsuccessful yogi who begins the path with faith, but whose mind deviates from God 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 Prakṛiti (Nature) and Puruṣh (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 guṇas, O Lord? How do they act? How have they passed beyond the bondage of the guṇas?" (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)

BG 2.55: The Supreme Lord 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.

Commentary: Shree 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 soul is a fragment of God, who is infinite bliss. Hence, the soul 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 soul from God, 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 trīṣṇā 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 Maya 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 suratvaṁ suratvalābhe sakalasurapatitvam
bhavtīrurapātīrūrdhvagatitvaṁ tathāpi nanivartate trīṣṇā (2.12.14) [v47]

"A king wishes to be the emperor of the whole world; the emperor aspires to be a celestial god; a celestial god seeks to be Indra, the king of heaven; 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 soul and becomes transcendently situated. The Kaṭhopanishad goes to the extent of saying that one who has renounced desires becomes like God:

yadā sarve pramuchyante kāmā ye 'sya hṛidi śhrītaḥ
atha martyo 'mṛito bhavatyatra brahma samaśhnute (2.3.14)[v48]

"When one eliminates all selfish desires from the heart, then the materially

fettered jīvātmā (soul) attains freedom from birth and death, and becomes Godlike in virtue." Shree Krishna states in the above verse that a transcendently situated person is one who has given up selfish desires and cravings of the senses, and is satisfied in the self.

BG 2.56: 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.

Commentary: In this verse, Shree 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.

BG 2.57: 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.

Commentary: 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 Shree Krishna describes to Arjun. One may wonder how an English poet expressed the same state of enlightenment that is described by the Supreme Lord. The fact is that the urge for enlightenment is the intrinsic nature of the soul. Hence, knowingly or unknowingly, everyone craves for it, in all cultures around the world. Shree Krishna is describing it here, in response to Arjun's question.

BG 2.58: 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.

Commentary: 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 Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam states that desires never go away when they are fulfilled; they only come back more strongly:

na jātu kāmāḥ kāmānām upabhogena śhāmyati
haviṣhā kṛiṣhṇa-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 God, 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 soul possesses similar control over the mind and senses and can retract and extract them according to the needs of the situation.

BG 2.59: 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 realize the Supreme.

Commentary: 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 soul for the divine bliss of God, of whom it is a tiny fragment. Until it gets that divine bliss, the soul 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 restraint is temporary because it does not extinguish the internal flame of desire. However, when the soul engages in devotion toward God, and gets divine bliss, it experiences the higher taste for which it had been craving since infinite lifetimes. The Taittirīya Upaniṣhad states:

raso vai saḥ rasam hyevāyam labdhvā 'nandī bhavati (2.7.2)[v50]

"God is all-bliss. When the soul attains God, 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 God. The Saint Ramakrishna Paramahansa expressed this principle very eloquently, when he said: "Devotion is love for the highest; and the lowest shall fall away by itself."

BG 2.60: 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 who practices self-control.

Commentary: 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 sādhaḥs 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 Śhrīmad 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 Rīg Veda, where there is a mantra called Saubhari Sūtra. 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 imaṃ paśhyata me vināśhaṃ (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."

BG 2.61: They are established in perfect knowledge, who subdue their senses and keep their minds ever absorbed in Me

Commentary: In this verse, the word yuktaḥ (united) indicates "absorption in

devotion," and mat paraḥ means "toward Lord Krishna." The word āsīta (seated) may be understood figuratively here to mean "situated or established." Having said that the impetuous mind and senses need to be tamed, Shree Krishna now reveals the proper engagement for them, which is absorption in devotion to God. The example of King Ambarish in Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam illustrates this process this very beautifully:

sa vai manah kṛiṣṇa-padāravindayor vacāḥṁsi vaikunṭha-guṇānuvarṇane
karau harer mandira-mārjanādiṣhu śhrutiṁ chakārāchyuta-sat-kathodaye

mukunda-liṅgālaya-darśhane dṛiṣhau tad-bhṛitya-gātra-sparśhe 'ṅga-saṅgamam
ghrāṇaṁ cha tat-pāda-saroja-saurabhe śhrīmat-tulasyā rasanāṁ tad-arpite

pādaḥ hareḥ kṣhetra-padānusarpaṇe śhiro hṛiṣhīkeśha-padābhivandane
kāmaṁ cha dāsyē na tu kāma-kāmyayā yathottamaśhloka-janāśhrayā ratiḥ
(9.4.18-20) [v52]

"Ambarish engaged his mind in remembering the lotus feet of Shree Krishna. He engaged his tongue in chanting the wonderful names, forms, virtues, and pastimes of God. He used his ears in hearing narrations about the Lord, his eyes in seeing the beautiful deity of God in the temple, his sense of touch in massaging the feet of devotees of the Lord, his nostrils in smelling the aroma from fragrant objects that had been offered to the Lord in worship, his feet in circumambulating the temple, and his head in paying obeisance to God and His devotees. In this way, he subdued all his senses by engaging them in the service of the Supreme Lord."

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

Commentary: Anger, greed, lust, etc. are considered in the Vedic scriptures as mānas rog, or diseases of the mind. The Ramayan states: mānas roga kachhuka main gāe hahiṁ saba keṁ lakhi biralēna 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, Shree 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 adhikāī (Ramayan) [v54] "If you satisfy desire, it leads to greed." Thus desire is never eliminated by satiating it:

yat prithivyām vṛhi-yavaṁ hiraṇyaṁ paśhavaḥ striyaḥ
na duhyanti manaḥ-prītiṁ pūṁsaḥ 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 Shree Krishna continues the chain further down, and explains the consequences of anger.

BG 2.63: Anger leads to clouding of judgment, which results in bewilderment of memory. When memory is bewildered, the intellect gets destroyed; and when the intellect is destroyed, one is ruined.

Commentary: 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.

BG 2.64: 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 God.

Commentary: The entire downward spiral leading to ruin begins with contemplating happiness in sense objects. Now, the urge for happiness is as natural to the soul as thirst is to the physical body. It is impossible to think "I will not contemplate happiness anywhere," because it is unnatural for the soul. The simple solution then is to envision happiness in the proper direction, i.e. in God. If we can repeatedly revise the thought that happiness is in God, we will develop attachment toward him. This divine attachment will not degrade the mind like material attachment; rather, it will purify it. God is all-pure, and when we attach our mind to him, the mind will also become pure.

Thus, whenever Shree 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 God, 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, Shree 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 God 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 God, one receives the grace of God 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.

BG 2.65: 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 God.

Commentary: Grace is like a divine energy that floods into a person's personality. By grace, God 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 God. By God'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 God alone is the source of happiness and is the final goal of the soul. 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 God.

BG 2.66: But an undisciplined person, who has not controlled the mind and senses, can neither have a resolute intellect nor steady contemplation on God. For one who never unites the mind with God there is no peace; and how can one who lacks peace be happy?

Commentary: This verse strengthens the conclusion of the previous verse by stating the reverse and negating it. Previously, Shree Krishna said "Know God; know peace." In this verse, he says "No God; no peace." A person who has not learnt to discipline the mind and senses can neither meditate upon God 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:

rātrirgamishyati bhaviṣhyati suprabhātaṁ
bhāsvānudveṣhyati haṣiṣhyati paṅkajaśhrīḥ
evaṁ vichintayati koṣha gate dvirephe
hā hanta hanta nalinīm 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." Kāshṭha bhedo nipuṇopi sangrihī kuṇṭhito 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 God. Finally, time overtakes us in the form of death. Here, Shree Krishna says that those who refuse to discipline the senses and engage in devotion continue to be rocked by the three-fold miseries of Maya. 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?

BG 2.67: 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

Commentary: The Kaṭhapaniṣhad states that God has made our five senses outward facing. parāñchi khāni vyatṛṇatsvayambhūḥ (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
ekaḥ pramādi sa katham na hanyate yaḥ sevate pañchabhireva pañcha
(Sukti 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, Shree Krishna warns Arjun of the power of these senses in leading the mind astray.

BG 2.68: Therefore, one who has restrained the senses from their objects, O mighty armed Arjun, is firmly established in transcendental knowledge.

Commentary: Enlightened souls 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, Shree 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.

BG 2.69: 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

Commentary: Shree 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 Shree 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 Shree 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 soul, and hence view it as "night." They consider refraining from the objects of the senses as elevating to the soul, and hence look on it as "day." Using those connotations of the words, Shree Krishna states that what is night for the sage is day for the worldly-minded people, and vice versa.

BG 2.70: 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.

Commentary: 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. Shree 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.

BG 2.71: That person, who gives up all material desires and lives free from a sense of greed, proprietorship, and egoism, attains perfect peace.

Commentary: In this verse, Shree 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 God. We came empty-handed in the world, and we will go back empty-handed. How then can we think of worldly things as ours?

BG 2.72: O Parth, such is the state of an enlightened soul 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 God

Commentary: Brahman means God, and Brāhmī sthiti means the state of God-realization. When the soul purifies the heart (the mind and intellect are sometimes jointly referred to as the heart), God bestows his divine grace, as mentioned in verse 2.64. By his grace, he grants divine knowledge, divine bliss, and divine love to the soul. All these are divine energies that are given by God to the soul at the time of God-realization.

At the same time, he liberates the soul from the bondage of Maya. 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-guṇas, three modes of material nature, ceases. The tri-doṣhas, three defects of the materially conditioned state come to an end. The pañch-kleśhas, five defects of the material intellect, are destroyed. The pañch-kośhas, five sheaths of the material energy, are burnt. And from that point onward, the soul becomes free from the bondage of Maya for the rest of eternity.

When this state of God-realization is achieved, the soul is said to be jīvan mukt, or liberated even while residing in the body. Then, at the time of death, the liberated soul finally discards the corporeal body, and it reaches the Supreme Abode of God. The Rīg Veda states:

tadviṣṇoḥ paramaṁ padaṁ sadā paśhyanti sūrayaḥ (1.22.20) [v60]

“Once the soul attains God, it always remains in union with him. After that, the ignorance of Maya can never overpower it again.” That state of eternal liberation from Maya is also called nirvāṇ, mokṣha, etc. As a result, liberation is a natural consequence of God-realization.

BG 3.1-2: 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.

Commentary: Chapter one introduced the setting in which Arjun’s grief and lamentation arose, creating a reason for Shree Krishna to give spiritual instructions. In chapter two, the Lord 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, Shree 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 Shree 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.”

BG 3.3: The 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.

Commentary: In verse 2.39, Shree 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 soul and its distinction from the body. Shree Krishna refers to this as s̄ankhya 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 God, or karm yog. Shree 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 soul's aspiration for God-realization has existed. Shree Krishna touches upon both of them since his message is meant for people of all temperaments and inclinations.

BG 3.4: One cannot achieve freedom from karmic reactions by merely abstaining from work, nor can one attain perfection of knowledge by mere physical renunciation.

Commentary: The first line of this verse refers to the karm yogi (follower of the discipline of work), and the second line refers to the s̄ankhya yogi (follower of the discipline of knowledge).

In the first line, Shree 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, Shree Krishna declares that the s̄ankhya 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 s̄ankhya 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 s̄ankhya yog. It is only their proportion that varies, creating the difference between the two paths.

BG 3.5: 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).

Commentary: 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 Shree 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 Shree 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 Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam contains a similar verse:

na hi kaśhchit kṣhaṇam api jātu tiṣṭhaty akarma-kṛit

kāryate hy avaśhaḥ karma guṇaiḥ svābhāvikair balāt (6.1.53)[v1]

"Nobody can remain inactive for even a moment. Everyone is forced to act by their modes of nature."

BG 3.6: 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

Commentary: 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 soul. 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." Shree 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 Śhrīmad 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 god of Death) came to take Tavrit to hell. 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 hell." 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." Tāvrit was doing exactly what Shree 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.

BG 3.7: 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

Commentary: The word karm yog has been used in this verse. It consists of two main concepts: karm (occupational duties) and Yog (union with God). Hence, a karm yogi is one who performs worldly duties while keeping the mind attached to God. 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.

Shree 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 Shree Kripaluji Maharaj contrasts these two situations very beautifully:

mana hari meṁ tana jagat meṁ, karmayog tehi 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 God, 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."

BG 3.8: 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.

Commentary: Until the mind and intellect reach a state where they are absorbed in God-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 manuṣhyāṇāṁ śharīrastho mahān ripuḥ

nāstyudyamasamo bandhūḥ kṛitvā yaṁ 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 soul, we should embrace the duties that help elevate and purify our mind and intellect.

BG 3.9: Work must be done as a yajna to the Supreme Lord; otherwise, work causes bondage in this material world. Therefore, O son of Kunti, for the satisfaction

of God, perform your prescribed duties, without being attached to the results.

Commentary: 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 Lord liberates one from the bonds of Maya 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 God, 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 God, and therefore, meant for utilization in his service. A beautiful ideal for this was established by King Raghu, the ancestor of Lord Ram. Raghu performed the Viśhwajit sacrifice, which requires donating all of one's possessions in charity.

sa viśhwajitam ājahre yajñam sarvasva dakṣhiṇam

ādānam hi visargāya satām vārimuchām iva (Raghuvaṁśh 4.86)[v5]

"Raghu performed the Viśhwajit 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 God. So he decided to use his wealth to please God 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 God, and hence meant for the satisfaction of God. We then perform our duties not for gratifying our mind and senses, but for the pleasure of God. Lord Vishnu instructed the Prachetas in this fashion:

griheṣhv āviśhatām chāpi pumsām kuśhala-karmaṇām

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."

BG 3.10: In the beginning of creation, Brahma created humankind along with duties, and said, "Prosper in the performance of these yajñas (sacrifices), for they shall bestow upon you all you wish to achieve."

Commentary: All the elements of nature are integral parts of the system of God'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 God'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. Shree Krishna says that we are obligated to participate with the creative force of nature by performing our prescribed duties in the service of God. 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 souls are tiny parts of the Supreme Soul 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.

BG 3.11: By your sacrifices, the celestial gods will be pleased, and by cooperation between humans and the celestial gods, great prosperity will reign for all.

Commentary: The celestial gods, or devatās, are in-charge of the administration of the universe. The Supreme Lord 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 God; they are souls 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 god of fire), Vāyu Dev (the god of the wind), Varuṇa Dev (the god of the ocean), Indra Dev (the king of the celestial gods), etc. Souls 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 gods).

The Vedas mention various ceremonies and processes for the satisfaction of the celestial gods, and in turn these devatās bestow material prosperity. However, when we perform our yajña for the satisfaction of the Supreme Lord, the celestial gods 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 Lord Shree Vishnu, we automatically worship all the

celestial gods, 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.

BG 3.12: The celestial gods, 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.

Commentary: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 gods are all servants of the Supreme Lord, they become pleased when someone performs a sacrifice for him, and in turn assist such a soul by creating favorable material conditions. Thus, it is said that when we strongly resolve to serve God, the universe begins to cooperate with us.

However, if we begin looking upon the gifts of nature, not as means of serving the Lord but as objects of our own enjoyment, Shree 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 God, 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 God. 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 God, 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 God-given duty is to help the citizens of his kingdom progress in their journey toward God-realization." Whether one is a king, a businessperson, a farmer, or a worker, each person, as an integral member of God's world, is expected to do his or her duty as a service to the Supreme.

BG 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.

Commentary:In the Vedic tradition, food is cooked with the consciousness that the meal is for the pleasure of God. A portion of the food items is then put in a plate and a verbal or mental prayer is made for the Lord to come and eat it. After the offering, the food in the plate is considered prasād (grace of God). All the food in the plate and the pots is then accepted as God'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. Shree Krishna states in this verse that eating prasād (food that is first offered as sacrifice to God) 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 God 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 souls 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." Mahatma Gandhi

In this verse, Shree 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 God then the consciousness changes. We then look upon our body as the property of God, 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."

BG 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.

Commentary;Here, Lord 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 gods, who then cause rains, and so the cycle continues.

BG 3.15: The duties for human beings are described in the Vedas, and the Vedas are manifested by God Himself. Therefore, the all-pervading Lord is eternally present in acts of sacrifice

Commentary:The Vedas emanated from the breath of God:

asya mahato bhūtasya ni śhvasitametad yadṛigvedo yajurvedaḥ sāmavedo
'thavaṅgirasah
(Bṛihadāraṇyak Upaniṣhad 4.5.11) [v9]

"The four Vedas—Ṛig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sāma Veda, Atharva Veda—all emanated from the breath of the Supreme Divine Personality."

In these eternal Vedas, the duties of humans have been laid down by God 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 God verily become godly, of the nature of God, and non-different from him.

The Tantra Sār states yajña to be the Supreme Divine Lord himself:

yajño yajña pumāmśh chaiva yajñaśho yajña yajñabhāvanah
yajñabhuk cheti pañchātmā yajñeṣhvijyo hariḥ svayaṁ [v10]

In the Bhāgavatam (11.19.39), Shree Krishna declares to Uddhav: yajño 'haṁ bhagavattamaḥ [v11]"I, the Son of Vasudev, am Yajña." The Vedas state: yajño vai viṣṇuḥ [v12] "Yajña is indeed Lord Vishnu himself." Reiterating this principle, Shree Krishna says in this verse that God is eternally present in the act of sacrifice.

BG 3.16: 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

Commentary: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 God for disciplining, training, and elevating all living beings of varying levels of consciousness. Shree 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.

BG 3.17: But those who rejoice in the self, who are illumined and fully satisfied in the self, for them, there is no duty

Commentary: 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." Shree 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 Shree 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 God.

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 Maya. Sage Tulsidas explains:

jiba jiba te hari te bilagāno taba te deha geha nija mānyo,

māyā basa swarūp bisarāyo tehi brama te dāruṇa duḥkh pāyo. [v13]

"When the soul separated itself from God, 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 soul, and therefore it is a folly to hanker after those sense-objects. Thus, self-illumined souls learn to unite their consciousness with God and experience his infinite bliss within them.

The karm (duties) prescribed for the materially conditioned souls are no longer applicable to such illumined souls 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 souls, it is said: brahmavit śhruti mūrdhni[v14] "Those who have united themselves with God 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 soul with God. Once the soul becomes God-realized, the rules of the Vedas, which helped the soul to reach that destination, now no longer apply; the soul 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 God-realization takes place, the task of the Vedas is over. Such an enlightened soul is no longer obliged to perform the Vedic duties.

BG 3.18: Such self-realized souls 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

Commentary: These self-realized personalities are situated on the transcendental platform of the soul. Their every activity is transcendental, in service of God. So the duties prescribed for worldly people at the bodily level, in accordance with the Varṇāśram Dharma, no longer apply to them.

Here, the distinction needs to be made between karm and bhakti. Previously, Shree Krishna was talking about karm, (or prescribed worldly duties) and saying that they must be done as an offering to God. This was necessary to purify the mind, helping it rise above worldly contamination. But self-realized souls have already reached absorption in God 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 souls 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 Prahlād, 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 God. 2) Those like Shankaracharya, Madhvacharya, Ramanujacharya, and Chaitanya Mahāprabhu, 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 God. In this verse, Shree 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.

BG 3.19: Therefore, giving up attachment, perform actions as a matter of duty because by working without being attached to the fruits, one attains the Supreme

Commentary: From verses 3.8 to 3.16, Shree 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? Shree 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.

BG 3.20-21: By performing their prescribed duties, King Janak and others attained perfection. You should also perform your duties 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.

Commentary: 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 escapists 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 God, 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 ātmā sahaja naraka mahñ jāya. [v15]

Sage Tulsidas says: "One who renounces worldly duties, without the concurrent internal enlightenment with divine knowledge, treads the quick path to hell."

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, Shree Krishna suggests that Arjun should practice karm yog. He now gives his own example to illustrate the above point.

BG 3.22: 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.

Commentary: The reason why we all work is because we need something. We are all tiny parts of God, 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 God'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-kriḍa (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, Shree Krishna tells Arjun that although in his personal form as Shree 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.

BG 3.23: For if I did not carefully perform the prescribed duties, O Parth, all men would follow My path in all respects.

Commentary: In his divine pastimes on the Earth, Shree 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 Lord 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. Lord Krishna states that he would be at fault for leading mankind astray.

BG 3.24: 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.

Commentary:When Shree 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 Shree 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 Lord 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 Yudhishthir. 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, Shree Krishna coaxed Arjun not to neglect performing his prescribed Vedic activities.

BG 3.25: 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

Commentary:Previously, in verse 3.20, Shree Krishna had used the expression loka-saṅgraham evāpi sampāśhyan meaning, "with a view to the welfare of the masses." In this verse, the expression loka-saṅgraham chikīrṣuḥ means "wishing the welfare of the world." Thus, Shree Krishna again emphasizes that the wise should always act for the benefit of humankind.

Also, in this verse the expression saktāḥ avidvānsaḥ 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 God-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 Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam states:

tāvat karmāṇi kurvīta na nirvidyeta yāvatā

mat-kathā-śhravaṇādaṁ 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 God."

Shree 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.

BG 3.26: 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.

Commentary: Great persons have greater responsibility because common people follow them. So Shree 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 God-realization. Lord Krishna neutralizes this argument by stating *na buddhi-bhedaṁ janayet*, 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, Shree Krishna explains this in the next two verses.

BG 3.27: All activities are carried out by the three modes of material nature. But in ignorance, the soul, deluded by false identification with the body, thinks of itself as the doer.

Commentary: 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 soul perceive itself to be doing activities? The reason is that, in the grip of the unforgiving ego, the soul 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 soul identifies with the mobility of prakṛiti. Thus, it perceives itself as the doer of actions. The moment the soul eliminates the ego and surrenders to the will of God, it realizes itself as the non-doer.

One may question that if the soul 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 soul 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 soul is held responsible for the actions of the mind-body mechanism because the senses-mind-intellect work on receiving inspiration from the soul.

BG 3.28: O mighty-armed Arjun, illumined persons distinguish the soul as distinct from guṇas and karmas. They perceive that it is only the guṇas (in the shape of the senses, mind, and others) that move among the guṇas (in the shape of the objects of perception), and thus they do not get entangled in them.

Commentary: The previous verse mentioned that the ahankāra vimūḍhātmā (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 God-realized Saints say: jo karai so hari karai, hota kabīr kabīr [v17] "God is doing everything, but people are thinking that I am doing."

BG 3.29: 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.

Commentary: The question may be raised that if soul is distinct from the guṇas and their activities, then why are the ignorant attached to sense objects? Shree 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 soul, 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, Shree Krishna gives the sober caution not to unsettle the minds of the ignorant.

BG 3.30: 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!

Commentary: In his typical style, Shree Krishna expounds on a topic and then finally presents the summary. The words adhyātma chetasā mean "with the thoughts resting on God." 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 God 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 soul is a tiny part of the Supreme Lord Shree 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."

BG 3.31: Those who abide by these teachings of Mine, with profound faith and free from envy, are released from the bondage of karma.

Commentary: Very beautifully, the Supreme Lord 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 Lord 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, Shree 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, Shree 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 God 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.

BG 3.32: 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.

Commentary: The teachings presented by Shree 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 souls and the Supreme Divine Personality? 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, "Shree 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 śhraddhā, or faith.

Jagadguru Shankaracharya defines śhraddhā as: guru vedānta vākyeṣhu dṛiḍho viśhvāsaḥ śhraddhā [v18]

"Śhraddhā is strong faith in the words of the Guru and the scriptures."

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu explained it similarly: śhraddhā śhabde viśhwāsa kahe sudṛiḍha niśhchaya (Chaitanya Charitāmṛit, Madhya Leela, 22.62)[v19]

"The word Śhraddhā means strong faith in God 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, śhraddhā 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 Shree Krishna's teachings are presented by the omniscient Lord for the welfare of the souls, people still find fault in them, such as, "Why is God asking everything to be offered to him? Is he greedy? Is he an egotist that he asks Arjun to worship him?" Shree Krishna says that such people are ahetasaḥ, 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.

BG 3.33: Even wise people act according to their natures, for all living beings are propelled by their natural tendencies. What will one gain by repression?

Commentary: Shree 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 *sanskāras* (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 God. 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, Shree Krishna told him, "If, motivated by pride, you think, 'I shall not fight,' your decision will be in vain. Your own nature will compel you to fight." (Bhagavad Gita 18.59) "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." (Bhagavad Gita 18.60) That nature should be sublimated by shifting the goal from worldly enjoyment to God-realization, and performing our prescribed duty without attachment and aversion, in the spirit of service to God.

BG 3.34: 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

Commentary: Although Shree 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. Shree Krishna is not asking us to stop consuming what is necessary, but to practice eradicating attachment and aversion. Definitely *sanskāras* (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. Shree 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.

BG 3.35: 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.

Commentary: 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 dhṛi, which means dhāraṇa karane yogya, or "responsibilities, duties, thoughts, and actions that are appropriate for us." For example, the dharma of the soul is to love God. It is like the central law of our being.

The prefix 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, Shree 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. Shree 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.

BG 3.36: Arjun asked: Why is a person impelled to commit sinful acts, even unwillingly, as if by force, O descendent of Vrishni (Krishna)?

Commentary: Shree 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 Shree 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 God 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 soul 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.

BG 3.37: The Supreme Lord 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

Commentary: 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 God, which is the inherent nature of every living being. When the soul associates with the material energy in the form of the body, its divine love for God is transformed into lust, in association with the mode of passion. Since divine love is the highest power of God, its perversion in the material realm, which is lust, is also the most powerful force in worldly activities.

Shree 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 soul 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, Shree Krishna labels lust, or desire, as the root of all evil.

BG 3.38: 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.

Commentary: 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. Shree 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 sãttvic desires create. A mirror, which is naturally reflective, gets obscured by dust. This semi-opacity is like the masking impact of rãjasic desires on the intellect. And an embryo gets concealed in the womb. This complete obfuscation is like the consequence of tãmasic 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. Shree Krishna states that it is this type of lustful desire that is responsible for shrouding our power of discrimination.

BG 3.39: 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

Commentary: Here, the inimical nature of kām or lust is being made even more explicit by Lord Krishna. kām means “desire,” duṣhpūreṇa 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 paṇḍito

(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.

BG 3.40: The senses, mind, and intellect are said to be breeding grounds of desire. Through them, it clouds one’s knowledge and deludes the embodied soul.

Commentary: By revealing the locations where lust resides, Shree 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, Shree Krishna states that the senses, mind, and intellect are the places from where lust exercises its dominion over the soul. 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 God-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, Shree Krishna explains how to do that.

BG 3.41: 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.

Commentary: Now, Shree Krishna explains how to overcome lust, the root of all evil, which is so pernicious to human consciousness. Having identified the repositories of lust, Shree 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 soul and our only purpose is happiness of the soul, then it becomes easier to renounce such material desires. Shree 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 God to us, as stated in the next verse.

BG 3.42: 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 soul

Commentary: An inferior entity can be controlled by its superior entity. Shree Krishna explains the gradation of superiority amongst the instruments God 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 soul.

This knowledge of the sequence of superiority amongst the senses, mind, intellect, and soul, can now be used for rooting out lust, as explained in the final verse of this chapter.

BG 3.43: Thus knowing the soul to be superior to the material intellect, O mighty armed Arjun, subdue the lower self (senses, mind, and intellect) by the higher self (strength of the soul), and kill this formidable enemy called lust

Commentary: In conclusion, Shree Krishna emphasizes that we should slay this enemy called lust through knowledge of the self. Since the soul is a part of God, 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 soul 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 Kaṭhopanishad with the help of the model of a chariot:

ātmanagvaṁ rathinaṁ viddhi śharīraṁ rathameva tu
buddhiṁ tu sārathiṁ viddhi manaḥ pragrahameva cha
indriyāṇi hayānāhurviṣhayānsteṣhu gocharān
ātmendriyamanoyuktaṁ bhoktetyāhurmanīṣiṇaḥ (1.3.3-4) [v21]

The Upanishads 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 soul 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 soul does not direct the intellect in the proper direction. Thus, the senses decide the direction where the chariot will go. The soul experiences the pleasures of the senses vicariously, but these do not satisfy it. Seated on this chariot, the

soul (passenger) is moving around in this material world since eternity.

However, if the soul 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 (soul) must be used to control the lower self (senses, mind, and, intellect).

BG 4.1: The Supreme Lord Shree Krishna said: I taught this eternal science of Yog to the Sun God, Vivasvan, who passed it on to Manu; and Manu, in turn, instructed it to Ikshvaku.

Commentary: 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, Shree Krishna establishes the credibility and importance of the spiritual wisdom he is bestowing on Arjun. Shree 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 Surya, Sun God, 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 God, and has existed ever since he has existed, just as heat and light are as old as the fire from which they emanate.

God and the individual soul are both eternal, and so the science of Yog that unites the soul and God 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. Shree 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.

BG 4.2: 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.

Commentary: In the descending process of receiving divine knowledge, the disciple understands the science of God-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 God himself, who is the first Guru of the world.

tene brahma hṛidā ya ādi-kavaye muhyanti yat sūrayaḥ (Bhāgavatam 1.1.1)[v1]

God revealed this knowledge at the beginning of creation in the heart of the first-born Brahma, and the tradition continued from him. Shree Krishna stated in the last verse that he also revealed this knowledge to the Sun God, 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, God reestablishes the tradition for the benefit of humankind. He may do so, either by himself descending in the world, or through a great God-realized Saint, who becomes a conduit for God's work on Earth.

Jagadguru Shree Kripaluji Maharaj, who is the fifth original Jagadguru in Indian history, is such a God-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 Shree Kripaluji Maharaj.

BG 4.3: 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

Commentary: Shree 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 soul toward God 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 Lord. Devotion to God can be practiced in any of the five sequentially higher bhāvas, or sentiments: 1) Śhānt bhāv: adoring God as our King. 2) Dāsya bhav: the sentiment of servitude toward God as our Master. 3) Sakhya bhāv: considering God as our Friend. 4) Vātsalya bhāv: considering God as our Child. 5) Mādhurya bhāv: worshipping God as our Soul-beloved. Arjun worshipped God as his Friend, and so Shree 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 God. 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.

BG 4.4: Arjun said: You were born much after Vivasvan. How am I to understand that in the beginning You instructed this science to him?

Commentary:Arjun is puzzled by the apparent incongruity of events in Shree Krishna's statement. The Sun god has been present since almost the beginning of creation, while Shree Krishna has only recently been born in the world. If Shree Krishna is the son of Vasudev and Devaki, then his statement that he taught this science to Vivasvan, the Sun god appears inconsistent to Arjun, and he inquires about it. Arjun's question invites an exposition on the concept of the divine descension of God, and Shree Krishna responds to it in the subsequent verses.

BG 4.5: The Supreme Lord said: Both you and I have had many births, O Arjun. You have forgotten them, while I remember them all, O Parantapa.

Commentary:Shree 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, God 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 anīśhvarāsarvajñaśhaṅkā mūrkhāṇām tām pariharan śhrī-bhagavān uvācha (Śhārīrak Bhāṣhya on verse 4.5)[v2] "This verse has been spoken by Shree Krishna to refute foolish people who doubt that he is not God." Non-believers argue that Shree 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 God. Here, Shree Krishna emphasizes the difference between the soul and God by stating that although he descends in the world innumerable times, he still remains omniscient, unlike the soul whose knowledge is finite.

The individual soul and the Supreme Soul, God, have many similarities—both are sat-chit-ānand (eternal, sentient, and blissful). However, there are also many differences. God is all-pervading, while the soul only pervades the body it inhabits; God is all-powerful, while the soul does not even have the power to liberate itself from Maya without God's grace; God is the creator of the laws of nature, while the soul is subject to these laws; God is the upholder of the entire creation, while the soul is upheld by him; God is all-knowing, while the soul does not have complete knowledge even in one subject.

Shree 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."

BG 4.6: Although I am unborn, the Lord of all living entities, and have an imperishable nature, yet I appear in this world by virtue of Yogmaya, My divine power.

Commentary:Many people revolt at the idea of a God who possesses a form. They are more comfortable with a formless God, who is all-pervading, incorporeal, and subtle. God is definitely incorporeal and formless, but that does not mean that he cannot simultaneously have a form as well. Since God is all-powerful, he has the power to manifest in a form if he wishes. If someone stipulates that God cannot have a form, it means that person does not accept him as all-powerful. Thus to say, "God is formless," is an incomplete statement. On the other hand, to say, "God manifests in a personal form," is also only a partial truth. The all-powerful God has both aspects to his divine personality—the personal form and the formless aspect. Hence, the Bṛihadāraṇyak Upaniṣhad states:

dve vāva brahmaṇo rūpe mūrtaṁ chaiva amūrtaṁ cha (2.3.1)[v3]

"God appears in both ways—as the formless Brahman and as the personal God." They are both dimensions of his personality.

In fact, the individual soul 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 soul is able to possess a body, can the all-powerful God not have a form? Or is it that God 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, Maya, God’s form is created by his divine energy, Yogmaya. It is thus divine, and beyond material defects. This has been nicely stated in the Padma Purāṇ:

yastu nirguṇa ityuktaḥ śhāstreṣhu jagadīśhvaraḥ

prākṛitairheya sanyuktairguṇairhīnatvamuchyate [v4]

“Wherever the Vedic scriptures state that God 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.”

BG 4.7: Whenever there is a decline in righteousness and an increase in unrighteousness, O Arjun, at that time I manifest Myself on earth.

Commentary: 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 descension of God 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 God. Twenty four such descensions have been listed in the Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam. However, the Vedic scriptures state that there are innumerable descensions of God:

janma-karmābhidhānāni santi me ’ṅga sahasraśhaḥ
na śhakyante ’nusaṅkhyātum anantatvān mayāpi hi
(Bhāgavatam 10.51.37)[v5]

“Nobody can count the infinite Avatars of God since the beginning of eternity.” These Avatars are classified in four categories, as stated below:

1. Āveśhāvatār—when God manifests his special powers in an individual soul 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 God in the personal form, where he displays some of his divine powers. Prābhavāvatārs are also of two kinds:
 - a) Where God reveals himself only for a few moments, completes his work, and then departs. Hansavatar is an example of this, where God 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 Mahabharat, and divided the Vedas into four parts, is an example of such an Avatar.
3. Vaibhavāvatār—when God descends in his divine form, and manifests more of his divine powers. Matsyavatar, Kurmavatar, Varahavatar are all examples of Vaibhavāvatār.
4. Parāvasthāvatār—when God manifests all his divine powers in his personal

divine form. Shree Krishna, Shree Ram, and Nrisinghavatar are all Parāvasthāvatār.

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 śhāśhvataśhcha dehāstasya paramātmanaḥ (Padma Purāṇ)[v6] "All the descensions of God are replete with all divine powers; they are all perfect and complete." Hence, we should not differentiate one Avatār as bigger and another as smaller. However, in each descension, God 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.

BG 4.8: To protect the righteous, to annihilate the wicked, and to reestablish the principles of dharma I appear on this earth, age after age.

Commentary: Having stated in the last verse that God 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. God 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. God 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. God 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 Shree Krishna is stating.

The biggest dharma that the soul can engage in is devotion to God. That is what God strengthens by taking an Avatār. When God descends in the world, he reveals his divine forms, names, virtues, pastimes, abodes, and associates. This provides the souls with an easy basis for devotion. Since the mind needs a form to focus upon and to connect with, the formless aspect of God is very difficult to worship. On the other hand, devotion to the personal form of God is easy for people to comprehend, simple to perform, and sweet to engage in.

Thus, since the descension of Lord Krishna 5,000 years ago, billions of souls have made his divine leelas (pastimes) as the basis of their devotion, and purified their minds with ease and joy. Similarly, the Ramayan has provided the souls with a popular basis for devotion for innumerable centuries. When the TV show, Ramayan, first began airing on Indian national television on Sunday mornings, all the streets of India would become empty. The pastimes of Lord 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 Lord Ram's descension provided the basis for devotion to billions of souls in history. The Ramayan says:

rām eka tāpasa tiya tārī, nāma koṭi khala kumati sudhārī [v7]

"In his descension period, Lord Ram helped only one Ahalya (Sage Gautam's wife, whom Lord Ram released from the body of stone). However, since then, by chanting the divine name "Ram," billions of fallen souls have elevated themselves." So a deeper understanding of this verse is:

To establish dharma: God descends to establish the dharma of devotion by providing souls 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 God, 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 God. 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, God 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 souls had become sufficiently elevated in their sādhanā (spiritual practice) to qualify to meet God face-to-face. When Shree Krishna descended in the world, these eligible souls got their first opportunity to participate in God's divine pastimes. For example, some gopīs (cowherd women of Vrindavan, where Shree Krishna manifested his pastimes) were liberated souls who had descended from the divine abode to assist in Shree Krishna's leelas. Other gopīs were materially bound souls who got their first chance to meet and serve God, and participate in his leelas. So when Shree Krishna descended in the world, such qualified souls got the opportunity to perfect their devotion by directly participating in the pastimes of God.

This is the deeper meaning of the verse. However, it is not wrong if someone wishes to cognize the verse more literally or metaphorically.

BG 4.9: 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.

Commentary: Understand this verse in the light of the previous one. Our mind gets cleansed by engaging it in devotional remembrance of God. This devotion can either be toward the formless aspect of God 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 God is tangible and simple. Such devotion requires divine sentiments toward the personality of God. For people to engage in devotion to Shree 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 God resides in these deities. It is these sentiments that purify the devotee's mind. The progenitor Manu says:

na kāṣṭhe vidyate devo na śhilāyām na mṛitsu cha
bhāve hi vidyate devastasmātbhāvaṁ samācharet [v8]

"God 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 Lord Krishna, we must learn to harbor divine sentiments toward his leelas. Those commentators who give a figurative interpretation to the Mahabharat and the Bhagavad Gita, do grave injustice by destroying the basis of people's faith in devotion toward Shree Krishna. In this verse, Shree 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 God's actions and ours. We materially bound souls have not yet attained divine bliss, and hence the longing of our soul is not yet satiated. Thus, our actions are motivated by self-interest and the desire for personal fulfillment. However, God'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 souls. Such divine actions that God

performs are termed as “leelas” while the actions we perform are called “work.”

Similarly, God’s birth is also divine, and unlike ours, it does not take place from a mother’s womb. The all-Blissful God has no requirement to hang upside down in a mother’s womb. The Bhāgavatam states:

tam adbhutaṁ bālakaṁ ambujekṣhaṇaṁ
chatur-bhujam śhaṅkha gadādyudāyudham
(10.3.9) [v9]

“When Shree 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 Yogmaya power, he simply kept expanding Devaki’s womb. Finally, he manifested from the outside, revealing that he had never been inside her:

āviraśid yathā prāchyāṁ diśhīndur iva puṣkalah
(Bhāgavatam 10.3.8) [v10]

“As the moon manifests in its full glory in the night sky, similarly the Supreme Lord Shree Krishna manifested before Devaki and Vasudev.” This is the divine nature of God’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.

BG 4.10: Being free 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 attained My divine love.

Commentary: In the previous verse, Lord 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 God-realized by this means. They achieved this goal by purifying their minds through devotion. Shree 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 God. 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 Maya 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 God, 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 Lord. Hence, the Ramayan states:

prema bhagati jala binu raghurāī, abhiantara mala kabahuñ na jāī

“Without devotion to God, the dirt of the mind will not be washed away.” Even the ardent propagator of jñāna yog, Shankaracharya, stated:

śuddhayati hi nāntarātmā kṛiṣṇapadāmbhoja bhaktimṛite (Prabodh Sudhākar)[v13]

“Without engaging in devotion to the lotus feet of Lord Krishna, the mind will not be cleansed.”

On reading the previous verse, a question may arise whether Lord Krishna is partial in bestowing his grace upon those who absorb their minds in him versus the worldly-minded souls. The Supreme Lord addresses this in the next verse.

BG 4.11: In whatever way people surrender unto Me, I reciprocate accordingly. Everyone follows My path, knowingly or unknowingly, O son of Pritha

Commentary: Here, Lord Krishna states that he reciprocates with everyone as they surrender to him. For those who deny the existence of God, 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 God's material energy, Maya, in its various apparitions, as wealth, luxuries, relatives, prestige, etc. Maya 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 God as the goal and refuge, he takes care of them just as a mother takes care of her child.

Shree Krishna uses the word bhajāmi, which means "to serve." He serves the surrendered souls, by destroying their accumulated karmas of endless lifetimes, cutting the bonds of Maya, removing the darkness of material existence, and bestowing divine bliss, divine knowledge, and divine love. And when the devotee learns to love God selflessly, he willingly enslaves himself to their love. Shree Ram thus tells Hanuman:

ekaikasyopakārasya prāṇān dāsyāmi te kape
śheṣasyehopakārāṇāṁ bhavāṁ ṛiṇino vyaṁ
(Vālmiki Ramayan)[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, God reciprocates with everyone as they surrender to him.

If God is so merciful upon his devotees, why do some people worship the celestial gods instead? He explains in the following verse.

BG 4.12: In this world, those desiring success in material activities worship the celestial gods, since material rewards manifest quickly.

Commentary: Persons who seek worldly gain worship the celestial gods and seek boons from them. The boons the celestial gods bestow are material and temporary, and they are given only by virtue of the power they have received from the Supreme Lord. 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 God 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 āśhram. However, I find that the Emperor is himself a beggar before the Lord. Then why should I ask him for any favors, and not directly from the Lord himself?"

The celestial gods give boons only by the powers bestowed upon them by the Supreme Lord. 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 Lord for the fulfillment of their aspirations. People are of various kinds, possessing higher and lower aspirations. Shree Krishna now mentions four categories of qualities and works.

BG 4.13: 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.

Commentary: 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), rajo 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. Shree Krishna explains in this verse that the classification of the Varṇāśram system was according to people's qualities and activities.

Although God 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, God provides the souls with the energy to act, but they are free in determining what they wish to do with it; God is not responsible for their actions.

BG 4.1: The Supreme Lord Shree Krishna said: I taught this eternal science of Yog to the Sun God, Vivasvan, who passed it on to Manu; and Manu, in turn, instructed it to Ikshvaku.

Commentary: 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, Shree Krishna establishes the credibility and importance of the spiritual wisdom he is bestowing on Arjun. Shree 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 Surya, Sun God, 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 God, and has existed ever since he has existed, just as heat and light are as old as the fire from which they emanate.

God and the individual soul are both eternal, and so the science of Yog that unites the soul and God 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. Shree 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.

BG 4.2: 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.

Commentary: In the descending process of receiving divine knowledge, the disciple understands the science of God-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 God himself, who is the first Guru of the world.

tene brahma hṛidā ya ādi-kavaye muhyanti yat sūrayaḥ (Bhāgavatam 1.1.1)[v1]

God revealed this knowledge at the beginning of creation in the heart of the first-born Brahma, and the tradition continued from him. Shree Krishna stated in the last verse that he also revealed this knowledge to the Sun God, 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, God reestablishes the tradition for the benefit of humankind. He may do so, either by himself descending in the world, or through a great God-realized Saint, who becomes a conduit for God's work on Earth.

Jagadguru Shree Kripaluji Maharaj, who is the fifth original Jagadguru in Indian history, is such a God-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 Shree Kripaluji Maharaj.

BG 4.3: 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.

Commentary:Shree 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 soul toward God 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 Lord. Devotion to God can be practiced in any of the five sequentially higher bhāvas, or sentiments: 1) Śhānt bhāv: adoring God as our King. 2) Dāsyā bhāv: the sentiment of servitude toward God as our Master. 3) Sakhya bhāv: considering God as our Friend. 4) Vātsalya bhāv: considering God as our Child. 5) Mādhurya bhāv: worshipping God as our Soul-beloved. Arjun worshipped God as his Friend, and so Shree 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 God. 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.

BG 4.4: Arjun said: You were born much after Vivasvan. How am I to understand that in the beginning You instructed this science to him?

Commentary:Arjun is puzzled by the apparent incongruity of events in Shree Krishna's statement. The Sun god has been present since almost the beginning of creation, while Shree Krishna has only recently been born in the world. If Shree Krishna is the son of Vasudev and Devaki, then his statement that he taught this science to Vivasvan, the Sun god appears inconsistent to Arjun, and he inquires about it. Arjun's question invites an exposition on the concept of the divine descension of God, and Shree Krishna responds to it in the subsequent verses.

BG 4.5: The Supreme Lord said: Both you and I have had many births, O Arjun. You have forgotten them, while I remember them all, O Parantapa.

Commentary:Shree 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, God 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 anīśhvarāsarvajñāśhaṅkā mūrkhāṇām tām pariharan śhrī-bhagavān uvācha (Śhārīrak Bhāṣhya on verse 4.5)[v2] "This verse has been spoken by Shree Krishna to refute foolish people who doubt that he is not God." Non-believers argue that Shree 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 God. Here, Shree Krishna emphasizes the difference between the soul and God by stating that although he descends in the world innumerable times, he still remains omniscient, unlike the soul whose knowledge is finite.

The individual soul and the Supreme Soul, God, have many similarities—both are sat-chit-ānand (eternal, sentient, and blissful). However, there are also many differences. God is all-pervading, while the soul only pervades the body it inhabits; God is all-powerful, while the soul does not even have the power to

liberate itself from Maya without God's grace; God is the creator of the laws of nature, while the soul is subject to these laws; God is the upholder of the entire creation, while the soul is upheld by him; God is all-knowing, while the soul does not have complete knowledge even in one subject.

Shree 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."

BG 4.6: Although I am unborn, the Lord of all living entities, and have an imperishable nature, yet I appear in this world by virtue of Yogmaya, My divine power.

Commentary: Many people revolt at the idea of a God who possesses a form. They are more comfortable with a formless God, who is all-pervading, incorporeal, and subtle. God is definitely incorporeal and formless, but that does not mean that he cannot simultaneously have a form as well. Since God is all-powerful, he has the power to manifest in a form if he wishes. If someone stipulates that God cannot have a form, it means that person does not accept him as all-powerful. Thus to say, "God is formless," is an incomplete statement. On the other hand, to say, "God manifests in a personal form," is also only a partial truth. The all-powerful God has both aspects to his divine personality—the personal form and the formless aspect. Hence, the Bṛihadāraṇyak Upaniṣhad states:

dve vāva brahmaṇo rūpe mūrtaṁ chaiva amūrtaṁ cha (2.3.1)[v3]

"God appears in both ways—as the formless Brahman and as the personal God." They are both dimensions of his personality.

In fact, the individual soul 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 soul is able to possess a body, can the all-powerful God not have a form? Or is it that God 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, Maya, God's form is created by his divine energy, Yogmaya. It is thus divine, and beyond material defects. This has been nicely stated in the Padma Purāṇ:

yastu nirguṇa ityuktaḥ śhāstreṣhu jagadīśhvaraḥ

prākṛitairheya sanyuktairguṇairhīnatvamuchyate [v4]

"Wherever the Vedic scriptures state that God 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."

BG 4.7: Whenever there is a decline in righteousness and an increase in unrighteousness, O Arjun, at that time I manifest Myself on earth

Commentary: 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 descension of God 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 God. Twenty four such descensions have been listed in the Śhrīmad

Bhāgavatam. However, the Vedic scriptures state that there are innumerable descensions of God:

janma-karmābhidhānāni santi me 'ṅga sahasraśhaḥ
na śhakyante 'nusaṅkhyātum anantatvān mayāpi hi
(Bhāgavatam 10.51.37)[v5]

"Nobody can count the infinite Avatars of God since the beginning of eternity." These Avatars are classified in four categories, as stated below:

1. Āveśhāvatār—when God manifests his special powers in an individual soul 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 God in the personal form, where he displays some of his divine powers. Prābhavāvatārs are also of two kinds:
 - a) Where God reveals himself only for a few moments, completes his work, and then departs. Hansavatar is an example of this, where God 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 Mahabharat, and divided the Vedas into four parts, is an example of such an Avatar.
3. Vaibhavāvatār—when God descends in his divine form, and manifests more of his divine powers. Matsyavatar, Kurmavatar, Varahavatar are all examples of Vaibhavāvatār.
4. Parāvasthāvatār—when God manifests all his divine powers in his personal divine form. Shree Krishna, Shree Ram, and Nrsinghavatar are all Parāvasthāvatār.

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 pūrṇaḥ śhāśhvataśhcha dehāstasya paramātmanah (Padma Purāṇ)[v6] "All the descensions of God 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, God 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.

BG 4.8: To protect the righteous, to annihilate the wicked, and to reestablish the principles of dharma I appear on this earth, age after age.

Commentary: Having stated in the last verse that God 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. God 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. God 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. God 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 Shree Krishna is stating.

The biggest dharma that the soul can engage in is devotion to God. That is what God strengthens by taking an Avatār. When God descends in the world, he reveals his divine forms, names, virtues, pastimes, abodes, and associates. This provides the souls with an easy basis for devotion. Since the mind needs a form to focus upon and to connect with, the formless aspect of God is very difficult to worship. On the other hand, devotion to the personal form of God is easy for people to comprehend, simple to perform, and sweet to engage in.

Thus, since the descension of Lord Krishna 5,000 years ago, billions of souls have made his divine leelas (pastimes) as the basis of their devotion, and purified their minds with ease and joy. Similarly, the Ramayan has provided the souls with a popular basis for devotion for innumerable centuries. When the TV show, Ramayan, first began airing on Indian national television on Sunday mornings, all the streets of India would become empty. The pastimes of Lord 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 Lord Ram's descension provided the basis for devotion to billions of souls in history. The Ramayan says:

rām eka tāpasa tiya tāri, nāma koṭi khala kumati sudhārī [v7]

"In his descension period, Lord Ram helped only one Ahalya (Sage Gautam's wife, whom Lord Ram released from the body of stone). However, since then, by chanting the divine name "Ram," billions of fallen souls have elevated themselves." So a deeper understanding of this verse is:

To establish dharma: God descends to establish the dharma of devotion by providing souls 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 God, 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 God. 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, God 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 souls had become sufficiently elevated in their sādhanā (spiritual practice) to qualify to meet God face-to-face. When Shree Krishna descended in the world, these eligible souls got their first opportunity to participate in God's divine pastimes. For example, some gopīs (cowherd women of Vrindavan, where Shree Krishna manifested his pastimes) were liberated souls who had descended from the divine abode to assist in Shree Krishna's leelas. Other gopīs were materially bound souls who got their first chance to meet and serve God, and participate in his leelas. So when Shree Krishna descended in the world, such qualified souls got the opportunity to perfect their devotion by directly participating in the pastimes of God.

This is the deeper meaning of the verse. However, it is not wrong if someone wishes to cognize the verse more literally or metaphorically.

BG 4.9: 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.

Commentary: Understand this verse in the light of the previous one. Our mind gets cleansed by engaging it in devotional remembrance of God. This devotion can

either be toward the formless aspect of God 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 God is tangible and simple. Such devotion requires divine sentiments toward the personality of God. For people to engage in devotion to Shree 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 God resides in these deities. It is these sentiments that purify the devotee's mind. The progenitor Manu says:

na kāṣṭhe vidyate devo na śhīlāyāṁ na mṛitsu cha
bhāve hi vidyate devastasmātbhāvaṁ samācharet [v8]

"God 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 Lord Krishna, we must learn to harbor divine sentiments toward his leelas. Those commentators who give a figurative interpretation to the Mahabharat and the Bhagavad Gita, do grave injustice by destroying the basis of people's faith in devotion toward Shree Krishna. In this verse, Shree 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 God's actions and ours. We materially bound souls have not yet attained divine bliss, and hence the longing of our soul is not yet satiated. Thus, our actions are motivated by self-interest and the desire for personal fulfillment. However, God'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 souls. Such divine actions that God performs are termed as "leelas" while the actions we perform are called "work."

Similarly, God's birth is also divine, and unlike ours, it does not take place from a mother's womb. The all-Blissful God has no requirement to hang upside down in a mother's womb. The Bhāgavatam states:

tam adbhutaṁ bālakam ambujekṣhaṇaṁ
chatur-bhujaṁ śhaṅkha gadādyudāyudham
(10.3.9) [v9]

"When Shree 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 Yogmaya power, he simply kept expanding Devaki's womb. Finally, he manifested from the outside, revealing that he had never been inside her:

āvīrāsīd yathā prāchyāṁ diśhīndur iva puṣkalah
(Bhāgavatam 10.3.8) [v10]

"As the moon manifests in its full glory in the night sky, similarly the Supreme Lord Shree Krishna manifested before Devaki and Vasudev." This is the divine nature of God'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.

BG 4.10: Being free 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 attained My divine love.

Commentary: In the previous verse, Lord 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 God-realized by this means. They achieved this goal by purifying their minds through devotion. Shree 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 God. 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 Maya 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 God, 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 Lord. Hence, the Ramayan states:

prema bhagati jala binu raghurāī, abhiantara mala kabahuñ na jāī

"Without devotion to God, the dirt of the mind will not be washed away." Even the ardent propagator of jñāna yog, Shankaracharya, stated:

śuddhayati hi nāntarātmā kṛṣṇapadāmbhoja bhaktimṛite (Prabodh Sudhākar)[v13]

"Without engaging in devotion to the lotus feet of Lord Krishna, the mind will not be cleansed."

On reading the previous verse, a question may arise whether Lord Krishna is partial in bestowing his grace upon those who absorb their minds in him versus the worldly-minded souls. The Supreme Lord addresses this in the next verse.

BG 4.11: In whatever way people surrender unto Me, I reciprocate accordingly. Everyone follows My path, knowingly or unknowingly, O son of Pritha.

Commentary: Here, Lord Krishna states that he reciprocates with everyone as they surrender to him. For those who deny the existence of God, 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 God's material energy, Maya, in its various apparitions, as wealth, luxuries, relatives, prestige, etc. Maya 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 God as the goal and refuge, he takes care of them just as a mother takes care of her child.

Shree Krishna uses the word bhajāmi, which means "to serve." He serves the surrendered souls, by destroying their accumulated karmas of endless lifetimes, cutting the bonds of Maya, removing the darkness of material existence, and bestowing divine bliss, divine knowledge, and divine love. And when the devotee learns to love God selflessly, he willingly enslaves himself to their love. Shree Ram thus tells Hanuman:

ekaikasyopakārasya prāṇān dāsyāmi te kape
śheṣasyehopakārāṇāṁ bhavāṁ ṛiṇino vayaṁ
(Vālmiki Ramayan)[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, God reciprocates with everyone as they surrender to him.

If God is so merciful upon his devotees, why do some people worship the celestial gods instead? He explains in the following verse.

BG 4.12: In this world, those desiring success in material activities worship the celestial gods, since material rewards manifest quickly.

Commentary: Persons who seek worldly gain worship the celestial gods and seek boons from them. The boons the celestial gods bestow are material and temporary, and they are given only by virtue of the power they have received from the Supreme Lord. 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 God 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 āśhram. However, I find that the Emperor is himself a beggar before the Lord. Then why should I ask him for any favors, and not directly from the Lord himself?"

The celestial gods give boons only by the powers bestowed upon them by the Supreme Lord. 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 Lord for the fulfillment of their aspirations. People are of various kinds, possessing higher and lower aspirations. Shree Krishna now mentions four categories of qualities and works.

BG 4.13: 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

Commentary: 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), rajo 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. Shree Krishna explains in this verse that the classification of the Varṇāśhram system was according to people's qualities and activities.

Although God 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, God provides the souls with the energy to act, but they are free in determining what they wish to do with it; God is not responsible for their actions.

BG 4.14: 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.

Commentary: God is all-pure, and whatever he does also becomes pure and auspicious. The Ramayan states:

samaratha kahuñ nahiñ doṣhu gosāiñ, rabi pāvaka surasari kī nāiñ. [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 in transforms all those dirty gutters into the holy Ganges. Likewise, God 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, God's actions are not motivated by selfishness; his every act is driven by compassion for the souls. 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. Lord Krishna states here that he is transcendental to the fruitive reactions of work.

Even Saints who are situated in God-consciousness become transcendental to the material energy. Since all their activities are effectuated in love for God, such pure-hearted Saints are not bound by the fruitive reactions of work. The Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam states:

yat pāda pañkaja parāga niṣheva triptā
yoga prabhāva vidhutākhila karma bandhāḥ
svairam charanti munayo 'pi na nahyamānās
tasyechchayātta vapuṣaḥ kuta eva bandhaḥ
(10.33.35) [v16]

"Material activities never taint the devotees of God 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 Lord himself who assumes his transcendental form according to his own sweet will?"

BG 4.15: 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

Commentary: The sages who aspire for God 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 God, 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 souls who are bereft of God 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 God. Working in devotion also attracts the grace of God. Shree Krishna is advising Arjun to do the same. Having asked Arjun to perform actions that do not bind one, the Lord now begins expounding the philosophy of action.

BG 4.16: 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.

Commentary: 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 Mahabharat, Arjun wishes to follow the same course of action and shun violence but Shree 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 god of Death, stated:

dharmaṁ tu sākṣhād bhagavat praṇītaṁ na vai vidur ṛiṣhaya nāpi devāḥ

(Śhrīmad 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 gods. Dharma has been created by God himself, and he alone is its true knower." Lord 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.

BG 4.17: You must understand the nature of all three—recommended action, wrong action, and inaction. The truth about these is profound and difficult to understand.

Commentary: Work has been divided by Shree 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 soul.

Inaction. Akarm is actions that are performed without attachment to the results, merely for the pleasure of God. They neither have any karmic reactions nor do they entangle the soul.

BG 4.18: 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.

Commentary: 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, Shree 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 God. 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.

BG 4.19: 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

Commentary: The soul, being a tiny part of God who is an ocean of bliss, naturally seeks bliss for itself. However, covered by the material energy, the soul 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 soul in karmic reactions.

In contrast, when the soul 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 God. It then strives to perform every action for the pleasure of God. "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 soul renounces selfish actions for material pleasures and dedicates all actions to God, the works performed produce no karmic reactions. They are said to be burnt in the fire of divine knowledge.

BG 4.20: 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.

Commentary: 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 God. Being fully satisfied in devotional union with him, they look upon God 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. Shree 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 Shree Krishna for a solution. He said, "Tell River Yamuna that if Shree Krishna is an akhaṇḍ brahmacharī (perfectly celibate since birth), it should give them way." The gopīs started laughing, because they felt that Shree 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 āśhram 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 Shree Krishna the secret behind what had happened. He explained that while God 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, Shree 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.

BG 4.21: Free from expectations and the sense of ownership, with the mind and intellect fully controlled, they incur no sin even though performing actions by their body.

Commentary: 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 God.

BG 4.22: 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.

Commentary: Just like there are two sides to a coin, so too God 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. Lord 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 God, we see both positive and negative fruits of those works as the will of God, and joyfully accept both.

BG 4.23: 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 God), they are freed from all karmic reactions.

Commentary: In this verse, Lord Krishna summarizes the conclusion of the previous five verses. Dedication of all one's actions to God results from the understanding that the soul is eternal servitor of God. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu said: *jīvera svarūpa haya kṛiṣṇera nitya-dāsa* (Chaitanya Charitāmṛit, Madhya Leela, 20.108)[v18] "The soul is by nature the servant of God." 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 souls develop? Shree Krishna explains this in the next verse.

BG 4.24: For those who are completely absorbed in God-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 God, easily attain Him

Commentary:Factually, the objects of the world are made from Maya, the material energy of God. 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 soul too is the energy of God—it is a spiritual energy, called jīva śakti. Shree Krishna states this in verse 7.5.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu stated:

jīva-tattva śakti, kṛṣṇa-tattva śaktimān
gītā-viṣṇupurāṇādi tāhāte pramāṇa
(Chaitanya Charitāmṛit, Ādi Leela, 7.117)[v19]

"Lord Krishna is the energetic and the soul is his energy. This has been stated in Bhagavad Gita, Viṣṇu Purāṇ, etc." Thus, the soul is also simultaneously one with and different from God. Hence, those whose minds are fully absorbed in God-consciousness see the whole world in its unity with God as non-different from him. The Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam states:

sarva-bhūteṣhu yaḥ paśhyed bhagavad-bhāvam ātmanah
bhūtāni bhagavatyaātmanyēsha bhāgavatottamaḥ
(11.2.45)[v20]

"One who sees God everywhere and in all beings is the highest spiritualist." For such advanced spiritualists whose minds are completely absorbed in God-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 God.

Having explained the spirit in which sacrifice is to be done, Lord Krishna now relates the different kinds of sacrifice people perform in this world for purification.

BG 4.25: Some yogis worship the celestial gods with material offerings unto them. Others worship perfectly who offer the self as sacrifice in the fire of the Supreme Truth.

Commentary:Sacrifice, or yajña, should be performed in divine consciousness as an offering to the Supreme Lord. 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 gods.

Others with deeper understanding of the meaning of yajña offer their own selves as sacrifice to the Supreme. This is called ātma samarpaṇ, or ātmāhutī, or offering one's soul to God. Yogi Shri Krishna Prem explained this very well: "In this world of dust and din, whenever one makes ātmāhutī in the flame of divine love, there is an explosion, which is grace, for no true ātmāhutī 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 God. Such surrender has six aspects to it, which have been explained in verse 18.66. Here, Shree Krishna continues to explain the different kinds of sacrifice that people perform.

BG 4.26: 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.

Commentary: 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, Shree 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 God in everything. In verse 7.8, Shree Krishna says: raso 'ham apsu kaunteya "Arjun, know me to be the taste in water." Accordingly, bhakti yogis practice to behold God 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.

BG 4.27: Some, inspired by knowledge, offer the functions of all their senses and their life energy in the fire of the controlled mind.

Commentary: 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 haṭha 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 Upaniṣhad 6.8.7) [v21] and ahaṁ brahmāsmi "I am the Supreme Entity." (Bṛihadāraṇyak Upaniṣhad 1.4.10) [v22]

The practice of jñāna yog is a very difficult path, which requires a very determined and trained intellect. The Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam (11.20.7) states: nirvinṇānām jñānayogaḥ [v23] "Success in the practice of jñāna yog is only possible for those who are at an advanced stage of renunciation."

BG 4.28: 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.

Commentary: Human beings differ from each other in their natures, motivations, activities, professions, aspirations, and sanskāras (tendencies carrying forward from past lives). Shree Krishna brings Arjun to the understanding that sacrifices can take on hundreds of forms, but when they are dedicated to God,

they become means of purification of the mind and senses and elevation of the soul. 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 God with the wealth they earn. In this manner, they offer their propensity for earning money as sacrifice to God 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 "Mīmāṃsā Darśhan," Ved Vyas wrote "Vedānt Darśhan," Gautam wrote "Nyāya Darśhan," Kanad wrote "Vaiśeṣik Darśhan," Kapil wrote "Sāṅkhya 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 God." So when persons inclined toward aṣṭāṅg yog learn to love God, 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 God, 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 God. sā vidyā tanmatirayā (Bhāgavatam 4.29.49) [v25] "True knowledge is that which increases our devotion to God." Thus, studiously inclined sādhsaks engage in the sacrifice of knowledge, which when imbued with the spirit of devotion, leads to loving union with God.

BG 4.29-30: 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

Commentary: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 Lord.

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, apān, vyān, samān, udān—that help regulate various physiological bodily functions. Amongst these, samān 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 samān, 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).

BG 4.31: 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.

Commentary: The secret of sacrifice, as mentioned previously, is the understanding that it should be performed for the pleasure of God, and then the remnants can be taken as his prasāda (grace). For example, devotees of the Lord partake of food after offering it to him. After cooking the food, they place it on the altar and pray to God to accept their offering. In their mind, they meditate on the sentiment that God is actually eating from the plate. At the end of the offering, the remnants on the plate are accepted as prasāda, or the grace of God. Partaking of such nectar-like prasāda leads to illumination, purification, and spiritual advancement.

In the same mood, devotees offer clothes to God and then wear them as his prasāda. They install his deity in their house, and then live in it with the attitude that their home is the temple of God. When objects or activities are offered as sacrifice to God, then the remnants, or prasāda, are a nectar-like blessing for the soul. The great devotee Uddhava told Shree Krishna:

tvayopabhukta-srag-gandha-vāso 'laṅkāra-charchitāḥ

uchchhiṣṭa-bhojino dāsās tava mām 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 prasāda, I will easily conquer Maya.” Those who do not perform sacrifice remain entangled in the fruitive reactions of work and continue to experience the torments of Maya.

BG 4.32: 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.

Commentary: 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 God. 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.

BG 4.33: 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.

Commentary: Shree 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 God'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 Shree Kripaluji Maharaj says:

bandhan aur mokṣha kā, kāraṇ manahi bakhān
yāte 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 God."

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 God and our relationship with him nurtures devotional sentiments. Hence, Shree 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.

BG 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.

Commentary: On hearing that sacrifice should be performed in knowledge, the natural question that follows is, how can we obtain spiritual knowledge? Shree 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 puruṣasyātma vedanam
svato na sambhavād anyas tattva-jñō jñāna-do bhavet
(11.22.10)[v29]

"The intellect of the soul 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 God-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 veda
(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 'yaṁ 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 God is when he brings the soul 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 Prahlād Maharaj said:

naishāṁ matis tāvad urukramāṅghriṁ spriśhatyanarthāpagamo yadarthāḥ
mahīyasāṁ pāda rajo 'bhiṣhekaṁ niṣkiñchanānāṁ 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 Shree Krishna mentions the need for approaching a Guru with reverence, inquiring about the Truth from him with humility, and pleasing him by rendering service.

BG 4.35: 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.

Commentary: Just as darkness can never engulf the sun, similarly, illusion can never again overcome the soul who has once attained enlightenment. Tadviṣṇoḥ paramaṁ padaṁ sadā paśhyanti sūrayaḥ "Those who have realized God always remain in God-consciousness."

Under the illusion of Maya, we see the world as separate from God, 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 God, and utilize whatever comes their way in the service of God. They also see all human beings as parts of God and harbor a divine attitude toward everyone. Thus, Hanuman says:

sīyā rāmamaya saba jaga jānī, karauṇ pranāma jori juga pānī. (Ramayan)[v34]

"I see the forms of Lord Ram and Mother Sita in everyone, and so I fold my hands and offer my respects to all."

BG 4.36: 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.

Commentary: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 soul, and endless lifetimes have gone by being subjected to these conditions. Like a football being kicked around the field, the soul 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 God liberates the knowledgeable. Thus, knowledge becomes the means of cutting material bondage. The Kaṭhapaniṣhad states:

vijñānasārathiryastu manaḥ pragrahavān naraḥ

so 'dhvanaḥ pāramāpnoti tadviṣṇoḥ paramaṁ padam (1.3.9)

"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."

BG 4.37: As a kindled fire reduces wood to ashes, O Arjun, so does the fire of knowledge burn to ashes all reactions from material activities.

Commentary: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 Shree Krishna assures Arjun that knowledge has the power to burn our heap of karmas in this lifetime itself. That is because knowledge of the soul and its relationship with God leads us to surrender to him. When we surrender to God, he burns our stockpile of endless lifetimes of karmas and releases us from material bondage.

BG 4.38: 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

Commentary:Knowledge has the power to purify, elevate, liberate, and unite a person with God. 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 soul, God, Maya, karm, jñāna, and bhakti from the Guru, but that by itself does not make a person God-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 God. The Sage Patañjali states:

śhrutānumāna-prajñābhyām 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 Shree Krishna as the purest sublime thing.

BG 4.39: 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.

Commentary:Shree 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 dṛiḍho viśhvāsaḥ śhraddhā [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 God under his guidance. The Shvetashvatar Upaniṣhad states:

yasya deve parā bhaktir yathā deve tathā gurau
tasyaite kathitā hyarthaḥ 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 God."

BG 4.40: But persons who possess neither faith nor knowledge, and who are of a doubting nature, suffer a downfall. For the skeptical souls, there is no happiness either in this world or the next.

Commentary:The Bhakti Rasāmṛit Sindhu classifies sādhas into three classes based on the degree of faith and knowledge:

śhāstre yuktau cha nipuṇaḥ sarvathā dṛiḍha-niśhchayaḥ

prauḍha-śhraddho 'dhikārī yaḥ sa bhaktāvuttamo mataḥ

yaḥ śhāstrādiṣhvaniḥpūṇaḥ śhraddhāvān sa tu madhyamaḥ

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

God and Guru. The lowest class sādhak is one, who neither has scriptural knowledge nor is endowed with faith." For the third category, Shree 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, Shree Krishna says in this verse that for the doubting person there is no happiness either in this world or in the next.

Karm is actions involved in prescribed rituals and social duties, sanyās means "to renounce," while "yog" means "to unite with God." Here, Shree Krishna has used the word yogasanyasta karmāṇaṁ, referring to "those who renounce all ritualistic karm, dedicating their body, mind, and soul to God." Such persons do their every action as a service to God. Shree Krishna says that their works 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 God, 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 souls perform in the world do not bind them, because they are offered to God in the fire of Yog, i.e. they are done for the pleasure of God. Thus, although doing all kinds of works, the Saints remain unfettered from the bonds of karma.

BG 4.42: 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!

Commentary: 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 Shree 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 Lord 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.

BG 5.1: Arjun said: O Shree 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?

Commentary: This is the fifth of Arjun's sixteen questions. Shree 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 Shree Krishna to begin to relate spiritual knowledge to him. In the second chapter, Shree Krishna revealed to Arjun the science of the self and explained that since the soul 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, Shree Krishna encouraged Arjun to dedicate the fruits of his works to God. His actions would then become karm-yog, or "united with God through works."

In the third chapter, the Supreme Lord 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 3.17).

In the fourth chapter, the Lord explained the various kinds of sacrifices (works that can be done for the pleasure of God). 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 God. 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 soul.

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 Shree Krishna.

BG 5.2: The Supreme Lord 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.

Commentary: In this verse, Shree 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 God. Jagadguru Kripaluji Maharaj states:

sochu mana yaha karm mama saba lakhata hari guru pyāre (Sāadhan Bhakti Tattva)

"Dear one! Think always that all your actions are being observed by God 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 souls, who have already risen beyond the bodily platform. A karm sanyāsī is one who discards social duties due to complete absorption in God, and engages entirely in the performance of spiritual duties (devotional service to God). This sentiment of karm sanyās was nicely expressed by Lakshman, when Lord Ram asked him to fulfill his worldly duties:

more sabai eka tumha swāmī, dīnabandhu ura antarayāmī (Ramayan)

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 God, while the karm yogis are

encumbered with social duties.

However, in this verse, Shree 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 God, 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 God. 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.

BG 5.3: 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.

Commentary: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 God. The Lord 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 God.

BG 5.4: Only the ignorant speak of sāṅkhya (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.

Commentary:Here, Shree Krishna uses the word sāṅkhya 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 God. 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 God 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 God 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 sanyāsī, 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 God-consciousness. Prahlād, Dhruv, Ambarish, Prithu, Vibheeshan, Yudhishtir, etc. were all such exemplary karm yogis. The Shreemad Bhagavatam states:

grihītvāpīndriyair arthān yo na dveṣṭi na hṛiṣyati

viṣṇor māyām idaṁ paśhyan sa vai bhāgavatottamaḥ (11.2.48)

“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 God 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.

BG 5.5: 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.

Commentary: In spiritual practice, the intention of the mind is what matters, not the external activities. One may be living in the holy land of Vrindavan, 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 land of Vrindavan, 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 manuṣhyāṇāṁ kāraṇaṁ bandha mokṣhayoḥ
(Pañchadaśī)

“The mind is the cause of bondage, and the mind is the cause of liberation.” Jagadguru Shree Kripaluji Maharaj states the same principle:

bandhan aur mokṣha kā, kāraṇ manahi bakhān
yāte kaunīu bhakti karu, karu mana te haridhyān
(Bhakti Śhatak verse 19)

“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 God.”

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 God, and so they are both identical in their internal consciousness.

BG 5.6: 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.

Commentary: 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, Shree 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 God. So the Lord 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 God. 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.

BG 5.7: The karm yogis, who are of purified intellect, and who control the mind and senses, see the Soul of all souls in every living being. Though performing all kinds of actions, they are never entangled.

Commentary: The word ātmā has been used in multiple ways in the Vedic literature: for God, for the soul, for the mind, and for the intellect. This verse typifies all these uses. Shree Krishna describes the karm yogi who is yog yukt (united in consciousness with God). He says that such a noble soul is: 1) viśuddhātmā, of purified intellect, 2) vijitātmā, who has conquered the mind, and 3) jitendriya, one who has controlled the senses.

Such karm yogis, with purified intellect, see God 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 Lord. 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.

BG 5.8-9: Those steadfast in karm yog, always think, "I am not the doer," even while engaged in seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, moving, sleeping, breathing, speaking, excreting, grasping, and opening or closing the eyes. With the light of divine knowledge, they see that it is only the material senses that

are moving amongst their objects.

Commentary: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 God-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 God, and thus they attribute all their works as done by the power of God. Since they have surrendered to the will of God, they depend upon Him to inspire their mind and intellect in accordance with His divine will. So, they remain situated in the understanding that God is the doer of everything.

The Sage Vasishth advised Lord Ram:

kartā bahirkartāntarloke vihara rāghava (Yog Vāsiṣṭh)

"O Ram, externally engage in actions diligently, but internally practice to see yourself as the non-doer and God as the prime mover of all your activities." In this divine consciousness, the karm yogis see themselves as mere instruments in the hands of God. Shree Krishna explains in the following verse the consequences of work done in this consciousness.

BG 5.10: Those who dedicate their actions to God, abandoning all attachment, remain untouched by sin, just as a lotus leaf is untouched by water.

Commentary: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 God's divine body. Hence charaṇ-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, Shree 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.

BG 5.11: The yogis, while giving up attachment, perform actions with their body, senses, mind, and intellect, only for the purpose of self-purification.

Commentary: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 God, who alone is the bhoktāraṁ yajña tapasām (Supreme enjoyer of all activities). However, in this verse, Shree Krishna brings a new twist to the samarpaṇ (dedication of works to God). He says the enlightened yogis perform their works for the purpose of purification. How then do the works get

dedicated to God?

The fact is that God needs nothing from us. He is the Supreme Lord of everything that exists and is perfect and complete in Himself. What can a tiny soul offer to the Almighty God, that God does not already possess? Hence, it is customary while making an offering to God to say: tvadiyaṁ vastu govinda tubhyameva samarpitaṁ "O God, I am offering Your item back to You." Expressing a similar sentiment, Saint Yamunacharya states:

mama nātha yad asti yo 'smyahaṁ sakalam taddhī tavaiva mādharma

niyata-svam iti prabuddha-dhāir atha vā kiṁ nu samarpayāmi te

(Śhrī Stotra Ratna, 50)

"O Lord 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 God's hands; that is the purification of our own heart (mind and intellect). When we purify our heart and engage it in devotion to God, 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 God.

Thus, the yogis understand that the biggest thing they can give to God is the purity of their own hearts and they work to achieve it. In the Ramayan, there is a sweet illustration of this principle. Lord Ram found Sugreev to be somewhat frightened before the battle of Lanka so He consoled him in the following manner:

piśhāchān dānavān yakṣhān prithivyāṁ chaiva rākṣhasān

aṅgugreṇa tānhanyā michchhan harī gaṇeśhvaraḥ (Vālmiki Ramayan)

Lord Ram said, "If I, the Supreme Lord, 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 Lord, then in order to kill Ravan, what is the need for collecting this army?" The Lord 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 Kabir states:

nindak niyare rākhiye āngan kuṭi chhabāya

nita sābun pānī binā nirmala kare subhāya

"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 God, the heart gets purified; and as the heart gets purified, we naturally offer the results of all our actions to the Supreme Lord.

BG 5.12: Offering the results of all activities to God, 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.

Commentary: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? Shree 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 God." 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 God in consciousness." It can also denote "desiring mundane rewards not beneficial to the soul." 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.

BG 5.13: The embodied beings who are self-controlled and detached reside happily in the city of nine gates free from thoughts that they are the doers or the cause of anything.

Commentary:Shree Krishna compares the body with its openings to a city of nine gates. The soul 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 lord of the body. Rather, they hold the body and all activities performed by it as belonging to God. Renouncing all actions through the mind, such enlightened souls 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 Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣhad:

navadwāre pure dehī hanto lelayate bahiḥ
vaśhī sarvasya lokasya sthāvarasya charasya cha (3.18)

"The body consists of nine gates—two ears, one mouth, two nostrils, two eyes, anus, and genitals. In material consciousness, the soul residing with the body identifies itself with this city of nine gates. Within this body also sits the Supreme Lord, who is the controller of all living beings in the world. When the soul establishes its connection with the Lord, it becomes free like Him, even while residing in the body."

In this verse, Shree Krishna declared that the embodied soul is neither the doer nor the cause of anything. Then the question arises whether God is the actual cause of actions in the world. This is answered in the next verse.

BG 5.14: Neither the sense of doership nor the nature of actions comes from God; nor does He create the fruits of actions. All this is enacted by the modes of material nature (guṇas)

Commentary: In this verse, the word Prabhu has been used for God, to indicate that He is the Lord 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 souls, 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, God 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 soul brings this pride onto itself out of ignorance. If the soul chooses to do away with the ignorance, then God helps dispel it with His grace.

Thus, renunciation of the sense of doership is the responsibility of the soul. The body is constituted of the three modes of material nature, and all actions are performed by the modes. But out of ignorance, the soul identifies with the body and becomes implicated as the doer of actions, which are in fact done by material nature (verse 3.27).

BG 5.15: The omnipresent God 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.

Commentary: God is not responsible either for anyone's virtuous deeds or sinful actions. God's work in this regard is threefold: 1) He provides the soul 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 soul 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 souls in existence. God'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 God granted free will to the soul. It is because the soul is a tiny part of God and it possesses His qualities to a minuscule extent. God is abhijña swarāt (supremely independent), and so the soul 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 God 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 God for them.

In ignorance, some souls do not even realize that they possess the freedom to choose their actions and hold God 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. Shree Krishna explains next how such ignorance can be dispelled.

BG 5.16: But for those whose ignorance is destroyed by divine knowledge, the Supreme Entity is revealed, just as the sun illumines everything when it rises.

Commentary: The sun's power in removing the darkness of night is incomparable.

The Ramayan states:

rākāpati śhoṛasa uahiñ tārāgana samudāi
sakala girinha dava lāia binu rabi rāti na jāi

"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 God'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 God's knowledge begins shining brightly, the illusion beats a hasty retreat, and the soul wakes up to its true spiritual identity, even while it lives in the city of nine gates. The soul had fallen into illusion because God's material energy (avidyā śhakti) had covered it in darkness. The illusion is dispelled when God's spiritual energy (vidyā śhakti) illumines it with the light of knowledge.

BG 5.17: Those whose intellect is fixed in God, who are completely absorbed in God, 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.

Commentary: 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 God. This verse makes very emphatic use of words denoting complete God-consciousness.

Tadbuddhayaḥ means the intellect is directed toward God.

Tadātmanaḥ means the heart (mind and intellect) is solely absorbed in God.

Tanniṣṭhāḥ means the intellect has firm faith in God.

Tatparāyaṇaḥ means striving after God as the supreme goal and refuge.

Thus, the sign of true knowledge is that it leads to love for God. Imbued with such love, devotees see Him everywhere. Such a divine vision is described in the next verse.

BG 5.18: 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

Commentary: When we perceive things through the perspective of knowledge, it is called prajñā chakṣhu, which means "with the eyes of knowledge." Shree Krishna uses the words vidyā sampanne to the same effect, but He also adds vinaya, meaning "humbleness." 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.

Shree 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 souls who are fragments of God, and are therefore divine in nature. The examples given by Shree 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 souls, 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 Vaiśhyas conduct business, and the Shudras engage in labor, yet they are all eternal souls, who are tiny parts of God, and hence alike.

BG 5.19: 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 God, and are therefore seated in the Absolute Truth.

Commentary: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. Shree 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 God, giving up all worldly attachments. The Ramayan states:

sevahiṁ lakhanu sīya raghubīrahi, jimi abibekī puruṣha sarīrahi.

"Lakshman served Lord 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 godlike in demeanor. The Mahabharat states: *yo na kāmāyate kiñchit brahma bhūyāya kalpate* "One who gives up desires becomes like God."

BG 5.20: Established in God, 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.

Commentary: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 God, when we surrender our will to the divine. In accordance with verse 5.17, when we unite our will to the will of God, 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 God." 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 God'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 God'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 God'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 God. This leads to surrender to the will of God, 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.

BG 5.21: Those who are not attached to external sense pleasures realize divine bliss in the self. Being united with God through Yog, they experience unending happiness.

Commentary: The Vedic scriptures repeatedly describe God as an ocean of unlimited divine bliss:

ānando brahmeti vyajānāt (Taittirīya Upaniṣhad 3.6)

"Know God to be bliss."

kevalānubhavānanda svarūpaḥ parameśhvaraḥ (Bhagavatam 7.6.23)

"God's form is made of pure bliss."

ānanda mātṛa kara pāda mukhodarādi (Padma Purāṇ)

"God's hands, feet, face, stomach, etc. are all made of bliss."

jo ānand sindhu sukharāsī (Ramayan)

"God is an ocean of bliss and happiness."

All these mantras and verses from the scriptures emphasize that divine bliss is the nature of God's personality. The yogi, who absorbs the senses, mind, and intellect in God, begins to experience the infinite bliss of God who is seated within

BG 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, so the wise do not delight in them.

Commentary: 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 soul for the following reasons:

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 God is infinite, and so it gives complete satisfaction.

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 God is eternal, and once attained, it remains forever.

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 God is sentient; it is sat-chit-ānand (eternal ever-fresh divine bliss). Hence, one can go on chanting the same divine Name of God 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. Shree Krishna emphasizes this in the next verse.

BG 5.23: 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.

Commentary: The human body presents a golden opportunity for the soul to reach the Supreme goal of God-realization. In this body, we possess the faculty of discrimination, while animals are driven by their nature. Shree 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 sodhum 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 Shree 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 Shreemad Bhagavatam states:

nāyaṁ deho deha-bhājāṁ nṛloke

kaṣṭhān kāmān arhate viḍ-bhujāṁ ye

tapo divyaṁ putrakā yena sattvaṁ

śuddhyed yasmād brahma-saukhyāṁ tvanantam (5.5.1)

"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 God." 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.

BG 5.24: Those who are happy within themselves, enjoying the delight of God within, and are illumined by the inner light, such yogis are united with the Lord and are liberated from material existence.

Commentary: "Inner light" is the divine knowledge that is bestowed from within in the form of realization, by the grace of God, when we surrender to Him. The Yog Darśhan states:

ṛitambharā tatra prajñā (1.48)

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, Shree 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 God. If we do not experience happiness within, we will not be able to permanently resist external temptations. But when the bliss of God 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 āsīt

tadāvadhi bata nārī-saṅgame smaryamāne

bhavati mukha-vikāraḥ suṣṭu niṣṭhīvanam cha

"Ever since I have begun meditating upon the lotus-like feet of Lord 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."

BG 5.25: 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 God and are liberated from material existence

Commentary: In the preceding verse, Shree Krishna explained the state of the sages who experience the pleasure of God within themselves. In this verse, He describes the state of the sages who are actively engaged in the welfare of all beings. The Ramayan states:

para upakāra bachana mana kāyā, santa sahaja subhāu khagarāyā

"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 God-consciousness of the soul. Hence, the highest welfare activity is to help a person unite his or her consciousness with God. This is the kind of welfare work that elevated souls with purified

minds engage in. Such welfare activity further attracts God'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 God, they are liberated to the spiritual realm and the divine Abode.

Thus far in this chapter, Shree Krishna has extolled the path of karm-yog. He now speaks the remaining verses for the karm sanyāsī, revealing that they too attain the final goal.

BG 5.26: For those sanyāsī, 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.

Commentary:Karm-yog is the safer path to take for most people, as explained in verse 5.2, and that is why Shree 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 sanyāsī in history. Shree Krishna states that such true karm sanyāsī 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 sanyāsī, 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 world itself.

BG 5.27-28: 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, fear, and anger, always lives in freedom.

Commentary:Often renunciants are more inclined toward aṣṭāṅg-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 God. Shree 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 apāṇ (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 God). Hence, the ascetic path must also be consummated through devotion to God, as stated in the next verse.

BG 5.29: Having realized Me as the enjoyer of all sacrifices and austerities, the Supreme Lord of all the worlds and the selfless friend of all living beings,

My devotee attains peace.

Commentary: The ascetic sādhanā, explained in the previous two verses, can lead to ātma jñāna (knowledge of the self). But brahma jñāna (knowledge of God) requires the grace of God, which comes through devotion. The words sarva loka maheśhwaram mean "Sovereign Lord of all the worlds," and suhṛidaṁ sarva-bhūtānāṁ means "benevolent well-wisher of all living beings." In this way, He emphasizes that the ascetic path too is consummated in surrender to God, with the knowledge that the Supreme Lord is the enjoyer of all austerities and sacrifices. Jagadguru Shree Kripaluji Maharaj has put this very nicely:

hari kā viyogī jīva govind rādhe, sañcho yog soī jo hari se milāde
(Rādhā Govind Geet)

"The soul is disconnected from God since eternity. True Yog is that which unites the soul with the Lord." Hence, no system of Yog is complete without the inclusion of bhakti.

In His "Song of God," Shree 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, Shree Krishna ends the topic revealing the necessity of devotion.

BG 6.1: The Supreme Lord 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 Agnihotra yajna or abandoned bodily activities.

Commentary: The ritualistic activities described in the Vedas include fire sacrifices, such as Agnihotra yajna. 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, Shree 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 God-realized." "This sadhu is a nāgā bābā (ascetic who does not wear clothes), and thus he is perfectly renounced." However, Shree 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 God, 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 God. 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 God without any desire whatsoever for rewards. Even though they may be grihasthas (living with a family), such persons are true yogis and the real renunciants.

BG 6.2: What is known as sanyās is non-different from Yog, for none become yogis

without renouncing worldly desires.

Commentary: 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 soul is God-realization. The process of going toward God—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 God-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 Maya, the material energy, and hence renounced because they are detrimental to spiritual progress. Yukt vairāgya is that where everything is seen as belonging to God, 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 Maya, 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 God. Do not waste it or throw it away; utilize whatever you have in your possession for the service of God.”

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 God. 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, Shree Krishna states that a real sanyāsī (renunciant) is one who is a yogi, i.e. one who is uniting the mind with God in loving service. In the second line, Shree 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 God, 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.

BG 6.3: To the soul 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.

Commentary: In chapter 3, verse 3, Shree 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, Shree 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 Shree 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 God." And when we talk of it as being the process, we use Yog as meaning the "path" to union with God.

In this second context, Yog is like a ladder we climb to reach God. At the lowest rung, the soul is caught in worldliness, with the consciousness absorbed in mundane matter. The ladder of Yog takes the soul 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 sādhaḥ who aspire for union with God 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? Shree Krishna explains this next.

BG 6.4: When one is neither attached to sense objects nor to actions, such a person is said to be elevated in the science of Yog, having renounced all desires for the fruits of actions.

Commentary:As the mind becomes attached to God 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.

BG 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.

Commentary:We are responsible for our own elevation or debasement. Nobody can traverse the path of God-realization for us. Saints and Gurus show us the way, but we have to travel it ourselves. There is a saying in Hindi: ek peḍa do pakṣhī baiṭhe, 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 God-realized Saints were always present on Earth. At any period of time, if the world is devoid of such Saints, then the souls of that period cannot become God-realized. How then can they fulfill the purpose of human life, which is God-realization? Thus, God ensures that God-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 God-realized Saints and yet we did not become God-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. Shree Krishna states that, on the one hand, as the greatest benefactor of the soul, 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:

Mind: When it creates thoughts, we call it *mana*, or the mind.

Intellect: When it analyses and decides, we call it *buddhi*, or intellect.

Chitta: When it gets attached to an object or person, we call it *chitta*.

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 *antaḥ karaṇ*, or the mind. For example:

The *Pañchadaśhī* refers to all four together as the mind, and states that it is the cause of material bondage.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Shree Krishna repeatedly talks of the mind and the intellect as being two things, and emphasizes the need to surrender both to God.

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 soul, classifies the mind into four—mind, intellect, *chitta* and ego.

So when Shree 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.

BG 6.6: 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.

Commentary: 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.

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 Shree Kripaluji Maharaj advises:

mana ko mano shatru usaki sunahu jani kachhu pyare (Sadhan Bhakti Tattva)[v1]

"Dear spiritual aspirant, look on your uncontrolled mind as your enemy. Do not come under its sway."

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, Franklin D. Roosevelt, former President of America, expressed this very nicely: "Men are not prisoners of fate, but only prisoners of their own minds." In this verse, Shree Krishna enlightens Arjun about the potential harm and benefits our mind can bestow upon us. In the following three verses, Shree Krishna describes the symptoms of one who is yog-aru?ha (advanced in Yog).

BG 6.7: The yogis who have conquered the mind rise above the dualities of cold and heat, joy and sorrow, and honor and dishonor. Such yogis remain peaceful and steadfast in their devotion to God.

Commentary: Shree 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 soul, 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 Maya and the other is the realm of God. If the mind rises above the sensual dualities of the world, it can easily get absorbed in God. Thus, Shree Krishna has stated that an advanced yogi's mind becomes situated in samādhī (deep meditation) upon God.

BG 6.8: 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.

Commentary: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 God. Since the material energy belongs to God, 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 God, and hence becomes a triptātmā, or one fully satisfied by virtue of realized knowledge.

BG 6.9: 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 unbiased between the righteous and sinful, is considered to be distinguished among humans.

Commentary: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 God, the elevated yogi see the whole creation in its unity with God. Thus, they are able to see all living beings with equality of vision. This parity of vision is also of various levels:

"All living beings are divine souls, and hence parts of God." Thus, they are viewed as equal. ātmavat sarva bhūteṣhu yaḥ paśhyati sa paṇḍitaḥ "A true Pundit is one who sees everyone as the soul, and hence similar to oneself."

Higher is the vision: "God is seated in everyone, and hence all are equally respect worthy."

At the highest level, the yogi develops the vision: "Everyone is the form of God." The Vedic scriptures repeatedly state that the whole world is a veritable form of God: īśhāvāsyam idam sarvaṁ yat kiñcha jagatyāṁ jagat (Īśhopeniṣhad 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 evedaṁ sarvaṁ (Puruṣh Sūktam)[v3] "God is everywhere in this world, and everything is his energy." Hence, the highest yogi sees everyone as the manifestation of God. Endowed with this level of vision, Hanuman says: sīyā rāma maya saba jaga jānī (Ramayan)[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, Shree 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, Shree Krishna describes the practice by which we can achieve that state.

BG 6.10: 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.

Commentary:Having stated the characteristics of one who has attained the state of Yog, Shree 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. Shree 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 God, 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 God. Once sufficient attachment for God has been achieved, one can challenge the world, "I will live amidst all the dualities of Maya, but remain untouched by them."

This instruction for seclusion has been repeated by Shree 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 God. 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.

BG 6.11: 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.

Commentary: Shree 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 Kuśh 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 God, while the instructions for the internal practice remain the same.

BG 6.12-13: 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.

Commentary: Having described the seating for meditation, Shree 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 God as it does while relishing sense objects. This creates the possibility for the mind to become languid when focused on God. 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 God's names. To avoid this, Shree Krishna gives the instruction to sit erect. The Brahma Sūtra also states three aphorisms regarding the posture for meditation:

āsīnaḥ sambhavāt (4.1.7)[v5] "To do sādhanā, seat yourself properly."

achalatvaṁ 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, dhyānveer 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 sukhamāsanam (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, Shree 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 saṁskāras and habits, and cultivate good qualities.

The best kind of meditation is one where the mind is focused upon God. This is clarified in the next two verses.

BG 6.14: 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.

Commentary: Shree 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:

brahmacharya pratiṣṭhāyām vīrya lābhaḥ (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 refrainment from masturbation, homosexual acts, and all other sexual practices.

Further, Shree Krishna states here that the object of meditation should be God alone. This point is again reiterated in the next verse.

BG 6.15: Thus, constantly keeping the mind absorbed in Me, the yogi of disciplined mind attains nirvāṇ, and abides in Me in supreme peace.

Commentary: 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? Shree Krishna makes this riddle easy to solve. He states that the object of meditation should be God himself and God 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 God himself. Hence, verse 14.26 states that God 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 God alone.

Now what is the way of fixing the mind upon God? We can make all of God’s divine attributes—names, forms, virtues, pastimes, abodes, associates—the objects of meditation. They are all non-different from God and replete with all his energies. Hence, devotees may meditate upon any of these and get the true

benefit of meditating upon God. In the various bhakti traditions in India, the name of God is made the basis of contemplation. Thus, the Ramayan states:

brahma rām teṅ nāmu bara, bara dāyaka bara dāni [v10]

"God's name is bigger than God himself, in terms of its utility to the souls." Taking the name is a very convenient way of remembering God, since it can be taken anywhere and everywhere—while walking, talking, sitting, eating, etc.

However, for most sādhas the name by itself is not sufficiently attractive for enchanting the mind. Due to sanskāras of endless lifetimes, the mind is naturally drawn to forms. Using the form of God as the basis, meditation becomes natural and easy. This is called rūp dhyān meditation.

Once the mind is focused upon the form of God, we can then further enhance it by contemplating upon the virtues of God—his compassion, his beauty, his knowledge, his love, his benevolence, his grace, and so on. One can then advance in meditation by serving God 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 God in the mind). In this way, we can meditate upon the names, forms, virtues, pastimes, etc. of God. All these become powerful means of fulfilling Shree Krishna's instruction to Arjun, in this verse, to keep the mind absorbed in him.

At the end of the verse, Shree Krishna gives the ultimate benefits of meditation, which are liberation from Maya and the everlasting beatitude of God-realization.

BG 6.16: O Arjun, those who eat too much or too little, sleep too much or too little, cannot attain success in Yog.

Commentary: After describing the object of meditation and the end-goal achieved by it, Shree 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 soul 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: śarīra 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 Ramayan states: tanu binu bhajana veda nahiṁ 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 Īshopaniṣad states:

andham tamaḥ praviśhanti ye 'vidyām upāsate

tato bhūya iva te tamo ya u vidyāyām ratāḥ (9)[v13]

"Those who cultivate only material science go to hell. But those who cultivate only spiritual science go to an even darker hell." 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, yogāsans, 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, Shree 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.

BG 6.17: But those who are temperate in eating and recreation, balanced in work, and regulated in sleep, can mitigate all sorrows by practicing Yog.

Commentary:Yog is the union of the soul with God. 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, Shree 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 Shree 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 tãnpurã (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."

BG 6.18: 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.

Commentary:When does a person complete the practice of Yog? The answer is when the controlled chitta (mind) becomes fixed and focused exclusively on God. 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, them I consider to be the highest of all." (Verse 6.47)

BG 6.19: Just as a lamp in a windless place does not flicker, so the disciplined mind of a yogi remains steady in meditation on the Supreme.

Commentary:In this verse, Shree 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 God, it becomes sheltered against the winds of desire. Such a yogi holds the mind steadily under control by the power of devotion.

BG 6.20: When the mind, restrained from material activities, becomes still by the practice of Yog, then the yogi is able to behold the soul through the

purified mind, and he rejoices in the inner joy.

Commentary: Having presented the process of meditation and the state of its perfection, Shree 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 soul and any acquired scriptural knowledge of the ātmā is only at the theoretical level. But when the mind becomes pure, the soul is directly perceived through realization.

BG 6.21: In that joyous state of Yog, called samadhi, one experiences supreme boundless divine bliss, and thus situated, one never deviates from the Eternal Truth.

Commentary: The yearning for bliss is intrinsic to the nature of the soul. It stems from the fact that we are tiny parts of God, 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 God as having an infinite ocean of bliss:

raso vai saḥ rasaṁ hyevāyaṁ labdhvā nandī bhavati (Taittirīya Upaniṣhad 2.7) [v14]

"God is bliss himself; the individual soul becomes blissful on attaining him."

ānandamayo 'bhyāsāt (Brahma Sūtra 1.1.12) [v15]

"God is the veritable form of bliss."

satya jñānānantānanda mātraika rasa mūrtayaḥ (Bhāgavatam 10.13.54) [v16]

"The divine form of God is made of eternity, knowledge, and bliss."

ānanda sindhu madhya tava vāsā, binu jāne kata marasi piyāsā (Ramayan) [v17]

"God, 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 soul within, which yearns for the infinite bliss of God.

When the mind is in union with God, the soul 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: samādhisiddhirīśhvara prapīdhānāt (Patañjali Yog Darśhan 2.45) [v18] "For success in samādhi, surrender to the Supreme Lord." In the state of samādhi, experiencing complete satisfaction and contentment, the soul has nothing left to desire, and thus becomes firmly situated in the Absolute Truth, without deviating from it for even a moment.

BG 6.22: 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

Commentary: 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 God. Since there is nothing higher than that, on experiencing that infinite bliss, the soul naturally perceives that it has reached its goal.

God's divine bliss is also eternal, and it can never be snatched away from the yogi who has attained it once. Such a God-realized soul, 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 God. Thus, even the biggest difficulty cannot shake such a Saint. Established in union with God, 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 God.

BG 6.23: That state of severance from union with misery is known as Yog. This Yog should be resolutely practiced with determination free from pessimism.

Commentary: The material world is the realm of Maya, and it has been termed by Shree Krishna in verse 8.15 as *duḥkhālayam aśhāshvatam*, or temporary and full of misery. Thus, the material energy Maya 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 Maya naturally gets dispelled when we bring the light of God into our heart. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu states this very beautifully:

kṛiṣṇa sūrya-sama, māyā haya andhakāra
yāhāñ kṛiṣṇa, tāhāñ nāhi māyāra adhikāra
(Chaitanya Charitāmṛit, Madhya Leela, 22.31)[v19]

"God is like the light and Maya is like darkness. Just as darkness does not have the power to engulf light, similarly Maya can never overcome God." Now, the nature of God is divine bliss while the consequence of Maya is misery. Thus, one who attains the divine bliss of God can never be overcome by the misery of Maya again.

Thus, the state of Yog implies both 1) attainment of bliss, and 2) freedom from misery. Shree 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 Shree 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.

BG 6.24-25: 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 God alone, and will think of nothing else.

Commentary: Meditation requires the dual process of removing the mind from the world and fixing it on God. Here, Shree 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 *sphurṇā* (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 God. 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—Shree Krishna then talks of the second part. The mind should be made to reside upon God. 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 dhṛiti. 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 God. 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. Shree Krishna explains next what that exercise involves.

BG 6.26: Whenever and wherever the restless and unsteady mind wanders, one should bring it back and continually focus it on God.

Commentary: 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 God, we will find that ever so often it wanders off in worldly saṅkalp and vikalp. It is thus important to understand the three steps involved in the process of meditation:

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.

Again, with the power of discrimination we understand that God alone is ours, and God-realization is our goal. Hence, we bring the mind to focus upon God. This also requires effort.

The mind comes away from God, and wanders back into the world. This does not require effort, it happens automatically.

When the third step happens by itself, sādhaḥs often become disappointed, "I tried so hard to focus upon God, but the mind went back into the world." Shree 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 God. 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 God 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.

BG 6.27: 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 God.

Commentary:As a yogi perfects the practice of withdrawing the mind from sense objects and securing it upon God, the passions get subdued and the mind becomes utterly serene. Earlier, effort was required to focus it upon God, but now it naturally runs to him. At this stage, the elevated meditator sees everything in its connection with God. Sage Narad states:

tat prāpya tad evāvalokayati, tad eva śrīṇoti,
tad eva bhāṣhayati, tad eva chintayati

(Nārad Bhakti Darśhan, Sūtra 55)[v20]

“The consciousness of the devotee whose mind is united in love with God 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 God in this manner, the soul begins to experience a glimpse of the infinite bliss of God 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, Shree Krishna says that when we are śhānta-rajasam (free from passion) and akalmaṣham (sinless), then we will become brahma-bhūtam (endowed with God-realization). At that stage, we will experience sukham uttamam (the highest bliss)

BG 6.28: The self-controlled yogi, thus uniting the self with God, becomes free from material contamination, and being in constant touch with the Supreme, achieves the highest state of perfect happiness.

Commentary:Happiness can be classified into four categories:

sāttvikam sukhamātmottham viśhayottham tu rājasam
tāmasam moha dainyottham nirguṇam madapāśhrayām
(Bhāgavatam 11.25.29)[v21]

Tāmasic happiness. This is the pleasure derived from narcotics, alcohol, cigarettes, meat products, violence, sleep, etc.

Rājasic happiness. This is the pleasure from the gratification of the five senses and the mind.

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 soul.

Nirguṇa happiness. This is the divine bliss of God, which is infinite in extent. Shree Krishna explains that the yogi who becomes free from material contamination and becomes united with God attains this highest state of perfect happiness. He has called this unlimited bliss in verse 5.21 and supreme bliss in verse 6.21.

BG 6.29: The true yogis, uniting their consciousness with God, see with equal eye, all living beings in God and God in all living beings.

Commentary: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 God himself, in the form of his various energies.

eka deśhasthitasyāgnirjyotsnā vistāriṇī yathā

parasya brahmaṇaḥ śhaktistathedamakhilam jagat (Nārad Pañcharātra)[v22]

“Just as the sun, while remaining in one place, spreads its light everywhere, similarly the Supreme Lord, 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 God.

BG 6.30: For those who see Me everywhere and see all things in Me, I am never lost, nor are they ever lost to Me.

Commentary: To lose God 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 God 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 God ceases. Instead, if we see the Supreme Lord seated in that person, we will think, “God 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 God when it gets attached to a friend or relative. Now, if we train the mind to see God in that person, then each time the mind wanders toward him or her, we will think, “Shree 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 God and Guru ceases. Now if we see that incident in connection with God, we will think, “The Lord 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 God in that incident.” Our self-interest lies in somehow or the other keeping the mind in God, and the simple trick to accomplish this is to see God 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 God and he is never lost to us

BG 6.31: The yogi who is established in union with Me, and worships Me as the Supreme Soul residing in all beings, dwells only in Me, though engaged in all kinds of activities.

Commentary: God is all-pervading in the world. He is also seated in everyone's heart as the Supreme Soul. In verse 18.61, Shree Krishna states: "I dwell in the hearts of all living beings." Thus, within the body of each living being, there are two personalities—the soul and the Supreme Soul.

Those in material consciousness see everyone as the body, and make distinctions on the basis of caste, creed, sex, age, social status, etc.

Those in superior consciousness see everyone as the soul. Thus in verse 5.18, Shree Krishna states: "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."

The elevated yogis in even higher consciousness see God seated as the Supreme Soul 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.

The most elevated yogis are called paramahansas. They only see God, and have no perception of the world. This was the level of realization of Shukadev, the son of Ved Vyas, as stated in the Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam:

yam pravrajantam anupetam apeta krityam
dvaipāyano viraha-kātara ājuhāva
putreti tan-mayatayā taravo 'bhinedus
tam sarva-bhūta-hṛdayam 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 God; all that he heard was God; all that he thought was God.

In this verse, Shree Krishna is talking about the perfected yogis who are in the third and fourth stages of the above levels of realization.

BG 6.32: 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.

Commentary: 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 God in all beings consider the joys and sorrows of others as their own. Therefore, such yogis are always the well-wishers of all souls and they strive for the eternal benefit of all. This is the sama-darśhana (equality of vision) of perfected yogis

BG 6.33: Arjun said: The system of Yog that you have described, O Madhusudan, appears impractical and unattainable to me, due to the restless mind.

Commentary: Arjun speaks this verse, beginning with the words yo yam, "This system of Yog," referring to the process described from verse 6.10 forward. Shree Krishna has just finished explaining that for perfection in Yog we must:

- subdue the senses
- give up all desires

- focus the mind upon God 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.

BG 6.34: 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.

Commentary: 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 Lord as Krishna. The word "Krishna" means: *karṣhati yogināṃ paramahansānāṃ chetānsi iti kṛṣṇaḥ* [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.

BG 6.35: Lord 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.

Commentary: Shree 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?"

Shree 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, Shree 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 Lord through abhyās. Take the mind away from the world—this is vairāgya—and bring the mind to rest on God—this is abhyās. Sage Patanjali gives the same instruction:

abhyāsa vairāgyābhyām tannirodhaḥ (Yog Darśhan 1.12)[v26]

“The perturbations of the mind can be controlled by constant practice and detachment.”

BG 6.36: 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 proper means, can attain perfection in Yog. This is My opinion.

Commentary: The Supreme Divine Personality, Shree 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 God 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 Shree Krishna in this regard.

BG 6.37: Arjun said: What is the fate of the unsuccessful yogi who begins the path with faith, but who does not endeavor sufficiently due to an unsteady mind and is unable to reach the goal of Yog in this life?

Commentary: The journey toward God-realization begins with śhraddhā (faith). Many sincere souls 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 ayatih (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 sādaks.

BG 6.38: 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?

Commentary: The desire to attain success is natural to the jīva. It comes from being a part of God, who is all-perfect, and hence the soul too wishes to be perfect and successful like its source—God. 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.

BG 6.39: O Krishna, please dispel this doubt of mine completely, for who other than You can do so?

Commentary: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 God-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 God, who is all-knowing. God alone is sarvajña (omniscient) and sarva-śhaktimān (all-powerful), and hence he is supremely competent in removing all ignorance, just as the sun is competent in repealing the darkness.

BG 6.40: The Supreme Lord 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 God-realization is never overcome by evil.

Commentary:The word Tāta is a word of endearment, which literally means "son." By addressing Arjun as Tāta in this verse, Shree 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, Shree Krishna wishes to indicate that God takes care of those who tread on his path. They are dear to God because they engage in the most auspicious kind of activity, and "the doer of good never comes to grief." This verse asserts that God preserves the devotee both in this world and the world hereafter. This pronouncement is a great assurance to all spiritual aspirants. Shree Krishna then goes on to explain how God preserves the efforts of the yogi who does not complete the journey in the present life.

BG 6.41-42: 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.

Commentary: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 God) is bhog (material enjoyment). One falls from Yog because of the desire for bhog. So God, 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 soul 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 souls are then given birth in a family where they have the opportunity to continue their spiritual journey. Śhuchī means those who are of pious and of good character; shree 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 souls 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, God 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.

BG 6.43: 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.

Commentary: God, 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 *sādhana* 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 God'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.

BG 6.44: Indeed, they feel drawn toward God, even against their will, on the strength of their past discipline. Such seekers naturally rise above the ritualistic principles of the scriptures.

Commentary: Once spiritual sentiments have sprouted, they cannot be wiped out. The soul with devotional *sanskārs* (tendencies and impressions) from the present and past lifetimes gets naturally inspired toward spirituality. Such an individual feels drawn toward God, and this pull is also referred to as "the call of God." Based upon the past *sanskārs* the call of God sometimes becomes so strong that it is said, "The call of God 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 God alone, they naturally rose above the ritualistic practices prescribed in the Vedas for material advancement.

BG 6.45: With the accumulated merits of many past births, when these yogis engage in sincere endeavors to make further progress, they become purified from material desires and attain perfection in this life itself.

Commentary: 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. Shree Krishna uses the words *prayatnād yatamānastu*, 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 Shree Krishna says: aneka janma sansiddhaḥ "Perfection in Yog is the result of the accumulated practice of many lives."

BG 6.46: 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.

Commentary: 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. Shree 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 God. As a result, the yogi's accomplishment is at the spiritual platform and is superior to them all.

BG 6.47: 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.

Commentary: 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. Shree 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 God. It is such a power that binds God and makes him a slave of his devotee. Thus, he states in the Bhāgavatam:

ahaṁ bhakta-parādhīno hyasvatantra iva dvija

sādhubhir grasta-hṛidayo bhaktair bhakta-jana-priyaḥ (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 God and considered by him to be the highest of all.

In this verse, Shree 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, Shree 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 soul as the servant of God, while the other kinds of yogis are still incomplete in their realization. They have connected themselves with God, but they have not yet situated themselves in the understanding that they are his eternal servants.

muktānām api siddhānām nārāyaṇa-parāyaṇaḥ

su-durlabhaḥ praśhāntātmā koṭīshv 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 Lord, Narayan, is very rare."

Another way of understanding this verse is that bhakti yog provides the closest and most complete realization of God. This is explained in verse 18.55, where

Shree Krishna explains that the bhakti yogi alone understands the true personality of God.

BG 7.1: The Supreme Lord 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.

Commentary: While concluding the previous chapter, Shree Krishna stated that the best yogis are those who exclusively focus on God and serve Him with great dedication. This gives rise to a few questions, such as, how can one get to know the Supreme Lord? How should a devotee worship Him and meditate upon Him?

Although Arjun had not asked these questions, yet the Omniscient and kind Lord began to answer. Here, Shree Krishna has used the terms mad-āśhrayaḥ, meaning "with your mind focused on Me" and śhṛiṇu, which means "listen." He is asking Arjun to listen to Him attentively.

BG 7.2: I shall now reveal unto you fully this knowledge and wisdom, knowing which nothing else remains to be known in this world.

Commentary: Jñāna is the knowledge learned by applying the mind, senses, and intellect. In contrast, vijñāna (wisdom) is the knowledge gained through spiritual practice, it is a direct experiential realization; and should not be misunderstood for intellectual knowledge. An example to explain this is honey kept in a sealed jar. We have heard that honey has the sweetest taste that is incomparable to any other sweet. But unless we open the jar and taste it, we will not get the experiential realization of its sweetness.

Likewise, the Guru gives us jñāna, which is the theoretical knowledge of the scriptures. Yet, we need to practice sadhana as per the acquired jñāna, which would consequently purify our mind. Only then, vijñāna (wisdom) knowledge, through self-realization will be attained.

Once Sage Ved Vyas intended to write the Shreemad Bhagavatam: a scripture that would describe God, His glories, nature, and as the object of devotion. But he did not wish to write it only based upon his jñāna. Therefore, first he engaged himself in bhakti to attain the experiential realization, which is vijñāna. He wrote:

bhakti-yogena manasi samyak praṇihite 'male
apaśhyat puruṣhaṁ pūrvaṁ māyāṁ cha tad-apāśhrayām
(Bhagavatam 1.7.4)

"Through bhakti-yog, Ved Vyas fixed his mind upon God without any material sentiments, and thus attained the complete vision and realization of the Supreme Divine Personality along with His external energy, Maya, which was under His control." Inspired by this realization, he wrote the epic scripture.

In this verse, Lord Shree Krishna affirms to Arjun that He will bestow upon him the theoretical knowledge regarding the Supreme Divine Personality. He will also illuminate his mind with the required wisdom. Once this knowledge is acquired, there will be nothing remaining for him to know.

BG 7.3: Amongst thousands of persons, hardly one strives for perfection; and amongst those who have achieved perfection, hardly one knows Me in truth.

Commentary: The word siddhi has numerous connotations and meanings. As per the Sanskrit dictionary, a few of them are: attainment of 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.

In this verse, Shree Krishna has used siddhi for perfection in the spiritual path. He says, "Only a tiny portion of the innumerable souls are fortunate to get a human birth. Amongst them, only a minuscule strive for spiritual perfection. And even among those perfected souls, ones who are aware of My divine glories and paramount position are very rare."

How is it that even perfected souls are unable to know God? The reason is without bhakti or loving devotion, it is not possible to realize the Supreme. Spiritual aspirants of karm, jñāna, haṭha yog, etc., cannot know God unless they include devotion in their practice. Shree Krishna has stated this fact several times in the Bhagavad Gita:

"The Supreme Divine Personality 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." BG 8.22.

"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." BG 11.54

"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." BG 18.55

Therefore, such spiritual aspirants who do not include devotion in their sadhana attain only limited theoretical knowledge or jñāna. And devoid of vijñāna the experiential knowledge, they are unable to know God or the Absolute Truth.

Shree Krishna has stated in this verse that only one among numerous humans knows Him in Truth. In the next verse, He moves on to describe the material and spiritual dimensions of His energies.

BG 7.4: Earth, water, fire, air, space, mind, intellect, and ego—these are eight components of My material energy.

Commentary: The energy that composes this material world is incredibly complex and fathomless. To make it comprehensible to our finite intellect, we have classified it into various categories and sub-categories. Modern science propagates matter to be a combination of elements, and the 118 elements discovered so far, are sectioned under the Periodic Table.

However, the Vedic philosophy and the Bhagavad Gita present a profoundly different classification of the material world. Matter is considered as part of God's energy and called prakriti. It is further divided into eight forms, as listed in this verse. It is amazing how insightful the knowledge in these ancient scriptures is in comparison to the developing trends in modern science.

Albert Einstein was the first to propound the concept of Mass-Energy Equivalence in 1905. In his Annus Mirabilis papers, he stated that it is possible to convert mass into energy and numerically presented it by an equation $E=mc^2$. His Theory of Relativity replaced an earlier concept of the universe made of solid matter. Both these theories were challenged in 1920 by Niels Bohr and other scientists with Quantum Theory, which proposes a dual particle-wave nature of matter. Ever since, the scientific community has been on the lookout for a single field or Unified Field Theory, which could expound on the relationship between matter and all forces of the universe.

More than 5000 years ago, long before the development of modern science, Lord Krishna had disclosed the perfect Unified Field Theory. He said to Arjun, "All that exists in the universe has manifested from My material energy." Just one material energy has extended itself into myriad shapes, forms, and entities of this world. The Taittirīya Upaniṣhad has elaborated on this:

tasmadvā etasmādātmana ākāśhaḥ sambhūtaḥ
ākāśhādvāyuḥ vāyoragniḥ agnerāpaḥ adbhyaḥ pṛithivī
pṛithivyā oṣhadhayaḥ oṣhadhībhyo 'nnam annātpuruṣhaḥ
sa vā eṣha puruṣho 'nnarasamayaḥ (2.1.2)

"From My material energy the ākāśhaḥ (ether) was created, from ether the air; from air, fire; from fire, water; from water, earth; from earth, plants; from plants, food and from food, man. This man is made of food-essence."

The material energy in its primordial form is called prakṛiti. God glances at it when He wishes to create the world. His glance agitates and creates mahān. (There is no equivalent word for it in English, as modern science is yet to discover such a subtle level of energy) Mahān further manifests into ahankār even this is unknown to modern science. Ahankār, in turn, forms the pañc-tanmātrās or the five perceptions of – taste, touch, smell, sight, and sound. And from these, the five gross elements– space, air, fire, water, and earth manifest.

Lord Shree Krishna includes the mind, intellect, and ego along with the five gross elements as different manifestations of His material energy. In this verse, He states that all these eight elements are simply parts of Maya, His material energy. In the next verse, He describes another of His superior energy; the soul energy.

BG 7.5: Such is My inferior energy. But beyond it, O mighty-armed Arjun, I have a superior energy. This is the jīva śakti (the soul energy), which comprises the embodied souls who are the basis of life in this world.

Commentary: Shree Krishna explains that beyond the eight-fold prakṛiti, the material energy, which He says is inferior; there exists another that is far more superior. This energy is completely transcendental as compared to the lifeless matter. It is His spiritual energy, the jīva śakti, which includes all the living souls of the world. Now, He has moved from explaining material science toward the spiritual realm.

Many great philosophers of India have given their perspectives and described the relationship between God and the jīva, the individual soul. For example, the non-dualists state: jīvo brahmaiva nāparaḥ "The soul itself is God." But this concept gives rise to several questions, such as:

How can the soul itself be God? God is most powerful, and Maya is His subservient energy. The souls are always overpowered by; Maya. Then is Maya stronger than God?

The individual soul is always; gripped by ignorance and misery. It needs a continuous reminder from the saints and scriptures, even about its existence and purpose. How can God, who is all-knowing, be considered a soul which is subject to ignorance?

The Vedas repeatedly state that God is all-pervading in this world and beyond. Similarly, individual souls should also be able to exist anywhere at any given time. Then what about the question of going to heaven or hell after death?

There is only one God, but the souls are countless. If the soul itself is God, then there should be many Gods. Therefore, the claims by non-dualistic philosophers that the soul itself is God are inconclusive.

The dualist philosophers' state that the souls and God are separate. Even though it may answer some of the above questions, yet it is still an incomplete philosophy in light of what Shree Krishna states in this verse. He says that the soul is a part of jīva śakti God's spiritual energy. And as explained earlier, Maya, the material energy, is also His subservient. Thus, God is supreme; He is the governor of both the lower material and the higher spiritual energies. Now

let us see what the scriptures and various saints have said:

eka-deśha-sthitasyāgnir jyotsnā vistāriṇī yathā
parasya brahmaṇaḥ śaktis tathedam akhilaṁ jagat (Viṣṇu Purāṇ 1.22.53)

"Just as the sun resides in one place but its sunlight pervades; the entire solar system. Similarly, there is one God, 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)

"The soul is the energy of God, while He is the Supreme Energetic."

Once we understand and accept that the soul is a small part of God's infinite energy, the concept of non-duality of the entire creation becomes clear. Energies can exist concurrently within the same energetic. For example, fire contains both heat and light, which are different entities and have different properties. But they are part of the same fire which emits them. Likewise, God as the Energetic and the souls His energy can be considered one. At the same time, due to their distinct properties, both entities are different from each other. Jagadguru Kripaluji Maharaj has encapsulated and perfectly expressed Shree Krishna's statement in this and the previous verse:

jīvu' 'māyā', dui śakti haiṇ, śaktimān bhagavān
śaktiḥiṇ bheda abheda bhī, śaktimān te jān (Bhakti Śhatak verse 42)

"The soul and Maya are both energies of God. Hence, they are both one with God and also different from God."

Considering the unison of both; the Energetic and His energies, it is stated that God and His creation are non-different. The entire world is a veritable form of God.

sarvaṁ khalvidaṁ brahma (Chhāndogya Upaniṣhad 3.14.1)
"All is Brahman."

iśhāvāsyam idam sarvaṁ (Īśhopaniṣhad 1)
"Everything that exists in the world is God."

puruṣha evedaṁ sarvaṁ (Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣhad 3.15)
"The Supreme Divine Personality is everything that exists."

According to these Vedic verses, there is only one God and nothing else. Yet, when we consider the Energetic and energy concept, there is diversity within this unity and an incredible variety. God, the souls, and matter, all three are different entities with different properties. God is Supremely sentient; He is the source of both the souls and the matter. Yet, souls are sentient, and the matter insentient.

The scriptures also state the existence of three entities in creation:

kṣharaṁ pradhānamamṛitākṣharaṁ haraḥ
kṣharātmānāvīśhate deva ekaḥ
tasyābhidyānād yojanāt tattvabhāvad
bhūyaśhchānte viśhwamāyānivṛittiḥ
(Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣhad 1.10)

"There are three entities in existence: 1) Matter, which is perishable. 2) The individual souls who are imperishable. 3) God, who is the controller of both matter and the souls. By meditating upon God, uniting with Him, and becoming more like Him, the soul is free from the world's illusion."

The Vedas have expounded on both dualistic and non-dualistic concepts. Jagadguru Shree Kripaluji Maharaj has upheld the concepts of concurrent coherence, yet variance between the soul and God. This means God and the soul are one; yet, separate from each other.

BG 7.6: 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.

Commentary: Living beings are a manifestation of God's two energies, jīva śhakti, the sentient soul energy, and Maya, the insentient material energy or matter. In the material realm, all life is a combination of both matter and soul. Matter by itself is insentient or lifeless, and the sentient soul needs a carrier body. Hence, both come together to form a living being.

Similarly, the entire creation is a manifestation of God's energies. One cycle of creation lasts for 100 years of Brahma. Then the Supreme Lord starts the process of dissolution. The five gross elements merge into five subtle elements, which in turn merge into ahankār. Ahankār goes back into mahān, which again unites with prakṛiti. Prakṛiti now resides inside the body of Maha Vishnu (another form of the Supreme Lord). All the materially bound souls, which could not get liberated during this cycle of creation, also reside in God's body. They remain unmanifested, waiting for the next cycle of creation.

When God decides to create, the entire cycle begins all over again (as explained in verse 7.4), and a new world comes into existence. Therefore, God is the source, the sustainer, and the resting place for the entire creation.

BG 7.7: There is nothing higher than Myself, O Arjun. Everything rests in Me, as beads strung on a thread

Commentary: Here, Lord Shree Krishna states about His dominion and His Supreme position in this universe. He is the Substratum over which this entire creation exists; He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Annihilator. Similar to the beads strung in a thread, which can move in their place, God has given individual souls the free will to act as they wish, yet their existence is bound to Him. The Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣhad states:

na tatsamaśhchābhyadhikaśhcha dṛiśhyate
parāsyā śhaktirvividhaiva śhrūyate (6.8)

"There is nothing equal to God, nor is there anything superior to Him."

In this verse, Lord Shree Krishna has clearly stated that He, in His original form, who stood before Arjun is the Ultimate Supreme Truth. By using the words, Me, My and I, He has dispelled the doubts that many have about Lord Shree Krishna Himself being God, the Supreme Lord. As many suppose that there is another higher formless entity, who is the ultimate source of even Lord Shree Krishna. As the first-born Brahma prays to Lord Shree Krishna:

iśhwarahaḥ paramahaḥ kṛiṣṇahaḥ sachchidānanda vigrahaḥ
anādirādir govindahḥ sarva kāraṇa kāraṇam (Brahma Samhitā 5.1)

"Shree Krishna is the Supreme Lord, who is eternal, omniscient, and infinite bliss. He is without beginning and end, the origin of all, and the cause of all causes."

BG 7.8: 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.

Commentary: Shree Krishna said in the previous verse that He is the origin, sustainer, and the basis of all that exists in this world. Now, He continues to explain it further in these four verses.

The sweet taste of any fruit that we eat confirms the presence of Fructose or fruit sugar in it. Similarly, Shree Krishna reveals that He is present in all the modifications of His energies. He says He is the taste in water. What does that mean? Water hardly has any taste of its own. Yet, other forms of matter such as solids, fires, and gases need liquids to carry their taste.

Have you ever tried putting a solid food item, on your dry tongue? Do you get any taste? Only when the saliva in our mouth dissolves some part of the solid, we start getting the taste as perceived by the taste buds on our tongue. After all, who can separate the taste of water from water? That is why Shree Krishna says that he is the taste in water. It is the intrinsic property of water to carry the taste of all substances; without water, there will be no taste.

In the same way, ākāśha (space) acts as the vehicle for sound. Different languages form due to sound modifications. Shree Krishna says He is the origin of it all, as the sound in space is His energy. He is the syllable Om the most important sound in the Vedic mantras. The sun and the moon get their radiance from Him. Even for all the abilities that manifest in humans, He is the ultimate energy source.

BG 7.9: 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.

Commentary: In continuation to the previous verses, Shree Krishna declares that He is the source and the most vital ingredient of everything. The entire universe is an extension of His opulence. On Earth, He is the force behind both the non-living and the living. He is the mild and pure fragrance of the earth and the bright radiance of a flame. He is the life-force of all living creatures. The ascetics or sadhus consciously deny themselves of bodily pleasures and perform austerities for self-purification. Lord Krishna says He is indeed the force behind their capacity to do penance.

BG 7.10: 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.

Commentary: In a cause and effect relationship, every cause is the seed of its effect. For example, an ocean is the seed of the clouds, and the clouds are the seed for rain. Similarly, Shree Krishna says in this verse that He is the cause (the eternal seed) from which all beings manifest.

Have you ever thought about why some people are more intelligent than others? Why do they have greater brilliance in their thoughts and ideas? The only explanation for this can be; since all that exists is a manifestation of God's energy. The splendid qualities visible in such outstanding people can only be due to God's grace. As Shree Krishna has mentioned in this verse, He is the subtle force behind the intelligent and the glorious. He makes their minds more analytic and thoughts scintillating.

Legend of modern history, such as William Shakespeare, displayed unmatched brilliance in the field of literature. That could have only been possible by God's grace. His works have nourished English literature, and English has now become the most used language of the world. Swami Vivekananda once said: the British Empire has united the world in one language.

Another such genius is Bill Gates, who changed the course of information technology with his Windows Operating System. With more than ninety percent of market share, Windows has become the most popular Operating System in the world. As it is very user-friendly, it has made information technology available to the public at large. The usage of computers is not limited to IT engineers anymore. Such inspiration to have one major operating system to unify the information

technology industry and ensure proper interaction could only be through God's plan. God enhances one such person's intellect when he wants to save us from chaos.

Of course, the saints have always acknowledged that the brilliance and beauty of their works are due to God's special grace. Sage Tulsidas said:

na maiñ kiyā na kari sakauñ, sahiba kartā mor
karata karāvata āap haiñ, tulasī tulasī śhor

"Neither did I write the Ramayan, nor do I have the ability to write it. The Lord is my Doer. He directs my actions and acts through me, but the world thinks that Tulsidas is doing them." Therefore, Lord Shree Krishna is indeed the ultimate source of all the brilliance and intelligence that manifests around us.

BG 7.11: 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.

Commentary: Desire is an active craving for things not attained. Fueled with passion, one achieves and experiences the desired objects. But this causes attachment, which is a passive mental emotion that provokes the thirst for more. Therefore, when Shree Krishna states kāma-rāga-vivarjitam; He means "devoid of passion and attachment." Explaining the nature of His strength, He says that He is the serene and sublime strength in people, which empowers them; to successfully fulfill their duties and responsibilities.

When sexual activity is undertaken only for sensual pleasure and is devoid of any regulative principles, it is considered beastly or animalistic. Whereas, it is regarded, in line with the scriptural injunctions and not a contrary virtue, when carried out for procreation by a householder. Here, Shree Krishna has mentioned that within the institution of marriage, He is the controlled, virtuous, and well-intended sexual activity of a householder.

BG 7.12: The three states of material existence—goodness, passion, and ignorance—are manifested by My energy. They are in Me, but I am beyond them.

Commentary: In this verse, Shree Krishna sums up His glories that He had described in the previous four verses. He says, "Arjun, I have explained how I am the essence of all objects. But there is no point in going into detail. All good-bad and ugly objects and states of existence are made possible only by My energy."

Even though the entire creation originates from God, He is beyond His creation and independent of it. A famous poet Alfred Tennyson stated in his poem "In Memoriam:"

Our little systems have their day;
They have their day and cease to be.
They are but broken lights of thee,
And thou, O Lord, art more than they.

BG 7.13: Deluded by the three modes of Maya, people in this world are unable to know Me, the imperishable and eternal.

Commentary:

The omniscience Lord Krishna was aware that the following question will come to Arjun's mind, "If such are your Vibhūti (opulence), then why most humans forget that you are the Supreme creator and controller of this entire creation?"

Shree Krishna says that humans are deluded by the three modes of Maya (His

material energy) that are ignorance, passion and goodness. These veil the human consciousness and cause fascination with the bodily pleasures which are short-lived. The word "Maya" is made from mā (not) and yā (what is). Thus, Maya means "that which is not what it appears to be."

Maya, being one of God's energy, is engaged in the service of hiding His true nature from the souls who are not yet eligible or God-realized. It lures and confuses the souls who are already vimukh (having their backs turned) from God. It also troubles them with problems and difficulties aided by the three-fold material miseries. By this, Maya makes the souls realize that they can never be happy unless they are sanmukh (their face turned) toward God.

BG 7.14: My divine energy Maya, consisting of the three modes of nature, is very difficult to overcome. But those who surrender unto Me cross over it easily.

Commentary

Some people claim that Maya is mithyā (non-existent). They say that the material energy Maya is a perception created due to our ignorance, but if someone attains spiritual knowledge, Maya will cease to exist. The soul itself is the Ultimate Reality, and once we understand that, all illusions shall dispel. However, this theory is negated by the Bhagavad Gita in this verse. Shree Krishna has already stated that Maya is an extension of His energy and not an illusion. The Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣhad also states:

māyām tu prakṛitiṁ vidyānmāyinaṁ tu maheśhvaram (4.10)

"Maya is the energy (prakṛiti), while God is the Energetic."

The Ramayan states:

so dāsī raghubīra ki samujheñ mithyā sopi

"Some people think Maya is mithyā (non-existent), but factually it is an energy engaged in the service of God."

Shree Krishna has mentioned here that because Maya is His energy, it is difficult to overcome. If someone claims they have defeated Maya, that would mean they have defeated God. No one can conquer God; therefore, Maya is equally invincible. The human mind is made of Maya merely by self-effort no yogi, jñānī, ascetic, or karmī can successfully control the mind.

One could then ask, "Is it impossible to overcome Maya?" The second line of this verse has the answer to this question. Shree Krishna says, "Those who surrender themselves to Me, the Supreme Lord, then by My grace, they would smoothly cross the ocean of material existence. I will instruct Maya to leave this soul, now that it has become Mine." On God's instructions Maya, the material energy of God, simply releases the surrendered soul from its clutches. It says, "My job is to keep troubling the soul until it surrenders at the feet of God; once the soul reaches there, my job is complete."

Here is an example from everyday life. Assume that you visit a friend who has a large house, outside on the gate, a board says, "Beware of dog." When you look inside, a trained guard dog is standing on the lawn. As soon as it spots you, it starts growling menacingly, scared; you decide to take the back gate. But even before you reach the back of the house, it is waiting there for you and snarls furiously, as if saying, "You dare step into this house." You have no choice, and you shout your friend's name aloud. Hearing all the commotion, your friend comes and finds you at the gate troubled by his dog. He sternly says to the dog, "No, Tommy, that is a friend, we need to let him in, come and sit down here." Hearing his master's command, the dog silently goes and sits near him. You can now open the gate and let yourself in without fear.

In the same way, we are in the clutches of Maya, the material energy. Although it is subservient to God, it keeps troubling us so that we keep moving towards God. By our own efforts, we cannot defeat Maya; only when we surrender completely to God, by His grace, we can cross the ocean of material existence. The next question in our mind would be, "If it is so easy to defeat Maya, then why is it that most of us fail?" Shree Krishna has elaborated on that in the next verse.

BG 7.15: 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.

Commentary

In this verse, Shree Krishna says that there are four categories of people who do not surrender to Him:

1. The Ignorant. People who lack spiritual knowledge and do not know anything about the soul being eternal and that its ultimate goal is God-realization. They have never heard about these concepts or aware of the process of surrendering to God.

2. The lazy. These are the ones who have the knowledge and awareness of what they need to do still, due to their lazy-nature do not want to take any initiative to surrender. Laziness can be a big pitfall for someone on the path of spirituality. There is a Sanskrit saying:

ālasya hī manuṣhyāṇāṃ śharīrastho mahān ripuḥ
nāstyudyamasamo bandhuḥ kṛitvā yaṁ nāvasīdati

"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. Deluded Intellects. People who are so proud of their intellects that they have no faith in the scriptures and the teachings of the saints. Because they do not have faith, they are unable to practice surrender or understand the concepts of God-realization.

4. Demonic Nature. These are the people who are aware of God and His purpose for the world but still work against Him. It is because of their demonic nature; they do not like God and His glories. They themselves are far from devotion and try to disturb others who are on the path of spirituality. Surrender to God is not at all expected from them.

BG 7.16: O best amongst the Bharatas, four kinds of pious people engage in My devotion—the distressed, the seekers of knowledge, the seekers of worldly possessions, and those who are situated in knowledge.

Commentary

In the previous verse, Shree Krishna described the four categories of people who do not surrender to Him. Now He describes; the other four kinds who take refuge in Him.

1. The distressed. Those who find that their pot of worldly miseries is overflowing, and they are unable to cope with them conclude that it is futile running after the world. Thus, decide to take shelter in God. Similarly, those who find that the worldly supports fail to protect them; turn to God for protection. An apt example in the Mahabharata was Draupadi's surrender to Shree Krishna when Duryodhan and Dushasan tried to dishonor her in the courtroom of Hastinapur. Initially, she expected her husbands would protect her, but they did not. She pleaded the elders in the courtroom, Bheeshma, Vidur, Dhritarashtra, Dronacharya, Kripacharya, etc. However, everyone remained speechless. When cruel Dushasan tried to disrobe her, she clenched her sari with her teeth and tried to protect her honor with her own strength. But her teeth could not hold on to the sari for long; they gave in to Dushasan's strength. She was helpless and finally

called out to Shree Krishna for help. It was at this point that she surrendered completely to God and was not relying on anyone or her own strength for protection. Shree Krishna reciprocated immediately and intervened. Now, how much ever Dushasan pulled, Draupadi's sari kept extending, and very soon, there was a huge pile of cloth in the middle of the courtroom. Dushasan was unable to disrobe Draupadi; exhausted, he gave up. Such was the power of God's protection, but it came only when Draupadi surrendered completely.

2. The knowledge seekers. There are some people who have heard about the opulence of God and His spiritual realm. Thus, they are curious to know all about God and try to seek Him through knowledge.

3. The seekers of worldly possessions. Some people are clear about what they want and take the shelter of God because they are convinced; that only God can provide what they are seeking. King Dhruv is an apt example. When Dhruv was a small boy, he felt neglected by his father, King Uttanapada. Disheartened, he went into the forest and did penance to please God. He wanted to become more powerful than his father. But as his devotion grew, he realized that God possessed the priceless jewel of divine love, and what he was seeking was like broken pieces of glass. Therefore, when pleased with his devotion, God gave him darshan, he requested the Lord to bestow upon him; self-less pure love.

4. Those situated in knowledge. Lastly, those souls who have understood the truth that they are tiny parts of God. Such people engage in devotion with the intent that it is their eternal duty to love and serve Him. Shree Krishna calls them the fourth kind of devotees.

BG 7.17: 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 very dear to Me.

Commentary

Shree Krishna says in this verse that those who are seeking God in distress, for worldly gains or out of curiosity, etc. are yet to possess selfless devotion. Gradually in the process of devotion, their hearts become pure, and they realize their eternal relationship with God. Then they develop selfless, exclusive, and incessant devotion toward Him. Now that they have the knowledge that the happiness of the world is temporary and God is the source of eternal bliss, they neither crave for favorable circumstances nor lament over reversals in the world. They become situated in selfless devotion with complete self-surrender. And for their Divine Beloved, they are willing to offer themselves as an offering in the fire of divine love. Shree Krishna declares that such devotees are dearest Him.

BG 7.18: 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.

Commentary

In the previous verse, Shree Krishna stated that the devotees situated in knowledge or jñānī bhakt are the highest. However, He clarifies in this verse that whatever may be the reason for their devotion, all His devotees are privileged; even the other three kinds are blessed souls. But the devotees seated in knowledge worship God selflessly, without expecting any material gains in return. Hence, the unconditional love of such selfless devotees even binds God.

Worldly love; is driven by the desire for self-gratification. There is a give and take attitude, and there is an expectation of receiving something in return from the beloved. However, Parā bhakti or divine love is totally different. It is filled with the desire for the happiness of the Divine Beloved and sacrifice in His service. Divine love fosters a giving attitude without expecting anything

in return.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu said:

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 Shree Krishna's happiness. There is a tremendous difference between them—lust is like darkness and ignorance, while divine love is pure and illuminating."

Jagadguru Shree Kripaluji Maharaj has very beautifully stated:

brahma lok paryanta sukh, aru muktiḥ sukh 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 God in this manner, he becomes a slave of that Devotee. The highest quality of God is bhakta vatsaltā (his love for his devotees).

The Puraṇas state:

gītvā cha mama nāmāni vicharenmama sannidhau
iti bravāmi te satyaṁ kṛitoḥaṁ tasya chārjuna
(Ādi Purāṇ 1.2.231)[v19]

Shree 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."

In this verse Shree Krishna goes to the extent of saying that bound by the devotion and love of His selfless devotees, He looks upon them as Himself.

BG 7.19: 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 soul is indeed very rare.

Commentary

In this verse, Shree Krishna clears this common perception of the intellectually inclined people that bhakti (devotion) is inferior to jñāna (knowledge). They are disdainful towards people engaged in devotion. They look down upon them and consider themselves to be superior as they are engaged in the brainy act of acquiring knowledge. Whereas, Shree Krishna declares that a jñānī spends several lifetimes cultivating knowledge and only when his or her jñāna matures does he finally surrender to God. In fact, it is true knowledge that leads to devotion.

Let us look at this example of a man who was walking on the beach. He steps upon an object on the sand and finds it to be a golden ring. He thinks of it as artificial jewellery worth \$10, keeps it in his pocket, and forgets about it. After a few days, he remembers it and shows it to a friend, who is a goldsmith.

He checks it and says, "This is pure gold and worth at least \$500". The man feels thrilled to have found something precious and wears it every day. A few days pass by, and his uncle visits him, who is a jeweller. The uncle looks at the ring and says, "The stone on your gold ring is a precious diamond. Where did you get this? It costs more than \$50,000." On hearing this, the man is overwhelmed and could not believe what his uncle just said. His uncle understood this and said, "It seems, you don't believe me, I am willing to pay you \$40,000 for it." Now, the man feels elated as if he has won a lottery. He loves the diamond-studded gold ring much more, now that he knows its real value.

This example demonstrates the direct relationship between knowledge and love. When the value of the ring was perceived by the man to be less, his love for it was also lesser as his knowledge of its value increased, the love for it, and the joy he got from it also kept increasing. The Ramayan states:

jāneṇ binu na hoi paratītī, binu paratītī hoi nahiṇ prītī [v20]

"Without knowledge, there cannot be faith; without faith, love cannot grow."

Similarly, if someone has acquired true knowledge and claims to know the Brahman, then love for Him comes naturally. Else their knowledge is merely theoretical if they do not feel the love that fosters devotion.

Shree Krishna says that jñānīs spend several lifetimes seeking true knowledge, and when their knowledge matures into true wisdom, that the Supreme Lord is all that is; they surrender to Him. However, He does not say this for the jñānīs, karmīs, haṭha-yogis, ascetics, etc. He declares this for the devotees or such exalted souls who have realized "God is all that is" and surrendered to Him. Nevertheless, such noble souls are very rare.

BG 7.20: Those whose knowledge has been carried away by material desires surrender to the celestial gods. Following their own nature, they worship the devatās, practicing rituals meant to propitiate these celestial personalities.

Commentary

Shree Krishna says that people worship the devatās (celestial gods) as per the prescribed rituals to attain material gains. Material desires have shrouded their knowledge. Hence, they forget that the Supreme Lord is the source of all that exists, including these celestial gods. As a president of a country appoints his officers among different departments. Similarly, these celestial gods also occupy different positions in the working of God's creation. They derive their powers from God; they are not independent of Him. They can bestow on their devotees only material things that are under their control. But cannot liberate anyone from the bondage of Maya or the cycle of birth and death because; they themselves are not liberated from this cycle. God alone has the power to do so. The celestial gods are also souls like us. However, they have attained these positions in the celestial abodes as a result of their pious deeds from previous lives. Once their account of pious deeds depletes, they have to return to earth. Hence, even the celestial gods are perishable; God alone is eternal.

BG 7.21: Whatever celestial form a devotee seeks to worship with faith, I steady the faith of such a devotee in that form.

Commentary

We find countless devotees around us engaging in devotion toward the celestial gods, with unflinching faith and wonder, how people develop such high faith in the lower form of worship? In this verse, Shree Krishna answers this and says that He is the creator of the faith in the celestial gods as well. When He finds people worshipping the devatās for the fulfillment of their material desires, He helps them in their devotion and steadies their faith. The ability to create śhraddhā or faith is beyond the capacity of the celestial gods; it is the

indwelling Paramātmā or the Supreme Soul who inspires faith in the hearts of the devotees. Later in the Bhagavad Gita verse 15.15, He states, "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 Vedant, and the knower of the meaning of the Vedas."

Shree Krishna had earlier mentioned that those who are in true-knowledge engage in the highest and the most beneficial kind of śhraddhā that is to worship the Supreme Lord. Then one might ask, why the Supreme Lord creates faith in people toward the celestial gods—is it not inappropriate?

Let us look at this example of parents giving dolls to their small children. The child plays with these dolls as if they were real people and develops love and affection towards them. The parents are aware of the child's innocence, yet they encourage this play to help the child develop the qualities of love, care, and affection towards other people. These qualities will help children become socially responsible when they grow up.

Similarly, our eternal parent God is aware of our ignorance. Hence, when He finds that some souls engage in worship of the celestial gods for material gains, He helps them by steadying their faith. He is aware that this experience will help in the evolution of the soul, and once they acquire true-knowledge that the Supreme Lord is the summum bonum or the highest good of everything, they will surrender to Him.

BG 7.22: Endowed with faith, the devotee worships a particular celestial god and obtains the objects of desire. But in reality, I alone arrange these benefits.

Commentary

Shree Krishna reiterates in this verse that the celestial gods do not have the capacity to fulfill the material desires of their devotees. They can only grant wishes if God permits it. Labhate means "to obtain." The devotees with mediocre understanding may think that they have obtained their desired material objects by pleasing the devatās (celestial gods). However, it is not the devatās, but God who facilitates everything.

BG 7.23: But the fruit gained by these people of little understanding is perishable. Those who worship the celestial gods go to the celestial abodes, while My devotees come to Me.

Commentary

Continuing from the previous verses, Shree Krishna explains to Arjun the spiritual principle that is: "One attains the object of one's worship. People who worship the devatās go to the planets of the respective devatās upon death. Whereas, those who are devoted to me come to my abode." Now, the question comes up again, when reaching God is the ultimate destination, then why does God steady the faith of those devotees who worship the celestial gods?

Consider the example of our education system, where students start with primary school but cannot stay at that level forever. The teachers encourage them and coach them to move to the next level. Even though primary school is necessary, students outgrow that and keep moving higher and higher. Similarly, the Bhagavad Gita is not for the primary school students or the novices who wish to attain the celestial abodes. But for those devotees who are seeking a higher purpose.

Since the devatās are perishable, the fruits they bestow on their devotees are also perishable. However, God is imperishable, and the fruits of his worship are also ever-lasting. Those who worship the eternal form of God, upon death, attain His eternal abode and stay there forever in His service.

BG 7.24: The less intelligent think that I, the Supreme Lord Shree Krishna, was formless earlier and have now assumed this personality. They do not understand

the imperishable exalted nature of My personal form.

Commentary

People often vehemently debate upon the Supreme Lord being a formless God, while the others claim He exists in His personal-form. Even those who agree to both aspects of God's personality are sometimes confused. Which of them precedes the other, and which of them is the original God? Did the personal form of God manifest from the formless, or is it the other way round? We have discussed this earlier in the commentary for Verse 4.5.

Here in this verse, Shree Krishna resolves this debate by stating that God exists in the spiritual realm eternally in His divine form. The ignorant do not understand the magnificent and imperishable nature of His personal-form. The divine personality of God has not manifested from the formless Brahman; it is primordial. The divine light that emanates from His transcendental body is the formless Brahman.

The Padma Purāṇ states:

yannakhenduruchir brahma dhyeyaṁ brahmāḍibhiḥ suraiḥ
guṇatrayamatītaṁ taṁ vande vṛndāvanēśhvaram
(Patal Khand 77.60) [v21]

"The light that emanates from the toenails of God's personality is worshipped as the Brahman by the jñānīs."

Therefore, there is no difference between the two forms. Neither of them is superior or inferior. In God's personal-form, His name, form, virtues, abode, pastimes, associates, etc., manifest as an extension of His divine energy. However, in the formless Brahman, even though all the divine potencies and energies exist, they are in a concealed form.

BG 7.25: I am not manifest to everyone, being veiled by My divine Yogmaya energy. Hence, those without knowledge do not know that I am without birth and changeless.

Commentary

Shree Krishna had mentioned two of His divine energies earlier in this chapter, in verses 7.4 and 7.5. The eight-fold prakṛiti, or the material energy, and the jīva śakti, or the soul energy. Now, He talks about His third and the most powerful energy that is the Yogmaya. The Viṣṇu Purāṇ states:

viṣṇu śaktiḥ parā proktā kṣhetrajñākhyā tathā 'parā
avidyā karma saṁjñānyā tṛtīyā śaktiriṣhyate
(6.7.61) [v22]

"The Supreme Lord Shree Vishnu has three main energies—Yogmaya, the souls, and Maya."

Jagadguru Kripaluji Maharaj states:

śaktimān kī śaktiyāñ, aganita yadapi bakhāna
tin mahañ 'māyā, 'jīva, aru, 'parā, triśakti pradhāna
(Bhakti Śhatak verse 3) [v23]

"The Supreme Energetic Shree Krishna has infinite energies. Amongst these, Yogmaya, the souls, and Maya are the main ones."

God descends in this world by virtue of His Yogmaya energy and reveals His divine pastimes, His divine abode, His divine bliss and love on the Earth plane. However, the same Yogmaya power keeps His divinity veiled from us. We are unable to feel His presence, although He is seated in our hearts. Even in the present, if we are fortunate enough to see the Lord in His personal-form, we cannot

recognize Him. Until we are eligible for His divine vision, the Yogmaya keeps God's divine form concealed from us. And only by God's grace, the Yogmaya bestows upon us the divine vision that allows us to recognize and see God.

The Ramayan states:

chidānandamaya deha tumhārī, bigata bikāra jāna adhikārī [v24]

"O God, you have a divine form. Only those whose hearts are purified can know you by your grace."

Similar to God, His Yogmaya energy is both formless and manifests into personal forms. Radha, Sita, Lakshmi, Parvati, Durga, Kali, etc., are the divine forms of the Yogmaya energy of God. In the Vedic culture, all these forms are revered; as the Mother of the Universe. She radiates the motherly qualities of kindness, mercy, compassion, beauty, divine grace, and causeless love. Among these, the most important quality for us souls is Her divine grace with which we can acquire transcendental knowledge to know God. It is for the same reason, the devotees of Vrindavan sing, "Radhe Radhe, Shyam se milā de," "O Radha, please bestow your grace and help me meet Shree Krishna."

Therefore, the same Yogmaya-conceals God from the unqualified souls and bestows Her divine grace upon the surrendered souls, for they can know Him. However, those souls who are under the influence of Maya or the material energy turn their backs towards God. They remain bereft of the divine grace of His Yogmaya energy and continue living in ignorance, entangled in Maya. Others who have turned to God are in the shelter of Yogmaya and liberated from Maya.

BG 7.26: O Arjun, I know of past, present, and future, and I also know all living beings; but Me no one knows.

Commentary

In this verse, God declares that He is trikāl-darśhī—knower of the past, present, and the future. Most of us are forgetful of even what we were thinking a few hours ago; whereas, God is omniscient. He remembers and keeps a record of the deeds, words, and even the thoughts of each individual soul of the universe throughout their life and since their infinite lifetimes. God maintains this record of the sañchit karma or the stockpile of karmas of every soul for endless lifetimes because, as the governor of the law of karma, He dispenses justice to the souls.

Shree Krishna says that He has the knowledge of everything, the past, present, and the future. However, with our finite intellect, we cannot know the Almighty God. His infinite glory, splendor, energies, qualities, and extent are beyond the comprehension of our inadequate intellect.

The Vedic scriptures state:

yaḥ sarvajñaḥ sarvavidyasya jñānamayaṁ tapaḥ (Muṇḍakopaniṣhad 1.1.9) [v25]

"God is all-knowing and omniscient. His austerity consists of knowledge."

naiṣhā tarkeṇa matirāpaneyā (Kaṭhopaniṣhad 1.2.9) [v26]

"God is beyond the scope of our intellectual logic."

yato vācho nivartante aprāpya manasā saha (Taittirīya Upaniṣhad 2.9.1) [v27]

"God cannot be described in words, nor can our mind comprehend Him."

rām atarkya buddhi mana bānī, mata hamāra asa sunahi sayānī (Ramayan) [v28]

"God cannot be analyzed by arguments or formulated by words, mind, and

intellect."

Only God knows Himself. However, if He finds some eligible soul, He bestows His grace upon that fortunate soul, and then with God's divine intellect, the soul gets to know God. Therefore, only by God's grace one can know God. Our material intellect does not have the capacity to know Him otherwise. The concept of God's grace is discussed again in detail in 10.11 and 18.56.

BG 7.27: O descendant of Bharat, the dualities of desire and aversion arise from illusion. O conqueror of enemies, all living beings in the material realm are deluded by these.

Commentary

Having given a glimpse of His omniscience in the previous verse, Shree Krishna now goes back to a subject He had covered earlier about the dualities in the world. Happiness and distress, pleasure and pain, summer and winter, night and day, etc., all these dualities exist in pairs. These dualities are an inseparable part of life's experiences. However, the most deluding dualities in life are birth and death. The arena of one's life exists between the two ends of birth and death. From the very moment a living creature is born, death is inevitable, and again comes a subsequent-birth.

Our material intellect believes that worldly pleasures will give us happiness and fulfillment. Therefore, in material consciousness, while we desire the favorable ones, we detest the unpleasant experiences. Although attraction and aversion are not the inherent qualities of these dualities, they develop due to our ignorance. Our intellect does not realize that materially pleasurable situations will only increase our material illusion. Thus, it makes us believe that pain is detrimental to us. However, adversities have the potential of dispelling that material illusion from our mind and elevate our soul. Our ignorance is the root cause of our delusions. A spiritually elevated person accepts these dualities as inseparable aspects of God's .

BG 7.28: 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.

Commentary

Shree Krishna says that those souls who have freed their minds from the dualities of hatred and desire worship him with unshakeable determination. They neither seek pleasure in the material world nor feel an aversion for pain. They are cautious while indulging in worldly pleasures as it may again delude their soul. Earlier, in verse 2.69, Shree Krishna had said, "What the ignorant consider as night, the wise consider as day." Such devotees, who aspire to attain God-realization, look upon adversities as an opportunity for spiritual growth and renunciation.

BG 7.29: Those who take shelter in Me, striving for liberation from old-age and death, come to know the Brahman, the individual self, and the entire field of karmic action.

Commentary

Shree Krishna had mentioned earlier in verse 7.26 that no one can know God by the strength of their own intellect. However, in this verse, He says that God can be known—only by virtue of His grace. Those devotees who surrender to Him completely—receive His divine grace. The Kaṭhopanishad states:

nāyamātmā pravachanena labhyo na medhayā na bahunā śruteṇa
yamevaiṣha vṛiṇute tena labhya-stasyaiṣha ātmā vivṛiṇute tanūṃ svām
(1.2.23) [v29]

"God cannot be known—through spiritual discourses nor the intellect nor hearing various kinds of teachings. Only when He bestows His grace upon someone does that fortunate soul come to know Him."

The Vedas state: ekasmin vijñāte sarvamidaṁ vijñātaṁ bhavati
[v30]

"If you know God, you will know everything."

Although some spiritual seekers consider ātma-jñāna, or knowledge of the self, as the ultimate goal of human birth, it is only a tiny drop in the ocean of knowledge, which is brahma-jñāna or the knowledge of God. By just knowing a drop, one cannot understand the enormity, depth, or prowess of the ocean. Therefore, ātma-jñāna cannot be in any way equal to brahma-jñāna. However, it can be a starting point toward the absolute.

According to the Vedas, absolute knowledge is—the Knowledge of God. If you know God, everything related to Him; is also revealed, and all your ignorance disappears. Shree Krishna states that those who take His shelter are liberated from the cycle of birth and death forever. And by His divine grace, they receive brahma-jñāna or knowledge of the Brahman, ātma-jñāna or knowledge of the self and the entire field of karmic action or the divine laws of karma.

BG 7.30: Those who know Me as the governing principle of the adhibhūta (field of matter) and the adhidaiva (the celestial gods), and as adhiyajña (the Lord of all sacrificial performances), such enlightened souls are in full consciousness of Me even at the time of death.

Commentary

In this verse, Shree Krishna mentions that those enlightened souls who know Him are truly devoted to Him, and even at the time of their death, they are in full consciousness of Him. Such true devotees attain His divine abode. But how can one remember God even at the time of death? Death is said to be a very painful journey, comparable to 2000 scorpions biting at the same time. Such extreme pain is beyond the tolerance of any normal human; a person loses consciousness; the mind and the intellect stop working much before the end. One cannot remember anything in that state. Where is the question of remembering God? How do they do it then?

Those enlightened beings who have attained true knowledge are ever filled with devotion to God, their mind and intellect, all surrendered and attached to Him alone. Thus, their bodies are beyond pleasure and pain even at the time of death. Their soul is completely disconnected from lamentation and hankering at the material level because it is no longer in bodily consciousness.

Shree Krishna has explained the words adhibhūta, adhidaiva, and adhiyajña in the next chapter.

BG 8.1-2: Arjun said: O Supreme Lord, what is Brahman (Absolute Reality), what is adhyatma (the individual soul), and what is karma? What is said to be adhibhūta, and who is said to be Adhidaiva? Who is Adhiyajna in the body and how is He the Adhiyajna? O Krishna, how are You to be known at the time of death by those of steadfast mind?

Commentary

Toward the end of the previous chapter, Shree Krishna had mentioned a few words like Brahman, adhibhūta, adhiyatma, adhidaiva, and adhiyajna. Also, that the enlightened souls are in full consciousness of Him even at the time of their death. Hearing this, Arjun is curious and wants to know more. In these two verses, he puts forth to Shree Krishna seven questions, out of which six are about these words, and the seventh question is regarding remembering God at the time of death. Since Shree Krishna had Himself introduced these subjects, Arjun wants Him to elaborate upon them.

BG 8.3: The Lord said: The Supreme Indestructible Entity is called Brahman; one's own self is called adhyatma. Actions pertaining to the material personality of living beings, and its development are called karma, or fruitive activities.

Commentary

The Vedas address God by several names; Brahman is one of them. In this verse, Shree Krishna says to Arjun that the Supreme Entity is called the Brahman. Time, space, the chain of cause and effect, etc., are all characteristics of the material realm. However, the Brahman is beyond these, as He is transcendental to the material plane. He is described as aksharam or indestructible because He is unaffected by the changes in the universe.

The Brihadaranyak Upanishad 3.8.8 states, "Learned people speak of Brahman as akshar (indestructible). It is also designated as Param (Supreme) because It possesses qualities beyond those possessed by maya and the souls."

The word adhyatma has two meanings in Sanskrit. One is the science of the soul, and the second is the path to spirituality. However, here Shree Krishna has used it for one's own self that includes the body, mind, and intellect.

Karmas are fruitive activities performed by a person. It is these karmas that forge every individual's distinct conditions of existence in various lifetimes. They keep the soul circling in samsara or the cycle of material existence.

BG 8.4: O best of the embodied souls, the physical manifestation that is constantly changing is called adhibhūta; the universal form of God, which presides over the celestial gods in this creation, is called Adhidaiva; I, who dwell in the heart of every living being, am called Adhiyajna, or the Lord of all sacrifices.

Commentary

The universe is a kaleidoscope of all the physical manifestations of the five elements of nature: earth, water, fire, air, and space. This ever-changing universe is called adhibhuta. Although the devatas or the celestial gods administer the different departments of the universe, God has sovereignty, even over the devatas. He is Virāṭ Purusha, the complete cosmic personality who encompasses the entire material creation. Hence, God is called Adhidaiva.

Shree Krishna says that as the Supreme Soul or Paramatma, He dwells in the hearts of all living beings of the universe. He is the one who bestows rewards for all our actions and the presiding divinity for all the yajna (sacrifices). Thus, He is also called Adhiyajna, or the Lord of all sacrifices. Therefore, all yajna should be performed; for the satisfaction of this Supreme Divine Personality.

So far, Shree Krishna has answered six out of the seven questions concerning the meanings of the various terms Arjun had asked at the beginning of this chapter. In the next few verses, Shree Krishna will answer Arjun's seventh question regarding the moment of death.

BG 8.5: Those who relinquish the body while remembering Me at the moment of death will come to Me. There is certainly no doubt about this.

Commentary

Shree Krishna declares in this verse that, whoever remembers Him at the time of death, attains Him and becomes God-like in character. He uses the words mad bhāvam, which means "godlike nature." Therefore, one can achieve the cherished goal of God-realization by consciously absorbing one's mind in the transcendental Names, Forms, Virtues, Pastimes, and Abodes of God, even at the time of death.

It is one's state of consciousness and the object of their absorption at the time of death; that determines their next birth. Shree Krishna will explain this principle in the next verse.

BG 8.6: 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.

Commentary

Shree Krishna states in this verse, whatever thoughts prominently dominate a person's mind at the moment of death determine his or her next birth. However, one should not conclude that God-realization can be attained merely by meditating upon God at the time of death. When we plan our travel, it requires careful planning and execution beforehand; we cannot make our plans after we pack our baggage.

For example, with a lot of effort, one may teach their pet parrot to say "Hello" or "Have a good day." However, if someone attacks the parrot, it forgets all that it has learnt, and screeches in its natural sound of "Te-Te." Likewise, the channels of thoughts that we create through lifelong habit, at the time of death, the same thoughts will naturally flow into our mind. What we constantly contemplate and meditate upon throughout our life are influenced by our daily habits and associations. Therefore, it is natural that these would continue to determine our final thoughts.

The Puranas tell a story of an illustrious King Bharat. He renounced his kingdom to pursue God-realization and was living an ascetics life in the forest. Once, he was meditating and saw a deer jump into a nearby river. She was pregnant and escaping an attacking tiger. Out of fear, she delivered the baby in the flowing water. She had no chance to rescue her new-born and crossed over to the other side of the river. Witnessing this entire episode, Bharat felt pity for the baby deer that was floating in the river. He rescued the fawn and took it to his hut. He started raising it with great affection. Collecting green grass and feeding it, keeping it warm by hugging it, and watching its frolicking, gave Bharat a lot of pleasure.

Slowly, Bharat spent his entire day taking care of the fawn. His mind became totally absorbed in its thoughts and away from God. Thus, even when he was about to die, he was only concerned about the fawn and called out to it in fond remembrance. As a result, King Bharat was born as a deer in his next life. Nevertheless, because of his spiritual sadhana from his previous lives, even in a deer's body, he was aware of the mistakes he had committed in his past life. Hence even as a deer, Bharat spent his entire life near pious ashrams of saints in the forest. And when he died, he was granted human birth again. This time, Bharat did not waste his chance and completed his sadhana. Eventually, he attained God-realization and came to be known as the great sage Jadabharat.

Death is a very painful experience. Therefore, it is natural that the mind gravitates toward those thoughts that are part of one's inherent nature. According to the Skand Puran, thinking of God at the moment of death is exceedingly difficult. Hence, for the mind to always think of God requires our inner nature to be one with Him. The consciousness that abides within our mind and intellect is our inner nature. And whatever thoughts we contemplate continuously manifest as part of our inner nature. Therefore, we must practice remembering God at every moment of our life. Only then will we develop a God-conscious inner nature. In the next verse, Lord Krishna advises the same to Arjun.

BG 8.7: 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.

Commentary

The essence of the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita is in the first line of this verse. It has the power to make your life divine. It reiterates the definition of karma yoga and applies to people from all walks of life. Shree Krishna says to Arjun, "Do your duty with your body, and keep your mind attached to Me." As a warrior, Arjun must fight; that is his duty. However, the Lord says to Arjun that even in the middle of a battle, one should remember God. The same message is for everyone—be it farmers, engineers, doctors, students, homemakers, or any other professional.

People often disregard their worldly duties and responsibilities with the pretext of leading a spiritual life. On the other hand, some give an excuse of their worldly engagements for not practicing spirituality. They perceive that both material and spiritual goals; cannot be pursued concurrently. But Shree Krishna's message in this verse defies all these myths and can sanctify our entire life.

In the practice of karma yoga, the body is engaged in worldly work, but the mind is attached to God. Hence, while we work to fulfil our worldly duties, these works are not bound by the Law of Karma. Works; that are performed with attachment result in karmic reactions. In the absence of attachment, one is not considered guilty even in the worldly laws.

Let us take an example of a man apprehended for killing a pedestrian in a road accident. In the court, when the judge questioned him if he killed the pedestrian, the man agreed. The judge said, "Then you are guilty of murder and will get punished accordingly." To this, the man said, "Sir, I agree I killed the pedestrian, but I had no intention to kill, it was an accident." He further explained, "Your honour, I was driving on the appropriate side of the road, the lights were green, and my car was within the speed limits. I was alert, and my car was also in perfect condition. However, this man came suddenly in front of my car, although I applied the brakes, my car hit him, and he died immediately." On hearing this, the judge let him off without any punishment, as it was established that the incident was an accident and this man had no intention to kill.

The above example illustrates that even in the material world, one is not held liable for actions taken without attachment to results. Similarly, in the spiritual world, the Law of Karma holds the same principle.

In the Mahabharat war, Arjun fulfilled his duties as a warrior. He fought valiantly without any attachments to worldly gain. He followed Shree Krishna's instructions and kept his mind constantly attached to God. Therefore, at the end of the war, Shree Krishna declared that Arjun had not accrued any bad karma. As per the Law of Karma: when someone performs their duties without any selfish attachment to the world, with their mind always in God, such actions get multiplied by zero. When you multiply even a million with zero, the result will always be a zero.

This verse clearly defines the condition for karma yoga: Do your worldly duties, but your mind should always be thinking of God. The very instant we forget God, our mind is taken over by the mighty commanders of maya's army—desire, envy, greed, lust, anger, hatred, etc. Therefore, it is necessary that we keep our mind always attached to God.

Some people claim to be karma yogis because they practice both karma and yoga. Every day they do their worldly duties, which they call their karma, and a few minutes of yoga, by meditating on God. However, this is not the definition of karma yoga given by Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita. He says that in karma yoga, there are only two conditions:

- 1) While doing any work, the mind should always be thinking of God.
- 2) The remembrance of God should be constant throughout the day and not

intermittent.

This famous couplet by Saint Kabir beautifully expresses this concept:

sumiran kī sudhi yon karo, jyauñ gāgar panihāra
bolat dolat surati meñ, kahe kabīra vichār

“Remember God just as the village woman remembers the water pot on her head. She speaks with others and walks on the path, but her hand keeps holding onto the pot.”

In the next verse, Shree Krishna explains the benefits of practicing karma yoga.

BG 8.8: With practice, O Parth, when you constantly engage the mind in remembering Me, the Supreme Divine Personality, without deviating, you will certainly attain Me.

Commentary

Lord Krishna has reiterated this instruction to always engage the mind in meditating upon God several times in the Bhagavad Gita itself. Verses 8.14, 10.10, 12.8, etc., emphasize the same concept.

In this verse, Shree Krishna uses the word *abhyāsa*, which means to practice. He says that we must train our mind and form a habit of always meditating upon God. This practice is not to be done at fixed times or regular intervals but continuously as part of our daily life alongside our worldly activities throughout the day.

We must remember that it is not the actions that we are performing with our body but where we are placing our mind that will shape our future. While performing our worldly duties, if we attach our mind to God, who is all pure, our mind will also get purified.

When one is continuously engaging in devotion, with complete surrender to God, their purified mind will gradually get fully absorbed in God-consciousness. Such souls receive the divine grace of God that liberates them from the bondage of *maya*. Then God bestows upon these souls His unlimited divine bliss, divine knowledge, and divine love. They become God-realized while they are still alive and live a complete life. Eventually, when they die, their soul ascends to the Divine Abode of God.

BG 8.9-10: God 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, fixes the *prāṇ* (life-air) between the eyebrows, and steadily remembers the Divine Lord with great devotion, certainly attains Him.

Commentary

We can meditate upon God in several ways. The Names, Forms, Leelas (Pastimes), Associates, and Abodes of God. There is no difference among all these aspects of God. Therefore, one can meditate on any one or all of them. Such meditation, where we attach our mind to the Supreme Divinity, takes our mind to the divine realm, and as a result, it purifies.

In this verse, Shree Krishna has mentioned eight such divine aspects of God:

1. Kavi: Like a poet who knows the entirety of his creation, God is omniscient. He is the seer who knows the past, present, and future, as mentioned in verse 7.26.
2. Purāṇam: God is the most ancient, and nothing predates Him. He is the origin

of the entire material and spiritual world, but He has not originated from anything. God is without a beginning or an end.

3. Anuśhāsītāram: God is the governor or the ruler. He administers His regime through the celestial gods that He has appointed or sometimes directly. He is the creator, and everything in this universe is under His control and run by His law.

4. Aṇorāṇīyān: Here God is said to exist in the subtlest or subatomic form. The soul is subtler than matter, but God is even subtler than the soul, as He is seated within every soul.

5. Sarvasya Dhātā: God is the source of sustenance. Similar to an ocean that sustains the waves and its vast marine ecology. God is the support for His entire creation.

6. Achintya rūpa: God exists in inconceivable forms. Our mind and intellect are material in nature, and God is divine, thus, beyond our understanding. It is only through His grace one can understand Him. He bestows His divine grace and makes our mind divine by His Yogmaya power; only then can we know Him.

7. Āditya varṇa: Āditya is one of the names of the sun god. Here, God is said to be dazzling like the sun.

8. Tamasah Parastāt: Similar to the sun that eradicates darkness, God with His effulgence eliminates ignorance. On a cloudy day, the sun is not visible, but it is an optical illusion for us. The sun is where it is, unaffected by the clouds in the earth's atmosphere. Similarly, during His Leelas or pastimes, God may seem to be covered by His material energy, Maya. However, He is unaffected by it. He is beyond darkness and ignorance.

One may ask, why so much variety. Western scholars often get confused by the various philosophies, paths, and instructions given in the Vedic scriptures. Therefore, it is stressed in the Hindu scriptures to study them under the guidance of an able Guru.

We all have different choices and natures according to our sanskārs (tendencies) from endless lifetimes. Consider this example of two people going into a cloth shop. The chances of both of them buying the same type, color, or style of clothes is very rare. Therefore, the shops keep a variety of clothes and cater to the choices and preferences of people. Similarly, the Vedic scriptures also offer various spiritual paths so that based on the level of sadhana that we may have performed in our past lives, we may choose a suitable path. However, they simultaneously stress on bhakti or devotion to God that ties together all these paths in one common thread.

The Bhagavad Gita beautifully embraces varieties of sadhanas to cater to a large populace belonging to diverse backgrounds, upbringing, and natures. Bhakti involves focusing the mind upon God, in His various divine Forms, Qualities, Pastimes, etc. In its pure form, bhakti is called śuddha bhakti. However, when undertaken along with ashtanga yoga, it is termed yog-miśhra bhakti or a fusion of devotion and ashtanga yoga sadhana.

Shree Krishna has described yog-miśhra bhakti from verse ten to thirteen. In the practice of ashtanga yoga, the life force or prān shakti is channelized through suṣūmṇā nādi of the spinal column and then raised toward the third eye region between the eyebrows. In this verse, He says that at the time of death, one who performs this with great devotion and complete focus on the Divine Lord will definitely achieve Him.

BG 8.11: 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.

Commentary

In the Vedas, God is referred by many names: Brahman, Bhagwan, Deva, Paramātmā, Praṇa, Puruṣh, Sat, etc. In some places, while referring to His formless aspect, God is said to be Akshar, which means imperishable. The Bṛihadāraṇyak Upaniṣhad states:

etasya vā akṣharasya praśhāsane gārgi
sūryāchandramasau vidhṛitau tiṣṭhataḥ (3.8.9)

“Under the mighty control of the Imperishable, the sun and the moon are held on their course.”

Shree Krishna mentions in this verse the word sangraheṇa, which means “in brief.” He says that this path is very difficult to follow and not suitable for everyone. Therefore, He will not elaborate much and briefly describe this path of yog-miśhrā bhakti; that leads to attaining the formless aspect of God. It demands living a life of rigid continence and perform severe austerities. Renouncing worldly desires and practicing brahmacharya, a vow of celibacy. As was previously detailed in verse 6.14, the practice of celibacy conserves a person’s physical energy. This energy, when channelized through sadhana, gets transformed into spiritual energy. It also enhances the intellect and memory power of the sādhas (spiritual aspirants) and helps them comprehend the spiritual subjects better.

BG 8.12: 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.

Commentary

It is through the senses and their objects the world enters our mind. When we see, hear, touch, taste, or smell an object of perception, it leaves an impression on our mind. Our mind then dwells upon these experiences, starts to contemplate, and creates repetitive thoughts that increase our attachment to the world. Therefore, a practitioner of meditation should guard himself against the incessant stream of worldly thoughts that the unrestrained senses can create. Locking the world out by restraining the mind and the senses; is most essential in meditation.

In this verse, Shree Krishna uses the words sarva-dvārāṇi-sanyamya, which mean guarding the gates of the body, and hrīdi nirudhya that means “locking the mind in the heart.” He says that by controlling the passages that enter the body, one can lock the mind in the heart. Restricting the senses from their natural tendencies and directing the mind toward akṣharam the imperishable Supreme Lord. Then with complete attention and devotional feelings, one should meditate on Him. He ends the verse with yoga-dhāraṇām, which means “uniting the consciousness with God.”

BG 8.13: One who departs from the body while remembering Me, the Supreme Personality, and chanting the syllable Om, will attain the supreme goal.

Commentary

The Vedic scriptures state that at the beginning of creation, God first created sound. With sound, He created space and then continued with the rest of the creation process. That primordial sound was the sacred syllable OM it is also called Pranav—the sound manifestation of the Brahman. It represents the formless aspect of the Supreme Lord, without any attributes and virtues. The Bible also mentions this in John 1:1: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The sound Om pervades the entire creation; it is imperishable and infinite like God Himself. Hence, it is also called anāhat nād. In the Vedic philosophy, it is conferred as the mahā vākya, or the Great Sound Vibration of the Vedas and often attached to the beginning of the Vedic mantras, as bīja (seed or core) mantra similar to hrīm, klīm, etc.

For proper chanting of the sacred word OM, the emphasis is on the vibrations of three letters: A... U... M... One starts by making an “A” sound from the belly, with

an open mouth and throat; it then merges into a "U" created in the middle of the mouth. Finally, it ends in chanting "M" with a closed mouth.

Devotees consider the word Om as the impersonal form of God. In ashtanga yoga, the Praṇav sound is considered the object of meditation. In this verse, Shree Krishna is describing the process of meditation with regard to the ashtanga yoga sadhana. He states that to focus the mind on God, one should chant "Om" while practicing austerities and maintaining the vow of celibacy.

However, the devotees who take the path of bhakti yoga prefer to meditate upon the personal Names of the Lord. They experience greater sweetness in God's bliss when they meditate on; the personal Name and Forms of God, such as Ram, Krishna, Shiv, etc.

If you compare; the pleasure experienced by two ladies, one who is an expectant mother and one who has her new-born baby in her lap. The experience is much sweeter for the new mother. Seeing her beautiful baby, she even forgets the discomfort and pain she had experienced during childbirth.

The time of death is the final test of our meditation. As death is said to be intensely painful and despite the pain, those who are able to focus on God even at that last moment; attain Him. And on leaving the body, their souls reach His divine abode. However, to achieve such a state is very difficult; it requires continuous practice throughout one's life. The merciful Lord Krishna shows us an easier path in the next verse.

BG 8.14: O Parth, for those yogis who always think of Me with exclusive devotion, I am easily attainable because of their constant absorption in Me.

Commentary

In the previous verse, Shree Krishna had explained the process of meditation as per ashtanga yoga sadhana to focus on the formless God, devoid of any attributes. However, this practice is not only difficult but also very bland. Therefore, He suggests an alternative method, that is, to meditate upon the personal forms of God such as Ram, Krishna, Shiv, Vishnu, etc., including their Names, Forms, Virtues, Pastimes, Abodes, and Associates. This method is simpler and helps in keeping the mind absorbed in God and His divine form.

For the first time in the Bhagavad Geeta, Shree Krishna says that He is easy to attain. But only to those yogis who are ananya-chetāḥ, which means their mind is absorbed exclusively in God. The word a-nanya Etymologically means na anya, or "no other." Thus, exclusive devotion is the precondition for attaining God.

Throughout the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna has stressed upon exclusive devotion and surrender to attain Him.

ananyāśh chintayanto mām 9.22
tam eva śharaṇam gachchha 18.62
mām ekam śharaṇam vraja 18.66

Other Vedic scriptures also reiterate the same message:

mām ekam eva śharaṇam ātmānam sarva-dehinām (Bhagavatam 11.12.15)
"Surrender to Me alone, who am the Supreme Soul of all living beings."

eka bharoso eka bala ek āsa visvāsa (Ramayan)
"I have only one support, one strength, one faith, one shelter, and that is Shree Ram."

anyāśhrayānam tyāgo 'nanyatā (Nārād Bhakti Darśhan, Sūtra 10)
"Reject all other shelters, and become exclusive to God."

Many spiritual seekers love God and try hard to attain Him, but their mind is

also attached to the material world, their family, friends, pets, house, assets, etc. They contemplate upon God to purify their mind, but when they go back to their worldly relations, it gets dirty again. The worldly attachments are not only binding but also imperfect, thus cause impurity of the mind. It is like applying soap to a dirty cloth, cleaning it with pure water, and putting it back into unclean water. Thus, all the effort goes futile.

The ultimate aim of sadhana is to purify the mind, which can only be done by attaching the mind to God, who is all-pure. In this verse, Shree Krishna says that it is not just devotion; but exclusive devotion; that is necessary to attain Him. Exclusive devotion is attainable only when a purified mind is absorbed in the Names, Forms, Virtues, Pastimes, Abodes, and Associates of God.

BG 8.15: Having attained Me, the great souls are no more subject to rebirth in this world, which is transient and full of misery, because they have attained the highest perfection.

Commentary

What happens when one attains God? Once God-realized the soul is liberated from the cycle of life and death, it reaches the divine abode of God and remains there forever. It does not take birth in the material world again and suffer its miseries. Life in the material world from birth till death is full of suffering.

The struggle starts inside the mother's womb itself, where we hang upside down for nine months. Then we go through a painful process of taking birth and delivered into an unknown world, where we have to cry for our every need. As we grow, we need to learn to speak, eat, walk, etc. Then comes the turmoil of adolescence, which is a mentally challenging phase. As adults, marriage and relationships test our endurance and patience to accept and accommodate individualities. We struggle to maintain social responsibilities. Then comes old age with its gifts of sickness and disease. All through our life, we suffer from pain and miseries; induced by our own body, mind, people, or circumstances around us. Then finally, we die, which is again an extremely painful experience.

But why does God put us through so much pain and misery? In God's grand design, the purpose of these miseries is to realize that the material realm is not the permanent abode for the soul. It serves as a correction home for the souls who have forgotten God and are trapped in the material world. These sufferings and miseries help the souls develop the desire for God. Consider an example of a person who accidentally puts his hand on burning coal. Immediately, due to the burning sensation and pain he experiences, he withdraws his hand.

What really happened here? When the man touched hot coal, his skin started burning, and the neurons on his skin sent a message to the brain of the pain he experienced. The brain immediately sends commands to his hand muscles that remove his hand to avoid further burning and pain. Therefore, pain is a signal that something is not right and needs correction. Similarly, the pain and miseries that we experience in the material world; are stimulation for us to shun our defective consciousness. These inspire and motivate the lost souls to tread toward their ultimate goal of union with God.

Those worthy souls who commit themselves in exclusive devotion attain God and reach His Divine Abode. However, those souls who remain engrossed in material affluence and forget God continue to rotate in the cycle of birth and death. Eventually, we get what we make ourselves worthy of and the endeavours we choose to undertake

BG 8.16: 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.

Commentary

According to the Vedic scriptures, there are fourteen worlds in our universe. Seven planes of existence beginning with earth and higher –bhūḥ, bhuvāḥ, swaḥ, mahāḥ, janāḥ, tapāḥ, satyaḥ. The higher planes are the celestial abodes called the Swarga. The remaining seven planes that are lower than earth are the hellish abodes called narak. These are –tal, atal, vital, sutaḥ, talāṭal, rasāṭal, pātāl. Similar references are made by other religions as well. Islam mentions the seventh sky or the sātvañ āsmān as the highest of the seven heavens. The Talmud, the book of Jewish law and theology, has also enumerated seven heavens, the highest being Araboth.

These fourteen planes of existence are called the lokas or various worlds of our universe. The satyaḥ lok, also known as Brahma Lok, the abode of Brahma is the highest among them, and pātāl lok is the lowest. However, all these lokas are under the realm of Maya, the material energy of God. Hence, the dwellers of all the fourteen lokas go through the cycle of birth and death. It is because of their impermanent nature Shree Krishna in the previous verse called these worlds to be aśhāśhvataḥ (temporary) and duḥkhālayam (full of misery).

All those who are born in these lokas of material existence are subject to death someday. Even the king of the celestial gods, Indra, has to die.

The Puranas mention an incident where Indra ordered the celestial architect, Vishwakarma, to construct a huge palace for himself in Swarga. However, the extension plan kept on increasing, and the construction was not ending. Vishwakarma got weary and prayed to God for help. God visited Indra and enquired, "How many Vishwakarmas have you engaged in constructing such a huge palace?" Indra was surprised by God's question because he thought there was only one Vishwakarma. Smiling, God said to Indra, "Similar to this universe with its fourteen worlds, there are infinite universes. And each universe has an Indra and a Vishwakarma".

At the same time, Indra saw several ants walking toward him in queues. Surprised, he asked God; where all these ants were coming from. God said, "All these ants were Indras in their past lives; I have called them to meet you." Indra was speechless.

Soon after, a revered sage, Rishi Lomash, visited Indra. He was carrying a straw mat on his head and had a circle of hair on his chest. However, there were gaps in that circle, made by fallen hair. Indra received the sage respectfully and then asked him politely; why he was carrying a mat on his head? Also, what does the hair on his chest signify?

The Rishi said, "I am blessed with a boon, to be chirāyu (endless life). The hair on my chest signifies life on this universe. Whenever the tenure of an Indra ends, one hair falls. And several such falls have caused the gaps in my chest hair." Indra was astonished. Lomash Rishi then added, "I carry this mat on my head because during the day it protects me from sun and rain. Also, I spread it on the ground at night and sleep. My disciples want to build a permanent residence for me to stay. But I think, when life itself is temporary, why build a house here?" Hearing this from someone who has the lifespan of many Indras; humbled Indra. His pride shattered, he thought to himself, "What is the point in building such a huge palace, if someday, I have to leave it all and go?" He asked Vishwakarma to stop the construction immediately and released him.

It is marvellous how these stories from the Puranas and the Bhagavad Gita give an insight into; cosmology of the universe. Amazingly, these scriptures were written in ancient times, several thousand years ahead of modern astronomy. It was only in the sixteenth century that a western scientist, Nicholas Copernicus, first proposed a heliocentric theory stating that; the sun was the centre of the universe. This theory changed the previous belief that the earth was the centre of the universe.

Further advancement in astronomy revealed that even the sun was not the centre of the universe. It was part of a galaxy called the milky way having countless

stars like our sun, each with its own solar system. And all stars, along with their solar systems, are revolving around the epicentre of the galaxy. Further research has revealed; that similar to the Milky Way, several galaxies are gyrating in our universe.

However, the Vedic philosophy states that the earth or the Bhūr Lok is revolving around Swar Lok, and the realm between them is Bhuvar Lok. The Swar Lok is again moving around Jana Lok, and the realm between these two is the Mahar Lok. Jana Lok is also not stationary and is circling the Brahma Lok (Satya Lok), and Tapa Lok is the realm between them. These are the seven higher planes, and similarly, there are seven lower planes as well. It is incredible; that our Vedic scholars had such insight into the subject over five thousand years ago.

In this verse, Shree Krishna states that all the fourteen worlds of this universe are within the realm of His material energy Maya. Hence, the occupants are subject to the cycle of birth and death. Only those who attain God-realization get liberated from the clutches of maya. Upon death, they leave their material bodies and go to His divine abode to stay there forever. They receive divine bodies and participate in the divine Pastimes of God eternally. They need not take birth in the material world. However, some saints and pious souls come back to the material world. Although liberated, they do so to engage in the divine welfare of humankind. These pious souls are the great Masters and Prophets. They descend on earth to help others get out of the bondage of maya and guide them on the path toward God-realization.

BG 8.17: One day of Brahma (kalp) 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.

Commentary

The Vedic cosmological system has measurements of time that are vast and astounding. Consider this example of an insect, that is, born at night and within the same night it grows, procreates, lays eggs, and grows old. The next morning, you find it dead under the street light. If one tells that insect that its entire lifespan was only equal to one night of a human, that will be unbelievable for the insect. Similarly, the measurements of time given in the Vedas are beyond normal human imagination.

The Vedas state that one year on the earth equals; one day and night of Indra and other celestial gods. Thus, one year of the celestial gods consisting of 12 x 30 days equals 360 years on the earth plane. The calculation goes much further; 12,000 years of the celestial gods makes one mahā yug (cycle of four yugas) on the earth plane, that is, 4.32 million years. Following is the Vedic calculation of time periods or yugas on the earth plane:

Kali Yug: 432,000 years

Dwāpar Yug: 864,000 years

Tretā Yug: 1,296,000 years

Satya Yug: 1,728,000 years

Mahā Yug: 4,320,000 years (Adding the four yugas)

Kalp: 4,320,000,000 years (1000 Mahā Yug = 1 day of Brahma)

One thousand mahā yug make one day of Brahma, called a kalp, and then there is Brahma's night of equal duration. Kalp is the largest unit of time in the world; it equals 4.32 billion years. In this verse, Shree Krishna states that only those who understand this knowledge truly know what day and night are.

According to Vedas, the duration of the universe equals Brahma's lifespan, of 100 years. Brahma's one day and night put together make 8.64 billion earth years, and 36,000 such days of his lifespan would make 311 trillion 40 billion years. So, that will be one life cycle of our universe. Now the question arises; when Brahma is a creator, why is he also subject to birth and death?

Brahma is also a soul; who has reached tremendously elevated consciousness. Thus, God has given him the position of Brahma, to discharge the duties as a creator on God's behalf. But like all other living creatures, Brahma is also under the cycle of life and death. However, at the end of his tenure, he is liberated and goes to the Abode of God. Sometimes, at the creation of the world, when God does not find any eligible souls for the position of Brahma, God Himself becomes Brahma.

BG 8.18: 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.

Commentary

The cosmic play of the various planes of existence in the universe is astounding. The fourteen worlds and their planetary systems undergo repeated cycles of *sṛiṣṭi*, *sthiti*, and *pralaya* (creation, preservation, and dissolution). All planetary systems, up to the Mahar Lok, are destroyed at the end of a *kalp*; that is Brahma's day of 4.32 billion years. This partial dissolution is called *naimittik pralaya*. When Shukdev Paramhans narrated the Shrimad Bhagavatam to Parikshit, he stated that Brahma creates these worlds similar to a child playing with his toys. A child builds structures with his toys during the day and pulls them apart before going to bed at night. Similarly, when Brahma wakes up, he creates the planetary systems and their life forms and dissolves them before going to sleep.

The entire universe dissolves at the end of Brahma's life of 100 years (311.04 trillion earth years). The whole 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 Maya, the material energy of God. Maya now takes up her primordial form. She goes back into the body of the Supreme Lord, Maha Vishnu. This great dissolution is called *prākṛit pralaya*, or *mahāpralaya*.

When it is time for the next cycle of creation, Maha Vishnu glances at *prakṛiti*, and by His mere glance, *prakṛiti* starts unfolding herself again. From *prakṛiti*, *mahān* is created, from *mahān*, *ahankār*; then from *ahankār*, *pañch-tanmātrās* are created; from *pañch-tanmātrās*, *pañch-mahābhūta* get created. And by this process, unlimited universes are created again.

According to modern science, there are 100 billion stars in the Milky Way. And similar to the Milky Way, there are over a billion galaxies in the universe. Thus, scientists have concluded that in our universe, there are more than 10^{20} stars. However, the Vedas state that, similar to our universe, there are infinite universes of various sizes and different features. These universes manifest from the body of Maha Vishnu. Every time He breathes in infinite universes are created from the pores of His divine body. And when He breathes out, they dissolve again. Thus, one breath of Maha Vishnu is equal to 100 years of Brahma's life. Also, all these universes have their own Brahma, Vishnu, and Shankar. In the innumerable universes, there are innumerable Brahmas, Vishnus, and Shankars. The entire creation originates from Maha Vishnu, and at dissolution, merges back into Him.

BG 8.19: 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.

Commentary

Four forms of *pralayas* or dissolution are enumerated in the Vedas.

Nitya Pralaya: Every night, when we fall into a deep sleep, our consciousness goes through dissolution daily.

Naimittik Pralaya: At the end of Brahma's day, all the abodes up to the Mahar Lok dissolve, and all the souls residing there become unmanifest. They remain in a state of suspended animation in the body of Vishnu, waiting for the next cycle of creation. When Brahma creates these lokas again, these souls are reborn based on their past karmas.

Mahā Pralaya: At the end of Brahma's life, this entire universe goes into dissolution. Again, all the souls of the universe unmanifest and stay in the body of Maha Vishnu. Their gross (sthūl) and subtle (sūkṣhma) body dissolve, but their causal body (kāraṇa sharīr) stays. In the next cycle of creation, these souls are reborn based on their past karmas and past sanskāras, which the soul's causal body stores and carries with it.

Ātyantik Pralaya: This is the dissolution from the clutches of maya that has been binding the soul since eternity. It takes place when the soul finally attains God and is liberated forever

BG 8.20: Transcendental to this manifest and unmanifest creation, there is yet another unmanifest eternal dimension. That realm does not cease even when all others do.

Commentary

So far, Shree Krishna revealed the material worlds and their temporary nature. He now starts describing the eternal spiritual realm, which He says is beyond these material worlds and everlasting. The spiritual realm does not dissolve along with the material realms in the cycle of creation. The eternal world is created by Yogmaya, the spiritual energy of God. Later in verse 10.42, He reveals that only one-fourth of His entire creation is in the material dimension, and the remaining three-fourth is the eternal spiritual world.

BG 8.21: That unmanifest dimension is the supreme goal, and upon reaching it, one never returns to this mortal world. That is My Supreme Abode.

Commentary

The spiritual realm has a divine sky called the Paravyom, where all the different forms of God have their eternal abodes called the Lokas. The Supreme Lord resides in His various divine forms in these Lokas along with His eternal associates. Goloka is the divine abode of Lord Krishna, Saket Lok is the abode of Lord Ram, Vaikunth Lok is the abode of Lord Vishnu, Shiv Lok is the abode of Lord Shiv, Devi Lok is the abode of Divine Mother Durga, etc. These divine forms are non-different from the Supreme Lord; they are all divine forms of the same one God. A devotee may worship any of the forms of God and strive to attain Him. Once God-realized, their soul will reach the divine Lok of that form of God and remain there forever. It receives a divine body and participates in the divine pastimes and activities of the Lord.

BG 8.22: The Supreme Divine Personality 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.

Commentary

God is present everywhere. The same Supreme Lord who resides in the spiritual sky in His divine abode, at the same time, is seated in the hearts of every living creature. He is all-pervading and present in every atom of the material world. It is not that He is a hundred percent God in His personal form and ten percent when He is in our hearts or anywhere else in the material world. God exists a hundred percent in all His forms. Due to our ignorance, we are unable to recognize His presence within us or all around us.

Sage Shandilya states in his Bhakti Darshan:

gavāṁ sarpiḥ śharīrasthaṁ na karotyaṅga poṣhaṇam

"Milk resides in the body of the cow, but it does not benefit the health of the cow, which is weak and sick." When the same milk is converted to yogurt and fed to the cow with a little black pepper, it cures the cow; of its illness.

Likewise, it is difficult to develop devotion for an omnipresent or all-pervading God. Worshiping Him in His divine form helps us purify our heart, which is necessary to attract His divine grace. Because, to perceive God's divinity, we need our senses to be divine. By His grace, His divine energy Yogmaya instills in us divine senses, mind, and intellect so that we could know both His all-pervading aspect and His personal form. Thus, in this verse, Shree Krishna declares that only through bhakti can we know Him.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Shree Krishna has repeatedly emphasized upon the need for bhakti to know God and attain Him. The verse 6.47 states: Shree Krishna considers those engaged in devotion as the highest in position among His devotees. However, in this verse, Shree Krishna explicitly adds the term ananyayā, which means "by no other path" can one know God.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu very nicely said:

bhakti mukha nirikṣhaka karm yoga jñāna (Chaitanya Charitāmṛit, Madhya 22.17)
"Although karma, jnana, and ashtanga yoga are also pathways to God-realization, all these require the support of bhakti for their fulfillment."

Jagadguru Shree Kripaluji Maharaj also said:

karm yog aru jñāna saba, sādhana yadapi bakhān
pai binu bhakti sabai janu, mṛitaka deha binu prān
(Bhakti Śhatak verse 8)

"Although karma, jnana, and ashtanga yoga are paths to God-realization, without blending bhakti in them, they all become like dead bodies without life-air."

Various other scriptures also announce the same:

bhaktyāhamekayā grāhyaḥ śhraddhayātmā priyaḥ satām (Bhagavatam 11.14.21)
"I am only attained by My devotees who worship Me with faith and love."

milahiṁ na raghupati binu anurāgā, kieṇ joga tapa gyāna birāgā (Ramayan)
"One may practice ashtanga yoga, engage in austerities, accumulate knowledge, and develop detachment.
Yet, without devotion, one will never attain God."

BG 8.23-26: 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.

Commentary

In these verses, Shree Krishna continues to answer the question Arjun had asked in verse 8.2, "How can one be united with God at the time of death?"

Shree Krishna explains that there are two paths—the path of light or the path of

darkness. Although these statements may seem cryptic, they present an effective allegory to explain spiritual concepts using the contrasting themes: light and darkness. Where light; is symbolic to knowledge and darkness; is for ignorance.

The bright daylight, the moonlit fortnight of śhuklaḥ or the bright ascending moon, and the uttaraayan, the northern course of the sun, are all considered the time of light. The God-conscious souls; who detach from worldly attachments and depart by the path of light (knowledge and discrimination) attain God. They are liberated from the wheel of samsara, the cycle of life and death, and reach the divine Abode of God.

The ignorant souls who are attached to the world remain entangled in the bodily concept of life. They forget their relationship with God. Such souls depart by the path of darkness. Hence, continue to rotate in the cycle of life and death. However, those who may have undertaken some Vedic rituals, as its fruit, go to the celestial abodes. But this position is also part of the material world, thus temporary. When their merits are exhausted, they have to return to earth. Ultimately all humans born on earth, upon death, have to pass along either of the two paths, the path of light or the path of darkness. It is their karmas that decide which path they would take eventually.

BG 8.27: Yogis who know the secret of these two paths, O Parth, are never bewildered. Therefore, at all times be situated in Yog (union with God).

Commentary

Those relentless souls who strive for Yog or union with God are true yogis. They recognize themselves to be tiny fragments of God and His eternal beatitude. They also realize the temporary nature of the material world and the futility of a materialistic life. Therefore, instead of running behind sensual pleasures, they endeavour to enhance their love for God. Such souls are on the path of light.

On the other hand are the ignorant souls, who are under the influence of maya, the material energy. They recognize themselves as only the body and the material world around them as the source of their pleasure. They continue to live through the miseries of material existence, being disdainful toward God or His eternal opulence. Thus, such souls are on the path of darkness.

In this verse, Shree Krishna urges Arjun to recognize the difference between these two paths and choose the path of light, thus become a yogi. It is not that many of us do not take the path of light, but after some time are back on the path of darkness.

For instance, someone wishes to go east and walks one mile toward the rising sun in the morning. He rests in the afternoon for a while. Then he starts walking again toward the sun, which is now in the west. He walks for two miles only to find in the evening that he is one mile farther in the west from where he had started. Similarly, treading on the path of light only for some time will not work; it needs to be a constant process, else one will slip back into darkness again. Therefore, in this verse, Shree Krishna adds the phrase, "at all times." It is for us to recognize the importance of being a yogi at all times. And avoid the danger of sliding back into the path of darkness.

BG 8.28: 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.

Commentary

In the last verse of this chapter, Shree Krishna declares that: those yogis who follow the path of light reap the fruits of their endeavours beyond any other processes can bestow. He says that even though one may undertake Vedic sacrifices, perform austerities, charity, or accumulate knowledge of the self, but without devotion to God, it is not the path of light. The Ramayan states:

nema dharma āchāra tapa gyāna jagya japa dāna,
bheṣhaja puni koṭinha nahiṇ roga jāhiṇ harijāna.

"You may engage in good conduct, righteousness, austerities, sacrifices, ashtanga yoga, chanting of mantras, and charity. But without devotion to God, the mind's disease of material consciousness will not cease."

All these good deeds can only reap material rewards, which are temporary. However, devotion to God leads to liberation from the bondage of the material world. Therefore, the yogis who have realized this truth detach their mind from the material world and attach it to God alone. Treading on this path of light, they eventually attain eternal happiness.

BG 9.1: The Supreme Lord 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.

Commentary

At the very beginning of the topic, Shree Krishna declares the qualification for hearing these teachings. Anasūyave means "non-envious." He tells Arjun that He is revealing this knowledge because Arjun is non-envious of Him. Lord Krishna clarifies this because God is going to glorify Himself profusely here. Anasūyave also has the sense of "one who does not scorn." Those listeners who deride Shree 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 God has no need for anything, and therefore everything He does is for the welfare of the souls. He only praises Himself to enhance devotion in the souls, 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 God 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 Shree Krishna is going to reveal in this chapter.

In the second chapter, Shree Krishna explained the knowledge of the ātmā (soul) 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.

BG 9.2: 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.

Commentary

Rāja means "king." Shree 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, God deliberately hides Himself from direct perception, thereby providing the soul the freedom to exercise the choice of loving Him or not. A machine cannot love, for it is devoid of choices. God

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 Lord. Bhakti also purifies the devotee by destroying pāp, bīja, and avidyā. Pāp is the stockpile of past sins of endless lifetimes of the individual soul. 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 soul and God, which in turn destroys the ignorance of material existence. The benefits of bhakti are described in the Bhakti Rasāmṛit Sindhu as follows: kleśhas tu pāpaṁ tadbījam avidyā cheti te tridhā (1.1.18) "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.

Pratyakṣa means "directly perceptible." The practice of the science of bhakti begins with a leap of faith and results in direct perception of God. 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." God 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? Shree Krishna explains this next.

BG 9.3: 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.

Commentary

In the last two verses, Shree Krishna promised knowledge and then qualified it with eight merits. It is mentioned here as "this dharma," or the path of loving devotion to God.

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 God comes later; initially, a leap of faith is required to begin the process. The Bhakti Rasāmṛit Sindhu (1.4.15) states: ādau śhraddhā tataḥ sādhusaṅgo 'tha bhajanakriyā "The first step in the path to God-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 God, 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)

There is a beautiful story regarding perception of God. A king once accosted a sadhu with the statement, "I do not believe in God 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, God is everywhere. If we cannot immediately perceive Him, we should not jump to the conclusion that there is no God. 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 God and become God-realized."

Belief in God 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 God. In the assembly of the Kauravas, when Dushasan endeavored to disrobe Draupadi, Lord 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 Shree Krishna and come to their senses. The Supreme Lord 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.

BG 9.4: 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.

Commentary

The Vedic philosophy does not accept the concept of God creating the world and then peeping into it from the seventh heaven to check whether His world is running all right. They repeatedly propound the theme of God being all-pervading in the world:

eko devaḥ sarvabhūteṣhu gūḍhaḥ sarvavyāpī (Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣhad 6.11)

"There is one God; He is seated in everyone's heart; He is also everywhere in the world."

īśhāvāsyam idam sarvaṁ yat kiñcha jagatyāṁ jagat (Īśhopaniṣhad 1)

"God is everywhere in the world."

puruṣha evedaṁ sarvaṁ, yad bhūtaṁ yachcha bhavyam (Puruṣh Sūktam)

"God pervades everything that has existed and all that will exist."

This concept of God being everywhere is understood subjectively. Some Eastern philosophers claim that the world is a pariṇām (transformation) of God. For

example, milk is an unadulterated substance. In contact with acid, it transforms to yogurt. Thus, yogurt is a pariṇām (effect or product) of milk, when it is transformed. Similarly, the protagonists of pariṇām vāda state that God 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 God 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 pariṇām nor vivarta. It is created from the material energy of God, called Maya śhakti. The souls too are the energy of God, but they are His superior energy, called Jīva śhakti. Therefore, the world and all the souls in it are both God's energies and are within His personality. However, Shree 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 souls and Maya exist within the personality of God, yet He is beyond them.

BG 9.5: 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.

Commentary

Beyond the two energies mentioned in the purport to the previous verse—Maya śhakti and Jīva śhakti—there is a third energy of God. This is called Yogmaya śhakti, which He refers to in this verse, as divine energy. Yogmaya is God's all-powerful energy. It is called kartum-akartum-samarthaḥ, or "that which can make the impossible possible," and is responsible for many of the amazing things we attribute to His personality. For example, God is seated in our hearts, yet we have no perception of Him. This is because His divine Yogmaya power keeps us aloof from Him.

Similarly, God also keeps Himself aloof from the influence of Maya. In the Bhagavatam, the Vedas praise the Lord:

vilajjamānayā yasya sthātumīkṣhā-pathe 'muyā (2.5.13)

"Maya feels embarrassed to even stand before God." Isn't it a wonder that although God pervades Maya, the material energy, yet He is aloof from it? This is again by the mysterious power of Yogmaya.

If the world could influence God, then when it decays or is destroyed, His nature and personality will also deteriorate. But despite all modifications in the world, God remains established in His personality. Accordingly, the Vedas call God by the name Daśhāṅgulī, or "ten fingers." He is in the world, and yet ten fingers beyond it—untouched by it.

BG 9.6: Know that as the mighty wind blowing everywhere rests always in the sky, likewise all living beings always rest in Me.

Commentary

Shree 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 God. 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 Shree Krishna means when He says that He is upholding all beings. The entire cosmos exists in space and space is created by God's energy. Thus, all beings can be said to be resting in Him.

The Supreme Lord 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 souls have no existence independent of God. They move in time, place, and consciousness, through transitory bodies, sometimes rapidly and sometimes slowly, and yet, they always exist within God.

From another perspective, everything that exists in cosmos is subordinate to the will of God. It is created, maintained, and annihilated in accordance with His will. In this way also, everything can be said to be resting in Him.

BG 9.7-8: 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 Kuntī, 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.

Commentary

Shree Krishna explained in the last few 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 8.17 to 8.19, Shree 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 Lord, Maha Vishnu.

At that time, all the souls within the material creation also go and rest in the body of God, in a state of suspended animation. Their gross and subtle bodies merge back into the source, Maya. 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 God creates the world again, the material energy unwinds in the reverse sequence prakṛiti-mahān-ahankār-pañch tanmātrā-pañch mahābhūta. Then, the souls 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. Shree Krishna thus calls them myriad life forms.

BG 9.9: O conqueror of wealth, none of these actions bind Me. I remain like a neutral observer, ever detached from these actions.

Commentary

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 Ramayan explains this well:

jāsu satyatā teñ jara māyā, bhāsa satya iva moha sahāyā.

"The material energy is insentient by itself. But when it receives inspiration from God, 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 God 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 God, He remains unaffected by the work of the material energy. He remains ever-blissful and undisturbed in His personality, by virtue of His hlādinī śhakti (bliss-giving power). Hence, the Vedas call Him ātmārām, meaning "He who rejoices in Himself, without any need for external pleasures." Having explained that He is unaffected, God now explains that He is the non-doer and the Supervisor.

BG 9.10: 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).

Commentary

As explained in the last verse, God does not directly engage in the work of creating life forms. His various energies and souls 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 God's sanction, He is also referred to as the Creator.

BG 9.11: 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 Lord of all beings.

Commentary

Good teachers occasionally use strong words to jostle their students out of the complacency of shallow thinking, into a deeper state of thoughtfulness. Here, Shree Krishna uses the word mūḍha, which means "dim-witted," to describe those who deny the divinity of His personal form.

Those who say that God is only formless and cannot manifest in a personal form, contradict the definition of God as being all-mighty and all-powerful. The Supreme Lord 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 God 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 souls also possess forms. If one holds that God cannot possess a form, then the corollary is that He has even less power than us a human beings. For God to be perfect and complete, He must have both attributes to His personality—a personal aspect and a formless aspect. The Vedic scriptures state:

apaśhyaṁ gopāṁ anipadyamānamā
(Rig Veda 1.22.164 sūkta 31)

"I had the vision of God as a boy who is never annihilated, and who appeared in a family of cowherds."

dwibhūjaṁ mauna mudrāḍhyaṁ vana mālinamiśhwaram
(Gopāl Tāpani Upaniṣhad 1.13)

"The Lord, wearing a garland of forest flowers, plays His flute, enchantingly forming the mauna mudrā with His hands."

gūḍhaṁ paraṁ brahma manuṣhya-liṅgam
(Bhagavatam 7.15.75)

"The deepest knowledge is that God accepts a human-like form."

yatrāvatīrṇo bhagavān paramātmā narākṛitiḥ
(Bhagavatam 9.23.20)

"At that time, the Supreme Lord, who possesses all opulences, descended in a human-like form."

iśhwarah paramah kṛiṣṇah sachchidānanda vigrahaḥ
anādirādir govindah sarvakāraṇa kāraṇam
(Brahma Samhitā 5.1)

In this verse, Brahma prays to Shree Krishna, "I worship Lord 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 God, 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 God is sat-chit-ānand—it is eternal, full of knowledge, and constituted of divine bliss.

asyāpi deva vapuṣho mad-anugrahasya
svechchhā-mayasya na tu bhūta-mayasya ko 'pi
(Bhagavatam 10.14.2)

In this verse, Lord Brahma prays to Shree Krishna, "O Lord, 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 souls like myself."

In chapter four of the Bhagavad Gita, Shree Krishna stated: "Although I am unborn, the Lord of all living entities, and have an imperishable nature, yet I appear in this world by virtue of Yogmaya, my divine power." (4.6) This means that not only does God possess a form, but He also descends in the world as an Avatar.

Since we souls 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 descension of God was present on the earth. It is even possible that we saw the descension. However, the limitation was that God'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 God'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, "Shree Krishna is a special person. He is very competent but is definitely not God." When those under the spell of rajo 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 God-realized saints who can recognize Him as God, since they have received divine

vision by His grace. And so, Shree Krishna says that the unaware materially conditioned souls do not know Him when He takes an avatar in the world.

BG 9.12: 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.

Commentary

There are many strands of atheistic views relating to the personal form of God that are prevalent in the world. Some people declare that God cannot descend in the world in a personal form. Consequently, they say that Shree Krishna was not God; He was merely a yogi. Others say that Shree 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 Shree 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. Shree 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 Lord, they cannot engage in bhakti toward Him. And since devotion to the formless aspect of God 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.

BG 9.13: But the great souls, who take shelter of My divine energy, O Parth, know Me, Lord Krishna, as the origin of all creation. They engage in My devotion with their minds fixed exclusively on Me.

Commentary

Shree 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 souls. Material life is a prolonged dream, which is being experienced by the souls who are sleeping under the sway of the material energy. In contrast, the great souls 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, Maya, they are now under the shelter of the divine Yogmaya energy. Such enlightened souls have woken up to the spiritual reality of their eternal relationship with God.

Just as God has both aspects to His personality—the formless and the personal form—His Yogmaya 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 God, and they are all non-different from each other, just as Krishna, Ram, Shiv, Narayan, etc. are non-different forms of the one God.

Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇ states:

yathā tvaṁ rādhikā devī goloke gokule tathā

vaikuṇṭhe cha mahālakṣmī bhavati cha sarasvatī

kapilasya priyā kāntā bhārate bhāratī satī

dwāravatyāṁ mahālakṣmī bhavati rukmiṇī satī

tvaṁ sītā mithilāyāṁ cha tvachchhāyā draupadī satī

rāvaṇena hṛitā tvaṁ cha tvaṁ cha rāmasya kāmīnī

“O Radha, You are the Divine Goddess of Golok (Shree Krishna's divine Abode) and

Gokul (Shree Krishna's Abode in the material realm, when He descended on earth 5,000 years ago). You exist in Vaikunth (Lord Vishnu's Abode) as Mahalakshmi. You are the consort of Lord Kapil (one of the descensions of God). You reside in Dwaraka as Rukmini (the wife of Shree 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 Lord Ram."

In this verse, Shree Krishna mentions that great souls take shelter of the divine energy of God. The reason is that divine grace, knowledge, love, etc. are all God's divine energies, and are all subservient to the divine Yogmaya energy, which is Radha. Hence, by the grace of Yogmaya, one receives the love, knowledge, and grace of God. Great souls, who receive divine grace, become endowed with divine love, and engage in uninterrupted devotion toward God.

BG 9.14: Always singing My divine glories, striving with great determination, and humbly bowing down before Me, they constantly worship Me in loving devotion.

Commentary

Having said that the great souls engage in His devotion, Shree 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 Lord is called kīrtan, which is defined as: nāma-līlā-guṇādīnām uchchair-bhāṣhā tu kīrtanam (Bhakti Rasāmṛit Sindhu 1.2.145) "Singing glories of the Names, Forms, Qualities, Pastimes, Abodes, and Associates of God is called kīrtan."

Kīrtan is one of the most powerful means of practicing devotion. It involves the three-fold devotion of śhravaṇa (hearing), kīrtan (chanting), and smaraṇa (remembering). The goal is to fix the mind upon God, 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 God 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 God. And since kīrtan involves loud chanting, the divine vibrations of the Names of God 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 viṣṇuṁ tretāyām yajato makhaiḥ

dwāpare paricharyāyām kalau tad dhari-kīrtanāt (Bhagavatam 12.3.52)

"The best process of devotion in the age of Satya was simple meditation upon God. In the age of Tretā, it was the performance of sacrifices for the pleasure of God. 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 bhājanah

parameṣha padaṁ yāti rāma nāmānukīrtanāt (Adhyātma Ramayan)

"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 Lord Ram, you will attain the highest destination."

sarva dharma bahirbhūtaḥ sarva pāparatasthathā

muchyate nātra sandeho viṣṇornamānukīrtanāt (Vaiṣhampāyan Samhitā)

"Even those who are deeply sinful and bereft of religiosity can be saved by the chanting of the names of Lord Vishnu; of this, there is no doubt."

kalijuga kevala hari guna gāhā, gāvata nara pāvahiṁ bhava thāhā (Ramayan)

"In this age of Kali, there is one means of salvation. By engaging in the chanting of the glories of God, 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 God. If we leave it out, the kīrtan will not purify the mind. Thus, Shree 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.

BG 9.15: 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.

Commentary

Sādhaks (spiritual practitioners) follow different paths of spirituality to reach the Absolute Truth. Shree Krishna previously described those who are devotees. They surrender themselves with devotion at the lotus feet of the Supreme Lord, in the attitude of being His eternal parts and servants. He now describes some of the other paths that sādhas follow.

Those who follow the path of jñāna-yog consider themselves to be non-different from God. They contemplate deeply on sūtras such as: so 'haṁ (I am That), śhivo 'haṁ (I am Shiv), etc. Their ultimate goal is to attain realization of the Supreme Entity as the undifferentiated Brahman, which possesses the attributes of eternality, knowledge, and bliss, but is devoid of forms, qualities, virtues, and pastimes. Shree Krishna says that such jñāna yogis also worship Him, but in His formless all-pervading aspect. In contrast, there are varieties of aṣṭāṅg yogis etc. who see themselves as distinct from God and relate to Him accordingly.

Still others worship the manifest universe as God. In Vedic philosophy, this is called viṣhwaroop upāsana (worship of the cosmic form of God). In western philosophy, it is called "Pantheism" from the Greek words pan (all) and theos (God). The most famous exponent of this philosophy has been Spinoza. Since the world is a part of God, 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 (God's undifferentiated all-pervading manifestation), Paramātmā (the Supreme Soul seated in everyone's hearts), and Bhagavān (the personal form of God).

How can all these divergent approaches worship the same God? Shree Krishna answers this in the following verses.

BG 9.16-17: 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 Ṛig Veda, Sāma Veda, and the Yajur Veda.

Commentary

In these verses, Shree 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 vaiśva deva that are described in the Smṛiti scriptures. Auśhadham refers to the potency in medicinal herbs.

Creation emanates from God, 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 God. The Ramayan states: jākī sahaja svāsa śhruti chārī "God manifested the Vedas by His breath." They are the knowledge potency of God, and hence an aspect of His unlimited personality. Shree Krishna states this truth dramatically by saying that He is the Vedas.

BG 9.18: 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 Repository and Eternal Seed.

Commentary

Since the soul is a tiny part of God, 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 soul 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, God is such a relative who has accompanied us lifetime after lifetime. From birth to birth, in every life-form that we went, God 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, God 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, God 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 souls are not related to each other, but to God, from whom they have

all emanated.

In this verse, Shree Krishna takes us above bodily consciousness and its concomitant attachment to worldly relatives. From the platform of the soul, God 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 śharaṇaṁ suhṛit gatirñārāyaṇa iti (Subāl Śhruti, mantra 6)

“Lord Narayan alone is the Mother, Father, Beloved, and destination of the soul.”

more sabai eka tumha swāmī, dīnabhandhu ura antarajāmī. (Ramayan)

“O Lord 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 God, 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 māmekaṁ śharaṇaṁ vraja, or complete surrender, which is necessary for receiving God’s grace. To achieve this single-mindedness, we must cut all the present attachments of the mind and replace them with attachment to God. Hence, the Ramayan states:

saba kai mamatā tāga baṭori, mama pada manahi bāñdha bari ḍori.

“Cut all the strings of worldly attachment of your mind; make a rope of these strings, and tie it at the lotus feet of God.” To help us tie our mind to Him, Shree Krishna here explains to Arjun that the soul’s every relationship is with God alone.

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BG 9.20: 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 heaven. By virtue of their pious deeds, they go to the abode of Indra, the king of heaven, and enjoy the pleasures of the celestial gods.

Commentary

Previously, in verse 9.12, Shree 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 souls, 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 gods, such as Indra, through the performance of yajñas (fire sacrifices) and other rituals. They worship the Supreme Lord indirectly because they do not realize that it is He alone who sanctions the gifts that the celestial gods 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 heaven. 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, Shree Krishna points out the defect in celestial pleasures.

BG 9.21: When they have enjoyed the vast pleasures of heaven, 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.

Commentary

Shree 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 soul. We have all been there many times in endless past lifetimes, and yet the hunger of the soul for infinite Bliss has not yet been satiated. All the Vedic scriptures support this belief:

tāvat pramodate swarge yāvat puṇyaṁ samāpyate

kṣhīṇa puṇyaḥ patatyarvāganichchhan kāla-chālitah (Bhagavatam 11.10.26)

“Residents of heaven 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 dukhadāi (Ramayan)

“The attainment of heaven is temporary, and is followed by miseries.”

Just as a football gets kicked all over the field, Maya is kicking the soul around in forgetfulness of God. 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 God-realization. Hence, the scriptures state that even the celestial gods pray to be given birth as a human being, so that they may rectify their previous mistake of going to heaven, and strive toward God-realization.

durlabhaṁ mānuṣhaṁ janma prārthayate tridaśhairapi (Nārada Purāṇ)

“The human form is exceedingly rare. Even the celestial gods pray to attain it.” Thus, Lord Ram instructed the residents of Ayodhya:

baṛeṇ bhāga mānuṣha tanu pāvā, sura durlabha saba granthanhi gāvā (Ramayan)

“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 heaven.” 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 God-realization by engaging in devotion to the Supreme Lord.

BG 9.22: 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.

Commentary

A mother never thinks of deserting her newborn helpless child who is entirely dependent upon her. The supreme and eternal mother of the soul is God. In this verse, God offers motherly assurance to souls 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. God 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. God'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, God 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, God also partially bestows His grace upon us. And when we offer ourselves exclusively to Him, māmekaṁ śharaṇaṁ vraja, God bestows His complete grace and takes full responsibility, by preserving what we have and providing what we lack.

BG 9.23: O son of Kunti, even those devotees who faithfully worship other gods also worship Me. But they do so by the wrong method.

Commentary

Having described the position of those who worship the Supreme Lord, Shree 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 gods, but their understanding is incomplete. They do not realize that the celestial beings receive their powers from God Himself. Hence, they also worship the Supreme Divine Personality, 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 gods come from the Supreme Lord. Thus, those with superior understanding do not go by the indirect route; they worship the source of all powers, which is God Himself. Such worship that is offered to the Supreme Lord automatically satisfies the entire creation:

yathā taror mūla-niṣhechanena

tripyanti tatskandhabhujopaśhākhāḥ

prāṇopahārāchcha yathendriyāṇāṁ

tathaiva sarvārhaṇaṁ achyutejyā (Bhagavatam 4.31.14)

"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 Lord, 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 gods certainly makes its way to the Supreme Lord, but such devotees do not get spiritual benefits. This is elaborated in the next verse.

BG 9.24: I am the enjoyer and the only Lord of all sacrifices. But those who fail to realize My divine nature must be reborn.

Commentary

Shree Krishna now explains the drawback in worshipping the celestial gods. By virtue of the powers bestowed upon them by the Supreme Lord, 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 gods 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 God Himself, and when their devotion reaches the stage of perfection, they go beyond the world of mortals to the divine Abode.

BG 9.25: Worshippers of the celestial gods take birth amongst the celestial gods, worshippers of the ancestors go to the ancestors, worshippers of ghosts take birth amongst such beings, and My devotees come to Me alone.

Commentary

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, Shree 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 god), Kuber (the god of wealth), Agni (the god of fire), etc. go to the celestial abodes. Then, when their account of good karmas gets depleted, they are sent back from heaven. 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. Shree 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 the Supreme Divine Personality. The word vrata means resolve and undertaking. Such fortunate souls, who firmly resolve to worship God and engage steadfastly in His devotion, go to His divine Abode after death.

BG 9.26: If one offers to Me with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or even water, I delightfully partake of that item offered with love by My devotee in pure consciousness.

Commentary

Having established the benefits of worshipping the Supreme, Shree 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 God accepts anything that is offered with a loving heart. If you have only a fruit, offer it to God, and He will be pleased. If there is no fruit available, offer Him a flower. If it is not the season for flowers, offer God 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 God, and not the worth of the offering.

By making this wonderful statement, Shree Krishna reveals the merciful divine nature of God. 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 ātmānaṁ bhaktebhyo bhakta-vatsalaḥ (11.261)

"If you offer God 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 Shreemad Bhagavatam contains exactly the same verse as the above verse of the Bhagavad Gita. While eating dry rice at the house of His friend, Sudama, Shree Krishna said:

patraṁ puṣhpaṁ phalaṁ toyaṁ yo me bhaktyā prayachchhati

tadahaṁ bhaktyupahṛitam aśhnāmi prayatātmanah (10.81.4)

"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 God descends upon the earth, He exhibits this quality in His divine Pastimes. Before the Mahabharat war, when Shree 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, Shree 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 Lord. Vidurani was overjoyed on receiving the Supreme Lord 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, Shree Krishna blissfully ate the peels, as if they were the most delicious food in the world.

BG 9.27: 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.

Commentary

In the previous verse, Shree 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 Lord. 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)

"Devotion means offering your every activity to God, and feeling intense

separation if ever you lose remembrance of Him.” When works are dedicated and mentally delivered to God, it is called arpanam. Such an attitude metamorphoses the mundane activities of material life into divine service of God. 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 chalũñ karũñ parikramā, jo jo karũñ so sevā

jaba sovũñ karũñ dañḍavat, jānũñ deva na dũjā

“Wherever I walk, I feel I am circumambulating the Lord’s temple; whatever I do, I see it as service to God. When I go to sleep, I meditate on the sentiment that I am offering obeisance to God. 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 sakalañ parasmai nārāyaṇāyeti samarpayet tat

(Bhagavatam 11.2.36)

“Whatever one does with body, words, mind, senses, and intellect, in accordance with one’s individual nature, should be offered to the Supreme Lord Narayan.” However, this act of offering is not to be done at the end of the work by merely reciting mantras, such as śhrī 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 Lord. Having stated that all works should be offered to Him, Shree Krishna now lists the benefits of doing so.

BG 9.28: 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.

Commentary

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 soul 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, Shree 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 Lord, we are freed from the fetters of both good and bad results.

Those who establish themselves in such consciousness are called yog yuktātmā (united in consciousness with God). 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 God.

BG 9.29: 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.

Commentary

We all intuitively believe that if there is a God, He must be perfectly just; there cannot be an unjust God. 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. God 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 God, for even common persons believe that God is perfectly just.

However, the previous verse by Shree Krishna creates the doubt that God is partial toward His devotees, because while everyone is subject to the law of karma, God releases His devotees from it. Isn't this symptomatic of the defect of partiality? Shree 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 unto Me, I reciprocate accordingly. Everyone follows my path, knowingly or unknowingly, 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, God 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? Shree Krishna now reveals the purifying power of bhakti.

BG 9.30: Even if the vilest sinners worship Me with exclusive devotion, they are to be considered righteous because they have made the proper resolve.

Commentary

Devotion to the Supreme Lord is so potent that it can reform even the most fallen. In the scriptures, the classical examples of this are Ajamil and Valmiki, whose stories are commonly sung in all Indian languages. Valmiki's impious deeds were so overbearing that he was unable even to enunciate "Ra..ma," the two syllables in Lord 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 fallen soul as Valmiki was reformed by the process of ananya bhakti (exclusive devotion) and transformed into a legendary saint.

ulaṭā nāmu japata jagu jānā, bālmiki bhae brahma samānā. (Ramayan)

"The whole world is testimony to the fact that Valmiki attained sainthood by chanting the syllables of God's Name in the reverse order." Therefore, sinners are not condemned to eternal damnation. On the strength of the transforming power of bhakti, Shree Krishna declares that even if the vilest sinners begin worshipping God 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.

BG 9.31: Quickly they become virtuous, and attain lasting peace. O son of Kunti, declare it boldly that no devotee of Mine is ever lost.

Commentary

How can devotees be considered venerable, merely for having made the correct resolve? Shree Krishna explains that if they continue the process of exclusive devotion with unflinching faith in God, their hearts will become purified and they will swiftly develop saintly virtues.

Divine virtues emanate from God Himself. He is perfectly just, truthful, compassionate, loving, merciful, etc. Since we souls are His tiny parts, we are all naturally drawn to these godly 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 Shree Kripaluji Maharaj declares the irrefutable truth regarding developing divine virtues:

satya ahinsā ādi mana! bina hari bhajana na pāya

jala te ghṛita nikale nahīñ, koṭina kariya upāya (Bhakti Śhatak verse 35)

"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 God." These qualities manifest when the mind is purified; and the purification of the mind cannot take place without attaching it to the all-pure God.

Further, Shree 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 Shree Krishna asks Arjun to make this statement, instead of declaring it Himself? The reason is that under special circumstances the Lord sometimes breaks His word, but He never permits His devotees' word to be broken. For example, Shree Krishna had resolved that He would not lift weapons during the Mahabharat war. But when Bheeshma, considered the perfect devotee, resolved that he would either kill Arjun by sunset the next day or make the Lord lift weapons to protect him, Shree Krishna broke His own vow to protect the vow made by Bheeshma. Thus, to reaffirm the strength of His statement, Shree Krishna here says, "Arjun, you declare that My devotee will never perish, for I shall guarantee that your word will be kept."

BG 9.32: All those who take refuge in Me, whatever their birth, race, gender, or caste, even those whom society scorns, will attain the supreme destination.

Commentary

There are souls 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 souls 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, Shree Krishna states that irrespective of birth, gender, 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 śhalinaḥ
mukukṣhoraiva hi brahma jijñāsā yogyatā matāḥ

“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 dravyaṁ śhraddhā samanvitam
pātre pradīyate yattat sakalaṁ dharma lakṣhaṇam

“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 aṣṭāṅg-yog as well, there are strict regulations:

śhuchau deśhe pratiṣṭhāpya (Bhagavatam 3.28.8)
“Perform haṭha-yog in a pure place, while seated immovably 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 niyamasthathā (Padma Purāṇ)

This verse states that God is not concerned with the time or place where we perform devotion. He only sees the love in our heart. All souls are the children of God, and He is willing to accept everyone with open arms, provided they come to Him with genuine love.”

BG 9.33: 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.

Commentary

When even the most abominable sinners are assured of success on the path of bhakti, then why should more qualified souls have any doubt? Kings and sages should be even more reassured of attaining the supreme destination by engaging in ananya bhakti (exclusive devotion). Shree 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.”

BG 9.34: 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.

Commentary

Having stressed bhakti, the path of devotion, throughout this chapter, Shree Krishna now concludes it by entreating Arjun to become His devotee. He asks Arjun to unite his consciousness with God 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. Shree Krishna assures Arjun that such complete

communion with Him through bhakti-yog will definitely result in the attainment of God-realization; of this, there should be no doubt.

BG 10.1: The Lord 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.

Commentary

Shree 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, Shree 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."

BG 10.2: Neither celestial gods nor the great sages know of My origin. I am the source from which the gods and great seers come.

Commentary

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 gods) and the *ṛishis* (sages) cannot comprehend the real nature of the origin of God, who existed before they were even born. And so, the Rig Veda states:

ko addhā veda ka iha prāvachat, kuta ā jātā kuta iyaṁ viśhrushtiḥ
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 *Īshopaniṣhad* states:

nainaddevā āpnuvan pūrvamarṣhat
(*Īshopaniṣhad* 4)[v2]

"God cannot be known by the celestial *devatās*, as he existed before them." Yet, such inaccessible knowledge will now be given by Shree Krishna to nurture the devotion of his dear friend.

BG 10.3: Those who know Me as unborn and beginningless, and as the Supreme Lord of the universe, they among mortals are free from illusion and released from all evils.

Commentary

Having said that no one can know him, Shree Krishna now states that some people do know him. Is he contradicting himself? No, he means that by self-efforts no one can know God, but if God himself bestows his grace upon someone, that fortunate soul gets to know him. Hence, all those who come to know God 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 loving devotion, I give the divine knowledge by which they can attain me." Here, Shree Krishna says that those who know him as the Supreme Lord of all lords are not deluded. Such blessed souls become free from all reactions to their past and present actions, and develop loving devotion toward him.

To make the distinction between the souls and himself, Shree Krishna declares that he is *loka maheśhwaram* (the great Lord of all the abodes of existence). The same declaration has been made in the *Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣhad*:

tamīśhwarāṇām paramaṁ maheśhwaram
taṁ devatānām paramaṁ cha daivatam
patim patinām paramaṁ parastād
vidāma devaṁ bhuvaneśhamīdyam
(6.7)[v3]

"The Supreme Lord 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."

BG 10.4-5: From Me alone arise the varieties of qualities in 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.

Commentary

In these two verses, Lord Krishna continues to confirm his Supreme Lordship 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.

Asammoham 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 one's 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.

Shree 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 God manifests in us positively or negatively according to our puruṣhārtha (the actions we perform by exercising our freedom of choice) in the present and past lives.

BG 10.6: 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.

Commentary

Here, Shree 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 Hiraṇyagarbha energy of Vishnu (the form of God 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 souls 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 Manvantara. In the present kalpa (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 Lord Vishnu, who in turn is a non-different expansion of Shree Krishna. Therefore, we can say that Shree Krishna is the original forefather of all forefathers (prapitāmaha).

BG 10.7: Those who know in truth My glories and divine powers become united with Me through unwavering Bhakti Yog. Of this there is no doubt.

Commentary

The word vibhūti refers to the great śhaktis (powers) of God manifesting in the universe. The word yogam refers to God's connection with these wonderful powers. In this verse, Shree Krishna explains that when we become aware of the magnificence of the Supreme Lord and become convinced about his glory, we naturally become inclined to engage in his devotion.

Knowledge of the greatness of God 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 śhāligrām, and a saintly personality has gifted it to me." A śhāligrām is a special kind of fossil stone worshipped as a representation of Lord Vishnu. If you are aware of the significance of śhāligrāms, when you receive this knowledge that the stone is a śhāligrām, 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

God enhances devotion toward him. Thus, having described God's majestic splendors that manifest in the wondrous workings of unlimited universes, Shree Krishna states that those who become situated in this knowledge naturally become united with him through unflinching bhakti.

BG 10.8: I am the origin of all creation. Everything proceeds from Me. The wise who know this perfectly worship Me with great faith and devotion.

Commentary

Shree Krishna begins the verse by saying ahaṁ 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, 10.2-3, and 15.15. It is also strongly proclaimed in all the other scriptures. The Rig Veda states:

yaṁ kāmāye taṁ taṁ ugraṁ kṛṣṇomi taṁ brahmāṇaṁ taṁ ṛṣhiṁ taṁ 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 soul empowered for the seat of Brahma." The wise who comprehend this truth develop firm faith and worship him with loving devotion.

Thus, Shree Krishna is the Supreme Lord of both the material and spiritual creations. However, administering creation is not the primary work of God. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu states:

swayaṁ bhagavānera karma nahe bhāra-haraṇa
(Chaitanya Charitāmṛit, Ādi Leela 4.8)[v5]

"Shree Krishna does not directly involve himself in the works of creating, maintaining, and dissolving the material universes." Shree Krishna's primary activity is to engage in eternal loving pastimes with the liberated souls 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 Lord that presides over the material realm, consisting of infinite material universes. Maha Vishnu is also known as Pratham Puruṣh (first expansion of God 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 Puruṣh (second expansion of God 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.

Garbhodakshayi 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 Tṛitiya Puruṣh (third expansion of God in the material realm). He resides at the top of the universe, but he also resides as the Supreme soul, 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 Lord Vishnu mentioned here are non-different from Shree Krishna. Thus, in this verse, Shree Krishna states that all spiritual and material creation emanate from him. Shree Krishna is also called the Avatārī (the source of all the Avatārs). The Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam states: ete chāmśha kalāḥ puṁsaḥ kṛṣṇas tu bhagavān svayam (1.3.28)[v6] "All the forms of God are the expansions, or the expansions of the expansions of Shree Krishna, who is the primordial form of God." And so, the secondary creator Brahma prays to Shree

Krishna:

yasyaikaniśhvasita kālamathāvalambya
jīvanti lomavilajā jagadaṇḍanāthāḥ
viṣṇurmahān saihayasya kalāviśheṣho
govindamādi puruṣhaṁ tamahaṁ 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 Shree Krishna of whom Maha Vishnu is an expansion." Shree Krishna now goes on to explain how devotees worship him.

BG 10.9: With their minds fixed on Me and their lives surrendered to Me, My devotees remain ever content in Me. They derive great satisfaction and bliss in enlightening one another about Me and in conversing about My glories.

Commentary

The nature of the mind is to become absorbed in what it likes most. Devotees of the Lord 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 God 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 God. Shree 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 Lord, they see every situation as coming from him. Hence, they gladly accept both positive and negative circumstances as the will of God, and remain equipoised in both.

While the devotees' love for God 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 God, and his names, forms, virtues, pastimes, abodes, and devotees. In this way, by engaging in kīrtan (chanting) and shravaṇa (hearing) regarding the glories of God, 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 God (bodhayanti). Speaking and singing about the glories of God 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, Shree Krishna now explains how he responds to their devotional activities.

BG 10.10: To those whose minds are always united with Me in loving devotion, I give the divine knowledge by which they can attain Me.

Commentary

Divine knowledge of God 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; God and his divine realm remain entirely beyond the scope of our corporeal intellect. The Vedas emphatically declare:

yasyā mataṁ tasya mataṁ mataṁ yasya na veda saḥ
avijñātāṁ vijñātāṁ vijñātamavijñātāṁ
(Kenopaniṣhad 2.3)[v9]

"Those who think they can understand God with their intellects have no understanding of God. Only those who think that he is beyond the scope of their comprehension truly understand him."

The Bṛihadāraṇyak Upaniṣhad states:

sa eṣha neti netyātmā grihyoḥ (3.9.26)[v10]

"One can never comprehend God by self-effort based upon the intellect." The Ramayan states:

rāma atarkya buddhi mana bānī, mata hamāra asa sunahi sayānī [v11]

"Lord Ram is beyond the scope of our intellect, mind, and words." Now, if these statements on the topic of knowing God plainly declare that it is not possible to know him, how then can God-realization be possible for anyone? Shree Krishna reveals here how knowledge of God can be gained. He says that it is God who bestows divine knowledge upon the soul, and the fortunate soul who receives his grace is able to know him. The Yajur Veda states:

tasya no rāsya tasya no dhehī [v12]

"Without bathing oneself in the nectar emanating from the lotus feet of God, no one can know him." Thus, true knowledge of God is not a result of intellectual gymnastics but a consequence of divine grace. Shree 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.

BG 10.11: Out of compassion for them, I, who dwell within their hearts, destroy the darkness born of ignorance, with the luminous lamp of knowledge.

Commentary

In this verse, Shree 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 God talks about? At present, our senses, mind, and intellect are all material, while God is divine. Hence, we are unable to see him, hear him, know him, or be united with him. When God bestows his grace, he confers his divine Yogmaya energy upon the soul. It is also called śhuddha sattva (divine mode of goodness), which is distinct from the sattva guṇa (mode of goodness) of Maya. When we receive that śhuddha sattva energy, our sense, mind, and intellect become divine. To put it simply, by his grace, God bestows his divine senses, divine mind, and divine intellect to the soul. Equipped with these divine instruments, the soul is able to see God, hear God, know God, and be united with God. Hence, the Vedānt Darśhan states: viśheṣhānugrahaś cha (3.4.38)[v13] "Only by God's grace does one gain divine knowledge." In this way, the torchlight that Shree Krishna refers to is his divine power. By the light of God's divine power the darkness of the material energy is dispelled.

BG 10.12-13: Arjun said: You are the Supreme Divine Personality, the Supreme Abode, the Supreme Purifier, the Eternal God, 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.

Commentary

Commentators on the Vedic scriptures are sometimes fond of saying that Shree Krishna, Shree 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 God. However, Arjun refutes such viewpoints by declaring that Shree 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 Shree 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 Shree Krishna as the Supreme Divine Personality and the cause of all causes. In the Bheeshma Parva of the Mahabharat, there is a poem in which many sages eulogize Shree Krishna. Sage Narad says: "Shree Krishna is the creator of all the worlds and the knower of all feelings. He is the Lord of the celestial gods, who administer the universe." (Verse 68.2) Sage Markandeya states: "Lord 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 God of gods and the first original form of Lord Vishnu." (Verse 68.4) Sage Ved Vyas states: "O Lord Krishna, You are the Lord of the Vasus. You have conferred power on Indra and the other celestial gods." (Verse 68.5) Sage Angira says: "Lord Krishna is the creator of all beings. All the three worlds exist in his stomach. He is the Supreme Personality of Godhead." (Verse 68.6) Elsewhere in the Mahabharat, Sage Asit and Deval declare: "Shree Krishna is the creator of Brahma, who is the creator of the three worlds." (Mahabharat Vana Parva 12.50) Quoting these great authorities, Arjun says that now Shree Krishna is himself reconfirming their statements by declaring that he is the supreme cause of all creation.

BG 10.14: O Krishna, I totally accept everything You have told me as the Truth. O Lord, neither gods nor the demons can understand Your true personality.

Commentary

Listening attentively to Shree Krishna's divine opulence and unlimited supremacy in brief, Arjun's thirst for hearing more has increased. Wanting Shree Krishna to further describe his glories, he wishes to assure the Lord that he is fully convinced. By using the word yat, Arjun means that whatever Shree Krishna has said to him from the seventh to the ninth chapters, he holds as true. He asserts that all Shree Krishna has stated is factual and not any metaphorical description. He addresses Shree Krishna as Bhagavān, or the Supreme Lord. The word Bhagavān is defined in Devī Bhāgavat Purāṇ in the following manner:

aiśhwaryasya samagrasya dharmasya yaśhasaḥ śhriyaḥ

jñānavairāgyośhchaiva śaṇṇām bhagavānniḥ [v14]

"Bhagavān is he who possesses these six opulences to the infinite extent—strength, knowledge, beauty, fame, opulence, and renunciation." The devatās (celestial gods), dānavas (demons), mānavas (human beings) all have finite abilities to understand. They cannot comprehend the full identity of Bhagavān.

BG 10.15: Indeed, You alone know Yourself by Your inconceivable energy, O Supreme Personality, the Creator and Lord of all beings, the God of gods, and

the Lord of the universe!

Commentary

Emphasizing that Shree Krishna is the Supreme Divine Personality, Arjun refers to him as:

Bhūta-bhāvana – the Creator of all beings, the Universal Father.

Bhūteśh – the Supreme Controller, the Lord of all beings.

Jagat-pate – the Lord and Master of creation.

Deva-deva – the God of all the celestial gods.

The Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣhad declares the same fact:

yasmāt param nāparamasti kiñchid (3.9)[v15]

“God can never be surpassed; he is beyond everything.”

The previous verse stated that God cannot be known by anyone. This is clearly logical. All souls possess finite intellects, while God 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: “God whom we could know would be no God.” However in this verse, Arjun states that there is after all one personality who knows God, and that is God himself. Thus, Shree Krishna alone knows himself, and if he decides to grant his powers upon a soul, then that fortunate soul comes to know him as well.

BG 10.16-17: 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?

Commentary

Here, Yog refers to Yogmaya (God’s divine power), and yogi refers to the Master of Yogmaya. Arjun has understood that Shree Krishna is Bhagavān. He now wishes to know in what other ways, yet untold, is Shree Krishna’s vibhūti (transcendental majestic opulence) displayed throughout creation. He wishes to hear about Shree 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.”

BG 10.18: Tell me again in detail Your divine glories and manifestations, O Janardan. I can never tire of hearing your nectar.

Commentary

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 atīśhayokti, or hyperbole (statement of extreme expression), in which the subject of comparison is omitted. He also addresses Shree Krishna as Janardan, which means “a benevolent person from whom distressed people ask for relief.”

Descriptions of God’s glories are like nectar for those who love him. He has been drinking Shree Krishna’s ambrosial nectar-like words with his ears, and he now cheers him, by saying bhūyaḥ 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 Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam from Suta Goswami:

vayaṁ tu na vitṛipyāma uttamaśhlokavikrame

yachchhṛiṇvatāṁ rasajñānāṁ svādu svādu pade pade (1.1.19)[v16]

“Those who are devoted to Lord 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.”

BG 10.19: The Lord spoke: I shall now briefly describe My divine glories to you, O best of the Kurus, for there is no end to their detail.

Commentary

The Amar Kosh (ancient Sanskrit dictionary that is widely respected) defines vibhūti as vibhūtir bhūtir aiśwaryam [v17] (power and wealth). God’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):

anantaśhchātmā viśhwarūpo hyakartā
(Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣhad 1.9)[v18]

“God is infinite and manifests in innumerable forms in the universe. Although he administers the universe, he is yet the non-doer.” The Ramayan states:

hari ananta hari kathā anantā [v19]

“God 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 guṇānanantān anukramiṣhyan sa tu bāla-buddhiḥ
rajānsi bhūmer gaṇayet kathañchit kālena naivākhilaśhakti dhāmaḥ
(Bhāgavatam 11.4.2)[v20]

“Those who think they can count the glories of God 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 God.” Therefore, Shree Krishna says here that he will only be describing a small fraction of his vibhūtis.

BG 10.20: O Arjun, I am seated in the heart of all living entities. I am the beginning, middle, and end of all beings.

Commentary

Shree Krishna declares that he is not far from the soul—in fact he is closer than the closest. The ātmā or eternal soul is enthroned in the etheric heart of all living beings. The Vedas state: ya ātmani tiṣṭhati [v21] “God is seated within our soul.” Seated inside, he grants the power of consciousness and eternality to the soul. If he were to subtract his power, our soul itself would become insentient and perish. We souls are thus eternal and sentient, not by our own power, but because the supremely sentient and eternal God is seated within, and is granting his powers to us. Hence, Shree Krishna declares that he is situated in the heart of all living beings.

Our soul is the body of God, who is the Soul of our soul. The Bhāgavatam states:

harirhi sākṣhādbhagavān śharīriṇāmātmā jhaṣhāṇāmiva toyamīpsitam
(5.18.13)[v22]

“God is the ātmā of the ātmā (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 Shree Krishna, Parikshit asked him how this was

possible:

brahman parodbhave kṛiṣṇe iyān premā kathaṁ bhavet
(10.14.49)[v23]

“O Brahmin, all mothers are attached to their own children. How did the gopīs develop such intense attachment to Shree Krishna, which they did not even feel toward their own child?” Shukadev replied:

kṛiṣṇamenamavehi tvamātmānamakhilātmanām
(Bhāgavatam 10.14.55)[v24]

“Please understand that Lord Krishna is the Supreme Soul of all living beings in the universe. For the benefit of humankind, he has appeared in a human form by his Yogmaya power.”

Shree 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, God is also the end of all living beings. Amongst the various definitions of God given by the Vedas, one of them is:

yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante yena jātāni jīvanti, yatprayantyaabhisamviśhanti
(Taittirīya Upaniṣhad 3.1.1)[v25]

“God is he from whom all living beings have emanated; God is he within whom all living beings are situated; God is he into whom all living beings shall unite.”

BG 10.21: 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.

Commentary

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 Lord Vishnu. Thus, Shree 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 Ramayan states:

rākāpati ṣhorasa uahiṇ 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 Shree 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.” Shree 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 gods). 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. Shree Krishna states that his vibhūti (opulence) manifests in the wind called "Marichi."

BG 10.22: I am the Samaveda amongst the Vedas, and Indra amongst the celestial gods. Amongst the senses I am the mind; amongst the living beings I am consciousness.

Commentary

There are four Vedas—Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda, and Atharva Veda. Amongst these, the Sama Veda describes God's glories as they manifest in the celestial gods, who are in charge of administering the universe. The Sāma Veda is also the most musical and is sung in praise of the Lord. 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 gods. He is unparalleled among souls in fame, power, and rank. Only a soul with many lifetimes of pious deeds is promoted to the position of Indra. Thus, Indra reflects the resplendent glories of God.

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. Shree 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 15.7).

Consciousness is the quality of the soul 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 soul by the divine power of God. Hence, the Vedas state: chetanaśhchetanānām (Kaṭhapaniṣhad 2.2.13)[v27] "God is the sentience in the sentient."

BG 10.23: Amongst the rudras know Me to be Shankar; amongst the semi-celestial beings and demons I am Kuber. I am Agni amongst the vasus and Meru amongst the mountains.

Commentary

The rudras are the eleven forms of Lord 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 Lord Shiv in the universe.

Yakṣhas (semi-celestial beings) are beings who are very fond of acquiring wealth and hoarding it. Their leader, Kuber, is the god of wealth and the treasurer of the celestial gods. He thus reflects the vibhūti of God 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, Shree 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. Shree Krishna thus speaks of it as his glory. As wealth distinguishes a wealthy person, these glories reveal the vibhūtis of God.

BG 10.24: O Arjun, amongst priests, I am Brihaspati; amongst warrior chiefs I am Kartaikya; and amongst reservoirs of water, know Me to be the ocean.

Commentary

A priest discharges the function of performing ritualistic worship and

ceremonies in temples and homes. Brihaspati is the chief priest in heaven. He is thus the topmost of all priests. Here, Shree Krishna says that amongst priests, he is Brihaspati. However, in the Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam, verse 11.16.22, Shree 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 God that manifests in that object. All the objects of glory that Shree Krishna is describing here should also be understood in the same light. It is not the object that is being emphasized, rather God's opulence that is manifesting in it.

Kartikēya, the son of Lord Shiv, who is also called Skanda, is the commander-in-chief of the celestial gods. He is thus the chief of all military commanders, and best reflects the opulence of God. Shree Krishna further says that amongst stagnant bodies of water, he is the grave and mighty ocean.

BG 10.25: 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.

Commentary

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 God, 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. Lord 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. Shree Krishna's glory is revealed best through him.

Worshippers of God in his formless aspect like to meditate on the "Om" vibration, which is another vibhūti of God. Shree 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 God. This is called japa yajña, or the sacrifice of the devotional repetition of the divine names of God. 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 God is even more emphasized.

kalijuga kevala nāma ādhārā, sumiri sumiri nara utarahiṇ pārā (Ramayan)[v28]

"In the age of Kali, the chanting and remembrance of the names of God is the most powerful means of crossing the ocean of material existence."

BG 10.26: Amongst trees I am the peepal tree (sacred fig tree); of the celestial

sages I am Narad. Amongst the gandharvas I am Chitrath, and amongst the siddhas I am sage Kapil.

Commentary

The peepal tree (sacred fig 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 peepal tree (sacred fig 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 God 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 Sāṅkhya system of philosophy and also taught the glories of bhakti yog (described in detail in the Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam, third canto). He was an Avatār of God and thus Shree Krishna makes special mention of him as a manifestation of his glory.

BG 10.27: Amongst horses know Me to be Uchchaihshrava, begotten from the churning of the ocean of nectar. I am Airavata amongst all lordly elephants, and the king amongst humans.

Commentary

Shree Krishna continues naming the most magnificent in each category to reveal his glories to Arjun. Uchchaihshrava 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 gods) 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."

BG 10.28: I am the Vajra (thunderbolt) amongst weapons and Kamadhenu amongst the cows. I am Kaamdev, the god of love, amongst all causes for procreation; and amongst serpents, I am Vasuki.

Commentary

The Puranas relate the story of the sacrifice offered by the great sage Dadhichi, which was unparalleled in history. Indra, the king of heaven 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 Lord Shiv for help, who took him to Lord 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. Shree Krishna deliberately refers to this thunderbolt here as the representation of the glory of God, preferring it above the mace and disc that are always held in the hands of Lord Vishnu.

In this verse, Shree 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 god 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 God, and should not be misutilized for sensual enjoyment, but rather be used solely for the purpose of begetting worthy progeny. In verse 7.11 as well, Shree Krishna had declared that he is the sexual desire that is not in conflict with virtue and scriptural injunctions.

BG 10.29: Amongst the snakes I am Anant; amongst aquatics I am Varun. Amongst the departed ancestors I am Aryama; amongst dispensers of law I am Yamraj, the lord of death.

Commentary

Anant is the divine serpent on whom Lord Vishnu rests. He possesses ten thousand hoods. It is said that he has been describing the glories of God with each of his hoods since the beginning of creation, but the description has not yet been completed.

Varun is the celestial god of the ocean. Aryama is the third son of Aditi. He is worshipped as the head of the departed ancestors. Yamraj is the celestial god of death. He arranges to take the soul from its mortal frame after death. He dispenses justice on behalf of God for the soul'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 God as the perfect dispenser of justice.

BG 10.30: 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.

Commentary

Prahlad was born as the son of the powerful demon king, Hiranyakashipu. However, he turned out to be one of the greatest devotees of Lord Vishnu. Thus, amongst the demons, Prahlad best reflects God'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 Lord indeed reveals itself in the lion. Garud is the divine vehicle of Lord Vishnu, and the greatest amongst the birds.

BG 10.31: Amongst purifiers, I am the wind, and amongst wielders of weapons, I am Lord Ram. Of water creatures, I am the crocodile, and of flowing rivers, I am the Ganges.

Commentary

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.

Lord 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 God, and thus Shree Krishna identifies with him.

The Ganges is a holy river that has its beginning from the divine feet of the Lord. 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.

BG 10.32: 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.

Commentary

Earlier in the twentieth verse, Shree 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 mīmāṃsā nyāya vistaraḥ

purāṇaṁ dharmaśhāstraṁ cha vidyā hyetāśhchaturdaśha

āyurvedo dhanurvedo gāndharvaśhchaiva te trayas

arthaśhāstraṁ chaturthaṁ tu vidyā hyaṣṭādaśhaiva tāḥ

(Viṣṇu Purāṇ 3.6.27-28)[v29]

"Śhikśhā, Kalp, Vyākaraṇ, Nirukti, Jyotiṣh, Chhanda—these are the six types of knowledge known as Vedāṅg (limbs of the Vedas). Ṛig, Yajur, Sāma, Atharva—these are the four branches of Vedic knowledge. Along with Mīmāṃsā, Nyāya, Dharma Śhāstra, 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 Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam as well: sā vidyā tanmatiryaṁ (Verse 4.29.49)[v30] "The best knowledge is that by which the intellect becomes attached to the lotus feet of God."

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. Vitaṇḍa 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 God.

BG 10.33: 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.

Commentary

In Sanskrit, all letters are formed by combining a half-letter with "a." For example, क् + अ = क (k + a = ka). 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.

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) bahubrihi, 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. Shree 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, Lord 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 God.

BG 10.34: 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.

Commentary

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." God 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. Shree 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, Shree 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. Shree 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, Shree Krishna enlists these qualities as his vibhūtis.

BG 10.35: Amongst the hymns in the Samaveda know me to be the Brihatsama; amongst poetic meters I am the Gayatri. Of the twelve months of the Hindu calendar I am Margsheersha, and of seasons I am spring, which brings forth flowers.

Commentary

Earlier Shree 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:

bhūrbhuvah swah tatsaviturvareṇyam bhargo devasya dhīmahi dhiyo yo nah
prachodayāt

(Rig Veda 3.62.10)[v31]

"We meditate upon the Lord 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.

Margsheersha 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 God's opulence the most.

BG 10.36: 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.

Commentary

Shree Krishna mentions not only virtue but also vice as his opulence. Gambling is a dangerous vice that ruins families, businesses, and lives. It was Yudhishtir's weakness for gambling that led to the Mahabharat war. But if gambling is also God's glory, then is there no harm in it, and why is it forbidden?

The answer is that God grants his power to the soul, 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 God. But if he decides to misuse these God-given gifts, then God is not responsible for the sinful deeds.

Everyone likes victory; it reveals the glory of the Lord. Also, Shree 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 God's power. All virtues, achievements, glory, victory, and firm resolve originate from God. Instead of considering these as our own, we should see them as coming from him.

BG 10.37: Amongst the descendants of Vrishni, I am Krishna, and amongst the Pandavas I am Arjun. Know me to be Ved Vyas amongst the sages, and Shukracharya amongst the great thinkers.

Commentary

Lord Krishna took birth on the earth in the Vrishni dynasty as the son of Vasudev. Since no soul can excel the Lord, he is naturally the most glorious personality of the Vrishni dynasty. The Pandavas were the five sons of Pandu—Yudhishtir, Bhishma, Arjun, Nakul, and Sahadev. Amongst them, Arjun was an archer par-excellence, and was a very intimate devotee of Shree Krishna. He looked upon the Lord as his dear friend.

Ved Vyas is special amongst the sages. He is also known by the names "Badarayan" and "Krishna Dwaipayana." 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 Shree Krishna himself and is mentioned in the list of Avatārs in the Śhrīmad 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 God.

BG 10.38: 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.

Commentary

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 God.

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 God realization. A person endowed with it develops the perspective of seeing all events, persons, and objects in the light of their relationship with God. 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. Shree Krishna says that he is such wisdom that manifests in the wise.

BG 10.39: I am the generating seed of all living beings, O Arjun. No creature moving or non-moving can exist without Me.

Commentary

Shree 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, Shree 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: Aṇḍaj—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. Shree Krishna is the origin of all of them.

BG 10.40: 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.

Commentary

Shree 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 (uddeśhataḥ) of the breadth of the topic (vistāraḥ).

The question can be asked that if everything is the opulence of God, then what was the need of mentioning these? The answer is that Arjun had asked Shree 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 Lord has revealed these specialties amongst his powers. Whenever we see a special splendor manifesting anywhere, if we look on it as God's glory, then our mind will naturally be transported to him. In the larger scheme of things, however, since God'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, Shree Krishna's statement is tantamount to saying, "Wherever you see a manifestation of glory, think of me."

BG 10.41: Whatever you see as beautiful, glorious, or powerful, know it to spring from but a spark of My splendor.

Commentary

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 God. 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 God, who is the source of all glory, the object of our worship.

BG 10.42: 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.

Commentary

Shree 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 God's entire manifestation; the remaining three-fourths is the spiritual creation.

pādo 'sya viśhwā bhūtāni tripādasyāmṛitaṁ divi (Puruṣa Sūktam Mantra 3)[v32]

"This temporary world made from the material energy is but one part of the Supreme Divine Personality. The other three parts are his eternal abodes that are beyond the phenomenon of life and death."

Interestingly, Shree 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 Lord Shiv. Once, Sage Narad gave Lord Shiv a very special fruit. Lord Shiv's two children, Kartikeya and Ganesh both began demanding the fruit from him. Lord Shiv thought that if he would give it to any one of them, the other would think that their father was biased. So Lord 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. Lord Shiv and Parvati were standing there. Ganesh circumambulated them thrice, and then announced, "Father, I have done it. Please give me the

fruit." Lord Shiv, "But how have you gone around the universe? You have been with us all the while." Ganesh said, "Father, you are God. The entire universe exists within you. If I have gone around you, I have gone around the entire universe." Lord Shiv had to agree that his son Ganesh was very smart, and indeed he had won the competition.

Just as Lord Shiv was standing in one place, and yet the entire world was contained in him, similarly, Shree Krishna announces to Arjun that the entire creation, consisting of unlimited material universes, is held within a fraction of his being.

BG 11.1: Arjun said: Having heard the supremely confidential spiritual knowledge, which You have revealed out of compassion for me, my illusion is now dispelled.

Commentary

Arjun has rejoiced upon hearing Shree Krishna's vibhūti, as well as knowledge about the Supreme Personality, and he feels that his illusion is now dispelled. He has accepted that Shree Krishna is not merely his best friend, but also the Supreme Divine Personality, who is the source of all opulence in the world. Now in this chapter, he begins by gratefully acknowledging Shree Krishna's compassion in revealing such invaluable knowledge.

BG 11.2: 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 magnificence.

Commentary

Arjun continues his appreciation of Lord Krishna's glories by confirming his paramount position as the source of the appearance and disappearance of the entire material manifestation. He addresses Shree 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 Shree 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."

BG 11.3: O Supreme Lord, You are precisely what You declare yourself to be. Now I desire to see Your divine cosmic form, O Greatest of persons.

Commentary

Arjun addresses Shree 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 God as a person. They wish to perceive God as only an impersonal light, without attributes, virtues, qualities, and pastimes. However, when we tiny souls possess a personality, then why should we deny a personality to the Supreme Lord? Not only can he have a personality, but he also has the best personality, and therefore he is the Supreme Divine Personality. The difference between our personality and God'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 Shree 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 Shree Krishna's viśvarūp, or universal form, replete with all opulences. He wishes to view it with his own

eyes.

BG 11.4: O Lord of all mystic powers, if You think I am strong enough to behold It, then kindly reveal that imperishable cosmic form to me.

Commentary

In the previous verse, Arjun desired to see the cosmic form of the Supreme Divine Personality. 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-aishwarya (mystic opulence)." Yog is the science of uniting the individual soul with the Supreme soul, and those who practice this science are called yogis. The word Yogeshwar also means "Lord of all yogis." Since the object of attainment for all yogis is the Supreme Lord, Shree Krishna is consequently the Lord of all yogis. Previously, in verse 10.17, Arjun had addressed the Lord as "Yogi," implying "Master of yog." But he has now changed it to "Yogeshwar" because of his increased respect for Shree Krishna.

BG 11.5: The Supreme Lord said: Behold, O Parth, My hundreds and thousands of wonderful forms of various shapes, sizes, and colors.

Commentary

After listening to Arjun's prayers, Shree Krishna now asks him to have a vision of his viśhwarūp, 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. Shree Krishna uses the phrase śhataśho 'tha sahasraśhaḥ to indicate they exist in innumerable fashions and multitude ways.

Having asked Arjun to behold his universal form with infinite shapes and colors, Shree Krishna now asks Arjun to observe the celestial gods and other wonders in that cosmic form.

BG 11.6: 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.

Commentary

The universal form of the Lord 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 gods 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 gods) are: Sattvajyoti, Aditya, Satyajyoti, Tiriyagjyoti, Sajyoti, Jyotishman, Harita, Ritajit, Satyajit, Sushena, Senajit, Satyamitra, Abhimitra, Harimitra, Krita, Satya, Dhruv, Dharta, Vidharta, Vidharaya, Dhvanta, Dhuni, Ugra, Bhima, Abhiyu, Sakshipa, Idrick, Anyadrick, Yadrick, Pratikrit, Rik, Samiti, Samrambha, Idricksha, Purusha, Anyadricksha, Chetasa, Samita, Samidricksha, Pratidricksha, Maruti, Sarata, Deva, Disha, Yajuh, Anudrick, Sama, Manusha, and Vish.

BG 11.7: 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.

Commentary

After hearing Shree Krishna's instructions to behold his form, Arjun wonders where to see it. So Shree Krishna states that it is within the body of the Supreme Divine Personality. 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.

BG 11.8: But you cannot see My cosmic form with these physical eyes of yours. Therefore, I grant you divine vision. Behold My majestic opulence!

Commentary

When the Supreme Lord 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 souls in this material world cannot recognize God when he takes an Avatār on earth. Shree Krishna mentioned this in the ninth chapter, verse 11: "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 Lord 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, Shree 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, Shree 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 Lord. By his grace, God adds his divine eyes to the soul's material eyes; he adds his divine mind to the soul's material mind; he adds his divine intellect to the soul's material intellect. Then, equipped with the divine senses, mind, and intellect of God, the soul can see his divine form, think of it, and comprehend it.

BG 11.9: Sanjay said: O King, having spoken thus, the Supreme Lord of Yog, Shree Krishna, displayed his divine and opulent form to Arjun.

Commentary

Arjun had referred to Shree Krishna as "Yogeshwar" in verse 11.4. Now, Sanjay refers to him as "Maha-Yogeshwar," adding the superlative "great" to the address "Lord of all yogis." Sanjay was bestowed with the gift of far-sighted vision by his Guru, Ved Vyas. So he also beheld the Lord'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 God is replete with the manifestation of his opulences, and it invokes fear, awe, and reverence in the beholder.

BG 11.10-11: 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 Lord whose face is everywhere.

Commentary

Sanjay elaborates upon Shree Krishna's divine universal form with the words aneka (many) and anant (unlimited). The entire creation is the body of God'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 God 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.

BG 11.12: If a thousand suns were to blaze forth together in the sky, they would not match the splendor of that great form.

Commentary

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, God'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.

BG 11.13: There Arjun could see the totality of the entire universe established in one place, in that body of the God of gods.

Commentary

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 Shree 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 Lord.

During his childhood pastimes, Shree Krishna had also revealed the cosmic form to his mother, Yashoda. The Supreme Lord had hidden his mystic opulences and was playing the role of a little child for the pleasure of his devotees. Thinking of Shree 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 Shree Krishna opened his mouth, he revealed within it a vision of his cosmic form by his Yogmaya 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 Shree Krishna touched her and brought her back to normalcy.

The same cosmic form that the Lord 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.

BG 11.14: Then, Arjun, full of wonder and with hair standing on end, bowed his head before the Lord and addressed Him, with folded hands.

Commentary

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 aṣṭa sāttvic bhāva, that sometimes manifests in devotees when their heart gets thrilled in devotion:

stambha swedo ' tha romāñchaḥ svarabhedo 'tha vepathuḥ

vaivarṇyamaśhru pralaya ityaṣṭau 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.

BG 11.15: Arjun said: O Shree 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.

Commentary

Arjun exclaimed that he was beholding multitudes of beings from all the three worlds, including the gods of the celestial abodes. The words *kamalāsanāsatham* refer to Lord Brahma, who sits at the lotus whorl of the universe. Lord Shiv, sages like Vishwamitra, and serpents such as Vasuki were all visible within the cosmic form.

BG 11.16: I see Your infinite form in every direction, with countless arms, stomachs, faces, and eyes. O Lord of the universe, whose form is the universe itself, I do not see in You any beginning, middle, or end.

Commentary

Arjun uses two vocatives—*viśhveśhwar*, meaning "controller of the universe" and *viśhwarūp*, meaning "universal form." He implies, "O Shree 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.

BG 11.17: 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.

Commentary

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 Lord.

Within the universal form, Arjun also perceived the four-armed Vishnu form of the Lord, with the four famous emblems—mace, conch, disc, and lotus flower.

BG 11.18: 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.

Commentary

Arjun announced that he recognized the sovereignty of Shree Krishna's position as the Supreme Lord, who is the support of all creation, and who is to be known through all the scriptures. The *Kaṭhopanishad* states:

sarve vedā yat padamāmananti (1.2.15)[v2]

"The aim of all the Vedic mantras is to take us in the direction of God. He is the object of the study of the Vedas." The *Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam* states:

vāsudeva-parā vedā vāsudeva-parā makhāḥ (1.2.28)[v3]

"The goal of cultivating Vedic knowledge is to reach God. All sacrifices are also meant for pleasing him." In his tribute to Shree Krishna, Arjun expressed his realization that the personal form of the Lord, standing before him, was the same supreme absolute truth that is the object of all Vedic knowledge.

BG 11.19: 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.

Commentary

In the sixteenth verse, Arjun had said that the form of the Lord 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.

God 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 Lord. Thus, it is he who provides warmth to the universe through these entities.

BG 11.20: The space between heaven and earth and all the directions is pervaded by You alone. Seeing Your wondrous and terrible form, I see the three worlds trembling in fear, O Greatest of all beings.

Commentary

Arjun says, "O Omnipresent Lord, 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 God'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 (Ramayan) [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. God is the supreme law-maker, and everyone is subject to the dominion of his laws.

BG 11.21: All the celestial gods 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.

Commentary

Arjun is seeing here the kāla rūp of Shree Krishna, i.e. his form as all-devouring time. The marching onslaught of time consumes even the greatest of personalities, including the celestial gods. Arjun sees them entering the universal form, with folded hands, in subservience to the kāla rūp of God. At the same time, he sees the sages and perfected souls, extolling the Lord with their thoughts, words, and deeds.

BG 11.22: The rudras, adityas, vasus, sadhyas, vishvadevas, Ashwini Kumars, maruts, ancestors, gandharvas, yakshas, asuras, and siddhas are all beholding You in wonder.

Commentary

All these personalities receive their positions by the power of God and they discharge their respective duties in reverence to the Laws of Creation. Thus, they are all mentioned as beholding the cosmic form of God with wonder.

BG 11.23: O mighty Lord, 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.

Commentary

The numerous hands, legs, faces, and stomach of God are everywhere. The Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣhad states:

sahasraśhīrṣhā puruṣhaḥ sahasrākṣhaḥ sahasrapāt

sa bhūmim 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 Lord. Again, the Kaṭhapaniṣhad states:

bhayādasyāgnistapati bhayāt tapati sūryaḥ

bhayādindraśhcha vāyuśhcha mṛityurdhāvati pañchamaḥ (2.3.3)[v6]

“It is from the fear of God 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 god of death, trembles before him.”

BG 11.24: O Lord 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.

Commentary

Seeing the cosmic form of God changed the nature of Arjun’s relationship with Shree 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 Shree Krishna was God, but the love overflowing in his heart would make him forget the almighty aspect of Shree Krishna’s personality. All he would remember was that he loved his friend Shree 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 Lord. 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 God.

The cowherds of Braj merely viewed Shree Krishna as their bosom buddy. Jagadguru Shree Kripaluji Maharaj describes their pastimes with Shree Krishna very sweetly:

dekho dekho rī, gwāla bālana yāri

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 Shree Krishna and his cowherd friends! They play games together, and when Shree 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 Shree Krishna was God, they would never have the gumption to do such a thing. And the Lord too relishes the intimacy of such interactions with his devotees in which they relate with him as a dear friend.

Shree 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 heaven and the celestial god 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 Shree Kripaluji Maharaj states in continuation to the verse above:

nakha dhāryo goverdhana-giri jaba, sakhana kahyo hama giridhārī

(Prem Ras Madirā, Rasiyā Mādhurī, Pada 7)[v8]

“When Shree 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 Shree Krishna’s supreme position.

Now, when the cowherd boys saw Indra, the King of heaven, coming and offering obeisance to their friend Krishna, they realized that Krishna is God. So, they began looking at him fearfully from a distance. Seeing their devotional sentiment change from friendship to awe and reverence, Shree Krishna lamented, “That loving exchange we were enjoying has vanished. They are now thinking I am God.” So by his Yogmaya power, he made them forget the significance of what they had seen, and they again felt that Shree Krishna was nothing more than their friend.

Arjun was also a devotee of Shree Krishna in sakhya bhāv. He was used to relating to Shree Krishna as his friend. That is why he had agreed to having Shree Krishna as his chariot driver. If his devotion had been motivated by the fact that Shree Krishna was the Supreme Lord 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 Shree Krishna was replaced by fear.

BG 11.25: 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 Lord of lords, You are the shelter of the universe; please have mercy on me.

Commentary

The universal form that Arjun beholds is just another aspect of Shree 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 Shree Krishna, and he is overcome with fear. Seeing the many wondrous and amazingly frightful manifestations of the Lord, Arjun is now scared, and thinks that Shree Krishna is angry with him. So he asks for mercy.

BG 11.26-27: 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.

Commentary

What are the teeth of God that Arjun is referring to? He mentioned them in the previous verse as well. We use our teeth to grind our food. God'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 God 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 Lord, to be ground between his teeth. He is beholding the imminent future in the cosmic form of God. Since God 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 Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam describes Bheeshma's prayer to the Lord, when he lay on the bed of arrows at the end of his life:

sapadi sakhi-vacho niśhamya madhye nija-parayor balayo ratham niveśhya

sthitavati para-sainikāyur akṣhṇā hṛitavati pārtha-sakhe ratir mamāstu (1.9.35)
[v10]

"Let my mind meditate upon Arjun's dear pal, Shree 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 Lord Shree 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 Shree Krishna disclosed to him he was the eldest son of Kunti and the Pandavas were actually his brothers, he asked Shree 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.

BG 11.28-29: 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.

Commentary

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.

BG 11.30: 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.

Commentary

The Lord 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 God, 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 Shree Krishna in the next verse.

BG 11.31: Tell me who You are, so fierce of form. O God 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.

Commentary

Earlier, Arjun had requested to see the universal form. When Shree Krishna exhibited it, Arjun became bewildered and agitated. Having witnessed an almost unbelievable cosmic spectacle, he now wants to know the very heart of God's nature and purpose. Hence, he asks the question, "Who are you and what is your purpose?"

BG 11.32: The Supreme Lord 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.

Commentary

In response to Arjun's question regarding who he is, Shree 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 Shree 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 Lord 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? Shree Krishna explains this in the next verse.

BG 11.33: 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.

Commentary

Shree 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. God does not need the help of a human for his work, but humans attain eternal welfare by working to fulfill God's wish. Opportunities that come our way to accomplish something for the pleasure of the Lord 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 God.

Shree 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.

BG 11.34: Dronacharya, Bheeshma, Jayadratha, Karn, and other brave warriors have already been killed by Me. Therefore, slay them without being disturbed. Just fight and you will be victorious over your enemies in battle.

Commentary

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 "Śhakti" 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 God. Bheeshma had a boon that he would only die when he chose to do so. And yet, if God wished them to die in the battle, then nothing could save them. There is a saying:

vindhya na īndhana pāiye, sāgara juḍai na nīra

parai upas kuber ghara, jyoṇ vipakṣha raghubīra [v11]

"If Lord Ram decides to be against you, then you may live in the Vindhyachal 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 god of wealth, but you will not have enough to eat." Thus, even the biggest arrangements for security cannot avert a person's death if God has willed it to happen. Similarly, Shree 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 God, it is God's nature to glorify his devotees. Hence, Shree 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 God wants you to succeed. Your effort will be instrumental, while God will fashion your victory by his grace."

What was Arjun's reaction upon hearing the Lord's call to action? This is stated in the next verse.

BG 11.35: Sanjay said: Hearing these words of Keshav, Arjun trembled with dread. With palms joined, he bowed before Shree Krishna and spoke in a faltering voice, overwhelmed with fear.

Commentary

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.

BG 11.36: Arjun said: O Master of the senses, it is but apt that the universe rejoices in giving You praise and is enamored by You. Demons flee fearfully from You in all directions and hosts of perfected saints bow to You.

Commentary

In this verse and the next ten, Arjun eulogizes Shree 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 Lord, the demons become frightened of him, and the saintly personalities offer devotional prayers to him.

BG 11.37: O Great One, who are even greater than Brahma, the original creator, why should they not bow to you? O Limitless One, O Lord of the devatās, O Refuge of the universe, You are the imperishable reality beyond both the manifest and the non-manifest.

Commentary

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 Lord, 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 souls can ever do anything to impact his personality, which is transcendental to both.

Arjun specifically mentions that Shree 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 Lord Vishnu, who is an expansion of Shree Krishna. Thus, while Brahma is considered as the senior most grandsire of the world, Shree Krishna is Brahma's Grandsire. It is thus apt that Brahma should bow to him.

BG 11.38: You are the primeval God 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.

Commentary

Arjun addresses Shree 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 Lord Vishnu has a cause. Although he is also a form of God, he is an expansion of Shree Krishna. However, Shree Krishna is not the expansion of any personality. He is the causeless first cause of everything that exists. Hence, Brahma prays to him:

iśhwarah paramah kṛiṣṇaṇah sachchidānanda vigrahaḥ

anādirādi govindah sarva kāraṇa kāraṇam (Brahma Samhitā 5.1)[v12]

"Shree Krishna is the original form of the Supreme Lord. 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."

Shree Krishna is omniscient—the knower of everything. Further, he is also the object of all knowledge. The Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam (4.29.49) states: *sā vidyā tanmatir yayā* [v13] "True knowledge is that which helps us know God." Jagadguru Shree Kripaluji Maharaj states:

jo hari sevā hetu ho, soī karm bakhān

jo hari bhagati baṛhāve, soī samujhiya jñāna (Bhakti Śhatak verse 66)[v14]

"Whatever work is done in the service of God, know that truly to be karm. Whatever knowledge enhances our love for God, know that to be true jñāna." Hence, Shree Krishna is both the knower and the object of knowledge.

BG 11.39: You are Vāyu (god of wind), Yamraj (god of death), Agni (god of fire), Varuṇ (god of water), and Chandra (moon-god). 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!

Commentary

Experiencing profuse reverence toward Shree Krishna, Arjun is offering repeated obeisances sahasra-kṛitvaḥ (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 gods have their distinct personalities and unique set of duties to discharge in the administration of the world. However, the same one God 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 God is all the devatās but the devatās are not God. Hence, in this verse, Arjun says that Shree Krishna is also Vāyu, Yamraj, Agni, Varuṇ, Chandra, and Brahma.

BG 11.40: O Lord 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.

Commentary

Arjun continues with his glorification of Shree Krishna by declaring him as ananta-vīrya (possessing infinite strength) and ananta-vikramaḥ (immeasurably powerful). Overcome with awe, he offers his salutations to Shree Krishna from all sides, repeatedly exclaiming Namaḥ! Namaḥ! (I bow down to you again and again).

BG 11.41-42: Thinking of You as my friend, I presumptuously addressed You as, "O Krishna," "O Yadav," "O my dear Friend." 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.

Commentary

Declaring the unparalleled supremacy of God, all the scriptures state:

aham evāsam evāgre nānyat kiñchāntaraṁ bahiḥ (Bhāgavatam 6.4.47)[v15]

"I, the Supreme Lord, am everything that exists. There is nothing beyond me and nothing higher than me."

tvamomkāraḥ parātparaḥ (Vālmiki Ramayan)[v16]

"The primordial sound "Om" is your manifestation. You are greater than the greatest."

vāsudevaḥ praḥ prabhuḥ (Nārad Pañcharātra)[v17]

"Shree Krishna is the ultimate Supreme Lord."

na devaḥ keśhavāt paraḥ (Nārad Purāṇ)[v18]

"There is no god higher than Lord Krishna."

vidyāt taṁ puruṣhaṁ param (Manu Smṛiti 12.122)[v19]

"God 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 Shree Krishna, Arjun had shared many intimate memorable moments with him, blissfully oblivious of his supreme position.

Having seen the universal form of God, Arjun is now painfully aware that Shree Krishna is not merely his friend and comrade-in-arms, but is also the Supreme Divine Personality, whom even the devatās, gandharvas, siddhas, etc. venerate. Thus, he feels regret for the disrespect he thinks he may have shown toward Shree Krishna by audaciously looking upon him as a mere friend. As an indication of respect, those who are venerated are not called by their first names. He is worried that due to excessive familiarity, he had put himself on equal status with God 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 Shree Krishna's personality.

BG 11.43: 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?

Commentary

Arjun says that Shree Krishna is the greatest and the senior most. The father is always senior to the son. Shree 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 Shree Krishna. The Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam (1.1.1) states: tene brahma hṛidāya ādi kavaye [v20] "Shree Krishna imparted Vedic knowledge into the heart of the first-born Brahma." Thus, he is the supreme spiritual master.

The Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣhad states:

na tatsamaśchābhyadhikaś cha dṛiśhyate (6.8)[v21]

"Nobody is equal to God, nor is anyone superior to him." Realizing Shree Krishna to be that same Supreme Lord of the Vedas, Arjun is declaring the above attributes regarding him.

BG 11.44: Therefore, O adorable Lord, 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.

Commentary

Considering his behavior as transgressions toward God, Arjun is asking for

pardon. While interacting with Shree 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 Shree 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.

BG 11.45: 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 God of gods, O Abode of the universe.

Commentary

There are two kinds of bhakti—aiśhwarya bhakti and mādhyura bhakti. Aiśhwarya bhakti is that where the devotee is motivated to engage in devotion by contemplating upon the almighty aspect of God. The dominant sentiment in aiśhwarya bhakti is of awe and reverence. In such devotion, the feeling of remoteness from God 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 Shree Krishna and Lord Ram respectively as their kings. Ordinary citizens are highly respectful and obedient toward their king, although they never feel intimate with him.

Mādhyura bhakti is that where the devotee feels an intimate personal relationship with God. The dominant sentiment in such devotion is "Shree Krishna is mine and I am his." Examples of mādhyura 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. Mādhyura bhakti is infinitely sweeter than aiśhwarya bhakti. Hence, Jagadguru Shree Kripaluji Maharaj states:

sabai sarasa rasa dwārikā, mathurā aru braja māhiñ

madhura, madhuratara, madhuratama, rasa brajarasa sama nāhiñ

(Bhakti Śhatak verse 70)[v22]

"The divine bliss of God 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 Mādhyura bhakti, forgetting the almightiness of God, devotees establish four kinds of relationships with Shree Krishna:

Dāśya bhāv—Shree Krishna is our Master and I am his servant. The devotion of Shree Krishna's personal servants, such as Raktak, Patrak, etc. was in dāśya bhāv. The sentiment that God is our Father or Mother is a variation of dāśya bhāv and is included in it.

Sakhya bhāv—Shree Krishna is our Friend and I am his intimate companion. The devotion of the cowherd boys of Vrindavan, such as Shreedama, Madhumangal, Dhansukh, Mansukh, etc. was in sakhyā bhāv.

Vātsalya bhāv—Shree Krishna is our Child and I am his parent. The devotion of Yashoda and Nand baba was in vātsalya bhāv.

Mādhurya bhāv—Shree Krishna is our Beloved and I am his lover. The devotion of the gopīs of Vrindavan was in mādhurya bhāv.

Arjun is a sakhya bhāv devotee and relishes a fraternal relationship with the Lord. On seeing the universal form of God, Arjun experienced tremendous awe and reverence, and yet he longed for the sweetness of sakhya bhāv that he was used to savoring. Hence, he prays to Shree Krishna to hide the almighty form that he is now seeing and again show his human form.

BG 11.46: 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.

Commentary

By special grace, Arjun has been shown the cosmic form that is not easily seen by anyone. Arjun has realized that Shree 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 God Almighty. Rather, he prefers seeing that Almighty Lord in the human form, so that he can relate to him as before, like a friend. Addressing Lord Krishna as sahasra-bāho, meaning “thousand-armed one,” Arjuna is now specifically requesting to see the chatur-bhuj rūp, or four-armed form of Lord Krishna.

In the four-armed form, Shree 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 Shree Krishna revealed himself in his four-armed form.

niśhama bhīma-gaditaṁ draupadyāśh cha chatur-bhujāḥ

ālokyā vadanāṁ sakhyur idam āha hasanniva (Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam 1.7.52)[v23]

“The four-armed Shree Krishna heard the statements of Bheem, Draupadi, and others. Then he looked toward his dear friend Arjun and began smiling.” By requesting Shree Krishna to manifest in his four-armed form, Arjun is also confirming that the four-armed form of the Lord is non-different from his two-armed form.

BG 11.47: The Lord said: Arjun, being pleased with you, by My Yogmaya power, I gave you a vision of My resplendent, unlimited, and primeval cosmic form. No one before you has ever seen it.

Commentary

Since Arjun had become fearful and beseeched that the cosmic form be hidden, Shree 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.

Shree Krishna bestowed this divine vision upon Arjun with the help of his Yogmaya energy. This is the divine all-powerful energy of God. He has referred to it in many places, such as verses 4.6 and 7.25. It is by virtue of this Yogmaya energy that God is kartumakartum anyathā karatū samarthāḥ “He can do the possible, the impossible, and the contradictory at the same time.” This divine power of God 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.

BG 11.48: 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.

Commentary

Shree 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 God. This is only possible by his divine grace. This has been repeatedly stated in the Vedas as well:

tasya no hrāsva tasya no dhehi (Yajur Veda)[v24]

“Without being anointed in the nectar of the grace of the Supreme Lord, 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 Lord is non-material—he is divine. To have a vision of his divine form we need divine eyes. When God bestows his grace upon the soul, 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 Mahabharat states that Sanjay also received by the grace of his Guru, Ved Vyas, who was an Avatār of God. Before the war, the Ved Vyas 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.

BG 11.49: 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.

Commentary

Shree 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.

BG 11.50: 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.

Commentary

Shree 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 Shree 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 sakḥā (friend) of Shree Krishna, and devotion dominated by the sentiment of awe and reverence would never satisfy him. He had played with Shree Krishna, eaten with him, confided his private secrets to him, and shared loving personal moments with him. Such blissful devotion of sakḥya bhāva (devotion where God is seen as a personal friend) is infinitely sweeter than aiśwarya bhakti (devotion where God is revered as the distant and almighty Lord). Hence, to conform to Arjun's sentiment of devotion, Shree Krishna finally hid even his four-armed form, and transformed into his original two-armed form.

Once in the forest of Vrindavan, Shree 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 Lord 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 Lord Shree Krishna as their soul-beloved, and this form of his as Lord Vishnu held no attraction for them. However, Radharani came onto the scene, and upon seeing her, Shree 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, Shree Krishna returned to his most attractive two-armed form.

BG 11.51: Arjun said: O Shree Krishna, seeing Your gentle human form (two-armed), I have regained my composure and my mind is restored to normal.

Commentary

Seeing Shree 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 Shree Krishna's pastimes with the Pandavas, the celestial sage Narad had earlier told Arjun's elder brother, King Yudhishtir: gūḍhaṁ paraṁ brahma manuṣhya liṅgam (Bhāgavatam 7.15.75)[v25] "Shree 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 Lord as a brother and friend.

BG 11.52-53: The Supreme Lord said: This form of Mine that you are seeing is exceedingly difficult to behold. Even the celestial gods 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.

Commentary

Having shown Arjun the cosmic form, and having praised it as being unavailable to anyone but him, Shree Krishna does not want him to slacken his love for the personal form of God. Hence, Shree Krishna says that the way in which Arjun sees God is exceedingly rare. He emphasizes that even the celestial gods yearn to realize God 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 God 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 Muṇḍakopaniṣad states:

nāyamātmā pravachanena labhyo na medhayā na bahunā śrutena (3.2.3)[v26]

"God 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 God in his personal form, then how can he be seen in this manner? He now reveals the secret.

BG 11.54: 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.

Commentary

In this verse, Shree 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, Shree 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:

bhaktirevainaṁ nayati bhaktirevainaṁ paśhyati bhaktirevainaṁ darśhayati bhakti vaśhaḥ

puruṣho bhaktireva gariyasī (Māṭhar Śhruti)[v27]

“Devotion alone will unite us with God; devotion alone will help us see him; devotion alone will help us attain him; God is enslaved by true devotion, which is the best of all paths.”

na sādhayati mām yogo na sāṅkhyāṁ 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 aṣṭāṅg yog, studying Sāṅkhya and other philosophies, performing pious acts and austerities, or cultivating renunciation.”

bhaktyāham ekayā grāhyaḥ śhraddhayātmā priyaḥ 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.”

milahiṁ na raghupati binu anurāgā, kieṇ joga tapa gyāna birāgā. (Ramayan)[v30]

“Without devotion, one can never attain God, no matter how much one endeavors through the practice of aṣṭāṅg yog, austerities, knowledge, and detachment.” In the next verse, Shree Krishna describes what bhakti is.

BG 11.55: 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.

Commentary

At the end of the ninth chapter, Shree 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 God, thus consecrating every act of theirs to him. The Saint Kabir states:

jahaṁ jahaṁ chalūṁ karūṁ parikramā, jo jo karūṁ so sevā

jaba sovūṁ karūṁ daṇḍavat, jānūṁ deva na dūjā [v31]

“When I walk, I think I am circumambulating the Lord; when I work, I think I am serving the Lord; 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 God 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 in 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 aṣṭāṅg yog, performance of fire sacrifices, etc. In this way, they feel that their relationship is with God alone. They behold only their Beloved

Lord 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 God alone.

They are without malice toward all beings. If the heart fills up with malice, it will again not remain exclusive toward God. Thus, exclusive devotees do not harbor any malice, even toward those who have harmed them. Instead, thinking that God resides in the heart of all beings, they see all actions as stemming from him and so they forgive even their wrongdoers.

BG 12.1: Arjun inquired: 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?

Commentary

In the last chapter, Arjun saw the cosmic form of the Lord, which encompasses the entire universe. Having seen it, he preferred to behold God 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 God or those who worship the impersonal Brahman.

Arjun's question once again confirms that God has both aspects—the all-pervading formless Brahman and the personal form. Those who say that God cannot possess a personal form limit Him, and those who say that God only exists in a personal form also limit Him. God is perfect and complete, and so He is both formless and possessing forms. We individual souls too have both aspects to our personality. The soul is formless, and yet it has taken on a body, not once, but innumerable times, in countless past lifetimes. If we tiny souls have the ability to possess a form, can the all-powerful God not possess a form whenever He wishes? Even the great proponent of the path of jñāna-yog, Jagadguru Shankaracharya, stated:

mūrtam chaivāmūrtam dve eva brahmaṇo rūpe, ityupaniṣhat tayorvā dwau

bhaktau bhagavadupaśiṣṭau, kleśhādakleśhādewā muktisyaāderatayormadhye

"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."

BG 12.2: The Lord 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.

Commentary

God 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, God 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 God), the Paramātmā (the Supreme Soul seated in the heart of all living beings, distinct from the individual soul), and Bhagavān (the personal manifestation of God that descends upon the earth). The Bhagavatam states:

vadanti tat tattva vidastattvaṁ yaj-jñānamadvayam

brahmeti paramātmēti bhagavān iti śhabdyate (1.2.11)

“The knowers of the Truth have stated that there is only one Supreme Entity that manifests in three ways in the world—Brahman, Paramātmā, and Bhagavān.” They are not three different Gods; rather, They are three manifestations of the one Almighty God. However, Their qualities are different. This is just as water, steam, and ice are all made from the same substance—H₂O 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, Paramātmā, and Bhagavān are manifestations of the one Supreme Lord but Their qualities are different.

Brahman is the all-pervading form of God, which is everywhere. The Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣhad states:

eko devaḥ sarvabhūteṣhu gūḍhaḥ

sarvavyāpī sarvabhūtāntarātmā...(6.11)

“There is only one Supreme Entity. He is seated in everything and everyone.” This all-pervading aspect of the Lord is called Brahman. It is full of eternality, knowledge, and bliss. However in this aspect, God does not manifest His infinite qualities, enchanting personal beauty, and sweet Pastimes. He is like a divine light that is nirguṇa (without qualities), nirvivśeṣh (without attributes), nirākār (without form).

Those who follow the path of jñāna-yog worship this aspect of God. This is a distant realization of God as a formless light, just as the train from far appeared like light.

Paramātmā is the aspect of God that is seated in everyone’s hearts. In verse 18.61, Shree Krishna states: “The Supreme Lord dwells in the hearts of all living beings, O Arjun. According to their karmas, He directs the wanderings of the souls, who are seated on a machine made of material energy.” Residing within, God 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 God 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, God went along with us. He is such a friend who never leaves us for even a moment. This aspect of God dwelling within is the Paramātmā.

The path of aṣṭāṅg-yog, as revealed by Patanjali in the Yog Darśhan, strives to realize God seated inside, and leads to the Paramātmā realization of God. 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 Paramātmā is a closer realization than Brahman.

Bhagavān is the aspect of God that manifests with a personal form. The Shreemad Bhagavatam states:

kṛiṣṇam enam avehi tvam ātmānam akhilātmanām
jagad-dhitāya so 'pyatra dehivābhāti māyayā (10.14.55)

“The Supreme Lord who is the Soul of all souls, has descended upon the earth in His personal form, as Shree Krishna, for the welfare of the world.” In this

Bhagavān aspect, God manifests all the sweetness of His Names, Forms, Qualities, Abodes, Pastimes, and Associates. These attributes exist in Brahman and Paramātmā as well, but they remain latent, just as fire is latent in a matchstick, and only manifests when it is struck against the igniting strip of the matchbox. Similarly, as Bhagavān, all the powers and aspects of God'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 God, just as the details of a train become visible when it comes and stops in front of the observer. Hence, in verse 18.55, Shree Krishna states: "Only by loving devotion to Me does one come to know who I am in Truth." Thus, Shree Krishna answers Arjun's question by clarifying that He considers the devotee of His personal form to be the highest yogi.

BG 12.3-4: 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 immovable—by restraining their senses and being even-minded everywhere, such persons, engaged in the welfare of all beings, also attain Me.

Commentary

Having said that worship of the personal form is the best, Shree 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 God.

Living beings are of an infinite variety of natures. The Supreme Lord 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 God into categories. Accordingly, Ved Vyas has classified God's various manifestations into three types, Brahman, Paramātmā, 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 God is the only correct one while those of the others are erroneous.

In verse 4.11, Shree Krishna had stated: "In whatever way people surrender unto Me, I reciprocate accordingly. Everyone follows My path, knowingly or unknowingly, O son of Pritha." Here, Shree 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, God meets them as the unmanifest, all-pervading Brahman.

BG 12.5: 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.

Commentary

Having embraced worshippers of all His various manifestations into the fold, Shree 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 God 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 Lord. 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 God 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 markaṭ-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 nirguṇa (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 God as nirguṇa, nirviśheṣh, and nirākār, have to rely entirely upon self-effort for progress. On the other hand, the personal form of God 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 God bestows upon His devotees, Shree Krishna stated in verse 9.31: "O son of Kunti, declare it boldly that no devotee of Mine is ever lost." He confirms the same statement in the next two verses.

BG 12.6-7: 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.

Commentary

Shree Krishna reiterates that His devotees reach Him quickly. Firstly, with the personal form of God 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 God, 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 God.

Secondly, since such devotees continuously offer their hearts in uninterrupted bhakti, God 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, God Himself becomes the Savior of His devotees and delivers them from mṛityu sāmsāra sāgarāt (the cycle of life and death).

BG 12.8: 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.

Commentary

Having explained that worship of the personal form is better, Shree Krishna now begins to explain how to worship Him. He asks Arjun to do two things—fix the mind on God 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 puṁsi muktaye
(Bhagavatam 3.25.15)

"Captivity in Maya 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 kāraṇam bandha mokṣhayoḥ (Pañchadaśī)

"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 God. 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, God 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 God 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, who went to get Shree Krishna from Vrindavan to Mathura, described these imperfections of the intellect in the Bhagavatam (10.40.25): anityānātma duḥkheṣhu viparyaya matirhyaham Akrur said: "Our intellect is strapped with wrong knowledge. Though we are eternal souls, 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 God, we must surrender our intellect to Him and follow His directions. Surrendering the intellect means to think in accordance with the knowledge received from God via the medium of the scriptures and the bonafide Guru. The characteristics of a surrendered intellect are described in verse 18.62.

BG 12.9: 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.

Commentary

Fixing the mind upon Shree 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 God? Shree 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 God through repeated practice.” Each time the mind wanders toward other objects and ideas, the devotee must strive to bring it back to God through remembrance of His Names, Forms, Virtues, Pastimes, Abodes, and Associates.

Jagadguru Shree Kripaluji Maharaj emphasizes this repeated practice in his instructions for sādhaḥs:

jagata te mana ko haṭā kara, lagā hari meñ pyāre

isī kā abhyāsa puni puni, karu nirantara pyāre (Sādhana Karu Pyāre)

“O dear one, remove the mind from the world and fix it on God. Practice this constantly, again and again!”

BG 12.10: 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.

Commentary

The instruction to practice to remember God is also often easier said than done. The mind is made from the material energy Maya and it naturally runs toward the material objects of the world, while taking it toward God requires conscious and determined effort. We may hear the instruction that we should think of God, and we may desire to implement it, but when we get absorbed in our work, God slips out of the mind. So what should those people do who find it difficult to practice the remembrance of God at all times of the day? Shree Krishna answers this question in the above verse.

Those who cannot constantly remember God 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 Lord, 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 God, 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 God.” 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 God with it. That is why I will carefully do the tasks required for its maintenance.”

When we practice working for the pleasure of God, 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 Lord Krishna, our mind will become steady and we will soon be able to focus upon Him. Then, gradually love for God will manifest within the heart, and we will gain success in constantly thinking of Him.

BG 12.11: 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.

Commentary

Beginning with verse 12.8, Shree 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 God, and have not yet made God-realization the goal of their lives, may find it impossible to work for His pleasure. Therefore, Shree 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.

BG 12.12: 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.

Commentary

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 God. 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, Shree Krishna says that higher than mechanical practice is the cultivation of spiritual knowledge. Knowledge bestows the understanding that the goal of life is God-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, Shree 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.

BG 12.13-14: 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-content, steadily united with Me in devotion, self-controlled, of firm resolve, and dedicated to Me in mind and intellect.

Commentary

Having stated that devotion to His personal form is the best, Shree 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 God. If they harbor envy toward others, it is tantamount to harboring envy toward God 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 God. 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 God. So whatever results come their way, they see them as the will of God, 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 God.

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 God. This absorption is not occasional or intermittent, but steady and constant because they are established in their relationship with God.

Self-controlled. Devotees attach their mind to God 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 soul is a servant of God by its inherent nature, and as we become enlightened with this knowledge, we naturally dedicate ourselves to the Supreme Lord. In this surrender, the mind and intellect are of primary importance. When they are devoted to God, the rest of the personality—body, working senses, knowledge senses, worldly possessions, and soul—naturally get dedicated in His service. Shree Krishna says that devotees who exhibit these qualities are very dear to Him.

BG 12.15: 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.

Commentary

The soul 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 soul naturally shine forth. The Shreemad Bhagavatam states:

yasyāsti bhaktir bhagavatyakiñchanā
sarvair guṇais tatra samāsate surāḥ
harāvabhaktasya kuto mahad-guṇā
manorathenāsati dhāvato bahiḥ
(5.18.12)

"All the wonderful qualities of the celestial gods manifest in those who devote themselves to the Supreme Lord. 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, Shree 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 God 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)

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 God 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 God. Hence, they experience neither fear nor anxiety.

BG 12.16: Those who are indifferent to worldly gains, externally and internally pure, skillful, without cares, untroubled, and free from selfishness in all undertakings, such devotees of Mine are very dear to Me.

Commentary

Indifferent to worldly gains. 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 God and they consider it to be the highest treasure worthy of possessing. They also give the highest priority to the loving service of the Lord. Hence, they become unconcerned about worldly gains.

Externally and internally pure. Since their minds are constantly absorbed in the all-pure Lord, 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 God. Hence, they perform their works with great care and attention. This naturally makes them skillful.

Without cares. Having faith that God is always protecting them in accordance with their surrender, they become without care.

Untroubled. Since devotees are surrendered to the will of God, 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.

BG 12.17: 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.

Commentary

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 Lord, being gratified with the divine love bliss of the God, 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 Nārada Bhakti Darśana states:

yatprāpya na kiñchidvāñchhati, na śhochati, na dveṣṭi, na ramate, notsāhi bhavati (Sūtra 5)

"On attaining divine love for God, 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 God, so the bliss of all material objects seems insignificant in comparison.

Renounce both good and evil actions. Devotees obviously renounce evil actions (vikarma), for they are against their nature and displeasing to God. The good actions Shree Krishna refers to are prescribed ritualistic duties (karma) mentioned in the scriptures. All actions performed by the devotees become akarma (inaction) because they are not performed with any selfish motive and are dedicated to God. The concept of akarma has been explained in great detail in verses 4.17 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 meṇ pūrṇimā nahīṇ "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 God. Shree Krishna says that such devotees are very dear to Him.

BG 12.18-19: 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.

Commentary
Shree 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 Prahlada regarding this. Once, his son, Virochana, got into an argument with his Guru's son Sudhanva. Virochana 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 impetuosity, 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 Virochana, "Your father, Prahlada, will be the judge." Virochana exclaimed, "Really! But then you will complain that he has been partial." "No, my father, Rishi Angira, has said that your father Prahlada is perfectly just, and will never differentiate between friend and foe."

The two boys went to Prahlada. Virochana asked, "Father, am I superior or Sudhanva?" Prahlada 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." Prahlada smiled and said, "Your friend, Sudhanva, is superior since he is the son of your father's Guru." Prahlada 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 Ṛṣhi, 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 gods 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 Lord he was equal to friend, foe, relative, kith, kin, and outsider.

Equipoised in honor and dishonor. Shree 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 God 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 God has willed, let it happen."

Free from unfavorable association. Associating with persons or objects is called saṅg. There are two kinds of saṅg. Association that takes our mind to the world is kusaṅ (unfavorable association), and that which takes our mind away from the world and toward God is called satsaṅg (favorable association). Since devotees do not relish worldly thoughts, they naturally avoid kusaṅ and engage in satsaṅg.

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 toward topics such as the Names, Forms, Pastimes, and Glories of God.

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

maiṅ bhī bhūkhā na rahūñ, sādhu na bhūkhā jāya

"O Lord, 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 soul, 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 Shree Kripaluji Maharaj states:

jaga meñ raho aise govinda radhey, dharmāśhālā meñ yātrī raheñ jyoñ
batā de

(Rādhā Govind Geet)

"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 God'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 God's grace they will achieve the highest realization. Hence, they neither wander from attraction-to-attraction or from path-to-path. Shree Krishna declares such resolute devotees to be very dear to Him.

BG 12.20: 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.

Commentary

Shree 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. Shree 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 Lord as their goal and cultivate devotion with great faith, imbued with the virtues mentioned in the previous verses, such devotees are exceedingly dear to God.

BG 13.1: Arjun said, "O Keshav, I wish to understand what are prakṛiti and puruṣh, and what are kṣhetra and kṣhetrajña? I also wish to know what is true knowledge, and what is the goal of this knowledge?"

Commentary

*[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.

BG 13.2: The Supreme Divine Lord said: O Arjun, this body is termed as kṣhetra (the field of activities), and the one who knows this body is called kṣhetrajña (the knower of the field) by the sages who discern the truth about both.

Commentary

Here, Shree Krishna begins explaining the topic of distinction between the body and spirit. The soul 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 soul 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 transcendently situated at the platform of the soul, and perceived their distinct identity separate from the body.

BG 13.3: 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 soul and God as the knowers of the field, this I hold to be true knowledge.

Commentary

The soul is only the knower of the individual field of its own body. Even in this limited context, the soul's knowledge of its field is incomplete. God is the knower of the fields of all souls, being situated as the Supreme Soul in the heart of all living beings. Further, God's knowledge of each kṣhetra is perfect and complete. By explaining these distinctions, Shree Krishna establishes the position of the three entities vis-à-vis each other—the material body, the soul, and the Supreme Soul.

In the second part of the above verse, He gives His definition of knowledge. "Understanding of the self, the Supreme Lord, 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 soul, and God, then according to Shree Krishna's definition, they are really not knowledgeable.

BG 13.4: 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.

Commentary

Shree Krishna now poses many questions Himself, and asks Arjun to listen carefully to their answers.

BG 13.5: 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.

Commentary

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 God. Whenever God creates the world, He manifests the Vedas for the benefit of the souls. The Bṛihadāraṇyak Upaniṣhad (4.5.11) states: niḥśhvasitamasya vedāḥ "The Vedas manifested from the breath of God." 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 Śhruti, or "knowledge received through the ear." At the beginning of the age of Kali, Ved Vyas, who was himself a descension of God, 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 apauruṣheya, which means “not created by any person.” They are respected as the infallible authority for spiritual knowledge.

bhūtaṁ bhavyaṁ bhaviṣhyaṁ cha sarvaṁ vedāt prasidhyati (Manu Smṛiti 12.97)

“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 Ramayan and the Mahabharat. They describe the history related to two important descensions of God. The Ramayan was written by Sage Valmiki, and describes the Leelas, or divine Pastimes, of Lord Ram. Amazingly, it was written by Valmiki before Shree Ram actually displayed His Leelas. The great poet Sage was empowered with divine vision, by which he could see the Pastimes Lord Ram would enact on descending in the world. He thus put them down in 24,000 most beautifully composed Sanskrit verses of the Ramayan. These verses also contain lessons on ideal behavior in various social roles, such as son, brother, wife, king, and married couples. The Ramayan 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 Ramayan, Ramcharit Manas, written by a great devotee of Lord Ram, Saint Tulsidas.

The Mahabharat was written by Sage Ved Vyās. It contains 100,000 verses and is considered the longest poem in the world. The divine Leelas of Lord Krishna are the central theme of the Mahabharat. It is full of wisdom and guidance related to duties in all stages of human life, and devotion to God. The Bhagavad Gita is a portion of the Mahabharat. It is the most popular Hindu scripture, since it contains the essence of spiritual knowledge, so beautifully described by Lord 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 God 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 gods and the holy sages. The most important amongst them is the Bhāgavat Purāṇ, or the Shreemad Bhagavatam. It was the last scripture written by Sage Ved Vyās. In it, he mentions that in this scripture, he is going to reveal the highest dharma of pure selfless love for God. Philosophically, the Shreemad Bhagavatam begins where the Bhagavad Gita ends.

Śhaḍ-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 Śhaḍ-darśhan, or six philosophic works. They are:

1. **Mīmāṃsā:** Written by Maharishi (Sage) Jaimini, it describes ritualistic duties and ceremonies.
2. **Vedānt Darśhan:** Written by Maharishi Ved Vyās, 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. **Vaiśeṣhik Darśhan:** 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 God, beginning with physical postures.

6. Sāṅkhya Darśhan: Written by Maharishi Kapil, it describes the evolution of the Universe from prakṛiti, 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 God and the saints for the eternal welfare of all humankind.

Amongst these scriptural texts, the Brahma Sūtra (Vedānt Darśhan) is considered as the last word on the topic of the distinction between the soul, the material body, and God. Hence, Shree 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 Vedānt Darśhan was written by Sage Ved Vyas, 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 soul and God. Jagadguru Shankaracharya's commentary on the Vedānt Darśhan is called Śhārīrak 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 Vedānt Pārijāta Saurabh, which explains the dwait-advait-vād school of thought. Jagadguru Ramanujacharya's commentary is called Śhrī Bhāṣhya, which lays the basis for the viśhiṣṭ-advait-vād system of philosophy. Jagadguru Madhvacharya's commentary is called Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣhyam, 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, Vijñanabhikshu, and Baladev Vidyabhushan.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, himself a Vedic scholar par excellence, did not write any commentary on the Vedānt Darśhan. He took the view that the writer of the Vedānt, Sage Ved Vyas himself, declared that his final scripture the Shreemad Bhagavatam is its perfect commentary:

arthoyaṁ brahmasūtrāṇaṁ sarvopaniṣhadāpī

"The Shreemad Bhagavatam reveals the meaning and the essence of the Vedānt Darśhan and all the Upanishads." Hence, out of respect for Ved Vyas, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu did not deem it fit to write another commentary on the scripture.

BG 13.6: 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.

Commentary

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). Shree Krishna uses the word daśhaikaṁ (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. Shree Krishna has included them here because He is referring to the entire field of activity for the soul. 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 soul that is ensconced within:

Annamaya kośh. It is the gross sheath, consisting of the five gross elements (earth, water, fire, air, and space).

Prāṇamaya kośh. It is the life-airs sheath, consisting of the five life airs (prāṇ, apāṇ, vyāṇ, samān, and udān).

Manomaya kośh. It is the mental sheath, consisting of the mind and the five working senses (voice, hands, legs, genitals, and anus).

Vijñānamaya kośh. It is the intellectual sheath, consisting of the intellect and the five knowledge senses (ears, eyes, tongue, skin, and nose).

Ānandmaya 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.

BG 13.7: Desire and aversion, happiness and misery, the body, consciousness, and the will—all these comprise the field and its modifications.

Commentary

Shree 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), apakṣhiyate (withering with age), vinaśhyati (death). The body supports the soul in its quest for happiness in the world or in God, as the soul guides it.

Consciousness. It is the life force that exists in the soul, 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 soul makes the body seem lifelike by imparting the quality of consciousness in it. Shree 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 soul to achieve goals through the field of activities. The will is a quality of the intellect, which is energized by the soul. Variations in the will due to the influence of sattva guṇa, rajo 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 Lord, 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 God. 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 soul does so along with it because it identifies with the mind. However, material happiness never satiates the hunger of the soul, which remains discontented until it experiences the infinite divine bliss of God.

Misery. It is the pain experienced in the mind through disagreeable circumstances.

Now Shree 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.

BG 13.8-12: 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.

Commentary

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 Shree 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 five 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 God has given all these attributes to us. Pride thus results in distancing our consciousness from God. 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: ātmanaḥ pratikūlāni pareśhām na samācharet "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, Shree 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 Śhāṇḍilya Upaniṣhad states: śhauchaṁ nāma dwividhaṁ-bāhyamāntaraṁ cheti (1.1) "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 God. Jagadguru Shree Kripaluji Maharaj states:

māyādhīn malīn mana, hai anādi kālīn,

hari virahānala dhoya jala, karu nirmala bani dīn. (Bhakti Śhatak verse 79)

"The material mind is dirty since endless lifetimes. Purify it in the fire of longing for God, while practicing utmost humility."

Steadfastness. Self-knowledge and God-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 "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 God-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 God into our hearts, we must get rid of the pride of the self.

jaba main thā taba hari nathīn, ab hari hai, main nāhīn

prem galī ati sankarī, yā meñ dwe na samāhīn (Saint Kabir)

"When 'I' existed, God was not there; now God exists and 'I' do not. The path of divine love is very narrow; it cannot accommodate both 'I' and God."

In the path of jñāna-yog and aṣṭāṅg-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 God). Now the "I" no longer remains harmful and self-consciousness is replaced by God-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 God.

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 God. 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 God. Therefore, Shree 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 God. 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 God, 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 Shree Krishna is talking about.

Philosophical pursuit of the Absolute Truth. Even animals engage in the bodily activities of eating, sleeping, mating, and defending. However, God 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 God-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, uncleanness 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 self-knowledge. Thus, Shree Krishna calls them ignorance and darkness.

BG 13.13: 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.

Commentary

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. Shree 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 jñānis. In Its personal form, as Bhagavān, it is the object of worship of the bhaktas. Residing within the body, It is known as Paramātmā. All these are three manifestations of the same Supreme Reality. Later, in verse 14.27, Shree Krishna states: brahmaṇo hi pratiṣṭhāham "I am the basis of the formless Brahman." Thus, the formless Brahman and the personal form of God are both two aspects of the Supreme Entity. Both exist everywhere, and hence they both can be called all-pervading. Referring to These, Shree Krishna reveals the contradictory qualities that manifest in God.

BG 13.14: Everywhere are His hands and feet, eyes, heads, and faces. His ears too are in all places, for He pervades everything in the universe.

Commentary

Often people argue that God cannot have hands, feet, eyes, ears, etc. But Shree Krishna says that God has all these, and to an innumerable extent. We should never fall into the trap of circumscribing God within our limited understanding. He is kartumakartum anyathā karatūṁ samarthah "He can do the possible, the impossible, and the reverse of the possible." For that all-powerful God, to say that He cannot have hands and feet, is placing a constraint upon Him.

However, God'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, God possesses unlimited hands and legs, eyes, and ears. While our senses exist in one place, God's senses are everywhere. Hence, God 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 Chhândogya Upaniṣhad states: sarvaṁ khalvidaṁ brahma (3.14.1) "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.

BG 13.15: Though He perceives all sense-objects, yet He is devoid of the senses. He is unattached to everything, 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.

Commentary

Having stated that God's senses are everywhere, Shree 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 God 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. God possesses infinite contradictory attributes at the same time. The Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇ states:

viruddha dharmo rūposā vaiśhvaryāt puruṣhottamāḥ

"The Supreme Lord is the reservoir of innumerable contradictory attributes." In this verse, Shree Krishna mentions a few of the infinite contradictory attributes that exist in the personality of God.

He is devoid of mundane senses like ours, and hence it is correct to say that He does not have senses. Sarvendriya vivarjitam 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 God are in all places. Sarvendriya guṇābhāsaṁ means "He manifests the functions of the senses and grasps the sense objects." Including both these attributes, the Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣhad states:

apāṇipādo javano grahītā, paśhyatyachakṣhuḥ sa śrīṇotyakaraṇaḥ (3.19)

"God does not possess material hands, feet, eyes, and ears. Yet He grasps, walks, sees, and hears."

Further, Shree Krishna states that He is the sustainer of creation, and yet detached from it. In His form as Lord Vishnu, God maintains the entire creation. He sits in the hearts of all living beings, notes their karmas, and gives the results. Under Lord Vishnu's dominion, Brahma manipulates the laws of material science to ensure that the universe functions stably. Also, under Lord Vishnu's dominion, the celestial gods arrange to provide the air, earth, water, rain, etc. that are necessary for our survival. Hence, God is the Sustainer of all. Yet, He is complete in Himself and is, thus, detached from everyone. The Vedas mention Him as ātmārām, meaning "one who rejoices in the self and has no need of anything external."

The material energy is subservient to God, 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 God is divine.

BG 13.16: 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.

Commentary

There is a Vedic Mantra that describes God in practically the same manner as Shree Krishna has described here:

tad ejati tan naijati taddūre tadvantike

tad antar asya sarvasya tadasarvasyāśya bāhyataḥ (Īśhopaniṣhad mantra 5)

“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, Shree Krishna said that to know God 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 God is not knowable by the senses, mind, and intellect. The intellect is made from the material energy, so it cannot reach God who is Divine. However, if God Himself bestows His grace upon someone, that fortunate soul can come to know Him.

BG 13.17: 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.

Commentary

God’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, Shreemad Bhagavatam states:

dravyaṁ karma cha kālaśḥ cha svabhāvo jīva eva cha

vāsudevāt paro brahman na chānyo ’rtho ’sti tattvataḥ (2.5.14)

“The various aspects of creation—time, karma, the natures of individual living beings, and the material ingredients of creation—are all the Supreme Lord Shree Krishna Himself. There is nothing in existence apart from Him.”

God 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 God 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.

BG 13.18: 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.

Commentary

Here, Shree Krishna establishes the supremacy of God 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 God imparts the power to them, only then can they illumine anything. The Kaṭhopaniṣhad says:

tameva bhāntamanubhāti sarvaṁ

tasya bhāsā saravamidaṁ vibhāti (2.2.15)

"God makes all things luminous. It is by His luminosity that all luminous objects give light."

sūryastapati tejasendraḥ (Vedas)

"By His radiance, the sun and moon become luminous." In other words, the luminosity of the sun and the moon is borrowed from God. They may lose their luminosity someday, but God can never lose His.

God 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, Shree Krishna describes the Supreme Entity as the jñeya (the object worthy of knowing), jñāna-gamya (the goal of all knowledge), and jñāna (true knowledge).

BG 13.19: 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.

Commentary

Shree 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, aṣṭāṅg, 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 God.

Jagadguru Shree Kripaluji Maharaj puts this very nicely:

jo hari sevā hetu ho, soī karm bakhāna
jo hari bhagati baṛhāve, soī samujiya jñāna
(Bhakti Śhatak 66)

"That work which is done in devotion to God is the real karm; and that knowledge which increases love for God is real knowledge."

Devotion not only helps us to know God, it also makes the devotee godlike, and hence, Shree Krishna states that the devotees attain His nature. This has been emphasized in the Vedic scriptures again and again. The Vedas state:

bhaktirevainaṁ nayati bhaktirevainaṁ paśhyati bhaktirevainaṁ darśhayati bhakti
vaśhaḥ puruṣho bhaktireva bhūyasī (Māṭhar Śhruti)

"Bhakti alone can lead us to God. Bhakti alone can make us see God. Bhakti alone can bring us in the presence of God. God is under the control of bhakti. Hence, do bhakti exclusively." Again the Muṇḍakopaniṣhad states:

upāsate puruṣhaṁ ye hyakāmā-ste śhukrametadatativartanti dhīrāḥ (3.2.1)

"Those who engage in bhakti toward the Supreme Divine Personality, 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 hyartha prakāśhante mahātmanah (6.23)

"Those who have unflinching bhakti toward God and identical bhakti toward the Guru, in the hearts of such saintly persons, by the grace of God the imports of

the Vedic scriptures are automatically revealed." The other Vedic Scriptures also reiterate this emphatically:

na sādhayati mām yogo na sāṅkhyāṁ dharma uddhava
na svādhyāyas tapas tyāgo yathā bhaktir mamorjitā
(Bhagavatam 11.14.20)

Shree Krishna states: "Uddhav, I am not attained by aṣṭāṅg-yog, by the study of sāṅkhyā, cultivation of scriptural knowledge, austerities, nor by renunciation. It is by bhakti alone that I am won over." In the Bhagavad Gita, Shree Krishna repeatedly states this, in verses 8.22, 11.54, etc. In verse 18.55, He says: "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." The Ramayan also says:

rāmahi kevala premu piārā, jāni leu jo jānanihārā.

"The Supreme Lord 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 Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might (Deuteronomy 6.5). 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 nahiñ, gītā sama nahiñ grantha

"There is no personality like God; 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."

BG 13.20: Know that prakṛiti (material nature) and puruṣh (the individual souls) are both beginningless. Also know that all transformations of the body and the three modes of nature are produced by material energy.

Commentary

The material nature is called Maya, or prakṛiti. Being an energy of God, it has existed ever since He has existed; in other words, it is eternal. The soul is also eternal, and here it is called puruṣh (the living entity), while God Himself is called param puruṣh (the Supreme Living Entity).

The soul is also an expansion of the energy of God. śhaktitvenaivāmśhatvaṁ vyañjayanti (Paramātmā Sandarbh 39.1) "The soul is a fragment of the jīva śhakti (soul energy) of God." While material nature is an insentient energy, the jīva śhakti 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 Maya. It creates the three modes of nature—sattva, rajas, and tamas—and their countless varieties of combinations.

BG 13.21: In the matter of creation, the material energy is responsible for cause and effect; in the matter of experiencing happiness and distress, the individual soul is declared responsible.

Commentary

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 soul 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 soul identifies with the mind, it vicariously enjoys that pleasurable sensation. In this way, the soul 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 duḥkha ahaī (Ramayan)

jauṇ sapanēṇ sira kāṭai koī, binu jāgeṇ na dūri dukh hoī (Ramayan)

"The world is sustained by God. It creates an illusion, which, although unreal, gives misery to the soul. 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 soul 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.

BG 13.22: When the puruṣh (individual soul) 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.

Commentary

In the previous verse, Shree Krishna explained that the puruṣh (soul) is responsible for the experience of pleasure and pain. Now, He explains how this is so. Considering the body to be the self, the soul energizes it into activity that is directed at enjoying bodily pleasures. Since the body is made of Maya, 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 soul identifies itself as the doer and the enjoyer of the body. The body, mind, and intellect perform all the activities, but the soul 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 soul and they work under its dominion. Hence, the soul 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.

BG 13.23: Within the body also resides the Supreme Lord. He is said to be the Witness, the Permitter, the Supporter, Transcendental Enjoyer, the ultimate Controller, and the Paramātmā (Supreme Soul).

Commentary

Shree Krishna has explained the status of the jīvātmā (individual soul) within the body. Now in this verse He explains the position of the Paramātmā (Supreme Soul), who also resides within the body. He previously mentioned the Paramātmā in verse 13.3 as well, when He stated that the individual soul is the knower of the individual body while the Supreme Soul is the knower of all the infinite bodies.

The Supreme Soul, who is located within everyone, also manifests in the personal form as Lord Vishnu. The Supreme Lord 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 Paramātmā. Seated within, He notes their actions, keeps an account of their karmas, and bestows the results at the proper time. He accompanies the jīvātmā (individual soul) 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 sakhāyā
samānam vṛikṣhaṁ pariṣhasvajāte
tayoranyaḥ pippalaṁ svādvattya-
naśhnannanyo abhichākaśhīti
samāne vṛikṣhe puruṣho nimagno-
'nīśhayā śhochati muhyamānaḥ
juṣhtaṁ yadā paśhyatyanyamiśha-
masya mahimānamiti vītaśhokaḥ (3.1.1-2)

“Two birds are seated in the nest (heart) of the tree (the body) of the living form. They are the jīvātmā (individual soul) and Paramātmā (Supreme Soul). The jīvātmā has its back toward the Paramātmā, 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 Paramātmā is a friend of the jīvātmā, but He does not interfere; He simply sits and watches. If the jīvātmā can only turn around to the Paramātmā, all its miseries will come to an end.” The jīvātmā has been bestowed with free will i.e. the freedom to turn away or toward God. By the improper use of that free will the jīvātmā is in bondage, and by learning its proper usage, it can attain the eternal service of God and experience infinite bliss.

BG 13.24: Those who understand the truth about Supreme Soul, the individual soul, 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.

Commentary

Ignorance has led the soul into its present predicament. Having forgotten its spiritual identity as a tiny fragment of God, it has fallen into material consciousness. Therefore, knowledge is vital for resurrecting itself from its present position. The Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣhad states exactly the same thing:

sanyuktametad kṣharam akṣharam cha
vyaktāvyaktaṁ bharate viśhwam īśhaḥ
anīśhaśh chātmā badhyate bhokṛibhāvā-
jjñātvā devaṁ muchyate sarvapāśhaiḥ (1.8)

“There are three entities in creation—the ever-changing material nature, the unchangeable souls, and the Master of both, who is the Supreme Lord. Ignorance of these entities is the cause of bondage of the soul, while knowledge of them helps it cut asunder the fetters of Maya.”

The knowledge that Shree 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. Shree Krishna now talks about some of these spiritual practices in the next verse.

BG 13.25: Some try to perceive the Supreme Soul 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.

Commentary

Variety is the universal characteristic of God'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 souls 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, Shree Krishna explains that some sādḥaks (aspirants) find great joy in grappling with their mind and bringing it under control. They are attracted to meditating upon God seated within their hearts. They relish the spiritual bliss that they experience when their mind comes to rest upon the Lord within them.

Others find satisfaction in exercising their intellect. The idea of the distinction of the soul and the body, mind, intellect, and ego excites them greatly. They relish cultivating knowledge about the three entities—soul, God, and Maya—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 God-given abilities in working for Him. Nothing satisfies them more than using the last drop of their energy in service of God. In this way, all kinds of sādḥaks 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 God. The Shreemad Bhagavatam states:

sā vidyā tanmatir yayā (4.29.49)

"True knowledge is that which helps us develop love for God. The fulfillment of karma occurs when it is done for the pleasure of the Lord."

BG 13.26: There are still others who are unaware of these spiritual paths, but they hear from others and begin worshipping the Supreme Lord. By such devotion to hearing from saints, they too can gradually cross over the ocean of birth and death.

Commentary

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 Lord 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 Shreemad Bhagavatam, 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:

śhrīṇvatām sva-kathām kṛiṣṇaḥ puṇya-śhravaṇa-kīrtanaḥ

hṛidy antaḥ stho hy abhadrāṇi vidhunoti suhṛit satām
(Bhagavatam 1.2.17)

“Parikshit! Simply hear the descriptions of the divine Names, Forms, Pastimes, Virtues, Abodes, and saints of God 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.

BG 13.27: 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.

Commentary

Shree 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 soul in humans, but do not accept that other forms of life also have souls. 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 soul. 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 Shree Krishna’s statement here that all life forms possess consciousness; they are the combination of the eternal soul, which is the source of consciousness, and the body, which is made of the insentient material energy.

BG 13.28: They alone truly see, who perceive the Paramātmā (Supreme Soul) accompanying the soul in all beings, and who understand both to be imperishable in this perishable body.

Commentary

Shree Krishna had previously used the expression yaḥ paśhyati sa paśhyati (they alone truly see, who see that...) Now He states that it is not enough to see the presence of the soul within the body. We must also appreciate that God, the Supreme Soul, 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 sarvabhūtāntarātmā (Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣhad 6.11)

“God is one. He resides in the hearts of all living beings. He is omnipresent. He is the Supreme Soul of all souls.”

bhavān hi sarva-bhūtānām ātmā sākṣhī sva-dṛig vibho (Bhagavatam 10.86.31)

"God is seated inside all living beings as the Witness and the Master."

rām brahma chinamaya abināsī, sarba rahit saba ura pura bāsī (Ramayan)

"The Supreme Lord Ram is eternal and beyond everything. He resides in the hearts of all living entities."

The Supreme Soul accompanies the individual soul as it journeys from body to body in the cycle of life and death. Shree Krishna now explains how realizing the presence of God in everyone changes the life of the sādhak.

BG 13.29: Those, who see God as the Supreme Soul equally present everywhere and in all living beings, do not degrade themselves by their mind. Thereby, they reach the supreme destination.

Commentary

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 God as the Supreme Soul 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 God, 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 God. Also, the humanly created distinctions of nationality, creed, caste, sex, status, and color, all become irrelevant. Thus, they elevate their mind by seeing God in all living beings, and finally reach the supreme goal.

BG 13.30: They alone truly see who understand that all actions (of the body) are performed by material nature, while the embodied soul actually does nothing.

Commentary

The Tantra Bhāgavat states: ahankārāt tu samsāro bhavet jīvasya na svataḥ "The ego of being the body and the pride of being the doer trap the soul 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 soul, and think, "I am doing this...I am doing that." But the enlightened soul 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 soul 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 Vasiṣṭh instructed Ram: kartā bahirkartāntarloke vihara rāghava (Yog Vāsiṣṭh) "Ram, while working, externally exert Yourself as if the results depend upon You; but internally, realize Yourself to be the non-doer."

BG 13.31: 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 the Brahman.

Commentary

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 gods. All of them are rooted in the same reality—the soul, which is a part of God, seated in a body, which is made from the material energy. The distinctions between the forms are not due to the soul, 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 God, such an understanding makes us see the same spiritual substratum pervading all existence. This leads to the Brahman realization.

BG 13.32: The Supreme Soul is imperishable, without beginning, and devoid of any material qualities, O son of Kuntī. Although situated within the body, It neither acts, nor is It tainted by material energy.

Commentary

God, situated within the heart of the living being as the Supreme Soul, 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 soul.

BG 13.33: Space holds everything within it, but being subtle, does not get contaminated by what it holds. Similarly, though its consciousness pervades the body, the soul is not affected by the attributes of the body.

Commentary

The soul 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 soul. Shree 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 soul is a subtler energy. It retains Its divinity even while It identifies with the material body.

BG 13.34: Just as one sun illumines the entire solar system, so does the individual soul illumine the entire body (with consciousness).

Commentary

Although the soul energizes the entire body in which it is present with consciousness, yet by itself, it is exceedingly small. *eṣho 'ṇurātmā* (Muṇḍakopaniṣad 3.1.9) "The soul is very tiny in size." The Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣad states:

bālāgraśhatabhāgasya śhatadhā kalpitasya cha

bhāgo jīvaḥ sa vijñeyaḥ sa chānantyāya kalpate (5.9)

"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 soul. These souls are innumerable in number." This is a manner of expressing the minuteness of the soul.

How can such an infinitesimal soul energize the body, which is huge in comparison? Shree Krishna explains this with the analogy of the sun. Although situated in one place, the sun illumines the entire solar system with its light. Likewise, the Vedānt Darśhan states:

guṇādvā lokavat (2.3.25)

“The soul, although seated in the heart spreads its consciousness throughout the field of the body.”

BG 13.35: 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.

Commentary

In His customary style, Shree 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 souls and tiny parts of God. 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 God-realization.

BG 14.1: The Divine Lord 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.

Commentary

In the previous chapter, Shree Krishna had explained that all life forms are a combination of soul and matter. He had also elucidated that prakṛiti (material nature) is responsible for creating the field of activities for the puruṣh (soul). He added that this does not happen independently, but under the direction of the Supreme Lord, 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 guṇas). By gaining this knowledge and imbibing it into our consciousness as realized wisdom, we can ascend to the highest perfection.

BG 14.2: 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.

Commentary

Shree 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 God 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.

Shree 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 sādharṁyam means they will acquire “a similar divine nature” as God himself. When the soul is released from the bondage of the material energy, it comes under the dominion of God's divine Yogmaya energy. The divine energy equips it with God's divine knowledge, love, and bliss. As a result, the soul becomes of the nature of God—it acquires divine godlike qualities.

BG 14.3-4: The total material substance, prakṛiti, is the womb. I impregnate it with the individual souls, and thus all living beings are born. O son of Kuntī, for all species of life that are produced, the material nature is the womb, and I am the seed-giving Father.

Commentary

As explained in chapters 7 and 8, the material creation follows cycles of

creation, maintenance, and dissolution. During dissolution, souls who are vimukh (have their backs) toward God remain in a state of suspended animation within the body of Maha Vishnu. The material energy, prakṛiti, also lies unmanifest in God'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 God casts the souls into appropriate bodies, determined by their past karmas. Thus, Shree Krishna states that prakṛiti is like the womb and the souls are like the sperms. He places the souls 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 Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam:

daivāt kṣhubhita-dharminyām svasyām yonau paraḥ pumān

ādhatta vīryam sāsūta mahat-tattvaṁ hiraṇmayam (3.26.19)[v1]

"In the womb of the material energy the Supreme Lord impregnates the souls. Then, inspired by the karmas of the individual souls, the material nature gets to work to create suitable life forms for them." He does not cast all souls into the material world, rather only those who are vimukh.

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

Commentary

Having explained that all life-forms are born from puruṣh and prakṛiti, Shree Krishna now explains in the next fourteen verses how prakṛiti binds the soul. Although it is divine, its identification with the body ties it to material nature. The material energy possess three guṇas—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 soul is swayed by the influence of these dominating modes. Shree Krishna now describes the impact of these modes upon the living being.

BG 14.6: 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 soul by creating attachment for a sense of happiness and knowledge.

Commentary

The word prakāśhakam means "illuminating." The word anāmayam 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 soul 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 soul, 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 soul 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 soul 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 God that is beyond material nature. When the soul becomes God-realized, by his grace, God bestows *śuddha sattva* upon the soul, making the senses, mind, and intellect divine.

BG 14.7: O Arjun, *rajo guṇa* is of the nature of passion. It arises from worldly desires and affections, and binds the soul through attachment to fruitive actions.

Commentary

Shree Krishna now explains the working of *rajo guṇa*, and how it binds the soul to material existence. The *Patañjali Yog Darśhan* describes material activity as the primary manifestation of *rajo guṇa*. Here, Shree 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 soul 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 God. This creates detachment from the world, and pacifies the effect of *rajo guṇa*.

BG 14.8: O Arjun, *tamo guṇa*, which is born of ignorance, is the cause of illusion for the embodied souls. It deludes all living beings through negligence, laziness, and sleep.

Commentary

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 soul 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.

BG 14.9: *Sattva* binds one to material happiness; *rajas* conditions the soul toward actions; and *tamas* clouds wisdom and binds one to delusion.

Commentary

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 guṇa illumines 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 God. 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 God-realized Saints.

In the mode of passion, the souls 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 guṇa 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 guṇa, which binds the soul in the darkness of ignorance.

BG 14.10: 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).

Commentary

Shree 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 sanskāras (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 sātṭvic. 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 tamogūṇa 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.

BG 14.11-13: 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.

Commentary

Shree Krishna once again repeats how the three modes influence one's thinking. Sattva guṇa leads to the development of virtues and the illumination of knowledge. Rajo guṇa leads to greed, inordinate activity for worldly attainments, and restlessness of the mind. Tamo guṇa results in delusion of the intellect, laziness, and inclination toward intoxication and violence.

In fact, these modes even influence our attitudes toward God 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 God 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 God 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.

Shree Krishna now begins to explain the destinations bestowed by the three guṇas, and the need for making it our goal to transcend them.

BG 14.14-15: 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.

Commentary

Shree Krishna explains that the destiny awaiting the souls is based upon the guṇas of their personalities. We get what we deserve is God'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 soul. 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 soul 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.

BG 14.16: 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.

Commentary

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.

BG 14.17: From the mode of goodness arises knowledge, from the mode of passion arises greed, and from the mode of ignorance arise negligence and delusion.

Commentary

Having mentioned the variation in the results that accrue from the three guṇas, Shree 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 soul. Tamo guṇa covers the living being with inertia and nescience. Shrouded in ignorance, a person performs wicked and impious deeds and bears consequent results.

BG 14.18: 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.

Commentary

Shree Krishna explains that the reincarnation of the souls in their next birth is linked to the guṇas that predominates their personality. Upon completion of their sojourn in the present life, the souls 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-lokaṁ rajo-layāḥ

tamo-layās tu nirayaṁ 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; while those who are transcendental to the three modes attain Me."

BG 14.19: When wise persons see that in all work there is no agent of action other than the three guṇas, and they know Me to be transcendental to these guṇas, they attain My divine nature.

Commentary

Having revealed the complex workings of the three guṇas, Shree 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 guṇas, and hence the guṇas are the active agents in all the works being done in the world. But the Supreme Lord is beyond them. Therefore, he is called tri-guṇātīt (transcendental to the modes of material nature). Similarly, all the attributes of God—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 God and the Guru. This enables them to transcend the three guṇas, and attain the divine nature of God. This is further elaborated in verse 14.26.

BG 14.20: By transcending the three modes of material nature associated with the body, one becomes free from birth, death, old age, and misery, and attains immortality.

Commentary

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 varṇāśhram dharma, or śhārīrik 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.

Shree Krishna explains that when we transcend the three modes, then Maya no longer binds the living being. Thus, the soul gets released from the cycle of life and death and attains immortality. Factually, the soul 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 soul, which seeks release from it. Hence, the material illusion is naturally discomfoting to our inner being and, from within, we all seek the taste of immortality.

BG 14.21: Arjun inquired: What are the characteristics of those who have gone beyond the three guṇas, O Lord? How do they act? How do they go beyond the bondage of the guṇas?

Commentary

Arjun heard from Shree Krishna about transcending the three guṇas. So, now he

asks three questions in relation to the guṇas. The word *līngais* means "symptoms." His first question is: "What are the symptoms of those who have transcended the three guṇas?" The word *āchāraḥ* means "conduct." Arjun's second question is: "In what manner do such transcendentalists conduct themselves?" The word *atīvartate* means "transcend." The third question he asks is: "How does one transcend the three guṇas?" Shree Krishna answers his questions systematically.

BG 14.22-23: The Supreme Divine Personality said: O Arjun, The persons who are transcendental to the three guṇas 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 guṇas that act, they stay established in the self, without wavering.

Commentary

Shree Krishna now clarifies the traits of those who have transcended the three guṇas. They are not disturbed when they see the guṇas 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 souls 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 God. They simply have to do their duty to the best of their ability, and leave the rest in the hands of God. Having come into God'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 Mahatma Gandhi said: "Be the change that you wish to see in the world."

Shree 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 guṇas in their mind, they do not feel disturbed. The mind is made from the material energy, and thus contains the three modes of *Maya*. So it is natural for the mind to be subjected to the influence of the guṇas, 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 God 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 guṇas.

BG 14.24-25: 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 guṇas.

Commentary

Like God, the soul too is beyond the three guṇas. 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 nirguṇa (beyond the influence of the guṇas). 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.

BG 14.26: Those who serve Me with unalloyed devotion rise above the three modes of material nature and come to the level of the Brahman.

Commentary

Having explained the traits of those who are situated beyond the three guṇas, Shree 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 Lord, Shree Krishna. Then alone will the mind become nirguṇa (untouched by the three modes), just as Shree Krishna is nirguṇa.

Many people are of the view that if the mind is fixed upon the personal form of God, 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 God possesses infinite guṇas (qualities), these are all divine and beyond the modes of material nature. Hence, the personal form of God is also nirguṇa (beyond the three material modes). Sage Ved Vyas explains how the personal form of God is nirguṇa:

yastu nirguṇa ityuktaḥ śhāstreṣhu jagadīśhvaraḥ

prākṛitairheya sanyuktairguṇairhīnatvamuchyate (Padma Purāṇ)[v3]

“Wherever the scriptures refer to God 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 God. And so, only when the object of our meditation is God can it truly be called transcendental meditation.

BG 14.27: I am the basis of the formless Brahman, the immortal and imperishable, of eternal dharma, and of unending divine bliss.

Commentary

The previous verse may give rise to the question about the relationship between Shree Krishna and the formless Brahman. It was previously stated that the all-powerful God has both aspects to his personality—the formless and the personal form. Here, Shree Krishna reveals that the Brahman which the jñānīs worship is the light from the personal form of God. Padma Purāṇ states:

yannakhenduruchirbrahma dhyeyaṁ brahmādibhiḥ suraiḥ
guṇatrayamatītaṁ taṁ vande vṛindāvanēśhvaram
(Patal Khand 77.60)[v4]

“The light that emanates from the toe nails of the feet of the Lord of Vrindavan, Shree Krishna, is the transcendental Brahman that the jñānīs and even the celestial gods meditate upon.” Similarly, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu said:

tāñhāra aṅgera śhuddha kiraṇa-maṇḍala
upaṇiṣhat kahe tāñre brahma sunirmala
(Chaitanya Charitāmṛit, Ādi Leela 2.12) [v5]

“The effulgence emanating from the divine body of God is described by the

Upaniṣhads as Brahman." Thus, in this verse, Shree 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 Lord.

BG 15.1: The Supreme Divine Personality said: They speak of an eternal aśvatth 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.

Commentary

Lord Shree Krishna speaks of the eternal Aśvatth tree, which is an upside-down peepal (sacred fig) tree with its roots above and branches below. Aśvatth also means; which will not remain the same even on the next day or something which is constantly changing. The Sanskrit word for the world, Sansar is defined in the Sanskrit dictionary as sansaratīti sansārah; something that is constantly shifting. Another Sanskrit word for the world Jagat is also defined as gachchhatīti jagat, that means it is a constantly moving world. The world is not just moving or constantly changing, but someday it will be completely destroyed and reverted unto God. Therefore, the world we live in is temporary, or Aśvatth.

The Lord explains that this material world is like a huge Aśvatth tree for the soul. Its roots are going upwards (ūrdhva-mūlam) originating from God; nourished and supported by Him. The trunk and branches which are extending downwards (adhaḥ-śhākham) encompass all the life-forms from different abodes of the material realm. Its leaves are the Vedic mantras (chhandānsi), which describe rituals, ceremonies, and its reward. By performing such rituals, the soul can ascend to the heavenly abodes and enjoy celestial pleasures, but eventually, when the rewards deplete, they have to fall back to earth.

In this way, the leaves of the Aśvatth tree nourish the material existence of the souls and perpetuate the continuous cycle of life and death. Due to this continuity, the beginning and the end are not experienced by the souls. Hence, this tree form of the world is Avyayam or eternal. As the water from the oceans evaporates forming clouds that rain the earth, which then forms rivers, and eventually flows back to the oceans. Likewise, the cycle of life and death is also continuous.

The Vedas also mention this tree:

ūrdhvamūlo 'vākśhākha eṣho 'śhvatthaḥ sanātanaḥ (Kaṭhōpaniṣhad 2.3.1)

"The aśvatth tree, with its roots upward and branches downward is eternal."

ūrdhvamūlaṁ arvākśhākhaṁ vṛikṣhaṁ yo samprati

na sa jātu janaḥ śhraddhayātmṛityutyurmā mārayaditi (Taittirīya Āraṇyak 1.11.5)

"Those who know this tree with its roots upward and branches downward will not believe that death can finish them."

The intention of describing this tree in the Vedas was to make us understand that, we are beyond the cycle of life and death, and we should work towards cutting this tree down. For the same purpose, Lord Shree Krishna has mentioned that one who understands the secret (of cutting) this tree of samsara is the knower of the Vedas (veda vit).

BG 15.2: 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.

Commentary

Lord Krishna went on to explain how the human form is similar to the aśvatth tree. While in the human form the soul performs karmas, which is the trunk of the tree, and its branches (śhākhās) extend both upward (ūrddhva) and downward (adhah). Based on how the soul performed in its past and present forms it is reborn. If it led a virtuous life, when reborn, it moves to the upward branches which denote the celestial abodes of the gandharvas, devatās, etc. In case, a soul was involved in sinful acts, in the next birth, it gets degraded to the downwards branches, which are for the nether regions and animal species.

Similar to how water irrigates a tree, the three modes of material nature or the three gunas irrigate this eternal tree of material existence. The sense objects generated by these gunas are like buds on the tree (viśhaya-pravālāḥ), which sprout causing further growth. These buds sprout creating several aerial roots of material desires. For example, another tree of the fig family, the banyan tree has aerial roots which grow straight from the branches, down to the ground, and with the passage of time these turn into secondary trunks. This makes the banyan tree grow huge, covering a large area. "The Great Banyan" in the Botanical Garden of Kolkata, is one of the largest known banyan trees. It is spread across a vast area of about 4.7 acres, with over 3700 aerial roots and crown circumference of about 486 meters.

Likewise, in the context of the material world, the sense objects are like the buds on the aśvatth tree, which sprout into aerial roots as they evoke desires of bodily pleasures in a person. To satiate these desires, a living being performs karma. But these desires are unending and keep increasing; similar to the aerial roots, which provide nourishment to this metaphorical tree, causing its unlimited expansion. Eventually, the soul gets further entangled into this web of material consciousness.

BG 15.3-4: 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 Lord, 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.

Commentary

Shree Krishna says that the mystery of the aśvatth tree is not easy to understand for the embodied souls, as they are deeply entangled in the continuous cycle of life and death. The buds of the tree, which are the objects of the senses lure them into developing desires. Ignorant souls keep working hard towards fulfilling these desires, which only keep increasing and nourish the tree to grow further. When such desires are fulfilled, they return with double the intensity forming greed. But when obstructed it causes anger, which fogs the intellect and further deepens the ignorance.

In the bodily form, the soul only thinks of itself to be the person in flesh and bones. It is forgetful of its origin and its eternal existence. It identifies itself with its human name, family, country, etc. Thus, to satisfy the bodily needs and in quest of material happiness, the living being gets involved in unfruitful endeavors. Sometimes to satiate one's materialistic desires knowingly or unknowingly a human being commits sins. These cause it to move downward and it is reborn in the lower species and nether regions. Whereas, sometimes it gets attracted towards the leaves of this tree, which are the ritualistic ceremonies of the Vedas, these help in accumulating pious merits. The propensity of material pleasures drives the human being to involve in such pious activities. The pious merits help the soul move upward in the celestial abodes, but once these merits deplete, it is sent back to the lower forms, and this cycle continues. Thus, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu said:

kṛiṣṇa bhūli 'sei jīva anādi-bahirmukha, ataeva māyā tāre deya samsāra-duḥkha
kabhu swarge uṭhāya, kabhu narake dūbāya, daṇḍya-jane rājā yena nadīte chubāy
(Chaitanya Charitāmṛit, Madhya Leela 20.117-118)

"Since the soul is forgetful of God since eternity, the material energy is subjecting it to worldly miseries. Sometimes, it lifts the soul 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." In the olden days, some kings ordered a very torturous punishment, wherein a person's head was immersed into the water almost till suffocation, then released for a few gasps, again put back into the water, and was repeated. The condition is similar for a soul trapped in the tree of material existence, it is pushed back and forth between the upper and lower regions according to its merits. When born in the celestial forms it enjoys some temporary relief, which fades soon and the soul gets dropped back to the human form.

Several lifetimes have passed, and the soul continues to work towards material enjoyment. This has caused the tree to expand its roots of desire farther and has become huge. Yet, this tree can be cut with dispassion says, Lord Shree Krishna. The remedy for the soul's never-ending suffering is asaṅg, which means detachment. The axe of detachment can cut the roots of desires which are nourished by the three modes of material nature. The Lord further explains that this axe of detachment can only be developed with the knowledge of the self. One has to realize that, "I am not this material body, but an eternal spiritual being. The everlasting happiness that I pursue cannot be achieved with material things. My endeavors towards gratification of the material desires of this material body have no satiation, they are only getting me further trapped in the samsara or the web of life and death." With detachment, one can stop further growth of the tree roots, and due to lack of nourishment, the tree starts to wither.

The next step is to look for the base of this upside-down tree, which in real terms is on the top and much higher than everything else. It's here that the Supreme Lord of all creation resides. As Lord Shree Krishna had earlier mentioned, "I am the origin of all creation. Everything proceeds from Me. The wise who know this perfectly worship Me with great faith and devotion." (Verse 10.8) Therefore, to find the ultimate source, we must surrender to God as explained in this verse: "I submit unto Him from whom the universe came into being a long time ago."

This way, the unfathomable tree can be conquered and axed. However, in an earlier verse Shree Krishna has also said that, "My divine energy, Maya, 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) Therefore, the only way to cut down the aśvatth tree is by totally surrendering to the Supreme Lord and taking his refuge. By doing this, we will not return to this material world, and after death will go to His divine Abode.

In the next verse, Shree Krishna has revealed the requirements for the process of surrender.

BG 15.5: Those who are free from vanity and delusion, who have overcome the evil of attachment, who dwell constantly on the self and on God, who are free from the desire to enjoy the senses, and are beyond the dualities of pleasure and pain, such liberated personalities attain My eternal Abode.

Commentary

In this verse, Shree Krishna has explained the requisites for complete surrender to the Supreme Lord, who is at the base of this enigmatic aśvatth tree. The first step is to give up all pride, which is due to ignorance. The embodied souls have an illusion that they are the governors of all the material wealth that they have acquired, and continue accumulating more. Their minds are blinded by pride borne by ignorance, they think that all this is for their enjoyment,

and would continue giving them happiness. A soul in such a state does not comprehend God as the owner of all. Thus, cannot surrender unto his will.

Only through proper knowledge of God can this false notion of being the enjoyer be removed. It is necessary to realize that God alone is the owner of all the material energy and it needs to be used for his service only. He is the master of the entire creation, and the souls are his eternal servants. The souls should give up the attitude of pride and develop an attitude of selfless service to the Lord. This can be achieved by understanding the true nature of the self as the eternal servant, eliminating material attachments that pull us towards the world and away from him. The Padma Purāṇ states:

dāsa bhūtamidaṁ tasya jagatsthāvara jangamam
śhrīmannārāyaṇa swāmī jagatānprabhurīśhwarah

“The Supreme Lord Narayan is the controller and the Lord of the world. All moving and non-moving beings and entities in this creation are His servants.” Hence, as our desire to serve God increases, the illusion of being the enjoyer of prakṛiti (material world) gets gradually eliminated and the heart is cleansed. Jagadguru Shree Kripaluji Maharaj emphasizes this above everything else, as the most powerful means for purifying the heart:

sau bātana kī bāta ika, dharu muralīdhara dhyāna,
baṛhavahu sevā-vāsanā, yaha sau jñānana jñāna.
(Bhakti Śhatak, verse 74)

“Out of a hundred advice for purification, the most important is this. Let your mind be absorbed in the divine flute-player, Shree Krishna, and keep increasing your desire to serve Him. This counsel is more important than a hundred such gems of knowledge.”

But what happens once our etheric hearts are cleansed and become perfectly situated in the loving service of the Lord? In this verse, Shree Krishna says that all those perfected souls enter his spiritual realm and stay there forever. Once the state of God-realization is achieved, the material realm serves no purpose, the soul is free from the cycle of life and death. It now stays in God’s divine Abode along with other perfected, God-realized souls. The material realm is only one-fourth, while the spiritual realm is three-fourths of the entire creation. As a city prison only occupies a small part of a large city, similarly, the material realm is a very small part of God’s vast creation. The Vedas state:

pādo 'sya viśhwā bhūtāni, tripādasya amṛitam divi (Puruṣh Sūktam Mantra 3)

“This temporary world made from the material energy is but one part of creation. The other three parts are the eternal Abode of God that is beyond the phenomenon of life and death.”

In the next verse, Shree Krishna explains the nature of the eternal Abode.

BG 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.

Commentary

Here, Lord Shree Krishna briefly describes his divine Abode, which he says is self-luminous. No sun, moon or fire is required to light it up. As the material realm is created by Maya (material energy), it is full of defects and dualities. Whereas, the divine realm is created by Yogmaya (spiritual energy), which is both transcendental and perfect. It is also described as sat-chit-ānand (full of bliss, knowledge, and eternality).

The Paravyom is the spiritual sky of the divine realm. It is filled with splendor and divine opulence. It contains numerous abodes of various eternal

forms of God. Narayan, Ram, Shree Krishna, etc. all have their separate Abodes. They reside there eternally along with their devotees and perform divine Leelas (Pastimes). In a prayer to Shree Krishna Brahma says:

goloka-nāmni nija-dhāmni tale cha tasya
devī maheśha-hari-dhāmasu teṣhu teṣhu
te te prabhāva-nichayā vihitāśh cha yena
govindam ādi-puruṣhaṁ tam ahaṁ bhajāmi
(Brahma Samhitā verse 43)

"In the spiritual sky is Golok, the personal Abode of Shree Krishna. That spiritual sky also contains the Abodes of Narayan, Shiv, Durga, etc. I adore Supreme Divine Personality Lord Krishna, by the majesty of whose opulence, this is possible." Brahma has further described Golok in the following verse:

ānanda-chinmaya-rasa-pratibhāvitābhis
tābhir ya eva nija-rūpatayā kalābhiḥ
goloka eva nivasaty akhilātma-bhūto
govindam ādi-puruṣhaṁ tam ahaṁ bhajāmi
(Brahma Samhitā verse 37)

"I worship Govind, the Supreme Lord, 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."

Shree Krishna assures Arjun that souls who attain him, reside eternally with him in His Supreme Abode, which is perfect in every way. These devotees become free from samsara the cycle of birth and death and get to participate in His Divine Leelas.

BG 15.7: The embodied souls in this material world are My eternal fragmental parts. But bound by material nature, they are struggling with the six senses including the mind.

Commentary

In the previous verse, Shree Krishna explained that all the perfected souls who find Him go to His Abode and never return to the material world. Now in this verse he says, but those who remain in the material world are also His Anśha or fragmental parts.

Are the embodied souls also a part of God? To understand this, we must first look at what are the different forms in which God manifests. There are mainly two forms:

Swānśh: All the direct forms of God, who are His integrated parts and not different from Lord Shree Krishna are called swānśh. They are also known as His Avatars such as Shree Ram, Narshingh Bhagavan, Varaha, Matsya, etc.

Vibhinnānśh: All the souls of existence come under this category; they are not directly His parts. These take form from His material energy or jīva śhakti. Shree Krishna had previously explained this in Verse 7.5 "But beyond the material energy, O mighty-armed Arjun, there is another superior energy of Mine. It is the embodied souls who are the basis of life in this world."

These vibhinnānśh souls are further divided into three kinds:

Nitya Siddha: The liberated souls, who have always resided in the divine realm of God since eternity and participate in His divine Pastimes.

Sāadhan Siddha: Those souls from the material world, who practiced sādhanā and attained the Supreme Lord. And now they reside in the divine realm for the rest of eternity.

Nitya Baddha: The embodied souls who have been trapped in the material realm since eternity. Due to their material existence, these souls are dis-illusioned by their five senses and the mind. They are struggling in samsara; the cycle of birth and death.

The Kaṭhopaniṣhad states:

parāñchi khāni vyatṛiṇat swayambhūḥ (2.1.1)

"The creator, Brahma, has made the senses such that they are turned outward toward the world."

Therefore, Shree Krishna said for the vibhinnānśh nitya baddha parts, "Bound by their material nature, these souls are struggling with the six senses including the mind." In the next verse, He explains when a soul moves from one body to another upon death, what happens to the mind and the senses.

BG 15.8: As the air carries fragrance from place to place, so does the embodied soul carry the mind and senses with it, when it leaves an old body and enters a new one.

Commentary

Here, Shree Krishna has given the example of the breeze to explain the process of transmigration of a soul from one body into another. Similar to the breeze, which carries with it the fragrances of the flowers, upon the death of the gross body, the soul carries with it the subtle and the causal bodies, these include the senses and the mind. (The concept of three kinds of bodies has been explained in detail in Verse 2.28).

Even when the material body dies, the soul continues to carry the mind along with the experiences of its past lifetimes from its former body to the new one. That explicates why people who are born blind can still dream, probably based on their experiences from past lives. Dreams are considered to be a visual representation of what we see or think during waking hours. It might be in a distorted or rambled form, which gets connected in our mind when we sleep. For example, someone saw a bird flying and thought, "How wonderful will it be to fly like a bird!" Sometime later, he dreams that he is flying in his human body itself. Yet, a blind person who has not seen anything from birth dreams, this can only be due to all the impressions that are stored in the subconscious mind, which it carries with it from past lifetimes.

In the next verse, Shree Krishna explains what the soul does with the mind and senses it takes with it when it departs from its present body.

In the next verse, Shree Krishna explains what the soul does with the mind and senses it takes with it when it departs from its present body.

BG 15.9: Using the sense perceptions of the ears, eyes, skin, tongue, and nose, which are grouped around the mind, the embodied soul savors the objects of the senses.

Commentary

The soul is divine, then how does it savor the objects of the senses? With the help of the mind and the senses, it can enjoy taste, smell, touch, feel or hear sounds. Even though the mind and senses are lifeless, due to the consciousness of the soul they become lifelike. This helps them to experience pleasure and pain from their thoughts, situations, persons, and objects of the senses. Then the embodied soul identifies the same experiences of the mind and the senses as its own because of the ego.

The trouble here is, that the happiness experienced through the mind and the senses is material, but the soul is divine. Hence, regardless of the amount, the soul can never be satisfied with such material pleasures. It is restless and continuously keeps searching for that ultimate source of happiness.

Ralph Waldo Emerson an American philosopher very beautifully said, "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 soul makes its enormous claim?" Another famous philosopher, Meister Eckhart has written: "There is something in the soul which is above the living being, divine and simple. This light is only satisfied with the supra essential essence."

The divine bliss, which is both eternal and infinite; that the uncontended soul is continuously searching for; can only be attained from God. Those who realize that the mind and the senses are the cause of bondage, and the only way to break free is to turn these instruments of senses towards God, progresses on the path of devotion. Saint Tulsidas, the author of Ramayana in Hindi (Awadhi) is an excellent example.

As a young lad, he was madly in love with his wife. Once she went for a few days to her parents' house, which was in a nearby village across a stream. At night, the weather was bad, but Tulsidas was very restless and eager to meet her. He decided to go and meet her right away. It was very dark and raining, so no boatman was willing to take him across the stream. Then he saw something floating nearby, thinking that it was a log, he clung to it and swam across. When he reached her house, it was late, he was hesitant to wake the entire household. His wife's room was on the second floor, he thought of calling out to her, but saw a rope hanging from her window. He caught that and went up to her room.

She was astonished to see him there and enquired how he managed to come that late at night, in such terrible weather. He pointed at the window, but when they looked out of the window, both were shocked. There was no rope it was a snake, and what Tulsidas assumed to be a log, was in fact, a floating dead body. His desire for his wife was so intense that it had blinded his mind. She was furious and said to him, "You desire me, a body made of flesh and blood. If you would have such an intense desire for God, you would attain him and be free from the cycle of life and death."

Her words had a life-changing effect on Tulsidas. He left home, renounced a householders' life and took up devotion. By detaching himself from the material pleasures and engaging them towards devotion to God, he went on to become a great saint and poet. He later wrote:

kāmihi nāri piāri jimi lobhihi priya jimi dāma,
tīmi raghunātha niranantara priya lāgahu mohi rāma
(Ramayan)

"As a lustful man desires a beautiful woman, and as an avaricious person desires wealth, may my mind and senses constantly desire Lord Ram."

BG 15.10: The ignorant do not perceive the soul 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.

Commentary

The soul savors the perceptions of the mind and the senses while it resides within a body, but not everyone can understand this. It is a spiritual object and cannot be seen or touched using material senses. Several experiments have been conducted by scientists to find the soul, but the material instruments of the laboratories are no good to detect it. Hence, they conclude that all the bodily parts working together are the source of life.

It is similar to a newbie mechanic trying to figure out how does a car move. He looks at the movement of the wheels, traces that back to the accelerator, then the steering wheel and the ignition switch. He concludes that all these parts make a car move. But he missed the important part, who starts the ignition and

moves the steering wheel? Unless a driver operates the car, it would not move.

Similarly, devoid of spiritual knowledge about the existence of the soul and its functions, the physiologists' theory is that the physical body itself along with its different parts is the source of life.

In this verse, Shree Krishna has said that the ignorant (vimūḍh) are unaware of their own divine identity and presume the physical body to be the self. Only someone who has acquired spiritual knowledge understands that it is the soul that gives life to the body. Without the soul, the body is lifeless. When a person dies, the material parts of the body; the heart, brain, lungs, limbs, etc. are there, but they don't function, as the soul has left the body.

Consciousness is an indication of life or the presence of a soul in a physical body. When the soul departs, consciousness ends. Only those who have acquired the eyes of knowledge (jñāna chakṣhu) can understand this phenomenon.

BG 15.11: Striving yogis too are able to realize the soul enshrined in the body. However, those whose minds are not purified cannot cognize it, even though they strive to do so.

Commentary

Only acquiring knowledge is not sufficient, it must also be in the proper direction. The common flaw with the human approach is that we tend to use our material senses to understand the divine. We want to decide the correctness and faults in knowledge with our intellect, which has only worldly but no experience of the divine. We believe that things which cannot be perceived by the mind and the senses do not exist.

This approach is well elucidated by Noble laureate and French physiologist, Alexis Carrel. In his book, *Man the Unknown*, he states: "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."

According to Nyāya Darśhan, one of the ancient schools of Hindu philosophy, such thinking is called *kūpa-maṇḍuka-nyāya* (the logic of a well-frog). The story behind this is of a frog which has been living within the walls of a well, unaware of the world outside. Once an ocean frog gets washed off and falls into that well. The well-frog enquires to the newcomer, "How big is the ocean, where you lived?" The ocean frog replied, "It is huge." The well-frog said, "It must be 5 times bigger than this well." To this, the ocean frog said, "No much bigger than that." The well-frog said, "Is it 10 times bigger?" "Much more than that," said the ocean frog. The well-frog was now curious and said, "A hundred times?" To this, the ocean frog replied, "A hundred is nothing, the ocean is much bigger than that." The frog from the well did not believe the ocean frog and said, "You are a liar, how can any place be a hundred times bigger than my well?" The well-frog had been living there its whole life, it had not seen anything beyond the walls of that well. Therefore, its mind could not comprehend the idea of a vast ocean, or the world that existed outside of that well.

Like the frog of the well, materialistic people cannot perceive the idea of an eternal soul. Due to their limited experience and lack of spiritual knowledge, they cannot perceive that there is an entire spiritual universe beyond the understanding of their material intellects. Only those who have taken the path of spirituality, endeavor to purify their hearts with humility and faith. A cleansed mind naturally experiences the presence of the soul. Then the knowledge of the scriptures becomes clear to them.

Similar to the existence of the soul, the senses cannot perceive the existence

of God as well. Only through the eyes of knowledge can one realize God. In the next verse, Shree Krishna has briefed on the method of perceiving the existence of God.

BG 15.12: 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.

Commentary

In the human form, we tend to forget our origin and eternal form. We regard ourselves as the physical body and get attracted to our bodily relations; parents, spouse, children, material wealth, etc. We feel they are the most significant. We also forget that it is God who is the creator and sustainer of the entire universe.

In this verse, Lord Shree Krishna has said that the entire creation; is the manifestation of his energy. Even the Sun gets its radiance from him. According to scientific theories, the energy emitted every second by the sun is equivalent to millions of nuclear power plants put together, and it has been an uninterrupted process for billions of years. Yet this energy has not reduced in any way. The glory and brilliance of the sun are a part of God's wonderful creation.

Similarly, the night sky is lit up by the moon. Though our mundane intellect might want us to believe and it is also scientifically concluded that moonshine is due to the reflection of the sun's light. But the periodic movement of the moon is also part of God's amazing creation. The sun, the moon, the planets, stars, the panch mahabhootas (earth, water, air, fire, and ether); in fact, the entire universe is a manifestation of God's vibhūti (opulence). It would be very naïve to think that such an amazing celestial arrangement is a result of some random big bang.

There is a story in Kenopanishad, which explicates this. Once there was a prolonged war between the devatās (celestial gods) and the daityas (demons from the nether regions). Eventually, the devatās won by the grace of God. But their pride made them think that it was due to their own strength. God wanted to teach them a lesson; He manifested as an effulgent and powerful yakṣha (a semi-celestial being) in the celestial sky.

When Indra, the King of Heaven saw this yakṣha, he felt insecure and intimidated. To find out who this yakṣha was, he sent Agni, the fire god. With great pride, Agni challenged the yakṣha and said, "I am the fire god, and possess the power to burn the entire world within seconds, please reveal yourself." The yakṣha put in front of him a piece of straw and asked if he could burn it. Agni laughed, "Can a blade of grass be a test for my immense power? Let that be." But when he moved forward to burn it, he could not and started feeling very cold himself. God had taken away his power, defeated and embarrassed he ran back to Indra.

Next, Indra sent Vayu, the wind god to inquire who this yakṣha was. He went to the yakṣha and said, "I am the wind god and possess the power to turn the world upside down within a few seconds, reveal who you are?" Again, the yakṣha put a piece of straw in front of Vayu and said, "Turn this over if you can?" Vayu smirked with pride and tried to blow it, but could not. He felt powerless, and with great effort, he returned to Indra exhausted.

Now Indra was raged and came to challenge the yakṣha himself. But by then the yakṣha had disappeared and in his place was seated Goddess Uma, God's divine Yogmaya power. A baffled Indra asked her, "O Divine Mother, please tell me who was that powerful yakṣha?" She answered, "O imprudent child, you could not recognize Him? Your pride had blinded your prudence. He was your Supreme Father, your creator, and power source, without him you would be powerless." Realizing his mistake, Indra begged for forgiveness.

BG 15.13: Permeating the earth, I nourish all living beings with My energy. Becoming the moon, I nourish all plants with the juice of life.

Commentary

In this verse, Shree Krishna has said that it is His energy which has brought about the appropriate physical conditions for life to exist on planet earth. Here, gām means earth, and ojasā is energy. Like all other celestial bodies, the earth is also a big mass of matter. But God has made it habitable, so that, it can sustain life.

Ever wondered, why ocean water is so salty? God could have made the oceans full of freshwater, but it would have become a breeding ground for diseases. Due to the high salt content of the ocean water, many disease-causing microorganisms cannot survive in it, thereby protecting life.

Similarly, several such amazing phenomena make earth inhabitable to a variety of species, of both movable, and static living beings. Nobel laureate and famous American scientist, George Wald has written in his book, A Universe that Breeds Life: "If anyone 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."

Shree Krishna also says that the moonlight gets its nourishing properties from Him. And it is the ambrosial nectar of the moonlight that nourishes the entire plant life, i.e. fruits, vegetables, grains, herbs, etc.

BG 15.14: 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.

Commentary

Shree Krishna says that God exists inside all living beings as vaiśhvānara, meaning "fire of digestion," which is ignited by the power of God. The Bṛihadāranyak Upaniṣhad has also stated:

ayam agnir vaiśhvānaro yo 'yam antaḥ puruṣhe
yenedam annaṁ achyate (5.9.1)

"God is the fire inside the stomach that enables living beings to digest food."

Though the scientific community has concluded, that the organs of the digestive system such as the stomach, liver, pancreas, gall bladder, etc. secrete digestive juices enabling the digestion of food in living beings. This revelation by God suggests that such an approach is naïve. It is God's energy which fires up the digestive process in living beings.

Chaturvidham means four types and annam means food. Food is categorized into four types: 1. Bhojya - Foods that are chewed, such as bread, chapatti, etc. 2. Peya - These are mostly liquid or semi-solid foods which we have to swallow or drink, such as milk, juice, etc. 3. Kośhya - Foods that are sucked, such as sugarcane. 4. Lehya - This includes foods that are licked, such as honey, etc.

In the last few verses, Shri Krishna has explicated how God supports every aspect of our life. With his energy, He makes the earth habitable, nourishes all vegetation, and even ignites the gastric fire to digest our food. In the next verse, he concludes by stating that He is the master of all knowledge.

BG 15.15: 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 Vedant, and the knower of the meaning of the Vedas.

Commentary

In this verse, Lord Shree Krishna says that He has bestowed upon us this amazing ability of memory and knowledge. While the mind and the intellect are like software; the brain can be considered hardware. Yet this mechanism of the brain is way beyond human understanding.

Although there is vast development in technology, there are many areas where the scientific community is still struggling. For example, surgeons who perform brain transplant get delighted with their feat; but do not fully understand its functions. Another example is of face-recognition technology. It is remarkable that humans can very easily recognize someone they meet after several years, even though there are many changes in their looks. Whereas, present-day computers sometimes cannot even recognize unchanged faces. How amazing it is that while the scanner software finds it difficult to read even typewritten text; humans can read even sketchy handwritings, without much effort. Such are the mysteries of the human brain which the Supreme Lord has created.

Shree Krishna says that He has also given us this power of forgetting the past. Similar to how unwanted records are deleted from a computer, living beings wipe off unwanted memories. Else there would be an information overload.

Uddhav says to Shree Krishna:

tvatto jñānaṁ hi jīvānāṁ pramoṣhas te 'tra śaktiḥ (Bhagavatam 11.22.28)

"From You alone, the knowledge of the living being arises, and by Your potency that knowledge is stolen away."

Other than the internal knowledge that we carry, there is another source of knowledge; that is from the scriptures. In this verse, the Lord has further revealed his glories in regards to the manifestation of the Vedas; that he is the creator, knower, and writer of the Vedas. God is divine and all his creations, including the Vedas, are divine. He alone is the knower of their true meaning; and only by his grace can a fortunate soul know the Vedas. Ved Vyas the author of the Vedānt Darśhan is considered to be an avatar of God. And Shree Krishna has specifically mentioned that he is the author of the Vedānt.

Eventually, He says that although the Vedas give out numerous instructions both material and spiritual, the final objective of all knowledge is to know Him. The purpose of the rituals and ceremonies instructed are to lure people back from the material world towards spirituality. They act as an intermediate step to detach them from their materialistic mindset and direct them towards God.

The Kaṭhopanishad (1.2.15) states: sarve vedā yat padamāmananti "All the Vedic mantras are actually pointing towards God." Memorizing and reciting the Vedic mantras in proper meter, following all the rituals, meditating or even awakening the kuṇḍalinī power; all will be worthless if we do not know God. Only those who have learned to truly love God, have understood the real teachings of all the Vedic scriptures.

Jagadguru Shree Kripaluji Maharaj states:

sarva śāstra sāra yaha govind rādhe, āṭhoṇ yām mana hari guru meṇ lagā de (Rādhā Govind Geet)

"The essence of all the scriptures is to engage your mind day and night in loving devotion to God and Guru."

In the next two verses, Shree Krishna has described the terms kṣhar, akṣhar, and Puruṣhottam and given proper perspective to the knowledge revealed so far.

BG 15.16: There are two kinds of beings in creation, the kṣhar (perishable) and the akṣhar (imperishable). The perishable are all beings in the material realm. The imperishable are the the liberated beings.

Commentary

Shree Krishna says that there are two kinds of beings; the kṣhar (perishable) and the akṣhar (imperishable). All beings in the material realm are perishable, and those liberated are imperishable.

Although all souls are eternal; in the material realm, Maya binds the individual soul to a material body. From the tiniest insect to the celestial gods, all embodied living entities in the material world are kṣhar (perishable). They have to go through the repetitive cycle of birth and death of their material body.

Whereas, the akṣhar (imperishable) souls possess an immortal body, which is free from the cycle of birth and death. They reside forever in the divine realm; the Abode of God.

BG 15.17: Besides these, is the Supreme Divine Personality, who is the indestructible Supreme Soul. He enters the three worlds as the unchanging Controller and supports all living beings.

Commentary

In the previous verses, Shree Krishna spoke about the different worlds and categories of souls. Now he speaks of God - the Supreme Divine Personality called the Paramātmā, which means the Supreme Soul. The appellation of Param emphasizes on the fact that Paramātmā is different from ātmā, which is an individual soul, whereas, Paramātmā is the Supreme Soul. He is the transcendental God who controls both the perishable and imperishable worlds. For the non-dualistic philosophers who propagate that individual soul itself is the Supreme Soul, this verse is clear disapproval of their claim.

While the individual soul is very tiny and confined to the material body it resides in; the Supreme Soul is present inside every living entity. He is the constant companion of the individual soul in every life, immaterial of what species the soul gets born into. He sits in their hearts quietly taking a note; keeping an account of their karmas, and gives appropriate results. For example, in a particular birth, a soul has received a dog's body. The Supreme Soul continues to be inside and gives results based on the soul's past karmas. This explains why even dogs have different destinies. Some dogs are born on the streets, live a famished life, and die in misery. Whereas, some get to live comfortably as pets in lavish mansions, living a dainty life. This huge difference in destiny is due to the stockpile of karmas from their previous births. The Supreme Soul which accompanies the soul in its various births, in different species, keeps granting results based on its karmas.

The Supreme Soul also exists in a personal form as the four-armed Kshirodakshayi Vishnu, commonly known as "Bhagwan Vishnu". A popular saying in Hindi goes: "mārane vāle ke do hāth, bachāne vāle ke chār hāth" which means, a killer has two arms, but the savior has four arms. The four-armed personality referred to here is the Paramātmā, the Supreme Soul.

BG 15.18: I am transcendental to the perishable world of matter, and even to the imperishable soul; hence I am celebrated, both in the Vedas and the Smṛitis, as the Supreme Divine Personality.

Commentary

So far in this chapter, Shree Krishna has detailed that His opulence is the source of all the magnificence in nature, and in creating the visible universe he does not deplete Himself. In this verse, He has called Himself Puruṣhottam, the Divine Supreme Person who transcends over the material world, which includes both kṣhar the perishable and akṣhar the imperishable divine souls.

Does that mean the Puruṣhottam He has referred to and Lord Shree Krishna Himself are two different entities? To eliminate any such doubts, in this verse, while

referring to Himself Shree Krishna has used the term aham (I), which is first person singular. He also said that the Vedas and the Smritis have described Him similarly:

kṛiṣṇa eva paro devas taṁ dhyāyet taṁ rasayet taṁ yajet taṁ bhajet
(Gopāl Tāpani Upaniṣhad)

"Lord Krishna is the Supreme Lord. Meditate upon Him, relish the bliss of His devotion, worship Him, and serve Him."

yo 'sau paraṁ brahma gopālaḥ
(Gopāl Tāpani Upaniṣhad)

"Gopal (Lord Krishna) is the Supreme Being."

Then the question arises, who are Lord Ram, Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva, and all the other Gods and Goddesses? They are all different manifestations of the same Bhagavān, the Supreme Divine Personality and should not be considered separate.

BG 15.19: Those who know Me without doubt as the Supreme Divine Personality truly have complete knowledge. O Arjun, they worship Me with their whole being.

Commentary

As per the Shreemad Bhagavatam, there are three ways to realize God:

vadanti tat tattva-vidas tattvaṁ yaj jñānam advayam
brahmeti paramātmēti bhagavān iti śabdyate (1.2.11)

"The knowers of the Truth have stated that there is only one Supreme Entity that manifests in three ways in the world—Brahman, Paramātmā, and Bhagavān."

This does not mean that these three are different entities, God is one, and these forms are only his manifestations. As water exists in nature as ice, water, and steam that have different physical properties; but are forms of the same substance; likewise, God exists in three forms Brahman, the formless, omnipotent and omnipresent. The followers of jñāna-yoga worship God as Brahman. The aṣṭāṅg-yoga seeks God as Paramātmā, the Supreme Soul who resides in the hearts of all living creatures. Whereas, Bhagavān is more personal and can be considered the sweetest among his form. Here, God manifests as a person and performs sweet Leelas (pastimes). The devotees of the Bhākti-yoga savor this form and immerse themselves in his loving bliss, as explained earlier in verse 12.2.

In this chapter, Shree Krishna has described all three forms of God. But which of them is the most complete? Here, in this verse lies the answer. Shree Krishna says those who know Him as the Supreme Divine Personality and worship him as Bhagavān truly have complete knowledge of Him.

Jagadguru Shree Kripaluji Maharaj in his book Bhakti Śhatak has given a detailed explanation of why Bhagavān realization is the highest. He has quoted the same verse 1.2.11 of the Shreemad Bhagavatam and said:

tīna rūp śhrī kṛiṣṇa ko, vedavyās batāya,
brahma aura paramātmā, aru bhagavān kahāya. (Bhakti Śhatak verse 21)

"Ved Vyas has declared that the Supreme Lord manifests in three ways—Brahman, Paramātmā, and Bhagavān." Then he goes on to describe these three manifestations of the Absolute Truth.

sarvaśhakti sampann ho, śhakti vikāsa na hoyā,
sat chit ānanda rūp jo, brahma kahāve soya. (Bhakti Śhatak verse 22)

"As Brahman, the infinite energies of God are all latent. He merely displays eternal knowledge and bliss."

sarvaśhakti sanyukta ho, nāma rūp guṇa hoyā,
līlā parikara rahit ho, paramātmā hai soya. (Bhakti Śhatak verse 23)

“As Paramātmā, God displays His Form, Name, and Virtues. But He does not engage in Leelas, nor does He have associates.”

sarvaśhakti prākāṭya ho, līlā vividha prakāra,
vihārata parikara sang jo, tehi bhagavān pukāra. (Bhakti Śhatak verse 24)

“The aspect of God in which He manifests all His energies and engages in various loving Pastimes with His devotees is called Bhagavān.”

Through these verses, Jagadguru Shree Kripaluji Maharaj has explicated that; while in His manifestation as Brahman and Paramātmā God does not reveal himself completely; but as Bhagavān, He manifests himself with all his Names, Forms, Virtues, Pastimes, Abodes, and Associates. This complete realization of the Supreme Entity has also been explained earlier in verse 12.2, with the example of a train. Thus, those who seek God as Bhagavān, the Supreme Divine Personality can truly acquire complete knowledge of Him.

BG 15.20: 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.

Commentary

To conclude this chapter Shree Krishna uses the word iti in this verse, which means “these”. This is to imply that, “Arjun, here I have given you the gist of all the hidden knowledge of the Vedic Scriptures. From the description of the nature of this world to the differentiation between matter and spirit. Finally, the realization of the Absolute Truth about Oneself and the Supreme Divine Personality, God. I assure you that whoever espouses this knowledge will be truly enlightened. Their deeds and endeavours will be definitely fruitful and take them towards their ultimate goal, which is God-realization.”

BG 16.1-3: The Supreme Divine Personality 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, 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.

Commentary

Here, Shree 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 God 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 God purifies it.

Steadfastness in spiritual knowledge. It is said: *tattva vismaraṇāt bhekiṇī* [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 God 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 soul, helps eliminate the cause of all suffering, which is separation from God. 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 God.

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 God.

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. God 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 God.

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 God, one overcomes anger.

Renunciation. The entire material energy belongs to God 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 God. 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. *Hriḥ* 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 God 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 God for the good qualities they possess. Thus, they refrain from self-aggrandizement.

BG 16.4: O Parth, the qualities of those who possess a demoniac nature are hypocrisy, arrogance, conceit, anger, harshness, and ignorance.

Commentary

Shree 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.

BG 16.5: 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.

Commentary

Having described the two kinds of natures, Shree 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 Maya.

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 God. But if we possess the saintly virtues that Shree 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. Mahatma Gandhi and Benjamin Franklin both mention having used such techniques in their autobiographies.

Some may argue that if we develop devotion to God, we will naturally, over time, acquire the saintly virtues described by Shree 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 Shree Krishna has mentioned in this chapter and shed any demoniac ones.

BG 16.6: 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.

Commentary

All souls 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 cruelest 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 godly 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 God, while the lower self pulls it downward. Having described the saintly qualities, Shree Krishna now goes into an extended description of the lower nature, to help us recognize it and avoid it.

BG 16.7: Those possessing a demoniac nature do not comprehend which actions are proper and which are improper. Hence, they possess neither purity, nor good conduct, nor even truthfulness.

Commentary

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.

Shree 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.

BG 16.8: They say, "The world is without Absolute Truth, without any basis (for moral order), and without a God (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."

Commentary

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 God. 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 God, out of fear of him we will refrain from immoral behavior. Instead, if we do not believe in God, 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 God. Instead, they prefer to subscribe to the view that there is no God 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 God 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 souls and their interactions with God. In the material realm, its distorted reflection, lust, dominates the consciousness of materially conditioned souls, particularly those under the mode of passion. Thus, the demoniac-minded see engagement in lustful activities as the purpose of human life.

BG 16.9: Holding fast to such views, these misdirected souls, with small intellect and cruel actions, arise as enemies of the world threatening its destruction.

Commentary

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:

yāvajjīvetā sukaṃ jīvet, ṛiṇaṃ kṛitvā gṛitaṃ pivet

bhaṣmī bhūtasya dehasya punarāgamaṇaṃ kutaḥ [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 eternality of the soul 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.

BG 16.10: 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.

Commentary

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.

BG 16.11: 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.

Commentary

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 pauṭra bharaṇavyāpāra sambhāṣhaṇe
yā chintā dhana dhānya yaśhasām lābhe sadā jāyate
sā chintā yadi nandanandan padadvandvāra vindekṣhaṇam
kā chintā yamarāja bhīma sadadvāraprayāṇe 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 Shree Krishna’s lotus feet, they will never again have to worry about Yamraj, the god 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.

BG 16.12: 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.

Commentary

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 svatvaṁ hi dehinām

adhikaṁ 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 God, 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.

BG 16.13-15: 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 God Himself, I am the enjoyer, I am perfect, 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 gods); I shall give alms; I shall rejoice." In this way, they are deluded by ignorance.

Commentary

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 parahitaṁ swārthāya nighnanti ye

ye tughnanti nirarthakaṁ parahitaṁ 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." Shree 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 God because I am like God 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:

ũñche pānī na ṭike, nīche hī ṭaharāye

nīchā hoyā so bhari pī, ũñchā pyāsā jāya [v8]

"Water does not remain above; it naturally flows down. Those who are low and unassuming drink (God's grace) to their heart's content, while those who are high and pompous remain thirsty."

BG 16.16: 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 hell.

Commentary

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, Shree 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 God in accordance with the law of karma. The Ramayan 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, God casts those who choose to cultivate demoniac qualities into inferior states of existence. The principle is very simple:

ūrdhvaṁ gachchhanti sattvasthā madhye tiṣṭhanti rājasāḥ

jaghanya guṇa vṛittisthā 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."

BG 16.17: 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.

Commentary

Virtuous people perform sacrifice to purify the self and to please God. 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 vṛiddhiḥ kīrtitasya bhavet kṣayaḥ* (Mahabharat)[v11] "If we advertise a good deed we have done, its merit decreases; if we keep it secret, its merit multiplies." In this verse, Shree Krishna dismisses the ritualistic ceremonies of the demoniac by saying that they are incorrectly performed.

BG 16.18: Blinded by egotism, strength, arrogance, desire, and anger, the demonic abuse Me, who am present in their own body and in the bodies of others.

Commentary

Here, Shree 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 Soul who is seated within their own hearts and the hearts of others.

BG 16.19-20: 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 souls take birth again and again in demoniac wombs. Failing to reach Me, O Arjun, they gradually sink to the most abominable type of existence.

Commentary

Shree 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 soul's hands to choose the species, abode, and environment of its next birth. God 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.

BG 16.21: There are three gates leading to the hell of self-destruction for the soul—lust, anger, and greed. Therefore, one should abandon all three.

Commentary

Shree 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. Shree 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, Shree Krishna labels them as gateways to hell, and strongly advises 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.

BG 16.22: Those who are free from the three gates to darkness endeavor for the welfare of their soul, and thereby attain the supreme goal.

Commentary

In this verse, Shree 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, free 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 soul, thereby moving toward the supreme goal.

BG 16.23: 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.

Commentary

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 niṣedh. The directives to perform certain activities are called vidhi. The directives not to perform certain activities are called niṣedh. 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, Shree 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.

BG 16.24: 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.

Commentary

Shree 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 hell 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:

bhūtaṁ bhavyaṁ bhaviṣyaṁ cha sarvaṁ 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, Shree Krishna concludes by instructing Arjun to comprehend the teachings of the scriptures and act according to them.

BG 17.1: 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?

Commentary

In the preceding chapter, Shree 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.

BG 17.2: The Supreme Divine Personality 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.

Commentary

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 God because I cannot see him," they do not have faith in God 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. Shree Krishna now explains the reason why different people choose to place their faith in different places.

BG 17.3: 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.

Commentary

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. Mahatma Gandhi had faith in the incomparable importance of satya (truth) and ahimsā (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 God-realization renounce their material life in search of him. Thus, Shree 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, Shree Krishna begins expounding on the kinds of faith that exist.

BG 17.4: Those in the mode of goodness worship the celestial gods; those in the mode of passion worship the yakṣhas and rākṣhasas; those in the mode of ignorance worship ghosts and spirits.

Commentary

It is said that the good are drawn to the good and the bad to the bad. Those in tamo guṇa are drawn toward ghosts and spirits, despite the evil and cruel nature of such beings. Those who are rājasic get drawn to the yakṣhas (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 guṇa become attracted to the worship of celestial gods in whom they perceive the qualities of goodness. However, worship is perfectly directed when it is offered to God.

BG 17.5-6: 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 Soul. Know these senseless people to be of demoniacal resolves.

Commentary

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. Shree 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 Soul who resides within. All these are contrary to the recommended path of the scriptures."

Having described the three categories of faith, Shree Krishna now explains, corresponding to each of these, the categories of food, activities, sacrifice, charity, and so forth.

BG 17.7: The food that people prefer is according to their dispositions. The same is true for the sacrifice, austerity, and charity they are inclined (or predisposed) toward. Now hear of the distinctions from Me.

Commentary

The mind and body impact each other. Thus, the food people eat influences their nature and vice versa. The Chhândogya Upaniṣhad 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 śhuddhau sattva śhuddhiḥ (7.26.2)[v1] "By eating pure food, the mind becomes pure." The reverse is also true—people with pure minds prefer pure foods.

BG 17.8: Persons in the mode of goodness prefer foods that promote life span, and increase virtue, strength, health, happiness, and satisfaction. Such foods are juicy, succulent, nourishing, and naturally tasteful.

Commentary

In Chapter 14, verse 6, Shree 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." Mahatma 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.

BG 17.9: Foods that are too bitter, too sour, salty, very hot, pungent, dry, and full of chillies, are dear to persons in the mode of passion. Such foods produce pain, grief, and disease.

Commentary

When vegetarian foods are cooked with excessive chilies, sugar, salt, etc. they become rājasīc. While describing them, the word "very" can be added to all the adjectives used. Thus, rājasīc foods are very bitter, very sour, very salty, very hot, very pungent, very dry, full of chillies, 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.

BG 17.10: Foods that are overcooked, stale, putrid, polluted, and impure are dear to persons in the mode of ignorance.

Commentary

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 God 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:

mām sa bhakṣhayitā 'mutra yasya māmsam ihādmy aham
etan māmsasya māmsatvaṁ pravadanti manīṣiṇaḥ (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)."

BG 17.11: Sacrifice that is performed according to 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.

Commentary

The nature of yajña also corresponds to the three guṇas. Shree 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 dṛiṣṭaḥ 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 Lord, as required by the scriptures. When yajña is performed in this manner, it is classified in the mode of goodness.

BG 17.12: O best of the Bharatas, know that sacrifice performed for material benefit, or with a hypocritical aim, is in the mode of passion.

Commentary

Sacrifice becomes a form of business with God 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. Shree 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.

BG 17.13: 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.

Commentary

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 God and the scriptures.

BG 17.14: When worship of the Supreme Lord, the Brahmins, the spiritual master, the wise, and the elders is done with the observance of cleanliness, simplicity, celibacy, and non-violence then this worship is declared as the austerity of the body.

Commentary

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.

Shree 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.

BG 17.15: Words that do not cause distress, are truthful, inoffensive, and beneficial, as well as regular recitation of the Vedic scriptures—these are declared as austerity of speech.

Commentary

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 austerities of speech. The progenitor, Manu, wrote:

*satyaṁ brūyāt priyaṁ brūyān na brūyāt satyaṁ apriyaṁ
priyaṁ cha nāṇṛitaṁ brūyād eṣha dharmah sanātanaḥ*
(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.”

BG 17.16: Serenity of thought, gentleness, silence, self-control, and purity of purpose—all these are declared as austerity of the mind.

Commentary

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. Shree 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 bedaubs 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.

BG 17.17: 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.

Commentary

Having delineated the austerities of the body, speech, and mind, Shree 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.

BG 17.18: 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.

Commentary

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.

BG 17.19: 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.

Commentary

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.

BG 17.20: 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.

Commentary

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: dānamekaṁ kalau yuge [v5] "In the age of Kali, giving in charity is the means for purification." The Ramayan states this too:

pragaṭa chāri pada dharma ke kali mahuñ ek pradhāna
jena kena bidhi dīnheñ 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 daśhamānśhena dhīmataḥ
kartavyo viniyogaśhcha īśhvarapṛityarthameva 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 God.” Charity is classified as proper or improper, superior or inferior, according to the factors mentioned by Shree 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.

BG 17.21: 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.

Commentary

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 being asked for a donation, or to regret later, “Why did I give so much? I could have gotten away with a smaller amount.” Shree Krishna classifies this kind of charity in the mode of passion.

BG 17.22: 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.

Commentary

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.

BG 17.23: 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.

Commentary

In this chapter, Shree 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 soul 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 Maya. 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, Shree Krishna goes beyond the three guṇas, 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.

BG 17.24: 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.

Commentary

The syllable Om is a symbolic representation of the impersonal aspect of God. 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 bīja (seed) mantra to invoke auspiciousness.

BG 17.25: 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.

Commentary

The fruits of all actions belong to God, and hence, any yajña (sacrifice), tapaḥ (austerity), and dānam (charity), must be consecrated by offering it for the pleasure of the Supreme Lord. Now, Shree 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 soul through God-realization.

BG 17.26-27: 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."

Commentary

Now the auspiciousness of the word "Sat" is being glorified by Shree 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 Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam states:

satya-vrataṁ satya-param tri-satyaṁ
satyasya yoniṁ nihitaṁ cha satye
satyasya satyam ṛita-satya-netraṁ
satyātmakaṁ tvāṁ śharaṇaṁ prapannāḥ (10.2.26)[v8]

"O Lord, 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."

BG 17.28: O son of Pritha, whatever acts of sacrifice, charity, or penance are done without faith, are termed as "Asat." They are useless both in this world and the next.

Commentary

In order to firmly establish that all Vedic activities should be performed with faith, Shree 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.

BG 18.1: Arjun said: O mighty-armed Krishna, I wish to understand the nature of sanyās (renunciation of actions) and tyāg (renunciation of desire for the fruits of actions). O Hrishikesh, I also wish to know the distinction between the two, O Keshinisudan.

Commentary

Arjun addresses Shree Krishna as "Keshi-nisudan," meaning "killer of the Keshi demon." In his divine pastimes on the earth, Lord 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 Shree 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 Lord Shree Krishna, as the Master of the senses, himself embodies this state of perfection.

This topic had been explained in the previous chapters as well. Shree 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, Shree 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 Lord is the paramount duty, and its attainment is the goal of human life.

BG 18.2: The Supreme Divine Personality said: Giving up of actions motivated by desire is what the learned understand as sanyās. Relinquishing the fruits of all actions is what the wise declare to be tyāg.

Commentary

Kavayaḥ are the learned. Shree 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 soul further in the wheel of karma and lead to repeated rebirths in the samsara of birth and death.

Vichakṣaṇāḥ are the wise. Shree 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 Shree Krishna recommend? He provides more clarity on this topic in the subsequent verses.

BG 18.3: 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.

Commentary

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 Mīmāṃsā 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 Mīmāṃsakas (followers of the Mīmāṃsā 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 Mīmāṃsakas say we must never give up beneficial activities, such as sacrifice, charity, and penance.

BG 18.4: Now hear My conclusion on the subject of renunciation, O tiger amongst men, for renunciation has been declared to be of three kinds.

Commentary

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, Shree 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, Shree 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 śhūravīra nahīn hoyā

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 Maya and engages in bhakti."

BG 18.5: 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.

Commentary

Here, Shree 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, Shree 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.

BG 18.6: These activities must be performed without attachment and expectation for rewards. This is My definite and supreme verdict, O Arjun.

Commentary

Acts of sacrifice, charity, and penance should be done in the mood of devotion to the Supreme Lord. 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. Shree 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.

BG 18.7: Prescribed duties should never be renounced. Such deluded renunciation is said to be in the mode of ignorance.

Commentary

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. Shree 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 soul. 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 soul, sacrifice, charity, and penance are the duties.

BG 18.8: 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.

Commentary

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 sādḥaks 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. Shree 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. Shree 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 God.

BG 18.9: When actions are undertaken in response to duty, and one relinquishes attachment to any reward, O Arjun, it is considered renunciation in the nature of goodness.

Commentary

Shree 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 God-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.

BG 18.10: 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).

Commentary

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 thither 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 Mahatma 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.

BG 18.11: 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.

Commentary

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. Shree 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, Shree Krishna states here that if one can give up attachment to the fruits of actions, it is considered perfect renunciation.

BG 18.12: 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.

Commentary

The three kinds of rewards that the soul reaps after death are: 1) *iṣṭam*, or pleasant experiences in the celestial abodes, 2) *aniṣṭam*, or unpleasant experiences in the hellish abodes, and 3) *miśram*, 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 God, 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.

BG 18.13: 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.

Commentary

On knowing that work can be performed without attachment to the fruits, a natural question arises: "What constitutes action?" Shree 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 Sāṅkhya philosophy as well. Sāṅkhya refers to the system of philosophy established by Maharishi Kapil, who was a descension of God and appeared on the earth as the child of Kardam Muni and Devahuti. The Sāṅkhya 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.

BG 18.14: The body, the doer (soul), the various senses, the many kinds of efforts, and Divine Providence—these are the five factors of action.

Commentary

In this verse, adhiṣṭhānam means "place of residence," and refers to the body, since karmas can only be performed when the soul is situated in the body. Kartā means "the doer," and refers to the soul. Although the soul 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 Upaniṣhad states: eṣha hi draṣṭā spraṣṭā śrotā ghrātā rasayitā mantā boddhā kartā vijñānātmā puruṣaḥ sa pare 'kṣhara ātmani sampratiṣṭhate (4.9)[v3] "It is the soul that sees, touches, hears, feels, tastes, thinks, and comprehends. Thus, the soul is to be considered both—the knower and the doer of actions." The Brahma Sūtra also states: jño 'ta eva (2.3.18)[v4] "It is truly the soul that is the knower." Again, the Brahma Sūtra states: kartā śhāstrārthavattvāt (2.3.33)[v5] "The soul is the doer of actions, and this is confirmed by the scriptures." From the above quotations, it is clear that the soul is also a factor in accomplishing actions.

The senses are instruments used for performing actions. Without the senses, the soul 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 soul 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 vaśhībhavanti [v6] "With sufficient effort, even poor destiny can be transformed into good fortune." Nirutvāhād daivaṁ patita [v7] "Without proper effort, even good destiny can be converted into misfortune." Therefore, cheṣṭhā (effort) is another ingredient of action.

God 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 God. Similarly, others seem to have God-given talents in fields such as sports, music, art, literature, etc. It is God 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.

BG 18.15-16: 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 soul as the only doer. With their impure intellects they cannot see things as they are.

Commentary

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. Shree Krishna's purpose in revealing this knowledge is to annihilate the soul's pride of doership. Thus, he states that those who see the soul only as the contributory factor for action do not see things as they truly are. If the soul were not granted a body by God, it could not have done anything at all. Further, if the body were not energized by God, it could have still done nothing. The Kenopaniṣhad states:

yadvāchānabhyuditaṁ 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."

yachchakṣhuṣhā na paśhyati yena chakṣhūṁṣhi paśhyati (1.6)[v10]

"Brahman cannot be seen with the eyes. By its inspiration, the eyes see."

yachchhrotreṇa na śrīṇoti yena śrotramidaṁ śrutam (1.7)[v11]

"Brahman cannot be heard with the ears. By its power, the ears hear."

yat prāṇena na prāṇiti yena prāṇaḥ praṇīyate (1.8)[v12]

"Brahman cannot be energized by the life airs. By its inspiration, the life airs function."

This does not mean that the soul 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 soul 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 God 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.

BG 18.17: 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.

Commentary

Having described the obtuse intellect in the previous verse, Shree 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 Lord 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

jyoñ jyoñ kara ūñchyo karo, tyoñ tyoñ 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.

BG 18.18: 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.

Commentary

In his systematic treatment of the science of action, Shree 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), kārṇ (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, Shree Krishna now relates them to the three modes of material nature, to explain why people differ from each other in their motives and actions.

BG 18.19: 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.

Commentary

Shree 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 soul 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 Lord will explain the three types of knowledge, action, and doers.

Amongst the six systems of thought in Indian philosophy, the Sāṅkhya philosophy (also called puruṣa prakṛiti vāda) is recognized as the authority in the matter of analysis of material nature. It considers the soul as the puruṣa (lord), and thus recognizes many puruṣas. Prakṛiti is the material nature and includes all things made from it. Sāṅkhya states the cause for misery is the desire of the puruṣa to enjoy prakṛiti. When this enjoying propensity subsides, then the puruṣa is released from the bondage of material nature attains eternal beatitude. The Sāṅkhya system does not acknowledge the existence of the Param Puruṣa, or the Supreme Lord, and hence it is insufficient for knowing the Absolute Truth. However, in the matter of knowledge about prakṛiti (material nature), Shree Krishna refers to it as the authority.

BG 18.20: Understand that knowledge to be in the mode of goodness by which a person sees one undivided imperishable reality within all diverse living beings.

Commentary

Creation gives the appearance of a panorama of diverse living beings and material entities. But the substratum behind this apparent diversity is the Supreme Lord. 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 Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam states:

vadanti tat tattva-vidas tattvaṁ 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 God, in his form as Shree 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. Sajātiya bhed śhūnya. (He is one with all similar entities.) Shree Krishna is one with the various other forms of God, such as Ram, Shiv, Vishnu, etc. since these are different manifestations of the one God.

Shree Krishna is also one with the souls, 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. Vijātiya bhed śhūnya. (He is one with all dissimilar entities.) Dissimilar to God is Maya, which is insentient, while God is sentient. However, Maya is an energy of God, and energy is one with its energetic, just as the energies of fire-heat and light-are non-different from it.

3. Swagat bhed śhūnya. (The various parts of his body are non-different from him.) The amazing thing about God’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 chiraṁ jaganti (5.32)[v17]

"With every limb of his body, God can see, hear, talk, smell, eat, and think." Hence, all the limbs of God's body are non-different from him.

4. Swayam siddha. (He needs the support of no other entity.) Maya and the soul are both dependent upon God for their existence. If he did not energize them, they would cease to exist. On the other hand, God is supremely independent and does not need the support of any other entity for his existence.

The Supreme Lord Shree 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 God, it is considered sāttvic knowledge. And love based upon such knowledge is not racial or national, rather it is universal.

BG 18.21: That knowledge is to be considered in the mode of passion by which one sees manifold living entities in diverse bodies as individual and unconnected.

Commentary

Shree 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 God, 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.

BG 18.22: 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.

Commentary

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 God 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 God and religion, they create disruption in society and obstruct its har

BG 18.23: Action that is in accordance with the scriptures, free from attachment and aversion, and done without desire for rewards, is in the mode of goodness.

Commentary

Having explained the three kinds of knowledge, Shree 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 Mahabharat states:

ātmanah pratikūlāni pareśhām na samācharet

śhrutiḥ smṛitiḥ 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, Shree 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.

BG 18.24: Action that is prompted by selfish desire, enacted with pride, and full of stress, is in the nature of passion.

Commentary

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.

BG 18.25: 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.

Commentary

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. Shree Krishna uses the word kṣhaya 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.

BG 18.26: The performer is said to be in the mode of goodness, when he or she is free from egotism and attachment, endowed with enthusiasm and determination, and equipoised in success and failure.

Commentary

Shree 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 soul. 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 God.

BG 18.27: 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.

Commentary

The rājasik workers are being described here. While the sāttvic workers are motivated by the desire for spiritual growth, the rājasik 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 aśhuchiḥ (impure). When their desires are fulfilled they become elated, and when they are daunted they get dejected. In this way, their lives become harṣha śhoka anvitaḥ (a mixture of delights and sorrows).

BG 18.28: A performer in the mode of ignorance is one who is undisciplined, vulgar, stubborn, deceitful, slothful, despondent, and a procrastinator.

Commentary

Shree Krishna now gives a description of tāmasic workers. Their mind is blotted with negative obsessions and thus they are ayuktaḥ (undisciplined). The scriptures give injunctions regarding what is proper and improper behavior. But workers in the mode of ignorance are stabdhaḥ (obstinate in their views), for they have closed their ears and mind to reason. Thus, they are often śhaṭhaḥ (cunning) and naiṣhkṛitikaḥ (dishonest or vile) in their ways. They are prākṛitaḥ (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 alasaḥ (slothful) and dīrgha-sūtrī (procrastinating). Their ignoble and base thoughts impact them more than anyone

else, making them viṣhādī (unhappy and morose).

The Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam also describes types of performers of actions:

sāttvikaḥ kārako 'saṅgī rāgāndho rājasah smṛitaḥ

tāmasah smṛiti-vibhraṣṭo nirguṇo mad-apāśhrayaḥ (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."

BG 18.29: 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.

Commentary

In the previous nine verses, Shree 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. Shree Krishna now discusses both these faculties and their three-fold classifications.

BG 18.30: The intellect is said to be in the nature of goodness, O Parth, when it understands what is proper action and improper action, what is duty and non-duty, what is to be feared and what is not to be feared, what is binding and what is liberating.

Commentary

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 Lord and requested him to enlighten him regarding his duty. Through the divine song of wisdom, Lord 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 illumines 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.

BG 18.31: 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, O Parth.

Commentary

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.

BG 18.32: 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, O Parth.

Commentary

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.

BG 18.33: The steadfast willpower that is developed through Yog, and which sustains the activities of the mind, the life-airs, and the senses, O Parth, is said to be determination in the mode of goodness.

Commentary

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 impediments on the journey.

Shree 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).

BG 18.34: The steadfast willpower by which one holds on to duty, pleasures, and wealth, out of attachment and desire for rewards, O Arjun, is determination in the mode of passion.

Commentary

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. Shree Krishna says that determination fuelled by the desire for enjoying rewards is in the mode of passion.

BG 18.35: 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.

Commentary

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 hell 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. Shree Krishna states that determination based upon such stubborn clinging to unproductive thoughts is in the mode of ignorance.

BG 18.36: Now hear from Me, O Arjun, of the three kinds of happiness in which the embodied soul rejoices, and can even reach the end of all suffering.

Commentary

In the previous verses, Shree 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. Shree Krishna now goes on to explain the three categories of happiness.

BG 18.37: 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.

Commentary

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 baḍoñ kā kahā, bād meñ 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, Shree 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 Kaṭhapaniṣhad states:

anyachchhreyo 'nyadutaiva preyaste ubhe nānārthe puruṣhaṁ sinītaḥ
tayoḥ śhreya ādadānasya sādhu bhavati hīyate 'rthādya u preyo vṛiṇīte

śhreyaśhcha preyaśhcha manuṣhyametastau 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."

BG 18.38: 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.

Commentary

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.

BG 18.39: 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.

Commentary

Tāmasic happiness is of the lowest kind and is foolishness from beginning to end. It throws the soul 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. Shree Krishna states that such pleasures—derived from sleep, laziness, and negligence—are in the mode of ignorance.

BG 18.40: No living being on earth or the higher celestial abodes of this material realm is free from the influence of these three modes of nature.

Commentary

The Śhwetāśhvatar Upaniṣhad states that the material energy, Maya, is tri-colored:

ajāmekāṁ lohita-śhukla-kṛiṣṇāṁ bahviḥ prajāḥ sṛijamānāṁ sa-rūpāḥ
ajo hy eko juṣhamāṇo 'nuśhete jahāty enāṁ bhukta-bhogāṁ ajo 'nyaḥ...(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 Lord, who is full of knowledge. God, 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."

Maya'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 Maya, they exist in all the material abodes of existence. Hence all living beings in these abodes, be they humans or the celestial gods, 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, Shree Krishna explains why human beings possess differing natures.

BG 18.41: The duties of the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras—are distributed according to their qualities, in accordance with their guṇas (and not by birth).

Commentary

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, Shree 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 varṇāśram dharma was a scientific organization of society according to svabhāva-prabhavair guṇaiḥ (work based on one's nature and guṇas). In this system of categorization, there were four āśrams (stages in life) and four varṇas (occupational categories). The stages in life were: 1) Brahmacharya āśram (student life), which lasted from birth till the age of 25. 2) Grihastha āśram (household life), which was regular married life, from the age of 25 till 50. 3) Vānaprastha āśram (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 āśram (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 God.

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 God, everyone worked according to their intrinsic qualities to sustain themselves and society, and make their life a success by progressing toward God-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 Varṇāśram system. In the next few verses, according to the original categorization of the system, Shree Krishna maps the guṇas of people with their natural qualities of work.

BG 18.42: Tranquility, restraint, austerity, purity, patience, integrity, knowledge, wisdom, and belief in a hereafter—these are the intrinsic qualities of work for Brahmins.

Commentary

Those who possessed predominantly sāt̥tvic 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.

BG 18.43: 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.

Commentary

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.

BG 18.44: 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.

Commentary

The Vaishyas were those whose natures were predominantly rājasic with a mixture of tamō 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.

BG 18.45: 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.

Commentary

Swa-dharma is the prescribed duties based upon our guṇas 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.

BG 18.46: 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.

Commentary

No soul is superfluous in God'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 Yudhishtir by Sage Markandeya, in the Vana Parva of the Mahabharat. 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 soul gradually evolves from its present gross consciousness to divine consciousness. The lecture the butcher delivered is known as the Vyadha Gita of the Mahabharat.

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, Shree Krishna instructs him that by doing his prescribed duty in proper consciousness he will be worshipping the Supreme, and will easily attain perfection.

BG 18.47: 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.

Commentary

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 God 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 soul, which is devotion to God. 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, Shree Krishna will give the final conclusion in the end of the Bhagavad Gita: "Give up all varieties of dharmas 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 yāvatā

mat-kathā-śhravaṇāḍau vā śhraddhā 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 God has not developed."

BG 18.48: 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.

Commentary

People sometimes recoil from their duty because they see a defect in it. Here, Shree 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 Shree 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.

BG 18.49: 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.

Commentary

In this last chapter, Shree 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 naiṣkarmya-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 God, 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 God 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 God 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, "God alone knows what is best. Let him do what he feels is best." Such acceptance of the will of God brings detachment from outcomes, despite being immersed in the incessant stream of events in the world.

BG 18.50: 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.

Commentary

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 naiṣkarmya-siddhi, or actionlessness while performing work, transcendental knowledge becomes available through experience. Fixed in that knowledge, the karm yogi attains the highest perfection of God-realization. Shree Krishna explains how this happens in the next verse few verses.

BG 18.51-53: 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).

Commentary

Shree 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.

BG 18.54: 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.

Commentary

Shree Krishna concludes his description of the stage of perfection. The words *Brahma-bhūtaḥ* mean the state of Brahman realization. Situated in it, one is *prasannātmā*, meaning serene and unaffected by turbid and painful experiences. *Na śhochati* means one does not grieve nor feel any incompleteness. *Na kāṅkṣati* 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, Shree 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 God.

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. Shree Krishna states that having attained the highest realization of *jñāna*, one develops *parā bhakti*. Ved Vyas has declared the same in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*:

*ātmārāmāś cha munayo nirgranthā apy urukrame
kurvanti ahaitukīm bhaktim ittham-bhūta-guṇo hariḥ (1.7.10)[v24]*

"Even those who are *ātmārām* (rejoicing in the self), established in self-knowledge, and liberated from material bonds, such perfected souls desire to possess *bhakti* toward God. The super-excellent qualities of God are such that they attract even the liberated souls." 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 God, 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 Sanandan 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 Lord Vishnu. There, the fragrance from the *tulsi* (holy basil) leaves at the lotus feet of the Lord 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 Lord Vishnu. They beseeched him for a boon:

*kāmaṁ bhavaḥ sva-vṛjīnair nirayeṣhu naḥ stāch
cheto 'livad yadi nu te padayo rameta (Bhāgavatam 3.15.49)[v25]*

"O Lord, we do not even mind if you send us to hell, 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 hell for the sake of relishing the bliss of the personal form of God.

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 Lord 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 Lord Ram and Lakshman. What took place then is described in the Ramayan:

inhani bilokata ati anurāgā, barabasa brahmasukhahi mana tyāgā [v26]

"On seeing Lord Ram, King Janak became detached from the bliss of the formless Brahman, and deeply attached to the personal form of the Supreme Lord." 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, Maya, 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 Lord Krishna:

barhāpīḍaṁ naṭa-vara-vapuḥ karṇayoḥ karṇikāraṁ
bibhṛad vāsaḥ kanaka-kapiśhaṁ vaijayantīm cha mālāṁ
randhrān veṇor adhara-sudhayāpūrayan gopa-vṛindair
vṛindāranyaṁ sva-pada-ramaṇaṁ praviśhad gīta-kīrtiḥ
(Bhāgavatam 10.21.5)[v27]

"Shree 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 vaijayantī 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 Lord Krishna. He felt so deeply attracted to the bliss of the personal form of God, 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), nirviśeṣha (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 Lord Krishna, Lord Ram, Lord 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 God in all of them. In Prabodh Sudhākar, he writes:

kāmyopāsanayārthayantyanudināṁ kiñchitphalaṁ swepsitam

kechit swargamathāpavargamapare yogādiyajñādibhiḥ
asmākaṁ yadunandanāṅghriyugaladhyānāvadhānārthinām
kiṁ lokena damena kiṁ nṛipatinā 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 aṣṭāṅg 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 Shree 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 Lord 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 God, 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.

BG 18.55: 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.

Commentary

Shree 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 God’s personality. Previously, the jñānī had realized God as the nirguṇa (quality-less), nirviśeṣha (attribute-less), nirākār (formless) Brahman. But the jñānī had no realization of the personal form of God. 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. Shree Krishna states here that the mystery of God’s form, virtues, pastimes, abode, and associates can only be comprehended through unalloyed devotion. The devotees understand God because they possess the eyes of love.

The Padma Purāṇ mentions a beautiful incident illustrating the above truth. A ṛiṣhi 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:

brahmavidyāhamatulā yogimdrairyā cha mṛigyate
sāhaṁ hari padāmbhoja kāmyayā suchiraṁ tapaḥ
charāmyasmin vane ghore dhyāyanti puruṣhottamam
brahmānandena pūrṇāhaṁ tenānandena triptadhīḥ
tathāpi śhūnyamātmānaṁ manye kṛiṣhṇaratim vinā [v29]

“I am Brahma Vidyā (the science of knowing the self, which ultimately leads to the Brahman realization of God). 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 God. I am replete and satiated with the bliss of Brahman. Yet, without loving attachment to Lord Krishna, I feel empty and void.” Thus, mere knowledge is insufficient for relishing the bliss of the personal form of God. It is through bhakti that one enters into this secret and achieves full God-consciousness.

BG 18.56: My devotees, though performing all kinds of actions, take full refuge in Me. By My grace, they attain the eternal and imperishable abode.

Commentary

In the previous verse, Shree Krishna explained that through bhakti the devotees enter into full awareness of him. Equipped with it, they see everything in its

connection with God. They see their body, mind, and intellect as the energies of God; they see their material possessions as the property of God; they see all living beings as parts and parcels of God; 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 God. 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 eternality, knowledge, and bliss. Regarding his divine realm, Shree 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 God 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 God. Thus, the devotees of Lord Krishna go to Golok; those of Lord Vishnu go to Vaikunth; the devotees of Lord Ram go to Saket; the worshippers of Lord 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.

BG 18.57: 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.

Commentary

Yog means "union," and buddhi yog means "having the intellect united with God." This union of the intellect occurs when it is firmly convinced that everything in existence has emanated from God, 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 Shree Krishna means by buddhi yog –developing a resolute decision of the intellect that all work and all things are meant for the pleasure of God. For such a person of resolute intellect, the

chitta easily gets attached to God.

BG 18.58: If you always remember Me, by My grace you shall overcome all obstacles and difficulties. But if, due to pride, you do not listen to My advice, you will perish.

Commentary

Having advised Arjun what to do in the previous verse, Shree Krishna now declares the benefits of following his advice and the repercussions of not following it. The soul should not think that it is in any way independent of God. If we take full shelter of the Lord, 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 God and the scriptures, we will fail to attain the goal of human life, for there is no one superior to God, nor is there any advice better than his.

BG 18.59: If, motivated by pride, you think, "I shall not fight," your decision will be in vain. Your own nature will compel you to fight.

Commentary

Speaking in a chastising mood, Shree Krishna now delivers a word of caution. We should not think we have complete liberty to do what we wish. The soul does not lead an independent existence; it is dependent upon God'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 God 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. Shree 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.

BG 18.60: 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.

Commentary

Continuing his words of warning, Shree Krishna further elaborates on the previous theme. He says, "Due to your sanskāras 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."

BG 18.61: The Supreme Lord dwells in the hearts of all living beings, O Arjun. According to their karmas, He directs the wanderings of the souls, who are seated on a machine made of material energy.

Commentary

Emphasizing the dependence of the soul upon God, Shree 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."

BG 18.62: Surrender exclusively unto Him with your whole being, O Bharat. By His grace, you will attain perfect peace and the eternal abode.

Commentary

Being dependent upon God, the soul 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 God bestows his grace, he will grant his divine knowledge and divine bliss upon the soul, and release it from the bondage of the material energy. Shree Krishna emphasizes that by his grace, one will attain eternal beatitude and the imperishable abode. However, to receive that grace, the soul must qualify itself by surrendering to God. 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 God is not a whimsical act; he has perfectly rational rules on the basis of which he bestows it.

If God 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 God 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 God's grace, but this person received it without making himself eligible. Then our effort for self-improvement was meaningless." God 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 Upaniṣhad states:

yo brahmāṇaṁ vidadhāti pūrvam yo vai vedānś cha prahiṇoti tasmai

taṁ ha devaṁ ātma-buddhi-prakāśhaṁ mumukṣhur vai śharaṇam ahaṁ prapadye (6.18)
[v30]

"We take shelter of that Supreme Being who created Brahma and others. It is by his grace that the soul and intellect get illumined." The Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam states:

mām ekam eva śharaṇam ātmānaṁ sarva-dehinām

yāhi sarvātma-bhāvena mayā syā hy akuto-bhayaḥ (11.12.15)[v31]

"O Uddhav! Giving up all forms of mundane social and religious conventions, simply surrender unto me, the Supreme Soul of all souls. Only then can you cross over this material ocean and become fearless."

Shree Krishna also stated it in verse 7.14 of the Bhagavad Gita: "My divine energy Maya, consisting of the three modes of nature, is very difficult to overcome. But those who surrender unto me cross over it easily."

The Ramayan also says:

sanamukha hoi jīva mohi jabahīn, janma koṭi agha nāsahīn tabahīn [v32]

"The moment the soul surrenders to God, its account of sinful deeds in endless past lifetimes is destroyed by his grace."

In the above verse of the Bhagavad Gita, Shree Krishna has reiterated the principle of the necessity for surrendering to God 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

rakṣhiṣhyatīti viśhvāso goptrītve varaṇam tathā

ātmanikṣhepa kārpaṇye śhaḍvidhā śharaṇāgatiḥ

(Hari Bhakti Vilas 11.676)[v33]

The above verse explains the six aspects of surrender to God:

1. To desire only in accordance with the desire of God. 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 God, we must make our will conform to the divine will of God. 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 God.

2. Not to desire against the desire of God. 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. God notes them and gives the results at the appropriate time. Since God 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 God. However, if they get suffering, they blame God for it, "Why did God do this to me?" The second aspect of surrender means to not complain about whatever God gives us.

3. To have firm faith that God is protecting us. God 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? God ensures that they are all provided for. On the other hand, elephants eat mounds of food every day. God provides for them too. Even a worldly father cares and provides for his children. Why then should we doubt whether our eternal father, God, 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 God. We have received so many priceless gifts from the Lord. 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 God. In fact, it is because of him that we exist; he has brought us to life and imparted consciousness in our soul. 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 God, 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 God. God 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 God alone. When we think something belongs to us, we forget the proprietorship of God. 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 God. 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 God 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 God's condition and he will bestow his Grace upon us.

BG 18.63: 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.

Commentary

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, Shree Krishna had revealed knowledge of the soul, 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. Shree 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." Lord 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 (Ramayan) [v34]

"Once, Lord Ram called all the residents of Ayodhya. Everyone, including Guru Vasishth came to hear him." In the discourse, Lord Ram explained to them the purpose of human life and the way to accomplish it. In the end, he concluded:

nahin anīti nahin kachhu prabhutāī, sunahu karahu jo tumhahi sohāī (Ramayan) [v35]

"The advice I have given to you is neither incorrect nor coercive. Listen to it carefully, contemplate over it, and then do what you wish."

This free will to choose between available alternatives has been given to the soul by God. 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 God. Sometimes people question that if God 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 do good always comes with the danger of doing evil. More importantly, God 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. God 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 God cannot force the soul to love and surrender to him; this decision has to be made by the soul itself. Here, Shree Krishna is calling Arjun's attention to his free will and asking him to choose.

BG 18.64: 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.

Commentary

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 Shree Krishna. The Lord 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, Shree Krishna now feels confident that he will be able to grasp the final and most profound knowledge as well. Further, he says *iṣṭo 'si me dṛiḍhamiti*, 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."

BG 18.65: 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.

Commentary

In chapter 9, Shree 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 Shree 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 Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam describes:

sa vai manah kṛiṣṇa-padāravindayor vachāmsi vaikunṭha-guṇānuvarṇane
karau harer mandira-mārjanādiṣhu śhrutiṁ chakārāchyuta-sat-kathodaye

mukunda-liṅgālaya-darśhane dṛiṣṭau tad-bhṛitya-gātra-sparśhe 'nga-saṅgamam
ghrāṇaṁ cha tat-pāda-saroja-saurabhe śhrīmat-tulasyā rasanāṁ tad-arpite

pādaḥ hareḥ kṣhetra-padānusarpaṇe śhiro hṛiṣhīkeśha-padābhivandane
kāmaṁ cha dāsyē na tu kāma-kāmyayā yathottamaśhloka-janāśhrayā ratiḥ
(9.4.18-20) [v36]

"Ambarish absorbed his mind on the lotus feet of Shree Krishna; he used his speech in glorifying the qualities of God, his hands in cleaning the temple, and his ears in hearing the divine pastimes of the Lord. 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 Tulsī (holy basil) leaves offered at the feet of the Lord, and his tongue in tasting prasād (food sanctified by offering to God). He utilized his feet for walking to the holy abodes, and his head in offering obeisance to the lotus feet of God. He offered all paraphernalia, such as garlands and sandalwood, in the service of God. He did all this, not with some selfish motive, but only to attain the selfless service of Lord Krishna, through purification."

The instruction to wholeheartedly engage in devotion is the essence of all the scriptures, and the summum bonum of all knowledge. However, this is not the most confidential knowledge that Shree Krishna referred to, for he has already mentioned this earlier. He now reveals this supreme secret in this next verse.

BG 18.66: Abandon all varieties of dharmas and simply surrender unto Me alone. I shall liberate you from all sinful reactions; do not fear.

Commentary

All along, Shree 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, Shree 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 God. 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? Shree Krishna tells Arjun not to fear; he will absolve him from all sins, and liberate him from material existence.

To comprehend this instruction of Shree 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 aparā dharma or material dharma. This includes the dharma as a Brahmin, Kshatriya, etc. However, when we identify ourselves as the soul, we have no material designations of varṇa (social class) and āśram (status in life). The soul’s Father, Mother, Friend, Beloved, and resting place are all God. Hence our one and only dharma becomes loving devotional service to God. This is also called parā 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 Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam states:

devarṣhi-bhūtāpta-nṛiṇām pitṛiṇām na kiṅkaro nāyam ṛiṇī cha rājan
sarvātmanā yaḥ śharaṇām śharaṇyām gato mukundaṁ parihṛitya kartam (11.5.41)[v37]

This verse explains that for those who do not surrender to God, there are five debts—to the celestial gods, 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 God, 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 God, 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 Śhrīmad Bhāgavatam states:

ājñāyaivam guṇān doṣhān mayādiṣṭhān api svakān
dharmān santyajya yaḥ sarvān mām bhajeta sa tu sattamaḥ (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 sādḥaks.” In the Ramayan, we read how Lakshman renounced all material duties to accompany Lord Ram in the forest. He said:

guru pitu mātu na jānahu kāhū, kahahu subhāū nātha patiyāū
more sabahiñ eka tumha swāmī, dinabhandhu ura antarayamī [v39]

"O Lord, 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 janaḥ [v40]

"I do not know any mother, father, or relative (God is everything to me)."

In the Bhagavad Gita, Shree 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 God-realization; it leads to the celestial abodes, and once the pious merits are depleted one has to come back. Hence, Shree 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 God with the mind (verse 8.7). This instruction of karm yog forms the major portion of the Bhagavad Gita. Now in the very end, Shree Krishna instructs Arjun to practice karm sanyās, i.e. renounce all material dharma and simply adopt spiritual dharma, which is love for God. He should thus fight, not because it is his duty as a warrior, but because God wants him to do so.

But why did Shree 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? Lord Krishna clearly explains this in the next verse.

BG 18.67: 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.

Commentary

It was explained in the previous verse that if one is situated in loving devotion to God, 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 God, 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 Shree Krishna says that this confidential teaching given by 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 Shree Krishna, that person may respond, "Shree 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 chopadeśhaḥ śhiva-nāmāparādhaḥ [v41]

"By giving transcendental instructions to those who are faithless and averse to God, we cause them to become offenders." Hence, Shree Krishna describes the

disqualifications for listeners in the above verse.

BG 18.68: Amongst My devotees, those who teach this most confidential knowledge perform the greatest act of love. They will come to Me, without doubt.

Commentary

Shree 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 God, but the opportunity to help others engage in devotion is an even bigger blessing, which attracts the special grace of God. 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 ghaṭe na nīra
apane hātha dekha lo, yon 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.

BG 18.69: No human being does more loving service to Me than they; nor shall there ever be anyone on this earth more dear to Me.

Commentary

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." Shree Krishna states here that he considers the sharing of the knowledge of the Bhagavad Gita as the highest loving service one can render to God. 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 God, and to accord all credit to the grace of the Lord.

BG 18.70: 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.

Commentary

Shree 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 God with their intellect.

BG 18.71: 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.

Commentary

Not everyone has the intellect to comprehend the deep imports of the dialogue between Shree Krishna and Arjun. Here, Shree Krishna reassures that if such people merely hear with faith, they will also benefit. God 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, Hastamalaka, and Trotakacharya. In the above verse, Shree Krishna assures Arjun that even those who merely hear the sacred dialogue with great faith will gradually become purified.

BG 18.72: O Arjun, have you heard Me with a concentrated mind? Have your ignorance and delusion been destroyed?

Commentary

Shree 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. Shree 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.

BG 18.73: 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.

Commentary

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, and gave 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 God and shall do what Shree Krishna instructed him to do. This was the impact of the message of Bhagavad Gita upon him. However, he adds *tvat prasādan mayāchyuta*, meaning, "O Shree 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 Shree Krishna's grace with an attitude of faith and loving surrender. Then we will know the purport of the Bhagavad Gita by his grace.

BG 18.74: Sanjay said: Thus, have I heard this wonderful conversation between Shree 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.

Commentary

In this way, Sanjay comes to the end of his narration of the divine discourse of the Bhagavad Gita. He refers to Arjun as mahātmā (great soul), as he has heeded the advice and instructions of Shree 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 romāñchaḥ svara bhedo'tha vepathuḥ
vaivarnyamaśru pralaya ityaṣṭau 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.

BG 18.75: By the grace of Veda Vyas, I have heard this supreme and most secret Yog from the Lord of Yog, Shree Krishna Himself.

Commentary

Shree 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 Lord of Yog himself, Shree Krishna.

Ved Vyas, the author of the Brahma Sūtras, the Puraṇas, the Mahabharat, etc. was a descension of God, and possessed all the clairvoyant powers himself. Thus, he not only heard the conversation between Shree Krishna and Arjun, but also the one between Sanjay and Dhritarashtra. Thereby, he included both conversations while compiling the Bhagavad Gita.

BG 18.76: As I repeatedly recall this astonishing and wonderful dialogue between the Supreme Lord Shree Krishna and Arjun, O King, I rejoice again and again.

Commentary

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.

BG 18.77: And remembering that most astonishing and wonderful cosmic form of Lord Krishna, great is my astonishment, and I am thrilled with joy over and over again.

Commentary

Arjun was blessed with the vision of the cosmic form of the Lord, which is rarely seen even by the greatest yogis. Shree 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.

BG 18.78: Wherever there is Shree Krishna, the Lord 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.

Commentary

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 God and his pure devotee, and so will goodness, supremacy, and abundance.

God is the independent, self-sustaining sovereign of the world, and the most worthy object of adoration, and worship. *na tatsamaśh chābhyadhikaśhcha dṛiśhyate* (Śhwetaśhvatar Upaniṣhad 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 soul who surrenders to him provides such a vehicle for the glory of God to shine forth. Thus, wherever the Supreme Lord 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.