

INTRODUCTION TO THE BHAGAVADGĪTĒ

It is said that a human birth is not easy to achieve. If we look at it from an evolutionary standpoint, there are millions of years between the ape and the human being. In other words, the monkey did not become a person overnight. Even from the standpoint of reincarnation, where human birth is said to be a result of one's own past actions, *karma*, it is not easy. And once you have this human body, whether it be due to *karma* or to the natural selection inherent in evolution, you are no longer in the hands of nature. You now have the rare capacity, called free will, to initiate a further process of evolution. The whole process, then, is in your own hands.

An animal, on the other hand, is fulfilled once it survives a few years and produces an offspring. The cow, for example, need not do anything more than reach physical maturity in order to be an adult. It need not do anything to be evolved emotionally. There is no such thing as an emotionally mature cow. The only goal of a cow's life is to survive to adulthood and, as an adult, to survive as long as it can. Once it has become an adult, the cow is mature in every way.

A human being also has to become an adult physically. Otherwise, one's life is unfulfilled. To become an adult physically, you need only survive by appeasing your hunger and thirst and avoiding fatal accidents and diseases. You need not do anything special. The process is a very natural one, made possible by the survival instinct common to all living beings. Hence, after a few years, you find that you have become an adult.

Until you are a physical adult, you are in the hands of nature. Nature takes care of your physical growth until you can no longer say, 'I am a child.' Emotional maturity, however, does not happen in the same way. Unlike physical maturity, emotional growth is purely in your own hands. Unlike a cow, one need not be mature just because one happens to have an adult physical body. Inner maturity is a process that you have to initiate because you are a human being enjoying a faculty of choice.

THE HUMAN PURSUIT

Whatever is fundamentally sought after by every human being is called *puruṣārtha* in Sanskrit. Although each individual seeks something peculiar, there are four ends that everyone seeks, whether he or she is an Eskimo in Alaska or someone living in a remote village in India. The universal ends most commonly sought after are security and pleasure — *artha* and *kāma*. The remaining two *puruṣārthas* — *dharma* and *mokṣa*, to be explained below — can also be accomplished by a human being.

That which gives you any kind of security — emotional, economical, or social, is called *artha* in Sanskrit. *Artha* may be in the form of cash or liquid assets, stocks, real estate, relationships, a home, a good name, a title, recognition, influence, or power of any kind. Such accomplishments boost one's ego and therefore also provide some security for the ego. And although each person seeks various forms of security at a given time, that he or she is seeking security is common to all.

Seeking pleasure is another *puruṣārtha*, called *kāma* in Sanskrit. It, too, takes many forms. For instance, sensory pleasures may be anything from seafood or ice cream onwards. Examples of intellectual pleasures are those derived from playing certain games, solving puzzles or riddles, and studying certain bodies of knowledge. Thus, we have varieties of pleasures.

Anything that satisfies your senses, that pleases your mind, that touches your heart and evokes in you a certain appreciation, is *kāma*. Any form of pleasure you derive from your home, for example, or from a relationship is *kāma*. Music and travel are also *kāma*, not *artha*; because, by pursuing them, you are seeking pleasure, not security. You do not go to Hawaii or the Bahamas to seek security. In fact, you lose some security, in the form of money, when you go to these places. Because you happen to have some money, you travel for pleasure, not for security.

There is another form of pleasure derived from seeing the stars on a beautiful night, enjoying the sunrise, a flower, a playing child, or a beautiful painting, for example. Because this pleasure is neither sensory nor intellectual, I will call it aesthetic pleasure. Even though such pleasures go beyond one's senses and intellect, they are still *kāma*.

DHARMA AS A HUMAN END

There is a third *puruṣārtha*, *dharma*, that is neither *artha* nor *kāma*. *Dharma* is a word with many meanings, as we shall see. Here, it refers to the pleasure born of harmony, the pleasure derived from friendship, sharing, helping another person, and so on. For example, when you are able to relieve someone's suffering, you experience a joy that is not *kāma*. This form of pleasure is different from both *artha* and *kāma* in that you do not usually seek out a person in pain in order to pick up some pleasure. It is not the same as going to Hawaii or to a concert. You happen to come across someone in pain, you are able to alleviate the person's discomfort, and you feel happy.

A doctor who does not work purely for financial gain enjoys this kind of pleasure. Charity works in the same way. Those who are able to discover joy in such work do so, I would say, because there is inner growth and understanding, a certain sensitivity on their part. This sensitivity is also required to understand love, for to love another person thoroughly is to understand the other person, for which one should be educated, cultured.

If a person has not learned through experiences, if a person is not cultured, what kind of joy can he or she get out of life? For such people, there can be only sensory pleasures, eating, for example. But many simple joys are lacking in their lives. Thus, the gain in one's life is commensurate with what one knows.

It seems that a certain professor of medicine, in his introductory class, said, 'What your mind does not know, your eyes do not see.' What he meant was that, without medical knowledge the cause for a disease would continue to elude a person, even though the symptoms are everywhere. The eyes may see the symptoms, but the mind does not know. In life also, the more I know, the brighter life is, because I cannot see more than what I know. This is not to imply that I should necessarily get more out of life, only that my life is to be lived properly, fully, which implies a lot of understanding.

Living does not simply mean dragging yourself around from day to day — from bed to work, back home and to bed again. The whole process repeats itself until the weekend comes. Then you drag yourself to some recreation in the hope of forgetting yourself — which is why recreation becomes so important. In fact, your whole life can be a recreation. Someone once asked a Swami, 'Swamiji, do you not take any holidays? You seem to be working every day.' In fact, the Swami's life is one long holiday.

If you enjoy what you do, life is very simple. If you do not enjoy what you do, then you have to do something to enjoy, which can be very costly. On the other hand, any pleasure that comes out of one's maturing process is a different type of joy. Not hurting someone, or doing the right thing at the right time, for instance, gives you joy — if not immediately, later. Suppose you have postponed doing something, like the laundry, vacuuming, or letter writing, the day you decide to do it — and do it, you find that there is a joy in finally having done it — a joy that is neither pleasure nor security. It is just doing what is to be done; it is *dharma*, a very big topic that we will discuss later. For now, it is enough to know that as you grow in your understanding, your *dharma* also grows.

These, then, are three of the four *puruṣārthas* — *artha*, *kāma* and *dharma*. Because of the importance we place on *dharma*, the order can now be reversed — *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma*. *Dharma* accounts for your maturity. The more mature you are, the more *dhārmika* you are. In order to be mature, an understanding of *dharma* and conformity to it become of prime importance in one's life. Thus, *dharma* occupies the first place among these three human ends. Without violating *dharma*, doing what is to be done, you pursue *artha* and *kāma*, security and pleasure. This is how these three universal human pursuits are to be understood.

MOKĀA: FREEDOM FROM WHAT?

Even though it comes last, *mokṣa* is a very important *puruṣārtha*, as we shall see. *Mokṣa* is recognised as a pursuit only by a very few people in any given generation. Because a certain appreciation, a certain maturity or insight, about life and its struggles is required to understand *mokṣa*, people do not discerningly pursue it, although everyone is in fact, always seeking freedom in one form or other.

Although we think of freedom in a very positive way, the word *mokṣa* is actually defined in a negative sense. There is something binding you, from which you want to become free and that freedom is *mokṣa*. We say, for example, that a man who is not in jail has freedom, whereas if he is in jail, he does not. Because he cannot choose to come out, he has lost his freedom of mobility and wants to gain it. He wants freedom from the shackles of jail.

If you are using crutches because of a leg fracture, you want freedom from the crutches. Similarly, an infant requiring the help of the wall or mother's hand in order to stand wants to be free of the wall or the hand and therefore strives to stand on his or her own. Freedom, then, is always freedom from something.

Mokṣa means freedom from something I do not want. And because *mokṣa* is a *puruṣārtha*, a human end common to all, wanting to be free is not peculiar to me alone. Everyone wants to be free from certain things that are common to all. That I am attached to particular forms of security, *artha*, reveals a certain fact about myself — that I am insecure. That I also seek pleasures, *kāma*, reveals that I am restless, that I am not satisfied with myself. I have to do something in order to please myself, which means that I am displeased with myself.

If you are always seeking security and pleasure, when will you make your life? When will you really be able to say, 'I have made it! You can say that only when you see yourself as secure and are pleased with yourself. Then you are free; you have *mokṣa*.

Mokṣa does not mean salvation. In fact, there is no word in Sanskrit for salvation, which is just as well, since salvation implies a certain condemnation of yourself. It implies that someone has to salvage you, has to save you, which is not what is meant by *mokṣa* at all. The word *mokṣa* refers only to the freeing of myself from certain fetters. The basic ones are the notions that 'I am insecure' and 'I am displeased with myself.'

I must see myself as secure and be pleased with myself as I am. Only then do I have *mokṣa*. If I am secure and pleased with myself, what situation is going to change that? I require no security or a situational change whatsoever to be secure and at peace.

This should be understood well. You spend your entire life manipulating the world to please yourself. In the process, you find that two hands and legs, five senses, and a

mind are not enough to contend with all the factors involved. There are just too many events and situations, as well as natural forces, over which you seem to have no control.

FREEDOM IS FREEDOM FROM SEEKING

With my limited powers and limited knowledge, I find that I can never measure up to the demands of gaining the securities and pleasures that I seek. This is why life seems to be a problem. Only when you reach thirty-nine or forty, when you undergo what is sometimes referred to as the ‘Mid-life crisis,’ do you begin to understand this. Even though you may think your marriage or your job is your crisis, actually you are the crisis. Your crisis has nothing to do with marriage or any of the other situations in your life. Your tendency, however, is to find a scapegoat for every problem you have and the immediate scapegoat available is often your partner in life.

When we look into our various pursuits — *artha*, *kāma* and *dharma*, we find that, what we really seek is none of these. We seek only freedom from being a seeker. Everyone is a seeker pursuing *artha* and *kāma* mainly and, to some extent, *dharma*. But, ultimately, everyone is seeking only *mokṣa*. Therefore, *mokṣa* alone is the real end. In other words, freedom from being insecure is what we seek when we seek security. When I seek certain securities, I am not really seeking the securities themselves. I am seeking freedom from being insecure. This distinction should be clearly understood.

The shift in emphasis that this distinction represents is what we call learning. Seeking security is very natural. For an uninformed person, one who does not think about or understand his or her own ideas and urges, security is a particular thing and is always taken to be outside oneself. That — ‘I am insecure’ — is a totally accepted conclusion for such a person, a conclusion that is never doubted or questioned.

Various philosophies have arisen from this insecurity. One person says, for instance, that money will not give you security, while another person says it will — but only here on earth, not later. Later security, we are told, can only be gained by doing certain prescribed acts. Thus, we have varieties of religions and philosophies, all of which have been born out of accepting that, ‘I am insecure’ and that, security is something outside of oneself.

Even as a child, one's security depends on the constant availability of protection, love, and care of one's parents. On the other hand, once the child has grown up, the situation is reversed. Now the parents' security depends on the attention of the child. Parents often feel neglected by their grown up children who are now occupied with their own lives. Once a child has grown up, security is no more in the parents; it lies elsewhere.

THAT I LACK IS THE PROBLEM

As a child I was insecure and now also I am insecure. There is a constant shift in what I take to be securities, which is considered to be a normal life for everyone. No one, however, deserves to have this problem. Security is not the problem. That I lack something is not the problem. The problem is that 'I' lack. This difference must be seen clearly.

What I lack is always variable — I lack iced tea; I lack children; I lack a house. What one lacks is always peculiar to the individual at a given time and place in one's life. This differs from individual to individual, from culture to culture. However, this 'I lack' is common to all and is entirely different from what I lack. I may lack a healthy body, a taller body, a thinner body, a turned-up nose, longer eyelashes, or a different skin colour. And this may only be the beginning of an endless list! But the fact that I conclude that 'I lack' is universal.

For instance, what can you do if your height is less than you would like it to be? The most you can do is to wear high-heeled shoes, which does not really make you any taller. In fact, in the eyes of others you may be shorter. It is only when you are being recruited for a basketball team that anyone else thinks about your height. Height is your complex. I do not think about your height until you get into high-heeled shoes and try to walk. Only then do I see your height because you have drawn my attention to it; and I immediately cut it down by a few inches. I may actually reduce it more than the actual height of your heels. You not only fall short of my expectation, but also you become shorter than what you really are!

Thus, if you have a complex with reference to your height, you are stuck. If you were a wire or something stretchable, your height could be increased but, here, no stretching is possible. Similarly, there are a lot of things that you are stuck with because the things you are not, known and unknown, are countless. And what you lack you can never totally fulfil. The more you go after what you lack, the more you breed what you lack because what you lack has a knack of multiplying itself. It is like going to the supermarket to pick up a few things you lack and coming home with a few more desires to be fulfilled when you get your following week's paycheque. This is why we say desire is like fire that leaves a black trail after itself. No matter how much you feed it, fire never says, 'Enough!' Similarly, human beings can never say 'Enough!' to securities and pleasures.

INSECURE PLUS INSECURE IS NOT SECURE

When, then, are you going to completely fulfil your *arthas* and *kāmas*? I am not saying you should not seek out security; that is not the emphasis here. We are only trying to understand the very pursuit itself. Money definitely has its value. But, if you think that

there is security in money, or in anything else, the process of seeking becomes endless. The insecure me, the one who wants to be secure, does not really become secure by the addition of what I consider to be securities. No one can say, 'I am secure,' even with all possible securities.

As long as I require crutches, the sense of insecurity centred on me will remain with me. Feeling secure because I have crutches does not mean I am secure. I feel secure only because of the crutches, whereas the sense of insecurity centred on me remains.

Suppose I am insecure and what I think is secure is as insecure as I am. For example, if one insecure person marries another insecure person in order to be secure, the result is not security. All that results is a marriage between two insecure people. Can there be a greater hell anywhere? When two such people come together, it is a problem because insecurity plus insecurity do not make security, only double insecurity.

There is a story about a man who, as he was bathing by the side of a river, slipped and was swept away by the current. Because he could not swim, he prayed, 'Oh! Lord, please help me!' Just then a log came along and, catching hold of it, the man said, 'My God! God is great!' Then he realised that the log had fur on it — and hands also. He had thought he was holding on to a log, but now he realised that the 'log' was holding on to him. Still he thought that the Lord was saving him. He found, however, that the Lord was a grizzly bear that, having fallen from a tree, had also been swept up by the current. Once he realised he was holding on to a bear, he wanted to escape, but the bear already had too tight a hold on him.

WHO HOLDS ON TO WHAT?

Similarly, you do not know which holds what or who holds whom. You may have thought you were holding on to something, only to find that you cannot give it up, which means that it is holding you. This is a problem. Any habit is the same. An alcoholic was once a free person. When he or she took the first drink, the person poured the alcohol into the glass and, then, holding on to the glass, drank from it — no problem. However, after some time the person finds that he or she does not drink at all. As soon as 'Happy Hour'¹ arrives, the bottle tells the person, 'Come here,' and he or she goes like a zombie. Then the bottle says, 'Come on, pick me up!' And the person picks it up. It says, 'Come on, pour me into the glass! Drink!' And the person drinks. Then, it says 'One more, one more.' And the person takes more and more alcohol without his volitional control. Who is this person now, the one who was previously free? Does he or she drink? Or does the drink, drink the person?

In so many situations, no one knows who holds on to what. I see no difference between the grabber and the grabbed, the holder and the held. Even inert things like

¹ *The time in a bar when drinks are served at reduced prices.*

drinks, cards, or dice, have the capacity to grab me — to say nothing of relationships, since people are equally insecure. Therefore, an insecure me plus anything in this world that happens to be within the framework of time is not going to make me secure. This we should understand well. We are not trying to develop a particular attitude here, just a simple appreciation of the facts.

THE FACTS OF INSECURITY

That I am insecure is a fact and that I seek securities is also a fact. That which I consider secure is not secure because it also is finite. This, too, is a fact.

You may think that, by giving away whatever securities you have, you will become secure. One man did this. He gave away his house, his business, and his bank balance, and went to a Swami. But the Swami was also insecure and wanted to have a following of disciples. Previously, the man was on a husband trip, a father trip, a business-money trip, and now he is on another trip — a Swami-*ātmā*-trip minus a house, wife, children, money and so on. To think that subtraction is going to help, when addition does not, is nothing but a lack of understanding. And if *artha* is like this, *kāma* is the same.

No pleasure is going to be lasting. Take music, for instance, You buy a recording of a hit song. Why is this song a hit? Because, like a hit man, it knocks off all the other songs out of the running. Last month's hit song has been hit and is no longer a hit song. It only gathers dust on your tape deck. No one bothers about it any more.

Similarly, your attitude is always changing. What made you happy before no longer provides the same joy. You get tired of everything. Even if God were around you all the time, you would eventually want some privacy. This constant changing is natural because you are basically displeased with yourself. Therefore, you are pleased only now and then. The only silver lining in life is one's hope. This is all that keeps you going. Perhaps hope is nature's way of enabling you to survive so that you can discover nature herself.

Suppose those moments of pleasure, which are so few and far between, were denied to a given person, suppose they were not there at all, do you think a self-conscious human being, the displeased human being, would want to live? He or she would surely commit suicide. And, in spite of these moments of pleasure, if a person thinks there is no possibility of being happy, either because of a loss of some kind or an apprehension of some great calamity, the person would choose not to live. This is the thinking behind all suicides.

Therefore, moments of pleasure are worthwhile because they keep you going. The hope is that you will discover that you do not need a mother-in-law to be displeased; you need only yourself. If you close the doors, put aside the world and sit in an easy chair

and try to be with yourself, then you will understand whether you are pleased with yourself or not. You will find that you do not require a world of perception, a world of books or anything to be displeased. All that you require is yourself. After just a few minutes of sitting with yourself, you want to get up and go out or take a shower — anything other than sitting with yourself.

THE WORLD IS NOT THE CAUSE OF YOUR PROBLEMS

To be displeased, then, requires nothing but yourself. It is not the world that displeases you; you are displeased with yourself. And whatever pleases you is going to be time-bound, all of which we will see as we study the eighteen chapters of the *Bhagavadgītā*.

Because any *kāma*, any pleasure, you pick up is limited by nature — in terms of time, content, and degree, the one who is displeased remains in spite of occasional moments of pleasure. Therefore, we have now discerned the problem to be the conclusion about myself that, ‘I am displeased.’ This is a fact that is not going to be altered just because I pick up moments of pleasure. That I am insecure does not change merely because I acquire or give up certain securities. Thus, the only solution is to see myself secure and pleased with myself. But how is it possible to do this?

If, with all these securities and pleasures, I am displeased with myself, how am I going to see myself pleased without them? This is where the teaching called *Vedānta* comes in and tells you that your problem is not one of lacking something, but of not knowing that you do not lack anything. It converts all one's pursuits into a pursuit of knowledge.

In the vision of *Vedānta*, there is no reason for you to be displeased with yourself because you are totally acceptable to yourself — not in terms of attitude, but in reality. It is not a belief; it is a fact, a discoverable fact. Only something that can be discovered is a fact; and the discoverable fact here is that you lack nothing. You are totally free. This is a vision of you and this is the heart of *Vedānta*, the heart of this teaching. The problem that ‘I lack’ is thereby converted into ignorance, the cause of which I do not know for the time being. Until I come to know, the vision assumes the status of a promise.

YOU ARE THE PROBLEM; YOU ARE THE SOLUTION

Vedānta defines the problem as not what you lack, but that you lack, and says that you are the solution because you are the problem.

There are two types of problems. One has its solution outside the problem and the other has its solution within the very problem itself. The solution to the problem of feeling cold, for example, is outside the problem in the sense that you have to cover yourself, go to the fireside, or go out into the sun. You may even decide to go to the

Bahamas. When the solution to a problem is outside, it means that you have to do something to solve the problem. If hunger is your problem, you, have to feed the hunger by eating food, which is also outside. The solution to a jigsaw puzzle, however, is within the problem, within the puzzle itself. Because the solution is within the problem. There is no problem, in fact. The only problem is you and the solution is also you. When you do not understand something, it is a problem for you, whereas when you do understand, there is no problem. The understanding is the solution. In the vision of *Vedānta*, you have no problem, in fact.

Then, you may ask, how can I recognise that I do not have a problem? This seems to be one more problem to add to the ones I already have. But is it? One problem is not there — the problem of self-non-acceptance. Because, in the vision of *Vedānta*, the self is acceptable. What else do you want really? The only problem any human being has is self-non-acceptance. Therefore, you are the problem and you are the solution. Now your pursuit becomes one of knowing yourself and it can be a game — fun, all the way. This, then, is the teaching.

A discriminative analysis of *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma* leads one to a certain fundamental human problem. Once this human problem has been discerned, you will take special steps to resolve it, even though you may continue to pursue *artha*, *kāma*, and *dharma*. The solution to this original fundamental problem is called *mokṣa*.

MOKṢA IS NOT SALVATION

Mokṣa, as we have said, is not an equivalent to salvation, as is commonly thought. Nor is it some kind of accomplishment other than yourself. As freedom from something, however, *mokṣa* could be considered a negative accomplishment of sorts. Nevertheless, there is nothing more positive than *mokṣa*.

Once we say ‘freedom,’ the question is, ‘Freedom from what?’ and the answer is simply, ‘Freedom from something I do not want.’ No one wants freedom from what he or she wants. Therefore, no one wants freedom from *artha* or *kāma*, securities and pleasures. We want *artha*, *kāma*, a little bit of *dharma* plus *mokṣa*.

Mokṣa is not freedom from *artha* or *kāma*. That, which *artha* provides, *mokṣa* cannot provide. But that which *mokṣa* provides cannot be provided by *artha*, *kāma*, and *dharma* combined. A person who has *mokṣa* also has the freedom to pursue the other three human ends, *artha*, *kāma*, and *dharma*, if he or she so chooses. This, then, is real freedom and not freedom from these pursuits.

And who is it that undertakes these pursuits? The person, called *puruṣa* in Sanskrit, meaning any person young or old, man or woman, Indian or American. This *puruṣa*, the person, is the one who is after *artha* and *kāma*.

ALL ACTIONS HAVE A PURPOSE

A human being never undertakes a deliberate activity without it having a purpose. Even involuntary actions have a purpose, but here, we are talking only about those actions that are voluntary. Voluntary, deliberate actions always presuppose a desirer, whose desire is never for the action as such, but for the result, the object of desire. There is always some end in view.

An object that you have cannot become an object of desire if you know you have it. However, you may have something and not recognise that you have it and, therefore, it may become the object of your desire. Thus, the clause ‘if you know you have it,’ is important here. For instance, you cannot desire a head over your shoulders, since you already have one. Even if you have such a desire, no one can fulfil it; not even the Lord. If you were to ask him why, in spite of all of your devotion and prayers, he has not fulfilled your desire, he could only say, ‘I cannot give you what you already have.’ When I tell you that I cannot give you something, there are only two possible reasons for my response. One is that I am incapable of giving it to you, due to my lack of knowledge, power, or resources. The other possibility is that I can give it to you, but you do not deserve it, you are not qualified to receive it. Therefore, either you are not qualified to receive it or I am not qualified to give it to you.

Here, however, the incapacity to give you a head over your shoulders is because you are asking for something you already have. How, then, can even God give you one? If you want one more head, being God, he can give you a second head, although I do not know how a second head is going to help you, if the one you already have has not helped you. But he can give it to you. You will have to tell him, of course, where you would like it put. But do not ask him to give you a head over your shoulders. What you have, he cannot give you.

Although you cannot desire an object that you know you have, you can always desire an object that you do not have. There are many things that you do not have, like a green card, a new house, another job, a promotion, a wife, a husband, or children, a trip to a particular place — anything you do not have, you can desire. Thus, what you do not have can become an object of your desire.

Without a purpose, there is no effort, no deliberate activity. Therefore, the *puruṣa*, the person undertakes activities for accomplishing different ends — mainly *artha* and *kāma*, but also *dharma*. If this is so, there is a very important question to be asked, ‘Do I want *artha* and *kāma* for the sake of *artha* and *kāma* themselves?’ The answer to this question is what distinguishes the entire Vedic vision of human life from one's usual way of looking at it.

WHY DO I SEEK OUT SECURITIES AND PLEASURES?

Is *kāma* for its own sake? Is it for the sake of pleasure? Is it just for fun? If so, then with it or without it, you are the same. You go for it just because you go for it. In other words, it is nothing more than a fancy. But is this really the case? Are *artha* and *kāma*, which we are seeking in life, for their own sake or are they for myself? The *Veda* says that every object of my desire is for my sake alone — *ātmanastu kāmāya sarvaṃ priyaṃ bhavati*.¹

We only desire that which we know. No one can desire an object that is unknown to him or her. None of you has a desire for ‘Gagabugan,’ for instance. An unknown Gagabugan cannot be an object of desire. In fact, there is no such thing as Gagabugan. No amount of coaxing will cause you to get into your car and go to buy Gagabugan. But, you always have a reason for getting into your car. Some desire is always being fulfilled. Thus, an unknown object does not become an object of desire.

Only known objects become objects of desires. There are of course, some known objects for which I do not have a desire — scorpions, cancer, etc., for example. In fact, the more I know of such objects, the more I want to be rid of them. Also, an object that has been known and loved by me need not always be desirable to me. I may have no desire for it whatsoever a few years down the road. No one performs an action or undertakes a course of action without an end in view. Whether the end is right or not can only be discovered later. One may change one's view, or give it up altogether, for a variety of reasons. We have all done this. But what is desirable now, I will definitely seek out. Therefore, one who desires a particular end, any *artha* or *kāma*, does so for his or her own sake.

Suppose you say, ‘No, Swamiji, it is not for my sake; it is for the sake of my son.’ This only means that your ‘me’ has become a little extended, but it always reduces to ‘me.’ Your ‘me’ can extend to the community in which you live, to your religion and to your nation also. It is your ego — an extended ego — and the more extensions, the healthier the ego. Still, the end is always for your sake alone.

PRAYER IS ALWAYS FOR ONE'S OWN SAKE

Even if you offer a prayer, for whose sake is the prayer? For God's sake? Is God in such difficulty that you have to pray for him also? If God requires our prayers in order to survive, then to whom should I pray? If you are praying to God for God's sake, then for God's sake, please give it up! When one says, ‘For God's sake,’ it is only an expression. You do not do anything for God's sake.

¹ *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad 2.4.5*

It is also often said that one should ‘Serve God.’ Is it that, God has too much work to do and therefore needs our help? Of course not. Your service and your prayer is for your sake alone. There is nothing wrong with that. If you pray for your mother, father, children, humanity and all living beings, you do so because you can only be happy if others are happy. How can you be happy if everyone else is unhappy?

We see this in games, for instance. In tennis, you always start with love — like marriage! — and then fight to the bitter end. One person wins and the other loses. The one who wins, throws his or her racket into the air and says, ‘Wonderful! I won!’ Whereas, the one who loses, never throws his or her racket into the air, although it may be thrown to the ground in a gesture of defeat! And when the winner approaches the net, still ecstatic and gasping for breath, to shake hands with the loser, the elation subsides a little, because every human heart knows what it is to be on the other side. Thus, when others are unhappy, you cannot be happy.

Desiring *arthas* and *kāmas*, then, I make certain efforts; and if these efforts do not seem to be enough, I make another effort called prayer. Prayer is neither an *artha* nor a *kāma*; it is *dharma*. Through prayer, you want to gain some invisible result which will give you *artha* and *kāma*. Although spiritual seekers do not pray for *artha* and *kāma*, they do pray for knowledge and maturity, which again is for one's own sake alone. This aspect of the human personality is very important and is basic to the vision of *Vedānta*.

When you know that, whatever you do, is for your own sake, everything becomes meaningful. You find that what you do has its place and everything falls into place. Nothing is more efficacious than anything else; no one action is more important than another. Each action becomes important in its own sphere and is meant for producing its own result. Can we say that the ears are better than the eyes or that the eyes are better than the ears? No, we require both. If I see you shouting at me but cannot hear what you are shouting, I cannot respond to you properly. Eyes have their own sphere, as do the ears. Similarly, each organ — the kidney, liver, heart, lung, and so on — has its own sphere, each one as important as any of the others.

But in order for everything to fall into its place, the starting point must be proper. Here, the proper starting point is knowing that any action I perform is always for a given end and that end is for my sake alone. *Vedānta* takes this statement one step further to cover certain important relationships. A wife is dear to her husband not for her sake, but for his sake. Similarly, the husband becomes dear to his wife for her sake, not for his sake. If I understand that everything I do is for my own sake alone, then even my relationships would be very objective. I will not go about saying, ‘I did so much for you’ — the starting point for all kinds of trouble.

FREEDOM FROM BEING A WANTING PERSON

That I want *artha* and *kāma* reveals that, I am an insecure and unhappy person from two different standpoints. What do I really want? Do I want the actual *artha* and *kāma*, the objects themselves or do I want security and happiness? Because I want security and happiness, all *arthas* and *kāmas* are reduced to security and happiness alone.

If I am insecure, I naturally seek security and if I am unhappy, I seek happiness. However, it is not the security itself that I want. What I really want is freedom from insecurity. In terms of security, I am wanting. In terms of fullness and happiness also, I am wanting. Therefore, I want freedom from being a wanting person and, in order to be free from being a wanting person, I have to see myself as secure. I have to see myself as one who does not lack anything and I can see myself in this way alone when I have no sense of lack.

If I am insecure and unhappy, and I see myself as secure and happy because of some kind of self-hypnotism, for instance, then I am under yet another delusion. It is better to be insecure than to be deluded into thinking that I am secure. If I know I am insecure, then at least I can be objective and thereby understand my problems.

Thus, one has to be secure in order to see oneself as secure. To be able to say, 'I am happy,' one has to be happy to understand the happiness we talk about. I can therefore see myself as secure and happy either by becoming so or by already being so. I am using two different words here, 'becoming' and 'being' for a reason. We generally see ourselves as insecure and unhappy and then try to become secure and happy. The whole process of living, the struggles in our lives, are all a process of becoming — being insecure, we seek to become secure.

In the final analysis, people are all after the same thing. One may seek this and that, but over the shoulders of seemingly different ends, we see two common ends — being secure and being happy. My hope is that one day I will become secure, that one day I will become happy. Therefore, even when we are seeking *artha* and *kāma*, we are all seeking freedom from being insecure and unhappy. This must be clearly understood.

MOKĀA AS THE END IN LIFE

Given that everyone wants freedom from being a wanting person, everyone wants *mokṣa*. When it is put in this way, it looks as though *mokṣa* is just another end. In fact, it is not another end; it is the end, the end behind all ends. We refer to *mokṣa* as another end, another *puruṣārtha*, only because people do not recognise it as the only end, even though they seek freedom from insecurity. Recognising this end is the culmination of one's life; the end of *saṃsāra* — insecurities and unhappiness.

The culmination of one's life is not ageing; it is the ability to discern yourself as one who is secure and happy. This discerning is part of growing up. Once the fact that you are secure and happy has been discerned, even though you may continue in your various *artha* and *kāma* pursuits, you have taken the necessary step for *mokṣa*. However small the step, the step has been made. Having 'stepped into' this teaching, the necessary step has been taken.

You should not be alarmed by the word *mokṣa*. You need not worry about what will happen to your family if you study and become enlightened. Believe me, your family will be happy because they will no longer have to deal with your insecurities and unhappiness. Also, by trying to gain enlightenment, the pressure you were feeling will definitely be less because you now have something better to accomplish in life. Otherwise, life is a problem.

Marriage, for example, cannot be an end in itself. If it is, there will be problems, and the marriage will end. Marriage is a means, not an end, whereby husband and wife each seek freedom from insecurity. Freedom from insecurity is their common end and they help each other. Together, as companions, they make the journey. This most significant aspect of marriage is acknowledged in the seven steps of a Hindu marriage ceremony. Only when these seven steps have been taken has the marriage taken place. Each of the seven steps represents one aspect of the couple's journey, for which there is a destination, *mokṣa*.

Discerning *mokṣa* as the end in life and seeking it make one's life meaningful. They do not prevent a person from seeking *artha* and *kāma*. In fact, without them, life is just a rat race. One should always remember that the truth of the rat race is that, even after the race, the winning rat continues to be a rat. The vision is now clear; freedom is seeing myself as a secure and happy person, free from being insecure and unhappy.

The whole struggle in life stems only from insecurity and unhappiness. One thinks that by adding some security, one will become secure. In this way, life is one of becoming; and, in the process, one becomes hurt, aged, and has all kinds of things happen to him or her. If the fundamental problem is not discerned, one's life is wasted. All that is achieved is that one human life has been spent. The good thing about all of this is that, the Veda says you always have another chance — and another and another! While this may provide some satisfaction, it is not a solution to the fundamental problem.

Now, if there is no 'becoming free,' and I have to be free, then I must already be free. Moreover, if I am already free and I seek freedom, then I am seeking something that I already am. I know that I want freedom, but I do not know that I am free. Therefore, not knowing I am already free is the problem.

If there is ignorance of oneself, in order to know oneself, there should be a means of knowledge. And it is a fact that what can be known by one means of knowledge cannot be known by another means of knowledge. For example, what can be known by the eyes, in terms of colour and form cannot be known by the ears, in terms of sound. Similarly, what can be inferred can only be inferred at a given time and place.

The basic means of knowledge available to me for knowing things other than myself is perception. But the self, myself, cannot be an object of perception like sound (*śabda*), touch (*sparśa*), a form or colour (*rūpa*), a taste (*rasa*), or a smell (*gandha*). Only those objects which have the attributes of sound, form or colour, smell, taste, and touch can be known as objects of my senses; whereas the self is the one who uses this means of knowledge, perception. Therefore, I cannot employ perception as a means of knowledge to know myself.

One's perception can be enhanced by microscopes, telescopes, and various other instruments, thereby gathering better data and increasing one's capacity to make more accurate inferences based on perception. These better data definitely question one's previous understanding. For instance, because you see the sun rising in the eastern sky and setting in the west, you conclude from your perceptual data that the sun rises and sets. And the earth is stationary. However, seeing the sun move does not mean that it moves. The sun can appear to be moving but, if you go to the North Pole, you will see that the sun does not move from east to west. You now have better data because of which you revise your earlier conclusion. This new conclusion then becomes the basis for additional data and inferences.

Similarly, if we put a stick in a glass of water, the stick looks bent. You may think that the water has the capacity to bend the stick, but when you pull it out, you see that it is not bent. Your conclusion or knowledge now is that it does not bend, that it only appears to be bent while in the glass of water. Perception is negated by conclusive knowledge. That the stick appears to be bent when it is not is now understood as an optical illusion. Conclusions based on better data are all valid and all conclusions are arrived at through a means of knowledge, *pramāṇa* — inference in this case.

The question now becomes, can the self, myself, who uses inference and perception, become an object for either of these means of knowledge? It cannot. And yet, at the same time, I must know myself.

WHAT MEANS OF KNOWLEDGE IS THERE FOR KNOWING MYSELF?

I do know that I exist and, to know this, I do not require a means of knowledge, as we shall see more clearly later. All I need to know is what I am. Am I as I conclude? Am I insecure? What are the reasons for concluding that I am insecure? We will also see all

of this more in detail, later. But, for now, it is enough to know that ignorance is the main reason that I see myself as insecure.

Ignorance is the main reason for any error. But, here, the error is typical and wherever an error is typical, there are other incidental reasons that make it so. Suppose you mistake a rope for some other object. What kind of a mistake do you make? You do not take the rope to be an elephant. Such a mistake is not possible. But you could take the rope to be a snake or any number of other similar-looking objects. You cannot, however, mistake it for something totally dissimilar.

Similarly, there is self-ignorance leading to certain typical conclusions on the part of every being — that I am insecure, unhappy, and so on. There are, thus, incidental causes for such conclusions as well as the prime cause, ignorance, which we are dealing with here. Knowledge alone can dispel ignorance and knowledge cannot take place without a means of knowledge — even knowledge that is picked up accidentally, like the knowledge of Penicillin, for example.

Knowledge picked up accidentally does not preclude a means of knowledge. In fact, there was a great deal of knowledge leading to the accidental discovery of Penicillin — the greatest discovery of the century, I would say, since it has revolutionised the quality of human life. Infections that were once fatal succumb to this wonder drug and certain innovative surgeries, such as heart transplants, can now be performed, thanks to Alexander Fleming, who stumbled upon this particular knowledge.

‘Stumbling upon,’ serendipity, is also a means of knowledge. If the scientist who discovered Penicillin had not been qualified, he would not have had the knowledge to question why the strain of bacterium he was culturing had been destroyed by a particular fungus. When he found the bacteria dead, he would have just said, ‘They died. Better luck next time.’ Instead, he had the capacity to look into the whole situation and, using the proper means of knowledge, experiments, and so on, he concluded that, this particular fungus destroys bacteria.

Knowledge itself is never stumbled upon. All that is stumbled upon is a particular situation leading to the knowledge. For knowledge to take place, you have to recognise the situation and this recognition is what is meant by knowledge. But, the self can never be stumbled upon, even if you remove all your thoughts, as some people maintain. Which self will you stumble upon? Who is it that is stumbling and what is it that is being stumbled upon? If you are ignorant of your self and remove all the thoughts you previously had, what will you be? You will still be ignorant — without thoughts. Then, if you conclude that you are enlightened because you have removed all thoughts, the conclusion will be a thoughtless conclusion.

THOUGHTS NEED NOT BE ELIMINATED

This you must know. The enlightened mind is not brought about by the elimination of thoughts. Knowledge always comes because of an appropriate means of knowledge. There is no way of altering knowledge and there is no replacement for a means of knowledge. Therefore, what can be known by a given means of knowledge can be known only by that means of knowledge. There is no accommodation here. If you have to see a colour, what accommodation can there be? Only the eyes will see colour; your nose certainly will not. There is no other means for knowing colour except the eyes.

Because I cannot stumble upon my self, will I not remain ignorant in spite of anything I might do? And if so, might one not also ask, ‘is it not enough just to be a devotee? Why should I study all these books? Why should I have this knowledge? As a devotee, will I not gain *mokṣa* when I die?’

You may think that, because of your devotion, you will go to heaven and sit with God. However, you will still be ignorant. In addition, how long will it be before you become bored there and want to come back? On the other hand, the reward for all your prayers, offered either in this life or in previous lives, is stumbling upon the means of knowledge for knowing the *ātmā* or even understanding what a means of knowledge is. This is all stated in the Vedas. What is the means of knowledge to know the self then? We have seen that it has to be other than perception and inference and, therefore, can only be external means — words. For facts that I cannot know by perception and inference, words, *śabda*, can be a means of knowledge. And those words are called Veda. They are with us, meaning that they are with humanity. We refer to them as ‘revealed’ and look upon them as a means of knowledge for truths that can be neither inferred nor perceived.¹ This acceptance of the Veda as a *pramāṇa* is what is meant by *śraddhā*.

THE VEDA AS A MEANS OF KNOWLEDGE

Suppose I were to say, ‘The *Veda* says that there is such a thing as heaven,’ can you prove it? Can you disprove it? If it can be proven, it is not knowledge exclusive to the *Veda*. Since we cannot prove or disprove it, the *Veda* is the *pramāṇa* for knowing about heaven.

¹ प्रत्यक्षेणानुमित्या वा यस्तूपायो न बुध्यते।

एतं विदन्ति वेदेन तस्माद् वेदस्य वेदता॥

pratyakṣeṇānumityā vā yastūpāyo na budhyate

etaṃ vidanti vedena tasmād vedasya vedatā — Ṛgveda-bhāṣya

People know through the Vedas that which cannot be known through perception or inference. Therefore the Vedas are a means of knowledge.

Anything that cannot be proved or disproved is the sphere of the *Veda* and is its definition as well. That there is a heaven, that there is an afterlife, that there is not an end of everything and everyone, cannot be proved. Nor can you prove that, for all your actions, right and wrong, there are invisible results, accrued to your account, called *puṇya* and *pāpa*.

The *Veda* says that *puṇya* is the result of good action and *pāpa* is the result of wrong action. The *Veda* also says, along with some supporting logic, that *pāpa* accrued to our account has to be paid for with pain. This is called the law of *karma*. Can you disprove such statements? Can you prove them? You can neither prove them nor can you disprove them.

There are a number of other things mentioned in the *Veda*. For instance, we are told that by performing a certain ritual, we will receive a specific result, either immediately or later. Suppose you perform a ritual for the sake of having a child, called *Putrakāmeṣṭi*. You have made every effort possible and the best medical advice available has assured you that there is no reason for you not to have a child. But, then, something is denying you this particular gift. Since you are dealing with an unknown factor, and you want a specific result, you perform a specific prayer, not a broad-spectrum prayer. This specific prayer takes care of the unknown factor that is denying you the gift of a child — and a child comes to you. All of this is stated in the *Veda*. Because this ritual and its result is given by the *Veda*, you accept it — along with all the other statements made therein. The spheres covered in the *Veda* are only those that are not available for perception and inference.

The first portion of the *Veda* deals with various rituals, prayers, *karma*, *puṇya*, *pāpa*, and so on, and is called the *pūrvabhāga* or the *karmakāṇḍa*. The end portion of the *Veda* deals with certain facts about the nature of the self that cannot be stumbled upon by any other means of knowledge at our disposal. This is called the *jñānakāṇḍa* or the *Vedānta* or the *uttarabhāga*.

When we say that something is beyond one's inference or perception, we do not mean that it is beyond the mind. We mean that, it is not available for one's inference or perception. Still, it has to be known and any knowledge takes place only in the mind. Therefore, where does self-knowledge take place? Only in the mind — *manasā eva anudraṣṭavyam*. Because all knowledge has to take place in the mind, you cannot go 'beyond the mind' to gain self-knowledge.

Self-knowledge is a peculiar knowledge in that, it is not knowledge of an object. It is knowledge of myself, for which the means of knowledge is the last portion of the *Veda*, in the *Upaniṣads*, collectively called *Vedānta*. Any statement that reveals the truth of oneself, the nature of oneself, with all fallacies removed, is *Vedānta*, whether it is in Sanskrit, some tribal dialect, or any other language. Although the literal meaning of the word '*Vedānta*' is 'the end of the *Veda*,' the word '*Veda*' itself means 'a body of

knowledge.’ This body of knowledge is available for the humanity. All that one has to do is make use of it.

REVEALED KNOWLEDGE — APAURUĀEYA-PRAMĒŪA

How has this knowledge come about? We can say, that it has come about by revelation. But, to do so, requires a certain understanding of the word ‘revelation.’ Anyone can say, ‘I had a revelation yesterday.’ God always comes in dreams, it seems, and tells certain people all sorts of things. I can also say I had a dream in which God came; but, in my dream, God said, ‘I never come in dreams!’

The statement that ‘The entire Veda and hence *Vedānta* is a revealed knowledge’ is not an immature statement, as we will come to understand. The entire Veda is a body of knowledge that was not authored by any person. It was revealed to the *ṛṣis* directly. That is why the *ṛṣis* are not the authors of the *Veda*. They are the seers of the *mantras* — *mantra-draṣṭāraḥ* and not *mantra-kartāraḥ*. Therefore the *Vedas* are considered to be *apauruṣeya*, not born of human intellect. They are considered to be a *pramāṇa* because, they reveal some thing that is not available to us through perception or inference be it the knowledge of various ends and means in the *karma-kāṇḍa* or the knowledge of the self in the end portion of the *Vedas*. Thus my definition of *Vedānta* is that, it is a means of knowledge, a *pramāṇa* in the form of words. The sphere of this means of knowledge is ‘you.’ It talks about ‘you.’

You now have a means of knowledge, which you did not have before. Originally, you had only inference and perception, which you cannot press into service to know yourself. Naturally, then, you look for an appropriate means of knowledge and find that there is none available to you other than the one that is outside of you.

An appropriate means of knowledge must tell you something valid about yourself. In other words, it cannot be fallacious. When something is said about you, it can either be true or untrue, something that is subject to personal validation. The word ‘revelation’ here is to be understood in terms of an appropriate means of knowledge. The first step towards self-knowledge, then, is accepting *Vedānta* as a revealed means of knowledge.

How do we know that, *Vedānta* is a means of knowledge? What is the proof? Is there a proof for a means of knowledge? If *Vedānta* is a means of knowledge for the self, it requires neither inferential nor perceptual proof. All that is required is that it should not contradict what you know inferentially or perceptually.

HOW DO YOU PROVE THAT VEDĀNTA IS A PRAMĒŪA

Vedānta cannot be disproved as a means of knowledge and it requires no proof other than self-validation. Let us suppose that a man who was born blind undergoes a new surgical procedure, at the age of thirty-five, that will enable him to see. The surgery

is considered to be a success, there are no complications, and the doctors are convinced that the man will see. After removing the bandages, the doctor says, 'Please open your eyes.' But, keeping his eyes closed tightly, the man says, 'Doctor, I will only open my eyes when you prove that I can see.' What can the doctor do now? He is being asked to prove that the man's eyes are a means of knowledge, that they are capable of sight. But how can he do that? He can only say, 'I think you will be able to see. The surgery went very well and there is no reason why your eyes should not see.' Even if the doctor forces the man's eyes open, the only proof that he will be able to see is the sight registered by the eyes themselves.

Vedānta says that you are the solution to your problem and that there is no other solution. You have already tried to resolve the problem in a number of different ways. *Vedānta* does not promise anything. It does not say you will become the solution; it says you are the solution. To become the solution, implies a certain commitment and investment, meaning that you may find it or you may not, since every 'becoming' is fraught with uncertainty.

In the Vedic vision of the reality, everything that is known and unknown is *Brahman*, and that *Brahman* you are — *tat tvam asi*. Gaining this vision, one finds oneself free from all the limitations imposed upon oneself due to ignorance and error.

TWO COMMITTED LIFE-STYLES

To gain this vision, the *Veda* prescribes two committed life-styles. One is a life of activity — *pravṛttimārga* and the other a life of renunciation of activity — *nivṛttimārga*. Śaṅkara introduces his *bhāṣya* to the *Bhagavadgītā* with the exposition of this two-fold *dharma* as it is revealed by the *Veda*. Here, *dharma* can be understood as a religious or as a spiritual pursuit.

The *Veda* talks about action or activity — *karma*, meaning not only religious activities, but also those that we consider as secular. All activities, whether religious or secular, are considered to be *dharma*; and thereby become duties. This is what is meant by the life-style of *pravṛtti*, whereas the life-style of *nivṛtti* is called renunciation — *sannyāsa*.

The life-style of *pravṛtti* is two-fold; a *pravṛtti* for achieving security and pleasures, here and in the hereafter, and a *pravṛtti* for the purpose of one's own maturity, for the purification of oneself — *antaḥkaraṇa-śuddhi*, as we shall see later. The same acts of prayers and other religious activities are done for both purposes.

There are, therefore, two types of people who follow the *pravṛttimārga*. Both the types follow the *Veda*, but one group does so for the purpose of gaining immediate pleasures and securities. This group also follows the *Veda* for the unseen results of good deeds to be converted into better forms of security or pleasure later, either here or in the

hereafter. The second group of people follow the *Veda* and engage in various actions for the sake of *antaḥkaraṇa-śuddhi* with *mokṣa* as their end in view. People belonging to both these groups accept the *Veda* as a means of knowledge — *pramāṇa*, and are called *vaidikas*. And because they are *vaidikas*, they are referred to as believers — *āstikas*.

BELIEVER AND NON-BELIEVER

In English, we use the words ‘atheist’ and ‘theist’ purely with reference to whether or not a person believes in God. It is not so in *vaidika-dharma*. Here, one may believe in the *Veda* and not believe in a personal God at all. Such a person interprets the *Veda* in such a way that there is no such *Īśvara*, no creator at all. Thus, there can be a *vaidika*, one who accepts the *Veda* as a *pramāṇa*, who is an *āstika*, a believer, who believes in the *Veda*, but does not believe in God as a person.

For us, then, *āstika* means someone who believes in the *Veda* as a *pramāṇa* and *nāstika* is one who does not. Given this definition, there are many *nāstikas*, people who do not accept the *Veda* as a *pramāṇa* and who are religious. For instance, a follower of Buddha, although a *nāstika*, should not be dismissed as irreligious. Such people are religious in their own way. However, in our view, a Buddhist is a *nāstika* based on our definition of *āstika* and *nāstika*. Similarly, a person who follows Mahavira, a Jain, is also a *nāstika*. The *Sāṅkhya* philosopher, *Kapila*, and his followers, on the other hand, are *āstikas*, *vaidikas*. They accept the *Veda* as a *pramāṇa*, but they do not accept *Īśvara*. One who follows the Vedic rituals, but who does not accept an *Īśvara*, is also an *āstika*.

Although Buddhists and Jains are *nāstikas*, they both believe in *karma*. They believe there is an afterlife and that there is such a thing as *nirvāṇa*, liberation or *mokṣa*, which is gained after a number of births. That is their belief and they have their own arguments to support it.

When *mokṣa* is the end in view, the two committed life-styles — *pravṛttimārga* and *nivṛttimārga* must be properly understood. They are stated very clearly in the *Vedas* and are again presented in the *Gītā* as well as by *Śaṅkara* in his opening commentary.

ALLOWING THE MEANS OF KNOWLEDGE TO WORK

If I am the solution, I have no reason either to deny what *Vedānta* says or to prove that it is correct. Just as, in our earlier example, the man had to open his eyes to prove that he could see, so too, the only proof that *Vedānta* is a means of knowledge is in allowing it to work. I should let the words do their magic on me. ‘Words’ refers to a certain knowledge born of the words. Words are not just words. They can reveal and thereby remove my ignorance.

The words need not always give rise to indirect knowledge; they can also give direct knowledge. When the *Veda* talks about heaven, the knowledge is definitely indirect. In fact, it is a belief. There is a description giving you some indirect knowledge about heaven, if indeed there is one. Every tradition has its own description of heaven and we understand it from that description.

The *Veda*, then, reveals the self by saying that it is beyond words and, at the same time, uses words to make you see the truth of yourself. Therefore, the self is not ‘beyond words’ in the usual sense of the term. It is something entirely different, highly technical, as we will see, and may take some time to understand.

When words are about an object away from myself, the knowledge is indirect and when they are about an object around myself, the knowledge is direct. Suppose I hold up an orange. You know it is a fruit, but suppose you do not know what kind of fruit it is. Then I tell you it is an orange. You now know that it is an orange. Then you want to know how it tastes and I tell you how it tastes. That is not enough. You have to taste it actually. You also have to taste some other oranges as well. Only then you come to know more or less, all about an orange. When you smell an orange, peel it, and eat it, not knowing that it is an orange, and I say, ‘This is an orange,’ the knowledge is direct knowledge, immediate knowledge.

Now, I ask, ‘Do you exist or not?’ ‘I exist. I am,’ you say. Then I ask, ‘Who are you?’ To this question, there are many answers — all of which reveal, ‘I am insecure.’ However, I say, ‘you are secure.’ This is not just a statement. I have a whole methodology of teaching. I take you through all the steps logically and then I say, ‘Therefore, you are secure.’ Is this knowledge immediate, direct, or mediate, indirect? It is immediate, direct knowledge. *Vedānta* is therefore a *pramāṇa*, a means of knowledge, and you have no other way to proceed except to expose yourself to it, taking it as a means of knowledge. You need to understand exactly what *Vedānta* is saying. And if you do not understand, if you have questions, then you should make an effort to understand.

If what *Vedānta* says is untenable, I should see how untenable it is and examine the untenability. Perhaps it is my understanding that is untenable and what is said is tenable. If that is the case, then, I correct my understanding and keep on correcting it, thereby seeing what *Vedānta* has to say.

THE GĪTĀ AS A MEANS OF KNOWLEDGE

The *Gītā*, of course, is not as voluminous as the Vedas, which contain all the *Upaniṣads*. The *Upaniṣads* are the original source book which is understood with the help of books like the *Gītā*, since these books present the same material very cogently in an easily understood form. This is why the *Gītā* is referred to as the *gītāśāstra*.

There are seven hundred verses in the *Gītā*, contained in eighteen chapters, the first chapter and the initial few verses of the second chapter providing the context. We have, then, the entire *gītāśāstra* in seventeen chapters wherein the two-fold *dharma* of a committed life-style for *mokṣa* is unfolded.

Because the *Gītā* is a book (*grantha*) that unfolds this *dharma*, it is looked upon as a *pramāṇa-grantha*, even though the *Upaniṣads* are the *pramāṇa*, not being born of a given intellect. The *Upaniṣads*, meaning the *Vedas*, form the means of knowledge. But the *Gītā* is also looked upon as a *pramāṇa* because it upholds and unfolds what the *Veda* (*śruti*) says. If the *Gītā* said anything not in keeping with the *śruti*, it would definitely not be considered a *pramāṇa-grantha*. The *Gītā* would not be studied, nor would *Śaṅkara* have written a commentary on it.

The *Gītā* is accepted as *pramāṇa-grantha* because of its affinity and fidelity to the *Veda*. Lord *Kṛṣṇa* himself confirms in the *Gītā* that, what he is saying has already been said in the *Veda*. Further more, the *Gītā* is presented by *Vyāsa* who is considered to be the editor of the *Vedas*.

The four *Vedas*, collectively referred to as the *Veda*, existed even before *Vyāsa*. He was the one who grouped them properly so that a designated person in a given family could study one particular *Veda* and then hand it over to each succeeding generation. Because *Vyāsa* knew the *Vedas* so well, he was considered to be all-knowing (*sarvajña*). In the middle of the vast, beautiful word tapestry of his epic, *Mahābhārata*, *Vyāsa* presented the wisdom of the *Vedas*, in the form of the *Gītā*. It shines in the midst of the much larger work like a pendant jewel. These eighteen chapters are therefore considered to be an authentic *pramāṇa*.

The first argument for the *Gītā* being a *pramāṇa*, then, is that it does not contradict what the *Veda* says. It expounds and illustrates what the source book says. The second argument is that it is presented by *Vyāsa*. Thirdly, *Vyāsa* presents *Kṛṣṇa* as an *avatāra* of the Lord. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* is looked upon as an *avatāra*, a particular form the Lord has assumed for achieving certain limited ends.

If the concept of *avatāra* is accepted, *Kṛṣṇa* as an *avatāra* is Lord *Nārāyaṇa*, *Īśvara* himself. Therefore, when *Kṛṣṇa* talks in the *Gītā*, *Īśvara*, the Lord, is talking. What is said is the word of *Bhagavān* (*bhagavad-vacana*) and *Bhagavān* is telling us what the *Veda* says. This again makes the *Gītā* a *pramāṇa-grantha* for the believers. When *Bhagavān* himself is talking about what is said in the *Vedas*, what else do we want? Because the *Gītā* is *bhagavad-vacana*, the word of *Bhagavān*, it is a *pramāṇa*.

THE MEANING OF BHAGAVĒN

*Bhagavān*¹ is the one who has *bhaga*, the six-fold virtues in absolute measure. These are: all knowledge, *jñāna*; total dispassion, *vairāgya*; the capacity to create, sustain, and resolve, *vīrya*; absolute fame, *yaśas*; all wealth, *śrī*; and overlordship, *aiśvarya*.

To have all knowledge, *jñāna*, is to be free from all ignorance. Thus the one who has all *jñāna* does not require a mind, perception, or a means of knowledge with which to know. If we require a mind to know, there is always ignorance. Thus, whoever is endowed with a mind in order to know cannot be *Bhagavān*. We will see later how it is possible to be one with *Bhagavān*. *Bhaga*, therefore, is *jñāna*, all knowledge.

Total, absolute, dispassion is also called *bhaga*. The one who has total, absolute dispassion, *vairāgya*, has no longing, no insecurity. He or she is full. *Vīrya* is absolute power or *śakti* meaning the capacity to create, to sustain, and to resolve. The one who has this absolute power is called the Almighty.

Absolute fame, *yaśas*, means all fame, including your own or anyone else's. This is also *bhaga*. One who is endowed with the ability to sing, for example, may gain some fame, a ray of glory, but that fame belongs to the Lord, the one who has all fame. The Lord also has all wealth, all resources — *Śrī*. Any wealth you may have really belongs to *Bhagavān*, the Lord, and you are only a trustee of whatever resources you happen to have.

Finally, the one who is not caused, who is not ruled by anyone, who is not subject to the laws of someone else, has the *bhaga* called *aiśvarya* — *overlordship*. We, as individuals have to go by the laws of nature; we cannot go against them. Even an engineer who is responsible for planning, commissioning, and running a thermal plant cannot touch a live wire without facing the consequences. In other words, the engineer cannot behave as he or she likes merely because he or she caused the electricity to be generated. It was because of the laws alone that the engineer was able to generate electricity in the first place.

¹ भगः अस्य अस्ति इति भगवान्।

The one who has bhaga is called Bhagavān . It is said in the Viṣṇu-purāṇa:

ऐश्वर्यस्य समग्रस्य वीर्यस्य यशसः श्रियः ।

ज्ञानवैराग्ययोश्चैव षण्णां भग इतीरणा ॥

aiśvaryaśya samagrasya vīryasya yaśasaḥ śriyaḥ

jñāna-vairāgyayoścaiva ṣaṅṅāṃ bhaga itīraṇā

(*Viṣṇu-purāṇa* — 6. 5. 74)

Total and absolute overlordship, power, wealth, dispassion, fame and knowledge are known as bhaga .

The one who does not subject himself to the law or laws of another is the Lord. If the Lord is ruled by someone else, then that someone else becomes the Lord; and it is this Lord that we are talking about. These six absolute virtues, then, constitute *bhaga* and the one who has this six-fold *bhaga* is *Bhagavān*.

BHAGAVADGĪTĒ; THE LORD'S SONG

There are a variety of *Gītās* — the *Anugītā*, *Uttaragītā*, *Kāmagītā*, *Pāṇḍavagītā*, *Haṃsagītā*, *Siddhagītā*, *Rāmagītā*, *Uddhavagītā*, *Gaṇeśagītā*, etc.; but the most popular one is the *Bhagavadgītā*.

The title *Bhagavadgītā* means the song (*gītā*) of the Lord (*Bhagavān*). It is considered a song because it is in the form of verse and therefore pleasing. It has only two meters — *anuṣṭubh* and *triṣṭubh*, making the *Gītā* easy to recite and remember. The *Gītā* is also pleasing because it has a subject matter that is highly desirable to all.

The word *Bhagavadgītā* is feminine in gender because the *Veda*, the word *śruti*, is feminine, further revealing that, what is said in the *Gītā* is said in the *śruti*. And who is *Bhagavān* here? *Kṛṣṇa* is *Bhagavān*. *Kṛṣṇa* is the one who has proved that he has the six-fold *bhaga* and is therefore looked upon as *Bhagavān*. Once you understand the meaning of *Bhagavān* as the one who has *bhaga*, *Kṛṣṇa* being *Bhagavān* presents no problem at all.

One can look at the title *Bhagavadgītā* in another way — as a song that has *Bhagavān* as its subject matter. This is similar to saying ‘electronic knowledge,’ — knowledge whose subject matter is electronics. Therefore, we can take the title, *Bhagavadgītā*, to mean either *Bhagavān’s gītā* or a *gītā* (song) that has *Bhagavān* as its subject matter.

THE SUBJECT MATTER OF THE GĪTĒ

This *Bhagavadgītā*, with *Bhagavān* as its subject matter, actually has two aspects, because both a life of activity and a life of renunciation are presented. One is *yoga-śāstra* in that it talks about *karma-yoga* and the other is *brahma-vidyā*, knowledge of *Brahman*. Its subject matter, therefore, implies both activity and the renunciation of activity.

Since both the life-styles are meant for *brahma-vidyā*, *brahma-vidyā* is its real subject matter. It is this *brahma-vidyā*, that is pursued by a *sannyāsī* to the exclusion of all else — a *sannyāsī* being the one who has given up all *karmas*.

While a *sannyāsī* pursues only *brahma-vidyā*, a *karma-yogī* pursues *brahma-vidyā* plus *karma*. How does a *karma-yogī* pursue *karma*? With a certain attitude whereby the *karma* that is done becomes *yoga* for him or her. Because both *brahma-*

vidyā and *karma-yoga* are found in the *Gītā*, its subject matter is two-fold — *brahma-vidyā* and *yoga-śāstra*.

BRAHMA-VIDYĒ: KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT IS

Brahma-vidyā means, the knowledge of what is. What is *Brahman*? What is *Īśvara*, the Lord? What is the reality of the world, *jagat*? What is the nature of the individual, *jīva*? What is the truth of oneself, *ātmā*? What is the relationship between the *jīva*, the *jagat* and *Īśvara*? What is the reality of each of them? Is there anything common among them? Are they all one or are they separate entities? *Brahma-vidyā*, knowledge of *Brahman*, reveals all of this.

To gain this *brahma-vidyā*, there are certain qualifications mentioned, which *karma-yoga* alone can provide. To help one gain these qualifications, *karma-yoga* is discussed in detail in the *Gītā*. Because both *karma-yoga* and *brahma-vidyā* are dealt with, the *Gītā* is considered complete and referred to as *gītāśāstra*.

This is what is meant by one particular verse praising the *Gītā*: *gītā sugītā kartavyā kim anyaiḥ śāstra-vistaraiḥ* — the *Gītā* has to be studied well; what is the use of studying other elaborate works? The completeness of the subject matter unfolded by the *Gītā* is highlighted here.

People always say that whenever they are in trouble, they go to the *Gītā* and their problem is solved. Maybe they do find answers in the *Gītā* because one can read into it whatever one wants. Be that as it may, the *Gītā* has something of its own to give. Do you want what it has to give? That is the question.

UNDERSTANDING THE GĪTĒ

To know what the *Gītā* says requires inquiry, *vicāra*. In the introduction to his commentary on the *Gītā*, *Śaṅkara* says:

तदिदं गीताशास्त्रं समस्त-वेदार्थ-सार-सङ्ग्रहभूतं दुर्विज्ञेयार्थम् ।
tadidaṃ gītā śāstraṃ samasta-vedārtha-sāra-saṅgrahabhūtaṃ
durvijñeyārtham

The sense of the *gītā-śāstra*, which is in the form of the essence of the meanings of all the words of the Vedas, is difficult to grasp.

तदर्थ-आविष्करणाय अनेकैः विवृत-पद-पदार्थ-वाक्यार्थ-न्यायम् अपि अत्यन्त-विरुद्ध-
 अनेकार्थत्वेन लौकिकैः गृह्यमाणम् उपलभ्य अहं विवेकतः अर्थनिर्धारणार्थं संक्षेपतः विवरणं
 करिष्यामि ।

*tadartha āviṣkaraṇāya anekaiḥ vivṛta-pada-padārtha-vākyārtha-nyāyam
api atyanta-viruddha-anekārtatvena laukikaiḥ grhyamāṇam upalabhya
ahaṃ vivekataḥ arthanirdhāraṇārthaṃ saṅkṣepataḥ vivaraṇaṃ
kariṣyāmi.*

By many commentators, in an effort to clearly expound its meaning, this has been expounded in the form of treatises that deal with the words of this text, the meanings of the words, the meanings of the sentences, the logic involved, etc. Seeing that they are fraught with vagueness and contradictions, in order to ascertain the correct meaning with due discrimination, I am writing this brief commentary.

The essence of any knowledge is sometimes expressed too cryptically to be understood. Because the *Gītā* is the essence, one naturally has to know the entire *śāstra* to fully appreciate what the *Gītā* is saying. Even though *Arjuna* had a certain background, it was not easy for him to understand. He had to ask questions. If it was not easy for *Arjuna*, it is definitely not going to be easy for someone in our own time who does not have the same background, being so far removed from both *Arjuna* and the *Vedas*. For such a person, the *Gītā* will be as difficult to understand as any other text of *Vedānta*. The knowledge of oneself is in the form of words. But since the subject matter is something very unique, the knowledge is not easily accessible through words. At the same time, words are employed to reveal the self immediately. Therefore, one requires not only the teaching, *Vedānta*, as a *pramāṇa*, but also a teacher, a *guru*.

THE NEED FOR A TEACHER

There are two letters in the word *guru*, ‘*gu*’ meaning darkness or ignorance, and ‘*ru*’ meaning the one who removes it. Thus, a *guru* is one who removes darkness of ignorance by teaching the *śāstra*. The teaching is the *śāstra* and the teacher is also the *śāstra*. As a teacher, then, I do not use the *śāstra*; rather, what I teach is *śāstra*.

What does this mean? The teaching itself comes to life when it is handled in a certain way. Otherwise, all you have are so many dead words. Even though the teaching is a *pramāṇa*, there is a methodology employed for unfolding the words. A teacher, a *guru*, is one who is able to unfold the meaning of these words. The words are already there and their meanings are already there. They need only to be unfolded for your comprehension, just as an artist unfolds his vision on the canvas.

WHO IS THE FIRST GURU?

The problem then is — who is the first *guru*? I answer that question by asking, ‘Who is the first father?’ When you tell me who the first father is, I will tell you who the first *guru* is. Either way, it is the same. Thus, if you say that the Lord the creator is the

father, then, he also must have a father, which means that he cannot be the Creator. Therefore, there is no father for the one whom you call the Lord.

Someone claimed that the first father was a monkey, which is an inferential conclusion. You will find, however, that this monkey also had a father, who had a father, who had a father, until finally you give up. Because you are into infinite regression, you had better give up! Or you may decide that the first father was one who was not a son. He was only a father, one we call the Lord.

Thus if we assume that the first father is the Lord, then, the first *guru* is not going to be different from that Lord. And, from the Lord downward, there is a teacher-student lineage, called *guru-śiṣya-paramparā*. The entire *paramparā* is praised in the following verse :

सदाशिवसमारम्भां श ? राचार्यमध्यमाम् ।
 अस्मदाचार्यपर्यन्तां वन्दे गुरुपरम्पराम् ॥
sadāśivasamārambhāṃ śa ? račāryamadhyamām
asmadācāryaparyantāṃ vande guruparamparām

I salute the lineage of teachers, beginning with *Śiva*, the Lord, (linked by) *Śaṅkarācārya* in the middle, and extending down to my own teacher.

Thus, when you salute the teacher, your salutation goes to the Lord in whom the lineage has its beginning. To point out one of the links, *Śaṅkarācārya* is mentioned as being in the middle, meaning somewhere in the flow between the Lord and one's present teacher. The word 'middle' having been used, there must also be an end. If the beginning is Lord *Śiva* meaning the Lord, one who is all fullness, all knowledge, and the middle is *Śaṅkarācārya*, then who is the end? — my teacher, *asmadācārya*.

Because I am here today, I know there has been no break in the flow between the first father and myself. Similarly, since this knowledge is coming to me right now, I know it has been kept alive by one teacher giving it to another and, thus, there has been no break between my teacher and the Lord. I salute this *guru-paramparā*.

HOW TO CHOOSE A GURU

To choose a *guru* can also be a problem. Do you find the teacher with the longest or the whitest beard? So much is said by so many, everyone claiming to know the truth. Given all this confusion, first and foremost, I would say that the best teacher is one who looks at the whole human problem as an error.

If someone says you have a problem, then that person is going to manipulate you. If, however, the person says that the problem that you seem to have is an error, then he or she is objective. And, if the problem is real, no one will be able to resolve it.

If the situation is factually real, how can it be changed? If I am really an inadequate and limited person, then there is no way of my solving the problem of inadequacy, with or without help. The limited is always limited. But, here, there is no need to say, 'if I am a fraction of the whole, I will always be a fraction of the whole.' If I am the whole, the conclusion that I am a fraction is an error and the way out is to see myself in the proper light. Thus, the one who says the problem is an error and that it is a universal error, not your own personal error, may be a *guru*.

In order to know that I am the whole and therefore acceptable to myself, it is said, 'May one go to a teacher, *gurum abhigacchet*.' What kind of a teacher? The *Veda* itself says that, the teacher should be one who is well informed in this teaching and who is well rooted in this knowledge — one who is a *śrotriya* and a *brahma-niṣṭha*.¹ But how do I know whether someone is well informed or not? If I want to study higher mathematics and do research in topology, I need only find someone who has studied higher mathematics and specialised in topology. If I find a person who has published numerous credible papers on topology, I can assume that he or she knows the subject matter. I can then decide to study with this person until he or she proves otherwise.

In *guru*-seeking, however, there is a problem because this knowledge, being spiritual knowledge, is different. How do you know the person has this knowledge and has undergone the discipline of learning unless you already know something of it yourself?

The society should be informed enough for one to be able to find out whether a person knows or only pretends to know. The person could also be deluded, not pretending to know, but thinking he or she knows. Such people do not know what they do not know.

Previously, in Indian society, this was not a problem because everyone is supposed to become a *sannyāsī* eventually. One did not start another life after retirement. But nowadays, people plan their retirements early. Still, the best retirement plan to be ever conceived is *sannyāsa*, which was meant to be the last stage of one's life. Having been married and so on, the time comes when you just walk out — not because of a quarrel or because you want to marry another person. Walking out is considered a part of married

¹ तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत् समित्पाणिः श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्मनिष्ठम्।

tadvijñānārthaṃ sa gurumevābhigacchet samitpāṇiḥ śrotriyaṃ brahmaniṣṭham.

(*Muṇḍakopaniṣad* – 1. 2. 12)

For gaining that knowledge, may one properly approach a teacher who is a śrotriya and a brahmaniṣṭha.

life and is appreciated by both husband and wife as its ultimate aim. At this stage, they have matured and are independent enough for a life of *sannyāsa*.

This kind of retirement plan requires no social security, only the maturity to walk out as a renunciate. Since the Indian society respects the *sannyāsa* stage of life and the *Veda* enjoins it, naturally the basic needs of a *sannyāsi* are taken care of by the society. Although some people postpone this stage of life, every one is expected to become a *sannyāsi* in the end.

THE GURU AS A RENUNCIATE

To be a *sannyāsi* means that one already has the knowledge or is seeking it. Even as a householder, one is supposed to study in order to gain self-knowledge. Once a person becomes a *sannyāsi*, he or she has no daily duties, except studying and teaching. Thus, in every village, you will find a few *sannyāsīs* coming and going, or permanently staying there, so that the society knows who knows what, just as we know who is a professor of mathematics and who is not. To do research in mathematics or electronics, we have no doubts about whom we should go to and which institution we should attend. There is, therefore, no problem in choosing a teacher for such knowledge in such a society.

If you know exactly what you are seeking and whether or not the person is recognised as having the knowledge, to that extent, you can know whether the person knows or not. However, if people do not know these things, then they are totally gullible, in spite of their expertise in other fields. For such people, anyone can pass as a *guru*.

A person who has undergone this discipline of knowledge is a scholarly person and is called a *śrotriya*. Therefore a *guru* is a scholar, whereas a scholar need not be a *guru*. To be a *guru*, a committed pursuit is also necessary. One who is committed to this knowledge is called a *brahma-niṣṭha*. This is an important point to understand.

If the knowledge is used to gain security, the person is insecure. Moreover, because the knowledge is 'I am secure,' the person does not really know anything about it and is therefore not qualified to teach it. Such a person is self-seeking and has no knowledge to give you. All that he or she can give is a collection of words, for which you do not require a teacher. You need only a book and a dictionary!

The teacher you require is one who employs these words and makes them meaningful. To do this, a teacher must necessarily be free from being insecure so that he or she is not seeking recognition or security. The proof of a teacher's knowledge is in the teaching methodology, in the person's communicative ability and the content of what he or she communicates. Thus, you go to a teacher who is well informed in this teaching and one who is committed to it, one who has no other pursuit.

And how should you go to a teacher? With an attitude that indicates you are ready to serve the teacher, meaning you are ready to do what is to be done in order to gain this knowledge because of your love for it. Nothing is too much and no distance is too far. This attitude is not damaging to you because you have chosen the right teacher. Hence there is no question of the person exploiting you if he or she is a *guru* — true to the definition of the word *guru*. A *guru* exploits no one. Thus, whatever you can do, you will do. That is your attitude. Only then can the teaching begin.

THE GĪTĀ AS A DIALOGUE

The entire *Gītā* is a dialogue. In fact, all the teaching is in the form of a dialogue, although the methodology of the teaching does not necessitate the presentation of characters and the dialogues between them. After all, we are not interested in knowing the names of the teacher or the taught. We are only interested in the teaching itself. But, then, the characters involved in the dialogue are presented in the form of a story, an *ākhyāyikā*, in order to tell us something about ourselves.

We find the same approach in the *Upaniṣads* where many names of people are cited. If *tat tvam asi* — that thou art, is the message, why not just talk about that message? Why are all these stories brought in? Only to reveal the method of teaching, the *sampradāya*, how we have to learn, and what type of knowledge it is.

THE FOUR TYPES OF DIALOGUES

There are different types of dialogues. One is a discussion involving two or more people who are interested in finding out the facts about a certain subject matter. They are all exploring. In this type of discussion, there is no teacher-student relationship. Each person is equally placed, even though one person may know a little more than the others about the subject matter. They are all interested in understanding. This kind of discussion among equals, any collective study among students, for example, is called *vāda* and is naturally healthy and is traditionally an important component of study. It is said that a student gains a quarter of his knowledge by such discussion.¹

¹ *With reference to gaining any empirical discipline of knowledge, there is a verse that says:*

आचार्यात् पादमादत्ते पादं शिष्यः स्वमेधया ।

पादं सब्रह्मचारिभ्यः पादं कालक्रमेण च ॥

ācāryāt pādamaḍatte pādaṃ śiṣyaḥ svamedhayā

pādaṃ sabrahmacāribhyaḥ pādaṃ kālakrameṇa ca

A student obtains one quarter from the teacher, one quarter by one's own intelligence, one quarter from the fellow students, and one quarter in time

The third quarter refers to vāda.

There are also two unhealthy types of dialogue that we should be aware of. One is the dialogue that takes place between two people who are already committed to different beliefs. Such a discussion, called *jalpa*, is governed purely by each person's wit. Any discussion between two fanatics falls into this category. Each of them is convinced that the other person is totally wrong and tries to win the other over to his or her particular belief, although there is no basis for the discussion.

Suppose you have a belief and I have another belief. Your belief may be right and mine may be wrong. On the other hand, my belief may be right and yours may be wrong. Or both of us may be wrong! Both of us may be right also! How, then, can either of us insist that 'I alone am right'? The difference between a believer and a fanatic becomes obvious here.

THE IMPORTANCE OF AN OPEN, INQUIRING MIND

The difference between a scientist and a believer is also worthy of notice. One may adhere to a belief, but everyone must necessarily have a mind, which is open to explore and know. That open, inquiring mind, the mind of a scientist, is an entirely different mind from that of a believer.

We can and must respect the beliefs of others, but we cannot have a discussion based on such beliefs. Both of us may be wrong. A discussion between two people, both of whom are committed to certain beliefs, is purely a dialogue between two missionaries. It is better to respect the other person's belief and have a simple human relationship. Discussions are useless. All you can do is ask, 'What is your belief?' Some people are curious. If you are curious, you can ask, but I myself would not ask because the other person is acceptable to me, along with his or her beliefs. I need not know what they are. This is a healthy attitude to have towards a person. But any discussion, *jalpa*, based on beliefs, is useless. No one wins and no one loses. Each person always comes back with better arguments. *Jalpa*-discussions, therefore, are useless; they have no value.

There is another type of discussion called *vitaṇḍā*, wherein one person makes a statement with which the other person always disagrees. Why? Merely because the other person said it. Due to jealousy or some other reason, one person always tries to prove the other wrong. Such a discussion is also useless.

A fourth type of discussion, one that concerns us here, is called *saṃvāda*, a discussion between a teacher and a student, *guru-śiṣya-saṃvāda*. In the teacher-student relationship, the student has already accepted the other person as a teacher and therefore looks up to him or her. Although there is a dialogue between them, the attitude is entirely different, the discussion being based on the student's acceptance that 'I am a student and

this person is my teacher.’ This attitude prevails until or unless the person thought to be a teacher proves to be otherwise.

The moment you discover the person has nothing to teach, you can become friends. However, when you have to learn from someone, you look up to that person. If you do not understand what the teacher is saying, you give the benefit of the doubt to the teacher, even though he or she may sometimes appear to be contradictory, seeming to have said something previously that is not in harmony with what is being said now, as we will see in the *Gītā*.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN TEACHER AND STUDENT

In a *guru-śiṣya-saṃvāda*, the subject matter can be anything. Here, in the *Gītā*, the subject matter is *brahma-vidyā* and *yoga-śāstra* — in one word, *Vedānta*. The *guru* is *Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa*, referred to as *Vasudeva’s* son, and the student is *Arjuna*, called *Pārtha* here because he is *Prthā’s* son. He is also called *Kaunteya*, the son of *Kuntī*. *Arjuna* has a number of other names — *Dhanañjaya*, *Savyasācī*, *Guḍākeśa*, and so on, but *Arjuna* is his popular name.

Between *Arjuna*, the student, and Lord *Kṛṣṇa*, the teacher, there is a discussion and *Gītā* is the body of knowledge being taught. Therefore, the *Gītā* is called a *saṃvāda*.

GIVING THE TEACHER THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

If it looks as though the teacher is being contradictory, the student gives the benefit of the doubt to the teacher. This is what is expected of a student. As a student, one need not take the blame upon oneself.

The teacher can be asked a question — ‘Previously such and such was said and now this is being said. Why is this difference?’ You said *Brahman* is without qualities, *nirguṇa* and now you say it is with qualities, *saguṇa*. How can *Brahman* be *saguṇa*? You say it is beyond the mind, and that it is not available as an object for the mind. At the same time, you say, one sees oneself, the *ātmā* with the mind (*manasā paśyati*). How can one see the *ātmā* with the mind? And how is one going to know that one is seeing the *ātmā*? It looks as though the *śruti* herself is contradictory. To say that *Brahman* cannot be objectified by the mind but has to be recognised by the mind seems to be a contradiction. But it is not a contradiction; it is perfect. If it looks like a contradiction to the student, then he or she can ask a question, a *praśna* and when the student waits for the right time to ask a question, it is called a *paripraśna*, based on his or her faith, *śraddhā*, in the teacher.

As a teacher, one cannot contradict oneself. A teacher who contradicts himself or herself does not know the subject matter. Nor can a teacher simply learn along with a

student and teach, since this creates situations wherein both the teacher and the student may suddenly discover a new fact never known to either of them before, a fact that contradicts everything they knew thus far. This is not why one goes to a teacher. Teaching is not meant to be exploratory. Therefore the teacher should know exactly what he or she is talking about and not be contradictory.

The attitude implied by the term *guru-śiṣya-saṃvāda* is especially relevant here. Since the entire teaching is itself a means of knowledge, it is not a philosophical speculation. Moreover we are not attracted to this kind of learning out of a simple academic interest. The teaching has a value and the value is myself alone. The teaching is about myself. I have a value for freedom and this value makes me want to know. As a person, I want to be free and I want to learn for no other purpose than to be free. Since there is a value there, and the teaching itself is a means of knowledge, there must necessarily be a certain attitude on my part towards this teaching and the teacher.

That the teaching has to come from a teacher in the form of a dialogue is because it is something to be understood — something to be followed, not swallowed. In a belief, there is nothing to follow, only something to swallow, something to accept totally, without question. Any questioning that may take place is meant only to establish what the belief is, which is not really questioning at all. This is why there are so many attempts to establish historical proofs that a certain person existed. Whether someone existed or not is not the issue. The teaching is the issue.

Therefore, if you look into the teaching, if you are interested in what is being taught, your whole attitude and approach will be different. Here, a dialogue implies a teaching that is received from a teacher, meaning that this knowledge has to be received from a teacher and the subject matter has to be understood.

TWO TYPES OF SUBJECT MATTER

There are two types of subject matter, *sādhya-viśaya* and *siddha-viśaya*. *Sādhya* is that which is yet to be accomplished and is accomplished by doing something — by an action. If you want to know how to go to heaven, for example, first you have to know what heaven is and then you have to decide to buy a ticket. You are told that *puṇya*, the ticket for heaven can be gained by doing good deeds. You must also hold on to the *puṇya* you have earned, which means that you must not do any improper actions, *pāpa*, while you are earning your ticket to heaven. Only then will you go to heaven after death. All this is very straightforward for a person who has *śraddhā* in the Veda being a *pramāṇa* and is not something that can be logically arrived at.

Any question related to *sādhya* is only to understand how to do something, like cooking, for example. An Indian woman who wants to know how to make pizza will ask certain questions. The situation is very simple — you just tell her how to do it a few

times until she knows how and the topic is over. It is just a matter of whether she has understood what you have said. There is an order governing how everything is to be done. Certain elements are involved and, therefore, must be understood. What has to be done is also to be understood. And that's the end of it. One may do it or not do it. By practice, one eventually acquires the knack of it. If a person keeps on making pizza, hopefully with some sympathetic people around, he or she will certainly master the art of pizza making.

This is *sādhya*, then. There is no questioning here. When the subject matter is something you have to accomplish later, when it is dealing with means and ends (*sādhana* and *sādhya*), proper questioning is not a part of the whole approach. This is true even if the subject matter is a Vedic ritual.

Again, when it comes to actions there are many choices available. You can do it this way or that way; you need not do it at all; or you can do something else entirely and achieve the same result.¹

There is more than one way to go to heaven. There are a hundred different ways, one of which one can choose. Why anyone would want to go is another matter. Thus, when a *sādhya*-*viśaya* is involved, there can be choice. But this is not so with a *siddha*-*viśaya*.

NO CHOICE IN KNOWLEDGE

There is no choice involved, however, when what is to be accomplished is already accomplished, *siddha*, but not understood. Unlike action, knowledge is not open to choice; it is always true to its object. For example, knowledge of an apple is always true to the object — apple, even if I will it to be otherwise. Nor do I have a choice in knowledge, once the means of knowledge and the object of knowledge are aligned. If my eyes are open, and if they are not defective, and if the mind is not elsewhere, I will necessarily see what is in front of me. What choice do I have?

To know an already accomplished fact requires proper questioning in order to remove whatever that may be blocking the knowledge from taking place. Why should you be denied the knowledge of yourself once it is unfolded? What exactly is the obstruction? Is it that you do not follow what is being said? Once the obstructions have been identified, they have to be removed, one by one, because you are *Brahman*. The whole pursuit, then, is one of removing all doubts.

¹ कर्म — कर्तुं शक्यम् अकर्तुं शक्यम् अन्यथा वा कर्तुं शक्यम्।

karma — *kartuṃ śakyam, akartuṃ śakyam, anyathā vā kartuṃ śakyam*.

Action — *may be done, may not be done or may be done differently*.

Because this is the knowledge of an already accomplished fact, the knowledge has to be immediate; it cannot be indirect. If it does not happen in spite of the teaching, then there is some obstruction, which is in the form of error, vagueness, or doubt. The obstructions are removed in the dialogue between the teacher and the student.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF QUESTIONING

Where there is understanding involved, questioning is imperative. This does not mean that you should question all the time. What is meant is that a questioning mind is necessary because, without questioning, you can never gain clarity. Therefore, the teaching itself consists of a number of questions. As teachers, we ourselves raise questions and keep answering them. If the student still has questions, he or she should ask those questions in order to know, since we are not dealing with simple belief here. And if we find that something is a belief, we can say, 'This is a belief,' thereby ending the matter.

We do not try to establish a belief, beyond establishing that it is a belief. For example, the statement, 'This is my mother,' is a belief because there is no way of proving it. How do you know two babies were not switched? There may be a lot of corroborative evidence, but still it is a belief. It is not direct perception. There are many beliefs and there is nothing wrong with beliefs — as long as we understand them as beliefs. However, there are also many things we have to know, and where we have to know questions are very important and are allowed. The *Gītā* was presented as a dialogue between a teacher and a student to emphasise that the subject matter is one for understanding, not for believing.

COMMENTARIES ON THE GĪTĀ

Śaṅkara says that he is writing this commentary on the *Gītā* so that people could analyse and understand what the true meaning of the *gītā-śāstra* is, although it had already been so elaborately commented upon by others. These earlier commentaries, no matter how definitive they were, sometimes differed from one another, and, in some cases, were even opposed to each other. Since these various works were confusing to those who did not have a clear understanding of the *śāstra*, *Śaṅkara* decided to undertake this work in order to clarify what the *Gītā* is actually saying.

Since *Śaṅkara's* time, there have been numerous commentaries and translations in various languages with varying degrees of clarity. None has matched *Śaṅkara's* analysis of the *Gītā*. His commentary is extremely cogent and consistent from the beginning to the end. For instance, whenever the topic of *bhakti* comes up, he discusses it, in its proper context. Wherever *Īśvara* is mentioned, even though Lord *Kṛṣṇa* uses the first person singular, *Śaṅkara* makes it very clear that, what was meant was the Lord, *Īśvara, paramātmā*.

When the *Gītā* is analysed properly, the analysis must be rational. It should not go against reason. A commentary on the *Gītā* should be in keeping with the words that are there. It should honour all the rules of grammar and syntax. What was said before and what is said later should also be taken into account.

THE NEED FOR INQUIRY

Since the *Gītā* is a book that contains only what is said in the *Upaniṣads*, this is all the more reason for any commentary on it to be reasonable. Nothing should contradict the source book. Our understanding of the *Gītā* should definitely be in keeping with all these various factors. Only then can there be real understanding. Whether the *Gītā* says this or that is something that must be understood. We are not trying to make the *Gītā* say what we want to say. We are trying to understand what it says and, for this, we need to inquire and be objective.

This is why before approaching the *Gītā*, a few verses called the *Gītā-dhyānam* are sung in praise of it, whereby we invoke the Mother *Gītā* to reveal the truth contained in the *gītā-śāstra*. These verses are a prayer to the *Gītā* herself, to the *Gītā* as the mother *śruti* and to the *Gītā* as *Bhagavān*, the Lord. It is only after we have invoked the *Gītā* in this way, do we try to extract the exact meaning of what the *Gītā* has to say.

The *Gītā* is like a mirror, just as the *Upaniṣads* are a mirror of words wherein we can see ourselves very clearly. If the world is not separate from me and if *Īśvara* also is not separate from me, then I should be able to see this truth in the words of the *Gītā*. The prayer is for the sake of understanding the *Gītā* properly, which is understanding myself.

In the brief discussion of the *Gītā-dhyāna*-verses that follow, you will come across sentences requiring further elucidation and more clarity in order for you to enjoy their meaning completely. This clarity will come as the *Gītā* is unfolded.

GĪTĒ-DHYĒNAM

Verse 1

ओं पार्थाय प्रतिबोधितां भगवता नारायणेन स्वयं
व्यासेन ग्रथितां पुराणमुनिना मध्येमहाभारतम्।
अद्वैतामृतवर्षिणीं भगवतीमष्टादशाध्यायिनीम्
अम्ब त्वामनुसन्दधामि भगवतीते भवद्वेषिणीम् ॥ १ ॥

*om pāṛthāya pratibodhitāṃ bhagavatā nārāyaṇena svayaṃ
vyāseṇa grathitāṃ purāṇamuninā madhye-mahābhāratam
advaitāmr̥tavarṣiṇīṃ bhagavatīmaṣṭādaśādhyāyinīm
amba tvāmanusandadhāmi bhagavadgīte bhavadveṣiṇīm (1)*

ओम् *Om* — name of the Lord; अम्ब भगवतीते *amba bhagavadgīte* — Oh! Mother *Bhagavadgītā*; भगवता नारायणेन *bhagavatā nārāyaṇena* — By Lord *Nārāyaṇa*; स्वयम् *svayam* — himself; पार्थाय *pāṛthāya* — to the son of *Prthā*; प्रतिबोधिताम् *pratibodhitām* — (you who were) taught; पुराण-मुनिना व्यासेन ग्रथिताम् *purāṇa-muninā vyāseṇa grathitām* — (you who were) incorporated by the ancient sage *Vyāsa*; मध्ये-महाभारतम् *madhye-mahābhāratam* — in the middle of *Mahābhārata*; अद्वैत-अमृत-वर्षिणीम् *advaita-amṛta-varṣiṇīm* — (you who have) the nature of showering the nectar of *Advaita*; अष्टादश-अध्यायिनीम् *aṣṭādaśādhyāyinīm* — (you who are) in the form of eighteen chapters; भवद्वेषिणीम् *bhavadveṣiṇīm* — (you who are) the destroyer of the life of becoming, *saṃsāra*; भगवतीम् *bhagavatīm* — (you who are) the Goddess; त्वाम् अनुसन्दधामि *tvām anusandadhāmi* — I repeatedly invoke

Om. Oh! Goddess Mother, Oh! *Bhagavadgītā*, (you who were) taught by *Bhagavān Nārāyaṇa* himself for the sake of *Arjuna*, the son of *Prthā (Kuntī)*, (you who were) faithfully collected and reported by the ancient sage, *Vyāsa*, (and placed) in the middle of the *Mahābhārata*, (you who are) in eighteen chapters, you who have the nature of showering the nectar of non-duality, who is the destroyer of the life of becoming (*saṃsārā*), again and again I invoke you.

AN AUSPICIOUS BEGINNING

Any beginning is considered to be auspicious. Since the word ‘*Om*’ is the name of *Bhagavān*, the Lord, it is an auspicious way to begin these verses in which we invoke the Lord's help as we begin our study of the *Gītā*.

THE GĪTĒ INVOKED AS MOTHER

A mother is a symbol of love, affection, and spontaneous care, is someone who always prays for your welfare, who never lets you down when you are in trouble. This is also true of the Vedas because, with great compassion, the Veda takes into account the need for the human being to achieve various things in life and talks about the various means and ends for one to achieve them. And finally through self-knowledge in the *Upaniṣads*, gets the person out of the pursuit of means and ends. Therefore the Veda or the *śruti* is given the status of a mother. And because the *Gītā* says exactly what the Vedas say, it is also looked upon as a mother.

In this opening verse, the *Gītā* is invoked in this way: Oh! Mother, I invoke you. I meditate upon you again and again as a mother of blessing.

FOR WHOSE SAKE IS THE GĪTĒ TAUGHT?

The *Gītā* was taught to *Arjuna*. He is called *Pārtha* in this verse because he is the son of *Prthā*, another name for his mother, *Kuntī*. Because the *Gītā* was taught for *Arjuna*'s sake, *Arjuna* is said to be its cause, *nimitta*.

THE TEACHER OF THE GĪTĒ

The knowledge contained in the *Gītā* was taught by the Lord, *Bhagavān Nārāyaṇa*. It was not taught by any other *guru*, but directly by *Nārāyaṇa*. Even though every *guru* is considered to be *Nārāyaṇa*, this verse makes it clear that the all-knowing Lord himself, as *Kṛṣṇa*, was the teacher of the *Gītā*.

THE MEANING OF NĒRĒYAŪA

There are many ways of looking at the meaning of the word *Nārāyaṇa*, one of which is particularly relevant here. The word *nara* is used to refer to a human being. It also means indestructible, that which always remains, not destroyed — *na riṅyate iti naraḥ*. *Nara*, therefore, can only refer to that which pervades everything and is timeless, *ātmā* in Sanskrit. *Ātmā* here refers to ‘I’— the essence of the subject who performs various actions and enjoys various forms of experiences. This is an entirely different meaning from what we commonly understand by the word ‘I.’ Therefore, the real

meaning of the word *nara*, human being, is to be understood from the *śāstra*, to be the all-pervasive and timeless *ātmā*, *paramātmā*.

Narasya idaṃ nāram — that which belongs to the *nara* is *nāra* or *jagat*, the world. The world is born out of the all-pervasive, timeless *paramātmā*, and is sustained by *paramātmā* and goes back to *paramātmā*. *Nāra*, then, is the entire world. And, *nāram eti iti Nārāyaṇa* — the one who knows this *nāra*, the world, is *Nārāyaṇa*, the omniscient Lord, *Parameśvara*. Therefore, the same *ātmā*, the *nara-ātmā*, the human being, is the omniscient *paramātmā*, *Parameśvara*, the Lord. Because this omniscient *Nārāyaṇa* is the one who is teaching *Arjuna* here, everything that is taught in the *Gītā* is considered valid. *Nārāyaṇa* is the one who knows everything and is also the one to be known through *Vedānta*.

VYĀSA AS A REPORTER

How would we know about the Lord's teaching to *Arjuna* without *Vyāsa*? Any gospel is the report of a disciple and, therefore, its accuracy depends on the disciple. If the disciple is adept, he or she will report properly. If the disciple has limitations, then there will be problems with the report.

In the *Gītā* the reporter is very important. *Nārāyaṇa* taught and *Arjuna* heard; but it was *Vyāsa* who reported it all. The reporter here is not an ordinary person, as we shall see in a later verse. *Vyāsa* is the one who is capable of elaborating a brief statement into one thousand verses, complete with intricate details and cogent arguments.

Vyāsa is described here as a *purāṇa-muni*, an ancient sage. A *muni*, a *manana-śīla*, is a person who is capable of bestowing careful thought over a particular subject matter. The word *purāṇa* can also mean the ancient legends based on the teaching found in the *Vedas*. *Vyāsa* gathered these legends together and, remaining faithful to the Vedic vision, put them into writing, called *Purānas*. Therefore, he is referred to as *purāṇa-muni*.

Because the subject that is being taught in the *Gītā* was so well-known to him, *Vyāsa* had no problem with reporting it properly. Where did *Vyāsa* report what was taught by the Lord to *Arjuna*? He presented it in the middle of the epic *Mahābhārata*, in the *Gītā*, in eighteen chapters.

THE SUBJECT MATTER OF THE GĪTĀ

What is the subject matter of the *Gītā*? What did Lord *Nārāyaṇa* teach *Arjuna*? What was taught is described as a shower of *amṛta*, nectar. Nectar generally comes only in drops, but in the *Gītā*, nectar is showered upon us. What kind of nectar is it? All nectars are sweet to the taste but do not last forever. The nectar that is showered by the *Gītā* is different. Not only does it provide happiness here, but also showers us with the

amṛta of *advaita*, non-duality. Here the word *amṛta* is used in the sense of that which gives you immortality. Here the knowledge frees you from mortality in the form of life and death.

In non-duality there is no second thing. Therefore, with this knowledge, all fear is eliminated. Only in duality can there be fear. Fear cannot exist in non-duality because there is no second thing to fear.

THE NECTAR OF NON-DUALITY

That you are everything, that there is nothing other than you, is not an ordinary subject matter. This is what is meant by non-duality. Non-duality means that you are the whole. That which gives you this vision is the nectar of non-duality. Nectar is used here because, just as nectar is something to be tasted, to be experienced, non-duality is something to be understood to be yourself.

The Goddess *Gītā* showers the nectar of non-duality upon you. This shower of nectar is the vision of non-duality. It is the message of the Lord. The *Gītā* is *Bhagavatī*, the Goddess and, therefore, not separate from *Bhagavān's* vision. She knows that *Kṛṣṇa* is *Īśvara*, the Lord, and along with him she blesses you because she gives you this knowledge.

THE EIGHTEEN CHAPTERS OF THE GĪTĒ

In this verse the *Gītā* is addressed as the one who has eighteen chapters. It is said, 'Oh! *Gītā*, the one with eighteen chapters, I salute you.'

THE GĪTĒ AS A DESTROYER OF SORROW

The nectar of non-duality destroys the *bhava*, the *saṃsāra*, completely. *Bhava* means a life of becoming with all of its problems and fears, a life of sorrow, bondage, birth, and death. This teaching is, therefore, the medicine for *saṃsāra*, that by which the whole *saṃsāra* is destroyed. The destroyer of *saṃsāra* and the nectar of non-duality go together and refer to the *Gītā* as the mother who destroys the *saṃsāra* by showering the nectar of non-duality.

In the first verse, then, we salute the mother *Gītā* by meditating upon her, by invoking her, before we start our study. Also, we cannot think about the *Gītā* without thinking about *Vyāsa*, *Kṛṣṇa*, and *Arjuna*, called *Pārtha* in this verse. The second verse, therefore, is addressed to *Vyāsa*.

Verse 2

नमोऽस्तु ते व्यास विशालबुद्धे फुल्लारविन्दायतपत्रनेत्र ।

येन त्वया भारततैलपूर्णः प्रज्वालितो ज्ञानमयः प्रदीपः ॥ २ ॥

namo'stu te vyāsa viśālabuddhe phullāravindāyatapatranetra

yena tvayā bhāratatailapūrṇaḥ prajvālito jñānamayaḥ pradīpaḥ

विशाल-बुद्धे *viśāla-buddhe* — one whose intellect is vast; फुल्ल-अरविन्द-आयत-पत्र-नेत्र *phulla-aravinda-āyata-patra-netra* — one whose eyes are clear and pleasing like a fully blossomed lotus; व्यास *vyāsa* — Oh! *Vyāsa*; येन त्वया *yena tvayā* — by you; भारत-तैल-पूर्णः *bhārata-taila-pūrṇaḥ* — full of the oil of the *Mahābhārata*, ज्ञानमयः *jñānamayaḥ* — in the form of knowledge; प्रदीपः *pradīpaḥ* — the lamp; प्रज्वालितः *prajvālitaḥ* — is well lighted; ते *te* — to you; नमः अस्तु *namaḥ astu* — let (my) salutation be

Oh! *Vyāsa* the one whose intellect is vast, whose eyes are clear and as pleasing as a fully blossomed lotus, who lit the lamp of knowledge well by filling it with the oil of the *Mahābhārata*, to you, my salutations.

THE VASTNESS OF VYĀSA'S INTELLECT

Shakespeare's intellect has been described as the 'platform of the world,' upon which its drama unfolds. He was able to write excellent characterisations for the stages of the world. Similarly, in this verse, *Vyāsa* is described as one whose intellect, whose knowledge, is vast. He wrote thousands of verses, meaning that they simply flowed out of him.

There is a story told that when *Vyāsa* was planning to write the *Mahābhārata*, he wanted to dictate the epic to a stenographer. Because there was no shorthand at the time, stenographers had to write very quickly in longhand. But no human being could take dictation from *Vyāsa* because his mind was so quick and clear. He just reeled out the verses and no one could hope to keep up with him. So he asked Lord *Gaṇeśa* to be his stenographer.

Gaṇeśa agreed on the condition that *Vyāsa* would not stop dictating once he began. *Vyāsa* agreed; but, he also had a condition that, *Gaṇeśa* should understand everything he said in every sense. Agreeing to this condition, *Gaṇeśa* pulled out one of his tusks, sharpened it, and with it wrote down *Vyāsa's Mahābhārata* on palm leaves. That is why Lord *Gaṇeśa* is portrayed as having only one tusk.

In the *Mahābhārata* you will find, for the most part, simple, descriptive verses. But every once in a while there will be a verse which is all-profound — a purple verse

with different meanings. The reason *Vyāsa* did this was so that, he could have a breather. Because *Gaṇeśa* understood so easily what was being written, *Vyāsa* had to throw out a difficult verse whenever he wanted a break. If we count these verses, then, we can find out how many times he stopped. By the time *Gaṇeśa* figured out the meaning, *Vyāsa* had had his time out and was ready to begin again. This is *Vyāsa*.

THE CLARITY OF VYĀSA'S VISION

Vyāsa had beautiful big eyes. They are described in this verse as being like a fully blossomed lotus, eyes that were clear and pleasing. *Vyāsa* is also compared here to a lamp that sheds light, the light of knowledge. This lamp is very well lit. He is, therefore, the one who lights the lamp of knowledge for us.

The lamp that was lit by *Vyāsa* is filled with the oil of the *Mahābhārata*. This epic is considered to be the fifth *Veda* because it is true to the knowledge found in the *Vedas*. It seems to have been written for the sole purpose of lighting up this knowledge.

When a small object is presented against a much larger background, its beauty is often more evident. The *Mahābhārata* is like a canvas from whose vast background the Vedic knowledge emerges. Knowledge is the lamp and the epic is its fuel. The fuel is for the lamp; the lamp is not for the fuel.

This verse, then, is paying tribute to *Vyāsa*, who lit up the wisdom of the *Vedas* with the oil of the *Mahābhārata*. So, unto you, *Vyāsa*, who lit the lamp of knowledge with this epic fuel, my salutations.

Verse 3

प्रपन्नपरिजाताय तोत्रवेत्रैकपाणये ।

ज्ञानमुद्राय कृष्णाय गीतामृतदुहे नमः ॥ ३ ॥

prapannapārijātāya totravetraikapāṇaye

jñānamudrāya kṛṣṇāya gītāmṛtaduhe namaḥ (3)

प्रपन्न-परिजाताय *prapanna-pārijātāya* — unto the one who is the wish-fulfilling tree for those who have surrendered to him; तोत्रवेत्र-एक-पाणये *totravetra-eka-pāṇaye* — unto the one who has the whip in one hand; ज्ञान-मुद्राय *jñāna-mudrāya* — unto the one whose other hand assumes the gesture symbolising knowledge; गीता-अमृत-दुहे *gītā-amṛta-duhe* — unto the one who milks the nectar of the *Gītā*; कृष्णाय *kṛṣṇāya* — unto that *Kṛṣṇa*; नमः *namaḥ* - my salutations

Unto the one who is the wish-fulfilling tree for those who have surrendered, who has the whip in one hand and the symbol of knowledge

in the other, (and) who milks the nectar that is the *Gītā* — unto that *Kṛṣṇa*, my salutations.

KĪÂÛA AS A WISH-FULFILLING TREE

In the third verse, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* is likened to a wish-fulfilling tree said to be found in heaven. Whatever you wish for while sitting under this tree immediately appears in front of you. *Kṛṣṇa* is this wish-fulfilling tree for those who have surrendered unto him. To them he is the giver of everything.

KĪÂÛA'S CONTROL

In one hand, *Kṛṣṇa* is holding the whip with which he drives the horses. His other hand assumes the gesture symbolising knowledge. This means that *Kṛṣṇa* does not give up the job of charioteer when *Arjuna* wants to be taught. Right in the middle of the battlefield, when *Arjuna* wants to know, *Kṛṣṇa* assumes the role of a teacher.

Knowing full well that *Arjuna* would fight, *Kṛṣṇa* did not drop *the* whip. *Arjuna* dropped his bow and arrows, but *Kṛṣṇa* kept the whip in his hand. He loosened the reins for the interim, but everything was under control. Unto the one who thus holds the symbol of knowledge, I offer my salutations.

THE SYMBOL OF KNOWLEDGE

We offer our salutations, not to the symbol of knowledge, but to the one who has this knowledge of non-duality, which cannot be negated. The symbol of knowledge, *Jñānamudrā*, is formed by joining the three fingers and separating them from the index finger. The index finger then joins with the thumb to form a circle.

The index finger, also called the accusing finger, stands for the self and usually joins the other three, representing the body, mind, and senses. By separating them out, we see that the body, mind, and senses are all *anātmā*, not 'I.' One generally thinks that these are *ātmā*, but they are not. They are all *anātmā* and are therefore to be understood as such. Whatever is not *anātmā* is the self and is revealed by the teaching as identical with the limitless *Brahman*, represented by the thumb.

Without the thumb, the fingers cannot grasp anything. It is important that the thumb be away from the fingers in order to do so. Similarly, the limitless *Brahman* is away from, unattached to, the body, mind, and senses. At the same time, without the limitless *Brahman*, the body, mind, and senses have no being, much less any function.

Previously, we thought of ourselves as limited. The circle created by the index finger and thumb signifies that, because we now have the knowledge of non-duality, the

sense of limitation is gone. Just as a circle has no beginning and no end, we know ourselves to be limitless.

KĪÂÛA, THE GIVER OF THE NECTAR OF GĪTĒ

The *Gītā* is likened to milk and *Kṛṣṇa* is the one who provides the milk. From where does the milk come? From the *śruti*. Therefore, all the *Vedas*, the *Upaniṣads*, are likened to a cow, its milk being the *Gītā*. Unto *Kṛṣṇa* the one who gives out the nectar that is the *Gītā*, my salutations.

Verse 4

सर्वोपनिषदो गावो दोग्धा गोपालनन्दनः ।

पार्थो वत्सः सुधीर्भोक्ता दुग्धं गीतामृतं महत् ॥ ४ ॥

sarvopaniṣado gāvo dogdhā gopālanandanah

pārtho vatsah sudhīrbhoktā dugdham gītāmṛtam mahat (4)

सर्व-उपनिषदः *sarva-upaniṣadaḥ* — all the *Upaniṣads*; गावः *gāvaḥ* — cows; गोपाल-नन्दनः *gopāla-nandanah* — joy of cowherds; दोग्धा *dogdhā* — one who milks; पार्थः *pārthah* — *Arjuna*; वत्सः *vatsah* — calf; सुधीः *sudhīḥ* — one whose mind is clear; भोक्ता *bhoktā* — enjoyer; महत् गीत-अमृतम् *mahat gīta-amṛtam* — great (invaluable) nectar of the *Gītā*; दुग्धम् *dugdham* — milk

The *Upaniṣads* are the cow; the joy of cowherds, *Kṛṣṇa*, is the one who milks; *Arjuna* is the calf; the one whose mind is clear is the one who drinks the milk; and the invaluable, timeless *Gītā* is the milk.

The first two verses praised the *Gītā* and *Vyāsa*. Because the *Gītā* was taught to *Arjuna* by Lord *Kṛṣṇa*, he is praised in the third verse as the teacher of the *Gītā*, as *gītācārya*. In the fourth verse, the nature of the *Gītā* and the Lord are both mentioned. This is the subject matter of the *Gītā* and it is being praised here.

THE UPANIĀADS AND THE GĪTĒ AS A COW AND ITS MILK

All of the *Upaniṣads* are taken into account in the *Gītā*. To present the *Gītā* as the essence of the *Upaniṣads*, a popular imagery is used in this verse. Here, the cow, a symbol of wealth and sanctity, is presented to represent all of the *Upaniṣads*. Together, they form the body of the cow. If the *Upaniṣads* are the cow, then its milk is the *Gītā*.

KĪĀŪA AS THE MILKMAN

Who is the milkman? Nowadays, milking is all done by machines, but previously it was not easy to coax milk from a cow. The cow has its own moods and will not yield for just anyone. In this verse *Kṛṣṇa* is acknowledged as the best milkman. Born into the family of a milkman, in a cowherd community, *Kṛṣṇa* did not need to be taught how to milk a cow. Even from cows with empty udders, *Kṛṣṇa* was able to get milk. Just as he could get milk from a cow, *Kṛṣṇa* is able to milk the *Upaniṣads*. He knows exactly what the subject matter is. In fact he is the subject matter. Since he knows the subject matter so well, he is the best one to milk the *Upaniṣads*.

Milk is the essence of the cow in that the many things a cow eats are all converted into milk. In the same manner, the *Upaniṣads* talk about a variety of topics, but it is all converted into the milk of *vedānta-śāstra* (*brahma-vidyā* and *yoga-śāstra*). These are the two most important topics in all of the *Upaniṣads*. They form the milk and there can be no better milkman than *Kṛṣṇa*.

LORD KĪĀŪA AS GOPĒLA-NANDANA, THE JOY OF COWHERDS

Lord *Kṛṣṇa* is referred to here as *Gopāla-nandana*, the joy of cowherds. The word 'go' in Sanskrit, not only means 'cow'; it also means 'words' and 'earth.' The one who gives meaning to all of these words is Lord *Kṛṣṇa* and the one who nourishes and sustains the earth with life is also Lord *Kṛṣṇa*. In this verse, he is also referred to as the milkman who is the joy of all the cowherds because he is the nourisher and protector of cows.

ARJUNA: THE CAUSE OF THE GĪTĒ

A cow produces milk for the sake of its calf. Here, also, there must be a calf to generate the milk that is the *Gītā*. *Arjuna*, *Pārtha*, is the *vatsa*, the calf, because he is instrumental in drawing the *Gītā* out from *Kṛṣṇa*. Just as the cow's milk is born for the sake of the calf, the *Gītā* was born for the sake of *Arjuna*.

Since the calf cannot take all of the milk produced by the cow, there is extra milk for the people. In the same way, *Arjuna* acquired the milk of the *Gītā* and others are also the partakers of it.

PARTAKERS OF THE GĪTĒ

Unlike the milk from the cow, the milk of the *Gītā* is endless. The enjoyer of this milk is the one whose mind is clear and who has discrimination. The person who is capable of inquiry, *sudhī*, is the partaker of this milk.

The *Gītā* is likened to milk because it is nourishing to all. Milk is a complete food, a universal food. The message of the *Gītā* is also universal. It is applicable to everyone at any time or place because it deals with certain facts that do not change with time or place.

THE TIMELESSNESS OF THE SUBJECT MATTER

That which does not change is the very subject matter of the *Gītā* and is, therefore, described here as *amṛta*. There are many meanings for the word *amṛta*, but the one that is most relevant here is ‘that which is not subject to death.’ Whatever is not bound by time, does not undergo any change, that which immortalises you, nourishes you, makes you happy, is considered to be *amṛta*. Anyone can take it; it is applicable to all. This timeless, nectarine *Gītā* is described here as something that becomes more available the more it is given. The milk of the *Gītā* is knowledge. The more knowledge you give, the more you have because, as you keep giving, the knowledge becomes clearer for you.

Verse 5

वसुदेवसुतं देवं कंसचाणूरमर्दनम् ।

देवकीपरमानन्दं कृष्णं वन्दे जगद्गुरुम् ॥ ५ ॥

vasudevasutaṃ devaṃ kaṃsacāṇūramardanam
devakīparamānandaṃ kṛṣṇaṃ vande jagadgurum (5)

वसुदेव-सुतम् *vasudeva-sutam* — son of *Vasudeva*; कंस-चाणूर-मर्दनम् *kaṃsa-cāṇūra-mardanam* — destroyer of *Kaṃsa* and *Cāṇūra* (demonic kings); देवकी-परम-आनन्दम् *devakī-parama-ānandam* — the greatest joy of *Devakī* (*Kṛṣṇa*'s mother); जगद्-गुरुम् *jagad-gurum* — the teacher of the world; देवं कृष्णम् *devaṃ kṛṣṇam* — the Lord *Kṛṣṇa*; वन्दे *vande* — I salute

I salute *Kṛṣṇa*, the Lord, the teacher of the world, son of *Vasudeva*, destroyer of *Kaṃsa* and *Cāṇūra*, the greatest joy of *Devakī*.

KĪÂÛA AS THE TEACHER OF THE WORLD

In the fifth verse, *Kṛṣṇa* is presented as the teacher of the world, *jagad-guru*. A teacher can only be a teacher of the world if he or she has a universal message. Also, one can teach only those people who want the subject matter he or she is teaching. For instance, only those who are interested in calculus will go to a teacher of calculus. A universal message is relevant to everyone everywhere, even though not everyone will be interested in it.

Here, the message of the *Gītā* can be given to anyone because it is relevant to everyone. *Kṛṣṇa* is not considered to be a teacher merely because he is accepted as such, but because he has a message acceptable to all. This we must know. It is a message that is extremely valuable to everyone. Without it, one's life is a search that never comes to an end. This message, which *Kṛṣṇa* is giving here in the *Gītā* is what makes him a *jagad-guru*.

KĪÂÛÂ AS A PERSON FOR PURPOSES OF MEDITATION

As a teacher of the world, *Kṛṣṇa* is looked upon as a person with certain qualities or attributes, but only for the purpose of meditation. When that which is being discussed is free from all attributes, it is a matter for knowledge. It is something to be understood. But when a particular form with a set of attributes is being talked about, such as *Kṛṣṇa* as a person, it is purely for the purpose of meditation.

In this verse, some historical facts are given about *Kṛṣṇa* to create a figure for meditation. He is described as the son of *Vasudeva*, *Vasudeva-suta*, and, at the same time, he is the Lord, *deva*, father of all, including *Vasudeva*. Obviously, he is not an ordinary son. If he were, we would not meditate upon him.

KĪÂÛÂ AS THE DESTROYER OF EVIL

Kṛṣṇa is also referred to here as the destroyer of evil. We should know that there is no evil beyond our own minds and that there is no such thing as an evil mind. There is only wrong thinking that needs to be corrected. *Kṛṣṇa*, as the Lord, is the chastiser of wrongdoers. By giving them what they deserve he removes this evil of incorrect thinking.

KĪÂÛÂ AS THE SOURCE OF HAPPINESS

Kṛṣṇa is the greatest joy of his mother, *Devakī*. He is the most attractive, the one who is the source of all-happiness. Anything that attracts (*karṣati*) is *Kṛṣṇa*; anything that attracts is happiness. What pleases you attracts you because it makes you happy. This is why the source of happiness is the focus of complete attraction. Oh! *Kṛṣṇa*, teacher of the world, whose message is universal, I salute you.

Verse 6

भीष्मद्रोणतटा जयद्रथजला गान्धारनीलोत्पला
 शल्यग्राहवती कृपेण वहनी कर्णेन वेलाकुला ।
 अश्वत्थामविकर्णघोरमकरा दुर्योधनावर्तिनी

सोत्तीर्णा खलु पाण्डवै रणनदी कैवर्तकः केशवः ॥ ६ ॥
bhīṣmadroṇataṭā jayadrathajalā gāndhāranīlotpalā
śalyagrāhavatī kṛpeṇa vahanī karṇena velākulā
aśvatthāmavikarṇaghoramakarā duryodhanāvarttinī
sottīrṇā khalu pāṇḍavai raṇanadī kaivartakaḥ keśavaḥ (6)

भीष्म-द्रोण-तटा *bhīṣma-droṇa-taṭā* — with *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa* as its banks; जयद्रथ-जला *jayadratha-jalā* — with *Jayadratha* as its water; गान्धार-नीलोत्पला *gāndhāra-nīlotpalā* — with *Gāndhāra* (*Śakuni*, the prince of *Gāndhāra*) as the blue lily; शल्य-ग्राहवती *śalya-grāhavatī* — with *Śalya* as the shark; कृपेण वहनी *kṛpeṇa vahanī* — with *Kṛpa* as the speed of the water's flow; कर्णेन वेलाकुला *karṇena velākulā* — with *Karṇa* as its breakers; अश्वत्थाम-विकर्ण-घोर-मकरा *aśvatthāmā-vikarṇa-ghora-makarā* — with *Aśvatthāmā* and *Vikarṇa* as its killer whales; दुर्योधन-आवर्त्तिनी *duryodhana-āvarttinī* — (and) with *Duryodhana* as its whirlpools, सा रणनदी *sā raṇa-nadī* — that river of battle; पाण्डवैः *pāṇḍavaiḥ* — by the *Pāṇḍavas*; खलु *khalu* — indeed; उत्तीर्णा *uttīrṇā* — was crossed over; कैवर्तकः *kaivartakaḥ* — the boatman (being); केशवः *keśavaḥ* — Lord *Kṛṣṇa*

With *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa* as its banks, *Jayadratha* as its water, *Gāndhāra* (*Śakuni*) as the blue lily, *Śalya* as the shark, *Kṛpa* as the speed of the water's flow, *Karṇa* as its breakers, *Aśvatthāmā* and *Vikarṇa* as its killer whales, and *Duryodhana* as its whirlpools, the river of battle was indeed crossed by the *Pāṇḍavas*, because the boatman was *Kṛṣṇa*.

THE PĀṆḌAVAS

The *Pāṇḍavas*, *Pāṇḍu's* sons, were five in number. The oldest son was *Yudhiṣṭhira*, also called *Dharmaputra*. The second son was *Bhīma*. *Arjuna*, who appears in the *Gītā*, was the third son. The fourth and fifth were *Nakula* and *Sahadeva*.

THE RIVER OF BATTLE

It is said that the *Pāṇḍavas* crossed a river of battle, *raṇanadī*, which is described poetically in this verse. Every river must have two banks within which the water flows. Without the banks there would be no river at all. *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa* are the two banks of this river of battle.

BHĪĀMA AND DROŪA

Bhīṣma, *Arjuna's* grandfather, was the eldest in the family and a man of great vows. He was considered to be invincible even though he was an old man. *Bhīṣma* was such a great warrior that he never lost a battle; only trickery could destroy him. *Droṇa* was the greatest archer, the *guru* who taught archery to *Arjuna* and his brothers, as well as his cousins.

DURYODHANA

Both *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa* were in *Duryodhana's* ranks against the *Pāṇḍavas*. *Duryodhana* took care of them during the thirteen years that the *Pāṇḍavas* were in exile. He pampered them so much that they felt obliged to him. And he made sure they felt obliged. *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa* were his strength and, because of them, he thought he could win the war. He had one more important ally in *Karṇa*. Therefore, these three people were the indirect causes of this war. Without them, *Duryodhana* would definitely not have embarked upon it.

In a river, there are always whirlpools. In this verse, *Duryodhana* is likened to a whirlpool because anyone who went near him got sucked in. Once caught in a whirlpool, it is very difficult to get out. They all got sucked into this battle — *Bhīṣma*, *Droṇa*, *Kṛpa*, his uncle, all of them got sucked in. Even though they were all very kind to the *Pāṇḍavas*, *Duryodhana* was able to drag them into his grip because he was such a scheming person.

DURYODHANA'S OTHER ALLIES

Although *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa* were the banks of this river of battle, the river would have been empty if *Jayadratha* and his huge army had not been there. *Jayadratha* provided the manpower and was, therefore, the water.

There are areas in the river where the water collects and remains. This is where the blue lilies grow, making the river not only beautiful but difficult to move through because of their entangling stalks. The prince of *Gāndhāra*, *Śakuni* is referred to here as the blue lily.

The river being described was one that had sharks in it. *Śalya* is likened to a shark and is called the great grabber. He was *Karṇa's* charioteer and was considered the greatest driver. A charioteer is very important in battle. He must not only have great expertise in driving, but he must also encourage the warrior, whose chariot he is driving. But, during the battle with the *Pāṇḍavas*, *Śalya* discouraged *Karṇa* as much as he could because of a promise he had made earlier to the *Pāṇḍavas*.

The current in this river was very fast. Its speed was provided by *Kṛpa*. Because of *Karṇa*, it was full of breakers. *Aśvatthāmā*, the son of *Droṇa*, was a great archer and also a killer. *Vikarṇa*, was one of the hundred sons of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*. These two, *Aśvatthāmā* and *Vikarṇa*, were the youngest and are described as killer whales.

CROSSING THE RIVER OF BATTLE

To cross such a terrible river is not easy. It is only possible by boat. Swimming across is impossible because of all of the whales, whirlpools and breakers. Even a boat may not make it.

There is, however, a way. If *Kṛṣṇa* is your boatman, you can cross this river of *saṃsāra*. We too face the various problems mentioned here; we have whirlpool problems, breaker problems, whale problems, credit card problems, etc. If Lord *Kṛṣṇa* is the boatman, you will definitely make it.

Verse 7

पाराशर्यवचःसरोजममलं गीतार्थगन्धोत्कटं
 नानाख्यानककेसरं हरिकथासम्बोधनाबोधितम् ।
 लोके सज्जनषट्पदैरहरहः पेपीयमानं मुदा
 भूयाद् भारतप ? जं कलिमलप्रध्वंसि नः श्रेयसे ॥ ७ ॥
pārāśaryavacaḥsarojamamalaṃ gītārthagandhotkaṭaṃ
nānākhyānakakesaraṃ harikathāsambodhanābodhitam
loke sajjanaṣaṭpadairaharahaḥ pepīyamānaṃ mudā
bhūyād bhāratapañkajaṃ kalimalapradhvaṃsi naḥ śreyase (7)

पाराशर्य-वचः-सरोजम् *pārāśarya -vacaḥ-sarojam* — the lotus born of the waters of the words of the son of *Parāśara*, (*Vyāsa*); गीता-अर्थ-गन्ध-उत्कटम् *gītā-ārtha-gandha-utkaṭam* — having the *Gītā* as its sweet fragrance; नाना-आख्यानक-केसरम् *nānā-ākhyānaka-kesaram* — with many stories as its stamens; हरि-कथा-संबोधन-आबोधितम् *hari-kathā-sambodhana-ābodhitam* — fully opened by the revealing stories of the Lord, *Hari*; लोके *loke* — in the world; सज्जन-षट्पदैः *sajjana-ṣaṭpadaiḥ* — by the honeybees who are right thinking people; अहरहः *aharahaḥ* — day after day; मुदा *mudā* — happily; पेपीयमानम् *pepīyamānam* — being relished; कलि-मल-प्रध्वंसि *kali-mala-pradhvaṃsi* — the destroyer of the blemishes of *Kali-yuga*; अमलम् *amalam* — spotless; भारत-प ? जम् *bhārata-pañkajam* — the lotus of *Mahābhārata*; नः श्रेयसे *naḥ śreyase* — for our good; भूयात् *bhūyāt* — may it be

May the spotless lotus, *Mahābhārata*, born of the waters of the words of the son of *Parāśara* (*Vyāsa*), having the meaning of the *Gītā* as its sweet fragrance, with its many stories as stamens, fully opened by the revealing stories of the Lord, *Hari*, relished happily day after day by the honey bees who are the right thinking people of the world, (this lotus of *Mahābhārata*) which destroys the blemishes of *Kali-yuga*, may it be for our good.

IN PRAISE OF THE MAHĒBHĒRATA

This is a verse in praise of the *Mahābhārata* itself. It says, 'Let it be for the good of all people. Let this beautiful lotus epic be for *mokṣa*, liberation, the most desired end.' It destroys all of the problems of *kaliyuga*. *Kali* is that which is selfish. Any evil is called *kali*. *Kaliyuga* is a *yuga*, a time period when people become easily caught up in their own likes and dislikes, *rāgas* and *dveṣas*.

The *Mahābhārata* has a number of guidelines for people to follow. It talks about ethics — personal, social and political values, and even logistics through interpretative illustrations.

THE LOTUS THAT IS THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

What kind of a lotus is the *Mahābhārata* ? Just like any other lotus, it is born of water. It comes from the water of words. This water of words springs forth from *Vyāsa* , the son of *Parāśara* . Also, this word-lotus is as clean as the lotus in the pond. It has the strong, sweet fragrance of the meaning of the *Gītā* .

A meaning is something silent; it is something that you understand. You can repeat a word because it is a sound, but its meaning is always silent. You can see a flower, but the smell cannot be seen anywhere. You can only sense it. Similarly, the meaning of the *Gītā* makes the whole *Mahābhārata* waft with fragrance. This epic is the lotus that exudes the fragrance of the meaning of the *Gītā* .

There are many small stories within stories. These stories are like the rows of stamens of the lotus. The stamens of the saffron flower are the most fragrant, whereas stamens of the lotus are known for their beauty. If the *Gītā* is the fragrance of the *Mahābhārata* , then the stories are the stamens which impart beauty to it.

Because of *Kṛṣṇa*'s presence in the *Mahābhārata* , it is the Lord's story. Without it, the *Mahābhārata* would be a lotus that had not yet bloomed. The opening of a bud generally requires the Sun; here the Lord's story is the Sun. It opens up the *Mahābhārata* with devotion. It provides the light necessary for this opening.

ENJOYMENT OF THE GĪTĀ

The *Gītā* is being enjoyed happily. People are drinking deeply from it, taking more and more, day after day. Who are these people? They are likened to an insect with six legs, the honey bee, for instance. Human beings have five sense organs plus a thinking intellect. Some extra intellect is necessary to extract the nectar from the epic flower that is the *Gītā* . The people who enjoy the *Gītā* are therefore, thinking people, those who use their intellects.

Let this *Gītā* which is the destroyer of all problems in *kaliyuga* , of the problems caused by likes and dislikes, be for the good of all people.

The next verse is in praise of the Lord, which says, 'I salute the Lord who is all *ānanda* , joy, fullness, whose form and expression are *ānanda* , and who is Lord *Kṛṣṇa* .'

Verse 8

मूकं करोति वाचालं पङ्गुं लङ्घयते गिरिम् ।

यत्कृपा तमहं वन्दे परमानन्दमाधवम् ॥ ८ ॥

*mūkaṃ karoti vācālaṃ paṅguṃ laṅghayate girim
yatkrpā tamahaṃ vande paramānandamādhavam (8)*

यत्कृपा *yat-krpā* — whose grace; मूकम् *mūkam* — the mute; वाचालम् *vācālam* — eloquent; करोति *karoti* — makes; पङ्गुम् *paṅgum* — one who is lame; गिरिम् *girim* — mountain; लङ्घयते *laṅghayate* — causes to scale; तम् *tam* — him; परमानन्द-माधवम् *paramānanda-mādhavam* — *Kṛṣṇa*, the Lord of *Lakṣmī* (wealth), whose nature is fullness; अहम् वन्दे *aham vande* — I salute

I salute *Kṛṣṇa*, the Lord of *Lakṣmī* (wealth), whose nature is fullness, whose *krpā*, grace makes the mute eloquent and causes the lame to scale mountain tops.

Mādhava is another name for Lord *Kṛṣṇa*, one who has all the resources and wealth with him, who is *Bhagavān*, the Lord. I salute the one who is *Mādhava*, *Bhagavān*, and whose expression and essential nature is fullness, *ānanda*.

THE LORD'S GRACE

This verse adds something more — grace, *krpā*. Grace is something that is earned. It is not something that the Lord randomly distributes day by day. If he did, he would be partial, which is not the case. Grace is a graceful expression for *karma-phala*. *Karma* is what you do and *phala* is the result of what you do.

PRAYER AS AN ACTION

Prayer is also a *karma*, an action. Because it is an action, it necessarily produces a result. The result is two-fold — seen, *dr̥ṣṭa-phala* and unseen, *adr̥ṣṭa-phala*.

One example of a seen result is the psychological benefit of prayer. The very fact that you are able to pray is itself a benefit. Also as a result of prayer, there can be the psychological benefit of having someone upon whom you can rely. Any individual has limitations, whereas the one you pray to is looked upon by you as limitless. Even without understanding, the Lord is looked upon as someone who is omniscient.

WHAT IS OMNISCIENCE, ALL-KNOWLEDGINGNESS?

No one understands totally what it means to be omniscient, to be all-knowing. To understand all-knowledge you must be all-knowing. However, our knowledge is limited. From this limited knowledge we can always know a little more, but that also will be limited. What we can very easily understand, however, is limitation in knowledge. From that we are able to appreciate that an omniscient person is free from limitation with respect to knowledge. This is what is meant by having an appreciation of omniscience.

Who is the omniscient person? Is he or she another kind of person or one of us? There is, therefore, a great deal of knowledge to be known in order to appreciate *Īśvara*, the Lord. I invoke this *Īśvara* in the form of a prayer.

THE RESULTS OF PRAYER

Prayer is a *karma* and it produces an immediate result, a visible result. That you are able to invoke the Lord is the result. You have someone to rely on, someone who is all-powerful, almighty, all-knowledgeable, unlike anyone else. From this, you gain a certain strength, knowing that you can draw on this power to the extent that your capacity to draw on it allows. It is like having a huge reservoir of water. You need not bring all the water at once; it does not matter that your receptacle is small. Just knowing that there is so much water in the reservoir gives you a certain strength.

Thus, the immediate benefit you experience, because you are able to pray, is that there is someone for you who is all-knowledge, upon whom you can draw whenever and as much as you want. This is the *dr̥ṣṭa-phala*, the seen result. You experience it even as you pray. There is also an *adr̥ṣṭa-phala*, the unseen result of prayer. This is what we call grace — which accounts for benefits which we cannot attribute to a particular day's prayer.

HOW DOES GRACE COME TO YOU?

Grace is earned in the same way that you earn anything else. Since you are not able to relate an unseen result to a given course of action on your part in the immediate past, we are constrained to call this result, grace. This grace is able to convert a mute into one who is eloquent and enables a lame person to climb a mountain.

Kālidāsa, the celebrated poet, was considered to be a mute but, because of grace, he began pouring out verses. Similarly, *Vālmiki* became a great poet because of grace. In day-to-day life, we often hear various stories of the disappearance of incurable diseases. Cancer suddenly vanishes and no one knows how. We call it grace because the causes are not known. You can call such happenings grace, accident, or chance.

However, a perceptive person, with a certain maturity and understanding of *Īśvara*, appreciates these unseen results as what we call grace.

THE INVISIBLE RESULT OF PRAYER

In a prayer, what you really release is an invisible force causing the *adr̥ṣṭa-phala*, the unseen result. The very system, the laws, that produce certain results which are not visible to us are reorganised by prayer. Certain elements are introduced, through prayer, into this invisible system, causing it to reorganise itself. However, we do not know how it will be reorganised. This is why the results are said to be caused by grace.

Grace, therefore, is something that we receive purely as a result of our own *karma*, actions done either in our immediate past or in the remote past. Because of this result, this grace, certain situations happen in our favour. What is generally taken to be impossible is made possible by grace. In fact, all life is like that — the impossible is made possible.

With this verse I salute *Bhagavān*, the one, by whose grace the mute becomes eloquent and the lame scales mountain tops, the one, by whose grace the impossible is made possible.

The final verse of the *Gītā-dhyānam* describes the various beings who praise this all-knowing Lord

Verse 9

यं ब्रह्मा वरुणेन्द्ररुद्रमरुतः स्तुन्वन्ति दिव्यैः स्तवै-

वेदैः साङ्गपदक्रमोपनिषदैर्गायन्ति यं सामगाः ।

ध्यानावस्थितत?तेन मनसा पश्यन्ति यं योगिनो

यस्यान्तं न विदुः सुरासुरगणा देवाय तस्मै नमः ॥ ९ ॥

yaṃ brahmā varuṇendrarudramarutaḥ stunvanti divyaiḥ stavair-

vedaiḥ sāṅgapadakramopaniṣadairgāyanti yaṃ sāmagaḥ

dhyānāvasthitatadgatena manasā paśyanti yaṃ yogino

yasyāntaṃ na viduḥ surāsuraḡaṇā devāya tasmai namaḥ (9)

ब्रह्मा *brahmā* — *Brahmāji*; वरुण-इन्द्र-रुद्र-मरुतः *varuṇa-indra-rudra-marutaḥ* — *Varuṇa, Indra, Rudra, and Marut devatās*; दिव्यैः स्तवैः *divyaiḥ stavaiḥ* — with divine hymns of praise; यम् *yaṃ* — whom; स्तुन्वन्ति *stunvanti* — praise; सामगाः *sāmagaḥ* — the singers of the *Sāmaveda*; वेदैः *vedaiḥ* — by the *Vedas*; साङ्ग-पद-क्रम-उपनिषदैः *sāṅga-pada-krama-upaniṣadaiḥ* — along with the *Upaniṣads* and the limbs (of chanting) such as *pada, krama*, and so on; गायन्ति *gāyanti* — sing in praise; यम् *yaṃ* — (of) whom; योगिनः *yogināḥ* — contemplative people; ध्यान-अवस्थित-तद्-गतेन मनसा *dhyāna-*

avasthita-tat-gatena manasā — with a mind resolved in him in a state of meditation; यम् *yam* — whom; पश्यन्ति *paśyanti* — see clearly; सुर-असुर-गणाः *sura-asura-gaṇāḥ* — the celestials as well as demons; यस्य अन्तम् *yasya antam* — whose nature; न विदुः *na viduḥ* — do not know; तस्मै देवाय *tasmai devāya* — unto him, the Lord; नमः *namaḥ* — my salutations

To the Lord about whom *Brahmā*, *Varuṇa*, *Indra*, *Rudra*, and the *Marut-devatās* praise with divine hymns, the one whom the singers of the *Sāmaveda* praise by singing with a full complement of the limbs (of singing) in the order of *pada* and *krama* and the *Upaniṣads*, the one whom contemplative people see with minds resolved in him in a state of meditation, whose nature the celestials and demons do not know, unto him, the Lord, my salutations.

The word *deva* has different meanings. The root meaning is that which is effulgent. *Deva* can refer to any god, a celestial, or even a sense organ. The Lord is also called *deva*, meaning the one who is all-knowing. Unto this Lord, my salutations.

PRAISE BY EXALTED BEINGS

Who is this Lord? He is the one about whom all the gods, from *Brahmāji*, downward, sing hymns of praise. In addition to *Brahmāji*, the verse specifically mentions the *devas Varuṇa*, *Indra*, *Rudra*, and the *Marut-devatās*. Even though these *devas* are exalted beings, they are still *jīvas* (individuals) occupying special positions. Their songs in praise of *Īśvara* are found in the *Vedas*.

PRAISE BY SCHOLARS

Those who are able to sing the *Sāmaveda* also praise the Lord. To sing the *Vedas*, one must have the knowledge to do so. Six other disciplines of knowledge are required. They are called the *ṣaḍaṅgas*, the six limbs. They are: phonetics (*śikṣā*), grammar (*vyākaraṇa*), rituals (*kalpa*), etymology (*nirukta*), prosody (*chandas*), and astronomy with astrology (*jyotiṣa*). The reciters of the *Sāmaveda* with the full knowledge of these six limbs sing in praise of the Lord the hymns of *Sāmaveda* in the form of *pada* and *krama* along with the *Upaniṣads* which reveal the truth of the Lord.

PRAISE BY CONTEMPLATIVE PEOPLE

Then there are the contemplative people who meditate upon the truth of *Īśvara*, whom they see very clearly. How do they see? With their minds. What kind of mind? A mind that is in a state of contemplation, a mind that is absorbed, tranquil, and subtle. These people contemplate, again and again, with minds that are awake to the true nature

of the Lord, which they have come to appreciate through listening to and analysing the *Īśvara*, the teaching.

PRAISE BY OTHERS

There are people who praise the Lord as one with a form and attributes. The whole creation with all of its glories is nothing but the Lord's form. There are others, *yogīs*, who see the Lord as formless, whose nature is not known by either gods or demons. Even though these gods are all exalted beings, they do not necessarily know that they are limitless. Being a god or a celestial does not mean that the person is enlightened. Self-knowledge is not something that comes with an exalted position. They must have a means of knowledge, a *pramāṇa*, to know this truth about themselves.

Thus salutations are offered to the Lord, who is praised by the gods and demons alike — the demons also praise the Lord to gain various powers by his grace — and by the singers of the *Sāmaveda*, whom the contemplative people realise in their meditations and whose glories even gods and demons know not.

Thus, these nine verses praise the *Gītā* in general. First, the *Mahābhārata*, in which the *Gītā* is placed, is praised. Then Lord *Kṛṣṇa* is praised as a boatman because of whose tact and grace the *Pāṇḍavas* were able to cross the great river of battle with all of its hurdles.

The *Gītā* herself is also praised, after which *Vedavyāsa*, the chronicler of the *Mahābhārata*, is praised because of whose grace we now have the *Gītā*. *Arjuna* is recognised in these verses as being its *nimitta*, cause. Without him, there would be no *Gītā*. Because *Arjuna* asked for it, we have the Lord's Song, the *Bhagavadgītā*.

Life as we know it, that is, *saṃsāra*, is considered to be a river of battle, *raṇanadī*, in which people drown. The verses do not tell us how this river can be crossed. Nor do they mention *Kṛṣṇa's* grace. We simply need to understand that the boatman is *Kṛṣṇa*, the Lord. *Kṛṣṇa* is the one whose grace enables us to cross.

Having invoked the Lord's help by this prayer to the *Gītā*, we can now commence our study. Before we begin the first chapter, we will see briefly the context, in which the *Gītā* is set, and its purpose.

THE CONTEXT OF THE GĪTĒ

A large-scale battle between two factions of the royal clan of the *Kurus*, in the days of *Kṛṣṇa*, provided the context for the *Bhagavadgītā*. The people belonging to this *Kuru* clan were called *Kauravas*. The battle was waged between the one hundred sons of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*, collectively referred to as *Dhārtarāṣṭras*, and the five sons of *Pāṇḍu*, called the *Pāṇḍavas*. The entire *Mahābhārata*, in which the *Gītā* is placed, is a piece of literature, drama. Thus, the author, *Vyāsa* had the freedom to use his imagination creatively. He did this by weaving the whole tapestry of this huge epic around a few historical events and characters.

THE KAURAVAS

When *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* and *Pāṇḍu*, the sons of *Vicitravīrya* came of age, *Bhīṣma* had to install one of them as the king to rule the *Kauravas*. Although *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* was older than *Pāṇḍu*, he was not eligible to rule because he was blind. According to the *dharma śāstra*, which states exactly who can and cannot rule, ruling a kingdom being a very responsible and difficult job, a king should have all his faculties intact. *Pāṇḍu*, therefore became the ruler. *Pāṇḍu* was a great man and he ruled well. He respected his older brother, *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*, and gave him the full status of a king, even though he could not actually rule. *Pāṇḍu* went on a *digvijaya* (going in all the directions and conquering the rulers of various kingdoms and bringing them under one's subjugation) and brought in wealth and prosperity to the kingdom. He also extended the frontiers of his kingdom.

Once *Pāṇḍu* decided to go to the forest along with his wives *Kuntī* and *Mādrī* and a huge retinue, to hunt and enjoy the life of living in the forest. There, once he came across a pair of deer, which were sporting together. Without thinking, he shot arrows at them and mortally wounded them. In that instant the pair of deer took on their original forms of a *ṛṣi* and his wife. They had assumed the form of deer and were cavorting freely. Then the *ṛṣi*, by the name *Kindama*, cursed *Pāṇḍu* that, if ever he would unite with his wife, he would die instantaneously and hence would never be able to beget children. After this *Pāṇḍu* renounced his kingdom and took to an ascetic way of life in the forest along with his wives. He observed many kinds of austerities and his wives *Kuntī* and *Mādrī* also practised the austerities along with him. Thus all three of them lived a life befitting the *vānaprasthāśrama*.

The fact that he could not beget any children was a source of great sorrow to *Pāṇḍu*. His wife *Kuntī* had been given a *mantra* as a boon by the sage *Durvāsas* once, when she had served him very well. This *mantra* had the power to bring any God to her

and bless her with a son. Therefore at *Pāṇḍu*'s behest, she gave birth to three sons, *Dharmaputra*, *Bhīma*, and *Arjuna*, using the *mantra*. She also helped *Mādrī* to beget the twins, *Nakula* and *Sahadeva*, using the *mantra*. Later, being unable to resist the temptation, when *Pāṇḍu* tried to approach *Mādrī*, the *ṛṣi*'s curse took effect and he died. Because she had been instrumental in causing *Pāṇḍu* to die, *Mādrī* put an end to her life by committing *satī* after entrusting her two sons to the care of *Kuntī*. After this the *ṛṣis* in the forest brought *Kuntī*, and the five sons of *Pāṇḍu*, to *Hastināpura* and entrusted them to the care of the elders of the *Kuru* clan. The entire *Kuru* clan accepted the five brothers as the rightful heirs of *Pāṇḍu*. *Bhīṣma* entrusted to *Droṇācārya* the task of education and training in archery and warfare of all the princes — the hundred sons of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* and the five sons of *Pāṇḍu*. After their education was completed, they all demonstrated their skills in public during their graduation ceremony. Then by the unanimous decision of all the elders, *Dharmaputra*, the oldest of the *Pāṇḍavas*, was installed as the crown prince and was entrusted with the responsibility of ruling the Kingdom.

Dharmaputra, also known by the name *Yudhiṣṭhira*, was committed to a life of *dharma*, to what was right, even at the cost of his own welfare. Because *Dharmaputra* was born by the grace of Lord *Yama*, he was also called *Dharmarājā*. The second son was *Bhīma*, a man of valour and strength. He was born by the grace of Lord *Vāyu*. He also had a great heart and was committed to *dharma*.

Then there was *Arjuna*, the most versatile of them all. Not only a master archer, *Arjuna* had a thorough grasp of logistics. He knew all about warfare, how to organise an army, how to advance, how to fight. There is a *śāstra* for all of this, explaining the various ways to arrange an army into appropriate formations, *vyūhas*, so that when the front lines are gone, there are other lines to back them up. All of this requires a lot of study and understanding. Besides being an expert in warfare, *Arjuna* was very adept in the performing and fine arts. He was a great dancer, musician, and a man of great name and fame, committed to *dharma*.

Nakula, a younger brother to these three, was also an archer. *Sahadeva*, the youngest, was considered to be a wise man, a *jñānī*, and a great astrologer. *Nakula* and *Sahadeva* were twins born to *Mādrī* by the grace of the twin gods, *Aśvini-kumāras*, the celestial physicians. When it became obvious that war with *Duryodhana* was inevitable, *Dharmaputra* asked *Sahadeva* when the *Pāṇḍavas* should begin the war against their cousin, *Duryodhana*, so as to win. *Sahadeva* gave his brother a certain time. *Duryodhana*, having the same respect for *Sahadeva* and his integrity, also asked for an appropriate time to begin the war against the *Pāṇḍavas*. *Sahadeva* naturally gave *Duryodhana* a time meant to make the war go in his favour. This one episode alone, in the *Mahābhārata*, presents *Sahadeva* as an extraordinary person with all the additional qualifications of a prince, such as skill in archery and warfare. However, thanks to Lord *Kṛṣṇa*'s grace, *Duryodhana* could not start the war on time.

Together, *Dharmaputra* and his four younger brothers, committed to the law of *dharmā*, ruled the kingdom very well and all the citizens were very pleased. One and all showered praise and accolades on the *Pāṇḍavas*. This marked the beginning of all the problems because the sons of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*, especially *Duryodhana* were very jealous and did not accept the *Pāṇḍavas* as rulers. They did whatever they could to see that the *Pāṇḍavas* were always in trouble even though, as princes, the *Dhṛtarāṣṭras* (sons of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*) were treated very well by the ruling *Pāṇḍavas*.

DURYODHANA'S JEALOUSY

The *Pāṇḍavas* grew up in the same palace with their cousins, the hundred sons of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*. Even as children, *Duryodhana* and his brothers were jealous of the *Pāṇḍavas* and would gang up and try to destroy them. Therefore, the *Pāṇḍavas* always grew up in the midst of great jealousy and constant fighting. They tried to understand that their cousins were jealous and accommodated them as best they could.

Now that the people were happy that *Dharmaputra* was their crown prince, *Duryodhana's* jealousy knew no bounds. From the time *Dharmaputra* became the crown prince, *Duryodhana* began scheming for the throne. He plotted with his uncle *Śakuni*¹, *Karṇa*² and his brothers to kill the *Pāṇḍavas*. With the silent approval of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*, *Duryodhana* plotted to kill the *Pāṇḍavas* at *Vāraṇāvata*. *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* sent them to *Vāraṇāvata* under the pretext of asking them to preside over an *utsava*. *Duryodhana* had already built a palace made of inflammatory substances for their stay and had sent one of his agents with the instruction that at an opportune moment he should set fire to the palace so that it would look like an accident. This would lead to the end of the *Pāṇḍavas*.

But *Vidura*³ who already knew about this plot warned them and made secret arrangements for their escape. Everybody assumed that the *Pāṇḍavas* had perished in

¹ *Śakuni* was the brother of *Gāndhārī*, *Duryodhana's* mother. He was the vile schemer who advised *Duryodhana* in his actions against the *Pāṇḍavas*.

² *Karṇa* was actually the son of *Kuntī*, born to her by the grace of Lord Sun, when she had experimented with the mantra that the sage *Durvāsas* had given her when she was a young unmarried girl. When the child was born, being afraid of the society, she placed the child in a basket and floated it away in the river *Gaṅgā*. This child was found and raised by a charioteer as his son. *Karṇa* was very valorous and grew up into a fine archer. He came to the Graduation Ceremony of the *Kuru* princes to prove himself and gain some acceptance. He challenged *Arjuna*. But he was not allowed to participate on the grounds that he was not a *kṣatriya*. When he thus stood humiliated, *Duryodhana* came to his rescue and crowned him as the king of *Aṅgadeśa*. Since then he became the most devoted friend of *Duryodhana*.

³ *Vidura* was another brother of *Pāṇḍu* and *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*. He was born to a servant maid and was not entitled to rule the kingdom. He was a minister to the king and was a great

the fire. Except *Vidura* no one knew of their escape. The *Pāṇḍavas* lived incognito for sometime and went to the *svayaṃvara* of *Draupadī* who was the daughter of the king of *Pāñcāla*. *Arjuna* won the test and all five of them married *Draupadī* and came back to *Hastināpura*.

This time the elders of the *Kuru* family decided to put an end to the conflict by dividing the kingdom into two halves — one each for the *Dhārtarāṣṭras* and the *Pāṇḍavas*. The most undeveloped and unproductive part of the country called *Khāṇḍavaprastha* was given to the *Pāṇḍavas* as their share. *Hastināpura* itself with the developed productive lands around it went to the *Dhārtarāṣṭras*. But they accepted the deal and went to *Khāṇḍavaprastha*. With the help of Lord *Kṛṣṇa*, Lord *Indra* and the divine architects, the *Pāṇḍavas* made the land fertile and built a very beautiful capital for themselves. This was called *Indraprastha*. *Yudhiṣṭhira* sent his brothers in all directions for *digvijaya* and they in turn brought in wealth and made their country prosperous and powerful.

Dharmaputra was asked by *Vyāsa* to perform a great *yajña*, called *rājasūya*, in which money and food were to be distributed. In that *yajña*, *Duryodhana* was in charge of distributing the money. He was known to be generous and if it was someone else's money, he gave even more. Everyone participated in the *yajña* in some way and this was *Duryodhana's* contribution to it.

After the *yajña*, people began praising *Dharmaputra* and his brothers. This made *Duryodhana* even more jealous. He could not bear to see the prosperity of the *Pāṇḍavas*. He wanted *Indraprastha* for himself. But he knew he could not win in a war with the *Pāṇḍavas*. *Śakuni* advised him to invite *Dharmaputra* for a game of dice and said that he would play on behalf of *Duryodhana* and win for him *Indraprastha* and all that the *Pāṇḍavas* owned. With his father's consent, *Duryodhana* invited *Dharmaputra* for a game of dice. *Śakuni's* plan worked — *Dharmaputra* lost everything.

THE GAME OF DICE: DHARMAPUTRA'S WEAKNESS

Dharmaputra accepted the invitation for a game of dice because it was considered to be a *kṣatriya-dharma* not to refuse an invitation to a game of dice. But apart from that, he had a liking to it. That was his weakness. But he had not bargained for playing against *Śakuni* who was an expert in the game. *Dharmaputra* was no match for *Śakuni* even in a fair game. But *Śakuni* had no intentions of playing fair. Not knowing that *Śakuni* had loaded the dice, *Dharmaputra* thought that with every subsequent throw he would recover what he had lost. Instead, being goaded by *Śakuni* to stake more and more, he lost the crown, the kingdom, his brothers, himself and

soul. He was dharma incarnate. Many a time he would try to give good advice to Dhārtarāṣṭra.

everything — even his wife, *Draupadī*, who was also considered to be part of his wealth. *Śakuni* baited *Dharmaputra* to stake *Draupadī* in an attempt to regain all that he had lost. A gambler's thinking being what it is, *Dharmaputra* thought that this at last, would work and, in that stake, he lost her too.

All the stories in the *Mahābhārata* point out either certain human virtues or weaknesses. This story reveals that playing the game of dice is a weakness and that a gambler gambles everything. There is a value here and the value is to be understood. *Dharmaputra's* weakness was gambling and he paid dearly for it!

The story then continues to tell how *Draupadī* was drawn into the court where she was insulted and attacked by *Duryodhana's* brother, *Duśśāsana*. But, while she was being disrobed, *Kṛṣṇa* helped her by continuing to lengthen her sari until her attacker finally became exhausted by his efforts. Although she had sympathetic support, no one else was able to help her because of *dharma*. *Dharmaputra* had staked his wife and lost her to another. Whatever he did with her or allowed to be done to her was his right. Because of their commitment to *dharma*, the furious *Pāṇḍavas* had to remain helpless witnesses, controlling themselves from doing anything to stop *Duśśāsana's* malicious act. *Kṛṣṇa's* grace was *Draupadī's* only support which saved her from further humiliation.

THE EXILE OF THE PĀṆḌAVAS

The *Pāṇḍavas* felt humiliated. The other four brothers were bound by love and honour to *Dharmaputra*. That prevented them from killing *Duryodhana* and others then and there. So they stood there with suppressed anger and frustration and *Draupadī* appealed to the elders in the assembly for justice. Many signs of ill omens appeared at that time. Then *Bhīma* declared that he would kill *Duryodhana* and *Duśśāsana* in war later. *Arjuna* declared that he would kill *Karṇa*. *Sahadeva* vowed to kill *Śakuni*. *Nakula* in turn vowed to kill *Śakuni's* son. These declarations were terrible and frightening.

At this *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* lost his nerve and promised *Draupadī* he would offer everything back to the *Pāṇḍavas* and they should forgive and forget and go back to *Indraprastha*. Then, *Bhīṣma*, *Droṇa*, and other respected elders too told *Duryodhana* that what had happened was wrong and that *Dharmaputra* should continue to rule the kingdom. But *Duryodhana* would not budge an inch. And then everyone agreed to play one more game with the condition that if the *Pāṇḍavas* won they would get their kingdom back and if they lost, they would go to the forest for twelve years, during which time *Duryodhana* would rule the kingdom. When they returned, however, the kingdom was to be given back to the *Pāṇḍavas*.

Duryodhana agreed to this condition, with one amendment. That is, for one additional year, the *Pāṇḍavas* should live somewhere incognito without being recognised by anyone. If any one of them was discovered, they would all have to serve another period of twelve years in the forest plus one more year living incognito — *ajñātavāsa*. In this way, *Duryodhana* was certain that he could send the *Pāṇḍavas* back into exile for thirteen more years because he had so many spies moving about the kingdom. At least one of the *Pāṇḍavas* would surely be recognised, he thought.

Thus, the *Pāṇḍavas* lived for twelve years in the forest and one more year incognito in the kingdom of *Virāṭa*. Each of them became employed in the king's palace, *Dharmaputra* as a companion to the king, *Bhīma* as a special cook, *Arjuna* as the teacher of dance and music to the women. *Arjuna* had been cursed by the celestial damsel *Urvaśī* that he should lose his masculinity. Lord *Indra* had modified that curse to take effect for a period of one year whenever he chose. Thus *Arjuna* opted for it to take effect for this period of *ajñātavāsa*. And he taught music and dance to the royal ladies of the king of *Virāṭa*. In this way, the *Pāṇḍavas* lived out the remaining year unrecognised by anyone.

Because *Duryodhana* had suspected their presence in *Virāṭa* he engineered a border skirmish in order to bring them out into the open. *Arjuna* did come out, along with the prince of *Virāṭa*. But the one year period had just expired. *Bhīṣma* was the one who told *Duryodhana* that, according to the lunar calendar, the period was indeed over. All that came out of *Duryodhana's* scheme, therefore, was that *Arjuna* gave him and his people, *Karṇa* and the others a good scare. It was a great day for *Arjuna*, one he had been long awaiting.

THE PĀṆḌAVAS' RETURN

The *Pāṇḍavas* came back to claim the kingdom but *Duryodhana* refused to return it to them. No amount of pleading could convince him to alter his stand. *Bhīṣma*, along with other highly respected people, advised *Duryodhana* to return the kingdom; but he refused.

Duryodhana had enjoyed absolute power for thirteen years. Power corrupts — and absolute power corrupts absolutely. *Duryodhana* was now so corrupt that he would not give the *Pāṇḍavas* so much as a square inch of the kingdom. The *Pāṇḍavas* for their part were willing to accept anything because they wanted to avoid war; therefore, they turned to *Kṛṣṇa* for help. *Bhīma*, in spite of his vow to avenge *Draupadī* by destroying his cousins, pleaded with *Kṛṣṇa* to somehow avoid the war. They all told *Kṛṣṇa*, 'It will be the end of the entire family. We do not want this. We are ready to take anything, but let *dharma* prevail. Otherwise, it is *adharma*, it is not proper. We are supposed to protect *dharma*. Now we have to fight and we do not want to fight. Please make it possible for us to avoid the war.'

But even *Kṛṣṇa*'s eloquence, pleading power, and negotiating acumen were of no avail. *Duryodhana* was too hard a nut to crack. His attitude towards his cousins was based on the fact that they were princes, members of the ruling class. They had valour and were well-armed with weapons. 'Let them fight,' he said, 'and take the kingdom as they should. I am not going to give it back to them. I have declared war. If they want the kingdom, they should meet me in the battlefield in *Kurukṣetra* and take it. Otherwise, let them go back to the forest. I will not disturb them there.'

In his role as the mediator, *Kṛṣṇa* then asked *Duryodhana* for some kind of compromise. He said, 'Give them one state with five districts. Give them a district with five counties. Give them a county with five villages. Give them a village with five houses. Give them a house with five rooms.' *Duryodhana* refused to give even one needle-point of land to the *Pāṇḍavas*.

The issue, therefore, was no longer the kingdom, but a matter of *dharma*, a question of right and wrong. The *Pāṇḍavas* were the lawful rulers, even though *Duryodhana* ruled the kingdom de facto. The *Pāṇḍavas* were the rightful rulers, rulers in exile, and *Duryodhana* was a usurper who continued to occupy the throne. To allow a usurper to rule the kingdom is to allow injustice, *adharma*, to go unchecked. If the king himself is following *adharma*, what will happen to the kingdom?

Just as a fence, put around a growing crop to keep out stray animals, should not creep into the field and destroy the crop, so too, a ruler should not destroy *dharma*. Rulers, kings, are all fence-like protectors. If they begin to follow *adharma*, the kingdom will not be fit to live in.

There is a daily prayer that says, *nyāyena mārgena mahīm mahiśāḥ paripālayantām* — let all the rulers of the world rule their kingdoms following the path of justice. This is said because the word 'ruler' implies justice. It may be your own son or a cousin by marriage who has done wrong. Nevertheless, the person must be given the punishment that the crime deserves. This is the duty of a ruler. The *Pāṇḍavas* were supposed to protect *dharma*, law and order, and *Duryodhana* had gone against it in every way. *Dharma* and justice had to be reinstated.

Therefore, the *Pāṇḍavas* could not avoid this war, even though they had explored all possible avenues for avoiding the war. Because *Duryodhana* would not return the kingdom, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* had no option but to hand over the challenging gloves to *Dharmaputra*, saying, 'I am sorry. I could not get even a square inch of land from *Duryodhana*. I tried everything. The situation is impossible. Here are the gloves. You have to fight. There is no other way.'

WAR IS DECLARED

It was with great reluctance that *Dharmaputra* accepted the need to fight. In the meantime, both parties had begun gathering whatever support they could. Since *Duryodhana* was the ruler, he was able to sway people to his side by bribing those who were willing to compromise. Such people are prepared to ignore what is right and wrong when it suits their purpose. Thus, using his money, power, land, and position, *Duryodhana* gathered a large number of people, kingdoms, armies and supplies — everything required to wage a war.

Neighbouring kingdoms felt that if they did not give *Duryodhana* their support, they would have to face the consequences. *Duryodhana* was the emperor, whereas they were lesser kings and chieftains. Because they could also have elected to join the *Pāṇḍavas*, *Duryodhana* sent his brothers and special messengers to elicit their support. They agreed to join his ranks primarily out of fear. Therefore, the number of people who refused to give him their support because they lived according to *dharma* was very few.

There are always a few people in any society who live their lives according to *dharma*. We read in a Tamil verse that it is because of these people that the rains come, the winds blow, and the flowing water still finds its own level, meaning that there is some order in the society. Here, too, there were a few people who were not threatened by *Duryodhana*, still less tempted by his offers because of their commitment to *dharma*. Unbribeable and virtuous, these people cast their lot with the *Pāṇḍavas*.

THE DHARMA OF WAR

War was declared openly. No stealth was involved because, in those days, even war was controlled by *dharma*. There was no such thing as a pre-emptive strike, where, while one side was preparing for war, the other side went in and took them by surprise. Nor could a man without a weapon be struck. If he was in a chariot, the other person also had to be in a chariot before any fighting could occur.

Thus there were certain rules that had to be followed and that is how the battle between the *Pāṇḍavas* and *Duryodhana* was fought. A time was declared and the fighting did not begin until then. The place was also arranged — *Kurukṣetra*, located just above Delhi.

As the *Gītā* opens, the forces of *Duryodhana* and those of *Dharmaputra* had assembled. *Duryodhana's* commander-in-chief was the invincible *Bhīṣma*, the grand old man of the *Kuru* family. Even though *Bhīṣma* was a man of *dharma*, he felt obliged to be on *Duryodhana's* side because he had promised his father that he would always stand by the one who ruled *Hastināpura*. And at the time of the war, rightfully or not, *Duryodhana* was the current ruler and hence *Bhīṣma* was obliged to fight on his side.

Although *Droṇa* had taught archery to both the *Dhārtarāṣṭras* and the *Pāṇḍavas*, his heart was with the *Pāṇḍavas*. But, *Duryodhana* had made him feel so obliged that *Droṇa* agreed to join his ranks. And also, *Droṇa* was extremely fond of his son, *Aśvatthāmā*. In fact one could say *Aśvatthāmā* was his weakness. And *Aśvatthāmā* was *Duryodhana's* friend. This was another reason for *Droṇa* to stay on with *Duryodhana*. *Kṛpācārya* was also obliged to stay with *Duryodhana*. *Karṇa*, of course, was *Duryodhana's* friend and very loyal to him. Because of his exceptional expertise in archery, *Karṇa* was *Duryodhana's* answer to *Arjuna*. He had been recognised as a great archer, early on, and *Duryodhana* had deliberately cultivated him and had given him a small kingdom. This gesture was enough to commit *Karṇa* to *Duryodhana* forever.

Thus everyone who was in some way obliged to *Duryodhana* had come to the battlefield to fight for his cause. They were all very well equipped with weaponry, skills, and a thorough knowledge of warfare. Just as armies now have tanks, there were chariots, cavalries, regiments with camels as the mount, regiments with elephants as the mount and infantries. With all this support, *Duryodhana* was ready.

The *Pāṇḍavas* were also ready and the war was about to begin. All eyes were upon *Arjuna* because he was the one everyone wanted to see in action. Even the gods wanted to see him and the balconies were full! To add to the colour, *Kṛṣṇa* was sitting right in front of *Arjuna* as his charioteer. *Kṛṣṇa* was the added attraction. *Arjuna* was already the apple of everyone's eye. But to add to that *Kṛṣṇa* was also there. Therefore, all eyes were upon *Arjuna* whose chariot was driven by none other than *Kṛṣṇa*, the Lord himself.

AN ACCOUNT TO SETTLE

This, then, was the situation as the *Gītā* was about to begin. *Arjuna* had a long account to settle with his cousins. From childhood onwards, there were so many occasions when he would have got even with *Duryodhana*, but his mother would not allow it, nor would his older brother. The incident involving *Draupadī* was the final insult. He therefore wanted to teach all the *Dhārtarāṣṭras* a lesson.

All the weapons he had been stockpiling for this day were going to have a chance to express themselves. These were not simple arrows. They were a different type of weaponry; they were all missiles. One came emitting fire, like a napalm bomb. Another one had the ability to neutralise it by dousing it with water. With such missiles, what a fight it would be! Elaborate descriptions of these weapons and missiles are found in the pages of the *Mahābhārata*.

Arjuna's magnificent weapons had been stockpiled in anticipation of an appropriate occasion in which they could be used. The war of *dharma*, which was about

to begin, was just such an occasion. More often than not, war is due to *adharma* on both sides; but, here, *adharma* was on one side only.

When a warrior fights for *dharma*, all his weapons and skills become useful. They come alive and are not wasted. The warrior will not think he spent his life simply gathering weaponry that was never used. A warrior who does not have an opportunity to fight, having spent fifty or sixty years stockpiling weapons, may develop arthritis and wish he had studied geology instead! He will regret what he has done because he has no proof of his valour. Therefore, for a *kṣatriya* like *Arjuna*, it was a great day to prove himself. He was a prince who had been nursing a lot of hurts and injustices. For him, the D-Day had come. Having waited so long for this day, *Arjuna* was naturally one flame of fury.

He ordered *Kṛṣṇa* to position his chariot in such a way that he could see all those with whom he would be fighting. *Arjuna* could not have fought with ordinary soldiers. He had to determine which chieftains he must tackle, which ones were his equals. As a good driver, *Kṛṣṇa* replied, ‘Yes, Sir,’ and placed the chariot where *Arjuna* could see all sides.

ARJUNA'S GRIEF

When *Arjuna* looked around him, he collapsed, not out of fear but in appreciation of the following fact that the people he was going to destroy were the people whose life and company he would prefer to have. He thought, ‘In their absence, my life will be empty. How can I destroy my own family, my kith and kin? These are the very people who are standing in front of me. How can I destroy all of these people?’

Most of the people *Arjuna* saw were citizens of this great kingdom. They had all been conscripted by *Duryodhana*, given a crash training course, and then brought to the battlefield. This was all visible because of their dress. They did not know how to button the shirts of their uniforms properly and their walk was clumsy because of the heavy, unfamiliar military boots. They were obviously new recruits who had come to be fodder for *Arjuna's* arrows.

Not only were there so many citizens in the opposite camp, but on his own side, too, there were a lot of innocent people. *Arjuna* then understood that no one was going to be victorious in this war. Because *Arjuna* and his brothers were committed to the moral order, *dharma*, they did what was to be done and avoided what was not to be done. A word once spoken was fulfilled and their actions were always beyond question. Their life, therefore, was lived according to this *dharma*, whereas, in the case of *Duryodhana* and his brothers, with the exception of *Vikarṇa*, it was quite the opposite. They followed a life which was questionable, *adhārmika*. Therefore the fight now was between *dharma* and *adharma*.

This battle is also sometimes interpreted as representing a conflict within the physical body, the body having been brought into being by a certain type of *dharma* — good actions. In this interpretation, the body is called *dharma-kṣetra*, *kṣetra* meaning ‘place.’

KNOWLEDGE OF RIGHT AND WRONG IS UNIVERSAL

If the physical body is considered a *dharma-kṣetra*, then *Kurukṣetra* is your own mind in which there are conflicts between *dharma* and *adharma* — what is to be done and what is not to be done, what is proper and not proper. These things you already know, of course, because you have a certain innate sense about them. No one can plead ignorance of what is right and wrong. This knowledge is universal.

What do we mean by universal knowledge? All monkeys, for example, born to live on treetops, need to know something about the law of gravity — and they do. If you were to observe the mother monkey, you would see that she has no concern about whether there is a baby holding onto her or not as she jumps from tree to tree. The baby monkey, however, holds onto its mother's bosom for its dear life. It is definitely afraid of falling, whereas the mother is not. She just keeps leaping from one branch to another, while her baby holds on tight.

Suppose, however the baby monkey had to undergo some education to know that there is a law of gravity operating, that it must hold on tightly in order not to fall, and that if it did fall, it would be injured or it would die. If all of these things had to be taught to monkeys, many of them would die for want of education and the species itself would sooner or later become extinct.

Fortunately, every baby monkey, without being educated, seems to know what is to be done and what is not to be done. Without going to Harvard or Cornell, without joining the Moral Majority, it knows very well that ‘I will fall if I let go of my mother.’ That ‘I will fall’ is one piece of truth and ‘if I fall, I may hurt myself’ is the second piece of truth the monkey seems to know. The third piece of truth is, ‘To fall and get hurt or be killed is not good for me or for my species.’

Instinctively, then, the monkey knows all this. Since monkeys are made to live on treetops, the minimum knowledge every monkey must have in order to survive is to know, ‘I will fall; objects come down; I will be the victim if I don't hold on to the other branch when I leap.’ This knowledge must be given to monkeys along with the creation. Only then is there any hope of a monkey living its life on the treetops.

Such knowledge is instinctive and is what we call the creation. If that knowledge is not given to a monkey and it has to be educated in order to know how to survive, then I would say that there is a defect in the creation.

Similarly, as a human being, I am born with a faculty of choice. Unlike a monkey, however, I can choose to live on treetops, on the twentieth floor of a building in Manhattan, or in a cottage on some riverbank. I can choose to go to Alaska and keep only my nose out or I can live in the tropics. Because I have the faculty of choice, I can choose my course of action. I can choose various ends and various means to achieve those ends.

That human beings seek securities and pleasures is a common fact that we have already analysed. And in seeking these ends, they have to follow certain means to achieve them. More often than not, upon analysis you will find that the problems lie only in the means and not in the ends. For example, the desire for money, an end, is not a sin. In fact, if you seek money, Lord *Viṣṇu* will be very happy about it, knowing that his wife, *Lakṣmī*, the Goddess of wealth, is so popular. The security that money represents is a natural need perceived by all humans.

SEEKING SECURITY IS NATURAL

People seek different forms of security. In itself, this seeking is neither good nor bad, only natural. The means alone is what is important here.

If I am controlled by a set of instincts, then I need not think about whether the means I employ is right or wrong. If you live in India and leave a couple of bananas on the window sill and a monkey comes along and takes them away, you cannot say the monkey is a thief. At the most, all that you can say is that you were careless. When we know there are monkeys around, we have to keep certain things away from them.

Whatever a monkey does, that action cannot be labelled as wrong because it is controlled by its own instincts. Thus, the monkey is always right and is not responsible for what it does. This is what we mean by *svabhāva*, one's own nature. Only when there is a choice, is there right and wrong. Wherever choice is involved, you cannot avoid the concept of right and wrong. There can be proper choice and improper choice.

Now, if this knowledge of what is proper and improper is to be given to you by an educational institution, it will definitely be denied to a lot of people, thereby making it possible for them to destroy themselves.

Just as the monkey is given an instinctual knowledge of gravitation for its survival, so too, a human being is given a common-sense knowledge with reference to what is good and not good for him or her. No institution is required to teach such knowledge. That I should not get hurt, for example, is a piece of knowledge. A mother and father need not teach this common-sense knowledge to their child because the child already knows it.

Thus, when I know 'I should not get hurt,' I also understand that, like me everyone else is aware of this fact. I also know exactly what is expected of me by others. You do

not expect me to hurt you, just as I do not expect you to hurt me. No one needs to be taught this knowledge. Because I have to choose, this knowledge is not left to education. It must be known to me. When I choose a means of action or perform an action, I must necessarily see whether it will hurt me or hurt anyone else or anything else. Knowledge of this moral order is what we mean when we say knowledge is born of common sense.

A moral order is known to us. That you do not want to be robbed and that no one else wants to be robbed is very well known. You do not want to be cheated or deceived, nor does anyone else want to be cheated or deceived by you. You do not want to be the target of any one's anger, hatred, or jealousy and you know very well that no one wants to be the target of yours. And, to put it positively you want others to sympathise with you, to understand you, and others also want you to understand them. You want others to help you when you are in trouble and others also want your help when they are in trouble.

There are many values involved in a moral order — non-injury (*ahiṃsā*), the absence of deception, speaking the truth, compassion, sharing, the absence of jealousy, the absence of hatred and so on — all of which are connected to each other. With reference to the behaviour of others, we are very clear. Thus, this particular knowledge is with all of us and is gathered by common sense. No education is necessary to know what is right and wrong. *Duryodhana* had this knowledge and so did the *Pāṇḍavas*. However, problems arise because of our priorities, which is why we settle for compromises.

UNIVERSAL, CULTURAL AND INDIVIDUAL VALUES

Values can be universal, cultural, and individual. In the West, for instance, there are a lot of individual likes and dislikes. In fact, children are taught to develop them at a very young age. The mother asks, 'What do you want on your toast? Do you want honey or brown sugar?' From childhood on, you are asked, 'What do you want? This or that?' In this way, you have been taught to exercise your faculty of choice. In India this is not done. You are offered tea with the milk and sugar already in it. There is no choice in the matter, whereas in the West you are not only asked what you would like in it, but whether you would like tea, coffee, or something else.

Our choices are all based on personal likes and dislikes, which we are not concerned with here. We are concerned with the fact that there is a common structure, a universal structure, wherein no one wants to be robbed, for example. Whether the person is a tribesman living in a remote desert or an urbanite living in a sophisticated society, it is the same. A person may be walking along in a street in Delhi or a person may be walking in a forest; but both of them do not want to get hurt or robbed. No one says, 'Because New York City is such a wonderful city, I want to get mugged there.' No one wants to get mugged anywhere.

There is, therefore, a structure that we all commonly sense, a structure which is already there. This universal structure that is already there is a moral structure. It comes up in the *Gītā* itself later on and I will talk about it more then. The word *dharma* refers to this structure, this order, which includes the ecological order. This *dharma* is known to me, to you and everybody else.

Money, power, name and influence are not universal values. You may seek money as a form of security and be prepared to destroy your name for it. There will also be another person who is ready to give up his or her money for the sake of power, name, or influence. Although name, influence, money, and power are generally sought after, they are not universals.

VALUES ARE NOT ABSOLUTE

Sympathy, love and compassion, on the other hand, are universal values, which does not mean that they are absolute. Values are never absolute; they are always relative, even though they may be universal. The point is that, one should not go against the universal values while pursuing individual or cultural values. For example, as long as your pursuit of money conforms to the universal values, you are living a life of *dharma*, whereas if your pursuit, whether for money, power, or pleasure, comes into conflict with the universal values, then there is *adharma*.

The *Pāṇḍavas* also sought money, power, and pleasure, but they tried to conform to the *dharma* at the same time. *Duryodhana*, on the other hand, represents a life of *adharma*, wherein power becomes so important that its pursuit comes into conflict with the order, *dharma*. For such people, however, this is not a problem because they do not think of it in these terms. Therefore, for them, the means can be anything, as long as the end is achieved. To say, 'For the sake of power, I can do anything,' is not due to ignorance, really speaking. There is some ignorance involved, as we shall see later, but the ignorance is not of the universal values.

Duryodhana definitely knew that he did not want to be cheated and that the *Pāṇḍavas* did not want to be cheated either. But power was so important to him that he did not mind cheating or destroying anyone, legitimately or illegitimately, who stood in his way. He simply did not think about the legitimacy or illegitimacy of what he was doing.

Your understanding of the laws, reflected in your choice of the means, if there are such laws, is what is meant by inner maturity. When I choose a means which is not proper for the sake of money, I go against the order, *dharma*, for the sake of money because I do not understand what I lose. I only know what I gain — money, which is very important to me. The difference between having the money and not having it is very clear to me.

One person may tell a lie for the sake of five thousand dollars while another person may tell a lie for a hundred thousand dollars, or for any amount in between, but not for five thousand dollars. There may also be those who would tell a lie for as little as a dollar. Everyone seems to have a price.

THE VALUE OF A VALUE

We even try to bribe the Lord in order to get to heaven. We are always ready to compromise if we can get something that is valuable enough to us. If a man sees the difference between having five thousand dollars and not having it, he may even deceive a friend who has offered to give him twenty percent over and above the value of the house he bought and renovated. All he has to do is to jack the price up by the amount of money that is so important to him. This man knows that the money can take him to Hawaii. It will definitely give him a good vacation somewhere. Thus, to have this five thousand dollars will definitely make a difference in his life. Therefore he is ready to compromise.

Suppose you tell someone, ‘You should not tell a lie,’ and the person, being very pragmatic, questions you, ‘What do I lose if I tell a lie?’ What will you say? Or, if your child asks, ‘Dad, if I can get some money so that we can have some more things, why should I not tell a lie?’ Generally, you will say that, telling a lie is wrong, which is another way of saying, ‘Don't do it!’

The general message the child gains is that, what is ‘wrong’ is what I should not do. But this does not explain anything. Therefore, the child will come back asking, ‘Why is it wrong?’ ‘Well, because it is not right,’ you say. ‘Why is it not right? Everybody else does it,’ the child argues, ‘And those who lie get money. I don't get it because I don't tell a lie, but if I tell a lie, I will get it. Why should I not tell a lie then?’ A father who is a little more intelligent will say, ‘You see, my child, you will be detected.’

Now the whole question becomes, ‘is it all right to tell a lie if I do not get caught?’ Someone might say, ‘So what? Even if I get caught, so what?’ ‘You will lose your credibility,’ the person is told. But, if the person does not care about his or her credibility or anything else, then where is the problem? ‘You will not be eligible for a credit card,’ may be your response, to which the person replies, ‘That is why I steal them. That way I get five cards at the same time!’

This line of argument is of course, foolish and should not be pursued. What one should appreciate is this. If there is a universal value and I go against that value, I must lose something. But my focus is on the gain that results from such an action. Perhaps I gain money, which makes a difference to me because I see the value of it. But what do I lose? Since I do not care for credibility, I do not see that I lose anything.

COMPROMISE AND MORAL ORDER

If you can see the immensity of the loss with reference to compromises made to gain such things as money, power, etc., you are mature. You will not go for the bargain because you see it as a bad bargain. You should see that what you lose is more than what you gain — which has nothing to do with the moral majority.

If there is a universal structure — and there is — then what I lose must definitely be much more than what I gain. Therefore, the education needed for maturity is to know what I lose. Suppose I say, ‘You will go to hell’ and you do not accept the idea of hell, then, that is the end of that. You will simply say, ‘You go to your hell, if there is one. I am not going; because I do not accept a hell.’

How do we know there is a hell other than where we are now? Hell is simply a belief. Suppose it is wrong? The threat of hell is certainly not a very convincing argument for telling the truth. Perhaps I do not believe in hell or do not care if there is a hell. If there is a hell, I will tackle it when I get there. It is not my problem right now. All that I want to do is get out of the hot water I am in right now. I will deal with the heat in hell later. This is a different thing. I am in hot water right here and now and five thousand dollars will make a difference.

However, if the person knows that he will be the loser by gaining this five thousand dollars he may not compromise for the sake of that money. If I were to ask him, ‘Why do you want this five thousand dollars?’ and he would say, ‘Because I can then buy certain things.’ Then I ask, ‘Why do you want those things?’ and he replies, ‘So that I can be happier, more secure.’ But if I were to show him that, in the process of getting this five thousand dollars, he becomes incapable of being happy and hence the bargain is a bad one, then he will not compromise. Now he understands the price he may have to pay for the compromise. This is how one understands the value of a value.

No one wants money for money's sake. If that were the case, a cashier's job would be good enough because, by just feeling money, you would be happy. You want money for your sake, so that you can be happy. Money is very interesting. Without it, certain things cannot happen, but there is a limit to what money can offer. It can buy a book, but it can never make you read unless the author offers you a thousand dollars to read it. Then, of course, you will read it overnight. But even then the money cannot make you understand what the book says. For that, you require something else, something other than money.

Money can buy music, but it can never make you understand music. You can hire the best musician to sing for you, but the money you pay to the musician cannot stop you from falling asleep during the performance — unless, again, you are offered money to stay awake! Thus, money can provide situations. That is all it can do. And money does do that, which nothing else can — a point to be remembered. But, then, the enjoyment is

for the person. You are the one who is to enjoy the music. If I lose the enjoyer, in the process of acquiring the money that will provide the opportunities for me to enjoy, then it is a bad bargain.

Therefore, the whole education or inner maturity, of a human being is not in knowing what is right and wrong, which we all know, but in knowing what I lose when I do the wrong thing. This I should know. What will I lose? How much will I lose? If I know this very well, it is not possible for me to go for the bargain. This is what is to be understood here.

When you tell a lie, you are speaking and, therefore, you are a doer, a performer, an actor. You are doing the action of speaking and, as the actor, when you tell a lie you are saying something that is not true to what you think. Therefore, the thinker is one and the actor is quite another. You know one thing and, by the time it comes out of your mouth, it is entirely different because what you say and what you think are not the same. This means there is already a split in you. As a speaker, a doer, who is telling a lie, I behave in such a way that I create a split in myself, like a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

THE THINKER AND DOER SPLIT

Once I create a split in myself, then, as a doer I am different from the one who knows, who thinks. If this split has taken place, do you think that you can succeed in life? Even with money or whatever else, you cannot. Because the person, you, is already split. As a thinker, I am entirely different from the performer, the one who does things, the doer. There is only one 'I,' and when I see myself as a split person, then, I cannot enjoy what money buys. I will be worried all the time.

You cannot do a wrong thing without a conflict and every conflict naturally creates a split in you. The conflict itself is the split and the split creates conflict. The more conflict there is, the more split the person is. This is not a conflict of choice. It is a conflict between me, the knower and me, the doer. The split is in the very personality, the very person, so that the mind is unable to enjoy the pleasures that money has bought. If a person already has a split between what he or she thinks and does, how can there be enjoyment of anything, whether it be food or a beautiful house? Being in conflict, the person is also potentially moody. You have to determine whether or not someone is in a good mood before you can talk to the person and good moods come only occasionally! When you say what you have to say, the person may feel so bombarded that he or she gets into yet another bad mood. Thus, the person is nothing but mood, potential mood — all due to split, the conflict between the thinker and the doer.

By analysing such situations, we find that this split, which is the basis of all psychological problems, has something to do with our rubbing against the law of *dharma*. Just look at yourself. When you are in conformity with the order, there is

always freedom. There is harmony, joy, and a certain composure. Whereas, when you rub against the order, you get rubbed in the process.

No one can rub against something without getting rubbed. If you rub against a rough bark of a tree with your bare body for five minutes, you will see who gets rubbed — and this knowledge will stay with you for at least ten days! That you never rub against anything without getting rubbed in the process, needs to be well understood.

FOR EVERY GAIN, WE NEED TO KNOW THE LOSS

Having understood that we cannot rub against the moral order without being rubbed in the process, it takes even more understanding to know exactly how much we lose by performing certain actions. It becomes a matter of self-esteem. What kind of self-esteem can there be when a division has been created between the thinker and the doer? Sooner than later, you will conclude that you are worthless.

This process can be seen when you make a very simple resolution, such as, 'Tomorrow I am going to get up early in the morning, at six o'clock, and I am going to meditate for half an hour.' You have decided that to begin the day with some kind of meditation is good and this is what you want to do. Therefore, you are going to get up half an hour earlier than usual and meditate.

Whose decision is this? It is not someone else's; it is yours. You even set your alarm clock to ring at six o'clock — and it does. In fact, it never stops. It goes on beeping, beeping, beeping. Then what do you do? Annoyed, you turn the alarm off and go back to sleep!

Do you know why? Because the one who made the decision last night to get up half an hour earlier did not consult the one who had to wake up the next morning. This is like a husband making a decision to go on a weekend family trip without informing or consulting his wife! The decision to wake up earlier was made by someone who thinks and figures things out, whereas I am the one who has to get up. Therefore, you had better consult me before you decide anything!

Between husband and wife, there can be some consultation. But when I am thinking that I will get up a half an hour earlier, the waker is not there to be consulted. Here is a real problem because the waker is also me. While this plight looks very simple, it is actually a very complex issue. The split between the one who thinks and knows and the one who does is a very self-detrimental split one that eventually and naturally leads to self-condemnation.

If you tell me to do something and I decide not to do it, it is quite different from when I tell myself to do something and I cannot do it. Once, twice, or thrice is not a problem, but when I cannot conform to my own decisions more times than not, what self-esteem will I have? If it happens only once, I can always justify not having done

something, but if I do it consistently, then I cannot have any self-esteem. And, without self-esteem, no one can really help me. Even the Lord cannot boost me up because, intrinsically, I have a problem. Therefore, I am the loser.

If I am together as a person, I can enjoy sports and a variety of other situations that do not cost money. I can even enjoy myself, which also does not cost money. Whereas, if in the process of gaining money, I lose myself, the transaction is definitely a bad bargain. To know this about myself is education; it is growing up. Who, then, can afford not to have such knowledge?

Because I have a faculty of choice, I must necessarily exercise that choice. I must know the norms which are the basis upon which I choose. These norms are known to us by our own common sense. The only education needed with regard to them is an understanding of what I lose when I gain something. In a so-called gain, I should be able to see how much I lose. If I do not lose, then the gain is truly a gain and is worthwhile. Whereas, if I lose, the gain is not worthwhile. Therefore, the means that one follows in gaining one's ends are very important.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BATTLE IN THE GĪTĀ

In the *Gītā* we have a conflict between two groups of people, based on a historical event. One group was ready to compromise the means and go against the *dharma* even though the *dharma* is so very important. The other group was committed to maintaining the moral order, the *dharma*.

This conflict can also be looked upon as one between a person's common-sense knowledge and what he or she wants to accomplish — an inner war, an inner *Mahābhārata*, so to speak. After all, every war takes place first in one's mind, and only later, outside.

The moral order is considered to be so important that a person will sacrifice everything for its sake. In the *Mahābhārata* there are many stories of such sacrifice. One story is about a man who gave up his kingdom and everything else he had in order to uphold the universal value of speaking truth.

Because India is a place where *dharma* is important, it was referred to in the *Gītā* as *dharmaśetra*. The Veda rules the hearts of the people and everything subserves the order of *dharma*. In the country of *Bhārata* (India), in a place called *Kurukṣetra*, these two groups of people have assembled, prepared to fight; one group does not understand the value of values and the other group does.

All eyes were upon *Arjuna*, considered to be the greatest archer. *Arjuna's* driver was none other than Lord *Kṛṣṇa*. The illustration of *Arjuna*, seated in his magnificent chariot drawn by white horses and driven by Lord *Kṛṣṇa* is very beautiful in that it

relates to one's own life. This illustration also appears elsewhere in the Veda, in the *Kāthopanīṣad*.

THE BODY-CHARIOT ANALOGY

In this illustration, your body is likened to a chariot, your senses are the horses, the mind is the reins, and your intellect, *buddhi*, is the driver. You are the one who is seated in the chariot; in other words, you are the *Swami*, the master. If your *buddhi* is loose, if your understanding is not very clear, you can end up anywhere because your chariot, your physical body, will not take you to the destination.

You can take the chariot to *artha*, *kāma*, *dharma*, or *mokṣa*. It all depends on the driver and you, the *Swami*. The driver, the *buddhi*, educates the *Swami*, really speaking. You are as good as your driver. If the driver is uneducated, and drunk also, you have had it! If, however, your driver is informed, educated, then he or she can take you anywhere you want to go.

In the *Gītā*, *Kṛṣṇa*, the driver, became the one who educated *Arjuna*. He was a *guru* to *Arjuna* and *Arjuna* was the *Swami*, the one seated in the chariot. *Arjuna* ordered *Kṛṣṇa* to station his chariot between the two forces so that he could see those in the enemy ranks with whom he would fight. *Kṛṣṇa* moved the chariot as directed. From the vantagepoint selected by *Kṛṣṇa*, *Arjuna* saw his own people in both camps and decided that nothing would be gained by fighting this battle.

Arjuna found himself facing *Bhīṣma*, who was his grandfather, and *Droṇa*, who was his teacher in archery. He saw uncles and cousins, friends and acquaintances, and other relatives. These were the people *Arjuna* would be destroying, the very people he needed with him in order to be happy about winning the war. Therefore, he said, 'I would rather not fight.' We will see his arguments for this thinking later.

The whole problem for *Arjuna* was one of 'These are my own people.' We have this problem even today. For example, when we say 'my people,' we mean that our people can get away with doing anything and other people, unknown people, cannot. But in *Arjuna's* case the people were not unknown. If the opposing army had been made up of men who were unknown to *Arjuna*, there would have been no *Gītā* at all. *Kṛṣṇa* would only have had to drive the chariot, nothing else, and *Arjuna* would have fought.

But *Arjuna* happened to see people he knew, people with whom he was connected, with whom he had to settle accounts, and people who, in the process, might die. This is what bothered him, as it should have. It would bother any cultured person, any mature person. These were the people who really counted in *Arjuna's* life. *Duryodhana* also saw the same people, but it did not bother him as it did *Arjuna* because his value structure was different.

There are a few select people in everyone's life whose opinions count. You may not want to be seen by them on New York City's Forty-second Street, for instance. This may not be because you do not want to be there but, rather, because you are afraid of what these people will think of you. You do not want to fall short of the good opinion they have of you. These were the people who were standing in front of *Arjuna*, against whom he was supposed to fight.

ARJUNA'S DILEMMA

Because *Arjuna* no longer wanted to fight, he had a problem. According to the code governing the war in those days, there was no such thing as a successful retreat. Either you won or you lost, the loss amounting to death since the fight was always to the end. Thus, *Arjuna* knew that in order to hoist the flag of victory, he had to destroy all the people in whose company he would be happy and in whose absence he would be unhappy.

Arjuna wept, not out of fear, but out of compassion, out of sympathy, out of care. His response was that of a mature person. He began to think that war was not the answer to the problem — which, of course was true, given that the loser always prepares for a comeback. The first and second world wars are recent examples. No one wants to accept the fact that he or she has lost.

Not only did *Arjuna* think war would not solve the problem, he also felt that its aftermath would create great confusion in the society. Since all the able-bodied people would be destroyed, the society would have no leadership and the very structure of the society would disappear because people would be confused as to their duties. Even *dharma*, for the sake of which *Arjuna* was supposed to win the war, would be in trouble for there would be no one to carry it forward to the next generation.

Dharma is both a discipline and a life of discipline. The values that govern that discipline are also *dharma*. This life-style, this *dharma*, has to be handed over to the next generation by the present one and is not something that can simply be bottled and buried for the future. *Dharma* is something that has to be lived. Thus, when you protect a person who lives a life of *dharma*, you are protecting *dharma*.

You can protect libraries, but you can never protect scholarship unless you protect the scholars. Protection of the scholar is the respect you have if you value scholarship. When a society values scholarship, the people will sell their shirts to gain that scholarship because it commands their respect. This was the situation in India. A king would come to his knees when a scholar entered his court. When scholarship is valued, respected, in this way, the scholar will be protected and valued. Only then will scholarship continue.

Similarly, to protect *dharma*, you have to protect the one who lives the life of *dharma*, the *dharmī*. And if the *dharmī* is protected, meaning that he or she is respected and valued, then everyone will want to be a *dharmī*. *Arjuna* naturally thought that by destroying these people there would be no one left to live a life of *dharma*, and that the *dharma* itself would thereby be destroyed — the very *dharma* he wanted to protect by waging the war. The battle was supposed to be one of *dharma*, but the very fighting of it, he thought, would endanger *dharma*.

Arjuna, therefore, felt that he would be incurring a great sin by causing confusion in the society. Naturally, he wanted to avoid this problem. At the same time, he did not run away from the battlefield. He did not jump out of the chariot and run towards *Rishikesh*, which was only a short distance away. Instead, he dropped his bow and arrows and sat back in the chariot, as we will see at the end of the first chapter of the *Gītā*.

KĪŪA'S RALLYING CRY

Arjuna was so completely overwhelmed by compassion, sympathy, and consideration, that he could not fight. Addressing that sad *Arjuna*, *Kṛṣṇa* expressed his sense of surprise. To extend his actual words, he may have said, '*Arjuna*, where did you get such a disposition? I never expected you to behave like this. This is not a time for talk; it is a time to act. Talk in the battlefield is not befitting to your temperament at all. You are supposed to act. You are a prince — and the most respected prince at that. You are the greatest archer and you are someone who is supposed to protect the *dharma*. If you, of all people, do not want to do this, what will happen? This is definitely the wrong time for you to be talking like this.

'Had you told me a few years ago, while you were in the forest, that you did not want to return to the kingdom, that you wanted to study and contemplate, I could have appreciated it and we could have discussed it at length. But not here. You came to the battlefield. You even brought me along with you! Now you are making a right-about turn. This is making you look silly. And you are making me look silly, also. When I stake on a horse, I am ready to lose my bet, but I do expect the horse to run. That much satisfaction I should have. And now you are telling me that you will not even start!'

Kṛṣṇa then asked *Arjuna* to stand up and fight. It should be understood that not all of *Kṛṣṇa's* words are scriptural. Here, they were purely words of advice and not meant as an order. Only when he taught and dealt with the ultimate concerns in life, the universal problems, that belong to me, to you and to all and sundry, at any time and place, do his words assume the status of a scripture. *Kṛṣṇa* was just giving *Arjuna* a pep talk.

Recognising that *Kṛṣṇa* was talking to him as though he was afraid to fight, *Arjuna* exclaimed, ‘How can I fight against *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa* in this battle? They are men deserving of my respect! I would rather live the life of a mendicant and live on alms than destroy these people.’ This was *Arjuna*’s thinking.

ARJUNA AS A STUDENT

Arjuna also said, in so many words, ‘I do not think this sorrow will go away just by gaining a kingdom, whether the kingdom be here or in the hereafter. Even if I go to heaven and become the ruler there, I would be the same wanting person. I would have the same problems.’ *Arjuna* knew that to be the ruler of a kingdom brought only royal problems, that enemies abound, especially if the kingdom is prosperous or unrivalled. He, therefore, did not see himself as one who would be free from the problem of sorrow by gaining any kingdom.

The problem of sorrow, as *Arjuna* pointed out, is self non-acceptance. Self non-acceptance is the original problem, in fact. If I do not see myself as an acceptable person, that self non-acceptance will always be there, with or without a kingdom. Therefore, *Arjuna* saw no solution to the problem. He recognised that he had spent his time on immediate, empirical concerns and had never dealt with the ultimate concerns of life.

Because of his desire to solve the original problem, *Arjuna* offered himself as a student to Lord *Kṛṣṇa* and asked him to teach him what he needed to know. He considered himself to be qualified for this knowledge because he had had enough experiences in life and had discovered the problem. All that now remained was for *Kṛṣṇa* to decide whether he would accept him as a student, a *śiṣya*. In other words, the ball was in *Kṛṣṇa*’s court, *Arjuna* having done his part by saying, ‘I am your *śiṣya*; please teach me.’ All of this we will see in detail, later.

There are three very significant words that mean ‘the student’ in Sanskrit — *vidyārthī*, *antevāsī*, and *śiṣya*. *Vidyārthī*, means the one who wants to know and can refer to the type of student who enrolls in a college to get a degree, but spends very little time in the classroom. An *antevāsī* is a student who lives with the teacher. This type of student also wants to know but may not be able to grasp what is being taught.

A *śiṣya*, is one who is truly qualified to study and therefore, deserves to be taught. He or she may also gain other experiences while studying, but these are by-products only. For the *śiṣya*, there is a certain direction and commitment that is necessary for a person to really accomplish anything in life.

If I am happy that you are in my class, then you are a *śiṣya*, and if I miss you when you are not there, you are a *śiṣya*. If I wait for you, if you are delayed a few minutes, you are a *śiṣya*. To be a *śiṣya* means you are qualified to be a student. The teacher looks for

your presence and does not want you to be absent. When this is so, you are definitely a *śiṣya*.

When *Arjuna* told *Kṛṣṇa*, ‘I am your *śiṣya*. Please teach me,’ he was also saying that he had a commitment to this knowledge, that he saw the value of it and also that he looked upon *Kṛṣṇa* as a qualified teacher. He did not say he was a student; but he said, ‘I am your student — *a haṃ te śiṣyaḥ*,’ meaning that he had chosen *Kṛṣṇa* as his teacher.

The *Gītā* began only because *Kṛṣṇa* took *Arjuna* seriously and chose to teach him. Therefore, we have seventeen chapters of dialogue between the teacher and the student — *Kṛṣṇa-Arjuna-saṃvāda*. *Kṛṣṇa* may have taught in prose, but *Vyāsa* chose to put it in the form of verses. Each chapter is a dialogue with a predominant subject matter, which is revealed by the title of the chapter. Thus, the first chapter is called *Arjuna-viṣāda-yoga*, meaning that the topic discussed is *Arjuna*’s sorrow.

A FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM REQUIRES A FUNDAMENTAL SOLUTION

A problem can be solved topically or fundamentally and *Arjuna* decided to solve it fundamentally. Because of the clarity it produces in one’s thinking, a fundamental solution resolves the problem so completely that topical issues of right and wrong no longer arise.

In fact, in the second chapter of the *Gītā*, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that his sorrow was not legitimate, that no sorrow is legitimate, even though legitimate sorrow is commonly accepted. That is, we acknowledge that it is legitimate to be sad in certain situations. When you have lost a loved one, for example, it is wrong to tell yourself that you do not want to be sad or that it is not legitimate to be sad. If you are sad, you are sad. It is therefore best to acknowledge the sadness and that there is a reason to be sad.

Remember, however, that you become sad because you are already subject to sadness. In fact, only the sad become sad, just as the mad become mad and the bad become bad. All that is required is a particular situation. The sad person is already there and it may take no more than a change of weather for him or her to become sad. Certain plans may have been made based on a weather forecast of a ‘good’ weekend. A rainy weekend then becomes a ‘bad’ weekend.

There are vulnerable spots in everyone and, when these are touched, the person is touched to the quick, meaning that he or she suddenly becomes angry, frustrated, sad, hateful or desperate. A person does not suddenly become a desperate person; he or she is already desperate. The person is the despair. Thus, psychologically speaking, there is sadness and there is some legitimacy for it. But, if you look into the matter dispassionately and realistically, you will find that there is no real reason to be sad.

When you go to a therapist, you are a seeker. The therapist analyses your past and arrives at a solution to your problem saying, 'It's all due to your mother.' 'Yes, that is true,' you say. In this way, the therapist validates your feelings. Knowing there is a reason for your sadness, you have a sense of freedom. You had certain opinions about yourself that made you sad and now your reactions and responses have been validated properly. Your conclusions, based upon wrong notions about yourself, can now be looked at differently. By changing those opinions, you gain a freedom, as though you have thrown light upon yourself.

ACCEPTING SITUATIONS AS THEY ARE

You begin, then, by acknowledging the situations and validating your responses. Later, you find there is no reason for sorrow. This does not mean you are suppressing the sorrow, only that you see the situation as it is. What we are doing is taking the sorrow one step further and asking, 'Is there a real reason for sorrow?' Lord *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* there was not. How could he say this? Was it merely because he had never experienced sorrow? After all, *Kṛṣṇa* was looked up to, everyone prostrated to him, and all the *gopīs* were after him. Did he not recognise *Arjuna's* limitations?

Lord *Kṛṣṇa* understood *Arjuna's* limitations very well. Everyone has limitations — physical, perceptual, intellectual and others that are picked up while living one's life, due to the natural ageing process. Originally, you may have had 20/20 vision and now perhaps a vision of 20/60. Thereafter, you require glasses, a hearing aid — and perhaps a cane also.

In spite of all these limitations, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* said there is no room for sorrow. This is something to know and is what the teaching is about. *Arjuna* asked for the knowledge and Lord *Kṛṣṇa* taught him in the second chapter. He did not just make the statement and ask *Arjuna* to work on it. He made it very clear. Once *Arjuna* received the teaching, it became a matter of questioning and assimilating the knowledge given to him.

Thus, the second chapter ends with *Arjuna's* question, 'How do you describe a wise man?' *Kṛṣṇa* had told him that the person who is wise is different. He or she is one in whom, due to wisdom, there is no room for sorrow. Since the problem is to be solved by knowledge, *Arjuna* wanted to know how a wise man behaves while conducting the affairs of his life. He wanted to know how he walked, how he talked, whether he talked, and so on.

Kṛṣṇa did not answer the question literally, but instead, responded to the spirit of the question. Had he not done so, *Arjuna* may have thought that all he had to do to be wise was to walk, talk, and sit in a certain way.

A wise person is one who is happy and secure with himself or herself, one who requires nothing else to become secure. This refers to one who looks at oneself as a

totally acceptable person, the one who can say, ‘I cannot be better than myself.’ Because the acceptance is total, there is no area of non-acceptance. The self is essentially free from any sense of want or limitation; it is the whole — in spite of the limitations of the body-mind-sense complex.

You are the whole. I am the whole. If I understand this, then I do not need to prove myself to anyone; to do so is no longer a necessity. Such a person may do a lot of things, but not to prove himself or herself. This is how *Kṛṣṇa* defined a wise man to *Arjuna* and he gave a few examples, as we will see later.

TWO LIFE-STYLES FOR GAINING SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Kṛṣṇa also talked about *karma-yoga*, a life of activity, and about *sannyāsa*, a life of renunciation. Then he said that all you need in order to be free is to know yourself. ‘Why, then,’ *Arjuna* asked, ‘do you ask me to engage myself in this war which will result only in destruction?’ This was a very relevant question.

Arjuna thought that *Kṛṣṇa* was giving him two conflicting pieces of advice. *Kṛṣṇa* had said that knowledge liberates and, therefore, *Arjuna* felt that he was telling him to pursue knowledge, which was what he wanted to do. Not only had *Kṛṣṇa* said that knowledge liberates, he had also said that *karma* binds. Then, he had told *Arjuna* to do *karma*! What did this mean? Thus, *Arjuna* begged *Kṛṣṇa*, ‘Please do not say, ‘*sannyāsa* is good and *karma-yoga* is also good.’ I cannot accept this. Tell me one or the other.”

Knowing the difference between *karma-yoga* and *sannyāsa* is a matter of understanding and *Arjuna* was confused. Therefore, he asked *Kṛṣṇa* to tell him which one was right for him to follow. But *Kṛṣṇa* did not want to play the role of a consultant; he only wanted to teach *Arjuna*. To teach is to make the other person see as clearly as you see so that he or she does not need to come to you again. The person who is able to do this is a teacher. *Kṛṣṇa*, being a teacher, did not give *Arjuna* advice. Instead, he taught him the remaining chapters of the *Gītā*.

At the beginning of the fifth chapter, *Arjuna* had the same doubt and rephrased his question. Again, *Kṛṣṇa* told him that *sannyāsa* was good and *karma-yoga* was good. Then he told *Arjuna* that it was not a matter for choice, that it was a matter for understanding.

HOW THIS TEACHING CAME ABOUT

We have two epics, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and the *Mahābhārata*. Both are historical and also have a literary value. I consider these historical, poetic works to be similar to those we have in English literature. Shakespeare's plays, for example, while based on certain historical figures, also have drama woven into them. Walter Scott's novels are

especially historical in their mention of the names of particular kings. The description of the time, period, and condition is all true, whereas the heroes and heroines are fictional.

Similarly, I see in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, authored by the poet, *Vālmīki*, historical figures in *Rāma*, *Sītā*, and *Daśaratha*. Also, *Ayodhyā*, the city in which they lived, did exist. So, too, the island called *Laṅkā* and the demonic king, *Rāvaṇa*. But I also see an underlying meaning conveyed by *Vālmīki* when he presented *Rāvaṇa* as having ten heads. If someone has ten heads and each head thinks in its own way, then you have a person who thinks as though he has ten heads, each one having its own way of thinking. He is, therefore, a person of great confusion.

Rāvaṇa was like that. He was a *brāhmaṇa* and a great devotee of Lord *Śiva*. However, he did not behave like a *brāhmaṇa*. A *brāhmaṇa* should not rule a kingdom and *Rāvaṇa* did. Furthermore, although he was a devotee, he was also demonic. Thus, *Rāvaṇa* was an embodiment of contradictions. This may be why he was portrayed as having ten heads, an aspect that is purely poetic.

We also find, in these epics, a lot of poetry centred on certain historical events. That is why they are called *Itihāsa*, meaning ‘this is how it was — *iti ha āsa*.’ Thus, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, authored by *Vālmīki*, and the later *Mahābhārata*, authored by *Vyāsa*, are both considered to be historical poetry.

MAHĀBHĀRATA: THE FIFTH VEDA

There are four Vedas and the *Mahābhārata* is referred to as the fifth Veda because it is so complete. There is not nearly the amount of information in the *Rāmāyaṇa* as there is in the *Mahābhārata*. Any topic you could ask for is there — *dharma*, logistics, political acumen and so on. All of these are beautifully illustrated through the epic's excellent characterisations.

Various values are highlighted in the stories by presenting the same person in different moods and situations. *Bhīma*, for instance, stands out as a person with his own moods, proclivities, characteristics, inclinations, capacities, limitations, and points of vulnerability. Each of these aspects is mentioned when characterising any given hero. In this way, the five *Pāṇḍavas* and the hundred sons of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*, from *Duryodhana* downward, are all presented individually as characters in their own right.

THE AUTHOR: VYĀSA

Vyāsa is considered to be a principal link in the Vedic teaching tradition. He is, therefore, an important figure. Beginning from the Lord, *Nārāyaṇa*, all the way down to my own teachers, there is a live tradition in which *Vyāsa* is the most important historical connecting link. The *paramparā*, lineage of the teachers of *Brahma-vidyā* is presented in the following verse.

नारायणं पद्मभुवं वसिष्ठं शक्तिञ्च तत्पुत्रपराशरञ्च
 व्यासं शुक्रं गौडपदं महान्तं गोविन्दयोगीन्द्रमथास्य शिष्यम् ।
 श्रीशंराचार्यमथास्य पद्मपादञ्च हस्तामलकञ्च शिष्यं
 तं तोटकं वार्त्तिककारमन्यानस्म ुरुन् सन्ततमानतोऽस्मि ॥

*nārāyaṇaṃ padmabhuvam vasiṣṭhaṃ śaktiñca tatputraparāśarañca
 vyāsaṃ śukraṃ gauḍapadaṃ mahāntaṃ govindayogīन्द्रamathāsya śiṣyam
 śrīśaṅkarācāryamathāsya padmapādañca hastāmalakañca śiṣyaṃ
 taṃ toṭakaṃ vārttikakāramanyānasmadgurūn santatamānato'smi*

I remain as one who always salutes *Nārāyaṇa*, *Brahmā*, *Vasiṣṭha*, *Śakti*, his son, *Parāśara*, *Vyāsa*, *Śuka*, the great *Gauḍapāda*, *Govinda*, (*Govinda-bhagavatpāda*) the most exalted among the *yogīs*, his disciple, *Śaṅkarācārya*, *Śaṅkara's* disciples *Padmapāda*, *Hastāmalaka*, *Toṭaka*, and the author of the *Vārtikas* (*Sureśvarācārya*) and our other teachers.

Vyāsa is also called *Veda-vyāsa* because it was he who edited, and classified and codified all the *mantras* of the Vedas. He grouped them into four and made them available to the future generations by making one family responsible for maintaining one *śākhā* or branch. To commit all four Vedas to memory is not realistic. It requires twelve years and a bright mind to commit even one entire Veda to memory. A young boy, in his eighth year, goes to a teacher and spends his next twelve years doing this. To memorise four Vedas, then, would mean becoming a grandfather by the time the work is completed.

Therefore, *Vyāsa* made it easy. A particular family maintains one branch of the Veda throughout the generations. In this way, the four Vedas have come down to us in their original form through an unbroken chain of oral tradition. Because *Vyāsa* was responsible for handing the Vedas over to posterity, he came to be known as *Veda-vyāsa*

THE GĪTĒ'S INVOCATORY PRAYER

Although the *Bhagavadgītā* is presented by *Vyāsa*. in the middle of the *Mahābhārata*, it is an independent work. Every work begins with a prayer in recognition that any successful undertaking involves three important factors — effort, *prayatna*, time, *kāla*, and the unknown factor, *daiva*. We ourselves are capable of providing the effort and we can also wait out the time it takes for the result to come. Success or failure, however, is accounted for by the third factor, the unknown factor, *daiva*. Therefore, we cannot fail to take *daiva* into account.

Daiva is there whether you take it into account or not. In spite of all your efforts and waiting, you do not always get what you want. There seems, then, to be some unknown factor over which you have no control. You may call it chance or luck, but we call it *daiva*, grace.

Grace is nothing but *karma-phala*. It is a graceful way of referring to *karma-phala*. It is something you earn by prayer. It is not an arbitrary decision on the part of God. Otherwise, God would be just another autocrat who goes about distributing packets of grace every morning, and missing us more times than not.

We do not consider grace to be the result of our actions because we do not know which action produces the grace. Although it is the result of prayer, we have no direct knowledge of whether it is cumulative or the result of one single prayer. All we know is that there is a plus factor as well as a minus factor with reference to the result of our actions. Thus we find that in spite of all our effort, there is something else which makes the difference between success and failure. That is the *daiva*, the unknown factor.

Astrology tries to unfold a pattern in your life that can be projected from your horoscope. Your birth is an event, a visible event that inaugurates your life. An event occurs in a particular place, *deśa* at a particular time, *kāla* and is a link in the whole process. If there is a pattern, if there is destiny, then this event is the inaugural event from which the destiny would unfold itself. You do not know what the pattern of destiny is, but you do know that your birth, an event, took place at a given time.

Now suppose there is another pattern that is projectable. This projectable pattern and the pattern unknown to me are connected. How? When you are born, the constellations and planets are in a particular configuration. Because each planet has its own orbit and its own speed, you can find patterns of the horoscope which are projectable to any future time.

By observing people's lives, relationships can be seen between the heavenly patterns and the events in a person's life. Recurrences of specific events in the lives of people under certain planetary configurations gives rise to rules of astrological prediction. The planets do not interfere with your life. Your actions in the past and present do, according to the *śāstra*.

Astrology is only a predictive discipline. Indian astrology is useful in that, it gives you a basis for specific prayers to neutralise the negative *karmas* in terms of undesirable situations unfolding in this life and to enhance the results of positive *karmas* in terms of desirable situations.

THE UNKNOWN FACTOR

What we are saying here is that there is such a thing as *daiva*, a third factor, a factor in which you can neutralise certain results already created either in this life or

previously. This is done through prayer. Thus, for any undertaking, the third factor, *daiva*, is invoked.

This is why before beginning the study of any discipline of knowledge we invoke the Lord through a prayer. The *Gītā*, coming in the middle of the *Mahābhārata*, does not have a prayer as such, although *Vyāsa* did invoke the unknown factor in the form of a prayer at the beginning of the epic itself.

Because of the importance of the message of the *Gītā*, it is described as a pendant jewel in the midst of the *Mahābhārata*. Therefore, there should be a prayer for the *Gītā* also. Prayer can be in different forms. It can be mental, it can be in so many words, or it can be suggested by one word. Here, we have a suggestive prayer in the narrator's sentence, —*dhṛtarāṣṭra uvāca*.

The word *dhṛtarāṣṭra* is much more than the name of the blind old man seated in his palace wanting to know what had happened in the battlefield. *Dhṛta* means 'is sustained' and *rāṣṭra* means 'the entire world.' *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*, then, means the one by whom the entire world is sustained — *dhṛtaṃ rāṣṭraṃ yena*. And who is that? The Lord — the entire world is sustained by *Īśvara*. By beginning the *Gītā* with the words *dhṛtarāṣṭra uvāca*, two purposes are served. The Lord is invoked by the word *dhṛtarāṣṭra*, which is a kind of prayer, and the word *uvāca* indicates that the narration of the *Gītā* was about to begin.

The *Gītā* opens, with the blind king *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*, sitting in his palace with his companion, *Saṅjaya*, a minister who was blessed by *Vyāsa* with an extraordinary audio-visual capacity. He could hear what was happening far away. He had a mind like a radio that could pick up sounds from a distance. He could also see situations and events beyond the frontiers of human eyesight. Knowing that *Saṅjaya* had these psychic powers, the blind *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* asked, '*Saṅjaya!* What happened on the battlefield between my sons and the *Pāṇḍavas*?'

With this extensive introduction, we will now begin the *Gītā* verses. Chapter One and the first ten verses of Chapter Two are actually a continuation of the *Mahābhārata* and thereby provide the context in which the dialogue between *Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna* took place. Although we are only interested in *Kṛṣṇa's* teaching, which does not begin until the eleventh verse of Chapter Two, it is important to understand the condition of *Arjuna's* mind that led him to ask *Kṛṣṇa* to teach him. Therefore, these contextual verses will be analysed in some detail.

ABABABABAB

CHAPTER 1

ARJUNA'S SORROW

धृतराष्ट्र उवाच ।

धर्मक्षेत्रे कुरुक्षेत्रे समवेता युयुत्सवः ।

मामकाः पाण्डवाश्चैव किमकुर्वत सञ्जय ॥ १ ॥

dhṛtarāṣṭra uvāca

dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre samaveta yuyutsavaḥ

māmakāḥ pāṇḍavāścaiva kimakurvata sañjaya

Verse 1

धृतराष्ट्रः *dhṛtarāṣṭraḥ* — *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*; उवाच *uvāca* — said ;

सञ्जय *sañjaya* — Oh! *Sañjaya* !; धर्मक्षेत्रे *dharmakṣetre* — at the place where *dharmā*

resides; कुरुक्षेत्रे *kurukṣetre* — at *Kurukṣetra* ; समवेताः *samavetaḥ* — those who have

assembled; युयुत्सवः *yuyutsavaḥ* — desiring to fight; मामकाः *māmakāḥ* — my people;

पाण्डवाः *pāṇḍavāḥ* — *Pāṇḍu's* sons; च *ca* — and; एव *eva* — indeed; किम् *kim* — what;

अकुर्वत *akurvata* — did they do

Dhṛtarāṣṭra said;

Oh! *Sañjaya* , what indeed did my people and the *Pāṇḍavas* do,

assembled at *Kurukṣetra*,¹ the abode of *dharmā* , desiring to fight?

In the Indian tradition, any beginning begins with a prayer. Being in the middle of the *Mahābhārata* , the *Gītā* does not require a beginning prayer of its own. Still for this chain of eighteen chapters, for this pendant jewel placed against the background of the much larger epic, it seems that a prayer should be there — and it is implied in this first verse.

A prayer can be either expressed or implied. The first word of the *Gītā* , ‘*Dhṛtarāṣṭra*,’ is a prayer by implication. It means the one who sustains a kingdom or

¹ *Kurukṣetra* exists even today between *Delhi* and *Ambala* . Then great King *Kuru* , the founder of the *Kuru* dynasty, performed great *tapas* here. It is said that once when he was ploughing the land with a golden plough , Lord *Indra* came down and asked what he was doing . When the king told him that he was sowing the seed of *dharmā* , Lord *Indra* gave him the boon that the seed of *dharmā* sown there would grow for ever .

the whole universe, *yena dhṛtaṃ rāṣṭram*. It is, therefore, an appropriate name for a king. Had *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* not been blind, he would have been the ruler of the kingdom.

Rāṣṭra also refers to the world, the entire universe. The Lord is the one who is the holder, the sustainer, of the order that is the world. Therefore, *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* is also the name of the Lord. By beginning the *Gītā* with the name of the Lord, the traditional opening prayer is implied.

The opening scene of the *Gītā* takes place in the palace in *Hastināpura*, the capital of the kingdom of the *Kauravas*. This was the kingdom that the *Pāṇḍavas* were supposed to rule, but which was now ruled by their cousin, *Duryodhana*, who had usurped the kingdom. As we have seen, the *Pāṇḍavas* were tricked into exile by *Duryodhana*. They had to spend twelve years in the forest plus one-year living incognito somewhere in the empire. The kingdom was to be returned to them after they had fulfilled these conditions.

The *Pāṇḍavas* served this term of thirteen years and came back to claim their kingdom. However, *Duryodhana* would not give it back to them and therefore, war was declared. They could choose to either go back to the forest or take the kingdom back in battle. All possible compromises were put forward, but *Duryodhana* would not give one needlepoint of land to the *Pāṇḍavas*. It had, therefore, become a problem of justice — *dharma*.

THE PROBLEM OF JUSTICE — DHARMA

Dharma, here, means that which has to be done. Rulers also have their *dharma* in that there are certain things that must be done by them. The kingdom belonged to the *Pāṇḍavas* and *Yudhiṣṭhira*, in fact, was the ruler. Every minute that *Duryodhana* continued to occupy the throne confirmed *adhharma*, for which the *Pāṇḍavas* were responsible. There was, therefore, no other way but to accept the challenge and fight it out.

Duryodhana had gathered the support of most of the important kings within the empire by bribing them in various ways. He had the power in his hands to do this. Some of the kings joined the *Pāṇḍavas* too. In this situation, *Kṛṣṇa* was another force to be reckoned with. His kingdom was *Dvārakā*, on the West Coast in Gujarat. *Kṛṣṇa* had a well known and very valorous army of *Nārāyaṇas*.

Duryodhana thought that *Kṛṣṇa's* support would tilt the balance. Although *Duryodhana's* army was bigger than that of the *Pāṇḍavas*, and he had great stalwarts like *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa* in his ranks, he felt that *Kṛṣṇa's* army would make the difference between victory and defeat. Therefore, he went to *Kṛṣṇa's* palace to seek his help.

Kṛṣṇa was resting at the time. *Duryodhana* was the first one to arrive. He saw that *Kṛṣṇa* was sleeping. He found a nice chair at the head end of the sleeping *Kṛṣṇa* and sat on it, waiting for *Kṛṣṇa* to wake up. *Arjuna* also arrived shortly and he had come for the same reason. And, since *Kṛṣṇa* was sleeping, he stood with folded hands at *Kṛṣṇa's* feet. To *Arjuna*, *Kṛṣṇa* was not just a king. Through his mother, *Kuntī*, they were related, but *Arjuna* knew *Kṛṣṇa* to be more than an ordinary mortal. He had not yet recognised him as his *guru*, but he did recognise him as a person of extraordinary powers, calibre, and wisdom.

Rumour had it that *Kṛṣṇa* was an incarnation of the Lord, that he was an *avatāra*. In fact, many members of *Arjuna's* family worshipped him. *Arjuna's* uncle, *Vidura*, and his wife looked upon *Kṛṣṇa* as the Lord, as did *Arjuna's* brothers, their wife, *Draupadī*, and their mother, *Kuntī*. *Arjuna* recognised him more or less in the same way and wanted his help. This recognition of *Kṛṣṇa* as an *avatāra* is an important aspect of the *Gītā*.

Duryodhana knew why *Arjuna* had come and *Arjuna* also knew why *Duryodhana* was there. As he opened his eyes, *Kṛṣṇa* saw *Arjuna* first. *Duryodhana* no doubt made his presence known, perhaps by clearing his throat. *Kṛṣṇa* then turned to him and asked what he could do for him. He then put the same question to *Arjuna*. *Duryodhana* responded by saying, 'You know why we have come, why I have come. I seek your support.' He also added, 'I was the first to arrive and therefore, my request should be entertained first.' *Arjuna* also said, 'War has been declared and I am asking for your support.'

KṚṢṆA'S PROPOSAL

Kṛṣṇa was now in a great fix, but he was an adept at getting out of such tight situations. To both of them, he made a proposal. He said, 'If I join either of you, I will not fight. You have a choice between me, who will not lift a weapon on one hand and my army on the other hand. If you choose me, you will be choosing the person *Kṛṣṇa*, mere *Kṛṣṇa*, who refuses to fight.' *Kṛṣṇa* was known to be a great fighter. Even as a child he had knocked out *Kaṃsa* and had dealt with hordes of demonic people. To have such a fighter on your side would be a great asset, but this was not *Kṛṣṇa's* proposal. Instead, he said, '*Arjuna*, I happened to see you first even though *Duryodhana* claims to have arrived first. However, because you are the younger of the two, you have the chance to choose first. The younger ones are entitled to this privilege. Therefore, I am proposing this to you and ask you to choose one of the two options — that is, *Kṛṣṇa* who will not fight on one side and the army of the *Nārāyaṇas* on the other side. If you choose me, I am not going to fight. I will come to your side and perhaps give some advice. But the army will go to *Duryodhana*. If you choose the army instead of me, then *Duryodhana* must take me.'

Kṛṣṇa issued this proposal to *Arjuna* knowing what his choice would be. He also knew what *Duryodhana* would prefer. As he expected, *Arjuna* chose *Kṛṣṇa's* services, whatever they would be and in whichever form they would be available. This was what *Arjuna* wanted and so he said, '*Kṛṣṇa*, please come to me.'

If *Duryodhana* ever prayed in his life, this was surely the time he prayed and his prayers were answered. Because he thought the *Pāṇḍavas* to be sentimental and born losers, *Duryodhana* expected *Arjuna* to ask for *Kṛṣṇa*. He certainly did not want *Kṛṣṇa* for himself. He would only be another mouth to feed during wartime when food was necessarily rationed. In addition, *Kṛṣṇa*, being a respected person, *Duryodhana* would have to take good care of him. *Duryodhana* did not want to be continually torn between taking care of *Kṛṣṇa* and thinking about the war. A fighting *Kṛṣṇa* would have been something to think over, but a non-fighting *Kṛṣṇa*, a mere *Kṛṣṇa*, would be useless to him, he thought.

Duryodhana wanted *Arjuna* to ask for *Kṛṣṇa* so that he would get *Kṛṣṇa's* army and this was exactly how it worked out. He returned to his camp rejoicing. *Duryodhana* had made his day! He was sure that he would win the war. The *Kṛṣṇa's* army meant crack divisions with men who were fit to fight, adding greatly to his already enormous strength.

Arjuna was equally happy. He knew *Duryodhana* was ecstatic and he also knew what *Duryodhana* thought of him. *Duryodhana's* attitude and value structure was such that he would definitely look down on *Arjuna* and his preference. But *Arjuna* knew that with *Kṛṣṇa* by his side, he would win the war. *Sañjaya* expresses the same idea in the last verse of the *Gītā* :

यत्र योगेश्वरः कृष्णो यत्र पार्थो धनुर्धरः ।
 तत्र श्रीर्विजयो भूतिर्ध्रुवा नीतिर्मतिर्मम ॥
yatra yogeśvaraḥ kṛṣṇo yatra pārtho dhanurdharaḥ
tatra śrīrvijayo bhūtidhruvā nītirmatirmama

Wherever Lord *Kṛṣṇa* is, wherever *Arjuna* is, with his bow in hand, ready to fight, there, all wealth, victory, glory, and justice will be.

THE UNKNOWN FACTOR: DAIVĀ

In *Arjuna's* mind this was very clear. *Arjuna* knew he had all the weapons and skill that he required. Nevertheless, he also knew he had to allow for one more thing — the unknown factor, *daiva*. A *dhārmika*, one who is committed to a life of *dharma*, appreciates his or her limitations and then takes this one step beyond — recognizing that success is ultimately possible only because of this unknown factor, *daiva*. Later in the *Gītā*, *Bhagavān* himself talks about this.

Daiva is a factor over which you have no control at all, a factor that makes the difference between success and failure, between victory and defeat. We often call this unknown factor ‘luck’— ‘good luck’ and ‘bad luck.’ In all cultures, I suppose, there are equivalents for these two words because people have to account for a factor that seems to work favourably or otherwise. Even a hard-boiled dialectical materialist has to miss a bus occasionally and is constrained to say, ‘I was unlucky.’ Catching the bus earlier than expected is also not an uncommon event.

This unknown factor is viewed here as a divine factor, the unknown invisible *adr̥ṣṭa*, explained earlier in the introduction. It represents an order and is called the law of *karma*, the law of *dharma*. The factor is not visible, but the results that are reaped by us are seen very clearly. The results are *dr̥ṣṭa*, whereas the causes are *adr̥ṣṭa*.

QUALITIES OF A MATURE PERSON

The one who does not leave the *adr̥ṣṭa* to the hands of chance, the one who does something to change the *adr̥ṣṭa*, is considered to be a *bhakta* and is religiously mature. You may call such a person a religious person, but I would refer to him or her as a mature person who recognises unseen hands that shape and are behind these known hands. Such hands are not the hands of chance. They are the hands of the law, hands that are the law, and are looked upon as the Lord. The law is not separate from the Lord and the wielder of the laws is also the Lord.

Throughout the *Gītā*, *Kṛṣṇa* describes the person who recognises this factor, and at the same time recognises the necessity of his or her own effort, as a mature person, a *yogī*. A mature person is one who has a fear of *adharma*, one who tries to conform to *dharma*. *Dharmaputra*, his four brothers and his entire family underwent many privations for a long period of time only because of their commitment to *dharma*.

Having such a commitment, *Arjuna* naturally recognised his own prowess and believed in his skills. He had self-confidence and was a person who knew the importance of effort. He did not keep beseeching the Lord, ‘Please give me, give me, give me.’ He knew that would not work.

QUALITIES FOR SUCCESS

In order to be successful, six qualities¹ are required — *udyama*, proper effort; *sāhasa*, perseverance; *dhairya*, courage; *buddhi*, knowledge; *śakti*, skill and resources;

¹ उद्यमः साहसं धैर्यं बुद्धि-शक्ति-पराक्रमाः ।

षडेते यत्र वर्तन्ते तत्र देवः सहायकृत् ॥

udyamaḥ sāhasaṁ dhairyaṁ buddhiśakti-parākramāḥ

ṣaḍete yatra vartante tatra devaḥ sahāyakṛt

and *parākrama*, the capacity to overcome obstacles. You may have courage and enthusiasm, but no proper effort at the right time. On the other hand, you may have right effort, but no enthusiasm. You may also have the necessary enthusiasm to persevere but if, after some time, you have not accomplished what you set out to accomplish, you may give up due to a lack of courage.

In warfare, the knowledge of logistics is very important. You need to know how to approach the enemy, how to enter the opponent's ranks and how to get out again. Skill and resources are also required. Without resources, what is the use of planning? Such effort is useless. If something requires manpower, you must have that. If raw material or skill is required, you must have that, also. Finally, you must have the capacity to tide you over an obstruction (*parākrama*), to be able to encounter and deal with forces that are inimical to you.

You must be like a flowing river, unmindful of all obstructions. If a huge mountain is there, the river simply flows around it. It does not stop. If the obstruction is a simple rock, the river jumps over it. If it is a bigger rock, it simply goes around or swallows it and flows over it. If it comes to a valley, the river fills the valley first and then continues flowing. That is the nature of a river. It does not see an obstruction as an obstruction.

Even if these six qualities are present, we cannot say with any degree of certainty that a person will meet with success. There is still that unknown factor to be recognised, *daiva*, that extended helping hand, to be sought. *Dharmaputra* and *Arjuna* recognised it. They did not go to the forest because they were afraid of *Duryodhana* or of a fight. They went only to conform to *dharma* because they recognised *daiva*. They knew that you never get away with what you do.

KĪÂÛA AS THE UNKNOWN FACTOR

Arjuna, being a mature person, knew the necessity of recognizing the unknown factor, which for him was *daiva*, *Īśvara*, the Lord. He recognised it in *Kṛṣṇa*. *Kṛṣṇa* was there and he told *Arjuna* he was available. *Arjuna* recognised him as grace in flesh and blood. Grace does not fight. It is not a weapon, a bow or arrow, a place or time. It is something that is not visible.

Here, however, grace was visible in the form of *Kṛṣṇa*, with hands and legs, always wearing a smile as though he knew nothing. This was *Kṛṣṇa* and for *Arjuna*, mere *Kṛṣṇa* was enough.

One can always fight if one has to. With the six qualities required for success, one can take care of the obstructions. However, the seventh factor is in *Bhagavān*, the Lord. *Arjuna* recognised this factor in the Lord and knew it made the difference between victory and defeat. He wanted only grace. Therefore, he wanted *Kṛṣṇa* with him.

Duryodhana viewed things differently. He was happy with the outcome and thought *Arjuna* was an idiot because *Duryodhana's* belief was only in strength. Because he knew that strength required effort, he was also a great believer in effort, which was why he went to *Kṛṣṇa* to seek his help. *Duryodhana* was a man of great effort and had planned well for this day. He was continually scheming. He saw to it that *Bhīṣma*, *Droṇa*, *Karṇa*, *Jayadratha*, and the others felt obliged to him only because he felt they were very important to his strength. Naturally, then, *Duryodhana* believed only in the strength of *Kṛṣṇa's* army, not in *Kṛṣṇa's* grace. In addition, he got the army he wanted.

Thus, *Duryodhana* and *Arjuna* felt equally victorious. What a proposition! Because they were two such different people, they could both be happy with the outcome. No judgement would make both the affected parties feel victorious; but, here, *Duryodhana* thought he was the victor and so did *Arjuna*. How could this be? That is because these two men had two types of thinking, two different commitments, and two different attitudes. *Arjuna* was happy that *Kṛṣṇa* would be with him and *Duryodhana* was happy that *Kṛṣṇa's* army would be with him. Thus, they represented two forces.

Kṛṣṇa, then, was going to be with the *Pāṇḍavas*. Where would he be during the war? *Arjuna* wanted him to be near by, but where would he put him? His chariot had only two seats, one at the back for himself and the other in front for his driver. Given the arrangement, *Arjuna* could not ask *Kṛṣṇa* to sit beside him. However, a double-seater could have been arranged. When you are preparing for war, it does not take much time to create a new chariot with two back seats. But, if *Kṛṣṇa* were to sit on one side or the other of *Arjuna*, how could *Arjuna* draw inspiration from *Kṛṣṇa* during the battle? As soon as he turned his head towards *Kṛṣṇa* he could lose the battle.

Arjuna's opponents were *Bhīṣma*, *Droṇa*, and *Karṇa*, among others, none of whom was a mediocre fighter. One blink of the eye and *Arjuna* would be opening his eyes in heaven! Because his opponents were not ordinary men, *Arjuna* knew that the only way to win the war was to keep *Kṛṣṇa* in mind and fight, which meant that *Kṛṣṇa* would have to be in front of him. He, therefore, asked *Kṛṣṇa* to be his charioteer. He said, 'You told me you would not fight. However, driving a chariot is not fighting. Will you drive my chariot, *Kṛṣṇa*?' *Kṛṣṇa* agreed, thinking it would be fun to see the show. He would have a front-row seat, so to speak.

KĪÂÛA AS ARJUNA'S CHARIOTEER

Arjuna thus handed over his chariot, horses, and himself into *Kṛṣṇa's* hands. Every arrow had to pass through *Kṛṣṇa* before it reached *Arjuna*. When you keep *Kṛṣṇa*, the divine factor, in front of you and do what you have to do, fighting or whatever, the arrows that come to you will have already been blunted. This is exactly what happened when *Arjuna* fought with *Karṇa*.

Karṇa was considered to be the answer for *Arjuna*. *Duryodhana* had cultivated him only for that purpose alone. That, there would be finally, a dual between the two was a forgone conclusion. Again, except *Arjuna* and *Kṛṣṇa*, nobody else was a match for *Karṇa*. *Kṛṣṇa*, knowing all this, had very intelligently planned for that day. At first, when he knew that war was inevitable, he himself met *Karṇa* and tried to convince *Karṇa* that he should join the *Pāṇḍavas* by revealing to him the truth of his birth. He told *Karṇa* that he was in fact a *Kaunteya*, son of *Kuntī*, like *Arjuna*, born of Lord *Sūrya*. However, being the noble person that he was, *Karṇa* refused to ditch *Duryodhana* at the last moment.

Kṛṣṇa made sure that *Karṇa* made a vow that he would not kill any *Pāṇḍava* other than *Arjuna*. To extract this vow from *Karṇa*, *Kṛṣṇa* had tutored *Kuntī* very well. *Kuntī* at the behest of *Kṛṣṇa*, went to *Karṇa* and told him the story of his birth and requested him to join the *Pāṇḍavas*. Again, he refused; but he promised her that he would spare all her other sons except *Arjuna*. He told her that he would not kill any of the others. And if it came to a combat between him and *Arjuna*, one of them would live and she still would have five sons. He wanted nothing more than to kill *Arjuna* in order to show his gratitude to *Duryodhana*. Giving one's word was very important and was upheld even at the cost of one's life. The two epics, *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* are filled with situations based on someone having given his or her word.

Karṇa had been born with *kuṇḍalas*, earrings, in his ears and a *kavaca*, an armour on his chest. This meant that he was gifted, that he was a very brilliant person and had the blessing of Lord Sun. However, he had one complex. He could not accept the fact that he was not a *kṣatriya*. 'After all, I am only the son of a chariot driver,' he would say. Because he did not know who his real parents were, he always thought that he was a charioteer's son. His entire lot in life, however, was with the *kṣatriyas* because he was brilliant in archery, having acquired this expertise from *Paraśurāma*, who was like an *avatāra*.

PARAŚURĒMA'S CURSE ON KARŪA

Paraśurāma had made a vow that he would never teach a *kṣatriya* because of some problems he had had with them as a child. In fact, he had made a vow to destroy them and he did destroy a lot of *kṣatriyas*. A man of great powers, he existed even at the time of *Rāma*, with whom he had a verbal battle. *Karṇa* went to *Paraśurāma* as a *brāhmaṇa*, and learned archery from him.

One day, *Paraśurāma* was sleeping with his head on *Karṇa*'s lap. A big insect came along and bit *Karṇa*. Although the wound was bleeding profusely, *Karṇa* would not disturb his *guru*'s rest. Feeling the wetness of the blood, *Paraśurāma* woke up. Seeing the blood, he knew that *Karṇa* could not be a *brāhmaṇa*. Had he been, he would have made a great hue and cry over the sight of his own blood. Because *Karṇa* was able

to stand the pain and the sight of the blood, *Paraśurāma* was prompted to ask, ‘Who are you? Tell me the truth.’

Paraśurāma had vowed to teach no one other than a *brāhmaṇa* and now *Karṇa* was forced to admit that he was not a *brāhmaṇa*. Having been deceived by *Karṇa* in this way, *Paraśurāma* cursed him, ‘All that I have taught you will not be available to you at the time of need. You will forget all the *mantras*.’ These *mantras* were, in fact, the guided missiles *Karṇa* needed in battle.

Karṇa later obtained another missile, by the name *śakti*, for a one time use, from Lord *Indra* in return for the *kavaca* and the *kuṇḍalas* when Lord *Indra* came in the disguise of a *brāhmaṇa* and asked for them. True to his reputation, he would not deny anything that any one asked as *dāna* and he had gifted them away. But he had obtained this *astra* called *śakti* from Lord *Indra*. And he had reserved it for using it on *Arjuna*. And, even *Arjuna* would have been powerless against this *astra*. *Kṛṣṇa* knew this and all the time carefully avoided the dual between *Arjuna* and *Karṇa* as long as *Karṇa* had it with him. He arranged for a situation where *Karṇa* had to use it against *Ghaṭotkaca*, *Bhīma*’s son. Thus by careful planning *Kṛṣṇa* saved *Arjuna* from the *śakti*.

Karṇa still had the serpent missile, *nāga-astra*, which, he had also reserved to use against *Arjuna*. And use it, he did! When finally *Karṇa* faced *Arjuna* in the dual, he used it. It was coming right for *Arjuna*’s head. Because *Arjuna* had no answer for *Karṇa*’s *nāga-astra*, it looked as though he would surely die. For a *nāga-astra*, a *garuḍa-astra*, an eagle missile, is required. Only an eagle can take care of a serpent. What did *Kṛṣṇa* do? He pressed the chariot so that it went down the few inches needed for the arrow to hit *Arjuna*’s crown and not his head.

To lose his crown was a great shame for *Arjuna* because he was no mean fighter, but at least his head was saved by *Kṛṣṇa*’s intervention. *Kṛṣṇa* did not fight; he only pressed the chariot down. Stories such as these show the play of *daiva*, the unknown factor in any situation. During the war *Arjuna* kept this factor in front of him, in the form of *Kṛṣṇa*, his driver, and thereby saved himself.

Everyone’s life is a battle. With the awareness that *Kṛṣṇa*, in other words, the Lord, is always with you, everything becomes easier. *Arjuna* did this and it saved him all the way. There were many occasions like this one, either before, during or after the war, when *Kṛṣṇa*’s presence as the unknown factor made significant difference in the lives of the *Pāṇḍavas*.

The blind *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* knew that war had been declared. *Saṅjaya* had just returned from the warfront carrying the news that *Bhīṣma* had fallen on the tenth day of the war. *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* was shocked at the news and after lamenting the fall of *Bhīṣma*, requested *Saṅjaya* to tell him everything in detail that had happened after the war had been started. This request forms the first verse of the *Bhagavadgītā*, the dialogue

between Lord *Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna*. This dialogue called the *Bhagavadgītā* occurred at the beginning before the war actually started. And this dialogue was reported verbatim by *Saṅjaya*. *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* was not only visually blind, but he was blind in his thinking also, as can be seen in the first verse itself.

DHĪTARĒĀURA'S QUESTION

Saṅjaya was sitting in the palace in *Hastināpura* in front of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* who asked the question, ‘What happened between the *Pāṇḍavas* and my people at *Kurukṣetra*?’ As the narrator of the *Gītā*, *Saṅjaya* had been given the power, by *Vyāsa*, to see and hear what was taking place elsewhere.¹ Although *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* was the oldest, most revered person in the family, he was nursing a jealousy towards the *Pāṇḍavas* because they were the sons of his younger brother, *Pāṇḍu*, who ruled the kingdom instead of himself due to his blindness. Such complexes do not easily disappear.

It is important to note that the word *dharma* is the first word of the *Gītā*. If you protect *dharma*, *dharma* will protect you (*dharmo rakṣati rakṣitaḥ*). But this is not the case with things like money. The money you protect may protect you in a time of need, but it can also attract bandits and muggers. But when *dharma* is protected, it does protect you.

To protect *dharma* is to live *dharma*, and for a *kṣatriya* to live *dharma*, he must do what is to be done. To do what is to be done leads to *mokṣa*. That is why *dharma* is placed first among the four *puruṣārthas*, human ends or pursuits, *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *mokṣa*. In fact, the order is more accurately reflected as — *artha*, *kāma*, *dharma*, and *mokṣa*, in keeping with a person's natural tendency to go for security and pleasure, *artha* and *kāma* first. But *dharma* is placed first because of its importance.

¹ *Just before the war, Vyāsa had gone to Dhṛtarāṣṭra to talk to him. He had tried to convince him to bear upon Duryodhana to make peace with the Pāṇḍavas and avoid the war. But Dhṛtarāṣṭra was not convinced. He then offered Dhṛtarāṣṭra a divine eyesight, so that he could witness the happenings at the warfront sitting in his palace. Dhṛtarāṣṭra refused, saying that it was very painful for him to witness the destruction of his own people. He requested Vyāsa to bestow that power on Saṅjaya. Vyāsa then gave a boon to Saṅjaya that, he would witness everything that happened in every nook and corner of the battlefield, wherever he was. He said that nothing would be parokṣa to him, i.e., he would know everything as if he was a direct witness. He would know everything including what was spoken and thought of by those in the battlefield. Using this Saṅjaya faithfully reported everything to Dhṛtarāṣṭra.*

THE LAW OF DHARMA

Because the *Gītā* begins with the word *dharma* in the compound '*dharma-kṣetre*,' the importance of *dharma* is evident. *Kṣetra* means a place. A place of pilgrimage is called a *kṣetra*. It can be a country or your physical body. The whole *Bhārata*, India, was a place where the Vedas once ruled the hearts of the people and, therefore, it is a *dharma-pradhāna-kṣetra*, meaning that the predominant ruling factor of all human activity is the law of *dharma* — *veda-ukta-dharma*. *Dharma* is important and everything else, power, wealth, etc., should be in conformity with it. Power without *dharma* is not power at all and is not considered proper. Money without *dharma* is not true wealth. Any form of pleasure should be gathered legitimately.

According to *dharma*, a ruler is to be respected, which is why you do not seek a king's audience with empty hands. Similarly, when you go to a temple or to a teacher, you always carry something. No one should approach these three, *devatā*, *guru*, and *rājā*, empty-handed. This is why the citizens of India always greet a new king with flowers or some other offering in their hands. They even did this for Alexander, the Great. Until he actually won the war, they fought against him. Once he won, they all lined up and offered flowers to him.

Because the entire country was ruled by the Vedas, it was referred to as *dharma-kṣetra*. Because *dharma* prevailed, the Indian people always respected the king. This was known very well by the British and that was why they retained the local kings. These kings ruled the people, who worshipped them and the British ruled the kings, extracting annual tributes from them. Although there were rumblings, they allowed the small kingdoms to exist. The Moslems also were able to rule the majority of people only because of this particular *dharma*.

Every New World country, previously colonised and subsequently independent, has a history of bloody coups. India, on the other hand, has never had such coups because, even today, *dharma* is in the very blood of the people. This is *vaidika-dharma*. You cannot change it completely; it is still there. India is a peace-loving country. Because there is a Vedic genius there, the whole country is a *dharma-kṣetra*. It is a place where even in the courtyards of people's homes, one can hear talk of the timeless, the all-knowing, and the limitless.

What a culture it is! Classes on the *Upaniṣads* are conducted under a tree for large groups of people. A mountain may be in view and the river *Gaṅgā* may be flowing by. Here, the teacher, a hermit, says, 'All that is there is one. All the dividing factors are but a myth.' This is India, *Bhāratabhūmi*. This particular *bhūmi*, earth, or land, has something amazing about it. It has survived thousands of years of deliberate exploitation and destruction only because of the intrinsic worth of the Vedic wisdom. Therefore, it is called *dharma-kṣetra*.

Looking at the words in the first verse, then, *Kuru-kṣetra* is the name of the place from where the *Kuru* clan ruled, a place named after the head of this clan, whereas *dharma-kṣetra* refers to the entire country. Those who wanted to fight, who had gathered to fight, are called *yuyutsus*, meaning ones who have a desire to fight.

DHĪTARĀṢṬRA'S WEAKNESS

The words *māmakāḥ* and *pāṇḍavāḥ* in this verse, are significant. *Pāṇḍu's* sons were not unknown to *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* and yet he did not include them among his own people here. *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* was the oldest in the family and should have looked upon *Pāṇḍu's* children as his own. And yet he used the words, *pāṇḍavāḥ* and *māmakāḥ*, thus creating a division, when he asked, 'What happened between my people and the *Pāṇḍavas*?' revealing where his heart lay.

This information was important to *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* because his son's victory would be his own. Therefore, he wanted to know — did *Duryodhana* win? Impelled by *dharma*, out of fear of destroying his own people, did *Dharmaputra* decide to go back to the forest so that my *Duryodhana* could retain the kingdom? His question reflected his wishful thinking. Otherwise, the question would have been irrelevant. He would not have asked, '*kim akurvata*?' — What did they do?' Everyone had obviously come to fight. They were armed to the molars. They had not assembled there to have fun. *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* himself knew that. More over he was very eager to know everything that had happened in detail.

Dhṛtarāṣṭra knew he did not have *dharma* with him. He also knew very well that his sons had no *dharma* either. He did not stop the war. He did not tell *Duryodhana* that what he was doing was wrong, and withdraw his support. Had he done so, *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa* would not have joined *Duryodhana* because what he was doing would have been against his father's mandate. None of this happened, however. All *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* had to do was to speak one sentence to *Duryodhana*, but this he did not do. This was *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*. He was very jealous of the *Pāṇḍavas*. This jealousy and his blind love for *Duryodhana* led him to support all the schemes that *Duryodhana* hatched against the *Pāṇḍavas*. Thus he was indirectly responsible for the war and its outcome.

THE WAR IN ONE'S MIND

This verse can also be looked at subjectively. *Kuru-kṣetra* would then mean *karma-kṣetra*, the physical body. Because the human body is a place where backed by free will, *karma* is done, it is called a *karma-kṣetra*. The same *karma-kṣetra* is also called *dharma-kṣetra* because it is born of *dharma*, meaning *puṇya*. According to the law of *karma*, a human incarnation is due to a mixture of both *puṇya* and *pāpa*, with *puṇya* being the predominant factor. Therefore, it is called *puṇya-pradhāna-kṣetra*.

Here, then, in this human physical body called *puṇya-pradhāna-dharma-kṣetra* and *kuru-kṣetra*, two forces have assembled — *dharma*, represented by the *Pāṇḍavas*, and *adharmā*, represented by *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*'s sons. *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* was blind but, more than that, his mind was blind to *dharma* and *adharmā*, right and wrong. Therefore, his sons, the *Kauravas*, are considered to be the brood of ignorance, in other words they were born of the lack of discrimination between right and wrong, *aviveka*.

Blindness is ignorance and *aviveka* is the lack of discriminative knowledge. The *Gītā* deals with two types of *aviveka*. One is with reference to *dharma* and *adharmā*, right and wrong, and the other is with reference to *ātmā* and *anātmā*, which is why the *Gītā* is called both *yoga-śāstra* and *brahma-vidyā*. The blind man here stands for ignorance, *ajñāna*. In blindness you do not see and in ignorance also you do not see.

THE FIGHT BETWEEN DHARMA AND ADHARMA

Confusion is born out of ignorance. No one, however, can say, 'I am ignorant of what is right and wrong.' Whatever one expects from others in terms of behaviour, attitudes, and so on, is right if the same behaviour and attitudes are expected of oneself by others. This means that the values are understood by everyone, but the value of the values is not.

Here, the *Kauravas* represent the many confusions caused by ignorance, which is why they are greater in number than the *Pāṇḍavas*. *Pāṇḍu* stands for discriminative knowledge. In the *Mahābhārata*, he was presented as being very white in appearance. White always stands for knowledge. The *Pāṇḍavas*, then, were born of this discriminative knowledge, with reference to *dharma* and *adharmā*. They were only a handful and represent our inclinations towards *dharma*. There are also inclinations towards *adharmā*. These are born out of *aviveka*, lack of discrimination, with reference to the value of values, whereas inclinations towards *dharma* are born out of one's general knowledge of right and wrong.

Because of the confusion surrounding values, there is a fight between the inclinations towards *dharma* and those towards *adharmā*. Only in a human body, or in its equivalent, is this fight possible. No human being can avoid this conflict unless he or she understands everything properly. *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*'s question — 'What did they do?' — reflects a confusion related to values, born of ignorance.

Any external problem can come from an internal problem. All wars are first fought in the mind; are they not? The Second World War was first fought in the mind of Hitler. The conflict that began in the mind was actualised on the battlefield. All problems start in the mind and later find their expression outside. Without conflict in the mind, there would be no external conflict.

THE IMAGERY OF THE CHARIOT

Arjuna's chariot, with *Arjuna* and *Kṛṣṇa* in it, can be seen in terms of self-knowledge unfolded by the *Upaniṣads* and the *Gītā*. The significance of this scenario is explained in the *Kāthopaniṣad*. The physical body is the chariot, *ratha* is the intellect, *buddhi* is its driver, *sārathi*. The self, *ātmā*, is the master seated in the back seat. The mind is likened to the reins that control the horses and the horses represent the sense organs. The sense objects become the roads, as it were, because the sense organs naturally go towards them. These horses are held in check by the *sārathi*, the driver. He or she may let go of the reins, but the horses are still kept under control.

Thus, with your body as your chariot and your intellect as your driver, seated in the back seat, you are out in the world. If your *viveka*, discrimination, is not available to you, it is because your driver is confused and what happens to the chariot under such circumstances becomes quite understandable.

BUDDHI AS GURU

Now we can bring in this imagery into the opening scene of the *Gītā*. Here the charioteer is Lord *Kṛṣṇa*, the *guru*. He keeps the horses under control thereby keeping the chariot under control. *Kṛṣṇa* being a *jñānī*, his mind and senses are under his control. He has absolute mastery over them. The student who is a *karma-yogī*, too has a *buddhi* that has the mind and senses under its control. Now, the student's *buddhi* is not different from the *guru's buddhi*, when such a *buddhi* is exposed to the *pramāṇa*, taught by the *guru*. Therefore, such a *buddhi*, exposed to the teaching can itself be likened to the *guru*.

Although we say that the *pramāṇa* is *Vedānta*, it is really a thought, a *vṛtti*, that is the *pramāṇa*. *Pramāṇa* is that which gives rise to knowledge. For example, the eyes are not the final *pramāṇa* for seeing. The *vṛtti* is the final *pramāṇa* in as much as it is the final cause for knowledge. To see a flower, you must have a flower-*vṛtti*. It is this flower-*vṛtti* that gives rise to the knowledge of the flower seen. This is what is meant by *pramāṇa*. A *vṛtti* is born out of a certain situation and becomes the *pramāṇa*. We say that ears and eyes are the *pramāṇa* but, in the final analysis, *vṛtti* alone is the *pramāṇa*.

The mind, being the place where the *vṛtti* occurs, is called *antaḥ-karaṇa*, meaning, inner instrument. When you are exposed to a teacher or the teaching, your *buddhi*, the intellect, assumes the very form of the *pramāṇa*, the teaching. Therefore, the *guru's buddhi* or the teaching, and your *buddhi* become one and the same.

This *guru-buddhi* tells us, 'You are that — *tat tvam asi*.' Here, the *guru-buddhi* is turned towards *Arjuna*, who represents the confused *antaḥ-karaṇa*, the ego, or one's notion of 'I.' *Arjuna* was definitely confused. He had great sorrow and he was being told, '*tat tvam asi*.' That is why he asked so many questions in the seventeen chapters

that followed. Exposed to the teaching, one's own *buddhi* assumes the very meaning of the teaching and thereby becomes the *guru* to oneself.

If your *buddhi* does not know this fact, *tat tvam asi*, it cannot tell you. It cannot tell you anything more than what it knows. This is why continually asking, 'Who am I?' does not work. Nothing can happen because you do not know what you do not know. Someone has to teach you. You cannot simply ask, 'Who am I?' and expect to get an answer, because, the 'I' that is always present is the one asking the question. How will the answer to such a question come? You cannot hope to stumble upon the fact. The fact is you; therefore, you are not going to stumble upon an answer that is anything more than what you already know.

The only way an answer can be obtained is by this *buddhi*, meaning the *śāstra* pointing towards the confused *jīva* and saying, 'You are the whole, *paraṃ brahma*,' as we shall see. Thus, the whole *Gītā* can be presented through the *Kṛṣṇa-Arjuna* chariot scene.

To go back to the palace,

सञ्जय उवाच ।

दृष्ट्वा तु पाण्डवानीकं व्यूढं दुर्योधनस्तदा ।

आचार्यमुपसङ्गम्य राजा वचनमब्रवीत् ॥ २ ॥

sañjaya uvāca

dr̥ṣṭvā tu pāṇḍavānīkaṃ vyūḍhaṃ duryodhanastadā

ācāryamupasaṅgamyā rājā vacanamabravīt

Verse 2

सञ्जयः *sañjayaḥ* — *Sañjaya* ; उवाच *uvāca* — said;

तदा तु *tadā tu* — but then; पाण्डव-ानीकम् *pāṇḍava-anīkam* — army of the *Pāṇḍavas*; व्यूढम् *vyūḍham* — in battle formation; दृष्ट्वा *dr̥ṣṭvā* — seeing; राजा दुर्योधनः *rājā duryodhanaḥ* — the King *Duryodhana*; आचार्यम् *ācāryam* — the teacher (*Droṇa*); उपसङ्गम्य *upasaṅgamyā* — approaching; वचनम् *vacanam* — these words; अब्रवीत् *abravīt* — spoke

Sañjaya said:

Then, seeing the army of the *Pāṇḍavas* in battle formation, King *Duryodhana* approaching his teacher, *Droṇa*, spoke these words.

*Sañjaya*¹ referred to *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*'s son, *Duryodhana*, as king, *rājā*, when responding to *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*'s question. *Rājā* means the one who shines in his own glory — in other words, a king. *Sañjaya* was now in the employ of these *Kauravas* and,

¹ *Sañjaya* was a minister and a constant companion of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*

therefore, he had to refer to *Duryodhana* as the king, because even though *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* was on the throne of *Hastināpura*, it was *Duryodhana* who held all the power. He told *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* that his son, the king, had inspected both the armies. *Duryodhana* might have done this to see who had actually come to fight because there was still a lot of mystery surrounding who was going to join whom. He had collected a lot of support, but there may have been people whom he had omitted and who may have joined the *Pāṇḍavas*. In addition, he may have wanted to know if those who had refused to join him were neutral or whether they were going to support the other side. All this he would have seen as he inspected both the armies.

After surveying the army of the *Pāṇḍavas*, *Duryodhana* approached *Droṇa*, the teacher, and spoke to him. According to the style used in the *Mahābhārata*, the next verse should begin with — ‘*Duryodhana uvāca*, *Duryodhana* said.’ However here, in the *Gītā* we do not see this being done. Since the *Gītā* is a dialogue between *Kṛṣṇa* as *Bhagāvan* and *Arjuna*, we do find ‘*śrībhagavān uvāca*’ and ‘*Arjuna uvāca*’ throughout the text. Also, the first words of the *Gītā* are ‘*dhṛtarāṣṭra uvāca*,’ which serve as an introduction to the context and as an implied prayer, as we have seen. Throughout the text, ‘*sañjaya uvāca*’ is mentioned a few times to indicate the presence of a narrator.

Although the words, ‘*Duryodhana uvāca*,’ are not mentioned here, they are to be understood. The next verse, then, is within quotes, as it were, since *Duryodhana*, approaching *Droṇa* in the battlefield, spoke these words to him.

पश्येतां पाण्डुपुत्राणामाचार्य महतीं चमूम् ।

व्यूढां द्रुपदपुत्रेण तव शिष्येण धीमता ॥ ३ ॥

paśyetaṃ pāṇḍuputrāṇāmācārya mahatīm camūm
vyūdhāṃ drupadaputreṇa tava śiṣyeṇa dhīmatā

Verse 3

आचार्य *ācārya* — Oh! Teacher; तव शिष्येण *tava śiṣyeṇa* — by your disciple; धीमता *dhīmatā* — by the brilliant; द्रुपद-पुत्रेण *drupada-putreṇa* — by the son of *Drupada*; व्यूढाम् *vyūdhām* — formed (and led); पाण्डु-पुत्राणाम् *pāṇḍu-putrāṇām* — of the sons of *Pāṇḍu*; एताम् *etām* — this; महतीम् *mahatīm* — great; चमूम् *camūm* — army; पश्य *paśya* — please look at

Oh! Teacher please look at this great army of the sons of *Pāṇḍu*, formed and led by your brilliant disciple, the son of *Drupada*.

Why does *Duryodhana* go to *Droṇa* first? *Droṇa* is not his commander-in-chief. *Duryodhana* had chosen *Bhīṣma* for this post. Given that the war is about to begin, he should only be talking to *Bhīṣma*. However, he approached *Droṇa* first because he was certain that *Bhīṣma* was on his side, whereas he was unsure of *Droṇa*. *Droṇa* had come

to the battlefield to join *Duryodhana*, but many of his dearest disciples were in the opposite camp. Therefore, he gave *Droṇa* extra status by going to him first.

Also, *Droṇa* had been *Duryodhana's* teacher of archery, his *ācārya*. He therefore, went to him first as a sign of respect. He asked *Droṇa* to look upon the great army of the *Pāṇḍavas* arranged in formation in front of them — so many elephants, horses, men, and chariots all surging forward to the line of battle. This great army of the *Pāṇḍavas* was led by *Dhṛṣṭadyumna*, *Drupada's* son. He was also one of *Droṇa's* disciples, but *Droṇa* had life long enmity with *Drupada*, the king of *Pāñcāla*. *Duryodhana* did not miss the opportunity to point out to *Droṇa* that his own disciple, the brilliant son of *Drupada*, had formed and was leading the opposing army. In other words, *Duryodhana* was as much as saying, 'Everything *drupada-putra* knows, he learned from you, *Droṇa*, and now he is going to use it against you.'¹

Duryodhana introduced to the *ācārya* all the important people in the opposite camp and also presented to him the great men-at-arms in his own army. This he did because he considered *Droṇa* to be very important to his winning the war and retaining the kingdom.

Describing the army of the *Pāṇḍavas*, *Duryodhana* continued.

अत्र शूरा महेष्वासा भीमार्जुनसमा युधि ।

युयुधानो विराटश्च द्रुपदश्च महारथः ॥ ४ ॥

atra śūrā maheṣvāsā bhīmārjunasamā yudhi
yuyudhāno virāṭaśca drupadaśca mahārathaḥ

Verse 4

धृष्टकेतुश्चेकितानः काशिराजश्च वीर्यवान् ।

पुरुजित् कुन्तिभोजश्च शैब्यश्च नरपुङ्गवः ॥ ५ ॥

dhṛṣṭaketuścekitānaḥ kāśirājaśca vīryavān
purujit kuntibhojaśca śaibyaśca narapuṅgavaḥ

Verse 5

युधामन्युश्च विक्रान्त उत्तमौजाश्च वीर्यवान् ।

¹ *Droṇa and Dru pada went to the same gurukula and were very close friends. At that time Drupada impulsively promised Droṇa that he would give half of his kingdom to him when he became the king. Droṇa, at a later day went to claim that promise. But Drupada refused. Droṇa vowed to avenge this humiliation. When he became the ācārya of the princes of Hastināpura, he had his chance. Arjuna defeated Drupada and brought him as prisoner to Droṇa and Droṇa had his revenge and took away half of Drupada's kingdom and released him. Now it was Drupada's turn to seek revenge! He did a yāga praying for a daughter and son to avenge his humiliation at the hands of Droṇa. Dhṛṣṭadyumna was the son who came out of that yāga and he was destined to kill Droṇa. Yet Droṇa took him as disciple and taught him everything. He was the commander-in-chief of the Pāṇḍava-army.*

सौभद्रो द्रौपदेयाश्च सर्व एव महारथाः ॥ ६ ॥

*yudhāmanyuśca vikrānta uttamaujāśca vīryavān
saubhadro draupadeyāśca sarva eva mahārathāḥ*

Verse 6

अत्र *atra* — here (in the army of *Pāṇḍavas*); युधि *yudhi* — in battle; भीमार्जुनसमाः *bhīma-arjuna-samāḥ* — equal to *Bhīma* and *Arjuna*; शूराः *śūrāḥ* — unrivalled experts; महेष्वासाः *maheṣvāsāḥ* — men of great bows; (सन्ति *santi* — there are;) युयुधानः *yuyudhānaḥ* — *Yuyudhāna (Sātyaki)*; च *ca* — and; विराटः *virāṭaḥ* — the king of *Virāṭa*; च *ca* — and; द्रुपदः *drupadaḥ* — King *Drupada* (father of *Draupadī*); महारथः *mahārathāḥ* — the man of great valour; धृष्टकेतुः *dhr̥ṣṭaketuḥ* — *Dhr̥ṣṭaketu*; चेकितानः *cekitānaḥ* — *Cekitāna*; च *ca* — and; वीर्यवान् *vīryavān* — the valiant; काशिराजः *kāśirājaḥ* — the king of *Kāśī*; पुरुजित् *purujit* — *Purujit*; कुन्तिभोजः *kuntibhojaḥ* — *Kuntibhoja*; शैब्यः *śaibyaḥ* — *Śaibya*; च *ca* — and; नरपुङ्गवः *narapuṅgavaḥ* — the one who is the most exalted among men; च *ca*—and; विक्रान्तः *vikrāntaḥ* — the one who is very powerful; युधामन्युः *yudhāmanyuḥ* — *Yudhāmanyu*; च *ca* — and; वीर्यवान् *vīryavān* — one who is of great strength; उत्तमौजाः *uttamaujāḥ* — *Uttamaujas*; च *ca* — and; सौभद्रः *saubhadraḥ* — son of *Subhadra (Abhimanyu)*; द्रौपदेयाः *draupadeyaḥ*— the sons of *Draupadī*; च *ca* — and; सर्वे *sarve* — all (these); एव *eva* — indeed; महारथाः *mahārathāḥ* — men of great valour

Here are unrivalled experts, equal to *Bhīma* and *Arjuna* in battle, men of great bows — *Sātyaki*,¹ the king of *Virāṭa*,² and King *Drupada*, a man of great valour; *Dhr̥ṣṭaketu*,³ *Cekitāna*,⁴ the valiant king of *Kāśī*, *Purujit*,⁵ *Kuntibhoja*⁶ and *Śaibya*,⁷ the most exalted among men; the

¹ *Sātyaki* was the son of *Śini*, a *yādava* chieftain. He was a disciple of *Arjuna* and was totally devoted to *Kṛṣṇa*. He was counted as an *atiratha*.

² King *Virāṭa* of *Matsya-deśa* (also known as *Virāṭa-deśa*) was the father of *Uttarā* who was given in marriage to *Abhimanyu*. It was in his country that the *Pāṇḍavas* spent their *ajñātavāsa*.

³ *Dhr̥ṣṭaketu* was the son of *Śiśupāla*, the king of *Cedi*.

⁴ *Cekitāna* was a *Yādava* chieftain belonging to the *vṛṣṇi* clan and was the commander of one of the seven *akṣauhīṇīs* of the *Pāṇḍava*-army.

⁵ One of the brothers of *Kuntī*.

⁶ Another brother of *Kuntī*.

⁷ Father of *Devikā*, another wife of *Yudhiṣṭhira*.

powerful *Yudhāmanyu*, *Uttamaujas*,¹ a man of great strength, (*Abhimanyu*),² the son of *Subhadra* and the sons of *Draupadī* — all men of great valour.

Duryodhana told *Droṇa* that there were unrivalled experts in fighting and logistics in the army of the *Pāṇḍavas*. In the war that was about to take place, it was not enough to be able to send arrows. Logistics were also required. Therefore, all of them were top-notch fighters in battle, equal to *Bhīma* and *Arjuna* in their knowledge of warfare. *Duryodhana* mentioned their names to *Droṇa* because he knew he had a soft corner in his heart for these people.

Maheṣvāsa was a name given to people who wielded bows of great fame. *Arjuna's* bow, for example, was known as *Gāṇḍīva*. There are many stories about these bows. Each person had a special conch, *śaṅkha*, also, as a part of his equipment. Before a man started fighting, he would work himself up by blowing his own trumpet, which may be where the expression, 'blowing your own horn,' originated. This was done as a warming-up exercise. These conches also had names, as we shall see later.

Thus, these were all people of famous bows. It was not that the bows had made a big name for themselves, but that the men who wielded them were considered to be great. They were experts in warfare, equal to *Bhīma* and *Arjuna*. The king of *Virāṭa* was there, along with *Drupada*, the father of *Draupadī*, and a man of great valour (*mahāratha*). A *mahāratha* was one who was able to continue fighting, while protecting himself, his driver, and his horses. Because he needed his horses to pull his chariot, he could not allow them to get hurt. He also had to be able to protect his driver because, if he allowed him to be hit, no one would want to drive for him. A great charioteer, then, was one who was able to neutralise all of the arrows that came to his horses, his driver, or to himself. Such men were called *mahārathas*. They were not ordinary soldiers. Everyone named here by *Duryodhana* was a *mahāratha* without question.

Next, *Duryodhana* pointed out six more unrivalled archers who would be fighting against them. *Dhṛṣṭaketu* was the name of an important warrior who was well known at that time. *Cekitāna* also enjoyed a great reputation. Although not specifically mentioned by name, the king of *Kāśī*³ was presented by *Duryodhana* as a man of great valour.

¹ *Yudhāmanyu* and *Uttamaujas* were brothers and princes under the king of *Pāñcāla*. They fought valiantly for all the eighteen days of the war, but were killed while sleeping, by *Aśvatthāmā* in the end.

² *Abhimanyu* was the son of *Arjuna* and *Subhadra*, sister of *Kṛṣṇa*, a great warrior, who was mercilessly killed by the gang of all the *Mahārathas* of the *Kaurava*-army.

³ His name was *Abhibhū*.

Purujiit and *Kuntibhoja* were also acknowledged by *Duryodhana* and *Śaibya* was described by him as the most exalted of men.

Yudhāmanyu is described as a powerful chieftain and *Uttamaujas* is also known to be very mighty. Everyone mentioned thus far in *Duryodhana's* introduction is a great chieftain. Also mentioned was *Arjuna's* son, *Saubhadra*, *Abhimanyu*, born of *Subhadrā*, one of *Arjuna's* wives. The five sons of *Draupadī* born to each of the five *Pāṇḍavas* were also there.

All these people were great warriors, *mahārathas*, as was said earlier. The various levels of expertise have been defined elsewhere and are given below.

एको दशसहस्राणि योधयेद्यस्तु धन्विनाम् ।

शस्त्रशास्त्रप्रवीणश्च महारथ इति स्मृतः ॥

eko daśasahasrāṇi yodhayedyastu dhanvinām
śastraśāstrapraviṇaśca mahāratha iti smṛtaḥ

He who can, by himself, fight with ten thousand bowmen and who is an expert in using weapons and in the science of war is said to be *mahāratha*.

अमितान् योधयेद्यस्तु सम्प्रोक्तोऽतिरथस्तु सः ।

रथस्त्वेकेन यो योद्धा तन्न्यूनोऽर्धरथः स्मृतः ॥

amitān yodhayedyastu samprokto'tirathastu saḥ
rathastvekena yo yoddhā tannyūno'rdharathaḥ smṛtaḥ

He who can fight with a thousand to ten thousand bowmen simultaneously is called an *atiratha*. He who can fight with one thousand bowman is called a *ratha* and the one who is a little less than that in capacity is called an *ardharatha*.

THE PURPOSE OF INTRODUCING THE WARRIORS

Before continuing with these descriptive verses, it is important to understand their purpose. They provide the context necessary for us to come to know *Arjuna's* condition. The story that is unfolding is not an illustrative story. Illustrative stories are useful tools for communication, no doubt, but here the story is to tell us how the teaching came about.

This information is also given in the *Upaniṣads*, where we are told that a given person went to another person, in order to be taught, and that person had gone to yet another person, and so on. Thus, a story is told. For example, in the sixth chapter of

Chāndogyopaniṣad, there is a story about a great teacher, *Uddālaka*, and his son called *Śvetaketu*. When this boy was twelve years of age, *Uddālaka* decided to send him to a *gurukula* because he did not think his son could learn any more at home. *Śvetaketu* spent twelve years in the *gurukula* and came home when he was twenty-four. All this is mentioned in the *Upaniṣad*.

The young man returned home very proud and seeing this, his father asked; ‘Did you ask your teacher for that knowledge, gaining which everything is as well known?’ The son replied, ‘I don’t think my teacher had such a knowledge. Otherwise, he would have taught it to me.’ *Śvetaketu* later asked his father if there was such a knowledge. His father proved to him that there was.

By the knowledge of the cause, *kāraṇa*, everything else is as well known. If you know the clay, you know the pot. The word ‘pot’ is only with reference to a name and form, *nāma* and *rūpa*, for the substance clay. There is no substance in the pot, other than clay, for you to know. Similarly, once you know the cause of this entire creation, if there is such a cause, then everything is as well known. It is not that everything is known, but that everything is as well known. Just as you know the substance, clay, in terms of reality, you also know what *satya* is, what *mithyā* is. You know the real and the unreal. This is all there is to know.

Uddālaka established the possibility of such a knowledge and, in time, *Śvetaketu* wanted to know. That is how we get *mahāvākya-upadeśa*, the teaching of ‘that thou art — *tat tvam asi*.’ This kind of story, then, reveals the context and tells us about the urge to know, how it has to be known, and so on. In other words, the whole teaching methodology, *sampradāya* is brought out through these stories.

It is important, therefore, to know how *Arjuna*, a great warrior and a man of culture and compassion, became a seeker, a *jijñāsu*, the one who wanted to have this knowledge. In the process, we understand how a person discovers a quest in himself or herself to know the meaning of all the struggles in life. Although *Kṛṣṇa* sometimes spoke to *Arjuna* strictly within the context of the *Mahābhārata*, the context can be changed to apply to anyone. For example, when *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* to fight, he was speaking only to *Arjuna* and to no one else. Still, there is something in these that is relevant to everyone; and that is — what is to be done in a given situation must be done.

This context is naturally still a part of the *Mahābhārata* and the actual *Gītā* is yet to begin, which it does in the second chapter. Only with the words, ‘*śrī bhagavān uvāca*’ does it become *Bhagavadgītā*. The first chapter is only the context, leading to the *Gītā*. Although the previous chapters of the *Mahābhārata* have no direct connection to the *Bhagavadgītā*, there is a link with reference to *Arjuna*’s lot. Therefore, even though these first few verses of the *Gītā* have no real relevance to what we want to know, they do give us the context and for this reason, we look into them.

Having talked to *Droṇa* about the important people in the army of *Pāṇḍavas*, he then changed the topic to those in his own army.

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

asmākaṃ tu viśiṣṭā ye tānnibodha dvijottama
nāyakā mama sainyasya sañjñārthaṃ tānbravīmi te Verse 7

द्विज-उत्तम *dvija-uttama* — Oh! Learned among the twice-born (*brāhmaṇas*); अस्माकम् *asmākam* — of us; तु *tu* — whereas; ये *ye* — those who; विशिष्टाः *viśiṣṭāḥ* — are important; मम सैन्यस्य *mama sainyasya* — of my army; नायकाः *nāyakāḥ* — leaders; तान् *tān* — them; निबोध *nibodha* — please take note; ते *te* — to you; संज्ञार्थम् *sañjñārtham* — in order to introduce; तान् *tān* — them; ब्रवीमि *bravīmi* — I mention

Whereas, Oh! Learned among the twice-born (*brāhmaṇas*), please take note of those who are important amongst ourselves, the leaders of my army. I mention them in order to introduce them to you.

The people who had joined *Duryodhana* were also not just ordinary soldiers. They, too, were leaders, *mahārathas*. Wanting to point this out to *Droṇa*, *Duryodhana* again said, ‘In order to introduce them to you, I will mention them by name.’

In this verse, he addressed *Droṇa* as *dvija-uttama*, the best among the twice-born, *dvija*. A *brāhmaṇa*, a *kṣatriya* and a *vaiśya* are considered to be born again when they are initiated into the *gāyatrī-mantra*. *Droṇa* was described by *Duryodhana* as *uttama*, the best, because he was a learned teacher of archery.

Describing his own army, *Duryodhana* said:

भवान् भीष्मश्च कर्णश्च कृपश्च समितिञ्जयः ।
अश्वत्थामा विकर्णश्च सौमदत्तिर्जयद्रथः ॥ ८ ॥
bhavān bhīṣmaśca karṇaśca kṛpaśca samitiñjayaḥ
aśvatthāmā vikarṇaśca saumadattirjayadrathaḥ

Verse 8

अन्ये च बहवः शूरा मदर्थे त्यक्तजीविताः ।
नानाशस्त्रप्रहरणाः सर्वे युद्धविशारदाः ॥ ९ ॥
anye ca bahavaḥ śūrā madarthe tyaktajīvitāḥ
nānāśastrapraharaṇāḥ sarve yuddhaviśārādāḥ

Verse 9

भवान् *bhavān* — Your Honour; भीष्मः *bhīṣmaḥ* — *Bhīṣma*; च *ca* — and; कर्णः *karṇaḥ* — *Karṇa*; च *ca* — and; कृपः *kṛpaḥ* — *Kṛpa*; च *ca* — and; समितिञ्जयः *samitiñjayaḥ* — one who is always victorious; अश्वत्थामा *aśvatthāmā* — *Aśvatthāmā*; विकर्णः *vikarṇaḥ* — *Vikarṇa*; च *ca* — and; सौमदत्तिः *saumadattiḥ* — *Saumadatti*, son of *Somadatta* (*Bhūriśravā*); जयद्रथः *jayadrathaḥ* — *Jayadratha*; अन्ये च *anye ca* — and other; बहवः *bahavaḥ* — many; शूराः *śūrāḥ* — warriors; मदर्थे *madarthe* — for my sake; त्यक्त-जीविताः *tyakta-jīvitāḥ* — who have given up their lives; नाना-शस्त्रप्रहरणाः *nānā-śastra-praharaṇāḥ* — having many kinds of weapons; सर्वे *sarve* — all; युद्ध-विशारदाः *yuddha-viśāradāḥ* — experts in warfare

Your Honour, *Bhīṣma*, *Karṇa*, and *Kṛpa*¹, who is always victorious in war, *Aśvatthāmā*,² *Vikarṇa*,³ *Saumadatti*⁴ — son of *Somadatta*, (*Bhūriśravā*) and *Jayadratha*⁵ and many other warriors, all experts in warfare, armed with many kind of weapons, who have given up their lives for my sake (are present on our side).

Instead of calling him by name, *Duryodhana* addressed *Droṇa* as *bhavān*, meaning ‘Your Honour or You, Sir’ Because *Droṇa*’s dearest disciples were on the other side, *Duryodhana* was afraid that his heart would not be in the fight. He was, therefore,

¹ He was the brother of *Droṇa*’s wife *Kṛpī*. He taught archery to the *Kaurava* and *Pāṇḍava* princes before *Droṇa* became their master. He is counted among the *cirañjīviṣ*, those who live forever.

² He was the son of *Droṇa* and is also one of the *cirañjīviṣ*. He was so fiercely devoted to *Duryodhanathat*, finally on the last day when he was sure that there was no more hope for *Duryodhana*, he went at night to the camp of the *Pāṇḍavas* and killed all the men there when they were sleeping.

³ A son of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*, an exception among the *Dhārtarāṣṭras*, and was noted for his sense of justice and righteousness. He was the only one who protested against the humiliation of *Draupdī* in the *Kaurava-sabhā*.

⁴ *Bhūriśravā* — he was the grandson of *Bāhlika*, older brother of *Śantanu*.

⁵ He was the husband of *Duryodhana*’s sister *Duśśalā* and the king of *Sindhu-deśa*. He was a great warrior. He was instrumental in the death of *Abhimanyu* by stopping the *Pāṇḍavas* from going to *Abhimanyu*’s help when he was caught up inside the *cakra-vyūha*. He could do this because, earlier he had obtained a boon from Lord *Śiva* that he would defeat all the *Pāṇḍavas* together except *Arjuna*, single-handedly for one day. He used this boon to prevent the *Pāṇḍavas* from going in to help *Abhimanyu*. This led *Arjuna* to make a vow that, if he did not kill *Jayadratha* by sunset of the next day he would kill himself. The next day, *Duryodhanadid* all he could to protect *Jayadratha* so that *Arjunawould* be forced to put an end to his own life. Again *Kṛṣṇa* saved the situation by creating an artificial sunset and forcing *Jayadratha* out of his hiding so that *Arjuna* could kill him and fulfil his vow.

always trying to win *Droṇa* over. Later in the battle, he began taunting him, saying that the reason he was not fighting his best was because his heart was with the *Pāṇḍavas*.

When *Duryodhana* was losing and *Bhīṣma* was on his deathbed, *Droṇa* became *Duryodhana's* commander-in-chief. He became so inflamed by *Duryodhana's* taunts that he was determined to take *Yudhiṣṭhira*, dead or alive.

In this verse, *Duryodhana* acknowledged *Droṇa's* importance by using the term *bhavān*. Only then did he point out the invincible *Bhīṣma*, the oldest in the family and the strongest. There was no one to equal *Bhīṣma* at that time. When he fought, no one could stand against him. He had the boon that death would come to him only when he chose it. Even *Kṛṣṇa*, who had promised not to fight, became so impressed with *Bhīṣma's* strength that he actually took up his *cakra*. Only then, did he remember that he had promised not to fight. That *Kṛṣṇa* had been moved to pick up his *cakra* was enough for *Bhīṣma* and was what caused him to give up in the end.

The others described in this verse are *Karṇa*, *Duryodhana's* answer for *Arjuna*, and *Kṛpa*, presented here as one who was always victorious in any conflict and who could defeat an army single-handedly. *Duryodhana* also remembered to mention *Droṇa's* son, *Aśvatthāmā*, along with his own brother, *Vikarṇa*, who was the youngest and of the same age as *Aśvatthāmā*. *Jayadratha*, a very important person who caused the death of *Arjuna's* son, *Abhimanyu*, and *Saumadatti* were also presented to *Droṇa* by *Duryodhana*.

Having mentioned these people by name, *Duryodhana* then pointed out that there were many other warriors who had come to join him on the battlefield.

Duryodhana's words, 'Other warriors... who have given up their lives for my sake, *anye ca bahavaḥ śūrāḥ madarthe tyakta-jīvitāḥ*,' can be taken here as a divine omen of what was to come. Had they given up their lives, as he had said, he would have had a dead army on his hands! He meant that they were ready to give up their lives, but what he said was an example of *daiva*, certain words that indicate what is to come. Such words are not deliberately spoken. The speaker means one thing, but the words themselves mean something else. In fact, these warriors had already given up their lives for *Duryodhana's* sake. They were all going to die. This *daiva* is very uncanny; it comes out! Here, it came out in *Duryodhana's* speech. His defeat was indicated by his own words.

Who were these people? They were people who had a variety of weapons with them. Weapons can be either *praharaṇas*, those that can be aimed and released like an arrow or spear, or *śastras*, weapons that are held in one's hand, like a mace or sword. Not only did these people come with all of these weapons, but they were experts in using them. They had a thorough knowledge of weaponry and warfare, some having expertise

in more than one particular martial art. In the next verse, *Duryodhana*, assessing the overall strength of the two armies, continued his attempt to arouse *Droṇa's* enthusiasm :

अपर्याप्तं तदस्माकं बलं भीष्माभिरक्षितम् ।

पर्याप्तं त्विदमेतेषां बलं भीमाभिरक्षितम् ॥ १० ॥

aparyāptam tadasmākaṃ balaṃ bhīṣmābhirakṣitam

paryāptam tvidameteṣāṃ balaṃ bhīmābhirakṣitam

Verse 10

भीष्म-अभिरक्षितम् *bhīṣma-abhirakṣitam* — well-protected by *Bhīṣma*; अस्माकम् *asmākam* — our; तत् *tat* — that; बलम् *balam* — army; अपर्याप्तम् *aparyāptam* — cannot be overwhelmed; तु *tu* — whereas; भीम-अभिरक्षितम् *bhīma-abhirakṣitam* — even though protected by *Bhīma*; एतेषाम् *eteṣām* — of these people in front of us; इदम् *idam* — this, बलम् *balam* — army; पर्याप्तम् *paryāptam* — can be overwhelmed

Our army (being larger), well-protected by *Bhīṣma*, cannot be overwhelmed, whereas the army of these people in front of us, even though protected by *Bhīma*, can be overwhelmed.

Here, *Duryodhana* pointed out to *Droṇa* that his army could not be overwhelmed by the *Pāṇḍavas* because it was well protected by *Bhīṣma*. Also, it consisted of eleven *akṣauhiṇis*, divisions, whereas the *Pāṇḍavas* had only seven *akṣauhiṇis*.¹ He therefore considered his army in no danger, not only because it had more divisions, but because it had such great leaders. Even though the mighty *Bhīma* would protect the *Pāṇḍavas'* army, *Duryodhana* was sure that his army could easily overwhelm them and that he would win the war.

There is another meaning sometimes given for this verse that does not hold. In this version, *Duryodhana* told *Droṇa* that the strength of his army was not adequate, but at least it was protected by *Bhīṣma*, whereas the *Pāṇḍavas'* army was adequate, but was protected only by *Bhīma*. This meaning is not correct. Since *Duryodhana* had eleven divisions, he naturally thought that his army could not be overwhelmed by the seven divisions of his opponents.

Given the numbers involved, he concluded that there was no way that the *Pāṇḍavas* could defeat them. It would be a walkover! The contention surrounding these two interpretations centres on the meanings given to the words *aparyāptam* and *paryāptam*.

¹ An *akṣauhiṇi* is a division of army consisting of 21870 chariots, 21870 elephants, 65610 horses and 109350 foot-soldiers.

This, then, was *Duryodhana's* thinking. His words were meant merely to generate some enthusiasm in *Droṇa* so that *Duryodhana* would gain *Droṇa's* whole-hearted support in this battle.

In the next verse, *Bhīṣma's* importance to the outcome of the war was mentioned to *Droṇa* by *Duryodhana*.

अयनेषु च सर्वेषु यथाभागमवस्थिताः ।

भीष्ममेवाभिरक्षन्तु भवन्तः सर्व एव हि ॥ ११ ॥

ayaneṣu ca sarveṣu yathābhāgamavasthitāḥ

bhīṣmamevābhirakṣantu bhavantaḥ sarva eva hi

Verse 11

सर्वेषु अयनेषु च *sarveṣu ayaneṣu ca* — in all divisions (of the army); यथाभागम् *yathābhāgam* — in (your) respective positions; अवस्थिताः *avasthitāḥ* — stationed; भवन्तः सर्वे एव हि *bhavantaḥ sarve eva hi* — all of you indeed; भीष्मम् एव *bhīṣmam eva* — *Bhīṣma* alone; अभिरक्षन्तु *abhirakṣantu* — may protect

Stationed in your respective positions, in all the divisions of the army, all of you should indeed protect *Bhīṣma* in particular.

Bhīṣma was not just a commander-in-chief appointed according to seniority. Although he was the oldest person in *Duryodhana's* ranks, he was the one who really counted in this battle. As we know, *Bhīṣma* was not an ordinary person. He was invincible. No one can kill him. He would die only when he chose to die. And as long as he had his bow in his hand, no one can approach him. Therefore, *Duryodhana* said that they must all protect *Bhīṣma*. If *Bhīṣma* were to be protected, then the army would be protected and victory would be certain. 'I don't want *Bhīṣma* to get hurt in any way,' he said.

In fact, *Duryodhana* had organised the entire army into formations that would ensure the protection of his commander-in-chief. There was no way for the *Pāṇḍavas* to penetrate his ranks and get at *Bhīṣma*, he thought. Confirming his plans, he asked *Droṇa* to make sure that everyone remained in their assigned places so that *Bhīṣma* would be well protected. As long as *Bhīṣma* was there, they were safe.

Because *Duryodhana* had to shout in order to be heard over the din of the battlefield, *Bhīṣma* might have overheard him telling *Droṇa*, 'Everyone should protect *Bhīṣma*.' However, *Bhīṣma* knew that he needed no one to protect him, and that, not only could he protect himself but everyone else too, including *Duryodhana*. *Duryodhana's* concern was evidently silly. Therefore wanting to reassure and encourage *Duryodhana*, he let out a huge war cry, as described in the next verse.

THE CONCHES ARE BLOWN

तस्य सञ्जनयन्हर्षं कुरुवृद्धः पितामहः ।

सिंहनादं विनद्योच्चैः शङ्खं दध्मौ प्रतापवान् ॥ १२ ॥

tasya sañjanayanharṣaṃ kuruvṛddhaḥ pitāmahaḥ

siṃhanādaṃ vinadyoccaiḥ śaṅkhaṃ dadhmau pratāpavān Verse 12

प्रतापवान् *pratāpavān* — one who is known for his valour; कुरुवृद्धः पितामहः *kuruvṛddhaḥ pitāmahaḥ* — the grandfather of the *Kuru* family; तस्य *tasya* — his; हर्षम् *harṣam* — happiness; सञ्जनयन् *sañjanayan* —intending to produce; उच्चैः *uccaiḥ* — loudly; सिंहनादम् *siṃhanādam* — a roar like a lion; विनद्य *vinadya* — making; शङ्खम् *śaṅkham* — conch; दध्मौ *dadhmau* — he blew

Bhīṣma, the grandfather of the *Kuru* family, known for his valour, loudly let out a lion's roar and blew his conch in order to make *Duryodhana* happy.

Just to produce some kind of joy in the hearts of *Duryodhana* and the others, *Bhīṣma*, the old man of the *Kuru* family, the grandfather, roared loudly like a lion. In this verse, *Bhīṣma* is described as one who had a number of titles denoting valour, meaning that he had had many exploits in his life. *Bhīṣma* sounded the beginning of the war by blowing his conch.

Bhīṣma had accepted *Duryodhana's* challenge to the *Pāṇḍavas*. Being the commander-in-chief of *Duryodhana's* army, he was the one who had to give the command that would alert everyone to be ready. To do this, then, he blew his conch.

Once *Bhīṣma's* conch had sounded, everyone else in *Duryodhana's* army blew his conch, too, as described in the next verse.

ततः शङ्खाश्च भेर्यश्च पणवानकगोमुखाः ।

सहस्रैवाभ्यहन्यन्त स शब्दस्तुमुलोऽभवत् ॥ १३ ॥

tataḥ śaṅkhāśca bheryaśca paṇavānakagomukhāḥ

sahasāivābhyahanyanta sa śabdastumulo'bhavat Verse 13

ततः *tataḥ* — then; शङ्खाः *śaṅkhāḥ* — conches; च *ca* — and; भेर्यः *bheryaḥ* — kettle drums; च *ca* — and; पणव-आनक-गोमुखाः *paṇava-ānāka-gomukhāḥ* — tabors, trumpets, and cowhorns; सहसा एव *sahasā eva* — quite suddenly; अभ्यहन्यन्त *abhyahanyanta* — were blasted forth; सः *saḥ* — that; शब्दः *śabdaḥ* — sound; तुमुलः *tumulah* — was earth-shaking

Then, suddenly, conches, kettledrums, tabors, trumpets, and cow-horns were blasted forth and the sound was earth-shaking indeed.

All the various instruments of sound are described here. There was no music in these sounds, just loud noises coming from a variety of sound-making instruments — kettle drums, varieties of other drums, bugles, and so on.

First, there were the conches. *Bhīṣma* had to start off because he was the commander-in-chief and also the eldest. Everyone respected him. Thus, he started and everyone else followed. Then came the kettle-drums, tabors, trumpets, and cow-horns. All varieties of sounds coming from this array of instruments burst forth immediately. Even those people who had no instruments might have produced their own sounds by imitating various instruments. The effect was tremendous, earth-shaking, frightening, and something unimaginable.

When *Duryodhana's* entire army, with its many divisions, simultaneously began blowing their conches and other instruments, the whole sky was rent with this enormous noise. Given this situation, what did the *Pāṇḍavas* do? They, too, of course, followed suit, a description of which appears in the next six verses.

ततः श्वेतैर्हयैर्युक्ते महति स्यन्दने स्थितौ ।

माधवः पाण्डवश्चैव दिव्यौ शङ्खौ प्रदध्मतुः ॥ १४ ॥

tataḥ śvetairhayairyukte mahati syandane sthitau

mādhavaḥ pāṇḍavaścaiva divyau śaṅkhau pradadhmatuḥ Verse 14

ततः *tataḥ* — then; श्वेतैः हयैः *śvetaiḥ hayaiḥ* — by white horses; युक्ते *yukte* — yoked (drawn); महति स्यन्दने *mahati syandane* — in the great chariot; स्थितौ *sthitau* — seated; माधवः *mādhavaḥ* — *Kṛṣṇa*; पाण्डवः *pāṇḍavaḥ* — *Arjuna*; च *ca* and; एव *eva* — also; दिव्यौ *divyau* — celestial; शङ्खौ *śaṅkhau* — conches; प्रदध्मतुः *pradadhmatuḥ* — sounded

Then, *Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna*, seated in the great chariot drawn by white horses, also sounded their divine conches.

Having described the war cry of the *Kauravas*, *Sañjaya*, the narrator, then turned his attention to *Arjuna*, referred to here as *Pāṇḍava*, meaning *Pāṇḍu's* son. The name given to *Kṛṣṇa* in this verse is *Mādhava*, meaning the lord of wealth (*Lakṣmī*). Throughout the *Gītā*, *Kṛṣṇa* was addressed or mentioned by different names — *Hṛṣīkeśa*, *Acyuta*, *Keśava*, *Janārdana*, and so on.

Kṛṣṇa and *Arjuna* were seated in *Arjuna's* magnificent chariot that was drawn by white horses, white being a colour that could not be missed amidst horses of different colours. In response to the war cry of *Duryodhana's* army, *Arjuna* and *Kṛṣṇa* sounded

their conches, described here as *divyau*, celestial, because they were not gathered in the ordinary way.

Their names are given in the next verse:

पाञ्चजन्यं हृषीकेशो देवदत्तं धनञ्जयः ।

पौण्ड्रं दध्मौ महाशङ्खं भीमकर्मा वृकोदरः ॥ १५ ॥

pāñcajanyaṃ hr̥ṣīkeśo devadattaṃ dhanañjayaḥ

pauṇḍraṃ dadhmau mahāśaṅkhaṃ bhīmakarmā vṛkodaraḥ Verse 15

हृषीकेशः *hr̥ṣīkeśaḥ* — Lord of all the senses, *Kṛṣṇa*; पाञ्चजन्यम् *pāñcajanyaṃ* — *Pāñcajanya*; धनञ्जयः *dhanañjayaḥ* — *Arjuna*; देवदत्तम् *devadattam* — *Devadatta*; भीमकर्मा *bhīmakarmā* — the one of terrible deeds (*Bhīma*); वृकोदरः *vṛkodaraḥ* — *Vṛkodara (Bhīma)*, one who has the stomach of a wolf; महाशङ्खम् *mahāśaṅkham* — a huge conch; पौण्ड्रम् *pauṇḍram* — *Pauṇḍra*; दध्मौ *dadhmau* — sounded

Kṛṣṇa sounded the *Pāñcajanya*, *Arjuna* the *Devadatta*, and *Bhīma*, the man of terrible deeds and one with the stomach of a wolf, sounded his huge conch, *Pauṇḍra*.

Lord *Kṛṣṇa*'s conch was called *Pāñcajanya*. As we have seen, the bows also had names. *Arjuna*'s bow was known as *Gāṇḍīva*. *Dhanañjaya* was another name for *Arjuna* and *Devadatta* was the name of his conch, meaning that it was a gift from a god.

Bhīmakarmā was another name for *Bhīma*, because he was able to do the most frightening jobs, both in war and in peacetime. *Bhīma* never undertook ordinary work. For instance, when *Pāṇḍavas* were living incognito for one year, *Bhīma* was employed in the palace as a cook. In fact, he appointed himself because he wanted to be able to eat a lot of food. He excelled at cooking in large quantities, the kind of cooking wherein whole pumpkins were dropped into huge cauldrons.

There are two types of cooking mentioned in the Sanskrit literature. One type is called *bhīmapāka*, cooking for thousands of people at a time, and the other is called *nalapāka* after King *Nala* who was also a great cook, but for small numbers of people.

We might think that *Bhīma* must have been very flabby, with a huge stomach and all that goes with it. However, that was not the case. He did not resemble a Sumo wrestler at all. Here, *Bhīma* was described as one who had the stomach of a wolf, that is, so hollowed out that it almost touched the spine. A wolf is always hungry, which may be where the expression, 'keeping the wolf away from the door,' came from.

This analogy is a good example of what is meant by the word *lakṣaṇa*. The word wolf is the implied meaning of hunger. Although a wolf is always hungry and eats a lot, its stomach remains the same, ever trim. We understand, by the description of his

stomach as being like that of a wolf, that *Bhīma* was a huge man with a stomach resembling that of a wolf. Therefore, keeping hunger away was always a concern for him.

Bhīma also had very large lungs and, therefore, did not have an ordinary conch. Known as *Paunḍra*, his conch is described here as huge.

The conches of the other three *Pāṇḍavas*, *Yudhiṣṭhira*, *Nakula*, and *Sahadeva*, are mentioned in the next verse.

अनन्तविजयं राजा कुन्तीपुत्रो युधिष्ठिरः ।

नकुलः सहदेवश्च सुघोषमणिपुष्पकौ ॥ १६ ॥

anantavijayam rājā kuntīputro yudhiṣṭhiraḥ
nakulaḥ sahadevaśca sughoṣamaṇipuṣpakau

Verse 16

कुन्तीपुत्रः *kuntīputraḥ* — son of *Kuntī*; राजा युधिष्ठिरः *rājā yudhiṣṭhiraḥ* — King *Yudhiṣṭhira*; अनन्तविजयम् *anantavijayam* — the name of *Yudhiṣṭhira*'s conch; नकुलः सहदेवः च *nakulaḥ sahadevaḥ ca* — *Nakula* and *Sahadeva*; — सुघोष-मणिपुष्पकौ *sughoṣa-maṇipuṣpakau* — *Sughoṣa* and *Maṇipuṣpaka* (the names of *Nakula*'s and *Sahadeva*'s conches)

King *Yudhiṣṭhira*, the son of *Kuntī*, blew *Anantavijaya* and *Nakula* and *Sahadeva* blew *Sughoṣa* and *Maṇipuṣpaka*.

Although he was no longer the king, *Sañjaya* called *Dharmaputra* as 'King *Yudhiṣṭhira*' here. That is because, in *Sañjaya*'s mind, even though *Duryodhana* ruled the kingdom, *Yudhiṣṭhira* was the real king, albeit in exile. Because *Sañjaya* never agreed to this war and knew *Duryodhana* was making a mistake, he never missed an opportunity to point this out to *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*.

Ananta-vijaya, meaning that which produces countless victories, was the name of *Dharmaputra*'s conch. *Nakula*'s conch was called *Sughoṣa*, meaning that which produces a pleasant sound. *Maṇipuṣpaka*, that which is decorated with precious gems, was the name given to *Sahadeva*'s conch.

काश्यश्च परमेष्वासः शिखण्डी च महारथः ।

धृष्टद्युम्नो विराटश्च सात्यकिश्चापराजितः ॥ १७ ॥

kāśyaśca parameśvāsaḥ śikhaṇḍī ca mahārathaḥ
dhr̥ṣṭadyumno virāṭaśca sātyakiścāparājitaḥ

Verse 17

द्रुपदो द्रौपदेयाश्च सर्वशः पृथिवीपते ।

सौभद्रश्च महाबाहुः शङ्खान्दध्मुः पृथक् पृथक् ॥ १८ ॥

drupado draupadeyāśca sarvaśaḥ pṛthivīpate
saubhadraśca mahābāhuḥ śaṅkhāndadhmuḥ pṛthak pṛthak Verse 18

पृथिवीपते *pṛthivīpate* — Oh! King; काश्यः च परम-इष्वासः *kaśyaḥ ca parama-iṣvāsaḥ* — the king of *Kāśī*, an expert bowman; महारथः शिखण्डी *mahārathaḥ śikhaṇḍī* — *Śikhaṇḍī*, the man of great valour; च *ca* — and; धृष्टद्युम्नः *dhr̥ṣṭadyumnaḥ* — *Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna*; विराटः *virāṭaḥ* — *Virāṭa*; च *ca* — and; अपराजितः *aparājitaḥ* — unsurpassed; सात्यकिः *sātyakiḥ Sātyaki*; च *ca* — and; द्रुपदः *drupadaḥ* — *Drupada*; द्रौपदेयाः च *draupadeyāḥ ca* — and the sons of *Draupadī*; महाबाहुः सौभद्रः च *mahābāhuḥ saubhadraḥ ca* — and the mighty-armed son of *Subhadrā* (*Abhimanyu*); सर्वशः *sarvaśaḥ* — on all sides; पृथक् पृथक् *pṛthak pṛthak* — separately; शङ्खान् दध्मुः *śaṅkhān dadhmuḥ* — blew their conches

Oh! King, the king of *Kāśī*, an expert bowman, *Śikhaṇḍī*, the man of great valour, *Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna*, and *Virāṭa*, and the unsurpassed *Sātyaki*; *Drupada*, the sons of *Draupadī* and the mighty-armed son of *Subhadrā* (*Abhimanyu*), all blew their own conches.

The king of *Kāśī* was described here as one having a huge bow. *Śikhaṇḍī* was also mentioned as being another great warrior in *Arjuna's* camp. *Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna*, the first commander-in-chief of the *Pāṇḍava*-army, King *Virāṭa* and *Sātyaki*, another king, were also mentioned by name.

In these two verses, *Saṅjaya* concluded his account of those who had sounded their conches in the *Pāṇḍavas'* camp. Addressing *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* as *pṛthivīpate*, 'Oh! King,' *Saṅjaya* then pointed out *Drupada*, the father of *Draupadī*, the sons of *Draupadī* and *Abhimanyu*, the son of *Subhadrā*, *Saubhadra*, whom he described as, 'one of mighty arms,' — which is a description of *Abhimanyu's* valour, not the size of his biceps.

Together, these mighty warriors blew their conches. This sound is described in the next verse.

स घोषो धार्तराष्ट्राणां हृदयानि व्यदारयत् ।

नभश्च पृथिवीं चैव तुमुलो व्यनुनादयन् ॥ १९ ॥

sa ghoṣo dhārtarāṣṭrāṇāṃ hṛdayāni vyadārayat
nabhaśca pṛthivīm caiva tumulo vyanunādayan

Verse 19

सः *saḥ* — that; तुमुलः *tumulaḥ* — tremendous; घोषः *ghoṣaḥ* — sound; नभः *nabhaḥ* — sky; च *ca* — and; पृथिवीम् *pṛthivīm* — earth; च *ca* — and; एव *eva* — indeed; व्यनुनादयन् *vyanunādayan* — reverberating; धार्तराष्ट्राणाम् *dhārtarāṣṭrāṇām* — of the sons of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*; हृदयानि *hṛdayāni* — the hearts; व्यदारयत् *vyadārayat* — pierced

And that tremendous sound reverberating throughout the earth and sky pierced the very hearts of the sons of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*.

The sound made by the *Pāṇḍavas* in response to that made by *Duryodhana's* army was so tremendous that it pierced the very hearts of the sons of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*. The simultaneous sound reverberated and echoed, wave after wave, bouncing from the earth to the sky and back again. The magnificence of the *Pāṇḍava* war cry pervaded the entire atmosphere, creating panic in those of the opposing side. Again, *Sañjaya* drove home his point that *Dhṛtarāṣṭra's* sons were no match for the *Pāṇḍavas*.

अथ व्यवस्थितान्दृष्ट्वा धार्तराष्ट्रान् कपिध्वजः ।

प्रवृत्ते शस्त्रसम्पाते धनुरुद्यम्य पाण्डवः ॥ २० ॥

*atha vyavasthitāndṛṣṭvā dhārtarāṣṭrān kapidhvajaḥ
pravṛtte śastrasampāte dhanurudyamya pāṇḍavaḥ*

Verse 20

हृषीकेशं तदा वाक्यमिदमाह महीपते ।

hr̥ṣīkeśaṃ tadā vākyamidamāha mahīpate

महीपते *mahīpate* — Oh! King; अथ *atha* — then; व्यवस्थितान् *vyavasthitān* — standing assembled; धार्तराष्ट्रान् *dhārtarāṣṭrān* — the sons of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*; दृष्ट्वा *dṛṣṭvā* — seeing; कपिध्वजः पाण्डवः *kapidhvajaḥ pāṇḍavaḥ* — *Arjuna*, one who has *Hanumān*, on his banner; शस्त्रसम्पाते प्रवृत्ते *śastra-sampāte pravṛtte* — when the shooting about to begin; धनुः *dhanuḥ* — bow; उद्यम्य *udyamya* — having lifted; तदा *tadā* — then; हृषीकेशम् *hr̥ṣīkeśam* — to Lord *Kṛṣṇa*; इदम् *idam* — these; वाक्यम् *vākyam* — words; उवाच *uvāca* — said

Then, Oh! King, seeing the sons of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* standing assembled and the shooting about to begin, *Arjuna*, on whose banner was *Hanumān*, lifting his bow, said these words to *Kṛṣṇa*.

In this verse, *Arjuna* was called *Kapidhvaja*, the one who had a monkey on his banner. Every chariot had a flag and each important person had a flag of his own, *Arjuna's* flag had *Hanumān*, the great devotee of *Rāma*. This had come about in this manner. During their *vanavāsa*, the *Pāṇḍavas* went on a pilgrimage to the Himalayas. There on the *gandhamādana* mountain, *Draupadī* came across a very beautiful lotus with thousand petals and great fragrance. It was the *Saugandhika* flower. She was so enamoured by it that she asked *Bhīma* to go and get more of them. He went searching for them and on the way encountered Lord *Hanumān*. *Hanumān*, being the elder brother to *Bhīma*, tested him, advised him on *dharma*, etc., blessed him, and promised him that he would be present with them during the war to bless them. He offered to sit as a *dhvaja*, a flag or symbol, on top of *Arjuna's* chariot. Thus, *Arjuna* got the name of

Kapildhvaja. He said that he would lend his voice to *Bhīma* whenever *Bhīma* roared in the battlefield and make *Bhīma*'s roar more frightening to the enemies.

There is also another story not found in the *Mahābhārata*. It is said that *Arjuna* once went on a pilgrimage to *Rāmeśvaram*. When he saw the bridge that the monkeys had built for *Rāma* he thought to himself that *Rāma* need not have taken the help of the monkeys and could have built the bridge of arrows by himself. *Hanumān* who was present there, read his mind and presenting himself as a small monkey before *Arjuna*, challenged him to build such a bridge. *Arjuna* built one. But it could not take the weight of the small monkey and collapsed. By the grace of *Kṛṣṇa*, *Arjuna* recognised *Hanumān*. He then asked for his blessing and *Hanumān* promised to be present on his flag during the war.

It is said that *Hanumān* slept through most of the war. Only when *Kṛṣṇa* talked to *Arjuna* did *Hanumān* choose to listen. He found the war itself very boring, something like baseball when no one is hitting. However, when *Bhīṣma* came to fight, he would open his eyes until it was over. Then he would close them again until there was some other skirmish that interested him. This would last for a few minutes and, again, he would go back to sleep. At the end of the war, when *Bhīma* asked him how he enjoyed the battle, *Hanumān* replied that it had been nothing compared to those he had seen earlier — the fight between *Rāma* and the ten-headed *Rāvaṇa*, for example. After such episodes, watching arrows flying back and forth was like watching a game rather than a life-and-death battle! For *Hanumān*, sitting on top of *Arjuna*'s chariot in the form of a small monkey, it was nothing.

In his chariot, then, with *Hanumān* on his banner and *Kṛṣṇa* as his driver, seeing *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*'s sons in front of him, *Arjuna* picked up his bow. At the same time, he spoke to Lord *Kṛṣṇa*.

अर्जुन उवाच ।

सेनयोरुभयोर्मध्ये रथं स्थापय मेऽच्युत ॥ २१ ॥

Arjuna uvāca

senayorubhayormadhye ratham sthāpaya me'cyuta

Verse 21

यावदेतान्निरीक्षेऽहं योद्धुकामानवस्थितान् ।

कैर्मया सह योद्धव्यमस्मिन् रणसमुद्यमे ॥ २२ ॥

yāvadetanirīkṣe'haṃ yoddhukāmānavasthitān

kairmayā saha yoddhavyamasmin raṇasamudyame

Verse 22

अर्जुनः *arjunaḥ* — *Arjuna*; उवाच *uvāca* — said;

अच्युत *acyuta* — Oh! *Kṛṣṇa*; सेनयोः उभयोः मध्ये *senayoḥ ubhayoḥ madhye* — in the middle of the two armies; मे *me* — my; रथम् *ratham* — chariot; स्थापय *sthāpaya* —

(you) place; यावत् *yāvat* — so that; अहम् *aham* — I; योद्धुकामान् अवस्थितान् *yoddhukāmān avasthitān* — standing (there) desirous to fight; एतान् *etān* — those people; निरीक्षे *nirīkṣe* — can examine; अस्मिन् रणसमुद्यमे *asmin raṇa-samudyame* — at the onset of this battle; कैः सह *kaiḥ saha* — with whom; मया योद्धव्यम् *mayā yoddhavyam* — I should fight

Arjuna said:

Place my chariot, Oh! *Kṛṣṇa*, between the two armies so that, I can examine those people who stand here desirous of fighting, (and also examine) with whom I should fight at the onset of this war.

Arjuna had been waiting for this day, his D-Day, for what seemed like ages. From childhood, his cousin *Duryodhana* had done so much injustice. The sinful actions he had been piling up were directed towards the *Pāṇḍavas*, especially *Arjuna*. *Arjuna* was the object of *Duryodhana's* jealousy and hatred because he was the most beloved disciple of *Droṇa*. They had all been *Droṇa's* disciples, but *Arjuna* was the best archer. *Droṇa* naturally had a soft corner in his heart for him. *Arjuna* had not attracted this jealousy because of his boasting or pride. He was considered a most pleasant person, but *Duryodhana* had his own problems. His father was blind and was, therefore, not the king. Because of this, all one hundred brothers grew up nursing a jealousy and *Arjuna* was always its target.

Therefore, *Arjuna* had been waiting for the day when his pent-up anger could be released. Seeing these *Dhārtarāṣṭras* before him, his fury knew no bounds. He even forgot that *Kṛṣṇa* was with him, not by appointment but because of his prayerful request. *Kṛṣṇa* was seated in the front of his chariot as a driver by his own grace alone. Forgetting this, *Arjuna* commanded him to place the chariot between the two forces so that he could see who was in each camp.

Thus, *Arjuna* told *Kṛṣṇa* exactly where he wanted his chariot placed. He said, 'Place my chariot in between the two armies in such a way that I can examine these people.' Who are they who have come to the battlefield with a desire to fight on one side or the other? *Arjuna* especially wanted to see the army of his opponent in order to know with whom he should fight, once the war began.

योत्स्यमानानवेक्षेऽहं य एतेऽत्र समागताः ।

धार्तराष्ट्रस्य दुर्बुद्धेर्युद्धे प्रियचिकीर्षवः ॥ २३ ॥

yotsyamānānavekṣe'haṃ ya ete'tra samāgatāḥ

dhārtarāṣṭrasya durbuddheryuddhe priyacikīṣavaḥ

Verse 23

दुर्बुद्धेः *dur-buddheḥ* — of the one whose thinking is distorted; धार्तराष्ट्रस्य *dhārtarāṣṭrasya* — of the son of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*; युद्धे *yuddhe* — in the battle; प्रिय-

चिकीर्षवः *priya-cikīrṣavaḥ* — those who want to please; ये एते *ye ete* —those who; समागताः *samāgatāḥ* — have gathered; अत्र *atra* — here; योत्स्यमानान् *yotsyamānān* — with the intention of fighting; अहम् *aham* — I; अवेक्षे *avekṣe* — want to see

I want to see those who have gathered here with the intention of fighting, wanting to please the son of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*, the one whose thinking is distorted.

Arjuna wanted to see all those who had gathered there for the sake of pleasing *Duryodhana*. Therefore, he asked *Kṛṣṇa* to place his chariot in such a spot that he could do so. *Kṛṣṇa*, of course, being a good driver, did as he was told.

Arjuna's use of the word 'my' with reference to the chariot indicated his frame of mind. He was a flame of fury. *Kṛṣṇa* was only a driver of his chariot.

Saṅjaya then summarised this scene for *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*.

सञ्जय उवाच ।

एवमुक्तो हृषीकेशो गुडाकेशेन भारत ।

सेनयोरुभयोर्मध्ये स्थापयित्वा रथोत्तमम् ॥ २४ ॥

saṅjaya uvāca

evamukto hr̥ṣīkeśo guḍākeśena bhārata

senayorubhayormadhye sthāpayitvā rathottamam

Verse 24

भीष्मद्रोणप्रमुखतः सर्वेषां च महीक्षिताम् ।

उवाच पार्थ पश्यैतान् समवेतान्कुरूनिति ॥ २५ ॥

bhīṣmadroṇapramukhataḥ sarveṣāṃ ca mahīkṣitām

uvāca pārtha paśyaitān samavetānkurūniti

Verse 25

सञ्जयः *saṅjayaḥ* — *Saṅjaya*; उवाच *uvāca* — said;

भारत *bhārata* — Oh! King of the *Bharata* lineage, *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*; गुडाकेशेन *guḍākeśena* — by *Arjuna*; एवम् उक्तः *evam uktaḥ* — thus ordered; हृषीकेशः *hr̥ṣīkeśaḥ* — Lord *Kṛṣṇa*; सेनयोः उभयोः मध्ये *senayoḥ ubhayoḥ madhye* — in the middle of the two armies; भीष्म-द्रोण-प्रमुखतः *bhīṣma-droṇa-pramukhataḥ* — right in front of *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa*; च *ca* — and; सर्वेषाम् *sarveṣām* — of all; महीक्षिताम् *mahīkṣitām* — (of the) rulers; रथ-उत्तमम् *ratha-uttamam* — the best of chariots; स्थापयित्वा *sthāpayitvā* — having placed; पार्थ *pārtha* — Oh! *Arjuna*; समवेतान् *samavetān* — who have gathered here; एतान् *etān* — these; कुरून् *kurūn* — the *Kauravas*; पश्य *paśya* — please look at; इति *iti* — thus; उवाच *uvāca* — he said

Saṅjaya said :

Oh! King, thus ordered by *Arjuna*, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* placed the best of chariots in the middle of the two armies, right in front of *Bhīṣma*, *Droṇa*, and all the rulers and spoke thus; ‘*Arjuna*, please look at these *Kauravas* who have gathered here.’

Addressing *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* as *Bhārata*, *Saṅjaya* told him that *Kṛṣṇa* thus ordered by *Arjuna*, placed the great chariot between the two armies. *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa* were the people with whom *Arjuna* would have to fight. So, naturally, *Kṛṣṇa* placed the chariot so that *Arjuna* could see them. These two men were not only important for the opposing army and for *Duryodhana*, but being respected by the *Pāṇḍavas*, they were important to them, also.

Droṇa, was *Arjuna*’s most revered teacher. *Bhīṣma* was the grand old man of the family and the most respected person. *Arjuna* and *Bhīṣma* shared a very special relationship. Both of them were, therefore, important people to the people on both the sides of this war. Both were considered invincible. Thus, when *Kṛṣṇa* drove the chariot between the two armies, he placed it in front of *Bhīṣma*, *Droṇa*, and the other important kings, so that *Arjuna* could see these warriors.

The place chosen by *Kṛṣṇa* was the best vantage point possible, a place from where *Arjuna* could see everyone on both sides. *Arjuna* was able to see everyone, just as he had asked.

This is the first time *Kṛṣṇa* spoke in the *Gītā*. Although the verse does not begin with ‘*śrībhagavān uvāca* — the Lord said,’ the ‘*itī*’ at the end of the verse indicates a quotation.

‘*Arjuna*, please look at these *Kurus* who have gathered here,’ *Kṛṣṇa* said.

ARJUNA SEES ONLY KITH AND KIN

Now that *Arjuna* could see those who had come to fight on both sides clearly, we shall see what happened to him.

तत्रापश्यत् स्थितान् पार्थः पितृनथ पितामहान् ।

आचार्यान् मातुलान् भ्रातृन् पुत्रान् पौत्रान् सखींस्तथा ॥ २६ ॥

tatrāpaśyat sthitān pārthaḥ pitṛnatha pitāmahān
ācāryān mātulān bhrātṛn putrān pautrān sakhīṃstathā

Verse 26

श्वशुरान् सुहृदश्चैव सेनयोरुभयोरपि ।

śvaśurān suhṛdaścaiva senayorubhayorapi

अथ *atha* — then; सेनयोः उभयोः अपि *senayoḥ ubhayoḥ api* — on both sides of the two armies; स्थितान् *sthitān* — standing; पितृन् *pitṛn* — paternal elders; पितामहान् *pitāmahān* — grandfathers; आचार्यान् *ācāryān* — teachers; मातुलान् *mātulān* — uncles; भ्रातृन् *bhrātṛn* — brothers; पुत्रान् *putrān* — sons; पौत्रान् *pautrān* — grandsons; सखीन् *sakhīn* — comrades; तथा *tathā* — and also; श्वशुरान् *śvaśurān* — fathers-in-law; सुहृदः च एव *suhṛdaḥ ca eva* — and friends too; पार्थः *pārthaḥ* — *Arjuna*; तत्र *tatra* — there; अपश्यत् *apaśyat* — saw

Then, *Arjuna* saw standing there on both sides of the two armies, paternal elders, grandfathers, teachers, uncles, brothers, sons, grandsons, and fathers-in-law and friends too.

The word *kurūn* in the previous verse covered the *Kauravas* on both sides, all of whom were members of the *Kuru* clan. Looking around him *Arjuna* saw every one of them — all elders connected to him from the paternal and maternal sides, parents, uncles, brothers, sons, and grandsons — all directly or indirectly related. In addition to these blood relatives, there were others too — such as fathers-in-law, friends etc.

Arjuna also saw friends, in-laws on both sides, and those people who help others without having been introduced or being connected in any way, *suhṛds*. Everywhere he looked he saw only relatives, friends, and good people.

Generally, such people would be on your side and those against whom you are fighting would be enemies, invaders, and outsiders. Here, however, *Arjuna* found on both sides only his own people. This was his problem, which was not an ordinary one. Whichever way he turned, he saw only his own brothers, uncles, and cousins. This problem represented an important situation for *Arjuna* and was the reason for the *Gītā* to come about. Recognizing that everyone who had come to fight was related to him *Arjuna* was overwhelmed with compassion.

तान्समीक्ष्य स कौन्तेयः सर्वान् बन्धूनवस्थितान् ॥ २७ ॥

tānsamīkṣya sa kaunteyaḥ sarvān bandhūnavasthitān

Verse 27

कृपया परयाविष्टो विषीदन्निदमब्रवीत् ।

kṛpayā parayāviṣṭo viṣīdanṇidamabravit

सः कौन्तेयः *saḥ kaunteyaḥ* — son of *Kuntī* (*Arjuna*); अवस्थितान् तान् सर्वान् *avasthitān tān sarvān* — all those who had assembled; बन्धून् *bandhūn* — relatives; समीक्ष्य *samīkṣya* — seeing clearly; परया कृपया *parayā kṛpayā* — by deep compassion; आविष्टः *āviṣṭaḥ* — (being) seized; विषीदन् *viṣīdan* — being sad; इदम् *idam* — this; अब्रवीत् *abravit* — he said

Then he, the son of *Kuntī* (*Arjuna*), seeing clearly all the assembled relatives, seized by deep compassion, sorrowfully said these (words). *Arjuna's* compassion was born of distress because what was going to happen was destruction and all the people who would be involved were his own people.

Therefore, his compassion was too much for him. This was not some small matter that could be dismissed in the interests of practicality, simply because war had been declared.

When such thoughts of compassion come, they are generally dismissed by people. If we know something is not proper, we can usually say, 'What has to be done has to be done.' The battlefield was not the place for compassion. *Arjuna* could not afford to be compassionate here. He had to fight! In the same way, a boxer cannot afford to be compassionate towards his opponent. If, because his opponent is bleeding, the boxer's compassion prevents him from hitting him, the boxer himself will be knocked down. Certainly, seeing his opponent's blood, the thought will come that this is not the proper time or place to hit him. But, then, another thought comes — 'This is exactly the right time and place to strike.' Instinct will tell him this — some killer instinct. Any mercy or compassion is quickly dismissed in such situations.

This is what is meant by *kṛpā* — a compassion that is dismissible. However, when you cannot dismiss it, it becomes *parā kṛpā*, overwhelming compassion. *Arjuna* could not do anything about his compassion, which was born of distress because of the impending destruction about to befall all of his people.

अर्जुन उवाच ।

दृष्ट्वेमं स्वजनं कृष्ण युयुत्सुं समुपस्थितम् ॥ २८ ॥

Arjuna uvāca

dṛṣṭvemaṃ svajanaṃ kṛṣṇa yuyutsum samupasthitam

Verse 28

सीदन्ति मम गात्राणि मुखं च परिशुष्यति ।

वेपथुश्च शरीरे मे रोमहर्षश्च जायते ॥ २९ ॥

sīdanti mama gātrāṇi mukhaṃ ca pariśuṣyati

vepathuśca śarīre me romaharṣaśca jāyate

Verse 29

अर्जुनः *arjunaḥ* — *Arjuna*; उवाच *uvāca* — said;

कृष्ण *kṛṣṇa* — Oh! *Kṛṣṇa*; युयुत्सुम् *yuyutsum* — desirous to fight; समुपस्थितम् *samupasthitam* — well stationed in battle position; इमम् *imam* — these; स्वजनम् *svajanam* — my own people; दृष्ट्वा *dṛṣṭvā* — seeing; मम *mama* — my; गात्राणि *gātrāṇi* — limbs; सीदन्ति *sīdanti* — have lost all their strength; मुखम् *mukham* — mouth; च *ca*

— and; परिशुष्यति *pariśuṣyati* — has gone dry; मे *me* — my; शरीरे *śarīre* — in the body; वेपथुः *vepathuh* — trembling; रोमहर्षः *roma-harṣaḥ* — horripilation (hair standing on the end); च *ca* — and; जायते *jāyate* — has happened

Arjuna said:

Looking at these people, my own people, well stationed in battle position and desirous to fight, my limbs have lost all their strength, my mouth has gone dry, my body is trembling, and the hairs on my body are standing on end.

Thus, under the spell of such a deep compassion, he said to *Kṛṣṇa*, ‘Looking at my own people who have come with a desire to fight, each one very well prepared and well stationed, my limbs have lost their strength.’

Arjuna was so overwhelmed by the sight of his own people in both armies that his limbs gave in. They seemed to have lost interest in performing their functions. His hands did not want to lift or move in any way. It was the same with his legs. His mouth went dry and his whole body was trembling. His arms and legs were shaking and the hairs on his body were standing on end.

Any intense emotion can trigger these physical reactions. By their description, we can understand *Arjuna’s* condition. He himself explained it to *Kṛṣṇa* in this verse. *Kṛṣṇa*, still holding the chariot steady, looked over his shoulder at *Arjuna*, listening to him. Later, in the *Gītā*, when the real dialogue between them began, he altered his position and turned around completely to face *Arjuna*.

In the next verse, *Arjuna* continued describing his physical symptoms, telling *Kṛṣṇa* that it was not possible for him to stand, let alone fight.

गाण्डीवं स्रंसते हस्तात् त्वक्चैव परिदह्यते ।

न च शक्रोम्यवस्थातुं भ्रमतीव च मे मनः ॥ ३० ॥

gāṇḍīvaṃ sraṃsate hastāt tvakcaiva paridahyate

na ca śaknomyavasthātum bhramatīva ca me manaḥ

Verse 30

हस्तात् *hastāt* — from (my) hand; गाण्डीवम् *gāṇḍīvam* — *Gāṇḍīva* (the bow of *Arjuna*); स्रंसते *sraṃsate* — slips; त्वक् *tvak* — skin; च *ca* — and; एव *eva* — indeed; परिदह्यते *paridahyate* — burns; न च शक्रोमि अवस्थातुम् *na ca śaknomyavasthātum* — I am not able to stand; मे *me* — my; मनः *manaḥ* — mind; च *ca* — and; भ्रमति इव *bhramati iva* — totally confused, as it were

The bow, *Gāṇḍīva*, slips from my hand and my skin also burns. I cannot stand up and my mind is totally confused as it were.

Arjuna's condition was such that his bow, known as *Gāṇḍīva*, was about to slip out of his hand. His entire body felt as though it was burning and it was not even possible for him to stand properly in the chariot. He said to *Kṛṣṇa*, 'it is not possible for me to stand, let alone fight.' He also thought he was losing his mind.

As though this was not enough, he saw ill omens everywhere:

निमित्तानि च पश्यामि विपरीतानि केशव ।

न च श्रेयोऽनुपश्यामि हत्वा स्वजनमाहवे ॥ ३१ ॥

nimittāni ca paśyāmi viparītāni keśava

na ca śreyo'nupaśyāmi hatvā svajanamāhave

Verse 31

केशव *keśava* — Oh! *Keśava*; विपरीतानि *viparītāni* — bad; निमित्तानि *nimittāni* — omens; च *ca* — and; पश्यामि *paśyāmi* — I see; आहवे *āhave* — in the battle; स्वजनम् *svajanam* — one's own people; हत्वा *hatvā* — killing; श्रेयः *śreyaḥ* — any good; च *ca* — and; न *na* — not; अनुपश्यामि *anupaśyāmi* — I see

Oh! *Keśava*, I see bad omens and I see no good in killing one's own people in this battle.

Seeing his own people standing there on both sides, *Arjuna* could see nothing good coming out of this battle. His own people would be destroyed — people like *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa*. Even *Duryodhana* was his cousin, after all. All the omens he saw, both psychological and physical, indicated to him an unpleasant outcome.

Further, he said:

न काङ्क्षे विजयं कृष्ण न च राज्यं सुखानि च ।

किं नो राज्येन गोविन्द किं भोगैर्जीवितेन वा ॥ ३२ ॥

na kāṅkṣe vijayaṃ kṛṣṇa na ca rājyaṃ sukhāni ca

kiṃ no rājyena govinda kiṃ bhogairjīvitena vā

Verse 32

कृष्ण *kṛṣṇa* — Oh! *Kṛṣṇa*; विजयम् *vijayam* — victory; न काङ्क्षे *na kāṅkṣe* — I do not want; न च राज्यम् *na ca rājyam* — and not even the kingdom; सुखानि च *sukhāni ca* — nor comforts; गोविन्द *govinda* — Oh! *Kṛṣṇa*; नः *naḥ* — for us; राज्येन *rājyena* — with a kingdom; किम् *kim* — what is (the use); भोगैः *bhogaiḥ* — with enjoyments; जीवितेन *jīvitena* — by living; वा *vā* — even; किम् *kim* — what is (the use)

Oh! *Kṛṣṇa*, I want neither victory, nor the kingdom, nor comforts. Oh! *Govinda*, of what use are a kingdom, enjoyments, or even life to us?

Because he knew he would not be happy when this battle was over, *Arjuna* had no more desire for victory. Since *Arjuna* did not want victory, he would not get the kingdom back from *Duryodhana*. If he wanted the kingdom, victory was important. But *Arjuna* said he did not want the kingdom also. Not having the kingdom meant that he would have to suffer. He would have to go back to the forest and perhaps live the life of an ascetic, living on roots and so on. *Duryodhana* would never allow him to stay in his kingdom. He had already made that clear by refusing to give him even a house.

Was *Arjuna* ready to return to a life of deprivation without the comforts the kingdom would provide? He had just said he did not want victory, the kingdom, or comforts either. If there were no victory, there would be no kingdom, neither of which *Arjuna* wanted now. Without a kingdom, there would be no comfort, which also he no longer wanted. What did he want? He no longer cared. ‘What do we get out of a kingdom?’ he asked. ‘What do we get from all these enjoyments? Even by living, what do we get? Nothing.’

By destroying his own people, what would he get? If destroying them would give him a kingdom, what kind of a kingdom would it be? *Arjuna* did not think it would be a sane bargain at all. Even if he commanded enjoyments, how could he enjoy them with the nightmares he would have because of having destroyed all of these people?

In this way, *Arjuna* argued that victory, a kingdom, and even life itself were useless because:

येषामर्थे काङ्क्षितं नो राज्यं भोगाः सुखानि च ।

त इमेऽवस्थिता युद्धे प्राणांस्त्यक्त्वा धनानि च ॥ ३३ ॥

yeṣāmarthe kāṅkṣitam no rājyaṃ bhogāḥ sukhāni ca
ta ime'vasthitā yuddhe prāṇāṃstyaktvā dhanāni ca

Verse 33

येषाम् अर्थे *yeṣām arthe* — for whose sake; नः *naḥ* — by us; राज्यम् *rājyam* — kingdom; काङ्क्षितम् *kāṅkṣitam* — was desired; भोगाः *bhogāḥ* — enjoyments; सुखानि *sukhāni* — pleasures; च *ca* — and; ते इमे *te ime* — those same people; प्राणान् *prāṇān* — life; धनानि *dhanāni* — wealth; च *ca* — and; त्यक्त्वा *tyaktvā* — abandoning; युद्धे *yuddhe* — in the battle; अवस्थिताः *avasthitāḥ* — have assembled

Those for whose sake the kingdom, enjoyments, and pleasures were desired by us, they have assembled in battle, having given up their wealth and their lives.

Arjuna's thinking was that a kingdom and the enjoyments that go with it had only been desired by him for the sake of the very people whom he would be destroying — those who had come ready to die in the battle. To win the battle, he would have to destroy *Duryodhana's* entire army. There was no such thing in those days as retreat in a

battle. Even if it were possible, *Duryodhana* would never have done so. He was a king and a despot at that. He would never give up. If anyone else ran away, he would have shot him from behind. There was, therefore, no way for these people to survive this battle.

Many of those who were going to fight on *Arjuna's* side would definitely have to die. When *Bhīṣma* fought, he did not throw flowers. Nor would there be garlands strewn about when *Droṇa* was fighting. People would die by the thousands and, thus, the battle became meaningless for *Arjuna*. All these people had given up their wealth, including their wives and children, to come and fight. *Arjuna* could make no sense of it all.

आचार्याः पितरः पुत्रास्तथैव च पितामहाः ।

मातुलाः श्वशुराः पौत्राः श्यालाः सम्बन्धिनस्तथा ॥ ३४ ॥

ācāryāḥ pitarāḥ putrāstathaiva ca pitāmahāḥ
mātulāḥ śvaśurāḥ pautrāḥ śyālāḥ sambandhinastathā

Verse 34

(ते इमे *te ime* — these same people are); आचार्याः *ācāryāḥ* — teachers; पितरः *pitarāḥ* — paternal uncles; पुत्राः *putrāḥ* — sons; तथा एव च *tathā eva ca* — and so too; पितामहाः *pitāmahāḥ* — the grandfathers (like *Bhīṣma*); मातुलाः *mātulāḥ* — maternal uncles; श्वशुराः *śvaśurāḥ* — fathers-in-law; पौत्राः *pautrāḥ* — grandsons; श्यालाः *śyālāḥ* — brothers-in-law; तथा *tathā* — so too; सम्बन्धिनः *sambandhināḥ* — other relatives, friends, and so on

These people are teachers, paternal uncles, sons and also grandfathers, maternal uncles, in-laws, grandsons, cousins, other relatives, friends, and so on.

Wherever *Arjuna* looked, he saw only people known to him — his teachers, grandfathers, sons, uncles, cousins, in-laws, and friends. These were the people for whose sake he had desired the kingdom. If they were destroyed, what use would the kingdom be to him?

एतान्न हन्तुमिच्छामि घ्नतोऽपि मधुसूदन ।

अपि त्रैलोक्यराज्यस्य हेतोः किं नु महीकृते ॥ ३५ ॥

etānna hantumicchāmi ghnato'pi madhusūdana
api trailokyarājyasya hetoḥ kiṃ nu mahīkṛte

Verse 35

मधुसूदन *madhusūdana* — Oh! *Kṛṣṇa*, the one who destroyed the demon named *Madhu*; एतान् *etān* — these; घ्नतः *ghnataḥ* — who are going to kill (me); न इच्छामि *na icchāmi* — I do not want; हन्तुम् *hantum* — to kill; अपि *api* — even; त्रैलोक्य-राज्यस्य हेतोः

trailokya-rājyasya hetoḥ — for the sake of ruling over the three worlds; किम् नु *kim nu* — much less; महीकृते *mahīkṛte* — for this kingdom on earth

Oh! *Kṛṣṇa*, I do not want to kill these (people) who are about to kill me — not even for the sake of ruling over the three worlds, much less for this kingdom on earth.

‘I do not want to destroy them, even if they will kill me,’ *Arjuna* told *Kṛṣṇa*, addressing him as *Madhu-sūdāna*, meaning the one who destroyed the demon *Madhu*. Even to rule over the three worlds, even if heaven were to come to him because of this battle, *Arjuna* did not want to see his people slain. How, then, could he justify their destruction for this small kingdom, which could be crossed on horseback in a matter of days?

ARJUNA LOSES INTEREST IN THE WAR

Arjuna was convinced that it would serve no useful purpose to continue this fight because he had seen that all the people involved on both sides were his own people. Because they were dear to him, their destruction was not going to make him happy. Even from the standpoint of *dr̥ṣṭa-phala*, the immediate results, such as gaining the kingdom, and the pleasures and comforts that went with it, he did not consider the cost to be worth while.

We have seen that he no longer cared for victory, much less the kingdom. Nor did he care about the privations he would have to undergo not having the kingdom. What kind of happiness would he have, *Arjuna* argued, if he destroyed the very people he cared for? For him, then, there would be no *dr̥ṣṭa-phala*. Nor did he see any *adr̥ṣṭa*.

The *Pāṇḍavas* were supposed to be the protectors of law and order. In a battle based on *dharma*, they naturally had to see that *Duryodhana* paid for what he had done. According to this law, if a man who was supposed to protect the *dharma* was derelict in his duty, *pāpa* would definitely come to him. *Pāpa* has the sense of sin, as we understand it. Any unbecoming action, any action which is not proper, will incur sin.

Arjuna thought that by destroying his own people, he would incur only sin. Such an action would bring no *puṇya* to him, only *pāpa*. Therefore, no good would possibly come of it. So far, his argument had been based on *dr̥ṣṭa-phala*, seen results. He, then, began to argue on the basis of *adr̥ṣṭa-phala*, unseen results.

निहत्य धार्तराष्ट्रान्नः का प्रीतिः स्याज्जनार्दन ।

पापमेवाश्रयेदस्मान् हत्वैतानाततायिनः ॥ ३६ ॥

nihatya dhārtarāṣṭrānnaḥ kā prītiḥ syājjanārdana
pāpamevāśrayedasmān hatvaitānātāyinaḥ

Verse 36

जनार्दन *janārdana* — Oh! *Kṛṣṇa* (so called because he chastised those given to improper ways); धार्तराष्ट्रान् *dhārtarāṣṭrān* — sons of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*; निहत्य *nihatya* — destroying; नः *naḥ* — for us; का *kā* — what kind of; प्रीतिः *prītiḥ* — satisfaction; स्यात् *syāt* — would there be; एतान् *etān* — these; आततायिनः *ātatāyinaḥ* — wrongdoers; हत्वा *hatvā* — destroying; पापम् *papam* — sin; एव *eva* — only; अस्मान् आश्रयेत् *asmān āśrayet* — would come to us

Oh! *Kṛṣṇa*, what kind of satisfaction would there be for us by destroying these sons of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*? Only sin would come to us by destroying these wrongdoers.

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* was addressed as *Jana-ardana*, the one who chastises those given to improper ways. Previously, *Arjuna* addressed *Kṛṣṇa* as *Madhu-sūdana*, the destroyer of *Madhu*. Both names indicate that *Kṛṣṇa* is one who did not allow anything wrong to happen in his presence.

Arjuna was making his case to *Kṛṣṇa*. ‘What kind of satisfaction will we have? None at all.’ The people in whose presence the victors would be happy were the very people who would be fighting against each other. There would be no positive *dr̥ṣṭa-phala* with all of them dead. No visible result would accrue to the victors. On the other hand, he believed that there would definitely be *pāpa*, the invisible result accrued to the doer of an improper action.

Any action produces a two-fold result, *dr̥ṣṭa-phala* and *adr̥ṣṭa-phala*, as we have seen. With reference to a meritorious action, *dr̥ṣṭa-phala* is any satisfaction you receive now and *adr̥ṣṭa-phala* is the *puṇya* that you receive, which will later yield comfortable situations. For instance, when you have saved a person's life, the *dr̥ṣṭa-phala* is his or her thankfulness and gratitude to you and the satisfaction of having done something good. For the same action, there is also some *adr̥ṣṭa-phala*, *puṇya*, accrued to you. On the other hand, a wrong action, such as destroying someone, produces uncomfortable situations now, due to *dr̥ṣṭa-phala*, and again later due to *adr̥ṣṭa-phala*, *pāpa*.

WHO IS AN ĒTATĒYĪ?

Therefore, *Arjuna* said here, ‘*Pāpa* will certainly come to us if we destroy these people.’ In his mind, there would be no *puṇya* and no satisfaction either, even though the *Dhārtarāṣṭras* were *ātatāyīs*, wrongdoers.

An *ātatāyī* is one who has committed any or all of the six kinds of wrongdoing.¹ An arsonist, one that sets fires, is called an *agnida*. One who commits the crime of

¹ अग्निदो गरदश्चैव शस्त्रोन्मत्तो धनापहः ।
क्षेत्रदारहरश्चैतान् षड् विद्यादाततायिनः ॥

poisoning someone is called *garada*. A person who comes after you with a weapon in hand, when you are unarmed is a *śastronmatta* and a *dhanāpaha* is one who robs others of their wealth. A *kṣetrahara* is one who encroaches upon or occupies someone else's land. In spite of calling them by a respectable word, 'pioneer,' such people are, in fact, *kṣetraharas*. And one who kidnaps or grabs another man's wife is called a *dārahara*.

Duryodhana had committed all six kinds of crime. He had set fire to the wax house in which the *Pāṇḍavas* were staying. Only because of some timely inside information were the *Pāṇḍavas* able to escape. He had also poisoned *Bhīma* when he was young. He had robbed the *Pāṇḍavas* of their wealth, had occupied their kingdom, and would not give them so much as a small piece of land. He had tried to take away their wife, *Draupadī*.

Those who have committed any of these crimes are all called *ātatāyīs*. The law of the land gives them capital punishment. For these types of crimes, then, there is no court of appeal. *Duryodhana*, being an *ātatāyī*, deserved punishment, according to the *dharma-śāstra*.

In the empirical world, *dharma-śāstra* rules. Anyone going against this code incurs sin and is necessarily punishable. Even so, knowing all of this, *Arjuna* did not think that they would gain *puṇya* by destroying these wrongdoers. He was certain that only *pāpa* would be the result for reasons that he would explain to *Kṛṣṇa* later. *Arjuna* thought that by destroying his own people, he would be creating great confusion in the society. Because they would be the perpetrators, and would be the cause of this confusion, no law of *dharma* would excuse them. They would incur only *pāpa* in the end although *Duryodhana* was an *ātatāyī*. This was *Arjuna's* thinking. It was not correct, but that was how he saw it. His affection for these people caused confusion in his own mind and, he concluded.

तस्मान्नाहं वयं हन्तुं धार्तराष्ट्रान् स्वबान्धवान् ।

स्वजनं हि कथं हत्वा सुखिनः स्याम माधव ॥ ३७ ॥

tasmā nnārḥā vayaṃ hantum dhārtarāṣṭrān svabāndhavān

svajanaṃ hi kathaṃ hatvā sukhinaḥ syāma mādharma

Verse 37

तस्मात् *tasmāt* — therefore; स्वबान्धवान् *svabāndhavān* — one's own relatives; धार्तराष्ट्रान् *dhārtarāṣṭrān* — the sons of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*; हन्तुम् *hantum* — to kill; वयम् *vayam* — we; न अर्हाः *na arhāḥ* — not qualified; माधव *mādharma* — Oh! *Kṛṣṇa*; स्वजनम्

*agnido garadaścaiva śastronmatto dhanāpahaḥ
kṣetradāraharaścaitān ṣaḍ vidyādātātāyinaḥ*

svajanam — one's own people; हत्वा *hatvā* — having destroyed; कथम् हि *katham hi* — how indeed; सुखिनः *sukhinaḥ* — happy people; स्याम *syāma* — we would become

Therefore, we should not kill our own relatives, the sons of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*. Having destroyed one's own people, Oh! *Mādhava*, how would we be happy?

Because they would incur only *pāpa* by destroying their own relatives, *Arjuna* concluded that they were not qualified to kill the sons of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* and the others. 'Oh! *Kṛṣṇa*' he asked, 'How can we be happy by destroying our own people? Happiness under such circumstances would be impossible. With our own people gone, there will not be anyone with whom we can celebrate our victory.'

Calling him *Madhusūdana* and *Janārdana*, *Arjuna* told *Kṛṣṇa* that these were all people, whom he did not want to kill. 'You are *Madhusūdana* and *Janārdana*; you chastise those who are wrongdoers and you destroy demons, all of whom are people unknown to you. My situation is different. These are all my own people.' *Arjuna* thereby expressed that the kind of problem he had to deal with was entirely different from the ones *Kṛṣṇa* had faced.

Then he continued:

यद्यप्येते न पश्यन्ति लोभोपहतचेतसः ।

कुलक्षयकृतं दोषं मित्रद्रोहे च पातकम् ॥ ३८ ॥

yadyapyete na paśyanti lobhopahatacetasah

kulakṣayakṛtaṃ doṣaṃ mitradrohe ca pātakam

Verse 38

कथं न ज्ञेयमस्माभिः पापादस्मान्निर्वर्तितुम् ।

कुलक्षयकृतं दोषं प्रपश्यद्भिर्जनार्दन ॥ ३९ ॥

kathaṃ na jñeyamasmābhiḥ pāpādashmānnivartitum

kulakṣayakṛtaṃ doṣaṃ prapaśyadbhirjanārdana

Verse 39

यदि अपि *yadi api* — even though; एते *ete* — these, लोभ-उपहत-चेतसः *lobha-upahata-cetasah* — people whose minds are destroyed by greed; कुल-क्षय-कृतम् *kula-kṣaya-kṛtam* — born of the destruction of one's family; दोषम् *doṣam* — defect (sin); मित्रद्रोहे *mitradrohe* — in the betrayal of one's friends; च *ca* — and; पातकम् *pātakam* — sin; न पश्यन्ति *na paśyanti* — do not see; जनार्दन *janārdana* — Oh! *Kṛṣṇa*; कुल-क्षय-कृतम् *kula-kṣaya-kṛtam* — born of the destruction of the family; दोषम् *doṣam* — sin; प्रपश्यद्भिः *prapaśyadbhiḥ* — by those who see very clearly; अस्माभिः *asmābhiḥ* — by us; अस्मात् *asmāt* — from this sin; निर्वर्तितुम् *nivartitum* — to withdraw; कथम् न ज्ञेयम् *katham na jñeyam* — how is it not known

Although these people, whose minds are destroyed by greed, do not see the defect in the destruction of one's family and the sins of betraying one's friends, Oh! *Janārdana*, how can it not be known by us, who know that sin is born of the destruction of the family, to withdraw from this sin?

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* may have said, '*Arjuna*, this *svajana* -argument — that is, “how can I fight against my own people ”— is applicable to *Duryodhana* also, is it not? You are not the only one with this problem. *Duryodhana*, however, does not consider you one of his people. He considers you an enemy. He will not even give you a square inch of land in this kingdom. He does not look upon you as a *svajana*, as someone who is related to him. He looks upon you as someone who has come from another planet as it were, as an invader. Given the situation, what is this *svajana* -argument really all about? It is meaningless because *Duryodhana* does not feel the same way. If he did, there would be no war. You gave him every chance. You were ready to accept even a village, but he was not willing to give you one. Therefore, where is the problem? It is a simple question of *dharma* and *adharma*, right and wrong. You are supposed to be the protector of what is right, the protector of law and order, and if you allow *adharma* to continue, then it is a dereliction of duty on your part.'

This could very well have been *Kṛṣṇa's* argument. *Arjuna* expected it and this verse was his answer for it. He told *Kṛṣṇa* that these people were unable to tell the difference between right and wrong because their minds had been destroyed by greed. *Duryodhana* was not a bad man; greed was the problem. Because of greed, his discrimination, his commitment to right and wrong, was lost. He was, therefore, unable to see what great destruction would be wrought by this war and what a crime it would be to destroy one's own family. Nor could he see the sin he would incur by *droha*, cheating and deceiving his own friends. The word *mitra*, here, means one's cousins and other relatives, as well as friends. An example of *droha* is this. You ask a friend, whom you trust, to keep some money for you. And, when you claim it back, if he or she says, 'What money?' then, that is betrayal. The betrayal of Christ by Judas is also an example of *droha*.

The reason these people did not see was not because they were uneducated. In fact, they were all educated people. However, education is not required in order to differentiate right from wrong. Even uneducated people know the difference. The people *Arjuna* was referring to have been well brought up. They were not raised in criminal colonies. As children, they had lived in palaces with tutors. Yet, they did not see because they were possessed by greed. Their faculty of discrimination, their minds, had been robbed away by greed.

Greed is capable of anything. You may be highly educated, but greed overpowers all education. It robs away one's understanding of right and wrong and one's capacity to

interpret them. That being the case, the education only helps you justify your actions with cogent arguments. Here, too, the *Dhārtarāṣṭras* used every argument they knew to justify what they wanted to do because of greed. This was why they could not see the destruction they were bringing about.

‘But we do see the *pāpa* that is going to be incurred by us,’ *Arjuna* told *Kṛṣṇa*. ‘Recognizing this, how can we not turn away from this great sin?’ *Arjuna* wanted to know. How would they possibly consider this particular situation as anything other than one they should withdraw from?

Anticipating yet another argument from *Kṛṣṇa* — that, if the family had to be sacrificed, in order to protect *dharma*, then it should be done — *Arjuna* continued:

कुलक्षये प्रणश्यन्ति कुलधर्माः सनातनाः ।

धर्मे नष्टे कुलं कृत्स्नमधर्मोऽभिभवत्युत ॥ ४० ॥

kulakṣaye praṇaśyanti kuladharmāḥ sanātanāḥ

dharme naṣṭe kulam kṛtsnamadharmo'bhībhavatyuta

Verse 40

कुलक्षये *kulakṣaye* — when the family is destroyed; सनातनाः *sanātanāḥ* — the ancient; कुलधर्माः *kuladharmāḥ* — the *dharmas* of the family; प्रणश्यन्ति *praṇaśyanti* — they die; धर्मे नष्टे *dharme naṣṭe* — when the *dharma* is lost; अधर्मः *adharmāḥ* — *adharma*; कुलम् कृत्स्नम् *kulam kṛtsnam* — the entire family; अभिभवति उत *abhibhavati uta* — will it not overwhelm?

When the family is destroyed, the ancient *dharmas* of the family die.

When the *dharma* is lost, will not *adharma* overwhelm the entire family?

Arjuna felt that if the destruction of the clan were to be looked at in this way, the problem would always remain because there would be no one to establish *dharma* and *adharma*. Therefore, *Arjuna* did not agree with the argument that *dharma* was to be protected at the cost of destroying one's relatives. This verse reveals how he further substantiated his argument.

ARJUNA FEELS WAR WOULD DESTROY DHARMA

When important members of a family are destroyed, everything to be done by that particular family will also be destroyed. This is because *dharma* cannot be protected unless the *dharmī*, the one who follows the *dharma*, is protected. *Dharma* cannot be protected in a bottle! *Dharma* is not like historical scrolls that can be stored for posterity so that, even if a whole civilisation is destroyed, a future generation can find the scrolls and know the history. *Dharma* cannot be preserved by writing it up and keeping it

somewhere. Only when the person following the *dharma* is protected, is *dharma* itself protected. Just as the ‘pot-ness’ of a pot cannot be retained if a pot is destroyed, so too, *dharma* cannot be retained if the *dharmī*, the one who follows the *dharma*, is destroyed.

Flowing from time immemorial, from one generation to the next, this ancient family *dharma* (*kula-dharma*) is perennial. Because, *dharma* — what is to be done and what is not to be done — runs in the family, it will be destroyed if the family is destroyed. Moreover, when the *dharma* is destroyed, those who survived because they were not in the battlefield will definitely succumb to *adharma*. This was *Arjuna*’s argument here — one that was quite convincing.

He then went on to say:

अधर्माभिभवात् कृष्ण प्रदुष्यन्ति कुलस्त्रियः ।

स्त्रीषु दुष्टासु वाष्ण्य जायते वर्णसंकरः ॥ ४१ ॥

adharmābhibhavāt kṛṣṇa praduṣyanti kulastriyaḥ
striṣu duṣṭāsu vārṣṇeya jāyate varṇasaṅkaraḥ

Verse 41

कृष्ण *kṛṣṇa* — Oh! *Kṛṣṇa*; अधर्म-अभिभवात् *adharmābhibhavāt* — due to the increase of *adharma*; कुलस्त्रियः *kulastriyaḥ* — the women in the family; प्रदुष्यन्ति *praduṣyanti* — will be given to improper ways; वाष्ण्य *vārṣṇeya* — Oh! *Vārṣṇeya* (another name for *Kṛṣṇa*, meaning one who was born in the family of *Vṛṣṇi*); स्त्रीषु दुष्टासु *striṣu duṣṭāsu* — when the women become corrupt; वर्णसंकरः *varṇasaṅkaraḥ* — the confusion of *varṇa* (societal groups); जायते *jāyate* — is born

Oh! *Kṛṣṇa*, due to the increase of *adharma*, the women in the family will be given to improper ways. When the women become corrupt, Oh! *Vārṣṇeya*, confusion is born in the society.

In this verse, *Arjuna* tells *Kṛṣṇa* that *adharma* would only increase. It would be everywhere. Because of the increase of *adharma* in the ruling clan, it would pervade all other clans as well. The *Kuru* clan was not the only ruling clan at that time. There were many other clans ruling different parts of this country. And all the other clans had come to fight on one side or the other in this war. Every one of them was going to be destroyed.

Kings and soldiers alike would all be just so much fodder for the arrows of *Arjuna*, *Karṇa*, and the others. There was a huge infantry on both sides that had been given a crash training course and sent to the front only to exhaust their weapons, to become the victims of flying arrows. Since all the able-bodied men were here, and would be destroyed, how would the *dharma* be protected in their families?

Arjuna could not understand how such destruction could be sanctioned. Strictly speaking, it was the women, who protected the *dharma* in any society and they, in turn, were protected by the men. This was the societal condition at that time. If all the men who had been recruited, trained, and sent into battle, and all the great kings, princes, soldiers, and leaders, were destroyed, the women would not be protected and thus would be unable to follow *dharma* and thereby protect it.

Because a particular atmosphere is required to follow *dharma*, *Arjuna's* argument was that, in the absence of the order that governs a well-structured society, the women would be given to ways that were not proper. When those people who form the framework of a society's structure are destroyed, the structure itself is naturally destroyed.

Arjuna told *Kṛṣṇa* how the structure of society would fall apart. Each family had its own *dharma*, called *kula-dharma*. For example, there was a *dharma* for marriage — which states the exact way it has to be done. In the performance of rituals, each family had its own *sūtras* and the methods that governed them — in other words, the know-how required. There were *dharmas* relating to different groups — *kula-dharma*, *varṇa-dharma*, *āśrama-dharma*, etc. *Varṇa* means group — *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, and *śūdra* — which we shall discuss later. *Āśrama* refers to the stages of life — the student stage (*brahmacarya*), the married stage (*gārhasthya*), preparation for *sannyāsa* (*vānaprastha*), and renunciation (*sannyāsa*) — all of which had their own *dharmas*.

DHARMA WOULD BE LOST WITHOUT DHARMĪ

Who would be left to protect all the *dharma* that was handed over from one generation to the next? *Dharma* was not a system with built-in lateral controls; it was a tradition. There was no central organisation from which everything flowed down such as exists in the form of a papacy, diocese, and parish. Here, the form was purely a structure, handed over by the family. The parents passed it along to their children. The *dharma*, being an individual pursuit, would be destroyed. ‘What will happen then?’ *Arjuna* asked.

A society is strong only when its women are strong. When the women themselves are given to certain weaknesses, to ways that are not becoming, then you will find confusion. If the family is destroyed, one's parentage becomes a problem and an enormous confusion is thereby created. *Arjuna* argued from the standpoint of his society's social structure. He was convinced that the confusion would not only be within the *varṇas*, but also in the *āśramas*, once the women could no longer maintain the *dharma*.

One may then ask, 'so what if the *varṇas* are destroyed?' This question — 'so what?' — can always be asked at any stage. So you will die — so what? You won't be here — so what? Your family will miss you — so what? Therefore, let there be confusion — one may say. In anticipation of such a response, *Arjuna* continued:

स॒रो नरकायैव कुलघ्नानां कुलस्य च ।

पतन्ति पितरो ह्येषां लुप्तपिण्डोदकक्रियाः ॥ ४२ ॥

saṅkaro narakāyaiva kulaghñānāṃ kulasya ca

patanti pitaro hyeṣāṃ luptapiṇḍodakakriyāḥ

Verse 42

स॒रः *saṅkaraḥ* — confusion; कुलघ्नानाम् *kulaghñānām* — of the destroyers of the family; कुलस्य च *kulasya ca* — and of the family; नरकाय *narakāya* — for hell; एव *eva* — only; एषाम् *eṣām* — of these; पितरः *pitaraḥ* — ancestors; लुप्त-पिण्ड-उदक-क्रियाः *lupta-piṇḍa-udaka-kriyāḥ* — denied of their post-death rituals; पतन्ति *patanti* — fall; हि *hi* — indeed

Confusion, indeed, leads the family and the destroyers of the family to hell. Their ancestors, denied of their post-death rituals, indeed fall.

Here, *Arjuna* included the very family itself because, after the heads of these families die, the others would not follow *dharma*. For both the destroyers of the families, then, as well as those who survived the destruction of their families, there would be *naraka*. *Naraka* is the Vedic equivalent to hell, with the difference that, *naraka* is a place you go to and come back, unlike the concept of hell in Christianity. This is because there is no concept of eternal damnation here. Because these people would incur *pāpa* and after death they would go to *naraka*, a place of pain, for a period of time. Therefore, *saṅkara*, confusion, can only lead to *naraka*. Thus, for those who destroy the family and for the survivors of the family, the outcome is nothing but *naraka* when there is *saṅkara*. Many people would survive, but they would have no role models. Therefore, confusion would result. They would do things that are not to be done. Hence, there would be more *pāpa* accrued. People would be doing things that are not proper and would end up in *naraka*.

In *Arjuna's* mind, the situation was even more serious than that. His ancestors would also be affected. The wrong doings of the ancestors of the three preceding generations were traditionally neutralised by prayers performed month after month by the survivors in the next generations. Those for whose sake these oblations were made may have committed many *pāpa-karmas*. Those *karmas* would be neutralised by the rituals performed by their children. This ritual performed for the sake of one's departed ancestors is called *piṇḍa-udaka-kriyā*. In this ritual, water is religiously offered with chants, along with a ball of cooked rice (*piṇḍa*). If the family were destroyed, no one would perform this ritual and the ancestors would be deprived of having their wrong

doings neutralised by their children. Because of their children's prayers, they have all been protected somewhere. If, however, they were denied these rituals, they would fall from there.

Who would perform these rituals if the people who were to do them were destroyed? Even those who destroyed the families would also be destroyed in the process and would not be able to do the rituals. Nor would those who were left protect the ancestors in this way because they would not have grown up respecting the need to perform these rituals. Instead, they would choose to spend their time in other kinds of activities. That means, the rituals for the ancestors would be left undone.

There would be no role models, no family, and no home either. Therefore, those who were left would not know who was who and what was what. Without roots, what self-identity would they have? Without a self-identity, they could not perform rituals. *Arjuna's* point was that they should not think that if they destroyed all these people and were destroyed in the process, their children would save them. They would not. They would all be rock stars, punk artists, and the like! What would they possibly do for their ancestors? Therefore, there would be no one to help.

By saying what he did, *Arjuna* was citing the *dharma-sāstra*; but *Kṛṣṇa* had an answer for it all, as we shall see in the next chapter. *Arjuna* continues in the same vein.

दोषैरेतैः कुलग्नानां वर्णसंस्कारकैः ।

उत्साद्यन्ते जातिधर्माः कुलधर्माश्च शाश्वताः ॥ ४३ ॥

doṣairetaiḥ kulaghnānāṃ varṇasaṅkarakārikaiḥ

utsādyante jātidharmāḥ kuladharmāśca śāśvatāḥ

Verse 43

कुलग्नानाम् *kulaghnānām* — of those who destroy the family; वर्ण-संस्कारकैः *varṇa-saṅkara-kārikaiḥ* — by that which creates confusion about *varṇa-dharma*, etc; एतैः *etaiḥ* — by these; दोषैः *doṣaiḥ* — by wrong actions; शाश्वताः *śāśvatāḥ* — perennial; जातिधर्माः *jātidharmāḥ* — the *dharmas* of the group (community); कुलधर्माः *kula-dharmāḥ* — the *dharmas* pursued by the family; च *ca* — and; उत्साद्यन्ते *utsādyante* — are destroyed

By these wrong actions of those who destroy the family, creating confusion in the society, the perennial *dharmas* pursued by the family and the community are destroyed.

Here, *Arjuna* concluded that all the *dharma* perennially handed over by one generation to the next, from time immemorial, would be destroyed by wrong actions producing confusion with reference to *kula-dharma*, *varṇa-dharma*, *āśrama-dharma*, and so on. Therefore, to destroy all these people would be wrong because the *dharma* would also be destroyed. *Arjuna* was trying to tell *Kṛṣṇa* that the battle was not going to

work. In addition, the entire society would be destroyed by these acts of destruction. Therefore, he was not going to fight.

Dharma is to be seen here as three-fold: *sādhāraṇa-dharma*, *varṇa-āśrama-dharma*, and *kula-dharma*. *Sādhāraṇa-dharma* or *sāmānya-dharma* is universal ethics, applicable to all and sundry. Whether the person is of this age or of any other age, from this country and culture or from any other country and culture, he or she has a code of *dharma* in common.

Universal values, universal law and order, are a part of the creation and are something that we all sense commonly. In other words, they are universal. Whether or not you are educated in this *dharma*, you do know what is right and wrong. What you want and do not want others to do to you become right and wrong, respectively.

Being endowed with common sense, a human being is able to appreciate right and wrong without any education whatsoever. I need not be taught that I should not be hurt, that I should not be robbed and so on. These values are commonly sensed by everyone and thus govern all human interactions, although other non-universal values may override them. This is what causes people to compromise. Compromises, therefore, are not born out of total ignorance of universal values.

Varṇa-āśrama-dharma, and *kula-dharma*, together, are called *viśeṣa-dharma*, which can be divided in many ways. *Viśeṣa-dharma* means peculiar or particular *dharma*, governing certain situations, whereas *sāmānya-dharma* applies to all human beings whether a person is a student, a householder, or in any other stage of one's life. A particular *dharma* is one that is governed by the structure of a society. For instance, in the Vedic society, the society envisioned by the Vedas, there was a structure called *varṇa* and another called *āśrama*.

This structure, consisting of the *varṇas*, made it possible to assign particular jobs to particular groups of people. A broad division was thereby created, along with a concept of duty. Because I belong to this *varṇa*, this is to be done by me. This is all an integral part of *karma-yoga*, as we will see later. This structure of assigning specific duties to particular groups of people is called *varṇa-dharma*. This is a *viśeṣa-dharma*.

Then, there is *āśrama-dharma*, defining that which has to be done, given one's stage in life. For example, a *brāhmaṇa*, as a student, had to follow a certain order. When he or she married, certain changes occurred and additional *dharma* was included. As a student, one was not supposed to pursue certain activities. You could follow politics, but you did not participate in politics. If you did, you ceased to be a student. You became a politician, instead. Thus, there was a structure with reference to one's *āśrama*. *Āśrama-dharma* — what was expected of you, depending on the stage of life you were in, is also *viśeṣa-dharma*.

Another example of *viśeṣa-dharma* was *strī-dharma* or *puruṣa-dharma*, based on whether a person was male or female. There was also *kula-dharma*, *dharma* applicable to a particular family or clan. The *Kuru* clan, for instance, had its own *dharma*. Because it included all of these *viśeṣa-dharmas*, *kula-dharma* was used in this verse to cover all of them.

Arjuna argued that by destroying the *dharmī*, they would be destroying all these *dharmas* because an attribute cannot exist by itself without a locus, a substantive. In the expression, ‘a white cow,’ for example, the substantive ‘cow’ is qualified by the adjective ‘white.’ If you destroy the cow, the white also goes. Similarly, *dharma*, being what it is, must be lived by the *dharmī*, the person who is supposed to follow it.

Here, all these people had come to fight against and kill each other. For the sake of what? ‘You can’t tell me,’ *Arjuna* said, ‘that it is for the sake of protecting *dharma*.’ When the people who were supposed to follow *dharma* were destroyed, how could *dharma* be protected? With the *dharmī* gone, *dharma* would only be in the books. There would be no one for the others to follow. This *dharma* had always been handed over to the next generation, but after the war, the role models would be gone, creating a lot of confusion in the society.

Arjuna argued that, by going on with the war, he would be the cause of all this confusion and, therefore, he wanted no part of it. Further, he said:

उत्सन्नकुलधर्माणां मनुष्याणां जनार्दन ।

नरके नियतं वासो भवतीत्यनुशुश्रुम ॥ ४४ ॥

utsannaku ladharmāṇāṃ manuṣyāṇāṃ janārdana
narake niyataṃ vāso bhavatītyanuśuśruma

Verse 44

जनार्दन *janārdana* — Oh! *Kṛṣṇa*; उत्सन्न-कुल-धर्माणाम् *utsanna-kula-dharmāṇām* — for those who have destroyed the family duty; मनुष्याणाम् *manuṣyāṇām* — for those men; नियतम् *niyatam* — as a rule; नरके *narake* — in hell; वासः *vāsaḥ* — a life; भवति *bhavati* — is; इति *iti* — thus; अनुशुश्रुम *anuśuśruma* — we have heard

We have heard, Oh! *Janārdana*, that a life in hell is inevitable for those men who have destroyed the *dharma* of the family.

Here, *Arjuna* reminded *Kṛṣṇa* of what he had learned from the religious teachers — that those who destroy the *kula-dharma* must necessarily go to *naraka*, a place of pain, after death. Therefore, he concluded, if the *Pāṇḍavas* were to destroy the family, they would gain nothing but *pāpa* and would have to live in *naraka*, if only for a certain length of time. They had heard this from their elders who knew the *dharma-śāstra*. Believing this to be the case, *Arjuna* could see neither *dr̥ṣṭa-phala* nor *adr̥ṣṭa-phala* as

a result of this war. In his mind, there would be no immediate or future gain, here or in the hereafter. This was the basis for *Arjuna's* argument.

Duryodhana, on the other hand, was not concerned about *adr̥ṣṭa-phala* at all. He cared only for *dr̥ṣṭa-phala*, immediate gain. He did not think about *pāpa* and all that went with it. Had he done so, he would not have been an *ātātāyī*, a wrongdoer. He had no respect for the *adr̥ṣṭa-phala*, which meant that he was not an *āstika*. He was therefore *anāstika*, a disbeliever. This word *adr̥ṣṭa-phala* is known to us only through the scripture, the *śāstra*. Because *Duryodhana* had no faith in *puṇya* and *pāpa*, he was a disbeliever, interested only in what was available to him here, in this world.

He wanted to rule a kingdom. The power that went with the kingdom made him feel big. He had enjoyed absolute power, without any contention, for thirteen years. As we know, power has a knack of corrupting. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. *Duryodhana* had been absolutely corrupted by power and he did not care. He enjoyed absolute power and did not want to lose it. Although others thought of it as corruption, he did not. In fact, he thought those who thought this way were idiots and deserved only to live in the forest, nothing more. This was *Duryodhana's* thinking.

Arjuna's thinking was in keeping with what he had learned about *dr̥ṣṭa-phala* and *adr̥ṣṭa-phala*. He believed in *dharma* and was very clear that the fight was between *dharma* and *adharma*. *Arjuna* knew this, but still he thought that by destroying his own people, there would be no happiness for him, either then or later.

Therefore, he lamented:

अहो बत महत्पापं कर्तुं व्यवसिता वयम् ।

यद्राज्यसुखलोभेन हन्तुं स्वजनमुद्यताः ॥ ४५ ॥

aho bata mahatpāpaṃ kartuṃ vyavasitā vayam

yadrājyasukhalobhena hantum svajanamudyatāḥ

Verse 45

अहो बत *aho bata* — Fie upon us; यत् *yat* — that; राज्य-सुख-लोभेन *rājya-sukha-lobhena* — due to greed for a kingdom and its pleasures; स्वजनम् *svajanam* — one's own people; हन्तुम् उद्यताः *hantum udyatāḥ* — ready to destroy; वयम् *vayam* — we; महत् पापम् *mahat-pāpam* — great sin; कर्तुम् व्यवसिताः *kartum vyavasitāḥ* — are determined to commit

Fie upon us! Ready to fight, we are determined to commit the great sin of destroying our own people due to greed for a kingdom and its pleasures.

Up until this verse, *Arjuna's* lamentation focused on what he was about to do. Here, however, although the first arrow had yet to be shot, we see that *Arjuna* was bothered by all these people having come to fight. He asks himself, 'What were we

thinking of when we collected all these armies, to declare war and to come to *Kurukṣetra*? What happened to that thinking, that viveka that I now have? Where was it? Because it was not there, we are here in the battlefield right now! Why didn't I figure this all out before? Fie upon us! What kind of *pāpa* caused us to decide to come here, determined to commit this great universal sin, the destruction of *dharmā*.' Running away with his own train of thought, *Arjuna* had now come to this conclusion.

Lobha is greed or longing. When you have a kingdom (*rājya*) you have all the pleasures (*sukha*) that go with it — the best music, dancers, poets who praise you daily, a lot of titles and salutations, all of which boost your ego. This is what is meant by a power trip. For a mortal, this power is very enticing. 'Is it not greed for the kingdom and pleasures that has made us come with our stockpiles of weapons, prepared to fight and kill our own people,' *Arjuna* mused. Since they would be destroying their own people, *Arjuna* became ill at the very thought that they could ever have considered doing such a thing.

Therefore, he said:

यदि मामप्रतीकारमशस्त्रं शस्त्रपाणयः ।

धार्तराष्ट्रा रणे हन्युस्तन्मे क्षेमतरं भवेत् ॥ ४६ ॥

yadi mām apratikāramaśāstram śāstrapāṇayaḥ

dhārtarāṣṭrā raṇe hanyustanme kṣemataram bhavet

Verse 46

यदि *yadi* — if; अप्रतीकारम् *apratikāram* — one who does not retaliate; अशस्त्रम् *aśāstram* — who is unarmed; माम् *mām* — me; शस्त्रपाणयः *śāstra-pāṇayaḥ* — those with weapons in hand; धार्तराष्ट्राः *dhārtarāṣṭrāḥ* — the sons of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*; रणे *raṇe* — in battle; हन्युः *hanyuḥ* — would kill; तत् *tat* — that; मे *me* — for me; क्षेमतरम् *kṣemataram* — better; भवेत् *bhavet* — will be

It will be better for me if the sons of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*, with weapon in hand, were to kill me, who is unarmed and who does not retaliate.

Kṛṣṇa must have looked at *Arjuna* in wonderment. He had been going on and on, and now he was telling him that, if they gave up the fight, they may all be killed; but he did not care. *Arjuna* was determined not to fight back. However, this kind of thinking was not shared by those in the other camp. It was only in *Arjuna's* mind. Therefore, if *Arjuna* was not going to fight, either he would have to run away from the battlefield or stand there unarmed and be killed.

Arjuna would be unarmed; but not disarmed. He would have voluntarily given up all his arms. Moreover, he thought that it was better if he were to be killed. 'Let it be for my good,' he said. 'Myself not being killed but destroying all these people would definitely not be for my good. I am not going to win. I am going to suffer from the pains

that I caused by destroying all these people. It will always haunt me, even if I am killed in the process. Alive, I am going to be haunted; and dead, I will haunt this battlefield where my arrows destroyed my own people. That is even worse,' said *Arjuna*.

Having decided not to fight, *Arjuna* concluded that being killed would be better. What *Arjuna* then did was recounted to *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* by *Saṅjaya* in the last verse of this first chapter:

सञ्जय उवाच ।

एवमुक्त्वार्जुनः सङ्घृत्ते रथोपस्थ उपाविशत् ।

विसृज्य सशरं चापं शोकसंविग्रमानसः ॥ ४७ ॥

saṅjaya uvāca .

evamuktvārjunaḥ saṅkhye rathopastha upāviśat
visṛjya saśaraṃ cāpaṃ śokasaṃvigna-mānasaḥ

Verse 47

सञ्जयः उवाच *saṅjayaḥ uvāca* — *Saṅjaya* said;

अर्जुनः *arjunaḥ* — *Arjuna*; एवम् *evam* — in this manner; उक्त्वा *uktvā* — having spoken; सङ्घृत्ते *saṅkhye* — in the middle of the battlefield; सशरम् *saśaram* — along with arrows; चापम् *cāpam* — the bow; विसृज्य *visṛjya* — putting aside; शोक-संविग्र-मानसः *śoka-saṃvigna-mānasaḥ* — with his mind completely overcome by sorrow; रथ-उपस्थे *ratha-upasthe* — on the seat of the chariot; उपाविशत् *upāviśat* — sat down

Saṅjaya said:

Having spoken in this manner in the middle of the battlefield, putting aside his bow and arrows, his mind completely overcome by sorrow, *Arjuna* sat down on the seat of the chariot.

Because *Saṅjaya* was narrating the whole dialogue between *Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna* to *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*, the entire *Gītā* is actually in the form of a narration by *Saṅjaya* although it was really *Vyāsa* who was speaking. There is a particular style involved here, which we need to be aware of. Quotations are quotations within quotations. Through out the *Gītā*, we have to remember that *Saṅjaya* was describing what happened on the battlefield to *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*. Here, *Saṅjaya* first quoted *Arjuna* and then, in this verse, *Vyāsa* reminds his reader that *Saṅjaya* was talking to *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*.

Arjuna had been standing in his chariot in order to see all the people with whom he was to fight. Finding his own people on all sides, he concluded that it would be better for him to be killed. Having thus spoken to *Kṛṣṇa*, *Arjuna* sat down in the chariot, which was in the middle of the battlefield right between the two armies.

This verse also provides a few more details concerning *Arjuna's* condition. Putting his bow and arrows aside, *Arjuna* sat back, his mind completely overwhelmed

by sorrow. He felt sadness because the situation was so sad. That he had come to fight with his own people was not a happy thought.

Although he was sad, *Arjuna* did not run away from the battlefield because something inside told him that perhaps there was some defect, some fallacy, in his thinking. He was a man of *dharma*. He had been well brought up and his present thoughts were all coloured by his vision. There was some truth in his argument; but, at the same time, *dharma* was involved. Hence, it was not easy to resolve the issues involved.

Arjuna was a person who was supposed to take care of law and order. He had a job to do. One that was mandated by the *śāstra*, by the society, by the crown, and for that reason, he did not run away from the battlefield. He could have set out for the Himalayas, the distance from *Kurukṣetra* not being much. It would, therefore, have been very easy for him to go. However, he did not run away because he knew that there was some problem with his thinking. Instead, he sat there, in the chariot, in the middle of the battlefield, so that *Kṛṣṇa* could talk to him.

We sometimes tell someone that we do not want to do something, but still we listen to the other person's point of view. Why? Because we have a doubt about what we want or do not want. Otherwise, we would not be available for discussion. That *Arjuna* sat there indicates that something was telling him that there was a fallacy in his thinking and that he stood to be corrected. And he was ready for it.

The first chapter of the *Gītā* ends with these words:

ओं तत् सत् । इति श्रीमद्भगवद्गीतासु उपनिषत्सु ब्रह्मविद्यायां योगशास्त्रे
श्रीकृष्णार्जुनसंवादेऽर्जुनविषादयोगो नाम प्रथमोऽध्यायः ॥
om tat sat iti śrīmadbhagavadgītāsu upaniṣatsu brahmavidyāyāṃ
yogaśāstre śrīkṛṣṇārjunasaṃvāde'rjunaviṣādayogo nāma
prathamo'dhyāyaḥ

ओम् तत् सत् *om tat sat* — *Om, Brahman*, is the only reality.
इति *iti* — thus; श्रीमद्-भगवद्गीतासु *śrīmad-bhagavadgītāsu* — in the *Bhagavadgītā* ;
उपनिषत्सु *upaniṣatsu* — in the *Upaniṣads*; ब्रह्मविद्यायाम् *brahmavidyāyām* — in the
knowledge of *Brahman*; योगशास्त्रे *yoga-śāstre* — in the *yoga-śāstra*; श्रीकृष्णार्जुनसंवादे
śrīkṛṣṇa-arjuna-saṃvāde — in the dialogue between *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna*; अर्जुन-
विषादयोगः नाम *Arjuna-viṣāda-yogaḥ nāma* — called the 'Yoga (topic) of *Arjuna's*
Sorrow'; प्रथमः अध्यायः *prathamah adhyāyaḥ* — first chapter

Thus ends the first chapter called *arjuna-viṣāda-yoga* — The chapter of *Arjuna's* *Sorrow* — in the *Bhagavadgītā*, which is in the form of a

dialogue between ŚrīKṛṣṇa and Arjuna, which is the essence of the *Upaniṣads* whose subject matter is both the knowledge of *Brahman* and *yoga*.

Traditionally, the words ‘*Om tat sat*’ go before this line. ‘*Om*’ is the name for *Brahman* and *Brahman* alone is the reality — *tat sat*. This expression indicates a conclusion. After all is said and done, the reality is only *Brahman* — *Om tat sat*.

The word *śrīmat* means that which is endowed with all kinds of wealth including *vidyā*, that which gives you everything. The word *śrīmat* here is prefixed to *Bhagavadgītā* and is used for emphasis. *Śrī* means all wealth and *śrīmān*¹ can be the title for the *guru*. Here, *Bhagavān* plays the role of *guru*. *Bhaga* is the six-fold absolute virtues, as we have seen, and *Bhagavān* is, therefore, the one who has absolute *Śrī*. All wealth belongs to *Bhagavān* as does all knowledge, fullness, dispassion, overlordship, power, fame — the six-fold *bhaga*. The one who has these virtues is called *Īśvara*, the Lord, otherwise called *Bhagavān*. Thus, *Bhagavān* is a definition of *Īśvara*. And the one who can really be called as ‘*Śrīmān*’ is *Bhagavān* alone. This title of *śrīmat* is used here because *Bhagavān* has assumed the role of a teacher in the *Gītā*.

The chapters and verses of the *Bhagavadgītā* have the same vision as that of the *Upaniṣads*. Therefore the *Bhagavadgītā* is referred to as the *Upaniṣad*. The reference here being to the *Gītā* that is yet to come, since the actual *Gītā* has not yet begun. The *Upaniṣads* are the self-knowledge that destroys *saṃsāra*, all sorrow. The *Gītā* also destroys sorrow. By giving *Arjuna* self-knowledge, the *Gītā* removed his sorrow, that is highlighted in the first chapter. Therefore, the *Gītā* is equated to the *Upaniṣads* whose subject matter is *brahma-vidyā*, knowledge of *Brahman*.

The *Gītā* is not simple psychotherapy; it is much more than that. It deals with what *Brahman* is, revealing the reality of the self, the self as *Brahman*. Being identical to the *Upaniṣads*, in terms of its subject matter, the *Gītā* cannot but be *brahma-vidyā*, knowledge of *Brahman*. It is also *yoga-śāstra* because it talks about *yoga* for maturity, for preparing the mind for the knowledge.

Yoga-śāstra means *karma-yoga-śāstra* which includes all disciplines, values, religious rituals, prayers, and so on. Performing duties is *yoga*. Also when the *Gītā* talks about *bhakti*, it is *yoga*. When it talks about *karma* to be done with *bhakti*, it is all *karma-yoga*. Even when it talks about *sannyāsa* it is *jñāna-yoga*. Since *sannyāsa* can also be a means for an end to be achieved, it is *yoga*. *Sannyāsa* as an end is the knowledge that I am *Brahman* and not a *kartā* or a *bhoktā*. All of this will be analysed later.

The *Gītā*, then, is both *brahma-vidyā* and *yoga-śāstra*, which is purely *karma-yoga*, implying devotion as well as all other disciplines that are used as means for

¹ ‘*śrīmān*’ is the nominative singular form in the masculine of the noun base, *śrīmat*.

preparing the mind for the knowledge. Also, included in this closing line are the words, ‘in the dialogue between *Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna* — *śrīkṛṣṇārjunasaṃvāde*.’ This is because the dialogue had already started in the first chapter. The subject matter of this chapter was *Arjuna’s* lamentation, his sorrow, his grief, his despair; thus the title, ‘The *Yoga* of *Arjuna’s* Sorrow — *arjuna-viṣāda-yogaḥ*.

Of course, the title of the chapter does not imply that the first *yoga* we are to practice is sorrow! The word ‘*yoga*’ has various meanings, as can be seen from the synonyms given in dictionaries. *Yoga* is *nirodha*, control, or mastery. It also means *upāya*, a means of achieving something. Any form of meditation, *dhyāna*, is called *yoga*. And a connection, *saṅgati*, meaning a subject matter, *viśaya*, is also called *yoga*.

Each of the eighteen chapters of the *Gītā* has the word ‘*yoga*’ in its title, beginning with *Arjuna’s* sorrow. Therefore, the correct meaning of the word ‘*yoga*’ here is *saṅgati*, connection, or subject matter. For instance, in the fifth chapter, *jñāna-karma-sannyāsa* is the *viśaya*, the subject matter, which is not to suggest that it talks about a *yoga* called *jñāna-karma-sannyāsa* is to be practised. The *Gītā* talks about *karma*, about knowledge, *sannyāsa*, meditation, devotion, the vision of the cosmic person, the division between the knower and the known, etc. What is this division? Is there a division? — this is the topic of the thirteenth chapter called *kṣetra-kṣetra-jñāna-yoga*.

Thus, the word *yoga*, then, in the chapter titles, does not refer to the practice of *yoga*, but to the subject matter. This must be clearly understood because there is a lot of confusion about its meaning. Some people maintain that despair is necessary, and without it, we cannot come to spiritual life. Thus, we must work ourselves into despair! Despair is not something we need to work for; everyone has it. When we have to go to the tenth floor of a building and find out that the elevator is not working, despair begins! Despair need not be practiced. We are despair; we are born of despair alone. We are brought up in despair, continue to be in despair, and are despair to everyone else.

The purpose of this first chapter of the *Gītā* was to describe the particular type of thinking, which will lead to self-knowledge. How you think, what leads you to a particular type of thinking, what kind of heart you must have in order to do this inquiry, *vicāra* — all this is necessary to know. Therefore, the chapter reveals *Arjuna’s* nobility, his commitment to *dharma*, and his confusion.

A mature person can be confused and, therefore, *Arjuna’s* confusion represents anyone's confusion. This confusion can lead to a certain type of thinking and to questions about what I really am. A person has to be led to this type of thinking, which is why a chapter about *Arjuna’s* despair was included in the *Gītā*.

When *Śaṅkara* wrote his *Gītā-bhāṣya*, his commentary on the *Gītā*, he ignored this chapter and the first few verses of the second chapter. A *bhāṣya* comments only on that which requires explanation. Because the beginning of the *Gītā* can easily be

understood simply by reading by anyone who is able to understand *Śaṅkara's bhāṣya*, he restricted his commentary to that which had to be discussed; the *Gītā* itself; starting with '*śrībhagavān uvāca*' in eleventh verse of the second chapter.

The subject matter of the first chapter, then, leads to the second chapter. *Arjuna's viṣāda*, his despair, led to his *vicāra*, his inquiry. *Viṣāda* can lead one either to inquiry or to escape, including suicide, death being another means of escape. In *Arjuna's* case, it led him to *vicāra*, *Kṛṣṇa* made sure that it did and, therefore, we have the *Gītā*.

ओं तत्सत् इति । श्रीमद्भगवद्गीतासु उपनिषत्सु ब्रह्मविद्यायां योगशास्त्रे
श्रीकृष्णार्जुनसंवादेऽर्जुनविषादयोगो नाम प्रथमोऽध्यायः ॥
oṃ tatsat. iti śrīmadbhagavadgītāsūpaniṣatsu brahmavidyāyāṃ
yogaśāstre śrīkṛṣṇārjunasaṃvāde' rjunaviṣādayogo nāma
prathamo'dhyāyaḥ

ABABABABAB

CHAPTER 2

KNOWLEDGE

सञ्जय उवाच ।

तं तथा कृपयाविष्टमश्रुपूर्णाकुलेक्षणम् ।

विषीदन्तमिदं वाक्यमुवाच मधुसूदनः ॥ १ ॥

sañjaya uvāca

taṁ tathā kṛpayāviṣṭamaśrupūrṇākulekṣaṇam

viṣīdantamidaṁ vākyaṁuvāca madhusūdanaḥ

Verse 1

सञ्जयः *sañjayaḥ* — *Sañjaya* ; उवाच *uvāca* — said;

मधुसूदनः *madhusūdanaḥ* — *Madhusūdana* (*Kṛṣṇa*), तथा *tathā* — in that manner; कृपया आविष्टम् *kṛpayā aviṣṭam* — overwhelmed by compassion; अश्रु-पूर्ण-आकुल-ईक्षणम् *aśru-pūrṇa-ākula-īkṣaṇam*— whose eyes were filled with tears and showed distress; विषीदन्तम् *viṣīdantam* — one who is sad; तम् *tam* — to him; इदम् *idam* — this; वाक्यम् *vākyaṁ* — sentence; उवाच *uvāca* — spoke

Sañjaya said:

To him who was sad and thus overwhelmed by compassion, whose eyes were filled with tears and showed distress, *Kṛṣṇa* spoke these words.

The use of the third person in this verse reminds us that *Sañjaya*, the narrator of the *Gītā*, was continuing his report to *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*. The dialogue between *Arjuna* and *Kṛṣṇa*, on the other hand is always in the first person and second person.

As the second chapter begins, *Kṛṣṇa*, referred to as *Madhusūdana*, had been listening, very patiently to *Arjuna*. Because he knew the importance of listening, he let *Arjuna* talk.

A therapist also listens a lot and nods his or her head at the appropriate time, speaking only enough to keep the person talking. People do not generally listen in this way. They begin advising right away and do not know how to listen. *Kṛṣṇa* was a good listener. He had already listened to one complete chapter! Only when *Arjuna* laid down his bow, arrows, and sat back in the chariot, did *Kṛṣṇa* think it was time for him to respond.

The word *madhu* in the name *Madhusūdāna* refers to the ego. It means honey, something, which is very dear to you, very sweet. The *ahaṅkāra*, the ego, is very dear to us. Everyone wants to boost the *ahaṅkāra*. No one wants to give it up. We have already seen that *Madhusūdāna* refers to *Kṛṣṇa* as the destroyer of demons. The ego here can be seen as a demon. Therefore, the one whose grace destroys *ahaṅkāra*, the one knowing whom the *ahaṅkāra* is destroyed, is called *Madhusūdāna*.

Arjuna was described as being overwhelmed, overpowered by sympathy, compassion, and affection. His eyes were filled with tears because he had placed himself in such a situation. There was more here than mere compassion; there was conflict too, because of his sense of duty. *Arjuna* was confused about having to destroy people who were his *gurus* and relatives.

Because he was a man of discipline, *Arjuna* did not allow the tears to flow. There are three reasons why one's eyes can be filled with tears. Pepper can certainly do it. When you are ecstatic also, you may shed tears. When you are sad, the tears can well up. Any disease causing tears is usually due to an irritation and is therefore covered under the first of these three. Thus, the tear glands are stimulated by these kinds of situations. We know that *Arjuna's* tears were not due to ecstasy because he was described here as one who was sad.

Arjuna who was sad, whose eyes were glistening with tears, and whose heart was overwhelmed by compassion, was being addressed by *Śrī Bhagavān*. The word *vākya* usually means a sentence, a group of words. Here, it refers to the whole subject matter of this particular section.

What did the Lord say?

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

कुतस्त्वा कश्मलमिदं विषमे समुपस्थितम् ।

अनार्यजुष्टमस्वर्ग्यमकीर्तिकरमर्जुन ॥ २ ॥

śrībhagavān uvāca

kutastvā kaśmalamidam viṣame samupasthitam

anāryajuṣṭamasvargyamakīrtikaramarjuna

Verse 2

श्रीभगवान् *śrībhagavān* — *Śrī Bhagavān* (The Lord); उवाच *uvāca* — said;

अर्जुन *arjuna* — Oh! *Arjuna*; विषमे *viṣame* — in this crisis; इदम् *idam* — this; अनार्य-जुष्टम् *anārya-juṣṭam* — that which is not becoming of an upright man; अस्वर्ग्यम् *asvargyam* — that which is not the means to gain heaven; अकीर्तिकरम् *akīrti-karam* — that which does not add to your good name; कश्मलम् *kaśmalam* — despair; त्वा *tvā* — upon you; कुतः *kutaḥ* — from where; समुपस्थितम् *samupasthitam* — has come

Śrī Bhagavān said:

In such crisis from where has this despair come upon you, Oh! *Arjuna*?
It is not at all becoming of an upright man and does not add to your good
name. Nor is it which leads one to heaven.

‘Hey, *Arjuna*, where did you pick up this despair, this sorrow?’ asked *Kṛṣṇa*. *Arjuna* had been talking in a way that did not sound like him at all. Because it was totally unexpected, *Kṛṣṇa*’s response did not take the form of helpful advice. He did not let *Arjuna* know that he understood his position and the difficulties he was facing. Instead, he whipped him with his tongue. ‘Where did this despair come from, *Arjuna*? It does not befit you at all!’ he said.

To expand *Kṛṣṇa*’s words, — ‘You have missed your calling, *Arjuna*. You should have been a great actor. How could you have hidden this from me all these years? I never expected that you could get into this kind of a state. We all knew you to be the bravest, the most courageous, and now I hear your talk that betrays only sorrow — sorrow at the thought of the imminent destruction that this war will bring. It may have been all right if you had mentioned all this before we came to the battlefield. We could have sat down and discussed it, but we cannot do that here. This is both the wrong time and the wrong place.’ Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* admonished *Arjuna*.

This was when that *Arjuna* should have been spending his time on the strategies of the war such as, deciding with whom he should fight and how to proceed, etc. He was in the battlefield, standing in the midst of the two armies, having requested *Kṛṣṇa* to be his driver. *Kṛṣṇa* had fulfilled his end of the bargain, but now it looked as though he had backed a horse that would not even start! ‘Not only are you sick, *Arjuna*,’ *Kṛṣṇa* went on, ‘but you have made me also sick. This is a time for brave deeds, not for this kind of lamenting. This is neither the time nor the place for such talk.’ *Kṛṣṇa* therefore, demanded to know where all these had come from.

The verse contains three adjectives describing *Arjuna*’s despair — *anārya-juṣṭa*, *asvargya*, and *akīrti-kara*. *Anārya-juṣṭa* derives its meaning from *ārya*, meaning an upright man, one who does the right thing at the appropriate time. *Arjuna* was reminded by *Kṛṣṇa* that he had always been an *ārya*, a man who did what was to be done. From such a man, despair is not expected. Therefore, this behaviour is *anārya-juṣṭa*, not befitting, or becoming an *ārya*. It is not that an *ārya* does not cry. He will cry when the occasion warrants it, but not in the battlefield where he has to act. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that his despair, his wailing and lamentations, here in the battlefield, were totally inappropriate, *anārya-juṣṭa*, not becoming at all.

Kṛṣṇa also told him that what he was contemplating was *asvargya*, not the way to heaven. *Arjuna* had said that he had heard that people who destroy the family and thereby the *dharma* would live in hell, *naraka*, an abode of pain, for a certain length of time. He, therefore, thought that by doing his duty (of fighting this war) he would go to

naraka and that by not doing it, by retreating, he would go to heaven, *svarga*. He was therefore prepared to sacrifice everything and go to *svarga*. *Kṛṣṇa* was now telling him that, if this were to be his thinking, it would not work. Not fighting would amount to a dereliction of duty because he was supposed to protect the law and order of the kingdom. Therefore, when he talked like this, it was *asvargya*. *Kṛṣṇa* also told him in a later verse that, in addition to living with sorrow and privations due to not having a kingdom, this dereliction of duty would gnaw at his heart. Furthermore, when he died, he would go only to *naraka* and not to *svarga*.

To this, *Arjuna* might have said that he did not care about going to heaven. He did not even know if there was a heaven or a hell. Being cornered, he might have said that all he cared about was the here and now. If this were *Arjuna's* thinking, *Kṛṣṇa* tells him that it would prove to be *akīrti-kara*, a disgrace even in this life. He says, 'This sorrow, leading to your running away from the battlefield, is not going to redound to your credit in the society. People are going to look at you and say, 'That is *Arjuna*, the one who ran away from the battlefield.' If you go to Rishikesh and sit under a tree, pilgrims will come to see you before going to the Ganges, saying: 'I want to see *Arjuna*, the fellow who ran away from the battlefield.' Everyone will talk lightly of you.'

He might have said further, 'They will say, 'How great was *Arjuna*! How courageous he was! He was the master archer — until the battle began!' Nobody is going to give you any credit for such an action, *Arjuna*.'

Kṛṣṇa may then have said, 'Not only will they talk lightly of you, they will criticise and belittle all your powers and prowess. Even ordinary people will talk ill of you. If you run away from the battlefield, *Dharmaputra*, your older brother, crestfallen, will follow you. *Bhīma*, of course will be angry, but being helpless, he too will go away. The whole army will fizzle out; everyone will leave and some may even heave a sigh of relief that they have escaped.'

Everyone in *Arjuna's* ranks was afraid of *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa* and those in the opposite camp were afraid of *Arjuna* and *Bhīma*. They would all be greatly relieved. The *Pāṇḍavas*, along with their entire army, would be gone and *Duryodhana* would be handed the victory on a platter. He would be able to say, 'Hands down, without a shot, I won.'

Kṛṣṇa would therefore have admonished *Arjuna* even further, 'After you have gone to the forest, what will *Duryodhana* do? There will be parties everywhere. *Duryodhana* will let the entire army drink as much as it wants. Much more than a happy hour, it will be a happy day. Because the media is with him, *Duryodhana* will see to it that people think you are a coward. He will say that *Arjuna* asked *Kṛṣṇa* to station his chariot in such a way that he could see *Duryodhana's* army and, seeing it, he ran away in fear. The headlines will read, '*Arjuna* saw, shivered, and ran.' There will even be photographs of you running away.' 'Of course,' *Kṛṣṇa* may have continued,

'*Duryodhana* will present it in the worst possible light because *Duryodhana* cannot afford to have citizens looking up to *Arjuna* as a man of sacrifice. He will belittle you, *Arjuna*, even though he knows in his heart that your sacrifice was due only to compassion for the people, to save their families, and so on, he will not allow anyone to know that. He will cover it all up, saying that you ran away out of sheer fear for your precious life. *Duryodhana* will not be the only one to present it this way. The ordinary soldiers who normally had nightmares about *Arjuna*, those who had been so afraid of him, those who were recruited only a few days ago will also talk like this. Over drinks, one will boast to others that *Kṛṣṇa* stopped *Arjuna's* chariot right in front of him. And when *Arjuna's* eyes fell upon him, all he did was twist his moustache, give him that special look, and *Arjuna* ran away in terror. Who will not tell such stories? Not only the great warriors, but also yesterday's recruits, will talk like this. People will talk so ill of you, *Arjuna*, that it will be impossible for you to be happy in this world.' This, then, was what *Kṛṣṇa* meant by *akīrti-kara*.

Kṛṣṇa would have also reminded *Arjuna* of the many wonderful titles that had been lavished upon him over the years. He was a role model for every soldier and now he was thinking of running away! This would be something like a Nobel laureate who, having been honoured for the great work he had done for the downtrodden, the poor and the ill of the society, is found to have committed a multiple murder for the sake of money. This news, of course, would blare out from the headlines of all the newspapers. The Nobel laureates of the world will then immediately surrender their scrolls because the Nobel Prize will no longer have any meaning. This was exactly what happened when a group of rock singers was knighted. One of the old knights surrendered his knighthood because he did not want to be in the same ranks as these young singers.

'Therefore, *Arjuna*, your name, fame, credibility, and everything will be destroyed,' *Kṛṣṇa* tells *Arjuna*. *Kīrti-kara* means that which adds to your name. *Akīrti-kara* is that which does not add to one's credit at all. 'Your sorrow, *Arjuna*, is *akīrti-kara*. I see in it the seed for all further reactions,' says *Kṛṣṇa*. *Arjuna* had already dropped his bow and arrows and sat down. *Kṛṣṇa*, therefore, had to tell *Arjuna* that his thinking was confused and that he should get up and do what had to be done.

क्लैब्यं मा स्म गमः पार्थ नैतत्त्वय्युपपद्यते ।

क्षुद्रं हृदयदौर्बल्यं त्यक्त्वोत्तिष्ठ परन्तप ॥ ३ ॥

klaibyaṃ mā sma gamaḥ pārtha naitattvayyupapadyate

kṣudraṃ hrdayadaurbalyaṃ tyaktvottiṣṭha parantapa

Verse 3

परन्तप *parantapa* — Oh! Vanquisher of enemies; पार्थ *pārtha* — *Arjuna*; क्लैब्यम् *klaibyam* — unmanliness; मा स्म गमः *mā sma gamaḥ* — do not yield to; एतत् *etat* — this; न त्वयि उपपद्यते *na tvayi upapadyate* — does not benefit you; क्षुद्रम् *kṣudram* —

lowly; हृदय-दौर्बल्यम् *hṛdaya-daurbalyam* — weakness of heart; त्यक्त्वा *tyaktvā* — giving up; उत्तिष्ठ *uttiṣṭha* — please get up

Oh! *Pārtha*, the vanquisher of enemies, do not yield to unmanliness.
This does not befit you. Give up this lowly weakness of heart and get up.

By calling *Arjuna* as *Pārtha*, the son of *Prthā*, *Kṛṣṇa* was saying, ‘This is definitely not the time for behaving like a child, a mama's boy. *Kṛṣṇa* also used the word *klaibya*, meaning one who is neither male nor female — in other words, the mental state of a eunuch. Men fight in a certain way, and when women have to fight, they too fight in a way that is peculiar to them. Eunuchs, on the other hand, are a problem in any society because they are in between, neither man nor woman. *Kṛṣṇa* advised *Arjuna* against that state. ‘Do not proceed in this way. Do not let this emotion take you over — *klaibyaṃ mā sma gamah*.’

Arjuna was known to be a man of great discipline, perseverance, dexterity and skill and therefore this thinking like a *klība* did not fit him at all. He was a soldier and as *Kṛṣṇa* said, it was his duty not to talk in this way. More than a soldier, he was a *kṣatriya* who was supposed to protect *dharma*. By birth, he had had this duty enjoined upon him. In addition, because he was a prince, he had to set an example. Nor was he an ordinary prince; he was the most exalted among princes. There was no one like him in this kingdom or elsewhere. He was the role model. Whatever he did, others would follow.

‘You are a role model, *Arjuna*, a leader. You are not a *sādhu*. You are not a dropout, a hobo, who can do, as he likes. You are a responsible person and what is more, a leader. You are one of the five crowned princes and your older brother is supposed to rule. You are committed to doing what is to be done and there is no escape. To run away is not fitting for any soldier and for you, *Arjuna*, it is definitely not fitting,’ says *Kṛṣṇa*.

Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* continued, ‘Giving up, being overcome by emotional weakness at this time, *Arjuna*, is base and lowly. Please get up.’ Although he addressed him politely, *Kṛṣṇa* ordered *Arjuna* up, in fact. In the first line of this verse, he called him *Pārtha* and then, to remind him who he was, he called him *Parantapa*, the one who destroys the enemy. ‘Don't run away,’ he said. ‘Get up and face the battle.’

Kṛṣṇa told *Arjuna* to do what had to be done. For *Arjuna*, it happened to be a battle. The whole *Gītā* is going to point out that what is to be done must be done — unless one is a *sannyāsī*. Doing what is to be done can be *yoga*, requiring only a change of attitude on your part. Thus, this part of the *Gītā* is a set-up for the whole *dharma* that is to be unfolded, the seed for what is to come later in terms of *karma-yoga*.

Being ordered to get up in this way, *Arjuna* felt that he was not understood, much less was his sympathy understood. He then began again to explain himself. So much respect did he have for *Kṛṣṇa*!

Kṛṣṇa's admonitions were not meant as criticisms, but were only to show *Arjuna* that a particular type of thinking led to his sorrow and that now he should change his thinking. Sympathy for others is a virtue, but what is to be done has to be done. The whole teaching is about another type of thinking and *Arjuna's* thinking process was triggered off by *Kṛṣṇa's* whipping words, as evidenced by his reply:

अर्जुन उवाच ।

कथं भीष्ममहं सङ्ख्ये द्रोणं च मधुसूदन ।

इषुभिः प्रतियोत्स्यामि पूजार्हावरिसूदन ॥ ४ ॥

Arjuna uvāca

katham bhīṣmamahaṃ saṅkhye droṇaṃ ca madhusūdana
iṣubhiḥ pratiyotsyāmi pūjārhāvarisūdana

Verse 4

अर्जुनः *arjunaḥ* — *Arjuna*; उवाच *uvāca* — said:

अरिसूदन *arisūdana* — Oh! Destroyer of foes (*Kṛṣṇa*); मधुसूदन *madhusūdana* — Oh! Destroyer of the demon, *Madhu*; अहम् *aham* — I; सङ्ख्ये *saṅkhye* — in this battle; पूजा-अर्हौ *pūjā-arhau* — these two who are worthy of worship; भीष्मम् *bhīṣmam* — *Bhīṣma*; द्रोणम् *droṇam* — *Droṇa*; च *ca* — and; इषुभिः *iṣubhiḥ* — with arrows; कथम् *katham* — how; प्रतियोत्स्यामि *pratiyotsyāmi* — will fight against

Arjuna said:

Oh! Destroyer of foes! Oh! Destroyer of the demon, *Madhu*, (Oh! *Kṛṣṇa*!) How will I in this battle fight with arrows against *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa*, who are worthy of my worship?

In this verse, *Arjuna* said what amounted to: ‘you cannot understand what I am saying. You cannot appreciate where I am coming from. I have been placed in a very unenviable situation. I have to fight and I am quite accustomed to that. That I have to fight against people known to me is also not the real problem. I probably could manage to fight against my own people. But how can I fight against these two stalwarts, *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa*, for whom I have such great reverence, to whom I owe everything?’

By addressing *Kṛṣṇa* as *Madhusūdana* and *Arisūdana*, *Arjuna* was reminding *Kṛṣṇa* that he had destroyed only demons and enemies, not his teachers and family. But those whom *Arjuna* was now supposed to destroy were his *gurus*, who deserved only worship from him. Instead of weapons, he should have brought flowers and been making garlands to offer them. *Droṇa* was the one from whom he had learned the art of archery. He had grown up on *Bhīṣma's* lap and learned everything he knew from him. *Bhīṣma* was *Arjuna's* role model, his inspiration, idol, and hero. ‘How can I use my arrows against these two men?’ he asked.

Arjuna could also talk the way *Kṛṣṇa* was talking. He, too, could deliver a pep talk and tell others that they should behave like men and do what had to be done. But *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa* were two people for whom he had the greatest respect, which they deserved, and *Arjuna* did not think he could destroy them. This thinking was what led him to ask *Kṛṣṇa* to teach him what was right.

The process of *Arjuna's* thinking is revealed in these verses very beautifully. The *Gītā* still has not begun. *Kṛṣṇa's* advice to get up was that of a friend. What *Arjuna* intended to do was not going to take him to heaven, much less add to his credit and *Kṛṣṇa* told him so. Everything else *Kṛṣṇa* said was just to boost *Arjuna's* morale. Naturally, *Arjuna* was surprised that *Kṛṣṇa* was saying things like, 'Don't get into this eunuch-like state' and so on, since he was not accustomed to be spoken to as a weakling.

Given the words he used, *Kṛṣṇa* seemed to be thinking of *Arjuna* as a coward, someone who had to be told to get up and do what had to be done. *Arjuna* had never heard such words in his lifetime and had certainly never expected to hear them from *Kṛṣṇa*, of all people. Therefore, he wanted to counter all of *Bhagavān's* statements. Therefore, he said, 'It is easy for you to tell me not to have this weakness. However, the problem here for me is not fear. That is not why I want to leave the battlefield. I want to leave because of compassion and my concept of *dharma*, which holds that *dharma* can be protected only by protecting the *dharmīs*. The only way I can win this war is by destroying all the *dharmīs*. Therefore, none of this makes any sense.'

Arjuna's problem was something like that of a student who wanted to protect his *guru* from a fly that was bothering him while he slept. He took a big stone and killed the fly, also killing his *guru* in the process. Here, too, in the name of protecting *dharma*, the very people who were supposed to live *dharma* and hand it over to the next generation were all going to be destroyed. *Arjuna* was anguished and amazed that all the *Pāṇḍavas* could have armed themselves to fight such a war. Thus, he asked, 'How could we have decided to do anything so insensible?'

In *Arjuna's* perception, this war would not protect *dharma*. It was also very clear to him that the result of this battle would definitely not give him any happiness in this lifetime. Nor did he see any kind of heaven for himself after death; because, to destroy the entire *kula-dharma* was an act of sin. More than that, for the rest of his life, he would have to live with the thought that he had destroyed all these people. Therefore, there would be neither *dr̥ṣṭa-phala* nor *adr̥ṣṭa-phala* in such an action.

Since this was *Arjuna's* view, he did not understand how *Kṛṣṇa* could say that he was frightened. He went on to explain that the people standing there were not unknown to him. They were his own people, people for whom he had the greatest respect and reverence. Unless he killed people like *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa*, there would be no question of his gaining victory. In addition, if they were destroyed — assuming that *Arjuna* was going to destroy them — what kind of happiness would he possibly have? He had to live

with the thought that he had destroyed those he revered the most, those from whom he had learned all that he knew! ‘How can I send arrow for arrow against them,’ he asked *Kṛṣṇa*.

Even if *Kṛṣṇa* had argued that *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa* did not seem to have the same concern for him, *Arjuna* did not feel that he was in a position to make any such judgement. Their choosing to fight against him may have been wrong but at the same time, they no doubt had had their own logic for doing so. Because of his respect and reverence for these two stalwarts, *Arjuna* did not feel that he had the right to say anything about their decision to support *Duryodhana*. The point he was making to *Kṛṣṇa* was that he himself could not sin by exchanging arrows with them. He would rather die than draw the arrow that would destroy *Droṇa* and *Bhīṣma*, his teachers. He therefore told *Kṛṣṇa* that he, *Arjuna*, did not know the meaning of fear, as was very well known to *Kṛṣṇa*.

A brave man can be sympathetic, but a coward who is sympathetic has a problem because the sympathy ends in distress. This kind of sympathy is of no use, whereas, when a resourceful, courageous, skilful person is sympathetic, the sympathy can be useful to the other person. A brave man should be sympathetic. So too, a rich man should be magnanimous and a knowledgeable man humble. Knowledge and humility, money and magnanimity, power and justice, and, strength and gentleness — these go together. A person having only one of these two attributes, such as power or strength, without the justice or gentleness that goes with it, is capable of destroying others.

Arjuna was a brave man, a courageous man, and a mature person. A mature person can be sympathetic. A problem arises, however, when there is confusion. *Arjuna*’s confusion was that of a mature person. *Vedānta* cannot be taught to an immature person. Instead, he or she can be taught something else — something that will resolve a particular problem. A mature person can be taught *Vedānta*, thereby solving the problem more fundamentally. This is where the *Gītā* comes in as we will see.

Arjuna presented his case beautifully. *Kṛṣṇa* destroyed demons and enemies, but here, those who were to be destroyed were *Arjuna*’s teachers and relatives. *Droṇa* was a teacher who was not against *Arjuna* in any way. The only problem was that he was obliged to *Duryodhana* because of all the help he had received from him. *Bhīṣma* was also obliged for the same reason. This did not mean, however, that they were against *Arjuna*. Perceiving this particular situation properly, *Arjuna* told *Kṛṣṇa*, ‘Destroying demons and enemies, as you have done, is right, but destroying one’s teachers is not right.’ It was fine that *Kṛṣṇa* was known as a destroyer of demons — *Madhusūdana*. However, *Arjuna* definitely did not want to be known as a destroyer of teachers — *gurusūdana*.

Therefore, in the next verse, he said that it would be better for him to live on alms than to kill his *gurus*.

गुरुनहत्वा हि महानुभावान् श्रेयो भोक्तुं भैक्ष्यमपीह लोके ।
 हत्वार्थकामांस्तु गुरुनिहैव भुञ्जीय भोगान् रुधिरप्रदिग्धान् ॥ ५ ॥
gurūnahatvā hi mahānubhāvān
śreya bhoktuṃ bhaikṣyamapīha loke
hatvārthakāmāṃstu gurūnihaiva
bhuñjīya bhogān rudhirapradigdhān Verse 5

महानुभावान् *mahānubhāvān* — highly exalted; गुरुन् *gurūn* — teachers; अहत्वा *ahatvā* — not killing; इह *iha* — here; लोके *loke* — in this world; भैक्ष्यम् *bhaikṣyam* — food collected from others by begging; अपि *api* — even; भोक्तुम् *bhoktum* — to eat; श्रेयः *śreyaḥ* — better; हि *hi* — indeed; तु *tu* — whereas; गुरुन् *gurūn* — teachers; हत्वा *hatvā* — killing; इह एव *iha eva* — here itself; रुधिर-प्रदिग्धान् *rudhira-pradigdhān* — stained with blood; अर्थ-कामान् *artha-kāmān* — security and pleasure; भोगान् *bhogān* — enjoyments; भुञ्जीय *bhuñjīya* — I would experience

It would be better indeed to eat food collected from others here in this world than to kill these highly exalted teachers. Whereas, if I kill them, the enjoyments of security and pleasure I would experience in this world will be stained with blood.

Arjuna also looked upon his grandfather, *Bhīṣma*, as a *guru* because he had been taught by him as he grew up. *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa* were not ordinary *gurus* of the world. They deserved the status of highly exalted people. In this verse, *Arjuna* told *Kṛṣṇa* that it would be preferable to live on alms than to kill his own people.

Bhaikṣya means collecting food from others, something that only *sādhus* are entitled to do. They take only a little from each person so as not to be a liability on anyone. The whole process of *Arjuna's* thinking was changing. In fact, his mind had already gone to this way of life, rather than to fighting the war.

Arjuna knew that if he left the battlefield, he would have to go to the forest. Previously, he had counted on this day to retrieve the kingdom and he had been looking forward to it for a long time. He had gathered all the weapons he needed, but when the day came, he decided not to fight. What else was left for him to do but go to the forest and live a life of alms? He could not remain in the kingdom. Only from the distant mountain people could he hope to collect a little food on which to live. This was all that was open to him and he was ready for it. He wanted it, in fact.

Only two types of people can take *bhikṣā* — students (*brahmacārīs*) and renunciates (*sādhus*). *Brahmacārīs* can take *bhikṣā* because they are not earning members in the society. They leave home and go to the *gurukula* to live with a teacher.

Therefore, they are allowed to go for *bhikṣā*, if they have to. *Sādhus* or Swamis are renunciates and they live on alms. *Arjuna's* mind had now turned in this direction.

Because he was already a father and grandfather, *Arjuna* could not become a *brahmacārī*. Therefore, all that was available to him was the life of a *sādhu*. This was what he wanted and this was the basis for the only question he asked again and again in the *Gītā* — ‘Which is better of the two — *karma-yoga* or *sannyāsa*? Why do you ask me to do *karma* when there is this other lifestyle?’ He asked this question in the third chapter and again in the fifth chapter. Then, perhaps because he was a little shy about asking it again, he asked some other questions in between. And then, slowly, he slipped it in again in the eighteenth chapter in a different form — ‘What is the difference between *tyāga* and *sannyāsa*?’

Thus, *Arjuna* always kept the same thought in his mind. He wanted to be a *sādhu* and all of his arguments were directed to this end. Although, *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa* had come to the battlefield, not as teachers but to cast their lot with *Duryodhana* for the sake of the kingdom, *Arjuna's* point was that if these people were destroyed, what kind of kingdom would he have? Any enjoyment he would experience would be soaked in blood. He would be haunted by the sight of the blood of his teachers. Nothing would remove it from his mind, he was sure.

The more one tries to remove a fixation, the more it becomes fixed. There is no way of removing it. If it could be removed, it would not be a fixation. Thus, *Arjuna* knew that the sight of *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa* bleeding to death would be permanently imprinted in his mind. The impact would be so powerful that it would remain a fixation. Therefore, any pleasant experience he gathered would be sullied by the thought of having killed his own people. Any enjoyment he might have had would always be conditioned by the memory of the cost, the blood of *Bhīṣma*, *Droṇa*, and the others who were killed in the battle.

Arjuna, then, expressed his confusion in the next verse:

न चैतद्विद्मः कतरन्नो गरीयो यद्वा जयेम यदि वा नो जयेयुः ।
यानेव हत्वा न जिजीविषामस्तेऽवस्थिताः प्रमुखे धार्तराष्ट्राः ॥ ६ ॥
na caitadvidmaḥ kataranno garīyo
yadvā jayema yadi vā no jayeyuḥ
yāneva hatvā na jijīviṣāma-
ste'vasthitāḥ pramukhe dhārtarāṣṭrāḥ

Verse 6

नः *naḥ* — for us; कतरत् *katarat* — which of the two; गरीयः *garīyaḥ* — better; एतत् *etat* — this; न च विद्मः *na ca vidmaḥ* — and we do not know; यद् वा *yad vā* — whether; जयेम *jayema* — we should conquer (them); यदि वा *yadi vā* — or; नः जयेयुः *naḥ jayeyuḥ* — they should conquer us; यान् एव *yān eva* — indeed whom; हत्वा *hatvā* — having

slain; न जिजीविषामः *na jijīviṣāmaḥ* — we will not want to live; ते *te* — those; धार्तराष्ट्राः *dhārtarāṣṭrāḥ* — sons of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*; प्रमुखे *pramukhe* — in front of (us); अवस्थिताः *avasthitāḥ* — stand

And, we do not know which of the two will be better for us — that we should conquer them or that they should conquer us. The sons of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*, after slaying whom we will indeed not want to live, stand facing us.

In this verse, *Arjuna* told *Kṛṣṇa* that he did not know which was better — to win the battle against the enemies, who were his own people, or to be defeated by them. Regardless of who was victorious, the problem would remain. To be victorious, *Arjuna* had to destroy all these people. He would have the pleasures of a kingdom but would be unable to enjoy them. For *Arjuna*, then, the choice was meaningless. Because *Kṛṣṇa* was telling him to get up and fight, he was confused about how the victory could be good for him. If, on the other hand, *Duryodhana* won, the *Pāṇḍavas* would have to go to the forest and live a life of *bhikṣu*. Although this life-style was arduous and there would be no enjoyments, *Arjuna* thought that it was definitely the better of the two alternatives.

He said that the *Pāṇḍavas* did not want to live by destroying the sons of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* and those connected to them — *Bhīṣma*, *Droṇa*, *Kṛpa* and so on — all of whom were standing in front of him on the battlefield. He called the war a ‘no-win’ situation. It would be one big loss and he had no interest in it. But *Kṛṣṇa* had told him that, what he was thinking of doing was wrong. Therefore, *Arjuna* argued that whether it was wrong or right, the situation was such that he could not see anything good coming to him from fighting.

Then, *Arjuna* explained himself further:

कार्पण्यदोषोपहतस्वभावः पृच्छामि त्वां धर्मसम्मूढचेताः ।

यच्छ्रेयः स्यान्निश्चितं ब्रूहि तन्मे शिष्यस्तेऽहं शाधि मां त्वां प्रपन्नम् ॥ ७ ॥

kārpaṇyadoṣopahatasvabhāvaḥ

prcchāmi tvāṃ dharmasammūḍhacetāḥ

yacchreyaḥ syānniścitaṃ brūhi tanme

śiṣyaste'haṃ śādhi māṃ tvāṃ prapannam

Verse 7

कार्पण्यदोष-उपहत-स्वभावः *kārpaṇya-doṣa-upahata-svabhāvaḥ* — overcome by faint-heartedness; धर्म-सम्मूढ-चेताः *dharma-sammūḍha-cetāḥ* — confused about (my) duty; त्वाम् *tvām* — you; पृच्छामि *prcchāmi* — I ask; मे *me* — for me; यत् *yat* — which; निश्चितम् श्रेयः स्यात् *niścitam śreyaḥ syāt* — is definitely better; तत् *tat* — that; ब्रूहि *brūhi* — please tell me; अहम् *aham* — I am; ते *te* — your; शिष्यः *śiṣyaḥ* — student; त्वाम्

प्रपन्नम् *tvām prapannam* — one who has taken refuge in you; माम् *mām* — me; शाधि *śādhi* — please teach

Overcome by faint-heartedness, confused about my duty, I ask you which is definitely better for me. Please tell me. I am your student. Please teach me, who has taken refuge in you.

न हि प्रपश्यामि ममापनुद्याद् यच्छोकमुच्छोषणमिन्द्रियाणाम् ।
 अवाप्य भूमावसपत्नमृद्धं राज्यं सुराणामपि चाधिपत्यम् ॥ ८ ॥
na hi prapaśyāmi mamāpanudyād
yacchokamucchoṣaṇamindriyāṇām
avāpya bhūmāvasapatnamṛddham
rājyaṃ surāṇāmapi cādhipatyam

Verse 8

भूमौ *bhūmau* — on the earth; असपत्नम् *asapatnam* — unrivalled; ऋद्धम् *ṛddham* — prosperous; राज्यम् *rājyam* — kingdom; सुराणाम् *surāṇām* — of the denizens of heaven; अपि *api* — even; आधिपत्यम् *ādhipatyam* — overlordship; च *ca* — and; अवाप्य *avāpya* — obtaining; मम *mama* — my; इन्द्रियाणाम् *indriyāṇām* — of the senses; उच्छोषणम् *ucchoṣaṇam* — that which dries up; शोकम् *śokam* — sorrow; यत् *yat* अपनुद्यात् *apanudyāt* — that which would remove; न हि प्रपश्यामि *na hi prapaśyāmi* — I do not see

I do not see anything that will remove the sorrow that dries up my senses, even if I were to obtain an unrivalled and prosperous kingdom on earth and sovereignty over the denizens of heaven.

We will look at the second of these two verses first. Here, *Arjuna* described how his sorrow had dried up his sense organs so that they could not function. His arms and legs also seemed to have atrophied. The energy in them had been totally sapped by this incapacitating sorrow. Nor could he see any way of removing it. Even if he found the courage to fight because of his commitment to *dharma* and because *Kṛṣṇa* asked him to fight, *Arjuna* did not think his sorrow would ever go away. He saw it as something inside of himself.

A SORROW THAT CANNOT BE ALLEVIATED

In fact, only the sad become sad. No one suddenly becomes sad. Just as the angry become angry, the sad become sad. If you are already angry inside, all that you require is a reason to become angry. Similarly, the jealous become jealous and the lonely become lonely. Therefore, these feelings indicate that there is a problem already there underneath.

Arjuna recognised an inner, unwept sadness and felt sad. Sometimes the sadness that is underneath comes out. Otherwise, it always remains hidden there. In between the bouts of sadness that come out, there is some laughter — not because of your effort but in spite of it. Sadness seems to be something that is identical with the person. *Arjuna* concluded that even gaining an unrivalled kingdom on earth would not allay his sorrow.

A kingdom is usually surrounded by enemies, making it a rivalled kingdom, meaning that its ruler cannot sleep peacefully. This is like having a nice house, which you cannot enjoy because it is in an inimical neighbourhood. Similarly, in a kingdom, that all the rivals want to occupy and go on encroaching upon, one fellow nibbles away at the east while another nibbles away at the west. This continual encroachment, this nibbling, makes the ruler of the kingdom miserable. Therefore, in order to be happy, a ruler must have a kingdom that is unrivalled.

Even by being the emperor of an empire, this could not be accomplished, *Arjuna* knew. There can be such severe drought and poverty in an empire that people will begin to eat each other or, at least, will be ready to do so. *Arjuna* saw his situation in this way. *Dharma* is very difficult to follow when a man is hungry and, continues to be hungry. Eventually, he will begin to compromise his *dharma* in order to relieve his hunger. The ruler of a kingdom is no different except that he must become a national beggar. If you are the head of a family, you have to beg for the whole family — not a big problem. However, if you are the ruler of a whole nation and its citizens are hungry, you must go to UNESCO and America to plead for assistance.

A kingdom, which is poor, is not a happy kingdom and if it is prosperous, rivals will definitely be there. Having commented on earthly kingdoms, *Arjuna* then extended his thinking to the kingdom of the gods. 'I don't see that even ruling the kingdom of heaven will enable me to cross this sorrow,' he said.

Arjuna saw his mind as having been destroyed by *kāṛpaṇya*, miserliness. A person who has no money and does not spend is practical, whereas one who has no money but spends is not. Neither is a miser. A miser is one who has money and will not spend it. He or she is always waiting for retirement, which is not related to a job, but to the time when he can no longer take care of himself. Always worrying about who will take care of him, he keeps his money for later. If he does fall ill, he still hangs on to it out of his concern for a more serious illness later! Then, when he dies, his brother-in-law gets everything! Such a person is a miser. He does not spend on himself or others. He is a very unfortunate person, like a child holding on to all of his toys. He is immature; he does not know himself and dies not knowing.

The *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* talks about a *kṛpaṇa*, a miser, from another standpoint. It describes the person leaving this world without gaining the knowledge of *ātmā* as a miser.

It says:

यो वा एतदक्षरं गार्ग्यविदित्वास्माल्लोकात्प्रैति स कृपणः ।
 yo vā etadakṣaraṃ gārgyaviditvāsmāllokātpraitī sa kṛpaṇaḥ
 (Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad – 3.8.10)

Oh! *Gārgī*, the one who departs from this world without knowing this ‘Immutable One’ is a *kṛpaṇa*.

The real wealth of a human being is more than external wealth. It is knowing what is real and what is unreal, what is right and what is wrong — *viveka*. This wealth distinguishes the human being from all other beings. The one who has this *viveka* is not a *kṛpaṇa*, whereas the one who does not have it naturally holds on to things, which have no real content because his or her value structure is confused. *Arjuna* is referring to this kind of miserliness, when he says that he has been overcome by *kāṛpaṇya*.

Arjuna now saw that although he had opportunities to do so, he had not made proper use of his mind. Otherwise, he would not have had this problem and knowing what was right and wrong would have been easy. He knew he could only decide this when he was not caught in the very concept of right and wrong. He had to know a little more than *dharma* and *adharma* in order to decide about right and wrong. When right and wrong itself is an issue, it cannot be resolved by one whose mind is deluded with reference to right and wrong.

Because he knew something more was needed, *Arjuna* asked *Kṛṣṇa* to tell him what was best for him. He wanted *Kṛṣṇa* to teach him that which is more than *dharma* and *adharma*. Two pursuits are open to a person — *śreyas* and *preyas*. *Śreyas* is something that is good for all, something that is above *dharma* and *adharma*. Whereas *preyas* is the result of *dharma*. Any good action produces a result for you, such as prosperity, pleasure, and so on. *Śreyas* is other than this, more than this; it is *mokṣa*. *Arjuna* therefore asked, ‘Please teach me *śreyas* alone.’

Kṛṣṇa could have said, ‘Why should I teach you? I came here to drive your chariot and you are asking me to teach. That was not the original contract. I said I would drive; I told you I would not fight. I did not tell you that I would teach. You wanted me to drive your chariot and I accepted. Now you are asking your driver to teach you!’ But, *Kṛṣṇa* responded in this way because *Arjuna* was telling him something that he had never told him before. He was saying, ‘I am your student.’

If someone tells you that he is your student, you have to decide whether he deserves to be a *śiṣya* or not. Whether you will be his or her *guru* is something for you to decide. Thus *Arjuna* left it in *Kṛṣṇa*’s hands. He seems to say, ‘The ball is in your court now, *Kṛṣṇa*. You do whatever you like. I don’t care, but I am your *śiṣya*’ Up to

now, *Arjuna* had not told *Kṛṣṇa* that he was his student. That is why *Kṛṣṇa* had not taught him so far. Only for the asking is the teaching given and *Arjuna* had never asked for it, although he had asked for a variety of things. He had asked him to come and drive his chariot which *Kṛṣṇa* did. But he had never asked him to teach.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A STUDENT — A ŚIṢYA?

The words *śiṣya* and *śreyas* go together. Once you say, ‘I am a *śiṣya*,’ and you ask for *śreyas*, there is only one meaning for that *śreyas*. Although it can mean anything good, any topical solution to a topical problem, any medicine or treatment, *śreyas* here has an absolute meaning. Because *Arjuna* says, ‘I am your *śiṣya*; please teach me,’ the absolute meaning is conveyed.

Śiṣya can also mean many things. There is an archery *śiṣya*, a dance *śiṣya*, both of which apply to *Arjuna*, as well as many others. In all of them, one factor is missing — the surrender. By asking *Kṛṣṇa* to teach him, *Arjuna* became a *śiṣya*, a disciple. As a student, he surrendered himself to *Kṛṣṇa*.

As we saw earlier, there are three words in Sanskrit for the student — *vidyārthī*, *antevāsī* and *śiṣya*. *Vidyārthī* can be anyone having a desire for knowledge. Everyone wants to know everything, but that does not mean that effort is made to gain knowledge. An *antevāsī* is the one who makes this effort. This type of student goes to a teacher, joins the ranks, joins the courses, enrolls in the university. That does not mean that he or she understands what is being taught in the class. The student may simply be sitting there, accomplishing nothing.

The third word for student, *śiṣya*, refers to a student who is qualified to be taught based on his or her capacity to understand. By using the word *śiṣya*, *Arjuna* was stating that he thought he was prepared to learn what *Kṛṣṇa* had to teach. His compassion indicated that he was mature, but because of a certain lack of understanding, there was a confusion with reference to *dharma* and *adharma*. *Arjuna* wanted to solve this problem much more fundamentally. He could not but think of his sorrow, which is a human problem. He had discerned sorrow in a situation where sorrow was not expected. He could not proceed with the battle because he did not see any favourable outcome, nothing that he could be proud of and thus his mind went elsewhere.

Where does the mind go in such circumstances? It comes back to oneself. This is where culture comes in. Without culture, one becomes a hobo. In *Arjuna*’s case, his culture, maturity, his upbringing, his lifelong commitment to the values of *dharma*, the various privations he underwent for the sake of *dharma* — all of these had paid off in this particular coming back to himself and saying, ‘I don’t think that even a heavenly kingdom could remove this sorrow that is in me.’

Sorrow was, therefore, the problem and *Arjuna* had always heard that there was only one way of removing it. He had to become a *śiṣya* and gain *śreyas* or *mokṣa*, liberation. He did both of them. ‘To be a *śiṣya*,’ he told *Kṛṣṇa*, ‘I have surrendered to you. You are the one who is going to deliver the goods. I am your student.’ In this way, *Arjuna* surrendered so that Lord *Kṛṣṇa* could do what was to be done.

सञ्जय उवाच ।

एवमुक्त्वा हृषीकेशं गुडाकेशः परन्तपः ।

न योत्स्य इति गोविन्दमुक्त्वा तूष्णीं बभूव ह ॥ ९ ॥

sañjaya uvāca

evamuktvā hr̥ṣīkeśaṃ guḍākeśaḥ parantapaḥ

na yotsya iti govindamuktvā tūṣṇīm babhūva ha

Verse 9

सञ्जयः *sañjayaḥ* — *Sañjaya* ; उवाच *uvāca* — said;

परन्तपः *parantapaḥ* — the scorcher of foes; गुडाकेशः *guḍākeśaḥ* — *Arjuna*; हृषीकेशम् *hr̥ṣīkeśam* — to Lord *Kṛṣṇa*; एवम् *evam* — in this manner; उक्त्वा *uktvā* — having spoken; न योत्स्ये *na yotsye* — I shall not fight; इति *iti* — thus; गोविन्दम् *govindam* — to *Govinda* (Lord *Kṛṣṇa*); उक्त्वा *uktvā* — saying; तूष्णीम् बभूव *tūṣṇīm babhūva* — became silent; ह *ha*—indeed

Sañjaya said:

Having spoken to *Hṛṣīkeśa* (Lord *Kṛṣṇa*) in this manner, *Guḍākeśa* (*Arjuna*), the scorcher of foes, saying to *Govinda*, ‘I shall not fight,’ became silent.

With these words *Sañjaya* informed *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* of the most recent events on the battlefield, as he had been asked to do.

Wanting *Kṛṣṇa* to teach him *śreyas*, *Arjuna* had said, ‘I am your *śiṣya*. Please teach me.’ *Arjuna* seemed to know the profundity of the word *śreyas*, a word mentioned often in the *śāstra*. In the *Kaṭhapaniṣad*, there is a story about a young boy, *Naciketas*, who went to Lord *Yama*, the Lord of Death, and received three boons. He encashed the first in favour of his father, who was angry with him. For the second boon, he asked to be taught the ritual for gaining heaven. This boon, too, was for the sake of others. Lord *Yama* granted *Naciketas* both of these boons.

Naciketas encashed the third boon for himself. He wanted to know whether there was a self, an *ātmā* other than the body, because some people said there was, and others said there was not. He told Lord *Yama* that he wanted to be taught about this *ātmā* and that there was no one more qualified to do it than Lord *Yama*. At first, Lord *Yama* discouraged him, but finally, he decided to teach *Naciketas*.

Lord *Yama* told *Naciketas* that there were always two things available to a human being — *śreyas* and *preyas*. *Śreyas* is chosen by one who is wise, a *vivekī*. Whereas everyone else generally chooses *preyas* — prosperity and pleasure, *artha* and *kāma*. *Dharma* also comes under *preyas*. *Śreyas*, on the other hand, is *mokṣa*, liberation, the freedom brought about by self-knowledge. *Naciketas* asked Lord *Yama* for this *śreyas*.

Because *śreyas* can be used in both a relative and an absolute sense, it is important to know what it was that *Arjuna* was asking for. Whether *Arjuna* wanted it or not, *Kṛṣṇa* understood *Arjuna's* request only in terms of absolute *śreyas* and not in the ordinary sense. The absolute meaning of *śreyas* is absolute fullness — that which is good for me, good for you, good for everyone, at any time and place. That which was good for *Arjuna* was equally good for *Duryodhana*, if only he had ears for it. If *Duryodhana* had said to *Kṛṣṇa*, 'I am your *śiṣya*, please teach me,' and if *Kṛṣṇa* had considered *Duryodhana* a qualified student, he would have taught him in the same way.

Whenever and to whomever *śreyas* is taught, it is always taught the same way because it is knowledge, *jñāna*. From *Kṛṣṇa's* point of view, then the *śreyas* *Arjuna* asked for was this knowledge, which is *mokṣa*. In the wake of this knowledge, there is no sorrow. Because this is the teaching of the *Gītā*, from beginning to end, the *Gītā* is *mokṣa-śāstra*, a body of teaching meant to destroy *śoka* sorrow.

Knowledge is something that cannot be personal. Although it has to be gained by a person, knowledge, any knowledge, is always true to the nature of the object of knowledge. It is not something that is centred on your personal will, but on the object of knowledge. For example, if the object is a flower, it is a flower; there is no choice in knowing it as anything other than a flower. If there is something more to know about the flower, then you can know it — its botanical name, which includes its family, and so on. Whatever more you come to know about the flower is always *jñāna*. Because knowledge is always as true as the object, it is not determined by one's will. Therefore, knowledge of a thing is not going to differ from person to person.

RELATIVE ŚREYAS

Usually, what is good for you at a given time may be not good for you at another time. For example, a particular drug may be a cure for your illness, although it is also a poison. Thus, what is good for you at one time is not good for you at another time. Also, a certain medicine may be good for only one problem and not any other. Alternatively, the drug that treats your problem may not be good for someone else with the same problem, because of the other person's allergic reaction to it. This kind of goodness is what is meant by relative goodness, something that is not always applicable in the same way. It keeps on changing.

Something that is good is determined by place, *deśa*, time, *kāla*, and situation, *nimitta*. Even ethics and values, *dharma-śāstra*, which we generally consider as absolute, have to be interpreted from time to time. Because *dharma-śāstra* is to be interpreted, it cannot be considered absolutely good.

ABSOLUTE ŚREYAS

If there is something that is absolutely good, it must be something that does not change at any time and is always the same for any person. That is what is meant by *śreyas* here. *Arjuna's* sorrow led him to ask for this *śreyas* and *Kṛṣṇa* understood what he wanted as absolute *śreyas*.

Absolute *śreyas*, called *mokṣa*, is the complete acceptance of oneself. Self-acceptance implies a self that is already acceptable. If I am not acceptable to myself, positive thinking cannot give me self-acceptance. The self is unfolded in the *Gītā* as already acceptable, along with how it is acceptable and how it is free from all limitations.

The one who is happy with oneself has nothing more to do. Such a person is one who has checked off all the items to be completed, to be fulfilled that are on the list. He or she is a free person. Throughout the *Gītā* we are told that the self is acceptable and that this acceptable self alone is what everyone is seeking in life.

When *Duryodhana* wanted the kingdom, he wanted only self-acceptance. He wanted to see himself as a person who was acceptable to himself. Without a kingdom, he could not see himself in this way. Therefore, he wanted the kingdom. In the process, of course, he had conflicts. He was cavilled at by so many people and he had wronged so many people. How could he be acceptable to himself under such circumstances?

You should be acceptable to yourself without a kingdom, without any addition, without even the physical body and its condition. Only then can you accept yourself. If the body is something based on which you have self-acceptance, you are in trouble because the body will change. It is not going to remain the same. The self might have been acceptable yesterday, but not today, because the body has picked up a problem. The body is time-bound; it is subject to change and it keeps changing. Therefore, in the morning, it is acceptable and in the evening, it is not. We find, then, that if the self depends on any other factor for its acceptability it is not an acceptable self at all. The self by itself, in its own glory, should be acceptable to you, for which it has to be free from any limitation whatsoever.

The self is the whole. In reality, there is nothing other than self. This vision is unfolded in the *Gītā* in such verses as, ‘All beings exist in me and I do not exist in them — *matsthāni sarvabhūtāni na cā’haṃ teṣvavasthitaḥ* (*Gītā* – 9-4) and ‘in me there are no beings — *na ca matsthāni bhūtāni* (*Gītā* – 9-5).’ This means that while I do not

depend on any one of them, they all depend upon me. This is the vision of the whole, unfolded in the *sāstra* as the meaning of the word *śreyas*.

Śreyas is you. Until it is gained, *śreyas* is an end, as it were. Once gained, it is not separate from you. It is you alone. You are *śreyas*. *Arjuna* asked for it and he got it. If *Arjuna* had wanted ordinary *śreyas*, he would not have told *Kṛṣṇa* that he was his *śiṣya*. Nor would he have told him that he was surrendering to him. All this indicated that *Arjuna* wanted to gain absolute *śreyas* at this particular stage of his life. Having surrendered to *Kṛṣṇa*, *Arjuna* left everything to him. *Kṛṣṇa* then had to decide whether he would teach *Arjuna* or merely urge him to stop blabbering and fight! Fortunately, *Kṛṣṇa* taught him. Had he opted not to, we would not have the *Gītā*.

ARJUNA'S ATTRACTION TO SANNYĒSA

In asking that *Kṛṣṇa* teach him, there was a prayer, a surrender in *Arjuna* that calmed the storm within him. When there is a doubt or indecision, the mind is restless. When there is a possibility of a solution, or a decision is made, then the mind quietens down. There is definitely restlessness when there is a conflict between *dharma* and *adharmā*.

In *Arjuna's* mind there was a conflict between right and wrong (*dharma* and *adharmā*) and there was the emotion of sympathy, leading to his sorrow. Affections being involved, his mind was in an even greater state of confusion than it would have been had he merely been concerned about his duty. *Arjuna's* confusion naturally led to a certain sadness. Lord *Kṛṣṇa* was a good listener and perhaps the two verses wherein he tried to whip *Arjuna* into action also helped to trigger *Arjuna's* thinking.

While trying to prove to *Kṛṣṇa* that he was not frightened, *Arjuna* had to tell him that he could not handle this particular situation. He now saw himself as someone who was not as dispassionate as he was expected to be. *Arjuna* concluded that he would be better off living a life of alms, a life-style mentioned in the *sāstra* for a *sādhu*, a person who gives up the pursuit of all desires.

The life of a *sādhu* is meant purely for the pursuit of knowledge, *jñāna*, and is free from all social, national, religious, or familial obligations. As a *sannyāsī* you are a non-competitor in the society. You do not have a job. Nor are you interested in anything in the next life like heaven and so on. Self-knowledge is pursued to the exclusion of all else. The *sannyāsī* is respected by the society, and lives on alms (*bhikṣā*). The Vedic society has a value for this life-style and it is one of the four stages, *āśramas* of a person's life.

Sannyāsa was exactly what *Arjuna* had in mind. He thought that a life of *bhikṣā* would mean *sannyāsa* and he talked about it constantly. He knew that *sannyāsa* was

meant for *jñāna* (*mokṣa*), and that it was not for securities and pleasures (*artha*, *kāma* and *dharma*).

A TOPICAL PROBLEM BECOMES A FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM

Having lived in the forest, *Arjuna* had met many great people, *mahātmās*. What a period it was! Even though some *Duryodhanas* were there, it was an excellent era. Certainly, it is a rare privilege to have as one's contemporaries, people like *Vyāsa* and *Śuka*, *Bhīṣma*, *Vidura* and *Balarāma*.

Although *Arjuna* had lived in such times, he had been a prince with his own predominant desires and ambitions. Naturally, he had not been committed to the pursuit of *mokṣa* although he had access to it. He knew all about *śreyas*, but now the time had come for him to pursue it.

When *Arjuna* had first come to fight, he had no conflict whatsoever. All he wanted to know was with whom he would be fighting. Even when he saw his own people on both sides, his conflict was simple. It was, 'Should I fight? How can I fight my own people?' But then, as he thought about it, he became completely unnerved, believing that he was committing some kind of self-destruction. What had started out as a simple conflict had now gained a different proportion altogether. A simple topical problem had become a fundamental problem.

This can happen to anyone. A time comes when death draws our attention and we ask, 'What is this death?' Perhaps, the Buddha thought he had to be a monk in order to find an answer to such a question.

He was a prince and had not seen death or anyone who was crippled. Or, perhaps, since such events had not touched him personally, he had simply not paid any attention to them. Only when he began noticing them, did the big question hit him— 'There is so much sorrow and pain in life. Can there be a solution?' Having asked this question, it is said that, he left the palace in search of the answer. When you go off in search of truth, you do not carry a truckload of belongings with you. Since, he was interested only in truth, he just walked out.

THE BASIS FOR SORROW

Similarly, seeing simple pain, there is an empathy that turns into something else because a question has been triggered. In fact, all problems in life are connected to those that are much more basic, the basic problems being inherent in ordinary small problems.

The small sorrows and pains, which are mental in nature, have their basis in the core personality. One who is angry becomes angry and one who is not angry does not. Similarly, only the sad become sad. In order to determine why you are sad, a

psychotherapist may take you into regression, back into a period of time when you picked up various notions about yourself and the world. In this way, your neurosis is accounted for, which is psychology. There is a core personality, which is psychologically traceable by an informed specialist.

Tracking back, however, in itself, is not enough. One more step has to be taken — a step that is psychologically fundamental. No psychologist says that it is improper to think, that I am a mortal, that I am subject to sorrow, that I have to prove myself. In fact, they all agree that you should get angry if the situation warrants it. ‘Cry it out, don't suppress it,’ they say. The teaching, however, says we must take one more step because there is a more basic problem that must be addressed.

Because ‘I am subject to sorrow’ is a basic problem, there is something more basic about you, which you had better know. Any small problem can be traced if you ask a few more questions. Inevitably, you will come to appreciate that there is a basic problem. If you ask the question, ‘Am I really sad?’ you end up reading the *Gītā* because the *Gītā* is the answer.

The answer is not something you can figure out because if you are sad, you are sad. It is something that must be recognised. To ask, ‘What is the basis of sadness?’ means that it is something to be understood and not a particular condition or experience. The experiences of both happiness and sorrow have always been there, one alternating with the other — now I am sad; now I am happy. It seems, therefore, that happiness is a visitor and sadness is the person.

You have to understand whether the self is subject to sorrow, what sorrow is, and so on. There is a whole gamut of questions involved here. A simple frown by someone, can trigger some small pain in me. This can be traced to a fundamental self-ignorance and self-confusion, or at least a self-question — ‘Am I seeing myself rightly?’

This kind of questioning is called *ātmavicāra* and is what happened in *Arjuna's* mind. Therefore, he told *Kṛṣṇa* that he was his *śiṣya* and he wanted *śreyas*. ‘If you think the battlefield is not a good place for us to be in, then just drive the chariot somewhere else. Do whatever you like. I have handed over the horses and chariot to you. You decide. If you want a quiet place, drive to a quiet place. And if you think you can teach in this din and roar, then I too can listen. I do not mind.’ Saying this and leaving everything to *Bhagavān*, *Arjuna* became quiet.

ARJUNA'S SURRENDER

Not only had *Arjuna* handed over his horses and chariot to *Kṛṣṇa*, but also his life. Having found the possibility of a solution to his problem in the form of *śreyas* and in the form of *Kṛṣṇa's* teaching, *Arjuna* became silent. The storm in his mind had blown over. Although it was not enlightened, his mind was at least silent with some hope.

Although the storm was over, *Arjuna* was still overcome with an intense inner torpor. Where did it come from? He had been so enthusiastic, armed, and ready to fight. Now, right in the middle of the battlefield, his sorrow was so much that his eyes glistened with tears.

When you are in sorrow, you are present as a whole person. In fact, sorrow cannot come unless you are there as a whole person. Some people have a feeling of deadness due to some emotional problem and, in order to relieve it, to feel alive, they work themselves into sorrow. Only then do they feel that they exist. Only then is there some reality for them. Artists sometimes have this problem. They feel dull and think they should be either ecstatic or in pain. They say that pain produces music or some other art form. However, it is not the pain that does it. It is because the whole person comes out of the pain and then something is produced. The result of such pain then becomes some one else's pain — or joy, perhaps, depending on the product!

Similarly, *Arjuna* became a whole person because a storm had occurred. There was now no chance of sleep or any other expression of torpor — only silence. Having found this possibility of a solution, there was a lull in his mind now that the storm had blown over. What a silence it was!

Then, *Saṅjaya* said:

तमुवाच हृषीकेशः प्रहसन्निव भारत ।

सेनयोरुभयोर्मध्ये विषीदन्तमिदं वचः ॥ १० ॥

tamuvāca hr̥ṣīkeśaḥ prahasanniva bhārata

senayorubh ayormadhye viṣīdantamidaṃ vacaḥ

Verse 10

भारत *bhārata* — Oh! *Bhārata*; उभयोः सेनयोः मध्ये *ubhayoḥ senayoḥ madhye* — in the middle of both armies; विषीदन्तम् *viṣīdantam* — the one who is sad; तम् *tam* — to him; हृषीकेशः *hr̥ṣīkeśaḥ* — *Kṛṣṇa*; प्रहसन् इव *prahasanniva* — as though laughing (smiling); इदम् *idam* — this; वचः *vacaḥ* — sentence; उवाच *uvāca* — said

Oh! *Bhārata*, to him who was sad in the midst of both armies, *Hṛṣīkeśa* (*Kṛṣṇa*), as though laughing, said these words.

In this verse, *Saṅjaya* addressed *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* as *Bhārata*, a name that applied to all of these people, including *Arjuna* and his brothers, because they were born in the *Bharata* family. He told him that Lord *Kṛṣṇa*, about to respond to *Arjuna*'s silence, was 'as though laughing.' Why did he not simply say *Kṛṣṇa* was smiling? There being an opportunity for interpretation here, many interpretations have been put forward.

Was *Kṛṣṇa* smiling because he had been waiting for this day? Previously, *Arjuna* had used the words, 'my chariot.' Now *Arjuna* had surrendered, an attitude, which

Kṛṣṇa would no doubt have found preferable. *Kṛṣṇa* was quite satisfied with the outcome of *Arjuna's* outpourings. The discussion had not been just a simple dialogue with a person in despair. *Arjuna* had asked to be *Kṛṣṇa's śiṣya*. Perhaps *Kṛṣṇa* was smiling because it was now going to happen.

Whatever the reason, *Kṛṣṇa* was smiling. The knowledge he was about to teach was not a grim knowledge. He did not have to say, 'Please listen to me. I am a *Vedāntī* and this is a very serious matter. You are all bliss, all fullness, all *ānanda*. Please, therefore, do not take this knowledge lightly,' etc. The subject matter being what it was, it was a smile, laughter, all the way. We find that *Kṛṣṇa* always had a good time while teaching *Arjuna*, whereas *Arjuna*, of course, did have a hard time now and then. One can find a number of different meanings for this expression, 'as though laughing.'

Kṛṣṇa did not drive the chariot to a quieter place. He kept the chariot where it was, right in the middle of the battlefield. For gaining this knowledge, you do not require a particular time or place. You only require a particular person or persons. There should be someone like *Kṛṣṇa* who, in the din and roar of the battlefield, had all composure necessary to talk to *Arjuna*. *Arjuna* too had the necessary composure to listen to *Kṛṣṇa* and the appropriateness of his questions indicates that he listened well. Therefore, who is learning and who is teaching are important, whereas the time and place are not.

THE TEACHING BEGINS

Because the words to be spoken by *Kṛṣṇa* to *Arjuna* comprise the teaching, the *Gītā* is said to begin with the next verse. *Kṛṣṇa* began by telling *Arjuna* that there was no reason for grief — *asocyān anvaśocaḥ tvam* — and concluded the *Gītā* saying: 'Grieve not — *mā śucaḥ*' In between there is only removal of grief, or more accurately put, removal of the reason for grief. The cause of grief, ignorance and error, is removed totally. Therefore, the entire *gītā-śāstra* is a *śāstra* which removes sorrow, *śoka*.

Sorrow refers to any complaint. Any uneasiness about me, centred on the self, is sorrow. Physical pain is not sorrow, but complaining about such pain is sorrow. The problem is in thinking that everyone else is well and I am not. This self-centred sorrow, *śoka*, is purely the brood of ignorance — wrong thinking stemming from wrong notions about oneself and the world. *Kṛṣṇa's* words, *Bhagavān's Gītā*, addressed this very problem.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

अशोच्यानन्वशोचस्त्वं प्रज्ञावादांश्च भाषसे ।

गतासूनगतासूंश्च नानुशोचन्ति पण्डिताः ॥ ११ ॥

śrībhagavān uvāca

asocyānanvaśocastvaṃ prajñāvādāṃśca bhāṣase

gatāsūnagatāsūṃśca nānuśocanti paṇḍitāḥ

Verse 11

श्रीभगवान् *śrībhagavān* — *Śrī Bhagavān*; उवाच *uvāca* — said;
 त्वम् *tvam* — you; अशोच्यान् *aśocyān* — those who should not be grieved for; अन्वशोचः
anvaśocaḥ — grieve; प्रज्ञावादान् *prajñāvādān* — words of wisdom; भाषसे *bhāṣase* —
 you speak; च *ca* — and; पण्डिताः *paṇḍitāḥ* — the wise; गतासून् *gatāsūn* — those from
 whom the breath has left; अगतासून् *agatāsūn* — those from whom the breath has not yet
 left; च *ca* — and; न अनुशोचन्ति *na anuśocanti* — do not grieve

Śrī Bhagavān said:

You grieve for those who should not be grieved for. Yet you speak words
 of wisdom. The wise do not grieve for those who are living or for those
 who are no longer living.

Arjuna, confused about *dharma* and *adharma* and overwhelmed by sorrow,
 became a *śiṣya* and asked for *śreyas*. Wanting to help *Arjuna* out of his sorrow for good
 and knowing that relative *śreyas* was useless here, *Kṛṣṇa*'s teaching was for imparting
 self-knowledge alone.

The subject matter of the remainder of the *Gītā* is self-knowledge, *ātma-jñāna*,
 the cause for the removal of sorrow. *Śāṅkara*'s commentary starts with this verse since
 it marks the beginning of the teaching.

While the word '*tvam*,' meaning 'you,' refers to *Arjuna*, it can also apply to any
 second person. The word is significant given that the whole *vedānta-śāstra* is nothing
 but 'That thou art — *tat tvam asi*.' The first six chapters of the *Gītā* deal with 'you'
 alone. What is 'you' in the equation, *tat tvam asi*? You are 'that' means you are equated
 to 'that.' 'That' has to be presented and the meaning given is the Lord, *Īśvara*.
 Therefore, '*tat tvam asi*' means 'you are *Īśvara*.'

That there is a difference between you and the Lord is obvious. But, because the
 statement, '*tat tvam asi*,' is an equation, it seems as though 'you' are equated to the
 Lord. The vision of the *śruti* is that you are that *Īśvara* who is the cause for the entire
 creation. That *Brahman* you are. The '*tat tvam asi*' equation is a statement, a *vākya*, of
 this vision.

There are two elements involved here. One is *Īśvara*, the Lord, which is the
 meaning of the word *tat*; and the other is the *jīva*, the individual, which is the meaning
 of the word *tvam*, you. Unless the meaning of 'you' is properly understood, the equation
 cannot be understood because there is a contradiction. If the statement, 'You are
Brahman,' were to be a self-evident fact, there would be no necessity for the teaching at
 all. Since, however, there is a contradiction between *jīva* and *Īśvara*, we have to resolve
 it. Unless there is absence of contradiction, there is no identity. Unless you recognise the

real meaning of the word ‘you,’ which means ‘I.’ there is no way of discovering the identity between you and *Īśvara*, that the ‘*tat tvam asi*’ equation reveals.

Therefore, the first six chapters of the *Gītā* emphasise ‘you.’ The next six chapters deal with ‘that’ the Lord, and the last six chapters deal with the identity between the two. You will find, as you proceed, that the whole subject matter in the seventh chapter changes and that the last six chapters are significantly different.

ARJUNA'S SORROW IS YOUR SORROW

Arjuna's sorrow, the subject matter of the first chapter, is the sorrow of any *jīva*, the individual, one who is subject to sorrow. That *Arjuna* was sad is not unusual. In fact, we are all with *Arjuna*. His sorrow seems to be very legitimate. If this situation could not cause sorrow, what could? We can well appreciate and sympathise with *Arjuna* because for much lesser reasons, we find ourselves in even deeper trouble. This is the condition of the *jīva*. That the *jīva* is desirous of getting rid of sorrow is also obvious.

Generally, people seek relief through escapes. What is significant here is that *Arjuna* wanted to resolve the sorrow for good, which is the reason we have a *gītā-śāstra*. *Arjuna* was told straight away by *Kṛṣṇa*, ‘You, *Arjuna*, grieve unnecessarily.’ Over the shoulders of *Arjuna*, you too are being addressed. You too have entertained sorrow, the state of mind known as *śoka*.

WHAT IS DESERVING OF GRIEF?

Śocya is that which deserves grief, that which has legitimate basis for sorrow. In the society, we have universally accepted that certain events are matters for sorrow, while others are not. For example, when someone is about to be married, we do not send condolences. We send congratulations. Marriage is a matter for joy and laughter, not for sorrow. This is the case in any culture. For a death, on the other hand, even when there is relief involved because the person was suffering extreme pain and required constant care, there is at least a tinge of sadness when someone dies. Therefore, death is synonymous with mourning and can be called *śocya*, universally.

There is also personal *śocya*. You may be sad because of something that has come or gone, whereas another person may not be sad at all. A man may be very happy that his mother has come, whereas his wife is a pack of nerves. For him the event is not *śocya*, but for her it is a great *śocya*. Because this woman has walked into their home, one person becomes a pack of nerves. The other is ecstatic because he can show off his accomplishments to his mother. The event is the same for both of them, but for one person it is *śocya* and for the other it is *aśocya*. Thus, we find that some things are *śocya* universally and others are *śocya* only for an individual.

Culturally, there may also be peculiar situations that are *śocyas*. In some cultures the birth of a girl is *śocya*, whereas in other cultures the birth of a boy may cause sorrow since too many boys are definitely a problem. Thus, an object of sorrow, *śoka*, is called *śocya* just as an object of knowledge, *jñāna*, is called *jñeya*. An object of sorrow means a situation that causes sorrow, be it an event or an experience. A situation that does not cause sorrow is called *aśocya*. Here, *Kṛṣṇa*'s contention is that whatever may be the situation, you have no legitimate reason for grief. In the coming verses he will establish that there is no legitimate cause for sorrow both from the relative and the absolute standpoints.

THE WISE DO NOT GRIEVE

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that he had picked up sorrow where it was not warranted at all and that people of knowledge, *pañḍitas*, do not entertain any grief. *Pañḍā* means self-knowledge and a *pañḍita* is one in whom self-knowledge is born¹. *Kṛṣṇa* also acknowledged in this verse that, although *Arjuna* was grieving over that which did not deserve any grief, he had also spoken words of wisdom. *Bhagavān* remembered all of *Arjuna*'s words from the first chapter when he spoke so eloquently about who would go to *naraka* and why the *dharma* would be in trouble, etc. While acknowledging the wisdom of *Arjuna*'s words, *Kṛṣṇa* told him that people of wisdom do not grieve.

Arjuna was not a wise man and that was his whole problem, *Kṛṣṇa* knew that all he had to do was make *Arjuna* a *pañḍita* so that he would not see a problem where there wasn't one, as he was presently doing. The sorrow itself was unwarranted which was why he was aggrieved.

With reference to what, do the wise not grieve? Lord *Yama*, death, can interfere at any time. There are many breaths and any one of them could be the last. One breath alone does not last for eighty years. Between every inhalation and every exhalation, there is a gap. Therefore, how do you know which breath will be the last? Only when the next breath comes do we know that the last breath was not the last.

The verse makes a distinction between one who has breathed his or her last and one who has not. Men of wisdom do not entertain any grief either for the dead or for the not yet dead. Why was death referred to here? Because all of *Arjuna*'s arguments revolved only around death. He was always talking about the imminent death of his teachers and members of his family. Destruction was involved because there was a battle ensuing. This was one reason.

¹ पण्डा, आत्मविषया बुद्धिः येषां ते पण्डिताः । शा० भा०

pañḍā, ātmaviṣayā buddhiḥ yeṣāṃ te pañḍitāḥ

pañḍā – self-knowledge; the one who has this self-knowledge is a pañḍita

In addition, death is the only event that uniformly, universally, evokes sorrow. We would never send condolences to the bereaved unless we knew they were sad. On the other hand, if the survivors were sometimes happy, we would not automatically send condolences. We would have first found out whether they were sad or not and if not, if they were happy, we would have to send messages of congratulation. Without even a thought, however, we all send condolences because death is an event that universally evokes sorrow.

To use an analogy for why death was used here, a boxer who wants to become the heavyweight champion of the world has only to fight one person, the present champion. All he has to do is knock him out and he will become the world champion. Similarly, if death is one event which invariably evokes sorrow in all, with reference to which the wise do not grieve, certainly the loss of hair or the loss of a relationship or marriage will not be the cause for sorrow.

Finally, death is a particularly appropriate event to use in a discussion about sorrow and its removal when what is to be discussed is *ātmā*, which is not subject to death. *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna*, that anything he might look upon as a source of sorrow was not. Nor would any wise man look upon anything as a source of sorrow because there is no source of sorrow.

SOURCE OF SORROW

What is it that can cause you sorrow? There can be only two sources — yourself, *ātmā* or a source other than yourself, *anātmā*. If *ātmā* is the source of sorrow, then there is no problem. You will always be sad because sadness is your nature, your *svabhāva*. In fact, when you are sad, you will be very happy because to be sad is your nature.

A restless monkey is a healthy, happy monkey because restlessness is its nature. A quiet monkey is a problem and should be cause for concern. If you are taking care of a monkey who suddenly becomes very quiet, do not think he has become a *sādhu* and is meditating. He definitely has a problem and may require attention. Similarly, what is natural to you cannot be a source of sorrow. If sorrow is our own nature, then we have no cause for sorrow at all. We should all be happy being sad. Thus, if *ātmā* is the source of my sorrow, then sadness is not a problem.

Since sadness is a problem, we must analyse whether it is the *ātmā* or the *anātmā* that is the source of our sadness. This means that either the world that you come across is the source of your sorrow or you yourself are its source — in other words, you are a source of sorrow to yourself. Therefore, we have to analyse *ātmā* and *anātmā* from this perspective too, in order to discover the source of our sorrow. This analysis is the sole subject matter of the *Gītā*.

Paṇḍitas are those who know the *ātmā* and *anātmā*. If you know the *ātmā*, then you naturally know the *anātmā* also because what is not *ātmā* can only be *anātmā*. Conversely, if you know what *anātmā* is, you will also know what *ātmā* is. Therefore, knowing one implies knowing the other.

Arjuna's grief was due to not knowing the difference between *ātmā* and *anātmā*. That is, he did not have *ātma-anātma-viveka*. Knowing the difference, *viveka*, resolves the problem. This verse identifies the subject matter of the *Gītā* as *ātma-anātma-viveka* and states the result of such knowledge — knowing themselves, the wise do not grieve.

The *gītā-śāstra* is the connection between the subject matter and the result in that it reveals what the *ātmā* is, thereby enabling one to become wise. And who is qualified for this knowledge? A qualified person is one who has a good degree of dispassion, *vairāgya* with reference to his or her likes and dislikes and who has a desire for liberation, *mumukṣā*. Here, *Arjuna* is the qualified student and *Kṛṣṇa* is the teacher.

A PRAGMATIC VIEW OF THIS VERSE

This verse can be viewed from the standpoint of a pragmatist who has no belief in any scripture or its statements. Or, it can be viewed from the standpoint of a person who has faith, *śraddhā* in the survival of the soul after death, from the standpoint of a believer, *āstika*, a follower of the Veda. It can also be viewed from the standpoint of the vision of the *Gītā* — the standpoint of *ātmā* itself.

The practical person's standpoint is that any sorrow, if analysed, has no legitimacy. Legitimate sorrow is sorrow that is commonly accepted. The question is, is there a sorrow which can be called legitimate? For a simple, practical person, if sorrow produces a result that you want, then it is legitimate for you. Otherwise, it is not. That we all have sorrow is not in question for the practical person, but the point is that it does not produce any result.

When a person is sad because someone very near and dear has died, what does this sadness produce? Does it alter the fact that one's friend is dead and gone? No. Sadness does not alter any fact. A woman is crying because someone has died. Crying, she gets up and lights the stove. Crying, she boils water and makes coffee. Crying she adds milk and sugar. Crying, she drinks it. Nothing changes. Previously, she drank coffee and now also she is drinking coffee. All that is new is the crying. She is not taking coffee to cry better. No fact is altered.

From a pragmatist's point of view, sorrow is not going to help you and it certainly does not help the dead. If I am dead and gone, I have no problem. Even if I am dying, can I afford to be sad? The heart generally does not give up easily. It keeps trying even when there is pain, even when it misses beats, or even when one artery is gone. It does not give up. However, when you become sad, the heart may think, 'This fellow is sad.

Why should I continue to work?' Because you have already decided, it too will give up. The will also seems to have a way of moving the limbs and organs to make them tick. If the will is gone, if you are sad, the fighting system will necessarily give up.

There is a story about three men who, in the doctor's opinion, were dying of terminal diseases. The doctor therefore asked each of them what he wanted. The first man asked for a priest so that he could make his confession and this was arranged. The second man wanted to see his family and the doctor arranged this as well. When the third man was asked what he wanted, he replied, 'I want another doctor!!!'

This third man was practical and wanted to live. He had certain something about him that perhaps would make the heart try harder. Because all the strength he had was required in order to live, he definitely could not afford to be sad.

We have already seen that sadness with reference to someone who is dead produces no result in that it does not alter the fact. But, shouldn't you be sad if someone is seriously ill? If you cry when you visit such a man, he will think he is going to die, although all the doctors may have been telling him that his condition is not serious and that he should not worry. The doctors may even have some hope; but your crying is going to make him doubt what the doctors have been saying. In other words, he will read his own death in your crying and then give up. Anyone who is ill requires strength and therefore cannot afford to be sad. Instead of crying, you have to boost the person's morale in whatever way you can, which, in turn, can boost his or her strength.

GRIEF IS NEVER LEGITIMATE

Thus, crying does not alter the fact that the dead have gone and the dying do not require your crying. If you yourself are dying, crying is also useless. Why then this sorrow? Sorrow still takes place. It is born of confusion, *aviveka*. What is subject to change will change. Why then sit and say, 'They are changing. They are changing.' Changing is changing.

One who dies is one who is subject to death. Therefore, the one who will die, dies, and the one who will not die, does not die. What is not subject to death will always remain, and what is subject to death will not. Death may come earlier than expected, but it is always expected, although we do not know which breath will be the last.

Grief, therefore, is never legitimate. From the practical person's standpoint, sorrow is useless and for the one who believes that the *jīva* continues after the death of the body, sorrow is also not a problem because the *jīva* itself does not die.

TWO-FOLD TEACHING METHODOLOGY — PRAVĪTTI AND NIVĪTTI

The first portion of the Vedas is in the form of *pravṛtti*, meaning — that you engage yourself in positive pursuits in order to accomplish certain ends, which you do not have now and want to accomplish. These pursuits may be in the form of progeny, wealth, another world, a better birth, and so on — all of which require appropriate effort to achieve the desired ends. This subject matter of the Vedas in the form of effort-based pursuit in terms of action, *karma*, is called *pravṛtti-ātmaka-śāstra*.

The *karma* enjoined in the first portion of the Vedas is three-fold from the standpoint of the means of doing it — mental activity, *mānasa*, speech, *vācika*, and physical activity involving the limbs, *kāyika*. For example, repeating the Vedas is a prayer employing both mind and speech. Chanting the *Puruṣasūkta* is also a prayer in praise of the Lord, the *puruṣa*, who is everything. The *Puruṣasūkta* also gives you the knowledge of the Lord. Any *sūkta* is both a prayer and something to be understood.

Chanting is a *karma* which is *vācika*. However, chanting can also be an *aṅga*, a part of a ritual. For instance, a *paṇḍita* may chant the *Puruṣasūkta*, line by line, while offering a flower or some other oblation. Thus, the same *mantras* can be chanted, themselves forming a prayer, or used as part of a ritual. This three-fold *karma* — *kāyika*, *vācika* and *mānasa* — is the subject matter of the first portion of the Vedas and is what is meant by *pravṛtti*, what you must do to accomplish certain desirable ends.

The last portion of the Vedas, called *Vedānta*, is *nivṛtti-ātmaka-śāstra* in the sense that is purely in the form of negation. The first part of the verse we are presently studying, *aśocyān anvaśocaḥ tvam*, which reveals the entire subject matter of the *Gītā*, is also in the form of negation. In *pravṛtti*, the doer, the *kartā*, is retained. The *kartā* is told to do certain things in order to accomplish certain results. Whereas, in the *Vedānta* portion, the very notion that ‘I am the doer’ is questioned and negated. Here also there is something to be accomplished — that which is not already accomplished by you, the *kartā*. The accomplishment is negation of the doership in the wake of the knowledge of the *ātmā*.

This portion of the Veda, which says that you are the reality of everything, that you are the whole, is in the form of negation, *nivṛtti*, in the sense that all the notions that you superimpose upon the self, the *ātmā*, are negated. Therefore, this part of the Veda is in the form of knowledge, *jñāna*, leading to the negation and recognition of what I am not and an appreciation of what I am.

Sorrow is something that is superimposed upon the *ātmā* due to the non-recognition of the nature, the reality, *svarūpa*, of the *ātmā*. Therefore, all sorrow is really without reason because sorrow itself has its roots only in non-recognition of the self and confusion. The world, *anātmā*, cannot cause you sorrow, nor can *ātmā* be a

source of sorrow. Thus, this verse starts with the negative particle *nañ*, meaning ‘not’ — *aśocyān*, which means *na śocyān*.

Generally, a *nañ* would not be the first word of any *śāstra*, negation not being an appropriate beginning. A *śāstra* should begin with something positive. Here, the *śāstra*, being in the form of *nivṛtti*, begins with *nañ* — it begins with the word, *aśocyān*, meaning that nothing is deserving of grief. Because *Arjuna* was in sorrow, the word *aśocyān* is extremely relevant here.

The Lord is called *Hari* because he is the one whose grace removes everything. The Lord is a robber, a remover, of all of your problems, of everything that you do not want. Lord *Viṣṇu* is called *Hari* and Lord *Śiva* is called *Hara*. Both their names originate from the same root, ‘*hṛ*’ — to rob, to remove.

SORROW IS NOT REASONABLE

Arjuna is told, ‘You are aggrieved for no reason. You have entertained grief with reference to situations, which do not demand any grief on your part. *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa* can take care of themselves. You need not have any grief on their behalf or for any other reason.’ If you understand everything from the standpoint of *ātmā* there is no sorrow. From any other standpoint also, sorrow is not reasonable.

It is not that *Arjuna* was advised to have no sorrow. Such advice would not have been proper. Therefore, we should not say that we should not be sad because the *Gītā* says so. Nor does the *śāstra* say that it is not proper to be sad. It says there is no reason for sadness, meaning that sadness, sorrow is something to be inquired into and understood.

TWO ORDERS OF REALITY

The *Gītā* says that you have entertained grief for which there is no reason because neither the *ātmā* nor *anātmā* is the source of sorrow. This statement must, then, be proved, which the *gītā-śāstra* does by revealing that *ātmā*, whose nature is fullness, *ānanda-svarūpa*, cannot be affected by *anātmā*, *mithyā*, because the very existence of *anātmā* depends on *ātmā*, *satya*, the truth of everything. The *ātmā* then, is not going to be affected by *mithyā* just as the imaginary snake you see on the rope cannot affect the rope. If the rope is wet, it is wet, but it has not been made so by the sliminess of the snake you see sitting on top of it! The *ātmā* is not affected by anything that has been superimposed upon it.

Therefore, the basis, the *adhiṣṭhāna*, *satya*, is not affected by *mithyā*. *Mithyā* depends upon the *ātmā*, for its existence and sustenance, for its fuel, its very fibres of being. The only thing that could affect *ātmā* would be something enjoying the same order of reality. When two entities belonging to the same order of reality, such as the

father-in-law and the son-in-law, come together in a relationship, the dependency of one will affect the other. If the son-in-law does not have a job and finds it necessary to move in with his father-in-law, the son-in-law's dependency will definitely affect the father-in-law. This dependence is entirely different and is not what is under discussion here.

What we are discussing is *ātmā* which is *satya* and *anātmā* which is *mithyā*. Just as the *svarūpa* of water is not affected by the wave, the *svarūpa* of the *ātmā*, *sat-cit-ānanda*, is not affected by *anātmā*. This subject matter is discussed throughout the *Gītā* starting with this verse. Although the verse starts with a negative particle, *nañ*, it is not an improper beginning because the whole *Gītā* is *nivṛtti-ātmaka*.

Before beginning the *Mahābhārata*, *Vyāsa* saluted the Goddess of Knowledge, *Sarasvati*, and he started the first chapter of the *Gītā* with the word *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*, meaning the one who sustains the entire universe. In this way, prayer for an auspicious beginning was well taken care of and nothing more was required. To begin the teaching with the statement, 'There is no room for sorrow,' as he did in this verse, is therefore a very effective beginning, although a negative particle was used.

न त्वेवाहं जातु नासं न त्वं नेमे जनाधिपाः ।

न चैव न भविष्यामः सर्वे वयमतः परम् ॥ १२ ॥

na tvevāhaṃ jātu nāsaṃ na tvam neme janādhīpāḥ
na caiva na bhaviṣyāmaḥ sarve vayamataḥ param

Verse 12

अहम् *aham* — I; जातु *jātu* — ever; न तु आसम् *na tu āsam* — did not exist; (इति *iti*) न एव *na eva* — not indeed; त्वम् *tvam* — you; (न आसीः *na āsīḥ* — did not exist); (इति *iti*) न *na* — not; इमे *ime* — these; जनाधिपाः *janādhīpāḥ* — kings; (न आसन् *na āsan* — did not exist); (इति *iti*) न *na* — not; अतः परम् *ataḥ param* — hereafter; सर्वे *sarve* — all; वयम् *vayam* — we; न भविष्यामः *na bhaviṣyāmaḥ* — shall not exist; च *ca* — and; (इति *iti*) न एव *na eva* — not at all

There was never a time that I did not exist, nor you nor these kings. Nor will any of us cease to exist in the future.

If all these people are going to die, how can it be said that they do not cause sorrow for the bereaved? Surely, since they are going to die, they must be the cause of sorrow (*śocya*). Even those who are not on the battlefield are *śocyas* because they too are eventually going to die. Addressing this doubt, *Kṛṣṇa* shifted the discussion to the vision of *ātmā*. His statements were not meant as an argument to kill but rather, to provide an understanding of *dharma* so that what was to be done could be done. Since *Arjuna* also wanted absolute *śreyas*, *Kṛṣṇa* talked about the nature of *ātmā*.

He said 'There is no time that I did not exist. To say that I did not exist at some time is not true. I always existed.' *Kṛṣṇa* was obviously, therefore, not an ordinary

person. He was an *avatāra*. He could say, ‘I always existed.’ Could the same thing be said of a *jīva* like *Arjuna*? *Kṛṣṇa* said: ‘That you did not exist before is also not true. You too always existed.’

Being a prince, *Arjuna* was also not an ordinary person. *Kṛṣṇa* therefore went on to say that all the stalwarts standing before them on the battlefield, leaders of the people, chieftains, commanders-in-chief, and all the other soldiers had also always existed. What *Kṛṣṇa* was saying in this verse is that all of us are eternal: ‘I was there before and you were there before, as were all these other people.’ In his vision, they were all there before.

The next question would be, what about later? We might have existed before, but we might not exist later. Will there be a time in the future when I am not? *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘No! After the destruction of the body you will continue to exist.’

BIRTH AND DEATH IN TERMS OF THE VISION OF THE GĪTĀ

We have a concept that everyone is born and we have a horoscope to prove it. We know that we were born at a given time and take this to mean that there was a time when we were not. This is a very well-entrenched notion about the ‘I’— that I was born, that I am getting old, that I am going to die, and so on. If you are born, you will naturally get old. The notion that you are getting old is going to be there as long as you think you are born.

In the vision of the *Gītā* there is no such thing as birth for you. *Ātmā*, ‘I’ is not born. The notion that I am born is negated here by using double negatives. That we celebrate the birthday of *Kṛṣṇa* does not confirm the non-existence of *Kṛṣṇa* before. It only confirms that on this particular day, in this particular form (*nāma-rūpa*), *Kṛṣṇa* was born. To say that, he was born in this *nāma-rūpa* is correct and creates no problems. But to say that *Kṛṣṇa* was not there before, despite what people might think, is not true. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* was not really born. He was ‘as though’ born.

Kṛṣṇa went on to say that it is also not true to think that you were not there before. There was no time that you were not there. *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that he too essentially was timeless and that everyone else was as eternal, as existent, as *Kṛṣṇa* was.

Similarly, we always think that we will not exist later, a conclusion that calls for lamentation. This notion is also not true, *Kṛṣṇa* said. Whatever form you take yourself to be, you definitely exist. As an individual *jīva* or *ātmā*, you definitely exist. The *jīvatva*, individuality, may not exist later, but as *ātmā* you will always exist. Because the *jīvatva* goes when a person is enlightened, only *ātmā* is meant to be taken here. It is in this sense that *Kṛṣṇa* said to *Arjuna* ‘There was never a time when I was not, there was never a time when you were not, nor was there ever a time when all these leaders were not. Similarly, there will never be a time when all of us will not be.’

Does this mean, then, that this feud will continue forever because all these *ātmās* are going to be eternally there? No, the use of the plural here was only with reference to forms (*upādhis*¹). There was never a time when we were not there. Nor will there ever be a time when we will not be there. We can use pots and pot space as an example — the pots will come and go, but all the pot spaces will always be there because there is only one space. The words used in this verse — ‘I’ (*aḥam*), ‘you’ (*tvaṃ*), ‘we’ (*vayam*), ‘kings’ (*janādhipāḥ*) — are all with reference to the bodies seemingly enclosing one *ātmā*, like many pots enclosing one space.

ĀTMĀS ARE NOT MANY

Śaṅkara makes this important observation here in the last line of his commentary, *bhāṣya* — ‘*deha-bheda-anuvṛtṭyā bahuvacanam, na ātma-bheda-abhiprāyeṇa* — the plural has been used here with reference to the various bodies and not with reference to the one *ātmā*, the self.’ The people standing before *Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna* all had different physical bodies. Only from the standpoint of the physical bodies, there is plurality, not from the standpoint of *ātmā*. There are no differences in *ātmā*. It is not that a *Kṛṣṇa-ātmā* existed, an *Arjuna-ātmā* existed and other *ātmās* existed and all of these having existed before will continue to exist forever. That is not the contention here at all.

Ātmās are not many; there is only one *ātmā*. *Ātmā* that is not subject to time, *nitya-ātmā* being without form and attributes, can only be one. *Anitya*, that which is subject to time, means anything that has a form with attributes, with an *upādhi*. Only then can it be subject to time. But an *ātmā* that is subject to time is not the *ātmā* we are talking about. *Ātmā* is the very basis, the *adhiṣṭhāna*, of time and therefore is not subject to time. Because it is not subject to time, it is *nitya*.

Because the forms, *upādhis*, are many, there are many people, whereas *ātmā* is one whole consciousness, *caitanya*, not bound by time. In that consciousness alone is my mind, your mind, and any other mind. These minds differ, as do the bodies. When we count, the bodies are many, but not from the standpoint of consciousness, *cit*. Thus, what is necessary is the negation of a notion. Instead of telling *Arjuna* that *ātmā* is *nitya*, thereby creating a concept in his mind, *Kṛṣṇa* removed the notion of his being time-bound. When we are told that *ātmā* is eternal, we think of *ātmā* as having a long, long life. Here, instead, the concept of *ātmā* being time-bound is knocked off; it is negated. There was never a time when I, you, or anyone else was not. Nor will there be a time when we will not be, *ātmā* being timeless. Since you cannot cry for the timeless, *ātmā* is

¹ उप समीपे स्थित्वा स्वीयं धर्मं रूपम् अन्यत्र आदधाति इति उपाधिः ।

upa samīpe sthītvā svīyaṃ dharmam rūpam anyatra ādadhāti iti upādhiḥ

That, which imparts its qualities to another by staying close to it, is called an upādhi.

not a cause for sorrow; it is *aśocya*. *Anātmā* alone is subject to change; it is *anitya*. Even if you want to stop this present second, you cannot; because it is already gone. Therefore, crying for *anātmā* is foolish. Both *ātmā* and *anātmā*, therefore, are *aśocya*.

Anything time-bound is always time-bound. You cannot expect constancy from something whose nature is change itself. If you are aggrieved or sad because something that changes by nature is non-constant, what you need is proper understanding of the nature of *ātmā* and *anātmā*, neither of which is a matter for sorrow. Either way you take it, this fact remains. Therefore, the first line of the previous verse becomes increasingly true as our understanding of *ātmā* and *anātmā* increases.

THE CONSTANCY OF THE ĒTMĒ

Kṛṣṇa provided an example in the verse to help *Arjuna* understand, how *ātmā* is always the same and never changes.

देहिनोऽस्मिन् यथा देहे कौमारं यौवनं जरा ।

तथा देहान्तरप्राप्तिर्धीरस्तत्र न मुह्यति ॥ १३ ॥

dehino'smin yathā dehe kaumāraṃ yauvanaṃ jarā
tathā dehāntaraprāptirdhīrastatra na muhyati

Verse 13

यथा *yathā* — just as; देहिनः *dehinaḥ* — for the indweller of the body; अस्मिन् देहे *asmin dehe* — in this body; कौमारम् *kaumāram* — childhood; यौवनम् *yauvanam* — youth; जरा *jarā* — old age; तथा *tathā* — so also; देह-अन्तर-प्राप्तिः *deha-antara-prāptiḥ* — the gaining of another body; तत्र *tatra* — there (with reference to that); धीरः *dhīraḥ* — a wise person; न मुह्यति *na muhyati* — is not deluded

Just as, how, for an indweller of this body, the *jīva*, there is childhood, youth, and old age, so too, is the gaining of another body. With reference to that, a wise person does not come to grief.

Where does the person, the *jīva*, exist? The *jīva*, the one who makes the body conscious, is the indweller of this body. In other words, the *jīva* referred to in this verse as the *dehī*, is nothing but *ātmā* with a body, mind, and senses. In this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* referred to the three-fold states that the body undergoes, each of which is distinct from the other two.

For instance, in boyhood there is no need for shaving, whereas in youth and adulthood, there is. Nor is a person likely to require a cane in either of these two states, unlike in old age.

When childhood passes, does the one dwelling in the body survive or not? If there were no survivor, an old man could not talk about his earlier exploits and

accomplishments. His voice is certainly no longer the voice of his boyhood, having become very shaky due to the changes brought about by age, but the 'I' is the same. The 'I' is solid, not shaky. Thus, the one who was in childhood is the one who was in youth and is the one who is now. That 'I' does not change at all.

As each state comes and goes, the 'I' remains the same. Although each state is destroyed, the *ātmā* is never destroyed. The body is said to undergo a metamorphosis every seven years, but the person remains the same. The birth of a later state does not imply a new birth and a new life for the person, the *ātmā*. Nor does death of the previous state spell death for the *ātmā*. These states come and go and *ātmā* remains the same in a given body.

The same *ātmā* sees all three states — childhood, adulthood, and old age. One need only ask an elderly person what he or she had for lunch! In response to this simple question, an elderly man may start with his first marriage! The *ātmā* is the same through all the experiences of life.

Just as each of these states is taken for the *ātmā*, another body can also be taken for the *ātmā*, even though *ātmā* itself remains the same. Just as how a person does not remember his or her first three years, in the same way, previous lifetimes in other bodies are also not remembered — which is just as well, since there would only be that many more problems! If we all knew our own and each other's previous births, we would be blaming people from those lifetimes just as we do in this one. There would then be far too many situations and people to blame!

Known or unknown, *ātmā* is the same, be it with reference to the first three years of this birth or to previous births. Thus, from the standpoint of *ātmā*, there is no reason for sorrow born of self-decimation. It is the same even from the standpoint of the simple *jīva*, the one who has a body. Where is the reason, then, for getting into a state of delusion that I will be absent at any time? The *jīva* will continue, with or without a body. Without a body, there is no problem. I am *ātmā* and, therefore, timeless. As a *jīva*, gaining a new body gives you a new and better start. If you did not make proper use of the previous body, now you can make better use of the new one.

THE WISE HAVE NO SORROW

Because a wise person has the knowledge of *ātmā* and *anātmā*, there is no question of he or she being sorrowful. Such a person knows that, what does not change cannot be changed and what changes cannot be stopped. When the facts are clear, there is no sorrow. The wise person is one who knows what is real, *ātmā* and what is unreal, *anātmā*. Further, *Kṛṣṇa* said:

मात्रास्पर्शास्तु कौन्तेय शीतोष्णसुखदुःखदाः ।

आगमापायिनोऽनित्यास्तांस्तितिक्षस्व भारत ॥ १४ ॥

mātrāsparśāstu kaunteya śītoṣṇasukhaduḥkhadāḥ
āgamāpāyino'nityāstāṃstitikṣasva bhārata

Verse 14

कौन्तेय *kaunteya* — Oh! Son of *Kuntī* (*Arjuna*); मात्रा-स्पर्शाः *mātrā-sparśāḥ* — the contacts of the sense organs with the sensory world; तु *tu* — indeed; शीत-उष्ण-सुख-दुःखदाः *śīta-uṣṇa-sukha-duḥkhadāḥ* — which give rise to cold and heat, pleasure and pain; आगम-अपायिनः *āgama-apāyinaḥ* — which are of the nature of coming and going; अनित्याः *anityāḥ* — not constant; भारत *bhārata* — Oh! Descendant of *Bharata* (*Arjuna*); तान् *tān* — them; तितिक्षस्व *titikṣasva* — endure

Oh! Son of *Kuntī*, the contacts of the sense organs with the sensory world which give rise to cold and heat, pleasure and pain, which have the nature of coming and going are not constant. Endure them. Oh! Descendant of *Bharata*.

Given that the *ātmā* never dies, that it always survives, as *Kṛṣṇa* said, it seems that the sorrow caused by the death of a person is not reasonable and therefore not very legitimate. That there may be no sorrow for the person who knows the *ātmā* to be eternal and the *anātmā* to be non-eternal is also possible. However, in this life, sorrow does occur because of certain changes that take place.

Situations do not go your way all the time. You do not call all the shots. Things keep changing, some of them favourably and many of them not so favourably. Some situations are pleasant, others unpleasant. That which is pleasant does not last, while the unpleasant seems to stick to me most of the time. There is, therefore, both pleasure, *sukha*, and pain, *duḥkha*. The pleasant arrives and must pass away for the unpleasant to come.

For instance, people begin to wail about winter long before it actually comes. As the summer ebbs away, they wail about that, too. Even when summer is there, it is going. Thus, when winter is not there, it is coming and, when it is there, it seems not to be going at all! Half the summer is gone because of clouds and another part of it is frittered away by rain. When it is hot, it is too hot. Because the seasons keep on changing, we find that *sukha* and *duḥkha* keep on occurring. The pleasant has gone and the unpleasant has come accompanied by sorrow. The sorrow is not due to *ātmā* going and coming, but purely because of the situational context. This being the case, is there not a legitimate sorrow?

Kṛṣṇa talked here about the nature of the sense organs and the sensory world. The sense organs, *mātrās*, contact sense objects. And these contacts, *sparśāḥ*, give you the experience of cold, heat, pleasure, pain, etc. — *śīta-uṣṇa-sukha-duḥkhadāḥ*. The knowledge that something is cold or hot produces a response that this is pleasant, *sukha*,

or that this is unpleasant, *duḥkha*. Cold can be either pleasant or unpleasant and so can anything hot. For instance, you do not go to the fireside on a hot day as you would when it is cold. Thus, heat is not always pleasant and cold is not always unpleasant.

We find that there is a uniformity in our responses and also, to a certain extent, a universality. The world is one of opposites — heat and cold, for example, and these opposites give us pleasure and pain, *sukha* and *duḥkha*. Categorically, we may say that certain situations make us happy, like a pleasant, sunny day. At the same time, however, there are people who want rain so much that they are praying for it. Therefore, the rain that you do not want, someone else may be praying for. These, then, are our responses, which seem to give rise to *sukha* and *duḥkha*, all due to contact of the sense organs with their objects. One may argue that if contacting heat and cold gives rise to sorrow, perhaps we should avoid contact with sense objects. But how can we?

Kṛṣṇa did not say we have to avoid the contacts. We need only understand them. Most of our problems are like this; they only need to be understood. What is to be understood here is that the tendency to come and go, is the nature of opposites — heat and cold, pleasant and unpleasant, and so on. If you keep on saying it is hot, a time will come when the heat will be gone. It is the same with the cold. Therefore, they are not constant. They do not remain for you to complain about. Even if you want them to stay, they will not. They are always in a flux, constantly changing. And this nature of their being in constant flux does not change.

We cannot totally remove ourselves from the opposites or remove them from us. This is not to say that one should not make an attempt to improve a situation. But if things must always be pleasant for you, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* was making it very clear here that they would not be. Because things are both pleasant and unpleasant, they are not always going to be, as you want. Nor are they always going to be unpleasant either.

PHYSICAL PAIN OR SORROW

If death is said to be incapable of causing you sorrow, where does that leave all of the other situations that seem to make you unhappy? The world can cause you some physical pain because the physical body belongs to the physical world. One physical entity can, therefore, hurt another. *Arjuna's* problem is not physical. It is purely sorrow *śoka*, and *śoka* is a type of thinking. While physical pain is something to be endured and cured, sorrow is something you build on.

Physical pain is not something that is totally avoidable. The body is subject to pain and will be affected by one force or the other — the sun, rain, winter, and so on. You can protect the body to the extent possible, but because it is *anitya*, constantly changing, it is subject to pain. This is the nature of the body. Sorrow, on the other hand, is something you build onto the pain because of a particular way of thinking. This is exactly where we

have to change — cognitively. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* said: ‘Take every situation as it comes, *Arjuna*, cheerfully, in your stride, with a sense of humour.’

Kṛṣṇa later told *Arjuna* how these opposites cannot really do anything to you because, by nature, they have no independent existence apart from yourself, the *ātmā*. There is some kind of ‘lumping’ that occurs due to a confusion between orders of reality. The mind, senses, and body have similar realities, whereas the *ātmā* is of another order of reality. When you say you are sad, you involve the *ātmā*, I, in the sadness as though the *ātmā* belongs to the same order of reality as the mind, which it does not. In this way, the *ātmā* is taken to be the *anātmā* and it becomes one among the many. Because the *anātmās* in the world are too many and so varied, you cannot cope with them all, even though they are all *anātmā*. Even the small bugs create so many problems, let alone the more powerful forces.

If the *ātmā* is really one among the many, nothing can be done. However, the vision is that the *ātmā* is unlike any of them. Sorrow is not possible without *ātmā*, ‘I.’ Every time there is sorrow, it is because *ātmā* is somehow involved. Mere mind with its thought processes cannot create sorrow. Therefore, ignorance is the cause for imputing sorrow to *ātmā*.

WHAT IS THERE TO WORRY ABOUT?

The coming and going of the opposites is a fact. Thus, when *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna*, ‘Endure them — *titikṣasva*,’ he was not offering advice; he was being objective. What is the need for this objectivity? Because, situations are constantly changing — the pleasant as well as the unpleasant. To think that only the pleasant ones change and not the unpleasant is not correct.

What, then, is there to worry about? For a person who is objective, who has a certain appreciation for what the world and its situations are all about, there is no reason for sorrow. There are just situations to face and act upon, whether inner or outer. There is nothing to be sad about.

Further, he said:

यं हि न व्यथयन्त्येते पुरुषं पुरुषर्षभ ।

समदुःखसुखं धीरं सोऽमृतत्वाय कल्पते ॥ १५ ॥

yam hi na vyathayantye te puruṣaṁ puruṣarṣabha

samaduhkhasukhaṁ dhīraṁ so’mṛtatvāya kalpate

Verse 15

पुरुष-ऋषभ *puruṣa ṛṣabha* — Oh! The prominent among men (*Arjuna*); एते *ete* — these two (*sukha* and *duḥkha*); सम-दुःख-सुखम् *sama-duḥkha-sukham* — the one who is same in pleasure and pain; धीरम् *dhīram* — one who is discriminating; यम् पुरुषम् *yam*

puruṣam — the person whom; न व्यथयन्ति *na vyathayanti* — do not affect; सः *saḥ* — he; हि *hi* — indeed; अमृतत्वाय *amṛtatvāya* — for gaining liberation (*mokṣa*); कल्पते *kalpate* — is fit

Oh! *Arjuna*, the prominent among men, the person whom these (*sukha* and *duḥkha*) do not affect, who is the same in pleasure and pain, and who is discriminative, is fit for gaining liberation.

In this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* addresses *Arjuna* as a *puruṣa-ṛṣabha* whose literal meaning is — a bull, *ṛṣabha*, among men. Among large herds of cattle, the stud bull always stands out because of its size and the big hump on its back. Just as a bull cannot be missed among hundreds of cows, so too, *Arjuna* stood out as the most exalted of men. Even those who did not know who *Arjuna* was, would have acknowledged him because of his brilliance, *tejas*. He was a man of great accomplishment and a highly recognised person in the society. So he was addressed as *puruṣa-ṛṣabha*, the most prominent among men.

A discriminative person remains the same with reference to the opposites. Pleasant and unpleasant situations do not affect the person. Such a person is aware of their coming and going, of their constantly changing nature. In the *bhāṣya*, *Śaṅkara* makes it clear that this is not just a matter of practicality. A wise person knows himself as *ātmā*, one who cannot be affected by any situation. Such a person is called *dhīra*, meaning one who is discriminating, one who has knowledge of the *nitya-ātmā*. The word *pañḍita*, used in an earlier verse, is replaced here by the word *dhīra*, meaning one who is not affected by the opposites and, who therefore gains *mokṣa*, *amṛtva*. *Mṛtva* means being subject to mortality, whereas *amṛtva* is to be free from mortality. Knowing the *ātmā* as the one that is *nitya*, the wise gain *mokṣa*.

One who is discriminative, who accepts situations happily, and who does not allow himself or herself to be swayed by either pleasant or unpleasant situations is one who is fit for self-knowledge or who already has this knowledge. *Kṛṣṇa* obviously wanted to make this fact clear at the outset.

नासतो विद्यते भावो नाभावो विद्यते सतः ।

उभयोरपि दृष्टोऽन्तस्त्वनयोस्तत्त्वदर्शिभिः ॥ १६ ॥

nāsato vidyate bhāvaḥ nābhāvo vidyate sataḥ
ubhayorapi dr̥ṣṭo'ntastvanayostattvadarśibhiḥ

Verse 16

असतः *asataḥ* — for the unreal (*mithyā*); भावः *bhāvaḥ* — being; न विद्यते *na vidyate* — is not there; सतः *sataḥ* — for the real; अपि *api* — also; अभावः *abhāvaḥ* — non-being (absence); न विद्यते *na vidyate* — is not there; उभयोः अनयोः *ubhayoḥ anayoḥ* — of

these two (the *sat* and *asat*); अन्तः *antaḥ* — the ultimate truth; तत्त्वदर्शिभिः *tattva-darśibhiḥ* — by the knowers of the truth; तु *tu* — indeed; दृष्टः *dr̥ṣṭaḥ* — is seen

For the unreal (*mithyā*), there is never any being. For the real, there is never any non-being. The ultimate truth of both of these is seen by the knowers of the truth.

This is a very important verse even though cryptic. For the *asat*, a word we shall use as it is, there is no being, *bhāva*. In other words, being is not there for the *asat*. And for the *sat*, there is no non-being. In the second line of the verse, *Kṛṣṇa* went on to say that this fact is known by those people who know the ultimate truth about *sat* and *asat*. The first line is the crux of the verse.

Asat means something that does not exist independently and *sat* is what exists independent of anything else. What is it that exists independently? Cold and heat, for example, do not exist independently because they depend upon a number of factors. There is no absolute cold existing by itself. That something is cold depends upon something else. The temperature cannot reveal itself to you by itself unless you have a perception. Therefore, your perception is essential in order to understand that something is cold and something else is hot.

When you say, ‘This is a pot,’ does the word ‘pot’ reveal an object that exists by itself or does the object indicated by the word ‘pot’ depend for its existence upon something else? If it depends on something else, clay, because of which the pot is there and unto which it will go back, that clay becomes the cause, *kāraṇa*, for the pot. The word ‘pot’ has no real object outside of the word itself; it has no existence apart from clay. That which has a cause, that which depends upon something for its existence, that which does not independently exist, is called *asat*.¹

¹ This explanation is from the *Chāndogyaopaniṣad* where, in one particular sentence, it is said that before this creation there was only one thing — the *sat-vastu*, which was nondual, one without a second, undifferentiated. Nothing else was there. From that *sat-vastu* alone, called *Brahman*, everything has come and is non-separate from it. Nothing exists apart from *sat*. This knowledge was revealed in this *Upaniṣad* to *Śvetaketu* who had been sent by his father to a *gurukula* at the age of twelve. He returned at the age of twenty-four, very proud of his accomplishments, having studied the *Vedas* for twelve years. *Śvetaketu*’s father was a great man. He could not stand his son’s arrogance. So he asked his son, ‘Did you ask your teacher for that knowledge, gaining which everything is known?’ The boy replied that he did not think his teacher knew this. Later, he asked his father if there was such a knowledge. And he said, ‘How can you know one thing and thereby know everything else? If there is such a knowledge, please teach me, Oh! Lord.’ The same topic is discussed in the *Muṇḍakopaniṣad*. The only difference being that there the student asked this question to the teacher, whereas in the *Chāndogyaopaniṣad*, the father asked *Śvetaketu*, who said he didn’t

Śaṅkara explains *asat* further. When we try to prove the existence of things that are dependent upon causes for their existence, such as cold and heat or any given object, we find there is no self-existent thing at all among the objects of the world. Why? Because what is there is only a form, *vikāra*, that keeps changing — *vyabhicarati*. It is never the same; nor can it be the same.

Śaṅkara goes on to prove a point here. Suppose all pots are made of clay, but you have knowledge of only one pot. You know it is clay. If you know *satya*, the truth, the cause, *kāraṇa*, of all pots to be non-dual clay, regardless of what form any or all pots assume, you know that they are nothing but this one clay. By knowing that one clay, you know all pots in the sense that they are not separate from the clay. Although, this is a general knowledge, *sāmānya-jñāna*, of all pots as clay, and not the particular knowledge, *viśeṣa-jñāna*, of individual pots, it is knowledge of the whole.

Then what is a pot? It is purely a name for a form. Other than this, there is no pot that exists separate from clay. Nor is the clay the pot. If it were, again you would not need to make the pot, the clay being there already. Therefore, the clay is not the pot. If you remove the clay, where is the pot? Is it anywhere? Is it something that you have to search for? No. All that is there for the name ‘pot’ is a form recognised as such.

Anything that is time-bound, like a pot, will change and you cannot stop it because its nature is to keep on changing. When and how are you going to stop it? Therefore, what are you crying for? What are you sad for? Are you sad for something eternal because it is eternal? No.

Sat is that which never changes; it has no non-existence, *abhāva*, at all. *Sat* is never negated at any time, whereas *asat* never enjoys a being of its own. Therefore, *sat* cannot create any sorrow for you and *asat* is incapable of doing so because it does not exist in its own right.

How can *asat* create sorrow? In the vision of the Veda, you are the *sat* and everything else is *asat*. *Asat* cannot be a source of sorrow to *sat*, and *sat* cannot be a source of sorrow to you because it is you. The whole problem is one of confusion between *sat* and *asat*, between *ātmā* and *anātmā*. *Asat* has no being, no *bhāva*. It has no existence. Thus, it cannot be *bhāva*, that which exists in all three periods of time. A thing that exists is *bhāva* and *abhāva* is a thing that does not exist. The word *bhāva* comes from the root ‘*bhū*’ used in the sense of ‘existence.’

ANALYSIS OF EXISTENCE AND NON-EXISTENCE

Tuccha is another word for *abhāva* and refers to certain combinations that do not exist at all. For example, man's horn, *manuṣya-sṛṅga*, does not exist. Horn exists and

know. Then *Śvetaketu* asked his father to teach him.

man exists. Both are *bhāva*; both exist. For these words, there are objects in the world, which I know exist. But when I combine the two as ‘man's horn,’ there is no such thing.

Does the word *asat* in the verse mean *tuccha*, non-existent? No. Because it is unnecessary to say that something that is non-existent has no being. In some modern commentaries on the *Gītā*, however, we do find *asat* being translated as and equated to non-existent. What purpose is served by this sentence — the non-existent (such as the man's horn) has no existence? No purpose is served by this sentence.

That which we refer to as *asat* has an order of reality, which is neither *satya*, *bhāva*, nor *tuccha*. There is another type of *abhāva* between these two, a non-existence that we call *asat* here. For instance, we cannot dismiss the sense organs and sense objects as totally non-existent, *tuccha*. Are they, then, *sat*? Let us analyse them.

A sense organ cannot be called a sense organ unless it perceives something. Eyes are a sense organ only because they see a form. Ears are a sense organ because they hear a sound and the senses of smell, taste, and touch are all called sense organs because they contact their sense objects. How can you call eyes a sense organ if they do not see? If ears do not hear, there is no sense organ even though the earlobes may be used for earrings or for catching hold of someone. The earlobes, etc., are just the anatomical aspects of the sense called hearing. It is hearing that makes the ears a sense organ and there is no such thing as sound without the ears. Which establishes what?

To establish the existence of one, we need to establish the existence of the other. When establishing the existence of either one, which depends on establishing the existence of the other, there must be some other basis for the existence of both. Thus, all of them depend on something that is self-existent, called *sat*. Because we cannot dismiss the sense organs and their sense objects as non-existent, we say they are *asat*. They are not totally non-existent, that is *atyanta-abhāva*. The sense organs and the sense objects do exist. All the responses of pleasure and pain, *sukha* and *duḥkha*, exist. You cannot dismiss them as non-existent nor can you take them as independently existent.

Therefore, for something that cannot be dismissed as non-existent, *tuccha*, and cannot be taken as independently existent, *sat*, we have to have a word and that word is *asat*. Another word for *asat* is *mithyā*. *Asat* or *mithyā* is that which has no *bhāva*, that which depends upon *sat*. Only when there is *sat*, is *asat* possible. Therefore, *mithyā* or *asat* is something whose existence depends upon another thing and, because it has no independent existence, it is not separate from that upon which it depends.

OBJECTS DO NOT EXIST INDEPENDENTLY

When a pot is made, before it is baked, there is only clay. Thus, once upon a time, the pot was clay. When it became a pot, it was clay in the form of pot. Even though it has been fired, it is nothing but clay. All that has happened is that the clay now has an added

attribute, *guṇa*, the pot-form. This added attribute is what is meant by creation. Creative possibilities are there, but there is no such thing as a clay pot without clay.

When we look at anything in this world, we always find that it is a form with a name, depending on some other substantive, *vastu*. A particular form, *rūpa*, is called *asat*. It has the nature of its substantive, but in itself, has no *bhāva*. By the time, you see an object, it has already changed. It is never the same in the next moment. It is like seeing a film projected on a white screen. It looks as though someone is standing there, but in fact, the frame is continuously changing. Similarly, the frame in one's mind keeps on changing, exactly like the film. This is what makes it possible for us to see motion.

Because what you have seen is already gone and you do not see it again in the same form, an object has no real *bhāva*. In a flowing river, you do not get the same water at the same place. It is over, gone, flowing constantly in the flow of time. Similarly, any perception we have is conditioned by time and therefore has the nature of being merely an appearance. It is 'as though' there and not really there because it is always changing; it is 'as though' all the time.

All objects in the world are time-bound. When you see an object, that object is not seen by you as an independent object. You always see some other thing along with it. When you see a shirt, for example, you also see cloth and when you see the cloth, you see a particular material. Thus, you find that the shirt has no existence apart from its cause, *kāraṇa*, the cloth. Not only can you not create a shirt without cloth, you cannot imagine one either. (Cloth here refers to any material with which the shirt is made.) Without cloth, paper, or some other material, it is impossible to make a shirt, even in your imagination. You can imagine an elephant entering your ear by seeing yourself as very big, but you cannot imagine making a shirt without cloth. No object exists by itself, apart from its cause.

An object that does not exist independent of something else cannot have the word *sat* imputed to it. It can only be called *asat* because *sat* will be the one upon which the object depends for its *bhāva*. If I remove the cloth, can you wear the shirt? All you will have is the 'emperor's clothes!' There is no such thing as shirt without the material with which it is made. For the word 'shirt,' there is no corresponding object at all. *Bhāva* means it must independently exist and, because the cloth is the *bhāva*, the shirt has no independent substantive status.

Nor can you say the cloth with which the shirt is made is *sat* because it too depends upon something else. Then what is the real *sat*? That which exists by its own glory and does not depend on anything else for its existence is called *sat* or *satya*. Just because something is a cause does not mean it is *satya*. Causes themselves depend on their causes and therefore are also *asat*.

WHY DO WE SEE THE SAT IN THE ASAT?

If everything is *asat*, how is it that we see the world as real, as *sat*? We say the world is. We do not look at it as something that is not. This is because in every perception, there are two *buddhis*. Here *buddhi* means knowledge, cognition. One *buddhi* is with reference to the object and the other is with reference to its *asat-buddhi* — ‘the is-not-*buddhi*.’ This ‘is-not-*buddhi*’ has to be explained.

The problem is that we take the ‘is-not’ as ‘is’ and get confused. This confusion leads to *sukha* and *duḥkha*. When we see a pot, there is a ‘pot-*buddhi* — pot cognition’ and we say, ‘The pot is.’ That *buddhi*, cognition whose object is the pot, undergoes a change similar to the changing frame in a moving film. It is this *buddhi* that is called *asat-buddhi*. That which does not undergo a change is called *sat-buddhi*. Suppose the pot you are looking at is replaced by another object, a tree. The pot is gone and the tree is there in its place. Previously, we said, ‘The pot is,’ and now we say, ‘The tree is.’ If we analyse these two cognitions, we can see that the ‘is-*buddhi*’ never goes. The pot goes because it is *asat* and the *sat* that is always there is now with the tree. When the ‘tree-*buddhi*’ goes, ‘branch-*buddhi*’ may be there and when the ‘branch-*buddhi*’ is gone, ‘leaf-*buddhi*’ is there. When the ‘leaf-*buddhi*’ is gone, ‘chlorophyll-*buddhi*’ is there and when the ‘chlorophyll-*buddhi*’ is gone, ‘particle-*buddhi*’ is there. When ‘particle-*buddhi*’ is gone, whatever *buddhi* that is left will still be there.

What is it that remains? *Sat*, that ‘is,’ is always there. ‘Is’ always is. Therefore, it is called *sat*, that which does not change, whereas the object whose *buddhi* changes is called *asat*. The object is *asat* because the *buddhi* keeps changing. We recognise it differently each time it changes. In every perception, then there are two *buddhis* — the ‘object-*buddhi*’ and the ‘is-*buddhi*.’

When we say, ‘blue pot, *nīlaḥ ghaṭaḥ*,’ both words indicate the same object. The object that is blue is pot and object that is pot is blue. Similarly, when I say, ‘Please meet Mr. So and-so, the musician,’ both Mr. So-and-so and the musician are one and the same object. When we say, ‘*arjunaḥ, pāṇḍavaḥ*,’ there is only one person, *Arjuna*, and he is a *Pāṇḍava*. In all these situations, there is a substantive-adjective relationship. The word blue is an adjective to the pot in the expression — blue pot. However, this is not so when we say, ‘the existent pot,’ or ‘this is a pot.’ Here, it seems as though the ‘is-ness’ is an adjective to the pot; it is not correct. The pot is the adjective to existence — the ‘potness’ qualifies ‘is-ness.’

Here there is *sat-buddhi*, meaning that the pot exists, and there is also ‘pot-*buddhi*,’ i.e., the ‘object-*buddhi*,’ which are two different things. To say, ‘This is a pot,’ definitely implies ‘is-ness.’ since the word ‘is’ is used. There are, therefore, always two *buddhis* — *sat-buddhi* and *asat-buddhi* (object-*buddhi*). Only *asat-buddhi* (object-*buddhi*) changes, meaning that the existent *sat-buddhi* is conditioned by an object as its

attribute. 'Is' is always there. When the tree is, 'is' is in the form of a tree. Similarly, 'is' can be in the form of a pot, a person, a nose, a body, or anything.

Existence is also in the form of thought. Therefore, if there is no thought, what is there is existence minus thought. Existence minus the body, existence minus the world, is existence. That existence, *sat*, is always there not affected by any addition to or subtraction from it.

THE 'IS-BUDDHI' ALWAYS REMAINS

The way in which the *sat-buddhi* is conditioned is what undergoes change, whereas the *sat-buddhi* itself never changes. Therefore, Śaṅkara says in his *bhāṣya* that the object of the thought, 'This is a pot,' is *asat* because it is always changing. It never remains the same. The *sat-buddhi*, on the other hand, is *satya* because, whatever that *sat* is, it does not undergo any change.

A doubt being possible here, Śaṅkara clarifies the point in the *bhāṣya* by raising and answering an objection, *pūrva-pakṣa*. Suppose a pot is gone, destroyed, and the 'pot-*buddhi*, *ghaṭa-buddhi*' is gone, you say, 'The pot was and now the pot is no more.' The pot being destroyed, the 'pot-*buddhi*' goes and the pot proves to be *asat*.

But, along with the destroyed pot, does not the 'is-*buddhi*, *sat-buddhi*.' also go? Śaṅkara's response is that the 'is-*buddhi*' never goes; 'is' is always there. We say, 'The pot is destroyed,' 'The destroyed pot is,' 'The pot is no more,' etc. Because something else is, the 'is-*buddhi*?' never goes. Only the conditioned *sat-buddhi* is gone.

The *sat-buddhi*, the 'exists-*buddhi*,' is conditioned by a particular name and form, *nāma-rūpa*; and, when the pot is destroyed, that *nāma-rūpa* is gone, but the *sat-buddhi* is not gone. It is there to join anything. The 'is-*buddhi*' can join the broken pot — the broken pot 'is' or anything else 'is.' Only *asat* keeps on changing. The varieties of objects seen by you keep on changing, while you remain the same person. That 'is.' existence, remains; it never goes away. If this aspect of the teaching is not clear, you could conclude that *ātmā*, the *sat-vastu* is zero!

The *ātmā* alone is; and everything else is *nāma-rūpa*, only an addition to that *sat-buddhi* — an addition that does not bring about any addition. Just as the pot form does not bring about an addition to the clay, so too, the addition of a *nāma-rūpa* to the *sat-buddhi* does not bring about any change to it. This is the vision. The *sat-buddhi* is always qualified by an attribute — 'is' in the form of a tree, 'is' in the form of a pot, 'is' in the form of something, and that form keeps on changing. That which changes is *asat*, *mithyā*, whereas *sat* remains ever the same.

And what is that *sat*? *Sat-buddhi* is existence-consciousness, *sat-cit*. Existence is consciousness. Consciousness, the *sat-buddhi*, always joins with something in the form

of knowledge and reveals. For example, the pot is. When the pot is gone, the tree is. When the tree is gone, something else is. When everything is gone, I am, *aham asmi*.

CONSCIOUSNESS BETWEEN TWO THOUGHTS

Between two thoughts, everything is gone except consciousness. And although everything does go between two thoughts, consciousness does not require everything to go in order to be. Consciousness is always there. Whatever comes, consciousness is and if everything goes, consciousness is. There is only one thing that is *sat* and that is consciousness.

It was said that the pot is *mithyā*, *asat*, because the ‘pot-*buddhi*’ changes. Then it was said that when the pot is destroyed, the *sat-buddhi* — ‘the pot-is-*buddhi*’ — is also destroyed. Therefore, isn't your *sat-buddhi* also *asat*? No, Śāṅkara replies. Even when the pot is gone and the cloth is there, you see the *sat-buddhi* in the cloth. Only the attribute has changed. Previously the *sat-buddhi* was conditioned by the pot, whereas now it is conditioned by the cloth.

Again, an objection is raised. Even though one pot is gone, we may still have ‘pot-*buddhi*’ in some other pot. In this other pot we recognise, ‘This is a pot.’ Since ‘pot-*buddhi*’ does not change, does this not prove that it is *sat*? To this, Śāṅkara said that, although ‘pot-*buddhi*’ may be seen in another pot, it is not seen in the cloth. Only in another pot can you have ‘pot-*buddhi*.’ In a piece of cloth, the only *buddhi* you have is ‘cloth-*buddhi*,’ not ‘pot-*buddhi*.’ Whereas the *sat-buddhi* is always there — in the pot, in the cloth, in anything you see, and in anything you say is non-existent.

We say the man's horn does not exist. This does not mean there is no *sat-buddhi* here. When we say, ‘The horn is’ and ‘The man is,’ it is *sat-buddhi*. To say, ‘Man's horn is,’ is wrong, whereas to say, ‘Man's horn is not,’ is right. This latter expression indicates that ‘Man's horn is not,’ which is *sat-buddhi*. Therefore, *sat-buddhi* does not change in any way.

Sat-buddhi, which is the *sat* of the *ātmā*, the ‘is’ of the ‘I,’ is always there, even in deep sleep. That is why we want to experience sleep. If I were not there at all, I would not want to sleep. We find, however, that there is a universal interest in sleep because it is an experience and a very welcome one at that! *Sat-buddhi* is also present in the dream.

TWO ORDERS OF REALITY

Then Śāṅkara deals with another problem that comes up. A pot is *asat* and there is *asat-buddhi*, which is really *ātmā*, consciousness. It is this *sat-buddhi* that joins the pot. How is this combination possible? Between two equally existent objects there can be a combination, but how can there be a combination between *sat* and *asat*? You may

see a reflected face in the mirror, but you cannot feed that person because there are two orders of reality involved. The spoon belongs to one order of reality and the reflection in the mirror to another. That is why the mouth in the reflected face, even though it is open, cannot combine with the spoon. Similarly, then, if the *ātmā* is the object of this *sat-buddhi*, how can it go and join anything? To this, *Śaṅkara* said that there was no problem. *Sat* can join anything.

Mirage water in the desert makes you feel happy. But whether water is there or not, it is only *sat*. Even if there is no water and you only imagine it to be there, you still say, ‘The water is.’ Here, the *sat-buddhi* joins the mirage water which is *asat*. The ‘is-buddhi,’ the *sat-buddhi*, thus joins anything and everything. There is no rule that prevents *sat-buddhi* and *asat-buddhi* from joining because *sat* is not opposed to anything — everything being a superimposition upon the *sat*. The *sat-buddhi*, lends itself to any type of object, such as an imagined pot or areal pot, a mistaken snake superimposed on a piece of rope, or a real rope.

Imagination is something different from mistake. If you are aware that you are imagining something, then it is imagination. Either way, an imagined pot is, snake is, (even though it is later found to be a rope), a rope is. The *sat-buddhi* joins in any and every situation. That object of the *sat-buddhi* (*sat-buddhi-viṣaya*) is *ātmā* and is called *sat*, for which non-existence, *abhāva*, is not there — *sataḥ abhāvaḥ na vidyate*.

Anything that depends upon something else is *asat*. If you look at your body, *deha*, on that basis, it is *asat*. Therefore, there is no cause for sorrow. It is the same with any thought. When we say, ‘Thought is,’ that ‘is-ness’ is consciousness, *ātmā*. Consciousness is and the thought is incidental to that consciousness. A thought is a *nāma-rūpa*. A thought that has an outside object is called perception. If there is an object perceived outside sense perception, then it is inferential knowledge, imagination, or memory. Whatever it is, the thought ‘is’ — it is nothing but consciousness conditioned by *nāma-rūpa*. And if there is no *nāma-rūpa*, then what ‘is’ is still consciousness.

EXISTENCE IS CONSCIOUSNESS

Therefore, *sat* is always only *cit-ātmā* and the word *satya* can only mean *cit*. Self-existent consciousness alone can be *sat*. Either word, *sat* or *cit*, will bring in the other word because what has to be *cit* has to be *sat* and what has to be *sat* has to be *cit*. Thus, the *sat* will bring in *cit* and *cit* will bring in *sat*.

Because everything depends upon this *sat-cit*, *sat-cit* becomes limitless — *ananta*, *ānanda*. The word *ananta* means, limitless. And consciousness is *ananta*. It is also said to be *ānanda*, people are always looking for *ānanda*. If everything depends upon *sat-cit*, is there any limitation for *sat-cit-ātmā*? There is no limit because

everything is *sat-cit-ātmā*. Therefore from the stand point of the *sat-cit-ātmā*, there is no distance between itself and everything else nor is anything separate from it. In any cognition, the subject is *sat-cit-ātmā*, the object is *sat-cit-ātmā*, and the means of knowledge, the thought, *vṛtti*, is also *sat-cit-ātmā*. All three are *sat-cit-ātmā* alone. Thus, *sat-cit-ānanda* is the *svarūpa* of the *ātmā*. *Sat* is not going to be non-existent at any time; and *asat* cannot be kept as it is because it is constantly changing. *Sat* is the meaning, the content, of the *sat-buddhi* and the content of the *asat-buddhi* is name and form. When we say, ‘The pot is, the chair is, the table is, the man is, the woman is, the tree is,’ the ‘is’ in all of them is the *sat-buddhi*. That ‘is’ is common and is always qualified by the name and form called tree, pot, table, chair, and so on. Why do we say name and form? Because whatever you consider depends on something else, which depends on something else, and so on. Whenever we say, ‘Something is,’ the ‘is’ is the basis, the *satya*, and the *nāma-rūpa* is *mithyā*, depending on this *sat*.

The object, *viṣaya* of the *sat-buddhi* is *satya*. Therefore, the ‘am-ness’ in ‘I am — *aham asmi*,’ the ‘are-ness’ in ‘you are — *tvam asi*,’ and the ‘is-ness’ in ‘he is — *saḥ asti*’ and ‘that is — *tad asti*’ are all one and the same. The ‘is-ness’ that each implies is the common basis for all things that exist. Therefore, it is the *kāraṇa*, the cause for everything and is called *satya*. And the effect, *kārya* is called *asat*, *mithyā*, because it is dependent on the *kāraṇa* for its existence. As mentioned earlier, *Vedānta* is nothing but a discussion of this cause and effect, *satya* and *mithyā* — *kāraṇa-kārya-vāda*.

A PRODUCT AND ITS CAUSE

A product, a creation, a *kārya*, a *vikāra*, is entirely dependent upon *satya*, that which is self-existent. If *satya* itself depended upon something else, it would not be *satya*. The self-existent *satya* is called *kāraṇa*, cause. Depending on what it is you want to prove, *kāraṇa* can also be said to be *satya* — *yat kāraṇaṃ tat satyam*. That which is a cause is said to be *satya* because it is a cause, like clay with reference to a pot. Because clay is the cause for the pot, it is *satya* — but only for the pot, please understand. Another example is thread as the cause or *satya* for the cloth. Thus from these two examples, we see that *satya* is *kāraṇa* and *kāraṇa* is *satya*.

With reference to a product, a creation, we are going to prove something. In Śaṅkara’s *bhāṣya* on this verse, he says that a product is *mithyā* — *yat kāryaṃ tat mithyā*. *Mithyā* means *asat* — the word used in the current verse. (These kinds of statements reflect a style that we will be coming across later.) A product is *mithyā* because it is dependent upon a cause, as is the case for cloth. Whereas, *sat* is not dependent upon anything else and undergoes no change whatsoever — *sataḥ abhāvah na vidyate*.

Because the object of *sat-buddhi* is *sat* and the object of *asat-buddhi* is *asat*, we have the *sat-buddhi* at all times. The *asat-buddhi* depends upon the *sat-buddhi*. The

object of the *asat-buddhi*, the pot, depends upon the object of *sat-buddhi*, clay, which itself depends upon something else. When you say, 'Clay is,' the clay, depends upon another *sat-buddhi*, atoms. When you say, 'The atom is,' the atom depends upon particles, which depend upon a concept. When you say, 'A concept is,' the concept depends upon the witness of the concept, *sākṣī* which is consciousness. And when you say, 'Consciousness is,' what does it depend upon? It does not depend upon another consciousness because it is *svataḥ-siddha*, self-existent.

Therefore, nothing can be *satya* except that which is self-existent. This is all that is being said here. That which is self-existent is *ātmā* and that alone is *satya*. Everything else, being dependent upon *satya*, is *asat*. For the *satya-ātmā*, there is no non-existence, *abhāva*, whereas for the *asat*, there is no real existence. The experience of seeing objects is there, but these objects are all in the transactional world, *vyavahāra* and, therefore, have only an empirical reality.

About these two, *sat* and *asat*, a final understanding, an ascertained conclusion, the ultimate knowledge, is arrived at by the seers of the truth of *Brahman* — *tattvadarśibhiḥ anayoḥ ubhayoḥ api antaḥ tu dṛṣṭaḥ*. The *tattvadarśī* is the one who is capable of seeing the truth, *tattva* of everything. *Tattva* is the abstract form of the pronoun *tat*. The pronoun *tat*, means 'that' and can stand for anything from apple to zebra as indicated by the word in Sanskrit for pronoun, *sarva-nāma*, meaning 'the name for everything.' Therefore, the word *tattva*¹ means — the truth, the intrinsic nature of a thing, anything. Śaṅkara further explains its meaning by saying, 'Because all that is here is only *Brahman*, the name for that *Brahman* is *tat*. The abstract noun of *tat*, *tattva*, means the truth, the *svarūpa*, of *Brahman*.²

THE TRUTH OF BRAHMAN

Tattva is often said to mean reality but, in fact, it is the *svarūpa* of *Brahman*. That *Brahman*, is unqualified existence – *satya*, knowledge – *jñāna*, limitless –

¹ तस्य भावः तत्त्वम्। शा० भा० ॥

tasya bhāvaḥ tattvam.

The nature of a thing is called tattva.

² तत् इति सर्वनाम, सर्वं च ब्रह्म, तस्य नाम तत् इति, तद्भावः तत्त्वं — ब्रह्मणः याथात्म्यम्। शा० भा० ॥

tat iti sarvanāma, sarvaṃ ca brahma, tasya nāma tat iti, tadbhāvaḥ tattvaṃ — brahmaṇaḥ yāthātmyam.

'*Tat*' is the name for everything, that is, it includes everything. This is because *Brahman* is everything. And it is called '*tat*' here. The nature of this '*tat*,' that is, *Brahman*, is called '*tattva*' — the true nature of *Brahman*.

Here Śaṅkara uses the etymological meaning of the word *sarvanāma* to his advantage to define *Brahman*. Here the word *sarvanāma* is not a pronoun.

ananta, pure – *śuddha*, timeless – *nitya*, etc., can be understood through the various implied meanings, *lakṣaṇas* of each of these words. *Brahman* is the cause of the world, *jagat-kāraṇa* and at the same time is itself *satya*, *jñāna* and *ananta*. This, then, is the *svarūpa* of *Brahman* and is called *tattva*. *Brahman* is not only *satya* but is the *kāraṇa* for everything. Therefore, everything is *Brahman*. *Brahman* plus all names and forms is all that is here.

Thus, those people who know the truth of *Brahman*, *tattva-darśinaḥ* understand both *sat* and *asat*. Both must be known. *Sat* is *sat* and *asat* is *asat*. *Asat* depends upon *sat*, but *sat* does not depend upon *asat*. Those who know the truth of everything *tattva-darśinaḥ* are called *pañḍitas*, the ones who, as we saw earlier, do not come to grief. Why? Because they know the truth.

Now, why are you sad? Is it due to *asat* or *sat*? If you say you are sad because *asat* is going, you must see that going is the nature of *asat* and that it is not real. Therefore, you cannot cry for the *asat*. When one's understanding of *satya* is lacking then *mithyā* becomes *satya*, resulting in confusion. Without *satya* there is no *mithyā*. *Mithyā* must be understood as *mithyā* and *satya* as *satya*. Only then does everything fall into its own place. *Satya* does not elicit any sorrow, and *mithyā* does not have the status to cause sorrow. If there is sorrow, it is *mithyā*.

THE CONFUSION BETWEEN SATYA AND MITHYĒ

There is a well-known story that illustrates the confusion between *satya* and *mithyā*. It is as follows.

In the court of a particular king, there were two scholars. One was an *advaitī* who said that *Brahman* was *satya* and the world, *jagat*, was *mithyā*. He talked about this constantly, *Vedānta* being nothing but a discussion of *satya* and *mithyā*, cause and effect — *kāraṇa-kārya-vāda*. He told the king that *kāraṇa* was *satya* and *kārya* was *mithyā*. The whole world, including one's body, was *kārya* and therefore *mithyā*. There was nothing away from that *Brahman*, and that *satya*, *Brahman*, was independent of everything.

The king did not understand what this scholar was saying, but he liked the idea. There was a fascinating aspect to it because it said that he was wonderful, that he was *Brahman*, and so on. The king found this pleasant to get up to each morning. It was good for his mental health, at least.

The second scholar was a dualist, *dvaitī*, who kept telling the king that he was not *Brahman*, that *Brahman* was the cause of the world, *jagat-kāraṇa*, and that he was a product, subject to *puṇya* and *pāpa*. If he did the right things, he would gain some time in heaven and, if he did not, he would go to more unpleasant places such as *naraka*. This

scholar maintained that what he was saying was the truth as stated in the *śāstra*. He even backed up his statements by quoting *Vedānta* in his daily teaching.

The king listened to both of these scholars because he wanted to be impartial, although he generally slept in the second scholar's class! This made the second scholar a little jealous of the other one, who seemed to be getting more attention from the king.

The time came when the king went on a big pilgrimage accompanied by a large retinue, including his two teachers. As they walked through a forest, which was infested with many wild animals, they were confronted by a huge elephant with enormous tusks. The first scholar spied the elephant first and cried out: 'Elephant, Maharaj, elephant!' He, then, began to run and, of course, everyone else ran, too.

It should be remembered that these *advaitīs* are all very alert people and, because they understand things as they are, they are absolutely practical, also. Because they are not encumbered by projections, problems, or shadows, they are free to deal with things objectively. And, so, this scholar was the first to see the elephant and run. The king also ran, along with the *dvaitī* and the others.

After this adventure was over, the king decided to camp and start out again the next day when there had been time to check for safety. While the king was relaxing, the second scholar went to him and said, 'Oh! Lord, did you see how our *advaita-guru* ran?' The king remarked that he indeed had run very well. In fact, he reached safety before any of the others.

'That's what I mean,' said the *dvaitī*. 'He says the world is *mithyā* and yet he ran away from the elephant. If this world is *mithyā*, then the elephant must also be *mithyā*. Why did he run from a *mithyā* elephant? Everything he has been teaching is all so much verbal nonsense! That is why, Maharaj, I told you that there is no *mithyā*. Everything is *satya*.'

The second scholar then pressed his point a little further. 'I do not understand his running, given what he teaches. Perhaps Maharaj understands it better.' The king also found that it did not make sense to him. So he summoned the first scholar and asked him to explain himself. Out of respect for his teacher, the king gave him an opportunity to explain himself. He said 'Sir, you said everything is *mithyā*. Therefore, the elephant is also *mithyā*, is it not?' The scholar agreed that this was correct. 'Then why did you run away from the elephant?' the king asked.

'Maharaj,' the scholar replied, 'the elephant is indeed *mithyā*. But when did I tell you that running was *satya*? Running is also *mithyā*! Please find any sorrow or fear in me. There is none. I just did what was to be done.'

This is the vision. *Vedānta* says that everything is *satya* from the standpoint of the *sat-buddhi*. And everything is *mithyā* from the standpoint of the *asat-buddhi*. The vision does not exclude anything. We have to understand everything. Any action, *karma*

is *mithyā*. For example, we talk of ‘running’ as an action. But if we do some inquiry into this so-called action, we see that we cannot categorically say what is ‘running.’ Whether lifting the leg is ‘running’ or placing the foot is ‘running,’ we cannot say. This is true of any action. Therefore, it is all *mithyā*. The person performing the action, the *kartā* is *mithyā*, as is the action *kriyā*. Therefore, the whole thing is *mithyā*. Only *ātmā* is *satya*.

Once you see both *satya* and *mithyā* very clearly, as the *paṇḍitas* do, there is no reason for sorrow. Lord *Kṛṣṇa* has shown that what is *sat*, self-existent, does not have *abhāva* at any time, meaning that there is no end, no non-existence for it — *sataḥ abhāvaḥ na vidyate*. And *asat* being only a name and form, depending upon the *sat*, has no real *bhāva*, no real being. Therefore, it is *mithyā*.

THE INEXPLICABILITY OF MITHYĒ

What is *mithyā* then? It is neither *bhāva* nor *abhāva*. It does not have an existence of its own nor is it totally non-existent. It is something in between, which is what we mean when we say that *mithyā* is inexplicable. There are others who say that reality, the *vastu* or *sat*, is inexplicable. The vision of *Vedānta* is just the opposite. Only the *vastu* can be unfolded, albeit by implication, and everything else is inexplicable.

CAN TRUTH BE DEFINED?

It is generally thought that truth cannot be defined, whereas we say that truth alone can be defined. Everything else can be only conditionally defined and so requires further definition. Therefore, any definition of an object, which is *asat*, *mithyā*, is a point of view subject to further definition. Being neither *sat*, existent, nor *tuccha*, totally non-existent, how can *mithyā* be defined? There is no explicability for *mithyā*. That there is no explicability is its explanation. We are not just getting lost in *mithyā* and then saying it is not explainable at all. It is inexplicable in the sense that it cannot categorically be defined as, ‘This is *satya*,’ because our definition of *satya* is that which is not negated at any time. Because what is never negated at any time is *satya*, you cannot say that an object such as a pot is *satya* because it did not always exist. Furthermore, it may be broken tomorrow. Nor is it always the same pot, since yesterday it was in one form and today it is in another. The pot is also not *tuccha*, totally non-existent, because if it were non-existent, it would not be perceived or known to hold any water. There is therefore, such a thing as a pot.

Between *sat* and *tuccha*, therefore, there is a reality, which is referred to as *asat*. In fact, the technical word for *asat* is generally *mithyā*. Although the words *asat*, *mithyā* and *māyā*, are all used in the *śāstra*, the ontological definition for this order of reality is *mithyā*. What is not subject to negation in all three periods of time — past,

present and future — is *satya*. And that which does not exist at all in all three periods of time is *tuccha*. Therefore, what is in between becomes *mithyā* or *asat*.

Further *Kṛṣṇa* said:

अविनाशि तु तद्विद्धि येन सर्वमिदं ततम् ।

विनाशमव्ययस्यास्य न कश्चित्कर्तुमर्हति ॥ १७ ॥

avināśi tu tadviddhi yena sarvamideṁ tatam

vināśamavyayasyāsya na kaścikartumarhati

Verse 17

इदम् सर्वम् *idam sarvam* — this entire world; येन *yena* — by which; ततम् *tatam* — is pervaded; तत् *tat* — that; तु *tu* — indeed; अविनाशि *avināśi* — indestructible; विद्धि *viddhi* — know; अस्य अव्ययस्य *asya avyayasya* — of the one that does not change; विनाशम् *vināśam* — destruction; न कश्चित् *na kaścit* — no one; कर्तुम् *kartum* — to do; अर्हति *arhati* — is able

Know that, by which this entire world is pervaded, to be indeed indestructible. No one can bring about the destruction of the one that does not change.

Here, *tat* refers to *sat*, that for which there is no *abhāva* and that which is understood by the knower of the truth (*tattva-darśī*), as stated in the previous verse. That *sat* is not subject to destruction — it is *avināśi*. Moreover, everything that is here, the entire world, is pervaded by this indestructible *sat*, *sat-ātmā*. Being subject to destruction, the world is *asat*, not *sat*.

In this verse, *sat* and *mithyā* are made very clear. *Sat* is other than *asat*, whereas *asat* is not other than *sat*. *Sat-vastu* is called *viṣṇu*, a word which is being quietly introduced here by *bhāṣyakāra*, *Śaṅkara*. That which pervades everything, meaning the entire world including space is called *viṣṇu*. This is *sat*. Since there is no *asat* without *sat*, the *bhāva* of the *asat* is nothing but the *bhāva* of the *sat*. For example, because the existence of a clay pot is inherent in the existence of the clay, the *bhāva* belongs to the clay and not to the pot and when we say, ‘The pot is,’ that ‘is’ is *sat*. Therefore, wherever there is *asat*, there is *sat*.

How do we get to the *sat*? We do not have to get rid of the *asat* in order to get to the *sat*. Nor is the *asat* sitting upon the *sat*, covering it up, just as the pot does not cover the clay by sitting on it. You need not destroy the pot in order to know the clay. It is a question of understanding alone.

Another question then arises. When the entire world is pervaded by the *sat-vastu*, is the *sat-vastu* destroyed when the world is destroyed? No. One is *sat* which is not subject to destruction and the other is *asat*. When the *asat* is destroyed, the *sat* is not

destroyed. There is both difference and non-difference here — non-difference in the sense that all there is, is *bhāva*, *sat*, and difference in the sense that, while the *asat* depends upon the *sat*, the *sat* does not depend upon the *asat*. Therefore, we say that there is both non-difference and difference. Because there is no real difference, there is non-duality. The crux of the matter here is that ‘B’ is ‘A.’ whereas ‘A’ is not ‘B.’

THE INDESTRUCTIBILITY OF THE NON-DUAL

Is it possible that *sat*, like time, destroys itself by its own nature, creating itself and then going away? No, because it is *avyaya*, not subject to change. Can anything else, other than itself, destroy *sat*? No. Since *sat* pervades everything there is no other. Since *sat-vastu* is *ekam advitīyam* — one without the second, there is no second thing that can destroy *sat*. Any ‘other’ is dependent upon this *sat-vastu* and, therefore, has no independent *bhāva* at all. How is it going to destroy the *sat*? This would be like the pot destroying the clay. The pot cannot say to the clay: ‘I am bored with you. You are always hanging around me. You never give me any privacy. Wherever I go, you come too. I am going to get rid of you.’ The pot cannot get angry at the clay. It cannot get out of the clay and destroy it. Such a possibility does not exist. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* said here that the *vastu*, this *sat-ātmā*, which does not change at any time, cannot be destroyed by anyone or anything. There is no one to effect destruction and no one capable of destroying it — *asya avyayasya vināśaṃ na kaścit kartum arhati*.

Regardless of the number of people or objects, *ātmā* is always non-dual. No number or condition, activity or connection to activity brings about a change in the *ātmā*. In fact, there is no connection, *sambandha* for the *ātmā*, just as there is no connection between the clay and the pot because all that is there is clay. If there were a pot other than clay, then the clay could establish a relationship with it. But, when a pot is clay, there can be no relationship between them. This, therefore, is the nature of *ātmā*.

At the end of his commentary on this verse, *Śaṅkara* says that no one can destroy this *ātmā*, not even *Īśvara*, the Lord. But shouldn't God be able to destroy anything? *Śaṅkara* is not trying to belittle God here. He was merely pointing out that *Īśvara* cannot destroy the *sat-cit-ānanda-ātmā*, not because he is not almighty, but because *Īśvara* is *ātmā*. *Ātmā* is *Brahman* and *Īśvara* is *Brahman*; therefore, *ātmā* and *Īśvara* are the same *Brahman*, The destroyer, *Īśvara* is *ātmā*. What is to be destroyed is also *ātmā*. How, then, can there be destruction when there is no distinction between the agent and object of destruction?

A subject-object relationship, *karṭṛ-karma-sambandha*, is not possible between *Īśvara* and *ātmā*. But is there not a relationship between the devotee and *Īśvara*? Yes, if the word ‘devotee’ means an individual — *ātmā* identified with a given body-mind-sense complex. *Īśvara* can destroy or help a devotee, elevate or give punishment, but

Īśvara cannot destroy the *sat-ātmā* because both are identical; they have no subject-object relationship.

Perhaps it might be argued that one part of the subject can destroy the other part, just as we can take a knife in our hand and destroy ourselves. If one hand can amputate the other hand, why cannot one part of the subject, *ātmā*, destroy the other part? Cannot *ātmā* also commit suicide in this way? Such destruction could only happen if *ātmā* had parts — which it does not have. It is *avyaya*, indeclinable, indestructible.

Further:

अन्तवन्त इमे देहा नित्यस्योक्ताः शरीरिणः ।

अनाशिनोऽप्रमेयस्य तस्माद्युध्यस्व भारत ॥ १८ ॥

antavanta ime dehā nityasyoktāḥ śarīriṇaḥ

anāśino'prameyasya tasmādyudhyasva bhārata

Verse 18

अनाशिनः *anāśinaḥ* — of the indestructible; अप्रमेयस्य *aprameyasya* — of that which is not available as an object of knowledge; नित्यस्य *nityasya* — of that which is not subject to change, eternal; शरीरिणः *śarīriṇaḥ* — of the embodied one (the self); इमे *ime* — these; देहाः *dehāḥ* — bodies; अन्तवन्तः *antavantaḥ* — subject to end; उक्ताः *uktāḥ* — are said; तस्मात् *tasmāt* — therefore; भारत *bhārata* — Oh! Descendant of Bharata (*Arjuna*); युध्यस्व *yudhyasva* — fight

These bodies of the embodied one (the self), which is not subject to change, which is indestructible, and which is not available as an object of knowledge, are said to be subject to end. Therefore, Oh! Descendant of *Bharata*, fight.

Kṛṣṇa unfolded the *sat-vastu*, showing that no one can destroy this *ātmā*, including *Īśvara*, because it is indestructible and itself sustains everything. Now, what about the *asat*? If *sat* is indestructible and pervades everything, and if everything depends upon the *sat*, does that which depends upon the *sat* not become as true as the *sat*? Is it not said that you acquire the same qualities as the company you keep? Is it not also true that if you string roses and then remove them all, the string will continue to smell like roses because of its previous association with them?

Similarly, here, since the *asat* is always with the *sat*, is there not some kind of attribute-transference because of this association and then, will not the *asat* gain the same attribute of being indestructible? No, because there is no association. The string is different from the rose but, both enjoy the same empirical reality. What we call string has a certain empirical reality, as does the rose. Both of them enjoy the same degree of reality and, therefore, one can lend its attributes to the other because association is possible between objects belonging to the same order of reality.

Between the *sat* and the *asat*, however, such an association is not possible, just as it is not possible between the pot and clay. There is only one thing here — clay, which is *sat*. Therefore, the *asat* cannot gain indestructibility by association with the *sat*.

THE PHYSICAL BODY IS MITHYĒ

When you say, ‘This is the body,’ what is it exactly? Is it the skeletal structure, the skin, the flesh, the marrow, the blood, a given cell, or the DNA? There is no one thing that we call ‘body.’ All of this put together is the body. You can look at it in many different ways. You can look at it biologically or simply from the standpoint of being nothing but minerals, calcium, phosphorous, and so on. Because each component depends upon so many other things, the physical body is *mithyā*. Or, if you take the body as a whole, it depends upon the five elements, according to the model in *Vedānta*. However you look at it, the body is *mithyā*.

The physical body is a product created at a given time and is subject to modification. Because it has been created, it has an end, *antavat*. *Kṛṣṇa*, pointing out all the bodies standing before them, including his own, described them as *antavantaḥ*.

To whom do these bodies belong? The body, *śarīra*, is given existence and consciousness by *ātmā* alone. *Sat-vastu* lends its existence equally to the physical body, *sthūla-śarīra*, and to the subtle body, *sūkṣma-śarīra*. Because the subtle body can reflect consciousness, the body is conscious. Therefore, the *śarīra* belongs to and has its being in *ātmā*, which is the indwelled of the body.

Two words were used with reference to the physical body in this verse — *dehāḥ* (*ime dehāḥ*), which is plural, and *śarīrī* (*nityasya śarīriṇaḥ*), which is singular. *Nitya* means ‘eternal,’ that which is not subject to change, the one who indwells this body as *ātmā*, the meaning of the word ‘I.’ Because there is only one *ātmā*, the singular *śarīrī* is used, whereas with reference to all these bodies that undergo change and come to an end, the plural *dehāḥ* is used.

WHO CAN BE DESTROYED?

In one stroke, three facts have been conveyed here. One is that the bodies are many and *ātmā* is one. Secondly, *ātmā* does not come to an end and is behind every *śarīra*. Thirdly, *ātmā* cannot be destroyed. This being so, whom can you kill? You can only kill something that is subject to destruction. The destructible alone is destroyed. The one that cannot be destroyed is the real person — you, he or she, the ‘I.’ the *ātmā* that is always there.

‘Therefore, do what is to be done. Fight, *yudhyasva!*’ *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna*. What *Arjuna* had to do at the time was to protect the *dharma* by fighting this war. A war was at hand and he had to fight, because this was his *dharma* as a *kṣatriya*.

There are two types of destruction, *nāśa*. One is destruction in a relative sense. ‘He is destroyed because she walked out on him.’ This is not real destruction. It is figuratively used here. A person who has terminal cancer is destroyed, more or less. Although the final rites may not yet have been done, we say the person is finished, his life is over. Then, when it is literally over, when the person has died, there is another type of destruction. We have, thus, total destruction and relative destruction.

Similarly, there are two types of eternity, relative and absolute. In order to point out that which always is and is never destroyed at all, two words are used in this verse — *nitya* and *anāśī*. Both words mean that which is absolutely free from any form of change or death and, therefore, absolutely free from time, timeless.

There is also another adjective used here, *aprameya*. *Prameya* means that which is to be known, that which can be known. The knower, *pramātā*, gains the knowledge, *pramā*, of an object, *prameya* through a means of knowledge, *pramāṇa*. *Ātmā* is said here to be *aprameya*, something that is not an object to be known.

Any *prameya*, anything that is seen by you, any object that is available for your *pramāṇa* as an object, *drśya*, is non-eternal, *anitya*. Why? Because anything that is seen is within the time-space framework alone and is therefore *anitya*. You cannot say a pot, for example, is *drśya* and also *nitya*. To say that something is *drśya*, seen, means that it is changing every second. It is never the same because it is within time, and time is an element, which keeps on effecting change. Any object, therefore, is never the same; it is always different. What is available for you to know is therefore always *anitya* and never *nitya*.

Because *ātmā* is not available as an object of knowledge, it is *aprameya*. But if *ātmā* is not an object of knowledge, why are you doing all this study? What is the *gītā-śāstra* for if not for knowing *ātmā*?

THE NATURE OF PERCEPTION

Here, Śaṅkara enters into a short discussion, which he picks up again in more detail elsewhere in the *Gītā*. All these bodies are said to be *anitya*, subject to destruction, whereas *ātmā*, the *śarīrī* who obtains in all bodies, is *nitya*. *Ātmā* is *aprameya*, not available as an object of knowledge.

Anything subject to distinct understanding is called *paricchedyā*. ‘There are three words used with reference to our understanding of a distinct object — *paricchedyā*, *paricchedaka*, and *pariccheda*. *Paricchedyā* means that which is subject to limitation, *pariccheda*. *Paricchedaka* is what brings about this *pariccheda*.

Through the sense-organs you perceive objects. The eyes, for example, perceive the form and colour of an object. Therefore, the sense organs all become *paricchedakas* for varieties of *paricchedyas*. Each of the sense objects — sound, touch, form, taste, and

smell — is distinct from one another and, therefore, *paricchedyā*. The form that the eye sees is *paricchedyā* because it is perceived as distinct from all other things. Therefore, any *pramāṇa* which picks up a distinct piece of knowledge becomes *paricchēdaka* and what is picked up is *paricchedyā*.

Any object of knowledge that can be known in the form of a cognition such as, ‘This is a pot,’ ‘This is a cloth,’ ‘This is a tree,’ ‘This is a man,’ ‘This is a woman,’ is *paricchedyā* because an object of knowledge is conditioned or limited in nature and perceived as such through the sense organs. Therefore, the sense organs become *paricchēdakas* and the objects are *paricchedyās*. That which is not known in a determinate form, as an object, by all these *pramāṇas*, is what is meant here by *aprāmēya*.

Brahman is not one more object that you see, like the pot or the tree. If *Brahman* is also *paricchedyā*, then it becomes one of the objects in the world and, therefore, becomes *anityā*. However, *Brahman* cannot be known by the *pratyakṣādi-pramāṇas*, the various means of knowledge that are available to us, such as perception, inference etc. The ‘etc. – *ādi*’ here includes words, *śabda*, meaning that the Veda is also a *pramāṇa*.

When the Veda is a *pramāṇa*, then, heaven, *svarga*, for example, is a *prāmēya* and therefore a *paricchedyā*. Knowledge gained by *śabda-pramāṇa* is again determinate knowledge. Because heaven is not hell, earth, or this or that — it is a distinct object. Thus, there is limitation. If heaven is mentioned by the Vedas, then it means that it is something, which can be known distinctly.

Similarly, when you say *puṇya*, it is not *pāpa*. It is not produced by wrong *karma*. It is produced by right *karma*. In this way, we understand what *puṇya* is and what it does, purely by the *śabda*, the word. Therefore, *śabda* is also a *pramāṇa*, a means of knowledge.

ĀTMĀ IS NOT ESTABLISHED BY A PRAMĀṆA

If the *ātmā* cannot be known even by *śabda*, why, then, do you study the *gītā-śāstra*? If it is not an object of knowledge for the *pratyakṣādi-pramāṇas*, how can *Vedānta* be a *pramāṇa* for the *ātmā*? Addressing this question, *Śaṅkara* first says that *ātmā* is not known by any *pramāṇa*, including the Veda, because it is not an object of knowledge.

Thinking that *ātmā* could be known through this *pramāṇa*, a person goes to a *guru*, does a lot of service, and at the end of it the *guru* says that *ātmā* is not known even through the Veda. Since the *guru* teaches only the Veda, what is the use of all this? Naturally, such a person thinks it has all been a waste. He or she also thinks that the *ātmā* is understood perhaps through the *pratyakṣādi-pramāṇas*. *Śaṅkara* refuted this

notion here by saying that *ātmā* is not known by the *pratyakṣādi-pramāṇas*, including the Veda.

Before you listen to the *Vedānta-śāstra*, *ātmā* must be there. The existence of *ātmā* is not established by a *pramāṇa* like the Veda, nor can it be established by perception, *pratyakṣa*, or inference, *anumāna*. If the existence of *ātmā* were to be established by any of the *pramāṇas* resulting in such knowledge as — ‘Here is a pot,’ ‘Here is a table,’ ‘Here is the Swami sitting,’ etc. — then, we would be using perception, of course. But we would not be establishing the *ātmā* behind the perception. Only when the knower is already established, can there be an inquiry through a *pramāṇa*.

Vedānta-vicāra, inquiry, can only be done when there is an *ātmā* to inquire. If *Vedānta* were to establish the *ātmā*, it would mean that until one inquired into *Vedānta*, *ātmā* did not exist. This means you were not there! Who is it then, that goes to *Vedānta*, which says that *ātmā* is limitless? Moreover, who listens to this *Vedānta*? The *ātmā*.

The one who wants to know anything is the same one who can use any of the *pramāṇas* to inquire into what is to be known. Even before the *pramāṇas* are pressed into service for gathering such knowledge, there must be a self-evident *ātmā*. Therefore, the Veda does not establish the *ātmā*, as it does any other existent thing — heaven, *svarga*, for instance. A *svarga* that is unknown to me is made known to me by the *śāstra*. I come to know of something called *punya* that is said to be dormant in a *karma* which can be invoked, through the *śāstra* alone. Thus, we find these unknown things discussed in the *śāstra* as potentially existent things.

Similarly, there are many unknown things in the world, which we come to know through the various *pramāṇas* — a new disease, for example. Having come to know about it, we say the disease ‘is.’ After discovering it, we look for its cause. Then, after finding the cause, we say the cause ‘is’ and the treatment for the cause ‘is.’ After treatment, we say the side effects ‘are.’ Like this, with the help of *pramāṇas*, we keep on discovering things that exist but which were so far not known.

Although *ātmā* is not available as an object of knowledge, it is not totally unknown. In fact, *Śaṅkara* says that *ātmā* is not something unknown to anyone. It is always self-evident — *svataḥ-siddha*, self-established. No one's *ātmā* is unknown; everyone's *ātmā* is known. Only then is the operation of the *pramāṇas* possible. The *ātmā* is not established by a *pramāṇa*; it is *svataḥ-siddha*.

THE ŚĀSTRĀ AS A PRAMĒŪĀ

Then the problem would be — what about the *śāstra*? If I already know the *ātmā*, how can the *Vedānta-śāstra* be a *pramāṇa*? Here, *Śaṅkara* says that the *śāstra* is definitely a *pramāṇa*. How? Revealing the existence of *ātmā* is not what establishes the

śāstra as a *pramāṇa*. But, the *śāstra* has the status of a *pramāṇa* because it removes the wrong notions I have about *ātmā*.

Ātmā by nature, is *paraṃ brahma* and that *paraṃ brahma* is not known to us. The *pramāṇas* available to us are only good for knowing things other than ourselves. This *ātmā* is already *svataḥ-siddha* and it is this *svataḥ-siddha-ātmā* that is mistaken for a *jīva*, a doer, *kartā*, an enjoyer, *bhoktā*, one who is happy one moment and sad the next, *sukhī* and *duḥkhī*. That I am a *jīva*, an individual, means that I am someone who is limited, as good as the body, etc. This is the natural conclusion of every *jīva* because of ignorance, *avidyā*.

The status of being a *jīva*, *jīvatva*, has been superimposed upon the *ātmā*. In other words, the seeking person is born of *avidyā*. This is an error of self-identity, which only the *śāstra* can resolve. One's own *pramāṇas* are of no use here. The *śāstra* does not prove the existence of the *ātmā*; it only removes the confusion. For this reason, it has the status of being a *pramāṇa*, i.e., it has *pramāṇatva*. It does not bring to your recognition the *ātmā* as an object that is totally unknown, as it does for other unknown things like heaven, for instance.

When the *śāstra* says there is a heaven, heaven as an unknown thing is brought to your understanding. You understand that there is such a thing as heaven. When the *śāstra* says that this particular ritual will produce this particular result, it is definitely bringing an unknown thing to your recognition. That this ritual has this efficacy is not known to you by any other *pramāṇa*. Therefore, the *śāstra* has the status of being a *pramāṇa* by bringing to your recognition something that is totally unknown to you and that cannot be known by you through any other *pramāṇa*.

When it comes to the *ātmā*, the *śāstra* has *pramāṇatva* only in so far as it removes all superimposition's upon the *ātmā*. Knowledge is nothing but the removal of ignorance. It cannot be a superimposition upon ignorance. If ignorance is not removed, there is no knowledge at all, ignorance being opposed to knowledge. Only the removal of ignorance is necessary. Ignorance of *ātmā* is present and the *śāstra* has the capacity to remove it, meaning that it removes all the confusions centred on *ātmā*. But, *ātmā* is self-evident; that is why there is confusion. The *ātmā* is self-evident but that it is limitless is not known. Hence, all the limitations of the body, mind etc., are superimposed on it.

ĀTMĀ IS ALREADY KNOWN BUT NOT AS AN OBJECT

If *ātmā* were to be totally unknown, like heaven, you would not say that you are a *sukhī* or a *duḥkhī* or a *saṃsārī*. To say, 'I am finished,' is possible only because you have concluded that you are a *saṃsārī*. Therefore, the *ātmā*, 'I.' is already self-evident.

However, it is taken for something other than what it is and the *śāstra* makes the necessary correction, thereby proving itself to be a *pramāṇa*.

Śaṅkara quotes the *śāstra*, saying that this *brahma-ātmā* is self-evident — *aparokṣa*. That which is self-evident is the *ātmā*, *Brahman*; everything else becomes evident to the self. In this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* says that all bodies are subject to destruction, whereas *ātmā*, the indweller of the body, is not subject to destruction because it is the subject, not an object — *aprameya*. This is the point here. Any object is subject to destruction, whereas *ātmā*, not being an object, is *nitya*. Anything *aprameya* is *nitya* and only one thing is *aprimeya* — the *svataḥ-siddha-ātmā*. Therefore, *ātmā* is not subject to time and, thus, not subject to destruction.

Kṛṣṇa concluded by saying, ‘Therefore, fight, *Arjuna* — *tasmāt yudhyasva bhārata*.’ What does this mean? There is nothing for you to be sad about. Things that die, die. Things that are dying die. Things that remain permanent remain permanent. If *Arjuna* wanted to destroy *Bhīṣma’s ātmā* he could not. Had he wanted to stop *Bhīṣma’s* body from dying, he could not. Either way, *Arjuna* could not do anything. Therefore, what is to be done is to be done.

Śaṅkara says here that, *Kṛṣṇa* was not giving *Arjuna* an order to fight. That is not the point here. The meaning here was — ‘Do not entertain the idea of withdrawing from this battlefield.’ What is the difference between this statement and an order to fight? There is a difference, *Śaṅkara* says. This was not a command that one should actually fight. If it was not a command, then, was it a request? No. *Arjuna* was already prepared to fight. He had come with his entire armoury; but then found himself obstructed by sorrow and delusion — he was *śoka-moha-pratibaddha*. That is why he became silent. He could not proceed because he was completely paralyzed psychologically and emotionally for various reasons. Therefore, he was no longer interested in fighting and turned his attention to something else.

All that *Bhagavān* was doing here was removing the sorrow and delusion that were the obstructions, *pratibandhas*. Afterwards, if the fighting was to be done, then it was to be done. Therefore, *yudhyasva* was not a command; it was only asking *Arjuna* to do what was to be done. It was only a restatement of what he was planning to do. *Bhagavān* does not ask people to fight each other. *Gītā-śāstra*, *Śaṅkara* states, is not a *pravṛtti-śāstra* like the *karma-kāṇḍa*, which enjoins people to perform various rituals and other actions. It is a *nivṛtti-śāstra*, *mokṣa-śāstra*. To have asked *Arjuna* to fight would have been a *pravṛtti-śāstra* whereas the *nivṛtti* here is the removal of the cause of *saṃsāra*, sorrow and delusion which is ignorance.

REMOVING THE OBSTACLES TO KNOWLEDGE

The *gītā-śāstra* is meant to remove the ignorance which is the cause for *saṃsāra* consisting of *śoka* and *moha*. This should be understood well. It was sorrow and delusion that clouded *Arjuna's* mind and for that alone the *gītā-śāstra* was given by the Lord. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* was not asking *Arjuna* to fight. *Arjuna* was already fighting. He was simply saying that *Arjuna* should do what was to be done — in other words, he was saying, ‘Don't give me these kinds of arguments in order not to fight.’

Suppose someone were to say, ‘I will not take care of my child because it takes so much time to take care of a child. It consumes too much of my personal life. I want to pursue *ātmā* and to take care of this child will take seventeen years, perhaps longer. I cannot wait for *mokṣa*.’ If such a person were to go to *Kṛṣṇa* and *Kṛṣṇa* happened to teach the *Gītā*, he or she would be told, ‘Take care of your child.’ Or, if a man were to tell *Kṛṣṇa* that he wanted to get rid of his wife so that he could become a *sannyāsī*, or that he wanted to become a *sannyāsī* in order to get rid of her, he would be told not to use *sannyāsa* for this purpose. There are smaller solutions available. And if this man thinks that by getting rid of his wife, he will become a *sannyāsī*, *Kṛṣṇa* would say, ‘I am sorry. Such an idea is quite useless. It will not work. You had better take care of your wife.’

Arjuna had been talking to *Kṛṣṇa* and they happened to be in the battlefield. Therefore, the expressions like ‘Fight!’ and ‘Get up!’ are only contextual. *Kṛṣṇa* was not interested in a battle as such; he was only interested in *dharma*. He was not interested in engaging anyone in a fight. We should not think, ‘The *Gītā* says that I should fight; therefore, I am going to fight it out.’ That is not what was said here. That the situation may amount to a fight is one thing. But removing sorrow is the real issue. There are some points in the *Gītā*, like this one, that are important to understand well because they are areas where people often misunderstand the intended meaning.

Further:

य एनं वेत्ति हन्तारं यश्चैनं मन्यते हतम् ।

उभौ तौ न विजानीतो नायं हन्ति न हन्यते ॥ १९ ॥

ya enam veti hantāraṃ yaścainaṃ manyate hatam
ubhau tau na vijānīto nāyaṃ hanti na hanyate

Verse 19

यः *yaḥ* — the one who; एनम् *enam* — this (the self); हन्तारम् *hantāram* — killer; वेत्ति *veti* — thinks; च *ca* — and; यः *yaḥ* — the one who; एनम् *enam* — this (the self); हतम् *hatam* — killed; मन्यते *manyate* — thinks; उभौ तौ *ubhau tau* — they both; न विजानीतः *na vijānītaḥ* — do not know; अयम् *ayam* — this (self); न हन्ति *na hanti* — does not kill; न हन्यते *na hanyate* — is not killed

Both, the one who thinks this (self) to be the killer and the one who thinks of it as the killed, do not know. This (self) does not kill; nor is it killed.

This verse and the next were lifted from the *Kāthopaniṣad* and put a little differently by Lord *Kṛṣṇa*. He need not have quoted an *Upaniṣad* since he had the authority to propound the vision in his own way, but he respected the *Upaniṣad* because it is a means of knowledge — a *pramāṇa-grantha*. Therefore, whatever he says should have the sanction of the *Upaniṣad*. *Kṛṣṇa* does point out elsewhere in the *Gītā* that the *Upaniṣads* were his own creation. He says, ‘I am the one to be known through the Vedas. I am the one who initiated these Vedas (*Gītā* – 15-15).’ Thus, throughout the *Gītā*, *Kṛṣṇa* always talks as *Īśvara*.

Whether we accept him as *Īśvara* or not, *Kṛṣṇa* talks as though he was. The entire dialogue in the *Gītā* was between *Īśvara*, in the form of *Kṛṣṇa*, and *Arjuna*. That is how *Vyāsa* presents it. As *Īśvara*, *Kṛṣṇa* naturally does not need to substantiate his statement. At the same time, however, the *Gītā* has a certain historicity in that, it came from a given mind, *Kṛṣṇa*'s mind, at a given time.

What is heard and received by one generation from another is called *śruti*, whereas what is born of someone's mind is called *smṛti*. What *Kṛṣṇa* says has the status of *smṛti* and not *śruti*. Any *smṛti* must have the sanction of the *śruti* and, if it is against the *śruti*, the *smṛti* is to be looked at again to see whether it has some other meaning that will conform to the *śruti*. If it does not conform in all areas — from the beginning to the end, then the *smṛti* has to be dismissed.

This being the tradition, *Bhagavān*, in so many words, confirms the *śruti*. He did not say, this is what the *śruti* says. But he did put the words of the *śruti* in a different form here. There are several instances in the *Gītā* where such verses have been lifted from the *Upaniṣads*, mainly the *Kāthopaniṣad*, for the purpose of validating what is being said.

Śaṅkara begins his commentary of this verse by saying that *Bhagavān* presents the next two verses, taken from the *Kāthopaniṣad*, to support what he has been saying, meaning that the *śruti* is a *pramāṇa* that is like a witness. Generally, to validate an event that took place, you have a witness who says, ‘Yes, I saw that happen.’ Similarly, to validate what he was saying, *Bhagavān* needed a witness and called upon one.

The *śāstra-pramāṇa* has the status of a witness here. The *śruti*, being a *pramāṇa*, is self-valid. It does not require any validation by any other *pramāṇa*. All that is necessary is that it does not contradict any other *pramāṇa*.

If the *śruti* can be contradicted by any other means of knowledge, it ceases to be a *pramāṇa*. In other words, the *śruti* need not be validated by any other *pramāṇa* for it to be established as a *pramāṇa*. That is why reasoning is required, so that you can prove

that it is not contradicted in any way. If someone says the *śruti* is contradicted by his or her experience, then reasoning is used to show how the person's conclusion regarding the *śruti* or one's experience is wrong. By reasoning, then, we show that what the *śruti* says is not contradicted by any other means of knowledge and is, therefore, a *pramāṇa*.

The word *enam*, in this verse, refers to *ātmā* which is self-evident, which is *sat*, the very basis, the truth, of all *asat*, and which is *nitya* and *aprameya* — all of which has been stated previously. *Yaḥ* refers to the one who looks upon this *ātmā* as the agent of the action of killing, *hantā*.

Even though the action of killing, *hanana-kriyā*, does not have the same context in the *Kāthopaniṣad* as in the *Gītā* where there was going to be a war, it was nevertheless used in the *Upaniṣad* where there was no war at all. To understand the reason for this, the analogy of a world champion wrestler or boxer is helpful. In order to become the world champion, you need not fight against everyone in your particular neighbourhood. Nor do you need to fight all of humanity. You need only knock out the current world champion. Nothing more is required. Similarly, of all actions that a human being is capable of doing, the one that is universally considered to be the most unbecoming is killing. This is why this action is cited here.

I NEVER KILL AND I AM NEVER KILLED

With reference to killing, *ātmā* is looked upon in two different ways in this verse. One person may consider the *ātmā* to be the killer, *hantā*, the doer of the action of killing, and another person may consider himself or herself to be the object of the killing. One thinks *ātmā* is the *kartā*, the doer, of the *hanana-kriyā*, the act of killing, and the other one thinks the *ātmā* is the *karma*, the object of the *hanana-kriyā*, meaning that he or she is subject to destruction. The one who looks upon the *ātmā* as subject to destruction thinks that *ātmā* can be objectified. *Kṛṣṇa* says here that both of them do not know the *ātmā* — *ubhau tau na vijānītaḥ*.

Ātmā does not perform the act of killing; nor is it destroyed by anyone else. It is neither a killer nor the object of anyone's killing — *na ayaṃ hanti na hanyate*. This means that *ātmā* is neither *kartā* nor *karma*. If *ātmā* can neither kill nor be killed, again the question must be asked, how can one grieve? No one can harm *ātmā* nor can the *ātmā* harm itself. It is not a *kartā*. Not even *Īśvara* can destroy the *ātmā*, as *Śaṅkara* pointed out.

In the previous verse, we saw that *karṣṇa-karma*, the subject-object division, is not possible for *ātmā* and this statement is validated in the present verse, which is a replica of the *śruti*. *Ātmā*, therefore, is neither the subject of an action nor the object of an action. The status of doership, *karṣṇa* is imposed upon the *ātmā* while *ātmā* itself is *akartā*. Some insight can be gained here by looking at the meaning of the word, *sarva-*

karma-sannyāsa. In fact, there are two types of *sannyāsa* — *sannyāsa* as a life-style and *sarva-karma-sannyāsa*.

Karma-sannyāsa is present in both types of *sannyāsa*. When *sannyāsa* is taken as a life-style, all obligatory duties, including religious duties, are given up by performing a certain ritual. This ritual is the last ritual a *sannyāsī* performs, one that absolves him or her from those rituals and duties that are enjoined by the Vedas. This is *karma-sannyāsa*, the renunciation of all enjoined *karma*. But this *karma-sannyāsa* does not remove the doership, the *kartṛtva*, in you. *Sarva-karma-sannyāsa* is knowing the *ātmā*, the ‘I’ *aham*, as free from action. The knowledge that ‘I perform no action, *aham na kiñcit karomi*, I am not a doer, *aham na kartā*,’ frees me from all actions. This freedom is called *sannyāsa* here.

I AM NOT THE DOER

Later, we will see in the *Gītā* that a person who, by knowledge, gives up all *karmas*, knows full well that *aham*, the *ātmā*, does not perform any action (*na karma karoti*). The doership that one has can be with reference to either an enlightened doer or an unenlightened doer. An enlightened doer is one who knows, ‘I am not the *kartā*,’ even though he or she still performs actions.

This is not to say that there is no doer; there is a doer, but its reality (with reference to me) is negated. No one can perform an action without a sense of doership. Everyone has to recognise that ‘I perform this action.’ Even to speak, one has to identify with the body and the organ of speech and, thus, there is a *kartā*. There is a subject and an action done — a talker and the act of talking, for instance. Whether it is *Kṛṣṇa* talking, *Vyāsa* writing, *Śaṅkara* commenting, or any enlightened person doing anything, there is definitely a *kartā*. But it is an enlightened *kartā*, meaning that the person does not look upon himself or herself as the *kartā*. The *ātmā* is no longer mistaken to be the *kartā*. Thus, there is an enlightened *ahāṅkāra* and an unenlightened *ahāṅkāra*.

The *ahāṅkāra* is not something to be afraid of. All that we are aiming at is the removal of the ignorance, which makes the *ātmā* a *kartā*, a doer. The *ātmā* is free from all action and this is not known by one who looks upon the *ātmā* as the *kartā*. The one who thinks, ‘I subject myself to the influence of the world’ or ‘The world is too much with me,’ does not know the *ātmā*. The world is not too much with you. The world is you and you are free from the world.

That ‘I am the basis, the *sat*, of the whole creation and, at the same time, I am free from everything,’ is something that I must understand. It is this *jñāna*, therefore, that is taught in the *Gītā*, the essence of which appears in the next verse.

न जायते म्रियते वा कदाचिन्नायं भूत्वाभविता वा न भूयः ।
 अजो नित्यः शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे ॥ २० ॥
na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin-
nāyaṃ bhūtvābhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ
ajo nityaḥ śāśvato'yaṃ purāṇo
na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre

Verse 20

अयम् *ayam* — this; कदाचित् *kadācit* — ever; न जायते *na jāyate* — is not born; वा *vā* — or; न म्रियते *na mriyate* — does not die; वा *vā* — or; भूत्वा *bhūtvā* — having been; न अभविता *na abhavitā* — does not cease to be; भूयः *bhūyaḥ* — again; अजः *ajaḥ* — unborn; नित्यः *nityaḥ* — eternal; शाश्वतः *śāśvataḥ* —that which undergoes no change whatsoever; पुराणः *purāṇaḥ* — ever new; शरीरे हन्यमाने *śarīre hanyamāne* — when the body is destroyed; अयम् *ayam* — this; न हन्यते *na hanyate* — it is not destroyed

This (self) is never born; nor does it die. It is not that, having been, it ceases to exist again. This (self) is unborn, eternal, undergoes no change whatsoever, and is ever new. When the body is destroyed, it is not destroyed.

The *ātmā* does not perform any action nor does it subject itself to any action as an object of action because it is unchanging, *avikriya*. There must be some change on the part of the one who performs the action for an action to occur. Also, to subject oneself to an action is to undergo some change because whatever has been subjected to an action does not remain the same. Water, for example, when heated, is an object of the act of heating and is not the same after subjecting itself to that action.

Thus, if *ātmā* were subject to change, it would be possible for it to be a subject or an object, a *kartā* or a *karma*. It would be able to perform actions and subject itself to an action also. But, since the *ātmā* is not subject to any form of change, it is neither *kartā* nor *karma*. It does not change nor does any other condition bring about a change to it. This verse from the *śruti* was cited here to uphold this particular vision that *ātmā* is *avikriya*, unchanging.

The previous verse, also taken from the *Kāthopaniṣad* and put in *Kṛṣṇa*'s own words was in the *anuṣṭubh* metre, the more common of the two metres found in the *Gītā*, whereas this verse is in the *triṣṭubh* metre. The *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* generally follow the *anuṣṭubh* metre, it being a very popular one and easy to chant. Because the verse is in the *triṣṭubh* metre, it cannot be chanted in the same way as the other verses. Each metre demands its own style when chanting or reciting it and the tune has to be discovered.

Kṛṣṇa wanted to make two points here — *ātmā* is not born, *na jāyate*; nor does it die, *na mriyate*. There is no such change as birth or death for *ātmā*. Birth means that

certain changes have taken place and such changes are not for *ātmā*. There are many types of births. For instance, previously something was not and then afterwards it came into being, like a pot. Or, previously, something was in one form and now it is in another, like a seed that, having been in a seed form, is now in a plant form. There has been a sprouting and something new is born, but only the form has changed.

Thus, for the *ātmā*, there are no such births. There is no birth from *abhāva* to *bhāva*, non-existence to existence. It also does not have a birth from *bhāva* to *bhāva*, existing in one form and then assuming another. *Ātmā* undergoes no change at all, meaning that it neither dies nor is born.

These are two basic types of *vikriyās*, changes. One is the change of being born and the other is the change that spells death. Neither of these *vikriyās* are there for the *ātmā* at any time — *na jāyate na mriyate vā kadācit*. This means, then, that *ātmā* being existent now, does not become extinct later. And it was not non-existent before it came into being. Nor, having existed in another form, does it assume a new form now. The first change implying birth and the last change implying death, both having been negated, all the other changes in between — growth, metamorphosis, and decline — are also dismissed for the *ātmā* because there is no *vikriyā* whatsoever.

ĀTMĀ IS NOT BORN AND DOES NOT DIE

Kṛṣṇa also said in this verse that *ātmā*, having been before, does not again become non-existent — *ayam bhūtvā abhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ*. What is the sense of ‘again’ here? Again, having been, *ātmā* does not become non-existent. Death is ‘having been, one is no more.’ Such a situation is not there for *ātmā*. *Ātmā* was, is, and will ever be the same. Because *ātmā* is not subject to time, it is *avikriya*, not subject to change. This is one meaning.

A person who was there before and is no more is said to be dead. Such a person is gone and no one can say where he or she went. However, you cannot say the same for the son of a barren woman. He did never existed at any time. Therefore you cannot say that having existed he ceases to exist now. A non-existent thing does not die. The barren woman dies, but her son does not. Death only applies when, having been, something goes away. A similar change does not happen to *ātmā*. *Ātmā* is not subject to a futuristic extinction, which means that it is not subject to time in terms of the future in any way. Nor is it subject to time in terms of the past. That something did not exist before and has now come into being is another situation, called birth. Having not been before, it came into existence. The one who is born is the one who, having not been before, comes into being — *abhūtvā bhavitā*. Previously it was non-existent and later it comes into existence. This also does not apply to *ātmā*. Therefore, the words in the verse can be put differently also — *ātmā* was not non-existent previously and there will be no time when it does not exist. Either way you can take it — *bhūtvā abhavitā na* or *abhūtvā bhavitā*

na. Both meanings are given by Śaṅkara here for the same line because both meanings are there in the verse.

Having not been, and then coming into being, which is called birth, is not there for *ātmā* — *na jāyate*. Having been and disappearing, which is called death, is also not there for the *ātmā* — *na mriyate*. This being so, *ātmā* is unborn, *aja*. Because it is not subject to death, the word *nitya* also implies that *ātmā* is not bound by time. It is not an object within time. It is something on which time depends for its existence and is, therefore, *aja* and *nitya*. The word *śāśvata*, meaning that which is always the same, that never undergoes any change, was also necessary here to eliminate the possibility of the *ātmā* being taken for something eternal, *nitya*, but continuously changing, eternally changing.

NOR DOES ĀTMĒ GROW OLD

Therefore, the changes that the physical body is subject to between birth and death — growth, metamorphosis, and decline — are also not there for *ātmā*. Another word describing the *ātmā* in this verse, *purāṇa*, generally means ancient, but here it refers to that which is ever fresh. Even though *ātmā* was fresh earlier, it is still fresh. Always it is fresh. *Ātmā* is timeless and is the very content of the meaning of the word new, *nava*. It was *nava* then and it is *nava* now.¹ It is new now and previously it was also new. It is always new; it does not grow old. There is no ageing, *vrddhi*, no decline, *apakṣaya*, for the *ātmā*. In other words, even when the *śarīra*, the body is destroyed, the *ātmā* is not destroyed — *hanyamāne śarīre na hanyate*. It is always the same.

We have seen, then, that the *ātmā* is neither the subject nor the object of any action, which is why it cannot be affected by *puṇya* and *pāpa* or destroyed by anyone, not even *Īśvara*. If it were the subject of an action, it would necessarily undergo a change in order to perform the action. A new action cannot emanate in any other way. The subject, the doer of the action has a thought or a desire, *saṅkalpa* and undergoes whatever change is necessary to perform the action. For example, the desire to see something. ‘Let me look at the book,’ means that the person becomes a *kartā*. There is a *saṅkalpa* and the one with the *saṅkalpa* becomes the subject, the doer, and the doer undergoes a change. The change is in the form of a *saṅkalpa*, anxiety, and so on, on the part of the doer, the subject. That subject performs the action. If the *ātmā* is a *kartā*, the *ātmā* itself must undergo this *vikriyā*, change. That this self-evident *ātmā* undergoes no change and is therefore neither *kartā* nor *karma* was made clear in the previous verses. Therefore, only an *ātmā* that undergoes change, a *vikriyāvān ātmā*, can be a *kartā*. Similarly, if *ātmā* is the object of any action, it would be affected by any action perpetrated by someone towards it — you, the *ātmā*. A *karma*, action is that which brings about a change to the object of action. For instance, if I hit an object with a

¹ *purā eva navaḥ, purāṇaḥ* — Even before it was new.

hammer, that object, the recipient of that action, must undergo some kind of change and that change is the result of that particular *karma*, hitting. Similarly, if *ātmā* is the object of any kind of action, it must also undergo a change. Therefore, we would have a *vikriyāvān ātmā*, an *ātmā* that is subject to change. But *ātmā* is *avikriya*.

THE CHANGING AND THE CHANGELESS

The physical body, on the other hand, is subject to change. When the *ahaṅkāra*, the ego, identifying with the body, performs an action, it is the physical body that performs the action in keeping with the *ahaṅkāra's* intention. The legs move, the hands move, the body shrinks or expands, to a certain extent, in that you can stretch it in order to reach something or you can shrink yourself in order to get out of a tight place. Thus, the body undergoes all kinds of contortions. The body is at the disposal of the *kartā* and undergoes a lot of change. It also becomes an object of action when someone else pushes it. The body is, therefore, *vikriyāvān*; not only does it undergo change, but it is meant to do so. The body is born (*jāyate*), exists (*asti*), grows (*vardhate*), undergoes certain modifications (*vipariṇamate*), declines (*apakṣīyate*), and dies (*vinaśyati*) because it is *vikāravān*, that which is subject to change.

Due to lack of understanding, this physical body and the *ātmā* are taken together. *Ātmā* is taken to have a physical body as an intrinsic attribute. Therefore, I become as good as the physical body. Here, the discrimination, the *viveka*, required is that while the *deha* is subject to change, *ātmā* is not. It is neither born nor does it die. The first and last *vikāras* for the body, birth and death, are negated in *ātmā* by this verse.

Ātmā was not born because there was not a time when it was not in order to be born. It was always there. Nor will it die because, having not come into being, there will never be a time when it will not be there. Thus, it is not subject to birth or death; therefore it is *nitya*. Nor does it undergo the other changes that happen between birth and death; Therefore it is *śāśvata*.

The question may then be asked, if *ātmā* does not decline, does it grow? Is it that when you are born, there is a nascent *ātmā*, a baby *ātmā*, which then becomes a child *ātmā*, adult *ātmā*, and so on? No, *Bhāṣyakāra* said, it does not grow either. Here, *Śaṅkara* introduced a small definition for growth, *vṛddhi*. Any growth means that something that was not earlier should come into being. For instance, a young man previously did not have a moustache and therefore did not have to shave. Now he has both a beard and a moustache and has to shave every day. This is growth, *vṛddhi*. Something new has happened.

DOES ĀTMĒ GROW?

In any growth, there are always new features introduced. Either something is added to what is already there or it expresses itself in some new way. Either way, the arrival of a new feature makes the thing grow. For instance, a small sprout begins to grow. It branches out, puts out leaves and flowers, and becomes a full-grown tree. Therefore, growth always implies new features added to a given stem and the new feature that has been gained means that which grows is no longer the same.

Ātmā was always ever grown, meaning that it never grows. Only that which has a feature, an attribute, can grow and decline, wax and wane, bulge and contract. If it is a colour, for example, it will fade or a new colour may come. Something can happen to it, whereas the ātmā, having no features whatsoever, no limbs or attributes, is *purāṇa*, ever new. Even when the body is destroyed, *hanyamāne śarīre*, ātmā is not destroyed. 'Not destroyed' is to be taken here in the sense of change so as not to confuse its meaning with the use of *hanti* and *hanyate*, to kill and be killed, in the previous verse. All that is being said is that the ātmā undergoes no change whatsoever.

Śaṅkara concludes his commentary of this verse by saying that, with reference to ātmā, Kṛṣṇa negated the six-fold modifications that we see in any given physical body — birth, existence, growth, modification, decline, and death. The meaning of these two verses taken from the śruti, therefore, is that ātmā is free from any manner of modification. In no way is it subject to change.

No one can effect a change on ātmā because it is not available for objectification and does not have any feature or attribute, *avayava* to receive such an action. Nor does ātmā itself undergo a change to perform any action. Therefore, being both *akartā* (not a doer of the action) and *akarma* (not an object of the action), ātmā is *aśocya*, not a source of sorrow.

Where is *śocya*, then? There should be an object available for sorrow, a situation capable of causing sorrow. The ātmā cannot cause sorrow because it does not undergo any change, nor does it subject itself to change. How, then, can it be *śocya*? Ātmā, whose *svarūpa*, nature, is fullness, *ānanda*, can only be *aśocya*.

Further:

वेदाविनाशिनं नित्यं य एनमजमव्ययम्।

कथं स पुरुषः पार्थ कं घातयति हन्ति कम् ॥ २१ ॥

vedāvināśinaṃ nityaṃ ya enamajamavyayam

kathaṃ sa puruṣaḥ pārtha kaṃ ghātayati hanti kam

Verse 21

पार्थ *pārtha* — Oh! Son of *Prthā* (*Arjuna*); एनम् *enam* — this (*ātmā*); अविनाशिनम् *avināśinam* — indestructible; नित्यम् *nityam* — timeless; अजम् *ajam* — unborn;

अव्ययम् *avyayam* — that which does not undergo decline; यः वेद *yaḥ veda* — the one who knows; सः *saḥ* — that; पुरुषः *puruṣaḥ* — person; कथम् *katham* — how; कम् *kam* — whom; हन्ति *hanti* — kills; कम् *kam* — whom; घातयति *ghāṭayati* — causes to destroy

Oh! Son of *Prthā*, the one who knows this (self) to be indestructible, timeless, unborn, and not subject to decline, how and whom does that person kill? Whom does he cause to kill?

The one who thinks that *ātmā* performs the action of killing, or any action for that matter, does not know *ātmā* and the one who looks upon *ātmā* as an object of the action of killing or any other action also does not know the *ātmā*. This is because, as we saw in an earlier verse, *ātmā* does not kill nor is it killed — *na hanti, na hanyate*. To put it positively, one, who takes the *ātmā* to be neither the subject nor the object of action, knows the *ātmā*.

What has been pointed out so far was summed up here by *Kṛṣṇa*. His initial statement was that *ātmā* does not become the *kartā* or *karma* of any *kriyā*, including killing, *hanana-kriyā*. Having introduced this point, he explained that this is because *ātmā* is not subject to change. Having given the reason, he concluded, stating that the one who knows the *ātmā* knows it to be *avināśī* not subject to death or destruction.

The body's change is called *bhāva-vikāra*, a technical expression to include *jāyate*, is born, *vardhate*, grows, *vipariṇamate*, metamorphoses, *apakṣīyate*, wanes or declines, and *vinaśyati*, dies. Because *ātmā* does not have this last *bhāva-vikāra*, it is referred to here as *avināśī*. The one who knows *ātmā* as one that is not subject to death and therefore timeless, *nitya*, is called an *ātmajñā* — the knower of *ātmā*.

The *ātmā* is also known by the *ātmajñā* as unborn, *aḥ* and as that which does not undergo any kind of decline, *avyaya*. Unlike *ātmā*, the body is expended as the years go by. This is why it is described as a 'spent force' — the job being done, the game is over! All that is then discussed is in the past tense — 'I was like this, I was like that, and I would have been like that, etc.' This is *vyaya*, expenditure, whereas the *ātmā* is *avyaya*. In Sanskrit grammar also, an indeclinable word is called *avyaya*, that which does not change in any situation, regardless of number, gender or case.

WHOM DOES ONE KILL OR CAUSE TO KILL?

Bringing up one more point in his summary *Kṛṣṇa* asks, 'Whom does that person destroy — *kaṃ hanti?* Whom does he impel to kill? — *kaṃ ghāṭayati?*' There are two types of action reflected here. One is the action that you do and the other is the action that you make others do. In a robbery, for example, there is the accused number one and the accused number two. One may have performed the act of driving the get-away car,

while the other performed the act of driving the driver. There is someone who performs the felony and there is someone else behind it. The one behind the felony is the accused and the one who performed it is only an accomplice. The accused is an important person, the kingpin, whereas the other one is only a pin! But both of them perform action.

How can one who knows *ātmā* perform the action of killing and whom does he or she kill? Where is the person being killed? Where is that action? A question is not really being posed here. For instance, we are not trying to find out by what means the killing is done. Nor are we trying to find out why the person does it or whether he or she kills. This is not the intent here. Rather, how can one kill and whom does one kill is being looked into. There should be some *vikriyā* on one's part in order to perform the action and *ātmā* is *avikriyā*.

A doubt may arise here. If there is no *vikriyā* for *ātmā* and the *ātmajñā* knows that the *ātmā*, the 'I,' is not the performer of any action, how, then, can that person perform any action? What is to be understood here is that *ātmā* does not perform any action. It does not kill nor cause anyone to kill because *ātmā* does not even wish. It is the *svarūpa* of every wish. The wish is a *nāma-rūpa*, a thought, and if you press the thought, it ends up in *ātmā*, wherein there is no thought anywhere. Thus, any given thought or desire is *mithyā* and the doership is also *mithyā*.

If you analyse who the doer is, you find that the doer is nothing but consciousness, *caitanya*. That is, the doer disappears in the *caitanya* and is not there at all. When the doer is there, *caitanya* is there, whereas in the *caitanya* there is no doer. Therefore, there is only drama. There is no real doer, only an 'as though' doer. It is 'as though' he or she hears, 'as though' listens, 'as though' talks, 'as though' walks, and 'as though' stands.

There is no doership in *ātmā* because *ātmā* is always free. The notion that 'I am the performer of the action,' is the source of action we talk about here. Where is an action without a *kartā*? Without the doership, *kartṛtva*, there is no real action at all. Therefore, the doership is the one that gives the blood, bones, and flesh necessary for the action to be an action and for the *karma-phala* to be the *karma-phala*, the result you enjoy. The whole cycle is based upon the kingpin, the *kartā*.

WHO IS THE DOER?

Without the *kartā*, there is no *karma* or *karma-phala*. The *kartā* is defined as the one who decides and performs action. He or she has *kriyā*, etc. and, therefore, can choose from the hundreds of verbal roots for 'doing' that are available. The doer can choose to kill, to speak, or to do any of the varieties of actions possible, but for the *ātmā*, which is *avikriyā*, free from any change, there is no *kartṛtva*. Where, then, is the

question of how and whom, with reference to killing — *kathaṃ ghātayati, kathaṃ hanti, kaṃ ghātayati, kaṃ hanti!*

The word *hanti*, here, is only contextual and has nothing to do with killing as such. Śaṅkara says that the expression is purely with reference to action. What kind of action does the person perform and what kind of action does he or she cause anyone else to perform?

A question may then arise here. If a person is a *sarva-karma-sannyāsi*, and has given up all *karmas*, will he or she not perform any action at all? Does the person not continue to perform some actions? Does he or she not teach? Does the person not do anything — not even eat, walk, or talk? How can you say that one who still performs these actions is a *sarva-karma-sannyāsi*?

Sarva-karma-sannyāsi is the one who does not have the notion that ‘I am the doer,’ i.e., the one who does not have *karṭṛva-buddhi*. For such a person, there is no doership in the *ātmā*. You are not a *sarva-karma-sannyāsi* by merely not doing *karma*. You may be a *karma-sannyāsi* but not a *sarva-karma-sannyāsi*. Even if you do not do any *karma*, if you have *karṭṛva-buddhi*, you are still only a *saṃsārī*. A *sarva-karma-sannyāsi* is a *jñānī*, one who is totally free from all *karmas*. Even if *karmas* are performed, the *jñānī* does not perform any action. In this, he or she has no doubt whatsoever because, with reference to the *ātmā*, the self, the notion of doership is not there. All that takes place for the *jñānī* is that the sense organs, backed by the mind, engage themselves in their own fields of activity. The *jñānī* does not look upon himself or herself as the *kartā*. This is the actual meaning of *sarva-karma-sannyāsa*.

THE REAL MEANING OF SANNYĀSA

The person who is a *sarva-karma-sannyāsi* is called a *vidvān*, one who is wise. All the *karma* that the *vidvān* has done so far, all the prayers, *yoga*, and other forms of discipline, and even a life of *sannyāsa*, have found their fulfilment in this *sarva-karma-sannyāsa*. Thereafter, Śaṅkara said, there is no question of such a person doing certain *karmas* in order to create some result. There is nothing more to do. All the prayers have been fulfilled in this particular discovery and it is for this discovery alone that the prayers and other *karmas* were performed. In this way, Śaṅkara connected *vedānta-śāstra* to the *karma-śāstra*. *Karma-yoga* is meant for this alone. Thus, *sannyāsa* is really *sarva-karma-sannyāsa*.

For the *sarva-karma-sannyāsi* there are no *karmas* to be performed. The point here is that the rituals enjoined by the *śāstra* need no longer be performed by the *sarva-karma-sannyāsi*. If the person continues to be a householder, he or she is purely playing out previous *karma*, *prārabdha-karma* and whatever one was doing is continued.

King *Janaka* was a case in point. Although he was considered a wise man, he continued to be the ruler of a kingdom and was not bothered by the role at all. Like *Janaka*, one can be a wise person and be in the world or be a *sannyāsi* without playing any roles, having given up everything to pursue knowledge. Either way it is possible. Being a *jñāni* has nothing to do with what the *jñāni* seemingly does and does not do. This is what is meant by *sarva-karma-sannyāsa*, as established in the *śāstra* and elaborated upon here by *Śaṅkara*.

When you say, 'I am affected,' then *ātmā* is looked upon as an object, a *karma*, that has something affecting it. This object can be a person, an event, or even *Īśvara*. Anyone who looks upon *ātmā* as an object does not know *ātmā*. The *samsāri*'s ignorance, *ajñāna* is such that not only does the person look upon himself or herself as a *karma*, object, but also as a *kartā* which only heightens the *ajñāna*.

One looks upon oneself as a doer; otherwise, one could not be a sinner. Unless a person performs action, there is no way of sinning; nor is there any way of gathering *karmas* and *karma-phalas*.

Some people do not take the body as *ātmā*, but believe that there is a survivor of this body. Most religious people believe this to be so. Even the nihilists, Buddhists, believe that you are born again and again. Therefore, *mokṣa*, for them, is realising that the *ātmā* is a zero, non-existent. They believe in the survival of the *ātmā* until enlightenment whatever their concept of enlightenment may be.

Thus, in all religions, they talk of an *ātmā* other than the physical body, referred to as the soul, that which survives death. Any given soul is the *kartā*; he or she is the sinner, and so on. It is a belief but, at the same time, people do look upon that *ātmā*, the survivor, the soul, as one who is subject to all kinds of *karma*, all kinds of *puṇya*, *pāpa*, imperfections, and so on, and as one who may get some kind of bliss experience later. All these beliefs were negated here by *Kṛṣṇa*. *Bhāṣyakāra* mentioned specifically those who consider themselves to be great scholars and yet say there is no way of knowing the *ātmā*. They say that knowledge of the *ātmā* free from *karṭṛtva*, doership, is not possible and, therefore, *sarva-karma-sannyāsa* is also not possible.

I AM NOT THE DOER

It was pointed out that *sarva-karma-sannyāsa* is only possible if *ātmā* is not a doer, i.e., *akartā*. Only when one understands, 'I am not the doer — *aham akartā*,' does the renunciation of all *karmas* take place naturally. If the knowledge that 'I am neither a doer nor an enjoyer' has arisen in someone, then *sarva-karma-sannyāsa* is accomplished by that person. Only if the knowledge itself cannot take place, is *sarva-karma-sannyāsa* an impossibility. But on what basis can you say this knowledge

cannot take place? Are you saying such an *ātmā* is not there and, if so, upon what do you base your statement?

You cannot say that *ātmā* is not there, since the very act of saying so presupposes an *ātmā*. Because you are existent, you are talking. Therefore, no one can say, ‘I am not there.’ In the existence of *ātmā*, then, there is no doubt whatsoever. If the doubt is not with reference to the existence of the *ātmā*, then it is with reference to the *ātmā* being *akartā*. It is easy to assume that there can be no *akartṛ-ātmā* because the *ātmā* is known as *kartā* and not as *akartā*. And if there is an *ātmā* that is *akartā*, there is no way of knowing it. This could be the contention of most people who do not understand that there is no *kartṛtva* for the *ātmā*.

To this, we answer as follows. If *ātmā* is the *kartā*, it must always be the *kartā*. If the *ātmā* is always the *kartā*, if *kartṛtva* is the very nature of the *ātmā*, then as a doer it should be doing all the time. But that is not what happens. Sometimes you fall back and do nothing at all; you only enjoy. Then you see only enjoyership, *bhokṛtva* and no *kartṛtva*. Similarly, if enjoyership were the nature of *ātmā*, then *ātmā* would be a *bhoktā* all the time. Thus, *ātmā* is neither *kartā* nor *bhoktā*.

There are also moments when neither doership nor enjoyership is there, when there is no ‘I’ sense at all because this ‘I’ notion, *ahaṅkāra* is absent at times — between two thoughts, for example. How then are you going to account for this experience? You cannot. Nor can you say that the *śāstra* says the *ātmā* is a *kartā*. Because, it says that *ātmā* is *akartā* and we have no data whatsoever to contradict this statement.

You may agree with the *śruti* that *ātmā* is *akartā*, but may say that knowledge of such an *ātmā* is not possible because it is not the object of your mind. But *śāstra* says that such knowledge has got to be gained by the mind alone, for which there is a *pramāṇa* — the *śāstra*. You have a mind that is capable of the knowledge that will destroy the *ajñāna*, the ignorance. This is all that we are talking about and you say it is not possible. Is it that it is not possible for you or is it because it is not possible at all?

CAN ĀTMĒ BE KNOWN?

How can I gain the knowledge of the *akartṛ-ātmā*? I cannot see the *akartṛ-ātmā*. Here, *Śaṅkara* says that knowledge of *ātmā* is not similar to the knowledge of an object, but is rather the removal of ignorance about the subject itself. There is a knower who has ignorance about himself or herself and removal of that ignorance is the only knowledge being discussed here. This knowledge, *vṛtti-jñāna*, is ‘I am not the doer — *aham akartā*.’ This thought, *vṛtti*, is capable of destroying the ignorance about oneself. A particular fact — that I am the *ātmā*, the non-doer — is not known and ignorance of

this fact is removed by a *vṛtti* brought about by the teaching, *upadeśa*. The *vṛtti*, having done its job, goes, along with the ignorance.

Where is the problem here? We have a complete methodology, *prakriyā* for it — how exactly the knowledge takes place, and so on. If you say, that it does not take place in your particular mind, *antaḥ-karaṇa*, then we will say that a certain type of *antaḥ-karaṇa* is necessary and that there are ways for you to gain it. This is why the *Gītā* talks so extensively about *yoga*, and so on. Because you do not want to accept something, you keep on talking about its impossibility. This is because of your commitment to a belief. You are not committed to truth. First, you commit yourself to a belief, to a faith, and then you explore for confirmation of that belief in the *śāstra*. One should have *śraddhā* in the *śāstra* and explore it to find out what it has to convey.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTELLECTUAL HONESTY

If you are honest, committed to truth, all you need to do is look back at what has been said here. You will find nothing that you can disown or disprove. All that has been said is something that you have to see — as it is. We are not proposing anything speculative. We are not making a promise. We say that you are an *akartā*, that you are *avināśī*, indestructible. How can such a person perform any action, there being no action really?

There are two types of negation. One is a physical negation — *niśedha*. And the other is negation by knowledge — *bādhā*. The *kartrva-buddhi* is there and it is negated. You may see the same person performing an action, talking, for example, and at the same time saying that *ātmā* is *akartā* and so on. One could say that, *Kṛṣṇa* was talking and was, therefore, a *kartā*. *Arjuna* could have said to *Kṛṣṇa*, ‘You are performing the action of talking to me. How, then, can you tell me that *ātmā* is *akartā*?’

To say that the one who knows *ātmā* does not perform any action means that you do not know *ātmā*. *Kṛṣṇa* was definitely performing actions. For one thing, he was driving *Arjuna*’s chariot. Does this not make him an *ajñānī*? And if he is an *ajñānī*, what does he have to teach? This kind of question arises only because *ātmā* is not understood.

When you see the sun rise, you enjoy it and negate it also, because you know that the sun does not actually rise. There is a conclusion that the sun rises and because I see it rising. I say that the conclusion is true. I perceive it; therefore, the sun rises in the eastern sky. By further knowledge, however, we understand the whole process of why the sun appears as though it is rising. The sun rising becomes only an appearance and therefore is not a real rising in that there is no real action of rising on the part of the sun. Thus, seeing the sunrise, you negate it, knowing that it does not rise at all. This is negation by knowledge, *bādhā* — you see and still you negate.

Similarly, we see a variety of colours in a peacock's feathers, but there are no such colours, in fact. The appearance of colour is due to different prism-like structures that reflect light in a particular manner. This is purely *bādhā*, negation by knowledge. It does not mean that you are negating the perception of colour, only that you are negating colour being there.

In fact, all science is purely *bādhā*. It goes on negating. It sees something and then finds that it is not true, and that something else is true instead. When you go after the substance of a given substance, what was previously considered to be the substance is found to have no substance because it has to depend on another substance for its existence. In this way, we find that any substantive loses its substance and, still continues to exist. And although you have negated its existence, you may even use it!

Bādhā is a kind of negation that is done by everyone. A physicist will say that gold is nothing but some quanta of energy. Copper is also some quanta of energy. However, this does not mean that he will give his fiancée a copper engagement ring! Buying a gold ring does not, in any way, alter his knowledge that both gold and copper are but energy. This is also *bādhā*, negation. Seeing it, you negate it.

Bādhā, then, is a different type of negation and that is how the *karṣṭva-buddhi* in the *ātmā* is negated. *Bādhā* negation is not a simple negation. Once *bādhā* is there, regardless of what the *jñānī* does, he or she knows that, 'I perform no action.' This is the knowledge, *jñāna*, and there is no way of losing it. This is what we call *sarva-karma-sannyāsa*. It does not mean that a person will not do any action; it means that the *sat-cit-ānanda-ātmā* does not perform any action.

THERE IS NOTHING MORE TO BE DONE

While performing *karma*, the *sarva-karma-sannyāsī* sees that there is freedom from action. In action, he or she sees actionlessness. The one who knows this is called *buddhimān*; such a person has the knowledge, *buddhi*, and has done everything that has to be done — *kṛtsna-karmakṛt* — because he or she knows that *ātmā* is *akartā*, always full, *pūrṇa*.

Śaṅkara spends a lot of time here quoting from later verses because of the importance of these two sentences. He said that it would be shown that the one who has self-knowledge, *ātma-jñāna*, alone is qualified for *sarva-karma-sannyāsa*. Such a person is not bound any more by *karma*. Therefore, whatever a *sarva-karma-sannyāsī* does, he or she does only because it has to be done and not because of any desired result. Because of the person's *prārabdha-karma*, certain actions may be performed. This will be seen repeatedly throughout the *gītā-śāstra*. What is relevant here is the initial conclusion that *ātmā* is not subject to any change or destruction.

Further:

वासांसि जीर्णानि यथा विहाय नवानि गृह्णाति नरोऽपराणि ।
 तथा शरीराणि विहाय जीर्णान्यन्यानि संयाति नवानि देही ॥ २२ ॥
vāsāṃsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya
navāni grhṇāti naro'parāṇi
tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇān-
yanyāni saṃyāti navāni dehī

Verse 22

नरः *naraḥ* — a human being; यथा *yathā* — just as; जीर्णानि *jīrṇāni* — old; वासांसि *vāsāṃsi* — clothes; विहाय *vihāya* — giving up; अपराणि *aparāṇi* — others; नवानि *navāni* — new; गृह्णाति *grhṇāti* — takes; तथा *tathā* — so too; देही *dehī* — the indweller of the body; जीर्णानि *jīrṇāni* — old; शरीराणि *śarīrāṇi* — bodies; विहाय *vihāya* — giving up; अन्यानि *anyāni* — others; नवानि *navāni* — new; संयाति *saṃyāti* — takes

Just as a person gives up old clothes and takes up new ones, so too, the indweller of the body gives up old bodies and takes others which are new.

The word *nara* means a human being, or etymologically, one who cannot be destroyed, who always survives somehow! If a person is enlightened, he or she survives eternally, as eternal *Brahman*. If not, the person merely survives. How?

The word *yathā*, meaning 'just as.' indicates that an illustration is about to be presented. Here, the illustration used is the discarding of old clothes for new or better ones — *vāsāṃsi jīrṇāni vihāya aparāṇi navāni grhṇāti*. Similarly, the old body, *śarīra*, is given up and a new one is taken. The word *śarīra* means, that which is subject to disintegration. Bodies, therefore, become useless in time because of the natural ageing process, disease, or abuse. The abuse may be caused by someone's wrong action, like murder, for instance, or by your own abuse. By slow suicide, like drinking and so on, a person destroys the body and thus it is rendered old and useless, *jīrṇa*.

You are the one wearing the clothes and you keep on wearing them on this *śarīra*. They are with you only, as long as you find them useful and, then, when they are useless, you throw them away and take on new clothes. This process is repeated again and again. Similarly, there is a wearer of this body who is the indweller of it. The indweller, *dehī*, is the one who has a body, *deha*. Just as the body is within the clothes, so too, within this body, which is itself a costume, is the person, the indweller, Mr., Mrs., or Miss So-and-so, who takes new bodies — *anyāni navāni saṃyāti*. Giving up the old, one takes on the new.

The idea here is that either way *ātmā* is *nitya*, it does not die. It always keeps on going. Even when the *jīvatva* dies, the *jīva* does not die; only the notion dies. *Kṛṣṇa* wants to point out here that *ātmā* is always *nitya*. Never does the *ātmā* subject itself to disappearance; the *dehī*, the indweller, continues to be.

Here, certain questions can be asked. When a person is really old, the body is no longer useful. A man, for example, may be ninety-eight years old and unable to hear, see, walk, or do anything. He cannot digest his food or even open his mouth and, even if he can, he has no teeth. Such a body is definitely useless, like an old Cadillac. The only difference is that certain parts are salvaged from the Cadillac, whereas the old body has nothing to donate. Everything is so old and worn out that to receive a donation from such a person, one would need to be at least one hundred and fifty years old!

THE BODY AS A SUIT OF CLOTHES

Because this old body is no longer useful, the person gives it up. That he lets it go and takes a new body is understandable, just as the giving up of old clothes and the taking on of new ones is understandable. However, the example does not seem to hold in all cases, given that we see people dying away in the prime of youth with cancer and so on.

We can understand that accidents are due to someone's mistake, carelessness or whatever. Someone dying because of a homicide is also understandable in that another person abused his or her free will by performing a destructive action against a body which can be objectified by others. A bullet for example can destroy the physical body, *sthūla-śarīra*, and once ruptured, the subtle body, *sūkṣma-śarīra*, can no longer live in it. Just as a car needs a few things with which to operate, spark plugs and so on, so too, there is a minimum requirement for the *sūkṣma-śarīra* to be able to operate within the physical body.

There must be a heart and a kidney, for instance. If these are ruptured, the body is useless, regardless of its age. Just as the new car you bought yesterday can become a wreck today, so too, this body can also be wrecked. And, because the *dehī* can no longer run it, a new body has to be found.

However, when a young person dies of leukemia, or due to some unknown reason, we cannot say that he or she did anything wrong to bring about this disease. The person may have done one or two things wrong, but nothing sufficient to develop cancer. Crib death is but one of the many ways a child may die. People are also struck down in youth and middle age in any number of ways. Energetic, ambitious people, with a lot of plans and many irons in the fire, do succumb to heart attacks. Why do people die away like this when the body is not yet worn out? The answer to these questions is as follows.

What is said is that, the death of the physical body depends on the *dehī*. If the *jīva* has taken this body and is a survivor of death, then there must be some cause which has brought this body into being. If you accept that there is a *dehī* other than this body who survives death, then that *dehī* having survived not only this death but previous ones also,

is always a survivor. The *dehī*, then, must have come to this body because of his or her own *karma*, not because of God's will or for any other reason.

A God who willed suffering to people would be some kind of tyrant, a sadist, and would definitely require psychological treatment. Why else would he put so much sadness into people? One person is born with leprosy; another with syphilis, AIDS, and what not, through no fault of the person. What kind of God would sit there and give people such sadness from the very start? Not only for the growing child, but for everyone around as well, since seeing such suffering is a sickness in itself. Anyone who is responsible for doing such things is a sadist and is the first one who should be brought to justice. We could never sing in praise of such a Lord!

GOD IS NOT A TYRANT

Only a sadistic God could be a tyrant, enjoying the suffering of people for no reason. Some are born with wooden spoons in their mouths, others with silver and golden spoons, and some are born with no mouth at all. What kind of God would do this? Some are born to become orphans. Why then are they even born? 'Don't ask,' we are usually told. This is what is called double justification. God is first justified by what he does and then we are told not to question his actions. Why even talk about such a God then? Let us settle our account with ourselves. We have our own lot. You have a body here which has its own problems. You do not require God at all for this and, if there is such a tyrant, it is better not to think of him at all.

On the other hand, perhaps, the explanation is that we have asked for our particular lot in life. God is the law. We asked for it and we got it. The Lord says, 'I am the one who made you and, at the same time, I have not made you.'

This is like putting your finger into the fire and then asking the fire,

'Did you burn me?'

'Yes, I burned you,' says the fire.

'Why?'

'I didn't burn you at all.'

'You just told me you burned me and then you say you did not. How can you say both? You are blowing hot and cold. I thought you blew only hot and now I find you blow both hot and cold. Why is that?'

'When you stuck your finger into me, I burned. To burn is my nature, my *svabhāva*, and I burned. I cannot say that someone else burned; I burned your finger. But then, I did not go after your finger, did I? I remained in my place. You stuck your finger into me and got burnt. In other words, you asked for it.'

This is the law and is what is meant by the law of *karma*, *prārabdha-karma*. It is the *jīva's karma*, the law of *karma* being there. If you accept a soul that survives the body, then you definitely have to account for the varieties of situations that you face.

Thus, *prārabdha-karma* is the reason why a person, a *dehī*, comes with a particular *deha*, which dies when the job is done.

WHAT IS IT THAT IS NEW?

With reference to taking on a new body, who is to decide what is new? Car rental people always buy new cars and after one year sell them. For them, a one-year-old car is old, but the one who buys it thinks of it as new. Others may buy a much older car and also think of it as new, whereas the seller thinks of it as old. Of course, there are even others who buy very old cars, fix them up, and are very happy that they have the oldest car available because it is a valuable antique. Who, then, is to decide which of these is new?

Similarly, the king of Tiruvananthapuram, in the south of India, must walk to the temple everyday wearing new clothes. The clothes he wears one day are considered old the next day, and are given away. Of course, the one who receives the clothes thinks of them as new. This person may wear them for a year or two and then also think they are old. There is always someone who will take them. That is why it is said that there is a buyer for everything. You have to decide what is new.

Similarly, here, what is old or new has to be decided by the *dehī* and not by you, the onlooker. For the onlooker, the body may not be ready for death, but for the *dehī* the job is done. Those who are bereaved may look at a particular death as something that is premature, but this is not the case from the standpoint of the *dehī*, unless the death is caused by some wrong action that is the abuse of free will on the part of oneself or someone else. Otherwise, it is for the *dehī* to decide when the body's job is done — in other words, when the purpose for which the body was taken has been accomplished.

Even though the *dehī* may like to live on, the job for which this body was taken is done. When it is done the tenure is over. Whatever had to happen here has already happened. Therefore, death takes place. Just as, in the world, a person takes on new clothes and gives up the old ones, so too, the one who indwells in the body, the *jīva*, gives up the old body and takes on the new. What is meant by 'Old bodies' is to be understood properly. Therefore, for the *dehī*, the one who indwells the *deha*, there is no death at all and for the *deha*, there is no survival. The body is bound by time, subject to change, and it keeps changing all the time. There is no time when the body does not change. Because it is always changing, it is called *śarīra* or *deha*. *Deha* means that which is subject to cremation and *śarīra* means that which is subject to disintegration, that which is buried. The choice, then, is only between these two!

The *deha* is always subject to death and is always dying. It is not that suddenly, one fine day it dies; rather, it keeps on dying all the time. You cannot stop it, whereas in the case of the *dehī*, you cannot destroy it. Both facts must be seen clearly. This being

so, there is no cause for grief — *aśocyān anvaśocaḥ tvam*, a theme that continues and is the conclusion.

That there is no cause for grief is the vision of the *śāstra* and, being so, has a bearing upon the entire dialogue between *Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna*. As we proceed, we shall see that there are topical connections, sectional connections, and a total connection with this theme throughout the *Gītā*.

नैनं छिन्दन्ति शस्त्राणि नैनं दहति पावकः ।

न चैनं क्लेदयन्त्यापो न शोषयति मारुतः ॥ २३ ॥

nainam chindanti śastrāṇi nainam dahati pāvakaḥ
na cainam kledayantyaṅapo na śoṣayati mārutaḥ

Verse 23

शस्त्राणि *śastrāṇi* — weapons; एनम् *enam* — this (the self); न छिन्दन्ति *na chindanti* — do not cut; पावकः *pāvakaḥ* — fire; एनम् *enam* — this; न दहति *na dahati* — does not burn; आपः *āpaḥ* — waters; एनम् *enam* — this; न क्लेदयन्ति *na kledayanti* — do not wet; मारुतः च *mārutaḥ ca* — and the wind; न शोषयति *na śoṣayati* — does not dry

Weapons do not cut this (self); nor does fire burn it. Water does not wet (or drown) it and wind does not dry it.

In verse 16, and again in verse 20, *Kṛṣṇa* said that for the self, which is real, *sat*, there is no absence.

It is not subject to negation in any of the three periods of time — *abādhitam satyam*. This statement cannot be shaken because that which is not subject to negation cannot be negated and truth, *satya*, is not subject to negation. You yourself are this truth. If you have any doubt, try to negate yourself. The very person doing the negation is the one you are trying to negate. You find, therefore, that it is impossible to negate yourself.

Anything that is negatable is not *satya*. Therefore, the one who goes on negating is *satya*, the only one who cannot be negated; everything else is subject to dismissal. That which is not subject to negation can only be the *ātmā*, the self. Thus, there is no absence, *abhāva* for the *ātmā*.

Only that which is subject to time can be *asat*. That which is not subject to time is *sat*. *Sat* cannot be dismissed because dismissal implies prior existence and posterior non-existence, both of which are in terms of time alone — past, present and future. That which is not subject to time and for which time itself is a dismissible object is called *satya*, *ātmā*. This, then, is *Kṛṣṇa*'s constant refrain.

Just as one gives up old clothes and takes on new ones, the one who dwells in this body, *deha*, gives it up and assumes another body. Neither the *jīva* nor *ātmā* is subject to negation, the *jīva* and *ātmā* being one and the same. What can be negated, however,

is the notion that ‘I am limited’ — the *jīvatva*. The essence or *svarūpa* of the *jīva* cannot be negated, only the notion that ‘I am a *jīva*’ can be negated.

The same point was also made by *Kṛṣṇa* in another form when he said that the *ātmā* is not an object for any act of destruction — *na ayaṃ hanti na hanyate* (*Gītā* – 2-19). It is neither the performer of an action nor the object of anyone's action. In other words, the *ātmā* is not subject to negation because it is not subject to destruction. No action can destroy it.

ĀTMĀ IS INDESTRUCTIBLE

In the present verse, *Kṛṣṇa* mentioned a few methods of destruction, none of which affects the *ātmā*. At first, he talks of weapons, which cannot destroy *ātmā*. Later he enumerates the elements that can bring about destruction. Generally weapons are of two types. Those weapons that are released from one's hand, like a rock, a bullet, or an arrow, are called as *astras*. Those held in the hand, like a stick, hammer, or sword, are called as *śastras*. Here in the verse, the word *śastra* implies both types of weapons.

With reference to weapons, then, the *ātmā* does not subject itself to any type of objectification. This is so because the *ātmā* objectifies everything. That which objectifies everything cannot be objectified by anything. The *ātmā* — yourself, objectifies the whole world. The world does not reveal itself to you unless you objectify it. And the *ātmā* cannot be objectified by anything.

What is objectified is not going to objectify the objectifier because everything else shines after *ātmā*. There is only one source of consciousness and that is *ātmā*, you. Everything else is an object of consciousness. How, then, is an object of consciousness going to destroy consciousness? Consciousness has no particular form. If it had a heart, it could have an attack, but it does not. If it does, we have had it! The *ātmā* is the one because of which we are aware of the beating of the heart. It is the subject of every object. Because the *ātmā* is not subject to objectification, it is not subject to any type of action, including destruction. Thus, weapons do not slay this *ātmā*.

Fire also cannot destroy the *ātmā* — *na enaṃ dahati pāvakaḥ*. It can burn the body, but it cannot burn the *ātmā*. Fire cannot even destroy the subtle body, *sūkṣma-śarīra*, let alone the *ātmā*. Similarly, water cannot even wet the *ātmā*, let alone drown it — *āpaḥ enaṃ na kledayanti* — because it does not become an object that is subject to drowning. Nor can the wind dry it up — *na enaṃ śoṣayati mārutaḥ* — meaning that *ātmā* cannot be dehydrated.

Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* brings out all the elements. Earth, *pṛthivī*, implied by the weapons and the metals with which they are made, does not destroy the *ātmā*. Nor do fire, water, and air. Air, *vāyu*, does not bring about the death of the *ātmā* through dehydration. The word *māruta* refers to the hot air of the tropical country, which can cause dehydration.

THE FIVE -ELEMENT MODEL OF THE WORLD

Throughout the *śāstra* we find a particular model that presents the world as made up of five elements — space, *ākāśa*, air, *vāyu*, fire, *agni*, water, *āpaḥ*, and earth, *pṛthivī*. In their subtle and gross forms, these elements account for everything that is here. The subtle elements account for the mind, senses, and so on, and the gross elements account for the physical body and the physical world.

Your physical body comprises of five gross elements. It occupies space, *ākāśa*. It contains air, *vāyu*, oxygen being present wherever there is blood. The body has temperature or heat, *agni*, and its shape is due to the water, *āpaḥ*, it has as part of its composition. Finally, the body contains the same minerals that are found in the earth *pṛthivī* — calcium, carbon, magnesium, and so on.

The physical universe can be defined in many ways. This elemental model is simply for understanding. Each of the elements, *bhūtas*, enjoys the same degree of reality because they are all elements. Whatever the nature of reality is, *ākāśa* has a certain degree of that reality. The same degree of reality is also enjoyed by the other four elements, *vāyu*, *agni*, *āpaḥ*, and *pṛthivī*.

Only objects belonging to the same degree of reality can affect each other. For example, one physical body can definitely destroy another physical body. Similarly, a body and a weapon, both physical objects, belong to the same degree of reality. Therefore, the weapon can hit the body and injure or destroy it.

Suppose, however, you want to destroy a tree with the shadow of another tree. It is impossible. Nor can you hit a dog with the shadow of a rock. This is because the object and the shadow belong to two different orders of reality and are, therefore, incapable of destroying each other. If one is to affect the other, both must enjoy the same degree of reality.

THE NATURE OF DESTRUCTION

Objects belonging to the same order of reality need not affect each other also. Space, for example, belongs to the same order of reality as the other four elements but is not affected or destroyed by any of them. Air cannot dehydrate space, fire cannot burn it, and water cannot drown it. Nor can you take a sword in hand and destroy space. Space cannot be destroyed by bombing it, much less with a pistol. It cannot even be polluted. There is no such thing as space pollution; only the atmosphere is polluted.

The other four elements cannot destroy space because space has no form. Air, on the other hand, can be destroyed in the sense that one form can be changed into another. Air implies atoms and atoms imply a structure, which can always be changed into a new structure. If hydrogen and oxygen are brought together in a certain way, water is created.

Any structure is always available for change. It can become entirely different. One metal can be converted into another metal simply by changing its atomic weight. A base metal can be changed into gold in this way, although it is not economically feasible to do.

The word ‘death’ applies to a particular structure that no longer exists because it has been changed in some way. *Śaṅkara* argues that anything that has limbs, attributes or structure can be destroyed. Space, having none of these, cannot be destroyed, even by other elements that share the same order of reality.

The *ātmā* is also free from limbs, attributes or structure; it is pure consciousness. I am aware of everything, including my thoughts, which objectify this entire world. Therefore, this consciousness, *ātmā*, cannot be destroyed by any weapon or any other instrument of destruction because it is not available for objectification. Nothing can get at this *ātmā*. Furthermore, nothing else belongs to the same order of reality.

THE SELF-EVIDENT ĀTMĀ

Ātmā is *satya*. *Ātmā* alone is self-evident and everything else is evident to it. *Ātmā* is self-shining and everything else shines after the *ātmā*.

The one that shines of its own accord is *ātmā*. It requires no evidence for its existence. What is self-evident is self-existent, depending on nothing for its existence, whereas what is not self-evident is not self-existent and depends entirely upon that which is self-existent.

In this way, any given object depends upon another object. A clay pot depends upon clay, which is nothing but dirt and dirt is nothing but atoms. Atoms depend on particles and so on. Thus, everything depends upon something else and that something else depends upon your concept, which depends upon consciousness. Consciousness, alone, depends on nothing.

Therefore, everything shines after this self-evident, self-existent *ātmā*. Naturally then, the whole creation, the whole world, is equal to *asat* only. When everything is *asat* and *ātmā* alone is *sat*, how can the *sat* be destroyed by *asat*? Air, fire, water, and earth exist because of *ātmā*. Because *ātmā* is *sat* and the elements are *asat*, they are incapable of destroying the *ātmā*.

The reflection cannot come out of the mirror to tease and destroy you, any more than your own shadow can. If your reflection looks ferocious and frowning, that is only because you look so. There is no need to become anxious because your reflection is frowning and looks as though it is going to destroy you. If you run away from it and it comes chasing after you, any chasing that is done is all in your mind! The reflection is not going to affect you because it is *asat* and you are *sat*. Since all of the elements are *asat*, they cannot do anything to *ātmā*, which is *sat*.

A problem may arise here, however. Since a non-existent thing also cannot be destroyed by anyone, perhaps this *ātmā* is non-existent — zero, *śūnya*. In the expression, *vandhyā-putra*, the son of a woman who cannot give birth to a child, the son cannot be destroyed by anything. We are not talking here of an adopted son or a surrogate son but of a non-existent son. There is no son to be burnt or drowned. Similarly, perhaps there is no *ātmā*. This doubt could arise but, the next verse, along with *Śaṅkara's* commentary, puts this doubt to rest.

अच्छेद्योऽयमदाह्योऽयमक्लेद्योऽशोष्य एव च ।

नित्यः सर्वगतः स्थाणुरचलोऽयं सनातनः ॥ २४ ॥

*acchedyo'yamadāhyo'yamakledyo'soṣya eva ca
nityaḥ sarvagataḥ sthāṇuracalo'yam sanātanaḥ*

Verse 24

अयम् *ayam* — this; अच्छेद्यः *acchedyaḥ* — cannot be cut; अयम् *ayam* — this; अदाह्यः *adāhyaḥ* — cannot be burnt; अक्लेद्यः *akledyaḥ* — cannot be made wet; अशोष्यः एव च *aśoṣyaḥ eva ca* — and also cannot be dried; अयम् *ayam* — this; नित्यः *nityaḥ* — changeless; सर्वगतः *sarva-gataḥ* — all-pervading; स्थाणुः *sthāṇuḥ* — stable; अचलः *acalaḥ* — immovable; सनातनः *sanātanaḥ* — eternal

This (self) cannot be cut, burnt, drowned, or dried. It is changeless, all-pervading, stable, immovable, and eternal.

The word *ayam* in this verse refers to the self-evident self-existent *ātmā*, not a non-existent *ātmā*, *śūnya*. Self-evident means that which does not require any means of knowledge to prove its existence. The *ātmā* alone is self-evident. Everything else becomes evident to the self.

To say, 'I am.' does not require perception, inference, presumption, illustration, or the means of knowledge called *anupalabdhi*, that which helps you understand what does not exist. Even to understand what does not exist requires someone who is existent to use the *anupalabdhi-pramāṇa*. For example, in order to know that there is no pot in my hand, there must be perception and a person who wields the perception.

Inference, a means of knowledge based on perception, also presupposes a person who wields the inference. Whatever the means of knowledge, there must be someone to wield it. To say that the object in your hand is a feather and it belongs to a peacock, requires a means of knowledge — your own perception and your prior knowledge of a peacock feather. You perceive the object directly and recognize it as a feather. Similarly, to prove the existence of any object, a means of knowledge is necessary.

Even to perceive that my physical body is not the same as it was yesterday requires a means of knowledge. How do you know you have a stomachache, back pain, or that you ache all over? Since you cannot show the ache to anyone, no one can verify

it. This is why bodyache and back pain are so useful in applying for leave! Even an orthopaedic specialist cannot say whether there is an ache or not because it is purely your own experience. You alone are the witness. Witness perception, *sākṣi-pratyakṣa*, is another type of perception that does not involve the senses, but still is a perception.

You can only talk about these various conditions of the body if you have a way of knowing them. Similarly, since you talk about your mind, you must have some way of knowing it. There must be some perception by which you know the mind. That you have certain memories is purely because the programming is there, even though it might not always serve your purpose. Even to know that you have forgotten something is a perception.

Everything is evident to me because I have a means of knowing. But by what means do I know that 'I am'? Do I know I am by perception? By a scripture? By the senses? By inference? No. 'I' am there before them all. Because I am, I can infer. I am and, therefore, I can see and hear. That I am is self-evident and, because I am, all knowledge is possible.

ĀTMĒ IS NOT NON-EXISTENT

One thing alone — *ātmā* alone — is self-evident, *svataḥ-siddha*. Therefore, *ayam* is a very important word here, referring as it does to that which is not the object of any destruction, *acchedya*. *Kṛṣṇa* kept repeating it because the *ātmā* is not zero. It is not non-existent like the son of a barren woman. The *ātmā* is all-existent, self-existent, and is not subject to being slain, burnt, drowned, or dehydrated. It is timeless, *nitya*, and, thus, all-pervasive, *sarvagata*.

Anything that is time-bound, *anitya*, is not *sarvagata*. Even space is not all-pervasive. Space is all-pervasive only with reference to the world, but it does not pervade the *ātmā* because *ātmā* is consciousness and in the consciousness there is no space. But then, when space is there, consciousness is also there. Therefore, space does not pervade the *ātmā*, but *ātmā* pervades space — it is *sarvagata*.

Then, again, *ātmā* cannot move, it is *sthāṇu*. How can it move? Where can it move? It can only move to a place where it is not. Since *ātmā* is *sarvagata*, it is *sthāṇu*. It does not move, it is always the same. Here one may think, perhaps the *ātmā* is like a tree, staying in one place, but swaying. No, we are told. Unlike the tree, it does not sway, it is *acala*. *Kṛṣṇa* also describes the *ātmā* as that which remains the same always — it is *sanātana*. It is not brought into being by some force or cause. Because it is not affected in any way by anything, the *ātmā* is always the same, always fresh, always new.

Knowing the *ātmā* in this way, there is no reason for you to entertain any grief. But, you may say, 'I don't cry for *ātmā*, I cry for *anātmā*.' To which, *Kṛṣṇa* would ask, 'Why would you cry for *anātmā*?' It is always changing, *anitya*. *Anātmā* is always

going and you cannot stop it even if you want to, whereas the *ātmā* is *nitya* and there is no way of destroying it. 'For what do you grieve, *Arjuna*?' *Kṛṣṇa* asked. 'There is no room for grief at all. There is something to be done, Do it!'

This constant refrain is again sounded in the next verse:

अव्यक्तोऽयमचिन्त्योऽयमविकार्योऽयमुच्यते ।

तस्मादेवं विदित्वैनं नानुशोचितुमर्हसि ॥ २५ ॥

avyakto'yamacintyo'yamavikāryo'yamucyate
tasmādevaṃ viditvainaṃ nānuśocitumarhasi

Verse 25

अयम् *ayam* — this; अव्यक्तः *avyaktaḥ* — unmanifest; अयम् *ayam* — this; अचिन्त्यः *acintyaḥ* — not an object of thought; अयम् *ayam* — this; अविकार्यः *avikāryaḥ* — unchangeable; उच्यते *ucyate* — is said; तस्मात् *tasmāt* — therefore; एवम् *evam* — thus; एनम् *enam* — this; विदित्वा *viditvā* — knowing; अनुशोचितुम् *anuśocitum* — to grieve; न अर्हसि *na arhasi* — you ought not

This self is said to be unmanifest, not an object of thought, and not subject to change. Therefore, knowing this, you should not grieve.

Vyakta refers to anything that is manifest, that which is an object of perception, an object of the sense organs. And that which is not manifest, not an object of the sense organs, is *avyakta*. Therefore, *ātmā* is referred to here as *avyakta*.

If *ātmā* is not an object of one's perception, is it, perhaps, an object of inference? 'No,' says Lord *Kṛṣṇa*. *Ātmā* cannot be an object of inference because it is not an object of thought, it is *acintya*. *Ātmā* is self-evident. Thus, the word *acintya* does not mean that the *ātmā* is not available for understanding. Also, *ātmā* cannot be an object of inference or perception because, without the *ātmā*, inference and perception are not possible.

In addition to not being an object of sense perception, *avyakta*, nor an object of any inference, *acintya*, the *ātmā* also does not undergo any modification whatsoever — it is *avikriya*. It is not like milk that undergoes a change to become yogurt. The milk gains a new taste, sourness, and its smell as well as form, undergoes a change. Because milk is subject to change, it is said to be *vikārya*. Previously, it was in one form and now it is in another. The same object that was milk before is yogurt now.

Unlike milk, the *ātmā* undergoes no change. You cannot say that previously *ātmā* was happy and now it is sad because, no change is possible for the *ātmā*. Due to *aviveka*, however, one takes oneself, *ātmā*, to be subject to change. But, because it has no *avayava*, no attribute, it cannot undergo any change.

ĀTMĒ HAS NO ATTRIBUTES

One may say that *sat*, *cit*, and *ānanda* are attributes of the *ātmā*. Why then can *sat* not become *asat*, *cit* not become *acit*, and *ānanda* not become *duḥkha*? This does not happen because *sat*, *cit*, and *ānanda* are not attributes as such. They are the *lakṣaṇas* — words that convey their meaning by implication — for the *ātmā*. *Ātmā* is the *lakṣya* — that which is being implied. The implied meaning is the very nature, *svarūpa* of the *ātmā*. Attributes are something other than the *svarūpa* of an object. That which is *cit* is *sat* and also *ānanda*. *Ātmā* is not a substantive enjoying certain attributes. In fact, it is free from all attributes.

If *sat* were to be an attribute, what would the substantive be? The substantive itself is *sat*, so its *svarūpa* is *sat*. Thus, *sat* is not an attribute of the *ātmā*. Similarly, *cit* is also not an attribute. *Sat* is *cit*; *cit* is *sat*. *Cit* stands for consciousness and this is what we call *sat*. Because the *ātmā* is limitless, the word *ānanda* also comes in to imply its *svarūpa*.

Ātmā is said to be *avikārya*, not subject to modification at any time, because it does not have attributes to subject itself to change. Another reason that *ātmā* cannot undergo change is because it is not in time. *Ātmā* has always been as it is now.

All of this has been said about the *ātmā* by those who know the *śāstra*. This being so, knowing the *ātmā* as it has been revealed so far, corrects our thinking. I thought I was the body-mind-sense complex, *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta* and, therefore, a mortal, a doer, an enjoyer, a *sukhī*, a *duḥkhī*, one moment happy and the next unhappy. Knowing the *ātmā* as it is, as *sat-cit-ānanda*, all the previous notions about *ātmā* are given up.

Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna*, ‘You have no reason for grief — *śocituṃ na arhasi*.’ The literal meaning of ‘*na arhasi*’ is ‘you do not qualify.’ We do not qualify to be sad because we know that *ātmā* is not subject to death and that there is only one *ātmā*, not many.

Arjuna had told *Kṛṣṇa* that he was grieving because *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa* would die. To this, *Kṛṣṇa* responded by saying that *Arjuna* did not qualify to have any grief because no one really dies. If no one really dies, what is the use of grieving? People keep going. Even though they all disappear, they come back in different forms. Given this explanation, *Arjuna* could well have come back with, ‘I am not really worried about the *ātmā*. It may be eternal, but I cannot shake hands with *ātmā*. Nor can I enjoy a talk with *sat-cit-ānanda-ātmā*, whereas I can with *Bhīṣma*. I am going to miss *sat-cit-ānanda* in the form of *Bhīṣma*. I am not grieving for the sake of *ātmā*.’

Thus, if *Arjuna*’s grief was not for the *ātmā*, it was for *anātmā*. Even then, *Kṛṣṇa* said, grief is useless. *Anātmā* has to be either *nitya* or *anitya*. Obviously, it cannot be *nitya*. As *anitya*, *anātmā* is constantly born and is always dying. To be born means it

has to give up the previous form and giving up the previous form is what we call death. Therefore, birth itself implies death and every death implies birth.

Kṛṣṇa then presented this argument:

अथ चैनं नित्यजातं नित्यं वा मन्यसे मृतम् ।

तथापि त्वं महाबाहो नैवं शोचितुमर्हसि ॥ २६ ॥

atha cainaṃ nityajātaṃ nityaṃ vā manyase mṛtam
tathāpi tvam mahābāho naivaṃ śocitumarhasi

Verse 26

महाबाहो *mahābāho* — Oh! Mighty armed (*Arjuna*); अथ च *atha ca* — and if; एनम् *enam* — this; नित्य-जातम् *nitya-jātam* — constantly born; वा *vā* — or; नित्यम् *nityam* — constantly; मृतम् *mṛtam* — dead; मन्यसे *manyase* — you think; तथा अपि *tathā api* — even then; त्वम् *tvam* — you; एवम् *evam* — this; शोचितुम् *śocitum* — to grieve; न अर्हसि *na arhasi* — ought not

And if you take the *ātmā* to have constant birth and death, even then, Oh! Mighty armed, *Arjuna*, you ought not to grieve for the *ātmā* in this manner.

Whether you look upon this *ātmā*, in keeping with the body, as always born, continuously born, birth after birth, or as dying all the time, death after death, you do not qualify to have any grief. The point *Kṛṣṇa* was making here is that if the *ātmā* is being born all the time, why be afraid of death? *Bhīṣma* and everyone else will be born again in some other form. And if the *ātmā* is always dying, which death are you crying for? There is no new death for which you qualify to be sad. What is dying keeps dying. You only see a fact.

Thus, there is no question of sorrow with reference to births or deaths. The *asat* cannot be stopped by you. How are you going to stop that which is bound by time, *anitya*? No one is going to stop it. In fact, as *Kṛṣṇa* tells him later, that the people *Arjuna* was grieving for were already as good as dead! Therefore, he was not going to destroy anyone nor could he hope to keep alive the people for whom he was grieving.

However, if *Arjuna* could take them all as *ātmā*, there would be no death for himself or anyone else. Moreover, if he continued to take the *ātmā* to be the *anātmā*, the body, *deha*, he could not do anything about its going. He would have to say that people were either always born or always going. To think that they were always born would not cause him any sorrow and if they were always going, there is no new going because always going is always going! Since there is no new going, what is there for *Arjuna* to cry about?

For the one who is born, there is death and for the one, who is dead, there is birth. Even in this sense, *Kṛṣṇa* said there is no room for sorrow:

जातस्य हि ध्रुवो मृत्युर्ध्रुवं जन्म मृतस्य च ।

तस्मादपरिहार्येऽर्थे न त्वं शोचितुमर्हसि । २७ ॥

*jātasya hi dhruvo mṛtyurdhruvaṃ janma mṛtasya ca
tasmādaparihārye'rthe na tvam śocitumarhasi*

Verse 27

जातस्य *jātasya* — of that which is born; मृत्युः *mṛtyuḥ* — death; ध्रुवः हि *dhruvaḥ hi* — is certain indeed; मृतस्य च *mṛtasya ca* — and of that which is dead; जन्म *janma* — birth; ध्रुवम् *dhruvam* — is certain; तस्मात् *tasmāt* — therefore; अपरिहार्ये अर्थे *aparihārye arthe* — with reference to an unalterable situation; त्वम् *tvam* — you, शोचितुम् *śocitum* — to grieve; न अर्हसि *na arhasi* — ought not

Because, for that which is born, death is certain and for that which is dead, birth is certain, therefore, you should not grieve over that which cannot be altered.

There being no possible alternative, one, who is born, will be gone. *Kṛṣṇa*, *Rāma*, and all the other *avatāras* and prophets are all gone simply because they were born. This statement would only have made *Arjuna* sadder because everyone he was concerned about had been born and, therefore, would die. It was not that he wanted them to be eternal. He just wanted them to live a few more years. ‘Why do you want them to live a few more years?’ *Kṛṣṇa* may have asked, ‘Is there any guarantee that, even if they live a little longer, you are also going to survive? This is your problem, *Arjuna*.’

There is an interesting story in the tradition about King *Parīkṣit* that bears this out. A curse was placed on him that he would die in a week. He went to *Vyāsa*'s son, *Śuka*, who was a *jñānī*, and told him that he had only one week to live. In response, *Śuka* just laughed. ‘Why are you laughing?’ the king asked, ‘I am going to die in a week!’ *Śuka* then explained why he was laughing. ‘You are lucky,’ he said, ‘You say you are going to die in a week. This means that you know you are going to be alive for seven days, whereas I myself have no such guarantee.’

THE INSIGNIFICANCE OF A LIFETIME

Arjuna could have died before any of the people for whom he was grieving. Before he sent out his first shot, he could have had a heart attack and died. Anyone may die at any time. When death will come is anyone's guess and, in any case, no one is going to live for very long anyway, especially when compared to the age of a rock, for example, which has been around for millions of years.

If a rock had a tongue and a memory, it could tell many stories. It could deride human life and call us all pygmies, recalling the days of dinosaurs and other huge mammals. ‘These days,’ the rock would say, ‘everything is so miniature in comparison — people and elephants alike!’

Fifty, sixty, or eighty-five years of life is nothing. By the time we are eighty-five most of our cells are already gone and the rest are old and worn out. They are unable to register anything new and even what had registered previously does not come out. Regardless of what recall button is pushed, nothing comes up. The floppy disk is all worn out. It was too flimsy to last very long anyway.

What are a few more years? It is better to live only a few years with a floppy disk that works well, so that when you press the button, something happens. Even a vague answer that comes quickly is better than no answer at all. One thing is certain: a little earlier or a little later means nothing in the eternal flow of time. A hundred years in this eternal flow is nothing! In spite of this, however, a human being still claims to have a biography!

If we compare our lifespan to that of a rock, we will always have a freshness about ourselves. The calcium and other minerals in our bones definitely have a better story to tell! They at least have a story to tell. What story do we have? The body, therefore, is nothing but a few things brought together, which necessarily fall apart again in a relatively short span of time.

Another way of looking at the meaning of one's lifespan is with reference to a star. The star that we see tonight may be two hundred light-years away. The light we see left the star two hundred years ago. During the time that it took the light to reach our eyes, the star may have died. This means that the star we see today may already be dead.

Nothing travels as fast as light, as far as we know. In fact, all our concepts of time are related to the speed of light. It seems to be the constant with which we measure motion and everything else.

This is the nature of the world and one hundred years is nothing but a flicker in the eternal flow of time. We come like a flicker and go like a whimper!

LIFE IS A FLICKER

Life is like the flicker of a firefly — flicker... gone... flicker... gone... flicker... gone. Each birth and death represents one flicker. This flicker is our biography! We then divide it into childhood, teenage, adulthood, problems, and so on. One flicker is all we have and within this, there are so many things we have to do. We have to celebrate, cry, marry, divorce, and retire also — all within this flicker, this beep! The one positive note here is that there is always another beep available even for the dead who, as we have seen, are born again and again. Maybe you will beep in heaven also. There, slowly,

you may beep for some time until that, too, is over and the next beep occurs. Therefore, this life is but a flicker, a glow, and then it is gone.

Kṛṣṇa was saying here that life follows a rule — if the born dies, the dead will certainly be born. Conversely, if the dead are born, the born will certainly die. These are two different points of view, with the constant being the certainty. Therefore, what is there to cry about? With reference to a matter, which cannot be altered, you do not qualify to be sad because you cannot bring about any change. If you could change this fact, it would be different, but you cannot.

But *ātmā* is always there and does not elicit any sorrow from you. For the *ātmā*'s sake, you need not be sad. Nor do you need to be sad for the *anātmā*'s sake, either.

This line in the *Gītā* is, therefore, a very important one in that, it says, 'Let me accept what I cannot change.' The only alternative available is not to accept and to grieve. The point that *Kṛṣṇa* is making here is that something that cannot be changed does not deserve any sorrow on your part. He emphasizes his point still further in the next verse.

अव्यक्तादीनि भूतानि व्यक्तमध्यानि भारत ।

अव्यक्तनिधनान्येव तत्र का परिदेवना । २८ ॥

avyaktādīni bhūtāni vyaktamadyāni bhārata

avyktanidhanānyeva tatra kā paridevanā

Verse 28

भारत *bhārata* — Oh! *Bhārata* (*Arjuna*); भूतानि *bhūtāni* — beings; अव्यक्तादीनि *avyaktādīni* — being not manifest in the beginning; व्यक्तमध्यानि *vyakta-madyāni* — manifest in the middle; अव्यक्तनिधनानि *avyakta-nidhanāni* — not manifest in the end; एव *eva* — indeed; तत्र *tatra* — there; का *kā* — what; परिदेवना *paridevanā* — grief

All beings are unmanifest in the beginning, manifest in the middle, and (again) unmanifest in the end. What indeed is there to grieve about, Oh!

Bhārata ?

The beginnings of all living beings, including the elements themselves, are all unknown. They are not available for perception. We do not know what they were before or what happens to them after death. We do not see the soul leaving the body, despite claims to the contrary.

In fact, after death we do not know what happens. We do not see travelling souls, which is just as well. If we did, we would probably coax them back, promising to treat them better, and so on, even when they do not want to return. If we had our way, we would quite likely push these souls back into their bodies and then, afterwards, quarrel with them as before!

Perhaps it is to avoid such problems that we do not know what happens after death. We only know what is between birth and death. Even that is something like a travelling arrow. It emerges from darkness, *avyakta*, passes through a lighted area *vyakta*, and disappears into the darkness again, *avyakta*. It is not known before and it is not known later. In between, it dazzles in light. This is all life is about — this beep, glow, or flicker that we call life. Before the glow or flicker, we do not see the glowworm or the firefly. In fact, we never see it; we only see the light. And, after the light has gone, again we see nothing.

Since life is like a moving arrow, travelling between birth and death, what is there to talk about? It is not even something that is staggered; it is just passing, always moving. Why the lamentation for this moving arrow? You cannot stop it anyway. In this glow, what is there to retain? That which is always eternal is always there and, in between, there is some kind of life, *mithyā*.

The question, then, is what is there to lament about? If there is something that is always there and that thing has a problem, then it can be lamented about. However, what 'is' is not subject to lamentation. It is reality, the truth, *satya*, and it is limitless *ānanda*. Therefore, it is not subject to lamentation at all. Whatever else may be there is also not worth lamenting about.

WHY DO PEOPLE LAMENT?

But people do lament. Even though life is just a beep in the eternal flow of time, they do have problems. They are concerned about their childhood, their marriage, old age, retirement, and what will happen to them after retirement. Within this one beep, all these divisions are made.

People continue to lament only because of self-ignorance. And this ignorance remains because there is no means of knowledge for knowing the self. The orientation of the individual is, 'I am small; I am a nobody.' Even those who claim to know, those who call themselves saviours and who say that you must be saved, confirm that the *ātmā* is small, subject to sin, and so on. The world also confirms these notions by its very dimensions and its overwhelming strength.

Because you have a particular dimension and limited powers, you find that you are helpless against bugs and certain other forces that are so overwhelmingly strong. You always find that you have to conform to these forces. Against them, you always feel that you are a nobody. Thus, everything confirms my notion that, 'I am small,' and this conclusion about the 'I' is the problem.

Introducing the next verse, *Śaṅkara* agreed with *Kṛṣṇa* that the *ātmā* is not easily understood. *Arjuna* is not the only one who laments. He is not the only person subject to sorrow. Sorrow is universal.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ĀĀKĀRA'S COMMENTARY

Because we will be drawing on Śaṅkara's commentary throughout our study of the *Gītā*, a brief explanation on the place commentaries hold in the teaching tradition is in order here. The word *bhāṣya* refers to a commentary of an original work. The *Gītā* is an original work and, therefore, Śaṅkara's commentary of it is a *bhāṣya*. For a work to be original in our context, it must have the status of a scripture or *śruti*, meaning the *Upaniṣads*.

If the *Gītā* did not have the status of *śruti*, any commentary of it would be called only a *vyākhyāna*. But Śaṅkara's commentary, is not a *vyākhyāna*. It is a *bhāṣya* because the *Gītā* has the status of the original work. Any commentary on the *Upaniṣads* themselves, of course, is a *bhāṣya* because the *Upaniṣads* are *śruti*, providing what has been written is something more than the simple meaning of the verses. A commentary becomes a *bhāṣya* when it gives the meaning and also defends the meaning that is given.

A person who has written a *bhāṣya* is called *bhāṣya-kāra*. *Ṭikā-kāra* refers to a person who has written explanatory notes, *ṭikā*, for a *bhāṣya*. These notes serve to introduce the topic by explaining the sentences of the *bhāṣya* or a particular word in a sentence. A *ṭikā* is not an independent work because it follows the *bhāṣya*, line by line, sentence by sentence.

There is also another type of work, called *vārtika*, which is an independent exposition in verse form on the *bhāṣya* itself, not on the original. A *vārtika* is not a *ṭikā* because it either goes beyond the *bhāṣya* or it is a further explanation of the *bhāṣya*. The person who writes a *vārtika* is called *vārtika-kāra*.

There is a tradition, a *sampradāya*, in which certain people are recognized according to these categories. In *Vedānta*, by *vārtikakāra*, for instance, we mean the oldest of *bhāṣya-kāra*'s four disciples, *Sureśvara*. Again, when we say *bhāṣyakāra*, we mean Śaṅkara. *Patañjali* is known as *Mahābhāṣyakāra*, the *Mahābhāṣya* being the commentary on the *sūtras* of *Pāṇini* on grammar — *vyākaraṇa-sūtras*.

Ṭikākāra generally refers, in this tradition, to *Ānandagiri*, who wrote a *ṭikā* for all of Śaṅkara's commentaries. There are many *ṭikākāras*. Anyone who comments upon the *bhāṣya*, sentence after sentence, as a traditional teacher does, becomes a *ṭikākāra*.

Knowing, then, that the words *bhāṣyakāra* and *bhāṣya* refer to Śaṅkara and Śaṅkara's commentaries, respectively, we can proceed.

आश्चर्यवत् पश्यति कश्चिदेनमाश्चर्यवद्भवति तथैव चान्यः ।

आश्चर्यवच्चैनमन्यः शृणोति श्रुत्वाप्येनं वेद न चैव कश्चित् ॥ २९ ॥

āścaryavat paśyati kaścidenam

āścaryavadvadati tathaiva cānyaḥ
āścaryavaccainamanyaḥ śṛṇoti
śrutvāpyenaṃ veda na caiva kaścit

Verse 29

कश्चित् *kaścit* — some one; एनम् *enam* — this self; आश्चर्यवत् *āścaryavat* — as a wonder; पश्यति *paśyati* — sees; तथा *tathā* — similarly; एव *eva* —indeed; च *ca* — and; अन्यः *anyaḥ* — another; आश्चर्यवत् *āścaryavat* — as a wonder; वदति *vadati* — speaks; अन्यः च *anyaḥ ca* — and another; एनम् *enam* — this; आश्चर्यवत् *āścaryavat* — as a wonder; शृणोति *śṛṇoti* — hears; कश्चित् *kaścit* — someone; च *ca* — and; श्रुत्वा अपि *śrutvā api* — even after hearing; एनम् *enam* — this; न वेद *na veda* — does not know; एव *eva* — at all

One looks upon the self as a wonder. Similarly, another speaks of it as a wonder and another hears it as a wonder. Still another, even after hearing about this self, does not understand it at all.

Śaṅkara begins his *bhāṣya* on this verse by saying that the *ātmā* under discussion *prakṛta-ātmā* is not easy to understand — *durvijñeya*. The word *prakṛta* is a technical term, meaning the topic under discussion, which is *ātmā* here. Although one has to recognize *ātmā* as *Brahman*, it is not easy and, therefore, not everyone comprehends it. The cause for this confusion, *bhrānti*, between *ātmā* and *anātmā* being universal, *sādhāraṇa*, everyone is to be sympathized with. No one is an exception. *Arjuna* was not the only one lamenting his lot. Knowing this makes us feel that we are in good company.

Modern group therapy does the same thing. You may start off thinking that you are the only one with a particular problem. But when you participate in group therapy, you discover that everyone is undergoing the same experience. Then you realize you are not alone, that many people have the same problem for which there is a cause. In the beginning, then, there is validation, which is a good thing.

Here too, *Arjuna* was given a boost. It was as though *Kṛṣṇa* was saying, ‘You are not the only one lamenting, *Arjuna*. Everyone has the same problem because ignorance is common to all. It is not the personal problem of any one person.’ Ignorance of *ātmā* is common to all and remains so because *ātmā* is not easily understood. This verse explains why *ātmā* is so difficult to understand.

THE WONDER OF ĀTMĀ

Ātmā is always a wonder, *āścaryavat*. When you understand *ātmā*, it is a wonder and when you do not understand, it is a wonder to you how anyone can understand it. This wonder takes several forms. *Ātmā* is something never seen before, *adṛṣṭa-pūrva*, something that appears all of a sudden to one who has been taught by a *guru*, something that is striking. The student understands and looks at the *ātmā* as a wonder —

āścaryavat paśyati. Why? Because he or she now looks at himself or herself as a wonder.

When I suddenly discover that I am the whole and everything is centred on me, everything is me, it is definitely a wonder. First, this reality of oneself seems to be an impossibility. Then it becomes a vague possibility, and finally, it is real, true.

Anything that is experienced by me is myself. I am all the sounds; I am all the forms and colours; I am all the smells and sources of smell; and I am all the tastes and sources of tastes. Not only am I the food, I am also the one who eats the food. Otherwise, I would be eaten up. I am even the one who made the Vedas. I am not merely a reader of the Vedas; I am its author. I am the one to be understood by means of the Vedas. I am the one who is the Lord *Brahmā*, the creator of the entire cosmos.

Previously, we thought that we were under the rule of the ruler whose law is the rule of *dharma*. For every eon, *kalpa*, there is said to be one such ruler. Thus, we are presently under *Vaivasvata-Manu's* law. This *Manu* is the son of Lord *Sūrya*. We have been under the ambit of this law, but now, having understood the *ātmā*, we say, 'I am *Manu* — *ahaṃ manuḥ*.' Anyone, who was there in the past, was me and, in the future, anyone who is going to be there is me. Anything that is here now is also me. This is entirely a wonder because, previously, we could never have believed that we were everything, the truth of the whole creation. The opposite definitely seemed to be the case.

This very vision, *darśana* of the *ātmā*, the knowledge of *ātmā*, is a wonder *āścarya*. And when we listen (*śravaṇa*) to the explanation of this *ātmā*, it is another wonder. To hear that you are the truth of everything, *satya*, the source of all happiness, anyone's happiness, *paraṃ brahma*, is a wonder. Every creature in the world picks up small flakes of happiness, *ānanda*, all of which are from the original mountain or ocean of the *ānanda*, which is you. Thus, when the teacher talks about the *ātmā*, he or she describes it as a wonder — *āścaryavat anyahḥ eṇaṃ vadati*.

Ātmā is a wonder all the way! It is *sat-cit-ānanda* and, at the same time, it has created this entire world without undergoing any change. Talking about *ātmā* is itself a wonder because we are talking about something that is not available for words. That it is infinite and appears as though finite, without undergoing any change, without assuming any particular *nāma-rūpa*, is a wonder. All the *nāma-rūpas* are *Brahman* alone and that *Brahman* is you, the *ātmā*. That the teacher can talk like this and get away with it is definitely yet another wonder! And, after listening to the teacher, the students also talk among themselves about what a wondrous thing the *ātmā* is. Everything about *ātmā*, therefore, is a wonder.

Lastly, it is a wonder that it cannot be understood even after having heard about it — *śrutvā api eṇaṃ veda na ca eva kaścit*. Just as a very subtle joke is not understood,

people do not understand *ātmā* at all. It has to be explained to them. *Brahman* appearing as a *jīva*, the bondage for the *jīva*, and the freedom from the bondage, *mokṣa*, are all nothing but a big joke, the greatest joke ever, in fact. Therefore, life itself is a joke, as can be seen by analyzing any one thing.

LIFE IS LIKE A VERY SUBTLE JOKE

If you analyze a thought, there is no thought at all. Where does any given thought begin and where does consciousness end? Whatever you confront in the world is nothing but your thought. That there is a world for you is because you have a thought. When you ask, how far is any given thought true, where does the consciousness end, where does the thought begin, you will find that there is only consciousness. There is no thought. There is no beginning of the thought, there is no form of the thought. All that is there is consciousness.

This is both the beauty and the joke of the *ātmā*. The whole thing is a continuous joke. There is, as though, an original joke, and then, afterwards, a variety of secondary jokes, one after the other. Marriage is a joke and children are secondary jokes. Childbirth itself is a joke and so are the birth pangs. Thus, there is one continuous joke within which there are lamentations.

If the original joke is not understood, you will not understand other jokes. The original joke should be understood as a joke; then all other jokes become jokes quite naturally. The last joke, perhaps, is that there will always be someone who, after listening to *Vedānta* will say, 'Please tell me what the teaching is!' This is like the man who listened to a musician sing *Bhūpālī*, the name of a particular melody, *rāga*, in Hindustani music for an hour. He was nodding his head as though he understood the music very well. At the end of the rendering, however, the man said to the musician, 'Panditji, please sing *Bhūpālī* next!'

Similarly, there is always someone in the audience who, at the end of a *Vedānta* talk, will say, 'I did not understand anything. I saw nothing in it at all.' If someone else expressed his or her appreciation of what was said, the first person may accuse that person of having been swept away, of not having retained his or her independent thinking, of having lost himself or herself in a sea of meaningless words. Faced with such criticism, the person who understood may begin to doubt whether there had ever been a time when he or she had thought independently!

That some people can listen to the teaching about the *ātmā* and not understand is another wonder. Because it is a wonder, it is not easy to understand. Only a few people can understand such wonders. Even a simple joke is not understood by everybody, much less the *ātmā* joke! Because it is too big a joke, no one can say it is easy to understand. Therefore, it is no wonder that, having listened to talks about *ātmā*, some people do not

understand. Or, that people do not understand can also be taken as a wonder, since what is to be understood is themselves.

All that is being talked about is oneself, a self-evident fact. We experience this *ātmā* all the time. Only because of the *ātmā* do we experience the world. Everything in the world is unlike *ātmā*. This *ātmā*, as *ānanda*, is very evident in moments of joy when we discover ourselves to be full, *pūrṇa*. But, still, even when it is pointed out that we are that whole, we do not understand, which is another wonder — *śrutvā api enam veda na ca eva kaścit*.

THE DIFFICULTY IN UNDERSTANDING

Why is it that people cannot understand? It is not calculus or something that requires a certain intellectual preparation and acumen. All that is required here is to see what is being said. Yet, some do not see it. This is because seeing oneself is not like seeing an object. It is not knowledge of an object, like a pot, which depends upon another object, clay, only one of which you may understand. To see oneself is knowledge of oneself as something that is not subject to negation; it is knowledge of the whole. *Ātmā* is therefore to be understood as the whole, that which is free from all attributes — which is yourself. All attributes are incidental.

What is to be known here is very clear and, in itself, does not require any intellectual discipline, unlike calculus. Even a wise person, in order to learn calculus, has to start from ‘one plus one equals two’ and it will take the person ages to understand calculus. *Ātmā* on the other hand, is very simple. All that is required are your experiences in life.

That you have been constantly seeking is a fact. That there is no answer to this seeking is another fact. You have tried various pursuits and none of them has yielded what you wanted. This is also a fact. In between, you had some moments of joy, which is another fact. These two latter facts are the ones that you have to analyze in order to understand yourself, the *ātmā*. Because you have assimilated certain experiences, you cannot say that you have no raw material to analyze. The three states of experience — waking, dream, and deep sleep themselves provide you with enough data. That one state cancels another state is enough data. Therefore, it is not that you lack materials or data. All you require is someone to lift your vision, for which a means of knowledge *pramāṇa*, a teacher, *ācārya*, and a vision, *upadeśa*, are all there. Then you should be able to see the fact; then understanding should take place.

To see an object is no problem. Your eyes are there, the object is there, and you see it. Similarly, if the teaching is available and the *ātmā* is available, then knowledge should take place. There should be no hindrance to your gaining the knowledge. But, still, seeing may not take place and this not seeing is described in this verse as a wonder.

Kṛṣṇa pointed out here that seeing is a wonder and not seeing is a greater wonder. That a person can come out of the whole teaching untouched, unscathed, as it were, is definitely a wonder.

THE ONE WHO KNOWS ĀTMĀ IS A WONDER

We can also take the verse differently, using the word *āścaryavat* to mean that the person who knows the *ātmā* is like a wonder. The affix ‘*vat*’ means ‘like.’ And, therefore, *āścaryavat* means ‘like a wonder.’ Among millions of people, only one person may be a seeker and, even among the seekers, only one person may see the truth of what is said. Understanding *ātmā* is not easy. Therefore, one who knows *ātmā* without any doubt whatsoever, one who sees it directly, *yaḥ ātmānaṃ paśyati*, is a wonder because he or she has had to reverse an entire process.

Our natural trait is to follow the beaten track — in our ways of thinking, in our pursuits, and so on. We constantly strive to make something of ourselves because, initially, we condemn ourselves as useless. We try to set the *ātmā* up nicely by the pursuit of a *saṃsāri*. First, we think of the *ātmā* as a *saṃsāri*. Then we look for some means of support so that the *saṃsāri* can be better, so that he or she can develop some spine, some character, and so on. We think of the *ātmā* as so drooped that it requires some kind of a support system in order to be acceptable. This is the nature of people. They are like flowing water that finds its own level. In this way, people tend to follow the beaten track.

Some may follow it better than others. If one person makes money in a particular pursuit, another may try to make the same money in another pursuit. But this is all really one beaten track with only minor variations. Nevertheless, such people are called creative, whereas the really creative person is one who questions the very seeker. He asks himself, ‘Am I a *saṃsāri*?’ If one assumes that one is a *saṃsāri*, any pursuit is a beaten track. The one who questions whether he or she is a *saṃsāri* reverses the whole process. It is something like water climbing up the mountain. Water flowing down is nothing; it is natural. However, water that begins to flow upwards is truly a wonder — an *āścarya* to behold. All of humanity would gather to see water climbing up a mountain.

Even to start the process of self-inquiry is a big thing. A certain grace is definitely required; otherwise, starting is not possible. Just as it requires a lot of horsepower to send water up a hill, so too, for a person who has been following the beaten track to question whether he or she is a *saṃsāri* requires a lot of horsepower — God power or grace. And if the person discovers the truth, he or she is definitely a wonder.

THE ONE WHO TALKS ABOUT ĒTMĒ IS ALSO A WONDER

The one who knows, then, is an *āścarya* and the one who talks about it is another *āścarya* because there is nothing really to talk about. When someone comes and says, ‘I am overcome by sorrow,’ the person who knows the truth cannot really talk about it because he or she does not see any sorrow or problem at all. It is also a wonder that someone who knows there is no problem takes the person who has sorrow seriously enough to talk to him or her about it. Starting out as *Kṛṣṇa* did, saying that there is no reason for sorrow — *aśocyān anvaśocaḥ tvam* — creates some elbow room in which to talk. Otherwise, the one who knows cannot talk at all.

If *Kṛṣṇa* had simply said, ‘I am *ānanda*; you are *ānanda*; we are all *ānanda*,’ there would be nothing to talk about. To tell a person who says that he or she is sad, ‘No, you are *ānanda*’ leaves no room to talk, although the statement is true. To say that sorrow has no basis requires proof and *Kṛṣṇa* had seventeen chapters in which to prove that what he said was a fact. He knew that to start by saying, ‘You are *ānanda*,’ would give him no room to talk. Instead, *Kṛṣṇa* talked as though there was a problem and he ‘as though’ solved it also.

Thus, the talking itself is an *āścarya* because what cannot be talked about is talked about. What cannot be verbally mentioned is mentioned. What cannot be captured by words is presented by words. This is indeed a wonder. The one who teaches is also a wonder and the one who listens is another wonder. Can you tell an ordinary, practical person who asks you what you are studying that you are learning self-knowledge? No. If you did, your sanity would undoubtedly be questioned.

The self is something that is impossible to talk about and the one, who comes to listen, the one in many millions, is a wonder. Such a person thinks that knowledge of the self is very important, whereas everyone else thinks of it as nonsense. They think those who take three years to study self-knowledge are wasting their time. They will say that you are frittering away the prime of your life, that you could have had two children in the same amount of time!

There are so many aspects to this wonder — the wonder with a capital ‘W.’ Any way you look at it, it is a wonder. The one who is able to see the *ātmā* is a wonder. Or, we can say that the one among many who, sees the *ātmā* does so with wonder. Also, there is no wonder that even after listening to the teaching, there are those who do not understand. This second interpretation is offered by *Śaṅkara* in his commentary on this verse.

देही नित्यमवध्योऽयं देहे सर्वस्य भारत ।

तस्मात् सर्वाणि भूतानि न त्वं शोचितुमर्हसि ॥ ३० ॥

dehī nityamavadhyo'yaṃ dehe sarvasya bhārata

tasmātsarvāṇi bhūtāni na tvaṃ śocitumarhasi

Verse 30

भारत *bhārata* — Oh! Descendant of *Bharata* (*Arjuna*); सर्वस्य देहे *sarvasya dehe* — in the body of all; अयम् *ayam* — this; देही *dehī* — indweller of the body; नित्यम् *nityam* — for ever; अवध्यः *avadhyaḥ* — indestructible; तस्मात् *tasmāt* — therefore; त्वम् *tvam* — you; सर्वाणि *sarvāṇi* — all; भूतानि *bhūtāni* — beings; शोचितुम् *śocitum* — to grieve; न अर्हसि *na arhasi* — ought not

This *ātmā*, the indweller of the bodies of all beings, is ever indestructible, Oh! Descendant of *Bharata*. Therefore, you ought not to grieve for all these people.

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* summed up his original statement that he made in verse 11, that there is no cause for grief. *Ātmā* is *sat* and, therefore, *nitya*, meaning that it is not subject to birth, death, change, and so on. In the live physical body of any being, there is a *dehī*, an indweller of the body, *deha*, and this *dehī*, called the *jīva-ātmā*, is not subject to destruction — it is *avadhya*.

Vadhya means that which is subject to destruction, that which can be destroyed. *Avadhya* means that which is not subject to destruction. The *dehī* is not subject to destruction at all — it is *nityam avadhyaḥ*. It is always indestructible, meaning that even when the body is destroyed, the *ātmā* is not destroyed. This is the point that *Kṛṣṇa* wanted to establish. The *dehī*, the indweller of the body, is not destroyed even when the body is destroyed. This being so, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that, with reference to all living beings, *sarvāṇi bhūtāni*, ‘You do not qualify to be sad — *tvaṃ śocitum na arhasi*.’

Kṛṣṇa backed his statement with all possible arguments. For the body, *deha*, which is *anitya*, there is no way that it will not be destroyed and for the *nitya-ātmā*, there is no way of destroying it. Either way, therefore, there is no room for grief based on death. Nor is there any room for grief on the basis of any other situation, as has already been pointed out, because any situation that causes you sorrow is not a permanent situation. Therefore, *duḥkha* also comes and goes, as does *sukha*. Because there is no content to *duḥkha* we cannot even say that a particular object or situation causes it. It is one's thinking with reference to a particular object or situation that actually causes *duḥkha*. There can be physically painful or uncomfortable situations, but these are different from sadness. Here, we are dealing with sadness, not mere physical pain.

THE NATURE OF SADNESS

Sadness does not depend on what you have or do not have. It is a particular way of thinking. Sorrow is something centred on oneself and this topic is the subject matter of the *Gītā*. Thus, there is this refrain, ‘You should not grieve — *na tvaṃ śocitum arhasi*.’

Having stated that there is no reason for sorrow, *Kṛṣṇa* then takes up the same topic from other standpoints. In fact, he exhausted every possible standpoint. Introducing the next verse, *Śaṅkara* says that from the standpoint of ultimate reality, *paramārtha-tattva-apekṣāyām*, sorrow or delusion is not possible — *śokaḥ, mohaḥ vā na sambhavati*. And it is also not possible from the standpoint of relative reality.

Arjuna may well have said to *Kṛṣṇa*, ‘I am worried about *Bhīṣma* and the others and you are telling me that the *ātmā* does not die. *Bhīṣma* is my grandfather, a man whom I respect. Therefore, I cannot kill him. Just to think of it causes me sorrow and all you say is that he is the *ātmā*, he is eternal, etc. What are you doing to me? When I am sorrowful because someone is dead, you cannot come and tell me that no germ can kill the *ātmā* when, in fact, the germs killed the person. It just does not work. Here, too, what you are saying is too much for me.

Arjuna would not really have argued in this way because he himself had asked for self-knowledge. Until he asked *Kṛṣṇa* to teach him, *Kṛṣṇa* did not teach; he only encouraged him to fight. Only when *Arjuna* asked, did *Kṛṣṇa* begin to teach him. Because *Arjuna* wanted *śreyas*, he told *Kṛṣṇa* that he was his *śiṣya* and, therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* taught. Even though this was not *Arjuna*’s thinking here, *Kṛṣṇa* nevertheless exhausted the topic. He did not allow any standpoint, even relative standpoints, to go unattended. In this way, from both the absolute and the relative standpoints we can understand *Kṛṣṇa*’s statement that there is no reason for sorrow.

Kṛṣṇa then continued:

स्वधर्ममपि चावेक्ष्य न विकम्पितुमर्हसि ।

धर्म्याद्धि युद्धाच्छ्रेयोऽन्यत् क्षत्रियस्य न विद्यते ॥ ३१ ॥

svadharmamapi cāvekṣya na vikampitumarhasi

dharmyāddhi yuddhācchreyo'nyat kṣatriyasya na vidyate

Verse 31

स्व-धर्मम् *sva-dharmam* — one's own duty; अपि च *api ca* — and also; अवेक्ष्य *avekṣya* — looking at; विकम्पितुम् *vikampitum* — to waver; न अर्हसि *na arhasi* — you ought not ; हि *hi* — for; धर्म्यात् युद्धात् *dharmyāt yuddhāt* — than a righteous war; क्षत्रियस्य *kṣatriyasya* — for a *kṣatriya*; अन्यत् *anyat* — any other, श्रेयः *śreyaḥ* — good; न विद्यते *na vidyate* — does not exist

And also, from the standpoint of your own duty, you should not waver.

For there is nothing greater for a *kṣatriya* than a righteous war.

Shifting from the absolute standpoint, *Kṛṣṇa* then takes up the relative standpoint of *dharma* — what is right, what is to be done. This was a natural outcome of *Arjuna*'s earlier and numerous comments on *dharma*. He had said that societal confusion would be the result of this war and he would be the cause for the confusion. He had said, 'We have heard, Oh! *Kṛṣṇa*, that those men who have destroyed the family duty live in hell (*Gītā* – 1-44).' Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* looked at it from the standpoint of *dharma* as well as from other standpoints, including worldly gain, as we shall see.

Avekṣya means 'seeing' — seeing from the standpoint of *sva-dharma*, seeing what is to be done by oneself. Again, *Arjuna* was being told here that he was not eligible to develop this trembling hesitation — *na vikampitum arhasi* — looking at the situation from the standpoint of his *sva-dharma*, his duty.

First of all, *Arjuna* was a soldier, *kṣatriya*. Secondly, he was a crown prince, which meant that, along with his brothers, he was supposed to protect *dharma*. He was not just a recruited soldier with only certain prescribed duties to do. He was a royal person, belonging to the royal family, and also one of the crown princes. *Arjuna*'s duty was to uphold law and order. He had to administer and protect the kingdom. That was his job, his *dharma*.

When the *Pāṇḍavas* came back to claim their country after their thirteen years of exile, *Duryodhana* refused to give their kingdom back. All their efforts at a compromise failed. He refused to give them even a needle point of land let alone their country. Therefore *Duryodhana* was the usurper. Every day that *Duryodhana* occupied the throne, he did so illegally and this was *adharmā*. *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that being a *kṣatriya*, he could not just sit and allow *adharmā* to continue. Therefore, from the

standpoint of his own *dharma*, *Arjuna* ought not to waver or hesitate about what he had to do — *svadharmam api ca avekṣya na vikampitum arhasi*.

ARJUNA'S DUTY

A soldier is especially trained in warfare and must practice continually during peacetime to 'keep the powder dry' and to keep his wits sharp. If he has to retire before a war actually occurs, his skills go unused, although it was his and others' good fortune that there was no war. Not to fight is also proper if there is no cause to fight. But as *Kṛṣṇa* said, if that same soldier gets a chance to use his training legitimately, there is no greater opportunity than that to show his skills.

Generally, when such chances come, there is always some legitimacy about them. To shoot someone merely because he or she spoke out of turn is definitely illegitimate, but here, for *Arjuna*, there was a legitimate chance — *dharmāt anapetaṃ dharmyam*, that which was not against *dharma*. The battle, *yuddha*, was based purely on *dharma* and the one who brought *Arjuna* to it deserved to be punished. This, then, was a *dharmya-yuddha*, an expression that is often misused.

Here, the *dharmya-yuddha* was, first of all, to establish *dharma*. Also, the person who had flagrantly violated *dharma* by usurping the kingdom deserved to be punished. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* as much as said to *Arjuna*, 'The battle is right in front of you, *Arjuna*. You now have a chance to demonstrate your weapons and skill and it is your duty to do so.'

Arjuna's weapons had gone unused for a long time. They had been stockpiled and maintained so that they would not become rusty. Most of his missiles were in the form of *mantras* and *Arjuna* had to repeat these *mantras* daily because they were the power behind his weapons. This was how the weapons were kept alive and was how *Arjuna* 'kept the powder dry.'

Arjuna had done what was required and now a time had come when all of his acquired skill was to be used for the purpose for which it was learned and stockpiled. He did not learn all this to destroy people or to demonstrate his prowess, but to protect *dharma*. And now was his chance to do so.

Thus, from the standpoint of his own *dharma*, as to what had to be done, there was no room whatsoever for lamentation or hesitancy. This was one argument that *Kṛṣṇa* put to him.

Another argument *Kṛṣṇa* put forward was that for a *kṣatriya*, especially one of *Arjuna's* stature, there was nothing more appropriate for him to do. 'What is to be done by you, *Arjuna*, is to be done by you and this *yuddha* is something that is to be done by you,' said *Kṛṣṇa*.

यदृच्छया चोपपन्नं स्वर्गद्वारमपावृतम् ।

सुखिनः क्षत्रियाः पार्थ लभन्ते युद्धमीदृशम् ॥ ३२ ॥

yadṛchayā copapannaṃ svargadvāramapāvṛtam

sukhinaḥ kṣatriyāḥ pārtha labhante yuddhamīdṛśam

Verse 32

च *ca* — and; पार्थ *pārtha* — Oh! Son of *Prthā* (*Arjuna*); यदृच्छया *yadṛchayā* — by chance; उपपन्नम् *upāpannam* — has come; अपावृतम् *apāvṛtam* — opened; स्वर्गद्वारम् *svarga-dvāram* — the gates of heaven; ईदृशम् *īdṛśam* — of this kind; युद्धम् *yuddham* — battle; सुखिनः *sukhinaḥ* — lucky; क्षत्रियाः *kṣatriyāḥ* — *kṣatriyas*; लभन्ते *labhante* — get

And, Oh! Son of *Prthā*, only lucky *kṣatriyas* get this kind of battle, which has come by chance and which is an open gate to heaven.

Yadṛchā means ‘chance,’ something that happens without your willing or wanting it. Here, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that the gates of heaven were open to him. This was something that had come to *Arjuna* without his desiring it. It is said that a person who dies performing his or her duty goes to heaven. It is a *karma-phala* promised by the scripture. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* said, ‘When you perform your duty properly, heaven, *svarga*, will be the result. The gates of heaven have opened for you without any prayer on your part.’ *Kṛṣṇa* also told *Arjuna* in this verse that this kind of battle, *yuddham īdṛśam*, is not gained by ordinary people, but only by the very lucky ones — *sukhinaḥ kṣatriyāḥ labhante*.

A question may arise here: does this mean that the *kṣatriyas* in *Druyodhana*’s army were unlucky? No doubt, they were also going to fight, but they had conflicts because they were supporting a usurper. Unlike *Arjuna*, they were not able to fight with a clean heart. Of course, they were soldiers and they had their own reasons for fighting. They may even have said it was their duty and perhaps that was true. But still, for them the inner conflict was unavoidable. As soldiers, they could only do what they were commanded to do. Therefore, they too were doing their *svadharmā*, but at the same time it was not totally *dharmya* because their leader was a usurper.

The entire army of *Duryodhana*, including *Bhīṣma* and *Droṇa*, were not totally convinced that what they were about to do was according to their *dharma*. They were there primarily because they were obliged to *Duryodhana*. The war was foisted upon them and was not, therefore, totally in keeping with *dharma*, whereas for *Arjuna* it was.

ARJUNA’S CHANCE TO PROTECT DHARMA

While no one enjoys a war, a *kṣatriya* who has to protect *dharma* could never have a better chance to prove himself as a *kṣatriya*. *Arjuna* was a warrior. Therefore,

Kṛṣṇa may have said, ‘Only lucky *kṣatriyas* get a clean *yuddha* to fight. It is no longer a question of your ambition for a kingdom because you were already willing to accept a house with five rooms. You have explored every possible way to avoid this war, but in spite of all your efforts, war has been declared and it is definitely a *dharmya-yuddha*. Even from the standpoint of *dharma*, *Arjuna*, you have no cause to grieve.’

When *Kṛṣṇa* began to teach *Arjuna*, his original statement was — *aśocyān anvaśocaḥ tvam* (*Gītā* – 2-11). Having established it as a fact, *Kṛṣṇa* then told *Arjuna* that he is aggrieved for no reason, that grief has no real basis. This was *Kṛṣṇa*’s argument. First he dealt with it absolutely and then from simple, relative standpoints, based purely on one’s own duty, *sva-dharma*.

If we look at *Arjuna*’s conflict from the standpoint of the *dharma-śāstra*, we find that performing one’s duty produces certain *karma-phala*. The *dharma-śāstra* deals with what is to be done and what is not to be done, what is right and what is wrong. It talks about the immediate result, *drṣṭa-phala* of right action in the sense that the action produces no conflict. Avoidance of conflict is the immediate result. The *dharma-śāstra* also talks about *adrṣṭa-phala*, an invisible result credited to your account and enjoyed by you later.

The war, *yuddha*, for *Arjuna* was in keeping with his duty. Therefore, the war itself was like the gates of heaven opening for him. Because any *dharma* can only produce so much; going to heaven, of course, is a relative result. And, as though, by accident, without any prayer on his part, this result was assured to *Arjuna*. All he needed to do was to walk into the war and do what was to be done. Only the lucky ones get such an opportunity, not everyone.

Kṛṣṇa then continued with the same argument:

अथ चेत्त्वमिमं धर्म्यं सङ्ग्रामं न करिष्यसि ।

ततः स्वधर्मं कीर्तिं च हित्वा पापमवाप्स्यसि ॥ ३३ ॥

atha cettvamimam dharmyam saṅgrāmaṁ na kariṣyasi
tataḥ svadharmam kīrtim ca hitvā pāpamavāpsyasi

Verse 33

अथ *atha* — but; चेत् *cet* — if; त्वम् *tvam* — you; इमम् *imam* — this; धर्म्यम् *dharmyam* — in keeping with *dharma*; सङ्ग्रामम् *saṅgrāmam* — war; न करिष्यसि *na kariṣyasi* — will not do; ततः *tataḥ* — then; स्वधर्मम् *svadharmam* — one’s own duty; च *ca* — and; कीर्तिम् *kīrtim* — honour; हित्वा *hitvā* — forfeiting; पापम् *pāpam* — sin; अवाप्स्यसि *avāpsyasi* — you will incur

But if you refuse to engage in this war which is in keeping with *dharma*, then, forfeiting your own duty and honour, you will incur sin.

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that if he did not undertake this battle, which was in keeping with *dharma*, he would be destroying his own *dharma*, his duty. Destroying what is to be done by you simply means that you do not do it.

Also, the name and fame, *kīrti*, that *Arjuna* had thus far gained would be destroyed. He would incur sin alone. *Arjuna* had said earlier that he would incur sin by fighting this battle, but *Kṛṣṇa* was now telling him that by not fighting he would incur sin in the sense that he would be guilty of a dereliction of duty. Not fighting itself would not incur sin, but running away from his duty was an action, a *karma*, that would incur sin. Therefore *Kṛṣṇa* said, ‘You will incur sin, *Arjuna*, — *pāpam avāpsyasi*. And you will lose your name also.’

Arjuna had gained fame previously because of his earlier contact with Lord *Mahādeva*, Lord *Śiva*, who appeared in the form of a hunter. *Arjuna* had hit a boar and was going to take it away when Lord *Śiva* appeared there and claimed that it was his. He incited *Arjuna* to fight with him. Although *Arjuna* realised that he was up against someone more than an ordinary hunter, still he was equal to Lord *Śiva* in the fight. Pleased with *Arjuna*, Lord *Śiva* blessed him with a weapon. Because *Arjuna* had encountered Lord *Śiva* and engaged him in battle, *Arjuna* had gained a great name, all of which would be lost. Therefore *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘*kīrtiṃ ca hitvā pāpam avāpsyasi* — You will lose your name as well as incur sin.’

NOT PERFORMING AN ACTION IS NOT A SIN

Not performing an action that has to be done is considered sinful. However, it does not constitute sin. Not doing anything cannot attract a punitive response. How can it? Only action can produce a result; inaction cannot. Inaction can only maintain the absence of some result, absence in the sense that if you had done something, there would have been a result. If you do not do what is to be done, you do not directly produce any result, but there will be a result nevertheless.

For example, if you do not bathe, shower, or launder your clothes, whether you see the result or not, others will see it. The result will be very clear. This is what is meant by *dr̥ṣṭa-phala*. If you do not tidy up your room, you will see the results in just two days. It will be a mess. This is the natural entropy that is a part of the creation. Not doing something, then, can attract *dr̥ṣṭa-phala*. *Adr̥ṣṭa-phala* accrues only when you do it, rightly or wrongly.

To say that if you do not perform an action, you incur sin is a very loose statement. The point is that when you do not do what is to be done, you will do something else instead and that action may attract *adr̥ṣṭa-phala*. Running away from the battlefield is an action. A retreating action, on *Arjuna*’s part, giving up his duty and doing something

that was not his duty, would definitely attract *adr̥ṣṭa-phala*. That *Arjuna* could not avoid this *pāpa*, then, was another argument based on *dharma* put forward by *Kṛṣṇa*.

At the same time, *Kṛṣṇa* said, *Arjuna* would lose his name also. *Arjuna* may have replied, 'How can I lose my name? People will praise me. They will say that *Arjuna* was so compassionate that he gave away the kingdom and walked into the forest. He could have had the kingdom easily because he had the weapons to destroy the arrows of *Karṇa* and *Droṇa*. Still he gave away the kingdom. What a compassionate man *Arjuna* is!' But *Kṛṣṇa* said that it would not happen that way at all.

अकीर्तिं चापि भूतानि कथयिष्यन्ति तेऽव्ययाम् ।

सम्भावितस्य चाकीर्तिर्मरणादतिरिच्यते ॥ ३४ ॥

akīrtiṃ cāpi bhūtāni kathayiṣyanti te'vyayām

sambhāvitasya cākīrtirmaraṇādatiricyate

Verse 34

अपि च *apica* — and also; भूतानि *bhūtāni* — beings; ते *te* — of you; अव्ययाम् *avyayām* — unending; अकीर्तिम् *akīrtim* — dishonour; कथयिष्यन्ति *kathayiṣyanti* — will speak; सम्भावितस्य *sambhāvitasya* — for the honoured; अकीर्तिः *akīrtiḥ* — dishonour; च *ca* — surely; मरणात् अतिरिच्यते *maraṇātatiricyate* — is worse than death

Also, people will speak of your unending infamy. For the honoured, dishonour is surely worse than death.

Bhūtāni refers to all one's fellow beings. Not only great men were included here. They, too, would talk, of course, along with all of the recent recruits who had come to fight and who did not even know how to button their uniforms properly. They would tell all kinds of stories, *kathayiṣyanti*, about *Arjuna*, each one creating his own version. Their imaginations would run wild and rumours would quickly spread. They would use words that betrayed *Arjuna's* cowardice, *akīrti*, and people would continue to talk about it for all times to come.

Even children of subsequent generations, listening to the *Mahābhārata* would giggle when the topic of *Arjuna* would come up because he was the one who ran away. They would ask, 'Which *Pārtha* are you talking about? The one who ran away from the battlefield?' Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that not only those on the battlefield would talk ill of him, but all the ordinary people would do the same.

For someone who had no name or fame, there would be no problems. No one would care whether he ran away from the battlefield or not. People would only assume that such a person was one of those soldiers who ran away. But if *Arjuna* ran away, it would be front-page news because he was held in such high regard. *Akīrti*, ill fame is not the same as loss of fame; it is the opposite of fame, and is worse than death for the one who was held in high esteem by the society.

The argument here, then, is that if *Arjuna* cared about *dharma*, he should not leave the battlefield and, if he did leave, he would incur *pāpa*. Even if he did not care about incurring *puṇya-pāpa* or about his own *dharma*, but cared only for his own name and fame, the ill fame would be worse than death because no one can live with ill fame which is not at all legitimate. To have earned ill fame is one thing, but if it is unearned, undeserving, *Kṛṣṇa* said, it is worse than death.

Arjuna might as well have asked, ‘How will I have ill fame just by going away?’ To this, *Kṛṣṇa* said:

भयाद्रणादुपरतं मंस्यन्ते त्वां महारथाः ।

येषां च त्वं बहुमतो भूत्वा यास्यसि लाघवम् ॥ ३५ ॥

bhayādraṇādūparataṃ maṁsyante tvāṃ mahārathāḥ
yeṣāṃ ca tvāṃ bahumato bhūtvā yāsyasi lāghavam

Verse 35

महारथाः *mahārathāḥ* — great warriors; च *ca* — and; त्वाम् *tvām* — you; भयात् *bhayāt* — out of fear; रणात् *raṇāt* — from battle; उपरतम् *uparataṃ* —one who has retreated; मंस्यन्ते *maṁsyante* — will regard; येषाम् *yeṣām* — of whom; त्वम् *tvam* — you; बहुमतः *bahumataḥ* — highly esteemed; भूत्वा *bhūtvā* — having been; लाघवम् *lāghavam* — lightness (fall in esteem); यास्यसि *yāsyasi* —you will receive

The great warriors will consider you as having retreated from the battle due to fear. And you, having been so highly esteemed by them, will fall in their esteem.

The word *mahārathas* refers to *Karṇa*, *Duryodhana*, and the others. *Karṇa* was *Arjuna*’s arch enemy and along with *Duryodhana*, was supported by others of great valour. In this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that they would look upon him as one who had run away from the battlefield out of sheer fright at the sight of *Karṇa* and *Duryodhana*’s army.

These were not ordinary men; they were people who counted in the society. To them, *Arjuna* had always been a great man. Even *Duryodhana* considered him to be the greatest. That is why they were so afraid of him. But although they had always held *Arjuna* in such high esteem, *yeṣāṃ ca tvāṃ bahumataḥ*, they would now consider him a lightweight, *lāghava*. They would look upon him as a feather that is easily blown away. He would become an ordinary person to them.

Kṛṣṇa knew that *Arjuna* was a great man and that his problem was one of affection and sympathy. That is why he told *Arjuna* that they would look upon him as the one who ran away. *Kṛṣṇa* knew that *Arjuna*’s desire to run was not due to fear and that, in fact, he was not running away. Rather, *Arjuna* was giving up the fight, according to his own arguments, out of sympathy. But *Kṛṣṇa* knew that no one would understand

that. There was no *dharma* involved, nor prudence either. *Kṛṣṇa*, therefore, told *Arjuna* that running away would be neither a prudent nor an ethical action. He would lose all of the name and fame that he had earned thus far, which would prove to be worse than death.

People would make fun of *Arjuna*. If he went to Rishikesh and sat under a tree, all the pilgrims would come to see *Arjuna* who had run away from the battlefield. And, having become a *sādhu*, there would be no recourse for *Arjuna*. At least if he had remained as he was, people would be afraid of him. But no one is afraid of a *sādhu* because he has taken the oath of *ahiṃsā* and, therefore, cannot seek restitution. ‘People will come and talk ill of you, *Arjuna*,’ *Kṛṣṇa* said. They will say, ‘What kind of a *sādhu* are you, *Arjuna*, to have gone against the *dharma*? You will have to live with all their accusations and you are not going to enjoy that.’

Further, *Kṛṣṇa* said:

अवाच्यवादांश्च बहून् वदिष्यन्ति तवाहिताः ।

निन्दन्तस्तव सामर्थ्यं ततो दुःखतरं नु किम् ॥ ३६ ॥

avācyavādāṃśca bahūn vadiṣyanti tavāhitāḥ

nindantastava sāmāthyam tato duḥkhataram nu kim

Verse 36

च *ca* — and; तव *tava* — your; अहिताः *ahitāḥ* — enemies; तव *tava* — your; सामर्थ्यम् *sāmāthyam* — prowess; निन्दन्तः *nindantaḥ* — belittling; बहून् *bahūn* — many; अवाच्य-वादान् *avācyā-vādān* — unutterable things; वदिष्यन्ति *vadiṣyanti* — will say; ततः *tataḥ* — than that; दुःखतरम् *duḥkhataram* — more painful; नु किम् *nu kim* — is there anything

And belittling your prowess, your enemies will say many unutterable things about (you). Is there anything more painful than that?

Arjuna’s enemies, *Duryodhana* and the others, would not think that *Arjuna* went away out of compassion. Even if *Duryodhana* knew it to be so, he would definitely not say so. Simple psychology was involved here. *Duryodhana* was a ruler and, already, there was talk that *Duryodhana* was occupying the throne illegitimately. The subjects were not happy with *Duryodhana* on that score, even though he introduced a lot of welfare schemes to win them over. They knew in their hearts that *Duryodhana* was just trying to convince them that he was a good person, when in fact he was a usurper and was occupying the throne illegitimately. Everyone knew this.

HOW ARJUNA'S RETREAT WOULD BE PERCEIVED

Also, if *Arjuna* were to go away out of compassion, which would have been the case, *Dharmaputra* would definitely have followed him. *Bhīma* and the other *Pāṇḍavas* would have done the same. Therefore, *Duryodhana* would be victorious without a shot and would definitely not have allowed the news of *Arjuna's* real reasons to spread because he would not want the people to look upon *Arjuna* and the *Pāṇḍavas* as truly great. To allow this to happen would not have been good psychology on *Duryodhana's* part because he would have wanted to draw the attention of all his subjects towards himself. As the ruler, he was the person to be looked up to, not anyone else. *Duryodhana* could not afford to have anyone else greater than himself be looked up to by the people. His government would fall and the subjects may have started a revolution in an attempt to oust him.

Duryodhana would see to it that he himself was projected and *Arjuna* demeaned. He would say that *Arjuna* ran away out of sheer fear. Whatever esteem the people had for *Arjuna* would go and they would then think that, because he ran away from the battlefield, *Arjuna* deserved to live in the forest. No one would respect such a person because they knew the *dharma* and *Duryodhana* would make sure that people would talk, 'Your enemies will use words about your capacity and courage that are impossible for me to repeat — *avācya-vādān bahūn vadiṣyanti tava ahitāḥ.*' *Kṛṣṇa* therefore told *Arjuna*, 'What can be more painful than that — *tataḥ duḥkhataraṃ nu kim?*'

Even the fresh recruits, the simple soldiers, would talk. There would definitely be victory parties with a lot of drinking and talking. One soldier would say *Arjuna* ran away as soon as he looked at him. Another would say *Arjuna* became frightened when he put his hand on his moustache. Another would say that all he had said to *Arjuna* was, 'Get out!' and he fled in fear. Such people would also no doubt talk about *Kṛṣṇa* in the same way. Having involved *Kṛṣṇa* in the battle, *Arjuna* was now thinking of running away! Everyone would say that *Kṛṣṇa*, as *Arjuna's* driver, ran away too. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* may have said, 'On top of everything else, *Arjuna*, you have also brought me into this mess.'

In the next verse, *Arjuna* is told to get up and fight:

हतो वा प्राप्स्यसि स्वर्गं जित्वा वा भोक्ष्यसे महीम् ।

तस्मादुत्तिष्ठ कौन्तेय युद्धाय कृतनिश्चयः ॥ ३७ ॥

hato vā prāpsyasi svargaṃ jtvā vā bhokṣyase mahīm
tasmāduttiṣṭha kaunteya yuddhāya kṛtaniścayaḥ

Verse 37

हतः वा *hataḥ va* — or if destroyed; स्वर्गम् *svargaṃ* — heaven; प्राप्स्यसि *prāpsyasi* — you will gain; जित्वा वा *jtvā vā* — or conquering; महीम् *mahīm* — the earth; भोक्ष्यसे

bhokṣyase — will enjoy; तस्मात् *tasmāt* — therefore; कौन्तेय *kaunteya* — Oh! Son of *Kuntī* (*Arjuna*); युद्धाय *yuddhāya* — to fight; कृत-निश्चयः *kṛta-niścayaḥ* — having resolved; उत्तिष्ठ *uttiṣṭha* — get up

Destroyed, you will gain heaven; victorious, you will enjoy the world.
Therefore, Oh! Son of *Kuntī*, get up, having resolved to fight!

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* presented two possibilities to *Arjuna*. He said, ‘Suppose, *Arjuna*, you are destroyed, *hata*, in the process by *Karṇa*’s or someone else’s arrow, then you will gain heaven — *prāpsyasi svargam*. That is the rule. The *dharma-śāstra* says so. Therefore, when you perform your *karma* and in the process you die, you are not the loser. You gain *svarga*. And after *svarga*, you gain a better *janma* because you have done what is to be done. So there is no sin.’

Earlier, *Arjuna* had put forth an argument based on sin. He had said, ‘I would create confusion in the society and therefore would commit sin.’ Here, *Kṛṣṇa* was telling him that this was not true. *Pāpa* would not come to him. In fact, he would gain *svarga*. *Pāpa* takes one to *naraka*. But now because, *Arjuna* would have died while performing his duty, he would definitely go to *svarga*.

On the other hand, if *Arjuna* won the battle, having won, *jitvā*, he would enjoy the kingdom. Therefore *Kṛṣṇa* said, ‘*jitvā vā bhokṣyase mahīm*.’ Either way, he was not the loser. In the kind of battles *Arjuna* fought, these were the only two possibilities — either death or victory. Those days, the wars were fought to the death. Because there was no retreating from battle, the men were either victorious or they died in the process. That was the *dharma*.

Therefore, lovingly addressing *Arjuna* as *Kaunteya*, *Kṛṣṇa* said, ‘Please get up — *tasmāt uttiṣṭha!*’ He asked *Arjuna* to get up because *Arjuna* had been sitting in the chariot determined not to fight and *Kṛṣṇa* wanted him to stand up and fight. Telling him to get up was psychological as well as physical. He told *Arjuna* to get up, not to run away but, having made a favourable decision to fight, *yuddhāya kṛta-niścayaḥ*, to either defeat the enemy or die.

Once he was finished with this argument, *Kṛṣṇa* moved on to a more general standpoint. *Arjuna*’s situation involved a fight. But, because the *Gītā* is a *śāstra*, his situation had to be converted into something that was common, universal.

Therefore, he said:

सुखदुःखे समे कृत्वा लाभालाभौ जयाजयौ ।

ततो युद्धाय युज्यस्व नैवं पापमवाप्स्यसि ॥ ३८ ॥

sukhaduḥkhe same kṛtvā lābhālābhau jayājayau
tato yuddhāya yujyasva naivaṃ pāpamavāpsyasi

Verse 38

सुख-दुःखे *sukha-duḥkhe* — pleasure and pain; लाभ-अलाभौ *lābha-alābhau* — gain and loss; जय-अजयौ *jaya-ajayau* — victory and defeat; समे *same* — the same ; कृत्वा *kṛtvā* — having made; ततः *tataḥ* — then; युद्धाय *yuddhāya* — for battle; युज्यस्व *yuḥyasva* — prepare; एवम् *evam* — thus; पापम् *pāpam* — sin; न अवाप्स्यसि *na avāpsyasi* — you will not incur

Taking pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat to be the same, prepare for battle. Thus, you will incur no sin.

Taking pleasure and pain with equanimity, as though they are one and the same, is the seed for *karma-yoga*. The same applies to gain and loss, victory and defeat, success and failure. *Kṛṣṇa* sowed the seed here and discussed it later. The whole *Gītā* is based on the psychology of *rāga-dveṣas*, likes and dislikes. *Rāga* and *dveṣa* are the known causes for our sorrow. There may be a hundred unknown causes, but they can all be reduced to *rāga* and *dveṣa*. *Karma-yoga* was being propounded here by *Kṛṣṇa* who said, in so many words, ‘Don’t fight for the sake of *rāga* or *dveṣa*.’

We should not fight just because we do not like someone, nor should we fight just because we like to fight. *Rāga-dveṣas* are not involved here, only *dharma* and *adharmā*. *Arjuna* was not fighting out of spite, whereas *Duryodhana* was fighting because of both *rāga* and *dveṣa*. He had *rāga* for the kingdom and *dveṣa* for the *Pāṇḍavas*. He had always been jealous of them and could not stand to see them ruling. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* acknowledged that *Duryodhana* was fighting out of *rāga-dveṣas*, whereas *Arjuna* must fight against *rāga-dveṣas*. *Kṛṣṇa* also told *Arjuna* that in fighting this war, in reality, he was not fighting against *Duryodhana*; he was fighting against *rāga-dveṣas*. And therefore, the battle was one of *dharma-adharma*.

‘Do what is to be done,’ *Kṛṣṇa* said. Here, because what was to be done, happened to be a fight, he said ‘Fight!’ Because *Arjuna* was doing his *sva-dharma*, *Kṛṣṇa* assured him that he would incur no sin — *na evaṃ pāpam avāpsyasi*. In fact, by performing this action, he would gain only *puṇya* and not *pāpa*. To fight this battle was to uphold *dharma* so that *rāga-dveṣas* would not rule. This, then, is the entire psychology of the *Gītā*.

Let *rāga-dveṣas* not be the deciding factor. Let the sense of right and wrong prevail in its place. Let the sense of what is to be done and not to be done be the deciding factor. Then you become a *yogī*, as we shall see later. Taking the opposites, pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, as the same, striving to do what is right and thereby incurring no sin, is *karma-yoga* in seed form, *bīja-rūpa*, planted here in this verse. Later in this chapter and elsewhere in the *Gītā*, *Kṛṣṇa* picks it up again.

Kṛṣṇa had talked to *Arjuna* mainly about *ātmā*, saying that *ātmā* is something whose very nature is existence, that it is not subject to death, and so on. In fact, he taught

Arjuna the nature, *svarūpa*, of *ātmā*. This is called *sāṅkhya*,¹ meaning both *Brahman* and the knowledge of *Brahman*. The *jñānīs* who have this knowledge of *Brahman* are also called *sāṅkhyas*.

In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* tells *Arjuna* that, thus far he had talked about *sāṅkhya*, the nature of *ātmā*. And, now he would elaborate upon *karma-yoga*, which had been said only in seed form, that is, briefly thus far. In this way, he introduced the two different topics of the *gītā-śāstra* — *sāṅkhya-yoga* or *jñāna-yoga*, and *karma-yoga*. Because this is such an important section of the *Gītā*, *Śaṅkara* comments upon it in some detail.

एषा तेऽभिहिता साङ्ख्ये बुद्धिर्योगे त्विमां शृणु ।

बुद्ध्या युक्तो यया पार्थ कर्मबन्धं प्रहास्यसि ॥ ३९ ॥

eṣā te'bhīhitā sāṅkhye buddhiryoge tvimāṃ śṛṇu

buddhyā yukto yayā pārtha karmabandham prahāsyasi

Verse 39

साङ्ख्ये *sāṅkhye* — in self-knowledge; एषा *eṣā* — this; बुद्धिः *buddhiḥ* — wisdom; ते *te* — to you; अभिहिता *abhīhitā* — has been told; योगे तु *yoge tu* — but with reference to *yoga*; इमाम् *imām* — this; शृणु *śṛṇu* — please listen; पार्थ *pārtha* — Oh! Son of *Prthā*; यया *yayā* — with which; बुद्ध्या *buddhyā* — wisdom; युक्तः *yuktaḥ* — endowed; कर्मबन्धम् *karma-bandham* — bondage of action; प्रहास्यसि *prahāsyasi* — you will get rid of

This wisdom with reference to self-knowledge has so far been told to you. Now listen also to the wisdom of *yoga*, endowed with which you will get rid of the bondage of action, Oh! Son of *Prthā*.

In verses 11 through 30 of this chapter, the knowledge taught by *Kṛṣṇa* to *Arjuna* is *sāṅkhya*, meaning *Brahman*, the nature of reality of the *ātmā*, whereas verses 31 to 38 are purely contextual and have nothing to do with the nature of the *ātmā*. These eight verses are, therefore, unconnected to the topic under discussion and are not referred to in the present verse as the knowledge given thus far. They can, however, be brought under *yoga* or *dharma*. Although not *sāṅkhya-śāstra*, they are contextual in the flow, representing a particular argument from the standpoint of one's *dharma* alone, entailing simple worldly reasoning. The argument presented is not from the standpoint of *paramātmā*; it relates only to what is to be done at a given time.

In verse 11 through 16 of this chapter *Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa* introduced the topic under discussion, that is, the nature of *ātmā* and then went on to explain it in depth. Because its

¹ सम्यक् ख्यायते सा वैदिकी सम्यग्बुद्धिः साङ्ख्ये । तथा प्रकाशयत्वेन सम्बन्धि तत्त्वं साङ्ख्यम् । आ० गि० ॥

तद्विषया बुद्धिः साङ्ख्यबुद्धिः । सा साङ्ख्यबुद्धिः । येषां ज्ञानिनाम् उचिता भवति ते साङ्ख्ये । शा० भाष्० ॥

subject matter is *sāṅkhya* the chapter is called *sāṅkhya-yoga*. *Sāṅkhya* alone is not discussed here; other topics are also mentioned. For instance, *Kṛṣṇa* talks about *karma-yoga*, as we are about to see. *Sāṅkhya*, however, is definitely the predominant topic throughout the chapter.

It is unlikely that *Vyāsa* himself actually gave the *Gītā* chapters their titles. They were probably added by others to indicate the central topic of each chapter. In all the chapters, the topics indicated by their titles are discussed, along with other topics. In fact, although the twelfth chapter is called *Bhakti-yoga*, there is an even more extensive discussion on this topic, *Bhakti*, in the eleventh chapter where *Arjuna* praised Lord *Kṛṣṇa*. Similarly, in the chapter entitled *Dhyāna-yoga*, there are only a few verses about meditation, *dhyāna*, itself.

Up to the point we have reached in this chapter, *sāṅkhya* has been taught and this particular verse is a provisional conclusion of the topic. For those who study *Vedānta-śāstra* it is very important to know why *Kṛṣṇa* concluded the topic here as he did. The reason is that there are two *śāstras* within the *gītā-śāstra* — the *karma-śāstra* and the *mokṣa-śāstra*. *Mokṣa-śāstra* is *Vedānta* and the *Gītā* can be considered a *mokṣa-śāstra*. *Karma-śāstra* is the *Karma-kāṇḍa*, which discusses the various rituals *karmas*, or means, *sādhanas*, to gain various ends, *sādhyas*. *Karma-kāṇḍa*, is also Veda but *karma* is its subject matter. The subject matter of *mokṣa-śāstra* is knowledge, *jñāna*.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN KARMA-YOGA AND SĀṅKHYA-YOGA

Mokṣa-śāstra can be viewed from two standpoints with reference to the two possible life-styles — *karma-yoga* and *sāṅkhya* or *sannyāsa*. Both are meant for *mokṣa* alone. Because the difference between *karma* and *karma-yoga* must be clearly understood, *Kṛṣṇa* talked about it. Doing *karma* for the sake of self-purification is *karma-yoga*. It indicates that the person has discrimination, *viveka* and knows that he or she wants *mokṣa* because, to gain *mokṣa*, one requires a certain mind. And to gain that mind one performs actions, *karmas*, with a certain attitude. That attitude converts it into *yoga*. Merely doing *karma* is not *yoga*.

For example, there is a set of prayers, called *nitya-karmas*, that are to be done daily. One of these prayers is called *sandhyā-vandana*. *Vandana* means salutation or prayer, and *sandhyā* refers to the three times of day that the prayer is to be performed — in the morning as the sun rises, at noon, and in the evening as the sun sets. The literal meaning of *sandhyā* is ‘a time when two periods of time join, meet.’ For example, it indicates the time when the day has not yet begun because the sun has not risen, but the night has already rolled away. Similarly another *sandhyā* is when the sun has already set, but the night has not yet come. The third *sandhyā* is in the middle, exactly at noon,

neither forenoon nor afternoon. These *nitya-karmas* can be done for the sake of some result later or for the sake of purifying the mind — *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*.

Why would anyone want *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*? Because the mind, *antaḥ-karaṇa*, is necessary for gaining self-knowledge. Therefore, *karma* is performed as an indirect means for *mokṣa*, to prepare the mind for gaining the knowledge. When the prayer is done for *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, the person has no other result in mind. He or she only asks that the Lord be pleased with the *karma* and bless him or her with a purified mind. *Karma* may be performed out of joy or out of a concept of duty, as a prayer. When it is performed as a prayer, for the sake of *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* and *mokṣa*, it becomes a *yoga*.

A number of topics come under *karma-yoga* including prayer, devotion, *samādhi*, and *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* (for the sake of *samādhi*), all of which are stated in Śaṅkara's *bhāṣya* to this verse. The verse itself reveals that there is a division or difference between the two subject matters, *sāṅkhya* and *karma-yoga*. If this division is not clear, the entire *Gītā* will appear to be full of contradictions and the listener will be confused, whereas if the division is clear, understanding is possible. The listener will know what is meant when it is said that for the *sannyāsīs* there is only *jñāna-yoga* and for the others, who are also seekers, *karma-yoga* is the means for gaining *mokṣa*.

The subject matter of this knowledge is *sāṅkhya*, a discriminative presentation of what is real and what is not real. Every step of the unfoldment is based on discrimination. For example, the body, *deha*, is subject to death, whereas the one who dwells in the body, *dehī*, is not, and so on. The discrimination is presented because people usually think that when the *deha* is destroyed, the *dehī* is also destroyed. When one is not mistaken for the other, there is discrimination and it is this knowledge that has been given with reference to the reality of the *ātmā*. Thus Kṛṣṇa said, 'So far, whatever I have taught you is with reference to *sāṅkhya* — *sāṅkhye eṣā buddiḥ mayā abhihitā tubhyam*.'

WHAT CAN KNOWLEDGE DO?

And what does knowledge do? It removes ignorance. Knowledge is the cause for the removal of ignorance. It cannot do anything else. Ignorance itself is the problem, it being the cause for false pursuits and sorrow, *saṃsāra*. To think that heaven will be an answer to all my problems is delusion, *moha*. *Moha* is thinking that sorrow can be removed by reaching somewhere or gaining this or that. Knowledge of the reality of *ātmā* removes this ignorance, and therefore, is the direct cause for *mokṣa*.

WHAT CAN KARMA-YOGA DO?

Is there also an indirect cause for *mokṣa*? The *bhāṣya* says that there is, and that will be taught. That there are two different topics is clear. *Kṛṣṇa* himself says, ‘*sāṅkhye buddhiḥ abhihitā; yoge tu imāṃ śṛṇu* — this wisdom with reference to self-knowledge has so far been told to you; now listen to the wisdom of *yoga*.’ *Śaṅkara* deals with this point thoroughly because, even in his day, there was a great deal of controversy about whether the *gītā-śāstra* talks about *karma*, *jñāna*, or a synthesis of the two. There were many such notions, in one form or other. Therefore, *Bhāṣyakāra* spends a considerable amount of time here pointing out the distinction and then saying, ‘Now listen to what I am going to say about *karma-yoga*.’

Any discipline is useful because it helps one gain a certain composure, a certain mastery over the opposites, as we saw in the preceding verse. Therefore, all disciplines are called *yoga*. This composure is necessary for the mind to be able to receive the knowledge. To gain the composure you require *karma-yoga*. *Karma-yoga*, therefore, becomes an indirect means, not a direct means, for gaining the knowledge.

You cannot say, ‘I will take *karma-yoga* and you take *jñāna-yoga* and we will both reach the same end.’ It is not like that. If *karma-yoga* is presented as a means for gaining the knowledge that will destroy ignorance, one may ask why the study of the *śāstra* alone cannot do that. The reason is that study of the *śāstra* is capable of delivering the goods only when the *antaḥ-karaṇa* is ready. Therefore, preparing the *antaḥ-karaṇa* is what is meant by *karma-yoga* and is what is going to be discussed here.

IN PRAISE OF KARMA-YOGA

Kṛṣṇa praised *karma-yoga*, telling *Arjuna* that it was as important as *jñāna*. *Karma-yoga* is not something less than *jñāna* since, without it *jñāna* will not take place. To create a certain value for *karma-yoga* in *Arjuna*, *Kṛṣṇa* praised it in this way. *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that the knowledge of *karma-yoga* would enable him to destroy the bondage of *karma* — ‘*karma-bandhaṃ prahāsyasi*.’

Karma here means *dharma-adharma*, which means *puṇya-pāpa*, the good and bad actions that alone bind the individual. Therefore, it is called *karma-bandha*, the bondage of *karma*. The *karma* itself is the bondage which is destroyed by knowledge made possible by *karma-yoga*. Now a question may arise here. That is, knowledge destroys only ignorance, *ajñāna*; how is the *karma* destroyed? That is because, with the destruction of ignorance, doership is destroyed, causing all the *karmas* to fall apart.

Thus, both *sannyāsa* and *karma-yoga* play a role in the destruction of *saṃsāra*. But the difference between the two must be clearly understood. Otherwise, it will be said that there are various paths, such as the four paths advanced by some — *jñāna-yoga*,

bhakti-yoga, *karma-yoga*, and *haṭha-yoga*. It is also incorrect to say that there are as many paths as there are people.

Addressing this lack of clarity in understanding, *Śaṅkara* says that because of the grace of *Īśvara*, you find yourself with a purified mind, the teaching, and the teacher. And because of all of this, you gain the knowledge. He says, being endowed with this *karma-yoga*, '*Īśvara-prasāda-nimitta-jñāna-prāpteh* — by gaining the knowledge by the grace of the lord,' you will get out of the bondage of *karma*. A life of *karma-yoga* prepares the mind and knowledge releases one from the bondage. But to say here through *karma-yoga* one is released from bondage is to praise *karma-yoga*, which is the indirect means for *mokṣa*. To have the knowledge, you have to understand that 'I am *Brahman*.' There is no other way. The Lord's grace, *Īśvara-prasāda* is in the form of the *guru*, the *śāstra*, the teaching, the type of mind that is required, and conducive circumstances, as well.

It has been everyone's experience that there can be a number of obstacles in any undertaking. In fact, by the time people come to this teaching, they have met with a lot of obstructions in life and have experienced a lot of pain. This is how they come to the teaching, and the obstructions continue. For this undertaking also, then, the grace of *Īśvara* is required. Thus, one has to be prayerful.

ONE YOGA, TWO LIFE-STYLES

Karma-yoga makes everything possible so that you can gain the knowledge which destroys the bondage of *karma*. How many *yogas* are there for *mokṣa*, then? Only one; knowledge, *jñāna*. And there are two life-styles — *karma-yoga*, living the life of a *karma-yogī* and *sannyāsa*, living the life of a renunciate. This is the vision of the Veda, the only vision that can account for the entire *śāstra*. And *Śaṅkara* states it very clearly, presenting very well what the *śāstra* says.

Both life-styles imply knowledge and that knowledge is *mokṣa*. There is no doubt whatsoever here. To gain that knowledge you require a properly prepared mind, for which you require *Bhagavān's* grace. Therefore, you invoke the Lord's grace so that you have everything ready for gaining the knowledge. This is the only way to remove *saṃsāra*, bondage.

Before discussing the two possible life-styles, *Kṛṣṇa* first praises *karma-yoga*.

नेहाभिक्रमनाशोऽस्ति प्रत्यवायो न विद्यते ।

स्वल्पमप्यस्य धर्मस्य त्रायते महतो भयात् ॥ ४० ॥

nehābhikramanāśo'sti pratyavāyo na vidyate

svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt

Verse 40

इह *iha* — in this; अभिक्रम-नाशः *abhikrama-nāśaḥ* — waste of effort; न अस्ति *na asti* — is not; प्रत्यवायः *pratyavāyaḥ* — production of opposite results; न विद्यते *na vidyate* — is not; अस्य धर्मस्य *asya dharmasya* — of this *dharma* (*karma-yoga*); स्वल्पम् अपि *svल्पam api* — even very little; महतः भयात् *mahataḥ bhayāt* — from great fear; त्रायते *trāyate* — protects

In this, there is no waste of effort, nor are the opposite results produced.
Even very little of this *karma-yoga* protects one from great fear.

Karma-yoga, not *karma* itself, is involved in the pursuit of *mokṣa*. A person does *karma-yoga*, not for *karma-phala*, but for *mokṣa*. Here, *abhikrama* indicates the beginning of an undertaking and *nāśa* means destruction. You can always begin cultivation, but you may not be able to reap the harvest. Water may not be available, there may be no rain, or the pests may come in large numbers. Anything can happen between these two events. There may even have been floods or too much rain at the wrong time. All of these can destroy whatever cultivation that has been undertaken. But, in this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* says that, there is no destruction for this undertaking — *abhikrama-nāśaḥ na asti*.

Any *karma* that you undertake has numerous obstacles, but *karma-yoga* has none. It is purely prayer. All the *karmas* that you do, form a prayer, as it were. Prayer itself is the result because, to the extent that you are able to pray, your *antaḥ-karaṇa* is taken care of. You are praying for the sake of purifying your mind, *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, and the prayer itself produces the result. The result is not later. That you are praying is itself the result of prayer.

Karma-yoga is an attitude; it is not just action. If it were an undertaking, it would be a problem because it might not end properly. There could be obstructions in between or something could happen to prevent you from achieving the desired end. For example, if you perform a scripturally enjoined *karma*, *vaidika-karma*, the undertaking can be destroyed altogether by not doing the ritual properly, that is, there will be *abhikrama-nāśa*. Certain omissions and commissions may be there. If something was done incorrectly or if you did not distribute the proper gifts, *dakṣiṇā*, that was required, there would be no result at all. Therefore, in the *karma*, there can be *nāśa*, destruction, meaning that the desired end cannot be fulfilled at all. This is not the case for *karma-yoga* because you are not interested in the result, *karma-phala*. You are interested only in *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, so that you can gain *mokṣa*.

The word *pratyavāya* used here has two meanings. Any undertaking that you have not completed due to your own omission has a *pratyavāya-doṣa*, a defect. The desired result is not achieved because the action, a prescribed treatment, for example, is incomplete, inadequate. Suppose you start a treatment, do it for one or two days, and then discontinue it. This creates problems because the treatment must be applied for a

prescribed period of time for it to work. Only after a certain point should it be discontinued. To do otherwise will cause *pratyavāya* because you will not get the desired result. Not carrying out the prescribed treatment is a *pratyavāya*, a defect, and not doing it at the right time is also a defect — the second meaning for *pratyavāya*. If treatment is not taken at the right time, your condition may become complicated, yielding results that you did not expect at all and that may be most undesirable. Similarly, when an important ritual, *karma*, is performed, there are a number of satellite rituals to be followed. And, if these are not followed, there is either no result or a wrong result.

In *karma-yoga*, however, such problems do not exist because we are not talking about *karma*. *Karma-yoga* is an attitude and, being an attitude, if it is with you, it is with you. To the extent that you have it, you have it, and with this attitude, you continue to do *karma*. Previously you did *karma* and now also you do *karma*. It is the change in attitude that brings about the result and makes it *yoga*.

KARMA-YOGA IS AN ATTITUDE

The discipline called *karma-yoga*, this attitude, even in the smallest degree, *svalpam apī*, protects you from great fear, the great fear of *saṃsāra* — *trāyate mahataḥ bhayāt*. Once you have started living a life of *karma-yoga*, you have started a different journey. Till then, you were going in one direction as the water flows, so to speak. Now, it is as though the water has reversed its flow and flows towards the mountain top, instead of away from it. Through *karma-yoga*, you have reversed the process. Once you have started the reverse process, there is nothing to stop you, no matter how many obstacles remain. If you do not complete the journey in this lifetime, then you simply continue it in the next, the *Gītā* assures you.

You might ask how having *karma-yoga* in the smallest degree can help remove the *saṃsāra-bhaya*. It is because that small measure, that shift in attitude, has already initiated the reverse process of the journey. Even if the person dies while pursuing this *mokṣa-mārga*, according to *Kṛṣṇa*, it does not take much time at all to complete it, as we will see in detail in the sixth chapter. The very fact that you reversed the process shows that you are well on your way; that the journey is all but over.

By assuring us that, the reversal itself is a great blessing, the *Gītā* praises *karma-yoga*. In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* talks about one's understanding with reference to the clarity of the end in view.

व्यवसायात्मिका बुद्धिः एकेह कुरुनन्दन ।

बहुशाखा ह्यनन्ताश्च बुद्धयोऽव्यवसायिनाम् ॥ ४१ ॥

vyavasāyātmikā buddhiḥ ekeha kurunandana

bahuśākhā hyanantāśca buddhayo'vyavasāyinām

Verse 41

कुरुनन्दन *kurunandana* — Oh! Descendant of *Kurus*; इह *iha* — with reference to this (*mokṣa*); व्यवसायात्मिका *vyavasāyātmikā* — well-ascertained; बुद्धिः *buddhiḥ* — understanding; एका *ekā* — is one; अव्यवसायिनाम् *avyavasāyinām* — of the indiscriminate; बुद्ध्यः *buddhayaḥ* — notions; हि *hi* — indeed; बहुशाखाः *bahu-śākhāḥ* — many-branched; च *ca* — and; अनन्ताः *anantāḥ* — innumerable

With reference to this (*mokṣa*), Oh! Descendant of *Kurus*, there is a single, well-ascertained understanding. The notions of those who lack discrimination are many-branched and innumerable indeed.

The vision of the *Gītā* is that you are already free; you cannot be improved upon. Since you are already *paraṁ brahma*, it is knowledge alone that liberates you. To gain it, you should find a teacher and ask for the knowledge. In spite of the availability of such teaching, however, there is no guarantee that one will gain the knowledge because the place where it must occur may not be ready.

Knowledge has to take place in the mind. Physically, one may be a mature person, an adult, but this does not mean that the mind, the *antaḥ-karaṇa*, is ready for the teaching. A certain maturity, a certain *viveka* is necessary. The teaching may be given for the asking, but the mind must be ready for it. You must be desirous of the knowledge, not out of curiosity, but out of a certain discrimination, *viveka*, on your part. Then only can you ask for this knowledge and hope to receive it. The mind that is necessary in order to receive the knowledge is accomplished by *karma-yoga*.

You can choose a life-style of *karma-yoga*, performing *karma* with a prayerful attitude. Or you can choose a life of renunciation involving only *sāṅkhya*, knowledge. *Sāṅkhya* and *sannyāsa* go together, since *sannyāsa* is taken for the sake of pursuing knowledge to the exclusion of any other activity. By simply becoming a *sannyāsi*, one does not become enlightened. A *sannyāsi* also has to gain knowledge. Similarly, by *karma-yoga* alone, you do not gain liberation. You have to gain knowledge. Knowledge, therefore, is common to both. Knowledge liberates, for which you require a mind which has been made ready by *yoga*. A *sannyāsi* may follow the *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* upto its final limb of *samādhi*. But it too comes under *karma-yoga* because it is an action to be done to purify the *antaḥ-karaṇa* for the sake of gaining the knowledge. Any technique that helps to acquire steadiness of mind is useful and may be employed even by a *sannyāsi*.

THE MEANS AND THE END ARE ONE

In this verse, the word *vyavasāya* means *niścaya*, clarity with reference to what I seek and how I am going to go about gaining it. The mind, *buddhi*, therefore, is said to be single-pointed, *ekā*. There is also only one goal — *mokṣa*, in the form of *jñāna*,

knowledge. That the goal, the end, is clear, is itself a very big accomplishment. To see that *mokṣa* is the destiny of a human being, that this is exactly what I am seeking, that it is freedom, freedom from a sense of limitation, and that freedom must be centred on myself alone, that it cannot be outside of me, means that the goal is clear. I should see that I am already free and that if I were bound, I could never be free. If I am already free, I should know it to own it. This is the kind of knowledge I need to have first — that there is such a thing as the freedom I am seeking and that it is in the form of *jñāna*.

If there are a hundred seekers and all of them are very clear about what they want, all of them committed to the pursuit of knowledge, then all these minds have only one goal. *Śraddhā* is common to all of them. Only in preparing the mind can there be differences. Once the mind is prepared, it does not meander. It is like a river with two banks; it has a direction. If the banks themselves are not defined, if they are all over, there will be islands everywhere, just like the river *Godāvarī* before it reaches the sea.

Similarly, like a meandering river, the *buddhi* will meander all over if I do not know where I want to go. Everything will seem to be all right. Or everything will seem to be important, which means there will be a confusion about priorities. If everything seems to be as attractive as everything else, then everything will have the uppermost place on the list of items to be fulfilled. Because they have no *vyavasāyātmikā buddhi*, people are confused about what is to be done first and what later.

But here, whether it is with reference to *karma-yoga* or *jñāna*, the focus is the same because it is knowledge and knowledge cannot differ. Knowledge is centred on the object and is as true as the object. Therefore, knowledge cannot differ regardless of whether it is my knowledge or your knowledge. One plus one is two for both of us. Because it depends on a valid means of knowledge, knowledge of a given thing does not differ. So too, knowledge for one who takes to *karma-yoga* is the same knowledge as that pursued by the *sannyāsī*. A *karma-yogī* does not do *karma* for the sake of *karma* or *karma-phala*. No one is interested in performing an action for the sake of action. Inaction would be preferable. Action is performed because the person is interested in something. We need to be clear about what that is. A *karma-yogī* does not perform *karma* for the *karma's* sake, nor because it is going to produce a particular result in terms of security and pleasure and thereby make him or her a better person. Such a person no longer thinks that way, although he or she may have thought so originally. A *karma-yogī*, like a *sannyāsī* is a *mumukṣu*, a seeker, one who has a desire for *mokṣa* only. One does not become a *karma-yogī* otherwise.

WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE SEEKING IS ENDLESS

Everyone does some kind of *karma* or the other. Who does not? Some are doing more; some are doing less. But everyone performs *karma* with certain ends in view and these ends are numerous — *bahusākhāḥ*. There are many branches in the sense that

each one goes his or her own way. There are not just one or two ways; they are endless, countless, *ananta*. If you go after money, there is no end to the search. If you want power, it too is endless. Pleasures are the same. Whatever you seek, you find the pursuit is endless.

Those who do not have *niścaya*, those who are not clear with reference to what they want, have meandering minds — *bahuśākhāḥ buddhayaḥ*. Too many branches are there, too many channels, too many expressions, and too many pursuits. They are indeed countless. Both the means and the ends are countless in number because the same ends can be achieved by many means. Take money, for example, or power. There are many gates including ‘Watergate,’ through which you can gain power and lose it also. A gate can take you in and it can push you out. Inlets can become outlets. Thus, there are many ways to accomplish the same end because whenever an end is away from you, you can accomplish that end in different ways.

When the mind is not clear, priorities are always a problem. Everything seems to be equally important, whereas for the person who has clarity about what is to be known, there is *ekā buddhi*. With reference to *yoga* too it is *ekā buddhi* because *karma-yoga* is born out of *nitya-anitya-vastu-viveka*, discriminating knowledge between that which is eternal and non-eternal. All we have to do is to take care of our *rāga-dveṣas*, our likes and dislikes. These have to be neutralised and, to do this, we require *karma-yoga*. If a person does not have *karma-yoga* and becomes a *sannyāsī* or simply pursues knowledge on his or her own, *rāga-dveṣas* still have to be taken care of.

This does not mean that one should not pursue knowledge. The pursuit of knowledge itself may help one to take care of *rāga-dveṣas*. In fact, no one takes care of every *rāga-dveṣa* and then pursues knowledge. You pursue knowledge and take care of *rāga-dveṣas*. This was what *Arjuna* did.

KARMA-YOGA IS SOMETHING MORE THAN AN ETHICAL LIFE

Arjuna had been living a life of *dharma*, but it was not a total *karma-yoga*. He had great ambitions. Only in the battlefield did he become a *mumukṣu*. He had fought with Lord *Śiva* only for the sake of a weapon. Because he wanted a blessing from Lord *Śiva* in the form of a missile, he worshipped him — all for the sake of personal glories. Living a life of *dharma*, an ethical life, *Arjuna* legitimately sought these personal glories.

Karma-yoga is not merely living an ethical life because one can legitimately aspire for money, power, heaven, and so on. Legitimately, the person performs various *karmas* and earns his or her living ethically. Following sound work ethics and personal ethics means that one's life is proper. But such a person is not necessarily a *mumukṣu*, the one who has already discriminated between the real and the unreal, the one who has

nitya-anitya-vastu-viveka. *Nitya* means that which is eternal, that which is always there, and *anitya* is the ephemeral, the non-eternal. That 'I am seeking eternally' is knowledge that you gain in time after you have gone through enough rounds of experience to enlighten yourself. You see that experiences come and go and all that happens is that you become a permanent seeker, an experience hunter. Either you grow out of one experience and want a new experience or you want a repeat experience. Either way, the experience is *anitya*. The result of any *karma* is always *anitya*.

A person who has thus discovered a dispassion towards the experiences of life is called a *mumukṣu*, one who can take to a life of *sannyāsa* or to a life of *karma-yoga*. Those who take to either life-style are *mumukṣus* who have minds that are *ekā*, because of *niścaya-svabhāva*. There is a determination; there is clarity. *Niścaya* does not mean determination in the sense of resolve; it means that there is no doubt. There is clarity with reference to what I want to know.

If you want to know whether a pumpkin is made out of plastic or is real, you ascertain the difference and have *niścayātmikā buddhi* with reference to that object. There is clarity. A doubt, however, is what is created when someone says that what you thought was real is made out of plastic. You can believe that it is real, but the mind is not *niścayātmikā*. You have to ascertain whether or not it is real with your own *pramāṇa*, with your own hands and nose. You touch it and smell it. Nowadays, a pumpkin can be made to smell and feel like a real pumpkin, so you may also have to scratch it. Once you know it is a real pumpkin, then you have *niścayātmikā buddhi*.

From this example, we can understand that *niścaya* is clarity, not determination. What determination or resolve is there in knowing a pumpkin? Determination is something entirely different. You determine or resolve to achieve something. Here, very well ascertained knowledge is what is meant by *niścayātmikā buddhi*, clarity with reference to the *lakṣya*, what is to be accomplished in life.

Any target is called a *lakṣya*. Any implied meaning is also called *lakṣya* as we have seen before. What is aimed at here is *lakṣya* and the *lakṣya* is very clear. The means also are very clear. I do not choose *karma-yoga* thinking that it will deliver the goods. I choose it knowing full well it is *jñāna* that delivers the goods. A *karma-yogī* pursues knowledge while, at the same time, living a life of *karma-yoga*. In this, the *karma-yogī* has *niścaya*, a clarity about the goal. The person has no delusions whatsoever. He or she may practice *āsanas*, *prāṇāyāma*, and various other disciplines. A number of rituals may also be performed. However, whatever is done is meant for only one purpose.

This integration is clear to the *karma-yogī* because he or she knows that these *karmas*, themselves, will not produce knowledge. The purpose of the various disciplines is clear. This, then, is what is meant by clarity. No *karma* is discounted or dismissed;

nor is it mistaken for a means to an end that it cannot produce. Therefore, a *karma-yogī* will not complain later that he or she tried everything, none of which helped at all.

WHATEVER HELPS IS USEFUL

People actually say these things, ‘I tried all this and it did not work. It is all a trip.’ They do not know what they tried it all for? Whatever you try can help in some way or other if it is done properly. It is also true that something that helps one person may not help another. For instance, two people may have the same disease with the same symptoms, but only one will be helped by a particular treatment and another may actually be harmed by it. There are hundreds of disciplines and cures for varieties of diseases, but they do not help everyone because each of them has its own limitation. No one really knows what a particular medicine will do. Researchers may have watched its effect on rats, but how it will act on a human being, in a male body as opposed to a female body, an Indian stomach as opposed to a Western stomach, they do not know. What happens when you eat meat instead of brown rice is not really known either. It is all guess work and prayer. Because everything has its own limitations, there is no last word.

As long as you understand that you do a certain thing for a certain purpose and do not have any delusion about it, everything is fine. You do not become a faddist. Nor do you think that this or that will deliver what it cannot. Only *jñāna* will deliver and, for the sake of *jñāna*, you have to do what is to be done, which requires, *vicāra*, inquiry. It is the thing that produces the knowledge that will deliver. If, for the sake of that knowledge, you think you need to do this or that to be able to know, then do it.

Śaṅkara says here that, *viveka* being there, the mind is single-pointed — *ekā buddhiḥ bhavati*. Suppose, however, that the *lakṣya*, the human end, is not very clear. What kind of *buddhi* will there be? It will be a *buddhi* that is dissipated in many pursuits without any definite direction. Those who have no *vyavasāya* are those with no *viveka-buddhi*, no discrimination. They definitely do not have the knowledge born out of *pramāṇa* through the study of the *śāstra*. They have no such clarity and, for them, there are many branches, *bahu-śākhās*, countless means and countless ends — all of which are in the *buddhi*, so that the person wants to do many things at the same time finally not doing even one of them properly. Time management, therefore, becomes an enormous problem.

WITHOUT CLARITY PRIORITIES ARE A PROBLEM

To say, ‘This job I will do now and this one I will do later,’ means that you have only one *buddhi*, to say nothing of having only one body! However, suppose you want to do all of them and are not very clear about which one you want to do first, what happens is that you cannot even start! Similarly, when it is very clear to you that this

knowledge, this freedom, is what you want in life, then everything becomes *karma-yoga* for you, even marriage. In fact, marriage is *yoga*. Here both the partners together live a life of *karma-yoga*, preparing themselves for this knowledge.

Having pointed out the difference in understanding, *Kṛṣṇa* talks about those who are not clear about the end to be accomplished in life.

यामिमां पुष्पितां वाचं प्रवदन्त्यविपश्चितः ।

वेदवादरताः पार्थ नान्यदस्तीति वादिनः ॥ ४२ ॥

yāmimāṃ puṣpitāṃ vācaṃ pravadantya vipaścitaḥ
vedavādaratāḥ pārtha nānyadastīti vādinaḥ

Verse 42

कामात्मानः स्वर्गपराः जन्मकर्मफलप्रदाम् ।

क्रियाविशेषबहुलां भोगैश्वर्यगतिं प्रति ॥ ४३ ॥

kāmātmānaḥ svargaparāḥ janmakarma phalapradām
kriyāviśeṣabahulāṃ bhogaiśvarya-gatiṃ prati

Verse 43

पार्थ *pārtha* — Oh! Son of *Pṛthā*; अविपश्चितः *avipaścitaḥ* — those who do not see clearly; वेद-वाद-रताः *veda-vāda-ratāḥ* — those who remain engrossed in the *karma-kāṇḍa* portion of the Veda; अन्यत् *anyat* — anything else; न अस्ति *na asti* — is not; इति *iti* — thus; वादिनः *vādinaḥ* — those who argue; कामात्मानः *kāmātmānaḥ* — those who are full of desires; स्वर्गपराः *svargaparāḥ* — those with heaven as their highest goal; भोग-ऐश्वर्य-गतिम् प्रति *bhoga-aiśvarya-gatiṃ prati* — for the sake of the attainment of pleasure and power; जन्म-कर्म-फल-प्रदाम् *janma-karma-phala-pradām* — leading to a better birth as a result of their actions; क्रिया-विशेष-बहुलाम् *kriyā-viśeṣa-bahulām* — full of special rituals; याम् इमाम् *yām imām* — these; पुष्पिताम् *puṣpitām* — flowery; वाचम् *vācam* — words; प्रवदन्ति *pravadanti* — utter

Oh! Son of *Pṛthā*, the non-discriminating people, who remain engrossed in *karma* enjoined by the Veda and its results, arguing that there is nothing other than this, those who are full of desires with heaven as their highest goal, for the attainment of pleasure and power, utter these flowery words that talk of many special rituals that are capable of giving better births and various results of actions.

Those who see clearly are called *vipaścits* and *avipaścits* means the opposite, those who do not see clearly. They have no *vyavasāyātmikā buddhi*. There are people who may see, but not clearly, and there are those who do not see at all. *Kṛṣṇa* is talking here about people who see, but not very clearly, who study and believe in the veracity of the Vedas, but miss the most important teaching of the Vedas namely the *ātmajñāna*.

They believe in the existence of the soul after death because it is stated so in the Vedas. They believe in the efficacy of the various rituals mentioned in the Vedas for accomplishing various ends and they believe in the ends also, like heaven and a better birth. They believe in the capacity of a given ritual to produce a particular desirable result.

Therefore, these are not ordinary people. They are people who have studied the *śāstra* and who believe in its validity. This is why *Kṛṣṇa* used the word *avipaścit* meaning that these people see and yet, they do not see. They are the people who are not to be dismissed because they have studied the scriptures. *Śaṅkara* criticises them here because they have all the words and some arguments which they back up by quoting selected verses. They talk, argue, and try to convince others also — *yām imāṃ puṣpitāṃ vācaṃ pravadanti*. They use very well-known words, *prasiddhā vāk*, words that are very flowery. There are some trees, like magnolia trees, in which, when they flower, nothing but the flowers can be seen. Although the leaves and branches are there, they are hidden by the flowers. These people are like those trees because they speak words which are as attractive as a flowery, blossoming tree — *puṣpitāṃ vācaṃ pravadanti*. *Śaṅkara* also uses another expression — *śrūyamāṇa-ramaṇīya*, meaning ‘very nice to hear.’ As you hear the words, they are very pleasing and wonderful to the ear, but in fact, they are all just so much hype! Such words are used because people who do not have *ekā buddhi*, who have not ascertained what they have to accomplish in life, do not see things very clearly. Those, who do not have this *viveka*, revel in parts of the Veda that talk of means and ends and exclude the *Vedānta* portion. They are the *veda-vāda-ratās*.

They may even study *Vedānta* but only use it for the sake of rituals. These people revel in many of the *Veda-vākya*s because they state clearly what you will get and the means, *sādhana*, you must employ for gaining it. There are rituals for having children, restoring health, removing certain obstacles you may have, and so on. How these elaborate rituals are to be done is also stated. In other words, there is an answer for everything in the *karma-kāṇḍa* of the Veda.

Believing in all these sentences and performing certain *karmas* because one wants to accomplish various ends is fine. But, the *veda-vāda-ratās* argue that there is nothing other than *karma*. They say that you must do *karma* and you must accomplish all these various ends. They say that you should not fritter away this life and, of course, we say the same thing! You are given this one life and we do not know about the next one. There may be a next life or there may not be. Even if a next life does exist, you may be born a frog and end up on a lab table for experimental purposes. The legs go onto someone else's plate and the body goes to the anatomy department of some medical college! Therefore, this life is the only one we can count on.

The *veda-vāda-ratās* say that *karma* alone is to be done. For them, the greatest gain, *mokṣa*, is heaven, *svarga*. They also talk about this life, saying that the greatest gain is wealth. In other words, the goal is one hundred percent success here and in the hereafter also! This is how they talk. And why do they talk this way?

The people being described here are those who are nothing but desires — *kāmātmānaḥ*. It is not that they have desires. They are made up of desires alone. There is a difference. Going to heaven is the highest end for them; they are *svargaparas*. Thus, there are a lot of desires for them to fulfil here on earth and, then, for the hereafter, heaven is the ultimate goal!

The result of *karma* is always another birth, *janma*, in one form or other. All the *karma-phalas*, that you have gathered ends up in this way. Therefore, we have the flowery words, *puṣpītā vāk*, of those who talk about a better birth later being the result of *karma* gathered — they talk words that are *janma-karma-phala-pradā*. These words are in the form of statements such as ‘Next time you will be born a prince. You will be born with a golden spoon in your mouth,’ and so on. *Kriyā-viśeṣa-bahulā* is yet another adjective used by *Kṛṣṇa* to describe the words spoken by these people, words that reveal the many and varied *karmas* for attaining pleasure and power — *bhoga-aiśvarya-gatiṃ prati*. *Bhoga* is pleasure and *aiśvarya* is power, overlordship. You want power and overlordship because you cannot accept the helplessness that you feel. And so the words, ‘Next time you will become a king,’ or ‘in your next birth, you will be Indra, the ruler of heaven,’ are all very pleasant to hear. People's minds seem to be carried away by them.

Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* lamented their plight here. Not only are they themselves carried away by these words, their conviction in their belief is such that they become missionaries and make sure they convince a few other people too. The real reason for their missionary zeal is that they are not that sure. Their belief is only a belief, after all. Believers have to become missionaries because belief means there is a doubt and doubt means you require some strength. If you can manage to convince one person, then you feel secure. There is mutual strength and one helps the other. Groups are created in this way so that each member will have the support of all other members.

The minds of those who are carried away by these enticing flowery words do not stay with the pursuit of *Vedānta*. With reference to what one must gain, there is no real clarity because this clarity cannot take place in the minds carried away by such words. The idea here is that if you do not allow yourself to be carried away by words, if you look into them, you will find that they fall apart. And, if the words are not looked into, you will find that they are very pleasing and attractive. Therefore, people who have no discrimination are easily carried off by them.

भोगैश्वर्यप्रसक्तानां तयापहतचेतसाम् ।

व्यवसायात्मिका बुद्धिः समाधौ न विधीयते ॥ ४४ ॥

bhogaiśvarya-prasaktānām tayāpahṛtacetasām

vyavasāyātmikā buddhiḥ samādhau na vidhīyate

Verse 44

भोग-ऐश्वर्य-प्रसक्तानाम् *bhoga-aiśvarya-prasaktānām* — for those who pursue pleasure and power exclusively; तया *tayā* — by those words; अपहृत-चेतसाम् *apahṛta-cetasām* — whose minds are robbed away; व्यवसायात्मिका *vyavasāyātmikā* — well ascertained; बुद्धिः *buddhiḥ* — understanding; समाधौ *samādhau* — in the mind; न विधीयते *na vidhīyate* — does not take place

For those who pursue, pleasure and power exclusively, whose minds are robbed away by those flowery words, well ascertained understanding does not take place in their mind.

Kṛṣṇa had already unfolded the knowledge of *sāṅkhya* and then he asked *Arjuna* to listen to the knowledge unfolded about *karma-yoga*. Thus, when *Kṛṣṇa* praised *yoga* in terms of *karma-yoga*, as he did here, *sāṅkhya* was not being discussed at all.

Often something is praised by comparing it to something else. In *Kṛṣṇa's* praise of *karma-yoga*, there was a comparison to pure *karma*, *karma* done with a particular result in mind, the *karma* that is done with the thinking, 'I perform this *karma* for this given result alone.' The result, *phala*, of pure *karma* is always limited. This is not the *karma* done for the sake of *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, for purifying the mind, so that *mokṣa* will be gained. When *karma* is done in this manner for *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, then the commitment is to *mokṣa* alone and you become a *mumukṣu*. This is what we call *yoga*.

Karma is generally done for the sake of a limited result, whether the *karma* is worldly, *laukika-karma*, or scripturally based, *vaidika-karma*. The *karmas* that are done for gaining certain limited results are called *kāmya-karma*. The *śāstra* includes heaven also as a result of *kāmya-karma*.

The people under discussion, in this verse, know the Veda and quote it, but only for the purpose of establishing the glories of *karma* and their results (*puṣpitām vācaṃ pravadanti*). Words that are very flowery and pleasing to the ear are used in this way by these people, and they talk about the various *karmas* that can be done for the sake of gaining enjoyments, *bhoga* and overlordship, *aiśvarya*, meaning the wielding of power. Enjoyment and power are the only two purposes for which such people dedicate their entire lives. And committed as they are to their own desires, they also talk a great deal about it.

The word *aiśvarya* means overlordship, implying different degrees of power. For example, a policeman controls people's driving habits. This is one kind of *aiśvarya*. Then there is a police inspector who controls all the policemen in his station and a

commissioner who controls the inspectors. There is also someone else above the commissioner. The power wielded by all these people is in different degrees and represents different kinds of *aiśvarya*.

WITHOUT VIVEKA, CONFUSION IS ENDLESS

Those who are totally committed to *bhoga* and *aiśvarya*, who are engaged in the pursuit of enjoyment and power alone, are influenced by the flowery words that reveal the various types of *karmas*, the means for achieving different ends. These words are not only Vedic words but colloquial words also, drawn from whatever ‘hype’ that is available in the language at the time. Hearing these flowery words, which are very seductive, their minds are robbed away. They become *apahrta-cetasaḥ*. In such people, the discriminative knowledge is so totally covered that nothing is clear.

Naturally, such people do not see through these words. They do not see the limitations of these words because their discriminative capacity, *viveka*, is covered. For them, there is no *vyavasāyātmikā buddhi*, no clarity about what they want in life. That *buddhi* that is always the same, *ekā-buddhi*, is not there for them. Therefore, there are hundreds of ends to be accomplished and a variety of means also, resulting in confusion. Where there is confusion, priorities are always a problem because you find that you cannot grab everything at the same time. In such circumstances, the mind can never be steady.

Here, in this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* says that people who are committed to *bhoga* and *aiśvarya*, and whose minds are robbed away by enticing words praising the means and ends, do not have clear minds with reference to what is to be accomplished in life. Where is it that such clarity does not take place? In the mind — *samādhau na vidhīyate*. There is no other meaning for *samādhi* here because *Kṛṣṇa* was talking about *vyavasāyātmikā buddhi*, with reference to those who have no clarity, *niścaya*, about what they want, people whose minds meander. Therefore, this *vyavasāyātmikā buddhi*, which is *ekā buddhi*, does not take place in the minds of these people. Those who do have clarity have *ekā buddhi*, meaning that there is only one *lakṣya*, one goal, for them. *Mokṣa* is the only goal to be accomplished.

Śaṅkara explains the use of word *samādhi* in his commentary on the verse when he says that everything in the world reaches your mind alone — *samādhiyate asmin*. In the mind alone, all the sense objects, all the experiences, the entire world that is in front of you, are experienced by you. The eyes may be open and seeing, but what they see has to reach the mind before any seeing actually takes place. So here, *samādhau* means ‘in the mind’ *antaḥkaraṇe, buddhau*. And what is it that does not take place in the minds of these people? — *ekā buddhiḥ, vyavasāyātmikā buddhiḥ asmin samādhau na vidhīyate*. Instead, the *buddhi* is a meandering *buddhi*, wanting this and that, like the

mind of an active, bright child who is taken to a toy shop and asked to choose only one toy! Total confusion is the result.

When a person who is already confused, studies the Veda, and finds that various actions will produce various results, his or her confusion becomes endless. It is like looking through a catalogue because you want to buy some gifts. Before long, you find that you yourself need something on every page! Not only do you find the whole world consists of so many alluring things, but you discover through the *śāstra* that the unknown world contains many more equally enticing and attractive things. The mind is thereby robbed away for those who are committed to *bhoga* and *aiśvarya*, and their discriminative awareness is clouded. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* emphasised the importance of having this *vyavasāyātmikā buddhi*.

त्रैगुण्यविषया वेदा निस्त्रैगुण्यो भवार्जुन ।

निर्द्वन्द्वो नित्यसत्त्वस्थो निर्योगक्षेम आत्मवान् ॥ ४५ ॥

traiguṇyaviṣayā vedā nistraiguṇyo bhavārjuna

nirdvandvo nityasattvastho niryoga kṣema ātmavān

Verse 45

वेदाः *vedāḥ* — the Vedas; त्रैगुण्यविषयाः *traiguṇyaviṣayāḥ* — have their subject matter related to the three qualities; अर्जुन *Arjuna* — Oh! *Arjuna*; निस्त्रैगुण्यः *nistraiguṇyah* — one free from three fold qualities; निर्द्वन्द्वः *nirdvandvaḥ* — one free from the (sorrow of) the pairs of opposites; नित्य-सत्त्वस्थः *nitya-sattvasthaḥ* — one ever established in *sattva-guṇa*; निर्योगक्षेमः *niryogakṣemaḥ* — one free from the anxieties of acquiring and protecting; आत्मवान् *ātmavān* — one who is a master of oneself; भव *bhava* — be

The subject matter of the Vedas is related to the three qualities. Oh! *Arjuna*, be one who is free from the three-fold qualities, from (the sorrow of) the pairs of opposites, one who is ever established in *sattva-guṇa*, one who is free from the anxieties of acquiring and protecting, one who is a master of oneself.

Śaṅkara prefaces his commentary to this verse by saying that for the people who are committed to enjoyments and power, for those who do not have *viveka-buddhi*, the subject matter of the Vedas becomes *traiguṇya-viṣaya*. This is not a full definition of the Veda, which contains much more, including *Vedānta*. What is meant here is that for those who are committed to *bhoga* and *aiśvarya*, all scriptures will be *traiguṇya-viṣaya* alone. One usually looks in the scriptures only for what one wants to see. It is like going to a hardware store that has hundreds of things and looking only for what you want. Similarly, there are a number of topics in the scriptures and you look only for what you want.

The Veda provides you with legitimate means for achieving various ends. There are unknown means for known ends, known means for unknown ends, and unknown means for unknown ends. Heaven, for example, is an unknown end because it is not directly known to us. Another *janma*, a better birth, is also an unknown end that the *śāstra* says will be accomplished by a life of *dharma*. *Dharma* is a known means because what is right and wrong is not totally unknown to us. The Veda confirms what means are right and wrong to accomplish this desirable unknown end later, be it heaven or another *janma*.

Previously, I did not know that if I did the right thing I would get *punya*. And by doing the right thing, I not only get the result right here, *dr̥ṣṭa-phala*, but I get *adr̥ṣṭa-phala* also, a later result. In this way, the Veda talks about known means for gaining unknown ends. It also talks about unknown means for known ends, like having a child.

The ritual that is provided has nothing to do with having a child and is only performed when all other known avenues have been explored. If, after consulting doctors and following their advice, there is still no child, then there is definitely some obstacle, *pratibandhaka*. The only way remaining to remove the obstacle is through prayer. Therefore, the Veda gives a ritual, which is a prayer — not a broad-spectrum ritual, but a specific ritual meant solely for having a child.

Thus, you find that the Veda reveals a variety of means and ends, known and not known to us, but all of them are meant for limited results. These are what people committed to *bhoga* and *aiśvarya* look for. For them, the Veda means only that part which relates to the three *guṇas*, *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* — *traiguṇya-viṣaya*, meaning *saṃsāra*. *Sattva* will give you some happiness, *rajas* will give you agitation, and *tamas* will give you dullness and sorrow. Thus, these three qualities are what give you joy and sorrow, *sukha* and *duḥkha*. *Samśāra* means, that which is within the fold of the three *guṇas*.

MEANS AND ENDS ARE NOT THE ONLY SUBJECT MATTER OF THE VEDA

In this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* advised *Arjuna* straight away not to be one for whom *saṃsāra* is an end to be accomplished; he said, '*nistraiguṇyo bhava*.' In fact, *saṃsāra* cannot be an end to be accomplished; we already have it! We are already within the fold of the three *guṇas* and are seeking freedom from it.

A drowning man does not require more water. He is already drowning and will not want to get into the ocean. Similarly, we are already up to our necks in the ocean of *saṃsāra*. Thus, *saṃsāra* cannot be an end to be achieved at any time; it can only be a situation to get out of. *Kṛṣṇa* was as though telling *Arjuna*, 'Do not look into the Veda to find a better place in *saṃsāra*. Be a little discriminative. You have come up to the Veda. Yet, you are trying to perpetuate your *saṃsāra*. It is meaningless. May you, therefore, become one for whom *saṃsāra* is not there — *nistraiguṇyo bhava*.'

Śaṅkara gives the meaning in short — 'May you be free from desire, *niṣkāmaḥ bhava*.' That is, he says 'May you be free from the desire for pleasures and power.' Let these not be the end in view. Further, 'May you become free from the opposites, the causes of *sukha* and *duḥkha*, *nirdvandvaḥ bhava*.' *Śaṅkara* also explains the words, *dvandva* and *nirdvandva*. The causes, *hetus*, for *sukha* and *duḥkha*, pleasure and pain, are referred to as opposites, meaning of the word *dvandva* here. The one who is free from the opposites is called *nirdvandva*, free from the causes of *sukha-duḥkha*, etc. How can you be free from the causes of *sukha-duḥkha*? By not being dependent for your happiness on the presence or absence of anything. Cold and heat, for example, can make you unhappy. If they do, it means that you are dependent on their absence or presence for your happiness. That means that you are not *nirdvandva*.

Another set of opposites is *jaya* and *apajaya*, victory and defeat. They also become the *hetu*, the basis, for your *sukha* and *duḥkha*. In defeat, there is pain *duḥkha*; in victory, there is elation, *sukha*. To this you may say, ‘Granted I do not want pain, but why should I not be elated?’ The reason is that if you are elated, you are definitely going to have pain also. Therefore, may you not let the opposites affect you, *nirdvandvaḥ bhava*. Since you cannot avoid them, may they not affect you. Although you cannot avoid winter and summer, you can allow them not to affect you by maintaining a certain composure or attitude towards them. In this way, you need not be carried away by changing situations, which may not always be to your liking.

One whose mind, whose thinking, enjoys a predominance of the *sattva*guṇa is called *sattvastha*. When *sattva* is predominant, there is composure, discrimination, enquiry, and knowledge. *Rajoguṇa*, on the other hand, means agitation, ambition, and so on. Therefore, may your commitment always be to knowledge only — *nityasattvasthaḥ bhava* — so that you can discover yourself to be *nistraiguṇya*.

Śaṅkara also explains what the word, *niryoga-kṣema* means, in his commentary to this verse. Gaining something that you do not have is called *yoga*, something that is not with you, something that you want to accomplish, something that is desirable. *Kṣema* means having to protect what you have already gained. Say you do not have a job and you apply for one and then go for an interview. This is all done for the sake of getting the job and, therefore, you are doing *yoga*. Once you have the job, it becomes another job to retain it. The whole job of retaining a job is what is meant by *kṣema*. Similarly, earning money is *yoga* and hanging on to it, investing it, is *kṣema*. Having a child is *yoga*; bringing up and retaining the child, not losing it, is *kṣema*. Getting married is *yoga* and making it work is *kṣema*. Therefore, there is *yoga-kṣema* everywhere.

A person’s problems will always be related to either *yoga* or *kṣema*. Either you do not get what you want or you have lost what you had, or are losing what you have. From the hair on your head onwards, there are hundreds of things that we are losing which cause problems of anxiety, all of which are *yoga* and *kṣema*. *Kṛṣṇa*, therefore, said to *Arjuna*, ‘May you be a person who has no concern or anxiety due to *yoga* or *kṣema* — *niryoga-kṣemaḥ bhava*.’ The whole idea here is that for those who are only concerned with getting what they want and hanging on to it, engaging themselves in the pursuit of *mokṣa* will be very difficult. *Kṛṣṇa* did not say that you should not go for *yoga* and *kṣema*. Rather, he said, ‘Let there be no concern born of *yoga* and *kṣema*.’ In other words, ‘May you be free.’

Further, *Kṛṣṇa* said, ‘May you be one whose mind and senses are with you, may you be *ātma-vān*, a master of yourself.’ All of this is explained throughout the *Gītā*. Otherwise, *Kṛṣṇa*’s words would have been merely advice and not teaching. This verse tells us what *Kṛṣṇa* was going to teach. Here, *ātma* refers to the body, mind, and senses and not to the *sat-cit-ānanda-ātma*, which is already you. Because you have a body,

mind, and senses, what is being said here is — ‘May you have them; may they not have you! May you not be in the hands of your fancies. May your mind be with you. May you become free from indifference and mechanical thinking, *pramāda*. In other words, may you become alert; may you be together.’

Those who are committed to *bhoga* and *aiśvarya* see the Veda as having only the three qualities as its subject matter, *traiguṇya-viṣaya*, whereas it has much more to teach. For example, the contents of this verse are taught in the Veda. *Vedānta* is also a part of the Veda. *Kṛṣṇa* was saying that *Arjuna* had learned enough of the *traiguṇya-viṣaya* part of the Veda. Now it was time for him to study the other part, the *Vedānta*. Thus, he used the word, *nistraiguṇya*. He then went on to emphasise his point.

यावानर्थ उदपाने सर्वतः सम्प्लुतोदके ।

तावान् सर्वेषु वेदेषु ब्राह्मणस्य विजानतः ॥ ४६ ॥

yāvānārtha udapāne sarvataḥ samplutodake

tāvān sarveṣu vedeṣu brāhmaṇasya vijānataḥ

Verse 46

सर्वतः *sarvataḥ* — everywhere; सम्प्लुत-उदके *sampluta-udake* — when it is being flooded; उदपाने *udapāne* — in a pond or well (any small reservoir of water); यावान् *yāvān* — as much; अर्थः *arthaḥ* — use; तावान् *tāvān* — that much; विजानतः ब्राह्मणस्य *vijānataḥ brāhmaṇasya* — for the knowing *brāhmaṇa*; सर्वेषु *sarveṣu* — in all; वेदेषु *vedeṣu* — the Vedas

For the *brāhmaṇa* who knows the self, all the Vedas are of so much use as a small reservoir is when there is a flood everyw here.

The reason *Kṛṣṇa* asked *Arjuna* to go beyond those parts of the Veda dealing only with *saṃsāra* is given in this excellent verse. The word *brāhmaṇa* means one in whom *sattva* is predominant. Therefore a *brāhmaṇa* is a thinking person, a discriminating person. The word ‘*vijānataḥ*’ qualifying the *brāhmaṇa* refers to one who knows what it is all about. For an enlightened *brāhmaṇa*, *vijānataḥ brāhmaṇasya*, *Kṛṣṇa* says, the portion of the Veda relating only to *saṃsāra* is as useful as the water from a well when the entire countryside has been flooded, *sarvataḥ samplutodake*. When the wells and ponds themselves are under water, you need not look to them for water!

THE END OF SEEKING

The various means and ends talked about in the Veda are all limited so that any result you derive from the *karmas* enjoined is also going to be limited. The wise person is the one who knows he is limitless, *paraṃ brahma*. When a person is limitless *ānanda*, where is the necessity of looking for *ānanda*? Because the very nature, *svarūpa*, of the person is *ānanda*, one who has this knowledge does not look for

ānanda, just as a sugar crystal does not require any sugar at all to make itself sweeter. Nothing can become sweeter than sugar. Once something has crystallised into sugar, it cannot be sweetened any further. The very crystallisation indicates that the sweetness saturation has been reached. The American system of government may be better than the Russian system, but their sugars are both the same.

In the same way, you are *ānanda* by nature. When you are *ānanda*, you do not require any source of *ānanda*, any source of security. But this is exactly what you are seeking through all these *karmas*, means and ends. Therefore, the various means and ends mentioned in all four Vedas will only be of as much use, *tāvān sarveṣu vedeṣu*, as the small ponds and wells are when there is water, water, everywhere! When the ponds and wells are already flooded by water, where is the pond or the well, in fact!

All that *Kṛṣṇa* said in the previous verses was to create in *Arjuna* an interest in *karma-yoga*, which *Kṛṣṇa* has not yet talked about. He had only talked about *sāṅkhya*, knowledge. After asking *Arjuna* to listen to what he had to say about *karma-yoga*, he began praising it, saying that there was no possibility of losing anything or incurring any wrong result by its practice because *karma-yoga* is not mere *karma*. He then pointed out that people do *karmas* because they do not know what they really want. Since what they want is not very clear, they go after enjoyment and power. However, when what is wanted is very clear, the mind is settled. The storm is over and there is no more interest in experimentation. There is no more trying to see if this or that will do it. All experimentation stops because there is clarity with reference to what is wanted, which itself is a great blessing.

Then it becomes a question of whether you want to live a life of *sannyāsa* or *karma-yoga*, the only two lifestyles open to you. Between the two, you have a choice, but in fact, there is really very little choice because it all depends upon where you are. *Sannyāsa* may not be advisable at all; therefore, *karma-yoga* is preferable. Both have a common goal; both are meant for *mokṣa* in the form of knowledge. A *sannyāsi* works for *mokṣa* and so does a *karma-yogī*.

Although *Kṛṣṇa* has talked so much about *karma-yoga*, he has not actually said what it is. In the next verse, he explains it.

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन ।

मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥ ४७ ॥

karmaṇyevādhikāraṣte mā phaleṣu kadācana

mā karmaphalaheturbhūrmā te saṅgo'stva karmaṇi

Verse 47

कर्मणि *karmaṇi* — in action; एव *eva* — only; ते *te* — your; अधिकारः *adhikārah* — choice; फलेषु *phaleṣu* — in the results; मा कदाचन *mā kadācana* — never; कर्म-फल-हेतुः *karma-phala-hetuḥ* — the cause of the results; मा भूः *mā bhūḥ* — do not be; अकर्मणि

akarmaṇi — in inaction; ते *te* — your; सङ्गः *saṅgaḥ* — attachment; मा अस्तु *mā astu* — let it not be

Your choice is in action only, never in the results thereof. Do not be the author of the results of action. Let your attachment not be to inaction.

Śaṅkara takes the *karma* mentioned in this verse as purely scripturally enjoined *karma*, *vaidika-karma*, because that was what was under discussion. We shall look at it as any *karma*, rather than strictly *vaidika-karma*, since *karma-yoga* allows for it and Śaṅkara has said nothing to rule out the propriety of this approach.

The word *adhikāra* here means choice, your right, something over which you have power. This choice is only with reference to *karma*, the actions you perform. At no time, *mā kadācit*, however, is there a choice with reference to the results of actions, *phaleṣu*. Thus, with reference to all actions, you have a choice, but with reference to the results thereof, you have no choice whatsoever. This is a very simple statement of fact. Even for *vaidika-karma* there is a choice; you can do it, you need not do it, and you can do it differently. This capacity to do, not to do, and to do it differently makes you a *karma-adhikārī*. An animal, on the other hand, is not a *karma-adhikārī* because it does not have a choice in its actions, but is motivated only by its instincts.

When *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that he did not have any choice over the results of action, he was not giving him a piece of advice; it was a statement of fact. A statement of fact is not an advice; it is teaching. That, water boils at 100°C, is a statement of fact. Here, also, with reference to actions and their results, the statement, ‘Your choice is only in action, never in the results thereof, *karmaṇi eva adhikāraḥ te, mā phaleṣu kadācana*,’ is a statement of fact.

THE DEFINITION OF KARMA-YOGA

Yoga is defined in three different ways in the *Gītā*. The *karma-yoga* that *Kṛṣṇa* is praising is defined in two ways in this chapter.¹ The first is, evenness of the mind is called *karma-yoga*, *samatvaṅ yogaḥ ucyate* (*Gītā* – 2-48). The second is, discretion in action is called *karma-yoga*, *yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam* (*Gītā* – 2-50). Both definitions are necessary and need to be understood. Only then can *karma-yoga* be properly understood.

Samatva and *kauśala* are defining words for *karma-yoga*. *Samatva* is based on the sentence in the present verse — *karmaṇi eva adhikāraḥ te, mā phaleṣu kadācana*. *Samatva* means sameness and sameness of mind is *karma-yoga*. *Karma* is also definitely involved in *karma-yoga*. Otherwise there would be no *karma-yoga*. There

¹ Third definition of *karma-yoga* is:

Dissociation from the association with pain (*Gītā* – 6-23)

can be *karma* without *yoga*, but without *karma*, there can be no *karma-yoga*. If *karma-yoga* implies *karma*, then there must be sameness, *samatva*, with reference to *karma*. Let us see where this sameness is possible.

Sameness is not possible in the *karma* itself because you cannot do the same *karma* during the entire day, day after day, throughout your entire lifetime. Cooking is one *karma*, eating is another, and stirring the food in the pot is yet another. Removing the pot from fire is a different *karma* altogether. The *karmas* are therefore endless — sitting, standing, switching the stove on, switching it off, and so on. Obviously, then, the *karmas* cannot be the same because they are different.

Perhaps we can say that the results of *karmas*, the *karma-phalas*, are the same. Again, it is not possible. When you heat water, for example, there is one result and when you switch off the stove, there is another, entirely different result. The water that was hot slowly becomes cold as it loses its heat. Thus, different *karmas* are done for different results. The results vary. If you do not get a different result when you switch the stove on and off, you have a different kind of problem in that the stove is not functioning properly. Normally, the results will be different. Thus, neither *karmas* nor their results can be the same. In fact, different *karmas* are done for different results.

Every *karma* is desire-based; every action presupposes desire. Therefore, desire also cannot be the same. I do different *karmas* because I want different results. Desires are meant for results alone and the results are different. Thus, *samatva* is not in the *karma*, its results, or the desire upon which the *karma* is based.

In fact, *samatva* can only be with reference to your attitude concerning the results of action. While you have a choice over your action, you are helpless with reference to the result. You are not *Īśvara*; you are just an individual with limited knowledge, limited power, and ever so many desires. You have countless likes and dislikes, *rāga-dveṣas* to be fulfilled. Therefore, you undertake various activities.

KARMA IS TOTALLY DESIRE-BASED

Whatever be the nature of the *karmas* you do, they are all meant for fulfilling your *rāga-dveṣas* commonly called desires. *Rāga* is with reference to what you want to have, what you want to retain, and *dveṣa* is with reference to what you want to avoid, what you want to get rid of. That you want is *kāma*, desire. What you want is defined in terms of either *rāga* or *dveṣa*.

Everyone has likes and dislikes. They form the nature of an individual and are common to all. They may reveal how cultured, how sophisticated a person is, but the fact that everyone has likes and dislikes is common. There is no exception. Because of the presence of *rāga-dveṣas* alone, there are various activities and all the *karmas* undertaken are meant to produce the desired results because both *rāga* and *dveṣa* are

result oriented. You want to accomplish this, ‘this’ being the result. It is not that you want to accomplish *karma*; you want to accomplish the result and for its sake, you do this *karma*.

Since you perform a particular *karma* to accomplish a specific end, it seems as though you have figured out which *karma* will produce which result. But then you find that what you had figured out is not that predictable. In fact, you find that you can get exactly the opposite of what you thought you would get! What you want is one thing, but what you do seems to be either inadequate or inappropriate as it produces the opposite result. If we analyse any result, we find that it always falls into one of the following categories — more than we want, less than we want, the opposite of what we want, or exactly what we want.

If you want to cross the road and you do so, finding yourself on the other side, you got what you wanted. The result was as you expected. If you wanted to cross the road to catch a bus and, while doing so, someone offered you a ride right to where you were going, you got more than you expected from crossing the road. Had you not crossed the road to get to the bus stop, you would not have met the person who offered a ride. Or, having wanted to cross the road, you may have found yourself in the hospital, having only reached the middle!

The result can be entirely different from what you wanted. You may have wanted a job but, instead, the person who interviewed you for the job you did not get, sold you what turned out to be a winning lottery ticket. You did not get the job you wanted, but you did get something entirely different and, in this case, most desirable — a million dollars!

All these situations are possible because you are not omniscient. Also, there is a certain helplessness involved. Therefore, keeping all your fingers crossed may not be enough; you may be better off by crossing your toes also!

What is up the sleeve of the future is always a wonder because we simply do not know what is coming next. We do not even know what our next thought is going to be — even after having lived for forty or fifty years! Yet, we talk about the future! This, then, is the helplessness of the individual, the *jīva*.

THE LIMITATIONS OF THE JĪVA

Wherever the *jīva* is, power wielded by that *jīva* is limited. Even *Indra*'s wings are clipped. He does not have total overlordship because there are other domains where he is not even given entry. He may say, ‘I am *Indra*!’ and still be told to leave. Some one might say, ‘You might be *Indra* in your own *loka*, but here you do not even have the status of a mosquito. Get out!’ Thus, we find that no one's wingspan enables him or her to go everywhere. Such freedom, such limitlessness in terms of knowledge and power, is

not there for anyone. Our knowledge and power are both limited. For want of knowledge, we cannot avoid what we want to avoid. Knowledge is not limitless. If it were, there would be no problem. Exactly what I want to happen would happen. I would know that this action would produce that result.

Limitless knowledge means limitless power also. If you have limitless power, you do not need to do anything other than think a thought. The thought you have will shape itself perfectly. God did not commit a mistake when he thought that an avocado would be the fruit that has a big pit; it was meant to be that way. It would not be an avocado if it did not have a big pit. An apple, on the other hand, should not have a big pit; only then is it an apple. This is how the creation is.

When there is omniscience, the thoughts are clean and complete. Nothing needs to be done. Thus, God did not need six days to create the world. It is not that on the first day God did this and on the second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth days he did a few more things. Or that, having created everything else, he found there was no light and had to put a sun up there. How could he have done all those other things with no light? How could there be a first day without a sun? A day is due to the sun alone. Nor is it that God was doing a job that required him to do certain things on the first day so that he could paint on the next. On the third day he did not look at what he had done before, and decide that it was unsatisfactory, and rearrange the whole thing. God is not an architect! If the Lord is omniscient and omnipotent, all that is required is a *saṅkalpa*, a thought.

Even we, as mere mortals, do better in our dreams! We think of a world and it is there in front of us. If we think of a mountain, the mountain is up! If we think of a lion on the mountain, the lion is there! If we think of an African jungle, it is all there! We need not do anything nor do we have to go anywhere. It is all there; we created it. And if we want everyone to come and see our creation, they come in droves, in every imaginable means of transport, because we have the capacity to create them all in an instant. A capacity similar to this in the Lord, of course, is what is meant by omnipotence. That is why he is called a *satya-saṅkalpa*, one whose thought, *saṅkalpa*, is true, *satya*. When the thought is there, the whole thing is there. This is omnipotence.

THE RESULTS OF KARMA CAN NEVER BE PREDICTED

However, for you, power and knowledge being limited, certain situations cannot be avoided. For want of power, you cannot avoid certain illnesses or accidents, like falling from a tree. You know that you are falling and you may even know that you are accelerating downward at a speed of 32 feet per second per second. All this you know very well, but so what? Down you come! It matters not whether you are a great physicist or an ignoramus. One may know all the reasons as to why he or she is falling — the gravitational force, 32 feet per second per second, and so on — while someone else has

no understanding of gravitation at all. All that is known is that he or she is coming down! But, for want of power, neither of them can avoid falling.

Limitation with respect to power and knowledge, then, is the status of an individual. If this is so, *Kṛṣṇa's* statement that one's choice is only over action — *karmaṇi eva adhikāraḥ te* — is very important. You may say that there is really no choice because so much is determined by your past, and so on, but that is an endless debate. The point is that you do have a choice. To understand that much is enough. You can perform a given action, you need not do it, or you can do it differently. That capacity you have; therefore, you do have choice. This is the reason why you do not do certain things and you can force yourself to do other things, even though you do not feel like doing them. Or you can do them differently.

As a human being, then you have this choice, *adhikāra*, but over the results of action, you have no choice whatsoever. Once you perform, the *karma*, the result is taken care of. What choice do you have? If you had a choice over the result, you need not have done the *karma* at all. If you had any power over the result, you would always be successful. But, because you are not omniscient, you do not know that a certain *karma* will produce a certain result. No one knows the ways of *karma*. To know how *karma* is going to produce its result and what result it is going to produce is very difficult to figure out. This is because, your own past *karmas* may be inhibiting the results of the present *karma*. Thus, all we know is good and bad luck.

Sometimes we find ourselves in the right place at the right time and, at other times, we are in the right place but not at the right time. In order to get the desired result, I have to be at the right place at the right time, but I do not always know which is the right time and place. I can only keep trying. This means that there seems to be an element, called luck, involved here. But, we do not call it luck; instead, we refer to it as previous *karma*. If the cause-effect relationship is understood, there is no question of luck. It is simply replaced by past *karma*. Being at the right place at the right time is *karma* and being at the wrong place is also *karma*. Therefore, we really do not know; we can only go by our choice, our free will.

THE USE OF ONE'S FREE WILL

You have a free will, just as there is a free wheel in a car. You can only go by that. Whether the brakes will work or not is anyone's guess. You can check them, but at any time, they can give way. That is why they have special ramps every few miles on the highways for runaway trucks whose brakes have failed. It is not that every truck driver takes to the road without first having checked the brakes, but that anything can go wrong at any time. This is because when things are put together, their tendency is to fall apart. Whether it is a human system or any other system, the tendency is always the same. This

tendency to fall apart applies to relationships and houses also. In fact, we often spend more time maintaining our house than living in it!

Therefore, here, you can only go by your free will. There is nothing else you can do. What the result will be depends on so many unknown factors that it is always a question mark. Whether what you want from a particular *karma* will happen as you expected is anyone's guess. Since you do not have a complete choice over the results of action, you had better recognise this limitation. Limitation here is not helplessness. Helplessness is felt only when you do not accept the limitation and, therefore, it has a negative connotation, whereas acknowledging limitation is being objective. Therefore, dismissing the concept of helplessness from our minds, we recognise our limitations as individuals.

Because there is a limitation in knowledge and power, I cannot figure out exactly what I want. Nor do I know exactly what any given action will produce. When I understand this limitation, I can respond to the results of action in terms of *samatva*, evenness of mind. Any result can be responded to in either of two ways: dispassionately with *samatva* or like a yo-yo, elated because I got what I wanted or suicidal because I did not. And, if someone saves me from suicide, I will respond again like a yo-yo, feeling that I could not even commit suicide successfully, thereby developing yet another complex! This yo-yo response is because I think that I am the author of every result of action when, in fact, I am only the author of action.

Depression is created by some onerous responsibility you have assumed, one that is absolutely illegitimate. You take what does not belong to you and then smart under it because you cannot always produce what you want. This is a fact. Then why do you not just accept the fact? All that is required is to accept it objectively, to accept that this is how the creation is. This is what you are made up of and no one else, even a Swami, is made any differently. All human beings have the same types of limitations. According to the *śāstra*, even the *devas* have the same limitations, albeit with some small differences between them just as there are between human beings. Similarly, while the President of the United States definitely has more power than other people, still he cannot appoint anyone he chooses as a judge. Once he realises that he does not have a majority, he begins to withdraw quietly, proving that even presidential power is limited. Everyone's thumb has its size! Even if it swells, it can only become so big.

THE CAUSE OF ONE'S SENSE OF FAILURE

Similarly, everyone has power only to a limited extent. You can improve your power, but only to a limited degree. Knowledge also is limited and can be improved upon only in a limited way. Any thing else, such as your skills, health, longevity, your environment, are all limited and can be improved upon. But the improvement is always limited. Thus, there can only be an improved limitation. If this fact is understood clearly,

then you do not take up the responsibility of authoring the results of action, as you like. If you think you are the author of the results of action, you cannot but have a sense of failure. Is it not true?

What is being discussed here is *yoga*; it is not *jñāna*. It is simply an empirical, pragmatic attitude and has nothing to do with *ātmā* and *anātmā*, the reality, *Brahman*, and so on. It is simply looking at yourself as you are in the world, seeing how the world is and your own position in the scheme of things. To convey this attitude to *Arjuna*, *Kṛṣṇa* said, ‘Do not be the cause of the result of action, *mā karmaphalahētuḥ bhūḥ*, because you are not.’

Then what are you? You are merely the cause of action, *karma-hetu*, not the cause of the result of action, *karma-phala-hetu*. You are the author of *karma*, but not of the result thereof. Given this fact, the most appropriate thing to do is to take whatever result comes with an even attitude, *samatva*. By not getting what you want, you become wiser. Not getting what you want does not mean you have become a failure. It means only that your limited knowledge has improved somewhat. You have become wiser. Or, if the result is more than you expected, you are also wise. In addition, if you try again, thinking you will again get more, and the result is not as you expected, you say, ‘What luck!’ Still, you have become wiser. Whether you gain or do not gain, there is always wisdom to gain. There is definitely something to learn. To know that you are the author of the action, but not of the result thereof, produces *samatva*.

In this context, *samatva* is nothing more than a pragmatic attitude. To make it *karma-yoga*, we have to go one step further because *karma-yoga* implies the acceptance of *Īśvara*. Unless you accept *Īśvara*, there is no *karma-yoga*. There are a lot of people who are pragmatic and who take whatever happens in their stride and then proceed because they know it is all in the game of living and doing. They are more or less pragmatic, more or less objective, because, of course, they have their bad days. This is simple *samatva*.

KARMA-YOGA REQUIRES THE RECOGNITION OF ĪŚVARA

Samatva as *yoga*, on the other hand, requires one more aspect, recognition of *Īśvara*. Once we say the result of one's action is not within our control, and that it is taken care of, the next question is — what is it that takes care of it? All results are taken care of by certain laws, the body of which we call either the law of *dharma* or the law of *karma*. In fact, it is a law of *karma*. Other than the physical laws that we know and do not know, there does seem to be another order of law. We are always finding orders within orders. For example, when you lift your hand, physical laws are naturally at work, but there are also many other laws involved. Lifting the hand involves will. You have a thought and up it goes! There is nothing physical about this aspect of lifting your hand. You need not push any button.

Thus, although we find that this physical body, this anatomical structure, is standing on this earth according to physical law, it is born into this world by certain biological as well as physical laws. There are also physiological and psychological laws. We find, then, that there are laws within laws so that when I perform a simple *karma*, even my past *karmas* may infringe upon the result that I want from this particular action. We really do not know if this happens or not. Because we find ourselves lucky or not very lucky, we appreciate that there is some law at work. Whatever is the law that governs the *karma* and its result is the law of *karma* and that law of *karma* includes various other laws also.

No law is created by me. I am not the author of any law. If I were, I would not be helpless. I would always be able to accomplish whatever I wanted. There would be no problem. I could even reorganise the law to suit myself. I would not even need to cover the distance to reach a certain place; the place would come to me. Or, I could think about being in a certain place and I would be there immediately. However, this is not the case. Therefore, we try to go by the laws and, at the same time, we do not know very much about them.

RECOGNIZING THE AUTHOR OF THE LAWS

As one who knows very little, I can only go by the known laws and know that the laws are not authored by me. Then the question may arise as to who authored them? Certainly not my grandfather. He and his father and grandfathers before him were themselves all born of these laws. They existed because of the laws and they left the planet because of the same laws. The laws that bring people into being also take care of them and, then, take care of them for good! You find these laws always operating and no given person can be considered to be the author of them. To recognise the author, then, is to take one more step.

You must first recognise that the author of the laws produces the results of action and that the laws themselves do not. When you go one step further and recognise the author as *Īśvara*, the Lord, you have the beginnings of *karma-yoga*. There are still more steps to go, but this, at least, is the beginning: the creation is not created by me. Therefore, whoever did create it is *Īśvara* and this same *Īśvara*, is the giver of the results of action.

When you receive money from someone, month after month, the postman is the one who actually gives you the money. But this does not mean that the postman is a benevolent person who goes about distributing money to everyone like Santa Claus. There is someone other than the postman who is to be thanked. Similarly, the *karma-phala*, the result, is produced by the law and the law itself is produced by another intelligent being. That all-intelligent being, *Brahman*, is called *Īśvara*, the Lord,

with reference to the creation. He is the Overlord, in fact, the top man, and the boss, not limited by time, space, or anything.

THE NATURE OF THE AUTHOR

The Veda comes in here to address the question of the author and his creation. From that *Brahman* alone, the five elements are born; therefore, with reference to the creation, that *Brahman* is considered to be *Parameśvara*. Not only is he *Parameśvara*, the author, the maker of the creation, *nimittakāraṇa*, he is also the material. This is another important point. Because the world, *jagat* is *mithyā* having no independent existence apart from *Brahman*, it requires only a *mithyā* cause, called *māyā*. *Māyā* also being *mithyā*, has no independent existence apart from the *satya*, *Brahman*, whereas *satya* does not depend upon anything for its existence. In the *māyā*, there is *satya*. Being *mithyā*, the *jagat* is also *satya* and so are we. It is not that originally there was *Brahman* and now we have to cross over everything to reach that *Brahman*. Everything is *Brahman*. Wherever there is *mithyā*, there is *satya* and that *satya* is the basis, *adhiṣṭhāna*, for everything.

Therefore, that *Parameśvara* himself, who is *paraṃ brahma* and who is the cause of the creation *nimitta-kāraṇa*, who is omniscient, *sarvajña*, and omnipotent, *sarvaśaktimān*, is also the material cause of the creation, *upādāna-kāraṇa*. Thus, he is not only the maker of the results of action, but also the very law, the very result of action, in fact. Because our topic is *karma-yoga*, we will not go beyond this point here since, to do so, becomes *jñāna*. We say, then, that *Īśvara* is the maker of the laws and, also, that the laws are not separate from him. The results of action, coming as they do from the laws that are not separate from *Īśvara*, the Lord, and they come from *Īśvara*. It is this recognition of *Īśvara* that converts the simple *samatva* to *karma-yoga*.

Without *Īśvara*, what we have been discussing is nothing more than a pragmatic approach to life. But, here, we are dealing with a purely religious approach, which is entirely different because it recognises *Īśvara*, the Lord, as the giver of the results of action, *karma-phala-dātā*, and oneself as only the doer of action, *karma-kartā*. Therefore, to be a *karma-yogī*, one has to accept *Īśvara*.

Īśvara now has one more definition — one who has all-knowledge, *sarvajña*. And when we say *sarvaśaktimān*, we mean that he is all-powerful and has all skills, being the creator of everything. Another defining word we have seen is *karma-phala-dātā*, the giver of the fruits of action. These definitions eliminate the problems that arise when it is said that God created all beings. I may naturally ask why God created one person blind and another lame. If I am told that, being God, he is justified to do whatever he likes and that I should not question him, I will definitely ask why God's creation is even talked about since it is obviously nothing to boast about — especially when I am also told that he is all-compassion! I am asked to worship and love

him, but when I look at this creation with so much human suffering, God's compassion falls apart for me. Then I am told that he is justified in whatever he does and I am supposed to love him. How can I?

THE EXPLANATION FOR HUMAN SUFFERING

The answer to all of this is that not only is he the creator, he is also the creation. The individual, *jīva*, is non-separate from and, therefore, not different from *Parameśvara*. The individual self, *ātmā*, is *Brahman* and, therefore, all that is there is the *ātmā* that is *Brahman*. The *ātmā*, the *jīva*, is not created. When you say a person is created, it is only with reference to a given physical body at a given time. The *jīva* is due to ignorance alone and, ignorance being beginningless, the *jīva* is beginningless, *anādi*. The subtle and gross bodies, *sūkṣma* and *sthūla śarīras* are born in the sense that the subtle body, *sūkṣma-śarīra* always adapts itself to the gross body, *sthūla-śarīra*. We also find that the *sūkṣma-śarīra* is always in keeping with the *sthūla-śarīra* it adapts itself to. Thus, only a cat's *sūkṣma-śarīra* is present in a cat's body, and not a human *sūkṣma-śarīra*. Otherwise, the cat will not mew at you; it will talk to you, saying 'Come on, it's morning. Get up!'

We find that in this world of living beings, in each unit of creation, there is a *sthūla-śarīra*, which is in keeping with one's *karma-phala*. *Īśvara*, defined as the *karma-phala-dātā* is not to blame. Nor do you need to justify *Īśvara's* action either. To do so would only be justifying your own! You did it; you got it. You asked for it; you have had it — and you have it also. You will continue to have it because you keep asking for it. Therefore, no one else is responsible for what comes to you. Every *jīva* is responsible for what that person is. This is the kind of responsibility that is assumed by the *jīva* here. You have a capacity, a free will, to perform action. You can do whatever you want to do, but the result is always something that is taken care of by the law that is *Īśvara*.

Why at all is this understanding necessary? To answer this question, we have to go a little more into the human psyche, defined here in the *Gītā* as a psyche that operates on the basis of its own likes and dislikes, *rāga* and *dveṣa*. The entire *Gītā* psychology is dealt with in terms of *rāga* and *dveṣa* alone. No other norms are used. *Rāga* and *dveṣa* can be in an unspelt form or a spelled-out form. You may not know that you have a liking for something until you happen to see it closely. Otherwise, how is it that even though you meet so many people every day, one day you suddenly meet someone you like a lot. Of all the people you have met and known, why this particular one? In fact, it is a wonder to your family and friends that you chose this person as a life-partner when someone else, whom they thought more suitable, was already after you!

There are a lot of likes and dislikes embedded in us which are not shaped properly. We may call them unconscious, subconscious, or whatever, but still, they are unshaped

likes and dislikes, meaning that they are not very clear to you. But they are evoked when situations appear before you. All these are included in the term *rāga-dveṣas*. *Rāga* is that which is pleasing or desirable to you and *dveṣa* is that which is undesirable in your view. Both *rāga* and *dveṣa* are purely according to you alone, they are totally limited to the individual. Wherever psychology is involved, you must always know that it is according to you alone. When you say some man did something wrong to you, it is only according to you. In fact, if you ask the man, he will say that he gave you what you deserved. Thus, it is always a matter of perception — yours and the other person's.

AVOIDANCE OF THE UNDESIRABLE IS ALSO A FULFILMENT

What should you do when your whole life is dedicated to the altar of *rāga-dveṣas*? To fulfil *dveṣa*, you must stall what you do not want to happen, and when you succeed, you are very happy that you avoided it. Some people have become great devotees simply by avoiding what could have been a very serious accident. They say that God saved them. When you avoid something unpleasant, it is a great relief. People talk as though it is a great accomplishment when, really, you did not accomplish anything. The incident that could have created a problem for you simply did not happen. Still you are so relieved that you become a devotee! Why? Because something was avoided. Thus, avoidance is a fulfilment, too.

We see, then, that what I do not want and I have, I have to get rid of; what I want to have, I should have; and what I already have that is desirable to me has got to be retained. This is *rāga-dveṣa*. Therefore, all your activities are nothing but *rāga-dveṣas*. And all your psychological problems are also nothing but *rāga-dveṣa*. What else are they? If you had no *rāga-dveṣas*, you would have no problems, just like in deep sleep. Until you sleep, you may have *rāga-dveṣas* — the pillow may not be comfortable, the room may be too chilly or you may have a hundred other complaints. But, once you have gone to sleep there are no likes and dislikes.

This *rāga-dveṣa* argument is simple and complete. Certain things should be kept simple because the more you complicate them, the more problems there are. This applies especially to psychological problems which are based on one's anxiety to fulfil likes and dislikes and, also, on the judgements one makes with reference to their non-fulfilment.

The necessity for *karma-yoga* is because people are in the hands of *rāga-dveṣas*. Their behaviour, their activities, their responses and prejudices — cultural, racial, and otherwise — are all controlled by their likes and dislikes. All prejudices and preferences come under *rāga-dveṣas*, whether they are binding or non-binding. It is said that even gods have preferences. When we worship Lord *Ganeśa*, for example, we offer him a sweet *modaka* that we say he likes. This is based, of course, on our own likes. Thus, we impute our own *rāga-dveṣa* to *Bhagavān* also. We say *Ganeśa* likes this, *Śiva* likes

that, and so on, so that we can deal with the deity as a person. You cannot deal with someone without preferences, but the idea is that our preferences should be non-binding.

PREFERENCES SHOULD BE NON-BINDING

In everyone's life there are preferences that are non-binding in nature and others that are binding. Preferences that are binding in nature are the ones we have to deal with. About those that are non-binding, we need not do anything. In fact, the *gītā-sāstra* does not deal with them at all because they are not a problem. Whenever the *Gītā* talks about *rāga-dveṣas*, it does so in terms of one's binding likes and dislikes only. Even the one teaching the *Gītā*, *Kṛṣṇa*, the Lord, had preferences. For instance, he always chose the flute; he did not come with a guitar or a *viñā*. We know that he knew what he was talking about, as evidenced by his life. Whether we take him as a wise man or as *Īśvara*, the Lord, we cannot say that he had *rāga-dveṣas*, even though he had his preferences.

All of this is to point out that there are non-binding and binding *rāga-dveṣas* and we must deal with the binding ones. The binding *rāga-dveṣas* are those whose fulfilment is a must for you and in whose non-fulfilment you feel like a loser, a struggler, a seeker, all empty inside. You are a seeker because you have hope; you want to fulfil your likes and dislikes. These *rāga-dveṣas* are binding in nature and they make you act. Action does not take place without reason. When you undertake a course of action, there is definitely a like or dislike involved. *Rāga-dveṣa* is commonly called want or desire, *kāma*. These likes or dislikes are behind every kind of action.

We are talking here about the person who has just entered into a life of *yoga*, for which the cause is *karma*. Therefore, the *yoga* should definitely include one's own likes and dislikes. When you say, 'I am a *karma-yogī*,' you have to accept that you have likes and dislikes to fulfil. To do this, you have to undertake activities which produce results and these results are not always what you want because you have control only over your actions, but not over the results. The results come from *Īśvara*. First you accept *Īśvara* and then you accept *Īśvara* as the *karma-phala-dātā*, the giver of the fruits of action. When you do this, you have a purely religious attitude, the attitude of a devotee, a *bhakta*.

The recognition of *Īśvara* as the *karma-phala-dātā*, is what makes you appreciate *Īśvara* in your daily life. Even when you fall down and incur an injury, *Īśvara's* grace is at work. That you fell down and hurt yourself does not mean that his grace is absent. Under the law of *karma*, you escaped greater injury; you did not break altogether. One can fall down and receive a small injury, not be injured at all, or end up in the hospital, never to return! All these are possibilities. Therefore, as a devotee, we see *Īśvara* working constantly.

THE ATTITUDE OF A BHAKTA

No matter what the *karma-phala* is, I confront *Īśvara*. When I open my mouth to talk, when my tongue is able to produce the words that tumble out one after the other, it is all because *Īśvara* is at work. *Karma* I can do, but *karma-phala* is something that takes place because of the laws that are the Lord. Therefore, every action producing a result, even a small action like opening and closing the eyelids, is the work of the Lord. In every action, there is an intended result that sometimes happens and sometimes does not. It is all according to the laws. Therefore, as a *bhakta*, a devotee, I continuously confront *Īśvara* as I receive my *karma-phala*.

Since every result comes from *Īśvara*, I take it as *prasāda*, a Sanskrit word that does not have an exact English equivalent. The word ‘grace’ has a somewhat intangible connotation, whereas *prasāda* covers both the tangible results and the intangible, the grace. When I offer a fruit to the Lord, it comes back to me, given to me from the altar. The fruit that comes back is called *prasāda*. For an English word for *prasāda*, to exist, the concept must be there — and it is not there. A dieting person may refuse a laddu, but not when he comes to know that it is from *Tirupati Venkateśvara*. What converted the laddu into *prasāda*? The tangible laddu becomes *prasāda*, because the person now knows that it comes from the Lord.

Therefore, what converts a *karma-phala* into a *prasāda* is purely your recognition that it comes from the Lord. It is not just a statement; it is seeing, understanding. This is where the word ‘experience’ can be used, if at all. It is a way of looking at the whole thing. Recognition that *Īśvara* is the *karma-phala-dātā* converts every *karma-phala* into *prasāda*. Therefore, *prasāda* is not an object; it is a way of looking at an object.

Prasāda is purely symbolic. If a person with diabetes eats laddus, his blood sugar levels will definitely rise, not because he is eating *prasāda* but because he is eating laddus. *Prasāda* is an attitude, a way of looking at an object, which itself is born out of understanding that it comes from the Lord. Therefore, *prasāda* can be anything — a fruit, a leaf, a sugar crystal, a laddu, or even a child. Because, in India, a child is looked upon as *prasāda*, there are many people who are named as Prasad. Anything that comes to you as *karma-phala*, as a gift from the altar of *Īśvara* is called *prasāda*, which includes the attitudes with which you receive it. *Prasāda* is not received and then cast away disrespectfully; it is received in a certain manner. It is this *prasāda*, then, that brings about *samatva*, sameness of mind.

Once everything is *prasāda*, I have nothing really to complain about. I have only something to learn. Therefore, when the *karma-phala* comes, I take it as *prasāda*. If it is more than what I wanted, I take it as *prasāda*. If it is less than I wanted, it is still *prasāda*. And if it is exactly what I wanted, opposite to what I wanted, or different from

what I wanted, it is all *prasāda*. As every *karma-phala* comes, there is a sameness in your reception of it. This is what *Kṛṣṇa* is saying here when he tells *Arjuna* not to be the cause of *karma-phala*. The *karma-phala-hetu* is *Īśvara*, not *Arjuna*. *Arjuna* is the cause of action, but not the cause of its results.

Further, *Kṛṣṇa* said, ‘Let there be no attachment to inaction — *akarmaṇi saṅgaḥ mā astu*.’ Action itself is not the problem. It is your response to the result of action that is the problem. Thus, inaction here means fear of action — not of action, as such, but fear that the results you want will not come. Even before you begin doing an action, you expect to fail. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that *karma* itself is not binding. Nor does the *karma-phala* bind him. It is his response to the *karma-phala* that makes *karma* seem like a bondage. Thus, let there be a love for action, but let the results be received by you as *prasāda*.

योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा धनञ्जय ।

सिद्ध्यसिद्ध्योः समो भूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते ॥ ४८ ॥

yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi saṅgaṃ tyaktvā dhanañjaya
siddhyasiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā samatvaṃ yoga ucyate

Verse 48

धनञ्जय *dhanañjaya* — Oh! *Dhanañjaya* (*Arjuna*); योगस्थः *yogasthaḥ* — being steadfast in *yoga*; सङ्गम् *saṅgam* — attachment; त्यक्त्वा *tyaktvā* — abandoning; सिद्ध्यसिद्ध्योः *siddhyasiddhyoḥ* — with reference to success and failure; समः *samaḥ* — the same; भूत्वा *bhūtvā* — being; कर्माणि *karmāṇi* — actions; कुरु *kuru* — do; समत्वम् *samatvam* — evenness of mind; योगः उच्यते *yogaḥ ucyate* — is called *yoga*

Remaining steadfast in *yoga*, Oh! *Dhanañjaya*, perform actions, abandoning attachment, remaining the same to success and failure alike.

This evenness of mind is called *yoga*.

The recognition in your life that *Īśvara* is the *karma-phala-dātā* brings about a certain attitude, called *samatva*. *Rāga* and *dveṣa* are the cause for attachment, *saṅga*, which prompts us to say, ‘This should or should not happen to me.’ The *rāga-dveṣa* become a *saṅga* with reference to any *karma-phala* that is going to affect you. Then only is it *rāga-dveṣa*. But if you have the attitude of *samatva*, *rāga-dveṣa* are neutralised. They are rendered incapable of creating any kind of reaction in you. The *rāga-dveṣa* manifest themselves through various *karmas* and in time by one's attitude of *samatva*, they become neutralised. This is what is meant by *karma-yoga*.

Staying or abiding in *yoga*, being *yogastha*, means enjoying this attitude of *samatva*. This evenness of mind with reference to both success, *siddhi*, and failure, *asiddhi*, is called *yoga*. It is what makes you a *yogī*. *Samatvaṃ yogaḥ ucyate* — is a separate sentence in this verse that defines *yoga*.

As stated earlier, there are two definitions for *karma-yoga* in this chapter. The first one is this one, *samatva*, whereas the other one is — *yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*.

SCRIPTURALLY ENJOINED KARMA AND THE FOUR ĒĀRAMAS

Scripturally enjoined actions, *vaidika-karmas*, are made up of many rituals. These rituals can be divided into four categories: *kāmya-karmas*, meant for producing given results desired by a given person; *nitya-karma*, daily rituals; *naimittika-karma*, occasional rituals; and *prāyaścitta-karma*, rituals to right any wrongs done.

There is a ritual called *putrakāmeṣṭi* for those who want children. *Daśaratha*, *Rāma*'s father, had no children. Being a king, he had to have children so that there would be someone to rule the kingdom after his death. Naturally, he wanted children. Therefore, he performed the ritual, *putrakāmeṣṭi* and had four children. *Putrakāmeṣṭi* is still done and known to work, even in fairly recent times. Perhaps, any ritual in any religion will work if the person performing it has faith, *śraddhā*, in it. *Putrakāmeṣṭi* is a very expensive ritual, so that only a rich man can do it. We see here how the Veda can be very tricky. This kind of *karma* or ritual is an example of *kāmya-karma*, a ritual performed purely for a given desired result.

Even though *kāmya-karma* was designed and unfolded by the Veda, which tells you that a certain *karma* will produce a certain result, this does not mean that *kāmya-karma* is for *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*. Particular rituals are mentioned for particular results and are purely for desired objects, *kāmya*, such as the desire for a child. Similarly, there are many rituals mentioned in the Veda whose result is said to be heaven. These, too, are all *kāmya-karmas*.

Then there are *nitya-karmas* and *naimittika-karmas*, which can be considered together, *Nitya-karma* means a ritual or prayer that is to be done every day. Which rituals or prayers are to be done, depends on a person's status. An unmarried person, *brahmacārī*, has a two-fold *karma* to perform. The first is a prayer, *sandhyā-vandana*, enjoined by the Veda to be done three times a day — at sunrise, at noon, and at sunset. The second is a fire ritual, *samidhādāna*, performed once a day in the morning, wherein the prayer is, 'May I become brilliant. May I learn. May I be a person who has total control over myself.'

For a married person, called a householder, *gṛhastha*, the *nitya-karmas* differ somewhat. *Sandhyā-vandana* continues, whereas *samidhādāna* is replaced by *agni-hotra*, another fire ritual which is also a *nitya-karma*. This *karma* has to be performed twice a day, morning and evening. On the day of marriage, the fire is lit and it is not allowed to die until the person takes *sannyāsa* or dies. If the married person dies before *sannyāsa*, this same fire is used for the cremation of the body. Thus, the life of a

householder is a dedicated, religious life. The person can do anything in between, but these *nitya-karmas* have to be performed every day without fail.

When a married person withdraws from the duties of a householder and enters the next stage of life called *vānaprastha-āśrama*, a few more *karmas* are added. These are of the nature of meditation. In this third stage of life, *sandhyā-vandana* and *agni-hotra* rituals must still be performed. There is no way of escaping these *karmas* — except by *sannyāsa* or death. In *sannyāsa* the vow or commitment, *dīkṣā*, taken earlier to perform these rituals is given up and the person is no longer bound to do these *karmas*. One's hair and the various accoutrements of the earlier initiation are also given up, including the *gāyatrī-mantra*. Only the 'oṃ-kāra' remains and a few essentials. By saying that he is no longer interested in gaining heaven, having children, and so on, and by saying that no one should be afraid of him thereafter, a man becomes a *sannyāsī*. It is a very serious commitment! But until *sannyāsa*, he must definitely perform the various rituals enjoined by the Veda.

Performing these *nitya-karmas*, you do gain results in the form of *puṇya* or *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, but the main point here is that they are to be done daily and generally they are done. *Naimittika-karmas*, on the other hand, are those rituals to be done on particular occasions, at a particular time, on a particular day, like on the anniversary of the death of one's mother or father. Such a ritual called *śrāddha*, which must be performed monthly on the new moon day and a more elaborate ritual is done on the anniversary date itself. This, too, is done until *sannyāsa*. *Śrāddha* is not done daily and is only done if one's father or mother has passed away. Because these *karmas* are done on a particular occasion, *nimitta*, they are called *naimittika-karmas*.

Naimittika-karmas are generally performed by householders, although the *śrāddha-karma*, mentioned above, is done by everyone except *sannyāsīs*. Other *naimittika-karmas* performed by house holders include the rituals done, on the day when the northern and southern Solstices begin. Eclipses of the sun and moon are also recognised in this way, based on ancient methods of calculation. It has been said that if you think the *śāstra* is false, wait for an eclipse!

Finally, *karmas* that are done to right a wrong, called *prāyaścitta-karmas*, are performed when what is not to be done was done or there was some omission during the performance of any ritual. Thus, a particular *karma* can neutralise the results of wrong action, be it an omission or a commission. An example of *prāyaścitta-karmas* is *cāndrāyaṇa* wherein you regulate the amount of food you eat for one month. Beginning on the full moon day, you take the amount of food that you would ordinarily eat. The next day, you cut it down by one-fifteenth and the second day, by another fifteenth, continuing in this way until the new moon day, during which you eat nothing at all. Then you begin again on the first day after the new moon, on the *prathamā*, by taking one-fifteenth, then two-fifteenths on the second day, adding increments of one fifteenth

portion each day until the full moon day, when again you eat as before. During this entire period, certain rituals are performed. *Prāyaścitta-karma* then, is the fourth type of *karma*, a *karma* of atonement.

THE PURPOSE OF KARMA-YOGA

In *karma-yoga*, you give up *kāmya-karma* and perform *nitya-naimittika-karmas* as an offering to the Lord, as well as for purifying the mind. According to the definition of *kāmya-karma* stated above, *kāma* is always involved. This *kāma* is given up in *karma-yoga*. *Śaṅkara* says here that by performing these various *vaidika* rituals for the sake of *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, you become a *karma-yogī*. Otherwise, you are only a *karmī*. When you perform *karma* for a particular end alone, you will gain only that end. You will not gain the mind necessary for gaining the knowledge that is *mokṣa*, because you have no *vyavasāyātmikā buddhi*. If, however, you have *vyavasāyātmikā buddhi*, all your *karmas* are directed towards one thing, *mokṣa*. And for *mokṣa*, you require the mind, *antaḥ-karaṇa*, that is prepared. *Mokṣa* is not gained through *karma*; *karma* is only for preparing the mind. Thus, preparing the mind through *karma* becomes *yoga* for you.

In the *Gītā*, the word '*karma*' is usually used with reference to *vaidika-karma*. However, when *Arjuna* was asked to do *karma*, it was not a ritual to be performed. He was to fight; it was his duty. *Śaṅkara* confirms this also. Fighting is the 'to be done,' obligatory *karma* of a *kṣatriya*. Thus, *karma-yoga* covers all activities. And if *karma* is taken to mean any action performed, which is the actual meaning of the word, then we have to look at *karma* from the standpoint of a person's entire life. The actions then referred to will be those activities that one performs in the attempt to fulfil all one's *rāga-dveṣas*.

Since you do have *rāga-dveṣas*, and they have to be neutralised, what will you do? You cannot just command yourself to give up your likes and dislikes as you would a hat. Likes and dislikes are there; they are not just given up. They constitute the person. However, when you perform actions with a sameness of attitude, *samatva*, towards the results of your actions, your *rāga-dveṣas* are neutralised. This attitude is *karma-yoga*.

The attitude of *samatva* mentioned in this verse is not with reference to the action itself; it is with reference to the result, the *phala*, of any action. This attitude is present in the Vedic culture and is called *prasāda-buddhi*. We have seen that even children are named Prasad because they are thought of as *prasāda*. If your son is *prasāda*, then you are also *prasāda* to your parents. Your physical body is not only *prasāda* to others, but also to yourself. A house is called *prasāda*. The food cooked, offered to the Lord, and then eaten is also considered *prasāda*. Thus, this attitude (*prasāda-buddhi*) is an important aspect of *karma-yoga*.

It is important to note here that any translation that says we should perform action without expecting a result has no basis in the Veda. Such an interpretation serves only to create additional complexes. Try as we might, we find that we cannot do *karma* without expecting some result. The truth of the matter is that no one can perform action without expecting a result. Even a dull-witted person cannot engage in an activity without expecting a result. Therefore, this meaning of *karma-yoga* must be abandoned.

ANOTHER DEFINITION OF KARMA-YOGA

Although this verse presents a particular line of argument, the fact is that this is not the only way of looking at it. Let us, therefore, look at the other definition of *yoga*, *yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*. *Karmasu* means ‘With reference to actions.’ Thus, with reference to actions, *yoga* is *kauśala*, meaning the state of mind or the disposition of a *kuśala*, one who is an expert.

All kinds of meanings are given to this word, *kauśala*. It is the abstract noun of the word *kuśala*, expert — the qualities that make an expert. Thus, it has been said that *kauśala* is expertise or skill. From this meaning, a modern translation for this second definition of *yoga* has come about. People say, ‘Skill in action is *yoga*,’ which seems to convey that it is efficiency of some kind. Although efficiency is always desirable, it is not what *karma-yoga* is about. The inappropriateness of this translation will become clear as we proceed.

In the *Gītā*, the word ‘*karma*’ is usually used with reference to *vaidika-karma*. However, if *karma* is taken to mean any action performed, which is the general meaning of the word, then we have to look at it from the standpoint of the person's entire life. The actions then referred to will be the collective activities that you perform in your attempt to fulfil all your *rāga-dveṣas*.

Here, the ‘skill-in-action’ interpretation, meaning that if you are very skilful in action you are a *karma-yogī*, must also be abandoned. This is a secular translation designed to bypass *Īśvara*. There are a lot of people who read the *Gītā* without recognizing *Īśvara* at all. Those who want *karma-yoga* without recognizing *Īśvara* as the *karma-phala-dātā* simply cannot have it. There is *karma-yoga* only when *Īśvara* is recognised. *Karma-yoga* is a religious attitude, a devotee's attitude. There is no way of escaping this. There is no such thing as secular *karma-yoga*.

They say that when there is skill in action, when there is efficiency, then the person is a *karma-yogī*. A *yogī* may be efficient in whatever he does, but how can he be efficient if he is given a new job or is just beginning to learn to drive, for example? He has not yet acquired the necessary skill and, therefore, he will be inefficient in this respect. Thus, a *karma-yogī* can definitely be inefficient in a given area. Conversely, merely because a person is efficient in a given area does not mean that he is a *yogī*. A

pickpocket, for example, is very efficient in picking pockets, whereas if you try to do it, you will get caught. Even before you pick, you will be picked up! Picking pockets is not easy. Not only do you have to be skilful in getting an object out of someone's pocket, you also need to be a master of deception in order not to be accused. Such a person may be skilful in action, but this is definitely not *karma-yoga*. A *yogī* in action may be skilful, but this does not mean that skill in action is *yoga*.

WHAT IS KAUSĀLA?

Then what does the word *kausāla* mean in this definition? To understand this, let us go back to the first definition, *samatvaṃ yogaḥ ucyate*, where *yoga* is defined as sameness. Suppose a man says to the Swami, 'I have my likes and dislikes. For instance, I like my neighbour's money. He has a lot of it and has converted it into gold which he keeps in his safe. I definitely have a *rāga* for his money and I also have a *dveṣa* for this man. I hate him because he is so blatant about his riches. He thinks he is such a big shot and he is always showing off. Therefore, I hate him and I love his money! I want to fulfil my *rāga-dveṣa*. Also, I happened to listen to your talk yesterday. Until then, I had never heard of *karma-yoga*.

'Now I want to ask you, will I continue to be a *karma-yogī* if I carry on with my plan? I have been working on a tunnel between my house and the room in which my neighbour's safe is located. I know how to open the safe. I know how the whole thing has to be done. I have only one hour's work left and then I will be there in the room. I was going to do it last night but, having listened to your talk, what I was doing started to bother me. I really want to be a *karma-yogī*. It looks to me as though I can continue with my plan and still be a *karma-yogī* because you say I have a right, a choice, over my action. I have already sent my wife and children away and I will not give you their address. I am telling you only this much, hoping that you will not tell anyone. I intend to join them tomorrow. Tonight I am off. My house is already empty and, since I have been renting it, I have nothing more to claim from it. Therefore, everything is set and I am going to work.

'Of course I am taking a risk. You say that *Īśvara* is the *karma-phala-dātā*, the giver of the fruits of action. So I am going to work one more hour tonight so that I can clear out the safe. Of course, I do not know what is going to happen. There may be nothing in it at all. My neighbour may have already cleared it out and put the gold elsewhere. Or, the gold may be there but I may get caught. I may be shot or beaten up. I may be handed over to the police and have to be in jail for a number of years. Anything is possible. Or I may get away with it also. My hope, of course, is that I will get away with it. Therefore, whatever comes, I am going to take it as *prasāda*. If I get all the gold, fine, it is *prasāda*. And if I am beaten up, I will take every stroke as *prasāda*. Will that be okay? Do you think I am a *karma-yogī*? Do you think that when the Lord says in the

Gītā that a *karma-yogī* is very beloved to him he is referring to me? That is what I want to be. I want to be beloved to the Lord. If I take everything as *prasāda*, will I be beloved?’

It is for this person's sake that we have the definition — *yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*. *Kauśala* is discretion in one's *karma*, in one's choice. It is not an untethered choice without norms. It is choice with discretion, meaning that one's choice should be in keeping with certain norms. This, then, is another very important aspect of *karma-yoga*. The first definition is with reference to the results of action — *karmaphale samah bhūtvā* — which defines *karma-yoga* as an attitude of *samatva*. Whereas this definition is with reference to the action itself — *yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*.

Kauśala is your capacity to interpret correctly. This capacity to interpret with reference to norms for human interaction is the discretion, the expertise. The norm for human interaction is called *dharma* and the opposite is called *adharmā*. *Dharma* and *adharmā* form the standard norms. They are not absolutes in that they have to be interpreted according to the given situation. The person who can interpret them properly is called *kuśala*. *Dharma* and *adharmā* are not to be interpreted according to convenience, but must be in line with what is proper. Proper interpretation of *dharma* is what is meant by *kauśala*. *Kauśala* is *yoga* because, again, you are not in the hands of your *rāga-dveṣas* when you exercise discretion in your choice of action.

DHARMA AND ADHARMA ARE UNIVERSAL

The man in the story has *rāga-dveṣas*. His *rāga* is for the money and the *dveṣa* is for his neighbour to whom the money belongs. He wants to go by his *rāga-dveṣas*. And they are totally against *dharma* and *adharmā*. What should not be done, he is doing. Therefore, he is going against *dharma*, which means he is doing *adharmā*. But could it not be said that this is all a man-made order? No.

Suppose, in a particular country, there is no law against stealing. Does that mean that if some one takes away what belongs to another, it would not be called stealing? No; it would still be called stealing. This is not the same, as the man-made convention that traffic shall proceed on the right. We naturally all proceed on the right because to do otherwise is a definite risk to life and limb, and it is also illegal. Even if you say you are ready to take the risk, the police will not let you because you are not the only one involved. Other people will be in danger. Convention, then, we can describe as man-made.

But is the law against stealing man-made? No; because the law that stealing is not right, is not man-made; it is universal. If no one had anything that was his or her own, there would be no stealing. Even though there would be people, there would be nothing to steal and therefore no one can steal from the other. However, everyone has something

of his or her own and, therefore, there is going to be stealing. Even a Swami has a begging bowl and a *mālā*. These are the two important symbols, *liṅga*, of a *sādhu* and he is supposed to carry them. There are thieves for this also — especially now that they have become rare and therefore costly. Thus, even *sādhus* can lose their few possessions because, as long as anyone has something that is his or her own, there is such a thing called stealing. This is universal.

Like *adharma*, *dharma* also is universal, and is not man-made. *Dharma* is something that is commonly sensed by a human being and is meant for human interaction. I live and let live. I want to be left alone in the sense that I do not want the few possessions I have to be stolen. And, at the same time, I let others live in the same way.

There is a particular order that is sensed commonly and this order, called *dharma*, is the very basis upon which we are supposed to interact with our fellow beings. The scriptures confirm this and also say that if you go against the order, your action produces what is called *pāpa* for you. The scriptures do not tell us what is right and wrong, *dharma* and *adharma*, ‘Thou shalt do this; thou shalt not do that,’ etc. They merely confirm what we already know. We do not need anyone to tell us these things. Indeed, our knowledge is such that we tell everyone else! Scriptures the world over merely confirm the existence of a common-sense *dharma*. It is not that they came into the world at certain periods of time and, finding there was no *dharma*, established one. People knew what was right and wrong before the scriptures came along.

CHOICE IN ACTION IMPLIES NORMS

This common-sense *dharma* is there for a human being because he or she has a choice in action. This choice implies a set of norms, which must be known. If these norms, the *dharma*, were not there, the creation would be defective. I could not have been given a choice without having also been given the norms that go with choice. This would be something like giving a Ferrari to someone who is drunk and does not know how to drive or giving it to someone when it has no brakes!

Having been given a choice, the norms should be common to all without any education being necessary. This is a very important aspect of *dharma*. To be given a choice, but no knowledge of the norms, would also be a defect in the creation. If I did have to be educated about these norms, then no one would have the same opportunity to receive this education. Then certain people would be stealing or getting hurt because they never knew they should not steal or get hurt. They were never taught. Therefore, without any education at all, I know that I should not steal or get hurt. I also know that others do not want to be stolen from or be hurt. This, then, is the common norm.

What is equally common to you and me is the norm on the basis of which we can choose our actions. What I do not want from others, I find others also do not want from me. Therefore, we have a common norm, *dharma*, and the person who is able to interpret his or her to-be-done actions in terms of the *dharma* has *kauśala*.

Let us now complete the story of the man who wants to continue his plans to steal his neighbour's money and take the result as *prasāda*. He will only be fulfilling one part of the *karma-yoga* definition. The other part will remain unfulfilled because there is no *kauśala*. He is not even interpreting; he is going against the very *dharma*. If someone wanted to rob him, how would he take it? He would not allow it, which means that he should not rob anyone else because it is a wrong action. If everyone were simply to say, 'So what?' to all the norms, all we would have would be confusion. Even today, the society is not so confused, that we are prevented from conducting our lives. People more or less do follow some norms. If everyone were to do exactly what they wanted, they would be hitting others, robbing them, and so on, all of which would be going against *dharma*. There would be no order, only confusion, and no one could live his or her life.

There is order in the world, even today. That is why we are able to live peacefully. Some of us do not even have gates or fences because there is *dharma*. Since there are boundaries that people seem to follow, we cannot say there is no *dharma*. Of course, there is *adharmā* too, because choice is there and people are sometimes going to abuse their power of choice.

The man who wants to rob his neighbour has to be told, along with *Arjuna*, that he must conform to *dharma*, even though his likes and dislikes prompt him to do otherwise. What happens to *rāga-dveṣas* then? They are curtailed at the level of action. They must be aligned with *dharma* and *adharmā*. If there are lingering likes and dislikes which are not in conformity with *dharma* and *adharmā*, there is no one in my heart to claim them. I do not follow them; I do not join them. They rise and they die a natural death. There is no one to claim them because I have no connection with them. They simply rise as fancies and die as fancies. I go only by what is right and wrong.

SUMMARY OF THE DEFINITION OF KARMA-YOGA

To summarise, then, we have a two-part definition for *karma-yoga* — *samatvaṃ yogaḥ ucyate* and *yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*. With reference to the results of your actions, there is a sameness, *samatva*, in your response. Gaining this attitude of *samatva* depends upon the recognition of *Īśvara* as the *karma-phala-dātā*, the giver of the fruits of all actions. Whatever result you gain, the laws do not cheat you in any way. Therefore, as a *karma-yogī* you have the same attitude, towards both the desirable and undesirable results of your actions — *karma-phale samatva-buddhiḥ*. Then, with reference to action itself, because there is choice involved, as a *karma-yogī* you exercise

your choice based on certain norms. These norms are indicated by the rules of *dharma* and *adharma*. They are universal, common to all — *sāmānya -dharma*.

EVEN UNIVERSAL LAWS REQUIRE INTERPRETATION

Although common to all, *sāmānya -dharma* must be interpreted to accommodate given situations so that it is appropriate to the situation. This interpreted *dharma* is referred to as *viśeṣa-dharma*.

Ordinary laws also have similar provisions. That you should keep to the right in traffic is a law that is universal in this country. But suppose a huge truck is coming towards me in the same lane. By keeping to the left the driver of the truck is doing the wrong thing and I am doing the right thing. But, I am driving a very small, lightweight car. By keeping to the right, I am right, but if I refuse to interpret the law and do not budge an inch because I am right and he is wrong, I will certainly suffer the consequences.

Suppose, however, I swerve to the left, making sure that I am not going to hit anyone in the process, and then return again to the right when I have avoided the truck, then I have saved the situation. If a police officer sees me going to the left, he or she will not give me a citation, but will go after the truck driver instead. I interpreted the law rightly and the officer will probably congratulate me for escaping serious injury or death.

Every law has an exception. No one has ever made a law, including *Bhagavān*, without there being an exception. For example, Newton's law of gravitation applies only in certain areas. If you are in a spaceship, peanuts cannot be eaten in the same way as they are eaten here. Instead of going into your mouth when you toss them up, they will go to the right or to the left. Even though Newton's law is really *Bhagavān's* law, still it does not operate in the same way in all places at all times. Thus, there are no absolute laws.

That there are no absolute laws, however, does not mean that there is no universality. *Dharma* is universal because I feel the same way as others feel. However, even what is universal has to be interpreted according to the situation. Although you expect people to speak the truth to you and people expect the same from you, sometimes you may have to tell a lie in order to save someone's life. This is *viśeṣa-dharma* or interpreted *dharma*. *Viśeṣa-dharma* is when someone other than yourself is the beneficiary of the lie. Thus, the differences between *dharma* and *adharma* with references to speaking truth depends on whether or not you are the beneficiary of the lie.

Other examples of *viśeṣa-dharma* are those *dharmas* imposed by the scriptures, which are only valid in so far as a given place, time, or culture is concerned. For example, a *brāhmaṇa*, a *kṣatriya*, and a *śūdra* have certain duties to perform within the framework of the Vedic culture only. Therefore, these duties are *viśeṣa-dharma*.

KARMA-YOGA IMPLIES AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE LORD

Sāmānya-dharma and *viśeṣa-dharma* should always be the governing factors when exercising your choice with reference to a given action. You cannot go by your *rāga-dveṣas* alone. When you do go by *dharma* and not by your *rāga-dveṣas*, you are living an ethical life. Such a life, however, may not be *yoga*. *Yoga* comes into the picture only when *Īśvara* is taken into account.

The *Gītā* does not discuss *Īśvara* immediately. It only does so in the third chapter. Another verse, in the eighteenth chapter, explains the role of *Īśvara* in *karma-yoga*.

यतः प्रवृत्तिर्भूतनां येन सर्वमिदं ततम् ।

स्वकर्मणा तमभ्यर्च्य सिद्धिं विन्दति मानवः ॥ १८-४६ ॥

yataḥ pravṛttirbhūtānāṃ yena sarvamidaṃ tatam

svakarmaṇā tamabhyareya siddhiṃ vindati mānavaḥ (Gītā – 18-46)

The one from whom all beings have come into being, by whom all this is pervaded, worshipping him by performing one's duties, a person attains spiritual success.

The Lord is not only the creator but also the creation. Therefore, the creation is non-separate from *Īśvara* and *Īśvara* is both the efficient and the material cause of the creation. No product, *kārya*, is separate from the material of which it is made. The status of being both the efficient and the material cause is, therefore, what is meant by *Īśvara* and that is the reason why the creation is non-separate from the creator.

The creator, on the other hand, is independent of the creation in the sense that even without the creation, the creator remains. At the time of dissolution, for example, the entire creation goes back to *Īśvara*, who alone remains. The creation is like the dream world you create, without which you remain as you are. While the dream world is not independent of you, you can be without it, as you are in deep sleep. Similarly, the creation is not separate from the creator, the Lord.

Anything in the world that is naturally created can be looked at as *Īśvara's* creation, *īśvara-sṛṣṭi*, just as anything you make may be said to be your creation, *jīva-sṛṣṭi*, because your free will is involved. There is, however, only some truth in you being the creator of anything. When you say that the house you built is your own creation, you find, upon analysis, that the statement is not totally true. Because your will and effort are involved, there is some truth to it. But, the earth that the house is standing on is not created by you. Nor are the laws, which allow the house to stand. The materials that are necessary to build and maintain the house are also not created by you. In this way, you come to see that your 'creation' depends on many aspects, which are not

created by you. Therefore, nothing is really created by you although, for the time being, we can assume that there is such a thing as *jīva-sṛṣṭi*.

THE LAWS OF CREATION ARE NOT SEPARATE FROM THE CREATOR

Your physical body is not created by you. The powers that are necessary to create are not created by you. These are the Lord's creation, *īśvara-sṛṣṭi*, alone. *Īśvara-sṛṣṭi* includes the laws of *dharma* also. These laws are not created by us; they are only sensed by us. Gravitation is sensed by people and by monkeys as well. Birds seem to sense it also. They know that when they want to fly, they must flap their wings in order to take off into the air. Every creature seems to know at least some of these laws since they seem to know what they have to do.

The laws that are instinctively known by animals are known to us by our common sense. The laws of *dharma* are also known to us in the same way. Without any education whatsoever, without being taught, we know what is right and wrong. Although this knowledge is generally called 'conscience,' it is actually our simple common-sense knowledge of *dharma* and *adharmā*, what is right and wrong. It is basic knowledge that everyone has, about a fact that is already there in the creation. Just as other laws exist as a part of the creation, the law of *dharma* also exists as a part of the creation.

If the Lord is the creator and the creation is non-separate from the creator, then the law of *dharma*, being a part of the creation, is also non-separate from *Īśvara*. Therefore, *dharma* becomes *Īśvara*. The law of *karma* also becomes *Īśvara* in the same way. This is why we can worship the Lord as *dharma* and we have even given him two hands and two legs, in the form of *Rāma*.

When we say *Rāma* was an *avatāra*, we do not need any history at all. Whether *Rāma* existed or not is irrelevant because he is looked upon only as the Lord. He is *dharma* personified. History is necessary only for those who have problems with reference to what is historical. Their concept of the Lord being what it is, such people require history, but we do not require it.

A name and form are given only for the sake of worship and meditation, and that is how *Rāma*, *Kṛṣṇa*, and others are presented. Lord *Kṛṣṇa* is joy itself. He is nothing but joy, in fact, which happened to have developed two hands, two legs, a head, and so on, called *Kṛṣṇa* and then, taking a flute in hand, walked about. Therefore, whether *Kṛṣṇa* existed or not does not mean anything. *Kṛṣṇa* is a particular name and form given to *Parameśvara* whose nature is joy, *ānanda-svarūpa*. Similarly, *Rāma* portrays the Lord as *dharma*. Thus, we look at the Lord from various aspects in the creation and represent these aspects with many different gods called *devatās*.

What happens when I look upon *dharma* as *Īśvara*? If I merely conform to *dharma*, I am an ethical person. But if I look upon *dharma* as the Lord, I worship that Lord by doing what is to be done by me at a given time and place. *Dharma* is something already established and I come to sense it. Therefore, what is to be done by me, I do. *Kṛṣṇa* says that by doing the *karma* that is to be done by us, we are worshipping him. How can that be? This is also something we must know.

EVERYTHING IN THE CREATION HAS ITS OWN DHARMA

With reference to this cycle of creation, the Lord is the creator. The world is born of him and sustained by him. It is not that he created the world and then went to sleep. The creation is ON! Every moment new cells are born, new things are born. You yourself are born and new children are born. A continual process of creation, *sr̥ṣṭi*, existence or sustenance, *sthiti*, and dissolution, *saṃhāra*, is going on.

This second, a recognised unit of time, is born. And as it is born, it is, and it is also gone. This, ‘born – is – gone’ is a continuous process. The various living beings on this planet — trees, insects, animals, and human beings — all do exactly what is expected of them. In this way, everything goes well. A tree that has to change its colours before winter comes, does so and it keeps doing so, because it is a sugar maple tree and that is what a sugar maple tree has to do. Being programmed, the tree does exactly what it has to do. If it has to make chlorophyll, it makes chlorophyll. If it has to take in carbon dioxide and give out oxygen, it does exactly what it has to do. This is why a sugar cane continues to be sweet and a lime continues to be sour. All vegetation grows upon the same earth and may even belong to the same species. Still, one may be sour and the other sweet — if, for example, a particular orange happens to be a ‘lemon!’

An orange is an orange and a lemon is a lemon. If one orange turns out to be a lemon, there is a reason for it; it is because a certain programming is there. It is not that an orange tree decided to have some fun, wanting to see the face of the person who bites into a certain orange and discovers it to be a lemon. The tree does not make any such decision to produce a sour orange. Being programmed as it is, it behaves and contributes to the creation exactly as it must because the creation is ON!

Īśvara himself is in the form of the very world, the very creation. Therefore, every blade of grass is what it is — and it is *Īśvara*. Everything in the vegetable kingdom is *Īśvara*’s creation and, having a particular form, does exactly what is expected of it because members of the botanical world do not have free wills.

The world of animals is the same. A snail is always a snail; an oyster is an oyster; a jackal is a jackal; a lion is a lion; a cow is a cow; and a turkey is a turkey. All of them are exactly the same. They do not call themselves snails, lions, and turkeys. A cock will fight like a cock; that is why it is a cock. Similarly, monkeys behave like monkeys,

exactly as they should, programmed as they are. They all seem to be fine and are intelligent enough. Even turkeys know how to survive when left to their own devices. The fact that they cannot survive the month of November is only due to the way people choose to celebrate Thanksgiving!

ONLY HUMAN BEINGS ARE NOT PROGRAMMED

It is only when you come to human beings, even a small child, that you find a difference. When you call a puppy, it wags its tail and comes every time because it connects your calling it by name with a cookie or some other treat in your hand. But, if you call your young child by the same name, whether you hold out a cookie or not, he or she may or may not come. Why? Because the child is much more than a pup. He or she is a complete person with a will of his or her own, asserted from childhood onwards. This is always a problem for parents, especially when they want the child to perform for guests, for instance. If the child is at all concerned about what others will think, there is no way he or she will perform.

Even as adults, most of our worries are based on what others will think, a problem not shared with other living beings. When a cow wants to make a noise, it does so without bothering about what anyone will think. If a dog wants to bark, a donkey wants to bray, or a lion wants to roar, they too do not concern themselves with what others will think. Wherever there is water, all the frogs in the vicinity will gather every evening and put on a 'concert.' The racket they create is so dreadful that you cannot sleep. But, the frogs are not at all concerned with what you or anyone else thinks of their music. Only human beings have this problem because they have free will and a self-image, half of which depends on what others think. Therefore, they are entirely different and are not going to do exactly what is to be done unless they decide to do so.

In the process of growth, a person picks up hundreds of *rāga-dveṣas*, likes and dislikes. Such fancies are always there and we find that convenience is usually the order that we follow. This is why we often do not bother about, 'No Trespassing' signs, and cut across a rectangle diagonally, thereby creating a path, even though it is someone's private property. And, once there is a path, a right to it also seems to be established! This is what is meant by the term, 'grandfather rights.' We also see evidence that convenience is one's nature wherever there is a sign saying, 'Post No Bills.' There will even be a bill stuck right on top of the very sign, perhaps so that the problem will disappear!

Thus, convenience is often the governing factor. We want what is convenient, what is pleasant. Easy gratification is exactly what human beings go for. If some work, pain, or effort is involved, we want to avoid it. The human disposition is like that — going after easy, quick gratification, wanting only what pays off immediately. This is our nature. We have therefore created in ourselves a number of *rāga-dveṣas*, which prompt us to perform various actions that are not often in keeping with *dharma* and *adharma*.

To go against *dharma*, the Lord, is to go against the order that is the Lord, and this is *adharma*.

DOING ONE'S OWN DUTIES IS WORSHIP

Since the creation operates according to this same order, there is definitely a reason that you were born. Your parents may not have wanted you, but somehow you were born. Even if you feel unwanted, still you are here because, without you, this world is definitely incomplete. That is why you are here. It is as simple as that.

If you see a purpose in everything in the world, why should you take your presence in this big politic of humanity as anything other than important? Even in your own body politic, everything has a role to play. Just as a tree is there, you are also there. You are important. You have roles to play and things to do. *Īśvara's* job is going on and you are a cog in his wheel. This being the case, naturally you have to do your job. You have to know that at this time and place, this is the job that you have to do. This is called *svakarma*. Just as every animal and every tree contributes to this great creation, you too make your contribution. Whatever be your job, your *svakarma*, that very *karma* becomes an offering to *Īśvara*.

Offerings to the Lord need not always be in the form of flowers. *Bhagavān* says that by doing what is to be done by you at a given time, you are worshipping the Lord. Because of your recognition of *Īśvara*, whatever action you perform is your contribution, your offering, *arcana*, to the Lord. You offer your actions unto the Lord, who is in the form of the creation and who continues to do the job of creation. You are one of his limbs. You perform your role, which is an important one. Otherwise, you would not be here.

This is something like a symphony orchestra where, even though it looks as though some of the musicians could be removed, each person has a significant role to play according to the composer. One person may only play one note every fifteen minutes, but that is his or her role to play in the overall scheme of things. Similarly, each of you has your own job to do and when you do it, you are in harmony with *Īśvara*, the Lord. This is why, whenever you do exactly what you have to do, you find satisfaction. Even if it is something you do not want to do, once you do it, you feel great about it. Why? Because you are in harmony with *Īśvara*. Recognizing this, you become a *yogī*.

This recognition is not an ordinary thing; it is a vision. To be in harmony with the world, with what is to be done, with the law of *dharma* that governs all *karma*, is *karma-yoga* — *yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*. Therefore, you choose your *karmas* recognizing *Īśvara* as *dharma*. Then your actions become a form of *arcana* to *Īśvara*. This attitude results in *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, purification of the mind. Once, this happens, it takes no time at all for self-knowledge, *jñāna*, to take place. Since *antaḥ-*

karaṇa-śuddhi is all that is required, all the steps have been completed — *karma-yoga*, *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, and *jñāna*.

These steps are mentioned throughout the *Gītā* and *Śaṅkara* also mentions them repeatedly in his *bhāṣya*. Through *karma-yoga*, the mind is purified, and when the mind is pure, knowledge takes place and *mokṣa* is gained. *Karma-yoga*, therefore, is for *mokṣa* alone.

दूरेण ह्यवरं कर्म बुद्धियोगाद्धनञ्जय ।

बुद्धौ शरणमन्विच्छ कृपणाः फलहेतवः ॥ ४९ ॥

dūreṇa hyavaraṃ karma buddhiyogāddhanañjaya
buddhau śaraṇamanviccha kṛpaṇāḥ phalahetavaḥ

Verse 49

धनञ्जय *dhanañjaya* — Oh! *Dhanañjaya* (*Arjuna*); हि *hi* — therefore; बुद्धि-योगात् *buddhi-yogāt* — as compared to *buddhi-yoga* (the *yoga* of proper attitude); कर्म *karma* — action; दूरेण अवरम् *dūreṇa avaram* — is far inferior; बुद्धौ *buddhau* — in the *buddhi-yoga* (of proper attitude); शरणम् *śaraṇam* — refuge; अन्विच्छ *anviccha* — seek; फलहेतवः *phala-hetavaḥ* — those who perform actions only for results; कृपणाः *kṛpaṇāḥ* — misers

Action (based on desire) is therefore far inferior to that performed with the proper attitude of *karma-yoga*. Seek refuge in this *buddhi-yoga* (of proper attitude) Oh! *Dhanañjaya*. Those who perform action only for the results are misers.

The word *buddhi-yoga* means *karma-yoga*, the attitude of sameness towards all results, *samatva*. *Karma* done under the spell of one's *rāga-dveṣas* is far different from *karma-yoga* which involves proper attitude and commitment. The result of such *karma* is received in keeping with one's *rāga-dveṣas* and not with *samatva-buddhi*. This kind of *karma* is thus far inferior, *avaram*, to *buddhi-yoga*, *karma-yoga*.

Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* to take refuge in *karma-yoga-buddhi* — *buddhau śaraṇam anviccha*. 'Go for it, pray for it, *Arjuna*,' he said. Why? Because people who perform *karma* for the sake of the results alone, and not for *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* and *mokṣa*, are misers, *kṛpaṇāḥ*. They want only enjoyments, *bhoga*, and power, *aiśvarya*. For them, there is no *karma-yoga*, which makes them misers because they do not make use of their *buddhi*.

In his commentary on this verse, *Śaṅkara* defines misers, referring to them as helpless weaklings, *dīnāḥ*. Misers are those who have money but do not have the heart to spend it, either on themselves or on others. Those who have no money are not misers because they have no money to spend. Those who do have money and spend when there are occasions to spend are also not misers. A man who has money and spends more than

what he has, who does not spend judiciously, is a spendthrift and is just as much a problem as the one who has money and does not spend it at all. A miser cannot spend because he is that afraid his money is going, going, going. Therefore, he always keeps saving, saving for the winter of his life, retirement. Sometimes, such a person dies before retirement and his brother -in-law gets everything! Misers have no heart to spend because their priorities are not clear. They are not at all clear about what money is for.

The meaning of the word miser, *krpaṇa*, is extended here to the disuse of one's *buddhi*. *Śaṅkara*, quoting the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*, discusses the meaning of the word *krpaṇa*.¹

Why is such a person a miser? Because he or she was given an intellect, *buddhi*, and does not use it. The *buddhi* is the discriminative power one is endowed with as a human being and is the greatest wealth, the greatest treasure, that one can have. Therefore, its primary use should be for gaining self-knowledge. Even though everyone has a good chance to use the *buddhi*, a miser hoards it or fritters it away and dies not having made proper use of the greatest wealth that he or she was endowed with. And although the money misers leave can be enjoyed by others, no one can enjoy their *buddhis* after they are gone.

Misers are people whose aims are only small results, not *mokṣa*. Therefore, for them there is no *karma-yoga* or *sannyāsa*. There is only miserliness. We have seen that, according to the vision of the Veda, there are only two possibilities — to be a *karma-yogī* or to be a *sannyāsī*. There is no accommodation for a third kind of person. Those who are neither *karma-yogīs* nor *sannyāsīs* have to become *karma-yogīs*; otherwise, they are misers. Therefore, *Bhagavān* said, 'Take to *karma-yoga*.'

बुद्धियुक्तो जहातीह उभे सुकृतदुष्कृते ।

तस्माद्योगाय युज्यस्व योगः कर्मसु कौशलम् ॥ ५० ॥

buddhiyukto jahātīha ubhe sukṛtaduṣkṛte

tasmādyogāya yujyasva yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam

Verse 50

बुद्धि-युक्तः *buddhi-yuktaḥ* — the one who is endowed with the *samatva-buddhi* (sameness of mind); इह *iha* — here, in this world; उभे *ubhe* — both; सुकृत-दुष्कृते *sukṛta-duṣkṛte* — *punya* and *pāpa*; जहाति *jahāti* — gives up; तस्मात् *tasmāt* — therefore; योगाय *yogāya* — to *karma-yoga*; युज्यस्व *yujyasva* — commit yourself; योगः *yogaḥ* — *karma-yoga* (is); कर्मसु *karmasu* — in action; कौशलम् *kauśalam* — discretion

¹ Refer to page 166.

One who is endowed with the *samatva-buddhi*, sameness of mind, gives up both *puṇya* and *pāpa* here, in this world. Therefore, commit yourself to *karma-yoga*. *Karma-yoga* is discretion in action.

The idea already expressed is that one should not be attached to inaction but rooted in the sameness of mind that is *yoga*, one should perform action. In his commentary on this verse, Śaṅkara explains that *samatva-buddhi* that is talked about is with reference to *karma-phala*, the fruits of action. What is gained by one who follows *dharma*, right and wrong, and not mere *rāga-dveṣas*, likes and dislikes, is also stated here. Here, in this world, while alive, the person gains *yoga-buddhi* which means *samatva-buddhi*.

Two *buddhis* have been talked about — *sāṅkhya-buddhi* and *yoga-buddhi*. *Sāṅkhya*, knowledge, was already discussed and now *yoga* is under discussion. *Buddhi-yukta* means *yoga-buddhi-yukta*, one who is a *karma-yogī*, one who is committed to a life of *karma* with the *buddhi* of *yoga*. What does this person do? Here, in this world, *iha*, while alive, he or she gives up both *puṇya* and *pāpa*, *sukṛta-duṣkṛte*. *Sukṛta* means that which is well-done, a *karma* that is proper, and *duṣkṛta* means the opposite.

Both proper and improper actions produce results and the results are also called *sukṛta* and *duṣkṛta*. Therefore *sukṛta-duṣkṛte* means *puṇya* and *pāpa*. The verse says that the *karma-yogī* gives up both *puṇya* and *pāpa* here, in this life. But can the results of action be given up even by a *karma-yogī*? No. Because he has doership, *karṭṛtva*, the *karma-yogī* cannot give up the results. He can only become a master of his likes and dislikes so that he has freedom from them. In this way, he can be in harmony with *Īśvara* and, having a certain mastery over himself, he can enjoy a composure, but nothing more because he is a *karma-yogī*.

HOW DOES ONE GIVE UP PUṆYA-PĀPA?

A *karma-yogī* has doership, *karṭṛtva*, whereas a *sannyāsī*¹ does not. When you look upon yourself as a doer, you have doership and when you have doership, you cannot escape from the results of action, which always accrue to the doer. Because a *karma-yogī* has *karṭṛtva* he is not a *jñānī*. If he has *karṭṛtva*, he definitely has *puṇya-pāpa*. Whether he likes it or not, *puṇya-pāpa* will be there for him. Both the current *puṇya-pāpa* and the old *puṇya-pāpa* are standing in his account. Thus, the question of how one gives up *puṇya-pāpa* would naturally arise here. This has to be properly understood.

When *karma-yoga* is there for a person, knowledge is not far away. As long as *karma-yoga* is there, there will be *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*. And, this will soon be

¹ Here by the word *sannyāsī*, we refer to a *jñānī*. Śaṅkara often uses the word *sannyāsī* in this sense.

followed by knowledge. Śaṅkara points out this order again here and says — *sattva-śuddhi-jñāna-dvāreṇa*. The *karma-yogī* gives up *puṇya* and *pāpa* here in this world, while he is alive, by means of *sattva-śuddhi*. The word *sattva* has two meanings. It is one of the three qualities, *sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*. And it also means *antaḥ-karaṇa*, the mind. Here it is used in the sense of *antaḥ-karaṇa*. Therefore *sattva-śuddhi* here means purification of the mind.

First, *karma-yoga* takes care of *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*. Then knowledge is gained, there is *jñāna-prāpti*. This order is one of the important points in the *śāstra* that we have to know clearly. Otherwise, what is being said will be confusing. Because people are confused, they think that *karma-yoga* is just another means through which *puṇya-pāpa* is destroyed. And they say the same thing about *jñāna*. This ‘different means’ approach is how people get lost and become confused.

By performing *karma* with the proper attitude, you prepare yourself to be totally freed by knowledge and that knowledge is gained only when the *antaḥ-karaṇa* is *śuddha*, pure. We say that *karma-yoga* takes care of it because *karma-yoga* purifies the mind. Thus, whenever we come across expressions in Śaṅkara’s *bhāṣya*, like *sattva-śuddhi-jñāna-dvāreṇa ubhe sukṛta-duṣkṛte iha jahāti*, we must understand the order. Once the *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* is taken care of, that is, once the impurities, *aśuddhis*, of the mind are taken care of, the person is no longer under the enthrallment of his or her likes and dislikes. Because he or she enjoys a certain composure, self-knowledge, *ātma-jñāna* is not far away.

Concerning this point, Śaṅkara says that a *karma-yogī* is a *kama-yogī* only for the sake of *mokṣa*. A person is a *karma-yogī* only for *ātma-jñāna*. Therefore, he or she continues to listen to the teaching and reflect upon it so that it will become a reality.

KARMA-YOGA IS NOT A MATTER OF CHOICE

What, then, should *Arjuna* or anyone else do first? To ask whether you should become a *karma-yogī* or a *sannyāsī* is like asking if you should join a university or get a Ph.D. *Karma-yoga* is a step for gaining the knowledge. There is no choice here. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* says, ‘Commit yourself to *yoga* — *yogāya yujyasva*.’ This is the same as saying, ‘You have just started this inquiry, *Arjuna*. Therefore, prepare yourself by engaging in *karma-yoga*, which means doing what you have to do with the attitude of a *karma-yogī*.’ *Kṛṣṇa* also made it clear that *yoga* in no way implies the avoidance of action.

EXERCISING DISCRETION IN ONE'S CHOICES

In this verse, we are told that with reference to our actions, we must use our discretion, *kausāla*. What is not to be done is avoided and what is to be done is done

properly. And any action we do is done with the attitude that it is our offering to the Lord, *īśvara-arpaṇa-buddhyā*. This is *yoga*. Discretion, then, is with reference to the choices involved in action and involves one's appreciation of *īśvara* as well.

Inaction is not going to solve the problem, even though we will see later that *sannyāsa* is referred to as the giving up of all actions, *sarva-karma-sannyāsa*, something that is not physically possible. Even a great *jñānī* performs actions. There are Swamis — ‘sitting Swamis,’ ‘standing-on-one-leg Swamis,’ and many other Swamis — all of which imply actions. No one can avoid action totally. The renunciation of all *karmas* is strictly in terms of knowledge. By knowing that he or she is not the performer of any action, a *jñānī* is said to have given up all action. Thus a person who has this knowledge of the *ātmā* is called a *sarva-karma-sannyāsi*.

Kṛṣṇa was telling *Arjuna* here that *sarva-karma-sannyāsa* has nothing to do with inaction; it has concerns only with knowledge. This knowledge can only take place in a person whose mind is clear, *śuddha*. Such a person is either a *karma-yogī* or a *sannyāsi*, a person who has taken to the life of renunciations. Knowledge is possible for both *sannyāsis* and *karma-yogīs*.

Kṛṣṇa told *Arjuna* that while a choice between *yoga* and *sannyāsa* is possible, he did not think *Arjuna* was ready for *sannyāsa*. That meant, according to *Kṛṣṇa*, that *Arjuna* was ready only for *karma-yoga*. Therefore, as we saw in verse 48, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna*, ‘*Arjuna*, remaining steadfast in *yoga* and abandoning attachment, perform actions — *yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi saṅgaṃ tyaktvā dhanañjaya*.’

How could *Arjuna* live the life of a *sannyāsi*, a life of contemplation, when he was emotionally involved with his own people? Like others who have too many irons in the fire, *Arjuna* had too many arrows in his quiver. Therefore, it would be better if he exhausted them all and then see what was to be done.

Further, *Kṛṣṇa* said:

कर्मजं बुद्धियुक्ता हि फलं त्यक्त्वा मनीषिणः।

जन्मबन्धविनिर्मुक्ताः पदं गच्छन्त्यनामयम् ॥ ५१ ॥

karmajam buddhiyuktā hi phalaṃ tyaktvā manīṣiṇaḥ
janmabandhavinirmuktāḥ padaṃ gacchantyanāmayam

Verse 51

बुद्धि-युक्ताः *buddhi-yuktāḥ* — those who are endowed with the proper attitude of *karma-yoga*; मनीषिणः *manīṣiṇaḥ* — the wise; कर्मजम् *karmajam* — that which is born of *karma*; फलम् *phalam* — result; त्यक्त्वा *tyaktvā* — giving up; जन्म-बन्ध-विनिर्मुक्ताः *janma-bandha-vinirmuktāḥ* — free from the bondage of birth; अनामयम् *anāmayam* — free from all affliction; पदम् *padam* — that which is accomplished by knowledge, *mokṣa*; हि *hi* — indeed; गच्छन्ति *gacchanti* — go to

The wise, endowed with the attitude of *karma-yoga*, having given up the results of action, free from the bondage of birth, indeed accomplish the end that is free from all affliction.

Suppose a *karma-yogī* gains knowledge and thereby gives up all *karma-phalas*, that is, all the *punya-pāpas*, the good and the bad. Does that not mean that the person is empty, possessing nothing? Will he or she then be a nobody? At least if such a person had gathered a lot of *punya*, he or she would have been an entity to be reckoned with. But now, it seems that the person will be empty. This assumption is refuted in the present verse.

People who are endowed with a *karma-yoga-buddhi* first gain *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*. Then knowledge takes place, which results in the giving up of *punya* and *pāpa*. And giving up the *punya* and *pāpa*, as mentioned in the previous verse, *karma-phalaṃ tyaktvā*, he gains *mokṣa* through knowledge. The first line, here, is a restatement of the previous verse and connects it with the previous verse and tells that the *karma-yogī* also gains *mokṣa* eventually.

BIRTH IS BONDAGE

How do *karma-yogīs* give up the results of action? A *karma-yogī*, having sameness of mind towards the desirable and undesirable results of all actions, is said to give up the results and, in time, becomes wise. Such a person gains self-knowledge and is called a *manīṣī* or a *jñānī*. Having become a *manīṣī*, the person becomes free of the bondage of birth, he becomes *janma-bandha-vinirmukta*.

When the doership is not there, the result of action will also be not there. The result of *punya-pāpa* is birth, *janma*, which itself is a bondage. You cannot say that you are only bound after birth. You are bound inside the womb. No matter how much you twist and turn, you have to wait nine months before you can come out. Thus, bound, you are born. Once you are born, you are also bound in that you have to wait at least another eighteen years to have a life of your own. After that, of course, you are bound to a hundred different things. Therefore, birth is bondage all the way!

From this bondage of birth, the wise are liberated. *Śaṅkara* makes it quite clear here that liberation does not happen after death, but while you are living. He says, *jīvantaḥ eva vinirmuktāḥ* — while living they are liberated. Unless you are liberated now, while you are alive, you are not going to be liberated later when you are dead. All that you can be is a ghost! If you are liberated here, there will be no problem — to yourself or to others. But if you are not liberated, and you become a ghost, you will be just another entity knocking around for people to channel through! Here in the world, you confused people, by giving wrong advice and so on, and then later, as a spirit, you come through the channels, continuing to give out wrong information!

Thus, it was said that while you are alive, you are completely freed from the bondage of birth and death, commonly referred to as the cycle of *saṃsāra*. You may say that you do not care whether you are born again. If it happens, fine, and if it does not happen, that too is fine. You are only interested in ‘right now.’ You are not interested in any investment for later since no one knows what later really is. After death, all you see are the ashes, nothing more. And if the body is not cremated, it is buried deep enough that there is no chance of your coming out, even if, life is still there! Grass will be planted on top so that, there will be no chance of oxygen reaching you! This you know very well.

Whatever happens after death is all a matter of belief alone. Some logic may be there, but still, it is only a belief. I am only interested in what happens here. I do not care if my *karma-phalas* go or not. How do I know if *punya-pāpa* is really there for me? Therefore, I do not care about all this. But, I do care about my harmony with the world and I can understand the value of sameness of mind towards the results of action and discretion with reference to the choices involved in my actions. These things are all very clear to me, but please do not tell me that I will be freed from birth and death. I do not care about all that; I am only interested in what I can get now. This could be an argument. This is being answered now.

LIBERATION IS NOT AFTER DEATH

This verse tells us what we can accomplish here, while we are alive — not in the form of sense gratification, but in terms of a pursuit that is meaningful in this life itself. The word *pada*, here, means that which is to be accomplished. It also means ‘a word.’ that by which something is known. Mere sound is not *pada*. From the word, a given object must be understood. What I say, you must be able to understand. Then only is there a language. The word has a meaning and that meaning is understood by everyone. Any word in any language is a *pada*. It is not used in this sense here in this verse. Here it means that which is accomplished by knowledge.

The word *pada* in this sense is famous in Sanskrit literature — for example, there is a mention, *viṣṇoḥ paramaṃ padam*, meaning the greatest abode of the Lord *Viṣṇu*, the one who is all-pervasive. That all-pervasive *viṣṇoḥ padam* is *mokṣa*, liberation or freedom and that freedom is gained now, while living.

In the verse under study, *pada* is qualified by another word, *anāmaya*. Any problem is called *āmaya*. *Anāmaya* is defined by *Śaṅkara* as that which is free of all problems, *sarva-upadrava-rahita*. This includes all the problems starting from nagging onwards. Any kind of affliction is called *upadrava*. Thus, *anāmaya* means that you are free from all afflictions. ‘I am afflicted’ is a notion that everyone has. I am a product of my own past; and, therefore, I am afflicted. Everyone has this notion about himself or herself and, from this notion, the person becomes free.

Knowing that I am limitless *Brahman*, I am not afflicted by anything because there is nothing other than *Brahman*. There is nothing else to afflict me. Therefore, I am free of all afflictions. When? While living here in the world. This knowledge, then, is really something! It is more than just something; it is the thing! And whatever we do is only for the purpose of gaining this knowledge of oneself.

In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that he would attain this when his mind was no longer deluded.

यदा ते मोहकलिलं बुद्धिर्व्यतितरिष्यति ।

तदा गन्तासि निर्वेदं श्रोतव्यस्य श्रुतस्य च ॥ ५२ ॥

yadā te mohakalilaṃ buddhīrvyatitarīṣyati

tadā gantāsi nirvedaṃ śrotavyasya śrutasya ca

Verse 52

यदा *yadā* — when; ते *te* — your; बुद्धिः *buddhiḥ* — intellect; मोहकलिलम् *mohakalilam* — impurity of delusion; व्यतितरिष्यति *vyatitarīṣyati* — crosses over; तदा *tadā* — then; श्रोतव्यस्य *śrotavyasya* — for what is to be heard; श्रुतस्य *śrutasya* — for what has been heard; च *ca* — and; निर्वेदम् *nirvedam* — dispassion; गन्तासि *gantāsi* — you shall gain

When your intellect crosses over the impurity of delusion, then you shall gain a dispassion towards what has been heard and what is yet to be heard.

Delusion is in the form of absence of discrimination, *viveka*. The lack of discrimination, *aviveka*, makes a person go towards objects and not towards the self, the *ātmā*. The person's mind goes towards objects as though they are going to take him to the *ātmā*. Even though the solution to my problem is myself, I always think of it as being elsewhere, outside of me.

There is no greater delusion in this world than wanting a solution to a problem that is centred on the 'I' and expecting the solution to be outside of the 'I.' This great delusion *mahā-moha* is due to a lack of understanding of what I am about, what the world can give, what my problem is, what I really want, and so on. The impurity, *kalila* of this delusion is what is given up by discriminating between the *ātmā* and the *anātmā* — *ātma-anātmā-viveka*.

The verse goes on to say that when your mind is no longer under the spell of *moha*, you gain dispassion, *vairāgya*, with reference to what you have heard and what you have yet to hear. You have heard about a lot of means and ends. These are *śruta*. They are all on your list of things to do later. Then there are a few more means and ends that you have not yet heard about. They are to be heard later, *śrotavya*. They all come under the heading of *śrotavya* when you think, 'I think I should read this and find out...'

Dispassion towards what you have heard and will hear extends also to everything that is known to you; such dispassion is really very beautiful.

Suppose you decide to gain self-knowledge, *mokṣa*. You have developed a great value for this knowledge and have completely dismissed everything that you have so far come to know as desirable ends. Because they do not solve your problem you no longer have a value for them and have dismissed them. The only thing you want now is *mokṣa*. Suppose, however, someone comes and tells you that there is something more interesting than *mokṣa*, what will you do?

ONE'S DISPASSION CAN BE SHAKY

If you are a practical person, you may have to give up self-knowledge. This means that your *viveka* is incomplete and your *vairāgya* is shaky. Everyone has *vairāgya* until something more interesting comes along. Similarly, our plans for gaining self-knowledge vanish along with our dispassion, when we are confronted with something we think of as rosier and more promising than *mokṣa*. We give up *mokṣa* and go after whatever it is. This is a clear indication that discrimination is lacking. It is not that dispassion is lacking. Our discrimination is lacking and therefore our dispassion is shaky!

I was once asked what I would do if, having devoted my life to *Śaṅkara*, a new philosopher came along and dismissed what *Śaṅkara* had said. I replied that *Śaṅkara* was a teacher and I am not a Sankarite. I am a *sādhu*, a *sannyāsi* in this tradition of teaching, *sampradāya*. For us, *Śaṅkara* is only a link. He never said that he was starting a new philosophy. He was just a teacher, a link in the chain. This is reflected in the verse that all students of *Vedānta* chant daily.¹ It says, 'I salute the lineage of teachers, that begins with *Sadāśiva*, which has *Śaṅkara* in the middle, and that has my teacher at its end.'

There is no Sankara-ism here. There is only the teaching and a means of knowledge, *pramāṇa* in the form of words called the *Upaniṣads*, also known as *Vedānta*.

Suppose someone tries to say something that is better than what *Śaṅkara* said or something that proves what *Śaṅkara* said was wrong. For a person with discrimination, there will be no context for such statements because *Śaṅkara* says exactly what is said in the *Upaniṣads*. They tell you that you are *Brahman*, that you are the whole. Who is going to improve on this? Who is going to dismiss it? No one can dismiss it and no one can improve it. Try dismissing that you are the whole. The teacher is very clear about it and the *śāstra* is very clear about it. That you are the whole is not subject to your dismissal because you already know that only through the *śāstra* can you appreciate that you are the whole. How, then, are you going to dismiss it? It is not available for any

¹ Refer to the section, 'Who is the first Guru' in the introduction.

other *pramāṇa*. That I am the whole is already established by the *śāstra*, and that it cannot be dismissed is very clear.

If the statement, 'I am the whole,' cannot be dismissed or improved upon, I cannot be enticed by a new philosophy which gives me a supposedly better idea about myself. Already the *Upaniṣad* has given me the last word. It says I am limitless, I am infinite, I am *Brahman*, I am the whole, I am all that is here. Who is going to improve on this? No one can improve *sat-cit-ānanda*. Nor can anyone dismiss it because it is myself. There is nothing better possible. Anything that you are going to come to know later will not disturb your dispassion either. You will have the same dispassion towards what you come to know in the future as you have towards what you know now. Whatever comes will be from the world, which has no independent existence apart from *Brahman*. Nothing can come from outside the world and nothing more can come from *Brahman* because it is one, *eka*. Knowing this is what is meant by *viveka*, discrimination.

Once you do not have *moha* in you, when your values are very clear, when you understand the delusion of human pursuits, then you will discover in yourself a dispassion, *nirveda*, towards what is to be heard, *śrotavya*, and what has been heard, *śruta*, whether it is from the Veda or from any other source. This was the point *Kṛṣṇa* wished to make very clear to *Arjuna* in this verse.

श्रुतिविप्रतिपन्ना ते यदा स्थास्यति निश्चला ।

समाधावचला बुद्धिस्तदा योगमवाप्स्यसि ॥ ५३ ॥

śrutivipratipannā te yadā sthāsyati niścalā

samādhāvachalā buddhistadā yoga mavāpsyasi

Verse 53

यदा *yadā* — when; ते *te* — your; श्रुतिविप्रतिपन्ना बुद्धिः *śrutivipratipannā buddhiḥ* — mind, generally distracted by the Vedas (which present various means and ends to be gained); अचला *acalā* — firmly established; समाधौ *samādhau* — in the *ātmā* (oneself); निश्चला *niścalā* — steady; स्थास्यति *sthāsyati* — will remain; तदा *tadā* — then; योगम् *yogam* — self-knowledge; अवाप्स्यसि *avāpsyasi* — you shall gain

When your mind is no longer distracted by the Vedas (which present various means and ends to be gained) it will remain steady, firmly established in the self. Then you will gain self-knowledge.

This verse points out a further gain brought about by dispassion and also sums up the whole teaching. The Veda, *śruti*, talks about various means for achieving various ends. These means and ends are described so beautifully and so elaborately that one's mind becomes confused, *vipratipannā*. There seem to be so many means and ends for me to accomplish and they keep on increasing. Thus, the list of things to be done also keeps on increasing and I become confused by the *śruti*.

When, however, your mind becomes one, meaning when you have determined what is to be gained, you are not easily shaken by the various means and ends enjoined by the *śruti*. Just as any hype about a particular brand of shampoo has no effect on a bald-headed person, you will not at all be shaken by anything because you have already set your heart on an end that includes all means and ends.

We have seen that all means and ends are limited and that what we are really seeking is freedom from any limitation whatsoever. When we know this, everything becomes very simple. The mind being definite about what it wants, it stays without being shaken, without being assailed, swayed, or swept away by anything, no matter how seemingly attractive it may be — *sthāsyati niścalā*.

Not only is such a mind unable to be swayed, it is single-pointed, *ekā* with reference to the goal. This attitude of the mind is *karma-yoga*. When your goal is very clear to you, the hold that your *rāga-dveṣas* previously had on you is released and your mind, *buddhi*, is steady.

Śaṅkara defines *samādhi* in his commentary on this verse as, ‘That into which everything resolves, *ātmā* — *samyag ādhīyate cittam asmin iti samādhiḥ* — *ātmā*. He thus makes it very clear that the word *samādhi* means *ātmā* in this context. When your mind is no longer distracted by the various ends and means prompted by your *rāga-dveṣas* because the goal is very clear to you, it will remain steady, firmly established in the self, *ātmā*. Then you will gain self-knowledge.

The first line of the verse itself indicates that the person is a *mumukṣu*, one who seeks *mokṣa*, liberation. A *mumukṣu* may continue to be in the field of activity as a *karma-yogī*, or he or she may take to the life of renunciation as a *sannyāsī*. These are the only choices a *mumukṣu* has. When the mind is no longer swept away or confused by the *śruti*, which talks about various means and ends, it becomes steady and definite about what is to be accomplished — *mokṣa* through knowledge of the self. This steadiness is *karma-yoga* and the *karma-yogī* is a *mumukṣu*.

THE POSSIBILITY OF DOUBT

There can be some doubts here. Is *ātmā* always free or is it always bound? Is *ātmā* limited or free from limitations? Is *ātmā* mortal or is it free from time? Is *ātmā* the truth of everything or is it one of the many things in the world? Is *ātmā* the very cause of everything that is created here or is it a product of creation? Is *ātmā* identical with *Īśvara* or separate from *Īśvara*? Is *ātmā* separate from every other *ātmā* or is there only one *ātmā*? Is *ātmā* separate from the world or is it non-separate? Does *ātmā* undergo a change to become the world or does it always remain the same, even though it is the cause of the world? These are all examples of possible doubts, the list being in no way complete.

None of these doubts is there for a *mumukṣu*. When your *buddhi* remains without any doubt, *vikalpa*, whatsoever, there is knowledge, *jñāna*, which is real *yoga*. *Jñāna* can be called *yoga* and a means of knowledge can be called *yoga*. A state of mind can also be called *yoga*. Here, the context does not permit us to take the word *yoga* as simple *karma-yoga*. It can only be *jñāna*, the real *yoga*, which *Bhagavān* defined later as ‘dissociation from your association with pain, *duḥkha*.’ This means that there is nothing you have to do except be yourself.

You have been associating with *duḥkha* all along because of *aviveka*, a lack of discrimination that causes you to take on limitations of things that are different from you. Then you say, ‘I am limited.’ This is *duḥkha* and is called *duḥkha-saṃyoga*. Due to the lack of discriminative knowledge, *aviveka*, there is *duḥkha* for you. Dissociation from this association with *duḥkha* is brought about by removing the *aviveka*, by having *viveka* between the *ātmā* and the *anātmā*. When the *viveka* is very clear, meaning that I know very clearly that everything is myself and that I am free from everything, then there is real *yoga*, *paramārtha-yoga*. This *yoga*, called *jñāna*, is what *Arjuna* would gain. Thus *Kṛṣṇa* said, *yogam avāpsyasi*.

Śaṅkara gives the meaning of the word *yoga* as *viveka-prajñā*, thus making it clear that the word *yoga* in this verse is nothing but discriminative knowledge of the *ātmā* and the *anātmā*. When true discrimination is lacking, sorrow is the result.

ARJUNA'S FIRST QUESTION

Having talked mainly so far about *karma-yoga* and *sāṅkhya*, in this verse, *Bhagavān* summed up everything he had said so far. The first line, ‘*śrutivipratipannā te yadā sthāsyati niścalā*,’ refers to *karma yoga*. The second line, ‘*saṃādhāu acalā buddhiḥ tadā yogam avāpsyasi*,’ refers to *sāṅkhya-yoga*. Having thus summed up and perhaps thinking he had done a good job, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* might have paused for *Arjuna* to respond.

Arjuna did not say, as he would in the eighteenth chapter, that all his delusions were gone, that he knew what was to be done and was going to do it. He did not say this until the end of the *Gītā*. If he had said it here in the second chapter, the *Gītā* would, of course, be over! *Kṛṣṇa* would have said, ‘*Om tat sat!*’ and completed the *Gītā*. However, since the *Gītā* was a dialogue, *saṃvāda*, *Kṛṣṇa* talked to *Arjuna* and *Arjuna* asked questions because this particular subject matter has to be understood, not just blindly believed. There is no use in *Arjuna* walking away thinking, ‘*Kṛṣṇa* told me that I am eternal. Therefore, I must be eternal.’

A belief requires no explanation at all; you just believe. The only requirement is that the belief be stated. Why people write about belief is beyond comprehension. The belief need only be stated honestly. Stating a belief is exactly what a belief is. If there is

something to support the belief, that can also be stated. However, when something is to be understood, it will either remain not understood or it will be understood, regardless of the number of books written on the subject. In other words, it can be understood by reading only one book and, in spite of reading every book on the subject, it can remain not understood.

Here, the subject matter is a thing to be understood. In fact, *Kṛṣṇa* himself will say later on in his dialogue with *Arjuna*, ‘May you gain this knowledge by asking proper questions.’ If you ask the right question you get the right answer. Even if you ask the wrong question, as *Arjuna* did in the next verse, you may get the right answer!

अर्जुन उवाच ।

स्थितप्रज्ञस्य का भाषा समाधिस्थस्य केशव ।

स्थितधीः किं प्रभाषेत किमासीत् व्रजेत किम् ॥ ५४ ॥

arjuna uvāca

sthitaprajñasya kā bhāṣā samādhisthasya keśava

sthitadhīḥ kiṃ prabhāṣeta kimāsīta vrajeta kim

Verse 54

अर्जुनः *arjunaḥ* — *Arjuna*; उवाच *uvāca* — said;

केशव *keśava* — Oh! *Keśava*; स्थितप्रज्ञस्य *sthitaprajñasya* — of one in whom the knowledge is firm; समाधिस्थस्य *samādhisthasya* — of one whose mind abides in the *ātmā*, self; भाषा *bhāṣā* — description; का *kā* — what; स्थितधीः *sthitadhīḥ* — one whose mind is not shaken by anything; किम् *kiṃ* — how; प्रभाषेत *prabhāṣeta* — would speak; किम् *kiṃ* — how; आसीत् *āsīta* — would sit; किम् *kiṃ* — how; व्रजेत् *vrajeta* — would walk

Arjuna said:

Oh! *Keśava*, what is the description of a person of firm wisdom, one whose mind abides in the *ātmā*, self? How does such a person, whose mind is not shaken by anything, speak, sit, and walk?

Śaṅkara introduces this verse by saying that *Arjuna*, desiring to know the characteristics of a person who knows the *ātmā*, asked a question, ‘How does such a person speak, sit, and walk?’

The word *sthitaprajñā* refers to a person who has no doubts, vagueness, or error with reference to the knowledge of *ātmā*. Thus, the knowledge stays, becomes *sthita*. One's knowledge can also be so erroneous that there is no doubt or vagueness, but the error will show in time. Here, the knowledge stays without error, The word *sthitaprajñā* being in the masculine gender, means the person for whom the knowledge stays and not the knowledge itself. The word for knowledge is *prajñā*, which is in feminine gender.

Prajñā can mean knowledge of anything, such as archery, for example. *Śaṅkara* therefore clarifies the knowledge being spoken of as, ‘well-established, well-rooted knowledge that I am the whole — *paraṃ brahma aham asmi.*’ The topic here is *paramātmā*, not archery, and the person, for whom the knowledge of *ātmā* being *paraṃ brahma* is steady, is called *sthitaprajñā*.

This person is also described as one who is in *samādhi*, *samādhista*, one whose mind is abiding in the *ātmā*, is awake to the *ātmā*. *Arjuna* wanted to know how *Kṛṣṇa* would describe such a person. He asked, *sthitaprajñasya kā bhāṣā?* *Śaṅkara* puts this question in another way: How is this person described by others? — *katham asau paraiḥ bhāṣyate?*

Bhagavān used the word *samādhi* in the previous verse, not *sthitaprajñā*. It was *Arjuna* who coined this latter word and his question reveals that he seemed to know what it was all about — at least in the first line! He asked for a description of a wise person, a *sthitaprajñā*, which was an excellent question. He also used the word *sthitadhī*, meaning a person whose *buddhi* remains firm. But then he asked, ‘Does this person talk? *kim prabhāṣeta?* Does he or she sit? *kim asīta?* Does he or she walk? *kim vrajeta?* *Śaṅkara* did not think that these questions as worded were *Arjuna*’s real questions.

To ask, ‘Does a wise person talk?’ would have been meaningless because *Kṛṣṇa* had been talking all along. It would also have meant that *Arjuna* had a doubt about whether *Kṛṣṇa* knew what he was talking about and, therefore, whether he was a *sthitaprajñā*. Because *kim* can mean ‘what’ or ‘how.’ *Śaṅkara* took *Arjuna*’s questions to mean the latter. How does a wise person talk, sit, and walk?

When someone asks you a question, you either answer the question or you answer the person. When you answer the person, you still answer the question, but it is the spirit of the question that you address. When you answer the person, you consider what the person had in mind when he or she asked the question. Before a person talks, he or she has a sense to convey. This is the reason why one talks. Therefore, the listener tries to understand the intention or the sense of what the speaker is attempting to convey. This is real listening and is very important, whether you are reading something someone has written or are listening to something someone is saying. A person may not always say what he or she really wants to say. A person’s look may be enough for you to see his or her language. This sometimes happens without the eyes also, like when you hear two or three words and understand the whole sentence. It all depends on your capacity to see what the speaker wants to say.

THE SPIRIT OF ARJUNA'S QUESTION

When Lord *Kṛṣṇa* answered *Arjuna*, he did not answer his question. Instead, he answered the person, as we will see. If he had answered the question, what could he have said? Would he have described a *sthitaprajñā* as one who walks very slowly or quickly because the person is a *sthitaprajñā*! Suppose the *sthitaprajñā* does not have any legs? Or, would *Kṛṣṇa* have said that a *sthitaprajñā* talks very slowly because he or she is very alert? Or, that being very alert, the *sthitaprajñā's* words are carefully measured and come only in half-minute intervals, the person being so rooted in the self!

What does all this mean? How does it make any difference? Some people think that if you talk very slowly, you are wonderful. They think that the words of a wise person who talks slowly come from infinity and, therefore, they take time! They come from such depths, it seems! People can be very easily fooled by those who pose as wise by saying very little and speaking very leisurely.

There is yet another popular description of a wise person: 'Words just tumble out. The physical organ is incapable of keeping track of the pace of the quicksilver mind of the wise. It is so mercurial. No God has made an organ of speech that can keep pace with it. The person has such enormous energy!' And then there is another type of wise person, it seems, who, having reached *ātmā*, does not talk at all. He or she is always in *samādhi*. People come and the person just looks at them without even blinking! Why? Because he or she is a *sthitaprajñā*, one of steady wisdom!

Thus, we see that if *Arjuna's* question had been taken literally, no answer would have been possible unless *Kṛṣṇa* himself believed in such definitions of a wise person. Therefore, the second line of *Arjuna's* question did not mean anything to *Kṛṣṇa*, but there was a spirit to it; that is, how does a wise person interact with the world? How does he or she talk and go about in the world? Is there any indication that this person has wisdom? Is there anything that betrays or reveals the wisdom he or she has? Will there be any difference in how this person interacts with the world and how an ordinary person interacts? There should be some difference. Therefore, what is it that characterises the person's wisdom? This was the spirit of *Arjuna's* question and it was this question that was answered in the verses to come.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

प्रजहाति यदा कामान् सर्वान् पार्थ मनोगतान् ।

आत्मन्येवात्मना तुष्टः स्थितप्रज्ञस्तदोच्यते ॥ ५५ ॥

śrībhagavānurvāca

prajahāti yadā kāmān sarvānpārtha manogatān

ātmanyevātmanā tuṣṭaḥ sthitaprajñastadocyate

Verse 55

श्रीभगवान् *śrībhagavān* — the Lord; उवाच *uvāca* — said; पार्थ *pārtha* — Oh! *Pārtha*; यदा *yadā* — when; सर्वान् *sarvān* — all; मनोगतान् *manogatān* — as they appear in the mind; कामान् *kāmān* — desires; प्रजहाति *prajahāti* — gives up; आत्मनि *ātmani* — in oneself; एव *eva* — alone; आत्मना *ātmanā* — with oneself; तुष्टः *tusṭaḥ* — one who is happy; तदा *tadā* — then; स्थितप्रज्ञः *sthitaprajñāḥ* — a person of ascertained knowledge; उच्यते *ucyate* — is said to be

Śrī Bhagavān said:

When a person gives up all the desires as they appear in the mind, Oh! *Pārtha*, happy in oneself, with oneself alone, that person is said to be one of ascertained knowledge.

The characteristics stated here and in the subsequent verses of the chapter are with reference to a person who has already attained this knowledge. Both the definition, *lakṣaṇa* of a wise person, *sthitaprajñā* and the means for becoming wise, the *sādhana* are discussed.

Although *Arjuna* only wanted to know who is a *sthitaprajñā*, the *sādhana* is also taught because, throughout the *śāstra*, the characteristics of a wise person are said to also be the means for preparing one's mind for the knowledge of the *ātmā*. In his commentary, *Śaṅkara* referred to a *sthitaprajñā* as one who is accomplished, one who has made it, a *kṛtārtha*. The characteristics of one who has made it by gaining this knowledge become the *sādhana*, the means, for gaining the knowledge. Thus, the wise person's spontaneous expressions in life, the attitudes and disposition with which he or she interacts with others, are the characteristics that establish the norms to be followed by the seekers of this wisdom.

THE DEFINITION IS ALSO THE MEANS

These characteristics are to be cultivated because they are the means by which the seeker becomes a wise person. Without these *sādhana*s, a person does not become wise. Thus, in the beginning, there is a *sādhana* and then, later, the *sādhana* becomes an expression. Sympathy, love, freedom, giving, and so on are all *sādhana*s in the beginning. They are means for self-purification and maturity, eventually becoming the natural expressions of the same person. It is not that the person tries to be sympathetic, loving, and giving; he or she is naturally sympathetic, loving, and giving. However, for the person who has not yet made it, he or she tries, for example, to give. This is necessary because, along with the giving thought, there is also the opposite thought in the form of a reluctance to give. In the mind of the person, the question, 'Why should I give?' still arises. If the ego is there telling me not to give, then I am not a giving person. Thus, giving, love, sympathy, consideration, and so on, all of which are the spontaneous

expressions of a wise person, become the *sādhana*s for the person who wants to be wise, the *mumukṣu*.

The *sādhana* itself is to be accomplished by effort, *yatna*. If you succeed in acquiring these characteristics, then you become firmly established in the knowledge. You gain *jñāna-niṣṭhā*. What was accomplished with effort becomes the natural expression of the wise person. That is the rule. Therefore, all the universal values, being natural to the *sthitaprajña* are the *sādhana*s for a *mumukṣu*. They became natural to the *sthitaprajña* because they are a natural expression of oneself. But, in the beginning, the person deliberately cultivated them. To become wise, you have to follow them; only then can you gain *jñāna-niṣṭhā*. Thus, these values are both the qualifications and the qualities you need for the knowledge to take place and, in time, they become very natural to you.

The qualities represented by universal values are not like a boat that you use to cross the river and then leave behind once you have reached the other side. Even though these qualities are the means for preparing your *antaḥ-karaṇa* for the knowledge, they become natural expressions because you continue to be a person with such a mind. You interact with the world as before, but now you interact spontaneously because these qualities have become natural to you. Thus, in the beginning, they are in the form of *sādhana*s, the means for accomplishing self-knowledge whereas, later, they are like ornaments — very natural, spontaneous expressions of the person.

Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa included both the definition of a wise person and the means for becoming wise in his response to *Arjuna's* request for a description of a *sthitaprajña* because they are one and the same thing. *Śaṅkara* makes the same point in his commentary introducing this verse. *Kṛṣṇa* also indicated that giving up all desires, *sarvān kāmān*, does not mean that the *sthitaprajña* has no desires, but that as they arise in his mind, *manogatān*, he gives them up — *prajahāti*. That means the desires are not pursued. In this way, the wise person gives up all desires.

CAN YOU BE HAPPY IF YOU GIVE UP DESIRES?

Now the question may arise, if a man gives up all his desires, does that not mean that he will have no happiness, *ānanda*? We know that a man is happy only when he fulfils a desire. But, here, he gives up all desires as they arise in his mind and at the same time continues to live. If all his desires disappear and he disappears with them, there is no problem. But if he gives up all desires and continues to exist in this world, it seems that he has no way of being happy. What recourse does he have, except to become high on drugs or a mad man who is always laughing at nothing!

In order to answer this question, we have to take two things into consideration. First, people are not happy and, secondly, people are always busy fulfilling their desires

in order to be happy. They are always hopeful that happiness will come because they do become happy occasionally. ‘Tomorrow will be better,’ they say. ‘Everything will be wonderful when this is over.’ It seems therefore, that people who pursue their desires are always working for happiness, whereas those who have given up all desires have no way of being happy. And no one can remain for a long period without being happy.

Bhagavān corrected this train of thinking by saying that such a person is happy with himself or herself — *ātmani eva ātmanā tuṣṭaḥ*. In himself or herself, the wise person is happy. Everyone is happy in himself or herself anyway, but always because of something else. Here, without any external props or circumstances, without expecting or depending upon any condition whatsoever, the person is happy.

The analogy of a sugar crystal is useful here. Simply by being a sugar crystal, a sugar crystal is sweet. It does not require a sweetening agent to be sweet because it is already saturated with sweetness. That is why it is sugar crystal. Therefore, it cannot be sweetened further. Similarly, one who is happy, *tuṣṭa*, does not depend on any other object or situation to be happy. By one's own awakening to oneself alone one is happy. Such a person is called *sthitaprajña*.

Śaṅkara explains here that *sthita* means well established and *prajñā* is that knowledge which is born of *viveka*, the discriminative inquiry into and analysis of the *ātmā* and *anātmā*. Therefore, the one for whom this knowledge is well established is called a *sthitaprajña* or a *vidvān*, a wise person.

Arjuna wanted to know what a *sthitaprajña* was and this was *Kṛṣṇa*'s definition. It is an excellent and complete definition. A *sthitaprajña*, *Kṛṣṇa* said, is one who, being awake to the fact of the *ātmā*, being happy for no other reason, gives up all desires that arise in his or her mind.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BINDING AND NON-BINDING DESIRES

Desires, *kāmas*, are divided into two types — *rāgas* and *dveṣas*. *Rāga-dveṣas* being nothing but desire, the common word for both of them is *kāma*, ‘I want’ is *kāma*. ‘I want such-and-such’ can be either something you want to acquire or protect or something that you want to avoid or get rid of. Either way it is a *kāma*, ‘I want.’ This want can be in the form of *rāga* or *dveṣa*, depending on whether you want to acquire something or get rid of something.

Rāga-dveṣas are also of two types — binding and non-binding. Whenever the *śāstra* talks about *kāma* in the form of *rāga* or *dveṣa*, it is referring only to those that are binding. When a person gives up all *kāmas* as they arise in the mind, he or she does so for a reason. Otherwise, giving them up is not possible. That a man who gives up all the desires in his mind and who is happy in himself, is called a wise man, *sthitaprajña*,

seems to mean that the first condition is a necessity for the second condition. Thus, in order to be happy with oneself, one has to give up all desires. How is that possible? Unless you are happy with yourself, how can you give up all desires?

If, in order to give up all desires, you have to be happy with yourself, and in order to be happy with yourself you have to give up all desires, you are in an unenviable position. It is something like a mentally unbalanced man who is advised that unless he marries, he will not be cured. In other words, the diagnosis and the treatment are one. Because no father will give his daughter in marriage to a madman, he will not be able to marry and unless he marries, he cannot be mentally well. We seem to have the same situation here. But do we? According to some modern translations, it may look that way, but not according to *Śaṅkara*.

NON-BINDING DESIRES ARE NOT THE PROBLEM

First, *Śaṅkara* created a problem by saying that a person who gives up all his desires is like a mad man. Otherwise, how can he be happy? Then, he said, a man who is happy in himself, by his own awakening to himself, does not need any desire to be fulfilled in order to be happy. What desires are being referred to here? Only those desires whose fulfilment is meant to make me happy and not those that are non-binding in nature for me.

Non-binding desires may include a desire to do, a desire to write, a desire to teach, a desire to give, a desire to just simply stay put, and so on. Non-binding desires are not being considered here, only binding desires. If a wise person is one who gives up all desires, where does that leave *Śaṅkara*, who wrote the commentary on giving up desires? Was he a wise man? Was *Kṛṣṇa*, who taught *Arjuna*, a wise man? Was *Vyāsa*, who wrote the *Mahābhārata* in which the *Gītā* appears, a wise man?

If only those who have given up all desires are wise, none of these men can be considered to have been wise. *Kṛṣṇa* seemed to have a desire to teach. *Kṛṣṇa* all but pounced on *Arjuna*! He did not even mind that he was in the midst of a battlefield. *Kṛṣṇa*'s knowledge seems to have been bottled up inside him and it came pouring out for *Arjuna*'s asking in one long, continuous flow! Aside from his desire to teach, *Kṛṣṇa* seemed to have some other desires, too. For example, when he was asked to drive *Arjuna*'s chariot, he agreed.

Had *Kṛṣṇa* given up every desire that arose in his mind, he could not have driven the chariot. But he did drive it. He also took up the flute and played a lot of songs. If this desire had been given up, all the *gopīs* would be still, waiting to hear his music and he would be still sitting with his flute poised. He would not have even had the desire to remove his hands from the flute!

Since *Kṛṣṇa* presented himself as one who performed various actions and since doing presupposes desire, he could not have been a *sthitaprajñā* by his own definition. *Vyāsa* also must have had a lot of desires to have written this great magnum opus, this huge work called the *Mahābhārata*. To have kept on writing as he did, *Vyāsa* must have had a very special mind indeed and a lot of desires as well. People often have the desire to accomplish some enormous project or the other, but then after a while they give it up. They begin it, but do not complete it. Not *Vyāsa*. He began and finished every chapter. Thus, according to the definition, he could not have been a *jñānī*. In fact, no teacher can be a *jñānī*. Thus, they must all be *ajñānīs*. If the desire is not there, a wise person cannot teach. Which means that only the ‘otherwise’ can teach, but they have nothing to teach! Unfortunately, the explanations put forward in some modern commentaries of the *Gītā*, based on incorrect translations, have created a lot of problems in understanding what is meant by giving up all desires. If this were not the case, there would be no misunderstanding because what was said originally by *Kṛṣṇa* is very clear.

WHEN YOU ARE EVERYTHING, WHAT IS THERE TO BE DONE?

As *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* in the third chapter, a wise person is not bound by his or her desires and is not subject to any kind of mandate. Desires are only binding if you take yourself to be a *kartā*, a doer. Only then do you have things to do; only then can there be dereliction of duty. If, on the other hand, you do not look upon yourself as a *kartā* and are awake to the knowledge of yourself, there is no question of the self being a doer. Therefore, there is no doership and nothing to be done. Lord *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that because he had no desires, he had nothing to do. Because *Kṛṣṇa* is everything and everything is himself, what is there to be accomplished? Nevertheless, he was always active, meaning that all the activities he performed were non-binding.

If activities are non-binding, the prompting factor of activity, *kāma* must also be non-binding. Here, in the *Gītā*, non-binding *kāma* is not the topic; only binding *kāma* is discussed.

The placement of the words ‘when – *yadā*’ and ‘then – *tadā*’ in this verse is also significant. The word ‘then’ comes much later and until it comes, the force of the word ‘when’ continues. When a man gives up all desires as they arise and being happy with himself in himself, only then can he be called a *sthitaprajñā*. The force of ‘when’ is the same for both conditions ‘when he gives up all desires’ and ‘when he is happy’ with himself, in himself, depending on nothing for his happiness.

Therefore, one gives up all desires arising in one’s mind that are binding in nature — the desires to be secure, to be happy, to be somebody, and so on. A person who is secure with himself or herself gives up such desires naturally. The word *tuṣṭa*, in the verse, does not merely mean happiness; it implies security also. The insecure cannot be *tuṣṭa*, happy. Therefore, one who is secure is also happy. And giving up all desires is

possible only when one is happy with oneself. Thus, the definition of *sthitaprajña* is complete.

What else can be said? One who is happy with oneself is a wise person who can totally accept himself or herself because the self is acceptable. The self is perfect; it is not imperfect. Perfection means that there is no sense of imperfection whatsoever. The self is free from any sense of imperfection and the whole creation, the whole world, the universe, is non-separate from the self. Because the self is complete, *pūrṇa*, it cannot be improved upon. Just as the sweetness of sugar cannot be improved upon, so too, the fullness of the *ātmā* cannot be improved upon. Being awake to that fact, the person is happy.

TO BE WISE YOU MUST HAVE WISDOM

This, then, is the *lakṣaṇa*, the definition, of a wise person. To be wise requires wisdom, nothing else! How a wise person walks, talks, and sits means nothing. Anyone can learn to walk in a certain way. And if the definition of a wise person is that he or she talks slowly, then every one who talks slowly would be a *jñānī*! The speed at which one talks or how one walks means nothing. Wisdom alone makes one wise, just as being friendly is the only way to make friends. There is no other way.

Similarly, some people ask how they can develop love. All that is to be done is to love. What else can you do? You cannot discover love outside of love itself. If you want to discover more love, be loving. Create conditions that will help you discover love, conditions that are not inimical to the discovery of love. People often create certain conditions in themselves, knowingly or unknowingly, that are inimical to the discovery of love. If you avoid doing this, you will find that you are loving.

LOVE IS A MANIFESTATION OF ONE'S FULLNESS

Love is nothing but the expressed form of fullness, *ānanda*. And just as wheat flour takes on names such as bread, rolls, and muffins, so too love is subject to various forms. The different names given to wheat represent modifications of the wheat. Similarly, love is a simple emotion, which is a modification or manifestation of *ānanda*. If you analyse love, you will find nothing but *ānanda*. The manifest form of *ānanda* is love and love itself turns into such natural qualities as sympathy, compassion, and giving, depending upon the situation. And when that same love is distorted in any way, it becomes *kāma* leading to negative emotions such as greed, anger, depression, and so on. All of these, then, are nothing but one expression of *ānanda*, love. This is why we say love is *Bhagavān*, meaning that the expressed form of *ānanda* is *Bhagavān*.

And what is *Bhagavān*? The essential form of *Bhagavān* is *sat-cit-ānanda*. And the expressed form of *ānanda*, *Īśvara*, the Lord, is love. The modifications of this love

can be either positive or negative. Sympathy and compassion are examples of the positive modifications of love, whereas negative modifications are anger, greed, jealousy, and so on. All that is there is one *ānanda*, expressed or unexpressed. Unexpressed it is the *svarūpa*, the very nature of fullness, which is the definition of *ānanda*; expressed, it becomes love, *prema*. We shall see more of this definition later.

Here, the *sthitaprajña* is one who discovers the *ānanda* in himself or herself and knows that there is nothing other than oneself. When one says, 'I am the whole,' it means that the person is himself or herself the fulfillment of all desires. We shall see, as we proceed, how the discovery of oneself and the fulfillment of all desires are not separate, but identical.

दुःखेष्वनुद्विग्नमनाः सुखेषु विगतस्पृहः ।

वीतरागभयक्रोधः स्थितधीर्मुनिरुच्यते ॥ ५६ ॥

duḥkheṣvanudvignamanāḥ sukheṣu vigataspr̥haḥ
vītarāgabhayakrodhaḥ sthitadhīrṁnirucyate

Verse 56

दुःखेषु *duḥkheṣu* — in adversities; अनुद्विग्नमनाः *anudvignamanāḥ* — not affected; सुखेषु *sukheṣu* — in pleasures; विगतस्पृहः *vigataspr̥haḥ* — one who is without yearning; वीतरागभयक्रोधः *vīta-rāga-bhaya-krodhaḥ* — one who is free from longing, fear, and anger; मुनिः *muniḥ* — the wise person; स्थितधीः *sthitadhīḥ* — one whose knowledge remains; उच्यते *ucyate* — is said

The one who is not, affected by adversities, who is without yearning for pleasures, and is free from longing, fear, and anger is said to be a wise person whose knowledge remains.

Arjuna's question, as we have seen, was answered completely in the previous verse. Being awake to yourself and in yourself alone, you discover your joy, your fulfillment. And you discover it by yourself, meaning through knowledge. Without self-knowledge, you cannot discover happiness in yourself. How can you discover happiness in yourself by yourself when the self is unhappy? Generally, you are happy if your desire is fulfilled, but here you are happy with yourself without fulfilling any desire.

The nature of the *ātmā* is free from any sense of limitation and the person who is awake to this particular fact, the *sthitaprajña* is free from unhappiness. As desires arise in his or her mind, the person is not affected by them because of being happy with himself or herself. This, then, was how *Kṛṣṇa* described the characteristics of a person of wisdom when *Arjuna* wanted to know how a wise person responds to the world.

Even though one's response to the world does not necessarily reveal how much wisdom one has, still *Arjuna* thought that the spontaneous expressions of a wise person

interacting in the world would reflect those values to be cultivated assiduously by a seeker and would, therefore, serve as a handy reference. Knowing how a wise person expresses himself or herself in the world is not for judging whether a person is wise or otherwise. It is not that we have a matrix of norms indicating the exact behaviour of a wise person, against which everyone is measured. It is only to know what I should follow in order to be wise.

What was it that the wise person followed before becoming wise that made him or her wise and that continues as the spontaneous expression of the person? This is what *Arjuna* really wanted to know, because the characteristics of a *sthitaprajña* become the very means, the *sādhanas*, to be followed by a *mumukṣu*. *Kṛṣṇa* understood this to be the spirit of *Arjuna's* question and answered it accordingly.

THE THREE-FOLD SOURCE OF SORROW

Sorrow or pain, *duḥkha* has three sources — *ādhyātmika*, *ādhibhautika*, and *ādhidaivika*. *Ādhyātmika* is pain for which the source is your own body, mind, and senses, from a stomach-ache onwards. The second source of sorrow, *ādhibhautika*, are the situations around you, including the people and bugs that irritate you. Finally, *ādhidaivika* is the pain or sorrow caused by such things as earthquakes and lightning. This kind of pain is not created by your brother-in-law or anyone else, but is from a source that is absolutely divine, natural phenomena over which you have no control whatsoever. You may try to control mosquitoes with certain sprays that will destroy them, but there is nothing you can do to prevent an earthquake.

Thus, while the source of sorrow is three-fold, there are not different types of sorrow. Sorrow may express itself in a hundred different ways — weeping, howling, kicking, moaning, and so on. But the sorrow itself is one and the same. The word '*duḥkheṣu*' in the verse is in the plural because the source of sorrow is three-fold, as explained by *Śaṅkara* in his commentary on this verse. And those whose minds are not affected or shaken by the sorrow arising from these three sources of pain are said to be wise.

Because the sources of pain are always active, pain is possible for a wise person, but he or she is not affected by it. What, then, is the response of a wise man when his head aches? 'Will his head ache?' is the first question. Or, let us start from the very beginning, 'Does he even have a head?' Yes, and because the wise man continues to have a head, it may ache. Now, when his head aches, does he know it or not? After all, he is *sat-cit-ānanda*. Being *sat-cit-ānanda*, what happens when there is a headache? Does he recognise it? The verse indicates that he does by saying, when such pain occurs, the wise man is not affected.

When anyone recognises *duḥkha*, there is *duḥkha* for him. But what happens afterwards? The person is shaken by pain or sorrow and then he becomes disturbed, *udvigna-manāḥ*. Any disturbance from the three sources described above can make it a reality. The headache is there, you recognise it and then you worry about it until your whole head and everything else aches! You may even become a pain to everyone around you! You were the only one with a neck pain, but you talk so much about it and make such a fuss that your pain also becomes everyone else's pain in the neck.

A WISE PERSON'S RESPONSE TO SUKHA

What about pleasure, *sukha*, then? There are people who can remain quiet when *duḥkha* comes, but jump around like a football when something pleasant happens. The word *sukheṣu* here refers to any happy, pleasant situation, regardless of its source, which can also be described in the same three-fold manner. *Sukha* can come from your own sensory pleasure, from some external event, or yearning for such pleasures — *sukheṣu sprhā*.

But does a wise person not laugh when something funny is happening? Yes, but there is no 'Encore! Once more!' from the person, no longing. Recognising both pain and pleasure, he or she is not carried away by either of them — *sukheṣu-vigata-sprhāḥ duḥkheṣu anudvigna-manāḥ*. This characteristic, then, becomes a *sādhana* for a *mumukṣu*.

Śaṅkara in his commentary to this verse gives the example of fire. If you feed the fire with more wood, it will grow even more, *anuvivardhate*. In keeping with the fuel that has been offered, it grows to become a big conflagration. When you first light a fire, it always starts as a flame, but set one match to a tank of gasoline and you have an instant conflagration. Thus, the more the fuel, the more the fire! Unlike the fire, *Śaṅkara* said, the wise person's *sukha* resolves in himself or herself, in his or her fullness. The idea here is, since there is no yearning for *sukha*, the person's desires do not get out of hand.

Kṛṣṇa also said in this verse that one who is not swept away by either *sukha* or *duḥkha* is free of likes, fear, and anger — he is *vīta-rāga-bhaya-krodhaḥ*. Freedom from *rāga* implies freedom from *dveṣa* also. They are a pair. When one is mentioned, the other one is automatically understood to be included; in other words, they go together.

The happiness of those who are not in the hands of *rāga-dveṣas* is not determined by their *rāga-dveṣas*. Their *rāga-dveṣas* do not affect their being happy with themselves; the *rāga-dveṣas* no longer have any teeth! They may be baby *rāga-dveṣas* or old *rāga-dveṣas*, but either way, they do not bite because they cannot bite. They can

only be enjoyed. This is why the *rāga-dveṣas* of the wise are referred to as non-binding. They are toothless.

THE ABSENCE OF FEAR

Once *rāga* is gone, fear also goes. Fear exists only when desire is there and desire is there only when *rāga-dveṣa* is there. *Kāma* indicates duality. It is due to the notion, 'I am this much alone. Everything else is other than me and I have to get it.' Thus there is duality, meaning that there is a difference between *jīva*, the individual, and *Īśvara*, the Lord — *jīveśvara-bhedha*. Naturally, then, there will be fear because, a difference between the individual and the Lord implies duality between the individual and the world. And duality between the individual and the world means duality between individual and individual. Once you accept a duality between the individual and *Īśvara*, you will find difference, *bhedha*, everywhere.

If you think that you are different from *Īśvara*, you will think that you are different from the world and from everyone else in the world. And in this world of duality, you are an insecure person; therefore, the fear of danger from another source will always be there because the 'other' will always be there. Fear comes from duality only. Any fear means that duality is there because you recognise the source of fear as something other than yourself.

You can even be afraid of yourself if you have created a split in yourself. There is an 'ideal I' and an 'actual I' and the 'actual I' is always frightening to the 'ideal I.' This is also the reason why you are afraid of an insane person — provided you are sane, of course! Similarly, you may find that you are afraid of a person who is sad.

There can be no fear if there is only one thing, *vastu*. A second thing is necessary for fear to occur. Therefore, the one who has no duality is not only free from *rāga-dveṣa*, but is also free from fear.

ANGER ALSO GOES

Lastly, a wise person is free from anger, which is nothing, but another form of *rāga*. The desire itself is transformed into anger. First, the desire is in a very benign form and then it is transformed into another form, an ugly form called anger. We will be seeing this later in the chapter — *kāmāt krodhaḥ abhijāyate*. When what I want is not accomplished due to some obstruction, that very *kāma* turns into anger whose target is the obstruction. Whatever is obstructing my desire, becomes the object of my anger.

Many murders take place because the object of a person's love becomes the object of his or her anger. A man does not kill the loving woman; he kills only the obstinate, unwilling woman. And then he will cry for the loving one! Thus, when a person becomes an obstruction to your desire, that same person becomes the object of your anger. Anger

is always a mutilated, transformed, deflected form of *kāma*. Therefore, if you are free of *kāma*, desire, you will be free of *krodha*, anger.

DUALITY AND FEAR

The word *bhaya*, fear, was put between the words *rāga* and *krodha* because of its special significance, which is dealt with very well in the *śāstra*. The only way to be free of fear is by swallowing duality and you cannot swallow duality unless there is no duality. And because there is no duality, it can be swallowed — but only through knowledge. This is the only way of getting rid of fear. Wherever there is duality, there is fear — fear of mortality, fear of being put down, fear of being small, fear of not making it, and so on. Fear can exist only as long as there is a seeker-sought relationship, the very relationship implying duality between the seeker and the sought and, in the final analysis, duality between oneself and the Lord.

Any small division whatsoever is enough to cause fear. Even to say, 'Īśvara is everything and I am a part of him' is enough! In fact, upon analysis, you will find that this concept is the very point from which everything becomes different. This difference is born out of a natural lack of inquiry, *avicāra*, or non-thinking. And if, after inquiry, duality is still there, it is a tragedy. Because the *Upaniṣads* expect this kind of thinking or non-thinking, they address the topic thoroughly, pointing out that as long as there is any division whatsoever, fear cannot be avoided.

A *muni* is a thinking person, a person of inquiry, and the knowledge, *dhi*, of the *muni* stays *sthita*; that is it does not swing and sway. The *muni* does not think duality, *dvaita*, one day and non-duality, *advaita* the next, just because someone has put forth a cogent argument. In fact, *dvaita* is not knowledge; it is a belief. Regardless of the number of objections raised, *advaita* is something you know. You may not be able to communicate it to someone else, but you know because it is yourself. It is not something you have to believe. It is a freedom from all notions; *advaita* is all that is there.

We have seen that the person whose knowledge stays is called a *sthitaprajña*, a wise person. *Sannyāsī* is also a word to point out *jñānaniṣṭha*, one whose knowledge is firm and abiding. This word was brought in by *Śaṅkara* here because he did not think that one could be a *jñānī* without being a *sannyāsī*. As we proceed, we shall see that *Śaṅkara's sannyāsa* is always *jñāna*, nothing less.

Further, *Kṛṣṇa* said:

यः सर्वत्रानभिस्नेहस्तत्तत्प्राप्य शुभाशुभम् ।
नाभिनन्दति न द्वेष्टि तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥ ५७ ॥
yaḥ sarvatrānabhisnehastattatprāpya śubhāśubham
nābhinandati na dveṣṭi tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā

Verse 57

यः *yaḥ* — the one who; सर्वत्र *sarvatra* — in all situations; अनभिस्नेहः *anabhisnehaḥ* — without attachment; तत् तत् *tat tat* — whatever; शुभाशुभम् *śubhāśubham* — the pleasant and unpleasant; प्राप्य *prāpya* — gaining; न अभिनन्दति *na abhinandati* — does not rejoice; न द्वेष्टि *na dveṣṭi* — does not hate; तस्य *tasya* — his; प्रज्ञा *prajñā* — knowledge; प्रतिष्ठिता *pratiṣṭhitā* — is well established

For the one who is unattached in all situations, who does neither rejoices on gaining the pleasant and nor hates the unpleasant, his knowledge is well-established.

The *muni* discussed in the last verse is the person referred to here. A *muni* is a *jñānī*, one who has the capacity for *vicāra* and, therefore, knowledge. Such a person is said to be unattached to anything — *sarvatra anabhisneha*. *Sneha* means affection or love. The literal meaning of this word in Sanskrit is anything viscous, like oil or glue. If you touch it, it sticks to you. Thus, anything sticky is called *sneha*.

Affection is considered to be *sneha* because the person for whom you have affection sticks to you. Even if the person is away from you, he or she is always with you in your thoughts. Because there is sharing involved, the other person's joys and sorrows become your joys and sorrows. You are deeply affected by the person and, therefore, there is *sneha*, affection, between the two of you.

Affection need not be a problem. However, attachment, *abhisneha*, is definitely a nuisance. When a mother has affection for her child, there is no problem because the child needs the affection in order to grow well. To be fondled, talked to, listened to, and cared for — all of which is *sneha* — is very important for the child's growth. But what usually happens is that affection becomes attachment and attachment means there is a strangulation of some kind. Instead of being an object of your affection, the person becomes an object to be possessed and controlled.

The need to control is a common problem everywhere. It is also a very old problem, which is why *Kṛṣṇa* addressed it in this verse. Attachment is not there for a wise person. His or her heart is never caught anywhere. It is always free and in its own place. In fact, most of us have empty hearts because that which is our heart has been distributed in little bits to various places — a little bit in the furniture, another bit in the carpet, and still other bits in your bank balance and a variety of other things. All that is left is a ticking heart! Everything else has been liberally distributed around and about. In this way, we lose our hearts in quite a few places, and even say so, 'I lost my heart.'

YOUR MIND IS ALWAYS WHERE YOUR HEART IS

And where will your mind be? Where the heart is — because that is where you are. Wherever the emotional attachment is, the mind will run right to it. Thus, the heart

being in a hundred different places, the mind, attempting to keep pace with it, necessarily goes to the same hundred places and, in fact, finds it quite difficult to cope with all the travel!

A person who has a wound involving pain and a little swelling will look at the wound every few minutes and stroke it ever so gently. Because there is pain and a lot of healing activity going on, the wound receives all of the person's love and attention. The mind goes there because the heart is there. The whole system naturally wants to fight it out and will certainly not allow the mind to dwell upon the meaning of *sat-cit-ānanda* at this time! Thus, our attachment is towards many things and many places, including heaven, none of which attracts the wise.

Any description of heaven that you can think of, no matter how seemingly perfect, will not interest a wise person. He or she is one who is not caught up anywhere, whose heart is with him or her and never gets lost. Such a person may have love, friendship, affection, and care, but nothing more. This is why the prefix *abhi* is added to the word *sneha*. That the wise person may have affection, but no attachment, is evidenced throughout the *Upaniṣads* and the *Gītā*.

Kṛṣṇa definitely had affection for *Arjuna* when he said, 'Oh!, my friend, I am teaching you because you are my devotee and I am your friend.' He talked to him very fondly. We find many expressions in the *Upaniṣads* meaning, '*somya*, Oh! pleasing one' etc., referring affectionately to a student. The point is that, while there is affection, there is no attachment. Attachment helps no one, definitely not the *mumukṣu*.

The verse also tells us that the wise person does not dance for joy over desirable situations or hate undesirable situations — *śubhāśubhaṃ tat tat prāpya na abhinandati na dveṣṭi*. The word *śubha* means that which is good, auspicious, pleasant, and desirable and *aśubha* means that which is unpleasant like death, disease, and so on. To hate an undesirable situation is nothing but refusal to accept a fact. A wise person does not hate a given situation, meaning that he or she accepts it as it is, and therefore does not subject himself or herself to sorrow.

In the face of both the pleasant and unpleasant, the auspicious and inauspicious, the wise person is the same, *samaḥ*. For a *yogī*, it is a matter of attitude, born of a certain understanding, whereas for a *jñānī*, it is a natural, spontaneous expression. This is the only difference.

In his commentary on this verse, *Śaṅkara* confirms that the one who remains the same in the face of both pleasant and unpleasant situations is well established in knowledge. This is because the person is free from the swings of joy and sorrow, elation and depression. There are no stock-market highs and lows because the person's knowledge is born of *ātma-anātma-viveka*, discrimination between the real and the unreal.

Kṛṣṇa described the same person further in the next verse:

यदा संहरते चायं कूर्मोऽङ्गानीव सर्वशः ।

इन्द्रियाणीन्द्रियार्थेभ्यस्तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥ ५८ ॥

yadā saṁharate cāyaṁ kūrmo'ṅgānīva sarvaśaḥ
indriyāṇīndriyārthebhyastasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā

Verse 58

यदा *yadā* — when; च *ca* — and; अयम् *ayam* — this person; कूर्मः *kūrmaḥ* — turtle; अङ्गानि *aṅgāni* — limbs; इव *iva* — like; इन्द्रियार्थेभ्यः *indriyārthebhyaḥ* — from sense objects; इन्द्रियाणि *indriyāṇi* — sense organs; सर्वशः *sarvaśaḥ* — completely; संहरते *saṁharate* — is able to withdraw; तस्य *tasya* — his; प्रज्ञा *prajñā* — knowledge; प्रतिष्ठिता *pratiṣṭhitā* — is steady

And when, like the turtle that withdraws its limbs, this person is able to completely withdraw the sense organs from their objects, his knowledge is steady.

This verse was also in response to *Arjuna's* question about how a *sthitaprajña* interacts with the world, the word 'ca' connecting it to the previous verse. The wise person's capacity to manage his or her mind and senses is what is now being discussed.

A person may have *jñāna*, but for that knowledge to be steady, he or she must be able to withdraw the sense organs from the sense pursuits at will. Although the senses themselves are not harmful, they are referred to as the villains by the *śāstra* and by ourselves. For example, we make such statements as: 'I am okay, but my sense organs take me for a ride.' 'My eyes alone take me to New York's 42nd Street.' 'My ears also take me places.' 'My sense organs are turbulent.' 'They are the ones doing all the mischief. I am in their hands, the victim of my sense organs.'

THE SENSE ORGANS ARE NOT TO BLAME

In fact, the sense organs are not to blame at all. They are purely reporters. They do not ask you to do anything. Otherwise, you could not go into a shopping mall and come out without everything sticking to you. The senses themselves are not turbulent; they only report and they keep reporting because it is their nature to report. Reporting is their job. The eyes tell you what is there. If it is a sentence, they help you read it. If it is a colour, the eyes help you see it.

It is not the sense of smell that tells you that this is sweet and so on. It only reports the smell. You are the one who decides whether it is sweet or not. Otherwise, who would like blue cheese? If the senses had sweetness, they would never develop a liking for a strong smelling cheese called blue cheese. It is you who develop a liking for it, not the

senses. They only report the smell. And when they report the smell of blue cheese to some people, those people run! The senses are not responsible for your going for the blue cheese. Your mind is the cause. Thus, the senses themselves are not to blame.

Please, remove the blame from the senses. They are given to you simply for reporting; they do no harm. The reason they are presented as villains is because they report there are problems. If they did not report, there would be no desire, no pursuit, and therefore no problem. But, because they report, there are fancies and you go along with the fancies. These fancies are many and the reports of the senses are constant. They keep coming all the time — reports of new objects, changing objects, new scenes and changing scenes.

Because the senses are a means of knowledge, a *pramāṇa*, it is their job to report what is happening. For example, if there is a sound, your sense of hearing immediately tells you that it is a sound. Because of the various sense data, you get yourself started and, before long, find yourself caught up in fancies. Because the reports of the senses lead to fancies, the senses seem to be a problem, but they are not. Even the fancies that happen in your mind are not in themselves a problem, as we will see later. But, because you go along with the fancies, the senses are considered to be turbulent and are thought of as the villains.

The senses are not villains. If they report something and there is a fancy for it, you go along with the fancy until you find that you have no time for anything else. And because there are so many fancies, you are totally lost. The verse under discussion here refers to the person who is able to withdraw the senses at his or her will in order to gain steadiness in the knowledge of the self. When a person is able to gain or command the capacity to dismiss fancies at will, then his or her knowledge is steady because there is nothing for the person to regret. A *sthitaprajña* goes only by what he or she wants, meaning what is considered to be right, and is not dictated by fancies.

To go by what you want means that you decide. The decision itself may be right or wrong, but you go by it and not by your fancies. The one who does not go by fancies, who is able at will to withdraw one's sense organs, is not in the hands of the senses. Sense pursuits do not happen for such a person without his or her signature and sanction. This person will then be able to gain *jñāna-niṣṭhā*, steadiness in the knowledge of the self.

ANYONE CAN WITHDRAW THE SENSES

We must remember, here, that the person under discussion is a *sthitaprajña*, one whose knowledge is firm and remains. Otherwise, anyone who is together could be taken as *jñānī*, which is not true. The person we are discussing is either a *sthitaprajña* or one who is committed to *sthitaprajñatva*, one who wants to be a *sthitaprajña*. For both, the

capacity to withdraw one's senses from anything, at will, is important. This capacity has already been accomplished by a *sthītaprajñā*, whereas for the one who wants to be a *sthītaprajñā*, it is yet to be gained.

Kṛṣṇa used the example of a turtle, *kūrma*, with reference to withdrawing the sense organs. A turtle is able to withdraw its limbs at will and then send them out again. Because the turtle cannot move quickly, it is given a certain protection. It has the extraordinary capacity to withdraw its neck, legs, and tail in under its thick shell whenever it apprehends danger. The thickness of the shell prevents the detection of any scent of a living being underneath. This is *Bhagavān's* gift to the turtle and is also an indication of *Bhagavān's* sense of humour and justice. If he had given every living being four good legs, it would have meant that he had run out of imagination. Instead, *Bhagavān* is showing you that there is yet another way — without big legs or fast movements the turtle too can also survive by withdrawing its limbs into itself into its shell.

Similar to the turtle, a human being is not helpless in the hands of the senses because the person also has a thick shell into which he or she can withdraw. In fact, for some people their shell is so thick that nothing enters! If the mind is taken away by fancies, what can the senses do? But you can see a hundred different things without wanting any of them. You simply see them in the same way as you see nature's autumn colours. What do you want out of them? Nothing. You just enjoy them from a distance, appreciating them as they are.

In the same way, the senses need not create a problem. If there is fancy, it comes as a fancy and goes as a fancy. It is only when you want something that problems arise. By means of the turtle example, *Kṛṣṇa* is describing the capacity to withdraw the senses at will, from their objects and into oneself. And for the one who has knowledge, this capacity will enable that knowledge to become steady, to gain *niṣṭhā*.

For the person who has prepared himself or herself for the knowledge by developing the capacity to make the mind and senses behave in this way, the knowledge is not going to be far away. And if the person is not so prepared, let him or her try to make the mind and senses behave by the practice of withdrawing them from the sense objects. It is as simple as that.

The information in this verse is not provided in order to judge anyone, but so that you may understand how the mind and senses are meant to function.

Further, *Kṛṣṇa* said:

विषया विनिवर्तन्ते निराहारस्य देहिनः ।
 रसवर्जं रसोऽप्यस्य परं दृष्ट्वा निवर्तते ॥ ५९ ॥
viṣayā vinivartante nirāhārasya dehinaḥ

rasavarjaṃ raso'pyasya paraṃ dr̥ṣṭvā nivartate

Verse 59

निराहारस्य *nirāhārasya* — for the one who does not feed the sense organs; देहिनः *dehinaḥ* — for the one who indwells this body; विषयाः *viṣayāḥ* — senses; विनिवर्तन्ते *vinivartante* — come back to oneself; रसवर्जम् *rasa-varjam* — leaving the longing behind; परम् *param* — *Brahman*; दृष्ट्वा *dr̥ṣṭvā* — having seen; अस्य *asya* — of this person; रसः *rasaḥ* — longing; अपि *api* — even; निवर्तते *nivartate* — goes away

For one who does not feed the senses, the senses come back to oneself, leaving the longing behind. Having seen *Brahman* (when the self is known) even the longing goes away.

There is the possibility of a doubt here. Does this capacity to withdraw one's senses from the sense objects at will give the person *jñāna-niṣṭhā*? No. Even a complete fool can practice this technique. A *yogī* also actively engages in this discipline of withdrawing the senses. The sense organs can be withdrawn as a turtle withdraws its limbs. Therefore, you cannot say a person is a *jñāna-niṣṭha* merely because he or she can withdraw the senses and sit with himself or herself. *Śaṅkara* presents this doubt here in order to deal with it.

Even though people may not go along with their fancies, the taste for them will still be there. Therefore, is this not the practice of suppression, rather than a withdrawal? We have seen how people blow up. The senses definitely get them sooner or later — if not today, then tomorrow. Why? Because everything is suppressed inside. When the value for something is inside a man, he will definitely deliver himself into the hands of his senses eventually. Because he is not their master, the senses will get him. If he thinks he has enslaved them, he need only wait for certain situations to present themselves. He will find himself enslaved by his senses in no time. They will take him for aride. In the wink of an eye, he will be gone totally.

THE TASTE LINGERS ON

Thus, even an ordinary person can withdraw the senses, but the taste, *rasa*, and value for the fancies will still be there. Such a person feels that certain sense enjoyments are important and without them, he or she cannot be happy. Suppose, because this person is told that sense enjoyments are all very painful, he or she decides not to go after them. Then he or she might begin practising withdrawal of the senses, but find that the *rasa* does not go away. Even those who already have a value for meditation and learn to withdraw the senses in order to discover *ānanda* in themselves, or gain inner contentment, may continue to have a value for the enjoyments of the senses.

The question is — when would the taste, the subjective value, for sense enjoyments go? The subjective value is an emotional value. Suppose a person is not a

fool and has *viveka*. He is intellectually convinced that sense enjoyments are of no use, because they do not provide any real security or lasting pleasure. Even if this person has no intellectual value for sense enjoyments, he or she may still have an emotional value. Therefore, when and how will this emotional value go?

The emotional value is very important and must be recognised as such. Emotion is a part of your life, a part of your expression. Therefore, you cannot dismiss it, nor is it necessary to do so. And emotion does need to be respected because it has a power that can be overpowering. We can be completely overwhelmed by emotion and, therefore, we need to know how to tackle it.

An emotional value, which is a subjective value, is different from an intellectual value, which is objective. Intellectually, your analysis can be clean: ‘These are all sense objects. They do not contain any joy or security. I am insecure and remain so, whether I have sense objects or not, whether I have money or not. Therefore, I need to discover security within myself.’ All of this you may know. But, although you know that money does not make you secure, you still have an emotional value for it. And even if you do not have an emotional value for money, an intellectual value will definitely be there because you do need to buy a few things. Therefore, to say that money has no value is not correct.

THE VALUE OF MONEY

That money does not give you security is a fact, but money does give you a house, health, haircuts, and a variety of other necessities and comforts. Money is not something that has no value whatsoever. Because it has an objective value, it cannot be dismissed totally.

With reference to its emotional value, money is used to measure success. If someone comes to see you in a new car and your car is battered, you find yourself wanting to have a new car. When money is used to measure your success, there is always a feeling that you have not made it. ‘I did not do this and I did not do that’ is one of many inner tapes indicative of a subjective, emotional value that cannot be dismissed.

How can you withdraw from that *rasa*, that taste, that is always there? To suppress the value is not the answer because suppression is nothing but a volcano that blows its top one day. Whenever there is suppression, this problem arises. Here, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* how the subjective value is dealt with.

The word *viṣayas* usually means sense objects, but in the present context it stands for the senses, the topic discussed in the previous and following verses. Based on similar expressions found in the *śāstra*, *Śaṅkara*, in his commentary on this verse, converts sense objects into sense organs. Here, the sense organs belong to a person who does not take to any sense object, who denies himself or herself sense objects, who does not have

any sense pursuits, *nirāhāra*. *Āhāra* means ‘sense objects’ and refers to that which is taken by you. Food is called *āhāra*¹ because it is eaten, taken, by you. The one who does not feed the sense organs is therefore called a *nirāhāra*. *Kṛṣṇa* also referred to this person as a *dehī* meaning one who is alive in a physical body.

Śaṅkara makes the point here that the person who engages in a rigorous discipline of sense withdrawal can be either a *vivekī* or an *avivekī*. He or she can even be deluded, a fool, *mūrkhaḥ api*. In all cases, the sense organs that are withdrawn from the sense objects come back to oneself, *viśayāḥ vinivartante*. But even though the sense organs come back and sense objects are no longer with the person, the taste for the sense objects remains — *rasa-varjaṃ vinivartante*. In other words, the subjective emotional value for them is still there. If the person is deluded, an intellectual value will also be there, impelling the person to perform rigorous disciplines, *tapas*, merely because someone said that they should be done.

The difference between a *vivekī* and an *avivekī*, then, is that the *vivekī* will only have the subjective value, not the intellectual value, whereas the *avivekī* will have both the subjective value and the intellectual value.

KNOWLEDGE ALONE REMOVES RASA

In general terms, *rasa* is a sense and is commonly used to mean *rāga* or liking. *Śaṅkara* describes it in the same way. Anything that is pleasing to you may be referred to as *rāga* or *rasa*. This is the value that remains inside a person's heart and mind, even after having withdrawn the sense organs from it. This *rasa* too goes away, *Kṛṣṇa* said, when the self is known — *raso'pi paraṃ dṛṣtvā nivartate*. This means that when a *vivekī*, who pursues self-knowledge and is judicious about his or her present pursuits, withdraws the senses, there is no suppression. The *vivekī* is only living a life of meaningful discipline. Whereas, for a person who practices sense withdrawal without pursuing this knowledge, the withdrawal does amount to suppression.

The literal meaning of the word *dṛṣtvā* is — ‘having seen,’ but here it is used purely in the sense of knowing. What is to be known is ‘I Am That — *tat paraṃ brahma aham eva*.’ It is not any other *jñāna*. That *Brahman* is myself; there is no difference between the two. Knowing that ‘I am *Brahman*’ does not imply a knower-known difference. And in the wake of this knowledge, the *rasa* goes away, *nivartate*, meaning that it does not take the person for a ride. How the emotional value for sense objects can capture one's mind is explained by *Kṛṣṇa* in the next verse.

Once you can no longer be taken for a ride by the *rasa*, the knowledge of sense objects does not create any kind of craving or longing in you. It is seedless, *nirbīja*, and,

¹ *Āhriyate iti āhāraḥ. Āhāra is that which is taken in. Therefore, it can mean food or any sense object in general.*

therefore, does not sprout, meaning that it does not set you up so that you are carried away by your fancies. However, when the clarity of vision is not there, meaning when knowledge is not there, elimination of the *rasa* is not possible. Therefore, knowledge in the form of clear vision, *samyag-darśana*, has to be well established, steady, and firm. ‘May you work on gaining this vision, again and again’ is what is meant here because, if you give up working for this vision, the erroneous vision you have will not go away.

People generally plan to work for clear vision only after they have fixed up everything in their lives, but it does not work that way. There is no ‘fixing up of everything’ without the vision. So, the pursuit is two-fold: *yoga*, self-mastery, and *jñāna*, self-knowledge.

REMOVING THE SENSE OBJECTS ALSO DOES NOT WORK

Taking the word *viśaya* to mean sense organs, as we have just done, is the simple way of looking at this verse. Now, we will look at it by taking *viśaya* to mean the sense objects. Suppose the sense objects have gone away because you withdraw yourself from the sense world. Previously, you lived in Manhattan and now you are living in the mountains a day and a half away from anyone. You are completely alone. No objects will come to you — no newspapers, radio, or people. You have not even allowed yourself a television set. Having denied yourself all these sense pursuits, you are a *nirāhāra*.

However, although the sense objects have gone away, the taste for them will still be there. You will find yourself wondering about what everyone else is doing. Then you will begin to think that you should go back to the city for some time. After all, you will say, even Freud does not condone suppression. And then there are those who will send you letters now and then, pointing out that what you are doing is wrong. This is the prime of your life. Everyone is making money in the stock market and you are losing all kinds of opportunities to do the same, something you will certainly come to regret for the rest of your life — all of which will remind you that you are a nobody. Their comments will begin to make a lot of sense to you because you have *rasa* inside. A value for money is there, in fact, the only reason you are able to stay where you are is because you have money.

Alcohol is another example of something for which the *rasa* remains. You may have given it up and all the bottles may have walked away, but the *rasa* will still be there. It will only go when you have something more intoxicating, something with more of a kick in it, something more profound, more beautiful, and more useful. In other words, more powerful. This is why alcoholics require prayer. Without prayer, they cannot easily get rid of the problem. An alcoholic who turns into a sober person can be a saint because he or she has mastered prayer and knows what it is all about. When an

alcoholic finds something more powerful than alcohol, the *rasa* for alcohol within the person goes away.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACKNOWLEDGING THE EMOTIONAL VALUE

The need to acknowledge one's emotional values is seen in the alcoholic who thinks that he or she can stop drinking at any time and who may even advance the advantages of alcohol in terms of one's health. Of course, when you begin to take alcohol, you are still the master. You can take it or you need not take it. Sometimes you take it and other times you dismiss it. No problem. But alcohol is not an ordinary substance. It is something that takes charge of you in time, so that eventually you have no power over it. It is more powerful than *arākṣasa*, a demon. From here on, although you may argue that you can stop at any time, in fact, you cannot! You are no longer talking; the alcohol is talking.

First, the person takes the bottle and then, after some time, the bottle calls the person. If it is six o'clock, the time set-aside for 'Happy Hour,' and the person is elsewhere, the bottle calls: 'Where are you?' He replies, 'I am here in the office working.' Then the bottle says, 'This is not the time to be in the office. Come here!' Faithfully, the person goes. 'Come and sit down,' the bottle says, and the person sits down. 'Pick me up!' it says. Once the bottle is in his or her hand, it says, 'Come on, tilt!' Then the person tilts — everyday! There was a time when he or she took the bottle; now the bottle takes the person. All decisions about where to go and what to do are made by the bottle, not by the person.

Where, then, is there any question of taking alcohol being your decision? This is no longer the case. You lost this freedom a long time ago. The only way to stop drinking is to accept that you have no power over alcohol. You have to know that. The acknowledgement alone is the beginning. There is no other way. Once you acknowledge that alcohol has a power over you, there is a chance of you regaining this freedom — provided, of course, that you really decide to stop drinking. You need to acknowledge that you are not going to drink any more. And once you stop taking alcohol, the bottles you have in your cupboard will go away. You will not want to keep them and will therefore distribute them to those who want them. But the smell of alcohol, the craving for it, will still be there in your head, which is where support groups come in. Otherwise, you may start drinking again and lose yourself totally, after which there is no chance.

Only when people find themselves secure, when they know that they are everything, do the *rasas* lose their hold. Then, the world can no longer take such people for a ride.

To understand what *Kṛṣṇa* was saying here, we need not alter the meaning of the word *viśaya* to mean sense organs. It can be looked at from the perspective of sense objects also.

यततो ह्यपि कौन्तेय पुरुषस्य विपश्चितः ।

इन्द्रियाणि प्रमाथीनि हरन्ति प्रसभं मनः ॥ ६० ॥

yatato hyapi kaunteya puruṣasya vipaścitaḥ

indriyāṇi pramāthīni haranti prasabhaṃ manaḥ

Verse 60

कौन्तेय *kaunteya* — Oh! Son of *Kuntī*; हि *hi* —because; यततः *yatataḥ* — of the one who makes effort; अपि *api* — even; विपश्चितः *vipaścitaḥ* — of the one who sees clearly; (अपि *api* — even;) पुरुषस्य *puruṣasya* — of the person; इन्द्रियाणि *indriyāṇi* — sense organs; प्रमाथीनि *pramāthīni* — very powerful; हरन्ति *haranti* — take away; प्रसभम् *prasabham* — forcefully; मनः *manaḥ* — the mind

Because, the powerful senses of even the person who makes effort, who sees clearly, forcefully take the mind away, Oh! *Arjuna*.

A person who has given up sense pursuits does not feed the sense organs. By using the will, he or she simply does not pursue sense objects. Only when the senses are with the person, meaning under his or her control, can steadiness in self-knowledge be accomplished. Thus, in the beginning, the will is used to keep the senses in one's own hands.

Anything that is within your control or power is called *sva-vaśa* or *ātma-vaśa* the word *vaśa* meaning 'within one's hands.' The money in your own pocket that you can spend as you wish is *sva-vaśa*. If however, your money is in the hands of someone else, it is *para-vaśa*. Naturally, you do not have the freedom to spend it as you would like. The other person must give it to you first. Thus, anything in the hands of another is called *para-vaśa* and the one who delivers himself or herself into the hands of someone else or something is called *para-vaśa*. For example, a person who is totally overpowered by emotion or who is completely controlled by another person is *para-vaśa*. He or she has no freedom.

Still discussing how one becomes a *sthitaprajña*, one who is steadfast in the knowledge, *Kṛṣṇa* said that, first, one's mind and senses have to be with oneself alone. Even though a person is a *vivekī* and has certain knowledge, there is still something to be taken care of because the *rasa*, the taste, for sense objects is still there. If these are not taken care of, the person will deliver himself or herself into the hands of *rāga-dveṣas*.

The word *yatataḥ* in this verse means, 'of the person, *puruṣa*, who is making effort.' One may make effort and be a fool, *mūrkhā*, but this is not the person being discussed here. The person who makes effort is one who has *viveka*, who sees things

clearly, *vipaścīt*. Even this person's mind is not steady. But his or her mind is not the mind of an ordinary person, but one that is in the hands of the senses and fancies. He or she is not an armchair *vivekī*. This person has a commitment and makes efforts in order to gain firmness, *niṣṭhā*, in the knowledge. This, then, is the kind of mind that is being discussed here.

The sense organs can be turbulent, vicious, and very powerful. They can really shake you up. In this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that the sense organs can even take the mind of a *vivekī* away, meaning that they can take charge of his or her mind. Why? Because *rasa*, the taste for sense objects is still there inside the person. As long as the *rasa* is there, the sense organs will continue to take charge of the person's mind. As we saw earlier, the sense organs imply the various fancies that one has because he or she still has a value for sense objects. Thus, when we say that the sense organs take the mind away, we mean that the *rasas* rob the person of his or her *viveka*. By the time the person realises what has happened, the sense organs, meaning the *rasas*, have already taken him or her for a ride!

The use of the word 'hi' in the verse indicates that all of this is very well-known. The appetites that are there do not ask for any sanction; they forcefully, *prasabham*, take care of you! Therefore, what should you do? The only answer for these *rasas* is to gain steadiness, *sthairya*, in this knowledge. In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that this is done by contemplating upon what is.

तानि सर्वाणि संयम्य युक्त आसीत् मत्परः ।

वशे हि यस्येन्द्रियाणि तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥ ६१ ॥

tāni sarvāṇi saṁyamya yukta āsīta matparaḥ
vaśe hi yasyendriyāṇi tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā

Verse 61

युक्तः *yuktaḥ* — the one who is endowed with discrimination; तानि *tāni* — those; सर्वाणि *sarvāṇi* — all; संयम्य *saṁyamya* — keeping them in one's own hands; मत्परः *matparaḥ* — committed to me; आसीत् *āsīta* — may the person sit; यस्य *yasya* — whose; वशे *vaśe* — under control; इन्द्रियाणि *indriyāṇi* — sense organs; हि *hi* — indeed; तस्य *tasya* — his; प्रज्ञा *prajñā* — knowledge; प्रतिष्ठिता *pratiṣṭhitā* — well-established

May one who is endowed with discrimination, keeping all the sense organs in one's own hands, sit in contemplation of Me. For the one who has all the sense organs under control, the knowledge is well-established.

The advice given by *Kṛṣṇa* in this verse is — *tāni sarvāṇi saṁyamya yukta āsīta matparaḥ*. In the compound *matparaḥ*, *mat* refers to *Īśvara*, meaning, in me, *Īśvara*, and the word *para* means to be committed to. *Āsīta* means, 'may he sit.' *Kṛṣṇa*

says, ‘Withdrawing the senses, *tāni sarvāṇi saṁyamya*, may he sit committed to me, *Īśvara*.’

The person is advised to contemplate upon the one who is the *ātmā*, the self, of everything, the *satya*, the truth, of everything, the one who is limitless, the one who is the inner self of all beings, not just one’s own body-mind-senses — but the being of all beings — the existence in all forms of existence. This is the ultimate end to be accomplished and is the Lord — the cause for everything, the truth of everything — which is oneself alone.

Therefore, let the one whose ultimate end is the innermost self, *pratyagātmā*, which is the self of all, sit in contemplation, having withdrawn the senses to himself or herself. Such a person must be a *vivekī*. He or she must already be endowed with the ability to discriminate between the real and the unreal. Some knowledge must be there. Otherwise, sitting in contemplation will not work. If a person sits without *viveka*, what will he or she do? What will the advice, ‘Contemplate on Me,’ mean to such a person? His or her understanding of this advice will definitely be different because the person does not know what it is all about.

THE NECESSITY FOR CONTEMPLATION

Only when a person has enough inquiry, *śravaṇa*, and understanding, is he or she endowed with the capacity to discriminate. Only then will the person know what is to be contemplated upon. The question, ‘Why should I contemplate?’ comes from *rasa*. The vision is stifled; it is knowledge with a lot of obstructions, *sapratibandha-jñāna*. The knowledge we are talking about here is that of a *sthitaprajña*, one who is well-established in knowledge. The knowledge is possible only when *rasa* goes and *rasa* goes only by constant contemplation. It takes its own time. Thus, may the person sit in contemplation.

There are different forms of contemplation wherein the same *pratyagātmā*, inner self, is seen from different angles: the limitless self – *pūrṇa-ātmā*, the detached self – *asaṅga-ātmā*, the self as witness – *sākṣi-ātmā*, the action-free self – *akarṭṛ-ātmā*, the self that is free from the sense of being an enjoyer – *abhokṭṛ-ātmā*, and the self that is ever-full – *ānanda-ātmā*, is to be recognised in these different ways. By contemplating upon the *ātmā* in this manner, the *rasas* go. How can they remain? If you know, ‘I am all this — *aham idaṁ sarvam*,’ the *rasa* cannot be there. Thus, *rasa* goes away in time and knowledge becomes well-established and clear — *tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā*.

Śaṅkara introduces the next two verses by saying that *Kṛṣṇa* points out exactly how a person gets into trouble when he or she is completely taken over by the senses, meaning the *rasas*. This analysis applies to everyone — *vivekīs* and *avivekīs* alike. There is a common psychology here, the psychology of a desire — how a desire

originates, how the pursuit of it begins, how it destroys one's objectivity, and so on — all of which is set out in these two very important verses that follow.

ध्यायतो विषयान्पुंसः सङ्गस्तेषूपजायते ।

सङ्गात् सञ्जायते कामः कामात् क्रोधोऽभिजायते ॥ ६२ ॥

dhyāyato viṣayānpuṃsaḥ saṅgasteṣūpajāyate
saṅgātsañjāyate kāmaḥ kāmātkrodho'bhijāyate

Verse 62

क्रोधाद्भवति सम्मोहः सम्मोहात् स्मृतिविभ्रमः ।

स्मृतिभ्रंशाद् बुद्धिनाशो बुद्धिनाशात् प्रणश्यति ॥ ६३ ॥

krodhādbhavati sammohaḥ sammohāt smṛtivyibhramaḥ
smṛtibhramśād buddhināśo buddhināśāt praṇśyati

Verse 63

विषयान् *viṣayān* — objects; ध्यायतः *dhyāyataḥ* — for the one who dwells upon; पुंसः *puṃsaḥ* — for the person; सङ्गः *saṅgaḥ* — attachment; तेषु *teṣu* — with reference to them; उपजायते *upajāyate* — is born; सङ्गात् *saṅgāt* — from attachment; सञ्जायते *sañjāyate* — is born; कामः *kāmaḥ* — desire; कामात् *kāmāt* — from desire; क्रोधः *krodhaḥ* — anger; अभिजायते *abhijāyate* — is born; क्रोधात् *krodhāt* — from anger; भवति *bhavati* — comes; सम्मोहः *sammohaḥ* — delusion; सम्मोहात् *sammohāt* — from delusion; स्मृति-विभ्रमः *smṛti-vibhramaḥ* — loss of memory; स्मृति-भ्रंशात् *smṛti-bhramśāt* — from loss of memory; बुद्धि-नाशः *buddhi-nāśaḥ* — ruin of the mind; बुद्धिनाशात् *buddhi-nāśāt* — from ruin of the mind; प्रणश्यति *praṇśyati* — one is destroyed

In the person who dwells upon objects, an attachment is born with reference to them. From attachment is born desire and from desire, anger is born. From anger comes delusion and from delusion comes the loss of memory. Because of the loss of memory, the mind becomes incapacitated and when the mind is incapacitated, the person is destroyed.

Every desired object has its own peculiarities, its enticing qualities and desirable attributes. The object is not desired for itself. It is desired because it is seen as desirable. The person being discussed in these two verses meditates on the peculiarities and desirability of various objects, instead of meditating on the inner self — *pratyagātmā*.

One who dwells on a particular object and its merits develops a certain longing, a certain love or affection for the object. The word 'object' here refers to anything that you think of and, therefore, includes people as well. First, you come into contact with an object or a person and then, when the encounter is over, it is over — unless, of course, the object or person keeps coming back into your head. There is no reason, as to why

certain objects come back into your head. They just do; and when they do, you dwell upon them.

An object that comes back into your head and goes away again is not a problem. Any experience leaves a certain memory, *smṛti*, and, because of the impact of the experience, the whole scene may be played back in your mind. This, in itself, is not the problem. What happens, however, is that you begin to like the object and begin to dwell upon its desirability. Even at this stage, there is no real problem.

Dwelling upon the object is what is meant by meditation here, meditation meaning constantly thinking about something. It may be something about a person that you keep dwelling upon — the person's dress, jewellery, voice, speech, mannerisms, decorum, thinking, hair, nose, eyes, or height — all of which represent the countless varieties of objects upon which you can meditate. Meditation is the flow of thoughts about an object and anything connected to it — *sajātīya-vṛtti-pravāha*.

THE MEDITATION OF ATTACHMENT

Kṛṣṇa was not talking about the person who meditates on the *sat-cit-ānanda-ātmā*, even though the person he was discussing may be smiling while meditating. The smile is only because of the memory of some compliment or other. It is a smile of elation and this elation is what is meant by attachment, *saṅga*. There is a certain love, a certain affection, that has developed for another person or an object, a sense of being pleased with the object. Otherwise, there would be no attachment. Once a smile comes at the thought of the object, it means that attachment has already been established.

You cannot discover affection for anything without first dwelling upon it. A person may develop affection for a cat merely by continuing to think about it and caring for it. An attachment can also develop so that without the cat, the person finds that life is empty. If life is full only when it is full of cats and dogs, definitely we will find life full of cats and dogs!

This kind of attachment can occur towards any object — a carpet, furniture, anything! Is it any wonder, then, that there is affection and then attachment towards a person who talks back nicely, in a sweet voice that utters pleasing words? If affection for and attachment to a mewling cat can be developed, of course a talking, smiling, thinking person is capable of evoking an even better response.

Affection itself is no problem. The problem is this — whatever you like you almost always want to possess. This is why *Kṛṣṇa* said that desire is born from attachment, that attachment is the cause of desire. And because there are different types of objects, there are different types of desires — the desire to possess, the desire to own, the desire to experience.

To create a desire, all that is required is a casual glance at a Caribbean cruise brochure that came in the mail. In fact, the whole idea of direct mail is to create a desire in you. You may call it junk mail, but for those who send it, it is not junk. They know that someone will be attracted to the idea conveyed by the brochure and, to ensure that you do not forget, they also send you follow up literature. When the second brochure arrives, the pleasant memory that had been stored, based on the first brochure comes to mind and affection for the subject matter develops. From this affection alone comes the desire to go on a Caribbean cruise. In this way, the desire to experience, to own, to possess is created.

NOT EVERY DESIRE CAN BE FULFILLED

Varieties of desires are born, depending on the objects for which you have affection and attachment. Desire also is not a problem, but once a well-shaped desire has been formed, once it is no longer in the fancy state, you have to deal with it. You have to fulfil it and this causes you to take action. If you can fulfil the desire, there is no problem. More often than not, however, the desire is not fulfilled. This, then, is where the problem arises.

Not every desire can be fulfilled; it is not that easy. There are many obstacles that prevent the fulfillment of some desires. The problem comes, then, when the desires are not fulfilled, and you become angry. The desire itself turns into anger, *krodha*. Thus, desire is the cause for anger or, in the words of *Kṛṣṇa*, anger is born of desire.

If there is no expectation with reference to a desire, there will be no anger if the desire is not fulfilled. Suppose you want someone to do something for you and the person does not do it. If you knew that he or she might not do it, then there is no anger. But if you expected the person to do it, you will definitely be angry when it is not done. Even if the anger is not expressed, anger born is born.

The intensity with which you desire something is what determines the magnitude of your anger, and not the object itself. If your desire is such that it does not matter to you whether or not it is fulfilled, then anger will not be there. Even if it is, it will amount to very little. Whereas, if the intensity of the desire is great, the anger that comes from the desire not being fulfilled is not going to be easily managed either by you or by the person who happens to be between you and what you want. If the other person is an obstruction to what you want, then, your desire will turn into anger towards that person. If you expect the person to behave in a certain way and he or she does not behave in that manner, then the person will definitely be the target of your anger. And if that person's behaviour is not according to your expectations because of another person, then your anger gets directed towards the other person. And sometimes, your anger against the second may be more than towards the first.

THE NATURE OF ANGER

Anger is always towards the obstruction to the fulfillment of your desire. If between you and the object that you desire there is an obstruction, that obstruction is the target of your anger. The desire itself is deflected against this obstruction and this deflected ray of desire is what is called anger. In this way, this anger is like the vinegar that may result when you try to make wine. Both the wine and the vinegar have as their essence the grapes alone. But the wine turns into vinegar. How? it, too, has its own story.

The point here is not to avoid anger by avoiding desire. Rather, you have to remove the sting from your desires, for which a proper attitude is very important. That everything should happen as I want it to is not a realistic expectation. And such an expectation is due to *rāga-dveṣas* alone. The *rāga-dveṣas*, your likes and dislikes, have to be neutralised if you would like to be free of anger.

Nor is it a matter of controlling anger. What does controlling anger really mean? The anger is inside and you are simmering, simmering, simmering — until suddenly one day, it erupts like a volcano! Once anger is there, what happens is only too well known. *Aviveka*, lack of discrimination, will definitely be there. In anger, you are not going to take the time to consider whether a certain action is proper or improper. You are not going to spend time considering, ‘Should I kick him or should I punch him?’ Whatever comes first is what happens. Once anger is there, things just take place. What you do or say takes place of its own accord and depends entirely upon the past — your upbringing, and so on.

There is no question of control here. The very meaning of anger is that *viveka* with reference to what should and should not to be done, is lacking. And from this anger comes delusion, *sammoha*. What is being pointed out in these two verses is the process that takes place when one dwells on an object. There is no time involved here; dwelling on an object implies affection, desire, anger, delusion, and more.

Because of the delusion born of anger, loss of memory, *smṛti-vibhrama*, takes place. The word *smṛti*, memory, refers here to whatever you may have learned by studying the *śāstra*, whatever you have assimilated about right and wrong, whatever you learned from your teachers, elders, and life's experiences, what made you angry in the past, what happened, and so on. None of these you remember because delusion has come, and, along with it *aviveka*. Thus, there is a loss of memory with reference to all the wisdom you had gathered from your past education and experiences.

Once the wisdom of your past experiences, *smṛti*, is not available, the mind is incapacitated, There is *buddhi-nāśa*. Your *buddhi* now, is incapable of analysing whether something is to be done or not to be done because whatever wisdom you had gathered is not available to you. Delusion is like an inner torpor, a blackout that makes you forget the wisdom you had. Therefore, your *buddhi*, your intellect, is unable to do

what it is supposed to do. It is incapable of giving orders to go ahead or stop in accordance with what is right and wrong. This is what the *buddhi* is supposed to do, but it is not available to do it.

IN THE ABSENCE OF WISDOM, IMPULSE TAKES OVER

The *buddhi* is only available when wisdom is available. And in the absence of wisdom, it behaves as though it is not programmed at all; impulse takes over. In other words, the *buddhi* is destroyed, *praṇāśyati*. The person is no more a human being and can be likened to an animal because he or she gives himself or herself over to impulses. The impulses take over and determine exactly what the person is going to do. It may be biting, kicking, screaming, hitting some one, or even committing suicide. When a person is controlled by impulse, anything can happen and whatever happens, just happens.

Until anger comes, the person can be careful, but once anger is there, all caution is gone. The verbs used in these two verses are very revealing in this regard. From attachment, desire ‘is born’ and from desire, anger ‘is born.’ At this point, however, the verb changes from ‘is born’ to ‘takes place.’ From anger, delusion ‘takes place’ and from delusion, the incapacity of the mind ‘takes place.’ This shows how the person has no more any control over the situation. Once anger is born, delusion, loss of wisdom, and the destruction of the person just take place. Control is possible only before anger; afterwards, what happens is history.

Given that meditating on desirable objects creates problems for you, the message of the *Gītā* is clear — instead of meditating upon objects, meditate upon the self. Instead of meditating upon your own problems and inhibitions, meditate upon the *pratyagātmā*, the inner self, because, if you do not, you will naturally meditate upon the objects, which is the cause of all of your problems.

रागद्वेषवियुक्तैस्तु विषयानिन्द्रियैश्चरन् ।

आत्मवश्यैर्विधेयात्मा प्रसादमधिगच्छति ॥ ६४ ॥

rāgadveṣaviyuktaistu viṣayānindriyaiścaraṇ

ātmavaśyairvidheyātmā prasādamadhigacchati

Verse 64

तु *tu* — whereas; रागद्वेष-वियुक्तैः *rāga-dveṣa-viyuktaiḥ* — free from likes and dislikes; आत्मवश्यैः *ātmavaśyaiḥ* — with those that are under his or her control; इन्द्रियैः *indriyaiḥ* — with sense organs; विषयान् चरन् *viṣayān caran* — moving in the world of objects; विधेयात्मा *vidheyātmā* — one whose mind is controlled; प्रसादम् *prasādam* — tranquillity; अधिगच्छति *adhigacchati* — attains

Whereas, one whose mind is controlled, moving in the world of objects with the sense organs under his or her control, free from likes and dislikes, attains tranquillity

We have seen that even a *vivekī* cannot but dwell upon objects of *rāga-dveṣas*, likes and dislikes, if he or she still has *rasa*, a value, for these objects. And this dwelling upon is also called meditation. One dwells upon objects of *dveṣa* in order to avoid them, for which one has to scheme and plan, whereas objects of *rāga* are dwelt upon in order to gain them.

Dwelling upon the desirability of objects is, indeed, the basis for all problems that come later. It is the cause for the affection and love that develops for the object. Once affection is there, it will naturally turn into a desire. If the desire is fulfilled, there is no problem, but if it is not fulfilled, the whole psychology of how one loses oneself comes into play, as *Kṛṣṇa* pointed out in the previous two verses. The present verse reveals how the problem created by unfulfilled desires becomes neutralised and, once again, points out the starting point for *mokṣa*, liberation.

The natural, pursuit of a person's sense organs is in keeping with his or her *rāgas* and *dveṣas*, likes and dislikes. But suppose the person is a seeker, a *mumukṣu*, meaning that he or she wants *mokṣa*, for which self-knowledge is required then all his pursuits cannot be dictated by his *rāga-dveṣas*. The word *mumukṣu* is especially pertinent here in that it means one who is desirous of liberation, *moktum icchuḥ – mumukṣuḥ*. We have seen that *mokṣa* is one of the four pursuits open to a human being. But for a *mumukṣu*, *mokṣa* alone is important. He or she has already sought after and experienced pursuits of security, *artha* and pleasure, *kāma* or has learned about them by observing the pursuits of others. From all these, the person has developed discrimination, *viveka*, and, because of this *viveka* alone, has become a *mumukṣu*

Thus, the one who has *viveka* is a *mumukṣu*, whereas a person who is merely curious is not. The person who wants to be free must necessarily have a lot of *viveka* for this particular desire. At the same time, he or she does have some *rāga-dveṣas*. *Rāga-dveṣas* do not just go away because the person has *viveka*. What does a *mumukṣu* do then?

This was exactly *Arjuna's* situation. During the war that eventually ensued, his son died and *Arjuna* took a vow that, before sunset, he would avenge his son's death by killing the person who was responsible. We see, then, that *Arjuna* had a lot of grief. This was because *rāga-dveṣas* do not go away overnight. Even though, in the eighteenth chapter of the *Gītā*, which preceded the above episode, *Arjuna* had said, 'No more delusion for me. I know exactly what it is all about.' He still had ambitions and therefore attachments. He had definitely been living a life of *dharma*, but *rāga-dveṣas* were still in his heart. This is why one has to live a life of *karma-yoga* for a length of time.

A KARMA-YOGĪ IS A MUMUKĀU

The sense organs of a *mumukṣu* are freed from *rāga-dveṣas*, meaning that they are not backed by, *rāga-dveṣas*. This is because the *mumukṣu* has been living a life of *karma-yoga*. Such a person does not run away from the world. Where would he or she go? The *mumukṣu* goes about in the world, experiencing the sense objects. The word *caran* here generally means ‘reaching’ or ‘going’ in the sense of movement, but it can also have the sense of knowledge. In fact, any verbal root that has a sense of reaching or going has also the sense of knowing or experiencing. For example, the expression ‘reaching *Brahman*’ means understanding or knowing *Brahman*; there is no ‘going’ or ‘moving’ in the sense of reaching somewhere.

So, too, in this verse, *caran* does not mean that the person is moving around in the physical sense. The word means ‘experiencing’ and takes all the sense organs into account — the experience of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting. The senses are open and the world of sense objects is there. The verse also describes the sense organs as being in the person's hands and not in the hands of *rāga-dveṣas* — *ātmavaśyaiḥ rāga-dveṣa-viyuktaiḥ indriyaiḥ viṣayān caran*.

This means that all one's pursuits are not dictated by *rāga* and *dveṣa*, but by *dharma* and *adharma*, and, what is proper and improper. The person decides what he or she wants and is not goaded by his or her likes and dislikes. The *rāga-dveṣas* do not decide.

When your *rāga-dveṣas* do not come between yourself and the sense pursuits, the determining factor for the sense pursuits is purely *dharma* and *adharma*. Then you become one whose mind moves only according to your will. In other words, you are a person who is ‘together.’ Such a person is a *karma-yogī*, living a life of *karma-yoga* for the sole purpose of neutralising his or her *rāga-dveṣas*.

Every *karma-yogī* is a *mumukṣu*. The person is a *karma-yogī* because he or she is a *mumukṣu*. *Karma-yoga* is there only because the person has *mumukṣā*, desire for liberation. Because *karma-yoga* is meant for *mokṣa*, the *karma-yogī* pursues knowledge while engaged in freeing himself or herself from the hold of *rāga-dveṣa*. This latter pursuit makes the person a *karma-yogī* and marks the difference between a *karma-yogī* and a *sannyāsī*. Whether the person is a *sannyāsī* or a *karma-yogī*, he or she is one who has the senses and mind together. Such a person gains satisfaction or tranquillity, *prasāda*.

We have already seen that *prasāda* is anything that comes from the Lord. But *prasāda* has another meaning also — cheerfulness, satisfaction, tranquillity — which is what happens in the mind of one whose sense organs are in one's own hands and when one is free from the hold of *rāga-dveṣas*. The satisfaction, the contentment, is with oneself. The mind is steady and there is an almost total absence of agitation and

self-dissatisfaction. The person's knowledge is steady, *sthira*, and it stays. That *rāga-dveṣas* are to be tackled is the whole psychology of the *Gītā*.

प्रसादे सर्वदुःखानां हानिरस्योपजायते ।

प्रसन्नचेतसो ह्याशु बुद्धिः पर्यवतिष्ठते ॥ ६५ ॥

prasāde sarvaduḥkhānāṃ hānirasyopajāyate
prasannacetaso hyāśu buddhiḥ paryavatiṣṭhate

Verse 65

प्रसादे *prasāde* — when the mind is tranquil; अस्य *asya* — his; सर्व-दुःखानाम् *sarvaduḥkhānām* — of all the pain and sorrow; हानिः *hāniḥ* — destruction; उपजायते *upajāyate* — is born; हि *hi* — because; प्रसन्न-चेतसः *prasanna-cetasah* — of the tranquil minded; आशु *āśu* — soon; बुद्धिः *buddhiḥ* — knowledge; पर्यवतिष्ठते *paryavatiṣṭhate* — is well established

When the mind is tranquil, destruction of all pain and sorrow happens because the knowledge of one who is tranquil-minded soon becomes well established.

One whose mind is under control directs the mind according to his or her will. Such a person experiences the world through sense organs that are not backed by likes and dislikes. In this way, the *rāga-dveṣas* are neutralised and the person gains a mind which is cheerful, composed, and tranquil.

For the person whose mind is tranquil, all the *duḥkhas*, pain and sorrow, are destroyed. Although the plural form of *duḥkhas* is used here, all sorrow is the same. One person is crying because he lost the kingdom and someone else is crying because he lost his car. What is the difference between their two sorrows? Both of them are crying. Does *duḥkha* subject itself to division? No, sorrow is the same whatever the reason. Whether you lose your kingdom or your hair, the sadness is the same. What *Kṛṣṇa* meant here is that all sorrow, whatever be its source, is destroyed for the person whose mind is tranquil.

In an earlier discussion, we saw the three sources of sorrow — sorrow caused by people and situations in the external world, *ādhibhautika-duḥkha*; sorrow caused by calamities over which you have no control, *ādhidāivika-duḥkha*; and, finally, sorrow caused by your own body, mind, and senses, *ādhyātmika-duḥkha*. Your own past memories or the condition of your physical body create *ādhyātmika-duḥkha*, whereas the *duḥkha* caused by your brother-in-law is an example of *ādhibhautika-duḥkha*. Any natural calamity is *ādhidāivika-duḥkha*. *Kṛṣṇa* said, that these three-fold *duḥkhas* are all destroyed — *sarvaduḥkhānāṃ hāniḥ upajāyate*.

Although all *duḥkhas* are destroyed when the mind is tranquil, the causes for *duḥkhas* themselves do not go away. They are merely incapable of causing *duḥkha*.

The body may experience physical pain, but there will be no *duḥkha* because the mind is tranquil, *prasanna*. A tranquil mind means that the *rāgas* and *dveṣas* have been neutralised. Desirable and undesirable situations do not cause reactions.

All *duḥkhas* are said to be destroyed because the real nature of the self is tranquillity, and that tranquillity is manifest in the mind. The mind is stifled only because of *rāga* and *dveṣa*. The fullness of the self, which is its nature, *ānanda-svarūpa*, is inhibited from manifesting in the mind because of *rāga-dveṣas* alone. The *rāga-dveṣas* inhibit the fullness, *ānanda*. When the *rāga-dveṣas* are neutralised, the *ānanda* is uninhibited and the mind is tranquil. Destruction of *duḥkha* is said to be born, *upajāyate*, here in the sense that it happens, it takes place.

A TRANQUIL MIND MEANS THAT KNOWLEDGE IS NOT FAR AWAY

Does mere tranquillity destroy all forms of *duḥkha*? No, destruction of all *duḥkhas* can only happen when there is self-knowledge. *Duḥkhas* go away for the person who has a tranquil mind because the knowledge for such a person is not far away. We are talking about a *sthitaprajña* here. This knowledge, the subject matter of which is *ātmanā*, self-knowledge, is steady and, like space, it just stays; it does not move. The earth, air, and everything else moves, whereas space is always steady.

Similarly, the mind of a person with self-knowledge stays. And because the knowledge stays, the mind no longer causes any problem. The knowledge stays because there is nothing to oppose or inhibit it. This means that the very person stays in the form of knowledge. The mind of such a person becomes a useful instrument. Because the mind is tranquil, it no longer causes trouble.

To gain tranquillity, you have to take care of your *rāga-dveṣas*. Whatever is required is what you have to follow, whether it is *karma-yoga* or something else. Only when tranquillity is there does the knowledge stay. This means that the knowledge becomes clear, having been freed from all vagueness and doubts. Otherwise, you will always doubt your own knowledge. You will say things like, ‘With this kind of mind, how can I say that I know?’ The mind itself creates all kinds of doubts, which is the problem.

The mind has to gain the tranquillity that is the basis for self-knowledge and, to do this, it has to free itself from the *rāga-dveṣas*. Then all the *duḥkhas* go away because the knowledge stays. Tranquillity is the condition that frees one's knowledge from all obstructions and because of that knowledge, all forms of sorrow are gone and the person is said to have gained *mokṣa*.

नास्ति बुद्धियुक्तस्य न चायुक्तस्य भावना ।

न चाभावयतः शान्तिरशान्तस्य कुतः सुखम् ॥ ६६ ॥
nāsti buddhirayuktasya na cāyuktasya bhāvanā
na cābhāvayataḥ śāntiraśāntasya kutaḥ sukham

Verse 66

अयुक्तस्य *ayuktasya* — for the one who is not tranquil; बुद्धिः *buddhiḥ* — knowledge; न अस्ति *na asti* — is not there; अयुक्तस्य *ayuktasya* — for the one who is not tranquil; भावना च *bhāvanā ca* — contemplation also; न *na* — is not; अभावयतः *abhāvayataḥ* — for the one who is not contemplative; शान्तिः *śāntiḥ* — peace; न *na* — is not; च *ca* — and; अशान्तस्य *aśāntasya* — for the one who has no peace; कुतः *kutaḥ* — how; सुखम् *sukham* — happiness

For the one who is not tranquil, there is no knowledge. For the one who is not tranquil, there is no contemplation and for the one who is not contemplative, there is no peace. For the one who has no peace, how can there be happiness?

This verse is *Kṛṣṇa's* way of praising a tranquil mind, that is, *prasannatā*. The word *ayukta*, here, means a person who does not have the cheerful, tranquil mind that was discussed in the previous verse. The *ayukta* is one who has not taken care of his or her *rāga-dveṣas* sufficiently. It must be clearly understood that what is being said here is in no way meant as a judgement. If this is not understood correctly, a problem of self-judgement can arise as you listen to the *Gītā* and the *Vedānta-śāstra*. 'I am useless!' you may say. Because there is already a tape inside, the self-criticism begins immediately. All that the Swami has to do is utter one negative statement and this inner tape switches on automatically — 'Because I am an *ayukta*, I will never get this knowledge.'

Since the tendency is to judge yourself, you must know that what is being said in the *Gītā* is not meant as criticism; its sole purpose is self-understanding. If, having heard what the *Gītā* says, there is something to be done, it is to be done. There is nothing more to it than that. If *rāga-dveṣas* are there, they are to be taken care of, that is all.

The word *buddhi*, here means knowledge of the self, that by which you understand the self, the *ātmā*. Adequate knowledge does not take place for one whose mind is in the hands of *rāga-dveṣas*. For a *yukta*, the *rāga-dveṣas* are neutralised and there is no problem, whereas for an *ayukta*, *rāga-dveṣas* are there, causing his or her knowledge to be inadequate. In addition to the knowledge being inadequate, the pressure of the *rāga-dveṣas*, more often than not, will drive the person towards the desirable objects to be gained and retained and those that are to be avoided and eliminated.

There is nothing right or wrong about *rāga-dveṣa* pursuits. This is just to explain how the pressures of *rāgas* and *dveṣas* work. Because of the natural tendency of the mind towards objects of *rāga-dveṣas*, there is no yearning for or commitment to self-

knowledge. There is time only to nurse one's *rāgas* and *dveṣas*. Even if you try to read the *Gītā*, your *rāga* will keep clamouring at you — 'What are you doing? What kind of book are you reading? It is not going to fulfil any of your likes and dislikes. I have so many things to interest you.' In this way, the *rāga-dveṣas* seated inside you, demand your attention so much so that if you begin reading the *Gītā*, you will either fall asleep or feel like doing something else!

DESIRES STIFLE ONE'S INTEREST IN SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Rāga-dveṣas being there, one's interest in the pursuit of self-knowledge will necessarily be stifled and one's commitment inhibited. Even if you want to contemplate upon the self in order to get rid of some of your problems, the pressure of *rāga-dveṣas* makes contemplation very difficult. You find that you are unable to sit with yourself even for a short period of time.

For the one who cannot sit with himself or herself, who cannot contemplate, who cannot pursue self-knowledge quietly, there is no composure, no tranquillity. Whereas, for the one who contemplates upon oneself, for the one who can stay with oneself, there is tranquillity and love of oneself. Thus, the more one can be with oneself, the more tranquil one will be.

We are not talking about the commonly known self here. We are talking about the real self — the self that is beautiful. The more you begin to understand, the more you begin to love the self. The self, *ātmā*, is not other than yourself; therefore, self-love comes. And because the self is absolute, the love for it is absolute.

There is a lot of talk about the necessity of developing self-love. But how can you develop a love for this limited self that you have with its crippling *rāga-dveṣas*? Without feeling love for yourself, you cannot sit with yourself and, when you cannot sit with yourself, there is no tranquillity — all of which implies an absence of peace and contentment, *aśānti*.

HAPPINESS CAN ONLY TAKE PLACE IN A TRANQUIL MIND

A person may say that he or she does not want peace and contentment, *śānti*, but wants only happiness, *sukha*. One may say, 'Some people may want *śānti*, but I am an enterprising person. I want pleasures, joy, and happiness. For me *śānti* is useless!' But, all *sukha*, all happiness, is possible only in a tranquil mind. When you cannot sit with yourself, naturally you are agitated. And when you are agitated, where is the possibility of *sukha* for you? When you are agitated, there is no *sukha*. How can a person who is *aśānta*, who does not have *śānti*, pick up any *sukha*? There is no way! *Sukha* is only with yourself. Therefore, the more you can stay with yourself, the more tranquil you are, and the more tranquil you are, the happier you are.

Happiness, then, is another word for tranquillity. Only the tranquil person can discover happiness. In fact, such a person discovers happiness even in small things. He or she does not require a talk show to be happy. Everything in the world becomes amusing to the person who is tranquil. If you have tranquillity, the whole world is a continuous joke. You require nothing; it is all there, free of charge. Just open your eyes and you see the joke!

When inner tranquillity is there, you require nothing to be happy, whereas if it is not there, happiness cannot even be bought. 'Happy hour' does not buy you happiness; it only robs you of your money. It may be a happy hour for the owner of the bar, but not for anyone else. For both, you and your family, it is definitely an unhappy hour. When you cannot stay with yourself, where is the possibility of *sukha* for you?

One has to take care of *rāgas* and *dveṣas*. Otherwise, they are a nuisance. Therefore, whatever is to be done to take care of them must be done. This may imply *karma-yoga*, listening to the teaching, *śravaṇa*, or further analysis, *manana*. How the knowledge takes place, what is required for it to become steady, *sthira*, and why it can be so unsteady, *asthira*, is what is being discussed in these verses.

इन्द्रियाणां हि चरतां यन्मनोऽनुविधीयते ।

तदस्य हरति प्रज्ञां वायुर्नावमिवाम्भसि ॥ ६७ ॥

indriyāṇāṃ hi caratāṃ yanmano'nuvidhīyate

tadasya harati prajñāṃ vāyurnāvamivāmbhasi

Verse 67

हि *hi* — indeed; चरताम् *caratām* — of the moving; इन्द्रियाणाम् *indriyāṇām* — of the senses; यत् मनः *yat manaḥ* — that mind which; अनुविधीयते *anuvīdhīyate* — follows in the wake (of); तत् *tat* — that; अस्य *asya* — his; प्रज्ञाम् *prajñām* — knowledge; हरति *harati* — robs away; वायुः *vāyuḥ* — the wind; नावम् *nāvam* — a small boat; इव *iva* — just as; अम्भसि *ambhasi* — on the waters

The mind that follows the moving senses indeed robs the person of his knowledge, just as the wind carries away a small boat on the waters.

For the one whose mind is not resolved, and is therefore in the hands of *rāga-dveṣas*, there is no knowledge. Even if knowledge is there, it is not adequate, as it has already been pointed out. This is because the mind follows, goes behind, the moving senses, all of which are engaged in their own spheres of activity. For example, the eyes have their sphere of seeing in forms and colours and the ears have their sphere in sounds. Thus, you find that each sense organ has its own sphere of activity. As the sense organs experience the objects according to their own spheres, the mind naturally has some fancies that one goes after as they arise. In other words, you go along with the sense cravings.

The person being discussed in this verse is one whose mind joins with the sense perceptions, with reference to which there are certain inner cravings or fancies. A mind that joins the senses robs away one's knowledge, the knowledge born of the discriminative inquiry of oneself. This means that whatever self-knowledge one may have had is as good as gone! The mind, meaning the will, of such a person, is one that says 'yes' to everything that is not to be done and 'no' to whatever has to be done. To illustrate this point, *Kṛṣṇa* used the example of the wind with its capacity to take a small boat away from its destination.

Robbed of self-knowledge, the mind is busy with objects alone. It has no time for self-knowledge. In fact, there is no time for anything because there are so many *rāga-dveṣas*. Because situations do not happen as you want, there is nothing but concerns, one after the other. First, the pressure of *rāga-dveṣas* is in the form of undifferentiated concern and then the concern is in the form of desire, regret, disappointment, sorrow, despair, anxiety, and a constant sense of loss.

When the mind is occupied with objects, there is concern, whereas when it is occupied with the self, the *ātmā*, there is no concern, only tranquillity. The self will not run away. It stays put. Even if you come back after twenty years, *ātmā* will still be *sat-cit-ānanda*. Regardless of which book you read, *ātmā* will not grow into *asat-cit-ānanda*. *Ātmā* is always fullness, limitlessness, *ānanda*. If the object of your knowledge is the *ātmā*, the self, then there is *ānanda* for you.

Kṛṣṇa summed up all that he had said with reference to one's knowledge becoming steady in the following verse:

तस्माद्यस्य महाबाहो निगृहीतानि सर्वशः ।
 इन्द्रियाणीन्द्रियार्थेभ्यस्तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥ ६८ ॥
tasmādyasya mahābāho nigṛhītāni sarvaśaḥ
indriyāṅīndriyārthebhyastasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā Verse 68

तस्मात् *tasmāt* — therefore; महाबाहो *mahābāho* — Oh! Mighty armed (*Arjuna*); यस्य *yasya* — whose; इन्द्रियाणि *indriyāṅi* — senses; इन्द्रिय-अर्थेभ्यः *indriya-arthebhyah* — from sense objects; सर्वशः *sarvaśaḥ* — completely; निगृहीतानि *nigṛhītāni* — are withdrawn, mastered; तस्य *tasya* — his; प्रज्ञा *prajñā* — knowledge; प्रतिष्ठिता *pratiṣṭhitā* — is steady

Therefore, Oh! Mighty armed *Arjuna*, the knowledge of one whose senses are completely withdrawn (mastered) from their respective objects is steady.

The word *tasmāt* indicates that *Kṛṣṇa* was summing up this section dealing with description of the mind of a person who has some vision and is making an effort to make

his or her knowledge steady. He explained that because the senses are turbulent, they could rob away the mind of such a person. How they do this was also discussed.

Kṛṣṇa addressed *Arjuna* here as ‘*mahābāho*,’ meaning ‘Oh!, Mighty armed *Arjuna*.’ One may be mighty armed with reference to one's prowess and skill, but what is needed for self-knowledge is to be mighty armed, i.e., strong in the mind, which is more difficult. The prowess and skills that *Arjuna* had gathered to earn him the name ‘Mighty-armed’ were great in their own sphere in that he was able to control all external enemies, but his ability to control this inner one was the issue here.

To control the senses, to withdraw them from their respective objects, means to be able to withdraw them at will, just as the turtle withdraws its head and limbs into its shell whenever it senses any danger. If you want to release the senses, release them; if you want to withdraw them, withdraw them. This means that the senses are under your control. Only when you have the capacity to withdraw your senses at will, can your knowledge be steady. The idea here is that the knowledge becomes steady only when the mind is freed from the pressure of *rāga* and *dveṣa*.

To the extent that you master your likes and dislikes, to that extent your knowledge stays. Because your *rāga-dveṣas* are neutralised, you can enjoy the benefits of your knowledge. The pressure of *rāga-dveṣas* being less, the benefits of the knowledge are more. The knowledge is complete when the *rāga-dveṣas* have no say in your life, when they are all neutralised, when it makes no difference to you whether a desire is fulfilled or not. Only then is there no hindrance to self-knowledge.

KNOWLEDGE AND MASTERY OF THE MIND GO HAND-IN-HAND

There is a certain trick to all this in that, as one's knowledge grows in clarity, mastery of the mind over the *rāga-dveṣas* also takes place. With a *karma-yoga* attitude, the *rāga-dveṣas* are mastered to a certain extent and the knowledge becomes clearer. Thus, there is a mutual kinship between the two.

The entire presentation of *yoga* in the *Gītā* is with reference to *rāga-dveṣas*. The psychology of the *Gītā* is *rāga-dveṣa* psychology and, as a psychology, the *Gītā* itself is adequate and complete. When we are dealing with normal people, *rāga-dveṣa* psychology is enough. It implies an order, *dharma-adharma*, which is looked upon as *Īśvara*, the Lord, the giver of the fruits of action — all of which bring about a certain neutralisation of one's *rāga-dveṣas*.

Taking care of *rāga-dveṣas* itself brings about a certain tranquillity, a cheerfulness to the mind. And as the cheerfulness increases, one's knowledge becomes clearer. Conversely, as the knowledge becomes clearer, one's cheerfulness increases. In other words, the pressure caused by *rāga-dveṣas* is less. Just as a bird requires both wings to

take off, so too, we require both wings — inquiry and a proper attitude — to glide into this knowledge. One wing is as important as the other.

या निशा सर्वभूतानां तस्यां जागर्ति संयमी ।

यस्यां जाग्रति भूतानि सा निशा पश्यतो मुनेः ॥ ६९ ॥

yā niśā sarvabhūtānāṃ tasyāṃ jāgarti saṃyamī
yasyāṃ jāgrati bhūtāni sā niśā paśyato muneh

Verse 69

सर्वभूतानाम् *sarvabhūtānām* — for all beings; या *yā* — that which; निशा *niśā* — night; तस्याम् *tasyām* — in that; संयमी *saṃyamī* — one who has mastery over oneself (who is wise); जागर्ति *jāgarti* — is awake; यस्याम् *yasyām* — that in which; भूतानि *bhūtāni* — beings; जाग्रति *jāgrati* — are awake; सा *sā* — that; पश्यतः मुनेः *paśyataḥ muneh* — for the wise man who sees; निशा *niśā* — night

In that which is night for all beings, the one who is wise, who has mastery over oneself, is awake. That, in which beings are awake, is night for the wise one who sees.

Kṛṣṇa had been answering *Arjuna's* question about how a person of wisdom, a *sthitaprajña*, is defined and how such a person interacts with the world. Upon analysis, we find *Kṛṣṇa's* answer a very interesting one. First, he defined a *sthitaprajña* as one who is happy with himself by himself and thereby one who is free from the hold of all desires.

One who is able to give up all binding desires as they arise in one's mind, being happy with oneself, in oneself, is awake to the nature of oneself and is, therefore, wise. The wisdom of such a person is steady.

Although *Arjuna* expressed the second part of his question with the words, 'How does a wise person talk, sit, and walk?' the spirit of his question was, 'How does such a person interact with the world?' Taking the spirit of *Arjuna's* question into account, *Kṛṣṇa* replied that one's wisdom is steady only when one's mind is no longer a problem.

Kṛṣṇa said that *rāga-dveṣas* are the cause for one's knowledge being stifled or inhibited. For the person whose sense organs are freed from *rāga* and *dveṣa*, and whose pursuits are not backed by *rāga-dveṣas*, the knowledge remains because he or she has a cheerful mind, a mind that is not in the hands of *rāga-dveṣas*. *Kṛṣṇa* then summed up by saying that for the one who has withdrawn the sense organs from the sense objects, the one who has the sense organs with oneself, if indeed this person has self-knowledge, that knowledge will be steady.

Having said all this *Kṛṣṇa* was not very happy with his reply to *Arjuna's* question because he knew that to know whether or not another person is wise, you yourself must

be wise. How else are you going to know otherwise? Only a person who is wise knows what it takes to be wise. *Arjuna* thought that the characteristics of a wise person could be a kind of *sādhana* for him, a means for becoming wise. But how could he understand these characteristics if he himself was not wise? This is what *Kṛṣṇa* still had to convey to *Arjuna*.

IGNORANCE AND KNOWLEDGE ARE LIKE NIGHT AND DAY

Kṛṣṇa had talked about the person who is happy with himself or herself and, since a mad man can also be happy with himself, he also pointed out that a *sthitaprajña* must have knowledge. Recognizing, however, that his description of a wise person was not complete, *Kṛṣṇa* adds this very interesting verse. In essence, what he says is that a wise person is like a wise person and the ‘other-wise’ cannot really understand such a person without becoming wise. He illustrated his point by saying that what is night for all people is day for a wise person who has the mind and senses with him or her. Such a person is called a *saṁyamī* here. The word *yama* means mastery or control over the mind and senses, and *saṁyamī*, one who has that mastery, along with knowledge.

Further, *Kṛṣṇa* said, that which is day for everyone else is night for the wise person, called *muni* here. *Muni* means the one who sees things clearly, *mananaśīla*. For this person of clear vision, the state that everyone else thinks of as day is night. In other words, when all beings are awake, the *sthitaprajña* sleeps. And when they are asleep, the wise person is awake.

Does this mean, then, that one who is wise is some nocturnal being, like a bat, or a thief who prowls about at night? Not at all. Just as the darkness of night does not allow you to see objects as they are, night here represents darkness with reference to one’s knowledge not being clear. The wise person is awake to what is night for all beings, the night of *avidyā*, ignorance.

What is not known to people is called the sleep of night, the sleep of darkness, or ignorance, *avidyā-nidrā*. In this sleep of ignorance, people are like somnambulists, sleepwalkers. This state is more than just sleep; these people are all dreamers. They are sleeping, but awake, just like in dream. They are awake and perform all kinds of activities, but still they are asleep because they are not awake to certain realities.

If you are totally asleep or totally awake, you have no problem. The problem is when you are only half-awake, this being a state where mistakes are possible. In dream, a person is partly awake, meaning that there is some projection by the mind. The person is not identified with the body and the physical reality, but is identified with memories and thoughts, from which a dream world is set-up.

THE REALITY OF DUALITY

In the dream world, everything is dual, *dvaita* for the person. The knower is distinct from the known; the known is distinct from the knower, and the knowledge, of course is distinct from the knower, being something that the knower has and for which there is distinct object, i.e., the known.

This division in dream is a reality for the dreamer. But, upon waking, all the three — the knower, the known, and the knowledge — become one and the same. The known objects in the dream are not separate from knowledge. The knowledge is not separate from the knower; and the knower is not separate from the waker. All the three that belong to the dream resolve in to the waker, when the person who is dreaming wakes up. The waker was the knower, the known, and the knowledge in the dream. The knower is the waker. That is why one says, ‘I dreamt.’ The *ātmā*, the self of the knower that obtained in the dream, obtains also in the waking state, as evidenced by the expression of the experience as, ‘I dreamt. I was the one who was dreaming.’ In the dream, however, everything is a reality.

Even the Veda recognises duality, addressing you as a doer, a *kartā*. Śaṅkara discusses this in his commentary to this verse. The Veda tells you to perform certain *karmas* and it also tells you what you will gain by doing them. There are very specific differences mentioned also. It says, ‘This *karma* will produce this result if it is done in this manner by this person at this time.’ Thus, rituals to be performed are set out in the Veda — all of which implies duality because it addresses a *kartā* who is different from the *karma* he does.

The Veda that says you are the non-dual *Brahman* addresses you, in the earlier sections, as a person who wants certain results and who is going to get these results later. The connection between the person and the results is established by performing certain prescribed rituals, the result of which is *puṇya*. This *puṇya* is what connects the person to the result. The people, rituals, and the results are all different and therefore constitute duality.

Your perception also tells you that one object is different from another object. Perception gives rise to different types of knowledge and based on that knowledge you conclude that everything is different from you. The first part of the *śruti*, as we have seen, also confirms this difference by addressing you as a doer and not as *paraṃ brahma*. If the Veda were to address you as *paraṃ brahma*, it could not ask you to perform action. Thus, it can only address you as a doer.

The *śruti* deals with the person who is available right now. You are now a doer and that doer is addressed. Further more, the doer is told that he or she will be an enjoyer later if certain *karmas* are performed. If they are not done, or not done properly, the person will have problems later. Even if a wrong action is done, the doer will still be an

enjoyer, but the 'enjoyment' will not be very pleasant! In this way, the *śruti* keeps the person in view and talks about what is good and bad for the person, what should be done and what should be avoided.

Thus, it looks as though the *śruti* is for the doer alone and that duality is a reality. Naturally, then, the person looks upon himself or herself, in the waking state, as someone different from the world, just as in the dream. This is what is meant by the sleep of ignorance. Because of ignorance alone, the person is said to be sleeping. Sleeping here means that one is a dreamer. The person is not totally sleeping. He or she is awake doing various activities. There is even a valid *pramāṇa* available to the person, enabling him or her to know that certain actions are right and others are wrong. As long as this sleep of ignorance continues, everything is valid for the person in the waking state, just as it is in dream. One doer is different from every other doer and one enjoyer is different from every other enjoyer.

The physical body is the place of enjoyment, the counter of experience from which you encounter the world; it is the point from which one operates. You are an enjoyer and a mosquito is also an enjoyer, you being the object of its enjoyment. Thus, you find there are many enjoyers and different kinds of enjoyments; there are different doers and different types of doing — all of which are valid. Therefore, pain and pleasure are valid. That I am a small person is valid. That I am someone who is struggling to prove myself to be somebody is valid. That the struggle never comes to an end is also valid.

THE REALITY OF ONENESS

Everything seems to be valid to those who see themselves as distinct. But, amidst all this validity, one thing alone is not known — the *paramārtha-tattva*. The word *tattva* means reality and *paramārtha-tattva* is the ultimate reality, that which is the essential reality of everything. The differences that seem so real in dream and waking have no independent reality apart from this essential reality. What is essentially there, is only one thing and that is what I am — *tad aham asmi*. The knower is myself, the known is myself, the knowledge is myself, the doer is myself, the doing is myself, and the done is myself. The world is myself and the knower of the world is also myself. That all three — knower, known, and knowledge — are myself is an entirely different vision altogether. In reality there is no difference whatsoever.

For a wise person, the *paramārtha-tattva* is one thing alone and it is oneself. This *paramārtha-tattva* is not recognised by those who are not wise. For them, everything is real. This means that there is more than one reality for such people, which is why the world is always too much for them. To think that everyone is different from you means that everyone is as real as you are. Words, too, will have their own realities so that everything is as real as everything else. Naturally, then, you find a world, which is dual. In other words, you experience *saṃsāra*.

While others are in this great sleep of ignorance, the wise person is awake to the *paramārtha-tattva*. He or she is awake to the reality of the 'I,' the knowledge of which nullifies the division between the knower and the known since, in reality, there is no division. Therefore, 'I am all of this — *aham idaṃ sarvam*.' Previously, I was only one among the many. Now the vision is that, immanently, I am everything, and transcendently, I am free from everything. To this fact, the wise person, the *saṃyamī*, is awake.

COMPARISON IS NOT POSSIBLE

Those who are not wise are awake only to divisions. These divisions are very real for such people, whereas for the wise person, for the person of inquiry whose vision is very clear, any division is night. The *saṃsāra* that people complain about, he or she does not see at all. One person may say, 'I am sad,' but the wise person does not see any sadness. Others complain that the world is too much for them, but the wise person does not find it to be so. It is not that the world is too much. You are too much. You are everything.

Therefore, 'I am limitless — *ahaṃ pūrṇaḥ*' is the vision for the wise person, whereas other people say, 'I am limited — *ahaṃ pūrṇaḥ*.' This is their vision, which for the wise person is like night, because this is not their understanding at all. What is day to every one is night for the wise and what is night for every one else is like day for the wise. Thus wise are wise and the other-wise are other-wise. The other-wise do not know the wise and the wise do not see like the other-wise because night and day do not meet. They cannot co-exist, one being the opposite of the other. When the day breaks, night is gone. When night comes, day is gone. The day always ensures that night has gone before it comes. This is the role of the dawn. Lord Sun tells the dawn, *Aruṇa*, messenger of the sun, to go and make sure that the way is clear. Dawn then comes and clears the way. Thus, before the sun comes, night has already gone. In this way, the sun and the night do not meet.

Here is my story about why the sun rises every morning. *Nārada*, who is often found in mythological stories, was able to go to the gods without any particular passport or visa. Or, one could say that he had a cosmic passport, as it were, since he could go from one world, *loka*, to another. In this particular story, *Nārada* went from the earth to the sun. The sun asked *Nārada* what the people thought of him on earth. 'Oh! Lord sun,' *Nārada* responded, 'in India they do salutations to you in the early morning. Do you not see that when you come up?' 'Nowadays very few do it,' the sun replied, 'in the past, they did, but not now. But what is it that they say about me?' *Nārada* told him that everyone praises the sun, that when the sun comes out, everyone is happy. 'You are always praised everywhere, Oh! sun, except, of course, in the Sahara Desert and Saudi Arabia!'

‘What did you see that you liked on the earth?’ the sun then asked *Nārada*. In response, *Nārada* told him that there was one person whom he thought the sun should see someone that he had never seen before. ‘Everyone praises you as omniscient, but I would have to say that you are not omniscient because there is someone I think you have never seen’ ‘What!’ the sun exclaimed. ‘I am not omniscient! I am the sun. I see everything. Who is it that you think I have not seen?’

‘There is one lady called Miss Darkness,’ *Nārada* told him. ‘Where is this Miss Darkness?’ the sun then asked. ‘You can see her on the earth,’ *Nārada* replied. ‘Where will I find her right now?’ asked the sun. ‘She is in India. If you go there, you will see her,’ *Nārada* told him. Eager to see Miss Darkness, the sun rose in the eastern sky. But Miss Darkness had gone to the west, to the Antipodes, the opposite side of the globe.

The sun then became angry. He really wanted to meet this woman and so he set out after her again. But when he went to the Antipodes, Miss Darkness had already gone to the other side and when he went to that side, she was again on the opposite side. In this way, the sun continued to move around trying to find Miss Darkness and is still doing so, even today. When he comes to the east, Miss Darkness goes to the west. When he goes to the west, she comes to the east. They never meet each other, just as day and night never meet each other, because they are opposites. You cannot even compare the two; thus, it can only be said that the sun is like the sun and darkness is like darkness.

THE VISION OF THE WISE AND THE OTHER-WISE

So too, a wise person is like a wise person, which means that no comparison is possible. Therefore, *Arjuna* did not become wiser by *Kṛṣṇa*’s statement. For the wise person, what is reality is limitless. Oneself being everything is reality. The reality is that *Īśvara* is myself. For other people, *Īśvara* is located somewhere, in heaven perhaps, and is only a matter of belief. He sends people down and then meddles in their affairs, they think. People have so many kinds of beliefs, because, for them, the statement, ‘I am everything,’ is not a reality. Therefore, there are all kinds of conjectures, speculations, faiths, and beliefs. We find that for the ignorant, the *ajñānīs*, everything is guesswork, whereas for the *jñānī*, the wise person, there is no problem. The *jñānī* sees no problem at all, whereas for the other person, everything is a problem.

For the wise person, everything is a glory. The physical body, the mind, and the world are all glories, *vibhūtis* — my glories, *mama vibhūṭayaḥ*. I am the food eaten, *aham annam*, and again I am also the eater of the food, *aham annādaḥ*. I am the thinker and I am the object of thought. I am free from all these, also. The ignorant are asleep to this vision of the reality and the wise are asleep to what the ignorant are awake to.

This is something like one person seeing a snake and another person seeing a rope in the same object. The person seeing the snake sweats and shivers in fear. Even the sound of the snake's rattle is heard by this person in spite of the fact that there is no snake. There is only a rope mistaken for a snake. Once a snake is seen, everything else comes along with it — the sound of the rattle, the sight of its head rising, and so on. For this person, the snake is a reality, whereas for the other person, all that is there is a piece of rope — and he or she does not see what the frightened person is fretting about. The one who sees the rope as rope will either treat the other person with compassion or simply walk away because he or she does not see a problem. Even if a person is told that there is a snake, he or she will only reply that there is no snake, there is only the rope.

TO KNOW A WISE PERSON, YOU NEED TO BE WISE

This is strictly a matter of two different visions. How, then, is *Arjuna* going to understand a wise person? *Kṛṣṇa* was saying here that he could only do so by being wise. There is no other way. Being ignorant, you want to understand a wise person. In fact, there is really no such thing as a wise person. Wisdom is you. You are the wisdom. The wise person is one who knows himself or herself and if you know yourself you are a wise person. And until you know yourself, how are you going to understand a wise person? To be a wise person you have to be wise. There is no other way, then, of knowing the wise person.

In response to *Arjuna's* request for a description of a wise person, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* told him, the verse under study, that it takes wisdom alone to be a wise person. The wise person is a wise person; he or she is awake to a reality to which everyone else is sleeping. This answer could only have created despair in *Arjuna* because he wanted to know the characteristics of a wise person so that, by emulating them, he himself would become wise.

The sleep of ignorance that prevents one from knowing a wise person was explained further by *Śaṅkara* in his commentary on this verse. For the wise person, there is no activity because he or she no longer takes himself or herself to be a doer. This applies not only to the performance of Vedic rituals and prayers, *vaidika-vyavahāra*, but to worldly activities, *laukika-vyavahāra* as well, such as eating, cooking, dishwashing, bathing, laundering, vacuuming, and conducting business. The notions, 'I am doing this, I am the doer,' are no longer there.

TO PERFORM ACTION I HAVE TO KNOW 'I AM A DOER'

When you look upon yourself as a doer, you perform rituals and if you do not perform them, you will do something else. And this something else may incur sin. With reference to the performance of rituals, then, the Veda only addresses the person who takes himself or herself to be the doer.

A *brahmacārī*, a student, has to have the notion, ‘I am a *brahmacārī*,’ in order to perform the *karma* enjoined for *brahmacārīs* by the Veda. If a *brāhmaṇa* is enjoined to do certain *karma*, then the person doing it must look upon himself or herself as a *brāhmaṇa*. The same thing applies to other *varṇas* and *āśramas*. The Veda does not say that *sat-cit-ānanda* should perform *karma*. It says that a *brāhmaṇa*, a *brahmacārī*, or a married person, a *grhastha*, should perform *karmas*.

Karma, then, is enjoined only for the one who looks upon oneself as something or other such as — ‘I am this, I am that,’ etc. It is not meant for the person who has *jñāna*, in whom self-knowledge has taken place. Once this knowledge has dawned, it stays. Self-knowledge is not a dawning knowledge; it is a fully blazing, mid-day sun. In the wake of this knowledge, worldly and scriptural *karmas* both go away because all activity, *vyavahāra*, is born out of the notion, ‘I am the doer.’

Unless you consider yourself a doer, you cannot perform scriptural or worldly activities, activity itself being a product of self-ignorance. But, for the one who has self-knowledge, this ignorance is not there and, thus, it is said that the *vyavahāra*, all activity, goes away.

KNOWLEDGE REMOVES THE NOTION OF DOERSHIP

Does knowledge remove the product of ignorance or does it remove the ignorance itself? *Śaṅkara* deals with this question in his commentary on this verse. When knowledge takes place, the ignorance is removed. This knowledge, which is of the nature of a discriminative understanding between the real and the unreal, *ātma-anātma-viveka-jñāna*, is opposed to ignorance. Thus, when self-knowledge takes place, self-ignorance goes away. And when ignorance goes away, its broods, its products, also go away.

To take the classic example of the seeing of the rope as a snake, ignorance of the rope produces a snake. When the rope ignorance goes away, the snake also goes away. And when, we may ask, does the rope ignorance go? When the rope is seen, when it is known. Rope ignorance will go only in the wake of rope knowledge. Therefore, rope knowledge is the opposite of rope ignorance. When rope ignorance goes, anything that was there due to that ignorance will also go because when the cause of a problem is removed, the symptoms also disappear. Similarly, for the person who has knowledge, all activity is gone. Such a person becomes a *sarva-karma-sannyāsī*, one who renounces all *karma*.

The Veda sets out the *karmas* that have to be done and *Śaṅkara* clarifies as to who has to do them — the person who has such notions as ‘I am a *brahmacārī*,’ ‘I am a *brāhmaṇa*,’ ‘I am a married person,’ ‘I am bound by time, spring, new moon day, full moon day, morning, evening.’ The one who has these kinds of notions about himself or

herself, the one who thinks that he or she is time-bound, place-bound, and group-bound, is the person whom the *śruti*, the Veda, addresses with reference to the performance of rituals.

If the person knows ‘I am *sat-cit-ānanda*,’ the *śruti* does not address him or her at all. In fact, it says that you are *sat-cit-ānanda*, but it reserves this particular statement for the last chapter, which is what we call *Vedānta*. Until then, the Veda talks exclusively about rituals and meditation, all of which are *dvaita*, dual. Only at the end of all this does it say, ‘You are that *Brahman*, *tat tvam asi*.’

WHY SHOULD I PERFORM KARMA?

The question may then be asked, ‘Why did the *śruti* not say this in the beginning?’ If it had done so, I need not have done all this *karma*. I did the morning and evening prayers because the Veda said to do them and I had faith in the Veda. Now I find that these *karmas* have become a colossal waste because, at the end of it all, the Veda tells me that I am *Brahman* and that *karma* is of no use. If *karma* will not give me *mokṣa*, why did it not say so in the beginning?’

The reason the Veda does not tell you right in the beginning that you are *Brahman* is because you have to be ready for this knowledge. By performing *karma* you are able to eventually get to the last chapter of the Veda and understand what it says. By not performing *karma* you will be neither a *jñānī* nor a devout person. You will only be driftwood with no moorings whatsoever. The rule is that those who are not ready for the knowledge should not be disturbed with it. We will see this later in the *Gītā*. Instead, people are encouraged to perform *karma* in order to prepare their minds for the knowledge. They are told about *svarga*, heaven, in the beginning, so that they will perform the enjoined rituals for gaining *svarga*. In this way, they will definitely avoid *pāpa*, and *puṇya* will follow. The person who performs *karma* will have a value for *dharma-adharma*, right and wrong, and will come to believe that there is an *ātmā*, a self, other than the body. That much is enough in the beginning.

Once you respect *dharma-adharma*, the ability to discriminate between the real and the unreal will not be far behind. To respect *dharma-adharma* is not to be swayed by your *rāga-dveṣas*. Therefore, the pressure of *rāga-dveṣas* will be less. This is what is meant by *viveka*. *Viveka* begins as soon as you start to question what is what. First, there is an internal leisure and then *viveka* naturally comes. Once *viveka* is there, you will naturally turn to *Vedānta*. Only in this way can you proceed properly. Therefore, as long as self-ignorance is there, one should perform *karma*, whereas once there is self-knowledge, there is renunciation of *karma*, *sarva-karma-sannyāsa*.

Śaṅkara repeats this argument throughout his commentary on the *Gītā*. This is because there was a notion, prevalent in his day, that the Veda enjoins one to do *karma*

and, at the same time, to gain the knowledge that ‘I am *Brahman*.’ This position maintains that both will give you *mokṣa*, and is refuted by *Śaṅkara* at every opportunity.

Or, if either *karma* or *jñāna* is adequate for *mokṣa* why should anyone do the other? If *mokṣa* is something that I produce, why do I need *jñāna*? And, if *karma* is not going to produce *mokṣa*, there is no reason to do *karma*. If I am *Brahman* and I merely need to know it, which is *Śaṅkara*’s contention, then *jñāna* is *mokṣa*, and I do not need to do anything. Thus, the question, why should one do *karma*? The answer is that one performs *karma* in order to purify the mind, for *citta-śuddhi*. *Citta* means ‘mind.’ We have seen the word *śuddhi* with reference to *rāga-dveṣas*.

Reality is already accomplished; it is not something to be created. Reality is. Whatever the reality, that is what is. It is a thing to be recognised. Therefore even if you do millions of *karmas*, you do not create the reality that exists. Because of the prevalence in *Śaṅkara*’s time of the synthesis argument of combining *karma* and *jñāna*, he goes all out to clarify the difference between *karma* and *jñāna*.

There are certain topics that every teacher has to highlight, given the views of his or her time. In *Śaṅkara*’s time, the *jñāna-karma-samuccaya-vāda*, the contention that *mokṣa* is not gained by knowledge alone, but by a combination of knowledge and action, was widespread. Therefore, he found it necessary to refute it by continually pointing out the fallacies in it. This is the job of a teacher. Here, also, *Śaṅkara* points out that *karma* applied only until knowledge comes. For one who does not have knowledge, the *karma* enjoined by the Veda is a valid *pramāṇa*, whereas for the wise person, it is not. Once the *jñāna* is there, the person is a simple *sannyāsī*, one who is not a doer and therefore one for whom no *karma* is enjoined by any *śāstra*.

A WISE PERSON CANNOT BE EMULATED BASED ON ACTION

Since a wise person does not do *karma*, you cannot emulate him or her. You cannot say that because he or she does not do *karma*, you will not do *karma*. The wise person does not perform *karma* because the need to do so is no longer there. Because you still need to perform *karma*, you cannot imitate a wise person in this respect.

Kṛṣṇa did not say that the wise person is one who does not do any *karma*. To say that this person has no duty whatsoever could be interpreted by a *mumukṣu* in such a way that he or she would not live a life of *karma-yoga* and, instead, would become nothing more than a lazy person. This is why *Kṛṣṇa* pointed out here that, for a wise person, night is what is day for everyone else, meaning that no *karma* is enjoined. What is a means of knowledge, *pramāṇa*, for you is not a *pramāṇa* for the wise person. In fact, what *Kṛṣṇa* was saying here is that for the wise, there is no *pramāṇa* at all. Even the usefulness of the last *pramāṇa*, *Vedānta*, is over for them.

Vedānta says that you are *Brahman*. Until you know this, *Vedānta* is a *pramāṇa* and afterwards it, too, becomes *mithyā*. With knowledge, there is no means of knowledge, known, or knower, the differences between these three having been swallowed. The *pramāṇa*, the means of knowledge, is gone; it is *Brahman*, as are the *pramātā*, the knower, and the *prameya*, the object to be known. The very knower is cancelled by the knowledge that says you are not a knower.

RESOLUTION OF THE KNOWER, KNOWN, KNOWLEDGE

Śaṅkara says that the final *pramāṇa*, the statement, *tat tvam asi*, itself goes away, having dismissed the *pramāṇa*. An example generally given to illustrate how the knowledge works is the method of using a thorn to remove the thorn that is lodged in one's foot. Once the thorn is removed, we discard both the thorns. There is also a more interesting example used. When a body is cremated, a huge funeral pyre is made out of wood. If the person who died was rich, the pyre will be made of sandalwood, but this is the only difference.

When the pyre is ready, the body is placed on it, covered with husks and small pieces of wood, and then the fire is lit. Once the body has caught fire, the people who came for the ritual all go away. But the ritual itself is still incomplete and continues the next day when the person performing the ritual comes to pick up the ashes and bones. This person is either the departed one's eldest son or a cousin, someone who is closely related. When this person comes to pick up the ashes, there should be no portion of the body left unburned. It must be burnt thoroughly; there should be nothing remaining but the ashes and bones. Until this happens, the ritual is incomplete.

The person in charge of the cremation ground is the one who must ensure that the body is completely burned. Because the body is not to be touched and, being in the fire, cannot be handled. A stick is used for this purpose. Once the person is sure that the body is completely burnt, he throws the stick into the funeral fire. Having done its job, the stick also gets burnt.

Similarly, the statement, 'You are That — *tat tvam asi*,' is a *pramāṇa*. The *pramātā*, the knower, you, the *jīva*, is told, 'You are *Brahman*.' If you are *Brahman*, there is no knower. After this knowledge takes place, the *pramātā* is just an 'as though' *pramātā*. There is no real *pramātā* any more. When the knower is told, 'You are not a knower — You are *Brahman*,' the knower is sublated. And when the knower is not there, where is the *pramāṇa*? It too goes. All three, the knower, known, and means of knowledge are understood to be *Brahman*.

All duality goes in the wake of this knowledge, including the knower, the known, and the knowledge itself. The known, the *prameya*, is gone because there is nothing to know. Once knowledge takes place, all three — *pramātā*, *prameya*, and *pramāṇa* —

become meaningless. Therefore, all the knower-known-knowledge activities resolve in the wake of the knowledge that I am *Brahman*. This is what *Kṛṣṇa* meant when he said that what is day for everyone else is night for the wise person. This was alone conveyed by *Śaṅkara* in his commentary. All translations, therefore, should be read with this meaning in mind.

EMULATE THE VALUES OF A WISE PERSON

Any description of a person of steady wisdom, *sthitaprajñā*, is useless, really speaking. We can only talk about the wisdom, *prajñā*, that makes a person wise. Unless you have this wisdom yourself, you cannot understand what a wise person is. A *mahātmā* knows a *mahātmā*, whereas one who is not a *mahātmā* cannot appreciate a *mahātmā*. Therefore, any description, other than an unfoldment of the wisdom that makes such a person wise, is really meaningless. But, still, *Arjuna* wanted a description. He also wanted to know how a wise person reacts to the world. In his response, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* certain things, including the fact that one cannot emulate a wise person, except insofar as values are concerned.

The wise person may not perform Vedic rituals. For such a person, these *karmas* are no longer necessary because the previous performance of the scriptural injunctions has found its fulfillment in wisdom. Whether the person has taken *sannyāsa* or not, he or she is a *sarva-karma-sannyāsī*. The doership is already negated in the person. There is no real doer. And when there is no real doer, there is no real *karma*. In this way, the wise person is not bound by duty of any kind.

To emulate a wise person, therefore, is dangerous. *Kṛṣṇa* mentioned the mind, values, control, and mastery of a wise person because these alone are to be emulated. In this way, *Kṛṣṇa* confirmed for *Arjuna* that the characteristics of a wise person, as demonstrated in his or her interactions in day-to-day life, can become the means, the *sādhana*, for a seeker.

Finally, *Kṛṣṇa* said that a wise person is as different from an *ajñānī* as day is from night, meaning that there is no way of unfolding what a wise person is. What is night for all the people is day for the wise and what is day for them is night to the wise. *Arjuna* was bound to be flabbergasted by this. He was definitely not going to be any wiser for having heard this particular verse. Therefore, out of sympathy and compassion, *Kṛṣṇa* followed his night-and-day example with another example, an illustration that *Arjuna* could hold on to and one that would enable him to appreciate, in a way, what a wise person is.

आपूर्यमाणमचलप्रतिष्ठं समुद्रमापः प्रविशन्ति यद्वत् ।

तद्वत्कामा यं प्रविशन्ति सर्वे स शान्तिमाप्नोति न कामकामी ॥ ७० ॥

āpūryamāṇamacalapratiṣṭham
samudramāpaḥ praviśanti yadvat
tadvatkāmā yaṁ praviśanti sarve
sa śāntimāpnoti na kāmakāmī

Verse 70

आपूर्यमाणम् *āpūryamāṇam* — brimful; अचलप्रतिष्ठम् *acalapratiṣṭham* — without any motion, well-grounded; समुद्रम् *samudram* — into this ocean; आपः *āpaḥ* — waters; यद्वत् *yadvat* — just as; प्रविशन्ति *praviśanti* — enter; तद्वत् *tadvat* — so too; सर्वे *sarve* — all; कामाः *kāmāḥ* — objects; यम् *yaṁ* — the one (the wise person) into whom; प्रविशन्ति *praviśanti* — enter; सः *saḥ* — he; शान्तिम् *śāntim* — peace; आप्नोति *āpnoti* — gains; कामकामी *kāmakāmī* — the desirer of objects; न *na* — not

Just as water flows into the ocean that is brimful and still, so too, the wise person into whom all objects enter, gains peace, (remains unchanged); whereas, the desirer of objects does not gain peace.

There are two adjectives describing the ocean in this verse. The first one, *āpūryamāṇam*, refers to the ocean being totally filled with water. It requires no more water to be full because it is already filled to the brim. The second adjective, *acalapratiṣṭham*, describes the ocean as not moving from place to place in the same way that a river does, for example. Thus, the ocean is not only full but, being without motion, it is also well-grounded.

The verse also gives some more information about the ocean. While a pond depends upon a source of water for its existence, the ocean does not depend upon any other source of water for its fullness. It does not depend upon the rain for its oceanness, unlike the rain clouds that depend upon the evaporation of the ocean water for their cloudness. Nor does the ocean depend upon any entry of water. It does not become an ocean because river water enters into it. Thus, to be brimful, it depends on no other factor, no other source of water. The glory of the ocean, then, is within itself alone.

Water enters the ocean from all sides in the form of rain and rivers. But does the entry of these various forms of water bring about any change in the fullness of the ocean? If it does, then we can say that the ocean is not full, that it depends upon other sources for its oceanness. And if no change is brought about by the water entering into it, then the ocean is full by itself and the non-entry of water will make no difference in its fullness.

By itself, then, the ocean is full of water. Because it does not depend upon any source of water for its fullness, neither the non-entry nor the entry of water makes any difference to it. The ocean is not after the entry of water nor is it afraid of water entering into it. It has no fear of becoming flooded and thereby losing its name, ocean. Nor, in order to be ocean, does it covet water.

A pond, on the other hand, does depend upon rain or some other water to be a pond. If a pond is dependent upon a particular spring underneath it for instance, all that is required for it not to be a pond is for someone to put bore wells all around. The water table will go down, the spring will go dry, and there will be no water in the pond. A pond can also cease to be a pond if too much water enters into it. If its banks are broken, there will be water everywhere. No one will know where the pond is, unless they are wading in the water and suddenly step into it! Therefore, a pond will no longer be called a pond if there is too much water entering into it or if no water enters into it at all. Such changes are possible for a pond, whereas an ocean undergoes no change whatsoever, regardless of whether water enters or does not enter.

THE WISE PERSON

Just as the fullness of the ocean is not affected by the entry or non-entry of water, so too the wise person's peace of mind is not affected by objects that enter the mind. These objects enter into such a person just as water enters the ocean. But he or she is not affected by them because, like the ocean, the wise person is full — for no other reason than fullness being his or her own nature.

Everyone has this sense of fullness, if only for the time being, when something desirable happens. But, eventually, the person finds himself or herself not full. A wise person, on the other hand, does not depend on anything for his or her fullness because the self is already full, like the ocean. The self is *ānanda*; it has no limit. Thus, recognition of the self is the very reason for the person's being full. 'I am' is fullness. I am fullness. If I am fullness, then the meaning of the word 'I' is not found in a limited factor like the body, mind, or senses.

Therefore, the 'I' should be understood as it is — and it happens to be *ānanda*. The wise person is one who is happy without depending upon any object or situation. Like the ocean, he or she is full by his or her own glory, by his or her own nature. The fullness of a wise person, the *ānanda* of the person, is not going to increase because of the entry of some desirable objects. And if such desirable objects do not enter, the wise person does not lose anything. In either case, no change is brought about in the person. He or she remains unchanged.

If desirable objects enter into the head of a person who is not full, they create havoc in the person because they have to be gained, experienced, or owned and there may be no way of doing so. Therefore, the person smarts, sweats, frets, and fumes. When a person looks upon himself or herself as one who is lacking, desires only cause problems. And, if such a person is told to give up all desires, he or she cannot do it. Unless one is full, desires cannot be given up. They go away only when the person is full. Even if desires do enter the head of a wise person, they do not create any problems because whether the desires are fulfilled or not it is all the same to the person.

THE DEMISE OF ONE'S EMOTIONAL YO-YO

The word *kāma* in this verse is taken to mean objects — *kāmyate iti kāmaḥ* (they are desired and therefore called *kāmas*). If a person does not know that he or she is *ānanda*, the person is elated when desirable objects enter and dejected when undesirable objects enter. Whereas, for the wise person, there is no difference. He or she is *śānti* alone, meaning that there is no change in the person whatsoever. The emotional yo-yo is no longer there for him or her. There may be a ripple of laughter or even roaring laughter sometimes, just as the ocean seems to be very ecstatic at certain times and simply smiling at other times. There can be a smile, a laugh or tranquillity.

For the ocean, the small waves are its smiles and the huge breakers are its roaring laughter. If it is not roaring with laughter or smiling, is the ocean gone? No, it is tranquil in its fullness. Therefore, it is the fullness that is laughing, the fullness already being there. It can be a laughing fullness, a smiling fullness, or a tranquil fullness.

The other person mentioned in this verse, the *kāmakāmi*, is one who has desires. This is not to say that he or she has a desire for desires. No one wants to have a desire for desires, but this person definitely has desires for desirable objects. Into this person's mind, also, sense objects enter; the world enters. When the desirable enters, there is elation and when the undesirable enters, there is depression. In this way, the emotions of the person go up and down like a yo-yo.

If a wise person can be likened to an ocean, the other-wise can certainly be likened to a miserable pond that we just saw in the example. When the rains come, there will be water. Provided there is not too much water or too little, the pond will remain. But if it is flooded or all its water dries up, the pond is gone. Similarly, for one who has binding desires, the entry and non-entry of desirable and undesirable objects bring about changes, which is not the case for the wise person. This verse, then, gave *Arjuna* some hope. The previous verse was a real description of a wise person in the sense that it takes wisdom for you to be wise and, therefore, you had better gain this wisdom. This was then followed by the illustration in the present verse, which likened the wise person to an ocean. Let all the desirable and undesirable objects enter, like so much water into the ocean! The wise person remains full and the *kāmakāmi* does not.

Kṛṣṇa was telling *Arjuna* here that the one who has binding desires will always have problems and that by this illustration *Arjuna* would know what a wise man is like. Having said this, *Kṛṣṇa* then summed up the section on the *sthitaprajña*, as well as the entire chapter, in the next two verses.

विहाय कामान् यः सर्वान् पुमांश्चरति निःस्पृहः ।

निर्ममो निरहंरः स शान्तिमधिगच्छति ॥ ७१ ॥

vihāya kāmān yaḥ sarvān pumāṅścarati niḥspr̥haḥ

nirmamo nirahaṅkāraḥ sa śāntimadhigacchati

Verse 71

यः *yaḥ* — the one who; पुमान् *pumān* — person; सर्वान् *sarvān* — all; कामान् *kāmān* — binding desires; विहाय *vihāya* — having given up; निस्पृहः *nispṛhaḥ* — devoid of longing; निर्ममः *nirmamaḥ* — without the sense of ‘mine’; निरहङ्कारः *nirahaṅkāraḥ* — without the sense of limited ‘I’; चरति *carati* — moves around; सः *saḥ* — he; शान्तिम् *śāntim* — peace; अधिगच्छति *adhigacchati* — gains

Having given up all binding desires, the person who moves around, devoid of longing, without the sense of limited ‘I’ and ‘mine,’ gains peace.

The wise person is one who has given up all binding desires and who moves freely in the world. Whether the person is a king like *Janaka* or a *sannyāsi* like *Śaṅkara*, there is no difference in the freedom of the person. The longing for this or that is gone because the person is happy with himself or herself. There is no more longing for situations in order to be secure and happy. Therefore, the sense of ‘mine’ is no longer there. Such a person does not have this kind of attachment to anyone or anything.

People hold on to certain people and certain objects and look upon them as ‘mine.’ They are like children, who say, ‘Do not touch this. Do not take it away from me. This is my toy.’ The only difference between the ‘mine’ we had as children and the ‘mine’ we have as adults is that the toys have been replaced with other, more sophisticated objects. In fact, we are nothing but bearded, grown-up children. The ‘mine-ness’ never goes; only objects are replaced. Thus, with reference to a few things and people, we say, ‘This is mine.’

THERE IS NO ‘I’ OR ‘MINE’

However, when I see that the whole thing, everything, is myself alone, everything changes. I am the father, the mother, and all the places. When everything is myself, there is no ‘mine.’ ‘Mine’ means that ‘yours,’ ‘his,’ and ‘hers’ are also there. These are the reasons for all your problems. You become small in your own eyes. When ‘I’ and ‘mine’ are no longer there, because you know ‘I am all of this,’ you are wise.

When you say, ‘I am all of this’ the sense of ‘mine’ is gone. The ‘I’ sense is also gone because when everything is me, there is no ‘I.’ People think this is vanity, but vanity only exists when you are small. When you say, ‘I am everything,’ there is no vanity. Vanity is only with reference to comparison and pride. When you take yourself to be ‘this much,’ there is quantifying in terms of your possessions, your capacity, your skills, and so on. Then there is *ahaṅkāra*, ego. But when the ego is bloated to such an extent that ‘I am everything,’ there is no *ahaṅkāra* at all! There is only reality, knowledge, *Brahman*.

Ahaṅkāra is nothing but a notion, the 'I' notion. When the reality is 'I am everything,' there is no ego. Ego is only when you compare yourself with another person, and say, 'He does not have as much as I have' is ego. But there is no other person at all. All that is there is me. There is no ego, no doer; there is only *aham*, 'I.' That, 'I am a doer' is a notion, whereas 'I' is the self. Therefore, the person under discussion in this verse is one who has no 'I' or 'mine' sense because everything is himself or herself. If everything is oneself, where is the question of having a desire? Knowing this, then, the wise person has no binding desires.

HOW A WISE PERSON LIVES IN THE WORLD

The use of the word, *carati*, here is very beautiful. The wise person does not run away from the world. Where would he or she go anyway? Having given up all binding desires, such a person continues to live in the world and may engage himself or herself in a variety of activities. But the activity itself means nothing. The person gains only *śānti*, meaning that he or she never changes. Other people move around because of the pressure of their desires, whereas the wise person is free from such binding, pressurising desires.

People who are impelled by desires will say, 'This has to be done; only then can I be happy!' The only difference between a wise person and these people is that the wise person is motivated but not driven by his or her desires. In spite of moving around and being active in the world, there is no appreciable inner change brought about in the person either by desire or by its outcome.

When the world enters into the *sthītaprajñā*, the person is *śānta*. And when he or she enters into the world, engaging in the activities of the world, then also there is nothing but *śānti*. This was said because of a doubt that can arise here. It is fine to say that the *sthītaprajñā* is full and when the world enters into such a person, it merely resolves into his or her fullness. He or she just sits in one place in this fullness and whatever world enters into the person, *śānti* alone prevails. What about the wise person who is active? Activity does not change the person's wisdom. There is no change because there is no doership or enjoyership, no 'I' notion, in the person. *Śānti* alone remains.

Let the person be engaged in the world or let the world enter into the person. Either way, it is the same. Whether he or she is enjoying or doing, there is *śānti*. When the world enters into the person or the person does something, he or she does not become an enjoyer or a doer. Enjoyership and doership are both negated in the wise person. Although there is a seeming enjoyership and doership, essentially, they are not there. This is what we call *bādhita*, meaning that, through knowledge, the reality of doership and enjoyership, centred on 'I,' is sublated.

When *Kṛṣṇa* talked to *Arjuna* and when *Śaṅkara* wrote his commentaries, there was doership. But neither *Kṛṣṇa* nor *Śaṅkara* looked upon themselves as the doer. Doership, for the wise person, is just doing. The notion, 'I am the doer,' is not there. This means that the *sthitaprajña* continues to be *Brahman*. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* concluded.

एषा ब्राह्मी स्थितिः पार्थ नैनां प्राप्य विमुह्यति ।

स्थित्वास्यामन्तकालेऽपि ब्रह्मनिर्वाणमृच्छति ॥ ७२ ॥

eṣā brāhmī sthitiḥ pārtha naināṃ prāpya vimuhyati

sthitvāsyaṃantakāle’pi brahmanirvāṇamṛcchati

Verse 72

पार्थ *pārtha* — Oh! Son of *Prthā* (*Arjuna*); एषा *eṣā* — this; ब्राह्मी स्थितिः *brāhmī sthitiḥ* — the state of being in *Brahman*; एनाम् *enām* — this; प्राप्य *prāpya* — having gained; न विमुह्यति *na vimuhyati* — is not deluded; अन्तकाले *antakāle* — at the end of life; अपि *api* — even; अस्याम् *asyām* — therein; स्थित्वा *sthitvā* — remaining; ब्रह्मनिर्वाणम् *brahma-nirvāṇam* — liberation; ऋच्छति *ṛcchati* — gains

This is what is meant by being steady in *Brahman*, Oh! *Pārtha*. Having gained this, one is not deluded. Remaining therein, even at the end of one's life, one gains liberation.

The steady knowledge, *jñāna-niṣṭhā*, that had been the topic of *Kṛṣṇa*'s teaching from the beginning, is steadfastness in *Brahman*, *brahma-niṣṭhā*. In between, *karma-yoga* was pointed out and *Arjuna*'s question concerning the definition of a *sthitaprajña* was answered, this same steady wisdom being again mentioned. *Jñāna-niṣṭhā* means steady knowledge and *brahma-niṣṭha* is one whose knowledge is that *ātmā* is *Brahman*. It is this knowledge, called *brahma-niṣṭhā*, that is being praised here in the last verse of the second chapter.

Sthiti refers to this *niṣṭhā*, or steadfastness in the knowledge. Addressing *Arjuna* as *Pārtha*, the son of *Prthā*, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that being a *sthitaprajña* is the state, *sthiti*, of being in *Brahman*, born of the knowledge of *Brahman*. However, once we use the word 'state,' there is a problem because, being only a state, it will not always be the same. Previously, something was not and now this something is, in a particular state. Later, using the same logic, it will be lost when another state is gained, just as the previous state was lost when this state was gained.

When the waking state goes, dream comes. When the dream-state goes, sleep comes. When sleep also goes, waking comes. When this particular life is gone, another life comes. Because of centrifugal force, we find that certain things are in a particular state or position and when the force is gone, they are no more in the same position. Similarly, any state is subject to loss, subject to change. Otherwise, it would not be called a state.

It is important to note that we are not discussing *samādhi* here, which is a state. The question about what happens after one comes out of *samādhi* often arises. The final stage of *samādhi*, wherein there are no thought modifications whatsoever, the *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, is a state and, therefore, will be lost.

Since *Kṛṣṇa* used the word *sthiti* here, one may question how long this state will last, if indeed it is ever gained. The word ‘state’ is used in this verse only for want of a better word and does not mean something that will be lost. This *niṣṭhā* is knowledge, knowledge of *Brahman*. It is not that *ātmā* goes into *Brahman* and sits there. All that is there is *ātmā*, the self, and the self happens to be *Brahman*. Therefore, it is something to be understood.

KNOWLEDGE OF BRAHMAN IS NOT A STATE

There is no *Brahman* other than *ātmā*. *Ātmā* is *Brahman*. If *ātmā* is *Brahman*, it is a matter for understanding. It is not a state; it is knowledge, gaining which the person is no more deluded. Because knowledge is not a state, the wise person never dons the cloak of delusion again. Therefore, one's old ignorance does not come back. Such notions that were based on ignorance, such as ‘I am a *jīva*, a mortal, a doer, an enjoyer,’ also do not return.

You may fret about whether the false notions will come back again. You may think, ‘Suppose the doer, the enjoyer, comes back. Again, I will have all the old problems. Then what will I do? I will have to find another *guru*. My present *guru* will send me away because, having taught me once, he will not want to teach me again. What will I do? Again, I will have to come back. I will have to assume another body and everything will start all over again!’ There is no such problem because what we are discussing here is not a state; it is knowledge. Knowledge gained is gained for good. *Ātmā* is *Brahman*. When its *svarūpa*, its nature, is understood, there is no more *jīva*. The individual is gone. There are no more false notions about oneself and the old delusion does not return.

IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO GAIN SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Kṛṣṇa then said that, remaining in this knowledge of *Brahman*, the wise person gains *mokṣa* in this life itself. Living, he or she is liberated. Also, there is one more piece of information given: liberation is possible even for a person who is in the last lap of his or her life. The person may be very old. The ears may no longer hear, the eyes may not see, the liver may not work, the heart may be palpitating, and the person may always be scratching his or her head in order to remember things — none of which matters at all.

Even if a person is old and is in the last days of his or her life, the person can know, helped by all life's experiences. The old problems are no longer there and

everything has been tried anyway! It is only those who cannot even try any longer who tend to think of themselves as lonely. 'I cannot go out boating or fishing. I can no longer catch any salmon. They move too fast for me. Now it is deer season and all the deer escape from me. I cannot even drive a car and I am in an old age home. No one comes to see me except at Christmas time. Even then my family asks me how I am and goes away again.' For such people, these are big problems, whereas if a person has some discrimination and has learned what life can teach, nothing is really a problem for him or her anymore.

Life is meant for all this. Children are born and call you 'Daddy' and then 'Grand-daddy.' When you are a Daddy, you are supposed to be a *vivekī*, one who can discriminate the real from the unreal, and when you are a Grand-daddy, you are supposed to be a grand *vivekī*! Naturally, then, such a person is ready. If all the people go away and he is left with himself, it should not be a problem. By now, the person should know that nothing is really with him or her, except some Social Security perhaps. There is no other security. Then, having some *viveka*, if the person listens to the *śāstra* the knowledge will stick. Why? Because the person is mature.

MOKṢĀ NEED NOT TAKE TIME

An old person has already gone through all the experiences that make one wiser. For such a person, one sentence, if presented properly, is enough. He or she should be mature by this time and, therefore, should have no emotional problems or *rāga-dveṣas*. This kind of mature person, even though close to death, can gain the knowledge.

Earlier in this chapter we saw the story about King *Parīkṣit* that bears this out. A curse was placed on him that he would die in a week. He went to *Vyāsa's* son, *Śuka*, who was a *jñānī*, and told him that he had only one week to live. In response, *Śuka* just laughed. 'Why are you laughing?' the king asked, 'I am going to die in a week!' *Śuka* then explained why he was laughing. 'You are lucky,' he said, 'You say you are going to die in a week. This means that you know you are going to be alive for seven days, whereas I myself have no such guarantee. Since you are sure you are going to live for seven days, it is definitely a matter for celebration. You are lucky. My God! You can be *Brahman* by that time.' Seven days are more than enough time to change one's whole perspective and, sure enough, in seven days this king became a *jñānī*. Thus, even if you are suffering from a terminal disease or are very old, it makes no difference. You can gain *mokṣa*, liberation.

Śaṅkara then completed the sentence. If a person about to die can gain *mokṣa*, anyone can. Even as a *brahmacārī*, before one enters the second stage of life which is marriage, a person who takes to this study can gain *mokṣa*. Then, for as long as he or she lives, the person lives in the knowledge of *Brahman*.

When the ears hear, the eyes see, the mind is thinking, and memory is a possibility, knowledge can definitely be gained. If a person whose memory is gone, whose eyes do not see, and whose ears do not hear can gain this knowledge, all the more possible is the knowledge for one whose body is healthy and whose mind is bright.

There being no doubt that knowledge is all that is to be gained for one to be liberated, the second chapter comes to an end.

ओं तत्सत् । इति श्रीमद्भगवद्गीतासु उपनिषत्सु ब्रह्मविद्यायां योगशास्त्रे

श्रीकृष्णार्जुनसंवादे साङ्ख्ययोगो नाम द्वितीयोऽध्यायः ॥

*om tatsat. iti śrīmadbhagavadgītāsu upaniṣatsu brahmavidyāyāṃ
yogaśāstre śrīkṛṣṇārjunasaṃvāde sāṅkhyayogo nāma dvitīyo'dhyāyaḥ*

ABABABABAB

CHAPTER 3

THE TOPIC OF KARMA

In the previous chapter, beginning at verse 55, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* pointed out that a wise person, a *sthītaprajñā*, is one who gives up all desires, being happy with oneself in oneself. This is the ultimate human end and is what is meant by *mokṣa*, liberation or freedom.

Giving up desires implies giving up all activities also. An activity is pursued because there is a desire to accomplish a given end. If there is no desire to accomplish a given end, there is no pursuit.

Arjuna wanted *śreyas*, liberation, and understood that in order to gain it, knowledge alone was required and *karma* was of no use. *Kṛṣṇa* explained all this when *Arjuna* asked him to describe a *sthītaprajñā*. Before that, *Kṛṣṇa* talked about the nature of the *ātmā* being free from any limitation. Then he asked *Arjuna* to listen to what he had to say about *karma-yoga*; he said, *yoge tu imām śṛṇu (Gītā – 2-39)*.

During this discussion, *Kṛṣṇa* asked *Arjuna* to perform action, remaining rooted in *karma-yoga* — *yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi (Gītā – 2-48)*. This mandate confused *Arjuna*. ‘Should I continue to do *karma* or should I pursue knowledge?’ he wondered. ‘If I pursue knowledge, I will definitely gain *mokṣa*, whereas if I perform *karma*, I will be bound by *karma-phala*. Even *karma-yoga* is not adequate for *mokṣa*. How then am I to gain *mokṣa* if I perform action?’

Arjuna had made it very clear to *Kṛṣṇa*, early in the second chapter, that he wanted *mokṣa*. He told *Kṛṣṇa* in so many words, ‘I am your student. Please teach me so that I will gain *śreyas*, *mokṣa*.’ *Arjuna* naturally expected *Kṛṣṇa* to tell him exactly what would give him *mokṣa*. *Kṛṣṇa* pointed out that knowledge would give him *mokṣa*, thereby implying that all *karma* was to be renounced in order to pursue knowledge. Why, then, was *Kṛṣṇa* advising him to do *karma*? Having said that knowledge would give *Arjuna mokṣa*, *Kṛṣṇa* had then said, ‘Get up and fight!’ What did this mean?

Did *Kṛṣṇa* think that *Arjuna* was unfit for *mokṣa* or did he think that *karma-yoga* would also result in *mokṣa*? *Arjuna* wanted to know what *Kṛṣṇa*’s contention really was. The situation was like a man going to a doctor, being told that he had diabetes, and being advised to start and end each day with sweet rolls and pastries! Such a prescription would result only in a quick death and is not at all befitting the man’s condition.

Here, *Arjuna* wanted *mokṣa*, absolute freedom, and *karma* was prescribed for him. He knew that the *karmas* enjoined by the Veda were strictly for achieving results within *saṁsāra*, a life of limitation, and that they would not deliver him from *saṁsāra*. *Kṛṣṇa* himself had said to *Arjuna*, ‘May you not get involved with any *karma* unfolded in the Veda.’ *Arjuna* was therefore confused by all these conflicting statements. Since *mokṣa* was said to be purely in the form of knowledge, he concluded that he should go for knowledge. And if he was to pursue knowledge, why do *karma*? This was why *Arjuna* wanted to become a renunciate, a monk, and renounce all activities so that he could dedicate his life to the pursuit of knowledge.

‘Giving up everything, may you go after this knowledge — *sannyasya śravaṇaṁ kuryāt*’ was a popular statement. The *sannyāsī* *Arjuna* had seen had all given up everything to pursue knowledge. He therefore thought that if he was interested in *mokṣa*, he should do the same. This is the case for anything one wants in life. If money is what you are interested in, you must give up a lot of things and go after money. Or, if you want power, you should go after it to the exclusion of all else, spending whatever money is necessary to get it. You cannot expect to retain your money and, at the same time, gain power. No election was ever won that way! However, after gaining power, whether you are able to regain the money is a different issue!

Arjuna therefore thought, ‘if I want knowledge, it is only reasonable that I should give up *karma*, action.’ For a person to pursue knowledge in a dedicated fashion, giving up everything is not an unreasonable requirement. This is why a life of renunciation, *sannyāsa*, loomed so large in *Arjuna*’s mind and was all he wanted. In his eyes, *sannyāsa* seemed to be the only destination and was the right thing to do. But *Kṛṣṇa* had said, ‘Having decided to fight, please get up and fight! — *tasmāt uttiṣṭha kaunteya uddhāya kṛta-niścayaḥ* (*Gītā* – 2-37).’

KNOWLEDGE ALONE IS ADEQUATE FOR MOKṢA

Arjuna’s confusion was based on his incorrect understanding of renunciation. *Kṛṣṇa* seems to have dismissed the pursuit of *karma* for good by not allowing it to be considered in the pursuit of *mokṣa*. Therefore, *sannyāsa* had to be the answer. At the same time, however, *Kṛṣṇa* had praised *karma*. This apparent contradiction caused *Arjuna* to ask, ‘What exactly should I do?’ He did not think of pursuing both *karma* and *mokṣa* because nowhere in the second chapter did *Kṛṣṇa* mention combining them.

Knowledge, *jñāna*, is adequate for *mokṣa*. *Mokṣa* does not depend on any *karma*, because it is not something that is created. Being the very nature of the *ātmā*, *mokṣa* is already accomplished. The self is already liberated, already free, and needs only to be recognised as such. Therefore, knowledge alone is adequate for *mokṣa*. And after knowledge, *karma* is also not required because the person is happy with himself or herself as he or she is. What *karma* is to be done then? And for what purpose?

Doing *karma* for the pleasure of it is not what is being discussed here. To do *karma* merely for the pleasure of it means that one may or may not do it. Some people will do *karma* and enjoy themselves, while others may not do any *karma* at all and still enjoy themselves. If you do something for the enjoyment of it, there is no question of doing it as a bounden duty, Therefore, you need not do it or you may do it. But for *mokṣa*, why should you do *karma*, when all that is required is knowledge? If knowledge is adequate, then you must only pursue that knowledge.

Thus, from what Lord *Kṛṣṇa* had said so far, it looked to *Arjuna* as though knowledge was the prime pursuit. But it was also very clear to *Arjuna* that he had been commanded to perform action. Therefore, the first dose of teaching, contained in the second chapter, was confusing to *Arjuna*, who was already confused when the teaching began. In an attempt to resolve his confusion he asked *Kṛṣṇa* to describe a *sthitaprajña*, a wise person. This was an indirect question in that, by knowing exactly what a *sthitaprajña* was, *Arjuna* thought he would know whether it was knowledge or *karma* that would make him wise and therefore free.

In response, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* did not mention *karma* at all. He talked only about self-mastery and knowledge. He never said that one who does *karma* becomes a *sthitaprajña*. All of *Kṛṣṇa*'s descriptions of a wise person implied knowledge alone. He had said that what is night for the ignorant is day for the wise and what is night for the wise is day for the ignorant. In this way, he talked about two visions — that of the wise and that of the ignorant, the vision of one who is ignorant being different from the vision of one who is wise.

From all that *Kṛṣṇa* had told him, *Arjuna* received confirmation that knowledge was adequate for *mokṣa*. There was no question of *mokṣa* requiring a little bit of knowledge and a little bit of *karma*, a little bit of this and a little bit of that. *Mokṣa* after all, is not like an English trifle or granola! Only knowledge is necessary and all other little bits are useless. Thus, *Arjuna* concluded, 'It knowledge alone is going liberate me, then the pursuit of knowledge is enough.' If knowledge is adequate *karma* never comes into the picture, neither before knowledge nor after knowledge. Because this was *Arjuna*'s thinking, he had a doubt to raise. Thus, when *Kṛṣṇa* finished talking, *Arjuna* asked his question.

There are two types of questions. One is a question that is asking for an explanation, called *praśna*, in Sanskrit. 'What is a wise person?' is such a question. Another type of question involves doubt. Doubt, *saṁśaya*, comes in the form of, 'Does the *sthitaprajña* walk, talk, sit, etc., or not?' Only when there are two or more opinions about a topic is there a possibility of a doubt.

Throughout the *Gītā*, *Arjuna* raised doubts and also asked questions involving definitions or descriptions. When *Arjuna* wanted to know what a wise person was, he was not expressing a doubt, although he may have had one. He only wanted to know.

‘What is *sannyāsa*?’ for example, is not a doubt; it is purely a question asking for a definition. But when *Arjuna* asked which was better, *sannyāsa* or *karma-yoga*, he was expressing a doubt.

Here, in the beginning of the third chapter, he raised a doubt:

अर्जुन उवाच ।

ज्यायसी चेत्कर्मणस्ते मता बुद्धिर्जनार्दन ।

तत्किं कर्मणि घोरे मां नियोजयसि केशव ॥ १ ॥

arjuna uvāca

jyāyasī cetkarmaṇaste matā buddhirjanārdana

tatkiṃ karmaṇi ghore māṃ niyojayasi keśava

Verse 1

अर्जुनः *arjunaḥ* — *Arjuna*; उवाच *uvāca* — said (asked);

जनार्दन *janārdana* — Oh! *Janārdana*; कर्मणः *karmaṇaḥ* — than action; बुद्धिः *buddhiḥ* — knowledge; ज्यायसी *jyāyasī* — better; ते मता चेत् *te matā cet* — if it is your contention; तत् *tat* — then; घोरे कर्मणि *ghore karmaṇi* — in the gruesome action; माम् *mām* — me; किम् नियोजयसि *kiṃ niyojayasi* — why do you impel; केशव *keśava* — Oh! *Keśava*

Arjuna said:

If, Oh! *Janārdana*, your contention is that knowledge is better than action, why then do you impel me into this gruesome action, Oh! *Keśava*?

Arjuna addressed Lord *Kṛṣṇa* here as *Janārdana*, a name for the Lord, which means one who upholds the law of *karma* by giving the fruits of wrong action to the performer of the action. Wrong *karma* results in pain, *duḥkha*, either immediately or later.

Kṛṣṇa’s contention, as *Arjuna* saw it, was that the pursuit of knowledge and knowledge are better than or superior to action, *karma*. The action being referred to here was no ordinary action such as performing a ritual or cooking. It was a terrible, gruesome action involving bloodshed and the destruction of many people. Therefore, *Arjuna* asked *Kṛṣṇa*, ‘Why do you engage me in this terrible action? If, with reference to *mokṣa* knowledge is superior, if knowledge alone is going to give me *mokṣa*, why are you asking me to do *karma*?’

In *Arjuna*’s understanding, *Kṛṣṇa* was asking him to act, but at the same time he was praising knowledge and its pursuit. *Kṛṣṇa* seemed to be saying that knowledge liberates, but at the same time, he was asking *Arjuna* to do *karma* — and terrible *karma* at that! *Arjuna* wanted to be a *sannyāsī* and *Kṛṣṇa* seemed to be pushing him into the

ring to fight. He had not even signed a contract with him! He had asked only that *Kṛṣṇa* be his driver, not his agent who would arrange fighting matches for him.

Arjuna's question, 'Why are you asking me to perform this terrible action?' extends into the next verse as well.

व्यामिश्रेणेव वाक्येन बुद्धिं मोहयसीव मे ।

तदेकं वद निश्चित्य येन श्रेयोऽहमाप्नुयाम् ॥ २ ॥

vyāmiśreṇeva vākyaena buddhiṃ mohayasīva me
tadekaṃ vada niścitya yena śreya'hamāpnuyām

Verse 2

व्यामिश्रेणेव *vyāmiśreṇeva* — self-contradictory; वाक्येन *vākyaena* — with words; इव *iva* — seemingly; मे *me* — my; बुद्धिम् *buddhim* — mind; मोहयसि इव *mohayasi iva* — you appear to confuse; येन *yena* — by which; अहम् *aham* — I; श्रेयः *śreyaḥ* — liberation, *mokṣa*; आप्नुयाम् *āpnuyām* — shall gain; तत् *tat* — that; एकम् *ekam* — one; निश्चित्य *niścitya* — (you) having decided; वद *vada* — tell

With words that are seemingly contradictory, you appear to be confusing my mind. Having decided which is better, tell me the one thing by which I shall gain liberation.

Arjuna did not say that *Kṛṣṇa's* words were self-contradictory, but that they were seemingly contradictory. In *Arjuna's* understanding, there was contradiction. But, even knowing this, he did not say to *Kṛṣṇa*, 'You confuse me with self-contradictory words,' which would have been an accusation.

Here, we are given an indication of how one should talk in such situations. When *Arjuna* said, 'By words which are seemingly contradictory, you seem to be confusing me,' he meant that, in fact, *Kṛṣṇa's* intention was to confuse him.

We know that there is often accusation involved in a dialogue between two people. If your perception is that a person did this or that to you, you may say, 'You did this to me.' The person then becomes defensive and will not accept your statement. You then feel that your feelings are invalidated, that you are not understood. The other person also feels that he or she is accused and not understood at all! In other words, there is not only no communication but also miscommunication! Here, *Arjuna's* use of the word *iva*, 'as though,' reveals an important principle in communication: never evoke the defensive person in the one with whom you are communicating.

Arjuna was not accusing *Kṛṣṇa* of confusing him. Nor did he say that his words were contradictory. Instead, he said that *Kṛṣṇa's* words seemed to be contradicting themselves and, therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* seemed to confuse him. This means that *Arjuna* did not think that *Kṛṣṇa* was confusing him, only that this was how he perceived it. He says

'My perception is that I have not understood what you have taught because you seem to praise knowledge.'

MOKṢĀ IS NOT PRODUCED BY KARMA

For a wise person, all the *karmas* and their results that are mentioned in the Veda are like a well that has been completely flooded over by water. Of what use is the well water when there is water everywhere? You need not search for the well. When the river is dry, the well water is useful, but when the river is overflowing, and the well is underneath it, you are not going to go looking for the well because it is not going to be of any use to you. Similarly, for the person who knows himself or herself to be full, free from limitation, of what use is an object of security and happiness except for its empirical value? This was how *Kṛṣṇa* had praised the wise person.

By praising the wise, wisdom is praised. *Kṛṣṇa* had praised wisdom in this way and had made it very clear that knowledge was quite adequate for *mokṣa*. So *Arjuna* told *Kṛṣṇa* that he was confused by being asked to perform action. *Arjuna*'s confusion was based on his conclusion that either *karma* or knowledge should be able to take him to *śreyas*.

Karma, action, is something that can be produced, something that is born out of one's will, whereas *mokṣa* cannot be produced. Four types of results can be produced by *karma*: something can be created by you; something that has already been created can be modified or destroyed by you; something can be cleansed or purified by you, and a place that is already there can be reached. Whether actions are worldly or religious, they can only produce one of these four types of results.

Here, however, we are talking about *mokṣa* which cannot be produced. If it could be produced, it would be lost also. If, for example, *mokṣa* could be achieved by purifying the *ātmā*, it would take no time at all for the *ātmā* to become impure again. You would have to scrub it everyday!

Nor can the *ātmā* be reached because *ātmā* is myself. It is not something I have to reach because it is not away from myself. Therefore, reaching it is impossible. Modification of the *ātmā* is also not *mokṣa*. What can be modified is subject to time. So, *mokṣa* gained will be lost! Also, in order for the *ātmā* to be subject to modification, it would have to be an object objectifiable by me. But, because the *ātmā* is myself, it cannot be an object in my hands. Therefore, it is not something that I can modify. The self is already accomplished and *mokṣa* is identical with it.

But *Kṛṣṇa* was asking *Arjuna* to do *karma*. Therefore, *Arjuna* asked him to settle on one or the other — either knowledge or *karma*. If it was to be *karma*, he wanted to know why.

THE NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge is not something that is produced and is therefore different from *karma*; knowledge is knowing things as they are. To know that an unclean object is unclean or that a clean object is clean is knowledge, *jñāna*. To know an untruth as untruth or a truth as truth is also *jñāna*. To know the real, *satya*, as *satya*, is *jñāna* and to know the unreal, *mithyā*, as *mithyā*, is also *jñāna*.

Because knowledge is as true as the object, it is not dependent upon your will. I cannot decide that this is how knowledge should be. I can only see the object as it is. Nor can knowledge be modified by my will. The will can set you up to pursue knowledge, but it cannot interfere in the perception of an object. This being the case, *jñāna* and *karma* are two entirely different things.

Arjuna wanted *Kṛṣṇa* to tell him whether knowledge or *karma* would liberate him, ‘Tell me whether I will gain *śreyas* by *karma* or by knowledge. Tell me which one will do it. Do not tell me that knowledge is all right and *karma* is also all right and that I can go this way or that way.’

Suppose you go to one teacher who tells you that you should perform *karma*. Then you decide to go to another teacher for a second opinion, just as you might if a doctor you have consulted recommends surgery. The second teacher may say, ‘What *karma*! You should do *yoga*.’ Yet another teacher might say you must pursue knowledge. It is to be expected that if you go to three different teachers, each one may give you a different set of instructions. You then have to find out for yourself, which of the three is proper. Which teacher is right? There may be a fourth person who is right.

It is also understandable that the same teacher may give different advice to different students. One student may ask, ‘Should I marry or not,’ and be told that he or she should marry. Another student may be told not to marry because he or she does not know how to take care of himself or herself. The person is already a *duḥkhi* and risks making another person a *duḥkhi* also by marrying prematurely. Thus, a teacher may advise his or her students differently.

ARJUNA'S CONFUSION ABOUT KNOWLEDGE AND KARMA

In the *Gītā* there are only two people involved — *Kṛṣṇa*, the teacher, and *Arjuna*, the student. It seemed to *Arjuna* that *Kṛṣṇa* was saying, ‘Knowledge liberates; therefore, do *karma*!’ Only one student was involved here, *Arjuna*. It looked as if he was being told, ‘Knowledge is okay and *karma-yoga* is okay.’ *Arjuna* was, therefore, understandably confused by *Kṛṣṇa*’s seemingly contradictory words. There was a similar situation in the epic, *Rāmāyaṇa*, between *Prahasta* and *Rāvaṇa*.

Rāvaṇa had kidnapped *Rāma*'s wife, *Sītā*. This was probably the first kidnapping ever reported and was definitely a federal case! *Rāma*, who was a king, took the case into his own hands. When negotiations for *Sītā*'s return were unsuccessful, *Rāma* declared war on *Rāvaṇa*. *Rāvaṇa* had a minister, *Prahasta*. Summoning him, *Rāvaṇa* asked, '*Prahasta*, what do you think? Should I give *Sītā* back to *Rāma*? I think we are inviting trouble by keeping her here.' To which *Prahasta* replied, 'Yes, Maharaj, you should give her back because we are definitely inviting danger by doing otherwise. We will all be destroyed.'

Hearing this, *Rāvaṇa* became very angry, and said, 'Are you saying that we will be destroyed by this *Rāma*, a mere mortal, an ordinary human being? Are you telling me, *Rāvaṇa*, who has ten heads and great powers, that this puny little *Rāma* is going to destroy me?'

'Never, Maharaj, never!' *Prahasta* replied. '*Rāma* is a nobody. He has only two hands and two legs. With his bow and arrows what can he possibly do to you?' Then *Rāvaṇa*, said, 'But I am told that this *Rāma* is not an ordinary mortal.' *Prahasta*'s reply came promptly; he said, 'Maharaj do you know what I have heard about this *Rāma*? They say that, he is an *avatāra*, an incarnation of the Lord himself, and not an ordinary mortal.'

Growing even angrier, *Rāvaṇa* asked, 'Do you think that *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa* with these monkeys can beat us? We can beat anybody. When I am the Lord of the three worlds, are you saying that these two are going to destroy me?' 'Never, Maharaj,' *Prahasta* replied. 'How can these two fellows with their monkeys do anything to you?' *Rāvaṇa* then said, 'But I am told that the monkey, *Hanumān*, is a very powerful fellow!'

'Maharaj, there is not only one *Hanumān*,' *Prahasta* responded, 'There are thousands of monkeys; some of them are as great as *Hanumān*. There are so many of them that if they all come here, we are done for.' Then *Rāvaṇa* asked, 'Are we afraid of monkeys?' 'What, Maharaj,' exclaimed *Prahasta*. 'Of course, we are not afraid of monkeys. *Varuṇa*, the god of water comes and waters our gardens. The god of air, *Vāyu*, comes and sweeps our floors. Why should we be afraid of these monkeys?'

It would seem the *Prahasta* had read a book equivalent to 'How to Win Friends and Influence People.' The advantage of being a *Prahasta* is that, in every cabinet reshuffle, his name always appears on the top of the list because he says 'yes' to everything.

A TEACHER ANSWERS QUESTIONS

Such pleasantries may be acceptable to those who are anxious to maintain a position, but, in *Arjuna*'s case, the relationship was one of teacher and student. 'I am

your student,' *Arjuna* had told *Kṛṣṇa*. A teacher should not be afraid to tell a student what is true and what is not true. If a teacher does not tell you what is true, who else is going to do it? *Arjuna* wanted *Kṛṣṇa* to tell him what was true and not true. Therefore, he was not looking for pleasantries. He wanted to be told what was the one thing that would give him *mokṣa* and did not want to hear about anything in between. He did not want to be told that *karma* is good and knowledge is also good because he did not see it that way, even though it looked as though this was what *Kṛṣṇa* was saying.

Arjuna was as though saying to *Kṛṣṇa*, 'From your own words, I understand that knowledge liberates and *karma* binds. Why, then, do you want me to be bound to this *karma*? Every *karma* I perform only makes the knot more complicated. If I am to resolve this knot, this tie to *saṃsāra*, a life of limitation, for which I need and want *mokṣa*, then I need to pursue knowledge. But you are asking me to act. Therefore, you must have something in mind. Please tell me what it is because I do not understand.'

This, then, was the thinking behind *Arjuna's* question, which was really a doubt. *Kṛṣṇa* answered him in the next verse.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

लोकेऽस्मिन् द्विविधा निष्ठा पुरा प्रोक्ता मया नघ ।

ज्ञानयोगेन साङ्ख्यानं कर्मयोगेन योगिनाम् ॥ ३ ॥

śrībhagavān uvāca

loke'smin dvividhā niṣṭhā purā proktā mayānagha

jñānayogena sāṅkhyānām karmayogena yoginām

Verse 3

श्रीभगवान् *śrībhagavān* — the Lord; उवाच *uvāca* — said;

अनघ *anagha* — Oh! Sinless One; अस्मिन् *asmin* — in this; लोके *loke* — world; द्विविधा *dvividhā* — two-fold; निष्ठा *niṣṭhā* — committed life-styles; पुरा *purā* — in the beginning; मया *mayā* — by me; प्रोक्ता *proktā* — was told; ज्ञान-योगेन *jñāna-yogena* — in the form of the pursuit of knowledge; साङ्ख्यानम् *sāṅkhyānām* — for the renunciates; कर्मयोगेन *karmayogena* — in the form of the pursuit of action; योगिनाम् *yoginām* — for those who pursue activity

Śrī Bhagavān said:

Oh! Sinless One, the two-fold committed life-style in this world, was told by Me in the beginning — the pursuit of knowledge for the renunciates and the pursuit of action for those who pursue activity.

Kṛṣṇa was not talking here as Mr. *Kṛṣṇa*, who was born on a given day at a given time, but as *Īśvara*, the Lord. Throughout the *Gītā*, *Kṛṣṇa* talked as the Lord, except in one or two places where he said to *Arjuna*, 'You are my friend.' In fact, anyone who understands the nature of *Īśvara* can talk as an *avatāra*, as *Īśvara* incarnate, just as

Vyāsa had Kṛṣṇa do in the *Mahābhārata*. In the fourth chapter of the *Gītā*, Kṛṣṇa himself talked about what an *avatāra* is, as we shall see later.

Here, in this verse, Kṛṣṇa said that in the Veda, the two-fold *niṣṭhā* was expounded by him. *Niṣṭhā* means a committed life-style. For example, a person who is committed to the practice of *japa*, chanting the Lord's name, is called *japa-niṣṭha*, and when performing austerities, *tapas*, as the emphasis in one's life, the person is called *taponiṣṭha*. One for whom the pursuit of *Brahman* is the *niṣṭhā* is called *brahma-niṣṭha* and *jñāna-niṣṭha* — one whose commitment is to knowledge.

In this verse, Kṛṣṇa said that one of the *niṣṭhās* or life-styles he revealed to the world in the beginning is for the *sāṅkhyas*, the *sannyāsīs*, and is in the form of *jñāna-yoga*, meaning that knowledge is the means. Knowledge is the means for the *jñāna-yogī* who is a *sannyāsī* because he has no *karma* to do, other than the pursuit of knowledge in order to gain *mokṣa*. The other *niṣṭhā*, *karma-yoga*, he revealed to the world in the beginning is for everyone else — *karma-yogīs*.

Kṛṣṇa then revealed the two-fold *niṣṭhā* to *Arjuna*. The word *sāṅkhya* means knowledge and is also used in the *Gītā* by Lord Kṛṣṇa to mean *sannyāsa*, the life of renunciation. Those who are committed to knowledge are called *sāṅkhyas*¹ and the knowledge that is unfolded so clearly by all the *Upaniṣads*, the subject matter referred to as *Vedānta*, is called *sāṅkhya*. The only topic that *Vedānta* deals with is — ‘*ātmā* is *Brahman*.’ Therefore, *sāṅkhya* means *Brahman* and what is unfolded by the Vedas, by the *Vedānta*, is called *sāṅkhyam brahma*. Because the knowledge of *Brahman* is called *sāṅkhya*, and those who pursue that knowledge are also called *sāṅkhyas*, we find in the *Gītā* that the word is also used as a synonym for *sannyāsa*, the life-style of renunciation in which knowledge alone is pursued.

Because *Arjuna* wanted *śreyas*, *mokṣa*, Kṛṣṇa told him about this two-fold *niṣṭhā*. *Mokṣa* is clearly the end in view and the *niṣṭhā* is a means to this end. The *niṣṭhā* is two-fold because there are two different groups of people. One group is called *karma-yogīs* or just *yogīs* and includes everyone who does not live a life of renunciation. For these people there is *karma-yoga*, whereas for the *sannyāsīs* there is *jñāna-yoga*. These two styles are in accordance with the four stages of life found in the Vedic culture.

The first stage is called *brahmacarya-āśrama*, wherein the person lives a studious life with learning as the main focus. The *brahmacarya-āśrama* prepares one for the next *āśrama*, the *gṛhastha-āśrama* or marriage. In *Chāndogyopaniṣad* we read that, *Śvetaketu* spent twelve years in the *gurukula*, which he joined when he was twelve

¹ सम्यक् ख्यायते सा वैदिकी सम्यग्बुद्धिः सङ्ख्या । तथा प्रकाशयत्वेन सम्बन्धि तत्त्वं साङ्ख्यम् । आ० गि० ॥
तद्विषया बुद्धिः साङ्ख्यबुद्धिः । सा साङ्ख्यबुद्धिः येषां ज्ञानिनाम् उचिता भवति ते साङ्ख्याः । शा० भाष० ॥

years old. So the first twenty-four years of one's life is the first stage of the *brahmacarya-āśrama*.

The second stage of life, *gṛhastha-āśrama*, where being a householder and raising a family is the primary focus, prepares one for the third stage, called *vānaprastha-āśrama*. In this stage, a person remains married, but husband and wife live as friends, rather than as a married couple. The person continues to perform the various rituals enjoined by the Veda for householders, but withdraws from worldly activities and lives a contented life. The *vānaprastha-āśrama* prepares one for the fourth and final stage of life, *sannyāsa*, a life of renunciation. *Sannyāsa* is the best retirement plan there is because you do not require money for it. You simply renounce whatever you have.

Renunciation is possible at any stage. *Arjuna*, who was in the *gṛhastha-āśrama*, wanted to renounce. He did not want to go through the intermediary stage as a *vānaprastha*. To remain as he was, meant that he would have to remain a *gṛhastha* for a length of time and then take permission from his wife to move on to the *vānaprastha-āśrama*, none of which would be easy. Nor was it necessary to do so, for the day a person wants to get out of any of the first three *āśramas*, it can be done. When one discovers the readiness, the dispassion, in oneself, on that very day, one can take *sannyāsa*. There is a Vedic sanction for it.

The *sannyāsa-āśrama* is a stage in life where one is absolved from performing all *karma*. One is freed from all duties in order to pursue knowledge. This pursuit is all that is to be done. Therefore, the person must already be a *jñānī* or want nothing but knowledge.

TYPES OF SANNYĀSA

There are two main types of *sannyāsa*. For a person who is already a *jñānī*, there is *vidvat-sannyāsa*, a *sannyāsa* taken because of knowledge. The person has knowledge and, therefore, there is nothing more for him or her to do in the world — no obligations whatsoever. If the knowledge has been gained in any of the other three *āśramas* — *brahmacarya-āśrama*, *gṛhastha-āśrama*, or *vānaprastha-āśrama* — the person can take to the *sannyāsa-āśrama* directly, taking *vidvat-sannyāsa*, so that he or she is no longer obligated. Otherwise, for the person with knowledge, there will still be obligations because each of the first three *āśramas* implies certain duties on one's part, which cannot be left undone as long as one is in that *āśrama*. Thus, the person takes *sannyāsa* to be free of these obligations — to make it perfect, in other words.

The other main type of *sannyāsa* is called *vividiṣā-sannyāsa* and is meant for knowing.¹ This *sannyāsa* is for those who desire to know the self, *ātmā*, as *Brahman*.

¹ वेदितुम् इच्छा — विविदिषा — *Desire to know*.

The person knows exactly what is to be done. He or she has heard that this *ātmā* is *Brahman* and wants to know it. Such a person is not interested in anything else and has a certain *viveka*, discrimination, with reference to the real and the unreal. He or she also has *vairāgya*, dispassion, *mumukṣutvam*, the desire for liberation, and other qualifications in various degrees. And with these qualifications, the person takes to the life of *sannyāsa*, called *vividiṣā-sannyāsa*.

There is a third type of *sannyāsa*, called *āpat-sannyāsa*. When a person thinks he or she is going to die and does not want to die a *grhastha* or a *vānasprastha*, but rather as a *sannyāsi*, he takes *āpat-sannyāsa*. *Āpat* means danger. Because the *sannyāsa-āśrama* is always praised in the *śāstra*, it is natural for a person to want the results of this *āśrama*. It is as though the person has had a blank cheque all along and now wants to encash it. For one who has already lived a *grhastha* life and has been told that death is near, there seems to be no use in continuing in the *grhastha-āśrama*.

A man who is not about to die will usually want to remain a *grhastha* because he is fond of his wife and children. But if he knows he is going to die fairly soon, he may go for *āpat-sannyāsa*. At such a time, one does not require a *guru* but can simply declare oneself to be a *sannyāsi*. With the sun, the elements, and all the gods as witness, one can make vows, for which there is a particular *mantra*. And if one happens to survive, the vows taken can always be ratified later. This is how *Śaṅkara* became a *sannyāsi*.

HOW ŚAṅKARA BECAME A SANNYĀSĪ

Śaṅkara wanted to become a *sādhu* at very young age, but his mother was not at all agreeable. As the story of his life goes, he had the help of a crocodile that had caught hold of his leg while he was bathing in the river. *Śaṅkara's* mother was waiting for him on the bank and he called out to tell her what was happening. It may have been a ploy or perhaps the crocodile was symbolic of *saṃsāra*. We do not know. In any case, when his mother began crying, *Śaṅkara* told her that if he took the vows of *sannyāsa*, the crocodile would let go of him. Because there was danger to his life involved, this was *āpat-sannyāsa*. *Śaṅkara* then took the vows and, lo! and behold! The crocodile released him!

When he walked out of the river, his mother said, 'Come on, let's go home.' 'What!' *Śaṅkara* replied, 'I am a *sannyāsi* now.' When his mother told him the vows were only for the crocodile's sake, he said, 'Not at all! I have made the vows and I am going.' In this way, *Śaṅkara* became a *sannyāsi*. Later, he went to the *guru*, *Govinda-bhagavat-pāda*, who lived on the banks of *Narmadā* in the middle of India, and became his disciple. It was *Govindapāda* who ratified *Śaṅkara's* vows of *sannyāsa*. Ratification is always possible whenever one has taken *āpat-sannyāsa* and survives.

Expecting some good end from the *sannyāsa-āśrama*, people have value for it. This expectation is based on the belief that a *sannyāsi* does not take another birth. And if there is a birth, the hope is that one will at least get a better chance in the next life. This is a belief and one has faith, *śraddhā*, in it. A person may be born into a family where he or she can start life as a *sādhu*, so that directly from the *brahmacarya* stage he or she will become a *sannyāsi* and not a *gṛhastha*. Thus, those who have become *sannyāsis* this way may have been *āpat-sannyāsis* in their previous life.

THE LAST RITUAL OF A SANNYĀSĪ

Arjuna's heart was not in *āpat-sannyāsa*. He was not dying, but he did want to know. Therefore, he wanted to take *vividiṣā-sannyāsa*. In *sannyāsa* one gives up all *karmas*, for which there is a special ritual, the last fire ritual that a *sannyāsi* performs. You may see a *sannyāsi* doing a *pūja*. But you will never see a *sannyāsi* sitting around a fire performing a Vedic ritual. Such a person has been freed of all obligatory fire rituals, of all *karmas*, in fact. A *sannyāsi's* last fire ritual is one in which all *karmas* are given up.

In this ritual, the *sannyāsi* bids goodbye to all the ancestors, to whom there has been an obligation — father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, great-grandfather, great-grandmother, then *ṛṣis* and *devas*. The person taking *sannyāsa* says that self-knowledge will be pursued to the exclusion of all else, asks for the blessings of the paternal and maternal ancestors, and takes a vow of *abhaya*, a vow not to harm any living being, including trees and plants. The *sannyāsi* also vows to be a non-competitor in this world and all others, thereby becoming a person who does not compete for the sake of status politically, economically, or socially. Knowledge is the only interest for the *sannyāsi*.

Having taken these vows, the *sannyāsi* takes a few symbolic steps towards the north, the direction that stands for *mokṣa*. South stands for death. Thus, Lord Death, Lord *Yama*, is a southerner. This symbolism may be based on the polar attraction in the north. Death never attracts you, whereas freedom from death does. Moving towards the north in search of *mokṣa*, having discarded all clothing, the *sannyāsi* is called back by the *guru*, given a set of simple clothing, and asked to serve and continue studying with the *guru*. This, then, is the ritual of *sannyāsa*, be it either *vidvat-sannyāsa* or *vividiṣā-sannyāsa*. Both are mentioned by *Śaṅkara* in his commentary.

In *vidvat-sannyāsa*, one may or may not take *sannyāsa* formally. The main aim is that, by knowledge, one gives up all *karmas*. The knowledge is that 'I am a non-doer. I perform no action.' This is what is called *naiṣkarmya*, the state of actionlessness. I perform no action at any time because *ātmā*, which is 'I,' does not perform any action. Nor does *ātmā* cause anyone to perform action. I am not a doer in spite of all the actions I do. This knowledge is real *sannyāsa* as described *jñāna-karma-sannyāsa*.

For the sake of this *jñāna-karma-sannyāsa*, one takes to the life-style of *sannyāsa*, pursuing self-knowledge. The other *niṣṭhā*, *karma-yoga*, is for all those seekers in the other *āśramas*.

THE PURPOSE OF KARMA-YOGA

There is no doubt that *karma* binds, with its limited results. But, if you do *karma* for *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, for neutralising your *rāga-dveṣas*, for gaining the grace of *Īśvara* — if you perform your prayers, rituals, and duties for the sake of these alone, the *karma* you perform becomes a means, *yoga*, for *mokṣa*.

Sannyāsa is only possible if you have lived a life of *karma-yoga*. Otherwise, you become a *sannyāsī* who has *rāga-dveṣas* and you will be miserable. A *karma-yogī* has the means, a world, a field, where his or her *rāga-dveṣas* can be neutralised. Such a field is not there for a *sannyāsī*. *Sannyāsa* means a life of study from morning to night. No other activity is available. A *sannyāsī* cannot even sing much because the pursuit of music, along with everything else, has already been given up.

A *sannyāsī* is one who has to pursue knowledge for which a certain capacity to contemplate is required. If the pressure from *rāga-dveṣas* is there, you cannot sit in contemplation. You will find, instead, all kinds of agitation or you will fall asleep. After a few days, the life-style of a *sannyāsī*, traditionally indicated by the wearing of orange robes, will become a source of irritation. Naturally, then, *sannyāsa* is meant only for those who, to an extent at least, have taken care of their *rāgas* and *dveṣas*.

The two-fold *niṣṭhā* is meant only for *śreyas*. *Arjuna* wanted *Kṛṣṇa*, to tell him which one was better and *Kṛṣṇa* replied that one can be a *sannyāsī* or a *karma-yogī*. Both are meant for the same end — *mokṣa*, *śreyas*. One can live a life of a *karma-yoga* and gain *mokṣa* and one can live a life of *sannyāsa* and gain *mokṣa*. The only difference is that for a *sannyāsī* there is only knowledge, whereas for a *karma-yogī* there is knowledge and *karma*. This difference must be understood well because this is where there is a lot of confusion.

Arjuna was a *karma-yogī*, not a *sannyāsī*. By listening to *Kṛṣṇa*, he was pursuing knowledge. Although *grhasthas* pursue other activities, they are qualified for knowledge. This pursuit of knowledge plus the performance of *karma* made *Arjuna* a *karma-yogī*. If the pursuit of knowledge had not been there, if he had had no discrimination, if *mokṣa* had not been the end for him, he would not have been a *karma-yogī*. He would have been a simple doer, a *karmī*, a *karmātha*. When *mokṣa* is the end in view, then *karma* becomes *yoga* because it is done with a particular attitude in order to gain *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, purification of the mind.

In this way, *karma-yoga* is important in gaining knowledge. You can take *sannyāsa* and gain *sarva-karma-sannyāsa* or you can live a life of *karma-yoga* and

gain the same thing. *Sarva-karma-sannyāsa* is an end in itself for which the means is either of the two life-styles — *sannyāsa* or *karma-yoga* revealed by the Lord in the beginning itself, in the *Upaniṣads*.

Among the ten *Upaniṣads* commonly studied, the first one is *Īśāvāsyopaniṣad*. The first *mantra* of this *Upaniṣad* is meant for the *sannyāsi*, the *jñāna-yogī*. It says, 'In this moving world, everything should be looked upon by you as *Parameśvara*, the Lord — *īśāvāsyamidaṃ sarvam*. The Lord being everything, what is there that is yours? Or, not yours? Live a life of renunciation and pursue self-knowledge alone,' this *mantra* advises. Pursuit of this knowledge, giving up every other pursuit, is the life of *sannyāsa* or *jñāna-yoga*, said *Śaṅkara*, in his commentary.

The second *mantra* of the same *Upaniṣad* says, 'Even if you want to live one hundred years, live doing *karma* with the proper attitude.¹ This is the best way for you. If *karma* is done in the proper way, it will not affect you at all.' This is *karma-yoga*. Thus, we see here the two-fold *niṣṭhā* being unfolded, *sannyāsa*, wherein the pursuit of knowledge alone is allowed, and *karma-yoga*, the pursuit of knowledge along with whatever *karma* is to be done. Throughout the *śāstra*, these two *niṣṭhās* are always discussed in the same way.

CHOICE OF LIFE-STYLE

In the Vedic vision, *śreyas* is *mokṣa*. *Mokṣa* is the end, the human destiny to be gained in this life. Here, itself, *saṃsāra* is crossed. To have taken a human birth means that you have already made it. Because you have an intellect, *buddhi*, *viveka* is possible. It is true that experience teaches, but you do not need to get knocked around for seventy-five years to develop discrimination. Twenty-five years are good enough! Once you develop *viveka*, *śreyas* alone looms large before you; it becomes the only real end for you.

Then you become either a *karma-yogī* or a *sannyāsi*. The *niṣṭhā* was told in a two-fold way because there are two kinds of people. But there is only one means for *mokṣa*, knowledge. Depending on the kind of person you are, you can be either a *sannyāsi* and pursue knowledge to the exclusion of all else or a *karma-yogī* and pursue knowledge along with *karma*. In both life-styles, the pursuit of knowledge is common. Knowledge is *mokṣa*. Therefore, the choice is not between *jñāna* and *karma*. It is between *sannyāsa* and *karma-yoga*.

¹ कुर्वन्नेवेह कर्माणि जिजीविषेच्छतं समाः ।

एवं त्वयि नान्यथेतोऽस्ति न कर्म लिप्यते नरे ॥ १-२ ॥

kurvanneveha karmāṇi jijīviṣecchataṃ samāḥ

evaṃ tvayi nānyatheto'sti na karma lipyate nare (Īśāvāsyopaniṣad – 1-2)

When the choice is between *karma-yoga* and *sannyāsa*, it is natural to look to *sannyāsa*. Given a choice, why do *karma* at all? *Sannyāsa* seems to be the better choice since performing *karma* implies so much effort, problems, and even bloodshed. *Karma* can be such a nuisance. When two life-styles are available, why should I put up with a life of *karma*?

The choice is like asking which is the better way to catch hold of my nose in order to do breathing exercises. Shall I take my hand directly to my nose or shall I reach around from behind my head? It can be done either way, but when the first way is obviously so easy where is the question of choosing? *Sannyāsa* seems to be easier — just give up all the *karmas* and pursue knowledge. Why do both? A *karma-yogī*, living in an agricultural society, for example, has to milk the cow, graze it, wash it, and take care of the children, among other things. One child is crying, the other is on his lap, and the third one is tugging at him from behind. The mosquitoes are biting and his wife is shouting. In between, he has to perform the fire ritual, called *agnihotra-karma*, with all its problems. The firewood is wet, everything is smoking, and his eyes become filled with all kinds of tears — tears born out of the smoke, tears born out of all the nagging children, tears born out of his helplessness, and so on. When will such a person have time to pursue knowledge? Whenever he picks up the *Gītā* book, all that comes is sleep!

Is it therefore not better to go for *sannyāsa*? *Arjuna* definitely thought so. However, *sannyāsa* is not as easy as it appears. It looks as though you need only sit and study. But try it and you will find that it does not always work that way. Instead, you may vegetate all day because you are not able to study so intensively. This, then, is not the way. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* continued to tell *Arjuna* exactly what *sannyāsa* and *karma-yoga* are. Even though a choice is there, *karma-yoga* will pave the way for *sannyāsa*. It will even pave the way for the desire for knowledge and, therefore, for *vividiṣā-sannyāsa*. *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that *sannyāsa* is not at all easy in spite of how pleasant and simple it appears to be. After all, *sannyāsa* is giving up everything.

Arjuna thought that giving up everything would not present any great problem, especially since he had lived in the forest for twelve years. But, during those twelve years, he had been thinking about *Duryodhana* and the kingdom, and the injustice of it all. Twelve years of meditation upon *Duryodhana* did not make *Arjuna* a *sannyāsi*. *Arjuna* had been nursing a big hurt for a long time. Therefore, *sannyāsa* was not going to come so easily to him. One does not become a *sannyāsi* by decision alone — all of which *Kṛṣṇa* would tell him later in the *Gītā*.

In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* began teaching *Arjuna* the real meaning of actionlessness with reference to gaining *mokṣa*.

न कर्मणामनारम्भात्रैष्कर्म्यं पुरुषोऽश्नुते ।

न च सन्न्यसनादेव सिद्धिं समधिगच्छति ॥ ४ ॥

*na karmaṇāmanārambhānnaiṣkarmyaṃ puruṣo'śnute
na ca sannyasanādeva siddhiṃ samadhigacchati*

Verse 4

पुरुषः *puruṣaḥ* — a person; कर्मणाम् *karmaṇām* — of activities; अनारम्भात् *anārambhāt* — by non-performance; नैष्कर्म्यम् *naiṣkarmyam* — the state of actionlessness; न अश्नुते *na aśnute* — does not gain; च *ca* — and; सन्न्यसनात् एव *sannyasanāt eva* — merely by renunciation; सिद्धिम् *siddhim* — success (liberation); न समधिगच्छति *na samadhigacchati* — does not attain

A person does not gain the state of actionlessness by the non-performance of activities. Nor does the person attain success (liberation) out of mere renunciation, *sannyāsa*.

We have seen that there are two life-styles, *niṣṭhās* — *jñāna-yoga-niṣṭhā* and *karma-yoga-niṣṭhā*. These two *niṣṭhās* are for two types of people — the *sannyāsīs* and the *karma-yogīs*, respectively. All those seeking liberation, who are other than *sannyāsīs*, are *karma-yogīs*. Here, *Kṛṣṇa* explains why this is so.

There is a connection between *karma-yoga* and *sannyāsa*, *jñāna-yoga*. For a *jñāna-yogī*, the pursuit of knowledge alone is *yoga*, for which he or she must have freedom from the hold of *rāga-dveṣas*. *Rāga-dveṣas* have been described by the *Gītā* itself as the source of all our problems. Therefore, *rāga-dveṣas* must be taken care of before one becomes a *sannyāsī*.

If you become a *sannyāsī* without *karma-yoga*, how are you going to neutralise your *rāga-dveṣas*? There are *rāgas*, desires, for certain things and, for a *sannyāsī*, it is impossible to fulfil them. *Dveṣas*, those situations that one wants to avoid, will also be there with no possibility of being neutralised. As a *karma-yogī*, however, you have a field in which your *rāga-dveṣas* can be neutralised. Thus, *karma-yoga* becomes the means for *jñāna-yoga* and *jñāna-yoga* becomes the means for *mokṣa*.

We have seen how the word *sannyāsa* can have two meanings, one being a life-style implying the renunciation of all relationships and activities in order to pursue knowledge alone. The other meaning is that by knowledge, one gives up all action — *jñānena karma-sannyāsaḥ*. *Śaṅkara* often took it this way — *sannyāsa* as an end in itself, knowledge being *sannyāsa*. This is because *sarva-karma-sannyāsa*, the giving up of all action, takes place in knowledge. Through knowledge, the doership of the *ātmā* is nullified. Because there is no doership in the *ātmā*, even as one performs action, it is not really being done by the *ātmā*. Only when this is clearly understood, is there the giving up of all activity through knowledge — *jñānena karma-sannyāsaḥ*. This is what is meant by the word, *sarva-karma-sannyāsa*, which is equivalent to *mokṣa*.

Nyāsa means renunciation and *sannyāsa* means perfect or complete renunciation. Thus, *sarva-karma-sannyāsa* means perfect renunciation of all action, the renunciation

being in the form of knowledge itself. This knowledge is not possible without a certain mind. Such a mind is accomplished by *karma-yoga*, performing action with the proper attitude, as we saw in the previous chapter, and will see again in this chapter. *Karma-yoga* enables you to give up all *karmas* in the sense that it becomes a means for *sarva-karma-sannyāsa*.

THE NECESSITY OF KARMA-YOGA

With a desire for *mokṣa*, one can take to a life of renunciation, called *vividiṣā-sannyāsa*. In this type of *sannyāsa*, *sarva-karma-sannyāsa* has not yet taken place, but certain duties are given up so that knowledge can be pursued. However, if the person has not taken care of his or her *rāga-dveṣas* before taking *sannyāsa*, he or she will not be able to pursue knowledge to the exclusion of all else.

Taking *sannyāsa* is always possible because it is open to choice. If you are a *mumukṣu* and there is a choice between a life of renunciation of activity and a life of action, why should you perform activity? Since you are only interested in *mokṣa*, which can be gained by the pursuit of knowledge alone, why would you not take *sannyāsa* and pursue knowledge alone? Because, if you have not taken care of your *rāga-dveṣas*, it is not possible to do so.

Even if you do commit yourself to the pursuit of this knowledge, other interests will be there based on your *rāga-dveṣas*. For most people who take to this knowledge, it is not the predominant factor in their lives. They have a lot of other interests as well. Therefore, they are not *sannyāsīs* at all. One does not become a *sannyāsī* just by pursuing knowledge. *Sannyāsa* implies a certain mind that is only possible by *karma-yoga*.

To conclude that performing action is of no use to you when what you want is *mokṣa* is not correct. Doing *karma* is useful because without a prepared mind, your pursuit of knowledge will be useless. Without *karma-yoga* there is no chance of neutralising your *rāga-dveṣas* and, if this neutralisation does not take place to a significant degree, there is no chance to gain the knowledge through which all action is given up. Thus, to take to a life of *sannyāsa*, without having dealt with your *rāga-dveṣas*, is meaningless.

KNOWLEDGE ALONE NEGATES

In this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* said that by not performing action a person does not gain the end called *naiṣkarmya*, the state of actionlessness, which is *sarva-karma-sannyāsa*. The renunciation of all activities is in the form of knowledge alone because there is no such thing as giving up all activities without giving up doership. Why not just give up the doership then? But how are you going to give up the doership when you are the very

doer? If you think you can give it up by just deciding to do so, who is the one that makes the decision? How are you going to give up the doer who is deciding? Therefore, you are not going to give up doership this way.

GIVING UP THE DOERSHIP

Doership does, however, go away in the wake of knowledge that ‘I am *ātmā*, *Brahman*, which is not the doer.’ This knowledge alone negates the doership in the *ātmā*. Nothing else will do it. To think that surrendering is another way to reach God is certainly not correct, for how will you surrender the one who surrenders? You are still left with having to give up the doership.

A relevant verse from the *Mahābhārata* is as follows:

त्यज धर्ममधर्मं च उभे सत्यानृते त्यज ।
 उभे सत्यानृते त्यक्त्वा येन त्यजसि तत्त्यज ॥
tyaja dharmamadharmam ca ubhe satyānṛte tyaja
ubhe satyānṛte tyaktvā yena tyajasi tattyaja
 (Mahābhārata – Śāntiparva – 12-329-40)

Give up *dharma* and *adharmā*; give up the concept of real and unreal.
 Having given up the concept of real and unreal, give up that by which you give up.

Give up *dharma* and *adharmā*, right and wrong, good and bad. Go beyond them. Do not just give up the right and do the wrong! To give up the wrong and do the right is only the first stage. Give up the right also. The very concepts of right and wrong must be given up. All *karma* is to be given up — both *puṇya-karma* and *pāpa-karma* have to be given up. And that giving up is what we call *sannyāsa*. A *sannyāsī* does not perform actions that will create *pāpa*; nor does he or she do actions for the sake of *puṇya*. Giving up both *puṇya* and *pāpa-karmas*, the person becomes a monk, a renunciate. Having done this, all that is then done is in the form of inquiry, *vicāra*, with reference to the person's concept of what is real and what is unreal. Eventually, these concepts also are given up.

Suppose someone says that he or she has given up all concepts of reality — both empirical reality and subjective reality — meaning that the person no longer cares for the empirical world or for the false values he or she once had. The person no longer thinks that money or anything else is going to liberate him or her. In other words, he or she has become dispassionate towards everything that exists within the empirical reality we call the world. Having discovered this inner dispassion, the person now has the notion, ‘I am a *sannyāsī*. I am dispassionate.’ In other words, the person is still there in the form of

the ego, *ahaṅkāra*, which says, 'I have given up everything.' This *ahaṅkāra* also has to be given up and this can only be done through knowledge.

In fact, you do not give up the *ahaṅkāra*. How can you when you are the *ahaṅkāra*? Only in the wake of knowledge that you are not the *ahaṅkāra*, does it go away because it is not true. And along with the *ahaṅkāra* goes the doership and all actions too.

By absence of doership and therefore all actions, it should not be construed that the one who has knowledge of the self will be like a stone, not performing any action. In spite of all actions, the *jñānī* does not take the self to be a doer. For the *jñānī*, the doer is the self, but the self is not the doer. In this sense, *sarva-karma-sannyāsa* is the state of actionlessness, *naiṣkarmya*, in the form of knowledge.

Thus, self-knowledge and *naiṣkarmya* are identical. The word *naiṣkarmya* is used because, as long as *karma* is there, you are bound to whatever body you have at any given time and place. Even in dream, you have some kind of physical body of your own, albeit set up by your own thought. All bodies, ethereal, celestial, or corporeal, are all because of *karma* alone.

Karma makes you identify with a particular body in order to go through the experiences that are the result of *puṇya* and *pāpa*, themselves the results of previous actions performed by you. As long as *karma* is there, *saṃsāra*, life as we know it, is there and as long as *saṃsāra* is there, *karma* is there. *Karma* will remain as long as ignorance of oneself remains.

ACTIONLESSNESS IS NOT GIVING UP ACTION

The word *naiṣkarmya* is important because the state of actionlessness, freedom from action, is identical with what is called *mokṣa*, which is self-knowledge, *ātma-jñāna*. It looks so simple: by doing nothing, you will gain the state of actionlessness and, therefore, *mokṣa*. But *Kṛṣṇa* clearly stated here that the state of actionlessness is not accomplished by not doing *karma*. Thus, it is not as simplistic as one might think.

We know that the state of action means to be active. It is natural, therefore, to think that what we have to do now is to be inactive in order to gain the state of actionlessness called *mokṣa*. Thus the question arises, why perform all these actions? *Arjuna* asked *Kṛṣṇa* the same question — Why should he perform action, let alone such a terrible action? He, too, thought that by giving up all his actions, he would gain the state of actionlessness that is *mokṣa*.

Here, the question can be asked, how long should you be actionless in order to gain *mokṣa* — half a second, one second, two seconds, how long? If actionlessness is *mokṣa*, should you be actionless for a long time? What is the determining factor? Since, between two thoughts there is no action at all, should you not gain *mokṣa* before the

second thought comes? Should you not, therefore, have gained *mokṣa* long ago? In fact, in between thoughts, you must be gaining *mokṣa* all the time! If this kind of actionlessness amounts to *mokṣa*, you would have gained it long ago.

Another factor to consider is that it is not possible for you to be actionless. In fact, *Kṛṣṇa* pointed this out in the next verse. Remaining actionless for a long time is itself an action. Since sitting is an action, someone may say, 'I will not sit; I will lie down. Then I will be actionless.' But lying down is also an action. 'What are you doing now?' 'I am lying down.' Thus, there is no way of gaining the state of actionlessness by not doing action.

Someone may think that by not initiating an activity, he or she will gain the state of actionlessness since the very act of beginning anything is to become active. The state of actionlessness is lost simply by starting an action. Thus, if an action is not started, perhaps the state of equilibrium between not acting and acting is actionlessness. If that state is not disturbed, *mokṣa* will not be disturbed, but if you begin any action, *mokṣa* will be disturbed! To correct this thinking, *Kṛṣṇa* made it very clear here that by not starting any activity, you do not gain actionlessness, *naiṣkarmya*.

SANNYĀSA DOES NOT GUARANTEE MOKĀA

It may also be said that *sannyāsa* can be taken, not because the person is afraid of performing actions, but simply as a vow that absolves the *sannyāsī* from all of the commitments and obligations enjoined by the Veda. The Veda itself says that *sannyāsa* can be taken, all activities can be given up, in order to pursue knowledge. *Kṛṣṇa* addressed this notion also, saying that by simply taking to *sannyāsa* alone, one will not gain *mokṣa*. Just because a person has become a *sannyāsī* does not mean that he or she has *naiṣkarmya* because, for this, self-knowledge is required. *Śaṅkara* made the same point in his commentary on this verse.

Jñāna-niṣṭhā, otherwise called *mokṣa*, is not achieved by merely becoming a *sannyāsī* because *karma-yoga* is also a means. In fact, without the *karma-yoga-niṣṭhā*, the *sannyāsa-niṣṭhā*, is not possible. Only by *karma-yoga* can you become a real *sannyāsī*. Only then is there a choice between *karma-yoga* and *sannyāsa*.

If you have gained a certain contemplativeness by a life of *karma-yoga*, if your life is more or less adequate and you are satisfied with yourself, then you can sit with yourself. Only then can *sannyāsa* be a means for you. Without *karma-yoga*, this *sannyāsa* is not possible, to say nothing of *naiṣkarmya*. Therefore, the mere taking of *sannyāsa* does not amount to gaining *mokṣa*.

Not performing action is also not *naiṣkarmya*. If, not being a *sannyāsī*, you do not do the *karma* that is to be done by you, it amounts to a dereliction of duty. It is not *naiṣkarmya*. If, however, you give up *karma* by taking *sannyāsa*, you may think that

the vows you have taken are enough to free you from all action. But they are not; you still have to gain knowledge. Therefore, actionlessness is not to be taken literally, as we shall see in the next verse.

न हि कश्चित्क्षणमपि जातु तिष्ठत्यकर्मकृत् ।

कार्यते ह्यवशः कर्म सर्वः प्रकृतिजैर्गुणैः ॥ ५ ॥

*na hi kaścitkṣaṇamapi jātu tiṣṭhatyakarmakṛt
kāryate hyavaśaḥ karma sarvaḥ prakṛtijairguṇaiḥ*

Verse 5

जातु *jātu* — ever; क्षणम् *kṣaṇam* — for a second; अपि *api* — even; कश्चित् अकर्मकृत् *kaścit akarmakṛt* — some one who performs no action; न *na* — not; हि *hi* — indeed; तिष्ठति *tiṣṭhati* — exists; हि *hi* — because; प्रकृतिजैः गुणैः *prakṛtijaiḥ guṇaiḥ* — by the three *guṇas* born of *prakṛti*; सर्वः *sarvaḥ* — all, everyone; अवशः *avaśaḥ* — being helpless; कर्म *karma* — action; कार्यते *kāryate* — is made to do

Indeed no one ever exists for even a second without performing action because everyone being helpless is made to perform action by the (three) *guṇas (sattva, rajas, and tamas)* born of *prakṛti*.

There is no person who can exist even for a second, now or later, without performing any action whatsoever. It cannot be said that someone, who is young and active, either meaningfully or idly, performs action and someone who is old and inactive does not. Young or old, no one exists without performing one action or the other at any time, even for the shortest period of time.

Even *Kṛṣṇa* performed action. He was talking; he was teaching. And if he had not been teaching, he would have been doing something else. If there were no one to teach, he would simply pick up his flute and play. He would not remain quiet for very long — and even if he did, sitting quietly would also be an action.

In India, there is an expression, ‘keeping quiet,’ which means the person is doing nothing. But ‘keeping quiet’ is definitely an activity. No one keeps quiet; one is quiet. ‘Keeping quiet’ is an action because ‘keeping’ is an action.

KARMA DEFINED

There is, therefore, no time whatsoever when you are free from activity. We can see that there are many varieties of activities with many definitions. For instance, whatever is done voluntarily by you is *karma*. Closing your eyelids involuntarily is also *karma*. A general definition of *karma* is that which is in the form of motion — *calanāmatkaṃ karma*.

If action is motion, then non-action, *akarma*, must be motionlessness and therefore *naiṣkarmya*. But is it? How long can you be motionless? When a man who considers himself motionless is asked, ‘Do you do any *karma*?’ he may not answer because talking is a *karma*. Instead, he shakes his head in the negative, which is an action. Similarly, if he nods his head in agreement to the question, ‘Are you doing *akarma*?’ he is also performing an action.

The entire body is always in a state of activity. Breathing is motion; thinking is motion from one thought to another. Eating is an activity, even when performed by one who has given up all activity. There may be a special name for it — *bhikṣā*, but, even so, it is an action. Just see what a *bhikṣu* will do if, instead of giving him food, we simply write the word *bhikṣā* on a piece of paper and hand it to him!

Similarly, cooking, walking, and bathing are all *karmas*. Sitting in a chair, cross-legged on the floor, or in any other manner is *karma*. All these *karmas* are in the form of motion. If this is so, when are you going to be motionless? Only when you know, I am motionless. ‘In knowledge alone, there is *akarma*. There is no other *akarma*, otherwise.

Thus, at no time is there any living being who is not performing some activity or the other. We have no way of knowing whether there is activity after death, except that the *śruti* says that one takes another birth, thereby implying even more action. Therefore, when is a person not performing action? Even in deep sleep, there is activity since breathing and other vital physiological functions continue to operate. Otherwise, there would be no need to break one's fast; there would be no breakfast for the person!

CAUSES OF ACTION

If motion is action, then, there is no time when the person in a given physical body is free from activity. Even if action is taken as something that is will-based, one is always doing one thing or the other, helplessly impelled by an unseen cause, as *Kṛṣṇa* said in the second line of the verse when he introduced the word *prakṛti*.

Prakṛti is that out of which any product, any creation, is ultimately born and is the word given to the material cause of the world. Your mind is also born out of *prakṛti*, which has three qualities, *guṇas* — *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. Being qualities of the cause, *prakṛti*, these three qualities will also be in the effect or the product. For example, gold is the cause for a given bangle. The gold has certain qualities, a certain weight, and that weight will be there in the bangle. It also has a certain colour, which will also be in the bangle. Because gold is rustproof, the bangle will also be rustproof. The bangle will contain the malleability, strength, and so on, of the gold because it is born of gold, *prakṛti*, the cause. Its cause being gold, the bangle will necessarily have all of the same qualities as gold.

QUALITIES OF THE MIND

Similarly, *antaḥ-karāṇa*, the mind, is born of *prakṛti* and has the same qualities — *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. Each of these qualities produces certain types of desire, the expressions of which can be classified according to each of these qualities, as we shall see in more detail later in the *Gītā*. For instance, there are three types of giving. Giving as an investment in expectation of a return is born of *tamas* and giving for the sake of pride is born of *rajas*. Giving because it must be done and, once done is forgotten, is born of *sattva*. Thus, there is a clean division among the three.

Because *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* are present in everyone, there are three types of expression with reference to desires. Prompted by these desires, one performs action. In this way, all living beings are made to do action. There is no escaping it. A bug keeps moving because if it stays in one place it risks getting squashed. Even by moving, it has no guarantees! For a worm to go from one side of a room to another is like making a pilgrimage on foot to Benares from the South of India.

Something inside every living creature impels it to perform action. This is how the creation is. No one remains without performing action. Therefore, literally speaking, you are not going to accomplish *naiṣkarmya*, actionlessness. *Naiṣkarmya* is simply knowing oneself to be free from doership. This is the only *naiṣkarmya* available and is what is called *mokṣa*.

The verse under discussion here relates to the previous one. By not beginning an activity, you are not going to accomplish *naiṣkarmya*. Nor are you going to do so by giving up action, even if you adhere to the Vedic rules for *sannyāsa*. Also, by becoming a *sannyāsī*, you cannot give up all activity because it is physically impossible. You will always be doing one thing or the other. You will go for food, which is an action; you will eat the food, which is another action. Thus, even a *sannyāsī* is active in some form or the other.

Therefore, if you take *sannyāsa*, it does not mean that you have gained *sarva-karma-sannyāsa*; you have merely been absolved from certain duties. Giving up all action is a matter of knowing. When choosing between the two life-styles, do not think that *sannyāsa* is easy. There is activity in *sannyāsa* also, just as there is in *karma-yoga*. Which one is more appropriate for you depends upon your disposition.

WHICH LIFE-STYLE IS MORE SUITABLE FOR YOU?

If you have *rāga-dveṣas*, it is better to be a *karma-yogī*. If, however, you find that you are contemplative and not interested in anything other than pursuing self-knowledge, then *sannyāsa* will be suitable for you. This means that your life has been lived meaningfully and you are now ready for *sannyāsa*. Only then should you become a *sannyāsī*. Even so, *naiṣkarmya* is equal only to knowledge.

Kṛṣṇa then continued:

कर्मन्द्रियाणि संयम्य य आस्ते मनसा स्मरन् ।

इन्द्रियार्थान् विमूढात्मा मिथ्याचारः स उच्यते ॥ ६ ॥

karmendriyāṇi saṁyamya ya āste manasā smaran
indriyārthān vimūḍhātmā mithyācāraḥ sa ucyate

Verse 6

यः *yaḥ* — one who; कर्मन्द्रियाणि *karmendriyāṇi* — organs of action; संयम्य *saṁyamya* — controlling; इन्द्रियार्थान् *indriyārthān* — sense objects; मनसा *manasā* — with the mind; स्मरन् *smaran* — remembering; आस्ते *āste* — sits; सः *saḥ* — that one; विमूढात्मा *vimūḍhātmā* — deluded; मिथ्याचारः *mithyācāraḥ* — a person of false conduct; उच्यते *ucyate* — is called

The one who, controlling the organs of action, sits with the mind remembering the sense objects is deluded and is called a person of false conduct.

One who does not know that the nature of *ātmā* is *naiṣkarmya*, actionlessness, takes himself or herself to be a doer. When, as a doer, one gives up actions by will, his or her life is false. *Mithyā* means ‘false’ and *ācāra* means conduct and therefore, ‘*mithyācāra*’ literally means ‘false living.’

A person who does not know the *ātmā* is a *saṁsārī* with all the problems, inadequacies, and so on, that a life of *saṁsāra* implies. Giving up all activities, such a person cannot but dwell upon the sense objects towards which he or she no longer goes. Controlling all the organs of action, the person thinks that he or she performs no action. Not speaking or doing anything, the person just sits. What happens then? Because he or she does not see the self as fullness, *ānanda*, the person cannot but think of the sense objects. Not knowing the *ātmā*, but thinking that he or she is going to be actionlessness, one who gives up all activities will necessarily dwell on all the objects towards which he or she no longer goes. This is why *Kṛṣṇa* refers to such a person as *vimūḍhātmā*, one who is deluded and confounded. His or her conduct itself is false. It is not actionlessness at all because the person is always thinking about the sense objects.

CAN YOU BE ACTIONLESS WITHOUT SELF-KNOWLEDGE?

Suppose this person does not think about the objects. He or she cannot but think about them because the person has no other object to think about unless he or she knows the *ātmā*. If the *ātmā* is known, there is no problem. The person is already actionlessness. This is why knowledge of the *ātmā* is called *mokṣa*. Without this knowledge, a person who thinks he or she is going to gain *naiṣkarmya* by not doing

action is living falsely. Instead of enjoying the knowledge of *ātmā*, the person will contemplate upon all the objects already experienced or on possible experiences yet to come. *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that this type of living is false and *Śaṅkara* went so far as to call it sinful, *pāpācāra* .

Then, *Kṛṣṇa* went on to describe the person who does not live in this way:

यस्त्विन्द्रियाणि मनसा नियम्यारभतेऽर्जुन ।

कर्मन्द्रियैः कर्मयोगमसक्तः स विशिष्यते ॥ ७ ॥

yastvindriyāṇi manasā niyamyaṛabhate 'rjuna

karmendriyaiḥ karmayogamasaktaḥ sa viśiṣyate

Verse 7

अर्जुन *arjuna* — Oh! *Arjuna*; यः *yaḥ* — one who; तु *tu* — whereas; इन्द्रियाणि *indriyāṇi* — sense organs; मनसा *manasā* — with the mind; नियम्य *niyamya* — controlling; असक्तः *asaktaḥ* — unattached; कर्मन्द्रियैः *karmendriyaiḥ* —with the organs of action; कर्मयोगम् *karmayogam* — the *yoga* of action; आरभते *ārabhate* — takes to; सः *saḥ* — that one; विशिष्यते *viśiṣyate* — is far superior

Whereas, Oh! *Arjuna*, the one who, controlling the sense organs with the mind, is unattached and takes to the *yoga* of action (i.e., action performed with *yoga-buddhi*) with the organs of action, is far superior.

A person who can control his or her sense pursuits has discrimination, *viveka* . The control is through the mind only. The word *manasā*, through the mind, implies *viveka* , *manas* being another word for *buddhi*, intellect. To control one's organs of action and sense pursuits — in other words, having a mastery over them — is to direct them at will. Such a person, not attached to *karma-phala* , the results of action, begins, *ārabhate*, takes to a life of *karma-yoga*, meaning that the person performs *karma* as a *yoga* , as a *sādhana*, a means. You cannot do *karma-yoga*. You can only have it because *karma-yoga* is strictly an attitude with reference to action and its result. The person described by *Kṛṣṇa* in this verse is one who begins doing *karma* with the organs of action — speaking, walking, and whatever is to be done — with the proper attitude.

Actions to be done may be *vaidika-karmas*, scripturally enjoined rituals, or *laukika-karmas*, consisting of all other activities, When a person does *vaidika-karma* or *laukika-karma* with the *karma-yoga* attitude, he or she does not do it to fulfil his or her *rāga-dveṣas* but to neutralise them — in other words, to purify the mind for gaining the knowledge that is *mokṣa* .

Generally, people do *vaidika-karma* — rituals, prayers, and so on — in order to gain securities and pleasures. This is nothing but fulfilling their *rāgas* and *dveṣas*. First you pray and then you present the Lord with your petition. There is nothing wrong with this, but you should know that it is only for fulfilling *rāga-dveṣas*.

Praying to the Lord for the cure of a disease or the solution to a problem is definitely appropriate. If you have done everything you can do and it is not enough, why not invoke the Lord also? What should be understood here though is that all prayers, even those enjoined by the Veda, can be for your securities and pleasures, either here or in the hereafter. Or they can be a *yoga*, a means for self-purification and self-knowledge, which is *mokṣa*.

Karmas, even if performed according to *dharma*, is for the fulfillment of one's *rāga-dveṣas* alone, that is for the sake of achievements in the form of securities and pleasures. Such *karmas* are called *kāmya-karmas* and the person who does the *karma* is called a *karmī* or a *karmaṭha* — in other words, one who is attached to the results of action.

The person who is unattached is one who, rather than doing *kāmya-karma*, is doing *karma* for the sake of preparing the mind for knowledge. For such a person, prayer or any other type of *vaidika-karma* is for the very joy of praying and also for purification of the mind, *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*. Being for certain desired ends, that is, *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* and *mokṣa*, these *karmas* also come under the category of *kāmya-karma*, but since the purpose of performing them is *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, they are not considered to be impelled by *rāga-dveṣas*. This must be understood.

But *karma* done for any other reason is a *bhoga-sādhana*, a means for enjoying security and pleasure, even if it is a prayer or ritual enjoined by the Veda. A man may perform an elaborate ritual for the sake of wealth, progeny, or for heaven, in which he spends a lot of money. But all these are for enjoyment alone even though the person does not know who is enjoying what.

When you say you enjoy an object, you do seem to be enjoying it. In time, however, you find that the object has enjoyed you because you have grown older. The objects of enjoyment have taken away your liver, kidneys, everything! You find yourself the loser because you do not know who is the enjoyer and who is the enjoyed. During the early years of your life, your body was growing. You became taller and stronger. You grew by eating. But, as an adult, the emphasis shifted. Previously, you were eating and you were growing. But now, in spite of eating, you are declining. Therefore, who is eating now? You are no longer eating the food; the food is eating you. The food itself has become the eater because, in spite of eating, you are declining! In this way, the eater can become the eaten. Therefore, we do not know which is the enjoyer and which is the enjoyed.

ACTION AS PRAYER

If, when performing *vaidika-karmas*, a person thinks of himself or herself as an enjoyer, he or she is referred to as a *phalāsakta*, one who is attached to the results of

action. It is the same for *laukika-karma*, as well. In fact, for a *karma-yogī* there really is no such thing as a *laukika-karma*. The word is merely a verbal expression for an action that is not a Vedic ritual because, for a *yogī* all action is nothing but prayer to *Īśvara*, the Lord, as our analysis reveals. The order that is here in the creation is nothing but *Īśvara*. Once you recognise this fact, any action you perform, which is in keeping with *Īśvara*, becomes a prayer. Therefore, there is nothing that is *laukika* or *vaidika*, the words being used only to distinguish non-ritualistic actions from ritualistic actions.

Since any action that is in keeping with *dharma*, or *Īśvara*, becomes a form of prayer, action performed by one who is not attached to the results of action is not considered to be impelled by one's *rāga-dveṣas*. The expression, 'being unattached to the results of one's actions,' is the source of much confusion because no one performs action without expecting results. The word *asakta*, one who is unattached, has to be understood as a technical word which means one whose actions, whether *vaidika* or *laukika*, are not based purely on *rāga-dveṣas*. *Rāga* is always in terms of something desirable that is away from you and *dveṣa* is in terms of something you want to avoid or get rid of. Actions not based on *rāga-dveṣas* are considered to be in keeping with *dharma* and are meant for *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*.

Thus, in the verse, *asakta* refers to a person who enjoys a certain control. Otherwise, one's *rāga-dveṣas* alone will decide what one should do. Whatever fancies happen along, the person will simply join them and do whatever comes to mind. Convenience, instead of what is right, becomes the rule here, though the action may be against *dharma*. The *karma-yogī*, on the other hand, has a certain control over his or her organs of action and sense organs. We use the word 'certain' here because, even though the person is a *karma-yogī*, he or she is still an *ajñā*, one who is ignorant with reference to the self. Thus, even though this person may have some omissions and commissions, there is always a degree of control.

Being not impelled by *karma-phala* alone, interested only in *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* and *mokṣa*, the *karma-yogī* does what has to be done. The idea conveyed here is that, technically, purification of the mind is a result of one's actions. But, because purification of the mind is not born out of *rāga-dveṣa*-based action, it is not referred to as a *karma-phala* in the usual sense.

When you say you want to gain *mokṣa*, you mean that you want to know *ātmā*, which means you want to know *Īśvara*. *Antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* is for understanding *Īśvara*.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD IS KNOWLEDGE OF ONESELF

Whether we use the word 'knowing,' 'gaining,' 'reaching,' or whatever, what is meant is knowledge of *Īśvara*, which is not separate from knowledge of the self.

Between *jīva*, the individual, and *Īśvara*, the Lord, there is identity, which is expressed as an equation, ‘You Are That — *tat tvam asi*.’

‘That,’ *tat*, refers to *Īśvara* who is the cause of the world. ‘That,’ *Īśvara*, you are — *tvam asi*. This equation naturally implies self-knowledge and also *Īśvara*-knowledge. In this context, *karma* is performed for *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*. So that the knowledge of *Īśvara* can be gained, not for getting something out of *Īśvara*. Getting something out of *Īśvara* implies *rāga-dveṣas*, whereas here we want to know what he is. We want to have the vision of *Īśvara*, which is something entirely different. Therefore, *karma* becomes *yoga*. *Kṛṣṇa* described one who begins this *yoga* as far superior. To whom? In his commentary, *Śaṅkara* refers back to the person mentioned in the previous verse, the one who outwardly performs no action but dwells inwardly upon all the sense objects that have been given up. Such a person can also be called lazy.

Laziness and idleness are not the same thing. A lazy person is one who does nothing outwardly, but does everything mentally. He or she even writes letters mentally and then becomes annoyed when there is no reply! Whereas an idle person is one who is always busy, without ever accomplishing anything. He or she creates all sorts of messes and then clears them up. Such a person has no time for anything and accomplishes nothing.

In a planetarium in Hawaii, there is a coin-operated machine designed to be as busy as an idle person. Every form of mechanism can be seen in this machine — moving pistons, revolving wheels, hammering devices, and so on. Everything that is mechanically possible is going on there, but nothing is ever produced. Aside from being a waste of energy and genius, this machine is an excellent satire on how people are busy accomplishing nothing!

The word *viśiṣyate* in this verse does not mean simply superior. To say that the *karma-yogī* is far better does not mean that the *mithyācāra*, mentioned in the previous verse, is good. The two are completely different. One person is sitting, dwelling on things, being lazy, and the other person is active and has a *karma-yoga* attitude. Because the *karma-yogī* accomplishes everything, he or she is far superior, to the other person who is simply a hypocrite — not merely superior; there is no comparison at all. The *karma-yogī* accomplishes the ultimate *puruṣārtha*, *mokṣa* but the hypocrite achieves nothing even in a relative sense.

This being so, *Kṛṣṇa* said:

नियतं कुरु कर्म त्वं कर्म ज्यायो ह्यकर्मणः ।

शरीरयात्रापि च ते न प्रसिद्ध्येदकर्मणः ॥ ८ ॥

niyataṃ kuru karma tvaṃ karma jyāyo hyakarmaṇaḥ

śarīrayātrāpi ca te na prasiddhyedakarmaṇaḥ

Verse 8

त्वम् *tvam* — you; नियतम् *niyatam* — what is to be done; कर्म *karma* — action; कुरु *kuru* — do; हि *hi* — because; अकर्मणः *akarmanah* — (when compared) to inaction; कर्म *karma* — action; ज्यायः *jyāyah* — superior; अकर्मणः *akarmanah* — due to inaction; ते *te* — your; शरीरयात्रा *śarīrayātrā* — maintenance of the body; अपि *api* — even; च *ca* — and; न प्रसिद्ध्येत् *na prasiddhyet* — would become impossible

Do action that is to be done because action is superior to inaction. And due to inaction, even the maintenance of your body would not become impossible.

The word *niyatam* refers to *karma* that is enjoined by the *śāstra*. By telling *Arjuna* to do those actions that are to be done, *Kṛṣṇa* was not suggesting that the *śāstra* would always tell him what was to be done. There are, of course, many situations that the *śāstra* does not cover. But because every situation is a part of the given universal order, the situation itself dictates what is to be done. Thus, you need not be told that a particular action is to be done at a particular time. Given the situation, what is to be done becomes very obvious.

The *karma* that is obvious in a given situation, that which is proper, is also *niyata-karma*. It is *niyata* either by the order of *dharma* or because it is enjoined by the *śāstra*. In any case, it is the *karma* that must be done — daily, occasionally, whenever. *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* to perform action because it is definitely superior to doing nothing. If you do not know the *ātmā* and do not do *karma* either, nothing will be accomplished. Instead, all that will happen is that the body will become sick and the *antaḥ-karaṇa*, the mind, will become even sicker. Thus, doing *karma* is definitely superior.

The word *śarīra-yātrā* in the verse, refers to the journey of the living body. From birth onwards, it has been journeying. Even though it reaches certain stages, there are still stations to travel to, like a train that has not yet reached its destination. The journey of living, *Kṛṣṇa* said here, does not take place if actions are not performed. You simply cannot live your life. Even mere survival is not possible. And, by merely surviving, you are accomplishing nothing.

LIFE IS NOT FOR MERE SURVIVAL

Even a frog manages to survive. Every living organism has the instinct for survival and it does survive for as long it can. Since anyone and anything can survive, survival is not considered to be a human accomplishment. Life, human life especially, is not just for surviving; it is for some accomplishment. This is why the four-fold *puruṣārthas*, human ends, security — *artha*, pleasure — *kāma*, righteousness — *dharma*, and liberation —

mokṣa, are mentioned in the *śāstra*. Since there are these ends to be accomplished, we have various desires that impel us to attempt to fulfil them.

To just survive, one must at least eat. There is a Swami who is said to be such a great *sannyāsī* that he does not use his hands even for eating. However, he does open his mouth so that someone else can put the food in! Obviously, he does not understand that opening his mouth is an action and closing it is another action, to say nothing of chewing, swallowing, and preparing for the next mouthful. This same Swami will not talk either. He does nothing and people call it *naiṣkarmya*, which it is not.

Even eating is not possible if you do no action and, to live, you have to get your food somehow. If you will not use your hands to eat, someone else has to put the food into your mouth. When others have to cook your food and put it into your mouth, there is action. Earning the money to buy the food and materials needed to prepare it is also action. Since survival cannot possibly be without action, do what is to be done by you.

By telling *Arjuna* to perform action, *Kṛṣṇa* was telling him not to be afraid of action. *Arjuna*'s problem was that his *karma* was the cause of his being bound. When you do *karma*, you produce *puṇya* and *pāpa* and, because of this, you are born again. Again you will perform *karmas*, which again produce *puṇya* and *pāpa*, because of which you will be born yet again. This is why *karma* is said to be the villain in the life of *samsāra*. Because *karma* alone is the cause for your being bound, you conclude that you should not do *karma*.

KARMAS ARE INEXHAUSTIBLE

The cycle of life can be looked at through the model of *karma*, but if we do so, the model must be taken in its entirety. Suppose you say that by not doing any *karma* at all there will be no problem — no *puṇya* or *pāpa* and, therefore, no more birth and death. The cessation of this cycle of birth and death is what is meant by liberation, *mokṣa*. Therefore, by not doing anything, you will accomplish *mokṣa*. Let others study the *Gītā*; you do not need it because, by doing nothing, you can gain *mokṣa*.

To this, *Śaṅkara* replies elsewhere by asking further questions. He asks, ‘What about all the *karmas* standing in your account from previous births, *sañcita-karmas*? Who is going to fulfil them even if you do nothing in this birth? Secondly, when did you decide not to do any more *karma*? Until you were forty years old, all you did was *karma*! What about that *karma*? It also must be fulfilled. Furthermore, can you remain for even the briefest period of time without performing *karma*? When you have the “I am a doer”-notion, you cannot but do *karma*. In fact, you cannot remain for even a second without performing some action or the other. And if you are not occupied with doing right *karma*, it will take you no time at all to do wrong *karma*!’

Not doing *karma*, therefore, is nothing but a pipe dream. There is no such thing as gaining *mokṣa* by not doing *karma*. Of course *karma* is the cause for you being bound. No one ever said that *karma* liberates. *Karma* definitely binds the *jīva*. In fact, it is the third strand of a three-stranded knot. Ignorance is the first strand, ignorance in the form of the notion, ‘I am a doer.’ Once this ignorance-born notion is there, you cannot avoid the second strand, desire or *kāma*. If you think that you are small, limited, and mortal, you will want to be big, full, immortal — all these are desires.

Because you do not want to be limited by ignorance, limited by the knowledge that you have limited knowledge, you do not accept ignorance. This means that you want to be free of the limitation of knowledge and ignorance, which is another desire. There is also the desire to be happy, to be free from unhappiness, inadequacy, lack. These desires arise because you do not know that you are already full. When this ignorance is there, desires will also be there and, of course, they will be according to your limited knowledge. Therefore, even your wants are not very big. You may want this and that, but they are all small wants really. Then, in order to fulfil these wants, you perform *karma*, which produces the *puṇya* and *pāpa* that create new births for you. Given this ignorance-desire-action cycle, you remain bound by *karma*.

KARMA-YOGA RELEASES YOU FROM THE HOLD OF RĀGA-DVEṢĀS

This same *karma*, however, while not itself a releasing factor, can assist in one's release if it is done with the attitude of *karma-yoga*, as we have seen. By performing *karma* in this way one is released from the hold of *rāga-dveṣas*, likes and dislikes. Therefore, the same *karma* becomes a means, a *sādhana*. In the next few verses, the *karma* done in this way is being referred to as *yajñā*. It becomes *yoga* and one gains *śuddha-antaḥ-karaṇa*, a pure mind. With this pure mind, the person gains the knowledge that is *mokṣa*. This, then, is the order. Beginning with the next verse and ending with the 16th verse, *Kṛṣṇa* then talked about *karma* as a means leading to *mokṣa*.

यज्ञार्थात्कर्मणोऽन्यत्र लोकोऽयं कर्मबन्धनः ।

तदर्थं कर्म कौन्तेय मुक्तसङ्गः समाचर ॥ ९ ॥

yajñārthātkarmaṇo'nyatra loko'yaṃ karmabandhanaḥ

tadartham karma kaunteya muktasaṅgaḥ samācara

Verse 9

यज्ञार्थात् कर्मणः अन्यत्र *yajñārthāt karmaṇaḥ anyatra* — other than the *karma* performed for the sake of *yajñā*;— with reference to other (*karma*); अयम् *ayam* — this (person); लोकः *lokaḥ* — the one who is enjoined (to do the *karma*); कर्मबन्धनः *karma-bandhanaḥ* — the one who is bound by action; कौन्तेय *kaunteya* — Oh! *Kaunteya*;

तदर्थम् *tadartham* — for the sake of that; मुक्त-सङ्गः *mukta-saṅgaḥ* — being one free from attachment; कर्म *karma* — action; समाचर *samācara* — perform

This person who is enjoined (to do action) is bound by *karma* other than that performed for the sake of *yajña*, (i.e., other than the action performed as an offering to *Īśvara*). For this reason, Oh! *Kaunteya*, being one free from attachment, perform action for the sake of that (*yajña*).

Yajña is a very important word in the Vedic literature. Even though the word means a sacrificial ritual, in a wider sense *yajña* means every action of one's life is performed as an offering to *Īśvara*. In an act of giving, there is a giver, something given, and a recipient. In an offering such as a ritual, one more factor is involved — the place of offering, the altar. Thus there is the altar of offering, the recipient who is invoked in the offering, the one who does the offering, and the offering itself.

Generally, in any offering, there is a word like *svāhā* or *namaḥ*, meaning 'I offer this salutation.' For example, when we say, *Namaḥ Śivāya*, it means, 'Unto Lord *Śiva*, I offer this salutation,' and this is an offering. When this expression is repeated over and over again, it becomes a *japa-yajña*. Even the food you eat is an offering, although most people do not think of it as such. If, however, you look upon the digestive system as digestive fire, the food offered into that fire is an offering and the altar of this offering is the digestive process, *prāṇa*, itself. Therefore, before eating, the food is offered to the Lord in the form of *prāṇa*.

Nothing in the creation is looked upon as something separate from the Lord. The Lord is a conscious being, *cetana*. Only in a conscious being does the activity of digestion take place and the food offered is not separate from the Lord. This is why the fifteenth chapter of the *Gītā* and the *śloka*, '*brahmārpaṇam...*' are repeated before eating. These verses make it very clear that everything is the Lord, including the food we eat, and the one who eats it. Therefore, eating is an offering.

In a fire ritual, the altar is the fire, the turf. The oblation is offered unto the fire. The offerer is called *yajamāna* and the recipient of the offering, *devatā*. Usually, when you offer something to another person, you expect reciprocal treatment. You expect something in return from that person. Giving and receiving gifts during the Christmas season is a case in point. You offer a gift to another, no matter how small, and that person offers you something also.

ALL OFFERINGS BELONG TO THE LORD ALONE

Because giving gifts at Christmas time is a convention, a beautiful convention, you have to offer and a return is expected. It is not the gift you are interested in; it is the care

and consideration, the remembrance, of the other person that counts. But when we offer something to a *devatā* like *Indra*, reciprocity is not a factor. As part of the *yajñā* itself I say in so many words that what I am offering belongs to *Indra*; it does not belong to me.¹

In this way, everything is looked upon as a *yajñā*, as we shall see in the fourth chapter. The breathing process is a *yajñā*. The breath that goes out is called *prāṇa* and the incoming breath when you breathe in is called *apāna*. When you breathe out the *prāṇa* is offered to *apāna* and when you breathe in the *apāna* is offered back to *prāṇa*. In this way, breathing is considered to be a *yajñā*.

Those who are committed to the practice of *prāṇāyāma*, control of the breath, are not really doing exercises. They are performing a *yajñā*, *prāṇa* being *Īśvara*, the Lord. In the same way, all exercises and yogic postures, *āsanas*, are considered to be *yajñas*. In fact, each *āsana* has its own *devatā*. Indian music is also a *yajñā*. Every defined melody, *rāga*, is considered to have a head, trunk, and feet. Certain Indian paintings depict each *rāga* with the form of a goddess. Thus, even *rāgas*, melodies have their own presiding deities.

Any one aspect in the creation can be looked upon as an aspect of *Īśvara*, and that aspect becomes the presiding deity or *devatā*. Thus, in any given object, you can invoke the total or an aspect of the total. If it is an aspect, it is called *devatā*. Any functionary such as the eyes, ears, nose, and other organs has a presiding deity, *devatā*, which is but *Īśvara*.

THE SENSE ORGANS ASIĀVARA

If you look at *Īśvara* as the material cause of the whole creation, the eyes themselves are *Īśvara*. And if you look at the Lord as the efficient cause, the Lord becomes the presiding deity for the eyes. Without this appreciation of *Īśvara*, this *bhakti*, there is no *karma-yoga*. This appreciation is the very attitude that is *karma-yoga*, in fact. Thus, *karma-yoga* is *bhakti-yoga*. We are told very clearly that there are only two *yogas* — *karma-yoga* and *jñāna-yoga*.

Thus for the sake of *mokṣa*, there are two possible dedicated life-styles, *jñāna-yoga* and *karma-yoga*. Either one pursues knowledge to the exclusion of all else or one performs *karma* with the proper attitude, which implies *Īśvara*, along with one's pursuit of self-knowledge. *Bhakti*, appreciation of *Īśvara* is common to both the *sannyāsī* and the *karma-yogī*. A *sannyāsī*, *jñāna-yogī*, is not without devotion. In fact, this person's entire life is dedicated to the appreciation of *Īśvara*. He or she wants only

¹ *This is the mantra that we say, when we make an offering to Lord Indra — ‘indrāya svāhā indrāya id aṃ na mama – offered unto Indra, this is now Indra’s, not mine any more.’*

to understand what *Īśvara* is. The knowledge being *Īśvara*, nothing but *Īśvara* is there. *Īśvara* is the very pursuit. Thus, a *sannyāsī* is not a non-devotee.

Because two words, *jñāna-yoga* and *karma-yoga*, are used, it is commonly thought that there are two separate pursuits, the pursuit of knowledge and the pursuit of *karma*. This misunderstanding leads to the introduction of a seemingly third pursuit, the pursuit of *bhakti*. But how can this be? Suppose a *sannyāsī* is one who renounces all action, *karma-yogī* is one who performs all action, and then there is a third person, a *bhakti-yogī*. Does the *bhakti-yogī* not perform *karma*? And if not, what will he or she do for *bhakti*? To worship *Īśvara*, certain rituals have to be performed.

Whatever the person does to express his or her devotion is an action, a *karma*. This is *karma-yoga*, in fact. All that is being done is *karma*. ‘No, no,’ the *bhakta* might say, ‘I only sing, *Hare Rāma*.’ He or she may think that singing *Hare Rāma* is *bhakti*, but it is an action, a *karma* performed by the organ of speech and therefore called *vācikaṃ karma*. And if, while singing, the person also claps or dances, the *karma* becomes a *kāyikaṃ karma*, an action performed by the limbs of the physical body. Therefore, the *karma* is not only oral, it is also physical. In fact, this kind of *bhakti* can be so physical that it can totally exhaust the person!

BHAKTI-YOGA IS KARMA-YOGA

Bhakti is the recognition of *Īśvara* and any *karma* done for the sake of recognizing *Īśvara* is *yoga*. Even if you meditate mentally, it is *bhakti* because the Lord is involved. It is also a *karma* because you are doing it with your will. Any action that comes of your will and is invoking someone is a *yajña*, a *karma*. Therefore, the expression *bhakti-yoga* is to be taken as *karma-yoga*, *bhakti* being a common element.

Similarly, *haṭha-yoga* is a discipline which is a *sādhana* or indirect means for *mokṣa*. Any discipline is either for *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, purification of your mind, or for the integration and co-ordination of the physical body. Because there are a number of disturbances and many kinds of deficiencies possible in a person, various disciplines can be helpful. Any discipline is *yoga* if the purpose is very clear. If not, it can be a problem. Even Karate can be *yoga*, as long as it is not done to make you feel invincible. The purpose is not to kick someone but to gain a certain degree of fitness and co-ordination.

When there is commitment to *Īśvara*, everything becomes *yoga*, a means, there is no discipline or activity that we can say is not *yoga* if the Lord is involved. In the fourth chapter we will see how many types of activity there are and that, with these, everything is covered. Who is doing it, the person's attitude, the purpose for which an activity is being done — all these make any activity a *sādhana*, a *yoga*. It is important to understand, then, that although *yoga* has been divided into many different types, the *sāstra* makes it clear that there are only two in fact, *karma-yoga* and *jñāna-yoga*.

For the *jñāna-yogī* or *sannyāsī*, knowledge alone is *yoga* because the person is absolved from all duties. It is not that the *jñāna-yogī* does not do any *karma* whatsoever; it is just that the person is absolved of all obligatory duties. The *sannyāsī* is a non-competitive person, one who does not compete in the society in any way. Only then is the person freed from all obligatory duties to pursue knowledge. When *sannyāsīs* start incense factories, for example, they have to compete with other incense manufacturers. They have to project the product, proving it to be better than other products. Only a person who does not compete in the society can be called a *sannyāsī*.

Thus, there are only two *yogas* and *bhakti* is common to both of them. All *karmas* become *yoga* if they are done keeping *Īśvara* in view. A *yajña* is any *karma* which is done for the sake of *Īśvara*. It can be any ritual, worship, or prayer — each of which involves special *karma* performed for the sake of *Īśvara* only.

Bringing up a child is also a *yajña* and is an example of an indirect offering to *Īśvara*. I am here in this creation and the child is in my keeping. The child has been given to me as *prasāda* and is to be brought up by me. This is a proper attitude and is therefore *karma-yoga*. *Īśvara* is recognised and the order involved is seen to be *Īśvara*. To see things in this way is not an ordinary situation. A person has to be sensitive so that the order that is *Īśvara* is as tangible as a wall or a rock. This kind of appreciation is what *bhakti* actually means.

THE REAL MEANING OF BHAKTI

Bhakti is not just chanting, although chanting is also *bhakti*. It is the appreciation of *Īśvara* and the order. This appreciation is what makes you sensitive and gives meaning to your life. Recognizing *Īśvara* is to be able to see more than meets the eye, more than what the eyes see. *Bhakti* is an appreciation of what is behind and what is in front, the order within the order, seeing everything as *Īśvara*. And this is also exactly what is meant by *karma-yoga*.

By any *karma*, you are either directly or indirectly related to *Īśvara*. *Karma* involves role-playing. Something is expected of you. This action is to be done by you because you are placed in this situation. Therefore, you do it. This is how *Īśvara's karma* works. Otherwise, why are you in this place at this time? Why are you not elsewhere? There is a meaning here. You are in this place at this time because there is something to be done by you. This is the law of *karma*.

You see that there is a meaning and that the situation is not a random one. Everything seems to have a cause and an effect. There is no randomness in the creation. To use Einstein's words the Lord does not play dice. Even if he did, being omniscient, he would know exactly how they were going to fall. Otherwise, he would not be *Īśvara*. Therefore, he has no need to play dice. Situations do not happen randomly. They happen

because they have to happen. If this is understood, you will find that everything, even relationships, becomes meaningful.

To worship the Lord by doing what is to be done by you definitely requires that you see more than the eyes can see. You have to appreciate what is beyond the hands that perform the action, not merely the desire but what is behind the desire. You should appreciate that the desire itself is born of *Īśvara*. This kind of appreciation is *bhakti*. In this way, the performer of action worships the Lord indirectly.

Thus, there is a two-fold *yajña* — direct and indirect. When you perform a *karma*, a *yajña*, in the form of a prayer, there is a direct relationship between *Īśvara* and yourself. You either invoke *Īśvara* in the form of a *devatā*, a deity, or you invoke him as the Lord straightaway. Either way, there is a *bhakta*, a devotee, and there is a *yajamāna*, one who performs the *karma*. You can do the *karma* yourself or it can be done by someone else, by proxy, as when you ask a priest to conduct a ritual on your behalf. Either way, the result comes to you alone, the *yajamāna*.

DIRECT AND INDIRECT YAJNAS

Karma that invokes a *devatā* or *Īśvara* directly becomes a direct *yajña*. Any other *karma*, done with an awareness of *Īśvara*, becomes an indirect *yajña*. Because the *yajña*, direct or indirect, is done for the sake of *Īśvara*, *Īśvara* is also called *yajña*.

This section of the *Gītā* provides a beautiful description of *bhakti* that converts *karma* into *yoga*. Everything can be seen here — the order, the ecology, and so on. At every level, there is an ecology — the ecology of thought, the ecology of *karma*, the ecology of action. ‘Ecology’ is an excellent word, having brought into light a certain understanding that did not exist previously. ‘Ecology’ is now a commonly-used word because there is necessity for it, pollution now being a recognised problem.

Ecology is recognised here at different levels. All the *devatās*, all the elemental forces, are doing their jobs and should not be disturbed. Because you are a conscious being with a free will, even the ecology of the divine forces can be disturbed by your actions. If you are abusing your free will, you are disturbing the ecology of *dharma*, which is going to affect all humanity, whatever is disturbed is not going to remain without producing undesirable results.

There is an order and, wherever there is an order, there is ecology. Here, *Kṛṣṇa* was talking at the *dharma* level. *Dharma* alone should govern your free will. Once freedom is given to you, you can do whatever you want. There is no hindrance whatsoever. If freedom can be hindered, it is not freedom. Therefore, because you have a free will, you can commit homicide and even suicide!

Since there is the possibility of abusing freedom at different levels, there should be an ecology with reference to the freedom given. It seems that the only ecology we are

concerned about disturbing is the ecology of the flora and fauna. This attitude comes from human selfishness. We tend to think only about how we are going to be affected by this or that, but there is so much more to ecology than this. Ecology is the very awareness of one's actions and how they have an ever-widening circle of reactions. When a stone is thrown into clean water, it does not just drop to the bottom. It creates ripples, which keep on widening and widening into bigger and bigger circles, until finally, they lash upon the shore. Similarly, any action creates extended circles of response.

DISTURBING THE ORDER

Any action that disturbs the order, the *dharma*, will definitely bring about disorder, *adharmā*. Because you are given freedom your freedom should be controlled by *dharma*. If at all there is a control, it is conformity to *dharma*. And if you do not conform to *dharma*, you will cause an ecological disturbance at the *dharma* level, resulting in various conflicts and problems.

In this section of *Gītā*, you will find how the universe moves within an ecology. It moves in a certain order and any disturbance in that order is a disturbance to you and to everyone else. Awareness of this fact is what makes a person a *karma-yogī*.

Karma-yoga must be clearly understood. Because it is not an ordinary attitude, it takes a lot of maturity, awareness, and sensitivity. To simply say that one should love God is just so much Sunday talk. It means nothing. How can people who are not able to love their own mothers or those who care for them, love God? You do not even know who this God is or whether he exists.

Bhakti is no joke. You must have a heightened awareness of the whole at the level of the manifest. This heightened awareness is *bhakti* and is what makes you a *karma-yogī*, as we shall see later in this group of verses.

Arjuna was told by *Kṛṣṇa* to take to *karma-yoga* and he was also told that *karma*, action, binds the person who performs the action. Thus, there seems to be a problem here. Action, implying a doer, brings to the doer the results of the action. The results of action are either seen, *dr̥ṣṭa*, or unseen, *adr̥ṣṭa*. Seen results are those you see immediately, in this life itself. You can relate directly to them. When you boil water, for example, the boiled water is a result that is seen immediately.

The same actions can also bring about unseen results, those that are not seen by you now, but will come either later in this life or in the hereafter. A prayer or a ritual is a *karma* that brings about an unseen result. For example, *putrakāmeṣṭi* the name given to a ritual performed for gaining a son produces result in this life only. How it happens is not known; only the outcome is seen. The connection between the ritual and the result

not being seen, the result is called *adr̥ṣṭa*. That actions produce both seen and unseen results is unfolded by the *śruti*.

HOW ACTION BINDS THE PERSON

In this way, we see that action does indeed bind the person. It keeps the doer going all the time. Whether the result is good or bad, *punya* or *pāpa*, the doer is always there as a *saṃsārī*. For one who can discriminate between the real and unreal, even a good result is a shackle. A good result may mean that a particular situation is a little more comfortable, but it is not going to completely change the person in terms of his or her sense of limitation, centred on the 'I.'

A person can become the president of a country because of some *punya* alone, not merely because of his or her qualifications. You may say it is a fluke or chance, whereas we attribute it to some good *karma*. Even though a highly qualified person may repeatedly contest the presidential elections, he or she may never win. For the highly qualified person, the unseen result of winning a presidential election may not be there, whereas for a lesser-qualified person it is.

And even if you do become the president, there will still be problems. Perhaps you think your nose is too big and, having to be constantly in the public eye, you feel you should undergo surgery! Like this, some problem or other is always going to be there because, simply by becoming a powerful person in society, no one is going to alter his or her sense of limitation centred on the 'I.' Therefore, even *punya*, good results, are a shackle — a golden shackle. Whether one's shackle is made of gold or iron, it is still the same.

A discriminating person knows that both *punya* and *pāpa* are the cause for bondage, the cause for *saṃsāra* continuing. *Karma* does not cause *saṃsāra*; it perpetuates it. There is no need to cause *saṃsāra* because it is already there. Since *karma* perpetuates *saṃsāra*, instead of releasing you from it, 'Why should I do *karma*?' becomes the question.

In this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* also acknowledged that *karma* is the cause for continued bondage, *bandha-hetu*. There is no doubt about it if *karma* is done for reasons other than *yajña*. Here, *yajña* does not refer to the ritual itself but to the one for whose sake it is done, *Īśvara*. By saying that *yajña* is *Viṣṇu* the one who is all pervasive, the *śruti* makes it clear that *yajña* is the Lord. Similarly, in the verse 24 of the Chapter 4 of the *Gītā*, everything is seen to be *Brahman*, the Lord.¹ The one who performs the ritual is

¹ ब्रह्मार्पणं ब्रह्महविरब्रह्मग्नौ ब्रह्मणा हुतम्।

ब्रह्मैव तेन गन्तव्यं ब्रह्मकर्मसमाधिना ॥ ४-२४ ॥

brahmārpaṇaṃ brahmahavirbrahmāgnau brahmaṇā hutam

the Lord. The place where it is performed, the oblation itself is also the Lord. The *mantras*, ladles with which the oblation is offered, and so on are the Lord and so is the result. This means that there is nothing to gain. Everything belongs to *Brahman* because everything is *Brahman*.

KARMA AS AN OFFERING TO ĪŚVARA DOES NOT BIND

Kṛṣṇa said here that *karma* only binds a person when it is performed without recognizing the Lord. When *karma* is done for the sake of one's *rāgas* and *dveṣas*, without considering the *dharma* as *Īśvara*, then it is bondage. One gains only the results known as *punya* and *pāpa*, those that come from performing *kāmya-karma*, actions done for the sake of one's likes and dislikes. Only in this way can it be said that *karma* binds. It is true that if *kāmya-karma* is done keeping *dharma* and *adharmā* in view, no *pāpa* is incurred. However, only when *karma* is done for the sake of *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* does it become a means for *mokṣa*. Only then is it *yoga*.

Karma becomes *yoga* if it is *yajña*, done for the sake of *Īśvara*, as a propitiation to him or for *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*. If this is not the case, then even worship, prayer, and so on become *kāmya-karma*, performed to fulfil one's *rāgas* and *dveṣas*. There is nothing wrong in doing this, but one should know that performing *karma* in this way is bondage.

Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* said, do *karma* properly, for the sake of the Lord, as a *yajña*, as propitiation. And how should this *karma* be done? By being free of attachment. What binds you to *karma* are your *rāga-dveṣas* alone. *Karma* itself does not bind you. For a *jñānī*, a wise person, there is no problem at all. *Karma* does not bind the person. And for a *yogī*, one who is not controlled by his or her *rāga-dveṣas*, *karma* is an indirect means for gaining the knowledge that is *mokṣa*. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that, whether he looked upon himself as a *jñānī* or a *yogī*, there was no problem.

You find that your previous *karma*, *prārabdha*, has brought you to a given situation. With reference to action itself, you simply have to do what is to be done by you. Another aspect of *karma-yoga* concerns your response to the results of action. You have certain likes and dislikes and, in keeping with *dharma*, you fulfil them. At the same time, you are prepared to accept the results of your action as *prasāda*. In this way, your response to the results of action is also *karma-yoga*.

The action mentioned by *Kṛṣṇa* in this verse was not meant for fulfilling *Arjuna's* *rāga-dveṣas*. It was action to be done simply because it was to be done. *Arjuna* said he did not want to fight because he did not want the kingdom. Since *rāga-dveṣas* were not involved, why should he fight? *Kṛṣṇa's* response was that the matter was no longer in *Arjuna's* hands and that what was to be done by him must be done. *Rāga-dveṣas* have

brahmaiva tēna gantavyaṇi brahmakarmasamādhinā (Gītā – 4-24)

to subserve *dharma*. What is to be done, we have to do, without being dictated to by a utilitarian attitude.

HOW ACTION BECOMES YOGA

Actions are almost always dictated by a utilitarian attitude — what will I get out of this? How much will I get and so on? But, here, *Kṛṣṇa* was saying that if something is to be done by you and you do not want to do it, you had better do it anyway! In this way, action becomes a *yoga*. *Kṛṣṇa* was talking about a *karma-yogī* here, one who is qualified to do *karma*. The *jñānī* is not being addressed at all. For the *jñānī* there is no problem. Because the person knows that he or she is not the doer, there is nothing to be done. The *karma-yogī*, on the other hand, still thinking that he or she is the doer, continues to perform action until knowledge is gained.

Explaining why *karma* is to be done, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* continued:

सहयज्ञाः प्रजाः सृष्ट्वा पुरोवाच प्रजापतिः ।

अनेन प्रसविष्यध्वमेष वोऽस्त्विष्टकामधुक् ॥ १० ॥

sahayañāḥ prajāḥ sṛṣṭvā purovāca prajāpatiḥ
anena prasaviṣyadhvam eṣa vo'stviṣṭakāmadhuk

Verse 10

पुरा *purā* — in the beginning; प्रजापतिः *prajāpatiḥ* — the Creator; सहयज्ञाः *sahayañāḥ* — together with *yajña*; प्रजाः *prajāḥ* — human beings; सृष्ट्वा *sṛṣṭvā* — having created; उवाच *uvāca* — said; अनेन *anena* — by this (*yajña*); प्रसविष्यध्वम् *prasaviṣyadhvam* — shall you multiply; एषः *eṣaḥ* — this; वः *vaḥ* — for you; इष्ट-कामधुक् *iṣṭa-kāmadhuk* — the wish-fulfilling cow; अस्तु *astu* — may (this *yajña*) be

In the beginning, the Creator, having created human beings along with *yajña*, said: ‘By this (*yajña*) shall you multiply. May this (*yajña*) be a wish-fulfilling cow for you.’

Prajāpati means the Creator, the Lord of all beings, called *Brahmāji*. The statement, ‘In the beginning, the Lord said,’ refers to the Veda. The Veda is a body of knowledge considered not to have been written by anyone. Instead, it is looked upon as knowledge revealed to the ancient sages, *ṛṣis*, by the Lord.

What the Lord said, then, is in the Veda and what he said is for the sake of the human beings he has created. Animals, being programmed, do not need the knowledge contained in the Veda. Along with human beings, the Lord created *yajñas* and enjoined everyone to perform the rituals and other *karmas* found in the Veda.

Vedic rituals cover all phases of life. Even before a child is born, a ritual is performed. The Sanskrit word for ‘wife’ is *patnī* and for ‘husband’ *patiḥ*. The letter ‘i’

in *pati* is replaced by 'n' and the feminine suffix 'ī' is added to form the word *patnī* meaning wife. The *Pāṇini-sūtra*¹ that describes this grammatical rule states that the substitution is only done when a woman is connected to a man for the purpose of doing *yajña*, meaning a Vedic ritual. A man marries for this reason since, without a wife, he cannot perform certain rituals enjoined by the Veda.

Most Vedic rituals require one's wife, *patnī*, to take part. Although the husband, *pati*, actually performs the ritual, he cannot do so without his wife's permission. Nor can he perform it without her. Therefore, the marriage itself has a religious purpose. The very taking of a woman's hand in marriage, accepting another person into one's life, is religious. The woman herself need not perform any Vedic ritual because she naturally receives half the results of the rituals that her husband performs. And the results of any sins the husband may perform belong to him alone. Thus, she wins, hands down!

Although the wife is not required to perform rituals, she has specific duties related to them, such as preparing certain food. In this way, there is a sharing of responsibility: the husband performs the rituals and the wife gives her permission and attends them. Because she enables him to be qualified to perform the rituals, she is called *patnī* meaning that she is connected to *yajña*. Thus, inherent in the grammar of such words as *patnī* is the Vedic attitude about marriage.

There are Vedic rituals performed for the consummation of the marriage, for impregnation. Again a Vedic ritual is done during the seventh or eighth month of pregnancy, for the safety of mother and child. When the child is born, the ritual called *jāteṣṭi* is performed by the parents on the child's behalf because the baby cannot do it. Then there is a naming ritual, *nāma-karaṇa*, which is similar to the Christian christening ceremony. During the first year of the child's life, there is a ritual during which the baby's ears are pierced. This is also said to have some acupuncture value. A ritual for removing the hair may be performed at the same time or later. In the eighth year or the twelfth year, depending on which group the child belongs to, another ritual is performed for initiation into the Veda. A *mantra* is given and the child is referred to as one who is twice-born, the second birth being the result of the initiation ceremony. From this time onwards, a male child is to perform certain daily rituals and when he marries, as we have seen, certain other rituals are to be performed also.

Thus, in the Vedic vision, a child is born of rituals and is maintained by rituals. Certain rituals are performed three times daily — at dawn, at sunset, and at noon, when the sun is directly above one's head. This is direct propitiation, as we have seen, all other activities being indirect propitiation. In this way, everything is a ritual, even eating. Only after six morsels of food are given to the Lord does one begin eating. There is another

¹ पत्युर्नो यज्ञ-संयोगे। ४.१.३३

patyurno yajña-samyoge 4.1.33

ritual at the end of the meal, using water and a *mantra*. Bathing is also a ritual. A boy who has been initiated into the Veda has to do certain rituals from the time he gets up in the morning until he goes to bed at night; he has to remember certain chants in order to do the required rituals. Throughout his life, this continues.

COMMITMENT TO THE VEDA IS A LIFE OF YAJÑA

There are yet other rituals, quite a few in fact, that must be done on special occasions. One's entire life is a *yajña* and the person is called a *vaidika*, one who is committed to the Veda. To be a *vaidika* is no joke! It means that the person is to perform all the enjoined rituals — in other words, to live a religious life. This is what Lord *Kṛṣṇa* meant here when he said that when he created human beings he also created *yajñas*.

Prasava, meaning growth, is an interesting word here. You begin your life with just yourself — *aham*, I, myself. When you get married, there are two of you, because of which there can be no end of growth! Thus, the singular becomes dual and then plural — three, four, or more. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* said that by *yajña*, ‘May you grow, increase.’

Whenever the word ‘said’ is used, as it is in this verse, there is always an intention involved. Thus, to understand a sentence, you have to see the intention. By giving human beings the rituals that are in the Veda, the Lord intended for us to grow. ‘Let this *yajña* be for you,’ he said. ‘Let it be the cow that yields anything you desire. Let it be your wish-fulfilling cow.’

The cow *Kṛṣṇa* was referring to was certainly not your ordinary milk-giving cow! This particular cow, called *Kāmadhenu*, belonged to the well-known sage, *Vasiṣṭha*. One day, *Viśvāmitra*, the king, came to the forest where the sage lived. The king was accompanied by a huge retinue, all of whom were hungry. Finding *Vasiṣṭha*'s hut, they went inside and asked him for food. In only five minutes, food was served to them. When the king asked *Vasiṣṭha* how this had been possible, the sage replied that he had a cow in the yard. ‘What does a cow have to do with all this wonderful food?’ the king asked. ‘The cow gives everything,’ *Vasiṣṭha* replied.

The king then asked *Vasiṣṭha* to give him the cow. *Vasiṣṭha* told the king that he could give him the cow, but it would not be of any use to him because it would yield only to one who is a *brahmarṣi*, and the king was a *kṣatriya*. The story is a metaphor, based on the real meaning of the word *brahmarṣi*, one who has the knowledge whereby everything is gained. *Vasiṣṭha* had this knowledge and *Viśvāmitra* did not. By knowing the whole, *Brahman*, as oneself, everything is as well known. Having this knowledge, the person has everything because he or she is everything.

Vasiṣṭha's wish-fulfilling cow, *Kāmadhenu*, stands for knowledge. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* is saying here — let the knowledge of *Brahman* prove to be a *Kāmadhenu*; let it fulfil all your wishes.

DEFINITION OF A BRĀHMAŪA

When you have no wishes, you do not need any wishes fulfilled. That you are full and complete means that you have no wishes. But to know that you are full and complete you must be a *brahmarṣi*, meaning that you must be a knower of *Brahman*, a *brahma-jñānī*. There is an *upaniṣad* called *Vajrasūcikopaniṣad*, *vajrasūcī* meaning a diamond needle, one that pierces and thus defines. A *brāhmaṇa* is defined in it as follows — a *brāhmaṇa* is one who has *brahma-jñāna*, knowledge of *Brahman*, and everyone else is an *abrāhmaṇa*.

The wish-fulfilling cow will only yield to one who knows *Brahman*. Therefore, the cow would have been useless to the king. All he would have received from it would be a kick! This made the king very angry — of course, a typical *kṣatriya* response. He vowed that he would become a *brahmarṣi* in order to get the cow, for which he performed enormous austerities, *tapas*. As long as he continued to be angry, he did not become a *brahmarṣi*. In fact, as long as he wanted to become a *brahmarṣi*, he did not become one. Eventually, having given up wanting to become a *brahmarṣi*, he got the knowledge that made him a *brahmarṣi*.

In the Veda, the Lord said, 'Let *yajña* give you everything; let it be your wish-fulfilling cow.' *Yajña* is a prayer, as we have seen, and as *yoga* it gives you *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, purification of the mind, and then *jñāna*, knowledge. *Mumukṣus* want to know and for this they employ various means, various disciplines, all of which are *yajña*.

The wish-fulfilling cow is also said to be available in *Indra's* world. So, when you go there, please make sure that you see it. Just as when you go to Agra, you cannot come back and say that you did not see the Taj Mahal, so too, when you go to heaven, you had better look for *Kāmadhenu*.

देवान्भावयतानेन ते देवा भावयन्तु वः।

परस्परं भावयन्तः श्रेयः परमवाप्स्यथ ॥ ११ ॥

devānbhāvayatānena te devā bhāvayantu vaḥ

parasparam bhāvayantaḥ śreyaḥ paramavāpsyatha

Verse 11

अनेन *anena* — with this; देवान् *devān* — the deities; भावयत *bhāvayata* — propitiate; ते *te* — those; देवाः *devāḥ* — deities; वः *vaḥ* — you; भावयन्तु *bhāvayantu* — may propitiate; परस्परम् *parasparam* — one another; भावयन्तः *bhāvayantaḥ* — propitiating;

परम् श्रेयः *param śreyaḥ* — highest good (*mokṣa*); अवाप्स्यथ *avāpsyatha* — you shall gain

Propitiate the deities with this (*yajñā*). May those deities propitiate you.
Propitiating one another, you shall gain the highest good (*mokṣa*).

Previously, the Lord had said, ‘With this *yajñā*, may you all grow.’ In this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* how, by performing the daily rituals enjoined by the Veda, the various deities or aspects of the Lord are propitiated.

The sun is a blessing, no doubt, but if you look at it as just a ball of fire, it is not a deity, a *devatā*. It is purely an inert blessing. However, if you look at the sun as a *devatā*, you are recognizing that it is non-separate from *Īśvara*. Similarly, with the other deities — water, called *Varuṇa*; air, called *Vāyu*; fire, *Agni*; and earth, called *Prthivī*. Space, *Akāśa*, is also a *devatā*, as is time, *Kāla*. Thus, there are any number of *devatās* whose blessings you partake of every day.

There is an ecology at the level of your understanding with reference to free will, which is where the order that is *Īśvara* is to be appreciated. Daily *yajñas* imply your oblations, propitiation, to all these *devatās*, who are *Īśvara* in the form of various forces. May you propitiate them and, thus propitiated, may they bless you. You perform your daily duties and prayers and let the cosmic forces bless you. Let them bless you and you propitiate them. May you not disturb the cosmic ecology by not doing what is to be done.

A recognition, a sensitivity, is involved here. By recognizing the cosmic forces, you do not take things for granted. This is why children in India are told that they must get up before the sun rises. A child might think, ‘So what if the sun rises? Let it rise! Why should I get up?’ But they are told that they must rise in time to welcome the sun. The sun is a blessing and when a blessing comes, you should not be sleeping; you should be wide-awake for its coming.

A man had been meditating for twenty years. The Lord was pleased with his meditation and appeared before him. Unfortunately, the man was asleep at the time! This happens in meditation sometimes. And so the Lord came and went. The person had to meditate another twenty years before the Lord came again! But, here, in the form of the sun, the Lord comes every day.

Therefore, you should not be under the sheets when he comes. You should get up to receive the blessing that is the Lord. This kind of appreciation is what ecology is all about. There is no ecology other than your own understanding. You have to understand; otherwise, there is no ecology. Ecology is only for the person who understands.

YAJÑA REQUIRES SENSITIVITY

There are those who say that if you have seen one redwood tree, you have seen them all. Ronald Reagan said this when he was Governor of California. Because timber companies were destroying all the redwood trees, he was asked to put an end to the destruction. Reagan's response was that they would keep just a few trees so that people could see them. He did not see why anyone would want to preserve these hundred-year-old trees. This represents a particular level of understanding and at this level there is no ecology, only economy. And in the long run, there is no economy either!

Therefore, ecology is an appreciation that is in your head — in other words, in the eyes of the beholder. It is not beyond the eyes. It does not exist outside. If you do not see it, it is not there. This, then, is ecology. Appreciation of *Īśvara* is also ecology but at a deeper level. *Īśvara* is appreciated as the cosmic forces and is thereby propitiated. One of the forms of propitiation is daily prayer. Therefore, may you appreciate *Īśvara* in your prayers as the forces, the deities, and let them bless you. May you all grow by doing what is to be done.

There is a mutual respect here. The deities bless you and you propitiate them. You offer them your oblations and they offer you their oblations — in the form of rain, energy, health, and so on. In this way, may you gain *mokṣa*, *paraṃ śreyah*, characterised by knowledge, in due course, step by step, not directly, not immediately, but by *antaḥ-karaṇa-suddhi*, by preparing the mind, purifying it, for the knowledge.

If you die while pursuing knowledge, without having gained it, it is said that, at the very least, you will gain heavenly enjoyments, *svarga*. Therefore, there is no loss. *Svarga* also stands for better births, meaning that in your next birth, you will go further along towards *mokṣa*. This interpretation is more relevant since the *Gītā* is *mokṣa-śāstra*, not *svarga-śāstra*.

Then, *Kṛṣṇa* said:

इष्टान् भोगान् हि वो देवा दास्यन्ते यज्ञभाविताः ।

तैर्दत्तानप्रदायैभ्यो यो भुङ्क्ते स्तेन एव सः ॥ १२ ॥

iṣṭān bhogān hi vo devā dāsyante yajñabhāvitāḥ

tairdattānapradāyaibhyo yo bhun̄kte stena eva saḥ

Verse 12

देवाः *devāḥ* — gods; यज्ञभाविताः *yajñabhāvitāḥ* — propitiated by *yajña*; इष्टान् भोगान् *iṣṭān bhogān* — desirable objects; वः *vaḥ* — to you; दास्यन्ते *dāsyante* — will give; हि *hi* — therefore; तैः दत्तान् *taiḥ dattān* — given by them; एभ्यः *ebhyaḥ* — to them; अप्रदाय *apradāya* — without offering; यः *yaḥ* — the one who; भुङ्क्ते *bhun̄kte* — enjoys; सः *saḥ* — that person; स्तेनः *stenaḥ* — thief; एव *eva* — indeed

The gods, propitiated by *yajña*, will give you desirable objects. Therefore, one who enjoys objects given by them without offering to them in return is indeed a thief.

The gods here mean *Īśvara* in the form of deities who are propitiated by your *yajñas*, your prayers and rituals. They spread before you all desirable enjoyments. Whatever is desirable, they give to you. Thus, for those whose predominant commitment is to *yajña*, there will be conducive situations for growth.

In order for a person to be able to live a life of *dharma*, you require a society where *dharma* is predominant. It is not that you cannot do it otherwise, but it is difficult. Take life in modern-day India, for example. Even to buy a railway ticket, the agent must be bribed. There is simply no other way to purchase a ticket. Because of the melting pot environment created by too rapid an industrialisation following independence, the society is undergoing some rather drastic changes and people's desires have become manifold. The changes have come from the top and there is no foundation, leaving the society top-heavy without the roots that proper growth requires. Growth should be like that of a tree. First the roots are established and then the tree grows from there.

Thus, a person who wants to live a life of *dharma* will have problems in some parts of the world because he or she does not want to bribe people. Only where there is some *dharma* in the society is it easy to live such a life. To propitiate the *devatās* means to follow *dharma*. By living a prayerful life, you create a conducive atmosphere. And when the majority of people live this way, then the whole society will be conducive to the growth of *dharma*.

CONFORMING TO THE ORDER

The *devatās* will do their jobs whether you propitiate them or not, but when you go against *dharma*, you disturb the order and you are the sufferer. Therefore, everyone must do his or her job. The *devatās* do their jobs and you do yours according to the order of *dharma* given in the Veda.

Animals, trees and other plants are programmed and therefore do not require the Veda. People, on the other hand, do need it because they have to conform to the order, for which they need the understanding that the Veda provides. It is said that if you do not disturb the order, the *devas* do not get disturbed. Thus, ecology of the universal order means that is no disturbance at the level of cosmic forces, the level of *devatās*.

When the sun, water, fire, air, and earth do their respective jobs, what do you get? A delicious Thanksgiving dinner on your plate! In this example, food stands for the various enjoyments, all of which come to your plate as blessings of the deities, cosmic forces, natural laws, and so on. For us, these are not simply nature; they are *Īśvara*.

In this verse, a person who enjoys the results that are given by *Īśvara*, without having offered anything, is likened to a thief. Because you are continuously receiving from the cosmic forces, which are nothing but aspects of *Īśvara*, you should give them something in return. You can only do this by remembering *Īśvara*, by offering an oblation or a prayer. This is real Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is not something that happens once a year; it goes on all the time.

Although the deities do not need anything from you, you need to respect them and this respect is given in the form of a prayer. The prayer is a recognition of all these forces and makes you a sensitive person. You are not just seeing what the eyes see or hearing what the ears hear. You are going beyond them. This kind of a life is not an ordinary life; it is a profound life. Not giving back to the deities in the form of remembrance makes you a thief.

A thief does not say, ‘Thank you.’ He or she just takes what belongs to another and runs away. Therefore, a person who does not remember the *devatās* is no different from a common thief. One who takes money from someone and does not return it is also a cheat. This thief who is also a cheat runs away and begins operating from another place so as not to be found out.

Here, the *devatās* do not seem to come looking for you. They are all in your appreciation; otherwise, they simply do not exist for you. Still, they operate constantly. The very air you breathe is *Īśvara*. The work of the *devatās* is always done and can be recognised by you. And if you do not recognise them, you are a cheat because you take from them and do not give them what is to be given in return.

RECOGNITION AND THANKSGIVING ARE *YAJŅA*

What you return to the *devatās* is your recognition, which is what is called *yajña*. We perform the *yajña* as a return, as a thanksgiving. It is not for anything else. The *yajña* itself brings about an *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, because of which the person can give thanks. By giving thanks, by recognizing everything as *Īśvara*, you will definitely gain *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*.

A person who respects the cosmic forces is not an ordinary person. He or she no longer goes by *rāga-dveṣas* but goes beyond them. Otherwise, there would be no recognition or thanksgiving. On the other hand, a person who performs *karma* to satisfy his or her mind and senses alone does not offer oblations, not even water or a simple twig. Such a person is a thief and a cheat. He or she does not give the cosmic forces their due.

In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* describes these two types of people:

यज्ञशिष्टाशिनः सन्तो मुच्यन्ते सर्वकिल्बिषैः ।

भुञ्जते ते त्वर्घं पापा ये पचन्त्यात्मकारणात् ॥ १३ ॥
yajñāśiṣṭāśinaḥ santo mucyante sarvakilbiṣaiḥ
bhuñjate te tvaghaṃ pāpā ye pacantyātmakāraṇāt

Verse 13

यज्ञ-शिष्टाशिनः सन्तः *yajña-śiṣṭāśinaḥ santaḥ* — those who eat, having first offered the food to the Lord; सर्व-किल्बिषैः *sarva-kilbiṣaiḥ* — from all impurities; मुच्यन्ते *mucyante* — are released; ये तु *ye tu* — whereas those who; आत्म-कारणात् *ātma-kāraṇāt* — for the sake of themselves; पचन्ति *pacanti* — cook; ते *te* — they; पापाः *pāpāḥ* — sinners; अघम् *agham* — *pāpa* (sin); भुञ्जते *bhuñjate* — eat

Those who eat, having first offered the food to the Lord, are released from impurities, whereas those sinful people who cook only for themselves eat *pāpa* (sin).

Karma-yoga is presented as *yajña* in this verse. We have seen how all actions are *yajñas*, whether they are in the form of rituals, prayers, or performing one's duties to others, more of which we shall see in the next chapter.

Since *Īśvara*, the Lord, is to be recognised in the form of the various cosmic forces or elements, these forces are viewed individually and are called *devatās* or *devas*, meaning deities.

Thus, it is said, may you propitiate the *devas* and let them bless you. This means that you let them do what they have to do and you do what you have to do. In this way, since there is nothing outside of *Īśvara*, the natural forces are not looked upon as mere inert forces. Everything is within *Īśvara*, the conscious being, *cetana-vastu* even when one is under the spell of dream.

In a dream we see both living beings and inert objects. The mountain seen in a dream is inert, *jaḍa*. The sun and its rays are also *jaḍa*. Everything seen is *jaḍa*, in fact, and not *cetana*. But the difference between the inert and the conscious, *jaḍa-cetana-bheda*, is only within the framework of what is perceived by you as the subject of the dream. If, having perceived the dream objects, you shift your perception to the person who is dreaming, the creator of the dream, then you will see that there is no world outside of the dreamer.

If the dreamer is a conscious being, the dreamt world is non-separate from the dreamer because he or she is both the maker, *nimitta-kāraṇa*, of the dream world and the material, *upādāna-kāraṇa*, for it. Therefore, from the dreamer's standpoint, there is nothing inert or conscious. Everything is the dreamer alone.

Similarly, from the standpoint of *Īśvara*, the cosmic forces are recognised as being non-separate from *Īśvara* because there is nothing outside of *Īśvara*. They are not simply taken to be *jaḍa*. Even though they look as though they are *jaḍa*, they are all

devatās from the standpoint of *Īśvara*. In this way, the sun becomes a *devatā*, as does the air, fire, water, and the earth.

Acknowledging *Īśvara* in this way, recognizing his many aspects in the form of *devatās*, one performs various rituals and prayers, which are also actions. There are various actions that are to be done, including the daily rituals, *nitya-karma* and rituals performed on certain occasions, *naimittika-karma*, stipulated in the Veda as part of its vision. *Nitya-karma* and *naimittika-karma* are to be performed, without exception, until one takes *sannyāsa*, that is, until one renounces everything.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE COSMIC FORCES AS DEVĀTĒS

Whatever results you receive from the actions you perform are blessings given to you by the *devatās* who are doing their jobs. If you acknowledge these *devatās* and give them their due, you become a person who is not a thief or a cheat, as *Kṛṣṇa* said in the previous verse. Here, in the present verse, he contrasted the person who is not a thief with one who is.

One cannot help but perform certain harmful *karma* as one lives one's daily life. Life does live upon life. If freedom or free will were not there, nothing would be sinful, strictly speaking. There would be no wrongdoing, no *pāpa-karma*. But because one has to eat and must fulfil certain minimum requirements in order to survive, there is naturally going to be some kind of injury, *hiṃsā*, done. Some plants, animals, and bugs will be destroyed. In this way, many non-human living beings are destroyed everyday and this destruction produces certain untoward results, called *pāpas*, which keep on gathering every day.

How are you going to eliminate these results? Knowingly or unknowingly, a lot of *pāpas* are incurred and you gather results that are undesirable, which in turn result in some kind of unpleasantness, *duḥkha*, for you. To neutralise these results, then, there are different types of *yajñas* — *yajñas* to the deities, to one's ancestors, to one's fellow creatures, to the *ṛṣis* who have given us this knowledge, and so on. These *yajñas* are to be performed daily and are contained in one ritual.

The *yajñasiṣṭāsinah* in this verse, refers to those who eat, after having first offered the food to the Lord, in other words, those who partake having paid their dues. While people in India today may not perform all the enjoined *yajñas* very methodically, they always offer the food to the Lord and only then do they eat.

The ritual itself is not what is important; it is the attitude, the *bhāvanā* that counts. Food is cooked and offered to the Lord, the attitude being that only what is left over *yajñasiṣṭa*, is to be eaten, which is what is meant by *prasāda*. It is a blessing from the Lord. Those who eat only *prasāda* do not eat food; they eat only *prasāda*. Having offered the food to the Lord with a prayer, such as the chant *brahmārpaṇam...*, the

food itself becomes *prasāda*. Thus, it is said, that those who offer food to the Lord and then partake of what is left over are released, *mucyante*, from all the little *pāpas*, *sarvakilbiṣas*, that have been gathered daily because of having performed some injury or the other in the interest of survival.

Merely by grinding something, washing the floor, spraying detergent, or walking, we are continually killing something. This killing is often done deliberately for our own welfare. In fact, we could not live if we did not do it. The bugs that we kill want to live, but we also want to live. Co-existence not being possible, the bugs must be destroyed. This act of destruction involves some sin, some *adharma*, which, as *Kṛṣṇa* points out in this verse, can only be neutralised by daily prayer, not by anything else.

FREEDOM FROM THE RESULTS OF ONE'S ACTIONS

Or the verse can be taken another way: having become purified by the knowledge, you will be liberated from all *puṇya* and *pāpa*. No one releases oneself from *puṇya* and *pāpa* without having the knowledge. Thus, the statement, *sarvakilbiṣaiḥ mucyante* can be taken to mean ‘from all *karmas* they get released.’

The word *santah* can be taken together with the word *yajñasiṣṭāśinaḥ*, meaning ‘being ones’ who are *yajñasiṣṭāśinaḥ*, or it can be taken as a separate word meaning ‘the saintly people, *sat-purusāḥ*, the wise.’ In that case it is an adjective to the word *yajñasiṣṭāśinaḥ*. They become wise because of a life of prayer, which gives them the mind necessary to know.

In the second line of the verse, *Kṛṣṇa* described those people who are given to *pāpa-karmas*, actions based on *adharma* rather than *dharma*. They do not recognise *dharma* and *adharma* at all; they recognize only what is convenient to them. Their pleasure and security alone are important. They simply do not see anything more than that. While the *yajñasiṣṭāśinas* get rid of the sins gathered, these people just go on gathering them. Because they do not offer the food they eat to the Lord, it is said that they eat *pāpa*, meaning that when they eat, they eat only sin.

Sin, here, must be understood in the Indian context. Every *karma* has its own result. An action is sinful only in the sense that it results in some unpleasantness, *duḥkha*, for the person who performed the action. Similarly, a good action simply means that it produces a result that gives you some pleasure, comfort, and so on.

There is no accurate English translation for the Sanskrit words *pāpa* and *puṇya*. So as not to confuse them with the totally different concept generally associated with the word ‘sin’ in other contexts, it is preferable to retain the Sanskrit words themselves. Sin, in the Indian context, is always quantified.

Even in the realm of traffic violations, there are quantifiable differences, a driving violation being more serious than a parking violation. A parking violation may simply

involve a fine to be paid or your car may be towed away and may be costly to retrieve. But you do not have to keep on paying. It does not affect your insurance premium like a driving offence can. Like the laws governing traffic violations, the law of *karma* means that the result of any action is appropriate to the action performed.

RESTITUTION IS ALWAYS ACCORDING TO THE ACTION PERFORMED

According to the *karma* performed, there is both a seen and an unseen result. If the unseen result is undesirable, it is called *pāpa*. This is how it is. Those who cook and eat only for themselves and not as an offering to the *devatās* eat only *pāpa*, whereas those who eat only after offering the food to the Lord get rid of any sins, any *pāpas*, they might have collected through other actions.

Karma has to be done; it keeps everything going. The great cosmic wheel is constantly turning and, because you are a doer, one who enjoys a free will, you are a cog in it. You can do and you need not do. A tree does whatever it has to do because that is how a tree is made. An animal also does exactly what is expected of it because it is made to do so. In this way, all non-human living beings do what they do because they are programmed in a certain way. The human being, however, is one whose action is performed by will. Therefore, there is choice in action. One may perform an action, not perform it, or perform it differently.

In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* described how the cosmic wheel keeps on going because of *karma* alone.

अन्नाद्भवन्ति भूतानि पर्जन्यादन्नसम्भवः ।

यज्ञाद्भवति पर्जन्यो यज्ञः कर्मसमुद्भवः ॥ १४ ॥

annādbhavanti bhūtāni parjanyaḍannasambhavaḥ
yajñādbhavati parjanyaḥ yajñāḥ karmasamudbhavaḥ

Verse 14

भूतानि *bhūtāni* — living beings; अन्नात् *annāt* — from food; भवन्ति *bhavanti* — are born; पर्जन्यात् *parjanyaḥ* — from rain; अन्न-सम्भवः *anna-sambhavaḥ* — food is born; पर्जन्यः *parjanyaḥ* — rain; यज्ञात् *yajñāt* — from *yajña*; भवति *bhavati* — is born; यज्ञः *yajñāḥ* — *puṇya*; कर्म-समुद्भवः *karma-samudbhavaḥ* — born of action

Living beings are born of food; food is born of rain; rain is born of *yajña* (*puṇya*); and *yajña* (*puṇya*) is born of action.

The expression ‘born of food’ cannot, of course, be taken literally, since nothing is actually born of food. It refers instead to the food eaten by the person. In *Śaṅkara*’s

commentary on this verse, the word *bhuktāt* is added to the word *annāt*, meaning from the food eaten and assimilated.

From the food eaten all living beings, with various bodies, are born. The food eaten by the parents is converted into the causes for conception of the being, the blood, seed, and so on. Therefore, conception itself is because of food and food, being the material for it, is the material cause for the anatomical aspects, the physical aspects, of the body.

Kṛṣṇa then went on to say that the food itself is born from rain. If there were no rains, there would be no food. The entire earth would be a desert and sand would be the only food. The rain, in turn, *Kṛṣṇa* said, is born of *yajña*, your daily prayers acknowledging the blessings of the *devatās*.

It is true that if you do not perform *yajña*, rain still comes — but it may not come at the right time or in the right quantities. Later, *Kṛṣṇa* said that the rain always does its job and, unless you are offering daily prayers, you are not doing yours. It is not uncommon for a person to think that since everyone else is doing it, he or she need not do it, like in chorus singing. If one person does not sing at a given time, nothing is lost because most of the others are singing. Even if one person commits a mistake, it goes undetected because the others are not making the same mistake. Only if everyone were to commit the same mistake at the same time, would it become evident. Therefore, chorus chanting always sounds perfect even though, individually, there may be problems.

Here, too, some people offer their prayers and the rain is enjoyed by everyone. However, *Kṛṣṇa* likened one who does not do it to a thief. It is not that the rain will not do its job. It is the recognition of the cosmic forces as *Īśvara* that is important here. When you perform *yajña* as, when you do your duties, your prayers and so on, then the *devatās* bless you. For example, the sun has always been said to produce the rain since it evaporates ocean water, which then forms into clouds. And when you do your daily *devatā-yajñas* as, all the accrued *adrṣṭa*, unseen results, go to the appropriate deity, the sun here. Then from the sun, the rains come. This is another way of saying that you invoke the forces and the forces bless you. The rains come — at the right time, to the right place, in the right amounts.

The unseen result, *adrṣṭa*, is what is meant by *yajña* here. A prayer does not produce a tangible result immediately. It produces an unseen result, which, in turn, produces the tangible result later. Without *karma* you can produce neither seen nor unseen results.

We know that the seen result of boiled water cannot be produced without the action of heating the water. Similarly, an unseen result is one that is produced by the action of prayer. This action is what keeps the natural forces, the cosmic ecology, going.

When it is said here that *yajña* is born out of *karma*, *yajña* is not referring to a ritual because a ritual itself is a *karma*. To clarify this point, Śaṅkara said in his commentary to this verse that *yajña* is *adr̥ṣṭa*, the unseen result. The *adr̥ṣṭa* is born out of *karma* and is what produces the result. Only in this way, then, can it be said that *yajña* is born of *karma*.

And where do the *karmas*, the rituals, and so on, come from? Answering this, Kṛṣṇa continued:

कर्म ब्रह्मोद्भवं विद्धि ब्रह्माक्षरसमुद्भवम् ।

तस्मात् सर्वगतं ब्रह्म नित्यं यज्ञे प्रतिष्ठितम् ॥ १५ ॥

karma brahmodbhavaṃ viddhi brahmākṣarasamudbhavam

tasmāt sarvagataṃ brahma nityaṃ yajñe pratiṣṭhitam

Verse 15

कर्म *karma* — ritual; ब्रह्मोद्भवम् *brahmodbhavam* — born of the Veda; ब्रह्म *brahma* — the Veda; अक्षर-समुद्भवम् *akṣara-samudbhavam* — born of the imperishable *Īśvara*, the Lord; विद्धि *viddhi* — may you understand; तस्मात् *tasmāt* — therefore; सर्वगतम् *sarvagatam* — all-pervasive; ब्रह्म *Brahma* — the Veda; नित्यम् *nityam* — always; यज्ञे *yajñe* — in *yajña*; प्रतिष्ठितम् *pratiṣṭhitam* — abides

May you understand *karma* — ritual, prayer, etc. — to be born of the Veda and the Veda to be born of the imperishable *Īśvara*. Therefore, the all-pervasive *Brahma* (the Veda)¹ abides always in *yajña*.

By *karma*, Kṛṣṇa was referring here to the Vedic rituals, *vaidika-karma*. These rituals, *yajñas*, are to be understood as coming from the Veda itself, called *Brahma* in this verse. Although *Brahma* or *Brahmāṇi* is also the name given to the Creator in the trinity, here it refers to the Veda as the cause for *karma*.

Brahma is the Veda that reveals the nature of the *karma* and, therefore, becomes its cause. One would not know of the rituals otherwise. Thus, it is said that *karma* is born of the Veda. And how do we know that the *Brahma* is Veda and not the absolute *paraṃ brahma*, *Brahman*, the ultimate truth? The verse says that *Brahma* is born of *akṣara*, the imperishable, that which never dies, which is never born. Therefore, *Brahma* cannot be this absolute *Brahman*. That *Brahma* means Veda is confirmed by any Sanskrit dictionary.

The Veda comes from that imperishable *Brahman*. It is also said that the Veda is born as effortlessly as breathing. The Veda is something that reveals the four human pursuits, *puruṣārthas*, security – *artha*, pleasure – *kāma*, righteousness – *dharma*, and

¹ The Veda is called 'sarvagataṃ brahma' here, because it reveals everything.

सर्वार्थप्रकाशकत्वात् ब्रह्म = वेदः सर्वगतम् । शा० भा० ॥

liberation – *mokṣa*. Because it reveals everything that a person requires, the Veda is considered to be omniscient, *sarvajña*.

KNOWLEDGE IS NOT CREATED; IT IS UNCOVERED

The Veda is said to be revealed by *Īśvara* because knowledge cannot be created. Knowledge always is, but it is covered by ignorance. If knowledge were created, the place of creation could only be one of ignorance or no ignorance. If knowledge is created on ignorance, does the ignorance remain? Can knowledge be created on a foundation of ignorance? Or, in the wake of knowledge, does ignorance go?

And what is this knowledge that is created? If you discover something, is it something that is already there or do you create something and then discover it? To create something, you must know it already. You do not create knowledge. Knowledge is already there because it is knowledge of a fact. There is a certain reality, a fact, and the knowledge of it is as true as the reality, as true as the particular fact. Therefore, knowledge is nothing but realisation of facts.

This means that knowledge is always of what is, what is possible, and so on. Everything is only ‘what is.’ The future is also ‘what is.’ The future as a possibility ‘is.’ This ‘what is’ is what we call knowledge.

For *Īśvara*, all knowledge is always there. In fact, all knowledge is what is meant by *Īśvara*, the Lord, omniscience. If all knowledge is there, is *Īśvara* a conscious or an unconscious being? A being is always conscious; an unconscious being is not a being at all. That *Īśvara*, whose being is consciousness, has omniscience and this omniscience exists ultimately in the consciousness.

The *jīva*, the individual, who is related to *Īśvara*, is also a conscious being. And what is the nature of that conscious being, the individual? Is ‘conscious’ an adjective to ‘being’ or is being consciousness? Is there a being other than consciousness? If so, what is that being? How do you recognise it?

WHY AM I NOT ALL-KNOWING?

The being is consciousness; consciousness is being. Therefore, all knowledge exists in the conscious being, in the being that is consciousness. This being the case, why do I not have it? Because of ignorance alone. Ignorance covers the knowledge. Thus, whenever any knowledge is gathered, it is simply a matter of scraping off ignorance. We are just so many scrapers, ‘scraping through’ all the time. Scraping off ignorance is what we call getting knowledge. And, with reference to knowledge of the empirical world, we do not scrape very well!

One can scrape well only with reference to *ātmā*. Everything else remains either unscraped or a little scraped. It is as though you see some spots on something and then, scraping away at them, you gain a scrap of knowledge. A thesis may be written on one of these spots for which the person receives a Ph.D. degree. Then, afterwards, someone else comes along and again covers up what was scraped off by proving that the previous person did not really scrape at all. With this, this person also gets a Ph.D. This scraping process can continue only because there is no bottom line, no last word, in any empirical field.

Only in the self is a total scraping possible because you are talking about the whole that has no parts. Any part always has further parts, which have further parts, ad infinitum. This is the nature of empirical reality, whereas *ātmā* is the partless whole. Thus a total scraping is possible with reference to oneself, the *ātmā*. All this, of course, is by the way, given the focus of our present discussion.

The conscious being has all knowledge and this knowledge is covered by ignorance, *ajñāna*. Because of this *ajñāna*, people are *samsārīs*, limited beings given to various problems. Nevertheless, knowledge is always there. It was never created. Ignorance also is not created. All that is created is error, opinion, belief, unreasonable statements, any speculative form of knowledge, and so on. For example, sitting in an easy chair, one can continue to write about God. Error, of course, is not created deliberately. But it is born of a given intellect, with all its limitations, whereas knowledge is never born, never created.

Thus, the Veda is a body of knowledge that is not attributed to a given author. There is no founder. It is not historical and, therefore, we accept it as revealed. There is a ‘Veda-as-history’ argument propounded by some, but according to the tradition it is not valid because, for something to have its basis in history, it has to have been born of a certain intellect. And whatever is born of a given intellect has all the limitations of that intellect.

Knowledge is not born of a given intellect; it is something that is uncovered and handed over. All we can say about the Veda is that it is a body of knowledge that is revealed. And as a means for one to gain the knowledge, as a *pramāṇa*, it works. Its very words are the *pramāṇa* — *śabda-pramāṇa*.

A *pramāṇa* can produce two types of knowledge — indirect or mediate knowledge, *parokṣa-jñāna*, and direct or immediate knowledge, *aparokṣa-jñāna*, depending upon the subject matter to be known. If the *pramāṇa* talks about a heaven, the knowledge is purely indirect knowledge. When you have faith, *śraddhā*, in the *pramāṇa*, the knowledge is indirect. Otherwise, you simply accept what is said, which is only a belief, not knowledge.

PROVING THE PRAMĀṆA: IF IT WORKS, IT WORKS!

Similarly, when the *pramāṇa* says there are *devatās*, it is indirect knowledge. For instance, when the Veda talks about a ritual that invokes a particular *devatā* that will produce a certain result, the knowledge is indirect. When you perform the ritual and it produces the expected result, you understand that it has been verified that it works. Homeopathy and ancient systems of medicine that have not been scientifically validated are other examples of indirect knowledge. In other words, the only proof that something works is that it works!

All we know about the rituals enjoined by the Veda is that they work, for which there is statistical proof. This applies to all scriptures in the world. This prayer may work or that prayer may work. You can dismiss an African tribesman as a heathen, but when he dances for rain, the rains, I am told often come! Therefore, we say that his rituals work. God understands his mumbo-jumbo as well as he understands ours. In fact, for God, there is no such thing as mumbo-jumbo. For him, everything is meaningful. Even if you blabber, he picks up your intention.

The Veda, however, when it talks about what is, does not lend itself to speculation. It talks about you, the self, 'I,' which is already an evident being. If there is confusion about that being, the resolution of that confusion is immediate knowledge, direct knowledge. Because this knowledge is direct knowledge, there is no comparison possible between what the Veda says and what any other revealed body of knowledge says, unless, of course, they are both saying the same thing.

If both revealed bodies of knowledge have the self as their subject matter and are saying that the self is the whole, then they are saying the same thing. This knowledge, the knowledge about the reality of the self, does not belong to any territory and is what we call *Vedānta*.

THE STRENGTH OF THE VEDA

In the vision of the Veda, the self is the whole and there is nothing beyond it. If this fact is recognisable then it is not unreasonable. Because it is reasonable, everything contrary to it becomes unreasonable. That the self is self-evident and is the whole cannot be denied or negated, whereas everything else can be. Therefore, any scripture that makes this statement of fact, regardless of the language it is written in or the people who claim it as their own, is *Vedānta*.

This knowledge, this Veda, is born of *Īśvara* alone; it is not founded nor does it have a historical basis. Therefore, it does not have in it the problems of a given intellect. It is simply handed over from one generation to the next. That it has no beginning, no history, that it was not born of a given intellect, should not be considered its weakness; it is, in fact, its strength.

Another important point is that the Veda does not belong to anyone. No individual or culture can claim it. It is simply a body of knowledge belonging to humanity at large. This knowledge is here, in the world, for all people. The fact that it is maintained in a particular geographical area does not mean that it does not belong to humanity. To think otherwise, leads to the notion that the knowledge has been given to a particular person and, therefore, all wisdom comes through that person. Such notions generate all sorts of expectations and disappointments, the results of which are evident everywhere. *Kṛṣṇa* said that the Veda comes from the imperishable, the Lord, *Īśvara*.

Because it is born of *parameśvara*, the Lord, the Veda is said to abide in the *yajña*. How is this so? The ultimate cause, *Brahman*, is all-pervasive and also imperishable. From this *Brahman* alone, the ultimate cause of everything, comes *Brahma*, the Veda, and from the Veda comes the *yajña* as well as its result. From the result alone comes the rain and from the rain comes the food. From the food come all living beings. The beings do *yajña* and out of *yajña* come the rains and all other results, which in turn lead to more *karma*. This, then, is the cycle, the *cakra*.

Brahman is all-pervasive because it is both the efficient and material cause. And no effect can be away from its cause. Out of this all-pervasive *Brahman*, the Veda is born and the cycle described above is set in motion. In this way, everything is born out of *paraṃ brahma*. Thus, it is said that *Brahman* is in the *yajña*, *yajña* being born from the Veda and the Veda being born directly from *Parameśvara*, the Lord. Or, as *Śaṅkara* puts it, being born of the Veda, *yajña* is non-separate from the Veda and thus very much in it. And the Veda is non-separate from *Īśvara*.

Therefore, when you perform the *yajña*, you are naturally in tune with *Parameśvara*. You also are not away from the Lord. The *yajña* is looked upon as being immediately connected with *Parameśvara*. Its words are a revelation of *Īśvara* and, by performing this *yajña*, which is a *karma*, you are propitiating the *devatās* that are *Parameśvara*. And what happens if you do not perform such *karma*?

एवं प्रवर्तितं चक्रं नानुवर्तयतीह यः ।

अघायुरिन्द्रियारामो मोघं पार्थ स जीवति ॥ १६ ॥

evaṃ pravartitaṃ cakraṃ nānuvartayatīha yaḥ
aghāyurindriyārāmo moghaṃ pārtha sa jīvati

Verse 16

पार्थ *pārtha* — Oh! *Pārtha* (*Arjuna*); यः *yaḥ* — the one who; इह *iha* — here in this life; एवम् *evam* — in this manner, प्रवर्तितम् *pravartitam* — already set in motion; चक्रम् *cakram* — the cosmic wheel; न अनुवर्तयति *na anuvartayati* — does not follow; अघायुः *aghāyuh* — one who lives in sin; इन्द्रियारामः *indriyārāmaḥ* — one who is given to sensory pleasures; सः *saḥ* — that person; मोघम् *mogham* — wastefully; जीवति *jīvati* — lives

A person who does not live here in this life, according to the cosmic wheel that is already set in motion, in this manner, and lives in sin given only to the pleasures of the senses, lives wastefully.

If you perform *yajña*, the *devatās* are all pleased and you work in harmony, according to the order, referred to here as the cosmic wheel, *cakra*. There is a mutual benefit here that is inherent in the order that is already set in motion.

The whole universe, the whole planetary system, operates by mutual attraction. Every planet, the sun, the moon, and the earth move in their respective orbits because of the force of attraction that keeps the whole system going. Otherwise, it would collapse. When you look into any nucleus, you find that the motion of the particles operates in the same way. Similarly, certain proteins attract certain other proteins. Structurally, they are all attracted to each other. Certain bugs attack only certain things, all because of protein structures. In this way, the entire cosmos is nothing but a force of attraction operating in a most intelligent manner.

Living beings, who are not mere physical entities, are conscious beings mutually related to the *devatās*. Since this is how the order is set up, you recognise them, acknowledge them. The *cakra* spoken of here is much more than a cosmic wheel. It not only includes the physical world, it includes everything. This *cakra*, this order, is set up as it is by *Īśvara*, the efficient and material cause of it all.

SEEING BEYOND THE SENSE ORGANS

Aghāyu is a person whose life is nothing but *agha*, *pāpa*, sin. In this verse, such a person is also called *indriyārāma*, meaning one who lives only at the level of the sense organs and therefore does not perceive anything beyond the eyes, nose, and ears. The origin of these functionaries is never questioned by such people. The eyes are there and, therefore, they feast. These are people who are given to sensory pleasures alone. Those who live in this way, who do not follow the *cakra*, the wheel that is the order, live wastefully, *Kṛṣṇa* said here. Everything that is given to these people lays waste. Such people waste their lives and live without any purpose, drifting along without anchor or roots. The depth and understanding that a human being is supposed to have is not there for an *indriyārāma*.

Whenever there is this kind of criticism in the *Gītā*, its purpose is only to direct your attention to what is to be done. You are to push this wheel, this *cakra*. Knowing that you are a cog in it, someone who is important in maintaining the order, do what you have to do. By so doing, it keeps going. To think that by not doing what you have to do, the order will not be disturbed, is not proper, as the following story demonstrates.

There was once a king who thought that his citizens were all excellent people, but his chief minister, a very intelligent man, could not agree with him. He knew that while,

by and large, they had a good kingdom, there were probably some thieves among them. They simply did not hunt down every last one of them. There are always some petty thieves around, even if they only pick their own pockets for practice. Knowing this, the minister could not concur with the king that every citizen was upright.

To prove who was right, the king or himself, the minister erected a huge tank with a ladder to the top. He issued a decree that every citizen was to deposit one ounce of milk into this tank. Dutifully, the people all lined up to add their milk to the tank. When they had all done their duty, the minister said to the king, 'Let us go and see whether the milk in the tank is pure or whether it is somewhat watered down.' What they found was not pure milk nor even thin milk; only water was there without so much as a trace of white in it!

The king then asked the minister whether he had asked the people to put milk or water into the tank. The minister confirmed that he had said milk. 'But how can this be?' the king asked. The minister then explained to him that each person, thinking that his or her water would make no difference in so much milk, opted not to give any milk at all. This shows that if you think that you do not need to do what has to be done because everyone else will do it, and if that is the thinking of everyone, everything comes to a halt. And, if all but one person does do what is to be done, the one who does not do it and who partakes of the benefit becomes a cheat.

ECOLOGY ALWAYS STARTS WITH YOU

This is true in any system, be it a small community, a factory, a society, the world, or the entire universe. The same psychology, the same law, applies and is all that ecology is about — live, and let live — and recognise what the contribution is. This is what makes a person sensitive. Such a person is not an ordinary person and it is here that one's attention is to be drawn.

Ecology starts with one person and that person is you. It never starts with someone else. If you start with yourself, there is no problem. Whenever you count, count yourself first. Counting yourself first is not selfishness, as we shall see.

यस्त्वात्मरतिरेव स्यादात्मतृप्तश्च मानवः।

आत्मन्येव च सन्तुष्टस्तस्य कार्यं न विद्यते ॥ १७ ॥

yastvātmaratireva syādātmatṛptaśca mānavaḥ
ātmanyeva ca santuṣṭastasya kāryaṃ na vidyate

Verse 17

तु *tu* — whereas; यः मानवः *yaḥ mānavaḥ* — the person who; आत्म-रतिः एव *ātma-ratiḥ eva* — delights in the self alone; आत्म-तृप्तः च *ātma-tṛptaḥ ca* — and is satisfied with the self; आत्मनि एव *ātmani eva* — in the self alone; सन्तुष्टः च *santuṣṭaḥ ca* — and is

contented; स्यात् *syāt* — would be; तस्य *tasya* — for him; कार्यम् *kāryam* — work to be done; न विद्यते *na vidyate* — does not exist

Whereas, for the person who would delight in the self, who is satisfied with the self, contented in the self alone, there is nothing to be done.

If *karma* has to be done in order to keep the cosmic wheel going, does everyone have to perform it? And since some people do gain *mokṣa*, does this mean that *karma* becomes the way to *mokṣa* after all and *jñāna*, knowledge, has nothing to do with it? *Kṛṣṇa* had already said that *karma-yoga* does not produce *mokṣa* directly. Therefore, he had to address this doubt here.

If *karma* were the means for *mokṣa*, then everyone would have to do *karma* only as a *yoga*. But *karma-yoga* is not the means for *mokṣa*, let alone the only means; it is the means for *antaḥkaraṇa-śuddhi*, purification of the mind. *Jñāna* is the only means for *mokṣa* meaning that there is no *kartavya* — there is nothing that ‘has to be done.’ If knowledge is the means for *mokṣa* and the person gains that knowledge, then there is nothing else for him or her to do. There is no *kartavya* because the person is not bound by any *karma*, knowledge having destroyed the doer. Without the doer, no action is done.

Knowledge destroys doership completely. If someone is addressed as a doer, who is it that responds? Only a person who takes himself or herself to be a doer. The one who is not a doer is not addressed at all and therefore, of course, does not respond. ‘Whereas’ in the present verse is to distinguish the non-doer from the doer. *Śaṅkara* calls the non-doer *sāṅkhya* here, meaning one who has self-knowledge, a *sannyāsi*. Such a person is a *sthītaprajña*, as we saw in Chapter 2. For this person, there is no doubt, error, or vagueness with reference to ‘I’ the *ātmā*.

In order to become happy in oneself with oneself, a person has to become steadfast in the knowledge of *ātmā*. This is not possible for a person who looks upon *ātmā* as a *saṃsāri*, a limited, sorrowful, sinful person. The moment such a person thinks of himself or herself, he or she is unhappy because *ātmā* is looked upon as a doer, an enjoyer, as one who has limited knowledge, an imperfect person, a sinner, and so on. Because he or she cannot be happy in the *ātmā*, the person has to look towards something other than the self and must manipulate the world or the mind in order to gain even a small degree of happiness.

An enjoyer, *bhogī*, manipulates the world and a *yogī* manipulates the mind. A *bhogī* is one who looks upon the world as something to be enjoyed and who goes about manipulating situations, manipulating the world, to create conducive situations wherein he or she can discover a moment of joy. The situation thus created pleases the person — but only for the time being, whereupon the process of manipulation must begin again.

A *yogī* on the other hand, is one who does not manipulate the world. Such a person is concerned only with his or her thoughts, contending that the pleasurable mental disposition picked up by the *bhogī* through manipulating the world can be created straightaway in the mind. Thus, the *yogī* goes about manipulating the mind, whereas the *bhogī* goes about manipulating the world. There is yet another person, the *rogī* who is so diseased that he or she cannot manipulate the world, much less the mind. Such a person cannot keep himself or herself in good humour because of the pain of illness. Nor is he or she healthy enough to manipulate the world.

'BECOMING' IS A PROBLEM

Yogic postures, *āsanas*, breath control, *prāṇāyāma*, and so on, all create a certain conducive situation wherein the *yogī* can pick up a moment of joy. The *bhogī* of course, manipulates the world for enjoyment, and the *rogī* is unable to do anything in order to enjoy. The point here is that all three of them look upon the *ātmā* as something that has to become something. This becoming creates a lot of problems. Any becoming is unbecoming because it always requires yet another becoming. Thus, becoming is nothing but continuous becoming. Before becoming, there are nothing but problems; while, becoming, there is a lot of pain; and after becoming, the person has to become something else again. The problem is therefore never solved.

A person who looks upon the *ātmā* as imperfect is always in trouble and is therefore a *saṃsāri*; whereas the person described in this verse, an *ātmarati*, is one who always revels in the *ātmā*. The joy that revelling in the *ātmā* implies, does not require anything other than oneself. No object, no situation, no person, is required for the happiness of such an *ātmarati*. This means that the self cannot be imperfect, that it is the very essence of happiness and fullness.

If the essence of *ātmā* happens to be fullness, *pūrṇa-svarupa*, and if this is known to the person, then he or she is one who is steadfast in the knowledge of oneself — *ātma-jñāna-niṣṭha*. In order to be happy with oneself, one has to have knowledge, *jñāna* of *ātmā* as fullness. Generally, one who picks up a moment of joy does so with reference to some object or situation — either outside in the case of the *bhogī* or inside in the case of the *yogī*. The only difference between the two is that the *yogī* does not require any tools except himself or herself. A *yogī's* raw material is an agitated mind. If this is there, *yoga*, which is a discipline, can be practised. If the mind is not agitated, *yoga* is not required at all. Thus, the *yogī's* joy is also with reference to an object — the mind — even though it is not available to the senses.

In order to be a person whose joy is in the *ātmā*, one has to be awake to the *ātmā*. The person who is steadfast in the knowledge of oneself, an *ātma-jñāna-niṣṭha*, is one whose happiness is within oneself and not in internal or external objects. *Kṛṣṇa* also

described this person as *ātma-trpta*, one whose satisfaction is in oneself. Nothing more is required for a person to be satisfied.

Everyone wants to be satisfied. ‘This is not satisfying at all!’ we say. And then we continually seek situations that will satisfy us. An *ātma-trpta*, however discovers joy in the *ātmā*, in the self, and thereby satisfies himself or herself with the self alone. Generally, we satisfy ourselves with something else, but here, with the knowledge of the *ātmā*, the person is satisfied with himself or herself.

HAPPINESS IS WITH THE SELF ALONE

People pick up a moment of happiness when an external object desirable to them is gained. Whereas, for the *ātma-jñāna-niṣṭha*, not being dependent on the gain of any external situations or objects, happiness is with the self alone. This means that such a person is free from any longing to be secure, to be happy, and is therefore a *sarva-karma-sannyāsī*, a *jñānī*, one who looks upon himself or herself, not as a doer or an enjoyer, but as pure consciousness, that is *ātmā*. For this person, there is no *karma* to be done. He is happy with himself, *ātmani eva santuṣṭaḥ*.

For a person who already has this knowledge, the Veda, with all its enticing words, is as useful as a well when the well itself is under water. The wise are in no way enjoined by the Veda to do anything. This is an important point of clarification, since the Veda prescribes daily and occasional rituals in such a way that people think there is no way for anyone to escape them.

It is true that everyone performs action, even a *jñānī*. But the *jñānī* does not look upon himself or herself as a doer. For such a person, there is no doership and, therefore, the Veda does not enjoin any action. The *jñānī* is not even addressed, in fact. Only the *ajñānī*, one who looks upon himself or herself as a doer, is addressed. It is like calling someone by name, ‘*Rāma*, please come here!’ Only *Rāma* will come. *Kṛṣṇa* will not come. Nor will John. Similarly, it is only the *ajñānī*, the doer, who is being addressed by the Veda — ‘Oh! Doer, please perform this action.’

Only the person who looks upon himself or herself as a doer is bound by *karma*. Thus, *karma-yoga* is not meant for a *jñānī*, but for the ignorant, the *ajñānī* alone. *Karma-yoga* is enjoined for the ignorant because, without it, you cannot acquire the knowledge. Thus, *karma-yoga* becomes the indirect means for gaining the knowledge that is *mokṣa*.

Here, too, a doubt may arise. If knowledge of the *ātmā* can only be gained by an inquiry into the *pramāṇa* that gives this knowledge, why should I bother about *karma-yoga*? After all, *karma-yoga* is not the means for knowledge; it is only the means for *antaḥ-karaṇa-suddhi*. But can you inquire into the *pramāṇa* and gain the knowledge if your mind is not prepared? The *antaḥ-karaṇa*, the mind, is where the

knowledge has to take place. Thus, preparing the mind is necessary and is accomplished by *karma-yoga*. This is why *Kṛṣṇa* kept telling *Arjuna* to perform action, *karma kuru*. And again this is why he told him that both the life-styles, *karma-yoga* and *sannyāsa* or *jñāna-yoga* are meant for *mokṣa*.

The ritual of *sannyāsa* can be performed for the sake of knowledge, but that does not mean that, simply by taking *sannyāsa*, you will achieve *naiṣkarmya*, actionlessness. Without knowledge there is no *naiṣkarmya*. Throughout the *Gītā* this was Lord *Kṛṣṇa*'s contention.

The next verse describes the person who knows that he or she is not a doer.

नैव तस्य कृतेनार्थो नाकृतेनेह कश्चन ।

न चास्य सर्वभूतेषु कश्चिदर्थव्यपाश्रयः ॥ १८ ॥

naiva tasya kṛtenārtho nākṛteneha kaścana

na cāsya sarvabhūteṣu kaścidarthavyapāśrayaḥ

Verse 18

तस्य *tasya* — for that person (who revels in the self); इह *iha* — here in this world; कृतेन *kṛtena* — by doing action; अर्थः न *arthaḥ na* —there is no purpose; अकृतेन *akṛtena* — by not doing action; कश्चन *kaścana* — any (purpose); न एव *na eva* — indeed is not; च *ca* — and; अस्य *asya* — for this person; सर्वभूतेषु *sarvabhūteṣu* — on all beings; कश्चित् अर्थव्यपाश्रयः *kaścit arthavyapāśrayaḥ* — dependence (on any being) for anything; न *na* — is not

For that person (who revels in the self), there is indeed no purpose here in this world for doing or not doing action. Nor does such a person depend on any being for any object whatsoever.

We have seen that *karma* is performed either for a specific result or for *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*. The person being described in this and the previous verse does not require *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* because, without it, he or she would not have acquired the knowledge that has made it possible to revel in the *ātmā*.

Suppose the question is asked, ‘How do you know the person has *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*?’ Then, the response is, ‘because he or she has *ātmā-jñāna-niṣṭhā*, firmness in the knowledge of the self.’ Then, the next question could be, ‘but suppose the person has *ātmā-jñāna-niṣṭhā* and does not have *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*?’ Here we have to question ourselves as to ‘What is it that we really want? Do we want *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* or *ātmā-jñāna-niṣṭhā*?’ Of course, we want only *ātmā-jñāna-niṣṭhā*, which can only be had if the mind is prepared. Thus, having the knowledge implies *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*.

The *karma* is either one that produces a result that is outside oneself, that is, other than oneself, or the *karma* is with reference to the person's *antaḥ-karaṇa*. When you require nothing more than yourself, nothing else will benefit you in terms of happiness or security. And if some purpose, some benefit is there in terms of either security or happiness, then you do not know yourself. If you think that there is some benefit to be gained in heaven, it indicates that you do not look upon yourself, the *ātmā*, as fullness. The whole creation being oneself, where is the question of gaining some benefit somewhere? Therefore, for the wise person, no purpose is served by doing *karma*.

CAN THERE BE A RESULT WITHOUT ACTION?

There is another contention to be considered here. It is granted that by performing action, a person with this knowledge does not get a result. But by not doing what is to be done, will there not be an undesirable result? This seems to be our experience. Is it not the same for a wise person?

The Veda says that certain *karmas* are to be performed daily. According to the contention being discussed here, there are certain *karmas* such as breathing for which there is no result. All that happens is that you continue to live, nothing more. It is only when you do not breathe that you have a problem!

This, then, is the contention. There are certain *karmas* that we have to do and by doing them we do not achieve anything. But by not doing them, we attract *pāpa*. When you do not do the prayers, rituals, and duties, which are to be done daily and occasionally, there is a problem, whereas if you do them, there is no problem. Śaṅkara dismisses this argument as meaningless.

‘When you perform an action, there is always a result,’ says Śaṅkara. There is no such thing as a *karma* not producing a result. You cannot even throw a small pebble into a pond without creating ripples. There will always be a result. Suppose a *karma* done does not produce a result and only when you do not do it, there is a result. How can an action that I have not done produce a result? If I do not do an action, it will produce neither a desirable nor an undesirable result because nothing has been done. *Karma* done will produce a result and *karma* not done will not. It is as simple as that.

Why, then, is it said that if you do not do these enjoined *karmas*, you will attract sin and so on? Because if you do not do what is to be done, it will take no time at all for you to do what is not to be done. Therefore, doing *karma* is always better than not doing it because, by not doing it, you will attract a lot of other problems. Sooner or later, laziness will overcome you and you will begin doing improper things. As a human being, you are supposed to be a thinking person, but the thinking itself will be the first casualty. Your capacity for discrimination and inquiry will go, leaving you to ruminate and vegetate.

This kind of problem is not there for the *jñānī*. Everything that has been said is for an *ajñānī* alone. For the *jñānī*, there is nothing to be accomplished or to get rid of because he or she is fullness. The do's-and-don'ts do not affect such a person. Nor are *dharma* and *adharma* applicable. The *jñānī* is above right and wrong. Does this mean that he or she can do anything, including murder? Yes, because the person is not a doer. Of course, there is no reason for a wise person to commit murder because there is nothing to be gained.

DOERSHIP AND KNOWLEDGE DO NOT COEXIST

Behind a murder or any other crime, there is a small person, an *ahaṅkāra*, ego. A person who knows himself or herself to be fullness cannot commit a crime. Crime is only possible when there is fear, greed, anger, and so on, all of which the wise person has already taken care of. A criminal act cannot coexist along with the knowledge that 'I am the whole.' For a person to commit a crime, there has to be the notion, 'I must do this or that so that I can be somebody.' Such a notion implies an *ajñānī* and is not there for a *jñānī*, which is why it is said that the *jñānī* is above *dharma* and *adharma*, right and wrong, do's-and-don'ts.

There is no doing or not doing for the *jñānī* in the sense that the person knows that he or she is not the doer. And when there is nothing for the *jñānī* to do because there is no sense of doership, what is there that he or she cannot do?

A *jñānī* is not dependent on anything or anyone, from *Brahmāji* downwards including all beings that exist anywhere. When you say, '*indrāya svāhā* — unto Indra, I offer this oblation,' the god Indra becomes the basis for gaining something — some strength, some money, health, power, purification of the mind. Some purpose, *kaścid arthavyapāśraya*, is served. For example, you can say that you are performing this *karma* for the sake of knowledge, for the sake of dispassion, *vairāgya*. In order for this dispassion and knowledge to grow in you, you are offering this prayer. This is all well and good, but it is still *arthavyapāśraya*. There is some *devatā* to whom you offer the prayer. A petition may also be extended to *Īśvara*, to a *devatā*, or to a local village official, the person to whom the petition is offered being the *arthavyapāśraya*.

If I perform an action in order to accomplish something, then that because of which I perform the action also becomes *arthavyapāśraya*. But, *Kṛṣṇa* said, there is no *arthavyapāśraya* whatsoever for a wise person. He or she cannot say, 'I am doing this *karma*, I am invoking *Īśvara*, for the purpose of gaining knowledge,' because the knowledge has already been gained. For the *jñānī*, there is no *Īśvara* other than *ātmā*. All that is there is *Īśvara* alone and that *Īśvara* has already done everything that is to be done. He has paid off all the person's prayers. This is why the person is called *jñānī*. This is what we mean by *mokṣa*.

Therefore, amongst all the beings and things, there is nothing upon which a *jñānī* depends for anything. No one is going to contribute to his or her betterment. No one is going to affect the *jñānī's* fullness in any way and the fullness that the *jñānī* knows himself or herself to be, is not dependent upon anything. It is oneself and everything else is oneself also.

तस्मादसक्तः सततं कार्यं कर्म समाचर ।

असक्तो ह्याचरन्कर्म परमाप्नोति पूरुषः ॥ १९ ॥

tasmādasaktaḥ satataṁ kāryaṁ karma samācara

asakto hyācarankarma paramāpnoti pūruṣaḥ

Verse 19

तस्मात् *tasmāt* — therefore; असक्तः *asaktaḥ* — without attachment; सततम् *satatam* — always; कार्यम् *kāryam* — what is to be done; कर्म *karma* — action; समाचर *samācara* — perform well; हि *hi* — because; असक्तः *asaktaḥ* — without attachment; कर्म *karma* — action; आचरन् *ācaran* — performing; पूरुषः *pūruṣaḥ* — person; परम् *param* — the highest; आप्नोति *āpnoti* — attains

Therefore, always perform well the action that is to be done without attachment because, by performing action without attachment, a person attains the highest.

Given what has gone before, what does the first word of this verse, ‘therefore,’ mean? *Kṛṣṇa* had just said that, for the wise, there is no *karma* to be done and that by doing *karma* or not doing it, nothing is gained and nothing is lost. Why, then, was *Kṛṣṇa* now talking about performing action? *Arjuna* had expected him to say, ‘Therefore, *Arjuna*, do not do anything!’

But could *Kṛṣṇa* really have said such a thing? No. It is true that he had already established that knowledge could not be gained by doing or not doing action. ‘Pursue knowledge,’ *Kṛṣṇa* said, ‘but, then, what is to be done, please do it!’ This seemingly contradictory statement was based on the fact that, if knowledge is already there, there is nothing for you to do. But until that knowledge takes place, do whatever is to be done by you. The word ‘therefore’ is connected to the topic ending with the nineteenth verse.

THE 'WHAT IS IN IT FOR ME?' ATTITUDE

In this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* also reminded *Arjuna* that *karma* that is not *yoga*, binds the person. Performing action without attachment refers to the attitude one should have towards the results of one's actions, *karmaphala*. A vulture flying in the sky looks as though it is just gliding along, enjoying the flight, but in fact its eyes and beak are always directed downwards so as not to miss some dead rat or other prey to swoop down upon. No matter how high it soars, a vulture's eyes are always on the prey — thus, the

expression, ‘vulturous.’ People are said to have a vulturous attitude when they think that anything they do should bring them something. Because this attitude is so prevalent, people sometimes find it very difficult to understand a person who does things without expecting anything in return. One’s likes and dislikes need not constantly dictate one’s actions. *Dharma* and *adharma* can as well dictate them. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* said to *Arjuna*, ‘What is to be done, please do.’

Through *karma-yoga* alone you can gain the *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* that leads to steadfastness in the knowledge. Only then can you revel in the *ātmā*. Knowledge itself requires no action; it will take care of itself. This, then, is what *Kṛṣṇa* meant when he said to either pursue knowledge while doing *karma* or take to the life of *sannyāsa*. That this choice is there is without question, but the end is the same for both. Which one is more appropriate for you is all that matters. If you choose the one that is more appropriate for you, you will be the gainer. But if you choose *sannyāsa*, and it is not appropriate for you, the life of a *sannyāsī* will not bear the fruits that you expect.

In *Kṛṣṇa*’s view, *karma-yoga* was exactly what *Arjuna* was fit for. Thus, he tells him to continue doing *karma-yoga* and also to pursue knowledge. Not until all eighteen chapters of the *Gītā* had been taught by *Kṛṣṇa* did *Arjuna* finally say, ‘I am going to do what is to be done!’ He then started the fight and finished it.

By the time the *Pāṇḍavas* had become victorious, a lot of people had been lost — *Arjuna*’s son, *Abhimanyu*, *Draupadī*’s five sons, *Bhīṣma*, *Droṇa*, *Duryodhana* and all his brothers, *Karṇa*, and so many others. Thus, a lot of destruction had been done and *Arjuna* was very sad. He then asked *Kṛṣṇa* to teach him again! *Arjuna* might have said something like, ‘Before the war began, long ago, before all the fireworks, we had a dialogue. It was wonderful. Please teach me again because I have forgotten the words. Perhaps the message is with me still, but the words are gone,’ *Kṛṣṇa* replied that although he could not repeat the teaching verbatim, he could go over what he had taught him previously. Thus, there is one more *Gītā*, called *Uttara-Gītā*, meaning a subsequent *Gītā*.

Arjuna knew that he had to gain this knowledge. In his present circumstances, in the middle of the battlefield, he could only listen. There was no time for him to do a thorough analysis and reflect on everything *Kṛṣṇa* was telling him. Therefore, it was something he had to work out. This was why *Kṛṣṇa* told him that he should continue to do *karma* and gain knowledge in the process.

The *śāstra* says that one should do what has to be done with a mind free from the hold of likes and dislikes with reference to the results of one’s actions. When one performs action in this way, the mind becomes purified. Only when the mind is prepared can knowledge take place and, through the knowledge, one gains *mokṣa*. You will find this point consistently reiterated by *Śaṅkara* in this *bhāṣya*.

Karma-yoga or any other *yoga* does not directly produce *mokṣa*, as we have seen. To think otherwise is not to understand. First, the mind is to be prepared through *karma-yoga* and then the knowledge can take place. There is an order here and it is this order that *Kṛṣṇa* was describing in this verse. Then, he continued.

कर्मणैव हि संसिद्धिमास्थिता जनकादयः ।

लोकसङ्ग्रहमेवापि सम्पश्यन्कर्तुमर्हसि ॥ २० ॥

karmaṇaiva hi saṁsiddhimāsthitā janakādayaḥ

lokasaṅgrahamevāpi sampaśyan kartumarhasi

Verse 20

हि *hi* — indeed; जनकादयः *janakādayaḥ* — *Janaka* and others; कर्मणा एव — *karmaṇā eva* — by action done; संसिद्धिम् *saṁsiddhim* — liberation; आस्थिताः *āsthitāḥ* — gained; अपि *api* — also; लोकसङ्ग्रहम् *lokasaṅgraham* — (of) protecting the people from falling into unbecoming ways; एव *eva* — merely; सम्पश्यन् *sampaśyan* — seeing the desirability; कर्तुम् *kartum* — to perform action; अर्हसि *arhasi* — ought to

Indeed, by action alone, *Janaka* and others gained liberation. Also, by merely seeing the desirability of protecting the people from falling into unbecoming ways you ought to perform action.

Kṛṣṇa did not say that *karma* is to be done by everyone. *Karma-yoga* is meant for a person who is a *mumukṣu*, who is desirous of the knowledge that is liberation. For a *jñānī*, one who already has the knowledge, there is no *karma* to be done, *kartavyam nāsti*, because there is no doer. The absence of doership is purely in terms of knowledge. The *jñānī* knows that he or she is not the doer or enjoyer of any action. Knowing this, a wise person is not bound by any *karma* nor is he or she enjoined to do any *karma*, even by the Veda. Only a *mumukṣu* has to do *karma*, as does the *avivekī*, one who is only interested in fulfilling his or her *rāga-dveṣas*.

It goes without saying that an *avivekī*, a person whose likes and dislikes have to be fulfilled, has no choice. *Karma* definitely has to be done by such a person. And while performing action, he or she has to follow *dharma* and *adharmā*, right and wrong. Otherwise, the results of the person's action will be something undesirable, if not immediately, certainly later. A person who has a value for *dharma* need not be a *mumukṣu*, a *vivekī*, but may legitimately fulfil his or her desires, keeping what is right and wrong in view.

A *mumukṣu* also does *karma* but not always to fulfil his or her likes and dislikes. More often than not, such a person does *karma* simply in order to do what is to be done in a given situation. And if the person does perform action in order to fulfil his or her likes and dislikes, the action is performed and the results of the action, whatever they may be, are taken as *prasāda*, gifts from the Lord.

Here, in this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* provided further arguments for the performance of *karma*. People who have really given up everything to pursue this knowledge enjoy a certain disposition that, according to the *śāstra*, is not gained accidentally. They have earned it by performing *karma* with the proper attitude. Thus, *karma-yoga* precedes *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, purification of the mind, which in turn precedes *jñāna*, knowledge. This order is the context for the present verse.

Janaka and others like him, *Aśvapati*, for instance, are mentioned in the *śruti*. They were all kings and householders. They had offices to keep and were very busy with a variety of activities which were *kartavyaṃ karma*, to-be-done *karmas*. They were also considered to be wise men who had gained *saṃsiddhi*, another word for *mokṣa*, liberation. They had discovered freedom by living a life of *karma*, a life of activity.

THE WISE NEED NOT GIVE UP ACTIVITY

Even though considered by the *śruti* to be wise men and scholars also, *Janaka* and the others were not renunciates; they were householders. They acquired wisdom without giving up *karma*. Thus, it is very clear that performing *karma* is not against *mokṣa*, even though it cannot produce *mokṣa*. Only knowledge can be said to ‘produce’ *mokṣa*, *mokṣa* being an already accomplished fact. In other words, *ātmā*, oneself, is already liberated, *mukta*, and knowledge alone ‘makes’ us recognise this fact. And to prepare the mind for this recognition, there are a lot of means that one can use. This, then, is the reason for saying that there is nothing equal to knowledge for gaining liberation.

The use of the words ‘produce’ and ‘make’ here must be properly understood. Because knowledge is always true to a fact, it cannot ‘make’ or ‘produce’ anything unless there is a fact. Knowledge of the object ‘pot’ will only be equal to what is there — a pot. If the pot is a clay pot, it is a clay pot, not a brass pot. By knowledge, you cannot change the nature of the pot. You can only understand its nature. This is the very meaning of knowledge.

Mokṣa is always for oneself; it is not for anyone else. And because the self is already *mukta*, *mokṣa* is always for oneself; it is not for anyone else. And because the self is already *mukta*, *mokṣa* can only be gained by knowledge of the fact that the self is liberated. *Mokṣa* is already accomplished in the self and one can gain this knowledge without giving up *karma*, as *Janaka* and others like him did.

Karma is only opposed to knowledge when performed purely for fulfilling one's *rāga-dveṣas* and not for neutralising them. Such *karma* is without any doubt binding in nature. This, however, is not the *karma* that *Kṛṣṇa* was referring to here. He was talking about *karma* that is to be undertaken by oneself with an attitude of *karma-yoga*. This

karma is a *yoga* whereby you gain the kind of mind necessary for the knowledge to take place.

AFTER KNOWLEDGE WHY DO ACTION?

Understanding that one does *karma* to render one's mind fit for the knowledge, you may ask why the wise should continue to do *karma* once the knowledge has been gained. If *Janaka* and the others had already come to know, should they not have dropped all the *karma*? No, *Kṛṣṇa* said. They could continue to do whatever *karma* was there for them to do, according to their *prārabdha*, the result of previous *karma* that had caused their present births.

Once knowledge is gained, all action is spontaneous. Whatever is to take place, will take place. No one is going to stop it. Therefore, if *Janaka* were to continue being the king, he would be the king. If he were to renounce everything and continue his life as a *sannyāsī*, he would have done so. It all depended on what was stored in his *prārabdha*. Once a person is no longer bound by his or her *karma* or by any *rāga-dveṣa*, the question of performing or not performing *karma* simply does not arise. How the person lives, whether he or she lives a life of activity or a life free from all activities, depends purely on the person's *prārabdha*. He or she is no longer controlled by likes and dislikes. Even the desire for *mokṣa*, for liberation, is gone, having been fulfilled by the knowledge of the truth of oneself.

The doer not being there, there is virtually nothing for a wise person to do. Nor is there anything that such a person cannot do either. What the person will do depends only on what happens within him or her, itself governed by the *prārabdha* that resulted in this particular birth.

Prārabdha-karma is generally accompanied by the free will that a human being has. This free will can interfere with the *prārabdha-karma* in many ways — modifying it, mending it, working against it, and doing anything else to it that free will can do. Given that *prārabdha-karma* and free will go together, every situation is both *prārabdha*-based and will-based. Where *prārabdha* stops and free will begins, no one can say. There is no way of knowing which one brought you to a particular situation.

In the wake of self-knowledge, however, free will is not a factor. Only then does *prārabdha* alone take care of your life. If it is in your *prārabdha* to teach, you teach. If you are to sit quietly, then that is what you do and if you have to rule a kingdom, you rule the kingdom, just as *Janaka* did.

Kṛṣṇa mentioned *Janaka* here because *Janaka* was a king who was considered to be a wise man. Being a king meant that *Janaka* engaged in a lot of activities. He did not just sit and relax. He was the one whose phone was always ringing, so to speak. Even though he had a lot of people to help him, they were always asking him for advice. They

would ask, ‘What should I tell this person? What should I tell that person? We do not have any money. Our granary is empty. What shall we do?’ But, in spite of all the activities that were involved in ruling the kingdom, *Janaka* continued to rule because of his *prārabdha*.

Knowing that *Arjuna’s prārabdha* was to fight this battle, *Kṛṣṇa* told him to do *karma*. It was not that *Arjuna* had decided to fight *Duryodhana*; he did not even want this war. He was brought to it by his *prārabdha*. *Arjuna* was right inside this particular situation, one that warranted certain action on his part.

If *Janaka* and the others were wise men, they continued to do their jobs because of their *prārabdha* and if they were not wise, they were doing *karma-yoga*. The point *Kṛṣṇa* was making here is that a person achieves wisdom by doing whatever is to be done and not by running away from it.

Kṛṣṇa might have said to *Arjuna*, ‘Suppose you look upon yourself as a wise man. Are you going to say, “I am a wise man; therefore, I should not do action”? Is there any rule that says that a wise man should not do action?’ If a so-called wise man, deciding he is wise, does not do *karma*, it means that he is bound by *karma* because he is taking himself to be a *kartā*, a doer. And if he is bound by *karma*, he is definitely not wise!

Wisdom is knowing that *ātmā* is not a doer, that *ātmā* is *akartā*. For the person who has this wisdom, there is no mandate to do or not to do *karma*. This in no way means that because you are wise, you will not do *karma*. Not to do *karma* amounts to laziness unless, of course, you take *sannyāsa*, for which a certain preparedness is required. The point here is that even if you are a wise person, you can look at the situation you have been presented with and do what is to be done.

ARJUNA WAS A LEADER

In *Arjuna’s* case, the people had to be protected. *Arjuna* was a leader whether he liked it or not. Even if he himself thought he was not a leader, people looked upon him as one. Therefore, he had to do what was expected of a leader.

There are three types of leaders. One type of leader is the opportunist who becomes a leader to promote a particular cause in which he or she has a personal interest. Community leaders tend to be of this sort. Temples and churches usually get built in this way. A person who is successful in the community comes forward and heads a particular project. However, because others also want to be leaders, problems among various members of the community are inevitable. Thus, when there is an opportunity available, a person who wants power and who has the leisure and resources required, will organise the situation so that he or she becomes the leader. When an opportunist wields power in

this way, it is usually an ego trip or in the interest of money. Generally speaking, our societies are led by such people.

Another type of leader, who is even more dangerous, is the idealist. The opportunist has no ideal other than his or her ego and sets sail purely according to the direction of the wind. Such a person can switch political parties simply by crossing the floor. The idealist, on the other hand, is not on a power trip. This type of leader looks upon society as being full of problems that have to be solved by him or her, for which the person has a particular system — political, economic, religious, and so on. Certain religious leaders, for example, tend to think that they alone have the answers and everyone else is a heathen whom they alone must save. In other words, an idealist is one who thinks that the answers can only come through him or her. This is why such a person can be a real danger to a society. Communists, terrorists, and nationalists are all idealists who make such contentions as, ‘My country is the greatest country,’ ‘My culture is the greatest culture,’ ‘My religion is the greatest religion,’ or ‘My political or economic system is the only answer.’

An opportunist can easily be discovered, whereas the idealist converts more and more people to his or her way of thinking. When an idealist talks, there is so much conviction, so much heart and mind being brought to bear on the topic that those who are gullible will go along with whatever is being said. The idealist is one who has sold himself or herself on a particular idea and is prepared to die for it, Hitler being a case in point. His ‘blue-blood’ theory was pure idealism and caused the colossal destruction of millions of people. He really believed he was the one who was born to protect and rule the world and that people of the Aryan race were superior.

Once this idea struck him, Hitler had no rest. Nor did he allow others to rest. Under the spell of this idealism, they carried out his atrocious orders. Throughout the history of the world we find that wherever there were idealists, there was war and colossal destruction. Idealism creates religious and political fanatics and these people create havoc, as the history books reveal.

The third type of leader is one who leads, not because he or she wants to lead, but because there are some people following. Such a person lives his or her life, always ready to reshuffle his or her ideas in order to live according to what is true. The person may not even know that he or she is a leader. Thus, whether it is to one's liking or not, one becomes a leader. This is the type of leading that makes one a real leader and this was the kind of leader *Arjuna* was.

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* said to *Arjuna*, ‘Whether you like it or not, there are people who look up to you as their leader.’ *Arjuna* was the archer of the age and was looked upon by the people as a trend-setter. He was supposed to set an example and was not, therefore, someone who could just walk away from it all. That was not his *prārabdha*.

If *Arjuna* had been a loner and had wanted to become a *sannyāsī*, *Kṛṣṇa* would not have talked with him about the appropriateness of *karma-yoga*, and so on. *Kṛṣṇa* would have agreed to *Arjuna*'s becoming a *sannyāsī*, even though he knew there would be some problems. This, however, was not *Arjuna*'s situation. Being a leader and looked up to by all the people, he had to set a proper example. And if he set a wrong example, the people would follow it. Therefore, to protect the people, *Arjuna* had to do *karma* even if he considered himself a *jñānī*. That was how his *prārabdha* had set up his situation. And if he was a *karma-yogī*, protecting the world was his *karma-yoga* because he was a leader and that was what had to be done.

ACTION IS NOT OPPOSED TO KNOWLEDGE

The question that may arise here is why the world is to be protected. All that is involved here is that you find yourself in a situation with duties to perform. Someone has to be in this particular position and you happen to be that person. If you were not there, someone else would be. There is no choice involved here. *Arjuna* did not choose to be the son of *Pāṇḍu*. He happened to be born into this particular royal family and therefore had certain jobs to do.

Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* said, 'Whether you are a *jñānī*, or a *karma-yogī*, here is a situation for you to do *karma*. This is not opposed to knowledge because you are not a doer.' *Karma* can be done even if you know that you are not the *kartā*. Or, put another way, *karma* is not opposed to knowledge, nor is it a means to knowledge, because by just doing *karma*, you cannot gain *mokṣa*. If you have no *viveka*, *karma* can bind you, whereas it can also be a means for purifying your mind if you make it a *yoga* by a change of attitude.

In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* why he should do his duty.

यद्यदाचरति श्रेष्ठस्तत्तदेवेतरो जनः ।

स यत्प्रमाणं कुरुते लोकस्तदनुवर्तते ॥ २१ ॥

yadyadācarati śreṣṭhastattadevetaro janaḥ
sa yatpramāṇam kurute lokastadanuvartate

Verse 21

श्रेष्ठः *śreṣṭhaḥ* — an important person; यत् यत् *yat yat* — whatever; आचरति *ācarati* — does; इतरः *itaraḥ* — the other; जनः *janaḥ* — person; तत् तत् एव *tat tat eva* — that alone; सः *saḥ* — he; यत् प्रमाणम् कुरुते *yat pramāṇam kurute* — what he sets down as proper; तत् *tat* — that; लोकः *lokaḥ* — the world of people; अनुवर्तते *anuvartate* — follows

Whatever an important person does, that alone the other people do.

Whatever that person sets as proper, the world of people follows.

Śreṣṭha here refers to one who is considered to be important by other members of the society, a leader to be reckoned with, like a king, prince, judge, or an officer of some kind. The father of a given household is such a person, a role model. The word *acarati*, in this verse, refers to what one does in terms of how one lives, how one acts, and reacts to the variety of situations encountered in day-to-day life.

A person who is looked up to, sets the trend for how everyone else lives. People always look up to someone and whatever that person looks upon as the standard is what they follow. Here the word *pramāṇa* means the measure of what is right and what is wrong. The same word we have used earlier to refer to a means of knowledge. If a king looks upon the Veda as a *pramāṇa*, then most of his subjects will look upon it in the same way.

This is exactly what happened in ancient India when *Aśoka* and other kings came under the influence of Buddhist monks. Because these kings no longer looked to the Veda as a *pramāṇa* a lot of people also shifted to Buddhism. Thus, converting people to any new interpretation of Vedic religion was very easy in India in those days. All that had to be done was to convert the king. Whatever became a *pramāṇa* for the king became a *pramāṇa* for his subjects.

Because people generally have neither the time nor the inclination to look into religious matters, they do not stand on their own. They tend to follow someone else and can be easily carried away merely because their leader has set a particular trend. Mao, for example, told the people that if they wanted to be efficient and accomplish their ends, they should read his Red Book every day. In this way, he made a scripture out of it.

In India, too, it is said that by reading a particular verse or chapter every day, you will get this or that. The difference is that Mao's Red Book is not a scriptural authority; it is a worldly authority, a *laukika-pramāṇa*. It is not a Veda, *vaidika-pramāṇa*. Any system or book becomes a *pramāṇa* if you think it is going to solve all the problems of the world, including your own, of course. There are people, for example, who cannot go to the bank or do anything else unless they consult the I Ching or Tarot cards. This is their *pramāṇa*. In the same way, whatever a leader does, everyone else will do. Whatever he looks upon as his guide book, his *pramāṇa*, others will also look upon as a *pramāṇa*, even if it is the Red Book!

You will find that every revolution has some kind of book behind it. *Mein Kampf* – My Struggle, was the book Hitler's followers read and were inspired by. It became the *pramāṇa* for them. Hitler's entire ideology is there, including what exactly Aryan rule is, how the Aryan race is bound to rule, and the superiority of the Aryan race. Whatever the *pramāṇa* — *laukika* or *vaidika* — if it is considered a *pramāṇa* by a *śreṣṭha*, people will follow it.

Similarly, if a king says the Veda is not a *pramāṇa*, then the people will give it up. And if he says it is a *pramāṇa*, the people will look into it. This is why *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that whether he liked it or not, he was a leader and if he walked out, he would find that everyone else would also give up. Suppose, however, that *Kṛṣṇa* had encouraged *Arjuna* to go and, turning the horses around, drove him to Rishikesh. All the other soldiers would also have turned around. They would have pitched camps there because *Arjuna* was there. All the subjects would also have gone to Rishikesh. If *Arjuna* wore a certain type of clothing, everyone would have dressed in the same way. If he wore *rudrākṣa* beads, everyone would have them!

Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* said, ‘This is how it is, *Arjuna*. Whatever you do is exactly what others are going to do because you are a *śreṣṭha*, a leader, someone who is important.’ Because *Arjuna*’s decision would have far-reaching consequences, he had to look at his situation very carefully before he decided anything. *Kṛṣṇa* also assured *Arjuna* that he would lose nothing by doing his duty. If he was a *jñānī*, his action would be based on his *prārabdha* and would create no problems for him. And if he was an *ajñānī*, the action was definitely to be done because it was his duty. This was *Kṛṣṇa*’s whole point here.

Kṛṣṇa then continued, pointing to himself with reference to the performance of action:

न मे पार्थास्ति कर्तव्यं त्रिषु लोकेषु किञ्चन ।

नानवाप्तमवाप्तव्यं वर्त एव च कर्मणि ॥ २२ ॥

na me pārthāsti kartavyaṃ triṣu lokeṣu kiñcana

nānavāptamavāptavyaṃ varta eva ca karmaṇi

Verse 22

पार्थ *pārtha* — Oh! *Pārtha*; मे *me* — for me; कर्तव्यम् *kartavyam* — to be done; न *na* — not; अस्ति *asti* — is; त्रिषु *triṣu* — in the three; लोकेषु *lokeṣu* — worlds; अनवाप्तम् *anavāptam* — not accomplished; अवाप्तव्यम् *avāptavyam* — to be accomplished; किञ्चन *kiñcana* — anything; न *na* — not; च *ca* — yet; कर्मणि *karmaṇi* — in action; एव *eva* — indeed; वर्ते *varte* — I am

Oh! *Pārtha*, for me, there is nothing to be done. In the three worlds, there is nothing to be accomplished by me, which is not yet accomplished. Yet, I am engaged in action.

If one is awake to one's own nature, awake to the self as *akartā* then the state of actionlessness is achieved. Actionlessness does not imply the absence of activity, however, inactivity being impossible as long as one is alive, as we have already seen. A person is always doing one thing or another, whether he or she is a *sannyāsī*, a

karma-yogī, or simply a *karmī*. Total renunciation of action is possible only in the form of knowledge that I (*ātmā*) perform no action — *ahaṁ karma na karomi*.

This knowledge is an awakening. In my presence, all activities take place, as will be made clear later. I, myself, do not perform any action. This is not just a volitional or a self-hypnotizing thought. It is the recognition of a fact. This knowledge alone makes me a renunciate of all actions in spite of my being seen to perform actions. From my own standpoint, there is no action whatsoever. All action is only from the standpoint of the physical body, mind, and sense organs. From their standpoint, there is action, whereas from the standpoint of the self, there is no action at all. This is what is called *naiṣkarmya*, actionlessness.

Whether you have achieved this knowledge of actionlessness or not, doing *karma* is in no way a problem. In fact, if you have come to know what the self is, then all there is for you is *prārabdha*. Lord *Kṛṣṇa* knew *Arjuna's prārabdha* very well. If you know the action-free-self, whatever your *prārabdha* dictates, whatever the situation warrants, you do. Such *karma* does not bind you at all.

If you are an *ajñānī*, unaware of the fact about the *ātmā*, then *karma* can become a *yoga* for you, neutralizing your *rāga-dveṣas*, your likes and dislikes. *Rāga-dveṣas* cannot be neutralized unless you pay attention to them, which is what *karma-yoga* is all about. Either way, then, whether you are a *jñānī*, or an *ajñānī*, you can perform action.

WHAT IS THERE TO ACCOMPLISH?

Here, in the verse, *Kṛṣṇa* talked about himself with reference to action, saying that there was nothing to be done by him, nothing that was not accomplished nor anything that had yet to be accomplished. The expression, ‘in all three worlds,’ is meant to cover the entire universe and any others that may exist as well. *Kṛṣṇa* had no mandate whatsoever, either here on earth, or in heaven, or anywhere else. He was not duty-bound in any way.

Only when there is something to be accomplished, is there something to be done. If there is something to be accomplished in order to make myself better, then I must definitely do whatever is to be done. Without doing, I cannot accomplish and without accomplishing, I will not be satisfied. I will be stuck with the desire to accomplish, which is what makes a person a *saṁsārī*. However, for *Kṛṣṇa*, there was no such thing as not accomplished or to be accomplished because he knew he was everything. Knowing this, everything was accomplished. There was nothing for him to do, *kartavyam nasti*, because there was nothing for him to gain or lose.

If I want *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, I have something to be done, *kartavyam asti*. I have to do *karma* with a *karma-yoga* attitude, *yoga-buddhi*. Only then will my mind

become pure enough for the knowledge to take place. And of course I have to do *karma* if I want to fulfil my *rāga -dveṣas*.

Most people have a long list of items to be done in order to fulfil their likes and dislikes and they perform actions for this purpose alone. For such people, fulfilling their likes and dislikes is important because they do not want to be bugged by unfulfilled desires. However, desires, *kāmas*, are no different than bugs; they breed and grow very quickly. Desire bugs do not remain single or childless! They make sure that before they go they have left behind at least a handful and have a definite knack of generating their own species in great abundance.

Desire produces other desires, its nature being to continually perpetuate itself. Like fire that leaves a black trail of charred earth and never says, 'Enough! Don't give me any more fuel. I have burned up so many houses already!' desire too will never complain. This is why desire is described poetically as the 'villain of the piece' of *saṃsāra*. There is no way of having a desire without fulfilling it. Thus, we always have a list of things to be done — *kāryaṃ kartavyam asti*.

The person who understands *ātmā* as the whole is free from those desires that are binding in nature. But this does not mean that such a person does not perform action. *Kṛṣṇa*, who was no ordinary person, was driving *Arjuna's* chariot. He was a king, the king of *Dvārakā*, but he did not consider driving a chariot a mean job. There was dignity in his labour. In fact, he felt honoured when *Arjuna* asked him to drive the chariot and he happily agreed to do so.

Kṛṣṇa was always doing one thing or another. His entire life had been one of activity even though there was nothing for Him to accomplish. From childhood onwards, he had been destroying one demon after another. And if there was nothing else to do, he would pick up his flute and keep everyone else busy singing and dancing. This was *Kṛṣṇa* — always active. 'Before I came here to drive your chariot, I went as a mediator to *Duryodhana*,' *Kṛṣṇa* could have said to *Arjuna*. 'I played the role of a messenger, in fact. Then I came back and told you what *Duryodhana* said and now I am driving your chariot. And in response to your request that I teach you, I am doing that too right now.'

Why was *Kṛṣṇa* always in the midst of action? This he answered in the next verse.

यदि ह्यहं न वर्तेयं जातु कर्मण्यतन्द्रितः ।

मम वर्त्मानुवर्तन्ते मनुष्याः पार्थ सर्वशः ॥ २३ ॥

yadi hyahaṃ na varteyaṃ jātu karmaṇyatandritaḥ

mama vartmānuvartante manuṣyāḥ pārtha sarvaśaḥ

Verse 23

हि *hi* — because; पार्थ *pārtha* — Oh! *Pārtha*; जातु *jātu* — ever; यदि *yadi* अहम् न वर्तेयम् *yadi aham na varteyam* — should I ever not engage myself; अतन्द्रितः *atandritaḥ* — without

being lazy; कर्मणि *karmaṇi* — in action; मनुष्याः *manuṣyāḥ* — human beings; मम *mama* — my; वर्त्म *vartma* — path (example); सर्वशः *sarvaśaḥ* — in every way; अनुवर्तन्ते *anuvartante* — would follow

Because, should I ever not engage myself in action, without being lazy,
Oh! *Pārtha*, people would follow my example in every way.

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that if ever he became inactive, all human beings would follow him in this respect. They may not have followed him in certain other respects, but in this matter of inaction, they would definitely follow him. ‘See what *Kṛṣṇa* is doing?’ they would say. ‘He just sits. Therefore, we should all just sit, too. What is the use of doing anything? This life of *saṃsāra* is useless; therefore, let us do nothing. No one who performs action ever achieves anything!’

All that is achieved by this line of thinking, of course, is that you become worse. It is like saying that since everyone who underwent any treatment eventually died, I should not undergo treatment of any kind. Or, because everyone who eats has problems at one time or the other, I should not eat. Everyone who talks quarrels with someone; therefore, I should not talk. To decide not to talk simply because when you talk, it causes problems, does not really solve the problem. You may not be talking externally, but you will definitely be talking internally. Previously, you talked to people and now you talk only to yourself! There may be a problem caused by talking, but it will not be solved by not talking.

Kṛṣṇa knew that if he did nothing, everyone would follow him because doing nothing always looks easy. Activity definitely implies a certain will. Thus, there is a tendency to go for the convenient or the pleasant and to avoid anything that is painful. People generally think that the most pleasant activity of all is to do nothing. Doing something may imply pain and, therefore, is thought to be unpleasant. Thus, if people are to do anything at all, it should only be something that is pleasant.

If, however, you keep to this course, life eventually becomes full of painful situations because you have done only the pleasant, leaving undone whatever is painful. In this way, you are left with only the painful. You become a pain to yourself and to everyone else as well. If you keep on postponing the painful, then you will be stuck with the painful alone! The pleasant is done and the painful remains undone. In fact, there need be nothing painful about such activities, providing you do them. Then they are out of your way and you have only the pleasant to do.

Still, people are people; which is the reason *Kṛṣṇa*, the king of *Dvārakā*, praised as an *avatāra*, an incarnation of *Īśvara*, had to set an example and perform action.

Further, *Kṛṣṇa* continued:

उत्सीदेयुरिमे लोका न कुर्या कर्म चेदहम् ।

स?रस्य च कर्ता स्यामुपहन्यामिमाः प्रजाः ॥ २४ ॥

utsīdeyurime lokā na kuryāṃ karma cedaham

saṅkarasya ca kartā syāmupahanyāmimāḥ prajāḥ

Verse 24

अहम् *aham* — I; कर्म *karma* — action; न कुर्याम् चेत् *na kuryām cet* — if (I) were not to do; इमे *ime* — these; लोकाः *lokāḥ* — people; उत्सीदेयुः *utsīdeyuh* — would perish; च *ca* — and; स?रस्य *saṅkarasya* — of confusion; कर्ता *kartā* — author; स्याम् *syām* — would be; इमाः *imāḥ* — these; प्रजाः *prajāḥ* — beings; उपहन्याम् *upahanyām* — would destroy

If I were not to perform action, these people would perish. I would be the author of confusion (in the society) and I would destroy these beings.

If *Kṛṣṇa* performed no action and the people followed him, let them follow, one might say. The problem is that they would destroy themselves in the process. If the people have innumerable likes and dislikes and they do not perform the actions that will fulfil them, what will happen? Because they have no *viveka*, no discrimination, they will become insane, which is what destruction means here. There is no destruction for a human being other than insanity.

Everyone, normal and abnormal, is born of ignorance and error. And because there is very little difference between the empirical, the objective, and the subjective, this ignorance and error can lead to madness, there being a streak of madness in everyone. This is why it is said that the line between sanity and insanity is a very fine line indeed. If you see an object, you do not see it as objectively as the object is because there is always a certain subjectivity involved in the seeing. Therefore, it is very difficult to distinguish between subjective projection and objective appreciation.

A sane person is one who has some objectivity while an insane person is more subjective. He or she also has some objectivity. An insane person eats bread and not rocks just as a sane person does. This much objectivity he or she has. The problem is that such a person may feel persecuted, for example, when, in fact, he or she is not. There may be some objectivity, but because there is a lot of subjectivity we call the person insane.

Even a person who is very objective may have some degree of subjectivity. But because the objectivity is more predominant, he or she is called normal. The person may expect that money will provide security, an expectation that cannot be described as very objective. Another indication of subjectivity is when the person does not take people as they are and, instead, projects his or her own fears upon them. Thus, the difference between those we describe as normal and those we call insane is not very much. The

insane person is more subjective than objective and the sane person is a little more objective than subjective. Insanity can occur with the increase of one's subjectivity or the decrease of one's objectivity. It does not take much time and is what is meant here by destruction.

PERFORMING ACTION AS AN EXAMPLE TO OTHERS

Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* in this verse, 'If I do not perform *karma*, these people will definitely destroy themselves.' *Kṛṣṇa* was not talking here about being in charge of all three words. *Lokāḥ* usually means 'worlds,' but here it means 'people.' *Kṛṣṇa* did not say that if he performed no action in his capacity as *Īśvara*, all the worlds would fall apart. If this were the case, there would be no problem! We would all gain *mokṣa* because *Īśvara* turned lazy! This is the kind of translation that can happen if the word *lokāḥ* is not properly understood here.

Kṛṣṇa meant that the people would destroy themselves if they performed no *karma*. He also said that, if he performed no action, he would be the author of confusion. *Arjuna* thought if he fought this battle, he would create utter confusion in the society and thereby incur sin. This is why he did not want to fight. Now *Kṛṣṇa* was telling him that, by not fighting, *Arjuna* would be creating confusion because the people would also not do what was to be done.

Knowing all this, *Kṛṣṇa* knew that he himself had to set a good example. Otherwise, he would be the cause of everyone's destruction. The people had to do their *karmas*. Not doing them was not going to help them. They would not be happy not doing what was to be done by them. They may not have been very happy doing *karma*, but not doing it would be far worse. One big *tamas*, mass lethargy, would completely overtake the society.

Previously, *Kṛṣṇa* had pointed out that when one's *buddhi*, the intellect, is gone, the human being is destroyed — *buddhi-nāśāt praṇaśyati* (*Gītā* – 2-63). This destruction is not physical; it is *buddhi-nāśā*, destruction of the intellect, the capacity to discriminate between what is and what is not. Here, *Kṛṣṇa* said that if the people did not do what was to be done, there would be *buddhi-nāśā*, meaning that all reasoning would be gone and they would no longer be human beings. Thus, simply because people always take what an exalted person in the society does as their model, *Kṛṣṇa* would be the cause of their destruction if he did not perform *karma*.

Further, he said :

सक्ताः कर्मण्यविद्वांसो यथा कुर्वन्ति भारत ।

कुर्याद्विद्वांस्तथासक्तश्चिकीर्षुर्लोकसङ्ग्रहम् ॥ २५ ॥

saktāḥ karmaṇyavidvāṃso yathā kurvanti bhārata

kuryādvīdvāṃstathāsaktaścikīrṣurlokasaṅgraham

Verse 25

भारत *bhārata* — Oh! *Bhārata* (*Arjuna*); कर्मणि *karmaṇi* — to action; सक्ताः *saktāḥ* — attached; अविद्वांसः *avidvāṃsaḥ* — the unwise; यथा *yathā* — just as; कुर्वन्ति *kurvanti* — perform action; तथा *tathā* — so too; विद्वान् *vidvān* — the wise; लोकसङ्ग्रहम् *lokasaṅgraham* — the protection of people; चिकीर्षुः *cikīrṣuḥ* — desirous of doing; असक्तः *asaktaḥ* — unattached; कुर्यात् *kuryāt* — would perform

Oh! *Bhārata*, just as the unwise, who are attached to the results perform action, so too would the wise perform action, without attachment, desirous of doing that which is for the protection of the people.

Previously, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* had said that he did not really have anything to be done because there was nothing for him to accomplish in all three worlds, meaning here on earth, in the heavens, or in any other world. This was because he knew himself to be everything, *sarva-ātmā*. Because *Arjuna* saw *Kṛṣṇa* continually immersed in activity, *Kṛṣṇa* explained that he performed action to set an example, as we have seen.

Here, in this verse, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* asked *Arjuna* to suppose that he, too, were a knower of the *ātmā*, an *ātmavit*. Then he too could say, ‘Hey, *Kṛṣṇa*, in all the three worlds, there is nothing for me to accomplish because I am an *ātmavit*. I know I am everything!’ And knowing this *Arjuna* could then also perform action. He would have nothing to lose. He, too, would perform action for the sake of the people; otherwise, he would be destroying them.

The people did not know whether *Arjuna* knew or not. They only knew what he did. All they would see was *Arjuna* not doing what he was supposed to do and would simply conclude that not performing action is preferable. Once again, *Kṛṣṇa* was bringing up the argument that the people would follow *Arjuna*’s lead and, because of this, *Arjuna* should set an example.

Keeping this in mind, *Kṛṣṇa* addressed *Arjuna* here as *Bhārata*, for which there are two meanings. A person born in the family of *Bharata* may be referred to as *Bhārata*. Secondly, *bhā* means *brahma-vidyā*, knowledge of *Brahman*, and *tasyāṃ yaḥ ramate*, the one who revels in that, the knowledge of *Brahman*, is called *Bhārata*. Therefore, *Arjuna* was *Bhārata* in this sense also because he was receiving and revelling in the teaching of *Brahman*.

In this verse, *vidvān* means one who has this knowledge and *avidvān* is one who does not, taking the self to be a doer. Taking themselves to be the doer, people are bound to *karma*. They do not even perform action for the sake of *antaḥ-karṇa-suddhi*, but with the expectation that, ‘If I perform this action, I will gain this result.’ This expectation, this attitude, is what is meant by attachment to *karma*.

Action itself is not what people are attached to; they are attached to the results. Because people are interested in results, they undertake certain actions with a combination of enthusiasm, anxiety, and concern. What *Kṛṣṇa* was saying here is, let the *vidvān*, the wise person, perform action with the same enthusiasm as a person who performs action for the results alone. Thus, the enthusiasm is a common factor between the two, whereas the anxiety and concern are not.

A person who is attached to the results of action thinks, ‘Such-and-such should happen to me.’ For this person, there is no *karma-yoga-buddhi* which is *prasāda-buddhi* with regard to results. The terms dictating the action are purely *rāga-dveṣas*. The *kartavya-buddhi*, the to-be-done attitude, is not there for the person. When such people undertake activities, there is definitely going to be enthusiasm in anticipation of the results desired. But this enthusiasm will be dampened somewhat by the apprehension one has about getting undesirable results. Because there are no real guarantees that the action will produce the desired results, some anxiety will always be there. And the more enthusiastic a person is with reference to the result, the more anxious he or she naturally becomes. Therefore, for one who does not know oneself as everything, anxiety accompanies enthusiasm and with these, the person performs action.

ATTITUDE IN ACTION

Why is it that the wise can undertake action with the same enthusiasm but without the anxiety and concern? This is purely because of a difference in attitude. A wise person performs action simply because it is to be done. How a result comes or whether the expected result comes is not a concern for the wise. When the result comes, it is met with equanimity.

Action is always result-oriented. No one can perform an action without expecting a result. Expectation of a particular result alone makes the action meaningful. An action performed without expecting a result is meaningless. An action is always done for some purpose, even if it is *kartavya*, a to-be-done action. Thus, the purpose of any action is always known, whereas whether the purpose is going to be fulfilled is definitely anyone's guess! The results are not in your hands. You can only plan what you will do, then do it, and keep on doing it. But the results of the actions are not within your control. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* said here that if *Arjuna* was an *ātmavit*, a *vidvān*, he would perform whatever action was to be done by him with the same enthusiasm as people who are attached to the results, but without the attachment — in other words, minus the anxiety and heartburn.

THE WISE PERFORM ACTION TO BLESS THE WORLD

Why, you may ask, does a wise person perform action if he or she is not interested in the result? No one is saying that the person must perform action, but the question is

what does he or she lose by doing it. In fact, nothing is lost and there is a lot to be gained in terms of protecting others. It is true that the gain is not for the wise person, but there is nothing wrong with that. Let the others be protected and enjoy the gain. For a wise person who knows he or she is everything, there is nothing to gain — nothing to accomplish.

One who wants to do something is called *cikīrṣu*.¹ The desire spoken of here is to protect the people *lokasaṅgraha*. Those who want to perform action, even though they have nothing to accomplish for themselves, do not want the people to fall into ways that are non-productive and destructive. Therefore, to bless the world, to serve as an example to the world, the wise perform action. What else is there to do for a person who has nothing to do but to set an example, thereby protecting the people? This is why *Kṛṣṇa* was on the battlefield, in fact, driving *Arjuna*'s chariot.

Kṛṣṇa was definitely taking a risk sitting in the front seat of the chariot. He was the one who would be bombarded. Every arrow would have to cross his head and shoulders before finding its way to *Arjuna*. *Kṛṣṇa* could well be hit in the process. Being a charioteer is something like being a tank driver. Even though other men are using the weapons, the driver is risking his life. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* was as much as saying to *Arjuna*: 'I am your driver and, therefore, I am taking a great risk. I have actually given you my neck in fact. Why? For the protection of the order, the *dharma*, and thereby for the protection of the people.'

Dharma itself is not something that has to be protected. To think so would be idealism. In fact, it is the *dharmīs*, the people who follow the *dharma*, that are to be protected. There is no such thing as the protection of *dharma* other than the people who follow it. The *dharma*, the order, is meant for the people. Thus, when it is said that, the *dharma* is to be protected, what is meant is that the people are to be protected.

Kṛṣṇa had made it very clear that there were no *kartavya* — 'to-be-done action' for him or for anyone who has the knowledge of *ātmā*. There is no mandate that says you should continue to do *karma*. Whatever an *ātmavit* does is only for the blessing of the world. This is all that he or she does. This being the contention, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that he should determine what is to be done for the good of the people alone. And then he should do it. If *Arjuna* were to tell the people that there is no action to be done, *kartavyaṃ nāsti*, it would be wrong. And if he set a wrong example by performing no action himself, others would be disturbed. As a word of advice to those who already have knowledge of the self, this theme was repeated by *Kṛṣṇa* in the next verse.

न बुद्धिभेदं जनयेदज्ञानां कर्मसङ्गिनाम् ।
जोषयेत्सर्वकर्माणि विद्वान्युक्तः समाचरन् ॥ २६ ॥

¹ *cikīrṣuḥ* — *kartum icchuḥ*, one who desires to do.

*na buddhibhedam janayedajñānām karmaśaṅginām
joṣayetsarvakarmāṇi vidvānyuktaḥ samācāran*

Verse 26

कर्मसङ्गिनाम् *karma-śaṅginām* — of the people who are committed to the results of action; अज्ञानाम् *ajñānām* — of the people who are ignorant; बुद्धिभेदम् *buddhi-bhedam* — disturbance of one's understanding; न जनयेत् *na janayet* — should not create; विद्वान् *vidvān* — the wise person; युक्तः *yuktaḥ* — one who is steadfast in the knowledge; सर्वकर्माणि *sarva-karmāṇi* — all actions; समाचरन् *samācāran* — performing them well; जोषयेत् *joṣayet (ajñān)*— should encourage (the ignorant people)

The *vidvān* should not create any disturbance in the understanding of the ignorant who are attached to the results of action. The wise person, steadfast in the knowledge, himself, performing all the actions well, should encourage (the ignorant) into performing (all actions).

In this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* is saying, ‘May this *ātmavit*, the one who knows the *ātmā*, not produce any disturbance in the attitude of those who are ignorant, those who are committed to the results of action, *karma-phala*.’ *Karma-śaṅgīs* are those who have *śaṅga*, attachment, meaning, here, an attachment to the results of *karma*. Lacking discrimination, these people are not *karma-yogīs* and *Kṛṣṇa* was telling *Arjuna* not to disturb them — *na buddhi-bhedam janayet*.

Those who know a little *Vedānta* often say to others, ‘What is this *karma* that you are doing? These rituals and prayers are not going to help you. Why do you go on chanting, ‘*Hare Rāma, Hare Kṛṣṇa*’ all the time? You are wasting your time.’ Such statements do nothing but create unnecessary problems. Therefore, *Kṛṣṇa* said, ‘Do not disturb their understanding.’

These people need only be encouraged to do *karma* according to *dharma*, nothing more. *Dharma* and *adharmā* can be discussed with them in terms of their various pursuits. But they should not be disturbed by being told not to do any *karma*, since they are not ready for what that really means. Had *Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna* lived their lives doing nothing, and had all the enlightened people around them also done nothing, people would certainly have concluded that the right thing to do was nothing.

People, who are thought to be enlightened, are considered to be the elite in a given society and whatever they do tends to become law for the others. Therefore, such people are leaders, *śreṣṭhas*. And these leaders, including the *ātmavit*, should not disturb the minds of those who follow them.

Just as you cannot alter the direction of a river unless you do it very gradually, so too, the direction that a person's life is taking can only be altered gradually. A sensitive person, one who really cares for another person, brings about a change in that person by

going with the flow, altering the direction of his or her life, little by little, in a helpful way.

A WISE PERSON DOES NOT DISTURB THE UNDERSTANDING OF OTHERS

The word *vidvān* in the second line of this verse refers to a wise person who is asked not to disturb the understanding of an *ajñānī*, one who is ignorant. *Yuktaḥ* is another word for *vidvān*, meaning, one who is *jñānena yuktaḥ*, endowed with knowledge. Even though such a person does not have anything to accomplish and does not lose anything either, he or she sets an example for others to follow.

For example, a *vidvān* does not pass a temple, but enters, offers prayers, and may even compose a verse in praise of the Lord. A *vidvān* does not need to go into the temple because the person is a temple unto himself or herself. In this way, a *vidvān* performs all the *karmas* that are to be done. *Śaṅkara* consecrated many temples and composed verses in praise of the Lord. If the *vidvān* happens to be a *grhastha*, the *karmas* mandated for this particular *āśrama* are followed by him or her. And if the person happens to be a *sannyāsī*, a *sannyāsī*'s life is followed. Here, *Kṛṣṇa* was talking about *grhasthas*.

A *grhastha* is a householder; he or she is not a renunciate. For such a person, there are different levels of *karma* — obligations to the society, to one's parents, to one's own immediate family members, to the *devatās*, and so on. In this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* instructed the wise who is a *grhastha*, to set an example for others because it was the best way to teach them.

There are two types of teaching. Teaching can be done by setting an example as is done with reference to *karma* and *dharma*. Of course, the one who is teaching also says that certain things are to be done and not done. For the most part, however, *karma* and *dharma* are best taught by example. Only then will the words of the one who is teaching carry any weight. The words of a person who has lived a good life always carry more weight than those of one who has not.

In the case of *ātma-jñāna*, the teaching is not by example; it is to be taught by using words. This, then, is the other type of teaching. You cannot follow an *ātma-jñānī*. You cannot say that because he or she does this or that, I will do the same and become enlightened. It does not work this way because we are dealing with knowledge. Therefore, unlike a life of *dharma*, *ātma-jñāna* cannot be taught by example. It must be taught by words, *śabda*, whether few or many, words being the *pramāṇa* here.

THE NATURE OF WORDS

In teaching any subject matter, if the person knows what he or she is talking about, the words carry weight; they ring true. As the words are spoken, you see their meaning. Naturally, the words of a person who knows what he or she is talking about are different from those of everyone else. Still, teaching by using words is not teaching by setting an example.

What example are you setting when you tell someone that he or she is *Brahman*? Do you close your eyes? Do you walk around or remain seated? There is no example involved in telling a person that he or she is *Brahman*. When *Kṛṣṇa* compared a wise person to an ignorant person by saying what was night for one was day for the other, he was speaking from a position of desperation in terms of setting an example. To say that when the ignorant are sleeping, the wise person is awake and when they are awake, the wise person is sleeping, simply means that they never meet. We see something similar in today's families where the father works so hard that he leaves the house too early in the morning to see his children and comes home so late that they are again sleeping.

Just as the father and children never meet, the wise person and the otherwise also never meet. What is night for one is day for the other; what is day for one is night for the other. Therefore, in terms of setting an example for the people with reference to knowledge. Example-setting is only with reference to *dharma-sāstra*, not with reference to *jñāna*. This point has to be recognised because there are those who advocate teaching *ātma-jñāna* by example. The only way a wise person can set an example here is by doing *karma* properly. When he does the *karma* well, a wise person makes others do their various *karmas* because the people will follow him or her.

How a person is attached to *karma* is made clear in the next verse:

प्रकृतेः क्रियमाणानि गुणैः कर्माणि सर्वशः ।

अहंकारविमूढात्मा कर्ताहमिति मन्यते ॥ २७ ॥

prakṛteḥ kriyamāṇāni guṇaiḥ karmāṇi sarvaśaḥ
ahaṅkāravimūḍhātmā kartāhamiti manyate

Verse 27

प्रकृतेः गुणैः *prakṛteḥ guṇaiḥ* — by the *guṇas* of *prakṛti*; सर्वशः *sarvaśaḥ* — in various ways; कर्माणि *karmāṇi* — actions; क्रियमाणानि *kriyamāṇāni* — are performed; अहंकार-विमूढात्मा *ahaṅkāra-vimūḍhātmā* — one who is deluded by the I-notion; अहम् कर्ता *ahaṁ kartā* — I am the doer; इति *iti* — thus; मन्यते *manyate* — thinks

Actions are performed in various ways by the *guṇas* of *prakṛti*, the body, mind, and senses. Deluded by the I-notion, one thinks, 'I am the doer.'

Prakṛti means cause, that out of which all things come, the potential cause of anything. There are two aspects to an individual — *puruṣa*, meaning *ātmā*, the self, *caitanya*, consciousness, and *prakṛti*, also called *avidyā* or *māyā*. Your body, mind, and senses are modifications *vikāras*, creations, born of *prakṛti*, which depends entirely on the *puruṣa* — the *vastu*, the thing to be understood.

Prakṛti being the cause, anything born of it is called *prakṛti-vikāra* or *prakṛti-guṇa*, meaning modification. The word *guṇa* has to be seen in its proper context in order to understand its meaning because it has many meanings. It can be any simple attribute, *viśeṣaṇa*, like the yellow in a yellow flower. Any adjective is a *guṇa*.

Guṇa is also a technical term for *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, which indicate certain conditions of the mind as well as the constituents of *māyā* or *avidyā*.

A virtue is also called *guṇa*. For example, a person of ethics, one who has a good heart and stately qualities, is called *guṇavān*. Another meaning of *guṇa* is ‘knot.’ And, in Sanskrit grammar, *guṇa* is one of the many technical names given by *Pāṇini*. It indicates the vowel ‘a’ and the diphthongs, ‘e’ and ‘o.’

Guṇa is also a particular modification, *vikāra*. In this verse, we have ‘*prakṛteḥ guṇaiḥ*, — by the modification of *prakṛti*,’ meaning by the mind, senses, and physical body. All three are called *prakṛti-guṇas*. In the technical language of Sanskrit this body-mind-sense complex is called *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta*. We have already seen that the physical body is *kārya* and the mind, senses, and *prāṇa* are *kāraṇa*. The assemblage, *saṅghāta*, of the physical body, mind, and senses is called *guṇa* here being the modification of *guṇas* of the *prakṛti*. All actions are performed by these *prakṛti-guṇas*, the physical limbs, mind, and senses, alone.

Actions are performed in various ways, based on various sources of knowledge, for the purpose of achieving various ends. Thus, there are actions enjoined by the Veda *vaidika-karma*, and all other activities, *laukika-karma*. All types of activity are covered here, whether they are pursuits meant for gaining knowledge or for gaining various other results, here or in the hereafter.

THE DOER OF ACTION

The person who thinks he or she is doer of these various actions is referred to in this verse as *ahaṅkāra-vimuḍhātmā*,¹ meaning one who is deluded by the notions he or she has about the I, the *ātmā*.

¹*Śaṅkara resolves this compound as follows:*

अहंकार-विमूढात्मा — कार्यकरणसङ्घाते आत्मप्रत्ययः अहंकारः। तेन विविधं, नानाविधं मूढः आत्मा — अन्तःकरणं यस्य सः।

The I notion placed in the kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta is called ahaṅkāra. The one whose

The I-notion or I-sense has all the attributes. When you say, ‘I am so-and-so,’ the *kārya*, the physical body, and *karaṇa*, the mind and senses, are an integral part of your *ahaṅkāra* alone, the person has become deluded *vimūḍha* in many ways. In fact, the delusion is multifaceted — one delusion with varieties of nuances, one big knot with innumerable knots within knots. These knots are the varieties of problems and notions that a person has.

Ahaṅkāra implies many notions, beginning with ‘I am a mortal.’ The I-notion is connected to hundreds of notions about oneself. For example, religious notions are what brands one as religious. Then the person says he or she belongs to this or that religion, and so on. This is just one of innumerable problems brought about by notions. All such notions are about this ‘I’ and are expressed by this ‘I.’ The *ahaṅkāra*, itself includes all these notions.

The starting point for *ahaṅkāra* is the *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta*, the body-mind-sense complex centred on which is the conclusion, ‘I am as good as this body, mind and senses.’ And over a period of years, we keep gathering a variety of notions about this ‘I.’ No baby thinks, ‘I am white or black, Caucasian or Negroid.’ Only afterwards, as the child grows up, does he or she slowly begin to pick up such notions. One’s whole life is spent gathering more and more notions about oneself and this is what is meant when it is said, his mind is deluded, *vimūḍha*.

The *vimūḍhātmā*, the one whose mind is deluded in a hundred different ways by the *ahaṅkāra*, thinks that he or she is a doer, *ahaṃ kartā*, even though it is the physical body, mind, and senses that perform the actions. The person is the one who is aware of all the actions — in other words, the one who lights them up. He or she knows what does what; but, at the same time, is still able to think, ‘I am the doer.’ This, therefore, is no ordinary *avidyā*; it is not ignorance of an object or of a discipline of knowledge. It is self-delusion. Because the self is not clear, the obvious is not at all obvious. On the other hand, one who knows the *ātmā*, the *ātmavit* or the *jñānī*, does not take oneself to be the *kartā*, as we shall see in the next verse.

To tell someone who looks upon himself or herself as the *kartā*, that he or she is not the *kartā* will only confuse the person. Nothing is ever said in the *śāstra* to suggest that one should not do *karma*. The *śāstra* says you are not the doer and that this knowledge is *mokṣa*. You can live a life of renunciation or you can live a life of *karma-yoga*. In either case, knowledge is *mokṣa*. This is what is said.

ātmā – *antaḥ-karaṇa* is deluded in various ways because of this false ‘I-notion’ is called *ahaṅkāra-vimūḍhātmā*.

NOT DOING KARMA IS MEANINGLESS

To tell a person, who thinks he or she is a *kartā*, not to do *karma* is meaningless. Even if someone does no *karma*, it does not mean that he or she is not doing *karma*. As long as the person is a *kartā*, one's every move is a *karma* — standing is a *karma*, listening to someone is a *karma*. Everything becomes *karma* because the person thinks he or she is the *kartā*. As long as this notion is there, the person will always be doing one thing or the other thinking that he or she is the doer. If at all you are to teach such a person, you will have to try to make the person understand that he or she is *akartā*. This understanding is purely *jñāna* and has nothing to do with doing or not doing *karma*.

Kṛṣṇa then explained why the wise are not attached to *karma* :

तत्त्ववित्तु महाबाहो गुणकर्मविभागयोः ।

गुणा गुणेषु वर्तन्त इति मत्वा न सज्जते ॥ २८ ॥

tattvavittu mahābāho guṇakarmavibhāgayoḥ

guṇā guṇeṣu vartanta iti matvā na sajjate

Verse 28

तु *tu* — whereas; महाबाहो *mahābāho* — Oh! *Arjuna*; गुण-कर्म-विभागयोः *guṇa-karma-vibhāgayoḥ* — of the distinction between the body-mind-sense-complex and action; तत्त्ववित् *tattvavit* — knower of the truth; गुणाः *guṇāḥ* — senses, mind, and organs of action; गुणेषु *guṇeṣu* — with reference to objects; वर्तन्ते *vartante* — engage themselves; इति मत्वा *iti matvā* — knowing this; न सज्जते *na sajjate* — is not bound

Whereas, Oh! *Arjuna*, the knower of the truth, knowing the distinction between body-mind-sense-complex and action, knowing that the senses, mind, and organs of action engage themselves with reference to their respective objects alone, is not bound.

In this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* contrasted the *jñānī* with the *ajñānī* mentioned in the previous verse. The ignorant person takes the body-mind-sense complex *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta* as oneself and oneself to be the *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta*, thereby making no distinction between the two. This lack of discrimination is where individuality comes from, that which makes one seem unique and distinct.

The *jñānī*, on the other hand, while taking the body-mind-sense complex as himself or herself no doubt, does not take the self to be the body, mind, and senses. If the *jñānī* were not identified with the body-mind-sense complex, in this way, talking, walking, seeing, hearing, and thinking would not be possible. Since the *jñānī* thinks, does actions, and so on, he or she also naturally has an *ahaṅkāra*. Here the *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta-ātmā* is being called the *ahaṅkāra*.

THE NATURE OF DELUSION

Thus, both the *jñānī* and the *ajñānī* have this *ahaṅkāra*, the difference between the two being that the *jñānī* does not take the self to be *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta* whereas the *ajñānī* does, which is why there is *saṃsāra* for him or her. *Saṃsāra* is in the self, for the self.

Because the *ātmā* is taken to be the *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta-ātmā*, there are individuals, each of whom is unique and distinct from every other individual. Thus, there is an ‘as though’ division, an ‘as though’ duality, *dvaita*. The *śruti* does not say there is *dvaita*; it says only that there is ‘as though’ duality — *dvaitam iva bhavati*. Wherever there is this ‘as though’ duality, there is death, *mṛtyu*; there is time, there is *saṃsāra*.

The *jñānī* is referred to as *tattvavit* in this verse. The suffix ‘*tva*’ is added to a noun to convey its abstract sense, its essence. For example, the truth or essence of a pot, *ghaṭasya tattvam*, becomes *ghaṭatva*, potness. In English, the suffix ‘ness’ is used in the same way.

That is a pronoun and as such can stand for anything. Thus, *tattva* refers to that which is the truth or essence of everything — *tasya bhāvaḥ*. The one who knows the truth about oneself, the world, and God is called *tattvavit* and the one who does not know this truth is called *atattvavit*. In this verse, *tattvavit* refers to one who knows the truth of the *guṇas*, the modification that is the body-mind-sense complex, as well as of the *karmas*, meaning that the person can distinguish between the two. The distinction *vibhāga* here is that the body-mind-sense complex is an instrument, a *karaṇa*; it is not the *ātmā*.

I, the *ātmā*, is not the *karaṇa*, the sense organs or the mind, or the *kārya*, the physical body. While the mind and senses perform their actions, they are only *karaṇas*, instruments. *Ātmā* is not an instrument. It is the self, the content of the subject, the doer. Therefore, a distinction is to be made between the essence of the subject and the instrument.

THE SUBJECT AND ITS INSTRUMENTS

The subject cannot be taken as an instrument because the instrument, being wielded by the subject, is necessarily in the hands of the subject. You are handling the body; you are handling the mind and senses. The subject cannot be taken as the very thing that it handles, just as you cannot take the spoon or fork that you eat with as yourself. That you are holding the fork in your hand does not mean that the fork is you. It is simply an instrument that you wield. Similarly, you wield your mind and senses; you operate them. You wield your physical body; you operate it. Therefore, they are merely instruments and the doership imputed to *ātmā* is simply a thought belonging to the mind.

The one who knows the *karaṇa* as the *karaṇa* and the *ātmā* as the *ātmā* is one who knows the truth of both. The one who knows the truth of *ātmā* also knows the truth of *anātmā* and is therefore a *tattvavit*. This, then, is what is meant by *guṇavibhāga*.

Ātmā is not the *kartā*. *Ātmā* does not perform any action; only the *guṇas* perform action. Action does not come from the *ātmā*. It emanates from the *guṇas*, from the *kārya-karaṇa*, from the physical body, mind and senses, alone.

Any fancy or desire is a modification of the mind. But you may not go along with the desire or fancy. Many desires rise and fall simply because we do not bother about them. This happens because of a particular function of the mind that enables me to decide whether to go along with the desire or not. In such a decision, there are various considerations — pragmatic and ethical considerations, among others. ‘Is this necessary for me?’ — is a pragmatic consideration undertaken by the *ātmā* in the form of *buddhi*.

With the organs of action or the sense organs you perform *karma*. Whatever you do — eat, walk, or engage yourself in any kind of pursuit — some sense organ is involved. The truth of this *karma*, however, is that *ātmā* is not directly involved in the activity. *Ātmā* is not a desire or a decision. Nor does it desire or make decisions. Desires and decisions are always in the form of *vṛttis*, modifications of the mind. These *vṛttis* are *ātmā* no doubt, but *ātmā* is none of them. Thus, all *karma* emanates from modifications of the mind, *vṛttis*, and does not come from the *ātmā*.

EVERYTHING IS A MODIFICATION OF PRAKṚITI ALONE

The one who knows the nature of *karma* and the nature of *ātmā*, and therefore the distinction between the two, looks upon *prakṛti* as it really is. *Prakṛti*, also called *māyā*, in its entirety is the cause for everything in that it modifies itself into everything. The body, mind, and senses are *prakṛti* and the sense objects, the world, *jagat*, are also *prakṛti*. All are modifications, *guṇas*, of *prakṛti* alone. And these two *prakṛtis* are in touch with each other. One *prakṛti* is *kārya-karaṇa-prakṛti*, in the form of instruments of perception and action and the other *prakṛti* is in the form of objects, *viśayātmika-prakṛti*.

This verse explains that the *guṇas* in the form of instruments of perception and action engage themselves in activity in the spheres of their respective objects — *guṇeṣu*. This means that the eyes engage themselves in the sphere of forms, *rūpa*, the forms being *guṇa*. Sight itself is *guṇa* and the seen object is also *guṇa*. Similarly, hearing is *guṇa* and the objects heard, the sounds, are also *guṇa*. In this way, these *guṇas*, *guṇeṣu*, with reference to objects, *varjante*, engage themselves in activity. This means that I do not perform any action at all. Knowing this, the wise person is not bound, *matvā na sajjate*.

Knowing the truth of *ātmā* and *karma*, the *tattvavit* does not become attached to any *karma*. Such attachment is not possible because the person knows that he or she does nothing. To become attached, there must be a *vṛtti*, which is non-separate from *ātmā*, while *ātmā* is always free from any *vṛtti*. Because there is no connection, no attachment, between the *vṛtti* and *ātmā* there can be no attachment to any *karma* for one who knows that *ātmā* is always free — that is, for the one who knows that *ātmā* is *asaṅgaḥ*.

A problem arises when you say you must become *asaṅga*, detached. You do not become *asaṅga*; that, you are *asaṅga* is a fact to be known. There is no becoming here. You can never become detached. What you want to be detached from is always in your head; therefore, you can never detach from it. Even when you say you are detached from it, you are already attached because you are talking about it. A person who throws away some garbage and says, ‘I gave away my garbage,’ still has the garbage in his or her head. The garbage was outside and now it is inside! This is exactly how we have collected so much garbage!

As the nature of *ātmā*, detachment is already an accomplished fact. Knowing this, one is not bound — *iti matvā na sajjate*. The person looks upon himself or herself as a non-doer, *akartā aham asmi*, actionlessness itself. Previously, *Kṛṣṇa* said that by not performing an action, a person does not gain *naiṣkarmya*, the state of actionlessness. Knowing the self to be free from any type of action, doership is not there. When there is no doership, there is no *karma*. In this sense, knowing there is no doership, a person is free from all *karma*. This, then, is the difference between the *tattvavit* and the *atattvavit*.

KNOWING YOU ARE NOT A DOER, WHAT DO YOU DO?

When this is so, what should you do? Suppose you know you are *akartā* and the other person, whose welfare you are interested in, takes himself or herself to be a *kartā*. Should you tell the person not to do *karma*? Definitely not. If at all he or she is available for this knowledge, all you can say is, *ātmā* is *akartā*. This alone is the truth and anything else is a distortion of it. To tell someone not to do *karma* is the same as saying that performing *karma* is bondage. If the person still looks upon himself or herself as a *kartā*, being deluded in this way, he or she will only become lazy, nothing more!

Therefore, all you can do is tell the person to do *karma*, but to do it according to *dharma*. This much alone you can say. This is what the scriptures enjoin also. Not performing any action will eventually result in a person doing something that is not to be done. What is not proper for you is not proper for the other person also. There are universal implications inherent in all action. If you compromise with this universal fact, for example, by robbing someone even though you yourself do not want to be robbed,

you may think you can get away with it, but you cannot. This, the scriptures tell us. Otherwise, we would not need a scripture; common sense would be enough.

The scripture does not need to tell me that it is wrong to rob. This, I knew even as a child. When my older brother took the chocolate out of my hand, I complained to the heavens! I cried and created havoc in the house because I knew very well that he robbed what I held as mine. He took it away. Everyone is very clear on this point and does not need a scripture for it. Nor do we need someone to come and preach to us about things we already know. What the scriptures and preachers are saying, however, lest we do not know it, is that we should not think we can get away with improper actions.

This, then, is an extra revelation, extra information provided by the scripture. It says that the reason you do not get away with improper actions is because there is a law that is impossible to get around. The moment you commit a wrong action, a debit is registered against your name. The whole law is based on credit and debit, both of which are automatically recorded to your account. Also, there is no way of manipulating this law. It is already programmed to record whatever action you perform. Everything has been taken care of. This law is not a computer that you, the wizard, the *kartā*, can manipulate. You can, however, erase it by means of a different operation. This, then, is additional information that a scripture may talk about. Because the information is revelation, something that we have no other way of knowing, the scripture is given the status of revealed knowledge.

HOW TO HELP OTHERS IN TERMS OF THIS KNOWLEDGE

A person who performs action because he or she looks upon himself or herself as the *kartā* should not be told to refrain from action because *karma* is bondage. It is bondage, no doubt, but telling the person so is not going to make him or her free. If, however, you really care for the person, and he or she cares for your words, then you can share what you know. Otherwise, your talk will just go over the person's head. It is like someone who is interested in this knowledge trying to explain to his or her parents what he or she is studying. Because the parents do not understand, they will only ask themselves what they did wrong for their child to have been steered in such a useless direction. 'We must have been a little too severe and that is why our child listens to this Swami,' they may say. To attempt an explanation is only to make them feel guilty because it is impossible to convince them of the true worth of this knowledge.

You may care for the welfare of those who do not understand, but they too have to care for your words. Otherwise, they will only sympathise with you, feeling that you are completely deluded! And if they do care for your words, you can tell them the truth, that *ātmā* is *akartā*. In the modern literature on *Vedānta*, you may read that you must become *asaṅga*. This is why some people spend an entire lifetime trying to become *asaṅga*. It is also sometimes said that you should experience the *asaṅga ātmā*. There is

an experiencer, an object of experience, and *ātmā* is to be experienced by another *ātmā* who is an experiencer. All that you experience in this way is *anātmā*, not *ātmā*.

Because *ātmā* as *asaṅga* is a fact to be recognised, *Kṛṣṇa* further cautioned the wise not to confuse those who still think of themselves as doers.

प्रकृतेर्गुणसम्मूढाः सज्जन्ते गुणकर्मसु ।

तानकृत्स्नविदो मन्दान् कृत्स्नविन्न विचालयेत् ॥ २९ ॥

prakṛterguṇasammūdhāḥ sajjante guṇa karmasu
tānakṛtsnavido mandān kṛtsnavinna vicālayet

Verse 29

प्रकृतेः गुणसम्मूढाः *prakṛteḥ guṇa-sammūdhāḥ* — those who are deluded by the modifications of the *prakṛti*; गुणकर्मसु *guṇa-karmasu* — in the modifications of body-mind-sense-complex and actions; सज्जन्ते *sajjante* — become bound; तान् *tān* — those people; अकृत्स्नविदः *akṛtsnavidaḥ* — those who do not know totally; मन्दान् *mandān* — those who are not discriminative; कृत्स्नवित् *kṛtsnavit* — one who knows; न विचालयेत् *na vicālayet* — should not disturb

Those who are deluded by the modifications of the *prakṛti* become bound in the modifications of body-mind-sense-complex and actions. One who knows the self should not disturb those who do not know the self, who are not discriminative.

Here, *prakṛteḥ guṇa-sammūdhāḥ* refers to those who are deluded with reference to *prakṛti-guṇa*, which are the modifications of the *prakṛti*. They take the self to be the body-mind-sense complex. This expression can also mean that people become deluded because of the mind and senses, their ignorance with reference to these being the origin of their problems. Looking upon themselves as doers, such people become bound, attached, *sajjante*, with reference to the body, mind, and senses (*guṇa*), and with reference to action (*karma*).

To take the body, mind, and senses as oneself means, ‘I am only as good as the body, mind, and senses,’ with all their limitations; to think this way is bondage. The people discussed in this verse have become bound with reference to *prakṛti-guṇas*, such as the body-mind-sense-complex, *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta*, and also to their *karmas*. The bondage manifests in terms of actions such as, ‘This is my *karma* and I perform it for the sake of this result.’

Because people experience success and failure, they are bound by the results of their action. And if they have *śraddhā*, *punya* and *pāpa* are also involved. Then success and failure, *punya* and *pāpa* become the ruling factors in their lives. Thus, such people have both *drṣṭa* and *adrṣṭa* conflict, attached as they are to the seen and unseen results of their actions.

The verse also tells us a little more about those who are bound in terms of *guṇa* and *karma*. They are described as *mandas*, those who have no *viveka*. *Mandatva* means ‘dullness,’ the sense you have when you have indigestion, for instance, and do not feel like eating or doing anything. You develop a complete dispassion even towards foods that you like and it lasts for as long as the discomfort lasts, at least. And if this *mandatva* happens in our thinking, we have a definition for the person, *manda*, discussed in this verse. Nothing ignites in the brain of such a person. There is no fire, whatsoever! Although situations unfold around the person, there is no assimilation, no response.

The word *mandatva* is used here only as a definition for the condition of the mind. It is not meant as a criticism either of oneself or of another; the word simply indicates a person who does not discriminate between *ātmā* and *anātmā*. Two other words are used in the verse to make the same distinction between one who has the knowledge and one who does not.

Kṛtsnavit is a wise person, one who has complete, *kṛtsna*, knowledge with reference to *ātmā* and *anātmā*, whereas *akṛtsnavit* refers to everyone else. Because the *akṛtsnavit* does not know that he or she is not the doer, the person has problems. The *akṛtsnavit* may understand that *anātmā* — the body, mind, and senses — performs action, but may think of *ātmā* as something other than himself or herself, something that is not known. Therefore, he or she has some knowledge but does not know totally, which is the meaning of *akṛtsnavit*.

IGNORANCE IS BLISS ONLY IF IT IS TOTAL!

For a person who knows nothing, there is no problem. Ignorance is bliss, as they say — provided, of course, the ignorance is total. For example, there is no problem in sleep because you do not think of yourself as a *kartā*, *bhoktā*, or anything else. Only when there is some knowledge is there a problem. Those who are dull, *manda-prajñas*, who have no discrimination, *viveka*, with reference to *ātmā* and *anātmā* are referred to here as *akṛtsnavits*. These are the people that a wise person should not disturb, *tān na vicālayet*, by telling them that *karma* will not produce *mokṣa*. They should not be told: ‘*Karma* is all bondage. Why do you do *karma*? Why do you pray? Why do you go to church or to the temple? Why do you do *japa* and meditation? This is all nonsense. Only *jñāna* will give you *mokṣa*.’ Such comments should not be made because they do not help anybody.

A person should not be told not to work or that working for money is useless. Let the person work; otherwise, he or she will become lazy. Such people will end up at your door, telling you that you said not to make money and now they need some! People need food and place to live. Whom else will they come to but the person who told them not to make money. Therefore, do not tell them not to make money. Tell them to do so,

following *dharma*. You can even give them some ideas on how to go about it. There is nothing wrong with making money; it is a resource, *Lakṣmī*, and as such should not be abused.

If, on the other hand, you are talking to a person who has seen that money is not an end in itself and he or she has some *viveka*, then you can talk about *karma-yoga* or *sannyāsa*. It all depends on the person to whom you are talking. *Kṛṣṇa*'s point here was that the person should not be disturbed unnecessarily. Even a person who is a *mumukṣu*, who has *viveka*, should not be indiscriminately told to take *sannyāsa*. For someone who still has *rāgas-dveṣas*, *sannyāsa* will not work; it will only be abused. Such a person should be told to perform action as a *karma-yogī*, as *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* in the next verse.

मयि सर्वाणि कर्माणि सन्न्यस्याध्यात्मचेतसा ।

निराशीर्निर्ममो भूत्वा युध्यस्व विगतज्वरः ॥ ३० ॥

mayi sarvāṇi karmāṇi sannyasyādhyātmacetasā
nirāśīrṇirmamo bhūtvā yudhyasva vigatajvaraḥ

Verse 30

सर्वाणि *sarvāṇi* — all; कर्माणि *karmāṇi* — actions; मयि *mayi* — unto me; सन्न्यस्या *sannyasya* — renouncing; अध्यात्म-चेतसा *adhyātma-cetasā* — with a mind that is discriminating; निराशीः *nirāśīḥ* — devoid of expectations with reference to the future; निर्ममः *nirmamaḥ* — devoid of 'mine-ness'; भूत्वा *bhūtvā* — being; विगत-ज्वरः *vigata-jvaraḥ* — without any anger or frustration; युध्यस्व *yudhyasva* - fight!

Renouncing all actions unto Me, with a mind that is discriminating, devoid of expectations with reference to the future and any sense of 'mine-ness,' without any anger or frustration whatsoever, fight!

The word 'Fight!' in this verse can refer to anything, beginning with one's daily battle of getting out of bed in the morning. Throughout the day also there are a number of situations to be faced. For *Arjuna*, what had to be faced was an actual battle. The battle was a *kartavyaṃ karma*, a 'to-be-done' action for him. Given all that *Arjuna* and *Kṛṣṇa* had said before, *Kṛṣṇa*'s mandate, 'Get up and fight!' was to be expected. It was neither a command nor advice; it was teaching. Having presented his arguments, *Kṛṣṇa* simply said, 'Do it!' Thus, there was a definite 'therefore' implied here, indicating teaching rather than a command or advice.

The rest of the verse deals with how *Arjuna* was to fight. First, 'giving up all activities, fight! *sarvāṇi karmāṇi sannyasya yudhyasva.*' There are two types of *sarva-karma-sannyāsa*, as we have seen. How can you fight if you have renounced all activities? It won't work. If, on the other hand, the mandate is, 'Renouncing all actions, go to a teacher and listen to the *śāstra* — *sarvāṇi karmāṇi sannyasya śravaṇam*

kuryāt, gurumevābhigacchet. Giving up all activities, burning all your bridges behind you — and your boats, too, if you have any — go for *mokṣa*. The giving up is meant for learning alone, meaning that you go to a teacher and study until you gain the knowledge that is *mokṣa*. Renunciation is purely for *mokṣa*, not for anything else.

We have seen how *sannyāsa* is a particular life-style that enables a person to renounce all activities in order to pursue knowledge. But, here, *sannyāsa* is used in conjunction with the mandate ‘Renouncing all activity, fight! *sarvāṇi karmāṇi sannyasya yudhyasva.*’ Fighting being an activity, what does giving up all activity mean? Does it mean that *Arjuna* is not to do anything other than fight? Performing only one action, give up every other activity — prayer, ritual, eating, sleeping, helping, everything — and fight!

WHAT DOES RENUNCIATION REALLY MEAN?

Obviously, because activity in the form of fighting is involved, this *sannyāsa* is other than what we have seen before. Here, it relates to doing what is to be done, which for *Arjuna* happens to be *yuddha*, fighting. *Kṛṣṇa* was not suggesting that *Arjuna* give up all activities and fight. This would not have been possible. What was intended here becomes much clearer when the word *mayi* ‘unto Me’ is taken into account. ‘Unto Me’ means ‘unto the Lord,’ thereby connecting the giving up, *sannyāsa*, with *karma-yoga*, meaning that all one's activities are offered unto the Lord.

In his commentary of this verse, *Śaṅkara* compares this offering of one's actions, to how a servant of a king goes about doing various activities without questioning how or why it is to be done: ‘I have been placed here to do this particular activity. This is how I have been asked to do it and therefore I do it.’

Similarly, whether you like it or not, you find yourself in a given situation that calls for a particular action. For *Arjuna*, it happened to be a battle, a fight. For another person, it may be something else. And, although *Arjuna* was a *kṣatriya*, doing what was to be done would not always mean fighting. If he had taken the expression ‘*sarvāṇi karmāṇi sannyasya yudhyasva*’ wrongly, he may have thought that he should always fight, which was not what was intended. Doing what is to be done is to be understood within the context of the situation one finds oneself in. Certain situations call for certain actions. Therefore, *yudhyasva*, can be taken to mean *kuruṣva*, do what is to be done and do it with an awareness of *Īśvara*.

Awareness of *Īśvara* is pointed out in the verse by the word, *adhyātma-cetasā*; *cetasā* meaning ‘with the mind.’ The mind should have *viveka*. *Adhyātma* means with reference to oneself. *Adhyātmacetā* enables you to know what is and what is not the right thing to do. This capacity is also called *viveka-buddhi*.

A *viveka-buddhi* says: 'I am a doer, of course, but I do this for the sake of *Īśvara* as a *bhṛtya*, the one who serves — *ahaṃ karta, īśvarasya bhṛtyavat karomi.*' The person who performs action in this way is a *mumukṣu*, a seeker. Because the person thinks of himself or herself as a *kartā*, he or she is a *karma-yogī*. There is an evolution that can take place here. One who is not a *karma-yogī* and who is totally deluded, *vimūḍhātmā*, is also a *kartā*, but still does *karma* for the results alone. His thought is, 'For my sake, I am doing this.' For a *vimūḍhātmā*, expediency and convenience take precedence over a more appropriate means when choosing a course of action. Even though he or she may have one eye on *dharma*, the other eye can be somewhat blind if the person thinks there is any justification for going against *dharma*.

YOU ARE PLACED IN SITUATIONS THAT YOU DID NOT CREATE

The *karma-yogī*, on the other hand, performs action quite differently — for the sake of *Īśvara*. Therefore, an awareness is necessary, which is *viveka* here — *adhyātma-cetasā* — with a mind that is awakened to *Īśvara*. 'Do all the activities that you are going to do, surrendering them unto me,' *Kṛṣṇa* said here. Why? Because you are placed in situations that you did not create. Nor does anything really belong to you; everything belongs to *Īśvara* alone. Thus, you are placed in certain situations and the order of *dharma* governing such situations is the Lord. The order determines what is expected of you in each situation and as a *karma-yogī* you do it with an awareness of this fact.

Further, *Kṛṣṇa* said, *nirāśīḥ nirmamaḥ bhūtvā yudhyasva*. *Nirāśīḥ* is one from whom all notions about the future, *āśā*, have gone. Future plans, goals, grandiose schemes, and priorities can stifle and inhibit one's present course of action with reference to what is to be done now. A person who thinks only of the future will compromise what is to be done in the present, thereby becoming a schemer. Such a person is not a *karma-yogī*; he or she is an *avivekī*, one who performs *karma* for the results alone. What is to be done is not done if it is inhibited by your own *āśā*. Thus, *nirāśī* is one who is not inhibited by futuristic ambitions, nor devoid of ambitions.

Nirmama means one from whom the *mamatva*, the mine-ness, is gone. Such a person no longer thinks in terms of, 'this is mine, this is not mine,' which also inhibits what is to be done. 'This is not my job. I am not getting anything out of this. Why should I do this when it is his job? He is supposed to do it.' This mine-ness or *mamatva* is the greatest villain in the maturing process of a person because, to be mature, one has to see only what is to be done. Therefore, *mamatva* should not interfere with one's doing what is to be done.

We can see by these two words *nirāśī* and *nirmama*, that *karma-yoga* is not an ordinary thing; it requires a lot of maturity and an awareness of the laws that are *Īśvara*. *Karma-yoga* does not mean that you should not receive wages for work you do,

although there may be situations where it would be more appropriate not to. What makes you a *karma-yogī* is simply the awareness of *Īśvara*, as we have seen before and will see again.

Another word given in this verse describing how one is to perform action is *vigatajvaraḥ*, meaning to be free from all anger and frustration. Suppose a man wants to do what is to be done in a given situation that *Īśvara* has placed him or her in, but thinks that *Īśvara* has placed him in a wrong situation? He acknowledges that *Īśvara* knows what he is doing, but still thinks of it as a wrong situation and becomes frustrated. This frustration is what is meant by *jvara*, leading to murmuring, complaining. By using the word *vigatajvara*, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* to fight cheerfully without a dash of complaint, frustration, despair, or anger.

Further, *Kṛṣṇa* said:

ये मे मतमिदं नित्यमनुतिष्ठन्ति मानवाः ।

श्रद्धावन्तोऽनसूयन्तो मुच्यन्ते तेऽपि कर्मभिः ॥ ३१ ॥

ye me matamidaṃ nityamanutiṣṭhanti mānavāḥ

śraddhāvanto'anasūyanto mucyante te'pi karmabhiḥ

Verse 31

श्रद्धावन्तः *śraddhāvantaḥ* — people who have faith; अनसूयन्तः *anasūyantaḥ* — those who do not find fault (not intolerant of the goodness in others); ये *ye* — those; मानवाः *mānavāḥ* — people; मे *me* — my; इदम् *idam* — this; मतम् *matam* — teaching; नित्यम् *nityam* — constantly; अनुतिष्ठन्ति *anutiṣṭhanti* — follow; ते *te* — they; अपि *api* — even; कर्मभिः मुच्यन्ते *karmabhiḥ mucyante* — are released by the *karmas* (*karma-phalas*)

Those people who constantly follow this teaching of Mine, full of faith, without *asūyā* (without finding fault with the teaching or the teacher), they too are released by the *karma-phalas*. (They are freed from the hold of the *karma-phalas* — they gain *mokṣa*.)

We have seen the three types of people who perform *karma*. One type were kings like *Janaka*, who were also *jñānīs*, wise men, all of whom remained active, even though they had the knowledge. They engaged themselves in activities simply because it was in their *prārabdha* to do so. They had to do it and therefore they did it. There was no reason not to. They had nothing to lose and others benefited from their actions.

Those who do nothing but teach, having gained the knowledge, can also be included in this group, teaching being an activity. *Sarva-karma-sannyāsa* is the renunciation of all activities in terms of knowledge alone. It is not to be taken literally, as we have seen. In terms of knowledge, you are not the doer. Knowing this frees you completely from all action, whether you perform activities or not. You may be a

sannyāsī or you may be very active in the world. In this way, then, there are two types of enlightened people, *sannyāsīs* and non-*sannyāsīs*, with reference to life-style. But in terms of knowledge, there is *sarva-karma-sannyāsa* for both.

Although *Janaka* was a king, engaged in a lot of activity, he was considered to be enlightened. Here, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that even if he was enlightened, he could continue to do *karma* for the benefit of the world, as *Janaka* did, for the sake of establishing *dharma* so that the people would be protected. *Kṛṣṇa* knew very well what his own mission was, saying: ‘Look at me. I too perform actions, not because I have something to accomplish, but because if I do nothing, others will follow my example, which would not be good for them.’ All this *Kṛṣṇa* pointed out.

A second type of people who perform *karma* are *avivekīs*, those who have no discrimination and therefore no desire for *mokṣa*. They are only interested in fulfilling their likes and dislikes, for which they engage in activities. More often than not, such people cut corners and sometimes take the wrong path in order to accomplish their ends. These people can only be asked to come to *dharma*. Let them pursue whatever they want to pursue according to *dharma*. That itself is a blessing.

ONE'S CHOICE IS SURRENDERED TO WHAT IS PROPER

Finally, for those who are *mumukṣu*, who have *rāga-dveṣas*, *Kṛṣṇa* pointed out *karma-yoga*. Such people can either take to *sannyāsa* or *karma-yoga*, either of which involves giving up, *tyāga*. For a *sannyāsī*, *tyāga*, means *karma-tyāga* as well as all other *tyāgas*, covering any pursuit or attachment. The person has to grow out of each and every one of them, renouncing them all, before becoming a *sannyāsī*.

Or one can be a *karma-yogī*. Such a person does what is to be done simply because it is to be done. The *karma-yogī*'s commitment to *mokṣa*, being what, it is, his or her choice of action has nothing to do with what he or she likes to do.

If, on the other hand, the emphasis is on doing what is convenient and what one likes to do, even a child will eventually question why he or she cannot do certain things. He or she will say, ‘Who are you to stop me? That is how you brought me up. Why, now that I am sixteen, are you trying to stop me from doing what I want to do? It doesn't make sense. You have always asked me what I want and this is what I want!’ The psyche tends to react in this way when this particular approach is taken.

Such an approach is not always right; nor does the world necessarily operate in such a way. Therefore, what is proper becomes important. To do what is proper may involve sacrifice in terms of your own pleasures, your own likes and dislikes. Unless you can give them up, it is impossible to always do what is to be done, *kartavya*. Therefore, propriety, not convenience, should be the ruling factor, all of which is implied in *karma-yoga*.

A *karma-yogī* is a *bhakta*, a devotee. Without devotion, without the awareness of *Īśvara*, there is no *karma-yoga*. Having said all this before, *Kṛṣṇa* again picked up this thread. Performing all activities for the Lord's sake is one great *yañña*, one great offering. What you have to do in the situation you find yourself in, is done as something that is dictated by *Īśvara*, meaning *karma*. *Karma* is the law and the law is *Īśvara*. The choice of doing this or that is given to you and that choice is surrendered to what is obvious. Each situation is nothing but *karma* unfolding itself and inherent in it is an obvious course of action, an expected action. This is what you do because this is how you have placed yourself based on your own past actions. And, whatever are the results of the actions you perform, you simply receive them as *prasāda*.

HOW KĪÂÛA'S VISION IS TO BE FOLLOWED

The verb in this verse is *anutiṣṭhanti*, meaning 'follow,' 'practice,' or 'live according to.' *Mānavāḥ* means those who come under the mandate of *Manu*, the ordainer of the law that is *Īśvara* — in other words, all human beings. And how long do they live this way? *Nityam* — always. This is not just a morning or evening practice; nor is it a Monday, Friday, or Sunday practice. It is a constant practice. And what is it that is practised? What do the people follow? They follow what was said by *Kṛṣṇa* — his vision, *me matam*, this particular *sādhana*, *karma-yoga*. And they follow it properly with *śraddhā* — *śraddhāvantaḥ anasuyantaḥ* — and with no intolerance towards the Lord, his vision, or the *karma-yoga* that he has advised as a means for gaining liberation, *mokṣa*.

The *śraddhā* mentioned in this verse is looking upon the words of the *śāstra*, the Veda, as unfolded by a teacher, as true. Whether one understands these words to be true or not, one at least accepts them in good faith. This *śraddhā* extends to the words of the *Gītā* as well, since the *Gītā* does not say anything other than what is said by the Veda. The English translation for *śraddhā* is faith. *Śraddhā* is operative when, even though these scriptures may seem to be contradictory according to your perception, you accept them and inquire into their message. *Śraddhā* grants you the disposition, the attitude, necessary for further pursuit.

WHAT YOU CAN KNOW IS DETERMINED BY WHAT YOU ALREADY KNOW

When you look at the *śāstra* in the form of sentences, you derive a certain meaning from it, based on what you already know. Only on the basis of what you already know can you absorb or understand any sentence, in fact. In other words, you do not understand more than what you already know. What you will understand of the *śāstra* is determined by where you are coming from and where you are right now. Based on your past experiences and present understanding, there is a predisposition to what a

sentence can reveal to you. Therefore, when you look at a sentence that has a new message to give, what can it give you? Can the intentions behind the sentence be understood?

The intention of a sentence is important in communication. When someone forms a sentence, the person has an intended meaning to convey and that meaning is what you should receive. Sometimes, however, the words spoken do not convey the intended meaning of the speaker. And even when the intended meaning is clearly conveyed, it is anyone's guess whether the listener or the reader will pick it up. This is especially true if the message is unlike anything that the listener already knows, whereas if the message is similar to what he or she knows, it is much easier for the person to pick it up. Using the knowledge he or she already has, the person can go further in his or her understanding of what is being conveyed. But if the message is entirely dissimilar, meaning that it is against everything the person has so far concluded about himself or herself and the world, it is not even mind-boggling; it simply sounds silly.

How can everything be one when all I see are differences? To say that these differences are false, that everything is *mithyā*, when so much of what is experienced is tangible — the walls, physical bodies, objects, even the microbes that bother me so much — makes no sense whatsoever because everything seems to be so real. This is because the word *mithyā* is not properly understood. Nor do the various translations help. One will translate *mithyā* as 'false,' another as 'illusion,' and still another as 'delusion.' To say that the world is any of these does not agree with my experience.

To say the world is an illusion is itself an illusion. The very concept is an illusion. If you consider the world an illusion, where does that leave you? Are you not in the world? And since you are, does this not mean that both you and your statement are an illusion? If the one who talks is an illusion and that which is talked about is illusion, then talking also is illusion. This being the case, everything becomes *satya* because the one who talks and what is talked about belong to the same category! If everything is illusion, where is *satya*? Thus, you can call everything *satya* or you can call it illusion. In Buddhism, everything is *mithyā* and, therefore, *mithyā* is *satya*. To say everything is *mithyā* means that everything becomes *satya*.

Therefore, words like illusion, delusion, and so on, simply do not convey what is intended unless there is an understanding of what *satya* is and what *mithyā* is. To appreciate their meanings, you must know *Vedānta*, which means you must know what the statement, '*tat tvam asi*' means. And, unless you know '*tat tvam asi*,' you will not understand '*tat tvam asi*'! Thus, we have an interesting paradox here. If you already know, '*tat tvam asi*,' you need not study '*tat tvam asi*.' And if you do not know '*tat tvam asi*,' how are you going to understand, '*tat tvam asi*'? It is for this reason that one needs a lot of *śraddhā* and a teacher who is well established in the knowledge. It is not a

simple matter. To study *Vedānta* requires *śraddhā*; otherwise, it will have no meaning whatsoever.

VEDĀNTA AS A PRAMĀṆA

Vedānta can never be the subject matter of academic pursuit because it is based purely upon *śraddhā*. The *śraddhā* is in the *śāstra* as a *pramāṇa*, for which supporting logic is given. Only when *Vedānta* is looked upon as a *pramāṇa*, a means of knowledge, does it have a value; otherwise, it has none.

When I say *Vedānta* is a *pramāṇa*, you have no way of proving that it is not a *pramāṇa* because one *pramāṇa* cannot be dismissed by another *pramāṇa*. This is because, for a *pramāṇa* to be dismissed by another *pramāṇa* it should be within the scope of the other *pramāṇa*. But, what a particular *pramāṇa* makes you know is not available for verification or dismissal by another *pramāṇa*. For example, when I see an object as yellow and it is really blue, only the eyes can disqualify what I saw as wrong. I may still see the object in the same way, but the eyes alone have to say, not the ears, that it is not yellow, it is blue. Due to some problem in the eyes, I may not be able to see it as blue. No other *pramāṇa* has a scope here.

Once a *pramāṇa* is accepted as an independent *pramāṇa*, then it has to prove itself as a *pramāṇa*, as a means of knowledge. For it to do so, you have to give the *pramāṇa* a chance. If you do not give the *pramāṇa* a chance, you should not talk against it. You cannot establish that a means of knowledge is not a *pramāṇa* just by talking about it. This is an unreasonable position to take and a person who knows it as a *pramāṇa* will have no interest in refuting such a stance. You have not allowed the *pramāṇa* to prove itself to you. A reasonable stance can only be taken after you have analysed the *pramāṇa* and worked with it. But you can only do this if you accept it as a *pramāṇa* in the first place — and to do this requires *śraddhā*. Therefore, when you work with it with *śraddhā*, it works. Only then can it prove itself.

THERE IS NO BASIS FOR OBJECTION

The *pramāṇa* says you are not a *jīva*, an individual, that individuality is just a notion. It says you are *param brahma*, a statement that is not something to be simply swallowed. It is to be understood. Because the *pramāṇa* is saying something desirable, what basis do you have for any objection? None. Since the *pramāṇa* says you are *Brahman*, then until you see that you are *Brahman*, you should work with it. If you see that you are *Brahman*, there is no problem. And if you do not, on what basis can you say you are not *Brahman*? You can only say, '*Vedānta* says I am *Brahman*. But I don't think I am and, besides, other people tell me I am an idiot. This seems to be more reasonable to me because it seems to be truer.'

When what is said by the *pramāṇa* is desirable, ‘You are the whole. You are *Brahman*,’ then you have to go for it. No one needs to tell you that you are not *Brahman*. This you knew long ago. That you are not *Brahman* is not something that you have to be taught by a scripture, a religion, prophets, or messiahs. The *śruti* is not telling you something you already know; it is telling you something you do not know. It says you are *Brahman*, which is something desirable. To hear that you are the whole is definitely not undesirable because the whole is exactly what you want to be.

Behind all your pursuits is the conclusion that you are small and it is from this conclusion that you seek to be free. The *śruti* tells you that you are already free from being small. Therefore, you have no basis for saying that what the *śruti* says is wrong.

You cannot prove that you are not *Brahman*. If you could, then *Brahman* would be within the scope of perception and inference, which it is not. Perception and inference are the means of knowledge available to me, the subject, *ātmā*, whose essence is *Brahman*. *Ātmā* is *Brahman*. Because *ātmā* is not an object to be known by perception or inference, you cannot prove that the self is not *Brahman*. This is why *śraddhā* in the *śruti* as a *pramāṇa* is necessary. And, because you have to understand what the statement, ‘*tat tvam asi*’ is, to be able to know it, you must go to someone who knows — a teacher.

You may say that if a teacher can come to know, then you also should be able to figure it out. But the teacher came to know because he or she had a *guru* and that *guru* came to know because he or she also had a *guru*. Like this, it goes on and on, right back to the first teacher. Lord *Kṛṣṇa* said, ‘By me alone it was taught at the beginning.’ And it works — if you have *śraddhā* in the *śruti* as a *pramāṇa*.

Śraddhā is an attitude that enables you to say, ‘The words are true; my understanding alone is not proper.’ And if *śraddhā* is not there, you will give it up, saying, ‘I have studied so many *Upaniṣads* and have concluded that *Vedānta* is just another trip. The *Upaniṣads* say that you are *Brahman* and other scriptures say that you are not. Which should I accept? They are all speculations. The very *Upaniṣads* themselves are contradictory.’ In this way, you can dismiss it all because of a lack of *śraddhā*.

WITHOUT ŚRADDHĒ CONFUSION IS INEVITABLE

While writing an introduction to the translation of *Śaṅkara’s Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya*, the author who had translated it as part of the Max Mueller Series wrote that *Śaṅkara* did not know the difference between *Brahman* and *Īśvara*. He based his conclusion on a few passages, saying that where the word *Brahman* appears in the text, *Śaṅkara* used the word *Parameśvara* and where the text says *Parameśvara*, he used the word *Brahman*. Translations by such people are very dangerous in that they totally

miss the point. Whether the word is *Parameśvara*, *paramātmā* or *Brahman*, it is all the same. The word *jīva* can also be included, since *jīva* and *Brahman* are also one and the same.

Śaṅkara used the word *Īśvara* in the sense of *Brahman* as the cause of the creation, *jagat-kāraṇaṃ brahma*. Sometimes he used *paraṃ brahma* and sometimes he used *Parameśvara*. The meaning is the same, as he explained very clearly. He used *Brahman* in the way he did because that is how the *śāstra* used it. The word *Brahman* is like that. *Parameśvara* is *Brahman*; *Brahman* is *Parameśvara* because he is the cause of the whole *jagat* — *jagat-kāraṇatvāt brahmaiva paramēśvaraḥ*.

When you accept the *pramāṇa* with *śraddhā* you do not dismiss what it says; rather, you doubt your understanding of what it says.

Because *Arjuna* had this attitude, he did not tell *Kṛṣṇa* that his words were contradictory; he merely said that they seemed to be contradictory. This, then, is what is meant by *śraddhā* and you need it all the way. Because *mokṣa* is in the form of knowledge, you require *śuddha-antaḥ-karaṇa*, a proper mind. And for that, you require *karma-yoga*, which is based upon *śraddhā* in the sense that you want to know that you are *Brahman*. Because this knowledge is contained in the *śāstra*, you have *śraddhā* in the *śāstra* as a means of knowledge, a *pramāṇa*. The people mentioned in the verse under study have this *śraddhā*, which is why they are called *śraddhāvantaḥ*.

Those who have *śraddhā* are also described here as *anasūyantaḥ*. To understand the meaning of this word, there are two Sanskrit words we should look at — *asūyā* and *mātsarya*. *Mātsarya* can be translated into English as jealousy. Suppose someone has gained something, some success, skill, wealth, knowledge, or some possession or other. Seeing the achievement of this person, another person may become unhappy. This unhappiness is jealousy. In Sanskrit it is paraphrased as, *parotkṛṣṭaṃ dr̥ṣṭvā jāyamānaḥ santāpaḥ mātsaryaḥ*.

The words, '*jāyamānaḥ santāpaḥ*' describe this jealousy, *santāpa* meaning sorrow, sadness, some affliction or uneasiness in the mind, and *jāyamāna*, meaning 'being born.' This uneasiness or discomfort that occurs in the mind is called jealousy. It can be seen even in the way the jealous person looks at the other person. This, then, is what is meant by *mātsarya*, jealousy.

Then there is *asūyā*, which means intolerance, another form of jealousy. *Asūyā* is when a person tries to find a defect in a person who has some virtues, *guṇeṣu doṣa-darśanam*. When a man praises the virtues of another man, you may say that he is praising him because he does not know him and you do. In fact, you have a long list of things to prove that the person is not at all virtuous.

Asūyā is the characteristic of always trying to find some skeletons in a person's closet — some lack, some blemish, in the person. You try to find some defect among the

person's virtues or in the very virtues themselves. Jealousy is unhappiness, in different degrees, over the success or happiness of others. But *asūyā*, also an expression of jealousy, goes one step further and finds fault with the people themselves.

TRYING TO FIND DEFECTS IN THE VISION IS NOT *ĀRADDHĒ*

Kṛṣṇa is talking here about people who have *śraddhā* in his vision, which is the *śruti*'s vision. Such people do not try to see defects in it so that they need not follow it. Those who attempt to find defects in the *śruti* always try to justify that what it is saying is not true. But this justification is always backed by a prior conclusion. Any justification is preceded by a conclusion. You conclude and then justify.

Even though the *śruti* can give the person *mokṣa*, still he or she finds some blemish in it. Such people will say, '*karma-yoga*? I have seen a lot of *karma-yogīs*. They suffer as much as I do! What have they accomplished? Nothing. They are still the same.' How does the person know they are the same? They alone know what they were before and what they are now; no one else knows. To say they are the same is nothing but the person's perception and that is not exactly a reliable criterion to follow here.

Those who have *śraddhā* in the vision of the *śruti* are different. They accept that *karma-yoga* will give them the *antaḥ-karaṇa* necessary for gaining the knowledge. Such people do not have any *asūyā*, meaning that they accept what is said by *Kṛṣṇa* gladly, and are therefore, *anasūyantaḥ*.

The verse says that they also get liberated, released by the *karmas*, — *te api karmabhiḥ mucyante*. By *karma-yoga*, when these people gain *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*, they are able to assimilate the knowledge that 'I am *jagat-kāraṇaṃ brahma*.' And because of this knowledge they are free of all the *karma-phalas* standing in their account, i.e., all the *sañcita-karmas*. This is what is meant by — *te api karmabhiḥ mucyante*. Because *Arjuna* wanted to be a *sannyāsī*, *Kṛṣṇa* tells him, '*sannyāsīs* are liberated and *karma-yogīs* are also liberated.

There is no question of *karma-yogīs* being second-rate here. The only difference between the two is that *sannyāsīs* pursue knowledge directly, to the exclusion of all else, and *karma-yogīs* prepare themselves for pursuing knowledge. There may be a time lag for a *karma-yogī*, with reference to gaining the knowledge, but this will also happen for a *sannyāsī* whose *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* is not complete.

The point here is that knowledge has to be gained. *Karma-yogīs* are also *mumukṣus*. They also gain liberation. Liberation is not gained by *sannyāsīs* alone. Without giving up *karma*, *karma-yogīs*, as well as *sannyāsīs*, are liberated from all *karmas*. Thus, the word *api*, when taken to mean 'also,' can create confusion, whereas when it is taken to mean 'as well' there is no confusion at all.

ये त्वेतदभ्यसूयन्तो नानुतिष्ठन्ति मे मतम् ।

सर्वज्ञानविमूढांस्तान् विद्धि नष्टानचेतसः ॥ ३२ ॥

*ye tvetadabhyasūyanto nānutiṣṭhanti me matam
sarvajñānavimūḍhāṃstān viddhi naṣṭānacetasah*

Verse 32

तु *tu* — whereas; ये *ye* — those who; अभ्यसूयन्तः *abhyasūyantaḥ* — being critical without reason; एतत् *etat* — this; मे *me* — My; मतम् *matam* — vision; न अनुतिष्ठन्ति *na anutiṣṭhanti* — do not follow; — सर्व-ज्ञान-विमूढान् *sarva-jñāna-vimūḍhān* — deluded in all realms of knowledge; अचेतसः *acetasaḥ* — devoid of discrimination; तान् *tān* — them; नष्टान् *naṣṭān* — as lost; विद्धि *viddhi* — know

Whereas those who, being critical without reason do not follow my vision, know them, who are deluded in all realms of knowledge, and devoid of discrimination, as lost.

In the previous verse, *Kṛṣṇa* spoke of those who followed his vision, his *mata*, meaning the vision of *Īśvara*, *Īśvarasya matam*. Such people follow with *śraddhā*, without having any *asūyā*, without trying to find fault with the vision. In other words, they are *karma-yogīs*. They too, *te api*, gain liberation just as *sannyāsīs* do.

For *Kṛṣṇa* to have said that two types of people gain liberation, *mokṣa*, is in keeping with what he said in the beginning about there being only two life-styles, *niṣṭhās* for *mokṣa* — either *sannyāsa* or *karma-yoga*. There is no third *niṣṭhā* at all. Whether one is a renunciate or a *karma-yogī*, liberation can be gained.

Throughout the *Gītā*, there is often a ‘*tu* – whereas,’ indicating that a contrast, which may seem to be a criticism, is being made to bring out the point *Kṛṣṇa* was making. Suppose, for example, *Kṛṣṇa* had said, ‘This particular thing will release you and is therefore good for you.’ He would then also say, ‘And if you do not follow this, you will have this particular problem.’ In other words, if you have knowledge, you are free and if you do not, you have *saṃsāra*.

Here, the particle ‘*tu*,’ is to denote such a contrast. This particle also indicates an answer to a question, even though the question may not actually be stated. The question may simply be implied and the answer to it is introduced by ‘*tu*.’ ‘*Tu*’ is also used for emphasis. In this verse, however, ‘*tu*’ contrasts people who do not follow the Lord’s vision with those who do.

Jñāna-yoga or *sannyāsa*, of course, is too far removed for those who do not follow *Kṛṣṇa*’s vision, whereas *karma-yoga*, on the other hand, is possible for such people. But, even this they do not follow — *na anutiṣṭhanti*. Instead, they perform *karmas* solely to fulfil their own *rāga-dveṣas*, without considering whether this approach can give them what they really want in life.

Human life implies the use of reason, *viveka*; it is not just a matter of doing whatever one wants. People tend to think that they have to fulfil whatever desire pops up in their heads. This behaviour is natural for an animal, but not for a human being. If a dog feels like barking, it is natural for it to bark. The dog need not think about whether it should bark or not, nor does it have the discriminating *buddhi* to do so. Whereas, if you feel like shouting, you can always refrain from doing so because you have a free will with a discriminating *buddhi*.

LIVING A HUMAN LIFE IMPLIES DISCRIMINATION

In order to live the life of a human being, a person has to make use of this *buddhi*, *viveka*. *Kṛṣṇa* was talking here about those who do not make use of their *viveka* — in other words, those who do not follow his *mata* because they have *asūyā* — they are *abhyasūyantaḥ*. To justify how they are living, they find some blemish or other with reference to *Kṛṣṇa*'s vision. They criticise it, disregard it, and put forth endless arguments to justify what they are doing. Being critical, finding blemishes in this *mata*, they do not follow it.

With reference to these people, *Kṛṣṇa* says, 'Please know them, *tān viddhi*.' Understand those who do not follow this vision to be *sarva-jñāna-vimūḍhāḥ* — *sarveṣu jñāneṣu vimūḍhāḥ*, deluded in terms of all forms of knowledge.

Such people are deluded about their familial and social obligations, which come under *karma-yoga*. They are deluded with respect to national obligations also. They do not even remember or think about the many forces, *devatās*, that are constantly at work to keep them going and towards whom there are certain obligations. All these obligations are disregarded by those who do not follow *Kṛṣṇa*'s vision. Instead, they think that the family, the society, and the nation are obliged to them! They think that the society should protect them and help them gain whatever it is that they want and, if the society fails to do this, then the national government should do it.

People who think this way are self-centred, interested only in their own welfare, which means fulfilling their *rāgas* and *dveṣas*, unmindful of the welfare and interests of others. Thus, with reference to *dharma* and *adharmā*, right and wrong, they are deluded, *vimūḍhās*. They are also *vimūḍhās* with reference to *ātmā* and *anātmā*, what is real and not real, what is true and not true. With reference to all human pursuits *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *mokṣa*, they are *vimūḍhās*. Even with reference to eating, they are deluded — they do not know what to eat, what not to eat, how much to eat, and so on. Without becoming a faddist, a person should know the basics of what is important in life. But, for these people, delusion is rampant; it exists everywhere. This is the meaning of *sarva* in the expression, *sarva-jñāna-vimūḍhāḥ*. At all levels of understanding, there is delusion. Thus, we are to know that the people being discussed here are totally deluded.

ALL UNDERSTANDING REQUIRES DISCRIMINATION

At all levels of understanding there is *viveka* involved. This *viveka* has to be applied with reference to performing actions and responding to situations. When people do not have *viveka*, we should understand that they are deluded. Their delusion is not in terms of having a low IQ. If such were the case, we would not be talking about them at all. Their only problem is that they lack discrimination in the sense that they have the capacity to discriminate, but they do not make use of it. Therefore, they are *avivekīs*. *Kṛṣṇa* referred to them as *acetasaḥ*. And because they lack discrimination, they are deluded in every way.

Such people are to be understood as lost. So he says, *tān naṣṭān viddhi* — know them to be lost. *Naṣṭa* is one who is lost to everything, one who does not get what is to be gained in this world. Even though the people being discussed here may have money and power, from the standpoint of *viveka*, from the standpoint of what they really want, they are definitely *naṣṭas*. If, in the process of gaining money and power, a number of conflicts are also gained, one has to question whether the money and power are worth having.

A *vivekī* is one who always thinks about whether what he or she wants is good for him or her. One may want money for one's own happiness and peace, but if, in the process, one also buys a lot of conflicts, sorrow, and sleepless nights, then the money is worthless to him or her. It may be useful to someone else, but not to him or her. If conflict accompanies any gain, the bargain is a bad one. How bad it is has to be seen and your ability to do so is always in proportion to the discriminative power you have.

A mature person, one who has *viveka*, is one who sees the immensity of the loss involved when something is gained. When whatever you want to gain involves a great loss in terms of your happiness, your peace of mind, *śānti*, you should be able to see the laws at work and refrain from the pursuit. This is what is meant by *viveka* and maturity. When you take all the pros and cons into account, you may find that what seemed like a good bargain is not really a bargain after all.

Thus, the *vivekī* is one who is not *naṣṭa*, lost. Those who are *naṣṭa* are lost in the sense that they do not get anything here in this world, much less in the hereafter. They are not dead; they are lost and this we are to know. In Chapter 2, we have seen how this same idea was expressed. There too the word *praṇaśyati*, he is destroyed, was used.¹

There it was said that, for the one who dwells upon a given object, *dhyāyataḥ puṃsām*, there develops an affection, some love, for the object. And what a person loves, he or she wants to have; thus, with reference to the object, a desire is born —

¹ Refer to the verses 62 and 63 of Chapter 2.

kāmaḥ upajāyate. If the desire is fulfilled, there is no problem. Only if it is not fulfilled is there a problem.

Not fulfilling a desire is more common than fulfilling it. Therefore, the unfulfilled desire leads to *krodha*, anger. And once anger comes, you are lost. Among other things, anger brings about an inner torpor and prevents you from understanding the true situation. Whatever you had learned in the past from similar situations is not available to you when you are angry. You may have burned your fingers before, but the wisdom gathered in the past is not at your service once *krodha* has overtaken you. In the midst of anger, the memory, *smṛti*, does not work and your discriminative power, *viveka-śakti* is gone. The knowledge one has with reference to what is to be done, what is not to be done, the *kārya-akārya-viveka*, your inquiry, etc., are all lost. That is, *buddhi-nāśa* takes place.

When the *buddhi*, *cetas*, is gone, the person is destroyed, lost — *praṇaśyati*. Why? Because it is the *buddhi* that makes the person a human being. If the *buddhi* is gone, there is a problem. While we are to understand that such a person is lost, the loss is not an irretrievable one. At any time, the person can become a *vivekī*; therefore, he or she is only lost for the time being. This we also must know. Because of some grace, these people may again question what they are doing and thereby alter their course. Any criminal can become a saint. The possibility for change is always there because the person has a *buddhi*. But, for the time being, the people *Kṛṣṇa* was talking about in this verse are lost.

Śaṅkara introduces a question here in his commentary. Given that *Kṛṣṇa* had made his vision, his *mata*, so very clear, why do these people not follow it? What *Kṛṣṇa* had said is reasonable and well explained. When the *niṣṭhā*, the *karma-niṣṭhā*, he talks about, has been so carefully reasoned out, why do the people not follow it? Why do they follow something else?

The reason given is that each one acts according to his or her nature, *svabhāva*. Because animals are programmed to behave in a certain manner, nothing can be done about it. Thus, when a donkey brays or a tiger kills, it is because it is their nature, their *svabhāva*, to do so. A human being also has a *svabhāva*. Some past, perhaps even a remote past, is there for the person and that becomes his or her *svabhāva*. Whatever the person does is in keeping with his or her *svabhāva* alone.

The next two verses are particularly beautiful in this respect:

सदृशं चेष्टते स्वस्याः प्रकृतेर्ज्ञानवानपि ।

प्रकृतिं यान्ति भूतानि निग्रहः किं करिष्यति ॥ ३३ ॥

*sadr̥śaṃ ceṣṭate svasyāḥ prakṛterjñānavānapi
prakṛtiṃ yānti bhūtāni nigrahaḥ kiṃ kariṣyati*

Verse 33

ज्ञानवान् *jñānavān* — a wise person; अपि *api* — even; स्वस्याः *svasyāḥ* — one's own; प्रकृतेः *prakṛteḥ* — nature; सदृशम् *sadrśam* — in keeping with; चेष्टते *ceṣṭate* — acts; भूतानि *bhūtāni* — beings; प्रकृतिम् *prakṛtim* — (one's own) nature; यान्ति *yānti* — follow; निग्रहः *nigrahaḥ* — control; किम् *kim* — what; करिष्यति *kariṣyati* — will do

Even a wise person acts in keeping with his or her own nature. Because all beings follow their own nature, of what use is control?

Prakṛti is used to mean 'nature' here because cause is involved in the sense that one's actions are determined by one's nature. This applies to everyone, *Kṛṣṇa* says, even to a person who has knowledge, *jñānavān api*. The only difference is that the nature, the *prakṛti*, of a wise person is good and, therefore, his or her actions will be good. This is the idea being conveyed here. And, if even a *jñānī*, a person of knowledge, performs actions according to his or her own *svabhāva*, his or her own nature, what control is possible?

Action in keeping with one's own *svabhāva* applies to all living beings, including trees. If a tree is a sandalwood tree, the whole tree will have a particular aroma, not just its flowers. Every tree, flower, plant, insect, bird, animal, and human being, including the *jñānī*, behaves and acts according to *prakṛti* — *prakṛtiṃ yānti bhūtāni*.

ONE'S NATURE CANNOT BE CONTROLLED

Prakṛti being what it is, neither the doer of the action nor anyone else can control it. *Kṛṣṇa* himself cannot control it, as *Śaṅkara* points out in his commentary. This is because the person has been given free will, which gives him or her the capacity to say no to anything. Therefore, what is there that can control it — *nigrahaḥ kiṃ kariṣyati*? Unless the person listens to *Kṛṣṇa*'s vision and decides to behave differently, how is he or she going to stop a particular behaviour or action? And if the person chooses not to listen, there is no 'don't' that can control what such a person does.

Because everyone acts in keeping with his or her *svabhāva*, no control is possible, be it *Kṛṣṇa*'s or the person's own control. Even if the *guru* says to stop a particular behaviour, how is the person going to stop? All that will happen is that he or she will continue the behaviour stealthily. The *Gītā* also is incapable of controlling the person since it is his or her *svabhāva* to act in such a way.

But if everyone behaves according to his or her own nature, are we not going to have a problem? Where is free will in all this? If everyone were in the hands of *prakṛti* doing whatever is to be done according to his or her nature, no one would have any say over his or her action. Of what use is free will then?

If free will is not a factor, there is no such thing as right and wrong. For right and wrong to be, free will must have a sphere and, if all action is in keeping with *prakṛti*,

there is no such sphere. There seems, then, to be no scope for *dharma-śāstra* in all of this. If free will is not involved, what is the use of such statements as, ‘Go to a *guru* and listen,’ ‘Do this or that; otherwise you will get into trouble,’ ‘Do this and you will get this,’ and so on? All such advice, along with the entire *dharma-śāstra* and *Vedānta-śāstra* would have no usefulness.

But, because you have free will, these books do have a usefulness. Therefore, the guru can say, ‘Do this and don’t do that.’ The Veda says not to eat meat, drink alcohol, or hurt another person. These are all mandates of the *śāstra*. But they are not simply arbitrary mandates. Why certain things should be done and other things should not be done is explained in a most reasonable way and the necessary rationales are presented. But to whom are these reasonable mandates given? If everyone is behaving according to one’s own nature, why is there a *dharma-śāstra* at all?

The animals do not have a *dharma-śāstra* because they behave according to their nature. Animals also do not have any will. Even if you nicely ask a tiger not to kill anyone, it may pounce on you because it thinks you are going to attack it. Nor can you ask a cat not to mew. It will simply keep on mewling. This is why such creatures do not have books on ethics and scriptures. Nor do they join any congregation, let alone work for *mokṣa*.

The mandates are addressed only to human beings because they have free will. But, here, *Kṛṣṇa* was saying that each one behaves according to his or her *prakṛti* and nothing can stop it. This came like a big bombshell for *Arjuna* because he had always thought that he should do something. Now *Kṛṣṇa* was saying, ‘No, no. You just go by your *prakṛti* because nothing can stop it anyway.’ What does this all mean?

Here, then, there is something that we must understand and *Kṛṣṇa* began his explanation in the next verse.

इन्द्रियस्येन्द्रियस्यार्थे रागद्वेषौ व्यवस्थितौ ।
तयोर्न वशमागच्छेत्तौ ह्यस्य परिपन्थिनौ ॥ ३४ ॥

*indriyasyendriyasyārthe rāgadveṣau vyavasthitau
tayorna vaśamāgacchetau hyasya paripanthinau*

Verse 34

इन्द्रियस्य इन्द्रियस्य अर्थे *indriyasya indriyasya arthe* — with reference to the object of every sense organ; राग-द्वेषौ *rāga-dveṣau* — attachment and aversion; व्यवस्थितौ *vyavasthitau* — are there; तयोः *tayoḥ* — of these two; वशम् *vaśam* — spell; न *na* — not; आगच्छेत् *āgacchet* — should come under; हि *hi* — because; तौ *tau* — these two; अस्य *asya* — one's; परिपन्थिनौ *paripanthinau* — enemies

There is attachment and aversion with reference to every sense object.
May one not come under the spell of these two because they are one's enemies.

Repetition of the word *indriyasya* here is an example of a language style used in Sanskrit, called *vīpsā*. First, let us take the expression *indriyasya arthe*, meaning 'with reference to an object, *arthe* of a given sense organ *indriyasya*' — in other words, a sense object. By repeating the word *indriyasya*, in the phrase, *indriyasya indriyasya arthe*, the meaning conveyed is — with reference to every sense object. The repetition conveys the meaning of 'every.'

This verse tells us that, with reference to every sense object, there are two factors present; *rāga* and *dveṣa*, likes and dislikes. This verse is the key to everything that has been said thus far and contains the entire psychology of the *Gītā*. The senses themselves do not have an aversion or an attachment to the sense objects. They are merely reporters. What is said here is that with reference to every sense object, there can be *rāga* or *dveṣa*, on the part of a human being — *indriyasya indriyasya arthe rāga-dveṣau vyavasthitau*. This is a statement of fact.

LIKES AND DISLIKES ARE DUE TO PRAKĪTI

With reference to any sense object — sound (*śabda*), touch (*śparśa*), form or colour (*rūpa*), taste (*rasa*), or smell (*gandha*) — there are likes and dislikes. Everyone has his or her own likes and dislikes, even the *devas*. Angels also have their own likes and dislikes. And why are these likes and dislikes present? Because of *prakṛti*, one's own nature. In this, you have no say at all.

This is why when you tell someone, 'I love you,' and the person asks, 'Why?' you can only invent an answer! You do not really know why you love a person. Although one can say it is without reason, there is definitely a reason. So, if you look into your psyche and ask yourself what is it that makes you like a particular person, you will find a reason. This is why everyone has a person to like. In fact, he or she has been looking for that person. So many others came before, but not this one. Then, suddenly the person appeared and there was an electrifying experience.

All that can be said is that you love someone because of your *svabhāva*, which can be called your subconscious. There is something, causing you to love the person. The subconscious is the *prakṛti*, which may be the result of one's own past. If a man has to live his life with a certain woman or if a woman has to live her life with this man, however miserable the person may be, there will be a liking for the person and the Lord alone knows why!

Being married to and living with another person is no joke. It is something that is definitely going to change the person's life. Both pain and pleasure will be there, depending upon who the person is. And why did you choose this person from among all the other people in the world? You cannot say that the Pizza Hut where you first met was responsible! You have seen many people in the Pizza Hut and nothing happened. If you had not met there, you would have met somewhere else. So it is not a particular place that is responsible. This particular meeting took place because of something within yourself. That which connects two people in this way is called *karma*.

Śaṅkara says that *karma*, *prārabdha-karma*, plays a role — *saṃskāras* of *dharma* and *adharma*, *puṇya* and *pāpa* being there in everyone. This is why one person likes another person. In this life too, from childhood onwards, one picks up a lot of likes and dislikes unknown to oneself. These are all buried in the person's subconscious and this 'sub,' like a submarine, will also surface. And it always surfaces at the right time.

In the previous verse, *Kṛṣṇa* said that everyone acts in accordance with his or her own nature. One expresses one's nature in terms of *rāgas* and *dveṣas*, over which no control is possible. In the present verse, in the second line, free will is brought in — 'Do not come under the spell of these two likes and dislikes — *tayoḥ vaśaṃ na āgacchet*.'

Kṛṣṇa did not say, 'do not have likes and dislikes.' Such a statement would have been meaningless. He was simply saying, 'May you not come under their spell.'

THE LOGIC OF THE MIND

The mind behaves according to its own logic. It is meaningless to tell someone not to entertain a particular thought. The more the person tries not to have this thought, the more he or she will have it. In fact, it may even become an obsession, a fixation. If you try to avoid anything, in the name of avoiding it, it is necessarily right there in your mind. For example, if I tell a man that when he chants a particular *mantra*, he should not think of a monkey, what will happen? Because he wants to follow my advice, before chanting the *mantra* he will remember my advice, 'Don't think of a monkey.' In order to avoid thinking of a monkey, he must think of the very thing that he is to avoid — monkey! And, after some time, he will not just see one monkey; he will see all the varieties of monkeys he has seen in his life.

If I ask you to think of a monkey, only one monkey will come to mind. One that has previously created an impact on your mind. One person may think of a rhesus monkey or an Indian monkey. Another may think of a chimpanzee or of King Kong. In any event, only one monkey will come to mind. However, if you want to avoid the thought of this particular monkey, you would find any number of monkeys coming, one by one, starting with your own monkey, followed by a rhesus monkey, then a chimpanzee, a gorilla, King Kong, rat monkeys, and a variety of African monkeys! They will all come, one by one, all because you want to avoid thinking about a monkey.

To tell someone not to think of a particular object is meaningless. This is where free will comes in. The statement, ‘Do not come under their spell — *tayoḥ vaśam na āgacchet* — implies your will. Problems always arise when we try to avoid the thoughts themselves. Some people spend their lifetime trying to avoid certain thoughts because they are told that some thoughts are good and others are bad. In the process, they remain stuck with the very thoughts they are trying to avoid! In fact, these thoughts have nothing to do with you; they have only to do with *prakṛti*.

Therefore, what can you do about thoughts? If a commoner happens to see a princess and develops a *rāga*, a desire, for her, what is he to do? Because of his status, he cannot even enter the palace and yet he has a great love for the princess. He can love her alright, but he can hardly proceed on that love.

What control do you have over liking a person? None. Nor should you have any control. In fact, you should leave it alone because if you try to control it, you will be in trouble. You will be meddling with your mind and when you rub against your mind, you rub against nature. And in this process you get rubbed too.

YOU CANNOT AVOID HAVING CERTAIN THOUGHTS

Some of our modern spiritual literature is replete with statements declaring that you should avoid having certain thoughts. There are so many do's and don'ts that a seeker becomes nothing but a pack of nerves! Prior to becoming a seeker, the person was much more acceptable to himself or herself, but after reading so many books, the person finds so much garbage in his or her mind. Because *mokṣa* is beyond all concepts of good and bad and beyond concepts themselves, cultivating and avoiding good and bad thoughts becomes meaningless. All thought is *prakṛti*.

And how is your will involved here? Will is not to determine what you should and should not think, but how far you should go with the thoughts that arise. Your activities are not caused by the likes and dislikes appearing in your mind but by your identification with them. Because you are identified with your *rāga-dveṣas*, you go along with them — ‘you’ being the will.

The commoner who discovered a love for the princess just leaves his *rāga* alone if he is an intelligent man, that is, if he is a *vivekī*, one who has discrimination. If he is not a *vivekī*, he will go along with his *rāga* and get beaten up in the process.

Therefore, allow the *rāga-dveṣas* to be what they are. The mind is a beautiful instrument as long as you let it think and do not meddle with it. Otherwise, you will be in for problems. It takes very little time to become insane.

What is being said here is, while you can go by your likes and dislikes, you should make use of your free will to do what is right and avoid doing what is wrong. This is *karma-yoga*. Do not come under the spell of your *rāga-dveṣas*. Because, if you do, they become enemies for you. The *rāga-dveṣas* themselves do not form the enemies; it is your coming under their spell that turns them into your foes. When you are under the spell of your *rāga-dveṣas*, you do not do what is to be done and you do what is not to be done. In this way, *rāga-dveṣas* become obstacles for you.

This means that likes and dislikes are those into whose hands you deliver yourself. It is these *rāga-dveṣas* that become your obstacles. Such likes and dislikes become binding and, therefore, enemies. Because they rob away your reason, they are likened to thieves and become your enemies — *tau hi asya paripanthinau*. Therefore, without worrying about what happens in the mind, simply go by what is to be done and not to be done.

Further, *Kṛṣṇa* said:

श्रेयान्स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात् ।

स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मो भयावहः ॥ ३५ ॥

śreyānsvadharmo viguṇaḥ paradharmātsvanuṣṭhitāt
svadharme nidhanaṁ śreyaḥ paradharmo bhayāvahaḥ

Verse 35

सु-अनुष्ठितात् परधर्मात् *su-anuṣṭhitātparadharmāt* — as compared to the well-performed *dharma* of another; विगुणः *viguṇaḥ* — imperfect; स्वधर्मः *svadharmaḥ* — one's own *dharma*; श्रेयान् *śreyān* — better; स्वधर्मे *svadharme* — in one's own *dharma*; निधनम् *nidhanam* — death; श्रेयः *śreyaḥ* — is better; परधर्मः *paradharmaḥ* — the *dharma* of another; भयावहः *bhayāvahaḥ* — is fraught with fear

Better is one's own imperfectly performed *dharma* than the well-performed *dharma* of another. Death in one's own *dharma* is better. The *dharma* of another is fraught with fear.

We have seen that with reference to sense objects — forms, sounds, smells, tastes, etc., certain objects are looked upon as desirable while others are not. These likes and

dislikes arise in your mind in the form of various types of wants, for which you are not responsible. It is here that the *śāstra* comes in.

Wherever there is doership and enjoyership centred on free will, wherever free will has access, the *śāstra* has its sphere of influence. The *śāstra* deals with *dharma* and *adharma* – right and wrong, *satya* and *mithyā* – the real and the unreal. All these are dependent on *viveka*, *vicāra*, discriminative inquiry, for the person who is free. Therefore, the *śāstra* is not deemed to be useless simply because the previous verse declared that each person behaves according to his or her own nature, which cannot be controlled.

This *prakṛti*, one's nature, is only with reference to the appearance of *rāga-dveṣas* in the form of various thoughts arising in your mind. It is true that your *svabhāva*, your nature, is responsible for the appearance of these *rāga-dveṣas*, but whether you go along with them depends entirely upon you. There are always certain governing factors for any course of action. What is proper, what is useful to you, what is feasible — all determine which *rāga*, which like, you choose to follow or fulfil. Certain norms of pragmatism and ethics, *dharma* and *adharma*, also have to be taken into account.

AN ETHICAL PERSON NEED NOT NECESSARILY BE A KARMA-YOGĪ

If there is an awareness of *Īśvara* in your choice of action, it is *karma-yoga*. Until then, it is simply the choice of a mature person. A mature person is one who has ethics, for which one need not have religion. Bertrand Russell, for example, wrote a book called, 'Why I am not a Christian.' He never claimed to have any religious leanings and even wrote, in so many words, that he had nothing to do with such matters. At the same time, this man was a clean person and the first to raise his voice against the proliferation of nuclear weapons. He was a man of great ethics without having any religion.

Any thinking person understands ethics. Everyone knows what others should and should not do to him or her; everyone also knows that others expect the same in return. Thus, ethics are born of common sense, not of religion, and can be understood more clearly and assimilated if the person has a certain degree of maturity. One's own experiences in life and understanding are enough to understand what is proper and improper. Thus, no one needs religious scriptures or mandates in order to be an ethical person.

However, the religious scriptures of the world add something to ethical values. They say that if you perform an improper action, you cannot get away with it; you will have to pay for it later. This is where the concepts of *puṇya* and *pāpa*, merit and demerit, come in. According to the *karma* performed, there is a certain result that comes to you. It is like a ticket you get from a parking violation, which is not going to be as

severe as a ticket from a speeding offence. Similarly, according to the *karma* performed, there is a result, called *adr̥ṣṭa-phala* — *punya* and *pāpa*. That there is such a result as *adr̥ṣṭa-phala* is additional information gleaned from the scriptures. But for merely understanding what is ethical and unethical, religion is not required.

Thus, a person can be ethical without being a *karma-yogī*. He or she becomes a *karma-yogī* only when there is an appreciation on the part of the person that *Īśvara* is the giver of the results of action, *karma-phala-dātā*. A *karma-yogī* is a *bhakta*, a devotee, one who does not look upon one's possessions as one's own. For such a person, a physical body is given, a mind is given, the world is given, opportunities are given, resources are given, skills are given, time is given, place is given. Everything is given.

Only when one appreciates the given, and also the giver behind the given, is there *karma-yoga*. Ethically, therefore, one can be clean, but this in itself is not *karma-yoga* — all of which has been pointed out.

If what is to be done by you at this time and place and what you want to do, happen to concur, then your action is spontaneous and no thinking is required. Also, when what is not to be done is something that you do not want to do, avoidance or withdrawal from such an action is spontaneous. Even if someone asks you to do it, your 'no' is spontaneous because you do not have any such inclination and, also, the action is not to be done.

SPONTANEOUS ACTION

Thus, with reference to certain *rāgas* and *dveṣas* there is spontaneity because you are in harmony with *dharma*. You do not rub up against anything. The laws are not being rubbed against; in fact, you are in harmony with the whole set-up. But if your *rāga-dveṣas* do not conform to right and wrong, *dharma* and *adharmā*, there is a rub. This is why Lord *Kṛṣṇa* also said here, 'Death in your own *dharma* is better; the *dharma* of another is fraught with fear — *svadharme nidhanaṃ śreyaḥ paradharmo bhayāvahaḥ*.'

The choice you have is only with reference to what you are going to do, you have no choice whatsoever about what happens in your head. Thoughts just happen and you have no control over them. But whether you go along with them or not, is definitely subject to choice. *Svadharmā* means what is to be done by oneself, one's own *dharma*, *dharma* meaning *karma* here.

In a society where the duties are very well spelled out, each person knows exactly what is expected of him or her. In the Vedic culture, for example, each of the four groups of people, *varṇas*, had certain duties, which were very clearly defined. For a person of a given *varṇa* who is a student, there are certain duties. Then, as a householder or married

person, he or she has a different set of duties. So, too, for a *vānaprastha*, one who is preparing for a life-of renunciation.

Although such clearly defined systems no longer operate in the world, one thing is clear: in any given situation, there is a certain response required on your part in terms of action and this becomes your duty. Duty is not something that you have to be told about by someone, really speaking. It becomes evident as you look at the situation that you are in and understand it as it is. In this way, what is to be done becomes obvious to you.

If you do not understand the situation you find yourself in, you can always seek the help of someone in order to understand what your duty is in terms of what should and should not be done. Someone who is more informed, who has more experience, or who is more capable, and placed in such a way that he is able to spell out your duties, can do this for you.

The concept of *svadharma* needs to be seen also in the spirit of this verse. In terms of one's own *karma*, *svadharma*, what is to be done is to be done even if one is destroyed in the process. Doing one's own *karma* is far better than doing the *karma* of another person, meaning that it is useless to want to do what someone else is doing. Do only what you have to do.

Suppose the goalkeeper in a soccer game decides to run like the other players do, because the ball never seems to come to him anyway, it would be a disaster. In other words, if he decides to do the job of the other players, even though it is his job to stand between the posts, it would not work. What is being said here is that if standing between the posts is your job, you had better do it. If the ball does not come to you, it means the other team is not scoring goals and, if it comes too often, you can enjoy the action. It is not as though you are always going to be just standing there. Sometimes, there will be some action to perform. Just because the other players run, does not mean that you should run.

Similarly, the job of a bolt in a piece of machinery is to sit tight. But, suppose the bolt is teased by the piston that says, 'Why aren't you doing any action? I am the only one doing anything here. All you are doing is sitting there tightly. Why don't you do something?' Hearing this once or twice, the bolt may simply say, 'This fellow is just blabbering. My job is to sit tight. That's how my maker, the manufacturer, made me. Therefore, let me ignore what the piston is saying.' But, eventually, the bolt may think, 'Why should I not also move? I think the piston is actually making some sense. After all, I do sit tightly all the time while he keeps going. Should I not also do something? Then he may become my friend. I am also a part of the machinery. Why shouldn't I do anything?'

Having decided thus, the bolt has to struggle to move because it has been sitting so tightly for a long time. It tries to move one way and cannot. Then it tries to move the

other way and begins to shift. Happily, it says, 'I am also doing now. I am also doing now. I am also doing now. I am also doing now...' Whereupon the bolt falls to the ground! Before any time at all, the piston also falls out and the entire mechanism comes to a standstill — all because of one bolt wanting to do someone else's job!

Can any job be said to be really better than another? Which is better for the bolt — sitting tightly or moving? Jobs differ. One fellow's job is to sit tightly. Another's job is to move. One is not to do the job of the other person in the overall scheme of things. Because someone is working hard on a construction site does not mean that someone else has to do the same. Working hard is not the issue. What is to be understood is that there are different types of work. Sitting tight is also difficult work because, even though there is a tendency to move, you should not move if, for example, you are an orderly in an intensive care unit.

Similarly, each one has his or her own duty to perform in a given situation and that duty is only to be done by the person whose duty it is. It is better to die guarding your post than to do something else just because it is more convenient, more remunerative, more likeable, and so on. This does not work at all.

You see this problem everywhere in today's society. If you have monetary satisfaction, you may not have job satisfaction and, if you have job satisfaction, you may not have monetary satisfaction. You may love your job, but you cannot own even a small house. Paying rent is also a problem so that you find yourself still living in a one-room apartment. If you have job satisfaction, but such satisfaction does not produce the money you need, what kind of job satisfaction is this?

A man who is in this situation usually becomes more practical when he marries. He gives up the job he loves and takes another. In terms of money, it is a better job, but now he is sitting in front of a computer all day long, the additional money providing him with no job satisfaction whatsoever.

SVADHARMA AND SATISFACTION

When we see someone else doing something that seems to be making the person happy, we want to do it, too. But *svadharma* does not work that way. In any given situation, in any given position, whatever is to be done by you, whatever that is appropriate for you, that alone is your *karma*, your *dharma*. This does not mean that you should not switch jobs. Both, money and job satisfaction, are important, but a number of other factors must be taken into account.

If you are an artist, try to make money with your art. Produce something that will make money, something that is good. In this way, you will have job satisfaction and money also. This is the intelligent way to live; otherwise, you will have neither money nor satisfaction.

What kind of job is it, after all, that does not produce money? How can there be any real satisfaction in such a job? Your art will definitely be affected because being without the essentials of life that money provides, you will often be disgruntled. Your paintings will be angry paintings. The colours themselves will reflect your inner life. Of course, there are people who will like such paintings because they, too, are angry. So, you may even sell some of them!

In the verse under discussion, *Kṛṣṇa* also said that the duty of another is definitely fraught with fear, *bhayāvahaḥ*, when you take it as your own. This being the case, it is better to do one's own duty, to do whatever is proper and appropriate, even if it amounts to death, than to do someone else's duty. In this way, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that, at least until your death, you did what you had to do.

Also, if you neglect your own duty and do something else, you will be dying every day of your lifetime. You will have nothing but conflict, regret, guilt of omissions and commissions. What was to be done was omitted, what was not to be done was committed — all of which is a living death. While you are living, you go on dying!

EXERCISE YOUR CHOICE

Even though you have *rāga-dveṣas* that have no connection with your *dharma*, you still have a choice. You can choose not to go along with your *rāga-dveṣas*. You need not have anything to do with them. The only connection there need be, is that they happen in your mind; you need only recognise them, nothing more. You can even be so amused by them that you will not need to read another thriller. Reading your own mind will be enough! Your mind can provide you with pages and pages of entertainment by your simply witnessing what is going on. But in terms of choice in action, you go with what you want in accordance with the norms of *dharma*.

One's *svadharma* may not be as productive, as convenient, or as pleasant as one might want. Duties are certainly not always pleasant; they can be unpleasant also. Nor may they be remunerative or convenient. But, you have to do only that which is your *svadharma*. Even though it may be *viguṇa*, devoid of any enticing, pleasing, fascinating, or satisfactory features, your own duty is definitely better for you to perform than the *dharma* of others. Because the *dharma* of others is not your *dharma*, it is not to be done by you.

Thus, each person has certain things to do and these are what he or she must do. One need not do what others do. The one common factor between your *dharma* and others' *dharma* is that each of you 'do.' The actions to be done differ, situations differ, expectations differ, but each of you do what is to be done by you alone. In this way, you find your *karma* becomes a *yajña*.

If you can appreciate the phenomenal forces in your life as so many *devatās*, as aspects and features of *Īśvara*, and not just dumb forces, you give them the status of deities or God. For instance, *Sūrya*, the sun, is not just an implosion that is taking place. It can be explained this way scientifically, but it is actually a blessing. That this implosion takes place there and not here is definitely a blessing! It is also a blessing that the sun rises in the morning. As a part of the whole *jagat*, as the centre of the entire system, the sun is a blessing. It is a blessing in every way.

Just as the sun is a blessing, so too is the air, water, earth, every plant, insect, and so on. The elements are all forces that can be looked upon as *devatās*. By recognizing them as such, you need not tell yourself that you should work for the welfare of people. It will be spontaneous because, by recognizing these forces that are working for you, you will automatically recognise fellow beings and living creatures. With this sensitivity, you will not need to be told to be kind to people, to be appreciative of their needs, to do unto others what you would have them do unto you. By being able to include the *devatās*, all others are naturally included.

The books that talk about conduct and values, the *dharma-śāstra*, recognise this fact. If, for example, you cut a tree for any purpose, the *dharma-śāstra* says that, you should plant and care for ten more trees. This is to ensure that at least one of the ten will survive. I am told American forestry departments follow this rule now.

THE PRINCIPLE OF NON-INJURY

The thinking behind this rule is that to cut a tree is to perform an injury, *hiṃsā*. There is nothing wrong with cutting a tree if it is necessary but, at the same time, there should be an awareness of the principle of non-injury, *ahiṃsā*, with reference to trees and all other forms of life. Jainism is completely based on *ahiṃsā*, as is Buddhism to a lesser extent.

Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, highlighted *ahiṃsā* to such an extent that he instructed his followers to sweep the path in front of them as they walked so as not to trample on any insect that may be there. Also, the sweeping was to be done with feathers so that the insects would be removed from the path as gently as possible. When a person is talking, his or her mouth is to be covered to avoid bugs entering and being killed by the person. This is a kind of discipline and reflects an awareness that killing is wrong.

By creating certain situations, as Mahavira did, there is a symbolic heightening of one's sensitivity. A person, who sweeps the path before walking on it, out of fear of killing an ant, will definitely not be able to kill a fellow human being. This, then, is what is meant by *ahiṃsā*.

Human values are all based on the principle of 'live and let live' and, at the same time, are much more than that. In fact, you live in the awareness of how others make

your life possible and, in return, you make their life possible rather than miserable. Their lives should definitely be as happy as you want yours to be. In this way, each member of the society performs his or her duty and gains *śreyas*.

The Vedic culture is based upon duty alone, according to the person's group and stage of life, *varṇa* and *āśrama*.¹ It was in the spirit of this culture that *Kṛṣṇa* intends to convey here when he says, 'To die performing one's own *dharma* is better — *svadharme nidhanaṃ śreyaḥ*.' If a man is a *brāhmaṇa*, his job is only to study and teach the Vedas, along with the performing of the rituals, religious duties, and prayers for the welfare of the society. If this is his job, he should do it, without comparing himself to someone else. That someone else also should do his or her duty. Remuneration did not form the basis for choice of duty. Duty was prescribed.

THE RESULTS OF ABANDONING ONE'S DHARMA

Because many *brāhmaṇas* have abandoned their *svadharmā*, there are very few people who are capable of performing the religious activities that the *brāhmaṇas* are responsible for. And these few tend to be those who cannot be engineers, doctors, businessmen, soldiers, and so on! This is why the so-called religious people of today are not truly religious.

Suppose, however, remuneration and satisfaction, are not the criteria in terms of what I do. Because I was born in a particular family and because my aim is *mokṣa*, I know exactly what is to be done by me. My life becomes a preparation for *mokṣa* in that it enables my mind to become mature, to gain *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi*. Preparing the mind in this way is not an ordinary task. One's entire lifetime may be necessary to make the *antaḥ-karaṇa* mature, along with the numerous lifetimes that may have preceded this one. A person can reach his or her eighties and still have the old phobias and childhood problems that he or she had before. It seems as though one lifetime is not enough. And because each lifetime starts with the same innocence, we have the same problems — for which there seems to be no solution.

If inner maturity is such an important factor and *mokṣa* is to be gained, what money do you need to have beyond what you need to live a simple life? Of course, you must be able to buy your food and other basic necessities, Therefore, the need for money depends entirely upon your aim. Because its vision is *mokṣa*, the Vedic society is based upon duties so that the mind may be purified and be able to grasp the vision.

¹ Please note that the *varṇa-āśrama* system is not being prescribed to cure the ills of our society. The system itself has brought about many of these ills and no system can work forever. But the Vedic vision of this system has a certain logic and spirit which is to be understood. The spirit behind the concept of 'duty' is still valid.

If the aim is *mokṣa*, there is no competition. Which job you have is not an issue. And because you bring a certain attitude to it, you love doing the job that is yours to do. You know that what you require is maturity of mind and that by performing what is to be done by you, you will gain it.

Changing jobs is only necessary when the aim is money. Nowadays, there are even consulting agencies to advise you about which courses you should take, which field is currently open, where the easy jobs are, the better jobs, the more remunerative jobs. These agencies are staffed by people who earn money by giving such advice to others. The whole approach to learning and doing now has its basis in what will bring more money. For example, if a glut occurs in the field of Chemical Engineering, everyone becomes disinterested in that field and turns towards electronics. And when there is a glut there, those who were interested in electronics go into Chemical Engineering. Like this, everything keeps changing and people keep switching.

DUTIES AND RIGHTS ARE ONE AND THE SAME

When power and money are the criteria, your whole attitude changes, whereas if *antaḥ-karaṇa-suddhi* is the main aim, what job you do means nothing and how well you do it means a lot. Therefore, in the Vedic society, there are only duties; there are no rights whatsoever. In fact, they are one and the same. We see this also in the American constitution, or in the constitution of any country for that matter, where a person is granted certain rights, even the right to carry a gun. But, along with that right are certain responsibilities. You must have a license and you cannot shoot simply because you happen to have a gun.

Any right naturally implies a certain responsibility. You can emphasise the rights and spell out the responsibilities, the duties, which is what modern constitutions do. They specify the rights of citizens and then mention the duties associated with those rights. Or, you can emphasise the duties and not mention rights at all. When you emphasise rights, you have to mention the duties and enforce them also. But, when you emphasise the duties, you need not even mention the rights.

Why is this? If you analyse duties, you find that all duties are interpersonal and interrelated — duties towards the *devatās* or gods, towards the forefathers, towards parents, towards other members of one's family, towards fellow beings and all living creatures. In this way, you have widening circles of duty.

In India, even today, the emphasis on duty is reflected in a person's speech. If you ask a man if he can come to see you, he will not say he has to go to work. He will say he has duty. And if he takes up a new job, he will say he has joined duty, he has reported to duty, he is just coming from duty, this is his duty. This concept of duty is called *dharma*, *svadharmā*, one's own duty.

Being a husband, for example, is a role that comes with certain duties. There is no such person called 'husband'; it is merely a role. Related to someone, a man is a husband to that person. And every role has a script, which is one's *svadharmā*. As a husband, then, a man performs his duties according to the script, *svadharmā*. In this way, his wife receives certain rights. Similarly, in her role as wife, she also performs her duties and, as her husband, he receives his rights. How can either person's rights be denied when each one performs his or her *svadharmā*?

Similarly, as a citizen I perform my duties. The state also performs its duties, which become my rights as a citizen. The citizen's duties become the state's rights. Therefore, all that we have are duties. Rights come to us as a natural consequence. But we do not go after them; we do not command or demand our rights. We try only to perform our duties.

Only when we do what is to be done by us is *antaḥ-karaṇa-śuddhi* possible. When our likes and dislikes are one thing and our duty is quite another, we put aside our *rāga-dveṣas* and go by duty. In the process, everyone gets his or her right and there is no fight. To demand one's right always means fights. One person says, 'This is my right,' and the other person says the same. Neither person will fight, saying, 'This is my duty!'

THERE IS NO DEMAND IN DUTY

Duty is either done or not done. In the concept of duty, there is no demand whatsoever, whereas when one's rights are emphasised, there is always an element of demand. And wherever there is demand, there are denials and counter-demands, the natural results of demanding. This is because no one has the right to demand when he or she has not fulfilled the demands of the other person — 'When did you write to me that I should write back to you?' 'When did you take me out that I should take you out?' 'When did you phone me that I should phone you?' 'Why didn't you visit me when I was ill? Why should I visit you now that you are ill?'

Demand means there is always a rub in the form of a counter-demand or denial. There is friction. We see this in our own homes and in the society in which we live. Daily life is nothing but demands and more demands. When people are always demanding, the society will naturally be a demanding one. We can see this by reading the newspaper columns — everything is one continuous demand. Even groups are demanding — teachers, nurses, doctors, patients, ethnic groups, males, females, states, and so on. The gods also seem to have become demanding. They seem to say, 'Unless you remember us, no rain for you!' 'If you don't remember us, BANG! an earthquake.'

When you have duties you will find there is amity. And because you can never fulfil your duties completely, there is also humility. But if each person at least tries to fulfil his or her duties — as father and son or husband and wife, for example — they will

meet somewhere. In so doing, understanding is possible. Otherwise, there are problems. This is why *dharma* is called *mānava-dharma* or *mānuṣa-dharma*, the *dharma* of a human being.

Can there be any other basis for our interaction with each other that will benefit us all? If people are to live together — at home, in a community, in the society, or globally — this is the only way; there is no other way. Our *śāstra* goes even further and tells us to take into account all the forces. Cosmically speaking also, then, there is only one way — appreciating one's position, one's situation, one's station, seeing what is to be done, and doing it. Following one's own *dharma svadharmā-anuṣṭhāna* in this way, and not that of someone else, is the very basis of *karma-yoga*.

Having said all this, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* might have become quiet, whereupon *Arjuna* asked a question:

अर्जुन उवाच ।

अथ केन प्रयुक्तोऽयं पापं चरति पूरुषः ।

अनिच्छन्नपि वाष्ण्येय बलादिव नियोजितः ॥ ३६ ॥

arjuna uvāca

atha kena prayukto'yaṁ pāpaṁ carati pūruṣaḥ

anicchannapi vārṣṇeya balādiva niyojitaḥ

Verse 36

अर्जुनः *arjunaḥ* — *Arjuna*; उवाच *uvāca* — said;

वाष्ण्येय *vārṣṇeya* — Oh! Descendent of the *vṛṣṇis*, (*Kṛṣṇa*); अथ *atha* — now; अनिच्छन् अपि *anicchan api* — even while not desiring; अयम् *ayam* — this; पूरुषः *pūruṣaḥ* — person; केन *kena* — by what; प्रयुक्तः *prayuktaḥ* — impelled; बलात् इव *balāt iva* — as though by force; नियोजितः *niyojitaḥ* — pushed; पापम् *pāpam* — sin; चरति *carati* — commits

Arjuna said:

Impelled by what does a person commit sin, as though pushed by some force even though not desiring to, Oh! *Vārṣṇeya* ?

Previously it was pointed out that there are likes and dislikes with reference to every sense object and all you have to do is not fall under their spell — *tayoḥ vaśaṁ na āgacchet*. It was also said that even though one's *svadharmā*, what one must do, is not very pleasant, it is better to follow that than to follow something else that is more pleasing and convenient.

Hearing all of this in terms of *karma-yoga*, *Arjuna* asked what it is that impels a person to perform an action that he or she knows is not proper. Some kind of pleasure may be there, but still the person knows that the action is not becoming and will produce

sin, *duḥkha*. If the person did not know, of course, it would be different and understandable.

Why does a person do a *karma* that he or she knows to be an improper action — *kena prayuktaḥ pāpaṃ carati pūruṣaḥ*?¹ Impelled by whom or what does he or she do this action? Posing this question, *Arjuna* addressed *Kṛṣṇa* here as, *Vārṣṇeya*, one who is born in the family of *vṛṣṇis*.²

Arjuna described such a person as one who is as though, *iva*, impelled or pushed into performing improper actions by some force, *balāt niyojitaḥ*, *niyojita* implying a devilish force. Further, the person is pushed into it, even though he or she does not want to do it. The person knows it is not right, *anicchan*, meaning that he or she does not have any real intellectual value for performing such action. But still, it is done. Why? Impelled by whom, *kena prayuktaḥ*? This, was *Arjuna*'s question.

Duryodhana was once asked, 'Why do you do all this *pāpa-karma*? You come from a good family and have been brought up so well. You are a prince. What impels you to do such things?' In a verse attributed to him, *Duryodhana* responded, 'I know what is right, *jānāmi dharmam* and I also know what is not right *jānāmi adharmam*. My problem is not that I have any innocence or confusion with reference to what is right and wrong. The problem is, that I know *dharmam*, but I do not pursue it — *jānāmi dharmam na ca me pravṛttiḥ*. And I know *adharmam*, but I cannot refrain from it — *jānāmi adharmam na ca me nivṛttiḥ*.

Duryodhana then went on to say, 'in whichever way I am impelled by the one sitting in my heart, in that way I do — *kenāpi deveṇa hṛdi sthitena yathā niyukto'smi tathā karomi*'³ It may have been a person or a force, but *Duryodhana* did not know who or what it was. Thus, *Duryodhana* and *Arjuna* had the same question, 'Who or what is it that is sitting in the mind forcing the person to do what he or she knows to be wrong, even when the person does not want to do it?'

¹ *Puruṣaḥ eva pūruṣaḥ* — the word *pūruṣa* is the same as *puruṣa*, meaning a person.

² *Vṛṣṇi* is the name one of the ancestors of *Kṛṣṇa* by whose name the entire clan is known. Because he belongs to the clan of *vṛṣṇis*, he is known as *Vārṣṇeya*. However this word can be interpreted differently. *Brahmānandaṃ varṣati iti vṛṣṇiḥ saṃyag-bodhaḥ; tena avagamyate iti Vārṣṇeyaḥ* — that which showers on one the fullness of Brahman is called *vṛṣṇi*, the clear knowledge of Brahman, *brahma-vidyā*; the one who is known by this knowledge is *Vārṣṇeya*.

³ जानामि धर्मं न च मे प्रवृत्तिर्जानाम्यधर्मं न च मे निवृत्तिः ।

केनापि देवेन हृदिस्थितेन यथा नियुक्तोऽस्मि तथा करोमि ॥

jānāmi dharmam na ca me pravṛttirjānāmyadharmam na ca menivṛttiḥ

kenāpi deveṇa hṛdisthitena yathā niyukto'smi tathā karomi

(*Mahābhārata*)

Kṛṣṇa answered this question in the next verse.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

काम एष क्रोध एष रजोगुणसमुद्भवः ।

महाशनो महापाप्मा विद्ध्येनमिह वैरिणम् ॥ ३७ ॥

śrībhagavān uvāca

kāma eṣa krodha eṣa rajoguṇasamudbhavaḥ

mahāśano mahāpāpmā viddhyenamihavairiṇam

Verse 37

श्रीभगवान् *śrībhagavān* — Lord *Kṛṣṇa*; उवाच *uvāca* — said;
 एषः *eṣaḥ* — this; कामः *kāmaḥ* — desire; एषः *eṣaḥ* — this; क्रोधः *krodhaḥ* — anger;
 रजो-गुण-समुद्भवः *rajo-guṇa-samudbhavaḥ* — born of the *guṇa*, *rajas*; महाशनः
mahāśanaḥ — a glutton; महापाप्मा *mahāpāpmā* — a great sinner; इह *iha* — here in this
 world; एनम् *enam* — this; वैरिणम् *vairiṇam* — enemy; विद्धि *viddhi* — know

Śrī Bhagavān said:

This desire, this anger, born of the *guṇa rajas* is a glutton and a great sinner. Know that to be the enemy here in this world.

In his commentary to this verse, *Śaṅkara* discusses the six-fold *bhaga*, or qualities, possessed by the one who is called *Bhagavān* — total overlordship (*aiśvarya*); the strength to create (*vīrya*); all fame (*yaśas*); all wealth, resources (*śrī*); all knowledge, omniscience (*jñāna*); and total dispassion, freedom from any sense of want (*vairāgya*). This *vairāgya* is not a *sādhana*, a means for gaining the knowledge; it is absolute *vairāgya* that comes with complete fullness. Therefore, *Bhagavān* is the one in whom these six -fold qualities always remain in their entirety.

Everyone has these qualities in a small measure. All have limited *jñāna* and *vairāgya*. Certainly, with reference to garbage, almost everyone has *vairāgya*, although what is garbage for one may not be for another! In *Bhagavān*, however, each of the six qualities is without any hindrance or obstruction whatsoever.

Śaṅkara goes on to say that *Bhagavān* is one who knows about the creation and the dissolution, *utpattiṃ pralayaṃ caiva*. He also has complete knowledge of the good and bad ends of all beings. He also has complete knowledge about the time, type, and place of birth and death of all beings, *bhūtānām āgatiṃ gatim*. Whatever be their lot, pleasure or pain, *sukha* or *duḥkha*, he knows that too. He also knows knowledge and ignorance of the *bhūtas*, *vetti vidyām avidyāṃ ca*. Here the word *avidyā* also means *karma*. ‘This is the one who is to be called *Bhagavān*, *sa vācya bhagavān iti*,’¹ quotes *Śaṅkara*.

¹ उत्पत्तिं प्रलयं चैव भूतानामागतिं गतिम् ।

IMPROPER ACTIONS COME FROM DESIRE ALONE

In this verse, *Bhagavān* told *Arjuna* that what impels a person to do an action of *pāpa* is but a thought. A thought itself is not a person; it depends upon a person. Therefore, it is not a real substantive. But, because the *ātmā* is with the thought, a thought assumes a certain force. This thought, *Kṛṣṇa* said, is *kāma*, desire.

The expression, ‘this desire, *eṣaḥ kāmah,*’ indicates that it is something known to everyone. Thus, *Kṛṣṇa* was telling *Arjuna*, ‘You yourself can know this desire by looking into yourself.’ When you ask why a person performs an improper action, do you really think there is some devil or something in there? You are the only devil. There is no other devil, no separate satanic force, sitting there interfering with *Bhagavān*’s work. There is no second force more powerful than *Bhagavān*. You are both the devil and the angel here. It is your own desire alone and this desire is something that is very well known to you.’

To say that a person performs improper actions, even though the desire to do so is not there, simply means that the will does not seem to have the force necessary to stop the want, *kāma*. The want becomes so powerful and your identification with the want becomes so complete that whatever wisdom may be there, telling you that what you want is not good for you, is silenced.

In this way, *kāma* can be very powerful. Desire is born out of *rajoguṇa* alone, *rajoguṇa-samudbhavaḥ*, whereas wisdom is born out of *sattva*. When *rajas* is predominant, there is desire. Because *rajas* is a force, *kāma* is also forceful.

Kāma is said to be your enemy, *vairī*, an enemy being one who does what is not good for you. *Kāma* is inimical to you when it makes you go after things that you do not really want or need, things that you can afford to be without. In this way, it is your enemy.

Kāma also has another form — *krodha*. *Krodha*, anger, is simply another stage of *kāma*. If *kāma* is destroyed in any way, if it is obstructed and not allowed to fulfil itself, then it will turn into anger. *Arjuna* was only too well aware of how this can happen. Born of *Indra*’s grace, *Arjuna* was considered to be *Indra*’s son. *Indra* thought he would reward *Arjuna*, who had been doing *tapas* in the forest for a long time, by sending the beautiful *Urvaśī* to him. *Urvaśī* was a celestial damsel, the most beautiful *apsarā* in heaven, and therefore the dream of all men, including the men in heaven.

वेत्ति विद्यामविद्यां च स वाच्यो भगवानिति ।।

utpattiṃ pralayaṃ caiva bhūtānāmāgatiṃ gatim

vetti vidyāmaavidyāṃ ca sa vācya bhagavāniti

(*Viṣṇu-purāṇa*–6.5.78)

This is another way of describing Bhagavān. We saw the first definition on page 25.

When *Arjuna* told *Urvaśī* that he did not want to have anything to do with her, that he was already married and that he considered her as a mother, *Urvaśī* became very angry and put a curse on him that he would lose his masculinity and become a eunuch. Lord *Indra* intervened on behalf of *Arjuna* and made *Urvaśī* modify the curse such that *Arjuna* would become a eunuch only for the period of one-year and that he could choose the time when the curse would take effect. Later this curse turned out to be a blessing for *Arjuna*, since it made him eligible to teach dance and music to the ladies in the palace during the year he was to remain incognito. At the beginning of the thirteenth year of exile, *Arjuna* opted for the curse to take effect and became *Bṛhannalā* and spent that year teaching dance and music.

Arjuna had therefore experienced how desire can turn into anger. When *Urvaśī*'s desire for *Arjuna* was not fulfilled, it became anger. A person whose love has been rejected can even become violent towards the object of his or her love. Rejected love means that *kāma*, want, is there. It is not like the love that one has for the stars, the moon, the sky, etc. There one's mind has no demands as to how they should be or should not be. The mind totally accepts these as they are and enjoys them as they are. Therefore this kind of love does not cause any problem. This is not the case with a *kāma* that is demanding, and therefore binding. This binding *kāma* can be called by many names. In the beginning, it is called 'want,' then 'passion,' and then 'anger' — all these are born out of *rajoguṇa*.

Kāma as *krodha*, anger, was referred to here as *mahāpāpmā*, a great sinner, because it is the cause of those actions that a person regrets for his or her entire lifetime. Such actions have to be paid for and *kāma* alone is the cause. *Ātmā* has nothing to do with them, nor do the body, mind, and senses. And although your ignorance has something to do with performing improper actions, ignorance itself has nothing to do with it. Who does it? Desire alone, *kāmaḥ eva*, does it.

There is even a *mantra* to this effect, chanted by adults and children alike. The *mantra* is, 'Desire did it, anger did it. Oh! Lord, my salutations — *kamo'kārsīt manyurakārsīt namo namaḥ!*' This *mantra* is repeated 1008 times on a certain day of the year. It is not just a prayer; it carries a message too. It implies that 'I did not do it.' Thus, if knowledge is there, there is no problem. This is why *Kṛṣṇa* said, 'Understand, *viddhi*, that this *kāma* alone is your enemy.'

As your enemy, *kāma* forces you to perform actions that you know are improper and that do not really want to do. Just as *Duryodhana* said, 'There is someone sitting in my heart impelling me to do wrong actions, but I don't know who the person is,' *Arjuna* also did not know. Here, *Bhagavān* made it very clear that this person is none other than *kāma*.

DESIRE IS INSATIABLE

There is one more word given in the verse to describe *kāma* — *mahāśanaḥ*, one who is a great glutton. *Kāma* never says, 'Enough!' Of course, its fulfillment may be enough for some time, but eventually the *kāma* will start up again, just like a glutton, who barely takes time to swallow the food being eaten before wanting more. This, then, is the nature of want; any want is always replaced by further wants. There is no end to the gluttony of *kāma*, *Kṛṣṇa* said here.

To suppose that by continuing to fulfil one's wants there will be a day when none remains is not a reasonable assumption. Like fire, *kāma* always wants more; it will never say, 'Enough!' Therefore, there is no possibility of *kāma* coming to an end. It just goes on breeding. This is why we always have wants.

In the next verse, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* how *kāma* operates:

धूमेनान्नियते वह्निर्यथादर्शो मलेन च ।

यथोल्बेनावृतो गर्भस्तथा तेनेदमावृतम् ॥ ३८ ॥

dhūmenāvriyate vahniryathādarśo malena ca

yatholbenāvṛto garbhastathā tenedamāvṛtam

Verse 38

यथा *yathā* — just as; वह्निः *vahniḥ* — the fire; धूमेन *dhūmena* — by clouds of smoke; आन्नियते *āvriyate* — is covered; आदर्शः *ādarśaḥ* — the mirror; मलेन *malena* — by dust; च *ca* — and; यथा *yathā* — just as; गर्भः *garbhaḥ* — foetus; उल्बेन *ulbena* — by the womb; आवृतः *āvṛtaḥ* — covered; तथा *tathā* — so too; तेन *tena* — by that; इदम् *idam* — this; आवृतम् *āvṛtam* — is covered

Just as the fire is covered by clouds of smoke, just as a mirror is covered by dust, and just as a foetus is covered by the womb, so too, knowledge is covered by desire.

Even though fire is self-revealing, *prakāśātmaka*, being effulgent and requiring no light to be seen, still the smoke coming from the fire can cover the fire itself. In the same way, one's discrimination, *viveka* — knowledge of what is to be done and what is not to be done — is covered by *kāma*, which is born of the mind alone.

There are two types of *vivekas* — *dharma-adharma-viveka*, meaning *kārya-akārya-viveka*, what is to be done and what is not to be done, and *ātma-anātmā-viveka*, the ability to discriminate between the real and the unreal. This two-fold *viveka* is required to conduct one's life. If you have *kārya-akārya-viveka*, then *ātma-anātmā-viveka* will follow naturally. These two *vivekas* constitute knowledge, *jñāna*.

The mind, *buddhi*, that has this knowledge, *viveka-jñāna*, is covered by *kāma*, just as fire can be covered by its own smoke. Like fire, your *jñāna* is also self-revealing; therefore, it should be able to serve you. But, because it is covered, it cannot. When the *kāma* comes, it takes you over so completely that your murmuring wisdom is nowhere to be found!

Kṛṣṇa provided two other examples here — a mirror covered by a coat of dust and a foetus covered by the womb. The mirror and foetus are not seen, simply because they are covered. You can see the mirror but, at the same time, it is not clear at all. So, too, you know an unborn child is there, but you cannot see it because it has yet to see the light of day. So, too, in the first example, you know fire is there because you see the smoke, you cannot see the fire because it is covered.

SIMPLE VIVEKA WILL DISMISS MANY DESIRES

There is a specific reason why *Kṛṣṇa* used three different examples to make his point here. Everyone has certain *kāmas* that rob his or her wisdom away, but only for the time being. With a little *viveka*, a little discretion, you can dismiss them. There are always so many fancies going on in your head, but they need not hold you for any length of time. It is like walking through a department store. You may see many things that you would like to buy, but you just walk away without buying any of them — which is just as well because, if you fulfilled every fancy, your home would become the department store! Thus such fancies take hold of you temporarily, but then, by some inquiry, *vicāra* — by considering your purse, by seeing whether you need the objects or not, whether you really want them or not — you are able to dismiss these fancies.

Thus, with reference to certain wants, then, all that you require is a short *vicāra*. Other wants, of course, may require a longer *vicāra*. Mere *vicāra* may also not be enough; some force of will may be necessary to dismiss the desire. Still, you will come out the victor because you have the necessary will. You may have to say ‘NO!’ out loud, most emphatically, if you really want to do a particular thing. For example, when someone asks you to go somewhere and you want to go but you know you should do something else instead, you may reply with a loud ‘NO!’ In such cases, half the ‘no’ is for the other person and the other half is for yourself! This is why it comes out twice as loud. What this ‘NO!’ is all about is so well known in India that, if you say it when you are eating, you will be given one more helping of food!

This ‘NO!’ requires will on your part. *Vicāra* itself is not enough. This way of dismissing a desire is likened here to the mirror that is covered with dust. To merely blow on it is not enough. Not only will the mirror remain dusty, it will become hazy as well. You have to take a wet cloth and wipe the mirror clean, which requires both will and effort. Similarly, not giving into your desires requires *vicāra* and will. Talking with

some one who understands such matters, which requires effort, or some other action, may also be necessary.

The example of the unborn child in the womb is much stronger in that the time factor, *kāla*, must also sometimes be taken into account with reference to not giving into one's desires. It takes nine months for a child to be born. Similarly, it may take time to understand your desires and to gain a certain mastery over them. When time is required and you try to circumvent it, the whole effort will be aborted. Therefore, you need to bide your time.

The covering illustrated in this verse is binding desire and its modifications. The next verse reveals what is covered — discriminative knowledge, *viveka*, is covered:

आवृतं ज्ञानमेतेन ज्ञानिनो नित्यवैरिणा ।

कामरूपेण कौन्तेय दुष्पूरेणानलेन च ॥ ३९ ॥

*āvṛtaṃ jñānametena jñānino nityavairiṇā
kāmarūpeṇa kaunteya duṣpūreṇānalena ca*

Verse 39

कौन्तेय *kaunteya* — Oh! *Arjuna*; ज्ञानिनः *jñāninaḥ* — of the wise; नित्यवैरिणा *nityavairiṇā* — by the constant enemy; कामरूपेण *kāmarūpeṇa* — whose form is desire; *ca*—and; दुष्पूरेण *duṣpūreṇa* — insatiable; एतेन अनलेन *etena analena* — by this fire; ज्ञानम् *jñānam* — knowledge; आवृतम् *āvṛtam* — is covered

Knowledge is covered by this, Oh! *Arjuna*, the insatiable fire of desire, the constant enemy of the wise.

The word ‘this – *idam*,’ used in the preceding verse, refers to knowledge, *jñāna*. Here, this knowledge is said to be covered by the enemy in the form of *kāma*—*kāmarūpeṇa*, just as the fire, mirror, and foetus are covered by the smoke, dust, and womb, respectively.

And by what kind of *kāmas* is the knowledge covered? By the *kāmas* that are difficult to fulfil, *duṣpūreṇa*, and impossible to satiate, *analena*. *Anala* means fire. Fire is never satiated — the more fuel you offer it, the more it wants. All its tongues are out, demanding more. Therefore, fire is called *anala*. Like fire, desire also has no satiability. So it is referred to here as *anala*.

There is no such thing as fulfilling all your desires so that after retirement there will be none remaining. There is no such thing as a last desire, the last dregs of all one's desires. At no time can you say that you have only five remaining desires and that if you just fulfil these five, everything will be perfect because you will be *pūrṇa*, limitless.

ALL DESIRES FLOW FROM OUR SENSE OF LIMITATION

Desires themselves are born out of *apūrṇatva*, one's sense of being limited. Every desire is an expression of this sense of limitation. This sense is like a perpetual spring from which all desires flow. New desires will keep flowing to the surface. Even if you have no particular desire at a given point in time, the *buddhi* will say, 'You are not even capable of desiring.' In the face of this new condemnation, you will again feel limited and desire to be free of the limitation.

The adjective, *nityavairiṇā*, meaning 'by the permanent enemy,' indicates that *kāma* is permanent. *Śaṅkara* provides an excellent commentary on the word *nityavairī*. Knowledge can be covered by desire, even for one who is mature and knows what is to be done and not to be done. This desire is difficult to fulfil and is both insatiable and inimical to those who are discriminative. And why is this enemy described as permanent? *Śaṅkara* goes on to say that even before the desire comes, the person is a *kārya-akārya-vivekī*, knows what is to be done and not to be done. But this knowing what is proper and improper does not mean that the person will act accordingly. Even the discriminative person, knowing a particular desire is not good for him or her may still try to fulfil it because the desire can be more powerful than the wisdom of discrimination. Because the person knows, both before and after, that a given desire is not for one's well-being, desire is referred to as a permanent enemy, *nityavairī* of the discriminating people.

One who is not discriminating knows only later that the binding desire is useless, whereas at the time of desiring, the person thinks that to act on this particular desire will be wonderful; it seems to be the right thing to do. For example, a person who wants to make a killing on the stock market may say, 'I have a new scheme and I am going to make it work. In one month's time, you will see how great my plan is.' But, after the time has passed, all there is to see is that the person is broke! 'I should have thought it over,' the person will say. 'I never thought of the possibilities of loss.' Only later is there the discovery that the desire was costly, *anartha*, and, also, that it was the cause of the person's subsequent problems. 'If I had not been greedy, I would not have become involved in this mess!'

So, *Śaṅkara* says that *kāma* is *nityavairī* for the discriminative because it is a consistent enemy. Before and after acting, they know that the desire will not benefit them in anyway. Whereas, for the non-discriminating, *kāma* appears to be an enemy only after they have acted — the action not producing the benefits they had expected. *Arjuna* wanted to know who or what impelled people to perform improper actions. And, because *Arjuna* also wanted to know how to be free of that which impelled improper action, *Kṛṣṇa* told him how to deal with this *kāma*.

इन्द्रियाणि मनो बुद्धिरस्याधिष्ठानमुच्यते ।

एतैर्विमोहयत्येष ज्ञानमावृत्य देहिनम् ॥ ४० ॥

indriyāṇi mano buddhirasyādhiṣṭhānamucyate
etaivimohayatyeṣa jñānamāvṛtya dehinam

Verse 40

इन्द्रियाणि *indriyāṇi* — senses; मनः *manaḥ* — mind; बुद्धिः *buddhiḥ* — intellect; अस्य *asya* — its; अधिष्ठानम् *adhiṣṭhānam* — location; उच्यते *ucyate* — is said; एषः *eṣaḥ* — this; एतैः *etaiḥ* — with these; ज्ञानम् *jñānam* — wisdom; आवृत्य *āvṛtya* — covering; देहिनम् *dehinam* — person; विमोहयति *vimohayati* — deludes

Its location is said to be the senses, mind, and intellect. With these, it (*kāma*) deludes the person by covering his or her wisdom.

Kṛṣṇa had told *Arjuna* that *kāma* alone impels a person to perform actions he or she knows to be improper. A desire can be so powerful that the means employed to fulfil it is not even questioned by the person. Whenever a particular end is very important to you, you can always compromise the means because all desire is for an end only, not for the means.

Actions are usually only improper with reference to the means used for gaining a desired end. The end is very rarely wrong, whereas the means are often compromised because the end is so very important to the person. In some cases, both the means and the ends are wrong.

The villain in all of this is not a force outside yourself. Nor is it yourself. It is *kāma*, desire. The self itself is harmless. In fact, it is clean, *śuddha*. Nor can the body do anything right or wrong. It is only a place, a location. So too, the mind and senses are not harmful. *Kāma* alone is what creates the havoc. But *kāma* is only inimical when it is binding in nature. Thus, with reference to various ends, *kāma* is located in various places in terms of physical actions, perceptions, and experiences. Knowing where desire is located makes it possible to do something about it.

This is similar to how the police deal with thieves and other criminals. Investigation agencies keep records on habitual thieves based on certain repetitive patterns of behaviour. Some thieves enter only through windows and others open doors in a certain way. Some thieves pick up only certain things and leave everything else untouched. Each thief knows the places in which he or she can operate safely, meaning with less chance of being caught. Thus, criminals tend to be habitual offenders in two ways — in the types of offences they commit and how they commit them. All that is required to catch them is to discover their patterns — how they operate, where they spend their time, and so on.

ĀTMĒ IS FREE OF DESIRE

Similarly, when the place that one's enemy, desire, operates from is known, *kāma* is easy to manage and take care of. Where, then, is this *kāma* located? It is not in the *sat-cit-ānanda-ātmā* although, *sat-cit-ānanda-ātmā* is in the *kāma*. Without the *ātmā*, there is no want, no desire, no condition of the mind whatsoever. Whatever the condition, pain or pleasure, *ātmā* is there. But *kāma* is not in the *ātmā*.

If you look into the self there is no want therein. It is always clean, untouched by anything. But, without bringing about any material change in the object, the *ātmā* joins everything. If the *ātmā* itself had attributes, *guṇas*, its joining with a thought would result in a mixture, a compound. A desire would therefore not be a discrete desire; it would be 'coloured' by *ātmā* which is not the case. *Ātmā* itself, not having any attributes, lends its existence, *sat*, and consciousness, *cit*, to anything obtaining in the mind. Therefore, *ātmā* is said to be free from want, *kāma*.

The body, mind, and senses also do not have wants as such, but the wants involve all these locations. Almost all the *kāmas*, the wants, are with reference to sense objects. And without the senses, these objects are not known and therefore do not become objects of desire. Naturally, then, the senses become the basis, *adhiṣṭhāna*, for the desires to arise in the mind. Therefore, the senses are said to be the *adhiṣṭhāna* of *kāma*. Through the senses, desires can also be fulfilled.

Without the mind, *manas*, there is no want; thus mind is also the location, *adhiṣṭhāna*, for *kāma*. The *manas* is the one that creates the fancies that are the beginning of *kāma*. Because the decision with reference to the fulfillment of a want takes place in the *buddhi*, the intellect, the *buddhi* too is said to be the *adhiṣṭhāna* for desire. Thus, with reference to *kāma*, the *manas*, the *buddhi*, and the senses are places of operation, as it were.

When one's *kāma* is very powerful, it robs away the person's very wisdom, *jñāna*; it deludes the person. In terms of earlier acquired wisdom, the person is as though blindfolded by his or her desire and is taken for a ride. This ride can be a very long one also because, when you wake up, you find yourself elsewhere with all the damage already done. This is *kāma*.

THE REMOVAL OF DELUSION

What can you do about this delusion of desire? With regard to your mind, *buddhi*, and senses, the places where *kāma* operates, be careful. Exercise your capacity to curtail or stop the senses whenever you want something that does not benefit you. Any sense pursuit can be stopped just short of overt expression, as in eating, for example. One can always say, 'Enough!' even when, from inside, the desire keeps saying, 'Come on, have a little more!' To stop a sense pursuit at the level of the senses is called *dama*.

We have seen that one has no control over the wants that arise in one's head because of one's nature. You cannot say, 'I want to avoid this want,' because you cannot avoid it. Your desires do not need to be controlled, in fact. Your *prakṛti*, your nature, is your entire past, the remote past and the immediate past — all of which can give rise to a certain type of thinking and certain wants. Your likes and dislikes just happen; you cannot do anything about them. What you can do, however, is to keep a certain distance between yourself and your likes and dislikes. In other words, you need not deliver yourself to them. This is what is called *śama*.

Thus, there are two disciplines — *dama* and *śama* — with reference to *kāma*. Although you need not worry about what you think, what you desire, it is also not to your advantage to do whatever you want, based on your desires alone. Therefore, do not fall prey to your simple fancies and wants. Always look into yourself and see what is proper. Is it feasible, necessary, and useful to fulfil a particular desire? Is it proper? There may not be anything wrong with the desire; it may be quite legitimate but not at all necessary. Or it may be feasible to fulfil the desire — you may be able to buy something that you want — but you do not need it. Therefore, why buy it? It may be useful, but is it necessary to have this particular object? Instead of simply buying it, consider first how useful it is in terms of your priorities.

Having weighed all the factors, you can then go with the desire or not go with it. This deliberation is *śama*. And if, having gone along with the desire, you find that you want more and more, you then say, 'No, thus far and no further.' This is where you require *dama*, which can be practised daily whenever you feel like having another helping of food. Only when you practice *śama* and *dama* can you manage your wants. Otherwise, they will manage you and make a mess of your life. Therefore, taking the various factors into account, go with your desires, but do not let them make your decisions for you.

To manage your desires in this way, you need to be very alert, as *Kṛṣṇa* points out in the next verse.

तस्मात्त्वमिन्द्रियाण्यादौ नियम्य भरतर्षभ ।

पाप्मानं प्रजहि ह्येनं ज्ञानविज्ञाननाशनम् ॥ ४१ ॥

tasmāttvamindriyāṅyādau niyamya bharatarṣabha
pāpmānaṃ prajahi hyenaṃ jñānavijñānanāśanam

Verse 41

भरतर्षभ *bharatarṣabha* — Oh! Prominent among the descendants of *Bharata* (*Arjuna*); तस्मात् *tasmāt* — therefore: त्वम् *tvam* — you; आदौ *ādau* — at the outset; इन्द्रियाणि *indriyāṅi* — sense organs; नियम्य *niyamya* — controlling; हि *hi* — indeed; एनम् *enam* — this; ज्ञान-विज्ञान-नाशनम् *jñāna-vijñāna-nāśanam* — the destroyer of knowledge and wisdom; पाप्मानम् *pāpmānam* — sinner; प्रजहि *prajahi* — destroy

Therefore, Oh! *Arjuna*, controlling the senses at the outset, destroy indeed this sinner, the destroyer of knowledge and wisdom.

In this verse, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* to destroy his *kāma*, which had turned into *krodha* and had robbed him of his wisdom, which in turn would make him a sinner, a *pāpmā*. The *kāma* was to be destroyed in terms of giving it up, as *Śaṅkara* makes it very clear in his commentary. Giving up the want, not going with it, is the practice of *śama*. If you do not go with the wants as they arise, they will not continue to come up indefinitely. If someone keeps calling you and each time the person says ‘Hello’ you put down the phone, how long will he or she keep calling? Here, too, if you do not go with the wants, they will go because there is no one to support them.

In this way, whatever *kāma* that is there becomes meaningless. As long as I have a distance between myself and my *rāgas* and *dveṣas*, I can decide to go with them or not to go with them. Let them be there. They need not affect me at all. This is the beauty of what is being said here. We are not trying to eliminate the wants. We only want to maintain enough distance or space, to use the American expression, so that we can decide either to go with the want or not to go with it. This is real space, freedom, and is also the practice of *śama*.

Why is *kāma* called a *pāpmā*, a sinner, here? Because it robs you of your knowledge and wisdom; it is *jñāna-vijñāna-nāśana*. We refer to the people who rob us of our money as criminals, but such petty thieves cannot rob us of our knowledge, the greatest wealth we have gathered. Money can always be gathered again. But, because knowledge is not as easily gathered, it is considered to be our greatest treasure. Knowledge is something that is gathered, garnered, gleaned, over a long period of time from varieties of experiences. To take away such a treasure, therefore, is a great sin. Thus, *kāma* is called a *pāpmā*.

A person who robs you of your money is not a *pāpī*. This term is reserved for that which robs you of your real treasure, your knowledge and discriminative power — *kāma*. Knowledge, *jñāna*, can also be taken here to mean the wisdom that leads to *vijñāna*, the knowledge of realities. The one who is a destroyer of this *jñāna* and *vijñāna* is definitely a *pāpī* — sinner-like, a criminal, in other words. *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* to give up *kāma* first by practising *dama* and then by practising *śama*. This is why people practice silence, *mauna*, for a length of time — for an hour, two hours, in the morning, and so on. People make these small vows all the time. The *sādhus* also practice certain disciplines, such as not talking or not eating on certain days. These practices of *dama* lead to *śama*, the capacity to sort out your wants and go with what you want.

Further, *Kṛṣṇa* said:

इन्द्रियाणि पराण्याहुरिन्द्रियेभ्यः परं मनः ।

मनसस्तु परा बुद्धिर्यो बुद्धेः परतस्तु सः ॥ ४२ ॥

*indriyāṇi parāṇyāhurindriyebhyaḥ paraṁ manaḥ
manasastu parā buddhiryo buddheḥ paratastu saḥ*

Verse 42

इन्द्रियाणि *indriyāṇi* — senses; पराणि *parāṇi* — superior; आहुः *āhuḥ* — they say; इन्द्रियेभ्यः *indriyebhyaḥ* — to the sense organs; परम् *param* — superior; मनः *manaḥ* — mind; मनसः तु *manasaḥ tu* — to the mind; बुद्धिः *buddhiḥ* — intellect; परा *parā* — superior; बुद्धेः परतः तु यः *buddheḥ parataḥ tu yaḥ* — whereas the one who is superior to the intellect; सः *saḥ* — is he (*ātmā*)

They say that the sense organs are superior to the body; the mind is superior to the sense organs; the intellect is superior to the mind. Whereas the one who is superior to the intellect is he (the *ātmā*).

When *Arjuna* asked his question about what or who it was that impelled a person to perform improper actions, *Duryodhana* was standing right in front of him. *Duryodhana* knew that what he was doing was wrong. *Arjuna* knew this. These two men had grown up together, had been raised in the same way, and had the same teachers. Besides, right and wrong do not require to be taught. *Duryodhana* knew what was right and wrong, but still he did what he did because of *kāma*.

Because of *kāma* alone or because of anger which is *kāma* in another form, a person does things that are not to be done. Anger is not something separate from *kāma*; it is a modification, *pariṇāma*, of your own expectation, your own desire. Where there is no expectation, there is no anger at all. If you expect certain things to happen and they do not happen, *kāma* can turn into anger, if you are not ready to accept what faces you. Because *kāma* transforms itself into anger in this way, Lord *Kṛṣṇa* said, ‘This desire is this anger — *kāma eṣa krodha eṣaḥ*.’

Kāma can express as want, passion, and anger, *Kṛṣṇa* said. And because this *kāma* covers your wisdom, it deludes you. It takes you for a ride. However, when you do not want a particular pursuit, based on desire, to go any further, when you are convinced that it has gone far enough, you should be able to stop it, to pull down the shutters on it. The dictating factor here is your wisdom, your understanding, and not your fancies.

DISCOVER THE DISTANCE BETWEEN YOURSELF AND YOUR DESIRES

Kṛṣṇa was not asking to suppress or repress your desires. He said that to attempt to control likes and dislikes does not serve any useful purpose because the mind has its own ways. But you need not be swayed by them. In this way, your likes and dislikes will be no problem to you. Since your desires are located in the senses, mind, and intellect,

you can have complete mastery over them by discovering a distance between yourself and your likes and dislikes.

You cannot stay in the mind itself and have mastery over it. The more you go inside, the more reasons you find for why you are the way you are. This exploration may provide you with a certain understanding, but it cannot remove the reason, which is the problem psychology is faced with. Some understanding, some validation, and so on, is useful, no doubt. But if you are always stuck with the same problem, what is the use of this kind of understanding? How can you deal with the problem? How can you master such a mind?

To address this concern, *Kṛṣṇa* said here that you have to go one step further: you must be yourself so that you can manage your mind. In this way, you will be able to take care of all your *rāga-dveṣas*, all your *kāmas*. You can take care of your *rāga-dveṣas* or *kāmas* only when you are able to step outside of the *kāmas*. If you want to weigh something, for example, you cannot be inside of that which you are weighing. If I recall correctly, Newton was supposed to have said, 'If only I could be somewhere a little away from the earth, then I would be able to weigh the earth.'

Similarly, how can you fix up your mind when you are in the very midst of its mess? If you manage to solve one problem, another one will only pop up in its place. If you discover, for example, that all your problems are due to your mother, what do you have then? You have the problem of having had this mother! Then you will ask, 'Why did I have this mother? Why didn't I have a better mother? Why did my mother behave like this?' Nothing comes of this in that you are left with the same problem. In spite of the benefit of some validation, some understanding, the problem itself does not really go away.

This is what keeps people going to therapists. And once they begin to go, the going itself becomes yet another addiction. It becomes something that must be done. Thus, although some help may come from the therapy, another problem has definitely been created. Ultimately in order to deal with a problem, you have to step out of it, which is not to discount the usefulness of therapy as such. All that is being said is that you cannot really deal with psychological problems, with in *saṃsāra*, unless you step out of it.

And how do you step out of *saṃsāra*? *Arjuna* already had one foot out, it seemed. By planning to go to Rishikesh as a *sannyāsī*, he thought that he would be stepping out of *saṃsāra*. But this is stepping in, not out. Stepping out does not imply any external change. All that is implied is a situational change in terms of one's understanding, wherein the distance between one's desires, one's likes and dislikes, is discovered; only then can the mind be mastered.

THE ORDER INVOLVED IN MASTERING THE MIND

Whatever we master is always mastered from another standpoint, which implies a particular order. *Kṛṣṇa* was addressing this order here when he told *Arjuna* that those who know say that the senses are superior; so say the wise — *indriyāṇi parāṇi āhuḥ paṇḍitāḥ*. The word ‘superior,’ of course, implies comparison and thus the question, ‘Superior to what?’ To the physical body is the response.

The senses, *indriyāṇi*, are superior to the physical body, which is a part of an individual, a *jīva*. They are superior because they have the capacity to objectify the body. The eyes and other senses can objectify the body.

Another reason that the senses are said to be superior to the body is because they are subtler in nature. Being subtle, the senses have pervasiveness, *vyāpakatva*. For example, the body remains on the ground, whereas the eyes can go to the stars. To do anything at all, the body has to move, whereas the sense of sight, by simply opening the eyes, has already gone to the stars! Thus, the eyes and other senses are more pervasive than the physical body. The superiority of the senses is further established by the fact that they are inside the physical body in the form of the subtle body, *sūkṣma-śarīra*.

Then the verse goes on to say that the mind is superior to the sense organs, *indriyebhyaḥ paraṃ manaḥ*, because the mind can go where the senses cannot. For example, the mind alone can go to heaven. It can also suffer an imagined hell, which is something that the senses cannot do. Also, the mind is the one in whose hands the senses are. Without the mind there is no sense perception at all. Thus, the mind is definitely superior to the senses. It has access to regions where the senses have no scope. The mind's accessibility and the dependence of the sense organs on the mind definitely makes the mind superior, according to those who know.

Again, with reference to the mind, the intellect is said to be superior, *manasastu parā buddhiḥ*, because the *buddhi* is able to dismiss a doubt, of the mind with proper understanding. *Buddhi* includes your will also. Doubting and vacillation are the mind. Once there is resolve, which is *buddhi*, there is no more vacillation. You cannot say you have both resolve and vacillation at the same time. Once the resolve is there, the vacillating mind, the doubting mind, goes away. Thus, the *buddhi* is definitely superior to the mind.

DESIRE IS DESTROYED BY RECOGNIZING YOU ARE LIMITLESS

The mind and *buddhi* are the places wherein *kāma* moves. The *kāmas* are located right here. The difference between the mind and *buddhi* is only with reference to the types of *vṛtti* that take place there. We have seen how the desire, located in the mind, can be so powerful that it can take the *buddhi* along with it. Therefore, in order to really deal with your desires, you have to step outside of them. Then you can see exactly where

the *kāma* is hiding. This is why *Kṛṣṇa* went on to say that the one who is above the *buddhi*, is *ātmā*, yourself — *yaḥ tu buddheḥ parataḥ saḥ paramātmā* .

What *Kṛṣṇa* meant here is that, in order to take care of the *kāmas*, you have to recognise yourself as the *paramātmā*. Even though he said to practice *dama* and *śama* , you have also to see that you are not the *buddhi*, the mind, or the senses. You are the *paramātmā*, the limitless. Once you are awake to this fact, the enemy, *kāma*, is no more a problem. This, then, is how you deal with *kāma* drastically and finally.

When you are free from any sense of limitation, there is no enemy and the wants you may have become harmless, mere privileges in fact. Your mind is there and you have the privilege of desiring. Desiring is a privilege only when you do not need to fulfil any desire in order to be secure and happy.

Lastly, *Kṛṣṇa* said:

एवं बुद्धेः परं बुद्ध्वा संस्तभ्यात्मानमात्मना ।

जहि शत्रुं महाबाहो कामरूपं दुरासदम् ॥ ४३ ॥

evam buddheḥ paraṁ buddhvā saṁstabhyātmānamātmanā

jahi śatruṁ mahābāho kāmarūpaṁ durāsadam

Verse 43

महाबाहो *mahābāho* — Oh! Mighty-armed (*Arjuna*); एवम् *evam* — in this way; बुद्धेः *buddheḥ* — to the intellect; परम् *param* — superior; बुद्ध्वा *buddhvā* — knowing; आत्मना *ātmanā* — by the self (*buddhi*); आत्मानम् *ātmanam* — the mind; संस्तभ्या *saṁstabhya* — having made steady; कामरूपम् *kāmarūpam* — in the form of want; दुरासदम् *durāsadam* — difficult to understand; शत्रुम् *śatrum* — enemy; जहि *jahi* — destroy

Oh! *Arjuna*, knowing that which is superior to the intellect in this way, having made the mind steady with the *buddhi*, destroy the enemy, that is in the form of desire, that which is so difficult to understand.

In the previous verse, *Kṛṣṇa* revealed a fact: that which is above the *buddhi*, because of which the *buddhi* is illumined, is the *paramātmā* . And because a mastered mind is required to know this *paramātmā* , *Kṛṣṇa* concluded the chapter here by summing up what is to be done to destroy *kāma* .

The senses and the mind are in the hands of the *buddhi* alone because the *buddhi* is superior to them. Therefore, the *buddhi* is their master. The *buddhi*, meaning one's *viveka*, discrimination, steadies the mind and senses. Therefore, he said, *ātmanam ātmanā saṁstabhya śatruṁ jahi* .

Here, *Kṛṣṇa* told *Arjuna* that he should destroy the enemy in the form of desire, *kāmarūpa śatruṁ jahi*, by knowing that which is above the *buddhi*, *buddheḥ paraṁ*

buddhvā. To destroy an enemy outside of oneself is relatively easy, especially for *Arjuna* who had so many special missiles at his disposal. But, to destroy this inner enemy, *kāma*, requires tact, maturity, dispassion, and understanding. To indicate that *Arjuna* had these resources. *Kṛṣṇa* addressed *Arjuna* as *Mahābāho*, one who is mighty-armed.

The enemy, in the form of want, is an only expression of ignorance, ignorance being the mother of *kāma* and its brood — anger, jealousy, fear, and so on. Therefore, to destroy the enemy, one must destroy ignorance, which can only be done through *jñāna*, knowledge. This enemy is said to be *durāsada* here, that which is very difficult to understand. It would seem that desires should be very easy to understand since they just appear. But, this is not the case because every desire has a desire behind it. There is always a reason for liking something. And there is a reason for the reason. Therefore, there is no end to the desires that are there — all of which is to be understood. Only when *kāma* makes you suffer by its presence are you a *saṃsārī*, a sufferer. With knowledge, you can enjoy the presence of a *kāma*. Even if you are surprised by it, you can also be amused. You can either go with it or you need not go with it. When you step outside of your desires in this way, in terms of knowledge, all your desires becomes privileges for you.

Thus, whether you are a *karma-yogī* or a *sannyāsī*, there is no other way of dealing with *kāma*, except through *jñāna*. What better way for *Kṛṣṇa* to have made this point than to conclude this chapter, entitled *karma*, with *jñāna*, the only true conqueror of the enemy of desire.

ओं तत्सत् । इति श्रीमद्भगवद्गीतासु उपनिषत्सु ब्रह्मविद्यायां योगशास्त्रे
श्रीकृष्णार्जुनसंवादे कर्मयोगो नाम तृतीयोऽध्यायः ॥
*om tatsat. iti śrīmadbhagavadgītāsu upaniṣatsu brahmadevyāyām
yogaśāstre śrīkṛṣṇārjunasaṃvāde karmayogo nāma
tṛtīyo'dhyāyaḥ*

THE MEANING OF OM

All the chapters in the *Gītā* end with the above words, the only variation being the title of the chapter.

In the expression, ‘*Om tat sat*,’ *Om* is the name of *Brahman*, a phonetic name for the Lord. Apart from this, linguistically, that is grammatically, this term has a meaning too. It means, that which protects everyone, that which sustains everything — *avati rakṣati iti om*.

Phonetically, ‘A’ is the first and basic sound that you make when you open your mouth. Thus, ‘A’ is the first letter of the Sanskrit alphabet. Also, when you close your

mouth and make a sound, what comes out is the sound, ‘*M*.’ And, in between, there is a rounding off sound, ‘*U*.’ ‘*A*’ plus ‘*U*’ is ‘*O*’ which along with ‘*M*’ is *Om*.

All forms, all objects, have names and all names are words. Words, even the longest ones like ‘supercalafraglisticexpialadoshas’ are nothing but sounds. These sounds all come between the ‘*A*’ that comes when you open your mouth and make a sound and the sound *M*’ that comes with the mouth closed. You cannot make any further sounds after this letter ‘*M*.’ Thus, these are the two sounds within which all sounds are produced.

Given that the Lord is the Lord of everything, his name should be ‘*Om*,’ and to account for the ‘everything,’ the ‘*U*’ is inserted in between. In this way, *Om* becomes the name of *Bhagavān*, the Lord. Also, each of these three letters has been loaded by the *śāstra* to stand for the whole. This practice is called *āropa* in Sanskrit. Just as a country's flag represents its constitution, here, the ‘*A*’ represents the entire gross world, *sthūla-prapañca*, the ‘*U*’ represents the entire subtle world *sūkṣma-prapañca*, meaning the mind or inner world, and the ‘*M*’ represents the unmanifest condition, like in sleep when everything resolves and, on waking, again comes out.

In this way, *AUM* stands for the entire realm of cause and effect, which is nothing but *Brahman*. That *Brahman*, *Om*, is *tat sat*. *Tat*, that Lord alone, is *satyam*, *sat* and everything else is *mithyā* depending upon that *tat*, the Lord. Therefore, the expression *Oṃ tat sat* is a general conclusion. Having said a lot of things, the conclusion is, *Oṃ tat sat*, meaning that after all is said and done, *satya* alone is.

The *Bhagavadgītā*, which has the status of an *Upaniṣad*, contains the subject matter of *Brahman*. The knowledge of *Brahman*, *brahma-vidyā*, is simply ‘You Are That – *tat tvam asi*.’ The *Gītā* is also *yoga-śāstra*, dealing with attitudes and values with reference to self-management, self-improvement, maturity, and so on, which is *karma-yoga*. Even the rules of *sannyāsa* come under *yoga-śāstra* since they are not *jñāna*.

THE NATURE OF THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN LORD KĪÂÛA AND ARJUNÂ

This *yoga-śāstra* and *brahma-vidyā*, form the dialogue that took place between *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna* — *śrī-kṛṣṇa-arjuna-saṃvāda*, the dialogue that imparts knowledge. The word *vāda* means a discussion. A dialogue that imparts knowledge is different from a dialogue between equals, where there is no imparting of knowledge involved, only exploring of knowledge.

There are also two types of dismissing dialogues wherein the other person is declared to be in the wrong. One type is the dialogue of fanatics, *jalpa*, and the other is

vitaṇḍā, the dialogue of the intolerant where one person cannot stand another person saying something and getting away with it.

The discussion between Lord *Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna* was neither a *jalpa* nor a *vitaṇḍā*. Nor was it a discussion in order to discover something. It was a dialogue that imparts knowledge wherein one participant knew and the other wanted to know. Therefore, it was a *guru-śiṣya-saṁvāda*, a dialogue between a teacher and student. This particular meaning is denoted by the prefix ‘*sam*’ added to ‘*vāda*.’

This chapter under study is entitled *karma*, because it deals with the subject matter, *Brahman*, in terms of *karma*. Therefore it is said, *karma-yogo-nāma tṛtīyo’dhyāyaḥ*. As we have seen before, the word *yoga* used in each of the titles of the eighteen chapters of the *Gītā*, means ‘subject matter.’ Thus the third chapter, entitled, ‘*Karma*’ in the *Bhagavadgītā* whose status is that of the *Upaniṣad* which contains the knowledge of *Brahman* and *yoga-śāstra* in the form of a *saṁvāda* (a dialogue that imparts knowledge) between Lord *Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna* is concluded.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION TO THE BHAGAVADGĪTĒ.....	1
THE HUMAN PURSUIT	1
DHARMA AS A HUMAN END.....	2
MOKĀA: FREEDOM FROM WHAT?.....	4
FREEDOM IS FREEDOM FROM SEEKING.....	5
THAT I LACK IS THE PROBLEM.....	6
INSECURE PLUS INSECURE IS NOT SECURE.....	6
WHO HOLDS ON TO WHAT?.....	7
THE FACTS OF INSECURITY.....	8
THE WORLD IS NOT THE CAUSE OF YOUR PROBLEMS.....	9
YOU ARE THE PROBLEM; YOU ARE THE SOLUTION.....	9
MOKĀA IS NOT SALVATION.....	10
ALL ACTIONS HAVE A PURPOSE.....	11
WHY DO I SEEK OUT SECURITIES AND PLEASURES?.....	12
PRAYER IS ALWAYS FOR ONE'S OWN SAKE.....	12
FREEDOM FROM BEING A WANTING PERSON.....	14
MOKĀA AS THE END IN LIFE.....	14
WHAT MEANS OF KNOWLEDGE IS THERE FOR KNOWING MYSELF?.....	16
THOUGHTS NEED NOT BE ELIMINATED.....	18
THE VEDA AS A MEANS OF KNOWLEDGE.....	18
REVEALED KNOWLEDGE — APAURUĀEYĀ-PRAMĒŪA.....	20
HOW DO YOU PROVE THAT VEDĒNTA IS A PRAMĒŪA.....	20
TWO COMMITTED LIFE-STYLES.....	21
BELIEVER AND NON-BELIEVER.....	22
ALLOWING THE MEANS OF KNOWLEDGE TO WORK.....	22
THE GĪTĒ AS A MEANS OF KNOWLEDGE.....	23
THE MEANING OF BHAGAVĒN.....	25
BHAGAVADGĪTĒ; THE LORD'S SONG.....	26
THE SUBJECT MATTER OF THE GĪTĒ.....	26
BRAHMA-VIDYĒ: KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT IS.....	27
UNDERSTANDING THE GĪTĒ.....	27
THE NEED FOR A TEACHER.....	28
WHO IS THE FIRST GURU?.....	28
HOW TO CHOOSE A GURU.....	29
THE GURU AS A RENUNCIATE.....	31

THE GÌTĒ AS A DIALOGUE	32
THE FOUR TYPES OF DIALOGUES	32
THE IMPORTANCE OF AN OPEN, INQUIRING MIND	33
DIALOGUE BETWEEN TEACHER AND STUDENT	34
GIVING THE TEACHER THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT.....	34
TWO TYPES OF SUBJECT MATTER.....	35
NO CHOICE IN KNOWLEDGE	36
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF QUESTIONING	37
COMMENTARIES ON THE GÌTĒ.....	37
THE NEED FOR INQUIRY	38
GÌTĒ-DHYĒNAM	39
AN AUSPICIOUS BEGINNING.....	40
THE GÌTĒ INVOKED AS MOTHER	40
FOR WHOSE SAKE IS THE GÌTĒ TAUGHT?.....	40
THE TEACHER OF THE GÌTĒ.....	40
THE MEANING OF NĒRĒYAÛA	40
VYĒSA AS A REPORTER.....	41
THE SUBJECT MATTER OF THE GÌTĒ	41
THE NECTAR OF NON-DUALITY	42
THE EIGHTEEN CHAPTERS OF THE GÌTĒ.....	42
THE GÌTĒ AS A DESTROYER OF SORROW	42
THE VASTNESS OF VYĒSA'S INTELLECT.....	43
THE CLARITY OF VYĒSA'S VISION	44
KĪÂÛA AS A WISH-FULFILLING TREE.....	45
KĪÂÛA'S CONTROL.....	45
THE SYMBOL OF KNOWLEDGE	45
KĪÂÛA, THE GIVER OF THE NECTAR OF GÌTĒ.....	46
THE UPANIÂADS AND THE GÌTĒ AS A COW AND ITS MILK.....	46
KĪÂÛA AS THE MILKMAN.....	47
LORD KĪÂÛA AS GOPĒLA-NANDANA, THE JOY OF COWHERDS.....	47
ARJUNA: THE CAUSE OF THE GÌTĒ	47
PARTAKERS OF THE GÌTĒ.....	47
THE TIMELESSNESS OF THE SUBJECT MATTER.....	48
KĪÂÛA AS THE TEACHER OF THE WORLD.....	48
KĪÂÛA AS A PERSON FOR PURPOSES OF MEDITATION.....	49
KĪÂÛA AS THE DESTROYER OF EVIL	49
KĪÂÛA AS THE SOURCE OF HAPPINESS.....	49
THE PĒÛÂVAS	50

THE RIVER OF BATTLE.....	50
BHĪĀMA AND DROŪA	51
DURȪODHANA	51
DURȪODHANA'S OTHER ALLIES.....	51
CROSSING THE RIVER OF BATTLE.....	52
IN PRAISE OF THE MAHĒBHĒRATA.....	53
THE LOTUS THAT IS THE MAHĒBHĒRATA.....	54
ENJOYMENT OF THE GĪTĒ	54
THE LORD'S GRACE	55
PRAYER AS AN ACTION.....	55
WHAT IS OMNISCIENCE, ALL-KNOWLEDGINGNESS?.....	56
THE RESULTS OF PRAYER	56
HOW DOES GRACE COME TO YOU?.....	56
THE INVISIBLE RESULT OF PRAYER	57
PRAISE BY EXALTED BEINGS.....	58
PRAISE BY SCHOLARS	58
PRAISE BY CONTEMPLATIVE PEOPLE.....	58
PRAISE BY OTHERS.....	59
THE CONTEXT OF THE GĪTĒ.....	60
THE KAURAVAS	60
DURȪODHANA'S JEALOUSY.....	62
THE GAME OF DICE: DHARMAPUTRA'S WEAKNESS.....	63
THE EXILE OF THE PĒŪĀVAS	64
THE PĒŪĀVAS' RETURN.....	65
WAR IS DECLARED.....	67
THE DHARMA OF WAR.....	67
AN ACCOUNT TO SETTLE	68
ARJUNA'S GRIEF.....	69
KNOWLEDGE OF RIGHT AND WRONG IS UNIVERSAL.....	70
SEEKING SECURITY IS NATURAL	71
UNIVERSAL, CULTURAL AND INDIVIDUAL VALUES.....	72
VALUES ARE NOT ABSOLUTE	73
THE VALUE OF A VALUE.....	74
COMPROMISE AND MORAL ORDER.....	75
THE THINKER AND DOER SPLIT	76
FOR EVERY GAIN, WE NEED TO KNOW THE LOSS	77
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BATTLE IN THE GĪTĒ.....	78
THE BODY-CHARIOT ANALOGY	79

ARJUNA'S DILEMMA	80
KĪĀŪA'S RALLYING CRY	81
ARJUNA AS A STUDENT	82
A FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM REQUIRES A FUNDAMENTAL SOLUTION.....	83
ACCEPTING SITUATIONS AS THEY ARE.....	84
TWO LIFE-STYLES FOR GAINING SELF-KNOWLEDGE.....	85
HOW THIS TEACHING CAME ABOUT.....	85
MAHĒBHĒRATA: THE FIFTH VEDA.....	87
THE AUTHOR: VYĒSA	87
THE GĪTĒ'S INVOCATORY PRAYER.....	88
THE UNKNOWN FACTOR	89
CHAPTER 1	91
THE PROBLEM OF JUSTICE — DHARMA	92
KĪĀŪA'S PROPOSAL.....	93
THE UNKNOWN FACTOR: DAIVA.....	94
QUALITIES OF A MATURE PERSON.....	95
QUALITIES FOR SUCCESS.....	95
KĪĀŪA AS THE UNKNOWN FACTOR.....	96
KĪĀŪA AS ARJUNA'S CHARIOTEER.....	97
PARAĀURĒMA'S CURSE ON KARŪA	98
DHĪTARĒĀŪRA'S QUESTION.....	100
THE LAW OF DHARMA	101
DHĪTARĒĀŪRA'S WEAKNESS.....	102
THE WAR IN ONE'S MIND.....	102
THE FIGHT BETWEEN DHARMA AND ADHARMA.....	103
THE IMAGERY OF THE CHARIOT	104
BUDDHI AS GURU	104
THE PURPOSE OF INTRODUCING THE WARRIORS	110
THE CONCHES ARE BLOWN.....	117
ARJUNA SEES ONLY KITH AND KIN	126
ARJUNA LOSES INTEREST IN THE WAR	133
WHO IS AN ĒTATĒYĪ?.....	134
ARJUNA FEELS WAR WOULD DESTROY DHARMA	138
DHARMA WOULD BE LOST WITHOUT DHARMĪ.....	140
CHAPTER 2	152
A SORROW THAT CANNOT BE ALLEVIATED.....	164

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A STUDENT — A ŚĪŚYĀ?	167
RELATIVE ŚREYĀS	169
ABSOLUTE ŚREYĀS	170
ARJUNA'S ATTRACTION TO SANNYĒSA	171
A TOPICAL PROBLEM BECOMES A FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM	172
THE BASIS FOR SORROW	172
ARJUNA'S SURRENDER	173
THE TEACHING BEGINS	175
ARJUNA'S SORROW IS YOUR SORROW	177
WHAT IS DESERVING OF GRIEF?	177
THE WISE DO NOT GRIEVE	178
SOURCE OF SORROW	179
A PRAGMATIC VIEW OF THIS VERSE	180
GRIEF IS NEVER LEGITIMATE	181
TWO-FOLD TEACHING METHODOLOGY — PRAVĪTTI AND NIVĪTTI	182
SORROW IS NOT REASONABLE	183
TWO ORDERS OF REALITY	183
BIRTH AND DEATH IN TERMS OF THE VISION OF THE GĪTĒ	185
ĒTMĒS ARE NOT MANY	186
THE CONSTANCY OF THE ĒTMĒ	187
THE WISE HAVE NO SORROW	188
PHYSICAL PAIN OR SORROW	190
WHAT IS THERE TO WORRY ABOUT?	191
ANALYSIS OF EXISTENCE AND NON-EXISTENCE	194
OBJECTS DO NOT EXIST INDEPENDENTLY	195
WHY DO WE SEE THE SAT IN THE ASAT?	197
THE 'IS-BUDDHI' ALWAYS REMAINS	198
CONSCIOUSNESS BETWEEN TWO THOUGHTS	199
TWO ORDERS OF REALITY	199
EXISTENCE IS CONSCIOUSNESS	200
A PRODUCT AND ITS CAUSE	201
THE TRUTH OF BRAHMAN	202
THE CONFUSION BETWEEN SATYĀ AND MITHYĒ	203
THE INEXPLICABILITY OF MITHYĒ	205
CAN TRUTH BE DEFINED?	205
THE INDESTRUCTIBILITY OF THE NON-DUAL	207
THE PHYSICAL BODY IS MITHYĒ	209
WHO CAN BE DESTROYED?	209
THE NATURE OF PERCEPTION	210
ĒTMĒ IS NOT ESTABLISHED BY A PRAMĒŪA	211
THE ŚĒSTRA AS A PRAMĒŪA	212

ĒTMĚ IS ALREADY KNOWN BUT NOT AS AN OBJECT	213
REMOVING THE OBSTACLES TO KNOWLEDGE	215
I NEVER KILL AND I AM NEVER KILLED	217
I AM NOT THE DOER.....	218
ĒTMĚ IS NOT BORN AND DOES NOT DIE	220
NOR DOES ĒTMĚ GROW OLD.....	221
THE CHANGING AND THE CHANGELESS	222
DOES ĒTMĚ GROW?.....	223
WHOM DOES ONE KILL OR CAUSE TO KILL?.....	224
WHO IS THE DOER?.....	225
THE REAL MEANING OF SANNYĒSA	226
I AM NOT THE DOER.....	227
CAN ĒTMĚ BE KNOWN?	228
THE IMPORTANCE OF INTELLECTUAL HONESTY.....	229
THERE IS NOTHING MORE TO BE DONE	230
THE BODY AS A SUIT OF CLOTHES	232
GOD IS NOT A TYRANT	233
WHAT IS IT THAT IS NEW?	234
ĒTMĚ IS INDESTRUCTIBLE	236
THE FIVE-ELEMENT MODEL OF THE WORLD.....	237
THE NATURE OF DESTRUCTION.....	237
THE SELF-EVIDENT ĒTMĚ.....	238
ĒTMĚ IS NOT NON-EXISTENT	240
ĒTMĚ HAS NO ATTRIBUTES.....	242
THE INSIGNIFICANCE OF A LIFETIME	244
LIFE IS A FLICKER.....	245
WHY DO PEOPLE LAMENT?.....	247
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ĀĀ×KARA'S COMMENTARY	248
THE WONDER OF ĒTMĚ	249
LIFE IS LIKE A VERY SUBTLE JOKE	251
THE DIFFICULTY IN UNDERSTANDING.....	252
THE ONE WHO KNOWS ĒTMĚ IS A WONDER.....	253
THE ONE WHO TALKS ABOUT ĒTMĚ IS ALSO A WONDER	254
THE NATURE OF SADNESS.....	255
ARJUNA'S DUTY.....	258
ARJUNA'S CHANCE TO PROTECT DHARMA.....	259
NOT PERFORMING AN ACTION IS NOT A SIN	261
HOW ARJUNA'S RETREAT WOULD BE PERCEIVED.....	265
THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN KARMA-YOGA AND SĒ×KHYĀ-YOGA	269
WHAT CAN KNOWLEDGE DO?.....	270
WHAT CAN KARMA-YOGA DO?.....	271

IN PRAISE OF KARMA -YOGA	271
ONE YOGA, TWO LIFE -STYLES.....	272
KARMA-YOGA IS AN ATTITUDE.....	274
THE MEANS AND THE END ARE ONE	275
WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE SEEKING IS ENDLESS.....	276
KARMA-YOGA IS SOMETHING MORE THAN AN ETHICAL LIFE.....	277
WHATEVER HELPS IS USEFUL	279
WITHOUT CLARITY PRIORITIES ARE A PROBLEM.....	279
WITHOUT VIVEKA, CONFUSION IS ENDLESS	284
MEANS AND ENDS ARE NOT THE ONLY SUBJECT MATTER OF THE VEDA	287
THE END OF SEEKING.....	289
THE DEFINITION OF KARMA-YOGA.....	291
KARMA IS TOTALLY DESIRE -BASED	292
THE LIMITATIONS OF THE JĪVA	293
THE RESULTS OF KARMA CAN NEVER BE PREDICTED	294
THE USE OF ONE'S FREE WILL.....	295
THE CAUSE OF ONE'S SENSE OF FAILURE	296
KARMA-YOGA REQUIRES THE RECOGNITION OF ĪĀVARA	297
RECOGNIZING THE AUTHOR OF THE LAWS.....	298
THE NATURE OF THE AUTHOR.....	299
THE EXPLANATION FOR HUMAN SUFFERING	300
AVOIDANCE OF THE UNDESIRABLE IS ALSO A FULFILMENT	301
PREFERENCES SHOULD BE NON-BINDING	302
THE ATTITUDE OF A BHAKTA.....	303
SCRIPTURALLY ENJOINED KARMA AND THE FOUR ĒĀRAMAS.....	305
THE PURPOSE OF KARMA-YOGA	307
ANOTHER DEFINITION OF KARMA -YOGA	308
WHAT IS KAUĀALA?.....	309
DHARMA AND ADHARMA ARE UNIVERSAL.....	310
CHOICE IN ACTION IMPLIES NORMS.....	311
SUMMARY OF THE DEFINITION OF KARMA -YOGA	312
EVEN UNIVERSAL LAWS REQUIRE INTERPRETATION.....	313
KARMA-YOGA IMPLIES AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE LORD.....	314
THE LAWS OF CREATION ARE NOT SEPARATE FROM THE CREATOR.....	315
EVERYTHING IN THE CREATION HAS ITS OWN DHARMA	316
ONLY HUMAN BEINGS ARE NOT PROGRAMMED.....	317
DOING ONE'S OWN DUTIES IS WORSHIP	318
HOW DOES ONE GIVE UP PUŪYA-PĒPA?.....	321
KARMA-YOGA IS NOT A MATTER OF CHOICE.....	322
EXERCISING DISCRETION IN ONE'S CHOICES	322
BIRTH IS BONDAGE.....	324

LIBERATION IS NOT AFTER DEATH	325
ONE'S DISPASSION CAN BE SHAKY.....	327
THE POSSIBILITY OF DOUBT.....	329
ARJUNA'S FIRST QUESTION.....	330
THE SPIRIT OF ARJUNA'S QUESTION.....	333
THE DEFINITION IS ALSO THE MEANS	334
CAN YOU BE HAPPY IF YOU GIVE UP DESIRES?.....	335
THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BINDING AND NON-BINDING DESIRES	336
NON-BINDING DESIRES ARE NOT THE PROBLEM.....	337
WHEN YOU ARE EVERYTHING, WHAT IS THERE TO BE DONE?.....	338
TO BE WISE YOU MUST HAVE WISDOM.....	339
LOVE IS A MANIFESTATION OF ONE'S FULLNESS	339
THE THREE-FOLD SOURCE OF SORROW.....	341
A WISE PERSON'S RESPONSE TO SUKHA.....	342
THE ABSENCE OF FEAR	343
ANGER ALSO GOES	343
DUALITY AND FEAR.....	344
YOUR MIND IS ALWAYS WHERE YOUR HEART IS.....	345
THE SENSE ORGANS ARE NOT TO BLAME	347
ANYONE CAN WITHDRAW THE SENSES.....	348
THE TASTE LINGERS ON	350
THE VALUE OF MONEY	351
KNOWLEDGE ALONE REMOVES RASA.....	352
REMOVING THE SENSE OBJECTS ALSO DOES NOT WORK.....	353
THE IMPORTANCE OF ACKNOWLEDGING THE EMOTIONAL VALUE	354
THE NECESSITY FOR CONTEMPLATION.....	357
THE MEDITATION OF ATTACHMENT	359
NOT EVERY DESIRE CAN BE FULFILLED.....	360
THE NATURE OF ANGER	361
IN THE ABSENCE OF WISDOM, IMPULSE TAKES OVER	362
A KARMA-YOGI IS A MUMUKSHU	364
A TRANQUIL MIND MEANS THAT KNOWLEDGE IS NOT FAR AWAY.....	366
DESIRES STIFLE ONE'S INTEREST IN SELF-KNOWLEDGE	368
HAPPINESS CAN ONLY TAKE PLACE IN A TRANQUIL MIND	368
KNOWLEDGE AND MASTERY OF THE MIND GO HAND-IN-HAND	371
IGNORANCE AND KNOWLEDGE ARE LIKE NIGHT AND DAY	373
THE REALITY OF DUALITY	374
THE REALITY OF ONENESS.....	375
COMPARISON IS NOT POSSIBLE	376
THE VISION OF THE WISE AND THE OTHER-WISE.....	377
TO KNOW A WISE PERSON, YOU NEED TO BE WISE	378

TO PERFORM ACTION I HAVE TO KNOW 'I AM A DOER'	378
KNOWLEDGE REMOVES THE NOTION OF DOERSHIP	379
WHY SHOULD I PERFORM KARMA?.....	380
A WISE PERSON CANNOT BE EMULATED BASED ON ACTION.....	381
RESOLUTION OF THE KNOWER, KNOWN, KNOWLEDGE	382
EMULATE THE VALUES OF A WISE PERSON	383
THE WISE PERSON	385
THE DEMISE OF ONE'S EMOTIONAL YO-YO.....	386
THERE IS NO 'I' OR 'MINE'	387
HOW A WISE PERSON LIVES IN THE WORLD	388
KNOWLEDGE OF BRAHMAN IS NOT A STATE	390
IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO GAIN SELF-KNOWLEDGE	390
MOKĀĀ NEED NOT TAKE TIME	391
CHAPTER 3	393
KNOWLEDGE ALONE IS ADEQUATE FOR MOKĀĀ	394
MOKĀĀ IS NOT PRODUCED BY KARMA	398
THE NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE.....	399
ARJUNA'S CONFUSION ABOUT KNOWLEDGE AND KARMA.....	399
A TEACHER ANSWERS QUESTIONS.....	400
TYPES OF SANNYĒSA.....	403
HOW ĀĀ×KARA BECAME A SANNYĒSÌ.....	404
THE LAST RITUAL OF A SANNYĒSÌ	405
THE PURPOSE OF KARMA-YOGA	406
CHOICE OF LIFE-STYLE.....	407
THE NECESSITY OF KARMA-YOGA.....	410
KNOWLEDGE ALONE NEGATES.....	410
GIVING UP THE DOERSHIP	411
ACTIONLESSNESS IS NOT GIVING UP ACTION.....	412
SANNYĒSA DOES NOT GUARANTEE MOKĀĀ	413
KARMA DEFINED.....	414
CAUSES OF ACTION.....	415
QUALITIES OF THE MIND.....	416
WHICH LIFE STYLE IS MORE SUITABLE FOR YOU?.....	416
CAN YOU BE ACTIONLESS WITHOUT SELF-KNOWLEDGE?.....	417
ACTION AS PRAYER	419
KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD IS KNOWLEDGE OF ONESELF	420
LIFE IS NOT FOR MERE SURVIVAL	422
KARMAS ARE INEXHAUSTIBLE.....	423

KARMA-YOGA RELEASES YOU FROM THE HOLD OF RĒGA-DVEĀAS	424
ALL OFFERINGS BELONG TO THE LORD ALONE	425
THE SENSE ORGANS AS ĪĀVARA.....	426
BHAKTI-YOGA IS KARMA-YOGA	427
THE REAL MEANING OF BHAKTI.....	428
DIRECT AND INDIRECT YAJAS.....	429
DISTURBING THE ORDER.....	430
HOW ACTION BINDS THE PERSON.....	431
KARMA AS AN OFFERING TO ĪĀVARA DOES NOT BIND.....	432
HOW ACTION BECOMES YOGĀ.....	433
COMMITMENT TO THE VEDA IS A LIFE OF YAJŌA.....	435
DEFINITION OF A BRĒHMAŪA.....	436
YAJŌA REQUIRES SENSITIVITY.....	438
CONFORMING TO THE ORDER	439
RECOGNITION AND THANKSGIVING ARE YAJŌA	440
ACKNOWLEDGING THE COSMIC FORCES AS DEVĀTĒS	442
FREEDOM FROM THE RESULTS OF ONE'S ACTIONS	443
RESTITUTION IS ALWAYS ACCORDING TO THE ACTION PERFORMED.....	444
KNOWLEDGE IS NOT CREATED; IT IS UNCOVERED.....	447
WHY AM I NOT ALL-KNOWING?	447
PROVING THE PRAMĒŪA: IF IT WORKS, IT WORKS!	449
THE STRENGTH OF THE VEDA.....	449
SEEING BEYOND THE SENSE ORGANS.....	451
ECOLOGY ALWAYS STARTS WITH YOU.....	452
'BECOMING' IS A PROBLEM.....	454
HAPPINESS IS WITH THE SELF ALONE.....	455
CAN THERE BE A RESULT WITHOUT ACTION?.....	457
DOERSHIP AND KNOWLEDGE DO NOT COEXIST.....	458
THE 'WHAT IS IN IT FOR ME?' ATTITUDE.....	459
THE WISE NEED NOT GIVE UP ACTIVITY	462
AFTER KNOWLEDGE WHY DO ACTION?.....	463
ARJUNA WAS A LEADER	464
ACTION IS NOT OPPOSED TO KNOWLEDGE.....	466
WHAT IS THERE TO ACCOMPLISH?.....	469
PERFORMING ACTION AS AN EXAMPLE TO OTHERS.....	473
ATTITUDE IN ACTION.....	475
THE WISE PERFORM ACTION TO BLESS THE WORLD.....	475
A WISE PERSON DOES NOT DISTURB THE UNDERSTANDING OF OTHERS.....	478
THE NATURE OF WORDS.....	479
THE DOER OF ACTION.....	480
NOT DOING KARMA IS MEANINGLESS	482

THE NATURE OF DELUSION.....	483
THE SUBJECT AND ITS INSTRUMENTS.....	483
EVERYTHING IS A MODIFICATION OF PRAKĪTI ALONE.....	484
KNOWING YOU ARE NOT A DOER, WHAT DO YOU DO?.....	485
HOW TO HELP OTHERS IN TERMS OF THIS KNOWLEDGE.....	486
IGNORANCE IS BLISS ONLY IF IT IS TOTAL!.....	488
WHAT DOES RENUNCIATION REALLY MEAN?.....	490
YOU ARE PLACED IN SITUATIONS THAT YOU DID NOT CREATE.....	491
ONE'S CHOICE IS SURRENDERED TO WHAT IS PROPER.....	493
HOW KĪĀŪA'S VISION IS TO BE FOLLOWED.....	494
WHAT YOU CAN KNOW IS DETERMINED BY WHAT YOU ALREADY KNOW.....	494
VEDĒNTA AS A PRAMĒŪA.....	496
THERE IS NO BASIS FOR OBJECTION.....	496
WITHOUT ĀRADDHĒ CONFUSION IS INEVITABLE.....	497
TRYING TO FIND DEFECTS IN THE VISION IS NOT ĀRADDHĒ.....	499
LIVING A HUMAN LIFE IMPLIES DISCRIMINATION.....	501
ALL UNDERSTANDING REQUIRES DISCRIMINATION.....	502
ONE'S NATURE CANNOT BE CONTROLLED.....	504
LIKES AND DISLIKES ARE DUE TO PRAKĪTI.....	506
THE LOGIC OF THE MIND.....	507
YOU CANNOT AVOID HAVING CERTAIN THOUGHTS.....	508
AN ETHICAL PERSON NEED NOT NECESSARILY BE A KARMA-YOGĪ.....	510
SPONTANEOUS ACTION.....	511
SVĀDHARMA AND SATISFACTION.....	513
EXERCISE YOUR CHOICE.....	514
THE PRINCIPLE OF NON-INJURY.....	515
THE RESULTS OF ABANDONING ONE'S DHARMA.....	516
DUTIES AND RIGHTS ARE ONE AND THE SAME.....	517
THERE IS NO DEMAND IN DUTY.....	518
IMPROPER ACTIONS COME FROM DESIRE ALONE.....	522
DESIRE IS INSATIABLE.....	524
SIMPLE VĪVEKA WILL DISMISS MANY DESIRES.....	525
ALL DESIRES FLOW FROM OUR SENSE OF LIMITATION.....	527
ĒTMĒ IS FREE OF DESIRE.....	529
THE REMOVAL OF DELUSION.....	529
DISCOVER THE DISTANCE BETWEEN YOURSELF AND YOUR DESIRES.....	533
THE ORDER INVOLVED IN MASTERING THE MIND.....	535
DESIRE IS DESTROYED BY RECOGNIZING YOU ARE LIMITLESS.....	535
THE MEANING OF OM.....	537
THE NATURE OF THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN LORD KĪĀŪA AND ARJUNA.....	538