

Gita Vahini

Stream of Divine Song

Sathya Sai Baba

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Gita Vahini



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Greetings

Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba is the Timeless Charioteer (*Sanathana Sarathi*), who communicated the *Gita* scripture to Aditya (Sun God) and helped Manu (the first law-giver) and King Ikshvaku to know it. He was Arjuna's charioteer during the great battle between good and evil fought at Kurukshetra. When the rider, Arjuna, was overcome with grief at the prospect of the fight, Krishna instructed him in the science of recognizing one's Oneness with all and removed the grief and the fear. Krishna is the charioteer even now, for every one of us; let me greet you as a fellow sufferer and a fellow disciple. We have but to recognize Him and accept Him in that role, holding the reins of discrimination and flourishing the whip of detachment, to direct the horses of the senses along the path of truth (*sathya*), asphalted by righteousness (*dharma*), and illumined by love (*prema*) toward the goal of peace (*santhi*). Arjuna accepted Him in that role; let us do likewise. When worldly attachment hinders the path of duty, when ambition blinds the eyes of sympathy, when hate shuts out the call of love, let us listen to the *Gita*. Krishna teaches us from the chariot whereon He is installed. Then, He showers His grace, His vision and His power, and we are made heroes fit to fight and win.

This precious book is not a commentary or summary of the *Bhagavad Gita* that was taught on the field of Kurukshetra. We need not learn any new language or read any old text to imbibe the lesson that the Lord is eager to teach us now, for victory in the battle we are now waging. This Stream of Divine Song (*Gita Vahini*) is the same stream, refreshing and revitalizing, brought by the same divine Restorer to revivify man caught in the mesh of modern dialectics, in the pride of modern science, in the cynical scorn of modern superficiality. The teaching set forth here will comfort, console, and confer strength and faith.

Let us listen to these words with as much care and concentration as Arjuna had, even in the turmoil of a battle field, and we too will declare when the book nears its final pages, "My delusion is dissolved; I have become aware of My Reality, which is God."

The Ancient Charioteer who is in you and me has responded to the call of the conflict-ridden hearts; He gave these lessons in the "*Sanathana Sarathi*", which is published from the Abode of Peace (*Prasanthi Nilayam*). Now they are with you, between covers, as a book, which you can read as often as you can or must.

May the faith with which you have started to scan these pages grow from day to day; may you be drawn by the ever-widening vista of knowledge that this book reveals to the grand glory of the experience of the Oneness that is the basis of this manifoldness.

N. KASTURI

Editor, Sanathana Sarathi

Gokulashtami

8-9-1966

Preface for this edition

The first English edition of the *Gita Vahini* was translated from Telugu by N. Kasturi. This edition improves on that previous edition in several ways. Some grammatical errors and typos have been corrected, and some sentences have been rewritten to smooth and clarify the presentation —of course, without disturbing the original meaning. Some long paragraphs have been split in two where it made sense and provided easier reading.

Sanskrit words have been replaced by their English equivalents, to make the *Gita Vahini* more accessible to readers who do not know Sanskrit. However, the Sanskrit has been retained (in parentheses, following the English). Many Sanskrit words have no exact English equivalent, and retaining the Sanskrit keeps the edition accurate.

Some Sanskrit compounds have been hyphenated between their constituent words to aid those who like to analyze the meanings of the individual words.

Several Sanskrit words have made their way into the English language and can be found in most dictionaries —e.g. *dharma*, *guru*, *yoga*, and *moksha*. These words have generally been used without translation, although their meanings appear in the glossary at the end of the book.

Besides definitions of Sanskrit words used in the *Gita Vahini*, the Glossary contains descriptions of the people and places mentioned.

The chapters of the *Gita Vahini* are not titled. In order to help the reader get a sense of the structure of the *Gita Vahini*, a synopsis of each chapter is included at the beginning of the chapter and in the table of contents.

Finally, this edition, in ebook form (for the Ipad, Kindle, Nook, and other tablets) or interactive pdf form, has “hyperlinks” to the Glossary: in most places, clicking on the name of a person, a place, or a Sanskrit word will take you to its definition. Your ebook reader should have a button to take you back to where you were reading. We have not used this feature for all references to *Gita*, *Krishna*, and *Arjuna*, since they occur so often.

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Chapter I

Whom the Gita is for; the objective “remember dharma, practice dharma”; introduction to Arjuna and Krishna; Arjuna’s despondency; the path of surrender.

To understand the meaning of the *Gita*, a reverential approach is necessary. You must take up its study in an attitude of submission and expectancy. For the *Gita* is the “milk” of the *Upanishads*, drawn by the cowherd Krishna with the help of Arjuna, “the calf”, for all the “dull-witted” to drink and draw sustenance from. Some argue that the *Gita* as a sacred poem was created later than the *Mahabharatha*, of which it is a part; but whatever may be said of the composition of the *Gita*, there is no doubt that the principles and teachings of the *Gita* are ancient, nay, dateless. In the first three verses of the fourth chapter, reference is made to the Lord instructing the *Gita* first to Surya (Sun God) and later to Manu (first law-giver), and also to the fact that from Manu it reached King Ikshvaku and thence to others in succession! So, the *Gita* is beyond the category of time and cannot be assigned to a particular point of time, past or present.

The *Gita* is a text for spiritual practitioners, for it emphasizes spiritual discipline and spiritual attitudes more than anything else. Every chapter lays down means and methods of reaching the goal of peace and harmony. Now, spiritual discipline is the product of keen and steady yearning for progress. The aspirant must aspire, not despair. He must persevere, not clamour for quick success. The *Gita* is a boat, which takes people across from the self-imposed state of bondage to the freedom that is their nature. People are taken from darkness to light, from lusterlessness to splendour. The *Gita* ordains disciplines and duties that are free from the taints of tendencies and impulses that tie people to the relentless wheel of birth and death.

Really speaking, people have come into this field of activity (*karma-kshetra*) only to engage themselves in activity, not to earn the fruit of such activity. That is the teaching of the *Gita*, its fundamental lesson. The *Gita* is the quintessence of the meaning of all the *Vedas*. Rituals and sacrifices, the outward-directed activities, are mentioned in the preliminary portions of the *Vedas*. Activities of the mind, like worship of the Lord, which are directed inward, are mentioned later. And the *yoga* of spiritual wisdom (*jnana*) is also expounded to minds thus clarified and purified.

Any individual, however scholarly, cannot escape delusion and therefore is subjected to grief, which acts as a brake upon activity. Arjuna, the great hero, capable of great renunciation and of great wisdom, is deluded by the awful needs of war, and his grief handicaps his activity too. He confuses the body with the self; he starts identifying the two. He imposes on the *Atma* (the never-changing divine Self or Spirit) the unreal and ephemeral nature of the world and takes this delusion as true. He believes that his worldly activities, according to that false identification, are his *Atmic* nature (*Atma-dharma*)! This is the tragedy not only of Arjuna but of all humanity! Therefore, the *Gita* is of universal and eternal value.

To study the *Gita* is to learn the art of swimming across the sea of delusion. The *Gita* is the very voice of Lord Krishna. The fact that it has provided consolation and liberation to millions of people is evidence of its divine origin. A lesser person could not have given it that authenticity.

The way it begins and ends gives a clue to the subject that it expounds. The very first verse starts with the words “in the *dharma*-field, in the battle-field (*dharma-kshethre, kuru-kshethre*)”, with *dharma* (righteous action) being the leading word. The last verse of the final eighteenth chapter speaks of “wherever the Master of *Yoga*,

Krishna (*yathra yogeswarah Krishnah*), and the phrase “Master of *yoga*” sums up the *dharma* that is taught. Thus, it is clear that the objective of the teaching in the *Gita* is just this:

Remember *dharma*; practice *dharma*.

How significant this is! All scriptures (*sastras*) are engaged in demarcating and defining the nature and subtle characteristics of *dharma*. The *Gita* incorporates this study and this analysis. It is a textbook of *dharma*, in all its aspects. It discusses all the principles underlying *dharma*.

Arjuna is the individual (*jivi*). The body is the chariot and the teacher in the chariot is Krishna, the Lord. The charioteer is the Lord, the inspirer of the intelligence, the *Brahman* that prompts the intelligence, in answer to the prayer contained in the *Gayatri Mantra*: “Awaken my discrimination, oh Lord, and guide me”. The Kauravas represent the demonic nature; the Pandavas, the divine. Those are evil; these are good. And there has always been a struggle between the two. In this conflict between opposing forces, Krishna (the divine Self, the *Atma*) is always on the side of *dharma* —the reality that sustains, not the delusion that undermines. If you seek to have the Lord on your side as your guide, equip yourself with divine nature, the qualities of *dharma*. For the Lord is where *dharma* is.

Of course, this does not mean that the Lord is not omnipresent! Butter is omnipresent in milk, although it can be made manifest in one location, in the milk, only by the processes of curdling and churning. So too, the Lord can be made manifest in a specific location by the process of righteous spiritual discipline.

“Where there is *dharma*, victory is achieved (*yatho dharma-sthatho jayah*).” Arjuna was engrossed with the physical aspect, so it was necessary to bless him with the knowledge of the real, the *Atmic* aspect. The entire complex of spiritual discipline is directed to the clarification of the awareness of *Atma* and the fixing of attention on That. The teaching of Krishna is just this; in fact, this is the sum and substance of the search for truth.

Krishna answered many doubts that had entangled Arjuna but that he failed to express. “Oh Arjuna! You are grieving because these kings and princes who are related to you are about to meet death at your hands. You talk glibly of *dharma*. But remember, the wise mourn neither for the living nor for the dead. Shall I tell you why? Well, you are feeling grief over the body, which alone decays on death. Did you grieve when the body underwent many changes hitherto? The child disappeared in the boy, the boy disappeared in the youth, the youth became lost in the middle-aged man, the middle-aged man was lost in the old man, and the old man is lost in death. You never wept for the changes that affected the body so far, so why weep for this one change? Today, do you have the body you had when you were a boy? Where is that frame you had when you tied up Dhrishtadyumna? You still remember that boyish exploit, but the body that achieved it is gone! So too, whatever changes your body suffers, the *Atma*, the splendour of the true wisdom, remains immortal. Being established unshakeably in this knowledge is the sign of the truly wise.” Thus spoke Krishna.

“You may ask whether one would not feel sad when the bodies with which one moved and lived for years go out of sight. But for how many have you to lament, in case it is proper so to grieve? Have you thought of that? Joy and grief are as day and night. They have to be put up with, gone through. If you refuse, they won’t stop happening; if you desire, they won’t start happening! Both are related to the physical, material, the body; they do not affect the spirit, the soul. The moment you escape from these two you have liberation (*moksha*).”

The first discourse, which teaches these truths, is named “the Despondency of Arjuna (*Arjuna Vishada Yoga*)”. It is the very foundation of the edifice that is the *Bhagavad Gita*. When the foundation is strong, the edi-

vice too is lasting. The *Gita*, built on that foundation 5,000 years ago, is unshaken and unshakable. From this, you can infer how strong its foundation is and how wise the person is who laid it.

You refer to it as “despondency”! But that “despondency” was very beneficial; it was no ordinary “want of courage”. For it tested Arjuna’s sincerity and steadfastness; it induced him to take unquestioning refuge in the Lord. That is why it is dignified by the name *yoga*. The *Gita* begins with the *yoga* of despondency (*vishada*) and ends with the *yoga* of renunciation or detachment (*sanyasa*). Despondency is the foundation; renunciation, the superstructure. Despondency is the seed; renunciation, the fruit.

The question may be raised: how could Arjuna be credited with a pure nature, which alone is said to deserve the wisdom that is imparted in the *Gita*? The word Arjuna means pure, unsullied, white. He is very appropriately named, and he lived up to that name. That is how he secured the immediate presence of Lord Krishna; that is how he became the instrument for the gift of the *Gita* to the world.

Krishna uses the word *yoga* many times in the *Gita*; the state of the individual (*jivi*) during *yoga* is also described. Yet, a doubt may arise in the minds of those who have read the *Gita* that there is no agreement between the word as used ordinarily and as used by Krishna. Krishna has extolled detachment (*vairagya*) in some places. In other places, He has declared that the highest freedom can be earned by worship. He also elaborates on various methods of attaining the supreme state of spiritual bliss. In the eighth discourse, there is an account of the royal *yoga* (*raja-yoga*), but it is not right to say that the *Gita* is a text that teaches the royal *yoga*.

Complete surrender to Lord Krishna, freedom from the threefold shackles that bind one with the external world of objects, and observance of good deeds and virtuous disciplines —these are the principal truths underlined in the *Gita*. The Lord holds these forth as the best forms of training and the deepest secrets of inner progress.

The real meaning of the *Gita* is not grasped by all. Reputed scholars and writers, although gifted with rare intelligence, have failed to unravel the mystery of its message. Commentators speak of the principle of perfect balance amidst all change, or of the achievement of freedom as more important than anything else. On the other side, others compare the *Gita* with the philosophical texts of the West with which they are familiar and start teaching young minds in that strain! Of course, full renunciation is highly desirable, but only a very small number can practise it. If a certain spiritual teaching has to gain universal acceptance, it must have disciplines that can be practised and experienced by everyone in daily life and its activities.

The highest *dharma* is for each one to follow their own *dharma* boldly. Regarding this problem, there is a conflict between religion and morals. “It is difficult, fraught with danger (*Gahana karmanogathih*)”, says the Lord, speaking of moral discipline. Which act is legitimate, which is not? Which act is sanctioned by morals, which is not? People have struggled and are struggling to decide these. However, in the following verses, Krishna mentioned the type of acts that are worthy:

Fix thy thought on Me; be devoted to Me; worship Me; do homage to Me.

And thou shalt reach Me. The Truth do I declare to thee; for thou art dear to Me. This is My teaching, My grace.

This is the path to come to Me. Give up all *dharmas*; surrender to Me.

Do not grieve; I shall liberate you from the consequences of all your acts.

Manmanaa bhava madbhaktho madyaajee maam namaskuru.

Maam evaishyasi sathyam the prathijaanee priyo si me.

*Sarva dharmaan parithyajya maamekam sharanam vraja.
Aham thvam sarva paapebhyo mokshayishyaami maa suchah.*

Ah! Note the meaning and significance of these stanzas. Isn't this act of surrender enough to save you and to liberate you from the round of coming into, staying in, and leaving the world? Here is what the Lord seeks from you: Seeing Him in every being, being aware of Him every moment of existence, and being immersed in the bliss (*ananda*) of this awareness. Also, being merged in the relation caused by profound devotion and love to Him. And, dedicating all acts, big and small, to Him, Krishna. Wish, will, attitude, activity, fruit, consequence —dedicating everything from beginning to end. Finally, renunciation of all attachment to the self and performance of all acts in a spirit of worshipful non-attachment. This is what the Lord seeks from you.

Of course, it is hard to effect this full surrender. But if you make but the slightest effort toward it, the Lord Himself will confer the courage to pursue it to the end. He will walk with you and help you as a friend; He will lead you as a guide; He will guard you from evil and temptation; He will be your staff and support. He has said,

This course of action, if followed even to a small extent, will save you from terrifying fear.

Swalpamapyasya dharmasya thrayathe mahatho bhayath.

To follow *dharma* is itself a source of joy; it is the path least beset with hurdles. That is the teaching of the Lord.

“You will come near Me; you will approach Me (*Maamevaishyasi*)”. That is to say, you will understand My mystery, you will enter into Me, you will achieve My nature. In these terms, acquiring divine nature, existence in God, and unity in God are indicated. When one has attained the state of realizing the divinity in every being, when every instrument of knowledge brings the experience of that divinity, when It alone is seen, heard, tasted, smelled, and touched, then one becomes undoubtedly a part of the body of God and lives in Him and with Him. When this duty to your own progress is taken up, you will get new strength at the very first step; you will thrill to a new and purer joy; you will taste the fullness of bliss; and you will be refreshed by a new holiness.

This *dharma* is not laid down or recommended only for the extraordinary among people. It is within the reach of all, for all have the hunger for God, all have the discrimination to discover that there is something basic behind all this change. Even the most heinous sinner can quickly cleanse their heart and become pure by surrendering to the Lord in anguished repentance.

Therefore, the Lord's command is that each person should pursue the special *dharma* laid down for them; each should plan their life according to the spiritual foundations of their culture; each should give up the “objective” vision and listen to the voice of God.

Those born in India (Bharath) should deserve the privilege by listening to the voice of the leader of India, Gopala (Krishna), and manifest the divinity latent in them —in every word they utter, every letter they write, every wish they entertain, every thought they frame, and every act they do for the winning of gross things, such as food or shelter or health. Only then can this Indian nation demonstrate to the world the excellence of the Ancient Religion (*Sanathana Dharma*), which is its special gift to humanity, and ensure peace for all mankind. Acts in line with that *dharma* alone can confer the strength of spirit that can encounter all crises and achieve victory. The sacred *Gita* grants that boon, by indicating the way clearly.

Chapter II

Arjuna's despondency at having to fight; Krishna's teaching, beginning with chapter 2 verse 11; Krishna-Arjuna become guru-disciple.

The first chapter is better named “Arjuna *Gita*”, rather than Krishna *Gita*. Overcome by sorrow and delusion, Arjuna turns from war and keeps his weapons aside. He is dejected in his chariot, halted between the two opposing forces. He turns this way and that, puzzled and perturbed. He surveys the faces of his kith and kin; he is overcome by pity. His famous bow slips from his grasp, and he is too weak to stand or even sit; his mind wanders into the dictates of the *purva mimamsa* school of thought (a theology that interprets the action/ritual oriented portion of the *Vedas*). He swears he will not engage in fighting.

When Sanjaya reported this to the blind King Dhritharashtra, the king was overjoyed, for victory was within grasp! He had neither foresight nor far sight —much less divine vision— so he felt happy that his dream of an undiminished empire had come true, without bother.

But Sanjaya, who had divine vision, felt, “What is this insane joy that is affecting him? When the Lord Himself is on the side of the Pandavas, how can this king's wicked plan succeed?” Then he pictured to himself the ghastly consequences of Arjuna jumping into the fray.

But Arjuna had teardrops falling down his cheeks. There were whirlpools in his eyes. Even the Lord could not bear the sight; He could not remain silent. He felt Arjuna's pulse beat and diagnosed the malady. He knew in a trice that the malady of delusion caused by false evaluation had penetrated his three bodies: the gross, the subtle, and the causal. He saw that the pity that enveloped Arjuna was not genuine. For, genuine pity will be endowed with divine elevating impulses and motives; it will not disregard the orders of the Lord. Egotism was really under this veil of pity. So the Lord decided to cure him of that weakness. Arjuna was helplessly “overwhelmed by pity (*kripayaa vishtham*)”, the *Gita* says, and that had to be cured.

Just as a spirit entering a person has to be exorcised, Arjuna has to be freed from fear and cowardice. People who have the Lord by their side need entertain no fear. What can any spirit do to one who is the Lord of all the five elements (*bhuthas*)? “The Lord is the supreme doctor.” *Narayana* was the doctor Arjuna needed and got.

How lucky Arjuna was! Even from the depths of grief, joy will swell. Until the eleventh verse of the second chapter, it is the story of the despondency of Arjuna, the effect of “the possession”. That is why the first step in the cure is the exposition of *sankhya yoga* (the path of spiritual knowledge (*jnana*)).

Krishna's immortality-bestowing teaching begins from this eleventh verse. In fact, the *Bhagavad Gita* starts from this point. Up to this point, it is the description of Arjuna's delusion born of ignorance and dullness of intellect. Krishna, acting the role of witness, allowed the despondency to deepen and darken. When at last Arjuna threw down his bow and refused to fight, when he confessed that he had lost all sense of right and wrong, when he prayed that Krishna should teach him the way that would best solve his problems, then Krishna came forward and said,

“Arjuna! How could this miserable shade of cowardice overtake you now, when you have been clear and bright all along? This is quite unbecoming to the hero you are. The word Arjuna means pure unblemished character. Why then this grief? The battle is imminent. The clouds of war have gathered and are thundering. The foes

in front are awaiting the moment when they can jump into the fray. They have heaped countless injustices and cruelties on you, and now they are ready to grab the land that must come to you as of right. So far, you have borne all the agony they have poured over you, without stirring even an iota away from truth. You have fulfilled all the conditions they imposed, and you have passed through the years they prescribed for your exile. Your attempts to effect a compromise were futile, and you cannot avoid the clash of arms. We have yielded as much as we could. Now war is the only method by which the eyes of the evil-minded Duryodhana can be opened to his own iniquity.

“This war was decided on after long deliberation. It was not a hasty resolution taken in a fit of anger. Responsible elders weighed the pros and cons and came to the conclusion that resort to arms was inevitable. You and your brothers approved all this and appreciated the decision. You have been preparing for this battle with enthusiasm. In fact, you have been immersed in it more than others. How wrong is it for you now to turn back?

“This war did not pounce on you in a trice. You have been collecting the wherewithal for it for a long time. Remember how you struggled and starved and lived on roots and fruits of the forest in order to win the missile from Lord Siva, how you went as far as the region of the Lord of gods, Indra, in order to win celestial weapons for this battle.

“I thought that the moment of destiny for the annihilation they deserved had come for the wicked Kaurava brood, but now you have started this mourning dirge! Why this ominous note? Which scripture lays down this attitude? Think of your duty as a member of the warrior caste: to uphold *dharma*, to protect justice. Yours is the wealth of courage, adventure, and steadiness. But you are overpowered by this strange detachment, which is pathetically out of place.

“This cowardice brings shame on you and even on your far-famed forefathers. Fie on you! You have dragged down the warrior race into disgrace. War is the royal road for your kind, the road that leads to Heaven. How can you escape infamy if you withdraw from the field now? You have earned the title “Conqueror (*Vijaya*)” by the prowess of your arm. Don’t tarnish the reputation that you won by a lifetime of effort. Give up this weakening delusion.

“Listen to me. Remind yourself of what happened at Amaravathi. You disregarded the approaches of the divine damsel Urvashi, and when she wanted a son through your grace, you replied, ‘Take me as your son.’ That revealed you as an incomparable hero. The curse she put on you in her discomfiture helped you at the court of the Virata King to pass off as a eunuch, teaching dance to the royal princesses, didn’t it?

“Where has that heroism gone? Tell Me. How has this cowardice come over such a stalwart? You came to Me and disturbed Me in sleep with your request for help in this battle, from which you are now running away. Am I to help you thus? Have I to watch while you are fleeing? Pluck this delusion by the roots; reduce this fear to ashes. Become a hero again.” Thus exhorted Krishna.

Krishna used four words in this context: faintheartedness (*kasmalam*), ignoble nature (*an-aarya-jushtam*), the quality that destroys the Divine in humans (*a-swargyam*), and the quality that causes the decline of the fame that is lasting (*a-keerthi-karam*).

These inspiring words, which would make the blood of any warrior boil, had a tremendous effect on Arjuna. The thick cloud of ignorance that had overwhelmed Arjuna started to melt a little. The dullness (*thamas*) that had made him forget the truth was removed; passion (*rajoguna*) returned, and Arjuna found words to ask, “How?” That term reveals much—it shows that the *Gita* expounds not merely on what has to be done but even on how it

has to be done.

Arjuna asks Krishna, “Oh Madhusudana! Listen to my words: Those who are in the forefront of the battle line are all worthy of worship. The great Bhishma took care of us when we lost our father, brought us up from childhood, and shaped us into what we are. He is as a father to us, the grand old man of our clan. And what shall I say of Drona? He loved me more than he loved his own son, Aswathama; I had all his love. He is the guru who, through that love, took me as his favourite disciple and made me into the bowman that I am. Do you want me now to use the skill he taught me to overthrow him? Is it right for a son of India to do such a thing? In battle we have to kill our enemies, don't we? Or can we fight with fathers and teachers, who deserve reverence?”

“You say that Heaven can be won by battle. I cannot understand how Heaven can be obtained through the killing of these revered gurus. If this idea spreads, few gurus can survive! Whatever you say, let me tell you this: rather than earn happiness and power through these means, I feel it is better to live on alms collected from door to door. Food won through killing such people is mixed with their blood, and I would prefer a meal got through beggary. Well, even if I give up all these qualms and fight, how can victory be counted upon? Expecting victory to come to us, how can I resolve to slaughter these elders and lose both worlds? If by chance they win, then beggary is inevitable; if we win, it is as bad as losing, for of what gain is victory if the price we pay is the destruction of kith and kin? We gain but inconsolable grief for the rest of our life, Krishna! I am at a loss to solve this problem. My intelligence has deserted me. My nature has undergone a vast change; I do not know why. I cannot distinguish between right and wrong (*dharma* and *a-dharma*).

“My warrior blood rises up in protest when you prod it so; it is pushing me forward into battle. Fear of becoming the murderer of these revered elders is pulling me back. I am helpless. As you guide this chariot, guide me also and show me the way. Moreover, I am no longer concerned with worldly prosperity; I crave only spiritual progress,” Arjuna said.

From that moment, Krishna became the guru and Arjuna the disciple. Arjuna prayed for that status and got it. Until Arjuna accepted this attitude of a learner, his heart was filled with egotism and weakness. The hero had become a zero. He had taken a position the very opposite of that taken up by Krishna.

The reason for all this, if you study the situation carefully, is nothing but “egotism”. Love is the viewpoint of Krishna and delusion (*bhrama*) the viewpoint of Arjuna. Arjuna suffered from agony because of that. Then he realized that egotism led only to further ignorance and confusion. He surrendered his judgement to the Lord and saved himself. He said he was but an instrument in the hands of the Lord.

Recognizing one's error is the first excellence of a good disciple; it is the beginning of wisdom. Only the foolish will feel they know all and suffer from the dire disease of a swelled head.

Chapter III

For whom the Gita was spoken; the stages “I am Thine, Thou art mine, and Thou art I”; Arjuna surrenders; Arjuna’s objections to fighting are caused by delusion.

It is more useful for students to search for their own faults with a view to remove them than to seek excellences so that they might exult over them. Students who do the former can progress fast; they are not dragged behind by fear or anxiety; they can move on with faith in the Lord, on whom they have placed all their burdens. They reach a state of mental calm, which is the sign of the true aspirant. Arjuna arrived at that stage, and then Krishna gave him (and, through him, all humanity) the teaching that confers immortality.

For whom was the *Gita* spoken? Just think of that for one moment. Milk is not taken from the udder for the sake of the cow, for cows do not drink their own milk. Arjuna, the calf, has had his fill; Krishna is ever-content and needs nothing, not to mention milk! For whose sake was it that the *Upanishads* were milked by Krishna to get this *Gita*? Krishna says it is for the people who have intelligence that is moderated by goodness, intelligence that is controlled by virtue.

And what of the place where the teaching was given? Between two opposing armies! Therein lies the great significance of the *Gita*. On one side, the forces of virtue (*dharmā*); on the other, the forces of vice (*a-dharma*). On one side, the good; on the other, the bad. Between these two pulls, the individual, unable to decide which course to adopt, weeps in despair. And the Lord speaks the *Gita* to all such and grants them light and courage. Do not think that the distress of Arjuna was just his affair, his problem and no more. It is a universal human problem.

For Arjuna sought from Krishna not the pleasing, worldly glory (*preyas*) of power and status and wealth but the lasting glory of full joy (*sreyas*). He said, “wealth is available for human effort; it can be won by human activity. Why should I crave from You what I can win by my own endeavour? I am not so foolish as all that. Grant me the lasting glory of joy that is beyond the reach of my effort. That glory is not the fruit of action (*karma*), it is the fruit of grace!”

Thus, Arjuna rose to the height of absolute self-surrender (*saranagathi* –the state called *prapatthi*). Much can be said of absolute self-surrender. People surrender their dignity and status to others for various purposes in life: wealth, fame, possessions, pomp, power, etc. But rarely do they get the chance to surrender to the Lord for the sake of the Lord! How can one get the urge as long as one craves the world and not its basis? One longs for the object, but not for the base on which the object rests. How long can a base-less object satisfy? One wants the gift but not the giver, the created but not the Creator, things from the hand but not the hand! One is running after a non-existent thing. Can there be an object without a pre-existent cause? No; if there is a cause, it can be only the uncaused God. Therefore, it is sheer ignorance to surrender individuality for the sake of the transitory products of action, the “caused” rather than the cause. Surrender rather to the Basis, the Cause of all causes, the Origin of All. That is genuine self-surrender.

There are three types of self-surrender: I am Thine, Thou art mine, and Thou art I. The first affirms, I am Yours; the second asserts, You are mine; the third declares, You and I are One, the same. Each is just a step in the rising series, and the last is the highest step of all.

In the first stage (I am Thine), the Lord is fully free and the devotee is fully bound. It is like the cat and the

kitten; the cat shifts the kitten about as it wills, and the kitten just mews and accepts whatever happens. This attitude is very gentle and is within easy reach of all.

In the second stage (Thou art mine), the devotee binds the Lord, who is to that extent “not free”! Surdas is a good example of this attitude. “Krishna! You may escape from my hold, from the clasp of these arms; but you cannot escape from my heart, where I have bound you,” challenged Surdas. The Lord just smiled and assented; for, “I am bound by My devotees,” He asserts, without any loss of self-respect. The devotee can tie up the Lord with love, by devotion that overwhelms and overpowers egotism. When one is full of this type of devotion, the Lord Himself will bless one with everything one needs; His grace will fulfil all one’s wants. Remind yourself here of the promise made by the Lord in the *Gita*: “I carry the burden of his welfare (*Yogakshemam vahaamyaham*)”.

Next, about the third stage (Thou art I). This is inseparable devotion. The devotee offers all to the Lord, including themselves, for the devotee feels unable to withhold themselves. That completes the surrender.

The “Thou art I” feeling is non-dual surrender, based on the realization that all this (*idam*) is God (Vaasudeva) and nothing less, nothing else. As long as consciousness of the body persists, the devotee is the servant and the Lord is master. As long as the individual feels separate from other individuals, the devotee is a part and the Lord is the whole. When the devotee progresses to the state beyond the limits of the body as well as of “I” and “Mine”, then there is no more distinction; devotee and God are the same. In the *Ramayana*, Hanuman achieved this third stage through devotion.

This same subject is mentioned in the seventh verse of the second chapter of the *Gita*. The term surrendering devotee (*prapanna*) used there indicates that Arjuna has the qualification, the discipline of devotion. Moreover, Arjuna had analyzed his own faults and recognized them as such. Again, he had awakened from dullness (*thamas*). Krishna appreciated this the moment it happened. He said, “You are called the conqueror of the senses but you are enslaved by sleep (*nidra-jith*). Sleep (*nidra*) is the characteristic of dullness; how then can this dullness overwhelm you now? It is just a temporary phase; it can never bind you fast.”

If, by his efforts, Arjuna has won control over his senses and earned the name master-of-the-senses, then Krishna is the presiding deity of all the senses! On the field of battle, both are in the same chariot, one as learner and the other as teacher!

What exactly is the cause of all grief? It is attachment to the body that produces grief as well as its immediate precursors: likes and dislikes. These two are the results of the intellect considering some things and conditions as beneficial and some other things and conditions as not. This is a delusion, this idea of beneficence and maleficence. Still, you get attached to objects that are considered beneficial, and you start hating the others. But from the highest point of view, there is neither; the distinction is just meaningless. There is no two at all, so how can there be good and bad? To see two where there is only one, that is ignorance, delusion (*maya*). The ignorance that plunged Arjuna into grief was of this nature —seeing many, when there is only one.

Absence of the knowledge of the identity of “That (*Thath*)” and you (*thwam*) is the cause of all ignorance — the word *thathwa*, used to mean principle, enshrines this great philosophical doctrine. If this truth is not learned, one has to flounder in the ocean of grief. But, if it is learned and if one lives in that consciousness, then one can be free from grief. Many a prescription is recommended, used, publicized, and repeated parrot-like by all kinds of quacks. But these prescriptions do not go to the root of the matter; they are balms applied to the eye to cure an ache in the stomach. The disease and the drug have no coordination! The ache must be spotted and diagnosed

and the drug must be such as will remove it. Only then can it be cured. The Lord Himself (*Narayana*) is the only medical expert who can do so. And He had diagnosed Arjuna's illness correctly and decided on the treatment.

The wound that will not be healed by external application of balms has to be cured by internal remedies. So, Krishna prodded Arjuna with queries. "Why do you weep like a coward? Is it because Bhishma, Drona, and the rest are about to be killed? No; you weep because you feel they are 'your men'. Egotism makes you weep. People weep not for the dead but because the dead are 'theirs'. Have you not killed until now many who were 'not yours'? You never shed a tear for them. Today, you weep, since you are under the delusion that those whom you see before you are somehow 'yours' in a special way.

"When you sleep, you are unaffected by this feeling of 'I' and 'Mine', so you are unaware of what happens to your body, the bodies of 'your people', or your possessions, items that you carefully remember while awake. 'Mine' is the possessive case of 'I', so it comes in its trail. The fundamental ignorance, my dear fool, is the identification of yourself with something that is not you; viz. the body. The body is not *Atma*, but you believe that it is the *Atma*. What a topsy-turvy bit of knowledge this is! To cure this ignorance, I must administer the medicine of spiritual wisdom itself."

Thus, Krishna started giving him, in the very first instance, the most effective drug, spiritual wisdom. This is detailed from the eleventh verse of the second chapter, a key verse for all students of the *Gita*. Krishna condemns outright two objections that were haunting Arjuna for so long, saying that the destruction of the body does not mean the destruction of the *Atma* and that he is grieving for those for whom he need not grieve. "You talk like a wise man (*prajnaa vaadaamscha bhaashase*). You say this is *dharma* and the other is not, as if you really know how to distinguish them," said Krishna.

Here, attention has to be paid to one fact. Arjuna is suffering from two types of delusion: (1) ordinary and (2) out of the ordinary. To confuse the body with oneself and pine for the body as if something has happened to you is the ordinary delusion. To discard one's own *dharma* (in this case, the duty (*dharma*) of a warrior) as not *dharma* is an out-of-the-ordinary delusion. Krishna destroyed the first and removed the second. He dealt with the first in verses 12–30 of the second chapter; He tackled the second as a special problem and explained to Arjuna in eight verses the idea of his own *dharma*. These are collectively called the eight verses relating to *dharma* (*dharmashtakas*). One's own *dharma* does not bind and produce further birth, and it can lead to liberation; it has to be done as a *yoga* of action (*karma*), without attachment to the fruit. Toward the close of the second chapter, there is also a description of the successful aspirant who has steadied himself in a purified intellect, the person of steady integral spiritual wisdom (*sthitha-prajna*).

Krishna continued His discourse: "Arjuna! Think for a while who you are and what you are proposing to do. You declare you know everything, but yet you weep like a helpless woman. Your words proclaim that you are a pundit, but your acts reveal you as a simpleton. Hearing you, one would infer you are a wise man (*jnani*); but seeing you, one would find that you are an ignoramus! Your condition is disgusting, to say the least. If I take you to be a pundit, I cannot reconcile that view with your tears; for pundits do not grieve over life and death. If they grieve, they are not pundits. Pundits have the capacity to discover what is fundamentally true. Those who know the secret of the physical and the mystery of the spiritual, only such can be called pundits. How then can they weep over either the embodied or the disembodied? They will not forego their inner calm, whatever the stress or distress.

"The fully ignorant and the fully wise —both will have no grief for the living or the dead. Do you weep

because the bodies of Bhishma and Drona will fall, or because the *Atma* of those two will be destroyed? For the bodies, do you say? Well. Are tears any good? If they are, certainly people would have kept the corpses of their dead and revived them by their weeping. No, it can never be. Immerse the body in vessels of divine nectar; it cannot come back to life. Why then weep over the inevitable, the unavoidable?

“You might say that you are weeping for the *Atma*, the spiritual core. That reveals greater foolishness. Death can never even approach the *Atma*. It is eternal, self-evident, pure. It is evident that you have no wisdom of the *Atma* at all.

“Again, for a warrior, fighting is *dharmic*. Do your duty, regardless of other considerations. You ask, ‘How can I cause the death of Bhishma in war?’ But they have all come to get killed and to kill; you are not killing them in their homes. Of course, it is unrighteous (non-*dharmic*) to kill them in their homes, but on the battlefield, how can it be against *dharma*? I am sorry that you don’t have this much discrimination.

“It is enough. Get up and get ready for the fray. Why slide to the ground under the weight of all this useless ego? The Lord is the cause of all, not you. There is a Higher Power that moves everything. Know this and bend your will to it.

“Bhishma, Drona, and the rest have come like true soldiers and warriors to engage in battle. They don’t weep like you. Consider, they will never grieve or withdraw.

“Arjuna! This is the testing time for you, remember!

“Let Me tell you this also. There was never a time when I was not. Why? There was never a time when even you and all these kings and princes were not. That (the Godhead, *Thath*) is the highest *Atma* (*Paramatma*); This (the individual, *thwam*) is the soul (*jivatma*); both were the same, are the same, and will be forever. Prior to the pot, in the pot, and after the pot, it was, is, and will be clay.”

Arjuna was shocked into awareness and wakefulness by all this. He said, “Maybe You are God; maybe You are indestructible. I weep not for You but for such as us: we came yesterday, are present today, and are off tomorrow. What happens to us? Please enlighten me.”

One point has to be carefully noticed here. That (*Thath*), that is, the Godhead, is eternal; everyone accepts it. But the individual (*thwam*) is also the Godhead! It too is eternal, although it cannot be grasped as easily or quickly. So Krishna elaborates this and says, “Arjuna! You too are as eternal as the Absolute. Seen apart from the limitations, the individual is the Universal. Prior to the appearance of the jewel, there was just gold; during the existence of the jewel, there is just gold; and after the name-form of the jewel has gone, the gold persists. The *Atma* persists in the same way, body or no body.

“Although it is associated with the body, the *Atma* is unaffected by qualities (*gunas*) and *dharmas*; it has no qualities and characteristics. You are unaffected by the changes that the body undergoes when you grow from an infant to a boy, from a boy to a youth, from a youth to a middle-aged man, and thence to an old man. You persist, in spite of all this. It is the same when the body is destroyed; the *Atma* persists. So the hero will not pine for the change called death.” Krishna said this with such emphasis that the chariot shook!

Chapter IV

Further discussion of grief at killing; cultivating fortitude, and its benefits; action without desiring the fruit; the yoga of intelligence.

Arjuna was still doubt-ridden. “Oh Lord,” he began. “You said that bodily changes are like the stages of wakefulness, dream, and sleep. But we do not forget our experiences when we awake from deep sleep, while experiences of previous births are destroyed in memory by the incident called death.” Krishna replied that it was not possible to recall to memory all experiences, but it was possible to recall some. For the *Atma* persisted, although the vehicle changed.

Arjuna then shifted to another point, a point that pesters many besides Arjuna. That is why, Krishna says, “the wise person is not deluded by this (*dheeras thathra na muhyathi*).” He does not say that Arjuna should not be deluded by this; he intends to teach all wavering minds. Krishna solves every doubt as soon as it arises. He said, “Arjuna! While passing through the three stages, the intellect (*buddhi*) somehow manages to keep some points in its hold. But it too is destroyed when death comes to the body. At one stroke, all is forgotten. Memory is the function of the intellect, not of the *Atma*.

“Now consider this. You cannot now tell exactly where you were on a definite day, ten years ago, can you? But you existed that day, ten years ago, without a doubt. You dare not deny your existence then. The same is the case of the life you lived before this one, although you may have no recollection of how and where. The wise person is not deluded by such doubts, nor agitated by them.

“The *Atma* does not die; the body does not stay. Do you think that your grief at their possible death will make the *Atma* of your opponents happy? That is an insane thought. The *Atma* does not derive joy or grief, whatever happens or does not happen. Let the senses keep to their places, and there is no reason to fear. Only when the senses start contacting objects are the twin distractions of joy and grief produced. When you hear someone defaming you, you feel anger and grief; but no such agitation can take place if the words do not fall on your ears. The object-ward movement of the senses is the cause of grief and its twin, joy.

“It is like heat and cold: in the cold season, you crave warmth; in the hot season, you crave coolness. Sense-object contact is exactly like this. As long as the world is there, objective contact cannot be avoided; as long as the burden of previous births is there, the joy-grief complex cannot be avoided. Still, one can master the art, the discipline, the secret of avoiding them or bearing them without bother.

“Of what use is it to wait till the waves are silenced before you wade into the sea for a bath? They will never cease. The wise person learns the trick of avoiding the blow of the on-rushing wave and the drag of the receding wave. But a sea bath is essential. Some people avoid that very thing, because they are too idle to learn the art, Arjuna! Wear the armour of fortitude, and the blows of good and bad fortune can never harm you.

“The word fortitude (*thithiksha*) means equanimity in the face of opposites, putting up boldly with duality. It is the privilege of the strong, the treasure of the brave. The weak will be as agitated as peacock feathers; they are ever restless, with no fixity even for a moment. They sway like the pendulum, this side and that, once toward joy, the next moment toward grief.”

Here, some pause has to be made on one point. Fortitude is different from patience. Fortitude is not the same

as tolerance (*sahana*). Tolerance is putting up with something, tolerating it, bearing it, because you have no other choice. Having the capacity to overcome it, but yet, disregarding it—that is the spiritual discipline. Patiently putting up with the external world of duality combined with inner equanimity and peace—that is the path to liberation. Bearing all with analytic discrimination—that type of tolerance will yield good result.

(*Viveka* is the word used for such discrimination. It means the capacity to recognize what is called the “nature of the objective world”; that is to say, the world of objects that “come and go” and are not eternal.)

“Generally, people seek only happiness and joy; under no circumstance do they desire misery and grief! They treat happiness and joy as their closest well-wishers and misery and grief as their direct enemies. This is a great mistake. When one is happy, the risk of grief is great; fear of losing the happiness will haunt one. Misery prompts inquiry, discrimination, self-examination, and fear of worse things that might happen. It awakens one from sloth and conceit. Happiness makes one forget one’s obligations to oneself as a human being. It drags one into egotism and the sins that egotism leads one to commit. Grief renders one alert and watchful.

“Happiness spends the stock of merit and arouses the baser passions, so it is a real enemy. Really, misery is an eye opener; it promotes thought and the task of self-improvement, so it is a real friend. Misery also endows one with new and valuable experiences. Happiness draws a veil over experiences that hardens people and makes them tough. So, troubles and travails are to be treated as friends; at least, not as enemies. Only, it is best to regard both happiness and misery as gifts of God. That is the easiest path for one’s own liberation.

“Not to know this is the basic ignorance. A person so ignorant is blind; really, happiness and misery are like the blind person, who must always be accompanied by one who sees. When the blind person is welcomed, inevitably you have to welcome the person with eyes, who is the constant comrade of the blind one. So too, happiness and misery are inseparable; you cannot choose only one. Moreover, misery highlights the value of happiness. You feel happy by contrast with misery.” Thus said Krishna to Arjuna, to teach him the insignificance of all duality.

Then Arjuna resumed: “Madhava! What profit is there if your advice is followed and if the necessary fortitude (*thithiksha*) is cultivated? Forbearance is perhaps the only result. There is no benefit, is there?”

Krishna replied “Oh Son of Kunthi! The hero is the steady person who is not agitated to the slightest extent by ups and downs caused by roaring waves on the sea of life; who does not lose the poise that has become part of their nature; who keeps to the schedule of spiritual discipline whatever the attraction or distraction. The wise one is unaffected by the ever-present dualism of the objective world. The wise one is the person referred to as *dheera*.

“*Dhee* means intelligence; it is the quality that makes a person a perfect person (*purusha*). It is not the dress or the moustache that marks the person. Manhood comes with the rejection of the dual. To deserve the status, one ought to earn victory over internal, rather than external, foes. The exploit is to conquer the twin foes of joy and grief.

“Well, you might have another doubt also. (Your heart is a nest of doubts!) You might still ask what the gain of victory is. The gain is immortality, let Me assure you. Things of the world cannot confer that state of bliss. They can give only relative, not absolute bliss. When you rise above joy and grief, bliss is absolute, independent, full. Arjuna! You are a man among men, so you have no need of this paltry victory over worldly enemies. You deserve the bliss of immortality.”

Thus saying, Krishna began telling him of the science of *Atma* and non-*Atma*, the discipline by which one

can discriminate between the two. “The self-knower (*Atma-jnani*) is not bound by the results of action (*karma*); only those who indulge in action without awareness of the *Atma* (their real Self) get bound. Like the person who has learned swimming, the wise person can safely wade into the sea of worldly activity. If you do not know how to swim and still enter the sea, the waters will swallow you up, and death is sure.”

This explains why Krishna taught Arjuna the key science of self-knowledge. *Atma* neither kills nor dies. Those who believe that it kills or dies are unaware of its nature. The *Atma* of Arjuna does not kill; the *Atma* of Bhishma or Drona does not die; the *Atma* of Krishna does not prompt! These are just phases of the cause-consequence duality. The *Atma* cannot be the cause or consequence of any action; it is changeless.

There are six forms of modulation or modification: originating, existing, growing, altering, declining, and getting destroyed. These are the six transformations. Origination or birth is when it “was not” and later “is”. Termination or death is when it “is” and becomes “is not”. Birth happens to organic beings, not inorganic things. But the *Atma* has no organs, it is without parts. The *Atma* is not born, so how can it die? Whom does it kill? It is unborn, eternal.

“Just as a person discards old clothes and wears new ones, the dweller-in-the-body (*dehi*) discards one body and dons another. The body is to the individual what the clothes are to the body. If you understood the real nature of the *Atma*, then you would not give way to grief. All the weapons that you wield can harm only the material body; they cannot harm the modificationless *Atma*. Know this as truth and renounce this despondency.

“The foremost duty of a warrior is to stay on the side of *dharma* and destroy *a-dharma*. Consider your good fortune! You have worthy foemen like Bhishma on this battlefield. This same Bhishma fought in the past with his own guru, the *brahmin* who taught him all the arts, the great Parasurama himself, primarily in order to carry out his warrior duty. And now you, like a coward, are afraid to take arms against such stalwarts. A warrior finds his duty fulfilled when he upholds the cause of *dharma* in spite of all odds. That is the path of progress.

“*Kshatham* means sorrow, and a warrior (*kshatriya*) is he who protects beings from sorrow. A chance like this to wage a war on behalf of *dharma* against the forces of *a-dharma* comes but rarely. The war that is waged to establish peace and plenty in the world is referred to as a *dharmic* battle, and this is just such a struggle, where justice is bound to win. You have been blessed as a warrior to take part in this *dharmic* battle. Just imagine how much merit you will acquire by the service to the world, which you are set to do now.

“The Kauravas haven’t desisted from any sin, injustice, or vice. They insulted elders, deserted the virtuous, defamed the chaste, and wounded the self-respect of the good. Countless are their misdeeds. Now, the moment for retribution has come, and they are about to answer for all their crimes. And just at this hour, if you behave like a coward, you bring dishonour to your parents, to your brothers and indeed to the entire warrior caste.

“You imagine that it is a sin to engage in war. That is a great error. The sin, on the other hand, lies in avoiding the chance to destroy the wicked, in prolonging the agony of the virtuous. Give up your *dharma* now, and you run the risk of falling into perdition. Hold fast to it, and you are untouched by sin. Be of fixed mind; do not give way to either one or the other among all the dualities of the world.”

From verse 31 of this chapter, Krishna spoke of this devotion to one’s duty in eight verses. One should engage in activity, with a mind steady in the midst of fortune, good and bad. This was what Krishna advised in verse 37. Verse 39 is a transitional verse, for after saying “I have described to you the *sankhya* (see the glossary) arguments (*esha thebhihithaa saankhya*)”, Krishna said that He will go on to teach him the *yoga* of intelligence

and asked him to listen with care.

When desire to attain the fruit of action is renounced with full awareness, then it becomes what Krishna calls the “*yoga* of intelligence”. The intellect has to be purified and trained; otherwise, it is impossible to give up attachment to the fruits of action and to continue doing things as either duty or dedication. Such a purified intellect is named *yoga-buddhi*. Cultivate it and then, through it, liberate yourself from the bondage of action (*karma*). Really speaking, you, the true you, is above and beyond action.

You might say you will desist from action (*karma*) rather than practice the difficult discipline of renouncing the fruits thereof. But that is impossible. No, it is inevitable. One has to do some action or other. “Not for a single moment can one free oneself from action.” says Krishna in the third chapter of the *Gita*.

“Arjuna! Every deed or activity has a beginning and an end. But desireless action (*karma*) has no such. That is the difference between the two. When action is done with a view to the gain therefrom, one has to suffer the loss, the pain, and even the punishment. But desireless action frees you from all these.

“Desire the fruits of action, and get born again and again, caught up in that desire. Give up that desire, and you are liberated from the flux. The practice of this type of renunciation ends the state of bondage. The main point is to stick to the goal. The goal is action, not its fruit. Let me tell you that the desire for the fruit of one’s acts is an indication of the quality of passion (*rajoguna*), which does not befit you. Perhaps you prefer to remain inactive. Well, that is an indication of the quality of dullness (*thamoguna*). It is even worse than passion.” The Lord has laid down four commands: a “do” and three “don’ts”. The first insists on the cultivation of strength; the rest require the avoidance of weakness.

Of course, it is not Arjuna alone that got such advice; all mankind needs it. Arjuna is only the representative “man”. Students of the *Gita* must learn this lesson first: the *Gita* is primarily for every seeker.

Another point to be noted is this: the *Gita* is addressed to humanity, and not to birds and beasts or to the gods. People perform acts that are prompted by the desire for the fruits thereof; if the acts do not yield fruit, they will not perform the acts at all. Profit, gain, reward, result—these are what people seek. But this rule does not apply to those who take the *Gita* in their hands to drink the nectar of the Lord’s message. Not all yearn for the nectar, and, if you do, it is evident that you aspire for eternal joy, eternal liberation. Then you must pay the price, the giving up of the desire for the fruit of action, and dedicate everything at the feet of the Lord.

Chapter V

Detachment from the fruits of action; the person of steady wisdom.

If you have an eye on the fruits of your actions, you are liable to be affected by worry, anxiety, and restlessness. The question may arise: if the fruits have to be given up, how can one manage to live? But why this weakness of heart, this nervousness? He who has assured you, saying, “I will care for your well-being (*Yoga-kshemam vamyaham*),” will certainly look after that. He will give the means and the wherewithal. All you have to consider is: which is more important, a happy life or liberation from the circle of life and death? Happy living is of only short duration; the joy of liberation is eternal, unshakeable.

On this point, many commentators have exercised their intelligence and written differently. Many have said that the giving up of fruit is advised because there is no right or authority for the doer to desire the fruit. This is a great blunder. The Lord has said in the *Gita*, “refuse the fruit (*maa phaleshu*)” —that is to say, the deed yields results, but the doer should not desire the result or do it with the result in view. If Krishna’s intention was to say that the doer has no right to the fruit, He would have said, “It is fruitless (*na phaleshu* —*na* meaning no)”. So if you desist from action (*karma*), you will be transgressing the Lord’s command. That would be a serious mistake.

When one has a right to engage in action (*karma*), one has a right also to the fruit; nobody can deny this or refuse this right. But doers can, out of their own free will and determination, refuse to be affected by the result, whether favourable or unfavourable. The *Gita* shows the way: “Do —but don’t be attached to the consequence.” The desire for the result of your action is a sign of passion (*rajoguna*). The giving up of action because you can not benefit by the fruit is a sign of dullness (*thamoguna*). To engage in action, to know that the result will follow, and yet not to be attached to it or concerned with it —that is the sign of the quality of purity and serenity (*sathwaguna*).

The *yogi* who dedicates all actions to God, who has learned this secret of “action combined with renouncing the fruits thereof”, should have equal-mindedness (*sama-buddhi*) more than mind with attachments (*sanga-buddhi*). For, the intellect with attachments draws him into entanglements. “This action is mine; its results are due to my endeavours. I am the person entitled to it” —such are the thoughts that bind the doer. Krishna advised that one should rise above this mind with attachments and desires. He declared that equanimity (*sama-thvam*) is the genuine devotional practice (*Sama-thvam yogamuchyathe*).

In the second chapter, Krishna has made clear in a general way four principal points: the principle of renouncing the fruits of action, or absolute surrender (*saranagathi*), the *sankhya* (see the glossary) teaching, the *yogic* attitude (restraint, self control), and the nature of the person of steady integral spiritual wisdom (*sthitha-prajna*). We have noted the first three already. Now about the fourth.

Krishna taught Arjuna the nature and characteristics of the person of steady wisdom when Arjuna questioned him. Arjuna prayed “Oh Kesava!”, and when that appellation was used, Krishna smiled, for He knew then that Arjuna had understood His splendour. Do you ask how? Well, what does “Kesava” mean? It means, “He who is Brahma, Vishnu, Siva, the three forms.” Through Krishna’s grace, Arjuna had reached that stage of realization.

When Arjuna prayed for Kesava to tell him the true characteristics of a person of steady wisdom, He replied, “Partha! Such a person will be free from all desire and stable in the knowledge and awareness of the *Atma* only.”

Now, there are two processes in this: To give up all the promptings of desire in the mind is the negative process; to implant ever-present joy therein is the positive aspect. The negative process is to remove all the seedlings of wrong and evil from the mind; the positive process is to grow, in the field thus cleansed, the crop of attachment to God! The plucking of the weeds is the negative stage; the cultivation of the crop you need is the positive stage. The weeds are pleasures that the senses draw from the objective world; the crop is attachment to God.

The mind is a bundle of wishes, and, unless these wishes are removed by their roots, there is no hope of destroying the mind, which is a great obstacle in the path of spiritual progress. When the yarn that comprises the cloth is taken out, one by one, what remains of the cloth? Nothing. The mind is made of the warp and woof of wishes. When mind vanishes, one becomes steady in wisdom (*sthitha-prajna*).

So the first thing to be conquered is the demon of desire (*kama*). For this, it is unnecessary to wage a huge war. It is also unnecessary to use pleasing words to persuade the desire to disappear. Desires will not disappear for fear of the one or for favour of the other. Desires are objective; they belong to the category of the “seen”. With the conviction that “I am the see-er only, not the seen”, the steady-minded one releases themselves from attachment. By this means, desire is conquered. You must watch the working of the mind from outside it; do not get involved in it. That is the meaning of this discipline.

The faculty of the mind is like a strong current of electricity. It has to be watched from a distance and not be contacted or touched. Touch the current, and you are reduced to ashes. So too, contact and attachment give the mind the chance to ruin you. The farther you are from it, the better. By skillful methods, you have to make the best use of it for your own welfare.

The bliss in which the person of steady wisdom is immersed does not arise from external objects; that person has no need of them, either. Bliss is in everyone as part of their very nature. Those with pure consciousness find the highest bliss in the realization of their own reality, the *Atma*. That joy is self-earned, so to say. It is known only to the individual; it is self-evident.

Since Arjuna had not known this, Krishna had to clarify it in simple terms in verses 56–58 of Chapter II.

Joy or grief can be met with in three forms: caused by one’s self (*adi-atma*), caused by the five elements or the material world (*adi-bhauthika*), and caused by fate, i.e. natural disasters (*adi-daivika*). It is well known that sins bring grief as retribution and meritorious deeds bring joy as reward. So, advice is given to avoid sins and perform meritorious deeds. But the person of steady wisdom knows neither the pain of grief nor the thrill of joy. Such a person is not repulsed by one or attracted by the other and does not retreat before pain or run toward pleasure. Only those ignorant of the *Atma* will exult or droop when stricken with joy or grief.

The person of steady wisdom (*sthitha-prajna*) will be ever engaged in contemplation and rumination. The person is called a sage, and their intellect is steady, because the senses do not harry it.

One point has to be understood here. Conquest of the senses is essential for spiritual discipline, but that is not all. As long as the objective world continues to attract the mind, one cannot claim complete success. That is why Krishna says, “Arjuna! Establish mastery over the senses; then you need have no fear, for they become serpents with the fangs removed.”

But there is still danger from thoughts and impulses that draw you outward. Desire has no limit; it can never be satiated. So, along with mastery of the senses, one must also establish mastery of the mind. That is the sign of

a person of steady wisdom. If this double mastery is absent, the person is a wisdomless individual, not a steady-wisdom individual. Where does the wisdomless individual go? To perdition; nowhere else.

The upward path, the higher stage—that is for the person of steady wisdom. Of these two masteries, if the mind is subdued, that alone is enough; it is not necessary then to conquer the external senses. If the mind has no attachment to objects, the senses have nothing to cling to; they perish by inanition; love and hate are both starved out of existence. The bonds with the objective world are cut, although the senses may yet be affected by it. For the one who has been blessed with awareness of the *Atma*, how can anything worldly bring grief or joy?

Just as the stars fade into invisibility when the sun rises, so too, when the sun of knowledge or wisdom rises, grief, agitation, and ignorance vanish.

People have three chief instruments: the mind, the intellect, and the senses. It is when these three work in unison and cooperate with one another that either “immersion in the flux” or “liberation in the knowledge of the *Atma*” is realized. Krishna anticipated that Arjuna would be puzzled to know what would happen “when which operates with which”. So Krishna provided the answer. “Arjuna,” He said, “when the mind cooperates with the senses, you enter into the flux called the objective world (*samsara*); when it subordinates itself to the intellect, you attain the knowledge of the *Atma*. One path leads to surrender to the world; the other, to surrender to God. The intellect must resolve; the mind must carry out the resolution. That is the correct procedure.”

The senses have to be fully destroyed. That is the hallmark of a person of steady wisdom. So when all beings are experiencing night, the person of steady wisdom would keep himself awake. When all beings are awake, the person of steady wisdom would be asleep. The literal meaning of this is that what is night for one is day for the other. But that would be absurd. It would mean the person of steady wisdom is the one who sleeps during the day and keeps awake at night.

The inner meaning of this statement is very profound. Ordinary people are vigilant in affairs that concern the senses that arise out of this world. Wakefulness for them is the care they bestow on worldly pursuits. But the person of steady wisdom is unconcerned with these very things and is, so to say, asleep. What does sleep mean? It means the happiness resulting from inactivity of the senses. And vigilance? It means yielding to the senses and catering to them. When ordinary people are pursuing the senses and their demands, the person of steady wisdom is asleep. This can also be put in other words: forget the stage of *Atma* consciousness and you relapse into body awareness.

This is what happens: the ordinary person sleeps in the *Atma* stage and wakes into body consciousness. The case of people of steady wisdom is different; they sleep in body-consciousness and wake in the awareness of the *Atma*. They will not awake, even by mistake, in the sensory world, the world where the ordinary person is most vigilant! This is the inner meaning. It is far from the literal meaning, which, if taken as true, would entitle thieves, watchmen, and others to the name “people of steady wisdom (*sthitha-prajna*)”, because they keep awake at night and sleep during the day! Only those who have given up traces of desire and become mere instruments can achieve peace. Krishna ends the description of people of steady wisdom with an emphasis on “the giving up of desire”.

To people sorrowing on the battlefield of life, bewildered by attractions and distractions, not knowing where to turn and what road to take, Madhava taught this *sankhya yoga*—the path of knowledge, see Chapter II. The other chapters are like commentaries on the teaching in this chapter.

“Arjuna! prepare yourself for giving up the mind, for being merged in your own Self. Withdraw the mind

from sound, touch, sight, taste, and smell —the five elements. Then you become a man of steady wisdom,” said Krishna.

In Chapter II, Krishna elaborated (in verses 11–30) on the true nature of the Self (*Atma-thathwa*) in a simple, easily understandable style. Then, in verses 39–75, He taught the virtuous-action (*dharmakarma*) attitude, which is essential for attaining the God-head, an attitude that is based on the *yoga* of action, which itself is embodied in a balanced state of intellect —which has already been prescribed.

Chapter VI

The importance of action; Krishna has no need to do action; why realized souls do action; wisdom is the final goal of action; the path of wisdom; Surya, the sun.

In the 17 verses 56-72 of Chapter II, Krishna described the characteristics of the person of steady wisdom (*sthitha-prajna*) and the excellence of that stage. Then, saying that He Himself had established the *yoga* of spiritual knowledge (*jnana-yoga*) for the *Sankhyas* and the *yoga* of action (*karma-yoga*) for the *yogis* as a means of attaining liberation, He spoke of the importance of action.

Everyone has to bow to the demands of nature and engage in action (*karma*). It is inevitable. Therefore, Krishna said, “Do the action that is your bounden duty. Being engaged in action is to be preferred to being inactive. If you desist from action, the task of living becomes difficult, nay, impossible.

“Actions that don’t bind by attachment to consequence are referred to as sacrifices or offerings to God (*yajna*). All the rest are bondage-producing. Therefore, Arjuna, give up all attachment and engage in each act as a sacrifice dedicated to the Lord.” Krishna taught Arjuna the origins of action (*karma*), the roots from which the urge to do action sprouts and grows. He taught them so clearly that Arjuna’s heart was really moved and modified. “The *Vedas* emanated from God; actions emanated from the *Vedas*; from action originated sacrifice, from sacrifice, rain; from rain grew food; from food came all living beings. This cycle has to be accepted and honoured. Consider this, Arjuna. I don’t need to do any action; no, not anywhere in the three worlds. I am under no compulsion. Yet, I am ever engaged in action. Think of this. If I desist, the world will be no more. Have steady faith in the *Atma*; then dedicate all your acts to Me. With no desire for the fruit thereof, no egotism, and no sense of possession or pride, engage in battle.

“If the wheel of creation is to move smoothly, each one has to keep on doing action (*karma*). Whoever one is, one cannot get around this obligation. Even one who has achieved the highest wisdom has to observe this rule. Eating and drinking, intake and release of breath —these too are actions. Who can exist without them?

“You derive benefit from the world and from the community, so some activity on your part is their due. This bliss of *Brahman* itself, this whole universe, is really speaking a huge workshop; every human being is a limb in this organization. The limb is allotted a task in accordance with its structure, and it must find its fulfilment in doing that particular work. Whatever work one has been allotted has to be done as an offering to God. There is no single thing in the universe that does not engage itself in this great task. Plant and insect, stone and stump, wind and rain, heat and cold, if each of these does not work as per the plan, the world cannot subsist. The sun and moon carry on their routine tasks; wind and fire perform their duties without demur. If the earth and sun refuse to do their allotted duties, what would happen to the world? So no one is action-less, but yet with body! It is only when each performs their task without fail, and with care, that the wheel will move quick and smooth.

“You may wonder why realized souls (*jnanis*) should still do action (*karma*); not only you, but many others may be worried at that statement. Well, people usually follow the ideal set by those in higher levels. Their acts form the basis of *dharma* for all. If realized souls are inactive, how are ordinary mortals to save themselves? They would have no guide, so they would lose themselves in the easy paths of sensory pleasure. The duty of the wise is to foster the right and to practise it before others, so that they too may be prompted to follow, drawn by the hope of becoming as contented and joyful as the wise are. The wise have to do and get done, see and show, so that the

rest might be persuaded to follow the example set by them.

“Arjuna! Pay attention to just one fact! How warm is your body now? It may be about 98 degrees; how did that happen? Because the sun bears many million times this heat at that distance, right? Now, if the sun feels that it will not put up with all that fire and becomes cool, what will happen to humanity? Again, if I desist from action, imagine what will be the fate of this vast universe of activity! That is why I am engaged in action, remember. Not that I derive any profit thereby, or get any good, or any fruit.

“Almost everyone in the world is bound by the rule of action (*karma*). But people are so immersed in ignorance that they are unaware of their own moral or intellectual status and of the secrets of action. Such can be saved only by being inspired by the example of the great. That is why the wise have to be engaged in activity; they have to remove the sloth and delusion of ordinary people. So, all have to obey the rule of action (*karma*), without deviation.

Does the plane stay above, denouncing the earth below? Those who have earned the right to travel in it can't fly toward it and into it! Therefore, to take them in, the plane has to come down at places where they gather by previous arrangement, and then soar high into the sky with them. So too, although wise people have no desire or urge to do action, they come down into the region of action and help those who would not have otherwise put their talents to proper use. Even great personages like Janaka performed *dharmic* actions with this view; Aswapathi did likewise, to save the rest from sheer idleness or wickedness.

Then, in reply to another question of Arjuna, Krishna said, “Desire (*kama*) is the root cause of all evil”, and He elaborated on its nature, cause, and cure. “Those who are bound by the false idea that they are just this body and nothing more can never hope to conquer action (*karma*); they must acquire the awareness that they are just *Brahman* and nothing less, in order to be sure of victory. All acts must be performed in the spirit of dedication to the Lord. The universe must be identified with the form of Vishnu, the universal Transcendent.”

In this chapter, three important subjects were clarified:

1. Everyone has to do action (*karma*), for otherwise the world will come to nought.
2. The action of the great is the ideal that the rest have to keep in view.
3. Almost all in the world are bound by the obligation of action.

Krishna most graciously made Arjuna imbibe these lessons. Not satisfied with this, Krishna told him that spiritual wisdom (*jnana*) is the final goal and gain of action; wisdom is the treasure that is won by efforts to purify the mind and to earn the grace of God; wisdom not merely grants bliss but is itself the seat of bliss. Thus, He initiated Arjuna into the path of spiritual wisdom.

This subject is carried on until the fifth chapter. The *yoga* of wisdom shines as a precious jewel amid the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Krishna declared “nothing as holy as spiritual wisdom is known here”! Even later, in the seventh chapter, He said, “I consider the realized soul (*jnani*) as Myself (*jnaanithwathmaiva me matham*)”.

The excellence of the *yoga* of wisdom has been similarly extolled in many other contexts in the *Gita*. That is why it is believed to be the most fruitful of all spiritual disciplines. All scriptures find their fulfilment in wisdom alone. Meditation is just contemplation of the embodiment of spiritual wisdom, which is one's real nature. All are in you; you are in all. You have to get this conviction fixed in your consciousness, by means of analysis, discrimi-

nation, and intellectual exploration. You have to isolate and dismiss from consciousness the impressions of the senses, the mind, the intelligence, etc. These have nothing to do with the *Atma*, which you really are. The *Atma* is unaffected by any subject or object. Even if the senses, mind, intelligence, etc. are inactive, that inactivity will not affect the *Atma*! To know the *Atma* as such an entity, unaffected and unattached, is the secret of spiritual wisdom.

Every single act of yours must be carried out with this wisdom as its background. That awareness of the *Atma* will guide you in both the out-moving and in-drawing paths; it will not block action but fill it with purpose and meaning; it will build up faith and moral life; it will take you to the realm of deliverance along the road of renunciation of the fruit of action, and not renunciation of action itself.

For achieving liberation, wisdom is the direct road. Hence, it is declared to be incomparably sacred. Naturally, it follows that ignorance is indubitably the most despicable. “See the universal in the particular; see the particular in the universal; that is the essence of wisdom”, said Krishna. “All bodies know only one single knower of the bodies. And who is that? The *Atma* —you yourself, your own self! Know this and you become a wise person. So realize that the self is the highest *Atma* (*Paramatma*); that is the highest spiritual wisdom.” Krishna, who is All-knowing, began to teach Arjuna this *yoga*, in order to cast off all doubt from Arjuna’s mind.

“Arjuna! I taught this sacred *yoga* of wisdom to Surya. Then it was handed down from one generation to the next until Manu and Ikshvaku, and, from them, saint-kings came to learn it. Then it was lost in the world. That ever-existing *yoga* had to be restored to the world, so I had to come.”

You won’t fail to notice the discrepancy of the *yoga* being described as ever-existing and the statement that it was lost! Of course, the statement was not made without thought. Here, the indestructible is spoken of as having been destroyed! It is called indestructible for two reasons. Its origin is the *Veda*, which is free from decline. Its consequence is liberation (*moksha*), which is also free from decline. This *yoga*, on account of passage of time, neglect and disuse, was forgotten. That is to say, it disappeared, it was lost to view, it declined. The statement means nothing more. Bringing it to life means bringing it once again into use, not creating it *ab initio*! “Lost to view” is the sense in which the word “destroyed” is used in a general way. That is how you have to interpret it, for the Lord will never devise a thing that will suffer “destruction”.

The reference to Surya also merits consideration. The people of India are intimately associated with the Sun god. The heroes of India, the warriors (*kshatriyas*), are from the beginning attached to Surya. Even for ordinary men and women, Surya is so highly sacred that He has been raised to the status of the great Guru. The sacred scriptures and legends of India have not assigned a status of similar glory to anyone else. Surya occupies a unique position. Why, for the whole world, the sun is the visible manifestation of the Lord. And the sun is the source of time. Surya is the father of time (*kala*), as the scriptures declare. The sun limits and regulates the number of years each one lives; the sun diminishes every day a fraction of the allotted span. So the sun is the supreme arbiter, the maker of humanity’s destiny. Whether one wills it or not, every deed of is performed under His auspices and dedicated to Him.

Above all, consider the service the sun does to this world! That is within the daily experience of all; everyone is witness to that. The sun is the source of all life, plant and animal, upon this planet. Without His rays, it would be a desolate waste. He draws up into the sky the waters of seas and lakes, and from the clouds He pours rain on the crops. He is ever the deity of justice, scattering His rays equally on all.

Surya is the great renunciant; unequalled for renunciation. He is the great *yogi*; He performs His duty without

thought of reward, without a second's thought of His own glory or of rest. He is humble and steady in work. The service He does is something no one else can fulfil. The happiness He contributes is something no one else can confer. But He has no pretensions to pride. He moves above unconcerned with the consequences of His energizing mission of service.

Imagine the patience with which the Sun puts up with all that extreme heat for the sake of the world and of humanity. It is He who keeps the human body warm and comfortable. This material body is full of energy and intelligence on account of the solar energy that it imbibes. If the sun were idle for a moment, the world would be consumed in flames. Instead, He is fostering the world. He feels it as His mission, His purpose, and not as His service.

It is only in the duty (*karma*) that is your very nature that you can have fortitude; if it is just an assumed duty, you will find it difficult to put up with troubles and travails. Assumed duty is called unnatural (*a-sahaja*) duty, and duty that is the expression of one's genuine self is innate (*sahaja*) duty. Now, innate duty will sit light, and assumed duty will always be a burden. Assumed duty will induce conceit, or the feeling "I am the doer", so it will result in exhaustion or elation, disgust or pride.

Think of this one point: when a person is well, no one asks about their health, but when stricken with illness or sorrow, everyone asks why and bombards them with anxious queries. Why this anxiety? People are fundamentally happy and healthy. Their innate nature is joy. So, when someone is happy and healthy, no one is surprised or worried. But grief and sorrow are strange to their make-up; they are the result of a delusion that has overwhelmed the nature. So, people get worried and set about finding out how they got so deluded.

The sun is teaching us that when one is oneself, there will be no exhaustion or elation, no disgust or pride. The task of Surya is not something imposed from outside and taken up under compulsion. That is why it is performed systematically and smoothly. Surya is also exhorting mankind to use the time that He creates and allots fully and fruitfully, not merely for living comfortably and safely but for living a moral and elevating life, worthy of human destiny. Now you can realize why the *Gita* was first taught by the Lord to the Sun. He is the great *yogi* who renounces the fruit of action (the *karma-yogi*), the great desireless renouncer of the fruit.

Krishna is now teaching this indestructible *Gita* scripture to Arjuna, the representative of humanity at the crossroad, and He chose him because he has the same excellences, right? Reflect on that for a moment. If Arjuna was not a vessel endowed with such virtues and splendour, Krishna would not have used him as the recipient of the *Gita*. The Lord will not give gifts to the undeserving. Arjuna had the qualities that were needed for receiving the teaching, and he was chosen.

Chapter VII

Dharma – its decline and resurrection; Arjuna as Krishna’s closest devotee; Arjuna wonders how Krishna could know Surya and Manu.

“When the *dharma* that has been laid down declines, I incarnate in a human form, from the state of formlessness, in order to revive it and protect it and save the good from fear,” said Krishna. Now, this statement might cause some misgiving. You may ask: will not common people then conclude that *dharma* is something liable to decline and decay? Will they not condemn *dharma* as neither eternal nor truth?

Well. You will grasp the importance of the task of protecting *dharma* only when you consider its origin and purpose. God created this world of change on His own initiative, and He ordained various codes for its upkeep and smooth running. There were rules of correct conduct for every being. These form the *dharma*.

The word *dharma* is derived from the root *dhri*, meaning “wear”; *dharma* is that which is worn. The nation (*desa*), the body of the Lord, is protected by the *dharma* it wears; the *dharma* also gives the body beauty and joy; it is the yellow garment, the holy apparel of India. It guards both honour and dignity; it protects from chill and lends charm to life. *Dharma* preserves the self-respect of this land. Just as clothes maintain the dignity of the person who wears them, so *dharma* is the measure of the dignity of a people.

Not only this country but every single thing in the world has its own special *dharma*, or uniqueness of duty, and nature. Each has its distinctive clothes! *Dharma* rules the group and the individual. Consider the five elements, the components of the world. Movement and cold are the *dharma* of water; combustion and light are the *dharma* of fire. Each of the five has its unique *dharma*. Humanity for humans, animality for animals, these *dhar-mas* guard them from decline. How can fire be fire if it has no power of combustion and light? It must manifest the *dharma* to be itself. When it loses that, it becomes a lifeless bit of charcoal.

Similarly, people have some natural characteristics that are their very life breath. They are also called abilities. People can be identified as humans only as long as these abilities are found in them. If these abilities are lost, one is no longer “human”. To preserve and foster such qualities and abilities, certain modes of behaviour and lines of thought, are laid down. *Dharma* will not decline if these precepts and procedures are kept up. *Dharma* is not imported from somewhere outside, nor can it be removed. It is your own genuine nature, your uniqueness. It is the thing that makes a human out of an animal. How to observe *dharma*? By being “yourself”. If a thing breaks loose from its *dharma* and behaves as the whim dictates, then it is doing *a-dharma*.

This inborn (*sahaja*) *dharma* of humanity was overpowered in course of time; those who supported it, encouraged it, and derived joy from it declined. So, in common parlance, it was said to have been “destroyed”, although it is something that cannot be destroyed. It is only like the weed overpowering the crop. So the “establishment of *dharma*” is only weeding the field. Now in this iron age (*kali-yuga*), *dharma* has become a mere matter of words. *Dharma* is not just the magical manipulation of words. This must be clearly understood. What has to be spoken is truth; what has to be acted is *dharma*.

“Speak the truth, do your duty (*sathyam vadha, dharmam chara*)” has been the clarion call of the *Upanishads*, the repositories of Indian culture. These glorious teachings have been forgotten today; they have been turned upside down. In fact, “speak *dharma*” is the order of the day! The first step in the decline of *dharma* is

this descent from deed to word, the belief that a thing is done when it is only uttered! In fact, this is not *dharma*.

But what is not practised cannot possess strength. The crocodile's strength depends upon its being in water; the strength of *dharma* depends upon its being practised. It becomes weak when it is taken out of practice and thrown on the sands of words. Truth is a matter of speech, it gets strength when it is practised in speech; it is difficult to practise it in action. "Strength" has two meanings here: animal strength and *dharmic* strength. Bhima had physical strength, but while his elder brother, Dharmaja, was by his side, Bhima's strength became *dharmic*. The Pandavas were saved by their adherence to *dharmic* strength! But for that, they would have suffered defeat even in the very beginning. The Pandavas, without Dharmaja, whatever their resources, would have been an easy match for their opponents. Just ponder over that. How were the Kauravas destroyed, in spite of their vastly superior resources? They did not have *dharmic* strength. All they could rely on was sheer animal strength. The day when Dharmaja and Bhima, those who had *dharmic* strength, moved into the forest, *a-dharma* penetrated into the land of the Kauravas.

So, the *dharma* that has now been exiled into the forest has to be restored to the villages and towns in order to establish plenty, prosperity, and peace to the world. From the reign of *dharma*-lessness, the world has to enter the era of *dharma*. Special effort is called for when you cultivate a crop; no effort is necessary when weeds and wild grass are allowed to grow. The valuable crop of inborn (*sahaja*) *dharma* has to be cultivated with all care and attention. When *dharma* is practised, the lack of *dharma* will decline by itself. No special exertion is needed for putting it out of action. Therefore, in this present context, the establishment of *dharma* means the growth of the practice of *dharma*.

What does it mean when people say, "the sun has set"? Only, "it is not visible to us." So too, simply because *dharma* is not evident, you cannot say it has gone out of existence. How can it go out of existence? If it goes, it cannot be truth or *dharma*. *Dharma*, since it is associated with truth, is indestructible. The real establishment of *dharma* (*dharma-sthapana*) is to make the *dharma* that has become hidden visible once again. Krishna is doing exactly that.

Using Arjuna as an instrument, He is bringing to light the codes of conduct and modes of thought that were laid down as *dharma* from the very beginning and once again enforcing their practice. This is referred to as the raising of *dharma* (*dharmoddharana*). He is reviving something that is lost. This work cannot be carried out by ordinary people. So, the universal Basis, the universal Lord, has to assume the task Himself. He alone is all-powerful. He is teaching the world through Arjuna.

If Arjuna were an individual like others, he could not be the recipient and transmitter of this great teaching. So, you must infer that Arjuna was really a great man. He is a hero who has defeated not merely the outer foes, but even the inner ones. Weak hearts cannot grasp the *Gita* and put it into practice. It is with this full knowledge and this high purpose that Krishna selected Arjuna as the vehicle and showered on him His Grace.

Once, while Krishna was conversing intimately with Arjuna, He made this statement (note the over-powering grace that Krishna showed!): "Arjuna, you are My closest devotee. Not only that; you are My dearest friend. I have no friend as dear as you are. That is why I taught you this supreme, secret teaching."

Reflect on this. Many in the world are only self-styled devotees. The Lord has not accepted them as such. To get the title from the Lord Himself is great good-fortune, and that is the highest credential. The devotee must melt the heart of the Lord and get from Him the acknowledgement of devotion. If the title is taken by oneself, it

gives paltry satisfaction, not genuine joy. Arjuna was the only person who got the title of devotee from the Lord Himself. So you can understand how pure-hearted, how deserving Arjuna was. You might say a hundred things about yourself; you might advance this claim and that; but you must show the acknowledgement from the Lord. Without that, all your talk is empty boast; devotion must be won by implicit obedience. But that alone is not sufficient. That is also why Krishna uses the word “friend (*mithra*)”. The friend has no fear; that makes him a more perfect recipient.

Now we shall resume the trend and go back to the *Gita*. When Arjuna listened to Krishna’s words, he developed a head full of doubts. He became agitated. Not only he but all people nowadays are worried by doubts. Moreover, in the complex spiritual field and the field of knowledge concerning Godhead, there are two possible interpretations: the outer and the inner. Ordinary people accept the outer, while those who have some experience of the Lord seek to know the inner.

As the saying goes, “like the mole in the eye, the stone in the shoe, the thorn in the foot, the faction in the home” is this “doubt in the brain”. When such doubts assail Arjuna, who is the representative human, it means they are humanity’s own doubts. They can be solved only by Madhava (Krishna), who is beyond and above humanity. That is why Krishna is ready, by Arjuna’s side, to remove any doubt and plant joy in the heart.

Now, what exactly is the doubt? Krishna was born at the end of the third era (the *dwapara-yuga*); Surya and Manu are people of the past. How then could these two meet Krishna? It cannot be a physical relationship, for many generations separate Krishna from the other two. Krishna is Arjuna’s contemporary, so how did Krishna teach this *yoga* to Surya? To sit quietly, listening to unbelievable stories, is itself a sign of poverty of intellect. Every moment, Arjuna’s uneasiness increased. This was observed by Krishna, who is everywhere and in everything. He said, “What is the cause of the restlessness that I notice in you? Tell Me,” prodding Arjuna with a smile.

Arjuna was glad he got a chance. “Madhava! I do not understand your words. They confuse me so much that I am losing a little of the faith that I have in you. But, I pray, excuse me for asking this, please solve my doubt. I cannot stand it any more,” Arjuna pleaded with folded hands.

Gopala (Krishna) was glad, and He asked him what the doubt was. Arjuna then said, “You said that this *yoga* was taught to Surya and Manu; of what distant past are these two? And to which age do you belong? Did you teach them while in this body? That is unbelievable, for Your body is only four or five years older than mine. You are not older than that. When did You teach them, without my being aware of it? And the Sun! He is greater than You, many times greater. He is there from the very beginning, from a past that is beyond our imagination. I cannot believe it; no, not even the most intelligent person can prove it true. Let it be! You may say. ‘This is not the body, this is not the age; it was while I was in another body and during another age’. That makes it still more strange. How can anyone remember what happened in a previous birth? If you say that it is possible to have such memory, then it must apply to me also, right?”

“The scriptures declare that only a few divine beings keep such things in memory; that mortals cannot hold them in remembrance. Well, I may accept that You are divine. But I have to accept that Surya, the sun, is also divine. How can two persons equal in divine status teach and learn from each other? When You teach and he learns, he becomes Your disciple, doesn’t he? You must then be taken to be superior to Surya. Let us take it to be so. I accept that you are the Lord God Himself. That creates further difficulties for me. For why should God be bound by birth and death and activity? When you assume the five-foot human form, is it not a limitation on the Limit-

less? From that infinite limitless Universal, why should God incarnate as the limited particular? No matter how I argue within myself, I cannot solve this doubt. Your words are meaningful for You only: they convey no meaning to me. My head is confused; give me some guidance, some convincing reply,” prayed Arjuna.

Krishna laughed within Himself, recognizing that the appropriate moment had come. He said, “Arjuna! what exactly do people mean when they say the sun has risen and the sun has set? It is only as far as their vision is concerned; that is all, is it not? The sun does not rise, it does not set. I am also like that. I am not born, nor do I die. People of ordinary intellect consider that I am born many times and that I do many deeds during each birth. Whenever there is the need for the uplift of the world, I become manifest, assuming a name and a form, that is all. So I am conscious of all My appearances, all My manifestations. I am Almighty, I am omniscient (*sarva-jna*). Not only I, even you know everything. But your power of wisdom is overwhelmed by ignorance. I am wisdom itself, so I know everything.

“When the sun is seen in a mirror, it loses neither its status nor its glory. It is unaffected; its glory is undiminished. So also I am reflected in nature; and that does not diminish any of My glory or status.

I remain as Almighty and as Omniscient (*sarva-jna*) as ever. I am birthless, immortal. Humans are born as a result of the merit and demerit of previous births. Perhaps you think that this holds true for *Avatars* also. No. Yours is a *karmic* birth; mine is a birth of divine play. Prayers of the good are the cause of My birth. The misdeeds of the wicked are also the cause!”

Chapter VIII

The Avatar comes to protect the virtuous, punish the wicked, and support dharma; the four types of seeker; the reason for the caste system.

Krishna continued, “*Avatars* have no merit or demerits accumulated in former births, which, like ordinary mortals, they have to pay off in this birth. Theirs is a divine sport (*leela*), a birth taken on. The goodness of the good and the wickedness of the bad provide the reasons for the *Avatar* of the Lord. For example, take the *Avatar* of Narasimha. The merit of Prahlada and the wickedness of Hiranyakasipu combined to cause it.

“As a result of the coming of the Lord, the good will be happy and the bad will suffer. The *Avatar*, however, has no joy or grief, even when It is enveloped in the body It has assumed. The *Avatar* is not constituted of the five elements; It is spiritual or consciousness (*chinmaya*), not material (*mrinmaya*). It can never be disturbed by egotism or the sense of mine and thine; It is untouched by the delusion born of ignorance. Although people mistake an *Avatar* as just human, that does not affect the nature of the embodiment.

“The *Avatar* has come for a task, and it is bound to accomplish it. I shall tell you what that task is. It is to protect the virtuous, to punish the wicked, and to support *dharma*. By the virtuous, I do not mean the monks and ascetics who are indicated generally by that word. I mean virtuous qualities, like goodness, uprightness, virtue, and these can be possessed by animals and even insects. Really speaking, the promotion of the quality of purity (*sathwa-guna*) is the best means of fostering the virtuous. The *Avatar* is the embodiment of this sacred quality (*guna*), so It fosters this quality wherever it is found; but since renunciants (*sanyasins*) are striving to earn it, they are called good people and are supposed to be especially blessed by the attention of the Lord.

“But renunciants are not the only saints. All those who follow good conduct, who have virtue, who adhere to truth, who yearn for the presence of the Lord, who observe true *dharma*, who consider all (*sarva-jna*) as equal—all of them are virtuous. Such characteristics are even found among the animals and birds. In the *Ramayana*, Jatayu was saved as a result of these qualities. That is why the elephant was blessed and the monkeys were given a chance to serve and be blessed with His grace. The same reason prompted the Lord to bless the squirrel. A string of beads, an ochre robe, and a stick in the hand does not make a virtuous person (*sadhu*). The clothes the body wears and the language on the tongue do not decide who is virtuous and who is not; it is the characteristic (*guna*) that settles it. All animals have the potentiality to be good, so, fostering goodness in all is the best means of ensuring the welfare of the world.

“Next, punishment of the wicked. Those have to be punished who transgress the limits set for their type or genus of animals, who indulge in inaction, injustice, and improper behaviour, and who roam about caught in the coils of ego (*ahamkara*). Those have to be punished who have allowed passion (*rajoguna*) and dullness (*thamo-guna*) to predominate and purity (*sathwa-guna*) to be extinguished in them and those who have lost all trace of compassion (*daya*), *dharma*, and charity (*danam*).”

Thirdly, Krishna informed Arjuna that the fostering of *dharma* is also his work. The word virtuous (*sadhu*) has another meaning, which is important in this context. A virtuous person does not deviate from their duty, whatever the temptation and whatever the danger. The wicked revel in creating trouble for such people and indulging in acts contrary to the injunctions of the scriptures. What, then, is the establishment of *dharma*? It is acting strictly according to the *dharma* laid down in the scriptures; spreading among people the glory and splendour of a life

lived in *dharmā*; stabilizing reverence toward the *Vedas* and the scriptures, toward God, *Avatars* and high souls, and spiritual exercise that leads to liberation and a blessedness beyond this life. It is called the establishment of *dharmā*, the protection of *dharmā*, or the revival of *dharmā* (*dharmā-samsthāpana*, *dharmā-rakshana*, or *dharmā-moddharana*).

“Whatever I do, it is all for this high purpose; nothing is for My own advancement. Those who know this secret can escape birth and death,” said Krishna.

“To feel that the Lord is away, afar, separate from you —that is called indirect knowledge (*paroksha-jnana*). To feel that the Lord who is immanent in the universe is in you also as the *Atma* —that is direct knowledge. If all activity is moved by the dedicatory spirit, the mind (*chittha*) can be rendered pure. Only those who have pure consciousness can recognize the divine nature of the Lord’s birth and action (*karma*),” said Krishna. All cannot so recognize them as divine. Yet, no one should avoid contact with the Lord come in human form. Try your best and utilize every chance. There should be no lapse on your part.

This is emphasized in the tenth verse of this chapter, where the signs of the deserving candidate are given. “Arjuna! Not all can understand the divine nature of my birth and action (*karma*). Only those who are free from attachment, hatred, fear, and anger; who are immersed in the name and form of the Lord; who know of no other support than Me; who are sanctified by the knowledge of the *Atma* —only those can grasp it. Those who seek Me undeviatingly, who possess truth, *dharmā*, and love, will reach Me. This is absolutely true, take it from Me. Give up any doubt you may have.

“People render the inner consciousness impure by dwelling on the objective world, through ignorance. They take delight in mere sound, taste, form, etc. When they seek objective pleasure, they are tempted to secure the objects that give the pleasure; foiled in the attempt, they get restless, hateful, and afraid. Fear robs people of their mental resources. It creates anger that cannot be easily pacified. Thus, desire, anger, and fear are aroused one after the other, and these three have to be removed. Arjuna, revolve these facts in your mind and then act. Become reasonable. Have faith in My words.”

Arjuna heard all this and asked, “Nandakumara! Why can’t You make this sacred and high stage available for all people? You have announced Yourself as the embodiment of love and full of compassion. Why then all this partiality? I must declare it as favouritism, for you endow this stage only on the wise and deny it to the ignorant. I would even say that the ignorant person who has no discrimination, the person who swings like the pendulum of the clock from one thing to another, merits Your grace more. The wise person knows everything and is aware that the world is pervaded by God (*Vishnu-maya*). Why, then, should it be made clearer? Such a person has no more need of grace.”

Krishna replied, “Yes. People are usually overwhelmed by such doubts. You represent humanity, so your doubt is humanity’s doubt. By clearing your doubt, I can also announce My message to humanity. Listen. Those who seek Me are of four types. One is always worn out by ills that affect the body; the distressed and suffering (*artha*) are of this type. Another is worried by the struggle for prosperity, power, self, property, posterity, etc., and is seeking wealth (*artha-arthi*). A third yearns for the realization of the *Atma*, reads the scriptures and sacred texts, moves ever in the company of the spiritual seekers, acts along the lines laid down by the sages as good conduct, and is always motivated by the eagerness to reach the presence of the Lord. He is the seeker of wisdom (*jijnasu*). The fourth is the wise person (*jnani*), who is immersed in the formless God (*Brahma-thathwa*).

“The first, the suffering, worships Me only when in difficulty and suffering from grief or pain. When such people pray to Me, I hear it and satisfy them only in relation to that particular difficulty, that particular grief or pain. So too, when the person desiring wealth prays for riches, position, power, or high status, I listen and award only the particular thing craved. The seeker of wisdom is blessed with chances to do action without regard to its fruit, with a proper guru as guide, with an intellect that is sharp enough to discriminate between *Atma* and non-*Atma*; such a person is thus helped to achieve the goal. I bless such people so that they are saved from distractions and helped to concentrate on the single aim of liberation.

“I am like the wish-fulfilling tree. My task is to give each what they ask for. I have no prejudice, no favouritism. Not even the shadow of cruelty can touch Me. No fault can be imputed to Me. The rays of the sun fall equally upon all that are directly in their way; but if something is behind something else, inside a closed room for instance, how can the sun illumine? Cultivate the higher yearnings, and you receive the higher gains. The fault lies in the aspirant and their aspirations, not in the Lord’s attitude.

“Arjuna! People give up revering and seeking Me, who is their very Self. How foolish! People are not anxious to reach Me. On the other hand, they pursue lesser attainments that are temporary, untrue, and transitory. I will tell you the reason for this strange and stupid behaviour. Engagement in activity gives quick results; people seek only what is available now, in a concrete form, what is capable of being grasped by their senses. Generally, people find reality too difficult to attain, so they are carried away by the attraction of flimsy pleasures, away from the full joy derivable from transcending the senses.

“Achievement of wisdom is the inner victory; it is won after long and arduous struggle. People do not generally have the needed patience. Moreover, they attach greater importance to the gross physical body. The body can be happy only with objects that cater to the senses, so people do not seek wisdom, which will send them to paths where the senses are unwanted. They yearn for success in action, but not perfection in spiritual wisdom. Those who are caught by urges of the intellect are fewer than those who are caught by the senses and their urges. The sensual-minded are drawn by the obvious, the patent, the perceptible, and the physical. The few who are spiritually minded yearn for the imperceptible, invisible bliss of merging with the universal Absolute. Theirs is the correct path. Attachment to activity is the incorrect path. My task is to make clear to all the value of virtuous action (*dharma-karma*), which has to be adopted after due discrimination.

“But Arjuna, there is one method of reviving *dharma*, the task for which I have come. That is the organization of the four castes based on the *karma* and the qualities of the people. The caste system is essential for the functioning of the world. Its significance is not easy to grasp. Some mislead themselves into the belief that it causes unrest and divides people from one another. If the problem is reasoned out, then the real truth will become clear. To conclude that the caste system is not beneficial shows only ignorance. Such a judgement creates confusion. I have established this organization in order to promote the welfare of the world. The caste system helps people engage themselves in acts that they find congenial and fulfil them. Without it, people cannot earn happiness for a moment. For successful activity, the caste is the very breath.

“The *brahmins* are those endowed with the pure and serene quality (*sathwa-guna*), who have understood the *Brahman* principle (*Brahma-thathwa*), who foster spiritual, moral, and progressive living, who help others to earn the bliss of visualizing the reality of their nature.

“The warriors (*kshatriyas*) are those who stand by and guard the sound political system, law, and justice,

as well as the welfare and prosperity of the country and the moral order laid down for the people, and who keep under control the wicked and the immoral and come to the rescue of the weak and the distressed.

“The business people (*vaisyas*) are those who store and supply within proper limits to the people at large the wherewithal for happy physical living.

“The labourers (*sudras*) lay the foundation for human welfare by service activities; they provide the strength and sinews.

“I have laid down these four castes in this manner. If they carry out their assigned duties, humanity will attain all-round progress. As a result of this system, a division of service is brought about; the individual leads a happy harmonious social life, without any grief or fear. This caste system is an example of the grace that the Lord has bestowed on India (Bharath).”

The people of India are indeed blessed, since they look upon every act as but the execution of His order and as leading to His grace. This point has to be reflected upon. It is an important issue. The divine command is now in great danger of being set at naught. If the rulers change the face of this caste system, the world will not have the welfare they strive for. Many people argue and teach that India came to this sorry condition only because of this caste system, but these folks have to sit quietly for some little time and ponder over these questions: “Has the country survived as a result of this system? Has it come to this sorry condition because the system has weakened?” Then, on the basis of their conclusion, they can advise the discarding of the castes. When people find fault with the caste organization without such impartial investigation, their opinion can not be valued.

Of course, the system has veered from the proper path and taken to moving in wrong directions; this has been noted by many great people. But that cannot be sufficient reason to throw it overboard. Just because the leg is doing the work of the hand and the head is performing the function of the feet, it is not advisable to cut off the hands and feet. Attempts have to be made to set things right, rather than destroy the very system itself.

The caste system is not the cause of all this confusion and unrest. The fault lies more in the haphazard manner in which it has developed. It became a plaything in the hands of all types of people, so it lost its original symmetry and harmony. This system is essential not merely for India but even for the world. In countries outside India, this system is not absent. The name may be different, but the working is the same. There, there are also four classes: teacher, protector, merchant, and labourer. But in India, the castes are decided by birth; in other parts of the world, they are decided by action (*karma*), the work in which each is engaged. That is the distinction.

Now, among the *brahmins* who have been honoured by being established in the very first cadre, many can be found who have left the path and strayed into mean ways. So too, in the fourth caste, the labourers, many can be found who are moved by holy ideals and high spiritual aspirations and who are striving to attain purity of mind as a means of realization. Just because these things are possible, it is not proper to conclude that the caste organization of human society is useless.

Chapter IX

The caste system; the Lord shows no partiality; action versus inaction.

Although purity of mind is the primary thing, for the protection of society and the individual in the realm of the divine, the caste (*varna*) organization is also very important. It can never be blown off by ridicule, criticism, or condemnation, for welfare is essential for all. Therefore, rulers and scholars must give up feelings of anger and hatred, calmly delve into the pros and cons, and bring the organization into some good order. That is the thing to do. It is not proper for wise people and intelligent scholars to support the meaningless criticisms of the envious and ignorant. Those who deny caste are themselves forming a caste; those who deny religion are themselves forming a new religion. Even those who know much become prejudiced against castes and talk as if they are as ignorant as the rest. That is the wonder!

Every object has certain limits; if it exceeds the limits or breaks through them, it gets destroyed. What is the test of its identity? The coordination between its nature and its form. If it has the form but not the nature, then it is unreal, false. So too, if each class has no special limits, how can it be identified as a class? It will be neither this nor that, an amorphous mass, a confused group. The caste system is a divinely decided organization, so it was fostered and continued by the great sages, saints, and elders for many generations. But in this iron age (*kali-yuga*), the brainiest dismiss it as useless junk.

Without deep inquiry, without discrimination, if people look at this organization from the external, the individual standpoint, how can they arrive at the right conclusions? The sanctity and value of the caste system will be revealed if you have “inner sight”, a “universal outlook”, and an “inquiring spirit”. Just as the butter inherent in milk is made patent by the process of churning, so too the specific value of the four castes will become manifest only through the process of discriminating inquiry. Then, prejudices will perish and reality will be revealed.

The four castes are like the limbs of the same body. They have evolved out of the same divine body—the *brahmins* from the face, the warriors from the hands, the businessmen from the thighs, and the labourers from the feet. Of course, these expressions have a deeper inner meaning. Those who, like the guru, teach the principles of wisdom are the voice; they are the *brahmins*. The strong armed bear the burden of the earth; they are the warriors. The social edifice is upheld, as on pillars, by the businessmen, so they are figuratively described as emanating from the thighs of the divine Person. And, like the feet that are engaged in going about on all kinds of activities, the labourers are ever engaged in the basic tasks of society. The peace and happiness of society will suffer if even a single caste is slack in its task. All castes are worthwhile and valuable, just as all limbs are important. There is no higher or lower. Hatred and rivalry in society are as harmful as the stoppage of work by all the limbs in anger against the stomach!

A sugar doll is sweet all over. Break off its head and eat it; it is sweet. Break off a leg and eat it: it is as sweet as the head. Then how can the castes, which are the limbs of the self-same Divinity, be pronounced higher or lower? Limbs are different, but the very same red blood flows in all and animates all. There is no special variety for the hand or leg or face. The caste system is ordained by the *Vedas*, so there can be no injustice in it; it is not an artifice invented by people. So those who try to create differences and hatred by their inconsiderate remarks about it are only exhibiting their ignorance.

It looks as if those people who argue that “the abolition of the caste system will bring about human welfare”

are the only ones anxious to promote human welfare! They believe that those who consider the system to be beneficial are really eager to promote the downfall of the human society! Of course, both are delusions. But this much is true: those who support the caste system are really more interested in the promotion of human welfare. The others think that if castes go, they will be saving the country. That is a deluded belief. If only virtues and faults are analyzed carefully and without prejudice, there will be an end to this uninformed campaign of hatred and enmity. Then there will be a great change in the attitude of people toward the caste system.

Increased hatred will not benefit anyone. To pursue the ideal of “all are equal” is like running after the mirage to slake one’s thirst. It will only breed discontent. The rulers must now assemble and consult the representatives of the people —namely, pundits and experienced elders— and discuss the value of this ancient system of social organization. Instead, if they just decide on the basis of external forms and features that there is some poison in this and run into panic, that will only reveal their ignorance. The rulers, as well as the pundits, have the happiness of the people at heart; why, this caste system originated with that very end in view. It has led to comments because it was not practised according to the continued counsels of the wise.

Take one small example. Some nations have manufactured bombs that can wipe out a million people at one burst. Although they know this is bad, the rulers themselves encourage it. If the bombs are used as the whim takes them, ruin will fall on all. When chaos threatens, they are to be used only for self-defense; the purpose is not the destruction of the world but the protection of the values of one’s own country and culture. So also, the caste system is to be treated as strong armament to protect the country and culture. The rules and regulations, the restrictions and recommendations, are all to defend the people from ruin. They are disciplines that have to be honoured in the way they are laid down and followed strictly and correctly. To deal with them as the whim dictates, without regard to the directing bounds, limits, and boundaries, is to invite anarchy.

Therefore, the elders, the rulers, the great pundits, and the leaders of the community guarded and fostered this organization and preserved it; think of this for a while and the truth will flash on you, whether it is beneficial or not. If it was ruinous to society, would they have fostered it? Do you mean to say they were all foolish, or that they did not have the present type of scholarship, or that they were brainless?

No, no. Their intelligence, scholarship, and spiritual eminence, their spirit of inquiry, and their impartial, unprejudiced approach to social problems can be found only among one in a hundred today. Ascetics who dedicated all their intellectual and moral strength for the welfare of the world (a task that was the very breath of their life), *yogis*, spiritual warriors, and great seers who sought to confer true contentment to the human community —these were the framers of the social organization that the “moderns” condemn. They were not like the reformers of today, who yearn for welfare in a profusion of words but who undermine by their actions the very thing they profess to yearn for! This type of trick was unknown to the ancient sages. Modern ideas and plans are hollow and insincere. The present plans are all castles in the air. They cater more to the conceit of the planners and do not carry much meaning to others. The castles start falling down even while construction is proceeding in another place!

Just as the body is for the individual (*jivi*), the world is for the Lord. Whatever happens in any part of the body affects the soul; so too, all that affects any part of the world moves the Lord; He becomes cognizant of it and reacts to it. Just as you are interested in all the limbs of the body being in perfect trim, the Lord is interested in seeing that every country and every part of the world is happy and contented. Can He, will He, harm any country that is primarily a part of Himself? In matters relating to the Lord, all have equal rights, all are equal.

Yet, one limb cannot carry out the duties of another; each must do its allotted task. So too, each caste must carry out its allotted share of the activities of society and contribute its best to the welfare of the country. Just as the body has stages, society has castes. If all start trading, who will be the buyers? If all are engaged in fighting, who is to provide the wherewithal for their upkeep and maintenance —the food, armor, and equipment? So, each one has to do their share of social activity and ensure peace, harmony, and happiness. That is the wise course, the best organization of society.

Now, instead of attending to essential tasks, people are engaged in internecine struggle, fearing that the castes are great obstacles to progress. How can people who are unable to keep their body under control keep the country within limits? Consider that the fostering of the caste system, which was fostered for so long by the ancients, is the most beneficial thing that has to be done.

The Lord showed no partiality while organizing the caste system. He has no such trait in Him. Some people ask why the Lord should have such differences. No, He has no sense of inferior or superior. He is sweet all over, like a lump of sugar. All differences and distinctions are the property of individuals (*jivis*), who do not know the *Atmic* reality; they are the illusions of the individuals, who falsely identify themselves with the non-*Atma*.

Consider this example. A mother has four children, but she pays less attention to the other three than to the child in the cradle. Even if the baby does not call out for food, she is ever vigilant to feed it. The other three have to come and worry her for food and things to play with. Observing this, you cannot pronounce her a bad mother or a partial mother. The mother adjusts her activities to the capacity and ability of the child. So too, although the entire world is His, though all are His children, He has fixed upon each a part of the responsibility of the work of society according to capacity and ability. To ascribe faults to such selfless, sincere, simple, ever-blissful providence is like attributing darkness to the sun! Darkness and the rays of the sun cannot exist together; how then can the sun be the home of darkness? People who carp so at the sun do not know the sun at all. It is sheer folly, complete ignorance.

Really, from a deep spiritual (*adi-atmic*) point of view, the castes can be characterized in another way: those who are established in the contemplation of *Brahman* are *brahmins*; those who oppose untruth are warriors; those who systematically discriminate the true from the false are the business people; those who are ever active and follow truth in everyday life are the labourers. The happiness of humanity can be amply realized only when castes function in this way.

Now we shall revert to the subject. Krishna addressed Arjuna. “The four castes have been created by Me on the basis of quality (*guna*) and action (*karma*). Though I am the doer as far as they are concerned, I am still a non-doer! Pay attention to the fundamental principle, and then you will realize that action, which is basically consciousnessless and material, cannot affect the *Atma*, which is suffused with consciousness. The *Atma* is inherently devoid of attachment. It has no awareness of agency or of its own needs or nature of its possessions. It has no ‘I’ or ‘mine’, for these are marks of ignorance (*a-jnana*). Only those afflicted with ignorance will suffer from the ego or sense of ‘mine’. Although it may appear to ordinary eyes that I am the doer, I am a non-doer!

“Not only this. Action does not cease to affect the doer as soon as the action is finished. In fact, it is never finished. Action yields fruits; the fruits of action breed desire for them; desire results in impulses for further action; and the impulses bring about further births. Thus, action leads to the cycle of births and deaths; it is a vicious whirlpool, making you revolve round and round and finally dragging you down into the depths.

“Arjuna, listen well to another point also. Action (*karma*) as such has no capacity to bind; it is the conceit ‘I

am the doer' that brings about the attachment and the bond; it is the desire to earn the fruit that produces the bondage. For example, the zero gets value only with association with a digit. Action is zero; if agency or the feeling of 'doer' is associated with the action; then it breeds bonds. So, Arjuna, give up the sense of 'I', and the action that you do will never harm you. Action done without any desire for the fruits thereof will not produce impulses; that is to say, there will not even be impulse for birth. The aspirants of past ages performed action with this high ideal in view. They never felt that they were the 'doers' or 'enjoyers of the fruits' of any act. The Lord did, the Lord gave the fruit, the Lord enjoyed the fruit—that was their conviction. This world has only a relative value; it has no absolute existence; that was their faith. Arjuna! You too should cultivate that faith and earn that conviction. Do so; then your mind will become clarified and pure.

“Know also the distinction between activity (*karma*), wrong action (*vi-karma*) and nonaction. I will tell you the main points of difference now. Listen. Not all can grasp the distinction. Many aspirants get confused about this. They take it that one's own *dharma* is action and that all actions done not as duty (*dharma*) but with a view to earn self-knowledge (*Atma-jnana*) are wrong actions! Whatever the action, if it is done in the darkness and confusion of ignorance, however hard you may have exercised your abilities during the activity, its result can only be worry, grief, and travail. It can never result in equanimity, balance, or calm. One has to win action in non-action and non-action through action. That is the hallmark of wisdom.

“Non-action means action-lessness, according to some. But to explain it in simpler language, understand that the activities of the limbs, the senses, intelligence, the feelings, the emotions, and mind are all actions. Now, non-action means among other things non-activity, too. That is to say, it is the attribute of the *Atma*. So non-action means the characteristic of the *Atma*. When you travel in a bus or train or boat, the illusion is created that the trees and hills on either side travel along and the person feels that he is stationary! The movement of the chariot imposes on hill and tree the quality of movement; so too, people who are unaware of the principles enunciated in the scriptures delude themselves into the belief that the *Atma* is doing all the activities of the senses and the body. Well, which is the genuine non-action or activity-lessness? The experience of *Atma* is the perfect activity-lessness; that is your real nature. It will not do if you simply desist from external acts. You should realize the *Atmic* fundamental, not merely renounce action, for it is impossible to be completely activity-less.”

Chapter X

Qualities of a wise person; kinds of sacrifice or spiritual offerings; the qualities of guru and disciple.

“Dhananjaya! People are entitled to be called pundits only if they have seen clearly the distinction between action (*karma*) and non-action. If they have only stuffed in their head what they read in books, they are not pundits. The pundit must have an intellect that grants the vision of the truth. When that vision is gained, all action becomes ineffective and harmless. The fire of wisdom has the power to consume and burn *karma*.

“Some people say that a wise person (*jnani*) must perforce suffer the consequences of action in previous births (*prarabdha-karma*); they cannot be escaped. This conclusion is drawn by other people; it is not the experience of the wise person. The wise person might appear to others to be reaping the fruit of past actions, but the wise person is absolutely unaffected. Whoever is dependent on objects for happiness or pursues sensory pleasures, whoever is motivated by impulses and desires, is bound by *karma*. But those free from these cannot be affected by the temptations of sound, touch, form, taste, smell and other attractions of the senses. Such is the true renunciant (*sanyasin*) —He is unmoved. Wise people are supremely happy by themselves, without the need to be dependent on other things. They find action in non-action and non-action in action. They may be engaged in action but they are not affected in the least. They have no eye on the fruit.

“You may ask how they are able to do that. Listen. They are ever content. The contented person is free and does not depend upon others. The person is unaffected by the feeling of doership and is content with whatever happens, well or ill, for the contented person is convinced that the Lord’s will must prevail. The mind is unshaken, steady; the person is ever jubilant. Want of contentment is a sign of the ignorant. Those who give up the goals of human life (*purusha-arthas*) and walk the path of sloth, how can they be said to be happy, whatever happens? Contentment is the treasure that is won by the wise one; it cannot be won by the ignorant one, who piles one wish on another and builds one plan after another, who pines perpetually, worries himself, and sets the heart ablaze with greed.

“Wise people are not mastered by the dualities of joy and grief, victory and defeat, gain and loss. They are beyond duality. They scorn hatred and never allow it to affect them. Both the embodiment (*swarupa*) and the innate nature (*swa-bhava*) of the *Atma* guarantee that It is unaffected. It is unattached. It is uninfluenced by anything that is not *Atma*. It has neither birth nor death, hunger nor thirst, grief nor delusion.

“Hunger and thirst are qualities of life; birth and death are characteristics of the body; grief and delusion are affections of the mind. So, Arjuna, do not assign any status to these. Know yourself as the *Atma*, give up all delusion, and become unattached. Be like the lotus leaf in the marshy lake of change; do not get smeared with the mud around you. That is the sign of detachment: in it but yet outside it. Be like the lotus leaf, not like the porous blotting paper that gets tainted with whatever it comes in contact with.

“Do the besprinkling (*abhisheka*) of the *Atma* symbolized by the oval stone (*Atma-linga*) with the pure waters of your own mental impulses. When the mind moves in one direction and the senses in another, you are doubly confused. So, keep attachment afar. When that is done, whatever you do becomes a sacrifice (*yajna*). Whatever you speak becomes a holy mantra; wherever you plant your foot renders that place holy.

“Arjuna! I shall tell you something about sacrifice or spiritual offerings (*yajna*) also. Listen calmly, controlling all agitations of the mind. People talk of performing a material sacrifice, offering penance as sacrifice, a *yogic* sacrifice, etc. If a pit is dug, the earth excavated becomes a mound by its side; there is no pit without a mound. When riches accumulate in one place, there must be corresponding charity too. The proper utilization of one’s riches is material sacrifice. What is proper utilization? Gift of cows, of lands, of skill are included under material sacrifice.

“Again, when all physical activities, mental activities, and speech are utilized for spiritual discipline, then it becomes offerings of penance (*tapoyajna*). How can it be spiritual penance (*tapas*) if you have lain down due to weakness arising from missing a meal?

“Doing action but yet remaining unbound by action, that is *yogic* spiritual offering.

“And study of the scriptures? That means studying with humility and reverence the sacred scriptures that lead you to liberation. This study is the means to repay the debt due to the sages who put the scriptures together.

“The next one is the sacrifice involving spiritual knowledge (*jnana-yajna*). By this is meant not the knowledge of the visible and perceptible but the wisdom of the invisible and imperceptible. Listen to the scriptures that are related to this wisdom, study them, and ponder over the teachings in your mind, weighing the pros and cons; this is called the sacrifice involving knowledge. Wisdom (*jnana*) means also the eagerness to realize the reality of the soul (*Atma-thathwa*) through inquiry from elders and those who have spiritual experience.

“Arjuna! You may ask Me how this wisdom can be acquired. Those anxious to get it have to go to realized souls, win their grace, study well their moods and manners, and await the chance to ask them for help. When doubts arise, they should approach the realized souls calmly and courageously. Studying bundles of books, delivering hours-long discourses, and wearing the ochre robe do not make a genuine wise one. Wisdom can be won only from and through elders who have experienced the Absolute. You have to serve them and win their love. How can doubts be ended by the study of books? They tend only to confuse the mind.

“Books can at best inform; they cannot demonstrate by direct proof. Only the realized can convince by direct demonstration. So, they have to be sought after and served reverentially. Only then can this precious wisdom be won. No amount of sea water can slake one’s thirst; no amount of study of the scriptures can solve doubt.

“Besides, the aspirant for wisdom must have not only devotion and faith; they should also be simple and pure. They should not grow impatient and irritate the teacher. Haste ruins chances of success. Whatever the guru says should be practised and experienced. Don’t try out every single item of advice that you hear or learn, thus changing your spiritual discipline as fancy takes hold, even from the desire to become a wise one quickly. Doing thus, you will only end up completely ignorant. Why, it is sometimes preferable to remain an ignorant, for such people tend to end up in madness. Therefore, one has to be very careful.

“You must try to please the guru and win favour by obeying orders and serving lovingly. You should have no other thought than the guru’s welfare and happiness. Give up all else and win the guru’s grace; then, wisdom is yours. Instead, if you are disobedient and critical through egotism and want of faith, you cannot be blessed by the vision of the truth, and you will be plunged into gloom.

“Just as the cow takes her calf near upon seeing it, so the guru will draw the disciple to their presence and give the disciple the milk of grace. The disciple ought to be of sterling character; then, just as a clean piece of iron

will be attracted by the magnet, the disciple will receive the immediate attention of the teacher.

“Disciples can inquire into the qualifications of the guru. In fact, they ought to, for they need a teacher. Arjuna! I shall describe the characteristics that a teacher should possess. The teacher must have not merely book knowledge but the wisdom derived through direct experience. The teacher must be established in the reality, that is, in the steady contemplation of *Brahman* (*Brahma-nishta*). Mere knowledge of the scriptures is incompetent to grant liberation; it can at best help in gaining a living. Why, there are some who by sheer self-experience have won liberation, without a grain of knowledge of the scriptures. But such people cannot save disciples who are pestered by doubt; they cannot understand their difficulties and sympathize with them.

“There are thousands and thousands of people who are gurus in name only. All those in saffron are now ‘gurus’; even those who smoke marijuana are ‘gurus’; all those who indulge in discourses are ‘gurus’; all who write books are ‘gurus’!

“No one can claim the name by wandering over the country and learning to argue. Instead, through direct experience, the guru should possess the power to uplift disciples and put them on the track of spiritual disciplines prescribed by the scriptures. Of what use is argumentative skill? Whatever is said and done by him must have the sanction of the scriptures. Spouting things imbibed from books in long speeches that move the listeners from one wave of excitement to another does not make a guru. They may be heroes in lecturing; but they are zeros in spiritual discipline and in the mastery of the spiritual field. They can be schoolmasters, but they cannot confer devotion or point the way to liberation. These ‘gurus’ attain only that stage, and the disciples who resort to such gurus get just that. They have as much value as the books that contain all the matter that they pour forth.

“Many unwary spiritual aspirants are attracted by the magic of words and the verbal gymnastics of such showy ‘gurus’. The ‘gurus’ may be called pundits and may give lectures; but, just because of this, they do not become entitled to grant the boon of wisdom. That can be done only by *Avatars*, people who represent divine attributes and glory, and wise people who have attained the highest good of spiritual discipline and have tasted the supreme bliss, who have realized the Absolute. It is no use claiming a fraction of this or that experience. The experience must be of the Full and itself full. Those who know only a fraction will take you up to a certain point and leave you there, in the middle region, like Thrisanku, who was hung between heaven and earth.

“The guru must study the virtues and qualities of aspirants who seek guidance; the guru must not be moved or prejudiced by their wealth, status, or position. The guru must be able to judge aspirants’ hearts, their real nature. The guru must act as the alarm clock for disciples who are caught in the sleep of ignorance. If the guru is a miser and the disciple is a sloth, woe be to both.”

Thus, Krishna taught Arjuna very clearly the qualifications of both the guru and the disciple: their conduct, scholarship, virtues and weaknesses, activities and characteristics. These valuable gems of advice were addressed not only to Arjuna but to the whole world. All who seek to become either gurus or disciples must pay attention to these precious words.

The natures of the gurus and disciples of today are in keeping with the low standards of today. In ancient times, a guru could be found only with great difficulty; thousands of eager seekers searched the forests for them, for they were so rare and precious. Now, gurus are available by the dozen at every street corner, but true disciples are declining in number. Both are deteriorating fast, and each is becoming like the other, suited to the other’s level. The gurus have been reduced to the necessity of feeding and fostering disciples —not that it is wrong when

the disciples are worthy, but the gurus are afraid of the disciples deserting them, so they cater to their tastes and fancies. The disciples claim to be guru's sons, to be residents of ashrams, spiritual aspirants, etc., but their lives are untouched by the ashram atmosphere, spiritual exercises, or qualities of the virtuous. They don't have even elementary gratitude to the guru. They mouth slogans like "dedication to God", but their acts reveal only dedication to the body!

Besides, the disciples lay down conditions! Their desire for recreation, easy living, and comfort has to be honoured by the guru. The guru must ensure the happiness of the disciples without insisting on any spiritual discipline or causing any loss or worry. Liberation must fall like a fruit into their lap. The guru should not recommend any rigorous discipline or rule of life. The guru must respect all the wishes of the disciple. A guru who goes against the disciple is immediately given up and condemned.

Chapter XI

More on gurus-disciples; Krishna-Arjuna as the supreme guru-disciple pair; acquiring spiritual wisdom through faith and the yogas of action, meditation, and wisdom; Krishna as the one and only substance.

How can such coddled, comfort-loving persons attain liberation? If gurus are not able to secure such disciples, why should the gurus deplore their fate? It is strange that there are gurus who lament when they are not able to attract such disciples! Opium eaters and marijuana smokers are unfit to be gurus. They are cheats. How can those who spend all their energies in securing the wherewithal for their living be gurus? How can those who seek to fulfil their sensual fancies be disciples? These are money gurus, those are pride disciples! To consider such as gurus and disciples is to drag those holy names into the dust of disgrace.

Who, then, is the genuine guru? It is he who teaches the path of destroying delusion (*moha*). And who is the genuine disciple? It is he who seeks to control and conquer the outward fleeing mind. The gurus of today shout every day from platforms what they stuffed into their heads the previous day under the midnight lamp. Their performance is only like regurgitating the food once swallowed, and nothing more. They talk like parrots, reproducing what they have learned by rote. Even children know that greed and anger have to be mastered; but in these people, greed, anger, envy, hatred, lust, and pride pop into their devilish heads through every little word they utter, every little deed they do. If those who claim to be gurus do not themselves master these propensities, how can the unfortunate disciples who resort to them succeed?

If the guru is supremely self-sacrificing, seeking to sustain truth, saturated with selflessness, seeing all people as equal, striving to secure sorrowless lives for all, leading a sweet and simple life, with a soul suffused with strength-giving thoughts, satisfied only by the chance to show others the path of good conduct and good character—then perhaps a few disciples will gather around. They will impose faults upon the guru that sully and cast doubt upon the guru’s integrity and genuineness! But the guru will be as serene as ever, for the guru suffers no loss. The loss is all for the disciples, who let go the great chance.

One thing is certain. As long as the delusion that one is the body is not cast aside, God cannot be realized—however far one may wander, whatever the number of gurus one might select and serve. Stick to that delusion and all the meditation, all repetitions of the name, all the waters of all the holy bathing places that you bathe in cannot win success for you! All your effort is as useless as trying to bail water in a vessel riddled with leaks.

Householders who carry out their duties are any day preferable to such seekers (*sadhus*); they follow the *dharma* of their stage of life (*asrama*), and they tread the correct path in unceasing remembrance of the Lord, so these householders realize the goal. If the nature of the gurus and disciples of today is to be considered, volumes can be written; but that would be using precious time for inessential discussion. So, we shall revert to our main topic.

For, to dwell on the sacred guru-disciple bond of Krishna-Arjuna in the same breath with the relationship of the present day “gurus” and “disciples” would be a sacrilege. They are unique, incomparable, this supreme pair, unapproachable by any other. They have to be taken as the ideal by all teachers and aspirants. Arjuna bowed in humility and carried out sincerely the precepts of the guru. Krishna fostered what was really beneficial to Arjuna; He paid full consideration to what would really promote the reputation, *Atmic* bliss, and *dharma* of Arjuna; He

tended him and fended for him as the very breath of His life. That was the type of guru the Lord was for him.

Krishna is the highest *Atma (Paramatma)*; Arjuna, the *Atmic* soul (*jivatma*). Krishna is the supreme Lord of all (*Purushothama*); Arjuna, the best of people. That is why they are the ideal guru-disciple. Others are guru-disciple in name only. Self-willed disciples and power-drunk gurus are simply wasting their lives in vain pursuits. Krishna is an ocean of love; He watched over Arjuna as one watches over the eye or the heart. He taught holiness and transformed into holiness; He loved and was loved beyond compare. That makes the guru a genuine guru. And Arjuna? He too is no ordinary being. His surrender (*thyaga*) is unapproachable. Whatever the crisis, he stuck to Krishna's command and Krishna's word; he wore comradeship with the Lord as the armor that would save him from all harm, as the very body in which he dwelled, as something that he must foster, strengthen, and guard. Although a mighty force, he was ready to efface it when necessary. This is how guru and disciple should be bound together.

The Lord, who is the embodiment of love, realized the sincerity of the disciple, estimated his attainments, and then detailed to him the benefits and glory of *Atmic* wisdom. "Kauntheya," He said, "By means of wisdom you can see all beings in yourself and in Me. Then, duality and the consequent delusion will disappear, as darkness disperses before the rising sun.

"Arjuna, I know well your past and the background of your birth. Yours is no ordinary birth; you are born with divine accomplishments and heritage. I alone am aware of it, no one else. Since you are unaware of it, you are now condemning yourself as a sinner who kills kith and kin, teachers and elders!

"Even if you have sinned, are not sinners saved? Repentance is enough to transmute sin into sanctity. The Lord graciously accepts contrition and pours His blessings. The thief Rathnakara, who was engaged in acts of sin until the moment when wisdom dawned, became a saint through repentance. Didn't he become the sage Valmiki? His story is proof of the value of contrition. You may ask whether it is enough to be free from the effects of sin. Shouldn't the effects of virtuous deeds also be given up? Why, one has the freedom to give up merits of such deeds, although one may not have equal freedom to give up the demerit of evil deeds. The roaring forest fire reduces to ashes everything in its way; so too, the mighty conflagration of wisdom will consume and destroy all sin and all good consequences.

"To acquire this sacred spiritual wisdom, one thing is essential: Faith (*sraddha*), steady faith in the scriptures, in the teachers, and in the acquisition of wisdom. Without earnestness born of faith, no task, however tiny, can be accomplished. Therefore, you can see how essential it is for earning wisdom. Faith is the incomparable treasure-chest of tranquility (*sama*), control of the outer senses (*dama*), control of the mind by withdrawal of the senses (*uparathi*), fortitude (*thithiksha*), and mind-control by equanimity (*sama-dhana*), each one a coveted possession.

"Faith is only the first step. You must also yearn to imbibe the teachings I am imparting. This is necessary. Along with these, you must also be vigilant; don't yield to sloth. Again, you may fall into company that is not congenial or encouraging. To escape the evil influence of such company and to strengthen your mind to avoid it altogether, mastery over the senses is required.

"Do not admit doubt into you. Want of faith or steadiness is not as destructive as the venom of doubt. In its operation and consequence, doubt is like the tubercular bacilli. It is born in ignorance, and it penetrates into the cavity of the heart of and breeds there. It is the parent of disaster.

"Therefore, destroy this demon with the sword of self-knowledge (*Atma-jnana*). Arise, Arjuna! Engage in

activity as if duty bound, have full faith in My words, do as I bid with no thought of the fruit therefrom. Be a practitioner of renunciation of the fruit of action. By that renunciation, you will get established in wisdom and win liberation from change, from birth and death.

“Give up the idea that you are the doer and the beneficiary. You can do this by dedicating both deed and fruit to the Lord. Then, no sin can affect you, for you are not the doer and the deed must performe be holy. Like oil on the tongue, collyrium on the eye, the lotus leaf on water, the deed is with you but not by you. Whatever you do or hear or see, remain unaffected, devoid of deeds, innocent of listening or seeing. The joy derived from the external world opens the gateways of grief; it is fleeting; but you are eternal, the very source of bliss, above and beyond all this, the embodiment of *Atma* itself. That is your genuine nature. You are unrelated to these activities that are called deeds and these consequences that you now mistake as real. You are not the doer; you are just the witness, the see-er! All your perplexity has arisen from the delusion that you are the doer, from your ego and the sense of ‘mine’. Know the *Brahman*; take up all tasks but renounce the consequences; giving up the fruit of activity is far superior to giving up activity itself. The *yoga* of action is far superior to renunciation of action (*karma*).

“Well, superior to both these is the *yoga* of meditation. I shall tell you why. The *yoga* of meditation needs the support of the *yoga* of action (*karma-yoga*), so the *yoga* of action was first taught to you. Those who renounce the fruits while actively engaged in action are very dear to Me; they are the true renouncers (*sanyasins*). I have no affection for those who give up the ritual fire and desist from all activity except eating, sleeping, and craving sensory pleasures and behave like Kumbhakarna’s kinsmen, idling and wasting their time. I am unapproachably far from idlers. One who has not renounced the pursuit of wishes can never become a *yogi*, however busy they may be in spiritual disciplines. Only one who is careful not to get entangled in the senses and who is unattached to the consequences of deeds can become a renouncer of all attachments.

“The *yoga* of meditation is possible only on the basis of this renunciation of the fruit of action. If the mind is not under control and amenable to one’s orders, it can become one’s greatest foe. So, live in solitude so that you can master the senses. A horse without reins, a bull unused to the yoke, and a spiritual aspirant whose senses are not mastered are all like a river without water. Such spiritual discipline is a waste.

“So arise, Arjuna! Practise the *yoga* of meditation. Resolve to master the senses through this *yoga* and follow it steadily, systematically, regularly, at a stated time and place, without changing them as the whim takes you. A regular system is essential for this *yoga*. Observe it strictly. Do not alter as fancy dictates; that will bring about dire consequences.

“For those who eat too much and get exhausted with the task of assimilating it, for those who eat less and suffer from exhaustion, for those who sleep too much or too little, for those who indulge in meditation according to ‘convenience’ (that is to say, those who do it for long hours one day because they have no other work and do just token meditation the next day because they have lots of work), for those who give free rein to the six inner enemies (desire, anger, and the rest), for those who do not confer joy on parents, and especially the mother more than all these, for those who entertain doubt and have little faith in the Lord or in the guru whom they have chosen and installed in their hearts—for all these, meditation will yield no fruit at all.

“The mind of the *yoga* adept should be like the steady upright unshaken flame of the lamp, kept in a windless window sill. Whenever the slightest sign of unsteadiness occurs, endeavour to curb the mind and not allow it to wander. Develop the consciousness that you are in all and the feeling of oneness that all is in you. Then, you can

take up and succeed in all the *yogas*. Then, you are free from all distinctions like ‘ I ‘ and ‘others’, or ‘*Atma* and *Paramatma*’. The joy and grief of others will then become equally yours. You can then never harm others; then all can be loved and adored in the awareness that they are the Lord of all (*Sarveswara*).” Lord Krishna declared that those who have attained this vision are really the supremest *yogis*.

Meanwhile, Arjuna is beset by doubt, and he asks for some elucidation and explanation so that he may get convinced. “Krishna! All that you have been telling me is very pleasant to the ear, and I can well imagine that it must be a source of bliss to those who attain success. But it is so difficult, beyond the reach of all. The *yoga* wherein everything has to be realized as equal (*sama-thwam*) is fraught with obstacles even for the fully equipped aspirant. What, then, am I to say of people like me who are common aspirants? Is it ever possible for us? Krishna! Is the mind so easily controllable? Alas! Even an elephant cannot drag as the mind does. The mind is the nursery of waywardness; its mulishness and obstinacy are also very powerful; it is a terrible shrew. It can never be caught; it will never halt at one place. The attempt to catch the mind and tame it is like capturing the wind or bundling up water. How can anyone enter upon *yoga* with such a mind? One seems as hard as the other, these twin tasks of controlling the mind and practising the *yoga*. Krishna, you are advising an impossible task, beyond the capacity of any one.”

The Lord broke into a smile on hearing these words. “Arjuna! You have described the mind and known its nature very well. But it is not an impossible task. The mind can be mastered, however difficult the task might be. By systematic practice, relentless inquiry, and detachment (*vairagya*), the mind can be mastered. There is no task that cannot be accomplished by steady practice. Place faith in the Lord and practise with the certainty that you have the power and the grace, and all tasks become easy.

“Therefore, whoever enters upon this spiritual discipline with determination will attain the supreme Goal, available only for souls transmuted through several births. Remember, the person who has achieved union (*yoga*) is superior to the person who is the master of ritual action (*karma*). So, Arjuna, strive to become a *yogi*, to attain that high and holy status. But this is not all you have to do. There is a status higher than even this. Whoever fixes their entire consciousness in Me, whoever earnestly meditates on Me to the exclusion of everything else —such people are superior to all, they are great (*maha*) *yogis*.

“The *yogas* of meditation and wisdom are both inner disciplines; they are based on faith and devotion. Without these two, both *yogas* are unattainable; the pursuit itself is vain. An aspirant deprived of them is like a wooden doll, lifeless, unaware of the goal. The basic requisite is deep-rooted love toward the Lord. How can you get this? By getting to know the glory, the splendour, the nature and characteristics of the Lord, His essential nature (*swa-bhava*) and reality. That is why I am instructing you about these. I am imparting to you fully the wisdom of the scriptures, supplemented by the wisdom of inner experience. Know that there is nothing further for you to know. Of the thousands of aspirants, few strive to acquire this wisdom. And of these, only some single individual achieves success. All who start do not reach the goal.

“Arjuna! Note that there is nothing higher than Me in the world. All are strung in Me like flowers on a string. The five elements, the mind, the intellect, and the ego —these eight varieties of matter have produced the gross (*sthula*) and the subtle (*sukshma*) in creation. This is called the lower nature. There is another world distinct from this, known as higher nature. It is neither gross nor subtle; it is consciousness (*chaithanya*), in-dwelling in the soul (*jivi*). The world itself is its aspiration.

“The Lord first created the gross world. Then, as the soul, He entered it and rendered it awareness (*chit*) by His consciousness. This is declared clearly in the *Vedas*. You must consider the lower world to be the essential nature (*swa-bhava*) of the supreme Lord and the higher world to be His reality (*swa-rupa*). Dwell on the meaning of these essential qualities and realities and grasp them well. The gross is bound by the dictates of consciousness (*chaithanya*), which is the complete master, ever free.

“*Jivi* (individual, soul) means that which assumes breath (*prana*); the soul holds on to breath through skill and intelligence. The *jivi* is the inner ruler (*antar-yamin*), who has penetrated everything and who sustains everything. So the higher world is just highest *Atma* itself. All that becomes manifest with the same consciousness has to be taken as One.

“Inert matter (*jada*) and consciousness (*chaithanya*) are the two essentials for the entire creation. They are the same as the world (*prakriti*) and the Creator (*purusha*). The energy of the consciousness, when it entertains the idea of catering to the senses (*bhoga*), expresses the world out of its own destiny. Inert matter assumes the form of the body. Both of these are My nature. The Lord, who causes creation, preservation, and dissolution through these, is I myself, remember. There is no substance other than Me; there is no reality other than Me. I am the primal cause, the primal substance. ‘I am One; let Me become Many’. Thus, I Myself resolved upon this expansion into manifoldness, called creation. That resolution affected and motivated the power of illusion (*maya-sakthi*), so the intellectual principle (*maha-thathwa*) got produced. That was the first step in the evolution of creation.

“If a seed is planted in the earth and watered, in a day or two it will drink the moisture and swell in size. The sprouting has not yet taken place, but the first change is there. The intellectual principle is a happening of this type. Next, in accordance with the will of the Lord, a sprout arises. That is called the great ego. From it, five leaves break forth, the subtle principles of the five elements. The entire world is the combined product of these eight: the power of nature (*prakriti-sakthi*), the principle of intellect, ego (*ahamkara*), and the five elements.”

Chapter XII

Creation is saturated with God; the basis and the based; name-form; Om as the life-breath of the Vedas; merging the mind in Om; all forms of strength should be free from desire and attachment; believe that He is the Cause, that it is all His play.

Krishna continued, “The lower world about which I speak is just a manifestation of My power, My glory, My glory. Seen superficially, with the gross vision, the universe might appear as many, but that is wrong. There is no many at all. The yearning of the inner consciousness (*anthah-karana*) is toward the One; that is the real vision. When inner vision is saturated with wisdom, creation will be seen as *Brahman* and as nothing else. Therefore, the inner consciousness must be educated to interest itself only in wisdom.”

Creation (*jagath*) is saturated with the Lord of creation. Creation is nothing but the Creator in that form. All this is God (*Isavaasyam idam sarvam*), it is said.

Although there is only One, it appears as many. Let us remind ourselves of an example with reference to this statement of Krishna. We walk in the thick dusk of evening when things are seen but dimly; a rope lies higgledy-piggledy on the path; each one who sees it has their own idea of what it is, although it is really just a length of rope. One steps across it, taking it to be a garland. Another takes it to be a mark made by running water and treads on it. A third person imagines it to be a vine, a creeper plucked from off a tree and fallen on the path. Some others are scared that it is a snake, right?

Similarly, the One Highest *Brahman*, without any change or transformation affecting It, being all the time It and It only, manifests as the world of manifold names and forms. The cause of all this seeming is the dusk of delusion (*maya*). The rope might appear as many things —it might provoke various feelings and reactions on various people; it has become the basis for variety. But it never changes into the Many; it is ever One. The rope is ever the rope! It does not become a garland or a streak of water or a creeper or a snake. *Brahman* might be misinterpreted in a variety of ways, but it is ever *Brahman* only. For all the various interpretations, *Brahman* is the One Real Basis. Like the string for the garland, *Brahman* is the string that penetrates and holds together the garland of the souls. Like the foundation for the building, *Brahman* is the foundation for the structure of creation.

Note this. The string and the structure are not visible; only the flowers and the building are evident. That does not mean that the string and structure are non-existent! In fact, they support the flowers and the building. Well, you can know of their existence and their value by a little effort at reasoning. If you do not take that trouble, they escape your notice. Reason, examine, and you can arrive at the string that holds the flowers together and the foundation hidden in the earth. Do not be misled by the thing being contained (*adheya*) into denying the holder, the container, the basis, the support (*adhara*). If you deny it, you miss the truth and hold on to a delusion. Reason and discriminate; then believe and experience.

For the seen, there is an unseen basis; to grasp the unseen, the best means is inquiry and the best proof is experience. For those who have experienced, no description is needed.

The nature and qualifications of individual beads are not important at all; they should not distract our attention. Concentrate rather on the inner reality, the basis of all the beads, the *Brahman*; that is the essential quest. There may be many varieties of flowers in a garland, even trivial or flashy or nice pure ones (*thamasic, rajasic, or*

sathwic individuals) but the string, the basis, the highest *Atma* is independent of all of them. It is unaffected; it is truth, eternal, without blemish.

Flowers cannot become a garland without the string; so too, *Brahman* unites all souls. You cannot separate the two in all things and substances; *Brahman* fills everything. The five elements are but Its manifestations. It is the inner motive, unseen by those who look only at the surface. It is the inner motivator, in other words. That is why Krishna said, “I am taste (*rasa*) in water; I am effulgence, brilliance (*prabha*) in the sun and moon; I am the *Om* (*pranava*) in the *Vedas*; I am sound in space; I am heroism, adventure, and aspiration in humanity.”

Let us consider the topic of *Om* (*pranava*), which has just been mentioned. Krishna said that *Om* is the very life of the *Vedas*, didn't he? The *Vedas* are reputedly “beginning-less”. *Om* is spoken of as the very life-breath of the *Vedas*, which are themselves beyond all beginning. Take it that *Om* is the subtle essence, the underlying form of every particle and substance in the universe.

There are two parts in every single substance in the universe: name and form. Take away these two and there is no more universe. The form is conceived and controlled by the name. The form is dependent on the name, so if you reason out which is more lasting, you will find that the name is eternal and the form is impermanent. Consider the case of people who have done various good works, achieved meritorious deeds, constructed hospitals or schools or temples or places of worship. Even when their forms are not present in the world for people to see, their names with all the associated fame are ever present in human memory, aren't they? The form lasts for only a brief time, but the name continues.

Names are countless, and so are forms. But there is one matter that you have to take into consideration here, a matter that is within the daily experience of all, from the pundit to the ignoramus: letters. In Telugu, there are 52 letters; in English, just 26. If you pile up the entire literary output in Telugu or English and the pile rises mountain high, it is all composed of the 52 Telugu letters or the 26 English ones, not a single letter more.

Similarly, in the human body there are six nerve centres, all in the form of the lotus flower. All six lotus forms have one letter or sound attached to each petal. Like the reeds in the harmonium, when the petals are moved, each one emanates a distinct sound. Those who follow this statement intelligently may get a doubt; if the petals are said to move, who or what is moving them? Yes, the force that moves them is the primeval unstruck sound (*an-aahatha-dhwani*), which emanates without effort, regardless of conscious will. That is *Om*. Like beads in the string, all letters and the sounds that are present are strung on *Om*. That is the meaning of the statement that He is the “*Om* of the *Vedas*”. Krishna's teaching is that you should merge your mind in *Om*, which is the universal basis.

The mind has an innate tendency to merge in whatever it contacts; it craves this. So, it is ever agitated and restless. But, by constant practice and training, it can be directed toward *Om* and taught to merge with it. It is also naturally drawn toward sound. That is why it is compared to a serpent. The serpent has two crude qualities; its crooked gait and its tendency to bite all that comes in its way. These two are also the characteristics of people. People also seek to hold and possess all that they set their eyes on. They also move crookedly.

But the serpent has one praiseworthy trait. However poisonous and deadly its nature, when the strains of the charmer's music are played, it spreads its hood and merges itself in the sweetness of that sound, forgetting everything else. Similarly, through practice, people can merge themselves in the bliss of *Om*. This close attention to sound (*sabda*) is a principal way to realize the highest *Atma*, who is “the *Om* of the *Vedas*”. He is not other than sound. That is why the Lord said that He is the “vitality (*pourusha*) of humanity”, the breath of humanity.

Without it, a person has no manliness. However strong may be the force of the drag of previous births, it has to yield to the strength of adventure and achievement emanating from vitality. Unaware of this potentiality, foolish people are misled into cursing their fate, cursing the “inescapable” effects of what they dread as consequences of actions in previous births!

Everyone has to exercise vitality (*pourusha*), for without it, life itself is impossible. Living is struggling, striving, achieving. God created people to wield the talent of vitality and achieve victory. His purpose is not to make people consumers of food, a burden upon the earth, or animals that are slaves to the senses. He does not aim at creating a horde of idlers and loungers, who shy at hard work, accumulate fat, and grow into monstrous shapes. He does not create people with the idea that they should, while alive, ignore their Creator, deny *Atma*, and wander about like animals, allowing both intelligence and discrimination to go to waste, moving about without an iota of gratitude to the Giver of all the gifts that they consume and enjoy!

Creation also punishes those who exploit it for self aggrandizement, saying “This is mine, that too is mine, that belongs to those who belong to me”. She punishes heavily those who break her code; that is why Krishna describes to Arjuna the way of contemplation (*upasana*) in great detail, for worship is using creation to reach the Lord who transcends it.

Krishna said, “Arjuna! Many people anxious to offer uninterrupted worship to Me go into the thick forest. That is an insane step. There is no need to seek the jungle, as if I am only there. There is no place where I am not; there is no form that is not Mine. I am the five elements: earth, water, fire, air, ether! Where can you find a place devoid of one or other of these five? There is no special place to experience My presence and My glory, for I am everything, everywhere, ever. The fiery nature of fire is I Myself. I am life in all living beings. I am the strength of the strong, the strength that is free from greed and lust. Mine is the nature that prompts beings to desire *dharmic* things and means.

“Of course, when I say ‘strength’, I mean the strength of the intellect (*buddhi*). For the world knows many varieties of strengths: strength of riches, born of wealth; strength of education, born of scholarship; strength of people, coming from the consciousness that one has a large following; strength of mind, arising from one’s determination; physical strength, which is just muscular force, etc. All these are to be considered as Mine, for I am the supreme Lord. However, all forms of strength have to be free from desire and attachment. If desire and attachment adhere, then it becomes bestial strength, not divine; it is animal strength, not the strength of the lord of animals.

“Desire (*kama*) means the desire to possess a thing that is so strong that even when there is no chance of securing it, the mind hankers for it. Attachment (*raga*) is the feeling that a thing must be in one’s possession, even though it is evident that it cannot be there long, for it is after all an evanescent thing. *Ranjana* (enjoyment) is the root of the word *raga* (attachment). *Ranjana* indicates the capacity to give pleasure. Any form of strength that is polluted by either of these two cannot claim the dignity of divinity.

“Some forms of strength attain height or depth according to the status they are allotted by their owners. Consider, for example, riches. If riches reach a wicked person, they create vanity, pride, cruelty, and contempt. If they are with a good person, they are directed along the paths of charity and good works. The wicked use physical strength to injure others, while the good use it to protect others from harm.”

Another point has to be noted here. Krishna said that even anger and greed that are not opposed to *dharma* are forms of expression of the Divine. Therefore, why repeat it a thousand times: all feelings, all forms, all things

and beings are born out of the higher (*para*) and the lower (*apa-ra*) nature of the self-same divine Essence. But, to have higher feelings and emotions, you must accustom yourself to see My form in the higher feelings, higher forms, and higher beings. Still, you must not get away with the idea that only the higher is divine and the lower is not. That is not correct; the objective world with all its pure (*sathwic*), passionate (*rajasic*), and dull (*thamasic*) things, reactions, impulses—all originate in God. This conviction can grow in you and get firmly fixed only by reasoning it out and getting its truth affirmed.

The Lord Himself declared: “Arjuna! All this originated from Me, all this exists in Me, but I am not dependent on it; remember, I am unattached to all this.” Here, there are two points of view: the soul’s (*jivi*) and the Lord’s. The soul has the dual experience of good and bad, the Lord has no duality at all. When all is God, when God is the inner *Atma* in all, how can there be two, one good and another bad?

Now, ordinary folk may get some doubts on this point. The Lord says that all things, both good and bad, originated from Him and that He is the prime Cause. But at the same time, He declares that He is neither bound nor affected by the effects or defects of all that has thus originated! He says He has no relationship with them and that He is above and beyond that for which He is the Cause.

You might infer that people also are not in the least responsible for the good and evil done through them by the Divine, that their real nature is beyond both good and evil, that their acts, however evil, were basically prompted by the Lord Himself, for people have nothing they can claim as their act. True. But faith in this attitude that “nothing is done by you”, that “it is all the Lord’s will that is being worked through you”, must be steady, sincere, deep, and unshaken. There should be no trace of ego. If that is so, then certainly such a one has attained the highest goal of life. One is blessed to the utmost. That reality has to be known; that knowledge has to be stabilized. Indeed, those who have the conviction that all this is God, that they have no sort of relationship or kinship with the objective world, that they are above and beyond it, are true souls (*sathya-jivis*), the individuals whose sojourn here have been worthwhile.

Words, however, are futile. You may repeat certain set phrases like a parrot that has been taught for a long time—like “Everything is the Lord’s,” “I am but a puppet; and He pulls the strings, and I dance as He wills,” “Nothing is mine; I am just carrying out His will.” But what do you usually do? You claim praiseworthy acts for your own and ascribe blameworthy acts to the prompting of the Lord! You shout from platforms till your throats get dry that by your own effort you won honour, fame, status and standards, authority and position, property and possessions, attainments and achievements. But when it comes to confessing your share in earning ill fame and defeat, evil and wrong, you conveniently transfer the responsibility to the Lord, saying, “I am but an instrument in His hands; He is the Master, I am but a tool.” This has become the habit today. Nay, it has developed into a fashion. People swing from “I” to “He” like the pendulum of the clock. This is sheer deceit, hollow spiritual sham.

Mind, word, and act, all three must be filled with the belief that all is His play. That is the genuine path. It is a human frailty to separate things into good and evil; to impute this to God is sacrilege. Sometimes, it might appear that the Lord also has that weakness, but it is a passing phase, a cloud that hides His glory and not a blemish that adheres to Him.

Although qualities emanate from the Lord, He is unaffected. Smoke arises from fire, but fire is unaffected; clouds form and move about in the sky, but the sky is unaffected by them. All are attached to Him, like beads, but He is free, unattached. The universe is based on Him, but he has no need for the universe as base.

Take the example of cloth. Cloth is based on yarn, it is dependent on yarn; but yarn does not depend on cloth, it is unaffected, unattached to cloth. The pot depends on clay, but clay is independent. Again, cloth is yarn, pot is clay. Clay is *Brahman*; the pot is creation. Yarn is *Brahman*; cloth is creation (the universe of manifold variety). Ignore the shape, the form and the name —the pot is just clay. Ignore the form of the cloth and the name; observe the basic thing that stays in and through the cloth, then you know it is but yarn. Without clay, you can have no pot; without yarn, there can be no cloth. So too, without *Brahman*, there can be no creation. It is truer to say that all is *Brahman* than to say, “*Brahman* is in everything”. It is grander to picture *Brahman* as the basis of all (*sarva-adhara*) rather than to conceive It as the inner reality of all beings. That is the truth.

Chapter XIII

Faulty vision; delusion; four types of devotee and the kinds of train they are on; the wise person experiences “Vasudeva is all this”.

This universe itself is a superstructure, the basis being the Godhead; this is apparent, the other is the real. People ignore the basis and crave for the “based”. They do not stop to inquire how the “based” can exist without a base! This too is an example of faulty vision. When this faulty vision is set right, the author of this universe can be cognized.

This subject was raised by Arjuna before Krishna. He asked, “What exactly is faulty vision? Please tell me in detail, Krishna.” He also sought to know how the fault originates and develops. Now, Arjuna was not just an ordinary individual. He was not one to nod his head, whatever was told him. He was bold enough to stop Krishna in the middle of a sentence if he felt a doubt rising in his mind. He had the courage and the steadfastness needed. He persisted until he got from Krishna an answer that was verifiable by experience, that was in accordance with the wisdom enshrined in the scriptures. So the Lord also provided the answers immediately with a smile!

For this question on faulty vision, Krishna had the answer. He said, “Listen, Arjuna! Between Me and this universe there moves delusion (*maya*). It is indeed a hard task for one to see beyond delusion, for delusion is also Mine. It is of the same substance; you cannot deem it separate from Me. It is My creation and under My control. It will turn even the mightiest among people head over heels in a trice! You might wonder why it is so difficult to overcome. Of course, it is by no means easy. Only those who are wholeheartedly attached to Me can conquer this, My delusion. Arjuna, do not take delusion to mean some ugly thing that has descended from somewhere else; it is an attribute of the mind; it makes you ignore the true and the eternal highest *Atma* and value instead the attributeful, created, manifold multiplicity of name and form. It causes the error of believing the body as the Self, instead of the embodied. Delusion is not something that was and will disappear; nor is it something that was not but later came in and is. It never was, or is, or will be.

“Delusion (*maya*) is a name for a non-existent phenomenon. But this non-existent thing comes within view! It is like the mirage in the desert, a sheet of water that never was or is. He who knows the truth does not see it; only those ignorant in the ways of the desert are drawn by it. They run toward it and suffer grief, exhaustion, and despair. Like darkness arising in the room, hiding the room itself; like moss growing on the water, hiding the water itself; like cataracts growing in the eye, hiding the vision; delusion attaches itself to whoever helps it to grow. It overpowers the three qualities (*gunas*) and the three gods. That is to say, all who identify themselves with the limited, the named, the formed, the individualized, are affected by it. Identification with soul brings it about; identification with the That-this entity (*Thathwa-branthi*) removes it. It hides the That-this entity; it does not hold sway over those who have once known that ‘you are that That (*Thath twam asi*)’.

“Arjuna, you might ask Me whether this delusion that pervades and injures the very place where it originates has not tarnished Me, in whom it has taken birth. It is natural that such a doubt should arise. But that is a baseless doubt. Delusion is the cause of all this objective world, but it is not the cause of God. I am the Authority that wields delusion. This world, which is the product of delusion, moves and behaves according to My will. So whoever is attached to Me and acts according to My will cannot be harmed by delusion. Delusion acknowledges their authority also. The only method to overcome delusion is to acquire the wisdom of the universal and rediscover

your own universal nature. You attribute the limit of life to that which is eternal, and this is what causes delusion. Hunger and thirst are characteristics of life. Joy and grief, impulse and imagination, birth and death are all characteristics of the body. They are all un-*Atmic*. They are not characteristics of the universal, the *Atma*.

“To believe that the Universal that is you is limited and subject to all these un-*Atmic* characteristics, that is delusion. But remember, delusion dares not approach anyone who has taken refuge in Me. For those who fix their attention on delusion, it operates as a vast oceanic obstacle. But for those who fix their attention on God, delusion will present itself as Madhava (God)! The hurdle of delusion can be crossed by developing either the attitude of oneness with the infinite God or the attitude of complete surrender to the Lord. The first is called the *yoga* of wisdom; the second, of devotion.

“Not all people get the inner prompting to conquer delusion by surrendering their all to the Lord. It depends on the merit or demerit accumulated during many births. Those who have only demerit as their earnings will pursue the fleeting pleasures of the senses. Like the birds and the beasts, they revel in food and frolic; they take these as the purpose of life; they do not entertain any thoughts of God; they dislike the company of the virtuous and the good; they stray away from good acts; they become outlaws from the realm of God.

“On the other hand, those who have earned merit strive to grow in virtue, in uplifting thoughts, in contemplation of the divine Presence, and they yearn for the Lord. Seekers such as these may be drawn to the Lord through suffering, want, thirst for knowledge, or keenness to acquire wisdom. But the fact that they turn toward the Lord for relief shows that they have grown into the higher path through many births.”

The *Gita* does not approve acts done with intention to benefit therefrom or with the result as the prime motive. Only acts done without being concerned with the benefit that may accrue will free you from delusion.

Now, a doubt may arise about the one who turns to the Lord to relieve their own suffering. The question may be raised whether such a person can be called a devotee. No single person on earth is free from some want or other. Each depends on someone or other to fulfil their wants, is it not? Now, to have such wants, wants relating to objects, is itself wrong; and to lean on a person like oneself to fulfil them is an even greater wrong. The one who turns to the Lord to relieve suffering turns not to people but to the Lord, who is trusted and revered: that one implores Him only to fulfil them. Although it is wrong to cultivate wants, such a person avoids the greater wrong of putting trust on inferior instruments. Such a person is superior, right? The superiority of this attitude can be seen when you know that it is not what you want that is important but whom you ask for its fulfilment. The goal is the Lord; He is the Giver. His grace alone can confer boons —when this faith is fixed, you can be certain that the one who turns to God to relieve their suffering is really worthy.

The first three types of devotees mentioned in the *Gita* —the suffering (*artha*), the seekers of material possessions (*artha-arthi*), and the seeker of wisdom (*jijnasu*)— all adore the Lord in an implicit form, as the Unseen (*Paroksha*). They seek the Lord as a means for realizing their desires or goals. Of course, they will always be in a prayerful and worshipful mood and will remember the Lord at all times.

The spiritually wise one (*jnani*), the fourth type of devotee mentioned in the *Gita*, has one-pointed devotion, while the others have devotion to multiple objects or states; the others are attached to the objects or the states they desire and for their sake are attached to the Lord also. They are devoted not merely to the Lord, but also to the objective world. Wise people will not raise the eyes toward anything other than the Lord. Even if they do, they see the Lord wherever their eyes are cast. That is why the Lord has declared that the wise are dearest to Him. Of

course, all are the same for the Lord; but among those who have reached His presence and are present there, love is explicit, direct, immediate, directly cognizable and experienceable. Therefore, it can be inferred that the wise one is nearest to the Lord and thus is the dearest.

Of course, it is the nature of fire to warm you when you shiver from cold. But how can it help you keep warm if you do not approach it but keep away at a distance? Similarly, those who are earnest to remove the chill of worldly ills have to seek the fire of wisdom, which is won by the grace of God, and be in the immediacy of God.

Spiritual aspirants in the midst of their efforts sometimes imagine God to be less glorious than He really is! They feel that the Lord differentiates between sinners and saints, good and bad, wise and ignorant. These are unsound inferences. The Lord doesn't separate people thus. If He really did so, no sinner could survive His anger on earth for even a minute. All are living on the earth, since the Lord has no such distinction. This truth is known only to the spiritually wise one. Others are unaware of this. They suffer under the false belief that the Lord is somewhere far far away from them.

The spiritually wise one is free from delusion and is unaffected by the qualities of passion, dullness, or even purity (the *gunas rajas, thamas, sathwa*). The seeker of knowledge, however, is different. He uses time for unbroken contemplation of the Divine, in pious deeds and holy thoughts. And the other two, the seeker of wealth (*artha-arthi*) and the sufferer (*artha*), gather elevating experience, ruminate over the real and unreal, and transform themselves into seekers of knowledge. Later, they become spiritually wise people and are saved. The goal is thus reached stage by stage. You cannot attain the goal in one leap.

This can be better understood by an example. Spiritual wisdom is like the "through train". That is to say, the passenger need not detrain and enter another train to reach the destination. The seeker of spiritual knowledge has entered the "through carriage"; also, the seeker need not detrain and board another train, but the carriage will be detained and attached to other trains en route before finally reaching the desired place. The sufferer (*artha*) boards the ordinary train. Since the carriage is neither "through" nor in a through train, the sufferer has to alight at a number of places en route and wait until another train comes by, so the goal is reached by stages. It is a long and arduous journey. But, in spite of these difficulties, the distressed supplicant can accomplish it through persistence.

The goal is attained by all; only the process and the pace are different. No wonder the Lord has declared more than once that all these four types of devotion are "My own". Why has He so declared? Because they all seek the same high goal.

"Therefore, yearn always for the vast, the immeasurable. Do not limit your desires to the little. Those who crave for little things are misers. Those who yearn for the Lord are generous, large-hearted," said Krishna.

The devotion of the spiritually wise one is termed natural or direct devotion. The devotion of the others can be called indirect or derived devotion. The wise one cognizes the Lord as their own *Atma*; devotion is deep attachment to or affection for God. "Love of the Supreme is devotion," said Krishna.

The wise one becomes so as the result of merit accumulated through many lives. The stage is not attainable on the spur of the moment, nor is it available ready-made in shops for a price. It is not a marketable commodity. It is the culmination of spiritual endeavour practised in many lives.

It is desired that many good doctors be produced for ministering to the people. But years of study and experience alone can supply them; if those unequipped are appointed as doctors in the hospitals and start prescribing

and operating, they are bound to kill where they should cure. So too, if a person became a wise person today, you can imagine the years and years of spiritual discipline that won that height. The inheritance of spiritual impulses from previous births also helps in this endeavour.

All kinds of people now call themselves wise. They don't know, perhaps, that a spiritually wise one is marked by certain characteristics. The mark that proves them genuine is, of course, the declaration based on their own experience that "Vaasudeva is all this." The steady assimilation of that experience is the true sign of the wise one. By Vaasudeva is meant here not the son of Vasudeva, but He who has made all beings His home.

Only a person who perceives the Lord in all beings deserves to be called a wise one. Others who call themselves wise people are so in name only. They have no genuine experience of wisdom. What exactly is spiritual wisdom? It is the possession of the knowledge that enables one to have knowledge of all, so it enables one to dispense with the knowledge of all else.

This is the height that the wise one reaches. On the other hand, no one can claim to be wise who has simply learned a few verses by heart, or skipped through a few books or ascended platforms with ten others and lectured for hours in the full pride of scholarship, reeling off ponderous sentences (like a magician with a ball of thread), pouring out what has earlier been swallowed. We have large numbers of such self-styled wise people going about now. Their dress is ochre, but their hearts are ogre. Well, how can stones shine as gems? All stones are not precious stones. Who will assess a stone as equal to a gem? Only fools will be so misled, for they know neither the one nor the other.

In the *Gita*, Krishna declared "Vaasudeva is all this (*Vaasudevah sarvam*)" to be the king of mantras, just to counteract such pseudo-wise-people, whose emergence He anticipated. That one mantra is sufficient to save all mankind. That is His indirect gift—consider it as such and concentrate on it and its meaning. That is the highest good, the highest goal. These six (Sanskrit) letters can alone make human lives worthwhile.

Without the inner ever-present experience of those words, there are many who have named themselves great soul, preceptor of the world, *bhagavan*, realized sage, wise one, free from attachment to the sensory world, bliss-filled (*ananda*), etc. and who, alas, though counterfeit, receive currency among people as genuine. No one conferred these titles on them; they were selected and assumed by their present owners and worn as plumage to catch the people's eye. They are not genuine, so the glamour wears out soon enough. The exterior is renunciation (*sanyasa*), but the interior is too full of desires. Outwardly, the form is *yoga*, but inwardly they suffer from disease. Their names all speak of bliss but they roam around in the alleys. Their words are honey; their acts are spoony and often zany. A householder who is immersed in the daily duties of that stage of life is far better spiritually than these dressed-up specimens of renunciation and *yoga*.

The chief reason for the decline of the culture of India, of its ancient way of life and its moral rectitude, is the evil perpetrated by such fakes. Faith in God has declined for the same reason. People advise renunciation and aspire for the senses; they glorify morality and operate through hatred. This behaviour cuts at the very root of renunciation, and they inevitably rush toward doom. Where words and deeds are not coordinated, there is no trace of truth.

Well, householders do hold on to truth, more or less tenaciously. There are among them many who are devoid of hate, who are of pure unsullied hearts, and who tread the path of morality and virtue. But we find that the renunciants and *yogis* who parade as such are full of all possible types of hatred and all manifestations of desire.

They fall into the pit that these manifestations dig to trap them. Egotism, envy, exhibitionism —these bring to an end all the efforts of the spiritual aspirant. Therefore, seekers and devotees must be ever vigilant and keep away from all these undesirable traits. They must try to grow in the contemplation of the glory of the Lord and in the practice of morality, eagerly striving to experience the real bliss of attainment. This bliss has then to be shared with the world. That will inaugurate world peace and world prosperity.

Krishna was referring to such real wise people when He said that the world will shine in splendour through the wise people. A person without wisdom is like a home without light.

Chapter XIV

Objective and integral knowledge; introduction to: Brahman, supreme spirit, action, the material creation, tutelary deities, and the Lord of the sacrifice; the meaning of Brahman; Brahman as existence-knowledge-bliss.

“There is nothing to equal wisdom (*nahi jnanena sadrisham*).” And what is wisdom? That which makes you cross this sea of change (*samsara*). Of course, wisdom is of two kinds: objective knowledge (*vishaya-jnana*) and integral spiritual knowledge (*a-bheda-jnana*).

The first type is knowledge of the world; the second is knowledge of the identity of *Brahman* and the individual *Atma*, which is called undifferentiated or integral (*a-bheda*) wisdom. This wisdom is not a function of the intellect (*buddhi*); it is a feature of something beyond it, something that witnesses the activities of even the intellect. It destroys the delusion about this constant flux, which is mistaken to be a reality; it removes fear from the heart; it reveals to people the *Brahman* that they and all this is. So it is called the right (*samyak*) wisdom, the nearest (*sameepa*) wisdom.

There are two paths by which people can approach this integral knowledge: the inner and the outer. The outer spiritual discipline is engagement in activity without attachment (*nish-kama-karma*), dedicating the result of activities to the Lord. The inner spiritual discipline is meditation and total absorption (*samadhi*). In *Vedantic* terminology, this is inner concentration (*nidi-dhyasana*). Listen and meditate on what you have listened to—these two steps are the bases of this inner concentration. Without these, meditation is impossible to achieve.

This is the meaning of what is called control of the senses, detachment from the outer sensory world, withdrawal of the mind from the outer world. This is the goal of all life: knowing the highest *Atma*, attaining liberation. There can be no second aim for people. People are endowed with life not to build bungalows, acquire estates, accumulate wealth, add progeny, earn titles, or ascend to higher rungs of social life. Their greatness does not depend on these. The chief success in life lies in winning permanent bliss, permanent escape from grief and agitation.

“Listen, oh ye children of immortality, all over the world (*Sravanthu vishwe amrithasya putraah!*)” is the call, the invitation. The heritage of immortality must be recognized and experienced; it must be won back. The bonds of name and form must be removed; they are but bonds made of dream-stuff. They are changeable and temporary. They are not genuine natural characteristics of the soul (*jiva*). Real wisdom consists in recognizing that one is pure bliss; bliss that persists from the past into the present and the future. Escape from grief for a brief period of time and the attainment of joy for a short time—these are not signs of real liberation. “If you seek this steady, genuine, pure state of bliss, you must be attached to Me,” said Krishna.

“Arjuna! Whoever does spiritual practice after attaching himself to Me with a view to liberate himself from old age and senility will know all that is to be known of *Brahman*, *karma*, and *Atma*. I am the master of the material creation (*adi-butha*), the presiding deities (*adi-daiva*), and that which pertains to sacrifice (*adi-yajna*). If I am thus worshiped, the worshiper will develop equanimity and full control of the vagaries of the mind. Besides, such a person will dwell on Me without forgetting Me even in the last moment. For that reason, such a person will reach Me. That is to say, such a person will merge in Me.

“Arjuna! Everyone is anxious to avoid old age and death; that is human nature. But of what avail is mere

anxiety? One's conduct and behaviour should be in accordance with one's objective. If one has sincere yearning, and if one places full trust in and faithfully surrenders to the Lord, the fog of grief will be dispersed by the rays of His grace. If, on the other hand, one places trust on the objects of this world, the consequent grief will never end; nor can it be ended by any other than the Lord. Serve the Master of delusion, the designer of all this dreamland, rather than the dream itself. How can attachment to delusion yield anything but disappointment? How can joy be won by such pursuits? If joy is not won and grief avoided, how can liberation be achieved?" Krishna asked.

Then, Arjuna intervened. "Krishna," he said, "can't such people attain you? You say that grief must be conquered before one can attain you. Well, what is the origin of that grief? How is it to be tackled? How does it arise? How can one try to overcome it without knowing its origin and course of development? Please tell me how this grief arises in the human mind."

"Listen, Arjuna," Krishna condescended to reply. "The source of all types of sorrow is ignorance. You might now ask Me what the source of ignorance is. I shall tell you. It is identification with the body, the delusion that you are the body. This can be removed only by acquisition of right knowledge. To remove darkness, light is needed. You cannot frighten darkness away or make it yield by prayer or petition or protest. Unless light is on, darkness will not disappear, howsoever you may try. So too, ignorance will not disappear by merely wishing for its disappearance. Once you understand the nature and ramifications of this trait, this ignorance, the truth will be laid bare and grief will vanish.

"When ignorance goes, grief goes also. So attach yourself to Me, earn the light of true knowledge, and tread the path of no grief," said Krishna.

Immediately, Arjuna interjected with, "Krishna! Until now, you talked of certain paths by which we can reach You. Now, at the end of it all, if you throw this cannon ball, how can I grasp its meaning? You did not even confer, as a preliminary, a little power to do so! Please make me happy by describing this point in greater detail, so that I might follow You better and attain You."

Krishna replied, "My dear brother-in-law! Listen. My mystery can be understood once you are clear about the meaning of *Brahman*, Supreme Spirit (*Adi-atma*), *karma*, the material creation, deities presiding over the material realm, and what pertains to sacrifice. Let Me tell you this also. Whoever understands My mystery attains Me."

"Then, oh Lord, tell me about the first of these, *Brahman*," exclaimed Arjuna.

"Arjuna! *Brahman* is referred to as the imperishable (*a-kshara*) that is the highest (*para*). *A-kshara* means without destruction, or indestructible. *Brahman* comes from a root that means big, vast, etc. How vast, you may ask. Vaster than whatever you call vast is the answer. The word *a-kshara* has another meaning: omnipresent, immanent, everywhere. *Brahman* is not mere *a-kshara*, as you will have noticed. It is the highest *a-kshara*. What does that mean? It is the type of *a-kshara* that is beyond the reach of time and space and knowability; it cannot be known by any or all the categories; it never declines or ends; it is the highest Indestructible, Indescribable.

"The goal of humanity is to attain that *Brahman*; Indestructible (*a-kshara*) and *Brahman* signify the same goal. They indicate the with-qualities (*sa-guna*) aspect and the without-qualities (*nir-guna*) aspect of the same truth. For *a-kshara* means also the letter *Om*, which is a symbol of *Brahman*. That is why it is called the *yoga* of the indestructible highest *Brahman*. *Brahman* has two adjectives, highest (*para*) and indestructible (*a-kshara*). *A-kshara* indicates the *Om* (*pranava*) as well as delusion (*maya*). Delusion is also subsumed by *Om*. These two

are 'attribute-ful', qualified. *Brahman*, however, is attribute-less, without qualities and pure in Its own right. He who understands this attains Me.

“Now for the second point. It is *Brahman* that dwells in everybody in the form of 'I'. In fact, everybody hangs around this entity called 'I'. In the body, each part and organ in the organization performs one chief task. Each sense contacts and informs about one particular set of impressions from the outer world. But, though related to the senses, there is an 'I' shining in the body, above and behind all of them. If that relationship is broken, everything becomes inert material!

“When the 'I'-power flows through the senses, they are able to carry on their allotted tasks. That power is spirit; it cannot be known without great effort. Use the sharpest discrimination and you know it to some small extent. *Brahman* is the 'That (*Thath*)' entity; the individual soul is the 'this Thou (*thwam*)' entity.

“To make the matter clearer to you, take these two as appearance and character, form and substance. *Brahman* is the form, the individual soul is substance,” said Krishna.

Let us dwell on this matter a little. The scriptures describe *Brahman* as existence-knowledge-bliss (*sat-chid-ananda*), right? This is a way of denoting it, in the *Vedantic* vocabulary. It is also described as *asthi-bhathi-priyam*. Are they the same, or do they have different meanings? *Sat* means that which persists in the past, present, and future; the same meaning is conveyed by *asthi*. *Chit* means that which is conscious of everything; the same meaning is conveyed by *bhathi*. *Ananda* means unending source of joy, and so does *priyam*. These three are found in every human being—in every beast and bird.

Take the first of these, existence (*sat*), and this will become clearer. The body is subject to destruction, sooner or later. Everyone is aware of this; no one is ignorant of this elementary fact. Nevertheless, everyone is apprehensive of death! No one welcomes death or is eager to meet it. Death is inevitable; you have to meet it, even though you do not welcome it or you try to avoid it. All that is born has to die some day. Still, no one likes to die.

What is the key to this paradox? Note this: What does not welcome death? What meets with death? What leaves and what remains? The answer: the body dies; the body falls. What doesn't die is the *Atma*. But you delude yourselves into thinking that it is the *Atma* or “you” that dies. The *Atma* has nothing to do with death or birth. The body experiences death; the *Atma*, which is eternal, true, and pure (*nithya*, *sathya*, and *nir-mala*), does not die. You are the *Atma*, which does not like to die. That is to say, you are the eternal; your nature is eternal. The *Atma* is the “child of immortality”, not the body. The *Atma* is the eternal, not the body.

You are the eternal (*sat*), the *Atma*, the entity that has no death. It is this *Atma* that is in every casement, so every being feels the force of that eternal in the form of eternal unchanging existence. This is clear and unmistakable.

Now take the second term: consciousness (*chit*), the force that urges you on to know everything. Everyone is eager to know about anything that is apparent to their consciousness; they ask the questions: “What is this? How does this happen?” Those who succeed in knowing may be only a few. Others may have only eagerness, and not the steady intelligence needed to persist and win. That makes no difference. The essential fact is the thirst, the urge.

Take a little boy to a market, bazaar, or exhibition. You will note that the boy does not simply move along, seeing the various things on both sides. He will be continuously asking the person who is leading him by the hand

what this is and what that is. It may be something he does not need or something that is beyond his power of understanding, and yet, the stream of questions will not dry up.

Consider the inner significance of this hunger for knowledge. It is the power of intelligence that expresses itself. It is not its nature to leave things alone. It can't rest until knowledge is gained, so the hunger emerges as a stream of questions. The principle of intelligence is self-luminous, so it has the power to illuminate even inert things. That is why these qualities shine in people and make other things clearer to them. This is enough to make it plain that people have in them the principle of intelligence.

Now for the third: bliss (*ananda*). Even beasts and birds crave joy without any prompting or persuasion from others. They make every effort to win it. Not one of them craves grief or pain; they make every effort to escape from pain and grief and put an end to them, when they become unavoidable.

As for people, no further elaboration is necessary. They seek unbroken joy at all times and in all acts and activities. At no time or place, at no stage of life, do they desire grief. They pray for the joy and happiness of themselves and their kindred through whatever worship they offer, devotional songs they share in, vows they fulfill, rites they perform, pilgrimages they undertake, or gifts they make for spiritual merit. When the body suffers from any illness and the doctor prescribes a medicine to cure it and make one whole, one wants even that to be sweet, soothing, and pleasant!

What is at the root of this desire? You are fundamentally happy-natured. Bliss is your very personality. You are not of the nature of the body that you occupy. You are *Atma*. Happiness is the nature of the *Atma*. That is why no one is surprised when you are happy; they are not inquisitive about your happiness, for it is something natural to you. Surprise arises only when you observe something that was not there before. What you see every day does not arouse your curiosity. It comes only when something unnatural happens or is observed.

Take this instance. A child is in the cradle. It playfully laughs at jingling bells or some toy or perhaps some sensation that is pleasant enough to make it bloom. No one is surprised or worried at all this. No one loses peace of mind as a result of this. Now, let the child that was playing and laughing start shrieking and weeping. Everyone within earshot will run toward the cradle and frantically search the bed and bedclothes to discover the cause of all this commotion. This is the experience of all who have something to do with children. No one was worried to find out why the child was happy, but all sought the cause when it wept. Why? Because joy is its nature; grief is unnatural, against its inner composition.

This is not the entire point; there is something more. Let us take another example from experience. When some friend or kinsman of yours is happy and affluent, no one takes the trouble to ask him why he is so happy; they ignore him and do not harry him with questions regarding himself. But when grief strikes him and he is unhappy, you start worrying him and yourselves. Why? Happiness is natural, it is to be expected, it is not surprising. For it is the nature of the *Atma*, which everyone is. That is why one craves constant happiness.

The above three (being, awareness, and bliss) we see in every being as the very core of its very existence, as its reality itself. So it is the Lord Himself who has assumed the pose of individuality and plays as an individual, in that role. It is this inner meaning upon which Krishna elaborated, so that the relationship of the *Brahman* and the individual soul, that is to say, the identity of both with Him, could be understood by Arjuna.

Chapter XV

Discussion of action, the material creation, demi-gods, and the Lord of the sacrifice; the essence of the Gita: practice to secure the thought of Om at the last moment of life.

Then, Arjuna prayed that the third subject, *karma*, could be fully explained to him. Krishna was quite ready to oblige him. He began, “Arjuna! The limitation that is necessary for the creation, fostering, and destruction of beings is what is called *karma*. The movable and immovable are all beings; why, the very act of the very resolution for creation is *karma*; the very first, which still activates all everywhere —this entire universe and all the movements and agitations and activities in it are the direct consequence of primal action (*karma*), My divine will (*sankalpa*). And, as long as My resolution lasts, the stream of action will flow along. It can never go dry as long as I do not will it. All that you do is to get drawn into this flood; why, you are but currents in this rush, or ripples or waves. My will has prompted all action (*karma*), so action done in consonance with My will becomes part of Me.

“Action (*karma*) is of My nature; I manifest Myself as action,” said Krishna, to the great consternation of Arjuna. He made it clear that all action is divine, of His essence! “It is enough if you know that *Brahman* (the Universal), *Atma* (the individual), and *karma* are all three Me; knowledge of this will confer release. You need not worry about the rest,” said Krishna, as if He wanted to avoid further discussion. Evidently, Krishna wanted to take the chariot into the ranks of the foes and start the conflict, for time was flying fast.

But Arjuna was adamant; he was different. Ordinary people would not have argued even so long with Krishna. When Krishna says, “Don’t worry about the rest,” one should stop worrying. But Arjuna was the right interrogator for Krishna and Krishna was the right teacher for Arjuna; in fact, they are man-God (*nara-Narayana*), aren’t they? Hence, the appropriateness, interest, and value of this dialogue.

Arjuna was not content to leave the matter at that; he did not accept Krishna’s assurance. “Tell me about the remaining three also, oh Lord,” he pleaded. “Save me from the coils of doubt,” he prayed. “Destroy the darkness and reveal Your Reality to me,” he insisted. At this, Krishna melted a little. He fondly stroked Arjuna’s back and replied, “Do not grieve; I shall tell you all. This perishable creation (*adi-butha*), about which I mentioned, is not such a formidable tangle. It is quite within the reach of all. Everything that declines and dies, everything that has form and name, is included in this perishable creation.

“In other words, the whole perishable creation is lower nature. All these embodied things, on this side and on the other and everywhere, are this whole perishable creation. In spite of this, they aren’t different from Me,” said Krishna, pausing meaningfully. He did not continue the exposition!

The ways of the Lord are known only to Him. No one else can make out their meaning and purpose. Trying to unravel them is a fruitless task.

“They are not different from Me!” At these words, Arjuna was petrified with surprise. His head became heavy with doubt. His intelligence was befogged. His conviction was shaken. Doubts multiplied in his brain in frightening sequence. Why did he suffer like this? What was the reason for all this upset?

After declaring “I am existence-knowledge-bliss, the truth-eternity entity; I am unaffected by death, decline, or destruction,” Krishna made the devastating admission that He was also the temporary, transitional, destructible body! This was the cause of all the confusion in Arjuna’s brain! Anyone would be confounded by doubt at these

conflicting statements. Krishna laughed as He saw Arjuna's plight.

Still, since He had no intention of causing delay, and since he knew the source of Arjuna's dilemma, Krishna immediately set about resolving the doubt. "Arjuna! Why do you feel lost? You are confounded because I said I am the short-lived body too, aren't you? Common folk will be shocked on hearing this. Their reaction will be to reject the idea, for it is difficult to reconcile the two. This body, which is temporary, transitional, and transient, has affinity with Me, for I am the base from which it springs. Without Me, the body can never be. This will become clear to you with a summary of its origin. Listen to the story of the origins of the body, which clarifies the mystery.

The body is primarily indebted for its emergence to the food that the parents consume, isn't it? Where did that food come from? From the earth element: the grains and other materials that grew on the earth. And the earth, the earth element? It evolved from the water element. Tracing back, we find that the water element emerged from the fire element, the fire element from air, the air from ether (*akasa*) and ether from the shadow (delusion, *maya*) of Godhead! That shadow is merely My apparel.

"My Apparel, which I willed and folded around Me, became ether, the ether got transformed into air, the air changed into the fire element, the fire element into water, the water became earth, the earth grew grains of food, the food developed into the body! So, it is clear, isn't it, that the body is also Myself? Why doubt this?

"Therefore, I am also this perishable creation (*adi-butha*), as much as I am, as I said before, *Brahman*, the individual soul, and *karma*. The cause is the same as the effect; I am the primal cause, so I am all these effects also. I am the highest *Atma*; the rest all proceed from the divine (*adi-daiva*). In every physical citadel or body, the divine personality named *Hiranyagarbha* is immanent.

"Just as a people are served by their senses, the *Hiranyagarbha* is served by demi-gods (*adi-daivas*) proceeding from the divine. What role do these demi-gods play? These deities serve the divine purpose. That is to say, Surya illumines the eye, the divinities of the quarters enhance the ear, and Indra motivates the hand. These and other presiding deities are the senses of *Hiranyagarbha*. However great a spiritual aspirant might be, whatever eminence they might have reached, they can attain the Highest only through *Hiranyagarbha*. *Hiranyagarbha* is indeed the Godhead; there is no distinction between the two.

"Is this clear, Arjuna? I am as much demigod as I am the material creation. I am as much these two as I am *Brahman*, soul, and *karma*. They are all fully divine.

"Now for the next entity: the Lord of the selfless-ritual sacrifice (*adi-yajna*). That is also Me! This entity consumes joy and grief, the results of the multifarious actions in which beings are engaged. I, the Lord of the sacrifice, am the recipient of sound, touch, sight, taste, and smell through the five senses in all beings! I am not only the entity responsible for action; I am also the entity for which that action is gone through, the recipient of the fruits; I am the benefactor as well as the beneficiary."

Of course, Krishna was able to open Arjuna's eyes and clarify this truth, this fact of His being the Lord of the sacrifice (*adi-yajna*). But ordinary intellects may not be able to grasp its implications. It will be easy if we take some illustrations from life. When you want a breeze, you switch on the fan; when you want light, you switch on the lamp; when you want to cook, you light the stove; when you want to address a vast audience, you fix up a mike and loudspeakers and switch them on. Or, if you require printing, you operate the press with a switch. Consider these as separate operations and you will notice that they are unrelated to one another. Light and air, heat and

sound are unrelated; they are distinct in every way, it would seem. But for all these, the motivator (*kartha*) is the same: the electric current. The expressions, the manifestations, may be different; but the basis, the inspiration, the latent potency, the base is the same.

Like the current, Godhead operates through all instruments and awards the consequences of all the activities of the instruments. He is the bestower of the fruits of all action. Like the current, He is the inner motivator of all beings. Since He is the activator of all actions, He is called the Lord of the sacrifice (*adi-yajna*).

“The seventh entity is *Om* (*pranava*), which, when pronounced at the moment of death, awards merger with the imperishable highest *Atma* Itself!” When Krishna said this, Arjuna immediately prayed to Him to elaborate the point a little more so that he might grasp it clearly. Krishna was only too glad to do so.

“The moment of death does not mean some future point of time. It means, this very moment! Any moment might turn out to be the moment of death. So every moment is the ‘last’. Every moment must be filled with *Om*. The fate of a person after death is molded by the thought that predominates at the moment of death. That thought is the foundation on which the next birth is built. Whoever at that time remembers Me attains My glory, reaches Me in fact. So every action, every striving of his, every spiritual exercise, should be aimed at sanctifying that fateful moment. The years of life must be devoted to the discipline that will bring up at that moment the thought of the highest *Atma* or *Om*.

“What has to be discarded is the body, this physical case. What has to be earned is the Universal Absolute (*Parabrahman*). The body has your reality (*swa-rupa*), the undiscardable, indestructible, undying truth (*sathya*) and eternity (*nithyam*). That reality is the entity called *Atma*, or, what is the same thing, the highest *Atma*. Since you are that, you cannot cast it off. Casting off the body is akin to shifting from a house occupied for some years, and birth is your entry into a new one. These are both physical acts, which don’t affect the *Atma*.

“Arjuna! The *Atma* doesn’t come in or go out. Those who toil in the falsehood of body consciousness (*deha-thathwa*) cannot have the *Atma* revealed to them. Body consciousness is liable to decay and death. Therefore, more than the six items mentioned by Me already, *Om*, which is such a potent instrument of liberation, has to be understood clearly. All the long years of life are to be utilized for this consummation—the mind being fixed on *Om* when the body is being cast off. You belch the flavour of the food you ate; your last thought indicates the food you have fed on.

“Your progress is in accordance with your spiritual practices. Be always aware of the need to fix the mind on holy thoughts when the body is got rid of. That is to say, immerse yourself in holy thoughts every moment of your life.”

Arjuna inquired, “Oh Lord! Has one to strive for it from now on, if one wishes to get holy thoughts at the last moment of life? Can we not get them at that time itself?”

The Lord realized his doubt and replied, “Your intelligence seems to have been blunted a great deal! You hesitate to accept the need to develop holy thoughts from now on. Arjuna! The mind has to be educated into the habit through what is called the discipline of constant practice. The mind has to be trained to avoid other thoughts and concentrate only on the Lord. Only then can you reach the Oversoul, the supreme Spirit. Unless you systematically teach it and train it, it will not and cannot remember the supreme Spirit at the moment of death.

“You might ask Me why. Well, think of your own case. You are able to use these weapons of offence and

defence in the battle that is imminent because you taught yourself the art of handling them many years ago, right? Could you have used them with confidence, without preparation, on the spur of the moment? Is it ever possible? The warrior will be called upon to wield weapons some day, so he is taught the art from childhood so that he may be ready for any emergency.

“Similarly, whatever else a person may not meet during life, he is certain to meet with death. So, each one must be trained to have at that time the attitude and thought that are most beneficial to them. Otherwise, life is a failure, a waste. A person unready for this consummation has to suffer the fate that will befall him. No one enters a battlefield in order to suffer defeat. So too, no one voluntarily accepts a fall; people seek only progress. Would it not be wise, therefore, to strive for the end that is in your own best interest? Hence, everyone must take earnest steps to secure the thought of the seventh item, *Om (pranava)*, at the last moment of life. Whoever dies in that thought attains Me.” said Krishna.

This is the entire essence of the *Gita*. For the goal of all actions is to attain the acme of progress, isn't it? That is the urge that makes people engage in prayers, in repetition of the name and meditation, in ritual worship and spiritual exercises. All those who have placed faith in these have to remember the goal throughout.

Krishna said that *Om* has to be remembered at the moment of death. Certain points require elucidation in connection with this, for there are many who argue that *Om* can be repeated only by a few and that others are not entitled to it. This is wrong. This false conclusion has been arrived at because they do not know the truth. It springs from a mistaken belief.

The *Gita* does not mention this group or that group. Krishna declares “whoever”, without any qualifying words or limiting it to one class or sex. He does not even say, “who deserves or who does not deserve”, “who is authorized or who is unauthorized”. He says only that for meditation on *Om* (mere ‘calling it to memory’ is of no use), some preliminary disciplines have to be gone through, like control of the senses and concentration of the mind.

For, when the mind is flitting from one fancy to another, how can the production of *Om* by the vocal organs be of any benefit? The sound will not help the attainment of liberation. Senses have to be curbed, thoughts have to be one-pointed, the glory has to be apprehended. That is why the Lord advised that from birth to death, you must be engaged in the search for truth. Instead, if you postpone spiritual discipline until the last moment, you will be like the student who turns over the pages of the textbook for the first time just before entering the examination hall! If the student feels that he has before him one full year and neglects to learn from the teacher, lecture notes, and books, how can anything enter the brain that very morning? It will only add to the student's despair. The student can be pronounced proficient only in indolence.

No tree will yield fruit the moment you plant the seedling in your backyard. For the tree to reach that stage, you have to foster it with care over a long period of time, don't you? Similarly, whatever result you seek, you have to follow carefully the preparatory disciplines, without break. No one can acquire the fruit without vigilance and steadfastness.

Spiritual aspirants must be always aware of this. The yearning must be directed away from “how to be born” toward “how to die”! For birth depends on how death takes place. Death comes first, birth happens later. Folk believe that people are born to die and they die so that they may be born. This is wrong. You are born so that you may not be born again; you die, so that you may not die again. That is to say, the one who dies must so die that rebirth

does not happen. When once you die, you should not be born again to meet another death. Death is inevitable, if you are born; so avoid birth, and thus avoid death.

So, the spiritual aspirant should aspire not for a good birth but for a good death. You may be born well, in a good family or with many favourable circumstances, but subsequent action may not ensure a good death. If a good death is aimed at, the trouble of being born and becoming once again subject to death can be avoided.

Everyone born must have the end always in view. Cultivate good habits of thought and action in order to make the end genuinely auspicious. Attaining such an end is the unmistakable sign of winning God's grace.

Chapter XVI

Fixing the mind on God at death; 3 different ways to describe God; 8 aspects of God; what devotion consists of; repeating Om; the value of systematic practice.

Ordinary folk do not get their mind fixed on Madhava (a name for God) so easily at the point of death. It presupposes long training, previous achievement of certain accomplishments, what is called prior purification. The mind should have gone through a certain course of discipline; it has to be possessed of *yoga*. Even that is not enough. The mind must discard all other thoughts as low and inferior, even as defiling. This disgust toward all other objects should grow in strength. When these two are present, the thought of Madhava will certainly emerge and be steady during the last moments.

So your mind is the important thing; when the mind rots, all else rots. One moves as fast as the mind and in the direction that the mind takes. To tame and train the mind, good habits and disciplines have to be sought. Therefore, Krishna began describing how the Lord has to be pictured in the mind during the stages of spiritual discipline and with what feelings and emotions He has to be fixed in the mind.

“Arjuna! people describe Me in three different ways: as (1) without qualities, without form, (2) with qualities, without form, and (3) with qualities, with form (*nir-guna nir-aakaara*, *sa-guna nir-aakaara* and *sa-guna sa-aakaara*). I shall first tell you about the second and how you have to picture the Lord in this aspect.

“Listen, He is described as poet (*kavi*), ancient (*purana*), the independent master, subtler than the subtle, the sustenance and basis of all, having unpicturable form, with the splendour of the sun as His complexion, beyond all trace of ignorance and darkness.”

At this point, Arjuna interrupted Krishna. He asked, “Lord! You said He is a poet (*kavi*)! There are poets among ordinary mortals too. How, then, can you also call the Lord a poet and discredit Him? Or, does *kavi* denote something special when applied to Him? Make that point a little clearer.”

Krishna said, “*Kavi* does not mean merely a poet; it means also one who is aware of the past, present, and future, so it is a description of the Lord. He knows all; He sees all. Hence, the derivation of *kavi* is mentioned as ‘he who sees the next step (all-knowing (*sarva-jna*)), or seeing the next step’. It is the Lord who revolves in every heart and effects changes from step to step. For all creation, the poet (*kavi*) is the motivator, the prime basis. He is the poet; His poem is all this.”

Arjuna again inquired, “Lord, secondly, you said that He is ancient (*purana*); what is the significance of that?”

Krishna replied, “Of course, the Lord is the most ancient, but He is as modern as He is ancient. He is eternal (*sanathana*), primeval, beyond the beginning. He is also new every moment. *Purana* means formerly new, new every minute of the past, and the present.”

“What about the word ‘master (*anusaasitha*)’?”

“Independent, unchecked, master. He lays down the conduct of all. The five elements execute His orders. They cannot overstep the limits laid down by Him. His laws also govern the inner world of all beings as no human law can. He operates in the regions of the mind.”

“The fourth expression you used was that He is subtler than the subtle.

“Subtle? Perhaps, you thought that subtle indicates a diminutive microscopic body! No, no. The expression ‘subtler than the subtle’ means devoid of qualities (*nir-guna*); something that you cannot fathom with the help of the eye, the ear, and the rest of the senses. A thing becomes subtler with the reduction of its characteristic; if it has more it is less subtle.

“Sound, touch, sight, taste, smell —these are the characteristics of the five elements, which are ether, air, fire, water, and earth. The earth element has all five characteristics; water has only four; fire, three (sound, touch, sight); air, two (sound and touch); ether, only one (sound). That is to say, each of these is subtler than the rest and ether is the subtlest of all.

“This is self-evident. Earth is just stationary; water is subtler, so it flows. Fire is subtler than water, so it rises up. Air, which is even more subtle, can travel on all sides. Ether has just one characteristic, sound; it has no touch, form, taste, or scent. The Lord, who is beyond these five elements, has none of these characteristics, so He is subtler than the subtlest. He is all-pervasive, immanent in all. It is the characteristic that makes a thing heavy. The Lord has no such burden; so He is subtler than everything else.

“Next, about the fifth expression: the basis of all (*sarva-adhara*). There are two categories: the basis (*adhara*) and the based (*adheya*), the container and the thing contained. The based is all that is seen by the eye or heard by the ear —why, the entire creation is composed of the five elements. Well, all five elements are also the based, since they are based on the basis, *Brahman*. *Brahman* is the only basis; It is not based on another entity, for there is no second. Therefore, He is the Basis of all.

“The sixth too, I shall make clear to you. The sixth is an unpicturable form, a form that cannot be delineated or imagined. For He is beyond the reach of the mind, and it is the mind that pictures, delineates, or imagines. So, His form is incapable of being imagined by the mind. You might hesitate to accept this. The mind is matter; it is inert; it is fleeting. But *Brahman*, or the highest *Atma*, is pure ‘consciousness’; *Brahman* is eternal, everlasting, imperishable. *Brahman* and mind are at opposite poles; the fleeting and the fixed are totally unrelated. One dies and the other remains. The inert and the active are unrelated.

“The question may arise: what then should spiritual aspirants do? Oh, they are not deprived of hope. Let them picture the highest *Atma* as unpicturable, that is enough. Dwell on such thoughts as this and the fruit will be vouchsafed unto you. Aspirants must first learn the channels along which the thoughts should run.”

At this, Arjuna pleaded with Krishna thus: “Lord, let us proceed; time is running fast. We cannot be stationary in this battlefield without assuming responsibility or making a decision. War is facing us with open jaws, ready to swallow and overwhelm. I am ready to obey the instruction you may be pleased to give me; only, let there be no delay. Hence, quickly enlighten me about the seventh attribute of ‘with quality, without form (*sa-guna nir-aakara*)’.”

“Yes; the seventh is ‘with the splendour of the sun as His complexion’. This means, ‘He is self-effulgent as the sun; He is independent; He is the source of the light He shines with.’ He is the effulgence of the sun; He makes the sun shine. So, He is named ‘Sun (*Aditya*)’.

“I shall tell you about the eighth too, straight-away: ‘beyond darkness (*thamasah parasthaath*)’. He is the witness of darkness or ignorance. For *para* means ‘beyond’, one unaffected, and no darkness is as dark as igno-

rance; it is so deep and so dangerous. Delusion (*maya*) is another word for this ignorance, so ‘beyond darkness’, means ‘beyond delusion’.

“Arjuna! Just close your eyes for a moment; what do you experience? Complete darkness, right? How did you know that it is dark? You cannot see darkness; then how did you announce that there was darkness there? Two entities are there: darkness and the one who sees the darkness, right? If you are yourself darkness, how can you see the darkness? No; you are the seer, so you are not darkness. Darkness is that which is seen; the seer is you; you are the witness.

“Now consider another fact. People very often condemn themselves as ignoramuses, but if they really were ignoramuses or fools, how could they recognize their own ignorance? From where did people get that knowledge? When did that wisdom enter? And how?

“Ignorance (*a-jnana*) is the ‘seen’; inner wisdom (*jnana*) is the ‘seer’. You are the vision (*dhrik*) that sees the object (*drisya*) or ignorance. In the same way, all the eight descriptions above have to be contemplated upon. That is the correct meditation of the form of the Lord.”

Arjuna asked, “Krishna! Is such meditation enough by itself, or has it to be supplemented?”

“Of course, when this meditation is practised, care should be taken to see that the mind is concentrated on that thing only. It should not pursue diverse objectives. It must attach itself to that One Supreme, with love and devotion. Usually, a person’s love gets fastened on trifling temporary things and thus gets entangled in setbacks and sorrows. So the love has to be withdrawn from such objects and centred on the Lord.

“I shall tell you briefly what devotion consists of, listen! Devotion is the complete identification of one’s mental activities with those of the ideal on which the attachment is centred.”

Here, Arjuna intercepted and asked, “How is that ever possible, oh Lord?”

“It is possible, Arjuna. Control the senses, let the mind be effaced as much as possible, let the heart be purified, let the vital airs be uplifted into the highest region of the head, let the individual be established in the *Atmic* truth, and let *Om* be the only point of attention at the moment the breath leaves the body. One who does this comes to Me and joins with Me; their mental activities become the same as Mine,” said Krishna.

Here, readers should fix their attention on what the Lord told Arjuna. The Lord spoke of control of the senses, not their destruction. Control means: under one’s behest, obedient to the will. Destruction means: denial of activity, full inaction. The Lord also said this of all the senses, not just one or two. People must keep all senses under control and use them only when the purposes for which they have been devised are to be fulfilled. They should not be let loose, just because one has them. Give them the functions they are designed for, but do not allow them to master you and ruin you. Let them work strictly on regulated lines. That is the Lord’s intention.

There is another thing. You must yourself reason out and discover what exactly will expand your heart and what will breed disquiet; then, hold fast to the former and give up the latter. Or else, straying in devious paths like an insane ape, you will have to twist and turn in confusion. What is the cause of all the troubles and discontent to which many are subjected nowadays? It is the improper use they make of the senses.

You should decide and carefully watch out for who the proper people are to enter through each door of your home. Those who must enter by one door should not use some other door; if they do, then that house will have only discontent, confusion, disorder. It is wiser to take precautions against such disorder before entrance is ef-

fect than deal with the intruders after they have come in, through the wrong door. You may excuse the trespass, for the first time; but certainly, you must take enough care to see that it is not repeated. That is the better method, although not the best.

Again, Arjuna felt a doubt arising in him, and he wondered how, if the senses are bound, Om could be pronounced. Krishna understood this. He took up the matter Himself. “Arjuna! *Om* has to be pronounced in the mind, not through the mouth as a sensory organ!”

Next, Arjuna raised another question to relieve himself of another doubt. “You said, ‘he who does repetition of the name has no sin (*japatho naasthi pathakam*)’, but if repetition cures one from sin, what happens to liberation? Evidently, repetition is powerless to bring that about; repetition will not enable one to concretize the Lord.”

The Lord was happy when Arjuna mentioned this doubt. “Partha! Your question is important, but let Me tell you: liberation need not be sought after, separately, apart from other objectives. If *Om* is recited and the significance of the *Om*, that is to say, the Lord, is meditated upon, then the Lord is attained by you, in other words, you are liberated.”

Arjuna insisted on his point. He asked, “Lord! Can repetition bring about both results? Of course, it is easy for You to declare so, but trouble starts when we follow the path of repetition and meditation.”

Krishna replied, “It is just for this purpose that I mentioned at the very start about the value of systematic spiritual practice. Practice, steady practice, will ensure you both results —liberation and freedom from sin. Probably, you do not realize the importance of practice. Oh foolish Arjuna! Do you not see here how practice makes an animal execute difficult tasks? Look at these horses yoked to your chariot, these elephants ranged on the field; they render assistance in battle that even one with the superior equipment of reason cannot give! Consider how this was made possible. Where have elephants dwelling in the forest observed the tactics of battle? Or do you hold that fighting on the battlefield is their nature? No, their present skill is proof of the value of practice.

“Similarly, practise withdrawal of the mind from the senses, steadily; then it will develop skills that will release you from bondage. Let Me tell you, those who repeat the sacred *Om* with their last breath do attain the Lord.” Krishna said this with emphasis.

Arjuna made bold to put another query. “Lord! It is good that those who repeat *Om* with their last breath attain the Lord. But what about those who do not? Their number is certainly much larger. Have they no chance of release? In the court of the Almighty, are only some to be honoured with seats? Have the miserable and the poor no accommodation at all? Tell me where they go, where they will be admitted.”

“Arjuna! You are falling into a great error. Beware. The Lord does not discriminate between the weak and the strong or the high and the low. Such an attitude will never warp His vision. All are entitled to His grace; all are entitled to enter His reception Hall. Its doors are ever open. No guards are there to bar the entrance of anyone. No one is prevented; no one is invited. All are welcome to enter. What can anyone do if some do not approach the door? Those who desire warmth have to go near enough to the fireside and sit there. Those who stand afar can know only the light that emerges from that fireside. What do you say of the person who, standing afar, declares that the fire has no warmth? He certainly is not sane.

“All who yearn for the Presence, all who desire to enter the court of the Lord and who strive in their mind constantly for the fruition of that desire, all have admission and accommodation there. Not everyone can repeat

Om at the last moment; that is why constant remembrance of the Lord is said to have the power of inducing the Lord to bear the burden of your happiness here and hereafter. Of course, this has to be practised long. Spiritual discipline gains everything —strong and steady spiritual discipline.”

Chapter XVII

Remembering God at death; 2 types of liberation; 4 roads to moksha; auspicious times to pass away.

☪☪ Whoever is busy with no other thoughts than those about Me, whoever is ever remembering Me, that person certainly will release their dying breath through the centre of the head; that person will attain Me. I am as near to people as they are to Me. My dear Arjuna! How can I forget the one who never forgets Me? Forgetting is a human frailty, not a characteristic of God, let Me tell you! There is no need for *yoga* or spiritual exercise or even wisdom. It does not matter whether you give these up because you are too weak or whether, in spite of having the strength, you do not feel like struggling to master these. I don't ask for *yoga* or spiritual exercise; I ask only that your mind be fixed on Me. Devote your mind to Me, dedicate it to Me, that is all I ask for.

“If a spiritual aspirant cannot do at least this act of dedication to the Lord, I wonder what their spiritual discipline is capable of! If you plead that you don't have the strength of mind, I ask where the strength comes from to dedicate yourself as you do now to hollow ideals, the vain fantasies of family, fortune, and fame. Can't you direct this strength for that supreme dedication? People easily offer their all to poisonous objective pleasures, but they squirm and protest as if a mountain is tumbling on them when the call is made to dedicate their thoughts, feelings, and acts to the Almighty!

“In their eyes, salvation is as cheap and easy to attain as greens in the vegetable market! They seek to escape from bondage as easily as that. They do not yearn much, but they desire to earn much in the spiritual field! They are sunk more in dullness (*thamas*) than in spiritual penance (*tapas*). But they wish for the fruits that only spiritual penance can offer.

“Those prompted by genuine desire for the fruit must overcome all obstacles and temptations, doubts and disappointments, and dwell on the thought of the Lord. Then, the Lord will not keep apart; He will confer on that aspirant the status of sameness, described as ‘I am divine, You are I, We are one (*aham Brahmasmi*)’. And, the aspirant will be contemplating this unity without a break.”

Then Arjuna asked, “You say that this thinking only of the Supreme Spirit, this one-pointed devotion, is quite easy and that there is no need to take any greater trouble. You also declare that, for those who have acquired it, You are readily attainable. Well, what exactly is the benefit of attaining you?”

Krishna smiled at this and replied, “Arjuna! What greater benefit is there than that? That holy victory makes a mortal a great soul (*mahatma*). You may still pose the question: Of what benefit is it to become a great soul? Listen. The great soul is far superior to the ordinary person. The latter is established in the body and the soul (*jiva*); the latter identifies with the body and with breath, with the particular, ‘the wave’. So, the ordinary person is tossed about by joy and grief and rises or falls with each experience. Between snatches of calm and storm, the ordinary person reels under many a blow.

“The great soul is free from all dual experience, is above and beyond. The great soul has released itself from identity with the particularized and is in the Universal, the Eternal, the Changeless, absorbed in *Brahman*, not the body. The great soul knows that the *Atma* is not a limited entity and feels that it extends beyond all limits. The great soul is free from the blemish of dullness (*thamas*) and passion (*rajas*) and is neither dull nor driven about

by desire; the great soul's pure consciousness is unaffected by attachment or hate. Many who style themselves as such, nowadays, have no purity in their hearts; their consciousness is soiled by foulness. But the pure in heart have no further birth and death. They are under no obligation to appear again on earth. Without attaining that purity, you cannot escape the round of birth and death, however many your meritorious deeds, however high your spiritual status, however glorious the heaven you have secured! Only those who are perpetually absorbed in *Brahman* can attain this timeless Me and be freed from the chain by merging in Me."

At this, Arjuna gave expression to another doubt that worried him. He asked, "If that is so, why do the *Upanishads* declare that those who reach heaven need not be born again? Please clarify exactly who is freed from this cycle of birth and death."

"Arjuna! Two types of liberation are mentioned in the *Upanishads*: liberation on the spot (*sadyomukthi*) and liberation by stages (*krama-mukthi*). Liberation on the spot is also referred to as absolute unity with the Supreme Spirit (*kaivalya-mukthi*). For earning this, no one need aspire to any heaven. They get this on the spot and not by stages, step by step. Liberation secured thus is a possession forever. Only those who attain absolute liberation (*kaivalya*) merge and become one with the Eternal, the Universal.

"The other kind of liberation is liable to change. When the effect of the acquired merit wears out, heaven has to be given up, and life on earth starts anew. Such souls know no merging."

"That is to say," intercepted Arjuna, "the souls that attain absolute unity, liberation, are destroyed, right? Or is there any difference between merging (*laya*) and destruction (*naasa*)?"

"No, Partha! Merging is not destruction. Merging happens when it becomes invisible."

"That is what happens when a thing is destroyed; it becomes invisible, we cannot see it any more."

"But just because a thing is out of sight, how can you pronounce it 'destroyed'? No. A lump of sugar or salt disappears when placed in water. You see it no more, but can you say it has been destroyed? Or, do you say it has merged? It is there, the taste declares it. It has lost the form, but it is present as its quality (*guna*). The soul also merges like this in *Brahman*. It is not destroyed at all. When the soul is not merged like this, it can at best only wander between heaven and earth, deserving life in heaven for some time and descending again to earth for further effort toward salvation."

Arjuna, still afflicted with doubt, asked, "Krishna! you say that no heaven, even the highest region of *Brahman*, can save people from the cycle of birth and death. Then what is the royal road to salvation? Do you mean to say that those who strive for those heavens have to satisfy themselves with just that and no more?"

Krishna answered, "Partha! There is a State that knows no decline, beyond all these heavens. There are many roads by which that State can be won. Unaware of these roads or of the joy of that State, people are taking to others that are either crooked or comfortable. They don't know how to distinguish between the right road and the wrong.

"I may tell you that four roads are now used by mankind: (1) beyond or unaffected by action (*karma-atheetha*); (2) action without any desire for the fruit thereof, unaffected by any craving for the result therefrom (*nish-kama-karma*); (3) action with ambition to reap and enjoy its fruit (*sakama-karma*); and (4) action that knows no restraint or control (*karma-brashta*).

"Those beyond action (*karma*) are liberated while alive (are *jivan-mukthas*), all their actions have been

burned up by the fire of wisdom; their impulses for action have been scorched by the wisdom they have gained. They have no further need for injunctions and prohibitions. They need no spiritual exercise like charity, virtuous living, or austerity. All that they do or feel or think will be divine, holy, virtuous, beneficial to mankind. The very earth they tread on is sacrosanct; every word they utter will be the word of God; on death, their breath need not take them to realms that are heavenly; on the falling away of the bodily raiment, they merge without delay in *Brahman*. Such are the souls who were described by Me now as having absolute liberation, attainment of *Brahman*, or instant liberation.

“Next, the second group, who do action without desire for the fruit. These are the seekers of liberation (*mumukshus*), alert on the path of liberation and intent on attaining it. They perform each act as a step in the realization of the Lord. So they can never do anything bad; they do not look forward to the result; they leave it to the Lord to give it or withhold it. They are not prompted by worldly motives or even by the desire to gain heavenly pleasure. Their aim is just this: liberation from the bondage of the objective world. They win the grace of the Lord in proportion to the steadiness of their faith and practice.

“The third group performs all acts through the desire for the fruit thereof. Since they have an eye on the successful earning of the fruit, they will engage themselves only in acts that are approved by the scriptures; they will not do any sinful or prohibited act. They will equate each act with the merit it will confer, the happiness it will ensure, the heaven it will win. Such people, when they depart from this world, will enter the supra-mundane worlds, for which they have sought and worked; and, having stayed there as long as their merit entitles them, they have to return to earth.

“The fourth group is not guided by any rule of conduct. They have no norms, no discrimination between virtue and vice, right and wrong, proper and improper. They have no horror of hell, no conception of heaven, no dread of the devil, no reverence for God, no respect for the scriptures, no vision of *dharma*! They are best pictured as beasts in human form. The majority of humans are members of this unfortunate group. They strive for momentary pleasure, short-lived happiness, temporary joy, and evanescent comfort. To call them apes with human physique would be a big mistake, for the ape only jumps from branch to branch or from tree to tree. It releases itself from one branch or tree before landing on another. People are more like caterpillars, which move from leaf to leaf, fixing their foreparts on a new leaf, before releasing their hind parts from the leaf on which they were resting until then.

“That is to say, by their acts in this life, people decide on their next birth, where and how it will be, even before leaving this world. The new place is ready for them; their foreparts are already there. It is only after settling this that they relieve themselves of the hold on this world! Such people move round in the wheel of birth and death.

“To be born and to die, one must have auspicious moments that will guarantee a wise life and a worthwhile end, Arjuna! *Yogis*, for example, give up life only at auspicious moments, not at other times. That is why people say, ‘death is the witness for the good.’ An auspicious moment is to be chosen even for the act of death.”

Arjuna asked, “Krishna! Tell me when the body has to be yielded to death in order to escape the cycle of birth and death; tell me also the period of time to avoid.”

Krishna replied, “Partha! your question is very timely and urgent. Sometimes, you make Me marvel at your intelligence and make Me very happy. At other times, you make Me laugh at your ignorance. Your egotism and

sense of attachment cause this confusion. Let that pass. Let us come to your question.

“The *yogis* who practise action without desire for the fruit pass away in splendour (*tejas*) during the day, while there is light, in the bright half of the month and in the six-month period of the northward path of the sun (*uttarayana*). They have fire as their first state. Hence, their path is known as the path of the gods or, since fire is known also as *archi* in the *Vedas*, as the path beginning with fire or the Sun’s rays (*archi-radi-marga*). Such *yogis* emerge from effulgence (*prakasa*) and, traveling through effulgence, merge in effulgence itself. They attain *Brahman* and are not born again.

“The *yogis* who practise action with an eye on the fruit pass away in smoke (*dhuma*) at night, during the dark half of the month, during the six months of the southward path of the sun (*dakshina-ayana*). They go along the path beginning with smoke (*dhuma-adi-marga*), reach heaven, and there enjoy the pleasures they have yearned and worked for. When the stock of merit is exhausted, they get born again.

“Both these categories are called *yogis*; they will exist as long as aspirants and active progressive individuals exist in the world.

“Here, a doubt may reasonably arise: Why is the bright half of the month auspicious while the dark half is not? What, again, happens to those who die when it is neither bright nor dark, neither day nor night? This is a legitimate doubt, and everyone has a right to know the answer.

“Now, you must first understand what is meant by the bright fortnight (*sukla-paksha*). It is the half-month when the light of the moon increases day by day. But what is the relationship of the light of the moon to a person and their death? The moon is the symbol of the mind of people. ‘Out of the mind was the moon born (*chandra-maa-manaso jaathah*).’ Therefore, the bright half of the moon signifies the progress of the mind spiritually, in divine discipline, and the full-moon signifies the fullness of that achievement. Thus, the bright half is the period when spiritual progress is attained. For the body, the visible moon; for the mind, the symbolic moon-deity presiding over the mind! The increasing splendour of the mind due to the increasing realization of one’s own divinity is what is meant by the word ‘bright half (*sukla-paksha*)’.

“And what of the six months during which the sun travels north (*uttarayana*)? Be free from doubt on that score, too. Worship offered knowing the meaning of every rite and spiritual disciplines practised knowing the implications of every step—these cleanse the heart more effectively and loosen the chains of doubt.

“The time of the northward path of the sun is the period when no dot of cloud or whiff of fog contaminates the vast dome and the sun shines in all His glory. This is the gross meaning, but there is a subtle one, too. The heart is the inner sky. There, the sun that shines is intelligence (*buddhi*). When the clouds of ignorance, the fog of egotism, and the smoke of attachment hover in that inner sky, the sun of intelligence is hidden and things look murky and are mistaken. The time of the northward movement of the sun of the heart is when the inner sky is clear of all these and when the sun shines in full splendour. You must have heard the expression ‘the sun of wisdom (*jnana-bhaskara*)’. The sun is always associated with wisdom and intelligence. When people pass away with this equipment of the effulgent sun of wisdom in their clear heart, they can certainly escape re-birth! They take the path of fire (*archi-radi-marga*), as said already, and merge in *Brahman*!

“Those who pass away in the other half of the year, during the southward path of the sun, have the opposite destiny; then the heart is beset with smoke and fog and cloud. The sun is hidden, and His effulgence has no splendour. And, in the dark half of the month, the moon wanes, symbolizing the waning of Godward thoughts.

The newmoon night is enveloped in complete darkness, and all spiritual impulses suffer defeat. The thick smoke of ignorance lies heavily on the mind. This is the meaning of the expression ‘dark half (*krishna-paksha*)’. Those who die at such an inauspicious time reap an inauspicious result.”

Chapter XVIII

The period of the sun's northward path; the meaning of wisdom; the discipline of complete detachment; the sacred verse "... I shall bear the burden of your welfare"; the pundit who didn't know the meaning of this verse.

☞ Since the six months of the sun's northern path (*uttarayana*) is lit by the holy splendour of wisdom, it is praised as the white (*sukla*) path. The six months of the southern path of the sun (*dakshina-ayana*) is dark, filled with dullness (*thamas*) and ignorance; so it is called the dark (*krishna*) path. Those who discard the body and journey on during the northern journey of the sun move along the bright path and reach the stage of liberation, which is devoid of delusion, which is the seat and source of the bliss that is *Brahman*, from which there is no return to this world of name and form, this arena of embodied beings. Those who leave the body during the time of the southern path of the sun and move along the dark path have to bear again this physical encasement called body, subject to birth and death.

"The six months of the sun's northward path is not so much a period of time but a state of mind. Those who discard the body with the glory of self-knowledge move along the northern path of the sun, and those who die in ignorance of their *Atmic* reality move along the path of the fathers or dark path.

"The quality of purity (*sathwa-guna*) is pure and effulgent, while the quality of dullness (*thamoguna*) is dark, so they are distinguished by the opposite colours of white and black. Again, there are two nerves (*naadis*), *ida* and *pingala* by name, subtle nerves; *ida* to the left and *pingala* to the right of the carotic vein. The current flowing through the left nostril (*ida-naadi-marga*) is the lunar path and the current flowing through the right nostril (*pingala-naadi-marga*) is the solar path. *Yogis* proceed along the solar and the others along the lunar path. This is another of the unobserved mysteries.

"The end of everything that is born is death; union (*sam-yoga*) leads to separation (*vi-yoga*); construction must result in the destruction of that which is constructed. It is the law of nature that birth ends in death and death leads to birth. The stage that knows no coming and going is the stage when the Universal *Brahman* is visualized, for since *Brahman* is all-pervasive, where is the other place from which the 'coming' can be effected and to which the 'going' can be performed?

"There is no need to doubt whether such a stage is within the reach of all, whether all can achieve this victory. Nor is any special effort, peculiar good fortune, or specially designed act necessary. It is enough if the mind is always fixed on the highest *Atma (Paramatma)*, if the Lord is meditated upon without break. That will cleanse the mind, and the delusion that clogs it will disappear. This by itself comprises liberation (*moksha*), for what is *moksha* but *moha-kshaya* (destruction of delusion)? A person who has achieved this destruction of delusion will attain the stage of *Brahman*, howsoever death comes. Such a person is called a 'spiritually wise one (*jnani*)'."

At this, Arjuna put in a query. He said, "Krishna! I do not quite understand the meaning of what you call spiritual wisdom (*jnana*). Is it knowledge learned through the ear from the teacher? Or knowledge culled from the scriptures? Or knowledge imparted by those rich in actual experience? Which among these liberates one from bondage?"

Krishna replied: "The types of knowledge you mentioned now are all useful at some stage or other of one's

spiritual development, but by none of them can you escape the cycle of birth and death! The knowledge that releases you is known as self-experience, the knowledge that you yourself experience; that alone can help you to be free. The teacher can be of some help in the process but cannot show you your real Self. You have to visualize it yourself. Besides, you have to be free from vices like envy. Only then can you be called a complete wise person, one who has attained full wisdom. Only the one who has faith in this wisdom, who is devoted to acquiring it, and who is full of yearning to earn it can realize Me.

“One must be free from envy; besides, one must be earnest and steeped in faith (*sraddha*). Earnestness is essential for the performance of even the smallest act. Not humans alone, but bird and beast, worm and virus—all have to be earnest to succeed. When you have no earnestness or faith in the act, you cannot gather the fruit.

“Arjuna! I am the Witness. Through Me, this creation, this conglomeration of the five elements called the world, all these movable and immovable objects, are formed. Through Me as the cause, the world behaves in various ways. Fools who cannot understand Me as the highest Principle and as the Master of all the elements, whose will they have to obey, take Me to be just a man. Some great people reverently meditate on Me as *Brahman*; others worship Me under various names and in various forms; some others worship Me through sacrifice involving knowledge and self-sacrifice.

“Whatever the name, whatever the form of worship, I am the recipient; for I am the goal of all. I am the only One; there is no other. I Myself become the worshipped, through My many names and forms. Not only this; I am the fruit of all actions, the bestower of the fruit, the basis, the prompter, the promoter of all. Why recount and repeat? I am the force behind birth, existence, and death of everything and of every life. I am the birthless, deathless cause.

“Realize Me, the primal Cause; that is indeed liberation (*moksha*). He is liberated in this life (*jivan-muktha*) who attains that liberation. Therefore, Arjuna, if one yearns to become liberated while alive, to attain liberation, one must accomplish some simple disciplines. That is to say, one has to eradicate fully the attachment to the body.”

Hearing this, Arjuna intercepted. “Krishna! Do you speak of this spiritual discipline of complete detachment as a simple discipline? Is it so easy to practise? Even accomplished ascetics find it difficult, and you recommend it so glibly to people like me! You speak of it as if it were a very simple task, but it is a formidable endeavour. I feel you are putting me on trial with such suggestions. Can I ever attain that state? Can I win liberation, can I attain *moksha*? I have no hope,” he said, and sat dispirited.

Krishna was watching him steadily losing courage. He went close to him and patted his back in a reassuring manner. He said, “Arjuna! There is no need to get perturbed and desperate just for this. No, no one gets faith as soon as one hears of it. One must delve into it with the help of reason; then it will be found that this discipline is not as hard as it is imagined to be. To become completely detached, it is not necessary to grow matted hair, wear ochre robes, and torture the body into skin and bone. It is enough if you do all acts as dedicated to the Lord, without any desire. This is the secret of liberation.

“Performing all activities in this manner is not difficult. One need only have steady faith and earnestness. Of course, these are essential for every type of activity, so you can realize that they are indispensable for spiritual activity too.

“Whoever among devotees dedicates all acts to Me with no other thought, whoever meditates on Me, serves Me, worships Me, remembers Me—know that I am always with them, ever providing for them in this world and

the next. I bear the burden of their welfare (*yoga-kshema*). Do you hear Me?” asked Krishna, patting Arjuna again on the back and imparting courage to his drooping heart.

This statement about the Lord guaranteeing the welfare of the devotee has given rise to a great deal of misunderstanding. Even pundits, not to speak of others, have failed to grasp its real import. The commentators on the *Gita* propagate this declaration in manifold ways.

This most sacred sentence is to the *Gita* as the navel is to body. The navel of Vishnu was the place where Brahma took birth; this verse is the navel or place of nativity for those who thirst for the wisdom of Brahma. If this verse is followed in practice, the entire *Gita* can be understood.

There are a number of interesting stories about this verse 22 of Chapter 9. I shall give one example. A learned pundit was once giving discourses on the *Gita* in the august presence of a king. One day, the turn of this verse came:

For those devotees who worship Me alone,
Meditating on Me with no other thought,
Who are ever steadfast,
I carry the burden of their welfare.

Ananyaa-chinthayantho maam

Ye janaah paryupaasathe

Theshaam nithyaabhiyukthaanaam

Yogakshemam vahaamyaham

The pundit was enthusiastically explaining the many-sided implications of this verse, but the king shook his head and said: “This meaning is not correct.” He continued to dispute the correctness of every one of the explanations the pundit gave. The poor pundit had won meritorious distinctions at the court of many a king and was honoured by all of them with pompous titles. He felt stabbed when the king, in the presence of the entire band of courtiers, condemned his explanation of this verse as “wrong”. He smarted under the insult. Plucking up courage, he again set upon his task and, collecting all his scholarship, plunged into an eloquent discourse on the multiple meaning of the words *yoga* and welfare (*kshema*). The king did not approve of even this; he ordered: “Find out the meaning of this verse and, having understood it well, come to me again tomorrow.” With this, the king rose from his throne and went into the inner apartments.

The pundit lost even the few grains of courage left in him. He was weighed down by anxiety. He tottered under the insult, reached home, and, placing the copy of the *Gita* aside, fell on the cot.

Surprised at this, the pundit’s wife said, “Why did you come home from the palace today in such grief? What happened?” She rained one anxious question after another, so that the pundit was obliged to describe to her all that had happened, the insults heaped on his head, the command with which the king sent him home, etc. The wife listened calmly and, after pondering deeply over the incident, said, “Yes, it is true. What the king said is right. The explanation you gave for that verse is not the correct one. How could the king approve it? The fault is yours.”

At this, the pundit rose from the cot in anger, like a cobra whose tail is trodden hard. “What do you know, you silly woman? Am I inferior in intelligence to you? Do you, who are engaged in the kitchen all the time, cooking and serving, claim to know more than I? Shut your mouth and leave my presence,” he roared.

But the lady stood her ground and replied, “Lord! Why do you fly into such a rage at a statement of mere truth? Repeat the verse once again for yourself and ponder its meaning. You will then arrive at the right answer yourself.” Thus, by her soft words, the wife brought light into her husband’s mind.

The pundit started analyzing the meaning of each individual word of the verse. “For those devotees who worship Me alone (*Ananyaah chinthayantho maam*)”, he began, deliberately and slowly, repeating aloud the various meanings. His wife intervened and said, “What benefit is it to learn and expound the meanings of the words? Tell me what your intention was when you approached the king. What was the purpose?”

At this, the pundit got wild. “Don’t I run this family, this home? How do I meet the cost of food and drink, of clothes and things, for you and all the rest? It is for the sake of these that I went to him, of course; or else, what business have I with him?” he shouted.

The wife replied. “If you had only understood what Lord Krishna declared in this verse, the urge to go to this king would not have arisen! If He is worshipped without any other thought, if one but surrenders to Him, if at all times the mind is fixed on him, then the Lord has declared in this verse that He would provide everything for the devotee. You have not done these three; you approach the king believing that he would provide everything! That is where you have gone against the meaning of this verse. That is why he did not accept your explanation.”

Hearing this, the scholar sat awhile, ruminating on her remarks. He realized his fault. The next day, he did not proceed to the palace; instead, he immersed himself in the worship of Krishna at home. When the king asked why the pundit had not appeared, courtiers said that he was staying at home. The king sent a messenger, but the pundit declined to come. He said, “There is no need for me to go to anyone; my Krishna will provide me with everything; He will bear my welfare Himself. I suffered insult because I did not realize this for so long, being blinded by eagerness to know the manifold meanings of mere words. If I surrender to Him and ceaselessly engage in worshipping Him, He will provide me with all I need.”

When the messenger took this message to the palace, the king proceeded on foot to the dwelling of the pundit. He fell at the feet of the pundit, saying “I thank you sincerely for explaining to me this day, out of your own experience, the meaning of the verse that you expounded yesterday.” Thus, the king taught the pundit that any propagation of spiritual matters that does not come out of the crucible of experience is mere glitter and show. Have you grasped the point?

Even today, many learned people who go about discoursing on the *Gita* and doing propaganda for it do not observe its principles in practice. They are engaged in simply expounding to the world the valueless rind, the textual meaning, the sense of the words, and nothing more. Trying to spread the *Gita* without actually practising it is tantamount to ruining the cause and insulting the sacred book.

They extol the *Gita* as the very breath of their life, as the crown of all scriptures, as having emanated from the lips of the Lord Himself. They show so much reverence for the book that their eyes overflow with tears at the very mention of its name; they place it on their heads; they press it on their eyes; they keep it in their shrines and worship it with great bursts of demonstrative devotion. But all the respect, all the worship is only for the paper, the book!

If indeed they had reverence for the words of the Lord, the contents of the book, they would have striven to put them into practice, right? But they do not strive, they have no iota of experience. If they had the experience, none of them would barter the spread of that experience for money. They would yearn only for Grace.

Today, not even one in a million among the *Gita* preachers (those talking about their mission of spreading the *Gita*) has the yearning for the grace of the Lord. No; if they had that yearning, they would have no thought of income or money.

Chapter XIX

Misinterpretations of the *Gita*; the verse “I shall bear the burden of your welfare”.

Speakers who are out to spread the *Gita* have multiplied nowadays and, as a consequence, a variety of interpretations, most of them far removed from the genuine one, have emanated, clouding the true significance of the genuine one. Interpretations follow the nature and character of the exponent. Once one forms an opinion, one tries to buttress it with appropriate arguments and prove others wrong. The opinion is then repeated parrot-like on every occasion; no attempt is made to practise the *Gita* and make it part of one’s actual life. Such people pretend to be great *Gita* preachers and go about heavy with the burden of credentials and titles. They ruin themselves by this deception and undermine the trust placed on the *Gita*.

Each word of God is for translation into actual life, not for scattering into the ears of people to reap fame. But the times have gone so awry that today the words are misused for acquiring publicity and praise! Those who listen to the expositions of these preachers are also neglecting to question the bona fides; they do not care to examine whether the people who extol the *Gita* to the skies have tasted the sweetness of its teachings. Words and deeds are far apart; the teachers exhort others, but those who are exhorted find that the teachers themselves don’t follow the lesson! No, not even one in a million.

Some boast that they have the entire *Gita* on the tip of their tongue, that they can roll out, on the spot, any verse from the *Gita* that you want to hear, given only the chapter and number. Or, they can quote chapter and number for any phrase or word you give. I am inclined to laugh when such scholarship is exhibited. Poor tongue, that it should carry so much on its tip, without any of it being absorbed in actual life! A gramophone record can repeat as well as they can, and with equal benefit to itself. Practicing one verse certainly yields more benefit than learning all the verses by rote and retaining them in memory. Arjuna proved every word of Krishna true, by practising it. His sincerity won him the grace of Krishna.

It is a pity that even extremely learned pundits at the present time are unaware of the thrill of putting into practice a single word of the *Gita*. What, then, are we to say of the unlearned, the ignorant? In short, even some very reputed exponents of the *Gita* are playing false to its teaching, acting contrary to the message. To the song of the Lord, each one adds a fancy note of their own to demonstrate their special twist in scholarship, or their favourite predilection. Let us consider one example of this type.

The tenth verse of Chapter 6 of the *Gita* declares that accepting help from others (*parigraha*) is a great sin. Now, those who accept the *Gita* as authority should act accordingly, avoiding help, right? *Parigraha* means “accepting” even for the upkeep of the body and the maintenance of *dharma*! These preachers, however, do accept 99 percent of them! The condemnation of accepting help applies to all forms; there are no modifying circumstances or exceptions. Yet, collections and contributions are asked for *parigraha* sacrifices, as an “offering” during waving of lights in a ritual worship, as expenses for the community of *parigraha* preachers, as gifts for the guru. Tickets are “sold” for lectures, just as for entertainment (like the drama and cinema). People who do this have no faith in the words of Krishna, for had they faith, they would not have behaved in such contrary ways. If they were convinced that it is wrong, they would not be tempted to act so. They explain the verse and feel that their duty is done; they do not feel the need to follow the advice. That is the spirit of the times, for this is the age of hypocrisy. People who watch this type of *Gita* preaching lose faith first in the preacher and, later, in the *Gita* itself. The pub-

licity dissolves into mere pomp and vanity.

The teachings of the *Gita* don't get the respect that the book gets. Thousands of people, when they see the sacred books —the *Gita*, *Ramayana*, *Bhagavatha*, *Bharatha*, etc.— bow their heads, press them to their eyes, place them on their heads, keep them on a special seat in the shrine, and reverentially place a few flowers on them. They sit with closed eyes and, with tear drops rolling down their cheeks, fall prostrate before the books and rise very much satisfied with themselves! All that reverence is for the stack of paper, not for the contents of the books, the subjects they deal with.

The head must carry not the weight of the paper but the message explained thereon. Attach value not to the book but to the subject; revere not the volume but the matter expounded therein. Install it not on the altar but in the heart. For it is only then that the authority of the *Gita* will be honoured steadily, at all times. The mind won't be cleansed of egotism or like evils by all this outward reverence, learning by rote, offering worship in shrine rooms, holding the head, pressing on the eyes, etc. Let the message enter the heart; put it into practice and taste the joy that comes from it. That's the way to honour the *Gita*.

The tastiest dish can never quell your hunger if you place it on your head or press it to your eye or fall prostrate before it. The *Gita* is on a par with this. The *Gita* is a tasty dish, full of the sweet ingredients of devotion, wisdom, action (*karma*), and detachment. Eat it; drink it. One mouthful is enough. The hungry one does not need all the grain that is harvested; a handful of rice suffices. The thirsty one need not drink the Godavari dry; a glass of water is enough.

He who has hunger for God need not consume the entire *Gita*; it can be quenched by practising even one verse. A box of matches has many sticks; if you want to light a fire, you need to strike only one; you can nurture the little flame into a huge fire, with care and diligence. The entire stock of sticks need not be struck. There are 700 sticks in the *Gita*; each one is a stick from which you can light the flame of wisdom (*jnana*). Strike one on the stone of experience; that is enough.

The *Gita* has to be used thus for self-realization; that is the holy task for which it is designed. It is a great wrong to misuse it. All attempts to use it for fame and fortune, for titles and display, are but symptoms of egotism; they are acts of sacrilege. The fragrance (*gandha*) must be extracted from this book (*grantha*); that is the test of scholarship. The fragrance is the essence of the book. Do not, on the other hand, transform the brain (*masthaka*) into a book (*pusthaka*).

See God in the stone; do not change God into a stone. That is the desirable vision. The stone must be visualized as divine, suffused with God, which it really is. This vision is the precious gift that God has given the people of this land. Pearls do not float on the waves of the ocean, so dive deep into the silent caverns at the bottom if you yearn for them. The people of this land have sought for God in this manner for ages.

The practice of *dharma* is the body; the realization of God is its heart. This is the truth that has urged the people here to march forward and save themselves. They are not slaves to outward polish, external embroidery, or material comfort. They search for the basic *Atma* with the inner eye and cultivate detachment. However, the people of India (Bharath), who have this grand nature, are attracted today by material progress and outward pomp! This tragedy is much to be regretted.

Those who go about expounding the *Gita* with the object of earning money are thereby keeping God afar. They may give various justifications for their behaviour, no doubt; but no one who has real faith in the *Gita* or

who is a real adherent of its teaching can accept their explanations.

The *Gita* is spoken in order to foster *dharma*, not valued possessions (*danam*); it serves to promote goodness, not “goodsness”. Collecting money in the name of a temple for Krishna or Rama, or for a temple for the *Gita*, is another means of reducing faith in God; building a house for the Lord who is immanent and all-pervading is absurd. The heart is the proper temple where Krishna or the *Gita* is to be installed. To put up an artificial structure, which is certain to be ravaged by time, for the eternal Absolute, the indestructible Godhead, is very improper. Of course, until a stage is reached, these may be necessary, but in that case it is wiser to make the best use of the ancient temples that already exist. Building new ones and ruining the old ones is as foolish as killing the cow and donating footwear made out of its hide! The welfare of the world can be promoted by renovating old temples, not by creating new ones. The installation of God in ancient days was done according to strict scriptural ritual, so the old temples are holier. The power radiated from them confers upon this land what little welfare it now enjoys.

The sages of the past suffered hardships, detached themselves from the world, and even disintegrated their physiques in the search for the secrets of individual salvation and social uplift. They have handed down certain codes of conduct and rules of living that are practicable and simple. Even these are now neglected or misunderstood; new codes and rules are imposed, so these precious ones have gone under.

When elders, gurus, and pundits accept and honour these new-fangled modes of behaviour, how can India continue to be the abode of righteousness (*dharma-kshetra*), the abode of *yoga* (*yoga-kshetra*), and the abode of surrender (*thyaga-kshetra*)? This downfall in ideals explains why the land that verily was a bestower of food (*anna-purna*), feeding all her children, has to wail today for food. The holy experience “I am Siva (*Sivoham*)” was resounding from every mountain valley, every cave, every temple, and every sacred river bank; but now the cry is “I am dead (*Savoham*)”!

The land has lost its ancient joy; it is infested with anxiety; it is the home of self-aggrandizement; it is pursuing empty pomp. To counteract these tendencies, the spread of spiritual knowledge by people who have actually experienced the joy of spiritual discipline and success in and through it has become very necessary. Everyone from the simple unlettered person to the realized sage (*paramahansa*) must recognize this need. All must cultivate faith in the *Gita* and take it as the authentic word of the Lord.

The Lord has given the assurance, “I shall bear the burden of your welfare, here and hereafter (*Yoga-kshemam vahaamyaham*)”. He has undertaken this task voluntarily. But for mortals and aspirants to benefit from this, they have to live as ordained; they have to adhere to the lines laid down. When they feel that they are not so helped, they have only to examine their own lives and discover how far they have kept up the commands of God regarding the regulation of life. They fail to examine this. They do not consider the past and future; they complain about the grief of the moment, not knowing that it is caused by neglect in the past and ignorance of the future. This is the root of their suffering.

While considering this assurance, the condition contained in the same verse, “For those devotees who worship Me alone (*Ananyaah chinthayanthah maam, ye janaah paryupaasathe*)”, has to be remembered. “I shall bear the burden of your welfare, here and hereafter” is the crown of this condition, the final fruit. The assurance is the head; but no head can function independently of limbs. Holding fast only to the head, apart from neck and shoulders and the rest of the body, is like putting faith in the key in one’s hand after the iron safe has been stolen! Of what use is the key after the treasure is burgled?

The conditions for the fulfilment of that assurance are: meditation on the Lord unhampered by any other thought (*an-anya-chintha*) and steady worship (*upasana*). If unbroken meditation is absent, when worship is not offered with unconditional surrender, what justification is there to complain that He is not bearing the burden?

You surrender to others; you praise and extol others; you are immersed in other thoughts. How then can He assume the burden? You serve others and press the Lord for reward! How can this be undivided loyalty (*an-anya-chintha*)? The servant of the king must serve the king wholeheartedly; if the servant serves the king and loves his family, it cannot be termed unswerving loyalty. Serve whom you love, love whom you serve. That is the secret of surrender (*saranagathi*).

Vyasa made a lovely garland, using the words of Krishna as flowers; of that garland, this verse is the crest. It is the central jewel of that garland of gems.

The words “*yoga*” and “*kshema*” used by the Lord here mean: acquisition of something desirable and preservation of what is thus acquired. The discipline by which you can preserve it is: exclusive meditation on the Lord (*an-anya-chintha*). That will cleanse the mind; it will make you a devotee. Devotees are recognized by these things: they talk of the Lord; they sing of the Lord; they see only the Lord; they work and spend their leisure with the Lord.

Such people have no need to perform rituals or other sacrifices; they need not busy themselves with meritorious acts of charity, or go from one holy place to another. Why should they be sad if they miss these things or complain that the Lord did not give them the chance or the wherewithal for these? He does not insist on these or crave these. Offer whatever arises in the mind, made pure by spiritual discipline; He gladly accepts all. You may engage yourselves in what are termed “good deeds”, but if the mind is unclean, if the vessel is not “tinned” with the thought of God, they are all polluted into poison. He is particular that the vessel be clean.

Note how the handful of parched rice that Kuchela offered the Lord with a pure mind pleased Him. Read the experiences of Vidura and Droupadi in the epics (*Puranas*). What did they offer the Lord? Vidura gave a cup of gruel; Droupadi had only a wee bit of leaf to offer. On the face of it, they are valueless, unable to fetch even half a penny as price. But consider how much the Lord gave in return! He does not calculate the value of things. He calculates the feeling that prompted the act. So purify the feeling in order to win His Grace.

Chapter XX

Krishna is the impartial witness; God is present in all, is all; Krishna gives Arjuna a vision of God; Arjuna asks whether worship of the form or formless is more pleasing to God.

The *Gita* clearly declares that only the heart-lotus that is free from impurities, that grows in the pellucid waters of the mind, is worthy to be offered to God. That is why Krishna told Arjuna, “My dear brother-in-law, whatever activity you are engaged in, whatever gift you give, whatever food you take, do it as a dedicated offering to Me. Do everything in the dedicatory spirit as a tribute to God, for only such acts reach Me. I have no special preference for any one Name; all Names are Mine. I know neither friend nor foe. I am the unaffected Witness. I reside with all who serve Me and derive joy from that service.”

This raised some doubts in Arjuna’s mind. He asked, “Krishna! You say that you do not make any distinction, that you have neither friend nor foe. Why then are some happy and others unhappy, some strong in body and mind and others weak and sickly, some poor and others rich? What is the reason behind all this? When you yourself are above any distinctions of such type, why can’t you keep all in the same condition? Observing facts as they are, it is difficult to believe that you look upon all without any partiality.”

Krishna laughed at this “doubt” that worried Arjuna! “I give expression only to truth. I do not ‘adjust’ My speech to your approval or disapproval; I am not elated when you approve or depressed when you disapprove. I am the same in all. But all are not the same in Me. You have observed that during the cold months villagers sit around a fire at night; but only those who sit near the fire get refreshed by the warmth. Those squatting far away have also to put up with the darkness. If people stay afar and complain that they don’t receive the warmth and that they have to suffer darkness, can you ascribe it to the partiality of fire? It is meaningless to argue from this that fire treats different people differently.

“The splendour of divine vision is akin to this. If you seek to earn it, you have to approach it and stay there. Everyone has equal right to do so and to feel the fire, so that it might illumine and warm even more. Fire is impartial; in deriving its benefit and in making it grow into greater and greater capacity, there are differences. I am splendour; I have no partiality at all. All have equal chance, opportunity, and authority to experience Me and derive bliss from Me. Distinctions and differences arise as a result of the faults of the spiritual aspirants. They are not blemishes in Me.”

Did you notice the loving words of Krishna? The shower of His Grace? How true His words are! Really, people do not understand the faults in themselves; they seek faults in others. If the Lord had faults, how could the world exist or survive? The Lord sees all as equal; His Heart embraces all in Love; that is why the world has at least this much peace and prosperity. The doctor may declare that the patient has no fever just to console the sick one, but the thermometer cannot lie. God knows and reacts to the inner feeling, not to appearance. He can never go wrong, nor can He be deceived. The world considers only the outward appearance; it is guided only by that. Wade in the river; only then can you know the depth of the water. Eat, if you must know the taste. When people pronounce judgement on the depth or the taste without wading or tasting, how can their declarations be taken as true?

If the Lord Himself was affected by partiality, how could He award the bliss of spiritual union to the cow-

herd maids of Brindavan? Would He have partaken of fruits partly eaten by Sabari? Could Janaka have become a knower of *Brahman (Brahma-jnani)*? Could Nandanar have achieved the grand vision of the Lord? Could Prahlada and Vibhishana have approached the Lord? Would Hanuman have been accepted as the messenger of Rama? Could Valmiki have written the great epic, the *Ramayana*? Do these indicate any partiality in the composition of the Lord? Or do they prove that He has no such trait? These are examples of the Lord's love, His uniform kindness to all.

The Lord has commanded, “Keep your mind steadily on Me, be devoted sincerely to Me, prostrate before Me, offering all your thoughts, words, and deeds to Me, Love Me steadfastly (*Manmanaa bhava, madbhaktho madyaajee, maam namaskuru*)”. With these words, he has indicated that what He desires most in you are a “pure mind” and “untarnished love”.

When immersed in human-ness (*manava-thathwa*), you cannot attain God-ness (*Madhava-thathwa*). You have to attain God-ness to get God-hood. To see darkness, you must have only darkness; to see light, you should have light. To understand intelligence, you have to be intelligent. If you are constantly active about human things, how can you realize the glory of divinity? To become divine, you have to dwell in the memory of the divine, act divinely, behave divinely. The state, the environment, and the feeling—all must be coordinated for that one purpose. Only then can the principle be grasped.

It is on the basis of this truth that Krishna continued thus: “Arjuna! Spiritually wise ones (*jnani*s) are superior even to the gods, who in turn are superior to people; but these wise ones are also unable to grasp the full import of God. How then can ordinary people like you ever understand it?”

At this sly dig, Arjuna bent his head in shame. He said, “Yes, I agree. Krishna, You are beyond the grasp of anyone, however intelligent one may be. You are of endless manifoldness. I am convinced. You are the Universal Absolute, I know. I believe that you created the entire universe and that you are fostering it and presiding over both the evolution and involution of the worlds, that you are the Master of creation, preservation, and destruction or merging (*srishti, sthithi, laya*). You have told Me this yourself. I am ever grateful for this, and I am happy that I was considered worthy.

“But how, in what forms, are You immanent in the universe that You brought into being? I long to hear it from You and make myself worthier to be alive,” said Arjuna. “And which among these various forms am I to meditate upon? Tell me, so that I can meditate likewise and save myself,” he pleaded.

“A pretty small question, that!” said Krishna, with a smile. “Perhaps you felt that you can easily understand the answer, if given! Right. Since the question has been put, I shall melt a little and give the answer. Listen carefully. I am the inner *Atma* in the lotus heart of each and every being. So, if you believe and direct your life on the basis of the belief that the inner *Atma* in every being is My highest *Atma (Paramatma)*, that is enough meditation for you. See that this belief is not shaken or overthrown; stick to it steadily, practise it, apply it in your thoughts, words, and deeds. Then the experience of One-ness, of your being Me and I being you, can be achieved.

“The five elements—earth, water, fire, wind, and sky—are also My forms. I am the activity in the sun, moon, and stars. When the great destruction comes, I am the force of destruction, and I am the force that constructs again. I am everything from the microscopic to the macroscopic; I am the past, present, and future. I am the three regions and the three characteristics (*gunas*) that have shaped people and nature. There is no object that is not I, no name that is not Mine. Blood taken from any part of the body is the same as from any other part; so

too, the Divine is everywhere the same.”

Then, Arjuna joined both his palms and with uplifted hands asked, “Krishna! The whole of creation is your form, isn’t it? Knowledge, wealth, power, strength, energy, splendour—all these are expressions of Your glory, aren’t they? Well, won’t You give me the sacred chance to fulfil my life’s desire to experience You as all this creation, as the form of creation Itself (*Viswa-rupa*)? I plead with you. I pray at Your Feet.”

Knowing the anguish of his heart, Krishna replied, “Arjuna! I shall certainly satisfy you. But your physical eyes cannot see that glory. The form of creation cannot be perceived by the limited vision, which sees and grasps only this nature. Therefore, I shall confer on you the supernatural eye. Now, see!” He said and manifested Himself before him as creation and more. What great mercy! What superb experience!

While at this point, there is one subtle detail that seekers have to note. The *Vedas*, scriptures, and epics, as well as many scholars and saints and others who have a right to speak about such matters, all describe God as present everywhere and as the inner reality in every being. On the basis of this, some people argue, “If he is so present everywhere and in everything, why is He not seen by everyone?” For all such, the reply is: how can the physical eye composed of the five elements see beyond the five?

Nothing can illumine an object that does not reflect light; but a flame illumines itself and sheds light all around. God is self-luminous; He illumines all. He is beyond nature, which is but a manifestation of His glory. So He can be seen only by the eye of wisdom, an eye that can be won only by His grace. Hence, worship of God is an essential part of spiritual discipline. He who fails in seeing himself can never succeed in seeing others, in seeing anything outside him. Engage yourself in spiritual discipline that will secure the grace of God; through that grace, the eye of spiritual wisdom (*jnana-nethra*) will be granted. He is easily reachable by the path of devotion.

While experiencing the vision of God in the universe and God as the universe, Arjuna was shedding tears of joy. “Oh, Almighty God! All the gods, Brahma the Creator, all the sages and saints, all the manifold beings and objects, movable and immovable: Oh, I see every one of these. I see all . . . Oh, from Your awe-inspiring face flames of splendour emerge and spread to farthest distances. How I wish I could know the meaning and purport of this formidable form!” Arjuna exclaimed.

“Did you see, Arjuna? Have you known by this that I am the Creator, Sustainer, and Destroyer of all activity and of all beings and objects? Have you realized that you cannot save anyone on this battlefield, nor can you kill anyone? You have no power to kill; nor have they the power to die by their own efforts. Living and dying are both directed by My Will. I bear the burden of the earth; I create the burden; I relieve it,” said Krishna, fondly patting Arjuna on the back and speaking softly to assuage his ecstatic excitement.

This incident is a fine example to illustrate how God is bound by sincerity of devotion and how He bends to console and encourage His devotees. Just imagine! How could this Arjuna, who was so hesitating and nervous until he got ocular demonstration like an ordinary mortal, face and conquer mighty heroes and masters of all arts like Bhishma, Drona, and Karna? They were conquered by His will.

Arjuna wiped the tears from his eyes and folded his hands in prayer. “Oh Lord, I see the form of creation (*Viswa-rupa*), which I had never before seen or heard about, or even conceived. I realize that it is a factual truth. Those terrific flames of splendour are scorching me, my body is sizzling under the impact of that glory. Present Yourself before me, once again, with the sweet smiling form of Yours; I can no longer bear this vision. Father! Resume Your form, I cannot continue to look upon this,” pleaded Arjuna.

His grace made Him agree. He said, “Arjuna! You have just seen this universeful form of Mine, a vision that no height of *Vedic* scholarship or ritual asceticism or austerity can ever hope to win. This is achieved only by devotees whose devotion does not admit of the least distraction. Such devotees see only the Lord; whatever they do, they do as worship to the Lord. They have no other form before their eyes, no other thought in their minds, no other act for their hands. At all times and places, they see only My Form, they utter only My name; they think only about Me; they feel only for Me or about Me; they are active only for My sake. It is such, Oh Arjuna, that attain this vision. I, too, ask for only this: devotion that does not admit of the least distraction.”

Arjuna asked with a smile and a little tremor of the lips, “Lord! I realize that You are pleased with undeviating single-pointed devotion. But are you pleased with contemplation of You-with-form (*sa-aakaara-upasana*) or You-without-form (*nir-aakaara-upasana*)? Which melts You more and contributes to success in getting Your blessings? Which is easier for the spiritual aspirant and more welcomed by You? Please tell me.”

Krishna was happy that this question was asked. He said, “Arjuna! I do not make any distinction between the two. I am pleased however I am worshipped, provided the mind is saturated with Me and there is steady faith in every act, word, and thought.”

Arjuna intercepted with the query, “Krishna! Are mere purity of heart and steady faith enough? Do not sex or status as fixed by caste or the stage of life form obstacles to success?”

Krishna chided Arjuna and replied, “I am surprised that you should ask such questions after going through all this experience. Don’t you realize that for those who have fixed their minds on God, who have reposed in Me, the personification of truth, eternal and pure, there will not be one iota of ‘false identification of the self with the body’. If they still have awareness of sex or caste or stage of life with all the attendant pride, humility, etc., it only reveals that they have not surrendered their minds to God. For those who have rid themselves of attachment to the body, there will not be the distraction of caste, status, etc.

“But the codes of moral conduct prescribed for those in the four stages of life (student, householder, recluse, monk) and the codes of moral conduct for the castes do not hinder in any way the discipline of fixing the mind on God or of purifying the mind of evil or worshipping the Lord through all one’s actions, words, and thoughts. The distinctions of sex or caste or status or stage of life affect only those who live in the awareness of the body as reality and who act as if the world is absolute and eternal.”

At this, Arjuna said, “Krishna! The contemplation of the formless characteristic-less (*nir-guna nir-aakaara*) is very difficult for those who identify the Self with the body, isn’t it? The worship of the formful aspect of God, which is within the reach of the ordinary people, can it yield purity of mind, purity of the inner instruments of consciousness? Please enlighten me.”

Chapter XXI

Liberation requires giving up attachment to the body; the path of devotion.

“Arjuna! People think that the worship of God with form and attributes is quite enough. This discipline will be of only some help; it will guide the person along the road only for a little while. For the Lord will not condescend to grant liberation for just this! He who aims at liberation must first give up attachment to the body. Without that, the *Atmic* stage cannot be attained. Identification with the body is the expression of ignorance. The *Atma* must be recognized as distinct from the objective world (*prakriti*).

“The craving for objective pleasure based on the unreal value attached to the world has to be removed by meditation and penance (*tapas*). When that craving is lost, the individual becomes like the dry nut inside the coconut shell, which becomes loose and unattached both to the shell and the fibre outside it; it does not germinate or sprout again; it will remain forever without being spoiled, the individual has no more birth and consequent death. That is to say, the individual will be liberated. Becoming like that dry nut inside the shell is the stage called liberation while alive (*jivan-mukthi*).

“The contemplation of the Godhead as ‘above and beyond all attributes’ is necessary for becoming liberated while alive. If that is difficult and beyond your capacity, you can do another thing. Dedicate to Me all worship, all adoration, all *Vedic* rituals and other vows and vigils, with all the fruits that may accrue. Take Me as the ultimate goal, as the final aim, which transforms all acts into worship; fix your mind on Me, meditate on Me; I shall then shower My grace and take you across the ocean of constant change (of *samsara*); I shall favour you with the goal you seek. Arjuna! It is not an easy task to fix your mind steadily on Me. Not everyone can succeed in this. However long the practice, it is hard to keep the mind on Me without deflecting it toward other things or ideas.

“Therefore, you might ask, ‘Have we no other means?’ My reply is this: yes, there is. Even those who are eager to engage themselves in acts that please Me can get established in the *Atmic* consciousness and gain liberation. By means of prayer, recitation of the name, adoration of the glory, worship, etc., the sins of the past can be destroyed, the inner consciousness purified of impulses and urges. Then the light of wisdom will dawn, leading to liberation from darkness.”

There is great need for readers to ponder this point, for it is through the weighing of pros and cons that valuable conclusions are reached. Consider, for example, the difference between *bhakthi* (devotion) as described in popular usage and *bhakthi* as declared by the Lord. Popularly, *bhakthi* is described as genuine devotion of the Lord. But it connotes much more than this.

Devotion to the Lord is only a form of discipline to reach the goal. Seekers should not stop with acquisition of devotion; they should pay attention not so much to the devotion or love that they have toward the Lord but to the love and grace that the Lord bestows on them! They must be always eager to find out which behaviour, what acts of will be most pleasing to the Lord, will fill the Lord with bliss (*ananda*). Inquire about that, yearn for that, carry out the things that will secure that objective, be engaged in acts conducive to gain it, that is real devotion (*bhakthi*).

But people generally do not follow this ideal of devotion, nor do they think about its implications. They pay attention only to the love that the devotee has to the Lord, and, in the process, they do not pay much attention

to the *dharma* and action that the Lord approves or appreciates! This is why Krishna says, “Action that pleases the Lord is superior to action that fulfils the yearnings of the devotee.” Whatever devotees do or think or plan or observe should draw down the grace of God. Devotees should not be subject to their own will; they should be in accordance with His will. Devotees must test every thought and feeling on the touchstone of the Lord’s declared preferences.

The *Gita* declares that, although one may have deep devotion to the Lord, one cannot be called a devotee if one lives without regard to the commands of the Lord, that is, to the *dharma* laid down in the scriptures (*sastras*), which embody His orders, revealed to saints and seers. It is in this sense that Krishna uses the phrase “one full of devotion (*bhakthi-maan*)”, when He declares in the *Gita*, “Those who are full of devotion are dear to me (*Bhakthimaan yah sah me priyah*)”.

Again, whatever the act, a devotee should not feel that it is, “my action”; Krishna says that it must be conceived as “action for the Lord, by the Lord”. Usually people feel that some acts are “theirs” and others are “the Lord’s”. This is not the mark of the true devotee. If all acts are felt as the Lord’s, they will not be tarnished by egotism or the taint of “mine”.

Devotion is to be identified as the discipline that removes egotism and the limitations of “I” and “mine”. That is why the devotee is defined by those who know as one who is “non-separate” from God. At all times and under all conditions, one’s acts and feelings must be God-centred. Instead, if you pray when overwhelmed by misery, worry, and loss, “Oh God! Save me, rescue me from these,” and when they pass, if once again you plunge into objective affairs enslaved by worldly aims, such conduct is reprehensible.

This is the teaching of the *Gita*. Don’t worship the Lord as an emergency measure. When the tongue is affected and does not relish food, people seek hot pickles; so too, when grief afflicts, people seek God! This kind of demonstrative devotion is rampant today, perhaps due to the influence of the fundamental hypocrisy of the age. Hollow devotion that seeks to exhibit the strength of one’s attachment to the Lord is unfortunately evident even among “great” spiritual aspirants and persons who have renounced “everything” for the sake of Him, whom they consider to be their “All”! For many, devotion is a veil that is worn when on pilgrimage, when approaching elders, or when visiting temples. Once back home, they discard the veil, and with it all ideas and feelings of reverence for the Lord.

These are but exhibitionist stunts. Devotion, however, has to be steady and full; it is the establishment of the mind in the Lord, under all situations, at all times. Many assert that all their acts are dedicated to God (*Deva*) but their attitude shows that they are dedicated only to the body (*deha*). Instead of dedicating their acts to God, they dedicate them to themselves, the bodies with which they ignorantly identify themselves. They assert, “This I offer to Krishna,” but really, it is an offering to their son. They declare “This is an offering to Rama,” but their urge reveals that it is an offering to their sense of attachment and passion (*raga*). How can these acts be dignified by the word dedication or offering?

Dedication inspires the body, mind, and speech. If what you speak is not approved by the mind, if what is felt in the mind is not whole-heartedly put into action, then it becomes sheer hypocrisy. Be convinced that the doer, the deed, and the doing are all He; be devoted to Him, rather than to riches, wife, and children.

Where your mind attaches itself, there your devotion also stays. Devotion is as pure as the waters of the Ganges (*Ganga*); action (*karma*) as the water of the Yamuna; and spiritual wisdom (*jnana*) as the Saraswathi, flowing

secretly and mysteriously underground and sanctifying itself by merging with the other two. It is the commingling of these three that is called *Triveni*. It means the disappearance of the mind, unison, the “becoming-one” of the three qualities (*gunas*); it brings about the destruction of ego.

However, many are ignorant of these basic facts. They dip in water twice a day, go through the morning, noon, and evening rituals, worship the household gods, draw lines of ash or sandal paste on their brows, arms, and chest, put dots of saffron on their faces, wear strings of beads and rosaries around their necks, and roam about from temple to temple or from one spiritual teacher to another. They circumambulate holy shrines. They attend many discourses, recitals of epics, and readings of scriptures. The best we can say about such people is that they are engaged in good activities; we cannot say they are devotees.

Devotion (*bhakti*) has no relationship with dress and speech. On the basis of mere raiment and religiosity of expression, we cannot call a person “a devotee of the Lord”. Devotion is a matter of the inner consciousness, of feeling rather than external behaviour or conduct. Where there is smoke, there is fire. But some types of fire do not emit smoke, although all smoke originates from fire. There is a possibility that acts will be done without feeling, but you cannot say that all feeling must be expressed through outer show. Even without pomp and outer show, it is possible to have sincere feeling. Pure feeling is the important thing. Mere pompous outer activity is positively harmful to the progress —if one aspires at all for progress!

The question that Arjuna asked drew these further answers: Of course, there are two different types of devotees, the votary of the formful (*sa-guna*) One and the votary of the Formless (*nir-guna*). Among the devotees, the distressed (*artha*), the poor (*artha-arthi*) and the inquirer (*jijnasu*) are all eager about the nameful and formful aspects of Godhead. Just as for every auspicious act the right foot is placed first, the right foot of devotion of the formless (*nir-guna-bhakti*) must be used for the attainment of liberation. That is the “all auspicious”. That is to say, the spiritual discipline of the formless Godhead alone gives illumination. Both aspects have value and are indispensable. How long can anyone have one foot inside and another outside? Even if that were possible, of what avail is it? So devotion of the form (*sa-guna-bhakti*) has to be adopted as a spiritual discipline and devotion of the formless is the goal to be reached.

Either you can see the whole universe as God (*viswa* as *Visweswara*) or you can see the universe and God as separate and distinct. But both are the same. You may see the cloth as yarn or you may see yarn and cloth as separate. But whether you realize it or not, yarn is cloth and cloth is yarn.

Seeing yarn and cloth as distinct is contemplation (*upasana*) of God with attributes (*sa-guna*). Seeing yarn as included in the cloth and the cloth as a collection of yarn, and the two as identical, is contemplation of the formless aspect.

Devotion is not something that can be imported from somewhere; it is not something that is supplied by someone. It does not grow from the ground or fall from the skies. It wells up from oneself; it is selfless attachment to the Lord. The attachment, the love inherent in humanity should not flow wildly in diverse channels; it should flow uninterruptedly in the direction of God; then it becomes devotion. This love is in every living being. Birds and beasts, insects and worms —all have love inspiring them, filling them, to the extent that is appropriate to each. In short, life is love; love is life.

Each member of each living species has many-sided love toward offspring, parents, comforts. Each guards its food and drink, its joys and plays. Each of these types of love or attachment has a distinct name suited to the

objects on which it is fixed. It is called affection when directed toward offspring; infatuation when directed toward people who are less fortunate; comradeship when flowing toward equals; attachment when extended to goods or places. It becomes fascination in some cases, friendship in others. When directed toward elders and teachers and parents, it becomes reverence, humility, etc.

But the word *bhakti* (devotion) is used only with reference to love as directed to the Lord. When this love is broken up into many streams flowing in many directions and toward many points, it causes only grief, for it gets fixed on mortal things of the moment.

Instead, allow the love to flow single-pointedly to the ocean of the Lord's grace; this is the spiritual discipline called devotion (*bhakti*). Why waste life in the salty marsh of change? Strive rather to reach the vast ocean of grace. There you realize yourself; you attain existence-knowledge-bliss (*satchidananda*). How holy is that consummation! How filled with bliss!

The cowherd maids strove and succeeded in this spiritual exercise. Every moment and under every condition, their every thought, word, and deed was dedicated to the lotus feet of Sri Krishna. That is why the cowherd maids are called *yogis*. When Lord Krishna Himself addresses them as *yogis*, you can gauge the height of spiritual discipline they had achieved.

Chapter XXII

The path of establishing mind and intelligence in Krishna; being free from hate, being full of love, and expressing love as service; discussions of creation, field, and knower of the field; balancing the three qualities inertia, passion, and purity.

Arjuna questioned further, on the basis of Krishna's answers. "You described the characteristics of the votary of the formful (*sa-guna*) aspect of Godhead. You said that people with such characteristics are *yogis*. I am indeed happy to know all this. But just as the votaries of the form have characteristics, the votaries of the attributeless (*nir-guna*) Godhead must also have characteristics by which they can be recognized, right? Please tell me about them; I would like to know."

At this, Nandakumara of lovely form replied, "Arjuna! The votaries of the characteristicless aspect must acquire full control of their senses. Next, they must be unaffected by circumstances. Third, they must be of service to others in distress. Such will be the nature of the worshippers of the Imperishable (*A-kshara*)."

Readers might therefore infer that the characteristics of the votaries of the formful and formless or imperishable aspects of Godhead are all identical. Arjuna was overjoyed at Krishna's reply and exclaimed, "Now, I have clearly understood this point. But I want you to tell me how I ought to proceed, how I must act to win the Lord's grace," and fell at the feet of Krishna.

Narayana lifted *nara* (man, Arjuna) and said this to him, "Arjuna! You don't need now to acquire the characteristics of either of these. They are not within easy reach. I shall tell you of a path that is easier than these two. That path will surely confer on you My grace.

"This is that path: Establish your mind and intelligence in Me. If you cannot accomplish this and find it difficult, give up your egotism and carry on activities that are moral and holy. If even this is too difficult, give up attachment to the fruits, the consequences of all your acts, and offer them as deeds for Krishna. Offering your acts to Me should not be a mere vocal exercise. Take care that you offer them by thought, word, and deed, as they say.

"Do you feel that even this is beyond you? Then you will be made aware of the aftermath." After saying this much, Krishna sat silent for a while.

Take note of this. The aspirant for grace must have before the mind the act and not its consequence, beneficial or otherwise. That is why Gopala said that wisdom (*jnana*) is superior to steady practice, meditation is superior to wisdom, and the giving up of attachment to the consequences of your acts is superior to meditation. Such non-attachment, Krishna said, will confer peace (*santhi*).

"Devotion and hate are as fire and water; they cannot dwell together. I love those who feel no difference between grief and joy, affection and dislike, good and bad. If hate, in whatever form, in howsoever slight a quantity, resides in the heart, that person cannot be a devotee. The devotee must be convinced that 'all this is God (*Vasudeva sarvam-idam*)'. That is to say, one's own *Atma* is everywhere in everything; this truth must be realized, acted upon, and experienced. Hating another is hating oneself; scorning another is but scorning oneself; finding fault with another is finding fault with oneself," Krishna continued.

Readers might be troubled by a doubt on this point. Can the mere absence of hatred or contempt of another endow one with the full consciousness of the truth of "all this is God"? No; the mere absence of hate, etc. can not

secure the “Dweller within” and the bliss of recognizing Him. That will not win the grace of the Lord.

The task of the farmer who cultivates the crop is a good example of this; if you pay attention to this, the truth will be known and doubts will vanish. Before sowing the seed on a plot of land, the farmer removes all the wild growth, the bush, the scrub, the other small growths. But that is not enough to bring the harvest home. The plot has to be ploughed and partitioned, watered, and made ready for the sowing; then the sprouts have to be fostered and guarded into maturity until the crop ripens and can be collected and garnered in the granary.

Similarly, the thorny bushes of affection, hate, envy, pride, etc. have to be uprooted from the region of the heart, and the field has to be ploughed by means of “good deeds”. Then the saplings of bliss (*ananda*) have to be planted therein; the growing crop has to be fostered attentively by discipline and faith; at last, as a result of all this effort, the harvest of bliss will fill one’s granary.

The mere removal of hate from the heart will not ensure bliss. Love too should be cultivated. That is to say, uproot hate and plant love. Hill and anthill, tree and twig, mud and mountain —what do these hate? They have no dislikes. But for that reason, do we ascribe devotion to them all? We do not, for that would be absurd. The devotee must first be free from hate and full of love. Besides, the love must express itself as service to the distressed and the grieving, declared Gopala.

Arjuna was listening to all this with great attention. Then he asked, “Krishna! Are these three enough? Or are there any more to be followed and practised? Please tell me.”

Krishna replied, “The mere planting of the saplings is not enough; the field has to be watered and manured. The removal of hate and the planting of love have achieved only the first stage. As soon as the sprouts have appeared, the two processes of not-mine and egolessness have to be followed. They are like watering and manuring. They are essential for the successful crop of bliss.

“That is to say, you will have to rid yourself of the feelings of ‘mine’ and ‘I’. They are not distinct; the first springs from the second, and both arise from ignorance of the fundamental truth. For, once rid of ignorance, the sense of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ will not give trouble; they have no place in you. Hence, it is laid down that the aspirant for devotion (*bhakti*) must always possess contentment. What does this mean? It implies contentment under all conditions, good health or illness, loss or profit, grief or joy. Whether one’s wish is fulfilled or not, the mind should not lose equanimity and poise.

“The mind loses balance if the slightest obstacle arises in the path it frames for itself. It is so fickle. Why, if the cup of coffee is not forthcoming in time, if you miss seeing two films in one week, if you could not squat before the radio both in the morning and in the evening for long hours —if many such trifles are denied or disturbed, you feel overshadowed by discontent. Contentment (*sam-thusti*) is the state of mind that is unaffected by the achievement or nonachievement of any wish, the happening or non-happening of any event; the mind must be undisturbed, without excitement or disappointment.”

Arjuna then asked, “Oh Lord, you often mention creation or nature (*prakriti*) and the Creator (*Purusha*). I am eager to know what exactly creation is, what its characteristics are, what exactly its nature is.”

Krishna replied in a simple, easily understandable manner. “Arjuna! Creation (*prakriti*) has another name too: field (*kshetra*). Creation means this created world (*prapancha*), this composite of the five elements. There are two entities in this created world or nature: one is inert matter (*jada*) and the other active, the consciousness

(*chaithanya*). That is to say, one is the seen and the other is the see-er; the knower is ‘ I ‘ (*aham*), the known is ‘this (*idam*)’.

Nature is the sum of attributes or characteristics. The qualities (*gunas*) delusion, grief, and joy (*thamas, rajas, sathwa*) are the attributes of nature. Nature is but the permutation and combination of these qualities. So also are the attributes of the doer and the enjoyer.”

Arjuna wished to continue his questions. So Krishna said, “My dear brother-in-law! You are eager to question again?”

Seizing the chance, Arjuna put in his query. “Krishna! You have explained the nature principle. Now, I wish very much to know what is meant by the Creator (*Purusha*). What are Its characteristics, what is Its nature?”

“Arjuna! Whether you call It the Creator (*Purusha*) or the knower of the truth of life (*kshetra-jna*) or that which is known (*jneya*), it is the same. *Purusha* is the soul (*jiva*) and *prakriti* is the body (*deha*). The embodied is the soul (*purusha*), the person who knows the body. The body has also a number of names, each having a significant meaning. It is the body (*sarira*) because it wastes away; the body (*deha*) because it is liable to be burned. The soul is that which activates the body and becomes aware of its limitations.”

Arjuna was pestered by doubt at this answer, so he started another series of questions. “Krishna, how did this wasting and destructible body come to be called the *kshetra*?” Arjuna was indeed a clever listener. Krishna answered him with a great deal of patience.

Krishna replied, “It is through this body that merit can be acquired by engaging in various beneficent activities. The body is the vehicle for earning spiritual wisdom (*jnana*) or the Universal Vision; the body leads you on to liberation itself. It is the repository of such great achievements, so it is called *kshetra*. *Kshetra* means an armour, for it protects and guards the soul (*jivi*) from harm.

“Another meaning for *kshetra* is ‘field’, a meaning that is full of significance. Whatever seeds are sown or saplings planted in the field, the harvest depends on their nature and quality. The body is the field, the soul is the protector of the field and the crop. Sowing the seeds of meritorious deeds, one reaps joy and happiness. Sowing the seeds of sin, one reaps the harvest of grief and worry. Sowing the seeds of wisdom, one garners the harvest of *moksha*, that is, liberation from the bondage of birth and death.

“Just as the farmer knows the nature and characteristics of the field, the protector of the field (*kshetra-jna*), the soul, must know the nature and qualities of the body. The only difference between the words *kshetra* and *kshetra-jna* is the syllable *jna*. It means *jnana*, the one who knows, the knower. So the one who knows the field or the body, its excellences and deficiencies, is the *kshetra-jna*. That which has no such knowledge, the inert material thing, that is the *kshetra*.”

“Krishna!”, Arjuna asked, “Of what benefit is it to know these two entities: body (*kshetra*) and knower of the body (*kshetra-jna*)?”

Krishna laughed. “What a foolish question to ask! By inquiring and knowing about the nature of the *kshetra*, one’s grief is destroyed. By knowing about the nature of the knower of the body (*kshetra-jna*), bliss (*ananda*) is acquired. This bliss is also designated as *moksha* or liberation.”

Krishna then relapsed into silence. But Arjuna, who is the representative of all mankind on the battlefield between the higher and the lower impulses, prodded Him further. “Krishna! Who experiences both the destruction

of grief and the attainment of bliss? Is it the soul or the body? Please elucidate.”

Krishna replied, “Arjuna! The body (*kshetra*) is associated with the attributes dullness (*thamas*), passion (*rajas*) and purity (*sathwa*). So the soul, when in contact with the body and when it identifies itself with the body, imagines that it is experiencing grief and joy, which are the consequences of those attributes. The soul or knower of the field has no real relationship with the attributes; the soul is just a witness. When iron is in contact with fire, it has the power of scalding; but it is not iron that scalds, it is the fire. Through contact with nature, soul appears as the doer and experiencer.

“Therefore, it is not proper to infer that the soul is having grief and joy simply because it occupies the body, which is the vehicle of the attributes (*gunas*). The earth sustains and helps the seed to grow into a tree or to decline. It is the attribute of the earth that causes these two. So also, the seed of the life principle grows and blossoms into the *Brahman* principle (the Supreme Being, *Brahma-thathwa*) in the body, which is the earth-principle. Just as manure and water are essential for the tree to bloom and bear fruit, truth (*sathya*), equanimity (*santhi*), tranquility (*sama*), and control of the outer senses (*dama*) are essential for the blossoming of the spirit into *Atmic* wisdom. The attributes of creation make it assume multifarious forms.

“Think of this one point, and the whole problem will become clear. People are happy at one time, miserable at another; they are afraid one moment and courageous at another. Why? Because they are shaped so by the attributes. Do you say no? Then how can you explain these changes? Only they can transform people from one phase to another like this.

“If the three attributes dullness, passion, and purity (*thamas, rajas, sathwa*) are equally balanced, then a person won't change. But this never happens; they are always out of balance. When one is dominant and the others are dormant, then creation makes the person assume many roles.

“The three attributes represent the three aspects of human nature. Passion (*rajoguna*) is the attachment that brings about desires and creates eagerness to enjoy the objective world that is ‘seen’; it breeds desire for physical and heavenly pleasure. Dullness (*thamoguna*) cannot grasp the reality; so it misunderstands easily and takes the false to be the true. It lands persons into negligence and error. It binds, instead of releasing. Purity (*sathwa-guna*) controls the cause of grief and sorrow; it encourages people to follow the path of real joy and happiness. Therefore, being single-pointed and unaffected by any of these three is the basis for purity and steadfastness.

“Have the glass chimney of the lamp clear, and its light will shine bright. Have a glass that is multi-coloured, and its light will be dimmed. On the other hand, if the lamp is kept inside a mud pot, the darkness will continue as it was.

“The lamp is the same but the container affects its expression. Purity is the lamp that shines clear through the white glass chimney. Passion is the many-coloured glass chimney, which makes the light dim and poor. Inertia is the mud pot inside which the lamp is totally ineffective.

“Purity (*sathwa-guna*) is self knowledge. Passion (*rajoguna*) is sullied to some extent, as smoke sullies the chimney and dims the light, and it also agitates the flame of the lamp so that it is not straight and steady. Inertia (*thamoguna*) is the suppression of the light or wisdom that is the very nature of people.”

Chapter XXIII

The three qualities inertia, passion, and purity; the 20 virtues essential for wisdom.

“The three qualities (*gunas*)—purity, passion, and dullness (*sathwa, rajas, thamas*)—undergo various permutations, combinations, and modifications and become manifested as all this creation, this universe (*prakriti*). Therefore, this creation is subject to change; it is not fixed. True. But the *Atma* is consciousness (*chaithanya*), which is sheer effulgence, so it is not subject to blemishes or modifications. The body is creation; the intellect (*buddhi*) and the mind (*manas*) are also creation; for this reason, they also differ according to the degree of excess or deficiency of one or other of the qualities.

“Purity (*sathwa-guna*) is steady, pure, unselfish, light, so those who have this characteristic will have no wish or want. They will be fit for knowledge of *Atma*. Those with passion (*rajoguna*) will be engaged in acts tarnished with a tinge of ego. They may have the urge to do service to others, but that urge will drive them on to win fame and take pride in their achievements. They will yearn for their own good, along with the good of others. Those who are endowed with dullness (*thamoguna*) are overcome by the darkness of ignorance, so they grope about, not knowing what is right and what is wrong.

“Any one of these three qualities makes one unfit for the realization of the highest reality, which liberates the individual and merges one in the Universal. Since the person is embedded in creation, the person fondly believes himself to be experiencing the qualities that form creation. But this is an illusion. To destroy this illusion, inquiry into the nature and characteristics of the field (*kshetra*) or creation (*prakriti*) has become necessary. For the beginner, the spiritual aspirant, inquiry into knowledge and the known are essential, but the wise one (*jnani*) has to pay more attention to these qualities. The Known is the Reality, the experience of the divine Basis of all.”

Arjuna listened attentively to all this, and at the end, he asked, “Oh Lord! What qualities should a wise one possess?”

Krishna replied, “Partha! One must have the twenty virtues in ample measure. You might ask what they are. I shall tell you about them; listen. But do not conclude that the goal can be reached when you have them all. The goal, Immortality, can be reached only by experiencing *Brahman*, since All this is indeed *Brahman* (*Sarvam Khalvidham Brahman*). When Knowledge is full, the Knower becomes the Known.

“For this consummation, one has to be purified by virtues. Then the Known can be experienced and Realization reached. Therefore, I shall first tell you about this. Virtue first, then victory. What a splendid path! To seek *Brahman* without first ensuring a moral and virtuous life is like desiring a flame without lamp or wick or oil! Acquire all these three, then you light it and get light. So it is with the light of Realization of *Brahman* or God (*Brahma-jnana*).

“There is one point here that aspirants have to note carefully. The lamp, the wick, and the oil must be proportionate. If the wick is too big or too small for the lamp, if the oil is too much or too little for the wick, if the lamp is too small or too huge for the oil or the wick, then the flame will not burn brightly and give light. Clear steady light can be secured only when all three are in proper proportion. The three qualities (*gunas*) must also be in equilibrium to yield the maximum result, liberation. The three qualities are bonds. People are bound by them, like a cow whose forelegs are tied together, whose hind legs are also bound and whose neck and horns are bound

by a third bond. The three-fold qualities are such three-fold bonds. How can the poor beast move freely when it is bound so? Purity (*sathwa-guna*) is a golden rope, passion (*rajoguna*) a copper rope, and dullness (*thamoguna*) an iron rope. All three bind effectively in spite of the difference in the cost of material. As bonds, all three are obstacles to freedom of movement.”

Arjuna asked, “Oh Lord! You said that twenty virtues are essential for becoming entitled to wisdom. What are they? Please describe them to me in some detail.”

“Arjuna! I am delighted at your earnestness,” said Krishna. “Listen.”

1. Humility. “The first virtue is humility, the absence of pride. As long as you have pride, you cannot earn wisdom. A person’s behaviour should be like the behaviour of water; whatever colour you pour into water, it absorbs it and never asserts its own colour. It is humble without conceit. But now the behaviour of people is quite contrary. When they do the smallest service or donate the slightest amount, they are anxious for people to know about it. For this, they go about prattling or arranging to get it published. The absence of such pride and ambition is what is recommended as humility.”

2. Absence of vanity. “The second is absence of vanity. This is a very great virtue in people. It means the absence of pretence, pompousness, boasting that one is great when one is not, claiming that one has power when one has nothing, that one has authority when one has no such title.”

Here, readers will note one point. The world today is full of this false pretence, this hypocrisy. Whichever field of activity you watch, whomever you observe, you discover this dire defect. The governments of nations are in the hands of people who are pretenders to power, authority, and capacity. Those with no knowledge claim to know everything. Those with no one even to help them at home claim that they have a huge following.

In every activity, this hypocrisy is the very first step. It ruins people in every field, like a pest that destroys the crop. If this hypocrisy is wiped away, the world will be saved from disaster. Pretence will make you lose this world and the next. It is harmful at all times and places. It does not suit ordinary people; how can it then be beneficial to the spiritual aspirant?

3. Nonviolence. “The third virtue is nonviolence (*ahimsa*). This also is an important virtue. Violence is not simply physical; it means even more: the mental pain that is inflicted, the anxiety and worry that are caused to others by your actions and words. If you desist from causing physical pain to others, you cannot claim to have nonviolence. Your activities must not cause pain and must be unselfish. Your thoughts, words, and deeds must all be free from any motive to cause such pain.”

4. Patience, fortitude. “The fourth is patience or fortitude (*kshama*, also called *sahana*). It means that you should consider as unreal the evil others do unto you, the loss you suffer through them, the hatred they evince toward you. Treat these as you treat a mirage. That is to say, you must develop that degree of patience or fortitude. It is not the helpless putting up with the evil that others do because you are powerless to retaliate. It is the expression of the peace that reigns in the heart, this outer behaviour.”

It is true that many people put up with the injury that others inflict because they lack physical, economic, or popular support; this suffering cannot be honoured as real fortitude.

5. Integrity. “Next, let us consider the fifth: straightforwardness, integrity, sincerity. It means the agreement of action, speech, and thought; this applies to secular and spiritual activity. This is a facet of the second virtue, ab-

sence of vanity.”

6. Reverential service rendered to the spiritual teacher. “The sixth is reverential service rendered to the spiritual teacher. This virtue will promote affection for the pupil, so one will benefit a great deal. But the guru who has no goal will only mislead the disciple into perdition. The guru must shower grace on the disciple as freely and as spontaneously as the mother cow feeds the young calf with milk. The teaching of the guru is the source and sustenance for attaining God and acquiring liberation.”

7. Cleanliness. “The seventh virtue is cleanliness (*soucham*) —not merely outer cleanliness but inner cleanliness. And what is inner cleanliness? The absence of affection and hatred, of desire and discontent, of lust and anger; and the presence of good, i.e. godly, qualities. Water cleans the body; truth cleans the mind. Knowledge cleans the reasoning faculty; penance and discipline cleans the individual.”

8. Steadfastness. “The eighth virtue is called steadfastness (*sthairyam*), fixity of faith, the absence of fickleness or waywardness. Aspirants must hold fast to what they have once fixed their faith upon as conducive to their spiritual progress. They should not flit from one ideal to another, changing their goal from day to day. This is also referred to as dedication. Fickleness, the product of weakness, has to be scrupulously avoided.”

9. Control of the senses. “The ninth is control of the senses. Be convinced that the senses have to subserve your best interests, not that you should subserve the interests of the senses. Do not be the slave of the senses; rather make them your slaves.”

10. Detachment. “Next, the tenth virtue: detachment or renunciation (*vairagya*) —the loss of appetite for sound, touch, form, taste, smell, etc. The senses run after these things because they titillate and give them temporary joy. However, the senses are not interested in the goals virtue-wealth-desire-liberation of the sublime type. The *Atma* can be discovered only through pursuit of the sublime.”

11. Absence of egotism. “The eleventh virtue is absence of egotism — the breeding ground of all vices and faults. The ego-centric individual pays no regard to right and wrong, good and bad, godly and wicked. That person doesn’t care for them, doesn’t even know about them. That person is completely ignorant of *dharma* and morals and will not conform to justice. To be devoid of this poisonous quality is to be endowed with absence of egotism. Egotism is a foe in the guise of a friend.”

12. Awareness of birth-death-senility-illness-grief. “The next virtue is called *janma-mrithyu-jaraa-vyadhi-dukha-dhosha-anudarsanam*, meaning only this: awareness of the inevitable cycle of birth and death, of senility and disease, of grief and evil, and of other signs of the temporariness of this created world and life in it. Although people see these things happening to them as well as others, they do not investigate the reasons for them and the methods of escaping from them. That is the greatest mystery, the wonder.

“If only you go to the root of the problem, you will realize that whatever else you may escape, you cannot escape death. What people conceive as happiness now is, in reality, only misery in the guise of happiness. So understand the truth of these things; reflect upon the flaws in the reasoning that delude you. Then, as a result, detachment is strengthened, and through that, you attain wisdom. Therefore, Oh Arjuna! liberate yourself from birth, death, senility, illness, and grief (*janma, mrithyu, jaraa, vyadhi, dukha*).” Thus spoke Krishna, exhorting Arjuna with a great deal of affection.

13. Detachment. Then He spoke of the withdrawal of desire from objects, the absence of yearning. The greed to

possess things that you see is caused by egotism. “I must have this”, “I must be the proud owner of this valuable thing”, this is how egotism prompts. It is a strong cord that binds you to objects. Withdraw the mind and treat all as manifestations of the Lord’s glory. Love all things as expressions of His glory, but do not delude yourself into the belief that possessing them will make you happy. That is an illusion. Do not dedicate your life for their sake; use them for your needs, as and when necessary, that is all. That kind of impulse activating you will be a great handicap in your progress toward liberation. Whatever you may acquire as property will have to be given up some day. On that last journey, you cannot take with you even a blade of grass or a pinch of dust. Keep this fact ever before the mind’s eye and then you can realize Reality.

14. Absence of clinging to family and home. Before birth, one has no relationship with this world and its material objects. After death, they and all kith and kin disappear. This sojourn is just a game played in the interval. Getting fascinated with this three-day fair is foolish indeed. Desire tarnishes the mind and makes people unfit for higher pursuits. Aspirants who seek liberation and realization must rid themselves of desire, for, like grease, once contacted it sticks and is difficult to remove.

15. Equanimity. After this, attention has to be paid also to another virtue, the state of equanimity, of undisturbed peace during joy and grief, prosperity and adversity, happiness and misery. This is the fifteenth virtue of a wise one (*jnani*). Being elevated or depressed by success and defeat, profit and loss, honour and dishonour is a futile activity. Accept all equally as the grace of God, His consecrated food (*prasadha*). Just as you wear shoes to tread over thorny places, or hold an umbrella to escape getting wet in rain, or sleep inside a mosquito curtain to escape the stings of insects, so too, arm yourself with an unshaken mind that is confident of the Lord’s grace and bear praise or blame, defeat or victory, pleasure or pain with equanimity. To live bravely through life, this equanimity is declared essential.

16. Devotion. Next is devotion without any other feeling or thought. When grief overtakes you, you run to God. When difficulty overpowers, you take refuge in the Lord of Venkata. When joy is restored, you throw Him overboard. When you are down with fever and your taste is ruined and your tongue is bitter, you crave for some hot pickle; but when the fever subsides and you are normal again, you do not relish the same pickle. Devotion is not a temporary salve. It is the unbroken contemplation of God without any other interposing thought or feeling.

Whatever the activity, recreation, or talk, it must be saturated with the Love of God. That is undivided, undistracted devotion.

17. Dwelling in solitude. Thereafter comes dwelling in solitude (*ekantha-vasam*). One must be fond of being alone. This does not mean keeping the body in some solitary place, far from the haunts of humanity. There must be solitude and silence in the mind; all its occupants must be forced or persuaded to quit. The mind should be contentless (*nir-vishaya*), turned away from the objective world.

18. Absence of interest in the company of others. The eighteenth virtue that helps to promote wisdom is mentioned as absence of interest in the company of people, that is to say, absence of the desire to mix with people engrossed in affairs that concern the objective world. One can attain equanimity even in the midst of wild animals, but it is difficult to win it while among worldly minded ones. Spiritual discipline will be affected by the company you keep. Good people keep you good; bad people drag you away into badness.

Of course, it is hard to find out who are good and who are bad and then settle among the good. So, it is advisable to avoid people and concentrate on spiritual discipline. The human mind is like iron; if it falls into mud,

it rusts and disintegrates; if it falls into fire, it loses dross and becomes pure. Therefore, joining the company of wise people is better than being in solitude. Note how Narada, who was the son of a housemaid, became a sage because he fell in the company of god people; Rathnakara, who was a cruel hunter, got the company of the seven sages, so he was transformed into the First Among Poets, the *adi-kavi*. Evil company is highly detrimental. A red-hot iron ball is capable of causing more damage than a flame of fire; a sinful one is more to be avoided than sin itself. Aspirants have to be vigilant about the company they keep.

19. Awareness of the distinction between *Atma* and non-*Atma*. The nineteenth virtue is “awareness of the distinction between *Atma* and non-*Atma*.” Fix your consciousness always on the *Atmic* Reality and discard the body and senses as unreal and impermanent. *Atma* is the Eternal, so establish yourself only in that and not in the transient non-*Atmic* illusions or objects. Life is a struggle to achieve victory over the illusion that haunts: I am the eternal *Atma* in you and in all. So fix the mind on Me and engage yourself in the struggle, confident of victory.

20. Vision of the true nature of That. The twentieth and last qualification one has to earn is “vision of the true nature of ‘That (*Thath*)’ (*Thathwa-jnana-darsanam*)”, the universal principle of which the particular is but a shadow. It means that the spiritual aspirant should have a keen desire to visualize the universal.

Of the above-mentioned twenty virtues, if honest efforts are made to earn even two or three, the rest will come naturally to the seeker. No special effort is needed to earn them. As progress is made on the path, one acquires not only the twenty, but even a larger number of virtues. The twenty are mentioned here because they are the outstanding ones, that is all. Spiritual discipline based on these virtues takes one easily to the goal. That is why Krishna emphasized these.

Equipped with these, one can realize the Self; there need be no doubt on that, for they lead to the knowledge that the body, the senses, the intelligence, the inner consciousness—all are affiliated with the worldly (*prakriti*) aspect. And one who is distinct from all this is the perfect person (*purusha*). The perfect person is the one who is aware of the body (*kshetra*), the knower of the body (*kshetra-jna*). When one is able to distinguish between the soul (*purusha*) and nature (*prakriti*) or, which is the same thing, between field and the knower of the body, one becomes the witness and is free from all touch of want or wish.

Chapter XXIV

The basis and the based; the subtlety of *Atma* –It is everywhere but nowhere visible;
the banyan tree.

The awareness of being only the witness of everything is the secret of self-realization. Self-realization is either the knowledge that “I am the truth of Me” or “I have known Myself” or “All are one *Atma*” or “I have experienced that the individual and the universal are not distinct”. This is what every person has to discover for themselves; mere asceticism without this is sheer waste of time and energy. People are not mere animals. They have the spark of the Divine in them, and they should not allow it to be quenched dead.

Why, even when the senses operate, they are prompted by the presence of *Atma*. When the sun rises, birds take wing, flowers bloom, the human community starts its varied activities. The sun does not directly engage in any of these; it is the prompter, that is all. The sun is not the cause; He is just the activator, the witness, the on-looker. He is above and beyond all this. He is not bound or based on man or beast or bird or flower.

Birds fly in the sky, but they do not leave any trace behind of their path of flight. So too, however many sensory impressions fly through the inner sky of the heart, no impression should be left thereon. The heart is not affected by their flying through.

But people see only the superstructure, not the basis. In the garland, no one observes the string that keeps the flowers together; the existence of the string can be known only by investigation and inquiry. The basis is the string; the flowers depend upon it and hang together as a garland on account of it.

To understand this better, take another example. Pots, pans, plates, and pails are all made of clay; but though there is clay in them, clay is only clay. It is not pot, pan, plate, or pail. So too, the *Atma*, which is the basis, has no characteristics (*gunas*) like pot, pan, plate or pail; but the *Atma* exists in the characteristics as the embodiment of the characteristics. The *Atma* is mistaken for the characteristics, because it is conceived as limited and as with name and form. The *Atma* is the only reality that persists through all names and forms, like the clay, which is the only substance in all the pots and pans. By this kind of inquiry, the conviction that the basis and the substance of everything is the *Atma* (*kshetra-jna*) or *Parabrahman*) gets strengthened.

Then Arjuna asked Krishna thus: “It is indeed very difficult to know that basic *Atma*, that inner reality of all things. He is everywhere but is nowhere visible! He is the inner core of all but cannot be contacted at all! What is the cause of this mystery?”

Krishna replied: “Arjuna! You have not understood yet. The *Atma* is subtler than the subtlest, so it is difficult to cognize it. You know the five elements, don’t you? Earth, water, fire, wind, and sky. Of these, each subsequent element is subtler than the previous one. Earth has five qualities: sound, touch, form, taste and smell. Water has all these, except smell; fire has only three, sound, touch and form. Wind has only two qualities, sound and touch; and the last one, sky, has only sound. That is why each of these is subtler than the previous one and also more widely spread. The sky is everywhere, penetrating in and through all, because it has only one characteristic. How much more subtle must be the *Atma*, which has no qualities or characteristics! Imagine how much more immanent and universal it must be! Those who are objective minded cannot grasp this phenomenon; only the subjective minded can have the solution.

“This faith can come only to those who can reason things out. It is a fatal thrust on those who bark, in and out of season, that God cannot be immanent in everything because He is not to be perceived at all. They do not believe that God is above and beyond the trivial qualities with which they seek to measure Him. It is a pity, indeed. They tend to be as low as their thoughts. That is the inexorable law. God is as near to you as you are to Him; if you keep afar, He also remains afar.”

There are some fine examples of this truth in epics (*Puranas*). Hiranyakasipu sought God in all things and came to the conclusion that He is nowhere. Prahlada, on the other hand, believed that He can be found wherever He is sought, so He appeared from out of the impenetrably hard iron pillar itself! Prahlada was close to God, so God was close to him.

The cow carries sacred sustaining milk in its own udder: but, unaware of this, it runs after the water in which rice has been washed! So too, people are unaware of Madhava (a name for God), who is in them as their own *Atma*, and make no effort to discover Him, who is their own reality. They run after the much inferior joy obtainable from the fleeting objects, through their defective and deceptive senses. What colossal ignorance!

To revel in multiplicity is ignorance; to visualize Unity is the sign of spiritual wisdom (*jnana*). “Only those who are dead to reality (the *savam*)” see this as “many”. Only the Divine (*Sivam*) sees the seemingly many as “One”. What is called “that which is known (*jneya*)”, *Atma*, the knower of the field (*kshetra-jna*), and the Universal Absolute (*Parabrahman*) is that “One” only. This was taught to Arjuna so that he might experience the bliss thereof.

Readers! Just as the rivers have the sea as their goal, souls (*jivas*) have *Brahman* as their goal. Permanent joy can never be received by the “conscious” soul from “material” objects. *Moksha* is the acquisition of permanent joy; it is also called the attainment of *Brahman*. Fixed, exclusive devotion to Godhead can come only to those who have no attachment to the wild phantasmagoria of name and form that is called the “world”. Only such devotion can win self-knowledge (*Atma-jnana*). The world is the instrument for the attainment of renunciation; that is why it is so tempting and so treacherous. He is the real knower of the *Vedas* who sees the world as an instrument for escape from its coils.

Usually, the word *oordhwa* is taken to mean “above”, “high”, etc. But if you consider the world to be a tree, then it has its roots in *Brahman*; that is, the roots are above and the branches are below! This was taught to Arjuna by Krishna thus: “The tree of life (*samsara*) is a very peculiar one. It is quite distinct from the trees of the world. The trees that you see in the world have their branches above and roots below. The tree of life (*ashvattha*), however, has roots above and branches below. It is a topsy-turvy tree.”

Arjuna intercepted with a question. “How did it get the name *ashvattha*? It means a banyan tree, doesn’t it? Why was the tree of life called so? Why wasn’t it called by some other name?”

A strange name for a strange tree! “Listen. *Ashvattha* means impermanent, transient; it also means the ‘banyan tree. Its flowers and fruits are good neither for smelling nor for eating. However, its leaves quiver ceaselessly in the wind, so it is also called ‘quivering leaves’. Worldly objects are also ever wavering, ever unsteady, ever changing positions. In order to make people understand this truth and strive to overcome it, it is called *ashvattha*.”

“This disquisition is to make one develop the higher vision and yearn for steady faith in *Brahman*. The objective world can be truly understood only by two types of examination: the outer and the inner. There is a reasoning that binds and a reasoning that liberates. He who sees the world as world sees wrong; he who sees it as the highest

Atma (*Paramatma*) sees right. The world is the effect; it has a cause; it cannot be different from the cause. It is just a mutation of *Brahman*, which constitutes it. The millions of beings are the branches, twigs and leaves; the seed is *Brahman*, in which all the tree is subsumed and summarized. He who knows this knows the *Vedas*.”

Chapter XXV

The world as a permutation and combination of the 5 elements; qualities of demonic and divine natures; the highest dharma.

“Krishna! You say that those who recognize the world as mere world cannot claim to know the *Vedas*; they must recognize it as God (*Paramatma*). The world is an effect, so it cannot be different from the Cause. How is this possible? The world that is seen by us is subject to growth and decay. God, on the other hand, is eternal, true, unaffected by change. There can be no affinity between water and fire, right? How can these two be one? Please tell me; I shall be most happy to hear you,” said Arjuna.

“Well, Arjuna! In the cognizable world, every single thing displays its characteristic (*guna*). The characteristic depends upon the owner, the possessor. There is a basis (*adhara*) for the characteristics possessed by every object and being in the world. That basis is the *Atma*. Fix your attention on the unchanging basis —not on the fluctuating manifestations. Otherwise, you flounder in the flux. Just as the seed is the basis for the trunk, boughs, branches, twigs, leaves, and flowers of a tree, the world (*prakriti, prapancha*) is the tree that emanates from the seed, *Atma*. The world is the permutation and combination of the five elements, which are latent in the basis, the *Atma*. Consider the *Atma*, the base, as essential, for it is as its manifestation that the world is expressed. He who has grasped this truth through steady discipline deserves the title ‘he who has mastered the *Vedas* (*veda-vid*)’.

“But without deep inquiry, without discriminating between the real and the unreal, if one just mistakes the seen to be the lasting and argues so, one is losing the way. How can such a one reach the goal? How can such a one attain the reality? The yearning to know this Reality comes of God-ward attributes. The demonic nature has the opposite tendency; it makes people argue that they have known when they have not, it keeps them away from all attempts to know, it induces them to establish untruth as truth.”

As soon as the Lord finished saying this, Arjuna raised his head in astonishment and said, “Gopala! You were declaring so far that the *Atma* is the basis for all characteristics and all beings. That is to say, You were declaring that You were that Basis. Meanwhile, you have started talking about two distinct natures, the Divine being and the demonic being! I am getting confused. I am at a loss to decide which to accept and which to reject.”

“Arjuna! Your question is even stranger. You say, I never speak a word that has no meaning or do a deed that has no significance. Yet you worry over the issue of which among my statements to accept and which to reject! This is senseless anxiety and hesitation. My dear brother-in-law, the gods (*devas*) and the demons (*asuras*) are not two separate distinct groups; they are so divided on the basis of the distinction in characteristics. Well, the characteristics (*gunas*) are artificial; they are not of the essence of consciousness of which I have already told you.

The potter makes pots, pans, and plates. These are not essentially ‘parts’ of the clay out of which they were shaped. The pot, pan, and plate are artificial forms of the clay. The names are also artificial; the names and forms are the characteristics. The substance or basis (*adhara*) is clay; the shapes-names-forms, the manifestation, the expressions are pots, pans, and plates. Clay is natural; pots, pans and plates are artificial. Take it that the clay, the basis, the innate, inborn (*sahaja*) is My real form (*swa-rupa*), reality. In the names-forms, the expressions and pots, etc. are not in Me; but I am in them. I have no characteristics (*gunas*), but I am in the characteristics, note this. Therefore, don’t try to keep clay and pots apart, as two distinct entities. That cannot be correct. It is also not possible.”

“Krishna! What is the relationship between your reality or truth (*swa-bhava*) and its embodiment (*swarupa*), the objective world (*prakriti*)?”

“I have told you already that the five elements, earth, water, fire, air and sky, are My embodiment (*swa-bhava*), My attributes. What is this objective world except the combination of the five elements? What else can you call it?”

“Krishna! Without the five elements, nothing can exist in this world, right? Then how can I deny them? Existence is bound with them.”

“When you accept the five elements, you have to agree to the five-fold proliferation of each element, making in all 25 principles (*thathwas*). Only four elements —earth, water, fire, and air— are evident and perceptible, but ether or sky is the basis for all. So too, the mind (*manas*), intellect (*buddhi*), memory consciousness (*chittha*), and ego (*ahamkara*) are all cognized by experience, but the soul (*anthah-karana*), which is their base, can only be inferred. All things of which we are aware are only manifestations of a Thing, of which we are unaware. They derive their strength and support from the Unseen. That Unseen Basis of which you are unaware is I Myself, the *Atma*. All are based on Me.

“That which is based is subject to change: growth, decline, and modification. But the base should not therefore be taken as subject to change. For example, consider the moon and its reflection in water. The image of the moon in the water is not steady; it shakes and quivers. It is the water that shakes and quivers, not the moon above. Ignorant people, who are like children, infer that the moon is itself shaking. The transference of the characteristics of the based (*adheya*) to the base (*adhara*) is the fundamental demonic (*asuric*) quality. The recognition of the eternity and truth of the base even in the based —that is the real, divine nature.”

Arjuna listened intently and with steady attention to all this. Then he queried, “Madhava! You said that it is the inherent quality of nature that distinguishes these two. Which qualities make for demonic and which for divine natures? Please clarify.”

Krishna replied: “Arjuna! I am ever willing to clarify; I need only listeners who are steady and intent. Hear this with unwavering attention:

- (1) fearlessness,
- (2) purity of emotions,
- (3) awareness of the unity of all creation,
- (4) charity,
- (5) control of the senses,
- (6) sacrifice,
- (7) study,
- (8) asceticism,
- (9) straightforwardness,
- (10) nonviolence,
- (11) integrity,
- (12) equanimity, absence of anger or resentment,
- (13) detachment,
- (14) inner peace,

- (15) refraining from scandal-mongering and talking ill of others,
- (16) sympathy,
- (17) absence of greed,
- (18) sweetness and softness of speech,
- (19) fear of non-*dharmic* acts,
- (20) absence of fluctuation in the mind,
- (21) courage during disaster; patience and fortitude,
- (22) steadiness,
- (23) cleanliness,
- (24) harmlessness, and
- (25) humility.

These twenty-five holy qualities are the traits of divine endowment.

“Pride, pomp, vanity, anger, harshness, and absence of discrimination are the components of the demonic endowment of mankind. People having these qualities are infused with the demonic character. Although for all outward appearance they may be humans, they do not deserve that name. Those who have the aforesaid divine qualities are known as having divine parts; those who have the demonic attributes are known as demonic humans.

“Some people esteem themselves as part divine, but do they have all the attributes that should characterize them, or do they have at least sympathy (*daya*), morality (*dharma*), service to others, and equanimity (*santham*)? If they have these at least in a small measure, they can be regarded as divine. Instead, if the full battery of demonic equipment is evident in them, how can their declaration be taken at its face value? It is sheer vanity to pretend so or to claim as such. Vanity and pomp can never be classed as divine; they are unquestionably demonic.

“Each one can easily analyze himself and decide to which class he belongs. The class is not decided by physical appearance, possessions, status, or authority. For example, consider Ravana. He had the human form, he was an emperor, he was greater than Kubera, the Lord of wealth; but can he be considered part divine for these reasons? No. He is declared a demon, on the basis of the qualities he had.

“Three qualities form the fundamental basis of all demonic (*asuric*) natures: lust, anger, and greed (*kama, krodha, lobha*). They destroy the self and foster the demon in humanity. They have to be overwhelmed and overcome by the divine qualities of detachment, equanimity, and renunciation (*vairagyam, santham, thyagam*). Rely on these warriors in this fight. Foster these warriors and they will, in a trice, wipe out the forces of demonic influence. Any trace of the foes (lust, anger, and greed) left unsuppressed anywhere is a potential danger, so they must be reduced to ashes. That leads to real success in the struggle for the goal.

“Desires and attachments are as roots to the tree of life. When the roots are cut asunder, the tree dies; the rate of decline depends upon the speed and effectiveness of the cutting asunder. It will keep sprouting even if a single root is intact. It will not go dry or die. Remove every single root; then the tree perishes and becomes deadwood. The boast of people that they have destroyed all roots is vain if the tree is green and growing! So too, the delusion (*maya*) that has possessed the individual (*jivi*) will perish in proportion to the uprooting of the desire that binds.

“Some engage themselves in meditation after reducing, to some extent only, a few urges and desires. They do not achieve full concentration. Nor are they tossed by uncontrolled agitations. They are caught in the intermediate level. What is the reason for this state of things? Full concentration can come only from full control of desire.

Hence, it is declared that lust, anger, and greed are demons that harass people, demons that assume fearful and ugly forms.

“But it is not a calamity to have ugly faces or frightful forms. At the worst, one may be called ‘repulsive’, that is all. It is the repulsive character, the ugly nature that marks the calamity. A person may be beautiful in appearance and have a parrot-like chatter that is sweet to the ear, but the person cannot be regarded as divinely endowed, born with divine parts for these reasons. If demonic nature simmers in them, physical beauty and sweetness of voice cannot entitle them to divinity. The words that emanate from them are vulgarized into hammer strokes and dagger thrusts! Thus, demonic attributes and the divine attributes are related to the qualities that compose the nature and behaviour of the individual, and not to the physical form and appearance.”

Chapter XXVI

Regulation of food and recreation; pure, passionate, and dull food; physical, mental, and vocal disciplines; pure, passionate, and dull charity and recreation.

“Krishna! You say that the divine (*daiva*) and demonic (*asuric*) natures of people are the consequences of acts and feelings that had impact on the individual in previous births. Since it is impossible to escape from such impacts, what is the fate of those who are condemned to carry this burden with them? Are there any means by which this can be avoided? Or can their consequences be mitigated? If such exist, please tell me those, for I could save myself thereby”. Arjuna asked thus in order to draw out from the Lord the remedy for all mankind.

Krishna answered immediately. “There is no paucity of means. Listen. There are three types of qualities (*gunas*): pure, passionate, and dull (*sathwic, rajasic, thamasic*). They are based on the inner consciousness (*anthah-karana*). That too depends on the intake of food. You are what you feed on, and your activities shape your nature. So at least in this birth, by regulating food and recreation, people can overcome the demonic tendencies that tend to prevail upon them. Through planned self-effort, they can promote tendencies toward purity.” This advice was tendered lovingly by the Lord to the eager inquirer, Arjuna.

Arjuna was thrilled with joy when he heard that people have the means of saving themselves, and he longed to be further informed. Krishna showered His grace through His enchanting smile and condescended to reply. “Arjuna! Food is the chief formative force. The soiled mind dulls the brilliance of moral excellence. How can a muddy lake reflect clearly? The Divine cannot be reflected in the wicked or vicious mind. Food makes people strong in body, and the body is intimately connected with the mind. Strength of mind depends upon strength of body too. Moral conduct, good habits, spiritual effort—all depend upon the quality of the food. Disease, mental weakness, spiritual slackness—all are produced by faulty food.”

“Krishna!” asked Arjuna, “Pray tell me the constituents of food that is pure, passionate, or dull (*sathwic, rajasic, or thamasic*).”

“Arjuna! To be pure, food should be capable of strengthening the mind as well as the body. It should not be too salty, too hot, too bitter, too sweet, or too sour. It should not be taken while steaming hot. Food that fans the flames of thirst should be avoided. The general principle is that there should be a limit, a restraint. Food cooked in water should not be used the next day, for it becomes harmful. Even fried articles should be consumed before they develop unpleasant odours.

“Passionate (*rajasic*) food is the opposite of the *sathwic*. It is too salty, too sweet, too hot, too sour, too odourous. Such food excites and intoxicates.”

“Lord, excuse me if I appear impertinent; I ask with a desire to know, that is all. By mere change in food habits, can character be changed from one quality to another? Or has something more to be done to supplement the purification process? Tell me if there is anything more.”

“My dear brother-in-law! If transformation of character were so easy, wickedness and vice, so characteristic of the demonic nature, could have been wiped off the surface of the earth in a trice. Of course, there are more things to be done. Listen. There are three ‘purities’ to be observed: purity of the provisions; purity of the vessels in which food is prepared, and purity of the people who serve the prepared food.

“It is not enough if the provisions are pure and of good quality. They should have been procured by fair means; no unfair, unjust, untrue earnings should be used for one’s maintenance. These are fouled at the very source. The source as well as the course and the goal must all be equally pure. The vessel must be clean, free from tarnish. The person who serves must not only be clean in dress but clean in habits, character, and conduct. The person should be free from hate, anger, worry, and indifference while serving the dishes; the person should be cheerful and fresh, humble and full of love. While attending those who are dining, the person should not allow the mind to dwell on wicked or vicious ideas. Mere physical cleanliness or charm is no compensation for evil thoughts and habits.

“The spiritual aspirant who has to secure concentration has to be careful about these restrictions. Otherwise, during meditation, the subtle influences of the wicked thoughts of the cook and the servers will haunt the aspirant. Care should be taken to have only virtuous individuals around. Outer charm, professional excellence, reduced wages—these should not be allowed to prejudice you in favour of dangerous cooks and attendants. Examine carefully their habits and their character. The food you eat is such an important constituent of the physical and mental stuff with which you have to struggle in the spiritual field. Purity of mind can be and has to be supplemented by purity of the body as well as purity in its important function, speech. That is the real penance (*tapas*), physical, mental, and vocal.

“The mind should be free from anxiety and worry, hate and fear, greed and pride. It should be saturated with love for all beings. It has to dwell in God. It has to be restrained from pursuing objective pleasures. No lower thought should be allowed to creep in; all thoughts must be directed toward the elevation of the individual to higher planes. This is the proper spiritual discipline (*tapas*) of the mind (*manas*).

“Now for the physical disciplines. Use the body and its strength and capabilities for the service of others, for worship of the Lord, for singing His Glory, for visiting places hallowed by His Name, for regulated exercises in breath control, for holding the senses away from deleterious paths, and for treading the path of God. Service of the sick and the distressed, observance of moral codes—such beneficial acts must make it sacrosanct.

“Vocal penance (*tapas*) also has to be engaged in. Avoid talking too much; desist from false statements; do not take delight in backbiting and scandal-mongering; never speak harshly; speak softly and sweetly, speak with the memory of Madhava ever in the background of the mind.

“Even if one of these three (the physical, mental, and vocal disciplines) is absent, the *Atmic* effulgence cannot radiate light. The lamp, the wick, and the oil are all essential for a light; the body is the lamp; the mind, the oil; the tongue, the wick. All three must be in good trim.

“Some pious people also consider acts of charity to be physical asceticism. It is good that they think so. But when doing charity, one has to do so after pondering over the place, the time, and the nature of the recipient. For example, charities for schools should be given at places where there are no schools until then; hospitals have to be established in areas where diseases are rampant; the hunger of people has to be appeased where famine conditions have been caused by floods or drought. The nature and condition of the recipient has to be considered while imparting teaching of *dharma* and spiritual attainment (*Brahma-vidya*) and while doing service of various kinds. The charitable act that removes from a person the deficiency that is most harmful to progress is called good (*sathwic*).”

“Krishna,” interrupted Arjuna. ‘May I ask a question? Charity, however done, is charity, isn’t it? Why do you

distinguish between pure, passionate, and dull (*sathwic*, *rajasic*, *thamasic*) charities? Are there any such?"

Krishna answered, "Of course there are. Among those who donate for charities, most are anxious to get name and fame; that is the motive for the act. They are after something in return for what they offer. Very few desire the grace of the Lord and nothing else. Gifts made with that one end in view, to receive the grace of the Lord, are good (*sathwic*). Gifts made expecting something in return, like fame and publicity, public esteem, and power, or gifts made in a huff or made reluctantly under pressure —these are to be classed as passionate (*rajasic*).

"Charity should be given with reverence and faith. It should not just be thrown at the face of the recipient. Nor should it be given to an undeserving person or at an inopportune moment. Food for the overfed is a burden, not a boon. Hospitals in places that are inaccessible are as good as charity thrown away. Such benefitless and wasteful charity is called dull or ignorant (*thamasic*).

"While engaged in charity (*danam*), one has to be very vigilant. Do not scatter it to whomsoever pleads for it; nor can you shower it on all kinds of places. Be careful that you remember the three types mentioned by Me and then do what seems most proper. The gift you make must not be for name or fame; it should have no motive of pomp or publicity; it should be purposeful and useful. In all acts, the pure (*sathwic*) attitude is best. This attitude must permeate all things seen, heard and spoken."

Arjuna, who was listening with head bent and with great concentration to all this, drinking in the sweetness of the Lord's countenance, asked Him thus, "What exactly is true listening and true seeing? Please tell me this in some detail. I can then follow the instructions." He prayed to Krishna in such a pleading tone that the Lord smiled kindly at him.

Krishna patted Arjuna on the back. He said, "Pure (*sathwic*) listening is listening to the stories, experiences, and messages of sages and saints who aspired after God and realized Him. Pure seeing is seeing the worshippers of the Lord, seeing the portraits of saints and sages, attending festivals in temples, etc. Passionate (*rajasic*) seeing is seeing scenes of luxury, pictures of sensuous joy, of pompous pageantry, of the exhibition of power and status and display of egoistic authority. Taking delight in the description of sensuous scenes and incidents, in the demonstration of power and authority, in the assertion of might and prowess —these are to be classified as passionate (*rajasic*) listening. Others take delight in listening to gruesome adventures, stories of wicked ogres and vicious deeds. Such are *thamasic* individuals. They admire cruelty and terrifying tactics and take pleasure in keeping such pictures before them. They worship demonic bloodthirsty Gods and revel in the lore of ghosts and evil forces."

Dear Readers! This is the heart of the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita*. The body and life in it are based on food (*anna*) and are sustained by food. So food decides the level of attainment, high or low. Nowadays, emphasis is being laid on discipline and regulated behaviour (*nishta*), without reference to food (*naashta*). However great and learned one may be, however much one pays attention to the teachings of the *Vedanta* and takes care to spread them, if one neglects the strict code laid down for the food that is the very basis of the body and its functions, one cannot succeed. The purity of the provisions, of the cook, and of those who serve what has been prepared have all to be attended to.

People feel content when their stomachs are filled, when hunger is appeased. The first temple they visit when dawn breaks is the restaurant where rice cakes (*idli*) and lentil soup (*sambar*) are offered to the *Atma-rama*! How can such gourmards get concentration? Purity in cooking, purity of provisions, and purity of service —how can these be guaranteed in restaurants? Who pays attention to these? Without doing this, people complain aloud that

they do not get success in concentration and suffer greater confusion! The effect will be secured only when the proper causes function well. When bitter things are cooked, how can the final dish be sweet?

Food (*ahara*) and recreation (*vihara*) are both very carefully regulated in the *Gita*, but little heed is paid to its teaching. Nor is it considered so essential. There are people everywhere who swear by the *Gita*, who expound it for hours together, and who preach about it, but very few put its teachings into practice. The verses fill their heads, but they are powerless to meet reverses with philosophical cheer.

Bliss and peace can be secured only when food and recreation are cleansed and purified. Darkness and light cannot co-exist; *kama* (desire) and Rama cannot be in the same place together; they are like fire and water. How can one escape an evil reaction if the *Gita* is held in one hand and hot tea or coffee or a lighted cigarette or a pinch of snuff is held in the other? Some even justify their unregulated lives by declaring that whatever is eaten, however eaten, wherever eaten, the stuff is rendered pure and acceptable on account of the raging fire of spiritual wisdom (*jnana*) that they have in them! How can a bitter fruit be transformed into a sweet one when it is dipped in a series of holy rivers? How can people who simply speak on the *Gita* get saturated with the sweetness of its message? What really happens is that those who listen to such hypocrisies lose even the little faith they have in our scriptures and become hardened disbelievers.

How can a person who feels helpless to restrict and regulate food habits be trusted to restrict and regulate the senses? If such people cannot limit and control their feeding, how can they limit and control the senses? Can the nose that falls down at a cough survive a sneeze? How can one who is too weak to climb stairs climb to heaven's heights? How can helpless victims of coffee or cigarettes or snuff muster the strength and courage to overcome the more powerful foes: anger, lust, and greed? When one can't renounce dirt, how can one renounce desire? Become master of the tongue, and then you can master sex. They are firmly interconnected, as close as the eye and the feet.

Chapter XXVII

Abandoning pride in the ego and in possessions (feelings of I and mine) and surrendering.

Just as the healthy glow of the body is hidden from sight by the clothes that cover it, so the individual soul obscured by egotism (*ahamkara*) is not able to reveal the splendour of the true knowledge of *Brahman* (*Brahmathathwa*), which is its treasured possession. For egotism is at the root of all evil, all defects, all deficiencies. It is born in desire (*kama*). Be free from egotism too.

The state of desirelessness is really the state of egolessness. And what is liberation (*moksha*) except liberation from bondage to the ego? You deserve liberation when you break away from the bond of desire.

People engage themselves, by and large, in activities prompted only by the desire to benefit from the results. They withdraw from acts that bring no benefit. But the *Gita* condemns both attitudes. For whether consequences follow or not, one cannot escape the obligation to be active. People cannot completely give up activity. How then can they avoid being caught up in the mesh of consequences? The *Gita* teaches giving up all attachment to the fruit of action as the greatest spiritual discipline designed for this purpose.

Whether desired or discarded, hoped for or not, every act ends in some consequence, if not immediately, at least after some time. It is inevitable. The consequence may be good or evil, but if the act is dedicated to the Lord, neither will affect the doer. By that sacrament of dedication, the deed is transmuted into a higher order and made divine, holy, sacred. On the other hand, acts performed under the inspiration of the ego will be fraught with bondage.

Those who are sincerely seeking to realize God have to become free from the taint of desire in order to achieve Him. Become devoid of mine-ness; then you attain *moksha*, salvation. That is the achievement of the goal of life. That stage knows no joy or grief; it is above and beyond them both. Krishna willed that His friend and devotee Arjuna should reach that state, so He endeavoured to save him by teaching him the ways and means through a variety of methods. Moreover, He used him as an instrument to receive this precious gift for the good of all humanity.

Before concluding sacred counsel, Krishna addressed Arjuna and said, “Give up all *dharmas* and surrender to Me. I shall liberate you from all sin. That is to say, give up pride in the ego (*ahamkara*) and in possessions and mine-ness (*mama-kara*). Destroy the identification of the self with the body, which is only its cage or prison; get firm in the belief that all this is the highest *Atma* (*Paramatma*) and nothing else. There is nothing else to be done except to bow to His will and surrender to His plan.

“One has to give up the twin activities of commission and omission, resolving (*sankalpa*) and doubting (*vikalpa*). One has to follow the Lord’s commands, to accept His will and be happy wherever He has placed them, however He has shaped them. One should keep oneself far from the inquiry into the appropriateness or inappropriateness of their acts, but do them as acts of worship to the Lord, acts for which no reward is expected. That is the sum of duty.”

Some dry *vedantins* decked with strings of beads take advantage of this teaching of Krishna to give up all duties (*dharmas*) and, with this assurance that He will liberate them from all sin, idly stretch their legs and loll

with closed eyes. They shirk their legitimate duties and eat, sleep, and roam about as much as they like or can. They do not discriminate between good and bad; their excuse is that the Lord has commanded them to transcend *dharmā*. When elders at home or experienced seekers question their conduct, they answer, “Alas, that you too should blunder thus! Don’t you know what the Lord said in the *Gita*? I have accepted His command, ‘cast aside all duties (*sarva dharmāan parithyajya*)’ as the basis of my conduct. I don’t accept advice from people with lesser authority”. They feel very proud of their devotion and orthodoxy.

Such people select from the words of the Lord only the portions that favour their inclinations. The words before and after are conveniently ignored because they are unpleasant, although they are inseparable portions of the same injunction. They ignore the vital part of the command, in spite of the claim to be staunch votaries of the *Gita*.

Give up all feelings of obligations and responsibilities. “Surrender to Me alone (*maam ekam sharanam vraja*)”, says the Lord. Have they surrendered thus? No. Have they at least the deep yearning for liberation? No, for if they had it, they would not have neglected their legitimate duties. They would not have fallen prey to the demands of food and sleep. Such people are glorious only in gossip; they are great only in glittering. They do not put the Lord’s command into actual practice. They are too idle to do so. Not even an atom of spiritual endeavour can be seen in them.

True aspirants can discern valuable truths in the divine words spoken by the Lord:

Abandon all *dharmas*; Surrender to Me alone.

I shall free you from all sins; Do not fear.

(*Sarva dharmāan parithyajya*
Maam ekam saranam vraja;
Aham thwam sarvapaapebhyo
Mokshayishyami, maa suchah)

Note that the Lord said, “Abandon all *dharmas* (*sarva dharmāan parithyajya*)”, not “abandon all actions (*sarva karmaan parithyajya*)”. What then is the meaning of this statement? It means, “perform all acts enjoined by the Lord for His glorification, without getting involved and lost in discussions of *dharmā* and non-*dharmā*.”

Although you know that there is nothing for you to acquire, for you have placed complete trust in the Lord and live only as an offering to the Lord, still, like Janaka and others, you have to engage in activity for the well-being of the world. The soul immanent in every being is not distinct from the *Atma* or soul that is in you. So, be eager to promote the well-being of all beings. Perform all acts enjoined by the scriptures for this sake, in the spirit of dedication, with no eye on the fruits thereof. This is true renunciation of the fruit of action (*nish-kama-karma*).

Understand the *Gita* well and, observing its injunctions, establish yourselves in the attitude of renunciation of the fruit of action. Do all duties as acts of worship, offerings to God. That is the sole task. Leave the rest to Him: the fruit, the consequence, the result. Then, you receive the grace of Hari and your life on earth is sanctified and becomes worthwhile.

For those who follow the path of *dharmā*, ultimate victory is certain, in spite of diverse difficulties that might hamper them. Those who stray from the path of *dharmā* might have wealth and comfort for a long time, but they will ultimately be overpowered by disaster. The Kauravas and Pandavas are the brightest witnesses for this truth.

The Kauravas, steeped in non-*dharmā*, were so blinded by conceit that they subjected the good Pandavas to

a variety of tortures, but the Kauravas met with total destruction. They had the support of all types of parties but, since they did not earn the strength of the grace of the Lord, they were deserted by fate and ruined beyond repair. The *Mahabharatha* teaches all people of India (Bharath) this one lesson: Nothing can equal the grace of God, not even the mightiest array of arms. This is the most valuable message that it embodies.

The Mansion of *Gita* is the mansion of truth and *dharmā*, erected on the soil of India for the benefit of the world. Study it with faith and devotion. Experience the curative and restorative effects of its teachings by actual practice. For people who do this, the *Atma*, so full of the spring of sweetness and bliss (*Atma-rama*), will be ever-present as a reality. The Lord will shower His favours on such people in a trice. Pray to the Lord, who has all the fourteen worlds in Him, and you can certainly become master of the eight treasures that give happiness here below and, what is even more desirable, liberation (*kaivalya*), which is the fountain of eternal bliss, eternal truth, and eternal wisdom .

Why wander about for ghee when you have butter with you? Acquire butter, that is to say, the grace of the Lord, by implicit obedience to the rules of life laid down by Him. When that grace is won, there is no need to pray separately for liberation. He knows best what you should get and when. He will confer what you deserve and what is beneficial. Yearn for Him, suffer anguish for Him; then there is no need to yearn for *moksha*. If that is done with no second thought, He will destroy all sin. Hold fast to Him; He can make you immortal, like Arjuna. Those who seek to escape from this cycle of birth and death must obey the command of the Lord as laid down in the *Gita* and surrender to Him. Then, they will be crowned with success in every undertaking. They will achieve victory.

Glossary

This glossary contains many Sanskrit words, people, places, and literature that Sathya Sai Baba uses in His discourses, especially discourses appearing in this volume. The glossary attempts to provide comprehensive meanings and detailed explanations of the more important Sanskrit words, for the benefit of lay readers who are interested in Hindu religion and philosophy.

In an electronic version of this volume (e.g. an e-book for the Ipad, Kindle, or Nook), you can click on most names, places, people, and Sanskrit words within the text in order to immediately access the word in this glossary. Your device will also have an arrow or other link to press to get back to the text.

a-bheda. Integral; non-differentiating.

abhisheka. Ablution, bathing..

adhara. Basis.

a-dharma. Evil, injustice.

adheya. Being based, contained, sustained.

adi-Atma. Pertaining to the individual soul, spirit, or manifestation of supreme Brahman.

adi-atmic. Pertaining to *adi-Atma*.

adi-bhauthika. Pertaining to the physical or material world; the fine spiritual aspect of material objects.

adi-butha. Whole perishable creation; the primordial form of matter; everything that has name and form.

adi-daiva. Divinity or fate, the spiritual substratum of the cosmos.

adi-daivika. Pertaining to divinity or fate, e.g. natural disasters.

adi-kavi. First among poets.

Aditya. Son of Aditi; there were twelve of them, one of them being Surya, the sun, so Surya is sometimes called Aditya.

adi-yajna. Pertaining to sacrificial aspects.

a-dwaitha. Nondualism, monism, the doctrine that everything is God, the philosophy of absolute oneness of God, soul, and universe.

a-dwaithic. Of or pertaining to nondualism (*a-dwaitha*).

a-dwaithin. One who propounds nondualism (*a-dwaitha*).

aham. The knower, the “I”.

Aham Brahmasmi. “I am Brahman.” One of the great *Vedic* aphorisms (*mahavakyas*).

ahamkara. Ego, self-love, selfish individuality.

ahara. Food.

ahimsa. Nonviolence.

a-jnana. Ignorance, stupidity.

akasa. Space, ether, the subtlest form of matter.

a-keerthi-karam. Quality that causes disgrace or decline of reputation.

a-kshara. Imperishable, indestructible.

an-aahatha-dhwani. Unstruck, primeval sound; *Om*; mystic sound heard by *yogis*.

an-aarya-jushtam. Ignoble nature or behaviour.

ananda. Divine bliss. The Self is unalloyed, eternal bliss. Pleasures are but its faint and impermanent shadows.

an-anya-chintha. Undivided contemplation (of God).

Anasuya. Wife of sage Athri and mother of Dattatreya; an incarnation of the Trinity.

anithya. Impermanent, transient.

anna. Food.

antar-yamin. Inner ruler or Being that guides all creatures.

anthah-karana. Inner psycho-somatic fourfold instruments of mind, intellect, memory, and ego.

anusaasitha. Independent master, one who directs.

archi. Fire.

archi-radi-marga. Path of Gods, beginning with fire or the Sun's rays, taken by spiritual souls after death.

Arjuna. Krishna's disciple, in the *Bhagavad Gita*; third of five Pandava brothers. See *Mahabharatha*.

artha. Wealth, prosperity, material object, thing, aim, purpose, desire.

artha-arthi. One who longs for wealth; the poor.

a-sahaja. Assumed, unnatural.

ashvattha. Banyan tree, impermanent.

asrama. A stage of life, one of: student, householder, hermit, and renunciate.

asthi. Being, existence; is-ness; synonym for *sat*.

Asthi-Bhathi-Priya. Being, existence –that which shines, illumines, awareness – love, dearness.

a-sura. Demon; term arose when Diti's sons refused to drink the divine liquor (*suraa*) offered by Varuni, the daughter of Varuna.

Aswapathi. Lord of horses, brother-in-law of Dasaratha, the father of Rama.

a-swargyam. Quality that destroys the divine in man.

Aswathama. Son of Drona..

Athri. A sage; father of Dattatreya. Also, one of 10 mental sons of Hiranyagarbha.

Atma. Self; Soul. Self, with limitations, is the individual soul. Self, with no limitations, is Brahman, the Supreme Reality.

Atma-dharma. *Atmic* duty, divine duty.

Atma-jnana. Knowledge of Self-realization; awareness of *Atma*.

Atma-jnani. Self-knower.

Atma-linga. Oval stone symbolizing the divine *Atma*.

Atmarama. Eternal bliss; Rama in the heart.

Atma-thathwa. True nature of *Atma*, the *Atmic* Principle.

Atmic. Of or relating to the *Atma*.

Aum. Om; Designation of the Universal Brahman; sacred, primordial sound of the universe.

Avatar. Incarnation of God. Whenever there is a decline of *dharmā*, God comes down to the world assuming bodily form to protect the good, punish the wicked and re-establish *dharmā*. An *Avatar* is born and lives free and is ever conscious of His mission. By His precept and example, He opens up new paths in spirituality, shedding His grace on all.

Ayodhya. City where Rama was born and ruled.

Bali. Emperor of demons; grandson of Prahlada and son of the demon Virochana. Humiliated by dwarf Vamana, who was an incarnation of Vishnu.

Bhagavad Gita. Literally, Song of God. Portion of the *Mahabharatha* that is a dialogue between Arjuna, one of the Pandava brothers, and Krishna.

Bhagavan. Divinity; term of reverential address; Sathya Sai Baba is called *Bhagavan* by his devotees.

Bhagavatha. A sacred book composed by Sage Vyasa dealing with Vishnu and His incarnations, especially Krishna. It also means those with attachment to God, or the Godly.

bhakthi. Devotion to God.

bhakthi-maan. A person full of devotion.

Bharath. India; Indian; descendent of King Bharath, first emperor of India.

Bharatha. Son of Dasaratha and Kaika; brother of Rama. “Bharatha” means “he who rules”.

bhathi. That which shines, illumines; *chit*.

Bhima. Second of five Pandava brothers; named for his size and strength. See *Mahabharatha*.

Bhishma. The guardian and patriarch of the Kauravas and Pandavas. Son of King Shantanu. Remarkable for his wisdom and unflinching devotion to God. Trapped by his fate to fight on side of evil Kauravas; bled to death on a bed of arrows while thinking of God. See *Mahabharatha*. He also vowed life-long celibacy to ensure that his offspring would not claim the throne.

bhoga. Catering to the senses, eating, enjoyment.

bhrama. Delusion.

bhutha. Any of the five elementary constituents of the universe; spirit; monster.

Brahma. The Creator, the First of the Hindu Trinity of Brahma (the Creator), Vishnu (the Preserver), and Siva (the Destroyer).

Brahma-jnana. Knowledge of Brahman.

Brahma-jnani. Knower of Brahman.

Brahman. The Supreme Being, the Absolute Reality, Impersonal God with no form or attributes. The uncaused cause of the Universe, Existence, Consciousness-Bliss Absolute (*Sat-Chit-Ananda*); The Eternal Changeless Reality — not conditioned by time, space, and causation.

Brahma-nishta. Steady contemplation of Brahman.

Brahma-thathwa. Formless God, Brahman principle.

Brahma-vidya. Spiritual attainment, knowledge of Brahman.

brahmin. First of four castes of social order, the priestly or teacher caste; a person belonging to this caste.

Brindavan. Forest and pastoral lands where Krishna played in his childhood.

buddhi. Intellect, intelligence, faculty of discrimination.

caste. The four castes of social order are: *brahmin* (priestly or teacher), *kshatriya* (warrior, protector), *vaisya* (trader, merchant, agriculturist), and *sudra* (worker, helper). See *varna dharma*.

chaithanya. Consciousness, intelligence, spirit.

Chidambaram. Town 122 miles SSW of Chennai, noted for its temple dedicated to Siva in his aspect of “cosmic dancer”, Nataraja.

chinmaya. Consisting of pure consciousness.

chit. Consciousness, knowledge, awareness.

chittha. Mind stuff, memory, subconscious mind.

Daiva. Divinity, God.

dakshina-ayana. Southward path of the sun.

dama. Control of the outer senses.

Damayanthi. Wife of King Nala of Nishada, who lost his kingdom at dice.

dana. Charity, giving.

Dasaratha. Son of Aja and father of Rama; King of Ayodhya; the name means “ten chariot hero”.

Dasarathi. Son of Dasaratha: Rama.

Dattatreya. Sage son of Athri and Anasuya.

daya. Compassion, sympathy.

deha. Body.

dehi. One who has a body; conscious embodied Self.

desa. Region, space, country.

deva. Deity, celestial being, God.

Devaki. Mother of Krishna.

dharma. Righteousness, religion, code of conduct, duty, essential nature of a being or thing. It holds together the entire Universe. Man is exhorted to practise *dharma* to achieve material and spiritual welfare. The *Vedas* contain the roots of *dharma*. God is naturally interested in the reign of *dharma*.

dharma-karma. Act of duty, virtuous action.

dharma-kshetra. Abode or field of righteousness.

dharma-rakshana. Protection of *dharma*.

Dharmaraja. Also Dharmaja. Name for Yudhistira, eldest of the five Pandava brothers. Born to Kunthi by the grace of Yama Dharmaraja, Lord of Death. Named for adherence to *dharma*. See *Mahabharatha*.

dharma-samsthapana. Firm establishment of *dharma*.

Dharma Sastras. Codes of law and ethics concerning virtuous living.

dharmic. According to *dharma*, righteous.

dharmoddharana. The raising of *dharma*.

dheera. Steadfast, courageous, wise person.

dhrik. Vision, seer or perception.

Dhrishtadyumna. Droupadi's brother.

Dhritharashtra. Father of Kauravas; holder of ruling power.

dhuma. Smoke.

dhuma-adi-marga. Smoke-filled path of the manes; the opaque path, as distinguished from the path of light.

dhyana. Meditation.

drisya. That which is perceived by the senses; the seen.

Dronacharya. Drona, the teacher of archery and war tactics for the Pandavas and Kauravas.

Droupadi. Wife of Pandavas. See *Mahabharatha*.

Duryodhana. Chief (and eldest) of the evil-minded sons of Dhritharashtra.

dwaitha. Dualism, the doctrine that the individual and the Supreme Soul are two different principles or entities.

Dwapara-yuga. Third in the cycle of four ages. See *yuga*.

ekantha-vasam. Dwelling in solitude.

gandha. Smell, fragrance.

Ganga. The 1560-mile-long Ganges river; starts in the Himalayas and flows generally east into the Bay of Bengal; the most sacred river of India.

Gayatri mantra. A very sacred *Vedic* prayer for self-enlightenment; it is repeated piously at dawn, noon, and twilight devotions.

Gita. See *Bhagavad Gita*.

Godavari. Sacred river of south India; cuts across central south India, flowing from west to east.

Gopala. Cowherd boy. A name for Lord Krishna.

grantha. Scriptural text or book.

guna. Quality, property, trait; one of the three constituents of nature (*sathwa*, *rajas*, and *thamas*). They bind the soul to the body. Man's supreme goal in life is to transcend the *gunas* and attain liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

guru. Spiritual guide; a knower of Brahman, who is calm, desireless, merciful, and ever ready to help and guide spiritual aspirants who approach him.

Hanuman. Son of the Wind God and a great "devotee servant" of Rama. He was part man, part monkey.

Hari. God; destroyer of sins; name for Vishnu.

Hiranyagarbha. Cosmic divine mind; cosmic womb; golden egg first created by Brahman from which all creation issued.

Hiranyakasipu. A demonic person who forbade mention of Vishnu's name, wicked father of Prahlada, who was a great devotee of the Lord; killed by the man-lion Narashimha, an *Avatar* of Vishnu.

idam. This.

ida-naadi-marga. Path of the psychic nerve; current flowing through the left nostril; the cooling lunar nerve, as compared to the heating solar nerve, *naadi*.

Ikshvaku. Son of Manu and father of Kukshi; first king of Ayodhya and ancestor of Rama's dynasty.

Indra. Lord of the *devas* (celestials). Indra is one of the chief deities in the *Rig veda*.

indriyas. Senses.

ithihasa. Historical legend, traditional account of former events.

jada. Inert matter.

jagath. Cosmos, world of change, creation.

Janaka. A self-realized king; Sita's father and Rama's father-in-law. His ancestor was Nimi, a great emperor.

Jatayu. A famous eagle, whose wings were scorched when he flew too close to the sun. He tried to rescue Sita, and he played a role in Rama's fight against the demons.

jijnasu. Seeker of wisdom, inquirer.

jiva. Individual or soul, in a state of non-realisation of its identity with Brahman. It is unaware of its own nature and is subjected to sensations of pain and pleasure, birth and death, etc.

jivan-muktha. One who is liberated in this life.

jivan-mukthi. Liberation while alive.

jivatma. Soul or true Self, at the individual level.

jivi. Individual or soul.

jnana. Sacred knowledge; knowledge of the spirit, pursued as a means to Self-realisation. It is direct experience of God, as the Soul of the souls. *Jnana* makes a man omniscient, free, fearless, and immortal.

jnana-bhaskara. Sun of spiritual knowledge, spiritual wisdom.

Jnana-kanda. Portion of the *Vedas* that deals with knowledge of Brahman through the path of spiritual wisdom or discriminative knowledge.

jnana-nethra. Eye of spiritual wisdom.

jnana-yoga. Path of inner contemplation, spiritual wisdom.

jnani. Wise man, realized soul.

jneya. That which is known, the object of knowledge..

Kaikayi. Also **Kaika.** A princess of Kekaya (Kashmir), third wife of Dasaratha, and mother of Bharatha..

kaivalya. Absolute oneness, final beatitude.

kaivalya-mukthi. Absolute unity with the Supreme; final emancipation.

kala. Time, death (yama).

Kali-yuga. Fourth in a cycle of four ages; the evil age; the one we are now in. See *yuga*.

kama. Desire, lust, worldly fulfillment; one of four goals of humans.

karma. Action, deed, work, religious rite, the totality of innate tendencies formed as a consequence of acts done in previous lives. Every *karma* produces a lasting impression on the mind of the doer, apart from affecting others. Repetition of a particular *karma* produces a tendency (*vasanas*) in the mind. *Karma* is of three kinds: (i) *praarabdha*, which is being exhausted in the present life: (ii) *aagami*, which is being accumulated in the present life, and (iii) *samchitha*, which is being accumulated or stored to be experienced in future lives. *Akarma* is action that is done without any intention to gain the consequences; *vikarma* is action that is intentionally done.

karma-atheetha. Beyond *karma*.

karma-brashtha. Action without restraint or control; fallen or sinful person.

karma-kshetra. Field of activity.

karma-yoga. Yoga of action.

karma-yogi. Yogi who dedicates his actions to God.

karmic. Of or pertaining to *karma*.

kartha. Doer, subject of action.

kasmalam. Faintheartedness, impurity.

Kauntheya. Son of Kunthi (who is Arjuna's mother).

Kauravas. Family that fought Pandavas. See *Mahabharatha*.

kavi. Poet; seer of the future.

Kesava. "Slayer of the demon Kesi"; a name for Krishna.

krama-mukthi. Liberation in stages, progressive emancipation.

Krishna. The *Avatar* of Vishnu in the *Dwapara yuga*, prior to the present *Kali yuga*.

Krishna. A holy river.

krishna-paksha. Dark half of the month, when the moon is diminishing.

krodha. Anger.

kshama. Patience, fortitude, forgiveness.

kshatriya. Protector, warrior; see caste.

kshaya. Decline, loss, inertia; destruction.

kshema. Welfare, happiness.

kshetra. Field or life.

kshetra-jna. Knower of the truth of life.

Kubera. God of riches; father was Vishravas and younger half-brother was Ravana.

Kuchela. A poor *brahmin* classmate of Krishna.

Kumbhakarna. Younger brother of Ravana, who slept for six months at a time.

Kunthi. Also **Kunthi Devi**. Mother of Pandavas, wife of King Pandu (the younger brother of emperor Dhritharashtra), and sister of Krishna's father (Vasudeva).

Lakshmana. Brother of Rama and son of Sumitra; represents intellect.

laya. Merging, dissolution, absorption.

leela. Divine sport or play.

lobha. Greed.

Madhava. God (name for Krishna); Master of illusion (*maya*), Lord of Lakshmi.

Madhavathathwa. Divinity.

Madhusudana. "Killer of the Madhu demon". Name for Krishna.

Mahabharatha. The Hindu epic composed by Sage Vyasa, which deals with the deeds and fortunes of the cous-

ins (the Kauravas and Pandavas) of the Lunar race, with Lord Krishna playing a significant and decisive role in shaping the events. The *Bhagavad Gita* and *Vishnu Sahasranama* occur in this great epic. It is considered to be the Fifth *Veda* by devout Hindus. Of this great epic, it is claimed that “what is not in it is nowhere.

maha-thathwa. Supreme Principle; cosmic intellect.

mahatma. Great soul.

mama-kara. Mine-ness.

manas. Mind, the inner organ, which has four aspects: (i) mind (*manas*), which deliberates, desires, and feels; (ii) intellect (*buddhi*), which understands, reasons, and decides; (iii) the ‘I’ sense, and (iv) memory (*chitha*). The mind, with all its desires and their broods, conceals the Divinity within man. Purification of the mind is essential for realisation of the Self.

manava. Human being.

manava-thathwa. Humanness, essential nature of human being.

mantra. A sacred formula, mystic syllable or word symbol uttered during the performance of the rituals or meditation. They represent the spiritual truths directly revealed to the *rishis* (seers). The section of the *Veda* that contains these hymns (*mantras*) is called the *Samhitha*.

Manu. The first father of mankind; author of the codes of righteous conduct (*Dharma Sastras*); son of Surya (the sun) and father of Vaivaswatha Manu, the present progenitor of mankind.

masthaka. Brain.

maya. Delusion. The mysterious, creative, and delusive power of Brahman through which God projects the appearance of the Universe. *Maya* is the material cause and Brahman is the efficient cause of the Universe. Brahman and *maya* are inextricably associated with each other like fire and its power to heat. *Maya* deludes the individual souls in egoism, making them forget their true spiritual nature.

maya-sakthi. Power of illusion, the veiling and projecting power of God.

Mimamsa. Exegetical-expository school of Indian metaphysics, the earlier (*purva*) concerning itself chiefly with interpretation of *Vedic* ritual and the later (*uttara*) with the nature of Brahman.

mithra. Friend.

moha. Delusion caused by false identification, infatuation.

moksha. Liberation from all kinds of bondage, especially the one to the cycle of birth and death. It is a state of absolute freedom, peace, and bliss, attained through Self-realisation. This is the supreme goal of human endeavour, the other three being, righteousness (*dharma*), wealth and power (*artha*), and sense-pleasure (*kama*).

mrinmaya. Consisting of earthly material..

mumukshu. One who desires liberation.

naadi. Nerve.

naasa. Destruction.

naashta. Food.

Nanda. King who adopted Krishna as infant.

Nandakumara. “(Adopted) son of Nanda”, a name for Krishna.

Nandanar. Great 13th century devotee of Siva, born in the labourer (*sudra*) caste. Through devotion, he over-

came all obstacles and merged with God in the temple in Chidambaram.

nara. Man; divine man; primeval man, human being.

Narada. Sage-bard; traveled the world chanting Narayana. Famous for creating disputes, resulting in solutions for the spiritual advancement or victory of the virtuous. Expert in law and author of texts on *dharmā*.

Narasimha. Man-lion. One of the ten *Avatars* of Vishnu.

Narayana. The Primal Person, the Lord, Vishnu.

nidi-dhyasana. Inner concentration, profound meditation.

nidra. Sleep.

nidra-jith. Enslaved by sleep.

nir-aakaara. The state of formlessness.

nir-guna. Without qualities, attributeless.

nir-mala. Without blemish, pure.

nir-vishaya. Contentless objectless.

nish-kama-karma. Renunciation of the fruit of action.

nishtha. State, condition, steadiness, regulated behaviour, excellence.

nithya. Eternal, permanent.

Om. Designation of the Universal Brahman; sacred, primordial sound of the Universe.

Pandavas. Sons of Pandu; family of 5 brothers that fought the Kauravas: Dharmaraja, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva. See *Mahabharatha*.

para. Higher, beyond, transcendent, supreme, best.

Para-brahman. Universal Absolute Brahman.

parama-hamsa. Realized sage.

Param-atma. Supreme Self, Supreme *Atma*.

Parameswara. Supreme Lord, highest Godhead, Siva.

Parasurama. An incarnation of Vishnu as man, born to destroy the arrogance of the wicked *Kshatriya* kings.

parigraha. Accepting help from others.

paroksha. Unseen, invisible.

paroksha-jnana. Indirect or mediate spiritual wisdom.

Partha. “Son of Earth (Prithvi)”. Name for Arjuna.

Patanjali. Author of the *Yoga Sutras*, which form the foundation of the *yoga* system of Indian philosophy. See *raja-yoga*.

pingala-naadi-marga. Path of the psychic nerve current terminating in the right nostril; solar path.

pourusha. Vitality, valour.

prabha. Brilliance.

Prahlada. Son of the demon king Hiranyakasipu. As a boy, he was beaten, trampled, and cast into fire and water. But he saw only God everywhere, and repetition of the Name of God saved him. Once, Prahlada asserted

that God was everywhere, and Narayana appeared in his man-lion form from within a pillar to destroy the king.

prakasa. Effulgence, luminosity.

prakriti. Nature, the Divine Power of Becoming. Also known as *maya*, *avidya*, and *sakthi*; the world of matter and mind as opposed to the spirit. *Prakriti* has three dispositions or *gunas* (*sathwa*, *rajas*, and *thamas*), which go into the make-up of all living and non-living beings in the Universe, in varying proportions leading to the appearance of infinite multiplicity in form, nature, and behaviour.

prakriti-sakthi. Power of nature.

prana. Life-breath, life force, vital energy, the five vital airs of the body. English doesn't seem to have names for these vital airs, so we list them with their Sanskrit names: *prana* (located in lungs), *apana* (flatus, which moves downward through the rectum), *vyana* (diffused throughout the whole body), *samana* (navel; essential to digestion), and *udana* (rises through throat to head).

Pranava. *Om*; the sacred seed-sound and symbol of Brahman. "The most exalted syllable in *Vedas*". It is used in meditation on God. It is uttered first before a *Vedic mantra* is chanted.

prapancha. Cosmos; created world composed of the five elements.

prapanna. One who surrenders to the Lord.

prapatthi. Surrender to the Lord, unflinching devotion.

prarabdha-karma. Karma from previous births that determines the present life.

prasadha. Consecrated food. Anything, usually edible, given by a saint or the *Avatar* to their followers or that is first offered to a deity, saint, or the *Avatar* and then distributed in Their name.

prasanthi. Supreme peace, equanimity..

preyas. Pleasing, pleasurable sensation, worldly joy.

prithvi. Earth, world.

priya. Also *priyam*. Love, dearness.

pundit. Learned scholar, wise man.

purana. Ancient.

Puranas. Any of a number of collections of ancient legends and lore embodying the principles of the universal, eternal religion and ethics. There are 18 *Puranas*, the most famous being the *Mahabhagavatham* and the *Devi Bhagavatham*.

Purusha. Primeval Person, Supreme Spirit, Lord, God.

purusha-arthas. Goals of human life.

Purushothama. The supreme Lord of all.

Purva Mimamsa. A text by Jaimini on the early school of *Mimamsa* philosophy.

pusthaka. Book.

raga. Sense of attachment, passion, affection.

rajas. One of the three *gunas* (qualities or dispositions) of *maya* or *prakriti*. Passion, restlessness, aggressiveness, emotions such as anger, greed, grief. Associated with colour red. See *guna*.

rajasic. Adjective form of *rajas*, passionate, emotional.

raja-yoga. Royal *yoga* of meditation, detachment, and desirelessness. Eight-fold path of *yoga* developed by Patanjali, which includes control of the mind and withdrawal of the senses from the external world.

rajoguna. Quality of passion, restlessness, aggressiveness. Associated with colour red. See *guna*.

Rama. *Avatar* of the *Thretha yuga*. Hero of the *Ramayana*; killed the wicked Ravana to rescue his wife Sita, who had been kidnapped. “Rama” means “he who pleases”.

Ramayana. This sacred epic, composed by Sage Valmiki, deals with the incarnation of Vishnu as Sri Rama, who strove all his life to reestablish the reign of *dharma* in the world. The *Ramayana* has played an important role in influencing and shaping the Hindu ethos over the centuries.

ranjana. Pleasing, delighting.

rasa. Taste, sweetness, essence of enjoyment.

Rathnakara. The wayside robber who, because of the teaching of sages, repented and became Valmiki, the author of the *Ramayana*.

Ravana. Lord of demons and king of Lanka, who abducted Sita (Rama’s wife).

Rig-veda. First *Veda* composed by the sages, consisting of 1028 hymns. Oldest religious text in world.

Rig-vedic. Of or relating to the *Rig-veda*.

rishi. Sage, wise man.

sa-akaara. With form.

Sabari. A woman ascetic living in the hermitage of her teacher, Sage Mathanga; Rama gave her salvation.

sabda. Sound.

sadhu. Virtuous, wise aspirant; pious or righteous person.

sadyomukthi. Instantaneous liberation.

sa-guna. With qualities, with form, materialized.

sahaja. Innate, inborn, natural.

sahana. Tolerance, fortitude.

sahasra-nama. 1000 names of Siva or Vishnu.

sakama-karma. Karma with expectation to reap fruit for oneself.

sakthi. Great universal power, divine energy, strength. *Maha* means *Great*, so *Mahasakthi* is great *sakthi*.

sama. Control of the senses, peace, equanimity, tranquility.

Sama, Sama-veda. Collection of certain verses of the *Rig-veda* arranged for liturgical purposes.

sama-buddhi. Equal-mindedness.

sama-dhana. Mind control by equanimity.

samadhi. Literally, total absorption. The state of super consciousness resulting in union with or absorption in the ultimate reality, the *Atma*; perfect equanimity. The state that transcends the body, mind, and intellect. In that state of consciousness, the objective world and the ego vanish and Reality is perceived or communed with, in utter peace and bliss. When people realise in this state their oneness with God, it is called *nirvikalpa samadhi*.

samana. Digestive air; even breath.

sama-thwam. Equanimity of outlook.

samhitha. Collection of methodically arranged verses or text; continuous text of the *Vedas* as formed out of the separate words by proper phonetic changes.

samsara. Worldly life; life of the individual soul through repeated births and deaths. Liberation means getting freed from this cycle.

sam-thusti. Total contentment.

sanathana. Ancient and also eternal.

Sanathana Dharma. Eternal religion. A descriptive term for what has come to be called Hinduism. It has no single founder or text of its own. It is more a commonwealth of religious faiths and a way of life.

sanga-buddhi. Mind with strong attachments.

Sanjaya. An advisor to the blind King Dhritharashtra. Sanjaya had the gift granted by sage Vyasa of seeing events at a distance, and he tells Dhritharashtra what is happening in the battle. See *Mahabharatha*.

sankalpa. Will, resolve.

Sankara. Also **Sankaracharya.** Celebrated philosopher, preceptor of non-dualistic *Vedanta*. Defeated all religious opponents in debates throughout India.

sankhya. One of six leading systems of spiritual Vedic philosophy, attributed to sage Kapila. Its chief object is the emancipation of the soul from the bonds of worldly existence..

santham. Equanimity, serenity, tranquility.

santhi. Peace, equanimity, serenity, tranquility.

sanyasa. Renunciation-detachment, mendicancy.

sanyasi. Also *sanyasin*. Renunciant, mendicant.

saranagathi. Absolute self-surrender.

Saraswathi. Goddess of learning and eloquence, a daughter of Brahma. Also, an underground river, originating in the upper Indus river basin and joining the Ganga and Yamuna rivers at Prayag or Allahabad.

sarira. Body.

sarva-adhara. Basis of all.

sarva-jna. Omniscient.

Sarveswara. The Lord of all.

Sastras. The Hindu scriptures containing the teachings of the sages. The *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *itihisas* (epics), the *Puranas*, the *Smrithis* (codes of conduct), etc., form the *Sastras* of the Hindus. They teach us how to live wisely and well with all the tenderness and concern of the Mother.

sat. Existence, being, good, real.

sat-chit-ananda. Existence-knowledge-bliss, or being-awareness-bliss.

sathwa. One of the three *gunas* (qualities and dispositions) of *maya* or *prakriti*. It is the quality of purity, brightness, peace, and harmony. It leads to knowledge. Man is exhorted to overcome *thamas* by *rajas* and *rajas* by *sathwa* and finally to go beyond *sathwa* itself to attain liberation.

sathwic. Adjective form of *sathwa*; serene, pure, good, balanced.

sathya. Truth.

Satrughna. Sumitra's son, twin of Lakshmana and brother of Rama. The name means "slayer of enemies".

savam. Corpse.

Shantanu. A Kuru king, descendant of the Bharata race, of the lunar dynasty and the ancestor of the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Bhishma was his son.

Sita. Wife of Rama; brought up by King Janaka who found her in a box in the earth. Also, a tributary of the Ganga, flowing westward.

siva. Also *sivam*. Temple, the divine; refers to Siva. Also, grace, auspiciousness, goodness.

Siva. The Destroyer, the Third of the Hindu Trinity of Brahma (the Creator), Vishnu (the Preserver), and Siva (the Destroyer).

Sivam. The divine —Siva.

Skanda. Siva's son Subrahmanya.

soham. I am God.

soucha, soucham. Purity, cleanliness.

sraddha. Faith.

sreyas. Blessedness, ultimate good.

srishti. Creation.

sthairyam. Steadfastness.

sthitha-prajna. Person of steady integral spiritual wisdom.

sthithi. Preservation, staying, abiding.; a state, position, condition.

sthula. Gross, material, superficial.

sudra. Labourer, the fourth caste of workers. See Caste.

sukla-paksha. The bright fortnight.

sukshma. Subtle.

Sumitra. Second wife of Dasaratha and mother of Lakshmana and Satrugna.

Surdas. A great blind devotee of Krishna.

surya. The sun.

Surya. The sun god, the father of time. A name for the sun. Also, son of Kasyapa and father of Manu.

swa-bhava. Essential nature, essence, reality, truth.

swa-rupa. Form, essential nature, true nature of Being.

swa-rupa. Form, essential nature, true nature of Being, embodiment.

tapas. Concentrated spiritual exercises to attain God, penance, severe austerities.

tapoyajna. Ascetic sacrifice.

tejas. Spiritual power, splendour.

thamas. One of the *gunas* (qualities and dispositions) of *maya* or *prakriti*. It is the quality of dullness, inertia, darkness and tendency to evil. It results in ignorance.

thamasic. Adjective form of thamas, dull, ignorant, passive.

thamoguna. Quality of dullness, ignorance, delusion, inactivity, inertia, sloth. Associated with colour black. See *guna*.

Thath. That, the Godhead.

thathwa. Principle, truth, essence. That-this entity. *Thathwa* is regarded as made up of That (*Thath*) and you (*thwam*).

Thathwa-branthi. Identification with the That-this entity.

That twam asi. You are That. One of four great *Vedantic* statements expressing the non-difference of individual soul and *Brahman*, the supreme absolute Self.

thithiksha. Fortitude, forbearance.

Thretha-yuga. The second in the cycle of four eras. See *yuga*.

thwam. Thou, You, This, the individual.

thyaga. Sacrifice, renunciation.

thyaga-kshetra. Abode of sacrifice.

Thrisanku. King for whom Sage Viswamitra created another heaven.

Triveni. Confluence of the three rivers Ganga, Yamuna, and the subterranean Saraswathi at Prayag.

Upanishadic. Relating to the Upanishads.

Upanishads. The very sacred portions of the *Vedas* that deal with God, humanity, and universe, their nature and interrelationships. Spiritual knowledge (*jnana*) is their content, so they form the *Jnana-kanda* of the *Vedas*.

uparathi. Control of mind by withdrawal from senses.

upasana. Worship, devotion, meditation practice, acquisition of the presence of the Lord, a method for approaching or getting close to a deity or God, the act of being near or at hand..

Urvasi. One of 4 celestial dancers in the court of Indra.

uttarayana. Northward path of the sun.

Vaasudeva. Son of Vasudeva. Name for Krishna.

vahini. Stream or flow.

vairagya. Detachment, renunciation.

Vaishnavite. A person belonging to *Vaishnavism*, one of the major branches of Hinduism. It focuses on worshipping Vishnu and his ten incarnations.

vaisya. Business person, trader, merchant. See caste.

Valmiki. The saint-poet who wrote the *Ramayana*.

Vamana. Dwarf incarnation of Vishnu, who asked for three feet of land from Emperor Bali and humbled Bali's pride.

varna. Caste.

varna dharma. The Hindu community is divided into four social groups, or castes (*varnas*), based on qualities (*gunas*) and vocations: (1) *Brahmana* (the *brahmins*), the custodian of spiritual and moral role), (2) *kshatriya*, the warrior group, which rules and defends the land), (3) *vaisya*, the group dealing with commerce, business, and trade, and (4) *sudra*, the group devoted to labour and service to the community. Each *varna* has its own *dharmic* restrictions and regulations that strive to canalise impulses and instinct into fields that are special to their place in society, controls pertaining to the duties of the caste.

Varuna. Chief *Rig-vedic* god associated with Mitra; god of rain, water, the ocean, night; a great sage.

vasana. Inclination, impression of anything remaining in the subconscious mind from past action.

Vasishta. One of the greatest *rishis* (sages) of ancient times; priest of the solar race of kings; revealer of several *Vedic* hymns. Had sacred, wishfulfilling cow called Nandini.

Vasudeva. Father of Krishna.

Veda. Knowledge, wisdom. This knowledge is generally viewed as being given in the *Vedas*.

Vedanta. Means “the end of the *Vedas*”. It is the essence of the *Vedas* enshrined in the *Upanishads*. The philosophy of non-dualism, or qualified non-dualism, or dualism based on the *Upanishadic* teachings, is denoted by this term.

Vedantic. Of or pertaining to *Vedanta*.

vedantin. Knower of *Vedanta*.

Vedas. The oldest and the holiest of the Hindu scriptures, the primary source of authority in Hindu religion and philosophy. They are four in number: the *Rig-Veda*, *Sama-Veda*, *Yajur-Veda*, and *Atharva-Veda*.

veda-vid. One who has mastered the *Vedas*.

Vedic. Of your relating to the *Vedas*.

Venkata. Name for Vishnu. He is installed in Tirupati.

Vibhishana. Brother of Ravana; Demon chief who represented pure mindedness and sided with Rama.

Vidura. Brother and chief minister of King Dhritharashtra, the father of the Kauravas. See *Mahabharatha*.

vihara. Activity, recreation.

Vijaya. Conqueror, or Victory (name for Arjuna).

vikalpa. Negativity, indecisiveness.

vi-kara. Modification, adaptation, change.

vi-karma. Wrong action.

vishada. Despondency.

vishaya. Object and perception.

Vishnu. The Preserver, the Second of the Hindu Trinity of Brahma (the Creator), Vishnu (the Preserver), and Siva (the Destroyer).

Vishnu-maya. Illusory power of God.

visishta-adwaitha. Qualified nondualism. The doctrine that men’s spirits of have a qualified or partial identity with God.

viswa. Waking state, gross body.

Viswamitra. Sage; known for his efforts to equal Vasishta. Born as warrior Kausika who by the power of the *Gayatri* transformed himself spiritually. Early counselor of the young Rama.

Viswa-rupa. Cosmic form, form of creation, name for the sun.

Visweswara. God.

viveka. Discrimination.

Vyasa. Compiler of *Vedas* and author of the *Mahabharatha*, *Mahabhagavatham*, and others.

yajna. Holy ritual, sacrifice, or rite. Also, personification of rite (when capitalized).

Yama. God of Death; death personified.

Yamuna. Holy river rising in the Himalaya mountains at an elevation of 10,849 feet and flowing for 860 miles before joining the Ganga.

yoga. (a) Union of individual self or *Atma* with Supreme Being or Universal Self; act of yoking. (b) Spiritual discipline or exercise aimed at control of the senses. (c) Science of divine communion. (d) self control. Patanjali's Yoga-sutras define *yoga* as a series of 8 steps leading to union with God.

yoga-buddhi. *Yoga* of intelligence, purified intellect.

yoga-kshema. Welfare, well-being, happiness.

yoga-kshetra. Abode or state or field of yoga.

Yoga Sutras. An aphoristic treatise on *yoga* by Patanjali.

yogi. One who practices *yoga*.

Yudhistira. Eldest Pandava brother; also called Dharmaraja.

yuga. Era or age. There is a cycle of four *yugas*: the *Kritha yuga*, *Thretha yuga*, *Dwapara yuga*, and *Kali yuga*. Present age is the *Kali yuga*.

